

Sufism and the Anthropocosmic Self

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1 Introduction

It would not be an overstatement to say that the strand of thought now called Sufi metaphysics revolves around two interrelated doctrines, namely the oneness of being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) and the perfect human (*al-insān al-kāmil*).¹ As is well-known, the expression *waḥdat al-wujūd*² is controversial, which is composed of two words—*waḥda* and *wujūd*—both of which were important in the Islamic intellectual tradition since early days. The word “*waḥda*” means “unity or oneness,” and is of the same root as “*tawḥīd*,” which means “to affirm unity.” As for *wujūd*, which is from the root *w-j-d*, it is customary to translate it as Being, being or existence, but what is important to note is that in the Sufi context it is also understood as “to find” or “to experience.” For instance, Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) defines *wujūd* as “finding the Real in ecstasy” (*wijdān al-ḥaqq fī l-wajd*).³ Thus *wujūd* also has a mystical, first-person connotation, in

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- 1 Like the traditions of Islamic philosophy or theology, Sufi metaphysics came to designate a distinct philosophical system containing its own metaphysics, ontology, ethics, and epistemology. It is important to stress the indebtedness of this tradition to Avicenna and the Avicennan heritage, as can be evidenced from al-Ghazālī’s appropriation of many Avicennan concepts and vocabulary, or from the Ṭūsī-Qūnawī correspondence, or from al-Qayṣarī’s deep engagement with the Avicennan tradition. Yet, Sufi metaphysics is distinguished by its unique focus on the direct experience of reality, wherein *dhawq* (tasting) or *kashf* (unveiling) counts as the principal epistemic instrument. As such, it exceeds the limits of the philosophers’ representationalist theory of knowledge that is caught up in a subject-object dichotomy. Moreover, Sufi metaphysics presents novel perspectives on ontology (i.e., *wujūd*) and autology (i.e., selfhood and consciousness) which are not simply traceable to the Avicennan or the Neoplatonic tradition. In all, Sufi metaphysics aims to express metaphysical doctrines concerning being and selfhood through both rational and supra-rational instruments of knowledge, alongside emphasizing Sufism as a way of life. For an elaborate analysis, see Faruque, Muhammad U., “Sufi metaphysical literature,” in Alexander Knysh and Bilal Orfali (eds.), *Brill handbook of Sufi studies: Sufi literature*, Leiden: Brill, forthcoming.
 - 2 For a comprehensive history of the term *waḥdat al-wujūd*, see Chittick, William, “A history of the term *waḥdat al-wujūd*,” in Mohammed Rustom et al. (eds.), *In search of the lost heart: Explorations in Islamic thought*, Albany: SUNY Press, 2012, 71–88.
 - 3 See Chittick, William, “*Waḥdat al-shuhūd*,” in *ET² Online*.

addition to its regular ontological reference.⁴ In any event, *waḥdat al-wujūd* refers to the *wujūd* of the Real (*al-ḥaqq*), Who is self-evidently *wāḥid* (one), not to be denied by any Muslim. Hence there can only be one *wujūd* in reality.⁵ Understood thus, *waḥdat al-wujūd* implies that God or the Ultimate Reality is one, which is the essence of *tawḥīd*.⁶ But Sufi metaphysicians also discuss the complex nature of the *muwaḥḥid* (read “the perfect human”) or the affirmer of unity in the cosmic order. In doing so, they present a highly sophisticated analysis of the self, which is difficult to describe in simple terms. Building on the pioneering work of William Chittick, who uses the term “anthropocosmic vision” to describe the Islamic worldview, this study will explore the reality of the perfect human in terms of what it calls the “anthropocosmic self.”⁷ It will do so by principally drawing upon the School of Ibn ‘Arabī and Sufi poets such as Rūmī (d. 672/1273) and Ḥāfiẓ (d. 791/1389).

In his essay entitled “The anthropocosmic vision in Islamic thought,” Chittick treats such notions as *tawḥīd*, transmitted versus intellectual sciences, *nafs* (self/soul), and self-realization to bring out the salient features of the anthropocosmic vision in Islamic thought.⁸ For instance, according to Chittick,

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- 4 See for instance, Shabistārī, Maḥmūd, *Gulshan-i rāz*, ed. Parvīz ‘Abbāsī, Tehran: Ilhām, 2002, 50–51; and Lāhijī, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad, *Maḥfātīḥ al-i‘jāz fī sharḥ-i Gulshan-i rāz*, ed. Maḥmūdī Bakhtiyārī, Tehran: ‘Ilm, 1998, 232–234.
 - 5 Two points are worth emphasizing here: 1) when Ibn ‘Arabī and his School argue that *wujūd* is one, they never fail to underscore multiplicity (*kathra*) alongside *wujūd*’s oneness; 2) there are theological schools in the Islamic tradition which do not accept the Ibn ‘Arabīan interpretation of *wujūd* or *tawḥīd*, regardless of the fact that Ibn ‘Arabī never used the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* in a technical sense. These schools emphasize *tanzīh* or incomparability only, while the School of Ibn ‘Arabī maintain both *tanzīh* and *tashbīḥ* (similarity). On the question of whether *waḥdat al-wujūd* leads to pantheism, see Faruque, Muhammad U., “Sufism *contra* Shariah? Shāh Walī Allāh’s metaphysics of *waḥdat al-wujūd*,” in *Journal of Sufi Studies* 5.1 (2016), 27–57; Rustom, Mohammed, “Is Ibn al-‘Arabī’s ontology pantheistic?,” in *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 2 (2006), 53–67; Morris, James, “Ibn ‘Arabī and his interpreters. Part II: Influences and interpretations,” in *JAOS* 106.4 (1986), 733–734.
 - 6 It can also mean that everything is existent through the being of God, and it is this particular point which is theologically controversial. In a nutshell, Sufi metaphysics espouses a “continuity of being” through its doctrine of the oneness of being. This is because being/Being (*wujūd*) and consciousness are one and indivisible, while not negating the fact that Being appears transcendent vis-à-vis the world and the ego.
 - 7 Chittick adopts the term from Tu Weiming, who in turn takes the word “anthropocosmic” from Mircea Eliade. See Weiming, Tu, *Centrality and commonality: An essay on Confucian religiousness*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1989, 126; *Confucian thought: Selfhood as creative transformation*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1985, 10, 64, 137–138.
 - 8 Chittick, William, “The anthropocosmic vision in Islamic thought,” in Ted Peters, Muzaffar Iqbal, and Syed Nomanul Haq (eds.), *God, life, and the cosmos: Christian and Islamic perspectives*, New York: Routledge, 2002, 125–152.

tawhīd explains the interconnectedness of all beings by affirming their origin, sustenance, and ultimate return to the First Principle. Muslim scholars perceive existence as a unified cycle originating, flourishing, and ending within this unique Source. Consequently, they could not separate “knowledge of the cosmos from knowledge of God or from knowledge of the human soul.” Quite the contrary, their exploration of the cosmos reinforces the manifestation of the divine principle and illuminates the essence of the human self.⁹ That is to say, in the anthropocosmic vision, human beings and the cosmos are seen as an integrated whole. The goal of human life is to align with the higher principle and return to the transcendent origin of both humanity and the universe. Moreover, in contrast to the Enlightenment perspective that espouses “instrumental rationality,” alongside seeing the world as a collection of objects and regarding knowledge as a tool for manipulation and control, the anthropocosmic viewpoint proposes an organismic view of the world in which mind and matter are united, and knowledge aims not to manipulate the world but to fulfill our humanity to its fullest extent.¹⁰

While all these insights can serve as helpful building blocks, they do not yet bring out the full scope of the anthropocosmic self in Sufism, which is expressed in terms of the grand doctrine of the perfect human.¹¹ But it is worth emphasizing with Chittick that in the Islamic wisdom tradition, “grasping the full nature of our humanity necessitates investigating the nature of things and the reality of our own selves.”¹²

As will be seen in this chapter, especially the conclusion, the ecological implications of such a perspective in which all phenomena are interconnected cannot be overemphasized. It calls for a radical reorientation of modern subjectivity, and urges us to study, contemplate, and understand nature and protect it from senseless economic exploitation. One needs to educate oneself about the alternative conceptions of human-nature relationships and take them seriously on their own terms. Put another way, in the anthropocosmic perspective *contra* anthropocentrism, nature cannot be treated merely as a source of raw materials to be exploited by human beings, nor can it be seen as a material real-

9 Chittick, “Anthropocosmic vision” 134.

10 Chittick, “Anthropocosmic vision” 125.

11 The anthropocosmic self in Sufism can also be expressed through the concept of the *laṭāʾif* or subtle fields of consciousness as can be found in thinkers such as Shāh Walī Allāh (d. 1176/1762). See Faruque, Muhammad U., “Sufism and philosophy in the Mughal-Safavid Era: Shāh Walī Allāh and the end of selfhood,” in Mohammed Rustom (ed.), *Islamic thought and the art of translation: Texts and studies in honor of William C. Chittick and Sachiko Murata*, Leiden: Brill, 2023, 323–370.

12 Chittick, “Anthropocosmic vision” 132.

ity devoid of spiritual significance and beauty. Accordingly, the anthropocosmic self of the Sufis advances a participatory view and a deeper understanding of the human-nature relationship.¹³

But before we delve into the key features of the anthropocosmic self, a brief overview of key cosmological notions such as the five divine presences (*al-ḥaḍarāt al-ilāhiyyat al-khams*), the Muhammadan reality (*al-ḥaqīqa al-Muḥammadiyya*), and the concept of non-determination (*lā ta'ayyun*) is in order.

