God and the Perfect Man in the Experience of ʿAbd al-Qadir al-Jazaʾiri*

Itzchak Weismann

During the nineteenth century the Muslim countries, like most other non-Western parts of the world, increasingly yielded to the economic, political, and cultural hegemony of Europe. Traditional scholarly examination of this formidable challenge to the Islamic faith has tended to dwell on the ways in which modern Western ideas were imported and imposed upon its supposedly solidified dogmas and practices. Such an ethnocentric approach overlooked the point of view of the contemporary Muslim men of religion and failed to appreciate the significance of their traditions for the self-admittedly necessary adjustment to the modern circumstances. A more balanced analysis of nineteenth-century Islamic response to the Western challenge must substitute this dichotomous and ahistoric view of a modern West versus a backward Islam for the more nuanced and dynamic one of the modernization of Islam through its own reformist traditions.

Among the traditions of latter-day Islam the theosophical teaching of Muhyi al-Din ibn ʿArabi, the Greatest Master (al-Shaykh al-Akbar), held a prominent place. Highly controversial ever since its formulation in the first half of the thirteenth century, both adherents and opponents of the Akbari teaching confirmed in their continuous engagement its centrality for the Islamic discourse down to modern times. At the crux of the debate stood the implications of Ibn ʿArabi's mystical insights regarding the relationship between man and his Lord. This entailed the two related questions of the ontological status of the saints in the universe and the normative obligation to observe the precepts of the Holy Law. The formulations of these questions among Ibn ʿArabi's advocates, who faithfully defended the orthodoxy of his teaching, and his detractors, who tended

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to regard him as an outright heretic, changed throughout the ages reflecting changing circumstances of time and place. It was only natural, then, that under the most formidable challenge of the dawning modern era, the same Akbari teaching would serve alternately as a basis for the modernization of Islam and as a scapegoat for its failures.[1]

This article deals with the spiritual experience of amir ʿAbd al-Qadir al-Jazaʾiri, the most outstanding advocate of Ibn ʿArabi's thought at that crucial point of transformation into the modern era. Beginning with a sketch of ʿAbd al-Qadir's life, I shall then proceed to explore his Akbari mystical worldview in general and, within it, his concept of the Perfect Man in particular. Finally, I will try to refer these insights to the socio-economic and religious realities created under the multi-faceted challenge of the West, and to suggest why, despite ʿAbd al-Qadir's endeavor, in the modern Muslim world the tradition of Muhyi al-Din ibn ʿArabi has given way to that of his most formidable detractor, Taqi al-Din Ahmad ibn Taymiyya.

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The world-fame of the amir ʿAbd al-Qadir al-Jazaʾiri rests on his leadership of the resistance movement that crystallized against the French invasion of Algeria in 1830, rather than on any attachment to the mystical philosophy of Ibn ʿArabi. Receiving a pledge of allegiance from some major tribes in the western regions at the age of twenty-five, ʿAbd al-Qadir conducted an heroic struggle against the superior power of the French for the next fifteen years, until his final surrender in 1847. During this time he established his own state in the interior of the country, setting up a rudimentary bureaucratic machinery and striving to subjugate recalcitrant tribes to his centralized rule.[2]

1. For the evolution of the debate on Ibn ʿArabi's teachings in latter-day Islam see Alexander D. Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany, 1999). For the pre-modern and modern periods see Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufis and anti-Sufis: The Defense, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World* (Richmond, 1999), passim.

2. Raphael Danziger, *Abd al-Qadir and the Algerian Resistance to the French and Internal Consolidation* (New York and London, 1977).

The motivation behind 'Abd al-Qadir's struggle was not any Algerian or Arab "national" feeling, which would be premature for the first half of the nineteenth century, but a deep Muslim faith. He himself hailed from a Sharifian family which, from its headquarters in the religious center of Qaytana, disseminated a reformed message of the Qadiriyya order to the adjacent tribes. The pledge of allegiance to the amir, performed under a large elm tree, was staged as a reenactment of the Companions' pledge to the Prophet in Hudaybiya prior to the conquest of Mecca, and his official title henceforth was that of *amir al-mu'minun* (Commander of the faithful) and the leader of jihad. Extremely pious by inclination, 'Abd al-Qadir strove to bring about a moral regeneration among his people by returning to the spirit of the Qur'an and the exemplary path of the forefathers (*al-salaf al-salih*). Accordingly, he rigorously implemented the precepts of the Shari'a under his rule, enforcing regular attendance in the mosques and modest attire for women in public, as well as prohibiting drinking, gambling and smoking.[3]

