

FOUR

THEMES IN IBN 'ARABĪ'S PHILOSOPHY

(A) GOD

IF Ibn 'Arabī is usually described as a pantheist, there is ample justification in his own arguments. For while the Qur'ān declares: 'There is but one God', Ibn 'Arabī maintains that 'there is nothing but God'. His abandonment of the Islamic conception of God as the creator and cause of the universe, in favour of a God who *is* everything, definitely suggests a step from monotheism to pantheism. While the Prophet Muḥammad preached a God who is cause and a universe that is effect, the majority of Muslim philosophers introduced between God and His creation such intermediaries as the First Cause or the Universal Spirit. Ibn 'Arabī will have none of these intermediaries, but only 'absolute unification'. Though again and again he tries to reconcile his 'pantheistic' God with the unitarian God of the Qur'ān, his God 'Who is everything' must needs differ greatly from the Quranic God 'like unto whom there is nothing'. His God is not one who creates or from whom anything but Himself emanates, but a God who *manifests* Himself in an infinity of forms.

Ibn 'Arabī distinguishes between the finite God of religion and the infinite God of mysticism. The God of religion reveals Himself in various forms reflected in the different religions. It depends upon the 'capacity' of the believer which one of these forms (religions) he accepts. The God of the mystic contains all His forms, for the mystic's heart alone is all-receptive. While the

God of religion manifests Himself in man as both virtue and sin, the God of the mystic reveals Himself in a manner that is beyond virtue and sin. As we shall discover, this is an utterly a-moral God.

That the mystic's God can obviously be neither Muslim nor Christian, Buddhist, Jewish nor pagan is expressed beautifully in Ibn 'Arabī's famous ode contained in his *Tarjumānu 'l-Ashwāq*, a collection of mystical odes:

'My heart is capable of every form,
A cloister for the monk, a fane for idols,
A pasture for gazelles, the pilgrim's Ka'ba,
The Tables of the Torah, the Koran.
Love is the faith I hold: wherever turn
His camels, still the one true faith is mine.'¹

Since God is the essence of all existence, man needs Him so that he may exist. On the other hand, God needs man, so that He may manifest Himself to Himself.

Divine essence, for Ibn 'Arabī, is pure without attributes. It is endowed with Attributes when it manifests itself, either in the universe or in man (who is part of it), for all created things are His Attributes. Viewed as His Attributes, they are identical with God. When viewed *apart* from God—as they are by the rationalist and materialist—they are nothing. Since the universe, and everything within it, are God's manifested Attributes their existence is relative; God's is absolute.

By knowing itself, the Divine essence knows all things within itself. Nevertheless it distinguishes them from itself as objects of its knowledge. This, however,

¹ R. A. Nicholson's translation in his edition of *Tarjumānu 'l-Ashwāq* (Oriental Translation Fund, New Series, vol. xx, p. 19, vv. 13-15).

does not imply that there is some duality between the known object and the knowing subject. Since the Divine essence is the knower, the known and the knowing, there exists complete unity of the subject, the object and the function that establishes a relationship between them.

(B) CREATION

In conformity with the Qur'ān, Ibn 'Arabī regards the world as undergoing an eternal process of creation. In conformity with the Ash'arites (and the atomists) he regards that process as one of constant annihilation and creation. Annihilation here simply means that since an object changes from moment to moment, it cannot be the same once the change has taken place. Since it has ceased to be its old self, that self no longer exists. In order that it might cease to exist, it must obviously have been annihilated. Otherwise there would be not one object but an infinite number of them.

If God exists, and if everything has its being in Him, it follows that the universe was not created at some moment in the distant past—ever since evolving on its own—but that it manifests constantly the Divine existence of its maker. This means that the universe is in a perpetual state of creation. According to Ibn 'Arabī, God does not create anything. Creation means simply the coming into concrete manifestation of something already existing (in God). While this doctrine is in agreement with that of most Muslim philosophers, it is at complete variance with the views of Al-Ghazālī, who regards every spiritual perception and even sensory experience as something entirely new, created afresh by God from moment to moment, as though out of a vacuum.

Though God may will a thing to be, its existence is

made necessary by the very nature of the laws within the thing itself. Actually, for Ibn 'Arabī, God is the name for those laws.

Of particular interest is Ibn 'Arabī's discussion of the way in which the potential existence of things (inherent within God's essence) becomes actual existence in the phenomenal world. This was, of course, a subject that preoccupied most of the philosophers, and one that we associate with Plato's Ideas or the impact of a form (*eidos*) upon matter, in Aristotle. Ibn 'Arabī divides the Divine essence—or, at least, that aspect of it that manifests itself in tangible phenomena—into Divine Names and Divine Attributes. He views a Divine Name as a 'limited' form of the Divine essence prior to its manifestation. We could paraphrase him by saying that a Divine Name is the creative element that holds within itself the potentiality of a particular phenomenon (that might, or might not, come into tangible existence). In other words, it is the active element within the Divine essence out of which a given phenomenon will emerge.

A Divine Attribute, on the other hand, is a Divine Name manifested in the external world. It is the phenomenal object, though not necessarily a material one. For, in Ibn 'Arabī's doctrine, any human thought or activity, too, has its primary being in the Divine essence in which, before its external manifestation, it forms the apposite Divine Name. Whereas a Divine Attribute, being an exteriorization of the Divine Name, must needs be transient and represent the 'passive' element in the procedure, the Divine essence is, of course, unchangeable, indestructible, and embracing both its (potentially) phenomenal and non-phenomenal aspects. Thus it is more than the Platonic Idea, which denotes only the spiritual reality behind a phenomenon, and which disregards the latter's concrete manifestation.

But then, for Plato, such manifestations were mere shadows. For Ibn 'Arabī, they were particular aspects of Reality.

Ibn 'Arabī, in his effort to make his doctrine all-embracing, characteristically treats the same subject in yet other terms. He speaks of Divine consciousness which embraces all the intelligible forms of the prototypes or *a'yān*, as he calls them, and which, as we shall see later, he identifies with the *Logos*, or the Spirit of Muḥammad. The Divine essence embraces all the potential essences of the prototypes, which would seem to be but another title for the Divine Names. Indeed Ibn 'Arabī calls them also 'latent realities' or *Al-a'cyān al-thābitah*. He defines the essence of each of them as a 'mode' of God, and it is through that essence that God becomes conscious of each one of them.

(C) THE ONE AND THE MANY

It should be possible by now to divine how Ibn 'Arabī solves the problem of the unity of God and the multiplicity within the universe or, to put it differently, how he resolves the supposed duality in the relationship between God and His creatures. Naturally, he admits the existence of multiplicity in the world or, in his own words, of the many, *khalq*. But he does not admit the reality of the many in terms of their substance as opposed to essence. He accepts only one Reality, *Al-Ḥaqq* (the *Ana al-Ḥaqq* of Al-Ḥallāj). As viewed by Itself, that is, as God viewing Himself, or when viewed by ourselves as the essence behind all phenomena, their Reality indeed is but one, and can be nothing but one. It can only be regarded as many when viewed solely as *manifestations* of that essence, i.e. when viewed by ourselves in an intellectual or sensory way (that is, as substance).

Ibn 'Arabī's doctrine is by no means identical with the corresponding doctrine of Plotinus, for whom Reality is the *cause* of everything. (In this Plotinus, would be at one with orthodox Muslim doctrine.) For Ibn 'Arabī, the One is not the cause but the essence of everything. This difference in the two doctrines is fundamental. To be the maker of the thing I produce is one matter; it is quite another matter to be the thing itself or, rather, to share with it my essence. To paint the picture of a child is not identical with giving birth to a child.

