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A Universe of Mirrors: The Mirror Metaphor in Ibn ʿArabī's Thought in Relation to Ontology, Knowledge, and Perfection

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A Universe of Mirrors

The Mirror Metaphor in Ibn ʿArabī's Thought in Relation to Ontology, Knowledge, and Perfection

A Thesis Submitted to

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By

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Under the Supervision of

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Note about the Sources

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- *al-Insān al-kāmil min kalām al-Shaykh al-Akbar Muḥyiddīn Ibn al-ʿArabī,* Mahmoud al-Ghurab.

This book is a compilation of direct excerpts pertaining to the subject of the perfect man. They are gleaned from Ibn ʿArabī's major works, predominantly *al-Futūḥāt al-makkīyya*. It is important to note that quotes referenced to this book are al-Shaykh al-Akbar's own words.

- *al-Futūḥāt al-makkīyya,* Ibn ʿArabī.

This thesis relies primarily on Osman Yahya's edition of *al-Futūḥāt* (1985). Due to the fact that his edition is incomplete, scholars often rely on Dar al-Kutub al-ʿArabīa's edition (1911). Therefore, both editions have been used and are differentiated in the footnotes by their years of publication.

Their life came from that close, insistent sun

And in its vivid rays they shone as one.

There in the Simorgh's radiant face they saw

Themselves, the Simorgh of the world- with awe

They gazed, and dared at last to comprehend

They were the Simorgh and the journey's end.

They see the Simorgh –at themselves they stare,

And see a second Simorgh standing there;

They look at both and see the two are one,

That this is that, that this, the goal is won.

…

And silently their shining Lord replies:

'I am a mirror set before your eyes,

And all who come before my splendor see

Themselves, their own unique reality;

You came as thirty birds and therefore saw

These selfsame thirty birds, not less nor more;

…

Though you have struggled, wandered, travelled far,

It is yourselves you see and what you are.'[1]

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[1] Farīd al-Dīn ʿAttār , *The Conference of The Birds*. (Penguin Books, 1984), 149-150.

Introduction

A natural and profound mystification dwells in the aura of shadows, reflections, and mirrors. There is an unspoken promise of knowledge being held in, and potentially revealed through, a reflective surface. Memory and imagination summon the image of an oracle's crystal ball, and one wonders what the oracle sees besides her own reflection. Devoid of the lure of a scintillating crystal ball, even crude shadows on a cave wall can captivate. Plato's prisoners in the cave prided themselves on their skills in a game of shadow conjecture. Even though their gazes fell on a solid wall, the feeble shadows left the prisoners in a trance. Before a better reflective surface, Narcissus stared at his image in the lake and into his own demise. And far beyond the reflective capacities of crystal balls, cave walls, or the surface of water, mirrors are the image representors *par excellence*. In the same measure that they represent images, mirrors represent paradoxes. The image in the mirror treads the line between existence and nonexistence, embodying a subtle but quintessential theme in Muḥy al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī's (d.1240) thought.

The mirror image, like imagination, is an isthmus; the encounters between spectator and reflection before a mirror encompass the possibility of immense layers of knowledge as do encounters in the imaginal world. Of equal mystification to the mirror itself is the metaphor of the mirror, which is ubiquitous in sufi texts. Similar to the water and the vessel, the mirror is often used as an insightful yet straightforward metaphor invoked to illustrate an image of simultaneous similarity and difference, or purity and impurity. It is one of the most prominent images in Sufi literature often employed in capturing the crowning moments of the mystical journey. At the end of an arduous adventure, ʿAttār's (d.1221) birds reach their goal. Out of the congregation of birds who embark on the quest to find their Lord, only thirty arrive. The thirty birds (*sī murg*) stand face to face with the Simorgh, and the correspondence ceases to be lost on

them.[2] In Him, they see themselves reflected, and see Him reflected in themselves. Their Lord, the Simorgh, introduces Himself to them as a mirror set before their eyes, in which the onlookers see their reality.[3] The quest in actuality was an encounter with the self before a mirror.

This motif occurs in Najm al-Dīn Kubrā's (d.1221) notion of the Witness in Heaven. According to Kubrā, upon reaching the highest station on the sufi path, the mystic encounters his heavenly guide, an encounter characterized by reciprocity. A mirrored ascent on the part of the mystic and descent on the part of his guide takes place, until man realizes he is face to face with himself, standing as both witness and witnessed.[4]

An unassuming yet powerful metaphor, the mirror is manipulated to serve the context in which it is invoked, from the mystic journey in ʿAttār and Kubrā, to love in Aḥmed al-Ghazālī (d.1126), to Being in ʿAyn al-Quḍat Hamadānī (d.1131). Sufi texts are infused with the mirror. However, the metaphor is not treated as an independent concept, a terminology specific to the field and deserving explanation. For instance, the mirror does not receive an entry in Jurjānī's book, *al-Taʿrīfāt*, in which he collects and explains the most important sufi semantics.[5] Certainly, this is justified as the 'mirror' as a term is devoid of the complexity or sophistication necessary to warrant a definition or explanation. Nevertheless, the mirror is mentioned profusely in term indexes of the different sufi texts and with several variations. The mirror is treated as a metaphor adjustable to the image it aims to convey.

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[2] In persian, the original language of the epic of the Conference of the Birds, *sī murg* means thirty birds. The correspondence between the number of the birds and the name of the Simorgh has been pointed out by many scholars, the significance of which is iterated in the excerpt provided earlier, where the mirror metaphor is foundational. See page 5.

[3] ʿAttār, *The Conference of The Birds,* 149-150.

[4] Henry Corbin, *Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, (New York: Omega Publications, 1994), 15, 19, 83. The theme of 'the contemplator and contemplated' is central in Corbin's book. In concomitance with it, the mirror metaphor is frequently used both in Corbin's own writing and in the primary sources he quotes. The sources extend from Hermetic texts to the teachings of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī, Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, and ʿAlāʾ al-Dawla al-Semnānī, among others.

[5] Alī Ibn Muḥammad al-Jurjānī, *al-Taʿrīfāt,* (Cairo: Maktabat Mostafa al-Halaby, 1938).

In reading Ibn ʿArabī's writings, the mirror surfaces frequently, or looms in the background unnamed. Al-Shaykh al-Akbar's masterful writing is uniquely visual; he paints vibrant images, which effortlessly become animated in the reader's mind. Even in the absence of an explicit mention of the metaphor, the image of a mirror organically forms and offers a fitting visual representation to several of the concepts, moments, and connections in which Ibn ʿArabī delves. The frequency at which the mirror metaphor occurs in al-Shaykh al-Akbar's writings is not what substantiates its significance. Rather, the mirror earns its significance from the importance of the contexts where it operates and from the profoundness of the notions it is employed to deliver.

Reviewing secondary sources in preparation for this project, only two articles were found that paid the mirror metaphor special attention. Souad al-Hakim's article, *"Unity of Being in Ibn ʿArabī - A Humanist Perspective"* provides a concise exposition of the theory of Unity of Being, its misconceptions, and its practical application in the lives of humans. Al-Hakim writes, "The most important metaphor used by Ibn ʿArabī to depict the relation between God, the world, and man in particular, remains that of the mirror."[6] She dedicates a brief section to explicitly examine the significance of the metaphor in al-Shaykh al-Akbar's thought; however, the importance of the metaphor is evident throughout the article. Interestingly, in several secondary sources, the mirror metaphor is employed in explaining Unity of Being.

The second article is *"Ibn 'Arabi's Polished Mirror: Perspective Shift and Meaning Event"* by Michael Sells. In the article, Sells addresses Ibn ʿArabī's writing style, contrasting his use of poetry and prose, and literary and expository rhetoric. Sells discusses the conundrums of translating Ibn ʿArabī's mystical texts. While admitting to al-Shaykh al-Akbar's genius, Sells

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[6] Souad al-Hakim, "Unity of Being in Ibn ʿArabī – A Humanist Perspective," *The Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society* 36 (2004), retrieved from https://ibnarabisociety.org/unity-of-being-in-ibn-arabi-souad-hakim.

points out two main obstructions, namely Ibn ʿArabī's use of metaphors, and his 'deliberate' disregard, or intentional ambiguity when using reflexive and non-reflexive pronouns. The themes of the article are presented through an in depth analysis and translation of the first few passages of *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. Sells addresses the perspective shift resulting from the polishing of the mirror, wherein the polished mirror loses its visibility to the image it reflects. This is an allusion to the divine manifestation which ensues from self-effacement.[7] Sells concludes the article with, " I suggest that the metaphor of the mirror is a central and integral feature within the Andalusian master's writing, one that leads the reader into a reenactment of the perspective shift."[8]

The mirror metaphor has been noticed by both primary and secondary scholarship and given varying degrees of interest. However, it appears that the predominant reception of the metaphor is restricted to a momentary acknowledgement, after which the metaphor is neglected and deemed peripheral. What this thesis suggests is that this metaphor warrants further bewilderment. Instead of a cursory glance at the mirror as a convenient metaphor, the suggestion is to stand before it with more *ḥayrā* in order to witness the depths to which the roots of this metaphor reach. Then the question might arise, of whether the mirror is merely a metaphor at all.

The aims of this thesis are bifold, immediate and ambitious. As for the latter, this thesis hopes that the scrutiny paid to the mirror metaphor here would engender an interest towards evaluating the place of this metaphor in al-Shaykh al-ʾAkbar's thought at large. This encompasses, but is not restricted to, a reevaluation of the meaning of Unity of Being through the lens of the mirror metaphor.

The immediate aim of this thesis is to explore the mirror metaphor in al-Shaykh al-Akbar's thought in relation to ontology and epistemology, more specifically, his conception of

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[7] Michael Sells, "Ibn 'Arabi's Polished Mirror: Perspective Shift and Meaning Event", *Studia Islamica,* no. 67 (1988): 121. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1595976.
[8] Sells, "Ibn 'Arabi's Polished Mirror," 146.

Being, the purpose of creation, and the perfect man. These focal points have been selected due to their fundamental presence in Ibn ʿArabī's perception of the world at large. As will be elucidated in the second chapter, knowledge is the purpose of creation for Ibn ʿArabī, and the perfect man is the means of achieving this purpose. This nexus provides a panoptic view of al-Shaykh al-Akbar's thought, as it connects a constellation of the seminal interlocutors of his doctrine. The nexus of the perfect man and knowledge naturally invites into the conversation Ibn ʿArabī's ideas on the divine names, the image, the Muḥammadan Reality, and more. Analyzing the manner in which the mirror occurs in relation to these themes hopes to formulate a valuable reading of the metaphor's position in al-Shaykh al-Akbar's understanding.

There is nothing in existence but Him, and Existence can only be benefited from Him. No entity (ʿayn) for an existent would appear without His manifestation. The mirror is the presence of possibility and al-Ḥaqq is the onlooker. The image is you according to your capacity, either an angel or an orbit (malak aw falak), human or horse. Akin to the image in the mirror [appearing] according to the mirror's own form of height, width, roundness, and differences in shape, while it is a mirror in every case. In the same way, the possible things are like shapes in possibility. The divine manifestation earns the possible things their being, and the mirror earns them their shapes… Clearer than this, it cannot get except through declaration.[9]

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[9] Muḥy al-Din Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, vol. 3, (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Arabia, 1911), 80, quoted in Mahmoud al-Ghurab, *Sharḥ kalimāt al-sufiyya wa al-radd ʿala Ibn Taymiyya min kalam al-Shaykh al-Akbar Muḥy al-Din Ibn al-ʿArabī*, 2nd ed (Matba'at Nadr, 1993), 476.

I.   Unity of Being

"He asked me, 'Who are you?' I replied, 'Apparent non-existence.'" [10]

The mention of al-Shaykh al-Akbar's name is often closely followed by references to Oneness of Being or Unity of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). Even though, according to William Chittick, the term is not found in Ibn ʿArabī's works, the aspect of unity is seminal to al-Shaykh al-Akbar's conception of reality.[11] A hyperfocus on unity alone in Ibn ʿArabī's doctrine, however, can impair the attempt of formulating a comprehensive reading of his thought at large.[12] Similar to the various binary relationships which ultimately form a holistic understanding of God in Islam, i.e. immanence and transcendence, beauty and majesty, unity has multiplicity as its oppositional corollary. Ibn ʿArabī lends both poles plentiful attention as they permeate several of his core notions that to overlook one of the two would require a conscious effort.

As pointed out earlier, the phrase 'Unity of Being' does not occur in al-Shaykh al-Akbar's writing, a fact which is undoubtedly curious. Therefore, the discrepancy between the total absence of the term 'Unity of Being' from his work and the persistent attachment of scholarship over the ages to approach his work through the lens of Unity of Being specifically is puzzling. Chittick puts the subject of *wujūd* in the Akbarian doctrine into perspective by saying, "Ibn ʿArabī frequently discusses *wujūd,* but there is no special internal reason why his followers would have extracted this particular term from his writings and placed it at the center of their concerns."[13] Chittick singles out Ṣadr al-Dīn Qunawī for placing much attention on *wujūd* in an effort to engage the Akbarian teachings with philosophy.

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[10] al-Hakim, "Unity of Being in Ibn 'Arabī"
[11] William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 79.
[12] William Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn ʿArabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 15.
[13] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, xviii.

The shortcomings of entitling al-Shaykh al-Akbar's conception of Being at large as 'Unity of Being' are bifold. First, while the title accurately represents Ibn ʿArabī's position on Being as one, it fails to emphasize the distinction between Being and beings, a distinction which is often inconspicuous. Since Being can only be witnessed in beings, the difference could escape recognition. It becomes possible to forget that Being qua Being has never been seen. Akin to the example of a polished mirror; despite the commonplaceness of experiencing looking in a mirror, the mirror itself is hardly ever noticed.[14] Even when the mirror is noticed, it is never seen.[15] Due to the elusiveness of the discourse on Being, Toshihiko Izutsu made a point of highlighting the nature of the subject. He writes, "'Existence' in this particular context is not the kind of 'existence' of which all of us naturally have a common-sense notion… Rather it is 'existence' as it reveals itself only to a transcendental consciousness."[16] Had the distinction between Being and beings been as obvious as may be assumed, no allegations of pantheism would have been directed at Ibn ʿArabī, which prompts the second problem with 'Unity of Being'.

The concept of 'Unity of Being' arrives with a constellation of preconceptions, which feed further assumptions and hinder the possibility of a relatively objective approach. Abul Ela Affifi classifies Ibn ʿArabī's thought as unexpressed pantheism. He opines that pantheism permeated Ibn ʿArabī's philosophy, yet remained unnamed due to his lack of philosophical training.[17] Affifi's hypothesis has been largely discredited by scholarship over the years.[18] The fragility of this argument becomes evident upon taking into account the following aspects.

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[14] Sells, "Ibn 'Arabi's Polished Mirror", 121.
[15] Muḥy al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, ed. al-Sayyid Nizam al-Din Ahmad al-Lak'hanawi. 1st ed. (Cairo: Maktabat Misr, 2015), 33.
[16] Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Concept and Reality of Existence*, (Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1971), 37.
[17] Meena Sharify-Funk, and William Rory Dickson. "Traces of Panentheism in Islam: Ibn Al-ʿArabi and the Kaleidoscope of Being." *Panentheism across the World's Traditions*, (2013): 144. https://doi:10.1093/ACPROF:OSO/9780199989898.003.0008.
[18] Sharify-Funk, and Dickson, "Traces of Panentheism in Islam", 144.

Building on Chittick's observation that the phrase *waḥdat al-wujūd* does not occur in Ibn ʿArabī's writings, Mahmoud al-Ghurab remarks that he located it in *al-Futūḥāt* in only one instance as *al-waḥda fī al-wujūd*.[19] Considering this single mention of *al-waḥda fī al-wujūd* in light of the fact that al-Shaykh al-Akbar is a prolific writer and a unique master of language, it is not farfetched to infer that his inclination towards not employing the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* was deliberate. The single mention underpins that the expression occurred to al-Shaykh al-Akbar. Therefore, the fact that the phrase *waḥdat al-wujūd* does not appear in his books, which are moderately estimated at four hundred titles, cannot be due to an inability to arrive at this expression. Whether the absence of the term is due to a conscious refraining on the part of Ibn ʿArabī or any other reason, the absence in itself is meaningful. It presents sufficient purpose to pay homage to Ibn ʿArabī's legacy and identify an alternative terminology or description from his own corpus, one which encompasses the essence of his conception of God and the world, unity and multiplicity.

It is a daunting endeavor attempting to approach the subject of Being in the doctrine of Ibn ʿArabī, a situation which al-Ghurab captures in his succinct statement about Unity of Being, "Everyone who attempted to interpret it, rendered it more foreign"[20]. Ibn ʿArabī himself acknowledges the complexity of the matter and says that "its unveiling is difficult".[21] The intention, therefore, is to address the subject with reticence, by meeting it through al-Shaykh al-Akbar's own words. Glimpses of secondary scholarship are incorporated for context and background. Priority is lent to encountering the words of Ibn ʿArabī himself and observing the images he employs in explaining the relationship between God and the world. As the title of this

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[19] al-Ghurab, *Sharḥ kalimāt al-sufiyya*, 468.
(أَثبِت الكثرة في الثبوت و انفِها من الوجود، وأَثبِت الوحدة في الوجود و أنفها من الثبوت), See *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 2:502.
[20] al-Ghurab, *Sharḥ kalimāt al-sufiyya*, 468.
[21] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 2:70, quoted in al-Ghurab, *Sharḥ kalimāt al-sufiyya*, 474.

thesis suggests, the mirror metaphor has been identified as one of the most recurring and fitting images al-Shaykh al-Akbar summons in his treatment of the subject of Being.

