WRITING THE KALEIDOSCOPE OF REALITY: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DIVERSITY IN THE 6th/12th CENTURY PERSIAN METAPHYSICAL LITERATURE OF SANĀĪ, 'AYN AL-QUḌĀṬ AND 'AṬṬĀR

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Georgetown University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theological and Religious Studies

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Washington, DC
August 22, 2017
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the significance of diverse forms of diversity in the writings of three 6th/12th century authors of Persian metaphysical literature, Sanāʿī of Ghazna (d. 525/1131/1131), ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī (d. 525/1131) and Farīd al-Dīn Ṭṭṭār (d. 618/1221), using methods of holistic reading. In particular, these authors approach diverse aspects of reality, religious belief, and the cultivation of humanity from multiple points of view, facilitated by the use of materials from diverse pre-existing Islamic intellectual and literary discourses. The core substantive argument of the dissertation is that the writings of Sanāʿī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and Ṭṭṭār are pluralist and perspectivist. By ‘pluralist’, I mean they actively valorize diversity. By ‘perspectivist’ I mean that they hold that there are multiple valid ways of understanding and describing reality.

Since in most cases the understanding of an author on any given issue involves the integration of multiple points of view, partial and selective readings of their works will often provide a misleading picture. As such, the core interpretive argument of the dissertation is that the pluralist and perspectivist character of the writings of Sanāʿī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and Ṭṭṭār means that their works are best read holistically. To read holistically is to read with the goal of addressing holistic questions. The efficacy of this holistic reading is demonstrated by the solutions it provides to particular problems in the study of each author.

Finally, I show how characteristics of the writings of these authors develop from their original syntheses of diverse points of view, the majority of which can be traced to a range of
different Islamic intellectual and literary discourses. Thus, the core historical argument of the
dissertation is that the pluralist and perspectivist characteristics of the writings of Sanāʿī, ‘Ayn al-
Quḍāt and ‘Aṭṭār result from their conscious and original synthetic engagements with diverse
discourses of the 6th/12th century. In the conclusion of the dissertation, I suggest that the findings
presented on these three authors open new vistas to discovering the shared characteristics of
6th/12th century Persian metaphysical literature as a unique yet heretofore unrecognized stage in
Islamic literary and intellectual history.
Dedicated to my wife, Latifeh Aavani
My mother, Anthea Boylston
And to the memory of my grandmother, Avocet Phelps

هرگز نمیرد آن که دلش زنده شد به عشق
ثبت است بر جریده عالم دوام ما
Acknowledgements

To paraphrase Sa’dī of Shiraz, were all the hairs on my body to become tongues and join in the task, I would still not be able to give due thanks for all the support that brought this dissertation to its conclusion. It is difficult to put into words the importance of the relationship with my advisor over so many years, but most of all I am grateful to Dr. Paul Heck for helping me to discover and begin to become the kind of scholar I really want to be. Dr. Heck seemed to know exactly when to allow me to loosen the reins and follow my developing intuitions and when to encourage me to rein the project in and focus on the execution. Without his support I could never have considered taking on a project of this magnitude, and without his keen eye the final form of this dissertation would have left much to be desired. Dr. Madigan’s assistance as co-advisor and Director of Graduate Studies was also vital; not only did the many insights he imparted stay with me throughout the journey, but his support in managing the complexities of life while doing a PhD was much appreciated. Dr. Ahmet Karamustafa provided valuable insight along the way, and I am grateful for the attention and precision that he brought as a reader. I am also deeply thankful to my other reader, Dr. Justine Landau, for her warm encouragement and her thoughtful comments on the dissertation, which will provide a crucial resource as the project continues to develop.

As Directors of Graduate Studies during the latter half of my doctoral study, I am also grateful to Dr. Jonathan Ray, and also Dr. Terrence Johnson, who though taking on this task only while my work was in its final stages, nevertheless provided critical advice on how its significance can be explained beyond the field of Persian studies. For funding my doctoral studies, in the first place I am grateful to Georgetown University, the Department of Theology, and especially the
Chair, Dr. Francisca Cho. Moreover, the financial independence to see the dissertation to its completion was provided by the Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute, which awarded me the Roshan Institute Fellowship for Excellence in Persian Studies for the year 2016-17. It is difficult for me to imagine how I could have completed this project without this support, and I am thus truly thankful to the Roshan Institute and its Chair and President, Dr. Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali.

In addition to the humanity and intellectual vitality of the Department of Theological and Religious Studies, I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to many outside Georgetown who have provided crucial components of my training. My understanding of Islamic thought and Persian culture is deeply indebted to Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and my project benefitted from his insight from its initial stages until its completion. In addition to encouraging me early in my scholarly development to pursue my studies in Iran, Dr. Nasr imparted knowledge of many of the nuances necessary for understanding the texts I work with. Moreover, the original idea for this project developed while I was attending his lectures on Persian literature. I also owe an un repayable debt to Dr. Gholamreza Aavani, who not only tirelessly taught me Islamic philosophical texts but also sponsored and provided me with accommodation during my three and a half year stay at the Iranian Institute of Philosophy. His encouragement throughout my doctoral studies provided an endless source of solace and reassurance. At the Iranian Institute of Philosophy, I had the great pleasure to study the letters of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī with Dr. Babak Alikhani, whose instruction has proved to be the foundation on which a large part of this project was built. The entire Department of Islamic Philosophy and Theology at the University of Tehran deserves my gratitude for their hospitality and instruction during my MA, and I must thank Dr. Faramarz Gharamaleki, Dr. Najafqoli Habibi, as well as Dr. Gholamhossein Dinani, whose instruction bore direct fruits in this dissertation. The guidance and friendship of my teacher in classical Persian
music, Ostad Mohammad Abdoli, provided to keys to be able to hear a little of the music of the
texts I have been working with him.

I could not have made it to the end of this project without the support of my friends.
Nariman Aavani’s constant encouragement, both voiced and unvoiced, was a bedrock on which I
could always rest in the most difficult moments, and Munjed Murad and Rana Shieh were always
there when I needed to escape from the burdens of scholarship. Dr. Oludamini Ogunnaike and
Dr. Shankar Nair have been with me throughout the intellectual journey that has led here, and I
must thank them and also Nicole Dutil and Faheem Chishti for their enduring friendship, and also
their willingness to proof-read large portions of this dissertation on a tight deadline.

The debt of gratitude due to my parents, Anthea and Dr. Arthur Boylston, can hardly be
put into words. I am deeply thankful to them for all their support, and, along with my brother Dr.
Thomas Boylston, for their belief that my roads less-travelled were always leading where I was
supposed to go.

Throughout the highs and lows of dissertation writing, I always had a constant source of
love and encouragement, who kept my feet on the ground whilst always compelling me to be the
best I could. I feel deeply blessed to have such a wonderful spouse, with whom life has never a dull
moment, and without whose love I don’t think I could have managed to accomplish a fraction of
what I have.

Near the beginning of this project, my grandmother, Avocet Phelps, passed away at the age
of 94. Her last words sum up all that all that I could wish for all those who have helped me
throughout this project: “Full Life.”
This dissertation is dedicated to these three generations of women in my life, Avocet, Anthea and Latifeh.

Nicholas Boylston
Cambridge MA, September, 2017
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Notes on Transliteration

All texts translated are in Persian except ‘Ayn al-Quḍāṭ’s Žubdat al-Ḥaqāʾiq, which is in Arabic. However, Arabic phrases are often cited in the Persian texts, and the transition between languages forms a part of their rhetorical strategies. In order to preserve this distinction, translations of Arabic phrases have been rendered in Italic.

Arabic words that have become part of the English language and are found in standard English dictionaries have not been transliterated or rendered in italics, for example, Quran, hadith, madhhab, Simurgh.

Words that refer to God or an aspect of God are capitalized. At times this is ambiguous in Persian literature, so I avoid capitalization in these cases.

Quranic citations have been given within the main body of the text. Translations are generally from The Study Quran, in which case they are cited (SQ, Sūra:Āya). Where the translation differs from The Study Quran (though it has always been consulted) the citation is (Q, Sūra:Āya).
List of Abbreviations


Introduction

This project began as a circumscribed study of the significance of religious diversity in the writings of three Persian literary figures of the 6th/12th century. It was thought that by reading through their works and culling all statements having some bearing on this issue it would be short work to present their views on religious diversity in an orderly and cogent manner. It did not work.

My findings were that these central figures in the Persian literary and mystical traditions, Sanā‘ī of Ghazna (d. 525/1131/1131), ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī (d. 525/1131) and Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār (d. 618/1221), each presented a gamut of mutually-contradictory views on this topic, ranging from the most universalist to downright exclusivism. The challenge of understanding the reasons for such inconsistency and what it tells us about their status as thinkers who used literary media to express their ideas led me to conduct a far more wide-ranging study of the writing of these figures than I had thought possible at the beginning of this project.

Although the term ‘mystical’ is not central to my analysis, I do use it in this dissertation. A word of clarification is therefore in order. Though Sufism has often been described as ‘Islamic mysticism’, recent scholarship has moved away from focusing on the importance of ‘mystical experience’ as a focal point of analysis. In the study of mysticism more generally, though the relationship between experience and context has been the focus of debate, several scholars have pointed out that experience may not be the most useful way to think about mysticism. McGinn in particular argues that the term ‘mystical consciousness’ is in fact more useful than ‘mystical experience’, “because consciousness emphasizes the entire process of human intentionality and self-presence, rather than just an originating pure feeling, sensation, or experience easily separable from subsequent acts of thinking, loving, and deciding.” Bernard McGinn, “Mystical Consciousness: A Modest Proposal,” *Spiritus* 8.1 (Spring, 2008): 46. Since the intentionality of the mystic when writing is not separate from mystical consciousness, the investigator can, according to McGinn, “analyze the writings and witnesses of mystical teachers for what they reveal about all the forms of thinking and loving in which the human subject achieves self-transcendence and transformation through an encounter with God, the ultimate Source and final Goal.” McGinn, “Mystical Consciousness,” 46-7.

The transition from thinking about ‘mystical experience’ to ‘mystical consciousness’ moves the focus of analysis from that which is inaccessible to that which is directly accessible, namely the texts written by mystics. Having accepted McGinn’s position, the study of mysticism or, as I prefer, the mystical, becomes (for our purposes) the study of texts dealing with a set of inter-related themes - noetic, volitive and affective - connected to self-transcendence and encounter with the ultimate Source and Goal. The way we approach the mystical here will therefore not be a search for a ‘common core’ of mystical experience, but of the contextualized study of mystical utterances, texts and traditions. On this point see also Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), vii.
At some point, anyone who tries to make sense of the literary output of any one of these three authors will inevitably feel like the blind men clutching at different parts of an elephant in the Buddhist parable retold by Sanā‘ī, understanding the parts but unable to make sense of the whole. The breadth of the intellectual and literary vision of each seems too great to be encompassed by simple categorizations, as they synthesize material from a wide range of intellectual and literary discourses and deploy it in dynamic and original ways. However, as my study of each author progressed it gradually became clear that my own question – how do the parts of their works fit together? – was very close to a central question being posed and answered by each of these authors in his own way: Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and ‘Aṭṭār all show a profound concern for the significance of diversity - how the variegated parts of reality fit together.

Thus, although my research began as an investigation into religious diversity (which is now only a minor part of this dissertation), it led me to investigate a broader notion of diversity, encompassing many different types of diversity within it. Indeed, one of the most fascinating developments of this research has been to discover the interrelations between diverse forms of diversity. For Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and ‘Aṭṭār, the variegation of different aspects of the cosmos, the plurality within the human self, the diversity within religious doctrines, and the plethora of ways of cultivating humanity are all interrelated. Moreover, these types of diversity are explored by them in literary forms that are as dynamic and multi-faceted as the realities they describe.

The study of Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and ‘Aṭṭār that followed from this insight, developed through the eleven chapters of this dissertation, has led me to make the following three claims:

**First:** The holistic readings of Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and ‘Aṭṭār presented in this dissertation suggest that the investigation into the significance of diversity is central to their writings. In particular, diverse aspects of reality and of the task of the cultivation of humanity are approached from multiple points of view, facilitated by the use of materials from diverse pre-
existing Islamic intellectual and literary discourses. However, none of these authors stops at simply presenting a series of distinct and independent accounts, which would simply amount to a hotchpotch or rashomon of irreconcilable perspectives. Rather, each demonstrates a theoretical awareness of the need to approach reality from multiple points of view, and each actively uses literary methods to integrate and harmonize these points of view whilst maintaining their independent significance. The core substantive argument of the dissertation is that the writings of Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Qudāt and ‘Aṭṭār are pluralist and perspectivist. As we shall discuss below, by the term ‘pluralism’ I mean the valorization of diversity, whereas by ‘perspectivism’ I mean the view that there are multiple valid ways of understanding or describing reality.

**Second:** It is the failure to recognize this character of the writing of Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Qudāt and ‘Aṭṭār that leads to the type of confusion with which this project began, and indeed the scholarly confusions that remain regarding particular aspects of their thought. Since in most cases the understanding of an author on any given issue will involve the integration of multiple points of view, partial and selective reading of their works will often give a misleading picture. As such, the core interpretive argument of the dissertation is that the pluralist and perspectivist character of the writings of Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Qudāt and ‘Aṭṭār means that their works are best read holistically. As I shall explain, to read holistically is to read with the goal of addressing holistic questions. The efficacy of this holistic reading is demonstrated by the results it gives to particular problems in the study of each author.

**Third:** Although it is the holistic reading of Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Qudāt and ‘Aṭṭār that is the focus of this dissertation, by situating their writings within their 6th/12th century milieu we can also make a historical argument regarding their pluralist and perspectivist projects. To a large extent, these characteristics of their writings develop from their original syntheses of diverse points of view, the majority of which can be traced to a range of different Islamic intellectual and literary discourses. Thus, the core historical argument of the dissertation is that the pluralist and perspectivist characters of
the writings of Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and ‘Aṭṭār result from their conscious and original synthetic engagements with diverse discourses of the 6th/12th century.


The importance of Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and ‘Aṭṭār in the Persian literary tradition is well recognized. In Sanā‘ī’s oeuvre we see the major genres of classical Sufi poetry take shape, particularly the long, didactic mathnawī and the short, lyrical ghazal. The thought of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, who was executed on accusations of heresy that concealed political motivations, shows remarkable originality and flare, integrating the multi-dimensional religious thought of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī with the mystical flights of love of Ahmad al-Ghazālī to create one of the most important collection of letters of guidance in the Sufi tradition. ‘Aṭṭār is renowned as one of the greatest figures in Persian Sufi poetry, whose didactic mathnawīs, such as Mantiq al-Ṭayr (The Conference of the Birds), represent peaks of literary imagination and mystical expression.

But although the works of these authors possess great appeal to readers of diverse backgrounds, I believe that the current scholarly representations of their thought are inadequate. The reasons for this are very much related to the central problematic of this dissertation. Although scholars are quite apt at presenting their individual passages and the ideal they contain, characterizations of their contributions to Islamic thought are not so clear, for it turns out to be remarkably difficult to understand how the particular expressions of their ideas cohere to form a whole. My suggestion is that the common characteristics of these authors means that we can consider them in a sense a ‘school of thought’, for they are all authors of Persian pluralist metaphysical literature.

Though Sanā‘ī and ‘Aṭṭār are from the eastern end of Iranian plateau and ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt is from the western end, and though Sanā‘ī and ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt wrote at the beginning of the 12th
century whereas ‘Aṭṭār wrote at the end of it, they are connected in several ways. All of them participated in a stream of Sufi thought that can be traced back to al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), in which the transcendence of duality is expressed through the esoteric symbolism of infidelity. Moreover, both ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s and ‘Aṭṭār’s writings contain numerous references to the poetry of Sanā‘ī, and it is also likely that ‘Aṭṭār knew of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s teachings.

However, it is as much as a result of their differences as of their similarities that it has been valuable to read these three authors together. Whereas nearly all of Sanā‘ī’s and ‘Aṭṭār’s works are poetry, those of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt are prose. Whereas ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and ‘Aṭṭār clearly write from within the Sufi tradition, Sanā‘ī was trained as a court poet and wrote for scholars and men of worldly power, and it is only with close attention to his works that the nature of his connection with Sufism becomes apparent. Moreover, whereas Sanā‘ī and ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt synthesized a wide range of scholarly and literary discourses, ‘Aṭṭār seems apparently unconcerned with the particularities of religious scholarship outside the domain of Sufism. The fact that perspectivism and pluralism are evident in all the thought of all three authors despite these differences further emphasizes the importance of these characteristics. At this moment in Islamic intellectual and literary history, perspectivism and pluralism represented important approaches to thinking about the nature of the cosmos, the soul, religious doctrines, and human cultivation, and each author’s thought exhibits these characteristics in unique ways. It is to the characteristics and formation of this historical moment that we now turn.

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The political topography of the period we will consider in this dissertation was established in the 5th-11th century. In 429/1038, Rukn al-Duny wa’l-Din Tughril proclaimed himself Sultan in Nishapur, having defeated the Ghaznavids, who continued to rule from Ghazna but with territory now limited to the eastern-most lands of the Abode of Islam and under increasing subservience to the Saljuqs.

After ousting the Bûyids from Baghdad in 447/1055 and becoming the official Sultan, Tughril declared himself the defender of Sunni orthodoxy, and began a program of patronage of religious institutions that would have far ranging impact on the development of Islamic religious discourses and their social manifestations. Although the nature of the ‘Sunni Revival’ and the significance of Saljuq support of both madrasas and khanaqâhs is much debated, the institutional

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Omid Safi characterizes the Saljûq program of religious patronage as a process of construction of orthodoxy, which also involved the creation of heresy:

“The military response of the Saljûqs against the Ismâ’îlîs was accompanied by a state-sponsored systematization of the various Islamic intellectual disciplines and the propagation of that state-approved interpretation of Islam through the madrasa system. This process of validating certain branches of knowledge implied the invalidation of realms of thought which were deemed heretical.” Omid Safi, The Politics of Knowledge, The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam: Negotiating Ideology and Religious Inquiry (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolin Press, 2006), xxiv.

By contrast, Shahab Ahmed warns against viewing the Saljûqs’ project as “purely instrumental actions of a secular or profane elite seeking to advance its political interests of efficient government, or seeking to co-opt ‘religious elites.’” Rather, “it is a new era constituted by Muslims in terms of new institutions and forms and discourses of what is integrally Islam/Islamic, the stated integrality of which the secular-religious distinction obstructs us for conceptualizing and understanding.” See Shahab Ahmed, What Is Islam?: The Importance of Being Islamic (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016), 222-3. Ahmed is arguing in particular against Ira M. Lapidus, “State and Religion in Islamic Societies,” Past & Present 151 (1996): 3-27.
support for the Sunni ulama of both the Shāfī’ī and Ḥanafī madhhabs was consolidated, and far greater interactions were established between figures of Sufi authority and the rulers than had ever existed before. These conditions may well have had a large part to play in the developments in various religious discourses in the period directly preceding the one with which we are concerned, which has great significance for our project, for as Dabashi points out, “The fifth/eleventh century in Islamic history evinced a rigid consolidation of all previously established and legitimated discourses of the sacred.”

Although sharing in the conditions created during this ‘long 12th century’ (which ends with the Mongol sack of Nishapur in 618/1221 in which ‘Aṭṭār is thought to have died), different aspects of these conditions shaped the lives of each of our authors of focus. Moreover, the social and political context turns out to have varying importance for the interpretation of the writings of each author.

Sanā‘ī grew up and was trained in Ghaznavid courtly circles, benefitting from the literary traditions that had been established during the glory days of Sultan Maḥmūd (r. 387/997-421/1030). At some point between 503/1109 and 508/1114, Sanā‘ī moved outside of Ghaznavid territory to Balkh and then travelled within Saljūq lands, finding patronage with (mostly Ḥanafī) ulama. At some point around 520/1126, Sanā‘ī moved back to Ghazna, where he wrote poetry for Sultan Bahrāmshāh, though refusing to become the court poet.

For a focused study of the social and political conditions of Nishapur from the 10th to 12th centuries see. Richard W. Bulliet, The Patricians of Nishapur; a Study in Medieval Islamic Social History. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972).
7 Three different modes of relationships between Sufis and rulers during this period (namely bargaining with baraka, remaining aloof, and opposition) have been explored in detail by Safi in The Politics of Knowledge, particularly 125-200. See also Dabashi, “Historical Conditions of Persian Sufism During the Seljuk Period,” 153-69.
8 Dabashi, “Historical Conditions of Persian Sufism During the Seljuk Period,” 139.
10 See de Bruijn, Of Piety and Poetry, 57-78.
11 See de Bruijn, Of Piety and Poetry, 79-86.
As de Bruijn has shown, interpreting the poetry of Sanā‘ī is contingent on a certain level of understanding of the social circumstances in which he wrote. As we shall discuss in detail in Part One of this dissertation, the diversity of ‘secular’ and ‘religious’ poetry in Sanā‘ī’s oeuvre was shaped by the contexts in which he composed, amongst which the ‘sessions of sermonizing’ (majālis-i wa‘z) of the Ḥanafī ulama emerge as being the most important.\(^\text{12}\)

The case of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī is quite different. Although the circumstances surrounding ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s execution are obviously deeply entrenched in the political conditions of the day,\(^\text{13}\) the majority of his letters are only tangentially related to the political aspects of his context. Although there are political dimensions to his criticism of the servitude to worldly power he observed among the ulama of his day and those of his disciples who were attached to the Saljuq court,\(^\text{14}\) even these teachings are presented as lessons that are applicable in most political contexts. Indeed, I would argue that most of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s teachings have little if anything to do with politics.

But whereas the political context is of great relevance for the study of Sanā‘ī, and of intermediate relevance for the study of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, its significance is even more tangential for ‘Aṭṭār. Though scholars have attempted to link the pessimism of some passages of ‘Aṭṭār’s poetry with the social decline of the day, and particularly the Ghuzz invasion that ‘Aṭṭār would have witnessed as a child,\(^\text{15}\) there is no evidence of the influence of political circumstances on ‘Aṭṭār himself, who seems to have lived a quiet life as an apothecary/perfumier, as his name indicates.\(^\text{16}\)

\(^{12}\) See de Bruijn, *Of Piety and Poetry*, 164-6.

\(^{13}\) As has been analyzed in detail by Safi in *The Politics of Knowledge*, 158-200, and by Carl Ernst in *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985), 110-117.

\(^{14}\) On which see Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge*, 182-95.


\(^{16}\) The most politically significant event of his life would be his murder by the invading Mongols, if this indeed took place. See Helmut Ritter, “‘Aṭṭār,” *EI2*. 
Thus, though the political context of the 6th/12th century provides important background for our study, we must turn to the various intellectual and literary discourses of this period in order to gain greater understanding of the contexts in which our authors wrote.

**Sufism and Other Intellectual Discourses in the 12th Century**

Although the writings of the authors we shall be discussing in this dissertation are works of synthesis (particularly those of Sanā‘ī and ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt), it is in the Sufi tradition that we find their most important shared influences, and their writings are best considered in light of the history of Sufi textual traditions.

The task of introducing Sufism in the 6th/12th century is made more difficult by the fact that in the standard scholarly introductions this century does not fall into the ‘formative period’, and the works of this period tend to be presented in isolation from their historical precedents as representatives of ‘Sufi literature’.

As Caner Dagli points out, to effectively study ‘Sufism’ or ‘Islamic mysticism’ we must be clear whether the focus of our study is particular individuals, ideas, social institutions, modes of

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17 Thus the period of our concern lies outside the purview of Ahmet Karamustafa’s *Sufism: The Formative Period*. All three of our authors are treated by Annemarie Schimmel in the section on ‘Persian and Turkish Mystical Poetry’, independent of the consideration of the historical development of Sufism, in *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 294-309; and only ‘Aṭṭār is considered in Alexander Knysh’s *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 152-6, likewise in a section on mystical literature. This separation of the study of 12th century Sufism from its historical background has been remedied to some extent by Nile Green in *Sufism: A Global History* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 71-115.
inquiry or all of these.\textsuperscript{18} If we take as our point of departure social institutions,\textsuperscript{19} the nature of Sufism in the 5\textsuperscript{th}-6\textsuperscript{th}/11\textsuperscript{th}-12\textsuperscript{th} centuries becomes difficult to pin down. As Trimingham has described, in this pre-\textit{fārīqa} period spiritual teachings were most often transmitted through a personal relationship between teacher and disciple such that the social groups that formed around a particular teacher would generally dissipate after his death.\textsuperscript{20} The importance of the individual master-disciple relationship in the Sufism of this period meant that the particular forms that social organizations would take were shaped to a great extent by the proclivities of the master in question. Hence, the fact as major a Sufi figure as al-Qushayrī (d.465/1072),\textsuperscript{21} for example, chose to teach the ‘science of Sufism’ (\textit{‘ilm al-taṣawwuf}) as a science supplement to the madrasah curriculum reflects his own identity as a scholar rather than a necessary aspect of Sufism. As such, Sufism was not

\ \textsuperscript{18} See Caner K. Dagli, \textit{Ibn al-‘Arabī and Islamic Intellectual Culture: From Mysticism to Philosophy} (London: Routledge, 2016), 7. One useful definition of Sufism that would constitute a combination of these points of focus is that suggested by Nile Green, who offers “a basic definition of Sufism as a powerful tradition of Muslim knowledge and practice bringing proximity to or mediation with God and believed to have been handed down from the Prophet Muhammad through the saintly successors who followed him.” Countering the idea that Sufism, as ‘mysticism’, is an individualistic enterprise, Green emphasizes the “quintessentially relational profile of Sufism” as “the sum total of similar sets of relationships: between saints and their followers; between readers and writers of Sufi texts; between the Prophet, the mediating master and the humble believer; between the subjects and objects of the devotion that has been the emotional heartbeat of Sufi tradition.” Green, \textit{Sufism}, 8-10. Another definition is offered by Seyyed Hossein Nasr from within the tradition: “To follow Sufism is to die gradually to oneself and to become one-Self, to be born anew and to become aware of what one has always been from eternity (azal) without one’s having realized it until the necessary transformation has come about. It means to glide out of one’s own mould like a snake peeling off its skin. Such a transformation implies a profound transmutation of the very substance of the soul through the miraculous effect of the Divine Presence (\textit{ḥudūr}) that is implanted in the heart through initiation by the spiritual master and which is efficacious thanks to the grace (\textit{baraka}) that flows from the origin of the revelation itself. In order that this transformation may take place there must be a traditional link with the origin or a spiritual chain (\textit{silsila}), a discipline or a method to train the soul, a master who can apply the method and who can guide (\textit{irshād}) the disciple through the stations of the journey and finally a knowledge of a doctrinal order about the nature of things which will give direction to the adept during his spiritual journey (\textit{sayr wa sulāk}). And of course as a pre-requisite there must be a formal initiation (\textit{bay‘a}) which attaches the disciple to the master and his spiritual chain as well as to the higher orders of being. These are the fundamental aspects of Sufism.” Seyyed Hosein Nasr, \textit{Sufi Essays} (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 17.

\textsuperscript{19} As has de Brujin in his study of Sanā‘ī. See for example J.T.P. de Brujin, “Sanā‘ī,” \textit{EIr}.


\textsuperscript{21} For more information on al-Qushayri and his \textit{al-Risāla fi ‘ilm al-taṣawwuf} (\textit{Treatise on Sufism}) see Karamustafa, \textit{Sufism: The Formative Period}, 97-108.
bound to any particular forms of social organization, though some forms naturally favored it, whether it be groups that created a ‘Sufi’ identity in contrast to other members of society or study circles of ulama who taught an extra-curricular ‘science’ (‘ilm) of the transformation of character.

From the perspective of Sufism as social organization, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt appears as a typical representative of this period: a guide around whom disciples gathered whom he would teach according to his particular proclivities. However, Sanā‘ī seems only tangentially connected with Sufism, through his brief association with members of the circle that had formed around the Hanbali Sufi master ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī (d. 481/1089) and persisted after his death, which seems insignificant compared to his associations with the Ḥanafi ulama. Moreover, ‘Aṭṭār does not appear to be ‘Sufi’ at all, but rather a merchant-litterateur. Instead of focusing on social organization, it is more useful to look at Sufism in the 6th/12th century through the lens of textual traditions. Indeed, it is in the content of their writings that the connections of Sanā‘ī and ‘Aṭṭār with the Sufi tradition become apparent.

The characteristics of Sufi literature in the 6th/12th century come more clearly into focus when contrasted with the period that precedes them. The period between the composition of al-Sarrāj’s (d. 378/988) al-Luma‘ fi‘l-tāṣāwuf (The Gleams on Sufism) and Hujwīrī’s (d.465/1073 or 469/1077) Kashf al-mahjūb (The Revelation of the Veiled), is characterized by the dominance of ‘Sufi manuals’. As Karamustafa explains, the fundamental purpose of most works during this period, including these manuals and also Sufi biographical works, was to conceptualize the history of the

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23 In the case of Sanā‘ī, however, understanding his relation to the Sufi tradition requires careful consideration of specific examples of his poetry. Though not a central part of my reading of Sanā‘ī in this dissertation, the connection of Sanā‘ī with Sufi textual traditions is discussed in the chapters that follow.
tradition of Sufism and define the boundaries of its normativity. These manuals clarify the terms of Sufism, provide stories and aphorisms of exemplary figures, and describe the ‘stations and states’ of the path, but are generally reserved in their expression of mystical teachings. The conservativism of this genre seems to omit important forms of mystical teaching from the previous period of Sufism. Thus, for example, the open declaration of esoteric ideas by al-Ḥallāj, is absent here, and in this period generally, as if the textual tradition had fallen silent on his ideas in the wake of his execution.

Karamustafa distinguishes several trends among the manuals, from those written by traditionalists such as al-Makkī (d. 386/996) and Anṣārī who generally spoke from within the tradition, to the more scholarly and distanced tone of authors such as al-Sarrāj, al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021) and al-Kalābādhī (d. 380/990). Of particular importance are the manuals of al-Qushayrī and Hujwīrī, who endeavored to make Sufism acceptable in the milieus of fiqh and kalām (respectively).

The topography of Sufi writings shifts dramatically towards the end of the 5th/11th century with the Ghazālī brothers. Ahmad al-Ghazālī’s (d. 517/1123 or 520/1126) Sawānīḥ (Inspirations) represents a significant departure from the Sufi manual trend, presenting mystical insights designed for the contemplation of adepts and centered around a metaphysics of love in elegant Persian prose. In many ways, Aḥmad’s Sawānīḥ revives the approach of al-Ḥallāj in its readiness to openly declare

25 See Karamustafa, Sufism: The Formative Period, 83.
29 On whom see P. Nwiya, “al-Kalābādhī,” EI2.
30 See Karamustafa, Sufism: The Formative Period, 93-106.
31 I will continue to refer to this book by its untranslated title, which signifies more than is suggested by any single translation.
the most esoteric doctrines and its direct expression of the union of love and knowledge in symbolic language.\footnote{On this work see Joseph E. B. Lumbard, \textit{Ahmad Al-Ghazālī, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love} (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016), particularly 151-88.}

Moreover, the vast contribution of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) to Islamic thought of this period ushers in a new period of synthesis. In addition to writing pivotal works in theology and the principles of jurisprudence, Abū Ḥāmid’s\footnote{Given that I discuss both Abū Ḥāmid a-Ghazālī and Ahmad al-Ghazālī in this section, in order to avoid ambiguity, I will refer to the first as ‘Abū Ḥāmid’ and the second as ‘Ahmad’.} reformulation of the curriculum of Islamic sciences included the ‘inner science’ (‘ilm al-bāṭīn), namely Sufism. \footnote{See Karamustafa, \textit{Sufism: The Formative Period}, 107.} Making inestimable contributions to both practical and theoretical Sufism, his \textit{Revival of the Religious Sciences} (Iḥyāʾ ‘ulūm al-dīn) shows the necessity of integrating Sufi ethics into all aspects of Islamic practice, and his \textit{Mishkāt al-anwār} (Niche of Lights) represents a formative work in the tradition of theoretical Sufism. Furthermore, despite Abū Ḥāmid’s rejection of falsafa as a doctrinal school, it is now accepted that an important component of his legacy was in fact the integration of important philosophical methods and concepts into kalām and Sufism.\footnote{The nature of this integration is subject to considerable debate, particularly as regards Sufi epistemology. For Treiger, al-Ghazālī’s mystical epistemology is based on a deliberately concealed integration of Avicennan concepts, (See Alexander Treiger, \textit{Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought: Al-Ghazālī’s Theory of Mystical Cognition and Its Avicennian Foundation} (London; New York: Routledge, 2012), whereas for Akiti the considerable differences between al-Ghazālī’s doctrines and those of Avicenna, even if evident only through subtle modifications, suggest that it is better to think of the ‘naturalization’ of Avicennan concepts within al-Ghazālī’s work. See M. Afifi Al-Akiti, “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Falsafa: Al-Ghazālī’s Maḏmūn, Tahāfut, and Maqāṣīd, with Particular Attention to Their Falsafi Treatments of God’s Knowledge of Temporal Events,” \textit{Avicenna and His Legacy}, ed. Langermann, Y. Tzvi (Brepols Publishers, 2010), 51-100, cited in Dagli, \textit{Ibn al-ʿArabī and Islamic Intellectual Culture}, 39. See also Frank Griffel, \textit{al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology} (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).}

The case of Abū Ḥāmid demonstrates the possibility of synthesis that was emerging in this period. As Marshall Hodgson has pointed out, by the 10\textsuperscript{th} and 11\textsuperscript{th} century most of the major Islamic intellectual traditions, including theology, law, Quranic exegesis, and hadith criticism, as
well as logic, philosophy, astronomy and medicine, had reached their maturity. Now that the methods of these traditions had become established and the core set of issues around which discussion could take place could be taught in summary fashion, “[e]ach tradition was ready to look beyond its own roots.” The 11th and 12th centuries were therefore the beginning of a process of synthesis, in which “[t]he best thinkers were not simply working out the consequences of the particular insights of their own immediate tradition, as often before, but now came frankly and honestly to grapple with the best insights that any accessible tradition could offer.” Although the problem of synthesizing diverse discourses has remained a major concern of the Islamic intellectual tradition up to the present day, the beginning of this process involved considerable creativity, in which several individuals came up with quite different strategies to the challenge of harmonizing diverse discourses.

The fact that several of the works mentioned above were written in Persian, including Hujwīrī’s Revelation of the Veiled, several works by Anšārī, Ahmad al-Ghazâlî’s Sâvâniḥ, and Abū Ḥâmid’s rewriting of the Revival, Kīmây-yi Saʿādat (The Alchemy of Felicity), is particularly significant for our study. Indeed, on the basis of the ground laid by these works, the 12th century witnessed a remarkable flowering of intellectual and literary creativity in Persian. This was not only due to Sufi texts however. From a literary point of view, the early 12th century marks the end of the formative period of classical Persian literature. The conventions of court poetry, at the center of which was the panegyric qaṣīda, had become standardized, encompassing a wide variety of standard literary topoi that could be redeployed with great creativity. The qaṣīda had also emerged

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as a means of conveying ethical advice, and the full possibilities of this usage were to be explored in this century. The ghazal, the love lyric, probably developed for performance by court singing-girls and minstrels, had been an oral form until this time, and now emerged as a respectable genre of poetry. The oral tradition of quatrains (rubā’iyāt) had been popular for some time in oral form, used particularly in Sufi gatherings, and had now become a means of transmitting pithy insights that was recorded in writing. Finally, the mathnawī had been used up to this time for narrative poetry, including romance and epic, but grew in this century as a didactic form, in which storytelling was combined with spiritual and ethical guidance.

In the 12th century, authors writing in Persian possessed a vast range of generic fora in which to exercise their literary imaginations and present their ideas. They moreover had access to a vast range of sources of inspiration for the content of their works. In addition to the Sufi textual tradition discussed above, they could also draw on sophisticated cosmological schemes, the concepts and arguments of Avicennan philosophy, the various religious sciences and the cosmopolitan Arabic and Persian adab traditions. Indeed, from the writings of Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and ‘Aṭṭār it is clear that they all had mastery of the Arabic language and had access to the wealth of sources written in it, though this would not have been the case for all members of their audiences.

As we shall discuss in this dissertation, Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and ‘Aṭṭār each presented his own unique syntheses of particular strands of these traditions. Though clearly they were not the first synthesizers in the Islamic intellectual tradition, their works suggest a remarkable awareness of the epistemic and metaphysical implications of such a project, which I believe led them to adopt

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40 Regarding the spread of Avicennism, even in the madrasas see Jean R. Michot, “La Pandémie Avicennienne Au VIe/XIIe Siècle,” Arabica 40.3 (1993): 292f.
approaches that we can term ‘perspectivism’ as both the most effective method of synthesis and the most accurate way of speaking about the nature of the cosmos, the soul, and human cultivation. Moreover, they presented their syntheses using literary methods that were particularly well suited to the task, whether poetry in the case of Sanā‘ī and ‘Aṭṭār or prose (studded with poetry) in the case of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt.

Pluralism and Perspectivism

Given the importance of the terms ‘pluralism’ and ‘perspectivism’ for this dissertation, it is necessary to define what is meant by these terms. To begin with the more straightforward of the two, by ‘perspectivism’ I mean the view that reality can be correctly described by more than one set of independent descriptions. In the Islamic context, this is to be contrasted both with creedal theology, which purports to provide a single correct set of religious beliefs, and with systematizing philosophies that purport to be able to express all truth within a single discursive system. Perspectivism, as I have defined it, does not imply that all perspectives are equal. Nor does it mean that objective knowledge is impossible.

There are two levels in which we may find perspectivism in works such as those by Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and ‘Aṭṭār. The first is an explicit discussion of the validity of multiple perspectives,

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41 These are, however ideal types, and it is not clear to me that any form of intellectual activity actually exists that does not involve at least a minimum of perspectival thinking.

In the field of religious studies, the major reference point for perspectivism is now the work of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro on Amazonian cosmological perspectivism. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, “Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism,” The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute 4.3 (1998): 469–488; cited in Erki Lind, "Chinese Perspectivism: Perspectivist Cosmologies in Zhuangzi and Journey to the West," Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore 59 (2014): 145-64. For a discussion of the relationship between perspectivism and relativism see Tim Connolly, “Perspectivism as a Way of Knowing in the Zhuangzi,” Dao 10.4 (2011): 487-505. Connolly shows that the common characteristics associated with perspectivism ((1) our knowledge of the world is inevitably shaped by our particular perspectives, (2) any one of these perspectives is as good as any other, and (3) any claims to objective or authoritative knowledge are consequently without ground) apply neither to Zhuangzi nor to Nietzsche, though it is still useful to analyze their thought in terms of perspectivism.
thus constituting a theorization of perspectivism. The second is the juxtaposition of multiple perspectives in a single text or across an author’s oeuvre (bearing in mind the historical development of his thought). However, a strict dichotomy cannot be drawn between the two, as in many cases the mode of deliberate juxtaposition of multiple perspectives in effect shows an implicit theorization of perspectivism.

The term ‘pluralism’ has been used in a wide variety of ways. In its simplest definition, ‘pluralism’ simply means the view that there are many types of things, whereas ‘monism’ means that there is only one type of thing. Thus for example, ‘religious pluralism’ can be considered to mean simply a particular social state of affairs – that pertaining in the US in the 21st century for example. However, ‘pluralism’ is also used to denote the position that plurality is in some way valuable or preferable to the lack of plurality. Thus Raimon Panikkar explains,

Linguistic pluralism will not assume that one existing language is more adequate to human beings than another…Cultural pluralism admits different forms of being a cultivated person and thus will not impose one culture above another…Philosophical pluralism recognizes as valid and yet incompatible different forms of philosophizing and, in the last instance, of philosophies. Religious pluralism recognizes the authenticity, validity, and truth of different religions once their mutual incompatibility has been established on solid rational grounds.

It is with this meaning that I shall use the terms ‘pluralism’ and ‘pluralist’ in this dissertation. Thus, my claim is that in various fields, whether it be theology, cosmology, psychology or the study of religious beliefs, Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, and ‘Aṭṭār not only recognize the diversity of many types of entity, but also valorize this diversity. This they do in very different ways, requiring a close reading of the particularities of their thought, but I believe it is nonetheless a shared characteristic of their works.

42 I prefer the word ‘diversity’ for this meaning.
There is, however, a third meaning of ‘pluralism’ which I would like to identify and then set aside. In some discourses, ‘pluralism’ refers to the view that there are multiple incommensurable entities, values, truths or perspectives. \(^{44}\) It is this type of pluralism that Isiah Berlin describes as follows:

There are many objective ends, ultimate values, some incompatible with others, pursued by different societies at different times, or by different groups in the same society, by entire classes or churches or races, or by particular individuals within them, any one of which may find itself subject to conflicting claims of uncombinable, yet equally ultimate and objective, ends. \(^{45}\)

This type of pluralism has no place in the works of Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and ‘Aṭṭār. As we shall see, though there is great diversity in the phenomenal world, all types of diversity are either metaphysically or teleologically rooted in Divine Unity, as the final end of the project of human cultivation.

**Metaphysical Literature, Metaphysical Language, and the Cultivation of Iḥsān**

Although documenting the intellectual traditions that provide the background to the 12th century moment helps us to understand how the texts we will be studying emerged, it does little to tell us what they are really about. For one thing, Sufism is particularly difficult to define, nor does parsing it as ‘Islamic mysticism’ provide much help. As a starting point, I have named the genre of texts that we will be studying ‘metaphysical literature’. By doing this, I intend to emphasize, firstly, that taking into account the literary dimensions of these texts is crucial to understanding them,


and, secondly, that they are not ‘merely literature’, and should be read for the intellectual claims they make as well, and hence included in accounts of Islamic intellectual history. Indeed, in my reading of Sanā‘ī, I shall argue that it is the metaphysical vision (or visions) and use of language that he introduces into Persian courtly literature that are the keys to understanding his later work.

Furthermore, reflecting both their projects of synthesis and a characteristic of Sufi literature more generally, the works we shall be studying are inter-disciplinary. Metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics and scriptural exegesis are discussed side by side, and it is often impossible to draw the line between them. The character of this inter-disciplinary interest is best clarified by William Chittick’s discussion of iḥsān as Islam’s ‘third dimension’ (which, incidentally, he also considers to be the most appropriate definition of ‘Sufism’).  

Iḥsān literally means ‘to make beautiful’, but also signifies the perfection of the realization of Divine Unity (tawḥīd) and the attainment of sincerity in action. In contrast to authors of kalām and fiqh works, our authors are rarely interested in articulating and arguing for a specific set of beliefs and a specific list of do’s and don’t’s. Their main interest is in seeking to assist their readers in becoming more fully human, integrating both thought and practice in their cultivation of greater sincerity of action and greater clarity of insight.  

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46 As Chittick explains, iḥsān is precisely the deepening and perfection of faith and works, it is the inner spirit and intention within them that gives them meaning, it is the sincerity of the act and the intensity of faith, which is defined in a hadith as a ‘knowledge of the heart’. William Chittick, *Faith and Practice of Islam: Three Thirteenth Century Sufi Texts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 6. For another conception of Sufism that complements Chittick’s, considering Sufism as mysticism providing a moral depth beyond the shari‘a, see Paul L. Heck, “Mysticism as Morality: The Case of Sufism,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 34.2 (Jun., 2006): 253-286.

47 For an alternative but complementary conceptualization of the importance of cultivation of humanity through literary, mystical and philosophical works (with an emphasis on the Balkans-to-Bengal complex) see Ahmed, *What Is Islam?: The Importance of Being Islamic*, 80: “This discourse of self-conceptualization and self-articulation is the poetical and narrative tradition to which the concepts and vocabularies of the above mentioned Ibn Sinā, Rūmī, Ibn ‘Arabī, Tūsī, Hāfīz,...[and other authors who also wrote in Persian and who popularized the madḥhab-i ʿishq, or Way/School of Love]...—were foundational and seminal. Their canonical discourses constituted the paideia and, thus, the larger modes of thinking and the communicative idiom of the Muslims of this space and age—and as such, constituted an integral element in the hermeneutics of Islam of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex.”
This fundamental concern of Sanāʿī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and ‘Aṭṭār with becoming more human, which is often expressed to their Muslim audiences as becoming more truly Muslim, is holistic: Their works encompass metaphysical accounts of God and the cosmos, psychological accounts of the dimensions of selfhood, ethical teachings of great variety, aesthetic presentations of all aspects of the human condition, and even at times insights with a political bearing. This interdisciplinary concern for the cultivation of humanity made it logical to draw on as wide a range of sources and discourses as served this purpose. However, although one can identify a tendency among these authors to use whatever ‘skillful means’ is most effective for communicating the particular teaching at hand, I believe it would be wrong to consider them homiletic opportunists, who made use of any expression that might lead the reader towards ethical or intellectual improvement. Rather, a core goal of this dissertation is to expose the metaphysical underpinnings of the integration of multiple discourses in our texts of focus, rooting these in their authors’ perspectivism and pluralism. Hence, for example, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s diverse approaches to the meaning of infidelity or ‘Aṭṭār’s divergent claims about the nature of the cosmos become intelligible as the presentation of multiple valid points of view that cohere within a literary and spiritual journey through perspectives.

A crucial component of the fusion of metaphysical insight with literary form that occurs in the writings of these three authors is their approach to language. As Seyyed Hossein Nasr explains,

The masters of Sufism selected carefully the form which would be used to express the truths of Sufism and to become the vehicle for realities which these forms could reveal, while these vehicles were by definition confined to the world of outward forms that cannot but be a veil in itself. The Sufis also selected those forms which could be transformed and become transparent so as to be appropriate means for the expression of their meaning, which is none other than the message of

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48 This characteristic is implied, for example, by J.T.P. de Bruijn in some passages of his analysis of Sanāʿī. See Of Piety and Poetry, 213-5.
inwardness. They chose forms which could become wed to that message in such a way as to lead to the abode of the inward.\textsuperscript{49}

The metaphysical views of reality espoused by our authors of focus, in which this world is expressed as a manifestation of Divine Reality, have a direct impact on their views of language and their ways of using it. To be sure, in the writings of each author there are apophatic moments, in which language is shown to reach its limits in describing realities that transcend its capabilities. However, the texts we will study in this dissertation show remarkable faith in the possibilities of language for depicting reality and cultivating humanity.

Among the most important effects of metaphysics on language is in the uses of metaphor. Metaphor in general can be described as language reaching beyond itself. As Shahab Ahmed explains, “Metaphor, by way of form, enables the generation of meaning beyond form...In metaphor, words are able to say something other than what they mean—or mean something other than what they say; they are able to reach beyond themselves.”\textsuperscript{50} However, within a conception of the cosmos possessed of ontological hierarchy, not only can words reach horizontally towards other words, they can also reach upwards, towards realities of a higher plane of existence. Indeed, within such a metaphysics,

…the Seen world itself stands in relation to the Unseen world as metaphor does to Truth. \textit{The Seen world is itself a metaphor}: it is the World of Metaphor the experience of which evokes and alludes to the Real-Truth of the Unseen world—the World of Real-Truth, the \textit{ālam al-ḥaqīqah}. Real-Truth is \textit{configured} and \textit{delimited} in the forms of the Seen World: the True Meaning(s) of Real-Truth lie beyond and behind this configuration—by means of which Real-Truth may, nonetheless, be reached.\textsuperscript{51}


\textsuperscript{50} Ahmed, \textit{What is Islam?}, 390-1.

\textsuperscript{51} Ahmed, \textit{What is Islam?}, 394.
The best term for such a signification of higher levels of reality, whether applied to words or to things, is ‘symbolism’, and it is in this sense that we shall use this term in this dissertation.52

**Holistic Reading**

My approach to reading 12th century Persian texts has begun from the standards set in the disciplines of area studies and Islamic studies, emphasizing philological accuracy in addition to awareness of intellectual and historical context. The task of learning to understand the writings of Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Qudāt and ‘Aṭṭār on the level of individual words and sentences is already formidable, requiring knowledge of the technical terms of diverse Islamic intellectual and literary discourses as well as an understanding of generic norms and the idioms of this period of classical Persian literary expression. On this level, I have benefitted greatly from commentaries by contemporary Iranian scholars, who have meticulously clarified the many difficulties of the writings of this period. In particular, I am greatly indebted to the written commentaries by Shafi‘ī-Kadkanī on the works of Sanā‘ī and ‘Aṭṭār that accompany his editions of their works, and the oral commentaries on selected sections of the works of ‘Ayn al-Qudāt that I received from Bābak ‘Ālkānī at the Iranian Institute of Philosophy in Tehran between 2009 and 2011.53

However, although the common methods of both area studies and contemporary Iranian commentary are crucial for responsible reading of the texts, they only bring us to the aporia with


53 After long study of commentaries, I must concur with Francis Clooney, from whose methods of reading upon which he begins his comparative theological endeavors I have learned a great deal: “Reading with the care of a commentator is a difficult way to learn. When we honor commentary as a way of learning even a tradition other than our own, we are faced with subtle and complex challenges, since learning from commentaries is difficult. The fruits of commentary mature slowly - word by word, in obedience to the logic of a text that may not yield its wisdom readily…” Francis Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 61.
which this project began. The focus on the interpretation of particulars does not help us in interpreting the wholes. Indeed, the attempt to understand the views of a particular author on a particular subject with which the project began, and where many other projects in this field end, is in danger of making a hermeneutic mistake: that of considering the whole of a text (or the oeuvre of an author) to be nothing more than the sum of its parts.

As C. Mantzavinos points out,

…the semantic value of a text is not a function of the semantic value of its constituents and its structure. Whereas a sentence may express a thought which is a plausible mental correlate, a text expresses a sequence of thoughts which cannot be grasped directly: the meaning of a sentence can be grasped, memorized and processed; the meaning of a text as a whole on the macro-level requires for its comprehension a more complex cognitive process (Scholz 2012).\

Just as the blind men must discover a more holistic way to understand the elephant than simply each grasping one of its parts, in order to understand the approaches of Sanāʿī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and ‘Aṭṭār to diversity, we must engage with the complex task of understanding the meanings of their works on the holistic or macro-level. But although the way in which this should be properly done is a complex theoretical question with a long history, I suggest that for Persian literary texts of the 12th century the best approach to developing holistic readings of their works is to set theoretical discussions aside for the moment and to engage directly in the practice of interpretation itself.\


55 In this regard I take inspiration from Francis Clooney’s suggestion that comparative theology and its associated interpretive processes are best understood by doing them, not by standing on the sidelines and theorizing about them. See for example, Francis Clooney (ed.), The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation (London; New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 196.
should be read, and particularly the ways they must be interpreted with reference to their perspectivism, are found within the texts themselves.

Given that interpretation is a goal-directed activity, my approach to the holistic interpretation of Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and ‘Aṭṭār is to engage with their works by asking holistic questions. Whilst reading across their oeuvres and also reading through the interpretive literature in western and Iranian scholarship, a set of holistic questions has crystallized in my reading of each author, which either target the major interpretive problems that I have faced when trying to think about their works holistically or focus on the major issues for which the current responses in the secondary literature seem inadequate. One outcome of this method that has been most important in convincing me of the worthiness of this project is that nearly all of these holistic questions have ended up shedding light on the question of how our authors have engaged with problems of diversity. Though there is no direct equivalence between questions such as ‘in what ways can Sanā‘ī’s mature poetry be considered coherent given its apparently divergent secular and religious goals?’, ‘in what ways does ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s perspectivism shape his understanding of Islam?’, ‘in what ways does ‘Aṭṭār’s Book of Mysteries function as a coherent whole?’ (which represent general and specific questions asked), the attempts to answer these questions cohere together as a response to the more general question of the significance of diversity in the writings of these three authors. Moreover, the fact that perspectivism and pluralism are evident in all three authors suggests that their works can be labelled as a ‘school of thought’, representing a particular mode of intellectual and literary synthesis responding to the specific conditions of the 12th century moment.

56 See C. Mantzavinos, “Hermeneutics.”
The Significance of Diversity in the Study of Islam and Persian Literature

The significance of the diversity within Islamic intellectual and literary traditions has recently begun to receive greater scholarly attention. In the wake of critiques of essentialized and monolithic portrayals of Islam, in recent decades a vast number of studies of specific Islamic phenomena in their particular contexts have led to a great enrichment of the understanding of the historical realities of Islam in western scholarship. However, the diversity among these particularities has challenged the very notion that a singular conception of ‘Islam’ is even meaningful.57

This problem has been recently addressed with great nuance by the late Shahab Ahmed in What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic. Ahmed’s goal in the book is to come up with a new academic conception of Islam as a “historical and human phenomenon.”58 The diversity of phenomena that may be considered Islamic is the fundamental challenge that Ahmed grapples with, for, as he suggests, “The key to conceptualizing Islam is to identify the dynamic that renders things, despite their difference, mutually implicated in a shared process and relation of meaning.”59

Ahmed’s multifaceted work has a great deal to offer the study of Persian metaphysical literature, particularly in his emphasis on the historical importance of the ‘Balkans-to-Bengal’ complex and the significance of Sufism, literature and philosophy for the cultivation of humanity in this region.60 However, I wish to note only one aspect of his work here that I believe highlights the importance of the argument of this dissertation. In the course of elaborating an academic conception of Islam that is able to deal with diversity, Ahmed also shows the ways in which Muslims

57 See for example, Edward Said, “Impossible Histories: Why the Many Islams Cannot be Simplified,” Harper’s, July 2002. The desire to distinguish moderate from fundamentalist approaches to Islam has also been a major influence in this movement.
58 See Ahmed, What is Islam?, 5-6.
59 Ahmed, What is Islam?, 344.
60 The focus of Ahmed’s study is from the 13th century onwards.
themselves in the Balkans-to-Bengal complex have generally been happy to live with ‘coherent contradiction’ in their ways of making meaning in terms of Islam. In the course of his study, he thus explores ideas and practices such as “exploration, ambiguity, ambivalence, wonder, aestheticization, diffusion, differentiation, polyvalence, relativism and contradiction,”\(^{61}\) and moreover asserts that, “[i]f we conceptualize Islam in terms of expansive registers of possible meaning is to do no more than Muslims themselves did.”\(^{62}\) However, although Ahmed’s study presents numerous instances of Muslim ‘meaning making’ that show the acceptance of coherent contradiction, he does not present any examples in which Muslims themselves have theorized this process.

The pluralism and perspectivism that I uncover in 6th/12th century metaphysical literature in Persian in this dissertation provides an important case study in which Muslim authors themselves are actively grappling with the challenges of apparent contradiction. The writings of Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Qudāt and Ṭṭār provide a particularly sophisticated and self-aware response to these challenges, and I would argue that their active embrace of diversity constitutes a fundamental aspect of their thought. Moreover, for Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Qudāt and Ṭṭār, the response to diversity in reality also included a response to the diversity in ways of being Muslim. As we shall investigate in the case of ‘Ayn al-Qudāt in particular in Chapter Seven, these authors held conceptions of Islam that were able to harmonize diverse theoretical and practical positions. Moreover, as we shall see, this embrace of diversity is not a static relativism, but is rather a dynamic engagement that is directed towards singular ends of human cultivation and the journey towards Divine Unity.

Turning from the general conception of Islam to diversity in Islamic intellectual history, the theological significance of the diversity of beliefs plays an important part in Paul Heck’s study of *Skepticism in Classical Islam*. The relationship between diversity and skepticism that emerges from


Heck’s discussions of skepticism from the 3\textsuperscript{rd}/9\textsuperscript{th} to the 8\textsuperscript{th}/14\textsuperscript{th} centuries is a complex one. As Heck shows, theological disagreement remained a fundamental problem in Islamic thought throughout this period and led to diverse responses.\textsuperscript{63} These spanned the unquestioning acceptance of the authority of the Prophet (Ibn Hazm’s (d. 456/1064) solution)\textsuperscript{64} to seeking arbitration through philosophical or theological reasoning (in al-‘Āmirī (d.38 /992)\textsuperscript{65} and Māturīdī (d. 944)\textsuperscript{66}), and even the relinquishment of theological discussion in the face of the ‘equivalence of evidence’ (takāfu’ al-adilla).\textsuperscript{67} Furthermore, Heck also shows that certain forms of skepticism could even play a positive theological role. Thus, both Junayd and ‘Aṭṭār could find the key to realizing one’s state before God to lie in spiritual confusion,\textsuperscript{68} whereas Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī could advocate ‘learned ignorance’ as part of his project of synthesizing different views on God’s causal relation to the world.\textsuperscript{69} 

Although several of the strategies Heck discusses are present within the texts of Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and ‘Aṭṭār, particularly ‘spiritual confusion’ or ‘bewilderment’ (ḥayra), my reading of their works suggests that they represent a further development in Islamic responses to the diversity of theological beliefs, which can be placed alongside those explored by Heck. By integrating diverse perspectives within the dynamic movement of their metaphysical literature, each author is able to suggest not only that multiple correct perspectives are possible but also that they are necessary for

\textsuperscript{64} Heck, \textit{Skepticism in Classical Islam}, 197.
\textsuperscript{65} Heck, \textit{Skepticism in Classical Islam}, 86-104.
\textsuperscript{66} Heck, \textit{Skepticism in Classical Islam}, 197.
\textsuperscript{67} Heck, \textit{Skepticism in Classical Islam}, 74-81.
\textsuperscript{68} Heck, \textit{Skepticism in Classical Islam}, 48-52.
a proper understanding of reality, which is itself too vast to be encompassed by any single point of view.\textsuperscript{70}

Regarding the significance of diversity in Persian literature, Hamid Dabashi has recently argued that ‘Persian literary humanism’ is grounded in a ‘fragmented’ and ‘decentered’ self. Dabashi conceives his project as a response to the problems inherent in Edward Said’s conception of ‘humanism’, which fails to adequately manage “the enduring crisis of the all-knowing subject.”\textsuperscript{71}

For Dabashi, “[i]t is the nature of the literary act and the precarious disposition of its varied and multiple subject positions that are the defining modes of literary humanism.”\textsuperscript{72} By studying these aspects of Persian literary humanism, Dabashi intends to show that, “When we open the domain of subject formation to Persian literary humanism, we find that the decentered subject has a much wider spectrum of operation and never presumed to be unitary, autonomous, or undifferentiated.”\textsuperscript{73}

Through the study of the engagements with diversity in the writings of Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and ‘Aṭṭār, we are able to amend Dabashi’s position. In particular, while it is clear that Persian literary humanism is indeed not based on “the unitary, autonomous, and undifferentiated subject that was at the center of the Cartesian (and later Kantian) cogito as a core concept of metaphysics,”\textsuperscript{74} this does not mean that the modes of selfhood in Persian literature are best described using the postmodern frameworks that Dabashi is so fond of. Dabashi’s response to a line he quotes from Edward Said is particularly insightful here:

\textsuperscript{70} The views of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, in their advocation of metaphysical ascent beyond the world of multiplicity (discussed by Heck in \textit{Skepticism in Classical Islam}, 81-6), provide an interesting point of comparison here.


\textsuperscript{72} Dabashi, \textit{The World of Persian Literary Humanism}, 26.

\textsuperscript{73} Dabashi, \textit{The World of Persian Literary Humanism}, 34.

\textsuperscript{74} Dabashi, \textit{The World of Persian Literary Humanism}, 34.
“You should abandon your knowing heart to a person you love / For once you have a direction to pray to, you will never take yourself so seriously.” Redirecting the presumption of the knowing self to the certainty of an unknown alterity: precisely there, upon that lyrical turn is the subject forever decentered.\textsuperscript{75}

Dabashi is right to point to a decentering of the subject in Persian literature, but in the texts that we are studying this decentering is a decentering of the ego, and a recentering on God, who is both a transcendent ‘unknown alterity’, but also ‘nearer than the jugular vein’ (to paraphrase Q, 50:16). As we shall see in Chapter Ten, ‘Aṭṭār in particular presents an engagement with selfhood that depicts the spiritual path as the move from fragmented to integrated selfhood. The diversity of aspects of the self remains, but they are integrated in relation to a higher unity.

Finally, it is important to point out that my understanding of perspectivism in 6\textsuperscript{th}/12\textsuperscript{th} century Persian literature has been significantly improved by the insights of scholars of the 7\textsuperscript{th}/13\textsuperscript{th} century Andalusian Sufi Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 638/1240). The work of Michael Sells, William Chittick and James Morris in particular has greatly facilitated my ability to conceive of Sufi literature in terms of its metaphysics of diversity, its dynamics and its perspective shifts.\textsuperscript{76}

The importance of the dynamics of 6\textsuperscript{th}/12\textsuperscript{th} century Persian metaphysical literature and the role of many different kinds of perspective shift within it, as explored throughout this dissertation, emphasize both the significance of the research of the Ibn al-‘Arabī experts and expands the scope of their findings. Above all it shows that our appreciation of the significance of

\textsuperscript{75} Dabashi, \textit{The World of Persian Literary Humanism}, 27.
the dynamics and perspective shifts of Sufi literature needs to be extended. A full century before Ibn al-ʿArabī these were modes of expression that were not only extensively employed but also subjected to theoretical reflection. Moreover, the dynamic literary expression of perspectivism and pluralism is a characteristic of multiple thinkers of this period, suggesting the presence of a distinctive school of thought in Persian Sufism.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation is divided into three parts, in each of which I present a holistic reading of one of our authors that shows the significance of perspectivism and pluralism in his thought.

The four chapters on Sanāʾī in Part One focus on the question of whether Sanāʾī’s later oeuvre contains a coherent world-view, a question that has been subject to considerable debate in the secondary literature on his works. After introducing Sanāʾī and the genres in which he wrote, I explain the problem of coherence in Sanāʾī and introduce the most important scholarly approaches to this problem (Chapter One). Beginning my own analysis (Chapter Two), I present a holistic reading of Sanāʾī’s magnum opus, focusing on how Sanāʾī justifies his use of various types of discourse in light of the diversity inherent in the cosmos. I then explore how Sanāʾī employs two different metaphysical perspectives in this book. Turning to other genres of Sanāʾī’s religious poetry (Chapter Three), I perform close readings of the poetry Sanāʾī wrote for his most important patron, Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr, the Chief Qadi of Sarakhs. I show how Sanāʾī’s poetry for this patron is informed by both a metaphysical account of human perfection and a dichotomy between outward appearance and inner reality. These ideas allow me to explain how Sanāʾī’s poetry for this patron shows his transition from metaphorical to symbolic uses of language, as he transforms courtly genres to suit his developing metaphysical vision of reality. In the final chapter of this part (Chapter Four), I analyze Sanāʾī’s amatory lyrics, showing how the strategies employed in his religious poetry
are present here also, exhibited through a metaphysical approach to love and the creation of poetic dynamism through ambiguity.

In the four chapters of Part Two, I present a reading of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt that shows how his thought is rooted in a perspectivism resulting in his conception of the spiritual path. Beginning with ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s ontology and rhetoric (Chapter Five), I show how his explicit ontological perspectivism is reflected in his discursive styles. I then explore the relation of multiplicity and unity in his thought, tracing a parallel logic between his understanding of the cosmos, the Quran, and the expression of mystical knowledge. These discussions provide the basis for an extended analysis of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s understanding of wayfaring and the Way to God (Chapter Six). Here I consider both the connections between perspectivism and wayfaring and the diversity of approaches that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt uses to characterize the Way itself. Turning to ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s understanding of Islam and religious diversity (Chapter Seven), I again frame his discussions on these topics within his understanding of wayfaring and the perspectivism it implies. Moreover, I show that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s approach to Islam involves a double movement of taking apart conventional understandings of Islam and rebuilding Islam as being synonymous with the Way. Finally, I address some of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s most notorious teachings, on the problem of evil, the nature of infidelity and the status of Iblīs (Chapter Eight). The analysis of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s perspectivism conducted in the preceding chapters enables me to show how his discussion of each of these issues develops around an analogous set of perspective shifts.

My reading of ‘Aṭṭār over three chapters in Part Three focuses on the significance of diversity for ‘Aṭṭār’s mathnawīs. I begin by offering a new analysis of his magnum opus, The Conference of the Birds (Chapter Nine), showing how the entire work is structured around the investigation of diverse types of diversity. This reading provides me with the conceptual tools to perform a brief survey of the significance of diversity in ‘Aṭṭār oeuvre and a close reading of his Book of Affliction and
Book of God (Chapter Ten). In reading these two mathnawīs I focus on ‘Aṭṭār’s explication of the diversity within the cosmos and the soul. Finally, I use the analysis of diversity in ‘Aṭṭār carried out in these chapters as the basis for a new reading of his Book of Mysteries, the only authentic mathnawī of his that lacks a frame narrative (Chapter Eleven). I show that contrary to the prevailing opinion the teachings of this work do not lack coherent order, and I present a new interpretation of the organization of this book, once again taking the theme of diversity as my point of departure.
Part 1: Sanā‘ī of Ghazna

Chapter 1: The Problem of Coherence in the Works of Sanā‘ī

As Ḥakīm Abū’l-Majd Majdūd ibn Ādam Ghaznawī ‘Sanā‘ī’ lay dying after a sudden onset of fever, his magnum opus, Ḥadīqat al-Ḥaqīqa wa Shari‘at al-Ṭariqā, (The Walled Garden of Truth and the Way of the Path), lay without a definitive recension. Yet notwithstanding the disarray of this work, still visible in the editions we have today, Sanā‘ī’s oeuvre consolidated the core conventions and themes of classical Persian literature that would remain standard for nearly a millennium. To read Sanā‘ī is to engage with the first significant collection of ghazals (amatory lyrics) of the Persian tradition, the most important early didactic mathnawīs (long poems of rhyming couplets), and one of the peaks of the qaṣīda (ode, panegyric, homiletic) tradition.

However, to focus on the accomplishments of Sanā‘ī’s literary style alone would be to confine oneself to the lesser half of his legacy. For Sanā‘ī was also a great thinker, whose metaphysical vision is as much wedded to its ethical implications as the content of his poetry is wedded to its form. In this respect, the traditional citation of Sanā‘ī’s name alongside ‘Aṭṭār and Rūmī is indeed apt; for they all express a sublime vision in simple stories, present metaphysical

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insights that have the most direct impact on daily life, and vacillate between rhapsodic musicality and plainly spoken truths. These qualities have made the didactic mathnawīs of Sanā‘ī, ‘Aṭṭār and Rūmī central monuments in the tradition of Islamic humanities in Persian, which have educated and edified Persian-speakers over the past nine centuries across the whole range of social classes.\textsuperscript{79}

But despite Sanā‘ī’s crucial position in the history of classical Persian poetry, his works have received a disproportionately small degree of attention in western scholarship. Whether deterred by infelicitous evaluations of literary worth,\textsuperscript{80} the volume and difficulties of the texts, or more recently by the problematization of the authenticity of key sections of Sanā‘ī’s corpus, most scholars of Persian literature have avoided Sanā‘ī to the great detriment of our understanding of Islamic literary and intellectual history.\textsuperscript{81}

Indeed, Sanā‘ī’s oeuvre presents an imposing interpretive challenge. Aside from the sheer volume\textsuperscript{82} and difficulty of the poetry, Sanā‘ī’s work comprises a bewildering diversity of themes and attitudes. Pandering panegyrics for the men of power of his day sit beside ascetic poetry lambasting attachment to wealth and status, just as flights of mystical love are juxtaposed against secular and physicalistic portrayals of human beauty.\textsuperscript{83} This diversity prompts a set of questions that I see to be at the heart of the project of interpreting the poetry of Sanā‘ī. At the core of these

\textsuperscript{79} On how widely read Sanā‘ī has been through history as shown by the manuscript tradition see de Bruijn, \textit{Of Piety and Poetry}, 10 and 119.

\textsuperscript{80} See de Bruijn’s explanation of the root of the disparity between the western estimation of the literary worth of Sanā‘ī’s oeuvre and that found in the Persian literary tradition in \textit{Of Piety and Poetry}, xiv-xvi.


\textsuperscript{82} In addition to the \textit{Hadiqa}, which had early recensions of 5,000 and 10,000 distiches, and in its present edition consists of around 12,000, most versions of the \textit{Diwān} contain nearly 14,000 distiches. See de Bruijn, \textit{Of Piety and Poetry}, 91-4. To this is added the two short mathnawīs, \textit{Kār-nāmah-yi Balkh} and \textit{Sayr al-‘Ibād īlā‘l-Ma‘ād} of around 400 and around 800 distiches respectively.

\textsuperscript{83} It was for this reason that Sanā‘ī’s poetry appealed to such as wide range of people. As Muhammad ‘Alī al-Raffā’, one of first compilers of \textit{The Walled Garden} noted, “…until the end of the world all scholars, men of reason, lovers, Sufis and the desirous shall seek the nourishment of the spirit from his spread, and all theologians, sages and poets shall speak the mystery of meaning from his \textit{Diwān}.” HH, 11.
issues lies the following problem: was Sanā‘ī’s work written in light of a consistent worldview and set of values such that he can be considered a significant Muslim intellectual in his own right? Or, as one scholar has suggested, does it rather simply reflect a “hotchpotch” of intellectual and literary influences from the circles surrounding the Ghaznavid court, suggesting that, though a great poet, Sanā‘ī has no greater intellectual vision worthy of consideration?\textsuperscript{84}

The problem of the coherence of Sanā‘ī’s poetry contains several sub-questions: Firstly, is there an inherent contradiction between Sanā‘ī’s claims that he is a religious poet who disdaisons the worldlier aspects of the poetic craft on the one hand, and his composition of sensual amatory lyrics and panegyrics for men of religious and political authority on the other? And secondly, was Sanā‘ī the ascetic-mystic that tradition has remembered or the poet of the religious orthodoxy of the day, as the list of patrons of his works might suggest?\textsuperscript{85}

The positions we take on these questions turn out to be crucial. The volume of Sanā‘ī’s works, the range of possible interpretations of much that is attributed to him, and the lingering questions over their reliability mean that our understanding of Sanā‘ī’s identity as a poet and thinker will unavoidably influence the way we read his oeuvre and its significance for the history of Persian literature and Islamic intellectual history. A narrow characterization of Sanā‘ī will therefore cause us to overlook important aspects of his work, preventing us from integrating them into our understanding of his oeuvre as a whole. Moreover, if his works do in fact contain a coherent intellectual vision beneath the surface, a mischaracterization will prevent us from realizing this.

\textsuperscript{84} See Nile Green’s discussion in \textit{Sufism}, 108.

\textsuperscript{85} On the importance of religious scholars as patrons of Sanā‘ī’s work see de Bruijn, \textit{Of Piety and Poetry}, 164-8.
In what remains of this chapter I shall continue to flesh out this problem of coherence in the study of Sanāʿī, providing an introduction to the diversity of his oeuvre and considering the most important scholarly engagements with this problem that have been presented to date. On the basis of this discussion, I end this chapter with an overview of the stages of my analysis of Sanāʿī, that will be carried out in the remaining three chapters of this part of the dissertation.

**Sanāʿī’s Oeuvre**

Before considering Sanāʿī’s life and the contexts in which he wrote, let us consider the genres of his writings more closely. As Julie Scott Meisami notes,

> Poetic invention is closely linked to the issue of the relation of the poet and his poem to the tradition, to prior treatments of the same material... Other poets, other poems, play a formative role in the choice both of the poem’s “mental archetype” and of the materials appropriate to it; on the level of invention, such choices revolve primarily around questions of genre... Indeed, genre is perhaps the most important of literary concepts, as it provides a framework that the poet may not only write within, but write against.\(^\text{86}\)

Each poem that Sanāʿī wrote was thus composed in relation to the generic standards of the literary tradition in which he participated. Understanding these formal differences of genre is crucial to gaining a sense of the problems involved in discerning whether there is an intellectual coherence to Sanāʿī’s poetry, for each genre demands its own approach in both form and content across which any intellectual coherence must be sought.

**Qaṣīdas:**\(^\text{87}\) Although the *qaṣīda* is generally considered a single poetic form, Sanāʿī has written *qaṣīdas* that fall into several distinct sub-genres. Of these, two types overwhelmingly predominate:

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\(^{87}\) On the formal characteristics of the *qaṣīda* in Persian see C.-H. De Fouchécour, “Kaṣīda: 2. In Persian,” *EI2.*
The Panegyric *Qaṣīda* follows the formal structure established by Arabic praise poetry as adapted by Sanāʾī’s forebears in the Persian tradition. J.T.P. de Bruijn suggests four functions of Persian court poetry, which apply preeminently to this genre: as ritual language affirming royal status, to boost the prestige of the patron, to provide entertainment, and to provide moral instruction. Each of these functions is to be found in Sanāʾī’s poems of this type. Sanāʾī’s panegyric *qasīdas* generally follow the structure of the ‘Persian *qasīda*’, beginning with an amatory prelude (referred to as *nasīb*, meaning ‘prelude’, in regard to their function, or *taghazzul*, which describes their amatory content). This was often followed by a single-line transition (*takhallus*) in which the poet names himself, leading to the panegyric proper (*madīḥ*), and usually ending in a statutory plea for recompense from the patron and a prayer (*duʿā*) for his wellbeing. Though Sanāʾī follows many of the norms and set topoi of this well-established genre of praising men of political authority, his poetry is remarkable for the number of *qasīdas* for scholar-patrons. These panegyrics for scholars establish their own distinct set of topoi concerning the virtues particular to this social group, and these panegyrics represent one of Sanāʾī’s important contributions to the history of the form. Although panegyrics are often dismissed by scholars as being merely self-serving displays of eloquence in exchange for wealth and status, Meisami has shown that they often contain an ethical message. In Chapter Three in particular we will see that some of Sanāʾī’s panegyrics for scholars also possess crucial metaphysical significance.

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89 The difference between the ‘Persian’ and ‘Arabic’ *qasīda* in the Persian tradition is in the *nasīb*, the latter of which follows the conventions of the *qasīda* in Arabic whereas the former replaces the desert-themes of the Arabic form with an erotic passage or a description of nature. See Julie Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, c1987), 40.

90 Julie Scott Meisami has described the ethical function of panegyrics as follows:

“By providing a model, panegyric combines encomiastic with didactic ends; its ultimate goal—the stimulation of virtue—makes the principle of decorum, which dictates that the subject be praised in terms
The ‘Homiletic’ Qaṣīda (zuhd-u mathal)\textsuperscript{91} is structurally similar to the panegyric only in its rhyme-scheme and length, but does not contain its sub-divisions. These qaṣīdas are works of religious exhortation, encouraging the reader to abandon attachment to the world and to turn towards the spiritual life, and thus have a wider relevance than the court-centered panegyrics. Nevertheless, this genre also had a significance for courtly life, as is shown by the advice given in the Qābūs-Nāma (written about 475/1082): “Do not fail [to write poems] on abstention (zuhd) and unity (tawḥīd), if you are able to do so, because you will benefit from this in both worlds.”\textsuperscript{92}

Although there are earlier precedents for this genre in Persian literature, particularly in the poetry of Nāṣir Khusraw (d.481/1088),\textsuperscript{93} Sanā‘ī’s poems are considered both formative in their approach and unsurpassed in their rhetorical force and literary nuance.\textsuperscript{94} Moreover, as we shall see, Sanā‘ī’s homiletics have been considered by the major western interpreter of his works to be the most characteristic of his poems, such that in light of them Sanā‘ī should be remembered above all as a ‘homiletic’ poet. Whether or not we come to accept this characterization, it is clear that much of Sanā‘ī’s most important religious thought is presented within the genre of the homiletic qaṣīda.

Other Sub-Genres: In Sanā‘ī’s Dīwān we also see examples of other sub-genres of qaṣīda, including instances of boast (fakhriyya), satire (ḥazl), invective (hajw), and praise of nature, in addition to a significant group of poems of social critique, which provide a negative complement to the homiletic qaṣīdas. Sanā‘ī’s Dīwān also contains a number of stanzaic poems (tarkīb-band, tarjī‘-band, appropriate to his position, more than a purely rhetorical consideration.” Meisami, Medieval Persian Court Poetry, 46.

\textsuperscript{91} This is the term Sanā‘ī uses to describe this genre. See Shafi‘i-Kadkanī, Tāzīyāna-hā-yi Sulāk: Naqd wa Tahli‘ī Chand Qaṣīda az Ḥakīm Sanā‘ī (Tehran: Āgāh, 1991), 30.
\textsuperscript{92} Cited in de Bruijn, Persian Sufi Poetry, 32.
\textsuperscript{93} On whose qaṣīdas see de Bruijn, Persian Sufi Poetry, 34-5.
\textsuperscript{94} For example, by the contemporary Iranian critic Shafi‘i-Kadkanī. See Tāzīyāna-hā-yi Sulāk, 35-8. For a synopsis of Sanā‘ī’s style in his homiletic qaṣīdas, see de Bruijn, Of Piety and Poetry, 164-82.
muṣammat), quatrains (rubāʾiyāt) and ‘fragments’ (qiṭʿa), which include similar topics to the qaṣīdas as well as some occasional poems.\textsuperscript{95}

\textit{Ghazals:} Sanāʾī’s \textit{Dīwān} is the first extant collection of any Persian poet to contain a significant number of ghazals – independent love poems that are shorter than the \textit{qaṣīda} but share its rhyme-scheme.\textsuperscript{96} It has been hypothesized that, though a courtly form, in the centuries preceding Sanāʾī the ghazal was not considered to have the prestige of the \textit{qaṣīda}. For this reason, although poets would have composed them for performance in the court they were seldom recorded for posterity.\textsuperscript{97} With Sanāʾī this clearly changed, marking a definitive moment in the history of Persian literature. Moreover, Sanāʾī’s \textit{ghazals} already contain many of the hallmarks of the classical Persian ghazal (such as the use of the \textit{nom de plume} in the \textit{takhallus}, which becomes the final line). Sanāʾī’s \textit{ghazals} have been studied in detail in an unpublished dissertation by Franklin Lewis, who has suggested that they can be read as fitting into ten distinct sub-genres: ‘love and praise’; ‘love enjoyed’; ‘suffering love’; ‘the complaint of love’; ‘homoerotic love’; ‘panegyric \textit{ghazals}’; ‘\textit{ghazals} on religious themes’; ‘wine songs’; ‘\textit{qalandarī} poems’; and ‘Sufic \textit{ghazals}’.\textsuperscript{98} Moreover, Lewis emphasizes the importance of the performance contexts of these \textit{ghazals}, which he suggests would significantly influence the ways they were interpreted. Lewis’ insights provide an important tool for making sense of the diversity of Sanāʾī’s \textit{ghazals}. Moreover, we will see in Chapter Four that the \textit{ghazals} and the thematically similar \textit{taghazzul} sections of certain panegyrics provide a crucial site for Sanāʾī to explore the nature of love, which gives them a philosophical significance beyond their aesthetic worth.

\textsuperscript{95} All of Sanāʾī’s poetry, excluding the \textit{mathnawīs}, is collected in his \textit{Dīwān} (D). For a detailed philological study of Sanāʾī’s \textit{Dīwān} and its manuscript tradition, see de Bruijn, \textit{Of Piety and Poetry}, 91-112.

\textsuperscript{96} On the difficult question of the origins of this genre see A. Bausani, “Ghazal: ii. In Persian Poetry,” \textit{EI2}.


\textsuperscript{98} See Lewis, “Reading, Writing and Recitation,” 310-3.
Mathnawīs: This genre, composed of rhyming couplets, allows for much greater thematic diversity than any other in classical Persian literature, of which the most important types are the epic, romance, and didactic. Three of the mathnawīs attributed to Sanāʾī are indisputably authentic.\footnote{On the mathnawī genre, see J.T.P. de Bruijn, “‘Mathnawī: 2. In Persian,” \textit{EI2}. All of Sanāʾī’s mathnawīs are in the meter \textit{khafī-i musaddas-i makhbūn-i makhdūf}. See de Bruijn, \textit{Of Poetry and Poetry}, 192-3. For the mathnawīs attributed to Sanāʾī see de Bruijn, \textit{Of Poetry and Poetry}, 113-8. On the most important of the falsely attributed mathnawīs, \textit{Tariq al-Tahqiq}, see Bo Utas, \textit{Tariq Ut-tahqiq: A Sufi Mathnawi Ascribed to Hakīm Sanāʾī of Ghazna and Probably Composed by Ahmad B. Al-Hasan B. Muḥammad An-Naṣīr al-Ṭahqīqī} (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1973).}


\textit{Sayr al-‘Ībād ilā’l-Maʿād (The Journey of the Servants to the Place of Return)} was written during the mid-section of Sanāʾī’s career. Containing approximately 800 lines, this poem follows the general structure of a panegyric \textit{qaṣīda} except that the prelude describes the poet’s visionary journey through levels of the cosmos, which also represent the virtues and vices, until he meets the patron, Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr, at the level of the Universal Intellect. From here the poem transitions into a praise of this patron. We shall examine it in more detail in Chapter Three.

\textit{The Walled Garden of Truth}, written during the last stage of Sanāʾī’s life and containing many of his most important teachings, is considered his \textit{magnum opus}. The work consists of ten chapters and includes praise of God, the Quran and the Prophet, religious, mystical and ethical guidance, praise of Bahrāmshāh and some other religious and political figures, and a meditation on the poet’s reasons for composing the work. We shall look at this book in detail in Chapter Two.
From even such a cursory overview of this range of genres and sub-genres, several dichotomies within Sanā‘ī’s corpus come into view, and in light of which the question of his coherence as a thinker must be studied.

First, it is possible to speak in a general sense of a distinction between ‘secular’ and ‘religious’ poetry. The ‘secular’ poetry, in which Sanā‘ī received extensive training in his youth at the Ghaznavid court, would include panegyrics for political patrons as well as what we might call the ‘standard’ (i.e. non-religious) ghazal, the type composed for enjoyment at the court, plus The Memoirs of Balkh. The ‘religious’ poetry would include Sanā‘ī’s adaptation of these forms to religious audiences, such as the panegyrics for religious authorities, the homiletic qaṣīdas, the ‘Sufic ghazals’, plus Sanā‘ī’s two later mathnawīs.

Secondly, it is clear that many of Sanā‘ī’s poems follow the generic norms that he had inherited, whereas others (particularly The Walled Garden) represent significant innovations. Given the incompleteness of our knowledge of some of these genres before Sanā‘ī (particularly the ghazal), it is difficult to come to definitive conclusions about the originality of some of his deployments of particular poetic forms. Nevertheless, it is clear that, despite Sanā‘ī’s extensive use of the traditions he inherited, some of the most important passages in his work come through decisive innovation in content and in form itself.

We can wonder at this point whether there is any sense in searching for an underlying coherence across the diversity of the genres in which Sanā‘ī composed. Perhaps Sanā‘ī was simply a craftsman, who inherited certain generic norms and topoi and then redeployed them with his utmost skill, whilst also adapting the courtly forms so they would appeal to a religious audience. If

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102 Though admittedly problematic (see for example, Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 116), the secular-religious/mystical dichotomy serves as a useful starting point for understanding the genres of classical Persian poetry, and is still used by major scholars in the field, so long as one does not consider the difference to be absolute. Cf. de Bruijn’s use of the term ‘profane poetry’ in *Of Piety and Poetry*, 148-63.
this is the case, there would be no underlying worldview in light of which to make sense of the possible coherence of Sanā‘ī’s poetry. He would simply be writing each genre according to its own independent standards, at times a panegyrist valuing worldly power, at others a lover of human beauty, and at still others a pious orator. As a result, there would be no sincerity to his own claims about his poetry, such as the famous line:

O Sanā‘ī, when religion has let you in
Stay your hand from poetry and the ways of poets.103

Though this assessment of Sanā‘ī can be argued, and may even contain a grain of truth, I contest that it underestimates Sanā‘ī as a thinker. I will argue over the course of the following chapters that there are in fact metaphysical and linguistic principles in Sanā‘ī’s poetry that do suggest a particular type of intellectual coherence in his later poetry, suggesting that there is a unity of vision underlying the diversity of his poetry. However, as we shall discuss, the identification of intellectual coherence is different from the claim that Sanā‘ī was always consistent in deploying this coherent world-view. For it is possible for a poet whose project involves the simultaneous adherence to and transformation of pre-existing genres to write poems that simply repeat these generic norms and do not explicitly ground themselves in that poet’s philosophical world-view.

First, however, let us consider some of the ways in which other scholars have approached this problem.

Approaches to the Problem of Coherence and the Biographical Context

The seminal work on Sanā‘ī in western scholarship is J.T.P. de Bruijn’s Of Piety and Poetry. In this work, de Bruijn presents a comprehensive reconstruction of Sanā‘ī’s biography and social

103 Quoted by de Bruijn as the epigraph of Of Piety and Poetry. Translation my own.
context, a thorough examination of the manuscript traditions of his works, and an introduction to the content of the poems. In the light of this biographical and philological work, de Bruijn is able to definitively dismiss the myths that developed around Sanāʾī, which depict him as an ascetic recluse who was converted from his life of courtly vanity by the apt critique of a wine-drinking qalandar. In de Bruijn’s study, the stages of Sanāʾī’s life come into focus: from mediocrity on the fringes of the Ghaznavid court of Masʿūd III (r. 492/1099-508/1115), and the development as a religious poet in Balkh, to the discovery of favor and renown composing for Ḥanafi scholars and preachers in Sarakhs and other cities in Khurāsān, to a final return to Ghazna. It is during this return to Ghazna that Sanāʾī remained aloof from the court yet nevertheless wrote The Walled Garden of Truth as a tribute to and work of instruction for Sultan Bahrāmshāh, dying suddenly before the final recension could be completed.

de Bruijn’s biography provides a powerful hermeneutic tool for reading Sanāʾī’s works. Viewed against the biography, the apparent jumble of attitudes that one at first encounters in his Dīwān becomes immediately more intelligible. Crucially, certain poems can be dated accurately to particular periods of Sanāʾī’s life, becoming associated with specific places and identifiable patrons. We do indeed see correspondences between the attitudes of the poet and the developing contexts in which he was composing, from the concern with court-politics in The Memoirs of Balkh, composed when leaving the court circles of Ghazna, to the mature and vigorous religious

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104 A major component of de Bruijn’s scholarship on Sanāʾī has been to critically examine the documentary evidence to come up with a reliable biography and dispel the myths. In this he has continued the work of both Persian and Western scholars of the past century (including Ahmet Ateş and Mudarris-Radawī), but has managed to present a depiction more complete and freer from speculation than those who have gone before. See de Bruijn, “Sanāʾī,” EIr; and Of Piety and Poetry, 4-18.

105 There he associated with such major poets as Masʿūd Saʿd-i Salmān (d. 1121), whose Dīwān Sanāʾī compiled, see de Bruijn, Of Piety and Poetry, 32. For a study of this poet see Sunil Sharma, Persian Poetry at the Indian Frontier: Masʿūd Saʿd Salmān of Lahore (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2000).

106 de Bruijn, Of Piety and Poetry, 22-5 and 86.

107 See de Bruijn, “Kār-nāma-ye Balk,” EIr.
exhortations labelled in the *Diwān*, ‘composed in Sarakhs’. In the light of de Bruijn’s biography, it seems wrong-headed to search for a coherence that pervades all of Sanā‘ī’s poetry, for we can presume that the attitudes and world-view of the young poet learning the courtly forms of panegyric and *ghazal* was quite different from that of the mature poet of religious circles. I believe that it is therefore in ‘the later Sanā‘ī’, the Sanā‘ī from the Sarakhs period onwards, that we should investigate the problem of coherence.

However, the biographical context only takes us so far in interpreting Sanā‘ī, and the question of the intellectual coherence of the later Sanā‘ī is still deeply complex. To begin with, it is clear that Sanā‘ī did not abandon those genres of poetry that seem more worldly, despite his deepening religious interests. It is clear that he continued to write panegyric *qaṣīdas* and *ghazals* until the end of his life. Furthermore, any attempt to isolate Sanā‘ī’s later poems is fraught with difficulty; there are a great many *qaṣīdas* that cannot be situated chronologically with any degree of certainty, and indeed nearly the whole corpus of *ghazals* is impossible to contextualize. We are thus left wondering how Sanā‘ī’s journey through courtly and religious circles and his discovery of his vocation as a religious poet affected his approach to secular poetry. Indeed, it is clear that Sanā‘ī continued to write both panegyrics and amatory verse until the end of his life. Rather than solving the problem of consistence, the clearer understanding of Sanā‘ī’s biography provided by de Bruijn focuses and intensifies this question. Though we can now separate out some of Sanā‘ī’s earlier poems from the corpus, we are still left with a set of later poems that include great disparity and diversity, from pleas for patronage to mystical flights, and from eroticism to conservative religious exhortation. How is it that a poet with such strident religious views could continue to write

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108 To provide but a few examples that prove this point, *The Walled Garden* itself contains significant panegyric sections, on which see de Bruijn, *Of Piety and Poetry*, 79-86. Likewise, the panegyrics for Bahrāmshāh include important amatory preludes (*taghazzul*), which we shall discuss in Chapter Four.
poems that seem so worldly? What was Sanā’ī’s mature worldview such that such disparate poetic moods could be deployed beside each other, or is there no clear worldview there at all?

**A Homiletic Poet?**

It is to provide a workable answer to the question of Sanā’ī’s mature poetic approach and worldview that de Bruijn introduces the characterization of Sanā’ī as ‘homiletic poet’. Having dispelled the idea of Sanā’ī’s ‘mystical’ conversion, de Bruijn describes in detail the circles of religious scholars and preachers in Khurāsān for whom Sanā’ī composed the poetry that made him famous and shaped his style as it reached full maturity. Despite Sanā’ī’s continued composition of panegyrics, de Bruijn correctly notes that Sanā’ī’s religious poems display a style well matched to the sessions of sermonizing (majālis-i wa‘ẓ) of his scholarly patrons. In order to capture the ethos of Sanā’ī’s religious poems and particularly the admonitory tone that reverberates through *The Walled Garden* and a great many of the qaṣīdas, de Bruijn characterizes them, and ultimately Sanā’ī himself, as ‘homiletic’.¹¹⁰ de Bruijn does not mean this characterization to flatten the undeniable diversity of Sanā’ī’s poetic attitudes. Rather, for him the concept ‘homiletic’ strikes the correct balance between emphasizing the ethical message that would have appealed to the ‘orthodox’ ulama and allowing for a diversity of themes, including the mystical, to take a secondary place within Sanā’ī’s oeuvre.

However, de Bruijn’s characterization of Sanā’ī’s poetry is a double-edged sword. From one point of view, it helpfully sums up the task of religious and ethical instruction that Sanā’ī takes up in most of his religious poems, and also helps us to understand his openness to the use of many

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¹⁰⁹ de Bruijn carefully and insightfully evaluates the material available in literary, historical and biographical works, clarifying how the image of Sanā’ī as anti-authoritarian mystic developed as a literary creation, in *Of Piety and Poetry*, 3-15.

¹¹⁰ See de Bruijn, “Sanā’ī,” *EI*; and *Of Piety and Poetry*, 164-70.
types of discourse in order to convey his teachings (from references to Quran, hadith, mystical literature, the sciences of his day and stories of different kinds and provenances). However, by drawing our attention to what is most familiar, for the concept ‘homiletic’ brings to mind predictable sermonizing on piety, the characterization may direct us away from those aspects of Sanā‘ī’s work that resist easy characterization. Indeed, the idea that we have now ‘understood’ Sanā‘ī may have contributed to the lack of subsequent scholarship on him - no work I know of in western scholarship has tried to make sense of Sanā‘ī’s oeuvre as a whole since Of Piety and Poetry.

Furthermore, though de Bruijn does not wish to exclude the mystical from Sanā‘ī, he does wish to argue that Sanā‘ī is not a ‘Sufi poet’. As I have argued elsewhere, by setting ‘homiletic’ and ‘scholar’ against ‘Sufi’, de Bruijn creates a false dichotomy that is ultimately harmful for the understanding of Sanā‘ī’s poetry. Moreover, the ‘homiletic’ characterization takes no account of Sanā‘ī’s panegyrics and ghazals and hence is unable to help us to understand if and how they fit into his later oeuvre. It is therefore fair to say that much of Sanā‘ī’s poetry is homiletic, indeed much of it can be called mystical homiletic, but we should not allow this characterization to influence our attempt to come to a more holistic reading of Sanā‘ī.

111 de Bruijn’s analysis of Sanā‘ī, then, by no means excludes the mystical. Indeed, in the epilogue to Of Piety and Poetry he moderates the earlier claim of Bertels’ that Sanā‘ī’s work must be clearly distinguished from the mathnawīs of ‘Aṭṭār and Rūmī. de Bruijn sees the continuity, yet maintains that this is because of similarities between modes of expression used by the ‘two sides’ (namely Sufis and scholars). See de Bruijn, Of Piety and Poetry, 247.

112 Crucially, de Bruijn uses distinctions that are primarily social – public circles of sermonizing ulama versus a “closed group of [Sufi] adepts” (de Bruijn, Of Piety and Poetry, 247) – to develop a characterization that primarily refers to content. This line of thought is grounded in a set of assumptions: perhaps about what kind of poetry sermonizing ulama would be interested in and what they would be distasteful of, or about what the goals of their religious exhortations may or may not be. As William Chittick has pointed out, the term ‘homiletic’ and its distinction from the mystical carries with it the traces of long-standing and now outdated orientalist prejudices about the nature of Islamic ‘orthodoxy’ and its relationship to mysticism. (William Chittick, “Review: Of Piety and Poetry, The Interaction of Religion and Literature in the Life and Works of Hakīm Sanā‘ī of Ghazna by J. T. P. de Bruijn, Ḥakīm Sanā‘ī,” Journal of the American Oriental Society 105.2 (Apr. - Jun., 1985): 348-9.) I have discussed the question of Sanā‘ī and Sufism at length in my article, “Reminding the Scholars What it Means to be Muslim: Themes of Religious Identity in the Poetry of Sanā‘ī of Ghazna,” in Sufis and Mulas: Sufis and their Opponents in the Persianate World, ed. Reza Tabandeh and Leonard Lewisohn, forthcoming.
The Three Poles of Sanā‘ī’s Poetry

The foremost contemporary Iranian critic of Persian poetry, Muḥammad-Riḍā Shafī‘i-Kadkanī, has devoted considerable attention to the problem of the coherence of Sanā‘ī’s oeuvre, focusing in particular on the question of the ethical or spiritual coherence of his writings. As Shafī‘i-Kadkanī expresses it, one discovers three very different personalities in the Diwān: 1) the panegyrist and satirist; 2) the preacher and social critic; 3) and the lover or qalandar (the norm breaking rogue). Shafī‘i-Kadkanī names these personalities the dark pole, the grey center, and the light pole of Sanā‘ī’s being respectively.

Shafī‘i-Kadkanī further notes that despite the historical and methodological difficulties that prevent a clear analysis of the chronology of Sanā‘ī’s composition, some of which we have mentioned above, it is almost certain that all three of these aspects of Sanā‘ī’s being persisted until the end. Moreover, for Shafī‘i-Kadkanī it is precisely the difficulty of understanding how one individual could simultaneously compose poetry in three different value systems that led to the creation of the myths of Sanā‘ī’s mystical conversion.

Shafī‘i-Kadkanī continues to analyze each of these aspects of ‘Sanā‘ī’s being’, and is particularly interested in the literary quality of the poetry associated with each. As his analysis develops, it becomes clear that Shafī‘i-Kadkanī’s criteria for locating a poem along this spectrum is its ethical motivation, and thus only panegyrics and satire that lack moral significance are to be located on the dark pole. Given this clarification, Shafī‘i-Kadkanī notes that this category of

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113 On this term see Muḥammad Riḍā Shafī‘i-Kadkanī, Qalandarīyya Dar Ṭārīkh (Tehran: Sukhan, 2007).
114 See Shafī‘i-Kadkanī, Ṭāzijāna-hā-yi Sulūk, 25.
115 Shafī‘i-Kadkanī, Ṭāzijāna-hā-yi Sulūk, 25.
116 As such, he suggests for example that it is better to locate the satire of The Walled Garden, which is of high literary quality, towards the lighter pole. See Shafī‘i-Kadkanī, Ṭāzijāna-hā-yi Sulūk, 26.
Sanā‘ī’s poetry is quite mediocre, and is surpassed in skill and power by several of his contemporaries.\(^\text{117}\)

Regarding the central ‘grey’ section of Sanā‘ī’s oeuvre, that is, poetry of social critique and ethical advice, i.e. homiletics, Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī affirms that it is no less important than the ‘light pole’, and remains one of the peaks of the entire history of the Persian qaṣīda.\(^\text{118}\)

The “climate of luminosity of Sanā‘ī’s soul,”\(^\text{119}\) however, is to be found according to Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī in his ghazals, in which “he is the beginning and even the point of perfection and the climax” of this genre of Persian poetry.\(^\text{120}\) Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī notes the defining influence on Sanā‘ī’s ghazals on the tradition that followed him, emphasizing their mystical content. In particular, he points out the ability of Sanā‘ī’s ghazals to unite the physical and spiritual aspects of humanity,\(^\text{121}\) a topic that we shall return to in Chapter Four.

Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī’s perspective on Sanā‘ī’s oeuvre is an important complement to that of de Bruijn, whose work he has drawn on without accepting its conceptual limitations. In particular, Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī highlights the mystical significance of much of Sanā‘ī’s work and his integration of ideas from the Sufi tradition into poetic form.\(^\text{122}\) Moreover, his analysis of Sanā‘ī’s poetry along a spectrum from darkness to light according to worldly versus spiritual aspirations is a helpful tool in recognizing how striking the apparent lack of coherence in Sanā‘ī’s oeuvre is, suggesting that different types of poetry result from fundamentally different value systems. But though Shafī‘ī-

\(^{117}\) Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī, Ṭāziyāna-hā-yi Sulūk, 26-8.

\(^{118}\) Indeed, the purpose of Ṭāziyāna-hā-yi Sulūk is to collect and comment on a collection of these qaṣīdas.

\(^{119}\) Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī, Ṭāziyāna-hā-yi Sulūk, 30.

\(^{120}\) Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī, Ṭāziyāna-hā-yi Sulūk, 30.

\(^{121}\) Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī, Ṭāziyāna-hā-yi Sulūk, 32. Here Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī notes that he has discussed the ghazals in greater detail in the introduction to his collection Dar Iqlim-i Rushanā‘ī (Tehran: Āqā, 1994). However, in that book he explains his unfortunate decision to omit this essay, which as far as I know has never been published.

\(^{122}\) See in particular Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī, Ṭāziyāna-hā-yi Sulūk, 43-4.
Kadkanī suggests that certain examples of Sanā‘ī’s later poetry that seem worldly or ‘dark’ in fact have ethical or mystical significance, he does not attempt to solve the problem of the coherence of Sanā‘ī’s poetry. Indeed, Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī affirms that “until the end of his life [Sanā‘ī] was alternating between these two worlds.”

Rethinking the Problem of Coherence

de Bruijn and Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī masterfully analyze Sanā‘ī’s poetry from the point of view of an orientalist-historian and a Persian literary critic respectively. However, giving full credit to their historical and literary elucidations of significant aspects of Sanā‘ī’s poetry, my own reading of this major figure has lead me to the conclusion that scholarly analysis of Sanā‘ī thus far has failed to recognize a set of intellectual and linguistic principles that underlie much of Sanā‘ī’s mature poetry, hidden within the outer differences of the diverse genres in which he wrote. As I will show in the chapters that follow, uncovering these principles requires a trans-generic reading of Sanā‘ī’s poetry, which must accompany close reading of particular passages. Furthermore, as my analysis develops, I will also suggest that Sanā‘ī’s mature world-view is built on a recognition that diverse literary and metaphysical perspectives are necessary in order to understand reality and cultivate humanity. It is in these principles and this appreciation of the significance of diversity that I ground my claim for the coherence of Sanā‘ī’s later worldview. Nevertheless, given that this coherence lies at the level of principles that are sometimes beneath the surface level of the texts, there remains room for disagreement over his consistency in applying these coherent principles throughout his later poems. Indeed, as I will argue, a level of ambiguity over this question inevitably abides, and it is highly likely that Sanā‘ī was aware of this and made use of it for literary effect.

