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Being and Knowing According to an 8th/14th Century Cairene Mystic.

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Richard McGregor

Being and Knowing
According to an 8th/14th Century Cairene Mystic

The Eighth Century Hijra in Cairo, despite the occasional famine and earthquake, saw a flowering of intellectual activity. Mamluk rule had taken hold, and its princes joined the civilian élite in patronizing institutions of learning and religion. This was also the period which saw the expansion of the sufi orders, the most important being the Ahmadiyya, the Rifā‘iyya and the Shādhiliyya. The last order was established by Abū al-Hasan al-Shādhili in the middle of the 7th/13th century, and was refined by the able mystical thinker and second khalīfa of the order, Ibn ʿĀṭa Allāh al-İskandari (d. 709/1309). The former had provided the figure of a saintly founder, while the latter wrote not only the founder’s hagiography, but also inspired poetry and several works on sufi practice and theory.1 Another intellectual force of the era was the mystical philosophy of Muhý al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabî (d. 638/1240), the impact of which was unparalleled in the history of sufism. Even in his lifetime, Ibn ʿArabî was a famous figure.2 His works were certainly known in Egypt, although there does not seem to have been much of an Ibn ʿArabî “school” per se.3 In the same period Cairo itself produced its greatest mystical poet, Ibn al-İfârî (d. 632/1235).4 His compositions advanced mystical ideas much in line with those of Ibn ʿArabî. The former’s work was the subject of many commentaries, some of the most important of which were produced by thinkers deeply influenced by Ibn ʿArabî. Another ingredient in this rich intellectual mix was philosophy, which had come into Islamic thought early on.5

1 On the history and literature of the Shādhiliyya see chapter two of my Sanctity and Mysticism in Medieval Egypt: the Wu’fî Sufi Order and the Legacy of Ibn ʿArabî, forthcoming from the State University of New York Press.
2 In his Risāla, Ibn Ẓâfrī records his having met Ibn ʿArabî, saying of him:

“وكان من أكبر علماء الطريق وشهرة علما وتصانفه كثيرة”

3 The efforts to propagate his teachings by his step-son and most important follower Șadr al-Dīn al-Qinawī were more successful in the Turkish and Iranian milieux than they were in Egypt. See C. Addas, Ibn ʿArabî ou la quête du soufre rouge, Paris, 1989, p. 276.
It is into this milieu, in 702/1302, that Muhammad Wafā’ was born. His grandfather had come from Tunisia, settling in Alexandria and establishing his own zāwiya (mosque-shrine complex). Muhammad Wafā’ travelled around Egypt, finally taking up permanent residence on the island of Roda. Here in Cairo his fame as a mystic spread, and although he had been a member of the Shādhiliyya order, he began to lay the foundation of a new order, that of the Wafā’iyya. This effort was continued by his son ‘Ali Wafā’ (759/1357-807/1405), who played an important role in defining the character of the order. ‘Ali also marked the beginning of a long line of prominent figures from the Wafā’ family, who would impact public religious life for the next five-hundred years.6

The mystical writings of Muhammad Wafā’ drew on the devotional techniques of the Shādhiliyya order, the theosophical insights of Ibn ‘Arabi, and certain elements of Islamic Neoplatonism.7 The following pages will explore his development of some central ontological and epistemological subjects, in particular the following:

1. Supreme being and its relation to creation,
2. The dimensions of divine being,
3. The nature of mystical knowing,
4. The levels of existence,
5. The existential dimension of spiritual direction.

At the outset it should be said that Muhammad Wafā’ does not write in a systematic fashion. His project is the inspired exploration of a mystical reality. In this effort he draws on various strands of mystical thought; his tools include poetic language, traditional sufi vocabulary, the insights of Ibn ‘Arabi, and Neoplatonic concepts. The portrait emerging from this brief study provides historians of thought insight into the workings and production of mystical tradition in 8th/14th century Egypt.

Absolute Being and Its Self-Disclosure

The idea of absolute being (wujūd mutlaq) revolves around the question of the nature of existence in relation to the divine. The implications of this viewpoint are significant. Seeing God’s existence as the only existence, while a logically tenable position, was not generally acceptable to Muslim orthodoxy. The need was felt, even among a majority of mystical thinkers, to preserve some recognizable distinction between the Divine and creation. The relationship between the central Islamic tenet of the Oneness of God (tawḥīd) and the existential nature of creation became the matter of debate. Although a small but impressive school developed around the idea that material existence is essentially spiritual, sharing in the single existence of All,8 the dominant understanding in sufism was one which recognized both the absolute being (wujūd mutlaq) of God and a qualified or contingent being for all else.

6 For more on the history of Wafā’s see Sanctity and Mysticism in Medieval Egypt, ch. 3. Muhammad Wafā died 765/1363.
7 For a survey of both Muhammad and ‘Ali Wafā’s writings see my “New Sources for the Study of Sufism in Mamluk Egypt” to appear in BSOAS.
Doubtless the most sophisticated exposition of this Oneness of God in relation to the plurality of creation, came from Ibn `Arabi. His position on this, thanks to his later followers, came to be called “Oneness of Being” (وحدة الوجود). This doctrine posited first the absolute Being, “…for nothing exists other than God, His attributes and His acts. Everything is Him, is through Him, proceeds from Him, returns to Him; and were He to veil Himself from the universe even for the space of the blinking of an eye, the universe would straightaway cease to exist.” To this is added the idea of God’s Self-disclosure (تجلی), thus providing a mode of existence with apparent independence. This Self-disclosure must occur through His names and attributes, since absolute being is beyond creation’s ability to comprehend. Ibn `Arabi writes, “God does not disclose Himself in the name One, and there cannot be Self-disclosure within it, nor in the name God. But Self-disclosure does occur in the other Names that are known to us.” This Self-disclosure is unlimited in its possibilities, but its divine origin is concealed by the veils it acquires as it takes particular form. Only through spiritual insight can any of these existential veils be lifted.

Ibn `Arabi’s teachings on this subject are elaborate, but these are the basic outlines of what in short-hand came to be called “Oneness of Being”. With this explanation in mind, let us turn our attention to Muhammad Wafä’ in order to situate him within the discussion of the nature of Divine and created existence.

There is no shortage of passages in which this Oneness is referred to. We read, for example:

The essential existence (존재) is (God) the Encompassing, since it is the existence of all the existents. It is the (divine name) “god”, since it is described by the encompassing attributes. Through the connections of wisdom, its name is Allah.

In this quotation it is important to note that Muhammad Wafä’ follows comments on the absolute being of God with descriptions of this being’s particularization. Both of these are present in the passage just cited. Mention is first made of the encompassing nature of God’s existence, but this is immediately followed by its particularization. The point here is that Muhammad Wafä’ at once upholds the concept of a single absolute existence, but also emphasizes the dynamic relative existence of particular entities derived from this absolute.