Being: God and the World

Ibn ʿArabī's genius lies in his comfortability with paradoxes. His simultaneously affirmative and negative answer to Ibn Rushd's question is perhaps an archetypal moment of his life, one that comes to mind again and again when reading his words. It is characteristic of numerous of al-Shaykh al-Akbar's ideas to encompass both 'yes and no', 'is and is not', while traversing and acknowledging with profoundness and insight the layers in between. His conception of *wujūd* exemplifies the concomitance of opposites. Al-Shaykh al-Akbar's treatment of the story of prophet Yūsuf in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* captures the spirit of his eye for subtlety, as well as the place of paradoxes and layers in his theory of *wujūd*. The gist of the story is as follows:

The young Yūsuf settles in the comfort of his father's presence, and in the serenity of their companionship, Yūsuf recounts his dream to him. Eleven planets, the sun, and the moon prostrate themselves to him in a scene that is undoubtedly magnificent. In ancient Egypt some years later, Yūsuf stands in a majestic hall; he seats his parents on the throne, and his eleven brothers kneel before him. "This is the interpretation of my vision of long ago; my Lord has made it true," he says.[22] Yūsuf postulates that his dream traversed the realm of imagination and arrived as a manifest reality into the world of sensibles (*al-maḥsūsāt*). Ibn ʿArabī perceives a veil, another layer in the fabric of this story. He recites the words, "people are asleep" (*al-nās niyām*) attributed to prophet Muḥammad and posits them as the prophet's response to Yūsuf, which Ibn ʿArabī suggests to hold the discrepancy between Yūsuf's level of awareness compared to the prophet's.[23] Ibn ʿArabī explains that prophet Yūsuf could not see that standing in the grand

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[22] Quran, (12:100)

[23] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 130-131.

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hall with his parents and kneeling siblings, Yūsuf was still within a dream. His previous dream as a child was a dream within this dream.[24] In Ibn ʿArabī's view, Prophet Yūsuf's awareness mistook manifest reality for reality, rather than another layer of imagination. On the other hand, the prophet's words, "people are asleep" demonstrate his cognition of the imaginal nature of the world.[25]

A staple feature of Ibn ʿArabī's understanding of God (al-Ḥaqq) in contrast with the world, or what is conventionally called 'anything other than God' (mā siwā al-Ḥaqq), is their relation to Being. For al-Shaykh al-Akbar, Being belongs to the domain of oneness, the realm of the essence. It is one and the same as God.[26] More precisely, it is one and the same as God's Essence (al-ḍhāt); this means that it does not occur elsewhere.[27] Ibn ʿArabī writes, "Being is not the entity (ʿayn) of the existent except in the right of al-Ḥaqq."[28] Unlike the divine names, which manifest their effects on the canvas of creation and therefore bear the reality of multiplicity and approachability, al- ḍhāt is unknown and unknowable to creation. By extension, Being is unknown to creation.[29] Designating the possible things (al-mumkināt) as existents is, according to Ibn ʿArabī, "a metaphor not a reality"[30]. Rather existence, or Being per se, is an epithet in the right of creation, not an intrinsic reality. A mirroring and reciprocity surface here in the relation between God and creation, namely, what is Essence to al-Ḥaqq, i.e. al-wujūd, is an attribute in al-khalq, and what is an attribute in al-Hāqq-the divine names- is the essence of al-khalq.[31]

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[24] Ibn ʿArabī, Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam, 130-131.

[25] Ibn ʿArabī, Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam, 131.

[26] Ibn ʿArabī, al-Futūḥāt, (1911), 2:516, quoted in al-Ghurab, Sharḥ kalimāt al-sufiyya, 471. (لأن الحق هو الوجود).

[27] Ibn ʿArabī, al-Futūḥāt, (1911), 4:6, quoted in al-Ghurab, Sharḥ kalimāt al-sufiyya, 484; Ibn ʿArabī, Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam, 138.

[28] Ibn ʿArabī, al-Futūḥāt, (1911), 2:516, quoted in al-Ghurab, Sharḥ kalimāt al-sufiyya, 471.

[29] al-Hakim, "Unity of Being in Ibn 'Arabī".

[30] Ibn ʿArabī, al-Futūḥāt, (1911), 2:516, quoted in al-Ghurab, Sharḥ kalimāt al-sufiyya, 472.

[31] The divine names are the essence of creation because creation is merely their manifestation. This relationship is elucidated further throughout this thesis.

Al-Shaykh al-Akbar's position is clear when God and the world are contrasted on the basis of Being; his writings propound a dichotomy between real and imaginal. It is significant to unravel the layers of the current discussion. Chittick is critical of interpretations which present Ibn ʿArabī's understanding of the cosmos as illusory, and deems them 'shortsighted'.[32] His assessment is in full alignment with the purpose of this section. Many of al-Shaykh al-Akbar's works are dedicated to emphasizing the modality of existence experienced by creation.[33] The dichotomy being addressed in this section does not explain the cosmos, or rather explain it away, as an illusion. Rather it highlights one of the fundamental discrepancies Ibn ʿArabī establishes between Being as it is God, and Being as it is experienced by the world. Al-Shaykh al-Akbar writes, "Therefore, we said that the world, in juxtaposition to *al-Ḥaqq*, is of imagined Being and nonexistent. And Being and the Existent is none but the essence of *al-Ḥaqq*."[34] In this quote, Ibn ʿArabī reiterates the idea that only God is Being, and therefore, only He can be called the real Existent. Words like 'imagined' (*mutawahham*), 'imagination within imagination' (*khayālun fī khayāl*), 'dream within a dream' (*manāmun fī manām*) characterize the language Ibn ʿArabī employs in making the distinction between God and the world.[35]

The dichotomy between real and imaginal enunciates their conspicuous discrepancies, while simultaneously confirming a fundamental connection; as the imaginal is no more than the image of the real.[36] Ibn ʿArabī describes the world as a shadow (*ḍhill*), imagination (*khayāl*), and mirror reflection. In a sense, these terms can be considered synonymous; the reflection in the mirror is referred to in Arabic as both *ḍhill fī al-mirʾāh* and *khayāl fī al-mirʾāh*. The mirror not

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[32] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds,* 16.

[33] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1985), 1:41; Muḥy al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī, *Naqsh al-fuṣūṣ*, ed. al-Sayyid Nizam al-Din Ahmad al-Lak'hanawi, (Cairo: Maktabat Misr, 2015), 441.

[34] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 4:40, quoted in al-Ghurab, *Sharḥ kalimāt al-sufiyya*, 482. لذلك قلنا إن العالم (في جنب الحق متوهم الوجود لا موجود، و الموجود والوجود ليس إلا عين الحق)

[35] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 135, 138, 127.

[36] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds,* 25.

only dominates Ibn ʿArabī's metaphorical explanation of his theory of Being, it also encompasses some of the alternative metaphors.

Arriving at the dichotomy of real and imaginal is born from contemplating the trichotomy of Absolute/Necessary Existence, absolute nonexistence, and possible existence. Ibn ʿArabī holds the possible things to be "entities: fixed from the manifestation of al-Ḥaqq, nonexistent from the manifestation of nonexistence."[37] Between the two Absolutes of al-Ḥaqq and nonexistence, the isthmus takes the form of the possible things. In this intermediary and paradoxical position, the possible things appear on the surface of the mirror of nonexistence, and reflect the image of Absolute Existence, while maintaining the qualities of absolute nonexistence.

> Nondelimited nothingness stands before nondelimited Being like a mirror. Within the mirror, Being sees its own form. This form is the entity of the possible things. That is why the possible thing has an immutable entity and a thingness in the state of nonexistence, and that is why it comes out in the form of nondelimited Being. That also is why it is qualified by infinity, and it is said concerning it that it is infinite. [38]

He continues,

> Likewise, nondelimited Being was also a mirror to nondelimited nothingness. In the mirror of al-Ḥaqq, nondelimited nothingness saw itself. This form that it saw in the mirror is the entity of nothingness, by which the possible thing is characterized. And it [the possible thing] is described as infinite; similarly, nondelimited nothingness is infinite. Therefore, the possible thing has the attribute of nonexistence. It is like the manifest image between the seer and the mirror; it is neither the entity of the seer, nor other than him. The possible thing, in respect to its entity, is neither the entity of al-Ḥaqq,

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[37] Ibn ʿArabī, al-Futūḥāt, (1911), 3:48, quoted in al-Ghurab, Sharḥ kalimāt al-sufiyya, 471.

[38] Ibn ʿArabī, al-Futūḥāt, (1911), 3:48, quoted in Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge, 205. In this research, the term 'Being' is used to signify the essence of the divine, Being qua Being. Existence, on the other hand, mostly refers to creation itself. In a few instances, it refers to Being as experienced in the rank of possible existents.

"العدم المطلق قام للوجود المطلق كالمرآة، فرأى الوجود فيه صورته، فكانت تلك الصورة عين الممكن، فلهذا كان للممكن عين ثابتة و شيئية في حال
عدمه، و لهذا خرج على صورة الوجود المطلق، و لهذا أيضا اتصف بعدم التناهى، فقيل فيه: إنه لا يتناهى"

nor other than Him; and in respect to its nonexistence, is neither the entity of the

impossible, nor other than it.[39]

In this reciprocated witnessing, the seeing on both sides occurs through the possible

thing. The possible thing serves as a locus of manifestation, and by extension, a locus of

witnessing for both Being and nonexistence. In this intermediary position between Being and

nonexistence, the possible thing is lent its imaginal quality; it manifests the appearance of Being,

while residing on the surface of nothingness and certain annihilation. Similar to the 'Russian

Doll-ness' of the story of Yusuf's dream, the imaginal's fabric is layered and diverse, since both

the image (form) it reflects and the surface it reflects it on exhibit the attribute of

nondelimitation.[40]

Nondelimited nothingness is the mirror in which Being sees its form. Likewise, Being

acts as a mirror for Nondelimited nothingness and reflects its form to itself. The realm of forms

(images) is the realm of the possible things. As opposed to *al-Ḥaqq* whose Being is necessary

and the same as its essence, nonexistence has precedence in defining the possible thing's

essence.[41] This is not due to a temporal determination, referring to the possible thing's state of

nonexistence preceding its state of existence. Rather, it is due to the possibility of the possible

thing's nonexistence, an impossibility in the right of the Necessary Being.[42] Since the possible

thing does not possess Being in its essence, Ibn ʿArabī calls it a manifestation (*maẓhar*).[43] It is

the image in the mirror, manifesting the appearance of Being, while lacking it in its essence.

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[39] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 3:48, quoted in al-Ghurab, *Sharḥ kalimāt al-sufiyya*, 470-471.
"و كان أيضا الوجود المطلق كالمرآة للعدم المطلق، فرأى العدم المطلق فى مرآة الحق نفسه، فكانت صورته التى رأى فى فى هذه المرآة، هو عين العدم الذي اتصف به هذا الممكن، وهو موصوف بأنه لا يتناهى، كما أن العدم المطلق لا يتناهى، فاتصف الممكن بأنه معدوم، فهو كالصورة الظاهرة بين الرائي و المرآة لا هى عين الرائى و لا غيره، فالممكن ما هو من حيث ثبوته عين الحق و لا غيره، و لا هو من حيث عدمه عين المحال و لا غيره."
[40] The terms form and image are used interchangeably in this research. Mostly, image is given preference over form, and form is included in the context of other scholars' translations.
[41] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), quoted in al-Ghurab, *Sharḥ kalimāt al-sufiyya*, 473.
[42] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), quoted in al-Ghurab, *Sharḥ kalimāt al-sufiyya*, 472.
[43] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), quoted in al-Ghurab, *Sharḥ kalimāt al-sufiyya*, 472.

We knew that the world is not the entity of the Real (*ʿayn al-Ḥaqq*), rather it is what appeared in real existence (*ma ẓahara fī al-wujūd al-ḥaqq*). Were it the entity of *al-Ḥaqq*, [the idea of] it being created would not be right (*ma saḥ kawnahu badīʿan*). Akin to how the image of the seen occurs in the mirror; the onlooker looks into it [the mirror], and through this looking, it is as if he created it [the image]… This image is not your entity, for the quality of the mirror of smallness and largeness, length and width has a determination (*ḥukm*) on the image, but it [the mirror image] has no determination over you… The image is also not other than you, because of your determination over it…Therefore, the seen is neither other than you, nor it is your entity. Likewise is the matter regarding the existence of the world.[44]

When we saw that the mirror, through itself, has a determination over the image, and saw that the onlooker differed from that image in some aspect, we knew that the onlooker, in his essence, was unaffected by the entity of the mirror. Since he was unaffected, and since that image was neither the entity of the mirror nor of the onlooker, but appeared due to the determination/law (*ḥukm*) of manifesting to a mirror, we knew the difference between the onlooker and the mirror, and the manifest image in the mirror, which is hidden (*ghayb*) in it. Therefore, if the onlooker is seen going farther away from the mirror, he sees the image getting farther into the mirror, and if he approaches it approaches. And if the onlooker's image was upright in the mirror and he raised his right hand, the image raises its left hand. That is to apprise him that, even if I am your manifestation and in your image, you are not me and I am not you. If you comprehend what we alerted you to, you would know from where the servant was given the attribute of Existence (*wujūd*), and who is the Existent (*al-mawjūd*), and from where he was given the attribute of Nonexistence (*al-ʿadam*), and who is the Nonexistent (*al-maʿdūm*)... You would know

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[44] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 4:316, quoted in al-Ghurab, *Sharḥ kalimāt al-sufiyya*, 474-475.
(علمنا أن العالم ما هو عين الحق، و إنما هو ما ظهر في الوجود الحق، إذ لو كان عين الحق ما صح كونه بديعا، كما تحدث صورة المرئي في المرآة، ينظر الناظر فيها، فهو بذلك النظر كأنه أبدعها... ثم إن تلك الصورة ما هى عينك، لحكم صفة المرآة فيها من الكبر و الصغر و الطول و العرض، و لا حكم لصورة المرآة فيك فما هى عينك،... و لا تلك الصورة غيرك لما لك فيها من الحكم... فما هو المرئي غيرك و لا عينك، كذلك الأمر في وجود العالم الحق.)

who you are and who your Lord is, and where your rank is, and that you're in need of Him, Almighty, and He is The Rich, The Independent from you by His Essence.[45]

An onlooker and a mirror, this configuration is Ibn ʿArabī's answer to the question of Being. A single spectator, and a myriad mirror reflections. Being what they are, reflections, the images on the one hand are the spectator, since, even in their manyness, they reflect Him. On the other hand, they are certainly not Him. They appear on the mirror in accordance with the mirror's capacity to reflect. They appear as many, when the onlooker is one. Most importantly, the images only endure so long as He faces the mirror. Were He to turn His face away, the images cease to be, while He persists. Paradox is at the heart of Ibn ʿArabī's ontology, and in al-Shaykh al-Akbar's writings, this paradox is metaphorized as a mirror.

The relationship between God and the world vis-a-vis existence has been given many names and descriptions. "He is He" (*Huwa Huwa*) is a common and problematic depiction of this relationship, which Souad al-Hakim regards as incompatible with Ibn ʿArabī's views on Being. Al-Hakim coins "He within Himself" (*Huwa fī Huwa*) as an alternative expression to circumvent the pantheistic connotations of *Huwa Huwa*.[46] However, al-Hakim's expression propels the argument out of the treacherous waters of pantheism and into that of panentheism. Early in their article "Traces of Panentheism in Islam: Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Kaleidoscope of Being", Meena Sharify-Funk and William Rory Dickson declare that they do not classify Ibn ʿArabī as a panentheist and acknowledge the limitations of this category. They, however, argue that panentheism encompasses features of al-Shaykh al-Akbar's thought on Being better than the earlier classification of pantheism did.[47] While panentheism acknowledges the vastness of God beyond the limits of the world, it remains an interpretation external to Ibn ʿArabī's thought. It

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[45] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 4:316, quoted in al-Ghurab, *Sharḥ kalimāt al-sufiyya*, 475.
[46] al-Hakim, "Unity of Being in Ibn 'Arabī".
[47] Sharify-Funk, and Dickson, "Traces of Panentheism in Islam", 144.

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could explain some aspects of his ideas, but it does not envelope the relations that govern and connect his system of thought. In the following section, one of these relations is explored, namely, Ibn ʿArabī's concept of the image.

The Image

The concept of the image occupies a central position in Ibn ʿArabī's ontology and epistemology. It renders the existence of existents possible, and fulfills the ultimately epistemological purpose of creation. The image defines a fundamental feature of the relationship between God and the world, namely the world being created in the image of God. The famous prophetic *ḥadīth* "God created Ādam in his image" receives special attention and unique interpretations from Ibn ʿArabī. For al-Shaykh al-Akbar, the relation proposed in the *ḥadīth* extends beyond man and includes the world as well. He explains that both the microcosm - man- and the macrocosm -the world- are in the image of God.

As mentioned earlier, the realm of images is the realm of the possible things. Thus, by definition, the image treads the space between existence and nonexistence. More precisely, the image is the qualifying factor of the possible thing to be possible. "Know that it is unrightful that something of the world, which has existence, would not be the image of *al-Ḥaqq*" [48] Where does the image of *al-Ḥaqq* appear? On the surface of the mirror that is the world.

