

1. Wujūd and the Entities

The Arabic word for cosmos, *‘ālam*, derives from the same root as *‘alāma* (mark), *‘alam* (signpost), and *‘ilm* (knowledge). The derivation suggests that the cosmos is both a source of knowledge and a mark or a signpost pointing to something other than itself.

We mention the “cosmos” with this word to give knowledge that by it we mean He has made it a “mark.” (II 473.33)¹

The Koran refers to all things as “signs” (*āyāt*) of God, which is to say that Koranically, the meaning of things is determined by the mode in which they signify God, the Real. Hence the term *cosmology* might be defined as knowledge of the marks and signs and the understanding of what they signify. Ibn al-‘Arabī’s cosmology is then a science of signs, an account and a narration of the significance of marks.

In the most general sense, the word *‘ālam* means “world.” It can refer to the whole universe, in which case I translate it as “cosmos,” or to any coherent whole within the universe, in which case I render it as “world.” In the first sense of the term, Ibn al-‘Arabī commonly defines *‘ālam* as “everything other than God” (*mā siwā Allāh*) or “everything other than the Real” (*mā siwā al-ḥaqq*). Thus the cosmos is “everything other than God, whether high or low, spirit or body, meaning or sensory thing, manifest or nonmanifest” (III 197.31). Within the cosmos, there are many

worlds, but before looking at the worlds and entities within the cosmos and the internal structures that shape the cosmos, we can usefully look at how Ibn al-‘Arabī situates the cosmos in relation to God.

The most important synonym for “cosmos” is probably *creation* (*khalq*). Like its English equivalent, the Arabic term has two basic senses. It can refer to the act of creating, or to the result of the creative act. In the second sense, the word may be employed as a synonym for cosmos. It is everything other than God, or everything created by the Creator. The term is often juxtaposed with *al-ḥaqq*, “the Real.” Sometimes the word is used with a plural verb, and in such contexts I translate it as “creatures.” Then it is equivalent to *makhlūqāt*, “the created things.”

Signs, Marks, and Proofs

More commonly than either *sign* or *mark*, Ibn al-‘Arabī employs the term *dalīl* to refer to the fact that the cosmos points to God. The term means guide, directive, pointer, indication, signifier, evidence, proof, denotation. Although found only once in the Koran, it becomes an important term in the Islamic sciences, where it is used to refer to the proofs and demonstrations that scholars marshal to argue their cases. I translate the term

sometimes as “signifier” and sometimes as “proof.” In the first and more general sense, the term means practically the same as “sign,” but in the context of the rational sciences, it usually takes on the technical sense of a formal proof. In Ibn al-‘Arabī’s view, these rational arguments and formal proofs are inferior to unveiling and tasting as sources of knowledge. In one passage, he contrasts the terms *sign* and *proof*, identifying the former with the direct cognition achieved by the folk of unveiling and the latter with the indirect understanding acquired by the rational thinkers. Here he has in view specifically the philosophers, who are commonly called the “sages” (*ḥukamāʾ*), while philosophy (*falsafa*) is also called “wisdom” (*ḥikma*).

One of the knowledges comprised by this waystation is the difference between the *proof* and the *sign*. The companion of the sign is more worthy of having “wisdom” ascribed to him and of being called a “sage” than the companion of the proof, for the sign accepts no obfuscation, and it belongs only to the folk of unveiling and finding, but the proof is not like that. (III 240.31)

The superiority of signs over proofs is connected with the superiority of faith over rational understanding. Faith perceives with an interior light that accepts no darkening, while reason perceives with proofs that are not immune from counterproofs and obfuscations (*shubha*).²

Part of the reality of the [revealed] report is the possibility of the property of the two attributes, truthfulness and falsehood—in respect of its being a report, not in respect of considering who gave the report. Hence we distinguish between those who maintain the truthfulness of the report-giver on the basis of proofs and those who maintain it through faith. After all, faith is a luminous unveiling that does not accept obfuscations, but the companion of the proof is not able to preserve himself from misgivings that detract from his proof, and these send him back to his rational consideration.

This is why we consider the companion of the proof devoid of faith. After all, faith does not accept disappearance, for it is a watchful, divine light that *stands over every soul for what*

it earns [13:33]. It is not a solar or stellar light that rises and sets and is then followed by the darknesses of doubt or something else.

Those who know what we have just said know the level of knowledge in respect of faith and the level of knowledge that is gained from proofs. After all, the root, who is the Real, does not know things through proofs. He knows them only through Himself.

The perfect human being is created in His form. His knowledge of God is a faith through light and unveiling, so he describes God with attributes that are not accepted by proofs. People who have faith in Him in respect of their proofs interpret these descriptions, so their faith is diminished to the degree that their proofs negate them from Him. (III 218.23)

Everything qualifies as a sign of God. As the Shaykh remarks, “Everything in engendered existence is a sign of Him” (IV 411.20). “All possible things are signs” (III 492.11). Those who grasp the significance of the signs “see that everything other than God is a locus for the flow of the Real’s instructions to them” (III 372.34).

The fluctuations of the states in the cosmos are all signs. People undergo these fluctuations while remaining unaware. (III 344.33)

The “signs” are the signifiers that He is the Real who is manifest within the loci of manifestation that are the entities of the cosmos. (II 151.3)

The signs point to God, and each carries a message given to it by God. Each is a “messenger” (*rasūl*), even if this term refers technically to a specific type of prophet, as in “Muhammad is the messenger of God.”

In this waystation is found the knowledge of the messages scattered throughout the cosmos. Nothing walks in the cosmos without walking as a messenger with a message. This is an eminent knowledge. Even worms in their movements are rushing with a message to those who understand it. (III 210.2)

The cosmos is the sum total of the words of God articulated within the Breath of the All-Merciful. Hence each thing in the cosmos

is not only a sign, a proof, and a messenger, but also a letter or a word spoken by God, and its ultimate meaning is God Himself in respect of His names and attributes.

All the cosmos is a word that has come with a meaning, and its meaning is God, so that He may make His properties manifest within it, since He is not a locus in Himself for the manifestation of His properties. Hence, the meaning always remains intertwined with the word, and God remains always with the cosmos. He says, *And He is with you wherever you are* [57:4]. (III 148.10)

The Koran employs the word *sign* to refer not only to the phenomena of the cosmos but also to its own verses. Just as the Koran is God's book displaying His signs or verses, so also the cosmos is His book, and the special knowledge given to the folk of unveiling has to do with their God-given ability to read this book. Their "wisdom" does not come from rational demonstration, but divine inspiration.

The sage is he who does what is proper for what is proper as is proper. Even if we [sages] are ignorant of the form of what is proper in something, God puts it in the correct order at our hand. Thus we leave it and we do not enter into it with our own opinion, or with our rational faculties. God dictates to the hearts through inspiration everything that the cosmos inscribes in *wujūd*, for the cosmos is a divine *book inscribed* [52:2]. (II 163.26)

In discussing the Breath of the All-Merciful, Ibn al-ʿArabī treats both speaking and writing as analogues of God's creativity. In the same way, the marriage act (*nikāḥ*), which produces children in our world, derives from a divine archetype that appears as what he calls "the marriage act that pervades every atom."³ It should not be surprising, then, that sexual union is also an act of "writing" (*kitāba*) or a "book" (*kitāb*). The Shaykh employs this terminology in Chapter 559, the penultimate chapter of the *Futūḥāt*, and the fourth longest. He calls it, "On the true knowledge of the mysteries and the realities from diverse waystations." He writes, "In this chapter I have included everything that must be called to the reader's attention in all the chapters of

the book, arranged from the first chapter to the last" (IV 327.4). Unfortunately, except for the first few chapters, the correspondence between the sections of this chapter and the 558 chapters that precede it are not always clear, and, although the text provides numbers up to 475, most of these do not coincide with the actual chapter numbers in the printed text. In any case, these sections are richly allusive, and many of them are written in rhymed prose. Some are clear, some unfathomable. A large number begin, or mention in several places, the words, "He says," presumably referring to Ibn al-ʿArabī's own words in the relevant chapter (though these are certainly not direct quotations). When I quote one of the sections of Chapter 559, I title it "A Mystery." In the following, Ibn al-ʿArabī alludes to the hadith of the Hidden Treasure, according to which God created the universe out of love for it.

A MYSTERY
*Some inheritors of the
Folk of the Book taste the
lovers' chastisement.*

The chastisement becomes sweet
through the lovers' vision,
for their eyes witness
my place of return.
Chastisement is nothing but separation
from my lovers,
joy the seeing
of friends.