It should now be evident that for Ibn 'Arabī multiplicity has no spiritual reality, for it is not due to division within the One. It is due to our own individual points of view. As humans, we can see only fragments of the whole. Moreover, we seldom penetrate beyond their surface. According to Ibn 'Arabī, the mystic alone can perceive God in His unity rather than in His alleged multiplicity. It could be said that, for Ibn 'Arabī, the relationship between God and His creatures is that of an object reflected in countless mirrors. These reflections obviously cannot exist without Him, and, in a way, they are He. At the same time they are obviously not He. They are He when we are aware that the reflected image is but a reflection; they are not He when we forget the object they reflect and accept them as final realities. So it is quite permissible for Ibn 'Arabī to say both: 'I am He and He is I,' and also 'I am He and not He.' His God is both transcendental and immanent.

(D) THE SOUL

If there is really no duality of God and man, we might ask: why should the mystic be so eager to effect a union with God; why should the devout always seek a bridge that would lead him to God? On the basis of Ibn

'Arabī's doctrine, the very words 'meeting' God, 'unification' with God, and so on, are meaningless. For these words presuppose an original separateness from God. For Ibn 'Arabī, union with God is not an eventual reaching or meeting Him but rather a becoming aware of a relationship that has always existed. What the individual soul does is merely to awaken to the realization of its unity with God.¹ The fact that I am (fortunately, but seldom) aware of my liver or my teeth does not presuppose that in order to achieve that awareness I must go outside of myself in search of either of these. Ibn 'Arabī naturally holds that man never becomes God, as God never becomes man. They are always one, even though we are seldom aware of this fact. Only the true mystic can be aware of it.

What Ibn 'Arabī says about Divine essence being conscious of itself *in toto* and also of individual Names, applies equally to his doctrine of the soul. In common with several philosophers, he accepts the doctrine of a Universal Soul. Where he differs from them is in pointing out that the individual soul within it is not 'part' of it. For how, he asks, can soul—a spiritual entity—be divided into parts? The very word 'part' presupposes quantity. Yet within the realm of spirit everything is quality (essence). The Universal Soul is conscious both of itself as a whole and of each individual soul 'within' it. The latter, forming an individual aspect of the Universal Soul, cannot be conscious of the whole but only of itself. Thus God differs from man only in the sense that a thing differs from its individual aspects.

According to Ibn 'Arabī, man consists of three elements: spirit, soul and body. The three aspects of the soul are the rational, vegetative and animal. The

¹ See text from *Kitāb al-Ajwiba*.

rational soul Ibn 'Arabī seems to identify with spirit or the rational principle in man (and not, as does Aristotle, with intellect). The purpose of the vegetative soul is to seek food and to assimilate it. The animal soul has its seat in the physical heart and is shared by man and animals. It represents their vital principle. Both vegetative and animals souls Ibn 'Arabī regards as part of the body. The rational soul, on the other hand, is independent of the body, even though it uses it as a vehicle. It is 'that perfect and simplest substance which is living and active, the substance whose sole activities are remembering, retaining ideas, comprehending, discriminating, and reflecting'.¹

Viewed superficially, Ibn 'Arabī's division into spirit and body (rationality and animality) might wear a look of dualism. In actual fact both spirit and body are, for him, facets of the same central Reality, one being its inward, the other its outward, aspect. While he admits that the body, unlike the spirit, is destructible, he nevertheless differs from many Muslim philosophers in according it real being. Indeed, how could the body be without such being in view of the fact that it represents the outward aspect of reality?

(E) KNOWLEDGE

The chief aim of early Muslim philosophers was to acquire intellectual command of truths which during the years immediately following the death of the Prophet were accepted unquestioningly on faith. So long as the Muslim community felt no need for rationalizing Quranic truths, it could dispense with the acquisition of a knowledge built on reason. But gradually the Muslims found themselves compelled to explain

¹ *Risālah fī Ma'nā al-Nafs wa-l-Rūh*, Publ. by Asin y Palacios, in the *Acts of the 14th Oriental Congress*, Algiers 1905, p. 153.

Quranic revelation in terms intellectually acceptable. Attacks by Christian antagonists alone made such a task imperative. However, as soon as they began to tackle the problem of rational knowledge, questions concerning the technique through which the mind works forced themselves upon their attention. Does knowledge come direct from God or is it the fruit of man's own efforts? Does it reach the mind directly or are complex processes involved? Is the mind one indivisible entity or does it work through separate channels? These and kindred questions had to be answered. The quest for valid answers enabled the philosophers to probe into problems that had only been touched upon by their Greek masters. Some of the answers they evolved have not been invalidated even by modern psychological research. Al-Kindī, writing a thousand years ago, developed a theory (of four types of 'spirit') that nothing in 20th century psychology could easily refute. Ibn Sīnā put forward a doctrine of the internal faculties of perception that, while not dissimilar from Al-Kindī's, surpassed it in precision and elegance. Even Al-Ghazālī turned his attention to the ways by which the mind acquired knowledge; and Ibn Rushd and many others threw new light on that problem.

Ibn 'Arabī was no exception, and many pages of his major works deal with the problem of knowledge. But, as we should expect, his theories differ in their most important aspects from those of other philosophers, even though they show a resemblance with those of the Ṣūfīs. According to him, the soul is born with innate knowledge, but this is 'forgotten' during its association with the body. Thus any newly acquired knowledge is in reality 'old' knowledge suddenly remembered by the soul. Thinking processes he defines as the relating of concepts (already existing in the soul) to each other.

(As Leonardo da Vinci said: 'To understand is to set up a relationship.') Each concept represents an unchangeable idea. A given relationship between concepts cannot change. Each change means that a completely new relationship has been entered into by the concepts or the ideas they represent.¹ (Here Ibn 'Arabī obviously bases himself on Aristotle's theory of the eternal nature of the *eidos* and its subsequent inability to change, a theory accepted by most Muslim philosophers, though not by Al-Ghazālī.)

Where Ibn 'Arabī differs from other Islamic thinkers is in his views on the innermost nature of knowledge. Man's power to apprehend—the power that they usually describe as spirit—he defines as light, *al nūr*. In man this light takes the form of the rational soul which, in turn, is a 'mode' of Universal Reason, *al-'aql al-kullī*, the Aristotelian Agent Intellect or Neo-platonic *Logos*. How then does the light operate in man?¹

The first step in the acquisition of ordinary knowledge is a sensory perception. But what is it that enables the senses to perceive an object? According to our philosopher, it is the apprehending Light. That Light forms the essence of the senses. The impressions derived by the senses are instantly transferred to the heart which, in turn, passes them on to the intellect. The intellect, located in the brain, recognizes these impressions for what they are, namely sense perceptions, and then transfers them to the imagination. From there they finally reach the understanding (*mufakkirah*), which analyses and tabulates them. The perceptions that are of the greatest interest to the mind are retained by the faculty closest to the heart (not, however, the physical organ), namely memory. Now all the different channels through which perception is being gathered and or-

¹ See text from the *Futūḥāt*.

ganized function thanks to Light. Both mental faculties and sensory perceptions owe their rational character to that Light, the seat of which Ibn 'Arabī identifies with a non-physical centre which he calls the heart or, sometimes, the inward eye, *al-'ayn al-baṣīrah*. Everything that enables us to apprehend life—in fact our very awareness of living—is this light.

