Ibn Turkah's Conciliatory Spirit and the Rise of Mystical Philosophy

This paper explains the synthetic methodology of Ibn Turkah Iṣfahān, a Persian philosopher-gnostic of the Tīmūrid era. Though Ibn Turkah is heir to Ibn'Arabi in considering mysticism to be the highest form of knowledge, he diverges from the former in appreciating the role of reason and philosophy in helping the human soul reach up to the level of gnosis. Ibn Turkah brings together a variety of spiritual and intellectual traditions, and in doing so prepares the ground for the restoration of philosophy in Persia in a synthetic and openly mystical shape. The School of Iṣfahān, specifically the transcendental philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā, would not have conceived without the preparatory role played by Ibn Turkah.

1. Introduction

Ṣā'in al-Dīn 'Alī ibn Muḥammad Turkah Iṣfahānī, famous as Ibn Turkah, was a brilliant thinker, whose fate in the history of ideas has been as sad as the story of his life. He is a multi-dimensional scholar who brings together a variety of intellectual and spiritual traditions. Moreover, next to philosophy, and mysticism, he is quite well-versed in Persian poetry and prose. He has many philosophical, mystical, and confessional treatises written in a beautiful Persian prose and embellished with poems of his own. Ibn Turkah's attempts at the heart of the Tīmūrid era not only to produce works in the Persian language, but to revive and reconcile different schools of philosophy and spiritual traditions, certainly deserve more than the brief references which appear in a small number of Muslim history books.[1] Western scholarship on

[1] During the Tīmūrid dynasty (771-911/1370-1506 AD) due to the Turkish ancestry of the rulers, Persian literature received little, if any, support as compared to the prolific preceding ages. Moreover, at that age the golden days of original philosophy in Persia was past. After Suhrawardi there were only a few great commentators like Qutb al-Dīn-i Shīrāzī (b.634/1236). In the same century when Ibn Turkah died there appeared a number of synthetic theologian-philosophers such as Jalal al-Dīn Dawānī (b. 830/1427)) and Ṣadr al-Dīn Dashtakī (b.828/1425). Also one century before Ibn Turkah, Sayyed Ḥaydar Āmulī (b. 720/1319) made precious attempts to harmonize Shi'a theology with Sufism. The restoration of philosophy happened during the Safavid period (907-1135/1501-1722) within the School of Iṣfahān.

Ibn Turkah is very meager and none of his works has been translated into English so far.[2] Moreover, some of his major manuscripts have not yet been edited or published in Persian. In his homeland, there are a few books and articles that are relatively recent and address only the academics. There the only exceptionally famous work by Ibn Turkah is *al-Tamhīd al-qawā'id* which is an exposition and commentary on Abū Hāmid Iṣfahānī's *al-Qawā'id al-tawḥīd*. This book is used as a course book on Islamic mysticism at the Shi'a religious seminaries.

The poor reception of Ibn Turkah in the Muslim world is mostly due to his strong esoterism which has cast a shadow of doubt over the nature of his religious beliefs and sectarian affinities.[3] This article is meant to stay out of the sectarian controversy since the author believes that what really mattered to Ibn Turkah as a spiritual person was *the* truth of faith rather than the 'truths' of sects, and he sought it wherever he could. At best we can say that his conciliatory spirit makes him an exoteric Sunni and an esoteric Shi'a. This spirit is evident in every area of his work. Ibn Turkah's harmonizing treatment of Peripatetic, Illuminationist, Sufi, and Hurūfī teachings provided the old intellectual and spiritual traditions with the opportunity to gather force and give rise to a fresh philosophic system which would later be known as transcendental philosophy (*al-ḥikmat al-muta'āliya)*.

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[2] Henri Corbin has devoted a lengthy chapter of his *En Islam Iranien* to Ibn Turkah's *Treatise on the Cleaving of the Moon.* See Henri Corbin *En Islam Iranien, Aspects spirituels and philosophiques*, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1972) Book IV: chapter III. In this book Corbin seems to have no doubts as to Ibn Turkah's Shi'a devotion, and discusses his Sufi beliefs within the framework of Shi'ism.

[3] There is a schism among scholars of Muslim thought whether Ibn Turkah was Sunni or Shi'a. He lived at a period of extreme Sunni intolerance and was accused of Shi'a tendencies due to the content of his works. This accusation jeopardized his life and that of his whole family. He did his best to exonerate himself. Being a self-proclaimed Sūfī he even goes as far as to say that "all Sūfī masters (*shayhks*) belong in the *Sunna* outside which domain no one is capable of comprehending this science (Sufism)." See Sa'in al-Din Ibn Turkah, *Nafthat al-maṣdūr-i awwal* in *Chahārdah Risālah-i Farsī Ṣā'in al-Din ibn Turkah Iṣfahānī*, eds. Sayyed 'Ali Mūsavī Bihbahānī and Sayyed Ibrāhīm Dibājī (Tehran: Firdawsī Publishers, 1351 Sh./1972), 175. However, the esoteric teachings of Ibn Turkah can hardly be understood outside Shi'ism. Accordingly, he is claimed by Shi's scholars such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr. See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy from its Origins to the Present* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), 76&116. On the other hand, Leonard Lewisohn has an article on Ibn Turkah in which there is an emphasis on the latter's Sunni devotion. See, Leonard Lewisohn, "The Confessions of Ṣā'in al-Dīn Turkah Iṣfahānī" in *Sufism and Theology*, ed. Ayman Shihadeh (UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