> "*Al-Ḥaqq*, praise be to Him, had at first created the whole world as a sort of flat, undifferentiated place, devoid of the [divine] spirit, like an unpolished mirror. But the divine determination (*ḥukm*) would never do that without [making certain] that such a place was able to receive the divine spirit to which [God's] determination gives expression by breathing into [that place]." [49]

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[48] Mahmoud al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil min kalām al-Shaykh al-Akbar Muḥyiddīn Ibn al-ʿArabī,* (Damascus: Matbaʾat Nadr, 1990), 8. (اعلم أنه لا يصح أن يكون شيء من العالم له وجود ليس هو صورة الحق)
[49] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 10-11, quoted in Ronald L. Nettler, *Sufi Metaphysics and Quranic Prophets* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2003), 21.

As Ibn ʿArabī clarifies here, divine determination ruled that all possible existents must be capable of receiving the divine spirit. This is the feature distinguishing possible from impossible existence. Now, what is meant by the ability to receive the divine spirit?

It is the ability to be in the image, the ability to be a mirror. The capacity to be a mirror receptive of the divine image is the defining characteristic of possible existence.

In a quote mentioned earlier, al-Shaykh al-Akbar alludes to nondelimited Being and nondelimited nothingness standing opposite each other as mirrors. Nothingness acquires the appearance of Being through standing empty in opposition of Being. The emptier (flatter and more undifferentiated) nothingness is, the more it resembles a polished mirror; thus, the more it reflects and resembles Being. Akin to a beam of light falling upon a reflective surface, the surface in itself might be undifferentiated and empty, but the possession of a reflective quality would allow it to take on the image of the beam of light and reflect it, displaying it to itself. While nothing resides within the surface, this placement of opposition to infinite existence creates on it images of infinite existence.

ʿAyn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadānī alludes to this positioning of opposition in his work, *Zubdat al-Ḥaqāʾiq.*

> Every desired existent has a relation to the Necessary Existent, and the Necessary
> Existent has a face to every existent. Every existent is present to the Necessary Existent,
> and the Necessary Existent is distinct to every existent. Whatever is not present to the
> Necessary Existent is nonexistent, since the Necessary Existent has no face to it. Had it
> not been for the face of al-Qayyūm, existents would not have existence in the first
> place.[50]

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[50] ʿAyn al-Quḍāt al-Ḥamadānī, *Zubdat al-ḥaqāʾiq,* 75.

Hamadānī's language is primarily philosophical, but when read in light of Ibn ʿArabī's writings, the resemblance of the mental image both quotes present becomes apparent. The creator standing vis-a-vis creation, directing His face to it, is what lends creation its existence, an identical situation to a person standing before a mirror, lending the image in it its contingent existence.

Conclusion

From an expression unfound in Ibn ʿArabī's writings, to a metaphor he ubiquitously employed, the invitation is to reorient our point of departure when studying his conception of Being. Izutsu gives the designation 'transcendental consciousness' to those capable of receiving the reality of Being. This is a rare occurrence in individuals, rendering the words of those who possess it invaluable treasures. Al-Shaykh al-Akbar's unique ability at taming language has not been neglected by scholarship. Shahab Ahmed references ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī's evaluation of the role Ibn ʿArabī's ideas and language serve. al-Jīlī says, "Ibn ʿArabī's ideas can save the novice the difficulty of classifying and formulating the elusive mystical experiences and symbolic visions that he encounters on the Sufi Path…because they give him a greater conceptual clarity."[51]

Being a frequent visitor of the realm of imagination, a wayfarer who has traversed this path back and forth, Ibn ʿArabī has acquired or unveiled a familiarity with this realm. This familiarity has not only made interpreting the subtleties of these travels possible for him, but it has also made available the vocabulary for all those who succeeded him. His gift for words transported aspects of the spiritual journey into the realm of language after formerly being ineffable. Ibn ʿArabī alludes to this capacity as being a divine gift granted to him upon receiving

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[51] Alexander D. Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 250, quoted in Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016), 21.

the station of the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood and says, "It was as if I was given the sum of words" (*wa kaʾannanī ʾutīt jawāmiʿ al-kalim*).[52] Considering the ripeness of al-Shaykh al-Akbar's language and his copious writings, the motivation to contextualize his ideas through a terminology external to his corpus is rather unjustified.

In al-Shaykh al-Akbar's ontology, the predominant motif is a chasm, albeit layered and mysterious, between real and imaginal, a relation he animates through the metaphor of the mirror. The configuration of mirror and onlooker is recurrent, in some instances supplemented with phrases insinuating the seriousness of the revelation. The mirror epitomizes the is/is not concomitance characteristic of Ibn ʿArabī's notion of Being and embodies the pillars of his conception. It determines to whom actual Being belongs and whose Being is an image. And it emphasizes the conditional and dependent nature of the image's existence upon the existence of God.

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[52] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, ed. Osman Yahya and Ibrahim Madkur (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Masriyya al-ʾAmma lil-Kitab, 1985), 1:45.

"Where was your Lord before creating His (visible) Creation?", the prophet was asked.

"He was in a Cloud, [ʿAmāʾ]; there was no space either above or below"[53].

In this aloneness, hid a treasure wanting to be known. He created a creation capable of knowing Him, and made His attributes knowable to them. The constitutions, amzija, of this creation dictated a discrepancy in their capacities for knowing, and since like knows like, it was necessary for the fulfillment of the initial purpose from creation to create an essence, jawhar, very similar to that of the treasure, a perfect reality, which, through its own perfection, can know Him through knowing itself.

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[53] Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ʿArabī*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), 185.

In the milieu of Ibn ʿArabī's understanding of the cosmos, three seminal themes circumambulate his theories about the emergence of creation; these themes are perfection, love, and knowledge. While al-Shaykh al-Akbar's ideas are often deemed convoluted, one can only express both bewilderment and awe at the intricacy of his theories and the precision of the connections he weaves between them. The interconnections between knowledge, love, and perfection are recurrent in Ibn ʿArabī's writings, and the mirror metaphor is often concomitant to them, whether explicitly used or implied. The claim of this chapter is that the presence of the mirror in these foundational contexts is meaningful and worthy of analysis. The first chapter addressed the mirror's capacity at explaining the core principles of Ibn ʿArabī's ontology. It also offered a glimpse at how the mirror is implied in contexts of 'the image', in the absence of the mirror metaphor itself. This chapter further explores this idea of the image as the mirror through addressing three interlocutors: perfection as a pursuit and an end in itself, love as the nature of the initial creative movement, and knowledge as the purpose of creation.[54] Within these three focuses, Ibn ʿArabī's employment of the mirror metaphor alternates between explicit mentions and allusions through the guise of the image.

1.   **The Image and Perfection**

In Ibn ʿArabī's thought, the image is a prerequisite for perfection, as well as for love and knowledge. Al-Shaykh al-Akbar's theory of Being bears upon and offers the core justification for this conditionality. Since there is one Existent in whom the perfection of all attributes-including the perfection of perfection- exists, any degree of perfection which appears in the myriad manifestations, images, mirror reflections of this original Existent owes its presence to Him. The more a manifestation clearly reflects the image of God, the more it exhibits His

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[54] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 350-351.

perfection in the world. And so, every perfection that Ibn ʿArabī sees in this world, he attributes to the image of God.

Ibn ʿArabī writes in *Inshāʾ al-dawāʾir* that Allah commanded that the heavens and earth be created, "to relieve them [the divine names] from the state they were in, from the lingering and preoccupation of thought (*taʿalluq al-khāṭir wa shughl al-bāl*)."[55] While the discomfort of the divine names prior to the creation of the world is palpable in these lines, Ibn ʿArabī refutes the understanding that the world emerged out of a divine need for it.[56] He provides slightly varying explanations in different contexts, but the defining character of his understanding of this moment is essentially the same. In his perception, the core of the matter is love and perfection, and he viewed the latter as a pursuit in itself.[57] It is in response to the desire of existence and knowledge to be complete and perfect that creation was commanded to emerge, al-Shaykh al-Akbar explains in *al-Futūḥāt*.[58] The perfection of knowledge as well as existence lies in them being present in every possible reality capable of encapsulating them.

Ibn ʿArabī points to the world's "love for witnessing itself as actual existence, as it witnessed itself as a fixed entity."[59] Therefore, bringing potential existence into actual existence achieved the pursuit of perfection, and the initial movement was one of love present in both God and the world.[60] God's response for both knowledge and existence's pursuit of perfection, his response to the names' desire to witness their manifestations in the world is evidence of the divine preference for comfort, *rāḥa*.[61] Perhaps the divine breath seminal to the moment of

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[55] Muḥy al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī, *Inshāʾ al-dawāʾir*, (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqafa al-Diniyya, 2007), 28.
[56] Muḥy al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī, *Shajarat al-kawn al-nūrāniyyah min al-ḥaqīqa al-Muḥammadiyya* (Cairo: Arḍ al-Ḥaramayn, 2008), 10.
[57] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 351
[58] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1985), 14:409.
[59] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 351
[60] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 351
[61] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 351.

creation, referred to as *al-nafkh*, was a divine sigh of relief. For Ibn ʿArabī, perfection can be present in the world and man, only because they are in the image of God.

1.1 The Image in the Macrocosm [62]

"There is nothing in possibility more wondrous than what is."[63] The famous saying by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī is mentioned favorably in several of Ibn ʿArabī's books.[64] However, Ḥujjat al-Islām and al-Shaykh al-Akbar launch from distinct points of departure on the theory of best of possible worlds. According to Ibn ʿArabī in his book *Inshaʾ al-dawāʾir,* Ghazālī justifies his statement by proposing that had there been something more wondrous in possibility other than what is, this would entail one of two meanings: The Creator did not create this more wondrous creation due to either stinginess, deliberately preventing a better creation from existing, or impotence, a lack of ability to create a more wondrous creation.[65] Since both interpretations negate the understanding of a Most Generous, All Powerful God, the hypothesis they support must be false. Thus, "There is nothing in possibility more wondrous than what is."

Ibn ʿArabī writes that while he observes the merits of this argument, the 'most perfect' rationale in support of the theory of best of possible worlds for him is: the image, which is foundational to his thought at large and central to the various traditions and philosophies, which address the doctrine of the Perfect Man. For al-Shaykh al-Akbar, this world is the best of possible worlds because it was created in the image of God, as a manifestation of His Names.[66]

> "The world is in the image of *al-Ḥaqq*, and the Perfect Man is in the image of the world
> and the image of *al-Ḥaqq*, therefore, there is nothing more wondrous or perfect in

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[62] The terms 'Macrocosm and Microcosm' are used in the writing of Ibn ʿArabī to denote the correlation between the world being encompassed within the perfect man and referred to as *insān kabīr*, i.e. the macrocosm, and the perfect man being the epitome of the world, i.e. the microcosm.
[63] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 409.
[64] The saying is mentioned by Ibn ʿArabī in *al-Futūḥāt,* (1985), 1:53, *al-Tadbīrāt al-ʾilāhīyya,* 75, and *Inshāʾ al-dawāʾir*, 16, 29.
[65] Ibn ʿArabī, *Inshāʾ al-dawāʾir*, 16.
[66] Ibn ʿArabī, *Inshāʾ al-dawāʾir*, 16.

possibility than this world, since, had there been [a more wondrous and perfect world in possibility], there would have been what is more perfect than the image of *al-Ḥaqq*, and there cannot be." [67]

The theory of best of possible worlds for him is supported by the constant concomitance between perfection and the image.

Everything that has been brought into existence is in the image of *al-Ḥaqq*. Had it not been in the image, it would not be in existence.[68] However, as with several of al-Shaykh al-Akbar's ideas, there are degrees and layers to the presence of the image in existence. Ibn ʿArabī certainly does not suggest that every form of creation in isolation is in the image of God. Rather, the collectivity of creation is potentially in the image; the world represents the unpolished mirror, which, upon polishing, embodies the readiness for receiving the image. The polishing of the mirror is the creation of the Perfect Man.

> "The divine command necessitated the polishing of the mirror of the world, and Ādam is the very polishing of that mirror and the spirit of that form [the undifferentiated form of creation]."[69]

1.2 The Image in the Microcosm

"*Allah* created Ādam in His image."[70]

The significance of the image heightens and intensifies in the case of man. Ibn ʿArabī clarifies the intention from the image *ḥadīth*. He addresses the common interpretation that Ādam, as mentioned in the *ḥadīth*, is a reference to the entirety of mankind being created in the image of *al-Ḥaqq*.[71] Al-Shaykh al-Akbar, however, teaches that the truth of the matter is that only a select

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[67] al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 13.
[68] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 11.
[69] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 11, "فاقتضى الأمر جلاء مرآة العالم، فكان آدم عين جلاء تلك المرآة و روح تلك الصورة"
[70] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1985), 2:114.
[71] al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 11.

few humans are meant by this *ḥadīth*. The meanings and implications of the image *ḥadīth* are explored in further depth in the third section of this chapter entitled The Image and Knowledge. The focus of this section is to observe the contexts in which the image, and by extension the mirror, occurs in relation to perfection.

"Adam was perfected only through the divine names."[72] Being created in the image of God's names fulfilled the perfection of Ādam. Considering the variations of the image *ḥadīth* aids in contextualizing the image in which Ādam was created. The *ḥadīth* is mentioned with three variations, substituting the divine name Allah with *al-Ḥaqq* in some instances and *al-Raḥmān* in others.[73] It is conceivable that these divine names are specifically used because of the generality and universality they depict, a more inclusive domain upon creation, *Allāh* being the all-encompassing divine name. However, Ibn ʿArabī elaborates on the specific meanings of the names *al-Raḥmān* and *al-Ḥaqq* in relation to the image.

In what could be considered his exegesis of *al-Fātiḥa*, Ibn ʿArabī gives a theological explanation to the name *al-Raḥmān* as part of *al-Basmala*, the very first verse of *al-Fātiḥa* and the customary opening to almost all *sūrahs* of the Qurʾan. He writes that there are two ways the name can be regarded in "*Bismillah al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*", either as a reference to the Essence, *al-ḏhāt*, if it is grammatically considered a substitute (*badal*) to the name *Allah,* or as a reference to a divine attribute, if considered an adjective, *ṣifa*.[74] If the name *al-Raḥmān* is a designation to the essence, then the two variations of the image *ḥadīth,* where the names *Allah* and *al-Raḥmān*

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[72] al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 27. ("و ما كمل آدم إلا بالأسماء")

[73] Ibn ʿArabī mentions in *Naqsh al-fuṣūṣ* the two narrations of the *ḥadīth*, "Allah created Ādam in His image", and *"...in the image of al-Raḥmān."* Al-Sayyid Nizam al-Din, the editor of the book, references in the footnotes the pages in the canonical *ḥadīths* collections, Bukhārī's and Muslim's, where the first rendition of the *ḥadīth* is to be found. However, he notes that he was unable to locate the second rendition. See *Naqsh al-fuṣūṣ*, p. 436.

[74] Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1985), 2:157.

are employed, would be equivalent in significance. He cites the following Qurʾanic verse from

sūrat al-ʾIsrāʾ, and writes in commentary, "thus making them two names for the essence."[75]

> "Say: 'Call upon God, or call upon the Merciful; whichsoever you call upon, to Him
> belong the Names Most Beautiful.' And be thou not loud in thy prayer, nor hushed
> therein, but seek thou for a way between that."[76]

Nevertheless, Ibn ʿArabī acknowledges that the image *ḥadīth* formulation with the name

al-Raḥmān might not be authentic through the standard methodologies of *ḥadīth* transmission; it

is, however, authentic through *kashf.*[77]

The significance of employing the divine name *al-Raḥmān* in the image *ḥadīth* resides in

its allusion to a duty specific to the perfect man's servanthood. "Man to the Real is in the rank of

the pupil of the eye (*insān al-ʿayn*), to the eye; therefore, he was named *insān*. By him, the Real

looked upon His creation, and therefore, Had mercy upon them."[78] Ibn ʿArabī uses the generic

term *insān* in this quote and elsewhere, but it can be gleaned from the wider context that it is the

perfect man he is concerned with. Al-Shaykh al Akbar compares the perfect man, who is created

in the image of *al-Raḥmān*, to the animal man, who only shares the physical appearance with the

perfect man but inherits of the divine image only what his humanity, his constitution, allows.

Through the comparison, he acknowledges that the Perfect Man is "the perfect image and the

perfect state."[79] In a different excerpt, the influence of the name *al-Raḥmān* comes to the

foreground as Ibn ʿArabī explains that the most vicious of creatures is the animal man, and the

most merciful among creatures is the Perfect Man.[80] It is commonsensical that a Perfect Man,

who is the embodiment of all virtues, would possess infinite mercy as one of these virtues.

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[75] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1985), 2:170.
[76] Qurʾan (17:110).
[77] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1985), 2:157.
[78] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 13.
[79] al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 10.
[80] al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 15.

However, the specific mention of the virtue of mercy is an indication to the Perfect Man being created in the image of *al-Raḥmān.*

This allusion becomes more explicit in al-Shaykh al-Akbar's words on the Muḥammadan reality.[81]According to Ibn ʿArabī as well as mainstream *sunnī* scholars, *al-Ḥaqīqā al-Muhammadiyya*, also referred to as the Muḥammadan Light and the First Intellect, is the first reality to emerge from God's knowledge into existence. He writes that the first reality to be bestowed with existence is *al-Ḥaqīqā al-Muḥahmadīyya al-Raḥmānīyya*, emerging from the Divine Name, *al-Raḥmān.*[82] This reality, which is characterized by mercy, is the simple essence (*jawhar*) from which all subsequent creation ensued. Consequently, mercy becomes an inherent component of creation at large.[83] The perfect man's creation in the image of *al-Raḥmān* is the gateway for mercy to exist in the world.

