

# The Divine/Human Interplay of Gratitude (*Shukr*) In the Non-Dualism of Ibn al-‘Arabi\*

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*If the only prayer you ever said  
was ‘thank you’ it would be enough.*

*The eye with which I see God  
Is the eye with which He sees me.*

- Meister Eckhart

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The role and function of gratitude or *shukr* in Islam is a topic which to date has been the subject of little analysis.<sup>1</sup> This is despite the central place of gratitude within the faith. As Toshihiko Izutsu astutely observed, “Islam as a religion is ... an exhortation to gratitude towards God.”<sup>2</sup> The present essay aims to contribute to our knowledge of *shukr* within the realm of Islamic ethics by taking as its focal point Ibn al-‘Arabi’s treatment of the virtue as it appears principally in chapters 120 and 121 of the *Futūḥāt Makkiyya*, with a particular focus on the relation between divine and human gratitude, or rather, the “interplay” or even “dialectic” of gratitude between God and what the Andalusian mystic believed to be His theophanic self-revelation in the human being. The essay begins with an overview of the semantics of *shukr* within the Arabic language and the use of the term in the Qur’ān, and then proceeds to a

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<sup>1</sup> Among the literature on the topic, we may note Geneviève Gobillot’s comparison of patience and gratitude in Tirmidhī, “Patience (*Ṣabr*) et retribution des merites. Gratitude (*Shukr*) et aptitude au Bonheur selon al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (M. 318/930),” *Studia Islamica* 79 (1994): 51-78. There is also Roberto Totolli’s “The Thanksgiving Prostration (“*sujūd al-shukr*”) in Muslim Traditions,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 61, no. 2 (1998): 309-313. The well-researched article is terse, limited in its focus, and part of Totolli’s broader research on prostration in Islam. Mention should also be made of Simon van den Bergh’s “Ghazālī on ‘Gratitude Towards God’ and its Greek Sources,” *Studia Islamica* no. 7 (1957): 77-98. Despite its strengths, however, the article is marred by van den Bergh’s attempt to retrace Ghazālī’s ideas almost entirely to Greek philosophy, particularly Stoicism, overlooking the Qur’ānic and *ḥadīth*-based foundations of the medieval thinker’s analysis. More recently, Ghazālī’s *Book of Patience and Gratitude of the Iḥyā’* has been translated by H.T. Littlejohn (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2011). I have compared the translation with the Arabic, and find it to be a fine rendition of the original, supplemented with very useful notes. The *EQ* (Brill) article, “Gratitude and Ingratitude,” is useful for its conciseness. For gratitude in Western moral philosophy, see Terrance McConnell, *Gratitude* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993). On some recent developments in psychology on the study of gratitude as a human emotion, see Robert Emmons and Michael McCullough (eds.), *The Psychology of Gratitude* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). While the focus in the volume is on the psychology of gratitude, some of the contributors also explore the subject from anthropological, biological and even theological vantage points. Unfortunately, the essay on “Gratitude in the History of Ideas” (19-36) entirely skips the Islamic tradition. See also note 27.

<sup>2</sup> Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and the Man in the Koran*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (1964; repr. Kuala Lumpur: Kazi Publications, 2003), 15.

treatment of the levels of this *maqam* or “station” in IA. While the mystic deals with a cluster of broadly related themes in the two chapters, constraints of space will limit the present analysis to what we might designate the levels of human gratitude, and the particular manner in which these levels relate to divine *shukr*. In the process of this inquiry, the essay will also demonstrate the manner in which IA’s treatment of this virtue reflects an extensive engagement with and development of the broader mystical tradition to which he was an heir.

### *The Semantics of Shukr & Shukr in the Qur’ān*

The Arabic term *shukr* derives from the trilateral root sh-k-r which means to thank, commend, praise, or eulogize someone for a service, benefit or act of devotion.<sup>3</sup> The more concrete meaning of the root is closely bound to the idea of “revealing” or “unconcealing.” This is why it has been suggested that the root is a transposition, through a shifting of radicals, of k-sh-r,<sup>4</sup> which refers to an “act of uncovering, or exposing to view,”<sup>5</sup> that is to say, of *kashf*. Hence Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī’s (d. 996) statement in the earliest sustained treatment of the subject in Sufi literature that “the meaning of *shukr* in the (Arabic) language is to unveil (*kashf*) and make manifest (*izhār*).”<sup>6</sup> In relation to the act of gratitude, *shukr* therefore involves revealing and disclosing an act of benefaction by acknowledging and recognizing it, both to oneself and the benefactor. Its opposite is *kufṛ*, which entails a concealing of that very gesture in a display of ingratitude. Aside from the notion of unveiling or revealing, *shukr* may also signify, within the constellation of its more concrete root imagery, the idea of “being full.”<sup>7</sup> From this perspective, the subject of sh-k-r is one who is “full of praise” for his benefactor. Closely related to this idea is also the notion of *ziyāda*, that is to say, an “increase.”<sup>8</sup> The importance attached to this particular notion in IA’s conceptualization of gratitude will become clear shortly.

The root sh-k-r is deployed in the Qur’ān on 75 occasions, and like many laudable qualities in Scripture, is used of both God and the human being. In reference to the former the root appears 8 times. God is described both by the active participle, *shākīr* (“the Grateful”), and the intensive active participle, *shakūr* (“The All-Grateful” or “Oft-Grateful One”), both of which are also standard divine names. Of these two, the more commonly used is *shakūr*, a name which

<sup>3</sup> Lane, s.v. sh-k-r. See also Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya*, (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), 2:202. The edition is a reprint of four-volume 1911 Cairo edition. I have also been able to consult the more recent Yemeni edition edited by ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Sulṭān al-Manṣūb thanks to the generosity of Eric Winkel.

<sup>4</sup> *maqlūb ‘an al-kashr*. Isfahānī, *Mufradāt al-fāz al-qur’ān*, ed. Najīb al-Mājīdī (Beirut: Al-Maktaba al-‘Aṣriyya, 2006), 283.

<sup>5</sup> Lane, s.v. sh-k-r. Hence the expression *kashara ‘an asnānihi*, which is to say, “He displayed his teeth, or grinned.” Lane, s.v. k-sh-r. Cf. Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, ed. Sa‘īd Nasīb Makārim (Beirut: Dār al-Ṣādir, 1995), 1:414; Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī, *‘Awārif al-ma‘ārif*, eds. ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd and Maḥmūd b. al-Sharīf (Cairo: Maktabat al-Īmān, 2005), 477; al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *‘Ilm al-awliyā’*, ed. Sāmī Naṣr (Cairo: ‘Ain Shams University, 1981), 157; *ibid.*, *al-Furūq wa man ‘al-tarāduf*, ed. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm al-Juyūshī (Cairo: Maktabat al-Īmān, 2005), 117.

