

Does the twenty-fifth chapter of the *Fusus al-Hikam* reflect the epistemological framework of its author?

Phrasing this question for the reader was much more challenging than the initial enquiry that I asked of myself. My starting version was akin to, “Wow, am I seeing that ‘*Moses*’ actually highlights Ibn al-Arabi’s theories of knowledge all the way through?”. But that wouldn’t make any sense at this juncture, although I hope that it will by the end.

My first problem to make the focus of my research more ‘user-friendly’ was that depending upon whom you ask, the full title of my ‘*Moses*’, the twenty-fifth chapter of the *Fusus al-Hikam*, can be translated as follows;

[The Bezel of] The Wisdom of Eminence in the Word of Moses,
[The Bezel] From the Sublime Wisdom in the Word of Moses,
The bezel of the wisdom of exaltation exists in the essence of Moses,
The Quintessence of the Wisdom of Eminence as embodied in the Word Moses¹.

Hermeneutics is big-game fishing in the world of Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ‘Arabi al-Ta’i al-Ḥatimi, (Ibn al-Arabi, d.1240), a man described, somewhat aptly for my analogy, as “an ocean without shore”².

My second problem was that, as one might imagine, if the chapter of a title is that difficult to render, what is going on in the rest of it? A great deal is the simple answer.

Due to that fact, I shall dive right in, take you with me, and trust neither of us drown. Any encounter with this notorious, complex, prolific polymath, will engender immediate

¹(a) Austin, R.W.J., *Ibn Al-Arabi, The Bezels of Wisdom*, Paulist Press (1980) - first complete English translation

(b) Binyamin Abrahamov, *Ibn al-Arabi’s Fusus al Hikam, An Annotated Translation of ‘The Bezels of Wisdom’*, Routledge (2015)

(c) Titus Burckhardt, *The Wisdom of the Prophets*, (translator Angela Culme Seymour), Beshara (1975) - one of the earliest ‘Western’ translations, originally into French

(d) William Chittick, The Chapter Headings of the *Fusus*, *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society*, Vol. II (1984)

² Michel Chodkiewicz, *An Ocean Without Shore, Ibn ‘Arabi, The Book and The Law*, (translator David Streight), SUNY (1993), Cover abstract notes: “Chodkiewicz provides a good deal of documentation for the often heard claim that Ibn Arabi has been the most influential thinker in Islam over the past seven hundred years”

comprehension as to why he is renowned as such. Further it is these distinctions that provide the burning platform for understanding as much as we can about the man behind it all. If epistemology, in its broadest sense, which is what I am dealing with here, (a quick caveat - for anyone expecting exegesis involving analysis of application of particular epistemological theorem, you will be disappointed), is concerned with the nature and the limits of knowledge, what were the nature and limits of his? And is his framework really reflected in one chapter of a relatively small book?

For anyone familiar with Ibn al-Arabi, it may have occurred that the answer to my question will be “yes” primarily because every single chapter of the book reflects the epistemological framework of the author to a greater or lesser degree. The reason is twofold. Firstly, it is a ‘holistic’, in the very literal sense of foundational interconnectivity, work. The *Fusus al-Hikam*, or *Bezels of Wisdom* is a book given, or indeed gifted, nearly eight hundred years ago to Ibn al-Arabi in the totality of its form that it remains to this day:

“When God revealed to me, in my innermost center, what He had deposited in our great progenitor [Muhammad], I recorded in this book only that which he dictated to me, not all I was given, since no book could contain all of it, nor yet the Cosmos as now existing”³.

That totality is therefore, by default, a correlative representation, it could not be anything else, due not just to the nature of its ‘birth’ but to Ibn al-Arabi’s iconic fundamental ontology, *al-Wahdat al-Wujud*, the unity of being. This was a posthumous label, and a doctrine of extensive influence not just in the Sufis from their al-Shayk al-Akbar (the greatest Master), but throughout Islam and the world⁴. As such it forms the first part of my affirmative answer. For one unfamiliar with Ibn al-Arabi’s ontology, which in its most simplistic terms follows the Islamic principle of *tawhid*, the oneness of God, to its most extreme monist conclusion, incredibly, the chapter holds the key.

