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The Perfect Human From the Point of View of Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī al-Andalusī

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Abstract

The term "perfect human" is one of the special terms employed by Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn Arabi (1165-1240). With the semantic method and the synoptic approach to the two books of *Fusus al-Hikam* (The Ringstones of Wisdom, also translated as The Bezels of Wisdom and The Seal of Wisdom), and *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, (The Meccan Illuminations) it becomes clear that from Muḥyī al-Dīn's perspective the "perfect human" is the highest manifestation of God, the Caliph of God, the measure of truth, wise, and the giver of life. The perfect human has the power to conquer horizons and souls. He or she is the mediator of divine grace. Perfect human beings have different ranks in history. The supreme and perfect example of a perfect human is Muhammad, the Messenger of God, and the final perfect human, who is the guardian of the world today, is Muhammad bin Hassan Askari, one of

the descendants of Muhammad, the Messenger of God, who is currently living in what is referred to as the great occultation. He, who is the saviour of humanity, will appear one day and rule the world with justice.

Keywords: perfect human, Ibn Arabi, Muḥyī al-Dīn, *Fusus al-Hikam*, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Sufism.

Introduction

Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Ali bin Muhammad Ibn Arabi al-Hatami al-Al-Andalusi (born on July 26, 1165 - died on November 16, 1240), known as Ibn Arabi and nicknamed " Muḥyī al-Dīn " and "Al-Sheikh al-Akbar"¹, is one of the most important Sufis (mystics) and philosophers of the Islamic world. He is the founder of theoretical mysticism. His views have had a great impact on Islamic mysticism and philosophy. Mulla Sadra Shirazi², the author of "*al-Hikmat al-Motaaliyyah fi al-Asfar al-Aghliyyah al-Arba'ah*", which means, "Transcendent Philosophy on the Four Intellectual Journeys", the founder of the school of "*Al-Hikmat Al-Motaaliyyah*" (Transcendent Philosophy) was influenced by him. Muhyiddin has many works. His most important works are *Fusus al-Hikam*³ and *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*. His book "Fusus al-Hikam" is a textbook in many Shi'a seminaries, as an advanced course on mysticism and philosophy for students of religious sciences. In the contemporary era, Imam Khomeini, Ayatollah Hassan Hassanzadeh Amoli and Ayatollah Abdollah Javadi Amoli are the most important masters of teaching *Fusus al-Hikam* in the Seminary of Qom in Iran. Many commentaries have been written on *Fusus al-Hikam* during the past centuries.⁴

The term "perfect human, "*Al-Insan al-Kamil*", is one of the main terms of Muḥyī al-Dīn's mysticism. The theory of the perfect human

is important in terms of the anthropology and cosmology of Islamic mysticism. This theory has similarities and parallels with the principle of "Imamat" which is one of the central principles of Shi'a Islam⁵. Muḥyī al-Dīn used the term "*Al-Insan al-Kamil*" for the first time in the first chapter of *Fusus al-Hikam* (chapter of Wisdom of God in the Word of Adam).⁶ He also employs this term in *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* and the treatise *Haqiqat al-Haqaiq*.

After Muḥyī al-Dīn, Sadr al-Din Qunawi, Mu Ayyid Al-Din Jandi, Abd al-Razzaq Kashani, Dawud al-Qaysari, Fakhr al-Din Iraqī and Mulla Sadra Shirazi explained and completed this discussion to some extent. Aziz al-Din Nasafi (d. 1287 C. E), a mystic of the 13th century, wrote "The Book of Perfect Human" and Sheikh Abdul Karim Jili (1365- 1424 C. E), a 15th-century mystic, wrote the book "*Al-Insan al-Kamil fi Ma'rifat al-Awakhir wa 'l-Awail*".⁷ Rumi did not explicitly use the term "perfect human" in the "Mathnawi", but he used a concept close to Muḥyī al-Dīn's "perfect human" which he referred to as "Perfect intellect"⁸, "Wali"⁹, "Imam Hayy Qaim", "Mahdi and Hadi"¹⁰.

«مر ترا عقلیست جزوی در نهان- کامل العقلی بجو اندر جهان»

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مهدی و هادی ویست ای راجو- هم نهان و هم نشستہ پیش رو»

Synonyms of the perfect human in Ibn Arabi's works are *Al-Insan Al-Haqiqi*¹¹, *Al-Insan Al-Azali*¹², *Insan Al-Insan*¹³, *Al-Abdul Al-Jami Al-Kuli*¹⁴, *Aql Awal*¹⁵, *Al-Barzakhiya Al-Awala*¹⁶, *Insan Al-Akmal*, *Al-Fard*¹⁷.

«انسان الانسان، العبد الجامع الكلّی، عقل اول، الانسان الحقیقی، الانسان الازلی، البرزخیة الاولى، الانسان الاكمل، الفرد»

The position of the perfect human being in the hierarchy of being:

The theory of the perfect human is related to the doctrines of *wahdat al-wujûd*, the Oneness of Being or the Unity of Existence, "teleology of creation" and "permanent reality" (a'yân thâbita) ¹⁸.

The perfect human being is the perfect embodiment of the *Haqiqat al-Muhammadiyya* (the *Muhammadiyya* reality) and he is comprehensive of all the truths of existence.

The *Muhammadiyya* reality is the first determination of the divine essence. A prophet, a messenger, and a guardian are the manifestations of this truth in the lower world, and the most perfect manifestation of it in this world is the Prophet of Islam (PBUH). ¹⁹

It is only the Perfect human that has been created by God in the image of God, "and God has created no one in his image except the perfect human being".²⁰ In *Fusus*, in the chapter Adam Ibn Arabi writes: "The human being relates to the God as the pupil relates to the eye, and through the pupil, seeing occurs. therefore, he is referred to as a human being (*Insan*) as through him *al-Haqq* looks at His creations and has mercy upon them."²¹

The human being that has reached the station of Perfect human, has become a manifestation of Divine perfection, which is also interpreted as "*Alam al-Akbar*". The perfect human is *Khalifat al-Allah* who renders the caliph or vicegerent of God. "The caliphate only applies to a perfect person, God said about him: "I will be his hearing and sight ". This is part of a famous hadith of the prophet which is referred to as "*Qurb Nawafil*". And it is stated in various Sunni and Shiite sources. ²² The perfect human being is the Reality that has appeared as the perfect human: "*fa Huwa al-Haq al-Khalq*".²³ He is the embodiment of the beautiful Divine names and is the full-view mirror of God. The perfect human being is "the rational soul of the world".²⁴

The perfect human is “the created pre-eternal human, the permanent eternal matter, and the comprehensive definitive word through whom the world became complete.”²⁵ “Eternal permanent matter” indicates the important point that at any time there will be one perfect human being alive and residing in the world. “*The definitive word*” refers to the perfect human being the one who gives minute expositions on the truth. The perfect human is a purgatory through whom the Divine bestows mercy upon his creation. “Comprehensive” means that he is the comprehensive manifestation of God's perfect attributes in the world of possibilities. He is comprehensive of all the truths of the world of possibilities.

Characteristics of a perfect human

The perfect human is complete in *Sharia* (law), *Tariqah* (path) and *Haqiqah* (Reality), and in good words and deeds and good morals, as well as in divine knowledge is superior to all others.²⁶

The perfect human being is the most perfect form that has been created, and no being has been created that is more complete than the perfect human.²⁷

The perfect human being is a being through whom the secrets of Haqq are revealed to Haqq. The secrets of Haqq refer to the perfections of God's essence, which only the perfect human can display them. Because the perfections of the Divine essence were in the absolute unseen, God willed to see them in the apparent world, thus he created the perfect human so that He may see Himself in the mirror of the perfect human's existence.²⁸

Because of the virtue of the perfect human, the creatures of the world are obedient to the perfect human. Due to the possession of Divine names, the perfect human being can seize the world and manage it. “Likewise, there is nothing in the world except that it is subjected to this person when He gives him His true Image.”²⁹

The perfect human being is the preserver, and guardian of the world, and as long as the perfect human being is in this world, the world and the treasure in it will also be preserved, and when this person leaves this world and steps into the realm of the hereafter, all of the treasures in it will be transferred to the hereafter.³⁰

The Supreme Name of the Most High must have a manifestation in the world, the perfect human being is the manifestation of the Supreme Name. He is the complete face of Hazrat Haqq and the comprehensive mirror of divine attributes. His rank is higher than possible and higher than the rank of creation. The perfect human is the purgatory between necessity and possibility.³¹

The ranks of the perfect human being

Prophet Muhammad is a perfect example of the perfect human being. Abdul Karim Jili (1421-1365 AD), the author of the book "*Al-Insan al-Kamil*", believes that in reality, Prophet Muhammad is the perfect human being, and the rest of the prophets and divine saints are attached to him.³²

After Prophet Muhammad, Ali bin Abi Talib and his eleven sons possess *Imamat*, purity, infallibility and knowledge of esoteric matters and hidden secrets. The last of them is Muhammad bin Al-Hasan al-Askar, the promised Mahdi and the saviour of the End of Time, he is the perfect human of our age.

Muḥyī al-Dīn believes that Imam Mahdi is alive and is in occultation, however, some of the pious have the honour of serving him. Muḥyī al-Dīn has said that he has visited Imam Mahdi (A.S) several times. Studying some of his works, especially the expanded chapter of 366 *Futuhāt*, illustrates his belief in the Mahdi who is a

descendant of Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet, and also of Hussain Ibn Ali.

Muḥyī al-Dīn wrote in *Futuhat*: For the *wilayat-e Mohammadiyah* (Muhammadan guardianship), there is a special sign and seal (*Khatam*); for the religion that was revealed to Muhammad. His name is "Mahdi" and he was born in our time. I have also seen him and accompanied him and observed his seal (*Khatam*); Therefore, after that noble person, no one is a *wali* (guardian), except the one who refers to him; Just as there is no prophet after Muhammad, peace be upon him unless he refers to that nobleman.³³

Seyyed Haider Amoli (1319-1385 AD) has stated in the book *Nass al-Nusus fi Sharh Fuss al-Hikam* that at present time, Muhammad bin Al-Hasan al-Askari is the perfect human being.³⁴

Sheikh Baha'i (1547-1621 AD) at the end of the commentary of the 36th hadith of his book *Al-Arba'in* summarized some passages of the 366th chapter of the *Futuhat* as follows: The words of Ibn Arabi, who stated in chapter 366 of the book *Futuhat al-Makiyya* about the promised Mahdi and the perfect human being of the End of Time: "God has a caliph from the descendants of the Prophet and from the children of Fatima, who will appear {at the end of time}. He has the same name as the Prophet and his ancestor is Hussain ibn Ali (peace be upon him).³⁵

Mulla Sadra Shirazi³⁶ (1571-1640 AD), the founder of the school of transcendental philosophy, who was also influenced by Ibn Arabi, in his commentary on Surah Yasin writes: "The best of the souls of the prophets, the soul of the seal and their leader, is "the Lord of all in all" And after him are the class of saints of the purified household, whose dynasty continues until the appearance of Mahdi (a.s.), the guardian of the End of Time.³⁷

Perfect human and Shi'ite

Ibn Arabi's concept and some titles of Perfect human are influenced by Twelver Shi'ism, particularly in regards to Shi'a conceptions of *Imamat* and *wilayah* or divine guardianship and some prominent Shi'a supplications.

For example, in the expression "Peace be upon you, O Eye of God, in His creation," Ibn Arabi refers to the Perfect human as the Eye of God (Allah) in the *Fass Adam* in *Fusus*. Or his writings about the Mahdi in *Futuh* are similar to "Du'a Nudba" (دُعَاءُ النُّدْبَةِ)³⁸:

اَيْنَ الْخَيْرَةِ بَعْدَ الْخَيْرَةِ

ayna alkhiyaratu ba`da alkhiyarati

Where is the best after the best?

اَيْنَ الشُّمُوسِ الطَّالِعَةِ

ayna alshshumusu alttali`atu

Where are the rising suns?

اَيْنَ الْأَقْمَارِ الْمُنِيرَةِ

ayna al-aqmaru almuniratu

Where are the shining moons?

اَيْنَ الْأَنْجُمِ الْزَّاهِرَةِ

ayna al-anjumu alzzahiratu

Where are the brilliant stars?

أَيْنَ أَعْلَامِ الدِّينِ

ayna a`lamu alddini

Where are the authorities of the religion

وَقَوَائِدُ الْعِلْمِ

wa qawa`idu al`ilmi

And the foundations of knowledge?

أَيْنَ بَقِيَّةِ اللَّهِ

ayna baqiyyatu allahi

Where is the remainder of Allah

الَّتِي لَا تَخْلُو مِنَ الْعَنْزَةِ الْهَادِيَةِ

allati la takhlu min al`itrati alhadiyati

That is always represented by individuals from the guiding
(Prophetic) offspring.

أَيْنَ الْمَعْدُ لِقَطْعِ دَابِرِ الظَّالِمَةِ

ayna almu`addu liqat`i dabiri alzzalamati

Where is the one prepared for cutting off the roots of the
wrongdoers?

أَيْنَ الْمُنتَظَرُ لِإِقَامَةِ الْأَمْتِ وَالْعِوَجِ

ayna almntazaru li`iqamati al-amti wal iwaji

Where is the one awaited for mending every unevenness and
crookedness?³⁹

Therefore, in my opinion, Muhyiddin and his followers' theory of the perfect human is symmetrical to the teachings of the Twelver Shi'a religion. Contemporary thinkers such as Ayatollah Morteza Motahari, Ayatollah Hassanzadeh Amoli, Ayatollah Seyed Ahmad Fehri, Seyed Jalaluddin Ashtiani, and Ayatollah Abdullah Javadi Amoli believe that Ibn Arabi's theory of the perfect human being and his Mahdism is influenced by Shia beliefs and are compatible with it.⁴⁰

Conclusion

The perfect human is the caliph of God and the perfect Manifestation of His Nature. He loves God and God loves him. The heart of the perfect human is the mirror of Truth. The perfect human is the alchemist, the elixir, the owner of the heart, the shadow of Truth, the door of God's mercy, the shadow of God, the guardian of God and the lion of Truth. The perfect human has four levels of perfection: good words, good deeds, good morals, and pure intuition and presence. The perfect human is a symbol of wisdom, patience, courage, virtue, generosity and kindness. The perfect human is responsible for leading and guiding people and human societies.

To reach God, the seeker must obey the instructions and guidance of a perfect human being. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Hazrat Muhammad, Hazrat Fatima and the Imams from Ali to Hazrat Sahib al-Zaman Muhammad bin Al-Hasan Al-Askari (AS) are clear examples of perfect human beings. The perfect example of a perfect human being is Muhammad, the Messenger of God.

In every age, there is a perfect human being to guide and lead humanity, and other saints are his successors in different places and communities. In the current age, Hazrat Muhammad bin Al-Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) who is a descendant of Imam Hussain (a.s.) is the

perfect human being and the perfect guardian of God. Accepting his guardianship and following him is obligatory for all seekers. Because in every era there is only one perfect human being who, by the will of God, is the owner of the absolute Divine Will. The rest of the Divine saints, mystics and great authorities are the perfect human's vicegerents.⁴¹

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Endnotes

¹ See a short introduction on his life, works and ontology at:

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ibn-arabi/>

² <https://philpapers.org/rec/SAFMSL> .

³ See: chrome-

extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://ibnarabisociety.org/wp-content/uploads/PDFs/Chittick_Fusus-chapter-headings.pdf .

⁴ The best commentaries of Fusus are Qunawī, al-Fukuk, Sharh-i al-Tilimsani, Sharh-i Qaysari, Jandi, Baba Rukna, Parsa, Jamu, Nablusi, Khwarazmi, Ibn Turka and Hasanzadeh Amoli.

⁵ <https://en.shafaqna.com/87990/shia-islam-history-and-doctrines/>

⁶ Ibn Arabi, Fusus al-Hikam, edited by Al-afifi, pp. 50, 54 and 55. Farsi translation by Shalchian, pp. 31, 41 and 43. Ibn Arabi, Fusus al-Hikam, edited by Al-afifi, p. 50.

⁷ See: Morrissey, Fitzroy, Sufism and the Perfect Human From Ibn ‘Arabī to al-Jīlī, Routledge, 2021.

⁸ Mathnawi, Nicholson edition, b1, verse 2052.

⁹ Mathnawi, Nicholson edition, b2, verse 815.

¹⁰ Mathnawi, Nicholson edition, b2, verse 817- 818. See : Safavi, Seyed Salman, Ethics and perfect human in Rumi’s perspective , Tehran, Salman and Azadeh publications, 4th edition, 2017, pp. 45-97.

¹¹ Ibn Arabi, Futuhat, 1972, p. 300.

¹² Ibn Arabi, Futuhat, 1972, p. 240.

¹³ Ibn Arabi, Futuhat, 1972, p. 327.

¹⁴ Ibn Arabi, Futuhat, 1972, p. 169-170.

¹⁵ Ibn Arabi, Futuhat, 1972, p. 300.

¹⁶ Ibn Arabi, al-Tajalliyat al-Ilahiyyah,, Ibn Sudkin's Notes, edition by Osman Yahya, Tehran, 1408/1988 AD., p. 248.

¹⁷ Ibn Arabi, al-Tajalliyat al-Ilahiyyah, p. 138-139

¹⁸ Fixed entities, immutable entities, archetypes; immutable archetypes; immutable entities; immutable, essences; permanent archetypes; unalterable essences.

¹⁹ Ibn Arabi, Fusus, Afifi, Vol. 1, p. 64 and 214, Tehran, 1370.

²⁰ Ibn Arabi, al-Futuhat al-Makiyya, Dar Sadr, vol. 3, p. 266.

²¹ Ibn Arabi, Fusus al-Hakam, edited by Abul Ala Afifi, Tehran: Al-Zahra Publications. P. 50

²² See Hanbal, Ahmad, Musnad Ahmad, vol. 6, p. 56 and Kulayni, Muhammad, Al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 352.

²³ Ibn Arabi, Fuss, corrected by Abul Ala Afifi, p. 56, Farsi translation by Shalchian, p. 44. Commentary on Baba Rukna's FusUs al-Hikam, p. 145.

²⁴ Ibn Arabi, *al-Futuhat al-Makiyya*, Dar Sadr, vol. 3, p. 266.

²⁵ Ibn Arabi, *Fusus al-Hikam*, Afifi's correction, p.50. Farsi translation by Shalchian, p. 29.

²⁶ Nasfi, *Kitab al-Insan al-Kamil*, p. 3.

²⁷ Ibn Arabi, *al-Futuhat al-Makiyya*, Dar Sadr, vol. 1, p. 163.

²⁸ Ibn Arabi, *Fusus al-Hikam*, edited by Afifi, Tehran: Al-Zahra Publications. P.47-48.

²⁹ Ibn Arabi, *Fusus al-Hikam*, edited by Afifi, Tehran: Al-Zahra Publications. P.50.

³⁰ Ibn Arabi, *Fusus al-Hikam*, edited by Afifi, Tehran: Al-Zahra Publications. P.75.

³¹ Ibn Arabi, *Fusus al-Hikam*, edited by Afifi, Tehran: Al-Zahra Publications. P.50.

³² Jili, *Al-Insan al-Kamil*, vol. 2, p. 44.

³³ Ibn Arabi, *Futuhat*, Egypt edition, vol. 1, p. 240, quoted by Hassanzadeh Amoli, *Irfan wa Hikmat al-Motaaliyeh*, p. 43.

³⁴ Amoli, *Nass al-Nusus fi Sharh Fusus al-Hikam*, p. 279.

³⁵ Sheikh Baha'i, *Arba'in*, p. 157; Also see: Khatunabadi, translation of *Arbaeen*, pp. 554-556.

³⁶ See: Safavi, Seyed Salman, *Mulla Sadra: Life and Philosophy*, London, 2018.

³⁷ Mulla Sadra, *Interpretation of the Qur'an*, vol 5, p. 53.

³⁸ *Du'a Nudba* (دُعَاءُ النَّدْبَةِ) is one of the major Shia supplications about Imam Al-Mahdi. The supplication is recited every Friday morning and during Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Ghadeer.