The Arabic term for “cosmos,” *‘ālam*, shares its root with *‘alāma* (mark), *‘alam* (signpost), and *‘ilm* (knowledge). This connection suggests that the cosmos serves as both a source of knowledge and a mark or indicator pointing to something beyond itself. Broadly, *‘alam* means “world.” It can denote the entire universe (i.e., the cosmos) or any cohesive entity within the universe, described as “world.” For Ibn ‘Arabī, the cosmos encompasses “everything other than God” (*mā siwā Llāh*), whether spiritual or physical, abstract or tangible, visible or concealed.¹⁴ It is also instructive to note that the cosmos, in this perspective, comprises numerous worlds.¹⁵ Now, the multiple levels of the cosmos can be summarized in five or six fundamental degrees of being, which the Sufi metaphysicians call the “five divine presences.” These degrees of being (or presence) encapsulate the entire reality as envisaged in Sufi metaphysics. The different “presences” signify the manner in which the Divine Self becomes determined

13 The category “nature” has come under postmodern attacks by such authors as Bruno Latour, Donna Haraway, and Timothy Morton. See e.g., Latour, Bruno, *The politics of nature: How to bring the sciences into democracy*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004; Morton, Timothy, *Ecology without nature: Rethinking environmental aesthetics*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009. But it is worth pointing out that recent eco-philosophers have argued against the claim that nature and society are obsolete categories. Tracing the current of hybridism to the writings of Bruno Latour, Andreas Malm, for example, argues that we need to sift out the social components from the natural, if we wish to make sense of the crises and retain the possibility of intervening in them. Malm, Andreas, “Against hybridism: Why we need to distinguish between nature and society, now more than ever,” in *Historical Materialism* 27.2 (2019), 156–187. See also Cronon, William, “The trouble with wilderness; or, getting back to the wrong nature,” in William Cronon (ed.), *Uncommon ground: Rethinking the human place in nature*, New York: Norton, 1995, 69–90. While I personally think that there is problem with an unalloyed notion of nature, I am disinclined to completely stop using it. Hence in my writings, I make use of a variety of terms such as the “nonhuman world,” “more-than-human world,” etc., in addition to nature.

14 Ibn ‘Arabī, Muḥyī l-Dīn, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, iii, Cairo, 1911; repr. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d., 197:31.

15 Chittick, William, *The self-disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s cosmology*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1998, 3.

at various levels of manifestation. Generally speaking, they are as follows: First and second entifications of the Divine Self,¹⁶ the intelligible world,¹⁷ the imaginal world,¹⁸ the material world and the level of the perfect human. It should be noted that other terms such as *hāhūt*, *lāhūt*, *jabarūt*, etc. may also be used to account for the degrees of divine presence.¹⁹

While Sufi metaphysicians talk about the nature of reality in terms of the Five Presences, when it comes to the Divine Self or the infinite reality of God, they make it clear that It cannot be truly described using concepts and definitions. In contrast to philosophers such as Avicenna (d. 428/1037) who use the term the Necessary Being (*wājib al-wujūd*) to establish God's existence, Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 672/1274), for instance, argues that the idea of a First Cause or Necessary Being, based on the argument that the chain of causality starting with contingent things cannot regress indefinitely, does not constitute a conclusive proof.²⁰ Moreover, it does not shed light on the true essence of ontological necessity and contingency. What the metaphysical concepts of contingency and necessity truly imply, according to al-Qūnawī, is the relationship of the limited and constrained (*muqayyad*) toward the limitless and absolute (*muṭ-*

16 That is, *ta'ayyun awwal* and *thānī*, which lead to two sorts of unity in the divine order, namely One-Onliness (*aḥadiyya*) and One-Allness (*wāḥidiyya*). As Chittick explains in a recent article, "The Divine Essence can be regarded both as the One-Onliness, in which case all regards are stripped away from It, and as the One-Allness, in which case all regards are affirmed for It. In the former regard, called the First Entification, there is absolute sameness. In the latter regard, called the Second Entification, all things are differentiated." According to Chittick, al-Qūnawī was probably the first to use the term *ta'ayyun* or entification in a technical sense. It means to become an '*ayn*—a word which has numerous meanings. In this context, the word '*ayn* is synonymous with *shay'* (thing) as used in the Quran, such as "God knows each thing." It implies, among other, the unchanging reality (*ḥaqīqa*) of things. See Chittick, William, "Farghānī on the Muhammadan reality," in *Horizonte* 21.64 (2023), 1–19. I translate it as both "entification" and "determination" depending on the context. When it is understood as "determination," it is synonymous with *muqayyad* (limited and restricted).

17 That is, '*alam al-'aql*.

18 That is, '*alam al-khayāl*.

19 This doctrine, with slight variations, is expressed by virtually all the major figures of the School of Ibn 'Arabī. For a detailed analysis, see Chittick, William, "The five divine presences: From al-Qūnawī to al-Qayṣarī," in *MW* 72.2 (1982), 107–128.

20 For more information on al-Qūnawī vs. *falsafa*, see Schubert, Gudrun (ed.), *Annäherungen: Der mystisch-philosophische Briefwechsel zwischen Ṣadr ud-Dīn-i Qūnawī und Naṣīr ud-Dīn-i Ṭūsī*, Stuttgart: Steiner, 1995; Chittick, William, "Mysticism vs. philosophy in earlier Islamic history: The al-Ṭūsī, al-Qūnawī correspondence," in *Religious Studies* 17 (1981), 87–104.

laq).²¹ More specifically, al-Qūnawī seeks to replace the Avicennan distinction between necessity and contingency with a more nuanced perspective, namely the distinction between determination (*ta'ayyun*) and non-determination (*lā ta'ayyun*). This is because the more specific and determinate a thing is, the more limited and constrained it becomes in relation other things, and consequently, the more it relies on the principles defining its specific modes of determination. Therefore, every determination implies a restriction in relation to the unrestricted principles underlying it.²² For this reason, he even identifies Being (i.e., *wujūd*), conceived as the immediate principle of existence, with “determination itself.” For al-Qūnawī, Being encompasses all potential determinations within it without, however, being confined to any of its specific modes. Although he considers all entities to be dependent on this “first determination,” that is, Being, it is not regarded as the ultimate foundation of their reality. This is because the “first determination” (*al-ta'ayyun al-awwal*) is still characterized by some form of contingency, stemming from its very own determinate nature. As such, it excludes the “indeterminate” or “nonmanifest.” It cannot serve as the principle of all reality since it does not encompass the entirety of reality within itself. Consequently, al-Qūnawī contends that the fundamental principle of reality resides in that which transcends all limits, making it absolute, infinite, and all-perfect. This absolute freedom is inherent in the state of complete non-determination alone, which describes the true essence of the Divine as that indeterminate reality underlying all determinate things. For al-Qūnawī, the most profound way of looking at the relationship between contingency and necessity is to realize that all determinate realities are necessarily grounded in non-determination.²³ Considered thus, God *qua* Self transcends any form of relationship with the world. As al-Qūnawī says:

It is not in respect of the One-Onliness of His Self (*aḥadīyat dhātihi*) that God should be conceived of as the originator of contingent beings. On the contrary, in this regard it is really all the same whether one seeks to ascribe the necessity of existention to [the Self] or to deny such a con-

21 Al-Qūnawī, Ṣadr al-Dīn, *Miftāḥ ghayb al-jam' wa-l-wujūd*, ed. 'Āṣim Ibrāhīm al-Kayyālī, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2010, 69–71.

22 Todd, Richard, *The Sufi doctrine of man: Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī's metaphysical anthropology*, Leiden: Brill, 2014, 84–85. Cf. al-Qūnawī, *I'jāz al-bayān fī tafsīr umm al-Qur'ān*, ed. Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī, Qom: Būstān-i Kitāb, 2003, 88 ff.

23 Todd, *Sufi doctrine* 85.

nection; for nothing can have any relation with the Self, in respect of [its absoluteness], nor any correspondence such that It could act upon them and they could receive Its action. All reciprocity and relativity are effaced within this One-Onliness.²⁴

However, between the Divine Self, which possesses boundless existence, and possible beings, which encompasses everything except God, there is the intermediate reality, which is variously called the Reality of Realities or the Muhammadan Reality.²⁵ The Muhammadan Reality, which is also the supreme self-disclosure (*al-tajallī al-aʿẓam*) of the Divine Self, is not defined either by existence or nonexistence, nor by temporality or eternity. According to Ibn ʿArabī, the cosmos emerges from this Muhammadan Reality, which embodies the principle underlying the fundamental realities of the cosmos. Describing this entity as the cosmos or the Real would both be accurate. Similarly, admitting it as neither the cosmos nor the Real but a distinct entity in itself would also be correct.²⁶

2 The Structure of the Self

The doctrine of the perfect human exemplifies the highest degree of selfhood in Sufism, but a specific understanding of it as the anthropocosmic self requires one to analyze the general structure of selfhood in Sufism. In Sufi thinking, there is no room for the Cartesian dualism of mind and matter, since the self/soul (*nafs*) is understood in relation to both the physical (body) and the spiritual (spirit). That is, the soul presents an undetermined nature by representing the qualities of both the spirit such as awareness, luminosity, love, beauty, and meaning and the body such as darkness, density, disharmony, and disequilibrium. Cosmologically, the soul can be called a *barzakh* (isthmus), as it is a meeting place between the spiritual and the material worlds. Because of its ambiguous nature, the soul or self in the Islamic context represents an unlim-

24 Al-Qūnawī, *Sharḥ al-aḥādīth*, fol. 62^b, cited in Todd, *Sufi doctrine* 86; translation slightly modified.

25 On the “Muhammadan Reality,” see Chittick, “Farghānī on the Muhammadan Reality.” Cf. Farghānī, Saʿīd b. Aḥmad, *Muntahā l-madārik*, ed. ʿĀṣim Ibrāhīm al-Kayyālī, i, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2007, 102 ff.

26 Ibn ʿArabī, Muḥyī l-Dīn, “*Inshāʾ al-dawāʾir*,” in Henrik S. Nyberg (ed.), *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn al-ʿArabī*, Leiden: Brill, 1919, 16–17.

ited possibility for growth and expansion, whether in ascending, descending, or sideways manners.²⁷ It further signifies a never-ending process of self-discovery and self-finding.

