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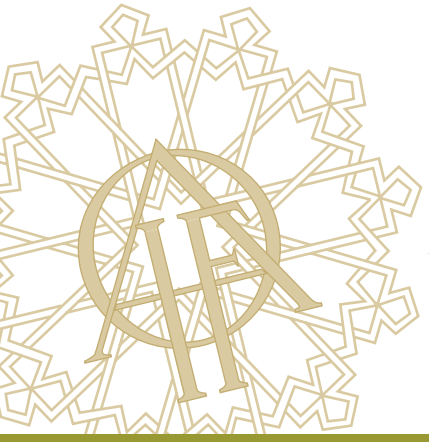

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José Pereira

Categories of Muslim Mystical Theology.

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José PEREIRA

Categories of Muslim Mystical Theology

PLOTINUS (205-270) can be titled the "Common Doctor" of the theologies of the three Semitic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.[1] Among his contributions that aided them in formulating their thought was a theory explaining the relationship of God and the world which many of their thinkers were to find greatly satisfying. This theory was expressed in five categories, the Plotinian Pentad: the One, Intellect, Soul, Sensible World and Matter: it provided Muslim mysticism with its intellectual structure, to the extent that the mystical theology of Islam can be described as a series of variations on the Plotinian theme. As this theme encompasses the spectrum of Muslim mystical speculation, it can be treated only summarily and synthetically in an article such as this one. We shall begin by discussing the relationship of God and the world as it occurs in the history of Islamic theology; continue with the types or models under which theology in general classifies that relationship, including the Pentad; and end with examining the variations that Muslim theology in particular produces of the models it adopts, particularly those on the Plotinian Pentad.

1. Phases in the development of Islamic mystical theology

The evolution of Muslim mystical theology can be divided into four phases: the creation of Muslim Neoplatonism, the apotheosis of Islamic monism, the Iranian poeticization of Muslim mysticism, and the culminant synthesis of Muslim mystical theology. Let us examine these phases in sequence.

First, the *creation of Muslim Neoplatonism*, where the categories of Plotinian metaphysics, in particular the Pentad, were applied to the Muslim concept of reality. Prominent figures in this phase are al-Farabi (c. 878 - c. 950),[2] Avicenna (Ibn Sina, 980-1037),[3] Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali (1058-1111), Ahmad al-Ghazzali (c. 1060?-1126), and Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi

[1] F.E. Peters, "The Origins of Islamic Platonism: The School Tradition" in Morewedge, Parviz (ed.), *Islamic Philosophical Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979), p. 14-45.

[2] Ian Richard Netton, *Allah Transcendent* (London & New York: Routledge 1989).

[3] Lenn E. Goodman, *Avicenna* (London & New York: Routledge 1992).

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(1153-1191).[4] Farabi was the first outstanding Muslim Neoplatonist; he initiated the process of assimilating Muslim vocabulary into Neoplatonism, of restructuring the categories of the Pentad, and of reinterpreting their content; his ideas were elaborated and systematized by Avicenna. Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali imported the Islamized Neoplatonism into Muslim mysticism (known as Sufism), endowed Islamic philosophy with a mysticism of light, and set it on an irreversible monistic course. Ahmad al-Ghazzali, his brother, developed the fashion of reinterpreting the categories of the Pentad, by identifying the One with Love. Suhrawardi elaborated a consistent illuminationism or mysticism of light on the basis of Avicenna's and Abu Hamid's suggestions, and emphasized the importance of experience over speculation in mystical theology. All these men seem to have belonged to the majority Sunni sect, but we must also include in this phase thinkers of a minority sect, the Isma'ilis, who were even more devoted to Neoplatonism than the Sunnis were: al-Nasafi (+943), al-Sijistani (c. 913-987) and al-Kirmani (+1066).

Second, the *apotheosis of Muslim monism*, attained in Muhiuddin Ibn 'Arabi,[5] the "Great Master" (1165-1240) and his school, which included thinkers like Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi (c. 1207-1274), Sa'id al-Din al-Farghani (+1299), Mu'ayyid al-Din al-Jandi (+1291), Kamal al-Din al-Kashani (+1329/1335) and Sharaf al-Din al-Qaysari (+1350). From the thematic elements formed during the first phase Ibn 'Arabi organized a comprehensive Muslim monistic synthesis, in a prodigious outpouring of inspired and exuberant prose. His ideas were given systematic form by Qunawi, and further elaborated by Jandi, Farghani, Kashani and Qaysari. More eclectic thinkers inspired by Ibn 'Arabi's ideas were Fakhruddin 'Iraqi (c. 1211-1289),[6] Qutbuddin Shirazi (1236-1311), Mahmud Shabistari (c. 1250-c. 1320) and Abdurrahman Jami (1414-1492).[7] Shirazi harmonized Ibnarabian concepts with the specific features of Suhrawardi's thought; 'Iraqi and Jami gave them a poetic interpretation; and Shabistari a lyrical embodiment in his classic *Mystical Rose Garden*, a summa of Sufism in elegant verse.

Third, and concomitantly with the second phase, was the *Iranian poeticization of Muslim mysticism*, cultivated by assimilating the themes of that mysticism into the imagery of Persian poetry, and to its motifs of love, wine and beauty. The first Persian Sufi poetry[8] is usually linked to the name of Abu al-Khayr (976-1049), but the first great Sufi poet, the adapter of its themes to Persian epic form, the *mathnawi*, was Sana'i (fl. 1070-1131+). The epic interpretation of Sufism was further developed with imaginative brilliance by Nizami (c. 1141-1209) and 'Attar (c. 1142 - c. 1220), attaining its apotheosis in the sublime ecstatic rhapsodies of Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273), author of a *Mathnawi* described as "the Koran in the Persian tongue." After Rumi, the Persian poets came under the influence of Ibn 'Arabi's thought, poets like the already mentioned thinkers 'Iraqi, Shabistari and Jami. Other

[4] John, Walbridge, *The Science of Mystic Lights. Qutb al-Din Shirazi and the Illuminationist Tradition in Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Mass.: Harvard University Press, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 1992).