Born around 761/1360 in Iṣfahān into an affluent and educated family, Ibn Turkah received his early education from his older brother and spent his youth travelling to different parts of the Muslim world such as Egypt, Syria, and Ḥijāz (today's Saudi Arabia) seeking knowledge from men of wisdom.[4] At the time when Tīmūr Gūrkānī, famous in English history as Tamerlane, gained control over Iṣfahān, many intellectuals including the Turkah family were forced to move to Samarqand[5]. Ibn Turkah went back to Iṣfahān shortly after Tīmūr's death and started to teach. During his lifetime, he fell in and out of favor with Tīmūr's successors. He was particularly liked by Tīmūr's grandson, Pīr Muhammad, who was appointed the governor of Fārs by his father Shāhrukh, Tīmūr's son and successor. He lived in Shīrāz for some years which were probably the most peaceful period of his life under the Tīmūrids. Later, Ibn Turkah left Shīrāz for Iṣfahān and, supported by the new governor, Mīrzā Iskandar, he became a man of social and political power, which was ironically the beginning of many troubles. Following the rebellion of Mīrzā Iskandar against Shāhrukh and the former's defeat, Ibn Turkah disengaged himself from the court to stay outside this political strife but to no avail. Suspicious of Ibn Turkah's position, the king summoned him two times to Khurāsān to go through a kind of trial. Upon the second trial, Ibn Turkah managed to regain Shāhrukh's trust which even resulted in his appointment as the chief jurist of Yazd. In his biographies it is usually mentioned that at this stage the envious rivals plotted against him on the charge of Sufism and deviation from the Sunni creed.[6] However, it would be closer to fact to say that Ibn Turkah's esoteric beliefs could easily be considered in conflict with the

[4] For a list of Ibn Turkah's teachers and Sufi masters see, Leonard Lewisohn, 63-64.

[5] Samarqand in central Asia was the capital of Timūr's empire which was extended from Turkey to India. Today, it is the second largest city in Uzbekistan. Although Persian has always been the official language in Samarqand, it was united with Iran only at times. Under Tīmūr the population of Samarqand was around 150.000 people.

[6] See Sayyid 'Ali Mūsavī Bihbahānī, "Ahwāl wa Āthār-i Ṣā'in al-Din Turkah Iṣfahānī" in *Collected Papers on Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism*, eds. M. Mohaghegh and H. Landolt (Tehran: McGill University Institute of Islamic Studies Tehran Branch, 1971).

theological 'correctness' which is normally required from a jurist. Moreover, the close association of the Ḥurūfīs with the anti-regime politics of the time must have provided the state with a compelling reason for fearing a man of such tendencies to be anywhere close to political power. The attempted assassination of Shāhrukh in 830/1426 by the rebellious Ḥurūfi, Aḥmad Lur, led to a series of arrests which included Ibn Turkah. He was cross examined, tortured, imprisoned, and forced into exile along with his whole family. But, worst of all was perhaps the ordeal of pleading not guilty to the monarch and praising him for those traits which he did not seem to possess in reality. However, masterfully written as his confessions of orthodoxy were, Ibn Turkah not only managed to exonerate himself of the charges but also enriched his contribution to the spiritual-philosophic tradition in Muslim history of Ideas in general, and that of Persians in particular. He died within a few years of his acquittal.[7]

Before I can explain the influence of Ibn Turkah on the rise of mystical philosophy in Persia, I need to explain some of his major doctrines which consist of Peripatetic, Illuminationist, Ḥurūfi, and Sufi elements. We will also see that like all other Islamic philosophers Ibn Turkah is fully conscious of the theological issues and reveals his stand on them wherever necessary. Although I am not going to deal with the literary aspect of Ibn Turkah's writings, it is worth mentioning that all his works are characterized by the aesthetic consciousness of a man of letters.

[7] There is so far no conclusive evidence for the exact time of Ibn Turkah's death. It is believed to have happened between 830/1427 to 836/1433. For Ibn Turkah's biography see Bihbahānī, 103-105; Lewisohn, 63-65; Ṣā'in al-Dīn 'Ali Ibn Muhammad Turkah Iṣfahānī, *Sharḥi- Naẓm Al-Durr*: *The Exposition of the Ode Ta'īyyah-'i Ibn-i Fāridh*, ed. Akram Jūdī Ni'matī (Tehran: Mīrāth-I Maktūb, 2005).

2. Onto-psychic diversity in unity

Following Ibn'Arabi, Ibn Turkah builds his metaphysical cosmology on the etymological meaning of *wujūd* (Being) as "finding" (*wajada*/*wijdān*) which refers not only to the essential self awareness of beings but also to the potentiality inherent in them as existent things to know the world. Although "being" and "knowledge" are different in the senses that they make to the mind, they are co-extensional. It means that every instance of being is also a referent of knowledge, and that the degree of knowledge corresponds to the degree of being.

This position is built primarily on Ibn Turkah's belief in the reality and primacy of being. He questions the position of Suhrawardi with regard to the latter's view of being as a mere mental consideration (*i'tibār-i 'aqlī*). Ibn Turkah believes that Suhrawardi's mistake lies in his conflation of real being and relative being. Referring to a treatise by Ibn'Arabi titled *Inshā'al-dawā'ir,* Ibn Turkah gives examples for real and relative concepts of being and explains that real being is the realization of things in the world. It is only after coming into being in the sense of realization that we can attribute to a thing relative being or non-being. For example, when we say that there is/exists water in the tap, all we mean by existence is a relation between water and the tap rather than the existence of water per se. [8]

In his commentary on 'Irāqī's *Divine Flashes*,[9] Ibn Turkah explains the genesis of the universe in terms of the dual outcome of Love as the first determination of Being, which considered in itself is beyond all determinations. The dual effect of Love consists of revelation and revealing (*ẓuhūr wa iẓhār*) on one side, cognizance and conveyance (*shu'ūr wa ish'*ār) on the other. Accordingly, everything that comes into being through the power of the

[8] Ayatollah Javādī Āmulī, *Tahrīr-i Tamhīd al-Qawā'id*, 1 vols. (Qom: Markaz-I Nashr-i Asrā', 1387sh. /2008), *283.*

