

Four Texts of Ibn al-‘Arabī on the Creative Self-Manifestation of the Divine Names

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Ibn al-‘Arabī treated the key cosmogonic subject of the hierarchy of God’s ‘Most-beautiful Names’ (*al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā*) in at least four non-discrete texts, or extracts, produced at different times beginning relatively early in his career. The first of these, composed around 596/1200 in Eastern Andalusia, was incorporated as a chapter in the systematic-cosmological section of the *K. ‘Anqā’ mughrīb* (The Book of the Fabulous Gryphon) and may be examined in my translation and study of that work.¹ The other three tracts, from the Shaykh’s *K. Inshā’ al-jadāwil wa-l-dawā’ir* (The Composition of the Columns and Circles)² and two chapters (4 and 66) of the *Futūḥāt al-makkīyah*, will be translated in the present article. The redaction of the *Inshā’* was drawn out over a long period of time, but the particular passage that concerns us here (our Text II, below) was probably first drafted in Tunis in 598/1202 at the home of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teacher and friend, Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Mahdawī.³ The fourth chapter of the *Futūḥāt*, cast in the form of a letter to al-Mahdawī, was evidently written in Mecca sometime around 600/1204;⁴ whereas Chapter 66, not bearing any conspicuous indications of its provenience, is more difficult to date with precision (though it certainly succeeds the latter by many years). Of these texts only the third, Chapter 4 of the *Futūḥāt*, has not hitherto been made available in English; nevertheless, I have translated the others here, as well, in

¹ Islamic Sainthood in the Fullness of Time: Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Book of the Fabulous Gryphon (Leiden, 1999), pp. 353–71. [This source will be cited hereafter as I. S.]

² This is the form of the title given by Ibn al-‘Arabī in his *Ijāzah li-l-Malik al-Muẓaffar* (see ‘A.-R. Badawī, ed., “Autobibliografía de Ibn ‘Arabī,” *Al-Andalus*, 20 [1955], p. 124, n. 71), but the *Fihrist al-mu’allafāt* adds: *wa-l-daḡā’iq wa-l-raqā’iq* (see A.-‘A. ‘Affī, ed., “The Works of Ibn ‘Arabī,” *Révue de la faculté des lettres de l’Université d’Alexandrie*, 8 [1955], p. 200, n. 68). The work is now commonly cited as *Inshā’ al-dawā’ir* (as below).

³ See at n. 32, below.

⁴ See n. 60.

order to provide as much technical consistency as possible among the four tracts which we shall be comparing.

The obvious justification for grouping together this quartet of texts is their common subject-matter, the creative interactivity of the specific archetypal manifestations of Divinity⁵ known in Islamic theology as the excellent Names of God. Moreover, in all of the tracts except for one (Text III) the topic is presented in a highly unusual, even shocking form – a kind of dramatic dialogue (*hiwār*) between the personified Names which has aptly been characterized as a creation *myth*, and which only really differs from a polytheistic account of any given ‘pagan’ religion from around the world in that, being a deliberate allegorization, it may be said to lack the imaginative, evocative charm of most true myths. As William C. Chittick has observed, such an unabashedly anthropomorphic treatment of a theological tenet is probably unprecedented in Islamic literature.⁶ Indeed, it was precisely this novel feature that proved to be a stumbling-block to many of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s detractors in the notorious incident of the great brouhaha raised in the Egyptian People’s Assembly over the on-going publication (since 1972) of Dr. Osman Yahia’s annotated critical edition of the colossal *Futūḥāt al-makkīyah*⁷ under the auspices of President Sadat’s Ministry of Culture in collaboration with the Sorbonne. Apparently reacting to the grotesque, almost comic anthropopathy of the Almighty Names depicted in Chapter 66 (our Text IV), the scandalized Assembly members demanded the suspension of the state-sponsored project, accusing the author of the *Futūḥāt* of rank anthropomorphism and polytheism.⁸

⁵ These are not ‘aspects of Divinity’ but, rather, aspects (*wujūh*) of the Self-manifestation of the Divine (*sci.*, of ‘creation’) as specific ideal archetypes abstracted from the content of human consciousness and personified by nominations such as the ‘Provider’, the ‘Equitable’, the ‘Castigator’, ‘Restrictor’, etc.

⁶ See his *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-‘Arabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany, 1994), p. 126. The eighth chapter of that work, entitled “A Myth of Origins,” includes a full translation of Chapter 66 of the *Futūḥāt* (see n. 92, below, for references).

⁷ The full title is *Al-Futūḥāt al-makkīyah fī ma’rifāt al-asrār al-mālikīyah wa-l-mulkīyah*, which could be rendered: *The Meccan Revelations on the Gnosis of the Mysteries of the Divine Sovereign and His Sovereignty*. Before Dr. Yahia’s lamented passing in 1997 fourteen volumes of his superb edition of the *Futūḥāt* had been published in Cairo since 1972. [That source will be cited in the notes as *Fut.* (rev.), with volume, page and line numbers.]

⁸ On this episode, see Th. Emil Homerin, “Ibn Arabi in the People’s Assembly: Religion, Press and Politics in Sadat’s Egypt,” *Middle East Journal*, 40 (1986), p. 466. (On a personal note, it was the social debate aroused by this controversy that led to my taking up study of the *Futūḥāt* at the American University in Cairo in 1980 – around the time of Shah Muhammad Riza Pahlavi’s funeral there. Thus, my

In the ‘*Anqā’ mughrib*, which contains the earliest and most detailed version of the Divine ‘dialogue’,⁹ the latter is recounted as an “eternal conference” (*muḥāḍarah azaḷīyah*) and “monistic assembly” (*ijtimā’ watrī*) of the Names, “Who discoursed amongst Themselves without any [real] argumentation, each Name beckoning to the One beside It without [actual] contact and contiguity, wondering to Themselves: ‘Would that We knew if Existence contains other than Us!’”¹⁰ Elsewhere in the *Futūḥāt* this Olympian summit is styled a ‘discussion, or debate’ (*muḥāwarah*), and “a collegial agreement in the arena of supervision over the creation of the World.”¹¹ Interestingly, however, in the different texts of the *muḥāḍarah*-theme the telic object, or product, of the Divine-creative activity varies: In the ‘*Anqā’* it is the microcosmic Perfect Man, or Muḥammadan Reality; while in the *Inshā’* it is the macrocosmic perfect World – “than which none more wonderful could possibly exist, since it emanates from absolute Generosity.”¹² In Chapter 4 of the *Futūḥāt* the object is, again, the World, but specifically in its archetypal form of essential Realities (*ḥaqā’iq* = Platonic ‘Ideas’), which correspond directly to the Names and are, in fact, Their Self-manifestations, though they are also said to relate to Them as ‘worshippers’ to their ‘Lords’; and in Chapter 66 it is the contingent, *imperfect* world which is the first-mentioned product of creation – resulting in the need to evoke a cosmic Lawgiver, the Lord, to set the chaotic situation in order. But all of these variant created objects can be classified as *cosmoi* (hence, we use the term, cosmogonic), while they are, ultimately and in reality, simply the Self-manifestations (*tajliyāt*) of the creational Names Themselves (as the title of our article indicates).

The myth of the Divine dialogue is introduced in each context at the critical point of connection/separation between the transcendent Absolute of apophatic theology and

own work in Akbarian studies was linked to Sadat’s Egypt just as many others’ were to pre-revolutionary Iran).

⁹ The passage from Chap. 4 of the *Futūḥāt* is longer, but, strictly speaking, that does not treat the Divine dialogue. The passage in Chap. 66 corresponding to the ‘*Anqā’* version is considerably shorter than the latter but it goes on to deal with the related activity of the lawgiving *Rabb*.

¹⁰ K. ‘*Anqā’ mughrib fī khatm al-awliyā’ wa-shams al-maghrib* (rep., Cairo, 1998), p. 45, translated in *I. S.*, 353–4.

¹¹ *Mujārātu-hā fī ḥalbatī l-munāzarati ‘alā ijādi hādihā l-‘ālamī* in *Fut.* (rev.), III, 297. 2–5.

¹² *Fa-lam yabqa fī l-imbāni abda’u min-hu, fa-inna-hu ṣadara ‘ani l-jūdi l-muṭlaqi*. See after n. 55.

the universe of relativity posited in speculative cosmology – where the finger-tip of the Creator touches the finger-tip of His beloved image, so to speak. On the supernal side of the equation this juncture of antitheses represents the paradox of ‘Divine multiplicity’ counterpoised to the equally anomalous notion of a ‘created Unicity’ – a fullness of Grace, Perfection in progress, a holy, intrinsic ‘Reality by and in Which the whole universe was created’ (*al-Ḥaqq al-makhlūq bi-hi*) – that is to say, the ‘Perfect Man’ (*al-insān al-kāmil*),¹³ the Goal, or Telos (*al-ghāyah* = *Raison d’être*), of all evolving existence, which “has been groaning in one great act of giving birth from the beginning until now,” as a wise master-builder wrote.¹⁴ Whereas Islamic religion emphasizes the Divine multiplicity as expressed in the Qur’ān (in which references to Deity are typically pluralized), Christianity has made a preferential option for the created (or, better, *generated*) Unicity – the “only-begotten Son” of the fourth Gospel – Who is the apotheosis of man and the “Word made flesh.”¹⁵ Islamic Mythos and Christian Logos, each the keystone of the temple linking their respective faith-communities to Heaven and the sacramental bridge to their salvation therein, have both, by an irony of human social history, become the stone rejected by the rival-builders,¹⁶ mocked by unbelievers for its patent absurdity (since, it has been well said, ‘faith precedes knowledge’).

¹³ Whereas the latter felicitous expression only became popularized in the work of that title by the late Akbarian theorizer, ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. *circa* 815/1412), it is important to understand that the basic concept is, indeed, attributable to Ibn al-‘Arabī (though he did not invent it), who actually uses the term in its proper sense in Chap. 198 of the *Futūḥāt*: “Every [created] thing except for man is [merely] created – but man is both a creation and an [uncreated] Reality (*khalq wa-Ḥaqq*). For the perfect/complete Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) is, in reality, [the same as Ibn Barraġān’s notion of the veritable] ‘Reality by/in which [all that has been created] was created’ (*al-Ḥaqq al-makhlūq bi-hi*) – that is, ‘because of Which (*bi-sababi-hi*) the whole world was created’. That is because the Telos (*al-ghāyah*) is That Which is sought by all preceding creation, for nothing of what preceded It was created except for Its sake and the manifestation of Its being; and were it not that It had not yet been manifested, all that went before would not have preceded It, for the Telos is That because of Which all the secondary causes of Its manifestations that preceded It were created” (Cairo, 1911 edn. [hereafter, *Fut.*], II, 396. 6–8; cf. *ibid.*, 469. 2–4). In *ibid.*, III, 231. 23, the same concept is styled “pre-eternal, universal, primordial Man (*al-insān al-awwal al-kull al-aqdam*).” See, also, the very important passage on the Perfect Man from Chap. 339 (in *ibid.*, 151–2, translated by Chittick in *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* [Albany, 1989; hereafter cited as *S.P.K.*], pp. 368–9).

¹⁴ *Rom.* 8: 22 (and cf. *1 Cor.* 3: 9–11). In this connection it is perhaps not without relevance to note that another master-stonemason, Socrates/Plato, was wont to resort to mythography in his Dialogues precisely at the most crucial turning-points of his (otherwise rigorously dialectical) arguments, and his entire cosmology was developed in mythic form in the *Timaeus*.

¹⁵ *John* 1: 14 and 18.

¹⁶ See *Matt.* 21: 42 and *Eph.* 2: 19–22. This rejected stone is the ‘stumbling-block’ of *Isa.* 8: 14, *1 Peter*, 2: 7–8, *1 Cor.* 1: 23, and *Rom.* 9: 32–3 (cf. also *Luke* 2: 34).

But in the present article we shall focus exclusively on the first-mentioned aspect of this key structural tenet, the imagined interactivity of the Divine Names which Ibn al-‘Arabī offers as a rationalistic metaphor of Their creative Self-manifestation, but which, more immediately, also gives indication of his classification and hierarchy of some of the major canonical Names, or attributes, of God. Our main purpose here will be simply to give a coherent presentation of the four texts concerned, briefly calling attention to some of their distinguishing features (by way of preparation for a later in-depth analysis of their form and content). In what follows, the first text will be fully described and the other three translated after cursory introductions.