The vehicle for the particularization of this absolute existence—according to both Muhammad Wafä’ and Ibn `Arabi—is the dynamic of Self-disclosure (تجلی). The Sha’ā’ir al-`irfān describes this process as part of the divine aspect of Encompassing: “The Encompassing (إضاحية) is multiplication of the one by Self-disclosure into various forms,

11 Muhammad Wafä’, as presented in ‘All Wafä’s, Kithâb al-masâmî al-rabbîniyya, Dār al-kutub al-Mi‘riyya, Ta‘awwuf Îälîm 174, fol 3b. (In this and the following passages quoted from the Wafä’ manuscripts I have not edited the texts.)
12 “الوجود الذات هو أHighest of beings, all the existents and His acts. Everything is Him, is through Him, proceeds from Him, returns to Him; and were He to veil Himself from the universe even for the space of the blinking of an eye, the universe would straightaway cease to exist.”
Elsewhere these connections are described as a thing’s esoteric name, linking it to Divine necessary being. It serves as a link, for the people of spiritual tasting, to the Eternal. See Muhammad Wafä’, Kithâb al-azal, p. 53.
like water as it thickens with cold." These Self-manifestations take place through a complex process, moving from non-existent possibility to existential necessity. Muhammad Wafâ’ describes necessary existence as the sustainer of the divine Attributes, but adds,

This (existence) Self-discloses upon levels of possibility according to the preparedness (استعداد) of each level.

Preparedness is the reality (حقيقة) of prime matter which subsists in the essence of the possible. This reality is divinely derived (الإبداع), rather than directly created (الإيات).15

The reality of this derivation is the preparation of prime matter for the accepting of form. This form is directly created.16

…The reality of its preparedness is the acceptance of the Self-disclosure of the Necessary.17 Thus, the result of Self-disclosure—moving things from the possible into the necessary—is determined by the particular abilities of the various levels of prime matter to accept the Self-disclosure of Necessary Being. This ability is essential to (possible) prime matter; in other words, it is not as such part of the process of divine Self-disclosure.18

The result of the preparedness receiving the Self-disclosure is the form. What results from this reception is “direct creation”, that is, a moving into existence according to a form, which itself was determined by the simply derived (i.e. possible) preparedness.

This Self-disclosure plays a dual role. On the one hand it serves to bring the Divine nearer to His servants, but on the other, it acts as a veil. In a discussion emphasizing the need of the worshipper to transcend the product of Self-disclosure, the highest level of forgiveness is that in which one’s derivative existence is surpassed.

Forgiveness and unbelief are both from the veil (of Self-disclosure); yet there is a difference between them since unbelief is the hiding of al-Îaqq by creation, and asking forgiveness is the hiding of creation by al-Îaqq.19 Asking forgiveness occurs on three levels:

15 That is, as a simple possible, it has no concrete existence.
16 That is, it moves fully into creation.
18 In other words, this prime matter is a kind of pre-existential entity and should not be confused with manifest creation, which is the result of creation via ta’jâl. See W. Chittick, The Self-Disclosure of God, p. 89. This creation scheme is similar to that of Ibn ‘Arabî, which also describes things coming into existence according to their preparedness. W. Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge. Ibn ‘Arabî’s Metaphysics of Imagination, Albany, 1989, p. 91-92. Ibn Sinâ (d. 428/1037), also uses an emanative system of creation, but for him ibdâ’ refers to that creation which is not subject to form; cf. L. Gardet, La pensée religieuse d’Avicenne, Paris, 1951, p. 63. He also distinguishes between formal (قائمة) and material (mayınَن) creation. A.-M. Goichon, Lexique du langage philosophique d’Ibn Sinâ, Paris, 1938, p. 414, and S.H. Nasr, An Introduction of Islamic Cosmological Doctrines, Albany, 1993, p. 219.
19 In his definition of ta’jlîq (verification), al-Qâhânî says: “...the verifier is neither veiled by al-Îaqq from creation, nor by creation from al-Îaqq”; Kitâb istijlâh al-îsâfîyya (A Glossary of Sufi Technical Terms), ed. and trans. N. Salwat, London, 1991, no 485.
1. By wearing down (مَاشتَهِلَ)20, which is asking forgiveness essentially, and which is that no sign (رَيْبُهُ) persists for the servant, and there is no notice to be had of his (own) being.

2. By drowning (عَطَرَ), which is asking forgiveness by the attributes, which is that the asker of forgiveness knows that it is he who has been forgiven.

3. By being veiled (نَشْمَتْ), which is asking forgiveness by the acts, which is that his being in things is by his Lord, and not by himself.21

Thus “unbelief” is essentially allowing creation to distract from the Divine, while “forgiveness” is allowing the Divine to distract the individual from creation. The three modes of asking forgiveness then, are the levels of existential rapprochement with the absolute Being. The highest level is one at which the servant’s being is obliterated in his essence. The other levels entail an existential differentiation of the servant from his Lord.

Also, by serving as a link between created beings and God, *tajallī* provides potentially limitless knowledge. Human perception (الَّذِى نَظَرَ)–like any other creation–is the product of a particular reception of Self-disclosure.

Without doubt, perception is the mirror of the unveiling of the Self-disclosure of knowledge in the known. So in perception manifests the known containing the Self-disclosure, without attaining quiddity…22

Every known thing has a locus which accepts its Self-disclosure at the time of reception, so its image manifests in it (the locus) as it (the locus) is then. It is said of this image, by virtue of this Self-disclosure, that it is a “possible occurrence”.23

So by this, everything from the unseen reality has a position in perception able to receive its particular reception of Self-disclosure.24

Thus one’s knowing a thing consists in accepting the Self-disclosure which engenders an image, according to its locus. This image is understanding. Although it is the result (at least initially) of a Self-disclosure, it remains only a non-necessary possibility. This determination is due to the receptive locus.25

In the last line of the passage it is made clear that all things in the realm of the unseen truths are potentially subject to becoming a Self-disclosure.

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20 The Dār al-Kutub ms, 28b, has مَايَتَهَلَ (beginning or opening) here which would seem to be a copiest’s mistake. By this wearing down the mystic’s carnal soul may be controlled, so that his spirit (نَارَى) can rise upwards; cf. L. Massignon, The Passion of al-Hallîj III, trans. H. Mason, Princeton, 1982, p. 347.

21 Muhammad Wafâ', Shifâ’îr al-‘Irîfîn, al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya (Cairo), Majâmî’ 1076, Zakî: 141313, fol 142b. Also, by serving as a link between created beings and God, *tajallî* provides potentially limitless knowledge. Human perception (الَّذِى نَظَرَ)–like any other creation–is the product of a particular reception of Self-disclosure.