The lexical meanings of *nafs* in Arabic include, soul, self, spirit, mind, desire, and appetite, among others. However, it also denotes reflexivity, as in *nafsī* (myself) and *bi-nafsihi* (by himself). What is important to note however is that in mystical and philosophical texts (unless it appears as a compound word), the word normally connotes either self or soul. My recent book proposes a multi-dimensional, “spectrum theory” to study selfhood in various contexts and cultures (Islamic or otherwise).²⁸ In my view, the self is a multidimensional entity best understood through the notion of a “spectrum.” By drawing a distinction between descriptive and normative dimensions within this spectrum, I provide a global framework for analyzing the self in terms of its bio-physiological, socio-cultural, cognito-experiential, ethical, and spiritual aspects. But the idea of “multidimensionality” can also be seen in the writings of Sufi philosophers, who repeatedly affirm that the self is a multidimensional and hierarchical reality containing the divine at the center of its being.

Also, when it comes to Sufism, selfhood is seen as a phenomenon which is ultimately indefinable and unknowable (i.e., ultimately it involves apophatic discourse). This is because, for many Sufis, selfhood is an ongoing and ever-changing manifestation of the divine names, which are infinite. Nevertheless, the basic sense of the self involves an ethical “split” within itself in terms of its higher and lower nature—the higher nature being the state of spiritual perfection, while the lower nature being the site of negative thoughts and emotions. It is also helpful to view selfhood as both received and achieved. That is, a self is not something that we automatically are. Rather a self is something we must become. Thus, it is possible to describe the self (the received aspect of the self) in terms of scientific and social facts, but at the same time it is equally possible to articulate it in terms of aspirational ideals that are yet to be realized (i.e., the achieved aspect).

One should also note various philological difficulties when it comes to discussing selfhood in Sufism, although it is beyond the scope of the present endeavor to deal with them. But at the very least, one should note that there is a cluster of terms such as *nafs* (soul/self), *rūḥ* (spirit), *sirr* (secret core), *khaft* (hidden), *akhfā* (most hidden), etc. that Sufi authors employ to talk about var-

27 See also Chittick, William, *The Sufi path of knowledge: Ibn al-‘Arabī’s metaphysics of imagination*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1989, 17.

28 See Faruque, Muhammad U., *Sculpting the self: Islam, selfhood, and human flourishing*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021.

ious dimensions of the self or consciousness, and without discerning whether the connotations of these terms point to a common reference, one would not be able to discuss the self in Sufism.²⁹ Some thinkers considered *rūḥ* and *nafs* to be synonymous, while others noted a difference between their meanings. For instance, it is not unusual for Muslim authors to talk about the “mineral spirit” (*rūḥ ma‘danī*).³⁰

Sufis (and sometimes non-Sufis) also use the term “*laṭīfā*” to talk about the self, a word which is difficult to translate but which I will nevertheless translate as the “subtle field of consciousness” (it can equally be conceived as the “subtlety” that characterizes the self). In fact, terms such as *nafs*, *qalb*, *rūḥ*, *sirr*, *khafī*, and *akḥfā* are conceived of as different *laṭā’if*, which have their corresponding equivalents in the macrocosm, and which ultimately derive from the conditioning of the Supreme Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-a‘zam*).³¹ Muslim thinkers’ talk of the self is thus inseparable from a relational, holistic view of the cosmos, even though they often emphasize features such as self-knowledge and self-cultivation.

3 Microcosm, Macrocosm, and All-Comprehensiveness

The doctrine of the perfect human comprises three principal modalities, namely individual, cosmic, and meta-cosmic.³² The individual self, having been created upon the form of the divine name Allāh, potentially contains the perfection of all the divine names and attributes. But seldom does one attain to the exalted station of the perfect human, with the exception of the prophets,

29 For a detailed discussion, see Faruque, *Sculpting the self* 24–26, 49–58.

30 This is because the term “soul” or “spirit” serves as a general term for the invisible force that becomes evident when we perceive life and consciousness. Moreover, observing manifestations of soul in the external world parallels experiencing its presence within ourselves. Life, spirit, and consciousness are exactly the features we recognize in ourselves as we observe them in other entities. For more information, see Chittick, William, *Science of the cosmos, science of the soul*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2007.

31 Al-Qayṣārī, Dāwūd, *Maṭla‘ khuṣūṣ al-kalīm fī ma‘ānī Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam (Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam)*, ed. Ḥasanzāda Āmulī, Qom: Būstān-i Kitāb, 2008, 154–156.

32 Toshihiko Izutsu thinks that the perfect human comprises two modalities rather than three, as I mentioned above. He leaves out the meta-cosmic dimension of the perfect human. This may be due to his restricting the reality of the perfect human below the Divine Essence, which, however, is not the position embraced by most of the commentators of Ibn ‘Arabī. On Izutsu’s explanation of this issue, see Izutsu, Toshihiko, *Sufism and Taoism: A comparative study of key philosophical concepts*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, 247 ff.

sages, and saints.³³ As for the cosmic dimension, every individual self is also the mirror of the macrocosm, since it reflects the realities of the cosmos. Finally, as a meta-cosmic reality, every self by virtue of the fact that it is a potential perfect human encompasses all the different levels of reality from the Divine Self to the terrestrial realm. Although the doctrine of the “perfect human” bears resemblance to the ancient idea of “microcosm,”³⁴ it is much more encompassing and variegated than the latter.³⁵ I will thus begin the discussion through the microcosm/macrocosm analogy.

In his *Muqaddima*, Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 751/1350) quotes verses attributed to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), which explain the relationship between microcosm and macrocosm:³⁶

Your cure is within you but you are not aware of it
 Your illness is from you but you do not see it
 Do you claim that you are a small body
 While the great world (*al-‘ālam al-akbar*) is folded within you
 You are the clear book whose
 Letters manifest the hidden.³⁷

33 However, even in the cases of the prophets and great saints, the actualization of the perfect human involves a hierarchy of degrees. Thus, the Prophet Muhammad is the supreme prototype of the perfect human as compared to other prophets.

34 The idea of the perfect human (Gr. *anthrōpos teleios*), which became a foundational doctrine of Islamic mysticism, goes back to Iranian and Hellenistic (Gnostic) sources; see e.g., Christensen, Arthur, *Les types du premier homme et du premier roi dans l'histoire légendaire des Iraniens*, Upsala: Appelberg, 1917 and 1934; Molé, Marijan, *Culte, mythe et cosmologie dans l'Iran ancien: Le problème zoroastrien et la tradition mazdéenne*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963, 469 ff.; Schaefer, Hans H., “Die islamische Lehre vom vollkommenen Menschen,” in *ZDMG* 4 (1925), 192–268. On the notion of *anthrōpos teleios*, see Turner, Bryan S., *Orientalism: Early sources*, i, New York: Routledge, 2000, 577 ff. As for Islamic sources, see Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Insān al-kāmil: Min kalām Muḥyī l-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī*, ed. Maḥmūd al-Ghurāb, Damascus: Maṭba‘at Zayd Ibn Ṭābit, 1981; Nasafī, ‘Azīz al-Dīn, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, ed. M. Molé, Paris: A. Maisonneuve, 1962; al-Jīlī, ‘Abd al-Karīm, *al-Insān al-kāmil fī ma‘rifat al-awākhir wa-l-awā’il*, ed. Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ṣalāḥ b. ‘Uwayḍa. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1997.

35 Masataka Takeshita seems to equate the reality of the perfect human with that of microcosm, which I think is incorrect because the former encompasses all levels of reality, and not just microcosm, see Takeshita, Masataka, *Ibn ‘Arabī’s theory of the perfect man and its place in the history of Islamic thought*, Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1987, 170 ff. For a more recent account, see Morrissey, Fitzroy, *Sufism and the perfect human: From Ibn ‘Arabī to al-Jīlī*, New York: Routledge, 2020.

36 According to Ḥasanzādah Āmulī, the verses belong to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib al-Qayrawānī. See al-Qayṣarī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikām* 112.

37 Al-Qayṣarī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikām* 112.

Typically, the term “great world” or macrocosm encompasses all of existence, while the “small world” or microcosm pertains to humanity. However, according to the School of Ibn ‘Arabī, the great world sometimes refers to the perfect human, and the small world represents creation. This is because the perfect human embraces all layers of existence, and the macrocosm would be incomplete without his presence.³⁸ Ibn ‘Arabī explains the relationship between macrocosm and microcosm by saying even though every entity within the cosmos is a form of God, it is only human beings—and more specifically perfect humans—who truly reflect the full spectrum of Divinity. Ibn ‘Arabī emphasizes this perspective by stating that not all aspects of the cosmos fully represent the Real.³⁹ Apart from human beings, only the entire cosmos, seen as a unified entity, truly mirrors the form of the name Allāh which encompasses all other divine names. While every element in the cosmos shares in the divine form (*al-ṣūra al-ilāhiyya*) to some degree, it is only when viewed in its entirety that it genuinely embodies this form.⁴⁰ Therefore, when Ibn ‘Arabī speaks of “God creating Adam in His form,” he means that every attribute accepted by the Divine Presence is also accepted by both the microcosm and the macrocosm.⁴¹ From another point of view, since human beings (qua perfect humans) represent the totality of the cosmos, it is more fitting to name the universe as the “great human being.”⁴² Ibn ‘Arabī explains the idea more explicitly in his *Futūḥāt*:

In reality, [the human being] is an all-comprehensive copy (*nuskha jāmi‘a*) in that there is within him something of the sky in one respect, and something of the earth in another respect, and something of everything (*min kulli shay’ bi-wajhin mā*) in a certain respect. For the human being is, in reality, from among the totality of created beings (*makhliqāt*). It is not said of him that he is *the* sky, or that he is *the* earth, or that he is the throne; rather, it is said of him that he is *like* the sky in this respect, and *like* the earth in that respect, and *like* the throne in another respect. Similarly, he is like the element of fire in this respect, and like wind in that respect, and like earth and water and everything else in the universe. So,

38 Kāshānī, ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Laṭā‘if al-a‘lām fi ishārāt ahl al-ilhām*, Tehran: Mīrath-i Maktūb, 2000, 386.

