



BRILL

# Nearness to the Real

## *Sainthood as Ontological Proximity in the Thought of Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī*

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### Abstract

This article presents the theory of sainthood found in the writings of Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 751/1350), a major commentator on the Sufi thought of Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240). Building on previous philosophical interpretations of Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought to systematize the worldview now known as the “Oneness of Being” (*wahdat al-wujūd*), Qayṣarī also developed a sophisticated theory of sainthood that not only described, but explained in detail what a saint was, how to become one, and what made the methods for doing so effective. After a historical introduction, I examine the principles of Qayṣarī’s hagiology in the broader context of his worldview, with special attention to his innovative use of philosophical language. Finally, my analysis of the spiritual path in Qayṣarī’s writings shows the consistency with which his account of Sufi wayfaring reflects these principles, according to which the acquisition of sainthood was a journey from the particular to the universal.

### Keywords

Sufism – philosophy – Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī – Ibn ‘Arabī – Middle Period – sainthood – Oneness of Being

### 1 Introduction

This article explores the concept of sainthood or divine friendship (*walāya*) in the thought of Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 751/1350), an intellectual and Sufi active in late Ilkhanid Tabriz who is best known for his interpretation of the teachings of Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) along philosophical lines. Born in Andalusia

only to travel east and spend the latter half of his life in the central lands of Islam, Ibn ‘Arabī formed a close circle of keen disciples who would spread his teachings throughout Anatolia, Iran, and Mamluk territories, from where they would reach the rest of the Islamic world. He was and remains perhaps the single most influential and contested figure in the history of Sufism, with his vision of sainthood in particular occupying a central place in the legacy he left to Islamic society and thought. Qayṣarī, in turn, was one of his more influential commentators, as well as a highly original thinker in his own right with a lasting impact on Islamic philosophy. His writings thus represent an important resource for the monumental task of analyzing and assessing the overall impact of Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought, since the latter’s staggering breadth and diversity in posthumous reception over time and across local and regional contexts make it almost impossible to generalize in much detail about the exact nature of his nevertheless undisputable influence. Because Qayṣarī’s commentary upon Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* would go on to serve as one of the principal introductions to the latter’s thought over the centuries, a close study of his theory of sainthood allows us to better envision the terms on which many Muslims would read Ibn ‘Arabī and receive his interpretation of this vital idea whose central significance not only to Sufi doctrine and practice, but Islamic society as a whole throughout the late medieval and early modern periods has become increasingly apparent in recent years.

In what follows, I seek to outline as fully as possible what Qayṣarī thought a saint was, what it meant to become one, and how he believed this was accomplished. I do so specifically by identifying and developing an as yet unacknowledged feature of Qayṣarī’s thought, which I call “ontological proximity.” This idea holds that, while things differ from one another in certain respects, to the extent that they do not differ, they are actually identical. Qayṣarī calls this relationship of identity “nearness” (*qurb*) and interprets God’s nearness as attested in the Qur’an as His identity with things. While God’s nearness to creation makes Him identical with all things in a general sense, some of His creatures resemble Him more than others, and are thus more identical with Him, with those most identical – or nearest – to Him of all being saints. This idea gave Qayṣarī both his definition of sainthood, and a principle of identity and difference with a wider applicability throughout his worldview, including his novel approach to established topics in philosophy. For example, and central to the following discussion, Qayṣarī envisioned the process of drawing nearer to God as one of escaping the conditions of particularity to become a more universal being. But rather than mere rhetoric or a series of claims to be accepted, Qayṣarī’s hagiology comprised a sophisticated theoretical apparatus that enabled him not only to describe what a saint was, but to explain

in some detail how to become one, and what made the techniques for doing so effective.

The classic studies of Islamic doctrines of sainthood do not document major changes of widespread significance in the way *walāya* was theorized after Ibn ‘Arabī.<sup>1</sup> However, it is my suggestion that Qayṣarī’s theory of sainthood may be regarded as such a development, or at least one of significance for the history of Sufism comparable to his codification of what has come to be known as the Oneness of Being or *waḥdat al-wujūd*. Indeed, both Qayṣarī’s theory of sainthood and his ontology are notable not for their original content, but for the definitive interpretation of Ibn ‘Arabī’s notoriously difficult writings they are meant to represent, expressed in clear language and standardized terminology. And yet, despite their close connection, it is still only for the latter that Qayṣarī is known in secondary literature, with no academic study in a Western language examining his theory of sainthood in any detail or relating it to the rest of his thought. That is the purpose of this article, which brings together the discussions of sainthood from Qayṣarī’s major works with supporting evidence from the rest of his writings in order to synthesize and make more explicit for contemporary readers the exact nature of sainthood according to Qayṣarī and its place in his broader worldview.<sup>2</sup>

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- 1 The first known “theorist” of Islamic sainthood and most influential figure to speculate on the nature of divine friendship whose works survive before Ibn ‘Arabī was al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 255/869). On Tirmidhī’s theory see Bernd Radtke and John O’Kane, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1996), and now Aiyub Palmer, *Sainthood and Authority in Early Islam: Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī’s Theory of walāya and the Reenvisioning of the Sunni Caliphate* (Leiden: Brill, 2020). On Ibn ‘Arabī’s theory of sainthood, which responded to and developed Tirmidhī’s ideas in detail, see Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn ‘Arabī* trans. Liadain Sherrard (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993).
  - 2 This study relies primarily upon three of Qayṣarī’s more influential treatises, which also include his most detailed discussions of sainthood and spiritual wayfaring: the introduction to his commentary on Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* known simply as the *Muqaddimat* or *Muqaddimāt*, by far his most prominent work; the *Risāla fī ‘ilm al-taṣawwuf*, which has iterations as an independent work, and as the introduction to his commentary on the *Tā’īyya* of Ibn al-Fāriḍ, and also appears entitled *al-Tawḥīd wa-al-nubuwwa wa-al-walāya* in an important Iranian printing; and his introduction and commentary upon Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s *al-Qasīda al-khamriyya*, the most influential of all the poem’s commentaries. An autograph of the *Muqaddimat* survives to this day and is the basis for the edition in the collection of works, *er-Resāil*, ed. Mehmet Bayrakdar (Kayseri: Kayseri Büyükşehir Belediyesi Kültür Müdürlüğü, 1997). Based on the edition of Ḥasanzāda al-Āmulī (see below) and practically identical to the Arabic text established by Bayrakdar, the recent translation and commentary of Mukhtar H. Ali, *The Horizons of Being: The Metaphysics of Ibn al-‘Arabī in the Muqaddimat al-Qayṣarī* (Leiden: Brill, 2020) will be cited below unless otherwise noted. Bayrakdar also includes in *er-Resāil* editions of the *Risāla fī ‘ilm al-taṣawwuf*, and the introduction to

This is a small but significant lacuna in scholarship because of the important role Qayṣarī's writings had in transmitting Ibn 'Arabī's thought during an era now recognized to mark the "triumph of sainthood" in the history of Islamic society and the place of Sufism therein.<sup>3</sup> Going to greater lengths than the tradition before him to communicate these teachings in terms any educated reader could understand, Qayṣarī arguably helped even Ibn 'Arabī's

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Qayṣarī's *Khamriyya* commentary under the title *Risāla fi ma'rifat al-maḥabba al-ḥaqīqiyya*. I have relied on the former, while using Th. Emil Homerin's improvement upon the latter combined with the commentary itself, *The Wine of Love and Life: Ibn al-Fārid's al-Khamriyyah and al-Qayṣarī's Quest for Meaning*, trans. Th. Emil Homerin (Chicago: Middle East Documentation Center, 2005). Of Qayṣarī's remaining works, I have also consulted the shorter treatises, *Asās al-waḥdāniyya wa mabnā al-fardāniyya*, *Kashf al-ḥijāb 'an kalām rabb al-arbāb*, *Tahqīq mā 'al-ḥayāt wa-sharḥ asrār al-ẓulumāt* (also known as *Sharḥ aḥwāl al-Khiḍr*), and *Sharḥ ta'wīlāt al-basmala bi-sūra al-naw'iyya al-insāniyya*, all found edited in Bayrakdar's collection. For Qayṣarī's *Fuṣūṣ* commentary itself, I have used the edition of Ḥaṣan Ḥaṣanzāda al-Āmulī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (Qum: Mu'assasa-yi Büstān-i Kitāb, 1423/2003). A complete list of Qayṣarī's works is given in İhsan Fazlıoğlu, "What Happened in Iznik? The Shaping of Ottoman Intellectual Life and Dāwūd Qayṣarī," *Nazariyat Journal for the History of Islamic Philosophy and Sciences* 4.1 (2017): 36–37. Bayrakdar and Homerin give similar lists along with descriptions of relevant manuscripts in *er-Resāil*, and *The Wine of Love and Life*.

- 3 The term "triumph of sainthood" belongs to Ahmet Karamustafa, which he employs to describe the emergence of Sufism as a form of mass piety by seventh/twelfth century. Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). By Qayṣarī's time, people reputed to be friends of God both living and deceased had captured the imagination and devotion of Muslims from all walks of life and exercised an unprecedented degree of influence in society. See Nile Green, *Sufism: A Global History* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012). At the same time, after the Mongol Invasion and fall of the 'Abbāsids in 1258, the mystical-messianic discourse of sainthood quickly became the preferred mode of articulating religious authority in Islamic society and often sole viable means of legitimating political power, at least in Mongol-held territories. See Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, "Esoteric Messianic Currents of Islamic East between Sufism and Shi'ism (7th/13th–9th/15th Centuries)," in *Lésotérisme shi'ite: ses racines et ses prolongements = Shi'ite esotericism ; its roots and developments*, ed. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi et al. (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2016), 643–64. This state of affairs would remain until well after the consolidation of the early modern Islamic empires, as first shown by Cornell H. Fleischer in "The Lawgiver as Messiah: The Making of the Imperial Image in the Reign of Süleyman," in *Soliman le Magnifique et son temps. Actes du colloque de Paris*, ed. G. Veinstein (Paris: Ecole du Louvre, 1992), 159–77. Indeed, it seems that only the new empires' successful assertions of quasi-universal sovereignty were capable of satisfying a public religious imagination so long dominated by sainthood, which demanded nothing less of temporal sovereigns than the kind of omnipotence attributed to the hidden saints of Sufi lore. In fact, in the Ottoman context, Qayṣarī's theory of sainthood as divine vicegerency played a significant part in the novel political discourse that modeled the sovereign after the Sufi saint with divinely granted sway over the cosmos, as examined in Hüseyin Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined: The Mystical Turn in Ottoman Political Thought* (Princeton University Press, 2018).

most controversial ideas reach a readership much wider than their original audience.<sup>4</sup> This he did while conferring upon them a certain respectability by showing their susceptibility to rational exposition and conformity with orthodoxy, all at a time when the question of exactly who God's friends really were had begun to acquire social and political significance of an unprecedented magnitude. Because of the breadth of his posthumous readership, and the centrality of sainthood in particular to his worldview and that of his readers,

4 The immediate audience of Ibn 'Arabī's notoriously difficult writings comprised only highly accomplished Sufis and his own disciples. The standard account of his life is Claude Addas, *The Quest for Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn 'Arabi*, trans. Peter Kingsley (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993). The most useful introductions to his thought are the studies of William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabī's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989) and *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-'Arabī's Cosmology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), comprised mostly of select translations and effectively doubling as a subject index for *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya*, Ibn 'Arabī's *magnum opus*. On the character of his writings and reception, cf. especially the articles of James W. Morris. A similar characterization of limited accessibility and audience holds for the two earliest expositors of his thought who were also his closest students, Sadr al-Dīn Qūnawī (d. 673/1274) and 'Afif al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī (d. 690/1291). On their lives and thought see Richard Todd, *The Sufi Doctrine of Man: Šadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī's Metaphysical Anthropology* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), and the introduction to 'Afif al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī, *In the Names of God: A Mystical Theology of the Divine Names in the Qur'ān* [working title], trans. Yousef Casewit (New York: New York University Press, forthcoming). The careers of these latter two, though illustrious, were spent largely in Mamlūk lands, whose religious climate often proved hostile to Ibn 'Arabī's teachings compared with the territories affected by Mongol rule and thus did not motivate any attempt to "clarify" their master's more controversial ideas. On this religious environment, in which both Qūnawī and Tilimsānī were accused of heresy, cf. Alexander D. Knysch, *Ibn 'Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999). Besides Qūnawī's student, Mu'ayyad al-Dīn Jandī (d. c. 699/1300), who sought patronage and disseminated Ibn 'Arabī's teachings in Ilkhānid Anatolia but on a limited scale, Qayṣarī's master 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. 730/1329) was arguably the first expositor of Ibn 'Arabī's thought who, as the foremost Sufi in the Ilkhanid court of Sultan Muḥammad Khudābanda Ōljejtū (r. 1304–1317), was as socially prominent as he was free to expound the latter's teachings openly. For notes on Jandī's career, see A. C. S. Peacock, "Two Sufis of Ilkhanid Anatolia and Their Patrons: Notes on the Works of Mu'ayyid al-Dīn Jandī and Da'ud al-Qaysarī," in *Cultural Encounters in Anatolia in the Medieval Period: The Ilkhanids in Anatolia: Symposium Proceedings, 21–22 May 2015, Ankara*, ed. Suzan Yalman and Filiz Yenişehirlioğlu (Ankara: Vehbi Koç ve Ankara Araştırmaları Merkezi, 2019); on Kāshānī's life and thought, see Ismail Lala, *Knowing God: Ibn 'Arabi and 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī's Metaphysics of the Divine* (Leiden: Brill, 2019). It appears to have been on the basis of the prestige secured by the latter, under the auspices of an Ilkhanid culture of patronage which had already embraced with enthusiasm Sufis espousing such theologically controversial doctrines as Illuminationism, that Qayṣarī found a context in which to subject the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī to an exposition of unprecedented clarity geared specifically toward the uninitiated.

Qayṣarī's theory of sainthood represents a significant but underappreciated window into the world of late medieval and early modern Islam.