[9] Fahkr al-Dīn 'Irāqī is a famous Persian Sufi poet who was born in 610/1213 near Hamadan in Iran and died in 688/1289. For his life story and spiritual affinities, achievements, and his poetry see Fakhr al-Din 'Irāqī, *Divine Flashes*, trans. William Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).

cosmic love is like a coin with an apparent and a hidden side. While the entire world is the manifestation of the same Reality, it is an onto-psychic diversity in unity. Not only is the world as a whole, but every particular object is characterized by this double-sided quality. Moreover, every side is understood as having a double function in characterizing existent things. According to Ibn Turkah, "…revelation and revealing means appearing and making apparent as we see among sensible objects and lights…and cognizance and conveyance refer to knowing and making known as evident through understanding and speech."[10]

Love is the first determination (*ta'ayyun*) of the Most Hidden that is God in His Exclusive Unity (*aḥadiyyah)*. This is according to a saying which is attributed to the Prophet and is frequently quoted by Sufis. That God said "I was a hidden treasure and loved to be known". Ibn Turkah defines "hidden" as being beyond any kind of diversity. He explains that "what is meant by the hidden and the concealed is not the opposite of the manifest but a kind of concealment that includes the binary opposites of outward/inward such as unity and diversity."[11]This refers to the inclusive unity of God (*wāḥidiyyah*) before the creation of the world. Unity in this sense is what Islamic philosophers and Sufis put in contrast to numerical unity which is our commonsense view of unity in general.[12] God's first determination, encompasses all the opposites within it; hence the attribution of the supreme Isthmus (*barzakh-i a'alā)* to it.

The inclusiveness of the opposites is the key to creation at the level of the world of Command ('*alam-i amr*). It is not identical with the Absolute Being but the manifestation of it. It is Love which includes both the lover and the beloved; the knower and the known; the

[10] Bihbahānī and Dībājī, *Chahārdah Risālah-i Farsī,* 7.
[11] Javādī Amulī, *Tahrīr-i Tamhīd al-Qawāid*, 2 vols. 376.
[12] Unity in this sense is characterized by ontological simplicity in that the whole is never bigger that the parts and unity is essential to the reality of that to which it is attributed.

outward and the inward. Being the first determination of the Most Hidden Reality, there is a level of diversity therein which is only ideal (*ma'nāī)* as a result of the diversity of Divine Names within the unity of their existence. It is like the manifestation of one and the same face in different mirrors.

At the level of the first determination or the Most Noble Emanation (*fayḍ-i aqdas*), the Names or Fixed Ideas (*a'yān-i thābitah*) are characterized by the inwardness of being. While ontologically they form one unitary whole, epistemologically they are only meanings in the knowledge of God of His essence. However, as Ibn Turkah explains, this is a kind of knowledge wherein "ontic simplicity overcomes semantic compositionality"[13]. This is the highest and most noble rank of knowledge in which the Names form a unity both extensionally (*miṣdāqan*) and intentionally (*mafhūman*). In other words, though the Divine Essence includes all the Names as identical with Him, during the first determination God's knowledge is only knowledge of Essence rather than of the diversity of Names and Ideas. And, though the Names exist at this stage, they exist as hidden or in Ibn'Arabi's word, as "non-existent entities"[14]. As for God, He is not completely hidden since He is known to Himself; hence His first determination. Drawing on an analogy of breathing, Ibn Turkah describes the first determination as the breath which is locked in the chest before exhaling.

He carries on with the same analogy to explain the second determination of Divine Reality. The second determination is like breath which is vented out through multiple venues of utterance. This analogy is rooted in Ibn'Arabi's description of the second determination as "the Breath of the merciful" (*nafas-i raḥmānī*). At this stage, God has knowledge of the diversity of the Names which are His attributes. Ontologically, this diversity is still identical

[13] Bihbahānī and Dībājī, *Chahārdah Risālah-i Farsī*, 11.
[14] See William C. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God* (New York: State University of New York Press), 39-42.

with the unity of Divine essence but as objects of God's knowledge they are semantically diverse. This is the level of the Noble Emanation (*fayḍ-i muqaddas*) through which the ideal existence of the Ideas becomes real and the world of outward multiplicity is created. Ibn Turkah describes this stage as "voiced" (*nāṭiq*) in contrast to the previous which is "voiceless" (*ṣāmit*).[15] The first and the second determinations are respectively the inward and outward faces of the same reality. Far from being independent of each other, the two aspects form one unitary whole. This is the key to creation as the manifestation of God.

The inward/outward characterization of the created world is extended by Ibn Turkah to all the descending levels of emanation. As mentioned above, everything in the world is like a coin with outward and inward sides. While the outward stands for the existence of a thing, the inward is the awareness of that existence. Just as the first manifestation of God through the Most Noble Emanation has an inward meaning which is His knowledge of Essence, every particle of His creation not only exists but has a level of knowledge as well as the potentiality to convey it.

3. From the Word to the World and Vice Versa

Knowledge for Ibn Turkah consists of cognizance and conveyance. The world is created to be decoded and man is appointed in the eternity to understand, interpret and reveal the symbolic meanings of the world of creation.[16] The identification of Divine creation with the Word of God is rooted in the New Testament, the Gospel of John. As for Islam, the very

[15] Ibid, 14.