Concerning the employment of the divine name *al-Ḥaqq* in the image *ḥadīth*, it harbors the tenets of Ibn ʿArabī's cosmogony and the order and ranks of the emergence of creation. Essentially, this constellation epitomizes the notion of the perfect man being the primary intention, and the last manifestation, a key notion which Ibn ʿArabī reiterates in various forms. Ibn ʿArabī perceives an identification between the Real (*al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihī*) and the divine Breath, from which creation emerged.[84] "Hence, the Breath has the property of the Nonmanifest, but when it becomes manifest it represents the property of the Manifest. So it is the First in the Nonmanifest and the last in the Manifest.[85]" The name *al-Ḥaqq*, therefore, alludes to the creation of the perfect man and his rank.

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[81] Further explanation of *al-Ḥaqīqā al-Muhammadiyya* is provided in Ch. III.
[82] Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 68.
[83] Nettler, *Sufi Metaphysics*, 106.
[84] Ibn ʿArabī*, al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 2:310, quoted in Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 134.
[85] Ibn ʿArabī*, al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 2:310, quoted in Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 134.

Ibn ʿArabī demonstrates an inherent distinction between the creation of man and the creation of the world, about which he writes, "The difference between man and the world is akin to the difference between existence and non-existence."[86] This difference owes to the following notions.

"The realities that Allah had gathered in Man were dispersed in the world, so *al-Ḥaqq* called them from all of the world, and they gathered. From their gathering came man."[87]

"The whole world emerged from nonexistence into existence, except for Man alone, who appeared from existence into existence, from dispersed existence into gathered, collective existence"[88]

There is a recurrent theme here regarding Ibn ʿArabī's notion of the order of emergence and the ranks of creation. While *al-Ḥaqīqā al-Muḥammadīyya* is the *first* and most perfect emergent and the *jawhar* from which all subsequent creation emerged, it appears as a corporeal reality in the *last* prophet. Ibn ʿArabī recites the prophetic *ḥadīth*, "I was a prophet when Ādam was between water and clay."[89] This configuration is paralleled here, where man, while being the very purpose of the emergence of the world, is the last to appear as a manifest reality. Launching from this point, one interpretation to the first line of *al-Futūḥāt* can be ventured.

Al-Shaykh al-Akbar's magnum opus begins with the following preamble. "Praise be to Allah, who brought things into existence from a state of nonexistent, and its nonexistence."[90] Ibn ʿArabī uses the term things (*al-ashyāʾ*), which could refer to both macrocosm-the world-and

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[86] al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 8.

[87] al-Ghurab,*al-Insān al-kāmil*, 7.

[88] al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 8. Ibn ʿArabī often uses the term 'man' in contexts which evidently address the Perfect Man. This, however, hardly confounds the reader, as Ibn ʿArabī's cosmogony provides a stark distinction between the rank and cosmological significance of the animal man and the Perfect Man.

[89] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1985), 2:171.

[90] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1985), 1:41. ("الحمد لله الذي أوجد الأشياء عن عَدَمٍ وعَدَمِه")

microcosm-man. One possible reading of the lines is that the first ʿadam refers to the creation of the macrocosm. God brought the macrocosm into existence from a state of non-existence. The quote mentioned previous to this opening line conveys that man is the amalgamation of creation, and thus, man became a manifest reality succeeding it. Hence, the second ʿadam. The double negation means an affirmation; the non-existence of non-existence is existence, (ʿadam al-ʿadam wujūd).[91] Thus, the second ʿadam is in reference to the microcosm and the creation of man, who emerged from an initial existence as everything in creation dispersed, into existence as the epitome of the whole of creation. Through this reading, this preamble could be phrased as, "Praise be to Allah who brought the macrocosm into existence after being in a state of nonexistence, and brought the microcosm from the nonexistence of nonexistence, i.e. existence [of the macrocosm]".

The question arises of what this reveals about the constellation of al-Ḥaqq, perfection, and the image? Ibn ʿArabī's answer lies in the ranks of existents in relation to their share of the image.

> "The world is in the image of al-Ḥaqq, and the perfect man is in the image of the world and al-Ḥaqq."[92]

> "The perfect man is the one created in the divine image, thus, he is the truth, al-Ḥaqq, by which creation was created, meaning that it is because of him that the world was created. The perfect man is the most complete/perfect of existents; he is the end. Since the end is the aim of the creation preceding it, this preceding creation was not created except for this end and the manifestation of its essence."[93]

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[91] Souad al-Hakim, *al-Muʿjam al-sufī: al-ḥikma fī ḥudūd al-kalima*, (Beirut: Dandara: 1981), 785. For al-Hakim, ʿadam al-ʿadam is an allusion to the existence (*wujūd*) of the fixed entities in God's knowledge. The line, thus, signifies the emergence of the world from an epistemic existence (*wujūd ʿilmī*) into entitic existence (*wujūd ʿaynī*).
[92] al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 13.
[93] al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 12.

One ponders the words of Ibn ʿArabī and Materia Prima, Anima Mundi, and Philosopher's Stone come to mind. al-Shaykh al-Akbar's words, "The perfect man is the one created in the divine image, thus, he is the truth, *al-Ḥaqq*, by which creation was created" convey the image of the perfect man being Materia Prima- *al-Ḥaqq* in this context, also *al-Ḥaqīqā al-Muḥammadīyya*- by which the world was created. He is thus comparable to the Anima Mundi, the soul animating through the world.[94] However, the rest of the paragraph delivers the obverse meaning, creation becomes Materia Prima, and man its epitome and perfection, its Philosopher's stone. An inclusive reading of both configurations recapitulates Ibn ʿArabī's overall conception of the theory of the perfect man, who is the initial intention, and the last manifestation.

> "The power of every existent in the world is found in man, thus, he potentially possesses every rank. Therefore, the image is unique to him alone (*ikhtaṣ waḥdahū bī al-ṣūrā*). He combined divine realities, which are the names, and realities of the world. For he is the last existent (*fa ʾinahū ākhir mawjūd*)... Everything except for man is creation, only man is creation, (*khalq*), and *Ḥaqq*."

What is the significance of man being created in the image of *al-Ḥaqq?* The rhyming terms, *khalq* and *Ḥaqq*, are frequently juxtaposed and contrasted in Ibn ʿArabī's writing, as well as in the Quran. There is a conspicuous opposition between the two terms, and consequently, the two realms they denote. And as Ibn ʿArabī often poetically explains, between any two opposites, an isthmus must exist.

As mentioned earlier, the image *ḥadīth* is often interpreted as referring to the generic man being in the image of God, which Ibn ʿArabī denies and refuses. Since the perfect man shares the

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[94] Chodkiewicz writes that in Ibn ʿArabī's writings, *al-habāʾ* and *al-hayulā* are synonymous with materia prima. The first existent to emerge in this *habā* was *al-Ḥaqīqā al-Muḥammadīyya al-Raḥmānīyya*. This means that *habā* is the materia prima of the Muḥammadan Reality, and the Muḥammadan Reality, or Muḥammadan Light, is the materia prima of the rest of creation.

outward appearance of the animal man, an obvious indication of the facet of his nature reflecting *khalq*, the *ḥadīth* accentuates the inner image that he was bestowed, the second facet of his nature, reflecting the Creator, *al-Ḥaqq*.

The narration of the image *ḥadīth* mentioning the name *al-Raḥman* alludes to the role of Perfect Man as an isthmus of mercy and knowledge between God and creation. And the narration employing the name *al-Ḥaqq* refers to the perfect man's rank as the first nonmanifet reality, and the last reality to materialize.

> "Man to the Real is in the rank of the pupil of the eye (*insān al-ʿayn*), to the eye; therefore, he was named *insān*. By him, the Real looked upon His creation, and therefore, Had mercy upon them."[95]

Man is *al-Raḥman's*, *al-Ḥaqq's* means of vision, a role that is isthmoid in function. It can be imagined as the meeting point of two opposite triangles, one is pointing downwards, the other upwards.
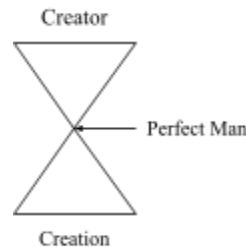
The perfect man, as the image of God and creation, reflects God to Himself and to creation, and reflects creation to itself and to God. Through Man as a means of vision and a reflective surface, God witnesses Himself in a manner that reveals His mystery to Him. Simultaneously, He witnesses creation in Man, and through this witnessing, He extends His mercy upon them. These are the events transpiring in the upper triangle. In the lower triangle,

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[95] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 13.

since Man is the amalgamation and epitome of all of creation, creation witnesses its perfection and wholeness in Man, while also witnessing a glimpse of divinity, a manifested reflection of God in him. The perfect man is a locus of witnessing of self and other for both above, *al-Ḥaqq*, and below, *al-khalq*.

2.   The Image and Love

The theme of knowledge stands at the heart of the moment of creation. Some scholars read love, others read sadness as the dominant emotion animating this moment. But while the emotion might be disputed, the motive expressed through the emotion is the same, a divine desire to be known.

> "I was a treasure but was not known. So I loved to be known, and I created the creatures and made Myself known to them. Then they came to know me."[96]

The abundant references to the Treasure *ḥadīth* in both primary and secondary scholarship lend it the centrality of a backbone to a plethora of sufi ideas. However, it does not appear in *al-Futūḥāt* until the twelfth volume.[97] Ibn ʿArabī considers the language of the *ḥadīth* where love for being known stands out as the primordial divine motive. Two of the themes pointed out earlier are commingled in the Treasure *ḥadīth*, knowledge and love. There is a secret, a state of occultation expressed in the *ḥadīth Qudsī* of the Treasure. This secrecy implies an incomplete knowledge. A secret or an entity in hiding, by nature, is simultaneously known and unknown. The secret is known to its keeper, the entity is known to itself, and unknown, but

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[96] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 66.

[97] Jonathan Brown in his book '*Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*' relays the contention around the Treasure *ḥadīth's* authenticity. This claim was addressed to Ibn ʿArabī, to which he responded affirmingly. Ibn ʿArabī explained that he received the *ḥadīth* through kashf, rather than transmission, and so, through the lens of orthodox measures of *ḥadīth* authentication, it was of contested origin. Therefore, this observation of the sporadic mention of this *ḥadīth* in *al-Futūḥāt* is significant. The *ḥadīth* does not singlehandedly shape sufi theories that they would falter in its absence. The *ḥadīth* begins to appear in the twelfth volume. It is long preceded by a vast array of al-Shaykh al-Akbar's fundamental ideas.

contingently knowable, to all else. God's knowledge of Himself was fulfilled, but He was not known to an 'other', capable of knowing Him.

There is coherence to Ibn ʿArabī's understanding of the world, physical and metaphysical. It is characterized by an underlying structure resembling sound echoes, or mirror reflections, in other words, varied manifestations of a single reality. A prophet can be connected to a word, a specific divine name, a letter, a planet, a feminine or masculine archetype.[98] This amalgamation of connections manifests itself in the life events of this prophet and his role in the world. They also manifest in the person and life of the inheritor, *wārith*, of this prophet. Therefore, one method that Ibn ʿArabī adopts in explaining his ideas is to return to the original reality, from which subsequent manifestations ensue.

An example of this is his understanding of motivation. He explains that every movement is essentially in reality a movement of love, since the initial movement, from which creation resulted, was a movement of love, *ḥaraka ḥubīyya*.[99] Had God not loved to be known, creation would not have been given the command to be. From this initial loving movement, every consequent movement arises, carrying the same quality of love.

The juxtaposition of love and knowledge in the Treasure *ḥadīth* represents one of Ibn ʿArabī's fundamental ideas, a 'universal law' determining the possibility of a certain occurrence. This law is the law of correspondence. For Ibn ʿArabī, a correspondence must occur between knower and known in order for knowledge to occur.[100] The same law governs the possibility of the occurrence of love.

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[98] These connections are found scattered in the different sources. For instance, in *al-Futūḥāt*, Ibn ʿArabī refers to Ādam being a manifestation of the word, *'Bism'*, from the opening verse of the Qur'an, as it is with him that creation of humankind began. He is also the resident of the first heaven (the moon).

[99] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 350.

[100] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1985), 2:86.

Ibn ʿArabī writes that natural love occurs when there is an interlocking between two realities, when the image occurring in the imagination of the lover matches the reality of the beloved, that they- the imagined image and the reality- become indistinguishable.[101] This matching does not necessarily mean a complete identicality between lover's imagination and beloved's reality, but rather a correspondence in meaning.

> "Meanings are different from the words and letters [that comprise them], but the word indicates the meaning by way of correspondence; so that if the meaning is embodied, it would not exceed the quantity of the word. The like of this sort is called love".[102]

And such is the case with the emergence of creation. The divine names and their manifestations in the world correspond with each other in utter precision.[103] Similar to the distinction between a word and its meaning, a divine name *is not* its manifestation, but it is accurately represented by it in meaning. This correspondence is the sign of the interlocking of love.[104] While the metaphor is unuttered, Ibn ʿArabī's words imply a mirror. The occurrence of love necessitates that the reality and its image correspond with utter precision. Therefore, the connection between God and the world is one of love, as the world -the image- corresponds precisely with the divine names -the reality- which it manifests.[105] In the same way that love precedes knowledge in the language of the Treasure *ḥadīth*, it precedes it in defining the relation between Creator and creation. Whether we follow the progression of Ibn ʿArabī's argument or backtrack the conclusions to arrive at the initial context, a mirror seems to be implied. The initial movement being one of love signifies a correspondence between the image as occurring in the

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[101] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1985), 12:573.

من شأن الحب الطبيعي أن تكون الصورة التي حصلت في خيال المحب على مقدار المحل الحاصلة فيه، بحيث لا يفصل عنها منه ما يقبل به شيئا) (أصلا

[102] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1985), 12: 573.

[103] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1985), 12: 573.

[104] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1985), 12: 573.

[105] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1985), 12: 573.

lover's imagination, and the reality of the beloved. And the divine names' correspondence with the world ascertains an interlocking of love between creator and creation.

The state of occultation of the Treasure was willed into cessation by the motivation of love. The Treasure wanted to be known, the divine names wanted a domain upon which to express their dominion, God wanted to see His essence in a comprehensive entity, which reveals His secret, His mystery to Himself.[106]

3.   The Image and Knowledge

"I was a treasure but was not known. So I loved to be known, and I created the creatures and made Myself known to them. Then they came to know me."[107]

The initial loving movement was a movement in the direction of knowledge. The Treasure *ḥadīth* presents knowledge as the purpose of creation, a launching point that determines the meaning, nature, and function of this creation for Ibn ʿArabī. The entanglement of love and knowledge continues and the image is the connective thread. As was discussed in the previous section, the interlocking of love between God and the world implies a mirror, and the occurrence of knowledge of God in the world necessitates it.

Ibn ʿArabī elaborates on the notion of knowledge being the purpose of creation through a concise opuscule with which he ends his treatise *Inshāʾ al-dawāʾir*. He explains that the divine names contemplate themselves and arrive at the realization that "they hold in their hands the reins of the heavens and earth, when there were no heavens and no earth."[108] According to Ibn ʿArabī, the divine names assign these designations, heavens and earth, to these plains yet to be created. In this primordial moment, the reality of opposition was brought to the foreground; a

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[106] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam,* 9-10.
[107] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 66.
[108] Ibn ʿArabī, *Inshāʾ al-dawāʾir*, 28.

reality, which reflects the oppositions present among the divine names. As the names *al-ʾAwwal, al-Nafiʿ, al-Muḥyy* stand in semantic, and effectual, opposition with *al-ʾĀkhir, al-Ḍār, al-Mumīt,* the heavens stand opposite the earth, embodying further oppositions, such as singular and plural, and above and below. While being in the domain of the names already means being in the domain of multiplicity, opposition augments the profoundness and character of this multiplicity; it seizes to indicate mere manyness, rather a paradoxical manyness, which, hypothetically, would be difficult to encompass all at once.

The names, in their conversation in *Inshāʾ al-dawāʾir*, realize that they own keys to locks nonexistent, and so a demand for their existence arose. The names raise the matter to the seven leading divine names: *al-Ḥayy, al-ʿAlīm, al-Murīd, al-Qāʾil, al-Qādir, al-Jawwād,* and *al-Muqṣit,* who in turn, raise it to the leader of the leading divine names, the name *Allah*. They request that "the heavens and earth exist, so they can place every key (*miqlād*) on its door."[109] The concerned names were delegated by the name Allah to act upon their domains in order to grant the divine names their request. The delegation and assigning of roles undertaken by the name Allah in the creation of the world, as well as the allusion to opposition mentioned earlier, exemplifies the completion of God's knowledge of Himself. The names - God's attributes- knew the distinct nature of each name and by extension, the unique abilities of each of them. And so creation did not arise from a divine epistemic destitution, a divine need for self-knowledge; it rather emerged to manifest God's names and attributes, so that He may witness Himself and be known by an other.[110]

Ibn ʿArabī writes, "Allah Almighty knew Himself, hence, He knew the world."[111] In contemplating Himself, God witnessed His names, and knowing the realities of the names The

[109] Ibn 'Arabī, *Inshāʾ al-dawāʾir*, 28.
[110] Ibn ʿArabī, *Shajarat al-kawn*, 10.
[111] Muḥy al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī, *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz,* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqafa al-Diniyya, 2007), 36.