He says: Among the inheritors of the Book is he who wrongs his own self through that in which he makes it struggle. Hence he wrongs his own self because of the *ḥaqq* that it has that belongs to himself. At that moment he is the companion of chastisement and pain, but he does not desire to repel it from himself, because he finds it sweet, and next to what he seeks, it is easy to endure, for he is seeking his own felicity.

The "Book" is the joining of meanings to meanings, but meanings do not accept joining to other meanings until they are deposited within letters and words. When they are enclosed in words and letters, some of them accept joining to others. Then the meanings join together by virtue of following the joining of the letters. This joining of letters is called "writing."

Were it not for the joining of the spouses, there would be no marriage act. The marriage act is a writing.

The cosmos, all of it, is a book inscribed [52:2], since it is an orderly arrangement, parts of which have been joined to other parts. Instant by instant in every state it gives birth. There is nothing but the appearance of entities perpetually.

No existence-giver ever gives existence to anything until it loves giving it existence. Hence everything in *wujūd* is a beloved, so there are nothing but loved ones. (IV 424.21)

Selves and Horizons

The signs and verses are found both in the outside world and within ourselves. The Koran says, *We shall show them Our signs upon the horizons and in themselves, until it is clear to them that it/He is the Real* (41:53). *Horizons* refers to the world that we see outside us, while *themselves* refers to the world of inner experience. The antecedent of the pronoun *hu*, translated as “it/He,” is ambiguous. It may refer to an implied “everything,” or it may refer to God. Ibn al-‘Arabī’s seems to understand it either way, depending on the context in which he cites it, but it is not always clear that he has one meaning rather than the other in mind.

In the Shaykh’s view, the basic sense of this verse is, “Your signifier of the Real is yourself and the cosmos” (IV 307.1). Self and cosmos are the two realities within which the Real’s self-disclosure may be witnessed. Some Islamic texts mention *horizons* and *selves* as Koranic expressions that are equivalent to “macrocosm” and “microcosm,” philosophical terms that go back to Greek sources. Study of cosmology entails the attempt to understand the significance of both the horizons and the selves, both the great world and the small world.

The Lawgiver turned you over to knowledge of yourself in knowledge of God through His words, *We shall show them Our signs, which are the signifiers, upon the horizons and in themselves*. Hence He did not leave aside anything of the cosmos, for everything of the cos-

mos that is outside of you is identical with the *horizons*, which are the regions around you. *Until it is clear to them that it is the Real*, nothing else, because there is nothing else. (III 275.32)

Ordinary people differ from the friends of God in that they miss the significance of the signs, not only in the great world, but also in the small world. Not that God’s friends simply choose to recognize the signs for what they are. In the last analysis, God inspires them with knowledge of this significance.

[The friend of God] exceeds those who are veiled only because of what God inspires into his secret heart. This may be a consideration of his rational faculty or his reflection, or it may be a readiness, through the polishing of the mirror of his heart, for the signs to be unveiled through unveiling, witnessing, tasting, and finding. (III 344.34)

From one point of view, God’s signs can be divided into two basic sorts—those that appear constantly such that we do not notice them, and those that impinge upon our awareness because they break with our concept of normalcy. Ibn al-‘Arabī sometimes calls these two sorts “habitual” (*mu‘tād*) and “non-habitual” signs. People see the first sort all the time, but only the friends of God notice them. The second sort catch everyone’s attention. They include certain natural events and what are commonly called “miracles” or, in Arabic, “the breaking of habit” (*kharq al-‘āda*), a term that means, in a more general sense, an extra-ordinary event. The expression *Folk of God*, which the Shaykh employs to refer to the highest of God’s friends, derives from the hadith, “God has folk among the people—the Folk of the Koran, who are the Folk of God and His elect.”

God has placed His signs in the cosmos as the habitual and the non-habitual. No one takes the habitual into account save only the folk of understanding from God. Others have no knowledge of God’s desire through them.

God has filled the Koran with [mention of] the habitual signs, such as the alternation of day and night, the descent of the rains, the bringing forth of vegetation, the running of ships in the sea, the diversity of tongues and

colors, sleep during the night, and the daytime for seeking after God's bounty. So also is everything He has mentioned in the Koran as signs for a people who have intelligence [13:4], who hear [10:67], who understand [6:98], who have faith [6:99], who know [6:97], who have certainty [2:118], and who reflect [13:3]. Despite all this, no one gives it any notice save the Folk of God, who are the Folk of the Koran, God's elect.

The non-habitual signs—that is, those that break habits—are those that display traces within the souls of the common people, such as earthquakes and tremblers, eclipses, the rational speech of animals, walking on water, passing through the sky, announcing events in the future that happen exactly as announced, reading thoughts,⁴ eating from engendered existence,⁵ and the satiation of many people with a small amount of food. Such things are taken into account only by the common people.

When miraculous breaking of habits occurs not on the basis of uprightness, or if it does not alert people and incite them to return to God such that they return and exert themselves in returning, then it is a deception and a *leading on step by step from whence they know not* [7:182]. This is the *sure guile* [7:183]—God's gifts, despite [the servant's] acts of opposition.⁶ (II 372.10)

The Folk of God, also known as the "gnostics," recognize the things of the universe as signs and grasp the messages that the signs convey. It is they, for example, who understand the meaning of God's two names, All-Encompassing (*muḥīṭ*) and Aeon (*dahr*). They have actualized the station referred to in the *ḥadīth qudsī*: "Neither My heaven nor My earth embraces Me, but the heart of My servant with faith does embrace Me."

God has unveiled the covering of ignorance from the eyes of their insights and has made them witness the signs of *themselves* and the signs of *the horizons*. Hence it has become *clear to them that it is the Real* [41:53], nothing else. So they have faith in Him, or rather, they know Him through every face and in every form, and they know that *He encompasses everything* [41:54]. The gnostics see nothing unless in Him, since He is the container that encompasses everything. And how should He not be? He has alerted us to this with His name Aeon, within which enters everything other than God, so he

who sees something sees it only in Him. That is why Abū Bakr said, "I see nothing without seeing God before it," for he did not see it until it had entered into Him. Necessarily, his eye saw the Real before the thing, for he saw the thing proceed from Him. So the Real is the house of all existent things, because He is *wujūd*. And the heart of the servant is the house of the Real, because it embraces Him—that is, the heart of the one who has faith, none other. (IV 7.30)

The Prophet confirmed the importance of seeing the signs of the self in his famous saying, "He who knows [*ʿarafa*] himself knows his Lord." Hence one definition of *maʿrifa* (knowledge or gnosis) is true knowledge of God through knowing oneself. One seeks to know the signs with the aim of knowing God. Knowing the signs of the self, one comes to know one's Lord. The self is one's basic *dalīl*, one's proof or signifier of God. "What I signify is the *wujūd* of the Real that supports me" (IV 31.23).

In some passages, the Shaykh tells us that this knowledge of self is achieved by the rational faculty (*ʿaql*) through its power of remembrance (*dhikr*), which, in the philosophical sciences, is called the "remembering faculty" (*al-quwwat al-dhākira*), i.e., memory. In his view, when the Koran addresses the "possessors of minds"—literally, "the possessors of the kernels" (*uluʿl-albāb*)—it means those with discerning rational faculties.

In this waystation is found the knowledge of the rational proofs and demonstrations that judge their Existence-Giver as is worthy of Him and [the knowledge of] His acknowledgment of their truthfulness in what they judge. After all, God set up some signs only for the Possessors of the Kernels, who are those who understand the meanings of the signs through the rational faculty that God has mounted within them.

Moreover, God made reason itself a sign of reason, and He bestowed upon it the remembering and reminding faculty that reminds it of the Real who discloses Himself to it so that it knows Him through witnessing and vision. Then He lets down the veils of nature upon it, and then He calls it to His knowledge through the signifiers and the signs. He reminds it that its own self is the first signifier of Him, so it should consider it. (III 291.2)

Although the Koranic verse on knowledge of the self and the horizons seems to place these two knowledges on the same level, Ibn al-ʿArabī sees knowledge of the cosmos as secondary to knowledge of the self, because everything in the cosmos is already found in the self, which was created in God's form. "There is nothing outside of you, so do not hope to know yourself through other than yourself, for there is no such thing. You are the signifier of you and of Him, but there is nothing that signifies you" (III 319.23). One might object that the macrocosm signifies the microcosm, but the macrocosm is unknowable in its totality, because of its indefinite dispersion in time and space. In one passage, the Shaykh suggests how one can read the verse on horizons and selves to support the primacy of the self. In the process, he tells us that through knowing self, one comes to know God in two basic ways, which correspond to *tanzīh* or declaring His incomparability and *tashbīh* or asserting His similarity, or to the actualization of both vicegerency and servanthood. We know ourselves as similar to God because we are created in His form to be His vicegerents, and we know ourselves as utterly incomparable with Him and insignificant before Him because He is the source of all that we are, so we can only submit to Him.