[16] This appointment is not equally shared by all humanity. It depends on a hierarchy on top of which stand the prophets and the Friends of God. In Hurūfī history, Fazlallah Astarabādī (d.1394) claimed to be the final messenger of God who had the divine gift of interpretation. For a brief discussion of Hurūfī ideas and the role of Astarabādī as the movement's founder see Shahzad Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabādī and the Hurūfīs* (England: Oneworld Publications, 2005); For the Sufi origins of Hurūfī thought see Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (USA: the University of North Carolina Press Chapel Hill, 1975), 411-25.

belief in the Quran as the Word of God and the resulting consecration of the Holy Book both as a spiritual and a physical object is a ground upon which signs with a symbolic or semantic content, most importantly words and letters could be dignified above their surface layer. Thus the Hurūfī metaphysics, which interprets natural, human, and linguistic phenomena in terms of a unitary divine supra-language, is not limited to an esoteric-sectarian movement in Muslim history. In the case of Ibn Turkah, though he was unjustly associated with the political side of Hurūfism and unjustly punished for that, it is rather the metaphysical and spiritual aspects of this school that matters.

Given that knowledge and being are two sides of the coin of creation, and knowledge is something which is essentially meant to belong to a knower, the whole creation should be the object of knowledge for knowing subjects just like in the eternity it is the object of Divine knowledge in a state of togetherness. Moreover, the unity of beings with the One Being requires that every phenomenon in the world below should stand in a semantic relation with the Divine realm. However, due to the apparent separation of the mundane from the spiritual, this semantic relation is not out there in the open. Hurūfī metaphysics is an attempt to decode, decipher, and interpret the symbols of creation as residing in all observable phenomena among which the constituents of language are the most revealing. To alter the Biblical verse, the Word was there in the beginning and so there are still words to be understood in their relation to the Divine.

Ibn Turkah's Hurūfī ideas are noticeable in almost all his writings but only a few treatises have been devoted completely to this subject.[17] For Ibn Turkah, linguistic entities such as

[17] For his detailed explanation of the science of letters and numbers, Ibn Turkah usually refers his readers to a treatise which he titles *al-Mafāḥiṣ*. See Ṣā'in al-Din Ibn Turkah Iṣfahānī, *al-Mafāḥiṣ*, MS Mar'ashī Najafī Library (Qom) no 3543.

letters and words, in both their verbal and written forms, signify extra-mental beings. Letters (*ḥurūf*) were created in the eternity and bestowed by the messengers of God to humans.[18] In other words, the constituents of language are the epistemic counterparts of ontological realities. Letters in their verbal and written forms are primordial in the sense that they are directly created by God, and mankind is only a passive recipient with regard to them. However, as these primordial realities descend from their divine position, they are used by man in the making of his conceptual and linguistic systems. That is the reason why there is a diversity of languages, and naming objects is an arbitrary action in which human will, though contextualized within cultural and historical situations, is an important factor.[19]

The metaphysical connection is not apparent at the level of everyday usage of language, hence the importance of metaphors for Ibn Turkah. In his *Exposition on the Ḥadith of Dot* (*Sharh-i ḥadith-i Nuqṭah*) he says in a couplet that:

Words said in the language of the heart

Are translated by the expressions of the heart.[20]

In order to go beyond the everyday meaning of words, we need to consider them as metaphors that require interpretation. But, the power to see words in their metaphysical relations is not possessed by everyone. Along with the hierarchy of knowledge there is a hierarchy of interpreters. The higher one ascends on the ladder of spirituality, the better he can

[18] Ḥurufism is rooted in the mystical approach to words based on this verse in the Holy Quran that "He [Allah] taught Adam the names, all of them". (2:31) Based on the knowledge of Names, Ibn'Arabi explains the position of the prophets and justifies the place of Prophet Muhammad as above all the rest. However, Ḥurūfīs are different from Ibn'Arabi. Ibn'Arabi interprets the Names as the manifestations of Divine Essence in the form of knowledge, so his approach is epistemic. But, Ḥurūfi approach is emphatically linguistic, and they see letters as having real metaphysical relations. For a brief exposition of Ḥurūfi tradition see Jean Canteins, "The Hidden Sciences in Islam" "Theology, Philosophy, and Spirituality" in *Islamic Spirituality*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991) 447-469.

[19] Nasrollah Hekmat, "Falsafa-yi tamthīl dar naẓar-i Ibn Turkah" *Paz̲ūheshnāma-yi ulūm-i insānī*, 49 (1385 sh.): 183-94.

[20] Ali Farrukh, "Sā'in al-Din Ibn Turkah, sharh-i ḥadīth-i nuqṭah" *Mirāth-i Ḥadīth-i Shi'a*, 1 (1388 sh.): 173-90.

decipher the real meaning of words which is beyond time and space. In Ibn Turkah's hierarchical classification of lives, those who possess the esoteric knowledge of letters are always on top, only one level below the Prophet's descendents.[21]As an example for how these people of esoteric knowledge of linguistic forms interpret words, Ibn Turkah mentions the Quranic verse "The hour is close and the moon is cleft in two" (54:1). He explains that the cleaving of the moon stands for the coming forth of the primordial meaning out of the apparent written form".[22] By the same hermeneutical power which is exerted without recourse to the tool of logic and discursive thought, these people can discover the truths of creation. As cognizance (*shu'ūr*) is correlated with conveyance (*ish'ār*), the wise man needs to express the esoteric truth in exoteric language. However, for Ibn Turkah, conveyance at this level is only possible through the intermediary of figurative speech.[23] He mentions Ibn'Arabi's bezel imagery as an example. In order to describe the heart of the Perfect Man (*insān-i kāmil*), Ibn'Arabi draws on the image of the bezel on a ring (*faṣṣ*). According to Ibn Turkah, the ground of similarity is the circular shape of the bezel, its consistence of two opposite semi-spheres, its position as surrounded by other jewels, and the marks on it which reveal the very purpose of its being as the manifestation of God in His Grand Name (*al-ism al-'aẓam*). Similarly, the heart of the Perfect Man is not only the metaphysical togetherness of all beings without whom the world would perish, but also the sum of all knowledge and the revealer of the Divine message.[24]

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[21] The hierarchy of lives based on the knowledge of truth appears in *Treatise on Cleaving the Moon* (*Risāla-yi shaqq al-qamar wa-sā'at*) in Bihbahānī and Dībājī, *Chahārdah Risālah-i Farsī*, 101-117. Also see Lewisohn, "The Confessions of Ṣā'in al-Dīn Turkah Iṣfahānī", 75-6.