<sup>6</sup> Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, 1:414. Suhrawardī provides a virtually identical definition in the *‘Awārif al-ma‘ārif*, 477. See also Tirmidhī, *‘Ilm al-awliyā’*, 156. also al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *‘Ilm al-awliyā’*, ed. Sāmī Naṣr (Cairo: ‘Ain Shams University, 1981), 156-157.

<sup>7</sup> Lane, s.v. sh-k-r. See also Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Madārīj al-sālikīn* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyya), 2:253; Isfahānī, *Mufradāt*, 283; and Elsaid M. Badawi and Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur’anic Usage* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 493.

<sup>8</sup> Abū Khalaf al-Ṭabarī (d. 1077), *Salwat al-‘arīfīn wa uns al-mushtāqīn*, eds. Gerhard Böwering and Bilal Orfali (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 164. For more on the little known author of this work, see the fine editorial introduction. See also my forthcoming review in the *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*.

highlights, when we consider the term's etymology, God's absolute, omniscient awareness of what the human being offers Him. The divinity is never "veiled" from the realm of human piety and goodness, and praises virtues deeds accordingly. In addition, a key feature of God as *shakūr* pertains to the extent to which He generously rewards humans for their devotion. Indeed, in two of the four instances where *shakūr* appears, it is preceded by mention of divine *faḍl*, that is to say, His overwhelming grace and favor (as opposed to His 'adl or justice).<sup>9</sup>

Sh-k-r is used in the remaining 67 instances to describe the human being. A number of verses tie in human *shukr* to divine *faḍl*, specifically as a response to it in this world.<sup>10</sup> Not only is God's *shukr* an act of *faḍl*, the latter must also evoke human *shukr*. At the heart of the latter there lies a recognition of divine benefaction and a corresponding praise of God. It is important to note that even though sh-k-r is used much less frequently in reference to God, this should not suggest that the quality is somehow more befitting of the human being, or that it is more congruous with her nature. On the contrary, the Qur'ān constantly reminds its' reader of the human being's propensity towards *ingratitude*, a theme which occurs so often that it would not be mistaken to identify it, within the sacred text's broader ethical *weltanschauung*, as one of the central moral weaknesses of the human being, his cardinal vice, one might say, and perhaps also the Islamic analogue to the primary failing of *tanha* or "desire" within Buddhist anthropology and original sin in Christianity. "Most people are not grateful,"<sup>11</sup> states the Qur'ān on multiple occasions, and "little gratitude do you show."<sup>12</sup> And in Q 100:6 we read, "verily the human being is terribly ungrateful towards his Lord."<sup>13</sup>

A comparison of the the manner in which the Quran addresses divine and human *shukr* reveals that whereas the human being is deeply susceptible to ingratitude, to *kufr al-ni'ma*, the quality of *shukr* is most perfectly "embodied" in God. It should come as no surprise that in half the instances in which sh-k-r is used of God, He is described by the intensive active participle (*shakūr*). Of the human being, however, the Qur'ān states, "and few ... are *shakūr*."<sup>14</sup> In so far as the cultivation of gratitude is concerned in the Qur'ān, the teleological aim of the human being can be conceived of as a movement away from one's natural inclination towards *kufr al-ni'ma* (ingratitude for blessings), to a fuller, more continuous, aware, and even divine-like realization of the virtue. If the stages of the development of this virtue were to be grafted on to a vertical spectrum, drawing from the ethical paradigm of Scripture, we would ascend from human *kufr* to

<sup>9</sup> Q 35:30 and 42:22.

<sup>10</sup> Q 10:60, 16:4, 27: 40, 28:83, 35:12, 45:12, 40:61. And there are numerous other instances in which mention of *shukr* is immediately preceded by examples of God's many bounties, both spiritual and worldly. See for example Q 2:52, 2:172, 2:185, 5:6, 5:89, 8:26, 14:37, 16:78, 16:114, 22:32, 23:78, 25:62; 29:17, 31:14, 32:9, 34:15; 36:35, 36:73, 54:35, 56:70 and 67:23.

<sup>11</sup> Q 2:243, 12:38, 40:61. See also Q 10:60, 27:73.

<sup>12</sup> Q 23:78, 32:9, 67:23.

<sup>13</sup> The Arabic term used here to describe this extreme form of unthankfulness is the quasi-intensive active participle, *kanūd*, employed only once in the entire text, and defined within the exegetical literature as *kāfir* (from k-f-r), an "obstinate ingrate." See for example Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* (ed. 'Abd al-Laṭīf Ḥasan 'Abd al-Raḥmān (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2000), 3:443; Sahl al-Tustari, *Tafsir al-Tustari*, tafsir.com; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1990), 32: 63-64. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Tha'ālābī, *al-Jawāhir al-ḥisān*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1996), 3:514. One of the underlying imageries conveyed by the root k-n-d is that of barren or infertile land. As Razi notes, *kanūd* earth refers to land "on which nothing grows." It is as if no matter how much rain or sunlight it receives, it has nothing to return or show. *Maḥāṭib*, 32:64; cf. Lane. s.v., k-n-d. This may be contrasted with one of the derivatives of sh-k-r, namely *shakūr*, that is to say, the shoots, leaves and herbage which grow around the base of a tree out of its abundance. Lane, s.v., sh-k-r; cf. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, 7: 172.

<sup>14</sup> Q 34:13.

human *shukr*, and within the parameters of human *shukr*, from the level of the *shākir* to that of the *shakūr*, until we reached at the very summit, gratitude *in divinis* or divine *shukr*. This basic Qur’ānic model, in which the virtues within the sphere of human ethics stand, in Izutsu’s words, as a “pale reflection – or a very imperfect imitation of the divine nature itself,”<sup>15</sup> that is to say, in which the divinity functions as a sort of prototype of human virtue, is, as we shall see, also a basic feature of the structure of IA’s moral theology. This is so-much the case that in the Andalusian mystic’s writings we find an argument for the literal, as opposed to simply symbolic or metaphorical, culmination of virtue *in divinis*. This is a culmination, however, which only takes place at the highest level of “abandoning gratitude,” or *tark al-shukr*, at which point the human being foregoes all claims to virtue and realizes God as the supreme subject. To this theme we shall turn near the end of this essay.