I) A DESCRIPTION OF THE ‘ETERNAL CONFERENCE ON AN
EVERLASTING FIGURE’ (*MUḤĀDARAH AZALĪYAH ‘ALĀ NASH’AH
ABADĪYAH*) CHAPTER IN THE *K. ‘ANQĀ’ MUGHRIB*¹⁷

As we saw already, the ‘Eternal Conference’ of the Names in this first and longest version of the theme begins with the Divine Appellations gathering together in the presence of Their common Identity, when/where They were overcome by the momentous question: ‘Does anything exist besides We Ourselves?’ (= Is this all there is?). For, perfect though They surely are in Their respective spheres, none of the Names really “know what is” beyond Themselves except for two, Allah and the Knower (*al-‘Alīm*). Thereupon the latter, presumably motivated by the same existential query, after duly invoking Allah, the Merciful and the Compassionate in the *basmalah*, uttered a blessing (*ṣalāh*) of the Prophet Muḥammad¹⁸ – at which the other Names expressed surprise, interrogating the Knower: “*Who* is that whom You bless, joining him to Our all-comprehensive Presence?”

The Knowing One explains that Muḥammad (that is, the *Reality* of Muḥammad, the Perfect Man) is an existent Entity (*mawjūd*) corresponding to Themselves and

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, pp. 45–8, translated in *I. S.*, 353–71. In the latter source I translated this chapter heading as “An Eternal Conference on an Everlasting *Plane*,” reading the prepositional phrase as locative. While that interpretation is tenable, I now think that the final expression probably refers to the Muḥammadan Reality, or Perfect Man, the first-emergent cosmic arising (*nash’ah*), as the subject-matter of discussion in the “conference” of the Divine Names.

¹⁸ There is an unfortunate editorial lapsus in *I. S.* at this point (on p. 355, first line), where “in the *Basmalah*” should read ‘*after the Basmalah*’ (that is, ‘in the *Ṣalāh*’).

manifesting all of Their own excellent qualities. He is, in fact, Their Epitome, summing up in microcosm all that may be found *in extenso* in Them.¹⁹ The Names then ask *when* will this marvelous thing come to pass, and the Knower has to point out that, not being “in time,” the question of time’s objective (*ghāyat al-zamān*) is meaningless to Him, but is under the jurisdiction of the [Divine] Will (*mulāḥazat al-mashī’ah*), so recourse should be had to the Name, the Purposer, or One-Who-Wills (*al-Murīd*). The oracular pronouncement of the latter Dignitary – “It is as it was and will be in the [immutable] Identities (*al-a’yān [al-thābitah]*)”²⁰ – would not appear to have solved the problem, however, as the whole Host of Names had to contribute something to the Prophet’s manifestation – the Knower defining him as ‘Man’ (*al-insān*), the Merciful “choosing him” (*yaṣṭafī-hi*) for existence, and the Beneficent (*al-Muḥsin*) granting him long life, *etc.*

By way of illustrating how the Names interact in accordance with Their distinctive properties, Ibn al-‘Arabī has the Most- Giving One (*al-Wahhāb*) declare: “I am the Bestower, both according to measure (*bi-ḥisāb*) and without measure!” But then the Reckoner (*al-Ḥasīb*) counters: “I shall charge to You what You give and debit You what You bestow!” – but that must be by the testimony of the Witnesser (*al-Shahīd*). Similarly, the Knower and the Purposer sometimes check each other’s activities, leading to serious ethical complications. In this manner all of the Divine Names allot among Themselves “the Kingdom of the Human Servant, ... anticipating the presence of this ‘World/ Existent’ (*al-kawn*), in the desire that an [all-comprehensive] ‘Identity’ might be

¹⁹ At this point in our text (*I. S.*, 357) there is a passage relating to the role of two Names – the Generous, or Magnanimous (*al-Jūd*), and the Light (*al-Nūr*) – in the manifestation of the “existent Entity” which is particularly abstruse (so much so that I am not confident of my previous translation) and which I propose to take up in a later study.

²⁰ Chittick has given a lucid and generally valid argument for preferring to translate ‘*ayn*’ in this sense as “entity” in *S.P.K.*, 83–4, and elsewhere. While appreciating his reasoning, I have opted here, *faute de mieux*, for the somewhat neoteric translation, “identity” (= ‘substance, essence; self, identity’), to allow for the unmanifest, pre-existent nature of the ‘*ayn*’ (as I point out in nn. 112–13, 115 and 121, below). In current usage the word, ‘entity’ (< Late Latin, *entitās*), seems to me to connote more the objective existence of *mawjūd* (as above), or else the pure, technical existence of *kā’in*, or *kawn* (existent). Also, I cannot entirely concur with the assertion that the *a’yān* must be distinguished from the Platonic (or, at least, the Neoplatonic) notion of “ideas, or forms”. Sometimes the correspondence, as in our present text, appears fairly close.

manifested to Them.”²¹ To that end They have recourse to the Purposer in Whom rests the function of the ‘specification of being’ (*takhṣīṣ al-wujūd*) once His ‘fancy’ (*nafs*) has become attached to the anticipated Being (*al-wujūd al-muntaẓar*) so that He *wills* it to be. Then the Powerful (*al-Qādir*) actually *creates* it, and the Knower *perfects* it, while the Merciful grants it the sustaining bond of [maternal] relations (*ṣilat al-arḥām*).²² Not content with this situation, the Powerful interjects that “all of that is under ... My subjection (*taḥta qahr-ī*)!” – at which the All-Vanquisher (*al-Qāhir*), justified by etymology, strenuously objects, stipulating that even the Powerful is *His* “Servant” (*khaḍīm*), despite His being, also, His “Companion” and “close Associate.” But the Knowing One ends the spiritual boasting-match (*mufākharah*) by reminding the whole cosmocratic Company that the comprehension of all of Their prerogatives is logically dependent on *His* aprioristic Knowledge.

After that remarkably fanciful account Ibn al-‘Arabī takes up another perspective on the subject of cosmogenesis, approaching it more as a philosophical problem to be explained teleologically, in terms of the end-result, which is now described as a desired ‘object’ (*shay’*) and referred to as both “cosmic Being” (*al-wujūd al-kawnī* – that is, Muḥammad, the ‘Perfect Man’) and the World (*al-‘ālam*) – each regarded as the unique, generative Source of all multiplicity (*aṣl al-‘adad wa-l-kathrah*), the Fountainhead by and through which the emanation of Divine Grace overflows the universe.²³ Again, it is the Names Themselves Who “yearned for the manifestation of Their Impressions (*āthāru-hā*) in existence” for the sake of Their Realities and Benefits (*al-ḥaqā’iq wa-l-manāfi’*). The ‘Worshipped Name’ (*al-ism al-ma’būd* = the Lord?), in particular, desired the creation of free, rational creatures to worship Him (see *Qur’ān LI: 56*) that they might come to know Him by the very attributes (that is, the anthropomorphic ‘Names’) that He

²¹ Cf. *I. S.*, 361. Note the typical rhyming parallelism between the unmanifest, immutable ‘identity, or essence’ (*‘ayn*) and the anticipated, objectively-existent ‘world, or entity’ (*kawn*) which are both the “kingdom of the human Servant.”

²² “For, truly, [Man/Muḥammad] is a close relation (*shijnah*) to Me, and he cannot bear to be apart from Me,” declares the Merciful in *I. S.*, 363. This maternal, umbilical “bond of relations” could be envisaged metaphorically as the attractive force of gravity grounding man’s substance in reality. The other three lines of influence – those of the specification (*takhṣīṣ*), creation (*ijād*) and perfection (*iḥkām*) of the anticipated being – are represented as rays, *nos.* 11, 17 and 8 in the key to the cosmographic diagram reproduced below (after n. 58).

²³ See *I. S.*, 364–8.

had, in effect, attributed to *them* when He created them such as they are. To achieve this desideratum, all of the Names are imagined as falling back upon (*laja'at ilā*) the Greatest Name, Allah, the 'Most-protective, Strong Support' (*al-rukn al-qawī al-a'ṣam*) and the 'All-inclusive Imām'.²⁴

At this juncture it would appear that the Names make the following argument before Allah: "As You know very well, the obstacle (*al-māni'*) to the realization of the Object [that is, the manifestation of the Micro/Macro-cosmos], as far as rational speculation is concerned, is Your own omnipresent Being (*kawnu-ka*) therein – nothing more. But were [the Object] to become 'isolated' from You in retreat (*tajarrada 'an-ka bi-ma'zil^m*), as it were, then You would surely behold It [as apart from You], refreshing Yourself in Its manifestation, so to speak, and you would come to know It [as a distinct Entity]."²⁵ For the Names are One in Their essential Reality (*ḥaqīqah*), and in that unitary state They are oblivious of anything other than Themselves; but, They reasoned, if the desired Being were to become manifest in space, in a locus (*ayn*) apart from Them (*fī ḥāl faṣl wa-bayn*), a spiritual *rapport* in the form of a 'subtle Ray' (*raqīqah*) connecting each quality of the Being to Its corresponding Divine Reality would be established – rather as the spoke of a wheel connecting its hub to the circumference.²⁶ These subtle Rays, or *raqā'iq*, represent not only the inalienable ontic connections uniting the transcendent Names to Their manifest Realities, but also the vital epistemic lines of communication by which rational creatures may acquire all that they might know about God – as by the inference of a metaphor (*istidlāl majāl*) and the "nocturnal appearance of an Apparition" (*turūq khayāl*).

Evidently moved by this argument, the Name, Allah, resorts to the Pure Godhead of the supreme SELF/ESSENCE (*al-Dhāt*); and, emerging therefrom, He gives the command: "Tell the Purposing Name that He should tell the Speaker (*al-Qā'il*) to

²⁴ These expressions are translated as the "Most-excellent, Mighty First-Principle" and "Comprehensive Leader" in *I. S.*, 365–6.

²⁵ Cf. *I. S.*, 366, where I opted for a somewhat different reading (which I now consider to be errant on the side of too much caution).

²⁶ In Christian parlance, the circumference (which is nowhere) is the Father; the central point (which is everywhere) is the Son, the intelligible Object of all consciousness; while the spokes, or *radii* (together forming the surface of the circle/sphere) represent the Holy Spirit, the universal intelligence and transcendent Subject of each individual experience. In the diagram of the 'World Sphere', below, the twenty-eight lines interconnecting some of the thirteen spheres are the 'subtle rays' (*raqā'iq*).

command [the World/Man] to *be!*” – an allusion to the Divine-creative *Esto (Kun)* of the Scripture²⁷ – while the Powerful is to actually produce the [individual] Identities (*ījād al-a’yān*) “so that He might make manifest that which You desire and bring to Your view that which You all crave.” In the diagram of the ‘World Circle’ from the *Inshā’*, reproduced below, note that the spheres of the Speaker and the Powerful (*nos.* 4 and 5) are connected directly to the created World (*no.* 11) on the left-hand side of Power, which echoes the ‘precedent’ order of the Knower and the Purposer (*nos.* 2 and 3), similarly connected on the right, for God’s ‘Speaking-Nature’ answers to His ‘Knowing-Nature’²⁸ – in that reflecting the Merciful.

II) FROM THE *K. INSHĀ’ AL-JADĀWIL WA-L-DAWĀ’IR*:²⁹

A SYNOPSIS OF THE ‘ETERNAL CONFERENCE’ THEME

Our second text comprises the final pages of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Inshā’*, which give a kind of *résumé* of the *Muhāḍarah*-motif. As stated above, this particular passage was evidently composed in Tunis in 598/1201-2, during the author’s last sojourn at the home of his teacher and close friend, Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Mahdawī (d. 621/1224).³⁰ That can be inferred from a remark made at the beginning of Chapter 4 of the *Futūḥāt* where Ibn al-‘Arabī is addressing his Tunisian confrère, probably from Mecca:

The saintly-pure Friend [*viz.*, Shaykh al-Mahdawī] (May God grant him continuance!) has already had occasion to learn about the cause of Cosmogenesis (*sabab bad’ al-‘ālam*) in our book entitled ‘*Anqā’ mughrīb*, as well as our book, *Inshā’ al-dawā’ir*, part of which was composed in his noble house at the time of our visiting him in the year, 598 A.H., when we were planning to undertake the

²⁷ *Kun fa-yakūnu*. The expression occurs in *Qur.* 2: 117, 3: 47 and 59, 6: 73, 16: 40, 19: 35, 36: 82, and 40: 68. Note that this is the first mention of the ‘Speaking Name’ (sphere *no.* 4 in the diagram).

²⁸ *Fa-ajāba nafsu-hu l-mutakallimu bi-nafsi-hi l-‘alīmi*. (For the sake of the *saj’* rhyme, either the first adjective should be *al-kalīm* or the second *al-mu’allim*).

²⁹ Hendrik S. Nyberg, ed., *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn al-‘Arabī* (Leiden, 1919) [hereafter, N], pp. 36–8. My translation is also based on *MS Manisa 1183/11* [hereafter, M], ff. 118–139b, transcribed in 655/1257 from an original in the hand of the author. The entire *Inshā’* was ably translated by Paul Fenton and Maurice Gloton as “The Book of the Description of the Encompassing Circles” in the commemorative volume, *Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi* (Shaftesbury, Dorset, 1993), pp. 12–43 (cf. especially pp. 40–1).

³⁰ On this important relationship, see my article, “Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Mahdawī, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Mentor,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (forthcoming).

