

THE HIERARCHY OF THE PERFECT MAN ACCORDING TO IBN 'ARABĪ

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Introduction

The notion of man as "a vicegerent (*khalīfah*) on the earth" occurs in the Qur'ānic statement about the aim behind the creation of Adam, and it is construed as being associated with man's relation to the world. From another point of view, such a notion stands for a link bridging the gap between the transcendental God and the phenomenal world. Ibn 'Arabī, in considering the vicegerency of man, insists on the latter aspect rather than the former and thereby aims at the explanation of cosmic necessity for the "perfect man." In so doing, he tends to incorporate within the doctrine of vicegerency, the tenet of the Sufi Pole (*al-qutb*) by whose spiritual power the universe is claimed to be maintained. Here lies also the influence of the Active Intellect (*al-'aql al-fa'āl*), previously adopted by al-Fārābī and Ibn Sinā but reaching back to Plotinian and even to Aristotelian roots. All these ideas are mingled in Ibn 'Arabī's speculations with extraordinary complexity. I shall endeavour in the present essay to tackle them step by step in order to show what these concepts mean in themselves and how they are employed to support each other. The "vicegerent of God on the earth" will be the point of departure.

1. The Vicegerent

Ibn 'Arabī sees that man may be viewed from two perspectives: first, as a being bound (*mukallaf*) by obligations, subjected to the laws of the phenomenal world, and second, as a lord (*rabb*), that is, the shadow of God, entrusted with a sublime mission in the world.¹ In the first view, man is a vassal (*'abd*) and a limited

¹ See *Inshā' al-Dawā'ir*, in *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn Al-'Arabī*, 3-38, ed. H.

being, similar to other temporal entities in the created world. But on the other hand, he transcends the whole universe by virtue of the perfection contained in his divine image—"the best stature" (*Qur'ân*, 95: 4). Man, in this respect, is the connecting link between God and the universe encompassing in himself both heavenly and earthly dimensions as a unified whole. He is implanted in the world to be the "divine mirror" which illuminates everything else with a special meaning, and thus he may be described as the "Throne of God" displaying His Might and Beauty.² Here the perfection in mankind rests on the fact that man is the culmination of the profane kingdom, as it were, and at the same time is entrusted with the position of divine vicegerency.

That man is the vicegerent of God goes back to Adam, who was assigned this position before the angels of Heaven. This assignment required from the start that Adam, the archetype of humankind, must have had the image of his Master.³ This image, in quite general terms, has been characterized earlier as falling within the dynamic realm of human feeling and consciousness, i.e., the realm which takes on a form akin to the Divine Vastness. When the question comes to the vicegerency, this divine image in man is exalted to the extent that it becomes counterpart to the Origin and furthermore is identified with God's Ipseity.⁴ In other words, God has equipped with His own Image certain selected

S. Nyberg (Leiden, 1919), 22, henceforth abbreviated as *Inshâ'*.

² *Bulghat al-Ghawwâş fî al-Akwân ilâ Ma'din al-Ikhlâş fî Ma'rifat al-Insân*, MS Zâhiriyyah (Damascus) No. 4124, 6^a; cf. *Risâlat al-Qasam al-Ilâhî* (Hayderabad, 1948), hereinafter referred to as *Bulgh* and *Qasam* respectively.

³ Cf. *al-Futûhât al-Makkiyyah* (Cairo: Bûlaq, 1293 A.H.), 1: 344; 3: 477, line 23; cf. *al-Futûhât al-Makkiyyah*, ed. Osman Yahyâ (Cairo, 1972-78), 4: 179. Further references to these two different editions will be abbreviated as *Futûhât* and *Yahyâ* respectively. See also *Kitâb Nuskhat al-Ḥaqq*, MS Dâr al-Kutub (Cairo) No. 1451, Tal'at Taş, 82^a, henceforth cited as *Ḥaqq*.

⁴ Cf. *Futûhât*, 2: 89, line 8, 24; 91, line 9; 3: 208, line 2; 477, line 25; *Fuṣûş al-Ḥikam*, ed. A. 'Affîfî (Cairo, 1271 A.H.), 55, hereinafter cited as *Fuṣûş*; see also *Inshâ'*, 3.