22 That is, to know of a Self-disclosure, rather than to know or simply see a Self-disclosure.

23 Ibn Sînà uses the Hadith in the same way. See A.-M. Goichon, Lexique, nos. 136, 64.

24 Muhammad Wafâ’, Kitâb al-asâl, p. 38-39. "الإدراك: تَتَفَكَّرُ العَلَّمُ مُنْعَمَةً لِلْمُتَحَذِّلِ بِهِ لَمْ يَحْكُمَ عَلِيَّ مَعْلُومًا (أَنْ هُوَ مَعْلُومٌ) ياَمَا مَا وَهُوَ بِهِ يَقَالُ عَلَيْهِ هَذَا الْمَثَالُ، يَقُولُ هَذَا الْمُتَحَذِّلُ، يَقُولُ هَذَا الْمُتَحَذِّلُ". "This recalls our earlier discussion of preparedness, and Ibn ‘Arâbî’s claim that Self-disclosure takes form according to the disposition of the recipient: "الإدراك: لا يكون إلا بصورة " (Fusûs al-Îlamî, p. 61).
As for Self-disclosure as an active creative principle, the following passage provides an example of its use specifically from the perspective of the creation of the intellects and material beings. The technical terms used would reward closer analysis, but such an exercise will have to wait for another study. The general message, however, is first that God, through His aspect as the Encompassing Intellect, moves by *tajallî*, to give rise to form, which itself is the reception of an absolute. From this form are generated the souls and the (necessary) intellects, which are the progenitors of humanity. From here Muhammad Wafâ’ goes on to restate the creative descent according to a neoplatonic model. Here the First Intellect is described as engendering the souls and intellects within the absolute Soul, or the spiritual world, giving rise to creation in all its varieties. The passage begins as follows:

When the Essential Will turned towards creating the form of all-encompassing Knowledge, It originated through Self-disclosure, with respect to the form of intellected encompassment, absolute receptacles (to receive) the encompassing influences in various particular ways. That Will gave to the form of knowledge–through its receptacles for divine origination, in this respect–intellects as fathers and souls as mothers, like Adam and Eve.26

Thus the entity knowledge, through its essential disposition, receives from the exitentiating Will the specifics that are intellects and souls. Within the physical realm, each of these, established the form of itself and the multiplications of the individuals (constituting) its species within the comprehension of its genus, like the plants in their morphological differentiation and in their variety of taste, smell and touch, beyond what the human imagination may conceive. Within this existential drama the First Intellect gives rise to the absolute principle (in this case) of souls and intellects, located in the absolute Soul.28 These principles function as the “seeds” for each particular subsequently created.

If this is understood, then we say, according to similitude, that the First Intellect as the first fatherhood originates intellects and souls in the absolute Soul. Each of these (intellects and souls) is an absolute in itself, and the encompassing of their species and genera is like the seed of the plants. If it brings out its branches, leaves and fruit, then its particular form appears in its very fruit, which is its unique and ultimate level.

Thus the fruit, or the various things in creation, are in some sense the fulfillment of their principles in the Universal Soul. Muhammad Wafâ’ then moves to the question of humanity, and its variety in intellect and soul. We saw above that the principles of intellect and soul are unitary and undifferentiated in the First Intellect, and that the fathers and mothers in the absolute Soul constitute differentiation. Our intellects may share a common source, but they have different fathers and mothers, representing different predispositions to receiving the creative Self-disclosure.

26 Ibn ‘Arabi uses the terms father and mother in much the same way, yet in a less philosophical context. W. Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge, p. 142.
27 The First, or Primary, Intellect in traditional neoplatonic philosophical cosmology is the first thing the Divine thought when It considered itself. The resulting First Intellect is the primary creative principle.
28 The Universal Soul is located below the First Intellect, from which it receives the creative emanation.
When the fruit of the whole is the children of Adam, all of them (the fruits) are based upon intellect and soul, being the fruit of diversity. And the fathers and mothers which were from the divine Self-disclosure are the creators and originators. Every tree is (from) a seed of their fruit, a root of their tree. Thus, the world occurred in its form with innumerable faces, and inexhaustible (divine) help. So each intellect judges the world by the form which has occurred in it, like... the viewpoints of the creeds and the sects\(^\text{29}\) according to the differences of their conceptions.

This is the existential blueprint for God’s progressively differentiated Self-disclosure, yet also possible is a “perfect intellect” which offers a mystical return to the unified.

In various spheres and horizons, each (sect) knows its own salat and praise, but the perfect intellect is the seed of the fruit of the encompassing tree of all roots and divisions. Vision does not know this face (of the perfect intellect), yet it knows all visions. As is said, “is it not He who encompasses all things?” (Q. 41:54).\(^\text{30}\)

The world thus occurs in an endless variety, yet the perfect intellect knows these forms within itself. It knows these forms are not inherent, but derived ultimately from God’s Will. This unitive perspective is possible only within the existential framework, based on divine Self-disclosure, laid out above by Muhammad Wafâ’.

**The Pre-Existential and the Everlasting**

A peculiar set of concepts which Muhammad Wafâ’ develops is that of azaliyya (pre-existence) and abadiyya (everlastingness). Although he does not take up the wider philosophical or theological questions of time in his writings, Muhammad Wafâ’ nevertheless addresses this pair of ideas on more than one occasion. In one instance, the two are distinguished categorically:

> Know that the encompassing Throne is that below which is the likeness of everything. It has two sides to it: a side of Omniscient-Merciful-Necessary-Pre-existence (ازاليّة وأحببها رحمانّة عالمية) and a side of All-Hearing-Compassionate-Possible-Everlastingness (رحمانية ممكنة نسيم إبدية) (اردّک).

These two sides might be awkwardly named, but the essential point is that the Pre-existential is distinct first because it is “necessary”, while the Everlasting is of the “possible” realm.

We have here the distinction between contingent beings; one class (intelligences and angels)

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\(^{29}\) Compare this to Ibn‘Arabi’s position that the servant sees God in the form of his own (predisposed) belief. *Fusûṣ al-‘Ushûm*, ed. A. ‘Alîh, Beirut, 1946, p. 121: “عدّدنا قلم الحجاب بين و بين: "كِرَآءَةٍ في صورة ممتعة كلامها في نفسه واحتفاظ نوعها وحسن كهف النبات إذا أخرجت نعوظه وربت ورتبوا ثم خرجت كانت صورتها الخاصة لها في عن أسرتها... فهي الزريّة عنها فنسنا أن كانت بهم ثورة الشجرة الجامعه. كل منها تأتي معلقة ونفس هن في ثورة وح من الوضع الشعور والآمال والآفان التي كانت عن التّجلي البراءة الإلهية المفهومة وبدعة وكل شجرة لما شمرتها لصلح العالم بصرته في وجه لا يتنتعب عدا و لا يندفع مما عليك يحكم على العالم بصره ما فعله فيه... كيويكل الغفل والجحل على الإخاذ صورتها وكذلك في سار الراك ونافل كل فد علم صلاته ونسح ونفّل الوجه هو لب ثورة الشجرة المحبطة في جامع الأصول وكل فعل مشرقة وهذا هو الوجه الذي لا شكره الأصل وهو بدرك الأشياء وكما قال لا أنه يكون في محظى.

\(^{30}\) Muhammad Wafâ’, *Sha‘ârîr al-‘Iršân*, Dar al-Kutub, fol 33a.
is necessary, while the other (sublunary bodies subject to decay) is contingent. As is clear from the other adjectives provided, God “knows” everything before creation, and He “hears” everything in time after creation. The second side of the Throne, the contingent, is fully within time. The same kind of temporal/existential distinction is made elsewhere by our author. We read: “Pre-existence is encompassing in oneness, while Everlasting is encompassing in plurality... The first is by necessity while the second is by possibility.”