³⁹ <https://www.duas.org/mobile/dua-nudba.html>

⁴⁰ See The collection of the works of Shahid Motahari, Vol. 4, p. 944, Fahri, Ahmad, *Maraqad Ahl al-Sham*, p. 90. *Tafsir Fatiha al-Ketab*, introduction by Seyyed Jalaluddin Ashtiani. *Rasail Qaysari*, Introduction by Seyyed Jalaluddin Ashtiani, p. 129. *Conversation with Allameh Hassanzadeh Amoli*, by Mohammad Badiei, p. 202. *Hasanzadeh Amoli, Mysticism and transcendental wisdom*, p. 43. *Javadi Amoli, Voices of Tawheed*, p. 85. *Hasan Zadeh Amoli, One Thousand and One Words*, Vol. 1, p. 88; Also see: *Description of the section on the infallible wisdom in the Fatimid word*, p. 103.

⁴¹ Safavi, Salman, *Irfan Thaqaalain*, p.87.

The Metaphysics of Trauma

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Abstract

Trauma, which has become a hallmark of everyday life in the modern world, forms part of the broader mental health crisis that afflicts society today. It also, arguably, reflects a lost sense of the sacred. Throughout humanity's diverse cultures, suffering is understood to be intrinsic to the larger fabric of life in this world; trauma, therefore, is a direct consequence of not being able to properly integrate suffering into one's life. However, this is not to simply equate suffering with trauma, or trauma with illness. The prevalence of acute traumatic suffering has always been a major cause of disbelief in religion. Yet the increased weakening of faith in the modern world has provoked a particularly severe spiritual crisis, which could be dubbed the "trauma of secularism." Through recourse to traditional metaphysics, we can begin to understand the transpersonal

dimension of this phenomenon and thus accurately assess, diagnose and provide adequate treatment. It will be argued that healing and wholeness cannot take place outside the purview of a “sacred science,” the spiritual dimension of which transcends the limitations of mainstream psychology and its profusion of profane therapies.

Keywords: Trauma, Psychology, Metaphysics, Religion, Healing

“He knows the pain ... therefore he does not have it.”¹

– Tao Te Ching

“God comes to you in the disguise of suffering.”²

– Ānandamayī Mā

“The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?”

– Proverbs 18:14

“If you only knew the worth of suffering, / You would have chosen it ahead of anything.”³

– Angelus Silesius

“Where there is pain, the cure will come.”⁴

– Rūmī

Introduction

To have experienced something so painful that words cannot describe it; to feel so wounded that we do not want to remember what happened to us, even though we cannot forget; to be trapped within the isolated confines of our own skin, as if held captive like a prisoner, yet feeling safe neither within ourselves or in the outside world; to be all alone with the turmoil inside us, our only companion being the troubling thoughts that assail our minds; to be unable to live in the world or to focus on our immediate experience and what transcends it, so that this inability becomes itself a reminder of the pain we feel; to know that this experience has come to define us, even though we are unable to free ourselves from its all-encompassing grip (all the while yearning to be liberated from this affliction): all of these ordeals offer a glimpse into the world of trauma.

As if out of nowhere, psychological *trauma* has become a commonly used term in everyday life. Although use of this word to signify a profound psychological wound is recent, it has long been used in the medical profession. Yet the reality of suffering goes back since time immemorial, recognized as central to human existence; and trauma may be understood as the inability to adequately integrate suffering into our lives. Many people experience traumatic events, yet not everyone becomes traumatized as a result. For this reason, it is important not to equate having lived through a potentially traumatic experience with trauma itself. What is distinctive about the present-day understanding of trauma or suffering is that it has become a problem to be ultimately resolved at a purely worldly level. In other words, that it can be eliminated from the human condition once and for all so that we may be allowed to live in a state of unfettered happiness. This is to overlook the nature of our existence in an ephemeral world that is replete with trials and tribulations. Alternatively, “We must not wish for the disappearance of any of our troubles, but grace to transform them.”⁵ The so-called problem of trauma or suffering is inseparable from

the loss of a sense of the sacred, which is intrinsic to the condition of our *samsāric* or fallen state.

The fact that trauma, on a collective level, is so widely discussed today reveals not only our vulnerability, but the precarious state – if not spiritual crisis – of the modern world. This raises the question: Is there something triggering about the modern world itself that is creating these conditions? Or is it just a matter of us now having a heightened awareness of the different types of trauma that are prevalent today: complex trauma, historical trauma, and intergenerational trauma? There is something peculiar about this phenomenon, as just about everyone has been wounded by it, in a way that is inseparable from the larger mental health crisis in our topsy-turvy era.

The Wounds of Secularism

On closer consideration, there appears to be a deeper dimension to the mass traumatization we see in present day, which often goes unnoticed. This is a form of anguish due to the loss of a sense of the sacred – what we might call the *trauma of secularism*. The vacuum that has been created in the modern world due to the loss of religion is not something that should be taken lightly, yet it is often unrecognized because of the hegemonic dominance of science and its empirical epistemology that rules out alternative ways of knowing reality. However, for many people, illness, suffering or trauma can – in themselves – impel a search for the sacred.

An important element missing in early attempts to define adverse experiences is the fragmentation that occurs within ourselves. This can occur when our transpersonal Self is lost sight of which, in turn, leads people to exclusively identify who they are with their mind-sense-body complex. A traumatic event can split our identity and cause a myriad of problems. Trauma can thus be defined as “an event in the subject’s life defined by its intensity, by the subject’s

incapacity to respond adequately to it, and by the upheaval and long-lasting effects that it brings about in the psychical organization.”⁶

The founder of the talking-cure, Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), wrote: “We apply it [trauma] to an experience which within a short period of time presents the mind with an increase of stimulus too powerful to be dealt with or worked off in the normal way, and this must result in permanent disturbances of the manner in which the energy operates.”⁷ Elsewhere he wrote: “Neurosis could ... be equated with a traumatic illness and would come about owing to inability to deal with an experience whose affective colouring was excessively powerful.”⁸

When human beings experienced suffering – prior to the emergence of the modern world – it did not cause them to lose their faith; yet the existence of trauma today is, in many cases, the chief cause of unbelief. The argument is that if a powerful and benevolent divine reality existed, why do we find so much evil and suffering in the world? As the wound inflicted on our collective psyche has become more palpable in the present age, there is perhaps nothing more urgent than the need to revive a true psychology – grounded in metaphysics – or “science of the soul” that can effect the healing required to restore our spiritual health.

The Significance of Anguish

Among many spiritual traditions, illness, suffering, and trauma are viewed as a blessing because they provide an opportunity to purify and transform ourselves, thus strengthening our reliance on the Divine. As St. Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582) affirms: “Suffering is to purify this soul.”⁹ However, this does not necessarily happen automatically for it often requires us to undergo the discipline of submitting to a divinely revealed therapy as found in all spiritual traditions. There is an intimate relationship between suffering or

trauma and the spiritual path, yet we need to be careful with our terminology here because we are not equating suffering with trauma or trauma with illness *per se*; but, rather, acknowledging that a transition through suffering or an illness is a component of healing trauma.

Through our participation in one of humanity's revealed religions, we may undergo *metanoia* or a profound 'change of heart,' which is the true source of all healing. The "dark night of the soul" as expounded by the Spanish mystic St. John of the Cross (1542–1591) conveys the experience of a total absence of divine light and hope. This necessitated a great deal of suffering for St. John, but the spiritual journey out of this abyss led him to a far-reaching transformation of his being. The Buddha taught that human existence consists of an abiding dissatisfaction, known as *dukkha* (Pāli; Sanskrit: *duḥkha*) and he became awakened to the 'Four Noble Truths' which are: (1) the existence of suffering; (2) the cause of suffering; (3) the end of suffering; and (4) the path leading out of suffering. Undertaking a spiritual path can thus be seen as a remedy to tackle the effects of suffering, pain, or even trauma, by restoring wholeness to our psyche.

With the rise of trauma-informed therapies, it is often overlooked that the anguish of living in a world devoid of spiritual nourishment is tremendously detrimental, as this has proven to be an invaluable support for human resilience and well-being. Psychology today attempts to assess, diagnose, and treat trauma without acknowledging the anguish caused by secularism. Without understanding the historical developments that led to the rise of modernity—the fruition of the Age of Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—it is difficult to understand how this profane trajectory radically undermined the collective psyche. The discipline of modern psychology has unapologetically participated in this anti-spiritual outlook which, at the same time – paradoxically and unknowingly – has also attempted to remedy the situation. Bereft of any metaphysical foundations, psychology today

remains adrift in a self-contradictory morass because it has failed to address the problem at its root.

By being born, we are subject to duality, which leads to an estrangement from the Absolute in this world. As such, entry into our temporal world of relativity inflicts a psychic wound in us. “The individual suffers because he perceives duality.... Find the One everywhere and in everything and there will be an end to pain and suffering.”¹⁰ Human beings find themselves trapped in a realm of perishable forms that expose us to separation, suffering, and death. Beyond manifestation, there is no separate self that suffers or can be traumatized. Due to their fallen condition, Adam and Eve lost their capacity for direct spiritual knowing, causing alienation from the Divine and discord between themselves. This led to the infliction of the primordial wound – a loss of the sense of the sacred and the corruption of the Intellect or “eye of the heart”; that part of us which religious traditions assert is our means of discerning spiritual reality directly.

It could be said that this wound is exacerbated by all other suffering or trauma in that it keeps us bound to our experience of this temporal reality, especially when we face adverse events. To lose our intrinsic spiritual vision is to abide in a *cul-de-sac* of *profound darkness*. “The house without a window is hell” says *Rūmī*, adding: “The foundation of religion ... is to make windows!”¹¹

The obscuration of our “eye of the heart” helps us to understand the well-known declaration by Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) that “Hell is other people!”¹² This outlook aptly frames the predicament of the modernist perspective which views everything, and everyone, as a problem.

Emotionally detrimental experiences can often provoke us to view others as hellish, but it is the hell we harbor within us of which we ought to be most fearful, because everything begins to mirror this overwhelming abyss that we project onto the world. This, in turn, prevents us from seeing our divine true self, which is immanent in

all people and living things. It is only by awakening the “eye of the heart” that life’s conflicts can be ameliorated and lasting mental health achieved.

Mainstream therapies are unable to treat the whole person as they often just target the treatment of symptoms, not the root cause of our mental health difficulties. Rarely do we hear asked: “What is behind the symptom?”¹³ Yet if you trace this back to its source, we often find a traumatic event, which may be the “overarching rubric under which most other disorders are subordinated.”¹⁴ Yet it could be said that, at the heart of all traumas, is our *samsāric* or fallen state. Many therapists and researchers are finding that numerous mental health diagnostic categories overlap and are triggered by a traumatic event. There is a strong connection between trauma, mental disturbance, physical illness, and addiction. Yet, through recourse to spiritual means, we may be better placed to access the foundations of trauma, to heal its wounds, and to restore wholeness.

At the root of the crisis in modern psychology is the ‘Cartesian bifurcation,’ the dualism between mind and body (along with matter) that has plagued the mindset of the contemporary West since the seventeenth century. In this myopic and truncated outlook, human beings become separate from reality, and everything is objectified, further entrenching the psyche in a subject-object dichotomy. This perpetuates the illusion of a fragmented worldview and an isolated self, which severs to undermine our relationship to the sacred. This leads to a truncated identity that desacralizes the cosmos and traumatizes humanity. When the Intellect or “eye of the heart” is restored to its integral condition, the person no longer views reality as fragmented but, rather, considers each phenomenon as mirroring the unity of this created order.

Every true “science of the soul” takes into account the human psyche in light of sacred cosmology:

In the Golden Age, all people experienced their essence, no holes. Then came the Silver Age as essence diminished and the holes

began to appear; then the Bronze Age. Now we're in the Iron Age. It's the darkest, heaviest. Iron is really nothing but defense. We can sometimes feel the quality of iron in our own defenses: the hardness, the determination to protect ourselves. So this is one way of viewing the present time—all defenses against holes.¹⁵

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877–1947) acknowledges the connection between human behavior and the underlying cosmic order: “The pattern of man’s behavior is not to be found in any code, but in the principles of the universe, which is continually revealing to us *its own nature*.”¹⁶ Today, psychology and the field of mental health do not consider cosmic cycles and how they determine the human mind according to the time and place in which it finds itself. Nor do they account for how these changes are connected to the gradual distancing of the human psyche from the Spirit, which is essential to any assessment, diagnosis, and treatment with a view to restoring wholeness.

Across the diverse traditional cultures of humanity, this bifurcation does not exist, as it is recognized that we are composed of Spirit, soul, and body. Within each of the world’s religions –Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and the traditions of the First Peoples – there exists a corresponding psychology that is fully integrated and grounded in the sacred. To provide wholeness and healing to the human psyche requires metaphysics to restore an ontological dimension to psychology so that it can become, once again, a true “science of the soul.” It is only through such a ‘salvific’ psychology that the discipline can be rehabilitated as something that will overcome the acute limitations of its modern Western form.

The spiritual traditions all teach that human faculties, including our emotions, need to be contained within their proper sphere in order to be properly harmonized. However, emotions are not to be elevated to the level of principles that guide our thoughts and behavior; to do so would lead to an unstable psyche. Contrary to the

notion that “The psyche is a self-regulating system that maintains its equilibrium just as the body does,”¹⁷ it is, in fact, the spiritual dimension that regulates the soul and the body. The Intellect – being synonymous with Spirit – is above all the faculties, including the psycho-physical order, which integrates them.

The intermediary realm of the human psyche is mysterious, as has been acknowledged: “There is nothing so unknown to the soul as herself.”¹⁸ For this reason, to understand and heal the human psyche requires a spiritual ‘infusion’ from what transcends it. If, when in a state of disequilibrium, emotions are allowed to direct our lives, then exposure to suffering and trauma will become considerably heightened. When we are feeling depressed or anxious, it does not necessarily mean that the entire world is out of balance; and likewise, if we are hurt, it should not suggest that the Divine is somehow unjust towards us. Similarly, if we encounter personal tragedy, this does not entail that the rest of creation has been harmed. We need to add a caveat here that, although the existential alienation that many feel today is a sign of a decline in the cosmic cycle, it needs to be made clear that not everything we experience in our lives is necessarily a consequence of the *Kali-Yuga* or “Dark Age.” Those who have sundered themselves from religion, may struggle more when experiencing suffering or may be ‘triggered’ to a larger extent than those who adhere to a revealed religion. According to Gai Eaton (1921–2010):

When misfortune strikes profane people they suffer on two levels and their pain is doubled. On the one hand, there is the misfortune as such and the pain they feel; on the other, there is the belief that it should never have happened and that its happening proves something very bitter and very ugly about the nature of the world (and if they bring God into it, then about the nature of God). They suffer because ‘something is wrong’; and then they suffer again because ‘everything is wrong’.¹⁹

Because human beings are subject to the constraints of time and cannot see into the future, they cannot fully grasp why certain things happen in the world or whether there is any divine purpose behind them. In other words, the significance of such events cannot be understood *sub specie aeternitatis* ('under the aspect of eternity'). The book of *Ecclesiastes* declares: "That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been" (3:15). The well-known Chinese allegory of the horse that ran away also comes to mind here:

The poor old man ... lived with his son in a ruined fort at the top of a hill. He owned a horse which strayed off one day, whereupon the neighbours came to offer sympathy at his loss. 'What makes you supposed that this is misfortune?' the old man asked. Later the horse returned accompanied by several wild horses and this time the neighbours came to congratulate him on his good luck. 'What makes you think this is good luck?' he enquired. Having a number of horses now available, the son took to riding and, as a result, broke his leg. Once more the neighbours rallied round to express sympathy and once again the old man asked how they could know that this was misfortune. Then the next year war broke out and because he was lame the son was exempt from going to the war.²⁰

Existence in our ephemeral world consists of both gifts and losses. Much of our well-being depends on how we view these vicissitudes. According to the Austrian psychotherapist Alfred Adler (1870–1937): "We do not suffer from the shock of [traumatic] experiences ... we make out of them just what suits our purposes."²¹ Because of the limited purview into our existence, we are unable to readily discern what is inimical to us or in our best interests, seeing as events in life may be other than how they appear. We recall that "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away" (Job 1:21).

The condition known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is well known today. It concerns the experience of terrifying events with which we cannot cope. There may also be flashbacks or a vivid

experience where the person relives certain aspects of a traumatic episode as if it were occurring here-and-now. Other symptoms may include nightmares, severe anxiety, or uncontrollable thoughts pertaining to the event. It is essential not to pathologize trauma and equate it with mental illness, as it is an event that *happened* to them; it is not who the person *is*. The same goes for a person suffering from mental illness; the diagnosis is not who we truly are. We cannot “treat” the impact of war, rape, molestation, natural calamities, or any other horrific encounter; what has occurred cannot be undone. With that said, we can treat the imprints of trauma on the human psyche and body.

Aeschylus (c. 525–c. 456) alludes to the wisdom that can be conferred by trauma:

“Knowledge won through suffering. / Drop, drop—in our sleep, upon the heart / sorrow falls, memory’s pain, / and to us, though against our very will, / even in our own despite, / comes wisdom / by the awful grace of God.”²²

The arising of metaphysical insight may help us to see that trauma does not define us, and that suffering can never touch our true self. Furthermore, we are called to be receptive to what adverse experiences have to teach us, perplexing or enigmatic though they may be. The great mystical poet of Tibet, Milarepa (c. 1052–c. 1135), shares the transformative experience of the loss of his most prized possession, demonstrating the impermanence of all phenomena:

I once had a pot, now I do not....

This clay pot so important, the whole of my wealth,
Becomes my lama [teacher] in the moment it breaks,
Teaching impermanence, how amazing!²³

Religion and spirituality are vital in supporting psychological integration and resilience. Yet, when cut off from sacred traditions,

people are more prone to become attached to their suffering, rather than seeing it as an inevitable feature of a finite, transitory, and imperfect world.

There are many cases today in which the effects of a traumatic event do not dissipate on their own, but rather fester and worsen: “The psychical trauma—or more precisely the memory of the trauma—acts like a foreign body which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work.”²⁴ Thus the soul’s response to trauma often becomes the problem more so than the traumatic event itself.

People will be unable to overcome traumatic events unless they acknowledge what has happened to them. Mainstream psychology often constructs a narrative to explain why a person thinks and behaves in the way they do. In the words of Sigmund Freud: “While the patient lives [the trauma] through as something real and actual, we have to accomplish the therapeutic task, which consists chiefly in translating it back again into terms of the past.”²⁵ Dating back to the earliest beginnings of the “talking cure,” it has been assumed that trauma “immediately and permanently disappeared when we had succeeded in bringing clearly to light the memory of the event by which it was provoked and in arousing its accompanying affect.”²⁶ However, this is not so easy to do, as traumatic events can transcend the limits of language and thus remain ineffable.

As trauma is pre-verbal, not having the language to speak about it can instill a great deal of fear and anxiety. William Shakespeare (1564–1616) writes: “O horror, horror, horror! Tongue nor heart cannot conceive nor name thee! Confusion now hath made his masterpiece!”²⁷ The saints and sages remind us that Ultimate Reality or the Absolute escapes all attempts to be captured in words. Although language cannot contain what transcends the psycho-physical order, it can help point to the Real, if informed by traditional metaphysics.²⁸

Words can be useful if we understand them in the way indicated by the Buddha; namely as a finger pointing at the moon. In the Taoist tradition, we find the affirmation: “The Way that can be told of is not an Unvarying Way.”²⁹ The mindful use of language can be therapeutic, as Shakespeare points out: “Give sorrow words: the grief that does not speak / Whispers the o’er-fraught heart, and bids it break.”³⁰ While mainstream talking therapies can contribute to symptom reduction or management, they are not enough to support healing and wholeness; a metaphysics with a sacred orientation is also needed to fully understand the non-verbal cues that are linked to the human ternary of Spirit, soul, and body.