123 Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī, Tāziyāna-hā-yi Sulūk, 16.
As mentioned above, the most prominent challenge to understanding the nature of any intellectual coherence in Sanā‘ī’s mature works is the diversity of genres in which he wrote. Indeed, each genre possesses its own norms and parameters, standing on its own and apart from the others. However, in order to frame the three chapters of analysis that follow, we can begin to draw connections between genres through the following observation: notwithstanding their fundamental differences of style and theme, the most important genres of Sanā‘ī’s poetry, namely the homiletic qaṣīda, the panegyric qaṣīda, the didactic mathnawī and the ghazal (in most of its sub-genres) are united in the fact that they are all concerned with the cultivation or representation of human perfection, of iḥsān in all of the meanings of the term discussed in the introduction.

More specifically, the homiletic qaṣīda and the didactic mathnawī are both written as means for human improvement, and direct the reader towards the acquisition of human perfection, here within the norms of Islam and Islamic spirituality. The panegyric qaṣīda portrays an image of perfection in the person of the political or religious figure that is its subject, simultaneously declaring this perfection to others whilst also setting an ethical standard that the patron must live up to. Though quite different from these other genres, the amatory ghazal nevertheless presents an aesthetic response to the perfection of the beloved, often including both the depiction of that perfection and the effect it has had on the poet.

The multi-faceted significance of the term iḥsān discussed in the Introduction to this dissertation is particularly useful for the trans-generic reading of Sanā‘ī, as it reminds us to be aware of the ways in which Sanā‘ī’s poetry across diverse genres is simultaneously invested in the intellectual and ethical cultivation, whilst also aiming for expression in the most beautiful form

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124 Let us note that the English word ‘perfection’ is both an abstract noun and a verbal noun; perfection is both a state and a process of attaining that state. Both meanings concern us here.

125 See Meisami, Medieval Persian Court Poetry, 46.
possible. The project of examining how human perfection is depicted in these diverse genres will lead us through the contribution of Sanā‘ī to various discourses in the Islamic tradition, from ethics and aesthetics, to Sufi doctrines of the Muhammadan reality and even Quranic interpretation. These connections will further affirm the significance of Sanā‘ī’s poetry within Islamic intellectual history.

Given the norms of these different genres, our expectation should be that the types of human perfection and perfectibility depicted or encouraged in each will be very different. Though there is likely to be overlap, say, between the religious values in a homiletic poem and a panegyrical qaṣīda dedicated to a religious scholar, it seems impossible on the surface level of language to collapse an amorous description of beauty, for example, with a depiction of piety. The real diversity of genres of Sanā‘ī’s poetry is therefore a crucial starting point for reading across Sanā‘ī’s oeuvre. Each poem must be read in light of the genre and generic norms in relation to which it is composed.

In light of the importance of genre, the arrangement of the three chapters that follow allows us to approach the problem of coherence from successively wider generic perspectives. In Chapter Two, I consider the problem of coherence within a single work, Sanā‘ī’s magnum opus, The Walled Garden of Truth. Here I suggest that Sanā‘ī himself was well aware of the problem of integrating diverse sources and perspectives within a single literary work and discussed it explicitly. In light of this discussion I analyze the strategies by which Sanā‘ī integrates diversity into the single fabric of poetic composition, where it forms a crucial component of both his metaphysical and ethical teachings and his rhetorical strategies. I focus in particular on his use of two distinct metaphysical perspectives, namely the perspectives of divine transcendence and degrees of reality, which emerge as important conceptual aids for the analysis of his other genres of poetry.

In Chapter Three, I begin the trans-generic interpretation of Sanā‘ī by focusing on the religious poetry that he wrote for his most important patron, Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr, the Chief
Qādi of Sarakhs. By interpreting the poetry written for this patron in light of Sanā‘ī’s praise of the Prophet, I suggest that Sanā‘ī’s multifaceted depiction of human perfection is rooted in a metaphysical approach to human perfection, in which the praised individual is seen as a manifestation of a hypostatic reality that transcends the material world. This approach, rooted in the metaphysical perspective of degrees of reality introduced in Chapter Two, allows us to identify a shift in Sanā‘ī’s linguistic strategies as his worldview developed. I term this shift a move from metaphor to symbol.

Moving beyond religious poetry, Chapter Four suggests that the metaphysical approach to human perfection and the linguistic shift from metaphor to symbol also play a crucial role in Sanā‘ī’s amatory poetry, as do the two perspectives of divine transcendence and degrees of reality. In order to investigate the applicability of these principles that we have discovered in Sanā‘ī’s religious poetry to the amatory realm, I first present a close reading of several ghazals and amatory preludes (taghazzul) that meditate on the nature of love itself. Having shown that Sanā‘ī’s conception of love fuses human and divine love, I turn to the problem of the ambiguity of the beloved in his love poetry. By pinpointing several different levels of ambiguity, I suggest that this ambiguity is deliberately cultivated by Sanā‘ī as a core component of his art of the ghazal.

The successively expanding generic focus of these three chapters allows us to identify the metaphysical and linguistic principles that are at work in The Walled Garden, the religious poetry for Muḥammad ibn Maṣḥūr, and the amatory verse. These metaphysical and linguistic principles constitute the core of Sanā‘ī’s coherent intellectual perspective, which he deploys through diverse genres in order to explore diverse aspects of human perfection and the cultivation of Ḭṣn. Sanā‘ī’s mature poetry therefore contains a true ‘unity in diversity’, which defies homogenization implied by simplistic characterizations and yet is nevertheless endowed with coherence. This, however, does not imply that Sanā‘ī deployed this coherent worldview with complete consistency throughout
each instance of his later poetry. Indeed, as we shall discuss, for both philological and stylistic reasons a degree of ambiguity regarding the consistency of Sanā‘ī’s later works inevitably remains. However, there remain ways in which this ambiguity itself can be seen as being coherent with Sanā‘ī’s mature worldview.
Chapter 2: The Walled Garden of Truth and Two Metaphysical Perspectives

The idea that Sanâ’ī’s poetry draws on a ‘hotchpotch’ of influences is in part due to the nature of his magnum opus, The Walled Garden of Truth. As a result of this, the task of investigating whether there is any coherence within the diversity of Sanâ’ī’s later works must begin with the search for coherence within this book itself, which is the task of the present chapter.

There are several immediate reasons why this work might seem at first to be a disorderly collection of wise sayings. To begin with, the text of The Walled Garden has gone through multiple stages of collection. As de Bruijn has described in detail, Sanâ’ī himself compiled two versions of the work. The first, sent to a Ghaznavid scholar living in Baghdad, Burhân al-Dîn Biryângar, which apparently amounted to ten thousand distiches, is now lost. de Bruijn considers the second, shorter version to be preserved in the Bağdatlı Vehbi (BV) manuscript, which he has discussed in detail, naming it Fakhrî-Nâma, one of the oldest titles of the book. However, neither of these versions was definitive, and Sanâ’ī probably continued to compose material for a final version until his sudden death. As such, it is not surprising that the various manuscripts of this work, representing different collections of material attributed to Sanâ’ī, contain still different versions of the text. Indeed, de Bruijn concludes that although some of the verses in the longer manuscripts that are not found in the manuscripts of the Fakhrî-Nâma may be by Sanâ’ī, in most cases there is ultimately no way to come to a definitive conclusion on their authenticity. Finally, the modern edition

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126 As noted, for example by Rypka in History of Iranian Literature, 236, cited by de Bruijn in Of Piety and Poetry, 226.


128 For de Bruijn’s study of the content of this version see Of Piety and Poetry, 218-45. See also de Bruijn, Persian Sufi Poetry, 37; de Bruijn, “Comparative Notes on Sanā’ī and ‘Aṭṭār,” 369-70; and de Bruijn, “The Stories of Sanā’ī’s Faxri-nâme.”

129 On the collection of the work and its textual problems see de Bruijn, Of Piety and Poetry, 119-39. While de Bruijn’s research does bring to light the problems of authenticity of particular sections of Sanâ’ī’s oeuvre, in
published by Mudarris-Riḍawī constitutes a further version of the poem, which de Bruijn has labelled a ‘vulgate’, as it collects the material found in the various manuscript versions.\(^{130}\)

\(^{130}\) See de Bruijn, *Of Piety and Poetry*, 219. For a list of the major differences between the *Fakhrī-Nāma* and Mudarris-Riḍawī’s edition, see *Of Piety and Poetry*, 220-6.
The state of the available versions of *The Walled Garden* thus presents a particularly difficult challenge for our study. Being unable to access the manuscript of the *Fakhrī-Nāma*, and recognizing that it does not include all the material that Sanā‘ī composed for this book, I have decided to focus my attention on the Mudarris-Riḍlawī’s edition. At the very least, the analysis presented below applies to this work as it has existed for the Persian literary tradition – for some of the passages not found in the *Fakhrī-Nāma* had been accessible to authors as early as Rūzbihān Baqlī (d.606/1209). However, I have also been able to strengthen the scope of the validity of conclusions reached in two ways: by confirming the authenticity of certain passages through comparison with de Bruijn’s descriptions of the *Fakhrī-Nāma*, and by citing poetry of more certain attribution from other genres of Sanā‘ī’s poetry. Through this latter means I have endeavored to protect the most important conclusions of the chapter, which will be used for the trans-generic reading of Sanā‘ī’s poetry in Chapters Three and Four, from the difficulties caused by the philological problems of *The Walled Garden*.

However, although the complicated history of the work’s collection is reflected to a certain extent in a measure of disorderliness in the available editions, it is the thematic diversity of the work that creates the greatest challenge to understanding its coherence. Indeed, de Bruijn has noted the difficulty of discerning a coherent order in even the shorter *Fakhrī-Nāma*.132

The diversity of the contents of *The Walled Garden* is best approached in light of the fact that this work, like much of Sanā‘ī’s poetry, executes a synthesis of several currents of Islamic thought and literature.

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132 de Bruijn does however suggest that the poem is structured as a panegyrical, much like SI. The panegyrical section is introduced by the didactic portion of the book. See de Bruijn, *Of Piety and Poetry*, 235-6.
The significance of The Walled Garden comes more clearly into focus once we identify three major traditions of Islamic ethical thought—literary ethics, religious ethics, and philosophical ethics.133 From one point of view, The Walled Garden stands directly within the tradition of literary ethics, or adab (termed ‘literary humanism’ by Makdisi).134 Indeed, several sections of the work correspond to particular strands of adab, from sections on ‘noble character traits’ (makārim al-akhlāq) in Chapters 5 and 6,135 to the ‘mirror for princes’ in Chapter 8.136 Indeed, de Bruijn has identified several didactic works in the Persian tradition, including Āfarīn-Nāma of Abū Shakūr Balkhī (composed in 333/944),137 and Mukhtārī’s Hunar-Nāma, which combine religious and secular themes.138 Moreover, it is the connection with genres of advice literature (pand, andarz) that helps to explain the tendency of The Walled Garden to appear as being simple a loosely ordered compilation of wise sayings,139 an appearance that we will show is partially misleading later in the chapter.

133 This division has been developed from comments made to me by Seyyed Hossein Nasr. The ethical significance of discussions in kalām and fiqh should also not be forgotten. On the former see Majid Fakhry, Ethical Theories in Islam (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1991), 31-59. On the latter see Rizwan Zamir, “‘Surely in Their Stories is a Lesson for Those Who Understand’: A Case for Islamic Narrative Ethics,” forthcoming.
135 Compare for example the Makārim al-akhlāq attributed to al-Tha‘alibī (d. 429/1039). See Bilal Orfali and Ramzi Baalbaki (eds.), The Book of Noble Character, Critical Edition of Makārim al-akhlāq wa mahāsin al-adab wa-badā‘ī‘ al-a‘wsā‘ī wa-gharā‘īb al-tashbihāt, Attributed to Abu Mansūr al-Tha‘alibī (d. 429/1039) (Leiden: Brill, 2015). Some similarity in order of topics between this work and The Walled Garden should be noted. The first chapter of this work deals with noble character traits, introduced by a section on the benefits of knowledge, just as Sanā‘ī’s discussion of noble character traits in Chapter 5 is preceded by Chapter 4 in praise of knowledge.
136 On this genre see Patricia Crone, Medieval Islamic Political Thought (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 148-164.
137 On which see J. Matūnī, “Āfarīn-Nāma,” EIr.
138 See de Bruijn, Of Piety and Poetry, 185; 197.
139 Roxane Marcotte suggest that this feature of ‘compilation’ was a particular characteristic of ‘traditional Iranian moral literature’, which influenced the development of Arabic adab: “The basic feature of traditional Iranian moral literature is its structure. It is first and foremost a literature of compilation. This type of literature consisted, in its primitive form, of an arrangement of collections of advice (pand), counsels (pand or naṣīḥah), and moral teachings (andarz). These advice, counsels and moral teachings were to be given to the ruler or the heir to the throne and, more generally, to the succeeding generations of kings as a practical guide in the ways to achieve a just rule, to become a just ruler and, more generally, to proceed in the ways of worldly matters.” Roxanne Marcotte, “An Early Anonymous Persian Moral Text: The Jāvīdān
Viewed as a work of literary ethics, as de Bruijn notes, The Walled Garden is, however, remarkable for its “reflections on Koranic texts or elements of hadith...edifying stories about prophets and saints, and ethical concepts proper to the Sufi tradition.” As such, in addition to being a work of literary ethics, The Walled Garden is also a work of religious ethics. Much like in the homiletic ḡāṣīdas, Sanā’ī speaks here often as a religious orator, calling his readers to wake up to their responsibilities towards God. This aspect of the work is particularly clear in the first three chapters, which are dedicated to Praise of God, the Quran, and the Prophet respectively, topics which though present in literary ethics are at the center of religious ethics. Furthermore, The Walled Garden demonstrates particular influence of an important strand of religious ethics, namely Sufi ethics. Indeed, statements on the ideals of Sufism, early Sufis such as Bayazīd Bastāmī, and mystical virtues such as poverty (faqr, ‘ajz), have almost come to define how The Walled Garden has been seen by posterity, as the founding work in the tradition of Sufi Mathnawīs.

Finally, although The Walled Garden does not make use of the discursive methods of philosophical ethics, which would be inappropriate in a work of poetry in any case, philosophy is nevertheless present. In particular, as we shall discuss below, the basic outline of the book is based on Neoplatonic emanationism, from the One, down through the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul, to the material world.

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Khirad’,” Islamic Studies 36.1 (Spring 1997): 78.

140 de Bruijn, Of Piety and Poetry, 184.

141 On the context of homiletics and Sanā’ī’s place in relation to this type of discourse see de Bruijn, Of Piety and Poetry, 164-70.

142 See for example, HH, 63; 91; 494-542.

143 de Bruijn prefers to call The Walled Garden a ‘homiletic’ work, rather than a ‘Sufi’ work, particularly since it was composed for Bahrāmshāh and not a group of Sufis. (See de Bruijn, Persian Sufi Poetry, 37.) This is a fair analysis of the work, given the diversity of its contents, which include characteristically Sufi material but are not dominated by it in the way that the mathnawīs of Ṭṭṭār and Rūmī are. Nevertheless, as de Bruijn points out, this work had a tremendous influence on subsequent Sufi authors.
In light of the above, *The Walled Garden* stands out as an important meeting between the Islamic ethical traditions, particularly literary and religious ethics. Although, the synthesis that Sanâ‘î attempted certainly came with the risk of creating a ‘hotchpotch’, I shall argue *The Walled Garden* can be read as reflecting a set of strategies that turn this diversity of contents to didactic advantage. I begin the chapter by investigating how the diversity of *The Walled Garden* is conceived of within this composition itself. In particular, I discuss the way the diversity of subject matter in this book is compared with the diversity present in the cosmos and human experience, which he conceptualizes around a series of correlated polarities. Drawing on this idea of complementary poles, I then examine how the structure of *The Walled Garden* develops around several different types of movement between polarities. It is this movement between polarities that enables Sanâ‘î to integrate diverse points of view into the intellectual and rhetorical structure of the book, creating a work that has a greater internal coherence than the list of its contents implies.

Finally, I suggest that the most important of these polarities within *The Walled Garden* is the polarity between two different metaphysical perspectives, one focusing on divine transcendence and the other on the degrees of reality. This use of two different metaphysical approaches shows that metaphysical perspectivism plays an important role in *The Walled Garden*. As we will see in subsequent chapters, these metaphysical perspectives can be traced in Sanâ‘î’s other mature writings, providing an important interpretive tool for understanding further points of coherence within his oeuvre.

**The Unity of the Message of The Walled Garden or ‘Sanâ‘î-ābād’**

Though we must never lose sight of the rich diversity of *The Walled Garden of Truth*, this diversity becomes more intelligible in light of Sanâ‘î’s own reflections on his unity of purpose in composing the book. In the final chapter of the work, Sanâ‘î considers what he has achieved,
praising the poetic quality and inspired content of the work. In one of the more striking passages of this section, Sanāʿī compares *The Walled Garden of Truth* to a celestial city, which he names ‘Sanāʿī-ābād’, which has been taken by some as an alternative name for the poem.\(^\text{144}\)

I have split the oyster of Spirit and heart,
   In order to retrieve from them a pearl such as this.
And within this bounty, for the sake of remembrance,
   I have now established a *Sanāʿī-ābād*.
A city more delightful than the abode of Eden,
   A palace greater than the great cities of the age…
Look upon the porticoes of this book with your Spirit,
   For with the eyes alone it is impossible to do this.
Though in number it’s like a heaven filled with angels,
   It is one with the letters of the *shahādatayn*…
Its outer aspect like houris with musky hair,
   Its inner aspect like the spring with laughing face….
Each of its saplings is a world of meaning,
   Each of its plants is like the Tuba tree….
Within it a hundred thousand veils of light,
   And behind the veils hundreds of thousands of houris…
A flourishing city, full of bounties and grace,
   The doors of its gates are open to outsiders…\(^\text{145}\)

Amidst the exquisite imagery comparing his work to a paradisal city or garden (calling to mind the title of the work itself), Sanāʿī here meditates on the unity within diversity that he sees to underlie his work. First, he claims that *The Walled Garden* is not simply a compilation of the words of others, but has rather resulted from his own spiritual effort to ‘split the oyster of Spirit and heart’.

\(^\text{144}\) Sanāʿī did not intend it to be a name of the poem, but some later transmitters have appended it to the title. See de Bruijn, *Of Piety and Poetry*, 129.

\(^\text{145}\) HH, 709-10. Part of this section, as occurring in the *Fakhrī-Nāma*, is cited by de Bruijn in *Of Piety and Poetry*, 129.
From this singular pearl of spiritual realization, Sanā‘ī has composed a diverse palace, city, or garden, each tree of which is ‘a world of meaning’, and the doors of which are ‘open to outsiders’ through the accessibility of its literary form.

But though composed of a great many such beautiful verses, the fundamental message of the book is one: the message of the Islamic testifications of faith (shahādatayn), affirming the unity of God and the messengerhood of the Prophet Muḥammad. As such, despite its inclusion of material as diverse as panegyrics and comedy, its purpose is ultimately that of human improvement, the cultivation of the same īḥsān that is the reason for the revelation of the Quran. As such, although we can differentiate between the diverse Islamic ethical traditions on which Sanā‘ī drew to compose this work, he himself sees no inconsistency. The cultivation of character that is the goal of adab is precisely the cultivation of character that is advocated in religious discourses.

However, even beyond this affirmation of a fundamentally religious purpose behind the diverse contents of this book, we also find a more detailed meditation on the significance of diversity within the book, drawing on a mode of thinking that we can term ‘correlative thought’.

Precisions on the Unity in Diversity of The Walled Garden: Correlative Thought and Two Poles in Sanā‘ī’s Work

Sanā‘ī returns to the description of The Walled Garden of Truth within cosmic dimensions in another passage in the work’s final chapter, which provides a more detailed investigation of the unity within diversity of the work, beyond the simple statement of a unity of purpose that we have already seen.

The basic mode of thinking of the passage that follows can be termed ‘correlative thought’. Sachiko Murata has analyzed this type of thought in detail. The core of her analysis of this type of thinking in Islamic texts, particularly those from the Sufi tradition, is as follows:
Since the Reality of God disclosed through the cosmos can be described by opposite and conflicting attributes, the cosmos itself can be seen as a vast collection of opposites. The two hands of God are busy shaping all that exists. Hence mercy and wrath, severity and gentleness, life giving and slaying, exalting and abasing, and all the rest of the contradictory attributes of God are displayed in existence…The key here is analogy or correspondence. And this is established by the qualities that things manifest, all of which ultimately go back to the One. In other words, different things, at different times and places, manifest the same qualities of the Real (al-Ḥaqq).146

The fundamental method of this type of thinking, which we will encounter repeatedly in the texts we are studying and which is crucial to making sense of them, is to collect together phenomena of different orders of reality - from the Divine to the human, the linguistic to the concrete, the ethical to the metaphysical - and to collect them together into different correlative groups. Often, as in this case, a single binary or polarity is emphasized. A diverse group of phenomena is then shown to be correlated with each of the two poles. In this way, phenomena of very different orders of reality become connected together by virtue of the pole they are correlated with. As we shall see, this correlation of phenomena of diverse orders of reality becomes a powerful means of developing a worldview that explains emphasizes the harmony within diversity.

Crucially, correlative thought is not simply based on associations that only exist in the mind of the poet. Rather, this type of thought is possible because the correlative thinker considers the correlations evoked to correspond to actual correlations in reality. As we shall discuss in Chapter Three, the metaphors of correlative thought are more than just metaphor - they establish symbolic or anagogic relations that assist the reader in understanding the symbolic nature of reality itself.

In the following remarkable passage, Sanā‘ī defends his inclusion of both serious topics (jīdd) and jest (hazl),\(^{147}\) often of a ribald nature, within the same work. In doing so, however, he presents an account of reality that draws together correlated polarities from diverse spheres: from the social to the psychological, and from the cosmological to the theological. As such he draws out the profound correlations between the many types of diversity that are to be found in poetry, in human experience, in the cosmos, and even within God Himself:

If there is jest with seriousness, say ‘Let it be,’
   For the lasso for the ruffians is not from the clever.
Since in this journey, I sometimes pass through lowlands,\(^{148}\)
   There is gold and barley, Christ and the donkey:
Each of them eats what is appropriate for him,
   Jesus, [takes] the gold, and his donkey the grain.
There must be goodness, when considered overall,
   But don’t expect there to be good without any bad.
Wherever there is ease there are a hundred sufferings,
   But beneath each suffering, all of it is treasure.
For beneath the seven [spheres], the five [senses] and the four [elements],
   There is no wine without a hangover, no rose without a thorn.
This is a world with fair and foul together,
   And that is a world with heaven and hell together.
In a world whose order derives from duality,
   This is the cause of bad and good character.\(^{149}\)
This does not [merely] follow from the order of His dominion,
   For there is Wrath and Kindness along with His Divinity.
You have seen fair along with foul in the world,

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\(^{147}\) In arguing for the importance of comedy amidst seriousness, Sanā‘ī is of course echoing the view of many Muslim literati before him, of which al-Jāhiz’s Kitāb al-tarbi‘ wa'l-tadwi‘r is a classic example. For this reference plus a general survey of these terms in Islamic literature see Ch. Pellat, “al-Djidd wa’l-Hazl,” EI2. See also J.T.P de Bruijn, “Humor,” EIr, which includes references to The Walled Garden.

\(^{148}\) Reading variant, gah past for ki rah-ast.

\(^{149}\) Reading variant, bā’ith-i for bā’ith-ash.
Good with evil, and infidelity with faith.  
There is expansion and contraction, in the world of life;  
There is harm and benefit in the constitution of plants.  
The expansion and contraction that’s in the world of the heart,  
Is likewise in the shape and form of water and clay.  
[718] This duality of color is for the sake of the Good,  
It is not out of ignorance that [He created] Turks and Africans…
It is not intelligent at the time of hospitality,  
To just accept a morsel (̪luqma) from [one as wise as] Luqmān.
What kind of sage, when he lays out his spread,  
Would not set aside a share for the man laboring in the garden.
For a host, to be an elitist is a fault;  
To extend the invitation to the masses is from intellect.
When a host busies himself with arraying the spread,  
Common herbs (tarra) have their role as well as the lamb (barra).
Although serious poetry is alien to jest,  
My jest and my seriousness are from the same home.
When the king arranges provisions for his storehouses,  
There is need for the good [treasures], as well as the bad [weapons].
My jest is not jest; it is instruction (ta’līm).
My verses are not verses; they are climes (iqlīm).
What do you know when you are in this clime,  
What kind of teaching the intellect-guide will give?
That is: if it’s seriousness, hang it onto your soul,
And if it is jest, like magic it clings to your mind.
And finally I give thanks that in terms of art,
My jest is sweeter than the seriousness of others.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ HH, 717-8. This is one of the many passages the authenticity of which remains impossible to verify. It is noteworthy that the Fakhrī-Nāma contained a section advising seriousness (jidd) and the avoidance of jest (haţl). (See de Bruijn, Of Piety and Poetry, 239.) Moreover, the ribald stories that are present in Mudarris-Riḍawī’s edition were not included in the Fakhrī-Nāma. Their presence likely required the insertion of this
In this remarkable passage, Sanā‘ī stakes his claim that the diversity of content within *The Walled Garden of Truth*, epitomized by the most striking contrast in the work, namely the contrast between the highest religious truths and the most ribald of tales, has its basis within the nature of reality itself. There are several stages of argument to this claim interwoven in this passage, which we shall now discuss in detail.

To begin with, jest and serious topics appeal to different types of people - the type of poetry that appeals to ruffians (*awbāsh*) is different from that which appeals to the clever (*zīrākān*).\(^{151}\) The various sections of *The Walled Garden* thus reflect the social diversity, including topics of interest to kings, scholars, spiritual seekers, and those simply seeking entertainment. Moreover, it is not fitting that a poet should cater to only one type of individual, for hospitality requires an all-encompassing generosity, which is inviting to all and involves converse with all. Indeed, by drawing all types of people to *The Walled Garden* through the diversity of its themes, he is exposing them all to its fundamental message, of ethical and religious cultivation, to which they may not have been originally attracted.

Furthermore, the diversity among different classes of people is also reflected in the diversity found within every individual, for within each of us there is a Jesus, i.e. the Spirit, and a donkey, namely the carnal soul. Just as the world contains provisions for both a man who can value precious metals and a domestic animal, so should poetry nourish the different parts of the soul by containing golden meanings and fodder for laughter. Indeed, though Sanā‘ī advises his readers to make effort to ‘hang’ the serious parts of his work onto the soul, he notes that the jest will itself attract the soul’s appetites and adhere to it naturally.

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Explanation. Nevertheless, as we shall see in the chapters that follow, the conception of reality as constituted by polarities is very much a part of Sanā‘ī’s thought and recurs in diverse genres.

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\(^{151}\) A term that often has negative connotations, ‘slyly clever’.
Furthermore, the diversity that is found on the literary, social and psychological planes ultimately derives from the very nature of the world itself; it has a cosmological basis. Indeed, within the sub-lunar sphere, which is composed of the conflicting natures of the four elements, there is always suffering to temper any pleasure, just as wine brings a hangover or a rose comes with its thorns. This same duality is found throughout the various domains of human existence, from character traits to the beating of the heart, and from the emotions to the medicinal effects of plants. However, this duality is not limited to the material world, as it is also represented in the Hereafter by the duality of Heaven and Hell, and indeed within the Divine Nature in Kindness and Wrath.

The correlative thought of this passage thus develops around the following series of polarities:

- Jest - Seriousness
- Ruffians - Clever People
- Lowlands - (Highlands)
- Barley - Gold
- The Donkey - Jesus
- (The Carnal Soul) - (The Spirit)
- Bad - Good
- Suffering - Ease
- Hangover - Wine
- Thorn - Rose
- Hell - Heaven
- Bad-Character - Good-Character
- Divine Wrath - Divine Kindness
- Infidelity - Faith
- Contraction (of the heart, of the emotions) - Expansion

Implied terms in parentheses.

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152 Implied terms in parentheses.
Poison in Plants - Medicinal Benefit in Plants
Africans - Turks
Common Herbs - Roast Lamb
A King’s Weapons - A King’s Treasure

In this passage, Sanā’ī is thus saying something profound about the interconnectedness of all domains of reality around polarities, whilst also making a penetrating statement about the logic of his own literary composition. The diversity of contents that might at first seem like a ‘hotchpotch’ is precisely what allows The Walled Garden to represent reality more adequately and to communicate its message more effectively. The diversity of the world and of human temperaments calls for a literary work that is inclusive of diversity.

But in addition to the teaching that duality and diversity is fundamental to reality, this passage also contains a further teaching: that underlying this duality there is a single purpose that unites the opposites. As Murata points out, “The ultimate aim [of drawing polarities] is always the establishment of tawḥīd, the unity and interrelatedness of all reality.” Just as Sanā’ī has expressed the entirety of The Walled Garden as being a diversified expression of the two Islamic testifications of faith, he also sees all of reality in the diverse modes highlighted above as being a set of diverse signs with a single unifying purpose. Indeed, in this respect Sanā’ī’s message here directly echoes the Quran: And among His signs are the creation of the heavens and the earth and the variation in your tongues and colors. Truly in that are signs for those who know. (SQ, 30:22)

Sanā’ī’s deployment of diverse strategies in order to achieve his goal of ethical and metaphysical instruction (taʿlīm), therefore mirrors God’s use of diversity in creating a world ordered around opposites. This parallel is summed up by Sanā’ī in his statement that each of his

153 Murata, The Tao of Islam, 10.
verses is a clime (iqtim), a distinct geographical region through which he guides his readers for the sake of their improvement.

Sanā‘ī is therefore making the claim that despite the apparent diversity of contents, his work is wisely ordered, just as is the cosmos, even though the wisdom of jest or suffering may not be immediately apparent. Moreover, the unity of purpose behind the dualities of the cosmos and of this book of poetry reflects the unity of the Divine Nature, which nevertheless comprises Kindness and Wrath.

Crucially, it is the method of correlative thought that enables Sanā‘ī to present the similarities in these diverse aspects of reality, each of which itself encompasses diversity and is arranged around a polarity of two terms. Correlative thought is simultaneously an approach to reality, a mode of literary expression and an organizing principle for drawing together and showing the connections between diverse aspects of reality. As we continue to study the approaches to diversity of Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and ‘Aṭṭār we shall see that correlative thought has an extremely important role to play.

The Structure of The Walled Garden of Truth: Movement, Alternation, Correspondence

Sanā‘ī’s affirmation that The Walled Garden is a mirror image of the cosmos is implicitly reasserted in the structure of the work itself, which is another key strategy that Sanā‘ī uses to show that his collection of wise insights is not simply a disorganized compilation. The basic organizing principle of the chapters of the book is the hierarchical levels of cosmic reality, which are here
encountered in descending order.\textsuperscript{154} Combining Islamic theology with Neoplatonic metaphysics, the first seven chapters of the work are as follows:

1. The Unity of God  
2. On the Word of God, the Quran  
3. In Praise of the Prophet Muḥammad\textsuperscript{155}  
4. On the Intellect  
5. On the Excellence of Knowledge  
6. On the Universal Soul and its States  
7. On Negative Character Traits (such as Pride and Negligence)

The book continues by considering various social themes: it praises and gives advice to Sultan Bahrāmshāh, presents comedic assessments of various social roles, and ends with reflections on the work as a whole and the state of its author:

8. In Praise of the Sultan  
9. On Wisdom, and Blame of Posing Poets, Physicians and Astrologers  
10. On the Composition of this Work

Each of these chapter headings provides the opportunity for Sanāʾī to gather together diverse pieces of wisdom around the topic at hand. But despite the semblance of order that is created by these chapter headings, and their partial relation to the ontological hierarchy of the cosmos, the contents of each chapter only partially correspond to them. The chapter headings seem to be only a rough organizing principle, under which many different topics are collected,

\textsuperscript{154} This structure has been noted by Julian Baldick in “Persian Sufi Poetry up to the Fifteenth Century,” \textit{History of Persian Literature: From the Beginning of the Islamic Period to the Present Day}, ed. George Morrison (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981), 118.

\textsuperscript{155} The placement of the Quran and the Prophet beyond the Intellect, which according to Neoplatonic cosmology is the highest hypostasis after the One, is most likely a symbol of revelation trumping the wisdom attained without it. Cf. Kathryn Johnson’s study of Sanāʾī’s \textit{Ṣayr al-ʾibād}, which she reads as a response to Ibn Sīnā’s cosmic journey in \textit{Hayy ibn Yaqẓān}. Kathryn V. Johnson, “A Mystic’s Response to the Claims Of Philosophy: Abūl-Majd Majdūd Sanāʾī’s \textit{Ṣayr Al-ʾIbād Ilāʾl-Maʿād},” \textit{Islamic Studies} 34.3 (Autumn 1995): 253-295. Here also the religious figure trumps the attainment of the philosopher.
sometimes with no discernible connection to the rest of the chapter. As such, even with the chapter structure in mind, it is still difficult to sense a coherent order or arrangement.

However, as we endeavor to read *The Walled Garden* holistically, patterns begin to emerge across these ten chapters and on different scales of focus. These patterns demonstrate that Sanāʿī arranged his collection of insights very carefully, using their diversity to his advantage in presenting his teachings.

In order to give a sense of the types of patterns around which *The Walled Garden* is structured, let us look at three different types: the juxtaposition of two stories that together provide a more complete ethical teaching on detachment than they do individually; the structuring of Sanāʿī’s praise for Bahrāmshāh, in which panegyric takes on new meaning in light of the stories that follow it; and two of Sanāʿī’s chapter transitions, which each develop through a contrast of imagery of darkness and light.

One of the most important of the patterns by which the disparate contents of *The Walled Garden* is ordered is found in Sanāʿī’s tendency to first express a point of view with great intensity and focus only to then shift perspective in order to provide a balancing point of view. This type of shift is perhaps most obvious on the level of the juxtaposition of two successive stories. One important example of this strategy is found in a pair of stories about Jesus that Sanāʿī uses to preach non-attachment to this world. In the first of these, Sanāʿī tells the story of how Jesus came to take up residence in the 4th planetary sphere (that of the Sun), where he will remain until he descends at the end of time. Sanāʿī narrates that when Jesus reached the 4th sphere God commanded Gabriel to search him to see if he was truly detached from the world. However, as is well known in Sufi lore, Jesus was so detached from the world that he would only carry a needle with him with which
to sew up his garments if they became torn. When Gabriel finds this needle on Jesus’ person he deems the prophet to be too worldly to progress any higher towards the Divine Threshold.\(^{156}\)

The hyperbole of this story offers a powerful image of the lengths that detachment from the world must be taken to in order to be truly efficacious: even Jesus was held back by so much as the possession of a needle. But though it skillfully depicts the absoluteness of ideal detachment, this story is nonetheless unseemly when taken on its own, disrespecting Jesus and leaving the reader with a task so difficult that even a prophet could not accomplish it.

It is probably this unseemliness that prompted Sanā‘ī to follow this story with another in which Jesus is redeemed. Here Jesus goes to sleep in the desert with only a stone as his pillow, only to be awoken by Iblīs.\(^ {157}\) The latter brings a complaint against him, that Jesus is interfering in his domain and seizing his possessions. When Jesus is perplexed at this, Iblīs explains that by taking up even a rock as a pillow Jesus has usurped his belongings, for this world belongs to him. Taking the point, Jesus easily casts away the rock, and Iblīs points out that now they are both free and no longer shall have anything to do with each other.\(^ {158}\)

By offering this second story, Sanā‘ī reaffirms the central message of the first tale while doing away with the undesirable consequences of the particular narrative components that were put to use there. A small change in perspective therefore allows Sanā‘ī to express himself more completely, and to correct possible misunderstandings that might arise from a static interpretation of each of his teachings.

\(^{156}\) HH, 391-2. It is important to note that the Fakhr-i-Nāma contains only short stories, so these are passages the authenticity of which it is difficult to verify.

\(^{157}\) On the significance of the role of Iblīs in this story see Peter J. Awn, Satan’s Tragedy and Redemption: Iblīs in Sufi Psychology (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 156-8, which includes a translation.

\(^{158}\) HH, 392-3.
Once we become sensitized to this method of offering complementary perspectives, we begin to see Sanā‘ī teaching as a dynamic process rather than a static list of doctrines or instructions. As such, for a great many of the topics that Sanā‘ī discusses in *The Walled Garden*, one perspective does not suffice. Each of Sanā‘ī’s teachings must therefore be reconsidered in light of the complementary points of view that he offers to enrich and expand upon it.

In many cases the dynamic between two perspectives emerges through the contrast of ideals and realities. In this way, Sanā‘ī’s praise of asceticism is later tempered by his ridicule of ostentatious ascetics,¹⁵⁹ his lines on the ideals of Sufism stand in contrast to his jokes about the hazards of having a family member who is a Sufi,¹⁶⁰ and his display of great erudition in the sciences of medicine and astronomy is balanced by severe ridicule of the pretenders in these fields.¹⁶¹

Among the most interesting of these contrasts occurs in Chapter Eight, in his praise of Sultan Bahrāmshāh. Sanā‘ī draws to a close a lengthy section of the most obsequious praise of the Sultan with the following tone-changing line:

The king must not be the servant of the body,
So that his panegyrist should not be a liar.¹⁶²

Having already satisfied the requirements of the panegyric form, Sanā‘ī is thus able to turn more directly to ethical exhortation of the object of his praise, warning him, “Do not become proud from these goodly words.”¹⁶³ Straightforward panegyric thus shifts to mirror-for-princes style instruction; praise of the Sultan is now replaced with powerful homiletic on the heavy burden of power, for:

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¹⁵⁹ Contrast for example HH, 133-4 with 430-1.
¹⁶⁰ Contrast HH, 494 with 666-7.
¹⁶¹ Contrast HH, 692-6 with 697, and HH, 699-702 with 697-8.
¹⁶² HH, 543.
¹⁶³ HH, 543.
If in all the world for a night there suffers
    A single soul, you are not excused.164

There follow a series of stories, far more memorable than the praise itself, on the responsibilities of rulership: The Companion ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar sees his father in a dream twelve years after the second caliph’s death, still being questioned about a sheep that fell from a bridge during his rule;165 an old woman’s possessions are taken by the regional governor, who is eventually hanged when she appeals repeatedly to Sultan Mahmud;166 the Abbasid Caliph Maʿmūn kills a man without crime only to be shamed by the latter’s mother.167

Though these first few tales represent a fairly straightforward set of ethical lessons for the Sultan, as the chain of stories continues Sanāʿī begins to express a more pessimistic outlook towards worldly power, verging on undermining the very idea of a virtuous ruler. Here an old man is wounded when a drunk governor practices archery, but the judge is a friend of the governor and rules against the wounded plaintiff, fining him for dirtying the governor’s arrow;168 or Sultan Mahmud justifies his extortion of taxes from the governor of Rūm by assuring him that he is the only tyrant in the land;169 or again, a man rebukes the governor of Kufa for his tyranny but then receives a lesson on why a ruler must combine politics with patience.170

Each of these tales suggests a suspicion of worldly power that stands in stark contrast to the praise of Bahrāmshāh that has come before. Although the panegyric section of this chapter of The Walled Garden may seem at first to be purely obsequious, it takes on a very different significance when read against the direct moral warnings of the Sultan and the pessimistic stories that follow.

164 HH, 543.
165 HH, 544-5.
166 HH, 545-548.
167 HH, 551-2.
168 HH, 562-3.
169 HH, 563-5.
170 HH, 565-8.
These passages break the illusion of perfection created by the panegyric, highlighting the fact that the image of the Sultan presented is precisely an ideal, which the Sultan must strive to attain having been given the almost impossible task of being a just ruler. Once again, the complexity of Sanāʾī’s teachings thus only emerge in light of the movement between themes that at first seem to be only tangentially related. Here again, the whole of Sanāʾī’s discourse amounts to more than the sum of its parts.\textsuperscript{171}

The shifts between contrasting perspectives also make up an important artistic component of \textit{The Walled Garden}. The poetic flow of this work when considered as a whole is determined in large part by its descending structure through the levels of reality. As such, Sanāʾī lacks some of the rhetorical possibilities of the ascending ‘pilgrim’s progress’, used in his \textit{Journey of the Servants}, which we shall turn to in the next chapter. The descent means that instead of moving towards a climax of the revelation of greater realities, we are in fact moving towards the mundane as we read the work.

However, in order to avoid potential anti-climax of this thematic arrangement, Sanāʾī creates the same effect as the ascent by using smaller contrasts. Two instances of these contrasts, which occur between chapters of \textit{The Walled Garden} are particularly important, mirroring each other closely.

The second chapter, on the Quran, ends with a lengthy depiction of the state of affairs during ‘the interval’ (\textit{fatrat}), the period between the lives of Jesus and Muhammad in which no messenger was sent to humanity.\textsuperscript{172} The rhetorical function of this passage that evokes the darkness of human society is to pave the way for the following chapter, which begins:

Ahmad, sent as Messenger, that lamp of the cosmos,

\textsuperscript{171} On the ethical function of panegyrics see Meisami, \textit{Medieval Persian Court Poetry}, 46.\textsuperscript{172} HH, 186-8.
A mercy to the world of the seen and unseen.\textsuperscript{173}

The juxtaposition of this image of the Prophet as a light of guidance sent to a world that has gone astray next to the darkness of the ‘interval’ creates a powerful contrast. This contrast gives this section far more rhetorical force than if it was simply placed right after the discussion of the various virtues of the Quran. Moreover, whereas on its own the passage on the interval seems out of place at the conclusion of a chapter on the Word of God, its function as preparation for the succeeding chapters makes its location immediately intelligible.

The efficacy of this contrast between light and darkness appealed to Sanā‘ī so much that he uses it again, in the transition between Chapter Five, on the Value of Knowledge, and Chapter Six, on the Universal Soul. Chapter Five ends, quite inexplicably, with a lyrical description of night and the night sky, which turns to dawn in the last few lines of the chapter. The reason for this becomes clear as Chapter Six begins, with the appearance of the spiritual master, equated with the Universal Soul,

With face like the Sun, suffused with light,

His indigo cloak like the cloak of the sky.\textsuperscript{174}

Though we shall return to this crucial passage in the following chapter, here let us note not only the importance of the imagery of transition from darkness to light in the appearance of the spiritual master, but also the parallelism with the praise of the Prophet, by which the roles of the two are equated.\textsuperscript{175} Much as we saw in the correlation of diverse polarities in Sanā‘ī’s explanation of his inclusion of both seriousness and jest, here the polarity of darkness and light serves to

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{173} HH, 189.
\textsuperscript{174} HH, 345.
\textsuperscript{175} This passage also played a central role in the Fakhrī-Nāma, as analyzed by de Bruijn in Of Piety and Poetry, 230-5.
\end{flushleft}
correlate the function of the spiritual master with that of the Prophet himself, a correlation that only becomes evident once we approach *The Walled Garden* in a holistic way.

Whether it be in his choice of particular stories, his attitudes towards spiritual ideals and the people who falsely parade them, the ideals and challenges of rulership, or the rhetorical movement between darkness and light, the wisdom that Sanā‘ī wishes to convey through this work cannot be accessed by an exclusive focus on particular statements or passages. Sanā‘ī’s message develops through the dynamics of his work, emerging through movement, alternation, and correspondence. It is for this reason that his thought must be represented as much through the relationships pertaining between each of the elements of his composition as through these elements themselves.

Moreover, Sanā‘ī’s reasons for structuring his teaching around these dynamics are as much philosophical as they are literary. While the movement between points of view is crucial to the rhetorical flow of the work, it also reflects Sanā‘ī’s conviction that reality itself is not unidimensional, and must be approached though diverse types of discourse and diverse perspectives. Rather than being able to simply express a set of propositions that describe reality and the correct way of acting in relation to it, Sanā‘ī’s worldview and ethics develop through contrasts of perspectives, which exists in dramatic and philosophical tension with one another. This is particularly true of the most important metaphysical tension around which *The Walled Garden* is structured, to which we now turn.

**Two Metaphysical Perspectives**

The instances of perspective shift in *The Walled Garden* that we have examined so far show that many of Sanā‘ī’s teachings cannot be completely understood if we limit the range of our attention to individual statements, for they develop through contrasts and complementarities.
Considering this book as a whole, this turns out to be true on the widest scale of focus. In particular, the teachings in Chapter One, In Praise of God, which generally cohere around a single attitude despite their diversity, stand in contrast to most of the teachings of the rest of the book. The reason for this is that *The Walled Garden* is not structured around a single coherent metaphysical view of reality, but develops through a tension between two metaphysical perspectives: that of an absolute gulf between the Creator and creation, and that of degrees of reality, the hierarchical chain of being between God and the material world.

Moreover, in addition to being crucial to *The Walled Garden*, the tension between these two perspectives can be traced throughout Sanā‘ī’s later religious poetry, and perhaps all of his later poetry. The study of this tension thus provides us with an important analytic tool for thinking about Sanā‘ī’s later writings in a holistic way.

**Divine Transcendence and the Unbridgeable Gulf**

*The Walled Garden* begins, as one would expect for a religious work, with the exaltation of God. Yet this theme, far beyond being a mere acknowledgement of convention, in fact defines a fundamental aspect of one of the most important metaphysical perspectives underlying Sanā‘ī’s poetry. The perspective of divine transcendence and the unbridgeable gulf between God and creation defines nearly all of the teachings that are presented in the first chapter of this work, as well as providing the point of emphasis for many of Sanā‘ī’s most important religious *qaṣīdas*.

The opening lines of *The Walled Garden* set the tone for what is to follow:

O Cultivator of the inward, Ornamentor of the outward,
O Bestower of intellect, gratuitously giving,
Creator, Sustainer of earth and of time,
Protector and Savior of the inhabitants of place.176

Following from this affirmation that every aspect of the world is in God’s hands, Sanā‘ī develops the major components of this chapter: God is beyond all dualities,177 and is therefore beyond physical attributes178 and all the categories of creation, such as time and place.179

As a result of God’s transcendence, the intellect cannot comprehend Him, which is cause for Sanā‘ī to tell the story of the elephant and the blind men, each of whom use their partial understandings of the elephant to liken it to something they already know.180 This aspect of Sanā‘ī’s epistemology, which is reminiscent of the critique of kalām of Ḥanbalī Sufis such as Khwājah ‘Abd Allāh Anṣārī,181 is expressed with particular eloquence in the qaṣīda 55,182 of which the following lines are most striking:

From Thy command are Intellect and Soul (jān),183
And then with passionate desire are filled.
So upon the tongue of intellect and soul
In secret prayers, how could I call Thee?
Thou are in act possessed of signs,
But in Thy Essence signless are.
Trapped in imagination and in sense,
‘Beyond all sign’, how could I call Thee?

176 Or ‘place and its inhabitants’, HH, 60-61.
177 See for example, HH, 82, 90.
178 See HH, 64, in which non-physical interpretations are given for the anthropomorphic images found in the Quran.
179 HH, 65
180 HH, 69-70.
182 D, 103-105. According the heading in the Divān, this poem was written in Balkh, and hence probably dates before the peak of Sanā‘ī’s career. See also Qasīda 129, 271-2.
183 The term jān, can mean ‘spirit’, ‘soul’ or ‘life’, all of which meanings are used in different poems by Sanā‘ī. The preference for ‘Soul’ here is due to the fact that the context seems to suggest that the hypostatic Universal Intellect and Universal Soul are being referred to in the first instance, and the individual intellect and soul in the second, but other interpretations seem valid.
The temporal is all that the heart can know,
And lips can utter nothing but words.
How could I know Thee by means of the heart?
Or with the tongue, how could I call Thee?

These last lines are particularly strong in their denial of the human ability to know God. However, in *The Walled Garden* Sanā‘ī does in fact leave room for knowledge of God, affirming with many famous Sufis that the only response to the failure of the intellect is to polish the mirror of the heart,184 and suggesting that “The Essence of God can be known through [the Essence].”185

Chapter One of *The Walled Garden* continues to draw out the consequences of divine transcendence: Given the ontological dependence of everything on God186 and God’s power over everything, the correct human attitude is to realize our utter incapacity, and to turn to God in plaint (ṣārī) rather than depending on our own power (ṣūr).187 Moreover, since the whole of creation depends on God, it must all be ultimately good. Even though to us there appears to be a duality between good and evil, this is because we do not understand the Divine Plan, just as a child does not realize why its mother might subject it to a painful medical procedure.188 As such, only a fool would find fault in God’s creation, and it is better to see even ugly things as being beautiful, submitting oneself to God’s Will.189

Though Chapter One does briefly present alternative perspectives that temper those of pure submission in the face of transcendence, such as the affirmation that effort is necessary within submission,190 its teachings cohere as a response to the utter transcendence of God. This collection

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184 HH, 68.
185 HH, 63.
186 HH, 61.
187 HH, 91; 137-9.
188 HH, 85.
189 HH, 83-85; 163-4.
190 HH, 79; 98.
of attitudes thus display influence from Islamic homiletic traditions, and perhaps also from Ashʿarī occasionalism, in which the power of God dominates every moment and every atom of creation.¹⁹¹

However, Sanāʿī’s expression of the perspective of divine transcendence is not simply pietistic, but also contains an important spiritual dimension, which is captured in Sanāʿī’s imagery of transcending the world. By this imagery, Sanāʿī does not simply intend a lack of attachment to worldly objects, as epitomized by the story of the ascetic’s wife who throws away his only possession, a reed prayer mat, since it veils him from God.¹⁹² Rather, he most often speaks of a quasi-physical ascent in which the body is literally transcended.¹⁹³

This emphasis on transcending the world and the body, rooted within the metaphysical perspective of divine transcendence and its interconnected set of themes, reappears throughout Sanāʿī’s religious poetry. Indeed, many of Sanāʿī’s most famous qaṣīdas, which have been recognized as masterpieces of the tradition,¹⁹⁴ begin with a single image of going beyond the world or setting foot upon the heavens. The following lines from qaṣīda 19 are but the most famous example of a motif with which many of his poems begin:

Make not thy home in body nor soul,
For one is lofty, the other low.
Take but one step beyond these two,
So be not here, and be not there.¹⁹⁵

As a response to the utter worthlessness of this world and one’s own soul in the face of the divine transcendence, the image of going beyond the body (and, indeed, the soul) brings a renewed mystical significance to the ascetic attitude to the world. The recurring theme of the body as a

¹⁹² HH, 143-5
¹⁹³ See for example, HH, 111.
¹⁹⁴ For example, as noted by Shafiʿi-Kadkanī in his introductions to many of the poems in *Tāzīyāna-hā-yi Sulūk*.
¹⁹⁵ D, 51-57 (*Qaṣīda* 19).
prison or cage for the spirit-bird does of course have Platonic resonances, but for Sanā‘ī this perspective is equally rooted in the Islamic revelation, recalling the Prophet’s celestial ascent. Sanā‘ī is thus expressing a sentiment quite similar to that of Sufis before him who have described their own personal celestial ascents.

There are many reasons to consider this call to transcendence a major hallmark of Sanā‘ī’s mature perspective, and not simply because of the frequency of this theme in his own poems. Indeed, in a poem in praise of Sanā‘ī by ‘Ārif-i Zargar (‘the mystical goldsmith’), which is included in Sanā‘ī’s Diwan along with Sanā‘ī’s responses to it, begins by using Sanā‘ī’s own theme:

O thou whose spiritual will has stepped
Upon the very heaven’s crest...

The image of transcending the world and placing one’s feet on the vault of heaven, used so often by Sanā‘ī, thus seems to have become a mark of his style recognized as characteristic of his poetry by his contemporaries.

The imperative of upward ascent has diverse practical and ethical ramifications throughout those of Sanā‘ī’s poems that develop around this theme. To being with, these poems represent one of the clearest indications of Sanā‘ī’s connection to the literature of Sufism in the narrowest sense. This is clearly shown in the following reference to spiritual annihilation in the following lines, again from qasida 19:

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196 This analogy is used for example in Plato’s Phaedrus.
197 See for example the tarkib-band in D, 717ff, where the quality of transcending the world is attributed to Muḥammad ibn Maṣūr using both the same imagery as the lines quoted above and the imagery of the prophetic mi‘rāj.
199 Identified by de Bruijn as Fādli ibn Yaḥyā, a member of the circle that had formed around Khwājah ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī and continued after his death. See Of Piety and Poetry, 76.
200 D, 39 (Qaṣida 15).
So die, O friend, before thy death!
If it’s in search of life thou art,
For from such death did Idrīs come
To be paradisical ‘ere us.

May thou be slain by the blade of love,
That thou may find eternal life;
For from the sword of Azrael,
Shall be not left a living trace.\(^{201}\)

This mention of ‘dying before death’,\(^{202}\) love of God, and Idrīs-like transcendence of the world\(^{203}\) is followed by the same poem by the following poetic consideration of the methodical concentration on the first testimony of faith, ‘There is no divinity except God’:

When ‘no’ has caste you from the bounds
Of humanity to bewilderment,
Then from the light of divinity,
You come to ‘God’ through ‘except’.\(^{204}\)

Sanā‘ī’s poetry therefore also hints at methodical instructions, the practice of invocation (dhikr) and contemplation (fikr) on the shahada.\(^{205}\)

Rather than advocating a gradual cultivation of virtue with the hope of reward in the Hereafter, the lessons given within the context of the perspective of divine transcendence seem designed to bring about a sudden realization in the audience; this poetry aims to bring about a sudden change of perspective, a realization that the world is nothing and God is everything, that

\(^{201}\) D, 52-53.
\(^{203}\) The association of Idrīs with celestial ascent derives from Quran, 19:57.
\(^{204}\) D, 52.
\(^{205}\) Cf. for example, Ahmad al-Ghazālī’s discussions of invocation of the *shahāda* discussed in Joseph Lumbard, *Ahmad Al-Ghazālī*, 85-91.
there is nothing of value to be gained in this world and so one must endeavor to go beyond it completely, rather than live well within it.

Sanā‘ī’s exhortation to transcend the world comes hand in hand with a sense of urgency; a dramatic tension pervades these poems. This tension emerges from the contrast between the transcendent perfection of God and the baseness of the world, the falsity of human society and the faults of the soul. As such, the perspective of transcendence is rooted in a type of metaphysical dualism. However, this dualism does not last, and important examples of Sanā‘ī’s religious poetry involve the dynamic movement from duality to unity. These passages, which in many ways could be considered the peak of Sanā‘ī’s literary and metaphysical writing, endeavor to communicate something of the perspective that is reached when one does in fact ‘set foot beyond the heavens’.

An important example of this poetic movement beyond duality occurs towards the end of the Chapter One of *The Walled Garden*. Here, the perspective of transcendence develops into a discourse on love, presented as the correct response to the emptiness of the world, the fullness of God and the incapacity of the intellect:

The lovers of God go towards His Presence drunk,  
Their intellects in their sleeves and their souls in their hands.206

The theme of love, central of course to the ghazals, and of great importance in many of Sanā‘ī’s qasidas, return in *The Walled Garden* as the focal point of Chapter Five, quickly taking the place of the ‘the virtues of knowledge’ that give that chapter its title, another example of Sanā‘ī’s teaching through contrast.

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206 HH, 109.
In both Chapter One and Chapter Five of *The Walled Garden*, the topic love is directly connected to the theme of transcending the body considered above:\textsuperscript{207}

Love is beyond the four tent-peg of the body,\textsuperscript{208}

The clever bird breaks its own cage.\textsuperscript{209}

Moreover, in both passages, the discourse on love ascends towards non-duality. In Chapter Five, Sanā‘ī thus declares:

For the one who has taken love as his guide,

Faith and infidelity are but the curtains at his door.

Universal and particular, all that’s in existence,

Is for the way of love but the arches of the bridge.

Love is beyond both intellect and soul,

It’s the *I have a time with God*\textsuperscript{210} of [spiritual] men.\textsuperscript{211}

Chapter One also pursues this same course, though in a less direct manner. Having taken us on a journey through multiple correlates of the perspective of divine transcendence, which include ontological, noetic, affective and ethical teachings, Sanā‘ī moves towards a more direct meditation on the goal of Unity. Towards the end of the chapter, he takes the theme of *tawḥīd* to its most thorough-going conclusion, providing a poetic and noetic climax to this section of the book:

The way far from the heart is your hesitation,

Faith and infidelity are from your bi-coloration.

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\textsuperscript{207} Indeed, the connection is so close that when Sanā‘ī’s near contemporary, Ruzbihān Baqlī (d. 606/1209), wrote the climactic chapter of his *‘Abhar al-‘āshiqīn*, ‘On the Perfection of Love’, he quotes lines from *Qasida* 19 and Chapter Five together. See AA, 143-4. For more information on Baqlī see Carl W. Ernst, *Rūzbihān Baqlī: Mysticism and the Rhetoric of Sainthood in Persian Sufism* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996).

\textsuperscript{208} i.e. the four elements.

\textsuperscript{209} HH, 326, AA, 143. There is a slight difference in wording between these two versions, HH having *dānā* where AA has *zīrak*.

\textsuperscript{210} On this hadith, often quoted by Sufis see Annemarie Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, c1994), 149.

\textsuperscript{211} HH, 327 (where the lines occur in a slightly different order); AA, 144.
Make the name of all these colors ‘metaphorical’,
And take a sip from the sea of needlessness…
For all of these colors, full of deception,
Will be made all one color in the vat of Unity.
So when they all become one, they all become Him;
The cord becomes narrow when it is reduced to a thread.\textsuperscript{212}

The metaphysical perspective of divine transcendence thus plays a central role in \textit{The Walled Garden}. In addition to being the perspective with which the work begins, Sanā‘ī returns to it midway through the book, when love eclipses knowledge as the true subject of importance in Chapter Five. Furthermore, this perspective also plays a key role in Sanā‘ī’s homiletic \textit{qasīdas}, suggesting important connections between these poems and his \textit{magnum opus}.

The perspective of divine transcendence allows Sanā‘ī to express the urgency inherent in the human condition in the face of the transitory nature of the world and our accountability before God that is such a central theme Islamic pietistic homiletics. It also allows him to develop a mystical homiletics emphasizing the need to fly beyond this world, and even to express this flight through homiletics of Divine Love.

However, the perspective of divine transcendence also possesses limitations. By completely negating the significance of the material world and our individual power to act within it, this perspective includes no scope for imparting wisdom on the cultivation of virtues and the arts of leading a successful life from a worldly point of view, and thus leaves little room for most of the topics dealt with in Islamic literary ethics. These issues, however, do indeed find their place in \textit{The Walled Garden}, but framed within a second metaphysical perspective.

\textsuperscript{212} HH, 166-7.
**Degrees of Reality**

As we have seen, the chapter sequence of *The Walled Garden* is based around a layered cosmology. Based on a fairly simple Neoplatonic schema, these levels consist only of the Universal Intellect and the Universal Soul as hypostases beneath God and beyond the world.\(^{213}\) Nevertheless, this schema implies a metaphysical perspective very different from the sharp gulf between Creator and creature that is the center of Chapter One.

The consideration of degrees of reality between material existence and the Divine Essence enables a quite different set of emphases than the perspective of divine transcendence. As we shall see in the following chapter, this perspective is of crucial importance for Sanā‘ī’s *Journey of the Servants*, which describes the poet’s journey through the ascending levels of the cosmos. However, in *The Walled Garden*, in which the levels of the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul are considered in descending rather than ascending order, it is the significance of each level taken individually that comes to the fore, rather than the individual journey through them.

To begin with, the theme of the Universal Intellect is an opportunity for Sanā‘ī to expound on the virtues of the intellect in general, a common theme in Islamic literary ethics.\(^{214}\) Counter-balancing the perspective presented in Chapter One, which tended to negate the value of the individual intellect in the face of transcendence, these passages extoll the intellect’s virtues. In this way, Sanā‘ī avoids the extreme position of rejecting individual reasoning entirely. Rather, here the

\(^{213}\) As such it is similar to the system of Plotinus, and much simpler than that presented in the *Rasā‘īl* of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā‘, which affirms nine members (the Creator, the Intellect, the Soul, Prime Matter, Nature, the Absolute Body, the Sphere, the Four Elements and the Beings of this world in the three divisions of mineral, plant and animal) see Richard Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists: An Introduction to the Thought of the Brethren of Purity*, Ikhwān al-Ṣafā‘ (London; Boston: G. Allen & Unwin, 1982), 35. It is interesting to note that Sanā‘ī includes this schema despite his strong criticisms of devotees of Greek philosophy. However, it is the reliance upon Greek thought to the exclusion of religion along with excessive interest in the courtly sciences of medicine and astronomy that Sanā‘ī criticizes, not the fusion of the philosophical elements with the religious perspective presented in his works, which of course he was not the first to utilize.

intell<text invisible='true'>ect becomes the shadow and vicegerent of God, the inner spokes-
man of the divine command, and the companion of the Quran:

The intellect is as eyes, and prophecy is as light;
The one from the other must not be so far.
When these two fall foul of lust and of wrath,
The eye is without light and the light without sight.
Light without sight is a branch without fruit,
A mere body without head is sight without light.

The restored value of the intellect, which is metaphysically grounded in the hierarchical vision of the cosmos, is an integral element of Sanāʿī’s wider ethical project. On the basis of this he is able to argue that one should cultivate the soul through knowledge, and to contrast the life led according to caprice (ḥawā) with the life led in accord with intellect. Within this perspective, Sanāʿī no longer commands the reader to consider the ugly to be beautiful since it forms part of the Divine Plan, but suggests constant discernment between virtue and vice. Moreover, it is the intellect that is the criterion of discerning between them, which though unable to know God directly, regains its function as a tool for organizing human action. The perspective of degrees of reality thus supports Sanāʿī’s counsel for living well within this world (rather than simply transcending it).

The Universal Soul also takes a central place in the teachings of The Walled Garden on human ethical and spiritual development, with much of the chapter dedicated to this level being devoted to the discussion of various virtues. However, in addition to simply providing an

215 HH, 297-8.
216 HH, 313.
217 See especially D, 152-4 (Qaṣṣaṣ 84).
218 See, for example, HH, 295; 374.
219 See, for example, Sanāʿī’s instructions that intellect is the basis of profitable friendship. HH, 444-5. See also Sanāʿī’s discussion of ādab, which requires use of intelligence in order to discern appropriate behavior amidst the complexities of relative human interactions. See HH, 478.
opportunity to discuss virtue, the Universal Soul itself plays a crucial role in the ethical message of the text. Following the description of night with which Chapter Five ended, Chapter Six begins with the darkness being broken by the dawn-like appearance of the spiritual master. The central message of this passage is that this figure is none other than the Universal Soul itself, which has come to save the poet from the darkness through which he was wandering, and from which on his own he does not have the power to escape.\textsuperscript{220}

The meeting with the spiritual master is depicted in cosmic proportions, in lines destined to resound in the memories and literary productions of those influenced by his works:

Higher thou art than substance and accident,
For all the existents thou are the goal.\textsuperscript{221}

The spiritual master as Universal Soul, questioned of his origin, replies:

Hand-crafted was I in the world of divinity,
   Leader and guide of the world of humanity.
The first creation of the world is us,
   In every location do we show our face.\textsuperscript{222}

Here, the perspective of degrees of reality allows Sanā‘ī to explain spiritual guidance in terms of the relationship between the material world and the levels above it. The spiritual master thus becomes a doorway to higher levels of reality, physically present within this world yet metaphysically rooted in the beyond. As we shall see in the next chapter, this understanding of the spiritual master is rooted in two important approaches to reality grounded in the metaphysics of

\textsuperscript{220} HH, 341-4.
\textsuperscript{221} HH, 346; AA, 6.
\textsuperscript{222} AA 7, the reading of which I am following. The Mudarris-Raḍawī edition of HH here (347) has an extra line ([Up] in a world, my felicitous abode/Beneath my feet is all of this world) inserted between the two given above. Moreover, the statement expressed in the last line quoted here is negated (I do not show my face). I have preferred the version in the ‘Abhar al-‘āshiqīn both for aesthetic reasons and because the point in the last line conforms more correctly to Neoplatonic doctrine, although the version in HH has the alternative virtue of emphasizing the rarity of finding the spiritual master.
degrees of reality: a dichotomy between outward appearance and inner reality, for the spiritual master appears to be an ordinary person yet is inwardly quite different from others; and a metaphysical understanding of human perfection, whereby particular individuals are seen to possess a metaphysical substance situated beyond the physical realm. It is therefore in the next chapter that we will discuss the importance of the perspective of degrees of reality beyond *The Walled Garden* itself.

The perspective of degrees of reality allows Sanāʿī to explore the status of those positive influences in human life (namely the spiritual master and the intellect) that are both a part of our human world and yet somehow transcend it, while nonetheless being lower than God Himself. Moreover, we will see that this metaphysical perspective suggests that the ethical life is one of gradual cultivation of the virtues, a process that takes place over an extended period of time. In each of these aspects, the perspective of degrees of reality provides the scope for the exploration of issues that do not fit well within the perspective of divine transcendence; for within the latter, no intermediary between God and the individual believer is conceivable, nor any idea of gradual progress.

By including two different metaphysical perspectives in *The Walled Garden*, Sanāʿī is thus able to present a much richer range of teachings and thus to cultivate a wider range of aspects of human experience. These two metaphysical perspectives allow him to integrate a wide range of sources into his project of cultivating the humanity of his readers. On the one hand, the perspective of divine transcendence allows him to integrate a great many themes from the Islamic pietistic traditions, emphasizing the teaching that the human situation requires an instantaneous choice in the face of the inevitability of death, the impermanence of the world, and the incapacity of humanity before an All-Powerful Creator Whom the mind cannot grasp. This perspective then seamlessly provides the basis for the expression of Sufi teachings on the transcendence of the world
through the flight of love that brings the seeker beyond all dualities. The perspective of degrees of reality, on the other hand, allows Sanā‘ī to integrate traditions of worldly wisdom common in literary ethics, affirming that the use of the intellect is necessary in the discernment between virtue and vice and the cultivation of a successful life. This perspective then allows Sanā‘ī to explore other mystical ideas, such as the gradual nature of spiritual progress and the metaphysical status of intermediary figures between God and the world, of which the spiritual master as manifestation of the Universal Soul is particularly important.

There remains the complex question of whether the inclusion of these two metaphysical perspectives make *The Walled Garden* intellectually incoherent. I suggest that they do not. There is nothing in the perspective of divine transcendence that inherently negates the existence of levels of reality between God and the world. Rather, the former perspective results from particular points of emphasis that cause all levels of reality between God and the world to fade into the background, leaving the seeker with a single choice to turn towards God in utter need, for God is the final goal and the only true cause, whatever the status of intermediaries. Likewise, the perspective of degrees of reality does not negate divine transcendence, for God stands above these levels as their Origin and remains the transcendent goal of the ascending wayfarer.

Indeed, Sanā‘ī’s expression of the logic behind the inclusion of both seriousness and jest on the one hand, and our analysis of movement, alternation and correspondence in the structure of *The Walled Garden* on the other, suggest that the inclusion of two different metaphysical perspectives is quite in keeping with Sanā‘ī’s understanding of reality and his approaches to expressing it through the poetic art. Reality is multifaceted and necessarily diverse, and therefore it is necessarily approached through multiple points of view, which are then placed in dynamic tension through literary creation. The poem is therefore much more adequate to reality than a systematic treatise that would be unable to combine these perspectives.
Conclusions

As we have seen, the inclusion of diversity that Sanā‘ī argued for through a complex correlative discussion of the complementarity of jest and seriousness is in fact a key to his broader strategies in his construction of The Walled Garden of Truth, which find resonances throughout his religious works. Sanā‘ī’s teachings are best understood, not as unqualified statements about the world and the way we should act within it so much as a dynamic movement between diverse points of view. In general, this movement occurs between two polarities, and the various sets of complementary teachings and perspective shifts in The Walled Garden can be summarized as follows:

**Balancing Teachings:**

The Story of Jesus Attached to a Pin - the Story of Jesus casting away a brick

   True Asceticism - Ostentatious Asceticism

   True Sufis - Jokes About Fake Sufis

   Praise of Kings - The Nature of Tyranny

Exposition of Knowledge of Medicine and Astrology - Criticism of Pretenders in these Fields

   The Value of Knowledge - The Value of Love

**Rhetorical Flow:**

The ‘Interval’ - The Appearance of the Prophet

   The Night - The Appearance of the Master

**Metaphysics:**

   Divine Transcendence - Degrees of Reality

   Complete reliance on God Given Our Incapacity - The Need for Effort

   The Uselessness of the Intellect in Knowing God - The Relative Uses of the Intellect in Human Affairs
Transcend the World - Work within the World According to its Rules in Order to Realize the Virtues
All is Good - The Choice Between Good and Bad
Unity - Discernment

Of all of these complementarities, the most important is the inclusion of two metaphysical perspectives, within which many of the other teachings find their place. Indeed, as we shall discuss, these two metaphysical perspectives are found throughout his works. This use of two different metaphysical perspectives, which are not necessarily contradictory but which imply significantly different approaches to understanding reality, shows that Sanā‘ī’s religious vision may be characterized as metaphysically pluralist. Although he does not seem to theorize this metaphysical pluralism directly, it fits clearly within the comments found in *The Walled Garden* on the necessary place of diversity within the cosmos, society, the soul and the poetic work, all of which ultimately reflects the Divine Nature.

Furthermore, we have seen that the two metaphysical points of view are associated with two quite different ethical approaches: The perspective of degrees of reality emphasizes a gradual journey and cultivation of the soul, a manner of living in the world that uses the intellect to determine the best course to achieve worldly and other-worldly felicity, and the valorization of spiritual influences that are beyond the human and yet lower than God Himself, of which the spiritual guide as Universal Soul is the most important. The perspective of divine transcendence, however, emphasizes our utter powerless in the face of the Divine Omnipotence, God himself guiding and bringing about felicity in a manner that goes beyond our capacity to understand. This perspective goes hand in hand with a negative attitude towards the world and the exhortation that the world must be transcended completely, which is one of Sanā‘ī’s most characteristic poetic motifs. Given the differing possibilities of each perspective, further interpretation of Sanā‘ī’s
writings must be based on attention to the metaphysical perspectives in which particular statements are made.

Sanā‘ī’s self-aware integration of diversity within *The Walled Garden* was a crucial factor in his ability to integrate material from diverse discourses, from the Quran and hadith, to ethical, pietistic and mystical discourses, and from the court sciences of astronomy and medicine, to Islamic theology, peripatetic philosophy and Neoplatonism, not to mention the particularly rich traditions of Persian court poetry to which he was heir. As befits a figure whose legacy is entirely constituted by poetry, Sanā‘ī is not a systematic theologian; rather, he adapts, integrates and switches between modes of discourse as befits the particular message he desires to convey at any particular moment. Yet through this pluralistic discourse, themes recur and messages are repeated through diverse literary forms, and these are organized around the movement between polarities. This movement between polarities thus emerges as a common strategy, ordering the diversity of material he integrates.

*The Walled Garden* gives us access to the literary composition of a theoretician, the uniqueness of whose intellectual contribution is not so much through the creation of a new set of concepts or doctrines so much as through an innovative harmonization of the discourses available to him. Furthermore, Sanā‘ī is never merely a theoretician. *The Walled Garden of Truth* is a metaphysically grounded call to the reformation of character, which develops through the dynamic movement between perspectives enabled by its literary form.
Chapter 3: Towards a Trans-Generic Reading of the Later Sanā’ī: Human Perfection and the Patron-Scholar-Guide, Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr

In my reading of The Walled Garden of Truth, I have endeavored to show that rather than being a ‘hotchpotch’, its diverse teachings are organized through an identifiable series of principles and strategies. The most important of these organizing principles is the pair of metaphysical perspectives, of divine transcendence and degrees of reality, which each enabled Sanā’ī to emphasize particular aspects of his message. By identifying principles of coherence within The Walled Garden of Truth, we were able to make the diversity of its contents more intelligible by elucidating their interconnections. Nevertheless, the process did not level out the diversity of his teachings, but rather brought the nature of this diversity into focus.

In this chapter we shall extend our analysis of Sanā’ī to a greater range of genres, focusing on genres of religious poetry. Surveying Sanā’ī’s diverse oeuvre in the context of his biography, there is one group of poems that stands out as being particularly important for his development as a poet. After his beginnings on the fringes of the Ghaznavid court in Ghazna and the development as a religious poet in Balkh, it is during his time in Sarakhs that, according to both Iranian and western scholars, Sanā’ī’s poetry reached both its stylistic and thematic maturity. Though Sanā’ī wrote poetry for a number of patrons during this period, as de Bruijn points out it was the patronage of the Chief Qadi of Sarakhs, Sayf al-Ḥaqq Abū’l-Mafākhir Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr, that was “the decisive factor to Sanā’ī’s career during the years of his stay in Khurasan.”

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224 de Bruijn, Persian Sufi Poetry, 37. For de Bruijn it is the patronage of Muhammad ibn Manṣūr in particular that makes it appropriate to characterize him, from this turning point onwards, as a ‘homiletic’ poet. “This qualification is more apt than that of a ‘Sufi’ poet, because the former term defines more precisely the environment where his poems originated as well as the purpose they primarily had to serve.”
Understanding Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr and the poems in which Sanāʿī mentions him is crucial for understanding Sanāʿī’s poetic character. Of the six that were written for this patron we will focus on the four most important:

Of these poems we have already mentioned The Journey of the Servants to the Place of Return, a mathnawī composed to commemorate the fifth anniversary of Sanāʿī’s meeting with this scholar. As we will see, Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr appears towards the end of the poet’s cosmic journey as the only one who can lead him to the journey’s end. The remainder of the poem is a panegyric for Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr that follows many of the conventions of Sanāʿī’s other praise poetry for scholars.

A second poem is another panegyric, of which the prelude is a poetic commentary of the Quranic Sūra, ‘the Morning Light’ (Q, 93) (for this reason I shall refer to it as the ‘tafsīr-panegyric’). In the published versions of Sanāʿī’s Dīwān the title of the poem explains that it was composed impromptu (bar badīha) at one of Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr’s sessions of sermonizing.

A third poem is a long tarkīb-band, of which the first stanza is a qalandarī taghazzul in which Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr turns out to be the convention-breaking beloved. Much of the rest of the poem is conventional panegyric, but one of the final stanzas depicts a conversation between the patron and Sanāʿī that is of great importance for understanding their relationship.

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225 On these poems, see de Bruijn, Of Piety and Poetry, 64-8. Shafīʿī-Kadkanī, considers Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr to be a Sufi (a suggestion that de Bruijn does not accept): (italics added) “In Sarakhs he became aquainted with Muhammad ibn Mansur-e Sarakhsi, one of the Sufis and ulama of the period who had a famous khanaqāh in Sarakhs, and for a while lived in that khanaqāh. It is not clear to what extent the taking on of the manner (mashrab) of ‘irfān and an ‘irfānī form of his poetry was influenced by the environment of Sarakhs and his stay in the khanaqāh. Apparently, years before his journey to Sarakhs he had achieved an outstanding basis in composing ‘irfānī poetry.” Tāzīyāna-hā-yi Sulūk, 15. Unfortunately, Shafīʿī-Kadkanī does not provide further evidence except for the fact that Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr founded a khanaqāh. Shafīʿī-Kadkanī also provides information of a manuscript of a work attributed to this figure named Riyād al-uns, located in the British Library. However, the attribution of this text is uncertain. See Tāzīyāna-hā-yi Sulūk, 60

226 See SI, 76-109.

227 D, 34-8.

228 D, 719-33.
A fourth poem is a qaṣīda that approaches a qalandarī ghazal in some of its formal characteristics (which I refer to as the qalandarīqaṣīda).229 The poem describes Sanā‘ī’s journey to a gathering held by Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr, his observations on the participants of the gathering and his climactic meeting with the patron himself.

Much of Sanā‘ī’s poetry for this patron resembles his poetry for other scholar-patrons: diverse literary devices are used to emphasize the patron’s knowledge and justice, his preservation of true religion, his benefit to the believers and the fear he instills in the wicked. As Chief Qadi of Sarakhs, Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr is depicted as possessing all the qualities that one would desire the holder of such a position to have, and indeed in Sanā‘ī’s poetry he shines as the foremost scholar of the age. As with Sanā‘ī’s other patrons, the praise for Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr is governed by the same norms as secular panegyrics:230 the poets request for monetary recompense is built into the structure of the poem, usually a penultimate plea before the closing prayer for the patrons wellbeing.

Those aspects of the poetry for Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr that are shared with Sanā‘ī’s praise of other patrons tell us more about Sanā‘ī’s approach to panegyric in general. However, against the backdrop of these features there are others that stand out as being particular to this patron. More specifically, the poems for Muhammad ibn Manṣūr contain important examples of a metaphysical depiction on human perfection within the context of panegyric.

Our analysis of the metaphysical approach to human perfection in the poetry for Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr will proceed in several stages. We will first look at the ‘tafsīr-panegyric’, seeing how the relationship between prelude and the main section of the poem establishes correlations between Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr and the Prophet Muhammad, linking this patron

229 See de Bruijn, Of Piety and Poetry, 67.
230 As pointed out by de Bruijn. See Of Piety and Poetry, 65.
to the complex web of ways of depicting the human perfection of Prophet in Islamic literature. It will become clear that amidst the several approaches to depicting the perfection of the patron and the Prophet, a metaphysical understanding of human perfection remains central. The contrast between the metaphysical and mundane in this poem raises the question of the relationship between these two aspects, a topic that I discuss in relation to the second poem, the ‘qalandarī-qaṣīda’. I show that this poem is constructed around a contrast of outward (ẓāhir) and inward (bāṭin), a theme that is common in classical Sufism, yet given a particularly vivid literary expression here.

Turning to The Journey of the Servants to the Place of Return, I first discuss Sanāʾī’s journey through the levels of the cosmos depicted in the first half of poem in the context of the metaphysics of degrees of reality, suggesting how this journey unites diverse aspects of the cultivation of perfection in Sanāʾī’s thought. I then examine Sanāʾī’s depiction of his meeting with Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr at the culmination of this journey as another example of the outward-inward distinction. The place of Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr as the spiritual guide in the qalandarī-qaṣīda and The Journey of the Servants leads me to a discussion of the relationship between this individual and Sanāʾī’s depiction of the Universal Soul in The Walled Garden already discussed. This comparison provides the last piece in the puzzle of understanding the metaphysical understanding of human perfection that underlies Sanāʾī’s attitude to this patron. I close the chapter by considering the shift in attitude to language that is implied by the metaphysical understanding of human perfection, suggesting that Sanāʾī’s mature poetry displays a transition from metaphor to symbolism. This understanding of language, along with the metaphysical approach to human perfection itself, will prove to be crucial tools in extending our trans-generic reading of Sanāʾī to amatory verse in Chapter Four.

However, before turning to the poems for Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr it is necessary to briefly consider certain aspects of Sanāʾī’s depiction of the perfection of the Prophet Muḥammad, for it is in light of this that his praise of his most important patron takes shape.
The Prophetic Reality

The role of Sanā‘ī in the history of Persian traditions of praise of the Prophet has been described by Annemarie Schimmel in the following terms:

Apparently it was with Sana‘ī of Ghazna in Eastern Afghanistan that the tradition of Persian na‘tiyya poetry proper began, around 1100... he appears as the first and, in certain respects, greatest panegyrist of the Prophet. The superb rhetorical technique he had acquired in singing the praise of worldly rulers was now applied, even more skillfully, to the praise of the Prophet; and as he had hoped for handsome rewards in cash or kind from princes and grandees, he now hoped for much more important spiritual rewards from God’s messenger, the intercessor at Doomsday and embodiment of all spiritual and physical beauty.231

As Schimmel points out, key sections of Sanā‘ī’s praise of the Prophet are rooted in mystical teachings of the Muhammadan Light (nūr muḥammadī) or Muhammadan Reality (ḥaqīqa muhammadīyya). Inspired by the Quranic reference to the Prophet as ‘a shining lamp’ (ṣīrāj munīr) (Q. 33:46), early commentators on the Quran such as Muqātil (d. 150/767)232 already read the Verse of Light (Q. 24:35) as referring to the Prophet, the conduit through which the Divine Light enters the world.233 Most likely already an important teaching in Shi‘i traditions,234 the doctrine of the Muhammadan Light was formulated in Sufi circles by Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896).235 Indeed, perhaps the classical formulation of this doctrine is found in the first chapter of the Tawāsīn of al-Tustarī’s student, al-Ḥallāj.236

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231 Annemarie Schimmel, And Muhammad is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 185.
233 Schimmel, And Muhammad is His Messenger, 124.
The core of this doctrine is summed up in the hadith, “The first thing God created was my light.” The first creation of God was the Muhammadan Light, from which the light of all the prophets, the celestial realities and the terrestrial world were created. In light of this doctrine, the Prophet Muḥammad represents not only a human recipient of the Divine Word, but the representative of a metaphysical hypostasis, which is itself the existential basis of creation and the substance of all prophecy. This approach to the praise of the Prophet, which in another context Chittick has called an ‘Islamic logos doctrine’, represents the highest possible understanding of human perfection from a metaphysical point of view, a kind of ‘high anthropology’. Furthermore, this perspective fits into what we have termed a metaphysics of degrees of reality. The Muhammadan Reality serves as an intermediary between God and the world, accessible through the person of the Prophet, whilst itself being the highest level of created reality.

Turning to Sanā‘ī’s poetry, within the praise of the Prophet Muḥammad that makes up the titular section of the third chapter of The Walled Garden, one of the most striking passages makes use of the idea of the Prophet Muḥammad as substance of prophecy, or ‘Prophetic Light’.

One passage in particular, in which the various prophets and archangels come to pay their respects to the Prophet, stands out in this regard:

The prophets from heaven alighted,
   From him, simple, towards the Simple they went.
From shame, Adam with heart and soul,
   Cried out at thy door ‘Our lord we have oppressed’… (Q. 7:23)
Noah, taking refuge in the fortress of thy infallibility,
   His spirit bound at the waist as a sign of servitude.
Michael, with a crown placed upon his head,

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237 See Schimmel, And Muhammad is His Messenger, 125-6.
Abraham, with a saddle placed upon his shoulder. Moses, who had burned upon thy flame,

*T’was at thy gate that he would say ‘Show me...’ *(Q, 7:143)*

*T’was through thy praise that Idrīs was raised,

*T’was for thy sake that Gabriel found the lote.239*

The eminence of the Prophet Muhammad among the prophets is evident in this passage, which as Schimmel points out is a central theme in Sanā‘ī’s praise of him.240 Yet his status here is more than merely that of a *primus inter pares*. Though the passage begins with fairly routine statements of the Prophet’s superiority, affirming that he was chosen by God to be the seal of prophecy, as the passage develops it becomes clear that this superiority is not merely in particular traits of character, but rather is existential. Sanā‘ī’s allusions suggest that the Prophet was mysteriously present during the revelatory moments experienced by Adam, Moses and other prophets; the Prophet Muḥammad is more than just his historical personage, he is the existential source of prophecy as such. As a line in an earlier section of *The Walled Garden* declares,

*Creation has derived its nobility and honor from him,

He was as the pearl, and the prophets were as oysters.241*

And another opines,

*The pain of the prophets is borrowed from his dust,

The light of the saints is kindled from his heart.242*

As the passage beginning ‘the prophets from heaven alighted’ continues, the whole universe becomes involved in this tribute to the Prophet, as celestial bodies and the Islamic symbols of sacred

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239 HH, 207-8. This passage is not contained in the *Fakhrī-Nāma*, and de Bruijn doubts its authenticity. (See de Bruin, *Of Piety and Poetry*, 221; 226) However, the content is corroborated by many other passages in Sanā‘ī in which the Prophet is conceived of as hypostatic reality, several of which we shall consider in this chapter.

240 Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, 197.

241 HH, 194.

242 HH, 215.
space and time; Mecca and Medina, the ‘Night of Power’ and the Eids, all come to express their devotion. The Prophet emerges as the central being of creation, the center towards which all animate or inanimate beings, and even the very dimensions of the cosmos, are orientated. The depiction of the cosmic function of the Prophet evokes the response of creation to the ḥadīth qudsī in which God says, “But for thee, I would not have created the engendered universe.”

This metaphysical understanding of the Prophet Muḥammad is of course only one way that Sanā‘ī extolls his virtues. However, it is these metaphysical depictions of the Prophet that allow us to recognize the clear influence of the Sufi doctrine of the Muhammadan Reality in Sanā‘ī’s poetry, which constitutes an important component of his compositions within the perspective of degrees of reality. Moreover, given the fact that earlier works such as al-Hallāj’s Ṭawāsīn were written in a language that only a small circle of initiates could understand, Sanā‘ī’s depiction of the Muhammadan Reality constitutes an important historical moment in the articulation of this doctrine, bringing it into poetic form that was easily accessible to the wider public. Indeed, the historical significance of Sanā‘ī’s poetry in praise of the Prophet should not be underestimated, for as Schimmel points out, “Just as Sana‘ī’s great mathnawī, the Ḥadīqat al-haqīqa (The Orchard of Truth), became the model of all later mystico-didactic Persian poetry, so too his hymns in honor of the Prophet offer the basic ideas that were elaborated in all following mystical eulogies.”

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243 For a translation of these lines see Schimmel, And Muhammad is His Messenger, 197.
244 See Chittick, Divine Love, 36.
245 As Schimmel shows, this doctrine subsequently becomes an important theme in popular devotional literature in diverse Islamic languages. See And Muhammad is His Messenger, 138-43. The related concept of the Perfect Man ‘insān kāmil’, has been discussed in relation to Persian literature by Meisami in Medieval Persian Court Poetry, 233-4, and by de Bruijn in Of Piety and Poetry, 216-7. For a general discussion of the related concept of the Perfect Man, see R. Arnaldez, “al-Insān al-Kāmil,” EI2. Though the concept insān kāmil does not appear in the poetry of Sanā‘ī, as we shall see there are certain similarities between this idea (the focused discussion of which in the technical sense develops a century after Sanā‘ī) and his conception of human perfection.
246 Schimmel, And Muhammad is His Messenger, 196.
As we consider Sanā‘ī’s depictions of his patron and mentor Muḥammad ibn Maṇṣūr and the connections he draws between the latter and the Prophet Muḥammad, this metaphysical understanding should remain at the back of our minds. At the same time, however, we should also bear in mind that it represents only one of Sanā‘ī’s approaches to human perfection.

**From the Muhammadan Reality to Muḥammad ibn Maṇṣūr: The Tafsīr-Panegyric between Convention and Innovation**

Arguably one of the most striking poems in Sanā‘ī’s oeuvre is his panegyric for Muḥammad ibn Maṇṣūr that begins with a commentary on the Quranic Surat al-Ḍuhā as its prelude (nasīb). Indeed, Schimmel has singled out this poem in particular for its importance for the Persian tradition of praise poetry for the Prophet, describing it as, “one of the most impressive odes in honor of the Prophet in the Persian language, a poem which at the same time sets the stage for the whole of subsequent literature in this field.”²⁴⁷

Like the image of its patron that will emerge as we study the poetry dedicated to him, and indeed the character of Sanā‘ī himself, this poem is multi-faceted. It is many things at the same time - panegyric qaṣīda and tafsīr of the Quran, mystical exegesis on the Muhammadan Reality and depiction of the human perfection of its scholar-patron. Each of these functions of the poem is meaningful in itself, and thus we must read it from several independent points of view. Yet it also conveys meaning by being each of these things at the same time. The complete poem is more than the sum of its parts.

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²⁴⁷ Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, 195. Schimmel discusses key lines from the nasīb, but I know of no study of the maṭīb of this poem and the relationship between the nasīb and maṭīb, which we discuss in what follows. This poem is also briefly discussed by de Bruijn in *Persian Sufi Poetry*, 42-3, and *Of Piety and Poetry*, 66.
The poem shows many of the most recent theories on the function of the *nasīb* in action. The *nasīb*, which is classically of an amatory nature, is generally thought to be intended to gain the attention of the listener, or as Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) put it “to incline hearts towards [the poet] and attract interest, and gain an attentive hearing.” Though Sanā‘ī does make frequent use of amatory *nasībs* in his poetry for religious scholars, it seems particularly insightful on his part that he should have brought this innovation to the genre by using *tafsīr* to attract the interest of his religiously minded audience.

But the function of the *nasīb* goes far beyond what Ibn Qutayba suggests here. Given the disparity between the subjects of the amatory *nasīb* and the panegyric section (*madīḥ*), one might think that the *nasīb* serves no function for the latter. However, both Clinton and Scott-Meisami have shown that the themes and images raised in the *nasīb* create the backdrop against which a ‘deeper level’ of significance of the panegyric takes shape. As such, Clinton was able to claim that in many panegyric *qaṣīdas* the *nasīb* generates “the meaning of the entire poem.”

In order to interpret Sanā‘ī’s *tafsīr*-panegyric effectively we should therefore read the *nasīb* carefully first, and then turn to the *madīḥ*, reading it in light of the *nasīb*.

**An Amatory Exegesis? The Tafsīr-Nasīb**

The *nasīb* of this poem is a commentary on the following *Sūra* 93 of the Quran:

> In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

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249 On the difference between the surface level (what a poem says) and the deeper level (what it implies) see Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 67.
251 Schimmel notes the importance of this Quranic *Sūra* for Islamic mysticism and the mystical depiction of the Prophet even before Sanā‘ī. See, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, 195.
By the morning brightness, and by the night when still, thy Lord has not forsaken thee; nor does He despise. And the Hereafter shall be better for thee than this life. And surely thy Lord shall give unto thee, and thou shalt be content. Did He not find thee an orphan and shelter, and find thee astray and guide, and find thee in need and enrich? So as for the orphan, scorn not. And as for one who requests, repel not. And as for the blessing of thy Lord, proclaim! (SQ, 93)

Sanā‘ī comments on this Sura in the following twenty-five lines of verse:

[1] For faith and infidelity, in darkness and in purity, the abode of the kingdom’s naught save the locks and face of Muṣṭafā. Had not his hair and visage manifested Wrath and Gentleness, Infidelity would be left destitute and faith would lack all sustenance. The prescription (nuskha) of determinism (jabr) and free-will (qadr) is in the form of his face and hair, The one is made known to you from by the night, and the other from by the morning brightness. (93:1-2)

If that face and tresses were not the distributors of infidelity and faith, When would the king have made an oath on those tresses and face?

That ‘O Muhammad, neither are you of this world nor the next, So necessarily neither do you have here a seat of honor (ṣadr) nor there a place to lean (muttakā). These two [worlds] have had mercy on you, so that from your sandal’s dust, You should be the eyes of this world and the collyrium of the next. You are a stranger in this world, and thus you ever become weary, Until it become necessary for you to say out loud, “Relieve us, O Bilāl.”

252 Lines of Sanā‘ī’s poem are marked at the beginning of each line and the Quranic verse referenced at the end.
253 dār al-mulk - this is a literal translation, but could mean ‘capital’ or ‘treasury’. ‘Treasury’ could also work will since - the Prophetic reality is the storehouse of both.
254 bar sahrā nāwardi - literally ‘brought to the desert’, which is a term in Persian Sufi literature meaning ‘manifested’.
255 Qadr is a reference to qadariyya, hence free will. See J. van Ess, “Kadariyya,” EI2.
257 Cf. Schimmel’s translation of these lines, of which she has changed the order, in And Muhammad is His Messenger, 195-6.
A world was awake in this field of infidelity,

The leader of each was sin (wabāl) and the foremost of each was pestilence (wabā).

Thus We sent you here so that from compassion,

Just like the masters of health you would teach the cure.

[10] If from the pharmacy, for a few days your disciple, from a command,

Does not bring them medicine here, for the sake of trial (ibtilā),

If they should insult you, do not take it

For those who are ill speak nonsense in delirium.

It is the shining of your face, that here you call the morning,

It is the shadow of your tresses, that here you call the evening.

It is both by your face that here of your soul (jān) He has not forsaken thee,

And it is by your tresses that from this fire of your heart nor does He despise. (93:3)

In both worlds it is necessary for you to ever be a physician,

But it is better there, for there better comes to hand the cure. (93:4-5)

[15] Whoever here did not become better, go and give him medicine there,

For such a patient as this without doubt should desire thus (sāzad hawā)

The devilishness of devils continuously crumbles in your time (‘ahd)

How can persecution remain for humans in particular with your love.”

Then He said to him: “O Muhammad, have Our favor (minnat)

For the capital (dār al-mulk) of our favors has no end.

Since you were a pearl, unique (yatīm) in the sea of corporeality,

Our bounty made you a crown for the head of the prophets. (93:6)

Nay, you had lost the way to your city, from the first

We made you acquainted with your fellow citizens.

[20] You were about to be drowned in the whirlpool of bewilderment,

But He brought out acquaintance from it, without an acquaintance. (93:7)

Nay, from want (qillat) the transmission (talqīn) of avarice was about to carry upon you,

Before your blessings (an‘ām) We taught you alchemy. (93:8)

What did We do for you in poverty and orphanhood out of generosity?

Do the same, O generous one, from your character traits for Our creation. (93:9)

Be a mother for the orphans, raise them with kindness,
Be a master (khwājāgī kun) for those who ask, and make their desire (ṭama’) into loyalty. (93:10)

Know the blessing from Us, and give thanks for Our bounty, that We might bestow
Upon you from this giving thanks, another blessing as a reward. (93:11)
[25] With your tongue speak praise for us among the Arabs,
So that your tongue will speak praise for you among the Ajam.”258

In these lines Sanā‘ī sets the tone for the entire poem, establishing a connection between his own poetry and the language of the Quran, which prove important for the entire poem. Both the rhyme of the poem (the long ā) and the last line of the nasīb establish a parallelism between the Quran and Sanā‘ī’s poetry on the one hand and the Prophet and Sanā‘ī himself on the other: the rhyme that Sanā‘ī has chosen for this poem is the same as that of the rhyming prose of the first eight verses of the Sūra;259 and the nasīb ends with the narrative voice, which here is the voice of God,260 commanding the Prophet to praise Him among the Arabs so that the Prophet’s tongue, which is none other than Sanā‘ī, can praise the Prophet among the Ajam. This is not to say that Sanā‘ī wishes to equate himself with the Prophet, nor claim for his poetry the status of revelation, but nevertheless does make a claim for a correlation between them. Like the Prophet, Sanā‘ī’s task is praise, though of a lower order. Likewise, if this poem was really recited impromptu, it would have carried an impression of inspiration (ilhām) that is a lesser but cognate form of prophetic revelation (waḥy).261

Once again, there is an important metaphysical dimension to Sanā‘ī’s praise of the Prophet here. Commenting on several lines of this nasīb, Schimmel points out that “in the Prophet the two complementary aspects of God, His beauty, jamāl, and majesty, jalāl, are manifested - attributes

258 D, 34-6; D2, 16-18.
259 Which is why Sanā‘ī can quote the Quran at the end of his third line and again in line thirteen.
260 I believe Schimmel overlooked the fact that the narrative voice is here intended to be that of God, not Sanā‘ī himself. Cf. Schimmel, And Muhammad is His Messenger, 196.
whose interplay keeps the whole universe in motion.” Indeed, the correlative thought represented by the prophetic reflections of God’s Beauty and Majesty, is in fact the fundamental strategy of this section of the poem. In the poems opening four lines, Sanāʿī establishes the following set of correlations:

- Faith - Infidelity
- The Face of Muḥammad - The Hair of Muḥammad
- Divine Gentleness/Kindness (lutf) - Divine Wrath
- Free-will - Determinism

The Quranic Verse ‘by the morning brightness’ (93:1) - The Quranic Verse ‘by the night…” (93:2)

The overlap between several of these polarities and those found in Sanāʿī’s justification of the juxtaposition of jest and seriousness discussed in the previous chapter suggest that a similar method of thought is at work. As in that passage, Sanāʿī is meditating here on the diversity found in creation (day and night) and in human belief (faith and infidelity). Moreover, as in The Walled Garden, Sanāʿī finds a basis for these in the Divine Nature itself, which is characterized by both Kindness and Wrath.

However, there is a further level of complexity here. The being of the Prophet Muḥammad is indicated here as the quintessence of the created polarity and the intermediary between this and the polarity within God. Not only are the Prophet’s face and tresses “the distributors of infidelity and faith,” but they are identical to the day and night that God swears upon in the Quran.

The roots of this particular type of correlative thought are to be found in Persian poetry before Sanāʿī, particularly the quatrains that were often sung at Sufi gatherings. By metonymy, the tresses, locks (zulf) or hair (mūy) of the beloved become identified with anything that veils, and thus become a metonym for infidelity (kufr), of which the Arabic literally means ‘covering’. The face (rūy)

262 Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, 196.
is the beloved him or herself, or unveiled access to him or her, hence becoming a metonym for faith. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī mentions these images in particular when he discusses the Sufi habit of hearing apparently profane poetry and considering it to be about God, which shows that the specific metaphysical understanding of these images predates Sanāʾī.263

However, even with this knowledge of the background of these images Sanāʾī’s discourse of the hair and face of the Prophet Muḥammad are not intelligible until we recognize this passage as another example of the ‘Islamic logos doctrine’. It is the Muḥammadan Reality that is the distributor of the reflections of Divine Kindness and Wrath throughout creation. Likewise, it is due to the role of the Muḥammadan Reality as an intermediary in creation that Sanāʾī can state:

[12] It is the shining of your face, that here you call the morning,

It is the shadow of your tresses, that here you call the evening.

It is particularly noteworthy that both the poles of light and darkness are here located within the Muḥammadan Reality, though the latter is referred to as a ‘shadow’. Though as we shall see in our study of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt this is not the only approach to this correlation, it is significant that the Muḥammadan Reality here acts as the resolution of duality. The images used in this correlative set of polarities both creates a dualism of light and darkness and resolves this dualism by rooting it in a single metaphysical source. However, this creates an extra layer of complexity within the poem, as the historical Prophet plays the role of light against darkness in many of the lines that follow.

263 “As regards the erotic poetry which is recited in Sufi gathering, and to which people sometimes make objection, we must remember that, when in such poetry mention is made of separation from or union with the beloved, the Sufi, who is an adept in the love of God, applies such expressions to separation from or union with Him. Similarly, ‘dark locks’ are taken to signify the darkness of unbelief; ‘the brightness of the face’ the light of faith, and drunkenness the Sufi’s ecstasy…” Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Alchemy of Happiness*, trans. Homes, Henry A. ([S.l.] : [s.n.], 1873), 68-9. I would like to thank Domenico Ingenito for altering me to Al-Ghazālī’s discussion of this topic. The non-metaphysical use of these images is found already in the poetry of Daqīqī (d. 395/1005), for example, on which see Hesmat Moayyad, “Lyric Poetry,” *Persian Literature*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (Albany, N.Y.: Bibliotheca Persica, 1988),124.
From line five the poem shifts registers, becoming a Divine address to the Prophet Muḥammad, just like Sūrat al-Ḍuḥā itself. Given that a nasīb is usually a poet’s message to a beloved, Sanā’ī’s interpretation of Sūrat al-Ḍuḥā here recasts this chapter as a love song from God to the Prophet. The purpose of this love song is to awaken the Prophet to his celestial nature, which is to say his identity with the Muḥammadan Reality itself. Subtly playing against the Quranic verse *And the Hereafter shall be better for thee than this life*, (SQ, 93:4) the Divine Voice tells the Prophet that he belongs to neither this world nor the next. It is for this reason that the Prophet feels weary in this world until the time when he can ask Bilāl to make the call to prayer.