It is not always easy to follow Ibn 'Arabī in his explanations of the light. It would appear, however, that he identifies it with our rational soul. We think and feel, hear and see, form images and memorize, by means of various faculties and senses. In their essence all these are light. In other words, light is the quality (or force) through which apprehension takes place. We might call it the inmost essence of our intelligence or that which, in the phenomenal world, is least separated from the Divine.

Now it is the objects of our apprehension that come into question: the phenomena, relationships, actions and, finally, ideas, which the light enables us to apprehend. What is their essence? Since God is the root of everything that is, He is Light *par excellence*. And so all His creatures, men and beasts, ideas, trees and microbes, are manifestations of Light. It follows, therefore, that both the apprehending intelligence and its objects are (functions of) Light. Equally true are the two opposite formulations: what is not Light cannot apprehend Light; and what is not Light cannot be apprehended by Light. Indeed Ibn 'Arabī points out that if a thing or idea cannot be apprehended by any kind of mind, it has no reality. It is even more obvious that what is not Light—for example, the mind of a complete idiot—cannot apprehend the Light (the truth), whether of objects or ideas.

The most perfect knowledge accessible to man is that

of a mystic, Ibn 'Arabī tells us. In the mystic's case Divine essence is revealed directly to the 'heart' in an immediate vision. Such a vision does not depend upon the intellect, and it can dispense with the complicated processes of apprehension requisite for conceptual knowledge. The mystic's heart sees (or reflects) all the Divine perfections which, otherwise, are scattered in endless multiplicity throughout the universe. In fact only the mystic's heart can perceive Reality itself which is beyond thought.

(F) INANIMATE OBJECTS

So far we have not discussed Ibn 'Arabī's views regarding objects other than man and animal. Since he does not attribute to a stone or a twig the rationality that distinguishes man, they might seem to exist in some substratum untouched by the Divine spirit. Yet Ibn 'Arabī, while denying them the *personal* rationality possessed by man, insists that they manifest *Divine* rationality. This results from their following their own inner laws. And, as we know, all laws originate in God. It will be remembered that, according to Ibn 'Arabī, all phenomena are God's Attributes. In so far as all such Attributes have their being in Divine Names which, in turn, are aspects (or localizations) of the Divine essence, they are all identical in origin, though not in their phenomenal manifestation. Must we then assume that a stone's relationship to God does not differ from that of man to God?

Ibn 'Arabī tells us that man alone can know God perfectly (just as God knows Himself through man who is God's consciousness 'in manifestation' that is, exteriorized or made 'visible'). Even the angels know less of God than does man, for they know Him only in His transcendental nature which has no relation to the

phenomenal world. Man alone can know God both in His aspects of the Real and the phenomenal. Why? Because, of all God's creatures, man alone is both real and phenomenal, eternal and transient, internal and external. Inanimate objects, on the other hand, can know of God only as much as they know of themselves, that is, of God's particular Name revealed through them. They know God's 'stoniness' or what is stone within God; they know what is water, or metal, or cabbage, in Him. Beyond any of these or similar organisms, they can know nothing of God.

(G) THE THING

Under the influence of Plato and Aristotle, Muslim philosophy was greatly preoccupied with the question of what constitutes a thing, or *shay'*. According to the Mu'tazilah, a thing was a concept that could be known regardless of whether it actually existed or not, existence being only one of its various qualities. Ibn 'Arabī, too, conceives of being as possible apart from things that actually exist. It is only in the phenomenal world that the quality of being must be possessed by an object in order that it may exist.

How then does Ibn 'Arabī define non-being? He divides things that have no being into two categories. To the first belong things that have no existence in any of the planes of pure Being, that is God. These he calls pure non-existent. To his second category belong things which exist in one plane but not in another. He divides them into two sub-categories: things which exist only as intellectual concepts without the possibility of existence in the actual world (like, we might say, the concept of a man with a hundred heads or a fire that is wet); and, second, things which have a possible existence in the actual world without, however, existing in

it. (Such a thing would have been, for non-Australians, the black swan in the days before Australia was discovered, or any invention prior to its having been made, e.g. the telephone or the jet plane a hundred years ago.) Ibn 'Arabī points out that while these last two categories of non-being can be objects of our thought, pure non-being can never be; in other words, any concept that our mind cannot possibly conceive is pure non-being. This means that pure non-being is everything that cannot be thought of or put into symbols.

Ibn 'Arabī's views are not dissimilar to those of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā who held that a concept that cannot be expressed in language is unthinkable. So they called the word the 'body of the thought,' and maintained that thought cannot exist without its verbal body. Ibn 'Arabī would certainly not disagree with this, for he regarded both words and thoughts as Divine Attributes and, thus, as partaking in the Divine essence. However, something for which neither a word nor a thought can be found cannot partake of that essence and thus is pure non-existent.

(H) DREAMS

Only with the advent of Jung's analytical psychology has the world become familiar with the concept of the archetypal dreams, dreams whose sources are to be sought not in the subconscious of the individual but in that of an entire civilization or nation. Most people consider the notion of the archetypal dream as not only new but revolutionary. In actual fact it is not new. For Jung's formulation of such a dream can be found in Ibn 'Arabī.

Ibn 'Arabī regards dreams as *khayāl*, or mental images (imaginings) which represent something between the real and the phenomenal worlds, as do our

imaginings. He also interprets *khayāl* as anything that provides a symbol for either reality or for some hidden meaning. In this particular sense, the entire phenomenal world might be considered *khayāl*. In fact both that world and dreams he regards as symbols of hidden realities.

It is during dreams that imagination is at its most active, producing ordinary dreams. According to Ibn 'Arabī, it is then that imagination gets hold of experiences of daily life, and presents them to the 'inward eye' (of the heart). In the inward eye, they are magnified as though in a mirror, and it is the subsequently distorted image of those experiences that fill our dreams. Usually these images become the foci or symbols of our desires.

There also exists a second type of dream, which Ibn 'Arabī regards as of far greater significance, the material for which comes not from our ordinary daytime experiences but direct from the Universal Soul, or, as Ibn 'Arabī sometimes calls it, the 'Guarded Table'. In such a dream man's (rational) soul perceives the archetypal ideas contained in the Universal Soul. But even in such dreams imagination gains possession of the received ideas, and distorts them. As a result, man's 'inward eye', while in direct contact with the Universal Soul, nevertheless does not act as a perfect mirror but as a 'running, yet undefiled, stream wherein are reflected illuminated objects of all descriptions'.¹ Thus the dreamer sees only the reflections of the archetypal ideas, and these are merely the symbols of the latter. The symbols have been provided by the dreamer's own imagination and not by the Universal Soul that presented the ideas in all their purity. In consequence, these dreams, being symbolical, have to be interpreted.

¹ From *Māḥiyat al-Qalb*, quoted by Affifi, op. cit. p. 132.

For only the reality behind the symbols is real 'knowledge'. (This notion, we might add, would offer opportunities to a Jungian analyst.)

There is, however, one type of dream that is not symbolical but a direct revelation of Reality. Imagination does not enter into it, and the 'inward eye' reproduces the exact reflection of the impression received. In such a dream, the Universal Soul (with its archetypal ideas) reveals itself direct to man's soul without any distortion. (What Ibn 'Arabī means, of course, is that the Universal Soul reveals itself through the medium of the individual soul.) Dreams of this nature obviously call for no interpretation. They are the truly archetypal dreams, and are similar to the mystic's revelation (*wahy*) or inspiration (*ilhām*). They are the direct vision of Reality, of Universal Truth.

