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III. The Nature of Man

1. Universal Man

Although the universe is one when seen from the point of view of the Divine Essence, from the point of view of relativity there is a fundamental polarization into microcosm and macrocosm. The macrocosm is the universe in all its indefinite multiplicity, reflecting the Divine Names and Qualities as so many individual particularizations and determined modes. The microcosm is man, who reflects these same qualities but as a totality. The macrocosm and the microcosm are like two mirrors facing each other; each contains all of the other's qualities, but the one in a more outward and objective manner and in detail (*mufassal*) and the other in a more inward and subjective manner and in summary form (*mujmal*). Thus man's total knowledge of himself in principle includes the knowledge of the whole universe. For this reason the Quran says, "And He [God] taught Adam the Names [i.e., the essences of all beings and things]" (II, 31).

> *The father of mankind, who is the lord of "He taught the Names," hath hundreds of thousands of sciences in every vein.*
>
> *To his soul accrued (knowledge of) the name of every thing, even as that thing exists (in its real nature) unto the end (of the world)....*
>
> *With us [ordinary men], the name of every thing is its outward (appearance); with the Creator, the name of every thing is its inward (reality)....*
>
> *Inasmuch as the eye of Adam saw by means of the Pure Light, the soul and inmost sense of the names became evident to him (I, 1234-35, 1239, 1246).*

The prototype of both the microcosm and the macrocosm is the Universal or Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*),[1] who is

[1] On the macrocosm and the microcosm and Universal Man see Burckhardt, *Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, pp. 89 ff.; Izutsu, *Comparative Study*, chapters 14-17; and R. Guénon, *Symbolism of the Cross*, London, 1958. The title of Guénon's work is explained

the sum total of all levels of reality in a permanent synthesis. All the Divine Qualities are contained within him and integrated together in such a way that they are neither confused nor separated, and yet he transcends all particular and determined modes of existence. Moreover, in terms of revelation, Universal Man is the Spirit, of which the prophets are so many aspects, and of which from the Islamic point of view Muhammad is the perfect synthesis.

Universal Man has another aspect when seen from the point of view of the spiritual path: he is the perfect human model who has attained all of the possibilities inherent in the human state. In him the "Names" or essences which man contains in potentiality (*bi'l-quwwah*) are actualized so that they become the very states of his being (*bi'l-fi'l*). For him the human ego with which most men identify themselves is no more than his outer shell, while all other states of existence belong to him internally; his inward reality is identified with the inward reality of the whole universe.[2]

Universal Man is the principle of all manifestation and thus the prototype of the microcosm and the macrocosm. Individual man, or man as we usually understand the term, is the most complete and central reflection of the reality of Universal Man in the manifested universe, and thus he appears as the final being to enter the arena of creation, for what is first in the principial order is last in the manifested order.[3]

The term "Universal Man" was given prominence by Ibn 'Arabī, though the doctrine was well known before him, and necessarily so, for from the point of view of Sufism the Prophet of Islam is the most perfect manifestation of Universal Man.

by him as follows: "Most traditional doctrines symbolize the realization of 'Universal Man' by…the sign of the cross, which clearly represents the manner of achievement of this realization by the perfect communion of all the states of the being, harmoniously and conformably ranked, in integral expansion, in the double sense of 'amplitude' and 'exaltation.'" p. 10.

[2] Burckhardt, *Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, p. 93; see also Guénon, *Symbolism of the Cross*, chapters 2 and 3.

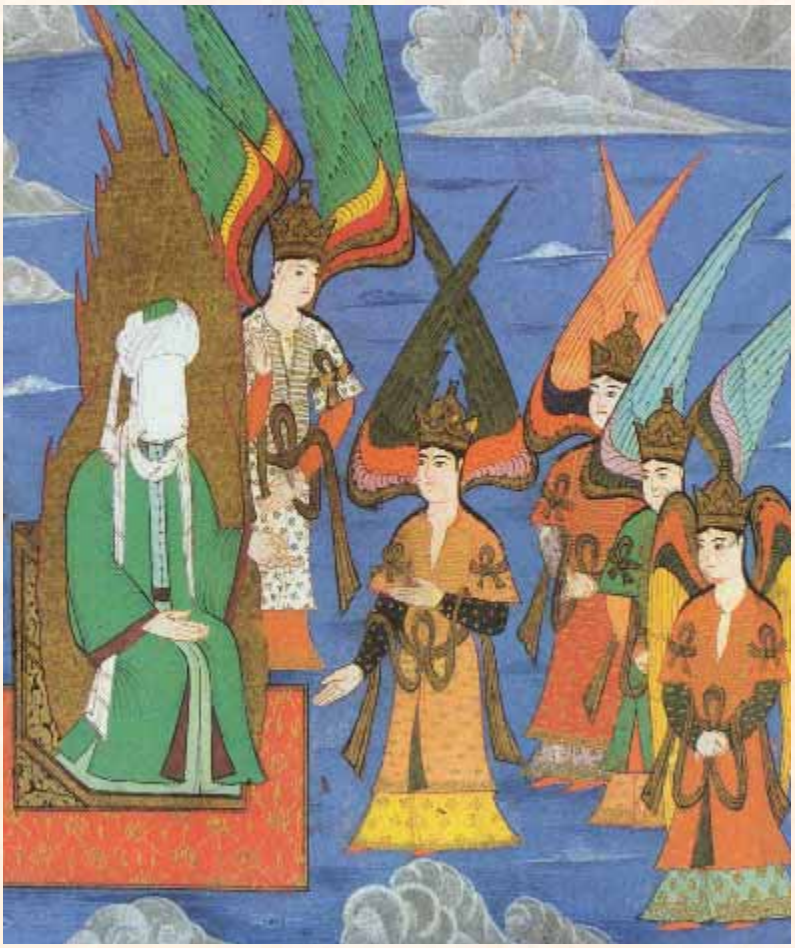
[3] The Arabic dictum is *awwal al-fikr ākhir al-'amal*, "The first in thought is the last in actualization." The metaphysical principle is explained by Guénon in *Symbolism of the Cross*, p. 7. See also S.M. Stern, "'The First in Thought is the Last in Action': the History of a Saying Attributed to Aristotle," *Journal of Semitic Studies*, vol. 7, 1962, pp. 234-52.