³ Austin n1 (a) p57

⁴ Chodkiewicz, n2 p1-18

My argument is thus: *Moses* contains references to key principles i.e. a framework, of Ibn al-Arabi's epistemology, which is essentially one of the primacy of *kashf* (unveiling) as the only way to access true knowledge. However the first part of my argument relates to Ibn al-Arabi himself. For that to take shape, of absolute necessity to the validity of my question is an appreciation of his significance, a grasp of the profundity of the book, and chapter. Therefore I begin with insight into all three, of which the man has the greatest share by far. This is not just an introduction or information. It is perspicacious in its detail of the life of Ibn al-Arabi, because approaching the epistemology that is reflected, whilst lacking understanding of his life or *modus operandi* would yield little, if not nothing.

There is a quick preambulatory note on the 'Musa of the Qur'an,' whom henceforth I shall continue to refer to in the romanised Arabic as Musa. Its inclusion is two-fold. Firstly it is helpful, secondly it supports my argument. I will then critically engage with a specific section, a doctrine and examples from the '*chapter on Moses*', which from this point onward is what I mean when I use the word *Moses* (*in italics*, Musa the prophet, *Moses* the chapter). Notwithstanding prefacing this section, it is not really about *Moses* or indeed Musa, or the book, but neither is it *not about them*. In a loop, it circles back once more to the man, but through *Moses*, and the book within which *Moses* resides, and the doctrine that binds them all together - which is the appreciation of Ibn al-Arabi's epistemological framework. Why is it important? Well, if his framework is solid, his output is true. It is within the chapter that through *al wahdat al wujud*, or the unity of being, we find the nature of knowledge. It is here too that the very deeply gnostic epistemology of the man, the interplay between *kashf* (unveiling), *ma'rifa* (gnosis), *al'ilm al zahir* (outward knowledge) and *ilm al-ladunni* (divine inner knowledge), is revealed. I synthesise these elements to say, yes, it does reflect his framework. However just as Gregory Vandamme observes, "every existing reality is thus implicated in ambiguous ontological correlations"⁵, so perhaps there is a subsidiary 'no' that co-exists in harmony with the 'yes'. It is this that I explore in conclusion. That's the point to say to anyone desperately seeking dichotomy, "look away now".

⁵ Gregory Vandamme, *Some Notes on Ibn al-Arabi's Correlative Propetology*, Brill, (2023) p97

The book, the chapter... but mainly the man

Ibn al-Arabi completed the *Fusus al-Hikam*, the Bezels of Wisdom, in Damascus in 1230. A concise work in comparison to his extraordinary 560 chapter tome, *Futuḥat al-Makkiyya* (The Meccan Revelations), it contains the two doctrines for which he is most well-known; *al-Insan al-Kamil* (the Perfect Human)⁶, and the aforementioned *al-Wahdat al Wujud* (the unity of being)⁷. Each of *Fusus*' twenty seven chapters is dedicated to a particular prophet, beginning with Adam and ending with Muhammad as *al-Khatim al-Anbiya*⁸ (the Seal of the Prophets). All are structured from the Arabic as, "the *fass* (bezel) of *hikma* (wisdom) of [a spiritual faculty] in the word of [a particular Islamic prophet]";

In the first chapter Ibn al-Arabi states that Adam is "that which the setting is the is to the ring, the setting carries the seal which the King applies to his treasure chests"⁹, thus the central trope of a bezel is the setting of a signet ring that fixes, designates and "safeguards"¹⁰ authenticity of content¹¹. *Hikma* (pl.*Hikam*) is wisdom, which Al-Qaysari (d.1350) an early commentator on Ibn al-Arabi, defines it as, "knowledge of the realities of things as they are in themselves"¹². Thus Moses, the twenty-fifth chapter, is the setting of the seal of '*al-hikmat al'uluwiyah*'¹³; *uluwiyah* is often used to reflect the most profound or elevated, therefore both Burkhardt's 'Sublime Wisdom' and the common 'Wisdom of Eminence' position well¹⁴. *Al-hikmat al'uluwiyah* signed, sealed and delivered as it were, in (the word¹⁵ [of]) Moses, that is *sublime wisdom as it really is in itself*, made divinely manifest through him.