## 2 Dawūd al-Qayṣarī: His Life, Works, and Impact

Little is known of Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī's life.<sup>5</sup> Born around 660/1260 in the Central Anatolian city of Kayseri into a family originally from Sāwa, his earliest education was under Sirāj al-Dīn al-Urmawī, probably in Konya, which must have been completed by the latter's death in 682/1283.<sup>6</sup> Some time thereafter, his travels took him to Cairo, like most seekers of knowledge of the day, where he acquired an excellent command of Arabic and different intellectual sciences, though the exact duration and nature of his studies are unknown. He also appears to have studied the poetry of Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 632/1235) with the latter's grandson 'Alī, though this would be his only contact with Sufism of which there is any record until significantly later in his life.<sup>7</sup>

There is no record of Qayṣarī's return to Anatolia until 1313–14, when documents place him in Niksar, near the Black Sea coast. There he pursued advanced studies with Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī and Ibn Sartāq at the Niẓām al-Dīn Yaghībaṣan *madrassa*, where he probably also worked as a *mudarris* (instructor). These two were the era's leading authorities in philosophy and astronomy respectively, though while in their tutelage he eventually inclined toward Sufism. He would travel to his ancestral home of Sāwa in Azerbaijan, possibly on the recommendation of Ibn Sartāq, to meet the man who would become his spiritual master, 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī, sometime before the latter's death in 730/1329.<sup>8</sup> Kāshānī, like Qayṣarī, had only devoted himself to Sufism after considerable advanced study in philosophy.<sup>9</sup> The likely resulting personal affinity may help explain Kāshānī's impact on Qayṣarī, whose first writings appear only after the former's death. They report among other things how Qayṣarī excelled among Kāshānī's students and received divine assistance while being taught Ibn 'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ*.<sup>10</sup> All of Qayṣarī's writings, then, date to

5 The most complete biography of Qayṣarī can now be found in Fazloğlu, "What Happened in Iznik?," 13–21. All the known sources for Qayṣarī's life are utilized there and listed alongside relevant studies on p. 13, footnote 31.

6 "What Happened in Iznik?," 14–15.

7 *Ibid.*, 15–16.

8 *Ibid.*, 16–17. Fazloğlu rejects the commonly given death date of 1335 for Kāshānī, citing a 1331 work of Qayṣarī that clearly describes him as deceased.

9 Lala, *Knowing God*, 19.

10 Qayṣarī, *Muqaddimat*, 21.

the period between 1331 and 1337, during which time he evidently stayed in Tabriz until the murder of his patron Ghiyāth al-Dīn Muḥammad in 736/1336, son of the renowned Ilkhanid vizier and patron of Sufism, Rashīd al-Dīn Faḍl Allāh.<sup>11</sup> At this point he appears to have made his way to Iznik on the early Ottoman frontier, where he stayed until his death sometime before 751/1350.

The substance of Qayṣarī's work can be summarized as realizing Kāshānī's as yet incomplete project of developing a conceptual system capable of expressing the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī in technical terms with standardized definitions. Though no substitute for the disciplines of spiritual wayfaring themselves, Qayṣarī regarded conceptual preparation as essential to success in reaching God, thus writing that "the knowledge of these mysteries is dependent on the knowledge of the tenets and principles that are agreed upon by the exponents of this Group," that is, the Sufis.<sup>12</sup> With that said, Sufis exhibited as much doctrinal diversity at that time as any other, so Qayṣarī's task also necessitated demonstrating the superiority of Ibn 'Arabī's teachings, according to his interpretation, over the views of others, who would have probably espoused either Ash'arite or Illuminationist views.<sup>13</sup>

It was in service of this end that Qayṣarī systematically developed and defended the definite theoretical outlook that would eventually become known as the Oneness of Being, or *waḥdat al-wujūd*, as the interpretive key to the thought of Ibn 'Arabī. This position consists essentially in identifying God with Being (*wujūd*), an assertion Ibn 'Arabī often made and an idea which a number of Sufis besides him also expressed. However, Ibn 'Arabī and others always employed *wujūd* in a number of different meanings, while also using other terms to denote God's ultimate reality or essence.<sup>14</sup> No one before Qayṣarī

11 "What Happened in Iznik?" 18. One later work attributed to Qayṣarī represents a possible exception, namely the *Ithāf al-Sulaymāniyya fi al-'ahd al-Ūrkhāniyya*, an *anmūzaj* or display of scholarly breadth dedicated to the son of the second Ottoman Sultan Orhan, Sulayman Pasha. However, if the author of this treatise is Qayṣarī, while certainly of historical interest, its contents are only formulaic demonstrations of competence in a variety of sciences without apparent bearing on his original thought. *Ibid.*, 23. The entire text is published in pp. 43–61 of the same article.

12 *Muqaddimat*, 21.

13 The doctrinal positions generally espoused among the Suhrawardiyya and Kubrawiyya, respectively, the most prominent Sufi orders during that time. Ibn 'Arabī's teachings would become accepted among the Kubrawiyya largely through 'Alī Hamadānī (d. 786/1385), and for a time among the Naqshbandiyya through 'Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī (d. 898/1492), both also readers of Qayṣarī (see below).

14 Though it appears with various meanings in both the Ibn 'Arabī commentarial tradition and in earlier sources, neither Qayṣarī nor the other early commentators upon Ibn 'Arabī employed the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* to describe their views as a school of thought. The earliest notable such use of the term recorded in writing belongs to Jāmī. William Chittick,

had committed to identifying God's reality with *wujūd* so strictly and completely as to develop its implications systematically into a worldview, including Kāshānī, whose inclination toward this end nevertheless inspired Qayṣarī to do so. The result was a new intellectual position founded on the insistence that God's reality was the true and most correct meaning of the word *wujūd*, while affording a secondary status or only partial validity to other designations of His Essence.<sup>15</sup> This proved to be a widely influential and enduring interpretation of the thought of Ibn 'Arabī and a formidable theological stance in its own right, one which, though often fiercely rejected, was nevertheless embraced and developed across a variety of cultural contexts. At the same time, however, Qayṣarī's theory of sainthood was just as much a part of this worldview as his ontology, and even proves in the last analysis to have been little more than an extended application of the latter to other areas of his thought. Qayṣarī's hagiology should thus be included alongside the Oneness of Being in considering his place in the history of Sufism, and his understanding of what exactly a saint was should serve as relevant context for future studies dealing with the Oneness of Being in Islamic society and thought. Let us briefly consider some evidence illustrating this connection.

In his *Risāla fī 'ilm al-taṣawwuf*, Qayṣarī offers a proof of the Oneness of Being that undergirds his understanding of sainthood as ontological proximity in several aspects. This proof charges that the views of theologians and philosophers, in their failure to identify God with *wujūd*, necessitate a reality of being (*ḥaqīqat al-wujūd*) distinct from God Himself upon which He depends for realization. For this reason, Qayṣarī objects that in order for God to be the Necessary Being, He must be "identical with the reality of being" itself, or Being as such. Otherwise, He would receive His being by another, even if being itself was His creation – and, since "whatever is other than being, is realized only by means of being," Qayṣarī views any such alternative scenario as yielding the absurd conclusion that "the Necessary Being would not be necessary." Ultimately, this formulation demanded that Qayṣarī's readers accept, on pain of derogating God's self-sufficiency, that the very being of the world cannot be other than Him, for "no one in the world doubts its existence (*kawnihi*

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"A History of the Term *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*," in *In Search of the Lost Heart: Explorations in Islamic Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), 85. The different terms employed among Ibn 'Arabī and his commentators to designate God's reality and the process by which *wujūd* ultimately came to carry this significance are traced in Caner Dagli, *Ibn al-'Arabī and Islamic Intellectual Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

15 Dagli, *Ibn al-'Arabī*, esp. 4, 117, 120–25. For a more detailed account of this process, see the entirety of chapters 6, "Kāshānī: conditioning and proving God's existence," and 7, "Qayṣarī and the centrality of existence."



*mawjūdan*),” and “what is meant by *wujūd* is only one thing.”<sup>16</sup> Indeed, if God’s reality is none other than Being, then what is usually said of God must also be said of Being, including above all His oneness, indivisibility and uniqueness.<sup>17</sup>

Now, the identity of God with the world resulting from His status as the sole Being was, according to Qayṣarī, the meaning of God’s Qur’anic proclamation “I am near.”<sup>18</sup> Yet this was not all, for while the use of unaided reason could lead to this conclusion, it remained powerless to elucidate the relationship between God and the world any further, doomed instead to obscure it with mental constructs.<sup>19</sup> Thus Qayṣarī wrote that those who sought to attain knowledge of God through reasoning

are like the ones concerning whom God says *Those call from a far place (Sūrat al-fuṣṣilāt, 44)*, because they declare the Real far from their souls, outside of all possible things, one single individual (*fardan wāhidan mushakkhkhiṣan*) distinct from all else from whom possible things issue, while the Real reports concerning Himself that He is near ... and in

16 Qayṣarī, “Risāla fi ‘ilm al-taṣawwuf,” in *er-Resāil*, 113–14. The crux of Qayṣarī’s entire argument here depends upon his assertion that “whatever is other than being, is realized only by means of being,” and moreover, his ability to comfortably maintain that “what is meant by being is only one thing,” whose meaning should be obvious to everyone. Dagli has shown how the cogency of Qayṣarī’s position depends upon the particular usage which *wujūd* had already acquired in both philosophical and broader parlance by his time. See *Ibn al-‘Arabī*, 123–24. In this context, whoever insists that the being of the world and God’s being are two different things that happen to share a common name, Qayṣarī accuses of “[waxing] arrogant against his own conscience.” Indeed, centuries later, the ontological basis of Shi’ite *‘irfān* would continue to rest on the premise that being is the most self-evident of all concepts.

17 Thus Qayṣarī would write that like God, “Being has neither contrary nor like.” *Muqaddimat*, 28–29. This means not only that there cannot be more than one Being, but also that nothingness or nonexistence (*‘adm*) is a pure mental construct and has absolutely no realization to speak of. Indeed, “Being *qua* Being is one,” and the only reality in existence, so “no other being can be realized facing it.” *Ibid*. Now this does not consign the obvious multiplicity of phenomena to insignificance or irrelevance, but rather mandates the recognition of their status simply as appearances, whose origins and sole reality are in Being, for one of the names of God is the Apparent, Outward or Manifest (*al-Zāhir*), making appearance (*zuhūr*) a perfection of Being. From another perspective, Qayṣarī actually saw all the multiplicity in the world of appearances as a manifestation and even inevitable consequence of the oneness of God’s Essence. See below, footnote 59.

18 *Sūrat al-baqara*, 186.

19 Qayṣarī writes of the philosophers and theologians who seek to know God through rational methods, “what is apprehended by their sciences is the understanding reached by their suppositions, which is no more than the creation of their theoretical speculation, not the pre-eternal Real Itself.” *Risāla*, 110.

these reports He declares Himself identical with all that appears and is hidden.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, while there remained no other possible explanation for the existence of the world than God's self-disclosure, His "appearance in the forms of the realities of beings," Qayṣarī maintained that the nature of this self-disclosure could never be grasped *a priori*, but rather "based only upon the sayings of the Folk of God."<sup>21</sup> As such, his proof of the Oneness of Being necessarily implied the sole authority of the saints to explicate the nature of reality, and the sole capacity of Sufism to lead to knowledge thereof. But going far beyond a simple conceit, it undergirded the concept of ontological proximity that allowed him to justify and explain in detail the reason for this authority, along with the nature of sainthood and the means of its acquisition. Briefly stated, it did so through the additional qualification that, besides having identity with God as their being, some things are nearer or more identical to Him than others proportionate to the appearance of His perfections in them, with the nearest of all being saints. Accordingly, saints know that God is near precisely because of the appearance of His perfections in their souls, whereas ordinary people fail to perceive this nearness because the state of their souls veil the appearance of God's perfections therein – and in this sense, He really is far from them.<sup>22</sup>

In what follows, we will see how Qayṣarī, by committing this simple formulation to a definite expression in the same standardized technical terms as his ontology, was able to rationalize the disciplines of Sufi wayfaring and the superior religious authority of the Sufi shaykh in a manner that not only described, but explained their efficacy as means of spiritual transformation in terms entirely consistent with his metaphysics and cosmology. At the same time, examining the care with which he integrated the philosophical language of the day into his defense of these institutions will help illustrate the significant challenge not only his theory of the Oneness of Being, but his systematic exposition of sainthood in light thereof, represented to theologians, philosophers, and their supporters among the Sufis. The posthumous popularity of Qayṣarī's writings and their use in a variety of establishment contexts speaks to the pious and intellectual credibility that his theoretical position was able to garner despite the considerable controversy that Ibn 'Arabī and his writings never ceased to raise.

20 Ibid., 120–21.

21 Ibid., 113–14.

22 See below, footnote 45.

After the death of Qayṣarī's patron in 736/1336 and the apparent end of his scholarly output, later sources allege that the Ottoman Sultan Orhan Gazi invited him to Iznik to serve as *mudarris* in the recently conquered city's newly established *madrasa*, leading to characterizations of Qayṣarī in secondary literature as the first head of the Ottoman education system. However, the evidence is insufficient to establish Qayṣarī's activities and whereabouts after 737/1337 with any certainty except for his death no later than 751/1350 and his apparent burial in Iznik.<sup>23</sup> What is more, even if Qayṣarī's employment as the first *mudarris* in Iznik were proven, this status alone would still not have given his ideas the long-term determining influence over Ottoman thought and society these characterizations have seemed to imply. This, however, amounts not to denying the long-term significance of Qayṣarī's thought, but rather identifying the question of its transmission and reception as an important area of further inquiry.

Indeed, long recognized as the most accessible of Ibn 'Arabī's commentators, Qayṣarī would introduce countless readers to the world of what has now become known as the "Akbarī school."<sup>24</sup> In the short term, Qayṣarī's philosophical presentation of Ibn 'Arabī's thought informed the latter's reception among as diverse an array of figures as 'Alī Hamadānī (d. 786/1385), Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. c. 787/1385), Ṣā'in al-Dīn ibn Turka (d. 835/1432), and Molla Fenarī (d. 834/1431), remaining a significant source of doctrine in the long term for such historically prominent Sufis as İsmail Hakki Bursevi (d. 1137/1725), 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nabulūsi (d. 1143/1731), and 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā'irī (d. 1300/1883).<sup>25</sup> His influence can still be seen on an intellectual level in the Primacy of Being as affirmed in Shi'ite *'irfān*, an intellectual tradition synthesizing philosophy and mysticism that survives to this day in Iran, where his *Muqaddimat* is taught as a seminary text.<sup>26</sup> On a more concrete social level, his interpretation of Ibn 'Arabī crossed social and political boundaries, exercising an early

23 Fazhoğlu, "What Happened in Iznik?," 18–21.

24 William Chittick, "The School of Ibn 'Arabī," in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (New York: Routledge, 1996), 518.

