

## In the End Will Be Consciousness

*Farghānī on the Ontology of the Soul*

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As human beings we are given the intelligence to know the One Who is the Origin and End of all things, who is Sat (Being), Chit (Consciousness), and Ānanda (Bliss), and to realize that this knowledge itself is the ultimate goal of human life, the crown of human existence, and what ultimately makes us human beings who can discourse with the trees and the birds as well as with the angels and who are on the highest level the interlocutors of that Supreme Reality who has allowed us to say “I” but who is ultimately the I of all I’s.<sup>1</sup>



If some historians have downplayed or sidestepped the identity of consciousness and being in Islamic philosophy, this may be because they have paid little attention to the literal meaning of the word *wujūd*, which is the standard Arabic term for being or existence. Dictionaries tell us that the verbal meaning of *wujūd* is to find, uncover, discover, and perceive, which are surely modes of consciousness. By settling on the word *wujūd* as the preferred term for being, the Muslim philosophers were recognizing that any existent thing must be found and perceived, which is to say that it must be the object of consciousness. In other words, they understood and often made explicit that *wujūd* in the sense of being cannot be separated from *wujūd* in the sense of consciousness.<sup>2</sup>

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- 1 Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, “In the beginning was consciousness,” in Nasr and Katherine O’Brien (eds.), *The essential Sophia*, Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 2006, 206.
  - 2 “Consciousness” is a problematic term, not least because of the attention given to it by various contemporary philosophers and scientists. For a good cross section of their wide-ranging attempts to understand what it entails, see Kripal, Jeffrey J., *The flip: Epiphanies of mind and the future of knowledge*, New York: Bellevue Literary Press, 2019.

As a graduate student in Tehran in the 1970s, I heard Seyyed Hossein Nasr say that the Vedantic triad *sat-chit-ānanda* can best be translated into Arabic and Persian as *wujūd-wijdān-wajd*—"being-consciousness-bliss." This was many years before I came across Ibn 'Arabī's statement at the beginning of Chapter 237 of the *Futūḥāt*, which is called "On *wujūd*": "For the Tribe [*qawm*]," that is, the Sufi teachers, "Being is consciousness of the Real in bliss" (*al-wujūd wijdān al-ḥaqq fī l-wajd*).<sup>3</sup> These three words—*wujūd*, *wijdān*, and *wajd*—are all derived from the root *w-j-d*. From early on in Arabic they were understood as variations on the meaning of finding, perceiving, and consciousness.

If we look at the theological discussions that developed simultaneously with Islamic philosophy, we see that the active and passive participles of the word *wujūd*—namely *al-wājid* and *al-mawjūd*—were understood as divine names. *Al-wājid*, "the Finder," is mentioned in the best known of the several early lists of God's ninety-nine names, that which goes back to the Companion Abū Hurayra. He provided it as a gloss on the Prophet's saying, "God has ninety-nine names, one hundred less one; whoever enumerates them will enter the Garden." As for the name *al-mawjūd*, "the Found," it is mentioned in several early books on the divine names.<sup>4</sup> Al-Ghazālī, in his commentary on the divine names (which follows Abū Hurayra's list), explains that "finder" is the opposite of "loser" (*fāqid*):

The Finder is He who lacks nothing of what He must have. All the divine attributes and their perfections are found for God (glorified and sublime is He!), so in this regard He is the Absolute Finder (*al-wājid al-muṭlaq*). Anything other than He, though it may be a finder of some of the attributes and causes of perfection, is also a loser of things, so it is a finder only relatively.<sup>5</sup>

Given that *wujūd* was understood as the divine attribute of finding and being found, it is not surprising that many theologians and Sufis who were critical of philosophy had no qualms about adopting the Avicennan distinction between *wājib al-wujūd*, "the necessary in existence," and *mumkin al-wujūd*, "the possible in existence."<sup>6</sup> In Arabic it was self-evident that this distinction asserts that

3 Or, as I have translated this sentence elsewhere, "Existence is finding the Real in ecstasy." Chittick, William C., *The Sufi path of knowledge*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1989, 212.

4 See Gimaret, Daniel, *Le noms divins en Islām*, Paris: Cerf, 1988, 133–136 (*mawjūd*), 224–226 (*wājid*).

5 Al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid *al-Maṣṣad al-asnā*, ed. Fadlou Shehadi, Beirut: Dar El-Machreq, 1989, 143.

6 Before using the word *wujūd* to mean existence became common, theological and Sufi texts tended to focus on *wujūd* in the sense of finding. For example, 'Abdallāh Anṣārī (d. 481/1088),

*wujūd* is God's inescapable attribute of finding and being found, and that everything else may or may not find and be found. In other words, God is absolute finding and consciousness, and all other things are relative finders and relatively conscious. When al-Ghazālī says in *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, "*Laysa fi l-wujūd illā Llāh*," the usual translation would be "There is nothing in existence but God." But the sentence can also be translated, "There is nothing in finding but God," or "There is nothing in consciousness but God." Just as all existence is in truth God's existence, so also all consciousness is in truth God's consciousness. Nothing truly finds but God, and nothing is truly found but God. Other things find and lose, are found and lost, but by essence they are lost and oblivious. Consciousness does not belong to things, only to the One, Absolute Finder.

In the theoretical Sufism that developed in the wake of Ibn 'Arabī's massive contributions to Islamic learning, the great teachers never forgot the identity of being and consciousness. As one example, let me provide snippets from the writings of Sa'īd b. Aḥmad Farḡhānī (d. 699/1300), the author of the first commentary (in two versions) on the most famous Arabic poem in Sufism, the 760-verse *qaṣīda Naẓm al-sulūk* (*The versification of the wayfaring*) by 'Umar b. al-Fāriḍ (d. 632/1235). Farḡhānī was a student of Ibn 'Arabī's stepson and most important propagator, Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī (d. 673/1274). The shorter, 600-page version of his commentary, *Mashāriq al-darārī*, was written in Persian, and the longer, 800-page version, *Muntahā l-madārik*, in Arabic. According to Qūnawī's foreword to the Persian text, the book is a clean copy of Farḡhānī's notes taken during Qūnawī's lectures on the *qaṣīda*. The title of the Arabic version, which can be translated as *The final end of the perceptual tools*, alludes to the existential goal of consciousness, which is to find the One Reality within oneself.

Farḡhānī's commentary, particularly in the Arabic version, is a major contribution to Islamic thought, not so much because it offers an unmatched explanation of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poem, but also because it presents rigorous and systematic explications of various concepts and notions that came to be widespread

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author of *Manāzil al-sā'irīn*, the classic description of one hundred waystations on the path to God, explains that *wujūd* is the ninety-sixth waystation and that it means "winning the reality of the thing" (*al-ẓafar bi-ḥaqīqat al-shay'*). He goes on to explain that it has three levels, the highest of which is "Finding (*wujūd*) the station of the dissolution of finding's delineation through immersion in the Firstness." When Farḡhānī defines *wujūd* following Anṣārī's outline of the waystations, he brings out the word's implications for existence and being. He says that *wujūd* is "that through which [the seeker] finds the Intended Entity in each thing through Its property of pervading every nonexistent and existent thing." Farḡhānī, Sa'īd b. Aḥmad, *Muntahā l-madārik*, ed. 'Āṣim Ibrāhīm al-Kayyālī, 2 vols., i, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2007, 140.

in the theoretical literatures of the Islamic languages.<sup>7</sup> In a lengthy prologue (*dībāja*) it sets down the Islamic worldview while integrating the various branches of metaphysics, theology, cosmology, and spiritual psychology in a manner that is hard to find anywhere else. Then, on the basis of the prologue, it demonstrates that Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *qaṣīda* is firmly grounded in the vision of reality that was described. One of the many issues that Farghānī addresses throughout the book is *wujūd*.<sup>8</sup>

## 1      **Ontology**

If "ontology" is the study of existence, and if *wujūd* is the standard term for existence in Islamic thought, one can conclude that ontology lies at the heart not only of Islamic philosophy but also of Sufism as it developed at the hands of Ibn 'Arabī and those who followed in his footsteps. This statement is problematic, however, given that it was impossible for the Sufi teachers to ignore the broad range of senses in the word *wujūd*.<sup>9</sup> It was clear to them that there can be no *mawjūd*, no existent thing, without a *wājid*, a finder of the found things. Any notion of a cold, flat, plain existence, abstracted from the myriad qualities of life and love, was alien to their thought, for they saw that *wujūd* is infused with the whole range of divine reality and human possibility. This had everything to do with the fact that these teachers were discussing *wujūd* in the context of

7 His commentary is far longer than any of the other early commentaries. That written by his friend and fellow student of Qūnawī, 'Afīf al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī (d. 690/1291), is perhaps ten percent as long. In its introduction al-Tilimsānī says that he read Farghānī's two-volume commentary but thought it would be useful to write an explanation that was "brief and to the point" (*qall wa-dall*). The next two well-known commentaries, by 'Izz al-Dīn Kāshānī (d. 735/1334–1335) and Dā'ūd al-Qayṣārī (d. 751/1350), are also brief and to the point.

8 In these discussions, both in Persian and Arabic, Farghānī was the first to use the famous expression *waḥdat al-wujūd*, "the oneness of existence" or "the unity of Being," as a technical term. See Chittick, William C., "Farghānī (d. 699/1300) on *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* in the Four Journeys," in *Journal of Sufi Studies* 14.1 (2025), 22–49.

9 A good example of a Muslim Aristotelian who drew the logical conclusions from this double sense of the word *wujūd*—that is, being and finding—is provided by Afḍal al-Dīn Kāshānī (d. c. 607/1210), who explains in his works, written in Persian, that *wujūd* is indefinable because it has no quiddity. But, it can be divided into four sorts on the basis of its two senses, which can be represented by the words *ḥastī*, "being" (in the sense of simply being there) and *yāftī*, "finding" (in the sense of perceiving things). Everything that finds exists, but not everything that exists finds, so finding is a more intense and more complete manifestation of *wujūd*. See Chittick, William C., *The heart of Islamic philosophy: The quest for self-knowledge in the teachings of Afḍal al-Dīn Kāshānī*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 43–44 and *passim*.