The brief synopsis of *shukr* in the Qur’ān should now enable us to more fully appreciate IA’s treatment of this virtue, particularly in light of the extent to which revelation infuses his writings. “[E]verything of which we speak in our meetings and in our writings,” as he states, “comes from the Qur’ān and its treasures.”<sup>16</sup> What IA offers in his brief discourse surrounding gratitude is therefore, from his point of view and of those who have taken his claims seriously within later tradition, little more than an illumination of Scripture’s hidden “treasures,” exegetically unearthed through gifts for which providence singled him out.<sup>17</sup>

### *The Interplay of Praise & Seeking an Increase (Ziyāda)*

IA opens chapter 120 by declaring that human gratitude entails praising (*thanā’*) God for benefactions.<sup>18</sup> Implicit with the claim is the idea of a mutual relation of praise which characterizes the divine-human dialectic. Just as God’s gratitude involves praising the human being for what he offers Him by way of pious devotion, human gratitude involves lauding God for what he receives from heaven. This circular, heliotropic relation is highlighted by Qushayrī in his treatment of *shukr* in the *Treatise*, a work to which we know IA was highlight indebted.<sup>19</sup> The author of the *Risāla* draws attention to this feature when he observes that “the *shukr* of the servant towards God most High is to praise Him by recalling His goodness towards him. And the *shukr* of the Real, may He be praised, towards the servant is His praise of him by recalling his

<sup>15</sup> Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur’ān*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen University Press, 2002), 18.

<sup>16</sup> Cited in Michel Chodkiewicz, *An Ocean without a Shore: Ibn al-‘Arabī, the Book, and the Law* (Albany: SUNY: 1993), 20.

<sup>17</sup> For Ibn al-‘Arabī’s reception in later tradition, see Chodkiewicz’s introduction to the *Ocean*. For the controversies which surrounded him, see Alexander Knysh, *Ibn al-‘Arabī in the Later Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image* (Albany: SUNY, 1999). See also M. Rustom’s article in this same volume.

<sup>18</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:202.

<sup>19</sup> As Chodkiewicz has shown in an exceptional contribution to Ibn al-‘Arabī studies, the structure of the 2<sup>nd</sup> *faṣl* of the *Futūḥāt*, in which we encounter Ibn al-‘Arabī’s treatment of the various maqāms, is generally modeled on the order of chapters in Qushayrī’s *Risāla*, with a noticeable addition of a chapter, following his treatment of 34 stations, on “abandoning” the particular station. This number however does not include those chapters, the contents of which reflect the same pattern. The chapter on “speech,” for example, is followed by one on “silence;” “poverty” is followed by one on “wealth,” and so on. See “*Mi’rāj al-kalima: From the Risāla Qushayrīyya to the Futūḥat Makkiyya*,” *JIAS* (2009): 1-20. The article was first published in French in a Festschrift produced by Todd Lawson for H. Landolt, *Reason and Inspiration in Islam* (London and New York: I.B. Taurus/Ismaili Institute, 2005), 248-261. For more on the *Risāla*’s influence on Ibn al-‘Arabī, see Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn ‘Arabī*, trans. Peter Kingsley (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 102-103.

(acts of) goodness towards Him.”<sup>20</sup> While IA does not pursue or develop this point in reference to praise, it is nevertheless contained within the overall logic of his treatment.

The Spanish mystic then turns to Q 14:7, with which, incidentally, Qushayrī also opens his treatment of *shukr*. In this verse the Qur’an has God state: “if you are grateful, I will *surely* give you more (*la azīdannakum*)” (Q 14:7). The emphasis here is through the intensifying particle, the affirmative *la* or *lām al-tawkīd*,<sup>21</sup> through which the Qur’an establishes an inextricable link between human gratitude and the divine response which follows in the form of an increase or *ziyāda*. The causal chain of events set in motion by human *shukr*, according to the verse, leads IA to state that “gratitude is a quality which necessitates an increase from the one thanked to the one thanking (*min al-mashkūr li al-shākīr*).” While the unique power of human gratitude is also noted by earlier authors,<sup>22</sup> IA goes further by declaring that the increase or *ziyāda* which must appear in the wake of gratitude should also, by analogy, govern the human response to divine gratitude. In other words, just as God promises to give more to the human being for his *shukr*, the human being should also give God more for His gratitude. This symmetrical, reciprocal obligation, applicable to both parties, is necessitated by the sharing of names.

God, may He be exalted, did not describe Himself as ‘Grateful’ (*shākīr*) to us except that we might give Him more of that for which He was grateful to us. This is so that we (too) might give Him more, just as He gives us more of a blessing if we are grateful to Him for His blessings and good favor.<sup>23</sup>

What can the human being possibly give God? The answer, as the passage makes clear, is simply a *ziyāda* of that which elicited divine *shukr* to begin with, that is to say, more of virtue, goodness and piety in conformity to the dictates of prophecy. At the heart of this idea, as we already seen, lies the Qur’ānic model in which human ethics (to return again to Izutsu) stands as a “pale reflection...of the divine nature itself.” We learn how to express gratitude to God by observing how it is that He expresses gratitude towards us. Since He gives us more of what we are thankful for, we too are obliged to give Him more of that for which He is thankful to us.

But there is more to the emphasis IA places on the necessity of giving more to God in response to His gratitude than simply a theological anthropology centered on the notion of the human being as an *imago dei*. The idea, as we saw earlier, is also found in at least one of the meanings of *shukr*. Abū Khalaf al-Ṭabarī (d. 1077) considers the particular semantic relation between “gratitude” and “increase” to be of such consequence that he opens his chapter on the

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<sup>20</sup> Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 333. My use of the *Risāla* in this article has been aided by the translations of R. Harris and A. Knysh.

<sup>21</sup> Also known as *lām al-ta’kīd*.

<sup>22</sup> Makkī highlights the unique power of gratitude by noting that God does not make an unqualified a promise to respond to petitions for (1) forgiveness (*maghfira*) (Q 5:40), (2) an increase in wealth or prosperity (*ighnā*) (Q 9:28), (3) sustenance (*rizq*) (Q 2:212), (4) an acceptance of the human’s being *tawba* (Q 9:27), (5) or the removal an ill (Q 6:41). For each of these the divine gift is qualified by “if He wills” or “on whom He wills.” But this is not so with gratitude, since He promises, without qualification, to give the *shākīr* a *ziyāda* or *mazīd*. *Qūt*, 1:411-412. Ghazālī, clearly under the influence of Makkī, also draws attention to this unique feature of the virtue in his treatment of the subject. *Ihyā’ ulūm al-dīn* (Aleppo: Dār al-Wa’ī, 1998), 4:125. Along similar lines, Muḥāsibī states that the sign that one has been genuinely grateful to God is that he receives more from God in its wake. *Kitāb al-qaṣd wa al-rujū’*, in *al-Waṣāyā aw al-naṣā’ih al-dīniyya wa nafūḥāt al-quḍsiyya*, ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad ‘Aṭā’ (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2003), 170.