Pre-existence is thus understood to be in the realm of God’s necessary attributes, while Everlastingness is the corollary present as temporialized individualization.

In a further elaboration, Muhammad Wafā’ introduces an inverse relationship. He describes each element as a dimension of the other:

What is interior to the Pre-existent is what is manifest in the Everlasting; and likewise the opposite. None other than the servant appeared in the Everlasting, yet his opposite was hidden in him. None other than a Lord appeared in the Pre-existent, while that which was hidden was the form of the first (i.e. the servant). Thus, that which appears because it was hidden, was hidden because it appeared.

These brief remarks are the extent of the substantive discussion in the sources. However, there are a few observations we can make. It is clear that the two aspects, the Pre-existent and the Everlasting, function as the necessary and the possible (or divine and human) realms. The aim of the last passage however is to highlight the link between the two. The created servant appears in the Everlasting created realm, but he is, at the same time, the possessor of “his opposite”. This opposite is an existential opposite, a Lordly potential. Likewise, the Lord’s standing in Pre-existence contains within it its opposite, a potential servanthood. This elaboration goes beyond the philosophical treatment—at least that developed by Neoplatonists like Ibn Sinā. The linking, or resolution, of the two aspects represent Muhammad Wafā’’s turn once again to the “unity of being” for perspective.

**Spiritual Anthropology**

For Muhammad Wafā’, the nature of humanity must be understood as at once having its source in the Divine, yet being a manifestation of one particular aspect of God: the Name al-Rahmān (the Merciful). Like Ibn ‘Arabi, Muhammad Wafā’ attributes to Adam a share in the Divine Names. In the Shā’ā’r al-‘irfān we are told that in the spiritual realm, before creation of the material world, Adam was not simply taught the names of things, but was himself the product of Divine Names: “Know that humanity is a collection of the Lordly Names which were known by Adam in the spiritual realm of Malakūt, and which contain both essential realities and particulars, and thus are the strongest links (رقائق) (to God)…”

33 Muhammad Wafā’, *Shā’ā’r al-‘irfān*, Dār al-Kutub, fol 50b.
34 Muhammad Wafā’, *Shā’ā’r al-‘irfān*, Dār al-Kutub, fol 38b. See also fol 50b.
35 Muhammad Wafā’, *Shā’ā’r al-‘irfān*, Dār al-Kutub, fol 27a, b.
Ibn ‘Arabî, in a different context, also assigns Divine Names to Adam: “God created Adam upon His own form. Hence He ascribed to him all His Most Beautiful Names.”

Muhammad Wafâ’ goes on to single out the name al-Ra‘îm as the source of humanity’s spiritual reality. First, the act of creating is tied to al-Ra‘îm: “Knowledge and the known, creation and the created, origination (تکریس (تکریس and becoming (Kon). The first pair is engendered by God, the second by al-Ra‘îm, and the third is by al-Haqq.” However, not only is al-Ra‘îm the source of creation and the created, it is the Divine aspect which is immediately accessible and linked to mankind. We are told,

God is the unseen of all things, and everything is identical (عينه (عينه with Him... for the absolute Unseen only appears as identical (to something), either by Self-disclosure or act or likeness or composition... “Your Lord creates and chooses what He wills; they have no choice in the matter.” (Q. 28:68) But when the lights of the knowledge of (divine) Presence burn the perceiving sense, it sees the unseen of all things in its essence (i.e. God). “Say: None in heaven or on earth knows the unseen except God.” (Q. 27:65) Humanity is the couch (سرير (سرير of al-Ra‘îm; in gnosis is the extinction of man and the subsistence of al-Ra‘îm. Al-Ra‘îm is the source (عين (عين of the unseen of everything...

Thus, by its faculty of gnosis, humanity may see the unseen. It is by being the couch of al-Ra‘îm (i.e. the receiver of the divine Self-disclosure) that mankind attains this perspective. It is as a mode of al-Ra‘îm (the Eternal, the Necessary) that the individual is more than simply one who is in heaven or on earth (the created, the possible).

This same spiritual anthropology is echoed in Muhammad Wafâ’s comments on the veils of creation. He describes a striping away which leads from humanity to the Divine. A passage from the Sha‘îr makes on this point:

The interior (الناظر (الناظر of the heart is the mirror of al-Haqq and the site of sincerity; and he to whom his Lord makes Himself known his heart is turned toward Him (قيله انقلب إليه) (قيله انقلب إليه); and in it (his heart) are Self-disclosed the lights of His truth, and in it are confirmed (the meanings) of the signs of His creation.

In the section quoted, the essential connection between an individual and God is recast in physical terms. The perception of this Divine presence within oneself allows an understanding which is beyond the normal perspective of a created being. It is by the existential link between the Divine and humanity—usually described as a process of Self-disclosure—that one may share in God’s knowledge. This dynamic appears to go both ways, that is, downwards into creation, as well as upwards. We read: “the heart of the gnostic

37 Muhammad Wafâ’, Sha‘îr al-‘rîfân, Dâr al-Kutub, fol 41b.
is the Pen of al-Rahmân, by which He writes upon the Tablet of possibility what is, and what has been”. 40 Although brief, this passage clearly points to the heart as a tool used in the process of creation, that is, the process of divine Self-disclosure. Note also the association once more between al-Rahmân and creation.

This essential link between God and humanity has implications for the latter’s self-knowledge. In short, humanity’s knowledge of self is also knowledge of the Divine:

He who finds the reality (حقيقى) of God’s secret has found his heart, and he who knows it (his heart) knows his Lord, and he who is ignorant of it (should know) “there is no power except in God”. (Q.2:165).41

This is of course an often repeated idea in the work of Ibn ‘Arabi, as it is for Muhammad Waf’â’. However, knowledge may be described in a rather different way. Muhammad Waf’â more than once speaks of the individual as the source of his own knowledge: “What unveils to you is your own known (things), from you and to you–at every level according to its measure…” 42 In the same vein is the following comment on gnostics and verifiers:

The gnostic is identical with his gnosis, and the verifier is the reality of what he realizes (الحقى حقى ما حقى). Commensurate with the witnessing of perfection and completion is the love of the witness for what he witnesses. Commensurate with the sincerity of love is the realization of the lover in his beloved. Commensurate with realization is the manifestation of the Realized by virtue of what is realized to him by the source and by the sign. God is All-knowing and All-encompassing. It is He, in as much as He is it (هو ما هو هو)…43

Here the initial assertion that the verifier is himself the source of verification is subsequently shifted to point to the Divine as the ultimate source. According to this later emphasis, the gnostic is the source of his gnosis in as much as it is manifested to him through his sincerity of witnessing and love. In other words, it is by the fact that God may be found in himself that the gnostic or verifier may find his “own” gnosis and reality. The last sentence of the passage may therefore be better understood–be it awkwardly sounding–as “He (the gnostic) is Him, in as much as He is him”.

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43 ‘Ali Waf’â’, Kitâb al-masâ‘î al-rabbîniyya, Dâr al-Kutub, fol 50a:

"لا يكمثل لنا ما لم يعلم منك وليك في كل مكان بهبس.

