

## Filosofija ir religija

### AT-TASAWWUF AND NEOPLATONIC PHILOSOPHY

#### Algis Uždavinyš

Institute of Culture, Philosophy and Art

*Despite the clear evidence that Sufism derived from the Qur'an, or rather interpretations of the selected Qur'anic verses and sayings of the Prophet, its metaphysical and spiritual dimensions are closely tied with the late Hellenic philosophy and especially Neoplatonism. The Sufi sages, such as Dhu'l-Nun al-Misri, Ibn 'Arabi, Shabistari, Suhrawardi and others, accepted, transformed and adapted to the Islamic context many ideas of metaphysics and spiritual psychology which originated in the Middle Platonic and Neoplatonic milieu. Alexander of Aphrodisias, Numenius, Plotinus, Iamblichus, Syrianus, Proclus or Damascius as philosophers under their own proper names are almost unknown to the Muslims and the Middle Platonic and Neoplatonic doctrines are often presented under the name of Aristotle. However, the anonymous Neoplatonic ideas are widely used, though sometimes they may be understood just as the manifestations of the same transcendental archetypes.*

'He lived alone in a very small house where he led truly a solitary life... He lived, essentially, in prayer, and dressed as a common man, he made the rounds of sacred places... But most often, he spent his time at home, leading not a human life, but an absolutely divine one, while he continually proffered prayers, praises of divine marvels... But on the whole he pondered in silence. He was endlessly in pursuit of the truth and he was a natural contemplator. He refused to bother himself with the more technical points of philosophy, but concerned himself with broader questions leading the state of divine possession. That was why he owned and read practically nothing but Orpheus'.

Damascius' testimony about Sarapion, the Egyptian friend of his master Isidore

'Now these were in fact the conditions under which the people of the Bench (*suffah*) lived, in the time of the prophet (God's blessing and peace be upon him.): for they were strangers, poor, exiles, having been driven out of their abodes and possessions. Abu Hurayah and Fudalah ibn `Ubayd described them as follows: "They faint of hunger, so that the Bedouins suppose them to be mad". Their clothing was of wool (*suf*), so that when any of them sweated, they gave off an odour like that of a sheep caught in the rain'.

Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi, *Kitab al-Ta'arruf li-madhhab at-tasawwuf*

## Quranic Sufism and Philosophy as Divine Mysteries

'For there in truth, as those who understand mysteries say, "Many carry the thyrsus, few are Bacchantes", according to Plato (*Phaed.* 69c)<sup>1</sup>. Mohammad Lahiji (d. 1506 A.D.), who lived as far as two thousand years after Plato, in his *Commentary on the Garden of Mysteries* of Shabistari asserted almost the same: 'Many are the wayfarers, the wayknowers, the wayseers few'<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, not many among us in our post-Edenic state can drink from ocean-like goblets of mystical illumination (*tajalli*) along with Ruzbehan Baqli, or realize the purity of creative intuition (*dhauq*) and experience the radiance of contemplative vision<sup>3</sup> Only minority can open the eye of the Heart and mount to the testimony of real things<sup>4</sup>. The initial *paradeigma* and the ultimate goal of every traditional civilization is the transcendental Principle, or God, despite the providential disparities and different levels of piety and understanding even among the adherents of a single orthodox religion or philosophy.

It is obvious that for the origins of Sufism one needs to look no further than the *Qur'an* and the Traditions in order to find the foundations of Sufi teaching, practice and inspiration. *Tasawwuf* as *haqiqah* represents *ihsan* – the inner dimension of Islam, though its customary definition is *tariqah* – the spiritual path, or ascent (*iman*), based on *shari'ah*. 'In essence it is an attribute of God, but by image it is an attribute of man', according to al-Junayd. Its main subject is the spiritual *mi'raj* while aspiring not only to restore the "original disposition" of man (*al-fitrah*), but also to realize the mystical union: a voluntary return to God (*ma'ad*). By the constant remembering of God the aspirant must acquire the qualification of sainthood and become a real servant of God as *wali haqq Allah*, or *wali Allah haqqan*, among "those who are close" (*muqarrabun*) to Allah<sup>5</sup>. It is necessary to open the "eye of certitude" (*'ayn al-yaqin*), taking to the extinction (*fana'*) of the knower in the Known – to the state of "black light" – just before *fana'* turns into *baqa'*. 'This blackness in reality is the very light of the Absolute-us-such. In the midst of this darkness there is hidden the water of life', says the Persian poet (Shabistari,

<sup>1</sup> (Plat. *Phaedo* 69c); cf. the Neoplatonic commentary on Dionysus and the Titans: Damascius *In Phaed.* I, 170, Westerink, 102.

