

Ibn ‘Arabī’s Contribution to the Ethics of Divine Names

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Introduction

“*Taṣawwuf* is good character”, said Abū Bakr al-Kattānī (d. 322/933), “Whoever surpasses you in good character, surpasses you in *taṣawwuf*.”¹ That is why almost every standard treatise on Sufism devotes a considerable space to the discussion of good morals. A recurring idea in most of the Sufi works is that of *al-takhalluq bi Akhlāq Allāh* or assumption of the character traits of God, as manifest from His Names.² Sufis believe that the divine names are indicators of the moral values with which one ought to imbue one’s character. Divine names, in other words, are the moral archetypes.

Important writers in this tradition include Abū ‘l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), ‘Abd al-Salām b. ‘Abd al-Rahmān Ibn Barraġān (d. 536/1141), Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 536/1240) and ‘Izz al-Dīn ibn ‘Abd al-Salām (d. 556/1261).

Although Qushayrī appears to be the earliest expounder of ethics based on divine names, the idea of *takhalluq* itself can be attributed to someone Qushayrī mentions among the “Masters of this way” (*Mashā’ikh ḥādhibi’l-tariqah*), Abū ‘l-Ḥusayn Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Nūrī (d. 295/907)³ who defined *taṣawwuf* as *takhalluq bi Akhlāq Allāh*.⁴

¹Abū ‘l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1998), 272. Ibn ‘Arabī has discussed this statement in chapter 164 of his *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth, 2002), 2: 263.

² Some Sufis claim that this idea is derived from a *ḥadīth*: “*Takhallaqū bi Akhlāq Allāh*”. However, this saying is not found in any of the authentic collections of *aḥādīth*.

³ Qushayrī, *al-Risālah*, 53.

⁴ Quoted by ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd in his preface to Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Ibn ‘Abbād’s, *Ghayth al-Marwāhib al-‘Alīyyah fī Sharḥ al-Ḥikam al-‘Aṭā’iyyah* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadīthah, 1970), 1: 15.

The basic drive for Qushayrī's work on divine names, *al-Taḥbīr*,⁵ was to shift the discussion of essence and attributes from the theologico-philosophical plane to Sufism. This is in addition to the general spirit of all his works, which he shares with Ghazālī, that is, to make Sufism respectable to the orthodoxy. In view of this, in *al-Taḥbīr* he expresses the opinion that an attribute cannot be applied in the same sense (*res significata*) to God and to human beings. He usually considers the primarily divine character traits to be only metaphorically attributable to man.⁶

ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn ʿAbd al-Salām has arranged *aḥādīth* related to morality in a treatise called *Shajarat al-Maʿārif*. In this work he emphasizes the necessity of gnosis for praxis; that is to say, in order to be good, one must first attain a true conception of reality. In his preface to this treatise, Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām considers the assumption of the character attributes of Lordship (*al-takhalluq bi Ṣifāt al-Rubūbiyyah*) as a part of the ethics of the Qurʾān (*akhlāq al-Qurʾān*). In the contexts of *al-takhalluq* he divides the attributes of lordship into two: those whose assumption is possible and the those which cannot be assumed. In this latter category he mentions *ʿazamah* and *kibriyāʾ*, having in mind probably the *ḥadīth qudsī*⁷ threatening those who contend with God in these two attributes. Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām then devotes the first two chapters of his book to an elaboration of the ethical significance of divine names.⁸

Ghazālī has dealt with the same topic in his book *al-Maqṣad al-Asnāʾ*.⁹ He divides this book into three major sections or what he calls 'disciplines' (*funūn*): first, introductory and preliminary matters; second, goals and objectives; and finally, supplementary and complementary matters. The first section contains four further subsections: of name, naming and the named; the question of synonymy and ambiguity; and the importance of assuming the traits of divine names.

In his work on the divine names, *Kashf al Maʿnā*,¹⁰ Ibn ʿArabī deals with

⁵ There is some confusion regarding the correct name of this treatise. Sometimes it is transcribed *al-Takhyir* (as in Khalīl al-Manṣūr's introduction to *al-Risālah*, 6). I have preferred *al-Taḥbīr*, following Ibrāhīm al-Basyūnī. See his book cited in n. 6 below.

⁶ Ibrāhīm al-Basyūnī, *al-Imām al-Qushayrī: Siratuhu, Āthāruhu, Madhhabuhu fī al-Taṣawwuf* (Cairo: Majmaʿ al-Buḥūth al-Islāmiyyah, 1974), 68–70.

⁷ "Magnificence (*al-Kibriyāʾ*) is my cloak and greatness (*al-ʿazamah*) My shawl, if anyone contends with Me in either one, I will smash him." Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, *Kitāb al-Libās*, *Bāb Mā Jāʾ fī ʾl-Kibr*; trans. William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabī's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2000), 315.

⁸ ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn ʿAbd al-Salām al-Sullamī, *Shajarat al-Maʿārif wa ʾl-Aḥwāl wa Ṣāliḥ al-Aqwāl wa ʾl-Aʿmāl* (Beirut: Bayt al-Afkār al-Dawliyyah, n.d.).

⁹ Karachi Nūr Muḥammad, n.d.

¹⁰ Edited, with parallel Spanish translation, by Pablo Beneito (Murcia: Editora Regional de Murcia, 1996). I am grateful to Professor Beneito for sending me a photocopy of this important

each divine name under three heads: *ta'alluq* (relation), *taḥaqquq* (realization), and *takhalluq* (assumption of character trait). As it has rightly been observed, this scheme bears the marks of the influence of the great 12th century Sufi master of Begaia (Bougie), Abū Madyan (d. 594/1198) on Ibn 'Arabī.¹¹

Ibn 'Arabī has also devoted chapter 558 of *Futūḥāt* to the divine names.¹² In this chapter he talks of the 'Presences of Divine Names' (*Ḥaḍarāt al-Asmā'*) and delineates the blessings and sciences which are bestowed upon those who enter in the presence of a specific divine name. Then, in chapter 197, regarding the breath of the Merciful (*nafas al-Rahmān*), we find Ibn 'Arabī discussing the cosmological significance of 28 divine names explaining how a particular entity is created through the attentiveness (*tawajjuh*) of a specific divine name.¹³ Finally, the division II of *Futūḥāt*, On Interactions (*mu'āmalāt*), is permeated with comments on the meanings of divine names and their ethical implications. For instance, in the chapter on *Murāqabah*, Ibn 'Arabī discusses the name *al-Raqīb*. Likewise, the divine names *al-Shakūr* and *al-Wājid* are found respectively in the chapters on *Shukr* (gratitude)¹⁴ and *Tawājjud*.¹⁵

The great Persian philosopher, Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī (Mullā Ṣadrā) (d. 1050/1640), does not appear to have devoted a separate work to the subject of *al-takhalluq*. He does, however, emphasize its centrality in the very beginning of his magnum opus, *al-Ḥikmat al-Muta'āliyah*.¹⁶

Coming to the Indian Subcontinent, one can mention Sayyid Sulaimān Nadvī (d. 1373/1953) as a major scholar who, has written a few pages about the ethical implications of divine names and attributes in his famous *Sīrat al-Nabī*.¹⁷ Like Ibn 'Arabī, Sulaimān Nadvī too considers that the obligation to assume the character traits of divine names is based on the creation of man in

work.

¹¹ Abū Madyan wrote: "In the Names of God are three [modes]: dependence, assimilation and realization. 'Dependence' is the apprehension (*shu'ūr*) of the Meaning of a given Name; 'assimilation' is that Meaning's subsisting in you (*taqūmu bi-ka*); and 'realization' is your being annihilated (*tafnā*) in that Meaning." See, Gerald Elmore, "Review of Pablo Beneito's *El Secreto de los nombres de Dios* [K. *Kashf al-ma'nā*]", *The Journal of Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī Society*, XXVII (2000), 86. For the Arabic text see, 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd, *Abū Madyan al-Ghawth* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1985), 103. For more on Abū Madyan, see Vincent Cornell, *The Way of Abū Madyan: The Works of Abū Madyan Shu'ayb* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1996).

¹² Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 4: 198–327.

¹³ Ibid., 2: 385–468.

¹⁴ Ibid., 2: 199.

¹⁵ Ibid., 2: 524–525.

¹⁶ Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Shīrāzī, *al-Ḥikmat al-Muta'āliyah* (Beirut: Dār Iḥya al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 2002), 1: 48–49.

¹⁷ Sayyid Sulaimān Nadvī, *Sīrat al-Nabī* (Islamabad: National Book Foundation, 1981), 4: 516–525.

the divine image and his being God's Vicegerent.¹⁸ Classifying the divine names under three categories — majesty (*jalāl*), beauty (*jamāl*) and perfection (*kamāl*) — he maintains that all the character traits of beauty may be assumed while no character trait of majesty may be assumed. As far as the third category, perfection, is concerned, all character traits belonging to it may be assumed except two, Oneness and Eternity.¹⁹ These two are the defining characteristics of divinity, so no mortal can think of having them.

Although there exist, and continue to appear, many works about divine names, little attention has been paid to studying the ethics of divine names. Most of these writings discuss only the etymological, linguistic and, at the most, theological implications. Strangely, some of the authentic expositions of Ghazālī's ethical philosophy do not take into account his *al-Maṣṣad al-Asnā*, in which he has propounded the ethics of divine names.²⁰ However, Professor William C. Chittick has given considerable attention to Ibn 'Arabī's views on the ethics of divine names in two of his important works, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabī's Metaphysics of Imagination* and *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity*.²¹ In these works, Professor Chittick has discussed the ethics of divine names, or what he terms as *theomorphic ethics*, as an integral part of Ibn 'Arabī's Sufi teachings. Professor Pablo Beneito, University of Seville, has also made significant contributions to the subject. He has edited Ibn 'Arabī's *Kashf al-Ma'nā*, has translated it first into Spanish and later on into French, and has published a full-fledged study of Ibn 'Arabī's views on divine names.²² He has also written an article on the divine name *al-Wadūd*, in which he has translated and elaborated the relevant passages from *Kashf al-Ma'nā* and *Futūḥāt*.²³

Taking inspiration from Professor Chittick's work, the present article places the ethics of divine names into the wider context of the Islamic tradition, discusses its Islamicity, logical presuppositions, philosophical

¹⁸ Ibid., 516–517.