[5] William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (New York: State University of New York Press 1989). Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969).

[6] Fakhruddin 'Iraqi, *Divine flashes*. Translated and introduced by William C. Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).

[7] *Lawa'ih. A Treatise on Sufism by Nur-ud-din 'Abd-ur-rahman Jami*. Translated by E.H. Whinfield & Mirza Muhammad Kazvini (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1914).

[8] Jan Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1968).

prominent Iranian mystical poets are the subtle and refined Sa'di (c. 1213-1291), the fluent and versatile Amir Khusru (1253-1325), and the greatest lyrical poet of Persia, Hafiz (1325-1389), celebrator of the joy of life, love and friendship and frequent declaimer of infidelity under a pantheistic camouflage.

Fourth, and last, the *culminant synthesis of Islamic mystical theology*, or theosophy, also attained in Iran, combining all anteriorly realized forms of Muslim mystical speculation in one all-encompassing system. This was the work of Sadr al-Din Shirazi, better known as Mulla Sadra (c. 1571-1640),[9] anticipated in part by his teachers Mir Damad (+1631) and Mir Findariski (+c. 1641) and elaborated by his disciples 'Ali Nuri (+1831) and Hadi al-Sabzawari (1797-1878).

2. Models in the God-world relationship

We can describe the relationship of the transcendental and the phenomenal or of God and the world through two sets of models, the static, which contemplates both categories as constituted in existence, and the dynamic, which views the phenomenal (or the world) as causally emergent from the transcendental (or God). The static models represent the entity of God and the world as different, identical, or partly different and partly identical. We have thus three static models: of Difference, Identity, and Difference-in-Identity: they constitute what we may call the *Trichotomy.*[10]

The problem can be stated metaphysically, as that of the One and the Many. Is reality one or many? We perceive a multitude of things, but our minds also conceive them in unitary fashion, as, say, "being", "reality", or "existence". Which of these are real and which (conceivably) unreal–our plural perception, our unitary conception, or both? In other words, which is real and which unreal–Difference, or Identity, or both?

To this question three basic answers have traditionally been given: Difference is real, Identity unreal: the *theologies of Difference*. Identity is real, Difference unreal: the *theologies of Identity*. Both are real: *the theologies of Difference-in-Identity*. The theologies of the first and last kind appear to occur world-wide; those of Identity seem to be limited to India, where they are identified as Nondualism or Advaita. Difference-in-Identity appears to be the preferred Sufi model.

The *dynamic models*, themselves classifiable under the three static varieties, include the following four: eternal dyadism, creationism, emanationism and bipolarity. Eternal dyadism and creationism pertain to Difference; emanationism to Difference or Difference-in-Identity; and bipolarity to Difference-in-Identity alone. We shall now examine the significance of these types and their relevance to Muslim mystical theology.

First, *eternal dyadism*. In this model the cosmos is an eternal dyad of the transcendental and the phenomenal, the coexistent realities of both being eternal and uncaused. But the reality of the phenomenal, uncaused though it be in substance, is indeterminate in form;

[9] Fazlur Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra* (Sadr al-Din Shirazi) (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975).

[10] See my *Hindu Theology. Themes, Texts and Structures*, 2nd ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991. 1st ed. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Image Books, 1976. Page numbering same in both editions).

the causal influx of the transcendent gives it formal and intelligible structure, just as an artisan gives definite shape to his artefact. The model corresponds to that proposed by Plato, as he is commonly interpreted. The eternal dyad thus comprises the intelligible world on the one hand and the material on the other. Permanent and eternal, the intelligible world contains the Forms or immaterial beings endowed with clear-cut identities; it constitutes the real world, one graced with immortal beauty. Changing and ever in process, the material world comprises beings that are mere imitations of the Forms; it is comparable to the intelligible world as shadow to light, possessing a beauty that is but transient.

Second, *creationism*, a theory for which the transcendent and the phenomenal are not coeternal. The former, God, is beginningless and the latter, creation, originates in time. More importantly the entity of God, totally distinct from that of the creature, is unoriginated and self-existent. The created entity, for its part, is of itself non-existent, and exists only through dependence on the Creator's causal activity.[11] This model is preferred by Koranic orthodoxy; the Isma'ilis try to combine it with emanationism.

Third, *emanationism*, the emergence of the phenomenal world by a series of radiations from the transcendental reality, each successive radiation inferior in perfection to its predecessor. While the divinity of the transcendent remains intact, that of the emanations is progressively degraded. If emanationism is classified under the model of Difference, the entitative distinctness of each of the emanations is maintained; if it is classified under the model of Difference-in-Identity, the entity of the phenomenal is postulated as being in essence identical with the transcendent, but different from it in appearance or mode.

Emanationism is already found in a simple form in the early *Upanisads,*[12] where the sage Uddalaka describes how Being first emanates fire, then water and last earth. Each of these elements diversifies into the constituents of the human person: fire into speech, marrow and bone; water in breath, blood and urine; and earth into mind, flesh and feces. At death, these constituents revert into the elements, which in reverse process return to Being. More subtle is the emanationism of Plotinus,[13] based on four assumptions: that complex entities presuppose simple ones; that multiplicity presupposes unity; that complex entities result from some kind of contemplation; and that the more indeterminate originates from the more determinate. From these postulates five categories–the Pentad–are derived: the One, Intellect, Soul, Sensible World and Matter.