25 See Fazhoğlu, "What Happened in Iznik?"; Mehmet Bayraktar, "Dāvūd-i Kayserī," in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 2013), accessed April 6, 2020, <http://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/davud-i-kayseri>. Jāmī also relies on Qayṣarī's *Fuṣūṣ* commentary on occasion to gloss his own writings, though without attribution. He more frequently cites the writings of Qūnawī and Fenarī. See Jāmī, *The Precious Pearl: Al-Jāmī's al-Durrah al-Fākhrah Together with His Glosses and the Commentary of 'Abd al-Ghafūr Lārī*, trans. Nicholas Heer (Albany: SUNY Press, 1979), 84, 108.

26 See Ali, "Introduction," in *The Horizons of Being*, and Ghulamhussein Ibrahimī Dinani, "The influence of Da'ud al-Qaysari in Iran" in *Uluslararası XIII. ve XIV. Yüzyıllarda Anadolu'da İslam Düşüncesi ve Davud el-Kayseri* (Kayseri: Kayseri Büyükşehir Belediyesi

influence on figures of such apparently contrasting character as the “rebel” Shaykh Bedreddin whose teachings allegedly abolished private property and questioned the boundaries between Islam and other religions, and Ahmed Bican Yazıcıoğlu, the early champion of vernacular Sunni orthodoxy on the Ottomanizing frontier.<sup>27</sup> And without ever enjoying complete hegemony, Qayşarî’s ideas would nevertheless remain a mainstay of elite Ottoman intellectual life, with his interpretations of sainthood as divine vicegerency influencing political thought and figuring prominently in the eventual theorization of the Ottoman empire as a “caliphate” (*khilāfa*).<sup>28</sup> Qayşarî’s importance in the *Fuṣūṣ* commentary tradition in South Asia has also been noted but remains to be explored.<sup>29</sup>

Of course, such a scope of influence through so many pathways of transmission also means a formidable diversity of interpretations, and it would thus be

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- Kültür Müdürlüğü, 1998). For a historical overview of *irfān* see Ata Anzali, *Mysticism in Iran: The Safavid Roots of a Modern Concept* (University of South Carolina Press, 2017).
- 27 Bayrakdar, “Dāvūd-i Kayserî”; Ayşe Beyazıt, “Ahmed Bican’ın *Müntehâ* İsimli Fusûs Tercümesi Işığında Tasavvuf Düşüncesi” (MA Thesis, Marmara University, 2008). On Bedreddin’s life see Michel Balivet, *Islam mystique et révolution armée dans les Balkans ottomans. Vie du Cheikh Bedreddin le “Hallâj des Turcs”* (Istanbul, 1995), and now also İlker Evrim Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran, Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī and the Islamicate Republic of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 122–40. On the careers of Ahmed Bican and his brother, Mehmed Yazıcıoğlu, see Carlos Grenier, “The Yazıcıoğlu and the Spiritual Vernacular of the Early Ottoman Frontier” (PhD Thesis, University of Chicago, 2017).
- 28 In addition to a few of his shorter treatises and copies of his *Muqaddimat* alone, an inventory of the Ottoman palace library under Bayezid II includes among its numerous *Fuṣūṣ* commentaries several copies of Qayşarî’s. Two are bound with the important work on metaphysics and natural philosophy, *Hikmat al-‘ayn* of al-Kâtibî al-Qazwîni (d. 657/1276), author of *al-Risāla al-shamsiyya*, an introductory text on logic and “perhaps the most studied logic textbook of all time” (Tony Street, “Logic,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005], 250), accompanied by the commentary of Ibn Mubārakshāh. This suggests a place for Qayşarî’s writings among the essentials of elite higher learning during that time, though one also consistent with their reputation as introductory material. In this context, the significance of Qayşarî’s thought for the development of the concept of the Ottoman caliphate is discussed at some length in Hüseyin Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined: The Mystical Turn in Ottoman Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 213–14. Though the impact of Qayşarî’s thought on Ottoman political theory as part of a broader learned milieu was not particularly direct, with Yılmaz noting a much greater immediate influence in the Ottoman reception of ‘Alī Hamadānī’s thought, the latter’s writings drew substantially on Qayşarî in the theory of human and divine governance they put forward.
- 29 See Muhammad Umar, “The influence of Da’ud al-Qaysari on the Fusus commentary tradition in the Indian subcontinent,” in *Uluslararası XIII. V° XIV. Yüzyillarda Anadolu’da İslam Düşüncesi ve Davud el-Kayseri*.

a regrettable oversimplification to view the theoretical minutiae of Qayṣarī's thought as representative or predictive in any detail of the views of those who read, claimed, or otherwise utilized his ideas. For this reason, in addition to a close reading devoted to contextualizing Qayṣarī's hagiology and understanding in some detail how he justified it on his own terms, I have attempted in what follows to illustrate some of its most salient features which I see as constituting its "gist," features I maintain no thoughtful reader could have missed, and with which one would have to either agree, or at least differ respectfully in order to view Qayṣarī as worthy of engaging and citing. For, to be sure, Qayṣarī's innovative approach to the problem of universals, or indeed his understanding of the path to sainthood as a journey from the particular to the universal may have been of limited interest to future generations. However, it should strike us as historically significant that writings with such an enduring legacy, even in official and establishment contexts could have espoused so openly and clearly such themes as God's partial identity with creation, the divinely granted omnipresence and omnipotence of the Prophet Muḥammad in the cosmos in his universal form as the Supreme Spirit, or a palpably emanationist understanding of adherence to Islamic law and the disciplines of Sufism as a corporeal yet theophanic participation in the Spirit. The undeniable controversy surrounding such views aside, the preservation of Qayṣarī's writings in eminently "normative" contexts is enough to give any reader pause to question whether prevalent conceptions of what has historically constituted "normative Islam" are sufficiently capacious today.

### 3 Ontological Proximity

I stated above that Qayṣarī's concept of ontological proximity holds that things, inasmuch as they do not differ, are actually identical with each other. In Qayṣarī's own words, "all realities return to Absolute Being with respect to reality, and each of them is identical with the other with respect to Being, even though they are distinct with respect to determinations (*ta'ayyunāt*)."<sup>30</sup> This

<sup>30</sup> Qayṣarī, *Muqaddimat*, 140–41 (trans. modified). Ali translates *ta'ayyun* as "individuation," since it refers to the phenomenon of "the particularization of the [Divine] Essence in its descending degrees." See Ali's introduction to *The Horizons of Being*, 11. Chittick and others following him have translated *ta'ayyun* as "entification." Both of these translations capture the important sense in which the term refers to the Divine Essence "becoming a thing," but Qayṣarī also speaks of the many individual phenomena or "things" that proceed from the Divine Essence as possessing multiple *ta'ayyunāt*, meaning that there is not a strict one-to-one correspondence between *ta'ayyunāt* and individual things. Thus I have

summary should be qualified by saying that, in Qayṣarī's view, no two things that differ in any respect are absolutely identical.<sup>31</sup> This idea holds for the relationship between God and other things, and for those things with each other. Things are identical with God because He is their being, and because they manifest His perfections, while they differ from Him in their contingency, limitations and whatever blameworthy attributes they may possess.<sup>32</sup> They are identical with each other generally because God is their being, and further according to their shared substance, the perfections they manifest in common, and the dependence of some upon others in the cosmic hierarchy of relative nearness to or distance from God.<sup>33</sup> The determinations by which all things differ are either identical with their unique essences, or attributes that can be added or removed, signaling the possibility that the relationship of identity between things can change.<sup>34</sup> Equating divine perfections with universals, the worlds in Qayṣarī's cosmic hierarchy are arranged according to their degree of universality, or the completeness with which they manifest the divine perfections. At the apex is the Muḥammadan Spirit, which is also the First Intellect and universal Substance, as well as the universal Human Reality, Human Spirit, or Supreme Spirit.<sup>35</sup> Possessing the fewest determinations and every

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chosen "determination," first of all for its literal meaning designating limitation, which the Essence adopts in the course of manifestation, and also to emphasize how this phenomenon is compounded in particular things, and is also to a certain extent undone in the course of the spiritual path.

- 31 This principle is made clear in another treatise where Qayṣarī writes that, "the thing that is identical with the Divine Essence in one respect, and different from it in another, is not absolutely identical with it, nor absolutely other." "Were it not for determination," Qayṣarī continues, "all would be identical, and not other." Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī, "Asās al-wahdāniyya," in *er-Resāil*, 157.
- 32 In numerous instances, Qayṣarī makes God's identity with things explicit through usage of the word *'ayn* in opposition to *ghayr*. In addition to the above, see *Muqaddimat*, 37–8, 211–12; "Risāla," 115; "Asās," 159, and the discussion below.
- 33 See *Muqaddimat*, 113–14; "Risāla," 113, 120, and discussion below.
- 34 *Muqaddimat*, 129–30.
- 35 The Muḥammadan Spirit, also known as the Muḥammadan Reality or Muḥammadan Light, refers to a mystical vision of the Prophet Muḥammad as a supernatural being with a central cosmic function like that of the *logos* in Hellenic philosophy or Christianity, a doctrine of considerable antiquity in Islamic history. See A. J. Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1950), 93–94. Given early elaboration in the mystical Qur'anic exegesis of Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) (see Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam the Qur'anic Hermeneutics of the Ṣūfī Sahl At-Tustarī (d. 283/896)* [New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1980], 149–50), Ibn 'Arabī, who cited Tustarī often, developed this doctrine much further, making the Muḥammadan Reality not only the light out of which God created the world, but also the First Intellect of the philosophers, and one of the essential components of his theory of *walāya*.

perfection, this Spirit is the nearest thing to God, while at the nadir of the cosmic hierarchy lies the visible realm of particulars or individual creatures, with the ordinary human being representing the utmost ontological distance from God.<sup>36</sup> Among individual creatures, however, the soul of the saint or Perfect Human Being (*al-insān al-kāmil*) bridges this distance by its identity with the Spirit, which contains within it the realities of all creatures.<sup>37</sup> As a result, saints are the individual creatures nearest to God, whereas the greatest of them are also omnipresent in the cosmos and identical with all things in a fashion similar to God and the Spirit, according to the degree of identification achieved with them.<sup>38</sup> Thus, as this brief introduction clearly illustrates, the acquisition of sainthood represents the most significant instance of change in a creature's ontological proximity to God and to other things in Qayṣarī's cosmos.

With this context, I will ultimately seek to show how Qayṣarī saw the spiritual path as capable of bringing individual human beings nearer to God according to his strict definition of what this meant, through the removal of the determinations that separated them and the cultivation of the perfections that strengthened their relationship of identity. This necessarily presupposed identification with the nearest thing to God, the Muḥammadan Spirit, which in Qayṣarī's adaptation of philosophical language was a process of becoming a more universal being in a very literal and direct sense. Here, the revealed law and the guidance of a living saint functioned as a gateway from the particular to the universal, enabling aspiring wayfarers' participation in God's emanation through the Spirit which alone could liberate them from the limiting conditions of individual existence and return them to their origins. This account of the spiritual path not only bore out Qayṣarī's metaphysics and cosmology to a

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See Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 66–70. A useful introduction to the place of the Muḥammadan Reality in Qayṣarī's thought is provided in Mohammed Rustom, "Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī: Notes on His Life, Influence and Reflections on the Muḥammadan Reality," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 38 (2005): 51–64. The ninth chapter of Qayṣarī's *Muqaddimat* is devoted directly to the Muḥammadan Reality, though in view of its many aspects in Qayṣarī's thought, the fourth, eighth and tenth chapters on substance and accident, the macrocosm-microcosm relationship between humanity and the world, and the Supreme Spirit are also basically treatments of it from different perspectives. On the Spirit's different aspects and names, see discussion below, esp. footnotes 61–65.

36 "Risāla," 115–16.

37 *Muqaddimat*, 132–33.

38 *Ibid.* For the identity of the Perfect Human Being with the Spirit see also "Risāla," 116. On the identity of the Perfect Human Being with all things, Qayṣarī further says that, "all realities that exist ... are identical with the reality of the First Intellect," i.e. the Spirit, which is "the true Adam." *Ibid.*, 140–41. On the Perfect Human Being permeating all creation, see *ibid.*, 184–85.

surprising degree of detail and consistency, but went as far as to account meaningfully and explicitly for the indispensable role of the body in the acquisition of sainthood, considerations often perceived as missing from the supposedly abstract, literary world of theoretical Sufism.<sup>39</sup> In so doing, it also provided a compelling rationale for private orthopraxy, as well as an intellectually sophisticated justification for the charismatic authority of the Sufi shaykh, a figure whose ascendancy in late medieval and early modern Islamic society has been so long associated in secondary literature with anti-intellectualism and the “decline” of Sufism and Islamic civilization more broadly.<sup>40</sup> But in order to

39 The topic of the body has long occupied a marginal place in the modern study of Sufism, though by no means necessarily in Sufi doctrine itself. A recent general study to bring to light the central significance of the body in the social history of medieval Sufism more broadly is Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011). As Bashir shows, the body was one of the principle means by which pious commitments were articulated, enacted and even represented in the mass phenomenon that Sufism had become by the Late Middle Period. Perhaps a development part and parcel of its popularization, these features of late medieval Sufism have led Nile Green to characterize it as a phenomenon significantly or even predominantly “physical.” See *Sufism: A Global History*. That this special significance of the body indeed did extend to the world of theoretical Sufism is also shown in Bashir’s study of the life, thought and legacy of Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh (d. 869/1464–65) in *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions: The Nurbakhshīya between Medieval and Modern Islam* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003). Even so, most studies of Sufi doctrine specifically have yet to investigate theoretical discussions of the body therein in much detail or on a general scope to examine how the intellectual history of Sufism may reflect these collective societal developments. The main exception is found in the Ḥurūfī followers of Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī (d. 796/1394), whose focus on the body as a divine manifestation has long earned them the designation “incarnationist” among heresiographers and modern scholars alike. However, recent work on the origins of this sect calls into question the real extent of its founder’s divergence from more mainstream Sufism during that time, e.g. Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power: Ḥurūfī Teachings between Shi’ism and Sufism in Medieval Islam: The Original Doctrine of Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015). At any rate, Qayṣarī’s understanding of the body as a recipient of divine emanation partially identical with the Spirit and God shows the significant place understandings of the body as a divine manifestation could have in credibly Islamic worldviews of great mainstream respectability during the late medieval and early modern periods.

