

CULTURE AND COSMOS

A Journal of the History of Astrology and Cultural Astronomy

Vol. 19 no 1 and 2, Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter
2015

Published by Culture and Cosmos
and the Sophia Centre Press,
in partnership with the University of Wales Trinity Saint David,
in association with the Sophia Centre for the Study of Cosmology
in Culture,
University of Wales Trinity Saint David,
Faculty of Humanities and the Performing Arts
Lampeter, Ceredigion, Wales, SA48 7ED, UK.
www.cultureandcosmos.org

Cite this paper as: Christine Broadbent, 'Celestial Magic as the
'Love Path': The Spiritual Cosmology of Ibn 'Arabi', *Celestial
Magic*, special issue of *Culture and Cosmos*, Vol. 19, nos. 1 and 2,
Autumn/Winter and Spring/Summer 2015, pp. 145-66.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue card for this book is available from the British Library

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ISSN 1368-6534

Printed in Great Britain by Lightning Source

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Celestial Magic as the ‘Love Path’: The Spiritual Cosmology of Ibn ‘Arabi

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Abstract: Nature’s secrets can be approached in a variety of ways and this paper explores celestial magic as the ‘path of love’ via the Sufi teachings of Muhyiddin Ibn al-Arabi (1165–1240 CE). Given the honorary title of ‘the greatest master’, *al-Shaykh al-Akbar*, he occupies a special place in the Sufi tradition, because his writings are by far the most extensive contribution to Islamic mystical philosophy. His terminology and works have become a main point of reference for most Sufi orders, partly due to the historical circumstances explored below. His teachings continue to be widely studied, and a range of contemporary Sufi schools, like *Beshara* in Scotland and *Karnak* in Northern Australia, have introduced westerners to the study, work, invocation and meditation of the Sufi path as passed down by Ibn ‘Arabi.¹ This paper explores his use of astrological symbolism to illustrate Sufi cosmology, as for example, his ‘orientations to spirit’, which are a different way of viewing the ‘quadruplicities’. In *Mystical Astrology According to Ibn ‘Arabi*, translator and author Titus Burckhardt (1908–1984) calls attention to what Ibn ‘Arabi calls the ‘contemplative penetration of cosmic atmosphere’. Mystical correspondences, including ‘eternal prototypes’ and designated prophets, are linked to planets, like the symbolic chain he draws between the moon and Adam’s prophetic role as the ‘mirror’ of divinity.² This may beg the question of an overlap between the mystical and the magical, yet any such engagement depends on cultural norms and social context for its nomenclature. Celestial ‘magic’, explored as an imaginative engagement with the cosmos for the production of knowledge, allows the Sufi ‘love path’, to be considered. Further, *Tasawwuf*, the mystical path of Sufism, is suggestive for the sociological discourse on the ‘magical subject’ and for the question that frames this paper: namely, what are the implications for our ways of knowing?

¹ Muhyiddin Ibn al-Arabi, *The wisdom of the prophets: Fusus al-hikam*, is the teaching resource most commonly used in Sufi schools. The *Karnak* Sufi school closed to students in 1991. I had the privilege of studying there in 1988.

² Titus Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology According to Ibn ‘Arabi*, trans. Bulent Rauf. (First published as *Une Clef Spirituelle de l’Astrologie Musulmane d’apres Mohyi-d-din Ibn ‘Arabi*, 1950) (Sherborne, UK: Beshara Publications, 1977; repr. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2001), p. 9.

Christine Broadbent, ‘Celestial Magic as the ‘Love Path’: The Spiritual Cosmology of Ibn ‘Arabi’, *Celestial Magic*, special issue of *Culture and Cosmos*, Vol. 19, nos. 1 and 2, Autumn/Winter and Spring/Summer 2015, pp. 145-66.
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Introducing Ibn 'Arabi

Born in Murcia on 27 July 1165 CE in the medieval *Al-Andalus* of Islamic Spain, Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi was known as the *Shaykh al-Akbar*, or 'greatest spiritual master'. Given that *Al-Andalus* had become 'one of the major intellectual centres in the Muslim world', this is high praise indeed.³ His extensive writings recorded in detail the Sufi oral tradition that preceded him and ensured the survival of a rich mystical heritage, replete with technicalities, symbol systems and an extensive knowledge of the Islamic sciences of his day. With a formal Islamic education, a mother of Berber heritage, and a father from an ancient Arab lineage of high standing, Ibn 'Arabi chose not to follow his father's path of serving in the sultan's entourage, following instead the Sufi way. Sufis called the mystical sciences 'the knowledge of the Real' and Ibn 'Arabi studied under many different Sufi Shaykhs, starting in his youth.⁴ These metaphysical studies included 'cosmology, esoteric exegesis, the science of letters and numbers and the stages of the [Sufi] Way itself'.⁵ In addition, he learned practices like invocation, prayer, fasting, retreat and meditation, which tended to ripen the propensity to 'experiences of a super-sensory nature'. 'Ibn 'Arabi seems to have had many such experiences... Among these were visions, foresight, spiritual communication with the living and the dead, and powers of healing'.⁶

Even within Sufism he chose the path which placed spontaneous revelation over philosophical speculation: 'If the speculative way can lead to divine knowledge, only the Prophetic Way allows God to be known in both His transcendence and His immanence...through inspiration (*ilham*) and theophanies'.⁷ The frequency of openings to 'divine visions', Ibn 'Arabi

³ Stephen Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier: The spiritual life and thought of Ibn 'Arabi* (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 1999), p. 11. The birth date given is based on Ibn 'Arabi's own recorded statement: pp. 34, 252. NB: This book is most useful to learn about the historical context of Ibn 'Arabi's time and his place in the history of Sufism.

⁴ William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's metaphysics of imagination*, compiled, edited and translated by Chittick from sections of *Al-Futûhât Al-Makkiyya* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. xi, cites 'a document dated 632/1234' in which Ibn 'Arabi 'mentions by name ninety masters of the religious sciences with whom he himself had studied'.

⁵ R. W. J. Austin, trans., Introduction to *Sufis of Andalusia: The Ruh al-quds and al-Durrat al-fakhirah of Ibn 'Arabi* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1971), p. 24.

⁶ Austin, Introduction to *Sufis of Andalusia*, p. 24.

⁷ Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi, *Futûhât al-Makkiyya*, selected sections compiled and edited by Michel Chodkiewicz, published as *Les Illuminations des la Mecque* (Paris:

explained, was almost overwhelming, and he added: 'I could only put them from my mind by committing to paper what they revealed to me'.⁸

Perhaps revelation chose Ibn 'Arabi, since he was prone to powerful visions, starting with a near death experience as a child. In the biographical *Ruh al-quds*, he recounts the aged and famous philosopher, Ibn Rushd – known to Europeans as Averroes – asking to meet him, when he himself was only a 'beardless youth', but already known for his spiritual experiences. His account suggests that while having great respect for Averroes, he countered his 'speculative' thought with his own 'revelations', and Averroes 'became pale and I saw him tremble', praising God.⁹ This occurred years before the time he claimed to have been initiated into the Sufi way, at age 20.¹⁰

Eighteen years after Ibn 'Arabi's death, Mongol invasions began the process of the disintegration of 800 years of Islamic civilisation. His legacy of over 350 written works meant that cultural knowledge was safe-guarded, ensuring an ongoing transmission of Sufi knowledge after widespread loss.^{11, 12} It is to this legacy that Austin refers when he observes: '... he was the bridge or link between two historical phases of Islam and Sufism', adding, '... secondly he was the link between Western and Eastern Sufism'.¹³

To address this second point: Ibn 'Arabi was born in the western Muslim world of Spain and settled in the East after thirty years of extensive travel, during which time he criss-crossed between the western dominions of Spain

Sindbad, 1988; English translation by W. C. Chittick and J. W. Morris, published as *The Meccan Revelations*, Vol. II (New York: Pir Press, 2004), p. 90; here Vol. III, p. 177, 1.11–13, quoted by M. Chodkiewicz. NB: Chodkiewicz instances Ibn Tufayl, 'another [earlier] Andalusian', as an example of the 'speculative way', which Ibn 'Arabi resisted as a path, see pp. 89–90.