The last phrase appears also in the writings of ‘Ali Waf’â’. See his Kitâb al-wanîyâ, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, no 1359, fols 48a, 104b.
Cosmology

The question of how existence, in all its forms, is organized is important to any mystical or philosophical speculation. The ultimate order of things provides a structure within which all else must operate. In Muḥammad Wafāʾ’s thinking however, cosmology is much more than a simple accounting of stars and spheres; it includes the human being.

As we saw earlier, Muḥammad Wafāʾ was no stranger to the Neoplatonic understanding of the universe which was headed by the First Intellect, followed by an absolute Soul.44 However, this cosmological system was not the one earnestly or systematically adopted by him. Instead, he focused on a cosmology which recognized three worlds—the world of omnipotence (jabarūt), the world of sovereignty (malakūt) and the corporeal world (mulk).

Despite similarity in terminology, this was not exactly the system adopted by Ibn ‘Arabî, since the latter held, in at least one important discussion, jabarūt to be an intermediary world between the worlds of mulk and malakūt.45 It is interesting to note, however, that al-Qāshānî’s definitions of the three worlds, a century later, are in line with those of Muhammad Wafāʾ.46 As we shall see, Muhammad Wafāʾ has a number of ideas play out in his descriptions of the cosmos.

In one cosmological model Muhammad Wafāʾ describes a universe, each part of which has its own ruler. The focus of this model is, however, the human form which becomes a microcosm of the larger cosmos. We are told,

The world is divided into two: the world of spirits (أرواح) and the world of bodies. Then it is divided into four branches: spirits of prophethood, angelic spirits (أرواح ملكية), spirits of jinn, and the Adamic forms. The First Intellect is the father of the spirits of prophethood, like Adam is the father of the human forms (أبو الأشياء), and likewise Gabriel47 is the father of the angelic spirits, like Iblis (Satan) is the father of the jinn spirits. All that is of human form has a prophetic spiritual form manifesting to it and rising from it, commanding it and forbidding it, inspiring it, improving it and making it pious. To each Adamic form there are two associates (فرسان), one is angelic and the other jinn-like. These two struggle, and if the angelic triumphs over the jinn-like, then clearness is established in the water by the falling of the sediment, and the commanding prophetic spirit rises, and its image appears in him/it by manifestation—like the shape of the seer appears in the mirror. If it conquers the jinn, then its affinity is close to the angelic, but if it is far, then it is Satanic and muddiness that prevails. Sight is then veiled and communication is

44 In all the Wafāʾ writings however, there is no explicit mention of Aristotle or the Arab and Persian philosophers (e.g. al-Fārābī, d. 339/950, Ibn Sinā, d. 429/1037) who used this cosmology, which saw the divine emanation take form as a series of spheres or intellects. For a concise description of this cosmology see P. Heath, Allegory and Philosophy in Avicenna (Ibn Sinā), Philadelphia, 1992, p. 37.


47 In the Nafā’is al-‘Irāfân text, Gabriel is replaced by Jabarūt.
cut, for “he to whom God does not give light, has none” (Q. 24:40). This Commanding Spirit is that which will settle the account of the servant on Judgement Day, and will reward him according to his acts, since, “your soul suffices to make an account against you” (Q. 17:14). He who knows himself, knows his Lord.48

This model—which is perhaps as soteriological as it is cosmological—has as its ultimate concern the fate of each “Adamic form”, that is, the individual soul. In this system the First Intellect engenders the spirits of prophecy, which function as warners and moral aids to the soul. Despite this help, the soul becomes the battleground for the forces of Satan and those of Gabriel. The final lines of this passage, evoking the image of one’s own soul standing as witness, provide a novel perspective on the oft-repeated hadith “he who knows himself knows his Lord”. The implication is that if one wants to know God the keeper-of-accounts, one need only know oneself.

All things may be divided between the necessary and the possible. The first category is engendered by God’s Command, while the second is brought about by His aspect as Creator.

(1) The Spirit of Command (روح الأمر) is from the treasury of the world of divine Power (قدرة)، and in it the unseen of the Necessary determines itself through Self-disclosure of the beautiful Names and lofty Attributes… and the archangels by the Throne and the Seat and the Tablet and the Pen…

(2) The Spirit of Creation (روح الخلق) is from the treasury of the world of (divine) Wisdom, and by it the bodily forms and spiritual shapes are determined; … and these two are Mulk and Malakūt, and the world and the hereafter, and what is in them of things heard, seen and felt.49

Here Muhammad Wafā’ has divided the cosmos into two, the necessary realm of God’s Names and Attributes, angels etc., and the realm of possible created beings—whether seen or unseen. The lower realm consists of Mulk and Malakūt, while the higher will elsewhere be identified as Jabarūt. In a brief, but clearer, distinction between the three worlds, Muḥammad Wafā’ writes,

The world of command, the world of creation, and the world of becoming—these are Jabarūt, Mulk and Malakūt; charity, faith and submission; the reality of certainty, the eye of certainty, and the knowledge of certainty; need, poverty and needfulness. These three levels are the beginning, the end and the middle.50

Here the division of worlds is extended to mirror certain virtues, to distinguish between modes of spiritual insight. Another brief statement ties the three worlds directly to specific divine aspects:

The worlds are three: the world of Mulk, which accepts (قابل) divine Acts only; the world of Malakūt, which accepts the divine Self-disclosures; and the world of Jabarūt, which accepts the divine Realities. The first is by Act, the second by Attribute and the third by Essence.51


49 Muhammad Wafā’, Nafā‘is al-‘Irifān, al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya, fol 78a.


51 Muhammad Wafā’, Nafā‘is al-‘Irifān, al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya, fol 76b.
The model here represents a simplified emanative scheme. The lowest world, that of Mulk, is the realm which exists by—or receives—only God’s Act. Above that, Malakūt has received the less formal Self-disclosures, and above that in turn the world of Jabarūt represents the first step of emanation, that of the divine realities communicated essentially. Elsewhere the point is much the same, even though the terminology is reshuffled. In his Kitāb al-azal, Muhammad Wafā’ writes: “Jabarūt is by the Essence and Attributes; the Malakūt is by the Names and the Named; the Mulk is by the tenuries and the moments.” 52 Here the Attributes are placed at the level of the Essence, with the successive level of Malakūt representing the Names and the Named. That the Attributes have now moved up to the Jabarūt signals an inconsistency, and the exact difference between the Names and the Attributes is not clear, yet the scheme of I. unknowable essence, II. general particularization, III. specific entities, remains clear.

Elsewhere Muḥammad Wafā’ supplies a more detailed account of the worlds, one which introduces their constituent elements. Of the three worlds,

... the first is the world of Jabarūt, which is the divine world, the second is the Malakūt, which is the spiritual world, and the third is Mulk, which is the world of formal soul. The first in Jabarūt is the divine world, and what reaches it does so at two bows'-length 53. The second world is that of Malakūt which is the world of spirit, and what reaches it is “gabriellness” acquired through angelic inspiration descending upon the heart. “The sure Spirit came down with it to your heart” (Q. 26:193-194). The third is Mulk, which is the world of pillars (of the physical world), of the engendered. And what reaches it is the jinn, by the righteous Command...