Pilgrimage. His servant, ‘Abd al-Jabbār³¹ (May God raise his rank!), transcribed for him as much as we had written down of [the *Inshā’* at that time], and I carried the book with me in my journey to Mecca (May God increase it in honor!) in the aforementioned year so that I might complete it there. But then *this* book [*viz.*, the *Futūḥāt*] diverted us from [working further on the *Inshā’* and other works] ...³²

Now, we know that the *Inshā’* was begun before the composition of the *K. al-Tadbīrāt al-ilāhīyah* (where the former is mentioned), which, in turn, preceded the ‘*Anqā’*.³³ As we learn here that part of the *Inshā’* – undoubtedly the very passage translated below (Text II) – was not written until just prior to Ibn al-‘Arabī’s departure from the Maghrib, then it would appear that that work was among the very earliest major literary efforts of the Shaykh with which he was still struggling at the time of his first pilgrimage. Furthermore, we may understand from this text that the *Inshā’* as we have it now is incomplete – indeed, *truncated*, abandoned midway – lacking the whole cosmogonic chain-of-being system that was presumably intended to ensue after the theological treatise of Divine Essence, Attributes, Acts and Names (as we find in the ‘*Anqā’* and again in the larger framework of the first half-dozen chapters of the *Futūḥāt*).³⁴

Whereas the following extract is presented as a synopsis or abridgement (*faṣl mukhtaṣar*) of our first text, it is actually much more (and rather less) than that. Firstly, the Names Themselves are divided into two distinct classes: the general ‘Custodians, or Gate-keepers’ (*al-sadanah*), and seven special Names thereamong Who are denominated ‘Imāms, or Leaders’. These include, in addition to the four cardinal Names treated in our first passage – the Knower, the Purposer, the Powerful and the Speaker – three others: the

³¹ That is, al-Mahdawī’s servant, who is called “the pure, trustworthy *faqīr* ” at the end of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *R. Rūḥ al-quds* (Damascus, 1970), p. 163.

³² *Fut.* (rev.), II, 119. The passage was translated by Fenton and Gloton in the monograph cited in n. 29 (on p. 12 therein).

³³ See *I. S.*, 237sq. Nyberg also edited the *Tadbīrāt* in his *Kleinere Schriften* (pp. 103–240; see especially p. 209).

³⁴ This, of course, is debatable, and Fenton and Gloton assume that the *Inshā’* “was probably completed in the East several years later” (p. 13). I originally shared that view (see *I. S.*, 76, n. 1), but now it seems to me that the *Inshā’* is manifestly an aborted work, and there is no reason to suppose that any further progress was made on it after the synopsis added in Tunis.

Generous (*al-Jawād*) and the Just, or Equitable (*al-Muqsit*),³⁵ along with the Living (*al-Ḥayy*), Which is not actually discussed in the text although It is apparently the highest-ranking of the seven Leaders, occupying the topmost sphere (*no. 1*) in the diagram (*ṣūrah, shakl*) reproduced below, and is even there denominated the “Imām of Imāms.” In the text itself, however, it *appears*, rather, that the Name, Allah, is the seventh Imām, inasmuch as It/He is actually referred to as the Divine Leader and supreme *Imām al-a’immah*.³⁶

Another novelty introduced into the present account is the symbolism of the “Keys to hidden treasures” (*mafātīḥ makhāzin*) which the Names possess – granted to Them by Their seven Imāms – without knowing what treasures, if any, They thus have control over. An obvious allusion to the popular *ḥadīth qudsī*, “I was a hidden Treasure (*kanz makhfī*) and I desired to be known,”³⁷ the imagery also resonates here with the notion of the Names being Custodians, Gate-keepers, or “Treasurers” (*khuzzān*). Finally, the prominent role assigned to the Generous (= ‘the Good’ of Plato’s *Timaeus*?) in the creation of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī’s “most-wonderful of all possible worlds”³⁸ was not developed in the ‘*Anqā*’ chapter,³⁹ although the general thesis had been adumbrated by Ibn al-‘Arabī in the *Tadbīrāt*,⁴⁰ and was to be revisited, later, in the *Futūḥāt* and *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*.⁴¹

The original figure of the ‘World Sphere, or Circle’ (*dā’irat al-‘ālam*) reproduced after our translation of Text II, below, derives from *MS Manisa 1183*, which was copied in the seventh/thirteenth century.⁴² (In the *Inshā*’ the diagram is actually placed *before*

³⁵ These two Names occupy the middle tier of spheres (*nos. 6 and 7*) in the diagram. Recall that a cognate form of *al-Jawād – al-Jūd* – was mentioned in Text I (see nn. 19 and 55).

³⁶ See at n. 53, below.

³⁷ Cf. Su’ād al-Ḥakīm, *Al-Mu’jam al-ṣūfī* (Beirut, 1981), pp. 1266–7, *no. 34*.

³⁸ On this subject, see Eric L. Ormsby’s excellent study, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought* (Princeton, 1984), pp. 92–134 (Chap. 2), especially pp. 103–7.

³⁹ But cf. n. 19.

⁴⁰ See N, 106–7. Ibn al-‘Arabī first broaches the theme earlier in the *Inshā*’ itself (see *ibid.*, 18. 11–2).

⁴¹ See *Fut.* II, 96. 12–4, 103. 33–4, and III, 449. 8–9; and A.-‘A. ‘Affī, ed., *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (Beirut, 1980), p. 172. 15–6.

⁴² Osman Yahia did not register this important manuscript in his *Histoire et classification*. Cf. the similar diagram produced by Fenton and Gloton in *op. cit.*, p. 39.

our passage).⁴³ A similar figure may be found in the *Futūḥāt*,⁴⁴ which relates, however, to the more developed form of the onomalogical motif represented in our Texts III and IV. After explaining the apparatus of the diagram,⁴⁵ Ibn al-‘Arabī concludes the *Inshā’* (as we have it now) with the following account of the ‘Divine Conference’ of the Names:

TRANSLATION

Know that in the *Book of the Fabulous Gryphon*, in the chapter, ‘An Eternal Conference on an Everlasting Figure’ (*muḥāḍarah azalīyah ‘alā nash’ah abadīyah*), we dealt with the cause of the World’s emergence (*sabab nash’ al-‘ālam*)⁴⁶ in accordance with the model of an allegorical Unveiling and Divine Wisdom (*al-kashf al-mithālī wa-l-ḥukm al-ilāhī*). I will now relate therefrom what is relevant to the present context.

And that is that while the ‘Custodians’ (*al-sadanah*) of these Names⁴⁷ had in Their possession the Keys of the heavens and the earth when there were as yet neither heavens nor earth, each Custodian-Name with Its Key remained unable to find what to open therewith. Wherefore They exclaimed: “How strange! [We are] Treasurers with ‘Keys’ to hidden Treasures Who know of no Treasure existing!⁴⁸ So what do these Keys do?”

Then the Names came to an agreement among Themselves, declaring: “We must go to Our ‘Seven Imāms’ Who have given Us these Keys without apprising Us of the Treasures over which We have control.” So They rose up and accosted the Gates of the

⁴³ At p. 35. 7 in N.

⁴⁴ *Fut.* III, 427.

⁴⁵ At this point in his edition (pp. 35–6) Nyberg includes a rather long passage (not translated by Fenton–Gloton) which reads rather like a scholion (by some such commentator as ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī?).

⁴⁶ *Nash’*: ‘arising, emergence, coming into existence; growing, springing up’. Note that the expression is implicitly ‘naturalistic’, a quality more pronounced in the later treatment of this motif in the *Futūḥāt* (see below, at nn. 115–21), where the contingent beings (*al-mumkināt*) themselves are said to initiate the process leading to their genesis. (Cf. the use of the verb, *intasha’at*, after n. 78).

⁴⁷ The ‘Custodians’ are represented in the fourth tier of the diagram (spheres *nos.* 8–10) reproduced below. *Sādin*: ‘a door-keeper, chamberlain or guardian of the Ka’bah’; specifically, one in charge of opening and locking its door (whence the imagery of the “keys”).

Imāms – that of the Specifying Imām (*al-imām al-mukhaṣṣiṣ*), of the Benefactor-Imām (*al-mun'im*) and the Imām of Justice (*al-muqsiṭ*).⁴⁹ The Names informed [these three Imāms] of Their affair, and the Latter replied: “You have spoken well. The Resources (*al-khiyar*)⁵⁰ are with Us, and We shall apportion them to You,⁵¹ if Allah (Be He exalted!) so wills. But come, let Us go to the remaining Imāms,⁵² and We shall gather before the Presence of the Divine Imām, the Imām of Imāms.”⁵³

Thus, all [of the Names] – and They are all ‘Custodians’ in consideration of Their relation to the Imām known as Allah – They all assembled and stood at the Gate of Allah. Then the Latter emerged before Them and asked: “What has brought You here?” Thereupon They related the matter to Him, stating that They sought the existence of the heavens and the earth so that They might apply each Key to its [respective] Gate.

The Name, Allah, then made inquiry: “Where is the Specifying Imām?” – at which the Purposer hastened to Him. Then [Allah] asked: “Are You not in possession of the information (*al-khabar*), You and the Knowing One?” He replied, “Yes.” [Allah] then declared: “If so, then put These [Custodians] at ease regarding Their obsession and preoccupation (*ta'alluq al-khāṭir wa-shughl al-bāl*).” The Knower and the Purposer then said: “O Most-Perfect Imām, tell the Powerful and the Speaking Imāms to help Us, for, verily, We cannot carry out Your command by Ourselves, but only by the four of Us.”

So Allah (Exalted be He!) called the Powerful and the Speaker and said to Them: “Help Your Brothers in what lies before Them!” – to which They answered, “Surely!”

⁴⁸ Following M, f. 138b: *Khuzzān um bi-mafāṭihā makhāzina lā na'rifu makhzan an mawjūd an*. “Keys” here is *mafāṭih*, but the same word in English in the preceding and the following sentences translates the synonym, *maqālid*.

⁴⁹ These are, respectively, spheres *nos.* 3, 6 and 7. Note that these circles correspond to the Names, the Purposer (*al-Murīd*), the Generous (*al-Jawād*) and the Just (*al-Muqsiṭ*).

⁵⁰ I read thus (plural of *khayrah*) in preference to *al-khabar* (the information) in N in order to accord with the plural direct object in the following clause (but cf. below, where *khabar* is associated with the Purposer and the Knower).

⁵¹ *Fa-qālū: Ṣadaqtum. Al-khiyaru 'inda-nā, wa-sanū'ayyinu-hā la-kum*. N reads *al-khabar* as the direct object of *ṣadaqtum*, but M clearly marks it as nominative.

⁵² I take this to refer to the three Imāms belonging to spheres 2, 4 and 5 (*viz.*, the Knowing, the Speaker, and the Powerful), while the “Divine Imām” of the next clause is sphere *no.* 1, corresponding there to the Name, the Living (*al-Ḥayy*). Here, however, Allah seems to be intended.

⁵³ The reference here is clearly to Allah (see what follows). In the diagram, however, note that the topmost sphere, occupied by the Living One, is styled the *Imām al-a'immaḥ*.

Then They⁵⁴ entered the Presence of the Generous (*al-Jawād*),⁵⁵ declaring to Him: “We have resolved to create engendered Existents and the temporal World (*al-akwān wa-‘ālam al-ḥidhān*) and to draw them out of non-existence into existence. [But] this is of Your entitlement, the Presence of Generosity (*ḥadrat al-jūd*). So give Us the Generosity by which We might bring them forth!”

[The Generous] then granted Them absolute Generosity (*al-jūd al-muṭlaq*), and with it They departed from His Presence and made contact with the World (*ta‘allaqū bi-l-‘ālam*), manifesting [Generosity] in the most perfect and excellent manner. For it is impossible that there should be any [World] more wonderful (*abda‘*) than [the present one] since, verily, it emanates from absolute Generosity. Were [any World] more wonderful than it to exist, [that would mean that] the Generous had been *miserly* in the perfection which He failed to bestow and kept to Himself, [so that] it would be inaccurate to call Him ‘the Generous’ in that something of miserliness would be found in Him. The Name, ‘the Generous’, with respect to what He gave would not [in that case] be more appropriate to Him than the name, ‘the Miser’ (*al-bakhīl*), regarding what He withheld! [Moreover] the essential Realities would be nullified.⁵⁶ But it is clear that the name, ‘the Miser’, cannot conceivably be applied to [God], and that, therefore, He cannot have kept the more perfect [World] to Himself.

