

Ibn 'Arabi on the Problem of Divine Hiddenness

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OUTLINE

Many people are perplexed that God should permit a situation in which human beings live in incomprehension and bewilderment regarding His existence, while all the time He could save humanity from such a predicament. The problem of 'divine hiddenness' refers to the epistemic situation where we human beings live in a world in which God is transcendent, we have limited cognitive faculties, and that knowledge of God is essential for our flourishing in this-worldly and otherworldly life; and where in addition it is supposed that God, the omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly loving, has permitted us to live in bewilderment and perplexity regarding His attributes and existence, all the while knowing that it is essential for our well-being during our eternal life to believe in His existence and so to act according to His commandments.

In this paper I focus on Ibn 'Arabi's ideas regarding the *problem* of divine hiddenness. Nowadays it seems an undeniable fact that there are many people who have searched for evidence of existence of God whole-heartedly, but did not succeed in finding a solid point on which to construct their faith; or that there are some truth-seekers who have found other non-theistic religions to be true religions and so converted to them; or as the result of their search have reached the belief that there is no true religion at all and that it is rational to be an atheist or at least agnostic. Seeing these facts and recognizing them as a problem is one thing; deducing an atheistic argument from them is another. While an atheist philosopher may derive an atheistic argument from the existing problem of

evil or hiddenness,¹ it is worth mentioning that there are some thoughtful mystics who put another gloss on the phenomenon and see the world in a completely different manner. They recognize the problem of divine hiddenness; but according to their view, divine hiddenness is caused by God's manifestation. Their view seems paradoxical, but I shall try to explain it by focusing on the ideas of Ibn 'Arabi, the most thoughtful and insightful author on Islamic mysticism. In order to understand his claim, I shall first show how, according to Ibn 'Arabi, divine manifestation (showing His signs through creation), which is His revelation through His creation, is itself a veil of God and so we human beings who live in the earth (the world containing all levels of God's manifestations) could not normally perceive God through divine appearance (via religious experience or other similar ways). He teaches us that one should go through the Sufi path to unveil the face of the beloved and then God will appear to his consciousness. Second, in order to answer the question, which seems to be what an atheist arguer ultimately demands (that is, a demand for God's appearance to the extent that all normal human beings who are not resisting God and are capable of having a meaningful relationship with God also believe that God exists), I shall stress that God's purpose for the creation of the universe and mankind is contrary to such a sort of divine appeared presence.

1. Schellenberg's main previous discussions of this argument are John L. Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), and 'What the Hiddenness of God Reveals: A Collaborative Discussion', in *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, ed. D. Howard-Snyder and P.K. Moser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). He tries to answer to several objections to his argument in 'The Hiddenness Argument Revisited (I)', *Religious Studies* 41 (2005), 201–15, and 'The Hiddenness Argument Revisited (II)', *Religious Studies* 41 (2005), 287–303. For his recent and most developed version of the argument see his *The Wisdom to Doubt* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), Chaps. 9 and 10.

IBN 'ARABI'S THEORY OF DIVINE MANIFESTATION

In this part I shall explain two basic principles that can be seen as the fundamental principles in Ibn 'Arabi's theosophy and world-view: the theory of divine manifestation and the hierarchy of divine manifestation. The theory of divine manifestation is about the incomparability and transcendence of the essence of God, and His presence and manifestation through His creation. The principle of the hierarchy of the levels of existence explains the locus of divine manifestation and creation.

According to Ibn 'Arabi, divine essence is the non-manifest, the Hidden Treasure.² The essence is God in Himself without reference to anything else. God's essence, in Ibn 'Arabi's terminology, is that which bears divine nature as a set of God's essential attributes.³ The being of the Essence is beyond being known, it is the most hidden secret (*aktam al-sirr*).⁴ As the absolutely absent being (*al-ghayb al-ghuyub*), no one can know God in Himself but Himself.⁵ No one can perceive the divine essence but God Himself. The gnostics can perceive divine self-disclosure, which is His revelation, but they cannot perceive God Himself unless they become annihilated. The divine essence will never be found and cannot be sought.