¹⁹ See ibid., 505–516. This classification echoes the one established by 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 832/1428) in *al-Insān al-Kāmil* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1998), 96–97.

²⁰ M. Umaruddin, *The Ethical Philosophy of Imam Ghazālī* (Aligarh: Aligarh Muslim University Press, 1962), Zakī Mubārak, *al-Akhlāq 'ind al-Ghazālī* (Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-'Arabī, n.d.), Mahamed Ahmed Sherif, *Ghazālī's Theory of Virtue* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975).

²¹ William C. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994).

²² Pablo Beneito, *Los Nombres de Dios en la obra de Muḥyiddīn Ibn al-'Arabī de Murcia* (Madrid: Secretariado de publicaciones de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2001).

²³ See Idem, "The Servant of the Loving One: On the Adoption of the Character-Traits of *al-Wadūd*", *Journal of Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī Society*, XXXII (2003), 1–24.

whereabouts and extracts its general rules and some of its specific guidelines from Ibn 'Arabī's *Futūḥāt*.

I

FOUNDATIONS OF THE ETHICS OF DIVINE NAMES

Ghazālī bases the desirability of assuming the character traits of divinity on a saying, which he ascribes to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him): "Assume the character traits of God!" According to him this *ḥadīth* furnishes the *raison d'être* of his exposition of the divine names.²⁴

Al-Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (d. 1205/1790), the editor and commentator of Ghazālī's *Iḥyā'*, however submits, this *ḥadīth* is nowhere to be found in standard collections of *ahādīth*.²⁵ This being the case, we cannot expect the orthodox scholars to wholeheartedly embrace the ethical theory propounded by Ghazālī. Let us see what Ibn 'Arabī has to say on this particular point.

In the course of transition from Ghazālī to Ibn 'Arabī it is noteworthy that although the latter quotes the above mentioned saying a number of times and identifies the assumption of character-traits of divine names as the core of the Sufi enterprise, he does not attribute this saying to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him),²⁶ however, he writes:

The Prophetic reports show that we have been charged to assume the character traits of God. The Prophet said, 'God would not forbid you to take usury and then take it from you Himself.' There is not a single description by which God has described Himself and by which He has not charged us to become qualified.²⁷

Ibn 'Arabī tries to solve (or dissolve) the problem of the authenticity of *ahādīth* in a peculiar manner. He justifies his quoting such sayings by appealing to religious experience. He believes that the Unveiling (*al-Kashf*) provides a means whereby the authenticity of such *ahādīth* can be tested. Moreover he says that:

...there is many a weak *hadith* which is not put into practice because of the weakness of its line of transmission—because certain forgers transmitted it—yet

²⁴ Ghazālī, *al-Maḥṣad al-Asnā*, 150. Although this saying can not be accepted as a foundation for the ethics of the divine names, instead of neglecting it we might interpret it not as an imperative but as an assertive statement (that is, a simple statement of fact). If we bear in mind that Sufism is a journey — though not in the physical sense, of course — to God, we might take this saying simply to mean that one *acquires* divine character-traits as one proceeds on the path to God. Thus understood, this saying would be a simple statement of fact and not a moral imperative.

²⁵ See Ghazālī, *al-Maḥṣad al-Asnā*, 150.

²⁶ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 283.

²⁷ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 1: 552; English tr. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 284.

which is sound in fact, since in this particular case the forger told the truth and did not forge it. ... There is also many a hadith which is sound by way of its transmitters and which has been learned by this possessor of unveiling who sees this locus of manifestation (*mazhar*). Then he asks the Prophet about this sound hadith and he denies it and says, 'I did not say it or judge by it.' Thereby the friend (*wali*) comes to know of its weakness and ceases putting it into practice, "upon a clear sign from his Lord."²⁸

Ibn 'Arabī considers what appears to be the Islamic brand of *imago dei* as foundation of the ethics of divine names. This is with reference to a *ḥadīth* in Muslim. The Prophet said: "God has created Adam upon His own image."²⁹

The fact that man was created in the divine image implies, according to Ibn 'Arabī's understanding, that God gave man His attributes. However, some attributes have been *actually* given, while human beings have the *potential* to acquire rest of them. The realization of these other divine character traits is the ethical agenda of human beings. The assumption of divine character traits is thus seen as an implication of man's creation upon divine image.

There is, however, an ambiguity in the *ḥadīth* of divine image. The ambiguity concerns the pronoun '*his/His*' with reference to the image. It can be taken to refer either to God or to man himself. Ibn 'Arabī declares, while explaining this saying in response to al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī's questionnaire in the 73rd chapter of his *Futūḥāt*, that the word '*his*' refers to God. But at the end he also points to the other interpretation: "If an Islamic philosopher asked me this question, I would reply that the pronoun refers to Adam... for every questioner needs an answer that will satisfy him."³⁰

It seems that the ethics of divine names can be developed out of this saying only if it is interpreted as referring to the divine image. Although according to the rules of Arabic grammar this interpretation is more plausible, the context in which the Prophet (peace be on him) uttered these words (namely, forbidding to slap another person's face), demands that the pronoun be deemed to refer to God and not to Adam.

There is also a practical implication of basing ethics on the concept of *Imago Dei* rather than on the saying "Assume the traits of God". In this latter case only those divine names can serve as the foundation of ethics which are

²⁸ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 1: 203–204; English tr. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 251–2.

²⁹ Muslim Ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Kitāb al-Birr wa 'l-Ṣilah, Bāb al-Nahy 'an Ḍarb al-Wajh. Surprisingly, Professor A.E. Affifi has accused the Sufis of mistakenly attributing this saying to the Prophet (peace be on him). He himself considers it of Jewish provenance. See Abū 'l-'Alā' al-'Afīfī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam: Wa 'l-Ta'liqāt 'Alayh* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1949), 35.

³⁰ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*; English tr. Michel Chodkiewicz, *An Ocean Without Shore: Ibn 'Arabī, the Book and the Law* (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2001), 38.

derived from the traits (*akhlāq*) and not the ones that pertain to actions. On the contrary, the concept of *Imago Dei* does not seem to limit the ethics based upon it to any subclass of divine names. So the ethics of divine names based on this alternate foundation would be more inclusive.

The Qur'ān calls man "the Vicegerent of Allah on earth" (*khalīfat Allāh fi 'l-ard*). Ibn 'Arabī has recourse to the notion of assuming the character traits of God as the foundation of this vicegerency of man. He says:

No existent thing is named by all the divine names except man, who has been charged to assume the names as his own traits. That is why he was given the vicegerency and the deputyship, and the knowledge of all names. He was the last configuration within the cosmos bringing together all the realities of the cosmos.³¹

The advantages of adopting man's vicegerency as the basis for assuming God's character traits are clear. For a vicegerent is the one who is made to step into another's shoes and become the means by which one performs certain tasks or governs certain places. Here reference to a well-known and authentic saying of the Prophet (peace be on him) is in order:

God says: My servant continues to draw near to me with supererogatory works so that I shall love him. When I love him I am his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees and his hand with which he strikes and his foot with which he walks.³²

The vicegerent, being the deputy, must have some powers and qualities of the one whom he represents. If he is not given those powers and qualities it would hardly be appropriate to call him someone's vicegerent or caliph or deputy. So the fact that man is declared God's caliph is enough to show that he has been, as a matter of fact, granted certain qualities of Him whose caliph he is. This is in order that he may use those qualities while exercising the powers of his vicegerency. But the teachings of Qur'ān are more explicit in this regard. The caliphate verse of the Qur'ān is almost immediately followed by the declaration that: "God taught Adam *all* the names." Opinions differ as to whose names Adam was taught. Ibn 'Arabī, however, takes for granted that the names were those of God and not of created things. Consider the following: "Were he [Adam] not manifest in the form of Him Whom he

³¹ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 2: 592; English tr. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 286.

³² Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, Kitāb al-Riqāq, Bāb al-Tawādu'; English tr. Johnson-Denys Davies, *Forty Hadith Qudsi* (Beirut: Dār al-Qur'ān al-Karīm, 1980), 104.

represents, he would not be the Regent.”³³

One might wonder what all this has to do with the ethics of divine names. Man, being God’s vicegerent, has *actually* been bestowed with some qualities such as, knowledge, power, desire, will, speech and hearing. At the same time, he has the potential to acquire the rest of the divine attributes. Man’s ethical mandate consists in the obligation to realize that potential. What marks him off from all else is this potential. Other beings must remain content with what they have been given. Man, however, is capable of acquiring more. In fact it is only man who can manifest in himself *all* divine names.

As Ibn ‘Arabī understands it, the ethics of divine names is implied by the obligation to love God. A true lover, in his opinion, is bound to assume the character traits of his beloved and the love of God is no exception to this. Ibn ‘Arabī writes: “The sincere lover is he who passes into the attributes of the beloved, not he who brings the beloved down to his own attributes.”³⁴ As examples of God’s descent to us because of His love for us, Ibn ‘Arabī mentions God’s:

- (1) receiving us joyfully when we come to His house in order to confide in Him;
- (2) rejoicing at our repentance and our return to Him after we had turned away from Him;
- (3) wonder at the young man who lacks sensual desires while he should be controlled by it, even though he has that through God’s giving him success;
- (4) being our deputies in our hunger, thirst and illness, and placing Himself in our waystations. When one of His servants is hungry, He says to the others, “I was hungry, but you did not feed Me.” He says to another of His servants, “I was ill, but you did not visit Me.” When the servants ask Him about this, He replies to them, “Verily so-and-so was ill; if you had visited him you would have found Me with him”.³⁵

Obviously, Ibn ‘Arabī sees here a foundation of the ethics of divine names. He finishes this beautiful passage by saying: “The sincere servant in his love for his Lord assumes the character-traits of His names (*yatakhallaqu bi ‘asmā’ih*).”³⁶ Therefore, sincere love of God demands assumption of the character-traits denoted by His names.

³³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 55; English tr. R.W.J. Austin, *The Bezels of Wisdom* (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1999), 56.

³⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 2: 585; English tr. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 72.

