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THE COSMOLOGY OF THE MUHAMMADAN REALITY

In this brief article I would like to focus on an important part of a commentary upon chapter 27 of Ibn 'Arabi's *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* ("Ringstones of Wisdom"), dealing as it does with the Prophet Muhammad. The commentary in question is by the key member of the school of Ibn 'Arabi, Dawud al-Qaysari (d. 751/1350).¹ It is hoped that the findings presented here will shed light on how an important *Fuṣūṣ* commentator expounds the metaphysical doctrine of the Muhammadan Reality (*al-ḥaqīqa al-Muḥammadiyya*), particularly with reference to its cosmological function.

Ibn 'Arabi begins chapter 27 of the *Fuṣūṣ* by saying that the Prophet possesses the wisdom of singularity since he is the most perfect being in existence. It is through the Prophet that the matter of creation began and ended. We are here reminded of the famous *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet says that he was a Prophet while Adam was still between clay and water:

His is the wisdom of singularity because he is the most perfect existent of this human species, which is why the matter begins and ends with him, for he was a Prophet while Adam was between clay and water. Then, in his elemental form, he became the Seal of Prophets.²

Qaysari's comments before this passage are important, since he provides an explanation as to why the Prophet is the ringstone predisposed to receiving this wisdom of singularity:

It is the wisdom of singularity because of his singularity in the station of Divine All-Comprehensiveness (*al-jam'iyya al-ilāhiyya*), above which is nothing except the level of the Essence of Exclusive Oneness (*al-dhāt al-aḥadiyya*). This is because it [the station of Divine All-Comprehensiveness]

¹ For the life and work of Qaysari, see Mehmet Bayrakdar, *La Philosophie Mystique chez Dawud de Kayseri* (Ankara, 1990).

² Ibn 'Arabi, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. A. A. 'Afifi (Beirut, 1946), p. 214.

is the locus of the Name Allah, which is the greatest, All-Comprehensive Name (*al-ism al-jāmi*) amongst all the Names and qualities.³

In the station of Divine All-Comprehensiveness, as Qaysari calls it, the Prophet is the receptacle for all the Divine Names, since he receives the Name Allah, which is the Name which brings all the other Names together. Thus, the Prophet possesses the wisdom of singularity because he is the being who best embodies the Name Allah—which is at once the All-Comprehensive Name and the solitary or singular Name (*al-ism al-mufrad*)—but also because, in the descent of Being, he stands alone at the top of the cosmic hierarchy of God’s Self-Disclosures. In order to illustrate this point further, Qaysari cites a well-known *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet is reported to have said, “The first thing God created was my light.”⁴ Qaysari employs this *ḥadīth* to explain Ibn ‘Arabi’s point about the Prophet’s being the first thing created by God:

The first thing that came about by the most holy effusion from amongst the entities (*a’yān*) was his immutable entity and the first thing that came to exist through the holy effusion in its outward aspect from amongst the existent things was his sanctified spirit, just as he said, “The first thing God created was my light.” So he came about through the Exclusive Essence, the Divine level, and his immutable entity, [which was] the first singularity.⁵

Here, Qaysari identifies the singularity which brought about the Prophet’s existence with the Prophet’s immutable entity. The Prophet’s singularity came about at the Divine level, which is where his immutable entity was brought into existence. And, since the Prophets are the loci of manifestation of a Universal Name

³ Qaysarī, *Sharḥ ‘alā fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (Tehran, 1984), 471:1 (p. 471, col. 1). Compare this to the comments on the same passage in the *Fuṣūṣ* by Mu’ayyid al-Din Jandi (d. ca. 700/1300): “He points to the fact that solitariness belongs to him [the Prophet], because of his being the most complete type of human perfection, for solitariness is, as we have mentioned, specific to the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*). And there is none more perfect than Muhammad—God bless him and grant him peace. So to him belongs the aforementioned solitary reality of the unseen entity (*al-fardiyya al-ḥaqīqiyya al-ghaybiyya al-‘ayniyya*) with respect to [both] his meaning and reality. [He was the] first in the world of meanings (*‘ālam al-ma’ānī*). Then, by his spiritual makeup, he was a Prophet sent to the rest of the Prophetic spirits, and by his elemental makeup, he was the Seal of the Prophets” (*Sharḥ fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. Sayyid Jalal al-Din Ashtiyani [Mashhad, 1982], 671). For Kashani’s comments on this same passage, see Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, Berkeley, 1984, p. 237.

⁴ There is another famous version of this tradition in which the Prophet says, “The first thing God created was the Intellect.” At pp. 483:2–484:1 of his commentary, Qaysari cites a version of this tradition and relates it to the primal light tradition. For Ibn ‘Arabi’s use of this tradition in his monumental *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, see William Chittick’s *The Self-Disclosure of God* (Albany, 1998), p. 273.

⁵ Qaysarī, *Sharḥ*, 471:1. Cf. 483:2 and 484:1.