(I) CAUSE AND EFFECT

The hardest test for a non-dualistic philosophy is provided by such distinctly dualistic concepts as those of active and passive, cause and effect, and, finally, good and evil. Aristotelian logic is compelled (by its very nature) to accept the dualistic nature of these concepts. But the acceptance of such a dualism by Ibn 'Arabī would inevitably bring down the entire house of his monistic doctrine. That his doctrine actually passes the test is not due to the author's piecemeal justification, but to the fact that its validity follows organically from the basic principles of his philosophy.

For Ibn 'Arabī's universe is not the effect of a cause that is God, just as a phenomenon is not the Aristotelian outcome of the imprint of form upon matter or, in other words, of the necessary upon the possible. His universe is the outward expression of God's aspects of eternity and infinity. Thus his universe—both the phenomenal,

and the invisible that we enter in the hereafter—is a constant process of creation.

In a system in which God provides both (what in Aristotelian terminology must be called) cause and effect, there must exist a like unity of origin on the plane of visible phenomena, and terms such as cause and effect can have no meaning. For Ibn 'Arabī God is the only source of both the lightning and of the destruction produced by it, of both the painter and the painter's picture. Both have their origin in Him, and so God is immanent in both of those phenomena we call cause and effect.

Ibn 'Arabī might have felt justified in explaining away the duality of active and passive by merely identifying the former with cause and the latter with effect. But to seek refuge in intellectual shortcuts was not his way of building up a philosophical system.

In the more conventional systems man appears as the passive agent created by the will of an active God. For Ibn 'Arabī man is passive only when he considers himself as apart from God, that is, exclusively as a phenomenon. As soon, however, as he becomes aware of his God-ness, he is bound to be active. Yet even in that condition he is also passive in so far as his 'active' nature comes from God whose agent he is. Thus he is both active and passive: active when viewed as Divine, passive when viewed as merely phenomenal. However, in Ibn 'Arabī's system these definitions have no real meaning. They represent merely our own mental conceptions born of our tendency to view everything in terms of opposites, contrasts, duality. Duality presupposes the existence of space, a dimension non-existent in pure spirit. It also presupposes the possibility of disharmony or disunity, and opens doors to the 'possible', in contradistinction to the 'necessary'.

Within the realm of pure spirit neither of these can occur. There can only be unity, harmony and necessity. So opposites, with their inevitable concomitants of space, disunity, impermanence, and so on, can be conceived only mentally, when we view the world non-spiritually.

What is true of cause and effect applies equally to active and passive. Thus the object of an action—its 'passive' recipient—is in turn active by his reaction to it. If I hit someone, the reactions of the latter's muscles, nerves, blood vessels, as well as of his mind and emotions, constitute quite as much an 'action' as did the original blow.

(J) GOOD AND EVIL

It is by no means exceptional for Ibn 'Arabī to put forward more than one theory on a given subject, one either amplifying the other or treating it from a different aspect. As we would expect, Ibn 'Arabī's conception of absolute Reality (*Al-Ḥaqq*), which is that of absolute Good (*Al-Khayr al-Mahd*), leaves no room for the duality of good and evil. In the universe, as known to us, he regards evil as non-existence, or rather, as the absence of real existence. Such existence (belonging, as it does, to Reality) must, of course, be 'positive'. Evil is thus the lack of a corresponding positive quality. Darkness is the absence of light, weakness the absence of strength, a lie the absence of truth, illness the absence of health. An organ becomes ill when health has been withdrawn from it. It cannot exist in a condition of 'neutrality'—neither healthy nor unhealthy—illness thus being not a 'quality' negative *per se*, but rather non-health. Everything that *really* exists is for Ibn 'Arabī good—otherwise it could not be there. Consequently he regards evil as a subjective, and not an objective, reality.

In the eyes of God all things must be good. Only man's ignorance calls some of them good and some bad. In his blindness man does not perceive that in the bad things goodness might possibly lie hidden behind their evil appearance. We might cite as an illustration of that truth the positive qualities of electricity which have always existed in, but which were discovered only after the evil forces inherent in lightning. Before their discovery man could see no good whatsoever therein. Likewise, the positive qualities within penicillin had potentially always existed within the mildew; but only the mould's negative qualities were known before Alexander Fleming's discovery. In its internal aspect, Ibn 'Arabī considers everything to be good; only in its external aspect, that is as mere appearance (*khalq*) may a thing appear evil.

Since good cannot produce anything that is evil *qua* evil, its evilness derives its apparent reality (that is, in the world of appearance) from man's individual reaction to it. A thing is considered evil because the prevailing convention, morality or religious codes label it as such. It appears as evil because it creates conflicts with certain mental or emotional desires, or because it disagrees with our individual temperament. Ibn 'Arabī insists that even such evil manifestations as lying, disorder, ugliness, sinful action, merely denote the absence of a positive quality, the presence of which would deprive them of their evilness.

Now let us examine Ibn 'Arabī's second interpretation of evil. God's universe would not be perfect if it did not also include imperfections. Perfection, which implies completeness, must include everything, just as a perfect, i.e. complete, colour scheme cannot be limited to 'pretty' colours but must contain every imaginable hue—even 'dirty' greys and browns and black. Without

them the scheme would not be complete. It follows from this that, in order to show perfection, the sum-total of happenings and actions within the universe must of necessity include 'imperfect', that is, 'evil', happenings and actions. Since, however, all those actions derive their being from God, it is He who ultimately decrees or commands them.

What then is the meaning of sin, *ma'ṣiyah*, in Ibn 'Arabī's system? According to him, God decrees that an action must take place, but forbids man to perform it or, as he puts it, 'the prophets are asked to communicate God's commandments to the people, but God does not always will that such commandments be fulfilled'. The contradiction implied in this statement is apparent rather than real. What Ibn 'Arabī means is that God decrees an action irrespective of whether, in human eyes, it appears good or evil. God's decree (*al-maṣḥī'ah*) makes such an action as indispensable as it makes the advent of night after day, of autumn after summer, and so on. God does not particularly command the darkness of the night or winter's cold, just as He does not particularly command the evil of any particular action. What He decrees is the action in its totality, irrespective of whether we regard it as good or bad. It is not the evil aspect in the action that He decrees but the action as a whole and as an inevitable expression of His law. In other words. He wills the *action* but not the evil within it. He must approve of *all* actions because they are all His. The conflict (*nizā'*) between them (in so far as they contain what appears to us as evil) and human law or morality exists only for us who are ignorant of the decree behind all God's manifestations. Actions *qua* actions could not become manifest unless they were 'approved' by God.

Sin, then, in Ibn 'Arabī's doctrine, is disobedience

not to God's will (which would be impossible for man), but to the 'mediate religious command'.¹ In God's eyes everything that is must be. Since it must be, it would be futile to define it as either good or evil. All that can be said about it is that it *is*. We are thus entitled to conclude that for Ibn 'Arabī morality, in a spiritual sense, does not exist, or to put it differently, that he considers morality as a purely human code. Within a non-dualistic system such as his, in which everything derives from God, there can be no room for the ordinary concept of morality.