³⁵ Ibid. That God receives us joyfully, rejoices at our repentance, wonders and becomes our deputies in our hunger and thirst etc., is mentioned in aḥādīth to be found, respectively, in Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-Masājīd, Bāb Luzūm al-Masājīd; Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Kitāb al-Tauba, Bāb fi ‘l-Ḥadd ‘alā ‘l-Tauba; Aḥmad Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad Aḥmad* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), 4: 151; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Kitāb al-Birr wa ‘l-Ṣilah, Bāb Faḍl ‘Iyādah al-Marīḍ.

³⁶ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 2: 585.

II

ESSENCE-ATTRIBUTES DISCOURSE AND THE ETHICS OF DIVINE NAMES

The ethics of divine names presupposes that the divine names are of a specific nature, that is, they are derived from certain character traits, alternately called divine attributes (*ṣifāt*). When, therefore, it is said that one should assume the character trait manifest from, say, the divine name *al-Ghaffār*, it is implied that one should assume the character trait embodied in that word to the extent his human potential allows him to do so. The presumption, therefore, is that the divine names are based on and derived from certain qualities and attributes. Ghazālī, like a majority of theologians and Sufis, considers the divine names as going back either to divine essence, divine attributes, or divine actions. He deals with these issues towards the end of his book on divine names, wherein he has provided an assortment of principles for the classification of the divine name.³⁷

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) tells us in his commentary on the divine names that there have been three opinions regarding God's names and attributes: (i) denial of the reality of divine names with the affirmation of divine attributes, (ii) affirmation of the divine names with the denial of attributes, and (iii) simultaneous affirmation of the names and attributes.³⁸ Now, as we have stated, an ethics can be founded on divine names only on the basis of the first and the last mentioned two positions. For, obviously the denial of attributes would be incompatible with it. We have no information as to any upholder of the first position while the second one is represented by the Mu'tazilites, some of whom maintain that God is 'Ālim without having the attribute of 'ilm; He is Qādir without the attribute of *qudrah*, etc.³⁹ Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) also thought that the term *ṣifah* was inapplicable to God and that one should talk about God only in terms of the most beautiful names. Ibn Ḥazm also refuses to accept that the divine names are backed by any attributes, saying:

We don't understand by our saying '*qadīr*' while referring it to God, anything other than what we understand by our uttering '*Allah*' only. This is because all these are proper names and as such, are not derived from the attributes originally. But when we said the He (Allah) is 'Ālim and knows what is hidden (*Ghayb*), it is meant that there are objects of divine knowledge and nothing hides from Him.⁴⁰

³⁷ See Ghazālī, *al-Maṣṣad al-Asnā*, 157–159.

³⁸ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ 'Asmā' Allāh* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1984), 30.

³⁹ See 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 2001), 131–40.

⁴⁰ Ibn Ḥazm, *Al-Fiṣal fi 'l-Milal wa 'l-Aḥwā' wa 'l-Niḥal* (Beirut: Dār al-Jil, n.d.), 2: 296.

Here Ibn Ḥazm is trying to separate what cannot be separated (*tafriq mā lā yatafarraq*): the divine names used while *naming* God and *describing* Him. The point that goes against Ibn Ḥazm is that there is no instance of pure naming God in the Qur'ān. If we grant the line he is drawing between God's *naming* and *describing* in the Qur'ān, a number of Qur'ānic verses would become pointless tautologies, i.e. the statements of the form "A is A". Therefore, once we accept Ibn Ḥazm's view, we must construe the Qur'ānic words, for example, "Certainly Allah is Forgiving, Merciful" (Qur'ān 2: 173) as equivalent to: "Certainly Allah is Allah!" Anyway, we must remember while going through the following points that Ibn Ḥazm denies the derivative (*mushtaqq*) status of divine names only where they are, according to him, instances of naming and not of describing God.

To put the issue in the modern logical terminology,⁴¹ what Ibn Ḥazm is saying is that although the divine names have denotation, they have no connotation. Now the connotation of a word is the characteristic or the set of characteristics which determine the objects to which the word can be correctly applied. Denotation, on the other hand, is the object to which the word rightly applies. In the words of J.S. Mill (d. 1873), "a non-connotative (that is, denotative) term is one which signifies a subject only or an attribute only. A connotative term is one which denotes a subject and implies an attribute."⁴² As far as the divine names are concerned, Ibn Ḥazm seems to be similar to Mill's view about proper names that they are of a non-connotative nature and that they do not imply attributes.

A contemporary Pakistani philosopher, Professor 'Abd al-Hamid Kamali has also attacked the essence-attributes religious discourse, advocating instead the use of divine names. In this connection he refers with approval approvingly Ibn Ḥazm's observation that the Qur'ān does not use the term *ṣifah*. Here is the gist of what he says:

As far as the Holy Qur'ān is concerned, the ordinary mode of cognition does not find any place in it. In view of this, the terms 'essence' and 'attributes' are not found in it. For God *al-Quddūs*,⁴³ the Qur'ān uses the word 'Allah'. Moreover in a number of places there are names like *al-Raḥmān*, *al-Raḥīm*, *al-Karīm*, *al-Ghaḥḥār* Constrained by their cognitive habits, ordinary people and philosophers call these *divine attributes*. But the Qur'ān itself calls them *the most*

⁴¹ See L. Sussane Stebbing, *A Modern Introduction to Logic* (London: Methuen, 1961), 27.

⁴² J.S. Mill, *A System of Logic* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1952), 19.

⁴³ I have intentionally left this phrase un-translated because Kamali's position implies the impossibility of translating divine names. We cannot translate proper names unless we refer to their meaning and underlying qualities.

beautiful names... Qur'ānic categories are "Allah and His names," while ordinary people use the categories, "Allah and His attributes."⁴⁴

Kamali proceeds to assert that whereas the names have a distinct existence and they transcend the objects which are named, "no attribute transcends the named (*musammā*) neither is any qualified object beyond its attributes."⁴⁵ He considers the essence-attributes discourse representing an influence of Greek logic upon Islamic thought and something which is contrary to and discordant with the spirit of Islam.⁴⁶

We, therefore, need to find out whether the divine names are non-derived (*jāmid*) or not.

We shall presently attempt to show that although the Qur'ān does not use the substantive form '*ṣifah*', it does contain, in addition to divine names, the instances of what we know as *ṣifāt* and that the divine names cannot be understood without bringing in the notion of *ṣifāt* (attributes).

Ibn Ḥazm's contention that the Qur'ān does not use the term *ṣifah* is, beyond doubt, true. But this is only as far as the use of that *term* is concerned. Whether the substance of *ṣifah* is found in the Qur'ān or not is another matter. The Qur'ān does *describe* (*yaṣifu*) God, although it does not intimate that it is going to *describe* Him. In some authentic traditions from the Prophet (peace be on him) we find the expression *dhāt* for God.⁴⁷ Therefore, these categories are very much part of the fundamental Islamic consciousness and cannot be regarded as the influence of external sources.

Commenting on Ibn Ḥazm's belief in the merely denotative nature of divine names, Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) writes:

Had all of them been non-derived proper nouns that signify no meaning, they would not have been divided into beautiful and ugly. Rather, it would have been

⁴⁴ Abd al-Hamid Kamali, *Iqbāl aur Asāsī Islāmī Wijdān*, ed. Dr Wahid Ishrat (Lahore: Bazm-i Iqbāl, 2002), 76.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 77.

⁴⁶ Ibn 'Arabī is very emphatic on the point that the divine names are both denotative and connotative. In respect of their connotation, that is, their definitional features, they are many and each name is different from the other. See Ibn 'Arabī *Futūḥāt*, 1: 272; English tr. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 37. The significance of this point cannot be exaggerated as it sheds light on Ibn 'Arabī's stance on the issue of Divine Simplicity, one of the four metaphysical divine attributes traditionally ascribed to Deity. Ibn 'Arabī states that the divine names are identical with each other in *referential* respect and not in respect of their respective sense. See Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 79–80.

⁴⁷ See Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, Kitāb al-Tawhīd, Bāb Mā Yudhkar fi'l-Dhāt wa'l-Nu'ūt wa Asāmī 'Ilāh and Abū Dāwūd Sulayman ibn Ash'ath al-Sajistānī, *Al-Sunan*, Kitāb al-Ṭalāq, Bāb al-Rajul Yaquḥlu li imra'atih, 'Yā Ukhtī'!

permissible for such a contender to name his Lord by *al-Mayyit* (the dead), *al-ʿĀjiz* (the impotent) and *al-Jāhil* (the ignorant) in place of *al-Hayy*, *al-Qadīr* and *al-ʿĀlim*.⁴⁸

The point Ibn Taymiyyah is trying to make is that, were we to grant Ibn Ḥazm's view, we would have no justification to prohibit the ascription of certain names to God, as there would be no criterion for differentiating between them. In view of this, Ibn Qayyim (d. 751/1350) has considered the equation of *al-Qadīr* to *al-Samīʿ* and *al-Baṣīr* to be an attempt to dodge reason, language and nature.⁴⁹

It is true that the Qurʾān mentions the names of God, calling them the most beautiful ones. It says, "Allah's are the fairest names. Invoke Him by them. And leave the company of those who blaspheme His names." (Qurʾān 7: 180). Let us note, with Ibn Taymiyyah, that the Qurʾān characterizes God's names as the "fairest (*ḥusnā*)", and it considers Him alone to have the "fairest names". A name can be labelled as fair, beautiful or unwholesome only in view of the meaning it conveys and no doubt only those names are considered good which contain a good quality or attribute (*ṣifah*). If that were not so, names would be nothing more than pieces of noise which we would divide quite arbitrarily and subjectively into fair and unfair. So if we were to accept the separation of names from attributes, the adjective '*ḥusnā*' in the Qurʾānic verse would become redundant.