<sup>23</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:202.

subject in the *Comfort of the Enlightened Ones* by drawing attention to it. “The meaning of gratitude in the (Arabic) language,” he writes, “is *ziyāda*.”<sup>24</sup> When we call to mind the extent to which the unique features of the Arabic language determine the contours of IA’s own line of thinking<sup>25</sup> we can see why he considers the two notions so closely intertwined. After all, Arabic is not, for IA, simply the vehicle of Islamic revelation, but a revelation in its own right, having its origin, like the Qur’ān, in God. The intricacy of the language’s structure and the conventions of its use among the ancient Arabs, far from being arbitrary, provide the exegetical keys through which the meanings of the Qur’ān can be unlocked.<sup>26</sup> In this light we can understand why he feels that “gratitude seeks an increase.”<sup>27</sup> This relation is not just established through a particular reading of Scripture, but also by a close attentiveness to its language. That this relation is primarily linguistic and Scriptural is evidenced by the general absence of the association in Western philosophical treatments of the virtue.<sup>28</sup>

### *The Shākīr/Shakūr Distinction*

Following his brief remarks about the increase which the thankful one is entitled to receive from the one thanked, IA then turns to explain the difference between the *shākīr* and the *shakūr*. While his focus this time around is on the human being, it is clear that he does not want the reader to lose sight of *shukr* as ultimately a divine quality. We have already seen that the Qur’ān ascribes both names to God. The difference of usage in the text, about which, incidentally, IA remains silent, at least in the two chapters under consideration, appears to center around the circumstances in which each of these names are used. The elative form *al-shakūr* is in three of its four instances coupled with the divine name *al-ghafūr* (The “All-Forgiving One;”

<sup>24</sup> *ma ‘nā al-shukr fī al-lughā al-ziyāda*. Ṭabarī, *Salwat*, 164.

<sup>25</sup> Chodkiewicz’s *Ocean without Shore* offers an unsurpassed analysis of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s understanding of the relation between language and revelation.

<sup>26</sup> As a case in point, we may consider Ibn al-‘Arabī’s criticism of the Mu‘tazilite doctrine according to which God is bound by necessity to punish the unrighteous for their transgressions unless they repent. The Mu‘tazilites whose thought pivots around the concept of divine justice (‘*adl*), hold this position at least partly because God promises in Scripture to punish evildoers for their wrongs. Their position is a well known one in the history of Islamic theology, part and parcel of their doctrine of the promise and the threat, *al-wa ‘d wa al-wa ‘id*. Ibn al-‘Arabī’s criticism of this doctrine, specifically in relation to God’s supposed obligation to take the sinner to account for his sin, is not based on philosophical or theological but linguistic grounds. The convention of the pre-Islamic Arabs, argues Ibn al-‘Arabī, allowed them to make threats without having to carry them out if they were later overcome by feelings of magnanimity, clemency and benevolence. Such acts of forgiveness, despite previous promises to the contrary, were not considered breaches or violations of one’s own word. For Ibn al-‘Arabī, the divine promise of punishment within Scripture must be understood along the same lines. God is not obliged to punish unrepentant sinners, contrary to the conclusion which might be drawn by one who knows Arabic but is ignorant of its structure and the subtleties of its pre-Islamic usages. Ibn al-‘Arabī’s position is dealt with tersely in Sha‘rānī’s *al-Kibrīt al-aḥmar fī bayān ‘ulūm al-shaykh al-akbar*, ed. Nawāf al-Jarrāh (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2003).

<sup>27</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:188. The same expression also occurs in chapter 178 on *maḥabbā*.

<sup>28</sup> In my overview of treatments of gratitude in Western philosophical writings, I have not come across an analogous point. In addition to the McConnell’s work on this virtue (see footnote 1) the reader is directed to the following excellent philosophical treatments, most of which focus on interpersonal obligations of gratitude: Fred Berger, “Gratitude,” *Ethics* 85, no. 4 (1975): 298-309; Patrick Fitzgerald, “Gratitude and Justice,” *Ethics* 109, no. 1 (1998): 119-153; and A. D. M. Walker, “Gratefulness and Gratitude,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, New Series* 81 (1980-1981): 39-55. For more theological reflections, see Joseph Lombardi, “Filial Gratitude and God’s Right to Command,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 19, no. 1 (1991): 93-118. For gratitude in Buddhist philosophy, see Malcolm D. Eckel, “Gratitude to an Empty Savior: A Study of the Concept of Gratitude in Mahāyāna Buddhist Philosophy,” 25, no. 1 (1985): 57-75, although very little of this article is devoted to gratitude per se.

also in intensive active participle form), and in the context of describing God’s generous bounties and immense forgiveness in the afterlife.<sup>29</sup> Since it is only then the full scale of divine gratitude will become known,<sup>30</sup> it is fitting for the Qur’ān to employ the *lafẓ mubālagha* to illustrate the breadth and range of divine mercy which, according to IA’s interpretation of Scriptural soteriology, will envelope *all* souls in the next world.<sup>31</sup>

As for the difference which the Qur’an established between the human *shākir* and *shakūr*, it appears to rest simply on the degree to which one might be marked by the virtue. In agreement with the earlier Sufī tradition, IA affirms that the distinction centers on the extent of one’s own gratitude. The *shākir* is grateful for those gifts which are considered blessings by convention or custom (*‘urf*). These may include the blessings of sound health, the companionship of family and friends, the comfort afforded by wealth, not to mention subtler spiritual gifts. But while the *shākir*’s gratitude is meritorious in its own right, and met with divine approval, it remains, for IA, deficient to the extent that it is not an all-pervading quality. The *shakūr* on the other hand is of the “elect of God.” He stands among the ranks of those, says the mystic, “who see everything which comes from God, in respect to them and His servants, as a divine blessing, (regardless of) whether it causes them joy or grief, for they are grateful in every state.”<sup>32</sup> Their rarity, attested to both by *wujūd* and divine report (Q 34:13), leads IA to pray, “May we be counted among their few! (*iyānā bi qillatihim*).”<sup>33</sup>

Lest IA’s actual position on this question, however, be misunderstood as a simplistic exhortation to be thankful for absolutely everything in life, without qualification, some clarification is in order. This is because IA states that “gratitude is not sound *except* for blessings.”<sup>34</sup> And in chapter 178 on love he clarifies the matter further: “gratitude is not for any other than blessings (*ni‘am*). It is not for afflictions (*balā’*), as claimed by one of them who had no knowledge of realities (*lā ‘ilm lahu bi al-ḥaqā’iq*)... he imagined that he should be grateful for afflictions. This however is not sound.”<sup>35</sup> It is clear therefore that for our mystic one need not be thankful for all experiences of distress, hardship, suffering and trial. While IA does not identify the individual in the passage above, numerous proponents of this view could be cited

<sup>29</sup> Q 35:30; 35:34; 42:23. Curiously, even in the one instance where *shakūr* does not appear alongside *ghafūr* (Q 64:17), the verse is still preceded by mention of divine *maghfira*, as if to reiterate the close Qur’ānic relation between divine gratitude and forgiveness. The relation is itself quite a logical one considering that through the former God rewards human piety and through latter He forgives human wrongdoing.

