



The Great Chain of Consciousness

FEATURE
ARTICLE

Do All Things Possess Awareness?

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IN AN ESSAY ON MAN, the eighteenth-century British poet Alexander Pope offers a succinct formulation of an age-old philosophical doctrine about reality. This doctrine, which Arthur Lovejoy refers to as the “great chain of being,” maintains that existence is hierarchical and organically linked, structured as it is upon the descending degrees of being. Reality begins with and proceeds from God, the Supreme Being, and ends in the most miniscule and discrete kinds of beings. Each thing in the cosmos, including the cosmos itself, forms a vital link with the other parts of this great chain. In Pope’s words,

Vast chain of being, which from God began,
Natures ethereal, human, angel, man,
Beast, bird, fish, insect! what no eye can see,
No glass can reach! from infinite to thee,
From thee to nothing!—On superior pow’rs
Were we to press, inferior might on ours:
Or in the full creation leave a void,
Where, one step broken, the great scale’s destroy’d:
From nature’s chain whatever link you strike,
Tenth or ten thousandth, breaks the chain alike.¹

Pope did not write *An Essay on Man* to make a philosophical argument about the great chain of being but as a way to rhetorically persuade readers to acknowledge the purposefulness of human life; the relativity of evil; man’s inability to know the ways of God; and ultimately, God’s absolute justice and goodness.

Now, what would a philosophical argument that advances the notion of the great chain of being look like? There are many ways this cosmic picture can be explicated, and the Islamic intellectual tradition provides a sophisticated philosophical exposition that arguably influenced medieval Christian thought through the medium of the Latin scholastic tradition.² This means Pope’s formulation may be indebted to Islamic metaphysics in some fashion.

The term “Islamic metaphysics” characterizes a tradition that seeks to approach “divine matters” (*ilāhiyyāt*) from a variety of intellectual and spiritual vantage points. Muslim metaphysicians have always sought to discern and explain the nature of God, the structure of the cosmos, and the “situation” of the human soul in the cosmos in light of the divine nature in whose image it has been created. In short, Islamic metaphysics can be called “the science of the Real, and the real science.”³

Reality Begins with Existence

The basic starting point of Islamic metaphysics is the given-ness of the situation of existence or being (*wujūd*)—there are things that exist, what we call “existents” (*mawjūdāt*). Now, what is their mode of existence? That is, how do they exist? Have some of them always been there, with other existents coming later? This inquiry leads us to the question of what causes things to exist.

But first, we need to clarify two key terms: “necessary” (*wājib*) and “possible” or “contingent” (*mumkin*). For example, if a person exists, we know that she has come to be in the world through the union of her parents. But if her parents ceased to exist, she would still be alive. This is because her parents are accidental causes, not essential causes, and her continued existence does not depend on the subsistence of her parents; the child’s sustenance is actually dependent on other factors, such as her cells. Her cellular structure, in turn, depends upon molecules, which depend upon atoms, and so on.^A In other words, her existence is in reality necessary through many other layers of simultaneous, sustaining causes.

As should be clear, her existence is not necessary in itself. Rather, it is possible, or contingent, and necessary through another. She could just as well not have existed, but when all the right factors came together, and she came to be, what sustained her was the simultaneous and causal presence of a host of other things.

This is true of all things that exist: each is possible in itself and necessary through other simultaneously existing, sustaining causes. If all things are part of an essentially ordered series of causes, then what is the ultimate cause of this series? It is impossible to have an infinite regress of essential causes because there cannot be *derived* things that exist that themselves are ultimately *underived*. This, then, means there is a cause that is neither possible in itself nor necessary through another; rather, it is necessary in itself and is the cause of all other causes. That which is necessary in itself must exist, and do so without a cause because it is the cause of all other causes. All other things ultimately depend upon it for their existence. This being is referred to as the Necessary Being (*wājib al-wujūd*)—namely God—and is akin to Aristotle’s Unmoved Mover.⁴