[22] Bihbahānī and Dībājī, *Chahārdah Risālah-i Farsī*, 111.

[23] For the necessity of symbolic interpretation see *the Ode Ta'īyyah-'i Ibn-i Fāridh* in Akram Jūdī Ni'matī, 12-13.

[24] Ibn Turkah, *Sharh-i Fusūs al-Hikam*, Muhsin Bīdārfar, ed. (Qom: Bīdār Publications, 1378 sh.) 62-63. "Heart" is a technical term in mysticism. It is described as a state of ontological equilibrium, the recipient of revelation, and the Preserved Tablet (*lawḥ-i maḥfūẓ*). As for its relation with the Perfect man, it stands for the equilibrium of unity and diversity, necessity and contingency, Creativity and Created-ness, and Lordship and Servant-hood. It is also the

4. Cosmic Capacity

The theory of cosmic capacity (*isti'dād* or *qābiliyyat*) is a key issue in Ibn'Arabi's mysticism. According to this theory, everything in the world has a certain natural capacity inherent in its eternal Idea (*'yn-i thābitah*). What existential properties the creatures receive from the Creator and what He knows and demands of them are pre-destined by their cosmic capacity. Since the Creator's Providence and His knowledge of the world are based on the Ideas of things which are eternally there at the level of Inclusive Unity before things come into being, the question of whether humans are free to choose between good and evil is a big challenge for Ibn'Arabi and those of his philosophically-minded followers who mean to reconcile the cosmic predestination with human will and responsibility according to the scripture and demanded by reason.[25]

In his *Treatise on the Meaning of Capacity* (*risālah dar ma'nā-yi qābiliyyat*) Ibn Turkah refers to his mystic predecessors in order to reconcile the cosmic capacity of the world with man's free will. In discussing this issue, he remains faithful to Ibn'Arabi and gains additional support from mystics including the legendary figures before Ibn'Arabi such as Fuḍayl ibn 'Ayyāḍ and Manṣūr-i Hallāj, and those who appeared in his wake like Mulavī and Aṭṭār. These heroes of quest for human perfection "did their best to unravel this mystery…in a secret

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manifestation of the Most Grand Name of God (*al-ism al-a'aẓam*) which is the togetherness of all His Names. For Ibn Turkah's detailed discussion on the meaning of the Perfect Man see Javādī Amulī, *Tahrīr-i Tamhīd al-Qawāid,* 3 vols. 13-91.

[25] Ibn 'Arabi's theory of cosmic capacity and his attempts to solve the problem of freewill appear both in *the Meccan Revelations* (*Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah*) and *the Bezels of Wisdom* (*al-Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*). For a detailed discussion of predestination (*qadr*) see William Chittick, *The self-disclosure of God: principles of Ibn al-'Arabī's cosmology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

language [of metaphors]".[26] Drawing on mystical teachings, Ibn Turkah argues that there is a middle way between the two extremes that he refers to as Ash'ari rejection of free will and Mu'tazili denial of predestination.[27] He builds his argument on two premises. First is the unity of all the Forms in the inclusiveness of the Most Noble Emanation (*fayḍ-i aqdas*). Secondly, the correlation of recipient/agent (*qābil wa fā'il*) during the Noble Emanation (*fayḍ-i muqaddas*). With regard to the second premise, Ibn Turkah explains that "the Lord (*rabb)* to whom all belongs (*mālik*) cannot be characterized by His Lordship unless the servant becomes manifest in his essential property of servant-hood."[28]The correlation is between the capacity of the creature which is essential to it, and the Divine Agent's bestowal which is known as the Breath of the merciful for Sufis and being for philosophers. God knows the creatures based on "the language of their capacity", and bestows being on them in accordance with it.

As for the first premise, prior to the correlation between the recipient and the agent there is only the pure unity of Forms within God's knowledge of His Essence. In Ibn Turkah's words, at this stage "the recipient and its origin are together in the sanctuary of oneness wherein the veil of multiplicity and diversity will not come in between."[29]

There is a third premise implied in his argument that predestination opposes free will only if we are determined by a force exterior to our essence. Our actions are only determined by our own capacity which is essential to us. Moreover, as we see in the second premise, this capacity is not only correlated with the Emanating Agent in the second emanation, but in unity with Him during the first. Thus, Ibn Turkah concludes that cosmic capacity is the key to

[26] Bihbahānī and Dībājī, *Chahārdah Risālah-i Farsī*, 272.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid, 274.

the justification of a type of freewill which makes sense only if we look at the world as the manifestation of one Absolute Reality into the mirror of many relational ones.[30]

5. From the fields of philosophy to the heights of gnosis

There is one important issue over which Ibn Turkah clearly diverges from Ibn'Arabi. Whereas Ibn'Arabi looks down upon philosophy and will not even mention any Islamic philosopher by the name in any of his works, Ibn Turkah not only attests to the role of reason as crucial in preparing the mind for reaching the truth, but considers a special place for philosophers in the hierarchy of knowledge. Moreover, it is clear from his works that he has a good command of Islamic philosophy both in the peripatetic and Illuminationist traditions. Ibn Turkah's writings are replete with philosophical concepts, arguments, and terminology. However, for him reason is only necessary not sufficient. The journey of the soul in quest of truth goes through the illuminated fields of philosophy but ends up on the heights of gnosis.