<sup>2</sup> Leonard Lewisohn, *Shabestari's Garden of Mysteries. The Aesthetics and Hermeneutics of Sufi Poetry*. Temenos 10, London, 1989, 198.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Ruzbehan al-Baqli *Mashrab al-arwah (The Fount of Spirits)*.

<sup>4</sup> The experience of union with the divine Intellect is compared with drunkenness produced by nectar in Plotinus. It transcends the duality of consciousness and consists of a vision without discursivity of any kind, the vision of an internal light. As Pierre Hadot pointed out, Plotinus 'insists on the fact that this contemplation of the intelligible world is not the vision of a spectacle external to the soul (as the myth in the *Phaedrus* might lead us to expect), but that it is internal to the soul, which has become identical with the divine Intellect' (P. Hadot, *Plotinus and Porphyry*, – Classical Mediterranean Spirituality, ed. by A. H. Armstrong, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1986, 239). P. Merlan argues that in Averroes and Ibn Bagga the *unio mystica* takes place with what Plotinus would call the second Hypostasis. This kind of absorption is different from the absorption into the Ineffable One, although what is common to both kinds of ecstasy is loss of personality (P. Merlan, *Monopsychism, Mysticism, Metaconsciousness. Problems of the soul in the Neoplatonic and Neoplatonic Tradition*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1963, 20–21). *Tawhid* is the *henosis*

*Gulshan-i Raz*, V.72). What is subjectively experienced as the black light corresponds to what is known ontologically as the stage of “oneness”(ahadiyah).

For the Hellenic philosophers and theurgists such as Plotinus, Iamblichus, Syrianus and Proclus (cf. Damascius *In Phaed.* I, 172) to open such an eye is to attain likeness (*homoiosis*) to God as far as possible. Philosophy in the ancient world and above all the late Platonic philosophy was a spiritual and contemplative way of life leading to enlightenment and liberation, to a transforming wisdom<sup>6</sup>. It was a spiritual way properly and intrinsically intellectual, as the Neoplatonic *Nous* covers all that we mean by both “spirit” and “intellect”. By the way, one should remember that the term “Neoplatonism” appeared only in the middle of the eighteenth century. Therefore if we cannot reject this term while speaking of the Plotinian and post-Plotinian hermeneutical development of Platonism, in fact it is as illogical as to speak of Neosufism of Ibn ‘Arabi in comparison with sufism of Rabi’ah al’Adawiyyah or Dhu’l-Nun al-Misri. Also it is indispensable to know that the “remembrance of God” as a perpetual reference to God at each instance of life (*anamnesis*, *dhikr*) was of the utmost importance for the Hellenic philosophy as a means of spiritual death (close to Sufi *fana’*) and the ascent of the soul (*mi’raj*). Proclus viewed the philosophy of Plato as an “illumination”<sup>7</sup>, “mystagogy”, and “initiation” into holy mysteries themselves, ‘raised up in purity onto a sacred pedestal and installed, for eternity, in the home of the gods on High’ (*In Plat. Theol.* I.1). He sought to unify the whole of Greek philosophy by presenting it as a continuous clarification of divine revelation. Plato himself in *Symposium* (210a) and *Phaedrus* (250b) had already presented philosophy on the model of the Eleusinian Mysteries. Even the word *mustikos* designates nothing but “secret visions” (*epopteia*) of the initiate or philosopher on the arrival at the summit of his interior ascent (Proclus *In Plat. Theol.* 3.18). ‘The object of the initiatory rites’, says Damascius, ‘is to take souls back to a final destination, which was also the starting-point from which they first set out on their downward journey, and where Dionysus gave them being, seated on his father’s throne, that is to say, firmly established in the integral Zeusian life. It follows necessarily that the initiate will “live with the Gods” in accordance with the design of the initiating Gods’ (Damascius *In Phaed.* I, 168).

### Spiritual Exercises and Experience of the Divine

The Gods in Hellenic Neoplatonism are equivalent to the Divine Names in Islam, therefore no wonder that Philo of Alexandria identified the Stoic *logoi* with the angels (αγγελοι). In Neoplatonism and Sufi theosophy they are Forms of pure and radiant Light whose nature is both passive and active, receptive and productive. They are the mediating beings that philosophers call intelligences (*‘uqul*) and that religious vocabulary designates as *mala’ikah*. To live in accordance with νοϋς includes the experiential union with the supreme Good, the seminal

<sup>6</sup> Cf. P. Hadot, „Exercices spirituels et philosophie Antique“, *Etudes Augustiniennes*, Paris, 1987.