“metaphysics” as this term was typically expressed in Arabic, that is, *ilāhiyyāt*, “the godly things,” everything related to God (Allāh).<sup>10</sup>

Muslim scholars generally talked about God in terms of three basic concepts: essence (*dhāt*), attribute (*ṣifa*), and act (*fiʿl*)—terms that they also used to talk about things in general. The essence is the thing in itself, the attributes tell us what sort of thing it is, and the acts tell us what it does. Grammatically the word *dhāt* is a pronoun meaning “possessor of.” If God in Himself came to be called *al-dhāt*, “the Essence,” this is because He is “the possessor of” the attributes and acts. Thus *al-dhāt* means the same as the less common word, *al-musammā*, “the Named.” It is precisely the Essence that is named by *al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā*, “the most beautiful names.” If the texts consider names and attributes synonymous, this is because an attribute is simply an abstract word derived from a name. In the case of God, the names are mentioned or implied in the Quran and the *ḥadīth*. God has the attribute of knowledge because He is named the Knower, He has the attribute of power because He is named the Powerful, and so on.

It needs to be stressed that many Muslim scholars understood the Essence as *wujūd* per se. For them to discuss what the theologians called *al-dhāt* was also to discuss what the philosophers called *al-wujūd*. Both terms designate the unique reality that is unknowable in itself but perceivable inasmuch as it discloses itself in attributes and acts. As Ibn ʿArabī points out, all that exists comes down to two things: the Essence and the manifestation of the Essence, or God and God’s self-disclosure (*tajallī*), or the Real (*ḥaqq*) and creation (*khalq*). The manifestation of God’s Essence does not tell us “what” the Essence is, only “that” it is. In philosophical terms, *wujūd* has no “whatness,” no “quiddity” (*māhiyya*). If we try to talk about God’s quiddity, we are in fact describing His attributes and acknowledging that each attribute designates the Essence from a certain point of view, or in a certain “regard” (*iʿtibār*)—to use the word that Farghānī typically employs. We perceive these attributes as many because the Real *wujūd*’s beginningless and endless self-disclosures are observed in the attributes’ properties (*aḥkām*) and traces (*āthār*), which become manifest to our consciousness because of their differentiation.

In talking about existence or being, it is helpful to keep in mind that the texts distinguish between two words. *Wujūd* is a general term that can be applied to

10 If I have recently begun to talk about “godly” in place of “divine,” not least in the expression “the godly names,” this is because many people seem not to know that “divine” means “pertaining to God.” Translating *ilāhī* as “godly” might prevent undergraduates from writing about “the divine names of God” and it may also remind scholars that “metaphysics” is a rather unfortunate translation of *ilāhiyyāt*, given that it ignores the self-evident (in Arabic) connection to God.

anything that exists or is found. In contrast, *kawn* is typically used to refer to created existence in contradistinction to the uncreated existence of the Real. The philosophers recognized this when they used the expression *al-kawn wa-l-fasād* to translate the Aristotelian notion of “generation and corruption” or “coming to be and passing away.” I translate *kawn* as “engendered being” to remind the reader that it is a specific sort of existence, called *wujūd* only from a certain point of view. Engendered being is the fruit of the divine command *kun* (“Be!”), which is the imperative verb derived from *kawn*. Ibn ‘Arabī often calls this imperative “the engendering command” (*al-amr al-takwīnī*), the command that is obeyed without question by everything that comes into existence. Farghānī prefers to call it “the existence-giving command” (*al-amr al-ijādī*), for it bestows existence on things that in themselves are nonexistent.

Engendered being can be called “existence” because it is found, but only in a relative sense, for as soon as it is found it disappears, given that all engendered beings undergo corruption—moment-by-moment as Ibn ‘Arabī often reminds us. Hence the existence of engendered things is not *real* existence. As Ibn ‘Arabī likes to say, “The realities do not change” (*al-ḥaqā’iq lā tatabadḍal*). If a thing’s existence were real, it would exist eternally. This is why it is often called “metaphorical” (*majāzī*) or “relative” (*nisbī*) existence. Farghānī typically says that existence is “ascribed” (*muḍāf*) to things and “effused” (*mufāḍ*) upon them, but it does not belong to them.

In his prologue Farghānī explains the meanings of well over one hundred godly names. When talking about the Essence per se, he reminds us that the Quranic designations for the Essence are simply pointers. These include the pronouns He, I, We, and Thou. In Arabic grammar, pronouns are often called “pointing names” (*ism ishāra*). So all pronouns referring to God—like the pronoun *dhāt*—simply point to His Reality, which in itself cannot be fathomed.

In discussing the attributes that manifest the Essence, Farghānī explains the meanings of God’s most beautiful names, beginning with the “seven leader names” (*al-asmā’ al-a’immat al-sab’a*). He lists them in fairly standard fashion as Alive (*ḥayy*), Knower (*‘ālim*), Desiring (*murīd*), Speaker (*qā’il*), Powerful (*qādir*), Munificent (*jawād*), and Impartial (*muqsiṭ*). After explaining their meanings, he turns to the rest of the “ninety-nine names,” which are the followers (*tābī’*) of these leaders, classifying each under its own leader. The second leader is the Knower, which is God’s living awareness, consciousness, and understanding of all things. “He knows everything” as the Quran often says. The fifteen followers of the Knower suggest the broad range of meanings that are implicit in the divine consciousness. Any or all of these meanings come into play as soon as *wujūd* is understood to mean finding and being found: Outward

(*ẓāhir*), Aware (*ḵhabīr*), Seeing (*baṣīr*), Hearing (*samīʿ*), Encompassing (*muḥīṭ*), All-Embracing (*wāsiʿ*), Witness (*shahīd*), Finder (*wāʿid*), Subtle (*latīf*), Light (*nūr*), Watcher (*raqīb*), Wise (*ḥakīm*), Guardian (*ḥafīẓ*), Overseer (*muḥaymin*), and Security-Giver (*muʿmin*).<sup>11</sup>

## 2 One-Onliness and One-Allness

*Tawḥīd*, the first principle of Islamic theology, means literally “to assert (God’s) oneness.” Bearing witness to the reality of God by uttering the first formula of the *shahāda* is also to bear witness to the literal meaning of the famous expression *waḥdat al-wujūd*, “the oneness of existence.” This is because saying “no god but God” is to assert the oneness of the Real Existence, the Essence that possesses all the names; any existence other than the Necessary Existence is metaphorical or relative and any finding and consciousness other than God’s knowledge is accompanied by losing and forgetting.

The Quran designates God’s attribute of oneness (*waḥda*) with two names, *aḥad* and *wāḥid*, which are derived from the same root and often taken as synonyms. Farghānī says in effect that *aḥad* designates God’s transcendent oneness, and *wāḥid* denotes His immanent oneness. Accordingly I translate them as “One-Only” and “One-All.” God is the One-Only inasmuch as nothing whatsoever has any true *wujūd* apart from Him, and He is the One-All inasmuch as His One *Wujūd* embraces all that exists and is found. Farghānī frequently discusses the abstract nouns derived from these two names, *aḥadiyya* (One-Onliness) and *wāḥidiyya* (One-Allness), and the pairing of the two became commonplace in Sufi literature after him. In Christian theological categories, one can say that the One-Only is God understood apophatically and the One-All is God understood cataphatically. The terms corresponding to apophatic and cataphatic are “stripping-away” (*salbī*) and “affirming” (*thubūtī*). Farghānī writes,

His Oneness, from which are configured both the One-Onliness and the One-Allness, is the same as His Essence, not an attribute or depiction added to It. At root, however, Oneness has two first regards.

One of the two is that regards are annulled from It entirely. In this regard the Essence is named the One-Only. This is connected to the Essence’s nonmanifestation (*butūn*), boundlessness (*itlāq*), and begin-

<sup>11</sup> Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 51–52.

ninglessness (*azaliyya*). Hence it is more appropriate for the name One-Only to be related to stripping-away than to affirming and positing.

The second regard is the affirmation of infinite regards for It. These are incorporated (*indirāj*) into It in the First Level of the Essence, but most of the differentiations of Its entifications are realized in the Second Level .... In this regard the Essence is named the One-All, a name of affirmation, not stripping-away. It is not correct to ascribe these mentioned regards to the name One-Only, neither in reality nor in convention .... This regard of the One-Allness is connected to the Essence's manifestation (*zuhūr*), existence, and endlessness (*abadīyya*), just as the regard of One-Onliness is connected to the Essence's nonmanifestation and beginninglessness.<sup>12</sup>

Farghānī speaks here of the "entifications" of the Essence, saying that most of their differentiations are realized in the One-Allness. The word entification (*ta'ayyun*) was probably first given a technical sense by Qūnawī. It means to be or become an '*ayn*'. In this specific sense of the word '*ayn*' it is practically synonymous with *shay'*, "thing," as used in Quranic verses like "God knows each thing" and "God is powerful over each thing." The thingness of a thing is its unchanging reality (*ḥaqīqa*), so the word entity was also used as a synonym for reality. In the common expression "the One Entity" (*al-ʿayn al-wāḥid*), the word was used to designate the Essence.

The things that God knows are eternal, which is to say that He knows them outside of time in His beginningless and endless knowledge, even though they have no existence in themselves. Ibn 'Arabī famously calls them "the fixed entities" (*al-a'yān al-thābita*), the unchanging, nonexistent realities that are known to the Real Existence. As Farghānī says, these known realities "are named 'fixed entities' because of their fixity in the Second Level, from which they never depart. What becomes manifest in entified existence is only their concomitants, properties, and extraneous affairs connected to the levels of engendered being."<sup>13</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, Qūnawī, and Farghānī all say that the entity is what the philosophers call the "quiddity" (*māhiyya*), that is, the thing's whatness. A thing's true whatness, whether or not it is known to us, is precisely its unchanging reality as known to the Real.

In the passage just quoted, Farghānī referred to "the Second Level," where the entities are eternally distinct and known. He explains that, inasmuch as God is both the One-Only and the One-All, He has two basic entifications or "levels"

<sup>12</sup> Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 21–22.