As every person is fundamentally unique, we need to exercise extreme humility when entering into a therapeutic relationship with those seeking help. The importance of authentic presence and empathy, including silence and the willingness to listen deeply, is essential in treating people with trauma. What is missing from mainstream approaches to psychology is the transpersonal dimension, which no longer informs the discipline’s outlook.

Resolving Disturbance Through Metaphysics

Austrian psychiatrist Viktor Frankl (1905–1997) documents how faith provided strength and resilience to those who survived the atrocities of the Holocaust: “They were able to retreat from their terrible surroundings to a life of inner riches and spiritual freedom.”³¹ Frankl starkly asserts that the “cure is self-transcendence.”³² Fritz Perls (1893–1970) is correct, in principle, when he remarks that “You never overcome *anything* by resisting it. You only can overcome something by going deeper into it.... Whatever it is, if you go deeply enough into it, then it will disappear; it will be assimilated”;³³ however, without access to a reality that transcends the human condition, there is no agency to remedy our suffering or trauma, or to reintegrate the human psyche into the sacred.

It is the transpersonal dimension that guides the assessment, treatment, and healing of a person. Therefore, being a wayfarer on a spiritual path is indispensable. As St. John Cassian (c. 360–c. 435) writes: “The Doctor of our souls has also placed the remedy in the hidden regions of the soul.”³⁴ According to ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib (d. 661): “Your cure is within you, but you do not know.”³⁵ Being an active witness to another person’s suffering can be therapeutic in and of itself when framed in a spiritual context. Rūmī says: “Your ears are turned entirely toward the cries of the distressed, and your eyes totally toward the weeping of those who have suffered injustice—thus you apply salve to their wounds and extend a helping hand.”³⁶

*As the saints and sages of all traditions attest, there is no trauma that cannot be healed and from which we cannot move beyond. We were, after all, born whole and complete, and it is this fact that confers a much-needed context. In the words of Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998), trauma “has no right to be absolute; it is there to be overcome and to be assimilated in view of that which is the reason for being of our life and of our very existence.”*³⁷

In essence, it is the way in which things are perceived (rather than events in themselves) that either supports our recovery and spiritual health or disturbs the equilibrium of the human psyche. *We recall that “God burdens a soul only to its capacity” (Qur’ān 2:286), and, likewise, “God ... will not suffer you ... above that ye are able ... to bear” (1 Corinthians 10:13).* We must not minimize human suffering, as each person has their own unique trials in this reality; however, we must also not forget that all suffering including trauma has an underlying meaning, for “A suffering which has no possible use would be pure evil.”³⁸

Regarding the spiritual meaning of suffering, Śrī Rāmakrishna (1836–1886), said: “You are suffering; but your illness has a deep meaning.”³⁹ Śrī Ramana Maharshi (1879–1950) goes as far as to say: “Suffering is the way for Realisation of God.”⁴⁰ As Śrī

Ānandamayī Mā (1896–1982) stated: “By sorrow does the Lord dispel sorrow and by adversity does He destroy adversity. When this is done He sends no more suffering—this must be borne in the mind at all times.”⁴¹ Hehaka Sapa, or Black Elk (1863–1950), voices the importance of self-sacrifice in the form of intentional suffering: “I shall ... offer my body and soul to *Wakan-Tanka* [Great Spirit] ... that our people may live.”⁴² Meister Eckhart (1260–1328) addresses the spiritual significance of adversity: “Everything the good man suffers for God’s sake, he suffers in God, and God is suffering with him in his suffering. But if my suffering is in God and God is suffering with me, how then can suffering be sorrow to me, if suffering loses its sorrow, and my sorrow is in God, and my sorrow is God?”⁴³ Eckhart adds: “Since you ... know that it is God’s will ... do not consider any pain as pain.”⁴⁴

Within the Christian tradition, the experience of suffering can unite the person with the suffering of Christ and its redemptive power. Syncretica (c. 270–c. 350) equates suffering to a medicine that can heal: “In the same way that a powerful medicine cures an illness, so illness itself is a medicine.”⁴⁵ St. Maximus the Confessor (c. 580–662) notes: “The person who truly wishes to be healed is he who does not refuse treatment. This treatment consists of the pain and distress brought on by various misfortunes. He who refuses them does not realize what they accomplish in this world or what he will gain from them when he departs this life.”⁴⁶ Similarly, the mystic and physician Paracelsus (1493–1541) upholds the same principle when he writes: “Decay is the beginning of all birth ... the midwife of very great things!”⁴⁷ Lilian Staveley (c. 1878–1928) observes: “We have no sufferings that are not useful to us.”⁴⁸ Within the Islamic tradition, there is the *ḥadīth qudsī*: “I am with those whose hearts are broken for My sake.”

The Sufi poet and mystic Rūmī (1207–1273) makes the following point about suffering (from the perspective of the Divine): “I have wounded your heart—lay no salve on the wound I inflict!”⁴⁹ In contrast to the prevailing secular mindset, some forms of suffering

or trauma require the person to actively surrender to the Divine in order to ask for healing, and thus to embark on a sacred journey to restore wholeness. Without the person knowing it, the purpose of this journey is not the healing in and of itself, but to draw the person closer to the Divine, seeing as our suffering – at its root – is caused by our separation from the spiritual realm. Rūmī stresses the importance of the human body as a vehicle for our life in this temporal world; also for the need to embrace our embodiment without becoming ensnared by it: “This body is a guest-house.... Every morning a new guest comes running. Beware! Do not say, ‘I am left with him on my neck,’ for in any case he will soon fly back to Nonexistence. Whatever comes from the Unseen World into your heart is a guest—welcome it!”⁵⁰

Although our physical body is necessary for our existence in this reality, our true sense of safety needs to always be anchored in what is beyond the spatio-temporal order. Ānandamayī Mā elucidates the need to situate our consciousness in the Eternal or transpersonal order, even as we remain a guest in the human body: “My consciousness has never associated itself with this temporary body. Before I came on this earth ... I was the same. As a little girl, I was the same. I grew into womanhood; [but] still I was the same.”⁵¹ If we trace suffering back to its genesis, the true source can be recognized: “The origin is the wrong identification of the body with the Self.”⁵²

Uncovering Our Innate Wholeness

No matter how hopeless someone may appear, they will always have an indwelling connection to the Spirit – something which can never be taken away. Each person, no matter what their circumstances, is born with an indestructible wholeness. Human beings are created in the “image of God” (Genesis 1:27), which can be distorted by sin but never eradicated. This is described by one Christian writer in the following way: “The *nous* [Intellect or Spirit

(*pneuma*)] is in effect the image of God in man. This image can be masked or soiled by sin, but it cannot be destroyed: it is the indelible mark of man's most profound being, of his veritable nature, the *logos* or constitutive principle of which cannot be altered."⁵³ Eaton writes: "Man cannot ... lose his theomorphism, his likeness to the divine image, however deeply this likeness may be covered in filth. Not even the most corrosive acid could ever destroy the divine imprint."⁵⁴ All spiritual traditions affirm that our transpersonal Self cannot be lost because we are never deprived of the Divine Presence – "Grace is always there."⁵⁵ To be confined to our traumas prevents us from becoming who we truly are. Human suffering stems from our identification with a self that is cut off from the Divine.

Salvific psychology views human beings as both geomorphic (of the earth) and theomorphic (of the Spirit) – both temporal and eternal – and who find themselves at the intersection of the horizontal and vertical dimensions of reality. *Duo sunt in homine* ("There are two [natures] in man")⁵⁶ was an axiom in the West prior to the emergence of the Renaissance that recognized both our corporeal and spiritual natures. Mainstream psychology focuses on the diagnosis and treatment of the outer human being, unaware that its materialist outlook excludes the "inward man" (Romans 7:22). All wounds in this life are limited to the surface of our being and cannot undermine our innermost Self. To be fully human is to recognize our fundamental relationship with the Spirit, which is to say that our true identity *in divinis* is the primordial state (*fiṭrah*), the "image of God" (*imago Dei*), Buddha-nature (*Buddha-dhātu*), or the Self (*Ātmā*). For this reason, the universal and timeless wisdom found throughout the world's diverse spiritual cultures teaches an essential truth: "Your natural state is one of happiness."⁵⁷

In Buddhism, each of us is said to consist of five psycho-physical aggregates or "heaps" known as *khandhas* (Sanskrit: *skandhas*): (1) Form (*rūpa*); (2) Sensation or Feeling (*vedanā*); (3) Perception (*sañña*); (4) Mental formations (*saṅkhāras*); and (5) Consciousness

(*viññāṇa*). However, the existence of these aggregates does not exclude the existence of the Self (*Ātman*) that is not bound to birth, old age, sickness, and death. The Buddha does not take issue with the Hindu understanding of the Self (*Ātman*) as *neti, neti* (“not this, not that”) which, by means of a double negation, conveys an apophatic understanding that eliminates all determinate conceptions, leaving in its place only the consciousness of that which is – the Self alone; all that is not this is the non-Self (*anattā*).

This position is indicated in the Buddha’s words: “What is not self, that is not my [true] self” (*yad anattā ... na meso attā*) (*Samyutta Nikāya*, iii. 45, iv. 2).⁵⁸ An awareness of *neti-neti* helps us to dis-identify from the phenomena that arise in our consciousness; yet this does not mean that we become sundered from the psycho-physical order, because we are still required to be fully aware of our tripartite nature as Spirit, soul, and body. In other words, we need to abide in what transcends the psycho-physical order while, simultaneously, remaining with our body. By means of one of humanity’s hollowed paths of return, we are able to ground ourselves in what has been termed a salvific psychology that can heal and restore our wholeness.

However challenging, deprived or traumatic our circumstances may be, we must not ignore that we are called to be “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). According to the Qur’ān, we were fundamentally “created to worship God” (51:56). This awareness will allow us to endure – and even flourish – despite the disturbing vicissitudes of the world. Additionally, the spiritual traditions teach us that to become who we are meant to be is to take a path that is far from easy; a life devoted to the sacred will inevitably be laden with challenges and difficulties. As Mencius (Mengzi, 372–289) remarked: “Sorrow and trouble bring life, whereas ease and pleasure bring death.”⁵⁹ Brother Lawrence (c. 1611–1691) articulates the ideal state of surrender to God: “Be satisfied with the condition in which God places you.... Pains and sufferings would be a Paradise to me, while I should suffer with my God; and the

greatest pleasures would be hell to me, if I could relish them without Him; all my consolation would be to suffer something for His sake.”⁶⁰

Ultimately, as we are taught in the Qur’ān, “Surely we belong to God, and to Him we return” (2:156) and, similarly, Black Elk reminds us that “Everything comes from Him, and sooner or later everything returns to Him.”⁶¹ It is through participating in a valid religious tradition that our adverse experiences can be understood, healed, and utilized to strengthen our connection to the Divine: “In order to vanquish ... traumas ... man must avail himself not only of that sacramental grace which is Invocation, but also of his intelligence, of his will, and of prayer.”⁶²

Conclusion

We cannot conclude this essay without also mentioning the existence of a very unfortunate phenomenon that has emerged in the field of trauma studies. Trauma-informed practices have, in many ways, become a much popularized, profit-generating industry with countless experts and therapeutic programs proliferating throughout the world. This trend not only muddies the waters but, again, is a sign of the times in that it stems directly from the spiritual vacuum that distinguishes the present age.

Suffering is inherent to our life in this world – “for it must needs be that offences come” (Matthew 18:7); however, it is not that God wants us to suffer *per se* but, rather, that He wants us to fully surrender our hearts and minds. In many ways, our temporal ordeals are attributable to humanity’s estrangement from the Divine, which disfigures our primordial nature and obscures our supernal vision – for “their hearts were hardened” (Mark 6:52). Willingly offering our travails to the working of divine grace infuses them with spiritual value. The natural need to feel safe in body and mind is intrinsic to our psychological integrity and well-being, yet our sense of safety

can often be undermined by the earthly tribulations that fuel the anguish in our lives.

St. Teresa of Ávila writes about turning ourselves towards the Divine: “Until we are there where nothing can cause pain this suffering will not be taken away.”⁶³ In essence, the modern world has been triggered and traumatized by its disjunction from the sacred; the remedy is in returning to one of humanity’s divinely revealed spiritual traditions, and grounding ourselves in a saving wisdom that is neither of the East or the West.

Islam teaches that “God alters not what is in a people until they alter what is in themselves” (Qur’ān 13:11) and, according to a prophetic saying, “for every disease there is a cure.” Commitment to a religious tradition can offer the most effective means of ensuring spiritual resilience, sound mental health, and the effective healing of traumas. If we survey the trajectory of our lives, we often find that it is through the existence of illness, suffering, and other trials that a deep-seated transformation can be catalyzed in our hearts. We conclude with a prayer from the Buddhist tradition: “May all sentient beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.”⁶⁴

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Avicenna's metaphysics of universals

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Abstract

The metaphysical problem of universals, roughly speaking, concerns whether universals exist in the extra-mental world. Avicenna resolves the problem by distinguishing the quiddity from the universal: the quiddity or essence in itself exists in the extramental world, while the universal is only in the mind. Some contemporary scholars maintain that this theory is ambiguous, identifying two alternative interpretations for Avicenna's doctrine: epistemological and ontological. My aim in this essay is to clarify his theory and assess the alternative readings.

Keywords: Quiddity in itself; Universal; Particular; Mental existence; Extramental existence.

Introduction

The metaphysical problem of universals, roughly speaking, concerns whether universals exist in the extra-mental world. Giving a positive answer to this question requires that we face the problem of the ‘one and the many’: how can the same entity exist in multiple instances? If there is humanity in the extramental world, for instance, that same humanity would exist in different individual men: yet this seems to be implausible. If the universal is *common* between different instances, it must be both one and many! Avicenna does give a positive answer to the question of the extra-mental reality of universals, and consequently cannot avoid this problem. His answer, though, is by no means a simple affirmation. Rather, it is characterized by many distinctions, qualifications, expositions, and clarifications.¹ Hence, though the description of his theory might at first seem easy, on a closer look it turns out to be anything but. It is no simple matter to be sure of getting it right.

M. E. Marmura, for instance, has maintained that some technical terms in Avicenna’s theory are marked by ambiguity and, therefore, that the theory is insufficiently clear or explicit. In addition, he has argued that Avicenna’s solution to the metaphysical problem faces a dilemma. Based on the ambiguity alleged by Marmura, Giorgio Pini has recently proposed two alternative readings for Avicenna’s theory: epistemological and ontological. My first aim in this paper is to give an account of Avicenna’s theory of universals. My exposition is restricted to the *metaphysical* aspects of his theory: although Avicenna also raised logical and psychological problems regarding universals, I will not discuss those. In the second section, I criticize the epistemological reading of the theory and show that the only plausible reading is ontological. Finally, I respond to Marmura’s purported dilemma.

Avicenna's theory of universals

Avicenna begins his discussion of universals by clarifying what he means by 'a universal meaning' [4: 195].² According to his theory, it is a meaning³ that can be predicated of many things; in other words, a universal meaning might be shared by many distinct entities. A universal is different from universality in itself, since the latter is simply the definition of universality, and is not a universal thing. Clearly, we are concerned with the existence of universal things. Our question, for instance, is whether there is *humanity* in the extramental world, besides particular men such as Zeyd and Amr.

In Avicenna's terminology, these universals are *quiddities*; so to understand what a universal is, according to him, we must understand what a quiddity is. Quiddities are what are offered in responses to questions about the *whatness* of things. When referring to an animal, my son asks, 'what is it?', and I respond by saying 'it is horse': so the predicate word 'horse' and the noun term 'horseness' both signify a quiddity. There are three types of quiddities, or, better, any quiddity could be considered in three ways: in itself, in reality, and in mind [4: 200–6]. Let me illustrate this by returning to the example 'humanity'. Humanity in itself is *nature* or *essence*: it is just the nature of particular human beings. There is nothing in the meaning of humanity other than its essential properties; every other predicate is accidental and extrinsic. When we define humanity by its genus and differentia, therefore, we are considering that quiddity in itself (later I will provide more exposition of this way of construing 'quiddity').

But if we refer to Zayd and say that 'he is a perfect human,' the word 'human' does not signify humanity in itself. Instead, in this usage, the term denotes a particular human. When we think of Zayd as a perfect *human*, we consider humanity as something specific in the extra-mental reality. Thus, in this second way, the quiddity is mixed with individuating accidents such as a particular color,

weight, height, etc. The third way is relevant when we think about humanity as a concept in our mind: if I say ‘humanity is not a genus, but a species’, the word ‘humanity’ here signifies a concept in the mind. This type or aspect of quiddity is devoid of all the external accidents that constitute an individual human. However, a concept in the mind has its own characteristics. Here the humanity that is being considered is mixed with those accidents that are appropriate for a mental being.

Now let us turn to the existence question. It is beyond reasonable doubt that the quiddity, considered in the second way, exists in extra-mental reality. There are human beings such as Zayd, Amr, and the like. Furthermore, there is no doubt that quiddities exist in the mind as concepts. We know introspectively that there are concepts such as humanity, horseness, or animality as mental existents. The main question, then, concerns the existence of the quiddity in itself. Avicenna argues for the existence of quiddities in themselves as follows [4: 201]. Particulars such as Zayd and Amr exist in the extramental world. What constitutes Zayd? Zayd is nothing other than the nature *humanity* along with his specific characteristics. These characteristics distinguish Zayd from Amr and other men: they are Zayd’s individuating accidents. Therefore, one of the components of Zayd is the nature *humanity*. This is a quiddity considered in itself, for, unless all his parts exist in the extramental world, the whole Zayd would not exist. Consequently, the nature *humanity* (the quiddity which is a constituent of Zayd) exists in the extramental world. Thus, the second way of considering the quiddity has the first one as its part: and since there are undoubtedly quiddities considered in the second way, there are also quiddities considered in the first way.

Somebody might object that Zayd is composed of *the nature humanity* and his specific accidents, in which case the existent nature of Zayd—humanity—is not humanity in itself, for individuating accidents surround it. As it is defined above, the quiddity associated with its accidents is considered in the second

way. The response to this objection is as follows: although individuating accidents accompany humanity in Zayd, that humanity could still be regarded as the nature it is in itself. None of its companions, including existence, fall *within* humanity in this way of considering the quiddity. All of them are extraneous, accidental attachments to humanity. Thus even when humanity in itself exists in the world, it is as such devoid of existence. However, this does not mean that it is in itself non-existent. Indeed it is not in itself existent, *and* it is not in itself non-existent.⁴ Nothing is included in the nature of Zayd and Amr except for animality and rationality. Therefore, the quiddity in itself exists in the extramental world. Note that in Avicenna's theory, the quiddity in itself is not separate from individuals. When it exists in extra-mental reality, it is within the realm of concrete individuals, not in some isolated domain of existence.

Avicenna realizes that certain questions and difficulties complicate the matter. The first is the problem of the one and the many. If *humanity* is shared between all individual men and *humanity* exists in reality, then it would be one and many. The common thing should be one—otherwise, it would not be *shared*—and many—otherwise, it would not be shared by *many* things. Evidently, something cannot be both one and many: *one* and *many* are inconsistent, although they are not each other's negation. So we face this question: is humanity in itself one or many? Avicenna maintains that it is not necessary to answer this question [4: 197]. Affirming or denying either alternative suggests that there is something in nature other than its essential properties. But there is nothing in humanity qua humanity other than its essential properties. The remaining option is to deny both alternatives with respect to humanity. Since 'in itself, one' and 'in itself, many' are not each other's negation, this response is logically possible: yet it does not fit the question, for it presupposes that humanity contains either one or many as its property; but this presupposition is not correct, since nothing is included in quiddity in itself but its

essential properties. Thus the question is a deviant one: it is better to leave it unanswered.

But there remains the question of identity: thus we may ask, 'Is humanity in Zayd in itself identical with humanity in Amr in itself?' Avicenna finds an inconsistency in the expression 'humanity of Zayd in itself' [4: 198]. If humanity is considered in itself, it could not be constrained by 'Zayd,' and if the humanity of Zayd is considered, it is not humanity in itself. If we tolerate this difficulty, we may respond to the question by denying both sides. 'Humanity in Zayd in itself' and 'humanity in Amr in itself' are neither identical nor distinct. Both identity and distinction are outside the essential features of humanity and it is denied that they form part of its nature.