<sup>7</sup> Plato’s philosophy is an illumination ‘according to the beneficent purpose of the higher powers, which to the souls that haunt generation, in so far as it is lawful for them to enjoy blessings so high and great, revealed therein their secret intelligence and the truth which is as old as the universe’ (Proclus *In Plat. Theol.* I.1).

“power of all things” (*dunamis panton*: Plotinus *Enn.* III.8.10)<sup>8</sup>. In the late Platonic philosophy the surest means of attaining union with god (or Divine Name) was theurgy, regarded as the key to salvation. As Iamblichus emphasized in *De mysteriis*, it is not thought that links the theurgist to the gods (=angels or henads). The theurgic union is attained only by ‘the perfective operation of the unspeakable acts (*erga*) correctly performed, acts which are beyond all understanding; and on the power of the unutterable symbols which are intelligible only to the gods’ (*De myst.* II.11.96–97)<sup>9</sup>.

The spiritual ascent is based on tasting (*dhauq*). The *wahdat al-wujud* doctrine in Islam is a rational reconstruction of an original metaphysical vision. The problem of *wujud*, according to T. Izutsu, was from the very beginning of the history of Islamic philosophy the metaphysical problem inherited from the tradition of Hellenic philosophy<sup>10</sup>. Therefore even such apparently scholastic philosopher as Proclus, who produced the “scientific theology” from the negations of the first Hypothesis of Plato’s *Parmenides*, interpreted as “a theological hymn in honor of the One”<sup>11</sup> (*In Parm.* 7.1191.34–35), ‘used to experience a Dionysiac ecstasy for the first principles and to contemplate face to face the truly blessed visions of the Beyond’ (Marinus *Vita Procli*, 22). The spirit of Platonism reveals itself precisely in making knowledge into a spiritual exercise. In order to know, one must transform oneself. The term “exercise” corresponds to the Greek terms *askesis*, *melete*, *meditatio*, and *prosoche*, “attention”. The last one is equivalent to the continuous exercise of the presence of God (*dhikr*). Therefore, according to Porphyry: ‘Let God be present as overseer and guardian of every action, deed and word’ (*Ad Marcel.* 12). Similarly, *tasawwuf* is to be with God without attachment to ought else’, according to al-Qushayri. The Sufis are ‘men whom neither trading nor selling diverts from the remembrance of God’ (*dhikr Allah: Qur’an*, XXIV. 37).

The Procline triad of faith, truth and love (*pistis – aletheia – eros*) regards *pistis* as beyond rational knowledge and itself “without any otherness”. *Pistis* (*tasdiq*, root *s-d-q*) grounds all existence in the One, while *aletheia* is treated as the foundation of the visibility or illumination of all spheres of reality, and *eros* has the function ‘to bring everything back to the divine beauty’ (*In Alcib.* 51.15ff). This erotic yearning performs anagogic function in the same way as a mad love which is one of the elements that makes up *tasawwuf*, according to Jalal al-din Rumi. It enables to see “the mystery of Divine self-manifestations” (*sirr-e tajalliyat*) or to see all things in everything<sup>12</sup>. Plotinus, as if anticipating Sufi metaphors, uses the union of lovers as a symbol

<sup>8</sup> Though Plotinus insists that purification involves a rigorous intellectual training, he also makes clear that the philosopher’s aim is to transcend abstract formulae and to come to see Intelligence ‘as though it were an object of sense’ (*Enn.* VI.9.5). We are not confined to images of the Intelligible world and the soul is able to overcome attachments to her separate individuality and realise her inner identity with the whole Intelligible world (*Enn.* VI.5.12). There remains the final return to the One, as R. T. Wallis pointed out (*Neoplatonism*, with a Foreword and bibliography by Lloyd P. Gerson, Gerald Duckworth, London, 1995, 86).

<sup>9</sup> Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, I.12.42.

<sup>10</sup> Toshihiko Izutsu, *Creation and the Timeless Order of Things. Essays in Islamic Philosophy*, White Cloud Press, Ashland, Oregon, 1994, 70.

<sup>11</sup> The term “One” connotes strictly only negation of plurality; hence the Pythagoreans were right to name the One Apollo (on the etymology *a*=not, *polla*=many; Plot. *Enn.* V.50b.26–28).