In such a cosmic picture, being is the basis of all reality. Each thing that exists is an individual being, and it is also there by virtue of being as such. Even though we know of this ever-present reality of being, because we are also individual beings, we are unable to get at the reality of being as such. As the thirteenth/nineteenth-century philosopher Mullā Hādī Sabziwārī (d. 1289/1873) puts it,

Being’s concept is amongst the best known of things.
Yet its reality lies in utter obscurity.⁵

The Persian philosopher and mystic Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640) adds greater clarity to the problem:

A I am drawing here on an article that, in the context of a proof for the existence of God, gives a superb account of essential causation using the example of a cat: “He who is above all else: The Strongest Argument for the Existence of God,” *Ismaili Gnosis*, last modified March 27, 2014, <https://www.ismailignosis.com/2014/03/27/he-who-is-above-all-else-the-strongest-argument-for-the-existence-of-god/> (accessed March 8, 2017).

The reality of being is the most manifest of all things through presence and unveiling, and its quiddity^B is the most hidden among things conceptually and in its inner reality. Of all things, its concept is the least in need of definition on account of its manifestness and clarity, and on account of its being the most general among all concepts in its comprehensiveness. Its identity is the most particular of all particular things in both its determination and concreteness, since through it all that is concretized is concretized, all that is realized is realized, and all that is determined is determined and particularized. Being is particularized though its own essence, and is determined through itself.⁶

Let us unpack the implications of the texts just cited. The concept (*mafhūm*) of being is among “the best-known of things,” which is to say that the idea of being occurs to all of us naturally or self-evidently because we are mired in it and are ourselves “beings.” Yet seeking to understand its reality (*ḥaqīqah*) is a more difficult task. *Where* is being so that we can define it and trap it into a conceptual grid amenable to analysis? We can point to individual instances of being—that is, to beings, including ourselves—but none of this reveals being as such.

Providing a definition of being requires grounding that definition in the reality of being itself. It is a basic logical axiom that a definition cannot contain the term that it seeks to define. So where is being? It is everywhere, and it is also nowhere because its reality is not completely manifest, or as Sabziwārī puts it, “its reality lies in utter obscurity.”

This is because the word *being* (or existence) is a synonymous term, not a homonymous term. That is, the word “being” can and does apply to any and all things. If we say that a car exists, or a building exists, or God exists, we are using the same word to denote the same meaning in each of these contexts. The contrary view, that the term “being” is homonymous, implies that when we say a car exists, a building exists, or God exists, we actually mean different things, even if the term “exists” is present in each of these statements.

There is a deep connection between being, finding/ consciousness, and bliss: that which is “finds” Itself, and, through this Self-awareness (consciousness), is in bliss.

A potential argument against the idea that *being* is a synonymous term is advanced by Ṣadrā’s opponent Mullā Rajab ‘Alī Tabrīzī (d. 1080/1669). He views such a position as a category mistake: the word *being*, when applied to God, is different from the word *being* when applied to everything other than God. There can be no sharing of the term when it is predicated (or asserted) of God and contingent things.⁷

An answer to this objection is that what we actually witness are modes of being, and *being* in its deployment (*al-wujūd al-munbasit*) has various grades not only when it is predicated of a particular subject, but in its reality itself. In this view, *being* remains a term that has both gradations and actual unity. Thus, it is a term that applies to God and to everything else (synonymy), but in varying degrees of its meaning; the cosmos therefore consists of the various degrees of intensity and diminution of being (modes of being).

^B “Quiddity” translates as *māhiyyah*. In general terms, a thing’s quiddity refers to its essence, or that by virtue of which it is what it is.