<sup>30</sup> Bayhaqī (d. 458 AH), for example, notes that when *shākir* is used of God it refers to His praise and reward for human devotion; when *shakūr* is used it refers to the continuation and perpetuity of that *shukr*. *Kitāb al-asmā’ wa al-ṣifāt*, ed. ‘Imād al-Dīn Aḥmad Ḥaydar (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Arabī, 2002), 1: 128.

<sup>31</sup> As Ibn al-‘Arabī states in his two chapters on the station of *riḍā’* (128-129), everyone will eventually experience the mercy of God after death because of an essential servitude to which each soul is bound and which it cannot, through its own will, escape. Divine mercy, and by extension divine *shukr*, will respond to the soul’s essential servitude by granting it everlasting felicity. See *Futūḥāt*, 2: 212-213. For a general treatment of the role of mercy in Akbarian soteriology, see William Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-‘Arabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: SUNY, 1995), 97-119. See also Mohammed Rustom’s discussion of Mulla Sadrā’s views on this subject in the *Triumph of Mercy* (Albany: SUNY, 2012), 99-116.

<sup>32</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:202.

<sup>33</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:202. We are reminded of an episode from the life of the caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khattāb, who once heard a man pray “My Lord, make me of the ‘few!’” The supplication led the caliph to retort, “what kind of prayer is this?!” to which he replied, “I heard the words of God, ‘and few of by bondsmen are *shakūr*.’ This is why I now pray that He include me among those ‘few.’” Maḥmūd b. ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-‘Abīkān, 1998), 5:112 (Q 34:13).

<sup>34</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:202.

<sup>35</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:343.

from the earlier tradition. We find in Qushayrī, for example, the statement, “it is said that the *shākīr* is one who is grateful for the gift (*‘aṭā’*), and the *shakūr* is the one who grateful for affliction (*balā’*).”<sup>36</sup> Abū Khalaf al-Ṭabarī offers a variant: “it is said that the *shākīr* is the one who is grateful for ease (*rakhā’*), and the *shakūr* is the one who is grateful for affliction (*balā’*).”<sup>37</sup> While the identity of the individual with whom IA is voicing his disagreement remains of secondary importance, considering the range of individuals who might have held this view, of significance is his own position, that gratitude should be restricted only for blessings. Trials and afflictions (*ibtilā’āt*), on the other hand, should be met with by patience, the proper course under such circumstances. IA’s perspective was not a new one, nor does he anywhere suggest so. Indeed we have a saying of Yaḥyā b. Mu‘ādh al-Rāzī (d. 872), where he encourages the *sālik* or spiritual wayfarer to “respond to blessings with gratitude, to adversity with patience, and to sins with repentance.”<sup>38</sup> And in *The Knowledge of the Friends of God* by al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 905-910), we read that “gratitude is a response to well-being (*‘āfiya*) while patience is a response to tribulation (*balā’*).”<sup>39</sup> More importantly, this view seems to be in closer conformity to the Qur’ān, which in more than one instance couples human patience and gratitude together as twin virtues.<sup>40</sup>

Despite our preceding clarification, however, one might argue that IA’s position as articulated in chapter 178 still seems to conflict with his claim in chapter 120, that the *shakūr* is “grateful in every state (*fī kullī ḥāl*).” Is there not a tension, the argument might go, when we consider that life is mixture of both uplifting and debilitating experiences, of joys and sorrows, of trials and blessings – as IA would surely concede? The seeming contradiction can be resolved when we realize that for our mystic the *shakūr* is not grateful in every state because he is thankful for both blessings and afflictions, but because he sees the blessings that are contained within the afflictions. In other words, the gratitude of the *shakūr* is not directed towards suffering, but the gift which lies within it. The suffering, affliction and distress are in a sense simply the layers of wrapping which enclose the *ni‘ma*. To illustrate his point, IA draws from the example of medicine. A sick patient who is administered a bitter, pungent remedy by a physician for an illness is grateful, but not for its foul taste, which makes it all the more difficult for him to ingest the drug, but rather its healing property. He endures its unpleasantness with patience while at the same time feeling gratitude for its healing power. This all occurs, moreover, in one state. Gratitude, therefore, as IA clarifies, must always be directed towards the blessing, even though it might lie concealed within a trial which could be quite painful, and for which, in regards to its painfulness, one must be patient. But it would make little sense – in fact, it would be counter-intuitive and perhaps even reflect an unhealthy state of mind – to be thankful for suffering qua suffering. To advocate this type of gratitude as an ideal reveals, for our mystic, an ignorance of “the realities of the affairs (*ḥaqā’iq al-‘umūr*).”<sup>41</sup>

<sup>36</sup> The “it is said” which precedes the citation of course implies that Qushayrī does not himself necessarily hold this position. *Risāla*, 334.

<sup>37</sup> Ṭabarī, *Salwat al-‘arīfīn*, 166-167. See also Abū l-Ḥasan al-Sirjānī (d. 1077), *Kitāb al-bayāḍ wa al-sawād*, eds. Bilal Orfali and Nada Saab (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 301-302.

<sup>38</sup> Ṭabarī, *Salwat*, 167.

<sup>39</sup> The remainder of the passage, which is instructive, is echoed in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s cosmological scheme: “Well-being (*‘āfiya*) is from His favor (*fadl*) while His favor is from His Beauty (*jamāl*). Tribulation (on the other hand) is from His Might (*sulṭān*) while His Might is from His Power (*mulk*). In the next world, tomorrow, his Beauty will be presented to the Inhabitants of Paradise (*ahl al-janna*) and His Dominion will be presented to the Inhabitants of the Fire (*ahl al-nār*). Observe then from where well-being and tribulation emerge.” Tirmidhī, *‘Ilm al-awliyā’*, 55.

<sup>40</sup> See Q14:5, 31:31, 34:19.

<sup>41</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:343.