2. The term 'the Hidden Treasure' refers to the prophet's well-known report of God as saying: 'I was a Hidden Treasure but unrecognized. I loved to be recognized, so I created the creatures and I made Myself recognized to them, so they recognized Me.' This statement contains one of the most influential ideas in the Sufi tradition in the entire Islamic world. See William Chittick, *Sufism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Chap. 6.

3. It should be noted here that what is meant by 'essence' (*dhat*) is the bearer of essential attributes, and not some set of God's essential properties, which sometimes is what is meant in analytic philosophy of religion by the nature of God. By essence, Ibn 'Arabi means the ultimate kernel of pure being or divinity that is unknowable and totally and utterly hidden to all things.

4. Gerald Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood in the Fullness of Time* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 274. He explains that for Ibn 'Arabi 'Divine essence is the non-manifest, the be-ness of the transsubjective Self' (229).

5. Seyyed Jalal al-din Ashtiani, *The Interpretation of Qaysari's Introduction to Fusus al-Hikam* (Qum: Islamic Propagation of the Islamic Seminary of Qum, 2000), 120–6.

Given that God's essence is unknowable, no knowledge of God is conceivable without appealing to divine self-disclosure and manifestation. If God in Himself cannot be sought, what are the seekers seeking? If He cannot be desired or found in His essence, then what do the believers believe and what do the desirers desire? Ibn 'Arabi answers: 'What the seekers seek and the desirers desire is only recognition of Him, witnessing of Him, or vision of Him. All of these are *from* Him. They are not He Himself.'⁶ In an interpretation of the Hadith of the Hidden Treasure he says:

According to the hadith, which is sound on the basis of unveiling but not affirmed by way of transmission from God's messenger, God said something whose meaning is this: 'I was a Treasure but was not known, so I loved to be known. Then I created the creatures and made Myself known to them, so they came to know Me.' Since He mentioned 'love', we come to know something of love's reality and its concomitants that the lover finds in himself. We have already explained that love attaches itself only to a non-existent thing whose *wujud* (existence) is correct, but which is non-existent in the state.

The cosmos is a newly arrived thing, while 'God was, and nothing was with Him'. He knew the cosmos from His knowledge of Himself, so He made nothing manifest in engendered existence save what He is in Himself. It is as if He were non-manifest and became manifest through the cosmos.⁷

In the above passage Ibn 'Arabi explains the idea that God was non-manifest and became manifest through the creation of the universe. I name this Akbarian⁸ principle – that 'we cannot know and recognize God unless He makes Himself known to

6. Ibn 'Arabi, *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya*, vol. II:663; translated and quoted by William Chittick in *Ibn 'Arabi, Heir to the Prophets* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 47.

7. Ibn 'Arabi, *Fut.*II:399; translated and quoted by William Chittick in *The Self-Disclosure of God* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1998), 70.

8. The term comes from regarding Ibn 'Arabi as the *Shaykh al-Akbar* (the greatest master).

us, and He does so by His self-disclosure' – the principle M, the principle of divine Manifestation.

M: God (the unknowable non-manifest) through His manifestation created a situation in which acquiring knowledge of God became possible.

According to this principle, the creatures, the whole universe and all things that have ever existed are the signs of God who has revealed and manifested Himself in order to be known. God reveals Himself in the universe, in the human self by creating them in His image, and also in Scripture by revealing many propositional truths. Nevertheless, while God is present in all of them, none of them is God, and they are just the signs of God and images of God. So, all creatures are at the same time showing the presence of God, and are the signs of the One (the One who is unique in His oneness) who is absolutely hidden in His essence.