⁸ Ibn 'Arabi, Introduction to the 'Memorandum', quoted by Ralph Austin in *Sufis of Andalusia: The Ruh al-quds and al-Durrat al-fakhirah of Ibn 'Arabi*, trans. R. W. J. Austin (1971; Sherborne: Beshara Publications, 1988), p. 48.

⁹ Ibn 'Arabi, *Futûhât*, Vol. I, p. 153, quoted by Ralph Austin in *Sufis of Andalusia*, pp. 23–24.

¹⁰ Ibn 'Arabi, *Futûhât*, II, p. 425, quoted by Austin, *Sufis of Andalusia*, p. 23.

¹¹ Hirtenstein, *Unlimited Mercifier*, p. 267: 'At least 350 works' is a conservative estimate. Osman Yahia, in his 1964 two volume classification, estimated that Ibn 'Arabi wrote 700 books, treatises and collections of poetry, of which 400 are extant. Even so, 'this inventory was necessarily full of omissions'.

¹² It is of interest that the works of Ibn 'Arabi have experienced a renaissance in the twentieth century Western world.

¹³ Austin, *Sufis of Andalusia*, p. 48. For more on the East-West link see Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* and Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier*.

and Africa and the eastern Muslim world, with extended stays in many parts, including Iraq, Anatolia and the Levant.

In Konya he met Sadruddin al-Qunawi and took him as his disciple. Qunawi became his greatest proponent and compiler: 'It was through the latter's links with some of the most eminent Persian Sufis that Ibn 'Arabi's teaching reached the East'.¹⁴ These eminent Sufis included Sufi poet Jalaluddin Rumi. 'Through Rumi in the East and Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili in the West, two of the greatest Sufi orders were permeated by his teaching'.¹⁵ It was in Qunawi's library that numerous original handwritten manuscripts and authenticated copies of Ibn 'Arabi's books were preserved for later times. Ibn 'Arabi's honorary title, '*Muhyid-din*', means 'animator of the religion', recognising the potency of his unique synthesis of Sufi knowledge.

The medieval Islamic worldview held spiritual teachers in high regard, and in *Al-Andalus* it was acceptable practice for these Shaykhs to publically criticise and 'awaken' even those of very high rank in worldly status: Ibn 'Arabi relates an anecdote in which his own paternal uncle awakened a king, in this way. When the king asked the Shaykh if it was lawful to pray in his fine clothes, part of his fiery reply was: 'You are full of unlawfulness, and you ask me about your clothes, when the sufferings of men are upon your head'. The king renounced his position and served the Shaykh for his remaining years.¹⁶ Ibn 'Arabi's social context, plus the cultural melting pot which was the *Al-Andalus* of his time, respected diverse ways of knowing. Hirtenstein adds: 'There was an extraordinary cultural interaction between Muslim, Christian and Jew, and many of the ideas that appeared later in Europe as the Renaissance, were formed and transformed in this crucible'.¹⁷

The Spiritual Praxis of Ibn 'Arabi: The 'Love Path'

The integration of 'knowledge' and 'love' in Sufism is intrinsic to its cosmology, and something that Ibn 'Arabi explored deeply. Sympathy with the 'effusion of being' and its fluid nature seem to have been natural to him, and 'unveilings' began early in his life. The *alam al-mithal*, or 'the world of imagination', was intensely real for Ibn 'Arabi, and he treated his experiences with respect, taking action based on those revelations.¹⁸

¹⁴ Austin, *Sufis of Andalusia*, p. 49.

¹⁵ Austin, *Sufis of Andalusia*, p. 49.

¹⁶ Ibn 'Arabi, *Futûhât*, II, p.18, quoted by Austin, *Sufis of Andalusia*, pp. 21–22, gives one such example.

¹⁷ Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier*, p. 12.

¹⁸ *alam al-mithal*, and the significance of this 'world of imagination' is explored further below.

Kashf, which means ‘unveiling’ or an ‘opening’ to higher orders of consciousness, is the praxis of the Sufi ‘love path’ and is considered a mode of gaining direct knowledge of the ‘Real’.¹⁹ The ‘love path’ is the path to that knowledge. In the spiritual context of his early experiences of *himma*, which refers to his ability to concentrate the energy of the heart; in the social context of the relative wealth and strong spiritual leanings of his extended family; and living in a social milieu that tended to respect revelatory experiences, Ibn ‘Arabi realised his spiritual potential to a high degree’.²⁰ That this was also a realisation of intellectual potential is in complete accordance with the Sufi collusion of love and knowledge.

Burckhardt’s statement that: ‘the intoxication of love symbolically corresponds to states of knowledge, which go beyond discursive thought’²¹ is a good starting point: for Ibn ‘Arabi, the human heart is an organ of comprehension, since ‘the heart is His Throne’, and the experience of revelation opens the heart to knowledge.²² What is considered truly natural to the heart is love as a quest for the divine, which is also a quest for knowledge in the Sufi lexicon. He describes the heart as: ‘that which is delimited by fluctuation so that it never ceases undergoing transformation’. Chittick spells this out: ‘In Islamic texts in general and Ibn ‘Arabi in particular, the heart is a locus for knowledge rather than sentiments or feelings’.²³

From these cultural roots Ibn ‘Arabi developed a singular translation of the Sufi mystical tradition and the ‘love path’. Campion describes him as ‘the last major proponent of the synthesis of Islam with the mystery teachings of the classical world’.²⁴ Hermetic and Platonic ideas became a source of influence that can be seen as themes. This is attested by one of his honorary titles: *Ibn Aflatun* or ‘Son of Plato’. Critchlow suggests that this title refers to his ‘fundamental viewpoint’ – ‘the dependence of the sensible world on the

¹⁹ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. xii, explains the technical vocabulary of ‘opening’ (*futuh*) as being ‘a near synonym for several other terms, such as unveiling, tasting, witnessing, divine effusion, divine self-disclosure and insight... mode[s] of gaining direct knowledge’.

²⁰ Hirtenstein, *Unlimited Mercifier*, pp. 37–9. His paternal uncle lived with the family in Seville and appears to have had a spiritual awakening at an advanced age. Through him Ibn ‘Arabi met several Sufi masters.

²¹ Burckhardt, *Introduction to Sufism: The Mystical Dimension of Islam*, trans. D. M. Matheson (1976; repr. Northamptonshire: Aquarian Press, Crucible, 1990), p. 31.

²² Ibn ‘Arabi, *Futûhât*, III, 129.17, quoted by Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. 107.