Ibn Turkah maintains that the Sufi path (*ṭariq al-taṣwwuf*) and the path of speculation (*ṭariq al-naẓar*) are not in opposition and can both lead to truth. In order to prove this claim, he replies to the objections made by either camp against the other. First he deals with those among philosophers who criticize the Sufi path based on the conditionality of its methodology. The objection, as Ibn Turkah reports, is that a Sufi has to remove hurdles of physical distractions so his heart can prepare for receiving truths from above. Ibn Turkah explains that this condition should also be fulfilled in the path of speculation. Philosophers need to be concentrated on the evident premises on which their deductions are built. The clarity of intellectual perception and the soundness of arguments would be jeopardized by

[30] From a theological point of view, Ibn Turkah diverges from the three dominant positions on freewill as proposed by Mu'tazili, Ash'ari, and Shi'a theologians.

illusions and fallacies unless the mind is totally focused on the premises, and watchful of the logical relations. The same things that cause distractions for a Sufi can distract the minds of philosophers. Ibn Turkah refers to physical imbalances such as overeating and hunger, oversleeping and insomnia. Philosophers and Sufis should equally be watchful of balance in their minds and lifestyles since speculation and intuition are not possible without clarity and discipline. [31]

On the other hand, reason is considered as crippled by most Sufis. Although Ibn Turkah regards the spiritual path as superior to that of the intellect, he saves the latter a crucial role on the way towards truth. Reason may not reach the heights that the heart does, but it can clear the way for it. A mind which is free from fallacies and with the help of logical tools curbs the disturbances caused by illusions is inclined towards the truth. This intellectual inclination has a great persuasive power in the quest of the soul. Ibn Turkah quotes from *Qawā'id al-tawḥīd* by Abū Ḥāmid Muhammad Isfaḥānī that,

> The preparation of the sacred locus (*al-maḥall al-qudsī*) via the speculative and the rousing movements is no obstacle; it is very useful in revealing all the knowledge and the judgment which is imprisoned therein, as the sacred faculty of the mind (*al-quwwat al-qudsiyya*) overpowers the bodily faculties, and preserves its dominance over the faculty of estimation (*wahm)* and imagination (*mutakhayyalah*).[32]

The Sufi critics of philosophy argue against its worthiness also based on the fallibility of sense perception which is the preliminary source of our theoretical knowledge. In response to this objection, Ibn Turkah tries to show that the efficient cause (*'illat-i fā'ilī*) of both intuitive

[31] Javādī Amulī, *Tahrīr-i Tamhīd al-qawā'id,* 3 vols. 237-243.
[32] Ibid, 239.

and speculative sciences is God. In both forms of knowledge the senses merely play the role of recipient (*qābil*) and occasion (*mawqi'*). It is true that senses are conditioned and fallible, but this will not impair the unconditional and perfect state of the efficient cause. Ibn Turkah agrees with Fārābī and Ibn Sina that although sense perception is a necessary condition for knowledge formation, the rational soul is finally dependent on the immaterial Giver of Forms (*wāhib al-ṣuwwar*) which as Divine Knowledge is identical with God Himself. It is to the same source that the Sufis get connected for seeing the truth. As for the body, it would be a mistake to look down upon it as a mere hurdle in the quest for truth. Ibn Turkah maintains that if the body did not have any preparatory function with regard to the journey of the soul, it would not have been conjoined with the latter in the first place.[33]

Nevertheless, in some particular cases of conflict between philosophical doctrines and those in mysticism, Ibn Turkah draws on his knowledge of both fields and his command of logic to argue in favour of the latter. His target is usually Peripatetic philosophy rather than Illuminationism, which he finds closer to truth. For example, he devotes a lengthy and philosophically technical discussion to arguing against some of the pivotal positions of the Peripatetic philosophers on the Reality of the Necessary Being (*ḥaqīqat al-wājib al-wujūd*) and their formulization of the distinction between the Necessary and the contingent, which is offered in rejection of Sufis on the same issue.[34] Although his criticism of the Peripatetic philosophers on this issue is meant to finally strengthen the position of the Sufis, he would not simply fall back on the complacent attitude of mysticism based on experiential knowledge; He rather goes through a detailed conceptual analysis and elaborate logical arguments to show that the peripatetic critique cannot easily be ignored, and any reply to it must be logically

[33] Ibid, 260-61.
[34] Ibid, 2 vols., 19-70

structured. He uses the peripatetic tools and terminology in order to reply to the objections made against it. This attempt may sound strange to the modern readers of Ibn Turkah, but what he intends to do is to gain more praise for overpowering a strong and worthy rival and in so doing reinforce the mystic's stand.

However, Ibn Turkah's response to philosophy is not always shaped by his intellectual or mystical concerns. Upon occasions when he is accused of heretical views, he condemns those claims of reason that are in conflict with either the literal meaning of the scripture or the Sunni dogmas of the day. In *Treatise on the Dogmas* (*risāla-yi 'itiqādāt*) where he struggles to exonerate himself of unorthodox beliefs, he points to some key issues in both Peripatetic philosophy and Mu'tazili theology. Among these issues are the peripatetic theory of emanation and the impossibility of bodily resurrection. With regard to emanation theory, he argues that God in His Creation "has no need for the intervention of another, as some philosophers hold, but created all by Himself."[35] Ibn Sīna's view on the impossibility of bodily resurrection is equally condemned in this treatise. As Ibn Turkah put it, "the domains of existentiation (*ījād*) and annihilation (*i'dām*), and the resurrection of the nonexistent (*i'āda-yi a'dām*) are all under His command."[36]

Ibn Turkah also criticizes the Mu'tazili stand on good and evil, the created-ness of the Quran, intercession (*shafā'at*), and Heaven and Hell.[37] What characterizes his critique of philosophy and theology in this treatise and a few others written under similar conditions is

[35] Bihbahānī and Dībājī, *Chahārdah Risālah-i Farsī*, 226. Ibn Turkah is referring to the neo-platonic-peripatetic theory of creation according to which from the One/Necessary Being spontaneously emanates the first Intellect. The whole world is the necessary outcome of the hierarchical order of the Intellects which grow in diversity down to the level of the last Intellect. The last Intellect, which is number ten in Ibn Sīna, not only is the giver of natural forms, but the creator of matter.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid, 228-9.

that he replaces the logical methodology and language of *al-tamhīd al-qawā'id* by a rhetorical and poetic style which he must have wished to impress his detractors and accusers.