Complex realities are comprehended within the cosmos. They must therefore derive from a cause that is wholly simple, lacking all differentiation and manifoldness. Plotinus declares that this cause, *the One*, is a self-sufficient unity and incomprehensible (indeed, anomalously, wholly unknowable). By self-contemplation it generates the first emanation, *Intellect*. Intellect, in turn, contemplates itself and the One; this contemplation comprises the intelligible Forms of Plato's ideal world, the prototypes of the many beings in the cosmos. While the One is but one, Intellect is both one and many: one in its entity and many in its Forms.

[11] "Sola prima causa est ipsum esse per essentiam; omne autem aliud esse est participatio illius esse, et ideo ex intrinseca necessitate postulat influxum ipsius esse per essentiam ut sit." Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, disp. 21, sect. 1, n. 10.

[12] *Chandogya Upanisad*, 6: 2: 3 *sq*.

[13] Dominic J. O'Meara, *Plotinus. An Introduction to the Enneads* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

The contemplation of Intellect generates *Soul*, whose own act of contemplation comprises Nature, which encompasses the various functions of Soul's presence in the body. The unitary Soul diversifies into a singular entity (the World Soul) and plural entities (the souls of various beings in the cosmos), the latter constituting *Sensible World*.

Up to this point the process of derivation from the One has produced an ever increasing indeterminateness of forms. This process can only terminate in a total indeterminateness, which is none other than *Matter*. In it appear lifeless images of Soul, which as such can carry no further the expression of the One's power and perfection. The categories of the Pentad can be divided into two groups, the intelligible (the One, Intellect, Soul) and the mixed and material (Sensible World, Matter). We may call the former the Primary Triad and the latter the Secondary Dyad. Muslim theologians focus their speculation more on the Triad than on the Dyad.

Our fourth and last dynamic model is *bipolarity*, where reality is declared to be one, but existent in two aspects or dimensions, one transcendent, eternal, omniperfect and immutable; and the other phenomenal, eternal in essence, but imperfect and changeable in mode. When the emanationist model is reduced to the bipolar, the transcendent being, the One, from which the emanations originate, is taken to be the transcendental pole of the one reality, and the emanations themselves the phenomenal pole. As Ghazzali puts it,

> "Everything has two aspects, an aspect to itself and an aspect to its Lord: in respect to the first, it is Not-being; but in respect to the God-aspect, it is Being. Therefore, there is no Existent except God and the God-aspect, and therefore all things are perishing except the God-aspect from and to all eternity."[14]

Sufi theologians clearly interpret the Pentad in a Difference-in-Identity manner. The transcendental pole is the One and the phenomenal pole the emanations, though their phenomenality is not immediately evident. The One is given such titles as Essence, Existence, Light and Love; the emanations Names, Attributes and Theophanies. Intellect is frequently named the Holy Emanation. Our theologians then range the categories of the Pentad under new classifications excogitated by themselves. Thus Jami subdivides the Most Holy Emanation into the Unity and Singleness stages, and the Holy Emanation into divine and mundane modes. Iraqi classifies the emanations into invisible and visible entitative determinations: the invisible is equivalent to Intellect and the visible to Soul and Sensible World. Qunawi, systematizing the thought of Ibn 'Arabi, reclassifies the Emanations into the five Presences: of Essence, Attributes, Operations, Images, and Visibles. Following the example of his master, he adorns them with many grandiloquent titles.[15]

Emanant from the undifferentiated absolute Essence of God, Qunawi's first Presence is identified as the Presence of Knowledge, by which God knows the infinite differentiations through which His undifferentiated Essence can manifest itself. But Qunawi's disciple

[14] W.H.T. Gairdner (transl.), *Al-Ghazzali's Mishkat al-Anwar* ("*The Niche for Lights*") (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1924. Asiatic Society Monographs, vol. 19), p. 59.

[15] William C. Chittick, "The five Presences: from al-Qunawi to al-Qaysari", *The Muslim World* 72 (1982), p. 107-128.

Farghani postulates an anterior Presence, which he terms the Presence of Exclusive Oneness, a Presence where God is seen to be as He is in Himself, unqualifiedly one and exclusive of all reference to phenomenal being. To the undifferentiatedness of the Essence, Farghani's new category appears to add the single differentiation of oneness. Following on this Presence is Farghani's Presence of Inclusive Oneness, which corresponds to Qunawi's Presence of Knowledge. Here God's oneness is preserved, but it cognitively encompasses, or is inclusive of, the totality of phenomenal being. Qunawi's other disciple, Jandi, for his part subdivides the fourth Presence, that of the Imaginal World or Image Exemplars, into two: one where the Exemplars are postulated as existing in themselves, and the other where they are given as localized by the perception of beings endowed with the faculty of imagination.

3. Muslim variations on the Plotinian Pentad

3.1 Ornamentation

Muslim theologians varied the Plotinian Pentad in three ways, which may be described as ornamentation, restructuring and reinterpretation. The first of these is ornamentation, the use of non-Plotininan idiom to give the Plotinian categories a Muslim coloring, as a rule without changing their meaning significantly. This idiom is of three kinds, Zoroastrian (itself Islamicized), Muslim and that of Persian poetry, a literary tradition consummated by Muslims.