The more critical question concerns universality. Is the quiddity in itself, located in the extramental world, also universal? Avicenna's answer is negative. One thing cannot be in multiple individuals. If one thing had been located in different matters, it would have inconsistent attributes. If, for instance, the same humanity had existed in many individual men, it would have been simultaneously white and black, knowledgeable and ignorant, etc.⁵ 'It is impossible for precisely one meaning to exist in many things' [4: 208]. Nevertheless, the nature of humans is common in the following sense [4: 211]: individual men are composed of nature plus individuating accidents. It is true of the nature of Zayd, for example, that if instead of Zayd's accidents, Amr's accidents had accompanied that nature, the resulting individual would be exactly Amr. It is also true of the nature of Amr, that if instead of Amr's accidents, Zayd's accidents had accompanied that nature, the resulting individual would be exactly Zayd. Similar sentences are true for all individual men. In this sense, the nature of humanity is shared by all men. It is also one and universal.

However, as defined initially, universality is specific to quiddity as considered in the mind [4: 205]. Humanity as a mental concept is

exactly *one* meaning that is equally true and predicable of multiple things. Because if we present any individual man in our mind and abstract it from all its accidents, the resultant meaning would be this mental concept of humanity. Thus many things share the same meaning, and therefore this mental entity is universal and general.

The upshot is that quiddity in itself, nature, and essence exist in the extramental world, and in one sense it is universal and shared. But universality and generality cannot occur in the extramental world. However, the mental existence of the quiddity is precisely universal.

Epistemological or ontological reading?

Giorgio Pini has introduced an epistemological reading of Avicenna's theory of universals [11] which contrasts with the ontological reading. The double interpretation rests on an ambiguity as regards the notion of universality in mind: is it quiddity in itself or mental quiddity? M. E. Marmura has levelled the same charge at Avicenna [7][8]. According to him, Avicenna uses the phrase 'the quiddity in itself' in two different meanings. Sometimes he means the quiddity regardless of everything else, including any existence, mental and extramental. In this usage, quiddity in itself is not an entity, it is a definition. Thus Marmura remarks:

Thus if someone asks about humanity: 'is it one or many?' he writes, 'there is no need for a reply because inasmuch as it is the defining identity (*huwiyya*) of humanity it is other than the two [alternatives]. In the definition of that thing, there is nothing except humanity alone. [8: 81]

At other times he uses the phrase to refer to the quiddity abstracted from all its mental and extramental accidents, which nevertheless *exists* in the mind. Indeed, in this second usage, 'quiddity in itself'

means 'quiddity by itself'. According to Marmura, unlike 'quiddity in itself'. 'quiddity by itself' is an entity; it is a mental existent [8: 83].

The difficulty is that Avicenna sometimes confuses the two senses. The first instance of confusion occurs in the discussion and rejection of platonic forms. Avicenna emphasizes that the quiddity in itself exists neither in the mind nor in the outer world. It is not an entity. But he argues against Platonists that the quiddity absent all individuating accidents exists only in the mind. So the quiddity in itself, which is the subject of universality, is something in the mind. The other two instances occur in his theory of celestial intelligences. The natures of things exist in these heavenly intelligences (which are nothing but minds) 'prior to multiplicity'. But it is not clear whether he means that the quiddities exist in those intelligences just as definitions, or as mental existents. Again, the celestial intelligences themselves are bare quiddities without any admixture of accidents. Since the heavenly intelligences are existent minds, once more the quiddity in itself is confused with some entity that exists. Indeed, Marmura thinks that the distinction between the three ways of considering quiddities is not comprehensive.

Pini maintains that this ambiguity does not originate from a mistake. Instead, it prompts two possible readings of Avicenna's doctrine. According to the ontological interpretation, the quiddity in itself constitutes both particular things in the extramental world and concepts in the mental domain. Zayd is thus composed of the nature of humanity as well as his individuating accidents. The mental idea of humanity is formed of the nature *humanity* plus the accident of universality. On the contrary, in the epistemological interpretation, the quiddity in itself is only an intellectual abstraction from the mental and extramental quiddity. Intellectual abstraction consists in considering the quiddity without its surrounding accidents. Thus, the quiddity in itself is just a way of knowing particular things and universal concepts. It is a constituent of things neither in the mind nor in extra-mental reality. Instead, the quiddity in itself is identical

to both external individuals and mental ideas. Both the mental and extramental existences are fundamental, and nothing is ontologically common to them nor prior to them. Individual men are just particular things, and they are not composed of the nature *humanity* and individuating accidents.

Moreover, the *indifference thesis* concerning the quiddity varies in the two interpretations. According to the ontological reading, the thesis states that quiddity qua quiddity is the subject and therefore metaphysically prior to both the mental and extramental existences. The quiddity in itself is capable of accepting both universality and particularity as extrinsic accidents. Particularity is a specific accident for individuals in the extramental world, and universality is a specific accident to universal concepts in the mind. On the contrary, on the epistemological reading there is nothing in common between mental and extramental quiddities. Then Avicenna's thesis of indifference is interpreted as follows: the quiddity qua quiddity *is* the individual *considered* without individuality; likewise, it *is* the universal concept *considered* without universality. Both descriptions are equally accurate. Indeed, the indifference thesis turns out to be an identity thesis.

However, according to both interpretations, the quiddity in itself does not exist independently from both the mental and extramental existences. Even on the ontological reading, humanity in itself exists either as a part of Zayd or as a part of the universal concept of humanity. Furthermore, on both interpretations, no universal exists in the outer world as a Platonic form. Even on the metaphysical reading, the existent quiddity as such is not a bare quiddity devoid of all accidents. It is one thing to be *indifferent* to mental and extramental accidents; it is another to be *devoid* of all accidents. The existent quiddity in itself is the former, not the latter.

Now to evaluate the plausibility of alternative interpretations. I begin by considering the ambiguity alleged by Marmura. First, Avicenna does not hold, I believe, that the quiddity in itself exists in

reality just as a definition. This conception rests on a misapprehension of the text. Let me translate the above-quoted passage of Avicenna:

When we take humanity's identity in itself—as one thing—in the subject place of the sentence question and ask whether it is one or many, there is no need for an answer since it—qua humanity's identity—is a thing other than each of the two. And there is nothing in the definition of that thing but humanity alone. [4: 197–198]

It is clear, I think, from this text that Avicenna takes humanity in itself as a thing and an entity. He is emphasizing that it is in itself alien to both 'one' and 'many.'

Marmura also refers to this passage:

Thus he writes: it is impossible for one meaning in its very self to exist in a multiplicity [of things]. For, if the humanity in Amr in itself, not in the sense of its definition, exists in Zayd, then whatever accident occurs to the humanity in Zayd would necessarily occur to it when in Amr. [8: 81–82]

Again, the above text does not imply that the quiddity in itself is just a definition. At first, it looks as if—unlike the quiddity in its 'very self'—the quiddity as a definition can exist in multiple things. Nevertheless, it is one thing to affirm that humanity as a definition can exist simultaneously in different individuals; it is another to think that humanity in itself is just a definition. The latter does not follow from the former. However, I believe he does not—strictly speaking—affirm the *existence* of the definition of humanity. A definition can be *true* of things, but it cannot exist in the extramental world. Hence, Avicenna implicitly affirms simply that the definition of humanity is true of all individuals. Therefore, it is not true that 'we are not speaking of an "entity" that is "humanity."' Humanity in itself, Avicenna thinks, exists as an entity in the

extramental world. And the question whether it is one or many is not a genuine question, since it has no answer.

Secondly, Avicenna is not confused about the usage of the phrase 'in itself.' The phrase consistently means a quiddity considered solely as the quiddity it is. The reason for the confusion in the first instance is that 'Avicenna has made it plain (and in the same chapter where he first attacks and rejects the Platonic theory of forms) that a quiddity like "horseness," considered in itself, exists neither in the soul nor outside it' [8: 83]. But the sentence 'horseness considered in itself, exists neither in the soul nor outside it' means that *horseness does not exist in itself*, in mind, or in reality. For neither mental nor extramental existence is included in animality qua animality. All accidents, including any kind of existence, are outside of this consideration. However, that sentence does not mean that *horseness in itself does not exist* in mind or reality. Existence attaches to horseness in itself but does not come inside the essence. Horseness in itself exists as part of individual horses; yet its extramental existence is accidental and extraneous. Again, horseness in itself exists in the mind; nonetheless, its mental existence is accidental and extraneous. Consequently, the quiddity in itself is always distinguished from the quiddity as a mental existence.

Nor do I think there is confusion in the two other instances. The natures of material things exist in the celestial intelligences as mental quiddities. They are composed of quiddities in themselves and mental accidents surrounding them. So the quiddities of material things occur in the heavenly intelligences in both considerations. The part is the essence of things, and the composite is a concept in an intellect. Also, the heavenly intelligences are quiddities without individuating accidents. Nonetheless, they are existent in reality, and their existence is accidental and external to their essence. So for each of those intellects, the quiddity in itself is a constituent and therefore exists. The composite—which also

exists—is an individual or the quiddity considered in the extramental world.

Therefore, I think that the Avicennian doctrine of quiddity is consistent and comprehensive. If I am right in denying any ambiguity to the phrase ‘in itself’, then there is no evidence in Avicenna’s text for the epistemological reading.⁶ The quiddity in itself is a way of knowing particulars and universal concepts, and this is only possible if it is a definition. Definitions are known expressions about the identity of things. Therefore, if the quiddity in itself is a definition, it is just a way of knowing things. On the other hand, it is a constituent of the real stuff if it is an entity. Hence, if there is no ambiguity in Avicenna’s usage of the phrase ‘in itself’, the only available interpretation would be the ontological one.

Moreover, there is a further reason which tells in favor of the metaphysical interpretation. One trouble about universals is this: if the universals exist in the extramental world, then they would be both one and many, and the existence of such things is implausible. However, a universal, by definition, is predicable of multiple items. So if the universals exist solely in mind, a difficulty arises in accounting for this predication. What, if anything, grounds it ontologically? A negative answer seems implausible. Avicenna solves this problem by introducing the quiddity in itself as a constituent of real things. Natures are neither particular nor universal, but they are in some sense common.⁷ The shared nature of things forms the metaphysical ground for the predication of a universal to many particulars. The epistemological reading does not allow for this response by the theory.

Marmura’s dilemma

Now let me turn to Marmura’s main objection against the Avicennian theory. He maintains that Avicenna’s theory of universals faces a dilemma [8: 84–86]. According to this doctrine,

the quiddities in themselves are neither particular nor universal. Universality and particularity are accidents that are appropriate to the quiddity's mental existence. So mental quiddities in the mind are sometimes universal and sometimes universal. Therefore, universals are composites that are formed of the quiddity in itself and the accident *universality*. However, since the composition occurs in mind, the universality attaches to the mental quiddity. Thus it is not clear with which consideration of quiddity universality associates. The theory designates that it is the quiddity in itself that composes the universal. However, as this composition happens in mind, it is the mental quiddity that accompanies universality.

A similar problem arises concerning universality. Avicenna clearly distinguishes between 'logical genus' and 'mental genus'.⁸ The former signifies the universality in itself, and the latter refers to a universal concept such as the universal concept of humanity. Moreover, according to his theory, the universal is composed of the quiddity as such along with universality as such, which is the logical genus. But since this composition occurs in the mind, the mental genus enters the composition. Now the dilemma is as follows. If both composite components are mental, then the quiddity and universality in themselves do not form universal parts. If both pieces are considered in themselves, then the universal would not be in the mind.

Yet Marmora's contention that both universality and particularity are appropriate to mental quiddity is grounded on a misinterpretation of the text. He quotes the following passage:

For animality does not become an individual to which one points except through the association of something that renders it [a thing] to which one points. Similarly, in the mind it would not be such [that is, an individual], unless the mind attaches to it a meaning that makes it specific. Moreover, nothing from the outside would

occur to it [so as to render it] universal [in the mind] unless there is in truth one essence that is animal, to which it has so occurred in external reality that it itself is found in many. [8: 80]

He adds:

This passage indicates that universality and particularity, or, as Avicenna expressed it elsewhere, “universality and particularity in predication [quoting 3: 15]” which he maintains exist only in the mind, have a foundation in extramental existence. [8: 80]

He thinks that the above passage addresses an epistemological question: what is the basis for the ideas of particularity and universality? Avicenna—according to Marmura’s interpretation—finds that both notions originate from the extramental world. Particularity is ‘in some manner a conceptualization of these individuating circumstances.’ Also, universality is ‘an abstraction of the quiddity’s extramental relation of being found in many.’

I do not think this passage tells in favor of Marmora’s reading. Let me provide an accurate translation:

For animality does not become a thing one can point to unless accompanied by something that makes it possible for it to be pointed to. Also, animality would not be in mind unless some proper meaning is attached to it by the mind. Furthermore, animality in the external world does not become accidentally general so that there is genuinely one thing: animal, and it happened to it accidentally among outer things that it itself exists in many things. [3: 65–66]

Accordingly, Avicenna does not speak here of the quiddity in mind as a particular. Rather, he indicates that when animality occurs in the mind, it is accompanied by something which is *specifically*

proper to its mental occurrence. Moreover, he is not here concerned with 'the quiddity's extramental relation of being "found in many"'. Instead, in this passage, Avicenna rejects the thesis that a universal is a numerically unique thing that exists exactly in many things. Therefore, he is not looking for the foundations of these two ideas. In sum, he is not here dealing with an epistemological problem.

The other text which Marmura refers to is more troubling:

[T]here is another consideration for quiddity in so far as it is an idea; so accidents specific to that kind of existence attach to it like being a subject or predicate, and like being universal or being particular in predication. [3:15]

Here Avicenna explicitly states that particularity—like universality—belongs to the domain of predication, which is mind. However, I think the term 'particular' here is used in another meaning. In this passage Avicenna is concerned with particular concepts such as that of Zayd. This concept is particular, since it is predicable just to one subject. So the particularity here is a characteristic of some mental concept. But the particularity which is specific to the quiddity in the extra-mental world is different. A quiddity in the real world is particular since it is something concrete and individual. So a particularity in the latter sense is never a mental accident.

The preceding point is crucial, for it implies Marmura's conception of the theory. Both universality and particularity are accidents which pertain to the quiddity in mind. So the quiddity's existence in mind is logically prior to both opposite accidents. Hence, the problem arises of to which universality which quiddity attaches. But this conception rests on the contention that the quiddity in mind is indifferent to particularity and universality. This contention, as I have attempted to show, is not supported by the passages from

Avicenna. Instead, universality is a ‘concomitant’ of the quiddity in mind [4: 205], and particularity is a concomitant of quiddity in the extramental world [4: 207]. This means that quiddity cannot occur in the mind without having the property of universality. Likewise, it cannot occur in the extramental world without having the property of particularity. Also, since universality is an attribute, it cannot occur in the mind except as an attachment to a quiddity. Therefore the accurate reading is as follows: the attachment of ‘universality in itself’ to ‘the quiddity in itself’ *and* the occurring of the mental quiddity is simultaneous. More precisely, the universal quiddity exists only in the mind, and reflection shows that it is constituted by the quiddity in itself and universality in itself. There is no existence of the parts before the whole. Thus an Avicennian theorist might respond to the dilemma in this way: the universal is composed of both quiddity and universality considered in themselves, yet the composite is the universal mental quiddity.

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Endnotes

¹ For some contemporary works see [1][2][6][9].

² For a brief discussion of the problem in Avicenna's own works, see [5:536-540].

³ For a discussion of Avicenna's theory of meaning see [10].

⁴ Avicenna emphasizes that 'in itself existent' and 'in itself non-existent' are not each other's negation. Thus this is no exception to the principle of the excluded middle.

⁵ Notice that in 'the humanity in Zayd' the quiddity is not considered in itself. Thus the humanity in Zayd is distinct from the humanity in Amr. In other words, humanity considered with individuating accidents is numerous.

⁶ Gabrielle Galluzzo remarks that there are good reasons in the texts of Avicenna to favor the ontological reading, but he does not go into details. See [2: 314–315].

⁷ See the first section of this paper.

⁸ I think Marmura should speak of 'mental universal' and 'logical universal' instead of 'mental genus' and 'logical genus'. For the distinction between mental and logical is general: all five porphyrian predicables are either mental or logical or natural.

A comparative study of the explanation of inclusive motion in physics and Philosophy

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Abstract

Motion is one of the most important topics in physics and philosophy. Two philosophical currents called “mechanics” and “dynamics”, which are active in both the West and Islam, have discussed that issue. Many of their philosophers, citing the reason, have emphasized the pervasiveness of motion in the universe. In this paper, in addition to explaining the two currents and their thinkers, an attempt has been made to search for the corresponding currents in physics and the view of their theorists. It was tried to suggest that two branches of physics, mainly

“mechanical” and “quantum” physics are very similar to these introduced philosophical currents.

Under the discussion of movement, we paid attention to the subject of Inclusiveness. This matter is first examined from the viewpoint of two mentioned philosophical theories (mechanics and dynamics). In both of them, there is a different view of motion in the world of beings. The physics viewpoints are also presented in accordance with philosophical theories. It seems there is a good agreement and conformity between them, but it does not mean the unitary.

Keywords: Philosophy of mechanics, Philosophy of dynamics, Mechanic, Quantum physics, Pervasive

Introduction

One of the important issues in the interaction of philosophy and physics is the “movement”. Both sciences have commented in detail on this subject. It seems that estimating differences and agreements and thinking about them can be the beginning of new ideas in both sciences. In fact, philosophy, with all its breadth and generality, and physics, with all its attention to detail, have no purpose other than to discover the facts. There were many defects in each of them that may be completed according to the other field of science.

Conceptology of movement

Before addressing theories, it is necessary to pay more attention to the concept of movement. This concept may be different from the customary concept of moving which means to transfer something

from one place to another. It especially is important for philosophers, because of its variety and diversity.

The concept of movement in the view of theologians is more near to its custom definition (Al-Ash'ari, 1999). But philosophers have a deeper view in this regard. They offer another definition that differs from the conventional view, which is originated from their deeper view of the category of place (Aristotle & Daniel, 1999). In this view, the question arises whether the movement only takes place in the location or can be achieved in other contexts. The response of philosophers is positive. Movement can be achieved not only in location but also in other contexts. Of course, this accuracy was also confirmed by the theologians, and some also emphasized a different definition, such as: "achieving in one state for the substance after achieving in another one." (al-Razi, 1999; Hilli & ibn Yusuf, 2009)

Aristotle, in his definition of movement, even went beyond the discussion of the context of motion. He proposed "departure from potential to action" to define the movement, which is completely independent of the context in which movement takes place. In this definition, he referred to the potential in a being as a reality which with the beginning of transformation and realization of it, the movement is beginning too. In this definition, movement is considered to be a specific actuality and reality that is obtained from potentiality (Charlton, 1985). This view of movement was welcomed by other thinkers so that to this day most Islamic philosophers have remained faithful to this definition with little change.

Background of Pervasive Movement

The subject of motion has long been explained in various philosophies. Heraclitus (475-535 BC) was one of the first philosophers to discuss it in detail. He not only referred to the motion of objects but also considered their motion to be all-

encompassing and pervasive. He believed that "all things are in a state of flow" (Copleston, 2003). This sentence may be the first emphasis of a philosopher on the subject of pervasive movement in philosophy. The statements of Heraclitus are very similar to the statements of Sadr al-Muta'allehin, a contemporary Islamic philosopher, about the intrinsic motion of objects. Some believe, therefore, that Heraclitus begins the belief in the Substantial Motion (at least in material objects). (Malek Shahi, 1997, 15)

After Heraclitus, Aristotle discusses movement in more detail. His book, known as *Naturalism* (Ross), although not entirely consistent with the topics of modern physics, is most similar to it. In this book, which contains most of the theories of thinkers such as Democritus, Anaxagoras, Parmenides, Melissus, Xenon, etc., the subject of the movement of objects is discussed in great detail. It can be said that this subject covers almost two-thirds of the whole book. The reason for all this attention to the category of movement in Aristotle's thought as the founder of philosophy is probably the Pervasive movement in the universe. This means that he considers movement to be the main feature of the natural world, and for this reason, he believes it necessary to place the greatest emphasis on movement to explain the universe. Pointing out that we are faced with only one source of movement in nature, he explicitly emphasizes that "nature is the material basis of things that have in themselves a principle of motion or change" (Aristotle & Daniel, 1999) This definition clearly confirms that he considers movement to be inherent in nature.