It is essentially to this state that the Prophet was referring when he said, "The first thing created by God was my light (*nūrī*)" or "my spirit (*rūhī*)"—a *hadīth* which has been cited by Sufis over and over again throughout the centuries. Moreover, because numerous saints from the time of the Prophet onward reached this state, they knew the meaning of the doctrine of Universal Man in a concrete manner, even if they did not speak of it in exactly the same terms as did Ibn 'Arabī.

Before Ibn 'Arabī Universal Man was usually spoken of in slightly different terms from those employed by him: the "microcosm" in this earlier perspective is man's external form, while the "macrocosm" is his inward reality. In other words, the term "macrocosm" refers essentially to the inward reality of the Universe and not to its outward form, as is usually the case in Ibn 'Arabī's doctrine. But this inward reality is precisely Universal Man and is therefore identical with the inward reality of the microcosm.[4]

[4] Sufis of later centuries have always looked at these two ways of viewing the reality of man as essentially the same. The following is a quotation from Jāmī, the well-known

Rūmī also, although living after Ibn ʻArabī, follows the earlier terminology in his writings. Discussing the true nature of man, Rūmī remarks that philosophers say that man is the microcosm, while theosophers or Sufis say that man is the macrocosm,



The Prophet Muhammad in the company of the angels

Sufi poet of the fifteenth century, who was a continuator of Ibn ʻArabī's school and who at the same time quotes Rūmī extensively, especially in his prose doctrinal works. The first three lines of poetry are by ʻAlī and show that the formulated doctrine of the macrocosm and the microcosm was known from the beginning of Islam:

"The Commander of the Faithful (ʻAlī) said,

"'Thy remedy is within thyself, but thou perceivest not; thy malady is from thyself, but thou seest not—

"'Thou takest thyself to be a small body, but within thee unfolds the macrocosm,

"'And thou art the Evident Book (*al kitāb al-mubīn*) through whose letters the Hidden (*al-mudmar*) becomes manifest.'

the reason being that philosophy is confined to the phenomenal form of man, whereas theosophy is connected with the essential truth of his true nature (IV, p. 301).

Man is in appearance a derivative of this world, and intrinsically the origin of the world (IV, 3767).

Externally the branch is the origin of the fruit; intrinsically the branch came into existence for the sake of the fruit.

If there had not been desire and hope of the fruit, how should the gardener have planted the root of the tree?

Therefore in reality the tree was born of the fruit, (even) if in appearance it (the fruit) was generated by the tree.

Hence Mustafā (Muhammad) said, "Adam and the (other) prophets are (following) behind me under (my) banner."

For this reason that master of (all) sorts of knowledge [Muhammad] has uttered the allegorical saying "We are the last and the foremost."

(That is to say), "If in appearance I am born of Adam, in reality I am the forefather of (every) forefather,…

Therefore in reality the father (Adam) was born of me, therefore in reality the tree was born of the fruit."

The thought (idea), which is first, comes last into actuality, in particular the thought that is eternal (IV, 522 ff.).

So it is realized that Muhammad was the foundation [of the Universe]. "But for thee [Muhammad] I would not have created the heavens."[5] *Every thing that exists, honor and humility, authority and high degree, all are of his dispensation and his shadow, for all have become manifest from him (*Discourses, *p. 117).*

"(In the same vein Rūmī says:) 'If you are born of Adam, sit like him and behold all the atoms (of the Universe [reading, with Jāmī, *dharrāt* for *dhurriyyāt*]) in yourself.

"'What is in the jar that is not (also) in the river? What is in the house that is not (also) in the city?

"'This world is the jar and the heart is like the river; this world is the house [reading *khānah* for *ghurfah*], and the heart is the wonderful city'" (IV, 809-13).

"Here Rūmī—may God sanctify his spirit—calls the world a 'jar' and a 'house,' and the heart of Universal Man a 'river' and a 'city' In this he is pointing out that everything that exists in the world is found in the human state…." *Naqd al-nusūs fī sharh naqsh al-fusūs*, edited by W. C. Chittick, Tehran, Anjuman-i Falsafah, 1977, p. 92.

[5] This is a well-known *hadīth qudsī*.

A most explicit statement of man's position in the Universe is found in the *Gulshan-i Rāz*:

Behold the world entirely contained in yourself,
That which was made last was first in thought.
The last that was made was the soul of Adam,
The two worlds were a means to his production.
There is no other final cause beyond man,
It is disclosed in man's own self.…
You are a reflection of "The Adored of Angels [Adam],"
For this cause you are worshipped of angels.
Each creature that goes before you [i.e., every other creature in the universe] has a soul,
And from that soul is a cord to you.
Therefore are they all subject to your dominion,
For that the soul of each one is hidden in you.
You are the kernel of the world in the midst thereof,
Know yourself that you are the world's soul.[6]

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[6] Vss. 261 ff.