First, *the assimilation of Zoroastrian idiom*. Zoroastrianism[16] had an impact on Muslim thought that needs to be studied in depth. The founder of that religion, Zoroaster, was born into a society that worshiped two kinds of gods, the Celestials (*daevas*) and the Lords (*ahuras*), the latter having special occult powers. Of these divinities the Persian prophet retained only one, the Wise Lord (*Ahura Mazda,* later *Ohrmazd*); he appropriated the powers of the other Lords into six individuals or faculties, associated with the Wise Lord, together with him forming the Seven Holy Immortals (*Amesha Spentas,* later *Amshaspands*): the daevas he reduced to demons. The Wise Lord created two spirits, and gave them the choice of good and evil. One spirit chose the good and was named the Good Spirit; the other chose evil, and was named the Evil Spirit (*Angra Mainyu,* later *Ahriman*). Subsequently Zoroastrianism (Mazdeism) confused Good Spirit with Ohrmazd, and opposed him to Ahriman, confessing thereby a dualism where Ohrmazd was light, goodness and life, and Ahriman darkness, wickedness and death. As the natural enemy of Ohrmazd, Ahriman was ever intent to attack him, and to prevent the attack Ohrmazd created, in the void between them, the spiritual and material worlds. Nonetheless battle ensued between the two gods. Fighting on the side of Ohrmazd were the Worshipful Ones (*yazatas*), identifiable as angels and archangels: they were none other than some of the old gods rejected by Zoroaster, and perhaps some of the Holy Immortals themselves. Suhrawardi appropriated the vocabulary of this late Mazdean dualism. The One is Light, indeed the Light of Lights; and Matter is Darkness. The void

[16] R.C. Zaehner, "Zoroastrianism," in *The Concise Encyclopedia of Living Faiths* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), p. 209-222. Cyrus R. Pangborn, *Zoroastrianism. A Beleagured Faith* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing Co., 1982).

between the two categories is filled with the spiritual and material worlds, including the created Intellects (forming a complex hierarchy of angels) and Sensible World.

Second, and more important, is *the assimilation of Muslim idiom*, which is of two sorts, that taken from the Koran, and from the reports of the Prophetic Tradition (*hadith*). The Koranic terms (along with their Plotinian equivalents) include: the Worlds of Command (the One) and of creation (the four emanations); the Pen (Intellect), the imperishable Tablet (Soul); and Adam (Intellect) and Eve (Soul). The relevant texts are as follows. On the *Worlds of Creation and Command*: "His is the creation, His the command" (7:54). On the *Pen*: "Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One, who by the Pen taught man what he did not know" (96:4-5; cf. 68:1); the Pen, in standard Muslim exegesis (which does not always coincide with Muslim Neoplatonizing hermeneutics), stands for permanent revelation. On the *Tablet*: "Surely this is a glorious Koran, inscribed on an imperishable Tablet" (85:21-22); for Muslim exegesis, the Tablet represents the incorruptibility of God's message to mankind. On *Adam*: "I am placing on the earth [declares Allah] one that shall rule as my deputy" (21:30-34). When Allah is about to create Adam, He tells the angels, "I am creating man from dry clay, from black molded loam. When I have fashioned him and breathed My Spirit into him, kneel down and prostrate yourselves before him" (15:26-30; cf. 3:59). As Intellect is the first emanation, Adam is the first of the human race. On *Eve*, who emerges from Adam as Soul emanates from Intellect: "It was He who created you from a single being. From that being He created his mate, so that he might find comfort in her" (7:189). Some of the equivalences are evidently forced.

Even more forced is Shabistari's attempt to make the entire Koran, with all its 114 chapters (*suras*), a portrayal of the evolving emanations, beginning with Intellect and ending with man (who belongs to Soul and Sensible World). Shabistari describes this process as follows:

> "To him, whose soul attains the beatific vision, the universe is the book of 'Truth Most High.' Accidents are its vowels, and substance its consonants, and grades of creatures its verses and pauses. Therein every world is a special chapter, one the chapter *Fatiha* [*sura* 1, the Exordium], another *Ikhlas* [*sura* 112, 'Oneness']. Of this book the first verse is 'Universal Reason' [Intellect], for that is the *B* of *Bismillah* ["In the name of God," the *incipit* of the Koran]. Second comes 'Universal Soul' [Soul], 'the verse of light' ["God is the light of the heavens and the earth," 24:35], for that is a lamp of exceeding light. The third verse thereof is 'Highest heaven' ["Your Lord is God, who created the heavens/highest heaven," 7:54]. Read the fourth verse, it is 'The Throne' ["His throne is as vast as the heavens and the earth," 2:255]; after that are the heavenly spheres. The 'chapter of the seven limbs' [*sura* 1, which has seven clauses] answers to these. After these, behold the bodies of the four elements, whereof each answers to its respective verse. After these come the three kingdoms of nature (mineral, animal, vegetal), whose verses you cannot count. The last that came down was the soul of man ["I seek refuge in the Lord of men, the King of men, the God of men," *sura* 114]. And thus the Koran ends in the chapter 'Men'."[17]

[17] Shabistari (transl. E.H. Whinfield), *Gulshan-i raz: The Mystic Rose Garden of Sa'duddin Mahmud Shabistari. The Persian Text, with an English translation and notes...* (London: Trubner & Co., 1880), vv. 201-210.

In this passage it is difficult to see how the Verse of Light should describe Soul rather than the One (or even Intellect), considering that the Koran itself identifies God with light. The only thing the seven clauses of *sura* 1 have in common with the seven spheres is the number seven. No *suras* are indicated which describe the four elements and the three kingdoms of nature.

The nomenclature of the Koran is supplemented by that taken from the reports of the Prophetic Tradition, especially the two *hadiths* of the Hidden Treasure and of the Cloud. In the former God is reported to have said "I was a hidden Treasure, I yearned to be known. That is why I produced creatures, in order to be known by them." In the latter, "Someone asked the Prophet: 'Where was your Lord before creating His creations?' [The Prophet replied] 'He was in a cloud; there was no space either above or below.'" These *hadiths* have more than mere cosmetic significance, for the first of these provided the reason as to why the emanations occurred and the second described the pregnant moment preceding their occurrence.