<sup>13</sup> Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 40.



(*martaba*) or “self-disclosures” (*tajallī*). The First Level is simply the Essence, sheer Oneness. The Second Level “is a shadow and form of the First Level and of the First Entification and Self-Disclosure.”<sup>14</sup> In these two levels, being and consciousness are the same reality—*wujūd*—but their regards differ.

### 3 Existence and Knowledge

The Essence, Farghānī said, is the Oneness “from which are configured both the One-Onliness and the One-Allness.” All regards are negated from the One-Onliness, and all are affirmed for the One-Allness. To differentiate between existence and knowledge is to affirm two regards. But, when the Essence is regarded as the One-Onliness, there can be no duality. Hence the two regards can be discerned only when the Essence is considered in the Second Level. Any talk of God’s knowledge in the First Level is simply to say that His being is nothing other than His consciousness.

In keeping with the First Level and the First Entification, knowledge is the manifestation of the Entity of the Essence to Itself by the incorporation into It of the regards of the One-Allness along with their realization, so it is connected to one known thing.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, all possibilities of manifestation and self-disclosure are implicit in the oneness of the Essence in the mode of “realization” (*taḥaqquq*), that is, identity with the Real. As noted, these possibilities are called by several names, such as things, fixed entities, quiddities, realities, and also relations (*nisab*) and tasks (*shuʿūn*).<sup>16</sup> In this First Level, no distinction can be drawn between the Essence and knowledge. In the Second Level, the Knower and the Known can be regarded as distinct.

In keeping with the Second Level, however, knowledge is the manifestation of the Essence to Itself by Its tasks in respect of the loci of mani-

14 Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 80.

15 Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 31.

16 “Task” in this sense of the word is another term that became common after Farghānī. It is derived from the verse “Each day He is upon some task” (Q 55:29). Ibn ‘Arabī explains that “He” points to the Essence, and “day” refers to the present moment, which is the locus of the never-repeated godly self-disclosures. Each instant makes manifest a new “task” of the Essence. See Chittick, *Sufī path* 18 and *passim*.

festation of these tasks within It, and these are named “attributes” and “realities.” So It is connected to distinct, differing known things in keeping with the Second Level.<sup>17</sup>

Having explained that God’s knowledge has a true manyness (*kathra ḥaqīqīyya*) through the known things and a relative oneness (*waḥda nisbiyya*) through the Essence, Farghānī turns to the notion of *wujūd*.

In respect of the First Level, existence is that through which the Essence finds Itself in Itself by the incorporation into It of the regards of the One-Allness. This is an aggregated finding (or “consciousness,” *wijdān mujmal*) into which is incorporated its differentiation (*tafṣīl*) and over which rules the negation of manyness, difference, otherness, and distinction.<sup>18</sup>

In the regard of the First Entification, *wujūd* is simply the Essence. In the regard of the Second Entification, *wujūd* can be understood as having two sorts. One sort is nothing other than the One-Allness embracing the names, attributes, realities, tasks, entities, and so on. In this respect, *wujūd* is one with a manyness of internal relations. The other sort of *wujūd* is the Breath of the All-Merciful (*nafas al-rahmān*), which articulates the cosmos and all that it contains, just as the human breath articulates countless words while remaining one reality. Farghānī writes,

One sort [of *wujūd*] is in the respect that the Second Level is the locus of disclosure for manifestation to the Real. *Wujūd* is that through which the Essence finds Its Entity in respect of Its manifestation, the manifestation of Its form (which is named “the outward of the name *All-Merciful*”), and the manifestation of Its entifications’ forms (which are named “godly names”) despite the oneness of Its Entity and the correct ascription to It of relative manyness. In this case It has a true oneness and a relative manyness.<sup>19</sup>

Farghānī just said that the Essence per se—which is unknowable, incomparable, and ineffable—has a “form” (*ṣūra*). The word *form* is used as the correlative of “meaning” (*ma‘nā*). It designates the meaning’s manifestation. The Essence itself is simply the absolute meaning, beyond all forms and manifestations.

<sup>17</sup> Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 31.

<sup>18</sup> Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 31.

<sup>19</sup> Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 31.

In the Second Level, the Essence's form is the outward (*ẓāhir*) of the name *All-Merciful*, which designates God inasmuch as "My mercy embraces everything" (Q 7:156). As Farghānī puts it, "The All-Merciful is a name in respect of the all-inclusive mercy, and that is the same as *wujūd*."<sup>20</sup> As for the "inward" (*bāṭin*) of the name All-Merciful, that is simply the unknown Essence. Remember here that *al-ẓāhir* and *al-bāṭin*, the Outward and the Inward, are names of God that can also be translated as Manifest and Nonmanifest. The attributes they designate, *ẓuhūr* and *buṭūn*, can be translated as manifestation and non-manifestation.

As for the second sort of Outward Existence, it is in the respect that the Second Level is the locus of disclosure for manifestation to engendered being, namely the engendered levels that are subordinate to the Second Level and configured from it—like the levels of the spirits (*arwāḥ*), the images (*mithāl*), and the senses (*ḥiss*). All existence that becomes entified in this level is inescapably named "creation" and "other."<sup>21</sup>

Existence is one reality. Inasmuch as it is outward and manifest, however, it is entified, colored, shaped, and formed by the fixed entities. In the same way, "God is the light of the heavens and the earth" (Q 24:35). His light is one reality, but it becomes differentiated into shapes and colors by shining. In one passage, Farghānī sums up this understanding of omnipresent existence as follows:

Know that existence, which is the same as the Essence and the Light, is one with no associate in its reality, which is an entity in which it finds that each thing is the same as it and other than it without any distinction, variegation, manifoldness, alteration, or otherness within it whatsoever. Indeed, this is so unless a relation is related to it, or an attribute is ascribed to it, like firstness and lastness, manifestation and nonmanifestation; and like the ascription to its entity of the attributes of life, knowledge, desire, speech, hearing, seeing, and power; eternity (*qidam*) and new arrival (*ḥudūth*), realness (*ḥaqiqiyya*) and createdness (*khalqīyya*), simpleness and compoundedness, subtleness and denseness ... and the like.

At this point the trace of distinction, manifoldness, alteration, and variegation becomes manifest in existence. This is by the property of these

<sup>20</sup> Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 37.

<sup>21</sup> Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 32.

relations and by the ascription of these attributes, states, and accidents to it, for they are distinct, manifold, variegated, altering, and changing in themselves. This is not in respect of its One Entity in its Essence.

So these relations, attributes, ascriptions, states, and accidents, by their essential distinctions, multiplicities, alterations, and variegations, come to be manifest to creatures' eyesights and insights in all the levels of createdness and also of realness, but the entity of the One Existence stays nonmanifest behind them. He whose understanding and perception are confined to these levels and their properties surmises that the entity of existence is variegated and manifold in respect of its Essence, just as he witnesses everything he perceives as variegated and manifold in respect of the attributes and accidents. Yes, it is manifest, variegated, and manifold, but in respect of and in keeping with these attributes, states, and levels, not in respect of its Entity and Essence.<sup>22</sup>

The One Existence becomes manifest by means of engendered being. As a result, created things find themselves existing in whatever world they may dwell. From their standpoint,

the meaning and reality of existence is that through which the form of everything that becomes entified from it finds itself and things like itself as existent things that are spiritual, imaginal, or bodily, manifest in each level in keeping with the level and its property. For, in the Level of the Spirits, the existent finds itself and things like itself only as spiritual, and so also in the Level of the Images—it finds itself only as an imaginal form. Likewise in the Level of the Bodies—it finds itself and things like itself only as bodily and sensory.

Accordingly, existence-giving and creating are only that the Existence-Giver, the Creator (sublime and holy is He!), bestows on the engendered realities that through which they find and have ascribed to them an entification from Him; and, it is manifesting their properties in the measure ascribed to them from Him in every level in keeping with the level and its property.<sup>23</sup>

In short, Farghānī is saying that no distinctions can be drawn in the First Entification between the Knower and the Known, for all realities there are identical

<sup>22</sup> Farghānī, *Muntahā* ii, 261–262.

<sup>23</sup> Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 32.

with the Real Existence, so no quiddity can be understood. In the Second Entification, existence can be understood as distinct from finding and knowing. The known things, called fixed entities and quiddities, have no existence of their own because they are not other than the Essence. Yet the properties and traces that we observe in the universe—the self-disclosures of the Real—are shaped, formed, and colored by these nonexistent entities, just as objects in the world bestow colors and shapes on the invisible light of the sun.

In another passage, Farghānī reviews the distinction between the First and Second Entifications and introduces the standard notions of necessity and possibility. Existence's necessity is the fact that it is and cannot not be. Since there is no escape from its controlling presence, it is the source of every act (*fi'l*) and trace-display (*ta'thīr*). Possibility is then a name for the realm of things that may or may not come into engendered being, and these are the infinite things known in the Beginningless Knowledge. To the realm of possibility belong reception (*qabūl*), receptiveness (*qābilīyya*), and reactivity (*infī'āl*). Although the Essence/Existence is simply oneness in the regard of its One-Onliness, the differentiation of existence and knowledge in the One-Allness allows us to see that the Necessary in Existence is active and displays traces, while the possibility of the known things is receptive to its acts. This in sum is what Farghānī is saying in the following passage. As for the word *presence* (*ḥaḍra*), it designates any realm in which a specific attribute or reality displays its properties and traces. Generally it is used as a synonym for *world* (*ʿālam*) and *level* (*martaba*).

You have come to know from the previous explanations that when the Godly, All-Merciful Breath first became entified and manifest from the Absent of the Absent (*ghayb al-ghayb*), it was simply unitary (*waḥdānī*). Into it, however, was incorporated the property of act and trace-display and of reception and reactivity; or rather the names, the attributes, and the acts. Hence the knower, knowledge, and the known; the actor, the receptacle, and the act, were all one thing, without distinctiveness and difference in the First Level, which is the same as the Breath's True Oneness.

From the entity and inward of this same presence became entified and manifest this same All-Merciful Breath in the Second Level, which is a regard and entification of its entity which, by its property of One-Allness, is inclusive of infinite regards connected with its endlessness.