Another way of framing this—because being is identified with light by some major schools of Islamic metaphysics—is to say that all things are rays of God’s light, albeit some rays being stronger than others.⁸ The reality of being, however, is identified as the aspect of God that does not manifest Itself, or what is called in Islamic philosophy “absolutely unconditioned being” (*wujūd lā bi-sharṭ maqṣamī*). It is as if the sun as such never manifests itself but only its rays do. Another term for being in its state of non-manifestation is “essence of exclusive oneness” (*al-dhāt al-aḥadiyyah*).⁹ Such notions explicitly ensure that this kind of metaphysics never amounts to a form of pantheism, despite the concerns of some theologians.¹⁰ Furthermore, because the order of time, change, and causation is only related to being when It manifests, change is never introduced into the divine nature. As the sage Maḥmūd Shabistārī (d. 740/1339) puts it in his Persian metaphysical poem *The Rosegarden of Mystery* (*Gulshan-i rāz*),

Since God’s Light neither moves nor transforms,
It is not affected by alteration and change.¹¹

Where Existence and Consciousness Meet

Another aspect of the term *wujūd*, which we have been translating as “existence” and “being,” is that from the root of this word we get terms such as “finding/consciousness” (*wij-dān*) and “joy” or “bliss” (*wajd*). This is why Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) defines *wujūd* as “finding God in ecstasy.”¹² We can therefore argue that there is a deep connection between being, finding/consciousness, and bliss: that which is “finds” Itself, and, through this Self-awareness (consciousness), is in bliss.¹³ Some important understandings about reality emerge from this argument: one is that the cosmos is the theater of God’s manifestation and displays the different modes of being in which God sees Himself objectively rather than purely subjectively.^c

Another implication of this linguistic relationship is that all things in existence—all modes of being—are also modes of consciousness, bliss, awareness, and knowledge,¹⁴ which gives us a cosmic picture that is concrete and palpable. If all things are modes of God’s consciousness—while God is pure consciousness—it means that even apparently inanimate things are thus aware in varying degrees.¹⁵ This explains why Afḍal al-Dīn Kāshānī (d. 606/1210) links existence with awareness when he says, “The seed of existence is awareness, and its fruit is also awareness.”¹⁶

Such a perspective allows us to conceive of what we might call the *great chain of consciousness*, which implies a more fluid conception of the world order for theists. As the sole basis of reality, consciousness is fundamentally a dynamic principle: the entire cosmos and its contents are nothing but the flow of consciousness and its individuation on both vertical and horizontal planes of existence. The reality of things is precisely accorded to them by virtue of how much consciousness they manifest—that is, how intense they are on the scale of consciousness. Thus, things as modes of consciousness are so on account of the graded nature of consciousness and not for any reason within themselves. The great chain of consciousness has an explanatory power that is at once simple and compelling: it accounts for

^c As the supreme Subject, God is not bound by any limitations—one aspect of His All-Possibility is thus “self-negation,” which implies manifestation and objectivization. See Rustom, “Philosophical Sufism,” 406ff.

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how and why there are different kinds of conscious agents in general, as well as the phenomenon of consciousness in particular. Naturalism or scientific materialism simply cannot do this because they reduce nature—including consciousness—to only material things, and are thus unable to adequately account for the presence of any conscious agents in the cosmos.¹⁷

The great chain of consciousness allows us to understand why many Muslim metaphysicians have seen the universe and all of its contents as alive. The Qur'an¹⁸ itself is replete with verses that

indicate the animate nature of seemingly inanimate things, both in this life and the afterlife. Consider, for example, the following verses with respect to the present life:

And unto God prostrates whosoever is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly, as do their shadows in the morning and the evening (Qur'an 13:15); The seven heavens, and the earth, and whosoever is in them glorify Him. And there is no thing, save that it hymns His praise, though you do not understand their praise. Truly He is Clement, Forgiving (Qur'an 17:44); Whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth glorifies God, and He is the Mighty, the Wise (Qur'an 57:1).¹⁹

The prostration and glorification in question are not just metaphors; rather, they refer to self-conscious actions. Concerning the afterlife and the manner in which seemingly inanimate things are in fact animate, consider these passages:

On the day their tongues, their hands, and their feet bear witness against them as to that which they used to do (Qur'an 24:24);²⁰ their ears, their eyes, and their skins will bear witness against them for that which they used to do. They will say to their skins, "Why did you bear witness against us?" They will reply, "God, Who makes all things speak, made us speak. He created you the first time, and unto Him shall you be returned. You did not seek to conceal, lest your ears, your eyes, and your skins bear witness against you. But you thought that God knew not much of that which you did" (Qur'an 41:20–22).