39 Ibn ‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt* iv, 8.1.

40 Ibn ‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt* iv, 231.5.

41 Ibn ‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt* ii, 139.30.

42 Chittick, *Self-disclosure of God* 360. For al-Qayṣarī, the world is called the “great human being” because just as the rational soul is the heart of human beings, the universal soul is the heart of the cosmos. See al-Qayṣarī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 114.

it is in this sense that he is a copy (*nuskha*), and is called “human being,” just as the sky is called “sky.”⁴³

The idea of the perfect human as an all-comprehensive copy or all-comprehensive being (*kawn jāmiʿ*) occurs in the writings of nearly all the major figures in the School of Ibn ʿArabī. For instance, in his *Miftāḥ ghayb al-jamʿ*, al-Qūnawī describes the perfect human as a synthesis of all levels of the cosmos, while in his *Muqaddima*, al-Qayṣarī states that the perfect human synthesizes all the divine books contained in the Five Presences (mentioned earlier) because he is a copy of the macrocosm.⁴⁴

All this is to say the self and the world are so similar that they are likened to mirror images of each other. This correspondence between the microcosm and macrocosm is understood as akin to a subject-object relationship. The human self acts as a conscious subject capable of encompassing the entire universe as its object. The bond between the self and the universe is so intrinsic that it can be aptly described as “organismic,” meaning the self and the world are inseparably intertwined. It is, moreover, understood that the existence of the microcosm is dependent on the macrocosm, and vice versa. While it is acknowledged that the macrocosm precedes human beings in the visible realm, without human beings, there would be no higher, spiritual purpose in the universe.⁴⁵ The intimate cosmic connection between the human being and the universe is captured beautifully through poetic imagery in Rūmī’s *Mathnawī*:

If you are born of Adam, sit like him and behold all his progeny in yourself.

What is in the jar that is not also in the spring?

What is in the house that is not also in the city?

This world is the jar, and the heart (*dil*) is like the water;

This world is the chamber, and the heart is the wonderful city.⁴⁶

43 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* i, 216.29.

44 Al-Qūnawī, *Miftāḥ ghayb al-jamʿ* 82 ff.; al-Qayṣarī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 112. See also, al-Fanārī, Muḥammad b. Ḥamza, *Miṣbāḥ al-uns*, ed. Muḥammad Khwājawī, Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mawlā, 1996, 601 ff.; Ibn Turka, Ṣāʿin al-Dīn, *Tamhīd al-qawāʿid*, ed. Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī, Tehran: Intishārāt-i Anjuman-i Islāmī Ḥikmat wa-Falsafa-yi Irān, 1982, 177 ff.

45 See also, Chittick, “Anthropocosmic vision.”

46 Rūmī, Jalāl al-Dīn, *The Mathnawī of Jalāluʿddīn Rūmī*, ed. and trans. Reynold A. Nicholson, iv, London, 1925–1940, 809–811; trans. modified. The “heart” symbolizes the human being, which is the macrocosm.

Rūmī further draws a distinction between Sufi and philosophical conceptions of the microcosm-macrocosm analogy. For him, philosophers describe human beings as the microcosm, while Sufi metaphysicians assert that human beings are the macrocosm.⁴⁷ This distinction comes into the fore because philosophy focuses on the phenomenal reality of human beings, while Sufi metaphysicians delve into the inner reality of human nature. As he writes:

Therefore, in form thou art the microcosm (*‘ālam-i aṣghar*),
 Therefore, in reality thou art the macrocosm (*‘ālam-i akbar*).
 Outwardly the branch is the origin of the fruit:
 Inwardly the branch came into existence for the sake of the fruit.
 If there had not been desire and hope of the fruit,
 How should the gardener have planted the root of the tree?
 Therefore, in reality the tree was born of the fruit,
 Even if in appearance it (the fruit) was generated by the tree.
 Hence Muṣṭafā said, “Adam and the other prophets are following behind
 me under my banner.”
 For this reason, that master of all sorts of knowledge has uttered the
 allegorical saying,
 “We are the last and the foremost.”
 “If in appearance I am born of Adam,
 In reality I am the forefather of every forefather.
 Since the worship of the angels was rendered to him for my sake,
 And he ascended to the Seventh Heaven on my account.
 Therefore, in reality the father (Adam) was born of me,
 Therefore, in reality the tree was born of the fruit.”
 The thought (idea), which is first, comes last into actuality,
 In particular the thought (*fikr*) that is eternal.⁴⁸

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- 47 This may be because human beings qua perfect humans encompass the entire cosmos, which goes beyond the microcosm-macrocosm correspondence. For instance, in his commentary on Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Naqsh al-fuṣūṣ*, Jāmī says: “Therefore, or because the world is like the body and the Perfect Man is like the spirit, it is said that the world is a “great man,” for just as man consists of a body and a spirit which governs it, the world is made up of these two, although it is larger than man in form; but this statement is only true on condition of the Perfect Man’s existence within it, or the world, for if he did not exist within it, it would be like a discarded body without a spirit.” Cited in Chittick, William, “Ibn ‘Arabī’s own summary of the *Fuṣūṣ*: The imprint of the bezels of the wisdom,” in *JMIAS* 1 (1982), 36.
- 48 Rūmī, *Mathnawī* iv, 520–530; trans. modified. The last verse alludes to the concept of the “final cause,” which occurs in thought first but is the last to materialize in the external world.

Following Ibn ‘Arabī, Rūmī, and others, Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640) transposes the traditional macrocosm-microcosm analogy in his philosophy. Instead of portraying the world as a macrocosm and the human self a microcosm, Ṣadrā claims that the self is the macrocosm while its body the microcosm. For Ṣadrā, this means that the human self encapsulates all of reality, since it can also identify itself with the Divine Self after experiencing the spiritual, noetic states of annihilation (*fanā’*) and subsistence (*baqā’*) and reaching the utmost degree of self-perfection. Ṣadrā writes:

It belongs to human to know everything, and his self has the receptivity for every form (*wa-li-dhātihi qābilat kull šūra*), since there is nothing without an equivalent within him. So all existent entities are parts of his self, and despite his oneness, he is all things (*waḥdatuhu jamī‘ al-ashyā’*), because his self is a macrocosm, his body a microcosm. There is nothing in reality that is not under his subjection.⁴⁹

The concept of the perfect human also implies an ontological perfection, since according to Sufi metaphysics, it is the form of God’s all-encompassing name “Allāh” that contains all other infinite names and attributes of the Absolute (*al-muṭlaq*). As Ṣadrā explains:

Know that “Allāh” is the name of the Divine Self (*al-dhāt al-ilāhiyya*) which, through its comprehensiveness (*jāmi‘iyyatihi*), encompasses all the perfections of the attributes, and the perfect human (*al-insān al-kāmil*) is the form of this name.⁵⁰ The greatest name of God (*ism a‘ẓam*) encapsulates all other divine names in an undifferentiated manner (*al-ijmāl*).⁵¹ He is the spirit of the universe, and the locus of manifestation of the name Allāh. He is also His vicegerent.⁵²

In a nutshell, the perfect human is the divine form from which both the microcosm and macrocosm take their forms.⁵³ Consequently, the perfect human

49 Mullā Ṣadrā, *The elixir of the gnostics (Iksīr al-‘arīfīn)*, ed. and trans. William Chittick, Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2003, 19; trans. substantially modified.

50 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Maẓāhir al-ilāhiyya fī asrār al-‘ulūm al-kamāliyya*, ed. S.M. Khamanei, Tehran: Bunyād-i Hikmat-i Islāmi-yi Ṣadrā, 1998, 40.

51 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Maẓāhir* 41.

52 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Maẓāhir* 72.

53 The word “*insān*” in the phrase “*insān al-kāmil*” could be misleading at times, as it tends to evoke a “superhuman image,” whereas it is about participating in the perfection of the divine.

even transcends the cosmos in that it can arrive at the threshold of the highest level of reality, i.e., the Divine Self. The Indian Sufi metaphysician Ashraf ‘Alī Thānawī (d. 1943) writes:

Divine comprehensiveness pertains to the lot of humans only, and the nature of such comprehensiveness is unfathomable through rational reflection. Thus, mystical unveiling (*kashf*) is required to understand [such a truth]. ... This comprehensive being (*mawjūd-i jāmi‘*) is called human being (*insān*) or vicegerent (*khalīfa*). It is named human being in virtue of its “comprehensive state” (*nash’a-yi ‘āmm*). That is, all the divine realities (*ḥaqā’iq-i ilāhiyya*) belong to the particularity of the human state (*nash’a-yi insāniyya*). Also, [since the human state] has a relationship with all other realities, it is named human being.... It is through him that the Real (God) sees His creation.⁵⁴

For Thānawī, and as for other Sufis, it is clear that such “comprehensiveness” of the perfect human as attributed to the human self can only be gleaned through mystical unveiling (*kashf*), and not through any form of rational analysis. He also gives reasons why human beings are called humans, which, according to him, is due to their possessing the “comprehensive state” (*nash’a-yi ‘āmm*).⁵⁵ This comprehensive state contains all the divine realities as they are manifested in the cosmos. And it is through such a comprehensive state that human beings can relate themselves to all other beings in the cosmos. But perhaps the supreme example of the all-comprehensive state of the perfect human can be gleaned from the following poem of Ḥāfiẓ. This poem, among other, shows how a perfected soul can contain all the realities (*ḥaqā’iq*) of the cosmos:

For years my heart sought the goblet of Jamshīd (*jām-i jam*) from me,
That which it (i.e., the self) already possessed (*ānchih az khūd dāsht*) it
sought from others,
[This true self is] the pearl which is outside of the shell of time and
space.
It (i.e., my heart) searched for its true reality from those lost on the
seashore.