The world of Mulk is centered in the body encompassing the four elements, which are water, fire, earth, and wind, from which are born the minerals, the plants, the animals and the (practical) reason used for the lives of people. The world of Malakūt is centered in the separated Spirit 54, which encompasses the four substances: the intellect, the soul, the creative faculty, and the commanding Spirit. Present through these are the Preserved Tablet, the Pen, the Throne and the Seat. The world of Jabarūt is self-standing by encompassing the absolute Being, distinguished by the four (divine) realities: Knowledge, Life, true Existence and the encompassing Face—all of which) descended (from this realm) by the Attribute, the Name, Light and Self-disclosure...

This description of the three worlds presents a progression from the most elemental, up to the spiritual substances, finally ascending to the eternal attributes of the Divine. There is here also an association of specific figures with each world: the Prophet (by two-bows’

52 Muḥammad Wafā’, Kitāb al-azal, p. 74.
53 Two bows'-length is either an allusion to Gabriel communicating revelation to the prophet Muhammad (Q. 53:9), or, as is more likely in this context, Muhammad’s direct encounter with God.
54 That is, the divine Spirit, after it has been separated from the One, and has taken distinct (non-material) forms.
55 Muhammad Wafā’, Ṣuffī’s al-irfān, al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya, feî 95a, b.
length) with Jabarūt, the angel Gabriel (by “gabrielness”) in Malakūt, and the elemental jinn with the lower world of Mulk.

The three worlds are also represented by unique kinds of angels. We read of the “pure illuminated angels and cherubs” of the Jabarūt; the angels Gabriel, Michael, Isrāfîl and ʿIzrāʿîl of the spiritual world that is the Malakūt; and the “earthly angels, the souls of the spheres and the knowing messengers” to be found in the world of the four elements, that is, the world of Mulk.56 In marked distinction from this angelology, Muḥammad Wafāʾ elsewhere simply says, “Gabriel is the Jabarūt, the eye of all unseen of the Godhead… and Michael is the Malakūt, the eye of all the spiritual, angelic, soulful and imaginal shapes…”57 Thus the archangels may have a metonymic function, each representing an entire realm.

A particularly interesting element of Muhammad Wafāʾ’s understanding of the three worlds is his description of the connections between them. In Peripatetic psychology the five bodily senses are accompanied by a “common sense” (حس مشترک), which is the cognitive faculty lying behind the five senses. Muhammad Wafāʾ introduces this sense as the link (barzakh) between the world of Mulk and Malakūt. More significantly, he describes a related link, between Malakūt and Jabarūt, which he calls the “common intellect” (عقل مشترک).58 In a passage describing these links we read,

The possible is divided into the visible (ملكي) and the invisible (ملكوني) realms. The visible is divided into six parts: the five senses59 and the “common sense”. The invisible is divided into six parts: estimation (متوهمة), imagination, preserving, remembering, reflection and the “common intellect”. The “common sense” is the link between the visible and invisible. The “common intellect” is the link between the invisible and the Jabarūt.

Know that the five senses, along with the “common sense”, are the six days in which God made creation. They are known as “days” because they are the lights of elucidation, the clarification of vagueness and the revealing of the unseen. They are the keys to the heavens and earth.

Thus, seeing (بصر) is the key to the treasure-house of visible things, and their light and elucidation. And (so are) hearing, … smelling, … tasting, … touching. The “common sense” is all of these things, their presence and preservation, in the state of the absence of their original sources.60

Imagination is their treasure-house and the utmost occasion of their pure form. This is the clear horizon, and the furthest Lote-tree.61 Thus the invisible lights (of the unseen world) are face to face with these visible lights.

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56 Muḥammad Wafāʾ, Nafâʾis al-ʿirfān, al-Maktaba al-ʿAzhariyya, fol 81b.
57 Muḥammad Wafāʾ, Shaʿrīr al-ʿirfān, al-Maktaba al-ʿAzhariyya, fol 143b.
58 This term seems to be an innovation of Muḥammad Wafāʾ’s. On the philosophical term maṭrakah; see A.-M. Goichon, Lesique, p. 70, and Ibn Sinā, Livre des directives et remarques, trans. A.-M. Goichon, Paris, 1951, p. 317, fn. 5.
60 That is, the “common sense” synthesizes and organizes the data from the five senses.
61 The clear horizon (Q. 81:23) recalls Gabriel’s revelation to Muhammad, while the Lote-tree is the sidrat al-muntahā (Q. 53:14), which is the limit of the Prophet’s ascension to God.
These twelve lights are the realities of the preparedness of the tablet. All of its levels are accepting of the emanated forms from the Pen. This is the “rational faculty” (القوة الناطقة). God has elucidated this in the transcript that is humanity. So he who knows himself knows his Lord.

He is the throne, under which is found the likeness of all things. He is the throne, under which is found the likeness of all things. 62

The definition given here of “common sense” is straightforward. This sense, along with the five interior senses, like estimation (وهمية), imagination, preserving, remembering and thinking. The “common sense” operates in parallel to “common sense”, but at the point between Malakût and Jabarût. The “rational faculty”, according to Ibn Sinâ is the highest part of the soul, and receives from the eternal Active Intellect. 63 Yet this is not Muḥammad Wafā‘is final word on the matter.

Elsewhere, to these two linking senses is added a third, the “choice connection” (مختار). This connection links Jabarût (here representing a further set of abilities) to the absolute Necessary. This set is described not with philosophical terminology, but rather with traditional mystical terms.

There are three worlds: the world of Mulk, which is a place from the viewpoint of sensation by the five senses. The “common sense” is the link (بيرزح) between the Mulk and Malakût, which is the second world. This is a place from the viewpoint of the intellect (مقترح), which is the fifth sense, the secret, the unseen secret; and the “choice connection” is the link between the absolute Necessary and Jabarût. This “choice connection” is the Throne of al-Rahmān, hidden in it by Omniscience and appearing from it by Self-disclosure; and it acts without restriction by choice because Absolute Necessity effuses from the Essence. 65