The notion of seeing the blessing within the trial is once again not a new one. IA makes no suggestion that he is being innovative, or introducing a perspective unknown to his predecessors. Indeed, we find in the earlier tradition a saying attributed to Junayd (d. 910), that “satisfaction (*riḍā*) is to see the affliction (*balā*) as a blessing (*ni‘ma*).”<sup>42</sup> Makkī is even more explicit when he writes of the *shakūr*, that he “is grateful for adversities (*makāriḥ*), afflictions (*balā*), hardships (*shadā'id*), and agonies (*la'wā*). But *this is not possible until he sees them as blessings (ni‘am)* which require of him gratitude through the truth of his certainty and reality of his detachment. This is a station of satisfaction and a state of love.”<sup>43</sup> What IA does, however, is clarify, and in a way that that the earlier tradition may have not sufficiently done, (with the exception perhaps of Ghazālī), the *adab* of gratitude, that is to say, its proper mode of comportment, including the pitfalls one must avoid to realize the virtue in its fullness. This clarification is all the more valuable in light of the dizzying array of terse, sometimes ambiguous and seemingly conflicting aphorisms found in much of the earlier literature.<sup>44</sup>

Before proceeding, we should perhaps note one final point in regards to the distinction IA makes between the *shākir* and the *shakūr*. When he states that the *shakūr* is grateful for the *ni‘ma* which resides within the *balā*, it is significant that he stresses that one must *see* the blessing therein. In other words, one cannot artificially imitate this level of gratitude. While it is certainly difficult to be thankful for everything, both for ease and hardship, blessing and affliction, it seems that it would be more challenging, in so far as it would require the cultivation of a subtle and refined sense of discernment, to be able to recognize blessings which may lie hidden within trials. The kind of awareness of which IA speaks of so highly of cannot be easily feigned, and requires seeing life’s afflictions through the eyes of real insight or *baṣīra*. In this respect, we can see why for IA the gratitude of the *shakūr* is not the consequence of a mindless, Herculean (and perhaps ascetic), feat of psychological will, but a meditative, introspective, and enlightened penetration into the deeper wisdom behind the human experience of suffering. What makes the *shakūr* so special in IA’s eyes then is not just that he is in a constant state of gratitude, but rather, his knowledge of what it is that he is being grateful for. This may better explain not only why our mystic considers the *shakūr* to be from the “the elect of God,” but also why he abruptly interrupts his discourse with a sincere prayer that both he and reader be included among such a lofty rank, since “few,” after all, “are *shakūr*.”

### *The Logic of Abandoning Gratitude*

In chapter 121 our mystic turns to discuss the theme of *tark al-shukr* or “abandoning gratitude.” It is in this chapter that IA explains how it is that the perfection of the given virtue

<sup>42</sup> Kharkūshī (also = Khargūshī [d. 1015 or 1016 CE]), *Tahdhīb al-asrār*, ed. Syed Muhammad ‘Alī (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya), 108. Arberrry’s assessment of this little known work was that while it should not be assigned the same degree of importance as the better known contributions of Sarrāj, Makkī, Kalābādhī, and Qushayrī, “it is a source by no means to be disregarded; and no complete history of Ṣūfism will ever be written that does not take [it] into account...” “Khargūshī’s Manual of Sufism,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*, 9 no. 2 (1938): 349. For more on Khargūshī, see Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 65; Hassan Ansari and Sabine Schmidtke, “Abū Sa’d al-Khargūshī and his *Kitāb al-Lawāmi*: A Sufi Guide Book for Preachers from 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century Nishāpūr,” *Arabica* 58 (2011): 503-506. See also Christopher Melchert, “Khargūshī, *Tahdhīb al-asrār*,” *Bulletin of the SOAS* 73, no. 1 (2010): 29-44.

<sup>43</sup> Makkī, *Qūt*, 1: 416-417.

<sup>44</sup> Even though Makkī, as we have just seen, states rather explicitly that one must see the blessing within the trial, he did not develop the idea in the *Nourishment* in such a way that would make it clear to his reader that one should not be grateful for the affliction, but the good within it.

necessitates leaving it altogether, at least in the conventional sense. On the surface, the idea seems to mark a significant departure from the orientation one encounters in the previous chapter, particularly in light of IA’s high estimation of the *shakūr*, characterized, as he is, by the continuity of his gratitude, *fī kulli ḥāl*, and his profound awareness of both open and hidden blessings. The logic of the following chapter, however, can only be appreciated when we consider that for IA the virtues reach their completion when they are relinquished of all traces of the ego or self. Gratitude in this light is only perfected when the human subject withdraws all claims to it, thereby allowing God, the only real actor in existence, to enter into a dialectical relationship with Himself. “Far from representing a blameworthy attitude,” as Chodkiewicz accurately points out, “this abandonment must be interpreted each time as a moving beyond the preceding *maqām*, a purification aimed at liberating the *sālik* of what remains of duality in the station he has attained,” adding that it is through this *tark* that the philosophy of the unity of being, “which constitutes the keystone of this complex architecture, is envisaged in itself or in its doctrinal consequences.”<sup>45</sup>

But it should be noted that even outside of formal considerations of the ultimate goal of the mystic, realized in its fullness through the abandonment of gratitude and the transcendence of an illusory ontological dichotomy which separates the human subject from the divine object, there is also a purely ethical and juridical basis for the idea that certain kinds of activities which may otherwise be virtuous must be left within specific contexts. That is to say, even if we move outside of the framework of *wahdat al-wujūd*, there are situations in which the proper course of action would require of one to refrain from an activity, which might, in a general sense, and within a different set of circumstances, be considered praiseworthy. In this light, sometimes the virtuous thing to do is to “abandon” a virtue, and this abandonment forms a necessary part of the embodiment of virtue as a whole. IA explains how this is so through the example of *ṣidq*:

[God] has made truthfulness (*ṣidq*) an act of worship, but he did not assign praise to it in every circumstance. Backbiting (*ghība*) is an act of truthfulness, but it is a blameworthy form of truthfulness; and tale-bearing of offense (*namīma bi al-sū’*) is an act of truthfulness, and it (too) is blameworthy. There are many circumstances in which truthfulness is blameworthy, even though truthfulness is absolutely (*ma’a al-iṭlāq*) a praised quality.<sup>46</sup>

There are numerous other examples which could be given to illustrate what IA has in mind. We may note the case of satisfaction or good-pleasure (*riḍā’*), which although a central virtue within Islamic piety, is not applicable in every circumstance. The Qur’an, although it ascribes the quality to God, also makes it clear, for example, that “He does not have *riḍā’* with the ingratitude (*kufṛ*) of His servants.”<sup>47</sup> IA uses this line of reasoning in his chapter 129 on “abandoning

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<sup>45</sup> Michel Chodkiewicz, “Mi‘rāj al-kalim,” 10. See also Binyamin Abrahamov, “Abandoning the Station (*tark al-maqām*) as Reflecting Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Principle of Relativity,” *JMIAS* 47 (2010): 23-46. Abrahamov’s article is useful because he provides a terse synopsis of the manner in which many of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s stations are to be abandoned. What Abrahamov, in view this author, does not sufficient recognize is that there is a “principle of relativity” present in any ethical system, and in this respect, such a principle is not unique to Ibn al-‘Arabī. The examples below illustrate this point.