Finally is *the assimilation of Persian poetic idiom,*[18] whose main themes, as we remarked above, are love, wine and beauty. These themes are expressed in an idiom which describes natural phenomena, minerals, vegetation, animals and human beings. *Natural phenomena* include the sky, atmosphere, planets, heavenly luminaries, wind, dew, clouds and sea. *Minerals* particularly include precious stones, chief among which are carnelians, rubies and emeralds. *Vegetation* includes trees like the plane, pine and cypress, the latter tree representing the elegant stature of the beloved; and flowers like the lily, tulip, narcissus, and most of all, the rose, a symbol of God's beauty that enamores the human soul. *Animals* are mostly mammals and birds: mammals like the lion, elephant, gazelle, camel and horse; but more birds appear, such as the falcon, hoopoe, parrot, and chiefly the nightingale, symbolic of the soul in love with God's beauty; as well as fantastic winged creatures like the 'Anqa and the Simurgh. Some other animals are reptiles like the serpent, and insects like ants, fireflies and bees.

Most important of all, naturally, are *human beings*. Marked attention is given to the human body, especially the head and its various features like the face, lips, mole and down on cheek, dimple on chin, the eyes, eyebrows (beautified by collyrium) and tresses. Individual types of humans are described, specifically the beautiful and haughty Cupbearer, as well as the fair Turk and the dark Hindu. There are full-length poems on loving companions, in particular couples like Qays and Layla and Yusuf and Zulaykha; occasionally affection between two men is portrayed, as that between King Mahmud and his servant Ayaz. Alluded to also are human activities, including pastimes like chess and polo; the arts, like music, painting, calligraphy and weaving; and sciences or pseudo-sciences like medicine, astrology and alchemy. Human artefacts and symbolic objects are also treated, like textiles, the infidel girdle, the cross, idols, idol temples, taverns, the cup of Jamshid and the mirror of Alexander. All these motifs are interwoven with themes taken from the Koran, pre-Islamic and Islamic history and poetical geography, many of the motifs being charged with clear mystical symbolism.

[18] Annemarie Schimmel, *A Two-Colored Brocade. The Imagery of Persian Poetry* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

3.2 Restructuring

The second of our three main variations is the *restructuring* of the Plotinian categories, where their format itself is reshaped. It exists in four modalities, which may be categorized as multiplication, contraction, reversal and intermediation.

Multiplication is the first of these modalities; it occurs when one of the standard Plotinian hypostases, chiefly the second, is but numerically augmented. Farabi appears to have been the initiator of this kind of variation. In his view the One, or the first Being, necessarily generates, by an act of self-apprehension or contemplation, not just a single Intellect, but only the first Intellect. With it begins a procession of nine other such Intellects, through a bipartite process, whereby each Intellect comprehends its own essence and that of the hypostasis above itself. In so far as it comprehends the latter, it produces another Intellect (thus the First Intellect generates the Second, the Second the Third and so on); in so far as it comprehends its own essence it produces the body and soul of one of the nine Ptolemaic heavens, in hierarchical sequence (Empyrean, Fixed Stars, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the sun, Venus, Mercury, and the moon), each heaven being assigned in proper order to the Intellects, except to the Tenth. Thus Plotinus and Ptolemy are reconciled. This scheme, followed by Kirmani (who however assigns earth to the Tenth Intellect), is elaborated by Avicenna, who replaces Farabi's bipartite evolution with a tripartite one, according to which each Intellect apprehends its cause, itself as necessary through its cause, and itself as contingent in itself. When each Intellect apprehends its cause, it generates another Intellect; when it apprehends itself as necessary through its cause, it generates the soul of one of the nine heavens; when it apprehends itself as contingent in itself, it generates the bodies of those heavens. Avicenna further refines Farabi's scheme by making the First Intellect independent of any heaven, assigning the heavens to the remaining nine Intellects, that is, the Second Intellect to the Tenth.

Suhrawardi too adopts this modality, evidently deriving it from Avicenna, but giving it greater complexity. He subdivides Intellect into two groups: of the archangelic monads he calls the Victorious Lights, those of the vertical or longitudinal orders on the one hand and the horizontal or latitudinal on the other, the former order producing and the latter produced, but both unconnected with bodies. The monads of the vertical order are of pure light unmixed with darkness; they are differentiated according to their luminosity and are arranged in descending intensity, the lower monads caused by the higher, all constituting a hierarchy of Intellects producing spheres. The first in this hierarchy is the Supreme Archangel, immediately emanant from the One or the Light of Lights, and identifiable with Vohu Manah or Bahman, the second of Zoroaster's Seven Holy Immortals. A whole series of archangels emanates from the first, the one above dominating the one below, and the latter loving the one above. Each archangel functions as an Isthmus (*barzakh*) between the lights above and beneath. The monads of the horizontal order are of light sometimes intermixed with darkness, each member of the series being causally independent of any other in it. While they are unconnected with material bodies, they are related to the species of those bodies as their archetypes, and–as each species is classified as an "idol" or "icon"–are termed Lords

of Idols, Suhrawardi's version of the Platonic Forms. The Persian mystagogue has yet another order of Intellect which he identifies as Regents or Lords of Lights. They include human souls, and are in contact with both gross material bodies and the subtle material and phantasmagoric bodies of that new Muslim category, also Suhrawardi's, the Imaginal World. Of these three groups the first, the vertical Victorious Lights coincide with the Plotinian Intellect; the second, the Regents of Lights, with the Plotinian Soul. But the third, the horizontal Victorious Lights evidently constitute an intermediate category, having no exact Plotinian counterpart.