And yet morality enters Ibn 'Arabī's doctrine as it were through a back door. But it is a morality conceived not in the conventional way of relative values—more good or less good, and thus quantitative—but a 'morality' that is purely qualitative, and that derives its validity from purely spiritual considerations. Even in Ibn 'Arabī's scheme man must strive for the good. Yet he must do so, not because such striving denotes virtue or moral soundness, but because it concerns itself with the positive alone. For only the positive—light, truth, health—represent reality, existence. A life of 'evil' is a life of their opposites or 'absences', and thus of spiritual non-existence. It is not an affirmation of life but of escape from it, of only apparent existence.

'Aware' of the dilemma confronting man living in a universe in which everything is willed by Him, God has given man means by which to differentiate between a life of affirmation and one of escapes. It is due to God that man can distinguish between perfection and imperfection, good and evil, harmony and disharmony. If man were not under the obligation to choose the real rather than its opposite and thus the 'moral' rather than the 'immoral', there would be no meaning in God's

¹ *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 319.

injunctions to man to be 'good'. If everything on the *human* level were equally 'good', there would be no validity in some of the Divine Names which, by themselves, imply the 'moral' character of the relationship between God and man. God the Pardoner (*Al-Ghaffār*), the Merciful (*Al-Raḥīm*), the Tormentor (*Al-Mu'adh-dhib*), the Guiding (*Al-Hādī*), would be meaningless if man regarded every one of God's manifestations as equally 'good' (in human terms) and had no need of His mercy or his guidance. In the purely spiritual sphere, that of absolute existence, Ibn 'Arabī obviously cannot accept the dichotomy of good and evil and with it morality. But in the world of appearance, the one in which man normally lives, even he must stress the contrast between moral and the immoral action. However, the decisive factor for him is not the moral aspect of an action but its reality.

(K) FREE WILL AND PREDESTINATION

The problem of free will and predestination preoccupied the Muslim philosophers from the very dawn of their contemplations. The Qur'ān abounds in sayings stressing both man's freedom of action and God's absolute power over man's destiny. The various philosophical schools employed the most ingenious methods to resolve the implicit conflict; but it cannot be said that they ever succeeded in their attempts. The Determinists (*Al-Jabriyyah*) held that man's actions are determined by an outside agent, namely God; according to the Ash'arites, God created man and all his actions; the Mu'tazilah held that while a man's action derives from his free will, his ability to act is God-given. But however subtle their arguments, none of the schools provided a satisfactory reconciliation of the Quranic theses insisting on both God's omnipotence and man's free will.

Ibn 'Arabī disagrees with the doctrine of *jabr* as a compulsion forced upon man from an outside agent. Yet it was obviously impossible for him to accept free will, for this would have left him no alternative but the opposition of man's will to that of God, and thereby have introduced dualism. Since, according to him, everything has its origin and being in God, free will, as ordinarily understood, can have no place in his system. Does it follow that his God as a kind of tyrant who steps in every time man performs an action and imposes His dictate upon him? Does it mean that human choice is governed by a relentless determinism and that man is the helpless victim of Divine arbitrariness? For Ibn 'Arabī man's choice is not dictated by perpetual interference on the part of God but by man's own inner laws. Every leaf, flower and fruit is 'predetermined' already by the seed from which it evolved. It is not Divine capriciousness that makes one seed grow into a big oak tree and another into a weakly maple; their respective inner laws are contained in their seed. Ibn 'Arabī accepts man's own choice, but finds it inherent in his own nature. Since, however, that nature derives from God, free will, in the accepted sense, plays no part in our philosopher's doctrine.

To understand his theory of human will it is necessary first to know that what he really means by 'will' is not exactly our habitual meaning. It signifies, rather, desire, *shahwah*. It is not will but desire that makes a man crave the satisfaction of some appetite. Desire, according to Ibn 'Arabī, is concerned with material objects. Will, on the other hand, is a spiritual force whose object is never a material one. Will drives man towards spiritual fulfilment, and, finally, towards the Divine. As such it is free from all pleasant or unpleasant sensations. Even to feel pleasure at the hope of gaining a vision of God is

not the outcome of will but of the desire 'for an object'. But, of course, Ibn 'Arabī's 'will' and its gratification are the privilege of a few exceptional beings, such as the saints and mystics.

Though Ibn 'Arabī occasionally tries to place a personal responsibility on human shoulders ('let him praise no one but himself and blame no one but himself,' he writes in the *Fuṣūṣ* p. 160), such efforts carry no ring of conviction, and we suspect that they were a half-hearted sop to the orthodox. In actual fact he denies free will even to God. God merely decrees what He knows must take place in accordance with the laws that have their being in Him. It is impossible for Him to will what does not lie in the nature of the thing itself. This means that human fate is not pre-determined but *self*-determined. Individual fate is simply man's essential character as it exists from eternity in the Divine knowledge. Man receives as much of good as the 'necessity' of his nature demands. It follows that fate is God's decree concerning things. It is conditioned by His knowledge of their essential nature. So whatever fate decrees is decreed by means of the thing itself. Even God cannot give man either more or less of certain qualities than he actually possesses. In other words, even God cannot perform a miracle that would violate the laws that have their being in Him.

When we consider Ibn 'Arabī's doctrine of free will together with his statements on the nature of good and evil, we find that he is far from being a determinist. Though everything is determined by the inner laws governing the nature of the particular agent, it does not follow that the agent is cognisant of those laws. He has to act in almost complete ignorance of them: in other words, he acts as though the 'predetermined' character of his 'choice' were absent. At the same time, if he wishes

to lead a life of Reality, he will strive for the positive or that which has true being. Thus, however much the nature of his choice and the outcome of his actions might be determined by his inner laws, he will act as though he were a free agent, and he will even act 'morally', however little conventional morality may be his incentive.

(L) AL-FANĀ'

Ibn 'Arabī devotes a great deal of thought to mystical experiences and the 'mechanism' within them. The usual Ṣūfī term for 'union' with God is *fanā'* (passing away, or annihilation). But not all Ṣūfis agree on its meaning, nor on the meaning of its opposite pole, the term *baqā'*, or enduring. Most of the Ṣūfis before Ibn 'Arabī use the word *fanā'* to describe a purely subjective state. They agree that in *fanā'* consciousness of the phenomenal world is lost; that *fanā'* leads to a gradual unification with God; and that it involves a giving up of all personal desires, and resignation to the will of God. But, as Dr Affifi points out (op. cit., p. 139), with the exception of Al-Qushayrī, no Ṣūfī defines *fanā'* or *baqā'* as clear psychological states: the one as 'abandonment of the phenomenal', the other as 'concentration of the Divine and spiritual'. As Al-Qushayrī says (in his *Risālah*, p. 32), 'the two states together are like a lover's absorption in the beloved'. Practically all other Ṣūfī statements on *fanā'* were vague.

Ibn 'Arabī was not only a Ṣūfī but also a philosopher, whose intellectual capacities were second to none in Muslim thought. In his views on *fanā'* he disagrees not only with most Ṣūfis but also with those Western mystics who describe a state corresponding to *fanā'*. How can even a mystic, he asks, 'die to self', and yet be conscious of God? Consciousness (irrespective of its

object) implies continuation of self. A passing away of self cannot mean anything but sleep. In such a state, 'the mystic is neither with his "self" nor with his "Lord"; he is asleep, he is unaware'. Ibn 'Arabī dismisses as ignorance the assumption that the mystic has become God or died to himself.