William Chittick explains Ibn 'Arabi's idea of the presence of God in His creatures while He remains incomparable to them and absent from them as follows:

Ibn 'Arabi concludes the chapter on absence by addressing ... the more general issue of absence and presence as attributes of created things. Everything other than God, he tells us, is by necessity both absent from God and present with Him, because everything other than God is barred from God Himself by the utter inaccessibility of the Divine Essence, but, at the same time, immersed in *wujud* (existence), the Divine Presence, because there is nothing else. This is the Shaykh's most fundamental perspective on everything in the universe – each thing is an image. Each is God/not God, He/not He.⁹

Thus for Ibn 'Arabi the cosmos manifests the unknowable. In as much as God's essence is independent of the worlds, the creatures are nothing but *faqir* (needy and poor) entities. However, in as much as He creates them, and bestows His mercy

9. William Chittick, 'Presence with God', *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society (JMIAS)* 20 (1996), 24.

(by inspiration of His Merciful Breath) upon them, the creatures become such things that manifest His attributes. God is absent from us but presents His signs for us through revelation, in creation, in Scripture and in ourselves. For Ibn 'Arabi, everything (every creature other than God) is presenting God (everything in its existence depends on God) and at the same time is absent from God (God is transcendent and incomparable to everything).

Ibn 'Arabi writes:

There is no entity among all the entities whose property is to witness everything, such that it might not be described by absence. Since there is no entity that possesses the description of encompassing everything through presence with everything – for that is one of the specific characteristics of God – there is no escape in the cosmos from both absence and presence.¹⁰

Hence, while the cosmos presents God (as the sign of creative activity), God Himself is hidden. Everything presents the unknowable's self-disclosure. In other words, divine revelation is the source of knowledge of God. Once God, the transcendent, becomes manifest, a source for acquiring knowledge of Him has been created.

Another essential concept in Ibn 'Arabi's theory of manifestation is the concept of the hierarchy of divine manifestation. Given that God discloses Himself in the forms that are called creatures, some creatures *strongly* indicate divine manifestation while some *weakly* indicate divine manifestation. To the extent that a creature is more tangible and knowable by the knower's cognitive and perceptual faculties, the creature will indicate divine manifestation in a stronger sense because the manifestation, as was explained, is the source of acquiring knowledge of God. For example, material creatures in comparison to immaterial creatures are strong indicators of divine manifestation, and among material beings visible objects are stronger indicators of divine manifestation than invisible ones because they are easier

10. Ibn 'Arabi, *Fut.*II:543, trans. Chittick, 'Presence with God', *ibid.* 24–5.

to grasp and perceive (and so to be known). This means that the earth, the moon, the sun and the physical universe are stronger indicators of the manifestation of God than angels. William Chittick explains Ibn 'Arabi's view about the order of manifestation:

Looked at in terms of its overall structure, the cosmos can be divided into manifest and nonmanifest domains. Although the whole cosmos, including the spiritual world, is manifest in relation to the nonmanifest He-ness, some of its worlds are nonmanifest in relation to others and hence can be called nonmanifest in a relative sense. For example, the world of sprits and angels is nonmanifest in relation to the world of bodies.¹¹

Distinguishing between strong and weak indications of divine manifestation based on the hierarchy of divine manifestation, I can introduce another Akbarian principle, namely the principle of special divine manifestation for human beings, as follows:

H: The physical world and especially the earth (which is the homeland of conscious minds) is the strong indicator of the divine manifestation in which God has disclosed Himself in order to be known by human beings.

And on the other side of the spectrum:

H*: The immaterial world and the unseen world (*'alam al-ghayb*) are weak indicators of divine manifestation.

For us – human beings – the earth and the physical world as the strong indicators of divine manifestation, namely *the witnessed world*, are the media for relationship indirectly with God through His manifestation. In the Chapter of Isaac he says: 'there is no creature higher than material being',¹² or in the Chapter of Hud in his eccentric interpretation of the Quran's

11. Chittick, *Self-Disclosure of God*, 207.

12. Ibn 'Arabi, *Fusus al-hikam*, ed. M. Movahhed, S. Movahhed, 364 (translation is mine).

verse (8:32) he says that God veils Himself behind material beings and because of that He admires them.¹³

Now a significant question arises: if God's signs are available in His manifestation through His creation, then why are there so many non-resistant non-believers (throughout the history of the world) who have had the capability to understand the signs of God but do not realize them as such? To answer this question I shall explain Ibn 'Arabi's theory of veils, in which he describes how there is no escape in the cosmos from both hiddenness and manifestation.