Toward the end of the passage, the Shaykh al-Akbar alludes to a hadith that he quotes more commonly than any other. This is the well-known *ḥadīth qudsī* that mentions obligatory and supererogatory works. In particular he constantly comes back to the words of God in the hadith, "When I love him [i.e., My servant], I am his hearing through which he hears, his eyesight through which he sees, his hand through which he holds, and his foot through which he walks." Here we have the mystery of God's nearness to the servant expressed in a language that provides the Shaykh endless opportunities to meditate upon the divine/human relationship. One meaning that he frequently attributes to the hadith is that "None knows God but God." The servant, qua servant, can never know God, because he is existentially locked into *tanzīh*. But inasmuch as God becomes the

representative and vicegerent, and because of the *tashbīh* involved he can see God. Or rather, none sees God but God—only the divine in the human sees and recognizes the signs for what they are. Throughout such meditations, there is a constant tension and dialogue between affirmation and negation, nearness and distance, the He and the not He.

The Messenger of God said that there is no path to knowledge of God but knowledge of self, for he said, "He who knows himself knows his Lord." He also said, "He who knows himself best knows his Lord best." Hence he made you a signifier. That is, he made your knowledge of yourself signify your knowledge of Him. This is either by way of the fact that He described you with the same essence and attributes with which He described Himself and He made you His vicegerent and deputy in His earth; or it is that you have poverty and need for Him in your existence; or it is the two affairs together, and inescapably so.

We also see that, concerning the knowledge of God that is called *maʿrifa*, God says, *We shall show them Our signs upon the horizons and in themselves until it is clear to them that He is the Real*. Hence the Real turned us over to the *horizons*, which is everything outside of us, and to *ourselves*, which is everything that we are upon and in. When we come to understand these two affairs together, we come to know Him and it becomes clear to us *that He is the Real*. Hence the signifying of God is more complete.

This is because, when we consider ourselves to begin with, we do not know whether consideration of the cosmos outside ourselves—indicated by His words, *in the horizons*—gives us a knowledge of God that is not given by ourselves or by everything in ourselves. If it did give us such a knowledge, then, when we considered ourselves, we would gain the knowledge of God that is gained by those who consider the horizons. As for the Lawgiver, he knew that the self brings together all the realities of the cosmos. Hence he focused you upon yourself because of his eager desire—since, as God said concerning him, *He is eagerly desirous for you* [9:128]. He wanted you to approach the signifier so that you would win knowledge of God quickly, and through it reach felicity.

As for the Real, He mentioned the *horizons* to warn you of what we mentioned—lest you imagine that something remains in the horizons

giving a knowledge of God that is not given by your self. Hence He turned you over to the horizons. Then, when you recognize from them the very signifier of God that they provide, you will consider yourself, and you will find that the knowledge of God that is yielded by your consideration of the horizons is exactly the same as that yielded by your consideration of yourself. Then no obfuscation will remain to cause misgivings in you, because there will be nothing but God, you, and what is outside you, that is, the cosmos.

Then He taught you how to consider the cosmos. He said, *Do you not see how your Lord draws out the shadow?* [25:45]. *What, do they not consider how the clouds were created?* and so on [88:17 ff.]. *Have they not considered the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth?* [7:185]. Such is every verse in which He urges you to consider the signs. In the same way He says, *Surely in that are signs for a people who have intelligence* [13:4], *who reflect* [13:3], *who hear* [10:67], and *who understand* [6:98], and *for the knowers* [30:22], *for the faithful* [15:77], *for the possessors of understanding* [20:128], and *for the possessors of the kernels* [3:190]. He knew that He created the creatures in stages, so He enumerated the paths that lead to knowledge of Him, since no stage oversteps its waystation, because of what God has mounted within it.

The Messenger turned you over to yourself alone because he knew that the Real would be your faculties and that you would know Him through Him, not through other than He. For He is the Exalted, and the "Exalted" is the forbidden through its unreachability. When someone attains someone else, the latter is not forbidden in its unreachability, so he is not exalted. That is why the Real is your faculties. When you know Him and you attain to Him, none will have known and attained to Him save He. Hence the attribute of exaltation never leaves Him. Such is the situation, for the door to knowledge of Him is shut, unless it comes from Him, and inescapably so. (II 298.29)

Even though knowledge of self is the primary goal, the Koran's mention of *horizons* before *selves* is not without wisdom, given the danger of self-absorption. Without the support of the external world, the seeker may be led to focus only on himself and ignore all input from the outside. Clearly, in any balanced psyche, both inside and outside have significant roles to play. The Shaykh refers to

the importance of the horizons in his chapter on *khalwa*, the Sufi practice of "seclusion" or spiritual retreat.

God says, *We shall show them Our signs upon the horizons and in themselves* so that they will know that the human being is a microcosm of the cosmos containing the signs that are within the cosmos. The first thing that is unveiled to the companion of the seclusion is the signs of the cosmos, before the signs of his own self, for the cosmos is before him, as God has said: *We shall show them Our signs upon the horizons*. Then, after this, He will show him the signs that he saw in the cosmos within himself. If he were to see them first in himself, then in the cosmos, perhaps he would imagine that his self is seen in the cosmos. So God removed this confusion for him by giving priority to the vision of the signs in the cosmos, just as has occurred in *wujūd*. After all, the cosmos is prior to the human being. How should it not be prior to him? It is his father. Thus the vision of those signs that are in the horizons and in himself clarify for him that *He is the Real*, nothing else. (II 150.33)

Just as each thing in the cosmos is a sign, signifier, and proof of God, so also it names Him. Ibn al-ʿArabī explains this by commenting on the first Shahadah, "(There is) no god but God," which is divided into two basic parts—the negation ("no god") and the affirmation ("but God"). The negation is directed toward any attributes of divinity, any claim to be a god, by anything in the cosmos. And since everything in the cosmos is a sign of God, displaying something of the divine attributes, the negation is directed toward all things. The "He-ness" of God is the Essence, or that which is signified by the pronoun *He* in such Koranic verses as, *He is the First and the Last* (57:3).

The negation is turned toward the indefinite noun, which is *god*, while the affirmation is turned toward the definite noun, which is *God*. The negation is turned toward the indefinite—that is, *god*—only because all things are included within it. There is nothing that does not have a share of divinity to which it lays claim. This is why the negation is turned toward it, since the "god" is he whose shares do not become designated, because all shares belong to

him. When people recognize that the god possesses all shares, they recognize that he is called by the name *God*.

Everything has a share and each share is one of the names of what is called "God," so all are His names. Every name signifies His He-ness, or rather, is identical with His He-ness. This is why He says, *Call upon God, or call upon the All-Merciful; whichever you call upon, to "Him" belong the most beautiful names* [17:110]. This is the property of every name you call upon—to Him belong the most beautiful names. So to Him belong all the names of the cosmos, and the whole cosmos has the most beautiful level. (IV 89.16)

The fact that the whole cosmos signifies and names God explains its beauty and goodness. The cosmos has an innate eminence (*sharaf*), so it must never be condemned. The only thing that can be condemned is ignorance of the true nature of things. The Koran says that, on seeing God's "waymarks" (*sha'ā'ir*), those who possess "godwariness" (*taqwā*)—an attribute that it constantly praises—should "magnify" (*ta'zīm*) these waymarks, which is to say, in Ibn al-^ḤArabi's reading, that they should acknowledge the majesty and greatness of everything that signifies God, not because of its own worth, but because of what it signifies.

Know—God confirm us and you with the spirit of holiness—that contempt for anything of the cosmos does not proceed from any godwary person who is wary of God. What then if someone knows God, whether through the knowledge of proofs or the knowledge of tastings?

After all, there is no entity in the cosmos that is not among God's waymarks inasmuch as the Real has put it there to signify Him. God has described those who magnify His waymarks with His words, *Whoever magnifies God's waymarks, that is of the godwariness of the hearts* [22:32]. In other words, either the magnificence of the waymarks is of the godwariness of the hearts, or the waymarks themselves are of the godwariness of the hearts.

God has delineated limits for all His waymarks in the abode of religious prescription. These limits pertain to those for whom prescription is made, in all their manifest and non-manifest movements, and include everything in which they act freely, on both the spiritual

and sensory levels, through the ruling [the prescribed limit]. God made these His "inviolable things" for those for whom prescription is made, for He says, *Whoever magnifies the inviolable things of God [that is a good for him with his Lord]* [22:30]. Their magnifying them is to keep them inviolable, just as God has determined them as such in the ruling, for there are affairs that remove them from being inviolable. For example, we will be in the last abode in the Garden without any forbidding, as indicated by His words, *We dwell in the Garden wherever we will* [39:74]; *Therein you shall have everything for which your souls have appetite* [41:31]. So also are His words, *Today the companions of the Garden are in an occupation rejoicing* [36:55], while interdiction has been lifted.