Just as he did in *The Walled Garden*, Sanā’ī here [Line 8] emphasizes the difference between the darkness of the period before the Prophet’s appearance (‘the interval’, fatrat) and the light of his message. From here Sanā’ī develops an extended metaphor of health to explain why it is that some people who hear the message do not accept it. Though the message the Prophet brings is medicine, some of the people who hear it are so delirious that they refuse it and speak nonsense to him. Nevertheless, the power for cure will be greater on the Day of Resurrection, when the Prophet will be given the power to intercede for all, a fact that is often mentioned in commentaries upon 93:5.264

In the remaining lines of the nasīb, Sanā’ī translates the sense of 93:6-11 as interpreted in the tafsīr tradition, which he was clearly aware of. In the process, he uses poetic language to emphasize the blessings that God has shown the Prophet and the noble character traits by which the Prophet can guide humanity.

Through this nasīb, Sanā’ī has already achieved several unique accomplishments. He has fused Quranic interpretation with traditions of Persian love poetry, both the amatory preludes of courtly panegyrics and the mystical songs of Sufi gatherings. He has displayed his knowledge of the

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tafsīr tradition, capturing the attention of his scholarly audience, whilst also revealing this Quranic 
Sūra to be a love song from God to the Prophet. Moreover, he has employed strategies of correlative 
thought to root this Sūra and its love-centered interpretation within a metaphysical perspective on 
the Muḥammadan Reality and its interconnection with the polarities inherent in various aspects 
of reality. This, however, is only the beginning, for the main section of the poem is yet to come.

Prophetic Panegyrics: The Madiḥ

Having completed his interpretation of Sūrat al-Ḍūha as Divine Praise of the Prophet, Sanāʾī 
uses the theme of ‘praise’ to transition to his panegyric for Muḥammad ibn Mansūr, which (along 
with the final prayer and plea) takes up the rest of the poem:

[26] The Sun of Intellect and Spirit (jān), Judge of Judges of the religion, who is
Like the decree of heaven, ruler upon the earth.
That head of the companions of Nuʾman (Abū Ḥānafa), for whom in order to gain nobility
At every moment the qibla of supplication upon his feet lays a kiss (qubla).
With the subsistence of his justice it is no wonder (nashīqīf) if under the sphere,
The individual of ‘animal’, like genus and differentia, should not accept annihilation.
So long as the breeze of his name has not sprung up in the gardens of religion,
Neither did the branches of religion nor the roots of tradition grow.

[30] In the inner chambers (ḥarīm) of his justice, as soon as he was manifest in judgement,
[Even] the magnet put aside its properties, in its attraction of iron filings.
As soon as he told the determinists (jabriyān) of the affair (mājarā) of command and prohibition,
As soon as he told the ‘folk of justice’ (tadlīyān, i.e. The Muʿtazila, the proponents 
of free-will) of the secret of submission and contentment,
They were freed by his clear explanation in command and judgment:
The determinist from the nullification (ta’ṣīl) of the Law (shar) and the (‘adlī) of the negation of the Divine decree (qaḍā).

This one bound his waist from *Thee do we worship* in the command of the Law.

The other placed [upon his head] a crown of *God does as He wills.*

O you, whose explanation is needed in the royal road of Muṣṭafā!

O you, whose tongue is the representative of the wound of the blade of Murtaḍā ('Alī)!

[35] Wherever you should place your step, the earth there is made proud,

Wherever your name should be mentioned, the sky presents obedience.

You are the Sword of Truth! It is from that sword that right has become flowing,

You are the Mufti of the east, and thus the east has become the source of light.

Or rather, the Sultan constantly calls you the Mufti of the East because

Wherever you should be the Mufti, it is not fit that that should be the west.

Go, for the days have shown you to be good in the open.

Go, for the Creator has cultivated you beautifully in the hidden.

Since, like Moses, you come up upon the footstool, Jesus says to you,

From the fourth heaven, “O Muhammad, Welcome!”

[40] The souls (jān) of the pure have long been hungry for your knowledge.

Since you laid the spread at the Lote tree and then declared, “Come and eat!”

When will the folk of prattling and claptrap recognize the grace of your speech?

What does the man of garlic and leeks know of *manna* and *quails* (Q, 2:57)?

Whosoever held back from harming you from pain is saved,

That sage-physician has spoken true who said, “Prevention is the strongest cure.”

There is no need for you to grapple with the enemy, for

You have a servant like the heavens (gardūn), which will tear his collar (I.e. humiliate him)

The desires of the wretched are withered by the fire of your wrath;

The water-bearer would not sell water on the edge of the sea for the price of his soul.

[45] Many a man has bragged *we are the victors,* (Q, 26:44) but
Their [words] the victors became we have believed (Q, 26:47) when the staff became a snake.

The sparkle of mercury and rope, how could it ever remain in place,

When suddenly there arises from the sea of power a dragon.

Now seek, without the cure of the moon in the desert of fear,

Now rejoice, without the constitution of Venus in the garden of hope.

The moon does not possess the status that it should say to you ‘How?’

Venus (zuhra) does not possess the gall (zahra) that it should say to you, ‘Why?’

O you, whose progeny because of you are pure like the Sayyids from the Prophet,

O you, whose ancestors are manifest, as of Asif Barkhiyā.

[50] Recover the goodness that God has done for you;

Also in this Sūra, that has declared the form of this affair.

You are the associate (ham-qarīn) of the knowledge of religion, like intellect with regard to thought,

You are the sitting companion of the seal of religion, like intelligence for intellect.

That is not all, for in accomplishing thanks to the Real for thy life (jān)

Of the claims of his blessings, by the morning brightness is testament.

Night and day in the world of Islam is your knowledge and forbearance,

The one is from the Folk of Abbas, the other is from the Folk of the Cloak.

Though for a few days you have accompanied this darkened spread,

Though for a few days you have associated with this blue coverlet,

[55] Nonetheless you are absolute in heaven’s decree

But form is this have and take, this seize and keep in the decree.

Nay, by your knowledge and forbearance the sun has sworn an oath,

For from you the lordly kindness shall never be separated.

O you who have crushed all of the enemies of religion

In this blue mill under the mill-sweep of wisdom and the torrent of sagacity,

Turn your reins not again towards that clime, because

Since they have become flour they have made the house better than the mill.

So that you shall see there all that your eye has desired,

So that you shall find there all that opinion has necessitated.
[60] Nay, at first your city, from the intentions of the envious,
    Was for you just like Karbala was for the family Yasīn.
Nay, from the first your friends did not have intimacy with you,
    Nay, now they have become like the boundary of China and Khotan.
Nay, now from the lordly kindness all of the clime of religion,
    With you has become delighted, as the city Sheba became with the family of David.
For the sake of the life-increasing affection of your love,
    The mandrake (mardum-giyā) is continuously jealous of your two pupils (mardumān).
You have become such that now those whose speak ill of you behind your back (bī-rū-yi tu)
    See no wellbeing in heart nor find worth in soul.
[65] Nay, you had remained bewildered in the witnessing of marvels,
    Nay, you had lost the way in the desert of concupiscence.
God guided you such that from purity,
    The patched-cloak wearers of the spheres beside you have become unascetic.
You were without father, but now out of such nobility
    The king of religion now ever calls you the father in religion.
Nay, you were in the prison of the well of the envious, in chains,
    The sitting companion of lowliness and estrangement, accompanying suffering and misery (‘anā).
Nay, God pulled you up from the well and status of the enviers
    Out of bounty, and sat you on the spread of majesty.
[70] O you who have seen orphanhood! Now show kindness to orphans,
    O you have been a stranger! Now be generous to strangers.
Read The Daybreak (al-falaq) and know the intentions of those enviers,
    Read By the Morning Brightness and give thanks for all these bestowals.
O you, who with one ‘Yes’ (na’am) have been continuously with so many blessings (ni’am)
    O you who with one ‘Yea’ (balī) have cut me off from so many tribulations (balā).
Were I to recite your thanks with one sound to the mountains,
    Out of greed to praise you there would return a hundred echoes.
My poetry is good, because of your goodly gifts, for the birds
Wherever they see better provisions better give voice to song.

[75] Thy proximity made me exist again in the desert of intimacy,
Thy wine made me drunk again in the garden of tranquility.
If my soul (jān) and intellect have become rich from thee, it’s no wonder,
just as from the Prophet, the group of the Hajj attained sufficiency.
I have yet remained drunk from that wine since last year,
Weak legged and heavy headed, the one from desire, the other from modesty.
Last night I said to my heart what is the medicine of this with you?
The heart said: The medicine for this with me is from it, by it. (Minhā bihā)
So long as the world of generation and corruption has the Spirit as its hat (kulāh),
So long as the world of knowledge and subsistence has the Intellect as its garment (qabā),
[80] May the head and body of your enemy be covered until eternity,
Both by the reverse of kulāh (i.e. hālik, perishing), and by the [diacritical]
transformation of qabā (i.e. fanā, annihilation).
May night and day be at the spread (khwān) of your being the transformation of ṣayf
(summer, i.e. dayf, guest),
May years and months be in the soul of your envier the reverse of shitā (winter, i.e. ātash, fire).
The world (ʿālam) is as happy with your knowledge (ʿilm) as child (ṣabī) is with its mother,
Creation (khilqat) is [as happy] with your character traits (khulq) as the zephyr (ṣabā)
is with the rose bush.
The [bestowal] of robes and generosity on the poet is the tradition of your namesake,
From your generosity in this tradition may there be splendor (sanā) for Sanāʾī!

Notwithstanding the outstanding elegance of this poem, read on its own there is much in
this madīḥ that is comparable with Sanāʾī’s conventional praise of a scholar-patron. Indeed, without
paying attention to the nasīḥ, the rest of the poem may seem like a set of flowery and hyperbolic

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265 D, 36-8.
depictions of the virtues of patron, with perhaps little more of interest than its clever scholastic references and Arabic linguistic puzzles.²⁶⁶

However, when the madiḥ is read beside the nasīb it is transformed, its significance reconstituted through a complicated set of references to the latter, by which the message on the deeper level of the panegyric becomes apparent.

In its very first line the madiḥ establishes its connection with the nasīb, essential for its main task will be to associate the patron Muḥammad ibn Maṣūr with the Prophet. In order to do this the patron is introduced as “The Sun of Intellect and Spirit,” (āftāb-i ʿaql-u jān) precisely recalling the titular ‘morning light’ of Sūra 93, the image of the face of the Prophet. Though more conventional panegyric follows, references to Sūra 93 continue throughout the madiḥ, particularly from Line 50 onwards, in which Sanāʾī calls on his patron to give thanks for the graces God has bestowed on him, and again in Lines 65-9 in which Sanāʾī reminds his patron that the words of God to the Prophet in 93:6-8 are also true for him, that God saved him during his wandering, orphanhood and destitution. Expertly tying the final verses of the Sūra to the norms of panegyric, which call for the poet to end the poem with a plea for recompense for the poetic service, Sanāʾī ends the poem by asking his patron to pass on the blessings that God has given him.

Yet Sanāʾī’s madiḥ does not simply share with the nasīb in its common reflections on a Quranic Sūra. Rather, it is the specific points made in the nasīb-tafsīr that are of particular importance for the madiḥ. Once again, Sanāʾī draws up a series of polarities around his patron that echo those of the nasīb. Whereas the Prophet’s face and hair were the “prescription,” and perhaps we could say, ‘the existential basis’, “of determinism and free-will,” Muḥammad ibn Maṣūr arbitrates between proponents of each point of view, showing that the truth lies in a combination

²⁶⁶ In lines 79-82, Sanāʾī’s duʿā for his patron requires the listener/reader to imagine the written forms of several Arabic words in reverse to understand the poet’s intent.
of these positions. [Lines 31-3] As such, Muḥammad ibn Maṣūr’s theological discourse plays a corresponding role in balancing free-will and determinism to the existential role played by the Muhammadan Reality.

Moreover, Muḥammad ibn Maṣūr also combines polarities in his person by representing both knowledge and forbearance (associated by Sanāʿī with the Alawis and the Abbasids), which represent day and night, or illuminating truth and just response to falsehood, [Line 54] in light of which the patron should give thanks to God (as commanded in Sūrat al-Ḍuḥā) whilst also seeking refuge from enviers (as commanded in Sūrat al-Falaq). [Line 71]

In addition to emphasizing that Muḥammad ibn Maṣūr is the preeminent representative of the Prophet for their times,267 there are also indications that the patron himself possesses a spiritual reality, comparable in some ways to the Muḥammadan Reality. Indeed, just as the nasīb had God remind the Prophet that he does not belong to the material world, in the madiḥ Sanāʿī does the same for his patron. Thus, Sanāʿī affirms that his patron’s association with “this blue coverlet,” namely the sky as roof of material existence and determiner of fate, is only temporary, and though within this world everyone is subject to the vicissitudes of fate, Divine Kindness is always with him. [Lines 54-5]. Moreover, Sanāʿī affirms that his patron has made the celestial ascent (miʿrāj) just like the Prophet,268 where he was welcomed by Jesus and Moses, and distributes the food of knowledge from the Lote-tree at the end of created existence (ṣīrat al-muntahā).269 [Lines 39-40]270

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267 Regarding the association of Muḥammad ibn Maṣūr with the Prophet, in addition to those features mentioned above, note also the theme of having difficulties with enemies in Lines 41 and 60-4 (particularly the image of curing sickness), and the theme of the patron as interpreter of the message of the Prophet in Line 34.

268 Cf. Similar claims in the Tarkīb-band for the same patron, D, 820.


270 Note also Sanāʿī’s call to his patron to transcend this world in Lines 58-9: the material world, governed by the rotating mill-stone of the heavens, is likened to a mill in which Muḥammad ibn Maṣūr has crushed
These suggestions that Muḥammad ibn Maṣūr does not belong to the material realm, and the hint of his association with the Muhammadan Reality go far beyond conventional panegyric. Indeed, they even go so far as to reframe the more conventional metaphors that Sanāʾī employs here. Thus, though it is not uncommon in a panegyric for the poet to draw the patron in cosmic proportions using hyperbolic metaphor, the collocation of the praise of Muḥammad ibn Maṣūr besides the metaphysical status of the Muhammadan Reality imbues the cosmic images depicting this patron with new significance. Thus, Sanāʾī’s suggestion that the earth is ennobled by his step and the heavens offers him obedience, [Line 35] the affirmation that he is the East, the source of light, [Lines 36-7] and the suggestion that he has controls over natural forces, [Line 31], begin to seem slightly less hyperbolic, and in fact strengthen the association of Muhammadan ibn Maṣūr with a metaphysical reality beyond this world.

These, however, remain suggestions. Sanāʾī’s taṣīr-panegyric functions through a complex system of correlative thought, in which correlation does not indicate identity. This poem enriches our understanding of Sanāʾī’s view of the Muhammadan reality significantly, and draws a complex set of connections between the Prophet Muḥammad and the patron Muḥammad ibn Maṣūr. It also suggests that this patron meant more to Sanāʾī than an ordinary scholar, orator and judge might, and that there is more to this patron than is suggested by his social appearance as judge and scholar. In particular, this poem reaffirms the metaphysical approach to human perfection that we saw in Sanāʾī’s depiction of the Muhammadan Reality in *The Walled Garden*. In addition to affirming particular ethical qualities of Muḥammadan ibn Maṣūr, this poem situates the attainment of all the enemies of religion, but once their grain has become flour it should be taken out of the mill and brought home. A similar contrast between the material and celestial worlds occurs in lines 48-9, in which Sanāʾī calls on his patron to manifest the spiritual virtues of seeking God and rejoicing, though beyond the material senses of the associated emotions of fear and hope, which are governed by the moon and venus respectively.
perfection in the context of a metaphysics of degrees of reality, in which the patron can become more fully himself by returning to his celestial reality that transcends the confines of material existence.

**Outward and Inward Identity: Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr as Qalandarī Idol**

The suggestion in the tafsīr-panegyric that Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr is more than simply a scholar and judge is confirmed by the qalandarī-qaṣīda. This poem fits into one of the genres of poetry for which Sanā‘ī is particularly famous—so much so that the legends that grew surrounding him were based on this genre—is the qalandarī or kharābātī ghazal. Given that this genre of Sanā‘ī's poetry has been explored in detail by de Bruijn, let us only mention a few important aspects of this genre here. The basis of this genre is an inversion of conventional pietistic values through the depiction of the ‘ruins’ (kharābāt, qalandar) on the outskirts of town in which all manner of prohibited activities are carried out. As Karamustafa has explained, although antinomian trends can be documented from the 7th/13th century, the literary kharābāt imagery predates this. Indeed, it seems that this imagery arose as a criticism of the increasing consolidation of the Sufi social practices, which

for most mystics exemplified a compromise, even a corruption, of true piety because of their willingness to translate their expertise in religion to social, economic, and political power. It was for this reason that in the “strange looking glass” of the kharābāt complex, “the norms and values of Sufi piety [were] all reversed,” and the qalandar was elevated to the role of the genuine mystic. This complete role reversal suggests that whether real or imaginary, the antinomian, nonconformist edge of Sufism always functioned as an indispensable mirror in which Sufis could look to see a critical reflection of their true place in society and on the spiritual path.272

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271 See de Bruijn “The Qalandariyyāt in Persian Mystical Poetry,” 75-86.

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Though there is evidence that the genre predates Sanā‘ī, his works contain the first collection of such poems in which numerous instances can be compared. Moreover, many of Sanā‘ī’s poems provide the symbolic keys to this genre, in which the spiritual meaning of the breaking of norms is explained.

The pair of instances in which Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr features as the qalandarī beloved or ‘idol’ (but, șanam) are particularly significant for this genre, a point which I believe has not been recognized by scholars until now. The fact that we can identify several depictions of the norm-breaking idol as a particular historical individual, the Chief-Qadi of Sarakhs no less, provides an important key to understanding the significance of these poems as depicting an inner spiritual attitude that is compatible with a conventional outwardly acceptable appearance. The qalandarī poems for Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr thus prove that this genre is based on the classical Sufi dichotomy between outward realities (zāhīr) and inner meanings (bāṭīn). The force of these poems is to teach readers not to judge simply on the basis of appearances, and to seek the spiritual realities that animate the actions of individuals of spiritual authority.

To begin with the less important instance, this genre written for Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr, the Tarkīb-band for this patron begins with a particularly well developed qalandarī taghazzul, a prelude on love in which ordinary social and particularly religious norms are inverted to emphasize the extent and intensity of the love. The mystical dimension of this taghazzul is clear in the first refrain of the poem:

For Love, Lover and Beloved, outside of these attributes

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Are one, O fool, not in form (naqsh) but in essence.\(^{274}\)

Given that the qalandarī poems exist in a parallel world to panegyrics and homiletics, which do not use their inverted logic, it at first seems difficult to connect the idol of the first stanza with the conventional depiction of the scholar-patron, Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr himself, who is praised in the rest of the poem. However, at various times in the panegyric body of the poem, Sanā’ī provides hints that they are indeed one and the same. We can therefore attribute all of the qalandarī qualities of the taghazzul, albeit expressed in inverted symbols, to Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr himself.\(^{275}\) As such, when Sanā’ī calls his readers to “Learn love from the foremost of religion,” we have no doubt as to whom he is referring to.\(^{276}\) As he sings,

Make your face like a dinar (i.e. gold) in the mint of the friend,
Then stamp the name of Mafkhar-i Din on the Dinar.
When you have found his acceptance
Strike fire into idle talk of religion and infidelity, glory and ignominy.\(^{277}\)

In this way, the Chief Qadi of Sarakhs, who is externally the representative of ‘faith’ and ‘Islam’, is identified in his inner reality as being the gateway to Divine Love, which must take the reader beyond the dualities of faith and infidelity.

The qalandarī themes that are raised in the Tarkīb-band are developed more fully in the qalandarī-qaṣīda in which Sanā’ī describes his journey to one of Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr’s gatherings, here translated in full:

O Sanā’ī, this night gone by there was a symposium for our friend,

\(^{274}\) D, 718.
\(^{275}\) Regarding this poem de Bruijn states, “The qalandari genre which we have discussed appears to have become an integral part of Sanā’ī’s homiletic discourse. The sensuality and coarseness of some of the poems...is not in contradiction with their figurative intention. The shocking nature of such passages only served to enhance their effect on the public to whom these poetical sermons were addressed.” de Bruijn “The Qalandariyyāt in Persian Mystical Poetry,” 85.
\(^{276}\) D, 718.
\(^{277}\) D, 721.
And I went there, although the way was long and it was moonless night.
I saw upon the way towards the threshold of that idol king,
All that’s in this whole world was but a hidden lover there.
No one recalled a lamp or candle, for within that place indeed
The beauty of the handsome there was nothing if not light on light!
Though everyone would offer much, no offerings of him worthy were,
For his lovers with their trails of tears had strung their necklaces of pearls.
No fragrance fair could be of use throughout the quarter where he dwelt,
For all the dust of that district was ambergris and camphor laid.
The carpet of his parade-ground the lips and faces of wine-drinkers,
His lovers’ resting place was not except the depths of Houris’ eyes.
I saw the springs all running by, in place of water all were wine,
Beneath the shade of every bow a thousand lovers languished drunk.
How many a man of worldly fame was present there yet seen by none,
Yet O how many wounded hearted paupers who were mentioned there.
Whosoever was gripped by fear, he to him indeed was near,
Whoever proudly did approach, was in truth but far from him.
A hundred-thousand Moses-like, astonished, gazed upon his path,
For every pebble on that way did seem akin to Sinai.
Whosoever gained approval, through beauty or through majesty,
Did see on that approval writ, “Lo, for thou shall see me not!”
From the ‘Hu Hu’s of lovers lorn and ‘Hey Hey’s of truthful ones,
No one knew if for mourning or celebration [they had gathered there].
The guardian then did give me way where he had not let others pass,
For indeed my humble name was of great fame in lovers’ ways.
And when that night my spirit came, in the presence of that Eminence,
My form was all then overcome and of it no being remained.
I saw a codex taken up, grasped by the hand of the idol-king,
In script was written our being (ḥast-i mā), and a single word: ‘Let it be not!’ (lā)
When I upon that codex gazed, I saw therein from head to foot,
The many secrets inscribed there, of Muḥammad-i Manṣūr’s gathering.\(^{278}\)

Given that we know Sanā‘ī frequented the ‘sessions of sermonizing’ of his patron, this poem can be imagined as an esoteric interpretation of one of these sermons. The antinomian qalandarī language, of the rivers of wine and languishing drunken lovers, is thus a description of the inner states of those in attendance. The inversion of norms sets up a dichotomy between the phenomenal appearance of the gathering, which would have followed particular accepted social norms, and the transformative effect of attendance on participants. This dichotomy is reflected at several points in the poem: material gifts are worthless due to the value of the pearl-like tears of the sincere. Those of social status receive no attention, while paupers who had given up their hearts for the cause are revered. Likewise, those who proudly sit at the head of the gathering are in fact distant from the host, whereas the humble who sit furthest are really in proximity.

In the last four lines of the poem, Sanā‘ī describes his selection for special favor, and admittance to the overwhelming yet intimate presence of his patron. Sanā‘ī’s private meeting with Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr himself, the climax of the poem, is what Michael Sells would call a ‘meaning-event’ – the evocation of a spiritual realization through a perspective shift in language.\(^{279}\) Here, as I interpret these difficult lines, Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr is initiating Sanā‘ī into the secret that his individual ego, represented by the Persian mā (meaning ‘us’), is in fact none other than the Arabic mā, the negative particle, ‘not’.\(^{280}\) This linguistic perspective shift mirrors the perspective shift in Sanā‘ī’s state of consciousness: when in the presence of his spiritual master he realizes his

\(^{278}\) D, 164-5. Near the completion of this dissertation I gained access to the latest of Sanā‘ī’s Dīwān (Dīwān-i Hakīm Sanā‘ī, ed. Muḥammad-Ridā Buzurg-Khāliqī (Tehran: Zawwār, 1393/2014), 2 Vols. [D2]), using the version of the poem there, which contains some variants and differences in line order, for clarification (D2, Vol. 1, 559-60).


\(^{280}\) This interpretation differs from that of de Bruijn, which I do not find to translate Sanā‘ī’s Persian directly: “The writing contained confirmed ‘not’ and denied ‘no’.” See de Bruijn, Of Pietry and Poetry, 68.
own nothingness, functioning as the doorway to the subsequent realization of the “many secrets inscribed there, of Muḥammad-i Maṣūr’s gathering.” This positive knowledge represents the state of subsistence (baqā’) complementing the preceding annihilation (fanā’). Indeed, it is precisely the ‘many secrets’ of the gathering that Sanā’i has been describing in the poem, the inner reality of the states of those present that would not be perceptible for those who can only see the outer form.

These qalandarī poems for Muḥammad ibn Maṣūr go far beyond conventional panegyrics, establishing for this patron a very special status for Sanā’i, suggesting a deeply spiritual relationship that goes far beyond that of poet and patron. As we have seen, a crucial function of this poem is to establish a dichotomy between outward appearance and inward reality. Thus, although Muḥammad ibn Maṣūr’s relationship with Sanā’i was not manifested in a social context associated with the label of Sufism, there is much in Sanā’i’s depiction of this patron here that suggests a master-disciple relationship. Outwardly, Muḥammad ibn Maṣūr was a prominent religious scholar, the Chief Qadi of Sarakhs, and not the leader of a Sufi circle in the social meaning of the term. However, though we will leave the debate about the nature of Sanā’i’s ‘Sufism’ to another venue,281 it is crucial to recognize the spiritual, perhaps even initiatic, features of Muḥammad ibn Maṣūr, which feature so strongly in the modes by which Sanā’i depicts human perfection in his praise of him.

This poem deepens our understanding of Sanā’i’s approach to the depiction of human perfection within a religious context by helping us to understand how several of his approaches to praise of this patron fit together. Muḥammad ibn Maṣūr is depicted as a multi-dimensional character. His outward function as religious scholar and judge occasions one form of praise from

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Sanā‘ī whilst his inward spiritual nature occasions another. While the first is closer to his conventional panegyrics, the second requires a metaphysical approach to understanding human perfection (as epitomized in the tafsīr-panegyric) and an allegorical expression of inner realities through qalandarī themes. Furthermore, the metaphysical approach to human perfection is deeply connected to the dichotomy of outward appearance and inner reality. Understanding the metaphysical reality of the Prophet or any other individual requires penetration beyond the veil of the outward, the material reality of ordinary human appearances. The metaphysical reality is precisely the inward meaning that becomes manifest on the basis of this insight, and it is this metaphysical reality, ‘the presence of that Eminence’, that has the transformative effect on Sanā‘ī described in the final lines of this poem.

Having become aware of both the metaphysical account of human perfection and the dichotomy of outward and inward in Sanā‘ī’s poetry for Muḥammad ibn Maṇṣūr, we are now well prepared to approach the longest poem he wrote for this patron, the mathnawī entitled The Journey of the Servants to the Place of Return, which develops both of these teachings.

**Muḥammad ibn Maṇṣūr as Guide Beyond the Intellect**

The genre of visionary narrative is a particularly important meeting point in the Islamic intellectual tradition between metaphysics and literature. Originating with Ibn Sīnā’s (d. 428/1037) Ḥayy ibn Yaqqān, and enabled by his view that metaphysical truths can be communicated in the language of imagination just as in intellectual discourse, this genre has provided a unique forum of continuity and disagreement in narrative form.\(^{282}\) Through the depiction of the journey

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of the seeker of knowledge, examples of this genre provide a powerful argument that Islamic philosophy is capable of being conceived of as a ‘way of life’ to use Pierre Hadot’s term.\textsuperscript{283} As Corbin notes in his classic study of this genre, “By substituting a dramaturgy for cosmology, the recitals guarantee the genuineness of this universe; it is veri-tably the place of a personally lived adventure.”\textsuperscript{284}

Sanā‘ī’s \textit{Journey of the Servants to the Place of Return} (or more precisely, its first section, which introduces the panegyric)\textsuperscript{285} is a formative member of this genre.\textsuperscript{286} As Kathryn Johnson has shown, Sanā‘ī’s depiction of his own spiritual journey through a Neoplatonic cosmos was written as a direct response to Ibn Sinā’s \textit{Hayy ibn Yaqqān}.\textsuperscript{287} While following the main contours of Ibn Sinā’s text, Sanā‘ī’s journey differs in its final stage, when the poet encounters a spiritual guide who can lead him beyond the level of the Universal Intellect, the terminus of the journey in the earlier work.\textsuperscript{288} Crucially for our study, this guide is none other than Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr.

After an apostrophe in which Sanā‘ī addresses the wind, the story begins with the descent of the soul “from above”,\textsuperscript{289} its adoption by the wet-nurse of nature, and its development through

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\textsuperscript{284} Henry Corbin, \textit{Avicenna and the Visionary Recital}, 4.

\textsuperscript{285} As de Bruijn notes, “A single panegyrical motif was sufficient to provide the poem with a plausible explanation of its composition. This motif was the identification of the patron with a specimen of human perfection and was used to make a transition from the main part of the introductory matter to the panegyric.” \textit{Of Piety and Poetry}, 200.

\textsuperscript{286} The content of this poem has been discussed by de Bruijn in \textit{Of Piety and Poetry}, 200-18 (of which 202-7 present and excellent overview of the journey, in much greater detail than we have been able to provide here); \textit{Persian Sufi Poetry}, 88-92; and “Comparative Notes on Sanā‘ī and ‘Aṭṭār,” 367-8.

\textsuperscript{287} de Bruijn has also noted some other important influences, most importantly a Turkish qaṣīda by ‘Am‘aq (composed 460-72/1068-80), which closely parallels the traditional Arabic \textit{nasīb} depicting a lover’s journey in separation, but has the poet travel through various realms containing wild beasts and godless humans, and the \textit{Hunar-Nāma} of Mukhtārī, in which the poet searches for a man of wisdom and meets a wise astrologer. See \textit{Of Piety and Poetry}, 197-200.

\textsuperscript{288} Johnson, “A Mystic's Response to the Claims of Philosophy.”

\textsuperscript{289} SI, 5.
the stages of the vegetal and animal soul. Becoming sick of the animal state, the poet comes to love wayfaring, finding a narrow way in the darkness through which he can move to the next level. Here Sanā’ī meets a luminous spiritual guide, who represents the rational soul, the ‘son’ of the Universal Intellect:

He said, “I am higher than substance and place
   My father is the work of the abode of God.
   It is he that is the first result of Eternity,
   The light of dawn [on the dark horizon] of nothingness.”

In a way comparable to Ibn Sīnā’s tale, the rational soul as luminous guide leads Sanā’ī through a number of stages in which the vices, such as ‘dark imagination’ (khīyāl-i tīra) and ‘miserliness’ are represented in imaginal form - for example a “one headed, four faced, seven mouthed viper,” that represents death. As the guide assists the poet in overcoming these obstacles, it becomes clear that they are making a journey through different levels of the cosmos, as certain vices are identified with particular elements - fire symbolizing wrath for example.

Once the poet has traversed several levels and Mars and the Sun come into view, his guide informs him that he has been saved from Hell. In the stages of the journey that follow the poet meets different groups of worshippers, who each represent a different type of character fault and are directing their worship in the wrong direction. These representatives of such vices as ostentation (riyā’) (who are facing each other in prayer) or the self-admiration (who worship

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290 SI, 6-9.
291 SI, 15.
292 SI, 17.
293 SI, 24. Sanā’ī frequently cites numbers and expects the reader to understand what they refer to, though in this mathnāwī his intention is sometimes difficult to discern. For example, the seven mouths of the viper could represent the seven gates of Hell.
294 See SI, 41.
295 SI, 46.
296 SI, 53.
towards a mirror), symbolize religious believers who have stopped short on their journey, underestimating the true object of their worship and lacking the aspiration (himmāt) to continue on the Way.

The guide then warns the poet that the next stage is more difficult, since the journey will take place within a world of light, which is more difficult to transcend than the dark worlds, to which the soul given the right guidance has a natural aversion. This luminous realm is the world of the Universal Soul, a great king possessing knowledge and forbearance. There the poet sees scholars of the Sharia and also some Christian monks and priests. The poet wishes to stay there to learn from these people, but the guide admonishes him, saying that the goal still lies beyond:

You are incomplete, for the sake of completion
Pass beyond the world of names.

The perfection attainable on the level of the Universal soul thus appears to represent all that can be attained through discursive knowledge and religious learning. The ‘world of names’ does not involve the mystical contemplation required for further progress.

Towards the beginning of the level of the Universal Intellect, the guide becomes mysteriously united with the poet, integrated into his very being. This suggests that until now Sanā‘ī’s Virgil has been a higher part of his own soul, the perfections of which he has now managed to integrate within himself. The poet again describes the different groups of inhabitants of this level, who are all worshippers experiencing different spiritual states. Many of these states are expressed using Sufi terminology, such as ‘expansion’ (bast) and ‘contraction’ (qabḍ). Although the poet sees

297 SI, 54-5.
298 See SI, 56-8.
299 See SI, 59-62.
300 SI, 63.
301 SI, 66-7.
302 See SI, 68.
worshippers who have become nothing in the face of their object of worship, he is informed by one of the lovers of God that he is still within the domain of form and duality, where religious obligation (taklīf) and law (shar‘) still apply. He therefore needs a new guide to take him further.303 The poet sees a luminous being moving in the distance, whom all are treating with great reverence, and he is told that this is the master he needs to free him from his own selfhood.

It is he who is able to show to the soul

Without a veil, the letters of the Quran.

For in these days, he is the wayfarer

In this land he is the one with open eyes.

I asked ‘Who’s that light?’ and he said that “That light, is Abū’l-Mafākhir Muḥammad-i Ṭaṣfurr.”304

As Johnson has pointed out, this ending to the visionary narrative of The Journey of the Servants is designed as a response to Ibn Sīnā’s visionary narrative. Though the intellect can serve as a guide for most of the journey, Sanā‘ī is making the claim that the seeker who wishes to reach the end of the journey must submit to religious authority and a spiritual master. Here it is particularly significant that understanding the meaning of the Quran requires the ascent beyond the Universal Intellect, echoing the superiority of the Quran to the Intellect in the chapter structure of The Walled Garden. Indeed, Ibn Sīnā’s conception that the highest attainment a human can reach is to become attached to the Active Intellect is rejected both here and throughout Sanā‘ī’s homiletic poetry depicting the ascent beyond all dualities, as in the Sufi tradition before him.

The final line quoted above, mentioning the name of the spiritual guide and patron to whom the poem is dedicated provides the transition (takhallus) for Sanā‘ī to begin his panegyric,

303 SI, 74-5.
304 SI, 76.
which departs from the theme of journeying. The panegyric is fairly conventional in its approach until the end of the poem, and therefore does not concern us here.

Like several of the poems we have encountered so far, the narrative of *The Journey of the Servants* is based on correlative thought; it is through correlation that the simultaneous journey through the levels of the cosmos, and the movement through vices, virtues and other spiritual qualities in conceivable. However, this is a type of correlative thought, quite different from that we have seen so far, admitting of greater complexity than the correlation around polarities. As de Bruijn explains, the various symbolic figures that appear in the story should be interpreted from multiple points of view:

> The successive stages are represented by three allegorical figures. Each of them is pictured in a matter which allows it to be interpreted at two levels: both as a force of the individual psyche and as an element of a metaphysical system of the world. The perfect harmony between the two levels is, undoubtedly, based on the concept of a congruity between the microcosmos of the human being and the macrocosmos.

This symbolic approach correlates various features of the internal and external worlds, such that Sanā‘ī’s journey is both a journey through the levels of reality and the successive mastery of various aspects of his own being.

Furthermore, it is Sanā‘ī’s commitment to a Neoplatonic ontology and a metaphysics of degrees of reality that makes his narrative possible; the true, the good and our knowledge of them are existentially interconnected within a hierarchy of levels of reality that reflect one another, ascending towards the Universal Soul, the Universal Intellect, and finally to God Himself, the One.

*The Journey of the Servants* adds a new dimension to Sanā‘ī’s homiletic poetry and his call for the cultivation of ḥusn. This ontological vision of the cosmos becomes a crucial reminder of the

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305 He is referring to figures representing nature (the wet-nurse), the animal kingdom (the king), and the intellect (the old man). However, his insight applies to many more symbols in the story.

human condition, in which the ethical choice implied by the human state becomes the choice to move upward towards the light or to remain in the darkness of vice. But his scheme also ties together several aspects of Sanā’ī’s thought that are elsewhere treated less systematically (and hence have appeared to some as a hotchpotch): the poet’s cosmic journey shows that the cultivation of the virtues, the development in knowledge and the movement through the ontological levels of the cosmos are all different aspects of a single endeavor, different dimensions of the journey towards God and beyond all duality. The same journey beyond duality that is depicted in much of Sanā’ī’s poetry framed within the metaphysics of transcendence can thus also be conceived of within the perspective of degrees of reality. In this latter perspective, however, it takes on greater depth, involving a holistic cultivation of the soul and of knowledge.

Once more, Sanā’ī situates his praise of Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr here within a metaphysical account of human perfection. As in the tafsīr-panegyric, this patron appears as a human with a celestial nature, and as in the qalandarī-qasīda the climax of the poem comes as Sanā’ī surveys a crowd of lovers and is then able to approach their leader. Like the latter poem, The Journey of the Servants is best understood as an account of Sanā’ī’s own experience seen through the eye of the inward. Sanā’ī clearly intends the poem to be directly autobiographical, a symbolic description of the inner transformations that occurred for him as he journeyed through animalistic attachment to the worldlier aspects of the poetic craft, through the cultivation of virtue and religious knowledge.

Indeed, regarding the ending of the visionary journey of The Journey of the Servants, I must disagree with de Bruijn’s assessment that Sanā’ī has been compelled to focus on the ‘moral perfection’ of the patron here. Rather than simply depicting ‘moral perfection’ there is a crucial

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307 de Bruijn’s purpose is to explain, why despite Sanā’ī’s use of philosophical approaches to ma‘ād in the sense of eschatology, he does not finally adopt the position of the philosophers. (See Of Piety and Poetry, 213.)
noetic and experiential aspect of the higher stages of the poet’s journey. Moreover, as we have seen, Sanāʿī deliberately uses Sufi terminology to describe the states of the individuals he encounters on the level of the Universal Intellect. Indeed, the reason why he needs to seek the guidance of the shooting-star-like figure who turns out to be Muhammad ibn Manṣūr is that he is the only individual who has the power to take him beyond his own individual selfhood, thus paralleling the ending of the qalandarī-qaṣīda. The fact that the journey ends with the meeting with Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr is of course an appropriate transition to the panegyric section of the book, but it also marks the end of Sanāʿī’s journey beyond the limitations of selfhood, and therefore beyond the limits of language itself. As in the qalandarī-qaṣīda, this poem stakes a crucial claim that it was Muhammad ibn Manṣūr who guided him towards the peak of his spiritual attainment.

The poems we have considered so far show the richness of Sanāʿī’s spiritual portrait of the Chief Qadi of Sarakhs. The final piece of this depiction, however, remains for us to consider.

**The Universal Soul**

As we saw in the previous chapter, in *The Walled Garden* the spiritual master appears to Sanāʿī when he reaches the level of the Universal Soul in the descending course of the book.308 Indeed, the individual master turns out to be a manifestation of this metaphysical reality, the principle of guidance for humans beyond the material world:

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Hand-crafted was I in the world of divinity,
Leader and guide of the world of humanity.309
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308 This section plays a central role in the *Fakhri-Nīma*, though de Bruijn believes that the association of the spiritual master with the Universal Intellect is clearer there. (See *Of Piety and Poetry*, 228-34.) This would make this depiction more similar to that of *The Journey of the Servants*, in which Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr is met on the level of the Universal Intellect.

309 HH, 347.
The logic behind this identification or association of a human person with a metaphysical reality, closely echoes the identification of the historical Prophet Muhammad with the Muhammadan Reality. Like the latter idea, it derives from a metaphysics of degrees of reality, in which the lower degrees are seen to reflect the higher.

The guidance that the master/Universal Soul gives Sanā‘ī enunciates the same message that was woven into Sanā‘ī’s discourse from God to the Prophet and his own message from Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr in the tafsīr-panegyric, for he reminds the poet: you do not belong to this material world.

My adopted son, how have you met this morn?
O you who have lain low in the prison of the soul.
O you who have remained prisoner in this pit of pride,
    Lorded over by the caprice-worshipping soul.
Get up, for this rubbish heap is not your abode,
    This is a house of desire, your place is not here.\textsuperscript{310}

Although the spiritual master in whom the Universal Soul manifests in The Walled Garden is not identified as any particular individual, and indeed claims that he is manifest in spiritual guides everywhere,\textsuperscript{311} these lines directly echo the spiritual advice Sanā‘ī himself was given and which he recalls in the Tarkīb-band. These words were of course said to him by none other than Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr:

Once you said to me, “You are not a human since,
    I see you always in companionship with asses, like a fly….
Once you said to me, “What kind of bird are you who for the body and sensation,
    You bury your head in a carcass, even though you are like an eagle?’
Once you said to me, you are not ‘Sanā‘ī’ (radiant) for if you were,

\textsuperscript{310} HH, 345.
\textsuperscript{311} HH, 347.
Your heart would be busy with praise (thanā) not with merit (thawâb).\textsuperscript{312}

By implication, the similarity of the teachings of the Universal Soul and Muhammad ibn Manṣūr suggest that that they are precisely one and the same. This implication is in fact confirmed in the \textit{Tarkīb-band}, in which Sanā‘ī at one point praises his mentor by advising his readers:

If you need on the level (khaṭṭa) of generation and corruption
To see the Universal Soul, see this particular soul.\textsuperscript{313}

In themselves, these lines seem like hyperbolic metaphor, expressing praise too lofty to be literally attributed to a human being. However, by reading across the genres of Sanā‘ī’s poetry, focusing on the religious poetry for this scholar-patron, we see that this teaching in fact fits squarely within Sanā‘ī’s metaphysical account of human perfection. Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr is for Sanā‘ī an example of the archetype of the spiritual master, who is the manifestation of the Universal Soul within the world, a human intermediary for the manifestation of the metaphysical principle of guidance.

In this regard I must again disagree with de Bruijn’s assessment of the status of the spiritual guide here:

The choice of this particular device was determined primarily by literary conventions. It was suitable for didactic compositions, both on account of its very nature and of the precedence of its use in earlier works of the same kind. There is, therefore, no reason to relate the character of the guide in the two poems of Sanā‘ī directly to the spiritual guide of the Sufi tradition. On could, at the most, point to a certain congruity to the extent that the necessity of guidance on the path of spiritual development is a basic assumption on both sides. But Sanā‘ī’s character is essentially an allegory representing the metaphysical concept of the Active Intelligence….As far as its function in the didactic composition is concerned, it represents a more general notion: that of the teaching of wisdom which leads to salvation.\textsuperscript{314}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{312} D, 727.  \\
\textsuperscript{313} D, 724.  \\
\textsuperscript{314} de Bruijn, \textit{Of Piety and Poetry}, 235.
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As we have shown, the status of the spiritual guide is in fact far more than a literary convention, but ties in directly to Sanā‘ī’s metaphysical account of human perfection, which is deeply rooted in the Sufi doctrine of the Muhammadan Reality.

**From Metaphor to Symbolism**

It would be misleading to suggest that the line cited above is the only example in Sanā‘ī’s oeuvre of the comparison of a patron-scholar with the Universal Soul. A similar image is in fact found in a *tarkīb-band* datable to the previous period of Sanā‘ī’s life, praising a scholar in Balkh named Muḥammah ibn Muḥammad.315 However, there is a slightly different nuance in Sanā‘ī’s expression here, for he states that the patron has “found knowledge, *like* the Soul of Universal Essence, without bounds.”316 This is a straightforward hyperbolic simile: the patron’s knowledge is very great indeed, and thus seems to the poet to be ‘without bounds’. It is with linguistic precision that Sanā‘ī here uses a simile, the knowledge of the patron in question *like* the infinite knowledge of the Universal Soul.

But rather than representing a mere difference of choice of expression in stating a similar relationship between a scholar and the Universal Soul, I suggest that there is a fundamental difference in the philosophy of language behind Sanā‘ī’s statement that a particular patron is *like* the Universal Soul during the middle period of his career and his statement that Muḥammad ibn Maṣūr in some way *is* the Universal Soul that he makes during his mature phase.

Whereas the hyperbolic simile (which could equally be expressed as a hyperbolic metaphor, without the ‘like’) requires no specific vision of reality within which to be meaningful, I believe that Sanā‘ī’s later statements do require such a specific vision of reality.

315 See D, 747-58.
316 D, 754.
The metaphysical point of view I have in mind is expressed by Sanā‘ī himself in a qaṣīda he wrote in response to ‘Ārif Zargar.317 There Sanā‘ī notes that it is impossible to stare directly at the sun:

Blindness (khīragī) results for the one who for the sake of his own knowledge

Casts his eyes at the shining sun without a leader (bī-μuqtādā).318

Sanā‘ī goes on to explain that in order to look at the Sun one must have “a well filled with water,” in which the image of the Sun is reflected. Seeing this reflection, the heart will be filled with longing and become attached to the Sun, and the soul will transcend his body in order to seek it.319

Sanā‘ī’s use of the term muqtādā to refer to the intermediary in which one can see the Divine Sun, which is itself too bright to be looked upon directly, is the key to this image. The term refers to a prayer-leader, or indeed any role-model, and therefore signifies that this intermediary is a human guide. As such, a human individual, the Prophet or a spiritual master, is the necessary intermediary that allows the aspirant to access the guiding reflection of higher realities through their reflection on a lower plane of existence.

The statement that a particular human being is the Universal Soul, or that the Prophet is the Muhammadan Reality, only makes sense within a metaphysics of degrees of reality. Moreover, these types of statement are made possible by a renewed understanding of the possibilities of linguistic expression that accompany such a worldview. Technically this type of expression is still metaphor, in the sense that these human figures both are and are not identical with the hypostatic realities they manifest; and indeed manifest implies both similarity and difference. However, it is a

317 de Bruijn, Of Piety and Poetry, 76.
318 D, 42.
319 D, 42.
specific type of metaphor, one which is ontologically grounded. As discussed in the introduction, I suggest the best term for this type of language is ‘symbolism’, in the specific sense of that term.

In a metaphysics in which the hierarchical cosmic levels of reality reflect one another, symbolism is a quality of both words and things. Both expressions and physical entities point to something beyond themselves, and thus can be described as ‘symbolic’. Symbolic language possesses the capacity to make us aware of the way the material world points beyond itself. Thus, Sanā‘ī’s poetry can direct the reader or listener from description of the phenomenal reality (of the patron for example) to the reality that he manifests, the Universal Soul. The hyperbolic metaphor of Sanā‘ī’s earlier description of a scholar-patron has thus been replaced by symbolic or anagogical expression in the later poetry, allowing him to lift the mind of the reader from the sensible realities that are more easily expressed in words to the spiritual realities that lie behind them.

This symbolic attitude is again a type of correlative thought, being grounded in the awareness of the correlations between different levels of reality and the ability of language to express across these levels. Moreover, we have seen this symbolic attitude at work across Sanā‘ī’s poems for Muḥammad ibn Maṇṣūr, in his evocation of the different dimensions of the Muhammadan Reality by the images of the Prophet’s tresses and face, and in the expressions of hierarchical levels of the cosmos through which the poet travelled in The Journey of the Servants. Consideration of Sanā‘ī’s discussions of the Universal Soul therefore allows us to recognize the use of symbolism that pervades these poems and hence forms a crucial part of his later thought.

**Conclusion: Muḥammad ibn Maṇṣūr as a Synthetic Icon of Human Perfection**

In this chapter we have extended our trans-generic reading of Sanā‘ī’s poetry to his panegyrics, studying poems written in the forms of mathnawī, qaṣīda and tarkīb-band. Through our close reading of the poems for Muḥammad ibn Maṇṣūr, we have seen that Sanā‘ī makes use of
diverse strategies to depict the diverse facets of the character of this Chief Qadi of Sarakhs. Indeed, the poetry that we have examined in this chapter contributes to diverse fields of Islamic thought, from metaphysics to ethics, Quranic exegesis to theoretical Sufism. As a result of this approach, Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr becomes particularly difficult to characterize. Indeed, the qalandarī poetry in particular seems designed to subvert ordinary characterizations, to lead the reader beyond conceptual categories to an encounter with the inner reality of the spiritual master himself.

In the poetry of Sanā‘ī, Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr is many things at once: both Chief Qadi and inebriated lover of God, both bringer of justice and religious order within the world and luminous guide beyond the Universal Intellect. Moreover, Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr is a representative of the Prophet, whom for Sanā‘ī was simultaneously upholder of the law, instructor in virtue, admonisher of the all who would listen, spiritual wayfarer and imparter of esoteric knowledge. Just as Sanā‘ī’s poems for Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr can all be considered ‘religious’ in some way, these values are also religious. Yet they go far beyond being ‘merely religious’, to include a formless love that is best expressed through antinomian imagery. In Sanā‘ī’s poetry, Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr becomes an icon synthesizing diverse dimensions of human perfection in a single individual, much like the figure of the Prophet Muḥammad.

These characteristics of Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr are crucial to understanding Sanā‘ī himself; the multi-dimensional character of the patron is in many ways reflected in the poet. Just as Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr would have been known most widely for his upholding of the religious law and his sessions of sermonizing, much of the mature poetry of Sanā‘ī is indeed characterized by the homiletic tone, calling the listener to sincerity in acts of worship and deepening of religious knowledge with a view to posthumous felicity. Moreover, just as the Chief Qadi of Sarakhs was willing to employ a professional poet to spread fame of his virtues, Sanā‘ī was willing until the end of his life to engage in the give and take that was the norm of the secular panegyrics. But the give
and take between Sanā‘ī and this patron was not limited to the remuneration he requests according to the norms of the genre at the end of several poems. Sanā‘ī also sought to “learn love from the foremost of religion,”³²⁰ as Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr became the muse for mystical taghazzul, the spiritual master who exhorted Sanā‘ī to abandon worldly attachments, and the initiatic guide beyond individual selfhood. Indeed, both Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr and Sanā‘ī himself are depicted in the poetry we have examined as possessing metaphysical realities beyond their outward appearances. Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr is the qalandarī idol, the guide beyond the Universal Intellect, and the manifestation in this world of the Universal Soul, and Sanā‘ī is the seeker, who traverses the levels of the cosmos in order to meet this master.

As we have seen, these portrayals of Sanā‘ī and his patron are woven together in the metaphysical cosmology that comes to take a central place in both The Journey of the Servants and The Walled Garden. The spiritual guide, around whom Sanā‘ī creates a set of allusions to a metaphysical status beyond that of ordinary physical humanity, plays a central role in the journey through the levels of being and moral qualities of the soul. Just as the metaphysical perspective of degrees of reality serves to weave together the various aspects of human development in the poet’s progress in The Journey of the Servants, the metaphysical account of human perfection recurs in so many of Sanā‘ī’s poems in praise of Muhammad ibn Manṣūr. Thus, though Sanā‘ī deploys diverse strategies in order to extoll the virtues of his patron, it is his metaphysical understanding of human perfection, elaborated through the duality of outward/inward, that stands at the center and gives the ethical message of these panegyrics their coherence. As we have seen, this metaphysics leads Sanā‘ī to a renewed perspective on language, bringing about a shift in his expression from metaphor to symbolism.

³²⁰ D, 718.
Although these aspects of Sanā‘ī’s depiction of human perfection are clearly rooted here in his religious poetry, in the following chapter we will see that they nevertheless provide important keys to understanding his amatory verse.
Chapter 4: Metaphysics Beyond Religious Poetry and the Fundamental Ambiguity of Love

Given that our aim is to discover intellectual and discursive principles that underlie Sanā‘ī’s mature world-view, the ghazals present a particularly difficult challenge. In contrast to the qaṣīdas, many of which can be located temporally and geographically by their patrons or by the titles that accompany them, the ghazals contain almost no identifying features. In the Dīwān we are confronted by a mass of poems, arranged alphabetically by rhyme, yet with no indication of when they were written during Sanā‘ī’s career. We therefore have no way of knowing whether a particular ghazal was written in Sanā‘ī’s youth when he was assimilating the norms of Ghaznavid ‘secular’ court poetry or whether it was written whilst he was composing his mystical homiletic qaṣīdas or The Walled Garden itself at the culmination of his career.

Furthermore, the task of interpreting Sanā‘ī’s ghazals is compounded by the fact that his Dīwān contains the first substantial collection of ghazals in the history of Persian literature. In interpreting Sanā‘ī we have to set aside our presuppositions about the ghazal that have been created by the subsequent history of the genre and the centuries of use and re-use of many of the same images we find in Sanā‘ī.

However, if one judges the character of Sanā‘ī’s ghazals themselves, it is clear that they brought about a transformation in classical Persian love poetry. Commenting on the situation before Sanā‘ī, de Bruijn notes that, “The practice of love poetry in Persian in the tenth and eleventh centuries was initially purely secular. It seems that, during that period, ghazals were still mainly

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321 Indeed, as Meisami has pointed out, “the ghazal is, perhaps, the most opaque and elusive of Persian poetic genres.” Medieval Persian Court Poetry, 239.
322 As noted, for example, by de Bruijn in Persian Sufi Poetry, 56.
known as songs performed by minstrels. Though most poets of the time must have composed ghazals, hardly any specimen of an independent poem of this kind has survived.”

Indeed, although poems that display many of the features of the classical ghazal are found as early as the 4th/10th century, by the hand of such poets as Shahīd Balkhī (d.324/936), there remains scholarly disagreement over the state in which the ghazal existed as a separate genre from the qaṣīda (and its amatory prelude, or taghazzul) before Sanā‘ī. Furthermore, this problem is not only exacerbated by the lack of extant examples of separate ghazals but also by the ambiguity of the term ghazal itself, which probably originally referred to the amatory content (and hence could be applied to taghazzul) and later came to refer to the specific genre.

However, de Bruijn’s comment that love poetry in Persian before the 12th century was purely secular must be qualified; this refers to love poetry in the courts. Love poetry, which generally took the form of quatrains or ‘proto-ghazals’ (similar to quatrains, but with more lines, lacking the formal characteristics of the courtly ghazal), was used extensively in Sufi circles. Although the attribution of specific quatrains to figures such as Abū Sa‘īd ibn Abīl-Khayr (d. 440/1049) or Bābā Ṭāhir (d. early 5th/mid 11th c.) may be difficult to establish from a philological point of view, it is unreasonable to doubt the wider oral culture of mystical quatrains in its general outlines.

323 de Bruijn, Persian Sufi Poetry, 55.
324 For an analysis of Shahi Balkhi’s ghazal, which has all the formal characteristics except the takhallus, see Moayyad, “Lyric Poetry,” 120. This article also includes an important survey of amatory poetry by many poets before Sanā‘ī. On the abovementioned scholarly disagreement see 134.
325 On this point see Lewis, “Reading, Writing, and Recitation,” 104-11.
326 On the Sufi influence on lyric poetry in this period in general, and the specifics of these figures and the problems associated with attribution of poetry to them in particular, see Moayyad, “Lyric Poetry,” 132. The mystical use of love poetry is affirmed by Abū Ḥamīd al-Ghazālī in Kīmiyā-yi Sa‘ādat, (al-Ghazali, Alchemy of Happiness, 68-9) and is also evidenced by the quatrains and proto-ghazals quoted by ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī throughout his Persian writings.
Much like the task accomplished by Sanāʿī in the transformations that he worked in the
genre of didactic mathnawī, perhaps his most important contribution to the genre of ghazal was to
infuse the courtly lyric form (which was well represented as prelude to qaṣīdas but probably also
existed in the songs of minstrels) with the sentiments of Sufism. As we shall investigate in detail,
one of the crucial results of this process was that the vast majority of ghazals can be cogently read
from either a secular or mystical point of view. Indeed, as de Bruijn has pointed out, “it should be
considered that the ambiguity of their ultimate meaning has become an essential feature of the
genre.”

Nevertheless, we should not be too hasty in drawing conclusions about the nature of the
mysticism in Sanāʿī’s ghazals. Given that the imagery of the ghazal soon became fully integrated into
the mystical use of this genre, the question remains as to what extent such mystical connotations
are present within the world of Sanāʿī texts themselves or whether they develop as a result of a
back-projection onto his poetry. Indeed, scholars of Sanāʿī have taken differing approaches to this
issue, resulting in part from their emphasis on different examples from Sanāʿī’s Divān. Thus, for
Shafīʿi-Kadkanī, Sanāʿī’s ghazals depict the meeting of the earthly and heavenly aspects of human
nature, creating a paradigm that is the mother of the ghazals of Rūmī, whereas for de Bruijn,
“Many of these poems would not be classified as mystical poems if we did not know that they were
indeed written by Sanāʿī, and may very well have served him at any of the religious séances in
which he was involved.”

In this chapter, I will argue that the metaphysical strategies that we have identified in
Sanāʿī’s religious poetry also play a crucial role in his amatory verse. The tensions between

327 de Bruijn, Persian Sufi Poetry, 55-6.
328 Shafīʿi-Kadkanī, Tāziyāna-hā-yi Sulūk, 30-2.
329 de Bruijn, Persian Sufi Poetry, 56.
‘mystical’ and ‘secular’ aspects of Sanā‘ī’s poetry and the ambiguity that results will be at the center of my focus. One method of approaching this problem has been provided by Franklin Lewis, who suggests that the intent of particular poems would have been clarified by their performance contexts, particularly given the diverse audiences that Sanā‘ī wrote for, which included “Musicians, Clerics, Mystics, Sectarians, Kings and the Creator.” However, given the near impossibility of discerning the performance contexts of particular ghazals, I have decided here to focus on the texts of the ghazals themselves. Moreover, I do not intend to give an exhaustive exposition of the diverse sub-genres of Sanā‘ī’s ghazal composition, a task that has already been accomplished by Lewis. Rather, in line with my goal of uncovering coherent principles of world-view and language in Sanā‘ī’s later poems, I will focus here on specific examples that support this task. The implications of this limitation of focus will be discussed at the end of the chapter, in which the question of Sanā‘ī’s consistency will be discussed.

In the first part of my analysis, I examine a set of poems in which Sanā‘ī meditates on the nature of love. Here I suggest that among examples in which love appears as generic, applying to all forms of love, there are cases in which a metaphysical view of love is clearly intended, which clearly show that Sanā‘ī is interacting with Sufi discussions on the nature of love. This section of the chapter allows us to gain a clearer idea of how Sanā‘ī formulated the synthesis of courtly and mystical love poetry that is such a crucial part of his ghazal composition.

I then turn to the problem of the ambiguity of the identity of the beloved in Sanā‘ī’s ghazals, which as we have seen came to be a fundamental characteristic of the classical Persian ghazal tradition. I argue that this ambiguity was deliberately cultivated during his later career, and constituted a crucial strategy that gives his ghazals their literary efficacy. Moreover, by reading

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330 As is titled the section in which Lewis deals with this issue, see “Reading, Writing, and Recitation,” 171-87. Lewis discusses the issue of performance contexts on 69-91.
Sanā‘ī’s amatory lyrics in light of the analyses of his religious poetry already conducted, it becomes clear that the metaphysics of human perfection and the linguistic move from metaphor to symbolism maintain their significance beyond the religious genres of his poetry discussed so far, playing a fundamental role in the art of the ghazal. Sanā‘ī’s ghazals thus provide the last piece in the puzzle of determining the coherence of Sanā‘ī’s later worldview.

As we shall see in the course of analysis, reading across genres becomes particularly important for interpreting Sanā‘ī’s ghazals. On the one hand, it allows us to discover parallels between particular ghazals and poems that are dateable, even if these parallels do not allow us to draw firm conclusions. We shall return to the implications of this lack of certainty in the conclusions we can draw about the ghazals at the end of this chapter. On the other hand, it allows us to root our interpretation of the images of Sanā‘ī’s ghazals in his use of the same images in other genres, rather than in later uses of the same images by other poets.

In reading Sanā‘ī’s ghazals in light of other genres of his poetry, one group of poems has been particularly useful. During the last period of the poet’s life, after he had returned to Ghazna and was writing The Walled Garden for Sultan Bahrāmshāh, Sanā‘ī also wrote a set of over twenty panegyrics for this monarch.331 With a few exceptions,332 these panegyrics do not hold to the conventions that Sanā‘ī had generally followed throughout his career.333 In most of the poems for Bahrāmshāh, the amatory prelude (nasīb, taghazzul) takes up almost the entire poem, with only a couple of lines given to the madīḥ, preceded by the ‘transition’ (takhallus in its original sense), in

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331 de Bruijn has said of these poems, “Most difficult to assess are a number of poems written by Sanā‘ī for the Ghaznavid Sultan Bahrāmshāh (reigned 1118-ca. 1152). They are really ghazals, mostly describing a beloved in terms which, though not explicitly mystical, are evidently referring to transcendent Beauty. To this, however, a brief panegyric has been attached marking the same ghazals as pieces of court poetry.” Persian Sufi Poetry, 56.

332 See for example D, 143-5 (Qaṣīda 80), which contains a well-developed panegyric section.

333 As noted by Shafī‘i-Kadkanī in Ṭāziyāna-hā-ya Sulīḥ, 28.
which Sanā‘ī mentions his own name and compares some aspect of the beloved of the taghazzul to the patron. As such, whereas the taghazzul had generally been subsidiary (though as we have seen, crucial in the generation of meaning) with respect to the madīḥ, in these poems it becomes the centerpiece. The praise of the patron then appears almost as an afterthought.334

From this restructuring of the panegyric it is clear that during the final phase of Sanā‘ī’s life, while he was writing his magnum opus of mystical and ethical instruction, the ghazal possessed central importance for him. Moreover, given the fact that the panegyrics for Bahrāmshāh are really ghazal-plus-praise instead of true qasīda, they serve as excellent points of comparison for the ghazals themselves, giving us datable points of comparison for Sanā‘ī’s undatable ghazals. Indeed, we will see Sanā‘ī following similar strategies in the taghazzuls for Bahrāmshāh and many of the ghazals on which we focus in this chapter, in which Sanā‘ī develops his approach to the questions of the nature of love and the identity of the beloved.

**Mystical Discourses on Love Before Sanā‘ī**

In addition to being an important topic in Persian and Arabic literary traditions, which include the courtly forms that we have already discussed, the nature of love was also an important debate in religious circles.335 The diversity of opinions on love of such scholarly groups as theologians, philosophers, physicians, bellettrists and Sufis in the 10th century is documented by Abū’l-Ḥasan al-Daylamī (fl. Late 10th c.) in his Kitāb ‘Af al-alif al-ma’lūf ‘alā’l-lām al-ma’mūf (Book of

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334 The historical importance of this transformation is borne witness to by the form taken by those ghazals of Hāfiz that mention a patron in their final lines; the panegyric in these cases had thus become a sub-genre of ghazal.

335 On the scriptural and theological foundations of discussions of love in Islamic thought see Chittick, *Divine Love*, 3-40.
the Conjunction of the Cherished Alif with the Conjoined Lām).\footnote{336} Although he includes the views of those who disparage love, al-Daylamī is above all interested in the spiritual significance of love. Indeed, this work brings to light the great richness of mystical discourses of love across disciplines during this period.

As Joseph Lumbard has described, the many expressions of love in the Sufi tradition before the 12th century can be analyzed around a series of points of disagreement.\footnote{337} First, is love simply one station on the Way, or is the entire path to God a path of the deepening of love? Secondly, given that the Quran does speak about the love of God for humans and the love of humans for God,\footnote{338} but only uses the term 
\textit{hubb/mahhaba}, is it appropriate to use the more intense term \textit{‘ishq} for either of these types of love? And thirdly, what is the relationship of love to the Divine Essence? Can love be considered a Divine Attribute, or even as identical with the Essence itself?

Regarding the first question, love had been conceived of as the highest station of the Way as early as Shaqīq Balkhī (d. 194/810), who saw \textit{mahhaba} as being the culmination of asceticism (\textit{zuhd}), fear (\textit{khawf}), and longing (\textit{shawq}).\footnote{339} Love was also considered one stage among many others by such figures as al-Sarrāj and al-Qushayrī.\footnote{340} However, for al-Daylamī, who echoes Sumnūn al-Muḥībb (d.287/900),\footnote{341} the entirety of the Way could be conceived of as eleven stages of love, the eleventh of which is \textit{‘ishq}.\footnote{342}

\footnote{338} See \textit{SQ}, 5:54 ‘O you who believe! Whosoever among you should renounce his religion, God will bring a people whom He loves and who love Him, humble toward the believers, stern toward the disbelievers, striving in the way of God, and fearing not the blame of any blamer. That is the Bounty of God, which He gives to whomsoever He will. And God is All-Encompassing, Knowing.’ For a discussion of the significance of this verse in Persian Sufi literature see Chittick, \textit{Divine Love}, 9-11.
\footnote{339} Abū Tālīb al-Makkī also considered love to be the final station. See Lumbard, \textit{Ahmad al-Ghazālī}, 117.
\footnote{340} See Lumbard, \textit{Ahmad al-Ghazālī}, 113; 132-3.
\footnote{341} See Lumbard, \textit{Ahmad al-Ghazālī}, 135. See also B. Reinert, “Sumnūn,” \textit{EI2}.
\footnote{342} Lumbard, \textit{Ahmad al-Ghazālī}, 120-1.
Regarding the terminology for love, there seems to have been considerable dispute over whether the term ‘ishq could be applied to human love for God or God’s love for humans. Indeed, notwithstanding al-Daylamī’s defense of the applicability of the term ‘ishq,343 several of the Sufi manuals of the 11th century, which were designed in part to demonstrate the orthodoxy of Sufism, avoid using ‘ishq altogether. Indeed, al-Qushayrī explicitly rejects the applicability of the term, providing a quotation from his teacher Abū ‘Alī al-Daqqāq (d. 405/1015) to the effect that ‘ishq implies transgressing limits in love, whereas a servant can never love God enough.344 Nevertheless, it does seem that just before Sanā’ī ‘ishq did become accepted, in particular circles at least, as applicable to God, and was used by both of the Ghazālī brothers.

Regarding the metaphysical status of love, in the early tradition it seems that al-Hallāj stood out for his metaphysical statements about love. Indeed, in al-Hallāj’s teachings, particularly as transmitted by al-Daylamī, who was a student of al-Hallāj’s associate ibn Khafīf (d. 371/982),345 love (‘ishq) appears as the most important of the Divine Attributes.

Sufi discourses on the nature of love were transformed, however, by Aḥmad al-Ghazālī’s Sawānih, beginning a Persian tradition in which love was placed at the center of metaphysics.346 Indeed, for Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, ‘ishq is identical with the Divine Essence. Although it is quite possible that the approach typified by al-Hallāj continued in Sufi oral tradition, as exemplified by figures such as Abū Sa’īd ibn Abī‘l-Khayr, as Lumbard notes, “It is, however, clear that in the Sawānih Aḥmad al-Ghazālī chose to put to paper that which others before him, with the exception

343 This questions takes up Chapter Two of The Book of the Conjunction… See al-Daylamī, A Treatise on Mystical Love, 8-9.
344 Lumbard, Ahmad al-Ghazālī, 134. See also J. Chabbi, “Abū ‘alī Daqqāq,” EIr.
346 And including figures such as Samānī (d.534/1140), Maybudī (fl.6th/12th c.), and in some ways ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt. As Lumbard notes, the role of Khwāja ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī in the formation of this tradition is difficult to determine, given the difficulty of ascertaining whether the statements on love attributed to him in Maybudī’s Quranic exegesis, Kashf al-asrār, are authentic. See Lumbard, Ahmad al-Ghazālī, 112; 138-40.
of al-Hallāj and perhaps of ‘Abdallāh Anṣārī, had been reticent to make public. This choice was a watershed event in Sufi history, the impact of which shaped Persian Sufi literature to this day.”

However, given that the Sawānīḥ is an esoteric text that could only be properly interpreted by a limited group of initiates, perhaps we could add that an equally important watershed even in Sufi history is to be seen in the influence of Aḥmad on his brother Abū Ḥāmid. Indeed, in light of the conservatism of the preceding generations of Sufi authors, it is noteworthy that Abū Ḥāmid affirms the validity of the term ‘ishq, and speaks of love for God as “the ultimate aim among the stations and the highest summit of the degrees.”

As Lumbard explains, “it is clear that unlike al-Hujwīrī and Abū ‘Alī al-Daqqāq, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī maintains that the human being can have ‘ishq for God, that God has ‘ishq for the human being, and that through ‘ishq the human being can know God in His very Essence, not only through His attributes and actions.”

Just as Sanā‘ī was beginning his career, discourses on love, particularly in its mystical aspects, were thus undergoing a revival. It thus remains to be seen how Sanā‘ī’s poetry fits into this discussion.

347 Lumbard, Ahmad al-Ghazālī, 149.
348 Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn, 4:257, translated in Lumbard, Ahmad al-Ghazālī, 141.
349 Lumbard, Ahmad al-Ghazālī, 147. For a summary of the Kūsh al-Mahabbah from the Iḥyā see Abrahamov, Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism: The Teachings of Al-Ghazālī and Al-Dabbāgh (London; New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 42-86. Another important dimension of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī’s account of love, which concerns the taking on of the Divine character traits and friendship, discussed by neither Lumbard or Abrahamov is analyzed by Paul Heck in “Adab in the Thought of Ghazālī (d. 505/1111): In the Service of Mystical Insight,” in Ethics and Spirituality in Sufi adab, ed. F. Chiabotti, E. Feuillebois-Pierunek, C. Mayeur-Jaouen and L. Patrizi (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 298-324
What is Love? Sanā‘ī Poses a Question

Although the ghazal is generally a love song addressed to the beloved, in a number of poems Sanā‘ī steps back to meditate on the nature of love itself. These poems are therefore a logical starting point in piecing together his attitude towards love.

Several of Sanā‘ī’s ghazals on the nature of love are grouped around a single rhyme, implying a consistency of poetic approach among these poems. In addition to those that use the rhyme ‘ishq (‘love’) itself, a set using nīst (‘is not’) is also remarkable, of which the following is a striking example:

There is no suffering in the world like the suffering of being a lover,\(^{351}\)
A man’s not a man ’til he tastes the suffering of being a lover.
The beginning of love: one look at it is sweet;
The end of love is but sorrow and a cold sigh.
Love is a fire in the heart and water in both eyes,
Whoever is paired with love has these two as his pair.
It is a honey mixed with poison, and energy with fatigue;
It is a painful remedy for one who has no share of pain.
The one who loses love, and loses life and all the world;
Show to me a lover, whose face is not yellow from love.\(^{352}\)

Poems such as this one take a generic approach to love; love is evoked through a set of characteristics and poetic images that are standard across the ghazals. Nothing specific is said of the type of love that is discussed, save that it is intense, and therefore the reader can supply the details in order to make it personal. Indeed, little is said in a poem like this that is not to be expected by a reader familiar with secular amatory poetry. Certainly, there is significant art in the combination

\(^{350}\) Lewis has suggested that these poems are mystical, but I do not believe there is anything necessarily mystical in these particular examples. See D, 915-17, and Lewis ‘Reading, Writing and Recitation’, 581.

\(^{351}\) Unless otherwise noted, ‘love’ and ‘lover’ are used to translate ‘ishq and ‘āshiq.

\(^{352}\) D, 825-6. (Gh 61)
and recombination of the set images of love and the sonority of their expressions, but there does not seem to be anything of particular philosophical significance in such a poem, nor does it help us in placing Sanā‘ī in relation to the disagreements within mystical discourse on the nature of love. That is, however, until we begin to read more widely in Sanā‘ī’s ghazals and do so with his wider oeuvre in mind.

Consider the following ghazal:

O Muslims, of that idol’s love, I am protective, jealously,
For this is not a play of love, but perplexity in perplexity.
For love is a surrounding sea, its water nothing is save fire,
And like a range of darkened mounts, the waves are crashing in.
Amid those swirling ocean depths, three hundred sharks do lie in wait,
And on the shores are standing there a hundred dragons, fearsome fell.
The boat is made of sorrowers, the anchor is from patience wrought,
The sails are set towards the wind, yet tribulation’s wind it is.
And I am cast, without myself, within this deep and darkened sea,
Just like a freeman who has donned the clothes and yolk of servitude.
For I was dead, and then I drowned, and wonder! then I came to life,
A jewel now has come to hand, that’s worthy of the two-world’s price.\(^{353}\)

Standing in stark contrast to the generic description of love discussed above, this ghazal creates an imaginal world in which the many dimensions of love are differentiated, only to be woven together into the drama of love itself. Rather than using the more common conceit that love is only to be understood by those who have experienced it, this poem makes a more daring attempt to communicate the nature of love. By drawing on the experience of a sailor’s peril at sea, which is easy to imagine even if one has not experienced it oneself, the poem draws the reader directly into the poet’s world. Love is the fire surrounded sea that the lover traverses on a boat made of

\(^{353}\) D, 806-7. (Gh 27)
sorrowing lovers themselves, held steady only by the anchor of patience and impelled forward by the wind of tribulation.

Though any type of intense love can be read into this poem, the poem’s last lines, when read in light of Sanā‘ī’s other works, contain a very particular implication. The poet’s experience of love, as he is cast ‘without myself’ into the sea of fire, is expressed in terms that parallel Sanā‘ī’s religious and mystical homiletic:

So Die O friend, before thy death!
   If it’s in search of life thou art,
   For from such death did Hermes come
   To be paradisical ‘ere us.
May thou be slain by the blade of love,
   That thou may find eternal life;
   For from the sword of Azrael,
   Shall be not left a living trace.354

For the reader of mystical homiletics, the image of death and rebirth resulting in the attainment of a prize worth more than this world and the afterlife evokes the classic Sufi theme of annihilation in God and subsistence through God,355 for it is only through the attainment of God Himself that the spiritual aspirant can gain something greater than paradise.

On its own, the ghazal of seafaring love can be read as being about any love that overwhelms the lover to the extent that he feels he is drowning, only to gain new life through love itself. Indeed, this meaning never leaves the poem, for Sanā‘ī’s allusions to mystical attainment are subtle and do not force a single interpretation. Yet the language he uses resonates with his religious poems, creating a set of associations that brings a poem like this into a relationship with poems such as

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354 D, 52-3. (Q 19)
355 On this topic see Wilcox, “The Dual Mystical Concepts of Fanā‘ and Baqā‘ in Early Sufism,” 95-118.
Sanā‘ī’s qalandarī-gašīda for Muḥammad ibn Maṣūr, which also ends with a similar annihilation of the ego followed by an enlightened restoration of selfhood.

Philosophizing on the nature of love also constitutes the taghazzul of one of the panegyrics for Bahrāmshāh, showing that this was a topic that occupied Sanā‘ī’s attention during his final phase of poetic composition. The following poem (translated in excerpt), when read in light of his other works, represents one of his most complete and personal expressions of love:

The intellect requires deliberation (tadbīr); love has no deliberation.
The intellect with its stained skirts does not grasp the collars of the lovers.
Love laughs at deliberation for in the desert of intellect,
Whatever is deliberation is but the play-thing of destiny (taqdīr).
Love is a knave (‘ayyār). What has it to do with the deception (tazzwīr) of its destiny?
The intellect is a memorizer, which has no work save deliberation.
If you have intellect and sense, lose the knowledge of food and sleep (khwāb),
For in the world of being a lover, there’s no dream (khwāb) nor interpretation.…
The world of the intellect, O Sanā‘ī, is to give children milk;
Since love drinks blood like milk, let there be no talk of lactation…
If in one moment the man of love gives a hundred-thousand hearts to the friend,
He has nothing in hand save the shame of the gift’s privation…
Pass, like hot-galloping riders, beyond the face and tresses of the friend,
Though without these there is no night for souls, nor morn’s illumination,
So you should not remain bound within the chains of the beloved’s locks,
For chains in this Way are not a condition for sanity’s deterioration…
The ‘Ayn and Shīn and Qāf of ‘ishq, where there is the lesson of love,
Save the ‘Ayn and Shīn and Qāf themselves there is no explanation.
The master (pīr) knows the expansion (basīt) and contraction (qabd) of lovers, but what use?
For our dust is not the master’s place but the place of the spade (bīl).
Love being the enemy of this world of victory (chīragī) and treachery (khīragī),
All of Sanā‘ī’s love is not the love that’s for the vain (khīr).
What is the cause of the loosing and binding (hall-u ‘aqd) of love (may its essence endure!)?
It is not but from the craft of the world-possessing, world-conquering king.

Our king, Bahrāmshām, that king whom in order to find nobility

The spheres do not come short in the service to his court.\(^{356}\)

The core conceit of this poem is of course the contrast between love and intellect through their differences regarding deliberation (\textit{tadbīr}), which implies thinking ahead with the intention of managing one’s affairs. Once again the love described here could refer to either worldly or spiritual love, for both can deprive the lover of sleep and cause such anxiety that it is as if one is drinking one’s own blood. But from the beginning, Sanā’ī sets his comparison of love and intellect within a theological framework. He thus raises the problem of destiny (\textit{taqdīr}), which the pre-planning intellect is endeavoring to overcome whereas love submits to the will of the beloved.

Such illusions amount to little on their own; but again when we read this panegyric in light of other poems in Sanā’ī’s oeuvre its saturation with mystical and homiletic images from the religious poetry comes to light. The \textit{taghazzul} panegyric begins with the briefest of allusions to the \textit{qalandarī} poetry, of which we have seen an example in the \textit{qalandarī-qaṣīda} for Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr. Here love is described as a ‘knave’ (\textit{ṭuyār}),\(^{357}\) who has no need for the deceptions (\textit{tazwīr}) of the intellect’s concerns with the problem of destiny, much like the \textit{qalandar} himself, who has no need for pretensions of piety. Moreover, whereas love as knave appears to be morally at fault, in reality it is the presumptuous intellect whose skirts are stained (\textit{tar-dāman}) with impropriety. As such, much like in the \textit{qalandarī} poems, here appearances are deceiving, for it is love, not intellect, that has the moral high-ground.

As the poem develops around the contrast between love and intellect, several similarities appear with the contrast between knowledge/intellect and love that is the center of Chapter Five

\(^{356}\) D, 93-4. (Q 46)

\(^{357}\) A common expression for the norm-breaking qalandarī beloved.
of *The Walled Garden*. Indeed, in addition to the common theme of the superiority of love over intellect, both passages even use similar images, contrasting maturity and childhood or the letters that spell love and the ineffable meaning of love itself.\textsuperscript{358}

However, whereas in *The Walled Garden* the contrast of love and knowledge leads into a poetic description of night that paves the way for the dawning of the Universal Soul and the appearance of the spiritual master, here Sanā‘ī calls on the reader to pass beyond the duality of night and day. Though Sanā‘ī sets up the same correlative polarity (darkness-light, the beloved’s tresses-face, night-day) that was developed in the *tafsīr*-panegyr, his purpose here is not to evoke the polarities within creation and to root them in the metaphysical Muhammadan Reality. Rather, these polarities here become a symbol of all the dualities that the lover must overcome on the way to unity. It is here that the spiritual meaning of love comes to dominate in the poem, though Sanā‘ī is also dismissive of the contrasting spiritual states of expansion and contraction, which represent yet another duality that has to be transcended in the flight of love. As such, these dualities have no bearing for a lover who is truly dead and buried under the earth, having attained annihilation in God.\textsuperscript{359}

The poem’s *madīḥ* is only two lines, praising love first of all and then giving a suggestive yet formulaic image of the celestial spheres serving Bahrāmshāh’s court, an image that recurs in these panegyrics. But it is Sanā‘ī’s *takhallus*, the stamp of his own name on the poem as the summation of the *taghazzul*, that is the rhetorical climax of the poem. Recapping the dualities of the created order, Sanā‘ī affirms that love is the enemy (*khaşm*) of this dualistic world, constituted by victory

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\textsuperscript{358} Cf. HH, 329-30. Interestingly *The Walled Garden* reverses the images to make the same point, stating that we are all mature in intellect but children in love, and affirming that true love is beyond the letters that make up the word.

\textsuperscript{359} Compare another panegyr for Bahrāmshāh that philosophizes on love, but in which Sana‘i states: “Though I do not call myself a true lover, for I am not / Like true lovers, buried in the earth.” D, 551 (Q 238)
(chīragī) and treachery (khīragī). Indeed, Sanāʾī here makes a claim for his own love, which frames all of his ghazals in a new perspective: that he would never waste his love on the vain, on the material world of dualities. Here at least, Sanāʾī’s philosophy of love comes to coincide precisely with the mystical homiletics of his religious poetry, in which love is the journey beyond all dualities and the realization of Pure Unity (tawḥīd). As with the poems for Muḥammad ibn Mansūr, in which Sanāʾī himself appears as the wayfarer through the levels of the cosmos or to the Qadi’s gathering, the poets voice is deeply personal here, staking a claim that he practices what he preaches. As he puts it in another qaṣīda:

And if Sanāʾī is not a lover say,

“His words are false and unworthy.”

Once the associations from Sanāʾī’s religious poetry that underlie these discourses on love are recognized, the spiritual and metaphysical significance of his statements on love comes to the fore. As such, statements that would seem like hyperbolic metaphor when read simply within the context of the ghazals, which take physical descriptions of the beloved as their point of departure, in light of the other genres of Sanāʾī’s work appear as metaphysical statements.

Though many of Sanāʾī’s statements on love apply equally to human and divine love, in light of the associations drawn above be can identify ghazals in which Sanāʾī develops a philosophy of love in which love itself is Divine, as in the following lines from Ghazal 58:

The beauty of the beloved, since it is without shore,

The suffering of the lover cannot have an end…

The world of love is not the world of knowledge;

The truthful vision is not like a narration.

Whoever can tell the difference between lover and Beloved

The strength of his love has not reached its full.

360 D, 96.
Whatever you have, like the heart, must be lost;
   For the purpose of love a heart is will not suffice.
The one has not [yet] come to guidance from infidelity
   For whom infidelity is not equal to guidance.
No one attains friendship through pretension,
   For the meaning [of friendship] does not pervade him.
Know well indeed that that which is sought,
   Is only from a gift and a gratuitous favor.\textsuperscript{361}

Although in previous examples it is worldly love that at first seems to be the most obvious
intent, with the mystical significance appearing through cross-generic comparison, here a worldly
interpretation never seems to fit. It is only Divine Beauty that is literally ‘without shore’ and it is
therefore the love of God that can have no end. Likewise, it is mystical vision (\textit{ruyā}, considered a
fragment of prophecy according to the famous hadith) that is truly more veracious than transmitted
knowledge. Indeed, Sanā\textasciiacute{\textuml{a}}\textasciiacute{\textuml{i}}’s words here seem very close to those attributed to Khwāja ʿAbdullāh
Anšārī in the \textit{Book of Love (Muḥabbat-Nāma)}:

‘\textit{Ishq} is a burning fire and an ocean without shore. It is the spirit and the spirit of the
spirit. It is story without end and pain without remedy. The intellect is bewildered
in its perception, the heart unable to grasp it. It makes the hidden apparent and the
apparent hidden. It is the ease of the spirit and the outset of openings…\textsuperscript{362}

In light of these references, the lines of the poem that follow are seen to be a description of the
mystical path, the attainment of Pure Unity and the transcendence of the duality of faith and
infidelity.

This philosophy of Divine Love is made even more explicit in the following lines from
\textit{Ghazal} 60:

Love is a king, its feet on the Throne of Pre-Eternity,

\textsuperscript{361} D, 826. \textit{(Gh 58). Cf. D, 826-7 (Gh 59)\textsuperscript{362} Translated in Lumbard, \textit{Ahmad al-Ghazālī}, 140. It is also noteworthy that Sanā\textasciiacute{\textuml{a}}\textasciiacute{\textuml{i}} was in contact with the
circle of Sufis who had been associated with Anšārī. See de Bruijn, \textit{Of Piety and Poetry}, 76-7.
Save through it a man has no authority (wilāyat)…

Love is a feeling beyond humanity (bashar),

For love, water and clay are not sufficient.  

Although lines such as these do not make explicit statements about whether love is a Divine Attribute, or is even identical with the Essence itself, they come close to doing so; indeed, the image of the feet of love being on the Throne come very close to identifying love with God. Through poetic allusion, Sanā‘ī is able to make suggestions that would be particularly meaningful for those familiar with the wider mystical discourses on love. There are thus aspects of Sanā‘ī’s discussions of the nature of love that seem very close to the metaphysical accounts of love given by such Sufis as Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, though without being as explicit. Moreover, Sanā‘ī’s Dīwān contains at least one example in which love is cast entirely within the framework of the spiritual path, much as al-Daylāmī had considered the entire path to be a path of love.

Furthermore, just as is the case with Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, it would be a mistake to think that Sanā‘ī’s attitude towards the divine character of love means that he had closed his eyes to worldly beauty. As we have seen, Sanā‘ī affirms that if one looks at the Sun directly one will be blinded, so one should look at the Sun’s reflection in a pool of water. Indeed, the following ghazal on love

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363 D, 827. (Gh 60)
364 See Lumbard, Ahmad Al-Ghazālī.
365 The ghazal referred to is the following:

The way of love, for the intellect, is difficult because of this:

It’s not the way of foot or form, but rather the heart’s way it is.

And on the stage of being a lover, from certainty and sincerity,

When you lose your body and your soul, right then you shall attain the goal.

Beware lest you from negligence should take these words to be a game,

In love the very first waystation is nothing but to lose one’s head.

In meaning’s way distinguish now the work of the heart from the work of clay,

For what you are engaged with now, O son, is just the work of clay. D, 814. (Gh 40)

366 That love of God should blind one to earthly beauty was one classic approach, epitomized by certain sayings of Rābi’a al-‘Adawiyya. See Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, 39.
suggests that there is no strict separation between the contemplation of God and the contemplation of the ‘moon-faced’ beauties of this world:

The cause of being a lover\textsuperscript{367} is not goodness;
The fault of heart-takers is not being moon-faced.
Love of the Essence and Attributes is not polytheism;
Idol-worship is from being black-faced.
Love is both the lover and the Beloved;
Love is not two-faced, it is single faced.
The substance of love is to be without share,
Whoever says otherwise is a teller of tales.
I have cut speech short, without saying it all;
The ease of lovers is in speaking little.\textsuperscript{368}

As the second line of this \textit{ghazal} affirms, the love of the reflections of beauty within this world is in fact love of the Attributes of God, which evidently cannot be considered polytheism (that is, unless one is veiled from the divine origin of beauty, and hence ‘black-faced’). The human lover must realize his or her own poverty, ‘being without share’ is the very substance of love. Moreover, it is in this nothingness that the lover realizes the unity underlying lover, love and Beloved, as Sanā‘ī sings in the \textit{tarkīb-band} for Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr,

\texttt{For Love, Lover and Beloved, outside of these attributes,}
\texttt{Are one, O fool, not in form (\textit{naqsh}) but in essence.\textsuperscript{369}}

The poems analyzed here show that when Sanā‘ī’s cryptic and elliptical poems on the nature of love are read in the context of his wider oeuvre, a philosophy of love can be extracted in which the mystical sense of love comes to the fore. In several respects, the mystical dimensions of the poems discussed above place Sanā‘ī within the Sufi tradition of the theorization of love. Regarding

\textsuperscript{367} Using variant ‘\textit{āshiqī} for ‘\textit{āshiqān}.
\textsuperscript{368} D, 823. (Gh 54)
\textsuperscript{369} D, 718. (TB 1)
the three questions over which Sufi authors have differed, we find Sanā‘ī alluding to some of the most affirmative positions available. He clearly believes that ‘ishq is an appropriate term for the love of God, at times conceives of the whole of the spiritual path in terms of love, and even intimates that love belongs to the divine realm (perhaps as Attribute or even as the Essence – for Love, lover and Beloved are one), and that individuals in this world merely participate in love much as they participate in any Divine Attribute.

Moreover, we see several indications here that Sanā‘ī’s metaphysical perspectives are not limited to his religious genres, but enter, at least in some poems, within the domain of the ghazal. Once again, the poetic expression of this metaphysical attitude is made possible by a symbolic attitude towards language. From the metaphysical point of view, love is a single reality that manifests with different levels of intensity, both in attraction to human beauty and in the attraction towards God. Love can thus be seen as ultimately Divine, inseparable from the Divine Beloved even when accessed through worldly beauty.

The Ambiguity of the Beloved

Despite the metaphysical significance of these particular poems, it is important to note that so far we have elicited this philosophy by focusing on particular examples of only one fairly rare type of ghazal that directly addresses the nature of love. As such, though the poems above show that Sanā‘ī’s ghazals and taghazzuls contain a philosophy on love that is fully consistent with his religious persona, this is not the whole story. We need to look at his ghazals more widely in order to gain a more complete understanding of his approach to love.

Nevertheless, even though the metaphysical approach to love described above is but one component of Sanā‘ī’s collection of ghazals and taghazzuls, once recognized it cannot but influence the way we read the other examples of this genre.
Consider the following *ghazal*:

Who am I that the thought of thee should accompany my every breath,  
Or that I should have the desire of union with one like thee?  
If this soul of mine is worthy of sorrowing over thee,  
This share of the bounty of thy love suffices me.  
If thy love has not become my shadow, why whenever I  
Turn my face from it, do I find it following behind me?  
Every breath I take in the memory of thy time,  
The whole world follows in the wake of that breath of mine.  
Whenever I gladden my heart with the hope of union with thee,  
I again say, ‘No’, what place is there for this desire of mine?  
Since my eye cannot even see the imagining of the dust of thy feet,  
How could thy union ever be within my reach?\(^\text{370}\)

This poem reads as a particularly beautiful example of the secular *ghazal*. The recollection of the beloved has become all-consuming for the lover, accompanying him like his own shadow. The lover is filled with hope of union; yet as is common in the genre, union seems beyond reach, and the lover contents himself with simply being considered worthy to sorrow in separation.

However, though there are no specific images that suggest that the love here is metaphysical, this *ghazal* also reads particularly well as being about the Divine Beloved. The poem begins with a contemplative speculation on the poet’s own identity, the fundamental spiritual question, ‘Who am I?’ Moreover, the poem is not simply a meditation on the spiritual practice of the remembrance of God (*dhikr*), but gains much of its thematic unity from the symbolism of the breath, which is a fundamental component of the physical act of vocal remembrance of God. Midway through the *ghazal*, the poet affirms that through his concentration on the single breath of the moment, this breath takes precedence over the whole world, both past and present. Read in

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\(^{370}\) D, 797-8. (Gh 12)
this way, the poem ends by contemplating the fundamental paradox of the mystical desire of the finite individual to attain union with the Infinite. This contemplation occurs within the transition between the spiritual attitudes of hope (rqā‘) and fear (khawf), hope that God’s mercy will compensate for our faults and fear that we are unworthy of God. It is here that the literal meaning of the poem supports the metaphysical interpretation, for God is literally beyond the power of the imagination of the servant.

In reading a ghazal such as this, there is no question of an ‘either-or’ in determining the identity of the beloved. Indeed, as we shall see, the ambiguity of the beloved becomes one of the central strategies by which Sanā‘ī’s ghazals function as works of art. However, the nature of the ambiguity is different in different poems. I suggest the following categories of analysis: poems that are best read as being metaphysical; poems that are truly ambiguous but contain allusions to the metaphysical; and poems that remain ambiguous and lack specific metaphysical allusions.

Metaphysical Ghazals and Taghazzuls

Although the ambiguity of the identity and nature of the beloved is the most common feature of Sanā‘ī’s ghazals and taghazzuls, there are several examples in which the images used point directly towards a divine rather than a human beloved.

Considering the following taghazzul from one of the panegyrics for Bahrāmshāh:

If in the least my beauteous one were visible unto creation,
O happy would be the creation, O glad would be the world.
From creation she became hidden, so all of it would be for you;
If she were at all to be manifest, she would have belonged to everyone.
The Spirit (jān) saw her beauty, for otherwise with all knowledge
Who would have been able to tell her from the gate-keeper of her servant?

371 On these classic terms see Berger Lutz, “Fear of God and Hope (for God’s mercy) (in Sufism),” EI3.
The heart saw the wrath of her two tresses, and from that bit its fingers,
   If it had seen her lip’s kindness, it would have been finger-cutting.
The world is overturned, for the sake of seeking, otherwise,
   The earth would be narrow and time itself would be lame.
If the six directions of the world were to accept light from her,
   The lows would become all gardens, and the highs would become all mines.
If clay were not to accept from her the light of theophany \(\text{\textit{tajallî}}\),
   When would clay be the Ka’ba of the spheres, and when would the heart be the
   rosegarden of the soul?
She has said, “One day I shall take your soul just like your heart.”
   I am a servant of that day. O would that it could be thus!
Sanā’ī has a soul, in its eyes is her spear,
   So if it is not like this, without soul, how could it be thus?\(^{372}\)

In the opening lines of this poem, Sanā’ī sets up the contrast of manifestation versus
hiddenness that provides the thematic unity of the \textit{taghazzul}. The entire \textit{taghazzul} is set in the irrealis
mood (using the classical verb-ending -\textit{astī} as the rhyme), contemplating what the world would be
like if the beloved had manifested more fully, not at all, or in a different way than is the case.

Though the \textit{taghazzul} speaks of the beloved in the third person, the second person pronoun
does appear in the second line. Although irregular for a \textit{taghazzul}, this ‘you’ appears to be
Bahrāmshāh himself, who will be addressed directly again in the final three lines of praise. Reading
the beloved as representing God, Sanā’ī is thus telling Bahrāmshāh that ‘God became hidden from
creation so all of it would be for you’; the reason for his kingship is the fact that God is partially
absent from this world, implying that Bahrāmshāh’s role as Sultan requires him to act as the just
representative of God.

\(^{372}\) Several lines of praise of Bahrāmshāh follow this. D, 624-5 (Q 277).
Each line of the poem develops a different perspective on divine manifestation: Line 4 alludes to the same polarity of darkness and light that we have seen in Sanāʿī’s *tafsīr*-panegyric, contrasting the *mysterium tremendum* aroused in the heart at seeing the Majesty or Wrath symbolized by the beloved’s tresses with the *mysterium fascinans* that the beloved’s lip would have evoked (which would have made the heart cut its fingers, as did the women who saw Joseph in the Quranic narrative).\(^{373}\)

Line 5 implies that the entirety of creation gains its value by seeking the hidden God, which is precisely the doctrine of the universe being animated by love that is found in the *Treatise on Love* attributed to Ibn Sīnā.\(^{374}\) Lines 6 and 7 stand in contrast to each other: Line 6 contemplates the marvels in creation that would have resulted if the beloved was more intensely manifest, while Line 7 proves that the beloved is indeed manifest here, for otherwise how could a pile of stones have the significance of the Kaʿba and how could the heart have become like a rose-garden?

As the *taghazzul* draws to a close, Sanāʿī contemplates the fact that despite the tension between manifestation and hiddenness that constitutes the condition of the cosmos, the moment of death will mean reunion. Just as the beloved has already taken Sanāʿī’s heart, in the end she will take his soul (or ‘life’, *jān*), a moment that Sanāʿī longs for.

As befits the generic norms of *taghazzul* and *ghazal*, this *taghazzul* never explicitly declares the identity of the beloved. Indeed, the use of hyperbolic metaphor, using cosmic and religious imagery to describe the beloved, is not uncommon within these genres. Images of a super-human scale are themselves not enough to indicate that a given poem is metaphysical, for hyperbole is one of the stock resources of *ghazal* and panegyric alike. However, what is significant about a poem like this one is the consistency and coherence of its metaphysically significant images. Though the

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\(^{373}\) See Q, 12:31.

The dichotomy of hiddenness and manifestation would certainly be meaningful in the depiction of a human beloved, the specific applications of this theme that Sanāʿī deploys in this poem each have a specific metaphysical significance. Indeed, given the fact that works such as *The Walled Garden* are structured around the contrast of the metaphysical perspectives of divine transcendence (which emphasizes God’s distance from the world) and degrees of reality (which emphasizes the degrees of divine manifestation), this dichotomy is of particular metaphysical significance for Sanāʿī. As such, given a metaphysical interpretation, this force of this poem is indeed to show the complementarities and contrasts between multiple perspectives on divine manifestation. As a poem about a human beloved, this *taghazzul* reads as an interesting collection of hyperbolic images, whereas as a meditation on the Divine Beloved it is a complex and multi-dimensional exploration of the tensions between divine presence and absence. To read the *taghazzul* metaphysically is thus to discover in it a wealth of significance that it simply does not possess when read as a standard *taghazzul*. Moreover, this possibility of reading this *taghazzul* as either physical or metaphysical results precisely from metaphysics and philosophy of language that we have analyzed in Sanāʿī’s religious poetry. The symbolic treatment of physical attributes allows them to point beyond themselves, to describe realities beyond themselves. A poem such as this is both physical and metaphysical because a symbol, by definition, is also both physical and metaphysical.

The ambiguity of many of Sanāʿī’s metaphysically significant *ghazals* and *taghazzuls* develops around precisely the decision about whether we read the poem as a hyperbolic description of a human beloved or a metaphysically accurate description of God.

Consider the following *ghazal*:

O Moon Face, throughout the world there is the fame (*āwāza*) of thy song (*āwāz*),

The works of lovers are left undone from [the effects of] thy instrument (*sāz*).

Wherever there is sweet poetry, it is a tale of thy love;
Wherever there is beautiful prose, it is the letters of thy grace (nāz).
The falcon of thy love has hunted all other falcons as if they were partridges;
How lofty in aspiration is that falcon who becomes the prey of thy falcon!
May a hundred thousand hearts be the ransom of that heart, who from love
Is year and month and night and day busy with thee, and thy witness-play.
O heart taker! The hearts of men are all possessed by thy glance.
O flower-faced! The souls of the pure are all possessed by thy feigned distain (nāz).
The swift and unyielding heaven is under thy hand, tamed to thee;
The wild flurry of destiny is but thy wet-nurse and companion.
Wherever there is a seeing eye, it is the court of thy love;
Wherever there is a refined ear, it is in love with Thy song.375

The thematic unity of this ghazal is given by a single claim that the poet is making to his beloved: ‘everyone is in love with you’. One can imagine how this single statement, expressed through so many images in this poem, could be addressed to a human beloved - a hyperbolic statement of how much attention that person receives. However, from the kind of metaphysical perspective expressed in the depiction of love in The Walled Garden or the ghazals on love discussed above, we need not see any hyperbole here. Instead, this poem becomes a revelation of a metaphysical reality in Sanā‘ī’s philosophy of love: that all love, even when directed to limited ends, is in fact love of God. The reason for this is that within this metaphysical perspective, each level of reality reflects the level above it, and thus the cosmos is a hierarchical system of mirrors in which the face that is ultimately reflected is that of God.376 All beauty thus belongs to that Face, and

375 D, 807. (Gh 28)
376 This theory of beauty was expressed in Platonic form by such thinkers as the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā. See for example, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines: Conceptions of Nature and Methods Used for Its Study by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’; Al-Birānī, and Ibn Sīnā, Rev. ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 71. However, it was also adapted in Sufism. For detailed discussions of this tradition see Cyrus Ali Zargar, Sufi Aesthetics: Beauty, Love, and the Human Form in the Writings of Ibn 'Arabi and 'Iraqi (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2011) and Kazuyo Murata, Beauty in Sufism: The Teachings of Rūzbihān Baqī (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017).
therefore all love of any type of beauty is really love of Divine Beauty, whether or not the lover recognizes Whose Face is being seen.