IBN 'ARABI'S THEORY OF VEILS

Divine hiddenness for Ibn 'Arabi has two faces. One, as mentioned above, is the absence, unknowability and hiddenness of God's essence. However, God becomes manifest and creates via self-disclosure. In addition, Ibn 'Arabi points to another face of divine hiddenness which he names the hiddenness of God who manifests, the silence of God who speaks and the absence of God who is present. The central theme is that God becomes hidden by His manifestation. Although the universe and all creatures are signs of God, in as much as they manifest God's attributes they veil God because they show themselves rather than God. God has manifested to be known, but His manifestation is the veil of His face and hides Him. This is a paradox of divine manifestation, which seems to be the source of the problem of divine hiddenness. Of course the non-believers still can be accused of culpability in not trying hard enough to unveil the veils of divine manifestation in His creation and to reach knowledge of God by following His signs, but the significance of Ibn 'Arabi's theory of veils is that it shows us why we human beings should go through the path of unveiling and why belief in God and knowledge of God is not immediate for us (in this world).

The universe and all things within it are manifestations of God's glory and power and beauty. They are signs of God. Every

13. *Ibid.*, 508–9.

creature on the one hand shows the glory and power of God – the creator – and on the other hand shows its dependence on and requirement for God's grace. Because of the former property they can be considered as signs of God the creator, and based on the latter kind of property they are signs of their *faqr* (poorness), indigence. However, the problem of veil as Ibn 'Arabi explains is yet more profound. In Ibn 'Arabi's terminology the creatures, except for their relation to God and their being signs of God, are no-thing. The created things then are both existent and *non-existent*. The point is not only that they do not exist because they are nothing but the sign of God; they do not exist because to be a creature is to be a non-existent who seeks to receive the attention of that which will enable it to become existent. Ibn 'Arabi not only holds that the creatures are non-existent because their reality continuously depends on God's reality, but he points out that the creation is a bestowal of *existence*, light and love to non-existing entities continuously in an unrepeated unique manner. According to Ibn 'Arabi, the created thing in itself is non-existent, so it can be the object of God's bestowal and mercy constantly and forever. For God as *perfect being* lacks non-existence and so loves this non-existence. One loves what one lacks. So, God, absolute existence, loves non-existence and this love is the relation which is named creation. Ibn 'Arabi says, 'as long as there is love, one cannot conceive of the existence of the created thing along with it, so the created thing never comes into existence.'¹⁴

Therefore all things in themselves as creatures are the signs of richness (because of their dependence on God as the creator) and poverty (because of their own poorness and indigence toward God). If they were being witnessed in themselves they could not be the sign of God, for in themselves they are non-existent and so are the veils of existence. Hence the creatures are the veils of God. In other words, for the inhabitants of the manifest world, God is hidden.

14. *Fut. II:113:29; Heir to the Prophets, 42.*

The fact that all the cosmos is the veil of God who is manifest can also be explained in terms of the principle that God alone is the necessary being, and everything other than God is contingent (*mumkin*).¹⁵ Contingency, traditionally understood, is to be between existence and non-existence. All things (non-impossible entities) other than the necessary existent are contingent existence. So, in themselves they are non-existent things that have the potentiality, or in Ibn 'Arabi's words the desire, to have existence. All contingent things then are veils of sheer and real *existence* because they stand in front of real existence as its manifestation, but do not have its essential property, that is of being necessary existence. But since they are veils, this is all they could be. 'Were the veils to be lifted from possible (contingent) things', Ibn 'Arabi says, 'possibility (i.e. contingency) would be lifted.'¹⁶ All contingent beings, which were created, are nothing but incomprehensible vast and infinite levels of veils over the face of the real *existence*. God knows Himself but He manifests through creation for the sake of being known by us – mundane human beings and inhabitants of the earth who come to see His glory and to know Him.¹⁷ Ibn 'Arabi summarizes all of the above discussions in these words: 'There is no veil and there is no curtain [if there were no creation]. Nothing hides Him but His manifestation.'¹⁸