⁶ "...a key concept of Islamic mysticism. Being coined by Ibn al-'Arabi in his *Fusus al-hikam* in relation to Adam, the idea can be traced back to the early beginnings of Sufism itself" Coeli Fitzpatrick and Adam Walker, *Muhammad in history, thought, and culture : an encyclopedia of the Prophet of God*, ABC-Clio (2014) p440

⁷ "...although Ibn al-'Arabi himself did not use this term", *ibid.*, p446. It was accorded posthumously.

⁸ The Seal [i.e. the last of] the Prophets, Q. 33:40.

⁹ Burkhardt, n1 (c) p12

¹⁰ *Ibid.* Austin n1 (a) prefers, "preserves"

¹¹ There is much scholarly debate around the use of the word 'bezel', some arguing that despite Ibn Arabi's description it refers to holding of a gemstone see Chittick for summary, n1 (d) p6-7

¹² Al-Qaysari, *Sharh fusûs al-hikam*, Tehran, 1299/1881-82, Chittick n1 (d)

¹³ Burkhardt, n1 (c) p96

¹⁴ See n1

¹⁵ Chittick removes the 'of' between the 'word' and 'prophet' on the argument that it is akin to Logos, however the relationship of this word to Muhammad and other prophets is complex and outside of the scope here. Effectively though it is to be read as the fundamental manifestation of all the attributes of the divine name, so it is word as prophet. See n1, (4)

Ibn al-Arabi represents both a polarising and synthesising force in Sufism, where he was posthumously accorded the title which is still upheld today, that of *al-Shaykh al-Akbar* (The Greatest Master). In Islam he has been either equally revered, in his lifetime Ibn al-Arabi was known as Muhyi al-din, ‘the reviver of religion’¹⁶ or insulted and prohibited, e.g. Ibn Abd al Salam’ (d.1262) declaration that Ibn al-Arabi was the “*shaykh su*” (master of evil)¹⁷. His influence today reaches far wider still¹⁸ and not necessarily with any less controversy, A.E. Afifi calls him a “thoroughgoing pantheist”¹⁹ and Michel Chodkiewicz notes that the famous orientalist scholar, Louis Massignon held an “enduring hostility” toward him²⁰. The other side of the coin, or further evidence of Vandamme’s persistent ontological ambiguity in the man himself, is current revivalist studies, alongside those of other ‘mystic philosophers’²¹ such as Suhrawardi (d. 1191)²², with whom he shared startling views on value of intuited or received knowledge above reason or rational contributions, within *irfan* (primarily Iranian body of theoretical mysticism) supporting the *scientia sacra* of perennialism led by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (b.1933)²³, which continues to receive growing global and pluralist support.

Qunawi (d.1274) his step-son, philosopher in his own right coined the term *mashrab al-tahqiq*, (the school of realisation)²⁴ to distinguish ‘Akbarian’²⁵ concepts that epitomise the mystical elements of the Islamic sciences²⁶ from *falsafa* (philosophy) and *kalam* (theology).

¹⁶ The moniker of a Muslim leader of religious renewal expected in each century - previously accorded to Al-Ghazali (d.1111),

¹⁷ Ibn Taymiyya’s (d.1328) reproduction of Ibn Abd al Salam’ declaration, Alexander Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arabi in the later Islamic tradition*, State University of New York Press (1999) p66

¹⁸ See further Stephen Hirtenstein, *Names and Titles of Ibn [al] ‘Arabi* <https://ibnarabisociety.org/names-and-titles-of-ibn-arabi-stephen-hirtenstein/>. Not all his titles were flattering - e.g. the insulting Ibn Aflatun (Son of Plato), *ibid.*, Austin, pxiii, or

¹⁹ A E Affifi, *The mystical philosophy of muhyid din-ibnul‘arabi*, CUP 1939 p.67

²⁰ See Michel Chodkiewicz, *The Seal of the Saints. Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn ‘Arabi*. (translator Liadain Sherrard), The Islamic Texts Society (1993)

²¹ The question as to whether Ibn al-Arabi can indeed be called both is addressed later

²² With whom he shared startlingly similar views on the relationship of reason and gnosis considering they are a few decades apart, and at their closest in time, the width of the entire Islamic land stood between them

²³ See further Sayed Hossein Nasr, *The Need for a Sacred Science*, SUNY (1993)

²⁴ “Qūnawī, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s step-son, is considered to be the greatest expositor of his works and the foremost of his students”, H.Ali Muktar, Introduction, H.Ali Muktar (Ed.s) *The Horizons of Being, The Metaphysics of Ibn al-‘Arabī in the Muqaddimat al-Qayṣarī*, Brill (2020) p1, see for a comprehensive list of early commentators

²⁵ Not a term he would have used, however is a helpful later description adopted from the term ‘al-Shaykh al Akbar’, particularly of common use in the body of Iranian theoretical mysticism known as *irfan*.