In the last verse, God causes the skins that testify against human beings in the afterlife to speak. The verbal form for causing this speech, *anṭaqa*, comes from an Arabic root that refers not just to speech but also rational articulation, hence the intimate relationship between speech and rationality. This is why in Arabic the science of logic is called *manṭiq*,²¹ and the standard definition of man is that he is a "rational animal" (*ḥayawān nāṭiq*; literally, a "speaking animal").

The Qur'an, and by extension the hadith, speak of living, conscious "worlds," and there is a longstanding tradition in Islamic metaphysics that supports this view. It is somewhat surprising, however, that even a philosopher such as Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274), a strict Peripatetic whose philosophy of nature should not support such a view, argues for the conscious behavior of natural agents or inanimate things.^D

^D An extended discussion of al-Ṭūsī's position can be found in Rustom, "The End of Islamic Philosophy: A Poem and Commentary," in *A Festschrift for Seyyed Hossein Nasr* [working title], ed. Ali

Şadrā, as one would expect, finds al-Ṭūsī’s position perfectly reasonable²² because Şadrā’s understanding of conscious natural agents is informed by his dynamic metaphysics. Yet there are other views²³ outside the Islamic metaphysical tradition that envision inanimate things having consciousness in some form or another. In Western thought, for example, the idea that matter may have some degree of thought has been a topic of debate for at least three centuries, beginning with a suggestion by John Locke in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.²⁴

Finding Consciousness in Contemporary Thought

In a recent essay, analytic philosopher Philip Goff argues²⁵ that materialist conceptions of matter can tell us a great deal about what matter can do—but they have nothing to say about its intrinsic nature. So whether an inanimate thing has an intrinsic nature, experiences, and some kind of consciousness is not within the purview of physics. But we now know, for example, that organisms in the human brain are themselves inherently experiencing subjects. This leads Goff to argue that panpsychism, or the pervasiveness of consciousness, may be the single explanatory fact that unites our seemingly disparate parts of reality because it extends consciousness beyond the organisms in the brain to all other seemingly “inert” forms of matter.

Goff’s defense of panpsychism is somewhat akin to al-Ṭūsī’s position about consciousness in natural agents and also shares some similarities with quantum theory. However, his position remains deeply entrenched in a philosophical worldview indebted to Bertrand Russell’s (d. 1970) view that things are one kind of substance that is neither only physical nor only mental.²⁶ As such, there can be no talk of a hierarchically graded and conscious universe. Some interpretations of quantum theory, on the other hand, offer a much more compelling account than panpsychism, setting forth a blinding set of observations concerning the manner in which awareness and consciousness inform each and every entity that exists. Here, consciousness is seen as an intrinsic phenomenon because the observed outcomes of quantum experiments vary, thereby relativizing our conceptions of space, time, and matter—the very things we take for granted as constitutive of the infrastructure of the cosmic order.²⁷

Despite the interesting findings of quantum theory and its deep resonances with Islamic metaphysics regarding consciousness and in other cosmological domains, some fundamental limitations are inherent to its worldview.

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Lakhani (Vancouver: Sacred Web Publishing, forthcoming). Al-Ṭūsī puts forth his argument in his commentary on Ibn Sīnā’s (d. 428/1037) *Allusions and Admonitions (al-Ishārāt wa al-tanbīhāt)*, wherein he responds to the criticisms raised against Ibn Sīnā by the great philosopher and theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) in his commentary on the same text. For helpful introductions to the structure and content of both of these commentaries, see Ayman Shihadeh, “Al-Rāzī’s (d. 1210) Commentary on Avicenna’s *Pointers: The Confluence of Exegesis and Aporetics*,” and Jon McGinnis, “Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274), *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Khaled El-Rouayheb and Sabine Schmidtke (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 296–325 (Shihadeh) and 326–47 (McGinnis).