This, then, is the origin of the emergence of the World and its cause. The Imām of Justice (*al-Muqṣit*) did not appear until after the Revelation of the Divine-legal Prescriptions (*nuzūl al-sharā‘i‘*) [in the Qur’ān].⁵⁷ Then the Names each took up Their Keys, coming to learn of the Reality of what they represented and to which they corresponded in the existence of engendered Beings. So realize the meaning of this

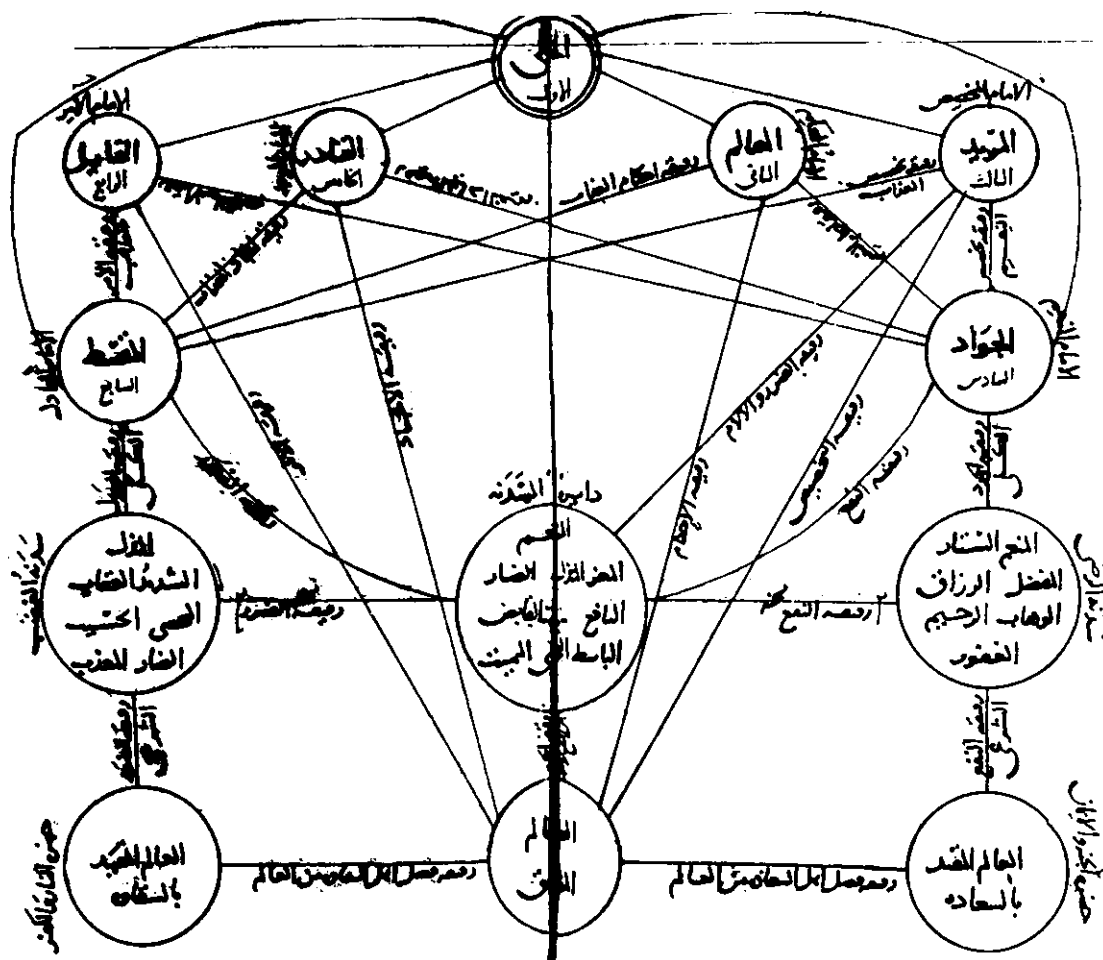
⁵⁴ Some sources (including M) have the plural here (and in what follows); N has the dual, indicating the Powerful and the Speaker.

⁵⁵ M, f. 139, has *al-Jūd* (meaning the same) here and *al-Jawād* as object of the following verb. Cf. n. 35.

⁵⁶ *Wa-baṭalati l-ḥaqā’iqu*. The ‘realities’ are *perfections*, which, as such, could have no place in an imperfect world. It is interesting that Ibn al-‘Arabī thus adverts to the Platonic ‘ideas’ in his treatment of the notion of Divine generosity, or goodness, and the ‘best of all possible worlds’, the argument for which, likewise, originates in the *Timaeus* (27d–30a).

⁵⁷ In creation, God’s mercy precedes His justice, even as the existence of the world may be said to precede its perfection (on this notion, see Text IV after n. 132, below). But although it is left unsaid here, in the ‘re-creation’ of mystical realization, or liberation – which is *death* to the temporal human entity – the Divine ‘Destroyer’, *al-Mumīt*, is Lord (recall Socrates’ last words in the *Phaedo*).

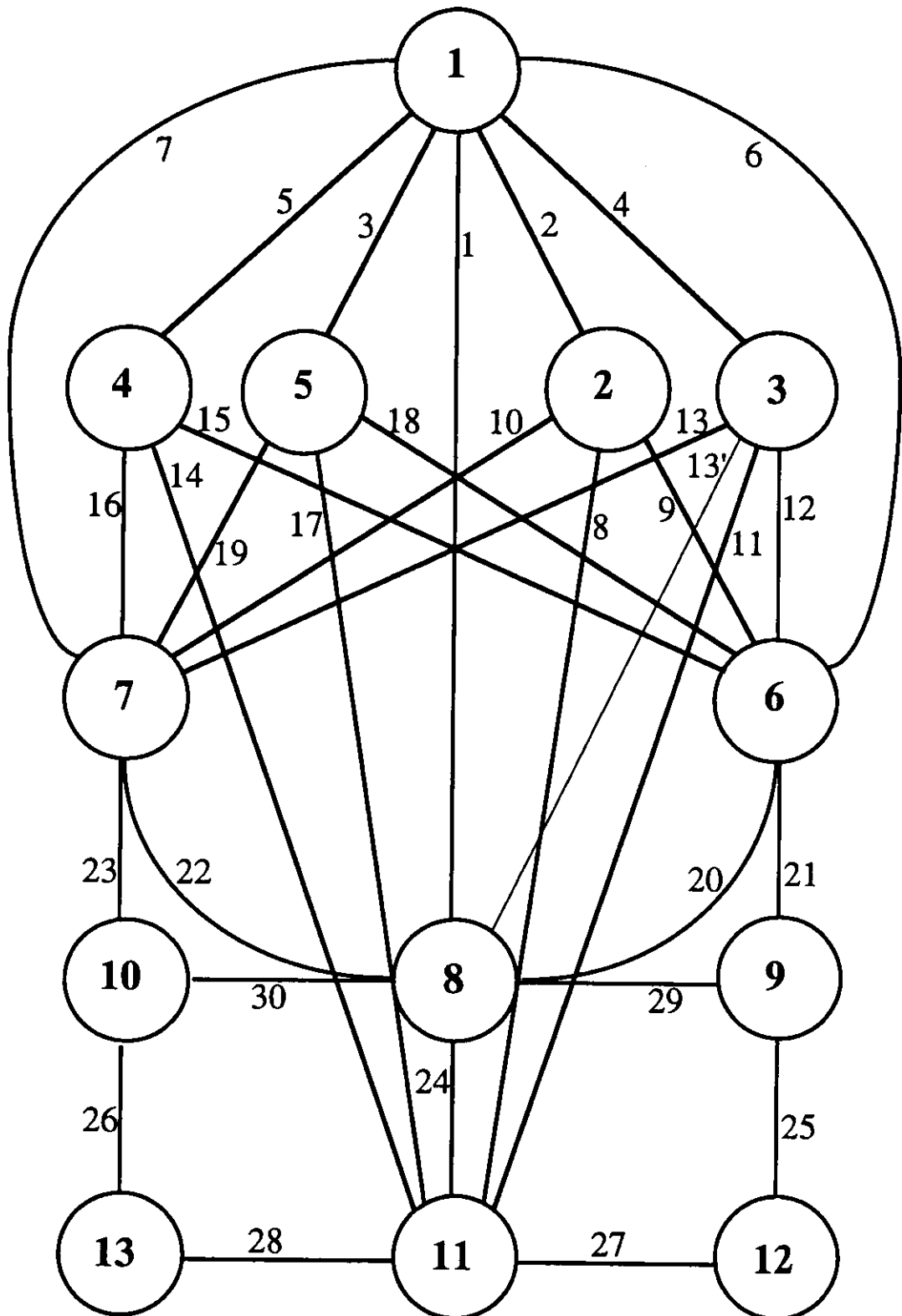
marvelous abridgement [from the *'Anqā' mughrīb*], for, indeed, it will be useful in understanding the present section [of the *Inshā' al-jadāwil* treating of Cosmogony] – while “*God knows best.*”⁵⁸



Courtesy of Manisa Kütüphanesi

The Circle of the World (*dā'irat al-'ālam*)
 from MS Manisa 1183/11, ff. 37b-38,
 copied in the 7th/13th century.

⁵⁸ Qur. 3: 167, *et passim*. Instead of this, N's sources read: "God is the Guide to the Truth."



Courtesy of Koninklijke Brill, Leiden

Key to the Figure

THE SPHERES (*al-dawā'ir*)

The Seven Imāms:

- 1) The Living (*al-Ḥayy*), the First [Imām].
- 2) The Knowing (*al-ʿĀlim*), the 2nd, or 'Wise Imām' (*al-imām al-ḥakīm*).
- 3) The Purposer (*al-Murīd*), the 3rd, or 'Specifying Imām' (*al-mukhaṣṣiṣ*).
- 4) The Speaker (*al-Qā'il*), the 4th, or 'Commanding Imām' (*al-āmir*).
- 5) The Powerful (*al-Qādir*), the 5th, 'Creator-Imām' (*al-mūjjid*).
- 6) The Generous (*al-Jawād*), the 6th, 'Benefactor-Imām' (*al-mun'im*).
- 7) The Equitable (*al-Muqsiṭ*), the 7th, or 'Just Imām' (*al-ʿādil*).

The Custodians, or Gate-Keepers:

- 8) The Sphere of the Custodians (*dā'irat al-sadanah*): the Benefactor, the Honourer, the Debaser, the Harmer, the Profiter, the Restrictor, the Expander, the Life-Giver, the Giver of death.
- 9) The Keepers of the [Divine] Pleasure (*sadanat al-riḍā*): the Benefactor, the Veiler, the Preferrer, the Provider, the Giver, the Compassionate, the Forgiving.
- 10) The Keepers of the [Divine] Wrath (*sadanat al-ghaḍab*): the Debaser, the Severe in punishment, the Calculator, the Reckoner, the Harmer, the Castigator.

The Three Worlds:

- 11) The Created World (*al-ʿālam al-khalq*).
- 12) The 'Presence of Paradise and Faith' (*ḥaḍrat al-jannah wa-l-īmān*).
- 13) The 'Presence of Hell and Infidelity' (*ḥaḍrat al-nār wa-l-kufr*).

THE SUBTLE RAYS (*al-raqā'iq*)

- 1–7) Rays extended from sphere *no.* 1 unlabeled.
- 8) The ray of perfection (*al-iḥkām*).
- 9) " " " the perfection of grace (*iḥkām al-na'im*).
- 10) " " " the perfection of punishment (*iḥkām al-ʿidhāb*).
- 11) The ray of specification (*al-takhṣīs*).
- 12) " " " the specification of grace.
- 13) " " " the specification of punishment.
- 13') " " " detriment and sufferings (*al-ḍarar wa-l-ālām*).
- 14) The ray of command (*al-amr*).
- 15) " " " the command to grace.
- 16) " " " the command to punishment.
- 17) The ray of creation (*al-ijād*).

- 18) " " " the creation of grace.
- 19) " " " the creation of punishment.
- 20) The ray of benefit (*al-naḥf*).
- 21) " " " universal bounty (*al-jūd al-kullī*).
- 22) The ray of detriment (*al-ḍarar*).
- 23) " " " universal justice (*al-ʿadl al-kullī*).
- 24) The ray combining benefit and detriment (*al-jamʿ bayna l-naḥf wa l-ḍarar*).
- 25) " " of legal benefit (*al-naḥf al-sharʿī*).
- 26) " " " legal detriment (*al-ḍarar al-sharʿī*).
- 27) The ray separating the people of happiness from the world
(*faṣl ahl al-saʿādah fī l-ʿālam*).
- 28) " " " " " " " misery from the world
(*faṣl ahl al-shaqāwah fī l-ʿālam*).
- 29) The ray of benefit (*al-naḥf*).*
- 30) " " " detriment (*al-ḍarar*).*

* According to notations on the diagram, this designation does not occur in all manuscript copies (cf. rays nos. 21 and 22). Note that the twenty-eight other *raqāʿiq* correspond to the number of letters in the Arabic alphabet.