²⁶ Seyyed Hossein Nasr (b.1933 -) writes extensively on the ‘desacralisation’ of both knowledge and ancient sciences in general, and *Irfaan* in particular. His works are extensive but a sympathetic starting point for this article is Seyyed Amir Hossein Asghari, Sufism and Challenges of Modern and Secular Philosophy: Nasr’s Perspective, *Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Veli Araştırma Dergisi*, 98 pp 245 -258 DOAJ (2021)

Their uses were not denied²⁷, but Ibn ‘Arabi’s epistemological primacy was not learning through study or transmission or reason, but through the direct experience of *kashf*.

“Witnessing follows unveiling, or it may be said that it is followed by unveiling”.

Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūhāt*, 2:484²⁸.

It would be erroneous to suggest he was unique in this regard, as it is a long tradition in Islamic thought²⁹, yet it is correct to identify him as synthesising Sufi notions that began from the early Love based personal mysticism of Rabi’a (d.801)³⁰ through the (sometimes antinomian) ecstasies such as Al-Hallaj (d.922)³¹ and Al-Bistami (d.874) extending ‘sober’ perspectives instituted by Al-Ghazali (d.1111)³², into cosmology, metaphysics and ontology making him one of the singularly most contributive doctrinal authors in the history of Islamic thought.

A note on the Qur’anic Musa and Interpretation

Thanks to being shared across the Abrahamic religions, and the ex-religio fame of the Ten Commandments, most are familiar with some sort of variation of the story of Moses. He is highly venerated in Islam, the prophet mentioned more times than any other including Muhammad, who famously said, “do not give me superiority over Moses”³³. In Islam the most noticeable variation is the inclusion of Moses’ immortal, other-worldly *sahib* (companion) al-Khidr³⁴, and their interactions, which are the subject of extensive allusive

²⁷ Rosenthal, Franz. “Ibn ‘Arabī between ‘Philosophy’ and ‘Mysticism’: ‘Sūfism and Philosophy Are Neighbors and Visit Each Other’. Fa-Inna at-Taṣawwuf Wa-t-Tafalsuf Yatajāwarāni Wa-Yatazāwarāni.” *Oriens*, vol. 31, 1988, pp. 1–35

²⁸ Dom Sylvester Houédard, *Notes on the More Than Human Saying: “Unless you know yourself you cannot know God”* MIAS, accessed May 2024

²⁹ See F.Hamza, “Locating the ‘Esoteric’ in Islamic Studies, *Islamic Studies Today: Essays in honour of Andrew Rippon*, ed. Majid Daneshgar and Walid Saleh, Brill (2016), pp355-366

³⁰ Rkia Elaroui Cornell, ‘Rabi’a the Lover.’ Rabi’a from Narrative to Myth. The Many Faces of Islam’s Most Famous Woman Saint, Rabi’a al-‘Adawiyya. Oneworld (2019)

³¹ Yusri Mohammed Ramli, Yusri Mohamad, ‘Martyrdom of al-hallaj and unity of the existence: The condemners and the commenders’, *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 3, (June 2013) pp106-112, Alexander Knysh, A. "Chapter Four The “Intoxicated” Mysticism of Al-Bistāmī and Al-Hallāj". In *Islamic Mysticism*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill (2000)

³² Al-Ghazali was noted for his success in preventing the loss of Sufism from mainstream Islam

³³ “The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Do not give me superiority over Moses, for on the Day of Resurrection all the people will fall unconscious and I will be one of them, but I will be the first to gain consciousness, and will see Moses standing and holding the side of the Throne (of Allah). I will not know whether (Moses) has also fallen unconscious and got up before me, or Allah has exempted him from that stroke” *Sahih al-Bukhari*, 2411, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:2411>