The above-mentioned Qurʾānic verse ends with the words: "Leave the company of those who blaspheme His names" (Qurʾān 7: 180). This is to be understood with reference to another Qurʾānic verse: "And when it is said to them: 'Adore the Beneficent (*al-Raḥmān*)', they say: 'And what is the Beneficent?'" (126: 60) Ibn Taymiyyah comments:

The polytheists did not abstain from giving God a lot of names, they only kept from some of these (e.g. the divine name *al-Raḥmān*). It is known that if the names were non-derived (*jāmid*) proper nouns (*aʿlām*) signifying no meaning, there would have been no difference between (any two of) them. So no blasphemy (*ilḥād*) could have been committed in respect of one divine name rather than the others and no wise person would have denied one name rather than the others.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-ʿAqīdah al-Isfahāniyyah*, quoted in Aḥmad bin ʿAṭīyyah al-Ghāmīdī, *al-Bayhaqī wa Maʿwāqifuh min al-Ilāhiyyāt* (Madinah: Al-Jāmiʿah al-Islāmiyyah, 1982), 144. This objection, however, is not very strong as the opponents might reply that they only prohibit the application of these names because the scripture does not attribute them to God.

⁴⁹ Ibn Qayyim, *Madārīj al-Sālikīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1972), I: 29.

⁵⁰ Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-ʿAqīdah al-Isfahāniyyah*, 76–78.

In light of these comments it is obvious that although the Qur'ān talks about the names and not about the attributes of God, we can make no sense of the verses that talk about the divine names unless we consider these to represent some attributes. There is no way to accept Ibn Ḥazm's opinion that these names are *jāmīd* (non-derived) and only denotative.

As we have mentioned above, although the word *ṣifāh* is nowhere to be found in the Qur'ān, we find *instances* wherein divine attributes have been referred to *in addition to* the divine names. Consider, for example, the following verses, some of which contain both a divine name and an attribute.

- (i) Allah is of (*dhū*)⁵¹ infinite bounty (*al-faḍl al-'azīm*). (Qur'ān 2: 105)
- (ii) Allah is Mighty ('*Azīz*) of Requite (*Dhū intiqām*). (Qur'ān 3: 4)
- (iii) Thy Lord is the Absolute (*al-Ghanī*), of Mercy (*Dhū 'l-Raḥmah*). (Qur'ān 4: 133)
- (iv) Your Lord is of All-Embracing Mercy (*Dhū al-Raḥmah al-Wāsi'ah*). (Qur'ān 4: 147)
- (v) Certainly, Your Lord is rich in pardon (*Dhū Maghfirah*) for mankind. (Qur'ān 13: 6)
- (vi) Your Lord is owner of forgiveness and owner of dire punishment. (Qur'ān 13: 43)
- (vii) Lo! Allah! He is that gives livelihood (*al-Razzāq*), of unbreakable might (*Dhū al-quwwah*) *al-Matīn*. (Qur'ān 51: 58)
- (viii) Blessed be the name of thy Lord, of (*dhū*) Majesty (*Jalāl*) and Glory (*wa al-Ikrām*). (Qur'ān 55: 28)

Now, obviously, *Allāh*, *al-'Azīz*, *al-Ghanī*, *al-Rabb*, *al-Razzāq* and *al-Matīn* are divine names (*asmā'*) and not attributes (*ṣifāt*). But what are *faḍl*, *intiqām*, *raḥmah*, *maghfirah*, *quwwah*, *jalāl* and *ikrām* if not attributes?

Ibn Ḥazm's refusal to conduct God-talk in terms of attributes was a logical outcome of his literalism (*zāhiriyyah*), that is, because the term *ṣifāh* has not been used by the Qur'ān with regard to God. Professor Kamali, on the other hand, advocates the use of divine names instead of attributes.⁵² He does so because these

⁵¹ It is to be noted that some translators of Qur'ān are not consistent in rendering this word into English. Pickthall, for instance, translates this word as 'of', 'lord of', 'owner of', etc.

⁵² That this in fact is the case can be gathered from Kamali's comments on Ghazālī's position. See his *Iqbāl aur Asāsī Islāmī Wijdān*, 41–43.

latter lead, according to him, ultimately to the doctrine of immanence. In his view, the attributes were firstly posed instead of names (call it major premise) and then the world was equated with attributes (the minor premise). As the attributes do not transcend the essence, we consequently had the thesis that God does not transcend the world. Now, to embark upon the defence of divine transcendence is a very noble purpose indeed, but it is not clear whether it is necessary to deny the major premise, namely, that God has *attributes* as the conclusion can be refuted even if we deny the minor premise, namely, the equation of the world with divine attributes or acts.⁵³ The course Professor Kamali has adopted, namely that of denying the legitimacy of talking in terms of divine attributes themselves, seems all too radical.

III

SOME GENERAL RULES

Character-traits (*akhlāq*) are relationships between *two* beings, so the objects between whom these relationships exist are important. Ibn 'Arabī divides divine character traits into three kinds according to the possibility of their assumption and the beings in relation to whom they can be assumed.⁵⁴ First, there are divine character-traits which a human being can assume as a relationship only with the objects of the Universe, for instance, *al-Raḥīm* (the Merciful). Although we can treat ourselves mercifully, our fellows, the animals and the environment, there is no question of showing (or being mercifully disposed towards) God. Second, there are character-traits that can be assumed in relation both to God and the objects of the Universe, like *al-Ghaḥūr* (the Covering One).⁵⁵ Third, there are those character traits which can be assumed only in relationship with God Almighty.

Granted the assumption that assuming the character trait of the divine names is identical with *taṣawwuf*, the path towards God, what is the point of departure of this journey? Fortunately, from the *ḥadīth qudsī*: "My mercy takes precedence over My wrath,"⁵⁶ we can derive the principle that, following God, one must start by assuming the character traits of the divine names falling in the category of mercy.

⁵³ Professor Kamali has in fact done this, as he has maintained that the world is not a *fi'l* or *ṣifah* but an effect (*natījah*). He says that the Muslim theologians should have rectified the situation by simply adding the category of effect (*natījah*) to those of *dhāt*, *ṣifāt* and *aḥāl*. See Kamali, *Iqbal Aur Asāsi Islāmī Wijdān*, 65.

⁵⁴ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 2: 72.

⁵⁵ It is customary to translate this divine name as the "Forgiving One". I am deviating from this here only in view of the present context wherein Ibn 'Arabī takes this name in a literal sense.

⁵⁶ Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, Bāb Qawl Allāh Ta'ālā, "Wa Yuhadhḥirukum Allāh Nafsah".

In Ibn 'Arabī's metaphysics, the dichotomy of mercy (*rahmah*) and wrath (*ghadab*) parallels that of similarity (*tashbīh*) and incomparability (*tanzīh*). As is generally known, he combines these two perspectives on God. While we can assume the character-traits of God in so far as He is the Merciful, the latter perspective demands that all creatures be infinitely far from Him. Must we, in the face of this situation, conclude that the character traits of incomparability cannot be assumed? This conclusion would be quite unacceptable to Ibn 'Arabī, who is of the opinion that "there is no description by which God has described Himself, by which He has not charged us to become qualified,"⁵⁷ and who believes the capability to assume the character traits of *all* divine names a peculiar feature of human beings. What, then, is the way out of this contradiction, namely, between saying, on the one hand, that all divine names must be assumed and maintaining on the other, that we cannot assume the character traits of *some* divine names?

This problem can be solved by taking into account the *beneficiaries*, so to speak, of the ethics of divine names, i.e. those who are at the receiving end of the relationship. We can assume the character traits of *all* divine names, but we *cannot* assume the character traits of *all* divine names in relation with *everyone*. God is responsive (*al-Mujīb*), so we must be responsive to Him and to His servants. God is merciful so must we be. But there is no way we could be merciful to God. The engendered entities (*akwān*) can be the objects of our mercy, but not the one who has engendered the entities (*khāliq al-akwān*). God is *al-Raqīb* (the Examiner) and we must follow Him. But the assumption of this character trait cannot be taken as a license to interfere into the affairs of everyone. We should assume this character trait in relationship with God, and do what Ibn 'Arabī calls "the examination of examination" (*murāqabat al-murāqabah*). Instead of examining the fellow human beings, we must always attend to the fact that we are constantly under divine examination.

The divine names connoting divine Majesty and incomparability can be assumed only in relation with what is other than God (*mā siwā 'llāh*), subject, of course, to the conditions we shall mention below. God is *al-Jabbār*, which is a name denoting incomparability. It does not mean that we cannot assume this character trait. We can certainly be *al-jabbār*, not in relation to God but in relation to the evil forces, our enemies, both within and without.

One of the oft-occurring concepts in Ibn 'Arabī's writings, especially *Futūḥāt*, is that of *ḥikmah* or wisdom. One can render this norm as justice, moderation and balance. Understood as justice, wisdom demands that everything must be given its due and nothing should be given more than or other than what it deserves. *Ḥikmah* has been defined as the discernment of

⁵⁷ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 1: 552.

relations (*ma'rifat al-i'tibārāt*), which is in line with Ibn 'Arabī's understanding of the term. The discernment of relations and perspectives is the prerequisite for doing justice. We can give something what it deserves only after we have discovered its rightful claim upon us.

Wisdom in the sense of moderation comes to this; first, the denial of absolutes and second, the recognition of limits to everything existing between the two poles of *absolute existence* (i.e. God) and *absolute nothingness*.

Both these interpretations of wisdom lead to the third, that is, balance. As we are supposed to begin with assuming the character traits portraying divine mercy, in the same manner we must observe balance while assuming the character traits of mercy itself.

This should enable us to understand the criterion according to which balance can be maintained. A touchstone is necessary in order to avoid arbitrariness. The touchstone Ibn 'Arabī has to offer is the *scale of law* (*sharī'ah*). This is the scale (*al-Mizān*) in which everything having to do with God — knowledge, love, spiritual realization and the human state in general — must be weighed.⁵⁸

The ethics of divine names, therefore, is subject, like everything else, to the scale of the Law. If the Law might seem to forbid the assumption of some specific character traits then we must avoid them. This contributes to legitimizing the ethics of divine names. Once this condition is fulfilled, the ethics of divine names cannot be criticized by pointing to some divine name whose assumption the Law forbids. Such counter instances would be considered exceptions to the general obligation of assuming divine names. The following passage of *Futūḥāt*, dealing with the station of seclusion (*'uzlah*), might be enlightening in this regard.