RING NEBULA IN THE CONSTELLATION LYRA

metaphysics regarding consciousness and in other cosmological domains,²⁸ some fundamental limitations are inherent to its worldview. Quantum theory does not present us with a stable and consistent picture of the world,²⁹ and it remains largely inaccessible except to a handful of specialists, despite efforts to popularize it. Quantum theory is also based on a physical conception of nature and reality, and as such is unable to escape the materialist framework within which its entire outlook is implicated.³⁰ Thus, some interpretations of quantum theory might suggest how all things are alive and how there are arguably no sharp distinctions between subject and object. Yet this can only be demonstrated through empirical science, which is based on a worldview in which subject and object are seen as distinct.^E Islamic metaphysics, on the other hand, provides through the great chain of consciousness a more accessible explanation because it works with basic insights common to all human beings, and does not proceed along scientific lines.

That many if not most Muslim metaphysicians view all things, even seemingly inanimate ones, as alive should be taken quite literally. That is to say that every element in the cosmos, from stones to plants and everything in between, are living beings, the same as are

^E The most sustained presentation of this point is in Smith, *The Quantum Enigma*. He consequently attempts to rescue the findings of quantum theory by extricating its fundamental insights from the scientism in which it is mired, grounding it instead in traditional (largely Thomistic) metaphysics.

animals.^F Everything that is part of the great chain of consciousness is an alive, aware, and conscious agent. Ibn ʿArabī offers a very clear explanation of this point:

The name Alive [*al-ḥayy*] is an essential name of God—glory be to Him! Therefore, nothing can emerge from Him but living things. Hence, all of the cosmos is alive, for indeed the nonexistence of life, or the existence in the cosmos of an existent thing that is not alive, has no divine support, whereas every contingent thing must have a support. So, what you consider to be inanimate is in fact alive.³¹

Consciousness is the root of all things, and pervades all of reality. The more real a thing is, the more consciousness it has. God, who is Supreme Consciousness, is the most real, whereas beings lower than God have a share of consciousness commensurate to their cosmic rank and level. A conscious person is therefore more conscious than a tree, but a tree is more conscious than a rock. This is tantamount to saying that since God is absolute awareness and life, all else derives its relative awareness and life from Him.

This has some important implications vis-à-vis the point of life's origin (*mabda'*) and the point of its return (*ma'ād*).³² The underlying consciousness of things proceeds from pure life and consciousness and is successively stratified into lower forms of consciousness until "rock bottom" is reached. When this happens, the disparate forms of consciousness begin their upward ascent to the higher realms of consciousness from which they emerged. This is when seemingly inanimate objects display their sophistication as living, conscious beings. As William Chittick explains:

In describing the trajectory of the originating and centrifugal movement, the Muslim thinkers insist that the manifestation of life begins in the fullness of unified awareness and consciousness. As this living and aware light emerges from its Source, its blinding radiance is diminished and diversified. When it becomes sufficiently dim, it appears as various realms that allow for diverse sorts of creaturely perception. The lower reaches of the descent are commonly called "heaven," "earth," and the "elements." At the lowest point, the flow of life and light reverses direction.

In the descending movement from the Origin, life remains invisible and traceless, first in the spiritual realm, then in the celestial realm, and then in the four elements, which do not exist as such in time and space. In the returning movement, the combination of the four elements gives rise to the visible and temporal realm of inanimate things, plants, and animals, and the traces of life begin to appear in the indefinite diversity of perceptible forms. The apparently inanimate world turns out to be a seedbed in which the outward forms of life sprout and grow.³³

Consciousness as a Path to God

The fundamental insights to be drawn from the great chain of consciousness can help us solve a number of pressing contemporary problems. For example, we can engage the envi-