54 Thānawī, Ashraf ‘Alī, *Khuṣūṣ al-kalīm fī ḥall Fuṣūs al-ḥikam*, Lahore: Nazir Sons Publishers, 1978, 17.

55 Thānawī, *Khuṣūṣ al-kalīm* 17.

Last night, I took my problem to the Magian Pīr (*pīr-i mugān*),⁵⁶
 Who could solve problems by his powerful [spiritual] insight.⁵⁷
 I saw him joyful and happy with a goblet of wine in his hand.
 And while he looked at the mirror in a hundred different ways,
 I asked, "O sage, when was this world-viewing goblet given to you?"
 He said, "On that day, when He created the azure dome [of heaven]."
 He said, "That friend (i.e., al-Hallāj) who honored the top of the gallows,
 His fault was that he laid bare the secrets [of the self]."
 If the Holy Spirit bestows his grace again,
 "Others can also do what the Messiah did!"
 I said to him, "What is the chain-like tress of idols for?"
 He replied, "Ḥāfiẓ complains of his frenzied heart (*dil-i shaydā*)."⁵⁸

At first blush, the content of the poem may seem disparate, but as some interpreters have argued, there is an underlying unity at work here.⁵⁹ The poem, in brief, brings together correspondences between the metacosm (God), the macrocosm (the cosmos) and the microcosm (the human self) by the symbolism of the "goblet of wine" (the macrocosm) which corresponds to the "heart" of the spiritual seeker (the microcosm), which again, after self-realization, corresponds to the Divine Throne in the metacosm.⁶⁰ Another way of explaining the symbolism would be to say that just as when one looks into a cup full of liquid one sees one's own face or the face of someone else, one sees the face of one's *true self* or the divine when looking at one's own heart, if it is full of divine wine, i.e., divine love. The goblet of Jamshīd is a mythical cup into which the ancient Persian king Jamshīd could look and see any place in the world. So the goblet of Jamshīd symbolizes the realized, true self into which one can look and find everything that is out there in the cosmos.⁶¹ According to Abū al-Ḥasan Lāhūrī's

56 "Magian Pīr" symbolizes the person of the spiritual master.

57 The first two couplets lay out the problem—the "seeking heart" being a parallel structure in the first two couplets—which leads to the third couplet in which he goes to the spiritual guide for counsel. In other words, he is searching for his true self, but in the wrong places, and asking the wrong people.

58 Ḥāfiẓ, *The divan of Hafez: A bilingual text*, trans. Reza Saberi, Lanham: University Press of America, 2002, #136 (trans. modified).

59 This is cogently argued in Hillmann, Michael C., *Unity in the ghazals of Hafez*, Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1976, 39–46. It should, however, be noted that for the commentators of Ḥāfiẓ, an underlying unity is always assumed.

60 See Lāhūrī, Abū l-Ḥasan, *Sharh-i 'urfāni-yi ghazal-hā-yi Ḥāfiẓ*, ed. Bahā' al-Dīn Khurramshāhī et al., ii, Tehran: Nashr-i Qaṭra, 1995, 1276 ff. Needless to say, this is not the only interpretation of this *ghazal*.

61 See e.g., Hillmann, *Unity in the ghazals of Hafez* 43–45.

massive commentary on the *Dīwān*, the *jām-i jam* (symbolizing here the true self) cannot be discovered through the effort of the ordinary self, whose sole essence is analytical thinking or reason.⁶² Thus one needs the help of a spiritual guide who can unlock the mystery of the true self by showing one the path of love.

4 Spirit of the Cosmos

According to Ibn ‘Arabī, God wanted to see His own infinite reality in an all-inclusive object encompassing the totality of His never-ending self-manifestation, so that He would have objective self-knowledge.⁶³ So, God brings into existence a comprehensive being, identified as the perfect human so that He may see His own perfection in the mirror of the former. Accordingly, Adam or the prototype of the perfect human was created in the form of the name Allāh (i.e., the Absolute), which contains the perfection of all the divine names and attributes. Now it may be asked at this point why did God, whose Self already contained infinite perfection, wish to see Himself in the mirror of another being? Did not God already “see” His perfection before the creation of the perfect human? In response, Sufis such as Ibn ‘Arabī say that even though God did witness Himself (i.e., His names and qualities) *before* the creation of the perfect human, this witnessing was through His own Self, and not through an external form. For the act of seeing oneself in oneself is different from the act of seeing oneself in another being, which would be like a *mirror* to the former. In the case of the former, i.e., seeing oneself in oneself, the witnessing takes place without any intermediary, whereas in the case of the latter the act of seeing materialized through an intermediary, which is the reality of the perfect human. If we focus on the mirror metaphor more, we could then say with Ibn ‘Arabī that when God created the cosmos it was like an unpolished mirror lacking a spirit. And as the forms of the divine names and qualities reflected in the cosmos could not be seen clearly on account of the latter’s being an unpolished mirror, God created the perfect human, who is the very polishing of this mirror and the spirit of this form (*wa-rūḥ tilka l-ṣūrā*), since he completes its perfection.⁶⁴ As Nūr al-Dīn al-Jāmī (d. 898/1492) explains:

62 The “ordinary self” is symbolized in the poem as “*bīgānīh*” (stranger/other) and “*gum-shudihgān-i lab-i daryā*” (lost on the seashore) respectively. See Lāhūrī, *Sharh-i ‘irfān* ii, 1276–1278.

63 Ibn ‘Arabī, Muḥyī l-Dīn, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. Abū l-‘Alā’ Afifī, Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 2002, 48–49.

64 Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 13. On the “mirror symbolism” and its semantic analysis, see

Without the existence of Adam, [the world] was a harmonious body and sound constitution but without spirit. To clarify, the original aim and rationale for creating the world was to acquire perfection of the clear and the manifest (*al-jalā' wa-l-istijlā'*), which is the theophany of His Self and His vision in every aspect of His Essential knowledge. It is a manifestation that has a specific individuation according to His wisdom.⁶⁵

The Arabic phrase *al-jalā' wa-l-istijlā'* calls into mind divine self-disclosure being reflected in the human mirror. The human being functions as a comprehensive mirror, with its spirit serving as the essential link in existence, mirroring the divine form. The polished mirror is an allusion to the heart, as it is the locus (*maẓhar*) of divine theophany. The divine form is actualized at the intersection of human and divine realms—cosmologically through Adam's role in polishing the mirror, and mystically through the purification of the heart's mirror during spiritual union or *fanā'*.⁶⁶ Jāmī further explains that the Divine Names by their essences require the existence of the world. Hence, God brought forth the world as a harmonious entity, with Adam serving as its spirit. By "Adam," Jāmī means the entirety of human existence. For Jāmī, the perfect human is the spirit of the world, while the world is his body. And just as the spirit⁶⁷ governs the body through its faculties, the perfect human governs the affairs of the world through its knowledge of the true essences of things. That is why God imparted knowledge of all the divine names to Adam (i.e., the human spirit), as these names signify the inner meanings of things.⁶⁸

But it was not lost on these Sufi authors that human beings possess two aspects: an outer manifestation and an inner essence. The external aspect mirrors the order of the cosmos, while the inner reality mirrors the divine form. Therefore, humanity embodies the anthropocosmic reality, serving as the vessel for all eternal and contingent entities. No other being can fulfill this role, as individual components of the cosmos cannot reflect the divine form.⁶⁹ All this

Sells, Michael, *Mystical languages of unsaying*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, 63–89; "Ibn 'Arabi's polished mirror: Perspective shift and meaning event," in *SI* 66 (1988), 121–149.

65 Jāmī, Nūr al-Dīn, *Naqd al-nuṣūṣ fī sharḥ Naqsh al-fuṣūṣ*, ed. William Chittick, Tehran: Iranian Institute of Philosophy, 2001, 85; cited in Ali, Mukhtar, *Philosophical Sufism: An introduction to the school of Ibn al-'Arabi*, New York: Routledge, 2022, 141.

66 Sells, *Mystical languages* 84.

67 Spirit here means the highest part of the soul, namely the intellect.

68 Jāmī, *Naqd al-nuṣūṣ* 3.

69 Ibn 'Arabi, "*Inshā' al-dawā'ir*."

is to say the perfect human as the anthropocosmic self serves as both the spirit and the final cause of the cosmos.⁷⁰ This is further explained by Thānawī who writes:

Adam is like a spirit for the entire cosmos, while the angels are like the various faculties of the form of the cosmos, which is called macrocosm (*insān-i kabīr*) in the language of the Sufis. So the angels are like the faculties of sense and spirit, which human beings have in their constitution.⁷¹

As hinted earlier, according to the School of Ibn ‘Arabī, Adam or the perfect human prototype is the synthesis of both macrocosmic and microcosmic realities in that only he is made in the image of the all-encompassing name of God, Allāh.⁷² Thus the universe as a whole reflects all the divine names and attributes of Divinity (or the name Allāh which encapsulates all other names) through countless number of species and entities, but each entity or thing reflects only a particular mode of a given divine name. In other words, a particular entity like quartz crystal may reflect its perfection only through a particular given name of God, which is the cause of manifestation of the former. In like manner, angels are similar to the various faculties of human, which bear their own “conditional” perfection in that each sense-faculty may be perfect in terms of its particular function, e.g., sight when it comes to seeing, and can know a particular aspect of reality perfectly. But it is the human spirit or self which unites all the faculties and achieves perfection in the process.

Although by no means a Sufi, the peripatetic philosopher Avicenna comes very close to expressing the anthropocosmic self as he describes the vision achieved by perfected souls when they unite with the Active Intellect (*al-‘aql al-fa‘āl*). The gist of Avicenna’s argument is that the self is able to actualize its cosmic possibilities by becoming an intelligible world (*‘ālam al-‘aql*):

As for the rational self, the perfection (*kamāl*) proper to it consists in its becoming an intelligible world (*‘ālam al-‘aql*) within which is impressed the form of the All (*ṣūrat al-kull*), the order intelligible in the All, and the good which is showered through the All, beginning from the origin

⁷⁰ It is through him that the meaning of the creation of the cosmos is fulfilled, since he becomes the eye with which God sees His creation.