Among the realities and presences incorporated into the One-Allness in this Second Level, the first to become manifest and distinct from the entity of this All-Merciful Breath was the presence of existence, which

is named “the Presence of Necessity” by way of naming a thing by its concomitant. True oneness and relative manyness are related to this presence. Since true oneness is related to it, the properties of act, trace-display, and all the godly names related to this presence are specific to it and to the loci of manifestation related to it.

The counterpart of this presence in the Second Level becomes manifest and distinct as the Presence of Knowledge connected with the possible known things. It is named “the Presence of Possibility”—a naming by the description of what is within it. In respect of the possible realities contained by this presence, true manyness and relative, gathered-together oneness are ascribed to it. And, because of the intensity of the relation of manyness to it, the things to which it is connected and which it contains are specific to reception, trace-receiving (*ta’aththur*), and reactivity.<sup>24</sup>

#### 4 Levels of Existence

The quoted passages have referred to three basic worlds of the cosmos, namely those of spirits (*arwāḥ*), images (*mithāl*), and bodies (*ajsām*). When these three are viewed along with the First and Second Entifications, we have five “universal levels” (*marātib kullīyya*). “The universal levels,” Farghānī explains, “are named ‘worlds’ and ‘presences.’ They are like loci (*maḥāll*), places of disclosure (*majālī*), and loci of manifestation (*maẓāhir*) that encompass and contain all the realities related to the Real or to engendered being.”<sup>25</sup>

Some authors preferred to speak of “the Five Godly Presences” (*al-ḥaḍarāt al-ilāhiyyat al-khams*), that is, the five universal levels in which the name *God* exercises its universal, all-gathering influence. Then the First and Second Entifications were counted as one presence, and spirits, images, and bodies were counted as three more presences. The Perfect Human (*al-insān al-kāmil*) is the fifth, all-gathering presence. In Farghānī’s enumeration of the universal levels, the Perfect Human is the sixth. He explains:

The universal levels are confined to five levels, two of which are related to the Real and three of which are attributed to engendered being. The sixth gathers them together. This is because, given that these levels are loci of manifestation and disclosure, they must be either a locus of disclosure

<sup>24</sup> Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 91.

<sup>25</sup> Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 42.

and manifestation within which what becomes manifest is manifest only to the Real, not to engendered things; or a locus of manifestation within which what becomes manifest is manifest to the Real and also to engendered things.

The first is named “the Level of the Absent,” because every engendered thing therein is absent from itself and its like, so nothing has manifestation within it except the Real (high indeed is He!). Manifestation is negated from the things in one of two ways: One way is by the total negation of their entities inasmuch as “God was, and nothing was with Him.”<sup>26</sup> His manifestation to them in knowledge and finding (*wijdān*) is negated by the total negation of their entities. This locus of disclosure is the First Entification and the First Level of the Absent.

The second way is that the attribute of the things’ manifestation is negated from their entities while they are realized, distinct, and fixed in the Beginningless Knowledge and in manifestation to their Knower, not to themselves or to their likes. This is exactly like the situation of the forms fixed in our minds. This locus of disclosure and manifestation is the Second Entification, the World of Meanings, and the Second Level. The name “Absent” includes the two because of what we mentioned.

That which is a locus of disclosure within which what becomes manifest also becomes manifest to the engendered things in knowledge and finding is of three sorts. It may be a locus of manifestation and disclosure within which what becomes manifest becomes manifest to the engendered, existent things that are simple in their essences, and this is named “the Level of the Spirits.”

It may be a locus of manifestation and disclosure within which what becomes manifest becomes manifest to the existent, compound things. These existent compound things may be subtle (*latīf*) such that they do not receive partition, segmentation, tearing, and mending, in which case their locus of disclosure and the locus of their manifestation and of manifestation to them is named “the Level of the Images.”

Or they may be compound existents, which are dense (*kathīf*) in relation to those subtle things, or in reality, inasmuch as they receive partition, segmentation, tearing, and mending. Then their locus of disclosure, the place of the attribute of their manifestation as well as the manifestation of what becomes manifest to them is named “the Level of the Senses,” “the World of Witnessing,” and “the World of the Bodies.”

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26 An often quoted *ḥadīth*.

True Humans—the Perfect and the Most Perfect—gather together all by the property of being the locus of manifestation for the Second and the First Isthmusness (*barzakhiyya*).<sup>27</sup>

Discussion of the Six Universal Levels or the Five Godly Presences provides a rather static overview of the relation between the One Existence and the many existent, found things. From a more dynamic standpoint, scholars described the emergence of things from the Real and their return to It. Philosophers discussed this under the heading of “the Origin and the Return” (*al-mabda’ wa-l-ma’ād*), and Sufi teachers commonly spoke of the Circle of Existence (*dā’irat al-wujūd*), differentiating between its descending and ascending arcs. The word arc (*qaws*) is taken from a Quranic verse that was understood to refer to the Prophet’s ascension (*mi’rāj*) to God: “He was two-arcs’ length away, or closer” (Q 53:9).<sup>28</sup> Most of Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s *qaṣīda* and Farghānī’s commentary focus on the Ascending Arc of existence and the realization of the Divine Unity in the human self—*tawḥīd* in its deepest sense.

One of the most important technical terms in this discussion (a term mentioned by Ibn al-Fāriḍ in forty verses) is *jam’*, gathering, which is contrasted with *farq* (or *tafriqa*), dispersion, difference, and separation. In the chapter on terminology in *al-Risāla*, the standard textbook of Sufism, Abū l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) explained that these two terms are much discussed by the Sufi teachers. He quotes several of their sayings which say in effect that gathering is to see the Real, and dispersion is to see creation.<sup>29</sup> In *Manāzil al-sā’irīn*, ‘Abdallāh al-Anṣārī described gathering as the ninety-ninth of the 100 waystations on the path to God. He called it the “final goal of the stations of the wayfarers” (*ghāyat maqāmāt al-sālikīn*). In chapters 222 and 223 of the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn ‘Arabī added his own unrivalled insights to earlier discussions of the two terms. More importantly, he made *jam’* a cornerstone of his vision of reality as expressed in his voluminous writings. He often discussed the name God, *Allāh*, as the “all-gathering name” (*al-ism al-jāmi’*), the referent of all the godly names. In the first chapter of the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, he specifies that God’s goal in creation was to configure the “all-gathering engendered being” (*al-kawn al-jāmi’*), that

27 Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 43–44. Farghānī’s understanding of “isthmus” will be explained shortly.

28 Usually translated as “two-bows’ length.” The word *qaws*, like *arcus* in Latin, means both bow (which shoots arrows) and the arc of a circle. For some of Ibn ‘Arabī’s meditations on the cosmological and anthropological meanings of this verse, see Chittick, William C., *The self-disclosure of God*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1998, 233–237.

29 Al-Qushayrī, Abū l-Qāsim, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, ed. Ṭāhā ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf Sa’d, Cairo: Dār Jawāmi‘ al-Kalim, 2007, 100–101.



is, the Perfect Human, whom He created in the form of the name *God*. In brief, the contrast between *jam'* and *farq* runs throughout his works and those of like-minded scholars who came after him.<sup>30</sup>

Generally, gathering designates the unity and harmony of things in God, and dispersion designates the status of engendered things inasmuch as they display the diverse entifications of the One Entity. Gathering manifests the oneness of the Essence, while dispersion discloses the manyness of the fixed entities in the Beginningless Knowledge. Farghānī understands gathering as a synonym for *ijmāl*, aggregation, which is the opposite of *tafṣīl*, differentiation. In the Essence, all reality is gathered and aggregated, but in the Divine Knowledge, all things are relatively dispersed and differentiated. In one passage he describes the entire Circle of Existence as successive stages of gathering and dispersion:

The descent of the Self-Disclosure along with its passage over the godly and engendered levels stands between aggregation and differentiation—or say, between gathering and dispersion. Thus we explained that the First Entification and Self-Disclosure has a true oneness, gathering, and aggregation; and this aggregation and gathering has a relative differentiation, which is the regards of the One-Allness incorporated into it. This relative differentiation has a gathering and aggregation that is the same as the Second Entification and Self-Disclosure, that of the One-Allness. This gathering and aggregation also has a dispersion and differentiation, which is the manyness of the known things and the relative manyness manifest in the godly names.

The gathering of this dispersion and the aggregation of this differentiation is the reality and existence of the Highest Pen. Its dispersion and differentiation is the reality of the Guarded Tablet inasmuch as it includes the spirits, the angels, and the spiritualities (*rūḥāniyyāt*).<sup>31</sup> The gathering

30 One of the literal meanings of *qur'ān* is *jāmi'*, "gathering," and the implications of this meaning play important roles in Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of the revealed book. See Chittick, William C., "The Qur'an in the thought of Ibn 'Arabi," in George Archer, Maria Dakake, and Daniel A. Madigan (eds.), *Routledge Companion to the Qur'an*, New York: Routledge, 2022, 282–290.

31 "Spirits" are the realities of angels and humans that are given engendered being in the World of Spirits. "Spiritualities," in contrast are the spiritual existences of other things, whatever they may be. Nothing exists in the bodily realm that does not have a "spirituality," that is, a preexistent presence in the World of Spirits, for the Highest Pen writes out all that will be engendered until the Day of Resurrection in the Guarded Tablet. Farghānī explains (Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 78): "This [human] spirit precedes the entification of the elemental constitution. After the entification of the constitution, what becomes entified is

of this dispersion and the aggregation of its differentiation is the Dust Entity (*al-ʿayn al-habāʾī*). Its dispersion and differentiation is the Throne, the Footstool, and all the imaginal forms. The gathering and aggregation of these is the Most Tremendous Element; its dispersion and differentiation is the pillars, the heavens, and the progeny in all the forms of their genera and species and some of their individuals.<sup>32</sup>

The Descending Arc reaches its lowest point at the Most Tremendous Element, which the philosophers called Prime Matter. From here differentiation and dispersion move toward aggregation and gathering on the Ascending Arc. The four pillars (the elements) interact with the seven heavens to beget three successive levels of increased gathering that appear as the three progeny (*muwal-ladāt*), which are minerals, plants, and animals. Finally all the levels become aggregated in the human, all-gathering, engendered being. But humans are diverse in realizing their potential, and only a tiny minority reach perfection. The sorts of perfection are then gathered together by the Seal of the Prophets.