^F It should be noted that, outside the perspective expounded in this article, one can argue in favor of the consciousness of non-rational animals on the sole grounds of their sentient animality. One of the implications of such a position is that they do not survive in any way after their bodily deaths. See Edward Feser, "David Bentley Hart Jumps the Shark: Why Animals Don't Go to Heaven," *Public Discourse* (April 8, 2015), <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/04/14777/>. For an argument in favor of the posthumous states of all conscious entities, see Rustom, *Islamic Metaphysics*, chap. 3.

ronmental crisis and go beyond the usual legal, economic, and social spheres; we can understand people as conscious beings who are encouraged to protect other conscious beings placed in their trust.³⁴ If, for example, we believe a tree has consciousness, not just biological life, and that it participates in the same awareness, being, life, and consciousness as humans, we would likely feel more responsible about our custodianship over it.³⁵

The great chain of consciousness allows us to discern the multiple orders of consciousness that result from the manifestation of the Supreme Consciousness. This can lead to a gradual awakening in an individual to not only the reality of the abstract concept of being, but also to the concrete and all-pervading reality of consciousness. With this realization, one can tie the seemingly disparate orders of reality together, seeing them as so many manifestations of the One Consciousness, whose beautiful Face remains hidden behind the tresses of its modes of manifestation (i.e., the myriad forms of individual consciousness).³⁶

Through much study, a good deal of help, self-purification (*tazkiyah*), and the invocation and remembrance of God (*dhikr*),³⁷ the bird of the soul can take flight, intensifying in consciousness along the way, and thereby becoming more real and aware. Here, obtaining self-knowledge and remembering God are paramount, as they help engender heightened awareness of the presence of God and of one's true nature. For some of the great Muslim metaphysicians, such as Mullā Ṣadrā, individuals are only as "real" as their self-knowledge and remembrance of God, which results in their awareness of God and hence God's "awareness" and remembrance of them:

Some interpretations of quantum theory [offer] a blinding set of observations concerning the manner in which awareness and consciousness inform each and every entity in existence.

Since forgetfulness of God is the cause of forgetfulness of self, remembering the self will necessitate God's remembering the self, and God's remembering the self will itself necessitate the self's remembering itself: *Remember Me and I will remember you* (Q 2:152). God's remembering the self is identical with the self's existence, since God's knowledge is presential (*ḥuḍūrī*) with all things. Thus, he who does not have knowledge of self, his self does not have existence, since the self's existence is identical with light, presence, and awareness (*shu'ūr*).³⁸

Continuing its flight upward, the bird of the soul eventually exposes itself to the possibility of lifting its own partial consciousness from the cosmic scene as a seemingly other, knowing agent in order to behold the reality of Consciousness itself. It is to this that Ḥāfiz (d. 792/1390) alludes when he draws on another synonym for consciousness in texts of Islamic metaphysics, namely love. He offers sound advice for all conscious beings and lovers, wherever they may be along the journey back to their Beloved:

Between the lover and Beloved there is no barrier.
Ḥāfiz, you yourself are the veil. So lift what stands in between!³⁹