6. Ibn Turkah's impact on mystical philosophy

Mystical philosophy, for which the best representative is Mullā Ṣadrā, is characterized by a synthetic methodology which not only brings together intuition, gnosis, and logic, but also draws on the Quran and *Ḥadīth*. It is that species of philosophy which in the words of Seyyed Hossein Nasr is "philosophy in the land of prophecy". The official start of mystical philosophy coincides with the Shi'a renaissance in the Safavid era. However, the preliminary steps were already taken in the centuries before.

Between Suhrawardi and the establishment of the School of Iṣfahān at the heart of the Safavid era, philosophic activities mostly consist in writing commentaries on the preceding philosophers such as Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi, and debates over their views. Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d.672/1274), Qutb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d.710/1311), Jalāl al-Dīn Dawānī (d.908/1502-3), and the Dashtakī family (9th century), are mainly commentators. Although there are sparkles of original ideas in each of these scholars, none of them generates a ground breaking philosophical system.[38] As for philosophic originality, Ibn Turkah belongs to the same category. Besides he shares with his preceding generation the love of Illuminationist philosophy and passes it on to the next. He is one of the most philosophic figures who establish the Illuminationist reading of Peripatetic philosophy. In comparison, Ibn Turkah is more systematic in synthesizing the philosophical with the mystical and esoteric.

[38] For a concise discussion on this tradition see, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy from its Origin to the Present, Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy* (Albany: State University of new York, 2006) Chapter 10. See also John Cooper, "From al-Tūsī to the School of Iṣfahān" in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, eds. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (UK: Routledge, 1996).

Almost one century ahead of Ibn Turkah, Seyyed Ḥaydar Āmuli (d. after 787/1385) and Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā'ī (d. after 904/1499) introduced and fit Ibn'Arabi into the Shi'a context[39], but it is Ibn Turkah who takes the next step of adapting mysticism with philosophy. It is against this conciliatory background that mystical philosophy comes into being. Two centuries after In Ibn Turkah, his homeland Iṣfahān, becomes the host of Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, famous as Mullā Ṣadrā (d.1050/1640), the founder of transcendental philosophy (*al-ḥikmat al-muta'āliyah*). Mullā Ṣadrā's work is the outcome and culmination of the rebirth of systematic philosophy within the School of Iṣfahān where his intellectual growth took place. It would sound unreasonable to suspect that Ibn Turkah, who lived the biggest part of his life in Iṣfahān, was not remembered and read less than two centuries after his death by the philosophers of the School of Iṣfahān.

By the time Ibn Turkah starts his intellectual-mystical career, there exists a rich reservoir of Persian mystic poetry by poets as great as Rūmī and Shabistarī with whose works Ibn Turkah was completely familiar. Ibn Turkah who is a poet himself extensively uses this poetic legacy of mysticism in his works. Being a philosopher-mystic-poet, Ibn Turkah sets a perfect example for the 'renaissance men" of the school of Iṣfahān. The three early major figures in this school, namely, Mīr Muhammad Bāqir Dāmād (d. 1041/1631), Bahā al-Dīn al-'Āmilī (d. 1030/1621), and Mīr Abulqāsim Fenderesky (d. 1050/1640) are at the same time philosophers, mystics, and poets.[40] They particularly seem to model on Ibn Turkah for expressing some of their philosophic views in verse. So, though they may not have admitted

[39] Henri Corbin discusses the work of Ḥaydar Āmuli in his *En Islam Iranien.* See Henri Corbin *En Islam Iranien, Aspects Spirituels and Philosophiques*, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1972) 149-213.
[40] See Leonard Lewisohn, "Sufism and the school of Iṣfahān" in *The Heritage of Sufism*, 3 vols. eds. Leonard Lewisohn and David Morgan (UK: Oneworld, 1999).

their intellectual debt to Ibn Turkah, the latter is indeed the pioneer of mystical philosophy both in its synthetic approach and many of the pivotal teachings.

That we cannot find a well-deserved mention of him in the major works of this school would not prove otherwise. One conjecture would be that Ibn Turkah's apologetic testimony to the truth of Sunni Islam, when studied in contrast with the Shi'a tendency which inspires many of his esoteric teachings, must have perplexed the Shi'a philosophers of the school of Iṣfahān. Moreover, Ibn Turkah's affinities with Ḥurūfi thought, which, in turn, is said to be related to Ismā'īlī esoterism, must have been very alarming at a time in the History of Persia when Twelver Shi'ism was supposed to be guarded and on guard. There is however a more optimistic way of looking at this silence. In those days, writers did not have the academic obligation of always mentioning the sources of their ideas.