To sum up, the Akbarian theory of veils leads to the following statement:

15. Chittick, *Sufism*, 190.

16. Ibn 'Arabi, *Fut.III:276*, trans. Chittick, *Sufism* 191.

17. Shams Maghrebi, as one of the followers of the Akbarian Sufi tradition and a Persian poet, goes one step further than Ibn 'Arabi and thinks that God sees the world through our eyes. For him not only does God create and manifest for us to come to know Him or manifest to be known by others, but He also manifests to know His own glory and beauty, and not only to know His beauty but to know His beauty through our eyes. Thus he asks God: 'If You see Your beauty through my eyes, then how I myself cannot see Your hidden face?' (Sonnet 161). See his poems in *Shams Maghrebi, Divan*, ed. Abu Taleb Mir Abedini (Tehran: Amirkabir, 1382/2002).

18. Ibn 'Arabi, *Fut.III:276*, trans. Chittick, *Sufism* 191.

V: Divine manifestations are veils of God, in as much as they have been seen (known) independently of God.

And by distinguishing the worlds as strong and weak indicators of divine manifestation and adding this notion to V we can conclude:

V*: The stronger an indicator of divine manifestation a world is, the darker the veil of God's appearance it consists of.¹⁹

Moreover, from H we can conclude that the earth – the situation in which we human beings live – is a strong indicator of divine manifestation.²⁰ From conjunction of V* and H we will infer that the earth is the world containing a high degree of divine hiddenness, because it is replete with so many veils of God, and so:

K: Although we human beings live in the situation that knowledge of God (perceiving God) through strong indicators of divine manifestation is possible; only through unveiling the dark and light veils we can reach the virtuous knowledge of God.

In the same vein we can conclude from H* and V* that:

K*: In the immaterial world and the unseen world (*'alam al-ghayb*) only the weak indicators of divine manifestation are available²¹ so

19. The notions of the dark and light veil were used frequently by Ibn 'Arabi. In summary, to see or to desire material objects, or mundane desideratum, independent of God is called the dark veil; while to see or to desire something like science or the otherworldly better life, or even desiring to be nearer to God, are examples of light veils. See Ibn 'Arabi, *Risālat al-Hujub* (Treatise on veils), Persian translation by G. Saidi (Tehran: Sokhan, 2007).

20. One of the central notions in Ibn 'Arabi's theosophy regarding human beings is the notion of being the Caliph (the successor) of God. The point is that God has decided to put His Caliph in the earth: 'I am going to place in the earth a Caliph' (Q.2:30), and of course not in heaven. Based on the discussion above it seems that the earth (the physical and the witnessed world) is the world where God is so hidden that such a position as His successor can be defined.

21. According to the Quran (2:30–3), Adam knew something that

the problem of divine hiddenness (at least as it is for us) vanishes, and the inhabitants of such a world can have knowledge of God through God's appeared presence.

According to the Hadith of the Hidden Treasure, which was cited frequently by Ibn 'Arabi, God loves us and creates us to come to know Him. We human beings are the best creatures that were created in God's image. He has manifested and has shown us His face to the extent that we through our ordinary faculties of sense perception can perceive His signs and manifestation in the physical world. God loves us and because of that manifests Himself for us to know Him. He gives us the possibility to know Him to the extent that no angel could know what we are capable of knowing. According to the Quran, Adam is the teacher of the angels:

Behold thy Lord said to the angels: 'I will create a Successor (Caliph) on earth.' They said 'Wilt thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? Whilst we do celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy [name]?' He said: 'I know what ye know not' (30). And He taught Adam the names of all things; then He placed them before the angels and said: 'Tell Me the names of these if ye are right' (31). They said: 'Glory to Thee: of knowledge we have none, save that Thou hast taught us: in truth it is Thou who art perfect in knowledge and wisdom' (32). He said: 'O Adam! tell them their names.' When he had told them their names, Allah said: 'Did I not tell you that I know the secrets of heaven and earth, and I know what ye reveal and what ye conceal?'²²

Adam who was created from the soil, a finite mundane being, knows the names of all things, for he is living in the world of

angels did not know, and so He was able to educate them. It seems that the inhabitants of the earth can acquire a degree of knowledge of God that even angels, the inhabitants of the unseen world, cannot. There seems to be a trade off between the degree of divine hiddenness we face and the degree of knowledge of God we can acquire in a possible world.