It may happen that within the abode of religious prescription the servant is made to stand in this homestead, so he desires to act freely in it, just as its reality demands—but in its own homestead. Then the servant overthrows the inviolable things of God in this, so he gives them no notice and does not find that he should magnify them. Hence he loses their good—if he does not magnify them—with his Lord. Thus God says, *Whoever magnifies the inviolable things of God, that is a good for him with his Lord* [22:30].

God says this without making any threats only because the companions of states, when they are overcome by their states, are like madmen. As a result they are no longer answerable to the Shariah. Thereby much good with God escapes them. That is why none of the great ones ever seek states. They seek only stations.⁸

We are in the abode of prescription. When something of prescription escapes us in this abode, its good escapes us in the last abode. Then we will know for certain that we are not among the folk of solicitude with God—through the escape of that good.

Such is the situation if we have not exerted ourselves to gain the state that makes the good escape from us. What then will be our situation if we become qualified by the property that makes the good escape from us because we have exercised rational consideration in the roots of affairs after having come to know a few of their realities, and in these few themselves lies what makes the good escape from us? I have seen many of the considerative thinkers in such a situation without any state given by tasting—God give us refuge from that in tasting and consideration!

Since a signifier gains its eminence from what it signifies and since the cosmos signifies the

wujūd of God, all of the cosmos is eminent. Nothing in it is worthy of contempt or disdain. This is if we take it in respect of reflective consideration. In the Koran, this is indicated by His words, *What, do they not consider [. . .] how heaven was lifted up, and how the mountains were hoisted?* [88:19], and by all the verses of consideration that are found in the Koran. So also are His words, *Have they not considered the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth?* [7:185]; His words, *Surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day and so on* [2:164]; His words, *Do you not see how your Lord draws out the shadow?* [25:45]; His words, *Do you not see how to God prostrate themselves all who are in the heavens and all who are in the earth, and so on* [22:18]; and His words, *We shall show them Our signs upon the horizons and in themselves, until it is clear to them that He is the Real* [41:53], and other verses of the same sort.

As for the folk of unveiling and finding, in their view every part of the cosmos, or rather, everything in the cosmos, was brought into existence by God. Inescapably it is supported in its wujūd by a divine reality. Those who have contempt or disdain for it have had contempt and disdain for its Creator, who has made it manifest. Everything in wujūd is a wisdom that God has brought into existence, for it is the artisanry of one who is Wise. So nothing becomes manifest save [wisdom, which is] "what is proper for what is proper as is proper." Those who are blind to the wisdom of things will be ignorant of the things; and those who are ignorant that the affair is a wisdom are ignorant of the Wise who has put it there. There is nothing uglier than ignorance.⁹ (III 527.17)

Although the cosmos signifies and proves God, this means that it signifies His "Level" (*martaba*), not His Essence. In other words, it gives us knowledge of God's names and attributes, but God in Himself remains forever unknown. In respect of the Essence, or the very Selfhood of God, the cosmos signifies only that there is such a reality. When Ibn al-ʿArabī says that the cosmos signifies God in respect of the fact that "God" is the all-comprehensive name, the name that brings together all opposites, he clearly means that the cosmos signifies God in respect of His many names. Nothing can signify God as He is in Himself, because only God Himself can signify His own Self.

In one of the many passages where Ibn al-ʿArabī explains that the cosmos cannot act as a signifier for God's Essence, he does so while explaining "intimacy" (*uns*) with God, an attribute that is much desired by those who are seeking to reach Him. Although intimacy can be achieved, it cannot be achieved with God, because, properly speaking, God is the Essence, and the Essence is, in the Koranic expression, *Independent of the worlds* (3:97). Hence the "intimacy" that can be experienced is with God's self-disclosure, which is to say that it is experienced on the basis of the relations that exist between God and the cosmos, relations that are denoted by His names.

The Koran calls God *Independent of the worlds*. We make Him independent of signification. It is as if He is saying, "I did not bring the cosmos into existence to signify Me, nor did I make it manifest as a mark of My wujūd. I made it manifest only so that the properties of the realities of My names would become manifest. I have no mark of Me apart from Me. When I disclose Myself, I am known through the self-disclosure itself. The cosmos is a mark of the realities of the names, not of Me. It is also a mark that I am its support, nothing else."

Hence the whole cosmos possesses an intimacy with God. However, parts of it are not aware that the intimacy they have is with God.

Each part of the cosmos will inescapably find an intimacy with something, whether constantly, or by way of transferal to an intimacy that it finds with something else. However, nothing other than God among the engendered things has any properties. Hence, a thing's intimacy can only be with God, even if it does not know this. When the servant sees his intimacy with something, that thing is one of the forms of His self-disclosure. The servant may recognize this, or he may deny it. So the servant feels repelled by the same thing with which he is intimate, but he is not aware, because of the diversity of the forms. Hence, no one lacks intimacy with God, and no one is terrified of any but God. Intimacy is an expansiveness, while terror is a contraction.

The intimacy of the knowers of God is their intimacy with themselves, not with God, for they have come to know that they see nothing of God but the form of what they are and that they have no intimacy with anything but what they see. Those who are not gnostics see intimacy only with the other, so they are seized by

terror when they are alone with themselves. (II 541.11)

In short, everything in the cosmos names, denotes, signifies, and proves God. In this perspective, in which *tashbih* is stressed, everything is good and praiseworthy, because everything manifests the Real. There is nothing but the self-disclosure of God, who is *wujūd*. Wherever we look, whether on the horizons or in ourselves, we find existent things, which, in respect of their existence, are nothing but the shining light of *wujūd*. Only darkness can be blamed, but darkness cannot be found. It follows that every act performed by every creature is also a sign and mark of God, an affirmation of *wujūd*, which is Sheer Good. Unmixed evil cannot exist.

Know that there is no deed that is not an affair of *wujūd*, and there is no affair of *wujūd* that does not signify the *wujūd* of God and His *tawhīd*, whether the affair is blameworthy according to common consent and the Shariah, or praiseworthy according to common consent and the Shariah. If it is a signification, then it is a light, and light is praiseworthy by its essence. Hence nothing can be blamed in an absolute sense. (II 203.17)

Wujūd

To say that the cosmos is “everything other than God” is to say that it is everything other than *wujūd*. Strictly speaking, *wujūd* belongs only to God, because *wujūd* is God. “The Real is identical with *wujūd*” (I 328.25). “In actual fact, *wujūd* is identical with the Real, not other than He” (III 566.30).

Although “*Wujūd* is not identical with the existent thing except in the case of the Real” (II 588.2), anything in the cosmos can be called a *mawjūd*, an existent thing, because it is found. Hence, every existent thing manifests *wujūd*, and Ibn al-ʿArabī often employs the term *wujūd* to mean “all existent things” (III 384.10), everything that exists in any mode whatsoever. Nevertheless, when *wujūd* is

ascribed to the cosmos, it needs to be remembered that, “As for the Real in respect of Himself, He is not qualified by anything by which the *wujūd* of the cosmos is qualified” (III 537.21), because the things that fill the cosmos are inherently nonexistent, which is to say that they do not exist on their own. The *wujūd* they possess has been loaned to them by God. Inasmuch as the cosmos is found, it is *wujūd*, but inasmuch as it is considered in and of itself, it is nonexistence. “The nonexistent thing becomes manifest in the form of the existent thing, but it is distinct in *wujūd* from true *wujūd*” (III 307.29).

If, in a certain respect, everything that exists in any mode whatsoever can be said to possess *wujūd*, this means that whatever can be known, whether or not it is found in itself, has some mode of existence.

There is no object of knowledge that is not qualified by *wujūd* in some respect. The occasion of this is the strength of *wujūd*, which is the root of roots, that is, God, because through it all the levels become manifest and all the realities become entified. (II 309.33)

Although it is proper to speak about the *wujūd* of the things in a certain sense, in the last analysis, all *wujūd* is the Real, because *wujūd* is a single reality. Hence, “There is nothing in *wujūd* but God” (I 272.15, II 148.17, 470.16, III 80:14)—a formula that was used by al-Ghazālī and has been traced back to Maʿrūf al-Karkhī in the second/eighth century.¹⁰ Nonetheless, “It should not be said, ‘There is nothing in *wujūd* but God,’ because the possible things and the creatures are manifest” (III 299.28). From the first standpoint, God alone is real; from the second, the cosmos and everything within it are infused with His reality, because He has given them existence and attributes. Hence they are His self-disclosure.