Despite the Safavid silence over Ibn Turkah's work, today we hear very often from the historians of Islamic philosophy that Ibn Turkah was a huge influence on the synthetic approach developed in the School of Iṣfahān through his Illuminationist reading of Peripatetic philosophy,[41] and the philosophical exposition of Ibn'Arabi.[42] Corbin goes even further and believes that Ibn Turkah shares with the school of Iṣfahān the prophetic philosophy whose core is the belief in the Shi'a Imams. He says,

Ṣā'in al-Din's work has managed to draw our attention toward a knowledge of gnosis (*gnoséologie)* which is shared by Avicennism, the oriental theosophy of Suhrawardi, and every branch of Sufism. From this knowledge of gnosis results the idea of a common vocation for a prophet, a

[41] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Theology, Philosophy, and Spirituality" in *Islamic Spirituality*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991) 432.
[42] Ibn Turkah is mentioned as one of the two major influences on the mystic turn of Mullā Ṣadrā next to Dāwūd Qayṣarī. See M.R. Juzi, "Ibn'Arabi and Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī" in *The Heritage of Sufism*, 269.

philosopher, and a mystic; at the heart of prophetic philosophy we discover an Imamology which is either not conscious of itself, or does not dare to reveal its name…[43]

In addition to the synthetic methodology, there are concrete moments in Ibn Turkah's writings that must have helped Mullā Ṣadrā in shaping some of his major doctrines. Ibn Turkah precedes Mullā Ṣadrā in rejecting the Illuminationist primacy of quiddity (*aṣālat-i māhiyyat)*. As explained in section two of this paper, Ibn Turkah objects to Suhrawardi's belief that being is a consideration of the mind, and explains that this mistake is due to the conflation of real being with relative being. In *Tamhīd al-qawā'id,* Ibn Turkah expresses his surprise that for Suhrawardi the concept of being as implied by the statements "Zayd is in the market", "Zayd is in the house", "Zayd is in the mind", and "Zayd is in the real world" all convey the same meaning of existence.[44] He explains that only in the last two statements "is" refers to real existence in the sense of realization (*taḥaqquq*), respectively in the mental and extra-mental worlds. In this sense, there is no ontological gap between existence and that which exists. In response to those who confuse the two meanings of "is" and, as a result, seek to justify the ascription of being to quiddity, Mullā Ṣadrā explains, "In saying that "Zayd exists" we actually mean that "Zayd is Zayd".[45] The belief in *wujūd* as realization, in which the reality of the world consists, is equally shared by Ibn Turkah and Mullā Ṣadrā. It is true that both are indebted to Ibn'Arabi in considering *wujūd* as the foundation of reality, but Ibn Turkah is prior in addressing this issue within a philosophic context.

[43] Corbin, *En Islam Iranien*, 270.

[44] Javādī Āmuli, *Tahrīr-i Tamhīd al-qawā'id*, 1 vols. 284. In Arabic the confusion is easier to escape the eye since in all the above examples the verb "yūjad" is cognate with "wujūd" meaning existence which, unlike "is" in English and *ast* in Farsi, is not a linking verb. Although in the above translation, "Zayd exists in the world" would be closer to the meaning of the original statement, I intentionally use "is" to show the root of the conflation.

[45] Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Mashā'ir* **,** Mullā Mohammad Ja'far Lahījī, ed. (Qom: Bustan-i kitāb, 1376 sh.) 259.

The identity of being with knowledge[46] is another key issue where we find Ibn Turkah and Mullā Ṣadrā in agreement. In Mullā Ṣadrā's transcendental philosophy where being is *the* reality, knowledge has an ontological status and like being is of different existential degrees. One implication of this doctrine is that the diversity of beings within unity (*kathrat fi'l-waḥdat*) should be the diversity of consciousness which unfolds along a hierarchical line from the lowest grade of the 'inanimate' world to the heights of self-conscious immaterial souls and intellects. In several places in *al-Asfār* there are traces of ontological vitalism where even the inanimate objects are said to have a low grade of consciousness. Moreover, everything that exists is not only alive, but has an innate desire for its own perfection, a cosmic state of things which Mullā Ṣadrā interprets as love.[47] This equation of existence with consciousness and love is strongly reminiscent of Ibn Turkah's cosmology.

With regard to mysticism or gnosis, there is also one more characteristic which is shared by Ibn Turkah and the school of Iṣfahān. The shared characteristic is the critique of popular mysticism in favour of the educated type. As John Cooper correctly put it about the Safavid scholars, "[they] were rescuing Sufism from associations with popular practice and reconfirming it as one among the religious sciences."[48] The same attitude is explicit in Ibn Turkah when he criticizes the immature followers of Sufism who misread the complicated words of Sufi masters and end up with heretical beliefs. He says in this regard that "it is quite clear that the words of Masters *mashāyikh* are fathomed only by those who devote years of perseverance on the path of Muhammad's knowledge and tradition (peace be upon him and his

[46] Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Asfār al-arba'a*, 3 vols, ed. Muhammad Riḍā al- Muẓaffar (Beirut: Dār al-Iḥyā',1990) 286&292.
[47] See Ibrahim Kalin, *Knowledge in later Islamic philosophy: Mullā Ṣadrā on Existence, Intellect, and Intuition* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2010) 229-230.
[48] John Cooper, "Some Observations on the Religious Intellectual Milieu of Safavid Iran" in *Intellectual Traditions in Islam*, ed. Farhad Daftari (London and New York: I.B. Tauris and the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2000) 154.

descendents)."[49] Ibn Turkah also warns the masses against being taken in by the false claims of those pseudo-Sufis whose heretic beliefs are the source of corruption.[50]

Thus, we see in Ibn Turkah a well-versed philosopher who is also aware of the limitations of philosophy in dealing alone with crucial questions such as the nature of being and knowledge. He is heir to a long tradition of Islamic philosophy in Persia where intuitive knowledge, gnosis, and prophecy were delicately working together before their collaboration openly came to the foreground in the School of Iṣfahān, and most prominently in the philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā. Ibn Turkah's work is certainly the biggest step in preparing the ground for the restoration of Islamic philosophy in its mystical manifestation.

[49] Bihbahānī and Dībājī, *Chahārdah Risālah-i Farsī*, 176.
[50] Ibid, 176-7.

7. **The Word and the world**

8. **Exoteric prophecy and esoteric guardianship**

9. **Existential capacity and eschatology**

10. **Hierarchy of knowledge**

11. **From Ibn Turkah to the School of Isfahān**

12. **Conclusion (primacy of being, diversity in unity, using quran and hadith, ontic togetherness, synthetic methodology and the development of Mystical philosophy)**