III) FROM CHAPTER IV OF THE *FUTŪḤĀT AL-MAKKĪYAH*⁵⁹:
 THE DIVINE NAMES AND THE EXISTENTIAL REALITIES
 CORRESPONDING TO THEM

Our next text, translated here for the first time, is the last half of Chapter 4 of the *Futūḥāt*, which was written in the vicinity of Mecca, probably around 600/1204, and appended to an open letter addressed to Shaykh al-Mahdawī which makes up the beginning of that chapter.⁶⁰ As al-Mahdawī was already familiar with the *Muḥāḍarah* passages from both the ‘*Anqā*’ and the *Inshā*’, it is no wonder that Ibn al-‘Arabī does not simply recast the ‘Eternal Conference’ theme here but approaches the subject from another angle, more as a traditional theological disquisition. The seven cardinal Names referred to earlier as ‘Imāms’ are now styled ‘Mothers, or Matrices’ (*ummahāt*),⁶¹ and two other Appellations – the disposing ‘Director, or Planner’ (*al-Mudabbir*) and the more hands-on ‘Distinguisher, or Particularizer’ (*al-Mufaṣṣil*) – are introduced, bringing the pantheon of demiurgic Names up to nine, a proper *Ennead*. Apart from such modifications, the present text provides more in the way of theory as to the correspondence between the Divine Names of Revelation (now called ‘Relations’, *nisab*) and the mystical–philosophical ‘Realities’ (*ḥaqā’iq*).

⁵⁹ *Fut.* (rev.), II, 123–31; corresponding to *Fut.* I, 99. 26–101. 21.

⁶⁰ The opening lines of the chapter are translated above, at n. 32. From the contents of the letter in which Ibn al-‘Arabī is trying to persuade al-Mahdawī to come to Mecca, it is apparent that it was written in the blessed environs of the Holy Places shortly after the author’s first pilgrimage – therefore, sometime between 598/1202 and 601/1204.

⁶¹ The seven are also called “Lords [of the other Names]” in the following passage (see at n. 75), but that usage should not be confused with the fact that all of the Names are regarded as ‘Lords’ to Their ‘worshippers’ (*‘ābidāt, marbūbāt*) – Their corresponding existential realities (*ḥaqā’iq*) making up the world.

TRANSLATION

[The Names of God and the existential Realities]

Know (May God grant us and you and all Muslims success!) that most of the Knowers of God among the People of Unveiling and the Realities do not have knowledge of the cause of the origination of the World (*sabab bad' al-'ālam*) beyond the connection of the pre-eternal Knowledge (*al-'ilm al-qadīm*) with its creation. For [God] caused to exist (*kawwana*) that which He *knew* would be made to exist – and there most people end their inquiry. But as for us and those to whom God has shown what He has shown to us, we have come to know other matters besides this. And that is that if you consider the World analytically (*mufaṣṣal^{an}*) in terms of its various Realities and Relations (*ḥaqā'iqu-hu wa-nisabu-hu*),⁶² you will find it limited (*maḥṣūr*) by those Realities and Relations, determined (*ma'lūm*) by the Stations and the Ranks (*al-manāzil wa-l-rutab*), bounded by the genera (*mutanāhī l-ajnās*) – something between 'homogeneous' and 'various' (*mutamāthil wa-mukhtalif*).⁶³ When you come to know this matter, you learn that in this there is a subtle secret and a wondrous thing of which you may not realize the Reality either by precision of thought or speculation, but only by a God-given Knowledge (*'ilm mawhūb*) of the knowledge of Unveiling and the effects of spiritual Strivings associated with the psychic Energies (*natā'ij al-mujāhadāt al-muṣāḥabah li-l-himam*). For spiritual Striving without a psychic Energy cannot generate anything and is without an effect on knowledge, although it *will* have an effect on the spiritual Condition as to the subtlety and purity [of Condition] that the one engaged in the spiritual Striving experiences.

Know – May God teach you the Secrets of Wisdom (*sarā'ir al-ḥikam*) and the Comprehensive Words (*jawāmi' al-kilam*)! – that the Excellent Names of God which number more than the Names enumerated [specifically in the Scripture] but which 'descend below' Them in felicity [so to speak] – They are the Ones Which bring about impressions (*al-mu'aththirah*) in this World, They being the 'Primary Keys' (*al-mafātiḥ al-uwal*)⁶⁴ Which no one knows but He. To each [existential] Reality (*ḥaqīqah*) there is

⁶² On the 'Relations' (which are, in fact, the Divine Names), see n. 103.

⁶³ On the latter dichotomy, see below, after n. 84.

⁶⁴ Whereas in Text II the Names were *Possessors* of the Keys (see at n. 48), here They are the 'Keys' Themselves.

One of the Names Which is special to it. (By ‘Reality’ I mean a reality which comprises a genus [*jins*]). The Lord (*rabb*) of that Reality is that Name; and the Reality is the worshipper of [that Lord] (*‘ābidatu-hu*) and under His constraint (*taklīfu-hu*) – nothing else.

When some thing (*shay’*) brings together for you many [Divine] Names, the matter is not as you may imagine it. But if you consider that thing, you will find that it has aspects (*al-wujūh*) to which those Names indicated by [the aspects] correspond – they being the ‘Realities’ which we mentioned. An example of that is what is proven to you in the knowledge concerned with the external sense of the intellects (*zāhir al-‘uqūl*) and under their authority with regard to any given existent entity (*mawjūd*), [that it is] an indivisible individual (*fard^{un} lā yanqasimu*) like individual substance (*al-jawhar al-fard*), the part [of the entity] which is not divisible. [But even so] there are in [that so-called ‘individual’ substance] numerous Realities requiring a corresponding number of Divine Names. For the Reality of its creation (*ījādu-hu*) requires the Name, the Powerful; while the aspect of its perfection (*iḥkāmu-hu*) requires the Name, the Purposer; and the aspect of its manifestation (*zuhūru-hu*) requires the Name, the Seer (*al-Baṣīr*), the Observer (*al-Rā’i*),⁶⁵ and other [such Names]. Thus, this [substance], although it is an ‘individual’, has these [various] aspects (*al-wujūh*) and others we have not mentioned. And to each aspect there are many [other] aspects requiring Names, accordingly. These aspects are the Realities – in our [nomenclature], the *Secondary* (*al-thawānī*) [Realities]. Intellectual inquiry into them is difficult, and learning about them by way of Unveiling is even more difficult.

⁶⁵ Note that the Seer is not given a place in the diagram, above, even though sight (along with hearing) is among the traditional–theological attributes of Deity, and here it is recognized as having a manifesting (creative?) function.

[The ‘Mothers’ of the Divine Names]

Know that, as for the Names Themselves, we might leave Them in Their multiplicity if we simply take note of the aspects of those seeking Them (*al-ṭālibūna la-hā*) in the World. If we do *not*, then we shall return and take note of the ‘Mothers’/Matrices of the [Divine] ‘Objects-of-seeking’ (*ummahāt al-maṭālib*)⁶⁶ – [that is, the Names of God] Which are indispensable to [the system of the Divine Names as a whole]; and we will then realize that the Names upon Which the aforesaid ‘Mothers’ are based are *also* ‘Mothers’ of the Names, in turn. Thus, speculation will be facilitated and the objective completed, the passing on (*al-ta’addī*) of these ‘Mothers’ to the ‘Daughters’ (*al-banāt*) being made easy, even as the return of the ‘Daughters’ to the ‘Mothers’ will be facilitated. For if you consider all of the Names Which are known in the higher and the lower worlds, you will find that They are contained by the Seven Names – by Which the partisans of the science of discursive theology denote the [Divine] Attributes (*al-ṣifāt*).⁶⁷ We have already spoken of this in our book, *The Composition of the Circles*.⁶⁸

Our purpose in *this* writing is not concerned with these Seven Mothers which signify the Attributes, but, rather, we have in mind the Mothers Which are necessary for the creation of the World. Nor are we in need of rational proofs as regards the Gnosis of the Real (*ma’rifat al-Ḥaqq*) (Be He praised!) but only [the knowledge of] His being Existent (*mawjūd*), Knowing (*‘ālim*), Purposing (*murīd*), Powerful (*qādir*) and Living (*ḥayy*) – nothing else.⁶⁹ What is additional to that is made necessary by the imposition [of Divine Law] (*al-taklīf*). For the coming of the Apostle [Muḥammad] (Upon him be peace!) made us to know Him (Be He exalted!) as Speaking (*mutakallim*), and the Divine Law made us to know Him as Hearing and Seeing (*samī’ baṣīr*), as well as in terms of other Names. That of which we are in need for the Gnosis of the Names is the existence of the World, [and Those just-mentioned Names] are the ‘Lords’ [among] the Names

⁶⁶ *Maṭālib* is the plural of *maṭlab*, ‘one from whom something is sought’ – here signifying the Divine Names. Yahia adds *al-ilmīyah* (epistemic; semantic) as a modifier of *ummahāt al-maṭālib*, suggesting that the Names are the ‘meanings’, or semantic bases of the *wujūh* (aspects) of things.

⁶⁷ The seven cardinal attributes are life, knowledge, will, speech, power, sight and hearing.

⁶⁸ See N, 27–8sq.

⁶⁹ Reason posits only the five attributes of Deity listed above. Revelation requires *ipso facto* that we recognize, also, speech; and the content of the latter adds sight, hearing, etc.

(*arbāb al-asmā*'), while Others [of Them] are Their 'Custodians' (*sadanah la-hā*), even as some of the 'Lords' are 'Custodians' of some among Them.

Now, the 'Mothers' of the Names are: the Living, the Knowing, the Purposing, the Speaking, [the Powerful],⁷⁰ the Generous and the Just; and These are also the 'Daughters' of the two Names, the Director (*al-Mudabbir*) and the Distinguisher (*al-Mufaṣṣil*).⁷¹ For the Living determines your intelligence (*fahmu-ka*) after your existence and before it; while the Knowing determines your perfection (*iḥkāmu-ka*) during your existence, and before your existence in your predestination; and the Purposing determines your specification (*ikhtiṣāsu-ka*), the Powerful your nullity ('*adamu-ka*), the Speaking your eternity (*qidamu-ka*), and the Generous your creation (*ijādu-ka*). These are Realities the existence of which is necessary; so their Names, Which are their Lords, are also necessary. For the Living is the 'Lord of the Lords and the Servants' (*Rabb al-arbāb wa-l-marbūbīn*), He being the Imām; while the Knowing follows Him in rank, and the Purposer follows the Knowing, and the Speaker follows the Purposer; the Powerful follows the Speaker, the Generous follows the Powerful, and the Just is the last of Them. Verily, He is the Lord of the [lower] Ranks (*Rabb al-marātib*) – they being the last of the Stations of Existence. The Names Which remain are under the authority of these Imām-Lords (*al-a'immah al-arbāb*).

⁷⁰ Inadvertently omitted.

⁷¹ The significance of the two putative Names, *al-Mudabbir* and *al-Mufaṣṣil*, becomes clearer in the next section. Their ranking in the hierarchy of the cardinal Names may be contemplated in the diagram in *Fut.* III, 427, where They are the two spheres situated directly below the Living (*no.* 1) on the central axis. Note, however, that there They manifestly rank 'below' the Knowing, Purposing, Speaking, and Powerful Names (and 'above' the Generous and the Just), so how are we to understand Ibn al-'Arabī's apparent statement here that the seven 'Mothers' are the 'Daughters' of the Director and the Distinguisher? (Cf. also, below, where the latter are the "Ministers" of the Name, *al-Rabb*). Perhaps we should amend the sentence to read: "... and These [last two Names, the Generous and the Just] are also the 'Daughters' of the Director and the Distinguisher."

[The Imāms of the Names]

The cause of these [seven] Names resorting to (*tawajjuh ilá*) the [Greatest] Name, Allah, in the creation of the World was the rest of the Names, along with Their Realities.⁷² Nevertheless, the [veritable] Imāms of the Names [considered in Themselves], without regard to the World, are just four – no more: His Name⁷³ (Be He exalted!), the Living and the Speaking and the Hearing and the Seeing.⁷⁴ For [God] (Exalted be He!), when He hears His own Speech (*kalāmu-hu*) and sees His own Essence (*dhātu-hu*), His existence in His Essence is complete without regard to the World; whereas we [rational creatures], we only intend by His Names that upon which the existence of the World is based. Hence, the Names become numerous for us. We turned toward Their Lords and came unto Them in Their Presences,⁷⁵ and we found [there] none other than These [Lords] Whom we have just mentioned, presenting Them in accordance with our own witnessing of Them. But the cause of the Lords of the Names resorting to the Name, Allah, in the creation of our essential Identities (*ījād a’yāni-nā*)⁷⁶ was the rest of the Names.