The fact that God is *wujūd* explains the deepest meaning of the Koranic divine name *al-muḥīṭ*, the All-Encompassing. “Since the Real is identical with *wujūd*, He has the attribute of encompassing the cosmos” (IV 193.16). Everything in the cosmos is embedded in *wujūd* and embraced by *wujūd*.

Hence—if you have understood—nothing is understood by imagination, reason, or sensation save the Real *Wujūd* that supports us in our *wujūd*. (III 547.5)

In his chapter on “separation” (*farq*), the Shaykh sets out to explain several definitions of separation provided by classical Sufis. According to one of them, “Separation is the affirmation of creation,” because, by affirming the reality of creation, we separate it from the Real. In a similar way, “bringing together” (*jam*), the correlative of separation, is “affirmation of creation as abiding through the Real” (II 516.17). But, according to the Shaykh, affirmation of creation does not mean the affirmation of its *wujūd*, since *wujūd* belongs only to the Real. Hence, to affirm creation is to affirm the fixed entities, which are inherently nonexistent.

He says “affirmation of creation,” not “affirmation of the *wujūd* of creation,” because creation’s *wujūd* is identical with the Real’s *wujūd*. In respect of its own entity, creation is fixed, and its fixity belongs to itself from eternity without beginning. The fact that it is qualified by *wujūd* is a newly arrived affair that overtakes it, and we have already let you know what this means. Hence, his words, “the affirmation of creation,” mean that in eternity without beginning separation occurred between God and creation. Hence the Real is not identical with the fixed entities, in contrast to the state when they become qualified by *wujūd*, for He is identical with that which is described by *wujūd*, not with the entities. (II 519.5)

People commonly ask when the universe began. If we consider the cosmos in relation to Real *Wujūd*, the question is meaningless, because the question “when” only makes sense in the context of the cosmos itself, given that time (*zamān*) is created along with place (*makān*).

The cosmos is existent through God, neither through itself nor by itself. In its very essence it is bound in *wujūd* through the *wujūd* of the Real. Hence, the *wujūd* of the cosmos can never be correct save through the *wujūd* of the Real.

Since time is negated from the *wujūd* of the Real and from the *wujūd* of the origination of

the cosmos, the cosmos did not come into *wujūd* within time. Hence we do not say, in respect of the actual situation, that God existed “before” the cosmos. For it is affirmed that “before” is one of the modalities of time, and there is no time. Nor do we say that the cosmos came to exist “after” the *wujūd* of the Real, since there is no afterness; nor [do we say] “with” the *wujūd* of the Real, for the Real is He who brought the cosmos into existence and He who is its agent and deviser when it is not a thing. Rather, as we said, the Real is existent through His own Essence, and the cosmos is existent through Him.

A possessor of fantasy may ask, “When did the *wujūd* of the cosmos derive from the *wujūd* of the Real?” We would reply: “When” is a question pertaining to time, and time belongs to the world of relations, which is created by God. After all, the world of relations possesses the creation of “determination,” not that of “existence-giving.”¹¹ Hence this question is absurd. So consider how you question! Let not these grammatical particles veil you from realizing these meanings and gaining them in yourself!

Nothing remains but a sheer, pure *wujūd* not following upon a nonexistence, and this is the *wujūd* of the Real; and a *wujūd* following upon the nonexistence of the entity of the existent thing, and this is the *wujūd* of the cosmos. There is no in-betweenness [*bayniyya*] between the two *wujūds*, nor is there any extension, save in the fantasy of supposition, which knowledge shows to be impossible. There is an unbounded *wujūd* and a bound *wujūd*, a *wujūd* that acts and a *wujūd* that is acted upon. Such is given by the realities, and so it is. (I 90.13)

The exact manner in which *wujūd* is identical with the cosmos is not at all clear to the rational mind, and Ibn al-ʿArabī does not claim to explain it in any exhaustive fashion, though he frequently provides suggestive analogies. In any case, real knowledge of *wujūd*’s omnipresence comes by way of unveiling, not reason. Reason’s powers—consideration and reflection—force rational thinkers to declare God incomparable with all things. As long as they employ reason to the exclusion of unveiling, they are locked into *tanzīh*. Only God’s friends see God in His self-disclosure, recognizing *tashbīh*. Even so, not everyone worthy of being called a friend of God necessarily sees or understands His self-disclosure. In one passage, the Shaykh points out that the full vision of *wujūd*’s

omnipresence is achieved only by a small elite among God's friends—those whom he calls here the "chosen" (*muṣṭafā*). These are the friends whom God protects from acquiring rational knowledge concerning Him before He lifts them up to Himself. Ibn al-ʿArabī certainly has his own experience in mind, given that he received his grand opening long before he had studied any of the sciences. In employing the word "knotting" (*ʿaqd*), he has in view the etymological sense of the words *ʿaqīda* and *iʿtiqād*, the standard terms for "creed" and "belief."¹²

Know that, before his prophecy, no prophet ever knew God through rational consideration, and it is not proper for any prophet to do so. In the same way, the chosen friend of God has no prior knowledge of God through rational consideration. Any friend of God who has prior knowledge of God in respect of reflective consideration is not "chosen," even though he is a friend of God, nor is he one of those to whom God has given the inheritance of the Divine Book.

This is occasioned by the fact that rational consideration binds the friend's view of God by some affair that distinguishes God from other affairs. He is not able to attribute the all-inclusiveness of *wujūd* to God. Hence he has nothing but naked *tanzīh*. Then, when he has tied his knot upon Him, he rejects anything that comes from his Lord that diverges from his knotting, for it detracts from the proofs with which he supports what has come to him from his Lord.

When God shows solicitude to someone, He preserves him, before He chooses him, from the sciences of consideration and He *employs* him *for Himself* [20:41]. He comes between him and the search for considerative sciences and provides him with faith in God and in that which has come from God on the tongue of God's Messenger. This is the situation of this community, whose messenger's call is general.

In the former prophecy, when a person lived in a gap between prophets, God would provide for him and make him love occupying himself with seeking provision or the practical arts, or occupying himself with the preparatory sciences, such as arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, medicine, and anything of the same sort that does not attach itself to the God. If the person was chosen and in God's knowledge he was to be a prophet in the time of prophecy, then revelation would come to him while his

heart was pure of being bound by a God restricted within the compass of his rational faculty. If he was not a prophet, but a messenger had come to a community to which he belonged, he would accept what his prophet brought him because of the unobstructedness of his locus.¹³ Then he would practice in accordance with his faith and would have godwariness toward his Lord, and at that God would provide him with a discrimination in his heart possessed by no one else.¹⁴ In this manner God has caused His habit to occur in His creation.

Even if the companion of rational consideration reaches felicity, he will never achieve the level of the one who is unobstructed, who has no knowledge of God except in respect of his faith and his godwariness. Such a person is an heir to the prophets in this attribute, so he is with them and stands in this degree of theirs. So know this, and say, *My Lord, increase me in knowledge!* [20:114]. (III 402.13)¹⁵

Although the chosen are able to see that *wujūd* is all-comprehensive and all-inclusive, neither they nor anyone else can discern the exact manner in which *wujūd* becomes manifest through the *mawjūdāt*, the existent things. *Wujūd* in itself, after all, is God's own Self—His Essence—and His Essence is unknowable. *Wujūd* as *wujūd* is no less unknowable when present in an existent thing that we know, because we know only the entity or reality of the thing, not the *wujūd* through which the thing is present to us. This should help us understand why the Shaykh maintains that the Folk of God do not seek God.

A MYSTERY

The long interval impedes.

When the Men who have no impediment
reach the long interval,
you will see among their warriors
a servant whose state brings
the pain of distance,
thus cutting him off from them.

He says: Since God created *human beings hasty* [17:11] and He created in them seeking, but they do not gain the object of their search in the first step, the interval draws out for them because of their hastiness. They halt because of the length of the interval, and they are held back from gaining benefit.

After all, God is not reached through seeking. Hence the gnostic seeks his own felicity, not God. One does not aspire for what one already has. God is greater than that He should be sought through the distance of steps, the hardship of deeds, and reflective thoughts. Just as He does not become spatially confined, so also He does not become distinct. He is known to us in the sense that in each thing He is identical with each thing but unknown in the distinction, because of the diversity of the forms that we witness.

As soon as you say concerning a form, "He is this," another form with which He is identical will veil you from that form. Concerning it you will also say, "He is this," and His He-ness will absent itself from you through the form that goes. Then you will not know what you depend upon, exactly like the person who is bewildered by reflective consideration and does not know what he believes. As often as a proof shines forth to him, an obfuscation also shines forth.