Endnotes

- 1 Alexander Pope, excerpt from *An Essay on Man* cited in Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 60.
- 2 For the significant impact of Islamic philosophy upon the medieval Latin world, see Dag Nikolaus Hasse, “Influence of Arabic and Islamic Philosophy on the Latin West,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Zalta, last modified March 18, 2014, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/arabic-islamic-influence> (accessed March 29, 2017).
- 3 For this working definition of Islamic metaphysics, see Mohammed Rustom, *Islamic Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction* (London: Oneworld, forthcoming), chap. 1.
- 4 See Aristotle, *Physics* 8 (trans. R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye) and *Metaphysics* 12.7 (trans. W. D. Ross) in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).
- 5 Mullā Hādī Sabziwārī, *Sharḥ-i Manzūma*, ed. Mehdi Mohaghegh and Toshihiko Izutsu (Tehran: McGill University Institute of Islamic Studies, 1969), 4. Unless otherwise stated, translations are my own.
- 6 Mullā Ṣadrā, *The Book of Metaphysical Penetrations*, trans. Seyyed Hossein Nasr; ed. and intro. Ibrahim Kalin (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2014), 6–7 (cited with minor modifications).
- 7 See Mullā Rajab ‘Alī Tabrizī, *On the Necessary Being and The Fundamental Principle*, trans. Mohammed Rustom in volume five of *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Mehdi Aminrazavi (London: I. B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2015), 285–304. For an assessment of Mullā Rajab’s position, see Muhammad Faruque and Mohammed Rustom, “Rajab ‘Alī Tabrizī’s ‘Refutation’ of Ṣadrian Metaphysics,” in *Philosophy and the Intellectual Life in Shī‘ah Islam*, ed. Sajjad Rizvi (Leiden: Brill, in press).
- 8 Particularly apt in this regard is the work of the founder of the school of Illumination (ishrāq), Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191). See, in particular, Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, ed. and trans. John Walbridge and Hossein Ziai (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1999).
- 9 For this term, see Rustom, “Philosophical Sufism,” in *The Routledge Companion to Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Richard Taylor and Luis Xavier López-Farjeat (New York: Routledge, 2016), 401ff.
- 10 For more on this point, see Rustom, “Is Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Ontology Pantheistic?,” *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 2 (2006): 53–67.
- 11 Maḥmūd Shabistarī, *Gulshan-i rāz*, ed. Javad Nurbakhsh (Tehran: Khānaqāh-i Ni‘mat Allāhī, 1976), line 24.
- 12 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1968), 2:538. Translation taken, with a slight modification, from William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 212.
- 13 For this doctrine in various guises, see David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014) and Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Paths to Transcendence: Shankara, Ibn Arabī, and Meister Eckhart* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2006), 203ff.
- 14 One of the finest discussions concerning the fundamental relationship between knowledge and existence in Islamic metaphysics is to be found in Ibrahim Kalin’s study, *Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy: Mullā Ṣadrā on Existence, Intellect and Intuition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 192–255. A detailed analysis of some compelling models of self-awareness in Islamic philosophy can be found in Jari Kaukua, *Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy: Avicenna and Beyond* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
- 15 For more on this, see René Guénon, *Les états multiples de l’être* (Paris: Éditions Vêga, 2009).
- 16 Afḍal al-Dīn Kāshānī, *Muṣannaḥāt*, ed. Mujtabā Mīnuwī and Yaḥyā Mahdawī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Khwārizmī, 1958), 655. Translation taken from Chittick, *The Heart of Islamic Philosophy: The Quest for Self-Knowledge in the*