Creator, the Most Merciful, the Most Powerful, He knew the possibility existed for an object upon which His names can manifest their being and exhibit their effect.[112] If He is the Creator, then there can possibly be a creation. And it is of His supreme omnipotence to bring forth into existence every thing which can potentially exist. His knowledge of Himself included within it knowledge of the world. The names' intrigue with the keys they were entrusted is a curiosity towards the names' effects.[113] Perhaps one can say a desire for the divine order *Kun* to pass through each one of the divine names as a beam of light and reflect their reality upon the surface of creation.

Worthy of mention is the fact that Ibn ʿArabī explicitly affirms the completion and perfection of God's knowledge of Himself in his writings.[114] He lucidly explains it in the chapter on Mūsā in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, a nexus where knowledge, love, and perfection coalesce. Knowledge was complete in the Necessary Existent, *wājib al-wujūd*, but absent from contingent existence, *al-wujūd al-muḥdath*, due to the absence of the latter itself. Since contingent existence was possible and potentially capable of receiving knowledge, the ultimate perfection of knowledge necessitates that knowledge occurs in contingent existence as well. Perfection necessitates that knowledge be present in all forms of existence capable of knowing, the Eternal, *al-Qadīm*, and the created, *al-muḥdath*.[115]

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[112] This statement does not imply a temporal chasm preceding God's knowledge of Himself. It is elucidating the ideas of Ibn ʿArabī as explained through the conversation between the names.

[113] al-Hakim, "Unity of Being in Ibn 'Arabī".

[114] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 351.

[115] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 351.

"و علمه تعالى بنفسه من حيث هو غنى عن العالمين، هو له و ما بقى إلا تمام مرتبة العلم بالعلم الحادث الذي يكون من هذه الأعيان، أعيان العالم اذا
وجدت. فتظهر صورة الكمال بالعلم المحدث و القديم فتكمل مرتبة العلم بالوجهين"

3.1 Witnessing vs. Knowing

When *al-Ḥaqq*, Exalted is He, wanted, through His countless beautiful names, to see them/their entities (*aʿyanaha*)[116], and if you will you could say, to see Himself (*ʿaynahu*) in an all-encompassing being (*kawn jāmiʿ*), who embraces the whole matter, by way of exhibiting the attribute of existence, and through whom God's mystery would be revealed to Him. Because something seeing itself in itself, is not the same as seeing itself in something else, that would be as a mirror to it. It appears to itself in an image given by the seen entity- the witnessed locus- in a way that did not appear to it without the existence or manifestation of this locus.[117]

These lines comprise the introduction of the first chapter of *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. They beckon the question of God's knowledge of Himself and whether a creation is required to complement this knowledge. As mentioned earlier, Ibn ʿArabī refutes the reliance of God's knowledge of Himself upon the created world. A closer reading of the lines from *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* shows that the motive emphasized in the quote is witnessing, as opposed to the motive of knowing found in the Treasure *ḥadīth*. Ibn ʿArabī explains that something witnessing itself in something else allows it to see itself in a way that would not be possible for it otherwise. In these opening lines, Ibn ʿArabī solely refers to acts of seeing rather than knowing. Contextualizing both motives, witnessing and knowing, reveals that the objects recipient of them are God and the world respectively. Through the world, God becomes the recipient of witnessing Himself, and the world becomes the recipient of knowledge of God.

Qāshānī offers an interpretation in his commentary on *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* to define the ramifications each mode of seeing entails. He explains that in the absence of a mirror, the seeing which occurs achieves and is limited to awareness and knowledge (*ruʾyah ʿilmīyya*). While in the

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[116] To see the manifestation of the realities contained within the knowledge (*al-ḥaḍra al-ʿilmiyya*) of the names.

[117] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 10.

presence of the mirror, i.e. the locus of manifestation, the seeing achieves both knowledge, (*ruʾyah ʿilmīyya*), as well as witnessing (*ruʾyah ʿaynīyya*).[118] God's knowledge of Himself is, therefore, unaffected by the absence of the mirror. For the current purposes, suffice to note that the Treasure *ḥadīth* holds a moment of connection over knowledge between God and creation, while the introductory lines from *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* hold a moment of connection over witnessing between God and Himself.

3.2 The Image Possibilizing Knowledge

While knowledge, akin to rain, might fall equally on a piece of land, the land's topography determines the share of rainwater it could encompass. A mountain would preserve substantially less water than a valley; similarly, existents, being of different constitutions (*amzija*) have different capacities for encompassing knowledge. Considering these differing constitutions, the nature of the creation most capable of receiving knowledge of the divine becomes a question. The law of correspondence epitomizes al-Shaykh al-Akbar's answer. A maxim can be derived from Ibn ʿArabī's writings: only through similarity is knowledge possible.

> "When Allah loved to be known, it was not possible for Him to be known except by he who is in His image, and Allah did not bring into existence anyone in His image except for the Perfect Man." [119]

Abd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī recounts an anecdote about a disillusioned scholar known for his obstinacy demanding that the former provide an explanation for the first line of *al-Futūḥāt*.[120] Shaʿrānī responded to the request with an advice to the scholar to follow a Shaykh, only then could he acquire spiritual tasting, *dhawq*, and be open to the meaning of these words. The possibility of acquiring knowledge remains conditional in Ibn ʿArabī's view. This conditionality

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[118] Muḥy al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam,* ed. ʿAbd al-Rāziq al-Qāshānī, (Cairo: Āfāq, 2016), 14.
[119] al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 8.
[120] ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī, *Mukhtaṣar al-futūḥāt al-makkīyya*, 1st ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Iḥsān, 2016).

is exemplified by the aforementioned quote. The quote signifies that the possibility of knowledge and the extent to which it is possible depend upon the potential knower. Something has to occur and be present within the potential knower, which elevates him to be a knower in actuality. This thing is: resemblance to the object of knowledge.

This notion is ubiquitous in Ibn ʿArabī's corpus. The following excerpts reveal the varied contexts where it appears, and consequently, its deep rootedness in Ibn ʿArabī's thought at large. In the first volume of *al-Futūḥāt*, Ibn ʿArabī narrates the story of a meaningful encounter between him and a person he calls, *al-fatā*, the young man. Ibn ʿArabī commences to disclose some of the mysteries of knowledge revealed to him. He informs *al-fatā* that the reason why this knowledge was accessible to him is due to the nature of his reality.[121]

> "Had it not been for what God has entrusted in my reality, of what it required, and [had it not been for] what my path arrived at, I would not have found attainment of this spring, or an inclination to this knowledge. Therefore, I always return to myself in the end." [122]

An excerpt which further illustrates Ibn ʿArabī's doctrine of correspondence is found in *Kitāb al-mwāzana li khatm al-wilāyā al-Muḥammadīyya*, where he propounds an uncommon reading of the experience of Hellfire. He explains that for one to experience the burning in hellfire, they have to have started and propagated a fire within themselves first. A hell needs to be already present within them. A correspondence to Hellfire, the outside, has to exist within their scope of known experience, their inside, for the burning to befall them.

> You do not burn by an outside fire, but by a fire you have ignited yourself, and no one extinguishes it but you, and no one kindles it but you. So abandon that which gives you the illusion that the fire is somewhere, and he who's tormented is thrown into it. If you

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[121] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1985), 1:220.
[122] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1985), 1:220.
("و لولا ما أودع (الحق) فيّ ما اقتضته حقيقتي، و وصلت إليه طريقتي، لم أجد لمشربه نيلا، و لا لمعرفته ميلا. و لذلك أعود عليّ عند النهاية")

are, for instance, thrown in the fire, and you have already extinguished your fire, you would not burn. You know there are angels in the fire; how do they not burn? [123]

If within the person, the fire was extinguished with the elements that Ibn ʿArabī specifies: the waters of certitude (*yaqīn*), asceticism (*zuhd*), and dependence upon God (*tawakkul*), the torment of Hellfire would have been unrecognizable, and ineffectual on them.[124]

While one can hypothetically summon, by virtue of imagination, a faint glimpse of the feelings of pain associated with a broken bone, or an amputated limb, only a person who has experienced these misfortunes can fully know and describe the pain. While a person can read about the spiritual ascensions (*maʿārij*) of al-Shaykh al-Akbar, only someone whose spiritual standing resembles that of Ibn ʿArabī's can arrive at the profundity of these spiritual experiences. Ibn ʿArabī implies in the aforementioned quote that resemblance is a prerequisite for knowledge, to put it in familiar and resonant terms, *like knows like*. And nothing resembles one more than their own image in the mirror.

> "Know that mirrors are diverse in shape and that they modify the object seen by the observer according to their own shapes, whether they be tall, wide, curved, bent, round, small, large, numerous, and so on- whatever may be given by the shape of the mirror."[125]

Herein lies the polarity of a mirror. Even though a mirror intrinsically is a surface of emptiness with a readiness for containing the image of the entity standing before it, mirrors themselves are of varied attributes. These attributes alter and determine the experience of the onlooker. Thus, an imperfect mirror can be deceptive, a flaw which nullifies the mirror and its basic function.

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[123] Muhy al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-muwāzana li khatm al-wilāya al-muḥammadīyya.* ed. Saʿeed Abd al-Fattah, (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqafa al-Diniyya, 2014), 82.
[124] Ibn ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-muwāzana,* 82.
[125] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 3:251, quoted in, Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 351.

Ibn ʿArabī uses the mirror symbolism here to explain the notion of *mizāj,* constitution.[126] According to him, creatures, like mirrors, are created in different constitutions. This becomes evident upon considering people's varying capacities of faith and rational contemplation. The constitution of a person determines the quality and nature of their mirror, consequently, their share of the image. A constitution which comprises an unpolished, bent, large, or small mirror will reflect an inaccurate approximation of the image of the onlooker. Following the same vein of logic, a constitution which forms a perfect mirror will be the reflection of the image *par excellence*. The perfection of the mirror is, therefore, incumbent for the fulfillment of both primordial motives, witnessing and knowing. There must exist a perfect mirror for *al-Ḥaqq* to witness His image in *al-khalq*, and for *al-khalq* to unveil the knowledge of *al-Ḥaqq*.

3.3 Constitution[127]

"The divine command necessitated the polishing of the mirror of the world, and Ādam is the very polishing of that mirror and the spirit of that form [the undifferentiated form of creation]."[128]

Ibn ʿArabī writes in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* that Ādam was the exact polishing of the mirror of creation. Thus, he implies a distinctive quality to the reality of Ādam, which was absent from the world before his creation. Attention is paid here to what in Ādam's constitution qualified him to be the polishing of the mirror, and thus, in the image.

The Quranic myth of creation and Ibn ʿArabī's treatment of the creation of Ādam demonstrate the station and metaphysical meaning of the first man and prophet. In doing so, they allude to the nature of his constitution, and what ensues from it. The quranic narrative begins

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[126] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 3:251, quoted in, Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 351.

[127] This subsection is a continuation of the subsection preceding it. They have been broken down into two subsections to facilitate and guide the flow of ideas.

[128] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 11. ("فاقتضى الأمر جلاء مرآة العالم، فكان آدم عين جلاء تلك المرآة و روح تلك الصورة")

with God informing the angels that He will create a vicegerent on earth. The information is met with dispute on the side of the angels, and a questioning of the purposefulness of a creation, which they claimed would bring about corruption and bloodshed.[129] Ibn ʿArabī proposes that the angels' prejudice against this new creation is the product of what is found in their own nature. They assumed the new creation would cause chaos, a chaos which al-Shaykh al-Akbar explains to mean precisely dispute and conflict, which characterize the angels' response upon receiving the information. Their assumption was dispute and conflict, because dispute and conflict were of their nature, as is evidenced with their response to God.[130] Their constitution dictated their understanding and expectations. According to Ibn ʿArabī, the angels "were veiled by their own essences."[131] They believed that they possessed the aptitude for the highest ranks, and consequently, they believed that their acts of worship and glorification of God were sufficient.[132]

The pivotal moment unfolds through this Quranic verse, "And He taught Adam the names, all of them; then He presented them unto the angels and said, ʹNow tell Me the names of these, if you speak trulyʹ."[133] The Quranic verse does not explicitly identify 'the names' as the Divine Names, but Ibn ʿArabī's conclusions from this verse, as explained in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, definitively establish his belief that they are indeed the Divine Names. He contrasts Ādam's knowledge of all Divine Names, and his ability to name them, to the angels' ignorance of the existence of the names altogether.[134] The verse treads the line between the literal and the figurative. The Divine Names being presented before the angels and Ādam suggests a visible manifestation of the names' realities. Abd al-Qādir al-Jazāʾrī elaborates on the nature of this

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[129] Quran, (2:30).
[130] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 15.
[131] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 12.
[132] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 12, 15.
[133] Quran, (2:32).
[134] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 15.

manifestation in his book *al-Mawāqif fī al-waʿẓ wal-ʾirshād*. He writes that Ādam was presented with the fixed entities, which are "the realities of external things".[135] He knew which names corresponded to -and by extension governed- which fixed entities, through his knowledge of the differences in the names' effects. In this understanding, Ādam witnessed the world, the whole of creation, in the form of fixed entities.[136]

The moment of the manifestation evoked a knowledge and recognition in Ādam, and a sense of diminution in the angels, upon becoming perceptive of the destitution of their knowledge.[137] Ādam's knowledge of the names is an event of tremendous meaning. To reiterate a key focus of this research, knowledge is only possible when a correspondence occurs between the knower and the object of knowledge.

> "When Allah loved to be known, it was not possible for Him to be known except by he who is in His image, and Allah did not bring into existence anyone in His image except for the Perfect Man." [138]

Ibn ʿArabī writes, "Ādam was given the knowledge of the Names in the origins of his foundation. He was created in this way."[139] Ādam could only know God's Names because of a correspondence in meaning between the names and 'the origins of his foundation'.[140] This correspondence rendered Ādam a polished mirror, with a readiness for reflecting the Divine

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[135] Abd al-Qādir al-Jazāʾrī, *al-Mawāqif fī al-waʿẓ wal-ʾirshād,* (Cairo: Matbaʿat al-Shabab), vol.1, 293.

[136] al-Jazāʾrī, *al-Mawāqif fī,* 1:294.

[137] To elaborate on the ranks of the angels, in the preamble of Ibn ʿArabī's book *Nuskhat al-Ḥaqq*, he writes "Praise be to God who made the Perfect Man the teacher of the angel." However, on the matter of superiority, Ibn ʿArabī validates the opinion of the superiority of the angels over men, based on a dream in which he asked the prophet about this debate between the scholars. See *Kitāb al-ruʾyā wa al-mubashshirāt*, 31.

[138] al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 8.

[139] Ibn ʿArabī, *Nuskhat al-Ḥaqq,* ed. ʿAssim Ibrahim al-Kayyali, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 2004), 202. ("فأُعطِيَ علم الاسماء في أصل نشأته، جُبِلَ على ذلك")

[140] al-Jazāʾrī explains that Ādam's knowledge of the names was not due to an inspiration or prior education, but through God's revelation of Ādam's reality to himself, in which he found the Divine Names gathered. See *al-Mawāqif,* 1:294.

Names. Ādam knew the Names through seeing them reflected in himself. For Ibn ʿArabī, this seminal event is the definition of the ḥadīth, "Ādam was created in the image of God". The creation of Ādam marks both completion and commencement. His creation accomplishes the original purpose, knowledge of God, through knowledge of His Names. Simultaneously, the chain of human existence, vicegerency, and perfection launches with him. All of these roles were only possible for Ādam because he was created in the image of God; he was a polished mirror.

"Adam only acquired perfection through [the knowledge of] the Divine Names"[141]

The purposefulness of the creation of Man is evident in the Quran and, therefore, in the Akbarian thought. In fulfillment of God's love for being known, a creation emerged. Since it was love that inspired this initial movement, an interlocking occurred between creation as was imagined- perhaps imaged- by the Creator, and creation as it manifested; an interlocking which established a correspondence in meaning between the divine names and their manifested realities. This creation was a mirror to the multiplicity of the divine, and thus, was an incomplete reflection. Therefore,..

> *Al-Ḥaqq*, praise be to Him, wanted, through His most beautiful names which are innumerable, to see the essences (aʿyan) of the names-- or, if you will, to see Himself [or His ʿayn, essence]. He wished to do this through an all encompassing being (kawn jāmiʿ) who embraces the whole matter: a being which embodies the attribute of existence. Through this being, God's secret would then be revealed to Himself. [142]

This encompassing being is Man.

> "The realities that Allah had gathered in Man were dispersed in the world, so the Real called them from all of the world, and they gathered. From their gathering Man came." [143]

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[141] al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 27.
[142] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 9-10, quoted in Nettler, *Sufi Metaphysics*, 19.
[143] al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 7.

The epitome of this all encompassing being is the Perfect Man. Thus, he is the mirror of both the multiplicity and unicity of the divine. Juxtaposing *ḥadīths* which are prominent in al-Shaykh al-Akbar's writings along with his own explanations demonstrates the Akbarian understanding of the purpose of creation.

> "I was a treasure but was not known. So I loved to be known, and I created the
> creatures and made Myself known to them. Then they came to know me." [144]
> "Allah created Adam in His image."[145]
> "The aim from [creating] the world is the Perfect Man."[146]
> Ādam's creation in the image of God is what accomplishes the initial purpose of creation.

God wanted to be known, and could only be known by a creation in His image; therefore, Ādam was created in the image, and came to know Allah.