Ibn 'Arabī considers *fanā'* from both a mystical and a metaphysical aspect. In a mystical sense, *fanā'* is a passing away of ignorance and a becoming aware of the essential oneness of the whole. It is realization of one's non-existence as form (phenomenon). This, he claims, can be achieved only intuitively. In a metaphysical sense, *fanā'* is a passing away of the forms of the phenomenal world and continuation of the one universal essence. It is the disappearance of form at the moment of the manifestation of God in another form or, as he puts it, 'the disappearance of a form is its *fanā'* at the moment of the manifestation of God in another form'.¹ It can be said then (on the basis of Ibn 'Arabī's, and the atomists', doctrine of the world as being in a constant process of creation, that is, of destruction and recreation) that *fanā'* is catching the infinitesimal moment between the annihilation of one Divine Attribute and the emergence of a new Attribute. (What Ibn 'Arabī appears to mean is that, since Divine Attributes, by their very nature, exist in time, only the 'instant' between them belongs to eternity—the dimension of pure essence. And so it is only then that the timelessness of *fanā'* can be reached.)

In his endeavour to give an objective assessment of *fanā'*, Ibn 'Arabī delineates it as a gradual process which he divides into seven stages. These are as follows:

1. Passing away, from sin. This Ibn 'Arabī does not interpret in the usual Ṣūfī manner as the abandonment

¹ *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 230.

of all sin, but as a realization that all actions are right (not in a moral sense but as coming from God). That which is sin, is to regard one's actions as coming from oneself.

2. Passing away from all actions in the realization that God is the agent of all actions.

3. Passing away from all attributes of the 'form' in the realization that they all belong to God. As Ibn 'Arabī puts it; 'God sees Himself in you through your own eye and, therefore, He really sees Himself: this is the meaning of the passing away of attributes.'¹

4. Passing away from one's own personality in the realization of the non-existence of the phenomenal self, and the endurance (*baqā'*) of the eternal substance which is its essence.

5. Passing away from the whole world in the realization of the real aspect which is at the bottom of the phenomenal.

6. Passing away from all that is other than God, even from the act of passing away (*fanā' al-fanā'*). The mystic ceases to be conscious of himself as contemplator, God being both the contemplator and the object of the contemplation. (This is very different from the common Ṣūfī view of the disappearance of consciousness which Ibn 'Arabī defines as mere sleep.)

7. Passing away from all Divine attributes. The universe ceases to be the 'effect of a cause' and becomes a 'Reality in appearance' (*Ḥaqq fī Ṣuhūr*). This seventh stage represents the fullest realization of the oneness of all things, and must be the final aim of all mystical endeavour.

It may be objected that Ibn 'Arabī tries in vain to give an intellectually acceptable explanation of the mystical experience, since such an experience is essentially incommunicable. It must, however, be

¹ *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 198.

conceded that no individual experience that involves quality and not merely quantity is communicable except by approximation. No one has ever been able to convey to others the essence of the feeling of being in love, or of the sensation of plunging headlong into icy water. All communication is effected by symbols, whether verbal, mathematical or of any other nature. Though the symbols used by a mystic differ more profoundly from the experience they symbolize than do most symbols from their respective experience, the difference between the two kinds of symbols is not fundamental. If we wish to communicate a mystical experience, we can do it only by employing symbols similar to those we employ when communicating any kind of qualitative experience. These symbols, being media belonging to a plane different from the plane of the things they symbolize, must needs distort the truth of the experience. It may well be that a mystical experience sweeps through the different stages as tabulated by Ibn 'Arabī as though in a flash, and that his detailed tabulation is too complex and artificial to explain it. It may seem too particularized and intellectual, but it contributes to a clearer understanding of the mystical experience.

Summing up, we might say that for Ibn 'Arabī the goal of *fanā'* is the attainment of *true* knowledge by the passing away of everything phenomenal, that is, everything other than God. Attainment of such knowledge can be equated with awareness of God. This, however, must not be interpreted as becoming God. Rather is it God's recognizing Himself through, and within the medium of man.

(M) THE LOGOS

No other Muslim thinker has dealt more thoroughly

with the doctrine of the *Logos* than has Ibn 'Arabī. The *Logos* doctrine—not necessarily always under that name—plays an important part in Islamic philosophy. In their preoccupation with it Muslim thinkers based themselves inevitably on Plotinus. To some extent Ibn 'Arabī did likewise. Yet, in his hands, that doctrine assumes its own peculiar character. Incidentally, it forms one of the main subjects of his *Fuṣūṣ*.

For Ibn 'Arabī the *Logos* is the creative, animating and rational principle and, as such, Reality of Realities. It is the inward aspect of the Godhead and the Godhead is its outward aspect. It is God's consciousness and, as such, contains all the ideas of existing (or potential) objects, without, however, in itself, having multiplicity. It is through the *Logos* that the world is brought into manifestation. Since the world manifests its perfection, it, too, must be, and indeed is, perfect. Besides being the principle of Divine creativeness, the *Logos* naturally has rationality. In fact it is through the *Logos* that God becomes conscious of Himself. For even in the case of God, thought is a function not of the thinker as a whole but of His mind.

Now, according to Ibn 'Arabī, the Divine consciousness reaches its supreme point in the Perfect Man. So it is in the Perfect man that God knows Himself perfectly. It is to Him that God says (according to a ḥadīth): 'I have not created a creature dearer to me than thee. With thee I give and with thee I take, and with thee I punish.' Evidently Ibn 'Arabī's *Logos* represents the 'agent' through whom God can emerge from His absoluteness, His unknowableness (and, in a sense, unknowingness) into manifestation.

So far Ibn 'Arabī's doctrine would seem to differ but little from that of either Philo or Plotinus. Where he completely parts company with his Greek predecessors

is in his interpretation of the manifested *Logos*. Who is this Perfect Man, for him? It is the Prophet Muḥammad. Does this mean that Ibn 'Arabī takes over the Christian doctrine of Incarnation, and assigns to Muḥammad the status of Jesus in Christian dogma? Such a deification of Muḥammad would, of course, be regarded in Islam as polytheism. However unorthodox Ibn 'Arabī might be, he was not likely to propound a doctrine that would have cleared the way for what Muslims consider to be an essential dualism (if not worse) in Christianity. But then his *Logos*-Muḥammad is not the man Muḥammad from Mecca but Muḥammad as the active principle of Divine knowledge, as the spiritual (and not phenomenal) head of the hierarchy of sainthood and prophethood.

Seeds of a *Logos* doctrine were sown in the Qur'ān itself. In a number of instances the term *rūḥ* (spirit) and *kalimah* (word) are employed to denote a *Logos* concept, as e.g. in Surah iv, 169: 'Verily the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, is but the Apostle of God, and His Word which He cast into Mary and a spirit from Him.' On another occasion, Jesus is described as God's word: 'The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only the messenger of God, and His word that He committed to Mary.' In his *Fuṣūṣ*, Ibn 'Arabī calls every prophet a *logos* but not *the Logos*. Saints and prophets are, in his view, the perfect instruments of the universal *Logos*. But while they individually manifest this or that particular aspect of the *Logos*, Muḥammad alone unites in himself all these aspects.

Particularly interesting is our philosopher's interpretation of the difference between the *Logos* (Muḥammad) and mankind to which Adam—another aspect of the *Logos*—stands in a somewhat similar relation to that existing between Muḥammad and other saints. In fact

Muḥammad and Adam are for Ibn 'Arabī practically identical. But while in the phenomenal world Muḥammad is the inward aspect of Adam (Humanity), in the world to come, that is the spiritual, Adam will be the inward aspect and Muḥammad the outward of the same Reality, i.e. the *Logos*.