This is not the end of the matter, and Aristotle goes on to argue. In this argument, the universe is considered as a moving whole that needs a mover that is outside of this whole and unmoved. That unmoved mover that moves the universe is the prime mover and obligatory of existence (Aristotle & Madigan, 1999). We will not prove this, but it is important to note that if a part of the universe does not have motion, Aristotle's argument for motion will not be true at all, and it is only if motion is pervasive in all parts of the

universe that the argument can be presented. This is proof of the pervasive movement in Aristotle's thought.

Philosophy of Mechanics

After Aristotle, various schools of thought about movement emerged. The first of them to discuss it was mechanical philosophy, which emphasized external movement. René Descartes (1596-1650) played the main role in establishing this school of thought. He considered the universe to be nothing more than a spatial shape and motion and believed that to examine any object first, it was enough to examine it as a shape or set of moving geometric shapes (Descartes, 2013). Secondly, that movement also applies it not from inside but outside (Descartes & Sanei, 2005). For such claims, Descartes used an element of clarity and distinction to convince him. The method of achieving this goal was also the analysis (Grabiner, 1995). In this regard, he reduced the continuous motions into discontinuous motions using analysis based on clarity and differentiation and emphasized that the motion curve is nothing but an infinite number of moving points along a curved path (Domski, 2007).

Among Islamic philosophers, Avicenna (Avicenna; 980-1037) is one of those whose thoughts are most in line with the philosophy of mechanics. He believes that the cause of natural movements is nature itself. Nature, in parallel with its cause for motion, achieves motion in itself, but this motion is given to the object from outside (Motahari, 1990). In this way, Like Descartes, he believes in external origins for movement in nature. Thus, it seems that the philosophy of mechanics was founded in the time of the Avicenna before Descartes (about 600 years before him).

Regarding the range of motion in the material world, Avicenna considers natural beings to have power (in physics terms equivalent to potential) and action (anything that has the objectivity and

desired effect (Tabatabaei, n.d, 196)). Having power and action, they also have an exit from power to action. In other words, it is not that there are power and action in the matter, but there is no output. Because the mere existence of these two things will cause the transformation of potential and power into action. But Avicenna flexes the argument that not every output means the famous motion. In his opinion, there are two ways of departing from power to action: the first is instantaneous and the second is gradual. According to him and the definition he has given, the movement should be only gradual, and if it is instantaneous, this is not the movement (Shafa, p. 81,). Therefore, in his opinion, the gradual nature of the movement can be achieved only, in a limited number of categories such as quantity and quality. Thus, in Ibn Sina's view, the issue of motion is not universal and pervasive, because change may take place, but it is repulsive, and it is not motion, but a simple transformation.

Physics views on the philosophy of mechanics

The discussion of power in Avicenna's philosophy of mechanics seems to be very similar to the discussion of energy in physics. The definition proposed in philosophy is a possibility and talent in the object that allows it to become something else.

In physics, the initial definition for energy was "ability to do work", but after deriving the second law of thermodynamics, a more comprehensive and similar definition was given: "a property of an object that can be transferred to other objects or converted to heat. (Lehrman, 1973)" Here, the energy definition is based on the property of "transfer" and "transformation", which is used in the philosophical definition of power too.

It may seem that the philosophy's view of power and energy is simplistic and is limited to one power but this is not the case at all. The provided definition does not limit the forces in an object. An

object may have multiple powers. For example, he considered the power of the prima materia in philosophy, which has several powers(Sajjadi, 2000).

Now, with these two points, it seems that both physics and philosophy look at the issue of power and energy closely. Physicists believe that energy manifests in two general ways:

Kinetic (K): When an object has mobility. Its value is directly proportional to the mass (m) and the square of the velocity (v) of the object is written as $\frac{1}{2}mv^2$.

Potential (U): Based on the position of the object in a conservative force field, which depends on the type of force field can appear as gravitational, electrical, nuclear, etc. forms.

In physics, an object can have both types of energy at any given moment. For example, a rock that is falling freely has kinetic energy due to its motion and because it is in the gravitational force field of the earth, it has potential energy that at any moment and with the continuation of the falling process, its potential energy storage is reduced. (Due to decreasing altitude) and increases its kinetic energy. (Speed increases as the fall continues). The sum of these two energies at any given moment is called the mechanical energy of the body.

In this way, an object can have power and energy in different stages of motion and does not contradict the philosophical viewpoint to the motion and is completely consistent with the provided definitions.

Inclusive motion and thermodynamics

According to the mechanic, is motion Inclusive or it occurs in some objects? To get the answer, it is better to start from the Equipartition theorem and continue it with the third law of thermodynamics:

According to the Equipartition theorem, the kinetic energy of a particle moving in one dimension is $\frac{1}{2}K_B T$, where T is the absolute temperature of the particle and K_B is a constant number called the Boltzmann constant (Zemansky, 1968). On the other hand, kinetic energy is equal to $\frac{1}{2}mv^2$. Therefore, we will have:

$$\frac{1}{2}mv^2 = \frac{1}{2}K_B T \quad (1)$$

It can be concluded that the temperature of a particle depends on its speed and the faster it moves, the hotter it will be.

On the other hand, the third law of thermodynamics states: "It is not possible to reach absolute zero temperature ($T = 0$) through a series of finite processes." (Guggenheim, 1985). This expression is considered as the inaccessibility of absolute zero temperature infinite time. Thus, any object that has a finite life (all objects) has a temperature higher than zero and therefore according to Equation (1) have a non-zero speed. Thus, nobody is stationary in the absolute sense. Therefore, it can be said that physics, along with philosophy, confirms a kind of Inclusive motion.

Philosophy of Dynamics

After philosophy and mechanical physics, we see another approach called dynamic philosophy, which, like the attitude of mechanics, prioritizes movement and becoming, but unlike the previous one, implies the originality of dynamism in the objects. In the mechanics' view, only the movement of objects is considered, but there was silence about what was going on inside them. Whereas in this view, it is believed that the truth of the substance is motion and the essence of things is nothing but transformation and progress.

Many philosophers have spoken of this, including Leibniz, a religion based on the principle of dynamism, which means that the being is inherently mobile. Another is Bergson, who, with his theory of creative evolution, believes that all material appearances are interpreted as forces non-referable to matter and motion (Sajjadi, 2000). Among the Islamic philosophers, Sadr al-Muta'allehin has seriously entered into this discussion and has presented his strong theory called the Substantial Motion in this regard.

Leibniz (1716-1646, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz) seems to have made many innovations in the field of motion concept. His first point is that if motion is merely a displacement, it cannot be considered a real being. The only thing which is really moving is the force (Leibniz, 1988). Force means a kind of interaction between action and reaction, which causes movement in the objects (Latta, 1898). His other innovation is that he thinks the movement is related to the nature of objects. Essence naturally cannot exist without action. Motion is related to the nature of objects, and in fact, there is nothing without a motion (Leibniz, 1996). Thus, with such ideas, the foundations of dynamic philosophy were formed. Because until then, the motion was not related to the nature of objects. Rather, according to ancient philosophers, it belonged to the effects of objects.

There are other philosophers in this field whose views are in line with Leibniz's theory, such as Henri Bergson (1859-1941). He sees movement not just as what happens in place, but as a change beyond. He believes that "the apparent displacement of matter and molecules studied in physics and chemistry depends on the relation of intrinsic motion (which is evolution, not transfer) to the position of a moving object relative to the motion of that object in space." (Bergson & Gunter, 1984). For him, this subject is so vast that it encompasses the whole of existence (Bergson & Gunter, 1984).

If we present the view of philosophy to the theories of Muslim philosophers, Sadr al-Muta'allehin (1571/2 - 1640) has many views on this subject. Before him, Islamic scholars, following Aristotle, believed that movement takes place in four accidental categories: location, quantity, quality, and situation. For this reason, the types of spatial motion, quantitative motion, qualitative motion, and situational motion were mentioned. But Sadr al-Muta'allehin also proved the movement in the category of physical essence and concluded that due to the movement of physical essence, Movement in these four categories consists of a combination of some movements and is called movement in movement (Sadra, 1628). As can be seen in the comments of Leibniz and Bergson, this view is fully reflected in their theories. Given that Leibniz was born around the time of Sadr al-Muta'allehin's death, Sadra could not have been aware of his views. Of course, the opposite is possible.

The important point is that Sadr al-Muta'allehin's views on motion, in essence, are not a sub-view, but is fundamental of all Sadra's views and opinions (Javadi-Amoli, 2007). His view on the truth of human which is a compound between soul and body, and even issues related to the resurrection are influenced by his Substantial Motion theory (Ibid.,) The attitude of Sadr al-Muta'allehin starts from the material part, but it does not stop there and encompasses the whole existence.

In Sadra's view, movement depends on power and action and their transformation into each other, thus Confirms the role of potential and energy in the field of motion. But about the reality of motion, it should be said that he does not agree at all with Leibniz. The reality of motion is easily understood by physics through sensory evidence. Of course, if the movement is considered as a kind of relocation, as Ibn Sina also pointed out: the movement is called something which happens in a place (Ibn Sina, 1974). perhaps the statement of Leibniz is not so wrong. Because in many cases there is a change of location but no movement has taken place. Sadr al-Muta'allehin does not agree with Leibniz. According to what has been said,

beyond the change that other philosophers consider to move, in his view, motion is quite related to the existence of the object even it is selfsame of existence. Philosophically, the truth of motion does not have an objective separation from the existence of the object. What is outside and is called existence is also a perfect example of motion. In fact, we find both together outside, which, to Sadra's interpretation, we find a restless existence and unrest quiddity, which are only separated from each other in intellectual analysis and have no differences(Sadra, 1628). These statements clearly show that Sadr al-Mutallahin, like Leibniz, thinks about moving beyond space, but unlike him, he considers space to be one of the truest opportunities to move. There are many points about Sadr al-Mutallahin's substantive view of motion that do not fit into this space, but another point that can be very effective in his dynamic philosophy is his accuracy in the time moments of a motion. As we know, mechanical philosophers emphasized the stationary nature of motion components but Sadr al-Mutallahin emphasizes the fluidity of these components.

Quantum mechanic

As it is known, with the emergence of a dynamic approach to the category of motion, we are witnessing a dramatic change in the field of philosophy. In physics too, it seems we are facing a great leap that is equivalent to what happened in philosophy. Before the twentieth century, physical phenomena were well explained by the classical theories of physics; But in the early twentieth century, and the rise of human technical capabilities to penetrate the world of microparticles (subatomic) and study events in that area, the shortcomings of classical physics gradually became apparent so that the physicists had to abandon the classical law and define new principles that could justify new events, especially in the field of small objects. This new theory, called quantum physics, has passed many experiments over the past century with its modern

formulation, and although its details and interpretations have evolved, their principle stayed constant and now is the framework of modern physics is (Gutzwiller, 1998). Some may want to define these two developments in the same direction and say that the two subjects of dynamic philosophy and quantum mechanics are two sides of the same coin. Regardless of the veracity of this great claim, it seems that several claims are defensible: The first is that these two great developments are, at least in part, related and aren't separate at all. Few people may want to consider these two main developments completely unrelated. Secondly, if we want to physically study the essence of objects whose motions are emphasized in the philosophy of dynamics, we had to enter the space of microparticles, at first. And of course, it is the quantum physics territory. So logically the continued topics will be placed in quantum physics.

Particle motion in quantum physics

One of the most fundamental results of quantum mechanics is the existence of the principle of uncertainty in the universe. This principle can well express the all-encompassing motion in all the particles of the universe. The mentioned principle is expressed in different ways which the following expression is one of the most common (Heisenberg, 1985; Sen, 2014):

$$\Delta p \Delta x \geq \frac{\hbar}{2} \quad (1)$$

In the above phrase, the momentum of an object (p) comes from the production of its particle mass (m) at its velocity (v). The parameter (x) also represents the location of the particle. \hbar is also a constant called the Planck reduction constant, which approximately is 10^{-34} joules per second. The symbols Δp and Δx also mean the measurement error or uncertainty in determining each of its location

and momentum quantities, respectively. There are different interpretations for the above relationship. According to Heisenberg, the founder of this principle, and Bohr, who was one of the most important developers and exponents of this principle, this relationship indicates that we always face an inherent limitation for simultaneously measuring the speed¹ and location of an object. In other words, if the physical location of a particle is measured and determined with an accuracy of Δx , lead to that its momentum could not be measured with an accuracy better than $\frac{\hbar}{2} \times \frac{\Delta x}{m}$ (and consequently, the accuracy of determining the velocity, will be limited as $\frac{\hbar}{2} \times \frac{\Delta x}{m}$). This means that there is no quantum state in which the system (which can be a particle) is stationary without motion because such a situation requires that the momentum and velocity of the particle be measured with any desired accuracy where It is a clear violation of the principle of uncertainty. Therefore, absolute inertia is not possible.

This issue can be explained in another way. A wavelength can be attributed to all objects based on the wave-particle duality property (Greiner, 2011). This wavelength can be interpreted as the particle width or the range where the object is probably to be present. The mentioned wavelength, which is usually represented by the symbol λ , for an object that moves with the momentum of $p = mv$, results from the De Broglie relation as follows(Eisberg & Resnick, 1985):

$$\lambda = \frac{h}{p} \quad (2)$$

Now, if an object is completely stationary, means that its velocity and consequently its momentum is zero. Now it can be seen from the De Broglie relation (3) which its wavelength will be infinite.

¹In physics, the velocity and momentum of one object are sometimes used interchangeably, which does not mean that they are the same, but in the case of a particular object, having one can easily achieve another $p = mv$.

Such an object is described by a wave pack of infinite width and it means this object has the possibility of being present in the whole universe (Weidner & Sells, 1960). Now, vice versa all objects which are located in a finite range (which can be all of the objects that we deal with in the real world) are unable to be in the complete inertia and should have a movement even though it is very slow.

Another issue that confirms the impossibility of absolute stillness is the minimum possible energy for a quantum system called zero-point energy. In quantum mechanics, by solving the Schrodinger equation, the possible energies for an object can be obtained. For example, by solving this equation for a particle that is bounded to a cubic enclosure, the allowable energy values can be found as follows (Greiner, 2011):

$$E_{n_1, n_2, n_3} = (n_1^2 + n_2^2 + n_3^2) \frac{h^2}{8mL^2} \quad (3)$$

Where n_i is a positive integer number. Thus, the minimum allowable energy for this particle (i.e., E_0) is not zero but $\frac{3h^2}{8mL^2}$ which shows it cannot be at rest ever because the zero speed only happens for zero kinetic energy. This is not specific to this particle, but for all quantum systems which are in a well-defined potential, except the free particle. This is another confirmation that the minimum speed of objects is not zero.

In the case of a free particle, which means a particle that is not affected by any other force or body in the universe (Greiner, 2011) clearly, It is an unreal situation.

It should be noted that the history of zero-point energy dates back to before the formulation of the Schrodinger equation and matrix mechanics, i.e., in early quantum theory, which can find a detailed discussion around this in the ref. (OECD Nuclear Energy Agency & International Atomic Energy Agency, 2012).

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The Glorious Gratitude: On the Essential Affinity between Gratitude (*shukr*) and Goodness/the Good (*khayr*)

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Abstract

This short note attempts to reflect on some aspects of the concept of “gratitude” (*shukr*), and its essential correlation with “the good/goodness” (*khayr*).

I have examined different dimensions of the concept of *shukr* (gratitude), based on *a new methodology*, centered around the concepts of *tashbīh* and *tanzīh* (immanence and transcendence), in my recent book in Persian,

Khānesh-i Shukr dar Safar-i Nāmirāy-i Tashbīh wa Tanzīh
(Reading “Gratitude” on the Undying Journey of
“Immanence and Transcendence”), Negah-e Moaser

Publishing House, Tehran, 1401 SH/2022. For details, please see the book.¹

Keywords: gratitude (*shukr*), goodness/the good (*khayr*), praise of God/"the most comprehensive expression for conveying gratitude to God" (*ḥamd*), evil (*sharr*)

I. The Glorious Gratitude

One of the prominent figures of the Christian spirituality in the Middle Ages, Julian of Norwich (d.1416), describes a profound revelation which she perceived through spiritual experience, and refers to as the "glorious gratitude." Based on her account of this revelation, she provides us with the description of three all-encompassing and blissful feelings of "joy": "God showed three degrees of bliss which every soul shall have in heaven who has willingly served God whatever his degree upon earth. The first is the glorious gratitude...this gratitude is so exalted and so glorious that it seems to the soul that it is fulfilled, even if there were nothing more. For it seemed to me that all the pain and trouble that could be suffered by all those alive might not deserve the glorious gratitude that one shall have who has willingly served God."²

She continues her description of the elevated realization of the grateful contentment and satisfaction while referring to the "increasement" of the joyful blessing. As the "gratitude" seems to be reciprocated between God and the grateful souls, the abundance of the "bliss" begins to manifest itself: "The second degree is that the all the blessed in heaven will see the glorious gratitude, and God makes the soul's service known to all who are in heaven. And at this time this example was shown: if a king thanks his servants it is a great honour for them, and if he makes it known to the whole kingdom, then their honour is much *increased*."³

According to Julian of Norwich, the “third degree” of this blissful spiritual experience, provides the grateful souls with the feelings of infinity, everlastingness, and immortality of the blissful joy: “The third degree is that this will last eternally just as new and delightful as when it is first received. And I saw that this was revealed in a gracious and kindly way: that the age of every one will be known in heaven...especially, the age of those who willingly and freely offer their youth to God is surpassingly rewarded and wonderfully thanked. For I saw that whenever or how long a man or woman be truly turned to God, for one day’s service and for his willingness to serve without end, he shall have all these three degrees of bliss.”⁴

In my opinion, what mainly stands out in these descriptions, is the essential correlation of “the good/goodness” (*khayr*), with Julian of Norwich’s account of the “glorious gratitude.” In her elucidations on the “glorious gratitude,” the theophany of “goodness,” such as joy and bliss, seems to “increase,” by advancing the manifestations of the reciprocal presence of “gratitude.”

The elevated excellence of experiencing what we might call here, the “knowledge by presence of the good/goodness,” is, in a way, knowing the correlation of “**all things**” in existence, with manifestations of goodness (*khayr*).

A personal interpretation of “the entire being,” in which, a seemingly simple, but lucidly comprehensive perspective of existence and **all** its dynamics and events, are defined with a realization of “goodness,” in a constant, non-static, practical, and undying journey of/through “gratitude.” In this vast representation of “gratitude,” one might recognize a methodologically and ontologically infused reading of “the good/goodness,” and “existence” (as “God’s blessing/grace”).

It seems that, in her solid reading of “gratitude,” Julian of Norwich has also points to a series of interwoven concepts such as “optimism,” and “the presence of absolute benevolence” in existence. As if, in a constant flow of the grateful benevolence, “everything” is immersed in, and connected to, a rare, superbly diverse, and vastly cherished form of “comprehensive spiritual wellness” (*sālāmat-i jāmi ‘- i ma ‘nawī*), which bestows emancipation, comfort/tranquility, extensive experience of joy and elation, dignity, needlessness, generosity, and freedom.