40 On the origins of the Sufi shaykh, or the *shaykh al-tarbiya*, see Margaret Malamud, “Sufi Organizations and Structures of Authority in Medieval Nishapur,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26. 3 (1994): 427–42. On the topic of decline in Sufi studies, see Alexander D. Noysh, “Historiography of Sufi Studies in the West,” in *A Companion to the History of the Middle East*, ed. Youssef M. Choueiri (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 125–26. In the context of late medieval Sufism as a mass phenomenon, the so-called “decline narrative” characteristic of Islamic historiography has singled out the Sufi shaykh and the master-disciple relationship in particular as negating the virtues of intellectual and moral effort and personal experience characteristic of the early Sufis. See, e.g. the remarks



appreciate these applications of Qayṣarī's theory of ontological proximity, it will first be necessary to examine its conceptual formulation in greater detail.

In his *Risāla fi 'ilm al-taṣawwuf*, Qayṣarī gives the following definition of the term *walāya*: "Know that *walāya* is derived from *al-walī*, which is nearness (*al-qurb*). This is why the beloved is called '*walī*,' due to his closeness to his lover. As a technical term, it is nearness to the Real."<sup>41</sup> We have already seen how Qayṣarī equated God's nearness to things and His identity with them, referring above all to God's own testimony regarding Himself. But in addition to His use of the term "near" to describe Himself, Qayṣarī writes that God

has also indicated that He is identical with all things, by saying, "He is the First, the Last, the Manifest, the Hidden, and He is aware of all things." His being identical with all things is by His appearance in the raiment of the divine names, and His being other than them is through His invisibility in His Essence, His exaltedness by His attributes above all deficiency and dishonor, His transcendence from limitation and specification, and His being sanctified from the characteristics of origination and creation.<sup>42</sup>

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in John S. Trimmingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 162–65, or Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 236–40. This narrative sees the late medieval transformation of Sufism into a mass phenomenon as its decline from its original, individual pole of intellectual creativity and insight of the first mystics, to a collective pole of devotional, embodied or popular expressions of piety among common people, whose unsophisticated conceptions and naivete the shaykhs of the Sufi orders would at best accommodate out of necessity in their teachings, and at worst manipulate and exploit for personal gain. Qayṣarī's rigorous theorization of the authority of the Sufi shaykh, by all appearances personally unmotivated and aimed primarily at intellectuals, casts serious doubt on the adequacy of these terms of analysis. Indeed, numerous studies in recent years have sought to depart from the decline narrative by devoting badly needed attention to the devotional, embodied, social and political aspects of Sufism as opposed to its doctrinal and normative elements once widely held to constitute its real content. Some of the most important of these studies are reviewed in Le Gall, "Review Article: Recent Thinking on Sufis and Saints in the Lives of Muslim Societies, Past and Present," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42. 4 (2010): 673–87. And yet, many questions remain as to the exact place of doctrine in the lives of those medieval Sufis, much of whose world is now otherwise being excavated in such often vivid detail. In this context, Qayṣarī's depiction of the Sufi shaykh certainly suggests a high degree of permeability between the world of theoretical speculation and the everyday realities of religious authority and embodied practice, a permeability that invites further study and interpretation.

41 "Risāla," 123.

42 *Muqaddimat*, 36–37 (trans. modified).

Here Qayṣarī gives a succinct account of the kinds of determinations that separate God from creation, a point to which we will return shortly. However, this passage also establishes the possibility of God being nearer to some things than others, which stands to reason, for otherwise the friend of God would not be worthy of the special designation *walī*. Even more significantly, God explicitly mentions His friend as the object of this nearness as identity in the canonical narration known as the *ḥadīth* of supererogatory acts (*ḥadīth al-nawāfil*). Here, God says of His beloved servant who has “drawn near” to Him through voluntary acts of worship, “I am the ear with which he hears, the eye with which he sees, the hand with which he strikes and the foot with which he walks.”<sup>43</sup> On the strength of such authoritative and explicit references, Qayṣarī confidently asserts concerning God’s nearness, “He is more knowledgeable concerning His Essence than [any] other.”<sup>44</sup> But what accounts for His special nearness to His friends, and in what precisely does it consist?

As the above passage alludes, God’s greater identity with some things than others is proportionate to the appearance of His perfections in them, as well as the absence of limiting determinations from them.<sup>45</sup> And yet, no matter the degree of perfection they manifest, all creatures, even the closest of God’s friends, still possess “characteristics of origination and creation” by definition that could never be removed from them without them ceasing to be what they are essentially. Thus, human beings draw near to God by removing only the blameworthy traits and attributes of “limitation and specification” that inhere in their souls as accidents and oppose the divine perfections. Meanwhile, it is actually the remaining essential attributes of createdness that differ utterly from God that according to Qayṣarī facilitate His “appearance in the raiment

43 Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, kitāb al-riqāq*, 38: *Bāb al-tawāduʿ*. See an analysis of the different textual sources and iterations of this *ḥadīth* in William A. Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam: A Reconsideration of the Sources, with Special Reference to the Divine Saying or Ḥadīth Qudsī* (The Hague: Mouton, 1977), 173–74. A recent study to trace the influence of this *ḥadīth* in early Sufism until Ibn ‘Arabī while also highlighting parallels and precedents in early Shi‘i literature is Michael Ebstein, “The Organs of God: *Ḥadīth al-Nawāfil* in Classical Islamic Mysticism,” *The Journal of the American Oriental Society* 138. 2 (2018): 271–89.

44 “Risāla,” 120.

45 “The appearance of the light of Being by its perfections in its loci of manifestation ... [strengthens] and weakens depending on nearness to the Real and distance from Him.” *Muqaddimat*, 108–9 (trans. modified). Elsewhere, Qayṣarī writes that Being’s “appearance and perfections weaken” due to “its descent in the levels of creation, its appearance in the enclosures of contingency, and the multiplicity of intermediaries,” while “in view of the decrease [of these conditions], the light [of Being] intensifies, its appearance strengthens, and its perfections and attributes appear.” *Ibid.*, 50–51 (trans. modified).

of the divine names.”<sup>46</sup> Thus all things have two aspects, one in which they are identical with God, and one in which they differ, with their ability to manifest divine perfections, and resulting nearness to God, depending upon the relationship between these two aspects.

In human beings, Qayṣarī calls these two aspects the lordly aspect or aspect of reality (*al-jihā al-rabbāniyya, jihat haqqiyyatihi*), and the aspect of humanness or createdness (*al-jihā al-bashariyya, jihat khalqiyyatihi*).<sup>47</sup> The difference between saints and ordinary people lies in which aspect dominates, with sainthood requiring “the annihilation (*fanā*) of the human aspect in the divine aspect,” followed by the “servant [becoming] determined with real divine determinations and the attributes of Lordship ... which is subsistence (*baqā*) in God, after which these determinations are never removed.”<sup>48</sup> This is why Qayṣarī calls the saint “the annihilated (*fānī*) in God, established in Him, appearing by His names and attributes (*al-zāhir bi-asmā’ihi wa-ṣifātihi*).”<sup>49</sup> The acquisition of sainthood and goal of the entire spiritual path for Qayṣarī thus consists only in achieving this annihilation, subsistence, and manifestation of divine perfections.

This introduction has acquainted us in more detail with how Qayṣarī defined sainthood as ontological proximity. Though God is near to all things, the appearance of every divine perfection in human beings who realize their true potential makes Him nearer to them than all other creatures, whence their

46 This is a subtle but important point. See, e.g. “Risāla,” 131. “Were there no mercifier and mercified, God’s all-mercifulness would not be known ... the same goes for all the names and attributes.” The Perfect Human Being is both, with Qayṣarī writing that the Muḥammadan Spirit is at once “servant of God,” and “lord of the worlds by His lordship over it,” that is, *because* of its perfect servitude. These characteristics of neediness in the servant differ from the blameworthy attributes removed in the course of the spiritual path. The former are the kind of determination Qayṣarī identified with the essence of a thing, whereas the latter are accidental. Because the essential attributes of servitude are necessary for the outward manifestation of the divine perfections, Qayṣarī would write that, “deficiencies are also perfections from another perspective.” *Muqaddimat*, 190–91.

47 *Muqaddimat*, 228–29, 190–91, 234–35 (and 86 in Bayrakdar ed.). For proof of the existence of the lordly aspect of humanity, Qayṣarī cites *āya* 17 of *Sūrat al-anfāl*, “And you did not throw when you threw, but God threw,” (*Muqaddimat*, 190–91) as well as the *ḥadīth* of supererogatory acts (*ibid.*, 228–29). As for the created aspect, Qayṣarī uses the term *bashar* to indicate this mortal or limited aspect of humanity, in contrast to the term *insān*, a reality embracing both of these aspects that manifests the Supreme Name Allāh (*ibid.*, 180–81, 190–91). From the aspect of *bashariyya*, Qayṣarī affirms that even the universal Reality of Humanity which is the Muḥammadan Spirit itself “is a servant, lorded over and in need of its Lord, as the Almighty indicates in His saying ‘Say, I am only a man like you receiving revelation’” (*Sūrat al-kaḥf*, 110). *Ibid.*, 190–91.

48 *Muqaddimat*, 228–29 (trans. modified).

49 “Risāla,” 123.

worthiness of the name *walī*. In Qayṣarī's own terms, this realization consisted in the subjugation of the human aspect of the wayfarer to his or her lordly or divine aspect, or a removal of determinations and cultivation of divine perfections which he also equated with the classical Sufi concepts of annihilation and subsistence in God. As we shall see, Qayṣarī's discussions of the spiritual path give an account of how the disciplines of Sufi wayfaring allowed people to draw near to God in exactly these terms. And yet, individual attainment to the divine nearness also involved an identification with, or nearness to the Muḥammadan Spirit governed by the same principle of ontological proximity outlined here. An examination of this relationship, and some of the philosophical language Qayṣarī used to articulate it, will do much to illustrate the consistency and explanatory power of Qayṣarī's theory of sainthood before we proceed to examine its primary application in his discussions of spiritual wayfaring.

#### 4      **Ontological Proximity in the Cosmos: Universality as Perfection and Nearness**

Returning to his use of the word “nearness” to describe God's identity with creation, Qayṣarī likens it to a kind of relationship of identity between things more generally. “Though it differs in meaning from the nearness which is between two bodies, [it is] like the nearness between a reality (*ḥaqīqa*) and the individuals that are determined from it (*mā yataʿayyan minhā min al-afrād*),” with determination (*taʿayyun*) being the only thing that separates them ontologically.<sup>50</sup> This indicates that the kind of relationship of partial identity that Qayṣarī referred to as “nearness” was in fact integral to the structure of the cosmos as he understood it, with “reality” here referring to anything with a manifestation on lower levels of existence, and “individuals” specifically to its particular manifestations in the visible world. Indeed, everything in Qayṣarī's cosmos was a manifestation of something at a higher level of reality, including the various worlds themselves. Ultimately, each level of reality along with everything therein was both dependent upon what was above it, and identical with it, except for certain added determinations. Epitomizing this relationship of nearness in the cosmos was that of the Muḥammadan Spirit, the “reality of realities,” to all other creatures, which depend upon it utterly to receive their sustenance from God. The relationship of this Spirit to particular human beings as their universal reality, and the possibility of this relationship changing,

<sup>50</sup> “Risāla,” 120.

meanwhile, will be essential for our understanding of Qayṣarī's theory of sainthood. But before proceeding to the Muḥammadan Spirit itself, it will be necessary to turn first to Qayṣarī's innovative conception of the universal and the particular that structured this vision of the cosmos and the place of human beings in it. As we shall see, by systematically elaborating Ibn 'Arabī's identification of universals with divine perfections, Qayṣarī made universality and sainthood near synonyms as far as the state of the human soul is concerned, whose transformation in the context of the spiritual path he then envisioned as "the purification (*takhlīṣ*) of the soul from the constraints (*maḍā'iq*) of the restrictions (*quyūd*) of particularity." The removal of these determinations, together with its "characterization with the attributes of absoluteness and universality," identified the individual soul more completely with God, above all by first rejoining it to the universal reality of the Spirit of which it was but a particular manifestation.<sup>51</sup>

In the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, Ibn 'Arabī takes on a classical issue in Islamic philosophy, the nature of universals (*umūr kullīyya, kullīyyāt*), albeit from a visionary, theosophical perspective, which Qayṣarī would in turn develop systematically. "Universals," Ibn 'Arabī writes, "though not possessing existence in themselves ... have determination (*ḥukm*) and effect (*athar*) over whatever has external existence. Indeed, [the latter] is identical with [the former] – I mean the external existents [are identical with universals]."<sup>52</sup> As examples of universals, he gives life and knowledge, as well as humanness (*insāniyya*). Ibn 'Arabī's basic claim that these things do not exist in the world by themselves apart from their particulars was by then a mainstream philosophical position.<sup>53</sup> However, he departed radically from the philosophers in his understanding of

51 "Risāla," 110–111.

52 Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. Abul Ela Afifi, 51 (Dagli trans. modified, 20). I have modified Dagli's translation to reflect Qayṣarī's interpretation of this passage, found in *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 265–67.