²³ Ibn ‘Arabi, *Futûhât*, III 198.33, quoted by Chittick, *Sufi Path*, pp. 106–7.

²⁴ Nicholas Campion, *Astrology and cosmology in the world's religions* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), p. 181.

intelligible world, and the intelligible in return on the ontological principle of Unity'.²⁵ All goes back to Unity, on the Sufi 'love path'.

Astrological Signifiers on the Love Path

'So the cosmos is all lover and beloved, and all of it goes back to Him', said Ibn 'Arabi in *Al-Futûhât al-Makkiyya*, his opus.²⁶ As a symbolic language capable of many forms, astrology appeared within the *Futûhât*, integrated into his cosmology and serving to illustrate how 'it all goes back to Him'.²⁷ Titus Burckhardt compiled and translated the astrological fragments from the *Futûhât* for his 1950 French publication on mystical astrology.²⁸ With 560 chapters, it has been the source of many translations, compilations, separate books and treatises, *The Mystical Astrology of Ibn 'Arabi* being but one.²⁹ Ever faithful to the 'Unity of being', Ibn 'Arabi unfolded the Unity in a multiplicity of cosmological guises, in its play of subtle and material entities, of virtuality and of manifestation. He used a medieval cosmological schema constructed as concentric spheres, with a central Earth, plus sub-lunar and planetary spheres. The outer limit of the schema was 'the Sphere of the Divine Throne', considered to be the 'synthesis' of the cosmos. This descends to the next 'transcendent' sphere – the 'Pedestal' – the first differentiation where the 'divine longing' begins.³⁰ An intermediate zone is reached, with the third transcendent realm called the 'Sky of Zodiacal Towers'. Its focus is not physical, but it is the 'place of the archetypes'.³¹ Like the archetypal *alam al-mithal*, or the world of imagination, the Zodiacal Towers are a threshold realm, accessible to the human imaginative faculty. Consciousness can undergo transformation in this realm.

²⁵ Keith Critchlow, Forward notes to Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology*, p. 7.

²⁶ Ibn 'Arabi, *Futûhât*, II 326.18, quoted by Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. 181.

²⁷ Muhyiddin Ibn al-'Arabi, *Futûhât al-Makkiyya*, Cairo, 1329, 4 vol handwritten manuscripts. Compiled and edited by Osman Yahia, Cairo 1392–1413/1972–92 (14 volumes to date, corresponding to one third of Vol. I of the original *Futûhât*). Information from M. Chodkiewicz, ed., *The Meccan Revelations*, Vol. II, p. 251.

²⁸ Titus Burckhardt, *Une Clef Spirituelle de l'Astrologie Musulmane d'après Mohyi-d-dîn Ibn 'Arabi* (Paris: Les Editions Traditionnelles, 1950) (trans. by Bulent Rauf as *Mystical Astrology According to Ibn 'Arabi*).

²⁹ Hirtenstein, *Unlimited Mercifier*, Appendix 1, p. 272: Despite the length of the *Futûhât*, which was completed in 1231, a 'second version in thirty-seven volumes was completed in 1238 (636)'.

³⁰ Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology*, pp. 26–29.

³¹ Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology*, p. 16.

The role of human consciousness is also part of the next descent, the ‘sky of fixed stars’ or ‘stations’. A ‘station’ is a ‘state’ that has become permanent’, as for example, the ‘station of longing’.³² This ‘sky’ is the place of the twelve zodiacal constellations, linked to spiritual ‘stations’ and depending in turn on the ‘subtle order’ of the archetypal zodiac preceding them.³³ From this point the seven physical planetary spheres descend from Saturn. Burckhardt suggests that this cosmological schema is ‘a theoretical hierarchy according to the degrees of density’.³⁴ I find it useful to see it as a diagram of the potential ascent of the spiritual journey from its human centre – the visible world – to the subtle. The ‘Unity’ unfolds not as a linear flow, but in subjective time as moments of recognition and revelation (*kashf*), each moment timeless. Ibn ‘Arabi’s words from the *Futûhât* explain his perspective: ‘the Real becomes qualified by wonder, receiving joyfully, laughter... and most of the attributes of engendered things. So return what belongs to Him, and take what belongs to you! He possesses descent, and we possess ascent’.³⁵

Symbols as the Language of the Heart

When the transcendent sphere of the ‘Pedestal’ was described as the place where ‘divine longing begins’, this is a reference to ‘the Most Beautiful Names’ (also called the ‘potentialities’) – sorrowful in their unrealised potential and longing to be realised. Yet, human ‘aptitude’ to receive that spiritual union, Ibn ‘Arabi explains, has no causal origin, rather: ‘the aptitude of the potentialities [Names] is a specific state’, and that in turn ‘is a relationship subject to knowledge, and knowledge is a relationship subject to that which is known, and *the known is you and your states*’ (italics added).³⁶ This is a typically elliptical statement, designed to challenge and transform the taken-for-granted worldview of the ‘reader’. In the thirteenth century Islamic world, this was more likely the ‘listener’, since texts were read to a group.³⁷ Yet, when considered slowly, the message is quite clear that what we *can* know is conditioned and limited by our state of being. Immediately the

³² Burckhardt, *An introduction to Sufism*, p. 88.

³³ Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology*, p. 15.

³⁴ Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology*, p. 13.

³⁵ Ibn ‘Arabi, *Futûhât*, I, 41.31, quoted by Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. 181.

³⁶ M. Ibn al-‘Arabi, *Fusus al-Hikam Vol II*, translated from Arabic to French by Ismail Hakki Bursevi, translated from French to English by Bulent Rauf (Oxford, Istanbul and San Francisco: Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society, 1987), p. 390.

³⁷ Hirtenstein, *Unlimited Mercifier*, p.156: ‘As Arabic is normally written down without vowels... only an oral reading will determine which variant the author intends’.

emphasis is shifted from intellectual knowing to an experiential level, sometimes called the wisdom of the heart. To reach this level a suitable symbolic language is needed to facilitate a shift in perspective.

Since for Ibn 'Arabi, love is the mechanism that receives knowledge, and the 'Most Beautiful Names' are the facets of knowledge, then the interaction between human longing and the 'divine longing' to be known are the dynamics of the 'love path'. Personal 'taste' opens the way to specific Names. Certain Names play leading roles, and tend to have complementary opposites. An example is 'beauty' (*jamal*), which is a deeply interior beauty and dialectical companion to *jalal*, majesty. These two Names feature strongly in *zhikr*, a spiritual practice of commemoration. Burckhardt notes: 'It is in the object, Beauty that love virtually coincides with knowledge.'³⁸

Beauty, Love and Knowledge are three entwined symbols, which also indicate embodied potential. This understanding of the 'symbolic' as embodied, rather than just a 'sign', is an ancient one, as Liz Greene notes: 'the term 'symbol', in ancient Greek divinatory practice, carries the notion of a meeting, an encounter... This perception of symbols approaches them as both representations and embodiments of an objective reality that exists both within and outside the human being'.³⁹ The transformative nature of the symbol is such that it provides access to a realm beyond rational thinking where rational exclusions and boundaries cease to define reality.