(*ism kullī*), all of which are subsumed under the Divine Name for which the Prophet Muhammad is the locus of manifestation, Qaysari goes on to conclude that the Prophet is the most perfect solitary being, which is why he says that it was the spirit of the Prophet which became existentially, and then later came to exist as the Seal of Prophets in the person of the Prophet.⁶ Of course, this is none other than the Muhammadan Reality which runs across the generations of all the Prophets and saints, a point which Ibn 'Arabi is very adamant about, as is shown in his writings.⁷ The Prophet is the prototype of God's own Self-reflection in the phenomenal world with respect to His Names. It is his reality which manifests itself in every Prophet and becomes actualized in the physical person of the Prophet himself. The Muhammadan Reality therefore marks the beginning of existence and is brought to its completion and its totality in the Prophet. It is for this reason that Ibn 'Arabi states that "the matter begins and ends with him."⁸

Qaysari also states that the first singularity is "the Reality of the Muhammadan Spirit (*al-ḥaqīqa al-rūḥāniyya al-Muḥammadiyya*), referred to as the First Intellect (*al-'aql al-awwal*)."⁹ As is seen elsewhere in Islamic thought both before Ibn 'Arabi and after him, the Muhammadan Reality is directly identified with the First Intellect.¹⁰ This is indeed a significant point, because the First Intellect in Neoplatonic Islamic philosophy, as articulated by the likes of Farabi (d. 339/950) and Avicenna (d. 428/1037), is the first existentially entity from the Godhead, allowing for the world of multiplicity to come about (albeit through a string of emanations, each producing an Intellect and heavenly body in Farabi's dyadic emanative metaphysical scheme, with the added element of a string of emanations of corresponding souls in Avicenna's triadic scheme). It is with the emanation of the tenth Intellect, the Active Intellect (*al-'aql al-fa'āl*), that the world of generation and corruption comes about. Needless to say, Qaysari does not adhere entirely to this Neoplatonic model, not for the least reason that it entails a different cosmology and anthropology.

To be sure, the identification of the First Intellect with the Muhammadan Reality allows Qaysari to maintain that creation begins and ends with the Prophet. Indeed, the Divine Essence cannot be diffuse throughout the cosmos, and, in Its manifest aspect, It requires an intermediary of some sort, who is none other than

⁶ Ibid., 471:2.

⁷ For detailed discussions on this topic, see Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn 'Arabi*, trans. Liadain Sherrard (Cambridge, 1993), ch. 3 in particular.

⁸ Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 214. See also Ronald Nettler, *Sufi Metaphysics and Qur'anic Prophets: Ibn 'Arabi's Thought and Method in the Fusus al-Hikam* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 177.

⁹ Qaysarī, *Sharḥ*, 471:2. Cf. Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought* (Albany, 1992), p. 189.

¹⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 166, where Qunawi's student and major figure in the school of Ibn 'Arabi, Sa'id al-Din Farghani (d. 695/1296), identifies the Muhammadan Light or the Muhammadan Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-Muḥammadi*) with the Pen and the Intellect. The Muhammadan Light, Spirit, and Reality are synonymous.

the Prophet. In other words, the function played by the Prophet is of the utmost significance. He manifests the Name Allah and acts as the intermediary through whom the Divine Names become diffuse throughout the cosmos.¹¹ It is with this point in mind that the famous *ḥadīth qudsī* “if it were not for you, I would not have created the cosmos,”¹² although not cited by Qaysari, can be understood.

Qaysari also introduces a discussion in which he attempts to explain how the levels of Divinity (*al-darajāt al-ilāhiyya*) bring about the cosmos.¹³ The context for these comments is the following statement made by Ibn ‘Arabi:

He observes the levels (*darajāt*) which are with the Real when He says, *Raiser of levels, Possessor of the Throne* (40:15), because of His establishing Himself upon it with the Name the All-Merciful (*al-Raḥmān*). So there is no one under the Throne whom the Divine Mercy shall not reach, which is why He says, *My Mercy encompasses all things* (7:156). The Throne encompasses everything, while the One established upon it is the All-Merciful. Through its reality does the cosmos receive the diffusion of mercy (*sarayān al-raḥma*), as we have elucidated elsewhere, both in this book and in the *Meccan Revelations*.¹⁴

According to Qaysari, from these levels of Divinity, the First Intellect is brought about and, from it, the Universal Soul is existentiated. From the Universal Soul come about all of the rational souls, bodily matter, universal substance, and the starless heaven (*falak al-aṭlas*), which Qaysari identifies with the Throne (*‘arsh*).¹⁵ Then the Footstool (*kursī*) is existentiated, followed by the elements from the heavens and the earth. This process therefore accounts for the intermediate world or the world of imagination (*malakūt*) as well as the phenomenal world (*mulk*).¹⁶ Particularly noteworthy here is what Qaysari has to say about the Throne itself. As Ibn ‘Arabi states, the Name the All-Merciful established itself