We must abstain from [assuming character traits of] the divine names belonging to the other category (i.e. incomparability) in view of the harm which may occur (as a result of assuming them). As He said, "Taste this, a mighty (*al-'Azīz*) and honourable (*al-Karīm*) man you are" (Qur'ān 64: 49) and His saying, 'In such a manner does God set a seal on every heart which is 'arrogant (*Mutakabbir*), overbearing (*Jabbār*)' (Qur'ān 50: 35), so he keeps from such divine names because of the condemnation which they bring to anyone who adopts them... Human reality demands that he should be needy and the needy is never arrogant as (the arrogant) is the one who appears with what neither belongs to him nor is his attribute. That is why God will not look at him and he is one of the three [mentioned in a hadith]: the aged adulterer, the king who lies and the arrogant destitute.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 27.

⁵⁹ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 2: 150. The *ḥadīth* mentioned at the end by Ibn 'Arabī can be found in Aḥmad b. Suh'ayb al-Nasā'ī, *al-Sunan*, Kitāb al-Zakāh, Bāb Man Yus'al wa lā Yu'tī.

The ethics of divine names is at times faulted on the grounds that it is a call to play God, that is to say that the person assuming divine traits is apt to jump out of his skin and consider himself a god beside the One True God. Ibn 'Arabī is conscious of this and recognizes it to be the greatest danger on the path towards the Lord. He himself prays, "We beseech and implore God that He not veil us from our servitude when we assume the traits of divine names!"⁶⁰

Ibn 'Arabī has stressed that there is no point on the path to God at which the servant could leave his servitude and become the Lord.⁶¹ Consider the following famous words of his: "It is impossible for realities to change, so the servant is servant and the Lord Lord; the Real is the Real and the creature creature."⁶² What can happen at the most is that one might *lose sight of or forget* one's servitude.

The mode in which a wayfarer (*sālik*) may err is that he, after assuming a character trait that originally belongs to God, might forget its true owner and start thinking it as his own. In view of this, Ibn 'Arabī counsels that we should be careful regarding even those names which denote primarily human properties and are only secondarily applicable to God. He says:

The attributes you mentioned (laughing, forgetting, love, etc.) do not belong to servanthood. They are the attributes of Lordship in respect of its manifestation...⁶³

... Hence the servant only becomes adorned with what he himself possesses. And the Real only becomes manifest in what He possesses, whether attributes of incomparability or attributes of similarity. All of this belongs to Him. ... *All are attributes of God's perfection. He is described by them as His essence requires, and you are described by them as your essence requires.*⁶⁴

What all this boils down to in practical terms is that the wayfarer (*sālik*) must not forget his original poverty, the fact that in reality nothing belongs to

⁶⁰ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 2: 123; English tr. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 326. It is note-worthy that Ibn 'Arabī uses the phrase 'veil us' instead of anything like 'deprive us' etc., simply because no one can deprive us of our servitude, as it pertains to our essence; "Ibādah is a real name of the servant since it is his essence, his abode, his state, his entity, his self, his reality and his face." Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 2: 150; English tr. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 311 (the Arabic word 'Ibādah' has been retained instead of Chittick's translation of it as 'worship').

⁶¹ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 1: 230.

⁶² Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 312.

⁶³ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 2: 93; English tr. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 313.

⁶⁴ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 2: 473; English tr. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 75–76. Emphasis added.

him. What he owns since his birth or assumes as a result of his own choice belongs in reality to God and is given to him only by way of trust. It is only then he might expect to avoid the pitfall.

The Qur'ān says: "God commands you to deliver trusts back to their owners" (Qur'ān 4: 58). Explaining this verse Ibn 'Arabī writes:

Because the divine attributes are a trust with the Gnostic (*'Ārif*), he never ceases being weighed down by examining them. How should he employ them? Where should he put them to use? He fears to employ them in the way that their owner might employ them. When he is weighed down in this way he returns them to their owner and remains happy and burden free in servanthood, which is his own possession, or rather, his reality, since anything in addition to that may disappear from him.⁶⁵

Every human being possesses himself and all his positive attributes as God's trust, so everyone must strive to handle the trust properly. The perfect servant combines servitude with the assumption of the divine character traits. While talking about adornment (*al-taḥallī*), used here synonymously with the assumption of character traits (*al-takhalluq*), Ibn 'Arabī says:

Adornment is to become qualified by the divine character traits. In the path it is called "assumption of the traits of the names." In our view adornment is the manifestation of the attributes of servitude continually, in spite of the existence of the assumption of the traits of divine names. If the servant should cease being adorned in this manner, then the assumption of the names will go against him.⁶⁶

The recognition of the dangers of this ethics makes Ibn 'Arabī declare at times that in the strict sense the *assumption* of the character traits of the divine names is not possible. In a loose sense, however, he allows it; hence we may assume the divine names. It is in this sense that we should understand the following lines of his:

And when the Real gave you His names, take them as trust, after the manner of one who understands.⁶⁷

At another place he says:

... these Names are the robes (*khila'*) of the Real (*al-Haqq*) upon His servants and these are the robes of ennoblement. Thus out of courtesy (*adab*) they must be

⁶⁵ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 2: 619; English tr. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 317.

⁶⁶ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 2: 125; English tr. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 314.

⁶⁷ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 2: 485.

accepted... That is because the Prophet of God has commanded him to accept the gifts like this.⁶⁸

On the one hand, is the fact that every property belongs to God and man does not and cannot own anything, no assumption is possible. On the other hand, all ethical properties are divine gifts that must be accepted and the ensuing duties must be fulfilled.

The Qur'ān says: "... so that (their Lord) may question the truthful about their truth" (Qur'ān 33: 8). Ibn 'Arabī understands this verse in his peculiar way. This Qur'ānic verse, according to him, implies that being truthful is not enough; the truthful must explain the *kind of* truth that they have. *Al-Ṣādiq* is one of the divine names. A person might be in possession of this attribute, but it is not going to help him if he has not *assumed* it, believing it to be one of the character traits of the divine names. Ibn 'Arabī writes:

That's why He shall ask them [on the Day of Judgment] whether their truth is the divine attribute with which God has named Himself as *al-Ṣādiq* or not. If it is He demands them to fulfil its property the way He fulfils it ... This is the meaning of God's saying "This is the day when the truthfulness of the truthful benefits them." (Qur'ān 5: 5)⁶⁹

It is only their being *divine* which makes these character traits worthy of assumption. If this reference point is absent then mere realization of their meanings is of no use. Hence the person assuming the character traits of divine names must not lose sight of the being *whose* names' character traits he is assuming. Alternately, if a bit of Platonism is allowed, it can be said that the truth (or any moral quality, for that matter) is to be weighed on the anvil of moral archetypes, that is, the divine character traits. Our morality is perfect or imperfect in as much as it is in accord or otherwise with those moral archetypes.

According to Ibn 'Arabī, the assumption of the character traits of divine names is possible due only to what he calls, divine expansion (*al-Baṣṭ al-Ilāhī*, from the divine name, *al-Bāsiṭ*). Being *al-Bāsiṭ*, God allows the assumption of character traits of His names by His servants according to wisdom, measurement, scale of the Law and the preparedness (*isti'dād*) of each person. Ibn 'Arabī writes:

And from the divine expansion is His saying 'it is He who... spreads his mercy, and He alone is the Guardian, the Praiseworthy' (Qur'ān 12: 28). Were there no

⁶⁸ Ibid., 2: 150.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 2: 219.

divine expansion no creature of God could assume the character traits of *all* the divine names.⁷⁰

In these words of the Qur'ān, quoted by Ibn 'Arabī, the former divine name (*al-Walī*) implies that God spreads His mercy by allowing human beings to assume the character traits of the names of Mercy. Secondly, the divine name *al-Ḥamīd* is also important for understanding the message of the verse. He writes:

The praise is for the fragrance and not for the person in whom it subsists. Likewise, when this character trait is seen in the servant, that he has assumed it, the praise originally did not apply to him but especially to the character trait.⁷¹

Therefore, God is praised whenever a good character trait is praised, as He says: "He alone is the Guardian, the Praiseworthy" (Qur'ān 12: 28). Thus, the divine names *al-Bāsiṭ* and *al-Ḥamīd* have fundamental significance for the ethics of divine names. The possibility of assuming divine names manifests the infinity of divine Mercy.

A few words must be added, before moving to the next section, about the philosophical whereabouts of the ethics we have been discussing. To simplify things, let us try to put it in the schema of the obtaining ethical theories.

Ethical theories can either be deontological or consequentialist. The former consider obedience to moral law without taking into account the consequences of an action, while the latter evaluate morality with reference to the results.

In spite of the aversion Sufis have to being good *for the sake of* the pleasures in Paradise, or *for avoiding* chastisement in the Hell,⁷² the ethics of divine names, or any Islamic ethics for that matter, remains consequentialist. As 'Abd Allāh Drāz has rightly observed, the one who turns away from intending any physical enjoyment of the paradise to the vision of God, is in the final analysis also a consequentialist.⁷³ Anyone familiar with the doctrines of Islamic jurisprudence can see that the morality with the motive, '*Let Justice*

⁷⁰ Ibid., 500. (Emphasis added)

⁷¹ Ibid., 2: 72.

⁷² For example, Rābi'ah (d. 185/801) said, "If He (God) had created neither Garden nor Fire He would still be worthy of worship." This saying is reported and discussed by Ibn 'Arabī in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 4: 57.

⁷³ See his footnote to Abū Ishāq al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt fi Uṣūl al-Sharī'ah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d.), 2: 165.

be done though the heavens fall,' can find no place in the ethical consciousness of Islam, although we are sure that heavens never fall when justice is done.

IV

THE ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF SOME DIVINE NAMES

We shall now have a look at the ethics of a selection of divine names, and while doing so we shall also compare Ibn 'Arabī's views with those of his most important predecessor, Ghazālī.