³⁴ Q 18:60-82

exegesis³⁵, *al-tafsir al-ishari*, particularly in relation to knowledge, regarding the relationship between *al'ilm al zahir* (outward knowledge) and *ilm al-ladunni*, (divine inner knowledge), and *ta-wil* (the deeper meaning from the literal). Exoterically recognised as highly mystical Qur'anic verses, even at-Tarabi's (d.923) classical exegetical encyclopaedia description of al-Khidr's *ilm al-ghayb*, "knowledge of the unseen", actually provides similes to early Sufi interpretations by al-Sarraj (d.988) and al-Tirmidhi (d.c907)³⁶, whose epistemological hierarchies included *hikma* and *ma'rifa*. It is thus further support to the argument that this particular chapter does support Ibn al-Arabi's epistemological framework; as previously noted he is a synthesis point for the early Sufi thought represented here.

What does Moses reflect?

The chapter begins with Musa's birth, and ends with Musa's death which makes it sound as if it is about a life story of this prophet. Of course, it is not. I am going to take one passage, the first one of the chapter, the doctrine contained in the middle, and examples scattered throughout to argue it does indeed reflect Ibn al-Arabi's epistemological framework.

Musa is the "fusion" of the potentiality of every child killed by the Pharaoh, an "amalgam" of spirits, receiver of a and "everything prepared for each child according to its spiritual receptivity then resided in Musa" which was a "divine favour"³⁷

(spiritual receptivity and predeterminism)

Receptivity is the key to experiencing *ma'rifa*. Knowledge is conditionally imminent to the receptacle it is received in, the *qalb* (heart, a centre of spiritual cognisance as opposed to the beating organ). In the Akbarian tradition it is incorrect to say that the knowledge 'already exists', knowledge in the imaginal plane has the possibility of existence (being) and becomes so upon man's receptivity - found in the *qalb*. The *qalb* that is ready to receive effectively facilitates the birth of the knowledge into existence (hence many Sufis speak of 'polishing

³⁵ See Hugh Halman's excellent *The Sage of Inner Knowledge: Al-Khidr in Qur'an, Hadith, and Tafsir*, Boivin, M., and Pénicaud, M., (eds.) "Inter-religious Practices and Saint Veneration in the Muslim World, Khidr/Khizr from the Middle East to South Asia", Routledge (2024)

³⁶ Ayub Palmer, 'Sufism.' Brown (ed.) *The Wiley Blackwell Concise Companion to the Hadith*. Blackwell (2020) p273

³⁷ Ibid., p

the heart' in order to create such receptivity³⁸). This is the contingent response of the Divine in the process of its self-manifestation into being, as such presents the concept of *al-wahdat al-wujud* in relation to knowledge³⁹. All his major theories are self-representing of non-duality, albeit as a 'supra' extended monism that does not conflict with *tawhid*⁴⁰ and were framed by divine disclosure. Ibn al-Arabi's works were *all* the result of divine visions and revelations - hence he was the 'ready receptacle' or polished heart, and they began in his teens before any formal spiritual training, so there was no 'polishing' on his part. As Claude Addas observes;

“In a sense Ibn ‘Arabi arrived at the goal of spiritual realisation straight away... he burned all the stages and in one single leap completed the journey [of the Sufis]... ”⁴¹

In Musa's case we see that his spiritual receptivity was created by becoming the spiritual amalgam of the murdered-in-his-name children, thus he too was ready to receive the visions that enabled him to lead his people out of Egypt and was given this receptive capacity as a gift from birth, and did nothing to 'achieve' it.

This opening sequence therefore provides the predetermined element of the capacity for knowledge.

It is summarised by Ibn al-Arabi in the *Futuhāt*; “God singles out any of his servants whom He wills [...] He who has no unveiling has no knowledge”.

Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūhāt*, 1:218.19⁴²

There is a paragraph on knowledge. The form of perfection is manifest through the things that come into being and knowledge of the eternal things

³⁸ For 'polishing' see William Chittick, *Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul, The Pertinence of Islamic Cosmology in the Modern World*, Oneworld, 2007 p21

³⁹ Chapter 3 The Permanent Archetypes and a Comment on the Manifestations of the Names [في الأعيان الثابتة والتنبيه على المظاهر]". In *The Horizons of Being*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill (2020)

⁴⁰ The one-ness of God, 'la ilaha illallah', part of the affirmation in the *shahada*, the first pillar of the monotheistic Muslim profession of faith of God's transcendent unity. *Shirk* is the unpardonable and greatest sin of recognising more than one God.

