

A PRELIMINARY APPROACH TO IBN 'ARABĪ'S THEOPHANIC ANTHROPOLOGY*

Adīb Nāyif Diyāb

This study is an attempt to explore the philosophical anthropology of Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī, mainly based on his *Summa*, the *Futūḥāt*, without neglecting his other minor works and certain relevant manuscripts. Ibn 'Arabī is known as a prolific (yet systematic) thinker, but preceding studies have been centred around his metaphysics and his spiritual experience. The present investigation, therefore, purposely draws a demarcation between Ibn 'Arabī's metaphysics and his philosophical anthropology in order to allow a deeper discussion of his views in the latter field. The outcome is that a number of new themes emerge here which were left untouched in the preceding studies dealing with Ibn 'Arabī's thought. These themes include Ibn 'Arabī's style, the Archetype of Adam, the Self, Imagination in Signs and the Spiritual states. They constitute the essential contribution of the present work. Other topics may be found in other studies, but here they are investigated from a new perspective and with a considerable amount of fresh data from Ibn 'Arabī's published and unpublished works.

Man occupies a prominent place in Ibn 'Arabī's mystical philosophy; a fact which constitutes the core and the aim in some of his earlier works:

It is not the case that my objectives in all that I write on this art [i.e., the doctrine of microcosm] is to know what appears in the cosmos. My purpose is, rather, to call the attention of the heedless to what

* This study is based on my unpublished dissertation entitled "The Dimensions of Man in Ibn 'Arabī's Philosophy", Cambridge University, 1981; henceforth referred to as "Dissertation".

exists in this human essence in this Adamite individual.¹

This statement was written when he was thirty five years old; two years earlier he introduced his *Tadbīrāt* as "expressing the reality of the human being and his superiority to all animals".² This anthropocentric interest remains constant though not fully expressed or met in other early works. True, the topic of Man appears in his latest works like the *Futūḥāt*, the *Fuṣūṣ* and the 'Abādilah as embedded in other themes and only emerges suddenly here and there, often in connection with esoteric interests. But it is equally true that such fragmented notes acquire more depth and expansion than they had in the earlier treatises. Ibn 'Arabī in the *Futūḥāt* still considers "Man in relation to his actualities" and the "imaginative revelation" as two of the seven main objects of knowledge.³

Here Ibn 'Arabī's starting point, as far as we can judge, is either the religious archetype of "Adam the vicegerent on earth" or the "doctrine of microcosm". These two elements are both strikingly present in his early writings and thus both may be considered as bringing him towards the field of philosophical anthropology. The doctrine of microcosm is found not only as one component in his thought but also inspires him with regard to the arrangement of his writings. In *Mawāqī' al-Nujūm*, the planets and orbits are made counterparts for spiritual states. The

¹ 'Anqā' Mughrib (Cairo, 1954), 6.

² *Al-Tadbīrāt al-Ilāhiyyah*, ed. H. S. Nyberg in *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn al-'Arabī* (Leiden, 1919), 106.

³ "Wa midād al-'ilm alladhī yakhtaṣṣih ahl Allāh 'alā sab' masā'il...wa hiya: ma'rifat asmā' Allāh - Ta'ālā - wa ma'rifat al-tajalliyāt, wa ma'rifah khiṭāb al-Ḥaqq 'ibādah bi-lisān al-Shar', wa ma'rifah kamāl al-wujūd wa naqṣih, wa ma'rifat al-insān min jihah ḥaqā'iqih, wa ma'rifat al-kashf al-khayālī, wa ma'rifat al-adwiyah." *Futūḥāt*, 4 vols. (Cairo, 1293 A.H.), 1: 42, repeated in 2: 395, line 23; in O. Yaḥyā edition, to which we shall henceforth refer as *Yaḥyā*, 1: 153.