Now it must be repeated that Ibn 'Arabī does not identify the *Logos* with the earthly person of the Prophet but with the Spirit of Muḥammad, of which the man from Mecca and all the prophets, including Moses, Abraham and Jesus, were individual manifestations. (Though by no means indetical, that relationship is somewhat similar to that between Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus Christ as the incarnation of God the Father.) The entity Muḥammad, combining in itself both the Spirit of Muḥammad and Muḥammad the man, is for Ibn 'Arabī the link between the eternal and the temporal, the Real and the phenomenal. While Muḥammad the man was born, was active, and died in time, the Spirit of Muḥammad exists in all eternity. It is identical with the First Intellect (*Ḥaqīqat al-Ḥaqā'iq*). It is the 'depositor' (*mulqī*) of the *logoi* (*kalimāt*) of the entire world, and, as such, identical with the Holy Spirit (*Rūḥ*). Muḥammad is, thus, the Perfect Man and, as such, the most perfect manifestation of God who Himself is Absolute Perfection.

While every human being is potentially a microcosm, only the Perfect Man is an *actual* microcosm which manifests *all* Divine perfections. Only in him are united all that is manifestable and all the manifestations that, otherwise, exist only separately, whether in a spiritual or phenomenal state. Though Ibn 'Arabī does not actually say so, he almost leaves us under the impression that the Perfect Man (as realized in Muḥammad) surpasses the Godhead in perfection, for he alone is not

merely spiritual perfection but equally its phenomenal manifestation. But such an impression would be wrong, for it would suggest (if only by implication) some sort of duality between Godhead and the Perfect Man. Indeed Ibn 'Arabī stresses that the Perfect Man is 'to God as the eye-pupil is to the eye . . . and through him God beholds His creatures'.¹

While there are many similarities between Ibn 'Arabī's *Logos* doctrine and corresponding doctrines in Christianity, it would be wrong to deduce that the former derives from the latter. Christian *Logos* conceptions are based on the idea of the Incarnation which Ibn 'Arabī utterly rejects. His Spirit of Muḥammad is not a second Person in the Godhead: it is God Himself viewed from a particular aspect. Furthermore, the God of Christianity is spirit, is love, while Ibn 'Arabī's God is beyond all attributes² and acts and reveals Himself only through a particular Agent whom he calls the Spirit of Muḥammad. The difference is far more than merely a semantic one. Paradoxically, it might be said that while the God of Christianity is everything and yet becomes Incarnate (in the person of Christ), Ibn 'Arabī's God, while nothing but pure essence that acts through an 'agent', does not require an incarnation. While the God of both Christianity and Islam *created* the universe and is the Creator, Ibn 'Arabī's God manifests Himself in the infinite forms of the universe.

It might be asked why Ibn 'Arabī should have spent so much time and effort upon evolving so complex a doctrine of the *Logos*? We can only assume that, like so many philosophers before him, he found it impossible to conceive of creation, that is, the relationship between

¹ *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 19.

² The word 'attribute' is used here in its common sense and not in the specific sense in which Ibn 'Arabī uses it when he refers to Divine Names becoming Divine Attributes.

God and the universe, without some 'hierarchical' system. Hierarchy is inherent in every ordered system. It must needs dominate the macrocosm as well as the microcosm. No man could function properly without organizing his various functions in some inner hierarchy. Thus he will not put the whole of his physical energy into picking up a pin, just as he will not expend the whole of his emotions for a minor pleasure or a minor irritation. An innate hierarchical system within him instinctively makes him assign certain duties to certain inner 'agents' rather than employ the whole of himself for each one of them. Likewise, God does not act (or manifest Himself) *in toto* in the greatest as well as the least significant of His manifestations. He will assign specific agents for specific functions. Hence the acceptance in most religions of archangels, angels, spirits, and so on.

A hierarchical system is of course the basis of most Muslim doctrines of creation as it was of those of the Neo-platonists. But whereas their system implies duality (God on the one hand, and His emanations (or creatures), with the succession of Universal Reason, Spirits of Spheres, the phenomenal world, and so on, on the other), Ibn 'Arabī's system shows no such duality. It might be said that while their hierarchy is a vertical one, beginning with God at the top and reaching matter at the bottom, Ibn 'Arabī's system is a centrifugal one or, rather, one in which all the hierarchies remain within the circle. They are merely the different modes, the inner and outer manifestation of one Reality. That Reality might be said both to act from a centre and to be all-embracing. The doctrines of the philosophers only pretended to solve the problem of duality between a unitarian God and a universe of multiplicity and imperfections, and they did it by the use of such terms

as 'emanation' instead of 'creation', 'necessity' of God's nature instead of God's 'will', and so forth. Al-Ghazālī *appears* to have solved the problem by accepting the simpler Quranic doctrine of creation. In actual fact he left the intellectual solution in the air. Ibn 'Arabī would seem to be the only one who solved the problem both from the mystical and the philosophical points of view; that is, in so far as such a problem can ever be solved intellectually, and the solution be expressed through the imperfect medium of language.

We might perhaps summarize Ibn 'Arabī's *Logos* doctrine in the following manner:

Logos is Reality of Realities, first Manifestation of the Absolute; *Logos* is Reality of Muḥammad, not the man of Mecca, but Muḥammad the principle or the Spirit of Muḥammad; the *Logos-Muḥammad* unites in himself all the prophets who, in turn, are minor logoi; the *Logos-Muḥammad* had been manifesting himself in all the genuine prophets long before Muḥammad of Mecca was born.

Each individual prophet manifests but one particular 'Name' of God, whereas the *Logos-Muḥammad*, the Seal of the Prophets, manifests *all* His names; the *Logos-Muḥammad* is the step from the Godhead to the phenomenal universe; it is the link between the eternal and the phenomenal.

And since Ibn 'Arabī approaches the *Logos* problem from more aspects than one, we might conclude by saying that: in its metaphysical aspect the *Logos* is Reality of Realities; in its mystical aspect the *Logos* is Reality of Muḥammad; in its human aspect the *Logos* is the Perfect Man. Naturally all the three are identical, as a man remains the same, irrespective of whether we consider him as a spiritual, biological, intellectual, racial, social or any other entity.

(N) HEAVEN AND HELL

Divine mercy and divine punishment run like a thread through the Qur'ān, and thus heaven and hell play an important part in Muslim doctrine. Whatever else the Qur'ān might be, it most certainly is a book of the most pervasive moral implications. By no stretch of the imagination can the same be said of Ibn 'Arabī's doctrine. In a scheme such as his, there is little room for orthodox morality. In view of this, it is surprising to find that he speaks of both heaven and hell and of the ultimate effects of moral and immoral actions.

Unlike some of the Ṣūfīs, especially Al-Muḥāsibī and Al-Ghazālī, Ibn 'Arabī does not attempt to tell us what we ought to do; how to behave in order to avoid hell and to deserve heaven. Now morality, it has been argued earlier, is primarily a matter of degree and thus of quantity. Ibn 'Arabī is seldom concerned with quantity, with the substantial aspects of the universe. His concern must needs be the essence, the true reality of, and behind, phenomena. And essence, unlike substance, is not a matter of quantity but of quality. Yet since heaven and hell depend upon human behaviour in a moral, that is primarily a quantitative, sense, it would be difficult to equate them with the domain of pure essence.