The Divine Breath and its Symbols

Astrological Codes provide the symbolic ladder for Ibn 'Arabi's presentation of his concept of Being. Being is linked to the 'Breath': 'the substance of the cosmos is the All-merciful Breath, within which the forms of the cosmos become manifest'.⁴⁰ Ibn 'Arabi employed an astrological schema, translated and presented by Burckhardt, in which a correspondence between 'the 28 sounds which determine the lunar mansions' and 'the 28 letters or sounds of the sacred language', is established.⁴¹ Here, the Arabic alphabet is conceived as the micro-cosmic form of the '28 cosmic degrees' of the divine 'Breath'. The 28 'mansions of the Moon' divide the tropical zodiac into 28 sectors.⁴² Burckhardt translates this as the 'vehicle of spiritual revelation, in articulated

³⁸ Burckhardt, *Introduction to Sufism*, p. 33.

³⁹ Liz Greene, 'Signs, Signatures and Symbols: The languages of heaven', in *Astrologies, Plurality and Diversity*, ed. N. Campion and L. Greene (Ceredigion, Wales: Sophia Centre Press, 2011), p. 30.

⁴⁰ Ibn 'Arabi, *Futûhât*, II 404.9, quoted by Chittick, *Sufi Path*, pp.181–2.

⁴¹ Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology*, p. 35.

⁴² Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology*, p. 38.

language'; it starts with the silent hiatus of 0 degrees Aries, 'through the guttural sounds, the labials, the palatals and the dental' sounds, as one reaches the last degree of Pisces. Burckhardt adds that this coding of the 'primordial sound' is 'carried by the physical breath' and relates to 'the double aspect of the role of the mediator proper to the human heart'.⁴³ This is 'double' in the sense that 'the subtle form of the heart changes all the time, successively answering all the directions or spiritual polarisations', yet also 'being always open to the transcendent Unity'.⁴⁴

The Love Path and the Luminaries

Just as the Moon, its phases, and 'mansions', are used to code spiritual revelation, the fact that the Moon too has a 'double role', changing its form constantly while continuing to receive the light of the Sun, makes the Sun an equally important symbol for the 'Love Path'. Thus Burckhardt suggests: 'the relation between the Sun and the Moon is analogous to that which holds between Pure Intellect and its reflection in the human form'.⁴⁵ This symbolic correspondence of heart and Moon, Intellect and Sun, seems to resonate with the alchemical notion of the 'Hermetic Marriage' of Sun and Moon. Perhaps that is not surprising considering that the *Al-Andalus* into which Ibn 'Arabi was born was a period of high culture, percolating Alexandrine Hermeticism into Islamic sciences.⁴⁶

The 'love path' then is a symbol of transformation, a consciousness open to knowledge: Ibn 'Arabi says of the transformed heart, 'The heart is his Throne and not delimited by any specific attribute. On the contrary it brings together all the divine names and attributes'.⁴⁷ The 'transformed heart' is repository of 'all' knowledge and Adam is the prophet who best represents this particular wisdom in Ibn 'Arabi's *Fusûs* or 'Wisdom of the Prophets'.⁴⁸ Both the Moon and Adam correspond to the level of consciousness, which is called the 'opening' of the heart to receive the 'essential revelation' (*at-tajalli*). The cosmic quality...which expresses itself in the role of mediator between "earth" and "Heaven".⁴⁹ For Ibn 'Arabi, the Moon has special importance to the 'love path' as a symbol of both receptivity and transformation, while

⁴³ Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology*, p. 35.

⁴⁴ Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology*, pp. 38, 34–35.

⁴⁵ Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology*, p. 30.

⁴⁶ See Hirtenstein, *Unlimited Mercifier*, pp. 33–36.

⁴⁷ Ibn 'Arabi, *Futûhât*, III 129.17, quoted by Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, p. 107.

⁴⁸ Ibn 'Arabi, *Fusus al-Hikam* I, focuses on 27 prophets, drawing together Islamic, Christian and Hebraic prophetology.

⁴⁹ Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology*, pp. 34–35

Adam symbolises the prophet and prototype of the unique human potential to develop an 'integral nature'; this nature is 'integral' precisely because it can comprehend diversity and also find synthesis in unity at the same time.⁵⁰

Linking the ideas of lunar consciousness and Adamic consciousness is the following quote from Ibn 'Arabi's teaching manual, the *Fusus*: 'Adam became the light itself of this mirror and the spirit of this form.'⁵¹ Ibn 'Arabi links Adam's 'interior form' with the 'total of the Divine Names and Qualities', because he perfectly mirrors the divinity, as the Moon mirrors the Sun.⁵² Both Adam and the Moon could be described as symbolic role models for entry to the 'love path' and also the potential for transformed consciousness that this represents.

This recalls the discussion of symbols by Greene: Symbols 'are generated by the human psyche through the organ of imagination rather than being constructed by the intellect... they are capable of inaugurating the transformation of psychic energy while at the same time describing that transformation'.⁵³

Meccan Revelations and Symbolic Consciousness

That a symbol can inaugurate, as well as describe, transformation is a possibility that appears to be many times illustrated by the 'revelations' Ibn 'Arabi describes, and the life events that accompany them. His profound understanding of primordial Unity lives on through his writing, much of which is potentially transformative and clearly symbolic. The sheer number of his deeply nuanced works appears to support his claim that no reflective process interrupted his flow, as with the *Fusus*, or 'Wisdom of the Prophets', his most widely read book.⁵⁴ He claimed this was 'revealed to him in a single dream'.⁵⁵ Of the *Futûhât*, his multi-volumed opus, he said: 'This book is not a place for that which is given by the proofs of the reflective powers, only for that which is given by divine unveiling'.⁵⁶ *Futûhât al-Makkiya* translates as the 'Meccan Revelations' because it was inspired by a mystical experience on a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1202. This journey sealed his eventual move to the

⁵⁰ Ibn 'Arabi, *Fusus I*, pp. 12–13.

⁵¹ Ibn 'Arabi, *Fusus I*, p. 10.

⁵² Ibn 'Arabi, *Fusus I*, pp. 17–18.

⁵³ Greene, 'Signs, Signatures and Symbols', p. 30.

⁵⁴ Chittick, Introduction, p. xvii, discusses the historical trajectory of the *Fusus*.

⁵⁵ Austin, *Sufis of Andalusia*, p. 48.

⁵⁶ Ibn 'Arabi, *Futûhât*, II 389.6, as quoted in Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, p. xv.

East and was punctuated by continuous writing and visionary experiences.⁵⁷ Arriving in Mecca, he tells of an experience which revealed his life task:

‘A vision of the Youth steadfast in devotion who is both speaker and silent, neither alive nor dead... He indicated to me by hint and sign that he was created to speak only in symbols... He revealed the reality of his Beauty to me and I understood... Then he said to me: “Circumambulate in my footsteps, and observe me in the light of my moon, so that you may take from my constitution that which you write in your book and transmit it to your readers.”⁵⁸

This seminal vision inspired a dedication to write the *Futûhât*, which was a dominant theme in the last 17 years of his life, when he settled in Damascus. In this he created an extensive compendium of Sufism, recording the oral traditions through his own lens of revelation, and demonstrating his profound respect for the Koran.⁵⁹

Seeking the Possible: The Ternary of Spiritual Dynamics

The three ‘orientations of the possible’ on the journey of knowledge were defined by Ibn ‘Arabi’s treatment of the three astrological modes of operation, as translated and compiled by Burckhardt. Just as these modes define the most dynamic astrological ‘aspects’, so they are linked to a spiritual dynamic by Ibn ‘Arabi.⁶⁰ The traditionally named ‘cardinal’, ‘fixed’ and ‘mutable’ signs were treated as the signs of ‘mobility’, ‘fixation’ and ‘synthesis’.⁶¹ These three modes were called the ‘ternary of spirit’, and considered to be ‘superior’ to the four astrological elements because they are closer to ‘reintegration in the perfect [spiritual] synthesis’.⁶²

Within this ‘ternary’, the ‘mobile’ signs of Aries, Cancer, Capricorn and Libra have an expansive movement which reaches out to measure the ‘width of the possible’. They therefore embrace all that is manifest, relating to the ‘states of this world’. The descending movement comes with the ‘signs of fixation’ (Taurus, Leo, Scorpio and Aquarius), which measure the ‘depth of the possible’. In so doing, they are seen to regulate ‘the relatively superior a-

⁵⁷ Hirtenstein, *Unlimited Mercifier*, pp. 146–7.