<sup>46</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:203. For the Spanish master’s use of Makkī, see Saeko Yazaki, *Islamic Mysticism and Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī: The Role of the Heart* (London: Routledge, 2013), 99-100; William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany: SUNY, 1989), 103.

<sup>47</sup> Q 39:7.

satisfaction (*tark al-riḍā'*)” to explain that the human being should not be pleased with everything, in all circumstances, because God Himself does not have *riḍā'* with everything. Moreover, satisfaction with one’s own state cuts off spiritual aspirations (*himma*) and a desire for greater knowledge without which any real development on the Way is not possible.<sup>48</sup> We may also consider the example of humility (*tawāḍu' / khushū'*). Understood in the conventional sense as a kind of lowliness, the very opposite of pride, it need not be exercised before everyone and in every circumstance, since “to be proud before the rich ... is part of humility.”<sup>49</sup> Only an ethically unsophisticated and counterproductive view of *tawāḍu'* and *khushū'* would demand a continuous state of abasement before all people, thereby preventing one, when necessary, from standing up to falsehood, injustice and tyranny. One may recall here the famous episode from the life of Christ, who, despite his words, “blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth,” and his exhortation to “turn to them the other cheek,” did not restrain himself from turning over the tables of the money lenders in the Temple in an act of holy violence.<sup>50</sup> Many other examples could be given. At risk of redundancy, it is sufficient to note that the idea of “abandoning” a virtue is not so radical to begin with, and need not be grounded in the presuppositions of a non-dual mystical framework, even though, its full logic is only obtained, for IA, when the Absolute is existentially realized as the supreme agent.

### *The Levels of Abandoning Gratitude*

IA’s example of *ṣiḍq* sets the stage for his discussion which follows of *tark al-shukr*, beginning with its lower levels. The example he gives of an acceptable form of abandonment is the case of one who does not witness the divinity within the means through which he receives the gift. It is permissible for him not to express gratitude to God, because such *shukr*, after all, requires a cognizance or awareness of divine benefaction. “Abandoning gratitude,” he states, “because of seeing the act (of benefaction) from the human being (alone) is a sound abandonment (*tark ṣaḥīḥ*). This is the station of the common folk (*maqām al-'umūm*). It is a sound abandonment for the common folk from among the people of God.”<sup>51</sup> While imperfect, this *tark* is nevertheless acceptable for our mystic considering the abandoner’s state. While IA does not address whether or not such a one thanks the human means through whom he receives the gift, there is no reason to presume he does not when we recall that he is of “the folk of God.” It is unlikely anyone of this rank would, in our mystic’s eyes, fail to fulfill as basic a moral obligation as thanking others according to the measure of their right. As he states in the previous chapter, “gratitude towards the benefactor is obligatory on the basis of (both) rational proofs and revelation (*'aql<sup>an</sup> wa shar<sup>an</sup>*).”<sup>52</sup> The inability of the recipient of the gift to recognize the divine self-disclosure or *tajallī*, however, is another matter, and one that is excusable since he is of the *'umūm*.

The mystic then proceeds to describe the gratitude of the perfect ones (*al-kummal min al-nās* [sing. *kāmil*]). Their perfection with respect to *shukr* is the result of the two-pronged or dual nature of their gratitude, which leads them to thank both God and people, or in more theological terms, both the Causer of causes (*musabbib al-asbāb*) and the secondary causes (*asbāb*). Unlike

<sup>48</sup> See Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:213. See also my forthcoming article, “Contentment, Satisfaction, and Good-Pleasure (*Riḍā'*) in Early Sufi Moral Psychology,” in *Studies in Religion*.

<sup>49</sup> The saying is attributed to Ibn Mubārak (Qusharyi, *Risāla*, 292), but has its basis also in a prophetic tradition.

<sup>50</sup> Matthew 5:5, 5:39, 21:12.

<sup>51</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:203.

<sup>52</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:202.

those who stand at the level below them, they are not veiled by the means through which divine gifts come their way, and therefore fulfill, as far as the obligations of gratitude are concerned, both the rights of God and His servants. They are thankful to God because they see Him as the Ultimate Benefactor, thereby fulfilling the “right of gratitude” (*ḥaqq al-shukr*) which, as IA makes clear in the previous chapter, necessitates recognizing the principle origin of benefactions.<sup>53</sup> And they are thankful to others out of their desire to live up to the Qur’ānic commandment, “Be grateful to Me and to your parents,”<sup>54</sup> and the words of the Prophet, “He who has not shown gratitude to people has not shown gratitude to God.”<sup>55</sup> Since the divinity is not concealed for them by the world of relativity, nor does the divinity, inversely, conceal them from such a world – in which case they would show gratitude to God but not people<sup>56</sup> – they are grateful to both.

But what does this level of gratitude, despite its completeness, have to do with *tark al-shukr*? After all, what exactly have the Perfect Ones abandoned? For IA, they have abandoned what he calls, somewhat provocatively, the *tawḥīd* of gratitude. The reason for this is that they have introduced a partner in their gratitude to God. But since this association is itself the result of a divine command, it is a praiseworthy form of “sharing” or “co-partnering,” without which the obligations of *shukr* imposed on them would remain unrealized.<sup>57</sup> In the words of our mystic, “this is the station of abandoning gratitude, that is, abandoning the *tawḥīd* of gratitude towards the root Benefactor, for he has made his gratitude (to Him) share (cf. *shirk*) between the Benefactor at root and the secondary cause, out of the command of God.”<sup>58</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī’s use of language here should not be glossed over, since by transforming the *shirk* of gratitude into the ideal, (because it involves introducing a partner in one’s gratitude to God), and relegating the *tawḥīd* of gratitude to a lower level, (because it entails an infringement of an explicit divine command), he overturns the usual associations of these terms (*tawḥīd* = praiseworthy; *shirk* = blameworthy). The provocative nature of his language, it seems, is not just for the sake for provocation, but to loosen, instead, our rigid, formulaic and reifying ways of thinking about God

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<sup>53</sup> It has at least part of its basis in a famous ḥadīth in which God says to Moses, “Be grateful to Me with true gratitude (*ḥaqq al-shukr*).” Hearing this, the Israelite prophet replies, “O Lord, and who is capable of that?” God then responds by informing him, “if you see that the blessing is from Me, than you have shown gratitude to Me with true gratitude.” Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:202. Cf. Makkī, *Qūt*, 1:413; Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 335; Sīrjānī, *Bayād*, 302.

<sup>54</sup> Q 31:14.

<sup>55</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:204.