In addition to his Qadiri affiliation, 'Abd al-Qadir also belonged to the spiritual chain of Ibn 'Arabi, which was transmitted in his family since his grandfather had received it in Cairo from the eminent eighteenth-century scholar, Muhammad Murtada al-Zabidi.[4] 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri's interest in al-Shaykh al-Akbar was kindled in earnest, however, only in the wake of his defeat when, contrary to the stipulations of the treaty signed with him, he was taken to France. Here during five years of confinement, 'Abd al-Qadir could realize at first hand the impressive material progress attained by Europe through its new rationalist–scientific approach. At the same time he went through an acute spiritual crisis, which converted him to the Akbari teaching.[5] After his release by Louis Napoleon in 1852, 'Abd al-Qadir left for the Ottoman Empire, finally settling in

3. Pessah Shinar, "'Abd al-Qadir and 'Abd al-Krim: Religious Influences on their Thought and Action", *Asian and African Studies*, 1 (1965), pp.139–60.

4. Michel Chodkiewicz, *The Spiritual Writings of Amir Abd el-Kader* (Albany, 1995), pp.7–8.

5. Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri, *Tuhfat al-Za'ir fi Ta'rikh al-Jaza'ir wal-Amir 'Abd al-Qadir* (Beirut, 1384/1964), pp.514–30; Jawad

Damascus, where he was to spend the rest of his life, until his death in 1883.

In Damascus, 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri enjoyed great prestige, with connections at the highest levels in the Ottoman capital as well as in Europe, and great wealth. Perceiving the great economic opportunities which were being opened up by the integration of Syria into the world market, he invested his fortune in the export of grain to France and Great Britain, thereby becoming one of the great landholders of the city.[6] 'Abd al-Qadir's position was further fortified by his heroic efforts to protect local Christians and European consuls during the severe disturbances that erupted in Damascus in 1860. After the outbreak of the Ottoman–Russian War of 1877–78 he was even invited to assume the reign of an Arab Kingdom were Ottoman rule in Syria to collapse.[7]

However, 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri's principal occupation in the almost three decades he spent in Damascus was in religion in general, and in the teaching of Ibn 'Arabi in particular. Soon after his arrival, 'Abd al-Qadir was invited to teach in the central mosque of the city, the Umayyad Mosque, and as a result he gathered around him an elite circle of disciples who studied the Akbari theosophy under his guidance. In the course of a prolonged hajj journey in 1862–63, he also followed the Sufi path in full, reaching the goal on Mount Hira', in the cave where the Prophet himself used to spend his periods of seclusion. In accordance with his will, 'Abd al-Qadir was buried near the tomb of his spiritual master in the north of Damascus.[8]

The spiritual experiences of 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri in the last three decades of his life are amply recorded in his *Kitab al-Mawaqif fi al-Wa'z wa-Irshad* (The Book of Stops for Preaching

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al-Murabit, *Al-Tasawwuf wal-Amir 'Abd al-Qadir al-Hasani al-Jaza'iri* (Damascus, 1966), p.18.

6. Linda Schatkowski Schilcher, *Families in Politics: Damascene Factions and Estates of the 18th and 19th Centuries* (Stuttgart, 1985), p. 215.

7. David Dean Commins, *Islamic Reform: Politics and Social Change in Late Ottoman Syria* (New York, 1990), pp.26–30.

8. Jaza'iri, *Tuhfat al-Za'ir*, pp.694–9, 856–8 (see n.5 above).

and Guidance).[9] This is a vast collection of interpretations of Qur'anic verses and Hadith reports that unmistakably bear the imprint of Ibn 'Arabi, along with an elucidation of difficult points in the writings of al-Shaykh al-Akbar himself in response to his disciples' queries. The basic ideas underlying these mystical interpretations were already discernible in the logical arguments that 'Abd al-Qadir had put forward in two books he had composed prior to his arrival in Damascus. These were a rejoinder to the accusations of a Catholic priest who worked in Algeria concerning the supposed immorality of Islam,[10] and a subsequent essay presented to a French scientific committee that had chosen the amir as representative of the Muslim nation.[11] The unique quality of the *Mawaqif*, a term which refers to the stops between the stations on the Sufi path, lies in the fact that they were experienced by 'Abd al-Qadir as a direct inspiration from the Divine. The passages are accordingly written in a highly associative language, not unlike Ibn 'Arabi's *Al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya*, on which they were ultimately modeled.