The core of the ambiguity in this *ghazal* is captured by a single term: ‘*shāhid-bāzī*’ (literally, ‘witness-play’). Referring to the contemplation of the beautiful youth (*shāhid*), this practice was current among the Sufis of Sanā‘ī’s time, who sought to contemplate the Divine Beauty in a physical representative, much as Sanā‘ī argued that the sun must be contemplated in a pool of water. Indeed, *shāhid-bāzī* epitomizes the Sufi theory of beauty that is reflected in these poems by Sanā‘ī. To give a classical explanation, as al-Daylamī explains,

> The word *shāhid* (witness) has two meanings. The first is a witness beyond reproach (*shāhid ‘adl*) who informs you that his Maker stands apart from all other artisans by His workmanship…The second meaning of *shāhid* is an eye witness (*[shāhid] hādir*) who informs you that he has recently been at the scene of the universal beauty and that he has been distinguished by his Maker by (the beauty of) His workmanship from all his other works…All witnesses, then, are alike, except that [beauty] is more intense in some than in others. Indeed it may be so hidden in some that it hardly can be perceived by any rational being, and it may be so manifest in others that it hardly can escape the notice of any rational animal. Thus a certain poet has said:

> In each and every thing there is a sign of Him,

> Indicating that He is one.\(^{377}\)

Thus, if we take the beloved of this poem as being human, then Sanā‘ī is praising those who constantly gaze upon the poem’s human beloved – an interpretation that seems weak in light of the theory as explained by al-Daylamī. However, if the beloved is divine, then Sanā‘ī is paying reverence to those who constantly contemplate the Divine Beauty, in whatever form appears to them.

> It is important to note that the metaphysical interpretation of this poem ends up including the physical interpretation of the poem within it (whereas the reverse is not the case): If all beauty is a reflection of the Divine Beauty, then human beauties are indeed a correct support for the

contemplation of the Divine. Physical (or sonoral, or poetic) beauty is therefore always divine from this perspective; it is simply a question of whether the eye is ‘seeing’ or the ear ‘refined’ enough to perceive it.

Finally, given a metaphysical interpretation, Sanā‘ī’s claim that “Wherever there is sweet poetry, it is a tale of thy love,” becomes a self-referential statement about this poem and indeed all of his love poetry. If all love is love of God, even if it is masquerading as human love, then all of Sanā‘ī’s poetry is poetry for God, even if Sanā‘ī was unaware of it at the time of composition, as may have been the case early in his career. From the point of view of the metaphysics of degrees of reality, all poetry is in fact written for God. It is simply a question of whether the poet is aware of this or not.

**Metaphysical Intimations**

Though cases such as this one, in which a poem contains a thematic unity that is metaphysically significant, are less common among Sanā‘ī’s ghazals and taghazzuls, metaphysical intimations nevertheless abound in his love poetry, and become particularly evident when read in the light of his mystical-homiletics.

The following ghazal is particularly rich in metaphysically significant imagery:

Thy beauty, O Soul, has made us exist;
Thy majesty, O Moon, hath rendered us low.
O Peaceful-Heart, O Beloved, when thou art,
We possess everything that we should.
The wine of the love of thy joyful face
Has made us drunk, like your narcissus [eyes].
And if one day I should kiss the soles of thy feet,
Our hands would be on top of the two worlds.
The desire for thy lips has kept us frantic (šūrīda)
Like thy musky tresses, continuously.
Since thy ruby [lip] is the hunter of intellect,
It is fit that we wash the ends of thy locks.
When will fate break the bonds of thy snare?
For thy two locks have tied us firm.\(^{378}\)

The poem begins with language laden with metaphysical significance, addressing the beloved in terms of her beauty (jamāl) and majesty (jalāl), a pair of terms used to describe the major categories of Divine Attributes.\(^{379}\) Sanā‘ī immediately draws out the implications of each of these qualities for the lover: Beauty, which is associated with the pole of Divine Mercy, gives existence, while Majesty, associated with Divine Wrath, causes the lover to be humbled in fear. The use of these explicitly theological terms at the beginning of the poem immediately poses the question of the identity of the beloved to the reader? Is it God? Is it some figure of divine proportions? Or is Sanā‘ī merely extolling a human beloved using hyperbolic metaphor?

Including images that are now familiar to us, the poem uses correlative thought to extend this polarity of beauty and majesty, finding it again in the lips and tresses of the beloved. But in addition to these themes, Sanā‘ī also introduces another image here that is particularly significant for understanding the relationship between a ghazal like this and his wider oeuvre. Line 4 repeats Sanā‘ī’s most famous homiletic image, of transcending the world and standing above it, reframed within the context of the ghazal. Here it is kissing the feet of the beloved that leads to this transcendence of ‘the two worlds’, this world and paradise, again intimating that this ghazal is more than it seems. Once again, the mystery of the identity of the beloved is never resolved in this poem, which seems deliberately crafted to suggest this mystery, to bring the reader to contemplate more deeply what the lips and tresses of the beloved really mean.

\(^{378}\) D, 790. (Gh 2)
\(^{379}\) On these terms in relation to Sanā‘ī’s poetry see Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, 196.
A particularly interesting set of poems containing such metaphysical intimations is found among the panegyrics for Bahrāmshāh in which it is not God to whom the allusions point but rather the Prophet Muḥammad.\textsuperscript{380} \textit{Qaṣīda} 4, for example, begins with an exclamation on the unattainability of the beloved:

\begin{quote}
The eyes see not thy hidden form,

The kiss finds not the shape of thy mouth.\textsuperscript{381}
\end{quote}

The familiar physical descriptions that follow make us think that we are in familiar \textit{taghazzul} territory, until Sanā‘ī states:

\begin{quote}
Paradise and the houris are kissing your feet and stirrups,

The Intellect and the Spirit prostrate to your hands and reins.\textsuperscript{382}
\end{quote}

At first these images seem to simply be laying a claim to the celestial beauty of the beloved. However, the reader familiar with Sanā‘ī’s other writings might recall how in the descending arc of \textit{The Walled Garden} he places the Prophet above the Universal Intellect, saying of him,

\begin{quote}
He was a head, and the Intellect was his neck;

He was a heart and the prophets were his body.

The Threshold of his gate in the garden (rawda) of intimacy;

It was the garden (bustān) of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{383}
\end{quote}

The intimations that Sanā‘ī is actually singing the praises of the Prophet in this \textit{taghazzul} increase as it continues, bringing in the dichotomy of day and night by which he praised the Prophet in the \textit{tafsīr}-panegyric:

\begin{quote}
Day and night are the veil keepers of the curls of thy tress…

Love made its \textit{qibla}, seeking infidelity and faith,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{380} I consider \textit{qaṣīdas} 4 (D, 24-5), 23 (D, 66-7), 80 (D, 143-5), and 265 (D, 594f) to be in this group.

\textsuperscript{381} D, 24.

\textsuperscript{382} D, 25.

\textsuperscript{383} HH, 192.
Thy inverted tresses and thy supine face….\textsuperscript{384}

As the *taghazzul* resolves into the *takhallus* and *madih*, Sanā’ī affirms our suspicions about the identity of the beloved in this poem:

The vanguard of paradise upon the wings of intellect,

Have read the prescription of religion: thy manner and wont…

Sultan Bahrāmshāh, who by the affirmation of the Real,

Is in truth the guardian of thy house and life.\textsuperscript{385}

The force of the poem is thus to advise Bahrāmshāh that his task as Sultan is to protect the legacy of the Prophet. Indeed, though affirming the patron’s religious duties is a lesson commonly worked into panegyrics, Sanā’ī is able to deliver this message using a unique rhetorical strategy here. As a result of the rich set of ideas and images developed in his religious poetry, he is able to create a complex set of allusions in poems such as these. In this particular case, it seems that Sanā’ī wished his patron to decode these allusions and reach the message of the poem.

In other cases, however, Sanā’ī alludes to the complex metaphysics of the Muhammadan Reality without ever finally confirming that this is his intention. Using a range of strategies, from celestial images regarding the crescent moon\textsuperscript{386} to the association of Quranic verses with the Prophet’s face and hair,\textsuperscript{387} Sanā’ī again contemplates human perfection as verging on the divine. The same logic by which Sanā’ī contemplated the associations of his mentor Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr, the Prophet Muḥammad, and the metaphysical realities of the Universal Soul and Muhammadan Reality, are thus found in his love poetry also. Moreover, though Sanā’ī does not shy away from writing *ghazals* that seem to be for God Himself, as many of the poems discussed

\textsuperscript{384} D, 25.
\textsuperscript{385} D, 25.
\textsuperscript{386} See D, 594. (Q 295)
\textsuperscript{387} See D, 67f and D, 594.
above testify, here the dramatic tension results from precisely the fact that he is casting a human
beloved in super-human terms. He therefore has to warn his readers,

Although he is without peer among the illuminated ones of the world,

Be careful not to call him ‘God’, by God be careful! (Allah allah!)\textsuperscript{388}

In this way, Sanā‘ī is deliberately skirting the boundaries of human and divine, crafting love
poetry around many of the same metaphysical insights that have animated his mystical-homiletics
and panegyrics.

**Ambiguity Abides**

As a genre, the *ghazal* never loses its connection with human love, constantly evoked
through the intensely physical imagery that is always central. However, to the reader aware of
Sanā‘ī’s other genres of poetry, the possibility of a more-than-human love shining through each
*ghazal* always remains. Indeed, in many poems the dramatic tension is created precisely through
this possibility, as Sanā‘ī introduces a suggestive image or leads his reader to a sudden realization.\textsuperscript{389}

Sanā‘ī’s ability to write love poetry that develops through the ambiguity of the beloved
derives above all from his ability to deploy images that function with regard to all forms of love.
His reliance on images of the transformative power of love\textsuperscript{390} or the paradox between the lover’s
experience of existence and non-existence in relation to the beloved\textsuperscript{391} to maintain this ambiguity

\textsuperscript{388} D, 594f.
\textsuperscript{389} See for example *qaṣīdas* 40 (D,87f) and 58 (D, 106f) for Bahrāmshāh, in which explicitly religious images
enter only at the end of the poem.
\textsuperscript{390} For example, the lines:
For when the Sultan of Love takes up residence in a heart,
It erases from the person both habit and ethics.
Whoever has become without attributes gains the love of that idol,
For that idol is alone in beauty, and wants one who is alone. D, 795. (Gh 8)
\textsuperscript{391} For example, the line:
Since he has mated us, all are our opponents,
And there where there is nothingness, it is precisely our being. D, 806. (Gh 26)
is rooted in a claim about the nature of love itself: that there is a fundamental similarity between human and divine love. Seen from a metaphysical point of view, this is nothing other than the claim that love is one: “Wherever there is sweet poetry it is a tale of thy love;” \(^{392}\) that all love is of a single character, though it is manifested in different ways.

However, there are clearly important differences among Sanā‘ī’s *ghazals*, which remain even in light of the metaphysical point of view. Although the cross-references with Sanā‘ī’s religious poetry are so common within the *ghazals* that they cannot be accidental, there are varying degrees of ambiguity. Some poems are much easier to read as standard *ghazals* without overt metaphysical references, while others make little sense without these references; and there are many grades in between. Indeed, Sanā‘ī’s deliberate cultivation of this ambiguity within his *ghazals* makes it seem that he is deliberately posing a question to his reader, ‘What is the nature of love?’

This ambiguity filled with signification is made possible precisely by the metaphysical perspective of human perfection established in Sanā‘ī’s religious poems and the accompanying linguistic move from metaphor to symbolism that it implies. Any ordinary physical image always possesses the potential of being read as a symbol for a reality beyond it.

Finally, for the reader seeking to engage with the ambiguity of Sanā‘ī’s lyric poetry there is an irony in our inability to date them. We are unable to tell whether any given *ghazal* was written early in his career, in which we must assume his intentions were ‘secular’, or late, when he was an established religious poet with a record of expressing mystical insight. The ambiguity of the beloved in Sanā‘ī’s *ghazals* is ultimately intractable; a fitting beginning to the tradition of written *ghazals* in classical Persian poetry.

\(^ {392}\) D, 807, see above.
In reading a poem like the following, there is therefore no final answer to the question of the poet’s intention, and the text possesses greater signifying power than could be limited to a single reading. However, perhaps Sanā‘ī the metaphysician has the final word, for he can read all love, even that of his youth, as being a reflection of the only love there is.

There is not, without the meeting with thee, any patience in my heart;
And there is not, without thy speech, any ability in my heart.
In union with thee I was empty of melancholy and of bile,
But thy departure has left me bilious and melancholic.
Thy love, each night, in my soul incites a resurrection,
Whenever thou flee and leave me in my loneliness.
I cannot even tell the difference between the Sun and a mote;
You would say there is not in my eyes even a mote of sight.
I do not complain of thee just anywhere, since thou hast gone everywhere;
There is no place for complaint for me from my everywhere-beloved.
At the time of old age on my face from love of thee has shown itself
What in the time of my youth was hidden in my heart.
Fate has made me an outcast at the time of wisdom and intelligence,
What benefit in intelligence and wisdom for me, when there is your tribulation?\textsuperscript{393}

**Conclusion: Diversity in Sanā‘ī**

These four chapters on the poetry of Sanā‘ī of Ghazna have explored a set of interrelated questions: in what ways does Sanā‘ī establish coherence amidst the diversity of content in his *magnum opus*, *The Walled Garden of Truth*?; what strategies underlie the presentation of human perfection in Sanā‘ī’s religious poetry?; how do these strategies influence the way we read his *ghazals* and later panegyrics?

\textsuperscript{393} D, 798. (Gh 13)
Each of these questions is motivated by a concern for understanding whether there is a coherent world-view to be found in Sanā‘ī’s later poetry, the kind of world-view that suggests we should read him as a thinker in his own right, and not just a master of diverse poetic genres.

Our inquiry first of all showed that parallel to our concern for the significance of the diversity of Sanā‘ī’s writings, Sanā‘ī himself contemplated this diversity. Furthermore, Sanā‘ī suggesting that there are fundamental correspondences between the way a skillful poet will juxtapose serious and comedic subjects and the way that polarities and juxtapositions permeate reality, from the beating of the heart up to the Divine Qualities.

We then saw that this concern for alternating polarities is to be found throughout The Walled Garden of Truth, animating its rhetorical flow and even underlying its metaphysical perspectivism, which allows for both a perspective of divine transcendence and a perspective of degrees of reality.

Turning to Sanā‘ī’s religious poetry, this integration of perspectives is found there also. But though the perspective of transcendence animates Sanā‘ī’s most famous image, of ‘setting foot upon the heavens’, it is the perspective of degrees of reality that is arguably most significant in providing the underlying unity within Sanā‘ī’s depictions of human perfection. At its peak, Sanā‘ī contemplates human perfection, whether it be of the Prophet or of his preferred patrons, in light of the metaphysical realities that he intimates they manifest.

Sanā‘ī’s metaphysics of manifestation is intimately connected with a shift in the appreciation of the possibilities of linguistic expression: as the ability of language to evoke likeness through metaphor is transformed into the linguistic representation of symbolic signification, in which both words and things point beyond themselves to higher realities. This appreciation of Sanā‘ī’s later views on language and the web of metaphysically significant images that accompanies it transforms our reading of his ghazals and later taghazzuls. Read in light of his religious poetry,
these become the vehicles for the exploration of ambiguity, constantly posing the questions of the nature of love and the identity of the beloved.

Each of these aspects of Sanāʿī’s poetry form a coherent world-view that can be traced across the genres of his poetry. Though metaphysically perspectivist, Sanāʿī consistently uses these metaphysical perspectives across genres to expound a range of teachings, whether it be the call to transcend the world of duality through love in the perspective of transcendence, or the contemplation of metaphysical beauty in human form in the perspective of degrees of reality. Moreover, Sanāʿī’s approach to language conforms to this coherent world-view, as metaphor becomes symbolism so that poetry points beyond this world.

Sanāʿī can thus be accurately described as a metaphysical poet. His works constitute an important contribution to Islamic intellectual history, which is in fact strengthened by the poetic forms in which they were composed. Moreover, this contribution is characteristically perspectivist and pluralist, perspectivist in its combination of metaphysical points of view, and pluralist in its valorization of diversity. This valorization is rooted in Sanāʿī’s insight that all aspects of reality are rooted in difference, which he expresses as being intertwined through a single polarity. Moreover, Sanāʿī made use of diverse genres of Persian poetry, and in fact forged new forms of preexisting genres to suit his purposes, creating the plurality of discourses that comprise his oeuvre. These allowed him to contemplate the cultivation of یحسان in diverse aspects, from metaphysical perfection to mystical aesthetics, and from religious preaching to light-hearted humor. As a result of these diverse literary approaches to cultivating humanity in Sanāʿī’s works, his oeuvre can be characterized as exhibiting discursive pluralism.

Given its cross-generic application, I find this to be a better characterization than de Bruijn’s suggestion that Sanāʿī is a ‘homiletic poet’. 

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Both Sanā‘ī’s perspectivism and his pluralism (both metaphysical and discursive) can be read as conscious responses to the challenges he faced in attempting to synthesize diverse religious ideas, from the metaphysical and mystical to more conventional ethical teachings, within the framework of the pre-established genres of Persian court poetry. Thus, Sanā‘ī’s combination of pious reflections on divine transcendence with the worldly ethics of literary humanism was greatly facilitated by his ability to switch between metaphysical perspectives. Moreover, his use of panegyrics and amatory lyrics to present metaphysical truths was enabled by his renewal of his approach to language, which allowed simultaneous expression of the worldly and the metaphysical through symbolism. Sanā‘ī’s writings therefore represent a particularly inventive response to the diverse possibilities of Islamic thought and literature that were available to him, which through perspectivism and pluralism he was able to synthesize as parts of a coherent world-view.

However, the claim that Sanā‘ī’s later poetry displays a coherent world-view is not the same as the claim that Sanā‘ī deployed this world-view consistently. Does Sanā‘ī deploy this coherent world-view consistently throughout his later poetry?

In one sense, if framed within the assumptions that have governed scholarship on Sanā‘ī and our own investigation, it is impossible to answer this question definitively. Given the difficulty of dating so many of Sanā‘ī’s poems, it is quite possible that he wrote poetry of a completely ‘secular’ nature right up to the end of his life. Moreover, given the subtlety with which Sanā‘ī deploys his world-view, leaving room for a great deal of ambiguity, ‘secular’ readings of poetry that can be dateable to the last period of his life remain possible.

However, the metaphysical insights found in Sanā‘ī’s later religious poetry and the wealth of metaphysical references in his love poetry enable another reading: that by the end of his life Sanā‘ī had completely reconceptualized the ‘secular’ forms in which he had been trained, focusing on the moral potential of the panegyric (or even allowing taghazzul to overshadow it), and realizing
the potential of the ghazal as a site for contemplating the true nature of love. Indeed, Sanāʾī’s later poetry contains all the resources for arguing that his later works were composed in light of such a unity-in-diversity: a coherent set of principles that could be deployed in diverse ways in various genres, each allowing Sanāʾī to contemplate the human condition in particular ways whilst also holding fast to correct metaphysics.

Not only would a definitive decision between these two readings require close reading of all of Sanāʾī’s poetry, a task that goes far beyond what anyone in the field has ever attempted, there would also remain inevitable disagreement between interpreters. In a sense, Sanāʾī ensured this through his literary use of ambiguity.

There is, however, a third way of approaching the problem of consistency: In light of Sanāʾī’s affirmation that good poetry should combine serious instruction with light relief, it is clear that he was aware that we are multi-faceted creatures: the human self possesses diverse aspects, encompassing worldly desires and spiritual aspirations. Indeed, the diverse genres in which Sanāʾī composed until the end of his life each take up particular aspects of human selfhood: including our need for ethical restitution, our role as social beings, our capacity for love, and our potential to transcend all duality. These diverse aspects of the human self can be integrated through poetry, which has the capacity to speak to all parts of us, and by doing so, to integrate them. Perhaps the concern that animates Sanāʾī’s later poetry is thus best encapsulated in the following line from a panegyric dating to the last period of his life:

Jesus and his donkey, since they are both in our gathering,
When the one starts the spiritual dance, where is the hay for the other?395

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395 D, 579. (Qas 255, for Bahrāmshāh)
Part 2: ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī

Chapter 5: ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s Ontological Pluralism and Discursive Strategies

The prose works of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī, Abū’l-Ma‘āli ‘Abdullāh ibn Abī Bakr Muḥammad Miyānajī (d. 526/1131), are remarkable for their ability to bring opposites together: to combine the ecstatic utterances of an enraptured mystic with the sober logical analysis of a master of theology. Studded with citations from Quran and hadith as much as with classical Arabic poetry and Persian mystical quatrains, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s letters to his disciples and his magnum opus, the Tamhīdāt (Preludes), flow from patient explanation of intricate theoretical issues to outbursts of insight that go beyond rational thought. To read ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s works is thus already to grapple with diversity, in both his sources and modes of expression.

Although ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt is yet another figure in the Persian intellectual tradition whose work has not received sufficient attention, the secondary scholarship relates significant information about his life and death. Born in Hamadan to a lineage of scholars hailing from Miyānajī, a small town between Tabriz and Maraga, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt received training in Arabic letters and the religious sciences and philosophy, composing his first work in his early teens. He may have been introduced to Sufism at an early age, as he mentions attending a samā‘ session with his father. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt mentions a turning point in his life in which reading Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī’s Revival of the Religious Sciences over the period of four years saved him from confusion, and he became the

396 I will continue to refer to this book by its untranslated title, which signifies more than is suggested by any single translation.
398 L1.375.
disciple of Ahmad al-Ghazali in 516/1122. In addition to working as a judge, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt gave spiritual instruction to a group of disciples, several of whom held positions at the Saljuq court, though ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt himself was severely critical of corrupt rulers and obsequious service of worldly power. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt was tried for heresy, and in his prison memoirs, Shakawāt-gharib (The Exile’s Complaint), mentions and refutes allegations that he considered himself to be a prophet, that his doctrine of the authority of the spiritual master is tantamount to Ismailism, that the resurrection is not corporeal, and that God does not know particulars. However, despite the religious nature of these allegations, various contemporary scholars have debated the relative importance of political machinations versus doctrinal concerns in his condemnation. Nevertheless, Mohammed Rustom has recently argued that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt had his own interpretation of his impending fate, seeing it as a Divine Rebuke for revealing secrets not meant to be uttered.

But despite what we know about ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s life, which more or less exhausts the information available in historical sources, our understanding of his thought is far less adequate. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s prose is generally very clear, lending itself well to translation, and many of his most

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401 See Safi, The Politics of Knowledge, 196-7. As Safi points out, many of these accusations are precisely those defined by Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ghazālī. This work has been translated by A.J. Arberry as A Sufi Martyr (London: Keagan and Paul, 1969).


important ideas, such as his doctrine of the celestial realities of Muḥammad and Iblīs as counterparts of light and darkness, are well known. However, many interpreters of his works have faltered in clearly explaining his ideas, and there remains much work to do in order to explain how the various components of his mystical thought cohere as a whole.

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s thought presents an original synthesis of ideas and discursive methods from kalām, philosophy and Sufism. His Žubdat al-ḥaqqā’iq (The Quintessence of Verities), written in 1122, when ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt was only twenty-four (solar) years old synthesizes argumentative strategies from kalām and philosophy to deal with such theological issues as the unity of God, God’s knowledge of particulars, the realities of the Afterlife and the relation of the soul and body. However, it ascends from these to speak of the ‘level beyond the intellect’ (ṭawr wa‘rā’ al-ʿaql), using philosophical theology as a point of departure for presenting his mystical philosophy.

Whereas The Quintessence of Verities takes the form of a philosophical or theological treatise, the majority of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s later writings are letters of instructions to his disciples, and constitute one of the richest and earliest of such collections in the history of Sufism. Though there is considerable overlap with his earlier work, doctrinal matters are expounded less systematically, addressing the particular needs of the addressee. Moreover, in addition to practical spiritual instruction, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s letters often express the overflowing of mystical rapture, which causes him to depart from the topic under consideration to present esoteric teachings, often accompanied with the disclaimer that the reader is not yet prepared to understand them. The Tamhīdāt, though more systematic in its division into ten chapters, shares a great deal in its rhetorical style, and indeed there is much overlap between passages in this work and particular letters. The freedom offered to ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt within the epistle genre means that, in both the Nāma-hā (Letters) and the
Tamhīdāt, he is able to express his teachings using a wide range of discursive styles, often following where his train of thought or spiritual state leads him.404

Among the various philosophical, theological and Sufi authorities that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt cites in his work, it is the Ghazālī brothers who stand out as his most important influences. As he himself explains, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt was a keen reader of the works of Abū Hāmid, and specific passages of his writings are found summarized by ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt on many occasions. Like Abū Hāmid, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt draws on both philosophical and theological sources to present a multi-faceted set of doctrinal and practical teachings. However, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt was also the direct disciple of Ḥāmid, and it is the combination of mystical insight with homiletic instruction found in such works as the ‘Ayniyya, apparently addressed by Ahmad to ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, that appears to have been most formative in the development of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s mature discursive style.405

In this section of the dissertation, I attempt to present the fundamentals of a holistic reading of the works of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, focusing on the Letters and the Tamhīdāt but also drawing on the earlier Quintessence of Verities. Paying attention to both ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s ideas and the rhetorical forms in which they are expressed, my goal is to demonstrate why paying attention to the perspectivism in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s thought is crucial to understanding him. As such, I will show that in order to understand ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s ontology, his understanding of Islam, the relationship between faith and infidelity, or any number of other aspects of his thought, it is necessary to recognize that his

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404 Ernst’s comment on ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s discussions of infidelity are equally applicable to most areas of his thought: “‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s thoughts on this subject are not systematic; they are couched in poetic reflections that illuminate these concepts from a variety of angles.” Words of Ecstasy, 73-4.


writings contain various complementary and even apparently conflicting perspectives. However, rather than diminishing ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s status as a theoretician, these differing accounts in fact derive from his explicitly perspectivist position, according to which reality, human existence and religious life cannot be sufficiently explained from a single point of view. As such, for ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, proper understanding of any of these issues requires the movement between perspectives, a movement that is enacted by the discursive structures of his writings.

In what follows in this chapter, I begin by showing how ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s perspectivism develops logically from his understanding of the difference between two types of knowledge (‘ilm and ma’rifā, ‘knowledge’ and ‘realization’). I then show that he is explicitly perspectivist and pluralist in his ontology, and that the discursive styles of his later writings are closely adapted to this perspectivism. Finally, I analyze ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s ways of speaking about the relationship between unity and multiplicity, in which he applies a similar line of reasoning to diverse cases. This relationship provides a metaphysical justification for the necessity of perspectivism in the spheres to which it applies: in understanding God and His relationship to creation, in interpreting the Quran, and in expressing spiritual realization.

In Chapter Six, I argue that this perspectivism permeates ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s later writings. These should be read within the paradigm of wayfaring (sulūk), in which different perspectives are encountered at different stages on the spiritual journey. In Chapter Seven, I clarify ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s highly original conceptions of Islam and religious diversity, showing how they are rooted precisely in his perspectivism and understanding of wayfaring. Finally, In Chapter Eight, I turn to ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s discussions of the problem of evil, free-will, light and darkness, and Iblisology, showing that these interrelated issues are best understood in light of the perspective shifts that they contain. Before undertaking these tasks however, let us consider two important studies on ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s thought, to which the contributions of these chapters offer a corrective.
Two Views of ‘Ayn al-Qudāt

Despite the relative paucity of scholarship on ‘Ayn al-Qudāt in western languages, two recent studies, by Hamid Dabashi and Salimeh Maghsoudlou, have each attempted to present a holistic picture of his thought. These works deserve particular consideration not simply for the many insights they provide into the thought of ‘Ayn al-Qudāt but also because of the stark differences between their approaches.

Turning to the latter, despite being an (as yet) unpublished PhD dissertation, Maghsoudlou’s “La pensée de 'Ayn al-Qudāt al-Hamadānī (m. 525/1131), entre avicennisme et héritage gazalien,” demands close scrutiny from scholars of this 5th/12th century author. Focusing on core philosophical and theological problems in ‘Ayn al-Qudāt’s writings, central to both his thought and of relevance to the claims that were made against him when he was tried and executed for heresy, Maghsoudlou presents a thorough analysis of the ways in which ‘Ayn al-Qudāt synthesized his Ash’arite and philosophical sources. Through discussions of the nature of God and His attributes, the cosmos (and the nature and scope of causality, human agency and Divine Knowledge within it), and humanity (including the relation of the soul to the body, the afterlife and the nature of prophecy), Maghsoudlou is able to show how ‘Ayn al-Qudāt deepens the Ghazalian project of synthesis between Ash’arī kalām and philosophy, extending the influence of Avicennan ideas without positioning himself as a philosopher. ‘Ayn al-Qudāt thus takes his place in an intellectual trend of the period in which,

La philosophie avicennienne, parfois masquée, parfois embellie et restituée, fait ainsi son entrée dans l’univers intellectuel de ces auteurs qui n’en revendiquent

cependant jamais ouvertement l’héritage. La philosophie remplit ainsi la fonction qui appartenait auparavant au kalām.410

Through careful analysis of ‘Ayn al-Qudāt’s arguments, framed within a clear and extensive presentation of the kalām and philosophical source texts he would have had access to, Maghsoudlou is able to present the details of ‘Ayn al-Qudāt’s contribution to this intellectual trend. For example, she demonstrates how ‘Ayn al-Qudāt’s accounts of the nature of God and creation take elements from both traditions — from Avicenna, the structure of the proof of God and His uniqueness, from kalām, the argument for God’s incorporeality411 — whereas in discussions of prophecy and the soul-body relation it is philosophy that has the greatest influence.412

In Maghsoudlou’s study, ‘Ayn al-Qudāt emerges as a philosophical theologian, the importance of whose contribution has generally been overlooked in the study of Islamic intellectual history. Indeed, her study brings new insight into this aspect of the thought of ‘Ayn al-Qudāt, which has been lacking in previous scholarship on this figure. Nevertheless, while Maghsoudlou proposes that she will study ‘Ayn al-Qudāt’s synthesis of philosophy, Ash’arism and Sufism,413 Sufism is in fact unrepresented in her work.414 While Maghsoudlou ultimately argues that ‘Ayn al-Qudāt considers Avicennism to be fully in harmony with the project of Sufism,415 the latter is generally

411 Maghsoudlou, “La pensée de ’Ayn al-Qudāt al-Hamadānī.” These points are discussed in detail in Part One, and summarized on 360.
412 Maghsoudlou, “La pensée de ’Ayn al-Qudāt al-Hamadānī.” These points are discussed in detail in Part Three, and summarized on 364-6.
414 The place of Sufism in ‘Ayn al-Qudāt’s thought is discussed briefly in Maghsoudlou, “La pensée de ’Ayn al-Qudāt al-Hamadānī,” 43-5; the mystical Iblisology in relation to theodicy is discussed in 288-9; and the role of the Sufi master is discussed in 340f.
415 Maghsoudlou accurately suggests that “La philosophie avicennienne, notamment sa métaphysique, bien que présente dans ses écrits, n’est pas perçue comme étrangère ou distincte du taṣawwuf…Entre la métaphysique avicennienne et la pratique sufi aucun antagonisme ne subsiste : l’une étudie ce que l’autre vit. Dans son effort de présentation du sufi comme science à part entière, l’avicennisme joue donc le rôle de support théorétique. C’est de cette concordance harmonieuse entre la métaphysique avicennienne et la vocation sufi que naît le projet de son livre, Zubdat al- haqāiq, qui entreprend de montrer le point de vue du mystique, empruntant la voie de la démonstration et s’adonnant à l’étude des sujets théologique,
considered as little more than “un mode de vie ascétique et contemplatif.”

So while her dissertation helpfully explores the elements of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāṭ’s thought derived from Avicennan philosophy and kalām, the substantial contribution of the intellectual dimensions of the Sufi tradition are underrepresented, and many of the ideas she attributed to Avicennan influence could be equally, if not better, attributed to the Sufi tradition. Though the study of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāṭ’s philosophical theology in particular is a justifiable place to focus, and results naturally from Maghsoudlou’s concentration on *The Quintessence of Verities,* in no way does this exhaust his ‘thought’, and it would be a grave mistake to assume that the mystical, ethical, and practical elements of this writings do not qualify as ‘thought’. With these caveats, however, Maghsoudlou’s study is exemplary, and a much-needed addition to the field.

Turning to Hamid Dabashi’s *Truth and Narrative: The Untimely Thoughts of ‘Ayn al-Quḍat al-Hamadani,* we see a different picture of the Judge of Hamadan entirely. Although the idiosyncrasies of Dabashi’s approach, which he presents as a “consciously anti-Orientalist method,” have led to this work being subject to severe scholarly critique, there are nonetheless lessons to be learned.

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418 Maghsoudlou’s dissertation contains a translation of this entire work into French, and the whole dissertation seems to take this work as its point of departure. Though passages from the *Letters* are included, these are selected according to the theological issues raised by *The Quintessence of Verities.* The mystical contents of the *Letters,* and indeed the *Tamhidāt,* are not given much consideration.
419 Dabashi, *Truth and Narrative,* 32.
420 The most illustrative comment is that of Omid Safi: “Dabashi clearly admits, ‘The way I shall look at him with my own particular urges and fallibilities, will very much be a reflection of my own conditions and reasons for remembering him.’ One cannot help but recall Ayn al-Quḍāṭ’s own words here, that his discourse has a ‘mirror-like’ quality: whoever looks at them, sees their own face being reflected. In reading and writing about Ayn al-Quḍāṭ, Dabashi is working through some of his own angst as an expatriate, postcolonial Iranian intellectual.” The Politics of Knowledge, 167, quoting Dabashi, *Truth and Narrative,* 3. See also Joseph Lumbard, “Review: Truth and Narrative: The Untimely Thoughts of Ayn Al-Qudat Al-Hamadani by Hamid Dabashi,” Muslim World 96.3 (2006): 532-34; Alan Jones, "Dabashi, Hamid, "Truth
from this book. In addition to the presentation of important passages from ‘Ayn al-Qudät’s later works, throughout this book, Dabashi brings our attention to the significance of ‘Ayn al-Qudät’s rhetorical style. As Dabashi demonstrates on many occasions, ‘Ayn al-Qudät’s later works are always infused with a sense of his authorial subject position – though ‘Ayn al-Qudät does discourse at length on the eternal verities of metaphysics, his writings, and particularly the letters, make it clear that the contemplation of these verities takes place in this world according to the particularities of the ‘moment’ (waqt) and the individual states of the teacher and disciple. Dabashi is thus correct in pointing out what he calls the “narrativity and rhetoricity in the writings of ‘Ayn al-Qudät.”421 It is unfortunate that Dabashi tries to make ‘Ayn al-Qudät an exception in this regard, divorcing him from the Sufi tradition, which, as we shall see, conditions this rhetoric.

Maghsoudlou and Dabashi give us two diametrically opposed portraits of ‘Ayn al-Qudät. More significantly, it seems that neither is able to value the approach of the other.422 In light of these two studies, ‘Ayn al-Qudät’s thought seems too multi-dimensional to be successfully analyzed by either an intellectual historian focusing on just philosophy and kalâm or a post-modern critic. Indeed, neither work properly analyses ‘Ayn al-Qudät’s mystical doctrines and relationship with

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421 Dabashi, Truth and Narrative, 31. However, these characteristics may not be as particular to ‘Ayn al-Qudät as Dabashi claims, as suggested by Leaman in "Truth and Narrative: The Untimely Thoughts of ‘Ayn Al-Qudät Al-Hamadhānī (Book Review),” British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies 27.2 (2000): 209-10.

422 Maghsoudlou explicitly rejects Dabashi’s work (“La pensée de ‘Ayn al-Qudät al-Hamadānī,” 19) and I believe it is fair to say that Maghsoudlou’s methods fall under the characteristics of the conception of ‘Orientalism’ that Dabashi dismisses (see Truth and Narrative, 3-4; 6-8), though I would not use this term to describe her work.
Sufism, a task that has been undertaken by others but only with respect to particular ideas in his writings, and not in a holistic way.423

I suggest that the understanding of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s mystical thought should begin with his definitions of the differences between two types of cognition, knowledge and realization.

**Knowledge and Realization**

At the core of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s *Quintessence of Verities* lies the classical Sufi distinction between two types of cognition: ‘ilm (which I shall translate as ‘knowledge’) and ma’rifa (which I shall translate as ‘realization’, though ‘gnosis’ is also an accepted translation in the scholarly literature).424 Indeed, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains that one of the purposes of this work is to describe the latter, which he also

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calls ‘the level beyond the intellect’ (ta'wir warā al-‘aql).

As I will suggest, the difference between these two types of knowledge is an important starting point for understanding ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s perspectivism.

As ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt states in *The Quintessence of Verities*, ‘ilm, which we could call ‘discursive knowledge’, indicates, “Any meaning regarding which it is conceivable that it be expressed using an expression that corresponds to it.” ‘Ilm is therefore propositional knowledge, is composed of concepts, and can thus be adequately expressed by language.

*Ma‘rifā*, on the other hand, which we translate as ‘realization’, signifies, “Any meaning of which no expression at all can be conceived, except at best in such a way that the words [of that expression] are ambiguous.” The fact that there is no direct correspondence between any instance of *ma‘rifā* and linguistic expression proves that the former is non-propositional.

However, although *ma‘rifā* cannot be expressed literally, this does not imply that language is useless in conveying it. This is evident in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s description of the components involved in the transmission of each type: Conveying ‘ilm only requires the speech of the teacher and the understanding of the learner, since the words exchanged between them are sufficient for the meaning to be unambiguously represented. For *ma‘rifā* however, a third component is also

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426 ZH, 67.
427 ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt notes that the term ‘ilm is sometimes used to indicated *ma‘rifā*, particularly in the Quran. See ZH, 67.
428 ZH, 67.
429 This definition of *ma‘rifā* roughly corresponds to that of Hujwīrī, who calls it a ‘state’ (ḥāl) and suggests “One, then, who knows the meaning and reality of a thing they call *‘ārif* (gnostic), and one who knows merely the verbal expression and keeps it in his memory without keeping the spiritual reality they call *‘ālim*.” See Hujwīrī, *The Kashf Al-mahjub*, 382, and 267-8. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt gives a Quranic example to illustrate what he means here, suggesting that the fact that *ma‘rifā*, or ‘ilm-i ladunni, cannot be expressed in words was the reason that Khidr, declared by the Quran to possess this knowledge, stipulated that Moses not ask him for a verbal explanation of the mysterious acts he would commit in the story related in Q. 18:65-82. See ZH, 68.
required, namely the ‘taste’ (dhawq),\(^{430}\) or ‘unmediated apprehension’, of the person who is receiving the benefit of the teachings.\(^{431}\) This ‘taste’, which may not necessarily indicate full realization of the point being made (it can be “just a taste,” otherwise there would be no need for verbal communication), nonetheless indicates that God is directly involved in the process of understanding, bestowing on the receiver the insight that is merely occasioned by the words. It is thus God’s bestowal of unmediated apprehension that leads to the correct understanding of the necessarily ambiguous expression of ma’rifä.\(^{432}\)

Moreover, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt affirms that anyone who is not predisposed to deny the expressions that are used to convey ma’rifä, but is rather open to affirming them without affectation (takalluf), has already been given something of that taste, an intuitive sense however elementary of what is being discussed, which can serve as the seed from which true ma’rifä will grow.\(^{433}\) It is precisely this possibility of conveying ma’rifä to those who have the capacity to receive it that justifies the Sufi use of ‘indications’ (ishārāt) and symbols (rumūz).\(^{434}\) Indeed, if language were useless in the transmission of ma’rifä, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings would serve no purpose. As the following

\(^{430}\) Hujwīrī discusses dhawq as the direct apprehension of either the pain or pleasure of a spiritual state, and as Nicholson points out this is confirmed by Quranic usage of the verb for instances describing the experience of the punishments of Hell (Q, 44:49 and 54:48). See Hujwīrī, *The Kashf Al-mahjūb*, 392. One might be tempted to ground ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s understanding of dhawq on Avicennan foundations, as Treiger has done in the case of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī’s use of this term. (See Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought*, 48-63). Although the Sufi conception of dhawq found in Hujwīrī seems to relate only the experience of a certain type of state (ḥāl), whereas the use of this term in al-Ghazālī and Avicenna is cognitive, we should recall that Hujwīrī’s understanding of ḥāl includes a cognitive dimension, for he describes ma’rifä as a type of ḥāl. Indeed, as has been suggested by Dagli, there is no need to root even al-Ghazālī’s understanding of dhawq in the thought of Avicenna – rather than being ‘originally an Avicennan term’ dhawq and terms like it were common in the intellectual milieu in which all of these figures participated. See Dagli, *Ibn ʿArabī and Islamic Intellectual Culture*, 37-8.

\(^{431}\) ZH, 69.

\(^{432}\) See ZH, 68. In this respect, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s conception of ma’rifä corresponds exactly to that explained by Hujwīrī: “Knowledge of God is the science of Gnosis (ʿilm-i ma’rifat), whereby He is known to all His prophets and saints. It cannot be acquired by ordinary means, but is the result of Divine guidance and information…” *The Kashf Al-mahjūb*, 16.

\(^{433}\) See ZH, 97. See also, T 253-4.

\(^{434}\) ZH, 68-9.
assessment of the importance of the ‘ilm-ma’rif distinction in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s thought shows, the presence of these two levels of knowledge itself implies a kind of perspectivism:

What characterizes Hamadānī’s pattern of thinking in a most striking manner is that his thought is structured in reference to two different levels of cognition at one and the same time…All major concepts that have been sanctioned by tradition as authentically Islamic whether they be philosophic or theological, are to be discussed and elaborated on these two levels of discourse in such a manner that each of these concepts might be shown to have an entirely different inner structure as it is viewed in reference to either of the two levels.⁴³⁵

Moreover, the fact that ‘ilm corresponds to linguistic expression whereas ma’rifā does not, suggests that the linguistic strategies used in order to convey each type of cognition may be quite different. Whereas each instance of ‘ilm must correspond to a single linguistic utterance, a particular insight of the category ma’rifā may be occasioned by various utterances, or indeed various types of utterance. As such, as we shall see, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt uses diverse discursive strategies in his writings, including the citation of scripture and poetry, symbolic illustrations, ecstatic utterances, and philosophical or theological arguments. A certain type of perspectivism is therefore implicit within the expression of ma’rifā – the lack of correspondence between language and ma’rifā suggests that there may be multiple ways of expressing the same thing.⁴³⁶

However, as our analysis of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s thought progresses we will see that perspectivism does not simply apply to the expression of ma’rifā, but also between different types of ma’rifā. This perspectivism is most clearly expressed by ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt in his discussion of three different ontologies that are advocated by different groups of the ‘folk of ma’rifā’ (ahl-i ma’rifat).

⁴³⁶ This suggests that perspectivism is not appropriate on the level of ‘ilm, a point that is alluded to only in passing by ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, whilst discussing the difference between legal and intellectual matters, “in intellectual matters there is necessarily a positive or negative judgment regarding each issue, whereas in the conjectural issues of fiqh (zanniyat-i fiqhi) this is not the case since in reality there is no specified judgment/ruling.” L2.285.
The Three Ontologies

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s ontological pluralism is directly addressed in Letter 16, which is devoted to the clarification of three different ontologies asserted by various groups of the ‘folk of realization’ (ahl-i ma’rifat). There he explains:

A group of the folk of realization say ‘There is nothing in existence save God’; another group of the folk of realization say, ‘There is nothing in existence save God and His Acts’; and yet another group of the realizers say, ‘There is nothing in existence save God, His Acts and His Attributes.’ All of these perspectives are correct, but if you do not know the meaning of each according to its correct definition (‘ālā haddīh) you will fall into much error, as have others. And each perspective requires an explanation…

Given that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt describes the proponents of all three of these ontologies as ‘folk of realization’ it is clear that he considers them all to be valid positions. As a result, it must be the case that there are multiple valid descriptions of reality, and hence ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt can be categorized as a metaphysical perspectivist.

The tripartite division has its roots in a bi-partite distinction found in the writings of Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, which has been analyzed by Treiger as the distinction between al-Ghazālī’s ‘monism’ and ‘monotheism’. Moreover, there is a clear connection between ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s formulation in Letter 16 and that of al-Ghazālī, as shown by the common use of variations on the phrase lā wujūd illa’Llāh and analogies of the sun in both author’s works. Indeed, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s first two ontologies correspond to the last two of the four degrees of tawḥīd mentioned in Book 35,

437 L1.132.
438 As Treiger defines these terms, “For the purposes of the present study, the term ‘monism’ refers to the theory, put forward by al-Ghazālī in a number of contexts, that God is the only existent in existence and the world, considered in itself, is ‘sheer non-existence’ (‘adam mahd); while ‘monotheism’ refers to the view that God is the one of the totality of existents which is the source of existence for the rest of existents. The fundamental difference between the two views lies in their respective assessments of God's granting existence to what is other than He: the monistic paradigm views the granting of existence as essentially virtual so that in the last analysis God alone exists, whereas the monotheistic paradigm sees the granting of existence as real.” Alexander Treiger, “Monism and Monotheism in al-Ghazālī's Mishkāt al-anwār,” Journal of Qur'anic Studies 9.1 (2007): 1.
on ‘Faith in the Divine Unity and Trust in the Divine Providence,’ of al-Ghazālī’s *Iḥyā*. To these ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt has thus added a third ontology, which takes into consideration the Divine Attributes separately from the Essence and creation. These ontologies, which are made use of at diverse points in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s works, thus constitute a continuation of al-Ghazālī’s mystical thought. Given that these three ontologies recur and interact at various points in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings, let us consider each in turn.

The First Ontology: ‘There is Nothing in Existence Save God’

After presenting a complex analogy (*mithāl, tashbīḥ*) based on the intermingling of the Sun’s rays with illumined objects, the complexity of which suggests the difficulty of verbally conveying this metaphysical perspective, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt bases his explanation of the first ontology in Letter 16 on a single philosophical point:

Existence-from-self (*wujūd az khud*) can only belong to the Eternal. And whatever is other than Him, can be nothing but non-existent of itself…If the Eternal were not, [everything else] would now be nothing other than pure non-existence, in the state it was and will be in. There is no difference [for the contingent entity] between this state of non-existence to this state of existence except the existence of the Eternal.

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439 For a translation of the four degrees see Treiger, “Monism and Monotheism,” 5-6.
440 It is also highly likely that some of the sources for ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s treatment of the third ontology could also be found in al-Ghazālī, particular in light of the shared emphasis on ‘taking on the Divine Character Traits’ (*takhalluq bi-akhlāq Allāh*), for which see Paul Heck, “*Adab* in the Thought of Ghazālī (d. 505/1111): In the Service of Mystical Insight,” *Ethics and Spirituality in Sufi adab*, eds. F. Chiabotti, E. Feuillebois-Pierunek, C. Mayeur-Jaouen and L. Patrizi (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 298-324.
441 “Although bodies exist at night, they are all dark and colors of course are not manifest. When day comes, everything becomes illuminated and colors are manifest, and a light is evident on every body, and every particle is mixed in a wondrous way with a particle of light, such that if the whole world should want to separate the particles of air that exist at night from the rays they become mixed with during the day, they would be incapable of it; just like cold water that becomes warm: all parts of the water become mixed with heat such that if someone wants to place their finger on the heat without that (water) he cannot, and also if he wants to place his finger on water without heat he cannot. And to distinguish these with sensory indication is difficult, though with intellectual indication this distinction is easy.

“Now, those bodies that exist at night also exist during the day, and there is of course no addition nor subtraction except the body of the Sun. So if someone says, ‘There is of course nothing but the body of the Sun, which exists during the day, in addition to that which exists at night,’ this person speaks correctly.” L1.132-3.
So if someone takes this perspective and says, ‘Nothing exists except the existence of the Eternal,’ this person has spoken correctly.\textsuperscript{442}

This manner of justifying the first ontology is based on a reconceptualization of the significance of the philosophical categories of ‘necessary’ (\textit{wājib}) and ‘contingent’ (\textit{mumkin}), the senses of which are directly paralleled by ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s uses of the theological terms ‘Eternal’ (\textit{qadīm}) and ‘originated’ (\textit{ḥādīth}). According to the Avicennan analysis, the Necessary exists by its very nature, whereas the contingent only exists by virtue of being caused by the Necessary.\textsuperscript{443}

Although ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt is brief in Letter 16, the same line of reasoning is pursued in greater detail in Letter 24, clarifying his line of reasoning. There ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt directs the reader to contemplate the derivative nature of the existence of the contingent/originated entity. Upon doing so, the reader will realize that this entity does not possess existence of itself. For ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, this is as much as to say that from this perspective the originated entity does not \textit{really} possess existence at all:

When an originated entity has a small share of existence from the existence of the Eternal, that is not by the perfection of the originated entity, but is the perfection of the Eternal, for He is the ‘Giver of existence’ (\textit{Mūjid}) by virtue of being existent, whereas the originated entity by itself is only non-existent; and it is not but non-existent, and cannot ever be other than non-existent.\textsuperscript{444}

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s justification of the ontology of Pure Unity through Avicennan metaphysics is again similar to the approach of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī’s.\textsuperscript{445} However, it is crucial to note that the position ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt is advocating here, though based on Avicennan terms and modes of

\textsuperscript{442} L1.133.


\textsuperscript{444} L1.204.

\textsuperscript{445} As Treiger has shown, al-Ghazālī was able to adopt elements of Avicennan reasoning in order to support his own particular position, which is both consonant with and critical of elements of the Sufi tradition. See Treiger, “Monism and Monotheism,” 8.
reasoning, leads to a conclusion not held by Ibn Sinā. In particular, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt sees in the position of philosophers such as Ibn Sinā the veiled belief that God and creatures exist in the same way. As a result, they affirm that the word ‘existence’ is applied with the same meaning (or, ‘univocally’, bi‘l-ismāṭāk) to both categories of being, which is to say that they ‘share’ in existence. For ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, this use of language implies that the Necessary and the contingent exist in the same way, and that they both possess existence for themselves. This, however, is impossible - the very fact that one is ‘Necessary’ and the other ‘contingent’ means that they do not ‘share’ in existence at all. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains, “sharing (ishtirāk) in existence would be when two things have existence, and thus would share with each other in existence. But when for one existence is a necessity, and for the other [considered in itself] non-existence is necessary, how can this mean ‘sharing’?”

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt thus wishes to show how a clear understanding of what is meant by the terms ‘Necessary’ and ‘contingent’ (or indeed ‘Eternal’ and ‘originated’) in itself implies the realization that the contingent/originated does not really exist. From this point of view, in which one will only affirm existence of what ‘really exists’ in this way, the position, ‘There is nothing in existence save God’, logically follows.

The first ontology recurs in numerous places in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s works. It represents his deepest conviction about the nature of existence as expressed in his early work, The Quintessence of

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446 The term ishtirāk is philosophically and theologically significant, as it would remain a topic of debate throughout the history of the Islamic intellectual tradition whether the term ‘existence’ when applied to God and to creatures means the same thing or two unrelated things (i.e. is it univocal muštaarak ma‘nawī or equivocal muštaarak lafẓī). See Dagli, Ibn al-‘Arabī and Islamic Intellectual Culture, 62-6 and 135-9.

447 L1.204. For the perspective ‘only that which exists subsisting by itself (gā‘im bi-khud),’ see also Letter 146, L3.397f.

448 As Treiger has shown, Ibn Sinā’s own works do contain passages that come close to suggesting this position. See his translation from Ilahiyyāt al-Shifā’ (Bk. 8 Ch6) in “Monism and Monotheism,” 9. Nevertheless, in Ibn Sinā’s metaphysics there is no equivocation that contingent existents do exist as independent effects, which are ‘necessary by another’ (wājib bi‘l-ghayr). See also Maghsoudlou, “La pensée de 'Ayn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadānī,” 96-8.
Verities: “There is no existent in existence that possesses an essence deserving of the reality of existence, save the One, the Paramount.” Furthermore, this ontology reappears in the Tamhīdāt, this time expressed through the aphorisms of past Sufi masters.

However, the first ontology, asserting the sole existence of God, is by nature particularly difficult to express using language, which seems designed for duality. Indeed, even the philosophical explanation discussed above begins from our conceptions of the existence of objects other than God, and then transforms these conceptions. The first ontology therefore rarely stands on its own in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings, but rather appears as an end point, a realization that can be approached but never fully attained by language.

The Second Ontology: ‘There is Nothing in Existence Save God and His Acts’

Returning to the ontologies presented in Letter 16, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt again uses an analogy of the Sun to explain this second ontology. Considering that the illumination of the face of the Earth depends on whether the Sun’s rays are present or not, it is logical to think of these rays as things that exist during the day and do not exist during the night, a conclusion one would reach whether or not one actually sees the Sun itself. Likewise, it is evident that the Sun itself is not on the face of the Earth, whereas the rays are (during the day, that is). As such, the Sun and the rays must be two distinct things and cannot be equated. He writes, “When this analogy is understood, know that the

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449 ZH, 14.
450 See for example, T, 256-7. Here “There is nothing in existence save God” (laysa fi‘l-wujūd illa‘Llāh) is one of the aphorisms used, and is attributed to Ma‘rūf Karkhī. On whom see R.A. Nicholson and R.W.J. Austin, “Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī,” EI2.
451 Indeed, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt concludes his explanation of the first ontology in Letter 16 by stating that he has written as much as can be contained in writing, and the reader will need to seek oral clarification if he still has problems. See L.1.134. On the idea that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings are ‘preparations’ (one possible translation of ‘Tamhīdāt’) for what is never attained within the realm of language cf. Dabashi, Truth and Narrative, 295.
Creator is one thing and the creatures are another…The Essence of the Creator according to its limit (or ‘definition’, ‘alā haddīlī) is an existent, and the essences of the creatures are themselves another existent.”

It is tempting to consider the second ontology as representing the viewpoint of the ordinary believer, who considers both God and the objects of his or her perception to exist. However, it is crucial to note that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt attributes this perspective to a certain group of ‘the folk of realization’. For those who have realized this perspective, all creatures are not simply considered in themselves but are seen as the Divine Acts. To fully appreciate this perspective therefore requires spiritual realization, by which the sage would immediately see the dependence of all things on their ontological Source. However, even without this direct insight it is possible to conceptualize this state of affairs using reason, which would reach this conclusion by investigating the chain of causality linking each creature with God. Contrasting the second perspective with the first, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt declares that, “This way is closer to sobriety, and is the perspective of this world from the way of reason. And the first perspective is the perspective of the Hereafter, and a group are closer to the Hereafter than to this world even though they are still in the cage of humanity (bashariyyat), in the fetters of the appointed measure (ajal).”

In this way, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt affirms that both the perspectives of the first and the second ontologies are valid, but suggests different qualities of their proponents. Though the proponents of each perspective are ‘realizers’, those who affirm the distinction between God and the world are sober thinkers with their feet in this world, whereas those who see only God see things as they will appear after death when the veils are lifted. Moreover, by implication they are ‘less sober’ or ‘more intoxicated’ than those who affirm duality.

452 L1.135.
453 L1.134.
Elements of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s perspectivism are already clearly visible here, as he affirms that there is a plurality of valid ways in which the ontological status of the world and its relation to God can be understood. Moreover, there are allusions here to some of the distinguishing factors between these two perspectives. In subsequent chapters, we shall see that the distinction between ‘sober’ and ‘intoxicated’ approaches to reality, an important distinction in early Sufism,\(^ {454}\) plays crucial role in many aspects of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s thought and modes of expression. Moreover, there is already an indication here that there is some kind of hierarchy between these two ontologies, even though they are both valid. The nature of this hierarchy is clarified as we trace these ontologies in other passages of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings.

**Comparing the First Two Ontologies**

Before we consider the third ontology presented in Letter 16, it is important to note that the very fact of affirming that there is more than one valid way of understanding reality raises complex questions about ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s thought. In particular, what is the relationship between these two ontologies?\(^ {455}\)

This spiritual significance of the first and second ontologies is epitomized by the symbolism of the moth and the candle, deployed by ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt on numerous occasions.\(^ {456}\) At first the moth, who has fallen in love with the flame of the candle, benefits from its light and heat; it

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\(^{455}\) Treiger’s comparison of the differences between the ‘monistic’ and ‘monotheistic’ perspectives in al-Ghazālī offers an interesting point of comparison here. He characterizes the monistic position as focusing on *existence* (thus stating that only God truly exists) whereas monotheism focuses on *quiddity* (such that God must be affirmed as being different from all creatures). However, Treiger’s suggestion that monism is ‘conceptual’ whereas ‘monotheism’ is experiential, whether or not this is a correct assessment of al-Ghazālī, certainly does not apply to ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt. See Treiger, “Monism and Monotheism,” 14-16.

considers itself separate and yet related to the flame, and thus holds to the second ontology. But this love draws the moth towards the flame, until the moth enters the flame and is consumed and nothing but fire remains.\textsuperscript{457} Here the moth has realized the first ontology. ‘Ayn al-Qudāt expresses the difference between these ontologies from a spiritual perspective, focusing on the perceiver’s state of selfhood, as follows: “If you look with the eye of knowledge from the shore of discernment, existence appears as a particle from the Giver of Existence (Mūjid). But if you look with the eye of realization in the ocean-depths of selflessness, no property (hukm) remains for existence. ‘All that is upon it passes away…’” \textsuperscript{(SQ, 55:26)}\textsuperscript{458}

In passages such as this, it is clear that a hierarchy is intended between the first and second ontologies. As such, the second ontology appears as preparation for the first. The conception of all creatures as dependent on their Divine Source is thus a preparation for the realization that only the Divine Source truly exists.

However, this is not the only way that ‘Ayn al-Qudāt conceives of the relationship between the two ontologies. Indeed, on occasion the second ontology appears as the equal of the first. The equality of these two perspectives is affirmed by the following use of the analogy of the Sun:

If the majesty of the Sun shines from its pinnacle of Greatness (kibriyā) and Exultation (taʿzzuz) its speech is all: ‘All light belongs to the Sun’…and when the Sun rises and shines from the rising places of the generosity of its Being, its speech is all: ‘Light belongs to the Sun and to the whole earth and to every particle.’ Both are correct, but one must have vision to apprehend it.

It takes a man to sense the fragrance,

For otherwise the world is full of the zephyr’s breeze.\textsuperscript{459}

Indeed, ‘Ayn al-Qudāt’s explanations of the canonical prayer suggest that both perspectives are ritually enshrined in Muslim daily practice. Using a technicality of Arabic grammar to elucidate

\textsuperscript{457} See for example, T, 82.
\textsuperscript{458} L1.478.
\textsuperscript{459} L2.236-7.
this, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt points out that, due to the semantics of the Arabic comparative form, the words *Allāhu akbar*, which punctuate the canonical prayer and many supererogatory supplications, can either mean ‘God is greater’ or ‘God is great’. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt argues that the second option is more correct, since it does not imply the existence of anything other than God to whom He might be compared. However, in particular supplications this phrase is extended and the comparative is specified - *Allāhu akbar kabīran*, ‘God is much greater’ - so that it is clear that comparison is meant. Commenting on one such supplication, often recited before the canonical prayer itself, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt challenges the addressee to admit whether he has directly realized the shift in perspective implied by the addition of this single word: “Have you ever seen the existence of the terrestrial and celestial worlds (*mulk wa malakūt*) erased when you say, ‘Allahu akbar’? Have you ever seen the affirmation-after-erasing in ‘kabīran’?”

In this particular expression, a certain type of duality does indeed take its place after the realization of unity. Once existence is restored in the eyes of the one praying, he or she sees the whole world as filled with the blessings of God and every particle of the universe speaking of each of God’s qualities. One loves the blessings that God has bestowed because wherever one sees blessings (*ni’mat*) one also sees the Giver of Blessings (*Mun‘im*), just as one loves a love-letter because of its writer, not because of the paper and ink.

From this perspective, the first ontology implies the attainment of annihilation in God (*fanā’*), for to truly see that ‘there is nothing in existence save God’ implies that all else has been annihilated. In the second ontology, on the other hand, multiplicity (*farq*) is restored ‘after unity’
(ba’d al-jam’), as the servant comes to subsist through God (baqā’ bi’Llāh) after annihilation in Him (fanā’ fi’Llāh).\textsuperscript{465}

The different approaches to the relation between the first and second ontologies discussed above suggest that perspectivism is in play here as well. The way that the relationship between the two ontologies is conceptualized depends on the perspective from which one approaches the problem. From a metaphysical point of view, it follows logically that just as the highest reality is Pure Unity the realization of this Unity will be superior. However, from the perspective of the stations of the path, the realization of unity-in-multiplicity implied by the station of subsistence appears higher than the unity of annihilation. In practice, the choice between these perspectives depends on the specific teachings that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt wishes to impart in a particular passage. As we shall see, it is precisely the possibility of being able to move between perspectives in different ways that provides ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings with much of their dynamism. However, before turning to the rhetorical significance of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s perspectivism, let us complete our analysis of the ontologies of Letter 16.

The Third Ontology: ‘There is Nothing in Existence Save God, His Acts and His Attributes’

The third ontology, in which the Divine Attributes are posited as a separate ontological level between the Divine Essence and created beings, raises its own set of ontological and theological questions\textsuperscript{466} and also plays a distinct role in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s thought. Letter 16 once

\textsuperscript{465} For an analysis of the history of these terms see Andrew Wilcox, “The Dual Mystical Concepts of Fanā’ and Baqā’ in Early Sūfism.”

\textsuperscript{466} Although there is of course no firm distinction between ‘ontology’ and ‘theology’ in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s thought, there is nevertheless room for a provisional distinction, just as it is customary in post-Avicennan...
again returns to the analogy of the Sun to explain this perspective: “In the perspective of this group, the Sun is one thing, the light-giving (tāmāwir) of the Sun is another attribute (ṣifāt-i digar), and the rays are other existents.”

As such, there is an intermediate level between the Sun (the Divine Essence) and its rays (created beings): the ‘attribute of light giving’, which signifies all of the Divine Attributes. In explanation of this intermediate level between the Divine Essence and the created order, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt compares two sayings attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās: “There is nothing nearer to God of what He has created than Isrāfīl,” and “There are only three things closer to God than Isrāfīl: Mercy, the Mother of the Book, and Wisdom.” The difference between these sayings already suggests a type of perspectivism; although there is nothing created higher than the ‘Angel of the Trumpet’, from a certain point of view one can speak of uncreated realities, i.e. realities belonging to the divine order. Since they are uncreated, they are higher than the highest ‘creation’, and yet they are still to be considered distinct from the Essence. It is the affirmation of this level of realities within God, but between the Essence and creation, that constitutes the distinguishing characteristic of the third ontology. Giving a commonly used term in Islamic cosmology an uncommon meaning, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt names this intermediate level, the ‘Jabarūt’, or ‘the ‘Domain of Dominion’.  

philosophy to discuss questions relating to being-as-such in the metaphysical generalis (ilāhiyyāt bi‘l-ma‘nā‘l-a‘amm) and questions regarding the Necessary and His Attributes in the metaphysica specialis (ilāhiyyāt bi‘l-ma‘nā‘l-akhass).

467 L1.138.
468 The angel who will sound the trumpet bringing about the end of this world and the resurrection.
469 L1.138.
470 ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt makes reference to two uses of this term, differing according to whether the Jabarūt is considered lower or higher than the Malakūt (or ‘celestial world’). He attributes the first usage to Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī and the second to Abū Ẓāliḥ al-Makkī, stating that the second is correct and the first a mere term. For ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s more common use of the term see, L1.173-4; T, 61-2, 306. There are, however, instances in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings in which he follows the first use, e.g. L1.277; T, 143. For this term in al-Ghazālī, see Kojirō Nakamura, “Imām Ghazālī’s Cosmology Reconsidered with Special Reference to the Concept of “Jabarūt”,” Studia Islamica 80 (1994): 29-46 (especially 38-9).
‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s description of the Jabarūt points to the abstruseness of the reality described by this term, and he ultimately concludes that “The Jabarūt signifies meanings (ma‘ānī) that are connected to the Essence, and I cannot write more than this…”\textsuperscript{471}

Yet once again, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt does write more than this, differentiating the Jabarūt from the Unicity (aḥadiyyat) of the Essence, and suggesting that the Jabarūt plays a crucial role in enabling the creation of the world. Switching to Arabic, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains this role in creation as occurring through the interplay of the Divine Qualities, ‘the Hidden’ (al-bāṭin) and ‘the Manifest’ (al-zāhîr):

\begin{quote}
Were it not for the intensity of His manifestation in the illumination of the glories (subuhāt) of His Light He would not have hiddenness. And were it not for His hiddenness in His Veils He would have no manifestation, and if He manifested existence would be annihilated. And it is inconceivable that the Sun be apprehended except when it is covered in veils of clouds...and (otherwise) the celestial world (malakūt) would be destroyed and He would only have manifestation to Himself, and no existence would remain for anything else such that there would be manifestation of Him for it. “Verily, this is the truth of certainty; So glorify the Name of thy Lord, the Magnificent!” (SQ, 56:95-6)\textsuperscript{472}
\end{quote}

From the perspective of the third ontology, any metaphysics that only considers God and creation faces a profound problem: the infinitude of God and the intensity of His luminosity leave no room for anything beside it. But rather than concluding with the first ontology that this means that only God exists, the third ontology envisions an intermediate yet uncreated level beneath the Divine Essence, which veils the Essence in some way and makes the manifestation of the world possible. This perspective becomes clearer when we consider ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s other writings on the nature of the Divine Attributes, though we have to bear in mind his warning that, “Here there are

\textsuperscript{471} L1.138-9.
\textsuperscript{472} L1.139.
difficult mysteries, and there is no way for the people of the world to reach this station, *Save whom God wills.* (SQ, 27:87, 39:68)\(^{473}\)

**The Divine Attributes**

The nature of the Divine Names and Attributes is among the most complex issues in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s thought, precisely because he maintains that multiple statements about the Attributes are simultaneously true. Moreover, the diverse explanations of the Attributes scattered throughout ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s letters cannot be considered to show that he has ‘changed his mind’, for they are all present in his earliest work, *The Quintessence of Verities.*\(^{474}\)

From one point of view, when God is considered in Himself, His Oneness leaves no room for there to be multiple Names or Attributes:

The Eternal Attributes in eternity were with the Essence and [were] eternal. What can names do there? He Himself transcended letters and sounds. There was neither nine nor ninety there, for all was Unicity (*ahādiyyat*). And the distinction of Attributes has arisen from the difference of existents, according to the wayfarers. There where He is what can distinction do? That One in reality is called by several thousand Names. In every veil, He has many Names, and He is Himself, and there is the Majesty of His Uniqueness. But He manifests many thousands of Attributes so that…\(^{475}\) He should bring Himself out of all veils. And regarding this much more must still be written, and this is as an introduction…\(^{476}\)

From this perspective, the Divine Attributes only arise through consideration of the relation between God and the various aspects of creation. As such, when considered in relation to the creation of something that is considered agreeable or disagreeable by a particular creature, God

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\(^{474}\) Maghsoudlou has discussed the first of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s perspectives on the Divine Attributes in detail (noting its Avicennan basis), but does not recognize that there is a second. See “La pensée de 'Ayn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadānî,” 140-58.

\(^{475}\) ‘Usayrān’s edition contains an elipsis here.

\(^{476}\) L3.312. On *Aḥadiyyat*, see also L1.117.
will be named ‘The Benefiter’ (al-Nāfi’) or ‘the Harmer’ (al-Dārr) respectively.\textsuperscript{477} This perspective also leads ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt to state that God’s Knowing, Willing and Power are identical, for His Knowledge is such that it brings creatures into existence,\textsuperscript{478} and there is no separation between His Willing something and His having the Power to accomplish it.\textsuperscript{479} From this point of view, the Attributes are fundamentally relations (nisab), that is, conceptualizations of the relationship of the one Essence with diverse aspects of creation.

For ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, the view that the Attributes are relations itself implies a kind of perspectivism. While addressing the classical theological question of whether the Divine Attributes are identical with or separate from the Essence, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt first answers that neither are correct, and later that both are correct. Although he affirms that the reason for making these contradictory statements can only be fully apprehended through realization, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt nevertheless anticipates the reader’s objection to this outright contradiction. As such, he points out that one can affirm these contraries so long as two respects or points of view are taken into consideration - two things may be non-identical in one way and non-different in another.\textsuperscript{480} In other words, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt is stating here that the problem of the nature of the attributes is solved by perspectivism: from one perspective they are identical to the Essence, and from another they are not.

In order to explain this point, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt makes use of a similar type of reasoning to that by which he distinguished the first and second ontologies: Everything other than God is non-existent when considered in itself and existent when considered in relation to God, for any

\textsuperscript{477} ZH, 16.
\textsuperscript{478} As opposed to our sensory perception, which is subsequent to the existence of the object perceived. This is Ibn Sinā’s distinction between active (fi’lī) and passive (infi’ālī) knowledge. See Ibn Sinā, al-Ishārāt wa’l-tanbihāt, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Dār Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al’Arabiyyah, [N.D.]), 3:298-9.
\textsuperscript{479} L1.178.
\textsuperscript{480} ZH, 37-8.
contingent entity exists only by virtue of its relation to the Necessary. In a similar way, insofar as the Attributes are considered as ‘adjacent to’ the Essence (min al-wajh alladhī yafā al-dhāt), there is no difference at all between Essence and Attributes; but when viewed in light of the divisions of existence brought about by the diversity of creatures, the Attributes are different from the Essence and different from each other. Though it may at first seem counter-intuitive that a single entity could have different attributes in relation to different objects, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt points out that the number ten has one reality in itself but takes on the attributes ‘double’ and ‘half’ when considered in relation to five and twenty, respectively.

Yet this explanation of the Attributes, in which they seem to possess no independent existence of their own, once again does not represent ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s final word on the matter. In addition to the view that the Attributes are simply relations, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt presents a perspective that affirms independent existence for certain Attributes, such as Grandeur (al-kibriyā), Greatness (al-‘azama), Beauty (al-jamāl) and Glory/Splendor (al-bahā’). The logic behind the assertion that the Attributes result from the consideration of the relation of the Essence to particular aspects of creation cannot apply here, for ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt states that these particular Attributes have no connection with any existent and have meanings far from what we usually understand by these words. These Attributes cannot be apprehended by reason but rather require the use of the epistemological faculty that in The Quintessence of Verities ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt refers to as the ‘level beyond reason’ (lawr warāʾ al-‘aql), i.e., the domain of ma’rifā. Moreover, this perspective of the independent reality of the Names, which accords with the third ontology, is of particular

481 ZH, 38.
483 ZH, 32.
significance for ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s description of the journey of the seeker (taḥīb), who travels through each of the Divine Names in turn.⁴⁸⁴

Due to this bewildering diversity of perspectives, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt can approach Ash’arī doctrine as articulated by Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī⁴⁸⁵ in much the same way as he adopted the technical terminology of Islamic philosophy; rather than representing a single creedal doctrine, the position of al-Bāqillānī that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt quotes here represents an icon that the reader should contemplate. Within ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s diverse discussions of the Divine Attributes, this doctrinal expression is here offered as an opportunity for the reader to rise above the literal significance of the words and to strive for realization, which is the only adequate way of approaching this mystery:

The Attributes of the Real, Exalted be He, are not identical to the Essence, for if all the Attributes were identical to the Essence it would be unification (ittihād); and they are not other than the Essence, for otherness would be the multiplicity of divinity. One can say the Attributes are subsisting entities (qā‘imāt) of the Essence…

   Alas! The liver is cut to pieces by the fact that in the world one must hear the words of Abu Bakr Baqillānī: ‘The Maker (al-Bārī), exalted be He, is Permanent by permanence, One by oneness (waḥdāniyya), and Existent by existence.’ He is saying that the Permanent (al-Bāqī) is one thing, and permanence another, the Existent is one thing and existence another, the One is one thing and oneness another. Although these meanings subsist by His Self, nevertheless one cannot affirm the separation of the Attributes from the Essence.⁴⁸⁶

Once again, just as the perspective affirming the reality of the Divine Attributes is just one ontology among others, his account of the Attributes is only to be understood through perspectivism. Although a rational explanation based on a single point of view can elucidate certain aspects of the nature of the Attributes, any single explanation remains incomplete. Rather, diverse articulations of the partially valid perspectives on this issue are necessary. However, these articulations are only provisional, and do no lead to an adequate understanding. Indeed, much of

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⁴⁸⁴ As opposed to the ‘sought’ who begins with the alif of Allāh. T, 345.
⁴⁸⁵ al-Bāqillānī was a chief systematizer of Ash’arī doctrine. See R. J. McCarthy, “al-Bākillānī,” EI2.
⁴⁸⁶ T, 304-5. See also Maghsoudlou, “La pensée de 'Ayn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadānī,” 140.
the purpose of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāṭ’s presentation of multiple perspectives on the Divine Attributes is to convince the reader that his or her own faculties are not up to the task of understanding this problem. Rather, “here one cannot fly except with the wings of the Beloved…There one must be like a moth when it is burned. When it exists there is a moth that can fly by its own wings. But in the Way of seeking, when one reaches Him he has no wings, so the fire gives him wings from itself.” \(487\)

As this last comment indicates, notwithstanding his engagement with discursive thought, for ‘Ayn al-Quḍāṭ, it is the non-propositional knowledge of realization (\(\text{ma’rifa}\)) that is the only adequate means to gaining knowledge of the Divine. Since realization cannot be unambiguously expressed in language, which simply acts as the occasion for the receptivity of a divinely bestowed gift, there are necessarily multiple ways of speaking about metaphysical realities. These include the three ontologies, each of which represents a particular perspective on reality, possessing particular explanatory advantages, and also a stage on the Way. However, these perspectives do not remain on the theoretical level in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāṭ’s writings, but in fact are enacted within his very process of writing itself.

**The Rhetorics of Ontological Perspectivism: From the Second to the First Ontology in the Explanation of Intention**

The way that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāṭ makes use of the movement between perspectives in crafting the literary dynamics of his writings is epitomized in the transition between Letters 2 and 3, which focus in particular on the topic of intention (\(\text{niyyat}\)) and form part of a twenty-seven letter sequence on the internal and external conditions (\(\text{arkān wa shūrūt}\)) of the canonical prayer.

\(^{407}\) L3.311.
Letter 2 offers an analysis of the psychological and existential chain of causality that lies behind any act that a human can choose to either do or leave undone. Examining the interrelations between human capability (qudrat), will (irādat), and knowledge ('ilm), ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt affirms that correct action depends on whether it follows correct knowledge instead of supposition (zann).\(^{488}\)

Applying this logic to matters of religious significance, which impact one’s otherworldly felicity, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt affirms that correct knowledge is identical to faith (īmān) in the advice and warnings of prophets. This faith in turn results from the influence of angels, whereas the corresponding infidelity (kufr) results from devils. But ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt is still not content to trace back the roots of volition to the dualism inherent in this spiritual cosmology. Rather, both angels and devils are instruments of the Divine Will and instruments of His Action. This, after all, is the affirmed in the Quran, for ‘Whomsoever God will, He leads astray, and whomsoever He will, He places him upon a straight path.’ (SQ, 6:39)\(^{489}\)

The analysis of intention given here in Letter 2 provides a step-by-step contemplative exercise whereby the reader can trace back the source of his or her intentions, whether good or bad, to God.\(^{490}\) This analysis of intention fits squarely within ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s second ontology. Human actions are affirmed as entities distinct from God, yet they are nevertheless to be understood in their relation to the Divine Act. Moreover, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s approach to this topic here is quite similar to that of Ibn Sīnā and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī.\(^{491}\) ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt is making

\(^{488}\) L1.10-13

\(^{489}\) L1.14-15.

\(^{490}\) Indeed, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt alerts the reader that understanding this analysis will require much thought before it will ripen, though when it does it will make all aspects of intention and its many descriptions in the Quran and hadith as clear as the Sun. See L1.15.

use of the resources of philosophy and theology in order to provide some fundamental teachings to his disciples on intention, a crucial topic for the correct practice of ritual acts.

But given the conviction with which the teachings of Letter 2 are delivered, it comes as a surprise when at the beginning of Letter 3 ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt describes the very same analysis of intention as “the view of the commoners,” going so far as to declare that “from the perspective of the elite, this is infidelity.”492 Between Letters 2 and 3 there occurs a fundamental perspective shift, requiring the reader to completely reconsider the topic at hand. Anticipating the reader’s consternation at this sudden change, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains:

By my life, although it is infidelity according to inner vision, nevertheless we cannot dispense with indicating this in order to guide you and your kind among the beginners. When we go to the Ka’ba and wish to set foot on ‘Arafāt, we must necessarily set foot in Kufa, Baghdad and Hulwan.493 And though we know that the Ka’ba is not in Hulwan, this is our way; it is not our stopping-point (manzil),494 nor what we seek (maqsūd), nor our destination (maqsad).495

As such, just as the waystation must not be confused with the destination, “the habit of scholars” to speak of the intermediary levels between human voluntary action and God, though “necessary to convey understanding… falls far short of the reality of the matter.”496

Having dispensed with the ontology of Letter 2, in Letter 3 ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt departs in a new direction, negating any role of secondary causes in existence: “From the point of view of verification (taḥqiq), in existence [i.e. in the world] nothing comes into existence from anything else. For, given that no thing has real existence, how could it be capable of giving existence to another?”497

492 L1.17.
493 Located near Kermanshah, on the Silk Road.
494 Throughout ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s thought, manzil indicates a way-station, a temporary stopping point on the way to the destination. However, since the cities between Hamadan and Mecca that are mentioned are precisely way-stations according to this terminology I have used an alternative translation here. In any case, his point is clear.
495 L1.17.
496 L1.18.
497 L1.18.
Whereas the description of intention in Letter 2 had been based on a hierarchical chain of causes, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt here wants to attribute all causality to God, removing any significance for intermediaries. He is thus initiating a move from the second to the first ontology.

To help us to understand this point, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt suggests that the reader consider the individual letters written on the page being read. Although they came into existence after the movement of the pen, no one would say that the pen wrote the letters, for writing requires power, will and knowledge, which the pen does not possess. Rather, the pen is an inanimate object that is compelled to move according to the will of the writer. Building on this analogy from common experience, together with a philosophical meditation on the conditions of causality, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt uses Quranic language to sum up the metaphysical teaching of this letter,

…that in existence there is but One Existent; only He has existence, and that is all. And whatever is other than Him is itself not. So if it is, it is from His existence, but in itself it is nothing but non-existence. All that is upon it passes away. And there remains the Face of thy Lord, Possessed of Majesty and Bounty. (SQ, 55: 26-7) All things perish, save His Face. (SQ, 28:88) 498

The Ecstatic Expression of the First Ontology in Letter 3

Up to this point, Letter 3 has presented a well-reasoned argument for the superiority of the ontology of unity to the ontology of duality. In particular, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s analogy of waystations between Hamadan and Mecca provides a particularly useful way of envisioning the approach to perspectivism he is advocating here.

However, as Letter 3 continues, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt changes his rhetorical register in order to bring to light further aspects of this shift in perspective that cannot be expressed through sober analysis. During the metaphysical discussion of the ontology of unity, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt begins to

498 L1.18-19. This doctrine, which can be restated “The relation of God to all existents is one,” (ZH, 23-4) has been discussed in detail by Izutsu in “Creation and the Timeless Order of Things,” 130-8.
express the expectation that this ontology goes beyond the capacity of his reader to understand. As his discussion intensifies, he almost stops himself short: “If I were to write more than this, the mad would begin to rattle their chains,” uttering a despairing line of Arabic poetry:

*If I had called to one living I would have made him hear,*

*But the one who is called possesses no life.*

This expression is simply the beginning of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s engagement with the challenge of expressing the inexpressible, a problem that takes center-stage in the letter as his discourse continues.

After continuing to approach the ontology of unity from multiple perspectives, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt sums up his teaching in Letter 3 with a Quranic verse and a prayer: *Truly We have created everything according to a measure. And Our Command is naught but one, like the blinking of an eye. (SQ, 54:49-50)* *Holy! Glorious! Exalted be the Great, the Transcendent.*

This Quranic verse, expressing the unity of the Divine Command - which for ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt encapsulates the metaphysical perspective that God alone is the one unique cause and there is no need for secondary causation - acts as a fulcrum, swinging the discourse into a new tone, in which the reader is directly admonished:

*Do you suppose that you have ever read or understood a single letter of the Quran? How unlikely! None touch it, save those made pure. (SQ, 56:79)* *The idolaters are surely unclean. (SQ, 9:28)…*

*O drowsy sleeper, what is this sleep of yours? You are not aware who is the watcher (naẓẓāra) of your dream.*

Having warned the reader that he lacks the capacity to understand what is being said, a chain of ecstatic teachings is uttered: that the Quran is identical to paradise; that there is nothing

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499 L1.19.
500 L1.21.
in paradise save God; that God spoke the disconnected letters of the Quran Ṭā-Hā and Yā-Sīn a million years before the creation; and that the Quranic descriptions of paradise with its houris and sumptuous food is a trick, for one should seek the neighbor then the house.\footnote{A famous saying of Rabi’ā. See Leonard Lewisohn, “Sufism’s Religion of Love, from Rābi’a to Ibn ‘Arabī,” The Cambridge Companion to Sufism, 151-3.}

From these brief, ecstatic teachings, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt breaks into poetry, uttering one Persian and one Arabic quatrain:

Though I should join a gathering with others and make merry,
In the end with the love of others I brand not my heart.
But if it should happen that the Sun set on someone,
In the place of the Sun, he sets a lamp in front.\footnote{L1.22.}

\textit{Whenever I thirst for her saliva,}
\textit{I take up wine as its replacement.}
\textit{And how great is the difference between wine and saliva!}
\textit{But I am merely busying a heart with diversion.}\footnote{L1.23.}

Without explaining the purport of these poems, which allude to the impossibility of speaking of spiritual realization yet nonetheless act as excuses for trying, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt further asserts that lovers of the world may know the outer behavior of the lovers of God, but know nothing of their inner states. Finally, before the paper on which he is writing runs out, the ecstatic judge alludes to the contradictions inherent in prophecy, the highest state a human can attain; for though the Prophet said, ‘I am but a servant, I eat and drink as servants do,’ God said of him: \textit{Muhammad is not the father of any man among you;} (SO, 33:40) Ṭā-Hā; (SO, 20:1) and \textit{I swear by this land, while thou art free in this land.} (SO, 90:1-2)\footnote{L1.23.}
This ecstatic climax of Letter 3 is intended to elude discursive elaboration, but even before we develop the holistic understanding of his thought that is necessary to appreciate the specifics of these teachings, we can observe that the rhetorical force of this letter develops through the tension of a set of irreconcilable binaries: the ontology of intermediaries versus the ontology of ‘God alone exists’; the conventional understanding of paradise versus the quest for God Himself; the trace and recollection of the Beloved, be it the lamp or the wine, versus the beloved herself, her saliva, and the Sun; and the human versus the more-than-human aspects of the Prophet Muhammad.

As the ecstatic outburst that constitutes the second half of Letter 3 shows, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s perspectivism is not limited to the sober analysis of different philosophical accounts of reality. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s rhetorical style when addressing the first and second ontologies reflects the very characteristics that he gives to the proponents of each perspective, that the ontology of duality is ‘closer to reason’ and ‘more sober’, whereas the ontology of unity is intoxicated. As such, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s rhetorical style enacts the movement between perspectives itself. In this way, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings lead the reader through differing perspectives on reality though their form as well as through their content. The literary style of the letters embodies the dynamism of the perspectivism inherent in his approach to reality.

The Unity of Plenitude

The correspondences between the dynamic engagement with plurality in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s ontological perspectivism and the rhetorics of his literary expression suggest some of the ways in which his thought develops and writing around the theme of diversity. Indeed, as we shall discuss in what remains of this chapter, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s methods of thinking about reality and linguistic expression parallel each other. In particular, there is a close correspondence between his thinking about the manifestation of the multiplicity of the cosmos from the Divine Unity on the one hand,
and the linguistic expression of this Unity on the other (whether by revelation or mystical discourse). Both the cosmos and certain types of language are phenomenal expressions of a single numinous reality. Whereas the numinous reality is one, the phenomenal expressions in each of these domains must be many. In what follows we will see that this implies particular properties of both the numinous reality and the phenomenal expressions. On the one hand, the numinous reality must be a special type of unity, which I shall refer to as a ‘Unity of Plenitude’. On the other hand, this analysis will show that pluralism is inherent in both the created world and language, whether human or revealed. As such, I will show that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s interconnected approaches to diversity are rooted in a specific understanding of the relationship between the One and the many.

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s approach to the relation of the One and the many is clearest in his discussion of the relations that pertain between God and the cosmos. As we have seen, in his discussion of the Divine Attributes, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains that it is a common mistake to draw the conclusion from the fact that God can be described in many ways (such as First and Last, Knowing, Willing and Powerful) that the Attributes constitute multiple eternally co-existent entities with God. However, this conclusion arises from an erroneous inference from human experience, in which knowing something is different to willing it or creating it. In the case of God, despite diverse Names and Attributes by which humans refer to Him, God is not only One, but is also Unique, a Unicity (ahādiyyat) besides which no comparable being can even be conceived.505

The Unicity of God is thus a special type of unity, possessing particular properties. Although God is One, His effects are diverse,506 and even manifest as opposites. For ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt,}

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505 Whereas the Sun is one (wāḥid), one could conceive of a world in which there were two suns without logical contradiction. Once one correctly conceives of the nature of Divine Unicity (ahādiyyat) one realizes that the very idea of two gods is a contradiction. See L1.117.

506 ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt rejects the philosophical principle ‘only one thing emerges from something that is one (in every respect)’ (al-wāḥid lā yaṣḍuru minhu illa’l-wāḥid) as emerging from the limitations of the intellect. See ZH, 44-7.
the contrast between the diverse effects (or creations) of God is most apparent when we compare the nature of those who attain felicity through their earthly life and those who attain damnation. From a human perspective, it is the good or evil deeds that lead to one ending up as a friend or enemy of God. However, from the perspective of the Divine Act, there is but a single Divine command that leads to this diversity, in accordance with the Quranic verse, *And Our Command is naught but one, like the blinking of an eye.* (SQ, 54:50)

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt endeavors to make this point more comprehensible through a series of analogies. In our everyday experience, we can see a single substance having opposite effects, depending on the nature of the entities it interacts with. For example, immersion in water gives life to a fish but kills a human being. Likewise, sunlight, a favorite illustration of the relationship between God and the world, will turn cloth white, especially when it is coated in a bleaching agent. However, if the man who is in charge of bleaching the clothes stays in the sun too long his skin will be darkened.

However, despite the importance of these metaphysical roots of diversity, what concerns us in this particular juncture is an alternative perspective: seen from this vantage point, just as God can only become Creator through His relation with the beings He creates, real diversity can only come into existence through the physical world, which contains a multiplicity of physical individuals. As such, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt categorizes “This world [as] a vat between Pre-Eternity and

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507 L1.189-90.
508 T, 186.
509 See for example, L1.189. Ultimately, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains how the diversity of the world, epitomized by differences of the fates of felicitous and damned individuals, is rooted in the Divine Unity itself. This difference, as we shall discuss later, occurs through the Light of Muhammad and the Light of Iblis, the sources of guidance and misguidance respectively; nevertheless, both of these metaphysical realities are contained within the Light of God. See T, 186.
Post-Eternity, and in this vat all colors are found. Felicity is manifest from this world and the body, as is wretchedness, for otherwise in nature (fitrat) all were the same.\textsuperscript{10}

The capacity of this Unity to produce such diverse effects results from the fact that unlike the numerical unity, which is less than the numbers that follow it, the Unity of God is undeniably more than everything that results from it. It is a Unity that contains all, albeit in undifferentiated form, such that both complementary and contradictory relations will emerge from it. Using a more modern understanding of optics, we can imagine this Unity as white light, which contains within it the entire spectrum of colors. A physical body that is translucent will bring about the refraction of this light, manifesting the diversity that was latent within it. Since this Unity contains the metaphysical principles of all the possibilities that will be manifested from it, we can refer to it as the Unity of Plenitude.

The Quran as Unity of Plenitude

Although strictly speaking, there is only one true Unity of Plenitude, for there is only one Unicity, ʿAyn al-Quḍāt approaches several other issues using the same logic; in several other instances a single reality, itself beyond form, is shown to be so rich that it must manifest in diverse forms and expressions. The idea of ‘unities of plenitude’ can therefore help us to discover the connections between a range of phenomena that are one in themselves, yet lead to a diversity of manifestations, paralleling the way the fullness of God leads to the diverse manifestations that constitute the world.

\textsuperscript{10} T, 193-4. This can be further explained by T, 193: “This world has been made the criterion of the Hereafter, and the body of the spirit. The color of God, and who is better than God in color (Q, 2:138) explains it clearly.”
The ways in which ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt speaks of the Word of God, ‘the Mother of the Book’, (umm al-kitāb) or the Pre-Eternal Quran (qurān-i azalī) present a prime example of this type of unity of plenitude. Rather than being limited to the specific words that constitute the Quran and other revealed scriptures, the Quran describes its own inner nature in its command to the Prophet as follows: Say “If the sea were ink for the Words of my Lord, the sea would be exhausted before the Words of my Lord were exhausted, even if We brought the like thereof to replenish it.” (SQ, 18:109) The dichotomy between the singular inexhaustible reality of the unrevealed Quran and the indefinite diversity of its possible manifestations thus closely parallels the Unity of God and His diverse manifestations in creation.

For ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, in addition to the Quran’s expression of its own inner plenitude through this verse, the revealed Quran also gives expression to its inexhaustibility in synoptic fashion. This it does in two different ways. To begin with, twenty-nine sūras of the Quran begin with ‘Disconnected Letters’ (ḥurūf muqaṭṭa‘a), the significance of which has been much debated by commentators.\(^{511}\) The level of attention that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt gives these Disconnected Letters, which as we have seen in Letter 3 often occur as his writing takes an ecstatic turn,\(^{512}\) has come to be considered one of the hallmarks of his writing.\(^{513}\) Though his reflections on the significance of the Disconnected Letters are intended to remain beyond the level ordinary comprehension, and hence he does not give a step-by-step analysis of them, one of his clearest explanations comes in the context of the expression of the inexhaustibility of the Divine Word. He asks,

Do you want to know at all why these letters are in the Quran? Know that when the Speech of Love (ḥadīth-i ‘ishq) reached the limits of time and space… it made an address [consisting] of sūras and āyas, of words and letters. Everyone stepped back, knowing that ‘If the sea were ink for the Words of my Lord, the sea would be exhausted before the Words of my Lord were exhausted.’ (SQ, 18:109) What place is this for a sūra, an āya,

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\(^{511}\) See SQ, Commentary to 2:1.
\(^{512}\) As we have seen in the case of Letter 3.
or a word? Letters without meaning stepped forth, ‘yet man bore it; truly he has proved himself an ignorant wrongdoer.’ (SQ, 33:72) \(^{514}\)

The Disconnected Letters are thus an expression of, and therefore a doorway to, the supraformal and inexhaustible Divine Word; they bore the burden of the Speech of Love in a way that no other formal expression dared to. It is for this reason that these Letters can act as a means for the wayfarer to contemplate various aspects of the unrevealed Quran itself, a process that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt expressed through ecstatic language.

But it is not only the Disconnected Letters that are able to manifest synoptically the reality of the Quran, a reality that itself transcends limitative expression. Rather, “Every letter of the Quran has many thousands of secrets and millions of tongues.” \(^{515}\) This perspective is most famously expressed in the teaching found in diverse Islamic mystical sources that the entire Quran is contained its opening chapter (the Fātiḥa), or its first words (the basmala), or the diacritical point under the letter bā’ of the basmala, \(^{516}\) and likewise the saying attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās that ‘Alī discoursed on this diacritical point for a whole night, during which time Ibn ‘Abbās felt “like a mouse cast into the middle of a great ocean.” \(^{517}\)

But rather than leaving the manner in which the entire Quran might be contained within the diacritical point under its opening letter shrouded in mystery, in Letter 60 ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt attempts to make it intelligible to us using two analogical strategies:

To begin with, a Persian speaking child hears the Persian word shīr and the Arabic word layth (both of which mean ‘lion’), it will be obvious to that child that these two words are different; for the child does not know how to distinguish between the shape of the word and its meaning, and

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\(^{515}\) L3.331. See also T, 172.
\(^{516}\) L1.452.
\(^{517}\) L2.99. See also, L2.228, and cf. L3.330.
does not understand the meaning of the Arabic. For an intelligent person on the other hand, in whom attention to meaning predominates over concern for words, the common meaning of these two words will be evident (so long as he knows some Arabic). Moreover, this intelligent person will forgive the child for his understandable limitations in considering the words different, whereas the child will consider the intelligent man to be mistaken in his assertion that they are the same.

Likewise, since the Fātiha contains the term ‘all the worlds’ (al-‘ālamīn), and since the Quran, considered as one entity among others in the world, falls under the semantic scope of this term, the Fātiha logically contains the Quran. Although it is harder to understand why the basmala, ‘In the Name of God’, contains more than this, and even harder to understand why the point under the bā’ should contain as much, this difficulty is simply due to the limitations of our understanding, just like the child in the example above. Although this explanation seems to be based on a triviality, the analogy it suggests contains profound implications - that meanings are separate from words, and are in fact metaphysical entities that words, functioning as terrestrial vehicles for celestial realities, are able to ‘carry’. For this reason, the entire reality of the Quran is carried by, and thus is accessible through, a single point beneath its first letter.

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s second method for helping us to understand this esoteric point shows even more clearly how the Quran is a unity of plenitude:

Of the word asad (another word for ‘lion’ in Arabic), a child sees letters, whereas an intelligent person hears the meaning, and the form of a lion fills his imagination. But if there is a lover who sees the letters of ‘lion’, for example, in his beloved’s handwriting, or hears if from the beloved’s tongue, his whole being becomes pleasure upon hearing the beloved’s voice or seeing her handwriting. ‘Unto God belongs the loftiest analogy (mathal).’ (Q. 16:60) This lover knows neither the letters of ‘lion’ not its meaning, for the pleasure of hearing the beloved has stolen him away. He cares about nothing else. If instead of ‘lion’ [the beloved] says ‘wolf’ or ‘honey’

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518 This argument is clearly intended as a contemplative aid, rather than a trivial truth.
519 L1.452-3.
or ‘poison’ it is all the same for the lover… Though the intelligent person knows the meanings of these words to be different, the lover knows one meaning for them all, for he is heedless of understanding what is named by these words and is immersed in the pleasure of apprehending the voice of the beloved; and all words spoken by the beloved are one to him. For the lover everything has one meaning.521

As this illustration suggests, although we can gain some idea through these analogies of what the point under the bā’ means for a true lover of God, one cannot really understand love without being a lover oneself. Hence ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt again affirms that this teaching will only be understood once the wayfarer has reached as station (maqām) in which he sees “the whole Quran…and all existents in the [diacritical] point of the bā’ of bismi’Llāh.”522 This teaching, an example of realization, is thus one of the many ideas in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings that he affirms will only be truly understood at a certain point on the wayfarer’s journey, a point we shall return to in the following chapter.

In dealing with the inexpressible fullness of the Divine Word, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt provides insights that further strengthen the analogy between the world’s relationship with God and the relationship between Quranic language and the unrevealed Divine Word. To begin with, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s assertion that the singular act of the Divine Creation produces creatures that will tend towards the opposite extremes of good and evil is equally true of the revelation of the Quran and the prophecy of Muhammad. Though Muhammad was sent ‘as a mercy unto the worlds,’ (SQ, 21:107) it is only by hearing the Quran as transmitted by Muhammad that the true nature of a disbeliever such as Abū Jahl could become apparent; for Abū Jahl may have seemed like an ordinary person if he was not living in the proximity of a prophet and had not rejected his message. Directly linking this quality with his explanations of the diverse effects of the Divine Light, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt points

521 L1.457.
522 T, 172. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt describes his own attainment of a similar station in T, 347.
out that sunlight not only enables vision for those with sight, but also causes foul odors to be released when it shines upon refuse.\textsuperscript{523}

Furthermore, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s use of the third ontology to explain the relationship between the One and the many is also paralleled in his descriptions of the descent of the Quran. Just as the ontology of Divine Attributes was justified by the observation that the infinity of the Divine Reality would annihilate any otherness were it not for some kind of process of veiling, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt also states that “The eternal Quran was sent to creation in several million veils. If the majesty of the point of the bā’ of bismi’Llāh were to shine on the Throne without a veil it would be immediately melted. You have read ‘Had We made this Quran descend upon a mountain, thou wouldst have seen it humbled, rent asunder by the fear of God’ (SQ, 59:21), but you have still not understood it.”\textsuperscript{524}

As a result of this process of veiling, the Quran possesses multiple aspects, and appears in multiple ways depending on perspective. “In one veil they call the Quran ‘the hidden Quran’ (qurān-i maknūn), and in another veil they call it ‘the clear Quran’ (qurān-i mubīn)… in another world they call the Quran ‘noble’ (karīm)… And the Quran has several million names that cannot be heard with the outer hearing. If you have inner hearing then Ḥā-Mīm-‘Ayn-Sīn-Qāf will manifest those hidden names to you.”\textsuperscript{525}

There is therefore a close parallel between ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s explanation of the relationship between God and the cosmos and the relationship between the unmanifest and the manifest Quran. Both the manifest Quran and the cosmos represent diversified manifestations of a single ‘unity of plenitude’. As such, multiplicity or plurality is inherent to their nature. As a result, in order to understand either the Quran or the cosmos, one must be prepared to see things from many

\textsuperscript{523} L1.14.  
\textsuperscript{524} L1.99.  
\textsuperscript{525} L2.99-100. See also T, 174.
points of view. For ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, the metaphysical explanation of the descent of the Quran confirms the hadith, “A man is not possessed of understanding [in religion] (faqīh) until the Quran has many aspects (wujūh) for him.” Quranic interpretation, like the interpretation of so many other aspects of reality, therefore must involve the consideration of multiple perspectives.526

**Spiritual Realization as a Unity of Plenitude**

In addition to clarifying the nature of the Quran in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s thought, the concept of a ‘unity of plenitude’ is also helpful for understanding his approach to the different types of knowledge, particularly ‘ilm and ma’rifa, which we discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Each instance of ma’rifa is a reality beyond formal expression, which can be expressed through many possible ambiguous expressions that lead to it in different ways. As such, it seems appropriate to also refer to ma’rifa as a unity of plenitude. The dichotomy between single numinous reality and multiple phenomenal expressions parallels the relation of the One and the many that we have seen in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s discussions of both God and the world on the one hand, and the unmanifested and manifested Quran on the other.

The unity of plenitude that is ma’rifa, or ‘realization’, is indeed intimately connected to the other unities of plenitude that we have discussed so far. Just as the unmanifested Quran is beyond the letters that express it, God imparts knowledge to any heart He wills without need of letters. As ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains: “Whatever of Pre-Eternal Knowledge becomes the share of the heart is the Pre-Eternal Word, of which the source is Pre-Eternal Knowledge, and there can never be limitation in Pre-Eternal Knowledge. ‘Say if the seas were ink…’ (SQ: 18:109)”527

526 See for example, L2.228. For a consideration of the scriptural bases for the Sufi notion that the Quran is open to multiple levels of interpretation see Kristin Zahra Sands, *Ṣūfī Commentaries on the Qurʾān in Classical Islam* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), 15-51.