Contraction is the second of the modalities, where two Plotinian categories are fused into one. Such a fusion appears to have taken place in the schemes of Farabi and Avicenna, where the function of Soul seems to have been appropriated by the Tenth Intellect, which then splinters into a multitude of human souls.

Reversal is the third of the modalities, where the even rhythm of emanation is disturbed, and the position of some of the categories reversed. The rhythm of emanation postulates a graded degradation of perfection, with each successive hypostasis proportionately less perfect than the one before it. The evenness of the rhythm is broken if a category is disproportionately higher or lower in perfection than the one before or after it. In the Plotinian scheme, in the last three categories for example, Sensible World is perfectionally inferior to Soul, and Matter to Sensible World; indeed, Matter is the very nadir of imperfection. But for Farabi, Avicenna, Nasafi and Sijistani the order is reversed. Matter emerges before Sensible World: in Farabi and Avicenna after the Tenth Intellect; in Nasafi and Sijistani after Soul. Either Intellect or Soul generates the Matter and the Forms of which Sensible World is then constituted. For Kirmani, however, the most imperfect Matter emerges in the middle of the evolution of the hypostases of Intellect itself, from the Third Intellect, to be precise. There the perfectional level of Intellect dips precipitously, to shoot up again with the emergence of the Fourth Intellect, continuing therefrom the even degradation of perfection until the Tenth Intellect is emanated.

Intermediation is the fourth and perhaps most important of the modalities, produced by the intromission of intermediary categories in the points occurring between the members of the Pentad. This multiplication of intermediaries seems to be a response to a basic difficulty in emanationism, where all the categories or hypostases following the first successively degrade from its omniperfection and infinity. The transition from the infinite to the finite is sought to be achieved by a process of removing ever greater degrees of perfection from the omniperfect ultimate hypostasis, the removed perfection justifying the degradation and the remnant perfection constituting the degraded hypostasis. But such a transition appears to be unjustifiable. For the perfection removed from what would otherwise have been an infinitely perfect hypostasis (rendering it in consequence finite) is either finite or infinite. If infinite, the removed perfection will be total and the remnant perfection null and not just finite. If the removed perfection is finite, the remnant perfection will still be infinite (for the infinite cannot be diminished, and hence no degradation will have taken place). If the remnant is finite, then, since the removed and remnant perfections are both finite, and together would constitute the infinite hypostasis, its infinite perfection would be the sum of two finite

perfections. Finite plus finite does not equal infinite. The emanationists feel that this quandary can be resolved by emphasizing the gradualness of the transition from infinite to finite merely by increasing the number of intermediary categories.

Muslim theologians insert their intermediary categories in the four intervening points of five members of the Pentad, the first point between the One and Intellect, the second between Intellect and Soul, the third between Soul and Sensible World, and the fourth between Sensible World and Matter. They appear to concentrate on the first and third points. At the first point, between the One and Intellect, Ghazzali interjects the Obeyed One, Suhrawardi Irradiation and Ibn 'Arabi Absolute Mystery. At the second point, between Intellect and Soul Suhrawardi interposes Regents of Lights. At the third point, between Soul and Sensible World Suhrawardi intromits the Imaginal World (or that of Image Exemplars), Ibn 'Arabi Perfect Man, and Mulla Sadra the Hierarchy of Names and Forms. The new categories are added mostly for theological reasons, for they help adapt the Plotinian Pentad to Muslim doctrine.

To take the intermediaries at the first point, Ghazzali appears to have been the first theologian to introduce an intermediary category of any sort, which in his case was the *Obeyed One*.[19] This prime theologian of Islam distinguishes between two aspects of the supreme Being, an undifferentiated aspect on the one hand and a creative one on the other; the undifferentiated aspect is the One and the creative the God of the Koran, Allah. This God's power is absolute, independent of the activity of any being outside itself, for "When He decrees a thing, He need only say 'Be,' and it is" (Koran 2:117). In coming to be creation obeys this command; Allah is thus the Obeyed One. But when Ghazzali speaks of a being so described he seems to have in mind a Koranic passage that refers not to God but to the Prophet Muhammad, the fact that the revelation given to him "is the word of a gracious and mighty messenger, held in honor by the Lord of the Throne, obeyed in heaven, faithful to his trust" (19:21). As God and the Prophet are each aptly describable as the "Obeyed One," it appears that Ghazzali is identifying the Prophet with Allah, the speaker of the command, similar to the manner in which the Logos is said to be one with the Father. Once spoken, Allah's command becomes Intellect or Universal Intelligence, identified by many Muslim thinkers with Adam, the male creative principle–from which emanates Soul, said to be Eve, the female creative principle.

Suhrawardi's intermediary at the first point is *Bahman* (equivalent to the Zoroastrian *Vohu Manah*, Good Spirit), the Supreme Archangel, emanating directly from the Light of Lights, the Persian theologian's version of the One. This category is also termed the Primordial Irradiation, and is said to be the equivalent of the Mazdean Spirit of Glory (*Khvarenah or Khorreh*). Through this Irradiation, the Light of Lights, self-contained and inward luminosity, flashes outwards (not unlike the self-illuminant Brahman of Nondualist Vedanta, whose creative flash projects the illusory cosmos) and thus initiates the process of emanating the phenomenal world, a process that begins with the vertical Victorious Lights. Ibn 'Arabi's intermediary at the first point is the first of the five Presences later established by his school, comprising those of the divine Essence, Attributes or Names (= Intellect), Operations or

[19] R.C. Zaehner, *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), chap. 8, p. 172-174.