<sup>56</sup> This possibility is embodied in the person who through his absorption in the contemplation of the One, becomes unconsciousness of the world of multiplicity, and therefore witnesses and thanks none but the divinity alone. The idea is reflected in a saying attributed to Shiblī, that “gratitude is the vision of the (divine) benefactor, not the gift (*al-shukr ru’yat al-mun ‘im lā al-ni ‘ma*).” Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 335. The idea of thanking God but not the means also appears within the more “ascetically minded” formulations of gratitude, which encourage the wayfarer to turn away from the world of relativity, along with the conventional responsibilities which accompany it, so as to fix one’s attention entirely on the Absolute. This orientation is found in a saying ascribed to Abū ‘Uthmān al-Ḥīrī, that “the truthfulness of gratitude is that you do not praise anyone other than the (divine) benefactor (*ghayr al-mun ‘im*), and the reality of gratitude is that you do not show gratitude for the gift because it is a veil over the Gift-giver.” Ṭabarī, *Salwat al-‘arīfīn*, 165. For a similar saying attributed to Dhū al-Nūn, see Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 341 (chapter on *yaqīn*); Kharkūshī, *Tahdhīb al-asrār*, 71. See also Helmut Ritter, *Ocean of the Soul: Men, the World and God in the Stories of Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār*, trans. John O’Kane with editorial assistance of Bernd Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 219. For Ibn al-‘Arabī, naturally, both of these perspectives remain, at face value, deficient for reasons already explained.

<sup>57</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:204.

<sup>58</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:204. Translated differently, it can also read, “he partnered in his gratitude (*sharraka fī shukrihi*) the Benefactor at root, with the secondary cause, out of the command of God.”

– a hallmark not just of IA, but of mystics across traditions (as Sells has so ably shown<sup>59</sup>). In a strange way, the strategy is also more faithful to those aspects of the Qur’ānic text which emphasize the total otherness of God and the inability of the human mind to “pin-Him-down” than the approaches characteristic of rationalist philosophy and dogmatic scholasticism.<sup>60</sup>

IA’s description of the *tark al-shukr* of the *kummal* does not end here. He goes on to explain how the full perfection of their gratitude is only obtained when God is realized as the supreme agent. This in turn can be viewed from two perspectives: (1) the servant can be seen as marked by gratitude to the extent that gratitude occurs through him; but to the extent the gratitude is that of the Real, he relinquishes all claims to it. IA writes that such a person is “an abandoner of gratitude from one perspective, and characterized by gratitude from (another) perspective.”<sup>61</sup> (2) From another point of view, which is that of God qua His absoluteness – or as Ghazālī says in his own treatment of *shukr* in the *Ihyā’*, from the view of pure *tawhīd*<sup>62</sup> – He is the *shākir* absolutely (*shākir<sup>an</sup> mutlaq<sup>an</sup>*),<sup>63</sup> which is another way of saying there is no *shākir* except God. The servant’s perception of his own gratitude is, from this vantage point, false and illusory, since the Real is the only actor in existence. But the matter, as we would expect, does not end there either. Just as God is the only true *shākir*, He is also the only One to whom gratitude can be shown. In other words, there is no *mashkūr* but Him. While this is to state the obvious as far as thanking God directly is concerned, it is no doubt perplexing and counter-intuitive when we consider human objects of gratitude, or the secondary causes through which gifts arrive our way. For IA, the matter is only beguiling for those who are not in a continuous state of witnessing God, who do not recognize the tapestry of divine self-disclosures which give the cosmos its very fabric of existence. For those who do know, however, and live in this reality, (the *kummal* in our mystic’s eyes), the entire dialectical relationship of gratitude is ultimately a relationship the Real has with Himself within Himself – it forms part of an interplay which occurs within the divinity. IA explains this relationship in chapter 558, entitled the “Presence of Gratitude (*Ḥadrat al-shukr*),” through the example of charity and gift-giving. He begins with a basic premise of his ontology:

The divine state is like the state of existence, because He is its very being. There is none other than Him. Thus, He did not give gratitude to anyone except Himself, since He did not confer a gift except upon Himself. No one received and accepted it except Himself. Therefore God is the Gift-giver (*mu’tī*) and the Receiver (of the gift) (*ākhidh*). It is just as he (the Messenger) said, ‘charity falls into the hands of the all-Merciful,’ because He receives the charity. The hand of the beggar is a form which veils the hand of the all-Merciful, and so the charity comes into the hand of the all-Merciful before it (even) arrives into the hand of the beggar. Or if you like, you may say ‘the hand of the beggar is the (very) hand of the Gift-giver,’ and that the Real thanks His servant for the gift, so that he may give Him more of it (cf. *ziyāda*).<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> See Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), particularly his introduction and epilogue.

<sup>60</sup> This is also reflected in the constant shifting of pronouns to refer to God.

<sup>61</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:204

<sup>62</sup> Ghazālī, *Ihyā’*, 4:133. Cf. the saying attributed to Ibrāhīm al-Khawwās in Sīrjānī, *Bayāḍ*, 302.

<sup>63</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:204.

<sup>64</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 4: 242-243. Note the end of the passage, where God seeks an increase from the servant for His own gratitude to him.

He then goes on to explain the real nature of the inter-play between God and the human being by turning to a well-known, oft-cited *ḥadīth*:

God, glorified and exalted be He (*‘azza wa jall*) [trans.], said “I was hungry but you did not feed Me.” He (the servant) then sought from Him an explanation of the context, and asked Him, “and how you can be fed and when you are the Lord of the Worlds?” He – exalted be He – said, “When so-and-so was hungry and asked you for food, and you did not feed him, had you had fed him, you would have found that person by My side (*la wajadta dhālika ‘indi*)” And the story is told in the same way about the sick person, and the one who brings water (to the thirsty person), that is, ‘it is I who would have received it, not him.’ The *ḥadīth* is in Saḥīḥ Muslim. With these words (we see that) the Real is a veiled form (*ṣūra ḥijābiyya*) over the servant and, and with respect to the receiving and giving, the servant is a veiled form (*ṣūra ḥijābiyya*) over the Real.”<sup>65</sup>

And so the circle of gratitude is completed where its point of origin converges with its terminus in the Real. The relationship of *shukr* between the God and the human being is, in the final order of things, an interplay which occurs within God Himself. To think that the human being can express gratitude to God is to fail to recognize that servant is a “veiled form over the Real;” and to think that one can thank any other than God, is to fail to realize that “the Real is a veiled form over the servant.” Earlier we saw that for Izutsu, human ethics in the Qur’ān is a pale reflection of divine ethics. From this paper we now see how IA carries out this Scriptural model to its end. The “paradox of monotheism” – alluded to by the contrasting quotations from Eckhart with which we opened this paper – is resolved in a non-dual ontology which leaves room for none other than God, reminding us of the *ḥadīth*, “The truest verse sung by the Arabs is the line of Labīd, ‘Is not everything other than God unreal?’”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 4: 242-243.

<sup>66</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 3:443; cited in Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 127.