<sup>12</sup> ‘We are each of us an intelligible cosmos’ (*Enn.* III.4.3.22). This statement was not accepted by other Neoplatonists without reservations. *Nous* and the primary Being may be considered as the universe of interpenetrating spiritual beings, each containing all the others organically united in contemplation.

of the soul's union with the One, thus emphasizing the necessity of the real experience in its highest sense. Certain scholars suppose that the concept of *dhauq* as heart-savour is originally Peripatetic. The activity of perception or sensation in Greek is *aisthesis* which means at root "taking in" and "breathing in". According to L. Lewisohn, this archetypal psychology based on aesthetics of the heart was picked up by Avicenna and then passed into Sufi theosophy<sup>13</sup>. While discussing the symbolic meaning of the Heart as "the throne of the Intellect" and the awakening of a "vertical" consciousness which is what the Sufis call *dhauq* (literally "taste" as a direct experience), Martin Lings pointed out that in connection with one of the Prophet's mystical visions the *Qur'an* says it was his Heart which *saw* (LIII, 11)<sup>14</sup>. Sufism as the Islamic way of transcending indirect mental knowledge and one's earthly self is "a reality without a name" (Hujwiri). It is rooted in the first generation of Islam and can be traced back to the pre-Islamic spirituality of *Hunafa*.

### Hellenic Imprint on Islamic Thought

The controversy among scholars regarding the Hellenic heritage and its imprint on Islamic thought is ardent and really surprising. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the narrow Hellenocentric view prevailed, despite its shortcomings not only in respect of Islamic civilization, but also regarding Greek spirituality and traditional metaphysics in general. A large number of European scholars (among them pious Lutheran theologians as well as those who forced Plato's thought into Kantian categories) used to speak about Neoplatonism as the "pseudo-Platonism", heavily stressing the Oriental element in it and its "essentially un-Platonic character". At the same time they rejected it as "eclecticism", like many modern scholars pretending to understand Plato better than the latter understood himself.

Now another attitude strongly prevails which is attested by M. Chodkiewicz. Despite 'the earlier or later borrowings by Islam of vocabulary and conceptual tools from various religious heritages that it took under its wing', he finds 'these historical explanations unacceptable, because they end by denying the specificity and coherence of the spiritual experience of believers. Similar attempts have been made to prove that *tasawwuf* was merely a heterogenous collection of non-Islamic ideas and practices'<sup>15</sup>. Therefore S. H. Nasr is anxious to emphasize that 'usually in modern times' the teachings of Plotinus 'have been used to obliterate the significance and serious nature of the esoteric currents of the Islamic as well as Jewish and Christian traditions'<sup>16</sup>. This warning perhaps is turned against such scholars as I. Goldziher, who looked for traces of Neoplatonic and Gnostic influence in the texts relating to the *Nur muhammadi*<sup>17</sup>, or E. H. Whinfield, who maintained that the source of Sufi theology was

<sup>13</sup> L. Lewisohn, *ibid.*, 181.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century*. George Allen & Unwin, London, 1971, 40.

<sup>15</sup> Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints. Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn 'Arabi*, The Islamic Texts Society, Cambridge, 1993, 64.

<sup>16</sup> Introduction to *Lawa'ih* by Nur al-Din 'Abd al Rahman Jami, translated by E. H. Whinfield and Mirza Muhammad Kazvini, Royal Asiatic Society, London, 1978, xx.

<sup>17</sup> I. Goldziher, *Neoplatonische und Gnostische Elemente im Hadith - Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, 1909, XXII, 317-344.

Neoplatonism. E. H. Whinfield emphasized that 'Neoplatonism, mainly in the form expounded by Plotinus, was used by all the more learned Sufis to explain and justify the simple emotional sayings of the earlier Sufis. Henceforward Neoplatonism pervades all systematic treatises on Sufism and 'even the poets use the Greek terminology' (e.g. Hakim Sana'i)<sup>18</sup>. Similarly A. E. Affifi pointed out that 'on the philosophic side Ibn 'Arabi is chiefly Neoplatonic, and it seems clear <...> that it was Neoplatonism as understood by *Ikhwan al-Safa*.' Sometimes even 'the *Qur'an* is turned into Neoplatonism' by his spiritual hermeneutics<sup>19</sup>. Ibn 'Arabi's thinking is fundamentally Platonic, according to T. Burckhardt<sup>20</sup>, since 'in common with other Islamic thinkers of the time, whether philosophers or theologians he draws heavily for many of his terms and concepts on the Neoplatonic writers'<sup>21</sup>. Thus Ibn 'Arabi in his days was given the surname Ibn Aflatun, "Son of Plato". Meanwhile in the Suhrawardian theosophy of Light the entire Platonic theory of Ideas is interpreted in terms of Zoroastrian angelology, and the disciples of Suhrawardi (the *Ishraqiyun*) are designated as "Platonists" (*Ashab Aflatun*). R. T. Wallis underlines the Neoplatonic tendency of al-Ghazzali's theology, claiming that Neoplatonic ideas are unlikely to have been absent from Sufism before al-Ghazzali, but with him they become predominant<sup>22</sup>. Similarly Giorgio di Santillana declares: 'The conceptual elements of Islamic mysticism itself are to be found in Neoplatonic literature'. The growth of the imposing new metaphysics (due to the Greek Neoplatonic element) which took the name of Sufism, inspired the unitary vision of Justice, Harmony, and controlled Order extending to the whole cosmos and reflecting back on man's life<sup>23</sup>. Regarding the word "Sufi" as a transliteration of the Greek *sophos*, sage, it may be at least a sort of archetypal indication (in the light of metaphysical etymologies and their invisible connections), since 'that was too good to be true', according to H. Corbin<sup>24</sup>. Nevertheless even Biruni regarded it as a transcription of the Greek *sophos*, and *sufya*, sufism, is indeed the Arabic spelling of Hagia Sophia<sup>25</sup>.