22. Q.2:29-33.

manifestation. However, because of the nature of divine manifestation that can be seen independently of God and thus as the veil of God, we cannot expect a normal human being to acquire knowledge of God just by looking at God's creatures. This seems to be the reason why there are non-resistant non-believers in this world. If through God's guidance you succeed in passing through one veil, you will only reach another veil. Nevertheless, as you are, the veil remains, and in the end you should come out of the way and become annihilated to see God's face and be in union with Him.²³

Here one may ask: if we are so besieged by veils of divine manifestation then how can we acquire knowledge of God in this world? Ibn 'Arabi's answer is to go through the way of unveiling by faith that is *the path of love*. Although Ibn 'Arabi says that ordinary people have no access to the non-manifest world (the immaterial and unseen world), he maintains that God may appear to the consciousness of some of His friends (the Folk of God) who may be given visions of the hidden worlds. Not everyone can see God in this world²⁴ – only the Folk of God, who are precisely those to whom He has given the preparedness to see, albeit that this preparedness is a matter of degree. In as much as people commit themselves to be faithful in God and try to unveil the curtains of divine manifestation by seeing the cosmos as His creation, they will recognize God's presence. However, in as much as they see the world independent of God, they go astray and they have a sense/feeling of God's hiddenness.²⁵

23. Referring to the verse of *Miqat* (Q.7:142–4), Ibn 'Arabi interprets the collapse of the mountain as the annihilation of Moses' self as a precursor of a vision of God. See Chittick, *Self-Disclosure of God*, 208–10.

24. At the resurrection there would be no veil and no divine hiddenness, because we will be in the unseen and non-manifest world in which God is not hidden. Death is the natural way to lift the veils of God, and to reach the world of the non-manifest, while Gnosticism is the way for us in this world to see His face, and to overcome the hiddenness.

25. Faith, which includes trust and commitment in God, seems to be the first step we may choose to overcome the uncertainty of divine hiddenness. For more about the nature of faith, see Richard Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), Chap. 4.

It seems noteworthy that vision of God, even for gnostics in their mystical experiences, is through veils. Nevertheless, although the veils are infinite and inescapable, the light of God's guidance allows the seeker to throw aside the light and dark veils one by one by following His prophets' guidance. 'If you love God then follow me [as the messenger of God], then God will love you and forgive you your faults, and God is Forgiving [and] Merciful.'²⁶ The veils are infinite but the spiritual itinerant should take this long journey step by step, following God's guidance.

According to Ibn 'Arabi, the veils are necessary for the divine manifestation that itself is necessary to give us the opportunity to acquire knowledge of God to the extent that the inhabitants of the unseen world could not acquire. As much as God is manifest to be known by us, the human beings, it is possible for us not to recognize His intimacy and closeness and so become more perplexed regarding His existence. God manifests through all of His creatures in the world, and in addition to this many of us have access to His propositional revelation in Scripture. We can see His signs, in the world and in the Scripture, and at the same time if we see the world as a self-regulating object it becomes a veil. So we live in a paradoxical and perplexing situation. And it is an inescapable situation. Of course, God helps us and guides us in throwing the veils aside as much as possible if we try to follow His messengers and friends faithfully.