'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri's great indebtedness to Muhyi al-Din ibn 'Arabi, and the license he took to adapt his spiritual master's teaching to the circumstances of the modern age, are expressed in the *Mawaqif* by way of a dream. In it 'Abd al-Qadir relates that he saw Ibn 'Arabi in the form of a lion holding a large chain in its hand. The lion commanded him to put his hand into its mouth and he, despite his fear, complied. Thereafter, Ibn 'Arabi returned to his human form, recognized by 'Abd al-Qadir from many previous dreams, though this time al-Shaykh al-Akbar was like a madman (*majdhub*) uttering confused words. Reiterating a number of times that he was going to perish, he finally fell on the ground, before 'Abd al-Qadir woke up. The dream is followed by its interpretation. Ibn 'Arabi's appearance as a lion alludes to his status among the saints (*awliya'*), while the chain in his hand symbolizes the Shari'a. Putting his hand

9. 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri, *Kitab al-Mawaqif fi al-Wa'z wal-Irshad* (3 vols., Cairo, 1328–29/1910–11).

10. *Idem, al-Miqrad al-Hadd li-Qat' Lisan Muntaqis Din al-Islam bil-Batil wal-Ilhad* (Beirut, n.d.).

11. *Idem, Dhikra al-'Aqil wa-Tanbih al-Ghafil* (Beirut, 1966).

into the lion's mouth signifies 'Abd al-Qadir's reliance on the teaching of al-Shaykh al-Akbar, for he regarded everything he wrote as deriving from him. Ibn 'Arabi's confused state represents the troubles of the time, in which great changes were taking place and moderation was being lost. When he said that he was going to perish, the meaning was an expression of his deep sorrow that Muslims had reached the point of disobeying the commandments of God and His messenger, and of shunning their religion.[12]

Taking upon himself the mission of guiding the Umma back to its true religion, 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri laid out the foundations of the Akbari system at the first stop of the *Mawaqif*, as a prelude to his own mystical experiences. The Sufis of our path, he states, neither revoke the literal meaning of the scriptures, nor do they maintain that their interpretation is the only valid one. Yet, while confirming the literal meaning of the scriptures, they also find in them additional inner meanings. This is supported by the prophetic traditions which testify to the many faces of the Qur'an, by the Sufi experience, and by reason. As the word of God corresponds to His all-encompassing knowledge, He may mean by His words not only what the scholarly and the Sufi commentators understood them to be, but also that which did not even cross their minds. Hence, a man may, by means of a mystical revelation, generate a new interpretation of a verse or a tradition, to which no one else had previously been guided. In 'Abd al-Qadir's eyes, the Qur'an thus constitutes a source of perpetual renewal in Islam, facilitating ever new interpretations that do not contradict the tradition, but rather add to it new layers of meaning, according to the revelations of the Sufi saints in every generation.[13] The same holds true for the commandments of the Shari'a. The knowledge revealed to the saints contains no precepts or prohibitions beyond those handed down by the Prophet, but it may include their inner secrets hitherto undisclosed.[14]

12. *Mawqif* 346, vol. 3, pp. 68–9.
13. *Mawqif* 1, vol. 1, pp. 21–2.
14. *Mawqif* 3, vol. 1, pp. 27–8.