The true gathering and final aggregation of this dispersion and differentiation is the form of Adam. In respect of the universals gathered together by his form and meaning, his dispersion and differentiation is only the realities of the vicegerents, the perfect, and every prophet and messenger. Or rather, each of them is a gathering and aggregation of the dispersion of those of his people who are under his scope, whether they accept or refuse.

The form of the gatheringness of all of them, the One-Onliness of the Gathering of their universal dispersion, and the true aggregation of their differentiation—both their followers and those they follow—is only the most perfect Muhammadan form and its most gathered meaning and reality (God bless him and give him peace!). The dispersion of this One-

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only the relation of this spirit's manifestation in the form of governing (by which relation it is named 'the in-blown, serene soul') over that which becomes entified in the constitution from this spirit that is related to the locus of manifestation of the Godly Presence. So understand! So also is the spirituality of every individual, whatever it may be—inanimate, plant, or animal. And among them are the forms of the *jinn*, who are delimited by fiery loci of manifestation."

32 Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 114. Farghānī adds many more details to this scheme and returns to it several passages. The levels he enumerates are similar to those described by Ibn ʿArabī in Chapter 198 of the *Futūḥāt*, where he analyzes the twenty-eight letters articulated by the Breath of the All-Merciful. See, for example, Chittick, *Self-disclosure* xxvii–xxxii.

Onliness of Gathering is the realities of the perfect, the vicegerents, the pivots, the substitutes, and those in this Muhammadan community who enter under the scope of each of them.<sup>33</sup>

## 5 The Human Isthmus

Gathering (or gatheringness, *jamʿiyya*) is to bring dispersed things together. It is a *barzakh*, an “isthmus,” situated between two things and sharing the characteristics of both. The notion of isthmus plays an important role in Ibn ʿArabī’s thought and has even begun to influence the way some Western scholars think about the Islamic tradition generally.<sup>34</sup> In *Muntahā l-madārik* Farghānī uses this word (also *barzakhiyya*, “isthmusness”) well over three hundred times in several contexts. He mentions it for the first time in the prologue, shortly after explaining that the One-Onliness and the One-Allness are configured from the Oneness. He writes,

The first regard and entification that becomes entified from the Absent is this Oneness from which are configured the One-Onliness and the One-Allness. It remains an isthmus gathering the two together (like the reality of love, from which are configured loveness and belovedness). It unifies (*muwaḥḥid*) the two by gathering them together and eliminating their separation.<sup>35</sup>

He goes on to explain that this Oneness is the root (*aṣl*) of all oneness and manyness, all gathering and dispersion, all activity and receptivity:

This regard and First Entification, which is the same as the Essence by the property of the mentioned isthmusness and gatheringness, is the same as the Essence’s receptiveness toward Its nonmanifestation, Its absent, the negation of regards from It, and the property of Its beginninglessness; and also toward Its manifestation and the manifestation of what It entails,

33 Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 114–115. Farghānī describes the various sorts of prophets and the friends of God called by these names in a number of passages (e.g., Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 39–40, 107–108, 116–118, ii, 75–79).

34 I have in mind Bruce Lawrence and Vincent Cornell in their introduction to the edited volume, *The Wiley-Blackwell companion to Islamic spirituality*, Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2023.

35 Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 24.

namely the regards that affirm the property of Its endlessness in itself in aggregation, and then in differentiation. So this receptiveness is the root of every receptiveness, and also of activeness as well.<sup>36</sup>

In a long discussion of the First Entification, Farghānī reviews some of the terms that are used to refer to it. He says that “one of the greats” (presumably Ibn ‘Arabī) called it “the Reality of Realities” (*ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqā’iq*)

because of its universality (*kullīyya*) and because it is a root of every regard and entification, the inward of all godly and engendered realities, and the root from which all are configured. It pervades everything with its universality. Hence it is godly in the godly and engendered in the engendered, while all things are the loci of its manifestation and the forms of its differentiation.<sup>37</sup>

Some have called the First Entification “the Ahmadan Reality” and described it as “fixed in exact middleness (*wasatīyya*), isthmusness, and equilibrium (*i’tidāl*) such that no property whatsoever of any name or attribute dominates over it.”<sup>38</sup> It is also called “the Muhammadan Reality,” which “is inclusive of all and is named the ‘Reality of Realities.’ It pervades all, just as the universal pervades its particulars. It is the same as the First, Greatest, Most Prior, Root Isthmus.”<sup>39</sup>

As for the Second Entification, it has the characteristic of the One-Allness. Hence it is a relative manyness in which all names and realities are distinct, an isthmus that gathers together oneness and manyness. It is the godhead (*ulūha*) and is called by the names *God* (*Allāh*) and *the God* (*al-ilāh*). It is the reality that

36 Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 24.

37 Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 28–29. Concerning the perfect human Ibn ‘Arabī writes, “It is as if he is an isthmus between the cosmos and the Real, bringing together creation and Real. He is the differentiating line between the godly and the engendered presences, like the differentiating line between shadow and sun. This is his reality. So he has unqualified perfection in new arrival and eternity. The Real has boundless perfection in eternity, but He has no entry into new arrival (high indeed is He above that!). The cosmos has boundless perfection in new arrival, but it has no entry into eternity (it is driven far from that!). So the human became all-gathering.” Ibn ‘Arabī, Muḥyī l-Dīn, *Inshā’ al-dawā’ir*, ed. Abrar Ahmed Shahi, Rawalpindi: Ibn al-Arabi Foundation, 2021, 90.

38 Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 29.

39 Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 39. Ibn ‘Arabī seems to have been the first author to use the expression Muhammadan Reality. As for Ahmadan Reality, I have not found it mentioned by anyone before Farghānī (and rarely after him). See Chittick, William C., “Farghānī on the Muhammadan Reality,” in *Horizonte* 21.64 (2023), 1–19.

is worshiped by all worshipers and “the destination wherein their hearts will be stilled.”<sup>40</sup> Among its names are “the World of the Meanings” and “the Presence of the Beginningless Knowledge.” It is also the root of humanness (*insāniyya*), given that the name “God,” which designates this Second Level, “created Adam in His form,” meaning that God is the “meaning” of humanness, its fixed entity in the Beginningless Knowledge.

This Isthmusness of the Second Entification is inclusive of the mentioned universal root realities in respect of their suitability for ascription to the Real by rootness and to engendered being by subordination, while these root realities are distinguished by the property of the universality of the root, the fact that they are genera, and the configuration of their branches, species, and particulars from them as distinctly differentiated in this very Isthmusness. In regard to the incorporation of those universal root realities into this very isthmusness along with the realization of a hidden trace of them within it, it is named “the Human Perfectional Reality” (*al-ḥaqīqa al-insāniyya al-kamālīyya*).<sup>41</sup>

The “universal root realities” (*al-ḥaqāʾiq al-kullīyya al-aṣliyya*) are the specific realities in the Essence that become differentiated in the Second Isthmusness as the Seven Leader Names.<sup>42</sup> This Second Isthmusness pervades all the godly names and makes manifest their properties and traces in the cosmos; it pervades all the engendered things by effusing existence upon them. Hence it brings about the differentiation of all things both in God’s knowledge and in outward existence.

You have come to understand that the root of the configuration of the godly names and the engendered realities is only the Reality of Oneness through Its Inward, which is the entity of the Reality of Realities in the First Level; and through Its Outward, which is the Second Isthmusness fixed in the Level of the Godhead. With the property of Its universality, middle-ness, and gatheringness, this Reality pervades each godly name in order to guard its gatheringness of true oneness and relative many-ness, and [It pervades] each engendered reality in order to guard its middle-ness between necessity and impossibility.<sup>43</sup>

40 Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 34.

41 Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 34.

42 Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 22.

43 Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 122–123.

On the one hand, this Second Isthmusness embraces the differentiated realities of the entire cosmos, and on the other, it is the aggregated human reality:

As for this Isthmus in regard to its aggregation, it is the same as the Human Reality and the Level of Perfection, which is the scale (*mīzān*) of the reality of perfection and the exact equilibrium into which, in respect of this regard of aggregation, are incorporated the realities of the Seven Attributes, which are the roots that designate the Seven Leader Names. The realities of the Perfect among the prophets and the friends other than our prophet Muhammad (God bless him and give him peace!) are also incorporated into it.<sup>44</sup>

Adam is the “form” of the name *God*, which is the all-gathering name that designates the Real as Essence, attributes, and acts. As such he is

the locus of disclosure for the realities of the names of the Essence in the First Level and the exact midpoint of the Second Level. This is the human isthmus that is inclusive of the roots of the realities and of the Seven Names; these are the leaders because each is inclusive of all, but with the manifestation of a hidden trace of each within it.<sup>45</sup>

Just as the human, Adamic reality is the locus of manifestation for the Second Isthmus, so also the Muhammadan, Ahmadian Reality is the locus of manifestation for the First Isthmus. Having explained this in detail, Farghānī sums up his understanding as follows:

The Second Isthmus—which gathers together existence and the knowledge connected with the possible known things, the names and the attributes, and the godly and engendered realities—is a true form of the First Isthmus, which gathers together the Essence’s One-Allness and One-Onliness. The Second, Outward Self-Disclosure of the Breath is also a form and shadow of the Absent, Inward, True, First Self-Disclosure. In the same way this equilibrious, all-inclusive level and this compound, human constitution that comes about within it after the in-blowing [of the spirit] into it are the form of that Isthmus and Self-Disclosure inasmuch as these two are inclusive of the names, realities, and attributes of the Outward

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44 Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 41.

45 Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 45.

and the Inward. Thus he said (God bless him and give him peace!), “God created Adam in His form,” or, “in the form of the All-Merciful.”