527 L1.146.
Since ‘Ayn al-Qudat’s writings are intended precisely to participate in the process of the
transmission of realization, it is not surprising that he considers his own realization and its
expression in his works to possess the qualities that he attributes to the expression of realization
more generally. Indeed, he affirms that “if I write with a thousand expressions they are all one,”
and advises the reader to “Study my letters as much as you can, and there is no difference between
that speech which is lower and that which is higher, for it is all from a single source.”

Both ‘Ayn al-Qudat’s writings and the Quran represent ‘the words of love’, which know no
end. Whether found in the Quran or in ‘Ayn al-Qudat’s own writings the words of love express a
single reality, a unity of plenitude that is itself beyond any single expression:

When the lovers speak of their melancholia (sawda), be all hearing and abandon meddling:

The affair of the world has come to an end, and time has passed,

Our melancholia has never a day come to an end.

Say, “If the sea were ink for the Words of my Lord, the sea would be exhausted before the Words
of my Lord were exhausted.” (SQ: 18:109) The story of the lovers is never completely
told. Their melancholia has no end.

The world of love is vast and your vision is narrow,

The story of love is long, and your aspiration is short.

I say this from myself to myself. Be a follower (tufayl) in the middle. Should you be
so it is still a great thing.”

The Purposes of Expression

Conveying discursive knowledge, or ‘ilm, is a straightforward process. Since this type of
knowledge can be expressed unambiguously through propositions, the only conditions of its
transmission are that the teacher express a particular proposition correctly and that the student

\[^{528}\text{L2.448.}\]
\[^{529}\text{L2.478.}\]
\[^{530}\text{L3.281.}\]
understand and remember it. Realization on the other hand, as non-propositional knowledge, is much more difficult to convey. However, rather than leading to silence in the face of ineffability, the supra-propositional content of realization in fact seems to demand that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt make much more extensive use of the possibilities of language than would be necessary for conveying ‘ilm. As a unity of plenitude, a single truth or insight within the domain of realization can be expressed in multiple ways, and therefore multiple discursive strategies can be employed to ensure the best chance of communication.

As we have seen, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt affirms that the transmission of realization involves processes that lie outside of the texts: Divine Assistance is always necessary. Likewise, there are certain basic conditions that qualify a reader as an addressee of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings - such as the general tendency to affirm what is heard rather than doubt it, a greater interest in the message rather than the inevitable linguistic difficulties that will arise in the process of expression, and a thirst for understanding that is not quenched by theoretical knowledge alone.

But even after these conditions are met, each reader will understand what is being discussed to the extent of his or her capacity, which is determined by the individual’s progress on the spiritual path. Indeed, the exclamation of the incapacity of the particular addressee of many of the Letters, or alternatively (though far less frequently) the affirmation that the addressee is now able to hear more than was previously the case, constitutes one of the most common features of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s rhetorical style. This method cultivates interpretive humility and spiritual aspiration in

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531 As an example of the tendency to be avoided, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt refers in particular to scholars of the Quran who are more interested in perplexing issues in Quranic grammar than with the message that is being conveyed. See L3.324-5. See also, ZH, 4.
532 See ZH, 10, on the qualities of a reader who will benefit from this work.
533 See L2.453
534 See L2.205
the reader, and ensures that conceptual knowledge of the realities that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt is speaking of, which could be gained by simply memorizing his writings, is not confused with realization itself.

But aside from the aspects of the transmission of realization that do not occur on the page, we can learn a great deal about how ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt understands the transmission of this non-propositional knowledge through the way he writes and the way he describes his own writings.

Several of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s letters contain direct instructions issued to the disciple addressed on how the letters are to be read. To begin with, on several occasions he describes the reading of the letters as a spiritual practice that should be performed daily. Although ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s wont is to include teachings that are beyond the understanding of the particular addressee, they still provide benefit; for although the reader may not yet have direct access to the heart, the spiritual organ that is the seat of realization, “when you listen, your heart and inner aspect affirms its veracity.”

In order to explain the role of discourse in leading to realization, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt returns to one of the analogies he had used to explain the role of proximate causes within an ontology in which there is no real cause other than God:

God, exalted be He, manifests the reality of this work to one’s heart by His Own Pen, without intermediary…The analogy of this is the Sun and the earth, but since there are clouds there are no rays on the earth, so when the clouds disperse the rays become manifest…Now there is a veil between the human heart and God, Majestic and Glorious; and if there were not, the Pen of God would continuously write all that was and all that is within it.

Although it is God who imparts realization without any intermediary, linguistic or otherwise, the human heart is usually obscured by clouds, which prevent the light of Divine instruction from reaching it. As such, although both spiritual discourse and contemplation appear

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535 See for example, L2.368. See also L1.365.
536 T, 253. See also L2.420.
537 L2.106.
to us as positive phenomena, they both function negatively in the process of the seeker’s attainment of realization. The function of spiritual discourse, like that of all other proximate causes, is simply to remove the obstacles to Divine manifestation and to provide the occasion for particular effects of the Divine Act to be actualized.\footnote{\ref{zh-65}}

It is for this reason that when ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt considers the question of whether realization is attainable by effort, he cannot answer completely in either the affirmative or the negative. Using another analogy, he explains that one cannot say for certain whether a non-Arabic speaker will be able to gain the ability to compose Arabic poetry - for in addition to the requisite knowledge of Arabic and extensive practice in composition (which can be accomplished by effort), there is also the question of whether one has poetic taste, a factor independent of effort. Likewise, the acquisition of realization involves both effort-related and effort-independent aspects.\footnote{\ref{l2-393}} Moreover, spiritual instruction, whether oral or written,\footnote{\ref{l1-365}} is only one component in the process of bringing about the conditions for the attainment of realization. As such, the study of the letters is only one of the spiritual practices that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt recommends to his readers. Indeed, the majority of the letters end with instructions on particular prayers and invocations, or instructions to practice charity and other virtues.\footnote{\ref{l1-107}}

Taking accounts of the norms of knowledge-seeking of his day, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt warns his reader that, given the nature of realization, the efforts of doctrinal study should not be directed

\footnote{\ref{zh-65}} See also ZH, 65.\footnote{\ref{l2-393}} See L2.393.\footnote{\ref{l1-365}} See L1.365 for a discussion of the relative merits of oral versus written teaching, including the significance of reading the teacher’s own handwriting.\footnote{\ref{l1-107}} L1.107 for example discusses the interaction of the contemplative exercise and religious practices such as fasting. The consideration of discourse as a ‘spiritual exercise’, often accompanied by other forms of askesis, is a crucial component of Pierre Hadot’s reading of Ancient Greek (and strands of later) philosophy as ‘a way of Life. See Pierre Hadot, Philosophy as a Way of Life, and What Is Ancient Philosophy? (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002).
towards the acquisition of as much information as possible, but should rather form part of a holistic process of spiritual cultivation. Study should be contemplative rather than simply accumulative. In accordance with this understanding of the transmission of realization, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāṭ is therefore not simply a theoretician, though as we have seen his works contain complex theoretical discussions. Rather, he is a spiritual guide, who will even severely rebuke his addressee when he believes it is in the best interests of the latter that he do so.

But although there is a deeply personal dimension to his letters in particular, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāṭ speaks of a complex relationship between the immediate purposes that condition his decisions to include particular teachings in a letter to a particular disciple on the one hand, and the wider significance of the very same letters on the other. In one case, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāṭ speaks of his addressee as a ‘target’ (nīshān-gāh), which he aims at as he is writing. The state of the particular addressee conditions what is to be written in the letter, whether it be preliminary matters that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāṭ himself expresses having limited interest in, or more profound issues that have been called forth by the addressee’s sincerity of intention. However, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāṭ also affirms on many occasions that what he is saying will surpass his addressee’s understanding but will be of benefit for future readers, who will be far more capable of understanding the recondite truths that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāṭ finds himself compelled to express. We can thus compare ‘Ayn al-Quḍāṭ’s relation to the particular addressee of each letter to an archer who aims at a paper target that is near to him. The paper target is placed - providentially as ‘Ayn al-Quḍāṭ sees it - in such a way that having passed

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542 See ZH, 70.
543 For examples of letters containing rebuke see L1.307 (for a gentle example) and L2.372-3 (for a more severe example). The spiritual benefits of being rebuked by one’s teacher are discussed in L2.436.
544 L1.209.
545 See L1.209.
546 See L2.476 and T, 253.
547 See for example, L2.342.
through it the arrow will hit a real target much further in the distance. The addressee - the paper target - is intended, “but only metaphorically; whereas in reality the one intended is someone who understands this.”\textsuperscript{548} For this reason, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt encourages his addressee to continue to write letters asking him questions, not only for the addressees own benefit, but also simply to provide an excuse for writing, for “it is not evident what spiritual openings (\textit{futūḥ}) there will be for the people in each letter.”\textsuperscript{549} The \textit{Letters} are thus a “compassion for the creation,” and “for the many years in which these letters remain a world will open up from them, God willing.”\textsuperscript{550}

The tension between the concern for the needs of the particular addressee of each letter and the expression of teachings that will be incomprehensible to this addressee point towards an important feature of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s description of his own writing. Throughout his later work, i.e. in the \textit{Letters} and the \textit{Tamhīdāt}, a similar tension is constantly being played out between the conscious thought processes that are directing ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writing and a movement of inspiration that goes beyond his own control. In order to explain this, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt invokes the well-known saying, “The Sufi is the son of his moment; in every breath he says and does what is.”\textsuperscript{551} In this way, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s discursive methods thus mirror the perspectivism of his teachings. As we shall see in the following chapter, this discursive movement between perspectives is a direct result of his understanding of the spiritual path.

**Conclusion**

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s creative process is an expression and enactment of his deeper worldview. The dynamism of his movement through discursive styles, from the sober to the ecstatic, is a

\textsuperscript{548} L2.274. See also L1.411.  
\textsuperscript{549} L1.459.  
\textsuperscript{550} L1.207.  
\textsuperscript{551} L2.357.
concrete reflection of his own conviction that there are multiple correct perspectives on the nature of reality. Although, perspectivism may not play an important role on the level of 'ilm, regarding which ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt seems to uphold the possibility of singular certainty, it is a necessary aspect of maʿrifa. Since maʿrifa cannot be adequately conveyed using language, there is an advantage to combining multiple discursive approaches. However, as we shall see in the following chapter, perspectivism does not simply manifest in the linguistic expression of maʿrifa; spiritual realization itself involves a movement between perspectives.

Moreover, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s perspectivism is fully coherent with his understanding of the nature of the manifestation of the many from the One. The Divine Essence is a single reality that necessarily manifests in multiple ways, leading to the diverse qualities of the cosmos, and can therefore be described as a ‘Unity of Plenitude’. Moreover, this same logic of the relation between an unmanifested One and the manifested many underlies ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s understanding of the revelation of the Quran and the process of linguistic expression of spiritual realization. Each of these domains necessarily involves pluralism and perspectivism on the level of manifestation. Once again, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt applies this same logic in his task of using linguistic expression to aid the reader in attaining realization; diverse perspectives on reality and diverse linguistic strategies are required as part of a more holistic program for attaining realization, which includes spiritual practice along with theoretical study.

Indeed, the majority of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings are devoted to the process of spiritual realization itself. Moreover, although ontology and rhetoric are fundamental issues at the basis of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings, it is in fact in his discussions of the spiritual path that we find the fundamental paradigm in which he thinks. It is to the pluralism of this fundamental paradigm that we turn in the following chapter.
Chapter 6: Wayfaring - The Fundamental Paradigm of the Human Condition

Given that reality is necessarily multi-dimensional and must be approached through multiple perspectives, it cannot be understood by standing still. For ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt the only correct response to the perspectivism discussed in the previous chapter is that the seeker undertake the journey through perspectives towards the One source of multiplicity. Indeed, it is this ‘wayfaring’ on the Way to God that constitutes the core concern of nearly all of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s later writing. Even theoretical discussions are presented for their preparatory function, for it is wayfaring, not theoretical knowledge, that is of intrinsic benefit.552

By studying ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s understanding of wayfaring we come to terms with many of the most important constituents of his thought. Moreover, I would suggest that ‘wayfaring’ ( сулāк) is the most helpful single concept for understanding ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt in a holistic way. As we shall see, the capacity for the spiritual journey is for ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt the most significant characteristic of humanity, and may even be our very reason for existing. Wayfaring gives us a crucial window on what ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt thinks it means to be human. Moreover, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s understanding of wayfaring will provide us with important interpretive tools for understanding many of the most complex aspects of his thought, and to which we will return in the subsequent chapters.

This chapter is divided into two sections: in the first I consider ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s discussions of the nature of the Way and wayfaring. Grounding our discussion in the ontologies that underlie his discussions of wayfaring, I show that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s understanding of the Way is synthetic and multifaceted, contrasting sharply with schematic presentations of the ‘stations of the Way’

552 See for example, L1.116.
(maqamāt al-ṭarīq) that are depicted in earlier Sufi manuals. I then examine how ʿAyn al-Quḍāt’s own approaches to teaching and writing respond directly his understanding of the Way.

In the second part of the chapter, I investigate what I term the diverse ‘sub-paradigms’ of the Way in ʿAyn al-Quḍāt’s writings. That is to say, ʿAyn al-Quḍāt conceptualizes the Way in its preliminaries, stages, and ends through several distinct and independent perspectives. Thus the entire Way can be considered from the point of view of the journey within, the stages of Love, the deepening of gratitude, and the alternation of states. The fact that the Way can be conceptualized in these diverse Ways suggest that it is a type of ‘unity of plenitude’, a reality of great richness for which one mode of expression can never suffice. The chapter concludes with a consideration of how wayfaring is fundamental to human diversity.

The purpose of this chapter is first of all to explain one of the most central components of ʿAyn al-Quḍāt’s thought, regarding which there are no independent studies in the secondary literature. However, through these investigations it will also become clear how wayfaring acts as a theme that unites the diversity of ʿAyn al-Quḍāt’s ideas, serving as a central core around which his pluralism and perspectivism is formulated.

**Wayfaring, Ontology and the Veils**

Wayfaring, and more specifically the journey through different ‘stations’ (sing. Maqam, manzil) on the Way to God, is a core metaphor in the Sufi tradition, used to explain the stages of the cultivation and inner transformation of the disciple. Likely having origins in contemplation of the Prophet’s night journey (ḥisrāʾ) and celestial ascent to the Divine Presence (miʿraj), the description of the stages on the Way had already been the focus of spiritual treatises, whether

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focusing on the virtues acquired at each stage (such as Khwāja ‘Abd Allāh Anṣārī’s *Manāzil al-Sā‘īrīn* and *Ṣad Maydān*),

expressing the noetic and experiential realizations (such as Nafarī’s *Mawāqif*), or providing poetic and imaginative expressions of the journey (such as Sanā’ī’s *Journey of the Servants*).

Diverse aspects of the Sufi stations have been discussed in the scholarly literature. Not only have the schematic accounts of the stations of the path been well described, but the interconnections indicated by Sufi between different virtues or different levels of the self and the stations of the path are also clearly documented, for these connections play a crucial role in the depictions of the stations in Sufi manuals.

In this regard, the writings of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt present an important opportunity to expand these conceptions of the path. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s avoidance of systematic exposition of the stages of the Way, preferring a dynamic and ever-changing engagement with the realities of spiritual progress, lead to a depiction of the path that is far more complex than the picture given in Sufi manuals. Thus, although a theorist of the stations of the Way such as ‘Abdallāh Anṣārī warns his readers that “the wayfarers through these stages are very different from each other, not agreeing

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556 See Chapter Three.


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on a specific order, and not standing on a common goal,” the descriptions of the stations in Sufi literature both in the Sufi manuals and in the scholarship that focuses on them are often static and one-dimensional, simply providing a list of virtues or spiritual characteristics.

In contrast to these manuals, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt is not simply concerned with describing the Way and its stations, and does not attempt to do so in a systematic set of chapters on each station. Rather than providing the organizational structure of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings, wayfaring provides the conscious paradigm within which he thinks. As such, more or less everything he discusses possesses significance in relation to the Way. As a result, not only does the examination of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s understanding of wayfaring present us with one of the richest and most multi-dimensional expressions of this topic in the Sufi tradition up to his time, it also provides the framework within which he approaches a wide range of other issues.

We have already seen ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt use the imagery of wayfaring to describe the relationship between two accounts of the nature of intention. One of these accounts (which expressed an ontology of duality between Creator and creation) was expressed as an intermediate location or waystation on the way to the other (which expressed the ontology of pure unity). As such, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explained that, “When we go to the Ka’ba and wish to set foot on ‘Arafāt, we must necessarily set foot in Kufa, Baghdad and Hulwan. And though we know that the Ka’ba is not in Hulwan, it is our way…”

Just as a single landscape might appear quite different to us depending on where we stand, whether in the depths of a valley or on the top of a mountain, and just as a first-time pilgrim’s description of the Ka’ba would differ greatly between the time when he is still behind the mountains surrounding it and when he can see the Ka’ba with his own eyes, reality appears differently to us.

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560 L1.17. See also L2.262 for a similar image.
depending on where we are. Moreover, not only is it possible for more than one account of reality as perceived according to particular stations to be simultaneously true, for ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt it is also possible for some accounts to be more true than others, just as we would say that the eye-witness account of the Ka’ba is more correct than the statement ‘it is the structure behind those mountains towards which I am headed.’

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s ontologies also help us to understand his conception of wayfaring in another way: the logic behind the third ontology, which expresses the need for some kind of mediation between the Divine Essence and creation, also explains why the relationship between an individual and God should consist of a successive progression of multiple stages or stations. Since the intensity of the Light of the Divine Essence would burn up all other than itself if it were not veiled by the Divine Attributes, there is no way for a created entity to know God without an intermediary:

My dear! When the Sun manifests will the full perfection of its illumination, the lover has no nourishment or pleasure (ḥazz) from it. And when it manifests itself within clouds, [the lover] finds no rest (qarār) or satiation. Hear it from Mustafa, upon him be peace, when he says, “God has seventy thousand veils of light and darkness; if they were lifted the Glories (subuhāt) of His Face would burn the vision of all who apprehend Him…”

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The lover, or the wayfarer, is depicted here as being in a lose-lose situation. If God manifests Himself without a veil as he desires, the lover’s vision - and indeed his very existence - is burned up and nothing is gained. But a true lover cannot be satisfied by the separation implied by a mediated and limited encounter with the Beloved. It thus seems impossible for the lover to ever enjoy union. Nevertheless, it is from this seemingly intractable situation that the need for wayfaring arises, as ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt declares: “Alas! Do you know why all these veils were placed on the way?

561 T, 102.
In order that the vision of the lover should day by day become ripened, until he gains the capability to bear the encounter with God without a veil.”

For ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, the necessity of wayfaring thus arises from the nature of the cosmos and our place within it. Thus, just as in the context of the third ontology veiling was explained to be the necessary condition for the existence of the world, the veils also condition the journey of the lover towards the unveiled Source. The veiling of the Divine Reality was thus a merciful act that made both creation and the return to God possible. “My dear! What would you say about the Sun, which knew that no lover can ever derive nourishment from it when it shines at full intensity? Was its creation of veils and its becoming veiled not pure compassion and mercy?”

Diverse Aspects of the Stations of the Way

The descriptions that we have considered so far, including images of sunlight, vision, and the successive lifting of veils, have emphasize the noetic aspects of the diverse waystations; the further one travels on the Way the more one knows and the closer one is to the Source of Being. But ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt also describes the stations of the way from other points of view, each of which fills out our picture of how he understands them.

The ethical significance of the stations of the Way is brought to the fore in a letter in which ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt meditates on the great similarities between Quranic descriptions of the prophets on the one hand and of ‘the reverent’ (muttaqīn) on the other. He draws the conclusion from these similarities that it must be the latter group, namely those who possess virtues similar to the Prophet,

562 T, 104.
563 L2.84.
who must be deemed the true ‘heirs of the Prophet’ (warathat al-anbiyā’). This term was contested by various groups claiming to represent religious authority, and most often associated, in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s time at least, with the scholars of jurisprudence. For ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, however, ‘the reverent’, and hence the ‘heirs’, are none other than the wayfarers.

But, as ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt continues his explanation, it becomes clear that ‘the reverent’ are not a homogenous group. Just as the inheritors of worldly possessions receive differing portions of the wealth of the deceased, various wayfarers receive a share of the prophetic virtues based on their station. For ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, as for many authors who have preceded him including Sanā‘ī, wayfaring may thus be conceptualized as a journey of the successive acquisition of virtue. Given that different individuals are at different stages of the journey, some wayfarers have attained prophetic patience (“and its associated sciences”), whereas others have gained gratitude, trust or asceticism.

Although this associations of the stations of the way with virtues is common in Sufi writings, it is particularly noteworthy that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s expression of the acquisition of the virtues is inseparable from the acquisition of knowledge, to the extent that they appear as two sides of the same coin; to possess a vice is to be veiled and to gain a virtue is also to have a veil lifted:

What are this world and the veils, I mean lust, anger, envy, malice, love of wealth and status, ostentation, and all the other blameworthy character traits? For ‘those who turn away’ (mudbirān) they are causes for them to know nothing of the Sun,

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567 The term mudābir is Quranic, meaning ‘turning away’, often signifying one who flees from the revelation (e.g. Q. 30:52). The term muqbil means ‘to turn towards’, thus indicating one who accepts the revelation. However, it also has the sense of ‘being successful’. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt seems to be using this pair in both senses
so they will remain behind in the darkness of their turning away for all eternity. And for ‘those who turn towards’ (muqbilān) they are occasions for them to acquire virtues, to see the Sun in different veils, until the time that their eyes become mature and can tolerate the burden of the meeting with God without veils. This is a perfect exposition for you, if you can hear.\

However, the significance of the waystations does not end here. The acquisition of virtue and knowledge also possesses an experiential aspect. To begin with, the wayfarer gains the ability to experience a far wider range of emotions than those who have not set out on the journey, for “The sorrow and happiness of this Way are extensive, and they cannot be written. There are many thousands of types of happiness, and many thousands of types of sadness, and many thousands of types of fear, and many thousands of types of hope; and likewise asceticism, trust, contentment, submission and love are of thousands of types.”\

Indeed, those who travel a certain distance on the Way will see its inexpressible realities ever manifesting in diverse forms of beauty. For ‘Ayn al-Qudāt, this ever-new experience of the Beauty of the Divine Beloved is only adequately expressed through verse. The following two quatrains are particularly indicative on this point:

Every day, from your love, I’m in another state,
And from your fairness am I bound in another beauty.
You are another perfection of the sign of fairness,
And I another perfection of the sign of love.\

O why in face and hair and tress are you in every moment a different way?
Sometimes you are an amber chain, sometimes a polo-stick of musk.
Why are you every forging mail, when you’re not David the mail-maker?

simultaneously, since turning towards the Divine Message leads to felicity whereas turning away leads to wretchedness.

568 L2.84-5.
569 L1.74.
570 See T, 123-4.
571 L2.320.
Why are you ever tying knots, when you’re not Aaron the charm-speaker?572

Just as we saw in *The Journey of the Servants* for Sanā‘ī, in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings the idea of journeying along the Way to God acts as a synthetic mode of thinking about inner cultivation. This journey is by nature multi-dimensional, involving the cultivation of virtue and knowledge and the expanding of the capacity to experience beauty and the emotions as the wayfarer travels through the veils separating him from God.

**Constant Wayfaring**

Given that the stations of the Way, along with their accompanying virtues, insights and experiences, are known by realization, i.e non-propositional knowledge, and given the fact that the wayfarer is veiled from all stations beyond the one he or she has reached, it is impossible to really know what lies ahead. The awareness of one’s limitations is a crucial characteristic of the wayfarer, as ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt reminds his reader of throughout the *Letters*; it is only by realizing what one does not possess that one finds the aspiration to continue to struggle forward on the Way, for, “The sign of aspiration (ḥimmāt) is that one never look at what is attained and present, but all of one’s attention be limited (maqṣūr) to what one does not have…”573

This combined function of humility and aspiration is particularly important within ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s conception of wayfaring, for he explains that the only thing that can really stop a wayfarer on the journey is to become satisfied with the limited gains that have already been made. To stop in Kufa without reaching the Ka’ba, as it were, is the quintessential mistake on the Way, for “if someone makes a [permanent] residence of a waystation his path is blocked.”574

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572 L3.314.
573 L1.212.
574 L2.262.
thought generally emphasizes satisfaction with the minimum of worldly possessions, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt is careful to point out that “Satisfaction with little (qinā‘a) in religion is forbidden.” The wayfarer must be constantly seeking an increase in his or her attainment, reaching a different waystation each and every day, and should constantly sing:

O camel driver, take not thy stop
Save in the dwelling place of my beloved.

The necessity of not overestimating the value of what one has attained so far actually makes it more difficult for both scholars of the religious sciences and those who have had powerful spiritual experiences to travel on the path; they are more prone to thinking that what they have already achieved, whether it be extensive theoretical knowledge or paranormal abilities, is a sign that they have attained felicity and have no further need of search or effort.

Rather than being content with a particular view of reality and a particular code of action that can be applied universally, the wayfarer must live by the doctrine, “The Sufi is the son of his moment; in every breath he says and does what is.” This code of conduct is both a blessing and a curse. It is a blessing because one is constantly encountering wonders that are inconceivable to those “satisfied with eating and drinking.” But it is a curse, because one lacks the security that fixed perspectives and practices bring with them. Indeed, living by the moment is one of the many aspects of the Way that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt sees to be a source of great hardship and almost unbearable

575 L2.182.
576 Cf. L1.478, in which ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt cites an adage: ‘If two days of someone are equal, then he is faulty (magḥbūn).’
577 L2.307.
578 For the first group see ZH, 5-6 and L3.376. For the second, see in particular ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s discussion of ‘the little Baghdadi girl’ (dukhtarak-i Baghdādī) who possesses the ability to read people’s minds but as a result is most likely blocked from seeking greater proximity to God. See for example L2.457.
579 L2.357. For a more detailed account of the different courses of action that are necessitated for different wayfarers and different stations, see L1.440-1. See also T, 314.
580 L1.388
suffering, a suffering however that the wayfarer gladly accepts, for “If you become able to see the transformation of the moment you will become a point of pain and will become all bewilderment from head to foot.”

It is with this hardship in mind that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt expresses the elite status of the wayfarers in comparison to those who have taken up residence and discontinued their journey by quoting the following quatrain:

Come in with me, O love, to the work if you can,
And if not, go in peace, for you are wasting your time.
You are not my companion, so take your own way and go.
May you have health, and may I be overturned.

**Teaching the Ever-Changing Path**

The diverse aspects of the Way, the unveiling of spiritual vision, the acquisition of virtue, the expanding of experience and the recognition of appropriate action, are deeply interrelated in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s thought, expressing multiple dimensions on the process of spiritual cultivation. This multi-dimensional diversity ultimately has its root in the Divine Nature, for “God, exalted be He, has a thousand and one Names, and He manifests in a thousand ways for each Name, and each type of manifestation is the cause of a particular state in the wayfarer, and each state brings about in him a different point (nukta) and action.”

Since God is a Unity of Plenitude, simultaneously too vast and too unified for any single theological account or affective response to be sufficient, the only correct human response to God is to move towards Him, setting out on the journey that leads through the stations of the Way.

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581 L3.319.
582 L2.104; T, 15.
583 L1.74.
Again, to avoid this necessary movement, and to think and act in a fixed way towards God results from a metaphysical mistake, and a misunderstanding of the relation of the finite to the Infinite. As such, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt warns his readers: “Beware that you should not be one of those about whom the Quran says and among the people are those who worship God upon a word (ḥarf), (Q, 22:11) i.e. upon a single aspect (wajh).” The journey towards God is itself a movement through different modes of worshipping Him, necessitated by the immensity of His Nature.

But in addition to adapting itself to the ever-changing Way, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s spiritual instruction also takes full account of the diversity of the needs of different readers. If progress on the Way can be considered the healing of the illnesses of the heart, spiritual teaching will have to take different forms depending on the particular ailment and constitution of the patient. Without understanding this, it is impossible to make sense of the diversity, and even apparent contradiction, between the various forms of spiritual guidance found in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings. In this regard, he explains,

And an example of all that I have said is this: that a group of patients get up and visit a physician, seeking their cure. The physician gives them each different prescriptions in order to relieve their ailments. If someone were to say, this difference of prescriptions is from the physician’s ignorance, he has spoken incorrectly and the ignorant one is the speaker himself, for this difference of prescriptions has occurred from the difference of diseases. So diseases are various, and to give the prescription for one disease for all diseases would be severe ignorance and error. Those who know what is being said, themselves know.

The diversity of cures that are appropriate for different illnesses and for patients with different constitutions means that not every teaching is for everyone. Regarding his own writings, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt warns one addressee against dismissing the importance of the letter at hand simply

584 L3.429.
because he has derived no immediate benefit from it, “For not everything that is not appropriate for those with a hot constitution is not appropriate for those with a humid constitution.”

But ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt also considers this characteristic of his own writings to be equally true of the Quran, which here appears as the ultimate manual of the Way, for “In the Quran news has been given of all the stations: We have neglected nothing in the Book. (SQ, 6:38)” Indeed, for ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt the majority of the teachings and verses of the Quran are precisely different kinds of medicine that have different applications, depending on the temperament and specific needs of the wayfarer. This understanding of the Quran is another important argument for the superiority of masters of the Way over most of the exoteric scholars, who are usually seen as the experts of the Quran. For it requires a true physician, namely the prophets and their inheritors, to be able to make use of the pharmacy (khazāna) of the Quran, applying bitter fear-inducing verses and sweet hope inducing verses as differing conditions require.

Here again we see that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s thought draws correspondences between phenomena that seem unrelated. To begin with, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings are similar to the Quran in that they both contain diverse teachings or medicines that serve different purposes on the Way, which is the most important human concern. Moreover, both ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings and the Quran itself mirror the layered nature of reality, expressed in his thought as stations on the Way or levels of veiling of the wayfarer from God. Discussing the final and culminating chapter of the Tamhīdāt, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt declares that,

In this chapter (tamhīd) we have traversed several thousand stations, and from every world we have brought a quintessence in the clothing of symbols (rumūz) to the world

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586 L2.461.
587 L1.233.
of writing. It is clear what can be brought from that world to this world: a gulp from the cup of 'nay but this much is a drop from ocean depths, nay but it is a ray from the Sun.'

Likewise, the Quran is also an expression of the different levels of reality, for “In each of the worlds of God [and behind each veil] they call the Quran by a particular name, calling it no other name in that world.” As the Quran descends through the veils that separate God and the world, its various aspects are revealed to those who dwell behind each veil. Since the Way involves the retracing of this path back to God, the inner meanings of the Quran are thus accessible behind each particular veil.

Given the correspondences between reality and linguistic expression, the same logic that describes the multidimensional nature of wayfaring and the spiritual path discussed above also applies to both ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings and to the Quran. Both are expressions of plenary unity, which must be interpreted through a movement through multiple points of view, rather than attempting exhaustive explanation from a single standpoint. It is for this reason that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt cautions his readers:

Alas! ‘Speak to the people according to the capacity of their intellects,’ is perfect advice. But in these pages some things are said that are not meant for you, dear friend. Rather there are other lovers (mulḥibbān), who are not present at the time of writing. There must be a share for them also, so that you do not suppose that you are the sole object (maqṣūd). For whoever hears something which is not his station and is not within the capacity of his understanding, he does not apprehend it or consider it probable. Dear friend, do you suppose that the Majestic Quran is addressed to one group, or a hundred groups, or a hundred thousand? Rather, each verse, and each letter, is an address to one person, and the object is another person, or rather another world. Each line of what has been written in these pages is a different station and state, and each word has a different object and intent. It is a different address to each seeker, such that what is said to Zayd is not what is said to ‘Amr, and that which Khalid sees, Bakr, for example, does not see.

\[589\] T, 309. 
\[590\] T, 174. 
\[591\] T, 6.
‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s reflections on the nature of his own writing suggest some of the difficulties inherent in interpreting his thought. It is impossible to make sense of the bewildering diversity of perspectives presented in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings without understanding that they are presented in accordance with his understanding of wayfaring, the fundamental paradigm within which he thinks. The diversity of his teachings thus reflect not only the diverse stations of the Way, but also the diverse aspects of each station and the diverse characteristics of potential readers.

**Writing from the Moment**

Many of the passages we have looked at so far such as explanations of the Way, logical enumerations of ontologies, and reflections on writing and teaching suggest very sober and self-aware processes of thought and composition. However, this only reflects one side of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s personality. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings, particularly the *Tamhīdāt* and many of the *Letters*, also reveal a creative process that is as dynamic and spontaneous as poetry. Indeed, it is poetry, so often used to encapsulate a teaching which prose cannot quite seem to do justice, that often occasions a shift in the tempo and character of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s composition. Indeed, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s aesthetic and spiritual responses to the verses he cites or composes regularly occasion an ecstatic outpouring.592

Letter 95 includes a paradigmatic example of this type of transition. In the middle of a logical exposition of why there may be multiple answers to questions such as ‘Can character traits be changed?’ and ‘Is the name identical with the named?’ ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt expressed his frustration with rational analysis: “Until when with the alphabets of beginners? Let the name be identical to the named or let it be different, and let character traits be changeable or not!”

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592 We have already seen an example of this process in Letter 3. On ecstatic utterances in Sufism see Carl Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy*. 
He then turns to poetry, to give voice to his exasperation with the duality that is implied by sober discourse:

For the one who needs your lips, what benefit is sugar?

Another love in place of yours, what benefit is there?

Bring the one who brings the hearts of friends near,

And like a crocodile, gulps down the sorrow of our souls.

Until when will we waste our lives?”

Pages of poetry follow, each expressing subtle allusions to ecstatic states, until finally ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt declares that, “Since the boat has capsized in the ocean, discernment has departed!” Despite this statement, however, the letter does indeed soon return to a sober tone, as ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt continues the discussion that he had put on hold.

Passages such as this show us that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt is himself deeply involved in the processes of continuous movement that he considers to be at the core of wayfaring. Although his letters begin by considering the needs of a particular addressee, on many occasions his own state and its requirements take over the creative process. Sometimes it seems there is nothing that he can do about this, that he is being cast here and there like a polo-ball (gūy) by the polo-stick (chawgān) of the Divine Will. At other times, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt expresses more control over his writing, yet is nonetheless compelled by his spiritual condition to discuss a particular topic, which appears to him as the only way to relieve his burdened mind; for “what benefit is purging by laxatives for those who need to be purged by bloodletting (fasd)?”

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings, particularly the Tamhūdāt and the Letters, thus represent a kind of ebb (jazr) and flow (madd), or a series of transitions between day and night, images that he himself

593 L2.321.
595 See L1.282.
596 L2.248.
uses to express the states conditioning his teaching process. In states of spiritual and mental clarity, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt can lay out his teachings in an orderly fashion, taking account of the needs and abilities of his specific addressee. But when the night draws in and his intellect becomes veiled by ecstasy, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt seems to lose control of his pen and to utter mystical secrets that it would ordinarily be improprietary, or even illicit, to give voice to. As he explains, “Whatever I have written in this and other letters is all from taste, save a few examples heard and transmitted… And how could I ever have the courage to explain the Disconnected Letters…? But when I am writing this comes up and I am compelled to write, and it is as if should I want not to write I cannot.”

Part of the reason for the unsystematic nature of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings, as he himself explains, is that he is involved in the movement characteristic of the wayfarer, which demands that he relinquish his individual will to the dictates of the moment:

...I speak as it comes, and of what I am given I too lay the quintessence on the spread of writing. And order cannot be observed; because the traveling wayfarer - if he becomes colored and remains in that coloration - is stopped and becomes stationary, and speaking is the veil of his Way...Since I see myself hidden I have no choice in what I say. That which is chosen by the moment is written, ‘and God prevails over his affair,’ (Q, 12:21) that is, over the affair of his servants.

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s expressions of his own movement through the diverse states and stations on the Way throughout his writings enact his own doctrine that the Way involves the movement between diverse perspectives. This doctrine, as we have seen, is grounded in an understanding of the Way that is multidimensional and synthetic. The correct interpretation of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings therefore requires that we bear in mind this paradigm, and endeavor to situate each of

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597 See for example See L3.282 and L3.358. The symbolism of day and night representing sobriety and drunkenness persists throughout the classical Persian literary tradition. For a late 19th century example see Nicholas Boylston “Speaking the Secrets of Sanctity in the Ṭafsīr of Ṣafī ‘Alī Shāh,” Approaches to the Qur’an in Contemporary Iran, ed. Alessandro Cancian, Oxford University Press, forthcoming.
598 L2.308.
599 T, 18-19.
‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s statements in relation to the perspective at hand conditioned by this movement. This task applies equally to understanding his conception of the Way itself, which as we shall see is also conceptualized from multiple points of view, or ‘sub-paradigms’.

**The Diverse Sub-Paradigms of the Way**

From the metaphysics underlying ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s understanding of the Way as the motion of the finite towards the Infinite through stages that cannot be correctly known before they are reached and which cannot be properly communicated using discursive thought, it follows that no single complete account of the Way is possible. The realities of the Way will always exceed the possibilities of expression. In accordance with this metaphysics, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt does not present the kind of schematization that one finds in some earlier Sufi works, for (though pedagogically useful) these tend to oversimplify the complexity of the Way. Indeed, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt makes it explicit that the Way is different for each wayfarer:

Alas! What sign can be given of inner states and ways of going (rawish)? But you may have known yourself that ways of going are not of one aspect; that is, the way of going of every goer is of a different type, and the states of his wayfaring and advancement are different from others…

So the people of wayfaring have so many stations and ways of going that it is not possible to encompass and enumerate them. ‘And none knows its interpretation save God’ (SQ, 3:7) here is an explanation of ‘And none knows the hosts of thy Lord but He.’ (SQ, 74:31)

In place of a single systematic account of the stations of the Way, in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings we actually find a number of different explanations of the Way that appear complete in themselves. As we have seen regarding other aspects of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s thought, his response to

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600 Such as Anṣārī’s *Manāzīl al-Sā‘īrīn.*
601 T, 351. Cf. L2.117, which explains that the Way is both knowledge and action, but the ways are innumerable.
realities that he considers too vast for adequate linguistic expression is not to remain silent, but to attempt as many different approaches to explanation as possible. By considering several of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s approaches to explaining what the Way is, what its stages are, and how progress is made, we may gain a far richer picture of what he actually means by wayfaring, whilst also showing the interconnections between many aspects of his thought. Moreover, these investigations bring to light the remarkable richness of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s explanations of the spiritual life, which seems unprecedented in Sufi literature before him.

I suggest that we can organize a great many of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s teachings according to specific sub-paradigms of the Way that emerge in his writings. These sub-paradigms each represent a coherent set of perspectives on the meaning of wayfaring possessing its own internal logic that differs from the other sub-paradigms. Indeed, each sub-paradigm contains its own approach to themes such as cosmology, psychology, spiritual method and the goal of the Way. In what follows we will consider several of the most salient sub-paradigms of the Way in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings.

**The Way Within**

The imagery of wayfaring makes the task of the wayfarer seem more or less external, as if directed towards a goal that is somewhere out there, beyond where the wayfarer is now, such as paradise, or God considered as transcendent. One of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s most important sub-paradigms of wayfaring deliberately counteracts these implications. As such, he explains, “Finding the Way is obligatory, but the Way of God, exalted be He, is not on earth nor in heaven… The

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602 These ‘sub-paradigms’ of wayfaring are not always expressed in isolation from each other, and in the course of his teachings he is apt to move between them. However, insofar as they present different answers to the question of the nature of wayfaring they are separable, so we will artificially separate them for the purposes of analysis.
Way of God is within you… The seekers of God seek Him in themselves, for He is in the heart and the heart is within them.”

Conceived of as an internal journey, this sub-paradigm of the Way leads to a conception of the world within, drawing on the idea of the correspondence of the macrocosm and the microcosm. Thus, “It will cause you to wonder, that God has created within you all that is in heaven and earth. Whatever He has created in the Tablet, the Pen and in paradise, He has also created its likeness within you and in your substance. Whatever is within the Divine world, has made its reflection manifest in your Spirit (jān).”

But within this inner world, there is a single entity or spiritual organ that is all important: the heart.

Seek the heart! For the provision of this Way is the heart… Do you know how the heart is attained? By wayfaring. If you want proof hear it from the Quran: ‘Have they not journeyed upon the earth, that they might have hearts?’ (SQ, 22:46)...” Does He intend travel from one city to another? Nay! This is ‘Have they not journeyed upon the earth’…? (SQ, 30:9). This is, ‘And the foremost shall be the foremost.’ (SQ, 56:10) This is, ‘Truly I am going unto my Lord.’ (SQ, 37:99) This is, ‘So flee unto God.’ (SQ, 51:50)

In addition to a conception of the landscape of the inner world, this sub-paradigm also suggests a particular plan of action leading to progress, namely “the Way of the action of the heart.” Ayn al-Quḍāt clarifies the nature of this action of the heart by explaining why Hell is traditionally said to possess seven doors, whereas paradise has eight:

The beginning of the effort of the wayfarers of the Presence of Lordship is to close the seven gates of Hell to themselves… Do you know what the seven gates of Hell are? Your seven limbs, which take you to Hell…And it is these very limbs that bring you to paradise. But the gates of paradise are eight. Seven are these limbs and the eighth is the heart, for one can reach paradise by the heart but not Hell, and the infidels no not have hearts, such that because of them it should be possible to reach

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603 T, 286-7.
604 T, 287.
606 T, 6.
Hell by way of the heart...Paradise is for the reverent (muttaqīn), and the locus of reverence (taqwā) is the heart...607

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s discussions of the Way within also contain a philosophy of how spiritual progress occurs, which here appears as a gradual process of ‘acquaintance with the inward’ that is conditioned by a great many factors, both seen and unseen. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt thus explains that “Acquaintance with the inward comes about gradually, just like the ripening of fruit or the whitening of black hair, or human height and width, with time...”608 This acquaintance has terrestrial and celestial causes, which include the practice of physical rites and the cultivation of virtues (respectively), and is also aided by companionship with the Friends of God, by which one begins to take on their characteristics.609

The sub-paradigm of the Way within also includes an important account of the nature of the Afterlife, which is here conceived of in terms of the inward journey. After stating that the only thing worth spending one’s life in pursuit of is eternal felicity, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains in one letter that,

this world and the Hereafter are contained within the human soul (nafs-i ādamī). ‘This world’ (dunyā, literally meaning ‘lower’ or ‘nearer’) means ‘outside the veil of the soul’, and ‘the Hereafter’ (ākhirat, ‘the last’) means ‘within the veil of one’s soul’. Paradise is within this veil, for ‘No one shall enter paradise until the camel passes through the eye of the needle.’ If you want to know, seek until you know yourself by which way a person can pass through this veil... You must perform wayfaring in order to find a way within the veil, such that you will know what is ‘two bow’s length.’ (SQ, 53:9)610

The sub-paradigm we have named ‘the Way within’ itself contains a spiritual cosmology, psychology, eschatology and plan of action that are based on a similar logic and are coherent with each other. As such, the Way within itself presents the Way in its totality. However, the vastness of

607 L1.395-6.
608 L1.471.
610 L2.127-8. The reference to Q, 53:9 shows that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt considers the journey of the wayfarer within his or her own soul to parallel the Prophet’s celestial ascent (mi’rāj) to the Divine Presence.
the Way itself means that its realities and the possibilities of spiritual instruction are not exhausted by a single sub-paradigm, and indeed ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings add many other perspectives on the Way that also contain their own inner logic.

**The Way of Thanksgiving**

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s discussions of thanksgiving and gratitude (*shukr*) provide us with another sub-paradigm of the Way, giving a different explanation of the nature of wayfaring and a new correlation of various instructions and insights. The central problematic of this sub-paradigm is the question of how it is possible to properly thank or praise God, a recurring motif in Islamic spirituality that can be traced back to the Prophet’s own admission of his incapacity to do so.⁶¹¹ After all, the Quran commands *Remember God’s blessing upon you* (ṣQ, 5:11, 33:9, 35:3) and the beginning of every cycle of the canonical prayer the words *Praise be to God* (ṣQ, 1:2). ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt thus admonishes his readers that if one is unable to state these words sincerely, to truly give gratitude to God, one is a liar and is incapable of properly accomplishing this central Islamic rite.⁶¹²

By focusing on this problem, the task of wayfaring becomes the task of learning how to give true thanksgiving. For ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, since every limb and faculty that a human possesses has been bestowed by God, the correct way to give thanks for these gifts is to use them in order to attain felicity. Indeed, God has given each of these limbs and faculties to us for this reason alone. According to this logic, it is thus only by seeking our own felicity that we can use our faculties in such a way as leads to God’s satisfaction (*rida*).⁶¹³

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⁶¹¹ In the hadith, “We have not known Thee as Thou deserve to be known, and we have not worshipped Thee as Thou deserve to be worshipped.”

⁶¹² See L1.447.

⁶¹³ See L1.365, L2.399-401.
However, despite the difficulty of truly giving thanks, there is a more hopeful side to ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s teachings on this topic. Given that there is a causal chain of events and actors that have led to one’s ability to give thanks, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt infers that to use one’s faculties and gifts to reach God amounts to giving thanks for everything that went into producing those gifts. For example, by using ink for God’s satisfaction, such as by writing letters instructing in the Way to God, one has given thanks for the ink itself but also for all of the components that produced the ink and all those who had a part in its production.614 Such gratitude in action thus connects one to the ontological network of creation, imbuing it with new meaning:

…Every action and non-action that you do is not independent of the existence of all existents in the heavens and the earth, the early and heavenly angels and the bearers of the Throne, in that action or non-action. If it is with His satisfaction you have given thanks for all blessings, and the whole of existence has been a cause for you to take one step further in the Way of God…This is the very meaning that Muṣṭafā, upon him be peace, said, ‘The folk of heaven and earth feel mercy for whoever does an act of devotion…’ And ‘The folk of the heavens and the earth curse the sinner.’615

In terms of what actually constitutes using what one has in the service of God, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt highlights three types of thanksgiving:

1. Thanksgiving of the heart, which is to know Him as the Giver of Blessings, and whoever does not know this is unthankful (kāfir); 2. Thanksgiving of the limbs, which is to use them for His satisfaction, in order that this should make you reach the perfection of success in religion; and 3. Thanksgiving through wealth, which is also to spend it for His satisfaction…616

But ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt also explains that each of the five pillars of Islam constitutes its own type of thanksgiving, which is made good through faith.617

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614 L2.401.
615 L2.402.
616 L1.261. This aspect of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s conception of gratitude is similar to that described by al-Qushayrī in al-Risāla. See al-Qushayrī, Al-Qushayri’s Epistle on Sufism, 189-10.
617 See L1.368.
The sub-paradigm of thanksgiving leads all the way from these considerations of all ritual actions and attitudes to some of the most exalted spiritual attainments. Taking a different approach to the problem of giving due thanks, ‘Ayn al-Qudāt does suggest at times that it is impossible for the servant to truly thank the Lord. It is only God Who can make up for this deficiency, for only He knows all the blessings He has bestowed. As a result, it is only by becoming annihilated in God’s own thanksgiving that the servant can fulfill his obligation: “One of the Names of God is ‘the Thankful’ (al-Shakūr). He thanks you for the blessings He has given you and says, ‘What an excellent servant! Truly he turned oft [unto God].’ (SQ, 38:30; 38:44) Nay He thanks Himself in your place, for you don’t know the value of His blessing to give thanks. He thanks Himself by Himself, so He is the Thankful.”

The problem of thanksgiving thus leads to the stations of annihilation in God and subsistence through God, for:

When the wayfarer becomes sighted to this royal gift (khal’at), as much as he sees thanksgiving to be obligatory for him, he knows himself to be incapable of giving thanks for this blessing…so when he sees himself erased amidst Praise be to God… the call is sounded in from the world of Divinity that ‘We will thank Ourselves in your place, and We will consider Our thanksgiving in place of yours…’ Alas, have you not heard that a great man said because of this, I have thanked my Lord by my Lord… Someone can appreciate these words to whom has been shown I have known my Lord by my Lord.

Through the various components of his teachings on thanksgiving, ‘Ayn al-Qudāt thus presents an entire account of the Way. This account begins from the wayfarer’s initial recognition that fulfilling even the simplest of religious obligations requires wayfaring, through the endeavor to use all of one’s being in the service of God, and culminating in annihilation in Divine Thanksgiving itself.

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618 L1.260.
619 T, 245-6.
The Way of Love

As we have seen, love is one of the most important terms in the flowering of Sufi literature in the 12th century. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt clearly falls within the ‘school of love’ (madhhab-i ʾishq), and his teachings on this topic show clear influence from his master, Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, whose influence is particularly evident in the sixth chapter of the Tanhīdāt. Given the complexity of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s teachings on Love, a complete exposition of this topic would require an independent study in itself. Our purpose here, however, is to simply highlight certain aspects of his teachings that show how the entire Way is conceptualized by ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt in terms of Love. This makes it an important sub-paradigm of the Way in his thought.

As we shall see in the following chapter, the status of the spiritual master plays a crucial role in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s thought. However, although ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt usually emphasizes the need for a human spiritual master to provide guidance on the Way, at certain points in his writings Love itself appears as the ultimate guide.

Love will do with you whatever must be done, be patient.
Be a disciple! Love is a sufficient teacher for you.

Love is thus so central to the spiritual life that it can even play the central role of guidance in the life of the wayfarer. However, true Love in this sense is not accessible to everyone. Indeed, as is clear from human experience, one cannot even choose to fall in love. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the wayfarer should sit idly waiting to be overtaken by Love. Rather, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains that it is a ‘tradition of Pre-Eternity’ (sumnat-i azal) that “Whoever seeks and is serious, finds.”

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620 Unlike Sanāʾī, in almost all cases it is clear that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt is interested in Divine Love, so it is more appropriate to capitalize this term.
621 Compare ʿAḥmad al-Ghazālī’s conception of the Way in terms of love in Lumbard, Ahmad al-Ghazālī, 174-84.
622 L2.29.
(Man ṭalaḥa wa jadda waqada). As such, though Love is not attainable by one’s own efforts one can “keep the snare of seeking ever set,” making oneself ready for Love, “for [setting the snare of seeking] contains the suspicion of free-will, until it may be that the bird of Love falls into your snare. And this falling is not by free-will...When the bird of Love falls into the snare, *one will never be wretched after it...* and whoever is not His lover does not worship Him.”

This last phrase shows that in addition to the guiding effect of Love, it is also intimately connected with the most important doctrinal teaching of Islam. Love is intimately related to *tawḥīd*, the profession of Divine Unity, for Love requires that one seek God alone. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains this relationship through an analogy, for although the Sun can illumine the whole world, the seeker only receives sunlight when he or she turns towards it completely. The true professor of *tawḥīd* is therefore one who has turned towards God wholeheartedly.

As with the other sub-paradigms that we have examined, all aspects of the Way take on a particular significance within this sub-paradigm of Love, which is one of the most important themes in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings. In particular, the sixth chapter of the *Talhīdāt* presents a multi-dimensional engagement with the reality of love. Here Love is presented as ‘obligatory for the Way’ (*fard-i rāḥ*), a deliberate reapplication of legal terminology, since no one can reach God without Love. But Love is also the metaphysical basis of reality, revealed to all humans when they made the pact of *Alast* in Pre-Eternity before being veiled by the levels of creation. Indeed, though Love is an accident of the Divine Substance, it is the very substance of lover, hence providing the ontological link between humanity and God.

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623 L2.469.
624 L2.30. In this passage ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt goes on to explain that while only God can be loved for His own sake, many things can be loved in a secondary way, for God’s sake.
625 T, 96.
626 T, 106.
627 T, 112-3.
As ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains in this chapter, the stages of the Way are also to be conceived of in terms of Love, as the wayfarer progresses through lesser, intermediate and greater Love. Indeed, for ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt the whole of the spiritual path is found described in the Quran in the best love-story ever told, the story of Joseph, which can only be properly interpreted by those who have experienced Love.

It is also in terms of Love that the highest mysteries of the Way can be expressed. These mysteries become intelligible to the wayfarer when the two halves of the Quranic verse *He loves them and they love Him* (Q, 5:54) come into intimate discourse without intermediary. At this point, the wayfarer attains annihilation in God, for Love implies the loss of self; in union there can only be one. Again, like thanksgiving, the servant finds him or herself to be ultimately incapable of Love of God, so the Love of God must work in the servant on his behalf.

Ultimately, however, Love is inexpressible, and only a lover understands what Love truly is:

Love is veiled, of it no one has ever given an indication,

Until when will these lovers spout such pointless prattle?

Each person prattles about love from his own supposition,

Love is empty of supposition, and from this and from that.

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628 T, 101-2. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s ontological conception of love shows the particular influence of his master Ahmad al-Ghazālī. On this aspect of the latter’s thought see Lumbard, *Ahmad al-Ghazālī*, 151-84.

629 See L1.366-8, and L2.130.

630 See T, 124-5 and T, 128.

631 See L1.172-5.

632 See L2.243.

633 L2.217.
The Way of the Alternation of States

In contrast to the sub-paradigms discussed above, each of which considers the entire Way according to a single aspect, one of the most important of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s approaches to explaining the spiritual path centers on the necessity of the alternation between differing states. This perspective regarding the Way is explained in terms of a simple metaphysical, epistemological and psychological observation about the nature of the human state and the world we live in, an insight that closely parallels Sanā‘ī’s justification for combining serious and jocular poetry: for ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt multiplicity is crucial to the processes by which we come to understand ourselves, the world and God. As such, “If there were no illness, health would not be pleasurable; and if there were no separation from the Beloved, no one would know the pleasure of union. Things are known by their opposites.”

Just as “the breath has two parts - it cannot all be expansion,” the Way is constituted by the alternation of spiritual states, which in Sufi literature are classically categorized around two poles: expansion or bast (correlating with states such as hope, joy and union) and contraction or qabḍ (correlating with fear, sorrow and separation). For ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt it is precisely the alternation between these polarities that brings about the cultivation and maturation of the wayfarer.

Though humans, like all sentient beings, are naturally inclined to seek that which is agreeable to their nature and thus results in pleasure, the wayfarer must realize the necessity of being “cultivated by Kindness and Wrath.” Understanding that God encompasses both these

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634 3.279.
635 L2.425.
636 For a classical expression of qabḍ and bast, see Hujwīrī, The Kashf al-Mahjūb, 374-6.
637 See L1.301.
638 L1.413.
aspects, and therefore the Way towards Him will include both these poles of experience, allows the wayfarer to comprehend the place of suffering and separation on the Way.\textsuperscript{639} As such, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains that,

\begin{quote}
The Friends [of God] are cultivated by His Kindness and Wrath. Every day they become drunk a thousand times from the wine of union, and in the end are trampled and debased by separation…

Within this city Our seekers are many,

O whoever should seek Us, your end is woeful.

At Our Threshold stand a thousand gibbets,

And upon each gibbet a disciple’s head is on display.

Every day a thousand times the inner seekers of the Divine Presence respond that ‘We know that our Beloved comes with Wrath and tribulation, but we have sacrificed ourselves to His Wrath and tribulation.’\textsuperscript{640}

Ultimately, once the wayfarer understands the purpose of the alternation of the overwhelming experiences and polar modes of being that must be undergone on the path, he or she is able to gain a sense of detachment from these states, which is the basis of precisely the kind of spiritual maturity this alternation should bring about. As such, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains that although this alternation of states at first bewilders the wayfarer, eventually he realizes that the Goal is beyond both states of ‘fullness’ and ‘emptiness’ (correlates for \textit{bast} and \textit{qabḍ}), a realization that leads to his spiritual liberation:

When they empty that chivalrous youth for the sake of filling, it is all bewilderment…

Look not at the fact that this servant has become miserable,

The cup sometimes becomes empty and sometimes full.

For he has come to know that being emptied is for the sake of being filled, and being filled is for the sake of being emptied…

\textsuperscript{639} See for example L2.470.
\textsuperscript{640} T, 222-3.
O friend, don’t you know that when the cup is filled it is passed around. When the cup realizes that it is not the goal, neither in being filled nor in being emptied, it escapes this place of perishing. ‘Sovereignty belongs to God.’

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt finds a precedent for this alternation of states in the Sunna of the Prophet, who outside the obligatory fast of Ramadan preferred alternation between days of fasting and days of breaking the fast over constantly following one course of action.\textsuperscript{642} In addition to representing the ‘middle way’, namely the prophetic practice of avoiding the extremes of excessive asceticism or laxity, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt sees in this approach the integration of both action and non-action into the spiritual life: “Fast to see Him and break the fast to see Him.”\textsuperscript{643} But even more than this, the acceptance of diverse proper modes of action represents an acknowledgement of our human nature, avoiding what ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt terms ‘single-coloredness’ (yak-rangi); for it would be a mistake to try to embody a static state within this world of multiplicity. Indeed, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains that the only being that fasts continuously is God, a symbolism that signifies His independence of all else. Since they are not comparable with God, all humans should alternate.\textsuperscript{644}

The ability to move between states is thus a crucial quality of the wayfarer, and is ultimately rooted in human nature. It is this that explains the diversity found in Quranic descriptions of humanity:

This human is a wondrous being. Sometimes it is said about him, ‘You are the highest and God is with you’ (Q, 47:35), and sometimes, ‘We cast him to the lowest of the low.’ (SQ, 95:5)

You have me in this Way ever head over heels,

So that I will be unable to remove my foot from your snare.\textsuperscript{645}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[641] L2.248-9.
\item[642] See L2.244.
\item[643] A hadith quoted by ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt in T, 92.
\item[644] See T, 92.
\item[645] L2.239.
\end{footnotes}
As this passage suggests, the range of possibilities of the human condition is deeply significant for ‘Ayn al-Quḍā’t’s reading of Quran and hadith, for he sees this alternation of states manifested in numerous scriptural statements describing the Prophet’s relationship with God. Indeed, for ‘Ayn al-Quḍā’t the range of scriptural declarations about this relationship itself necessitates the interpretive perspectivism that results from an understanding of the alternation of states. Once again we see that the Quran and hadith are unintelligible for ‘Ayn al-Quḍā’t outside the paradigm of wayfaring.

The words of the Prophet demonstrate the necessity of both union and separation in the human relationship with God, and it is this alternation of states that explains why the Prophet can both say “I am the lord of the children of Adam, and it’s no boast,” and yet wish, “Would that the Lord of Muhammad had not created Muhammad.” Likewise, it is in light of this alternation that the Quran states, Say, ‘I am only a human being like you,’ (SQ, 18:110, 41:6) and yet also affirms that Whosoever obeys the Messenger obeys God. (SQ, 4:80)

Within these scriptural statements ‘Ayn al-Quḍā’t finds and expression of the intimacy of God’s Love for Muhammad, which demands a far more complex interaction than that which can be understood by the intellect alone. Indeed, ‘Ayn al-Quḍā’t himself weaves these scriptural passages into a discourse from God to the Prophet, a discourse that epitomizes the necessity of the alternation of states on the Way:

O Muhammad, you seek ease, and We want from you bewilderment. O Muhammad, you want to complete your account with Us and sit in a corner; and

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646 ‘Ayn al-Quḍā’t discusses this hadith at length in Letters 85-92 (L2.2197-266). See for example, L2.212: “Know, O friend: Those who said, ‘That I be taken apart by a saw is more beloved to me that that I should say about something that has happened, “Would that it had not…,”’ were in the state of contentment (ridā); and there are several stations that necessitate such words. But there are other stations that necessitate that they say, “Would that I had not been created,” and “Would that the people had not disobeyed God.” And explaining these and those stations in detail is of little use for you. But I considered it important to write this much, that the cooling of your breast might result.”

We desire that in each breath there be a hundred thousand types of account between Us.

‘If We see you happy, We say, ‘Rejoice not! Verily God does not love the rejoicers.’”
(Q, 28:76) ‘Verily God loves every sorrowing heart.’ And if you become sad, We say ‘We know that thy breast is straitened.’ (SQ, 15:97)...

Conclusion: Human Diversity and Wayfaring

The sub-paradigms we have considered above by no means exhaust ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s diverse approaches to explaining the Way. They do however provide us with a useful picture of how ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt approaches the explanation of a reality that is in itself too rich and too multi-faceted to be exhaustively explained from one perspective. Indeed, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s approach to explaining the Way reflects his understanding of the Way itself, which is composed of multiple mutually illuminating yet potentially contradictory perspectives on God, the world and humanity. In order to explain such a reality, as he puts it in a different context, “there is much to say here, and one must speak from every station (maqām).”

It is this richness of the Way that for ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains the rich diversity of human experiences and tendencies. As we saw in the previous chapter, from a metaphysical perspective the manifestation of the Divine Unity of Plenitude must lead to diversity. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains to his reader,

O dear one, when the Substance of the Principle, ‘Allah is the source (maṣdar) of existents,’ came into action through Will and Love, His Alchemy was not but: ‘He it is Who created you, so among you are disbelievers and among you are believers.’ (Q, 64:2) The difference of the colors of existents is no small matter. One of the signs of God is the difference in the creation of people. ‘And among His signs are the creation of the heavens and the earth and the variation in your tongues and colors…’ (SQ; 30:22)

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649 L2.212. See also L2.216: “Being in one station and seeing that is a narrow way...O David, you shall not find a limit to the knowledge of Me, for it has no limit.”
650 T, 181-2. See also T, 187.
As a result of this diversity inherent in the process of manifestation, though human beings are outwardly similar, our bodies hide souls and hearts that are quite different from each other, some inclining towards darkness and some towards the light.\textsuperscript{651} Just as each species of animal knows what kind of food it should eat to gain the nourishment it requires, human hearts also gravitate to that which accords with their nature.\textsuperscript{652} Like birds who always return to their nests, some humans gravitate to the affairs of this world, some to the Hereafter, and some belong to no nest at all, longing only for the Face of God. This teaching is coyly summarized by ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt with the following quatrain:

I’ll pull at your curls and let them go on purpose,
So they should jump up and return again to the cluster.
I shall not blame it if it should return to its refuge,
For every part returns once more to the whole.\textsuperscript{653}

But despite the metaphysical roots of human diversity, from a human perspective these differences are discovered through an individual’s inclinations and aspirations, which in turn condition voluntary action. It is for this reason that Junayd states, “\textit{A man’s value is according to his aspiration (himmāt).}”\textsuperscript{654}

For those who gravitate towards the Way, it is the innate disposition of their hearts that will determine the manner of their journeying towards God. This in turn will condition their specific responses to particular stations of the Way,\textsuperscript{655} or whether they find so great an affinity with a particular station that they take up residence there and discontinue the journey.\textsuperscript{656} As such, it is in

\textsuperscript{651} See L1.307-8. On the metaphysical sources of human diversity see also ZH, 82-4.
\textsuperscript{652} See L1.319-21.
\textsuperscript{653} L3.355.
\textsuperscript{654} T, 253.
\textsuperscript{655} See for example T, 205-9 for a discussion of several groups of wayfarers.
\textsuperscript{656} See L1.321.
terms of wayfaring that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt most often categorizes the various types of human beings, and it is thus wayfaring that is the criterion of the human condition.657

Our considerations of both ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s ontologies and the paradigm of wayfaring within which the teaches have shown the importance of perspectivism for his thought. In the previous chapter we saw that for ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt reality is too rich to be exhausted by a single perspective on it. Here we have seen that the correct response to the vastness of reality, and the very purpose underlying the human condition, is to journey on the Way. But given the complexity of both the Way and the wayfarer, this task requires the ability to consider matters from multiple points of view, and to move between the perspectives afforded by the noetic, ethical, and experiential waystations. It is only by coming to terms with these diverse perspectives that the wayfarer can avoid the halting and stagnation that signifies the termination of his or her Way.

As we have seen, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s perspectivism is not just one teaching among others, but in fact conditions his very approach to teaching itself. As we shall see in the next chapter, this perspectivism bears fruit in a very particular approach to being Muslim.

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657 See for example L1.268 for a discussion of the three types of ‘real human’.
Chapter 7: Islam from the Inside Out

As we have seen, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt teachings draw on diverse aspects of the Islamic tradition. Both the Quran and hadith on the one hand, and Islamic philosophy and theology on the other, are crucial reference points in his thought. However, we have also seen that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s engagement with these sources is dynamic and creative. While he demonstrates a clear understanding of philosophy and theology as traditionally understood and has great respect for the literal words of the Quran and hadith, he often deploys these sources in unexpected ways, determined by the specific needs of his teaching.

As such, although ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt is deeply concerned with what it means to be Muslim, his understanding of ‘Islam’ and ‘being Muslim’ is quite different from what is expressed in works of fiqh or kalām, whether of his time or of any other. Dabashi has argued that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt offers a re-definition of Islam that wrests the authority to define the religion from the hand of the ulama. While largely correct, I think Dabashi both fails to offer a clear picture of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s redefinition of Islam and also over-emphasizes what he considers to be the subversive aspects of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s thought.\(^{658}\) In contrast to Dabashi, I see in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s attitude to Islam a double movement of destruction of conventional understandings of Islam and reconstruction of Islam ‘from the inside out’. Once this process is completed, many of the recognizable features of Islamic doctrine and practice, such as taṣḥīḥ and the five pillars, remain. However, their role in Islam has been transformed completely, and space has been created for more unconventional perspectives.

\(^{658}\) An exemplary statement of Dabashi’s position is that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt “suspend all institutional certitude, equates the sacred and the sacrreligious, reverses the trasgressives, and de-authorizes the absolutes, all in an assorted effort to re-originate the question of subjectively and individually becoming a Muslim, a man, an individual.” See Dabashi, *Truth and Narrative*, 593; and also 288; 300-1; 380-1.
As we shall see, it is impossible to adequately conceive of what ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt means by ‘Islam’ and ‘being Muslim’ outside of his perspectivism and the paradigm of wayfaring. As such, it will become clear that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s understanding of Islam is pluralistic, encompassing multiple perspectives on reality, and thus multiple correct doctrines and practices.

I begin this chapter by showing the close connections between ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s definition of Islam and wayfaring. I then examine those aspects of his thought that radically destabilize the more common understandings of these concepts. At the core of these is his philosophy of madhhabs and religious difference, which I analyze in detail. I then show how ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt reconstructs a new vision of Islam according to his own principles, paying particular attention to the role of Divine Guidance and the function of the spiritual master. This will put us in a position to understand the diverse points of view that make up ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s attitude to status of the Sharia at the end of the chapter.

Islam and Wayfaring

Hossein Modarressi, describes the main features of the classical Islamic schools of thought on the standard of being a Muslim as follows:

From the standard Ashʿarite position that recognized as a Muslim anyone who faced toward Mecca in his prayers, to the much more exclusive tendency of the Followers of Hadīth, including the Hanbalites, who would consider as a non-Muslim whoever disagreed with them over a long list of articles of creed, Sunnī Islam came to represent a multitude of opinions on how to define a Muslim and set a dividing line between faith and unfaith. On the other hand, the dominant opinion in Sunnī Islam maintained that being a Muslim was a matter of creed and that, unlike what most Khārijites advocated, no sin or irresponsible verbal utterance would compromise that status. A Muslim would remain a Muslim unless he explicitly renounced Islam.659

659 Hossein Modarressi, “Essential Islam: The Minimum that a Muslim is Required to Acknowledge,” Accusations of Unbelief in Islam: A Diachronic Perspective on Takfir, eds. Camilla Adang, Hassan Ansari, Maribel Fierro and Sabine Schmidtke (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2016), 402.
Thus, the utterance of the two testifications of faith signifies the entry into Islam, and for most schools, it would require an explicit renunciation for an individual to leave Islam.

Hardly any definition further from this could be conceived than that offered by ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, who redefines Islam within the paradigm of wayfaring: “Whatever brings a man to God is Islam.”

Crucially, this statement suggests that Islam is defined as a vector, a directionality of movement towards God, rather than a set of entry criteria (such as saying the two testifications), or a defined scope of orthodox beliefs and practices. This idea of Islam as vector is strengthened elsewhere in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings:

For ‘the one who turns toward’ (muqbil) everything is an excuse for salvation; but for ‘the one who turns back’ (mudbir), everything is a cause of wretchedness - he cannot hear the truth, and strikes the line of infidelity through the quality of being Muslim (musalmān). And if ‘the one who turns toward’ hears a thousand words of infidelity, he brings out from each one of them a true aspect from the innate disposition (gharāzat) of his own knowledge… The attribute of Muslims is this: ‘Those who hear the speech and follow the best of it.’ (Q, 39:18)

This passage divides humanity into two groups, each of whom receives a Quranic label: ‘Those who turn towards’ or ‘those who approach’ (muqbilān), who are also identified as the Muslims, are those who find in everything a reason to travel towards God; whereas ‘those who turn away’ (mudbirān), the infidels, will make any excuse to disregard anything they hear of the truth.

In the Tamhīdāt, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt uses similar language to contrast his approach with that of those who only see the external aspects of things (zāhir-binān), whose religious identity is constructed based on what they have heard attributed to authorities, such as al-Shāfī‘i or Abū Ḥanīfa. Whereas

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660 T, 25. See also L3.339. “We call the seeker of Islam the wayfarer.”
662 See for example SQ, 28:31: ‘O Moses! Approach and fear not!’
663 See for example, SQ, 27:80: ‘Surely thou dost not make the dead hear; nor dost thou make the deaf hear the call when they turn their backs’.

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true Muslims will listen to everything and follow whatever leads them to God, passing over what they do not understand since they realize their own limitations, the other group will reject whatever they do not understand or what they have not heard narrated from past authorities.\textsuperscript{664} Once again, in these discussions we see ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt describing the true Muslims as those whose sole purpose is to journey towards God, whereas those limited to the externals are simply adhering to a static religious identity.

But in addition to conceiving of Islam as a directionality, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s statement that ‘whatever brings one to God is Islam’ possesses another implication: in passages such as these ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt considers ‘Islam’ in its most universal sense, as defining the correct relation of the human with God, whatever the time and context of the believer in question. This understanding of the terms \textit{islām} and \textit{muslim}, which embrace but are not limited to their literal meanings of ‘submission’ and ‘one who submits’ (to God), is of course found in the Quran, which describes both Abraham and the Apostles of Christ as ‘Muslims’.\textsuperscript{665} As such, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt states,

\begin{quote}
‘Verily the religion with God is Islam.’ (Q, 3:19) Religion itself is Islam, and Islam itself is religion, but it becomes different by locus (\textit{mahāll}). Otherwise the principle is one, for ‘He has poured His Blessings upon you, both outwardly and inwardly.’ (SQ, 31:20) The blessings of the body and the outward are prayer, alms, fasting, etc. and faith and the acts of the heart are the blessings of the inward.\textsuperscript{666}
\end{quote}

Likewise, in the course of discussing felicity and damnation, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt affirms that there can be no difference between the various revelations (\textit{sharā‘i}) received by the prophets. Rather, differences relate to uncertain and secondary matters, precisely those matters that are the subject of the reasoning of religious scholars (\textit{ijtihād}). Thus,

\begin{quote}
There is no disagreement on the principle of felicity and wretchedness in the Hereafter, nor can there be [disagreement] in the principle of the Way of the realities of attainment. But in the division into sects (\textit{tafāruq}) that occurs according
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{664} See T, 197.
\textsuperscript{665} See for example, Q, 3:67 and 3:52 respectively.
\textsuperscript{666} T, 66.
to places (amṣār), times (aʿṣār), states and individuals there can be disagreement, and it is not right that there should not be.\footnote{L2.352. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt goes on to state that it is impossible to fully explain the nature of these differences: “And it is not possible for you to be able to know why there is difference … and it is haram to explain this. And I am hopeful that if you arrive you will see for yourself, and if you go the way of men, you will arrive.”}

Although these statements are not sufficient for outlining a full account of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s attitude towards Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians, particular those practicing in his own day, they nevertheless define an understanding of Islam and being Muslim that is quite different from more conventional approaches.

This difference can be illustrated by a geometric example. Consider a circle, the center of which represents God and the area encompassed representing all possible beliefs and practices relating to God in some way. A more conventional approach to Islam, whatever sect it might represent, would define Islam as a segment of that circle, which would encompass the set of correct, or ‘orthodox’, beliefs and actions, possessing an edge that is defined by entry criteria (and also criteria of exclusion), such as the two testifications of faith. A certain level of diversity of belief or practice might be possible, and perhaps also a hierarchy among the options, which could be represented by distance from the center. It would also be possible for an individual to move within the circle, from being outside the segment of ‘Islam’ to being within it, and perhaps from lesser to greater beliefs.

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s vision of Islam expressed above is quite different from this. Rather than being a defined segment of the circle, Islam is in principle any point within the circle so long as that point possesses a directionality towards the center. It may not be the case that every belief and practice does in fact lead to towards the center - this perspective does not suppose that everything is equally efficacious - but it certainly expands the notion of ‘Islam’ to potentially include much
more than is usually supposed, whilst also warning those who consider themselves safely within the segment of Islam as religious identity to take a look at the direction they are actually heading in.

As we have come to expect from ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, the dynamism of his thought means that this approach to Islam will be complemented by further perspectives on religious identity. However, Islam and religious difference always take their significance for him within the paradigm of wayfaring. At the intersection of Islam, religious difference and wayfaring in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s thought we find his philosophy of madhhabs, to which we shall now turn.

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s Philosophy of Madhhabs and Religious Difference

One of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s most original theories is his account of the origination of the diversity of religions and doctrines. Though certainly not the first Islamic thinker to come up with an account of religious diversity in terms of metaphysics,668 ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s ‘philosophy of madhhabs’ represents a particularly insightful and analytic integration of religious difference into the paradigm of wayfaring that dominates his thought.669

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669 Certain aspects of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s theories of religious diversity have been discussed in Lewisohn, Beyond Faith and Infidelity, 275-281; Omīd Ṣafi, “On the ‘Path of Love’ Towards the Divine: A Journey with Muslim Mystics” The Journal of Scriptural Reasoning 3.2. (Accessed online); Nasrullāh Pūrjawādī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt wa Īstādān-i ā, 39-54; and ‘Afīf ‘Usayrān’s preface to ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī, Zubdāt al-ḥaqāʾiq (Musannafāt), Ed. ‘Afīf ‘Usayrān (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tehrān, 1961), 13-15. These works are reliable but none of them brings together all aspects of his theory. There are several other works that deal with some aspect of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s attitude towards religious diversity but are not reliable. The relevant section in ‘Ali-Riḍā Dḥakawātī Gḥarāgolzū’s encyclopedia entry (“‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī,” Encyclopaedia Islamica, trans. Melvin-Koushki), aside from being understandably short, appears self-contradictory and lacks references. Hamid Dabashi’s discussion of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s philosophy of the distortion of madhāhib is useful to the extent that he is translating or paraphrasing the texts but is followed by an attempt to turn ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt into a post-structuralist. As we shall see, the root of his misinterpretation is the misreading of a single word. See Dabashi, Truth and Narrative, 429-440, reproduced in Hamid Dabashi, “‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī and the Intellectual Climate of His Times.” History of Islamic Philosophy, eds. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (New York: Routledge, 1996), 2: 406-418. Firoozeh Papan-Matin’s attempt to emphasize the influence of both Indian and Biblical thought on ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt is neither rooted in his texts nor in several
One of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s statements of his belief that anything that leads one to God is Islam uses the polyvalent term madhhab⁶⁷⁰ to describe this ‘anything’: “If a madhhab brings one to God, that madhhab is Islam, and if it does not increase the seeker in awareness, that madhhab is to God worse than infidelity.”⁶⁷¹

The word ‘madhhab’ in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings possesses its full range of possible lexical meanings, as determined by specific contexts. As such this word can mean ‘opinion’, ‘doctrinal perspective based on one or many principles’ (uṣūl, such as, but not limited to a school of law),⁶⁷² or the ‘collective identity for followers of that opinion or perspective’. As ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt uses the term, it most often indicates a theological or philosophical doctrine that usually (but not always) sums up the adherent’s world-view. Hence, examples of madhhabs are Sophism (ṣafṣaṭa, considered to be the view that the world does not exist),⁶⁷³ the position of the Qaddariyya,⁶⁷⁴ and the view that name and named are one. However, ‘madhhab’ can also mean something very similar to what we mean today by the term ‘religion’, and is used to discuss differences between Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Islam, as well as idol-worship and fire-worship. Finally, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt also uses the term in a more basic meaning, based on the morphology of the word: ‘madhhab’ is the place-noun from the verb ‘to go’, hence means ‘way of going’ in the most general sense.

places obeys the logic of chronology or takes account of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s relation to the Sufi tradition that precedes him. See Papan-Matin, Beyond Death, 101-114.

⁶⁷⁰ Found in the OED in both this form and ‘madhab’, hence I have not italicized it.
⁶⁷¹ T, 22-3. Both Lewisohn (Beyond Faith and Infidelity, 311) and Ernst (Words of Ecstasy in Sufism, 123-5) have recognized the importance of precision on this term, and Ernst situates the term in the context of Sufi usage.
⁶⁷² See Wael B. Hallaq, The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 150-2, where he identifies a basic meaning of “a particular opinion of a jurist” in addition to the following four technical senses: “a principle that underlies a set of cases subsumed under such a principle”; 2. “the collective doctrine of a school”; 3. “the mujtahid’s individual opinion as the most authoritative in the collective doctrinal corpus of the school” which Hallaq refers to as ‘madhhab-opinion’, and which entails unanimity of doctrine and practice; and 4. “a group of jurists and legists who are strictly loyal to a distinct, integral an, most importantly, collective legal doctrine attributed to an eponym…”
⁶⁷³ See L2.300.

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With these meanings of ‘madhhab’ in mind, the striking generality of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s statement remains, even in this more specific formulation. It will thus mean that ‘any religion, opinion, school of thought or law, or way of being, thinking or acting that brings one to God is Islam.’

Like other aspects of his thought, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s philosophy of the diversity of madhhabs is expressed in terms of wayfaring and movement towards the goal. To give one example, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt is generally dismissive of the widespread human tendency to believe that human attributes are in some way comparable to those of God, such that the names for the former such as ‘will’ and ‘speech’ are considered to impart knowledge of the latter. However, in the following passage ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt expresses the provisional value of this madhhab of ‘anthropomorphism’ (tashbīh), using images that we are now familiar with:

O Dear One! Anthropomorphism is on the Way and of the Way; and know all of the madhhabs of the people to be waystations on the Way of God. However, taking up residence in a waystation is an error. Hamadan and Baghdad are waystations to Mecca for someone coming from Khurasan, but it is not appropriate to take up residence there, for a waystation is never a place of residence, and if someone makes a residence of a waystation his path is blocked.675

In addition to the themes of movement and directionality that we have already considered, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s philosophy of madhhabs contains several strategies that are designed to destabilize the kind of conventional religiosity that his approach stands in contrast to.

The paradigm of wayfaring conceives of a single goal of all religiosity, God Himself. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s focus on the importance of the goal of religion means that any madhhab is not an end in itself; rather, “The seeker has business with the Establisher of the madhhab [i.e. God], not with the madhhab.”676 As such, the universal affirmation of all madhhabs that lead to God is

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675 L.2.262
676 T, 23.
accompanied by a down-grading of the importance of any particular madhhab, for after all to stop in one madhhab would be to cut one’s journey short without having reached the goal.\textsuperscript{677}

The need to avoid excessive attachment to any single madhhab that is implied by the understanding of madhhabs as waystations is directed as a criticism against the mode of religiosity of most human beings, which is based on both insufficient understanding and an irrational attachment to what one has received from one’s parents, and which ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt terms ‘habit-worship’ (‘ādat-\textit{parasti}). ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains that “Most of the madhhabs of the people of the world according to what has been recorded have been and are like this. They prattle about the victory of a madhhab of which they not even attained the reality.”\textsuperscript{678}

The supposition of most Jews, Christians and Muslims that their respective prophets are superior to the others derives from neither rational demonstration (for ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explores all the possible lines of reasoning that might reach a result and shows that they lead nowhere),\textsuperscript{679} nor realization, which would be the only means of knowledge adequate to the task. Rather, according to ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, this kind of partisanship (\textit{ta’\textasciitilde{a}ṣṣub}) and imitation (\textit{taq\textasciitilde{l}id}), results from worldly attachments, much like other vices, such as the excessive attachment to the opinions of one’s parents.\textsuperscript{680} Like other attachments they “ruin the heart,” and “destroy the first principles of intelligence,” preventing intellectual and spiritual progress.\textsuperscript{681}

It is this danger of madhhabs and their capacity to become obstacles or veils on the Way that causes ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt to sing,

\begin{quote}
I will strike fire and burn both madhhab and creed (\textit{kīsh})
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{677} It may be noted that his position is potentially extremely inclusivist: for any geographical point can be considered a waystation towards a particular goal relative to the point directly behind it, for which it represents progress towards the center.
\textsuperscript{678} L2.113-4.
\textsuperscript{679} See L2.390-7.
\textsuperscript{680} L3.298-9.
\textsuperscript{681} L2.391. See also L2.348 and ZH, 65.
I will set Thy Love in place of madhhab in front.

Until when will I keep Love hidden, a wound in the heart?

The goal of this servant (rahī) is Thou, not madhhab or creed.\(^{682}\)

In one particularly rich passage in the *Tamhidāt*, ‘Ayn al-Qudāt weaves together the concerns we have been considering, from the danger of excessive attachment to the madhhab one finds oneself in to the unity of the truth that underlies the many doctrines of diverse madhhabs:

Alas! Seventy-three madhhabs,\(^{683}\) the adherents (ashāb) of which are hostile to one another, and for the sake of religion (millāt) consider each to be the opposite of themselves and kill each other. And if they were to gather together and hear these words from this helpless man it would be comprehensible for them that they are all of a single religion (yak dīn wa yak millāt). Anthropomorphism (tashbiḥ) and error have made the people distant from reality, ‘And most of them follow naught but conjecture. Truly conjecture does not avail against the truth in the least.’ (SQ, 10:36) The names are many but the reality and the named is one. They call you [the addressee of the letter] Zahīr al-Dīn, and Khwājah, scholar and Muftī. If you had a reality for each name, then you would be twenty Zahīr al-Dīn’s. But your name is not one but rather many, whereas the named is one. ‘For you is your religion and for me is my religion’ (Q, 109:6) is this meaning.\(^{684}\)

For ‘Ayn al-Qudāt, madhhabs thus have a double significance. For those who cling to a particular madhhab with partisanship, the diversity of madhhabs on the formal level creates intractable disagreement. However, just as the many titles of a single individual have a single intent, those who understand the inner realities of each madhhab are able to realize that all madhhabs are but different stages or aspects of a single path to God, whether it be called ‘Love’, ‘Islam’, ‘the Way’, or anything else.

\(^{682}\) T, 23.

\(^{683}\) Although the number seventy-three suggests the hadith “…My Community will divide into seventy-three sects” the comments that follow suggest that ‘Ayn al-Qudāt may not just be talking about the community of Muhammad. On the hadith see Roy P. Mottahedeh, “Pluralism and Islamic Sectarian Divisions,” *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift*. Årg. 82 (2006): 155-61.

\(^{684}\) T, 339.
Where does the Diversity of Madhhabs Come From?

It is one thing to affirm that all madhhabs may potentially lead to God and quite another to explain the reasons for this diversity. Again, 'Ayn al-Quḍāt’s approach to examining the reasons for the diversity of madhhabs is multifaceted. Through the nuances of these discussions he is able to affirm the validity of multiple true perspectives, negate false madhhabs whilst explaining how they have arisen, and delimit a space for allowing acceptable disagreement.

To begin with the last of these approaches, the passage cited above continues,

Alas! Have you not heard it from Muṣṭafā, upon him be peace, that ‘Every mujtahid strikes the mark.’ The ijtihad of the mujtahid brings forth (ingārad) reward, and each religion (millat) has relied on ijtihad.\(^685\)

In the context of the passage that precedes it, which affirms the truth of multiple madhhabs almost as if they were equal, this statement seems to be a universal application of the hadith, “Every mujtahid strikes the mark (or ‘is rewarded’).” (kullu mujtahid muṣīb)\(^686\) Within the perspective taken up in this passage, the fact that all religions rely to a certain extent on human powers of interpretation and reasoning, and that human reasoning is fallible and leads to diversity, seems to suggest that there is a divine leniency and acceptance of this diversity. Since religions rely to a certain extent on human faculties, it makes sense that God would forgive us if we get it wrong.

However, this merciful and all-embracing attitude is not found in the same way in other passages in which ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt discusses the scope of ijtihad. In particular, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt distinguishes between legal (fiqhī) and doctrinal or intellectual (‘aqlī) matters in this regard. When two mujtahids exert themselves to derive a ruling based on the available sources and come up with two different answers they are both justified (bar ḥaqq) and rewarded. This is not the case in

\(^685\) T, 339.
intellectual matters, however, in which case one who makes an error is responsible and may be punished for this in the Hereafter.\textsuperscript{687}

The reason for this is that in intellectual matters there is necessarily a positive or negative judgment regarding each issue, whereas in the conjectural issues of fiqh (\textit{zanniyy\={a}t-i fiqh}) this is not the case, since in reality there is no specified ruling. There are a group who believe that there is a determinate (\textit{\textquotesingle al\={a} al-ta\={y}\={i}n}) ruling, but this is a mistake; but showing the way in which this group is mistaken is long, and is now outside our purpose. Wherever there is an ambiguous (\textit{mushtar\={a}k}) word, if it is in conjectural issues, when the folk of ijtihad meddle in it, it is sure (\textit{musall\={a}m}) for them.\textsuperscript{688}

This statement contrasts starkly with the many aspects of ‘Ayn al-Qu\={a}\={d}āt’s pluralism that we have considered so far, such as the doctrinal matter of the difference between the three ontologies. If in intellectual matters there is necessarily a positive or negative ruling, does this not make pluralism impossible?

In order to solve this problem, it is important to recall that the types of pluralism we have encountered in ‘Ayn al-Qu\={a}\={d}āt’s thought concern the journey beyond the level of reason, towards the realization of realities that cannot be expressed in language, speaking about which leads to ambiguity. Thus, a claim to perspectivism on the level of realization is not inconsistent with the claim that on the level of reason there can only be one set of correct answers (assuming shared premises).

Moreover, while it may not be possible to completely reconcile the position that all religious thought somehow ‘hits the mark’ with the view that there is diversity is impossible in intellectual matters, it is at least helpful to recognize that the articulation of these two positions represent two quite different ‘waystations’ in ‘Ayn al-Qu\={a}\={d}āt’s own thought. The latter position occurs within letters that are focused on the sober logical argumentation for certain doctrinal positions, and as

\textsuperscript{687} L2.284.
\textsuperscript{688} L2.285.
such it makes sense that he would there uphold the idea of truth of one position as opposed to others. The more inclusive passage, however, occurs in the last chapter of the *Tamhīdāt*, which is the culmination of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s mystical thought and verges on ecstatic and drunken forms of expression on many occasions.

The distinctions raised here, firstly between legal and intellectual matters, but also between intellectual and supra-intellectual means of knowing is brought to bear on the topic of the diversity of madhhabs in the following passage:

All these different madhhabs that you see in the way of God have arisen from those who have not arrived at knowledge of certainty (*ʿilm al-yaqīn*). Otherwise, how can there be disagreement between men who possess sight? “The disagreement of my community is a mercy” concerns issues that are the subject of ijtihad; otherwise there has never been nor will ever be disagreement on principles (*ʿusūl*) except among those who have not arrived (*nārasīdagān*). However, in the branches (*furūʿ*) disagreement is a necessity, and must be the case, and if there is no [disagreement] they do not take shape and this is a long conversation.689

The distinction between the unanimity of those who have attained knowledge of certainty and the differences among those who have not suggests another important source of diversity that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explores elsewhere. Given that some people follow baseless supposition, others follow correct reasoning, and still others follow their differing levels of spiritual insight, disagreement will occur to the extent that each group exclusively affirms what it knows, denying what lies beyond it.

To illustrate this point, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt asks the addressee of Letter 140 to consider how a recitation of the opening chapter of the Quran would be interpreted by a Turk who knows no Arabic, by ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, who has a high level of spiritual insight, and by the addressee himself, who is supposed to be a relative beginner in spiritual matters.

689 L2.247-8.
Given their respective apprehension of the recitation, each listener would mean something different when he says, ‘I heard the Fātiḥa.’ For the Turk, this would mean simply hearing the sounds of the words; for the addressee it would mean hearing the words and understanding their literal meaning; but for ‘Ayn al-Quḍāṭ it would mean gaining a profound understanding of the spiritual message being communicated. To begin with, this means that the terminology that each listener is using when they say ‘I heard’ differs, a point that for ‘Ayn al-Quḍāṭ illustrates the nature of much disagreement on doctrinal matters, such as the created or uncreated nature of ‘the Quran’ for example.

But even more importantly, more intractable disagreement would occur if the Turk - or indeed the addressee - were to insist that what he had heard was all there is to hear, and thus to deny the validity of the explanation given by someone who was able to hear in a qualitatively superior way.

This discussion leads ‘Ayn al-Quḍāṭ to conclude that, “Every disagreement that occurs in the world can be removed when people realize how knowledge should be sought. But since they don’t know, disagreement is never removed.” 690

How Madhhabs Become Corrupted

Given that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāṭ is generally pessimistic about the ability of the majority of people to seek knowledge in the correct way, we might expect him to consider the source of all those madhhabs that do not lead to God to be human error, weakness and self-interest. However, this is only half true. Indeed, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāṭ himself admits that at one point he used to think that false creeds should be more than true ones, for after all, “apprehension of the Real is difficult, His Way

690 See L3.343-5.
is long and dangerous and the understandings of people are limited…” However, when considering madhhabs such as sophism, which in Islamic thought had come to be understood as the position that the world does not exist, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt notes that these madhhabs are so ridiculous in their current forms that no one would have ever believed in them. He thus concludes that since madhhabs that are now ridiculous have indeed had numerous followers over time, they must have originally meant something different to what they do now.

In light of this insight, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt replaces the simplistic account of the diversity of religious errors - human intelligence is weak and people have made many mistakes - with his own account of madhhabs: all madhhabs were originally true, but some have become corrupted by bad transmitters.

As with other aspects of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s philosophy of madhhabs, this position contains both an affirmative and a negative component. Madhhabs were originally true because they were established by wayfarers who had attained direct realization of the realities of which they spoke; for “from where I am, every madhhab in the world has a correct root (aṣl), for the roots of the madhhabs are transmitted from wayfarers who had arrived (salikān-i rasīda).”

However, since the realization that these wayfarers attained was by nature beyond the range of what can be unambiguously expressed in language, in order to express what they had learned they had to use language that was open to misinterpretation, for “when someone who had

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691 L2.311.
692 See L2.300.
693 L2.269. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s explanation of how distortion enters madhhabs rests on the status of the language of wāṣīlān (such as in L2.286). Dabashi interprets this term to mean ‘intermediary sources’, in order make ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt make a post-structuralist move in which all language is supposed to be ambiguous. (See Dabashi, Truth and Narrative, 429-442.) However, the fact that this is not what ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt means, and that it is specifically the language of ‘those who have attained’ (the technical meaning of wāṣīl in Sufi vocabulary) is proved by ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s restatement of the issue here in L2.269, where he uses the Persian rasīda instead of the Arabic wāṣīl to make the same point. For ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt the spiritual realization arrived at on the path can only be expressed in ambiguous terms, but this does not make all expressions of knowledge ambiguous.
not engaged in wayfaring at all meddled with them, without doubt it is from there that error arose.”

‘Ayn al-Quṭāt develops a sophisticated account of how this misinterpretation may have occurred, much of which is derived from linguistics and the hadith sciences. In particular, he points out how difficult it is to transmit language without fully understanding its content. Perhaps one might replace a word with what one thinks is a synonym, whereas in fact the synonym conveys something different from what was intended. Or perhaps one might remember only half of the words without realizing the significance of what has been omitted. Indeed, if one transmits only the first half of the phrase *There is no god but God*, obviously the opposite meaning results.

The madhhab gone astray that receives most attention from ‘Ayn al-Quṭāt is the *qadariyya*, a term that by ‘Ayn al-Quṭāt’s time had come to mean the position that there are two gods, one of which is the source of good and the other the source of evil. While this is a term of polemic in Islamic disputation and it is far from clear that any Muslim thinkers held the position of the ‘Magians of this community’ as a reported hadith puts it (and in this respect, ‘Ayn al-Quṭāt’s skepticism of the reporting of religious belief seems to hold true), philosophically this case does very well for explaining what ‘Ayn al-Quṭāt is talking about.

To begin with, ‘Ayn al-Quṭāt posits that there must have been one of ‘those who had attained’ (*waṣilān*) who said, “God, exalted be He is all good, and from Him all good comes into existence.” However, given that the speaker is expressing what he or she sees directly, “it must be understood that the person who says [this], whether in a state of intoxication or sobriety, sees

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694 L2.269.
695 L2.301.
697 Quoted on L2.269.
698 L2.269.
no evil, great or small, in existence, and knows with certainty that it is impossible that evil come from the Most-Merciful of the merciful, exalted and sanctified be He."699 But since the speaker had no choice but to use ambiguous language, the statement in itself implies both a correct and an incorrect position. Subsequently, “When someone who cannot hear, and meddles in this with his limited intellect, he supposes that he is saying that God, the Exalted, has not created evil, and therefore the creator of evil is someone else.”700

Although this explanation of the source of the corruption of madhhabs is developed over a series of letters in a non-systematic way, it is systematized by ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt in Letter 94 in the following five (of six) principles:

**The First Principle:** Since the words of those who have arrived are ambiguous (mushtarak al-dalāla), indicating two or three meanings, only one of which is correct and the others false, necessarily whoever does not know will fall into error.

**The Second Principle:** The words of the arrived [at the Truth] can only be ambiguous, and it is impossible that it be otherwise.

**The Third Principle:** There is an utterance from which the Qadari madhab results [as the example at hand], that is correct in a certain respect.

**The Fourth Principle:** All madhhabs, or at least most, had a correct principle (asl), and have become corrupted over time.

**The Fifth Principle:** This corruption has many types, and it is impossible to exhaustively enumerate them.701

This account of how madhhabs have gone astray gives ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt a powerful tool for critiquing some of the theological positions in his milieu. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt is particularly concerned with the corruptions in Islam that have resulted from the misinterpretation of Quran and hadith,

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699 L2.270.
700 L2.270.
701 L2.282.
both of which contain many ambiguous statements resulting from knowledge that is not accessible
to all, according to the model he has presented.\textsuperscript{702}

What do you say? That Muṣṭafā, upon him be peace, was an anthropomorphist
\textit{(mushabbih)} when [he said] ‘\textit{God descends every night},’ and ‘\textit{The Compassionate mounted the}
\textit{Throne.}’ \textsuperscript{SQ, 20:5}? They fabricated a false madhhab, and you know that the proof-
text of their false madhhab is the word of the Real from the Quran and hadith, but
when they meddled with it with their own understanding the fell into error. The
madhhab of anthropomorphism will remain for a long time, even though the proof-
text of their fancies will not remain, for as the Prophet, upon him be peace, said,
‘At the end of time the Quran returns to heaven,’ but this is another world which
not all understandings and fancies can reach.\textsuperscript{703}

Here, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s philosophy of madhhabs also contains a warning for the Muslim
community at large, for just as “these madhhabs have gradually been destroyed, and now mere
idol worship and wearing the girdle and fire worship have remained,”\textsuperscript{704} so also, “being-muslim
\textit{(musalmān)} is gradually being destroyed.”\textsuperscript{705} Indeed, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt envisions a time in the future
in which Muslims are simply following the words and outer forms that have been passed down to
them without understanding their significance. As a thought experiment, he asks the reader to
consider a community for whom the only thing that remains of Islamic practices is their outer shell.
Though seemingly far-fetched, it is clear that the reader is supposed to draw analogies with the
present state of Islam:

And if there is a time when a group pray and put the prayer-niche in front of them,
and prostrate to it without genuflecting, not reciting the \textit{Fātiha} or other components
of the prayer nor the ablution, but only know and have seen and heard that their
fathers and grandfathers performed these actions and called it ‘prayer’ and faced a
prayer-niche like this, this is infidelity, for the prayer-niche is not a worthy object of
worship.

Don’t be surprised at this, for Muṣṭafā says, upon him be peace, ‘\textit{There will}
\textit{come a time when the people gather in the mosques and pray, and there is not a Muslim among
them.}’ And this is near…

\textsuperscript{702} See L2.284.
\textsuperscript{703} L2.271.
\textsuperscript{704} L2.302.
\textsuperscript{705} L2.301.
So if a wayfarer came across a people who pray like this and said to them, ‘Your religion (millat) is null,’ this is correct since this group is not on the religion of Muṣṭafā, upon him be peace…

And since regarding being Muslim at the time of the followers, Ḥasan al- Баşrī said that Islam had been destroyed, what has remained of it now? And what do we know what it will be like in a thousand years?  

The Function of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s Philosophy of Madhhabs and their Corruption

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt also uses his philosophy of madhhabs to criticize certain theological arguments that affirm the exclusive truth of one point of view by presenting corrupted forms of opposing positions - a type of straw-man argumentation. Here, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt singles out two discussions in the works of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī: his argument in the Maqṣad al-aqṣā that the name and the named are different, and his argument in the Ḳiyā that human character traits are changeable. In these discussions, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt points out that the positions that al-Ghazālī is arguing against are so ridiculous that no one could have held them, and goes on to suggest what these madhhabs might have been when uncorrupted. Crucially, it is not the positions al-Ghazālī held that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt is criticizing, but rather his inability to correctly understand or represent a point of view other than his own.

Indeed, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s purpose in these discussion is not so much to clarify specific theological issues as to give the reader an example of the correct way to approach the interpretation of madhhabs. This ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt sees to be far more important than theological dispute. Thus,

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706 L2.302.
708 In the case of the name and the named, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt suggests that they are in fact identical if one means by this that in the predication by the name the named is intended, and also that one can hold that the name is sometimes the named and sometimes not if by this one means that sometimes by a word we intend its referent and sometimes we intend the word itself (e.g. ‘The man is rational’ versus ‘The man is a noun’). See L2.314-6. As for whether character traits are changeable, for ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt it is too obvious that a child has different traits from an adult, and therefore the adherents of the unchangeability of character traits are able to change posthumously. See L2.325-30.
‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains that the reason al-Ghazālī had not understood the true purport of the positions he was arguing against was not lack of scholarly knowledge (which no one could fairly attribute to al-Ghazālī) nor the difficulty of the issues, but rather that “he had not come upon them.”

In order to understand what he means by this, we need to recognize the sixth principle of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s systematization of the corruption of madhhabs:

**The Sixth Principle:** The wayfarer must path through all these madhhabs. Regarding each, it may be that he remains in it or it may be that he passes it by.