At the center of Ibn 'Arabi's teaching 'Abd al-Qadir posits, in compliance with the later Akbari tradition,[15] the concept of *wahdat al-wujud*. According to his definition, this Unity of Being is the mystical station of separation (*furqan*), in which the creatures are perceived as subsisting in God. In this station, the divine attributes and the relative diversity are simultaneously present, and it is obligatory to fulfill the commandments and be concerned with worldly affairs, as required by the Shari'a. The people of *wahdat al-wujud* perceive both God and His creation (*al-Haqq wal-khalq*), the internal things in the external and the external things in the internal, without each being concealed from the other. Knowing God (*ma'rifa*) means to perceive the reality from a combination of these two perspectives, the divine and the earthly.[16]

The principle of *wahdat al-wujud* thus gives rise to a concept of mutual relationship between God and His creatures. Ibn 'Arabi maintained that the possible entities, namely the creatures in potential, and God in His degree of divinity, not as Himself but in His manifestation as Creator, are as if mutually dependent (*kal-mutadayifin*). Just as we need God to realize our prototypes (*wujud al-a'yan al-thabita*) so He needs us to make manifest His manifestations (*zuhur mazahirihi*).[17] Yet this existential mutuality is entirely vested in God, the only One who really exists. The world can thus be defined as the shadow of God, His external name, and His specific manifestations, definitions and particularizations.[18] In the same vein, 'Abd al-Qadir explains the command "be" in the sense of "Receive your specific character through My existence and My manifestation in you and thus be my manifestation, not that you become existent (*mawjud*)." Whatever is found on earth is in a state of non-existence, and

15. See William C. Chittick, "Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi on the Oneness of Being," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 21 (1981), pp.171–84; and *idem*, "Wahdat al-Wujud in Islamic Thought," *Bulletin of the Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies*, 10 (1991), pp.7–27.

16. *Mawqif* 192, vol. 1, p.377.

17. *Mawqif* 250, vol. 2, p.198.

18. *Mawqif* 248, vol. 2, pp.3–4.

the perception of existence is merely an illusion of the senses or of the intellect.[19]

Like Ibn ʿArabi, however, ʿAbd al-Qadir al-Jazaʾiri makes a distinction between two degrees of non-existence, the one relative (*fanaʾ* or *thubut*) and the other absolute (*ʿadam mahd*). The Sufis do not mean that the world does not exist at all, he clarifies, but only that in reality the world is different from how the common people perceive it to be, since its appearance is creation and its essence is God, or [as you may also] say, its appearance is God and its essence is creature. The world is like the imagination that every intelligent being finds within himself. One should not say that the world is the essential truth (*ʿayn al-haqq*) nor that it is untrue (*ghayr al-haqq*), but that within the truth one part is depicted as created and another as God. Beyond that there is the absolute existence of God within Himself, which cannot be grasped and against which stands nothingness.[20]

The world was thus created in the "imaginary reality" "as if" by a mutual act between the creating God, the active principle, and the created potentialities, the passive principle. Ibn ʿArabi expressed this idea by distinguishing between two stages in the manifestation of God in the world. The first stage is *al-fayd al-aqdas* (the most holy effusion), His revelation to Himself in the world of the unseen in the form of the *aʿyan al-thabita*. The second stage is *al-fayd al-muqaddas* (the holy effusion), His revelation in the visible world through these immutable essences, in the form of actual appearances. The shape of each such actual appearance is thus determined by the capability (*istiʿdad*) of its immutable essence to reflect God, rather than by God in Himself.[21]

It was mainly on the basis of this concept of *istiʿdad*, which implies that the realities of this world are determined by the combined capabilities of the immutable essences, on which ʿAbd

19. *Mawqif* 93, vol. 1, pp.178–9.
20. *Mawqif* 248, vol. 2, pp.73–5.
21. Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (Berkeley, Cal., 1983), pp.43–4; Suʿad al-Hakim, *Al-Muʿjam al-Sufi: al-Hikma fi Hudud al-Kalima* (Beirut, 1401/1981), pp.888–90.

al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri sought to base his adaptation of the Akbari system to the requirements of the modern world. His scheme included three principal points. One was an emphasis on the importance of science for human well-being, which reflected 'Abd al-Qadir's recognition of the material supremacy achieved by Europe and the Muslims' need to appropriate it. The other two points were the compassion toward Christians, which expressed his still basically religious perception of the West, and the emphatic call to shun politics, which was designed to prevent religious objection to the quest of the Ottoman government of the day for modernization.[22] The combined capabilities of the immutable essences determining mundane realities, or rather the unified essence of these capabilities (*haqiqat al-haqa'iq*), is also one of the definitions of the Perfect Man.[23]