- Writings of Afḍal al-Dīn Kāshānī (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 128.
- 17 For a discussion of this problem, see Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), chap. 3.
 - 18 For some extended inquiries into the manner in which the Muslim philosophers approached the Qur'an, see Jonathan Dubé, *Turning to the Real: Ibn Sīnā's Interpretation of the Qur'an* (Cambridge, UK: Islamic Texts Society, forthcoming); Tariq Jaffer, *Rāzī: Master of Qur'ānic Interpretation and Theological Reasoning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Oliver Leaman, *The Qur'an: A Philosophical Guide* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016); Rustom, *The Triumph of Mercy: Philosophy and Scripture in Mullā Ṣadrā* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2012).
 - 19 Translations from the Qur'an are taken from *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Caner Dagli, Maria Dakake, Joseph Lumbard, and Mohammed Rustom (New York: HarperOne, 2015).
 - 20 See also Qur'an, 17:36 and 36:65.
 - 21 An excellent and accessible introduction to logic for English readers is Peter Kreeft, *Socratic Logic* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2008).
 - 22 For which, see Roxanne Marcotte, "Al-Masā'il al-Qudsiyya and Mullā Ṣadrā's Proofs for Mental Existence," *Oxford Journal of Islamic Studies* 22, no. 2 (2011): 171–5.
 - 23 See Rustom, *Islamic Metaphysics*, chap. 2, where the gamut of perspectives in question are evaluated in light of Islamic philosophy and Sufi metaphysics.
 - 24 For the passage in question, along with an extensive analysis of its reception history in early modern Britain, see John Yolton, *Thinking Matter: Materialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1983). See also the discussion in Noam Chomsky, "The Mysteries of Nature: How Deeply Hidden?," in *Chomsky Notebook*, ed. Jean Bricmont and Julie Franck (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 3–33. An exposition of the late scholastic and early modern background that informs this debate can be found in Robert Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes, 1274–1671* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 339–49.
 - 25 Philip Goff, "Panpsychism is crazy, but it's also most probably true," *Aeon*, last modified March 1, 2017, <https://aeon.co/ideas/panpsychism-is-crazy-but-its-also-most-probably-true> (accessed March 6, 2017).
 - 26 For Goff's philosophical defence of panpsychism, see the second part of his *Consciousness and Fundamental Reality* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017).
 - 27 On some of the wide-ranging implications of quantum theory, see Robert Lanza and Bob Berman, *Biocentrism: How Life and Consciousness are the Keys to Understanding the True Nature of the Universe* (Dallas: BenBella Books, 2009).
 - 28 The most detailed exposition of the remarkable similarities between aspects of quantum theory and Islamic metaphysics is in Mohamed Haj Yousef, *Ibn 'Arabī: Time and Cosmology* (London: Routledge, 2008).
 - 29 See the observations in this regard in Wolfgang Smith, *The Quantum Enigma: Finding the Hidden Key* (Hillsdale, NY: SP, 2005), 3–4.
 - 30 For the problems inherent in a worldview that sees energy and matter as the fundamental building blocks of nature over and against consciousness, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "In the Beginning was Consciousness," in *The Essential Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, ed. William Chittick (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2007), 226–8.
 - 31 Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 3:324. Translation taken, with slight modifications, from Chittick, *In Search of the Lost Heart: Explorations in Islamic Thought*, ed. Mohammed Rustom, Atif Khalil, and Kazuyo Murata (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2012), 262.

- 32 For a recent discussion on the manner in which consciousness is related to the beginning and end of all things, see Chittick, “Reason, Intellect, and Consciousness in Islamic Thought,” in *Reason, Spirit and the Sacral in the New Enlightenment: Islamic Metaphysics Revived and Recent Phenomenology of Life*, edited by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 20–2.
- 33 Chittick, *In Search of the Lost Heart*, 263–4.
- 34 For the God-appointed human custodianship over nature, see Chittick, *In Search of the Lost Heart*, 291–7 and Maria Dakake’s commentary upon Qur’an, 16:12 in Nasr et al. (eds.), *The Study Quran*.
- 35 See also the pertinent and penetrating remarks in Nasr, “In the Beginning was Consciousness,” 228–9.
- 36 Some very helpful explorations into the true nature of human selfhood include Nasr, “Self-Awareness and Ultimate Self-Hood,” *Religious Studies* 13, no. 3 (1977): 319–25 and Shah-Kazemi, *Paths to Transcendence*, 221–7.
- 37 For the Islamic sages’ emphasis upon religious practice as the grounds for the realization of one’s conscious possibilities, see Chittick, “Reason, Intellect, and Consciousness in Islamic Thought,” 22ff.
- 38 Şadrā, *Risāla-yi Sih aṣl*, edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Tehran: University of Tehran Press, 1961), 14.
- 39 The text of the poem in which these lines occur is accessible at <http://mastaneh.ir/hafez/ghazal/ghazal-266> (accessed March 7, 2017). Cf. Plotinus’ statement to the effect that the One, who “has no otherness is always present, and we are present to it when we have no otherness....” (Plotinus, *Ennead* 6.9, “On the Good or the One,” 8.45–7 in *The Enneads*, trans. A. H. Armstrong [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988]).