So, by his reality, Adam (upon him be peace!) gathers together all the godly and engendered names, attributes, and realities that are gathered together in the Second Isthmus and Self-Disclosure. In the same way, by his reality and form, Muhammad (God bless him and give him peace!), gathers together everything that is gathered together in the First Isthmus—namely the Keys,<sup>46</sup> the One-All, and the One-Only—in a true gatheringness of the One-Onliness such that no property of anything whatsoever dominates over anything else.<sup>47</sup>

In an oft-quoted line of the *qaṣīda* (v. 628) Ibn al-Fāriḍ, speaking in the voice of Muhammad, says “And I, though in form am Adam’s son, / have a meaning in him bearing witness to my fatherhood.” In his commentary Farghānī explains that among other things, the phrase “bearing witness to my fatherhood” points to the relationship between the First Isthmus and the Second:

[Muhammad is saying,] my first reality and meaning is the Reality of Realities, the Greatest Isthmusness, and the First Receptiveness. It was by this that the manifestation, witnessing, and existence that precede every receptiveness and activeness, every witnessing and existence, came to be realized. But Adam’s reality and meaning is only the Second, Godhood Isthmusness, which is a branch, shadow, and form of that First Isthmusness. The “father” of every branch and shadow is that shadow’s root and possessor.

Given that the Second Isthmusness is a form of the First Isthmusness, it follows that the outward of the names *God* and *All-Merciful*, fixed in the Second Isthmus, is the form of their inward, fixed in the First Isthmus. Because of this meaning he said (God bless him and give him peace!), “God created Adam in His form” or “in the form of the All-Merciful.” So the *meaning* of Adam’s spiritualness and the *meaning* of his reality, which two are the inward of his form, are my two just witnesses that I am his father and root, even if his form by itself bears witness that I am one of his sons.<sup>48</sup>

46 As explained below, these “Keys of the Absent” (*mafātīḥ al-ghayb*) are the roots of the divine attributes in the Essence.

47 Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 95–96.

48 Farghānī, *Muntahā* ii, 198.

## 6 The Sought Perfections

*Wujūd*, in short, is an infinite being and consciousness that becomes manifest as the beginningless and endless words of the Real, which are articulated within the Breath of the All-Merciful. Given *wujūd*'s absolute perfection in itself, it is "unneedy of the worlds" as the Quran puts it. Why then did it create the worlds? One answer is simply that it is the All-Merciful, so it bestows the mercy of existence on every possible thing. "Mercy," however, is unidirectional and leaves aside the issue of human agency. It offers sufficient reason for the Descending Arc and the appearance of the worlds, but it does not explain the human role in the Ascending Arc. In contrast, love (*ḥubb*) is bidirectional and has everything to do with the human actualization of existence and consciousness.

Both philosophers (e.g., Avicenna) and Sufis spoke of love as the driving force of creation. Farghānī highlights its ontological role at the very beginning of the prologue, where he cites and then explains in detail the *ḥadīth* in which God says, "I was a hidden treasure so I loved to be recognized; I created the creatures so that I would be recognized." This is to say that the Essence (indicated by the word *kuntu*, "I was") becomes manifest because of its attribute of love. This love is directed at humans, who alone have the capacity to "recognize" (*ma'rifa*) God as such, for they alone were created in the all-gathering form that brings together the Essence, attributes, and acts.

Farghānī refers to God's love to be recognized as the "root love" (*al-ḥubb al-aṣlī*). It is identical, he says, with the First Entification and Receptiveness, and "comprises the meaning of the perfection that is connected to manifestation."<sup>49</sup> He also says, "This Root Love's final target, utmost objective, and that to which it is connected is the completion of the Perfections of Disclosure and Seeing Disclosure."<sup>50</sup>

The terms *disclosure* (*jalā'*) and *seeing disclosure* (*istijlā'*) are technical terms that have in view the word "self-disclosure" (*tajallī*). Discussion of the two seems to have been initiated by Qūnawī, who mentions them several times in *I'jāz al-bayān* and a few more times in *Miftāḥ al-ghayb*.<sup>51</sup> Two generations later,

49 Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 26.

50 Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 70.

51 Qūnawī provides his longest explanation of the two in *I'jāz al-bayān*, his commentary on the Fātiḥa, in a section called *Sirr al-insān al-kāmil*, "the Secret of the Perfect Human." Part of it reads as follows:

"When someone's relation is not stronger to one name rather than to any other; and when he is not attracted from the middle to one of the levels because of an increase in correspondence, property, or infatuation, while he receives the traces of all the names and becomes manifest through all of their properties without specifying anything other than



the well-known *Fuṣūṣ* commentator ‘Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī (d. 736/1335–1336) offered a definition in *Iṣṭilāḥāt al-ṣūfiyya*: “Disclosure is the manifestation of the Holy Essence to Itself in Itself, and seeing disclosure is Its manifestation to Itself in Its entifications.”<sup>52</sup> Farghānī gives a brief explanation of the terms in his Persian commentary on the *qaṣīda*:

Through its regards in respect of its loci of manifestation in the level of the Godhead, the First Self-Disclosure has an attentiveness toward the Perfection of Disclosure and Seeing Disclosure. What is connected to the Perfection of Disclosure is the regards’ differentiated loci of manifestation in the levels of the forms of the genera and the species, while the individuals of the cosmos are the same as those loci of manifestation. What is connected to the Perfection of Seeing Disclosure is their universal, true, aggregated locus of manifestation, which is the elemental form of the true human.<sup>53</sup>

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what the Real specifies in respect of the moment, the state, and the homestead and without the continuation of that specification and delimitation, then he is the servant of the All-Gathering (*al-jāmi‘*).

When someone embraces fully and in actuality everything that we have mentioned [about the names], without his delimitation by gathering, becoming manifest, making manifest, denuding himself of that, or anything else; and when he has ableness (*tamakkun*) for what he wills when he wills while he is a locus of manifestation for the Level and Form [of God] through the reality of servanthood and mastership—which are the two relations of the two levels of the Real and creation—then he is the Perfect Human. Among the names that are near in relation to his level is ‘the Servant of God.’

The Perfection of Disclosure is the perfection of the Real’s manifestation through this servant, who is this mentioned human.

The Perfection of Seeing Disclosure consists of the Real’s gathering together [1] His witnessing Himself through Himself in Himself and a Unitary Presence along with [2] His witnessing Himself in that which is distinct from Him and which, because of the distinction, is named ‘other.’ But, before the distinction, it was not like that. And it also consists of that other’s witnessing himself through himself inasmuch as he is a distinct other; his witnessing of Him who is distinct from him with his eye and the eye of Him who is distinct from him as well. So the One is distinct from him who makes Him two by the dispersion of betweenness (*bayniyya*) that came about between them and that became manifest between them from them, while each of them is solitary through the one-onliness and gatheringness of each.” Qūnawī, Ṣadr al-Dīn, *I‘jāz al-bayān*, ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad ‘Aṭā, Cairo: Dār al-Ta’līf, 1969, 236.

52 Kāshānī, ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Iṣṭilāḥāt al-ṣūfiyya*, ed. ‘Abd al-Āl Shāhīn, Cairo: Dār al-Manār, 1992.

53 Farghānī, Sa‘īd b. Aḥmad, *Mashhāriq al-darārī*, ed. S.J. Āshtiyānī, Mashhad: Dānishgāh-i Firdawsī, 1978, 29.

To summarize Farghānī's several long explanations of the two terms in *Muntahā l-madārik*, we can say that the Perfection of Disclosure is the realization of the Level of the One-Allness by the differentiation of everything known in God's Beginningless Knowledge. The Perfection of Seeing Disclosure is then the realization of the One-Onliness of Gathering (*aḥadiyyat al-jamʿ*) by means of the final goal of creation, which is achieved uniquely by Muhammad. In other words, the Perfection of Disclosure is the manifestation of everything other than God to God. The Perfection of Seeing Disclosure is for God to see the entirety of this manifestation through the eyes of the knowledge and consciousness of the perfect human self of Muhammad at the level of the One-Onliness as it gathers together all multiplicity after dispersion.<sup>54</sup>

In one of the passages in which Farghānī mentions the two perfections, he explains that the Root Love's final goal is the second of the two:

Given that the Root, First Love—as we explained at the beginning of the book—is the same as receptiveness, the same as the Reality of Realities, the same as the Ahmadan Reality and the First Isthmusness between the One-Allness and the One-Onliness, it follows that the kiblah of its attentiveness and connection had to be the entity of the most aggregated constitution and most equilibrinous heart of Muhammad (God bless him and give him peace!). These two were the locus of disclosure for the Perfection of Seeing the Disclosure of the First, One-Only, All-Gathering Self-Disclosure of the Essence, which at first was his Light, as we have pointed out more than once. This is why the name Ḥabīb Allāh (the lover/beloved of God) is one of his most specific names.<sup>55</sup>

## 7 The Circle of Existence

The *ḥadīth* of the Hidden Treasure says that the goal of the Root Love is for God to be recognized. The human fruit of this love is highlighted in the famous *ḥadīth*, "He who has recognized his soul has recognized his Lord." The Arabic word *nafs* or "soul" is used as a reflexive pronoun, so it often needs to be translated as "self." English "self," however, is too vague as a standalone word to help

54 Farghānī's explanation of the two perfections is much more complex than my summary suggests, not least because he describes each of the two perfections as having two faces, one related to the Essence and the other to the godly names. See Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 102–104.

55 Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 141.

us perceive the complexities of the inner relationships of the various levels of human selfhood that are discussed in Islamic texts. Like many other authors, Farghānī often differentiated among these levels using terms like soul, spirit (*rūḥ*), heart (*qalb*), intellect (*‘aql*), secret core (*sirr*), and essence (*dhāt*).<sup>56</sup> Each of these words can designate what we might call “self” in English, but each has distinct meanings that add nuance and depth to what is at issue.