⁷¹ Thānawī, *Khuṣūṣ al-kalīm* 15. Cf. Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 49–50; al-Qayṣarī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 210 ff.; Jandī, Mu‘ayyid al-Dīn, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī, Mashhad: Dānishgāh-i Mashhad, 1982, 126–142.

⁷² See al-Qayṣarī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 238–251.

of the All and proceeding on to the noble, spiritual, absolute substances, then to the spiritual substances connected in a certain way to the bodies, then the exalted corporeal bodies with their configurations and powers. Then it continues on like this until it completes within itself the realization of the configuration of existence in its entirety (*fī nafsihā hay'at al-wujūd kulluhu*). It thus turns into an intelligible world, parallel with all the existing worlds. It witnesses that which is absolute good, absolute beauty, and absolute comeliness while unified with it, imprinted with its likeness and form, strung upon its thread, and coming to be of its substance.⁷³

5 Becoming the Anthropocosmic Self

The preceding sections showed why any discussion of the perfect human is bound up with the self's relationship with the cosmos. But we should also do well to remember from section 2 that the self in Sufism is both descriptive and normative, or that it is both received and achieved. The descriptive or received aspect of human nature has to do with the question "What is the self," while its normative or aspirational dimension deals with the question "What kind of self should one be." According to Sufi metaphysics, God created human beings in the form of all His names, which means human nature defies any fixed definition, as the possibilities inherent in the divine form are limitless, and each individual manifests them in a distinct manner unlike any other. But the perfect human *attains* perfection by bringing the divine form from potentiality into actuality. In other words, the doctrine of the perfect human, in part, is a normative ideal based on the prophetic model, which provides an answer to the question "What kind of self should one be." And the answer in light of our analysis so far is that one needs to aspire to be an anthropocosmic self.

73 Avicenna, *al-Shifā': The metaphysics of the healing*, trans. Michael E. Marmura, Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2005, 350; trans. significantly modified. Similarly, in his *Muṣannaḥāt*, Bābā Aḥḍal (d. 610/1213) explains how the self encompasses everything in existence once it attains complete perfection: "It is self that is present with self. The self is the self's seen, seer, and seeing. Through this predominant seeing, it makes everything below self the same as self. This is like fire, which makes everything it reaches into fire. This is the utmost end and final goal of all utmost ends and final goals." See Bābā Aḥḍal, *Muṣannaḥāt* 37–38; cited in Chittick, William, *The heart of Islamic philosophy: The quest for self-knowledge in the writings of Aḥḍal al-Dīn Kāshānī*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, 262.

The first step toward becoming the anthropocosmic self is to realize that it is the principle of all existential determinations such that one should make a real effort in actualizing all degrees of existence within oneself. In practical terms, it means striving to achieve what al-Qūnawī calls “the point at the middle of the circle of existence” (*nuqṭa waṣaṭ al-dāʿirat al-wujūdiyya*) or the central point of equilibrium.⁷⁴ Because human beings mirror the entirety of the cosmos, the self has an inherent connection with every aspect of existence, including nature and other individuals. However, before the realization of perfection, this connection often leads to a centrifugal tendency away from the center. The ordinary self finds itself in the midst of all forms of distractions and challenges, which exert influence from all sides. One becomes imprisoned in the web of one’s materialistic desires and dreams. These desires in turn motivate the individual to chase after wealth, fame, and power. Yet, the ideal balance in all situations and conditions lies in the central point of equilibrium, and those who deviate from it stray from the right path.⁷⁵ This does not mean one has to kill off all of one’s desires and embrace an ascetic lifestyle but rather what this attitude calls for is a balanced allocation of one’s attention, giving everything its appropriate share without exceeding the balance, while maintaining inner steadfastness and neutrality in the motionless center. One who can calmly observe the periphery of each stage they traverse, remaining unaffected by their qualities, liberated from their influences, and assigning only the necessary portion of themselves to each attraction, thereby preserving their innate freedom and simplicity, devoid of specific attributes, states, characteristics, or labels—such an individual is truly noble, for they fulfill their duties to their Lord by granting everything its rightful place.⁷⁶

Also significant in this context is the link between worldly distractions that one experiences and one’s accidental bonds, which confines individuals within the limitations of their egos. But according to al-Qūnawī, the limitation of the ego is not an absolute and unchangeable condition but rather something human beings contribute to and thus can reverse by turning away from distrac-

74 A point, inherently devoid of dimensions, can only be understood in comparison to other geometric figures like lines and surfaces. Though it serves as the origin of all lines, surfaces, and circles, it remains intangible and unperceived, acting as an intelligible concept rather than a tangible entity. Thus, while everything emanates from it, the point itself remains unmanifest. See al-Qūnawī, *Iʿjāz al-bayān* 260–264. For Ibn ʿArabī as well, perfection is an equilibrium where each divine name fulfills its rightful function without any single name or subset of names exerting undue influence over the rest. See Chittick, *Sufi path of knowledge* 375.

75 Al-Qūnawī, *Iʿjāz al-bayān* 262.

76 Al-Qūnawī, *Iʿjāz al-bayān* 260–263.

tions and instead following the path leading to the center. Nevertheless, human beings are vulnerable to their own desires, tendencies, and negative states, and often fall victim to their own illusions. They already possess what they seek, yet they act as if they still need to acquire it. They firmly hold power over it, yet they behave as if they are impoverished. This paradox is partly due to the mystery of human comprehensiveness and the impermanence of what is reflected in their mirror, given that all things revolve around their essence, which is the very center of their circle. Thus, the essential reality of the self resembles a spherical mirror on an unfolded parchment, encompassing and revolving around it, containing all inscriptions, so the relationship of all things to their essence is akin to the points on the circumference to the central point from which they originate.⁷⁷

What matters for al-Qūnawī is the casting off of accidental, restrictive attributes (*al-awṣāf al-taqyīdiyya al-āridā*) so that the individual self is able to overcome and transcend the “accidentalities” of its personal identity, i.e., the individual consciousness usually shaped by heredity, personality, personal tendencies, capacities, fate, and vocation, the fact of being born at a given place, given moment, and undergoing given influences and experiences, and so on. In short, the socio-cultural milieu that is responsible for the construction of one’s identity and conditioned self. According to Sufis, becoming anthropocosmic self means overcoming all such accidentalities, paving thereby the way for the realization of the cosmic and meta-cosmic dimensions of the self associated with the perfect human. As al-Qūnawī says:

Indeed, he is entirely without distinguishing traits, like a polished spherical mirror in an intelligible central point that forms the common boundary between the domains of necessity and contingency, and around which all things describe an intelligible cycle. Although always full in respect of their reflection and always expressing, through his reality, the meanings, spirits, forms, attributes and states reflected and determined within him ... he is nonetheless in reality always empty of all things, neither containing nor contained. Veiled from all things precisely through their reflection in him, and by the fact that they themselves cannot see beyond this, he in himself remains unseen, unknown, ineffable and indescribable ... For this is the case with all mirrors in relation to the reflected image: it is not they themselves that are seen when they are filled with the image, but only the latter, whatever it be. Such, then, is the status of the true human

77 Al-Qūnawī, *Miftāḥ ghayb al-jamʿ* 139.

being when his contingent characteristics have been resolved within the Necessary Being and unity of his Lord.⁷⁸

Richard Todd summarizes it well when he says that there is an inherent correlation between the state of absolute emptiness (*farāgh*) and the comprehensiveness (*jam'īyya*) when it comes to the perfect human who reflects "all determinate things through his own indeterminacy, like a mirror which is completely empty and completely full at one and the same time."⁷⁹ That is to say, having attained the utmost degree, the perfect human encompasses all levels. Having embraced the characteristics of all divine names, he embodies the very form of the name Allāh. Just as Allāh signifies not anything particular, but rather everything—*wujūd* and all its qualities—similarly, the anthropocosmic self is not confined to any specific identity, as it encompasses all cosmic realities.

The aforementioned "mirror imagery," which explains how something can be completely empty and completely full at one and the same time, helps us to understand how the anthropocosmic self can overcome a narrow conception of the individual confined to its little island, limited thought-process, and provincial identity. Instead, the anthropocosmic self aims to develop a cosmic consciousness, incorporating as many diverse perspectives as possible. This is brought out clearly in Rūmī's poem below:

What is to be done, O Muslims? for I do not know myself.
 I am neither Christian, nor Jew, nor Magian, nor Muslim.
 I am not of the East, nor of the West, nor of the land, nor of the sea;
 I am not of Nature's quarry, nor of the heaven circling above.
 I am not made of earth, nor of water, nor of wind, nor fire;
 nor of the Divine Throne, nor the carpet, nor the cosmos, nor mineral.
 I am not from India, nor China, nor Bulgaria, nor Turkestan;
 I am not from the kingdom of the two Iraqs, nor from the earth of
 Khurasan.
 Neither of this world, nor the next, I am, nor of Heaven, nor of Hell;
 Nor from Adam, nor from Eve, nor from Eden nor Riḍwān.
 My place is the Placeless, my trace is the Traceless;
 'Tis neither body nor soul, for I myself am the Beloved.
 I have cast aside duality, I have seen the two worlds as one;
 One I seek, One I know, One I see, One I say.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Al-Qūnawī, *Murāsālāt* 138–139, cited in Todd, *Sufi doctrine* 168.

⁷⁹ Todd, *Sufi doctrine* 169.