It is apt to conclude this chapter with the thought that every mention of the image tantamounts to an implicit mention of the mirror. The foregoing sections condensed the connections of the image within the larger fabric of Ibn ʿArabī's mysticism, from ontology to perfection and knowledge. The mirror metaphor is the surface underlying these conceptions and is, thus, definitive of several of the cornerstone teachings of al-Shaykh al-Akbar. The imagery proposed is of a creation mirroring its Creator, with varying degrees of accuracy, reaching perfection in the mirror of the Perfect Man.

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[144] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 66.
[145] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1985), 2:114.
[146] al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 7.

—— *Chapter 3* ——
God in the Mirror, Man in the Mirror

Imagine that you're standing in a hall of mirrors, and can see infinite reflections of yourself. But not all mirrors are straight or polished to perfection, some are concave, some are convex, some are tarnished or moldy. In all of them, a reflection of you remains, but only a perfect mirror can be said to truly reflect your image.

And if out of compassion and supreme power you could grant the gazes of your reflections the ability to see, and their minds the ability to ponder, the reflection in the perfect mirror would look straight at you, reciprocating your gaze. A reflection in a crooked mirror would believe itself to be larger than you, greater, another would perceive itself to be smaller, or upside down.[147] The reflection in the tarnished mirror, with blurry vision, would not be able to recognize the original you from all the other reflections. And if the selves in the mirrors were incapable of seeing you directly, they would have to resort to your reflection in the perfect mirror, as it would be the truest representation of your reality.

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[147] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 3:251, quoted in Mahmoud al-Ghurab, *al-Khayāl ʿālam al-barzakh wa al-mithāl min kalām al-Shaykh al-Akbar Muḥy al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī*, (Damascus: Maṭbaʿat Naḍr, 1993), 14.

1.   The Implications of the Mirror

"He who has been brought into existence in the image of something, this thing is also in his image. So, by the same means of how he sees his image, he sees He whom he is in the image of. By the same means that he knows himself, he knows He whom he is in the image of."[148]

In al-Shaykh al-Akbar's thought, the implications of the mirror are predominantly oriented toward knowledge and witnessing as is recapitulated in this syllogism. The realization that the relation between God, man, and the world is one of spectator and mirror(s) is man's key to unlocking knowledge and witnessing that which he is an image of. The perfect man's constitution renders him a polished mirror, consequently, the most perfect receptacle of the divine image. Being a *barzakh* between God and the world, created in and reflecting the image of both *al-Ḥaqq* and *al-khalq*, the perfect man witnesses and knows God and creation through witnessing and knowing himself.[149] The ontological configuration of a single reality standing as an onlooker before a mirror grants the image in the mirror an immense opportunity for knowing the reality in whose image it is created. Within this metamirror, the configuration reiterates itself in various relationships, making it possible for man to know all the things that he reflects or that reflect him. In a sense, this configuration serves a pedagogical purpose, through which man knows his place and role in the cosmos.

There is another Scale, beside the Scale of the Law, which man must not put down and which will remain in his hand in this world and the next. That is the Scale of Knowledge… This Scale is like the Scale in the hand of the Real. Through it man witnesses the Real's weighing. Its relationship to the Scale of the Real is the relationship of one person who has a scale in his hand to another person who has a mirror. The person

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[148] Ibn ʿArabī, *Inshāʾ al-dawāʾir*, 13.

(فإنه من وجد على صورة شيء فذلك الشيء أيضا على صورته فبنفس ما يرى صورته رأى من هو على صورته و بنفس ما يعلم نفسه علم من هو على صورته)

[149] al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 27.

with the mirror sees in it the scale, the weighing, and the weigher… The Unseen which weighs, the weighing, and the Scale are the Presence of the Real, while the mirror is the presence of man (ḥaḍrat al-insān). The weighing belongs to God , while the witnessing belongs to him whose soul is a mirror. He is the truthful man of felicity.

God unveils this mystery to whom He will in order to show him in his mirror the form of the divine creation and how things emerge and become manifest in existence from Him… The possessor of this unveiling is "ever-creating" (khallāq), and that is what the Real desires from him through this unveiling.[150]

God unveils man's reality of being ever-creating to him through the mirror. As man witnesses the divine act of creating and finds resonance of it in himself, his true nature is revealed to him. The original weighing continues to belong to God, and to man belongs the witnessing of this weighing, through which God informs man of the due right of things and commands him to abide by it. As the vicegerent of God, it becomes man's duty to give things their due (ḥaqq), in the same way that God gave everything its creation (khalq).[151] The relation is mirrored and reciprocal, where on one side is God (al-Ḥaqq) and his duty al-khalq, and in the mirror is man (khalq) and his duty ḥaqq. "Hence the Real enters into creation, and creation enters into the Real in this situation."[152]

This unveiling reveals to man the reality of the forbidden things and what a sin entails. Through weighing, God brings into existence- creates- the preponderant things, the side of which outweighs the other on the Scale. Witnessing this weighing, man sees what God avoided bringing into existence. It becomes man's duty to not create the avoided thing himself. A man who is in the image of God, would naturally only create that which God created, and avoid that which God avoided. His reality as a mirror image would necessitate it. If man fails to abandon

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[150] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 178.

[151] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 3:239-240, quoted in Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 178.

[152] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 178.

what God avoided creating Himself, he would have transgressed and encroached on the due (ḥaqq) of things.[153]

This witnessing belongs to the station of the perfect man, whose mirror reflects a perfect image of God. Ibn ʿArabī also employs the mirror metaphor in explaining man's destiny. He teaches that God creates creatures according to what is known to Him of the creature. "We determine our own properties through ourselves, though within Him."[154] Man exists in God's knowledge through God's knowledge of Himself, then God creates man according to this knowledge.[155] "They will see that the Real did not do to them what they claimed He did, since everything derived from themselves. He knew them only in keeping with their actual situation."[156] This idea holds man in a position of responsibility and accountability, since it is his reality which attracted and actualized a certain constitution for him, and consequently, a certain life path.

"Recompense (jazāʾ) is a self-disclosure within the mirror of the Being of the Real. Hence nothing comes back to the possible things from the Real except that which is given by their own essences in their states."[157] Man's destiny is reflected in the mirror of *al-Ḥaqq*. What man believes to be God's reward or punishment, is in fact the mirror reflection of man's own actions. Man is in this sense, therefore, the creator of his own destiny, as his destiny merely reflects him to himself. The mirror's operation in the previous contexts illustrates its role in exhibiting man to himself and unveiling his reality.

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[153] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 178.
[154] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 83, quoted in Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 299.
[155] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 298.
[156] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 83, quoted in Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 299.
[157] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 119, quoted in Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 299.

2. "He who knows himself, knows his Lord."

In the experience of the divine as well as man, the mirror plays a role pertaining to knowledge. For God, the mirror is the locus of manifestation of the names. On its surface, the realities of the names become apparent, and through this appearance, God can witness Himself and potentially be known to an 'other'. Thus, the purpose of creation as discussed in earlier chapters would be attained.

In man's experience, the mirror is the means by which he is granted the image. Man, being the reflection in the mirror, can acquire knowledge of the real entity standing before the mirror through gazing at himself, a privilege which only a mirror can make possible. By looking into himself, at his image, man can know the onlooker standing before the mirror. This method of knowing, which begins with knowledge of the self, is articulated in the famous *ḥadīth*, "He who knows himself knows his Lord." While the authenticity of the tradition is contested, it is ubiquitously cited in al-Shaykh al-Akbar's writings.[158] In the absence of the tradition itself, the concept is presented in al-Shaykh al-Akbar's own expression.

> "The prophet said, 'Many a man attained perfection, but among women, only Mary and Asiya did'. By perfection he [the prophet] means their knowledge of them [themselves], and their knowledge of them [themselves] is their very knowledge of their Lord."[159]

3. al-Rabb al-Muqayyad wa al-Rabb al-Muṭlaq

The domain upon which we embark in this section is essentially the domain of the ineffable. It is elusive and intricate. We approach from a place of theory and attempt to present structured ideas; however, it must be acknowledged that the lived experience of the individual

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[158] Nizam al-Din Ahmed writes in commentary on this tradition that he was unable to find it in the six canonical *ḥadīth* works, in addition to *al-Muwaṭṭaʾ* and *al-Musnad*. However, he adds that the *ḥadīth* is from the words of Imām Alī, and mentions the sources in which it is found. See *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 373, footnote 599.

[159] al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 8.

dealing with the following themes is far from straightforward or structured. These are the matters dwelling in man's heart of hearts, a place which often escapes man's own knowledge and awareness. For this reason, it is worth noting that while al-Shaykh al-Akbar's notions maintain profound cohesion, the path of navigating this web of ideas requires one to look in many directions at the same time. The current question is concerned with the nature of the God who occurs in man's knowledge, the nature of the God whom man is commanded to worship, and the knowledge of God that the mirror provides or inhibits in both situations.

3.1 al-Rabb al-Muqayyad

The names Allah and *al-Rabb*, among others, are names of the divine essence (*asmāʾ al-ḍhāt*). In many respects, there is an affinity in meaning between both names; however, in the Quran and *ḥadīth* the name *al-Rabb* appears in conjunction to possessive pronouns far more frequently than the name Allah, which ensues in the former appearing in contexts where the later does not. The name *al-Rabb* is frequently mentioned in Ibn ʿArabī's writings in conveyance of notions of the individual experience of the divine, where man encounters his Lord. He writes:

> "*ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm* is not *ʿAbd al-Karīm*, and *ʿAbd al-Ghafūr* is not *ʿAbd al-Shakūr*. For every servant there is a name, which is his Lord (*rabbahu*). Akin to a body, and this name is its heart."[160]

The myriad divine names manifest in mankind, and these manifestations naturally vary as the names vary among Themselves. To understand the prophetic *ḥadīth*, "He who knows himself knows his Lord," in light of this notion of Ibn ʿArabī's would mean that he who knows himself knows the name that is his Lord. Thus, if *ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm* knows himself, he would know *al-Ḥalīm*, and if *ʿAbd al-Karīm* knows himself, he would know *al-Karīm*. The correspondence between the Lord and the vassal opens the channel of knowledge and recognition. Even though

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[160] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1985), 1:42.

the knowledge of the two servants would be indisputably majestic, it appears to be mutually exclusive, and therefore, imperfect.

The discussion at hand treads a subtle yet definitive line. Ibn ʿArabī teaches that within every divine name is all divine names, which proposes that in knowing *al-Ḥalīm*, ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm acquires a degree of knowledge of all divine names in accordance with his capacity.[161] The dilemma with the servant's knowledge is the narrowness characteristic of delimitation (*al-taqyyīd*) as opposed to the encompassing capacity of nondelimitation (*al-ʾiṭlāq*). On this aspect, Ibn ʿArabī writes the following exposition of *ḥadīth al-taḥawwul*, where man's knowledge of God in a delimited image stands between him and the recognition of God on the Day of Judgement.[162]

> Do not you see me appear to them, on the day of Judgment, in an image and a sign (*ʿalāma*) other than what they know, so they deny my Lordship (*rubūbīyya*) and of it [the image] they seek refuge, and in it, they seek refuge, but they do not feel. Rather, they say to this who appears, "We seek refuge in Allah from you! And here we are awaiting our Lord." At this moment, I come out upon them in the image which they have, so they admit to my Lordship, and to their servanthood. Hence, they are worshippers to their sign, and witnesses to the image settled in them.
> So whoever of them says that he has worshiped Me, his statement is false, and he has confounded Me with his lie. And how could this be rightful for him, when he denied Me upon appearing to him? Whoever restrains Me to one image to the exclusion of another, imagines he has worshiped, and this is the enabled reality hidden in his heart. He imagines that he worships Me, while he denies Me (*yajḥadunī*).
> And those who know, it is impossible to hide Me from their sights, because they have become absent to creation and to their own mysteries. So none appear to them, in them, other than Me. And they do not intelligize of the existents other than My names.[163]

[161] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1985), 2:129.
[162] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 434.
[163] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1985), 1:223.

The difference between those who know a restrained image of God and those who Ibn ʿArabī refers to here as, "those who know" is vast. The indetermination of the knowledge of the latter group indicates an equally nondelimited and unrestricted knowledge. The core idea of this passage is reminiscent of Ibn ʿArabī's treatment of prayer in the last chapter of *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, and the metaphor of the mirror, while unspoken, is a precise representation of Ibn ʿArabī's conception of prayer. Ibn ʿArabī establishes his ideas on the foundation that man prays upon God, and God prays upon man. While the reciprocity is evident here, following Ibn ʿArabī's further explanation of the role of he who is performing the prayer unravels a peculiar feature to witnessing God in prayer.

Ibn ʿArabī explains that when God performs prayer upon man, he does so with his name *al-Ākhir*, as He succeeds the presence (*wujūd*) of man in prayer. Man precedes with his presence, following which, God becomes present to him. The reason is that this is God as He is in man's belief (*al-ʾillāh al-muʿtaqad*).[164] Therefore, it is a sound configuration that man's presence precedes the presence of that which is present in his belief. As was discussed earlier in this research, the constitution of man determines his share of knowledge. Ibn ʿArabī reiterates that man creates a God in his heart in accordance with what is found in this individual's readiness.[165] Al-Shaykh al-Akbar references al-Junayd's succinct teaching on knowledge of God, "The color of the water is the color of the vessel."[166] This is to say *al-ʾillāh al-muʿtaqad* who prays upon man is a God whom man creates in his image, to the extent of man's knowledge of himself.[167]

Curiously, in the obverse situation, when God is the object of man's prayer, the end result of the situation appears to be the same for man, instead of exhibiting reciprocity as would be

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[164] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 399.
[165] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 399.
[166] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 399.
[167] Nettler, *Sufi Metaphysics*, 201.

assumed. In praying upon God, al-Shaykh al-Akbar writes, "He [God] only looks upon us by an image with which we came to Him."[168] One interpretation of this would imply that if man arrives into God's presence in prayer in the image of mercy, God would look upon him with the image of The Most Merciful. Contemplating both positions for man, being the performer and receiver of prayer, the circle appears to begin and end with him. As the performer of prayer, man encounters a God whom he has created in his image, as is plainly evident in the words of al-Junayd. And as the recipient of prayer, man is met with an image of God, which is reflecting his own image. In prayer, man stands "in a hall of mirrors", where he witnesses and is witnessed by himself.[169]

> Man praises the God who is in his belief and to whom he has bound himself. Whatever was of his deed returns to him. Hence, he has not praised but himself. He who praises the craftsmanship indubitably praises the craftsman, as its wellness or unwellness is due to its maker. The believed God is made for His spectator, He is his making, thus, his praise of what he has believed is his praise of himself.[170]

Prayer is the mirror in which man marvels at his own creation. Simultaneously, while perhaps in a more elusive sense, man also confronts the consequences of what he has created in his image. Man's praise of his believed God is his praise of himself for the majesty of his creation. Since the believed God arises from what man has known mercy, beauty, majesty, to be in himself, this image of God is equipped to evoke resonance and poignance in man, acquiring deeper affinity to him. The love and devotion man has to his believed God (*al-ʾillāh al-muʿtaqad*) is the love and devotion for the delimited image of God (*al-ʾillāh al-muqayyad*)

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[168] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 400.
[169] Nettler, *Sufi Metaphysics*, 203.
[170] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 401.

whom he has created in his image. This delimitation hinders man from knowing God as he is, nondelimited to a single image.

> The believed God is made for His spectator, He is his making, thus, his praise of what he has believed is his praise of himself. And therefore, man vilifies the belief of another. If he had been just, it would not have been rightful for him. However, the holder of this private God is ignorant, undoubtedly, due to his opposition of what someone else believes concerning Allah. Had he known what al-Junayd had said, 'The color of the water is the color of the vessel,' it would have been rightful for each holder of a belief what he believed. And he would have known Allah in every image, and every belief. He is a speculator (*ḍhān*) rather than a knower. Therefore [Allah] said, 'I am present in my servant's speculation about me.' This means: I do not appear to him except in the image which he believes; if he wishes, he can nondelimate, and if he wishes, he can delimate.[171]

Ibn ʿArabī's treatment of prayer in this chapter of *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* seems to propound the idea that prayer is a locus of witnessing oneself. It is an incubator for actualizing the prophetic *ḥadīth*, "He who knows himself knows his Lord," on the level of the private relation that man has with the name that is his Lord, as was discussed earlier. In the mirror of prayer, as man occupies the positions of the witness and witnessed, he is potentially capable of becoming cognizant of the name that is *rabbuhu*. Through man's discernment of his reflections, which he believes to be the image(s) of God to whom he prays, and which he believes to be witnessing him in his prayer, he arrives at the knowledge of his private Lord.

Interestingly, Ibn ʿArabī does not appear to be reproachful of this situation. Man's self witnessing in prayer seems to be the *raison d'etre* of prayer. While it is an obstruction that the

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[171] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 402.