62 Muḥammad Wafā‘, Kühâl al-‘azal, p. 60:
63 These comprehensions equate with the concept of the Ḥulûf (subtle substances) of earlier suf thought. These substances— as spiritual rather than physical or psychic faculties—function as organs linking the human and divine worlds.
64: The heart (قلب), the inner heart (أحلاظات), the secret, the unseen secret; and the “choice connection” is the link between the absolute Necessary and Jabarût. This “choice connection” is the Throne of al-Rahmān, hidden in it by Omniscience and appearing from it by Self-disclosure; and it acts without restriction by choice because Absolute Necessity effuses from the Essence. 65
Thus the “common intellect” is the cognitive faculty behind the internal senses, leading to the world of Jabarūt. This Jabarūt itself is then linked to the Divine by the “choice connection”—another term which Muhammad Wafāʾ appears to have coined. This connection is equated with the function of the Throne of Mercy, although in the previous quotation it appears at a lower level. It is noteworthy that the proviso is made that it “acts without restriction and by choice”. This is probably a nod to the Qur’anic vision of God as unfettered and omnipotent, as distinct from the philosophical vision which often denied God any choice in the matter of emanation. Perhaps more interesting though, is this term “choice connection”. In the previous quotation we met the “rational faculty” which seemed to be the highest human point; yet here the “choice connection”, located beyond a further set of (mystical) senses, seems to represent that point. This connection functions much as the ‘aql qudsî did for Ibn Sinā; an intelligence which is described as having ready access to the Active Intellect.66 Significantly, Muhammad Wafāʾ’s formulation presents a dimension beyond the Neoplatonic “rational soul”. This development (which is more anthropological than it is cosmological) shows us where Muhammad Wafāʾ’s true intellectual allegiance lies. That is, he is above all a mystical writer, and thus the highest human dimensions are described using sufi terminology. It would be fair to conclude that Muhammad Wafāʾ uses philosophical models and language as far as they may be of service to him in presenting his own mystical vision.67

Thus this “cosmology” is not a physical model of the universe. For Muhammad Wafāʾ the structure of existence may be made sense of in a number of different ways. We saw earlier in this section that the lower worlds represent possible existence, while the upper represents necessary existence. This is a philosophical perspective, yet we also saw a theological one. There Jabarūt was associated with God’s Realities and Essence, with Malakūt presenting God’s Attributes, and Mulk the divine Acts. We were elsewhere presented with a rather linear perspective which simply presented the lowest world as the material realm, the median as spiritual realm, and the higher as the divine realm.

**Spiritual Direction**

Although this study has not presented the reader with a historical portrait of Muhammad Wafāʾ or of his sufi order, it may be noted generally that the Wafāʾiyya was quite elitist in character. A quick survey of the writings of Muhammad Wafāʾ shows a distinct lack of the prescriptive counsel one might expect from the founder of a mystical order. Instead he seems to have nurtured for himself an inspired and mysterious image, one which did not much care for the details of spiritual direction.

66 A.-M. Goichon, Lexique, p. 230. The polished soul (ṣīr) looking at the Majesty of holiness (ṣuūr al-quds) is similar. See Ibn Sinā, al-lūlūr wa al-tanbūḥāt, IV: 92.

67 It is probably no coincidence that the earlier discussion of the rational faculty and its position as the highest human point was to be found in his most “philosophical” text, the Kitāb al-azāl.
Nevertheless, help for the aspirant on the sufi way is not wholly absent in his writings. Muhammad Wafā’ was, after all, striking out from the Shādhiliyya on an independent course, which necessitated at least some attention to the development of aspirants. One short work, *Maqāmāt al-saniyya li al-sāda al-sūfiyya* (The Sublime Stations of the Sufis), presents brief definitions of mystical vocabulary followed by cursory elaborations. The tone and form suggest this is a pedagogical text, a kind of manual intended for the novice. However, this kind of writing within the œuvre of Muḥammad Wafā’ is a remarkable exception. The composition in question covers only nine folios of the approximately three-hundred folios his writings occupy.

Yet this is not to say that all of Muḥammad Wafā’’s writing is speculative and abstract. At the beginning of the *Sha’ārār al-irfān* the reader is provided with basic definitions of a number of mystical terms:

- **Servanthood** fixes the command of Lordship. **Oneness** is the last level of with-ness (متعة) …
- **Humility** is the quieting of the soul along the paths of pre-existence… **Asceticism** is leaving all things (ترك الكل)… **Courtesy** (إد) is standing in the provisions of the moment. **Certainty** is the absence of indecision. **Remembrance** (ذكر) is the summoning of the remembered…
- **Perspicacity** (فراسة) is the extraction of the unseen from the seen. **Extinction** is consuming everything in God. **Persistence** is the fixing of everything by God.

Beyond these rudimentary pronouncements, we do find other passages which treat some of the basic distinctions an aspirant should be made aware of. In the following, the categories of spiritual men are described.

For the ascetics, their sciences are embodied in their acts. For the sufis, their sciences are embodied in their states. For the gnostics, their acts are embodied in their gnosis. For the verifiers, their states are embodied in their realities. Thus the ascetics find what they know by what they do; and the sufis find what they verify by the traits they assume; and the gnostics find what they do by what they know; and the verifiers find what they assume as traits by that which they are verified of.

The distinctions being made here are rather straightforward, adhering to a spiritual hierarchy which privileges realities (ِحاگی) and gnosis over temporary states and acts. In the same line of discussion—that of the basic categories of mystics—Muḥammad Wafā’ elsewhere writes:

> The face of the gnostic is a mirror of the Self-disclosures of known Attributes. The verifier is the model of what is verified to him. And the sufi has assumed the traits, which are related

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70 A popular hadith among sufi writers is one attributed to the Prophet: “Assume the character traits of God!” See W. Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 286-288.

71 Muhammad Wafā’, *Naḥfa al-irfān*, al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya, fol 87a:

> أزهار الدرجات علومهم في اعمالهم وصوفي اندرجت علومهم في اعمالهم والعارفون اندرجت علومهم في معارفهم وانفقون اندرجت علومهم في حقيقاتهم فازهاد وجدوا ما علوا فيما علوا وانفقوا واجدوا ما أتفرغوا في ما تتفرغوا والعاقرون وجدوا ما علوا فيما علوا وانفقوا وجدوا ما تخاطروا فيما تخاطروا.
(attributed) to the object of his desire in sanctification. Union is the source of his perfection, occurring only with the melting together of opposites, which is impossible normally and conceptually.72

These discussions of categories are rather brief, and they are noticeably missing the expected advice as to how the novice is to make head-way on the spiritual path. It seems that Muhammad Wafā’”s advice, on this level, is restricted to making observations such as “the knower (عَلَمَّ) realizes al-Haqq from the side of creation, but the gnostic (عَلَمَّ) realizes creation from the side of al-Haqq”.73 The apparent lack of concern exhibited for the spiritual advancement of lowly aspirants is striking, especially from the perspective of a hopeful founder of a new sufi order.

However, it should not be surprising that Muhammad Wafā’ presents some interesting speculations on the deeper mystical aspects of the subject. He characterizes the relationship between the spiritual aspirant and the master as one of existential union. This union even comes to mirror that between the servant and God. To start with, he ties together the essence of the aspirant, his spiritual guide and his Lord.

He who has no teacher, has no protector; and to him who has no protector Satan draws near.74

He who knows himself knows his shaykh. He who has not found his shaykh has not found his heart, and he who has not found his heart has lost his Lord.75

The details of the presence and function of the shaykh are also described. This relationship is rather mysterious, but seems to centre on the attributes of the shaykh. The description runs as follows:

Your shaykh is he who causes you to hear when he is silent. He makes you oblivious when he speaks. He causes you to be lost when he finds (God in ecstasy); and he causes you to find (God) when he is silent. Your shaykh is he who informs you by his speech, and he verifies you by his (spiritual) state, and he establishes you by his vanishing, and effaces you by his perfection…76

The point that the aspirant is existentially linked to the attributes of the shaykh is clear. Elsewhere, Muhammad Wafā’ describes this relationship as extending beyond the visible world. We read: “The heart of the aspirant is the house of his teacher, and his body is

72 Muhammad Wafā’, Nafīs al-‘irfān, al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya, fol 84a, b: “وجع العرف لواليات مكعب معرفة واتباع عيان ما تقوم به الصوفي هو التعلق بالأخلاف الدقيقة التي تمثله بالتمييز والجمع على كالمه لا يحصل إلا مع وجود اجتماع العقلين المستحسن عادة وفعلا.”


