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Chapter 5
THE BRANCHES OF THE DOCTRINE

Not being a philosophy, that is, a merely human mode of thought, Sufi doctrine is not presented as the homogeneous development of a mental point of view. Of necessity it includes many points of view which may on occasions be mutually contradictory, if their logical form is alone taken into account without regard to the universal truth to which they all relate. Because of this it may be that one master rejects some doctrinal assertion of another master whose authority he none the less recognizes.

Thus, for example, ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, in his book *Al-Insān al-Kāmil* (Universal Man) which is founded on the teaching of Ibn ʿArabī, rejects the latter's statement that Divine Knowledge depends, like every science, on its object. He does so because this statement could lead to a belief that Divine Knowledge is dependent on what is relative. Now Ibn ʿArabī refers Divine Knowledge to the pure possibilities principially contained in the Divine Essence, so that the apparent duality between Knowledge and its object does not exist except in the terminology, and the dependence of which he speaks is no more than a logical picture of the principial identity of the possible and the real.[1]

Sufi doctrine includes several branches in which two chief domains can be distinguished, that of Universal Truths (*al-Haqāʾiq*) and that which relates to human and individual stages of the way (*ad-daqāʾiq*) or, in other words, metaphysic and a "science of the soul". Needless to say these domains are not separated into watertight compartments. Metaphysic includes everything, but in Sufism it is always envisaged according to points of view connected with spiritual realization. The cosmology is derived from metaphysic and applied at the same time to the macrocosm and to the microcosm, so that there is a psychology

[1] In the same way, according to Origen, the Divine foreknowledge relates to pure possibilities: it includes possibilities but does not determine them, and that is why Divine foreknowledge and human free-will are not mutually exclusive. Cf. *The Philokalia of Origen* on the subject of destiny.

of cosmic amplitude just as there is a cosmology built up on analogy with the inner constitution of man.

In order to put this quite clearly it is necessary to insist at some length on this relationship. Apart from the two domains of *al-Haqā'iq* and *ad-daqā'iq* already mentioned, three chief domains of doctrine can be distinguished—metaphysic, cosmology, and spiritual psychology. This distinction corresponds to the triad: God, the world (or the macrocosm), and the soul (or microcosm). In its turn cosmology can be conceived either by applying metaphysical principles to the cosmos—and this is the contemplation of God in the world—or by drawing an analogy between the cosmos and the human soul.

Moreover in its complete development cosmology necessarily includes the cosmic reality of the soul, while no spiritual psychology can cut off the soul from cosmic principles. In the fabric of the cosmos there is no radical break. In its own fashion discontinuity does exist; it is what it is. But discontinuity is barely conceivable apart from a principle of unity which bridges the gap and without the background of a continuity which manifests it. Thus, for instance, the apparent discontinuity between individuals, the relation of their respective centers of consciousness, is only the mark of their unique Essence which "vertically" transcends the "horizontal" plane of their common nature.

As for the discontinuity between individual consciousness in general and the levels of Intelligence which are beyond form, it exists in terms of the quasi-material level of consciousness which links it "horizontally" with other consciousnesses that are on the level of form but at the same time also separates it from their unique Essence.

Thus reality is regarded according to different orders of continuity depending upon the point of view adopted or imposed on us by the very nature of things, and metaphysic alone can embrace all these various perspectives and give to them their proper place in that web of visions, the universe.

In itself cosmology is an analytical science in the original meaning of that term, for it reduces every aspect of the cosmos to the underlying principles, which are, in the last analysis, the active and the passive poles, the "informing" principle that molds and the plastic substance or *materia prima*. The integration of these complementary principles in the primary Unity belongs to the realm of metaphysic and not to cosmology.

It has just been stated that Sufi psychology does not separate the soul either from the metaphysical or from the cosmic order. The con-

nection with the metaphysical order provides spiritual psychology with qualitative criteria such as are wholly lacking in profane psychology, which studies only the dynamic character of phenomena of the psyche and their proximate causes. When modern psychology makes pretensions to a sort of science of the hidden contents of the soul it is still for all that restricted to an individual perspective because it has no real means for distinguishing psychic forms which translate universal realities from forms which appear symbolical but are only the vehicles for individual impulsions. Its "collective subconscious" has most assuredly nothing to do with the true source of symbols; at most it is a chaotic depositary of psychic residues somewhat like the mud of the ocean bed which retains traces of past epochs.

For profane psychology the only link between the macrocosm and the world of the soul lies in the impressions which reach the soul through the gateway of the senses, but Sufi psychology takes account of the analogy in constitution between the macrocosm and the human microcosm. To this order of ideas belong such sciences as astrology, the symbolism of which has been used incidentally by certain Sufi masters.

The Sufi path can be considered as a way towards knowledge of oneself in conformity with the saying of the Prophet: "He who knows himself (*nafsahu*) knows his Lord". It is true that this knowledge applies ultimately to the Unique Essence, the immutable Self (*al-huwiyah*) and so goes beyond any cosmological or psychological perspective, but, at a relative level, in so far as it concerns one's individual nature, knowledge of oneself necessarily includes a science of the soul. To a certain extent this science is a cosmology; above all it is a discrimination as regards the motives of the soul.