No proof of Him can ever be safe from obfuscation, because He is the Greatest Proof, and we are His obfuscation. (IV 442.31)

Given that people cannot understand *wujūd*, whether in itself or in its relations with the cosmos, those who study the actual situation of things are sure to end up in bewilderment, a situation which, for Ibn al-ʿArabī, can be one of the highest stations of knowledge, provided it is the right sort of bewilderment. In discussing the meaning of God's "independence" (*ghinā*) from the worlds, he suggests the various positions that people will take concerning *wujūd* and the entities.

The cosmos never ceases being preserved by God, so He never ceases being its preserver. Were the preservation cut off, the cosmos would disappear. After all, God is Independent of the cosmos only because He becomes manifest through Himself to the cosmos. So He is independent of being known through the cosmos, because He cannot be signified by the other. On the contrary, He signifies Himself through His manifestation to His creatures.

Among the creatures are those who know Him and distinguish Him from His creation.

Among them are those who make Him identical with His creation.

Among them are those who become bewildered in Him. They do not know if He is identical with His creation or distinct from it.

Among them are those who know that He is distinct from His creation and that the creation is distinct from Him, but they do not know through what creation is distinct from the Real or the Real from creation. This is why Abū Yazīd became bewildered, for he knew that there was some sort of distinction, but he did not know what it was until the Real said to him, "The distinction lies in abasement and poverty." Then he became still. God did not speak to him of the other half of the distinction, and that is the divine independence from the cosmos. (III 405.8)

The exact mode of a thing's becoming manifest is unknowable, because knowing it would demand knowing *wujūd* in itself. What Ibn al-ʿArabī does try to explain repeatedly is that it is easy to see from the signs and marks that everything is the self-disclosure of *wujūd*. One of his favorite analogies for this self-disclosure is the mirror, or, more specifically, what we would recognize as fun-house mirrors.

There is nothing in *wujūd* but God. In the same way, if you were to say, "There is nothing in the mirror except the one who is disclosing himself to it," you would be speaking the truth. Nevertheless, you know that there is nothing at all "in the mirror," nor is there anything of the mirror in the viewer. But within the very form of the mirror, the display of variations and traces is perceived. At the same time, the viewer is as he was, and he displays no traces. So glory be to Him who strikes likenesses and makes the entities appear so as to signify that nothing is similar to Him, and that He is similar to nothing!

There is nothing in *wujūd* but He, and *wujūd* is acquired only from Him. No entity of any existent thing becomes manifest except through His self-disclosure. So the mirror is the Presence of Possibility, the Real is the one who looks within it, and the form is you in keeping with the mode of your possibility. You may be an angel, a celestial sphere, a human being, a horse. Like the form in a mirror, you follow the guise of the mirror's own essence in terms of height, breadth, circularity, and diverse shapes, even though it is a mirror in every case.

In the same way, the possible things are like shapes in possibility. The divine self-disclosure

imparts *wujūd* to the possible things. The mirror imparts shapes to them. Then angel, substance, body, and accident become manifest, but possibility remains itself. It does not leave its own reality. (III 80.14)

*From Chapter 73:
The One Hundred and
Third Question*

Ibn al-ʿArabī connects God’s unknowability specifically to the issue of *wujūd* while commenting on a *ḥadīth qudsī*: “Exaltation is My loincloth and magnificence My mantle. When someone contends with Me in either of them, I shatter him.” The passage pertains to his answers to a series of 157 questions that had been posed three hundred years earlier by al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, who maintained that only the Seal of God’s Friends would be able to answer them.¹⁶ The Shaykh provided answers in a treatise that he later incorporated into the *Futūḥāt*.

Question: What are His words, “Exaltation is My loincloth”?

Answer: The Real blessed His servants when He called them to know Him by descending to strike likenesses for them so that they may gain knowledge from Him in the measure that He desires. Such, for example, is His words, *The likeness of His light is as a niche, within which is a lamp* [24:35]. This is because of His words, *God is the light of the heavens and the earth* [24:35], whereby He made Himself light, for it is the predicate of the subject, that is, its attribute. His He-ness is light in respect of the fact that He is God, the Light. But what does the light of the lamp have to do with His words, *God is the light*?

Similar to this is the report that when God speaks through revelation it is “like a chain across pebbles.” What does the speech of the Real have to do with striking a chain across pebbles?

Such also are His words, “Exaltation is My loincloth.” For the sake of His servants, He put Himself in the waystation of someone who receives qualification by a loincloth. What He desires them to know about Him in the like of this corresponds to a loincloth and what it curtains.

Know that a loincloth is worn for the sake of three affairs—first, for adornment; second, for protection; and third, for curtaining. Of these three, what is meant in this report is specifically protection. This is shown by the word *exaltation*. Here exaltation demands the impossibility of reaching Him, because the loincloth protects the site of embarrassment from being seen by the eyes.

Exaltation is forbidden through its unreachability, so in reality it cannot become the quality of any created or innovated thing, because abasement is the constant companion of created and innovated things, and abasement contradicts exaltation. Hence, when the Real put on the loincloth of exaltation, rational faculties were prevented from perceiving the entities’ reception of existence-giving, by which they became qualified and through which they became distinct to themselves. Hence nothing apart from God knows the form of His giving existence or its reception, nor how the thing comes to be a locus of manifestation for the Real, nor how it is described by *wujūd*—for now it is said concerning it, “existent thing,” but it used to be said, “nonexistent thing.”

Hence the Real said, “Exaltation is My loincloth,” that is, it is a veil over what souls can properly expect to gain.

That is why He says, “When someone contends with Me in either of them, I shatter him.” He reports that He is contended with in attributes of this sort that are appropriate only for Him—like exaltation, magnificence, and greatness. So exaltation is the subjugating force that you find preventing perception of the mystery through which the cosmos becomes manifest. (II 102.33)

Causality

Ibn al-ʿArabī describes the cosmos as God’s sign, signifier, mark, waymark, and image. In all these cases, the relationship is one of *tashbīh*, in the sense that the cosmos is understood to be a reflection or shadow of the Real in a manner that cannot fully be grasped by the rational mind. These terms are all Koranic, and they are rooted in the concreteness of the Arabic language and actual human experience of the world. Of course many rational explanations for the relation between God and the cosmos were offered

by the philosophers and theologians, but the Shaykh tends to look upon these with a critical eye, especially if the terminology is not drawn from the Koran or the Hadith. Thus, for example, the Muslim philosophers often called God the "cause" (*'illa*) of the universe and the universe God's "effect" (*ma'lūl*). So important is this doctrine for their position—in Ibn al-ʿArabī's view at least—that he sometimes refers to them as "the Companions of the Causes" (IV 307.18) or "the Affirmers of the Causes" (III 212.35).¹⁷ But he considers application of the term *cause* to God as misguided and mistaken, because cause and effect are inextricably correlative. There can be no cause without an effect. It follows that by calling God a "cause" the philosophers are maintaining that God demands the existence of the cosmos, but this contradicts the independence of the Essence. Hence cause and effect play roles within the cosmos, but not in the relation between God and the cosmos.

The Real is existent through His own Essence for His own Essence, unbounded in *wujūd*, not bound by other than Himself. He is not caused by anything, nor is He the cause of anything. On the contrary, He is the Creator of the effects and the causes, the King, the All-Holy who always was. (I 90.12)

We do not make Him a cause of anything, because the cause seeks its effect, just as the effect seeks its cause, but the Independent is not qualified by seeking. Hence it is not correct for Him to be a cause. (II 57.26)

The Author is He who is not the cause of anything. Hence the words of those who say, "O Cause of causes," is absurd. After all, the cause is equal to its effect in *wujūd*, but the situation is not like that. (*ʿAbādila* 163)

It is not appropriate that the Real's acts be assigned causes, for there is no cause that makes necessary the engendering of a thing save the very *wujūd* of the Essence and the fact that the entity of the possible thing is a receptacle for the manifestation of *wujūd*. (II 64.8)

The cosmos is identical with the cause and the effect. I do not say that the Real is its cause,

as is said by some of the considerative thinkers, for that is the utmost ignorance of the affair. Whoever says so does not know *wujūd*, nor who it is that is the Existent. You, O so-and-so, are the effect of your cause, and God is your Creator! So understand! (IV 54.8)

Ibn al-ʿArabī makes use of the idea that cause and effect demand each other in *wujūd* while explaining why he rejects the opinion that in order to know oneself, one must first know God.

Some of the reflective thinkers have held that knowledge of God is the root in knowledge of the self, but this can never be correct for the creature's knowledge of God. This is so only in the Real's knowledge, and here it is a priority and a root in level, not in *wujūd*, because in *wujūd*, His knowledge of Himself is identical with His knowledge of the cosmos. Although knowledge is a root in level, it is not so in *wujūd*.