The first to rise up to demand this World were the Director (*al-Mudabbir*) and the Distinguisher (*al-Mufaṣṣil*), in response to the request of the Name, the Sovereign/Possessor (*al-Malik*).⁷⁷ For when [these two Names] resort [to Allah], the Thing (*al-shay’*) [for which They are petitioning] ascends [in manifestation – the Thing] the ideal Image (*al-mithāl*) of which exists in the Soul of the World without any non-existence having preceded it. But a rank [in the ideal cosmic order] (*martabah*) preceded it, not any real existence – as in the case of the rising of the sun ‘preceding’ the beginning of the day, even though the beginning of the day is [strictly speaking] simultaneous with the rising of the sun. But it is clear that the [logical] cause (*al-‘illah*) of the existence of

⁷² But as we learn below, the Names Who initiated the movement toward creation were the Director and the Distinguisher, in response to the request of the Divine King (*al-Malik*). Cf. *Qur.* 13: 2, quoted below.

⁷³ Thus, in the singular.

⁷⁴ Recall that in our Text II, the Imāms were the seven Names Which are now called ‘Mothers’. Moreover, below (at n. 81) the seven ‘Mothers’ are referred to as ‘Imāms’ and ‘Lords’.

⁷⁵ That is, the presences of the Lords (*ḥaḍarātu-hum*) – the pronoun for Whom is human-plural, not collective (as in the case of the Names as such).

⁷⁶ On the ‘identities’ (*a’yān*), see nn. 112–13, 115 and 121.

⁷⁷ For the sense of these two Names, compare the cognate verbs in *Qur.* 13: 2 (quoted at the end of the article), where the Lord (*al-Rabb*), corresponds to *al-Malik* here (on the latter, cf. 59: 23 and 3: 26).

the day is the rising of the sun – [even though] it was simultaneous with it in actual existence – and such is the matter [of the other case].⁷⁸ [Similarly] when these two Names *directed and distinguished* the World – without any ignorance or privation of knowledge thereof having preceded it – and the Form of the ideal Image (*ṣūrat al-mithāl*) developed (*intasha’at*) in the Soul of the World, His Name (Exalted be He!), the Knowing (*al-‘Ālim*), made connection (*ta’allaqa*) at that moment with that ideal Image, even as it connects with the Form from which [the Image] is taken, despite its being invisible (*ghayr mar’īyah*) since it is non-existent – as we have mentioned in the [sixth] chapter [of this book, containing the section], “Whence Comes the World into Existence?” (*Min-mā wujida l-‘ālam?*).⁷⁹

[The First Names in the World]

The first Names [to become pre-eminent in the development] of the World are these two [*viz.*, the Director and the Distinguisher],⁸⁰ and the Name, the Director, is [in fact] the One that determines the moment of the preordained Creation (*waqt al-ījād al-muqaddar*). Then the Purposer made connection with [the World] commensurate with what the Director presented and directed. [These two Names, the Director and the Purposer] did nothing with regard to the development of that ideal Image [of the World] without the participation (*mushārah*) of the rest of the Names, but that was from behind the veil of these two Names. Thus, the Imāmate rightly belongs to Them, while the Others are not specifically conscious (*lā yash’urūna*) of that [development of the World] until the actual Form of the ideal Image appears, and They behold the Realities therein which have a correspondence with Them, attracting Them to ‘fall in love’ with them (*tajdhibu-hum li-l-ta’ashshuq bi-hā*).

Each One of the Names began to fall in love with Its own Reality which was in the ideal Image [of the World], but They were unable to have any concrete influence upon it since the Presence in which this Image was manifested does not [actually] present

⁷⁸ Although the entity’s particular existence is ‘beginningless’ in that there was no time preceding it during which it was nonexistent, nevertheless, its foreordaining when it was subsistent in the knowledge of God is required by the logic of positive theology.

⁷⁹ This is part of the cosmogonic Chap. 6 of the *Futūḥāt* (rev. edn., II, 220. 6sq.).

⁸⁰ Following Yahia in taking this first reference to be to the two Names just treated above.

[it to Them]. Hence, that love and attachment (*al-ta'ashshuq wa-l-ḥubb*) leads [the Divine Names] to 'seek, to strive for and desire' the creation of the Form of that ideal Image itself in order to manifest Their authority (*sulṭānu-hum*) and make Their Existence right by Reality. For there is nothing more tremendous in distress (*ḥamm^{an}*) than a Mighty One ('*Azīz*) for Whom nothing 'mighty' ('*azīz*) exists which He can subjugate under His subjection so that the authority of His might is legitimated – or One-Who-is-Rich (*Ghanī*) for Whom none can be found who needs His riches! And it is thus with all of the Names. Hence, [They all] resorted to Their Lords – the Seven Imāms⁸¹ Whom we mentioned – desiring Them to create this very Image which They had beheld in the Essence of the Knower thereof (*dhāt al-'Ālim bi-hi*) – and that is what is known as the World.⁸²

[The Divine Names: One in Essence, diverse in Connections]

Perhaps some proponent [of the exoteric theological doctrine of Attributes] will maintain: “O Verifier of the Truth, how can the [other] Names ‘see’ this ideal Image when no one except, specifically, the Seer, none other, can see it, since each Name is in possession of a [special] Reality not shared by the Others?” To him we say: “Know (May God grant you success!) that *each Divine Name includes all of the Names in Their entirety*, and each Name is qualified by all of the Names in Its furthest scope.⁸³ Thus, each Name is Living, Powerful, Hearing, Seeing, Speaking, in Its furthest scope and knowledge. Otherwise, how could [each Divine Name] really be a Lord to Its worshipper? What an idea!”

However, there is a subtle point (*laṭīfah*) not generally realized, and that is that you can positively know regarding grains of wheat and such things that each wheat-berry has in it what is contained in any one of its counterparts, just as you can know, also, that that particular grain is not identical to the other grain, even though they both do embrace homogeneous Realities (*ḥaqā'iq mutamāthilah*),⁸⁴ for they are homogenetic (*mithlān*) [to

⁸¹ Note that here the seven ‘Mothers’ of the section preceding the last are, again, the seven ‘Imāms’ of our Text II. They are also denominated ‘Lords’.

⁸² There is a pun on the words, '*ālim* (knower) and '*ālam* (world).

⁸³ This is the doctrine of the essential identity of the Divine Names which Ibn al-'Arabī attributed to his compatriot, Ibn Qasī (see n. 85).

⁸⁴ That is, individual realities, or ‘essences’, which are universal (common to the species).

each other]. But examine the Reality which causes you to distinguish between the two grains, and you will say: “Indeed, this one is *not* the same as that.” This is valid in the case of all things which are homogeneous as regards what makes them so. Similarly with the [Divine] Names: Each One is comprehensive (*jāmi‘*) of all of the Realities that the [other] Names comprehend. Moreover, you can know positively that this Name is *not* [identical to] that Other – by virtue of that same subtle point by means of which you distinguished between the grains of wheat and all such things which are like each other. Now, examine carefully this Meaning until you realize it by Remembrance [of God’s Names] (*al-dhikr*) – not by mere thought (*al-fikr*)!

But, I would like to acquaint you with the truth of what one of [our Ṣūfī] Predecessors (*al-mutaqaddimūn*) [*viz.*, Abū l-Qāsim Ibn Qasī]⁸⁵ spoke of – and, maybe, what he *revealed*, for perhaps you [too, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz] have been destined to it. I do not know if it has been granted to another than me after me or not, from the Presence to which I myself was granted [access]. But if one follows it up or realizes it by means of [this] my book, then *I* am his Teacher (*al-mu‘allim*); and, as for the [other Ṣūfī] Predecessors [in general], they did not find [the above-mentioned truth].⁸⁶ And that is that each Name, as we affirmed, comprehends [all of] the Realities of the Names and contains them – despite the existence of the subtle point by which you make a distinction between the two things which are alike. That is, [for example] that the Names, the Benefactor (*al-Mun‘im*) and the Chastiser (*al-Mu‘adhdhib*) – Which are the Outer and the Inner (*al-Zāhir wa-l-Bāṭin*) – each of these two Names include that which Its [Fellow]-Custodians (*sadanatu-hu*), from the First to the Last of Them, comprise. Notwithstanding, the Lords of the Names, along with the other Names, fall into three classes (*marātib*): among them,

⁸⁵ The allusion is to the *murīdūn*-rebel leader of the Algarve, Abū l-Qāsim Aḥmad Ibn Qasī (d. 546/1151), who taught that the essence of each Divine Name was identical to all of the others (as Ibn al-‘Arabī observes in *Fut.* II, 686. 22–5; and in *Fuṣūṣ*, 79 and 180, and elsewhere). But recall that these words are addressed to Shaykh al-Mahdawī, who must, therefore, have been unfamiliar with Ibn Qasī’s book, the *K. Khal‘ al-na‘layn*. This is noteworthy since Ibn al-‘Arabī himself became privy to the doctrine of Ibn Qasī (not necessarily for the first time) through the latter’s son whom he met in Tunis in 590/1194 during his first sojourn with al-Mahdawī (see *Fut.* IV, 129. 11–12).

⁸⁶ This is an unequivocal endorsement of Ibn Qasī as a ranking Ṣūfī authority which cannot easily be explained away despite the clear evidence of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s critical attitude in his later commentary on the *Khal‘ al-na‘layn* (cf. Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur* [Cambridge, 1993], pp. 55–7). Moreover, it should be noted that Ibn al-‘Arabī here is explicitly presenting himself as a transmitter of Ibn Qasī’s (effectively esoteric) doctrine of the homogeneity of the Divine Names (cf. also *Fut.* II, 286. 25–7).

[1] Those [more universal Names] attaining the [higher] grades (*darajāt*) of the Lords of the Names;⁸⁷ and Those specializing in a [particular] grade⁸⁸ – either [2] in that of the Benefactor, or [3] in that of the Chastiser. These Names of the World, then, are limited (*maḥsūrah*) [by Their cosmogonic connections].⁸⁹ *By God, Whom we ask for help!*

[The Supreme Divine Essence]

When all of the [other] Names resorted to these Imāms [of the Names], and the Imāms, in turn, had recourse to the Name, Allah, the Latter then took refuge in the [SUPREME DIVINE] ESSENCE (*al-Dhāt*) – WHICH has no need of the Names – by way of petitioning the granting of what the Names had requested. The MOST-GENEROUS BENEFACTOR (*al-Miḥsān al-Jawād*) graciously granted that [request] and declared: “Tell the Imāms to devote Themselves to the bringing-forth (*ibrāz*) of the World in accordance with what Their Realities bestow!” So the Name, Allah, went out [from the Presence of the SUPREME DIVINE ESSENCE to the other Names] and related to Them the message (*al-khabar*), and They quickly turned about, joyful and delighted, and They ceased being [discontented]. For They looked to the Presence which I shall mention in the sixth chapter of this book,⁹⁰ and then They brought about the existence of the World – as we shall speak of further in the chapters after this, God willing. “And God speaks the Truth and shows the Way!”⁹¹

⁸⁷ Either These are simply the seven ‘Lords’ (= ‘Mothers’, ‘Imāms’) of the Names, or else, perhaps, we should also include the more centrally-situated ‘Custodians’ of sphere *no.* 8.

⁸⁸ *Mā yanfaridu bi-darajat in.* If my reading of this (and the preceding clause) is correct, then Ibn al-‘Arabī has expressed himself rather awkwardly here. The point is evidently that whereas the more universal significance of the Names must be kept in mind when considering spheres 1–7 (and 8?), Those of spheres 9 and 10 – representing, respectively, the Keepers of the Divine pleasure and wrath – are characterized by Their special (partial) significations.

⁸⁹ Recall that in the present text Ibn al-‘Arabī has specified that he is treating the Names in reference to the creation of the World (see after n. 68).

⁹⁰ That is, the Perfect Man, or Muḥammadan Reality, which is the primary subject-matter of that chapter (see *Fut.* [rev.], II, 221–5sq.).

⁹¹ *Qur.* 33: 4 (end).

IV) FROM CHAPTER LXVI OF THE *FUTŪḤĀT AL-MAKKĪYAH*:⁹²
 THE ‘ETERNAL CONFERENCE’ OF THE DIVINE NAMES AS A PRELUDE
 TO THE INSTITUTION OF THE LAW

Chapter 66 of the *Futūḥāt* is entitled “On the Gnosis of the Secret of the Holy Law (*al-sharī‘ah*) ... and Which Divine Name originated it.” The Name in question is *al-Rabb*, the LORD,⁹³ the Cosmocrator called upon to preserve peace in the universe – and, consequently, its very existence – by instituting the principles of law and civil custom. The portion of the chapter translated here (roughly the first third) because of its correlation with our other three onomalogical texts, recounts the allegory of the Divine dialogue leading up to the manifestation of the realm of contingent beings (*al-mumkināt*) and, after the threatened failure of the experiment due to the inherent tyranny of a virtual ‘polytheism’,⁹⁴ the decision to institute a monarchic ‘henotheism’ with the appointment of the LORD by the other Names on behalf of existent creatures, the meek of the earth, who feared for their survival in a world without moral order.⁹⁵ I do not know if anyone has yet determined when this chapter of the *Futūḥāt* was written, but my impression is that it probably dates from a period considerably posterior to that of our last text. It is, in fact, the first of a continuous series of chapters (the last seven of Volume One of the Bulaq edition), some of them quite long, dealing with the orthopractic pillars of Islamic Law: the *shahādah*, ritual purity, prayer, almsgiving, fasting and pilgrimage. It would seem likely that such a series might have been produced *after* Ibn al-‘Arabī’s biographic phase of highest mobility (during which we know that he composed many shorter tracts)

⁹² *Fut.* (rev.), V, 90–7; corresponding to *Fut.* I, 322. 26–324. 1. This passage has been masterfully translated by William Chittick in *Imaginal Worlds*, pp. 126–36 (see especially pp. 129–32). See also the same scholar’s *S.P.K.*, 47–58, especially pp. 53–4; and his “Ibn al-‘Arabī’s ‘Myth of the Names’” in J. Martin, ed., *Philosophies of Being and Mind* (New York, 1992), pp. 207–19.