The Perfect Man holds a unique position within the general framework of the quasi-mutual relationship between God and His creation, as both an intermediary and a comprehensive being.[24] The perfection of man among all creatures, 'Abd al-Qadir writes, lies in his integration of the divine names *al-zahir* (the outward) and *al-batin* (the inward). Thus, at the cosmic level, *al-insan al-kamil* is the microcosm (*al-kawn al-jami'*) of the divine and the worldly realities. His situation is elucidated through the Qur'anic verse "*laysa ka-mithlihi shay*" (Q. 42: 11), which is generally interpreted as "There is nothing which is His similar". Following in the footsteps of Ibn 'Arabi,[25] 'Abd al-Qadir points out that in view of the seemingly superfluous "*ka*" it may also be interpreted as "There is nothing like His similar", which admits the existence of a being similar to God, to which no other creature resembles. This being is the Perfect Man, who faces, and

22. See author's, *Taste of Modernity: Sufism, Salafiyya, and Arabism in Late Ottoman Damascus* (Leiden, 2000), pp.181–92.

23. Al-Hakim, pp.158–68.

24. For an analysis of the concept of the Perfect Man in Ibn 'Arabi's system see especially Izutsu, pp.218–83; Matasaka Takeshita, *Ibn 'Arabi's Theory of the Perfect Man and its Place in the History of Islamic Thought* (Tokyo, 1987).

25. Michel Chodkiewicz, *An Ocean Without Shore: Ibn 'Arabi, the Book, and the Law* (Albany, NY, 1993), p.37.

mirrors, God the eternal but not created, on the one hand, and the world, the created but not eternal, on the other. Man alone is both eternal and created, both Lord and servant. He was created as God's vicegerent (*khalifa*) on earth while the entire world is a particularization of what exists in him. The world was thus created through man and for man, even though in the visible world man appeared the last. The Perfect Man is *mithl*, similar to God, and *mathal*, the example in whose form God was determined.[26]

On the individual level 'Abd al-Qadir emphasizes, again in full harmony with the teaching of Ibn 'Arabi, that the Perfect Man is the ideal of humanity. In the strictest sense only Muhammad has perfectly realized this state, since it is only in him that the divine names were revealed in complete harmony and perfection. The other prophets, and their perfect heirs, the saints, are nevertheless also regarded as Perfect Men, each attaining the degree of perfection which accorded with his individual capacity to approach God. In every age there must be one such Perfect Man, who is the pole (*qutb*) of his time. As opposed to *al-insan al-kamil*, 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri posits at this level not the animal man, the ordinary people who are immersed in their worldly concerns, but rather the imperfect man, *al-dajjal*, who is actually the Sufi imposter. The Perfect Man, in his capacity as vicegerent of the Lord, can like Him create by uttering the command "be", but he prefers to remain a humble servant and avoids revealing his power to work miracles. The imperfect man, by contrast, is keen on exhibiting his ability to control nature and exhorts people to worship him and hand over their property to him. Such an imposter may seem perfect in this world, but has no part in the hereafter.[27]

Owing to his intermediate position between God and His creation in the one Being, the perfection of Man may be further examined from the quasi-complementary divine and worldly points of view. These are explored by 'Abd al-Qadir mainly in his elucidation of the first chapter of Ibn 'Arabi's *Fusus al-Hikam*,

26. *Mawqif* 248, vol. 2, pp. 6–9.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 9–11.

which deals with Adam, the prototype of all human beings. Beginning with the worldly point of view, 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri maintains that the divinity of Adam's wisdom is derived from his comprehension of all the divine names that were aimed toward the world, the only, though important, exception being that of the necessarily existent. While every other creature reflects one divine name, in man all the names are epitomized in the most exalted one, Allah. Thus, when the ninth-century ecstatic Abu Yazid al-Bistami, and similar perfect heirs of Adam, declared "ana Allah", their intention was to say that they point to God, not that they *were* God. It is from such a cognitive point of view that the Perfect Man is regarded as the locus of God's manifestation, while the spirit of God, which is again the Perfect Man, is regarded as the locus of manifestation of all the realities of the world.[28]