### Traces of Perennial Wisdom

A couple of problems may be solved and controversies reconciled if one adheres to the principles of *sophia perennis* (presented by Frithjof Schuon), but at the same time refuses to neglect the historical realism altogether agreeing that our miserable life only partially reveals itself as

<sup>18</sup> *Lawa'ih*, Preface to the 1906 edition, p. x. E. H. Whinfield continues: 'The author of the *Dabistan* says that the belief of the pure Sufis is the same as that of the *Ishraqin* or Platonists, and also that Sufis were classed as orthodox (*Mutasharri*) and Platonists' (p. VIII). 'It was probably at about the end of the fifth century A. H. that Neoplatonic gnosis began to influence and modify Sufi doctrine. Up to that date the doctrine had been expounded in short precepts, parables (*mithal*) and similes like those in the Koran' (p. ix).

<sup>19</sup> A. E. Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyid Din-Ibnul 'Arabi*, Cambridge University Press, 1939, 185, 192.

<sup>20</sup> T. Burckhardt *Preface to The Bezels of Wisdom* by Ibn al-'Arabi, transl. by R. W. J. Austine, Paulist Press, 1980, xiii.

<sup>21</sup> R. W. J. Austine, *Introduction*, *ibid.*, 22.

<sup>22</sup> R. T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, 165.

<sup>23</sup> Giorgio di Santillana, *Preface to Seyyed Hosein Nasr, Science and Civilization in Islam*, New York, 1970, viii.

<sup>24</sup> Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, Bolingen Series XCI, Princeton University Press, 1969, 30.

<sup>25</sup> H. Corbin, *ibid.*, 30, 25.

a great ideal myth of a lofty celestial Dream. It means to recognize that so-called “borrowings” cannot abolish validity of the eternal truths, but are rather “human”, “normal”, and even indispensable issues in order to stimulate and elevate our creative thought. So-called “eclecticism” is not necessary tantamount to arbitrariness and silly imitation. The spiritual mandala of every civilization, though based on the initial revelations and coherent intrinsic geometry, nevertheless is woven of the innumerable interdependent threads. Humanity, as a whole, is a single living organism which on its highest summit tends towards the transcendental unity and the One that is ‘all things and none of them’ (Plot. *Enn.* V. 2.1.1–3). But if some reliable doctrines, some attractive ideas or methods which embody, develop or crystallize the initial intuitions and longings – as if reflecting a common celestial archetype – are learned (or simply “reminded”) from afar in the process of metaphysical *paideia*, the fact of a possibility to trace them back to certain “horizontal” sources (though never exclusively “horizontal”) cannot invalidate their wisdom or diminish the creative imagination and spiritual dignity of a recipient. ‘Seek for knowledge, even if you have to go as far as China’, according to the apocryphal *hadith* which occurs in Bayhaqi and suggests the symbolic meaning of China as the utmost limit.

This is plainly true regarding the great civilizations of the Mediterranean and the Middle East. They all are branches of the same primordial tree and teach us, albeit in diverse parlance, the same *al-hikmat al-‘atiqah*, or “ancient wisdom”, as Suhrawardi calls it, comparing to the Qur’anic wisdom in its perennial and esoteric sense. The problems regarding the “monotheistic” and “polytheistic” tensions can be explained without injuring either side, as F. Schuon shows in his still unsurpassed book on Sufism. However, the crucial misconceptions may arise if one is unable to comprehend that any doctrinal expressions in Sufism are not meant to be exhaustive, since ‘the Arab style favors synthetic and indirect figures of speech’, and ‘in reality a theoretical expression can only be an “allusive indication” (*isharah*) whose implications are limitless’<sup>26</sup>. But we cannot agree with W. H. T. Gairdner, who bewildered with an “Oriental hyperbole” exclaims: ‘Is not this true for *all* Sufi writers? Do we not take their language too seriously? If parades as scientific, it is really poetico-rhetorical’<sup>27</sup>.