Energies (= Soul), Imaginal World (or Image Exemplars, new category), and Visible World (= Sensible World). The first Presence, also termed the *Presence of Absolute Mystery or of All-Comprehensiveness and Being*, emanates directly from Essence; its function is to safeguard Essence's total solitariness while yet relating it to the phenomenal world. This Presence is adorned with other magniloquent titles like *Reality of Realities, first Entification, Nondelimited Effusion of the Essence*, or simply God as One. While Ibn 'Arabi seems to have only one intermediary hypostasis at this point, his disciple Qunawi appears to insert another, the *Emanation from the One, All-Pervasive Being*, or *Breath of the Merciful* (or *Sigh of Compassion*).

Of the intermediaries at the second point, between Intellect and Soul, there is, as was noted, at least one, Suhrawardi's *horizontal Victorious Lights*.

Placed at the third point is *Imaginal World* or *Image Exemplars*, consisting of forms not individuated by matter (as the forms in the category below it are). They are self-subsistent, and include reflections in mirrors, as well as dreams, visions, imaginative constructs, the conjurings of prophets and magicians, the location of miracles and eschatological events. The Imaginal World is less immaterial than the world of Souls but more so than the Sensible World. Perfect souls pass directly to the realm of Lights, but less developed ones are first purified in the Imaginal World in bodies that are distinct from their material bodies, but like them have external and internal senses and are controlled by rational souls. (Dante has an analogous concept in the *Purgatorio*,[20] the aerial body, which however endures only until the Last Judgment.)

Sadra, like many others, accepts the category Imaginal World, but appears to interpose, at this point, an additional intermediary, *Natures* and *Forms* (partially equivalent to Suhrawardi's Lords of Idols or Species). They are a type of Platonic Forms containing a corporeity of an immaterial kind. Below them is the world of Simple Bodies (Sensible World), their gross physical embodiment.

Intermediate at the third point is Ibn 'Arabi's and Qunawi's *Perfect Man*, who is said to be the totality of the five Presences. As interpreted by 'Arabi's follower 'Iraqi, the Perfect Man's archetype corresponds to the first Presence (identified as Divine Knowledge), his Spirit to the second (World of Spirits), his complete being as comprehensive of the other Presences to the third (Perfect Man), his soul, intermediary between his Spirit and Body to the fourth (Imaginal World) and his Body to the fifth (Material or Visible World). The Perfect Man, is distinguished from the Animal Man, who is part of the Visible World: in the former the Name "Allah" exists manifestly and in the latter only virtually. The Perfect Man, embodied in the Prophet, has two perfections, the essential servanthood and the accidental manliness. Simply put, Perfect Man is the totality of differentiated being (Plotinian categories 2-5), and as such, is a reflection or mirror of the undifferentiated being, the One (Plotinian category 1). His placement between Soul and Visible World is another example of the reversal described above.

[20] Dante, *Purgatorio*, canto 25: 79-108.

3.3 Reinterpretation

Reinterpretation is the third and last of the three major Muslim variations on the Pentad. It is itself of three kinds, metaphorical, philosophical and moral or volitional. The *metaphorical* is that adopted by Suhrawardi, who identifies the One with his Light of Lights (a title applied by the *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad*[21] to the Brahman). The Koran itself declares that God is light (24 : 35), an idea which is developed by Ghazzali, who reverses the metaphor, when he observes that "The real light is Allah ; and the name 'light' is otherwise predicated only metaphorically and conveys no meaning… Allah alone is the Real, the True Light, and beside Him there is no light at all."[22]

Philosophical interpretations include those that identify the One as Essence (Suhrawardi and Ibn 'Arabi), or Existence (Mulla Sadra). For Ibn 'Arabi the divine Essence, without reference to the creatures, is God Himself. As *Essence*, He can only be described by negative attributes, as what He is not, rather than what He is. For Sadra, on the other hand, God is pure *Existence* devoid of essence. Sadra argues that if God's nature were to be a composite of essence and existence, it would be a duality and not an incomposite singularity ; its existence would be an accident superadded to its essence, one that would have to be caused either by that essence or by some extrinsic entity. In either case it would be contingent and not necessary ; in either case, too, the divine essence would be prior to the existence.

The last type of restructuring is *moral or volitional*, like the category Love, identified by Ahmad al-Ghazzali with the One. For later theologians, developers of Ahmad's thought, this Love is an inclination toward perfection. In God, who in His essence is undifferentiated being, this perfection consists in the manifestation of His Names and Attributes in entitatively differentiated emanations, material and immaterial, through which and to whom He becomes known or loved. It is this Love, immanent in the One, that generates plurality. According to Jami, who gave the concept one of its clearest expressions–in his romantic epic *Yusuf and Zulaykha*–the Divine Being, from all eternity, prior to the procession of the emanations, abided in the solitude of His unconditioned Essence, in which the eternal possibles or Names remained latent as the Hidden Treasure of the *hadith* referred to above. Filled with compassion for Himself, who wished to be known, and for the as yet hidden Names who wished to know Him, He gave expression to this compassion in a Sigh. This Sigh of Compassion (or Breath of the Merciful) evolves in a threefold process :

1. The solitariness of the deity before creation ;
2. The urge of the deity to communicate itself ;
3. The manifestation of this urge in creation, in the phenomenal world.

Jami's relevant passages,[23] quoted below, show his skill in combining the abstract formulation of Sufi mystical theology with the idiom of Persian poetry.

[21] *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad*, 4 : 4 : 16.

[22] Ghazzali, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

[23] Jami, *Yusuf and Zulaikha*, chapter on the Nature of Beauty. Translation adopted from that of Hadi Hasan, *A Golden Treasury of Persian Poetry*. 2nd revised edition by M.S. Israeli (New Delhi : Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 1972), p. 292-294.