⁵⁸ Ibn ‘Arabi, *Futûhât*, I: 47ff and 1: 218ff (trans. O. Yahia), as quoted in Hirtenstein, *Unlimited Mercifier*, p. 152.

⁵⁹ Hirtenstein, *Unlimited Mercifier*, p.152: He says the *Futûhât* is ‘a complete esoteric exposition of the Book of the Quran, both in structure and content’.

⁶⁰ The most dynamic aspects are the ‘conjunction’, ‘opposition’ and ‘square’.

⁶¹ Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology*, p. 22.

⁶² Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology*, p. 21.

temporal world' and because of this 'descent', 'the world exists as such'. Finally are the 'synthetic signs' of Gemini, Virgo, Sagittarius and Pisces, which seek the height of the possible in the urge to return to 'the One'. They therefore relate to the 'intermediary worlds' and to the 'synthesis' of spiritual and psychic elements in 'the world of corporality'.⁶³

This treatment of the astrological signs gives interesting insights into an energetic dimensionality, further elucidating the dynamic aspect of the complementary action of 'Divine descent' and human 'ascent' which was integral to Ibn 'Arabi's cosmological schema.⁶⁴ As a model of spiritual possibilities, it adds transformative depth to the cosmology of the Sufi 'love path'.

Of Ways of Knowing: Knowledge and Love

Speaking for the position of a Gnostic or 'one of closeness', Ibn 'Arabi said: 'He accepts all kinds of beliefs, but does not remain tied to any figurative belief... knowing the kernel of all belief he sees the interior and not the exterior'.⁶⁵ The 'interior' is what he called the 'Real'. Love poetry is often the chosen mode of expressing Sufi mystical knowledge and one of the gifts this spiritual tradition has shared well beyond the bounds of the Islamic world. Ibn 'Arabi's unitary vision takes a passionate poetic form in the collection called *Tarjumâan al-ashwâaq*, or 'Interpreter of Ardent Desires'. One of its most well known verses follows:

Oh marvel! A garden amidst the flames!
My heart has become capable of every form:
A pasture for gazelles and a monastery for Christian monks,
a temple for idols and the pilgrim's Ka'ba,
and the tables of the Tora and the book of the Quran.
I follow the religion of Love: whatever way
Love's camels take, that is my religion and my faith.⁶⁶

⁶³ Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology*, pp. 21–23.

⁶⁴ Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology*, p. 12, suggests that Ibn 'Arabi's cosmological schema probably comes 'from the Andalusian Sufi Ibn Masarrah'.

⁶⁵ M. Ibn al-'Arabi, *Lubb'ul-Lub*, translated by Ismail Hakki Bursevi (1652–1728) into Turkish from Arabic; translated into English by Bulent Rauf as *The Kernel of the Kernel* (Sherborne: Beshara Publications, 1981), p. 1.

⁶⁶ M. Ibn al-'Arabi, *The Tarjumâan al-ashwâaq: a collection of mystical odes*, trans. R. A. Nicholson (London and Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing, 1978), p. 56.

Ibn ‘Arabi was perhaps pushing against the doctrinal sensitivities in the politics of Islamic knowledge when he wrote such verses or made claims like the following: ‘if a possessor of knowledge is cognisant of the being in his own ipseity, in all its meanings, he will not remain trapped in one belief’.⁶⁷ Ibn ‘Arabi was no stranger to controversy: after his *Tarjumâan* collection of sixty-one love poems was made public, he was accused of improper behaviour, of writing erotica in the guise of poetry. The entire collection was dedicated to a beautiful young woman, *Nizam*, who represented for him ‘the beauty of the Beloved’ and the uproar that followed caused him to write a long commentary explaining his mystical allusions.⁶⁸

Henri Corbin, citing these love poems, concludes that the ‘love path’ is mystical in the most passionate of ways. He calls this Ibn ‘Arabi’s ‘dialectic of love’, which he describes as: an ‘invisible Beloved... whose actuality depends on an Active Imagination which makes physical love and spiritual love “conspire” in a single mystic love’.⁶⁹ Corbin sees this as an endless devotional dance, a lived experience facilitated by the creative imagination. Ibn ‘Arabi’s mystical odes assert the heart as the locus of knowledge, as the setting for spiritual possibilities, and also for transformation: the word *qalb* or ‘heart’ comes from the same Arabic root as *taqallub*, or ‘transformation’ and as Chittick notes, the two words can be used as virtual synonyms.⁷⁰

Creative Longing

The locus Sufi practice circles around is love as the longing of the soul for mystical union, answering the longing of the ‘Most Beautiful Names’ to be known. Longing, in this two-way operation, is reminiscent of the ‘As it is above, so it is below. And as it is below, so it is above’ of the Emerald Tablet, whose alchemical operation describes ‘the making of the One Thing’.⁷¹ The ‘ascent’ and ‘descent’ of Ibn ‘Arabi’s cosmological schema also seem to evoke the Hermetic quest for the ‘One Thing’. Taking his inspiration from the

⁶⁷ Ibn ‘Arabi, *The Kernel*, p. 1.

⁶⁸ Ibn ‘Arabi, *Tarjumâan*, was composed of 61 poems. Hirtenstein, *Unlimited Mercifier*, pp. 186–189, discusses the controversy, and notes that the final form of the *Tarjumâan*, with commentary, took ‘ten years to come to fruition’. It is of note that the major controversy and critiques of Ibn ‘Arabi’s work came after his death, amid social turmoil and religious changes.

⁶⁹ Henri Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabi* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton/Bollingen, 1998), p. 291.

⁷⁰ Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, p. 106.

⁷¹ Jabir ibn Hayyan, ‘The Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus’, in E. J. Holmyard, *Alchemy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1957), pp. 97–8.

hadith qudsi, or sacred saying: 'I was a hidden treasure and I loved to be known, and I created the creation so that I be known', Ibn 'Arabi explains that the Divine longs to contemplate itself in the mirror of the human heart.⁷²

His explanation describes the reciprocal relationship intrinsic to the inclusive nature of 'Unity', and can be interpreted as the transcendent-beyond-time requiring the conscious human to know itself.⁷³ This can be understood in the context of an inclusive notion of the 'Real', which transcends any polarity of consciousness.

