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**THE WORLD TURNED INSIDE OUT: HENRY CORBIN AND ISLAMIC MYSTICISM.** By Tom Cheetham. Woodstock: Spring Journal Inc, 2003. Pp. 210 + ix. ISBN 1882670248(PB).

This monograph is a survey of the life and thought of Henry Corbin (1903-1978), a pioneering French scholar in the fields of Islamic philosophy, Shi'ism, Sufism and the philosophy of religion. Over the past three decades a number of articles, book chapters and monographs have been devoted to aspects of Corbin's thought. Cheetham's *The World Turned Inside Out* is, however, the first book devoted exclusively to him in English. This work is therefore a welcome contribution to the growing literature on Corbin.

Corbin's writings, critical editions and translations of classical Islamic philosophical and mystical texts have placed every student of later Islamic philosophy, Shi'ism and theoretical Sufism forever in his debt. But outside the field of Islamic studies proper the aspect of Corbin's work which has attracted a number of philosophers and scholars of religion is undoubtedly his ability to uniquely address, often against the backdrop of his numerous studies and monographs on Islamic thought, issues relevant to the wider fields of psychology, philosophy and religious studies. Because of this, some see Corbin as a theoretician of religion who, alongside Mircea Eliade and Gershom Scholem (both of whom were in close contact with Corbin), offers many valuable insights into the nature and significance of religion. Others, amongst whom Cheetham must be counted, see Corbin's work as a necessary aid in remedying the plethora of psychological and spiritual ailments which currently plague the human condition.

This monograph begins with a useful survey of Henry Corbin's early intellectual development, making note of his philosophical precociousness as a young man. Not only did Corbin study medieval philosophy under the great scholar of medieval Christian thought, Etienne Gilson, but he was also initiated into the field of Islamic studies by Louis Massignon. Cheetham devotes a good deal of time to the significance of Corbin's relationship with Heidegger. Indeed, Corbin's reading of *Being and Time* and his discussions with Heidegger would have a lasting influence on his own philosophical project. It would be none other than Corbin who would go on to introduce Heidegger to the French speaking world. But, as Cheetham rightly notes, although Corbin was very much influenced by Heidegger's fundamental concern with ontology, as laid out in *Being and Time*, he also felt that Heidegger's analysis of being was incapable of opening up to other modes of Presence. It would be through Corbin's prolonged contact with the Islamic sapiential tradition that he would find his own spiritual and intellectual home.

Cheetham manages to successfully exposit Corbin's principle ideas by copiously quoting and discussing key passages from his most difficult texts. The

author deals with all of the major themes which permeate Corbin's corpus: angeology, spiritual hermeneutics, prophetic philosophy, the world of imagination, etc. Apart from the dense chapters in which the author treats Corbin's thought, he devotes a chapter to ancient Iranian religion and the rise of Islam. This may seem out of place in such a sophisticated study, but Cheetham felt that this was necessary as a way to allowing readers unfamiliar with the Iranian spiritual traditions (both Pre-Islamic and Islamic) to understand the motifs, concepts and spiritual/intellectual context which helped shape Henry Corbin's worldview.

The catchy title of this work, *The World Turned Inside Out*, is inspired by a moving passage from Corbin's prelude to the second edition of his *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*. Cheetham appropriately begins his study with this quote, which encapsulates the central motif underlying Corbin's entire corpus:

Hegel said that philosophy consists in turning the world inside out. Let us say rather that this world is here and now inside out. The *ta'wil* and the prophetic philosophy consist in putting it right side out once more. (Cited in Cheetham, p. vi)

Henry Corbin's concern with *ta'wil* or spiritual hermeneutics is, consequently, brought out very well in this book. Corbin saw the shortcomings in phenomenological studies in the West as symptomatic of its inability to do *ta'wil*. It was precisely through *ta'wil* that phenomenology (a term which Corbin translated to his Persian-speaking students as *kashf al-mahjub*, literally "the disclosure of the veiled") could reveal new vistas of experiencing higher modes of Presence. It would be through *ta'wil* that humans could come to understand themselves outside the constraints of historical time and fixed systems of meaning.

*The World Turned Inside Out* is undoubtedly a lucid introduction to the life and thought of Henry Corbin and Cheetham is to be commended for this fine work. It will be of great use to students and scholars of Islamic thought and religious studies, as well as to philosophers trained in the Continental tradition.

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