⁸⁰ Attributed to Rūmī (*Dīwān-i shams*), translation in Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, *The pilgrimage*

This poem should be understood in its proper context, because it seems to contradict Rūmī's clear identification with Islam in his poetry, and also what we know of his life.⁸¹ While there is no doubt about Rūmī's allegiance to the message of Islam, as an anthropocosmic self, he wants to transcend the accidentalities of his personal existence tied to the socio-cultural and religio-historical markers of identity that al-Qūnawī mentioned earlier. This is because the anthropocosmic self is "indeterminate" in itself, as a result of which it is able to reflect all determinations on a given plane. So, the anthropocosmic self can identify with water, earth, air, fire, land, sky, sea, time, space, heaven, humanity, religion, race, nationality, gender, body, mind, intelligence, and so on, while remaining free of all such restrictive categories. This pluralistic and perspectival perspective on identity can only be accounted for in terms of the "all-comprehensiveness" of the anthropocosmic self. As Ibn 'Arabī says:

My heart can take on
any form
For gazelles a meadow
A cloister for monks
A temple for idols,
pilgrim's Ka'ba,
tablets of Torah,
scrolls of the Qur'an
I profess the religion
of love (*adīnu bi-dīn al-ḥubb*)
Wherever its camels turn,
there lives my faith.⁸²

of life and the wisdom of Rumi, Oakton: The Foundation for Traditional Studies, 2007, 67 (modified). Even if Rūmī did not author this poem, his poetry as a whole alongside the poetry of numerous other Sufi poets, reflects this universalist attitude.

81 On Rūmī's clear allegiance to Islam and the path of the Prophet, see Rūmī, Jalāl al-Dīn, *Kulliyāt-i shams, ya, Dīwān-i kabūr*, ed. Badī' al-Zamān Furūzānfar, Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 2000, #49, #1173. See also, Lewis, Franklin D., *Rumi: Past and present, East and West: The life, teachings, and poetry of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2007.

82 Ibn 'Arabī, Muḥyī l-Dīn, *The translator of desires*, trans. Michael Sells, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021, 39–41. As the anthropocosmic self is not confined to any particular characteristics, it can embody opposing and conflicting attributes just as it can embrace every belief. This is because the all-comprehensive name of God "Allāh," as its ontological source, encompasses contradictory traits, while uniting them harmoniously. For more information, see Chittick, *Sufi path of knowledge* 375.

As Sufi poets and metaphysicians are at pains to remind their readers, this way of expressing the anthropocosmic self does not compromise their specific religious or ethnic identity, since at the heart of the anthropocosmic self lies the paradox of being mirror-like—empty and full at one and the same time.

Notwithstanding its metaphysical and cosmological foundations, the real-life consequences of the anthropocosmic self issue from its ability to embody the divine character traits. Since the anthropocosmic self reflects the all-comprehensive name Allāh, everything in the universe becomes imprinted in the substance of its being. This means the anthropocosmic self's inner reality is identified with the inner reality of every being in the cosmos. Traits such as compassion, fellow-feeling, equity, objectivity, impartiality, justice, nobility, generosity, forgiveness, and wisdom naturally flow from such a being, whose "I" is identified with the "I" or self of everything.

As Ibn 'Arabī explains, by embodying every divine attribute while avoiding any sense of Lordship and thus exemplifying perfect servanthood, the exemplars of the anthropocosmic self achieve a state of utter commonality. In this state, nothing about them appears exceptional, as they seamlessly blend with all aspects of creation in perfect balance and harmony. For instance, they resemble a tree or a bird in their ordinariness, obediently following the divine order without resistance or friction, maintaining absolute tranquility without causing any disruption. Moreover, they are so harmoniously attuned to the ever-changing flow of events that they go unnoticed by those around them.⁸³ Ibn 'Arabī further says:

They are the sages (*ḥukamā'*) who put things in their proper places and judge things accordingly. They put the secondary causes in their correct locations, while negating them in the places from which they should be negated. They violate nothing of what God has arranged in His creation, leaving it just as He has arranged it. Whatever is required for this world, they leave for this world, and whatever is required for the next world, they leave for the next world. They observe things with the same vision with which God observes things. They never mix up realities (*al-ḥaqā'iq*).⁸⁴

83 Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt* ii, 501.25. Ibn 'Arabī ranks the *malāmatiyya* (i.e., the people of blame) as the highest exemplars of the anthropocosmic self, since they appear ordinary and even commit apparently antinomian acts, while inwardly they are in harmony with the rest of the universe at the profoundest level. See Chittick, *The Sufi path of knowledge* 372.

84 Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt* ii, 16.15.

As hinted earlier, the natural consequence of such a perspective involves compassion, mercy, and forgiveness. For Ibn ‘Arabī, forgiving and overlooking the wrongdoings of others fosters goodness and reflects an act of “*iḥsān*” or “doing what is good and beautiful.” This quality originates from the divine and mirrors God’s pardoning and forgiving nature towards His creation. Ibn ‘Arabī goes as far as to say that if people truly understood the significance of his viewpoint on this matter, they would never retaliate against those who wrong them with similar actions. Instead, the world would be filled with individuals who forgive and seek reconciliation. However, the veils obstructing clear understanding are strong, consisting mainly of personal desires and the impulse for swift revenge and retribution.⁸⁵ In contrast, nobility consists in finding harmony with everything:

The self of a noble person
is noble in everything
that the winds and decrees
bring his way.
God judges selves
through their measure,
and He it is
who has choice in His judgment.
Then the mindful man,
whose rational faculty is authorized,
judges differently from the noble self
and is bewildered.⁸⁶

6 Concluding Reflections

Sufi thinkers uphold an anthropocosmic view of the self in which everything is connected to everything else.⁸⁷ The tripartite structure of the microcosm, namely body-soul-spirit mirrors the corresponding tripartite structure of the macrocosm, namely the physical-imaginal-spiritual realms. The microcosm-macrocosm structure, in turn, reflects the metacosm, the absolute being (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*), whose mirror image is the perfect human (*al-insān al-kāmil*).

85 Ibn ‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt* iv, 24.11.

86 Ibn ‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt* iv, 24.11, cited in Chittick, *Self-disclosure of God* 123.

87 Al-Qūnawī literally uses the expression “*kull shay’ fihi kull shay’*” in one of his works. See al-Qūnawī, *al-Nafahāt al-ilāhiyya*, ed. Muḥammad Khwājawī, Tehran: Mawlā, 1996, 265.

In essence, the anthropocosmic self is characterized by an organismic unity, which pervades all forms of existence. Moreover, since all-comprehensiveness is an essential attribute of the anthropocosmic self, it is able to encompass and integrates all the degrees of existence.⁸⁸

As we saw, for the Sufis, the cosmos is the differentiated divine form, while the human being is its undifferentiated counterpart. Together, they mirror each other's reality. But it is important to emphasize that human beings contain a dual nature. Sufis do not deny that human beings' outer form is composed of matter which we observe in the universe, but they also assert that their inner reality is made in the likeness of the divine form. According to 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 826/1424), the perfect humans serve as microcosms of both God and the cosmos. This is because they assimilate higher truths into their subtle essence and lower truths into their more tangible, earthly nature.⁸⁹ Moreover, human beings represent the spirit or the essence of the universe. It is only with their presence that the cosmos finds its meaning and fulfilment. But such a perspective is far removed from the problematic notion of "anthropocentrism," which is rightly criticized by the environmentalist thinkers today.⁹⁰ This is because according to the Sufis, human nature displays a fundamental paradox. On the one hand, it is capable of transcending the accidents of personal identity and become an anthropocosmic self, while on the other hand, it can remain imprisoned in the illusion of its self-contained, individualistic identity and fall to the lowest of the low. For Ibn 'Arabī, when human beings are led astray by a misguided rationalism, their rank is demoted below that of the plant and stone:

No creation is higher than the stone, and after it the plant,
in a certain sense and according to certain measures.

88 This does not mean omniscience. It is more like the soul knowing the body, or the capacity of the anthropocosmic self to know the true essences of things. For a comparative account in Buddhism, see Garfield, Jay, "Indian and Tibetan Buddhist accounts of the epistemology of awakening," in Yujin Nagasawa and Mohammad S. Zarepour (eds.), *Global dialogues in the philosophy of religion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024, 7–21.

89 Al-Jīlī, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, ch. 60.

90 The charge of anthropocentrism begins with Lynn White, who argues that the "dominion narrative" mentioned in the Bible is responsible for the current ecological crisis. This is because the dominion narrative promotes an anthropocentric view and puts forth a dualistic view of human beings and nature. It also encourages the rule of human beings over nature. See White, Lynn, "The historical roots of our ecologic crisis," in *Science* 155 (1967), 1203–1207. Since White's seminal article on the ecological crisis, many prominent thinkers have responded to the charge of anthropocentrism. For a discussion, see Sayem, Md. Abu, *Religion and ecological crisis: Christian and Muslim perspectives from John B. Cobb and Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, New York: Routledge, 2023, 23–25.

After the plant comes the sentient being, all know their Creator
by a direct knowledge and on clear evidence.
As for the one called Adam, he is bound by intelligence,
thought, and the garland of faith.⁹¹

More importantly, becoming an anthropocosmic self is the very antithesis of the anthropocentric perspective, since the former does not privilege human essence over other beings, as alluded to earlier. If anything, the anthropocosmic vision transcends the subject-object dualism, which tends to give undue privilege to the mind. The guiding feature of the anthropocosmic self is its ability to realize oneness with the rest of nature, since in such a state its identity of being a particular "I" with a particular body-mind complex is transcended. This, however, does not mean that the individuality of the self dissolves completely in its transformed state so that no vestiges of the "I" remain. Rather, in such a transformed state of consciousness, the reality of the self is no longer located or reified in the conventional, empirical "I" that was once thought to be the essence or the center of one's identity. Thanks now to the transformative power of the anthropocosmic vision, the reality of the "I" is also experienced in the "non-I" (i.e., everything other than the individual self) that simultaneously constitutes its own identity.