In *Muntahā l-madārik* Farghānī often uses the word *nafs*, as is commonly done in Islamic texts, to designate the soul as an isthmus that brings together the inanimate clay of the body and the living spirit blown into the clay by God. He also uses *nafs* as a generic designation for what al-Ghazālī, Ibn ‘Arabī, and others sometimes call “the human subtlety” (*al-laṭīfa al-insāniyya*), meaning the internal, human reality that embraces all the levels of selfhood, from the external senses up to the Divine Essence.<sup>57</sup> If we take the broadest meaning of the word *nafs* into account, “consciousness” might be a neutral way to translate it. Modern discussions of consciousness, however, tend to ignore the human subtlety’s vertical dimension, partly because they make little attempt to differentiate among the levels of existence that are central to Islamic thought (not to mention, for example, Hindu thought).<sup>58</sup>

56 I have discussed some of the implications of the various designations for the human self in my essay, “Reason, intellect, and consciousness in Islamic thought,” in *Reason, spirit and the sacred in the new enlightenment: Islamic metaphysics revived and recent phenomenology of life*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, Dordrecht: Springer, 2011, 11–35.

57 For Ibn ‘Arabī’s explanation of the two basic sense of the term *nafs*, see Chittick, *Self-disclosure* 269 ff. In one of several passages where Farghānī addresses the word (Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 178), he explains its general and specific meanings as follows: “‘Soul’ in the lexical sense is applied to essence and spirit. In the technical sense it is an expression for a foggy vapor that is stirred up from the inward of the formal, pineal heart carrying the strength of life. It is of the same kind as the trace of the spiritual spirit meant by His words, ‘I blew into him of My spirit’ (Q 15:29). Its entification is fixed in the World of Spirits, and its trace reaches this vapor that carries life. So it—I mean the soul—is a gathered-together guise of the vapor and the spiritual spirit’s trace. This soul, with its property of being the same kind as the spiritual spirit’s trace, is entified for the sake of governing the human body. It is receptive to both high and sordid affairs, as He says (exalted is He who speaks!): ‘He inspired it [the soul] with its depravity and its godwariness’ (Q 91:8).”

58 Kripal’s survey of contemporary approaches to consciousness makes the discussion’s one-dimensionality fairly clear. Nonetheless, he takes a valiant stand against reductionist scientism and its adoption by the humanities, reminding his readers that consciousness (read “the soul” or “the human subtlety” or “*wujūd*”) is everything. He writes, for example, “Consciousness is the fundamental ground of all that we know, or ever will know. It is the ground of *all* of the sciences, *all* of the arts, *all* of the social sciences, *all* of the humanities, *indeed* all human knowledge and experience. We know of nothing else like it in the universe, and all we know we know only in, through, and because of this same consciousness.” Kripal, *The flip* 39.

In verses 744–745 of the *qaṣīda*, Ibn al-Fāriḍ reminds his readers that he has been guiding them to recognize their own souls. The context and Farghānī's explanation make it clear that the word *nafs* here needs to be understood as a designation for the human subtlety in its entirety. But in explaining the meaning of the verses, Farghānī also refers to the soul's multi-dimensional reality.

So look! Let the soul be recognized like this—or not—  
and the recognition will follow upon it every day.  
Its recognition is from its own soul, and it is that which  
dictated to the senses what I hoped from me.

Farghānī points out that the first half of the first verse refers to the *ḥadīth* of recognizing the soul, and “the recognition” in the second half is recognition of the Lord. Then, in the second verse, soul means “essence,” that is, the innermost reality of the soul, its highest level.

In order to put the two lines into context, Farghānī provides a six-page overview of the Circle of Existence, tracing the manner in which the human soul comes into existence and then returns to its Lord. He begins by reviewing seven levels of human existence that he had discussed in the prologue. He calls them “interiors” (*baṭn*) and “inwards” (*bāṭin*), taking inspiration from a *ḥadīth* which mentions that each verse of the Quran has an exterior (*ẓahr*) and seven interiors.<sup>59</sup> They are 1. The soul inasmuch as it is occupied with the affairs of this world; 2. The soul inasmuch as it is dominated by intellect and faith; 3. The spiritual spirit<sup>60</sup> that is fixed in the World of Spirits; 4. The humanness (*insāniyya*) that exists simultaneously in all three engendered worlds; 5. The heart receptive to the self-disclosure of the name *Inward*; 6. The boundless, All-Merciful Existence; 7. The First Level.<sup>61</sup>

59 Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 25.

60 “The spiritual spirit” (*al-rūḥ al-rūḥāniyya*) is a term that I have seen only in Farghānī's writings. He mentions it fifty-eight times in *Muntahā*, ten times in *Tahrīr al-bayān*, and twice in *Marātib al-taqwā*. In *Mashāriq al-darārī* he uses its Persian form, *rūḥ-i rūḥānī*, once (under v. 323). Probably the word *rūḥ* alone would have been too vague to get across the meaning he had in mind, not least because philosophers and Sufis often talked of *rūḥ* as having various levels, e.g., the vegetal, animal, human, and angelic spirits. What Farghānī means, as he says in footnote 57, is the human spirit inasmuch as it is individuated in the World of the Spirits before its properties and traces appear in the imaginal and bodily realms. During the ascent back to God, the voyager must return to his spiritual spirit before moving higher, for this spirit never leaves its homeland.

61 Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 26–27. These seven levels may remind readers of the “seven subtleties” that are commonly discussed in later Sufi texts, especially by authors of the Kubrawī order.

In each of these seven interiors, the Keys of the Absent become manifest in the manner appropriate to the level of existence. Farghānī's clearest explanation of what he means by these Keys is probably what he says in his introduction to his Persian commentary:

The Keys of the Absent—which are the first names of the Essence and are ascribed to the Presence of the He-ness—as He says, “With Him are the Keys of the Absent; none knows them but He” (Q 6:59)—are the Essence in respect of Its universal, first entifications and regards that are required by the utter Essence in respect of Its First Self-Disclosure to Itself in Itself for Itself .... The Level of the Godhead, which is the shadow of the Essence and the form of the First Entification, is realized in respect of these Keys. The attributes of the Godhead like life, knowledge, desire, and power are their shadow and trace. The names of the Godhead, such as Alive, Knowing, Desiring, and Powerful, are the forms of and loci of disclosure for these Keys of the Absent.<sup>62</sup>

Here is part of Farghānī's explanation of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's two verses urging his readers to recognize their own souls:

The poet is saying, addressing seekers who are eager for the recognition of the soul, upon which is consequent the recognition of the Lord: Know and be alert that when you desire the recognition of the soul such that the recognition of the Lord will follow upon it and be conjoined with it—by reason of “He who has recognized his soul has recognized his Lord”—you should recognize the like of what I have recognized, clarified, and elucidated with likenesses [in the preceding poetry], though not at a specific, delimited moment or time, but rather at every renewal of state by which the soul becomes garmented with a trace of speech, act, seeing, or hearing, all of which are ascribed to one actor, which is your soul.

This is because when you gaze (*naẓar*) in respect of your delimitation and your soul's delimitation by the World of the Senses and your soul's first and second interior, you will find the mentioned traces and acts ascribed to and emerging from diverse actors, which are your tongue, ear, eye, hand, and foot.

Then, when you are unbound from this limitation and you gaze in respect of its third interior, you will descry them as ascribed to and emerg-

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62 Farghānī, *Mashāriq* 29.

ing from one actor, which is your soul, the locus and source of the engendered being of these descriptions and traces. But, in reality, they are the descriptions of your Lord, and your soul is their locus of disclosure.

When your gaze advances to the fourth interior, you will find the entity of this speech, act, seeing, and hearing to be the entity of your Lord's Existence, while your soul is the form of a relation of that Existence.

When you advance to the fifth and sixth interiors, you will see all as One Entity, some of it related to the Presence of the Outward and some of it related to the Presence of the Inward, but with the slightest difference between the property of outwardness and the property of inwardness.

At the advance to the seventh interior, all will be witnessed as one along with the elimination of the trace of difference. At this, the gaze and advance come to an end entirely.<sup>63</sup>

Having described the ascension of the soul to its highest reality, which is none other than the One-Only Essence, Farghānī then reviews the Circle of Existence as he has been explaining it throughout the text.

Elucidation: There is nothing in what occurs but One Entity through Its relations, which are the same as It in Its First Level, as [the Prophet] said: "God was, and nothing was with Him."

Among Its relations are those that are like loci in which the rest become manifest. Each of these loci is named a "level." Each has a specific property, and what becomes manifest within it becomes manifest only in keeping with this property.

This One Entity is manifest to Itself as a unitary aggregate in the most gathering and most inclusive of Its relations. This is the First Level in keeping with its property, which is aggregation, oneness, and the incorporation of all relations into it without any difference between it and any of the relations, or between some of them and others; rather, with the property that each of these relations is inclusive of all, while this Entity is not confined to this manifestation. One of Its relations, manifest in the midst of Its manifestation in this First Level, is the Keys of the Absent, which are the most inward meanings of the attributes of speech, seeing, hearing, and power.<sup>64</sup>

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63 Farghānī, *Muntahā* ii, 291.

64 Farghānī, *Muntahā* ii, 292–293.

Farghānī mentions these four attributes of the Keys to the exclusion of others—such as life, knowledge, and desire, which he mentions in his definition of the Keys in the passage quoted from his Persian commentary—because the *qaṣīda* has singled out these four as the primary attributes of the soul that need to be recognized.

This One Entity is manifest to Itself in the form of another of the relations of level in keeping with it and its property in which all of Its relations are differentiated. Within it some of them receive manifestation in the description of activeness, which is dominated by the property of Oneness. These are Its Most Beautiful Names, which are ascribed to the entity of the All-Merciful Existence of the Outward. Some of them are described by the description of receptiveness, which is dominated by the property of manyness. These are the engendered realities to which the outward of the Beginningless Knowledge is connected with a unitary connection.

None of these names and realities is anything but the form of [the One Entity's] mentioned relations. From their entities are negated the property of otherness and difference in the First Level in keeping with it. And, in this Second Level, their forms become manifest as differentiated but with the description of not being ruled over by the property of sameness in every respect, nor that of otherness in every respect. This is through and in keeping with the property of this Second Level. With the regards fixed within it, this Second Level is named the Level of the Godhead (*al-ulūha*), and its description (*waṣf*) is “the Godhead-ness” (*al-ulūhiyya*). It is also named the Second Isthmusness, the Cloud Presence, the World of the Meanings, and the Level of Possibility.