It is this final principle that joins ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s philosophy of madhhabs to his greater project of spiritual instruction. The extensive discussion of madhhabs has as its final purpose the preparation of the reader for wayfaring, which ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt claims will involve a journey through the madhhabs, even those that had at first seemed false. Indeed, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt claims that he has developed philosophy of madhhabs from his own wayfaring. His own encounter with the truths underlying fire-worship, idol-worship, sophism and incarnationism (ḥulūl) has allowed him to understand their veracious origins, even though he thinks that what has remained in practice of these madhhabs are but distorted forms. With specific reference to the zunnār, the belt or girdle probably derived from both the Christian cincture and the Zoroastrian thread, but which for Muslims thinkers of this time and place was simply the mark of infidelity, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains,

I had written that the men [of the Way] know what keeping the zunnār, idol-worship or fire-worship are. My dear, I have seen them all in the Way of God, and if the intellect and knowledge had not taken my hand I would have tied the zunnār. So if one were not to have this knowledge and intellect he would tie the zunnār. Certainly,
you do not know for you have not arrived there. I know because I have arrived there.\textsuperscript{713}

Within this approach to madhhabs, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s abstract statements that whatever leads to God is Islam and that the Muslims finds the truth in whatever he hears take on a very concrete significance. One who is truly accomplished on the Way is able to see the truth underlying the diverse forms of religiosity that he or she encounters and to explain it to others, even if the practitioners of these forms may have lost touch with this truth themselves.

A [real] man is not one who takes the correct words of a wayfarer and interprets them in ignominious ways, then delving into their refutation. A man is he who brings to hand the correct aspect of all madhhabs, and finds the way in which each has been corrupted in a way that all will understand. God, exalted be He, describing this group says that [they are those] ‘who listen to the Word, then follow what is most beautiful of it. It is they whom God has guided; it is they who are the possessors of intellect…’ (SQ, 39:18) One must learn it from Muṣṭafā, who used to say in his night prayer, “O God lead us to that of the Truth that has been disagreed upon with Thy permission.”\textsuperscript{714}

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s reference to this final hadith reminds us that his complex philosophy of madhhabs and the manner of their corruption is closely related to his conception of Islam. Just as Islam means any madhhab that leads one to God, the experienced wayfarer will be able to discern the realities behind all madhhabs, finding in them their original meaning as an expression of a certain stage of the Way. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s philosophy of madhhabs crystallizes his perspectivism into a definable doctrine and firmly roots it within the paradigm of wayfaring. Moreover, so fundamental are perspectivism and wayfaring to his thought that they come to define Islam itself.

\textbf{Abandoning Habits}

Islam as envisioned by ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt within the paradigm of wayfaring and in the light of his philosophy of madhhabs looks quite different from the set of doctrines and practices that we

\textsuperscript{713} L2.25. See also L2.305.
\textsuperscript{714} L2.330.
might ordinarily understand as constituting it. Indeed, although we will see that his reformulation of Islam does eventually find a place for the practical and doctrinal components we habitually associate with the word, it radically changes his conception of both the beginning and the end of the process of being Muslim. Indeed, it is in these aspects of his descriptions of the Way that we see the greatest impact of his reformulation of Islam.

Given ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s emphasis that the point of Islam is reaching God (rather than any specific sets of actions or beliefs), with the attainment of the Goal all particular madhhabs are transcended:

When one reaches the end of seeking, he has no madhhab except the madhhab of the Sought. They asked Ḥusayn ibn Maṣṭūr [Hallaj], ‘What madhhab do you follow?’ He replied, “I am on the madhhab of my Lord…”

That One who painted the world with a thousand colors,

How would He buy the color of you and I, O you who are bereft?

All this color is but lust or conjecture.

He is without color, one must be colored like Him.

But whereas this idea of the end of the Way, the attainment of tawḥīd, as the transcendence of the dualities implied by any religious idea is something that we have encountered in the poetry of Sanāʾī, for ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, this lack of determination with respect to madhhabs is not limited to the end of the Way. Indeed, it is such a state of indetermination that is the very condition for a seeker to enter the Way, for, “If he differentiates, he is a differentiator not a seeker. This differentiating is still a veil of the Way for the seeker, for the purpose of the Seeker for the madhhab is that it should be that the madhhab he chooses take him to the Goal.”

Part of the reason for this perspective lies in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s criticism of religiosity based on blind imitation of what one has received, “for they have been satisfied with the beliefs inherited

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715 'T, 22.
716 'T, 22.
717 'T, 21.
from their fathers, ancestors, teachers and countrymen. And whoever is a seeker of the knowledge of certainty, the first condition in his path is this: that all of the madhhabs in the world should be equal in his view…”

The first step on the path is therefore to abandon habit and convention (‘ādat), for it is only then that the journey through the multiple waystations and perspectives of the path will be possible. Now not even the seeker’s general religious identity as a Muslim is of any assistance for the task that he or she is endeavoring to undertake. Received religious identity must be set aside, just as one would set aside one’s uniformed opinions when beginning to acquire knowledge of the physical and mathematical sciences:

O friend! Someone wants to know for example what ten multiplied by twenty equals; is it at all appropriate that before knowing in his heart there should be an inclination, nay that a supposition should be dominant, nay that that belief should be of utmost strength, that ten multiplied by twenty is three hundred? And if there is this inclination is it not a barrier obstructing the seeker from apprehending the reality of the matter?

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718 L2.251.
719 On this concept in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s thought, see also Herman Landolt, “Two Types of Mystical Thought in Iran.”
720 L2.251-2. Cf. Dabashi, Truth and Narrative, 416-7. This passage continues (my translation): “For him who wishes to attain the perfection of Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq in faith in God and the Messenger, upon him be blessings and peace, is it at all appropriate that before attaining this perfection he say: ‘It is attained through such-and-such madhhab and not such-and-such madhhab’? And he who wants to know the difference between the Mosaic perfection, the Christic perfection and the Muḥammadan perfection, upon them be peace, how is it appropriate that before reaching this knowledge he say, ‘the apprehension of this difference is attained through the path of the Jews’ as the Jews say? Or that he say, ‘It is attained through the path of the Christians (tarsīyān),’ as the Christians say? So it is also not appropriate that he say categorically that it is attained through the path of the Muslims. This is because the seeker does not know that the religion (millat) of the infidels is better or the religion (millat) of Islam, for if he knew he would never be a seeker of this affair. And if he does not know, how is it appropriate that it be in his heart that Islam is better than infidelity?…

O friend! The seekers of God, with their first step, abandoned conventions (‘ādat-ha), as this verse states correctly about them:

In Qādisiyya there are youths who see not the shameful as shameful,
Neither Muslims, nor Magians, nor Jews, nor Christians”
In this passage we find one of the most important reasons why ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt wishes to redefine Islam as a vector, rather than a specific set of beliefs and practices. For ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt one of the greatest obstacles to wayfaring is the satisfaction with what one has already attained. The definition of Islam according to the two testifications of faith suggests that anyone who utters them has succeeded, and is now Muslim and worthy of salvation. This is akin to learning the meaning of numbers and simply guessing the answer to a particular mathematical problem. The first step in Islam, which is to say the first step on the Way, is rather to set aside all conceptions of what Islam really is. This represents the neutral foundation upon which ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt can reconstruct his positive conception of Islam.

The Living and Dynamic Criterion of Islam

Those aspects of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s philosophy of religion that we have seen so far in this chapter seem to suggest no connection whatsoever between ‘Islam’ as ordinarily understood and ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s conception of ‘Islam’, which now seems to be a completely amorphous collection of madhhabs, changing as fit the situation of the seeker. However, while there may be a sense in which ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s conception of Islam is amorphous in principle, the way he actually describes the process of wayfaring does in fact reinstate or include many of the familiar doctrines and practices that we (like ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s contemporaries) associate with ‘Islam’. The key is how these are included.

The new foundation of what we might call ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s restructuring of Islamic thought and practice can be illustrated through an epistemological question: If Islam is whatever brings one to God, how can the seeker possibly know, given the changing conditions of the Way and the ego-centrism that the seeker is endeavoring to overcome, which ways of acting and thinking will actually bring him to God?
The conventional answer, that God has sent His guidance to humanity through the prophets, the last of whom being the Prophet Muhammad, whose Book and words are interpreted and applied to new cases by the exoteric religious scholars, is not adequate for ‘Ayn al-Qudât.

To begin with, despite the claim of the scholars of religious law (the so called ‘ulamā’) to authority in determining correct action, their field of expertise is in fact limited to a small segment of the revealed religion, which is only indirectly related to wayfaring itself; for, “In the Quran five-hundred verses are related to external fiqh, the rest is related to wayfaring on the path of God.”

Moreover, ‘Ayn al-Qudât is particularly critical of the exoteric religious scholars of his time, whose training simply involves memorization rather than understanding, such that according to the now corrupted terminology of the Salaf they should be known as ‘vessels of knowledge’ (wi‘ā’ al-‘ilm), rather than ‘ulamā’ (‘knowers’). The hearts of most of these scholars are in fact filled with anthropomorphist ideas, even though they outwardly curse those who hold this position, and many of them are in fact ignorant and simply use their facade of knowledge to curry favor with Sultans. It is these types of scholars that ‘Ayn al-Qudât believes are referred to in the hadith, “The strongest in torment [in the Hereafter] is the ignorant one who thinks by his ignorance that he is dear to God and one of the inheritors of the prophets.” But ‘Ayn al-Qudât is even more concerned about those scholars who are not simply ignorant but rather know that there is a Way to God but do not tread it. It is these people who are corrupting the religion of Muhammad, and deserve the epithet ‘the Evil Ulama’ (‘ulamā-yi shari).”

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721 L3.392.
723 See L1.238.
724 L1.184.
725 L1.244.
726 L1.245.
727 L1.245. See also L1.309, “The scholars are now highwaymen (quṭṭā’ al-ṭarīq).”
Alongside ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s harsh criticism of his contemporary pretenders to religious authority in the Muslim community, he also rejects what we might now call the ‘fundamentalist’ option, of relying on the Quran and Sunna alone. Comparing wayfaring - the curing of the soul - to physical medicine, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt asks, “What benefit is it for a patient to affirm that Galen knew medicine and there is a book by him? And it is not use to meddle in that and treat oneself. There must be a physician who knows what Galen said in order to treat the patient.”

As a result of the ever changing conditions of the Way, diverse ways of acting may be appropriate for different individuals and at different times. Just as different illnesses and constitutions demand different remedies, sometimes the seeker should fast all day and pray all night, but sometimes it is necessary to eat well and get one’s sleep, for “These judgments change according to a man’s moment, state and time.”

Moreover, it is not just the unpredictable and constantly changing nature of the Way that prevents an individual from being his own interpreter of the Quran and Sunna. Self-medication on the Way implies a greater danger. Given that the greatest sicknesses of the Way are pride (‘ujb) and egocentrism (khud-binnī), it is practically impossible for self-directed action to be truly sincere and hence efficacious, as all the actions that the ego itself chooses to do end up inflating it. As ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt sings in the Tamhīdāt,

No one can become aware of the hidden region of the heart.  
No one can be on his guard from the states of his own heart.  
No one can completely memorize all in the world of revelation.  
No human can remove himself from himself.  
No one can make the veiled understand this point.

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728 L3.392.  
729 L1.440.  
730 See for example, L3.387. A series of three letters criticize a disciple severly for making a waqf through his own initiative. See L1.428-32 and L3.404-7.
No one can pass on to His alley by virtue of himself.731

For ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, each of these options of religious guidance are wrong-headed, for “Whoever supposes he can reach God by other than God has been deceived.”732 The condition of the Way is the Guidance and Providential Care (‘ināyat) of God Himself. At a certain point in the Way, the wayfarer will gain direct access to this; heart will be exposed to the Divine Pen without intermediary, and God will write therein whatever He wishes and whatever the wayfarer needs.733 Once the wayfarer has entered the religion of Love (madhhab-i ‘ishq), like al-Ḥallāj he is the direct disciple of God, for Love is the nexus between God and humanity as a Divine Quality that is the true substance of the lover.734 As such,

The first resource (sarmāya) that the wayfaring seeker must have is Love, for our master said, ‘There is no Master more far-reaching than Love…’ When I asked the master, ‘What is the proof (indication and guide, dalīl) of God?’ He replied, ‘His proof (indication and guide) is God…’ The Sun cannot be known by a lamp, but should be known by the Sun. This is ‘I have known my Lord by my Lord.’

But I say that the guide (proof and indication) of God, exalted be He, for the beginner is Love. Whoever does not have the master of Love is not a traveler upon the Way. The Lover can reach the Beloved by means of Love, and sees the Beloved to the extent of Love. The more perfect the Love, the more beautiful one sees the Beloved to be.735

However, it is clear from ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings that although there may be individuals who are ‘sought’ (matlūb) by God Himself and guided directly,736 most seekers do not have the capacity to come under God’s unmediated tutelage. For most wayfarers, a human guide this therefore necessary.

731 T, 11.
732 L3.383.
733 See for example L1.279.
734 Cf. T, Ch 6.
735 T, 283-4.
736 See for example, L2.452.
The Spiritual Master as the Criterion of Correct Thought and Action

As someone who has traversed the path him or herself, the master (pīr or shaykh) has the direct knowledge of the Way of the prophets. He or she is thus able to apply the Divine guidance found in the Quran and Sunna to the ever changing Way. This knowledge resembles more the ‘taste’ for poetry or the experience possessed by a physician than book-learning, since “the work of the inward and the method of the heart has no limitation (ḍabt) and measure.”

But in addition to human functions performed by the master, such as warning the disciple of dangers that lie ahead, the human master acts as an intermediary for the disciple to access Divine Guidance itself. Using a perspectivism similar to that we have seen in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s three ontologies, the instruction of the master is both different from and identical to the Guidance of God. While discussing the reality of the master, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt therefore explains that, “A drop in the sea can be called the sea. And if you say that the drop is different [from the sea] it is correct. And if you say the drop is from the sea, it is also correct. And if you say it has come from the sea, it is also correct.”

Moreover, since most beginners are still not ready to receive the command of God directly, they must receive the Light of God as reflected in the heart of the master. Likewise, whereas the disciple cannot bear the unmediated Presence of God, the disciple can be ripened by

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738 T, 10. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains that this application of the Quran and Sunna is the true ḫithād, which as the Qadi of Hamadan shows is like legal ḫithād in that it often requires judgments to the particularities of situations that are too subtle to be completely codified. See Letters 55-6, L1.416-432. For the comparison of spiritual expertise with the taste for poetry, see L2.393. For a comparison of the conditions of the master and disciple based on the model of the crafts, see L2.353.
739 See for example, L3.375-6.
740 T, 336-7.
741 See L1.279.
the spirit (jān) of the master, just as fruit is ripened by sunlight, a process that requires physical proximity only for beginners.742

By pledging allegiance to a master, the disciple enters into a hierarchical chain leading up to God Himself. The words of the master are the point of access to this hierarchy, for “Whoever has followed the tongue [of the master] has followed the heart.”743 The master’s heart itself is dominated by the reality of the Prophet, and “Muṣṭafā’s heart, upon him be peace, [is] dominated by the command of the Real.”744 It is this spiritual hierarchy that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt sees affirmed in such Quranic verses as ‘The Hand of God is over their hands’ (SQ, 33:10), and ‘Whosoever obeys the Messenger obeys God.’ (SQ, 4:80) Thus ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt affirms of his own writings, that

whatever you have read and heard in the letters and dictations of this helpless one (būḥāra), you have not heard from my tongue, but have heard it from my heart, from the Spirit of Mustafa, upon him be peace. And whatever you have heard from the Spirit of Mustafa, upon him be peace, you have heard it from God.745

In light of this hierarchy, the seriousness of what is implied by the master-disciple relationship comes to light, and is much more than the kind of guidance a more experienced person might give someone less experienced in any other aspect of life. Given the Quranic affirmation that ‘among those We have created, there is a community that guides by the truth,’ (SQ, 7:181) the Divine seal of approval (tughrā) must have been received by the master, and false claimants will face God on the Day of Resurrection with their faces blackened. But such is the weight of the responsibility placed on their shoulders that those masters who receive the command to guide weep day and night, repeating the supplication of the Prophet, “Do not blacken my face.”746

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742 See L.1.290-4, L.2.171 and T, 30-1 and 314-5. On the influence of companionship with ‘Possessors of Heart’ see also L.1.472 and ZH, 71.
743 L.2.110.
744 L.1.279.
745 T, 17.
746 L.3.337.
The responsibility of the disciple is no less severe. To begin with, finding a true master is itself a process that depends on Divine Guidance, for although there are various signs that are displayed in different ways by different ‘Possessors of Heart’ (asḥāb-i dīl), there is no strict set of guidelines that can be followed. In the end, it is the intensity of seeking and destiny itself that will determine if a true master is found.747

Once the seeker has pledged allegiance to the master, the disciple must follow a strict set of comportment (ādāb) that will allow him or her to benefit from the relationship.748 Whereas many other texts in the tradition of ‘manners of disciples’ focus on particularities of outward behavior, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt pays greatest attention to the correct inward attitudes.749

However, it is on obedience to the commands of the master that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt places the greatest emphasis in his writings. To begin with, given that for ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt it is the quality of intention that determines the value and spiritual efficacy of any action, it is necessary for the disciple to learn how to purify the intention. Since most believers simply follow the religious actions that they have seen their parents doing, they are really worshipping habit (‘ādat-parastī) rather than worshipping God. This human tendency comes under severe criticism for ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, as he sees many of those who claim religious authority and his own disciples to be guilty of this sin, which he equates with idol-worship (but-parastī).750 Furthermore, even when one is not simply following habit, the ego (nafs) is prone to turn religious actions to its own advantage, such as by making use of them in order to appear pious in the eyes of others. Indeed, Satan has sworn to misguide human beings, and one of the ways he does this is to tempt them into changing the intentions that motivate

747 See L1.441-2, and ZH, 72-3.
749 See for example the list of ādāb on T, 31.
750 See T, 12.
their devotions. For ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, obedience to a true spiritual master is the only certain way to avoid these pitfalls, because one is following an inheritor of the Prophet over whom Satan has no power.⁷⁵¹ For this reason, “One cycle of prayer that you perform on the command of a Possessor of Heart is better than a thousand cycles motivated by habit, and one dirham that you give in charity on his command is better than a thousand dinars motivated by ostentation, the desire to hear praise and the concupiscence of the soul.”⁷⁵²

Given the ontological chain that links the master through the Prophet to God, the words of the master give the disciple access to a Divine means by which he or she can transcend the ego.

Anything the master tells the disciple to do is a divine robe (khal‘at-i īlāhī) that is given to him. Wherever the disciple is he is supported by that robe, for the command of the master is the command of God. ‘Whosoever obeys the Messenger obeys God’ (SQ, 4:80) can be this. ‘And We appointed leaders from among them who guided by Our Command’ (SQ, 32:24) is an explanation of all this.⁷⁵³

It is due to this importance of the master-disciple relationship that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt advises a disciple in one letter, “I know that you want to know the way to perfection, so I tell you it is service of shoes.”⁷⁵⁴ That is to say, the most seemingly insignificant service to a master, summed up by the oft-repeated term ‘serving the shoes’ (khidmat-i kafshi), is the key to the highest spiritual success.

Indeed, the importance of the spiritual master is so great for ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt that on several occasions he depicts the whole of the Way as being contained within this relationship.⁷⁵⁵ The following image beautifully illustrates the role of the master:

O friend, A person for whom discipleship has come about is like an ant that is going to the Ka‘ba from Khurasan. What do you say? Has an ant ever been able to go to

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⁷⁵¹ See L1.426.
⁷⁵² L1.44. But even if true sincerity is not attained by the disciple immediately upon submitting to the master, repeated practice under the master’s guidance will lead to it, just as a child learn calligraphy gradually by following a teacher’s instructions. See L1.54-5.
⁷⁵³ T, 35. Note that ‘Usayrān’s edition contains an error in the Quranic verse, corrected in the translation. See also L3.434. The necessity of obedience to the master is emphasized throughout ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings. See for example, L2.180, L2.241, L3.393-5.
⁷⁵⁴ L2.125.
the Ka'ba by itself? Far from it! For if it cuts out its soul [in effort] for a thousand years it would be as nothing. But if it attaches itself to the wing of a dove or an eagle, the Way becomes easy for it...The work of the disciple is to attach himself to the wing of a master, and when he has done so the Way of the disciple is finished and it is only the Way of the master that is left. But you will search worlds and not find a [true] disciple.756

We might be inclined to read this analogy as being hyperbolic, such that we would take ‘Ayn al-Qudāt as stating that the most important thing for a wayfarer to do is to find a master. However, following ‘Ayn al-Qudāt’s practice of considering the Way from different points of view or ‘sub-paradigms’ as discussed in the previous chapter, these statements suggest a perspective in which the master-disciple relationship is considered paramount. Indeed, from this point of view, the relationship with the master becomes so important for ‘Ayn al-Qudāt that the ability to hear and read the master’s teachings is considered to be the very reason that God bestowed these faculties on human beings.757

Bringing a personal dimension to this perspective, in Letter 132 ‘Ayn al-Qudāt speaks in a direct and intimate way with his addressee about the existential consequences of submission, which suggest that the master is the doorway to the highest forms of spiritual attainment. Having taught the addressee a particular supplication, ‘Ayn al-Qudāt explains,

The more you busy yourself with me the more effective this will be, for if you become busy with yourself it will have no effect. And when you spend a moment doing something for me, in that moment your spirit (jān) accepts the reflection of the Spirit. And when it accepts the reflection of the spirit, that reflection will begin to do its work in it, and will begin to make your substance take on its color. And the more you allow this reflection into your spirit, its path to me will be completed quicker. When its way to me has been completed, there is no need for it to travel itself; it will be my traveling within it...First seek seeking, then when you have found seeking, seek yourself! When you have found yourself invite me to you in order to lose yourself in me, so that you have found me by me. Then I will give you back to

756 L1.74-5. See also L2.476-7.
757 See L1.259.
yourself so that you will be yourself by me. From the beginning to the end it is what
I have said.\(^{758}\)

Through the role of the spiritual master as emphasized in passages such as this one, ‘Ayn al-\(\text{Qu\d{a}}t\) is able to re-establish Islam on the basis of an absolute criterion, preventing it from dissolving into a relativism in which anyone can claim to be travelling towards God using any belief or practice whatsoever. The instructions of the spiritual master become the criterion of orthodoxy. In contrast to the prescriptions of \(\text{fiqh}\) or creedal theology, however, this is a criterion that is fully responsive to the ever changing conditions of the Way and the needs of particular individuals. Just as Islam has been transformed by ‘Ayn al-\(\text{Qu\d{a}}t\) into wayfaring, the criterion of orthodoxy has been made the spiritual master.

**The Status of the Sharia**

‘Ayn al-\(\text{Qu\d{a}}t\)’s insistence on the necessity of absolute obedience to the spiritual master and his claim that Islam is whatever leads one to God lead us to the difficult question of the status of the Sharia in his thought and teachings. On several occasions, ‘Ayn al-\(\text{Qu\d{a}}t\) makes it explicit that it is the instructions of the master that trump the Sharia, a position for which he finds Qur'anic support in the story of Moses and Khidr.\(^{759}\)

The rhetoric that ‘Ayn al-\(\text{Qu\d{a}}t\) uses to make this point is deliberately forceful, designed to counterbalance the conception of a fixed set of rules of right and wrong, which is what legal scholars and their followers consider the Sharia to be. ‘Ayn al-\(\text{Qu\d{a}}t\) takes account of this

\(^{758}\) L3.296.

\(^{759}\) In which Moses is tasked to observe without objection Khidr’s sinking of a boat, killing of a child, and rebuilding of a wall that was supposed to be torn down. See \(\text{Q.}\) 18:65-82, and L1.252. ‘Ayn al-\(\text{Qu\d{a}}t\) considers the rebuilding of the wall, which in the story is done to protect treasure that will be inherited by orphans, to symbolize the master’s keeping of spiritual secrets until the disciple is ready to receive them.
conception on several occasions in the *Letters*, particularly when he feels the need to rebuke particular disciples for their lack of submission.760

The following passage seems deliberately designed to emphasize the possibility of the will of the master and a disciple’s conventional understanding of religion:

To be a disciple is to lose oneself in the master. First he loses his religion, then he loses himself. Do you know what losing religion is like? It is that if the master orders one to do something contrary to religion it is for this, for if in accordance with the master he does not take the way of opposing his own religion he is still a disciple of his own religion, not a disciple of the master...If he goes the way of the master he is a disciple. So if he goes the way of what he desires, he is a self-worshipper. A disciple must be a master-worshipper, binding the girdle for the sake of God, exalted be He and the Messenger, upon him be peace. What are you hearing? Alas, for this is not for you!761

However, when we examine these statements about the spiritual master and Sharia in the wider context of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s thought, it becomes evident that the Sharia is not simply cast aside, such that the disciple is simply following the personal religion of a master. Indeed, it is more appropriate to read ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s teachings as setting forth a range of perspectives and strategies that imbue his disciples with a new understanding of the nature of the Sharia and its applications, which for ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt more properly represent the intention of Scripture, the needs of the Way, and the proper function of the Sharia itself.

To begin with, in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s teachings, following the Sharia clearly plays an important role in the spiritual cultivation of the wayfarer. To give one example, while discussing the Way in terms of successively intense degrees of ‘faith’ (īmān) leading up to certainty (yaqīn), ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains,

Faith means affirmation, and what is affirmation without knowledge?…The beginning of faith is the affirmation of the heart, such that doubt has no place there. And the least of the degrees of this affirmation is that which causes one to follow

760 See for example the criticism of a disciple for besowing an endowment (waqf) without his permission, discussed in Letters 56, 57 and 149.
761 L1.270. See also, L2.102 and L2.420-1.
what is commanded and avoid what is prohibited… When this type of affirmation it attained within, a person resolves to make his actions and non-actions conform with the ruling of the Law (shar'). When he does this he is guided from the side of PreEternity…762

Here, adherence to the revealed Law is clearly both a result of the early stages of spiritual knowledge and a cause for the reception of further Divine Guidance, itself leading to further knowledge and progress on the Way. Finally, upon reaching the goal, “He is given vision, he looks and he is given the capacity to see the beauty of the Law, so that from being a follower he becomes one who can be followed.”763

But in addition to the spiritual efficacy of the prescriptions of the Sharia, which we will discuss further in what follows, the Sharia also possesses an important rhetorical significance in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings. Indeed, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt repeatedly reflects on the fact that he is reaching the limits of what it is permissible to express. Indeed, the vacillation between drunkenness and sobriety that is enacted in many of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s letters is expressed precisely in terms of the crossing of the limits of the permissible.764 We are therefore conditioned to think of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt himself when he explains that,

A group of wayfarers have gone mad for the Truth. The master of the Sharia knew by the light of prophecy that the mad must be put in chains, and so he made the Sharia their chains. Have you not heard that great man who said to his disciple, ‘Be mad with God and sane with Muṣṭafā’?765

Though ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt does in fact admit to crossing the line of what it is permissible to express, though only when he is compelled through inspiration and is not in control of his

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762 L1.353-4.
763 L2.90.
764 On the reasons why some things may not be spoken of according to the Sharia, see Letter 65, which provides a complicated proof in 9 tamkīds, or logical steps.
765 T, 204. See also T, 148.
composition, that fact that this line is significant in fact proves that the Sharia exists for him as an objective reality, the infringement of which will have heavy consequences.

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s awareness of the objective significance of the Sharia is, however, conditioned by the fact that the interpretation and application of the Sharia is dependent on circumstances. The Judge of Hamadan clearly possesses a clear legal philosophy of the nature of ḫitḥad, which acknowledges the difficulties of interpreting scripture and applying the Sharia to specific cases, which inevitably lead to a multiplicity of valid interpretations. Furthermore, he alludes to the fact (without going into details) that he holds the position that there are no determinate (‘alā al-ta’yīn) rulings in legal matters, presumably because the application of general rulings is always dependent on the specifics of circumstance.

These jurisprudential issues are further complicated by ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s understanding of the changing conditions of the Way. Using the circumstantial nature of the application of Islamic law as an analogy - and particularly the rules of ḫrām, such that “In one station wearing tailored clothes is forbidden, in another it is not” - ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt reminds the reader that legal responsibility (taklīf) is conditional on one’s status: “The good deeds of the righteous are the sins of those brought near. What is asked of men is one thing and what is asked of children is another…” The beginners are told not to commit grave sins. But “a station arrives in which one is told, in this station there are no misdemeanors. Ibn Mas‘ūd has said, ‘Everything God has prohibited is a cardinal sin…”

766 See L2.284.
767 ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt contrasts this understanding of legal rulings with intellectual matters, in which there are definite answers. See L2.284-5.
768 L3.315.
769 L3.314-5.
Passages such as these suggest that the further the wayfarer advances, the more difficult the requirements of the Sharia become. Indeed, at times ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt follows a logic in imposing legal obligations that can only cause anyone but a saint to realize the utter inadequacy of their spiritual practice. For example, the canonical prayer requires a state of ritual purity, but purity itself possesses levels. For the wayfarer, however, impurity has the additional meaning of possessing any vice and of worshipping anything other than God, for the Quran states that ‘The idolaters are surely unclean.’ (SQ, 9:28) Likewise, the prayer contains statements such as ‘There is no god but God and Thee we worship’ (Q, 1:5), so these cannot be uttered truthfully by anyone who secretly worships the world, attributing to it any existence aside from its Divine Ground. Given these strict conditions of prayer, the wayfarer reaches a point in which he or she realizes that they are really an idolator, and therefore cannot truthfully pray the canonical prayer.

A group of travelers on the Way of God reached a point where they knew with certainty that prayer is not correct with the impurity of idolatry. They did not see their inner aspects to be free of this impurity, nor could they purify themselves, so they abandoned the prayer…but they were mistaken, not striking the mark, for prayer is never possible for a human, but in any case, one still needs to perform it. It is just like if one cannot find anything with which to cover his nakedness, he must still pray naked…

In these cases, the literalism with which ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt applies the requirements of purity and truthfulness pulls the disciple out of their habitual practice of the canonical prayer, which the rules of fiqh have taught them to consider sufficient, and forces him or her to realize that all prayer is dependent on God and requires a constant awareness of this dependence, for none can reach God except by God.

But just as ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s perspectivism allows him to show the difficulty of living up to legal responsibility when this is what spiritual progress requires, it also allows him to relativize the

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770 See L1.382.
771 See L2.156-8.
importance of the Sharia and show its limitations. Taking as his point of departure a perspective that draws a sharp distinction between embodiment, which is the domain of legally significant action, and the supra-physical states, here considered to be the domain of wayfaring, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt emphasizes the limited applicability of legal criteria:

Alas! In the world of Sharia a physical individual spends his whole life in one station, which is humanity (bashariyyat); but a spiritual individual in every moment sees several thousand different stations and states, and passes beyond them. So how can a person like this be found in one station, which is the Law (sharī). For the physical individual they have given one ruling for all. Everyone in the legal (sharī) ruling are equal.772

This perspective, which sees the spiritual path as essentially lying beyond the body - as opposed to previous perspectives, which considered the conditions of embodied acts such as the canonical prayer - allows ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt to develop an alternative logic of responsibility: “For he who has given up (bāz gudhāshtā) the body and has cast aside human-nature and has come out from himself, responsibility and the ruling of address are lifted, and the ruling of the spirit (jān) and the heart are established.”773

The logic of this move derives from the Sharia itself, and particularly the hadith declaring those who are mad to have no legal responsibility.774 Developing a correlative mode of thinking that associates transcending the body, overwhelming love, loss of intellect, and intoxication, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains that,

Here the fatwas of the muftis do not work. If it were possible to speak of Love, this would be easy. There where the command of God, exalted be He, does not work, what can a fatwa do? There the pen of responsibility has been raised from the lover. How can there be a command there? It is the intellect of man that is the station of

772 T, 352.
773 T, 350
774 “The Pen (recording deeds) is lifted from three people: the sleeper until he wakes, the child until he reaches puberty, and the mad until he regains his mind.” On this hadith see V. Rispler-Chaim “People with Disabilities and the Performance of Religious Duties,” Disability in Islamic Law (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), 19-39.
the command and prohibition of God. When the Sun of Love rises the star of the intellect is erased.

The condition (ḥuǧ̲a]t) of the command of God in a man, O son, is the intellect;

The command has been lifted from him if his intellect has left him.

Here what can ‘do’ and ‘don’t do’ do? The rulings for lovers and the rulings for those with intellect are different.775

For those who are in this state, the conventional Sharia is replaced by the Sharia of Love (sharī‘at-i ‘ishq).776 Here the forbidden becomes licit and the wayfarer binds the ẓunnār of infidelity.

Though we will discuss this method of correlative thought that leads to the praising of infidelity in the following chapter, here let us note that both ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s strict and relativizing perspectives on the Sharia are designed to lead the disciple out of the habit-worship that usually describes adherence to the Sharia. This puts the Sharia in its proper place within a worldview that is defined by wayfaring and the changing conditions of the Way. For, “Observing the Sharia is habit-worship. Until you leave habit worship you will not observe the Truth. These words are to be understood in the Sharia of Truth, not in the Sharia of habit.”777

Islam from the Inside Out

As we have seen in this chapter, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s conception of Islam as ‘whatever brings one to God’, understood within the context of his philosophy of madhhabs, his teachings on the role of the spiritual master, and his engagement with the significance of the Sharia, leads to a conception of Islam that is radically different from that which we find in the discourses of fiqh and kalām. The directional and functional understanding of Islam does indeed lead to a much more flexible approach to many of the fundamental issues that constitute a particular interpretation of

775 L2.219.
776 See L1.227 and L1.235.
777 T, 320.
Islam, the Sharia being a case in point. This is demanded by ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s understanding of wayfaring as the quintessential characteristic of religion, and indeed of meaningful human existence, such that he can state, “We call the seeker of Islam the wayfarer.”

Furthermore, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s conception of Islam also differs from that of many Sufis, who conceptualize Islam as the combination of adherence to the revealed law and cultivation of character traits. As ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī advises, “Make the Sharia the sultan of your acts and the ṣarīqa the sultan of your character traits. Then you may perfect the noble character traits with the ṣarīqa of the Men [i.e. the Sufis] and arrange the character traits of submission and faith by observing the Sharia.”

However, the flexibility and perspectivism of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s engagement with Islam and its scriptures does not lead those practices that are conventionally associated with Islam or the practices of Sufism to be reduced in importance or simply cast aside. Instead, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt offers a fresh logic of why the wayfarer should (in the vast majority of cases) perform these practices and endeavor to do so in the most perfect way possible. The goal of Islam is to reach God, but save in the cases of an exceptional Divine fiat, this is accomplished by specific ‘causes of ripening’, which include both outward acts such as religious rites and invocations and inner qualities of the soul.

Indeed, the logic of Islam as wayfaring actually establishes a firm ground for justifying the five legal categories of the Sharia as signifying that which is respectively obligatory, assisting, neutral, impeding and ruining for the goal of reaching God. But rather than simply reinstating the fiqh of the legal scholars whom ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt so vehemently criticizes, this criterion of action moves the focus of attention from the movements of the body and thoughts of the mind - the only

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778 L3.339.
779 From Chihil-u du faṣl, Translated in Lumbard, Ahmad Al-Ghazālī, 63.
780 See T, 26-8.
781 See L2.1-16
dimensions of the individual that are subject to the rulings of the jurist - and affirms that it is the inner substance of actions - their intention, and the state of the heart - that is important. For this perspective ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt finds ample support in the Quran and hadith.\footnote{782 He is also influenced in many of his formulations of the inner reasons for performing the acts enjoined by the Sharia by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī.}

The central emphasis on the importance the inward dimension of the spiritual life as determining the value of the outward allows ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt to rearticulate and refashion many of the aspects of the religious practices of his disciples, teaching them, as many Sufi teachers had done before, of the deeper significances of these acts and of the ethical and noetic conditions of their correct performance.\footnote{783 A large quantity of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings are devoted to this. On the inner conditions of actions see for example, L1.24-5, L1.64-8, L1.70, L1.168, L1.182-3, L1.387, L1.466-9, and L2.48-49. On the inner significance of the five pillars see T, 55-95 and L3.361-9.}

However, the reinterpretation of Islam from the inside out also makes room for the exceptions, for those times when the master sees that the apparent rules must be broken in order for a higher truth to be realized, the very lesson that Khidr attempts to teach Moses in the Quran. Though the pillars of Islam are the necessary causes for the ripening of the spiritual faculties, the Way is too vast to be encompassed in a single set of rules or prescriptions. For sometimes the Way requires infidelity rather than faith.
Chapter 8: The Interplay of Darkness and Light

Although ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s restructuring of Islam ‘from the inside out’ includes many of the aspects of doctrine and practice familiar to conventional Islam, albeit imbued with new significance, his approach also opens up the possibility of perspectives that contrast starkly anything found in discourses such as fiqh and kalām. In this chapter, we will look into some of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s most notorious and controversial teachings, regarding the problem of evil, the symbolism of darkness and light, the interrelations between faith and infidelity and the significance of Iblīs.

These are the aspects of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s thought that have received the most scholarly attention. However, whereas scholarship on these topics has generally treated them independently, I suggest that these issues are fundamentally interrelated in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings. Moreover, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s views on all of these issues are clarified in light of what we now know regarding his pluralism and perspectivism. As such, whereas ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s views on these topics are often treated as static ‘doctrines’, they are far more comprehensible in terms of the process of perspective shift. In particular, I will suggest that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s treatment of each of these topics revolves around a single perspective shift, which is analogous in each case. Like so many so many aspects of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s thought, in order to understand his ideas on evil, we need to understand the process of shifting perspectives that characterized his thought.

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784 See Peter Awn offers a thorough treatment of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s Iblisology, contextualized in terms of previous thinkers on this topic. See Satan’s Tragedy and Redemption, 134-50. Carl Ernst brings together some of the most important of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s discussions of infidelity, showing their significance in the quest for mystical union (and does an excellent job of showing the dynamic significance of the discussions of infidelity). See Ernst, Words of Ecstasy, 73-84. Ernst grounds ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s discussions in the influence of al-Hallāj, but also points out those aspects of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s theories that continued to be discussed by Sufi authorities in the sub-continent. Leonard Lewisohn links ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s doctrines of infidelity to his expressions of religious tolerance (some of which we have examined in the context of the doctrines in which they fit in the previous chapter). He also mentions the connection between the doctrine of infidelity and ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s discussion of madhhabs. Further examination of the Hallājian roots of the doctrine of infidelity. These discussions are all a prelude to his investigation of Shabistārī’s presentation of the doctrine of infidelity. See Beyond Faith and Infidelity, 288-90. See also Papin-Matin, Beyond Death, 150ff.
infidelity and Iblīs, the relationships between ideas turn out to be as important as the ideas themselves.

As with other issues we have discussed, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s teachings on these points are practically inextricable from his methods of expression, and we will therefore begin with a close reading of a single letter, presented in abridged translation and commentary. Letter 128 shows us that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s treatment of the issues of good versus evil, light versus darkness, faith versus infidelity, and Iblīs versus Muhammad are interrelated using a correlative thought very similar to that we have identified in the poetry of Sanā‘ī. Moreover, the rhetorical flow of the letter allows ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt to weave these issues together and show their relationship to one another, again suggesting the importance of approaching ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s thought holistically.

The Problem of Evil in Letter 128

Letter 128 begins by considering the relationship of good and evil to God:

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate
The writing of that dearest brother arrived, may God prolong his continuance in obedience and with him traverse the path of ultimate felicity, and I was gladdened by that fact that it was said, ‘Where the Real, exalted by He, is, there is neither good nor evil.’ These words are correct. Where the Pre-Eternal Majesty is, there is no name of good or evil. For these are but pure relation (idāfat-i mahd). And where there is the reality of [the number] ten, for example, there is neither half-ness nor fifth-ness; but in relation to twenty and fifty these two qualities appear for ten.786

As we have already seen, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt often speaks of Divine Qualities as coming about through the relations between God and various created beings. From this perspective, one speaks about God as being powerful, for example, because one sees beings that are created and dominated by His Will, and so forth for the other qualities. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt also analyzes good and evil as being

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785 The use of the third person in place of the second person is a feature of formal Persian letter writing. For the remainder of the letter I translate the formal third person using the second person for the sake of clarity.
786 L3.277.
relational, and to an even greater degree than the Divine Qualities; for good and evil are defined as those things that are found to be agreeable or disagreeable to particular human faculties. According to this logic, as ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt states in The Quintessence of Verities, “it is possible for a single thing in a single state to be both good and evil in relation to two apprehenders. How veracious was the one who said, “The afflictions of one group are the benefits of another.’ ”787 This point of view explains why God should be considered beyond good and evil in Himself, that is, without taking into consideration His relation to created beings.788

But despite beginning Letter 128 by affirming that God is beyond good and evil, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt immediately shifts perspective on this issue:

By my life! However much to our reason it is possible789 that the Acts [of God] are thus, [nevertheless] they are the best of aspects (ahsan al-wujūh) and the nearest to wisdom. So from this perspective (i’tibār), all of His Acts are good.790

This is a brief statement of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s belief, also expressed by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī and others before him,791 that God has created the best of all possible worlds. As ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt elsewhere explains, for God to have done otherwise would contradict the Divine Omniscience, Omnipotence and Generosity.792 But this line of reasoning, immediately raises the question of the status of things that clearly appear to us as evil, particularly senseless evils. Anticipating his reader’s response, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt continues:

Regarding what you have said, that ‘I don’t know the place of some evils’: O friend, I have written all the answers in so many ways! But you have comprehended these perfections of the realities of this so late. Rather, of these answers, that which is clear[est] is that killing the highwayman is [for the] good (ṣalāḥ) in relation to the

787 ZH,15.
788 Cf. our discussion of Divine Attributes in Chapter Five.
789 ‘The text literally states ‘possible of existence’ (mumkin al-wujūd), and it seems as though ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt may be playfully using unnecessarily complex language to express the perspective of reason.
790 L3.277.
792 See L1.343.
order of the whole (niżām-i kull); and wounding certain limbs during bloodletting (fasd) or cupping (hijāmat) for the good (maṣlaḥa) of the whole body is identical with the good (ṣalāḥ) 793.

As is implied by ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s turn of phrase, these lines give a particularly concise statement of a teaching that occurs repeatedly and is diversely illustrated throughout his writings whenever the problem of evil arises: the fact that everything is good in view of the whole is not contradicted by the fact that from particular limited points of view and for particular individuals certain events and circumstances will be undesirable, and therefore considered evil. Indeed, it is impossible that everyone find everything pleasing, for the multiplicity of the world means that people will always have conflicting interests. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt elsewhere sums up this point of view with the quatrain,

The traveler hopes for clear air,
And the farmer wants snow and rain.
The wares of this become wet by the wish of that,
The sowing of that becomes dry from the wish of this. 794

In view of these conflicts, there is a place for meaningfully talking about evil, so long as one bears in mind its relativity. As ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt reminds his readers, the prophets and the Quran frequently mention evil, which is scriptural proof for the fact that evil is meaningful from some point of view. However, these scriptural utterances on evil do not imply that evil possesses an independent reality, even if their wording seems to suggest this. Scripture addresses itself to the needs and capacities of those to whom it is sent, whilst also containing within it more profound perspectives that will be accessible to those who are capable of understanding them. In one letter, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt sums up these different perspectives as follows:

Bad is relative, or rather it does not exist in itself. So there is the name of evil, and [the prophets] affirm it; but from the more correct point of view (min ḥayth al-tahqīq)
there is no evil; and they affirm this according to the capacity of the understandings of the people.\textsuperscript{795}

So the world does include relative evil, which is brought about by God as part of a larger plan. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s favorite way of illustrating this is to explain that God acts as a caring mother or father who takes their beloved child to be put under the knife of a healer, thus willing a relative evil for the child when it is the only way to achieve a greater good.\textsuperscript{796}

From this perspective, the entire problem of evil arises from the fact that just as the child simply does not understand the purpose of the suffering it feels during its medical procedure, we do not understand the purpose of the many evils in the world and the sufferings that all of us undergo here. The problem of evil is, therefore, fundamentally a problem of the limitations of our knowledge. In this vein, Letter 128 addresses turns to the most extreme possible example of the problem of suffering:

It may be that keeping someone in Hell perpetually (\textit{mukhallad}) is for the good of existence and you do not know it. And it is not the case that whatever your knowledge does not reach does not exist. Far from it! Nay, but the knowledge of Gabriel and Michael in relation to the knowledge of the Greatest Spirit (\textit{rūḥ-i aʿẓam}) is like the knowledge of a mosquito or an ant in relation to the knowledge of Gabriel and Michael…\textsuperscript{797}

This passage is designed to bring about an epistemic humility in the reader, which ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt sees as a necessary complement to the reasoning process behind the belief that God has created the best possible world. The need for this epistemic humility arises from the fact that, although reasoning about the compatibility of relative evil with greater good on the one hand, and about the Divine Omnipotence, Omniscience and Generosity on the other can lead to the

\textsuperscript{795} This position is summarized in a paradox ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt observes in the denial of evil: “When they say that evil itself does not exist, there must be evil.” L2.294.

\textsuperscript{796} L2.273. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt also gives scriptural examples of a greater good arising from particular evil, focusing in particular on the Joseph story, which for him presents the entire journey of the wayfarer to God. See for example L2.465-6 and L3.415-8.

\textsuperscript{797} L3.278.
intellectual certainty that all evil takes its place within the best possible world, it does not lead to an understanding of the meaning and purpose behind particular evils.798 Indeed, for ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt there are types of evil whose purpose even the prophets and saints cannot fathom.799 In relation to Divine Knowledge, even the prophets are like the child of a scholar, who asks why his father blackens some pages and leaves others white, for if the good were in blackening he should blacken them all. Furthermore, it is not the father’s fault that he cannot explain it to the child, for the child simply lacks the capacity to understand.800

By this point in the letter, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt has given a concise summary of his most important rational explanations of the problem of evil. Moreover, these explanations consist in a reformulation of ground covered by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī and other theologians before him. However, despite the fact that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt makes extensive use of rational argument and analogy to convince his reader of his theodicy, the direction that Letter 128 now takes shows that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s response to the problem of evil is by no means limited to following the discursive elaboration of his forebears. After intensifying his emphasis on the incapacity of the human mind to grasp every aspect of the Divine Wisdom by pointing out the magnitude of the existential distance between even the Greatest Spirit and God Himself, Letter 128 takes a turn in the direction of the ecstatic. As in other cases we have seen, this ecstatic turn is accompanied by meditation on the Disconnected Letters of the Quran, which is here occasioned by the desire to reveal a fresh perspective on the question of the eternity of Hell that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt had just addressed:

O friend, I cannot say all that I know. Far from it! Far from it!

798 As ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt discusses in L1.343.
799 L2.296. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains that evil is of two kinds: 1. Evil regarding which the prophets and saints know the concealed good. The symbol (mithāl) of this is the tresses (zulf) of the Beloved. 2. Evil of which no one can know what good lies in it. The symbol of this is the mole on the Beauty of the Beloved. That is, they don’t know in detail what the good is, but they do know in general that the mole increases the Beloved’s beauty.
800 L1.346.
Do not remove the dust that covers this ancient mystery,

Do not engage yourself and myself with this mystery.

Just as a human is constrained (majbūr) not to kill himself, likewise he is constrained to not speak openly of the mysteries of God, exalted be He, even if they can be uttered. And I speak from taste, not from what has been read or heard, of what the meaning of Kāf-Hā-Yā-‘Ayn-Ṣād is. Is it permitted, for example, [to mention] a verse that abrogates this other one about the perpetuity of the infidels [in Hell]? What do you say? And ‘We bring you into being in what you do not know.’ (Q, 56:61) Will it be anything else other than what we have been told? What do you say? ‘As for those who are wretched, they shall be in the Fire, wherein there shall be for them groaning and wailing, abide therein for so long as the heavens and the earth endure, save as thy Lord wills. Surely thy Lord does whatsoever He wills.’ (SQ, 11:106-7)

Elsewhere in his writings, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāṭ compares the punishment that God metes out upon the disbelievers to a merciful father punishing his child; though it inflicts pain on the child, it is really motivated by a deeper kindness.\(^{801}\) Again, the suffering of this punishment constitutes an evil on its own level and relative to the wishes of the individual who is suffering, but nevertheless there is a greater purpose at work. For ‘Ayn al-Quḍāṭ, the existence of Hell must be understood within the context of God’s declaration (in a ḥadīth qudsi) that it is written on the Divine Throne, My Mercy precedes My Wrath, and thus, “If there were no Mercy there would be no Wrath,”\(^{802}\) and similarly the hadith, “God, Exalted be He, created Hell from what was left over (fadl) of His Mercy.”\(^{803}\)

For ‘Ayn al-Quḍāṭ, the Quranic verses cited in this passage of Letter 128 clearly leave the possibility open that Hell is not eternal, for like everything else, the duration of Hell is dependent on the Will of an All-Merciful God. By the fact that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāṭ is here asking the reader to draw a logical conclusion based on the implications of scripture we can see that the ecstatic mode has not completely overcome his writing. Indeed, in this passage ‘Ayn al-Quḍāṭ is expressing the moment between sobriety and intoxication, in which he can still discern that the Sharia places

\(^{801}\) L2.226.
\(^{802}\) L2.273
\(^{803}\) L2.226.
limitations on the mysteries that may be revealed, yet is still pulled towards expression them. This force overcomes him, as he makes a further argument for the supremacy of Divine Mercy, citing the most authoritative collections of Sunni hadith to make explicit the implications of the Quranic verses he has cited:

So, what can happen? What do you say? It is in the Sahih of Bukhari or Muslim that when the Day of Intercession comes, God, exalted be He, will say: ‘The intercession of the prophets has come, but My Mercy still remains, So He takes from the Fire a Handful, or ‘two Handfuls’, I forget which. Do you know how many fit in His Handful?…”

This citation of hadith marks the end of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s appeal to the rational faculties in his discussion of the problem of evil; in the remainder of the letter the ecstatic attitude dominates. But before turning to these ecstatic passages, let us consider the significance of what we have seen so far.

The pedagogical strategies that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt has used so far in this letter, which synthesize many of the most important themes of his many discussions of the problem of evil, clearly illustrate the importance of perspectivism in his approach to this issue. On the rational level, the highest level of understanding that the human mind can achieve is to acknowledge the total Divine Plan, in which everything has its place and is therefore ultimately good. This in turn allows one to accept that relative evils, conditioned by the diverse interests and needs of particular individuals, must exist as part of this Plan. On the level of action, this ability to discern between different perspectives makes possible the correct response to evil, which is to speak and act in order to counteract it on the relative plane, whilst simultaneously being resigned to the Divine Decree (qadā) that evil play a relative role in creation. Furthermore, the understanding of these different perspectives enables effective reading of scripture, making it possible to understand the Mercy behind Divine Threats,

805 See L222-3.
whilst also comprehending why “because of the necessities of human nature and from the perfection of Divine Generosity,” scripture should not emphasize the full extent of the Divine Mercy.\textsuperscript{806}

As Letter 128 draws to its close, this mention of the triumph of Divine Mercy leads ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt to utter allusions to some of his most mysterious teachings, which often occur during the ecstatic portions of his writings. These final utterances show us, however, that the perspectivism of his rational and theological discussions of the problem of evil do not exhaust his response to this problem. Indeed, his most important, and perhaps also his most original, response to the problem of evil is present in this transition from the sober to the ecstatic mode of discourse; the sober and the ecstatic modes each presents its own point of view on the nature of evil.\textsuperscript{807} We will need to consider each aspect of these teachings systematically in order to clarify them, but let us first consider this passage in full to get a sense of the kind of issues that are at stake and the rhetoric of their presentation:

O Chevalier (jawānmand), you will never know what I know. The mole of the face\textsuperscript{808} of the beloved is for the perfection of beauty. Wait until you see your own beauty; then you will know if Iblīs is the mole or the master of the messengers, the lord of the first and the last…

O Chevalier, if there were no sickness, health would not be pleasurable. And if there were no separation from the beloved, no one would know the pleasure of union, and things become clear by their opposites…

O Chevalier, no one has brought the mystery of destiny (qadar)\textsuperscript{809} into expression as I have, but that which depends on your tasting is something else. Let them come into my eyes and look at it. You are in love with yourself, the fault is in this. If you had love of Him, it would be something else. O Chevalier, the mole is a fault – in it the lover sees himself there, where there is no selfhood. O master of the

\textsuperscript{806} \textit{L2.226.}

\textsuperscript{807} Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī’s theodicy also references the complementarity of rational and mystical approaches. (See Ormsby, \textit{Theodicy in Islamic Thought}, 69-74). However, whereas al-Ghazālī simply provides an indication that mystical insight solves many aspects of the problem, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt actively endeavors to communicate the nature of this insight.

\textsuperscript{808}  This volume (Vol. 3) of the \textit{Letters} is published without variant readings, but the meaning demands reading \textit{khal'-i rāy} for \textit{khal'-u rāy} here.

\textsuperscript{809}  Indicating particular God’s predestination of good and evil.
first and the last! ‘Then cast thy sight twice again; thy sight will return to thee humbled and wearied [unable to find fault in creation].’ (SQ, 67:4)
Correct the fault of your eye, and even if you don’t, it is all Beauty:

They say the Kharābāt are bad, this is not right.

The Khārabāt are good, the evils (badī-ḥā) are from us.

One must escape from vision that manifests evil,

For it is from a man’s rightness that the world comes aright.\(^{810}\)

**Two Perspectives on Light and Darkness**

In order to understand the interwoven themes of this passage - the contrast of the white face of the beloved with the black mole, of Muhammad with Iblīs, of sickness with health, and also the ambivalent significance of the Kharābāt - we need to take account of a manner of correlative thinking that occurs repeatedly in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings. Though similar to the correlations around light and darkness that we saw in Sanā‘ī’s panegyric-tafsīr of Sūrat al-Ḍuḥā, these themes in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings have their own very particular emphases, and so need to be treated on their own terms.

Like Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s correlative approach to themes of light and darkness is also rooted in the contemplation of verses of the Quran. Also like Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt uses the opening verses of Sūrat al-Ḍuḥā to develop the correlative polarities. Here the light and darkness of these opening verses are taken as symbols of the baser and loftier aspects of human selfhood:

…if someone is given way to the celestial world and is given back his heart… ‘By the night as it enshrouds’ (SQ, 92:1) is enough for him to understand the darkness of humanity (bashariyyat), and ‘By the day as it discloses’ (SQ, 92:2) is the face of the heart, ‘For he is upon a light from his Lord.’ (Q, 39:22)”\(^{811}\)

Making use of the method of ‘exegesis of the Quran using the Quran’ (tafsīr al-qur‘ān bi‘l-qur‘ān), ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt intimates that the Quran itself uses the same kind of correlative thought that

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\(^{810}\) L3.279-80.

\(^{811}\) L2.229.
he is presenting, for concerning the believers the Quran states that God “brings them out of the darkness into the light.” (SQ, 2:257) ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt argues that this must refer to spiritual light and darkness, as is clearly shown by the following similar verse, in which this movement into light is brought about by the Divine Blessing: “He it is Who blesses you, as do His angels, that He may bring you out of darkness into light.” (SQ, 33:43)

The correlations suggested in Quranic verses such as these are enriched and developed by ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, coming to be applied so widely to the phenomena of the spiritual life that it comes to seem that everything of spiritually significance is divided between these two poles. The universe is thus a universe of opposites, for,

- Infidelity and faith, ignorance and knowledge, darkness and light, death and life, hell and paradise, devils and angels, soul and spirit, reverence (taqwā) and lust (hawā), falsehood and truth, obedience and disobedience, all are opposites of one another.

But the force of this correlation is not simply to categorize various phenomena into two different groups, but in fact to suggest that there are really only two underlying realities in play. Thus,

You should know that darkness and this world, hell and the soul, lust and Satan, all are one. And light and the Hereafter, and paradise and the angels, and piety and the spirit, are likewise [all one].

In passages such as these, light becomes the symbol of everything good, and darkness is seen as the symbol of evil. Within this correlation, the celestial substance of the Prophet Muhammad is identified with the light of the Quranic oath, ‘by the morning as it breathes,’ (SQ, 81:18)

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812 L2.229.
813 Although the correlation between realities representing the poles of darkness and light is the most significant example of this mode of thinking in the works of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, it is not the only one. For another example, see the correlative thought developed around ‘the inward’ (bāṭin) and ‘the outward’ (zāhir) in T, 3-4.
814 L1.250.
815 L1.249.
whereas the substance of Iblīs is revealed by the oath, ‘By the night as it enshrouds.’ (SQ, 92:1)\textsuperscript{816} By following the logic of this correlative thought, the significance of God’s removing the believers from the darkness and bringing them into the light is made more tangible, for it directly signifies escaping from the clutches of Satan and traveling the way of virtue.\textsuperscript{817}

However, while passages such as these use correlative thought to draw together elements of the wayfarer’s struggle to fight against the evil tendencies of the soul and to progress in virtue, this is only the first of two uses that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt makes of the correlative polarity of light and darkness. In many passages, particularly those that turn ecstatic, we see a perspective shift in this polarity. Instead of there being a conception of good versus evil, both darkness and light are shown to have their own positive roles to play.

When considering the sub-paradigm of the Way as the alternation of states, we saw that the wayfarer was to be cultivated by the alternation of hope and fear, of joyous expansion and sorrowful contraction, of union and separation, of intellectual illumination and drunken ecstasy. Within this framework, the same Quranic oaths become symbols of these two necessary poles of the path, as also for ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s own manner of writing, which so often vacillates between the poles of sober, logical analysis and ecstatic overflow. It is this positive quality of the symbolism of the night that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt expresses using these paradoxical lines of poetry, which point to the contemplative richness of the night hours:

The sun of everyone sets when night comes,
My sun rises every night, at the evening prayer.\textsuperscript{818}

When we come across the correlative polarity of light and darkness that is a major theme in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s later writings we must thus be aware that there are two different uses of this

\textsuperscript{816} \Lref{L2.231.}
\textsuperscript{817} \Lref{L1.250.}
\textsuperscript{818} \Lref{L2.470.}
polarity. In the first there light and darkness are pitted against each other, with light representing everything spiritually positive and darkness representing all that must be overcome in the spiritual path. In the second, however, there is a parity between light and darkness as two poles between which the wayfarer moves during the alternation of spiritual states. These two uses of the polarity of light and darkness are crucial for understand ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s attitude towards faith and infidelity.

**Faith and Infidelity**

A central aspect of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s two-fold use of the light-darkness polarity in his teachings emerges through his complex depiction of the interplay between faith and infidelity, in which he draws on the paradoxical insights of Sufis in a tradition going back to al-Hallāj.\(^{819}\)

In many passages of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings, faith and infidelity take their place in the set of correlations that divide the good from the bad in the world. Explaining how even someone who is a believer can slip and commit a major sin, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains,

Faith and infidelity in the human heart are just like darkness and light in the visible sky. The sky is sometimes dark and sometimes light. If someone avoids fornication, it must be because the light of faith is dominant. And if he commits it, it is because the darkness of infidelity is dominant... It is possible that a heart that is the locus of faith at some point become darkened and fornication [or another major sin] be committed. Know that ‘Faith waxes and wanes.’\(^{820}\)

At many points in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings, faith and infidelity therefore mean precisely what one would expect them to mean. But this is not the whole story.

The same shift that occurs within the light-darkness polarity also occurs for faith-infidelity, so that both come to represent correlative sets of aspects of the alternating states on the path. It is

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a result of this ‘secret meaning’ of infidelity that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt (quoting Junayd) states, “They say things in private that are infidelity for the commoners, but the kernel of faith for the elite.”

The interpretive difficulty, however, arises from the fact that infidelity does not simply become a place holder or code for the positive correlates of darkness, such as separation, sorrow or drunkenness. It also maintains many of the connotations it possessed in its original negative meaning. Moreover, it is precisely the tension created between the two significances of infidelity that gives ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s expression of these teachings their dramatic force. In his writings, the mystery of the interplay of darkness and light and of faith and infidelity unfolds before us, in symbolic and poetic mode, just beyond the grasp of discursive thought.

In particular, the interplay between the two meanings of infidelity, which as we have seen through the study of Sanāʾī played a significant role in various strands of the Persian poetic tradition even before ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, had enabled the development of a rich symbolic language around these themes, a language that the ecstatic judge of Hamadan employs to full effect:

If you want to understand it more clearly: death for us is infidelity, and life is Islam and unity (tawḥīd). Know that the head of the witness-players (ṣāḥid-bāzān) is Muṣṭafā, who gave an indication of infidelity and faith in this way: ‘O God, by You I live and by You I die.’

Alas! The poet must have had a beautiful witness (ṣāḥid) in order to compose these lines, such that a particle of these meanings showed their faces:

That witness-idol, the Love of whom is within our Spirit,

His separation is pain and his union is our relief and remedy.

His face is religion, the direction of prayer; his tresses infidelity and idolatry,

So he himself without a doubt is both our infidelity and faith.

As deployed in passages such as this, faith (or ‘Islam’) and infidelity have already ceased to represent good and evil, and their functions ascend from being opposing poles to becoming

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821 L1.130.
822 T, 321. Cf. T, 20 where ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt states that the prophets swear by God, but God swears by the hair and face of the Prophet.
complementary parts of an integrative whole. Ultimately, their alternation leads to their being consumed in a unity, as the ecstatic wayfarer becomes unable to see the difference:

Here ‘By the night as it approaches,’ (SQ, 81:17) has become lost in ‘By the morning as it breathes.’ (SQ, 81:18) Here ‘By the morning brightness’ (SQ, 93:1) and ‘By the night when still’ (SQ, 93:2) have become a single point. Here ‘By the morning brightness’ (SQ, 93:1) and ‘By the day as it discloses’ (SQ, 92:2) have turned their faces to each other. Here the mole of the beloved is the sign of the perfection of her beauty. Here it is not clear which is the mole and which is the beauty. ‘In truth, by such tresses one cannot be Muslim.’

The beloved (yār) makes day of night, when she shows her face,
And makes night of day, when she unfurls her hair.
She shows the former to adorn the quarter,
And unfurls the latter to bring a fragrance like musk.

If you fall in love you know no difference between the face of the Friend and the hair of the Friend.823

This final meeting of polarities provides a key to understanding how ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s correlative thought functions, allowing us to draw together his teachings on the problem of evil, the nature of light and darkness, and the significance of faith and infidelity, which are all to be understood within the paradigm of wayfaring and in the context of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s discursive styles. Each of the issues that we have considered so far in this chapter develop in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings through the juxtaposition of two fundamental perspectives:

In the first perspective, which is the more easily understood within ordinary experience and within conventional Islam, evil and infidelity are clearly negative. Acting within an ontology that emphasizes duality, the wayfarer must struggle against evil and hold fast to faith, and the Way is conceived as a movement from the darkness of vice and ignorance into the light of knowledge, beauty and virtue.

823 L2.214.
In the second perspective, evil is first understood within the context of a greater good, and ultimately disappears within the total goodness of the Divine Plan, approaching the Unity of God in which no evil exists whatsoever. The wayfarer now journeys through the poles of light and darkness as the alternating states of the Way. As the wayfarer progresses, darkness and light become further integrated, until the wayfarer sees only the Unity that underlies their multiplicity. This progression is reflected in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s own prose, which moves from the sober to the ecstatic as unity dominates over duality.

**Infidelity and the Way: The Levels of Infidelity**

But even infidelity (kafr-i ḥaqiqī), the equal pole opposing light and faith, cannot be reduced to a single idea, something that could be easily defined and then rationally analyzed and explained away. Rather, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt approaches this topic from multiple points of view, each of which possesses particular implications. True infidelity is itself best approached as a correlative concept, drawing together a range of insights around this pole in the light-darkness pair. Seen from this point of view, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s conception of infidelity itself becomes an independent paradigm of the Way, in light of which the entire journey can be conceptualized.

The relationship between infidelity and the Way is most clearly expressed in the Tamhidāt. There ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt provides an unexpected interpretation of 35:32, ‘Then We bequeathed the Book to those of Our servants whom We had chosen. Among them are those who wrong themselves, those who take a middle course, and those who are foremost in good deeds, by God’s Leave.’ (SQ)

In one respect, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt follows one subset of the interpretations of this verse, in that he does label one of these three groups as infidels; but in his view it is not ‘those who wrong
themselves’ that are the infidels as some exegetes would have it.\textsuperscript{824} Rather, the infidels are ‘those who take a middle course’, because “infidelity is the middle of the Way.”\textsuperscript{825} The ‘true infidelity’ is thus as a mid-point between the entry into the Way and the Goal that most interpretations of true infidelity take their place.

On several occasions, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt describes the beginning of the Way as a realization that one’s religiosity up to that point had been an insincere result of habit. As we saw in the previous chapter, the wayfarer realizes that his declaration of ‘There is no god but God’ or that ‘Praise belongs to God,’ is in fact a lie, for his heart has not truly understood what these statements mean. It is the transition from compound ignorance to simple ignorance that makes seeking knowledge possible, and thus,

The folk of doubt are dear…When they give a man vision he looks, sees and knows that he does not have it. Doubt occurs here. Doubt is the first station of the wayfarers; until one reaches doubt there is not seeking… When one knows that one does not have something one seeks it… First he seeks the Way for the guides (rāḥ-barān), then he travels on the Way. Then, when he arrives, the Pre-Eternal Majesty again opens the ambush of destiny for him and shows him to himself. Here the man becomes able to see infidelity…Here ‘He who knows himself knows his Lord’ becomes manifest…His tongue continually says ‘O Overturner of Hearts, Make my heart firm in Your religion.’\textsuperscript{826}

\textsuperscript{824} T, 47. As ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains the term ‘those who wrong themselves’, “one who has neither infidelity nor faith is called a ‘wrong-doer’ (zālim), of whom the entire aspiration is nothing but this world, and whose object of worship is his desire (ḥawa),” That is to say, these are the people who follow conventions and have not undertaken the task of wayfaring. Given ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s understanding of true Islam, these people may in fact be ‘Muslim’, in the conventional and habitual sense. As such, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s interpretation of this verse may also correspond to the other common interpretation of this verse, stating this verse is referring to three groups within the Muslim community, since they have been described as receiving the revelation. For various interpretations of this verse see SQ, Commentaries on 35:32.

\textsuperscript{825} T, 48.

\textsuperscript{826} L1.309. Elsewhere, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt cites in this connection a hadith, ‘If God wills the good of a servant he makes him able to see the faults of his soul.’ See L2.353.
It is this first realization that the faith one professed is in fact a form of infidelity that is described as “Entering real infidelity and leaving metaphorical Islam,”\textsuperscript{827} thus explaining why ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt would tell his disciple,

How much should I write, for you have understood nothing of this religion, being content with ostentatious convention. Wait until the Truth reveals the Beauty of His Face to you. Then the beginning of your Islam is to tie the \textit{zunnār}. By the Pre-Eternal Majesty and Power, which has been worshipped by 124,000 leaders, that when you are able to see the reality of religion you will tie the \textit{zunnār}.\textsuperscript{828}

But even though this form of ‘infidelity’ signifies the beginning of the Way, and the first step towards actualizing true Islam, it is already a great attainment, and one that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt sees rarely achieved in his times. Indeed, as a quatrain often cited by ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt puts it:

The way of the \textit{qalandar} cannot be traversed without sight,  
\[ \text{One cannot steal one’s way to the alley of those who turn away (kū-yi mudbīrī).} \]

Infidelity in itself is the rule of faith;  
\[ \text{Easily, easily, one cannot reach infidelity.} \]

\textquote[‘Ayn al-Quḍāt]{‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s conception of ‘infidelity as the middle of the Way’ gains greater clarity later in the \textit{Tamhīdāt}, in pair of passages in which he explains the stages of infidelity.}\textsuperscript{830} In the second of these, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt compares the levels of infidelity to the stages in the Quranic account

\textsuperscript{827} T, 349. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt attributes this statement from Ibn Sīnā’s \textit{Risālat al-Aḍḥawīyya}, although it is not found in the current version of this text. See Safi, \textit{The Politics of Knowledge}, 178-9.\textsuperscript{.}
\textsuperscript{828} L2.45. The passage continues, “By my life, you have known but just as the people of convention know in country of Rūm. Their \textit{kufr} and your Islam is convention, not reality.”
\textsuperscript{829} L1.316. In the \textit{Tamhīdāt}, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains the different reactions of such an experience: some wanted their outer comportment to conform with their inward state, so they decided to tie the girdle of infidelity; another group became intoxicated, tied the girdle and began to reveal secrets, for which some were killed; others feigned madness to avoid the inconvenience of dealing with the world, and still others were given back to themselves so they could preserve the sharia and their lives. See T, 205-8. On ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s premonition of his execution, making him in one way a member of the second group, see Rustom, “‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Between Divine Jealousy and Political Intrigue.”
\textsuperscript{830} T, 209-12. Cf. L1.479, in which ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt calls his reader to pass through the first, second and third infidelities. See also, L2.353-4 in which the three levels are called ‘the infidelity of knowledge’, ‘the infidelity of action’, along with a third (unnamed), that is at the bottom of the infidel soul and which few wayfarers reach and even fewer can pass beyond.
of Abraham’s seeking his Lord amongst the celestial spheres. As such, each stage of infidelity (aside from the last), appears as a light in which the wayfarer seeks divinity. The Way therefore involves the successive rejection of apparent divinities, each of which brings about a temporary infidelity, and hence an ascent towards the only true object of worship.

By creating a composite of the two accounts in the Tamhīdāt, we come up with the following schema:

Firstly, ‘outward infidelity’ (kufr-i zāhirī), is infidelity in the ordinary sense of the term, meaning, when one “rejects or denies a sign or indication of the revelation (shar‘).”

Secondly, ‘the infidelity of the soul’ (kufr-i nafs), results from the soul’s claim to divinity, which makes it the greatest idol. Once again, there is a type of perspectivism in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s account of this level. In the first account ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt admits that everyone falls prey to this type of infidelity at one time or another, but nevertheless there is nothing praiseworthy about either this or the first type of infidelity. In the second account, however, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains the reason why seeing one’s own soul or spirit (rūḥ and nafs are used almost interchangeably here) can lead to infidelity, for “whoever sees the beauty of his own spirit has seen the beauty of the Beloved, yet this is not the beauty of the Beloved. And if a believer sees his own spirit he has seen the Beauty of the Friend, and if an infidel sees his own spirit he has seen the Majesty of the Friend.” The individual soul or spirit is a reflection of the Divine Qualities, hence its power to assume divinity, yet it not the Beloved, and hence must be transcended.

831 Q, 6:76-9.
832 This point is emphasized by Ernst in Words of Ecstasy, 82-4.
833 ‘T, 209.
834 ‘T, 209.
835 ‘T, 212.
Thirdly, at the stage of ‘The infidelity of Iblīs’, (kafr-i Iblīs) the wayfarer is overwhelmed by the vision of the dark light of Iblīs. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt affirms that this occurs after the wayfarer has transcended the body, and is hence beyond ‘sin’ in the ordinary sense, yet faces the risk of taking the black light of Iblīs as his final object of worship and progressing no further on the path.\textsuperscript{836} The significance of this stage will become clearer in light of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s wider discussions of the significance of Iblīs, which we shall turn to shortly.

Fourthly, the wayfarer transcends the black light of Iblīs and moves to ‘the infidelity of the heart’ (kafr-i qalb), also termed ‘the infidelity of Muhammad’ (kafr-i Muḥammad). Here the Muhammadan Reality manifests so intensely that the wayfarer may mistake it for God. However, the duality implied by setting the light of Muḥammad against the black light of Iblīs proves that this is not the final stage of the journey. Thus, the wayfarer must say with Abraham ‘\textit{Truly, as a ḥanīf, I have turned my face toward Him Who created the heavens and the earth, and I am not of the idolaters,}’ (SQ, 6:79) and pass on to the final infidelity. This fifth type, divine infidelity (kafr-i ilāhi), is the ‘true infidelity’ in the highest sense discussed by al-Ḥallāj, whom ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt quotes here:

\begin{quote}
I disbelieved in the religion of God, and disbelief is obligatory,

\textit{For me; and as the Muslims see it, it is ugly.}\textsuperscript{837}
\end{quote}

This type of infidelity implies the utter annihilation or ‘covering’ (the literal meaning of kafr) of the individual in God.\textsuperscript{838}

These last three stages, however, require that we take a closer look at ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s infamous teachings on Iblīs, which we are now in a better position to understand thanks to our

\textsuperscript{836} T, 211.
\textsuperscript{837} T, 215.
\textsuperscript{838} See Lewisohn, Beyond Faith and Infidelity, 268-317.

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analysis of the correlative thought in his discussions of good and evil, light and darkness, and infidelity and faith.

Iblīsology

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s esoteric teachings on praiseworthy infidelity are expressed in their strongest form in his controversial attitude towards Satan, or Iblīs. Though this topic has received significant attention from scholars, it is within the context of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s correlative thought and this twofold approach to the range of topics discussed above that this topic is best approached.

First of all, it is vital to recognize that in much of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings, Satan (also occasionally referred to as Iblīs in these contexts) is in fact depicted in precisely the negative way that one would expect from a teacher of Islamic morality and spirituality. As such, the disciple must be constantly on his or her guard against the temptations of Satan, who guides away from the straight path. Likewise, those who prefer this world over the Hereafter are really friends of Satan rather than God, and thus those who prefer the service of the Sultan to the service of holy men are serving the friends of Satan. As the Quran teaches, only ‘those made pure’ (mukhlaṣīn) escape from Satan’s misguidance, which ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt takes as proof of the necessity of following a spiritual master, for it is only through genuine attainment on the Way, and not simply book-learning that this characteristic of purity is achieved.

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839 See especially Awn, Satan’s Tragedy and Redemption, 134-142. Awn covers the main features of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s Iblīsology and situates them in relation to other Sufi figures, particularly al-Hallāj. However, Awn’s thematic approach limits him from showing the connections of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s Iblīsology with other aspects of his though. Awn also does not note that due to ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s perspectivism he upholds both the negative and positive depictions of Satan or Iblīs found in the Sufi tradition.
840 See for example L1.456.
841 See L2.177.
842 L2.68.
843 See Q, 38:82-3.
Satan or Iblīs obviously takes up a place within the correlative association on the side of darkness, and is perhaps its ultimate representative. As such, the same shift of perspective that transforms darkness from signifying ‘evil’, making it the necessary complement of light, also transforms the significance of Iblīs (in this context never referred to as Satan, Shaytān). Once again, as was the case with infidelity, it is the dramatic tension between the conventional role of Iblīs and his newfound significance that provides a great deal of the dramatic tension of many of the drunken passages of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings.

Within this perspective, which is always presented as a secret that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt finds himself compelled by the pull of inspiration to reveal, it is recalled that it is God who created Iblīs and gave him the power that he uses to misguide humans. Iblīs therefore possesses a God-given function in creation. Whereas Muhammad is a summoner (dā‘ī) towards God, Iblīs is the summoner away from God, who keeps strangers from entering the Divine Presence.844

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt expresses this teaching using an aphorism quoted from the Sufi master, al-Daqqāq.845 “The veil is jealousy (ghayra), and there is no higher obstacle on the Way of God than jealousy.”846 Jealousy (ghayra) here suggests the idea of ‘jealously guarding’ something, the feeling of keeping something to yourself and not wanting nosy outsiders to even look at it. The Arabic root of ghayra, related to ‘other’, fits well with this idea of keeping ‘others’ away. As such, both God and the servant need to practice this ‘jealousy’, for “The jealousy of the servant is that he should be completely for God, may He be exalted…and [God’s] jealousy is that He has made no way to Himself save by Himself.”847 Iblīs thus acts

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844 T, 228.
846 T, 316.
847 T, 316.
as a servant of this Divine Jealousy, keeping away all those who seek to reach God by anything other than God Himself.

Although within the first perspective, Iblīs is the enemy of the wayfarer who has sworn to misguide him, within the second perspective this function is recognized to be subordinate to a Divine Quality, for God ‘leads astray whomsoever He will and guides whomsoever He will.’ (SQ, 16:93) As such, Iblīs himself is seen as a Divine Act\(^\text{848}\) and an intermediary for Divine Misguidance. However, propriety prevents the servant from attributing evil phenomena to God Himself, and therefore no one in his right might will affirm that it is God who is ordering the work of Satan. The drunken wayfarer is not, however, in his right mind, and it is therefore those who are in waystations of intoxication who make statements like that of Moses: ‘This is naught but Thy discord (fitna’).’ (Q, 8:155) As such, “The drunkards have expressed this point in their drunkenness and have risked it, for otherwise when would this pass through the mind of one who is sober? And if it does he buries his head in the straw.”\(^\text{849}\)

Tracing the existential roots of Iblīs back to the Divine Attributes leads to an ontology in which, in addition to the ‘Muhammadan light’, the spiritual reality of the Prophet and the first manifest of God, there is also the ‘black light’ of Iblīs. Though both have their origins in God, their effects are opposite to one another:

My dear! Water is the cause of life and nourishment of fish but is the cause of death of others…Here you will know why the Sun of the Light of God is the cause of light and illumination for the Substance of Muṣṭafā and is the cause of darkness and darkening for the Substance of Iblīs; for from the Light of Muhammad faith arises and from the light of Iblīs infidelity and failure. Hear this meaning from Muṣṭafā, upon him be peace, when he said: ‘I was sent as an inviter and I possess nothing of guidance, and Iblīs was created as a misguider and possesses nothing of misguidance.’ Alas! What can be done? ‘None alters His Words.’ (SQ, 6:115)\(^\text{850}\)

\(^\text{848}\) See L2.232.
\(^\text{849}\) L2.8. See also T, 189.
\(^\text{850}\) T, 186.
Yet despite Iblīs’ role as summoner away from God, his place in this second perspective regarding the poles of light and darkness also gives him an important positive role to play. Since even Iblīs has a divine origin, he becomes the symbol of the realization that everything in creation, whether good or bad, ultimately leads back to God. It is therefore the one who realizes the function of Iblīs who is said to have studied mystery of destiny (qadar) in under in his school (maktab). Realizing the function of Iblīs is therefore to realize the unity of the Divine Act that underlies the diversity of this world. Here the wayfarer realizes that everything that seemed to be an imperfection in creation, plays the role of the mole on the face of the beloved, and “Whoever does not know the mole of the beloved to be the perfection of beauty still has a fault in his vision.”

The wayfarer is overcome by this realization, which cannot coexist with sobriety, for,

when the mole of the Beloved shows the face of its beauty to you, the tongue of the moment all dictates:

That unfortunate (shūr-bakht) wretch who sees that cheek and mole,  
Sees the disheveled state in his own condition.

The mystical insight into the function of Iblīs thus becomes the solution to the problem of evil, for when the wayfarer has reached the stage that even Iblīs is seen to play a role in the Divine Plan, then the significance of evil in creation will also become clear.

It is from this point of view that the ecstatic utterances with which Letter 128 came to a close become intelligible. The problem of evil, the nature of infidelity, and the status of Iblīs, are all epitomized in the symbol of the mole on the face of the beloved. The imperfection of the mole in fact leads to greater beauty. However, one can only appreciate everything about the beloved in one is truly in love, for it is love that brings one towards the perspective of unity. Just as a lover

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851 See L2.143.
852 L2.296.
853 L2.296.
loves even the faults of the beloved, one who has reached this stage understands the reasons why creation must contain privation, not through logical analysis, but rather through direct vision. It is thus that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt declares that the kharābāt, the symbol of vice, are not bad in themselves. It is rather our own egoism that causes us to see them as bad, for we fail to see the presence of the absolute Good through the illusory appearances of evil.

The Mythology of Iblīs

In addition to the ontological investigation into the reality of Iblīs on the one hand and the wayfarer’s vision of the significance of this reality on the other, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s Iblīsology also meditates on the inner significance of the Quranic account of his refusal to prostrate to Adam.

For ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, Iblīs’s refusal to prostrate is only one example of a series of events described in Islamic scripture that represent an outward breaking of the rules and yet conceal an inner wisdom. The core of each of these events - which include Adam and Eve’s eating of the forbidden fruit,854 Joseph’s secretly informing Benjamin of his identity while accusing him of theft in front of his brothers,855 and Abū Bakr’s refusal to allow the Prophet to share with him in ownership of the slave Bilāl, stating that ‘God has no partners’856 - is that secret love and approval is sometimes manifested through a show of rejection or disobedience. This idea sums up ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s understanding of Iblīs’ refusal to prostrate. This refusal was the ultimate expression of the affirmation of Divine Unity through the refusal to prostrate to something other than God, as captured in the lines,

If you were to cut me into pieces in love,

854 L2.186.
855 See L2.189.
856 See L1.95.
The heart would not incline toward other than you.\textsuperscript{857}

But, though this idea is inherited by ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt from predecessors such as his own teacher, ʿAbd al-Ghazālī, and from al-Ḥallāj, whom ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt quotes directly,\textsuperscript{858} the Judge of Hamadan is exceptional in the extent to which he elaborates on the redemption of Iblīs, drawing from it a wide range of spiritual lessons for his disciples.

Of primary importance among these is the challenge to the wayfarer inherent in Iblīs’ choice, which meant giving up the proximity to God that he had enjoyed for thousands of years in exchange for eternal suffering\textsuperscript{859} and the Divine Curse. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt warns the reader that anyone who is not potentially capable of making this choice - of accepting suffering if it is willed by God - is really an idolator, who worships the state of blessing and happiness achieved through proximity to God rather than worshipping God Himself.\textsuperscript{860} Drawing on the esoteric significance of the Disconnected Letters, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains the blessing that Iblīs finds within the Curse: that all he pays attention to in the Quranic laʿnātī, ‘My Curse’, is the final letter, yā’, the pronoun in which God expresses His Selfhood, This yā’ ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt considers to be the same yā’ found in the letters Kāf-Ḥā-Yā-ʿAyn-Ṣad at the beginning of Sūrat Maryam, thus encoding the mystery of which he speaks.\textsuperscript{861}

Making further use of the correlative thought that we have identified in the valorization of infidelity and Iblīs, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt discusses the qualities of those wayfarers who resemble Iblīs in certain respects as follows: “There is no difference in the pre-Eternal Attributes. If you prefer ‘He

\textsuperscript{857} L1.96.
\textsuperscript{858} See L2.187.
\textsuperscript{859} Or at least, until the end of the world, as implied by the verse addressed to Iblīs, \textit{And surely My Curse shall be upon thee till the Day of Judgment.} (SQ, 38:78)
\textsuperscript{860} See L2.410 and T, 179
\textsuperscript{861} See L2.411-3 and T, 225.
Guides’, it is from your self-worship. Those who worship God know His Attributes to be equal, for He is equal; and they desire Him from Him not paradise.”

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt further explains that those who reach the state of Iblīs and are destined to travel his path “travel the way of proximity in farness”, for separation is the criterion of friendship. These wayfarers, who resemble the ‘people of blame’ (malāmatiyya) discussed often in Sufi literature, possess their knowledge and love of God inwardly, though their faces are so blackened with shame that not even Gabriel and Michael know their true state, a state ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt associates with spiritual poverty (faqr).

However, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt warns his readers not to confuse themselves with those who have studied in the school of Iblīs, for the conditions of the Way differ for each wayfarer and according to each station. Moreover, he warns that what can be conveyed by discourse is quite different from that which is realized by attainment. As such, on one occasion, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt completes a letter that is particularly revelatory of the mysteries of Iblīs by warning the addressee that his inner substance is in the hands of Satan, who will only be forced out if he ‘serves the shoes’ of the men of God.

Indeed, the wayfarer will surely go astray if he or she endeavors to follow Iblīs in order to gain access to the mysteries of which ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt speaks. As we saw above, in the polarity of light and darkness, phenomena associated with the dark pole possess both a negative and positive significance, based on different perspectives and according to different stages on the Way. As such,

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862 L2.232.
863 L1.313.
864 L2.418.
866 See L1.285.
867 See L1.314.
868 L2.413.
to know that the quality of Misguiding belongs to God is very different from being subject to that Misguidance. For this reason, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt advises his addressee that: “Now the way of proximity for you is not to listen to [Iblīs’] words, for [God] leads astray whomsoever He will… (SQ, 13:27) One must deny Satan and pass by like a man.”

**Beyond Iblīs**

So far we have seen that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s approaches to the problem of evil, to faith and infidelity, and to the status of Iblīs are all centered around a single type of perspective shift. From a first, more conventional point of view, one term in the polarities good-evil, faith-infidelity, Muḥammad-Iblīs is positive and the other is negative. From this point of view, the spiritual path is conceived of as the struggle for good to overcome evil. However, at a certain point in the path a perspective shift occurs and the purely negative aspects of these second terms are transcended. When this occurs evil, infidelity and Iblīs are transmuted, becoming reintegrated as part of a new polarity of alternating states, epitomized by the alternating states of the Way. The second perspective is thus best conceived of as a stage in the direction of Divine Unity (tawḥīd), beyond conventional awareness but still within the realm of duality.

But despite ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s expression of the loftiness of the station of those who have understood the true nature of the black light of Iblīs, it still remains only one stage in the journey towards Unity. As such, the Way must continue beyond it. Indeed, the Black Light of Iblīs is nothing but the shadow of the Light of the Prophet, which is itself the shadow of God. Here ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt quotes a quatrain he attributes to Abū’l-Ḥasan al-Bustī,

We have seen the world hidden and the people of both worlds,
And we have passed so easily beyond fault and beyond shame.

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869 L1.315.
Know that black light to be beyond the point without points,
And we have passed by that too, and neither this remained nor that.\textsuperscript{870}

In ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s correlative thought, Iblîs represents the annihilation (\textit{fanā‘}) of the servant, whereas Muhammad represents subsistence (\textit{baqā‘}):

Whoever suffers in the world of Iblîs and is half killed, is healed in the world of Muhammad, for infidelity is of the mode (\textit{raqam}) of annihilation and faith is of the mode of subsistence. The more annihilation there is in this Way, the more perfect is the subsistence in this Way.\textsuperscript{871}

Much like \textit{fanā‘} in relation to \textit{baqā‘}, it is only with reference to the Light of Muhammad beyond it that the Black Light of Iblîs finds its full significance, for Iblîs is the gatekeeper of the Divine Presence, the Threshold of which is the Light of Muhammad, preventing those who are unworthy of entering:

Haven’t you seen how the nightingale is in love with the rose? When it reaches the rose it cannot bear it and strikes itself against it. The thorn has its post beneath the rose, to make the nightingale die for the rose...If the rose did not have the inconvenience of the thorn, all nightingales would claim to be in Love. But with the existence of the thorn, of a hundred thousand nightingales not one claims the Love of the rose...But one cannot reach this station until the guardian of this presence allows him to pass. Who is this guardian? ‘\textit{By Thy Might, I shall cause them to err all together.}’ (SQ, 38:82)

Despite the comparability of light and darkness that seems to be implied by the equality of light and darkness in Quranic oaths such as ‘\textit{By the sun and its morning brightness; by the moon when following it,}’ (SQ, 91:1-2) there is in fact no parity between them. Though the thorn plays its role in existence, there is no comparison between the thorn and the flower of the rose itself. Likewise, “From the station of the light of the moon to the station of the light of the Sun there is a vast distance! From light to darkness is as much as you think there is between the Throne and the dust.”\textsuperscript{872}

\textsuperscript{871} T, 233.
\textsuperscript{872} T, 213.
Passing beyond the black light, the wayfarer thus reaches the Light of Muḥammad:

When a man reaches that station in which he becomes drunk on the wine of realization, when he reaches the perfection of drunkenness and the limit of the end of himself the soul of Muhammad manifests to him... He gains felicity (dawlat) beyond which there is no other felicity. Whoever gains realization of his own soul gains realization of the soul of Muḥammad, and whoever gains the realization of the soul of Muḥammad sets the foot of his aspiration in the realization of the Essence of God...\(^{873}\)

But the Light of Muhammad also ultimately appears as a veil, the last level of infidelity to be set aside, just as Abraham turned to God having realized that the stars, the Moon, and finally the Sun were not his Lord.\(^{874}\) For ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, infidelity and faith are conditions of human nature, which is always vacillating between one state and the other. However, this duality can only exist so long as there is an individual self to be qualified by faith and infidelity. Thus, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt advises, “Remove yourself from the way and you have attained.”\(^{875}\) It is this which appears here as the final solution to the problem of faith and infidelity, and the end of the Way. It is thus that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s philosophy of the true nature of infidelity is purposed to bringing the wayfarer beyond all duality:

I don’t know what you understand of infidelity! There are many infidelities, since the stations of the wayfarer are many. Infidelity and Islam are necessary for and a condition of the goer at every moment. So long as the wayfarer is aware and there is still something of himself, he will not find release from the highwayman of ‘I shall cause them to err.’ (SQ, 38:82) When he is released, he arrives at the Lote Tree of the Uttermost, and they have given him way. But when he has passed beyond end and beginning, being and non-being, command and prohibition, the heavens and the earths, the Throne and the carpet, and all existents, and has stood up from the fetter of attaining and not attaining, and has been purified of the expectation of seeing and not seeing, he has escaped from all faults and tribulations. There is no tribulation more difficult in this Way than your existence, and there is no poison deadlier in this Way than the hopes of disciples. One must stand up from it all.\(^{876}\)

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\(^{873}\) T, 56-7.

\(^{874}\) On the levels of infidelity see T, 212-7.

\(^{875}\) T, 24.

\(^{876}\) T, 49-50.
Conclusion: Diversity in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s discursive style in his later works is a finely crafted response to the wide range of intellectual and literary sources that were at his disposal and could be used for spiritual instruction. Displaying the influence of both Abū Hāmid and ʿĀḥmad al-Ghazālī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt combines commentary on the Qurān and hadith, philosophical and theological discourse, ethical instruction, poetry, and mystical symbolism in his letters to his disciples and the Tamḥīdāt. But so seamlessly are these woven together in his engaging rhetorical style that one can read his works for a long time without realizing that many of the teachings he presents actually conflict with each other. As a result, though it is not too difficult to understand particular passages through close reading, the task of comprehending how his writings cohere as a whole is remarkably challenging.

In these chapters we have suggested that the diversity of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s teachings on the issues that concern him most is a direct result of the paradigms within which he thinks. Just as his core concern in his writings is to guide his readers on the Way, his understanding of the Way in fact conditions every aspect of his project. At the heart of this understanding is the idea that the Way involves the journey through multiple perspectives on reality, and thus many issues will appear differently, and need to be explained differently, depending on the perspective at hand.

Once we gain an appreciation of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s perspectivism and the paradigm of wayfaring, his teachings on a wide range of issues become far more intelligible. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s ontology, his theory of religious pluralism, and his attitudes towards evil, infidelity and Iblīs, are all articulated within the movement between perspectives. Moreover, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s discursive style is expertly adapted to this movement, leading the reader through the alternation of states that constitutes a fundamental characteristic of the Way.
Part 3: Farīd al-Dīn Aṭṭār

Chapter 9: Diversity in Aṭṭār’s The Conference of the Birds

The writings of Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār, Abū Ḥāmid, Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr Ibrāhīm (d.618/1221), are considered classics of Persian Sufi literature. In contrast to Ṣanāʿī and ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, our understanding of his writings is much clearer than our understanding of his life. This owes to the poverty of reliable information about the latter,877 perhaps resulting from the fact that he lived simply, working a pharmacist-perfumer as his name indicates. This profession meant that, unlike Ṣanāʿī, ‘Aṭṭār had no need of using poetry to make a living, and he himself rejoices in this fact, which allows him to use poetry only in the service of expressing truth and wisdom.878

A large portion of scholarly discussions over the past century regarding ‘Aṭṭār have focused the question of the authenticity of the works attributed to him. Scholarly consensus has now been reached that his authentic works consist of the prose hagiographical collection, Tadhkirat al-Awliyā’ (The Memorial of God’s Friends), plus those works listed by ‘Aṭṭār himself in the introduction to his Mukhtār-Nāma (Book of the Chosen): i.e. the three mathnawīs structured around a frame narrative, namely Mantiq al-Ṭayr (The Conference of the Birds), Muṣībat-Nāma (The Book of Affliction) and Ilāhī-Nāma (The Book of God), plus the frameless Asrār-Nāma (The Book of Mysteries), ‘Aṭṭār’s Dīwān (consisting mainly of ghazals) and the Mukhtār-Nāma itself, which consists of quatrains selected and arranged by

877 It is likely that his mathnawīs probably only became well-known in the 9th/15th century, whereas his contemporary ‘Awfī mentions his lyric poetry, and his Tadhkirat al-Awliyā’ was known in the 7th/13th century. See B. Reinert, “Aṭṭār, Farīd-al-Dīn,” EIr.
‘Aṭṭār near the end of his life. Given this list, all of ‘Aṭṭār’s works are rooted in the Sufi tradition and possess a remarkable stylistic and thematic continuity. Given that my understanding of how these works fit together is premised on my reading of *The Conference of the Birds* in this chapter, I will introduce each of these works in more detail in Chapter Ten.

The content of ‘Aṭṭār’s *mathnawīs* has been subject to detailed scrutiny, particularly in Helmut Ritter’s monumental *Das Meer der Seele*, in which a vast amount of material is translated or paraphrased and cross-referenced. Material is collected according to thirty themes, each of which collects a range of similar quotations on a number of points. These cover the whole range of topics, from death and the transitory nature of the world, to the virtues, the nature of God, and the goal of the spiritual path.

Ritter’s study seems almost so comprehensive as to leave little to be said about ‘Aṭṭār’s *mathnawīs*; or as one commentator has put it, “the expert world seems almost paralyzed with awe.” Indeed, I know of no other scholars account in any western language that attempts a holistic account of ‘Aṭṭār’s work after Ritter. Nevertheless, limitations can be noted in Ritter’s monumental study that result from his methodology. Despite the value of collecting quotations on similar themes from across ‘Aṭṭār’s works, the disadvantage of this approach is that it conceals from us the fact that the wholes of each of ‘Aṭṭār’s works are more than the sum of their parts. Indeed,}

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879 The last of the attributed works to be conclusively rejected is the *Khusraw-Nāma*, a romance telling the story of Hurmuz and Gul. Shafī‘i-Kadkanī has argued for the mistaken attribution of this work in detail. See IN, ‘Editor’s Introduction’, 48-63. ‘Aṭṭār’s own references to a work of his named *Khusraw-Nāma* are in fact to the book we now know as *Ilāhī-Nāma*. Given Shafī‘i-Kadkanī’s work, previous perspectives on the question of authenticity, such as that of Ritter espoused in H. Ritter, “‘Aṭṭār”, EI2, are now outdated.

880 Stephien has, however, refuted the commonly held opinion that ‘Aṭṭār’s works only contain mystical poetry and prose, pointing to “evidence of explicitly literary-poetic, as opposed to religio-mystic, authorial agendas” as well as philosophical aspects of ‘Aṭṭār’s poetry. See Stephien, “A Study in Sufi Poetics,” 85-8.


many of the components that ‘Aṭṭār weaves together to form his works have a substantially different significance if taken in isolation than if read in relation to their position within the whole. Notwithstanding the value of Ritter’s work, there remains much to be said about how ‘Aṭṭār’s works function as wholes, and how this effects our understanding of his thought.

In the chapters that follow, I suggest that a holistic reading of ‘Aṭṭār’s mathnawīs reveals multiple dimensions of the significance of diversity in his thought that does not appear if we only study the parts independently. In the present chapter, I begin this study by showing how ‘Aṭṭār’s magnum opus, The Conference of the Birds, develops around a set of meditations on the significance of diversity. Having shown the multifaceted ways in which ‘Aṭṭār engages with diversity in this book, I begin Chapter Ten by presenting a schema of how all of ‘Aṭṭār’s authentic works can be understood as corresponding to parts of The Conference of the Birds. This correspondence indicates the penetration of the concern for diversity throughout his writings.

However, this understanding of The Conference of the Birds as ‘Aṭṭār’s ‘master-narrative’ is simply a jumping off point for considering his other mathnawīs in more detail. In Chapter Ten, I first consider ‘Aṭṭār’s diverse perspectives on the significance of the cosmos, focusing on The Book of Mysteries and the main narrative section of The Book of Affliction. I then investigate ‘Aṭṭār’s approach to the diversity within the self, showing how the later narrative section of The Book of Affliction and the whole of The Book of God revolve around this theme. This in turn provides the basis for a brief consideration of the problem of the diverse perspectives ‘Aṭṭār espouses in the epilogues to his mathnawīs.

I devote Chapter Eleven to a study of The Book of Mysteries, ‘Aṭṭār’s only mathnawī without a frame narrative, which is generally thought to present its material without any cogent order. On the basis of the studies of diversity in ‘Aṭṭār’s other mathnawīs, however, I am able to suggest the concealed structure of this work.
Issues of Diversity in ‘Aṭṭār

Various aspects of the significance of diversity ‘Aṭṭār’s works have caught the attention of scholars, leading to a range of opinions on these issues. For Navid Kermani the diversity of ‘Aṭṭār’s teachings reflect his status as a poet, rather than a theorist. As such he states that ‘Aṭṭār’s Book of Affliction (of ‘Book of Suffering’):

not only develops a cosmology of pain but is itself a cosmos of themes, intellectual positions and ideas. It not only laments the terror of God but at once also praises His infinity, splendor and greatness - just as The Book of Suffering in general places completely different, partly conflicting motifs alongside one another. It would be wrong to combine them in a synthesis: the statements are true in their respective poetic contexts; this shows that Attar is a poet at heart, not a theorist. It is precisely this inner disparity within a uniform, closed outer form that is one of the fundamental characteristics of Attar’s three great epics, and it results not least from the alternation between the ongoing frame story and the individual tales.883

As our work in this dissertation has already shown, I do not consider the juxtaposition of diverse teachings to indicate that any author is not a theorist – rather this can be a fundamental part of the expression of an author’s theoretical project.

Several other scholars have, however, analyzed the positive significance of diversity for ‘Aṭṭār. For Muhammad Isa Waley, this diversity is a crucial part of ‘Aṭṭār’s expression of the human condition, and as such his poetry, much like “the conditions of earthly life take every thinking human being, the worldly and the spiritual alike, through an ever-changing interior landscape.”884

The spiritual significance of this diversity has been further elaborated on by Rafal Stephien, who

883 Kermani, The Terror of God, 47 Stephien has offered the following more positive assessment of the significance of diversity in ‘Aṭṭār’s mathnawīs: “As for structure, precisely the extended allegorical narratives underlying the Mosībat nāma, Elāhī nāma and, most famously, the Manteq al-tayr attest to an intricately complex inter-weaving of disparate levels of discourse (narratival-literal, didactic-moral, mystical-anagogical ... Dante would be proud!) that should put paid to any ideas of simplicity in ‘Attār’s poetic craft.” Stephien, “A Study in Sufi Poetics,” 89.

analyzes the ‘Aṭṭār’s expressions of mystical union through “literary apotheosis,” in which poetry comes into harmonious tension with revelation.885

The significance of social diversity in ‘Aṭṭār has also attracted the attention of several Persian scholars. For Hurmuz Mālikī, ‘Aṭṭār’s poetry demonstrate a double nature, ‘subjectivist’ and ‘objectivist’ strands, hence expressing both a deeply concerned socially active critical voice and the perspective of an otherworldly recluse.886 Claudia Yaghoobi has, moreover, analyzed the significance of ‘Aṭṭār’s portrayal of diverse social identities, and his particular interest in glorifying subalterns.887

All of these studies show that diversity in its many varieties present an extremely fruitful site for analysis. As I shall suggest in what follows, all of these types of diversity are brought together in ‘Aṭṭār’s Conference of the Birds, the very structure of which in all its stages is grounded in ‘Aṭṭār’s conscious concern for diversity.