1. ***The solitariness of the deity before creation***. In that pristine solitude when of existence there was no trace; and the world was concealed in non-existence. He constituted existence: all by Himself, without semblance of duality, without any talk of Thou and We. Confined to Himself alone, He was the Absolute Being; and His manifestation was only from Himself to Himself. That Beloved, the ornament of the heart, was then in the bridal chamber of the invisible world. His face unreflected by mirror; His hair not parted by comb; His tresses unwafted by breeze; His eyes not darkened with collyrium; on the roses of His cheeks, no hyacinths of tresses; on the flower of His face, no verdure of the down. No mole or painted spot on His clear face; unseen; uncontemplated–in such a wise did He dwell, playing to Himself the tunes of love–playing by Himself (for Himself) the game of love.

2. ***The urge of the deity to communicate itself to creation***. But since it is the nature of Beauty to disclose itself and to remain morose behind a veil–for Beauty tolerates no concealment and if confined will peep through the window of the cell. And just as the tulip growing on the hillside, radiant with joy at the advent of spring, bursts through the crevice of the flower-crushing rock and displays its beauty; or just as thy mind when it conceives a rare and original idea knows no rest until it has expressed it in words spoken or written–even so does Beauty desire to reveal itself and be admired; and the first to feel this inner urge was the Eternal Beauty (God Himself).

3. ***Manifestation of this urge in creation, in the phenomenal world***. Wherefore He descended to the world of phenomena and manifested Himself in all objects, animate and inanimate. Every object became a mirror to reflect one or more of His Attributes; and every place became a forum of His talk… With a flash of His Light the earth was irradiated; and the heart of the Nightingale [the lover, the soul] began to clamor for the Rose [the Beloved, God].

It is interesting to compare this concept of the divine impulse to self-communication, as formulated in Muslim theology, with its expression in the Christian. In the Muslim variant divine self-communication takes the form of creation (the world of phenomena), conceivably coeternal with the divinity, but not coequal with it in perfection; in the Christian variant, divine self-communication takes form of the Trinity of Persons, coeternal and coequal in perfection. For Christian orthodoxy the phenomenal world also originates from divine self-communication, but one that is free and uncompelled, and which may never have taken place. The Christian variant is given expression to by the Scottish theologian Richard of St Victor (fl. 1130-1173+), whose rationale, expounded below, is organized in a fourfold sequence:

1. Divine omniperfection includes charity or love;
2. This love cannot be self-centered but must be directed to another;
3. The other person to whom divine love, the highest kind of love, is necessarily directed, must be condign;
4. The only condign person worthy of the love of a divine person is divine, and not creaturely.

1. ***Divine omniperfection includes charity or love***. From what was said above we have learnt that in that supreme and universally perfect Good there will be the plenitude and perfection of all goodness. Where there is the plenitude of all goodness, true and supreme love cannot be lacking. Nothing is better than love, nothing more perfect than love.

2. ***This love cannot be self-centered but must be directed to another***. No one is said to have charity/love through a love that is private and confined to oneself. It is necessary, therefore, that the love reaches out to another, so as to be charity.

3. ***The other person to whom divine love, the highest love, is necessarily directed must be condign***. So where a plurality of persons is lacking, charity absolutely cannot be. But you will perhaps say that although there might be only one Person in that true divinity, yet it could have charity even toward the creature, and would in fact have it: however, it could certainly not have the highest charity toward a created person, for such a charity would be inordinate. It is impossible for an inordinate love to exist in the goodness of that supreme wisdom. A divine person could not therefore possess a supreme love for a person who was not worthy of that supreme love. So for love to be of the highest order and supremely perfect, it needs to be so great that it cannot be any greater; it has to be of such a kind that it could not be any better. As long as one loves no other but himself, he who has this private love for himself demonstrates that he is not in possession of the highest grade of charity. But the divine Person would not have anyone but itself to love worthily, if it did not have a condign Person at all to love.

4. ***The only condign person worthy of the love of a divine person is divine, and not creaturely***. No one who was not God could be a condign object of love to a divine Person. In order that the fullness of love could find a place in that true divinity, it was necessary that to a divine Person, a condign person–and therefore divine companionship–would not be lacking…

5. ***Summary of the argument.*** Certainly only God is supremely good. Only God is therefore to be loved supremely. The divine Person could not express supreme love to a person lacking divinity. The plenitude of divinity could not exist without the plenitude of goodness. And the plenitude of goodness could not exist without a plurality of divine Persons.[24]

Richard of St Victor is convinced that God can be neither a unipersonal being nor one manifesting Himself in a perfectionally degraded phenomenal cosmos indistinct from Himself. For the omniperfect divine Being to have remained solitary (or unipersonal) would have been a miserly withholding of an infinitely communicable good. To have compulsively communicated Himself to beings inferior to Himself and lacking in omniperfection would have been an inordinate diffusion of that good. Only self-communication in a Trinity of coequal and coeternal Persons is worthy of that divine Being.

Constat utique quod in illo indeficienti bono summeque sapienti consilio, tam non potest esse avara reservatio quam non potest esse inordinata effusio. Ecce palam habes, sicut videre potes, quod in illa summa et suprema celsitudine ipsa plenitudo gloriae compellit gloriae consortem non deesse.[25]

[24] Richard of St Victor/Richardus S. Victoris, *De Trinitate*, lib. 3, cap. 2. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 196, cols. 916-917.

[25] *Ibid.*, cap. 4, col. 918. "It is surely evident that, in that inexhaustible Goodness and supremely wise Counsel, there can neither be a covetous withholding nor an inordinate pouring forth. As you can see, it is clear that in the highest and supreme Eminence, the very plenitude of glory demands that there be not lacking an equal participant in that glory itself."