One may ask (the second main question) why many people have not received God's message and guidance during their this-worldly life. Why has the merciful and benevolent God not sent His messenger to them to inform them how they could unveil the veils? Why does God not appear in this world (considering the fact that His manifestation through His creatures does not provide sufficient evidence of His existence) to the extent that He can be perceived by all normal non-resistant human beings? Ibn 'Arabi's answer is that God, the benevolent, the merciful, gives us the opportunity to acquire knowledge of Him and become His lovers by seeing His manifestation. However,

26. Q.3:31.

reaching such a state of knowledge requires unveiling the veils of creation which are His manifestation. So it is our destiny to live in a world in which God is hidden to the extent that we become perplexed about His existence and His attributes. But if we choose to trust in the *trustworthy* God in this world, then God will unveil the veils for us in this world and also in another world, and we will have vision of God and reach union with God there, which is the goal of humanity. God expects us to trust in Him and to perform morally good actions in this world. This is enough for our salvation. And indeed, it is possible for everyone in this world to be so (to trust in God). In addition, God opens the door of Gnosticism for us if we desire to see Him in this world, before death.²⁷

REJOINDER TO THE ARGUMENT FROM DIVINE HIDDENNESS

Schellenberg, a famous atheist, thinks that, just as we have elementary forms of awareness of the external world or other minds, if God exists we should have the capability to see the cosmos as the sign of God, the creator, and should easily come to believe that He exists and so come to a love relationship with Him. Schellenberg thinks that life would be richer and more valuable if the benevolent God had given us the gift of personal relationship with Him easily, just by our trying. It is evident that Schellenberg's expectation of God is not realized in this world. The only thing that is available for all of us is the possibility of trust in God and to begin the long journey toward union with God. But why?

Many theologians and philosophers have responded to this sort of expectation of God in the literature.²⁸ They mainly propose that the perfectly loving and benevolent God has an (or

27. For Ibn 'Arabi's ideas in this regard, see Chittick, *Self-Disclosure of God*, 212–16.

28. For a list of typical responses, see Daniel Howard-Snyder, 'Hiddenness of God', *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2nd edn (New York: MacMillan 2006).

some) outweighing good reason(s) for not realizing such a world that Schellenberg expects. Schellenberg sums up his answer to all of these types of responses and says that:

Infinite resourcefulness, as even we finite beings can see, would provide many ways for a perfectly loving God to make explicit divine-creature relationship a genuine possibility at all times without failing to meet the dominant concern of any of the reasons for God to remain hidden that have been advanced, or seem likely to be advanced. Moral freedom, serious responsibility (both intellectual and non-intellectual), the cultivation of character, a choice of destiny, cooperation with others, spiritually efficacious revelation of moral/spiritual deficiencies, nurturance of a deeper spiritual maturity, occasions for meaningful investigation and intellectual debate – all these goods and many more can be provided within the context of a relationship-conducive set of conditions, with creatures left free to decide how to respond to God. If God exists, then there must at any stages along the way be literally an infinite number of ways of developing in relationship with God that God could facilitate, despite obstacles to continuing relationship of the sort to which reasons for hiddenness often make reference.²⁹

He claims that none of the good reasons we may know of (or may not know of) that justifies God's reason for permitting His hiddenness is acceptable, because God, the omnipotent, can accommodate both the goods in reciprocal relationship and any other suggested goods which have ever been proposed that justify divine hiddenness.

I think that Ibn 'Arabi's answer to these types of questions surpasses all of the theological and philosophical answers which have ever been proposed. The suggestion is that there are some goods – in fact, exactly those goods that Schellenberg himself counts as the value-givers and enhancers of life – that cannot possibly be obtained without divine manifestation (in creation). Goods like 'experience of nature as the creature of God; of nature as deeply reflecting the unsurpassable

29. Schellenberg, *Wisdom to Doubt*, 216.

great value existing in God; of the value thus received as the gift of God; and of God without intermediary', are exactly the goods that require divine manifestation and relationship with God through manifestation. Without divine manifestation there would be no knower to experience the glory of God and no material to be known and experienced as the sign of God. However, as explained, there would be no divine manifestation without divine hiddenness. As much as God is manifest to be known, He hides by the veils of manifestation. So, these goods that Schellenberg expects God to provide for mankind have already been provided, and there could not be any way to be more accessible.