In this comprehensive view of observing the entire existence based solely upon **goodness**, it seems that the seeker does not find any traces and vision of “**evil**” (*sharr*). Julian of Norwich, describes the outcome of this immense and inclusive view, in a forecasting spiritual method (**manner**), in which **all things**, events and occurrences in existence will be **good** (*khayr*), and everything will be presented, manifested and perceived, via/through **goodness**:

“All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.”⁵

Approaching the vast realization of “the good/goodness,” in its substantial and existential ties with “gratitude” as worldview, which creates “vast joy and optimism,” can also be seen in the works of contemporary Christian authors on spirituality.⁶ In this understanding and practicing gratitude, in everyday life, this form of “all-encompassing” perspective, has been explained as the “comprehensive gratitude,” through which, the recognition of “everything” with “the good,” is considered as a principal point of view and an essential practical worldview for the whole life: “Joy is a function of gratitude, and gratitude is a function of perspective. You only begin to change your life when you begin to change the way you see.”⁷

II. The Truth of Gratitude

In his masterpiece collection of supplications, *Ṣaḥīfah Sajjādiyyah*, ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn, known as Zayn al-Abidīn, the fourth Shi‘ī Imam, seems to make an ontological bond between our perception of “every state of life,” pleasant or unpleasant (as God’s grace/blessings, or *al-ni ‘mah/pl. al-ni ‘am*), and the good/goodness (*khayr*):

«...وَأَرْزُقْنِي الْحَقَّ عِنْدَ تَقْصِيرِي فِي الشُّكْرِ لَكَ بِمَا أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيَّ فِي الْيُسْرِ وَالْعُسْرِ وَالصِّحَّةِ وَالسَّقَمِ، حَتَّى أُنْعَرَفَ مِنْ نَفْسِي رُوحَ الرِّضَا وَطَمَأِينَةَ النَّفْسِ مِنِّي بِمَا يَجِبُ لَكَ فِيمَا يَحْدُثُ فِي حَالِ الْخَوْفِ وَالْأَمْنِ وَالرِّضَا وَالسُّخْطِ وَالضَّرِّ وَالنَّفْعِ.»

“...And provide me with what is Thy right when I fall short in thanking Thee for that through which Thou hast favoured me in ease and difficulty, health and sickness such that I may come to know in myself repose in satisfaction and serenity of soul in that which Thou hast made incumbent upon me in whatever states may occur: fear and security, satisfaction and displeasure, loss and gain.”⁸

Embracing the constantly renewed manifestations of the "truth" (*al-ḥaqq/الحَق*) of “gratitude” or the vast *intuitive* “certainty” (*yaqīn*) in seeing and recognizing God’s grace in ease and difficulty, health and illness, is a methodological perspective that also seems like a philosophical outlook, as well as a perpetual progression in finding elevated involvement on the path of spiritual wayfaring for finding the “truth.”

In this wayfaring, *ḥāmid-i shākīr* («حامد شاكر») : the “praiser” of the Absolute and the “practitioner” of “gratitude”) would also be capable of reaching the mystical **station** of *shakūri* (practicing **constant** gratitude in both ease and hardship) and seeing “everything” through his/her extensive and inclusive method of practicing gratitude.

In this practical method, the wayfarer, in the elevated understanding of *shakūri*, reaches an expansive "existential vision," through which, the meaning of existence will become constantly renewed by discovering a more unveiled knowledge of "gratitude" (*shukr*). In other words, the "knower of gratitude," continuously experiences a flourishing view and renewal manifestations of "goodness" (*khayr*). Finding "goodness" everywhere, overshadows the presence of "evil" (*sharr*). More recognition of "goodness," leads to less appearance of "evil." The "good" (*khayr*) brings about more contentment, satisfaction, and experience of peace and grace:

«...حَتَّى أَتَعَرَّفَ مِنْ نَفْسِي رَوْحَ الرِّضَا وَ طُمَأْنِينَةَ النَّفْسِ مِنِّي»

"...Such that I may come to know in myself repose in satisfaction and serenity of soul."⁹

III. Gratitude as Worldview

In Judaism also, "gratitude" has been referred to, in its connection with "goodness." One of the common terms in the Hebrew language for expressing "gratitude," is "*Hakarat Hatov*," or "*Hakaras Hatov*," which means "recognizing the good."¹⁰

Also, in the teachings of the "Old Testament," regarding the response to "goodness," its opposite concept, or "evil," has been mentioned. For example, in the book of Proverbs: "Whoso rewardeth evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house."¹¹

In other words, "evil," as the most telling manifestation and interpretation of "ungratefulness," will occupy the ungrateful person's house, or, the wholeness of his/her moral qualities. This engagement with evil will not be resolved unless by practicing and producing "goodness," which would be the outcome of putting "gratitude" into perspective.

Recognizing “the good” through “gratitude as worldview,” will shape the seeker’s place of standing in the whole creation. As this worldview gets vaster and more sophisticated, the recognition of goodness and “blessing/grace” (*ni ‘mat/ni ‘mah*) becomes the everyday practice of the seeker in every time and everywhere. This comprehensive and multifaceted worldview of gratitude provides the seeker with uninterrupted experiences of freedom, joy and emancipation in voyaging through the everlasting pathway of knowing existence.

IV. The Higher Ethics of Gratitude

In the book of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, the first Shi‘ī Imām, ‘Alī ibn abī Ṭālib, enumerates three ways/types of worshipping God (*anwā‘ al-‘ibādah*):

«إِنَّ قَوْمًا عَبَدُوا اللَّهَ رَغْبَةً فَبَلَغُوا النَّجَارَ، وَإِنَّ قَوْمًا عَبَدُوا اللَّهَ رَهْبَةً فَتَلَكَ عِبَادَةُ الْعَبِيدِ، وَإِنَّ قَوْمًا عَبَدُوا اللَّهَ شُكْرًا فَتَلَكَ عِبَادَةُ الْأَحْرَارِ» [الحكمة ٢٣٧]

“A group of people worshipped Allah out of desire for reward..., this is the worship of traders. Another group worshipped Allah out of fear; this is the worship of slaves. Still another group worshipped Allah out of gratefulness; this is the worship of free men.”¹² [*al-ḥikmah/ [words of] wisdom, 237*]

It seems that among these three perspectives, only worshipping based on “gratitude,” brings freedom in its boundless flow of “goodness.” In this distinction, those who worship God by doing trade with Him (merchants) for reaching Heaven, and those who worship Him based on fear of Hell (slaves), both appear in a far distance from the concept of “freedom” in worshipping, and far away from being free men.

“Merchants” recognize the most essential manifestation of the "goodness," only in the comfort and blessings of Heaven, and “slaves” see the total existence of "evil" in the all-pervasive fear of Hell. But, in an essentially different worldview, those “freed” (from concerns of Heaven and Hell), find “true gratitude” in embracing the “Pure/Essential Good,” or identifying God with the Good (*Khayr*), as the very Source of all “goodness,” which grants them a continuous realization of needlessness (*istighnā*), exaltation and elevation of the soul, happiness, joy and freedom, through the grateful experience of worshiping. This exceptional pathway of worshiping represents what I refer to here, as the “higher ethics of gratitude” (*akhlāq-i bartar-i shukr*).

V. The Sublime Gratitude

It has been reported that, after the tragedy of Āshūra, and the savage massacre of the Prophet ‘s grandson Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī and his followers, Ḥusayn’s sister, Zaynab al-Kubrā, who accompanied her brother, and witnessed the massacre and felt its immense and unbearable suffering in Karbalā, in a response to a wicked and hurtful question posed to her by the enemies’ chief commander, Ibn Ziyād, on how she viewed what happened to Ḥusayn and his family, stoutly replied, that “I saw nothing but beauty.”¹³ It seems that in the exalted ethics of *shakūri* (constant gratitude in both ease and hardship), and recognizing everything with goodness, an exceptional envisioning of “beauty” will be achieved, which we might refer to here, as the "sublime gratitude."

VI. The Blessed Gratitude

In the teachings of Buddhism, a kind of “gratitude meditation” has been discussed.¹⁴ Through a conscious effort on reaching mindfulness with an open heart, “Buddhist monks begin each day

with a chant of gratitude for the blessings of their life...the monks and nuns even offer

prayers of gratitude for the suffering they have been given.”¹⁵ In these practices of meditation on gratitude, feeling of happiness is associated with the recognition of “goodness” in everything.

In these gratitude meditations, “there’s a prayer in which one makes a rather unusual request of the universe: *Bring me challenges and obstacles*,”¹⁶ and also other prayers such as “*may I be given the appropriate difficulties so that my heart can truly open with compassion.*”¹⁷ In the Buddhist teachings, it is believed that “being grateful for not only life’s blessing but also its suffering is a key component of living a spiritual life—and more broadly, to a fulfilling and meaningful life.”¹⁸ It seems that, in this practicing of gratitude as worldview, everything in life, either blessing or suffering is practically considered as the manifestation of “goodness.”

VII. The Abundant Good

Contemporary researchers in the field of human behavior and human thinking have mentioned a certain type of conscious “attitude,” with focus on gratitude, which is called “attitude of gratitude.”¹⁹

This attitude has been described as “...creating a conscious mindset and habit to express thankfulness, and being grateful for, every aspect of your life, both the things that are going well and the things that aren’t.”²⁰ It is interesting to note that it is believed that “having an attitude of gratitude means you operate from a place of *abundance*, rather than scarcity.”²¹

It is worth pondering, that in the latest academic studies, and the fast growing researches on “gratitude,” as a “scientific field,” called

the "science of gratitude,"²² one of the most telling, foundational, and agreed upon definitions of "gratitude" in the 21st century, reminds us its essential correlation with "the good":

"Gratitude is the affirmation of goodness."²³

Concluding Remarks

Practicing "gratitude as worldview," in its constant and uninterrupted recognition of "the good/goodness," everywhere and all-the-time, also becomes an exalted interpretation of "beauty." The splendid combination of "gratitude and goodness," produces elevated human characteristics, and leads to the improvement of the quality of life. The current academic studies on "gratitude," provides us with a very considerable list of character enhancements, including, but not limited to, generosity; improving awareness, mindfulness, compassion, well-being (body and soul); feelings of sympathy, happiness, joy, and optimism; experiencing spiritual emancipation, and openness of heart to the vast realities of existence; controlling and decreasing greed, miserliness, selfishness, materialism, loneliness, isolation, depression, anxiety, mental and psychological distress, anger, jealousy/envy.²⁴ Probably, that is why, academic researchers refer to the "miracles" of gratitude.²⁵

The overflowing blessed fruits of practicing gratitude, which are presented in the form of "**character enhancement and improvement**," reminds us of the central and universal Qur'ānic notion of the promised "**abundance**" (لَا زَيْدَنَّكُمْ / *la-azidannakum*),²⁶ to the practitioners of "gratitude" (لَا يَنْ شَكَرْتُمْ / *la'in shakartum*)²⁷. God has made a universal proclamation (وَإِذْ تَأَذَّنَ رَبُّكُمْ) "and when your Lord proclaimed")²⁸ to increase His blessings upon grateful people.

This universal proclamation, which we might refer to here, as "the Qur'ānic Universal Manifesto," seems to manifest God's universal

Promise and Will, to increase “goodness” in the lives and characters of those who choose “gratitude” as their essential perspective and worldview. It might be thought provoking to know, that the first and the most central Qur’ānic chapter or “*sūrah*” (i.e., *sūrah* “*al-Fātiḥah*,” “The Opening,” or, *sūrah* “*al-Ḥamd*,” “Praise [of God],” or, “*Umm al-Kitāb*,” “the Mother of the Book”²⁹), is also called by other names, such as the *sūrah* “*al-Shukr*”³⁰ (“Gratitude”), and the *sūrah* “*al-Shifā’*”³¹ (“Healing”). “Gratitude” seems to find its miraculous ways to “healing” flaws and weaknesses of the human character.

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¹ See also, my work in English, *Ibn 'Arabī and Kubrawī: The Reception of the School of Ibn 'Arabī by Kubrawī Mystics* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2019), 138-44, which discusses a new methodology for approaching the concepts of *tashbīh* and *tanzīh* (immanence and transcendence). For a new approach to the concept of “methodology” in Islamic mysticism, see my book in English, *Method and Mysticism: Cosmos, Nature and Environment in Islamic Mysticism* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2011).

² See Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, trans. Barry Windeatt (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 59-60: “The sixth revelation is of the glorious gratitude...”

³ *Ibid.*, 60, emphasis added.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ See *ibid.*, back cover. See also, Center for Optimism, <https://www.centreforoptimism.com/All-shall-be-well-and-all-shall-be-well-and-all-manner-of-thing-shall-be-well>.

⁶ See, for example, Ann Voskamp, *One Thousand Gifts: A Dare to Live Fully Right Where You Are* (Michigan: Zondervan, 2011).

⁷ Ann Voskamp, *The Greatest Gift: Unwrapping the Full Love Story of Christmas* (Eugene, Oregon: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2013), 83.

⁸ Imam Ali Ibnul Husain Zainul Aabedeem As-Sajjad (a.s.), *Al-Saheefah Al-Sajjadiyyah Al-Kaamelah (The Psalms of Islam)*, translated with an Introduction and annotation by William C. Chittick, with a foreword by S. H. M. Jafri (Mumbai, India: Ja'fari Propagation Centre, Reprint, 2009), 151-2,

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⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ See, for example, Hershey H. Friedman, The City University of New York, “Hakaras Hatov: A Jewish Perspective on Recognizing the Good, Gratitude and Being Optimistic,” https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317840585_Hakaras_HaTov_A_Jewish_Perspective_on_Recognizing_the_Good_Gratitude_and_Being_Optimistic.

¹¹ Bible (King James Version): *Proverbs, 17:13*.

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¹² See *Nahj ul-Balaghah, Part 2 Selections from the Sayings and Preaching of Amīr Al-Mu'minīn 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib (Peace Be Upon Him) Including His Replies to Questions And Maxims Expressed for Various Purposes*. <https://www.al-islam.org/nahjul-balagha-part-2-letters-and-sayings/selections-sayings-and-preaching-amir-al-muminin-ali#hadith-n-237>

¹³ See, for example, Sayyid ibn Ṭawūs, *al-Luhūf alā Ghatlī al-Ṭufūf*, trans. Ahmad Fahri Zanjani (Tehran: Jahan Publication, 1384 SH/2005), 160. See also, Aḥmad ibn Alī Ṭabarsī, *al-Iḥtijāj 'alā Ahl al-Lijāj*, vol. 2, ed. Muhammad Baghir Khirsan (Mashhad/Iran: Nashr-i Murtaḍā, 1361 SH/1982), 308. The question has been reported as it follows:”

«كَيْفَ رَأَيْتَ صُنْعَ اللَّهِ بِأَخِيكَ وَ أَهْلِ بَيْتِكَ»: “[H]ow do you judge...what God has done to your brother and to the people of your house?,” see Christopher Paul Clohessy, *Half of My Heart: The Narratives of Zaynab, Daughter of 'Alī* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2020), 179; see also, Christopher Paul Clohessy, *Angels Hastening: The Karbalā' Dreams* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2021).

¹⁴ Joaquín Selva, “Gratitude Meditation: A Simple but Powerful Happiness Intervention,” <https://positivepsychology.com/gratitude-meditation-happiness/>. See also, Madhuleena Roy Chowdhury, “Guided Gratitude Meditation Scripts & Mantras (+Gratitude Yoga),” <http://positivepsychology.com/guided-gratitude-meditation/>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Carolyn Gregoire, “Jack Kornfield on Gratitude and Mindfulness,” https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/jack_kornfield_on_gratitude_and_mindfulness

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See, for example, Mark Petitt, “5 Ways to Develop an Attitude of Gratitude,” <https://lucemiconsulting.co.uk/attitude-of-gratitude>.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., emphasis added.

²² See, for example, Summer Allen, Ph.D., “The Science of Gratitude,” https://ggsc.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/GGSC-JTF_White_Paper-Gratitude-FINAL.pdf; Misty Pratt, “The Science of Gratitude,” <https://www.mindful.org/the-science-of-gratitude/>; Kevin Kruse, “The

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²³ See, Jeremy Adam Smith, et al., eds., *The Gratitude Project: How the Science of Thankfulness Can Rewire Our Brains for Resilience, Optimism, and the Greater Good* (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 2020),6.

²⁴ See, for example, Robert A. Emmons, *Thanks! How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make Us Happier* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2008); Robert A. Emmons, Michael E. McCullough, eds., *The Psychology of Gratitude* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004); Robert A. Emmons and Joanna Hill, *Words of Gratitude for Mind, Body and Soul*, introduction by Brother David Steindl-Rast (Pennsylvania: Templeton Foundation Press, 2001); Robert A. Emmons, *The Psychology of Ultimate Concerns: Motivation and Spirituality in Personality* (New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 2003). See also, Robert A. Emmons and Michael E. McCullough, “Counting Blessings Versus Burdens: An Experimental Investigation of Gratitude and Subjective Well-Being in Daily Life,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 84, No. 2, (2003): 377–389; “In Praise of Gratitude,” Harvard Health Publishing, Harvard Medical School, <https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/in-praise-of-gratitude>; S.P. Nguyen and C.L. Gordon, "The Relationship between Gratitude and Happiness in Young Children," *Journal of Happiness Studies: An Interdisciplinary Forum on Subjective Well-Being* 21, (2020): 2773–2787; Jeffrey J. Froh, David N. Miller, and Stephanie F. Snyder, "Gratitude in Children and Adolescents: Development, Assessment, and School-Based Intervention," *School Psychology Forum: Research in Practice*, Vol. 2, Issue 1, (Fall 2007):1-13, <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download;jsessionid=7FDF858070B24F3E38A7BA01BD0B1448?doi=10.1.1.183.3297&rep=rep1&type=pdf>; Ashraf H. A. Rushdy, *Philosophies of Gratitude* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020); Madhuleena Roy Chowdhury, “The Neuroscience of Gratitude and How It Affects Anxiety & Grief,” <https://positivepsychology.com/neuroscience-of-gratitude/>; Amy Morin,

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²⁵ See, for example, Robert Holden, Ph.D., “10 Miracles of Gratitude: The Power of Keeping a Daily Gratitude Journal,” <https://www.robertholden.com/blog/10-miracles-gratitude/>, and Arianna Huffington, “The Small Miracle of Gratitude: There’s Practically Nothing It Can’t Do,” <https://thriveglobal.com/stories/arianna-huffington-small-miracle-practicing-gratitude/>.

²⁶ وَإِذْ تَأَذَّنَ رَبُّكُمْ لَئِن شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ وَلَئِن كَفَرْتُمْ إِنَّ عَذَابِي لَشَدِيدٌ (ابراهيم/7)
"Qur'an: chapter "ابراهيم" "Ibrāhīm" (Abraham)/verse 7": “and when your Lord proclaimed, ‘if you give thanks, I shall surely grant you increase, but if you are ungrateful, truly my Punishment is severe!’” See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, et al, eds., *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (Harper One: New York, NY: 2015), 630.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ See ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, vol 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Kitāb al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1407 AH/1986), 116.

³⁰ Ibid., 190.

³¹ See Majd al-Dīn Abū Ṭāhir Muḥammad bin Ya‘qūb al-Fīrūz Ābādī, *Basā’ir Dhawil-Tamīz fī Laṭā’if al-Kitāb al-‘Azīz*, vol 1. (Cairo: al-Majlis al-‘Ala li-Shshu’n al-Islamiyyah-lijna Ihya al-Turath al-Islami: 1416 AH/1996), 128.

How to Change Your Mind: What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us About Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence

By Michael Pollan, New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2019, PP. 464

Reviewed by Samuel Bendeck Sotillos

After nearly five decades of being underground, psychedelics have returned. Before the ban, psychedelic research was burgeoning in the 1950s and 1960s given their anticipated therapeutic potential, but was hampered globally in the 1970s and 1980s despite purported evidence of these benefits. In the wake of the prohibition, we are now experiencing what has been widely hailed as the *psychedelic renaissance*, which began with the revival of research in the 1990s. However, by many accounts, while the research was officially curbed, there were always those dedicated to this cause and who continued the work in underground communities. It is worth reflecting as to why there is a resurgence now – what is behind the explosion of interest in psychedelics, especially in a non-traditional context.