You say a similar thing in the rational consideration of a cause and an effect, even though they are coextensive in *wujūd* and cannot be otherwise. It is known that the level of the cause is prior to the level of its effect in rational conception, but not in existence.

The same is the case with two correlatives inasmuch as they are two correlatives, and this is even more complete in what we mean. For each of the two correlatives is a cause and an effect of that through which the correlation abides. Thus each is a cause of that of which it is the effect, and an effect of that of which it is the cause. Thus, as a cause, "sonship" makes necessary that "fatherhood" be its effect, and fatherhood as a cause makes necessary that sonship be its effect. But in respect of their entities, there is no cause and no effect. (III 121.28)

A well-known philosophical maxim, apparently used first by Avicenna, maintains that "Nothing proceeds from the One but one."¹⁸ Ibn al-ʿArabī frequently cites or refers to this maxim, most often rejecting it. In the present context he understands it to mean that God is the cause of a single effect, which "proceeds" (*ṣudūr*) from Him, and that this Proceeder (*ṣādir*) is then the cause of the cosmos. When the issue is posed in these terms, it may appear that this Proceeder is

identical with Ibn al-ʿArabī's Breath of the All-Merciful. He addresses this issue, though somewhat obliquely, in Chapter 368, "On the true knowledge of the waystation of the Acts, like [God's command] came [16:1] and 'did not come,' and the Presence of the Command alone." Here he takes up the technical term *al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi*, "The Real Through Which Creation Occurs," which elsewhere he treats as a synonym for the Breath of the All-Merciful. The term is derived from a number of Koranic verses, and the Shaykh acknowledges that he has taken it from Ibn Barrajān of Seville.¹⁹ In this particular chapter, he says that some of the Folk of God have been mistaken in understanding this term, for, "Having heard God words, *He created the heavens and the earth through the Real* [16:3] and other similar verses in the Koran, they made the Real Through Which Creation Occurs an existent entity" (III 354.28). Having done so, they were guilty of *shirk*, because there cannot be two *wujūds*. Their mistake lay in reading the pronoun *bi* ("through"), which they took to mean that God needed this second Real to create the universe. What they failed to understand was that *bi* here means *li*, "for the sake of." In other words, the term means the Real For the Sake of Which Creation Occurs. This Real is the truth, the right, and the proper, or God's wisdom in creation. This is why, he says, the same verse continues by negating that there should be another existent thing—an associate of the Real—for it says, *High indeed is He above what they associate!* Having explained this and a number of other relevant points, Ibn al-ʿArabī summarizes his objections, which come down to the issue of causality.

They have stipulated the Real Through Which Creation Occurs in two meanings.

Some of them make this Real Through Which Creation Occurs identical with the cause of creation. But the Real's creation cannot be assigned a cause; this is what is correct in itself, so much so that in Him nothing can be rationally conceived of that would require the causation of this creation of His that becomes manifest. On the contrary, His creation of the creatures is a gratuitous favor toward the creatures and a

beginning of bounty, and He is independent of the worlds [3:97].

Others make this Real Through Which Creation Occurs an existent entity through which God created what is apart from Him. These are those who say that "Nothing proceeds from the One save one" and that the procession of this one is the procession of an effect from a cause, a cause that demands that procession. As for this—in it is what is in it [i.e., error].

As for me, I say,

When God's command comes [40:78], the

Commander is the command,
and this is the *tawḥīd* of Him who
possesses the command.

So associate not, for association is a proven
wrongdoing,

a wrongdoing that all have condemned. (III
355.30)

Ibn al-ʿArabī devotes several passages in the penultimate chapter of the *Futūḥāt* to the issue of causality. In three of the following four mysteries, he rejects the ascription of the term *cause* to God. But in the last, he accepts it and says that the really important point is not whether or not one uses it, but whether or not one preserves courtesy (*adab*) toward God. No doubt this means that one should be careful to observe the limits of God's revealed language, and one should not interpret (*ta'wīl*) God's speech in ways that go against the words. If God speaks of creation, we should speak of creation, at least in the context of the Koranic text. As long as we do not fall into association or some other error, it is all right to speak of God as "the Cause" in appropriate contexts. The term *ʿilla* in Arabic means not only "cause," but also "infirmity," just as *ma'īlūl* means not only "caused thing" or "effect" but also "infirm." Thus he writes, "The root of the cosmos is infirm, so illness clings to it forever. There is no remedy that could rid it of its infirmity" (*ʿAbādila* 67). In the second and third passages below, the Shaykh has a view toward both meanings of the terms. In the third and fourth passages he refers to the fact that the term *condition* (*shart*) has been preferred by some of the Realizers to avoid the problems connected with the term *cause*.

Wujūd and the Entities

Thus God is considered as a necessary condition for the existence of the cosmos, but not as its cause.

A MYSTERY

*The secret of eternity without
beginning is in the causes.*

Were He a cause, the effect would be coextensive with Him in *wujūd*, but it is posterior to Him, for the names Prior and Posterior are affirmed.

Were He to demand the *wujūd* of the cosmos because of His Essence, none of its newly arrived things would be posterior to Him.

Were it correct that nothing proceeds from Him save one, the relations and the witnesses would be nullified. Those who assign relations to the Proceeder, despite its unity, have affirmed relations and properties. The Proceeder is a known existent, but the relations are a nonexistent affair, and nonexistence does not abide through *wujūd*, for the demonstrations nullify this. But limits and manyness are intelligible, and there is no cause that is not an effect. (IV 336.4)

A MYSTERY

He who witnesses finds.

No one gains *wujūd*
save him who renounces the existent thing.
He who sees that engendered existence has
an independent entity
is the companion of a cause, not the
companion of a tenet.
No one professes causes
save him who says that the cosmos has no
beginning.
But how should the cosmos have eternity?
It has no entrance into the self-necessity of
wujūd.
It has only a secondary level,
which is the subsistent, the annihilated.
Were eternity affirmed for the cosmos,
nonexistence would be impossible for it,
but nonexistence is possible, or rather, it
actually happens
for all the cosmos.
However, most of the servants
are uncertain of a new creation [50:15].
No one recognizes the renewal of the entities
save the Folk of *Husbān*.
Al-Ash'arī affirmed it in the accidents

but the philosophers imagine that he was
the companion of a disease,
so they considered him ignorant of the black
of the African and the yellow of gold
and thought that his position had led him
astray.²⁰ (IV 378.33)

A MYSTERY

*Those who profess the cause
do not belong to the
community.*

For the Folk of the Community,
it is not correct for the Real to be our
cause,
since He was when I was not,
so why do you trouble yourself?
No cause is separate from its effect
just as no signifier is separate from the
signified.
Were this to become separate from that, it
would not be a signifier,
nor would the other be a causer.
Healing is one of the properties of causes
["infirmities"]
in eternity without beginning.
No one professes the cause
except those ignorant of what proofs
bestow.
The firm and fastened affair
lies in the knowledge of the condition and
the conditioned.
Upon this depend the Folk of Realization
in this path.
Professing the cause is an effect ["an
infirmity"]
according to the plainest proof.
The properties of the Real in His servants are
not given causes,
but He is the intended through aspirations
and hopes.
Were it correct for someone to hope for
something other than He
it would not be affirmed that He is the
God,
but it has been affirmed that He is the God,
so none hopes for any but He.
In the same way, He—exalted and majestic is
He—
has troubled His servants as He has
troubled them,
for He desires the deferred, last world,
but we desire the hurried, close world.
(IV 373.19)

A MYSTERY

Affirming the cause is a tenet.

He says: Although the cause requires the effect by its essence, it has priority in level. Although the effect is coextensive with the cause in *wujūd*, it is not coextensive with it in essential self-necessity. Once you have understood this, have no concern, save as courtesy restrains you.

He says: Those who fled to professing conditions fled only in fear of the coextensiveness of *wujūd*. They did not know that the existent thing has the property of *wujūd*, whether it is posterior or prior, in contrast to self-necessity, for that belongs to Him, but it does not belong to you. So "God was" in that, "but nothing was with Him" in that, and nothing will be, in contrast to *wujūd*.

If you were to say, "God was, and nothing was with Him," you would not say, "and He is now, and there is nothing," because of the *wujūd* of the things. But concerning essential necessity, you will say in every state, "God was and nothing was with Him, and He is now, and there is nothing."

Now that you know the separating factor, say "condition" or "cause," unless you are restrained by the Shariah. (IV 413.28)

God's Knowledge

Although God is not the cause of the cosmos, He is its necessary condition. Without Him, there is no cosmos. Not only does the *wujūd* of the cosmos derive from God, but also the specific attributes, characteristics, and limitations of the cosmos. Before they come to exist in the universe, all the entities are present to the Real *Wujūd*. This presence to God is known as His "knowledge."