⁹³ I transcribe this Name in capitals to distinguish it from the generic usage of ‘Lord’ for all of the Names in relation to Their existential ‘realities’, and for the seven cardinal Appellations *vis-à-vis* the other Names.

⁹⁴ I think that in this context Ibn al-‘Arabī has in mind the verse: “If there were in [the heavens and the earth a plurality of] Gods (*ālihah*) besides GOD, [the heavens and the earth] would surely be corrupted” (*Qur.* 21: 22).

⁹⁵ The situation could be compared to Israel’s institution of the Divine monarchy, the precursor of Christ’s messianic Kingship. David’s triumph over Goliath (personifying the brute force of the Powerful uncontrolled by the Knowing) is alluded to in the verse: “If God had not repelled some men by others the earth would have been corrupted” (*Qur.* 2: 251).

– that is, at some time in the second decade of the seventh/thirteenth century, when he was settled in Damascus and working full-time on redacting the multi-chaptered *Futūḥāt al-makkīyah*.

Furthermore, it may be possible to detect some evidence of a diachronic development in the Shaykh’s treatment of the ‘Eternal Conference’ theme as presented in this fourth text. Here the ‘Realities’ (*ḥaqā’iq*) are conceived as intelligible (*ma’qūlah*), epistemic instead of existential, and the ‘Identities’ (*a’yān*) are largely replaced by ‘possible beings’, the *mumkināt*, which, after manifestation (or entification) are called ‘Existents’ (*akwān*). Moreover, most notably, the very ‘root-cause’ (*aṣl*) of creation is allegorized in the present text as an impulse arising in the contingent beings themselves, who cunningly tempt the Names to do their bidding by offering Them the *quid pro quo* of worship for existence. The reader will also notice many significant differences in the enactment of the Divine dialogue itself, particularly as concerns the relationships between the Names, the ‘Producer’ (*al-Bāri’*) and the Powerful, and the Latter and the ‘Speaker, or Commander’ (*al-Āmir*), Who gives the command to *be* (*Kun!*) directly to the possible being which then, *ex mero motu*, as it were, enables the Powerful to create it. Finally, the SUPREME DIVINE ESSENCE of all of the Names is now referred to as THE ONE (*al-Wāḥid*), and the demiurgic duo of Names, the Director and the Distinguisher, introduced in Text III, are here subordinated as ministers to the Lawgiving LORD (*al-Rabb*).

TRANSLATION

The Glorious requested of the GLORIOUS Glory,⁹⁶
 but HE disdained to certify a Glorification:
 When, in HIS Majesty and Generosity, HE saw
 the Servant of Divinity befriending *vainglory* –
 For he was quite content to take glory in his own self,
 haughty, throwing his weight around and showing himself proud –
 HE apprised him of a Holy Law inviolate,
 the authority of which subdued him mightily.
 The lowly Servant cried out in his want and abasement:
 “O THOU WHO art Exalted and Blessed in THY Greatness!”

God has declared (To Him be Might and Majesty!): “Say: ‘If there were Angels walking at peace on earth, We would have sent down unto them from heaven an Angel as Apostle.’”⁹⁷ And He said (Exalted be He!): “We never punish [any people] until We have sent forth an Apostle [to warn them].”⁹⁸

Know that the ‘Divine Names’ are the [silent] ‘Voice of a Condition’ (*lisānu ḥāl in*) bestowed by the Realities.⁹⁹ So be mindful as to what you are about to hear [regarding the supposed ‘speech’ of these Names] and do not imagine multiplicity or the actual meeting together [of the various Names]! Rather, in this chapter I will only present the order of intelligible Realities (*tarṭīb ḥaqā’iq ma’qūlah*) which are multiple in regard to the Relations (*al-nisab*)¹⁰⁰ but not with respect to any ‘identified’ Being (*wujūd ‘aynī*),¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ The particular Divine Name, the Glorious (*al-Jalīl*), requested of the transsubjective Divine Essence (= the One Named, *al-Musammá*, by all of the Names) the manifestation in the World of the reality corresponding to His own Name – *i.e.*, glory (*jalāl*). But this was tantamount to demanding that some human being be granted the kingly quality of glory – certainly much to ask for the sake of vainglorious mankind. The metre of the poem is *al-kāmil*.

⁹⁷ *Qur.* 17: 95.

⁹⁸ *Qur.* 17: 15.

⁹⁹ That is to say, Their ‘speech’ as depicted parabolically in the Divine dialogue motif is not real (and, therefore, limited), but symbolic, the most-eloquent “voice of silence.” On the expression, *lisān ḥāl*, see Manfred Ullmann, *et alii*, *Wörterbuch der klassischen arabischen Sprache* (Wiesbaden, 1957–83), s. v. *lisān*.

¹⁰⁰ These are the Divine Names Themselves (see n. 103).

for the Essence of the Real (*Dhāt al-Ḥaqq*) is *ONE* inasmuch as It is [pure] ESSENCE. After that, however, we know from our own existence – our abject need and our contingency – that we must have a ‘Preponderator’ (*murajjih*) by Whom we may be supported,¹⁰² and that our [multifarious] existence will require of that ‘Supporter’ (*al-mustanad*, ‘cause’) various Relations¹⁰³ which the Lawgiver (*al-Shāri‘*) alluded to metonymically as the ‘Most-beautiful Names’.¹⁰⁴ For HE named HIMSELF by Them in HIS capacity as a Speaker (*Mutakallim*) at the [ultimate] level of the essentiality of HIS DIVINE BEING (*martabat wujūbiyat wujūdi-hi l-ilāhī*) in which none may participate since, verily, HE is *ONE GOD* – there is no other God.¹⁰⁵

With that stipulation at the beginning of this matter, and [keeping in mind God’s] effecting and giving preponderance to the Possible World (*al-‘ālam al-mumkin*) – I say [parabolically]: The Names gathered together (*ijtima‘at*) in the Presence of the NAMED ONE and contemplated Their own Realities and Meanings.¹⁰⁶ Then They sought the manifestation of Their Predications (*aḥkāmū-hā*)¹⁰⁷ so that Their various Identities (*a‘yānu-hā*) might be distinguished by Their Impressions.¹⁰⁸ Hence, the Creator (*al-Khāliq*) – the One-Who-Predestines (*al-Muqaddir*)¹⁰⁹ – the Knower (*al-‘Ālim*), the

¹⁰¹ That is, essential reality. The *ḥaqā’iq ma‘qūlah* are epistemic essences, or ‘meanings’ (*ma‘ān^m*), not ontological entities, which are the ‘realities’ proper.

¹⁰² As Creator, God gives preponderance (*tarjih*) to the creature’s possibility of being over its equally possible non-existence.

¹⁰³ *Al-nisab* (s., *nisbah*). Ibn al-‘Arabī employs this term in preference to the dialectical theologians’ usage of the word, *ṣifāt* (attributes), to denote the specific characteristics of Deity evidenced by the Names of God in the Scripture (see *Fut.* IV, 294. 11–19). Thus, he sees the Names more as formal, or hypothetical, interrelations of the supposed aspects (*wujūh*) of the Divine Self-manifestation rather than the actual, distinct semantic fields implied in the concept of ‘attributes, or qualities’.

¹⁰⁴ See *Qur.* 7: 180, 17: 110, 20: 8 and 59: 24. “The Lawgiver” here is God as Speaker in the Qur’ān.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *Qur.* 5: 73, *et al.*

¹⁰⁶ The *ma‘ān^m* are the “intelligible realities” mentioned above.

¹⁰⁷ These are the ‘authorizations, or judicial regulations’ that each Name, by Its very nature, causes to be predicated, rather as an astrological planet was conceived to impose certain judgments (*aḥkām*) when passing through the zodiac.

¹⁰⁸ *Āthāru-hā. Athar* : ‘trace, vestige; impression, effect’. These are apparently the ‘secondary properties’ (*al-thawānī*) of the Name – hence, ‘attributes of the Attributes’. On the ‘identities’ (*a‘yān*), see nn. 112–13, 115 and 121, below.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. *Qur.* 25: 2, 87: 2–3, *et al.* See Chittick’s commentary in *S.P.K.*, 389–90, n. 16, where he quotes *Fut.*, II, 62. 4: “The Divine determination (*al-taqdīr al-ilāhī*) concerning [creatures] is like the architect who causes what he wants to bring forth to be present [in his mind].” The point here is that the Name, *al-Khāliq*, ranks ‘above’ other ‘Creator’-Names, such as *al-Bāri‘* (see n. 114).

Director (*al-Mudabbir*), the Distinguisher (*al-Mufaṣṣil*), the Producer (*al-Bāri*), the Giver-of-Form (*al-Muṣawwir*), the Provider (*al-Rāziq*), the Giver-of- Life (*al-Muḥyī*), the Death-Dealer (*al-Mumīt*), the Inheritor (*al-Wārith*), the Grateful (*al-Shakūr*), and all of the Divine Names considered Their own Essences (*dhawātu-hum*),¹¹⁰ but They did not see any object of [Their] creation (*makhlūq*) nor anything directed (*mudabbar*), distinguished (*mufaṣṣal*) or provided for (*marzūq*).¹¹¹ So They asked: “How [are We] to act so that these Identities¹¹² might become manifest – [Identities] in which Our Predications shall be made manifest, and, thus, manifest Our authority?”

Hence, the Divine Names – Which certain of the Realities of the World have necessitated (*taṭallaba-hā*) after the manifestation of the [World’s] Identity (*zuhūr ‘ayni-hi*)¹¹³ – had recourse to the Name, the Producer, to Whom They proposed: “Perhaps You could create these Identities so that Our Predications might become manifest and Our authority established, since the [transcendent] Presence in which We now are cannot admit of Our influence [on the external World].” But the Producer replied, “That depends upon the Name, the Powerful, for I am under His aegis (*hīṭatu-hu*).”¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Note that from here on the pronouns are animate plurals, signifying true personification.

¹¹¹ These are the passive objects (patients) of the Divine actions, corresponding grammatically to the first Names mentioned above.

¹¹² That is, the concrete manifestations of the Names’ eternal natures, conceived as immutable – equally eternal – essential ‘identities, or substances’ (*a’yān*), which yet lack objective existence (entification).

¹¹³ Here it is the ‘realities’ (*ḥaqā’iq*) in the world’s essential ‘identity’ (*‘ayn*) which are responsible for the initial movement toward the manifestation of the world. That world had already been created *ex nihilo* by the Creator, however – hence, only some of the realities (not those corresponding to the Creator or the Knower, for example) urged the Names to approach the Producer.

¹¹⁴ The Producer needs power in order to act since His ‘creation’ is not *ex nihilo* (as with *al-Khāliq*) but out of pre-existing matter, as Adam was ‘created’, or produced, out of clay (see E. W. Lane, *Arabic–English Lexicon*, s. v. *bari’a* [end], quoting a *tafsīr* of al-Bayḍāwī). In the diagram, above, the Powerful is correlated with the function of creation, *ījād* (see sphere *no. 5* and ray *no. 17*).

[Possible beings and their manifestation]

The root-cause of this is that the Possible ‘beings’ (*al-mumkināt*)¹¹⁵ in their state of non-existence (*‘adamu-hā*) petitioned the Divine Names with the petition of their abject state and need,¹¹⁶ imploring Them: “Non-existence makes us unable to discern one another or to know what we owe to You by right.¹¹⁷ Were You to make manifest our Identities and clothe us in the vestments of Existence (*ḥullat al-wujūd*), You would be doing us a great favor in that, and we would surely give You Your due veneration and magnification. And You, also – authority will only be truly justified for You when we [Your subjects] are made manifest in actuality (*bi-l-fi‘l*). Today, You are ‘Authorities’ (*salāḥīn*) over us only potentially and plenipotentially (*bi-l-qūwah wa-l-ṣalāḥīyah*). This which we ask of You is more in *Your* interests than it is in ours!” The Names replied: “What the Possible beings have said is correct.” So They were moved to seek that [*sci.*, the manifestation of the World].