There is evidently a search for more holistic forms of mental health treatment that go beyond the management of symptoms in support of authentic healing and wholeness. The vacuum created by the loss of religion in the world today is often unrecognized here because of the hegemonic dominance of modern science and its empirical epistemology that rules out alternative modes of knowing. For many, this void has been filled with modern psychology and science. As the wounds of the collective psyche become more apparent in our day, there is perhaps nothing more urgent than the need to recover an authentically integrated psychology or “science of the soul” that is rooted in metaphysics, sacred science, and the spiritual healing of psychic illness.

In this connection, we need to stress that there is a global mental health calamity right now.¹ Statistics demonstrate the alarming rise in the number of individuals taking psychotropic medications. There is mounting research suggesting that these drugs do not work as commonly supposed – in many cases, they not only create more problems (such as unwanted side effects), but can also cause chronic and potentially irreversible harm. The fact that more people are being diagnosed and treated does not mean that there has been a decrease in mental health problems; on the contrary, the number of those seeking mental health support has markedly escalated.

Although we see mental health services, including medication management, being made available to more people than ever before, cases have not declined as one might expect. If modern therapy and psychiatry were as effective as they are widely touted to be, the numbers would plateau and steadily decrease rather than dramatically rise as they have been. Psychotropic medications can reduce certain symptoms and might appear to be of benefit in improving cognitive functions – at least in some cases or for short periods. At the same time, however, they could impede spiritual development and psychological integration; vital considerations that are often overlooked.

It is with these preliminary observations that we begin to explore the contents of this book under review. Michael Pollan's work offers a vast compendium of information about the history of psychedelics and their use – both traditional and modern – in treating various mental health disorders. This informative and engaging book consists of a prologue and the following chapters: 'A Renaissance'; 'Natural History: Bemushroomed'; 'History: The First Wave'; 'Travelogue: Journeying Underground'; 'The Neuroscience: Your Brain on Psychedelics'; and 'The Trip Treatment: Psychedelics in Psychotherapy.' The work concludes with an epilogue, 'In Praise of Neural Diversity.' To escape the 'counter-cultural' baggage of the term *psychedelic* (a Greek compound coined in 1956 meaning "mind manifesting"), the word "entheogen" ("the divine within"), has been proposed also derived from the Greek. Prior to the introduction of these terms, the label *psychotomimetic* (also known as 'psychotogenic'), referred to the ability of these substances to mimic symptoms of psychosis, such as the alteration of perception, thoughts, and feelings.

Pollan draws our attention, early on, to a central finding of his study: "What is striking about this whole line of clinical research is the premise that it is not the pharmacological effect of the drug itself but the kind of mental experience it occasions—involving the temporary dissolution of one's ego—that may be the key to changing one's mind" (p. 11). Pollan notes that many of the individuals that he interviewed for his book were materialists or atheists prior to partaking in psychedelics. Subsequent to their experience, however, they reported the "sacred" horizons of existence opening up in them, which left an enduring mark on their lives.

The author notes that the recent renaissance in psychedelic research could be seen as commencing from 2006. In that year, a unanimous court decision was handed down which ruled that the Brazilian organization UDV (União do Vegetal or Centro Espírita Beneficente União do Vegetal) founded by Mestre Gabriel or José

Gabriel da Costa (1922–1971) could import *ayahuasca* (containing dimethyltryptamine or DMT) to the United States for religious use. The ruling was based on the *Religious Freedom Restoration Act* of 1993, which aimed to restore the right – under the First Amendment’s religious freedom clause – of American Indians to use peyote in their sacred rites. 2006 also saw the appearance of a groundbreaking article, “Psilocybin Can Occasion Mystical Type Experiences Having Substantial and Sustained Personal Meaning and Spiritual Significance,”² which was the first rigorously conducted study to examine the psychological effects of psychedelics.

It is important to clarify that, while modern psychedelic science could be said to have begun in 1938 when chemist Albert Hofmann (1906–2008) synthesized lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) at Sandoz laboratories in Basel, the use of sacred plants in the traditional world – especially for the First Peoples and their shamanic traditions – has existed for much longer. In this context, we are reminded of the Mazatec native healer, María Sabina (1894–1985), who introduced the use of psilocybin mushrooms to R. Gordon Wasson (1898–1986) in 1955, who then documented his experiences in a famous *Life* magazine article entitled “Seeking the Magic Mushroom”³ (1957). This helped to popularize psychedelics in the modern West which, in turn, served to launch the 1960s counter-culture movement. It was Wasson who sent specimens of the *Psilocybe mexicana* mushroom to Hofmann who, in 1958, was able to identify two psychoactive compounds for the development of a synthetic version of psilocybin.

Without María Sabina, Wasson’s contributions to psychedelic science would not have been as influential as they are both now and prior to the ban on these substances. However, it was because of his lack of respect for their traditional uses that María Sabina later expressed regret for introducing Wasson to psilocybin mushrooms: “Before [R. Gordon] Wasson nobody took the mushrooms only to

find God. They were always taken for the sick to get well.”⁴ She remarked:

Before Wasson, I felt that the *saint children* [mushrooms] elevated me. I don't feel like that anymore. The force has diminished. If Cayetano [García] hadn't brought the foreigners ... the *saint children* would have kept their power.... [F]rom the moment the foreigners arrived ... the *saint children* lost their purity. They lost their force; the foreigners spoiled them. From now on they won't be any good. There's no remedy for it.⁵

This statement is very disheartening and casts a negative light on the modern uses of these substances outside of a traditional context.

It is worth documenting Wasson's response to these reflections. Although apologetic, he did not regret his cultural appropriation, suggesting that this knowledge would have been lost had he not saved it from its inevitable fate. In 1976, Wasson wrote:

These words make me wince: I, Gordon Wasson, am held responsible for the end of a religious practice in Mesoamerica that goes back far, for a millenia. I fear she spoke the truth.... At the time of my first velada with María Sabina, in 1955, I had to make a choice: suppress my experience or resolve to present it worthily to the world. There was never a doubt in my mind. The sacred mushrooms and the religious feeling concentrated in them through the Sierras of Southern Mexico had to be made known to the world, and worthily so, at whatever cost to me personally. If I did not do this, “consulting the mushroom” would go on for a few years longer, but its extinction was and is inevitable.⁶

It is difficult to accept that psilocybin was first introduced into the modern West by Wasson – a Vice-President of Public Relations at J. P. Morgan & Company – and Henry Luce (1898–1967), the owner of *Life* magazine; two less likely representatives of the counter-culture could hardly be imagined! Upon Wasson's return

from Mexico, it is reported that he facilitated his own *ad hoc* mushroom ceremonies at his Manhattan apartment.

Wasson did not set out on his journey to meet the Mazatec healer, María Sabina, and learn about the sacred mushroom without certain preconceived theories about who she was and what he would find – this fact deeply influenced his reporting to the outside world. In his romanticized depictions, he ignored the Mazatec people’s present-day devotion to Catholicism and María Sabina’s dual participation in both her native religion and the Christian tradition.

The assumption that Christian participation compromises one’s “Indianness” needs to be questioned, as this is certainly not the case. For example, Joseph Epes Brown (1920–2000) – a renowned scholar of Native American traditions – found that Black Elk (1863–1950), the Lakota *wicasa wakan* or holy man, held a view similar to that of the Mazatec. Brown makes a valid point about this delicate relationship:

Throughout virtually all indigenous American Indian traditions, a pervasive theme has been that all forms and forces of all orders of the immediately experienced natural environment may communicate to human beings the totality of that which is to be known of the sacred mysteries of creation, and thus of the sacred essence of being and beings.... Such conditioning to openness of mind and being towards manifestations of the sacred makes it understandable that for these peoples religious matters of whatever origin are not open to either question or argument. When, therefore, the Christian message came to the peoples through dedicated missionaries who led exemplary and sacrificial lives, the people easily understood the truths of message and example due to the profundity of their own beliefs; it was not difficult for them to adapt new expressions of values into the sacred fabric of their own culture. The historical phenomenon is thus not conversation as understood in an exclusivistic manner by the bearers of Christianity, but rather a continuation of the people’s ancient and traditional

facility for what may be termed non-exclusive cumulative adhesion. If this process of polysynthesis can be accomplished with neither confusion nor dissonance, it is ultimately due to the ability of American Indian peoples to penetrate and comprehend the central and most profound nature of all experience and reality.⁷

Brown, who met Black Elk in 1947, was a catalyst in providing practical support for the maintenance of indigenous spiritual traditions, as recorded in his account of the seven sacred rites of the Lakota.⁸ In stark contrast, Wasson's work appears not to have been focused on protecting the integrity of Mazatec spirituality and its sacramental use of this medicine; rather, he opened the doors for their mass consumption without regard for their context-specific nature or for the traditional peoples who were the rightful custodians of these remedies.

Pollan discusses the therapeutic utility of these compounds. In the early 1950s, psychedelics had been used to try to treat many conditions, such as addiction, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, schizophrenia, autism, and end-of-life anxiety. Bill Wilson (1895–1971), co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.), had sought to introduce LSD therapy into A.A. in the 1950s. This was in large part because Wilson credited his own sobriety to a mystical experience induced through Belladonna, a plant that can produce a type of psychedelic experience, which was administered to him at Manhattan's Towns Hospital 1934. It is not widely known that the central tenet of A.A. – a “spiritual” awakening that brings about the surrender to a “higher power” – stems from a psychedelic experience. In 1956, Wilson had several LSD sessions with Sidney Cohen (1910–1987) and Betty Eisner (1915–2004). Wilson had hoped to find a place for LSD within A.A.; however, his colleagues in the fellowship vehemently disagreed with him and wanted no part of it.

British psychiatrist Humphry Osmond (1917–2004) stressed the potential of LSD to allow mental health professionals to “enter the

illness and see with a madman's eyes, hear with his ears, and feel with his skin" (p. 146). Aldous Huxley (1894–1963), in correspondence with Osmond, noted: "People will think they are going mad, when in fact they are beginning, when they take it, to go sane" (p. 162). Abram Hoffer (1917–2009), a Canadian psychiatrist, emphasized that it was the transpersonal dimension that was of therapeutic benefit: "We considered not the chemical, but the experience as a key factor in therapy" (p. 149). This is something that Sidney Cohen recognized in an article published in 1965 when he coined the expression "therapy by self-transcendence"⁹ (p. 159).

Through his extensive study of the research on psychedelic substances, Pollan points to the purported therapeutic efficacy of these compounds in mental health treatment. The ability of psychedelics to provide remarkable results in merely hours, compared to what may take years in mainstream psychotherapy, is highlighted as extraordinary. In his initial experience with psilocybin, Timothy Leary (1920–1996) reported a profound transformation: "In four hours by the swimming pool in Cuernavaca [Mexico], I learned more about the mind, the brain, and its structures than I did in the preceding fifteen [years] as a diligent psychologist" (p. 187). Pollan notes: "Of all the phenomenological effects that people on psychedelics report, the dissolution of the ego seems to me by far the most important and the most therapeutic" (p. 389). Yet, at the same time, he offers a word of caution regarding psychedelics: "It is one of the many paradoxes of psychedelics that these drugs can sponsor an ego-dissolving experience that in some people quickly leads to massive ego inflation" (p. 193). This is likely unavoidable when traditional medicines are misused outside of a proper context.

The author also highlights the different positions taken by researchers on whether to make psychedelics more readily available. For the historical record, it is worth pointing out that many were opposed to how Leary hazardously unleashed these substances onto the world. Leary founded the Harvard Psilocybin

Project in 1960 and, in 1971, President Richard Nixon (1913–1994) declared him “the most dangerous man in America” (p. 58). An example of someone critical of his approach was Myron Stolaroff (1920–2013), who wrote the following to Leary:

Tim, I am convinced you are heading for very serious trouble if your plan goes ahead as you have described it to me, and it would not only make a great deal of trouble for you, but for all of us, and may do irreparable harm to the psychedelic field in general. (p. 199)

Aldous Huxley, Humphry Osmond, and Al Hubbard (1901–1982) all shared Leary’s sense of historical mission to get psychedelics out into the world, and they had a very distinct manner of accomplishing this. They believed that if they could capture the hearts and minds of the influential or intellectuals, this would be the best way to introduce psychedelics into the culture. Leary’s approach, by contrast, was to start at the bottom and work this influence into the higher levels of the culture. It is worth adding that Huxley’s book *The Doors of Perception* (1954) was, according to some, responsible for launching the psychedelic revolution.

Pollan also discusses the government’s covert program of testing these compounds and shaping the public mindset about psychedelics. It is difficult to ascertain the full extent of the government’s secretive MK-ULTRA program and the harm it caused, including to what degree the CIA negatively influenced the dominant culture about psychedelics. James Fadiman notes: “In the shadows, the CIA had tried to use these substances to confuse and terrify people. Through front organizations, the CIA also sponsored small conferences and publications where therapists and researchers shared their findings.”¹⁰

Researchers and mental health practitioners need to be aware of the complexity involved in understanding and treating the human psyche. As the soul is inseparable from the spiritual dimension of existence, treating it requires knowledge of humanity’s spiritual traditions. This is something that modern Western psychology does

not appear to comprehend. Each person consists of Spirit, soul, and body, and these dimensions cannot be ignored without causing potential harm. The soul is a mystery; it is immersed in time while also being rooted in the timeless. The human body is of both time and space, whereas the Spirit transcends both. The human psyche belongs to the intermediary realm between body and Spirit, but partakes of both dimensions. With the loss of spiritual metaphysics in our contemporary culture, Western psychology has become correspondingly degraded. Any consideration of the psyche is altogether absent from the discipline and, as a result, the field of mental health has been in a state of disarray.

Practitioners of ancient and traditional forms of medicine had not only a profound knowledge of the nature of things but a deep understanding of metaphysics and cosmology, along with their connection to a “science of the soul.” Such is not the case with today’s mental health professionals. The required study and experience (clinical hours, supervision, and preparation for licensure)—although very demanding—cannot compare to the training of traditional healers or the apprenticeship of a venerated shaman, which also included methodological supports for the purification of the soul and the cultivation of fundamental virtues. Given the dominance of modern science, some assert that mental health professionals, whatever their credentials may be, will have a greater knowledge of the mind and human behavior than traditional healers. However, this does not appear to be the case.

When we see, for example, psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy being practiced, it is not easy to separate its secular therapeutic application from the effects it may have on the spiritual health of the individual receiving this treatment modality. It can be argued that, because there are mental health professionals administering the psychedelic in a therapeutic environment (which are all secular), there is no blurring of this line. However, the issue is that whenever a person is being treated, especially when their consciousness is being dramatically altered, the Spirit, soul, and body are all present

whether this is acknowledged or not. Even if practitioners suggest that they are only addressing the psycho-physical realm, these two dimensions make up an irreducible whole in the Spirit and this cannot be partitioned in such an arbitrary manner.

From one perspective, it may seem efficient to administer a psychedelic the way that is done in psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy, seeing as the therapist engages the patient minimally or only as needed. But from the traditional perspective, this is precarious at best. In the healing ceremonies of the traditions where subtle and spiritual influences are evoked, the spiritual guide is present to the subtle and spiritual world, which is not always perceived by others.

A large part of this role is providing spiritual protection while the person is journeying in the subtle realm. Secular psychotherapists are unable to provide this protection and are often unaware of its vital importance in the healing process. In traditional worlds, the employment of psychic elements was always entrusted to someone with deep knowledge of the spiritual realm, and of the relationship between the soul and body, which no amount of secular training can offer.

Whitall N. Perry (1920–2005) illustrates why psychic phenomena are so seductive and difficult to discern: “The confusion is between the psychic and spiritual planes of reality, where the unfamiliar, the strange, and the bizarre are mistaken for the transcendent, simply by the fact that they lie outside the ordinary modes of consciousness.”¹¹ This recognition appears to be missing from the standard professional literature, and in any of the discussions related to the promises of psychedelic science and its implementation. René Guénon (1886–1951) elaborates on these dangers:

It is impossible to be too mistrustful of every appeal to the ‘subconscious’ ... in a sort of ‘cosmic consciousness’ that shuts out all ‘transcendence’ and so also shuts out all effective spirituality ... but what is to be said of someone who flings himself into the ocean

and has no aspiration but to drown himself in it? This is very precisely the significance of a so-called ‘fusion’ with a ‘cosmic consciousness’ that is really nothing but the confused and indistinct assemblage of all the psychic influences ... these influences have absolutely nothing in common with spiritual influences.... Those who make this fatal mistake either forget about or are unaware of the distinction between the ‘upper waters’ and the ‘lower waters’; instead of raising themselves toward the ‘ocean above’, they plunge into the abyss of the ‘ocean below’; instead of concentrating all their powers so as to direct them toward the formless world, which alone can be called ‘spiritual’, they disperse them in the endlessly changeable and fugitive diversity of the forms of subtle manifestation ... with no suspicion that they are mistaking for a fullness of ‘life’ something that is in truth the realm of death and of a dissolution without hope of return.¹²

Therapists working with individuals in psychotherapy need a properly metaphysical and spiritual framework in which to situate the myriad phenomena and experiences that may arise when dealing with psychic forces; however, this possibility cannot be admitted by mainstream psychology, as the discipline has renounced its metaphysical and spiritual roots. A question then beckons: If a therapist were to adopt a “science of the soul” (something familiar to all religions and spiritual traditions that do not depend on modern psychology), could psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy be a promising option?

This is difficult to answer. Even though, ideally, an outstanding level of spiritual acumen would have to be present in someone who practiced spiritually-informed therapy, this does not mean that a sufficient knowledge of psychedelics would be available to successfully guide treatment sessions; especially if the therapist did not belong to a tradition that sanctions the use of such substances within a proper context. In any case, would such an application even be appropriate in the first place? There is not sufficient space in this review to explore further this critical question.

What is often overlooked is that these compounds were never intended as a substitute for religious practice. Participation in a spiritual tradition was a given, prior to the desacralizing influence of the modern world. Wherever these plant medicines were used, they always required the observation of spiritual and ethical codes of conduct, along with purification rites prior to their usage in a religious context. Furthermore, neither was it simply about ingesting these substances.

Every faith provides a way of understanding the Spirit and of living in accordance with this reality. It is said that psychedelics have been known and used in sacred rituals throughout the world since time immemorial; however, we need to add the following caveat: “If drugs could change and transform consciousness, it is certain that this knowledge would have been incorporated into spiritual teachings from time immemorial. On the other hand, intoxicants and drugs have served universally as supports adjacent to ritual practices, even where the use is purely symbolic.”¹³

The authentically spiritual dimension found within the world’s religions is what keeps a faith healthy, as it were. Yet many do not know how to access this dimension of these traditions, so it is often assumed to be missing when this is assuredly not the case. We must take the time to rediscover these neglected elements at the heart of all religions. There are those who are averse to the idea of religion and are only interested in its mystical or esoteric aspects, as is the case with the widespread attitudes of those who say that they are “spiritual but not religious.” This often fails to recognize that religion is the vehicle that allows us to access its inner dimension. We recall that while the word “religion” off-putting to many (who prefer the notion of “spirituality”), we need to remember that the etymological root of the English word “religion” is the Latin *religare*, meaning to “re-link,” or “bind back” to the Divine that is transcendent to, and immanent in, all things.

Certain advocates have gone so far as to claim that the very phenomenon of religion itself had its genesis in psychedelics.¹⁴ In particular it has been suggested that these compounds were the key components of both the *Soma* mentioned in the Rig Veda and the Avestan *Hoama* of the Zoroastrians. Some have identified this substance as the mushroom *Amanita muscaria*¹⁵ or the fungus ergot (or *Kykeon* of the Eleusinian Mysteries) which contains psychoactive alkaloids such as LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide). It has also been asserted that that *Manna* of the Old Testament was a psychedelic,¹⁶ as well as the psychoactive mushrooms associated with the cult of Mithras¹⁷ (said to be used in ancient Egypt).¹⁸ Even the origins of Christianity have been ascribed to *Amanita muscaria*.¹⁹ Needless to say, such flagrant reductionism is open to serious challenges.

Although these sacred plants were thought to have been used from around 5000 BC;²⁰ that is, at the beginning of what the Hindu tradition calls the *Kali-Yuga* or ‘Iron Age’ – the culmination of our current temporal cycle – or, at best, the preceding *Dvapara Yuga* or ‘Bronze Age.’