From here it follows that in his state of perfection man parallels the image of God, in Whose image (*'ala suratihi*) Adam was created, and that the two images worship each other.[29] Moreover, from this worldly point of view, it is the cognitive capacity of man, his *isti'dad* as the essence of all *al-a'yan al-thabita*, that determines the image of God. Commenting on Junayd's saying, in response to a query about gnosis (*ma'rifa*), that "The color of the water is the color of its vessel," 'Abd al-Qadir clarifies that, like water, God has no particular image, and therefore He is manifested in reflection in the image of the one who knows Him. In a sense, all worldly images serve as vessels to the manifestation of the water of God, but it is man alone, as a gnostic, who can comprehend this phenomenon.[30]

From the divine point of view, the position of *al-insan al-kamil* in the one Being is presented by 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri through his exploration of the process of creation. In His unfathomable Self, God perceived Himself by Himself in the perfection of His essence. He then desired to perceive His perfection through His names, though these are determined only by their

28. *Mawqif* 367, vol. 3, pp. 312–18.
29. *Mawqif* 284, vol. 2, pp. 300–2.
30. *Mawqif* 17, vol. 1, pp. 47–8.

effects. He consequently manifested Himself in the form of the comprehensive Spirit (*al-ruh al-kulli*), in which the general image of all things was decreed in accordance with God's knowledge of it. Through this manifestation the divine Self became reflected in reverse as in a mirror. God then turned to this mirror with His face, the inner reality of every thing, and in this way the particular things became externally manifested. This mirror, which is yet another term for the Perfect Man, is also called the breath of God (*nafas al-Haqq*), the Reality of the Prophet (*al-haqiqa al-Muhammadiyya*), and Adam. When God perceived Himself in this mirror, namely in His image as the Perfect Man, He saw determinations and definitions which He could not perceive when being in Himself, though in reality all of them exist only in Him. The creation of Man, externally Adam but internally Muhammad, who reflect the image and inner harmony of the entire universe by their ability to comprehend it, is the polishing of the mirror and the forming of a spirit for the world.[31]

Thus, from various aspects – the cosmic and the individual, the worldly and the divine – ʿAbd al-Qadir al-Jazaʾiri's experience of the reality of the Perfect Man proves to be in full accord with that of Ibn ʿArabi. This strict faithfulness seems to indicate that, along with his scientific–rationalist oriented understanding of *istiʿdad*, ʿAbd al-Qadir also sensed the potential inherent in the concept of *al-insan al-kamil* for appropriating to Islam the other major basis of modernity, that is, its humanism. The convergence of the rationalist and humanistic ideals in the amir's thought emerges from his emphatic refutation of the objections raised against Ibn ʿArabi's ontological construction by the most remarkable interpreter of his teaching by way of spiritual experience before ʿAbd al-Qadir himself, the fourteenth-century Yemenite scholar ʿAbd al-Karim al-Jili.[32] Indeed, it was as a prelude to his discussion of these objections that ʿAbd al-Qadir

31. *Mawqif* 367, vol. 3, pp. 318–20.

32. James Winston Morris, "Ibn ʿArabi and his Interpreters, Part II (Conclusion): Influences and Interpretations," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 107 (1987), p. 108.

evoked his dream of the Great Master turning from a lion to a madman. In *Al-Insan al-Kamil fi Ma'rifat al-Awakhir wal-Awa'il* (The Perfect Man through the Gnosis of endings and beginnings), Jili disagrees with the Shaykh al-Akbar on three principal points regarding divine knowledge, will and power. He defies Ibn 'Arabi's assertions that God's knowledge of Himself is given to Him by the objects which He knows, that God's will is determined by the obligation to act in accordance with His nature, and that God did not create the world *ex nihilo* but only brought it from being in His knowledge to actual being. In contrast, Jili maintained that it was God's knowledge that necessitated the nature of things, that the divine will is uncaused and absolutely free, and that God brought things from non-being to being.[33]