⁴¹ Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur, The Life of Ibn ‘Arabi*, (Peter Kingsley translation), The Islamic Texts Society Golden Palm Series, Cambridge (1993)

⁴² Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 170

From the outset it is about knowledge. Musa is “particularised” by God in an “unprecedented manner”, that is he is given the spiritual “predisposition” of every child that the Pharaoh has murdered in order to prevent his life.

Everything in Moses is interrelated⁴³, and whilst it clearly identifies al-insan al-kamil, it is ostensibly the cosmology of al-Wahdat al-Wujud⁴⁴, provided part way through Musa’s life story. I will provide a brief synopsis of al-Wahdat al-Wujud (I do wonder if anyone has said that before), what is said about knowledge and one example of how it relates directly to Ibn al-Arabi’s framework.

That simple form of *al Wahdat al Wujud*, the total extension of *tawhid*, or the oneness of God, can be elaborated relatively quickly here, but it is many thousands of pages elsewhere, so the part I shall concentrate on is knowledge. Part of the *shahadah* (the profession of faith that is the first pillar of Islam) affirms *la ilaha illa Allah* or there is no God but God. Of the ninety-nine names of God (in the Qur’an, Ibn al-Arabi states they are infinite) one is al-Haqq, or the Real or Reality, and the Real is Being or *Wujud*. So as there cannot be anything else but God, for if there were this would contradict the first pillar of God’s oneness, and be the unpardonable sin of *shirk*. Therefore, there is no Reality but God. This is not to be confused with pantheism, reality is not God, there is no *reality* but God. What most people see as reality, from the cars in their drives to petty squabbles with the neighbours is not God, God is veiled, and ‘we’ are effectively in a dream (this is not the same as the Vedantic or Toltec where everything is but a dream), we have a version of reality but it is, again veiled from actual Reality, which is God. If that veil is lifted, even if only momentarily, we then *know* God. We cannot return to not knowing what Reality truly is, even if the veil returns, because we have experienced it. One does not forget the most beautiful view, even if one only had a glimpse of it. Once you know it is there, it is there. That is *kashf*. This is what Ibn al-Arabi knows cannot be taught, cannot be reasoned to⁴⁵. If I tell you that they’re giving away free Ferrari’s at Sainsbury’s tomorrow you cannot reason your way to experiencing how you felt

⁴³ “The notions of “relation” (*nisba*) and “correlation” (*munāsaba*) are absolutely central to the ontology of Ibn ‘Arabī Vandamme, G. (2022). "Chapter 6 Some Notes on Ibn ‘Arabī’s Correlative Prophetology". In *Islamic Thought and the Art of Translation*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill.

⁴⁴ Abrahamov., n1 (c) p161

⁴⁵ Addas, Quest for the Red Sulphur,

at the moment you realised the car was really yours, for nothing. However if you go and get one, you will know. The Sufi path is dedicated to that glimpse, or more, of behind the veil. That being said it is a little more complicated, hence the thousands of pages! In another sense we are God, because everything is effused from Him (effused, not created nor caused), and effusion through the Divine Names, leading to permanent archetypes⁴⁶... which of course reflect the attributes of God, and are called into existence by the at the moment of Being. One of those attributes, at the highest level, is Knowledge. In *Moses* the explanation concentrates on the completion or perfection of knowledge of the eternal and things brought into being; only when both are achieved is there the movement of Love. As such, knowledge is esteemed at such a level. There is a symbiotic relationship between perfection and knowledge.

“As a person moves closer to perfection, God gives him discernment among affairs and verifies for him the realities”⁴⁷,

which is the very description given of wisdom at the outset.

Further examples

The chapter is littered with references to knowledge, inner knowledge, outer knowledge, *kashf*, ignorance, perplexity, being veiled. It talks very much about the levels of interpretation of knowledge linked to perfection, highlighting conversations between Moses and Khidr who are both ignorant of at times their own motives⁴⁸. One of the things that became very clear to me after starting this research is that I would do it again, but could easily fill 20,000 words, not less than four. I did not find one statement about knowledge that did not support Ibn al-Arabi's principles and experience - the basis of epistemology. I asked at the outset, what if it supports his framework? Does that mean what he says is true?