The Conference of the Birds

‘Aṭṭār’s narrative style represents a significant development since Sanāʾī’s Walled Garden.888 In addition to the frame stories that we will be analyzing in the chapters that follow, not only are the individual didactic stories in ‘Aṭṭār’s mathnawīs more developed than those of Sanāʾī, but ‘Aṭṭār even includes longer ‘mini-romances’ in his works. Given ‘Aṭṭār’s interest in the romance genre, it is worth noting that his older contemporary, Nizāmī Ganjāwī (d. 607/1209) also shows interest in the importance of diversity as an organizing principle. In particular, the stories told by the seven

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888 As noted by de Bruijn. See “Comparative Notes on Sanāʾī and ‘Aṭṭār,” 372.
princesses in the *Haft Paykar* have been shown to provide a multifaceted exploration of the diverse aspects of love, considered within a metaphysical cosmology.\(^889\) ‘Atţār’s *Conference of the Birds* thus participates in a literary tradition beyond what are usually considered to be the borders of Sufi poetry.

Although there are recognizable precedents on which ‘Atţār based this narrative, particularly the *Treatise of the Birds* by Ibn Sinā and the work of the same title attributed to both of the Ghazālī brothers,\(^890\) critics have noted that ‘Atţār’s rendition of the story possesses a great deal more narrative complexity than its predecessors.\(^891\) Although there are a number of scholarly works that summarize the frame narrative of *The Conference of the Birds*, I have seen no detailed analysis of how the book functions as a whole. In this chapter I intend to take a new approach to analyzing *The Conference of the Birds*, presenting a holistic reading of the work, focusing on themes of diversity. Through a reading of the introductory sections in praise of God and the Prophet, the

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\(^{890}\) An Arabic version of this work has been attributed to Abū Hāmid whereas the Persian version is attributed to Ahmad. See MT, ‘Editor’s Introduction’, 119-25 for a full translation of the Persian version.

frame story itself, and the weaving of stories within this frame, I will argue that various types of
diversity constitute ‘Aṭṭār most consistent concern throughout this book.

**What’s in an Opening?**

As one might expect, ‘Aṭṭār’s introduction to *The Conference of the Birds* follows the
conventions established for the didactic *mathnawī* established by Sanā‘ī’s *Walled Garden of Truth*. Like
*The Walled Garden*, ‘Aṭṭār’s introductory praise of God focuses in particular on exalting God through
emphasizing human inability to know Him and human incapacity in the face of Divine Will. This
point of emphasis suits ‘Aṭṭār particularly well, for as we shall see, human poverty and incapacity
constitutes a theme on which he places the highest importance.

However, in addition to its extensive meditation on human incapacity and bewilderment
in the face of the Divine Reality, the opening section of *The Conference of the Birds* is noteworthy for
another method it uses to emphasize the greatness of God: its depiction of the diversity inherent in
God’s creation. ‘Aṭṭār’s several methods of conjuring up the diversity of creation and its significance
presage many of the themes of the book, showing his use of the technique of ‘the skillful opening’
(*barā’at al-istihlāl*). Moreover, the fact that he should choose themes of diversity as the material of
this literary device is a good indication that we are on the right track in taking diversity as a key
theme of *The Conference of the Birds*.

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the importance of the introductions to Persian *mathnawīs* in the following terms: “In the introductory sections...one may find information about the poets’ view of the world, their opinions on poetry and its practical aspects, on the background of their stories and the deeper meanings which they want to be read into them.” See *Of Piety and Poetry*, 187.
'Aṭṭār’s emphasis on the significance of the creation of diversity here follows several stages, that we can term ‘diversification’, ‘transformation’, ‘combination’ and ‘correlation’. In the first of these, ‘diversification’, the poet praises God by emphasizing the differences between various qualities in creation, such as the fixity of the earth and the movement of the heavenly spheres. In the following representative line, ‘Aṭṭār places emphasis on the fact that the created order is intrinsically related to number:

In six days He made the seven heavens appear,
And with two letters⁸⁹⁵ He manifested the nine spheres.⁸⁹⁴

The contrast of these numbers with the Divine Unity is of course implicit here; creation and multiplicity are as inseparable as divinity and unity.

‘Aṭṭār’s depiction of the diversification of creation continues through his evocation of the diversity of various created beings, considering the symbolism of various flowers and animals.⁸⁹⁵ His mention of birds is especially significant given the theme of the book. Here he mentions only two species, but uses precisely the same images with which he will ‘Welcome the Birds’ later on:

He has made for the parrot a collar out of gold,
He has made the hoopoe the messenger of the Way.⁸⁹⁶

Also, presaging his welcoming of the birds, ‘Aṭṭār draws a connection between the diversity in the natural order and the diversity inherent in sacred history, alluding to the differences in the missions and persons of the various prophets, each of whom was called to perform the same task. Thus, both Solomon and Moses were given a staff,⁸⁹⁷ but we might recall that the miracle of

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⁸⁹⁴ MT, 233.6.
⁸⁹⁵ See MT, 234.37-9. On the eulogizing of aspects of the cosmos in the Shāh-Nāma, which may represent a precedent for this aspect of ‘Aṭṭār’s introduction, see de Bruijn, Of Piety and Poetry, 187-8.
⁸⁹⁶ MT, 234.25. Cf. MT, 259.617 and 260.627.
⁸⁹⁷ MT, 234.32-3.
Solomon’s staff was its sturdiness,\(^{898}\) whereas the miracle of Moses’ staff was its plasticity. Likewise, God brought a camel out of solid rock and made the golden calf breathe,\(^{899}\) but the first of these was a miracle to guide and the second a false god to lead astray. This diversity in the Divine Acts within sacred history is summed up in the difference in function between the mosquito sent to torment Nimrod and the spider who spun its web with miraculous speed to conceal the Prophet Muhammad during the emigration:

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\begin{align*}
&\text{He set half a mosquito over the head of an enemy,} \\
&\quad \text{Keeping it over his head for four hundred years.} \\
&\text{And through Wisdom He gave a spider its web,} \\
&\quad \text{Bringing peace beneath it to the foremost of the world.}^{900}
\end{align*}
\]

In his discussion of each of these themes, we see ‘Aṭṭār alluding in different ways to the importance of diversity in the realization of the Divine Plan for creation.

But it is not just the diversity of God’s creation that testifies to His Power. In the second approach to diversity we can identify here, ‘transformation’, God is praised by highlighting His ability to bring about multiple states within a single being, making a single creature capable of many things:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{He made the [Holy] Spirit appear in pure form,} \\
&\quad \text{And brought all these works from a handful of dust.}^{901}
\end{align*}
\]

This capacity for transformation is particularly important for ‘Aṭṭār’s understanding of the human state, and, indeed, the entire book will revolve around transformation, as the birds progress through the inner transformation of the Way.

\(^{898}\) For no one realized his death for several days since he was leaning on the staff, which finally broke when worms chew through it. See J. Walker and P. and Fenton, “Sulaymān b. Dāwūd,” EI2.

\(^{899}\) MT, 35.

\(^{900}\) Mt, 234.15-16.

\(^{901}\) MT, 233.11.
Closely related to the transformation inherent in creation in general, and humanity in particular, is God’s power of ‘combination’. Introduced in the very first line of the work, God’s bestowal of “life and faith upon the dust,” is a key to understanding the secret of the human state, capable of the highest and lowest possibilities. ‘Aṭṭār is particularly interested here in the stages of human development and the associated Divine bestowal of reason and knowledge, which themselves lead to bewilderment, signifying that the human being possesses an inner psychological diversity. Though this theme of the inner diversity of the components of the soul will be treated in more detail in by ‘Aṭṭār in his other works, some of the opening lines of The Conference of the Birds already use the theme of birds to sum up one of his perspectives on the relation of the soul and the body:

He made the snare of the body variegated in its states,
He set clay to follow after the bird of the soul (jān).

‘Aṭṭār’s discussion of God’s combination of the diverse components of creation thus foreshadows his complex meditations of the human state, dramatized through his allegory of the birds of the soul. Here, however, the combination of the elements is of particular importance for the opening praise of God. It is proof of God’s omnipotence, for only God could bring together elements that are so radically opposed in their natures.

In addition to ‘Aṭṭār’s evocation of the processes of diversification, transformation and combination inherent in the process of creation, the poet also affirms the ‘correlation’ between the multiplicity of physical manifestation and the diversity of spiritual states or character traits. Using a similar type of correlative thought to that we have seen in the works of Sanā‘ī and ‘Ayn al-Qudāt,
‘Aṭṭār depicts the meaning inherent in creation by drawing the connections between phenomena of diverse categories:

He set the oceans to boil in submission to Him,
   He petrified the mountains out of fear of Him.\textsuperscript{907}

Echoing the Quranic verse, ‘And there is no thing, save that it hymns His praise,’ (SQ, 17:44) ‘Aṭṭār emphasizes that the whole world is involved in the same spiritual endeavor that he will be depicting in the rest of the book. He thus uses the language of spiritual states to describe the natural world:

Day from His expansion (\textit{bast}) is blazing white,
   Night from His contraction (\textit{qabḍ}) is burned in black.\textsuperscript{908}

Through correlation, the diversity of creation is thus shown to have an additional significance highlighting the greatness of God;\textsuperscript{909} the diversity of creation is a sign of the diversity of inner states through which the birds will traverse over the course of the book. Through this ‘skillful opening’, ‘Aṭṭār has alerted us to the significance of diversity for the spiritual journey that is to follow.

Even within the first few lines of \textit{The Conference of the Birds}, ‘Aṭṭār has demonstrated a particularly complex attitude towards the diversity of the created order and the human state. Diversity itself can be viewed an analyzed in multiple ways, which we have suggested may be summarized here as comprising of diversification, transformation, combination and correlation. The first pair of these processes focus on diversity itself, whereas the second pair emphasize modes of unity within diversity. On the one hand, the multiplicity of creation is a direct contrast to the Unity of God, which nevertheless testifies to the plenitude of this unity, a similar insight to that

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[907] MT, 233.9.
\item[908] MT, 234.24.
\item[909] The spiritual significance of the diversity of creation is the major theme of ‘Aṭṭār’s \textit{Book of Affliction}, to which we will turn in the following chapter.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
found in the writings of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt. On the other hand, things are interconnected; they are existentially and meaningfully interrelated in a manner that suggests the possibility of a return back to Unity. It is this complex attitude towards diversity that we will see played out at the various stages of *The Conference of the Birds*.

However, ‘Aṭṭār’s introduction does not end here. His insights into the diversity of creation still need to resolve into bewilderment in the face of God, a necessary component of the introduction and of ‘Aṭṭār’s own approach to the human condition. The poet initiates this resolution through several further stages, each of which consist of meditations on the relation of the many and the One.

After evoking the beauty of the diverse creation, ‘Aṭṭār turns to emphasize the gulf between creation and its Maker, using a kind of correlative thought to show that the created world precedes us in its bewilderment before the Divine Grandeur:

Now He lays a golden crown on the narcissus’ head,
    Now He places within that crown jewels of dew.
Reason has lost its function, the soul is heart-lost from Him,
    The heavens on high are spinning, the earth stands still from Him.
The mountains became like rock as a result of His Decree (taqdír).
    The oceans became blue out of shame before Him.
His earth has remained with dust heaped upon its head;
    His celestial spheres are but an iron ring hung upon His door.
All His eight paradises are no more than a threshold;
    All the seven hells no more than a lick of flame.
All are drowned within His Unity,
    How could they be drowned? They are utterly erased.\(^\text{910}\)

\(^{910}\) MT, 235.40-4. These lines encapsulate the major theme of the frame story of ‘Aṭṭār’s *Book of Affliction*, which we will examine in the following chapter.
But even as ‘Aṭṭār reaches this crescendo, in which all of the created order vanishes to nothing before the Divine Unity, he enacts a new perspective shift. Now, instead of the whole universe paling into insignificance, every particle of existence becomes significant in its own way, testifying to the nature of God:

Though from the fish’s back up until the moon,
Every single particle testifies to His Essence.
The lowliness of earth and the loftiness of the spheres,
These two testifications suffice for every thing.
Air and earth and fire and blood, all He brings forth,
Bringing His own mystery to light from every one.\textsuperscript{911}

But ‘Aṭṭār’s evocation of the divine mystery hidden within every particle of the universe again turns out to be just one stage in his dynamic meditation. After considering human generation and then once more affirming the utter nothingness of relative beings, ‘Aṭṭār captures this dynamic movement between perspectives within a few lines:

The Throne upon the water, the world upon the air;
Go beyond both air and water and everything is God.
The Throne and the world are no more than a talisman;\textsuperscript{912}
There is Him and that’s all, the rest is but a name.
Look closely for this world and that world are not but Him,
There is nothing except Him, and if there is, it is Him.
All is but one Essence, though it be qualified.
All is but one word; the expressions are many.
It takes a man, a knower of the king,
To recognize the king in a hundred different clothes.

\textsuperscript{911} MT, 235.45-7.
\textsuperscript{912} Though talismans had multiple functions in the medieval Islamic world, the context suggests that ‘Aṭṭār had in mind talismans used to protect treasure. Thus, by breaking the talismans of this world and the spiritual world by transcending them the seeker gains access to the treasure of the Divine Reality. On talismans see J. Ruska, J., B. Carra de Vaux, and C.E. Bosworth, “Tilsam,” \textit{EI2}. 
He makes no error, for He knows who He is.

Since all is Him, from whom could error arise?\footnote{MT, 235-6.60-5.}

Much as we have seen in the poetry of Sanā‘ī, for all of ‘Aṭṭār’s emphasis on diversity in this passage his final intention is to lead the reader beyond all duality, towards the realization of *tawḥīd*, both beyond the world and within its diversity.

As we have seen in the works of Sanā‘ī and ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, ‘Aṭṭār’s meditation on the relationship between Creator and creation in the opening lines of *The Conference of the Birds* is grounded in the understanding that this relationship cannot be encapsulated in a single metaphysical account. However, whereas Sanā‘ī developed different metaphysical perspectives in different sections of his works and ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt focused on three ontologies that he explained in detail, ‘Aṭṭār here presents a glimmer of numerous insights and perspectives, sometimes elaborated into several images or justified through a kind of associative logic, but never dwelt on for more than a few lines. It is above all the swift movement between perspectives that characterizes this section of the introduction to *The Conference of the Birds*. Within this movement, the world simultaneously trembles before God, is nothing before God, is a sign of God in all its diversity, is identical with God Himself, is the Essence in qualified form, is the multiple expressions of the single Divine Word, and is the diverse vestments in which the Divine King appears.

The poetic medium is particularly suited to this swift movement between perspectives, for the rhythm of the poetry draws the reader along through each point of view. Indeed, this swift movement is well suited to ‘Aṭṭār’s purpose here, which is to draw the reader towards the state of bewilderment that is the final adequate response to the Divine Unity and the multidimensional mystery of creation.
‘Aṭṭār’s consideration of diversity continues as he draws his opening praise of the Creator to its close in an expression of bewilderment and a prayer to God that encapsulates the subjective experience of this state. In particular, the inevitability of suffering is evoked through lines mentioning the tribulations faced by each of the major Quranic prophets:

The vanguard who have come, seers of the Way,
   One after another, for the sake of religion,
Have found their very souls identical to bewilderment,
   And the companions of their souls to be incapacity and regret.
First of all look at what He did to Adam,
   What was brought upon him by lifetimes spent in mourning… 914

As we have already seen, the prophets, as different personalities in different contexts who share a single function, are a favorite reference point of ‘Aṭṭār for evoking unity in diversity. Here it is bewilderment and suffering that unites them, revealed in its universal significance through the diversity of those individuals most beloved to God whom it has afflicted.

Turning briefly to ‘Aṭṭār’s praise of the Prophet, the second section of the work, here again we see that diversity is a key theme. Following in the tradition of Sanā’ī, ‘Aṭṭār choses to focus in particular on the Prophet as Muhammadan Reality or Muhammadan Light, the intermediary of the Divine Act of creation and the summation of the created order:

That which was manifest from the unseen Unseen (ghayb-i ghayb),
   Was his pure Light, devoid of all fault… 915

As God gazes upon this Light the multiplicity of the world comes into being as a result of its diverse qualities, leading to the hierarchy of levels of creation. 916

914 MT, 241.198-200.
915 MT, 244.282.
916 See MT, 245.290-8.
For ‘Aṭṭār, the role of the Muhammadan Light in creation is directly reflected in the Prophet’s earthly function, as ‘a mercy unto the worlds.’ (SQ, 21:107)\textsuperscript{917} Indeed, ‘Aṭṭār depicts the Prophet as transmitting a universal message, not merely to all the communities of the world but also to the angels, animals, the idols, and the jinn.\textsuperscript{918}

His Light, since it was the principle of all existents,
His essence, since it was the bestower of every essence,
It was necessary for him that he invite both the worlds,
His invitation of all particles, hidden and manifest.\textsuperscript{919}

‘Aṭṭār’s praise of the Prophet, like his Praise of the Creator, is a brilliant example of ‘the skillful opening’, setting out insights into the significance of diversity that he will return to throughout \textit{The Conference of the Birds}. However, more than simply setting forth praise of God and the Prophet in a language appropriate to the contents of the book, ‘Aṭṭār’s metaphysical insights provide the groundwork for the journey that will be depicted in the frame story. Whereas, as we shall see, ‘Aṭṭār’s \textit{Book of Affliction} makes the Prophet’s role in the spiritual journey explicit, here it is simply alluded to:

When the Simurgh of his Spirit becomes manifest,
Moses in awe will become like a finch (mūṣīja).\textsuperscript{920}

It will take the rest of the book for the reader to discover the full significance of the unity in diversity represented by the Prophet Muhammad, but the metaphysical keys to this understanding are presented here already in the work’s introduction.

\textsuperscript{917} Quoted by ‘Aṭṭār in MT, 244.265.
\textsuperscript{918} See MT, 245.299-307.
\textsuperscript{919} MT, 245-6.308-9.
\textsuperscript{920} MT, 247.349.
‘Welcoming the Birds’ and the Celebration of Diversity

Having completed his praise of the Prophet and added to it praise of the four Righteous Caliphs, ‘Aṭṭār begins the frame story of The Conference of the Birds by ‘Welcoming the Birds’. Even though ‘Aṭṭār has already provided a complete introduction to the text, I believe this section acts as a further ‘emblematic introduction’, of the type described by de Bruijn as follows:

The ‘emblematic type’ comprises a group of poems which are introduced, not by a prologue consisting of several parts, but by a single section devoted to the description of one particular item. It is treated as an emblem from which symbolic meanings, relevant to the subject to be dealt with in the poem, are derived. This was an imitation of the conventions of the qaṣīda where similar sections often occur in the nasīb.921

In this vein, the ‘Welcoming the Birds’ provides a symbolic emblem of the diversity of psychological temperaments and spiritual virtues that are at the center of the developing narrative of The Conference of the Birds.

In this section, each of twelve birds are hailed, their unique qualities mentioned, along with their association with a particular pre-Islamic prophet. They are then given specific advice on the spiritual path as befits their particular natures. In this way, for example, the nightingale is encouraged to sing and burn in love, making its voice as sweet as David’s, but also to follow David’s example in melting the chainmail surrounding the ego.922 The falcon on the other hand, being the companion of kings, is advised to abandon attachment to worldly power. It should remove its hood and gaze at the Truth, and finally to take its perch on the hand of Dhū’l-Qarnayn, the Quranic prophet traditionally identified as either Alexander or Cyrus the Great.923

The following lines give a sense of the tone and approach of this section:

Welcome, O Hoopoe, who has been guided right,

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921 de Bruijn, Of Piety and Poetry, 188. de Bruijn does not consider the possibility of a single mathnawī including two types of introduction, so this seems to be a remarkable feature of several of ‘Aṭṭār’s works.
922 See MT, 261.647-51.
923 See MT, 262
In Truth are you the messenger of every Vale…
You shall be the confidant of Solomon’s mystery,
When you bind the demon and keep him in jail…
Hail, musical Finch, quite Moses-like,
Play the best of music with mystic insight,
For the very soul of a musicologist,
Knows the tone of the music of the universe…
Welcome, O Parrot of paradise’s Tuba Tree
Cloaked in green and with collar fiery.
The fiery collar is for one destined for Hell,
The green cloak for the generous, the paradisal.
Like Abraham, the friend, who from Nimrod was saved,
You can sit quite happily amidst the flames…"}

‘Aṭṭār’s depiction of these twelve birds develops through a kind of associative logic, which Shafi‘i-Kadkanī aptly terms ‘the magic of proximity’ (jādī-yi mujāwarat). Slightly different from the correlative logic we have seen before, which asserts a direct existential link between the phenomena associated with each other, here even the mere similarity of sound, as between Mūsā (Moses), mūsīcha (finch) and mūsīqī (music), is enough for ‘Aṭṭār’s to conjure up a multi-layered depiction of this bird: that he should avoid the Pharaoh of the ego and be drawn to Sinai, where, being versed in music, he will be able to hear the music of creation just as Moses heard the words of God.

Through these depictions, lasting only five lines each, ‘Aṭṭār is able to draw up a unique personality and temperament for each bird. In contrast to the previous literary evocations of the Way that ‘Aṭṭār drew inspiration from, including the visionary recitals of Avicenna, Sanā‘ī’s Journey

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924 MT, 259-60.
925 See MT, ‘Editor’s Introduction’, 171.
926 MT, 259-60.622-6. See also MT, ‘Editor’s Introduction’, 171.
of the Servants, and Aḥmad al-Ghazālī’s Treatise of the Birds, from the very beginning of this work ʿAṭṭār emphasizes the psychological and temperamental diversity of the birds that are coming together to make the journey. As such, ʿAṭṭār’s frame story implicitly notes from the outset that the Way is traversed by a community, and that each of the individuals within that community possesses specific character traits and thus specific weaknesses of character to surmount.

In this opening section it is above all the beauty of the diversity of that stands out, depicted through the mythic allusions that each bird conjures up. These are summed up in the references to the prophet associated with each bird, each of whom is presented in so many of the shorter narratives that are woven into The Conference of the Birds as calling to the one God in his own unique way, representing a unique set of virtues and lessons. As in the introductory sections analyzed above, ʿAṭṭār is keenly aware here that the diversity of creation and the spiritual community is a source of great beauty, as each part contributes unique qualities that make up the variegated whole.

The Difficulties of Diversity

ʿAṭṭār’s frame story proper begins with the birds agreeing that since they lack a sovereign to unite them they will journey under the guidance of Solomon’s Hoopoe to seek out the legendary Simurgh. The Hoopoe speaks of his own experience in wayfaring, gained through his service to Solomon, and then fans the flames of aspiration in the birds by lauding the Simurgh and telling the story of how the Simurgh’s feather fell in China, both of which sections we shall discuss below.

927 ʿAṭṭār himself uses the narrative of the single wayfarer in his Book of Affliction. Though Aḥmad al-Ghazālī begins the Treatise of the Birds by noting that the birds “were many, their habits, natures and songs were different, and each was drawn to a different nest and home…”, their diversity plays no further part in the narrative. See MT, ‘Editor’s Introduction’, 119.
928 This reason for the birds’ quest is taken directly form Aḥmad al-Ghazālī’s Treatise of the Birds. See MT, Editor’s Introduction, 119.
However, though moved by the Hoopoe’s speech, several of the birds then decide that they will not undertake the journey. Coming so soon after the ‘Welcoming of the Birds’, these protestations of another set of birds (likewise identified by species and particular temperament), are clearly designed to present an alternative, and much more negative, model of diversity to that we have already encountered. It is only by addressing this negative potential of diversity that the Hoopoe will be able to restore the unanimity that will make the journey possible.

In each of these excuses, the bird in question speaks in the first person, and is given its own individual voice in the excuses it gives for not setting out on the Way. Several of these complaints are striking from a literary point of view, as ‘Aṭṭār both introduces each bird using fetching images drawn from his own poetic arsenal and allows each bird to powerfully state its case. For example, the Nightingale at first seems like a true lover:

The love-mad nightingale came in, drunken drunk,
    From love’s perfection neither being nor not.
With a meaning in every one of his thousand songs,929
    Beneath each meaning he had a world of mysteries.
Having become a crier of the mysteries of meanings,
    His speech had made the other birds tongue tied.
He said, ‘The mysteries of Love have been completed with me,
    Through the night I constantly repeat the lessons of Love…’930

The Hoopoe will of course admonish the Nightingale that his love for the rose, which will eventually fade, is folly, and that the rose (whose shape Persian poets often compare to a laughing mouth) is laughing at the Nightingale each spring, not with him.931 However, the fact that ‘Aṭṭār does give the Nightingale and each of the other birds his moment to justify himself with great

929 A play on one of the Persian words for nightingale, hazār-āwāz or ‘thousand-songs’.
930 MT, 265.750-4
931 MT, 266.774-7.
eloquence is crucial to the drama of the narrative. The beauty of ‘Aṭṭār’s versifications of perspectives that we know will turn out to be wrong allows us to sympathize with each of them for a moment, to realize how easy it is to make their mistakes. Moreover, the birds’ faults of character are generally not simple vices - like being lazy or envious. They are complex faults: attachments to relative goods or the overestimation of genuine value, such as longevity or asceticism,\(^932\) which are then compounded by a subtle pride and egoism.

Furthermore, although the fault represented by each bird at first seems obvious, on closer inspection ‘Aṭṭār’s descriptions of each are open to multiple levels of interpretation. In particular, in addition to the fact that each of the birds represents a particular kind of worldliness, there are several indications that the birds also represent the faults of particular types of wayfarers on the spiritual path.

Besides faults such the duck’s pride in asceticism or the peacock’s contentment with paradise, which clearly have religious significance, there are several more ambiguous cases. For example, though the Falcon (bāz) is a symbol of the love of proximity to worldly power, ‘Aṭṭār’s description of him boasting of his “hat-wearing” (kulah-dārī) and his experience in ascetic self-discipline (riyādat) suggest that it is particularly dervishes who seek authority that are being criticized. Likewise, the otherwise cryptic fault of the Heron (bū-tīmār, lit. ‘Father of Sorrow’) who loves the sea but will not benefit from it and so chooses to sit beside it in sorrow, has been interpreted by Shafi’ī-Kadkanī as representing the ascetic who makes life miserable for himself, and by Furūzānfar as exemplifying wayfarers who are attached to states of sorrow or who mourn if the waves of their spiritual states decrease for even a moment.\(^933\)

\(^932\) As displayed by the Parrot and the Duck respectively, see MT, 268.803-811 and 270.850-861.
With this level of interpretation in mind, ‘Aṭṭār’s depiction of the ‘Birds’ Excuses’ is not simply a description of the obstacles that can prevent individuals from embarking on the Way, but is simultaneously an inquiry into the reasons that wayfarers halt their progress. Like Sanā‘ī’s description in The Journey of the Servants of individuals on the level of the Universal Soul who have reached a certain level and then become satisfied, this section allows the reader to empathize with, and then discover the faults of, a diverse range of spiritual aspirants. Furthermore, like ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s insight that halting is the most severe error on the Way, ‘Aṭṭār is here introducing readers to the false logic that is used by some wayfarers to justify their cessation of the journey towards God.

Moreover, the alternation between the birds’ excuses and the Hoopoe’s responses allows ‘Aṭṭār to investigate the negative potential of diversity and how it is to be overcome. As the contemporary Iranian scholar, Taqī Pūrmāndāriyān, has observed, in each of Attar’s frame stories a journey takes place if and only if the characters of that story share a single goal. As such, it is precisely the loss of a single unified goal in ‘the Birds’ Excuses’ that has brought their journey to a halt.

Moreover, whether it be the Falcon’s satisfaction with his proximity to worldly power, the Moorhen’s love of jewels, or the Heron’s sorrowing beside a lake from which he will never drink, the Hoopoe basically identifies two common faults: egoism pure and simple, and the contentment with a particular good in place of the Good as such, a reality that is beyond the individual and will

934 See Pūrmāndāriyān, Didār Bā Simurgh, 269-71. Thus, in The Divine Book there is no description of movement, since the frame-story describes six princes seeking six different boons from their father the king. Whereas in The Book of Affliction, there is a single protagonist with a single goal, so movement towards that goal ensues.

935 As an interesting point of comparison, just as ‘Aṭṭār sees attachment to individual concerns to prevent the journey towards the Simurgh, Paul Heck notes that Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī had recognized that “skepticism, the equivalence of evidence, which is here closely associated with confusion, results from the inability of scholars to transcend their own attachments.” Heck, Skepticism in Classical Islam, 79.
require an arduous journey. In response to these faults, the Hoopoe provides responses that can be summed up in two teachings: a specific teaching on why the particular object of the bird’s attachment is limited or transitory, and a more universal exhortation to transcend the ego.

The Hoopoe’s task of unifying a group of birds with diverse temperaments, conflicting perspectives on reality, and divergent assessments of the worth of particular goods, is only possible because the true goal transcends each of these limitations. The foundation for the Hoopoe’s responses here has already been laid in his praise of the Simurgh, which preceded this section:

His description, since it is not the pure Spirit’s affair,
   Reason lacks the means to apprehend him.
Surely both Spirit and reason remain aghast
   In his qualities, with both eyes darkened.
No knowledgeable one ever saw his perfection,
   No insightful one ever saw his beauty.
To his perfection no creation has found its way,
   Knowledge went its way and vision found no way.
The portion of creation of that beauty and perfection,
   Is not but a fistful of imagination (khiyāl) if you put it all together.\textsuperscript{936}

Likewise, in the story of how the Simurgh’s feather fell in China, said to be the beginning of the infatuation with worldly creatures with this transcendent being, the Hoopoe states,

Everyone took up an image of that feather,
   Whoever saw that image began a different work.\textsuperscript{937}

As such, though the Simurgh is beyond any human (or avian) ability to comprehend him, the encounter with the traces of the Simurgh, here a symbol of revelation, causes particular individuals to come up with their own sketches or interpretations.

\textsuperscript{936} MT, 264.721-6.
\textsuperscript{937} MT, 265.739.
I suggest that there is a common logic of diversity that underlies the Hoopoe’s description of the Simurgh, the story of the Simurgh’s feather, and the ‘Birds’ Excuses’. Indeed, the keys to this logic have already been given in ‘Aṭṭār’s praise of the Muhammadan Light. By comparing these sections, we can gain a greater appreciation of the complex interconnection between ‘Aṭṭār’s unfolding teachings.

In the praise of the Prophet, a single transcendent reality (a type of unity of plenitude) was shown to be both the source and recourse of diversity, as the role of the Muhammadan Light in creation was described in parallel to the Prophet Muhammad’s invitation of all beings back to God. In the story of the Simurgh’s feather, a single transcendent reality (the indescribable Simurgh), is the source of diverse images and actions (the responses to the feather). However, the return to transcendence is blocked by this diversity, now represented by the diverse limited goods that the birds cling to and believe to be independent of the Simurgh. The Hoopoe’s call for them to return to a single goal is therefore achieved by calling them to transcendence. The function of the Hoopoe is therefore comparable to that of the Prophet Muhammad here, though with the added nuance that the Hoopoe has to explicitly deal with the obstacles to the reintegration of diversity into unity. He does this by reminding the birds that it is impossible to limit the Simurgh, or the Ultimate Good, to any particular perspective on it. It is precisely because the Simurgh transcends any of the individual birds’ conceptions of him, conceptions that are mutually exclusive of each other, that they are able to unite in their journey.

‘Aṭṭār’s Narrative Types

After the disharmonious aspects of diversity are resolved in ‘the Birds’ Excuses’, the birds are united in their purpose and hence can move as a single group. This ushers in the next stage of
the frame story,938 which will describe the journey towards the Simurgh itself. This journey is divided into two parts.

In the first of these, which we might call the ‘lesser mysteries’, a series of unidentified birds ask questions of the Hoopoe, generally pertaining to the cultivation of character necessary for their journey.939 Since the birds are unidentified, it appears that Attar views these questions, - which include requests for instructions on how to overcome the ego and love of wealth, as well as questions about the nature of aspiration and happiness - as potentially applying to anyone on the Way. The attention given to these twenty-one questions and the diversity of the topics of which they treat are an indication of Attar’s awareness of the complexity of the task of overcoming vice and acquiring virtue.

Diversity continues to be a theme here, not simply through the diversity of virtues and vices that must be taken account of in order for the journey to be possible, but also in ‘Aṭṭār’s narrative strategy of weaving stories within the frame tale. These narratives, as in all of Attar’s didactic *mathnawīs*, can be read as a great celebration of human differences, as ‘Aṭṭār draws wisdom from the lips of practically every type of person in medieval Persian society, not to mention his diverse sources of myth and legend. Every type of love provides a teaching on Divine Love, and members

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938 Preceding the description of the journey, ‘Aṭṭār presents the story of Shaykh-i Ṣan’ān, the longest narrative of the book, which is an allegory for the entire Way. Much attention has been given to this story in secondary literature, so there is little to add here, except to point out the similarities between the narrative structure and some of ‘Ayn al-Qudāt’s statements about the stages of faith and infidelity. The Shaykh’s status at the beginning of the story represents conventional religiosity, from which he is released by a movement through infidelity, in which he worships a reflection of Divine Beauty. This is finally resolved into true faith when the Prophet Muhammad intercedes for him, his faith is restored and his Christian beloved also becomes a ‘believer’. See Claudia Yaghoobi, “Subjectivity in Attar's Shaykh of San'an story in The Conference of the Birds,” *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 16.1 (2014).

939 A couple of the birds’ questions are more similar to the conversations of ‘The Birds’ Complaint’ in that they express pride in particular spiritual attainments. By including these erroneous assessments of self-worth next to genuine questions about the acquisition of virtue ‘Aṭṭar is showing that obstacles are not limited to the beginning of the Way, but illusions of pride in particular may occur after a certain amount of journeying has been undertaken.
of every social class have a lesson to impart, with Attar giving particular credence to the words of the insane and the heartfelt desires of social outcasts.940

Given the importance that these smaller narratives possess in ‘Aṭṭār’s mathnawīs, a brief consideration of the narrative types that ‘Aṭṭār uses and the significance of diversity within them will shed considerable light on his oeuvre. My reading of ‘Aṭṭār’s shorter narratives identifies four distinct types (organized approximately from least to most common):

1. Miniature Romances: Although it is likely that the attribution of the romance Khusraw-Nāma (or ‘Gul wa Hurmuz’) to ‘Aṭṭār is mistaken,941 nearly all of the lengthier stories in ‘Aṭṭār’s mathnawīs take the form of miniature romances. These are the few stories in which ‘Aṭṭār gives space for character development and poetic description of the characters involved. It is significant that all of ‘Aṭṭār’s longer stories concern the theme of love,942 as if it is the only topic that is worth dwelling on, or for which a brief narrative will not suffice to convey the message.

2. Symbolic or Situational Illustrations: A more common narrative type involves little narrative development but simply reframes a teaching ‘Aṭṭār has just communicated directly through a symbolic situational example. A symbolic illustration, for example, might involve a description of a spider expending great energy to build its web, making long term plans about how it will trap flies only to see the web swept away by the housekeeper, as an illustration of the impermanence of this world.943 A situational illustration uses a human situation to express a spiritual teaching, as for example when ‘Aṭṭār depicts the gratuitous generosity of God through a story of Sultan Mas’ūd, who joins an orphan fishing and later places the orphan next to him on the throne.944

941 See MT, ‘Editor’s Introduction, 48-63.
942 Except perhaps the ‘tale of Marḥūma’, which we will discuss in detail in the following chapter.
943 MT, 329-30.
944 MT, 305.
3. Aphorisms: Instead of simply uttering an aphorism himself, ‘Aṭṭār often imbues a teaching with a sense of place and character by introducing a sage, whether a well-known Sufi or an unknown figure, to say it for him. In many cases, this figure has already passed away and someone sees him or her in a dream. An important subdivision of this category is the unexpected aphorisms (or unspoken behavioral responses) that are given by wise-fools to a particular situation.⁹⁴⁵

4. Protagonist-Antagonist Interaction: The majority of ‘Aṭṭār’s narratives follow a single pattern. A protagonist is introduced who represents a certain attitude towards the world and a certain way of being. An antagonist, who often turns out to be wise, is then introduced and some kind of tension arises between the two, as the protagonist tries to assert his or her own attitude. The tension is resolved when the antagonist provides an insight that makes it clear that the protagonist was mistaken or naive, and is either punished or wakes up to a more authentic attitude towards the world.⁹⁴⁶ Though this type of story abounds in ‘Aṭṭār’s māṭhnawīs, let us give one example as an illustration:

A negligent person approaches a spiritual master and complains to him about Satan. The sage responds that Satan was just here complaining to him about that man, who was ruining his religion by being so attached to Satan’s property, namely the affairs of this world; otherwise Satan would have had nothing to do with him.⁹⁴⁷

In addition to illustrating the teaching that ‘this world is the fiefdom of Satan’, this brief story depicts a shift in perspective from a self-centered desire to find someone else to blame for one’s own shortcomings to a recognition that even Satan cannot be taken as an excuse for living

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⁹⁴⁵ Navid Kermani notes that, “There is probably no other writer in the history of world literature, not even Shakespeare, who took such fools as seriously as Attar.” See Terror of God, 144.

⁹⁴⁶ For an alternative analysis of narrative types in ‘Aṭṭār’s works, focusing on the frame narratives, see Pūmādnāriyān, Didār Bā Sūmugh, 274-5.

⁹⁴⁷ MT, 323.
beneath oneself. Much like the conflict between the egotistical assertions of each of the birds making excuses and the admonishings of the Hoopoe, ‘Aṭṭār’s most common narrative type revolves around the conflict between two different perspectives, or two different ways of being. Moreover, ‘Aṭṭār’s repeated use of this narrative structure, represented through all kinds of characters, teaches us that all of human life involves this type of contrasting of perspectives. We are always faced with moments of conflict with others whose way of being differs from our own, and hence there is constant opportunity to realize our own shortcomings and transcend our limited points of view.

This possibility is brought about precisely by diversity, precisely by the human differences that lead to these productive conflicts. Indeed, it is particularly ‘Aṭṭār’s madmen and wise-fools who provide the counter-point to so many of the worldly attitudes that he puts forward through his protagonists, only to be reduced to by the wise absurdities of the madmen.

The same diversity of individuals that is presented through the diversity of the birds thus recurs again and again throughout ‘Aṭṭār’s didactic works. So much of ‘Aṭṭār’s instruction centers on the realities, albeit schematized, of human interactions and conflicts. In this narrative type in particular, spiritual and ethical progress occurs through the recognition that there is another way of being and another way of seeing the world. The moral improvement of ‘Aṭṭār’s characters occurs through perspective shift, and it is therefore ultimately noetic. By inviting the reader into the conflicts between characters through narrative, ‘Aṭṭār is thus inviting us to go through this perspective shift ourselves.

The Seven Valleys

Up to this point in the journey nothing that has been described is explicitly ‘mystical’ - ‘Aṭṭār’s concern has been above all in the crafting of character and the fundamental attitudes by
which one orientates one’s goals and purposes. These concerns are necessary preparations for the second section of the journey, in which the Hoopoe describes for the birds the Seven Valleys that they will have to traverse on the Way to the Simurgh. These valleys, which are imaginative adaptations of the common Sufi theme of the ‘stations of the Way’ (*maqāmāt*), represent seven very different vantage points on reality and evocations of ways of being that correspond to those vantage points. The quality of the particular valley - be it Seeking, Love, Realization, Independence, Unity, Bewilderment, or Poverty-Annihilation - is described as utterly conditioning the wayfarer, addressed in the second person singular and thus indistinguishable from the birds hearing the story, or us as readers. Each of the valleys represents a different way of being orientated towards the unity of God, such that God is depicted as the sole object of seeking, love, or realization. However, despite sharing in their depiction of the total absorption of the wayfarer towards the Goal, and despite themes such as the suffering of love that recur in several valleys, the states described are often fundamentally contradictory.

Consider the following excerpts from the descriptions of the valleys of love, realization and bewilderment:

After this, the Valley of Love comes into view,

Drowned in fire is anyone who reaches here…

Of consequences he thinks for not even a moment,

How happily he will pull a hundred worlds into the fire.

Not even for a moment does he know religion or irreligion,

Not even a mote of certainty knows he or doubt.  


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After that there does appear unto your gaze,

A Valley for Realization, with neither head nor tail…

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948 MT, 385-6.3358-62.
The many ways that come forth and appear,
   According to its limit each one is shown.
Everyone’s journey goes until his perfection,
   The proximity of every is according to his state…
For this very reason, realization comes in many forms,
   One has found the prayer-niche and the other an idol.
When the sun of realization does begin to shine,
   From the celestial sphere of its lofty course,
Everyone becomes sighted according to his capacity,
   Within the Truth he discovers his own limit.
Illuminated becomes the mystery of his every mote,
   The ash-pit of this world is transformed into a garden.
He sees the kernel from within and not the shell,
   He sees not a particle save that he sees the Friend.949

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After this the Valley of Bewilderment appears,
   Your continuous occupation becomes suffering and regret…. 
There are sighs, combined with pain, accompanied by burning,
   Though night and day come, neither have their place here…
If they should inquire of him, “Are you sober or drunk?
   Do you say you are nothing, do you exist or not…?”
He will say, “I know not, not even a thing,
   And this ‘I know not’, I don’t know it at all.”
I am in love, but I know not with whom I’m in love.
   I’m neither Muslim nor infidel, so what am I?950

Like ‘the Birds’ Excuses’, ‘Aṭṭār’s depiction of the seven valleys is a striking depiction of diversity. Like the voices of each of the unwilling birds, each valley represents a different

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949 MT, 392.3502-15.
950 MT, 407.3827-38
perspective on reality and a particular way of being. Moreover, the states of several of the valleys
are depicted in such a way as to directly contradict those of the other valleys. For example, in the
valley of realization everything is understood ‘according to its own limit’, the differences between
beings are meaningful as different signs of God, and each wayfarer realizes mysteries in accordance
with his capacity. In the valley of independence that follows it, by contrast, God’s inscrutable Will
may make an ant worth a hundred elephants as everything besides God fades into insignificance.951
Significantly, the perspective shifts that develop through the Seven Valleys are thus quite similar
to some of those we encountered in the book’s introduction.

The nature of the diversity of the valleys is, of course, very different from that of the
complaining birds. Whereas each of the birds was focused on a limited goal determined by its own
attachment to a particular good, each of the valleys represents a particular manner of orientation
towards the single transcendent Good. Likewise, whereas the birds’ excuses involved first-person
assertions of a choice to remain behind, the passage through the valleys involves no individual
choice, and indeed ‘Aṭṭār often emphasizes the intensity of experience in a particular valley. Be it
love, suffering or the realization of mysteries, in these valleys the wayfarer is encountering modes
of being that would ordinarily be inconceivable.

The diversity of the valleys, each of which represents a great attainment on the Way to
God, shows that there is not just one way of being orientated towards the transcendent. Though
each of the valleys opens out onto the infinite, such that the wayfarer must seek God without limit,
he or she must be ready for utter bewilderment, and must eventually become completely
annihilated, their differences demonstrate that there are many ways in which the finite can reach
towards this infinite, just as multiple geometric axes can be prolonged indefinitely. The journey

951 See MT, 397.
towards the Simurgh passes through these diverse orientations towards the transcendent, such that the wayfarer is constantly traveling beyond limitations, including the limitations of the previous valleys.

**Chains of Stories**

In attempting to depict these valleys for us, ‘Aṭṭār faces a new challenge. Whereas the topics he has treated in *The Conference of the Birds* up to this point, whether it be the attachment to worldly power or the struggle with the ego, are accessible to common experience, the modes of being entered into in the valleys are not. Much like the writings of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, the depiction of the journey through the stations of the Way differs significantly from the classical enumerations of these stations in Sufi manuals. Though sharing a similar orderly scheme, ‘Aṭṭār uses his literary craft to convey the significance of these stages from within. Rather than simply providing a conceptual account, ‘Aṭṭār’s depictions of the valleys are designed to draw the reader directly into the experiential, aesthetic and noetic dimensions of these valleys, using poetry and the imagination as a means to broaden the reader’s horizons.

Indeed, it is important to note that the ‘Seven Valleys’ section of *The Conference of the Birds* does not actually describe the journey of the birds through these valleys. Rather, it is framed as the Hoopoe’s description of these valleys to the birds before they begin to traverse them. The Hoopoe is thus burdened with the same task as ‘Aṭṭār himself of communicating the ineffable in order to incite the aspiration for the journey, as the voice of the poet and the Hoopoe merge into one.

Given the difficulty of expressing the ineffable states of the valleys, ‘Aṭṭār’s manner of employing shorter narratives to convey the lessons inherent in each valley takes on a new significance here. Whereas the narratives up to this point have illustrated virtues or vices that any reader would be familiar with, here the short stories must translate the ineffable into narrative
form. Despite frequent assertions that Love, Realization and the others are inexpressible, ʿAṭṭār uses stories to give us an inside view of what wayfarers in these stations actually go through.

The scholarly literature on ʿAṭṭār’s didactic mathnāwīs often notes that he links together stories by association, such that the chain of stories can often stray quite far from the original point that was being illustrated. As Kermani insightfully notes,

As the inserts always correspond to the frame story...his approach in these compositions is both strictly formal and dynamic. This results in complex, seemingly organically developed narrative webs in which every cell is woven together with the next - and yet can still breath for itself. Different or openly conflicting interpretations of a single motif are nothing unusual here. The piety and praise of God in certain passages do not dilute the effect of the many lamentations and accusations, and vice versa.\(^{952}\)

While it is often difficult to discern the logic by which ʿAṭṭār has selected his collections of stories, closer inspection reveals sophisticated strategies are at work in certain story groups. In the descriptions of the Seven Valleys this is particularly salient, as ʿAṭṭār makes use of diverse narratives to provide us with diverse perspectives on the ineffable states of each valley.

ʿAṭṭār complements the descriptions of each valley with five to seven short anecdotes. Between each anecdote ʿAṭṭār’s own didactic voice generally reappears, driving home the lesson to be learned and subtly setting the stage for the anecdote to follow. By using this repeating structure, ʿAṭṭār creates the impression that his stories link together to form a logical chain of progression. However, closer attention to the content of the stories he uses to elucidate each valley reveals an often deeply complex associative logic, in which each story calls forth another that both complements and contrasts with it as ʿAṭṭār endeavors to communicate ineffable states through stories invariably based on human interactions.

\(^{952}\) Kermani, The Terror of God, 48.
The valley of Unity offers a fairly straight-forward example of how the associative logic of ‘Aṭṭār’s storytelling functions, a simplest type to which other valleys can be contrasted.

In the first story, ‘Aṭṭār offers us a basic teaching on the unity of the world and the transience of the multiplicity of phenomena. A madman is asked to describe the world, and he responds that the world is like a multi-colored wax model;\(^{953}\) when you squash it in your hands you will see that it is all of one substance. From this ‘Aṭṭār concludes that since unity underlies the phenomenal world, the duality between ‘you-ness’ and ‘I-ness’ is an illusion, and hence must be transcended.\(^ {954}\)

In the second story, the protagonist, ‘Abū ‘Alī’, whom Shafi’ī-Kadkanī identifies with the famous Sufi master ‘Abū ‘Alī Farmādī Ţūsī,\(^ {955}\) is offered gold-leaf by an old woman as an act of charity. The Shaykh responds that he has made a vow to except nothing from anyone other than God Himself, whereupon the old woman rebukes him for seeing double, or in other words for seeing someone other than God bestowing the gift on him.\(^ {956}\) In this story ‘Aṭṭār expands on what it means to understand unity, by describing the conflict between two different types of religious attitudes. This story acts as a complement to the first, contrasting the madman and the old woman’s veracious understanding of unity with the Shaykh’s misplaced claim, thus distinguishing the idea of unity, which can be insincerely displayed, from its actual realization.

‘Aṭṭār follows this story with an eloquent discourse on the nature of unity, being drawn as if by stream of consciousness to reflect on the conflicting pure and impure elements within a human being, and finally ending up in an expression of bewilderment before the reason-confounding

\(^{953}\) On the word translated as ‘model’ (nakhl), and hypotheses on its origin, see MT, ‘Editor’s Comments’, 736-7.
\(^{954}\) See MT, 403.3728-32.
\(^{956}\) MT, 403.3733-6.
reality of oneness. This outburst sets the stage for the next two stories (of Luqmān Sarakhsī and of the confused lover), both meditating on transcending the sense of self through realizing unity.957

In the fifth and final story of the valley of unity, ‘Aṭṭār allows himself greater space for narrative development and description. The story involves two of ‘Aṭṭār’s favorite characters, Sultan Maḥmūd of Ghazna (r. 387/997-421/1030) and his beloved slave Ayyāz, who are surveying the Sultan’s armies, accompanied by the Vizier Hasan.958 The Sultan declares:

So many elephants and an army like this are mine,
Yet I am yours, and you are my Sultan.959

However, Ayyāz makes no sign of being moved by such a great honor and pays no respect to the king in response. Being questioned by Ḥasan, Ayyāz states that there are two explanations: the first is that even to respond to the Sultan with great devotion and to fall at his feet would be to claim existence, and therefore to place himself on the same level as the Sultan. His lack of response was therefore a greater display of propriety. Though Ḥasan is greatly impressed, the Sultan dismisses him so that Ayyaz can give the second explanation, which is for the Sultan’s ears only. Now alone with the Sultan, Ayyaz explains that he is a shadow annihilated before the Sun of the Sultan’s regal halo (farr), that only the Sultan exists, and that therefore the kindness the Sultan showed is ultimately kindness to himself.960

957 In the first of these, Luqmān Sarakhsī bemoans his old age to God, affirming to his lifetime of slavehood to his Creator and asks to be set free. His wish is granted by an unseen voice, and his intellect and its accompanying discernment of duality are erased, leaving him freed from religious responsibility, in an ecstatic state in which he has no sense of self. In the following story, a ‘beloved’ falls into water and his (or her) lover jumps in after, eventually explaining that he (or she) is so in love that there is no difference between the two of them. MT, 404-5.3767-3785.
958 Abū ‘Alī Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad ibn Mīkāl, also known as Hasan-i Ważūr, d. 422/1031. See MT, ‘Editor’s Notes’, 741.
959 MT, 306.3794.
960 MT, 405-7.3788-3826.
Each of the stories in the valley of unity show a clear connection with the valley’s theme, yet sheds light on in a different way. Three of the stories are not allegorical, but instead directly present meditations on the realization of unity, complementing ‘Aṭṭār’s own didactic voice through the interest created by their narrative settings: the image of the wax model evoked by the madman, the contrast between the attitudes towards unity of the Shaykh and the old woman, and the image of Luqmān Sarakhsi’s being freed from servitude by having his intellect and awareness of self-removed. In the two allegorical stories, human love appears as the greatest teacher of the realities of the Way within the realm of ordinary human experience. Of these, it is the final story that gives the most tangible expression of the realization of unity, though as in several of ‘Aṭṭār’s stories the mystical lesson threatens to overpower the narrative itself. Ayyāz’s teaching brings to light two different faces of the realization of unity. So long as there is ‘otherness’ separating lover and Beloved, unity means that the lover negate himself completely and be utterly submitted to the command of the Beloved. However, when there is nothing separating them there is no question of self-negation, for the Beloved is all; there is nothing else.

These differing perspectives presented by Ayyaz and the other voices in the stories of this valley sketch out a response to unity that is subtle and multifaceted. As is shown by ‘Aṭṭār’s criticism of the inflexible mental conception of unity represented by Shaykh Abū ‘Alī’s refusal to accept bread from the hand of another, the poet is keen to avoid presenting a simple concept of unity that could be reified without being realized. This chain stories therefore work together to bring the idea of unity closer to the reader’s understanding without allowing it to be converted into a stale and lifeless doctrine.

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961 “…even if [the intruder, represented by Hasan the Vizier] be a hair.” MT, 407.3816.
The approach seen in the Valley of Unity holds for most of the other valleys. The narrative illustrations of the Valley of Love, for example, include several stories in which the protagonist’s love for an individual goes to such an extent that he either flaunts social convention in seeming absurdity (such as a lord’s squandering his wealth buying fermented fruit juice (fuqā’) out of love for the seller), or is ready to give up his life for the beloved. Similarly, the Valley of Bewilderment presents stories developing two themes: firstly, the experience of being madly in love without knowing who is the object of love, allegorizing the irresistible attraction to the Unknowable God; and secondly, the humiliation of spiritual masters who have devoted their whole lives to the Way and yet find themselves in unbearable bewilderment.

In contrast to these valleys, in which the stories skillfully convey their teachings through diverse human situations, the Valley of Realization is striking through the disconnect between its theme and stories. Rather than evoking what is experienced during Realization, ‘Aṭṭār begins with a brief and enigmatic tale of a man who is turned into stone in China, forever weeping for his state. ‘Aṭṭār interprets this stone man as knowledge, who is weeping since no one has high enough aspiration to seek it as far as China. This story acts as a pivot for ‘Aṭṭār to shift away from realization and focus on the virtue of aspiration, providing both a negative and a positive example (the lover who falls asleep in the dust while waiting for the beloved, and the night-watchman who fell in love). The section closes with stories teaching the transformative effects of the suffering of

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962 One of the most interesting stories in this collection involves an Arab man visiting Persia and happening upon a ‘qalandar’ used in its original meaning (equivalent to kharābāt) of the gathering place of qalandarīs. This story is a prime example of a tale in which the allegorical narrative collapses into its mystical meaning. The Qalandarīs, who are drunk without have touched a drop, take all the man’s wealth and even his eyes, leaving him in a state of annihilation as he stumbles back to his family, with ‘Aṭṭār’s mythological derivation of the word qalandar ringing in his ears, the Arabic-Persian mix qāl andar ā, “He said, ‘Come in’,” inviting him into the nondual Divine Presence. See MT, 390.3452-70.
963 See MT, 408-412. Including on of ‘Aṭṭār’s most striking narratives, the mini-romance of the princess who falls in love with a slaveboy.
964 See MT, 412-3.
965 For a discussion of the possible sources of this story see MT, ‘Editor’s Notes’, 723-4.
love and a criticism of contentment with worldly authority. Though we can only speculate on why ‘Aṭṭār avoids addressing the theme of only this valley, it is possible that he considered love of knowledge to be a common trait in his contemporaries, but one that was useless without the aspiration and love required to transform theoretical knowledge into realization. Indeed, ‘Aṭṭār’s strategy here parallels that of Sanā’ī in Chapter 5 of The Walled Garden, in which a chapter heading on knowledge became an excuse to contemplate love instead.

The most complex series of stories occurs in the Valley of Seeking, providing an excellent example of how the association of stories brings about multiple facets of the theme ‘Aṭṭār is exploring. Strikingly, ‘Aṭṭār chooses to begin his illustration of the first valley with the mystery of Iblīs. The first story recounts the contents of ‘Iblīs’ Treasure Book (ganj-nāma), attributed to ‘Amr ibn ‘Uthmān al-Makkī, one of the teachers of al-Ḥallāj.966 Laying out teachings that we have already encountered in our study of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, this ‘Treasure Book’ teaches the secret of the fall of Iblīs, who saw that the rest of creation sought God’s mercy and so accepted God’s curse for himself, considering everything coming from God to be of equal value. Repeating the same theme, the second story tells of the famous Sufi Abū Bakr Shībli on his deathbed, burning in jealousy of Iblīs who received the curse directly from the Divine Essence.967

‘Aṭṭār uses these two stories to describe the absoluteness of true seeking, which sees everything coming from the Beloved as being of equal value, whether it be Kindness or Wrath. In addition to the general message of ‘Aṭṭār’s valorization of Iblīs, which is common to all exponents of this attitude, there are several nuances of his use of these teachings that are shared with ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt in particular. First, like ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, ‘Aṭṭār’s praise of Iblīs does not prevent him from

966 For more on the ganj-nāma see MT, ‘Editor’s Notes’, 706.
967 MT, 382-3.3298-305.
espousing a more conventional attitude towards Iblīs elsewhere.\footnote{See for example, MT, 322-4.} The significance of Iblīs depends completely on where the observer stands; for the wayfarer who interacts directly with the temptations of Iblīs he is an enemy, whereas he appears as a profound symbol from the point of view of detached contemplation. Second, the fact that ‘Aṭṭār places the valorization of Iblīs at the beginning of the Valley of Seeking shows that, like ‘Ayn al-Qudāt, he considers true seeking to begin in a state of non-determination with regard to faith and infidelity. The true seeker is beyond partisan and willful affirmations of religious identity, and therefore can receive teachings that one who is attached to conventional religious identities is blind to.

The teaching that the wayfarer in the Valley of Seeking should accept anything that comes from the Beloved leads ‘Aṭṭār by association to a further aspect of the quest. The third story offers the absurd yet striking image of Majnūn sifting through the dust with the hope of finding Laylī there. His explanation to a puzzled onlooker that he searches literally everywhere with the hope of finding her reveals ‘Aṭṭār’s intent in bringing this story, which illustrates another aspect of the absolute nature of true seeking.

Much in the same vein, the fourth story sees a sage teaching:

In so much as on high and low,
The possessor of insight inspects all that is:
Every particle is another Jacob,
Seeking news of his Joseph lost.\footnote{MT, 383.3318-19.}

Given the role of the Joseph story in evoking the mysteries of love in ‘Aṭṭār’s works,\footnote{See for example, MT, 279.} no further elaboration is necessary for the power of this image to be conjured up. The wayfarer in the
valley of seeking sees the whole universe participating in the same task that he is consumed by himself.

The power of the image of the seeking particles brings ‘Aṭṭār to meditate on the necessity of suffering in the Way, and the patience that must accompany it. This in turn leads to a third story linking particles to limitless seeking, which brings the theme of the lengths one must go to seek God to its most extreme intensity. Here Shaykh Abū Sa‘īd ibn Abī’l-Khayr is overcome by a state of intense spiritual contraction (qabḍ) and heads out into the desert. There he meets an old villager performing farm labor who has a luminous countenance. After Abū Sa‘īd has explained the difficulties of his state, the old man adjusts his expectations of what it takes to reach the Divine Threshold:

The Master when he heard this said, “O Bū Sa‘īd,
From the lowly carpet (farsh) to the majestic Throne (‘arsh),
If they were to fill this totally with grain,
Not a single time but a hundred times in turn,
And if there were a bird who picks up openly
A single grain once in a thousand years,
Even if after such time as this,
That the bird has finished this world a hundred times,
For the soul (jān) to gain a whiff of His Threshold,
O Bū Sa‘īd, it is still soon for that!”

The intensity of this image serves ‘Aṭṭār’s purpose of expressing how the spiritual quality of seeking should be orientated towards the infinite. However, this story also threatens to make the task of seeking seem futile. The final two stories of the Valley of Seeking seem to act as a corrective to this story’s conclusion.

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971 MT, 384.3331-5. In MT, ‘Editor’s Notes, 712, Shafi‘i-Kadkani locates this in the Asrār al-Tawḥīd.
In the first of these, Sultan Maḥmūd is traveling in the mountains at night when he comes across a man who is sifting through the dust, looking for anything he might be able to sell for his daily bread. Feeling sorry for him, the Sultan secretly throws a priceless armband into the dust he has collected so he will be rich enough never to have to do this again. However, the next night Maḥmūd comes across the same man again, still engaged in sifting the dust. The Sultan asks him why he continues now that he is rich and the man explains:

Since my fortune appeared from this door,
So long as I have life, this shall be my task.\textsuperscript{972}

Behind this absurd image lies the complement of the previous story. Though the task of sifting grains or dust is without end, great riches, symbolizing spiritual attainments, are gained in the process. However, the true seeker is not content with these, but always looks towards the horizon of his seeking. As ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt puts it, “The sign of aspiration is that one never look at what is attained and present, but all of one’s attention be limited to what one does not have…”\textsuperscript{973}

‘Aṭṭār brings his description of the Valley of Seeking to a close with a final tale. Called to mind by dust-sifter’s use of the imagery of the door, this aphorism attributed to Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya also provides the way out of this valley:

A man without self was calling unto God,
“O God, at last open a door to me!”
Rābiʿa happened to be sitting there,
And said, “O negligent, whenever was it closed?”\textsuperscript{974}

The stories of the Valley of Seeking provide a particularly elegant example of the logic of association by which ‘Aṭṭār strings together tales that evoke diverse aspects of the theme at hand.

\textsuperscript{972} MT, 385.3352.
\textsuperscript{973} L1.212.
\textsuperscript{974} MT, 385.3356-7.
Linked by elements of different types, the figure of Iblis, the idea of seeking God in everything, or the theme of sifting particles, ‘Aṭṭār’s chain of stories entertains through its unpredictability whilst also leading the reader through a multi-dimensional tour of the valley. Like so many other encounters with the ineffable that we have discussed in the writings of Sanā‘ī and ‘Ayn al-Qudāt, the challenges of expressing the inexpressible does not lead to silence. Rather, here ‘Aṭṭār must use his poetic and narrative skill to its utmost in order to communicate diverse aspects of the reality he wishes to describe.

‘Aṭṭār is able to lead his readers on the journey to the Simurgh, in a virtual way, through the use of imagination. In another of his didactic long poems, *The Book of Affliction*, ‘Aṭṭār explains that imagination has the power to clothe meanings (which in this context signify all supra-formal realities that must be directly apprehended) in the cloaks of forms, thus making them communicable and accessible. Whereas sense perception is fundamentally divisive for Attar, imagination unites, functioning as the bridge between sensible and intelligible reality. The journey depicted in *The Conference of the Birds* (and likewise, *The Book of Affliction*) is thus an imaginalization of the journey of self-knowledge and self-cultivation. It takes us where we have not actually yet been able to go, just as good travel writing might. We receive, not the actual attainments of the journey, but a likeness of them. However, it is a likeness that is efficacious. It shows us that the existential location that we now inhabit does not represent the whole world; there are other, and more beautiful, places to see, kindling in us the desire to journey.

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975 On entertainment and unpredictability see Pūrṇamdāriyān, *Dīdār Bā Simūrgh*, 279.
976 See MN, 415.
977 Ibid.
978 As ‘Aṭṭār explicitly discusses at the beginning of *The Book of Affliction*, see MN, 158.
979 ‘Aṭṭār state that this process contains both success and failure, but like legal reasoning (*ijtihād*) one nevertheless gains a certain reward for the failure. See MN, 159.
Journey’s End

Attar’s final teaching on diversity in *The Conference of the Birds* is presented in the culmination of the frame story, in the encounter with the Simurgh itself. The theme of the diversity of the birds that ‘Aṭṭār has explored in ‘Welcoming the Birds’ and ‘the Birds’ Excuses’ finds its ultimate resolution in the climax of the tale.

They observed a Presence without qualification and description,
Beyond perception, reason and understanding.
If the spark of His Self-Plenitude were to be cast,
A hundred worlds would burn in one moment.
A hundred thousand esteemed suns,
A hundred thousand moons and stars, even more.
They observed them all in wonder,
Coming like atoms in a dance.⁹⁸⁰

Then, in the moment of climax that ‘Aṭṭār has been building to throughout the book the identity of the Simurgh is revealed:

From the reflection of the faces of thirty birds (*sī murgh*) of the world,
At that very moment they say the face of the Simurgh,
When these thirty birds (*sī murgh*) suddenly did look,
Without a doubt these thirty birds (*sī murgh*) were that Simurgh.⁹⁸¹

Although ‘Aṭṭār does go on to speak of an indescribable Unity, attained in annihilation and subsistence in the One, in this last stage of the Way that can be spoken of the diversity of the birds is not erased. What sets *The Conference of the Birds* apart from so many other visionary narratives of the Way is precisely this final image: that the final realization of the identity is not individual attainment of self-knowledge, but an egoless inter-subjective realization of unity in diversity. ‘Aṭṭār has prepared the way for this conclusion through the unique characteristics of *The Conference of the

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⁹⁸¹ MT, 426-4262-3.
Birds, which replaces the common image of the individual making a journey, with that of a journey in community.

Conclusion: Diversity in The Conference of the Birds

Themes of diversity permeate The Conference of the Birds, which explores this topic from multiple points of view. In its opening sections, ‘Aṭṭār takes a fresh approach, using a complex approach to the diversification, transformation, combination and correlation within God’s creative act to bring a new dimension to the standard praise of God and discovery of human incapacity that Sanā‘ī had used to open The Walled Garden. At the heart of this diversity is the Muhammadan Reality, the intermediary between the Divine Unity and the multiplicity of creation.

‘Aṭṭār then introduces his frame tale by ‘Welcoming the Birds’, providing us with a set of iconic representations of the birds, combining mythological associations and prophetic virtues to encapsulate twelve individual variations on the same theme of spiritual transformation. However, this celebration of diversity is short-lived, as ‘Aṭṭār explores the difficulties of uniting a group of egotistical individuals in a journey towards a common goal, showing that this is only possible if all participants realize that the goal transcends their particular conceptions of it. Even after the birds are thus united, themes of diversity remain present throughout the journey, as the birds first ask diverse questions regarding virtue and then hear of the journey through seven diverse valleys of spiritual realization. But it is only after arduously traversing the Way themselves can the birds realize the final secret of their diversity before passing into the ineffable, the unity in diversity of the Simurgh.

Themes of diversity provide ‘Aṭṭār with powerful opportunities to convey his teachings. As we have seen in the writings of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, diversity is a necessary aspect of the Way. Since the journey requires continuous movement through the stations of the path, a single mode of
experience or understanding of reality signifies stagnation and failure on the journey. ‘Aṭṭār thus creates movement between perspectives throughout this work, from the exchanges of perspective in his short didactic narratives, to the alternation of modes of being in the valleys. However, it is above all the diversity of individual temperaments that is so important in The Conference of the Birds, in a way that we have not seen in either Sanā‘ī or ‘Aṭṭār. Human differences provide a unique opportunity for ‘Aṭṭār to explore the nature of the ego, which comes into conflict with other egos, and ultimately to provide a unique expression of mystical attainment. In this final attainment, the negative aspects of the diversity of individuals is erased yet unity in diversity abides.
Chapter 10: Diversity in the Cosmos, Diversity in the Self

The Master Narrative?

Extending the analyses of ‘Aṭṭār’s works found in the secondary literature in light of the theme of diversity, a perspective on his oeuvre begins to emerge in which The Conference of the Birds appears as the master narrative, in relation to which each of his other works can be situated. Given our analysis of The Conference of the Birds as an exploration of diversity, this would suggest that the investigation of diversity is a fundamental theme running throughout ‘Aṭṭār’s compositions.

An argument for The Conference of the Birds as ‘Aṭṭār’s master narrative would go as follows:

1. The Conference of the Birds: As we have seen, the frame narrative of this work contains three major sections: ‘The Birds’ Excuses’, ‘The Birds’ Journey’ (which itself has two stages), and ‘The Meeting with the Simurgh’.

2. The Book of God: As Pûrṇâmdârîyân has suggested, there are significant correspondences between The Book of God and ‘the Birds’ Excuses’.982 The birds correspond to the six princes, each of whom seeks a particular and inappropriate goal, and the Hoopoe corresponds to the wise king who corrects the mistakes of the sons. As Pûrṇâmdârîyân points out, no journeying takes place in these narratives since the characters disagree on the correct objects of desire. In light of the analysis of the preceding chapter, both texts investigate the negative potential of human diversity.

3. The Book of Affliction: Pûrṇâmdârîyân has also noted a correspondence between The Book of Affliction and the second stage of the narrative of The Conference of the Birds, given that both texts discuss the stages of the Way, involving a journey directed towards a final goal.983 Given our

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982 See Pûrṇâmdârîyân, Dîdâr Bâ Simurgh, 266-7. Although my comparison of ‘The Birds’ Excuses’ and The Book of God is related to that of Pûrṇâmdârîyân, I do not agree with every aspect of his approach, and particularly his second explanation which depicts The Book of Affliction as representing a stage of spiritual development after The Conference of the Birds. See Dîdâr Bâ Simurgh, 273-4.
983 Pûrṇâmdârîyân, Dîdâr Bâ Simurgh, 269.
previous analysis, *The Book of Affliction* emerges as an investigation of the diversity of the stages of the Way.

4. *The Memorial of God’s Friends*: In his analysis of ‘Aṭṭār’s only prose work, his collection of hagiographies, Paul Losensky investigates “a variety of techniques” through which, “‘Aṭṭār gives shape and meaning to a dispersed body of formerly discrete stories and sayings.”

For Losensky, the inclusion of seventy-two entries in this book may be a reference to the hadith of the ‘seventy-two (or ‘seventy-three) sects’, suggesting that each saint represents a ‘sect of one’, a unique journey towards God. Whether or not ‘Aṭṭār had this association in mind, Losensky’s analysis of the diversity of character types and spiritual attitudes in *The Memorial* is solid. From the juxtaposition of Ja’far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), who was learned and prominent, with Uways al-Qaranī (d. 37/657), an unlettered an obscure camel-herder, in the first two chapters, diversity is clearly present. Moreover, Losensky’s discussions of the entries on Dāwud Ṭāṭī (d. 165/781-2), representing the virtues of scrupulousness or timidity (*wara’*), and Abū’l-Husayn Nūrī (d. 295/907-8), altruism and rapture (*iḥtār, wajd*), make it clear that ‘Aṭṭār is interested in the diversity of spiritual types found among the friends of God. Inspired by Losensky’s findings, let us suggest that *The Memorial* represents an extended meditation on the final stage of the frame story of *The Conference of the Birds*. Just as the Simurgh is composed of the diversity of birds, the individual qualities of which have been extolled in ‘Welcoming of the Birds’, the community of God’s friends each display unique virtues. The diversity among them, however, is different from the diversity of egos that is found among ordinary individuals. All of them have attained the status of friendship to God, and therefore their diversity masks a deeper unity in the realization of the fundamental purpose of human existence.

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904 Losensky, “Message and Structure in ‘Aṭṭār’s *Tadhkirat al-awliyā’*,” 89.
5. *The Book of Mysteries, The Book of Chosen Poems, the Diwan*: According to current scholarly understanding, these three of ‘Attār’s works are simply collections of teachings (in the case of the first) and shorter poems (in the case of the second and third). As such, there is no need to integrate them into the ‘master narrative’. However, it is worth noting the overlap between many of the themes treated in *The Book of Mysteries* and *The Book of the Chosen* and those found in ‘Attār’s other works. Furthermore, although the ghazals in ‘Attār’s *Diwan*, which are consistent in their concern for mystical love, lack the thematic diversity found in Sanā’ī’s *Diwan*, there is still a type of diversity present there. In particular, repeated references to ‘the Valley of Love’ (waḍī-yi ʾishq) connect the ghazals to the ‘Seven Valleys’ of *The Conference of the Birds*.985 Moreover, although the theme of love dominates, references are also made to the themes of the other valleys, particularly Divine Independence (istighnā) and Annihilation (fanā’),986 and even to the Simurgh.987 Seen in this light, ‘Attār’s ghazals can be read as lyrical depictions of the experiential aspects of the journey through the Way and its valleys, the “crystallizations of particular ‘states’ (ahwāl) and ‘moments’ (awqāṭ),”988 which serves as an important complement to the narrative approach found in *The Conference of the Birds* and *The Book of Affliction*.

The correspondences presented above suggest that the themes of diversity analyzed in *The Conference of the Birds* in fact pervade ‘Attār’s works, whether it be in the depiction of the diverse human desires that impede spiritual progress, the diverse virtues and stations of the Way that are involved in the spiritual journey, or the diversity that remains among travelers even at upon reaching the goal.

985 See for example ‘Attār, *Diwan*, Ghazal 128.
986 For independence see ‘Attār, *Diwan*, Ghazal 132, 145.
988 As noted by Waley, “Didactic Style and Self-Criticism in ‘Attār,” 220.
The comparison of ‘Aṭṭār’s other mathnawīs to *The Conference of the Birds* is a useful first step in understanding how the concerns of his works fit together, contributing towards a holistic vision. However, although valid up to a point, such an approach to ‘Aṭṭār’s works conceals some of their unique features, several of which in fact present further perspectives on diversity. The other mathnawīs cannot be reduced to their correspondences to ‘Aṭṭār’s *magnum opus*. In this chapter, I will discuss three problems in the scholarly literature that are solved by interpretations of *The Book of Affliction* and *The Book of God* that focus on the significance of diversity in these works. The first of these problems is the status of this world and suffering in ‘Aṭṭār’s mathnawīs, which have been discussed by both Helmut Ritter and Navid Kermani. The second of these problems concerns ‘Aṭṭār’s attitude to selfhood, which I suggest eludes the categories of Hamid Dabashi’s claim that Persian literary humanism is based on a ‘fragmented’ self. The third problem involves the endings of ‘Aṭṭār’s mathnawīs, which seem to present an array of self-contradictory attitudes.

**The Status of the World and the Problem of Suffering: Ritter and Kermani on ‘Aṭṭār**

A commonplace in Western scholarship on the thought of ‘Aṭṭār is the notion that this poet holds a particularly negative notion of the material world, which contributes to the general ascetic character of much of this poetry. While there are many passages in ‘Aṭṭār’s mathnawīs that support this idea, I believe that it is nevertheless overemphasized in the secondary literature. In particular, by recognizing the ways in which the structures of ‘Aṭṭār’s mathnawīs are constituted by the movement between perspectives we can gain fresh insight into ‘Aṭṭār’s views on the significance of the cosmos. Indeed, as we shall see in our readings of *The Book of Affliction* in this chapter and *The Book of Mysteries* in the following chapter, ‘Aṭṭār’s attitude to the world is precisely constituted by a diversity of perspectives. Within this diversity, the world-denying passages retain their importance, but are shown to represent only one fragment of his approach to this issue.
The study of ‘Aṭṭār’s work that holds most sway in the field to this day, both in general and on this particular problem, is Ritter’s Das Meer Der Seele (The Ocean of the Soul). In Chapter Two of this work, ‘The World’, Ritter notes the precedent of Islamic literature on ‘censuring the world’ (dhamm al-dunya), and situates ‘Aṭṭār within this tradition, collecting stories from ‘Aṭṭār’s work that emphasize the transitory nature of the world and the worthlessness of its pleasures. These sentiments escalate in passages in which it is stated that the world is itself morally bad and is in fact the fiefdom of Satan.

Chapter Three, ‘Distress, Suffering and Oppression: A Theodicy’, continues this line of thought, citing passages on the hardships that God allows humanity to endure, the inefficacy of prayer, and human impotence in the face of the apparently arbitrary Divine Will. Summing up ‘Aṭṭār’s views on the state of human existence in this world, Ritter explains that,

> even aside from the devaluation of the world and the goods of this world due to their transitoriness, and aside from their religious inferiority and the danger they pose, the image of earthly existence remains very dismal. Indeed, even the minimum which is necessary to eke out one's life is not available everywhere. People's needs are badly provided for, the general distribution of goods is arbitrary, and mankind is subjected to suffering and oppression.

Although Ritter’s conclusions do indeed seem to follow logically from the passages he has cited, as we shall see they only represent a partial view of ‘Aṭṭār’s attitude to the world. Indeed, though Ritter does in fact present a few of the more positive aspects of the life in the world, these passages are never integrated into Ritter’s account of ‘Aṭṭār’s view of the world. Furthermore, many of ‘Aṭṭār’s most significant passages on the cosmos are passed over in silence.

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991 Ritter, The Ocean of the Soul, 55.
992 Such as its value as a place for preparation for the Afterlife in Chapter 11. Ritter, The Ocean of the Soul, 188-191.
These limitations of Ritter’s otherwise exemplary study of ʿAṭṭār result directly from his method of approaching the texts. As he explains,

We will now present ʿAttār's stories ordered according to the conceptual motifs which they portray. It must be pointed out, however, that the idea which we extract from a story is not always identical with the motive which caused ʿAṭṭār to relate the story. We interpret the stories often in isolation, detached from their context, and then suggest, where it seems necessary, what the poet wished to illustrate with a particular story. This method may be remotely compared with a historian of literature or culture who, for instance, compiles the objects of comparison which occur in the similes of a poet or an era of poetry, without considering the poet’s intention, in order to establish which objects of intellectual and material culture were included in his horizons and were alive in the realm of his imagination.\footnote{Ritter, \textit{The Ocean of the Soul}, 32. Also cited in the translator’s introduction, xix-xx.}

Although \textit{The Ocean of the Soul} provides the non-Persian speaking reader with a treasure-trove of stories and ideas from ʿAṭṭār’s works, it generally does not do a satisfactory job of showing how these stories fit together. As we have already seen in our analysis of \textit{The Conference of the Birds}, ʿAṭṭār’s \textit{mathnawīs} develop through the relationships between diverse components; the wholes of ʿAṭṭār’s \textit{mathnawīs} are greater than the sums of their parts.

The scholarly emphasis on denial of the world and the centrality of suffering in the works of ʿAṭṭār has continued with Navid Kermani’s highly original and engaging study of theodicy based around a close reading of ʿAṭṭār’s \textit{The Book of Affliction}, namely \textit{The Terror of God: Attar, Job and the Metaphysical Revolt}. In many ways, Kermani’s work represents an excellent example of how the work of a Persian poet can be brought into dialogue with western intellectual traditions to produce a study that is both intellectually rigorous and deeply relevant to fundamental problems of human existence. Indeed, Kermani’s references to his first-hand experience of the effect of suffering on aged Iranians in his family, who had grown up in a world that had inherited many of the religious concerns that ʿAṭṭār engaged with, shows how relevant this poets words are for us today. Although
I ultimately disagree with Kermani’s reading of *The Book of Affliction*, this rich work deserves careful consideration.

In *The Terror of God*, Kermani sets out to investigate an alternative response to the harsh realities of human suffering besides either the theological justification of suffering or the denial of God. Kermani finds this third way, of “neither justifying nor denying God, but rather accusing Him,”994 in various thinkers grappled with the problem of pain, such as the German essayist Heinrich Heine (d. 1856), who himself endured great suffering,995 and above of in ‘Aṭṭār’s wise-fools, whose voice he finds to be strongest in *The Book of Affliction*.

As an exploration of this third way, *The Terror of God* is a remarkable work. In order to read *The Book of Affliction* as representing this third way, however, Kermani is compelled to produce a very particular reading of this work. As he himself admits, “In concentrating on the rebellious aspect of *The Book of Suffering*, I am inevitably guilty of a certain one-sidedness. On the other hand, I feel that Attar’s text itself strongly justifies this emphasis; for despite some brighter moments and didactic passages, it is ultimately dominated by blackness.”996

Like Ritter’s presentation of ‘Aṭṭār’s ‘blame of this world’, Kermani’s reading of *The Book of Affliction* results from an emphasis on one particular type of passage in this work. As a result, when focusing on these passages Kermani is particularly successful. Thus, his analysis of the behavior of wise-fools - that “Lament and rebellion are absorbed into faith itself; they become a theological, spiritual and - viewed against the concrete background of mystical rituals - almost liturgical motif…”997 – are insightful and accurate. However, as we shall see, Kermani’s characterizations

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of The Book of Affliction, and indeed his generalizations about all of ‘Aṭṭār’s mathnawīs, miss the mark.

Thus for example, Kermani states that,

Like his shorter poems, his epics describe the misery of being in all its shadings - metaphysical, existential and social - and speak of the human yearning to break free from oneself in order to attain fulfillment in God. But God is to be found only in one’s own soul, as his protagonists recognize - if at all - and only after long, painful journeys.998

Such a characterization fails to recognize all the soaring moments of ‘Aṭṭār’s writings, and indeed the moments of spiritual consummation in The Conference of the Birds and The Book of Affliction itself, moments that Ritter has documented in detail in the final chapters of his own work.999 Indeed, as we shall see, in order to present the complaint against God as the core message of The Book of Affliction, Kermani ends up underestimating the importance of the positive elements of the book, represented by the voice of the spiritual guide and by the wayfarer’s final attainment of the ‘Ocean of the Spirit’.1000

Much like the work of Ritter, of which the influence is clear in Kermani’s approach,1001 The Terror of God presents a reading of ‘Aṭṭār resulting from a particular focus on certain passages of his works. Certainly, the perspective that Kermani elaborates does form a crucial component in ‘Aṭṭār’s composition. However, by underemphasizing other perspectives in this work, and by ignoring the way the various parts of ‘Aṭṭār’s composition fit together, The Terror of God leaves much

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998 Kermani, The Terror of God, 30.
999 See Ritter, The Ocean of the Soul, 520-656.
1000 Thus, Kermani comments: “Take the answers given by the pīr: they almost always seem bland and half-hearted, especially considering the highly dramatic descriptions of misfortune to which they react.” And likewise, “The reader should not be deceived by the seemingly reconciliatory ending: Attar’s fundamental concern is the pain of existence, which makes nothingness seem so tempting. His book is indeed a ‘book of suffering’, as the title states. In its narrative, the God who is ‘closer to man than his jugular vein’ is distant. He exists, but He is distant, at best.” The Terror of God, 40; 49. When compared with the text of The Book of Affliction these comments seem more of a reflection of Kermani’s own interests in this work, i.e. those that emphasize suffering and rebellion, rather that the work as a whole.
1001 Also note Kermani’s criticism of Ritter, that he has levelled out the works of ‘Aṭṭār by treating them as equivalent, hence failing to recognize the difference of tone of a work like The Book of Affliction. The Terror of God, 32-3.
to be said about suffering and the significance of the world in ‘Aṭṭār. Let us turn to The Book of Affliction itself in order to broaden the scope of the insights provided by Ritter and Kermani.

**Knowing God through the Cosmos: The Book of Affliction**

The frame story of The Book of Affliction tells of the journey of the ‘wayfarer of contemplation’ (sālik-i fikrat) through the various levels of the cosmos, until he meets the prophets and begins to journey through the levels of his own self towards the Spirit (jān), the meeting place with God. In these characteristics it falls squarely within the genre of ‘visionary recital’, and is thus comparable to Sanā’ī’s *Journey of the Servants.*

*The Book of Affliction* stands out among ‘Aṭṭār’s works through the systematic nature of its engagement with the significance of the cosmos for the spiritual path. Although, as we shall see, the cosmos is also considered from several points of view in *The Book of Mysteries*, in *The Book of Affliction* the significance of twenty-eight particular levels of cosmic reality are treated in their particularity, as the wayfarer approaches each seeking spiritual guidance.

After an introductory section introducing the wayfarer of contemplation, describing his initial bewilderment and suffering, and heralding the eventual appearance of a spiritual master, the frame story proceeds in a systematic manner. Each chapter begins with the wayfarer approaching a being who represents a particular level of the cosmos and praising its qualities; these include entities such as the archangels, the four material elements, or the animals or birds. Having asked this being to assist him in his quest, it responds to him that it cannot offer any help, since it burns in longing for God but cannot travel beyond the level of reality that it now inhabits. In these descriptions, it is above all the suffering (*dard*) of love that is emphasized, which is the reason for the title of the book. Through this depiction of the suffering of love in separation the cosmology of
love presented in the *Treatise on Love* attributed to Ibn Sīnā\(^{1002}\) is transformed into a cosmology of suffering.

After each refusal and expression of suffering, the wayfarer reports his experience to the spiritual master, who explains to him the positive message of that being and the spiritual lesson that must be learned in order for the wayfarer to continue on his journey. (For a summary of these twenty-eight stages see Fig 1 at the end of this section.) In each case, ‘Aṭṭār extends this teaching by providing several stories that develop it further, following his general practice of linking stories by association, which often leads him substantially beyond the original teaching of the master. After the twenty-eight stages of the cosmic journey, this same narrative structure is maintained as the wayfarer visits seven prophets and five levels of his own selfhood, though in these twelve chapters his encounters provide him with more positive lessons than he received during his journey through the suffering cosmos.

‘Aṭṭār’s teachings the cosmos as represented by the frame story of *The Book of Affliction* are presented through the modes of both correlative and associative thought. Several commentators have pointed out that the forty chapters of the book correspond to the forty days of spiritual retreat that Sufi aspirants would often undergo under the close supervision of their spiritual masters.\(^{1003}\) This seems to be accurate, particularly since ‘Aṭṭār himself uses the technical term for this forty-day retreat, *chilla*, at the end of his introduction:

> When you have made this *chilla* in the Way (*tariqat*),
> Reconciliation will have been made with the Truth (*haqīqat*).\(^{1004}\)


\(^{1003}\) On this frame story see Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul*, 18-30.

\(^{1004}\) MN, 157.882.
However, the significance of ‘forty’ here may not be limited to the chilla. The number forty in the science of numerology is commonly assigned to the letter Mīm, which is written as a circle. In contrast to many linear depictions of the Sufi path, such as that found in The Conference of the Birds, the journey of the wayfarer in The Book of Affliction is not a straight line, but is rather a circle; it begins with the archangel Gabriel and descends until it reaches the elements, and then ascends again through created beings in order of complexity up to humanity, which initiates the next stage of the journey. Moreover, the letter Mīm and the number forty are also associated with the Prophet Muḥammad, who became a prophet at the age of forty. In The Book of Affliction the Prophet Muḥammad is the last stage of the wayfarer’s journey outside of himself (for the Prophet then initiates him into the journey through the levels of his own self). Indeed, as we saw in the introduction to The Conference of the Birds, the Muhammadan Reality is associated with both the descending creation of the cosmos and the ascending return to God, creating a circular movement that resembles the circle of the Mīm.

Though it is difficult to firmly conclude what aspects of these correlations ‘Aṭṭār had in mind while crafting the frame story of The Book of Affliction, it is clear that both correlative and associative thought play a fundamental role in this work. To begin with, each time the wayfarer approaches one of the levels of the cosmos he praises it in terms that bring both its mythological significance and its beauty into focus. Though the being he encounters always focuses on its own incapacity and love-sick suffering, the master’s commentary reveals the ethical and spiritual significance of the being in question. ‘Aṭṭār’s depiction of the wayfarer’s interaction with the various levels of cosmic reality are both correlative and associative - correlative when a particular objective quality of the being in question is directly correlated with an ethical quality, such as the firmness of the earth bringing forth teachings on the traits of patience and forbearance; and associative when an apparently more arbitrary connection is made, such as on the basis of linguistic similarity.
However, there is no clear line of demarcation between these two types of thinking here, as ‘Aṭṭār’s thought-making use of the ‘magic of proximity’--considers even apparently accidental associations to be revelatory of an aspect of reality. The most powerful example of this dimensions of his thought comes in the introduction to *The Book of Affliction* is which his association of ‘religion’ (*shar*) , ‘poetry’ (*šīr*) and ‘the Throne’ (*‘arsh*) results from their shared (though rearranged) root letters. The conclusion of this association is that “the world is a poet” (*jahān shā’ir buwad*), proved in this logic by the fact that many of the names of famous Persian poets are parts of the cosmos (such as Firdawsī, ‘of paradise’ or ‘Unṣūrī, ‘of the elements’).

However, despite how natural this type of thinking seems for ‘Aṭṭār himself, the poet pauses for a moment before beginning the frame story of *The Book of Affliction* to assure his readers that the cosmic journey that is about to follow is not as far-fetched as it might seem to the literal minded. Given its self-reflexivity, this section is a particularly rich resource for understanding ‘Aṭṭār’s approach to depicting the wisdom of the cosmos. In this introductory section, ‘Aṭṭār leaves room for the journey that follows to be interpreted in several ways, a fact that can be explained by his reference to *The Book of Affliction* as a “beautiful book for the masses and the elite.” Thus, each group can read the work in its own particular yet consistent way, and benefit from it according to their capacity.

In order to avoid any unnecessary confusion, ‘Aṭṭār explains that he does not wish to claim that the wayfarer has a verbal conversation with each of the beings described. Rather, the conversations proceed through ‘the tongue of the state’ (*zabān-i ḥāl*), a literary term that refers the

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1005 MN, 150.724.
1006 See MN, 150.717-721. The cosmological significance of this theme of the world as poet is discussed in detail by Stephien in “A Study in Sufi Poetics,” 92f.
1007 MN, 159.908.
way inanimate objects can give a message or tell a story by the very state in which they exist.\textsuperscript{1008} Moreover, given that the story is one of spiritual travel, it is likely that ‘Aṭṭār is also playing on the technical sense of ḥāl in Sufi vocabulary - the conversation will thus take place between the wayfarer’s inner state and the state of being of the cosmic reality he encounters. Furthermore, accepting that the technical meaning of the ‘tongue of the state’ might not be clear to every reader, ‘Aṭṭār gives a concession to those who do not understand it, stating that they should consider it “the tongue of [the wayfarer’s] ‘thought’ or ‘contemplation’ (fikrat).”\textsuperscript{1009}

As this passage continues, ‘Aṭṭār continues to clarify the nature of this journey to the supposedly disbelieving reader. Firstly, he points out that what he is about to describe is no more fantastic than the type of thing that can be seen by anyone in a dream. It therefore should not seem too farfetched if someone claims to have seen this through spiritual inspiration, or ‘unveiling’ (kashf). Moreover, though there are types of imagination and inspiration that are satanic rather than angelic in character, the experience, aspiration and reverence for God, along with religion (sharī‘) serve as a means of distinguishing between the two.\textsuperscript{1010} The type of discourse that is to follow is at worst like independent reasoning in law (ijtihād), in which an effort that leads to error is rewarded once, whereas success is rewarded twice.

From these descriptions it is clear that both the wayfarer’s journey and the discourse that ‘Aṭṭār will use to describe it reflect a particular type of cognition, which he distinguishes from ordinary thought in the final lines of this section:

For the wayfarer, that which traverses the Way is his contemplation (fikr),

A contemplation (fikrat) that is derived from his invocation (dhikr).

Invocation must be uttered until it brings forth contemplation,

\textsuperscript{1008} On this topic see Naṣrullāh Pūrjawādī, Ẓabān-i Ḥāl dar ‘Īfān wa Adabiyāt-i Pārsī (Tehran: Hirmis, 2006).
\textsuperscript{1009} MN, 158.891-4.
\textsuperscript{1010} MN, 158.896-7.
Bringing forth a hundred-thousand virgin meanings.

The contemplation of reason belongs to the infidels,

The contemplation of the heart belongs to the man of the Work (kār).

The Wayfarer of Contemplation who has embarked on the Work,

Has become manifest through the heart, not through reason.

The folk of the heart have the taste of another understanding,

Which is higher than the understanding of both of the worlds.

Whosoever is cast into the Work by that understanding,

Casts himself into the Sea of Mysteries.\textsuperscript{1011}

In addition to providing an insightful commentary on the genre of visionary narrative in general, these lines act as a corrective to the concessions ‘Aṭṭār has previously given. They declare that the journey of the ‘wayfarer of contemplation’ and its poetic expression, rather than resulting from mere thought or imagination, are rooted in the heart, the organ of unitive and spiritual knowledge, which will be encountered by the wayfarer as the deepest layer of his reality before the infinitude of the Spirit itself. Rather than deriving from syllogism, as is the philosophical thought of which ‘Aṭṭār is a fierce critic, the basis of this fikrat, or ‘contemplation’, is the Sufī practice of invocation. ‘Aṭṭār is thus declaring that the journey is not simply a matter of mere poetic artifice, thought up by the poet, but is rather a contemplative journey. This is why ‘contemplation’ is a more adequate rendering of the rich terms fikr and fikrat,\textsuperscript{1012} which are often misleadingly translated as ‘thought’. Although for most of the journey the objects of contemplation are external to the wayfarer, ‘Aṭṭār explains that, “All of them will come within the self.”\textsuperscript{1013} Moreover, the reader can participate in this journey by becoming “all ear head to foot, without veil,” as the opening lines

\textsuperscript{1011} MN, 159.909-15.
\textsuperscript{1012} Used synonymously by ‘Aṭṭār here.
\textsuperscript{1013} MN, 157.881.
of the frame story command.1014 ‘Aṭṭār’s purpose in The Book of Affliction is to lead the reader on a journey of self-realization, for:

Since you are seeking yourself in forty stations,
   All of it, in the end is you, and that’s it.1015

‘Aṭṭār’s description of what he means by ‘the wayfarer of contemplation’ around whom this story will revolve allows us to make better sense of the significance of the correlative-associative thought that develops at each stage of the journey. Each reality that the wayfarer encounters is an opportunity for him - and ‘Aṭṭār, and the reader - to contemplate a complex network of ideas: including the images and meanings (maʿānī, which signifies ‘spiritual realities’ as well as ‘concepts’) that the reality in question calls forth through its physical qualities (if it has them), its cosmic function, and its symbolic significance within ‘Aṭṭār’s literary and scriptural sources.

After these positive images and meanings have been woven by ‘Aṭṭār’s poetics into the aesthetics of the wayfarer’s praise, we hear a counter correlation from the cosmic reality itself, expressing its own limitations and telling us why it should not be idolized, and why the journey must continue beyond it. In this response other qualities of the being in question are emphasized, namely those that show its inadequacy, that it is a lowly being that must be transcended on the way to God.

A third voice enters with the spiritual master, who brings a further set of correlations in his expression of the spiritual lessons that are to be learned and the virtues that are to be acquired following the contemplation in question. These correlations correct the negative attitude of the being’s expression of suffering and reveal the message that God has placed within it. Under the

1014 MN, 158.884.
1015 MN, 157.883
master’s guidance, every being in the universe thus becomes a signpost towards God with its own set of directions to impart.

Each of these stages involves a complex correlation of physical reality, mythic significance, ethical association and linguistic representation. This correlation, belonging neither to physical reality nor to language as it occurs on the page or in speech, can only occur within contemplation itself. The wayfarer, and the reader, is guided by the spiritual master to understand the lessons of the cosmos through correct contemplation and to undergo the spiritual transformation that these lessons require. By contemplating the many levels of the cosmos, the wayfarer journeys through those aspects of himself that correspond to each level. Moreover, though each level of the cosmos has a positive message to tell, the consistent theme of the book, and the only message that each reality will itself give voice to, is that every being except the human is stuck where it is, and that it is the human that must journey on by integrating the wisdom of each level of the cosmos and then transcending it.

The first major narrative section of *The Book of Affliction*, describing the journey through the cosmos in twenty-eight stages, thus provides its own perspective on the significance of the world. In this work, the cosmos becomes the map of virtues and spiritual insights that the wayfarer must successively integrate on his journey. It is ‘Atṭār’s contemplation of the cosmos in its diversity that makes this schema possible.

Table 1: The Stages of the Wayfarer’s Journey through the Cosmos in *The Book of Affliction*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Reality</th>
<th>The Master’s Teaching</th>
<th>Theme(s) of the Stories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Gabriel</td>
<td>The invocation of the Name of God</td>
<td>The invocation of the Name of God; Sufism is not attained by effort but received as a gift.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Israfil</td>
<td>The fear of God and the tribulations of proximity</td>
<td>The fear of God and the tribulations of proximity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Michael  
God is the true Sustainer; the Unity of Divine Acts (*tawḥīd al-afʿāl*)  
God is the true Sustainer; everyone has a different task in God’s plan; one must accept God’s Kindness and Wrath.

4. Isra’il  
Isra’il seems to be a manifestation of Wrath but in fact brings ease, if death is case the world must not be worth anything.  
Death is near, so prepare for it.

5. The Throne-Bearing Angel  
The angels are constantly in worship, desiring God, and sacrificing themselves to Him.  
*On angels being burned up in the Divine Light and in prostration to humanity. The secret of humanity is near to us. Bewilderment.*

6. The Throne  
The Throne distributes the Divine Mercy into this world; especially on those who are merciful to others.  
Mercy as a key character trait; those who are shown mercy are transformed.

7. The Footstool  
The Footstool is always turning in desire for God. Whoever seeks like the Footstool gains taste of spiritual realities, but for this one must abandon the world.  
Worthlessness of this world; on justice; criticism of worldly power.

8. The Guarded Tablet  
The Guarded Tablet contains the knowledge of everything, which is as it is without reason.  
God’s actions are unfathomable; on habits; the dunyā runs by the command of Iblīs.

9. The Pen  
The Pen (*qalam*) is the instrument of Divine Power (*qudrat*); the Pen is upright yet is inverted in suffering.  
On accomplishing things completely; on love; on choosing religion or the world.

10. Paradise  
Paradise is where the Divine Beauty manifests.  
Vision of the manifestation of God’s light everywhere.

11. Hell  
Hell is the principle of the dunyā, so abandon it in order to gain religion (*dīn*).  
On abandoning the world.

12. The Sky  
The sky is bewildered (lit. ‘head-spinning’). The red of dusk is its heart’s blood.  
On bewilderment/‘head-spinning’ (*sar-gardān*).

13. The Sun  
The Sun is the court of lofty aspiration and realization.  
On aspiration.

14. The Moon  
The Moon is too weak to bear union with the beloved, so it is constantly expanding and contracting towards annihilation.  
On being unable to tolerate the power of love; on misnaming.

15. Fire  
Fire is greed, which has taken over this world making people idolize gold.  
On greed
| 16. Wind | The wind is the servant of the Spirit, it brings ease and mercy, and news of one's lost Joseph. | The trace of the beloved is sufficient; on mercy; on detachment from the world. |
| 17. Water | Water is pure, but the dog of the carnal soul (nafs) is impure. | On the impurity of the carnal soul. |
| 18. Earth | The Earth patiently bears the load of the world; forbearance leads to the acquisition of all virtue. | On forbearance; on humility. |
| 19. The Mountains | The Mountains are outwardly steadfast but are inwardly moving in the search for God. | Seeking God alone; on the lovers of God. |
| 20. The Sea | The Sea is constantly drinking yet remains dry lipped in thirst; the thirst of the heart and soul must be in moderation. | Love that is too intense can harm those who are not ready; love transcending duality. |
| 21. The Mineral Kingdom | The world, like minerals is solidified/depressed (afsurda), so transcend it and come to life. | The transitory nature of this world. |
| 22. The Vegetable Kingdom | The trees and plants symbolize different types of people – the great trees are the rational and the small plants are those who are madly in love with God and say what they want to Him. | Stories of madmen; the lovers of God are each like a perfect flower. |
| 23. The Wild Beasts (particularly Insects) | Each beast is a symbol of an aspect of the soul; the principle of all these is realization, of which the principle is Unity. The way to this is to be tramples underfoot like insects. | On Unity; the Divine Power; on asceticism. |
| 24. The Birds | The birds represent lofty spiritual realities. Until the meanings in the Spirit become joined to the body they remain hidden. | Being content with little. |
| 25. The Animals | The animals represent the carnal soul; do not feed its fire. | The animality of the carnal soul. |
| 26. Iblis | Iblis is egoism and jealousy so he has been appointed to guard the Divine Threshold from those who are not worthy. | False love; Satan’s fall, his sincerity and hope. |
| 27. The Jinn | Do not reject the words of the insane. | Stories about madmen. |
| 28. Humanity | The human Spirit is the All of All, and pure Bliss; the Spirit is the way to the Beloved. There is a Way to God in every heart. | God is directly accessible through the heart; the interdependence of lover and beloved; the lover must not see himself; negligence is the greatest sin of the lover. |
Diversity in ‘Aṭṭār’s Contemplation of the Cosmos and Suffering

The frame story of The Book of Affliction itself provides sufficient proof that ‘blame of this world’ constitutes only one aspect of ‘Aṭṭār’s attitude towards the cosmos. Although this attitude does take its place within this work, for example in Chapters 11 and 21, it is only one of the many messages that the cosmos has to give us. Indeed, just as the Quranic teaching that ‘The life of this world is naught but play and diversion,’ (SQ, 6:32) is balanced by its instructions to contemplate the signs of nature, the negative and positive aspects of the cosmos both appear in The Book of Affliction. Indeed, the whole of this book, in both its sections of journey through the cosmos and journey through the self, is thus a commentary on the Quranic verse, ‘We shall show them Our signs upon the horizons and within themselves till it becomes clear to them that it is the truth.’ (SQ, 41:53)

It is this combination of attitudes that means that ‘Aṭṭār’s work can neither be reduced to blame of the world, as is implied in Ritter’s chapter on this topic, nor to an excessive emphasis on suffering and revolt, as is the core of Kermani’s reading. The repeating structure of the frame narrative of The Book of Affliction is in fact structured around positive and negative attitudes, much as the movement between fear and hope is seen in The Conference of the Birds. Although the wayfarer’s hopeful approach to each level of the cosmos is rebutted with an expression of sorrow by a being interminably separated from God, the deeper meaning of the suffering of this level of the cosmos is then elucidated by the spiritual master, who presents diverse teachings that are further diversified by the narratives that ‘Aṭṭār uses to illustrate them.