'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri depicts these objections as unexplained errors of an otherwise great scholar. The gist of his rejoinder, which consolidates the above fourfold discussion, may be exemplified through his handling of the first objection, that pertaining to knowledge. Jili, 'Abd al-Qadir maintains, regarded *'ilm* only from the point of view of the creatures in their degree of separation (*farq*). In this degree it constitutes a divine attribute which is particularized from God's essential knowledge. In contrast to this, Ibn 'Arabi also considered it from the point of view of God as He perceives Himself by Himself in His degree of absolute Absence (*al-ghayb al-mutlaq*). In the first specification of the divine essence as the absolute unity (*al-wahda al-mutlaqa*), God then added to His self-knowing a general and undifferentiated knowledge of all the names and all perceptible, rational, and imaginary objects. This is the interior aspect of knowledge (*batin al-'ilm*). The particularized knowledge, which is its exterior aspect (*zahir al-'ilm*), however, is made possible only through these names and objects, since their multiplicity contradicts the divine principle of absolute unity. Hence from the human point of view, all objects of knowledge were hidden in God's eternal essence, but from the divine point of view they were manifested

33. Reynold A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* (Cambridge, 1921), pp.101–3.

only after the particularization of His essential unity, when He perceived them according to their capacity. This mutuality between God and the world is naturally vested in God, since the reality that was particularized from the divine knowledge was only the shadow of His essence and in reality there is nothing but the eternal knowledge of God. His essence is at once knowing, being known, and knowledge.[34]

ʿAbd al-Karim al-Jili's endeavor to safeguard the notions of the omniscience, free will, and omnipotence of God may have been intended to ward off the adversarial condemnations of orthodox theologians.[35] In ʿAbd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri's view, however, this endeavor ended up in nullifying the principle of mutuality vested in God which underlies the entire Akbari system. Clearly, – at the same time as restoring the Perfect Man to his proper ontological position between God and creation – ʿAbd al-Qadir's main concern, as his interpretation of the distressing appearance of Ibn ʿArabi at the conclusion of his dream indicates, was about the normative implications of Jili's stand. Aware of the abyss that his espousal of the orthodox view of the divine transcendence created between Lord and creature, ʿAbd al-Karim al-Jili had sought to reinforce their immanent link by apotheosizing the figure of *al-insan al-kamil*, the hallmark of his entire mystical thought. He asserted that Muhammad's status in the divine scheme was analogous to that of the Qur'an and, most significantly, that the pole of each generation (*qutb*) acquired a similar status by taking on the Prophet's Image (*al-sura al-Muhammadiyya*).[36] Though research on the impact of Jili's work is still scanty, it appears that among the Sufi orders – where his works were read and disseminated much more than those of Ibn ʿArabi himself[37] – such apotheosizing encouraged two complementary tendencies. On the one hand, given the general

34. *Mawqif* 346, vol. 3, pp. 70–2; *Mawqif* 123, vol. 1, pp. 245–8.

35. For the Ibn ʿArabi controversy in Yemen at the time of Jili, see Knysh, pp. 225–69 (see n.1 above).

36. Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin, 1998), pp. 208–11.

37. J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders of Islam* (London, 1971), p. 161, n.4.

problem of authority in the mystical sphere, it paved the way for Sufi leaders to make extravagant claims for the status of the Perfect Man. On the other hand, by being accepted into the main body of orthodox beliefs and practices, it intensified among the common people a fatalistic attitude toward the Almighty and the cult of saints functioning as intermediaries to Him.

These two tendencies emanating from Jili's theory of *al-insan al-kamil*, in their mutual sustenance, came to represent for 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri the major impediments in his scheme to modernize Islam, as well as the boundaries for keeping modernization within an Islamic framework. 'Abd al-Qadir must have been aware of the peril that an enhanced view of the Perfect Man in the later Akbari tradition would be employed by modern-minded Muslims as a tool for the adoption of Western rationalist and humanistic attitudes, possibly even at the expense of the Shari'a. Already in his early writings, therefore, while advocating progress along scientific lines, he emphasizes that reason must be subjected to the word of God as transmitted through His messengers.[38] As a pioneer of Islamic modernization, however, 'Abd al-Qadir was more disturbed by the fact that in the hands of the multitude of tradition-bound Muslims, Jili's concept of the Perfect Man was apt to be used in the opposite direction, that of anti-modernity. Thus the amir could not fail to observe that fatalism and saint worship were anathema to nineteenth-century Western-style progressivism. As a result, in the *Mawaqif* he repeatedly criticizes the orthodox men of religion, as the leaders of society, for professing the principle of divine predestination (*qada'*) and for adhering to the practice of blind imitation (*taqlid*).[39] Even more so 'Abd al-Qadir was alarmed by the growing phenomenon of Sufi leaders claiming to have attained the station of Lordship (*maqam al-rububiyya*) and therefore to be no longer subject, together with their adherents, to the precepts of the Shari'a or to worldly convention.