⁴⁶ This is not detailed, there are two types of effusion and a stage before the Names. See further Chapter 3 The Permanent Archetypes and a Comment on the Manifestations of the Names [في الأعيان الثابتة والتنبيه على المظاهر الاسمانية]. In *The Horizons of Being*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill (2020)

⁴⁷ hittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, Ibn Al Arabi and the Problems of Religious Diversity, SUNY (1994)

⁴⁸ Abrahamov, n1 (c) pp164-166

Conclusion

“It is only through the acquiring of gnosis that the Heart can be made receptive, not only to the particular Lord, but also to the universality of “God,” and ultimately to the Reality Itself”⁴⁹

Ibn al’Arabi identified himself as *al-Khatim al Awliya al Muhammaddiya*⁵⁰ (the Muhammadan Seal of the Saints)⁵¹, a view supported by oral tradition and the records of Jandi (d.1300), Qashari (d.1330) and Qaysari (1350) - three of his earliest disciples and most comprehensive commentators⁵². Developed from al-Tirmidhi’s (d.869) *al-Khatim al-Awliya* (the Seal of the Saints)⁵³, it provides the “burning platform” to understand the epistemology of the man.

It is of note that Tirmidhi’s doctrine of the Seal of the Saints⁵⁴ is considered *bida* (innovation), which takes it outside of *fiqh* (canonical law), the basis of *Shari’a* (Islamic law) e.g. it is neither based in Qur’an nor Hadith, hence highly controversial. Yet Ibn ‘Arabi not only expanded this vexatious doctrine, he, quite literally and metaphorically, ‘owned it’. Chodkiewicz writes,

“...Ibn ‘Arabi, in spite of some ambiguous statements, identified himself categorically with the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood. He wrote it; he said it.”⁵⁵

⁴⁹ From ‘The Wisdom of the Heart in the Word of Shu’Aib’, Ralph W.J. Austin, *Ibn Al-Arabi, The Bezels of Wisdom*, Paulist Press (1980) p146

⁵⁰ William Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds, Ibn al-Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity*, New York University Press, (1994), p6

⁵¹ See Michel Chodkiewicz, *The Seal of the Saints. Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn ‘Arabi*. (translator Liadain Sherrard), The Islamic Texts Society (1993), esp. chapters 8, p116 and chapter 9, p128 for detailed discussion.

⁵² Ibid., p132.

⁵³ See Michel Chodkiewicz, *The Seal of the Saints. Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn ‘Arabi*. (translator Liadain Sherrard), The Islamic Texts Society (1993)

⁵⁴ Jesus

⁵⁵ Ibid, p132

Ending with *al-Khatim al-Anbiya*, Muhammad, the seal of the prophets the conclusion is that, from Ibn ‘Arabi’s perspective, he and it (the *Fusus*) encompassed the divine wisdom of Muhammadan lineage, he was the ‘seal of the seal’ indeed recalling the revelation of the Qur’an itself, at the beginning he writes;

“...Of what I witnessed [in the spirit] and, of that, what I recorded in this book as laid down by the Prophet”⁵⁶

Thus, in his view, the ultimate content of the *Fusus al-Hikam* furnishes the entirety of Muhammadan intelligence of, between and within Man and God. There is nothing speculative about it whatsoever. It is not doctrine to be proven right, nor open to rational rebuttal. It was never intended for that purpose. It can be taken, or left behind. Understood, contemplated or ignored. There is nothing to fight. As *Moses* or Ibn al-Arabi through Moses, or God through Musa, or Ibn al-Arabi, or indeed if the distinctions are necessary if the ultimate source of wisdom is One, put it in ‘their’ chapter: read, it will meet you where you are. Whether any of us can meet it where it is, is a question for ourselves.

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⁵⁶ Austin n34, p58. Binyamin Abramahov writes, “One might get the impression that our author tries to compare himself to Muhammad, who received the whole Qur’an from the angel Jibril” Abramahov, n34, p3

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Does the twenty-fifth chapter of the *Fusus al-Hikam* reflect the epistemology of its author?

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