¹¹ Ibn ‘Arabi states that, in his earthly form, the Prophet is the best proof for his Lord because he was given all of the words which were the referents of the Names taught to Adam. Commenting on this, Qaysari states that this is so because the Prophet was given all the Names, which he refers to as “the mothers of the divine realities and the existential totalities in their particularities (*ummahāt al-ḥaqā’iq al-ilāhiyya wa’l-kawniyya al-jām’ia li-juz’iyyatihā*)” (*Sharḥ*, 472:1). In other words, since the Prophet is the locus of manifestation of the Name Allah, and all the other Divine Names are subsumed under this Name, the Prophet actualizes all the Divine Names in his person, which is why Ibn ‘Arabi says that the Prophet is the greatest proof for his Lord, since his very being itself points to the name Allah, accounting for all the Divine Self-Disclosures as mediated by the Names and marking the limit of human knowledge of the manifest aspect of the Divine Essence (471:2–472:1). Then Qaysari says that the Muhammadan Spirit is a proof for itself because “there is no distinction between him and his Lord except from the standpoint of entification (*ta’ayyun*)” (472:1).

¹² *Law lāk la-mā khalaqtu ’l-aflāk*.

¹³ Qaysari, *Sharḥ*, 484:1.

¹⁴ Ibn ‘Arabi, *Fuṣūṣ*, pp. 220–221.

¹⁵ Qaysari, *Sharḥ*, 484:1–2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 484:2.

on the Throne. God says in the Qur'an that His mercy encompasses all things, since the Throne itself encompasses all things. As the Occupant on the Throne which encompasses all things, the Name the All-Merciful is therefore responsible for diffusing mercy throughout the cosmos. Qaysari certainly agrees with Ibn 'Arabi's description of the Throne and more or less summarizes the Shaykh's comments in this way:

The Name that presides over the Throne is the "All-Merciful"; the Throne is the locus of manifestation for it, and through it, the effusion reaches whatever of the existent things are under it. For the Names, insofar as they are relations of the Essence, cannot be a source for the lights effusing from It, except with spiritual and bodily loci of manifestation.¹⁷

But Qaysari's understanding of the Throne is slightly more nuanced than this. In the following passage he says that the Throne has two realities: there is the spiritual Throne, and then there is the bodily Throne:

Since the Throne encompasses all of the existent things under it, as has already been discussed, the spiritual Throne, which is the First Intellect, encompasses all the spiritual and corporeal realities, while the bodily Throne encompasses all the bodies.¹⁸

Qaysari explicitly states that the Throne is the First Intellect in this passage, but we have also noted that he identifies the Throne with the starless heaven. The spiritual Throne is identified with the First Intellect, which Qaysari says is the Muhammadan Spirit. The bodily Throne, identified with the starless heaven, is what distributes mercy to the rest of the cosmos. Ibn 'Arabi says that the Name the All-Merciful presides over the "Throne". But how is the First Intellect or the Muhammadan Spirit related to the All-Merciful? Fortunately, this question is not left unanswered. Qaysari offers his solution in the following passage:

Through the descent to the ranks of matter, the establishment of mercy comes about. So the Muhammadan Spirit, which is the locus of manifestation of God's mercy, establishes itself upon the Throne so that His mercy may permeate the worlds, just as He said, *And we sent you not, save as a mercy to the worlds* (21:107).¹⁹

In other words, the Muhammadan Spirit or the First Intellect, insofar as it is the first entification from the Divine Level, is the locus of manifestation for all of the Names, one of which is the name the All-Merciful. As a locus for the Name the All-Merciful, the spiritual Throne or Muhammadan Reality establishes itself upon the bodily Throne so that mercy may be distributed throughout the cosmos. This point is clarified by Qaysari in one more passage:

¹⁷ Ibid., 485:1.

¹⁸ Ibid., 484:2.

¹⁹ Ibid.

If you want, you can say that, through the reality of the Throne, this permeating [of mercy] exists in the world. And it is the fixed entity through which the All-Merciful (*al-Raḥmān*) is manifest in the world, just as He is manifest through the First Intellect in the world of spirits and through the outermost sphere in the world of bodies.²⁰

With the foregoing discussion in mind it becomes clear how Dawud al-Qaysari was able to explain Ibn ‘Arabi’s opening statement in chapter 27 of the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. It will be recalled that Ibn ‘Arabi said that the matter began and ended with the Prophet, drawing upon a well-known *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet is reported to have said that he was a Prophet when Adam was still between clay and water. By placing the Muhammadan Reality, which is the locus of manifestation for the Name the All-Merciful on the bodily Throne, Qaysari was able to explicate both how the Muhammadan Reality is the first entification from the level of Divinity and how it is also responsible for distributing God’s mercy throughout the cosmos.

²⁰ Ibid., 485:1.