"و إله المعتقَد مصنوع للناظر فيه، فهو صنعته، فثناؤه على ما إعتقده، ثناؤه على نفسه. و لهذا يذم معتقَد غيره، و لو أنصف لم يكن له ذلك. إلا أن صاحب هذا المعبود الخاص جاهل بلا شك، فى ذلك لاعتراضه على غيره فيما اعتقده فى الله. إذ لو عرف ما قال الجنيد:"لون الماء لون إنائه" لسلم لكل ذى اعتقاد ما اعتقده، و عرف الله فى كل صورة، و كل معتقد. فهو ظان ليس بعالم، فلذلك قال: "أنا عند ظن عبدى بى" أى: لا أظهر له إلا فى صورة معتقده فإن شاء أطلق و إن شاء قيد."

mirror of prayer reflects man to himself, and thus, stands as a veil between him and knowledge

of the nondelimited God, it is necessary to reiterate the validity of the original function of the

mirror of prayer as a locus of witnessing. Al-Shaykh al-Akbar emphasizes that knowledge of

God begins with man's knowledge of himself.[172] Since the world of acts is the most perceptible

to man, the names of acts is where man's recognition commences. His recognition begins with

what he finds within himself. "The first object of the acts that I witness is the nearest to me, and

that is myself."[173] It is due to the generosity that ʿAbd al-Karīm witnesses in himself that he

refers this attribute to his Lord and recognizes Him to be al-Karīm. The two parallel strands of

knowledge concommit; knowledge of the soul, which is "an ocean with no shore" mirrors the

infinity of knowledge of God.[174]

In *Kitāb al-muwāzana*, Ibn ʿArabī addresses the reader in a manner exemplifying his

position on the knowledge available to the regular man through his own disposition. The station

of witnessing the nondelimited God remains unique to the perfect man, as will be discussed

shortly. Nevertheless, it is integral to point out that the regular man can achieve knowledge of

God through himself to the level of polishedness of his mirror. The following excerpt from

al-Futūḥāt illustrates the layers in Ibn ʿArabī's thought in regards to man's knowledge of God

through self-witnessing.

> There is a vast difference between one who says, 'My heart spoke to me about my Lord,'-
> even though he is of a high rank- and one who says, 'My Lord spoke to me about My
> Lord,' meaning, my Lord spoke to me about Himself… The first one is God of belief
> (*rabb al-muʿtaqqad*), and the second one is the God who is nondelimited…This is the
> knowledge that occurs to the heart through self-witnessing.[175]

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[172] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 3:121, quoted in Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 347.
[173] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 2:641, quoted in Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 345.
[174] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 3:121, quoted in Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 347.
[175] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1985), 1:257-258.

However, identifying with man's private God in the absence of the nondelimited God in prayer leads to the unfamiliarity with God as he is, as is expressed in *ḥadīth al-taḥawwl*. Man's contemplation of God in his heart is conducive to witnessing God as He is in man's belief. A heart more equipped at encompassing numerous images of the divine will potentially achieve an equally varied witnessing. Nevertheless, the witnessed God remains delimited to the images residing in man's heart. Only a man who is granted the station of "*ḥaddathanī rabbī ʿan rabbī*" is granted a witnessing that transcends the bounds of delimitation. Hence, while in prayer the mirror serves its function as a locus of witnessing of the self, and by extension of *al-rabb al-muqayyad*, it appears to simultaneously be a veil preventing the witnessing of *al-rabb al-muṭṭlaq*. This situation beckons the questions of whether witnessing the nondelimited God is possible in man's experience, and if so, where does man seek witnessing God in His nondelimitation?

3.2 al-Rabb al-Mutlaq

Ibn ʿArabī's response to this question is simultaneously simple and complex. The simplicity resides in the coherence of his teachings, and the complexity appears in the form of the layers of his answer, which is gleaned from the various contexts where he addresses the subject of nondelimitation. In keeping with the approach of the *ḥadīth* as well as al-Shaykh al-Akbar's teachings, the launching point is the self. Ibn ʿArabī elucidates the hypothetical extent of knowledge of God available to man as man consciously begins to know God through knowing himself.[176] Man's self, potentially, continuously reveals him to himself, and with each revelation, the image of man's Lord increases. Upon his completion of knowing himself and the images of God connected with this knowledge, man commits himself to knowing God through other

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[176] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 2:641, quoted in Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 345.

creatures. Succeeding this station, man begins to praise God by his names of incomparability, which signify God's Essence, hence, His nondelimitation.[177] However, al-Shaykh al-Akbar obliterates this possibility on the basis of the impossibility of the initial premise. Man cannot reach a completion point of knowing himself, since this knowledge is boundless; consequently and among other reasons, he cannot arrive at the station of knowing God in His nondelimitation through witnessing the names of His Essence.[178] However, the layers of al-Shaykh al-Akbar's thought orient the discussion towards the nexus connecting man, the creature of the world of manyness, to the absolute oneness of the divine Essence.

> The Prophet said, "He who knows himself knows his Lord." He did not say, "knows the Essence of his Lord," since the Lord's Essence possesses nondelimited Independence. How could the delimited thing know the Nondelimited? But the "Lord" demands the vassal, without doubt. So in "Lord," there is a whiff of delimitation. Through this the created thing knows its Lord.[179]

Man knows of the Essence a name, one which defines his relationship to and place from the Essence. A vassal and Lord, the definition shapes and subsumes the subsequent implications. Al-Shaykh al-Akbar alludes to the difference between the domain of the Essence, which is unknowable to man, and the domain of the names, through which God makes Himself knowable to man. The domain of the Essence is the realm of absolute oneness, a oneness which subsumes and transcends the oppositional manyness of the realm of the names. Therefore, the magnitude of the names of the Essence is unique, as they represent the last threads connecting the ineffable to the world of utterance. Knowledge of God in his absolute nondelimitation is inaccessible to man, rendering knowledge of his Lord man's highest hope. While in al-Shaykh al-Akbar's previous

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[177] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 2:641, quoted in Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 345.
[178] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 2:641, quoted in Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 345.
[179] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 3:72, quoted in, Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 177.

explanation of the progression of man's knowledge of God, he positioned man's advancement to know God through the world to be consequent upon finishing knowing God through himself, this conditional relationship does not withstand across his writings. In conjunction with the fact that Ibn ʿArabī's thought predominantly pivots around the concept of creation as a locus of manifestation and witnessing as a whole, he explicitly specifies certain receptacles for witnessing God in a number of contexts.

Al-Shaykh al-Akbar recites the prophetic *ḥadīth* "the man of faith is the mirror of the man of faith" to point out the knowledge man acquires through witnessing himself in the mirror of his brother in faith.[180] Veiled by his intoxication with himself, man's flaws dwell in his blindspots and escape his scrutiny. Through witnessing his brother's nature, man recognizes the praiseworthy as opposed to blameworthy traits, and reflects this discernment upon himself. Seeing the traits in his brother is man's opportunity to face his own beauty or ugliness. As previously addressed, there is a positive correlation between man's knowledge of himself and his knowledge of his lord. Therefore, witnessing the self in the mirror of man's brother ultimately serves man's quest of knowing God.

Of substantial bearing on the subject of loci of witnessing is Ibn ʿArabī's exposition in the last chapter of *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. The chapter discusses the bezel of wisdom particular to prophet Muḥammad, where Ibn ʿArabī proposes an interpretation to the prophetic *ḥadīth*, "Three things were made beloved to me of your world, women, perfume, and my comfort was made to be in prayer."[181] He contrasts the relation between God and man to man and woman on the basis of origin, since man was created in the image of God, and woman was created in the image of- and from- man.[182] Man occupies the position of an isthmus between God and woman. In women,

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[180] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 3:251 (1911), quoted in Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 351.
[181] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 372.
[182] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 378.

man sees himself as affecting (*fāʿil*), being the origin from which woman emerged. Simultaneously, in himself, man sees himself as affected (*munfaʿil*), emerging himself from God. In the absence of the witnessing happening through women, man only experiences himself as affected and is incognizant to his active role. Therefore, al-Shaykh al-Akbar recognizes witnessing God in women to be the most perfect and complete.[183]

Ibn ʿArabī not only acknowledges the potential knowledge contained within witnessing God in creation, he also detects a hierarchy of perfections. Left to his own devices, man's enamorment with himself overtakes him. He dwells on a God whom he has created in his image, and calls him his God of belief. Certainly, the image is rigidly delimited and exclusive of all that does not carry resonance with this man. Instead of worshipping his Creator, man worships his own creation.[184] Transcending the bounds of his own self, man exposes himself to witnessing the images of God reflected in others; he witnesses God in his brothers in faith, and in women, both granting him a richer knowledge of himself, and by extension, a more varied witnessing of God. However, these loci of witnessing can also obstruct man's vision. The brother in faith's mirror would only reflect God not only to the degree of its polishedness, but also according to its own shape.[185] This situation is inescapable and al-Junayd's words animate it, "The water takes on the colors of its cup;" the witnessing is always influenced by the witnesser, man, and the witnessed, the receptacles of God's manifestations.[186] For al-Shaykh al-Akbar, this is the reason why man is commanded to worship God through following the messenger.[187] Ibn ʿArabī incorporates another layer to this context, which corroborates the place of the mirror metaphor in his thought at large. Akin to prayer, which serves the function of a mirror but is also a veil, the perfect man is also

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[183] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 380.
[184] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 4:143, quoted in Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 350.
[185] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 3:251, quoted in Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 351.
[186] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 3:161, quoted in Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 341.
[187] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 4:143, quoted in Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 350.

simultaneously a mirror and a veil. And while it may seem counterintuitive, veils are sometimes the most perfect loci of witnessing.

4.   The Necessity of the Veil

The following anecdotes aid in imprinting in the imagination a glimpse of the contents of the forthcoming sections.

> When Moses returned from his Lord, God clothed his face in light as a sign of the authenticity of that which he declared; and so fierce was this light that no one could look on him without being blinded, so that he had to cover his face with a veil in order that those who looked in his face would not be taken ill when they saw him. Our teacher Abū Yaʿzā in Maghrib was [a] Moses-like [type of saint] (*mūsawī al-wirth*), and God had bestowed on him the same miraculous sign. No one could look him in the face without losing their sight. He would then rub the man who had looked at him with one of the garments he was wearing and God would give him back his sight. Among those who saw him and were blinded in this fashion was our shaykh Abū Madyan, on an occasion when he paid him a visit. Abū Madyan rubbed his eyes with the garment that Abū Yaʿzā was wearing and recovered his sight.[188]

> Know that God has seventy thousand veils of light and darkness. If He were to lift them, the lights (*subuḥāt*) of His face would burn that which the sights of God's creatures fell on. Therefore, we see God by a face other than the face He sees us by. The burning and the effect (*al-ʾiḥtirāq wa al-ʾathar*) occurs if the seeing occurs from one [the same] face, which is the falling of your sight on His sight. And God had brought into existence in this world an example of the mightiness and transcendence of this station. He created an animal called *al-ṣall*. If man's sight fell on it, and its sight on him on one line that the gazes meet, man dies instantly.[189]

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[188] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 4:50-51, quoted in Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 74. There are some discrepancies between the retellings of this meeting as related by Ibn ʿArabī in *al-Futūḥāt* and by Ahmed al-Tādilī al-Ṣawmaʿī in *Kitāb al-muʿzā fī manāqib al-shaykh Abī Yaʿzā*. In the latter's account, Abū Madyan lost his sight upon rubbing his face in the sitting place of Abū Yaʿzā. Abū Madyan only regained his sight when Abū Yaʿzā wiped his face with his hand. See *Kitāb al-muʿzā*, 130.
[189] Ibn ʿArabī, *ʿUqlat al-Mustawfiz*, 37.

4.1 The Veil as a Locus of Witnessing

The veil is a means of protection, as well as an enforcer of courtesy (*adab*), a knowledge which Ibn ʿArabī upheld upon being bestowed with the *Muḥammadan* inheritance.[190] He received the command to ascend the ladder of the *Muḥammadan* station. This evoked in him the realization that the command was one of affliction. And so he stopped and asked for the veil, and the veil descended between him and the *maqām*. He attained of the *maqām* a share equivalent to a single strand of hair, which supersedes the share of the rest of creation, who only acquire a shadow of it.[191] The veil, as Ibn ʿArabī explains, is the perfection of servanthood. In invoking the veil, he attained the station of servanthood, and he received praise for his request.[192]

There is danger in the absence of the veil. Sights were lost before Moses' face and the faces of the inheritors of his line of sainthood, and lives were lost upon the meeting of the eyes between man and animal. While veils are often the subject of narratives predominantly concerned with the removal of the veil, less pronounced in popular imagination is the destruction imminent at the moment of the reciprocation of the gaze.[193] Only in the presence of the veil could Moses' companions look upon his face, and, instead of going blind, see. The veil seizes to be an obstruction to witnessing. To the contrary, it becomes the sole means for witnessing to occur. This section is dedicated to paying attention to one particular veil, the perfect man, whose function as a veil is precisely his function as a mirror in the thought of Ibn ʿArabī.

4.2 The Perfect Man as a Veil and a Mirror

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[190] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1985), 3: 396.
[191] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1985), 3: 396.
[192] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1985), 3: 396.
[193] Ibn ʿArabī refers to this specific type of destruction as burning (*ʾiḥtirāq*) in several instances.

According to Ibn ʿArabī, the perfect man was granted perfection, through being in the divine image, solely to serve his role as a substitute (*badal*) for God. Therefore, God referred to him in His dialogue with the angels as a vicegerent (*khalīfa*).[194] This vicegerent and his successors are alone granted the divine image, while the rest of mankind receive of it a share in correspondence to the polishedness of their mirrors. Being the mirror of God, the vicegerent is given every divine name, and appears in all the images in which God appears.[195] Since the function of a vicegerent is to supplant he who has instated him as His successor, upon the arrival of the vicegerent, "God was veiled, as there is no rule for the vicegerent in the presence of He who gave him vicegerency."[196] Ibn ʿArabī elucidates, "God has veiled everyone from Him, and only manifested to the perfect man, who is His extended shadow (*ḍhill*)."[197]

The veil is only lifted between God and the perfect man, who himself then becomes God's veil. In providing further explanation of this configuration, Ibn ʿArabī uses the metaphor of the robe or garment.[198]

> Pride is the garment of *al-Ḥaqq*, and it's none other than you. God is clothed with you as you are His image, as the garment is in the image of its wearer… Almighty said: 'The heart (*qalb*) of my servant encompassed Me.' Hence, if you reverse the perfect man inside out (*ʾiḍhā qalabt al-ʾinsān al-kāmil*), you see *al-Ḥaqq*, and man is irreversible, and so the garment does not become the wearer of He whom it is a garment for.[199]
> "The garment is a barrier between Him and the world."[200]

The perfect man stands as a veil between God and the world in the same way a garment veils its wearer from the world. Because of this isthmus-like placement, the perfect man

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[194] al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 24-25.
[195] al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 22.
[196] al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 25.
[197] al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 20.
[198] He writes that the perfect man is referred to by different groups as *al-ridāʾ* and *al-thawb*. See al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 17.
[199] al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 16.
[200] al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 17.

witnesses God in the world, with the outer layer of the garment, and witnesses God as He is, with the inner layer of the garment. The garment- the perfect man- takes the image of the wearer- God- and exhibits His image to the world. Through the veil that is the garment, the world witnesses the image of the wearer, while the wearer Himself remains concealed. "The world does not witness but man, who is the garment."[201] In God's speech to the perfect man, He says, "You are My mirror… through you I became manifest to My creation."[202] And since burning lurks behind the meeting of the gazes, and since God has veiled everyone from Him, to the exception of the perfect man, who is His garment, His robe, His mirror, creation's most sublime opportunity at witnessing God lies in witnessing the perfect man. Through the configuration of his unique position and reality, the perfect man serves as a veil and a mirror, a situation reminiscent of the words Ruzbihān Baqlī heard from his Lord, "He who sees thee, sees Me."[203]

4.3 Witnessing God in Prophet Muḥammad

The station of the perfect man is the station of theophany. He manifests God to Himself and the world. His constitution enables him to fulfill this role. The constitution of Ādam, in other words the degree of polishedness of his mirror, granted him knowledge of the names. He was the polishing of the mirror of the world, through which the names could see their reflection manifested in the world.

The matter appears to repeatedly return to the 'word'. From Ādam who was given knowledge of words which are the divine names, to Moses the Conversor of God (*kalīm Allah*), to Jesus the Word of God (*kalimat Allah*). Profound dwelling on this subject extends beyond the scope of the current research, but of relevance here is the word's manifestation in the life and nature of prophet Muḥammad.

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[201] al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 16.
[202] al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 17.
[203] Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 44.

One defining characteristic of prophet Muḥammad as a primordial reality as well as a corporeal presence is comprehensiveness (*jamʿīyya*). This attribute has a corollary in all significant aspects of his existence. This comprehensiveness itself is the result of the nature of the prophet's unique constitution.

> It is known that the messengers are the most balanced (*aʿdal*) of all people in constitution… There is no prophet who was not sent specifically to a designated people, since he possessed a specific and curtailed constitution. But God sent Muhammad with an all-inclusive message for all people without exception. He was able to receive such a message because he possessed an all-inclusive constitution which comprises the constitution of every prophet and messenger, since he has the most balanced and most perfect of constitutions and the straightest of configurations.[204]

In the same way that Ādam's constitution made it possible for him to receive knowledge of the names, the constitution of prophet Muḥammad granted him comprehensiveness, wherein lies the manifestation of the word in his life, and his unparalleled perfection.