The 'Most Beautiful Names', too, point to inclusion within diversity: 'the names are the names of the states... Likewise they have another relationship in which they name the Real'.⁷⁴ In this way, personal 'taste' can lead to a specific Name, yet, 'all have also a unique reference: the Divine Essence which they name'.⁷⁵

In another of his works – *Anqâ Mughri* – Ibn 'Arabi describes a vision, foretelling a mystical union. This was experienced a short time before he left Spain and travelled to the East, where so much was to change, including his 'meeting' with the Youth who inspired him to write the *Futûhât*. Again this vision repeats the alchemical flavour of the inner 'marriage'. He recounts that he had a vision of a marriage but then realised: 'I did not find a 'Bride' (*'irs*) or a 'Husband' (*ba'l*) other than my own Essence, nor a dower other than my own Nature and attributes. For I was myself both the Husband and the Bride, and I married together the Intellect and the Soul'.⁷⁶

The Primordial Unity of Intellect and Emotion

It is inward reality Sufis seek, and Sufi praxis is geared towards an integration of intellect and emotion, 'in their primordial unity'.⁷⁷ As we have seen, 'divine opening' and revelations are considered the true source of knowledge for Ibn 'Arabi and the 'Folk', as Sufis called themselves.⁷⁸ He clarified the difference between the Sufi path and intellectual path, when he said: 'The canon of the

⁷² Ibn 'Arabi, *Fusus I*, p. 378; this hadith is explored in 'The Wisdom of Ecstasy and Rapture in the Word of Abraham'.

⁷³ Ibn 'Arabi, *Fusus I*, p. 12; this is one of many examples of his interior exploration of Koranic text.

⁷⁴ Ibn 'Arabi, *Futûhât*, II 8:17, quoted by Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. 188.

⁷⁵ Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, p. 302.

⁷⁶ M. Ibn 'Arabi, *Anqâ Mughrib (The Fabulous Gryphon)*, trans. Gerald Elmore (Ibn 'Arabi Society), available at <http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/anqamughrib.html> [accessed 24 May 2016].

⁷⁷ Burekhardt, *Introduction to Sufism*, p. 32.

⁷⁸ Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. xxi.

Folk of Allah ties together all parts of the cosmos, so they are taken from one thing to another, even if the scholar of outward appearances sees no relationship'.⁷⁹

Henri Corbin speaks of an 'outside-of-time function', whereby 'openings' to the 'Oneness of Being' are experienced as: 'forever inexhaustible events of the soul'.⁸⁰ Above all other writers, Henri Corbin champions what he calls the 'imaginal' realm in Ibn 'Arabi's work. The 'imaginal' features as a world to be creatively accessed, in the form of the *alam al-mithal* – the intermediate zone of imagination. Acknowledging Corbin's role in opening Ibn 'Arabi's 'love path' to a wider audience, Chittick suggests that Corbin's work most vividly 'depicts the God of theophany [revelation] who can be grasped by imagination'.⁸¹

***Alam al-mithal* and Sophiology**

The *alam al-mithal* refers to: 'the world in which occurs visions, apparitions, and in general all the symbolic histories'.⁸² Corbin explored at length the notion of the soul's passion for the mystical union; and 'the nostalgia which is the secret of creation' is seen as a fusion of the divine and human longings.⁸³

Ibn 'Arabi describes a spiritual alchemy where the Names are conceived as both the 'divine quality' and also the active agent of 'transformation'.⁸⁴ Only the imaginative faculty can perceive the fundamental nature of this world, which is an 'intermediary' between inner and outer events. The inner 'journeys' that Ibn 'Arabi reported in vivid details, he understood as embodied events in the *alam al-mithal*, the intermediate realm where the soul takes on form.⁸⁵

Sophia and the archetypal feminine play an important role in the cosmology of Ibn 'Arabi: 'Universal Nature', as an active force, he depicts symbolically, as the 'Sigh of Compassion' – *Nafas Rahmani*.⁸⁶ the 'Sigh' 'flows through the things of the world like the waters of a river and is unceasingly renewed,' said Corbin, paraphrasing the *Fusus*.⁸⁷ He explored the

⁷⁹ Ibn 'Arabi, *Futûhât*, III 200.26.

⁸⁰ Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, pp. 291–292.

⁸¹ Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. xix.

⁸² Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, p. 217

⁸³ Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, p. 152

⁸⁴ Ibn 'Arabi, *Fusus* II, p. 388.

⁸⁵ Many of these journeys are discussed in *Sufis of Andalusia*, which has an English translation of his personal accounts from the *Ruh al-Quds* of Ibn 'Arabi.

⁸⁶ Ibn 'Arabi, *Fusus* II, p. 354.

⁸⁷ Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, p. 201.

symbolism of Ibn 'Arabi's experiences of *Sophia* or divine wisdom, identifying some of the feminine presences therein. To do so he distilled some bibliographical details: Ibn 'Arabi's near-death experience as a youth, when a verse of the Koran appeared to him in the form of a beautiful being exhaling a sweet perfume; the two Sufi *shaikha* who strongly influenced him – Fatima of Cordova, and later, Yasmin of Marchena; also the vision of *Sophia aeterna* during his first visit to Mecca, and the meeting with *Nizam*, which inspired his collection of mystical odes, when he 'witnessed this station' [of Divine Love].⁸⁸ Also, in terms of astrological symbols, Ibn 'Arabi describes the mystic Moon and Venus as closest to the 'love path': the Moon is the 'mediator proper to the human heart', and Venus, in turn, is linked to 'the faculty of the creative imagination'.⁸⁹

It can be seen that the Hermetic notion of gender as a primordial principle and natural polarity is common to both astrological and Sufi symbolism. For Sufi cosmology, the godhead is conceived as having a creative masculine aspect and also a feminine aspect. However, while the masculine is purely creative, the feminine aspect is considered both receptive and creative, which includes the maternal feature of what Ibn 'Arabi called the *Rahman*⁹⁰ or 'Divine Breath'.⁹¹ Chodkiewicz summarises this as follows:

It is from *rahma* [love] that the universe is born – it takes shape in the "breath of the *Rahman*" – it is through *rahma* that the universe is sustained, and it is to *rahma* that it will return: whence Ibn 'Arabi's denial that punishment will be eternal; whence his quest for the positivity...in every idea, in every belief.⁹²

To summarise, the Sufi way goes beyond discursive boundaries; an integration of intellect and emotion is essential for knowledge, and integration is possible, because the heart is the organ of perception. Ibn 'Arabi explored, from many perspectives, the heart's 'natural' role as lover in the quest for the divine Beloved. Knowledge is treated as an interrelated whole, linked to states of consciousness and 'openings' to the 'Unity of Being', which can transcend cognitive limits. Again, those lines from the *Tarjumâan*, express Ibn 'Arabi's orientation: 'I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love's camels take,

⁸⁸ Hirtenstein, *Unlimited Mercifier*, p. 149, quotes Ibn 'Arabi, *Futûhât*, IV:84.

⁸⁹ Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology*, pp. 31–34.

⁹⁰ *Rahman* is pronounced 'Raakman'.

⁹¹ Corbin, *Mystical Imagination*, p. 299.

⁹² Chodkiewicz, Introduction to *Meccan Revelations II*, p. 42. Note that *rahma* also means 'compassion' but in this context, Chodkiewicz emphasizes that it means 'love'.

that is my religion and my faith'.⁹³ This is close to what Campion calls 'concrete magic', which seeks to merge with the greater whole, 'in a perhaps ecstatic union'.⁹⁴ The Sufi 'love path' creates no polarity between devotion and ecstasy that more ascetic, less passionate practices may do: the intoxication with the 'Beloved' knows no such bounds.