53 So were the ideas that universals have a kind of effect on particulars, as well as a kind of identity with them, but these relationships were understood primarily in terms of logical priority or definitional identity, not in the ontological or substantial sense that Ibn 'Arabī gives them here. See *Ibn Sina's Remarks and Admonitions*, trans. Shams C. Inati (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 121, 125, and *The Metaphysics of the Healing*, trans. Michael Marmura (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 5.1, 20. These passages are discussed in a detailed overview of the "problem of universals" from Ibn Sinā to Mullā Ṣadrā in Muhammad U. Faruque, "Mullā Ṣadrā on the Problem of Natural Universals," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 27.2 (2017): 269–302, esp. 274–281. See also Michael E. Marmura, "Avicenna's Chapter on Universals in the Isagoge of His *Shifā'*," in *Islam: Past Influence and Present Challenge*, ed. Alford T. Welch and Pierre Cachia (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1979), 34–56.

what universals really were, which also altered the exact meaning and implications of his statements otherwise so apparently consistent with philosophical usage. Universals like life and knowledge for Ibn ‘Arabī could be none other than perfections of the Divine Essence, or in the case of the nature of a possible thing like humanness, a possibility in the divine knowledge which was only a manifestation of the Essence’s perfections.<sup>54</sup> As theophanies of the Essence, universals were really no more than Being self-disclosing in a certain aspect, and thus naturally had a total power of “determination and effect” over their individual manifestations in the world, much as a body has over the shadow it casts.<sup>55</sup> None of this, however, entailed their actually entering into external existence in a way that would result in them accepting, in themselves, the division and limitation that characterized those manifestations – for to do so would ultimately introduce these conditions of creation into the divine knowledge or Essence itself.<sup>56</sup>

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- 54 Qayṣarī writes that the objects of God’s knowledge, which are the essences of things prior to their creation – the “Immutable Entities” or “Permanent Archetypes” (*a’yān thābita*) – include universals or quiddities (*māhīyyāt*) among themselves. *Muqaddimat*, 92–93. “Quiddities are the forms of His perfections and the manifestations of His names and attributes.” *Ibid.*, 38–39. Indeed, for Qayṣarī, divine attributes (*ṣifāt*) and perfections (*kamālāt*) are synonymous. Cf. *Muqaddimat*, 60–61, where he identifies the divine attributes life and knowledge as “perfections.” See also “Risāla,” 129: “Whosoever affirms a possessor of attributes of perfection resembling the divine attributes other than His Essence has attributed partners to Him in attributes and essence.”
- 55 Indeed, Qayṣarī writes that “all realities that exist externally are like shadows of those forms” that first emanate from God – i.e. the universals, quiddities, or Immutable Entities. *Muqaddimat*, 140–41.
- 56 Nothing according to Qayṣarī ever really enters or exits existence, or acquires or loses Being, since this would imply a reality apart from Being, or the conversion of Being into nothingness, both of which are impossible. *Muqaddimat*, 47–48. External existence, therefore, refers not to a kind of being that things really possess or lack, but simply to particular conditions of Being’s appearance governed by the divine name the Outward, or Manifest (*al-Ẓāhir*), conditions like division, multiplicity, change or deficiency under which the forms of possible things, or creation, are able to appear, but which are unacceptable for God Himself at the level of His Essence, divinity, or knowledge. See, e.g. “Asās al-wahdāniyya,” 154: “as for our saying, ‘a thing is existent externally (*mawjūd fī al-khārij*),’ its meaning is that the Reality of Being, determined by a specific determination permanent in the presence of His knowledge [i.e. a quiddity], appears externally ... So ‘being’ as it pertains to our saying ‘existent’ is appearance (*zuhūr*) and obtaining (*huṣūl*), and nothing else.” Thus, while denying the external existence of universals apart from their particulars rendered their ontological status ambiguous among the philosophers, for Ibn ‘Arabī, its main implication was rather the status of universals as theophanies *in divinis* precisely, which could never enter into the world as they are in God, but rather only through so many reflections without becoming subject to the conditions of external existence in themselves as universals. “The reality of knowledge is one, and the reality of life is one, and their relationship to the living being and the knower is the same ... they allow of

Now, while Ibn ‘Arabī never committed a conceptual system to writing for the interpretation of his teachings, Qayṣarī clearly kept his discourse on universals in view as he sought to do precisely that. For if universals were at root only perfections of the Essence, then there must be a way to account coherently for their “descent” in the same way that the divine names and attributes descend to give rise to the various degrees of cosmic existence in Ibn ‘Arabī’s teachings.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, since the “divine attributes are nothing but universal meanings emanating from the Essence,” Qayṣarī would write that “it is necessary for the universal meanings to permeate and descend to all the degrees of existence from their original degree ... do you not see how the universal meanings descend and become particular?”<sup>58</sup> In fact, the entire structure of the cosmos is the product of this descent, with Qayṣarī writing that the perfections,

by their descent from their absolute station self-delimit and fall into the constraints of contingency and perils of occurrence, thing after thing, until they fall into the extreme of individual constraint which is the

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determination with respect to individual existence, but do not allow of division or separation into parts; this is impossible for them.” Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 52–53 (trans. Dagli, 10). For a philosopher, maintaining that universals do not become many because of their individuals would be an important part of proving that their existence was not logically absurd, a point seemingly echoed here. And yet for Ibn ‘Arabī, at least in Qayṣarī’s interpretation, this point was even more urgent because a universal undergoing division in itself would imply the introduction of multiplicity or other conditions of contingency into God’s knowledge, something clearly inadmissible due to its identity with His Essence. Cf. *Muqaddimat*, 106–7.

57 These ideas were also not completely unprecedented in philosophy, though it remained for Sufi theosophy to develop them. The “descent” of universals, as well as their existence in God or in His knowledge are concepts that find some kind of expression in Ibn Sīnā, but the nature of their descent and its implications for their ontological status is not given much attention, nor does it amount to anything approaching a visionary cosmology like that of the Akbarī school. See Faruque, *Mullā Ṣadrā*, 285. What is more, to equate the intelligibles proceeding from God’s spontaneous contemplation of the “order of the good,” which according to Ibn Sīnā gives rise to the world, with a genuine “self-disclosure” of the attributes of God’s own Essence to Himself, as His emanation of the Immutable Entities is understood in the Akbarī school, risks imposing on Ibn Sīnā ideas he did not intend, and could invite an objection similar to his rejection of the Platonic Ideas as mandating multiplicity in God or partners with Him in eternal pre-existence. See Ibn Sīnā, *Metaphysics*, 7.1–9. Thus the potential continuity between these two perspectives should not be overstated out of hand, though it comprises a topic that would make an interesting area for further inquiry. Cf. remarks in Faruque, *Mullā Ṣadrā*, 282.

58 “Kashf al-ḥijāb,” 97–98. Cf. also *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, v. 2, 1202. “When [the gnostic] becomes an incorporeal intellect and enters upon the archangelic world ... he then witnesses universals (*umūr kullīya*) and incorporeal realities which are the principles of what appears in the world of nature. Thus he knows how the universals descend and become particular and sensible.”

particular itself. Thus, the particular is the universal, descended from its original station.<sup>59</sup>

In the resulting cosmology, the more universal a thing, the more fully the divine perfections appear within it – and thus the nearer to God it is by definition.<sup>60</sup> Now, the most universal being in this hierarchy could be none other than the Muḥammadan Spirit, the first thing created by God and the nearest thing to Him.<sup>61</sup> From the religious perspective of revelation and guidance, its nearness to

59 “Asās al-waḥdāniyya,” 159. Remarkably, Qayṣarī’s assertion that “the particular is the universal” extends beyond the universal attributes in particular things to include even the conditions of particularity themselves. Indeed, Qayṣarī considers even the progressively restrictive forms of genus, species and individual that arise in this descent of perfections to be from a certain perspective only manifestations of oneness, itself a divine perfection which has also descended from its highest level, that of exclusive oneness (*aḥadiyya*) which is identical with the Divine Essence. Its appearance as a limitation of possible things is ultimately a consequence of God’s manifesting His own oneness as one attribute distinct from others, and thus separating it from His Essence – since at the level of non-manifestation in the Essence all divine attributes are both identical with the Essence, and with one another. From the possibility of a oneness distinct from the essence of a thing proceeds the manifestation of possible things, in whom oneness adheres only as an accident by definition. *Ibid.*, 156–58. Incidentally, this account ultimately maintains consistency with the classical philosophical view that universals in themselves are neither one nor many. Cf. Ibn Sīnā, *Metaphysics*, 5.1, 18.

60 This justifiably raises the question of whether God Himself, or Being as such, is “universal.” Qayṣarī responds negatively to this question, writing that Being in itself “is neither a universal nor a particular,” though in accordance with its theophanies it “becomes absolute, limited, universal, particular, general, specific, unitary or multiple without experiencing any change in its Essence or reality.” *Muqaddimat*, 24–25. Simply put, Being as such is beyond even universality. Now, in one place, Qayṣarī does refer to Being as having a “natural universal” (“Risāla,” 115), though this term could not have been intended in the usual sense if it was to remain consistent with Qayṣarī’s basic statements on Being, and his definition of natural universals as quiddities in the divine knowledge. According to Jalāl al-Dīn Ashtiyānī, Qayṣarī’s use of the term “natural universal” with respect to Being is basically figurative, referring to the fact that Being can, like a universal, be said of many things, though without making it a quiddity such as genus or species in the manner usually associated with the term (*Rasā’il-i Qayṣarī*, ed. Jalāl al-Dīn Ashtiyānī [Tehran: Mu’assasa-yi Pazhūhishī-yi Ḥikmat va Falsafa-yi Īrān, 1381/2003], 71). Thus, even if God in his aspect as Being is not “universal” in the fully literal and strict sense, the universality of created things can be said to make them more like Him to the extent that it involves their transcendence and lack of limitation, while their presence in a multitude of things also resembles the omnipresence of Being.

61 Also the Universal Spirit, Human Spirit or Supreme Spirit. See e.g. “Risāla,” 116; *Muqaddimat*, 202–3.



God makes it “the real Prophet” (*al-nabī al-ḥaqīqī*) and source of all scripture.<sup>62</sup> It is also the First Intellect and universal Human Reality of which all people are in fact only individuals, while the historical prophets and messengers tasked with leading humanity to perfection are simply its most complete manifestations who make it fully present in the realm of particulars.<sup>63</sup> But from the cosmic point of view, through its supreme *walāya* the Muḥammadan Spirit is also the first creature to receive the total emanation of Being and every perfection, proceeding to transmit this emanation to the rest of creation, a function that makes it the lord of the worlds who governs the entire cosmos in God’s stead.<sup>64</sup> It accomplishes this by permeating the entire cosmos in its capacity as the universal substance, and thus, from another perspective, it *is* the emanation of Being once it enters into the world.<sup>65</sup> By its descent, it accepts limitation and gives rise to the levels of cosmic existence only to terminate in the individual human being, which, prior to characterization with divine perfections is the most particular creature and thus the furthest thing from God.<sup>66</sup> This hierarchy would thus prefigure the entire journey to sainthood, which could only consist in an “ascent” back through the levels of cosmic existence from the particular to the universal and union with the Spirit. A brief examination of this hierarchy will show how the concept of ontological proximity extends through Qayṣarī’s cosmology into his discussions of wayfaring, and how the

62 The “absolute lordship” (*rubūbiyya muṭlaqa*) of the Muḥammadan Reality who “possesses the Supreme Name,” its “giving everything its due and bestowing whatever the world needs” is by its *walāya*, its “[possessing] complete power and every divine attribute.” *Muqaddimat*, 188–91. Thus the entire world “only receives assistance, strength, power, control (*taṣarruf*), knowledge and divine emanations ... through the hidden, which is the station of sainthood.” *Ibid.*, 226–27 (trans. modified). On the connection between emanation and lordship, see also 104–5.

63 *Ibid.*, 180–83, 192–93.

64 *Ibid.*, 188–89; “Risāla,” 131–32.

65 “Risāla,” 107. Both Substance and the Spirit or First Intellect contain the realities of all things hidden within themselves. Qayṣarī calls them both the manifestation of the “Reality of all Realities” (*ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqā’iq kullihā*). “Risāla,” 131; *Muqaddimat*, 114–17. Elsewhere he writes, “the Universal Spirit is the one who becomes a species through appearance in another universal attribute, or in a particular attribute, an individual.” “Risāla,” 116–17. Compare with *Muqaddimat*, 112 (trans. modified), where Substance, “with the addition of a particular meaning becomes a particular substance, like an individual.” Cf. also Ali, introduction to *Muqaddimat*, 15, and *Muqaddimat*, 87, footnote 36.

66 “The existential movement ceases with the human being, who is the last of the degrees of descent.” “Risāla,” 116. In the state of nature, due to “veiling and distance from the mine (*mi’dan*) of the attributes of perfection,” the human being is no more than “an animal able to stand” who “knows only food and drink.” *Ibid.*, 125.

new significance it gives to the terms universal and particular structures and explains in some detail the account of the spiritual path to follow.

In Qayṣarī's cosmos, the realities closer to God were more "universal" not only because they manifested the divine perfections more completely, but also in a literal sense consistent with established usage – that is, they were really present in a multitude of particular things below them in this hierarchy. For Qayṣarī, this included incorporeal intellects and spirits as well as the forms of genera and species. Like the Muḥammadan Spirit, these "external realities" acted as conduits of the divine emanation to whatever was below them in the cosmic hierarchy from one perspective.<sup>67</sup> From another perspective however, that of their nearness to what was below them, they inhered in particulars and concurred with them in substance, differing only through added determinations.<sup>68</sup> None of this, however, amounted to an affirmation of the external existence of universals as Ibn 'Arabī and the philosophers both denied,<sup>69</sup> for Qayṣarī held that the forms of all individuals were hidden in the

67 Qayṣarī writes that a universal reality like a genus (*jins*) acts as "an intermediary by which the emanation [of Being] reaches what is below it ... until it terminates with individuals." *Muqaddimat*, 104–5 (trans. modified). Cf. also "Asās," 154: "All genera return to the high genus (*al-jins al-'ālī*), by whose appearance in a universal attribute and universal determination the relative genus has its being." Qayṣarī identifies the essences of genera and species as among the possible things (i.e. destined for external existence) in *Muqaddimat*, 96–99. They are what Qayṣarī calls "external realities," which occupy an intermediate position between externally existing individuals and the unmanifest *a'yān thābita*. *Ibid.*, 82–83. For a mention of the existence of a species as "one thing" in the external world, cf. also 62–63.

68 See "Risāla," 116–17, 120; *Muqaddimat*, 112–13. Everything in the cosmos from bodies to spirits is the locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) for an entity in the realm directly above it (stated succinctly in "Sharḥ ta'wilāt al-basmala," 196), and "both the locus and the manifestation are one in existence." *Muqaddimat*, 180–81.