1. *Al-Raḥmān; al-Raḥīm*

These two names are derived from *raḥmah* (mercy). God's mercy is absolute and perfect. Its absoluteness implies that it extends to all, to the deserving and the non-deserving. To assume the former divine name — *al-Raḥmān* — is to be merciful to the sinners, to guide them along the right path with wisdom and kindness. Every act of disobedience should come as a personal grief and loss to the *sālik* and he should leave no stone unturned to remove and prevent it. His motive in doing so should be the desire to save the sinner from chastisement and help him obtain God's nearness. As far as the name *al-Raḥīm* is concerned, Ghazālī counsels, in consideration for that, to try to alleviate the sufferings of others, making use, in this regard, of whatever resources one might have — energy, wealth and social status.⁷⁴

According to Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Raḥmān* is the most comprehensive divine name which comprehends all the names of lower ranks. In addition to the name *Allāh*, *al-Raḥmān* is the only divine name which can function as a subject, a name to which all other names can be predicated. "Call upon Allah or call upon the All-Merciful, whichever you call upon, to *it* belong the most beautiful names" (Qur'ān 17: 110). Ibn 'Arabī's understanding of 'mercy' (*raḥmah*) differs significantly from the ordinary understanding of the term. It denotes to ordinary people an essentially emotive attitude, the attitude of compassion, pity and benevolence. For Ibn 'Arabī, mercy is an ontological fact, it is the act of making things exist. It is in the light of this ontological understanding — according to which the very existence of every entity is a manifestation of mercy — that he explains divine mercy as covering all things.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ See, Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-Asnā*, 64.

⁷⁵ See Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, 116–118. For Ibn 'Arabī's classifications of various kinds of divine mercy, see Pablo Beneito, "The Presence of Superlative Compassion (*raḥamūt*): On the names *al-Raḥmān* and *al-Raḥīm* in the work of Ibn 'Arabī", *The Journal of Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī*

2. *Al-Malik*

Al-Malik, in Ghazālī's view, is he who is independent of everything else and all else depends on him. Thus understood, this name embraces the basic meaning of the divine name, *al-Ghanī*. Humans cannot aspire to assume this character trait except in a limited and metaphorical sense. This is because even if they become independent of other beings, they must always depend upon God. Therefore, it is in view of this partial independence from other beings that humans may be said to have assumed the character trait of *al-Malik*. So *al-Malik* among the human beings is he who is not owned by any *other than Allah*, who is the master of his own private little kingdom, he whose armies and subjects obey him. Now the kingdom of a person consists of his body, mind and soul; his armies are his desires, anger and whims. He is a king if he owns these and is not owned by them; if he is obeyed by them and is not subservient to them.⁷⁶ Although Ibn 'Arabī endorses Ghazālī's reservation about the ethics of this name, he nevertheless considers it possible in a bit more real sense. He says that "when the will of a servant becomes one with the will of the Real, the intended (act) occurs necessarily, and the name *al-Malik* becomes applicable to him."⁷⁷ He refers to the words of the famous *ḥadīth qudsī*: "I become the hearing with which he hears, the seeing with which he sees, the hand with which he grasps, the foot with which he walks."⁷⁸ Looking from this angle, the assumption of the character-traits of this name takes place only at the stage when the union is attained.

3. *Al-Salām*

Al-Salām is the one whose very being is pure and is free from every imperfection, whose acts are free from evil (intentions). All safety and soundness, in as much as it can be considered a positive quality, is explained through Him. The Divine acts are free from absolute evil.⁷⁹ Anything that is apparently evil is in fact for the sake of some greater good contained within and entailed by it. The nearest human being to God, as far as this attribute is concerned, is the one who has freed himself from deception, envy, jealousy; his mind from evil intentions; his bodily organs from sin and disobedience and his character from perversion. By perversion Ghazālī understands the reason that is subjugated by carnal lusts and emotions. Referring to a famous *ḥadīth*,

Society, XXVI (1998), 53–88.

⁷⁶ See *ibid.*, 66–67.

⁷⁷ Ibn 'Arabī, *Kashf al-Ma'nā*, 30.

⁷⁸ Muḥammad b. Ismā'il al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, Kitāb al-Riqāq, Bāb al-Tawāḍu'.

⁷⁹ Ghazālī, *al-Maṣṣad al-Asnā*, 68.

Ghazālī maintains that if the epithet 'Muslim' is applicable to the one from whose hands no one suffers any harm, a person who is not safe from himself cannot be called *'abd al-Salām*.⁸⁰

Ibn 'Arabī has differentiated between the names *al-Salām* and *al-Quddūs*, as far as the question of assuming their character-traits is concerned. To follow *al-Quddūs* is *being free ab initio* i.e. originally from defects and imperfections while to assume the traits of *al-Salām* is to *become* free of defects. The former is in fact something bestowed from above, while the servant can aspire to acquire the latter.⁸¹

4. *Al-Mu'min*

Ghazālī explains this name as referring to the source and provider of peace (*salām*). Given the ultimate poverty, dependence, weakness and vulnerability of the human being, God is the sole giver of peace. The person who has assumed this divine name must be a source of peace and security for others. He should become the refuge and shelter for others against harm and danger, whether in this life or the life hereafter.⁸²

Ibn 'Arabī recognizes two ways in which a believer can deserve this name, one of them being identical to that mentioned by Ghazālī. The other is the following: "When the servant attested every statement in the world then he is *mu'min*."⁸³ When put in a specific context, this peculiar statement can be better understood. Ibn 'Arabī emphasizes in his writings that there is an aspect of reality and truth in everything so nothing is to be rejected out of hand. We should note, however, that he is taking *al-Mu'min* as a *divine* name to mean 'the attester' (*al-Muṣaddiq*), while Ghazālī does not recognize this sense in the name when it is applied to God. According to him, only a human being can be an attester (*muṣaddiq*).

5. *Al-Muhaymin*

This name embraces the meaning of the divine names *al-Raḥīm* and *al-Hafīz*.⁸⁴ It implies that Allah supervises the actions (*af'āl*), sustenance (*arzāq*) and life-tenures (*ājāl*) of His creatures. The divine supervision (*haymanah*) implies God's awareness of, power upon, and guarding of, His creatures. Now every human being is a supervisor of his own heart. He examines his heart so as to become aware of the depths and secrets of his innermost being and

⁸⁰ See *ibid.*, 69–70.

⁸¹ See Ibn 'Arabī, *Kashf al-Ma'nā*, 32.

⁸² See Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-Asnā*, 70–72.

⁸³ Ibn 'Arabī, *Kashf al-Ma'nā*, 34.

⁸⁴ See *ibid.*, 36.

consequently be able to restructure the inner states and character.⁸⁵ According to Ibn 'Arabī, the perfect way to assume the character-trait of this divine name is what he has termed elsewhere as *murāqabat al-murāqabah* (examining the divine examination), that is to say, a person must always be attentive to the fact that God is watching over him.⁸⁶ Moreover, he must acquire knowledge of the rights of everything and also his own in order to do justice.⁸⁷

6. *Al-Jabbār*

Like the divine name *al-Malik*, this name points to someone who implements his will forcefully in every single entity, and yet cannot be influenced; a being in whose grasp is everything but who himself is beyond the reach of everything else.

In order to assume the character-trait of this divine name man can aspire to become an exemplar, the one who is followed by everyone but does not follow others, who benefits the creatures but is not benefited by them in turn.⁸⁸

7. *Al-Mutakabbir*

Al-Mutakabbir is someone who attaches little or no value to others and sees no greatness and magnificence except in oneself. Such a person looks upon others just as the Kings look upon their subjects. This attitude is appropriate on the part of God but from a human being it is injustice and falsehood.

However, in a limited sense, human beings can assume this character-trait. The ascetic (*zāhid*) and the Gnostic (*'arif*) can be called *mutakabbirūn*. These are the people who have turned their faces from everything other than their Lord, the Real (*al-Ḥaqq*). Consequently, they despise both this world and the world to come and turn wholeheartedly to the Real. Although an ordinary believer may look down upon the world, on his part it is more like a commercial transaction, as he is purchasing the luxuries of the next world by scarificing the comforts of this world.⁸⁹ But one must be careful not to exaggerate or misunderstand the assumption of this divine character-trait, as a *ḥadīth qudsī* warns: "Magnificence is My cloak and tremendousness My shawl; if anyone contends with Me, I will smash him."⁹⁰

⁸⁵ See Ghazālī, *al-Maṣṣad al-Asnā*, 72–73.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ See Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 4: 207.

⁸⁸ See Ghazālī, *al-Maṣṣad al-Asnā*, 74.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 75.

⁹⁰ See n. 7 above.

8. *Al-Ghaffār*

Al-Ghaffār is the one who covers the ugly and uncovers what is wholesome. Sins are instances of unwholesome things concealed by God, by covering them in this world and forgiving them in the world to come.

The share of human beings out of this divine name is that one should not make public about others something which one doesn't want others to know about him. That is the point of the *ḥadīth* which says that anyone who conceals something of a believer's shortcomings, God will conceal one of his shortcomings on the Day of Judgment. To deserve the title *al-Ghaffār*, one should look at and highlight the positive and good qualities of others and avoid backbiting. One must always concentrate on the brighter side of everything. The ethical implication of this name is a plea for optimism.⁹¹

Keeping in view the root meaning of this name Ibn 'Arabī makes an interesting statement that the names are a sort of cover over the named. The same is the case with divine names, which are covers over the essence.⁹² This is in line with his earlier-mentioned contention that the divine names are intermediaries between the Essence (*al-Dhāt*) and the engendered entities (*akwān*). On the ethics of this name, Ibn 'Arabī has made a statement identical with the one made by Ghazālī.⁹³

9. *Al-Qaḥḥār*

Al-Qaḥḥār is the one who subdues the powerful among His enemies and no existent escapes the domination of His power. Everything is powerless before His might.

Keeping in view the inapplicability of this name to human beings in the real sense, Ghazālī interprets this name metaphorically as he had done already with the name *al-Malik*, pointing to that which comes under the power of human beings. According to him, this name applies to those humans who overpower their enemies, and the greatest enemy of a human being is his or her own lower self. Once the self is conquered, man is no more susceptible to be overpowered by others.⁹⁴

According to Ibn 'Arabī's *Kashf al-Ma'nā*, man is able to subdue his carnal lusts and other foes only due to the share he has of the name *al-Qaḥḥār*.⁹⁵

⁹¹ See Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-Asnā*, 80.

⁹² See Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 4: 215.

⁹³ See Ibn 'Arabī, *Kashf al-Ma'nā*, 49.

⁹⁴ See Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-Asnā*, 80.

⁹⁵ See Ibn 'Arabī, *Kashf al-Ma'nā*, 51.