In spite of all this, Ibn 'Arabī not only speaks of heaven and hell, but he does so in the detailed and luxuriant vocabulary of orthodox Islamic literature, especially of the Ismā'īlians and Carmathians. But, as is to be expected, when he speaks of heaven he means something very different from the orthodox heaven, and his hell has not much in common with the hell of the learned 'ulamā'. While the language he employs in describing these two religions is designed to mollify the orthodox, the meaning behind it is his own. It is in

fact the geography of heaven and hell—he even provides a diagram of both these areas—that left so deep a mark upon Dante, and was taken over by him in the *Divine Comedy*.¹ But, having almost overwhelmed us with traditional descriptions of Paradiso and Inferno, Ibn ‘Arabī assures us that these are mere words, and he invites us to interpret them as we like or, rather, as he likes.

Inevitably the agonies of hell are for Ibn ‘Arabī nothing but symbols, and the existence of both heaven and hell in their conventional meaning is denied by him. He regards both as purely subjective states of the soul. His hell is nothing but the realization by the self of its own enslavement, which is selfhood. One Arabic word for hell, *jahannam*, he interprets as distance, or being-away from God. In consequence, to be in hell means to imagine that a real gulf exists between man and God, and to be oblivious of the fact of their oneness.

Jannah, the Arabic word for heaven, or paradise, he interprets as deriving from *janna*, to conceal. *Jannah* is thus for him the Divine essence in which all multiplicity is concealed; consequently, the realization of absolute unity. In the one case the soul, being the slave of a self that stands between it and the Divine, imagines itself to live in separation from God in a world of multiplicity. In the other case it enjoys the delights of ‘living’ in a state of complete unity. Since Ibn ‘Arabī insists upon the ultimate salvation of every soul, there is in the last analysis really little difference between his heaven and his hell. The only difference between the damned—whose existence he seems to accept merely to be on the safe side with the orthodox—and the blessed is that while the latter will behold the beatific vision, for the former that vision will be too veiled to be

¹ See *Islam and the Divine Comedy*, by Asin y Palacios.

recognized. But, finally, the veils will be removed even from their eyes, and even they will share that experience.

Ibn 'Arabī's heaven and hell appear to have much in common with those of Ibn Sīnā. Yet he is more charitable than the great Persian doctor. It would, however, be wrong to attribute his attitude to sentimentality or to some whim on his part. His heaven and hell form a logical part of a doctrine which cannot possibly admit duality even in after-life. But this essential non-duality of heaven and hell is not 'manufactured' artificially. It forms a logical part of it. How could there be the opposites of 'real' hell and 'real' heaven in a system in which all things, both good and evil, have their being in God or, rather, in their own laws which, however, derive from God? Had Ibn 'Arabī tried to conform to orthodoxy and accepted the traditional heaven and hell, then indeed the unity of his doctrine would have disintegrated into dualism.

(O) LOVE AND BEAUTY

In the Qur'ān, it is the quality of Divine mercy rather than of Divine love that predominates. Love implies reciprocity, and it would be presumptuous of man to assume that his love of God must impel his Maker to love him in return. In Ṣūfī doctrines, of course, love of man and God can be said to form the central core. Ibn 'Arabī is no exception to that rule. But his interpretation of the man-God love relationship differs from that of the other Ṣūfis. He agrees that the basis of all religions is the worship of God. But could man worship anything without loving the object of his worship? Without love worship is impossible. In fact, for Ibn 'Arabī, love is that which pervades all beings and holds them together. However much love may differ in its forms and expressions, it is fundamentally one, for it represents the

Divine Essence. Since, however, the highest object of man's love is God (or Divine Essence), that object, too, is love. In other words: that which, in man, turns lovingly towards God is, too, of the Divine Essence. As Ibn 'Arabī puts it: 'I swear by the reality of Love that Love is the cause of all love,' and: 'Were it not for Love (residing) in the heart, Love (God) would not be worshipped.'¹ Thus Ibn 'Arabī's inevitable formulation becomes: love loves love. This, of course, is the natural climax of a doctrine of absolute non-dualism. This climax also denotes the dynamic and living quality in the idea and the function of love.

It must follow that for Ibn 'Arabī true worship implies neither the verbal invocation of the Divine name (as by the orthodox in their prayers) nor even the heart's concentration on God (as by the Ṣūfis). True worship means for him contemplating God lovingly in all His aspects—from the most spiritual to the most material, in short, in everything that exists, including the contemplator himself. This, however, is far from the triumphant and, some would say, vainglorious cry of Al-Ḥallāj, '*Ana al-Ḥaqq*'.

Since the fundamental factor underlying all Divine manifestation is love, we would naturally assume that, for Ibn 'Arabī, love is the supreme purpose of existence: an end than which no other can be of equal worth. And yet he tells us that love as such has no intrinsic value! There is something even beyond love, something that is love's inmost 'cause'. That something is Beauty.

It comes almost as an anticlimax to find a thinker who probes so deeply into the very heart of existence elevating an aesthetic quality—even if it be the highest—to the supreme position in the Divine scheme. Yet even in this unexpected conclusion Ibn 'Arabī is still

¹ *Fuṣūṣ*, pp. 387 & 390, qu. by Affī, p. 151.

perfectly consistent. For is it not true that love without the incentive of beauty is a mere abstraction? Do we not love only what we consider to be beautiful? The standards of beauty may differ, and that which one person deems beautiful another one may regard as ugly. What matters is that for the lover—even if for no one else—the object of his love must be beautiful. He may be in love with a person regarded by all others as hideous. But if he loves that person, he does so because there is some element of beauty in that person—not necessarily physical—to evoke his love. We may be in love with a reptile or any other creature or object generally regarded as repellent, because even such a creature might well be endowed with beauty visible to us but concealed from others. Rembrandt falls in love with ugly old Jews in Amsterdam or with the darkness of shadows, and Utrillo with the peeling plaster on houses of mean Parisian streets on a grey winter evening; because both artists found beauty in such unlikely models. And because they are deeply in love with those hidden aspects of beauty, they succeed in making that beauty manifest to all.

Man loves God, says Ibn 'Arabī, because God is beautiful. (Al-Fārābī discerned God's beauty in the beauty of the order permeating the God-created universe.) Indeed it is inconceivable that we could love God without considering Him beautiful. An 'ugly' god might be feared, but he cannot be loved. We might offer him our sacrifices, but never our love. God, on the other hand, loves His creatures—man and all creation—because these, too, are beautiful. Whence do they derive beauty? Clearly, it is God's beauty that is the source of every kind of beauty, whether spiritual, intellectual or physical, even though God's own beauty as such must of necessity be beyond all form.

There still remains the question: why should God love the visible beauty as contained in the 'visible' forms of the universe? Ibn 'Arabī tells us that God loves it because in the beauty of created forms His own 'form-less' beauty, in fact His very being, is reflected. 'Does God not say,' Ibn 'Arabī exclaims, 'O David, My yearning for them is greater than their yearning for me?''¹ The 17th century English author, James Howell, seems to have perceived a similar truth when, in his book *Instructions for Forreine Travell* (1642), he wrote: 'By looking downward one can see the stars in the water, but he who looks only upward cannot see the water in the stars.' Without the water the stars could not contemplate their own beauty.

Beauty and the love it inspires are thus the cause of all creation. They are equally the cause of the return of all creatures to God in the double movement of their urge for Him and His urge for them.

¹ *Fuṣūṣ*.

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