Understanding the character of the Qurān is integral to formulating an extensive perception of the character of prophet Muḥammad. The name of the holy book denotes the significance of its reading and recitation. The initial reception of the name, however, placed emphasis on the alternative and more primary meaning of the Arabic root *q.r.ʾ*, which is to gather and collect.[205] The two names of the holy book, Qurān and Furqān, indicate its function to be to simultaneously gather and discriminate.[206] Chittick observes that Ibn ʿArabī devotes more attention to the encompassing quality of the Quran, which includes all the other holy books and scriptures. Hence, it manifests the character of *jamʿīyya*.[207] Al-Shaykh al-Akbar's law of

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[204] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 3:251, quoted in, Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 351-352.
[205] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 239.
[206] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 239.
[207] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 3:160, quoted in, Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 239.

correspondence emerges in this context in the form of the compatibility between the character of the Qurān and the character of Muḥammad. In the previous chapters it was discussed that al-Shaykh al-Akbar emphasizes that knowledge only occurs when a correspondence between knowledge and the object of knowledge is found. In the same vein, Ibn ʿArabī enunciates that Qurʾān descended upon Muḥammad because of the quality of *jamʿīyya* found in both of them.[208]

> *Al-Ḥaqq* gave His messenger the full sum of the words (*jawāmiʿ al-kalim*), which is sound judgement and decisive statement (*faṣl al-khitāb*). Ādam was perfected by the names. And the perfection of Muḥammad, peace be upon him, is by the full sum of the words, and the names are of the words.[209]

Through the Qurʾān, prophet Muḥammad was given *jawāmiʿ al-kalim*, his particular and all-inclusive perfection. Ibn ʿArabī denominates the perfect man 'the all-comprehensive engendered thing' (*al-kawn al-jāmiʿ*).[210] All-comprehensiveness is a staple quality in all perfect men, as they manifest the name Allah, the all-encompassing divine name. However, as they differ in rank, the perfect men embody *jamʿīyya* in varying degrees of perfection. Therefore, the holy book which characterizes all-comprehensiveness *par excellence* could only descend upon the perfect man in whom *jamʿīyya's* manifestation is excellent.

This compatibility, as was encountered in earlier chapters, ensues from the configuration of the image. Al-Shaykh al-Akbar invokes the image and furthers the discourse around the compatibility between the characters of the Qurʾān and prophet Muḥammad. The words of ʿĀisha, "His [the prophet's] character was the Qurʾān" resonate with Ibn ʿArabī to the letter.[211] He perceives identicality of characters denoting that witnessing one subsequently means

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[208] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 239.
[209] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 3:409, quoted in, al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 27.
[210] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 239.
[211] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 2:346, quoted in, Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 241.

witnessing the other. The claim of the previous chapter was that in Ibn ʿArabī's writings, mentions of the image are implicit mentions of the mirror. In this context, he reiterates the function of the implied mirror as the preserver of the image of the physically absent reality. In the same way that the perfect man serves as a substitute (*badal*) and vicegerent of the divine among creation by being in His image, the Qurʾān is the locus where the image of the prophet subsists after his material departure. By witnessing the Qurʾān, man witnesses prophet Muḥammad.

> Whoever wishes to see the messenger of God, those of his *umma* who are not his coevals, he ought to look at the Qurʾān. If he looks at it, there is no difference between looking at it and at the messenger of God. It is as if the Qurʾān formed a corporeal image called Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbd Allah Ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib.[212]

Tracing the origin of the prophet's all-comprehensiveness, Ibn ʿArabī observes the prophet's constitution. He compares the clays from which Ādam and his descendents were created to that from which Muḥammad was created. Unlike Ādam and his offspring, whose clay is a mixture of light and darkness, "Muḥammad's clay was created from the location of the *kaʿba*, the site of belief in God Almighty."[213] Al-Shaykh al-Akbar's discourse on constitutions is concerned with the degree of polishedness of man's mirror. Ādam's constitution allowed for the divine names to manifest in his mirror and occur in his knowledge. And the unparalleled purity of prophet Muḥammad's constitution made it possible for the sum of all words, encompassing the divine names and the Qurʾān, to manifest in him. This *jamʿiyya* is a testament to the complete polishedness of the prophet's mirror, because to reflect all-inclusiveness- in other words, everything- one's mirror must contain nothing.

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[212] al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 28.
[213] Ibn ʿArabī, *Shajarat al-kawn*, 14.

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What then does this polished mirror reflect of the divine? This part of the discussion pertains to the theme of the personal Lord (*rabb*), the delimitation and nondelimitation of God. Al-Shaykh al-Akbar explains that all righteous believers who are of the station of Polehood (*qutbīyya*) must manifest the name Allah. They, however, are also given another name specific to them, by which they're called outside their Polehood station.[214] "Hence, Moses' name is ʿAbd al-Shakūr ("Servant of the Grateful"), David's specific name is ʿAbd al-Malik ("Servant of the King"), and Muḥammad's name is ʿAbd al-Jāmiʿ."[215] Since Allah is the all-inclusive divine name, both divine names that prophet Muḥammad is given emphasize all-comprehensiveness. Therefore, the prophet's *jamʿīyya* transcends and subsumes the comprehensiveness of all other prophets.

It is due here to refer to an earlier point of discussion, namely, Ibn ʿArabī's words, "For every servant there is a name, which is his Lord (*rabbahu*). Akin to a body, and this name is its heart."[216] In Muḥammad's heart, the nondelimitation of his Lord is doubly present, as Allah and al-Jāmiʿ. The complete polishedness of his mirror, the utter effacement of himself, renders him the perfect man *par excellence*, the most perfect locus of manifestation of the divine. In him, the totality of God's all-comprehensiveness and nondelimitation are witnessed, to the extent that they can possibly be witnessed. In this relationship, the merits of the mirror metaphor surface, the quintessence of which is 'He/not He', the Akbarian archetypal yes/no. Being the most perfect image of the divine, Muḥammad reflects all the attributes of the divine. More importantly, he reflects God's Lordship by embodying absolute servanthood.[217] Since God's Essence, where his nondelimitation dwells, is unknown and inaccessible, the perfect man reflects it through

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[214] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 2:571, quoted in, Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 371.
[215] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 2:571, quoted in, Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 371.
[216] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1985), 1:42.
[217] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 2:603, quoted in, Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 372.

reflecting incompatibility, being God's reversed image in the mirror; the perfect man reflects the

nondelimited God by being the "nondelimited divine thrall."[218]

Man's self is the lens through which he witnesses God. As an obstruction, it drives man

further into his self-bemusement and he worships a God whom he has created in his image. As a

means of knowledge, the self reveals man's Lord to him to the extent that he has truly

encountered himself. In both cases, man is faced with his God of belief (*ilāh al-muʿtaqqad*), a

delimited image inclusive only to that which bears resemblance and resonance with the

constitution of man. The experience is narrow, constricted, and the temptation to dwell in and on

the self perpetuates it. Being of an impure constitution, as all animal men (*al-insān al-ḥayawān*)

are, man witnesses an image in his tarnished mirror and mistakes it for God. His state emulates

that of Plato's prisoners in the cave. Since it is his wont to look through the narrow lens of the

self at a reflection in an impure mirror, man is absent to the possibility of witnessing a perfect

reflection of the nondelimited God.

The self is not intrinsically narrow, to the contrary, it is in fact nondelimited. Muḥammad

witnesses his Lord in his mirror and encounters his own image. However, because his character

is *jamʿīyya* and he is created in the image of Allah and al-Jāmiʿ, the image of Muḥammad's

private Lord (*al-ilāh al-muqayyad*) is identical to the image of God as He is. Being the most

perfect of perfect men (*al-kāmil al-akmal*), Muḥammad is the excellence of the station of being

created in God's image.[219] He is God's most perfect reflection, hence Muḥammad's God of belief

(*ilāh al-muʿtaqqad*), whom he encounters in his own mirror, is identical to the nondelimited God.

This is the station God alludes to in *ḥadīth al-taḥawwul*, "So none appear to them, in them, other

than Me. And they do not intelligize of the existents other than My names."[220] This is the

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[218] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 2:603, quoted in, Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 372.
[219] al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 27.
[220] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1985), 1: 223.

function religions serve for Ibn ʿArabī. Man's refuge from the trap of worshipping a God of his own creation is to "worship the God brought by the Messenger."[221] He writes, "The intelligent person is he who abandons what he has in himself concerning God for what the messengers have brought from God concerning God."[222] The completion of the divine teachings is in the all-comprehensiveness of Muḥammad's message. And the most perfect witnessing of God is in witnessing *rabb* Muḥammad in the mirror of Muḥammad.

I conclude with an excerpt from *al-Futūḥāt*, which epitomizes the tenors of this chapter in al-Shaykh al-Akbar's own expression.

> There is no prophet who was not sent specifically to a designated people, since he possessed a specific and curtailed constitution. But God sent Muhammad with an all-inclusive message for all people without exception. He was able to receive such a message because he possessed an all-inclusive constitution which comprises the constitution of every prophet and messenger, since he has the most balanced and most perfect of constitutions and the straightest of configurations.
> Once you come to know this, and once you desire to see the Real in the most perfect manner in which He can become manifest in this human plane, then you need to know that this does not belong to you. You do not have a constitution like that possessed by Muhammad. Whenever the Real discloses Himself to you within the mirror of your heart, your mirror will make Him manifest to you in the measure of its constitution and in the form of its shape…So cling to faith and follow him! Place him before you as the mirror within which you gaze upon your own form and the form of others. When you do this, you will come to know that God must disclose Himself to Muhammad within his mirror. I have already told you that the mirror displays an effect in that which is seen from the point of view of the observer who sees. So the manifestation of the Real within the mirror of Muhammad is the most perfect, most balanced, and most beautiful manifestation, because of the mirror's actuality. When you perceive Him in the mirror of Muhammad,

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[221] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 4:143, quoted in, Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 350.
[222] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 4:278, quoted in, Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 351.

you will have perceived from Him a perfection which you could not perceive in respect of considering your own mirror."[223]

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[223] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, (1911), 3:251, quoted in, Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 351-352.

Conclusion

The mirror metaphor resides in an isthmus between absence and presence. On the one hand, the mirror is ubiquitous in Ibn ʿArabī's own expression in a manner proposing that it bears the potential of offering a panoptic view of al-Shaykh al-Akbar's thought at large. Primarily, this potential is not due to the mere frequency at which Ibn ʿArabī employs the mirror, rather, it is due to the centrality of the notions and contexts wherein he invokes the metaphor. In contrast to this influential presence in Ibn ʿArabī's thought, the mirror's reception in secondary literature is rather ambivalent. It is not unusual for the mirror metaphor to be utilized in illustrating al-Shaykh al-Akbar's ideas in secondary literature, however, the function of the mirror is mostly restricted to a convenient metaphor garnering sporadic and coincidental attention. This thesis exhibited a number of the ways in which the mirror occupies the position of a web underlying and connecting Ibn ʿArabī's seminal ideas. Osman Yahya resembles Ibn ʿArabī to an elite composer who created a melody in his imagination and divided and disseminated it into parts dispersed over his opus, which formulate the comprehensive melody if assembled.[224] Perhaps the mirror is precisely this Akbarian melody, hidden in plain sight.

The theory of Unity of Being is often considered to be the most controversial in Ibn ʿArabī's thought. Al-Shaykh al-Akbar's refraining from using the phrase *waḥdat al-wujūd*, and the copious occasions in which he invokes the mirror metaphor to explain his thoughts on Being provide sufficient reason to lend this alternative reading attention. As opposed to pantheism and panentheism, which are classifications extraneous -as well as inaccurate, and inviting of condemnation- to Ibn ʿArabī's legacy, the mirror metaphor suggests an alternative constellation of terminologies, which preserve Ibn ʿArabī's original expression. Most importantly, it embodies

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[224] Osman Yahya, *Muʾallafāt Ibn ʿArabī, tarīkhuhā wa taṣnīfuhā*, ed. Ahmed al-Tayyib, (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-ʿamma al-Masriyya li al-Kitab, 2001).

the quintessential He/Not He. Al-Jazāʾrī remarks the capacity of the mirror metaphor in elucidating divine manifestations. He writes in *al-Mawāqif*:

> One of the greatest examples for divine manifestations (*tajalliyat*) is polished substances, specifically mirrors… Imagining His majestic manifestation is very difficult, therefore, most people- except this group blessed by mercy- imagined it through incarnation (*ḥulūl*), or unity (*ʾittiḥād*), or flowing (*sarayān*), or the likes of them.[225]

The significance of the mirror arises from what it is a metaphor for, the image. In al-Shaykh al-Akbar's thought, the image is the definitive element for the occurrence of knowledge, love, perfection, and above all, existence. Consequently, the locus most receptive of the divine image is the one granted the highest degrees of knowledge, love, and perfection. Al-Hakim writes, "The texts of Ibn ʿArabī successively describe the world as a mirror, and the mirror means the place which accepts the image of a thing and not the thing itself."[226] While panentheism acknowledges God's transcendence beyond the bounds of the world's corporeality, and in doing so, mitigates pantheism's radical identification of God with the world, panentheism does not define the world's relation to God in a manner congruent with Ibn ʿArabī's doctrine. The world being in the image of God is both the most fundamental and most influential relation al-Shaykh al-Akbar establishes between God and the world.

Ibn ʿArabī's depiction of this relation reveals, however, that the image does not suffice as an accurate description. It is not solely an 'image'; rather it is a mirror image. The mirror metaphor preserves the integrity of al-Shaykh al-Akbar's ontological stance on whose Being is real and whose imaginal. Similar to the example of a pair of twin siblings. They can be said to be in each other's image, and both of them are equally real. If the depiction of Ibn ʿArabī's ontology

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[225] al-Jazāʾrī, *al-Mawāqif*, 2:22.
[226] al-Hakim, "Unity of Being in Ibn 'Arabī."

was restricted to 'the image', it would remain inconclusive and inexhaustive of his doctrine on Being. When the image is specified as a mirror image, his various teachings fall into place. The metaphor defines the relation as one between an onlooker, who is Absolute Being, and his image in the mirror, which earns the appearance of Being from Him.

In Ibn ʿArabī thought, creation emerged to fulfill an epistemic purpose. Its mission is to answer to God's desire to be known by an other. As Ibn ʿArabī's universal law of correspondence mandates across his teachings, a resemblance must exist between a subject and object for the desired outcome to occur. In the context of knowing God, al-Shaykh al-Akbar specifies that only a creation bearing resemblance to God can uncover knowledge of Him.[227] "The best mirror, which reflects the most complete and exact image, is the image of the prophet Muhammad."[228] The mirror metaphor does not only convey the reality of the world as the image of God, and its existence as dependent upon Him, it also conveys how creation accomplishes its epistemic mission through the most perfect mirror.

Ibn ʿArabī's thought pivots around images and his description of the world culminates in a universe of mirrors. He perceives a single reality manifesting in myriad forms in accordance with the constitution of the locus -the shape and degree of polishedness of the mirror- wherein it manifests. The world is created in the image of God, the perfect man is created in the image of the world and God, woman is created in the image of man, and Ādam is created in the image of prophet Muḥammad's name.[229] The prophet is the image of the Qurʾān, and imagination and the perfect man are the most excellent manifestations of the image of God.[230] These myriad mirrors entail that wherever man looks, he is bound to see. The seeing is influenced by both the seer and

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[227] al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 8.
[228] al-Hakim, "Unity of Being in Ibn 'Arabī"
[229] Ibn ʿArabī, *Shajarat al-kawn*, 18.
[230] al-Ghurab, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 27-28.

the seen. The seer's seeing is glossed over by his own self, consequently, man sees to the degree of purity of his constitution only that which bears resonance with him. Perhaps this is why some find solace in gazing at the shadows on the wall, and some find it in gazing at themselves on the surface of water. For al-Shaykh al-Akbar, since two veils stand between man and witnessing God, that of man's own self and that of the locus of his witnessing, and since the veil of the self is inevitable, man's most sublime opportunity lies in witnessing God in a locus representing a diaphanous veil, that which God used to veil Himself. The perfect men are God's veils, and prophet Muḥammad as a veil, being the most perfect of perfect men, is the most diaphanous.

The visual component is intrinsic to Ibn ʿArabī's thought as is signified by the repetitive mentions of the image and the mirror and, more importantly, by the profundity of the notions they are employed in conveying. The theme of single realities -and an ultimate single reality- and various manifestations is demonstrative of the underlying narrative of his thought at large. The relation between unity and multiplicity is encapsulated in the visual representation of one reality standing in a hall of mirrors, all of which reflect this one reality according to their own nature and purity. In the mirror embodying the constitution of letters, the reality appears as a letter, and in the mirror of corporeality, it manifests as a mountain or a river. In the mirror with the most balanced constitution and polishedness, the most perfect image of the single reality occurs. Therefore, for the rest of the manifestations this mirror becomes the ultimate reference in which the image of the single reality can be witnessed.

Bearing upon Ibn ʿArabī's ontology and epistemology, and consequently, offering insights on his notions around soteriology and eschatology, the mirror occupies a unique position in Ibn ʿArabī's thought. It is a vantage point upon his doctrine. In the palace of Ibn ʿArabī's ideas, where his theories reside and congregate, mirrors ornament the walls of various chambers,

as well as the hallways connecting them. But beyond their decorative function, the placement of these mirrors suggest that they can be integral structural elements. Although subtle and overlookable, the guidance of the mirrors carries the promise of illuminating a path for navigating the Akbarian premise.

Lastly, these words by al-Ghurab are the ideal coincidence with which to conclude this work. "Al-Shaykh Ibn al-ʿArabī, may God be pleased with him, is a Muḥammadan mirror with the utmost purity, balance, and uprightness, no one saw in him except himself."[231]

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[231] Mahmoud al-Ghurab, *al-Shaykh al-akbar Muḥy al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī: tarjamat ḥayātahū min kalāmihi*, 2nd ed. (Damascus: Maṭbaʿat Naḍr, 1991), 303.

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