The speech about *Deus innominatus* is not a casual design of pure fantasy, even if the limit of our discourse is “an impotent silence” praised by Damascius (*De principiis*, 1.7), since all forms of the true Being as necessary consequences derive from a single principle in conformity with certain general laws. The structure of the each level of reality mirrors the reality as a whole, and ‘in every letter a cosmos is concealed’, according to the Tabrizi Sufi Mohammad Maghribi, Shabistari’s literary heir. If one prefers the term “monotheism”, the final late Platonic synthesis must be described as monotheistic too, because as J. P. Kenney and A. H. Armstrong assert, ‘in it the whole of reality is derived from and totally dependent on the transcendent first principle, the One or Good, the creative source of all reality and value and the true ultimate goal of all desire’. Therefore the ‘Hellenic monotheism grew naturally out of

<sup>26</sup> Frithjof Schuon, *Sufism. Veil and Quintessence*, tr. by W. Stoddart, World Wisdom Books, 1981, 2, 5.

<sup>27</sup> W. H. T. Gairdner, *Introduction to Mishkat al-anwar* by al-Ghazzali, Kitab Bhavan, New Delhi, 1994, 40.

the vast complex of particular and local theophanies or experiences of the divine which were foundation of the archaic pieties of the peoples of the Mediterranean regions'<sup>28</sup>.

### Divine Irradiation and Spiritual Exegesis

The Prophet's nature (*khuluq*) is the *Qur'an*, according to 'Aisha. The customary *mimesis* in the sphere of *adab* and symbolic hermeneutics (*ta'wil*) – the tradition of interpretation which at the same time means *exodus* or leaving for the source – are essential to Sufism. In some respect it is a prolongation of the Oriental *hkm* tradition which speaks in parables and exposes conventional dramatic enthusiasm. A personal name of the sage (e.g. Ptahhotep or Solomon) there stands as a symbol of *auctoritas* – not author but authority. Therefore the common heroes are to be considered as an archetypal masks in the hierarchy of the socio-ontological stairway to Heaven. It is also a prolongation of certain methods of allegorical exegesis conducted by *ahl al-mazall*, “the people of the parasols”, to explain Homer. These methods were picked up by Philo and reached its another peak in the Neoplatonic *religio mentis*, viz. interpretations of the divine Plato, Homer, *Oracula Chaldaica* and *Orphica*. For a Neoplatonist to read the *Parmenides* is to perform the true religious act and travel the spiritual Path along the radius leading to the Truth (*Haqiqah*) at the center. Here, like in Sufism of al-Ghazzali, the heavenly realities (*haqa'iq*) and ideas (*ma'ani*) all have their symbols on earth. In Suhrawardi's *Oriental wisdom* everything in the visible universe is a “theurgy” (*tilism*) and an “icon” (*sanam*) of one of these archetypes who are the masters of the species (*arbab al-anwa'*), or the masters of the theurgies (*arbab al-tilism*)<sup>29</sup>.

The conception of Divine manifestation through the Principle's effulgence (*tajalli*) into everything in the last resort is based on the conception established between the Good and the Sun in Plato's *Republic*. It is further developed by Stoics and Neoplatonists. Iamblichus declares that the light of gods “irradiates” (ελλομπει), and Damascius likens our cognition of the intelligible to the reception of a sudden flashing trace from above. The notions of *zahir* and *batin*, along the correlation *lafz* – *ma'na*, *tafsir* – *ta'wil*, constitute quite a specific conception that can be traced back to Plato's doctrine of Ideas<sup>30</sup>. Meanwhile the Arabs' interpretation of Aristotle was as Neoplatonic as their interpretation of Plato. The later was seen through the eyes of pre-Plotinian interpreters, notably of Galen (in taking the *Timaeus*' temporal creation literally, for

<sup>28</sup> A. Hilary Armstrong, “Itineraries in Late Antiquity”, *Eranos*, 1987, Jahrbuch, vol. 56, Insel Verlag Frankfurt am Main, 1989, 110–111. See also J. P. Kenney *Mystical Monotheism*, Brown/New England University Press, 1991. In his paper “Apophatic-Kataphatic Tensions in Religious Thought from the Third to the Sixth Century A.D.”. From Augustine to Eriugena. “Essays on Neoplatonism and Christianity in Honor of John O'Meara”, The Catholic University of America Press, 13 A. H. Armstrong asserts: ‘I have developed a strong objection to using the silly and intentionally insulting terms “pagan” or “heather” to describe those who held, or hold, to older religious traditions in opposition to Christianity, and especially to using them of the leaders of the intellectual opposition to Christianity in late antiquity, the Neoplatonists’.