When [the Names] had recourse to the Name, the Powerful, He declared: “I am under the aegis of the Purposer, so I cannot create an Identity among You except by His specification.¹¹⁸ The Possible being (*al-mumkin*) of itself cannot enable Me [to bring it into existence] unless the command of the Commander (*amr al-Āmir*) come to it from its Lord.¹¹⁹ For when He gives the Command of Existentiality (*al-takwīn*), commanding the [Possible thing to] ‘Be!’ (*Kun*),¹²⁰ [the Possible being then] empowers Me of itself,¹²¹ and I become ‘connected’ (*ta‘allaqtu*) to its creation. Then I immediately cause it to come

¹¹⁵ These “possible beings” are ultimately non-different from the *a’yān*, which I have called the essential ‘identities’ (= Chittick’s “entities”). It is important to understand that *they do not actually exist* – they only ‘subsist’ in God’s fore-knowledge – so it is rather misleading to call them “entities” or “beings” as I do here, analogically (since they are obviously personified).

¹¹⁶ *Su’āla ḥāli dhillat in wa-ftiqār in*. That is, they ‘spoke’ in the silent language of their glaring need.

¹¹⁷ *Ma’rifatu mā yajibu la-kum mina l-ḥaqqi ‘alay-nā*: the knowledge of pious observance.

¹¹⁸ In our diagram, above, the ‘ray of specification’ (*no.* 11) connects the created world with the Purposer (sphere *no.* 3). The Divine will must direct the power to a specific purpose.

¹¹⁹ This would be the command of the Logos, or Speaker, ray *no.* 14.

¹²⁰ See the verses cited in n. 27.

¹²¹ *Makkana-nī min nafsh-hi*. I take the subject here to be the “possible being” – *al-mumkin*, cognate with the verb – (compare the same expression in the preceding sentence). Chittick’s reading of the subject as God is quite tenable but, I think, misses the important point that the ‘possible thing’ itself calls out for its own manifestation.

into existence. So, go to the Name, the Purposer. Perhaps He will give preponderance to the side of existence and specify it over that of non-existence. Then We can join together – Myself, the Commander and the Speaker¹²² – and give You existence [for the ‘Identities’ which You seek to manifest].”

So They sought the counsel of the Name, the Purposer, saying to Him: “We petitioned the Powerful concerning the creation of Our Identities, but He deferred the command of that to You. Then, what do you prescribe?” “The Powerful has spoken the truth,” the Purposer replied, “but I have no information as to what the Name, the Knower, has decided¹²³ concerning You. Has His knowledge anticipated the creation [which You seek] so that We might specify it, or has it *not* done so? I am under the aegis of the Name, the Knower, so go to Him and tell Him of Your suit.”

They then proceeded to the Knower and told Him what the Purposer had said, to which the Knower responded: “The Purposer has spoken the truth. My knowledge has, indeed, anticipated Your creation, but courtesy (*al-adab*) comes first: Verily, We have a Presence watching over Us all (*muhayminīyah ‘alay-nā*), and that is the Name, Allah. We must attend upon Him, for, indeed, [His] is the Presence of All-Comprehensiveness (*ḥadrat al-jam‘*).”

Hence, all of the Names gathered together in the Presence of Allah. “What is on Your minds?” [He] asked. [The Names] related the information to Him, and [Allah] responded: “I am a Name comprehending all of Your Realities, and I am, indeed, a Proof of ONE NAMED (*dalīl ‘alá Musammán*)¹²⁴ [by all of You Names], WHO is a HOLY ESSENCE (*Dhāt muqaddasah*) having the characteristics of Perfection and Transcendence (*nu‘ūt al-kamāl wa-l-tanzīh*). But stay here while I call on the ONE of WHOM I am the Proof (*madlūl-ī*).”

[The Name, Allah] then called upon the ONE of WHOM He is Proof and told HIM what the Possible beings had said and what the Divine Names had discussed. [The

¹²² “The Speaker” (here, *al-Mutakallim*) is *al-Qā’il*, the ‘Commanding Imām’ (*al-Āmir*), in our diagram.

¹²³ The verb, *ḥakama*, here relates to the character of the Knower as the ‘Wise (*al-ḥakīm*) Imām’, Whose ray is that of perfection (*al-iḥkām*), no. 8 in the diagram.

¹²⁴ *Dalīl*: “a sign set up for the knowledge of a thing indicated” (Lane, *Lexicon*, s.v.), whence smoke is called *dalīl ‘alá l-nāri* (an indication of fire). *Madlūl*, then, means ‘the thing indicated’.

TRANSCENDENT HOLY ESSENCE] then declared [to Allah]: “Go out and tell each One of the Names to establish a connection with that which His own Reality necessitates among the Possible beings.¹²⁵ For I am THE ONE (*al-Wāḥid*),¹²⁶ unto MYSELF, in respect of MYSELF.¹²⁷ The Possible beings, however, [eternally] seek¹²⁸ MY [exalted] ‘Status’ (*martabat-ī*), and MY ‘Status’ [eternally] seeks them.¹²⁹ The Divine Names, all of Them, apply to the [exalted] Status, not to ME¹³⁰ – except for THE ONE, in particular, that being a Name special to ME [alone]. None of the Names, none of the Ranks, nor any Possible being shares with ME in the Reality of [THE ONE] (*ḥaqīqatu-hu*) in every aspect.”

[The Emergence of the LORD (*al-Rabb*) and the Holy Law]

So the Name, Allah, went out, and, with Him, the Name, the One-Who-Speaks (*al-Mutakallim*), interpreting Him to the Possible beings and the other Names. He related to Them what the NAMED ONE had said, and consequently, the Knower, the Purposer, the Speaker (*al-Qā’il*) and the Powerful duly established Their connections [with Creation].¹³¹ Then the First Possible being became manifest by the specification of the Purposer and the wisdom of the Knower.¹³²

¹²⁵ For Chittick’s translation of the remainder of this passage, see *S.P.K.*, 54b.

¹²⁶ *Al-Wāḥid* (which is interchangeable with *al-Aḥad*) is the first of the Divine Names, ranking even above the all-comprehensive Name, *Allāh*, according to Ibn al-‘Arabī (see *Fut.* II, 57. 6–11, translated in *S.P.K.*, 390, n. 17).

¹²⁷ *Li-nafs-ī, min ḥaythu nafs-ī.*

¹²⁸ *Taṭlubu*: ‘they seek; demand, require’.

¹²⁹ All of the points of a pyramid converge upon the apex, which, symbolizing the eye/source of spiritual blessing to the material cosmos, may be said to seek out even the darkest corners of the underworld.

¹³⁰ As superlative perfections in Their own spheres, each of the Names have the status of ‘Lords’, referring to the highest subject-level (*martabah*) of the universal hierarchy. But, as such, They logically require the existence of ‘servants, or worshippers’, who are the objects of Their lordship (*marbūbūn*). Even the Name, Allah, comprehending all of Their perfections, requires an object of His Divinity (*ma’lūh*). Only the Name, *al-Wāḥid/al-Aḥad*, utterly precludes such a logical requisite. It would be interesting to compare Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *al-Wāḥid* with the Plotinian notion of the ‘One’ (Gr., *Henos*), then to extend the comparison to *Allāh-Raḥmān* and *Nous-Psyche*.

¹³¹ These ‘connections’ [s., *ta’alluq*] are represented by the four diagonal lines, or *raqā’iq*, connecting the spheres *nos.* 2, 3, 4 and 5 with the ‘created world’ (sphere *no.* 11) in the diagram.

¹³² The reference is to the rays of perfection (*iḥkām*) and specification (*takhṣīs*), *nos.* 8 and 11. *Iḥkām* denotes the activity of perfecting, fortifying by judicious wisdom (*ḥukm*) – hence the Knower is called the ‘Wise’ (*al-ḥakīm*) Imām.

When the Identities and the Impressions became manifest in the engendered Existents (*al-akwān*)¹³³ and some of [the Existents] exercised authority over others, while some [tyrannously] subjected others – all in accordance with what the Names supported in them – it led to discord and controversy, so that [the engendered Existents] declared: “We fear for ourselves that our order might be corrupted and we fall into the non-existence in which we used to abide!” So the Possible beings informed the Names (by that which the Knower and the Director presented to them), saying: “You, O Names – were You to predicate a ‘Fixed Scale’ (*mīzān ma‘lūm*) and an ‘Ordained Limit’ (*ḥadd marsūm*) by means of an Imām under Whose jurisdiction You would be, that would preserve our existence for us and Your Influences (*ta’thīrātu-kum*) upon us would also be preserved. Surely, that would be better for both us and You. So betake Yourselves to Allah! Perhaps He will send forth One Who will set for You a Limit at which You may stand. If not, we will perish, and You will be out of commission!”

[The Names] responded: “Indeed, this is most proper and the best idea.” And They did just that. Then They said [to the Existents]: “The Name, the Director – He will settle your affair.” So they apprised the Director [of their proposal] and He declared: “I am for the idea.”

The Director entered [into the Presence of Allah] and emerged thence with the Command of the Real to the Name, the LORD, saying to Him: “Do what the Best interest (*al-maṣlahah*) requires as regards the sustaining of the Identities of these Possible beings!” Then [the LORD] took two Ministers (*wazīrān*) to assist Him in what He was commanded to do. One Minister was the Name, the Director, the other Minister was the Distinguisher. [God] (Exalted be He!) has said: “He *directs* the [whole] Thing, He *distinguishes* the Signs¹³⁴ that, haply, you will be certain of the Meeting with your LORD”¹³⁵ – Who is the [above-mentioned] ‘Imām’. So consider how exact is the Speech of God (Be He exalted!) where expressions occur which are suited to the situation required by the matter at hand!

¹³³ The *akwān* (s., *kawn*) are here the possible beings (*mumkināt*) after they have been granted existence.

¹³⁴ *Yudabbiru l-amra, yufaṣṣilu l-āyāti*. Note that the verbs are cognate with the two Names, *al-Mudabbir* and *al-Mufaṣṣil*.

¹³⁵ *Qur.* 13: 2.

Then the Name, the LORD, set down the [legal] Limits (*al-ḥudūd*) and established the [social] Customs (*al-marāsim*) for [the Existents] that the [Cosmic] Kingdom might be improved ...¹³⁶

* * *

These four texts on the creative Self-manifestation of the Most-beautiful Names of God provide an excellent opportunity for an in-depth examination of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s treatment of the theme over a period of time ranging from the beginning through the middle of his career. In this article I have merely sought to present the textual material in an internally consistent form, and, although some provisional observations of the nature of each text and their interrelations have been suggested, I would emphasize that the present study does not pretend to offer a sufficient analysis of the subject-matter embraced. The problems bearing further consideration are legion: for instance, what, exactly, is the role of the Living (*al-Ḥayy*) in the drama of creation, and how does the Divine *ḥayāh* relate to *wujūd*? And what about the factor of mercy, so pronounced in other creational contexts?¹³⁷ Can it be treated in terms of the supreme goodness of God’s generosity (*al-jūd*) as touched upon in our Text II? And how does Divine justice (*al-qist*) factor in? Are we really to believe that mercy precedes justice? Also, the precise function of the Speaking Name is not entirely clear to me: Is *al-Qā’il/ al-Mutakallim* the same Persona as *al-Āmir* (the Logos, Who commands possible things to *be*)? Does the One-Who-Sees (*al-Baṣīr, al-Rā’ī*) not participate in the manifestation of the World (*zuhūru-hu*)?¹³⁸ Then why is He not treated further in this context? And what about the One-Who-Hears (*al-Samī’*)? Does the sound of a tree falling in the woods have no existence? Do the Names, *al-Mudabbir* and *al-Mufaṣṣil*, introduced in Text III, and *al-Rabb*, added in Text IV, mean that we should be contemplating *ten* Imām-Names in our pantheon rather than seven? Would that not raise the interdisciplinary question of the comparison of our Ṣūfī ‘World-Sphere’ of Divine Names with the well-known Qabalistic *Arbor vitae* of ten

¹³⁶ The remainder of Chap. 66 has been translated by Chittick in *Imaginal Worlds*, pp. 132–6.

¹³⁷ On this, see *S.P.K.*, 130–2 and 290–1, *et al.* See, also, at n. 22, above.

¹³⁸ See above, at n. 65.

sefirōth?¹³⁹ Lastly (but not finally), how does the whole system of the Names relate to that most quintessential of all Akbarian tenets – the Perfect Man? Is the latter Deiform personage more the object of discussion of the ‘Eternal Conference’ of the Names or, rather, its ultimate subject, the very Spirit of our most sacred insights? These and countless other questions remain to be explored even within the limited confines of the four texts presented here.

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¹³⁹ Note that even as the twenty-eight lines (*raqā’iq*) connecting the spheres of our diagram correspond to the number of Arabic letters, so the twenty-two ‘paths’ connecting the Qabalistic *sefirōth* correspond to the Hebrew alphabet.