Thus, it could be said that the use of sacred plants occurred late in the cosmic cycle (*manvantara*) and not at its inception; namely, the *Krita-Yuga* or *Satya-Yuga* (known as the ‘Golden Age’ in Western cosmology). This appears to suggest, as Mircea Eliade (1907–1986), the Romanian historian of religion noted, that “the use of intoxicants ... is a recent innovation and points to a decadence in shamanic technique.”²¹

To reduce the origin of religion to psychedelics is to completely misconceive the nature of revelation. Sacred plants can certainly be a medium through which spiritual influences may be channeled, but to suggest that they are the source of all religious manifestations is arguably risible. Spiritual phenomena are not the concoction of human beings but, rather, should be seen as firmly grounded in a

‘vertical’ dimension of reality that is transcendent, yet immanent in all things at the same time.

As the Psalmist reminds us, we cannot ask God to “take off the veil from mine eyes” (119:18) without first adhering to an authentic religious form. The veil exists for the protection of the seeker and cannot be lifted prematurely without grave consequences, and this is taught in various examples of traditional exegesis. As we have already seen, we should “enter houses through their proper doors” (Qur’ān 2:189). Within the Hindu tradition, it is said: “Nourished by the sacrifice, the Gods shall indeed bestow on you the enjoyments ye desire. Whoso enjoys—without offering to Them—Their gifts, he is verily a thief”²² (Bhagavad Gītā 3:12). There is a similar image in the Gospels: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber” (John 10:1). The inner chamber of religion is only accessible through the outer portal.

In the same way that we display common courtesy towards a friend by entering their house through the front – not the back – door, we must likewise embark on the spiritual path through one of the revealed traditions and not attempt to access its inner sanctum without the consent and blessing of the religion itself. To do so through the profane use of psychedelics, that is without participation in a traditional framework that allows and integrates such a use, is to demonstrate a lack of reverence which could engender spiritual harm. This was something to which Wasson, along with many modern Western seekers in search of mystical experiences, did not give sufficient importance—as the remorseful words of the Mazatec healer María Sabina, quoted earlier, illustrates so well.

After all, no saints or spiritual sages were interested in mystical states in and of themselves; what they sought was inner transformation by the purification of the soul and cultivation of virtues. In the Buddhist tradition, one is cautioned about becoming

attached to blissful states of meditative absorption (Pāli: *jhānas*). In Islamic spirituality, the superficial state of *ḥāl* is understood to be fleeting in nature, unlike the abiding spiritual ‘station’ of *maqām*. The wayfarer requires persistence and continuous effort on the path in order to reach a permanent proximity to the inner Truth (*Ḥaqīqah*). Ibn ‘Arabī (1165–1240) stresses the need to go beyond all spiritual experiences: “None of the great ones (*al-akābir*) ever seek states. They only seek stations.”²³

Huston Smith (1919–2016), one of the twentieth-century’s most internationally renowned and revered doyens of the world’s religions (who is mentioned in the book being reviewed), studied these matters in depth and reiterates the shortcomings of secular uses of psychedelics: “Religion is interested not in altered states but in altered traits—life transformations. The evidence is quite clear that chemically induced mystical experiences offer less on that front unless they are established in a sacred context.”²⁴ He elsewhere makes the following reservations:

If the only thing to say about the psychedelics was that they seem on occasion to offer direct disclosures of the psychic and celestial planes as well as (in rare instances) the Infinite itself, we would hold our peace. For though such experiences may be veridical in ways, the goal, it cannot be stressed too often, is not religious experiences; it is the religious life. And with respect to the latter, psychedelic “theophanies” can abort a quest as readily as, perhaps more readily than, they can further it.²⁵

Behaviorism and psychoanalysis, the twin pillars of Western psychology, have eroded the spiritual foundations of the human psyche and irretrievably fractured the discipline. The promises of more holistic approaches to psychotherapy lie not in augmenting the already desacralized foundations of modern Western psychology but, rather, in recovering the metaphysical roots of true healing found among the diverse religious and spiritual traditions of humanity. Only a fully integrated “science of the soul” can support

such an endeavor. This will not only benefit those seeking a more traditional form of therapy rooted in sacred realities, but will also provide therapists with the spiritual discernment necessary for a more holistic form of treatment.

As secular psychotherapy has failed to apprehend modes of knowing and healing that exist outside the epistemological constraints of modern science, how could psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy – if grounded on such a science – determine the short-term gains versus the longer-term consequences of using psychedelics in a non-ritual context? The problem is that it cannot because if the potential side-effects of psychedelics are not reported by the individual, they may not be detected at all. The potential spiritual harm caused by using these substances may not necessarily fit any of the current diagnostic criteria as found in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) or the *International Classification of Diseases* (ICD) – the two main sources of diagnosing someone with a mental illness.

As mentioned earlier, for traditional healers, the human being again consists of a tripartite constitution of Spirit, soul, and body which cannot be reduced to the merely mental or physical aspects of a person. In other words, there are “remedies” that might provide a short-term benefit to our everyday cognitive functioning, but which, nevertheless are harmful to the psyche. The dissolution of our empirical ego could be an example of this; while such treatment might cure an immediate symptom or illness, if done in a secular context, it could violate the norms stipulated by spiritual traditions when using psychedelics.²⁶ This could lead to a profound and irreversible spiritual disequilibrium in individuals.

If traditional civilizations are calling us to live more devout and spiritually grounded lives, we need to embrace the time-worn paths that have been revealed to us. To fail to ground traditionally employed methods of psychotherapy in the religious outlook from which they originate, is to perpetuate modernity’s crippling

reductionism and its ongoing assault on sacred conceptions of reality.

R. Gordon Wasson may have benefited from the following observations by Joseph Epes Brown, which still hold true for many advocates of the psychedelic renaissance:

We are still very far from being aware of the dimensions and ramifications of our ethnocentric illusions. Nevertheless, by the very nature of things we are now forced to undergo a process of intense self-examination; to engage in a serious re-evaluation of the premises and orientations of our society.²⁷

Michael Pollan's book has done a commendable job of documenting the history of psychedelic use in the modern West and its renaissance, yet without directly acknowledging it, his book reveals the aching hunger that many, in our time, have for healing and wholeness. Mainstream psychology and secular ideologies cannot meet this abiding need, which is why people are turning to psychedelics as a *faux* religion, so to speak. In presenting his research, Pollan openly shares his own experiences with psychedelics. Yet it would be regrettable if others – intrigued by the positive assessment of psychedelics presented in this book – were to follow in the author's footsteps and encourage their misuse outside of a strictly traditional context.

To repeat, without appropriate spiritual preparation and guidance, any attempt to penetrate the intermediary realm by means of these substances, gives rise to serious concerns that are rarely considered:

Nothing could be more erroneous than the belief that the magical operation of some external power on the psychic faculties could in itself effect a real and lasting transmutation of soul, especially apart from all question of suitability and preparation of the vehicle involved ... a drug through the violence of its poison can rupture the normal channels of consciousness so as to produce "openings"

into extra-normal modalities of psychic experience ... [yet they may be none] other than fragmentary in their positive content.²⁸

People are thirsty for the transcendent but having inappropriate recourse to psychedelics will provoke an “indistinct assemblage of all the psychic influences”²⁹ in a person. Such seekers may believe that they are in contact with the transcendent when, in fact, any perceived fissure or “opening up” is much more likely to be an exposure to negative psychic forces instead. Despite public testimonials about promising therapeutic outcomes, there are clear dangers when one seeks to force open these psychic channels with drugs. Psychedelics are well known to trigger psychosis in people already suffering from mental illness or in those with a history of psychological disturbances.

Taking psychedelic medicine with a view to restoring the harmony of one’s Spirit, soul, and body is a fraught option, given the serious dangers that can beset such treatment when improperly administered. We need to acknowledge that what is poisonous in one context can also be curative in another. Keeping this essential principle in mind, we need to affirm, once again, the need to use these traditional medicines only in an appropriate context.

Some might suggest that having recourse to psychedelics in a world that is in such disarray constitutes an *upāya* or “saving means” as the Buddhists would say; precisely because they offer some kind of psychological salve for the abnormal conditions spawned by our desacralized environment. It remains unclear as to whether those who do not adhere to a spiritual tradition can benefit – and to what degree – from these sacred medicines, even under the appropriate circumstances. As such, there are many questions that remain unanswered; reflecting, no doubt, the anomalous and deeply ambiguous conditions of our time.

Perhaps out of a saving mercy in these end times, psychedelic medicine may now prove beneficial – not only to the religious faithful – but also to secular society at large; in other words, the

traditional restraints on the use of these substances may have been providentially set aside *in extremis*, so to speak. With that in mind, we recall the following saying (*hadīth*) of the Prophet Mohammed: “At the beginning, he who omits one-tenth of the law is condemned but, at the end, he who accomplishes one-tenth of the law is saved.”

Despite the potential relief that could be made more widely available to ailing individuals, it remains troubling that the psychedelic renaissance – while apparently endorsing traditional medicines – does not encourage a return to the very wellsprings of genuine wisdom (with its own healing modalities) which can only be discovered in the vast religious patrimony of humanity. It is only here that we can find a proper spiritual framework for dealing with the subtle and ambivalent phenomena of our psychic universe; over and above any medicinal value they are able to confer, despite some of the hazards that have been already identified.

Many of the problems we see in modernity betray the undiagnosed symptoms of the spiritual crisis referred to above. Rather than introducing psychedelics to contemporary humanity, which has, for the most part, no spiritual or cultural connection to these substances, would it not be better to address these traumas at their root? We can do this by returning to one of the world’s religious traditions. How can we appreciate the true value of more integrative forms of psychotherapy and healing, if we persistently ignore its divine source and the traditions that protect it against profane misuse?

In order to mitigate the risks that psychedelics pose in a secular world – and as their use might not be appropriate for all people – it would be easier to devote ourselves to the study of the vast treasury of universal and timeless wisdom that remains accessible in the world of sacred traditions – one of the great compensations available to us all in these dark and challenging times.³⁰

Endnotes

¹ See Thomas Insel, *Healing: Our Path from Mental Illness to Mental Health* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2022).

² Roland R. Griffiths, William A. Richards, Una McCann, and Robert Jesse, “Psilocybin Can Occasion Mystical-Type Experiences Having Substantial and Sustained Personal Meaning and Spiritual Significance,” *Psychopharmacology*, Vol. 187, No. 3 (August 2006), pp. 268–292.

³ R. Gordon Wasson, “Seeking the Magic Mushroom,” *Life*, May 13, 1957, pp. 100–120.

⁴ María Sabina, quoted in Álvaro Estrada, *María Sabina: Her Life and Chants*, trans. Henry Munn (Santa Barbara, CA: Ross-Erikson, 1981), p. 73.

⁵ María Sabina, quoted in Álvaro Estrada, *María Sabina: Her Life and Chants*, trans. Henry Munn (Santa Barbara, CA: Ross-Erikson, 1981), pp. 91, 90.

⁶ R. Gordon Wasson, “A Retrospective Essay,” in Álvaro Estrada, *María Sabina: Her Life and Chants*, trans. Henry Munn (Santa Barbara, CA: Ross-Erikson, 1981), p. 20.

⁷ Joseph Epes Brown, “North American Indian Living Religions,” in *The Spiritual Legacy of the American Indian: Commemorative Edition with Letters While Living with Black Elk*, eds. Marina Brown Weatherly, Elenita Brown and Michael Oren Fitzgerald (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2007), p. 20.

⁸ See Joseph Epes Brown, *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk’s Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989).

⁹ See Sidney Cohen, “LSD and the Anguish of Dying,” *Harper’s Magazine*, Vol. 231, No. 1384 (September 1965), pp. 69–72, 77–78.

¹⁰ James Fadiman, “Therapeutic Effectiveness of Single Guided Sessions,” in *The Psychedelic Explorer’s Guide: Safe, Therapeutic, and Sacred Journeys* (Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 2011), p. 104.

¹¹ Whitall N. Perry, “Drug-Induced Mysticism: The Mescaline Hypothesis,” in *Challenges to a Secular Society* (Oakton, VA: The Foundation for Traditional Studies, 1996), p. 10.

¹² René Guénon, “The Confusion of the Psychic and the Spiritual,” in *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, trans. Lord Northbourne (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), pp. 239–240.

¹³ Whitall N. Perry, “Drug-Induced Mysticism: The Mescaline Hypothesis,” in *Challenges to a Secular Society* (Oakton, VA: The Foundation for Traditional Studies, 1996), p. 15.

¹⁴ R. Gordon Wasson, Stella Kramrisch, Jonathan Ott and Carl A.P. Ruck, *Persephone’s Quest: Entheogens and the Origins of Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986).

¹⁵ R. Gordon Wasson, *Soma: Divine Mushroom of Immortality* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1969).

¹⁶ Dan Merkur, “Manna, the Showbread, and the Eucharist: Psychoactive Sacraments in the Bible,” in *Psychoactive Sacramentals: Essays on Entheogens and Religion*, ed. Thomas B. Roberts (San Francisco, CA: Council on Spiritual Practices, 2001), pp. 139–144.

¹⁷ Carl A.P. Ruck, Mark Alwin Hoffman and José Alfredo González Celdrán, *Mushrooms, Myth and Mithras: The Drug Cult that Civilized Europe* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 2011).

¹⁸ Andrija Puharich, *The Sacred Mushroom: Key to the Door of Eternity* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1959).

¹⁹ John Marco Allegro, *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross: A Study of the Nature and Origins of Christianity Within the Fertility Cults of the Ancient Near East* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1971).

²⁰ Peter T. Furst, “Ancient Altered States,” in *Higher Wisdom: Eminent Elders Explore the Continuing Impact of Psychedelics*, eds. Roger Walsh and Charles S. Grob (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), p. 153. Some psychedelic researchers regard the rock art found in the mountain range of Tassili n’Ajjer southeast Algeria to be the most ancient verification of psychedelic use.

²¹ Mircea Eliade, “Shamanic Ideologies and Techniques among the Indo-Europeans,” in *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 401.

²² Bhagavad Gītā 3:12, *The Bhagavad-Gītā with the Commentary of Śrī Śankarachāryā*, trans. Alladi Mahadeva Sastri (Madras: V. Ramaswamy Sastrulu & Sons, 1961), p. 87.

²³ Ibn ‘Arabī, quoted in William C. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Cosmology* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 266.

²⁴ Huston Smith, quoted in Richard Smoley and Jay Kinney, “Tradition and Truth: A Gnosis Interview with Huston Smith,” *Gnosis*, No. 37 (Fall 1995), p. 35.

²⁵ Huston Smith, “Appendix: The Psychedelic Evidence,” in *Forgotten Truth: The Common Vision of the World’s Religions* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 155.

²⁶ See Mark Perry, “The Forbidden Door,” in *The Mystery of Individuality: Grandeur and Delusion of the Human Condition* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2012), pp. 245–271.

²⁷ Joseph Epes Brown, “Preface,” to *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk’s Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), pp. xv–xvi.

²⁸ Whittall N. Perry, “Drug-Induced Mysticism: The Mescaline Hypothesis,” in *Challenges to a Secular Society* (Oakton, VA: The Foundation for Traditional Studies, 1996), pp. 7, 8.

²⁹ René Guénon, “The Confusion of the Psychic and the Spiritual,” in *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, trans. Lord Northbourne (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), p. 240.

³⁰ See Whittall N. Perry, *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom* (London, UK: Allen and Unwin, 1971); reissued as *The Spiritual Ascent: A Compendium of the World’s Wisdom* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2008).

Islam in the Modern World: Challenged by the West, Threatened by Fundamentalism, Keeping Faith with Tradition

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 2011 (revised edition), 496pp

Reviewed by Seyed Sadr al-Din Safavi
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Islam in the Modern World written by Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr presents the teachings of traditional Islam on central themes that are subject to debate concerning Islam and the Islamic civilization by contrasting it with the revivalist and fundamentalist currents in the Muslim world and with modernism. These themes range from socio-economic to political, from philosophical and what constitutes knowledge or *al-'ilm* to art and architecture.

The Islamic Tradition which Nasr expounds in this work and is the central theme of much of his writings, as one of the primary figures of Perennial philosophy, is discussed in depth in the prologue and makes a clear distinction between Traditional Islam versus

revivalist and fundamentalist interpretations of Islam and Modernism. The term 'tradition' as employed by Nasr and Perennial Philosophy "implies both the Sacred as revealed to humanity through revelation and the unfolding and development of that sacred message in the history of the particular human community for which it was destined; it implies both horizontal continuity with the Origin and a vertical connection that relates each moment in the development of the life of any single tradition to the metahistorical Transcendent Reality."¹ The opposition between tradition and modernism is because "modernism, understood as a distinct worldview and paradigm, either denies truths of a religious or metaphysical nature or creates in the religious and metaphysical realms a blurred image within which half-truths appear as the truth itself, thereby compromising the integrity of all that tradition represents."²

Nasr offers a survey of the vastly heterogeneous contemporary currents of thought in the Islamic world, which offer different solutions to the problems and challenges faced by Muslims and the Islamic civilization today, which runs contrary to and shows the nativity of the West's homogenous description of the Islamic world. "Traditional Islam is still the form of Islam followed by the great majority of Muslims"³, however in confronting the question of why "the Islamic world was being defeated by non-Islamic forces such as the British and the French everywhere from North Africa to India and in such an irreversible fashion?"⁴ Four currents of thought which at times overlap with each other came forth, 1. Messianic hopes, 2. Fundamentalist Reaction, 3. Modern Reform Movements, 4. Revival of the Islamic Tradition.

One of the significant aspects of the book is its analysis of different facets of the Islamic tradition, from Philosophy and Education to arts. Essentially Each of the headings in *Islam in the Modern World* lays the foundation for further research into practical applications of the Islamic tradition to central issues of the Islamic World. In the field of art and architecture, for example, much of the Muslim

world has adopted Western techniques of urban development. Constructing concrete jungles and glass and steel skyscrapers that function as prisons, isolating their inhabitants from one another, and western-style shopping malls dominated by the offerings of international companies instead of local products and services. Even the Kaaba in Mecca considered the holiest site in Islam is a victim of this blind adoption of "progress" imported from the West. During the pre-Islamic period in Arabia, which is referred to as *Jahiliya* or ignorance, none of the buildings in the vicinity of the Ka'ba were built taller than the Ka'ba. Yet today the Ka'ba is surrounded by tall skyscrapers bearing the brand of international hospitality corporations and devoid of a trace of the vibrant tradition of Islamic architecture. This is done in the name of progress. Yet it is nothing more than blindly following and adapting modern Western standards of development and disregarding the rich and beautiful tradition of Islamic Art and Architecture that is rooted in the sacred. How do we approach urban development from the perspective of Islamic tradition by placing the sacred, beauty, family, and an interconnected, caring, and supportive community that fosters both material well-being and most importantly spiritual awakening and development?

Islam in the Modern World is one of the most important introductory books on the central civilizational issues facing the Muslim world. Without a doubt, it is an essential reading for Muslims and non-Muslims in the West seeking a *wholistic* understanding of the Islamic Tradition and the different currents that surround it. Emphasis must be placed here on the wholistic understanding of Islam and the Islamic tradition. That is based on an in-depth understanding and familiarity of firstly the sources of the religion which are the Holy Qur'an as Divine revelation and the Prophetic Hadith. And secondly, the Islamic sciences that stem from these sources and have been developed by Muslim scholars in the past 1400 years. Sciences such as Quranic commentary, Philosophy, Theology, Theoretical 'Irfan, Islamic art and architecture, Jurisprudence, and the science of Hadith. Deep

familiarity with and understanding of this rich and expansive Islamic scholarly tradition is one of the central elements that shines through the numerous invaluable works of Professor Nasr and results in his writings on Islam being wholistic, comprehensive, and essential in the West.

Endnotes

1 Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Islam in the Modern World*. (New York: HarperOne; Reprint 2011), Prologue Section.

2 Ibid.

3 Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Islam in the Modern World*. (New York: HarperOne; Reprint 2011), *Islam in the present-day Islamic world* Section.

4 *ibid*

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