<sup>29</sup> S. H. Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages. Avicenna-Suhrawardi-Ibn 'Arabi*, Harvard University Press, 1964, 72.

<sup>30</sup> Frithiof Rundgren, *The Preface of the Futuhat al-Makkiyyah*, Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi. A Commemorative Volume, ed. by S. Hirtenstein and M. Tiernan, Element, 1993, 342.

instance). The Muslims equated the νοῦς of which Aristotle speaks in *De anima* with the system of Unmoved Movers, these themselves being νοῦι, i.e. intelligences.

Sometimes it is useful to emphasize rather predominant rationalistic tendencies in Hellenic and especially Roman thought, while bearing in mind the great importance attached to the basic function of imagery in the evolvment of thought in Islamic mysticism, where ‘thinking in and through images is <...> almost the only authentic form of thinking’<sup>31</sup>. However, it seems questionable whether R. Nicholson is really making a great mistake, as W. C. Chittick supposes, in rendering *al-manazir al-‘ula* of Ibn ‘Arabi as “the Divine Ideas” instead of the “higher loci of vision” as the invisible realm inhabited by angels and perceived through the spiritual “unveiling” (*kashf*) and “tasting” (*dhawq*)<sup>32</sup>. This is because *eidos* and *idea* for Plato are not just silly Neokantian categories, but a sort of “thing seen” or “perceived” with our sensory eyes as well as with *nous* which is spirit. Contemplation (*theoria*) of Forms is tantamount to *theou horasin*, the “beholding God”, since the divine Intellect ‘establishes Forms within itself which are never other than itself and its essence’ (Syrianus *In Metaph.* 106.31–34). *Eidos* is a totality of the five Platonic categories, μεγιστα γενη. They express different facets of the eternal life of Intelligence. Hence they also represent the evident and structural noetic picture of every thing. The ‘symbol is an expressed *eidos*’<sup>33</sup>, which is revealed within a cosmos unwrapped as the divine Myth having burst forth in *ekstasis* from that which cannot be mirrored. It constitutes the procession which Proclus compares with the issue of bees from a hive. Truly speaking, Proclus simply recalls “the very words of the gods” that bear witness to Plato’s doctrines in the *Oracula Chaldaica* (*In Parm.* 800,21 ff; Des Places fr. 37):

Of these there was one source, but as they burst forth  
innumerable others were broken off and scattered  
Through the bodies of the cosmos, swarming like bees  
About the mighty hollows of the world,  
And whirling about in various directions –  
These intelligent Ideas, issued from the paternal source,  
Laying hold on the mighty bloom of fire.

The deity *qua* One is the cause of procession, *qua* Good of reversion (*In Plat. Theol.* II.VI.95), because *ekstasis* also signifies the upward process from effect to cause, and the Ideas are produced by the intellectual activity of the *Nous* in contemplating the first Principle. Hence our act of contemplation – *par analogiam* to the spiritual world – ‘makes what it contemplates, as the geometers draw their figures while they contemplate’ (Plot. *Enn.* III.8.4). The play of manifestation may be imagined as the broken sunlight and the interplay of images and shadows, similar to “seventy thousand veils of Light and Darkness”. According to the school of *wahdat*

<sup>31</sup> T. Izutsu, *ibid.*, 43.

<sup>32</sup> William C. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds. Ibn al-‘Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity*, State University of New York Press, 1994, 68–69.

<sup>33</sup> A. F. Losev, “Antique Cosmos and Contemporary Science”, *Being, Name, Cosmos*, Moscow, 1993, 484 (in Russian).

*al-wujud* existence is a “luminous reality” (*haqiqah nuraniyah*). In Suhrawardi’s view the opposite is true: existence is nothing but a rational “metaphor” for light. The archetypal contemplative image is an image of the unimaginable, and ‘if we have been trying to think in a Plotinus way about the archetypal image which is the real cosmos in *Nous* we shall not have been trying to apply to it the sort of clearly defined concepts which are useful in our distinctively human activity of logical discourse’<sup>34</sup>. The intelligible cosmos in Plotinus, the “shaykh of the Greeks” (Shahrastani), includes everything in the sensible world, hence the Platonic “world of Forms” is understood in terms of direct sense-awareness (A. H. Armstrong)<sup>35</sup>. Forms are beautiful since quickened to life by the radiance cast upon them by the Good (Plot. *Enn.* VI.7.1–24), and even sensible smells and odours (αρωματα) are images of the intelligible transmission along with some particular ray, or *seira*<sup>36</sup>, proceeding out of the transcendental divine henad, according to Proclus. The figure of a masked singing actor is the image of *mimesis* in its archetypal sense.