10. *Al-Wahhāb*

Al-Wahhāb is the one who gives away and whose endowments are free from ulterior and selfish motives, the one who gives without expecting or desiring anything in return. He is the one who bestows upon everyone their needs without any immediate or future consideration. Thus the real bestowal (*wahb*) is conceivable only from God. This characteristic is inconceivable in respect of human beings. They do not resort to charity unless some good is expected to result from it. This would seem to imply that even apparently altruistic actions are actually egoistic. The special lesson which Ghazālī and Ibn ‘Arabī want us to learn is that God must be obeyed out of pure love for Him and not in order to obtain any benefits in the life hereafter or to avoid chastisement. In *Futūḥāt*, after warning against the dangers involved in assuming the character-trait of this name, Ibn ‘Arabī refutes the Sufis who have considered supplication (*du‘ā*) a sort of contention (*nizā*) with the Lord. The contender with divine will is not the one who returns to his Lord with complaints and prayers, but the one who is uninfluenced by difficulties, as Ibn ‘Arabī looks at the matter.⁹⁶

11. *Al-Shakūr; al-Shākīr*

According to Ghazālī’s view of the matter, it is impossible to be really grateful to God. This is because being able to show gratitude to Him is in itself another favour of God for which He is to be amply thanked. So human beings should take care not to be *ungrateful* to Him; that is, not to use God’s blessings in acts entailing His disobedience. According to the Qur’ān, God increases His favours upon those who show gratitude to Him. Ibn ‘Arabī gives this a peculiar twist, considering it an attribute additional to Divine Gratefulness. God’s being ‘grateful’ means that He responds to the human gratefulness with an increase in His favours upon them. So to assume the character-traits of this divine name is to adopt the same attitude to God. We must respond to divine gratefulness by bringing about an increase on our good deeds.⁹⁷

God has two names in respect of which He responds to the good deeds and acts of gratitude of His servants, *al-Shākīr* and *al-Shakūr*. According to Ibn ‘Arabī, the servants are grouped into two categories. The first category is that of ordinary believers, who are received by and metaphysically related to the divine name *al-Shākīr*. These are the people who show gratefulness for the favours God bestows upon them. On the other hand, there is an elite minority of people who “consider everything that happens to them from God as His

⁹⁶ See Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 4: 217.

⁹⁷ See *Ibid.*, 2: 199.

favour, no matter whether it pleases them or not. So they show gratitude in every case."⁹⁸ The Qur'ān says: "A few of My servants are very grateful (*al-shakūr*)" (Qur'ān 34: 13). According to Ibn 'Arabī, this verse refers to this elite. This Qur'ānic verse is usually interpreted as an instance of God's complaint that only a few of His serious show gratitude to Him, while Ibn 'Arabī sees it, as he often does, in a very different light. If we agree with him then it only mentions the cold fact that some people show gratitude to the fullest degree while there are others who do that to a lesser degree. These are the ones who might be simply called *al-shākirūn*.

Gratefulness, as Ibn 'Arabī understands it, can be verbal (*lafẓī*), cognitive (*ilmī*), or practical (*amālī*). For the first and the last he cites the Qur'ānic words, respectively, "O people of David, *work gratefully*" (Qur'ān 34: 13) and "Proclaim the bounty of your Lord" (Qur'ān 93: 11). About verbal gratitude Ibn 'Arabī says, referring to a *ḥadīth*, that it is to consider God as the only source of all the favours.⁹⁹

12. *Al-Raqīb*

Al-Raqīb, in Ghāzālī's view, is the one who combines in him the attributes of the divine names *al-Ḥafīẓ* (the Protector) and *al-'Alīm* (the Knower), implying, however, a further element of constancy. So *al-Raqīb* is the one who *constantly* knows and protects.¹⁰⁰

Ibn 'Arabī has many important things to say about this divine name and the assumption of its character-trait. First, God's constant watching over the world implies the doctrine of perpetual creation. He relates the divine attribute of *Murāqabah* with the Qur'ānic notion of guarding in the famous "Throne Verse" (*Ayat al-Kursī*), viz. "the guarding of *these* (i.e. heavens and earth) does not weary Him" (Qur'ān 2: 252). Being *al-Raqīb*, the Almighty sustains the world in existence. As to the mode of this subsistence, consider the following interesting remark by Ibn 'Arabī:

So the world of bodies (*ajsām*) and substances (*jawāhir*) has no subsistence except through creation of accidents (*a'rād*) in them; so whenever the accident, with which its subsistence is bound, is not found, it becomes non-existence (*tan'adim*). There is no doubt that the accidents are non-existent in every second of their existence. So the Real (*al-Ḥaqq*) keeps on watching the world of the bodies and substances, high and low; whenever some accident goes out of existence, with

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Kitāb al-Musāfirīn, Bāb fi'l-Layl Sā'ah Mustajāb fi hā al-Du'a'.

¹⁰⁰ See Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-Asnā*, 117–118.

which their Existence is bound, He creates (in them) an accident like it or contrary to it in every moment. So He is creator forever and the world is dependent upon Him forever. So this is the Real's watchfulness (*murāqabah*) of His creatures in order to preserve them in existence. And these are the tasks (*shu'ūn*), which He expressed in His book by saying, "And everyday His is upon some task" (55: 29).¹⁰¹

Hence, in as much as God is *al-Raqīb*, He is the creator forever. Another instance of the Real's watchfulness of His creature is

... His looking upon them regarding whatever He has prescribed to them of obligations and restrictions and the boundaries He has set for them. This is the Watchfulness of Magnificence and Threat (*murāqabat al-kibriyā' wa 'l- wa'īd*).¹⁰²

As far as the watching over (*murāqabah*) of God by human beings is concerned, it is a bit problematic in view of the obvious impossibility of our watching the Lord. Ibn 'Arabī tells us, however, that from one perspective this kind of *murāqabah* might be considered possible.

... this type of examination can take place since the Law has defined Him as is proper to His majesty. So "He is with us wherever we are;" "He sat upon the Throne" (Qur'ān 20: 5); He is "God in the earth; He knows our "secrets" and what we make public; and He is also God in the heavens" (Qur'ān 4: 3) and descends to us. He is the Manifest (*al-Zāhir*) in the entity of every locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) among the possible things. Hence we know Him in this measure and examine Him to this extent.¹⁰³

Thirdly, Ibn 'Arabī explains two modes of the assumption of this divine character trait. The first consists of our being aware of the fact that God is constantly watching over us. *Murāqabat al-ḥayā'*, according to Ibn 'Arabī, is based upon the words of God:

... "Does he not know that God sees?" (Qur'ān 96: 14). The servant examines His seeing while He is seeing him. Hence he examines the Real's examination of himself. This is called the "examination of examination" (*murāqabat al-murāqabah*), and is established by the Law.¹⁰⁴

The second mode consists of examining and understanding the signs He has posted within and around us.

¹⁰¹ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 2: 205.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

...the servant examines his heart and his inward and outward self to see the signs of his Lord within it. Then he acts in accordance with the signs of his Lord, which he sees.¹⁰⁵

13. *Al-Mujīb*

Being *al-Mujīb*, Allah blesses the request before it is made and grants favours before anyone entreaties for it. This can be conceived only of Him who, knowing the future needs of His creatures, brought into existence the external world before them.¹⁰⁶

On the ethical side of this name Ghazālī quotes from the Qur'ān, "therefore, the beggar drive not away!" (Qur'ān 93: 7) and the words of the Prophet (peace be upon him): "If I am invited to eat a sheep's trotter I will comply, and if a shank is presented to me I will accept it."¹⁰⁷

In the words of Ibn 'Arabī, the presence of responsiveness, that is, the locus of manifestation of the name *al-Mujīb*, is denominated as the presence of affection (*infi'āl*).¹⁰⁸ That is to say, the possessor of this attribute is moved by and responds to the pleadings of others. Ibn 'Arabī refers to the words of God, "I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he cries to me" (Qur'ān 2: 186). God therefore, is characterised by responsiveness. On the other hand, He has also commanded us to be responsive: "Let them hear My call" (Qur'ān 2: 186). Now, a servant calls God by praying but God calls His servant through His Law (*shar'*). So to be responsive to God, in other words, to assume the character trait of the name *al-Mujīb*, is to obey and comply with the Divine Will as embodied in the God-given Law. According to the verse quoted above, God is receptive and His servants are also required to be so. In view of this, Ibn 'Arabī divides responsiveness (*ijābah*) into two categories: the responsiveness of compliance (*imtithāl*) and that of favour (*imtinān*). A servant responds to the call of his Lord in obedience and compliance with His commands, but God responds to the cries of His servant only as a favour.

14. *Al-Wāsi'*

The divine abundance (*al-sa'ah al-ilāhiyyah*), in Ghazālī's view, implies the absoluteness of divine knowledge, beneficence and other attributes of perfection. Man should aim at vastness in knowledge and character. His

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ See Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-Asnā*, 118.

¹⁰⁷ This *ḥadīth* is not found in the authentic corpus of traditions. However, a similar authentic *ḥadīth* may be mentioned here: "If anyone of you is invited to a meal he should accept it." Abū 'Īsā Muḥammad b. 'Īsā al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi'*, Kitāb al-Ṣawm, Bāb Ijābat al-Ṣā'im al-Da'wah.

¹⁰⁸ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 4: 256.

goodness should not be seasonal; i.e. it should not depend upon the external circumstances or his own changing temperament.¹⁰⁹

In the section on the presence of abundance (*ḥaḍrat al-sa'ah*), beginning with an important comment on the Qur'ānic verse: "Our Lord! You comprehended all things in Mercy and Knowledge" (Qur'ān 40: 7), Ibn 'Arabī argues for the perfect rightness of the actual. Taking the Prophet's saying, "The good all of it is in Thy hands, while Evil does not go back to Thee," Ibn 'Arabī says that whatever is given by God is good and as there is no giver except He, therefore, whatever exists, is the best possible. In order to explain the existence of evil in the world, he says that everything in itself is good and beneficial and whenever harm occurs, it is because of the incompatibility of the temperament of the person who is at the receiving end, so harm is not caused by the real nature of anything.¹¹⁰

15. *Al-Ḥakīm*

According to Ibn 'Arabī the lesson to be learnt from this character-trait is the understanding of the proper place of everything and consequently, assigning it to its rightful place. Secondly, it is necessary to be completely satisfied with the *qadar*. The latter message is one of the most fundamental Sufi teachings, characteristic of the writings of prominent Sufis such as 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī. (d. 561/1165). Ibn 'Arabī writes:

... the watchful servant (*al-'abd al-murāqib*) knows that God is the assigner of things and He is the Wise (*al-Ḥakīm*), so He does not place anything except in its rightful place and He does not lodge it but in its station (*manzilah*). Therefore, do not object to God about the entities He orders in the world in every moment. He (the servant) should not turn his sight and mind to the wisdom of his Lord saying "At this particular time, had this been such and such, it would have been better."¹¹¹

As to the assumption of the character trait of this divine name, Ibn 'Arabī writes:

Know that 'the wise' (*al-ḥakīm*) from amongst the servants is he who brings down every thing to its rightful place.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ See Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-Asnā*, 119.