Schellenberg may continue to place expectations on God, asking why, if earthly life requires divine hiddenness, has God not created us as inhabitants of the unseen world from the first moment? Then we could have been in a direct relationship with God and all would be living in love and union with God.

Of course it was possible for God to create beings that are in direct relationship with Him (and in fact according to Islamic and Christian theology there are angels that have such a direct relationship with God and God's existence is apparent for them). Perhaps Schellenberg expects God to create him in an angelic form too. This is a fine expectation. However I think that the loving God creates us in a form in which we have the ability to acquire the capability to live a better life than angels. We can know God more profoundly than the angels do and we can love God faithfully, all of which requires divine manifestation and divine hiddenness.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have explained some of the main principles of Ibn 'Arabi's account of divine hiddenness. I have introduced three theories: the theory of divine manifestation, the theory of the hierarchy of manifestation and the theory of veils. From the theory of divine manifestation I concluded principle M, that God (in His essence the unknowable non-manifest) through His manifestation as creation has created a situation in which

acquiring profound knowledge of Him has become possible. M refers to the Sufis' thought that God self-disclosed through creation in order to be known. And so each world that is more visible and knowable is the stronger indicator of divine manifestation. The central theme of the theory of hierarchy then leads to principle H, that the physical world and especially the earth are strong indicators of divine manifestation in which God has disclosed to be known. However, the theory of veils shows us that divine manifestations are themselves veils of God, in as much as they have been seen (or desired) independently of God. This is what I named principle V. From M, H and V, I concluded that God has manifested Himself through creation maximally (or optimally) in the earth in order to be known by us – human beings. But necessarily His manifestation is His veil. So I conclude principle K: that we human beings live in the situation in which knowledge of God (perceiving God) through strong indicators of divine manifestation is possible; but only through unveiling the dark and light veils can we reach the virtuous knowledge of God.

I have inferred two things from K, one concerning the problem of divine hiddenness, and the other responding to the argument from divine hiddenness.

First, from K I concluded that the source of the problem of divine hiddenness is rooted in the fact that God discloses Himself to be known and then to be loved. To be the Beloved, God has created a creature that has the capability to be the lover. And the loving God manifests Himself maximally for His best creature. He shows her all of His knowable signs. 'And He taught Adam the names of all things.'³⁰ He has created the whole cosmos for the sake of her. As the Quran says:

See you not (O men) that Allah has subjected for you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth, and has completed and perfected His Graces upon you, (both) apparent and hidden; Yet of mankind is he who disputes about Allah without knowledge or guidance or a Book giving light!³¹

30. Q.2:30.

31. Q.31:19.

If, as we presupposed in this discussion, the world in which the human lives is God's creation, then it contains signs of God. But divine manifestation is the veil of His face. He expects human beings to come to know Him and love Him through seeing His signs in the world. The Beloved is hidden because He manifests. But the poor human being looks at the signs of the Beloved as if they were something independent of God. God has shown His signs and wonders during the history of mankind and sent several prophets and messengers to remind us of our purpose and the meaning of life. But we refused to accept it. We have forgotten ourselves, who we are and why we are here. This forgetfulness and withdrawal from seeing God's manifestation in His creation as the sign of God seems to be the root of the *problem* of divine hiddenness.

Second, via K, I have shown that Schellenberg's expectation of God to establish a direct reciprocal relationship with human beings is baseless. This is for two reasons: first, as many have suggested in the literature, it is possible for God to have a justifying good reason to permit His hiddenness (and not to appear, that is, not show Himself in the manner of mystical or prophetic perception for all of us). Perhaps God has a purpose for the creation of mankind, as Sufis suggest that human beings become His lovers through traveling the path of perfection with its difficulties, tests, risks and hazards. This way is always open for all of us. Second, it is impossible to create human beings with their natural and phenomenal conditions without divine hiddenness because divine hiddenness is a necessary condition of divine manifestation. And the human being who lives in the earth is necessarily besieged with veils, which she herself should unveil to reach the perfection, which God expects of her and for which He created her. For those who try to find God and to all those capable of relationship with Him in this world, God will make Himself evident at some time or other.³²

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