69 This understanding of genera and species, which in mainstream Islamic philosophy were only terms of logic, may have its origins in the writings of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā ("Brethren of Purity"), who saw species and genera as having concrete referents in the world, subsidiary manifestations of the Universal Soul that sustain the cosmos in an emanatory schema similar to the one seen here. See *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*, 3:175–78, qtd. by Ali in *Muqaddimat*, 133, footnote 1. Given the influence of the Ikhwān on Ibn 'Arabī, it may well have been Qayṣarī's intention to reconcile their use of these terms with the modified peripatetic approach to universals espoused in the *Fuṣūṣ*, something that would admittedly not have concerned Ibn 'Arabī whose aim was not constructing a philosophical system. Qayṣarī, however, effectively resolved this issue by drawing a distinction between the genus or species itself as a form that achieves external manifestation, and the nature its members share, which is the universal properly speaking – e.g. a natural universal such as "humanness" (*al-insāniyya*, cf. *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 273) which never leaves the divine knowledge is contrasted with the "real species" (*al-anwā' al-ḥaqīqīyya*) such as "the human" or "humanity" in the substantive sense (*al-insān*, cf. "Asās," 155), whose form can,

universal Substance, and thus the universal forms that appeared within it were never truly separate from their particulars.<sup>70</sup> In the resulting cosmology, the forms of universals appear to manifest independently in the world of the First Intellect or archangelic realm, though in fact they are really inclusive (*mush-tamila*) of their particulars unmanifest within them.<sup>71</sup> In the intermediate realm, the Imaginal World, the forms of particular things appear separately, but with their universals still visible within them,<sup>72</sup> and finally, in the visible world, the conditions of nature and corporeality veil universals from the sight of ordinary humans.<sup>73</sup> And yet, even this lowest, most determined and particular level of existence comprised of individual bodies was not excluded from identification with the more universal levels of reality through their shared perfections, since its true Substance was none other than the Spirit.<sup>74</sup> This last point would prove to be of vital significance for Qayṣarī's account of the spiritual path, in which we shall see that the work of transforming the soul into a more universal substance depended upon in great measure and could not possibly omit the corporeal expression of divine perfections through acts of worship and pious conduct.

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in Qayṣarī's cosmology, achieve a kind of external existence as "inclusive" of its particulars (see below). Qayṣarī's elegant, if circuitous, combination of these two divergent views is consistent with his broader project of subjecting Ibn 'Arabī's teachings to a fixed technical vocabulary and demonstrating their comprehensive scope to a broader learned audience.

70 *Muqaddimat*, 116–17.

71 *Muqaddimat*, 54–55, 90–91, 134–35. To it belong both "universal and particular spirits from among the incorporeal intellects and souls." "Risāla," 118.

72 *Muqaddimat*, 56–59. For Qayṣarī, the Imaginal World also corresponds to the Universal Soul, to which he gives the Qur'anic names of "Guarded Tablet" (*al-Lawḥ al-Mahfūz*) and "Manifest Book" (*al-Kitāb al-Mubīn*). In the microcosm, this level of reality corresponds to the human heart, in which "universals are specified and witnessed individually." The Universal Soul is also the Heart of the macrocosm, and indeed of the Perfect Human Being. *Muqaddimat*, 132–33, 138–39, 140–41.

73 Qayṣarī attributes the veiling of human perception generally to the soul's connection to the body, and to the four elements specifically. See e.g. *Muqaddimat*, 142–43. Thus, even though "it is not possible to perceive the particular without its universal, since the universal is the particular with individuation" the conditions of their bodies and senses make most people unaware of this fact. Interestingly, this effect appears to be specific to humans, for Qayṣarī objects that, contrary to the prevalent intellectual position, animals can perceive universals. *Muqaddimat*, 122–23.

74 Further to this point, Qayṣarī writes, "the human body is the locus of manifestation (*māṣhar*) of his imaginal body ... which is the locus of manifestation of the soul-form attached to the body, which is the locus manifestation of the incorporeal, spiritual form, which is the locus of manifestation of the unseen form permanent in the knowledge of the Real" ("Sharḥ ta'wīlāt al-basmala," 196), while "the locus and manifestation are one thing in existence" (*Muqaddimat*, 180–81).

Indeed, for Qayṣarī, the spiritual path mirrored his cosmology almost exactly, with its three major stations of soul, heart and Spirit reflecting the same degrees of particularity and universality, or ontological distance and proximity to God, as the visible, imaginal and angelic worlds.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, the concept of ontological proximity explains how it was possible for human beings to traverse the levels of this existential hierarchy in the first place. That is, in a cosmos where higher levels of existence are identical with what is below them except for certain determinations, people do not so much “ascend” through levels of a cosmic reality outside of themselves as they “become” the more universal realities on which they previously depended for their external existence, all through the removal of determinations and cultivation of perfections within their own soul accomplished by acts of worship and obedience to prophetic and saintly guidance. Out of all creatures, however, this possibility is effectively limited to human beings, and conceivable for them only because the reality of humanity is the Universal Spirit with respect to which all other possible things, and even their respective universal realities, are only particulars.<sup>76</sup> Thus, while there is an inherent limit to how universal all other creatures can become because of the essential determinations that make them what they are, the reality latent within every person that makes them human is the most comprehensive in existence, God’s Supreme Name Allāh, which contains all other names.<sup>77</sup> That is, while reaching perfection for every other creature could only ever mean manifesting certain names of God to the exclusion of others, for human beings it is to manifest every name, or every perfection.<sup>78</sup> Thus, much as the name Allāh both permeates and encompasses all other names, to the extent of their perfection as this name’s manifestation do the souls of individual human beings actually come to permeate and embrace every world, due precisely to the identity they achieve with the Spirit.<sup>79</sup>

Qayṣarī speaks directly to this possibility. “The relationship of the Universal Spirit known as ‘the First Intellect’ to the rest of the spirits,” he would write, “is like the relationship of the genus to its species and individuals.” In the case of its individual manifestations, Qayṣarī would maintain “the spirit, the heart, and the soul that controls the body are one thing, whose names differ according to the difference between its attributes,” confirming that the individual

75 See “Risāla,” 125–26; “Taḥqīq mā’ al-ḥayāt,” 189.

76 *Muqaddimat*, 180–81.

77 *Ibid.* See also *Muqaddimat*, 20–21.

78 *Ibid.* See also “Sharḥ ta’wilāt al-basmala,” 199–200.

79 *Muqaddimat*, 180–81, 184–85.

soul's identification with the Spirit depended simply upon the removal of certain determinations and acquisition of certain attributes.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, for ordinary people, prophets and saints represent living proof of this possibility, with Qayṣarī writing of the Prophet Muḥammad that

the Perfect Human Being ... is the First Intellect, and the Muḥammadan Spirit, indicated by [the Prophet's] saying 'the first thing God created was my light,' and in another narration 'my Spirit.' And that is considering the characterization of his spirit by universality (*ittiṣāf rūḥihi bi-al-kullīyya*) and the lifting of the restriction (*taqayyud*) that entails particularity and reckoning between [the individual and his spirit] by duality. As for considering [his spirit's] attachment to forms of humanity (*bashariyya*) and the human body, the difference between them is like the difference between the universal and the particular, not like the difference between two different realities.<sup>81</sup>

Remarkably, Qayṣarī uses the exact same language to describe the goal of the spiritual path as he does here the universal aspect of the Prophet's Spirit, showing how for Qayṣarī, becoming a more universal being in the last analysis meant nothing other than to follow the Prophet Muḥammad in the deepest and most complete sense. But of still greater interest is the clear sense this passage gives of what the *jīha bashariyya* entailed, namely the spirit's connection to the body. Indeed, for Qayṣarī it is through the corporeal embodiment of perfections that the relationship of ontological proximity to the Spirit and God constitutive of sainthood extends to include even the body. To this point, Qayṣarī would write that, while spirit and body certainly differ in one aspect,

Insofar as the body is the spirit's form, the locus of manifestation, manifesting its perfections and its powers in the visible world, [the spirit] is in need of [the body] and cannot be divested of it. The spirit permeates it but not in the sense of indwelling or uniting with it, as the philosophers held, but as God, the Absolute Being permeates all things; there is no difference between the two in any aspect. Whoever perceives how God

80 "Risāla," 117. This agrees exactly with Qayṣarī's doctrine of Substance, of which all substances are simply diverse manifestations, and "the distinction between them is through the accidents related to each." *Muqaddimat*, 116–17. The choice of capitalization in my translations are intended to reflect either the sense in which "the Spirit" is a proper name for a single, universal reality (short for or identical with the Supreme Spirit, Universal Spirit, or Human Spirit), or an ordinary noun when applied to individuals.

81 "Risāla," 117.

manifests in creation, in which sense creation is identical with Him and in which sense it is other than Him, perceives how the spirit manifests in the body, in which sense it is identical to the body and in which sense it is other than it.<sup>82</sup>

Now, while they cannot appear in the visible world as they do in more universal levels of reality, this passage makes it clear that the task of making the divine perfections fully present in the cosmos hinges upon the correct relationship between spirit and body. Succinctly put, the body of a Perfect Human Being, though limited and subject to conditions of corporeality, nevertheless *is* the Spirit as it appears in the visible world, more so than any other thing. This, as it happens, appears to explain the perpetual need for a complete individual embodiment of the Spirit in a Perfect Human Being to be present in the cosmos as its Pole (*qutb*).<sup>83</sup> Indeed, since the Spirit cannot be present in the realm of particulars except as a particular thing precisely, it is not simply the Spirit as such, but the Spirit in and through individual saints that realizes the divine vicegerency and makes the emanation of divine perfections necessary to sustain the entire cosmic order reach individual creatures.<sup>84</sup> In the age of prophecy, the Pole who carries out this task is one of God's prophets or messengers, while in between prophets and after the cessation of prophecy, it is the greatest saint of the age who oversees the order and maintenance of the cosmos through control (*taṣarruf*) of its affairs, with the aid of his or her deputies.<sup>85</sup>

82 *Muqaddimat*, 212–13 (trans. modified).

83 Since the whole world depends upon the vicegerent or Pole to receive what it needs from God, “when the cycle [of sainthood] is also complete” and the last Pole dies, “the establishment of the Hour [i.e. the Day the of Judgment] becomes necessary.” *Muqaddimat*, 194–95 (trans. modified).

84 As Bashir notes, “‘the perfect man’ for many Sufi theorists was not an actual person ... [but] the macrocosm that paralleled an individual human being at the microcosmic level.” Bashir, *Messianic Hopes*, 37. Qayṣarī’s conception of the Perfect Human Being is then significant for explicitly specifying individuals who both embody and permeate the macrocosm through an identity with the Spirit that includes even their bodies, thus combining universal and particular within themselves. It thus also displays a notable similarity to the later idea of “projection” (*barazāt*, *burūz*) in the thought of Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh (d. 869/1464–65) and his disciple Shams al-Dīn Lāhijī (d. 912/1506–7), who used it to explain “how the Muḥammadan Reality appears in the human body” (ibid., 98, 174–75), a concept that would eventually become incorporated into Shi’ite *ʿirfān* (see Ata Anzali, *Mysticism in Iran*, 164–65).

85 “Risāla,” 124. Ibn ‘Arabī mentions specifically in *Futūḥāt*, v. 3, 89 (Būlāq ed.), “men and women have a part to play at all levels, including the level of the Pole.” Trans. by Chodkiewicz and Sherrard, qtd. in *Seal of the Saints*, 98.

This brings us to a point of vital significance for the acquisition of sainthood in Qayṣarī's thought, namely that the perfection of identity between Spirit and body that makes Perfect Human Beings what they are is not simply by virtue of some occult property. Rather, this identity, and the all-comprehensive nature and cosmic function born of it, necessarily involve everything a Perfect Human Being does, for as Qayṣarī writes, "after his characterization by [*walāya*], the servant is the origin of [his attributes and acts] with respect to his lordly aspect."<sup>86</sup> On the one hand, this shows that individual sainthood cannot exclude pious and moral conduct, that the body's reflection of universal attributes of perfection which make it the manifestation of God and the Spirit in the visible world must involve specific actions. On the other hand, it suggests that a path for ordinary people toward the acquisition of sainthood lies precisely in the accomplishment of such actions. These acts, with their undeniable corporeal dimension, are necessary for the transformation the soul, beginning by changing its relationship with the body.<sup>87</sup>

Herein lies the rationale of Qayṣarī's insistence that "arrival at God ... is impossible except by following the prophets and saints," a substantially corporeal undertaking comprising adherence to the *sharī'a* and surrender to the guidance of a spiritual master.<sup>88</sup> And as the following section will show, these forms of guidance are little more than the descents of the Spirit ontologically nearest to the individual human state, making the actions they prescribe the form of the Spirit in the world. To conform to this guidance, wayfarers imitate the conduct of a Perfect Human Being, which is ultimately to adopt the outward form of the Spirit until their souls too become identified with it. Ultimately, the transformative power of this imitation to remove the constraints of particularity from the soul and replace them with perfections derives from God's emanation to the world by the Spirit, though access to it is mediated ontologically by the religious law and living saints who stand between individual human beings and the more universal levels of existence. In the course of the spiritual path, wayfarers increasingly participate in this emanation proportionate to the identity with the Spirit they achieve through acts of worship, traversing

86 "Muqaddimāt," ed. Bayrakdar, 86.

87 According to Qayṣarī, "a particular body and a determinate place" are among the "determinations of individuality." "Asās," 151. And as we shall see in the following section, these are precisely the conditions by which the soul's actions and attributes cease to be determined in the course of the spiritual path. Thus, the soul that submits to divine guidance rather than its own obsession with the pleasures and needs of the body already begins to transcend individuality and become less particular in this immediate sense.

88 "Risāla," 119.

increasingly universal states of being until they are finally united with it and become sources of its guidance and power to perfect others in the world.

## 5 The Spiritual Path

This section examines Qayṣarī's account of the spiritual path, with special attention to how he understood the disciplines of Sufi wayfaring to be capable of removing the determinations that separate the soul from the Spirit and God, and inculcating in it the perfections that unite them. In light of the foregoing, this section shows how Qayṣarī understood the practices of the path to make the soul into a more universal substance in a literal and direct fashion entirely consistent with the principles of his metaphysics and cosmology. Ultimately, this ascent through the cosmic hierarchy was a process of progressive identification with the most universal substance of all, the Muḥammadan Spirit, accomplished with the mediation and assistance of its main manifestations in the visible world, the prescriptions of the prophetic *sharī'a* and the guidance of a spiritual master. A brief examination of these forms of guidance will show their role to be little more than a specialization of the Spirit's more general emanatory function. In this context, the concept of ontological proximity will do much to explain how the seemingly ordinary acts of worship and simple obedience to a Sufi shaykh that constituted the spiritual path held the power to open the wayfarer to unseen realities and more universal states of being with which such acts would otherwise have no obvious connection.