Wujūd, as the source of every reality, is the source of every conceivable attribute that denotes the presence of one thing to the awareness of another thing—such as knowledge, consciousness, witnessing, perception, wisdom, hearing, sight, and so on. As for knowledge, the Koran tells us repeatedly that God is *Knower of all things*. In contrast, the things *encompass nothing of His knowledge save such as He wills* (2:255). One of the

implications of this is that God's knowledge alone is perfect and complete. Only God knows any given thing as it truly is. "No one knows a thing in every respect except God, who *encompasses everything in knowledge* [65:12], whether the thing be fixed or existent, finite or infinite" (III 382.21). This leads to Ibn al-'Arabī's radical agnosticism concerning the realities of the cosmic things. He expresses it succinctly in a line of poetry:

I have not perceived the reality of anything—
How can I perceive something in which
You are? (*Dīwān* 96)

God's omniscience means that *wujūd* finds all things as potentialities within itself and as actualities within their own specific modes of *wujūd*. The term *wujūd* denotes not only the fact that God is found, but also the fact that He finds all things. Through self-finding, the Real perceives within Himself the presence of every possible modality of reality. These modalities, once they become manifest to human beings, are called by such terms as things, entities, realities, possible things, existent things, properties, traces, and occasions.

On the basis of what He knows, the Real gives existence to the things in the manner that He knows them, and they come into *wujūd* manifesting His properties. He creates the cosmos, like Adam, in His own form.

In Himself, God's knowledge of the cosmos brings together His knowledge of Himself, so the cosmos emerges in His form. This is why we say that the Real is identical with *wujūd*. (IV 306.22)

The cosmos is a mark of God's knowing His own Essence. In knowing Himself, God knows all the marks of *wujūd*, all its possible permutations and manifestations. In expressing His knowledge through His creative word *Be!*, He articulates the things within *wujūd*, which, as the substrate of all existential words, is known as the "Breath of the All-Merciful."

Knowledge—every knowledge—is gained through a signifying, because *'ilm* [knowledge] is derived from *'alāma* [mark]. That is why

knowledge of the things is attributed to God, for He knows Himself, and thereby He knows the cosmos. Hence He is a signifier and a mark of the cosmos.

In a similar way, the cosmos is a mark of Him in our knowledge of Him. This is indicated by the Prophet's words, "He who knows himself knows his Lord." Hence He made you your signifier of Him, and you come to know Him. Likewise, His Essence is His signifier of you, so He knew you and then brought you into existence. (II 479.3)

Given that God knows all things in Himself and that the cosmos is the exteriorization of this knowledge, and given that God's knowledge is the root of all knowledge, no knowledge of God is conceivable without the cosmos.

Do you not see that the *wujūd* of the servant—by which I mean the cosmos—becomes manifest only through the *wujūd* of the Real and His existence-giving? For the ruling property belongs to Him.

Then He who was prior became posterior, and he who was posterior became prior, for no entity becomes manifest for knowledge of God until knowledge of the cosmos makes it manifest. (IV 43.34)

God is present with the things both in the state of their nonexistence, when they are known to Him but not manifest in the cosmos, and in the state of their *wujūd*. God is always present with the cosmos, but the cosmos is not present with Him so long as it does not witness Him.

A MYSTERY

*He who is certain of emergence
will never seek ascent.*

He says: Since you have no escape from returning to Him, you should know that you are at Him from the first step, which is the first breath. So do not weary yourself by seeking ascent to Him, for that is nothing but your emerging from your desire such that you do not witness it. For *He is with you wherever you are* [57:4], so your eyes will fall on none but Him. However, it remains for you to recognize Him. Were you to distinguish and recognize Him, you would not seek to ascend to Him,

for you have not lost Him.

When you see those who are seeking Him, you will see that they are seeking their felicity in their path. Their felicity is the repulsion of pains from them, nothing else, wherever they may be.

The one who is completely ignorant is he who seeks what is already there, so no one is more ignorant than he who seeks God. If you have faith in His words, *He is with you wherever you are*, and His words, *Wherever you turn, there is the face of God* [2:115], you will recognize that no one seeks God. People seek only their felicity so that they will be safe from what they detest. (IV 424.15)

The fact that God is with all things helps explain why He brings them from nonexistence in knowledge to existence in the cosmos. Sufis typically understand love as God's motive for creating the cosmos. Like others, Ibn al-ʿArabī often refers to the famous *ḥadīth qudsī* that speaks of God as a Hidden Treasure. The version he usually cites reads, "I was a Treasure but was not known, so I loved to be known; I created the creatures and made Myself known to them, so they came to know Me." But the Shaykh often reminds us that the object of love remains nonexistent, whether the love be human or divine.²¹ Of course, objections quickly arise when it is said that the object of love does not exist.

You may object and say: We loved sitting with a person, or kissing, or embracing, or intimacy, or conversation. Then we saw that it was achieved, but love did not disappear, even though there was embracing and mutual arrival. Hence, the object of love does not have to be nonexistent.

We would reply: You are mistaken. When you embrace the person, and when the object of your love had been embracing, or sitting together, or intimacy, you have not achieved the object of your love through this situation. For the object is now the continuance and permanence of what you have achieved. This continuance is nonexistent. It has not entered into *wujūd*, and its period has no end. Hence, in the state of arrival, love attaches itself only to a nonexistent thing, and that is its permanence.

How beautifully the Koran has expressed this with His words, *He will love them and they will love Him* [5:54]. For it employs pronouns

of absence [i.e., third person] and future tense verbs. Hence it ascribes love's connection only to that which is absent and nonexistent. And every absent thing is a nonexistent thing in a relative sense. (II 327.8)

In the Shaykh's view, when God loves creation, He loves nonexistent things. This love then brings them into *wujūd* in the mode of their temporal unfolding.

God's love for His servants is not qualified by origin or end, for it does not accept qualities that are newly arrived or accidental. His love for His servants is identical with the origination of their engendered existence, whether they be prior or posterior, ad infinitum. Hence the relation of God's love to them is the same as the fact that He is *with* them *wherever* they *are* [57:4], whether in the state of their nonexistence or the state of their *wujūd*. Just as He is with them in the state of their *wujūd*, so also He is with them in the state of their nonexistence, for they are the objects of His knowledge. He witnesses them and loves them never-endingly. No property comes to Him newly that He did not already possess. On the contrary, He has always loved His creatures, just as He has always known them.

His words, "So I loved to be known," instruct us concerning the affair as it is in itself—[when these words are understood] as is proper to His majesty. He can only be conceived of as Agent and Creator.

Every entity was nonexistent in itself and known to Him, and He loved to bring it into existence. Then He made *wujūd* arrive for it newly, or rather, He made *wujūd* arrive in it newly, or rather, He draped it in the robe of *wujūd*. So an entity came to be, then another, then another, continually and successively, from the first existent thing supported by the Firstness of the Real. And there is no last existent thing, but rather, a continuing *wujūd* in individuals, for the "last" is in genera and species. Individuals among created things are not finite in the last world except in certain specific kinds.

Although this world is finite, the engendered things are new, without any end to their engendering, because the possible things have no end. Their endlessness is perpetual, just as beginninglessness in the case of the Real is fixed and necessary. His *wujūd* has no first point, so His love for His servants has no first point. (II 329.5)

Chapter 475: God's Waymarks

It was noted in a previous section that Ibn al-'Arabī understands "waymarks" in the Koranic passage *Whoever magnifies God's waymarks* (22:32) as a reference to the signs on the horizons. Naturally, they also refer to the signs in the selves. These microcosmic signs tell us that we ourselves signify God's knowledge. The Shaykh explains this in the course of Chapter 475, which he calls, "On the true knowledge of the state of the Pole whose waystation is, *Whoever magnifies God's waymarks*." This is one of the ninety-three chapters in Part Six that he dedicates to explaining how various Koranic verses have their highest human manifestations in the Muhammadan Poles, friends of God who inherit certain sciences and states from Muhammad that were not possessed by any previous prophets. Each of these Poles has a word or a formula, typically a Koranic verse, that provides him with a constant invocation (*hijjir*) and determines his degree in knowledge and witnessing.

God's waymarks are signposts for us,
set up that we may know
the difference between
the Real and the creation.
They are the limits
whose partitions abide
as a protection for him
who upholds difference.
When someone magnifies them,
they protect him—
he is the one who is wary
of the things through the Real.
On the Day of the Doves,
God will give him a station
apart from the creatures
called the *Seat of Truthfulness* [54:55].
He comes to possess it through
what he won in the race
during all that happened
in the racetrack of precedence.²²
He annihilates and makes subsistent
him who calls upon Him,
while He is qualified by His names
Annihilator and Subsistence-giver.