Numerous stories about the Sufis point to the idea of realizing oneness with the nonhuman world and overcoming anthropocentrism. For instance, Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār (d. 618/1221) mentions in his *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* that one day, Abū Yazīd al-Bastāmī (d. ca. 234/848) was strolling alongside a group of followers. As the path became narrower, a dog appeared from the opposite direction. Abū Yazīd stepped aside, allowing the dog to pass, respecting its right of way. Upon seeing this, a disciple showed a sign of disapproval and said: "God honored man above all other creatures. Abū Yazīd is the 'king of the gnostics,' yet with all this dignity, and such a following of disciples, *he makes way for a dog*. How can that be?" "Young man," Abū Yazīd replied, "this dog mutely appealed to me, 'What shortcoming was I guilty of in the dawn of time, and what exceptional merit did you acquire, that I was clad in the skin of a dog whereas you were robed in honor as king of the gnostics?' This was the thought that came into my head, so I made way for the dog."⁹²

91 Ibn 'Arabī, Muḥyī l-Dīn, *The bezels of wisdom*, trans. R.W.J. Austin, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1980, 98. Cf. Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 85.

92 'Aṭṭār, Farīd al-Dīn, *Muslim saints and mystics*, trans. Arthur J. Arberry, Ames: Omphaloskepsis, 2000, 145 (trans. slightly modified, emphasis mine). Similar stories can be found about Bahā' al-Dīn Naqshband (d. 791/1389) and other Sufis, see e.g., Fakhr al-Dīn,

According to Wael Hallaq, the charge of anthropocentrism essentially applies to secular humanism, which is inherently connected with violence and lacks empathy towards those outside its secular framework. It is also inherently rooted in a system of thought entirely shaped by methods of domination and control.⁹³ A similar view is expressed by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno in their well-known *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. They argue that the Enlightenment subjectivity (i.e., the modern, secular self) is characterized by 1) the subject-object dichotomy, 2) a tendency to control nature, 3) a faith in progress, 4) a denial of anything religious, and 5) a propensity to quantify things. They further argue that the self of the Magical Age (before the Myth of Odysseus) is the opposite of all the aforementioned features.⁹⁴

In contrast to the above, the Sufi philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr talks about a normative ideal in which human beings are conceived as intermediaries between God and nature, which, however, does not mean human beings can dominate or mistreat nature, since they are accountable to God as His servants. Yet through their cosmic dimension, human beings can develop a loving and harmonious relationship with nature and can rightfully claim their ranks as custodians of God's creation, which is implied by the concept of "vicegerency" or *khalīfa*.⁹⁵ Nasr highlights the pivotal role of human beings as

‘Alī Ṣafī, *Rashaḥāt ‘ayn al-ḥayāt*, ed. ‘Alī Aṣghar Mu‘īniyān, Tehran: Bunyād-i Nikūkāri-yi Nūryāni, 1977, 50 ff.

- 93 Hallaq, Wael, *Restating Orientalism: A critique of modern knowledge*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2018. The philosopher and poet Jan Zwicky agrees with Hallaq by flatly stating that "Western civilization is over." Zwicky sees the root cause of many of the West's problems stemming from a "way of thinking" that originated nearly 600 years ago. She acknowledges that it fostered the growth of capitalism, the military-industrial complex, and Big Technology, but finds it intensely anthropocentric and thinks it has led those who embrace it to regard the nonhuman world as nothing more than a bank of resources to serve modern subjects. While it analyzes, mechanizes, digitizes, and systematizes, it rejects empathy and compassion as "distorting influences" and insists on cold objectivity. See Zwicky, Jan, *Once upon a time in the West: Essays on the politics of thought and imagination*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023, viii. For similar accounts, see also McGilchrist, Iain, *The matter with things: Our brains, our delusions, and the unmaking of the world*, London: Perspectiva, 2021; Merchant, Carolyn, *The death of nature: Women, ecology, and the scientific revolution*, New York: HarperOne, 2020; Smith, Wolfgang, *Science and myth: With a response to Stephen Hawking's The grand design*, New York: Angelico Press, 2012; and Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, *Islam, science, Muslims, and technology*, Tehran: Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, 2008.
- 94 See Horkheimer, Max and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002, 1–90.
- 95 Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, *Religion and the order of nature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, 280. The political meaning of *khalīfa* (vicegerent) as the person who rules over the

intermediaries or pontifex in establishing the harmonious connection between the lower and higher levels of reality. He says:

From both the spiritual and the religious perspective, the physical world is related to God by levels of reality which transcend the physical world itself and which constitute the various stages of the cosmic hierarchy. It is impossible to have harmony in nature, or harmony of man with nature without this vertical harmony with the higher states of being. Once nature is conceived as being purely material, even if we accept that it was created by God conceived as a clockmaker, this cosmic relationship can no longer even be conceived much less be realized. Once we cut nature off from the immediate principles of nature—which are the psychic and spiritual or angelic levels of reality—then nature has already lost its balance as far as our relation to it is concerned.⁹⁶

Nasr further explains that the harmony mentioned above is maintained by human beings through religious rituals. The religious rituals, e.g., the Sun Dance of the Native Americans, by virtue of their re-enactment on earth, link the earth with the higher levels of reality. In Nasr's view, a rite always links us with the vertical axis of existence, and by virtue of that, links us also with the principles of nature *in divinis*. So, in this perspective, rituals help to create balance and harmony with the more-than-human world.⁹⁷

Islamic world is well known. But for the Sufis whom Nasr follow in this regard, the word also has a metaphysical meaning, which is expressed through the doctrine of the perfect human. On the issue of *khalifa* and anthropocentrism in Islam, see Tlili, Sarra, *Animals in the Qur'an*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 48, 51–54, 131–132, 185.

96 Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, *The spiritual and religious dimension of the environmental crisis*, London: Temenos Academy, 1999, 12.

97 Nasr, *Spiritual and religious dimension* 11–20. Nasr's ruminations on nature, the environment, and the climate crisis are not limited to the human-nature relationship or bringing about an inner transformation focused on reviving a spiritual meaning of nature; they also contain numerous practical advice such as planting trees in large numbers, preventing deforestation and supporting social forestation programs, creating an environmental awareness through mosques and churches, reviving traditional agricultural methods and avoiding harmful fertilizers, emphasizing quality of food rather than its "quantity," using traditional building and construction methods that are in harmony with nature, using alternative energy sources, such as solar power, windmills, and turbines, reducing carbon emission, encourage recycling, and most of all, consuming less. See Sayem, Md. Abu, "Religions and environmental sustainability: Focusing on some practical approaches by John B. Cobb Jr. and Seyyed Hossein Nasr," in *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 6.1 (2021), 65–80. These practical solutions have been criticized as well. For example, traditional agricultural methods may be expensive and time-consuming, and few want to go back to the



FIGURE 1.1

Majnūn in the wilderness; attributed to: Miskin, Indian, active about 1580–1610, Indian, Mughal, Mughal period, about 1600. Ink, watercolor and gold on paper. 40.5 × 28.7 cm. MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON, FREDERICK L. JACK FUND, 1981.81

The anthropocosmic perspective cannot be more relevant in our broken world in which climate change and ecological disasters shatter the rosy picture of progress and enlightenment. What we need instead is a vision of the self characterized by balance, harmony, and equilibrium: the self which aspires to develop a cosmic consciousness by overcoming the suffocating life of individualism, and by transcending egoism, nepotism, ethnocentrism, and chauvinistic nationalism; the self which considers integrating family, community, nation, world, and cosmos into its field of awareness and lifeworld; the self which practices traits such as love, compassion, and forgiveness, and strives to give everything its due based on truth and objectivity. That is the vision of the anthropocosmic self, which is also brilliantly captured in Mughal paintings about the famous character of Majnūn and his union with the natural world. Let us end this chapter with an analysis of these paintings and their relation to the anthropocosmic self.

During the late 10th/16th and early 11th/17th centuries, when the emperor Akbar was fashioning his identity as a perfect human, he likened himself to the renunciant figure in the wilderness. This figure, who derives power from his detachment from the world, in a way symbolized Akbar's own authority. Mughal artists commonly employed imagery such as lambs and lions coexisting peacefully to symbolize Mughal rule. A particular artwork, housed in

model of traditional village life, even though it may be more eco-friendly. People are used to modern life and the ways of modern technology, and they do not like to consume less. Also, a highly spiritual and less consumptive society is needed for most of Nasr's proposals. See Sayem, "Religions and environmental sustainability" 75–76.



FIGURE 1.2
The world of animals, ca. 1600,
Miskin. Ink, opaque watercolor
and gold on paper. 33.8×21.7 cm.
FREER GALLERY OF ART,
SMITHSONIAN INSTITU-
TION, WASHINGTON, D.C.:
PURCHASE—CHARLES LANG
FREER ENDOWMENT, F1945.29

the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (Fig. 1.1), encapsulates these allegories. Created around 1600 using the *nīm qalam* technique (a drawing technique that uses monochromatic tones with highlights of color or gold), it merges imperial ambitions with Sufi principles, while primarily illustrating a passage from Nizāmī's (d. 606/1209) *Laylī wa-Majnūn*.⁹⁸ The *nīm qalam* artwork portrays an emaciated Majnūn surrounded by animals. In this representation, Majnūn embodies the archetypal mystic, who is in harmony with the natural world. Beyond its role in illustrating an epic poem, this painting delves into deeper layers of meaning, illustrating the inner state of a purified soul where all elements, from earthly creatures like elephants, fish, and a crocodile to higher entities like birds in the tree, coexist harmoniously. While the Boston *nīm qalam* painting remains tied to a specific text, another version of the allegory, lacking the figure of Majnūn, is liberated from narrative constraints and can be interpreted

98 Ganjawī, Nizāmī, *Laylī wa-Majnūn*, ed. Barāt Zanjānī, Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tehran, 1990.

both as a symbol of inner harmony and a representation of the universe. It is at once a portrait of both the microcosm and the macrocosm. In this interpretation (Fig. 1.2), the tree, rather than Majnūn, symbolizes the perfect human, i.e., the anthropocosmic self. Additionally, the various animals in the artwork signify the ontological breadth of the enlightened sage, with the dragon representing lower possibilities and the phoenix representing heavenly ones.⁹⁹

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99 See Mumtaz, Murad K., *Faces of God: Images of devotion in Indo-Muslim painting, 1500–1800*, Leiden: Brill, 2023, 33–35, for more contexts regarding these paintings.

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