For Qayṣarī, the *sharī'a* was far more than a set of prescriptions and prohibitions that happen to be salutary, either for what they achieved in the visible world, or by virtue of arbitrary divine command. Rather, it appears as something integral to the structure of the cosmos, the very form in which the divine emanation by means of the Spirit reaches humanity. On its origins, Qayṣarī writes,

The prophet by sainthood takes from God ... the meanings (*ma'ānī*) by which [he has] the perfection of his degree in sainthood and prophecy, and by prophecy conveys everything he has taken from God ... to [His] servants and perfects them by it. This is only possible through the *sharī'a*, which means everything that a Messenger has brought of the [Divine] Book and [Prophetic] Wont (*al-kitāb wa-al-sunna*).<sup>89</sup>

89 "Risāla," 121.



Now, as we already know from Qayṣarī's use of the term quoted above, these "meanings" are not mere teachings, but the divine perfections themselves whose external appearance is the warp and weft of cosmic existence. In this case, the prophet's receiving them through *walāya* recalls the complete emanation of Being and its every perfection to the vicegerent of the age, who conveys them to creation. Revealed guidance to human beings thus appears clearly to represent only a special aspect of this more general emanatory function.

Indeed, in his renowned commentary on the Wine Ode of Ibn al-Fāriḍ, Qayṣarī interprets this poem as alluding to the universal emanation that comprises both existential support and guidance for human beings, or the "wine" of divine love and gnosis (*ma'rifa*).<sup>90</sup> While the descent of Being by means of the Spirit reaches all things proportionate to their need for existential support, Perfect Human Beings fulfill the special function of prophets and spiritual guides for the rest of humanity, who must partake of this wine further on a voluntary basis in order to reach their full perfection.<sup>91</sup> In this context, the *sharī'a* is the means by which they convey this emanation to humanity in its totality, for in the context of Qayṣarī's thought, the "*kitab* and *sunna*" that the Perfect Human Being brings from God can in the last analysis only mean his Spirit, since Qayṣarī writes that the Perfect Human Being is "a book embracing all [divine] books."<sup>92</sup> The *sharī'a* that people follow thus represents that first complete divine emanation to creation which constitutes human perfection, projected into the sensible world and rendered continuously accessible through concrete teachings and normative conduct. This is why Qayṣarī calls the outward observances of the *sharī'a* "the [outward] form of the knowledge of reality," while writing that the saint "who knows the inward and outward [of the *sharī'a*]" is the one "whose nearness to [the Prophet's] Spirit is strongest," and

90 Qayṣarī also writes that the wine is the legendary "water of life" (*mā' al-ḥayāt*) of which the hidden prophet Khidr drank. *Wine*, 27. In another treatise devoted specifically to this topic, he identifies this water as esoteric knowledge (*al-'ilm al-ladunnī*) "that emanates from the Presence of the Knowing, the Informed to the sanctified souls." This emanation of knowledge is also a kind of subtle substance, ultimately identifiable with Breath of the All-Merciful or Universal Substance itself that proceeds from the "All-Merciful Presence" (*al-ḥadra al-raḥmāniyya*). "Taḥqīq mā' al-ḥayāt," 184–85.

91 Commenting on the verse "In memory of the beloved we drank a wine," Qayṣarī writes, "what is intended by *drinking* is the reception of the divine effusion which descends in levels over the entities and their capacities, [and which] is the cause for the manifestation of the perfections hidden in the unseen of the servant's entity." *Wine*, 13–15. "The wine of divine gnosis appeared from the interiors of the perfect, perfected hearts ... to the souls lacking in their perfections. These ... are the souls of the prophets and saints calling creatures to the real, perfecting their souls." *Ibid.*, 24.

92 *Muqaddimat*, 136–37 (trans. modified).

is thus “worthiest to be followed.”<sup>93</sup> With this context in view, one of Qayṣarī’s discourses on *sharīʿa* observance as it concerns the spiritual wayfarer is worth quoting at length here.

For the seeker, it is mandatory to believe in God, His books and messengers, the Last Day, Paradise, the Fire, reckoning, reward, and punishment, and that all that [the prophets] report is true and valid, with no doubt or suspicion therein; and to act according to the dictate of what they command, and to cease from what they prohibit according to the method of imitation, so that the reality of the matter might unveil itself to him, and the guarded secret in all commands and prohibitions appear to him. And with that, his heeding the commands and ceasing from the prohibitions will come to be from knowledge and certainty, or indeed witnessing and beholding, not simple imitation and faith. And he will perceive matters higher than these, and then increase in worship, as the Prophet used to worship, for *he stood in prayer at night until his feet swelled*. [When] it was said to him “God has forgiven your past and future misdeeds,” he would say “Should I not be a grateful servant?”<sup>94</sup>

Now, bearing in mind that Qayṣarī considered the mental faculties associated with linguistic and formal thought to be corporeal, this entire regimen of adherence to correct belief and practice appears as a single, comprehensive program of active participation in the Prophetic norm which involved the entirety of one’s being.<sup>95</sup> Based on the preceding discussion of the body’s capacity to manifest perfections, we recognize the ultimate outcome of this imitation to be an identity with the Spirit, though this is ultimately achieved,

93 “Risāla,” 121–22.

94 Ibid., 123. The italicized portion is a near verbatim quote from the *ḥadīth* found in Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ, kitāb al-taḥajjud*, 6.

95 *Muqaddimat*, 172–73, and *Wine*, 33. My intention here is not to suggest that Qayṣarī understood spiritual wayfaring to be something purely physical that could be achieved in a rote manner without a sound intention, for this would invalidate Qayṣarī’s own motive for composing works of doctrine for the aid of wayfarers (see above, footnote 12). I only mean to emphasize the sense in which for Qayṣarī, orthopraxy extended to include the correct use of one’s mental faculties, making the discipline of body and soul activities that were ultimately inseparable. Indeed, for Qayṣarī, doctrine and method complemented one another totally, with a sufficient theoretical grasp of the purpose behind the disciplines of the path representing also the prerequisite for their efficacy. See “Risāla,” 110: “Arrival at God has two parts: theoretical (*ʿilmī*) and practical (*ʿamalī*). The practical is conditional upon the theoretical, so that the practitioner may have [spiritual] perception (*baṣīra*) in his knowledge.”

as we shall see, through the gradual effect of these practices on the wayfarer's soul itself.

This progressive manner in which this transformation takes place is particularly evident in Qayṣarī's account of the remembrance (*dhikr*) of God's names, which begins on the tongue, but proceeds to take hold in successively higher levels of the soul. Indeed, because "the locus and the manifestation are one thing in existence," the one who utters a name of God for a moment in a certain concrete sense becomes that name, manifest in the world of particulars.<sup>96</sup> In the end, the reality of humanity itself is God's Supreme Name Allāh, making its invocation and that of every divine name a kind of anticipation of the form the wayfarer ultimately seeks to take.<sup>97</sup> Now to the extent of the identity with the name that is achieved, the wayfarer must then participate in its reception of the emanation of the Essence, and its transmitting that emanation to the forms it lords over.<sup>98</sup> Thus, "when we deepen the remembrance to the remembrance of the heart... or remembrance of the Spirit," Qayṣarī writes, "the emanation will be more complete,"<sup>99</sup> with the perfections it manifests momentarily in the soul to eventually become instilled in it as innate properties. The same applies *mutatis mutandis* for the entire range of acts that the *sharī'a* prescribes, for as long as people manifest the perfections of the Spirit through their deeds, they are its locus of manifestation, and to the extent of the resulting identity with it they benefit from the emanation it receives by *walāya* themselves. Thus, Qayṣarī would write that "to the degree [the seeker] follows the prophets and saints, the divine lights and lordly secrets manifest to him."<sup>100</sup>

Now, the capacity to participate in this emanation of divine perfections through the practices of the *sharī'a* is ultimately possible only because the universal reality of humanity is the Spirit, which has already been endowed with every divine perfection essentially. Put another way, by continuously drinking the wine of love, people eventually realize their identity with it as their true Substance. For this reason, Qayṣarī writes that the annihilation of the servant's created aspect which is the goal of the path "is only possible through the essential love latent within the servant." This latent love, however, "appears

96 *Muqaddimat*, 180–81. On human beings manifesting the names and attributes at different times, see also 80–81, 100–1.

97 See above, footnote 75. To be exact, Qayṣarī writes that the name or names *Allāh, al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm* make up the "species-form of humanity" (*al-ṣūra al-naw'iyya al-insāniyya*). "Sharḥ ta'wilāt al-basmala," 200.

98 On these emanatory functions of the names, see *Muqaddimat*, 102–5.

99 *Wine*, 23 (trans. modified, Arabic 29).

100 "Risāla," 120.

only after turning away from all that contravenes and contradicts it,"<sup>101</sup> and as long as the soul remains the source of its own actions, this crucial disavowal is incomplete, for even in acts of worship, Qayṣarī maintains, the soul only seeks its own gratification.<sup>102</sup> Thus, even in good deeds the soul's entrenchment in its own particularity, its innate opposition to universality and perfection renders it impervious to the transformative power of revealed rites and observances. Only the guidance of a Perfect Human Being can actualize this potential. Thus, Qayṣarī writes,

The traveler must have a companion to accompany him, and a guide who leads the way, so he befriends one who has orientation (*tawajjuh*) [to God] and knowledge of the path, and this is the shaykh. Now, for as long as he fails to believe in him, nothing will open to him, and his company will not benefit him. So he must believe the best concerning him, and that his company is refuge from destruction, and that he is a knower of the paths he travels, and this is volition (*irāda*). Now when he verifies his volition, he must do whatever the shaykh says, to make achieving the goal possible, so much so that it is said "It befits the disciple in the hands of the shaykh to be like the deceased in the hands of the one who washes [him]."<sup>103</sup>

As a saint, the shaykh is one whose acts and attributes issue from his lordly or real aspect, the same aspect by which the Spirit is lord of the worlds and brings all things to their perfection.<sup>104</sup> The dominance of this aspect is none other than *walāya*, the very source of the revealed law itself, making the shaykh's every act the *sharī'a*'s living application. A concrete manifestation of the Spirit, only by obeying the shaykh like they would the Prophet himself can people ensure that they are truly following the *sharī'a*, and not simply the deceptions of their souls. At the same time, in so doing, they make their own acts originate in the lordly aspect of humanity vicariously, until finally the effects of its latent love dominate the soul and this aspect is brought out in the wayfarer. In one passage particularly illustrative in this regard, Qayṣarī writes of the perfected saint that

101 *Muqaddimat*, 228–29.

102 "Risāla," 126. "Before characterization by the station [of sainthood], the servant is the origin of his acts and attributes with respect to his humanness (*bashariyyatīhi*)."<sup>103</sup> "Muqaddimāt," 86 (ed. Bayrakdar).

103 *Ibid.*

104 *Muqaddimat*, 190–91.

the aspect of his reality is protected ... dominating the aspect of his createdness to the extent that it overwhelms it and annihilates it essentially, like a piece of coal adjacent to fire. Because of the proximity of the coal to the fire, its inherent capacity for combustion and hidden receptivity, it slowly ignites until it becomes fire, taking on all of the properties of fire such as burning, producing flames, emitting light, and so on, whereas, before burning, it was dark, dense, and cold.<sup>105</sup>

In addition to describing the condition of a saint, this passage also contains a powerful metaphor for the futility of the individual condition apart from prophetic and saintly guidance. In the same way that a piece of coal cannot ignite itself, the perfections within the ordinary person cannot be brought out without the help of an intermediary that stands between the particular, determined individual in whom they are hidden, and these universal perfections themselves as they first emanate from God to creation by means of the Spirit. Thus, while every act of worship and pious observance, and ultimately the soul itself all contain the wine of divine love hidden potentially within them, the shaykh is the cupbearer without whom the seeker will never taste it. On the other hand, for wayfarers who have abandoned themselves completely to the shaykh, the vessels are unsealed. It is then for them to drink all they can of the draught of divine love whose descent brought them into being to begin with and of which a share in fact lies hidden within them as the true substance of their soul.<sup>106</sup>

The wayfarer, now completely committed to following prophetic and saintly guidance, is finally capable of partaking in its transformative power, a process that begins with simple asceticism. This marks the beginning of the arc of ascent and spiritual wayfaring in its true sense: Qayṣarī writes,

Now, when the wayfarer enters upon the path, he abstains from all that distracts him from his goal from among worldly goods and their enjoyment. And he guards against every thought that crosses his heart and makes him incline toward other than the Real, and thus becomes

<sup>105</sup> *Muqaddimat*, 228–29.

<sup>106</sup> “Were one who knows nothing about divine gnoses and merciful realities, to come to the realized gnostic – the perfect, perfected one carrying the divine trust and drinking pure drink – and obey [the gnostic] and accept what [the gnostic] orders him to do on the path of sincerity and faith, and drink what overflows from [the gnostic], then this obedience and acceptance would allow [that ignorant one] to grasp meanings pertaining to the heart and true sciences that result from the effects of divine love and right gnoses.” *Wine*, 37.

characterized by scruples, piety, and asceticism. Then he examines his soul at all times in acts and utterances, and regards it with suspicion in all that it commands, including worship, because the soul is naturally inclined toward its caprices and pleasures.<sup>107</sup>

Significantly, we see here that resisting the incitements of the soul and forcing the body to carry out pious observances in their place ultimately causes the soul to acquire new attributes and eventually shed its shortcomings and blameworthy characteristics. Recalling that nothing other than its attributes distinguishes the soul from the Spirit, we recognize this not only as an ethical achievement, but the beginning of the soul's purification, its transmutation back into its true substance which is the universal reality from which it originated. This purification of the soul proceeds in stages, of which Qayṣarī gives the following account:

When the animal powers dominate the spiritual powers, it is called the "commanding" (*ammāra*) [soul], however, when there is a glimmer of the heart's light from the Unseen revealing its perfection, the rational soul's awareness of its iniquitous end and the corruption of its states, it is called the "reproachful" (*lawwāma*) [soul], since it reproaches its deeds. This degree is like a preliminary for the manifestation of the degree of the heart, because if the heart's light prevails and its dominion appears over the powers of the animal soul, the soul attains peace and is called the "tranquil" (*muṭma'inna*) [soul]. When its receptivity becomes complete and the powers of its light and luminosity are strengthened, realizing whatever was in potential, it becomes the mirror of divine theophany and is called the "heart."<sup>108</sup>

The wayfarer who progresses through these stages also begins to enter into the Imaginal World, whose forms appear to human beings "according to [their] inner purity."<sup>109</sup> Those whose souls are fully purified and acquire the heart reach the highest level of this realm, which Qayṣarī gives the Qur'anic name

107 "Risāla," 126.