Sympathy as a magical and mystical principle

A human-divine *sympatheia* is a part of Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of the 'Real' and its ever-recurrent creation. Sympathy as a magical and mystical principle was originally a Stoic concept.⁹⁵ Further, 'an ontological link between symbol and symbolised reflects an idea of sympathies or correspondences that was clearly formulated in Stoic circles in the last two centuries BCE'.⁹⁶ It also accords with some modern therapeutic approaches, like Thomas Moore's suggestion that: 'To deal with the soul magically rather than heroically, requires an extreme sympathy with all that is taking place'.⁹⁷ As we have discussed, for Ibn 'Arabi it is 'sympathy' and 'aptitude' that open to a correspondence with certain Names or Qualities in the 'super-sensory' intermediary world of *alam al-mithal*. Sociologically this is also suggestive for the role of the 'Other', and the 'othering' of the one who looks, acts, believes, or thinks differently. Sympathy in Ibn 'Arabi arises from a deep exploration of the meaning of existence, and the 'love path' arises from the ability to be the 'mirror' of the divine. The very intention to reach for lunar or Adamic consciousness as a receptive 'mirror' means the 'other' is no longer other on that journey of integration.⁹⁸

When the creative imagination is developed as the prime mode to comprehend the 'Real', 'normal' takes on new meaning. Out-of-body experiences, 'openings', extrasensory perception, telepathy and theophanic visions, were 'normal' within Sufi circles, and constant for Ibn 'Arabi, if his

⁹³ Ibn al-'Arabi, *Tarjumâan*, p. 67.

⁹⁴ Nicholas Campion, *The medieval and modern worlds: History of western astrology* (New York and London: Continuum, 2009), p. 94.

⁹⁵ Diogenes Laertius, 'Biography of 'Zeno'', in *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, trans. R. D. Hicks (London: William Heinemann, 1925), Vol. 2, pp. 110–263.

⁹⁶ Greene, 'Signs, Signatures and Symbols', p. 31.

⁹⁷ Thomas Moore, *Dark nights of the soul: a guide to finding your way through life's ordeals* (New York: Gotham Books, 2004), p. 94.

⁹⁸ Ibn 'Arabi, *Fusus I*, p.10.

own journals and the records of those who knew him are to be believed.⁹⁹ What Jung calls 'meaningful coincidence' or 'synchronicity' may be considered 'normal' within astrological circles.¹⁰⁰ Synchronicity certainly seems to be well exemplified by the seemingly super-human written output of Ibn 'Arabi and its role in saving hundreds of years of oral knowledge that may have otherwise been lost. For someone who saw time as 'imaginary', Ibn 'Arabi may not have been surprised by the timing of the Mongol invasion.¹⁰¹ His interest and focus was the spiritual journey, the changing 'states' and timeless 'stations' he embodied in the 'world of the unseen'. As he says in the *Futûhât*: 'This is why the Presence of the Imagination is the vastest of presences: it combines the two worlds, the World of the Unseen and the World of the Visible'.¹⁰² Through Ibn 'Arabi's works, Imagination as a 'Presence' allows sameness and otherness to be bridged, within an intermediate realm.

The Magical Subject

The modern category, 'magic', was born in colonial power relationships, developed conceptually as a counterpoint to 'rational' behaviour, and is far too politicized and complex to discuss here.¹⁰³ To focus more specifically on the human subject that employs 'magical thinking': Ibn 'Arabi as a magical subject is the pertinent example. In this context the 'magical subject' can be defined as the subject seeking knowledge in non-rational ways. In the case of the Sufi 'love path', there are specific applications of the imaginative faculty, a teacher is available as a guide to psychic and spiritual balance, and this is considered a path to knowledge of the 'Real'.

⁹⁹ Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. xiii: 'It should be noted that "opening"... cannot be applied to any and every sort of "inrush"... Ibn 'Arabi, like other Sufis, provides many criteria for distinguishing among different types of paranormal perceptions'.

¹⁰⁰ See essay by C. G. Jung. *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*, trans. R. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973).

¹⁰¹ Ibn 'Arabi, *Futûhât*, II 1.3: 'The moment is an imaginary portion in an existing source, which is the sphere and the star. The movement of that sphere and star is intersected by the portion allotted to it in an imaginary sphere which has no real existence, and which is called time'.

¹⁰² Ibn 'Arabi, *Futûhât*, Chapter 311, 42.11, quoted by Chittick, *Meccan Revelations*, Vol. II, p. 172.

¹⁰³ Stanley J. Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion and the Scope of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). This remains one of the best books on the subject of magic and rationality.

To consider Bruno Latour's assertion that via rational process we have erected a 'Great Divide' between 'Culture' and 'Nature', implies that the 'subject-object' Divide is a part of this.¹⁰⁴ That division appears in ways of knowing and in ways of applying knowledge to the larger environment. The duality perpetuated between magical and rational thinking has not fallen far from the familiar divides of Nature versus Culture. Like that duality, it is open to Latour's critique that it is both asymmetrical and problematic. He suggests a solution: 'everything changes when, instead of constantly and exclusively alternating between one pole of the modern dimension and the other, we move down along the nonmodern dimension...where the work of mediation emerges...quasi-objects, quasi-subjects, proliferate in it'.¹⁰⁵ These unacknowledged 'hybrids', which he identifies as the demystified face of 'culture- nature', are likely to extend into rational-magical 'hybrids' as well.¹⁰⁶

The Magical Subject as Other

When the magical subject is made Other, dismissed as 'irrational', one must ask: what actually comes before the rational gaze, what socially embedded assumptions of normalcy are themselves shot through with magical thinking? Meanwhile, magical thinking, as demonstrated by Ibn 'Arabi's body of work and life history, seems able to support high intellectual achievement. His important assertion, that one's 'state' determines what can be known, raises further questions: what outcomes may occur when magical thinking is unconscious and unacknowledged, or hidden in ambitious 'rational' plans? History debunks the myth that all rational thinking delivers desirable results.¹⁰⁷ It may also be a myth that magical thinking delivers only false results, or 'pseudo-science'. The question of the actual quality of knowledge hybrids is perhaps linked to consciousness and one's state, as Ibn 'Arabi's hermeneutics suggest. However, to make the magical subject 'Other' is to ignore, trivialise, stereotype, and often to repress, the knowledge that can be gained from a magical way of knowing.

'Othering' as a social process usually involves power relationships, and the political hegemony of a 'rational' worldview easily translates into economic advantage. Yet, the discourse on the 'Other' is expressed on a number of registers in the human sciences, and both psychological and ethical registers

¹⁰⁴ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993, pp. 97–137.

¹⁰⁵ Latour, *Never Been Modern*, p. 96.

¹⁰⁶ Latour, *Never Been Modern*, pp. 49–55, 140–142.