Moreover, suffering (dard) plays a deeply meaningful role in the wayfarer of contemplation’s journey, which is thus central to The Book of Affliction. Indeed, it is now generally accepted among scholars of ‘Aṭṭār that dard is all in all an extremely positive force in this poet’s works. As Husyan Ilahi-Ghomshei puts it,
In fact, in ‘Aṭṭār’s spiritual teachings the cure for all psychological and spiritual ailments lies in the transformative suffering and passion of love (dard). This is why he asks for that passion to be increased:

Give me an ounce of pain, O you
Who cure all pain, for left without
Your pain, my soul will die.
To heretics let heresy apply,
And to the faithful - grant them faith;
But for the heart of ‘Aṭṭār, let
One ounce of your pain remain.1016

Indeed, in light of ‘Aṭṭār’s introductory claim that The Memorial of God’s Friends will turn men into ‘pure dard’ (‘ayn-i dard), Waley has gone so far as to translate dard as ‘passion’, calling it “The driving force behind these men’s spiritual progression.”1017 Indeed, as Waley explains, “if this is sorrow, it is heartfelt grief at being separated from the Divine Beloved; if it is longing, it is a longing for the Vision of God…Such, then, is the apex of humanity according to Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār.”1018

Despite Kermani’s claims that The Book of Affliction differs from ‘Aṭṭār’s other works in the intensity of its focus on suffering, the positive attitude towards pain certainly features prominently here. Though admitted in a passage of which Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī has questioned the attribution, the work’s introduction addresses dard as the spiritual guide par excellence:

He said, ‘O pain, you are my cure,
You are the soul of soul, my infidelity and faith.
Should you lay a hundred mountains upon my neck,
All of that, without me, you lay upon yourself.
What a wondrous pain you are, I know you not.

I only know this much: my soul belongs to you. Should I weep, you tell me, ‘How long will you weep?’ And should I laugh, you say, ‘Laugh not, but weep.’ …If I do, you say ‘Do not! Hear these words.’ And if I don’t want to do, you are going to say, ‘Do it!’ Should I eat, you say, ‘Fast, O ignorant one!’ Should I not want to eat, you surely will tell me ‘Eat!’

With you what can be eaten? Nothing can be eaten.
With you what can be done? Nothing can be done.\textsuperscript{1019}

However, even if one casts doubt on the authenticity of these lines, in which pain becomes the beloved, the spiritual guide, and the doorway to the annihilation of the servant, the guiding purpose of suffering abides throughout \textit{The Book of Affliction}. Suffering is always the reason why the wayfarer must continue his journey to its very end, and this is precisely what sets him apart from all the other beings of the universe. Whereas all other beings in the universe are stationary, burning in the contemplation of the Divine from afar, for the human suffering can become the fundamental means to approaching God.

To be sure, Kermani’s analyses of those passages of ‘Aṭṭār in which suffering seems most meaningless are of crucial importance. They prevent us from sanitizing this suffering, which for those who undergo it verges on utter meaninglessness. However, even these moments of the most intense suffering are but a stage in the journey towards the Goal. As such, when treated in a static manner, as is conditioned by the scholarly methods of both Ritter and Kermani, suffering does appear to be absolutely pointless; but when considered as part of the whole, as a stage in the journey, it must be seen in a new light.

\textsuperscript{1019} MN, 166.1077-1086. CF. Kermani’s translation of this passage in \textit{The Terror of God}, 159.
Diversity in the Self and its Reintegration

Notwithstanding the significance of the cosmos in the narrative of *The Book of Affliction*, the journey does not stop there. Once the wayfarer of contemplation encounters humanity itself, his journey progresses through meetings with seven prophets.\(^{1020}\) Having received a different teaching from the first six, he reaches the Prophet Muḥammad, who instructs him in spiritual poverty (*faqr*), and initiates him into the journey within the levels of his own self.

In light of our discussion of Dabashi’s claim that Persian literary humanism is based on a ‘decentered’ and ‘fragmented’ subject,\(^{1021}\) it is particularly noteworthy that ‘Aṭṭār himself deals at length with the diversity within the self.\(^{1022}\) Indeed, as I shall argue, this topic is not only the focal point of the final five chapters of *The Book of Affliction*, but is also the central theme of *The Book of God*. Reading these two works together, I will show that in contrast to Dabashi’s dichotomy of ‘centered’ and ‘unity’ subject that is supposed to belong to enlightenment rationality and the ‘decentered’ and ‘fragmented’ subject of postmodernity, ‘Aṭṭār presents us with a third option, that of ‘unity in multiplicity’: the self contains many different aspects that for most individuals exist in a state of disequilibrium, but are brought into their proper relation through the process of traversing the spiritual path. In order to establish the precise nature of this ‘unity in multiplicity’ within the self we must return to the texts.

In the final five chapter of *The Book of Affliction*, we encounter the diverse faculties within the human self, each of which has its own spiritual lesson to give:

\(^{1020}\) Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus and Muhammad


\(^{1022}\) In although Dabashi’s brief discussions of ‘Aṭṭār, his most relevant insight here is that regarding ‘Aṭṭār and other hagiographers of his period, “their allegorical disposition gives them the character of a magic/realism that suspends any assumption of a centered reason or a knowing subject.” Dabashi, *Persian Literary Humanism*, 31. He thus clearly sees ‘Aṭṭār as belonging to the same model of fragmented ‘non-enlightenment’ selfhood that is discussed throughout the book.
The sense faculties (ḥisā) begin by warning the wayfarer of egoism and the scattering diversity that is the result of the diverse functions of the five senses. The master then instructs him to beware of egoism, seek unity of focus, and to appreciate the present moment.

Imagination (khiyāl) is depicted more positively than the sense faculties by ‘Aṭṭār, appearing as the faculty by which multiplicity is discovered in unity, though ‘Aṭṭār does not explore this theme in any detail. The master then teaches that imagination brings the image (mithāl) of beauty into sensible form.

The intellect (‘aql) is briefly given a more positive depiction than one would expect from ‘Aṭṭār, who here considers it valid but limited in scope. However, we see ‘Aṭṭār’s more common perspective manifested in the stories of this chapter, which are all about madmen.

As the journey nears its end, the wayfarer reaches the heart, the “reflection of the Sun of the Spirit.” However, despite the heart’s proximity to the goal, it nevertheless constantly sorrows in desire.

Reaching the end of the journey, the wayfarer addresses the Spirit (jān, rūḥ) in ecstatic discourse, of which the following lines are but a highlight:

He said, ‘O reflection of the Sun of Majesty
Ray of an eternal Sun.
Whatever has come in Absolute Unity
All of that, in you, has become realized.
Since you are outside of intellect and gnosis
Neither do you come under explanation or attribution.
Since you are constantly without essence and attributes
Both your Attribute and Eternal Essence are complete…
My own spirit (jān) is but a rivulet (shu’ba) from your Ocean,

1023 MN, 437.6878-11.
May I die, all vision now belongs to you alone.”¹⁰²⁴

The Spirit then replies with an equally extensive teaching, including the following:

That which you have lost, if indeed you have lost it
   Is within your Self, you are a veil of your Self…”¹⁰²⁵

A drop that departs out of the Ocean,
   Journeying through ‘Why?’ and ‘What?’ and ‘How?’,
So long as you are here, there is the question of ‘How?’
   The whole affair precedes in curiosity,
But when you reach the Ocean sacrificing your all,
   How is it possible to find you, and distinguish you from the dust?¹⁰²⁶

The power of these passages should immediately dispel from our minds the idea that hopelessness prevails in The Book of Affliction. Indeed, perhaps occasioned by Ritter’s translation of jān as Seele rather than Geist, the magnitude of the spiritual attainment with which the frame narrative concludes seems to have been lost on some readers.¹⁰²⁷ Whereas the preceding stages of the journey have led the wayfarer through his own soul (nafs), he has now reached the Spirit (jān and rūḥ are used interchangeably by ‘Aṭṭār here, hence the confusion – for jān is also used to translate the Arabic nafs). The final message of hope in The Book of Affliction is thus that, however far the Divine may seem from us, each of us possesses the ultimate gateway to God within us; the Spirit, the highest point of creation and the means of transcending it, can be accessed by each of us through the heart. Indeed, this reality is none other than the Muhammadan Reality itself.¹⁰²⁸

¹⁰²⁴ MN, 438.6894.
¹⁰²⁵ MN, 438.6898.
¹⁰²⁶ MN, 439.4908-11.
¹⁰²⁷ See Ritter, The Ocean of the Soul, 634-6. In particular, this has influenced Kermani’s pessimistic reading of the book.
¹⁰²⁸ See Ritter, The Ocean of the Soul, 636.
However, for our current discussion the journey through the five levels of the self is just as significant as the ending. Just as the journey through the cosmos proceeded through the contemplation of the diverse signs of God, in the wayfarer’s journey within the self it is the particularity of each level of the self that makes the journey meaningful. However, despite the diversity of these levels, the journey itself is coherent, as are the spiritual messages given by each faculty of the soul, which point the wayfarer towards his final goal. Moreover, like the journey through the cosmos, the wayfarer progresses by understanding each level on its own terms, by integrating the wisdom it has to offer, and then by transcending it and continuing the journey. Each level of the self is thus an independent and particular participant in a greater whole, the journey of the wayfarer towards the Spirit.

The significance of the ‘unity in multiplicity’ in ‘Aṭṭār’s conception of selfhood comes more clearly into focus when we complement our reading of The Book of Affliction with an analysis of The Book of God. As we shall see, the model of selfhood presented in the former work are addressed again there from a new point of view, in which a clearer account of integration is presented.

**Broken Allegories in The Book of God**

‘Aṭṭār’s Book of God is structured around the tale of a king who had six obedient and knowledgeable sons, whom he asks in turn what they desire from the world, promising that he will grant their wishes. The sons each desire: 1) to be wed to the beautiful daughter of the fairy king, 2) to learn sorcery, 3) to gain the cup of Jamshid in which the whole world is manifest, 4) to drink the water of life, 5) to dominate the world through the ring of Solomon, and 6) to be taught alchemy. The king finds these worldly goals to be unworthy of his sons and proceeds to help them

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1029 That ‘Aṭṭār begins by noting these virtues of the princes is noteworthy, given that the rest of the tale focuses on their shortcomings. See IN, 130.
realize the error of their ways by telling them instructive stories. Each son persists in trying to argue the worthiness of his goal, occasioning more stories from the king, until the son finally concedes. In the final chapter of each section, the king then reveals the true principle that lies behind each prince’s misdirected desire.

Following Ritter, scholars have often characterized *The Book of God* as centering on asceticism (rather than loftier ‘mystical’ topics), given the fact that a great deal of the king’s discourse focuses on the folly of particular worldly desires.1030 Moreover, the frame story has been considered ‘Aṭṭār’s weakest. As Pūrṇāmdāriyān points out, the journeying that creates the narrative movement in *The Conference of the Birds* and *The Book of Affliction* is absent here, made impossible by the fact that the sons desire different things, whereas journeying requires unanimity.1031 Moreover, given the fact that the focus of the book seems to be on correcting basic faults of intention in the princes, Pūrṇāmdāriyān suggests that its interests are situated on the level of Sharia, by which he means a preliminary stage before the wayfaring of the *ṭarīqa*.1032 Both Ritter’s characterization and Pūrṇāmdāriyān’s assessment seem to place *The Book of God* on a lower level than ‘Aṭṭār’s other, more mystical, *mathnawīs*.

Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī offers both a more generous and complete reading by pointing out the importance of the king’s final teaching to each son, the positive message for which the ground has been prepared by his more critical comments. Here Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī sees *The Book of God* to be in line with what he sees to be ‘Aṭṭār’s most important teaching: that everything worth seeking is found inside oneself.1033 The six sections of the book are therefore about six transformations of desire from an outward to an inward object: the first prince seeks outward beauty, but must learn

1031 Pūrṇāmdāriyān, *Ḍīdār Bā Śīnurgh*, 270-1.
1032 Pūrṇāmdāriyān, *Ḍīdār Bā Śīnurgh*, 271.
1033 See IN, ‘Editor’s Introduction’, 29.
that true beauty is found in the transformed soul (the nafs-e mutma‘īnna, or ‘soul at peace’ of Q, 89:27); the second prince’s Satanic desire for sorcery must be transformed into Iblīs’ virtue, being a true lover even in adversity; the third prince must realize that the true Cup of Jamshīd is the intellect, which only functions in one who has died to himself; the fourth prince must realize that the true water of life is knowledge; the fifth prince must seek the ring of power in contentment with little; and the sixth son must seek alchemy within himself, the alchemy of transformative suffering (dard).  

The recognition of the positive message with which each conversation between father and son concludes is a crucial starting point for a holistic interpretation of The Book of God. Shafī‘ī-Kadkani’s insight here is not simply based on an attentive reading of the last chapter of each section, but also takes into account the key to the allegory that ‘Aṭṭār places in the beginning of the tale. ‘Aṭṭār begins by praising and wondering at the Spirit (jān), the same reality that constituted the goal of the journey of The Book of Affliction. It turns out that the Spirit will play one of the roles in the story:

You are the king, the caliph, eternal,  
You have six sons, each is unique.
Each of your sons possesses a happy conjunction;  
Indeed, in his apogee each son is a world.
One is the soul (nafs), his place in sensation;  
One is Satan, with gaze directed towards suspicions (mauchūm);  
One is the intellect, who speaks of intelligibles;  
Another is knowledge, the seeker of sciences.
One is poverty, who seeks the non-existent;

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1034 See IN, ‘Editor’s Introduction’, 29-34.
1035 sahib-qirān, i.e. is born under an auspicious alignment of the heavenly spheres.
1036 Or simply, ‘the objects of the estimative faculty’.
One Universal Unity (tawḥīd-i kullī), seeking the Essence.\textsuperscript{1037}

When these six find their way under command,

They then discover eternal presence.\textsuperscript{1038}

This introductory section is thus the ‘key’ to the frame story; The Book of God is about the various inner faculties of the human being and their relationship to their ‘father’, the Spirit.

Admittedly, this allegorization has been criticized by Pūrnāmdāriyān on two counts: that the equation of terms is inconsistent,\textsuperscript{1039} and that by giving away the intention of the story the reader is excluded from the creative process of interpreting the story.\textsuperscript{1040} However, I believe that this passage does provide the key from which further investigation into The Book of God should proceed, building upon Shafi‘ī-Kadkanī’s observations. In particular, if we take as our starting point that ‘Aṭṭār does not intend for us to simply ‘decode’ the tale that follows according to this cipher, but rather wishes us to explore the associations and lines of inquiry it indicates, the need for creative interpretation in understanding how the pieces of The Book of God fit together comes to the fore once again. Moreover, as we shall see, it is particularly in the ways that the allegorization does not work, the ways in which we might call it a ‘broken allegory’, that many of the most interesting characteristics of The Book of God come into focus. It is the partial correspondences between the parts of The Book of God and the breaks in correspondence that invite us into the creative process of putting the pieces together ourselves.

\textsuperscript{1037} See IN, ‘Editor’s Introduction’, 35-7, where Shafi‘ī-Kadkanī considers the significance of each of these six components, pointing out the originality of their combination here.

\textsuperscript{1038} IN, 129.430-435.

\textsuperscript{1039} Pūrnāmdāriyān argues that for the allegory to function, its terms would need to be consistently interchangeable. Thus, for example, if the first prince represents the lower soul (nafs) and the fairy princess represents the ‘soul at peace’, the fact that the prince seeks the fairy princess should translate into the lower soul seeking the soul at peace, whereas this is not the case. See Didār Bā Simurgh, 285.

\textsuperscript{1040} See Pūrnāmdāriyān, Didār Bā Simurgh, 285-6.
Shafī‘ī-Kadkani’s suggestion that *The Book of God* is also really about the internal journey is confirmed in the lines following the key to the allegory. Here ‘Aṭṭār seems to turn to the reader, inviting him or her to take on the particular virtues of eleven different prophets, which include the command: “…Like Adam, travel within your own breast, like the world.” Not only is the inward journey explicit here, but the imagery is very similar to that of *The Book of Affliction*, which is simultaneously a journey through the cosmos and the soul.

Resonances with *The Book of Affliction* abound in this passage, which seems to present a schematic summary the penultimate groups of chapters of that work, the visits to the prophets, in a few short lines, albeit with a different roster of prophets and different virtues highlighted for each.

But there is an even more striking comparison with *The Book of Affliction* here: of the seven characters in ‘Aṭṭār’s allegorical key, five of them correspond to the final stages of *The Book of Affliction* (noted on the left):

- Muḥammadan Poverty (the last stage before the inward journey) - The 5th son, poverty
- Sensation - The 1st son, the soul, located in sensation
- Imagination - The 2nd son, Satan, directed towards suspicion (or, ‘negative imagination’, *wahm*)
- Intellect - The 3rd son, Intellect
- The Heart - no apparent correspondence, replaces ‘knowledge’
- The Spirit - The King, the Spirit

The final stage of *The Book of Affliction*, which is explicitly a journey through the levels of within the self, is clearly a reworking of the same inner diversity that forms the allegorical basis of *The Book of God*. Moreover, there are two ‘improvements’ found in the neater and more logical set found in *The Book of Affliction*, suggesting two parts of the allegory of *The Book of God* that may be weak links,

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1041 IN, 128-9.
1042 Despite the fact that ‘Aṭṭār is thought to have composed *The Book of Affliction* later than *The Book of God*, which says something about his creative processes.
or at least deserve further investigation. First, the level of knowledge, which seems somewhat redundant given the presence of the intellect, has been replaced by the heart. Second, the level of ‘Universal Unity’ (tawḥīd-i kull), which seemed awkward as the offspring of the Spirit, has been removed. As we shall see, both of these points are where ‘Aṭṭār’s allegory seems weakest, and as a result some of the most interesting components of *The Book of God* occur around them.

Yet despite these discrepancies, the similarities between the final stages of the journey of the wayfarer of contemplation and the allegorical identities of the king and his sons tell us that these stories share similar concerns. The final stages of *The Book of Affliction* concern the encounter with the diverse stages of the self and the integration of the particular wisdom of each, contributing to the journey towards the Spirit. Providing a different approach to the diversity within the self, *The Book of God* charts the process of the transformation of six aspects of the self, which thus become harmonized by the wise vision of the Spirit, their father. Crucially, in both stories ‘Aṭṭār wants us to come to terms with the diversity of elements found within our selves and to realize their true nature so each can take its proper place.

**The Story of Marḫūma**

Rather than providing a reading of the entire *Book of God*, the core message of which we have already summarized on the basis of the analysis of Shafi‘ī-Kadkanī, my analysis of the integration of the self in this work will focus on a single story. I suggest that this new reading of the first tale told by the king sheds new light on the entirety of the work.

‘The Story of the Righteous Woman Whose Husband had Gone on a Journey’, (or ‘The Story of Marḫūma) is one of ‘Aṭṭār’s tales that has received the most scholarly attention. The central interest in this story has resulted from its significance for world literature, for it is an early example of a tale found with remarkable similarities in diverse literatures, including *The Thousand
and One Night’s, Chaucer’s ‘Man of Law’s Tale’, and the Germanic tale of Crescentia.\textsuperscript{1043} As has been pointed out by Heshmat Moayyad, the earliest known version of this tale is found attributed to Imām al-Ṣādiq in al-Kulayn’s Shi’i hadith collection, \textit{al-Furū’ min al-Kāfī}, in the chapter on marriage, and it is likely that this was ‘Aṭṭār’s source. In both \textit{al-Kāfī} and \textit{The Book of God}, the placement of the story makes it clear what its fundamental message is: the virtues of marital fidelity in the face of temptation. Moayyad also notes that ‘Aṭṭār gives the story another message not found in the original: it is meant to teach the prince lusting for beauty that ‘manliness’ is a quality of character, unrelated to gender, that he should learn from this woman, who is “the head of the men of the court of God.”\textsuperscript{1044} Until now, scholars have agreed with Moayyad’s analysis that these are the two most important teachings in the story. Here I will suggest that this tale may have an allegorical meaning (albeit a ‘broken allegory’) of great importance to \textit{The Book of God} as a whole, which so far as I know has not been suggested by any commentators.

As ‘Aṭṭār tells the tale, an exceedingly beautiful woman named ‘Marḥūma’, (or ‘Marjūma’, ‘the one who was stoned’ in some editions)\textsuperscript{1045} is left in the company of her brother-in-law by her husband who sets out to make the Hajj. When the brother-in-law lays eyes on Marḥūma from behind the veil he falls madly in love with her. When he tried to seduce her she shames him before

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{1044} IN, 131.483. This teaching appears allegorically in the story when the heroine appears in men’s clothing.
\textsuperscript{1045} See Lewis, “Chaucer’s Pious Queen and a Persian in a Pear Tree,” 179.
\end{flushright}
God, but the brother-in-law plots revenge and pays four witnesses to testify that she is an adulterer, whereupon she buried up to her neck and stoned.

By the grace of God, Marḥūma survives, and is found by a passing bedouin, who nurses her back to health. But when she regains her former beauty, the bedouin too falls in love with her, despite being already married. Protesting that she is married, she counsels the bedouin to fear God, and he repents of his illicit desire and swears an oath that he takes her as his sister. However, the bedouin’s slave also falls in love with her, and upon being rejected plots revenge. He murders the infant child of the bedouin and places the bloody dagger under Marḥūma’s pillow. The mother of the child finds the dagger and accuses Marḥūma, and although she is eventually able to convince the bedouin of her innocence, he realizes it is best for her to leave and gives her three hundred dirhams for the journey.

Traveling on, Marḥūma comes across a village in which a young man is being crucified, and she is told that this is the order of a tyrannical ruler for those who cannot pay their taxes. She uses her dirhams to free the man, as an act of thanksgiving for her survival of the ordeal of stoning. As she leaves, the young man sees the face of his savior and he too falls in love with her. After she rejects him, he claims she is her slave and sells her to a group of merchants who take her aboard their wealth-laden ship. When these merchants fall in love with her and seek to overwhelm her, she prays to God for protection and waves of fire engulf them.

Tired of people falling in love with her, the woman dons men’s clothing as the boat reaches the shore. When the people of this new land wonder at how she has reached shore alone with all this wealth, she asks to see their king, to whom she explains that she will give all the wealth to him if he build her a Ka’ba like temple in which she can busy herself with devotion to God. The king appoints this noble ascetic as his successor, not realizing she is a woman, and the people come to believe in her miracles. When she is appointed king, she reveals her gender to the group of women
she has gathered around her on the pretext of being her prospective wives. Though the people ask her to be their monarch, she turns back to her devotions and asks them to appoint someone from amongst themselves. The narrative voice of the frame story’s king then intervenes to give his son the moral of this part of the story, that one should be devoted to God and utterly detached from rulership.\footnote{IN, 140.694-6.}

However, despite this intervention the story is not finished. We now cut to Marḥūma’s husband, who has returned from the Hajj and finds that his brother is blind and paralyzed in all four limbs, which we realize is a divinely ordained punishment for his false accusation. The brother informs him that his wife committed adultery and was stoned. When Marḥūma’s husband has recovered from his grief he tells his brother that he has heard of a radiant woman whose her prayers for healing are answered by God, and they set off in search of her, the brother tied to the back of a donkey.

On the way, they meet the bedouin, who informs them that his slave has also been blinded and paralyzed as a result of his mistreatment of a noble woman, and the four of them continue together. As luck would have it, they also meet the young man who had been saved from the gallows, now blind and paralyzed, and his mother brings him with them to find the famed healer.

One morning, Marḥūma leaves her seclusion and sees her husband and his companions approaching. She falls into prostration out of joy, but then worries what she will tell him, eventually taking heart when she sees that his companions are those who had oppressed her and can now testify to her innocence. Covering her face, she approaches them. The husband intercedes for his brother and asks for her prayers, but she states he must confess his sin to be cured. Though it is difficult for him to hear his brother’s sin, he decides to forgive him, and the brother is cured.
bedouin then brings the slave forward, the latter confesses and the bedouin forgives him, and he is cured. Finally, the mother brings the young man and he too confesses to selling a woman into slavery and is cured.

Marḥūma then reveals her face and her husband falls in a swoon in the shock of recognition, which he cannot believe until she confirms her identity, whereupon he falls into a prostration of thanksgiving. The others also realize her identity, whereupon they are simultaneously ashamed and joyful. As the story draws to a close, Marḥūma departs to busy herself once again with secluded worship of God, appointing her husband king of the land, making the bedouin his vizier and bestowing wealth on her brother-in-law, the slave and the young man.

The interpretations that are usually given for this story, that it extolls marital fidelity and praises the ‘manliness’ of its female protagonist who conquers the lust of her male suitors are clearly intended by ‘Aṭṭār, as is clear from the king’s way of introducing the story to the first prince and the moral he draws in the middle. But if this is all the story is supposed to signify, then the second part of the story is superfluous. Moreover, if we are to think that ‘Aṭṭār simply finished the story to stay faithful to his source, then why does he change the ending, which in al-Kāfī simply has the husband taking the wealth from the ship and has no mention of kingship, nor any final roles for the other characters.

Though there are stories in ‘Aṭṭār’s mathnawīs in which story-telling may seem to gain precedence over the story’s moral, I believe there is more than meets the eye to this story. What follows should be taken as a tentative interpretation of the story; it may not convince everyone, but I believe there are enough indications to make it plausible. If I am correct then Marḥūma’s tale is a broken allegory for frame story of The Book of God, a retelling of it that sets its components in new relation to each other and makes up for the narrative simplicity that some commentators have seen as a weakness in this work.
Let us begin with the ending. Note that just as the frame story of *The Book of God* involves seven characters, so does the ending of Marḥūma’s tale: Marḥūma herself, plus three pairs of traveling companions: her husband and his brother, the bedouin and his slave, and the young man and his mother. I suggest that there is a direct correlation in between these groups of seven characters, and therefore between the characters in Marḥūma’s tale and the seven allegorical meanings assigned to the king and the six princes in the beginning of the book.

At the end of the tale, Marḥūma herself represents the Spirit, which is absorbed in the contemplation of God. Moreover, like the king in the frame story, her function is to cure the ailments of each of the characters who approach her. Marḥūma’s prayers are equivalent to the king’s transformative stories, restoring their listeners to their true natures.

The bedouin is the easiest of the characters to identify. Although he is attracted by Marḥūma’s beauty and nearly deceived by the slave into falsely accusing her, he listens intelligently to her and accepts her reasoning. Moreover, when Marḥūma addresses him she repeatedly uses the word ‘*aql*’ in her speech. The bedouin is thus the intellect, who ordinarily wanders aimlessly in the deserts, but can always act as a guide, and has the capacity to become the wise vizier of the kingdom.

The bedouin’s slave is *wahm*, meaning suspicion, fanciful imagination or simply ‘the estimative faculty’. In addition to his evidently Satanic infanticide, the fact that he is black, in addition to reflecting medieval Persian social prejudices as noted by Lewis, also associates him with the ‘black-faced’ devil, the allegorical meaning of the son seeking magic. The slave convinces the bedouin’s wife that Marḥūma is a murderer by casting suspicion on her by placing

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1047 IN, 135.571-5.
1048 See Lewis, “Chaucer’s Pious Queen and a Persian in a Pear Tree.”
1049 The possible positive features of the black pole in the correlative thought associated with Satan are brought out in ‘Aṭṭār’s stories for the second son, but play no role here.
the knife under her pillow. Technically this inference from a ‘particular meaning’ is a use of the estimative faculty in the philosophical sense. The misuse of this type of imagination threatens to destroy the Spirit, but in the end it too has its place in the kingdom once the correct hierarchy has been restored.

Marḥūma’s brother-in-law represents the concupiscent soul (nafs), which is associated with sensation and sense perception. His lasciviousness is reminiscent of the qualities of the ‘soul that incites to evil’ (nafs-i ammāra). Moreover, he condemns Marḥūma to stoning by convincing other people to lie about what they have directly perceived.

Marḥūma’s husband will ultimately gain rulership over the kingdom, and therefore attains what is desired by the fifth prince, symbolized by Solomon’s signet ring. In himself he is therefore poverty, symbolized by the white robes of ḥjrām that he would have been wearing while making the Hajj at the beginning of the story. The husband shows virtues of selflessness by assisting the other travelers and forgiving his brother.

The young man and his mother are the weakest of the seven characters in this allegorical interpretation of the story, and it is not surprising that ‘Aṭṭār did not create a completely watertight allegory given that this story is an adaptation of his source. However, there is one important similarity between the young man and the fourth prince. The young man is granted life by Marḥūma, who saves him from the gallows, and the fourth prince seeks the water of life, only to be taught the secret of true life by the king, who equates it with knowledge.

Within this interpretation the reason for the pairings of the six characters becomes apparent. Each pair involves one paralyzed person and one interceder (who in two cases also has to forgive). The husband (poverty) is the intermediary by which the illness of his brother (the concupiscent soul) can be cured by Marḥūma, the Spirit. Likewise, the bedouin (intellect) must play
a role in the curing of the slave (fanciful imagination).\textsuperscript{1050} The individual self therefore contains both positive and negative elements in complementary pairs, but it requires the Spirit to establish the correct relationships between them.

Given this interpretation, the allegorical meaning of the two journeys in the story comes into focus. At the beginning of the story, Marḥūma represents the sixth son, the seeker of the Essence and representative of Unity (\textit{tawḥīd}). Though she goes on a journey she does not really undergo any major change in the story. From the beginning she is devoted to God and calls others to Him. Though the concupiscent soul, the intellect, the fanciful imagination and the worldly life-span are attracted to her beauty, all but the intellect attempt to dominate her, and end up being paralyzed in the process. At the end of the story she takes up her place as the Spirit itself, and perhaps she always has been the Spirit, but the rest of the inner faculties are either paralyzed or astray.

It is at this point that the husband begins his journey, having completed his religious obligations, yet nonetheless facing the state of a fallen human being whose inner faculties have rebelled and need to be restored to their proper places in order to function again. The husband is the individual wayfarer here, much like the wayfarer of contemplation in \textit{The Book of Affliction}, who must make his journey though the different inner faculties to the Spirit, without yet knowing its identity. Once his faculties have been restored to health he arrives at the moment of recognition, realizing what that the Spirit is in fact something with which he was already acquainted before he left. The final scene sees each of the faculties take up its right place. The individual who has realized his poverty is turned outwards towards the kingdom, the intellect stands by as his vizier, and the

\textsuperscript{1050} I suggest that the final pair would be the young man representing the physical life span and his life-giver Marḥūma, the Spirit, \textit{jām}, which also means ‘Life’. However, since Marḥūma needs to play the seventh role here, his natural life giver, his mother, steps into the story to take her place.
sense-faculties and imagination take up lower but nonetheless positive roles. The Spirit, however, is busy with the contemplation of God.

Reading The Book of God after Marḥūma’s Tale

Just as Marḥūma’s tale is transformed by reading it in light of the allegorical cipher that ‘Aṭṭār provides for the frame story of The Book of God, the latter is also transformed once we accept the allegorical reading of the former. The conversation between the king and his sons becomes a literary expansion on a single moment in Marḥūma’s tale, the reunion of the faculties of the self with the Spirit. The stories told by the king are the transformative process by which the various aspects of the self become what they should be. As Shafi‘ī-Kadkanī has suggested, The Book of God is indeed an inner journey in the same way that The Conference of the Birds and The Book of Affliction are. Moreover, The Book of God provides conclusive evidence that despite the diversity of faculties of the soul that ‘Aṭṭār considers, the self is only ‘fragmented’ at the beginning of the journey. With a similar logic to that found in ‘the Birds’ Complaint’ in The Conference of the Birds, when each component of the self is pulled in a different direction by its particular desires it is blinded to the Spirit and the parts of the self are in disharmony. However, the spiritual path integrates the self, bringing each of the self’s aspects into proper relation, with the Spirit at the center.

But in contrast to these other books, in which it is clear with whom the reader should identify in order to virtually undergo the transformative journey. It is not clear in The Book of God who the wayfarer is. Marḥūma’s tale answers this question: both Marḥūma and her husband are wayfarers, and we should identify in different ways with each of them. By analogy, we should identify with both the king and each of the sons. But how is this possible?
Our allegorical reading of the tale of Marḥūma suggests that ‘Aṭṭār affirms the teaching ‘there are two in man’: the human being contains two centers of consciousness, namely the individual soul and the Spirit. On the one hand, we are correctly addressed as Marḥūma, the Spirit, addressed in the beginning of The Book of God as follows:

You are connected, yet separated from us,

You are far from the eye, yet identical to vision.\textsuperscript{1052}

The Spirit is our inner reality, the goal to which the journey leads, yet present with us all the way.

Yet on the other hand, we are also correctly addressed as the fallen individual soul, as Marḥūma’s husband, the one that must make the journey to restore the inner faculties before being ultimately reunited with the Spirit. We are therefore also each of the princes.

\textbf{‘Aṭṭār’s Endings}

The dichotomy between two levels of selfhood at the center of the tale of Marḥūma enables us to shed fresh light on scholarly confusion over the endings to ‘Aṭṭār’s mathnawīs.\textsuperscript{1053} Much like his perspectives on the cosmos and on the self, the endings of each of ‘Aṭṭār’s mathnawīs seem to contain intractable contradictions. On the one hand, the frame narratives of works such as The Conference of the Birds and The Book of Affliction end with the ecstatic climaxes that describe the end of the journey – the encounter with the Simurgh and the dissolution of the wayfarer in the Spirit. Indeed, both of these events are described by ‘Aṭṭār as simply being the end of what it is possible to express in language, for the journey continues in God.

\textsuperscript{1052} IN, 128.420.
\textsuperscript{1053} See for example, Kermani’s comments on the ending of The Book of Affliction, in \textit{The Terror of God}, 50-2.
But after the frame stories are concluded, ‘Aṭṭār presents several different moods in his epilogues. These generally begin by ‘Aṭṭār boasting in the most extreme terms of how his poetry has expressed spiritual realities in a way that will never be matched but end with ‘Aṭṭār expressing his utter destitution and incapacity, a failed servant of God who is entirely dependent on the latter’s Mercy, for he has idolized poetry and failed to practice what he preached.\footnote{For a thorough discussion of these endings see Waley, “Didactic Style and Self-Criticism in ‘Aṭṭār.”}

As Waley has suggested, much of the logic of these endings can be derived from classical Sufi doctrine. Thus, ‘Aṭṭār’s self-reproach represents a crucial spiritual attitude in Sufism, whereas his boasting represents an attitude permitted by such Sufi authorities on comportment as Abū Najīb al-Suhrawardī (d. 562-3/1168), who considered it a valid expression of God’s blessings or an admissible response to ecstasy.\footnote{See Waley “Didactic Style and Self-Criticism in ‘Aṭṭār,” 223-233.} Indeed, as Waley points out, ‘Aṭṭār’s endings represent a movement characteristic of the spiritual path, which we have already seen in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s expression of the ‘alternation of states’:

For those in love with God, spiritual ‘contraction’ and ‘expansion’ (\textit{qabḍ} and \textit{bast} in Arabic and Persian) alternate like night and day, according to the degree to which they perceive themselves to be close to or far from their Beloved. As a man of passionate longing, ‘Aṭṭār shows vividly how the state of a person’s heart is manifested in their words. Those alternations colour his perceptions of his reception by his audience; his own view of his poetry; and many other things.\footnote{Waley, “Didactic Style and Self-Criticism in ‘Aṭṭār,” 218.}

However, the tale of Marḥūma presents another possibility for explaining why ‘Aṭṭār ends several of his \textit{mathnawīs} with both ecstatic climax and utter self-reproach. These two endings are the proper conclusions for two different components of the self, which find their consummation in two different final stations of the Way. The drop of the Divine Ocean of the Spirit returns to its origin and is annihilated therein, but the servant subsists. The destitution, bewilderment, suffering and need in which ‘Aṭṭār’s \textit{mathnawīs} end thus represents no fault or shortcoming on the part of the...
author. Rather they represent the very teaching of the Prophet Muḥammad at the pivotal moment of the journey of *The Book of Affliction*: the highest state the individual self can possibly attain is the Muḥammadan poverty, the utter dependence of the servant upon the Lord.

**Pluralism in the Cosmos and the Self**

As we have seen in this chapter, diversity within the cosmos and within the self hold a fundamental importance for ‘Aṭṭār, and the exploration of these themes lies at the heart of both *The Book of Affliction* and *The Book of God*. In *The Book of Affliction*, the diversity of levels of the cosmos and the self becomes the center of the frame narrative, which emerges as an extended contemplation of the signs on the horizons and within the soul. In *The Book of God*, it is the transformation of the diverse aspects of the self that is the central theme, encoded through the conversations between the king and the six princes, and depicted through the dynamic narrative of the tale of Marḥūma. As such, though the theme of diversity in these *mathnawīs* is shared with *The Conference of the Birds*, the engagements with this theme in these two works show us important new dimensions to ‘Aṭṭār’s pluralism.

Our focus on ‘Aṭṭār’s pluralism, namely his valorization of the diversity of the cosmos and the diversity within the self as central spiritual teachings, not only brings us to the heart of these *mathnawīs*, but also helps us to rethink central scholarly debates regarding ‘Aṭṭār’s thought. In particular, ‘Aṭṭār’s pluralism and his movement between perspectives show us that his thought should not be characterized by pessimism as regards the status of the world or the problem of suffering, for his bleak statements constitute only one among multiple perspectives. Moreover, ‘Aṭṭār’s engagement with the diversity within the self, which always develops around the theme of the integration of its various faculties, allows us to dismiss the idea that his writings are grounded in a fragmented self. Although the ego is decentered in ‘Aṭṭār’s writings, the individual becomes
recentered in the Spirit, in relation to which the other faculties find their place. Finally, the diversity within ‘Aṭṭār’s account of the self allows us to better come to terms with the selfhood of the poet himself, whose self-reflective endings to his mathnawīs show us multiple sides of his own self.
Chapter 11: The Structure of The Book of Mysteries through the Lens of Diversity

Of ‘Aṭṭār’s four mathnawīs, The Book of Mysteries stands apart; it is the only one of them that is not structured around a frame story. Though this is by no means exceptional in this genre, it has created difficulties for interpreters, who have generally supposed that the lack of a frame story implies a lack of logical ordering of its contents. As such, whereas a summary of the frame stories of the other three mathnawīs naturally finds its place in synoptic accounts of ‘Aṭṭār’s works, The Book of Mysteries is given little attention. Current scholarship thus provides no reason to doubt Ritter’s assertion that in this work, “The individual sections are strung together without any discernible scheme.”

In contrast to prevailing scholarly opinion, The Book of Mysteries does in fact develop around a discernable structure. Moreover, it is precisely the insights that we have gained through reading ‘Aṭṭār’s mathnawīs holistically with a focus on diversity and perspectivism, that allow us to revise the current understanding of The Book of Mysteries. The purpose of this chapter is thus to present a new account of the structure of this work.

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1057 The same is true for Sanā‘ī’s Garden of Truth and Nizāmī’s Storehouse of Mysteries (Makhzan al-asrār), and Mawlanā Rūmī also selected this approach for his Mathnawi-yi Ma‘nawi.

1058 Reinhart’s comment, following Ritter, are typical in this regard: “The contents are arranged in 22 discourses (maqālas) in random order, without regard to sequence of ideas. Each maqāla begins with an outline of an idea, which is then developed by means of short anecdotes. Frequently the anecdotes are accompanied by reflections which lead into thematically related fields or, in some cases, stray quite far from the basic idea. The work thus lacks a definite conceptual structure.” B. Reinert, “Aṭṭār, Farīd-Al-Dīn,” EIr. For a similar comment see de Bruijn, Of Piety and Poetry, 188-9.

1059 Both Furūzānfar and Ritter discuss the frame stories and structures of the other three mathnawīs in detail and pass over The Book of Mysteries. By contrast, Shafi‘-Kadkanī notes these omissions and supplies a rich summary of the contents of the work, without attempting to theorize on the logic of their arrangement, AN, ‘Editor’s Introduction’, 19-61.

1060 Ritter, The Ocean of the Soul, 30.
Salutations to the Human Being, The Epitome of The Book of Mysteries

‘Aṭṭār composes the first chapter\textsuperscript{1061} of The Book of Mysteries out of a series of seven salutations, each beginning with the emphatic vocative (a-lā qy), followed by several lines describing the person or entity he is addressing. Shafi‘i-Kadkanī explains that this chapter is an address to and praise of the human state (maqām-i insān), noting that it is one of the most beautiful passages on humanity in Persian mystical literature and far surpasses all precedents on this theme in any genre.\textsuperscript{1062}

Structurally, there are clear similarities of these multiple addresses of humanity with the ‘Welcoming of the Birds’ section of The Conference of the Birds. Though lacking orderliness of the fixed number of lines given to each of the birds there,\textsuperscript{1063} each of these sections also praises its referent, evokes its specific qualities, and offers specific advice about how its true nature and full potential is to be realized.

More importantly, just as the ‘Welcoming of the Birds’ sets up the fundamental problematic that ‘Aṭṭār engages with throughout The Conference of the Birds, namely the birds’ diversity, my reading of The Book of Mysteries suggests that this opening chapter is also a kind of epitome of the book, as we shall discuss in detail below. Here, however, is another crucial difference. The referent of each ‘welcome’ in the former work is clearly a different bird, whereas here it is one and the same human reality. The structure of this chapter is thus the salutation and praise of the human state in

\textsuperscript{1061} The Book of Mysteries, like ‘Aṭṭār’s other mathnawūs begins with praise of God, the Prophet and the Righteously Guided Caliphs. Noting that the chapter numbers differ among manuscripts (partly depending on whether these sections are numbered), Shafi‘i-Kadkanī argues by analogy with ‘Aṭṭār’s other works that the beginning of the book proper, after the salutations, should be designated Chapter (maqāla) One. Using this scheme, the book consists of 18 chapters plus the introductory and concluding sections. See AN, ‘Editor’s Introduction’, 62-8. I follow Shafi‘i-Kadkanī’s numbering throughout.

\textsuperscript{1062} AN, ‘Editor’s Introduction’, 26.

\textsuperscript{1063} The twelve birds welcomed in MT are given 5 lines each, whereas these 7 sections range from 5 to 28 lines.
seven different aspects and within seven different symbolic schemes. Given the importance of this section for understanding *The Book of Mysteries* as a whole, let us look at each of these sections in turn.

The first salutation revolves around the imagery of the Quranic Verse of Light:  

(i) O suffering and salve of the heart and the soul,
   You are that light that fire hath not touched.
From the apertures of a latticed niche
   Taken roost on a blessed branch,
In the lamp of the body, you are the niche of light,
   As a result of your being near, you are far indeed.
Break the glass, and pour out the oil,
   But hang on to the shining star.
What have you to do with the East and the West?
   For the light of the sky is a limitation around you.  

The compact imagery in this opening salutation establishes many of the themes that ʿAṭṭār will meditate upon throughout the work. Drawing on the rich tradition of Sufi commentaries on the Verse of Light, which have seen in it an allusion to levels of human subjectivity or consciousness and also a description of the state of human perfection, ʿAṭṭār addresses humanity as the light within the lamp and niche. The force of this address is to distinguish this light from the visible light of the heavens on the one hand, for the horizons are in fact a limitation (*ḥişār*) or enclosure that the

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1064 For the purposes of comparison, the entire verse is as follows: “God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is a niche, wherein is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as a shining star kindled from a blessed olive tree, neither of the East nor of the West. Its oil would well-nigh shine forth, even if no fire had touched it. Light upon light, God guides unto His Light whomsoever He will, and God sets forth parables for mankind, and God is Knower of all things.” (SQ, 24:35)

1065 AN, 105.442-6.

human reality transcends, and from the body on the other, which is symbolized by the lattice around the lamp through which the light shines. Though consciousness seems near to the body, since it shines through it as through the latticework of the lamp, it is ‘far indeed’ (dūr-i dūr), being of a completely different nature. In order to realize this, one must ‘break’ the lamp of the body. Moreover, by reconfiguring our relationship with the body we can realize that we are ‘neither of the East nor of the West,’ for our consciousness ultimately does not belong to the world of physical manifestation.

In this opening section, ‘Aṭṭār uses to symbolic scheme of the Light Verse to introduce several of the core distinctions that he will explore in the chapters that follow. Since the mystery of human subjectivity is beyond language, which is precisely what defines it as a ‘mystery’, ‘Aṭṭār must indirectly guide his readers to reach it. Here ‘Aṭṭār leads us to contemplate its mystery by setting it against the body and the world. Moreover, since he is addressing humanity ‘Aṭṭār is also addressing each of us directly as readers, an approach that is not so direct in the ‘Welcome of the Birds’, whereby human types must be read into the poetry by reading it allegorically.

‘Aṭṭār continues his address to humanity and call to the reader to wake up to his true nature by shifting perspectives and symbolic frames in the six salutations that follow, each of which contemplates the same mystery he has elucidated here from a different angle.

The avian image of ‘taking roost’ is made more explicit in the second salutation, which further strengthens the literary connection with the opening section of The Conference of the Birds:

(ii) O nightingale, speaker of mysteries,
    Remove the chains from the treasure-chest of jewels.
    Become sweet-tongued in speech like Jesus,
    Break the oyster and become a scatterer of pearls…

\[1067\]

\[1067\] AN, 106.457-8.
In this section, ‘Aṭṭār encourages the human to compare itself with other animals in order to cultivate humility, realizing that it lacks the keen eyesight of the swallow or the hearing of the rabbit.\textsuperscript{1068} What does in fact set the human apart from other creatures is our power of speech, exemplified on the highest level by ‘Aṭṭār’s poetry itself,\textsuperscript{1069} and our potential for purity of soul (jān). This section can be read as a reworking of the central idea of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’s ‘Case of the Animals Versus Man in the Court of the Jinn’. As we shall see as our analysis of The Book of Mysteries progresses, ‘Aṭṭār certainly agrees with the statement in this work that “Man at his best, we shall show, is a noble angel, the finest of creatures; but at his worst, an accursed devil, the bane of creation.”\textsuperscript{1070}

The third salutation takes up the theme of journeying, explaining the purpose of human separation from the Divine Source in the actualization of the potential of the human state:

(iii) O thou droplet who has chosen the heights,

Who has smelt a whiff of the ocean of Eternity…\textsuperscript{1071}

The core symbol here derives from the medieval understanding of how pearls are formed, according to which an oyster would open on the surface of the sea and receive a single drop of rain, which it would then hold within itself on the seabed until it developed into a pearl, hence explaining the celestial beauty of this precious stone. It is thus only by journeying from its home in the ocean, which throughout The Book of Mysteries symbolizes the infinitude of the Divine Reality, that the drop of rain can eventually become a pearl. Likewise, it is only by being brought out of

\textsuperscript{1068} AN, 106.451-2.
\textsuperscript{1069} Several of ‘Aṭṭār’s works, including the conclusion of The Book of Mysteries itself contain sophisticated meditations on the nature of poetry. This topic has been discussed in detail by Stephien in “A Study in Sufi Poetics,” 88-98.
\textsuperscript{1071} AN, 106.456.
the ocean that the oceans’ jewels, such as pearls and coral, come to have any worth; and it is only by journeying that the crescent moon can become full or the mulberry leaf can be transformed into silk by the silkworm.\textsuperscript{1072}

The remaining salutations each use particular images to call on the human to transcend the world. The fourth focuses on the contrast of time and eternity to express the goal of this flight:

(iv) O swift francolin,\textsuperscript{1073} do not quarrel,
For a moment rise up from the framework\textsuperscript{1074} of nature.
Go in flight to the world of the placeless,
Become a moment ( zamān ) that is without earth ( bī-zamān ) and without time ( bī-zamān )…\textsuperscript{1075}

As in the first salutation, ‘Aṭṭār evokes the nature of eternity through contrast with this world. Since time is measured by the movements of the heavenly bodies, there is no such thing as time beyond them.\textsuperscript{1076} By ‘exchanging ( badal kardan ) this earth in a moment’, a phrase that deliberately evokes the Quranic descriptions of the end of time,\textsuperscript{1077} one sees pre-eternity ( azal ) and post-eternity ( ābad ) joined in a single point, gaining certainty of the unity underlying all forms of duality.\textsuperscript{1078}

The fifth salutation takes a different approach to transcending the world. Rather than being envisioned as a physical enclosure, here the world is considered to be an illusion:

(v) O conjurer ( muhra-bāz ), playing at magic ( ḥuqqā-pārdāz ),

\textsuperscript{1072} AN, 106.463-6. The theme of the journey does not hold a central role in The Book of Mysteries, but it is of course the central theme of The Conference of the Birds and also The Book of Affliction.
\textsuperscript{1073} cf. AN, ‘Editor’s Notes’, 297 and MT, ‘Editor’s Introduction’, 172-3.
\textsuperscript{1074} chār-chāb, literally meaning ‘the four pieces of wood’ making up a door- or picture-frame, here symbolizing the four elements.
\textsuperscript{1075} AN, 106.467-8.
\textsuperscript{1076} AN, 107.471.
\textsuperscript{1077} See Q, 14:98, yubaddil al-ard ghayr al-ard.
\textsuperscript{1078} AN, 107.477-9.
Cast aside the veil from the effigy (lu’bat) of meanings…\(^{1079}\)

Without realizing it, the human is the greatest conjurer, who can make the entire world disappear by waking up to its illusory nature. As ‘Aṭṭār will discuss in detail in Chapter Eight, the world is simply a talisman, an insubstantial lock that magically prevents us from reaching the treasure that is our own nature.\(^ {1080}\) The greed for the illusory objects of this world that keeps us chained in the prison of this world is simply a result of our lack of awareness, of what we are missing and of what we truly are.\(^ {1081}\)

In the sixth salutation ‘Aṭṭār returns to the image of the bird flying beyond this world:

(vi) O wisdom-knowing bird, [tarry] a moment,

What a better nest you shall find than this!

Open your wings in the flight of meanings,

Open the gates of the abode of seven gates.

When you have passed by the four [elements] and nine [spheres] in flight,

Pass beyond yourself and open your eyes to the Real…\(^ {1082}\)

In this longest salutation, ‘Aṭṭār discusses several stages of the spiritual path. He begins by affirming that this world is the fiefdom of Iblīs,\(^ {1083}\) and is therefore equivalent to hell, the most likely meaning of ‘the abode of seven gates’.\(^ {1084}\) ‘Aṭṭār develops this section by describing paradise itself,\(^ {1085}\) a theme to which he will return in Chapters Three and Four, before describing the

\(^{1079}\) AN, 107.480. As Shafi’i-Kadkani notes, this line contains several references to show-magic: the conjurer would use his magic box (ḥuqqa) to make either beads (muhra) or dolls (lu’bat) appear and disappear. See AN, ‘Editor’s Notes’, 299.

\(^{1080}\) AN, 107.486-7.

\(^{1081}\) AN, 107.489-91.

\(^{1082}\) AN, 107.492-4.

\(^{1083}\) AN, 108.497-9.

\(^{1084}\) As we have seen in our study of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, hell is distinguished from paradise in having seven rather than eight gates. This interpretation is preferable to Shafi’i-Kadkani’s identification of the number of seven with the number of heavens given both the image of the door and the lines on the ‘fiefdom of Iblīs’. Cf. AN, ‘Editor’s Notes’, 300.

\(^{1085}\) AN, 108.502-3.
diversity of spiritual states that the wayfarer will experience one he or she has transcended their sense of self on the Divine Threshold.\textsuperscript{1086}

The final salutation explains the new vision of the world that is attained after it has been transcended:

(vii) Emerge, O bird, from this snare just for one breath,
And in the eternal meadows of paradise rejoice…
Every particle shall become like a Sun,
And from each veil shall be manifest [the next] veil.\textsuperscript{1087}

Taking a different approach to the world than that shown in the previous salutations, here it is affirmed that there is a way to towards the Friend from every particle of existence.\textsuperscript{1088} In this respect, this section recaps the engagement with the cosmos in its diversity that is the main theme of \textit{The Book of Affliction}. Here, ʻAṭṭār urges the human on in the spiritual quest by affirming that those who have gone ahead provide guidance by their light, and that the glance of the Friend leads inevitably to success. After speaking of the doorway towards the Friend that is opened in the heart once it has been polished, ʻAṭṭār ends the chapter by reminding the reader:

Of the two worlds you need only three things:
To know, to act, and to become one.
When from worship your knowledge becomes your reality,
Your heart becomes the mirror of the two worlds.\textsuperscript{1089}

This last statement echoes the opening of \textit{The Book of Affliction}, in which the journey through the cosmos described in the book was explained as an inner journey, resulting from the contemplation of the heart.

\textsuperscript{1086} AN, 108.509-515.
\textsuperscript{1087} AN, 109.520-5.
\textsuperscript{1088} AN, 109.529.
\textsuperscript{1089} AN, 109.538-9.
The seven sections with which *The Book of Mysteries* begins are framed as seven different summons to the human being. The mystery at the heart of each of these summons is thus the human being itself, in its true nature. Whether it be through a call for the human, i.e. the reader, to embark on the spiritual path, or to instantaneously realize the ever-present nature of consciousness, the fundamental message is the same: to be human is to possess the vast potential that is epitomized by mystical realization, and thus the highest goal that could possibly be sought is to be found within ourselves. In this sense, *The Book of Mysteries* begins with an emphatic affirmation of what Shafii-Kadkanii has called the fundamental teaching of Ṭṭṭār.1090

However, the approach of *The Book of Mysteries* is distinctive in its presentation of this teaching. In *The Conference of the Birds* Ṭṭṭār works his way to this climax of self-knowledge over the course of the entire frame story, in *The Book of Affliction* the mystery of the self-knowledge is alluded to at the beginning but only becomes clear during the final stages of the journey, and in *The Book of God* it only becomes evident once one pays attention to the common message in the king’s teachings to his sons. In *The Book of Mysteries*, however, Ṭṭṭār places this teaching at the very start of the book, and hammers it home through seven different expressions of it. Moreover, just as the ‘Welcoming the Birds’ is an emblem of the whole of *The Conference of the Birds*, the emblematic features of this first chapter of *The Book of Mysteries* suggest that it is the key to the whole book.

**The Structure of The Book of Mysteries in Light of Chapter One**

The motif of addressing the human being around which the first chapter of *The Book of Mysteries* is structured is in fact repeated throughout the work, though this is not immediately

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1090 IN, ‘Editor’s Introduction’, 24-5.
evident. Just as each of the seven sections of the first chapter begin with the vocative, of the book’s seventeen other chapters, twelve of them begin with a second person address.\textsuperscript{1091}

Moreover, as if to direct our attention to the deliberate use of the pronouns, the remaining five chapters use the five remaining possibilities in order to explore further aspects of the human state that the pronouns bring forth in ‘Aṭṭār’s imagination. Thus, Chapter Seven begins by

\textsuperscript{1091} These are as follows:
2. For a moment, O heart, relinquish water and clay,
   Give the summons of Love to the folk of the heart. (AN, 109.540)
3. Look at the sea, if your eye has sight,
   For this world’s not a world, it’s the foam of the sea. (AN, 115.675)
4. What is the truth? Being fore-thinking,
   Passing beyond self and being with Self.
If your soul should emerge from form,
   Of necessity you shall see all that you know. (AN, 124.857-8)
5. Why do you exist? Existence has made your work difficult.
   What can I say? A tricky mountain pass (‘aqba) has fallen to you. (AN, 133.1049)
6. Know, O pure in religion, if you are pure in view,
   That that moment that you come beneath the earth
You place your foot beyond this world’s quarter,
   And never again shall you see this world’s face. (AN, 137. 1153-4)
8. My dear, if you should awake from sleep,
   You will become aware of many joys indeed. (AN, 149.1419)
9. O you who has buried his head in negligence,
   Thrown your religion to the winds for the sake of this world,
Who told you you should arbitrate with the spheres,
   And bloody your liver for a saltless handful? (AN, 160.1662-3)
13. If you have the kingdom of the world beneath your ring,
   In the end your place is beneath the earth. (AN, 191.2344)
14. O Negligent one, who has fallen aside from the Way!
   You will die, as do the negligent, suddenly. (AN, 195.2454)
15. Alas! For you have lack the Way-seeing eyes
   And in negligence your whole sweet life do you spend. (AN, 201.2656)
16. For you in the Way are many pebbles, O friend!
   Each one of these pebbles will bring you out of your skin;
If you take on the burden of each one as pebbles,
   It’s much better than to take up a mountain at once. (AN, 204.2636-7)
18. Do not be proud of holdings, treasure and wealth,
   For this world remembers many like you. (AN, 222.3034)
discussing the diverse destinies that human beings, considered in the third person plural, may face, whereas Chapter Eleven considers the separation that must follow from the use of the first person plural by mortal beings. Indeed, the entirety of *The Book of Mysteries* emerges as an address to the human being, first of all the individual addressed in the second person, but also through the other possibilities afforded by the pronouns. Just as its first chapter pointed to the mystery of human subjectivity in seven different ways, the entirety of the book is a meditation on the diverse perspectives from which the mystery of human selfhood can be contemplated.

Having recognized that the entirety of *The Book of Mysteries* is an exploration of the diverse aspects of human subjectivity, the further subdivisions of the work come into focus. Chapters Two through Eight take a similar approach to the salutations of Chapter One. In particular, as we saw in the salutations, these chapters all begin by addressing the human being in its true nature,
reflecting on the true relationship between human consciousness or subjectivity on the one hand and the world or the body on the other, developing a different perspective in each case.

Moreover, though these seven chapters do not correspond directly to the seven salutations, there may be an allusion to the thematic similarity between them: Chapter Two, a meditation on love, begins with a strikingly similar call to the bird of the soul to sing the mysteries as that found in the second salutation:

2. For a moment, O heart, relinquish water and clay,
   Give the summons of love to the folk of the heart.
   From the light of love, light the candle of the soul,
   And from the Beloved learn the Psalms of love.
   Like the lute-string (ẓīr) speak lamentation’s symbol from love,
   Like the nightingale speak mysteries without using the tongue.
   Like David recite the verses of the bewildered,
   And read the Psalms of love for the confounded.
   Make the talk of love the litany of the lovers,
   In desire for the lovers lose your heart and soul…1094

If Chapters Two through Eight are considered as seven further contemplations of the highest mystery of humanity, then the end of Chapter Eight is a point of transition. Indeed, the final story of chapter eight presents this transition in narrative form:

There once was a king whose falcon flew out and landed at the house of an old woman. The old woman chained its feet and laid gruel before it to eat. The woman clipped the falcon’s talons and wings so that she could unchain it without it escaping. Eventually the king and his army arrive. Seeing the falcon in this sorry state, the king has no words of rebuke for the old woman, for her own actions in bringing this noble creature to such a sorry state are self-explanatory.1095

1094 AN, 109-10.540-4.
1095 AN, 160.1649-58.
Chapters Two through Eight have addressed the falcon of humanity in its true nature, the subsequent seven chapters address it as it is within the clutches of this old woman, who here, as in other tales in which an old woman plays a negative role, represents this world.\textsuperscript{1096} Chapter Nine through Fifteen are consistent in their rebuke of human weaknesses, criticizing humanity for its negligence,\textsuperscript{1097} warning of the mortality of the embodied state,\textsuperscript{1098} and delving into the inescapable bewilderment accompanying human nature.\textsuperscript{1099} Following these seven chapters are three more, which offer more positive ethical advice, focusing on the importance of contentment with little and of night worship,\textsuperscript{1100} and ending with a series of around seventy aphorisms, the last of which encourages silence, drawing the work to its conclusion.\textsuperscript{1101}

*The Book of Mysteries* thus addresses humanity, the greatest mystery of the work, from diverse points of view. Leaving aside the opening salutations and the final chapters of advice, the book consists of two sets of seven chapters, the first set focusing on the grandeur of the human state as it really is and the second set focusing on the sorry state of humanity as negligent and attached to this world. (See Fig. 2 below for a summary of this structure.)

In the previous chapter, we saw that in the tale of Marḥūma ‘Aṭṭār emphasizes two separate centers of selfhood: the Spirit, represented by Marḥūma, and the individual soul, represented by her husband. These two approaches to selfhood reappear as the central points of focus of *The Book of Mysteries*. The seven sections of Chapter One, as well as Chapters Two through Eight, are a diverse set of expositions of the higher mystery of human subjectivity, whereas Chapters Nine through Fifteen address fallen humanity, the individual soul in its state of attachment to the world.

\textsuperscript{1096} See ‘The Dunya as old Hag’. MN, 11 (Hell), story 9.
\textsuperscript{1097} Especially Chs. 9, 14 and 15.
\textsuperscript{1098} Especially Chs. 11, 12 and 13.
\textsuperscript{1099} Especially Chs. 9-10.
\textsuperscript{1100} Chs. 16 and 17 respectively.
\textsuperscript{1101} In Ch18.
If we consider these two approaches to selfhood through the imagery of light and darkness, the structure of *The Book of Mysteries* is further clarified. The transition between the light of human consciousness and the shadow cast by attachment to the world and the body repeats itself at many points in the work, particularly the first half. ‘Aṭṭār’s associative logic, which draws him from the main theme of each chapter to discuss a set of related teachings and stories, also brings him to consider the counterpoint of many of his teachings. Thus the brightness of ‘Aṭṭār’s opening salutation on the illusory nature of the world also leads him to rebuke humanity for its greed while being imprisoned in this illusion,1102 and his meditations on the spiritual reality of the body when joined to the Spirit also lead him to consider the way both may be ruined together.1103

An important ordering principle of the diverse meditations on human subjectivity in *The Book of Mysteries* is therefore the transition between a focus on the luminous potential of the human state and a warning of our current condition in the shadows. ‘Aṭṭār’s purpose is clearly to alert his readers to the truth of their own nature, but he also seems to be wary of the power of this truth. It is as if the revelation of these mysteries contains a danger, perhaps that the reader might falsely identify himself with the reality ‘Aṭṭār is describing without truly realizing it. Thus, in both the structure of the work as a whole and after many of his loftiest discussions, ‘Aṭṭār calls forth the humility of the reader by reminding us of our negligence, attachment and mortality.

In this shift between perspectives, important similarities can be observed between *The Book of Mysteries* and ‘Aṭṭār’s other *mathnwīs*. As Waley characterizes ‘Aṭṭār’s literary evocation of the movement between perspectives:

> From the viewpoint of ‘contraction’ and of the ego, physical death is the most fearsome of prospects and food for the most morbid reflection; from the viewpoint of ‘expansion’ and of the spirit, the prospect of death is to be embraced as bringing liberation from the confines of the mortal body and of this transient and ultimately

1102 See above and AN, 107.489.
1103 See AN, 121.810f.
doomed world will all its limitations…. [But] Not only does ‘Aṭṭār show us alternating tableux of darkness and light, dread and hope, sorrow and joy, annihilation and immortality: one could almost say that he throws us into them, such is the power of his engagement, vision, and poetic talent… In this way he fulfills an important didactic purpose: that of helping to prepare the spiritually engaged reader for the reality of ‘the journey to the Infinite.’”

‘Aṭṭār’s other mathnawīs achieve this effect through interweaving diverse perspectives into the depiction of the spiritual journey or the conversation between master and disciple. Lacking a frame narrative, The Book of Mysteries cannot use these options, yet it nevertheless includes this movement between polarities in the structure of its chapters and the arrangement of its stories.

Though the lack of frame narrative in The Book of Mysteries means that its lacks the evident principles of organization of the other mathnawīs, it also creates different possibilities for ‘Aṭṭār to explore. In this work, the single topic of human subjectivity becomes the center to which all of his teachings relate, each of which is designed to bring about a single ineffable perspective shift leading to the realization of our true nature. Throughout this process, the cosmos provides an important support for contemplation, taking on diverse significance in the way it assists the expression of this single mystery.

Table 2. A Summary of the Structure of The Book of Mysteries

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The Diversity of the World in Light of the Human Mystery

As we have seen, *The Book of Mysteries* can be fruitfully read as engaging with a single mystery, that of human selfhood. Though this mystery is unspeakable in itself, which is precisely what makes it a ‘mystery’, ‘Aṭṭār endeavors to teach it by approaching it from multiple angles. As we saw in our reading of the first chapter of this work, even though human selfhood is the goal, a great many of these angles depend upon consideration of the nature of the world. Indeed, Chapters Two through Eight develop a rich consideration of the world in relation to the human self, which further dispels the idea that ‘Aṭṭār’s attitude to the cosmos can be fully characterized as ‘blame of this world’.

A close reading of these chapters brings us deeper into one of ‘Aṭṭār’s least studied works, whilst also allowing us to clarify important aspects of his approach to cosmology. Once again, the consideration of ‘Aṭṭār’s cosmology emphasizes the importance of perspectivism in his thought.

Bewilderment at the World

Rather than being simply dismissed as a purely negative reality, in *The Book of Mysteries* the world appears as a mystery that can be contemplated from multiple points of view. Indeed, it is the movement between these points of view that creates much of the dramatic dynamism of the first half of this work, in which the reader is prevented from taking up a single lasting stance regarding the nature of the world.

‘Aṭṭār’s engagement with different perspectives on the world has its roots in Islamic scripture. On the one hand, ‘this world’, the *dunyā*, is described by a hadith as “the prison of the believer,” and ‘the life of this world’ is repeatedly characterized in the Quran as “play and diversion.” (SQ, 47:46) On the other hand, throughout the Quran the cosmos and everything it contains are characterized as signs of God that the believers should contemplate.
As we have seen, this double Quranic teaching was fundamental to the consideration of the world in *The Book of Affliction*. It reappears in *The Book of Mysteries*, epitomized in the following story, creating an aporia through the contrast of these two perspectives and expressed in exquisite verse:

There once was a dervish who gazed out upon
[The sky], that Divine Sea full of pearls.
As light-illuminating pearls did he see the stars,
As a result of their light the night was like day.
You too would have said the stars were all arrayed,
Loosening their tongues, addressing those made of dust,
And saying, “Take care! Negligent ones, be aware!
Upon this threshold for a night be awake!
Why are you laying all your heads down to sleep?
Until the Day of Resurrection you’ll be able to rest.”
The face of the dervish, heart-lost from that scene,
Became filled with stars from his pearl-casting eyes.
Delighting in the heavens, with their curved ways,
He loosened his tongue like a nightingale in speech:
Saying, “O Lord! If Thy prison’s ceiling is such,
(one could say its akin to the galleries of China),
I know not how shall be the roof of Thy garden,
For Thy prison’s a garden indeed of itself.”

Although the dervish affirms the ascetic view of the world verbally, his emotive response to the beauty of the night sky, conveyed by ‘Aṭṭār through the beauty of these lines, belies his true attitude. The negative perspective of the world, which ‘Aṭṭār himself expresses with such vehemence elsewhere, is thus simultaneously affirmed and denied in this tale. In its conclusion the

\[1105\] AN, 164-5.1753-61.
tale affirms the beauty of this world, but still takes it as incentive to transcendence, for how much more beautiful must paradise be?

**Awaking Instantly**

Throughout ‘Aṭṭār’s consideration of the nature of the world, the relation between the human seeker, the world and God is conceived of in different ways, each of which results in the cosmos being revealed as having a particular significance.

In several passages, the world appears as a pure illusion or an ‘imagination’, expressed in the singular non-specific (*khīyāl-i*):

Look at the sea, if your eye has sight,

This world’s not a world, it’s the foam of the sea.

This whole world is but an imagination, so think!

So see no imagination greater than this.

You must either be insane or unsettled,

That amidst this imagination you should sleep so much.

Are you a man playing games of imagination, 1106

Though mature being deceived like a child?

To see a fairy in a bottle is the work of children, 1107

For the mature one is without imagining of high and low.

Hear ‘Draw near!’ from the apex of the Throne of mysteries,

For there is not, O Sir, an owner in the house. 1108

The force of this imagination is to compare the world to the imaginary images that one sees in a dream, which instantly and totally disappear on the moment of waking.

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1106 *bāzī-yi khīyāl* - Shafi‘-Kadkani explains that this is basically like a kind of imaginary show, like the distorted mirrors one might see in a fun-house. AN, ‘Editor’s Introduction’, 315.

1107 Based on the belief that children could see jinn in glass. AN, ‘Editor’s Notes’, 316.

1108 AN, 115.675-81. The last phrase is more extreme play on the saying ‘There is no one running the house save Him’ (*lasya fīl-dār ghayrūhu dayyār*).
Though this perspective is even more extreme in its belittling of the world than the ‘censure of the world’ type-passages that Ritter focuses on, its resulting attitude is in fact far less melancholic. Whereas the world as ‘prison of the believer’ seems inescapable until death, one can be liberated from the world as imagination in a single moment. As ‘Abū Ḥāmid al-Mašhūr, one can be liberated from the world as imagination in a single moment. The sufferings of this world are themselves the proof of the joys that lie beyond it:

My dear, if only you should awake from sleep,
   You will become aware of many joys indeed.
Though all of us are in sorrow and in suffering,
   With certainty I know we shall rejoice in the end.
When there is the thorn, there is also the herb.
   When there is suffering, there is also the remedy.
If perchance today the remedy is not manifest,
   It shall be manifest when the command is given.
Going beyond bounds from that [pain], this is our story;
   As a result of destiny, suffering is our allocation.
But regarding a world of which remedy is the allocation,
   There is no allocation there nor is there a story.1109

Here the absolute contrast between this world and what lies beyond it becomes the ultimate source of hope. If, by its very nature, this world as the realm of multiplicity contains differing ‘allocations’ (hiṣṣa, or ‘portions’), which depending on the different destinies and stories of individuals necessarily imply suffering, then the realm beyond this world must lack these divisions and allocations, and thus be pure bliss.

The dichotomy between this world as the abode of suffering thus brings ‘Abū Ḥāmid al-Mašhūr to reflect on the nature of the life beyond, which in this perspective seems so close and immediately attainable.

The world of eternity, what a wonderful world it is!

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1109 AN, 149.1419-24.
That all of this world is of it but a sign.
All of the prophet, their place is there.
The heart and religion, the soul and the soul’s increase are there.
All of the angels have their residence there,
All of the Huris the drinking companions of that gathering.
If you need to get there, having heard this from me,
Die all to yourself, and you have arrived.
If you die here to your own existence,
Right here you will grasp the handle of that door.  

‘Aṭṭār illustrates these last lines in the famous story of the Indian sage and the parrot. The sage visits a king in Transoxiana and converses with his captive parrot, who sends its greetings to the parrots of India and asks them how he is to escape. When the Indian parrots hear of the birds plight they all fall from their perches in the trees as if dead. The bewildered sage returns to tell the captive parrot what happened and the parrot understands their message, himself falling lifeless on the cage floor. An attendant sees him thus and, thinking this to be an ex-parrot, casts him out of the cage, whereupon the parrot flies away to its freedom and reunion with its kind. With his parting words he advises the sage, “Die from thyself so that thou may find freedom.”

The force of this story in the present context is to show that to awake from the illusion of the world is also to awake from the illusion of the ego. That is to say, the world as the plane of multiplicity and suffering is also the plane of the division between ‘I’ and ‘you’, whereas there is a Selfhood that transcends these divisions in the reality beyond. Chapter Four begins with a particularly powerful statement of this same theme:

What is the truth? Being fore-thinking,
Passing beyond self and being with Self.

\[^{1110}\text{AN, 150.1432-6.}\]
\[^{1111}\text{AN, 150.1437-65.}\]
If your soul should come out of form,
   You will see all that you know, necessarily.
The two worlds will not come to be your veil;
   In a single instant you will see both worlds.
And from this form, if you should emerge,
   You will become the sun and the moon of the veiled.
When they have given your Spirit the station of Light,
   And turned your eyes towards the houris,
Become not proud with paradise and houris,
   For without the Real paradise has no light.\textsuperscript{1112}

In contrast to the previous passage, however, here paradise and its houris are not a positive symbol of the hope for the afterlife but rather represent a distraction to the Real, the ultimate goal of the quest. The theme of ‘awakening instantly’ from the illusion of the world is thus deployed in diverse ways by ‘Aṭṭār, bringing yet further nuance to his contemplation of the significance of the cosmos.

\textbf{The Differentiated Cosmos}

In each of the passages translated above, the cosmos is treated as a single entity, set in opposition to the Reality beyond it. Within other perspectives of the relation of humanity to the cosmos in \textit{The Book of Mysteries}, ‘Aṭṭār discusses the latter as an internally differentiated reality, much as he did in \textit{The Book of Affliction}. This in turn brings other aspects of human nature into focus. In the following passage, the relationship of humanity to the various stages of created existence is explored:

\begin{quote}
Why do you exist? Existence has made your work difficult.  
What can I say? A tricky mountain pass (‘aqba) has fallen to you.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{1112} AN, 124.857-62.
What crime did you commit that they brought you here, O Friend,
You, who in the way of meaning are the kernel of every shell?
Minerals are the kernel of the elements, though
Plants are then minerals’ kernel indeed.
The kernel of plants has fallen to the animals,
And thus the human has become the animals’ kernel.
Of humans, the prophets have become the quintessence,
And among them the master of masters in particular,
By these seven heavens in the Way of Meaning,
One must go, until the Master’s Threshold.
From whatever is far from the perfection of the principle,
The nature of one who sees reality is disinclined.
You were inanimate and you became animate;
Where were you nothing that you became something?
What I really want is that in the first sequence,
You should not hold yourself back for even a breath.
That from stage to stage you should place your step,
That you should come out from every coil of the snare.
Your knot filled substance is a fetter for the Spirit,
And from that Spirit you see not that world.
They made your substance full of knots from the first,
That at every moment a knot should become undone.\textsuperscript{1113}

In this passage, we see ‘Aṭṭār reflect on the levels of created existence leading teleologically
to the human being, and then beyond to the prophets. Whereas the passages that considered the
world in its totality in contrast to the Reality beyond it were connected by ‘Aṭṭār with the need to
wake up instantly from the illusion, the perspective of gradations of being is here connected with a
gradual idea of spiritual progress. In this respect, ‘Aṭṭār’s approach to the world resembles that of

\textsuperscript{1113} AN, 133.1049-60.
Sanā‘ī: a focus on divine transcendence brings a call to ascend beyond the world all at once, whereas a focus on the degrees of reality brings about a gradual conception of human perfection, whilst also allowing for greater cosmological nuance.

Here, ‘Aṭṭār encourages his readers to use the opportunity provided by every breath to progress through the stages of being towards the Divine Threshold. Indeed, in the final line ‘Aṭṭār implies that this journey is the very purpose of human existence; knots were tied in the human substance in order that they could be undone, just as the rainwater was made distant from the sea so that it could return and become a pearl.

This perspective of the differentiation of the world also allows ‘Aṭṭār to focus on the opportunity that life in this world provides for preparing for the Afterlife. In this regard, ‘Aṭṭār explains how the way one lives in this world determines one’s state after it:

Since this world is the sowing-field for that world,
Sow this seed for now is the time for that…
For this reason they have sent you here:
That today you should create the provisions for tomorrow.1114

Just as the metaphysical perspective of degrees of reality allowed Sanā‘ī to present worldly wisdom in The Walled Garden, this same perspective allows ‘Aṭṭār to affirm the need for the small yet significant every day actions in preparation for the afterlife that are otherwise overlooked in his more sublime expressions of the flight towards Unity.

The Mystery of the World and Self-Knowledge

‘Aṭṭār’s perspective on the cosmos revolves around the dichotomy that the world is both a veil that is to be cast aside in its entirety and a tapestry that is meaningful in its diversity. Whichever

1114 AN, 144.1314-9. See also AN, 125-6 for contrasting stories on the purpose of the world.
perspective is adopted, however, throughout the first half of *The Book of Mysteries* the purpose of the universe is for us to get to know ourselves, even if that process must result in bewilderment.

In the following story ‘Aṭṭār’s voice merges with that of the unnamed sage from whom he narrates this piece of wisdom:

“Upon whatever the Creator has bestowed existence,
Whether before or after, high or low,
Whether the stars or the spheres, the sun or the moon,
   The sea or the earth, the mountains or straw,
The Tablet or the Pen, the Throne or the Footstool,
   Whether angels, cherubim or even the humans,
Whether wine or honey, paradise or houris,
   Whether fish or moon, whether fire or light,
Whether East or West, from Mount Qâf to Mount Qâf,
   Whatever emerged from the Divine Command ‘Be!’,
Whatever the mysteries that exist in both worlds,
   Whatever delights, both hidden and seen,
Every single particle in both of the worlds,
   Every single drop in all seven seas,
All this He shows you, bright as the Sun,
   Such that you could gaze on it all for an eternity,
But he shows you not a hair of you to you
   Your you-ness itself must be hidden from you.”
If your own eye were to fall on your face,
    From love of yourself would arise a shout.
If you have the need to gain the scent of yourself
    Exert yourself (*riyādat kun*), for the world is full of you.
Why in the end have you fallen into error?
    Why in the end have you freed yourself from service?
You have seen nothingness and set your sights upon it.
[And yet] you have considered your own existence to be nothing.\textsuperscript{1115}

This story summarizes ‘Aṭṭār’s approach to the cosmos in \textit{The Book of Mysteries}. The cosmos in its diversity is an important locus of contemplation. However, its fundamental purpose is to act as a means for understanding the selfhood that transcends it. As we saw in our analysis of the structure of \textit{The Book of Mysteries}, this work is ultimately concerned with the mystery of human selfhood. However, the cosmos has a crucial role to play in realizing this mystery. Within each of the diverse approaches that \textit{The Book of Mysteries} adopts to explaining the mystery of human existence, the world takes on differing significance depending on the perspective involved. Though there are shared themes in each consideration of the world, particularly that the world must be transcended in order to reach the Divine Threshold, the conceptualization of key facets of the human mystery and the cosmos develop relative to one another.

Within ‘Aṭṭār’s dynamic approach to cosmology, if the world is conceived of as an imaginary veil, human perfection will appear as the immediate waking up from the dream. If the world is considered as a hierarchical scheme of created beings, human life should be devoted to the moment by moment ascent through the levels of human potentiality, or the gradual untying of knots within the soul until humanity as such remains. If the world is the prison of the believer, the correct human response will be to practice patience and contentment with little, making preparations for the life to come. And if the world is an ecstatic dance of love, then the human should join this dance, and by doing so ultimately transcend it. As such, though censure of the \textit{dunyā}‘ does comprise an important feature of ‘Aṭṭār’s attitude to the world, it by no means exhausts ‘Aṭṭār’s cosmology. Indeed, the term \textit{dunyā} (‘nearer’ or ‘lower’) is a relative term, itself expressing one way of conceiving of the relation of humanity and cosmos. To understand ‘Aṭṭār’s view of the

\textsuperscript{1115} AN, 154-5.1539-1551.
world we therefore need to come to terms with the diversity of interlocking perspectives that are found throughout *The Book of Mysteries*.

**Conclusion: Diversity in ‘Aṭṭār**

The structure we have discovered in *The Book of Mysteries* epitomizes ‘Aṭṭār’s approaches to diversity that we have seen in his other *mathnawīs*. *The Book of Mysteries* gains its inner consistency through the deliberate arrangement of diverse contemplations on the nature of selfhood, first in its higher realities and then in the dangers of the lower self, which are most clearly articulated in relation to the cosmos.

The concern with diversity in the cosmos and in the self are at the heart of *The Book of Affliction* and *The Book of God*. *The Book of Affliction* describes the wayfarer of contemplation’s movement through the diverse levels of the cosmos and the self, contemplation of the realities and integrating the teachings of each. Finally, *The Book of God* describes the integration of the faculties of the soul, consisting of their redirection from worldly ends to their realization that what they seek is to be found within, in the Spirit. In *The Conference of the Birds*, these different expositions of the integration of diversity are themselves integrated into a single narrative, as a set of unique individual birds journey from original discord, through the different valleys of spiritual realization, to final mystical harmony of unity-in-diversity.

There is a high level of consistency in ‘Aṭṭār’s engagement with diversity, to such an extent that each of his works can be seen as corresponding to a subsection of *The Conference of the Birds*. This, however, does not exhaust their significance, as each individual work also provides its own unique teachings, whether it be on the diversity of the cosmos, the diversity within the self, or the diversity of perspectives on the reality of humanity.
In each of these cases, the wholes of ‘Aṭṭār’s works are greater than the parts. Though each smaller narrative and each segment of the frame story is coherent and meaningful in itself, it takes on new significance in light of the larger movement in which it plays a part. Just like ‘Aṭṭār’s birds, the individual parts become who they really are when we realize the unity-in-diversity of the whole.
Conclusion: Writing the Kaleidoscope of Reality

The 12th Century Moment in Persian Metaphysical Literature

Throughout this dissertation I have endeavored to show the ways in which the writings of Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and ‘Aṭṭār are pluralist and perspectivist, and the ways in which these characteristics become evident through holistic reading of their writings. Moreover, I have shown how holistic reading with an attention to pluralism and perspectivism enables us to solve many of the most difficult problems in interpreting their works, problems for which the secondary literature has generally been unable to solve. However, it is crucial to note that each author is pluralist and perspectivist in his own particular way. Indeed, the explanation of ways in which the oeuvre of each author functions as a particular and unique whole accounts for the central contribution of each of the three parts of this dissertation.

Nevertheless, through our holistic readings crucial similarities have emerged between the writings of these authors. Occurring between particular facets of the pluralism and perspectivism of each author, this complex collection of similarities cannot be reduced to a single list that is applicable in every case. Rather, these similarities connect the writings of these authors like a set of interlocking circles. Common to all these similarities is the way in which the writings of Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and ‘Aṭṭār function as metaphysical literature.

However, instead of simply listing these similarities in conclusion to this dissertation, I will instead suggest the ways in which our analyses point beyond these authors to suggest characteristics that tie a wider range of examples of Persian metaphysical literature together. Though without performing holistic readings of each one of the 12th century authors we shall discuss here these discussions remain provisional, they nonetheless point to general characteristics of the 12th century moment. We find that a wide range of 12th century metaphysical writings are connected together
through a set of interlocking circles of similarity, pointing to the 12th century as a period with specific characteristics. The study of Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and ‘Aṭṭār together thus allows us to understand the significance of this period in Islamic intellectual and literary history in ways that have remained unnoticed due to the tendency of scholarship to focus on particular figures in this period in isolation.

The poetry of Sanā‘ī plays a fundamental role in the development of 12th century Persian metaphysical literature. This is demonstrated by citations of Sanā‘ī found in diverse works of this period, including not only ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and ‘Aṭṭār but also Rūzbihān Baqlī and Shīhāb al-Dīn Suhrāwārdī al-Maqṭūl. Sanā‘ī’s incorporation of religious and mystical teachings into the courtly genres of Persian literature transformed these genres irrevocably, making possible not only the *mathnawī* and *ghazals* of ‘Aṭṭār but also the poetry of figures such as Khāqānī (d. 582-595/1186-1199), who continued the use of religious themes in the courtly forms. Moreover, Sanā‘ī’s integration of cosmology based on the metaphysics of degrees of reality into the *mathnawī* genre was further developed by Niẓāmī. The explorations of diversity in Niẓāmī and ‘Aṭṭār made possible by this approach to cosmology is a particularly interesting connection in this regard.

Furthermore, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s synthesis of theology, philosophy and mysticism finds important parallels in the writings of other figures in this period, though historical influence is more difficult to establish. In particular, the use of philosophical discourse as a method of transforming the soul as part of a conception of the stages of the spiritual path is a crucial component in the

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1116 On these citations see de Bruijn, *Of Piety and Poetry*, 11.
writings of Suhrawardi and Afdal al-Din Kashani ("Bab Afdal").\textsuperscript{1119} The works of 'Ayn al-Qu'dat, Suhrawardi and Babaa Afdal represent three distinctive ways of integrating insights from Ibn Sina, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and a range of authors of the Sufi tradition into prose that has as its primary function the spiritual transformation of the reader through metaphysical insight.

Whatever the mode of discourse in question, from panegyrics to metaphysical treatises, the authors of the 12\textsuperscript{th} century show profound concern for religious categories. Whether it be in a \textit{tafsir}\textsuperscript{-}panegyric of Sanai or a Baqli's \textit{tafsir}, the Quranic takes a central place.\textsuperscript{1120} As a result of the developing synthesis of philosophy, theology and Sufism, metaphysical discourse becomes more closely connected to religious doctrine, such that in the works of 'Ayn al-Qu'dat, for example, it becomes impossible to separate them. Moreover, ethical literary discourses become infused with insights and guidance from practical Sufism. Through these syntheses, the meaning of Islam and being Muslim becomes an important focus of investigation, as the understanding of these terms are renewed through metaphysical, ethical and literary discourse.

The use of diverse discursive genres across the oeuvres of Sanai and 'Atitar and with greater integration in the prose of 'Ayn al-Qu'dat is a particularly important characteristic of 12\textsuperscript{th} century Persian metaphysical literature (a characteristic that in our study of Sanai I named 'discursive pluralism'). For example, Baqli presented his Sufi teachings in such modes as Quranic commentary, Persian treatise on the stages of love,\textsuperscript{1121} commentary on the ecstatic utterances of


\textsuperscript{1121} AA.
past Sufis, and a diary of visionary experiences. Moreover, despite the centrality of Arabic and Persian theoretical prose treatises in the oeuvres of Suhrawardī and Bābā Aḥḍāl, they each also composed in literary modes that engage the imagination. Both Suhrawardī’s visionary recitals and Bābā Aḥḍāl’s collection of quatrains are considered major contributions to their respective genres.

Across the authors of 12th century Persian metaphorical literature we see an emphasis on the presentation of metaphorical doctrine and the narration of the spiritual life in visionary mode. These include visionary narratives such as Sanā’ī’s Journey of the Servants, Suhrawardī’s many visionary treatises, and ‘Aṭṭār’s Book of Affliction, but also the descriptions of visionary forms of mystical realization, as found in the writings of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and as exemplified in Baqlī’s Kashf al-asrār (The Unveiling of Mysteries). Within the context of the closer relation between metaphysics and literature that emerges during this period, authors of these visionary narratives are able to explore the cosmic significance of the process of ethical and noetic transformation that is at the center of their projects. Indeed, in this respect the visionary narratives epitomize a crucial characteristic of this period: just as the visionary narrative depicts the noetic and ethical transformation of the wayfarer through the cosmos rich with symbols, the writings of this period moves seamlessly between theoretical and practical topics, using literary modes that are

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1125 On the difference between these two functions of narrative see Zamir, “Surely in Their Stories is a Lesson for Those Who Understand’: A Case for Islamic Narrative Ethics.”

1126 On this aspects of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings see Lewisohn, “In Quest of Annihilation.”
metaphysically grounded. The 12th century thus stands out for the diversity and richness of its examples of interdisciplinary and metaphysically grounded cultivation of Ḣāsān in literary mode. Moreover, the symbolism of wayfaring and the spiritual path become a central method of harmonizing the religious, metaphysical, ethical and mystical concerns of this period.

There are of course important historical factors that allowed these characteristics to come to the fore during the 12th century. Although 12th century Persian metaphysical literature is certainly not to be divorced from its social and political contexts, the diversity of the particular conditions in which each of the authors of this period lived makes it difficult to draw decisive conclusions regarding the nature of this connection. One might point to the general conditions of the ‘Sunni revival’ or the greater Saljuq patronage of Sufi figures, but it is difficult to trace the direct influence of these factors on any of the authors of this period. The lack of determinate social forms for Sufism, which would develop in the 13th century, does, however, seem to have been important. It seems impossible to definitively limit the scope of Sufism either socially or intellectually during this period. Indeed, Sufi ideas have a far reaching influence, even in the writings of figures such as Niẓāmī, who are not usually labelled ‘Sufi’. The significance of intellectual and literary precedents for the developments of this period can, however, be more easily traced. Indeed, it seems that the most important reasons for the developments of 12th century Persian metaphysical literature are to be found in the literary and intellectual resources that had become available by this time.

By the 12th century, Islamic authors had rich philosophical resources on which to draw. A century before, Ibn Sīnā had not only profoundly deepened Islamic philosophy through his

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1128 See Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn*. 
encyclopaedic *Kitāb al-Shifāʾ* (*The Book of Healing*), but had also made it more easily assimilable and more logical in its arrangement through teaching texts such as *Kitāb al-Najāt* (*The Book of Salvation*) and *al-Ishārāt wa’l-tanbīhāt* (*The Pointers and Admonitions*). Moreover, he had also presented his philosophical vision in narrative form in visionary recitals such as *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* and *Risālat al-ṭayr* (*Treatise of the Bird*). As we have seen, the fusion of metaphysics and imagination at the center of this genre proved to be an extremely inviting forum for the composition of 12th century Persian metaphysical literature.

Within the domain of Persian literature, the Ghaznavid courtly poets had developed a rich repertoire of metaphors and tropes and had brought *qaṣīda* composition in Persian to a highly developed stage. The *mathnawī* had also developed as a genre capable of serving multiple functions, including epic, romance, and ethics. Moreover, several significant genres were still oral: quatrains were commonly used outside the courts to express mystical ideas and ethical insights, and *ghazals* were likely sung by minstrels in the court without being recorded. These rich poetic resources were available for Sanā’ī to infuse religious and mystical teachings with the courtly forms, develop the didactic *mathnawī*, and make the *ghazal* a central literary genre grounded in ambiguity and hence resonating with mystical potential.

As two gateway figures to 12th century metaphysical literature, the Ghazālī brothers both had a large impact. Abū Ḥāmid’s presentation of both theoretical mysticism in the *Niche of Lights* and Sufi ethics in *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* and *The Alchemy of Felicity*, framed with emphasis on orthopraxy and orthodoxy, are directly cited by the prose writers of this period, and his

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1130 See Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital.*
influence on ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, Bābā Aḍḍal and Suhrawardī is particularly noteworthy. Moreover, Aḥmad al-Ghazālī not only intensified the Sufi homiletics of predecessors such as ‘Abdollāh Anṣārī, crafting the synthetic prose style that would be used by ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt in particular, but also initiated the tradition of Persian metaphysics of love.

The convergence of these various influences – the rich metaphysics of both widely available Neoplatonic cosmology and specific Avicennan arguments, the diverse literary genres of Persian, multi-faceted and synthetic religious discourses, and the emergence of Persian Sufi literature – created the conditions for a period of unprecedented originality in literary and intellectual activity. Each author of 12th century metaphysical literature drew on a specific range of influences available at that time, but each did so in unique and creative ways. It is for this reason that until now the complicated web of characteristics that connect the authors of 12th century Persian metaphysical literature together has not been recognized.

Much work remains to be done in order to analyze the characteristics of the various texts of 12th century Persian metaphysical literature in the detail they deserve. However, the study of Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and ‘Aṭṭār carried out in this dissertation paves the way for such an analysis. Above all, the chain of similarities between among authors of 12th century Persian metaphysical literature suggests that the concerns that have been central to our readings of Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and ‘Aṭṭār should also be pursued for other authors. In particular, trans-generic holistic reading is a crucial method that can resolve difficulties in the scholarship, as for example the excessive focus on either Suhrawardī’s logical or mystical teachings. By examining how the oeuvres of each

author function as unique wholes, the individual parts find can find their place in relation to each other, much as the various limbs of the elephant become intelligible once the whole elephant is understood. Moreover, given both the syntheses of discourses and the literary modes of expression that characterize this period, investigation of both pluralism and perspectivism appears to be particular important.


In conclusion to this dissertation, let us return to the main themes at the center of our argument regarding the nature of the writings of Sanā’ī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and ‘Aṭṭār, pluralism and perspectivism.

To begin with, although we have seen many different types of diversity in play in the works of these authors, there is no intrinsic reason why their approaches the diversity within the created cosmos, the diversity within the self, the diversity of religious perspectives, and the diversity inherent in the process of human cultivation should be connected. Nevertheless, despite the complexity that emerges around any one of these themes of diversity across the works of a single author, it is practically impossible to investigate them separately. This is partly the result of the interdisciplinary character of the writings of Sanā’ī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and ‘Aṭṭār, which move seamlessly between discussions of scripture, metaphysics, ethics and aesthetics. But it also reflects a deeper tendency in their thought. Whatever area of theory or practice they are dealing with, it seems that a single perspective is never enough. Reality is always richer than what can be pinned down in language or in a single point of view, and hence the need to move, both discursively and spiritually. This movement between perspectives was both a conscious response to the challenges
of expressing mystical realization within language\textsuperscript{1133} and an effective means for synthesizing multiple forms of discourse to create a literary wholes greater than the sums of their parts.

But there are also theoretical reasons articulated by each of our authors that explain why diverse forms of diversity must be interrelated. For Sanā‘ī, the diversity of his literary material, encapsulated by the dichotomy of jest and seriousness, is but a reflection of all the types of duality that pervade the cosmos, human experience, and the Divine Attributes, from the differences in the medicinal effects of plants and the beating of the heart, to the opposition of heaven and hell and Divine Mercy and Wrath.

For ‘Aṭṭār, different domains of diversity are likewise correlated. The journey through the diversity of the cosmos and through the diversity of the self is to be conceived of as a single movement; as each different level of reality is encountered, its lessons must be integrated before transcending it in search of the goal. Moreover, all of reality, whether it be the physical world or the diversity of human types, has its significance for the journey towards God. It is in ‘Aṭṭār’s works in particular that we see the diversity of individuals explored to its fullest extent, both in fellow wayfarers on the path and the particular encounters that make up his smaller narratives.

In the writings of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt we see a particularly complex interrelation of different types of diversity. A single logic underlies the polarities of good and evil, light and darkness, faith and infidelity, Muḥammad and Iblīs. These polarities begin as a simple opposition, but are then realized to be a complementary pair, ultimately leading beyond themselves to unity. Likewise, the way ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt treats relations of unity and diversity in the relations of God and the cosmos, the unrevealed and revealed Quran, and realization (ma‘rifa) and its expression all follow a corresponding pattern, as multiplicity is realized to be constituted by the diverse manifestations of

\textsuperscript{1133} As explored, for example, in the case of ‘Aṭṭār by Stephien in “A Study in Sufi Poetics.”
a unity of plenitude. Finally, the perspectivism inherent in the different stages of the Way is directly correlated to religious diversity, as each madhhab represents a single perspective that must be understood before being left behind. For each of these authors, to study their approach to diversity in just one of these themes would be to overlook the correlations between these different forms of diversity.

Perspectivism turns out to be a crucial way in which each of these authors deals with diversity. To begin with, perspectivism is a direct result of the diversity of human faculties of knowing, particularly the difference between reason and ‘the level beyond reason’ in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s analysis. Perspectivism is also an important teaching tool, as a single theme can be approached from multiple points of view in order to derive different lessons. For example, while ‘Aṭṭār constantly affirms that the cosmos has a role to play in our realization of God, sometimes it lacks any value and should be immediately discarded, whereas at other times it is meaningful in its diversity and should be made the object of contemplation. Finally, perspectivism plays a crucial role in our authors’ projects of synthesizing diverse sources of insight. By taking account of perspectivism we are able to make sense of the complementarity of apparently contradictory expressions within a larger whole.\[^{134}\] This is clear, for example, in Sanā‘ī’s use of both a metaphysics of divine transcendence, which at times shows an Ash‘arī influence and which allows him to exalt God and emphasize human incapacity, and a metaphysics of degrees of reality, which is more Neoplatonic in character and allows him to speak of the gradual ascending journey of the soul. As such, in addition to perspective shifts being an important way of enacting mystical realization within a text, as is now well known in the field,\[^{135}\] perspective shifts also play a crucial role in the larger structures of texts, particularly the *mathnawīs* of Sanā‘ī and ‘Aṭṭār.

\[^{134}\] Although the importance of perspective shifts has
\[^{135}\] Thanks to Sells, “Ibn ‘Arabi’s Polished Mirror: Perspective Shift and Meaning Event.”
The discursive strategies used by Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and ‘Aṭṭār are particularly well suited to both the diverse engagement with diversity and the integration of diverse perspectives. For Sanā‘ī in particular, the use of diverse genres, from the homiletic and panegyric qaṣīdas to the amatory ghazal, provide him with diverse generic fora to explore questions of human perfection, his treatment of which often reflects a fundamental set of metaphysical concerns. For both Sanā‘ī and ‘Aṭṭār, the mathnawī in particular allows diverse themes and perspectives to be collected together within a single work, united by a single metric rhythm. This is particularly clear in ‘Aṭṭār’s mathnawīs, in which the frame story provides the opportunity for a sustained engagement with diversity, composed of more focused explorations. The prose of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt also serves as a forum for integrating diversity. Not only does he use diverse discursive styles, from logical analysis to the citation of Quran, hadith and poetry, but his writings flow from sober didacticism to ecstatic outbursts, in a single movement that draws the reader along with it.

The discursive methods of these authors, and particularly the affirmation of writing as a suitable method of instruction, affirms their belief in the transformative power of discourse - that poetry and prose can be used in the service of their fundamental goal, which is the ethical, noetic and affective transformation of their readers. For ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, although language is not sufficient for communicating realization, it can function as a secondary cause that occasions that divine spark that brings it about. For ‘Aṭṭār, imaginative narrative brings the reader directly into the encounters of diverse points of view and perspective shifts that constitute so many of the smaller narrative moments of his works. And for Sanā‘ī, whether it be in providing an occasion for the contemplation of the inherent ambiguity of love or more conventional religious teachings, poetry is a powerful tool for reminding us what it means to be human.

The connections between the intellectual engagement with diversity and its linguistic expression in our authors is most clearly represented in their use of correlative thought. For all
three authors, correlative thought, or perhaps we should say ‘correlative discourse’, is a strategy by
which the diverse piece of reality can be put back together. Grounded in a metaphysical view of
reality in which all things are ontologically related to the One, manifesting It in different ways,
correlative thought allows our authors to reveal the correspondences between phenomena that
might ordinarily seem completely unrelated. Although these correlations seem alien at first, some
type of correlative thought seems to be rooted in metaphor itself, pervading our language, and
making equations such as light-darkness with good-evil seem intuitive. The correlative thought of
our authors grounds this type metaphor in metaphysics, and helps them to develop a symbolic
approach to language in which speech really does reflect reality as they see it.

Given this intimate relationship between speech and reality, literary modes of expression
(be they poetry or poetic prose) seem the most appropriate way of speaking about humanity and
the world. Just as reality in its diversity is an integrated whole for our authors, poetic expression
integrates us, activating our noetic, volitive and aesthetic capacities simultaneously. When reality,
both human, cosmic and divine, is an inexhaustibly rich tapestry of diversity that cannot be
encompassed in a single perspective, poetry becomes the ultimate science, the only adequate
response to reality, which can draw the reader into the kaleidoscopic transformations of
interrelated parts, clearly coherent yet beyond any single limiting expression.

Finally, in the works of Sanā‘ī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt and ‘Aṭṭār the single most important symbol
is that of the spiritual path. It is in their narratives and paradigms of wayfaring that the diverse
aspects of the human condition and the cosmos are integrated into a single process, albeit the
process of the journey through diversity. Whether it be the diversity of beings in the cosmos, the
diversity of levels of the self, the diversity of religious perspectives, or the diversity of Divine
Attributes, it is the spiritual journey that threads them together. The diverse forms of diversity are
harmonized in a single journey, of which the aim is to transcend all diversity.
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