108 *Muqaddimat*, 208–9. The names for these aspects or levels of the soul are Qur'anic in origin, first developed conceptually in Sufi exegesis by Tustarī. For a comprehensive overview of the Qur'anic sources for this model, see Gavin Picken, "Tazkiyat al-naḥs: The Qur'anic Paradigm," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 7.2 (2005): 101–27. For its earliest theorization in Sufism specifically, see Annabel Keeler and Ali Keeler, trans., *Tafsīr al-Tustarī* (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2011). Cf. introduction, xxxvii–xxxix.

109 "Risāla," 118, 126.

of “the Guarded Tablet” (*al-Lawḥ al-Mahfūz*). Here, particulars are manifest “without any veil from their universals.”<sup>110</sup> This reflects the conditions of the wayfarer’s soul exactly, which is now transparent to the appearance of universal attributes of perfection even though it remains characterized by individuality. In fact, the Imaginal World is also the domain of the Universal Soul, which is none other than the heart of the Perfect Human Being.<sup>111</sup> Thus, this journey into “higher worlds” and the corresponding perception of universals is really a journey inward through the more universal levels of the human reality, or indeed the transmutation of the wayfarer’s own soul into the substance of these more universal states.

Indeed, at this stage, the faculties of the soul merge with those of the heart, for the soul has acquired its perfections and thus ceased to differ from the heart in substance.<sup>112</sup> As Qaṣarī writes, “those spiritual faculties are the origin of the bodily senses, so if the veil between them is removed, the origin unifies with the branch, and what is witnessed by the bodily senses is witnessed by the [spiritual faculties].”<sup>113</sup> The wayfarer then becomes increasingly engrossed in the same acts of worship that brought him this far along the path, for “when he tastes something of [the Imaginal World], he desires solitude, retreat, remembrance, and remaining in a state of purity and ablution,”<sup>114</sup> all the more because the perfections these acts embody are now visible to him in imaginal form.<sup>115</sup>

Now, if entry into the Imaginal World is really no more than a transmutation of the soul that allows the divine perfections to appear more fully within it, the same goes for the angelic and archangelic worlds (*malakūt, jabarūt*). Here, as the wayfarer persists in acts of worship and the corresponding emanation they draw down strengthens, different forms of divine love “efface him from moment to moment and make him perish from himself.” More universal realities manifest continuously to the soul and “divine knowledge and secrets emanate to him ... [until] the inrushing of these states become a property.”<sup>116</sup> Indeed, in these worlds, universals are manifest with progressively fewer limitations to the point that their particulars are hidden within them, and the

110 *Muqaddimat*, 56–59.

111 *Muqaddimat*, 132–33, 138–39.

112 *Muqaddimat*, 208–9, but cf. also “Taḥqīq mā’ al-ḥayāt,” 189. Here, the beginning of the wayfarer’s “annihilation in the [divine] attributes” (*fanā’ fi al-ṣifāt*) comes only after the removal of all “selfish attributes” (*al-ṣifāt al-naḥsāniyya*).

113 *Muqaddimat*, 170–71.

114 “Risāla,” 126.

115 Cf. *Wine*, 36. When “the door of the Dominion (*malakūt*) opens for his heart,” the wayfarer “witnesses the lights of religious observances and their hidden forms, and so he increases in acts of obedience and willing acts of devotion.”

116 “Risāla,” 126.

same exact fate befalls the human aspect of the wayfarer, who now verges on annihilation. This marks the wayfarer's identification with the Spirit, "his becoming an intellect that grasps universals."<sup>117</sup> For now, if the wayfarer begins to perceive only universals without their particulars, which is in effect to only see God, it is because the attributes of particularity have disappeared from his own soul. He thus passes through the station of those angels completely lost in their adoration of God, and "achieves realization by their lights." Finally, even these manifestations cease as "the lights of the power of exclusive oneness ... reduce him to scattered dust," and "his determination is destroyed in the determination of the Essence."<sup>118</sup> Thus, the wayfarer finally reaches annihilation, which corresponds for Qayṣarī with the all-comprehensive station (*maqam al-jamʿ*), "the cessation of occurrence in the light of pre-eternity and the destruction of all ... that appears from noetic to external existence, in the Essence of Exclusive Unity." Here,

the wayfarer witnesses ... that the Real is only Being (*al-ḥaqq huwa al-wujūd faqat*). Here there is no wayfarer, no destination and no journey – or rather, these things *are not*, nor indeed anything in the world called "other."<sup>119</sup> And [all of that] is identical with the divine Essence appearing at different degrees and in different forms ... So at that moment there is nothing in his gaze except the Real, for when he gazes, the Real gazes at Himself in the forms of the gazer and the gazed upon.<sup>120</sup>

This, however, is not the end of the journey, for as long as the wayfarer remains annihilated in the essence, the degrees of being go unmanifest and unrecognized, and the full realization of the divine perfections incomplete. Thus annihilation is usually followed by the reconstitution of the soul's individual determinations in such a way that nothing opposing the perfections of being remains therein, instead making them no more than a locus for those perfections to appear in every world. As Qayṣarī writes,

After the Real self-discloses to the servant, removes him from his existence (*anniyyatihi*), destroys the mountain of his determination, and

<sup>117</sup> *Wine*, 20 (trans. modified, Arabic 26).

<sup>118</sup> "Risāla," 106.

<sup>119</sup> *Wa laysa hunāk sālik wa-lā maslūk ilayh wa lā sulūk bal al-sālik wa-al-maslūk ilayh wa-al-sulūk lā bal kull mā fī al-ʿālam al-musammá bi-al-ghayr.*

<sup>120</sup> "Risāla," 127.



annihilates the peak of his egoism,<sup>121</sup> the Real bestows being upon him a second time, and gives him back his intellect and control of his soul. This being is called “true being,” (*wujūd haqqānī*) due to its coming after arrival [at God], and due to the servant’s knowledge [that] his realization (*tahaqquqah*)<sup>122</sup> [is] by the Real, and not by himself, as he used to suppose before.<sup>123</sup>

The servant’s being is now called “true being” because the divine perfections appear fully within it.<sup>124</sup> Thus, Qayṣarī writes, “annihilation causes the servant to become determined with real divine determinations and the attributes of Lordship once again, which is subsistence in God, after which these determinations are never removed.”<sup>125</sup> Herein lies the true purpose and function of humans as God’s vicegerents, for since the human being contains within him or herself a share of every world, a human soul fully characterized by divine perfections guarantees their presence at every level of creation, thus ensuring the continuity of cosmic existence. Indeed, this final stage of the spiritual journey also marks the wayfarer’s assumption of this cosmic role, which is to become universal in the most literal sense of the word. Qayṣarī writes,

it is said that the Perfect Human must pervade all of creation in the same way God pervades all of creation. That occurs in the third journey

121 A reference to *Sūrat al-a’rāf*, 143, which reads in part “when his Lord disclosed Himself (*tajallā*) to the mountain he made it crumble to dust; and Moses fell down swooning.” (Arberry trans. modified). In addition to being interpreted esoterically as referring to *fanā’*, this verse is also important for Sufis as the Qur’anic source for the term *tajallī* or “self-disclosure” as something God attributes to Himself.

122 *Tahaqquq* has for Qayṣarī the meaning of external existence or actualization, in addition to verification or certain knowledge. See, e.g. “Risāla,” 113, or “Asās,” 154. Its usage here suggests that the completion of the annihilated, subsisting saint’s existence with every divine perfection coincides with his or her knowing God by means of this existence, precisely because it is not other than Him.

123 “Risāla,” 112.

124 The significance of the term *wujūd haqqānī*, equally translatable as “rightful” or “genuine being,” is clarified in Qayṣarī’s statement that “as Being descends in the degrees of existence ... its manifestations and perfections weaken. Likewise, as its intermediaries decrease, its light is intensified, its manifestations strengthen, and its perfections and attributes appear. Therefore,” he concludes, “to apply ‘Being’ to a relatively strong manifestation is preferable to applying it to a relatively weak manifestation.” *Muqaddimat*, 50–51. The saint’s attainment to this designation also confirms his or her status as a complete manifestation of the Spirit, with Qayṣarī writing elsewhere that, “the Muḥammadan Essence ... exists in true being.” *Wine*, 17.

125 *Muqaddimat*, 224–25 (trans. modified).

which is from God to the creation through God, in which his perfections are completed. By this journey one obtains the truth of certainty (*ḥaqq al-yaqīn*) whereby it becomes clear that the Last is identical to the First, as well as the secret of, “He is the First and the Last, the Hidden and the Manifest, and the Knower of all things.”<sup>126</sup>

With this subsistence (*baqāʾ*), the wayfarer finally knows that God is near because he or she has reached God’s nearness in the fullest sense of the word, with no determination remaining in the soul that would prevent the appearance of God’s perfections therein. And yet, despite seeing God in all things and all things in God without any veil, despite permeating the entire cosmos in the Spirit and implementing God’s will therein through characterization by every divine attribute, the saint “attributes nothing to himself except incapacity, shortcomings, poverty and need.”<sup>127</sup> This is in reference to the determinations that will always separate the servant from the Lord by virtue of what they are, even if they are two degrees of the same Being that share in every perfection except necessity.<sup>128</sup> With the human being combining all the qualities of lordship and servanthood, it is paradoxically those who become characterized with every divine perfection who are most intimately aware of the privative determinations that indelibly constitute their servitude. Unlike the ethical shortcomings that prevent the divine perfections from manifesting in ordinary people, these existential shortcomings that are constitutive of the human reality, when fully realized, are in fact integral to the appearance of the divine perfections in the world.<sup>129</sup> By the same token, saints almost never disclose their vital cosmological functions. The saint, “when he commands the creation, observes etiquette with them, and does not command except by the requirements of their degrees and what the Real desires in those degrees.”<sup>130</sup> Thus, despite the role of God’s friends in commanding the cosmos, effusing the divine perfections to every world, and realizing the very purpose of creation, the conditions of the visible world nevertheless veil their true nature from the eyes of ordinary people.<sup>131</sup> Even so, they remain the most complete divine self-disclosure. Standing between God and the rest of creation, they are the nearest of all things to Him, and thus it is only through first drawing near to them that the rest of humanity can hope to draw near to their Lord.

126 *Muqaddimat*, 184–85.

127 “Risāla,” 128.

128 “Risāla,” 131.

129 *Ibid.* See discussion above, esp. footnote 46.

130 “Risāla,” 128.

131 See Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 186, and Qaṣṣārī’s comments, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 1199–200.

Qayṣarī's theory of sainthood as ontological proximity gave a coherent and theoretically consistent account of not only what a saint was, but how and why the disciplines of the spiritual path made it possible to become one. As a projection of the Prophet's Spirit, the acts of worship that purified the soul of an ordinary person from vices and blameworthy attributes under the supervision of a spiritual master also enabled the substance of the individual soul, thus transmuted, to expand beyond the confines of particularity. The progressive appearance of universal attributes of perfection brought about by this continuous striving to fill the mold of the prophetic norm would make of the wayfarer's soul an increasingly universal substance until it regained its true identity with the Spirit itself. Nothing less than this journey from the particular to the universal was required to reach God's nearness which, once attained, determined every level of the wayfarer's being anew with every divine perfection and caused the substance of his or her being to permeate every world, ensuring the continuity of cosmic existence and the realization of the divine self-disclosure. Thus for Qayṣarī, not only sainthood itself, but the world in which it was realized along with the means and process of acquiring it, could all be described and explained in considerable detail by the principle that, to the extent that things do not differ, they are actually identical.

## 6 Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this study has been to give as detailed and well-rounded an account as possible of Qayṣarī's theory of sainthood, in hopes of giving us something of a window into his world, and that of those who followed his interpretations of Ibn 'Arabī's thought. And yet, pursuing an exposition of Qayṣarī's hagiology necessarily showed how the theoretical apparatus he used to articulate it, which I have called "ontological proximity," permeated practically every area of his thought, bringing together metaphysics, cosmology, and religious ethics through their shared connection with *walāya*. This evident centrality of sainthood to Qayṣarī's thought, which has itself already been recognized as marking a watershed moment in Islamic intellectual history, illustrates how the "triumph of sainthood" in medieval Islamic society extended to include even philosophy, while serving at the same time as a significant counterexample to the long-presumed unintellectual nature of the so-called "shaykh cult" characteristic of late medieval Sufism.

Ultimately, Qayṣarī's theory of sainthood was inseparable from his credible and enduring defense of the Oneness of Being as an attractive alternative to Ash'arism, Illuminationism, and philosophy. At the same time, it provided a

sophisticated rationale for private adherence to Islamic orthopraxy, as well as a theoretically sophisticated justification of the authority of the Sufi shaykh, a figure whose influence in Islamic society was trending steadily toward its apex during Qayṣarī's lifetime. And yet, despite his theory's significant implications for religious authority as well as its subsequent political applications, there is no evidence that the acquisition of power or authority motivated Qayṣarī himself in developing his theory – though this is not to say that his thought was impervious to these concerns or isolated from the more tangible social issues of his time either, an era in which an unprecedented number of people claimed in an unprecedentedly public fashion to have direct contact with God and the Prophet that made them capable of leading others to salvation. Rather, it appears that these very issues may have been among the factors that motivated Qayṣarī to *philosophize*, precisely – itself an activity much like any other, if frequently unrecognized as such – about the exact nature of this kind of authority, if only to provide himself and others with a sense of logical satisfaction necessary to continue living piously in a world full of seemingly contradictory appearances. Indeed, the circumstances of Qayṣarī's life, his relationship with Kāshānī, his minimal public profile and his advanced age at the time of his first writings make any other motives behind his synthesis of Ibn 'Arabī's teachings simply unlikely. Thus, while it has become justifiably common in the study of Sufi doctrine and Islamic intellectual history to ask to what extent such apparently abstract topics as metaphysics were “really about” supposedly more concrete issues of power and authority, Qayṣarī's is a case that appears to point in the opposite direction. Indeed, Qayṣarī's thought, and the substantial tradition of readership and commentary it inspired might give us pause to wonder for how many Muslims throughout history the things that appear abstract to today's reader may have been the most concrete of all, and whether issues of power and authority were, in their eyes, “really about” metaphysics.

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