¹⁰⁷ Current development plans for the Amazon Basin could lead to even less desirable results than the 'rational' choice of drilling for oil in the Gulf of Mexico.

of 'othering' can be recognised, once that lens is applied.¹⁰⁸ Michel Foucault and his concepts of privileging, subjugation and concealment, as they appear in the production of knowledge, and in the constitution of the modern subject, have played an important role.¹⁰⁹ He was acknowledged by Edward Said, who coined the term 'othering' to describe the process whereby ethnic others are stereotyped and homogenized, and who dedicated a book to this topic.¹¹⁰

Also acknowledging Foucault's influence, Peter Pels suggests: 'no present-day speculation about magic can escape the modern discursive boundary between the ideal modern subject that makes true perceptions and practises a rational discipline, and a magical subject that is set up in contrast as backward, immature, or dysfunctional'.¹¹¹ He adds that these are 'modernist myths that need to be scrutinized' and his edited compilation seeks to dispel these myths with situated ethnographies.¹¹² The socially constructed polarity, of the magical versus the 'rational' subject, is a boundary with great plasticity. It is thus open to manipulation. Yet, once that boundary is given ontological status, a knowledge system such as Ibn 'Arabi's, which moves seamlessly between spiritual epiphany and discursive logic, is not readily classified as being knowledge. In fact, once the magical subject is 'othered', an imaginative way of knowing is made irrelevant to serious knowledge pursuit.

Rationality, Disenchantment and Magic

Rationality and 'disenchantment' were drawn together by Max Weber at the turn of the twentieth century: he predicted disenchantment as the inevitable result of a capitalist culture of 'instrumental rationality', which is: 'dependent on the calculability of the most important technical factors'.¹¹³ Weber explored the way in which rationalised science works against both magic and

¹⁰⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Sean Hand (New York: Library of Congress, 2001), p. 290. As a philosopher, he articulates the ethical Judaic perspective: 'Prior to any act, I am concerned with the Other and I can never be absolved from this responsibility'.

¹⁰⁹ See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Allen Lane, 1977).

¹¹⁰ See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

¹¹¹ Peter Pels, Introduction to *Magic and modernity: Interfaces of revelation and concealment*, ed. Birgit Meyer and Peter Pels (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 31.

¹¹² Peter Pels, Introduction to *Magic and modernity*, p. 38.

¹¹³ Max Weber, *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus, 1905 (The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism)*, trans. Talcott Parsons (1930; Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003), p. 24.

nature: ‘rational empirical knowledge has consistently worked through to the disenchantment of the world and its transformation into a causal mechanism’, and by refuting any search ‘which asks for a “meaning” of inner-worldly occurrences’.¹¹⁴ That double strategy of declaring the world ‘causal’, while refusing to qualify inner-worldly events with meaning, resonates with Latour’s more recent concept of ‘purification’ as the means of maintaining an artificial divide, while relations – ‘mediations’ – go on between the two ‘sides’.¹¹⁵ Spanos calls this: ‘naturalising’ a ‘socially constituted hierarchical binary logic’.¹¹⁶ The material, psychological and ethical implications of this double strategy are considerable, as is the capacity for reframing reality.

Modern enchantments tend also to be reframed and disowned, and as Pels suggests, this is ‘because the content of *magic* is mostly defined in relation to a past superseded by modernity’.¹¹⁷ Yet the ‘rational enchantments’ of ‘consumer magic’, described by the sociologist George Ritzer as the ‘cathedrals of consumption’ and the new ‘hyper-realities’ that keeps consumers, consuming, are ever expanding as a part of global business practice.¹¹⁸ Pels speaks of a ‘haunting of modernity by the magic it represses’, and suggests this is wide-flung indeed.¹¹⁹ He cites Martha Kaplan’s ethnography on the printed word, which suggests that modern magic can also be ‘enlightening, creative and progressive’.¹²⁰

The magic that haunts modernity can even be found in the father of the sociology of religion, and of value-free social science, Max Weber. His own hybrid of the rational and magical was revealed in a 1917 lecture: *Science as a profession and vocation*. He exhorted each member of his student audience, to: ‘find the *daemon* which holds the fibres of his very life’.¹²¹ Sometimes

¹¹⁴ Max Weber, *From Max Weber: essays in sociology*, translated and compiled by H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills (1946; London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 350–351.

¹¹⁵ Latour, *Never Been Modern*, pp. 40–75.

¹¹⁶ W. V. Spanos, ‘Empire of the Gaze’, in *Foucault and Heidegger: critical encounters*, ed. A. Milchman and A. Rosenberg (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 238.

¹¹⁷ Pels, Introduction to *Magic and Modernity*, p. 35, his italics.

¹¹⁸ George Ritzer, *Enchanting a disenchanted world: continuity and change in the cathedrals of consumption* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2010), pp. 22–31.

¹¹⁹ Pels, Introduction to *Magic and Modernity*, p. 30.

¹²⁰ Martha Kaplan, ‘The magical power of the (printed) word’, in *Magic and modernity: interfaces of revelation and concealment*, ed. B. Meyer and P. Pels (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 183–199.

¹²¹ Max Weber, *Wissenschaft als Beruf* (‘On some categories of interpretive sociology’), in *Max Weber: collected methodological writings*, trans. H. H. Bruun, ed.

known as the '*daemon* of the soul', in its link back to Plato, Goethe's usage was a likely source for Weber, with references to the *daemon* in both Heraclitus and Goethe. The translator defines *daemon* 'as the characteristic and preformed essence of individual identity, the unchanging and self-directive "law" of destiny'.¹²²

This notion of the *daemon* also seems to accord with Ibn 'Arabi's discussion of 'taste' and 'aptitude', which enables one to connect with certain of the Qualities or Names. While each of the Names relates to a different state, all relate back to the *Rahmin*, 'the universal Divine Compassion', or 'creative Feminine'.¹²³ A symbolic language is a suitable vehicle for the cosmology of Ibn 'Arabi, and as Bakhtiar suggests: 'Symbols are realities contained within the nature of things... Symbolism is perhaps the most sacred of the Sufi sciences, for it is through seeing symbols that one continues to remember, to invoke'.¹²⁴

To conclude, I suggest that an interweaving of the rational and the magical occurs readily in the human search for meaning. Hybrids are common, but the multivalence of examples is not the prime issue. What Tambiah calls 'the translation of culture', is more important in understanding Ibn 'Arabi than the translation of the Arabic language, since misconceptions of the knowledge culture block accurate translation.¹²⁵ Likewise, the false divide between magic and rationality can be a genuine impediment to the journey of the creative imagination, whereas the everyday hybrids of the rational and magical are commonplace.

Where the search for meaning may lead is perhaps a matter of 'taste' and knowledge. Sufi knowledge, as expressed by Ibn 'Arabi, is in one way a spiritual manual for a journey through the states and stations of consciousness. This imaginative engagement with the cosmos has the goal of producing

H. H. Bruun and S. Whimster (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 273–303. Weber's original lecture has had a number of translations with a mistaken translation of *daemon* into 'demon' by Talcott Parsons, here corrected by Hans Bruun, p. 353.

¹²² Bruun and Whimster, *Max Weber*, Endnotes, p. 452. L. Scaff is cited for the definition.

¹²³ Corbin, *Mystical Imagination*, cites Ibn 'Arabi, *Fusus*, in 'Notes', p. 302.

¹²⁴ Laleh Bakhtiar, *Sufi Expressions of the Mystic Quest* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1976), p. 25.

¹²⁵ Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion*. pp. 35–58, discusses the 'translation of culture' and 'commensurability' as two prime concerns in ethnographic work and cultural anthropology. The translators whose work is cited here (Chittick, Burckhardt, Hirtenstein, Chodkiewicz, et al.) had great familiarity with the Sufi knowledge culture, prior to their translation work.

knowledge that comes from direct experience. In this context, consciousness itself is the frontier that the Sufi 'love path' most boldly explores, in the quest for union with 'the One'.