This One Entity has a manifestation inasmuch as It is an All-Effusing Light and Existence that effuses from the direction of Its root luminosity. This is specific to these two mentioned levels, though Its manifestation does not become confined to the two or to anything of the levels.

It has a manifestation in the respect that It has a ray effused from It ascribed to something of the engendered realities by the property of the existence-giving command expressed as “*Be!*” It also obeys Its own command and receives the act from Its Entity. This is expressed by His words, “*So it came to be*” (Q 36:82).

This manifestation in the description of becoming engendered and in the form of the ray and effusion from It is only in the form of another relation from among Its relations of level named “the Level of the Spirits.” In keeping with this level and its property in respect of entification and ascription to some of the engendered realities, It names Itself other,

apart, creature, created thing, artifact, and so on, also without confinement in this manifestation. In this respect It ascribes to Itself the names *Speaker*, *Seeing*, *Hearing*, and *Powerful*. And in this manifestation It gathers together the two descriptions of oneness and manyness.

In respect of the domination of the description of oneness It is named the spirit, and in respect of the domination of the description of manyness it is named the knowing, serene soul (*al-naḥs al-ālima al-muṭmaʿinna*), disengaged from matter and compoundedness and qualified by simpleness, subtleness, the description of universality and particularity, receptiveness to govern bodily constitutions with the two descriptions of universality and particularity, and the descriptions of speaking, seeing, hearing, and power.

Then this One Entity, inasmuch as It is an effused, ascribed ray, has another manifestation in the form of another relation from among Its relations of level named “the Level of Images,” without confinement within it. In this manifestation also It gathers together the two descriptions of oneness and manyness. In respect of oneness It is named the Throne and, in respect of manyness, the Footstool, which is marked by the stamp of otherness, createdness, compoundedness, and matter, but a compoundedness that is subtle and does not accept partition and segmentation.

Then this One Entity has another manifestation in the form of another relation of level named the Level of the Senses, without confinement within it and delimitation by it. It gathers together the form of the description of Its oneness, which is the sewing-up of the heavens and earth, and the form of the description of Its manyness, which is the unstitching of the two and their manifestation in the forms of the heavens, the planets, the elements, and the progeny—inanimate things, plants, animals, and *jinn*.<sup>65</sup>

Up to here, all of these manifestations are for the sake of the Perfection of the Disclosure of this One Entity, I mean the manifestation of the differentiations of the forms of Its relations and the manifestation of these forms to themselves, and the parts to other parts, inasmuch as they are other, not inasmuch as they are the same.

65 The terms sewing-up (*ratq*) and unstitching (*fatq*) are derived from the verse, “The heavens and the earth were sewn-up and then We unstitched the two” (Q 21:30). Farghānī discusses their cosmological implications in some detail (Farghānī, *Muntahā* i, 87, 90, 93, ii, 51–52).



Then this Entity has a manifestation in a form named Adam (upon him be peace!), who is the form of the Second Isthmusness. He is the first and root of the human forms. This form gathers together the two descriptions—oneness and manyness—along with firstness and lastness, outwardness and inwardness, and the loci of manifestation for the descriptions of speech, hearing, seeing, and power in the furthest levels of the manifestation of these descriptions and the delimitation of this One Entity inasmuch as It is a soul manifest in the description of governing this Adamic form, without confinement by this limitation.

Its manifestation like this is only for the sake of Its Perfection of Seeing Disclosure, that is, for the sake of Its manifestation to Itself in respect of the form of a relation that gathers together all of Its relations along with the property of their otherness and sameness. It is also for the sake of Its finding (*wijdān*) all of these manifestations in respect of their gathering-ness of otherness and sameness in terms of this Adamic form and the form of the perfect among his children; in terms of each Solitary<sup>66</sup> among them; and in respect of their hearing, seeing, hearts, intellects, spirits, and secret cores. Sometimes Its perception is delimited by this Adamic form and his children in a level or levels by reason of “A thing is not perceived by other than it,”<sup>67</sup> and sometimes It is unbound from the shackle of any of them.

Then this One Entity became manifest in the form of Its First Relation, which gathers together all of Its relations and is the First Isthmusness; indeed, and it is the Muhammadan Form. In respect of it, this Entity found all of Its manifestations—the aggregated and differentiated, the delimited and the unbounded—or rather, everything that It was finding in Its First Level, namely the inclusiveness of all by each relation without delimitation by that. This It found in this Muhammadan locus of manifestation by the inclusiveness of all by each of his faculties and motes and the imbuing of everything of his body, soul, heart, intellect, spirit, and secret core with all. So this One Entity became manifest in all these forms without confinement in them or in anything of them.<sup>68</sup>

66 According to Ibn ‘Arabī, the “solitary” (*fard*) is a friend of God who is equal in rank with the Pivot (*quṭb*) but does come under his sway (Chittick, *Sufi path* 413, n. 23). Farghānī uses the term on occasion but provides no definition for it.

67 Farghānī calls this statement a principle (*aṣl*) and refers to it in four other passages.

68 Farghānī, *Muntahā* ii, 293–294.

Having described the entire circle of existence in terms of the descent of the Essence's self-disclosure and the return to the Essence by means of the full perfection of the human soul, Farghānī shifts the perspective and describes briefly how the soul recognizes itself by ascending (*'urūj*) on the returning arc. He writes,

If the voyage is by the path of ascent, the recognition of the soul will have precedence. This is by the path that, when the trace of veiling becomes manifest within the soul, it will be recognized as one, and all of its root attributes—like speech, hearing, seeing, and power—[will be recognized] as unitary. These unitary traces and attributes will be manifest as manifold and variegated only in keeping with the loci, levels, and receptacles, like the places of articulation for letters; like the unitary light of seeing that becomes connected to the divided, manifold seen things; and like the unitary act that becomes connected to the variegated enacted things. So also is the affair in the One Existence and Its ascription to the engendered realities that are manifold in their properties.

Then, after the veils have been eliminated entirely in the manner that we explained, the soul will ascend to the witnessing of that One Entity and see It in all the levels as variegated in keeping with the levels and their property. So in each renewal of states in which his soul becomes manifest—contraction and expansion, sleep and wakefulness, approval and wrath, fear and hope, hardship and ease, joy and sadness—he will see that the One Entity, by the property of one Its names' descriptions and properties, is manifest in that state without conjunction or disjunction and without confinement and need in respect of Its Most Holy Essence (sublime and holy is It!).<sup>69</sup>

To complete his explanation of the two verses, Farghānī summarizes what the poet is saying:

The recognition of the soul should be a recognition gained from its very essence. As we mentioned, it will witness that its essence is manifest in all the levels and that there is nothing other than it, so it will recognize its essence from all respects and standpoints. Then its recognition will be from its essence. This will not be that the soul presumes that its essence

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69 Farghānī, *Muntahā* ii, 295.

is disjoined from it and that, once it recognizes that its soul's descriptions are disjoined from its Lord's Essence, it deduces its Lord's Essence.

When the poet says [v. 745], "and it is that which dictated to the senses what I hoped from me," he is saying, "It is my soul whose recognition dictated to my senses something that I had sought from my essence, namely the fountainheads of the recognitions and the perfection of realization in respect of all the levels of realness and createdness and what is above the two, namely that which does not become entified as determined, but rather becomes entified moment-by-moment from the Absent of the Absent."<sup>70</sup>

## 8 The *wujūd* of the Soul

Shams al-Dīn al-Īkī (d. 697/1298), a scholar who attended Qūnawī's lectures on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *qaṣīda*, reported that Qūnawī used to say that students should memorize the *qaṣīda* and then study it with someone who has understood its meaning.<sup>71</sup> Farghānī's commentary provides the best access to what his contemporaries would have seen in the poem when they studied it with an accomplished teacher. The high level of his discourse presupposes that such students would be grounded in Quran, *ḥadīth*, jurisprudence, theology, philosophy, and the ascetic discipline of Sufism. With al-Ghazālī, they would have understood that "There is nothing in existence/finding but God" and that the Real Being is the same as the Real Consciousness. They would have been prepared for Farghānī's elaborate explanations of the soul's true reality and the manner of recognizing it, because they would have taken it for granted that our human situation demands total dedication to recognizing God for ourselves—in our own consciousness, not by reporting what others have said about *wujūd*. They would have understood that the Quranic command to return to God meant actualizing the Real *wujūd* as identical with *wijdān* and *wajd*, pure consciousness and true bliss. They would not have been surprised to hear poetically from Ibn al-Fāriḍ and prosaically from Farghānī that the task of recognizing one's own soul,

<sup>70</sup> Farghānī, *Muntahā* ii, 295–296.

<sup>71</sup> This is according to one of the earliest accounts of how Farghānī came to write his commentary. See Homerin, Emil, *ʿUmar Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, New York: Paulist Press, 2001, 312; Todd, Richard, *The Sufi doctrine of man: Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī's metaphysical anthropology*, Leiden: Brill, 2014, 19. Al-Īkī's full name was Muḥammad b. Abū l-Bakr b. Muḥammad al-Fārisī ("the Persian"). According to Ibn Kathīr in *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya* (year 697), he taught logic, principles of jurisprudence, theology, and philosophy in Cairo and was buried among the Sufis.

of overcoming metaphorical consciousness and finding true consciousness, is the most difficult task people face and that, nonetheless, it is the responsibility of all humans to strive for it, even if they can only achieve what they achieve by the godly munificence.

This, then, is a glimpse of Farghānī's explication of the Real *wujūd*, the reality of Being and Consciousness, other than which there is no true reality, only relations and regards, names and attributes, properties and traces. His explication is an "ontology" because it addresses *wujūd* and explains exactly what the word implies as soon as we recognize that it is a name for the unknowable Essence that is named by all the names, the Existence whose quiddity is to have no quiddity. As for the *mawjūdāt*, "the existent/found things," they are simply the disclosures of the unknowable Real, metaphors for the True Reality. Yet, "He who has recognized his soul" as the unknowable Real "will have recognized his Lord" as the soul's seventh interior, the Essence that lies at the beginning, end, and middle of all reality. "He is the First, the Last, the Outward, and the Inward ..., and He is with you wherever you are" (Q 55:3–4).

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