### Mythological Paradigms of Sufism and Platonism

Iamblichus, Syrianus and Proclus erected the magnificent multi-dimensional building of ontological mirrors which reflect each other in every possible direction but, nevertheless, have a strict logical and axiological order. Both miraculous and ultimately rational hierarchy is intelligent and alive. The term *Muthos* here is equivalent to Hindu *Maya* in its broadest sense. Mythological figures and abstract noetic principles or ideas are thought as forming a single organic unity with its innumerable strata of the divine theatre, unending dramaturgy and laws of participation (*methexis*) in it. The same we discover in Ibn ‘Arabi’s theosophy. The Andalusian Sufi raised up the amazing esoteric hierarchy of visible and invisible spiritual beings, saints and prophets, though, according to R. T. Wallis, in its conception of God as attaining self-awareness in man Ibn ‘Arabi ‘departs from the main stream of Neoplatonism in the direction of Numenius and the anonymous *Parmenides* commentator, whom Arabi also resembles in his paradoxical resolution of the immanence-transcendence dilemma’<sup>37</sup>.

The symbol of Islamic civilization is not a flowing river, but the cube of the Kaaba, as S. H. Nasr pointed out<sup>38</sup>. But while history is a series of accidents that in no way affect the non-temporal principles of Islam, and though the universe consists of accidents all pertaining to a single substance which is the Reality, ‘the spectator is misled’, according to Jami, ‘in thinking that the universe is something constant and unique’<sup>39</sup>. This is the Heracleitean doctrine that all

<sup>34</sup> A. H. Armstrong, “Platonic Mirrors”, *Eranos*, 1986, Jahrbuch, vol. 55, Insel Verlag Frankfurt am Main, 1988, 167–168.

<sup>35</sup> A. H. Armstrong, *ibid.*, 171.

<sup>36</sup> The Neoplatonic term *seira* is derived ultimately from Homer, and refers to the vertical series of the divine theophany.

<sup>37</sup> R. T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, Duckworth, London, 1995, 166.

<sup>38</sup> S. H. Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam*, New American Library, New York, 1970, 21.

<sup>39</sup> *Lawa’ih*, *ibid.*, 33.

phenomena are in constant flux. The Greek verb *ρην* means “flow” or “stream”. Damascius speaks of an effect as “flowing” from its cause, while Proclus describes daimons as streaming forth from the life-giving goddess Rhea, whose name itself connotes emanation, “as it from some fountain”. Nevertheless, Jalal al-Din Rumi quotes the saying of “Arqlitus” that “contraries are congruous”, i.e. that contraries involve a higher unity which embraces both<sup>40</sup>. The same holds true regarding Sufism and Platonism, although they are not contraries in any, even the most misleading and superficial, sense. ‘He is God, One... (*Qur’an*, 112, 1–4) and ‘He encompasses everything’ (ibid. IV. 126). Therefore one can agree with the Brethren of Purity: ‘Will you not choose, oh my brother, to enter the Temple of Agathodaimon, in order to contemplate the heavens of which Plato spoke – spiritual Heavens, not the visible ones’.

#### **AT-TASAWWUF IR NEOPLATONIZMO FILOSOFIJA**

##### **Algis Uždaviny**

##### Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje kalbama apie islamiškojo sufizmo (*at-tasawwuf*) ir antikos neoplatonizmo sąsajas atskleidžiant įvairias sufizmo ir vėlyvosios helėnų filosofijos paraleles. Autoriaus dėmesio centre atsiduria kultūrinis islamo misticizmo kontekstas ir jį grindžianti metafizika. Nors sufizmas kyla iš Korano ir hadisų aiškinimo (todėl jis tėra giliau suprastas islamas, mistinis religijos branduolys), daugelis sufijų adaptuotų ir išplėtotų metafizinių idėjų yra vėlyvosios antikos palikimas. Jos gali būti suvoktos kaip skirtinga tų pačių transcendentinių archetipų manifestacija, tačiau negalima paneigti fakto, kad Numenijo, Plotino, Porfirijo, Jamblichio, Sirijano, Proklo, Damaskijo ir kitų neoplatonikų doktrinos tiesiogiai ar netiesiogiai (kartais nežinant šių filosofų vardų arba jų mokymus priskiriant Aristoteliui) paveikė ne tik sufizmą, bet ir visą islamo dvasinę kultūrą.

---

<sup>40</sup> *Lawa'ih*, ibid., 30.