¹¹⁰ See Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 4: 257.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4: 258.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 3: 37.

16. *Al-Wadūd*

Love is one of the themes about which Ghazālī, Ibn 'Arabī and other Sufis have a lot of important things to say. The name *al-Wadūd*, Ghazālī says, is similar in meaning to the name *'al-Raḥīm* (the Merciful). However, he hastens to add that mercy (*raḥmah*) is shown towards the one who is needy and distressed whereas love does not require this. *Al-Wadūd* is the one who acts out of his love for others. As an ethical counsel in the light of this divine name, Ghazālī quotes the *ḥadīth*, 'If you want to take precedence over those who are close to God, then be reconciled with those who broke with you, give to the ones who excluded you and forgive the ones who wronged you.'¹¹³

Ibn 'Arabī has discussed the concept of love in full detail. However, we are not interested in the topic for its own sake.¹¹⁴ *Al-Wadūd*, according to him, is the one who is constant in love. Constant love (*wudd*) is one of the four denominations (*alqāb*) of love. The other three are *hawā* (sudden desire), *ḥubb* (pure love) and finally, *'ishq* (blinding love).¹¹⁵

Ibn 'Arabī considers God's constant love the foundation of His conserving the creature in existence. About the famous Qur'ānic verse, "He loves them and they love Him" (Qur'ān 5: 54), he notes that "His love for us precedes our love for Him"; so His love is not the response we receive in return for our love for Him. He perpetually creates.¹¹⁶

Therefore, He loves incessantly and remains constant in His love (*wadūd*), so that He continually gives existence to that which corresponds to us and every day is concerned with a new task.¹¹⁷

The ethical implication of this name is worked out by Ibn 'Arabī in the light of following *ḥadīth qudsī*:

...Allāh, the Exalted and Glorious stated: He who draws close to Me by the span of a palm, I draw close to him by the cubit, and he who draws close to Me by the cubit I draw close to him by the space (covered) by two hands, and he who walks towards Me I rush toward him...¹¹⁸

¹¹³ See Ghazālī *al-Maṣṣad al-Asnā*, 122.

¹¹⁴ There are a number of scholarly studies of this subject. See, for example, Claude Addas, "The Experience and Doctrine of Love in Ibn 'Arabī", *Journal of Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*, XXXII (2002), 32: 25–45. See also William Chittick, "The Divine Roots of Human Love", *Journal of Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*, XVII (1995), 55–79.

¹¹⁵ See Pablo Beneito, "The Servant of the Loving One", 6.

¹¹⁶ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 2: 205.

¹¹⁷ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 4: 260; English tr. Pablo Beneito, "The Servant of the Loving One", 8.

¹¹⁸ Muslim Ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Kitāb al-Dhikr, Bāb al-Ḥaṭṭh 'alā Dhikr al-Allāh;

Ibn 'Arabī advises his readers:

Brother! Therefore it is necessary that you should learn to value the one who loves you, either for God or for himself. If the Real, in spite of His independence of the world hastens towards his servant who loves Him, then you should more preferably have this attribute. Whenever someone loves you, he gives you supremacy over him and makes himself a place for your rule (*taḥakkum*). So if you are reasonable you should know the value of love and of the one who loves you. And you should hasten towards union, assuming the character traits of Allah with His love.¹¹⁹

In his *Kashf al-Ma'nā* Ibn 'Arabī writes about the ethical implication of the name, implicitly referring to its basic meaning, that is, constancy:

If the love (*ḥubb*) of Allah — may He be glorified and exalted — and the love of the one whom He has ordered you to love, prevail in the heart of the servant in every state (*ḥāl*) which may arise unexpectedly from the beloved (*maḥbūb*), whether it is agreeable to him or not, then the servant is called loving (*wadūd*).¹²⁰

At another place Ibn 'Arabī has characterized the lover in the following words: "It is characteristic of the lover that his love neither increases due to the favours of the beloved nor does it decrease by the latter's aversion (*jafā*)."¹²¹

17. *Al-Tawwāb*

Explaining the Qur'ānic words, "Surely Allah loves the relenting (*al-tawwābīn*)..." (Qur'ān 2: 222), in the light of his doctrine that the lover only loves what corresponds to him in his beloved. Ibn 'Arabī writes:

Al-Tawwāb is His attribute and one of His names. ... That is, the Real returned to the servant in every state in which he might have been ... sin, disobedience or opposition. When the servant returned to the person who had wronged him from amongst his likes, bestowing favours upon him and forgiving the wrongs, he is *al-Tawwāb* ... Hence the one who returns to God, returns from dissidence to agreement and from disobedience to obedience. Were you one of the relenting towards those who wronged you, the Almighty would have been returning to you regarding the wrongs you have committed to Him.¹²²

English tr. A.H. Siddiqi, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1979), 4: 1432.

¹¹⁹ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 2: 335.

¹²⁰ Ibn 'Arabī, *Kashf al-Ma'nā*, 107; English tr. Pablo Beneito, "The Servant of the Loving One", 3.

¹²¹ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 2: 353.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 2: 336.

18. *Al-Ghanī*

Impassibility or absolute self-sufficiency (*ghinā*) is the defining characteristic of Divinity. The absence of its opposite, dependence and poverty (*faqr*), sets God apart from what is other than (*mā siwā*) Him. Ibn 'Arabī derives cosmological implications of utmost significance from this.¹²³ For instance, he interprets the Qur'ānic words, "Allah is independent of the worlds," (Qur'ān 3: 97) as meaning that Allah is independent even of anything's signifying (*dalālah*) Him. Allah does not need to instal signposts in order to make Himself known to His creature. From this perspective, says Ibn 'Arabī, God did not create the world as His sign; otherwise, we could not declare Him independent of the worlds. God is, says Ibn 'Arabī, clearer and more manifest than anything that might be taken to signify Him. Otherwise, the signification might have had a sort of superiority over the signified (i.e. God), which clearly is absurd.

As to the ethical dimension of the divine name *al-Ghanī*, Ibn 'Arabī discusses most of the points mentioned above in the chapter on *freedom* (*al-hurriyyah*), so it can be said without fear of contradiction that this station is governed by the divine name *al-Ghanī*.¹²⁴ However, Ibn 'Arabī declares this concept, in the chapter heading, 'a door to danger' (*Bāb Khaṭar*).

"Freedom is something capable of being realized (*taḥaqquq*) but not of being assumed (*takhalluq*)."¹²⁵ This would mean, perhaps, that we could only know the meaning of freedom with regard to the divine reality (*al-Haqq*).¹²⁶ We cannot attain this station, except in a very complicated philosophical sense.¹²⁷ A servant, according to Ibn 'Arabī, never attains freedom unless he gets rid of his poverty and dependence (*iftiqār*). His poverty and dependence, in turn, follow from his contingency (*imkān*). As contingency pertains to the essence of the servant, it is logically impossible for him to leave it and retain his identity as the servant. So, one can never be free in the true sense.

19. *Al-Jāmi'*

Assumption of the character-trait of this divine name, according to Ibn 'Arabī, is simply the *full* realization of human potential. We know that in Ibn 'Arabī's

¹²³ See *ibid.*, 2: 224.

¹²⁴ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 2: 223–224.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ See Pablo Beneito, "The Servant of the Loving one", 1.

¹²⁷ The only sense in which a servant can be free is, according to Ibn 'Arabī, that he should stick to his reality, which is non-existence, poverty and dependence. If he concentrates upon his actuality (non-existence) from which he can never depart, man is free. On the other hand, if he looks at his potentiality (i.e. the fact that he could have become this and that) he is in bondage. See his, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 2: 224.

metaphysics, only human beings can manifest the character-traits of *all* divine names. This is because of the fact that God created Adam in His own image and taught him *all* the Names. For a human being, to be *al-jāmi'* means that he should assume the character traits of all divine names and strive to attain moral perfection. This interpretation is also in line with the explanation in Ibn 'Arabī's *Kashf*.¹²⁸ Now, while most of the qualities enlisted by Ibn 'Arabī seem to be the blessings bestowed upon the wayfarer (*sālik*) when he reaches a certain stage, some of them are ethical norms to be integrated in one's character out of free will.

The servant of the All-Embracing (*'abd al-jāmi'*) is the one who is described by all the divine names through realization and assumption; ... He is the locus of the disclosure (*majlā*) of sacred qualities and divine manifestations. Doubts do not occur to him and he is above every thought improper to his station... He gives the nature its due share and fulfills the rightful demands of his spirituality. He establishes the balances and exercises free disposal (*taṣarruf*) according to determined measures. The time exists for him; he does not exist for time. He is for God and for no one else... He considers what is ugly as ugly and what is beautiful beautiful.¹²⁹

V

CONCLUSION

Qushayrī's work on the meaning of divine names was the source of the treatise written by Ghazālī and Ibn 'Arabī was well familiar with *al-Maqṣad al-Asnā* of the latter. If we look at the development of the ethics of divine names through the respective works of Qushayrī and Ghazālī, we notice an increasing sophistication. It is, however, in Ibn 'Arabī's work that it reaches the culmination of its philosophical and mystical development. The concept of *takhalluq* forms an integral part of the metaphysics and theology of Ibn 'Arabī, while in the thought of Ghazālī it stands as an isolated chunk. This is why, perhaps, no writer on the ethical teachings of Ghazālī has ever taken into account his book *al-Maqṣad al-Asnā*.



¹²⁸ Ibn 'Arabī, *Kashf al-Ma'nā*, 172.

¹²⁹ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 2: 563.