38. Jaza'iri, *al-Miqrad al-Hadd*, pp. 153–7; *Dhikra al-'Aqil*, pp. 81–4.

39. See for example *Mawqif* 266, vol. 2, pp. 238–42; *Mawqif* 125, vol. 1, pp. 251–2.

These people he condemns as the most dangerous heretics, who mistake the principle of *wahdat al-wujud* for their inner mystical state of union with the divine (*jam'*) while ignoring the essential outer complementary duty of obedience to His commands.[40]

A powerful strand of such an antinomian tendency became noticeable throughout Syria from the mid-nineteenth century, generally under the banner of the Yashruti branch of the Shadhiliyya.[41] The founder of this branch, 'Ali Nur al-Din al-Yashruti, a Tunisian who had settled in Acre a few years before 'Abd al-Qadir himself arrived in Damascus, was like him proficient in Ibn 'Arabi's teaching and opposed to Jili's criticisms.[42] Yashruti was no less a staunch follower of the Shari'a and indignant at those among his disciples who deviated from it. Yet, his apparent readiness to divulge the secrets of *wahdat al-wujud* to the uninitiated made it available to certain segments of Syrian society which 'Abd al-Qadir in his elitist approach was careful to avoid. For these elements, mostly belonging to the lower strata in the towns and villages, the monistic interpretation of the Unity of Being supplied the means for expressing their revulsion at the grave economic hardships and the deep anxieties brought upon them by European penetration of their country. Their interpretation was thus the opposite of 'Abd al-Qadir's humanistic and rationalist understanding of the Akbari teaching, which was ultimately reflected in the readiness of the incipient bourgeoisie in the cities to be integrated into the emerging new world order under European hegemony.

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, under the autocratic rule of Sultan 'Abdulhamid II, it became apparent that 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri's attempt to modernize Islam on the basis of Ibn 'Arabi's teaching would not prevail. Determined to lead the modernization of the Ottoman Empire in his own way, 'Abdulhamid gradually contained these antinomian groups, but

40. *Mawqif* 358, vol. 3, pp.185–6.

41. For Yashruti and his order see especially Fatima al-Yashrutiyya, *Rihla ila al-Haqq* (Beirut, n.d.); Josef Van Ess, "Libanesische Miszellen, 6: Die Yasrutiya," *Die Welt des Islams*, 16 (1975), pp.1–103.

42. Fatima al-Yashrutiyya, *Nafahat al-Haqq* (Beirut, 1963), p.67.

only to incorporate them within the larger body of tradition-bound Sufis whom he harnessed to the service of his State.[43] These conservative Sufis, led in Syria by the Chief Qadi of Beirut, Yusuf al-Nabhani,[44] drew on the doctrine of *al-insan al-kamil*, along the lines suggested by Jili, to propagate among the masses total submission to the Sultan as the visible vicegerent of God, and to reaffirm the cult of saints, as his hidden manifestations and sustainers. It was indignation at this officially-sponsored interpretation of the Akbari tradition which drove 'Abd al-Qadir's disciples after his death to abandon it altogether in favor of the legacy of Ibn Taymiyya. For them it was already clear that, although the humanistic interpretation of Ibn 'Arabi's Perfect Man reflected their middle-class aspirations, it was Ibn Taymiyya's politically activist model of the forefathers (*al-salaf*) which could provide them with the Islamic basis for resisting that formidable rival on the path of modernization, the autocratic Western-oriented modern Muslim State.

43. Butrus Abu-Manneh, "Sultan Abdulhamid II and Shaikh Abulhuda al-Sayyadi," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 15 (1979), pp.131–53.

44. Among Yusuf al-Nabhani's numerous books see especially, *Jami' Karamat al-Awliya'* (2 vols., Cairo, 1329/1911), and *Shawahid al-Haqq fi al-Istighatha bi-Sayyid al-Khalq* (Cairo, 1905).