To show how discrimination of the soul is inspired by cosmological principles, certain very general criteria of inspiration (*al-wārid*) may be cited by way of illustration. It must, however, first be made clear that inspiration is here taken, not in the sense of prophetic inspiration, but in the sense of the sudden intuition normally provoked by spiritual practices. This inspiration may have very different sources, but is valid only when it comes from the center of man's being outside time or from the "Angel", in other words from the ray of Universal Intelligence connecting man to God.

It is deceptive when it is derived from the psychic world, whether it comes on the one hand from the individual psyche, or the subtle medium in which the psyche lives, or, on the other hand, through

the human psyche from the sub-human world and its satanic pole. Inspiration which comes from the Angel, and so implicitly from God, always communicates a new perception which illuminates the "I" and at the same time relativizes it by dissolving certain of its illusions. When inspiration comes from the individual psyche it speaks for some hidden passion and so has something egocentric about it and is accompanied by some direct or indirect pretentiousness. As for inspirations which emanate from the satanic pole, these go so far as to invert hierarchical relationships and to deny higher realities.

Impulsions which come from the individual or collective soul insist tirelessly on the same object—the object of some desire—whereas the satanic influence only makes use provisionally of some lure of passion: what it really seeks is not the object of the passion but the implicit negation of a spiritual reality; that is why the devil routs discussion by changing his "theme" every time his argument is destroyed. He argues only to trouble man whereas the passional soul has a certain logical consecutiveness so that its impulsions can be directed into legitimate channels by dint of sufficiently decisive arguments, whereas satanic impulsions must simply be rejected *in toto*. The three tendencies in question respectively correspond to reintegration into the Essence, to a centrifugal dispersion, and to a "fall" into sub-human chaos, and they have their analogies in the universal order. Hinduism calls them *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*.

It may be surprising that so many Sufi books treat of the virtues when Knowledge (*al-maʿrifah*) is the only goal of the way and perpetual concentration on God the sole condition needed for arriving at it. If the virtues can certainly not be neglected, it is precisely because no mode of consciousness can he regarded as being outside total Knowledge—or outside Truth—nor any inner attitude as being indifferent. "Sight of the heart" (*ruʾyat al-qalb*) is a knowledge of the whole being. It is impossible for the heart to open up to Divine Truth so long as the soul retains, in point of fact if not consciously, an attitude which denies that Truth, and avoidance of this is the more uncertain since the domain of the soul (*an-nafs*) is *a priori* governed by the egocentric illusion which itself presupposes a blind spot.[2] All this amounts to saying that the science of the virtues, which applies Divine Truth to the

[2] All the same man always has a certain awareness of the falsity of his attitude, even if his reason does not take account of it. It is said in the Qurʾān: "Assuredly man is conscious of himself (or: of his own soul) even if he offers excuses" (75:14-15). The

soul, directly concerns spiritual realization. Its criteria are exceedingly subtle; it could never be summed up in a moral code and its fixations are no more than paradigms. Its object, which is spiritual virtue, is a sort of "symbol that is lived", the right perception of which depends on a certain inner development. Now this is not necessarily true of doctrinal understanding.

In a certain sense the Sufi method consists in the art of keeping the soul open to the inflow of the Infinite. Now the soul has a natural tendency to remain shut up in itself and this tendency can be compensated only by a contrary movement acting on the same plane; this movement is precisely virtue. Metaphysical Truth as such is impersonal and motionless; virtue translates it into a "personal" mode.

Spiritual virtue is not necessarily a social virtue in a direct sense, and the external manifestations of one and the same virtue may be different according to the point of view of the circumstances. Thus certain Sufis have shown their contempt for the world by wearing poor and tattered garments; others have affirmed the same inner attitude by wearing sumptuous raiment. In such a Sufi the affirmation of his person is in reality only a submission to the impersonal truth he incarnates; his humility lies in his extinction in an aspect of glory which is not his own.

If Sufi virtue coincides in its form with religious virtue, it none the less differs from it in its contemplative essence. For instance, the virtue of gratitude is, for the mass of believers, founded on the memory of benefits received from God; it implies a feeling that these benefits are more real than the sufferings undergone. In the case of the contemplative this feeling gives place to certainty: for him the plenitude of Being present in every fragment of existence is infinitely more real than the limits of things, and some Sufis have gone so far as to feel joy in what would be for others only a painful negation of themselves.

The spiritual virtues are, as it were, supports in man for the Divine Truth (*al-Ḥaqīqah*); they are also reflections of that Truth. Now any reflection implies a certain inversion in relation to its source: spiritual poverty (*al-faqr*) is, for example, the inverse reflection of the Plenitude of the Spirit. Sincerity (*al-ikhlāṣ*) and veracity (*aṣ-ṣidq*) are expressions of the independence of the spirit from psychic tendencies, while nobility (*al-karam*) is a human reflection of the Divine

man who desires to realize Divine Knowledge while despising virtue is like a robber wanting to become righteous without restoring the product of his robbery.

Grandeur.[3] In these "positive" virtues the inversion lies in the mode and not in the content, which means that they are, as it were, saturated with humility while their prototypes are made of majesty and glory.

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[3] One of the most profound works written on the subject of spiritual virtues is the *Maḥāsin al-Majālis* of Ibn al-ʿArīf.