75 Muhammad Wafā’, Nafīs al-‘irfān, al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya, fol 99a, b: “من ليس له أساتذة (8) ليس له مولي و من ليس له مولي فليس له إماميان به اوتي.” “من عرف نفسه فقد عرف شيخه نفس من لم يجد شيخه لم يجد قلبه ومن لم يجد قلبه فقد رى.”

76 Muhammad Wafā’, Shukr al-‘irfān, al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya, fol 139b: “يشبه من اسمعك فأنا سكوت وفظيكن فأنا عقل وأفتقاد و من جد واحد يشبه من عقل ودفتيكن فأنا عند ومثل شراءن.”
his grave in which he is buried, and from which he rises.’77 This image is further developed by Muhammad Wafā’ when he concludes: ‘He who has no son is not remembered.’ The gist of the images is that the timeless unseen spiritual presence of the shaykh is to be found in the heart of his follower.78 The connection between aspirant and shaykh is also explained in the context of the “oneness of being” insight. We encountered a passage earlier which is worth repeating here:

If you know your teacher and imām—guiding you by his necessary divine existence—then you know your Lord, al-Haqq. Do you know who He is? He is simply the source of your divine existence, as determined for you on the level of distinction of your being, by which you see that you have no existence except Him.79 Thus the guide, by his own share in necessary existence, is to his follower the divine Presence. An individual may find the Divine in himself, but also, and perhaps more easily, it may be accessed in certain others. It is also made clear that knowing al-Haqq in the teacher is a specific insight, which hinges on ones seeing that there is no real existence except in God.

In an even more dramatic formulation of the relationship of the aspirant with his guide, Muhammad Wafā’ describes the former as a kind of manifestation of the latter. In one brief statement the follower is identified with the creative “mercy” of his master. We read: “The heart of the aspirant is a throne for the rahmāniyya (mercifulness) of his teacher to sit upon.”80 As we noted earlier in section four of this paper, the creative impulse of the Divine is associated with the name al-Ra‘mān and the Throne; here that function is being transferred through the teacher. This transference is repeated at a lower level by other statements describing the aspirant as a kind of mouthpiece for communication of the insights of the shaykh. One such passage runs:

The sincere aspirant is the eloquent pulpit (منبر ناطق) whom the teacher climbs after his divesting himself of the physical worlds (عوالم الجسم). He (the aspirant) informs, by his sincere tongue, of what he has witnessed of the realities.81

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77 Muhammad Wafā’, Naḥīṣ al-ʿifān, al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya, fol 100a: ‘قلب المريد عرش لاستاده وقلب قره الذي يده في وسعته.’
78 The Iranian mystic Ṭayy al-Qudāt al-Hamadānī (d. 525/1131) noted that the aspirant is to contemplate God in the mirror of the spirit of his teacher. In turn, the teacher will contemplate himself in the mirror of his disciple, as God contemplates Himself through the mirror of creation. See H. Landolt, “Two Types of Mystical Thought in Muslim Iran”, Muslim World 68, 1978, p. 197; and F. Jahanbakhsh’s “The Pir-Murid Relationship in the Thought of Ṭayy al-Qudāt al-Hamadānī”, in J. Ashbyjani (ed.), Consciousness and Reality: Studies in Memory of Toshihiko Izutsu, Leiden, 2000, p. 132.
80 Muhammad Wafā’, Naḥīṣ al-ʿifān, al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya, fol 100a: ‘قلب المريد عرش لاستاده وقلب قره الذي يده في وسعته.’
81 Muhammad Wafā’, Naḥīṣ al-ʿifān, al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya, fol 100a: ‘قلب المريد عرش لاستاده وقلب قره الذي يده في وسعته.’
From this it is clear that the follower becomes a medium for use by the spiritually elevated (or deceased?) shaykh. Further, it seems this follower must himself have first achieved a purifying spiritual insight. The passage ends by stating that this follower’s task is then to broadcast what has been communicated to him.

It would be fair to say that Muḥammad Wafā’’s advice to novices in general is rudimentary and does not hold our author’s attention. Yet the idea of the spiritual function of the shaykh, and the aspirant’s relationship to him, received substantial reflection. It should be no surprise to find Muḥammad Wafā’ at some point referring the question back to the immanent existential divine Reality of creation. In this context the shaykh serves as simply one of a number of possible divine Self-disclosures. Thus, to know the shaykh is to know the Lord. More intriguingly perhaps, Muḥammad Wafā’ also describes the transference of spiritual insight from the shaykh to the aspirant—and emphasizes the latter’s central function as an inheritor, as it were, and as a transmitter.

In these five short discussions a variety of subjects touching upon existence and insight have been broached. Central to Muḥammad Wafā’’s mystical perspective is the overarching concept of existence, at base belonging only to God. This is not to say that a degree of individuality is not held by created entities. On the contrary, this is the result of the Divine Self-disclosure. Muḥammad Wafā’ follows Ibn ‘Arabî here, yet presents his own refinements. We saw him laying out his understanding of the relationship between Self-disclosure and the “preparedness” of prime matter. We also saw him moving beyond this by presenting the “perfect intellect” as an ultimate perspective which transcends this process of creation. Divine Self-disclosure is important to understand, but a deeper unitary perspective is the desired next step. The second discussion dealt with the concepts of pre-existence and eternity. Here there is first an identification of pre-existence with oneness and necessity, and of eternity with plurality and the possible. Yet the turn is then made to integrate these two poles. Each is hidden within the other, and thus in some sense essential to it. In the discussion of Muhammad Wafā’’s mystical anthropology, we saw that it is through God’s name al-Raḥmān that the individual is linked to Necessary existence. This link may be accessed not only by the knower understanding that knowledge is within himself, but also that this interior knowledge is in essence of divine origin. In the fourth discussion, that of “cosmology”, we saw Muḥammad Wafā’ building on the received neoplatonic model. He lays out the worlds, the senses and the intellects, but then proceeds to build upon them. Here sufi terminology is used to complete and build upon a philosophical structure. The last discussion touched on the relationship between follower and spiritual guide. Of note here was the slide from a transmission of knowledge to a kind of transmission of being. The guide becomes the follower’s link to the necessary divine Existence.

82 In the previous “gem” we are told that the “eloquent speaker (nāṭiq) is he who speaks by the tongue of his follower after his divesting (or purification).” Therefore, it is the “eloquent pulpit” who “informs... of what he has witnessed of the realities” and not the shaykh himself. This makes all the more sense when read in light of ‘Alî’s implied claim to be the continuation of his his father’s sanctity.