From Experiential Knowledge to Philosophical Transmission: An Analysis of Epistemology in Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* and the *Prolegomena* of Qayṣarī

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I dedicate this thesis to the memory of Rodger Swan, whose love and encouragement will always be present in my life.
Abstract

From Experiential Knowledge to Philosophical Transmission: An Analysis of Epistemology in the Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam and Prolegomena of Qayṣarī

A thesis presented to the Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Brandeis University Waltham, Massachusetts By Rebecca Makas

This thesis examines theoretical epistemology and the transmission of knowledge in Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638 A.H./1240 C.E.) and Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 750 A.H./1350 C.E.). Ibn ‘Arabī has been categorized as a philosopher, despite his overall mystical style of expression, due to the manner in which his disciples streamlined his scattered tracts of thought into a system of metaphysics. In a similar way, his disciples are generally categorized as mystics despite their more philosophical style of expression due to their lineage to Ibn ‘Arabī. Through the discussion of epistemology, a prominent feature which has been overlooked in the scholarship of the Akbarian School emerges; these categorizations are largely inaccurate and must be examined in a more rigorous fashion. In addition to this observation, the thesis questions the reliance on a historical explanation for the shift from Ibn ‘Arabī’s more allusive style of expression into the systematic manner of expression favored by Qayṣarī, and contains a discussion of the theoretical implications of this shift. This is covered through an overview of the theoretical epistemology put forth by Ibn ‘Arabī and clarified and commented on by Qayṣarī, as well as a theoretical discussion. The thesis asserts that not only is some profundity of mystical knowledge lost when presented in a systematic way, but given the specific theoretical epistemology asserted by
Ibn ‘Arabī and confirmed by Qayṣarī, it is quite problematic to use this method of expression.
Table of Contents

Introduction………………………………………………………………………………………………1

Chapter One: An Unquenchable Thirst: Epistemology in Ibn ‘Arabī…………………..12

Chapter Two: My Lord, Grant Me Increase in Knowledge! Clarification in Qayṣarī’s
Prolegomena..........................................................................................................................28

Chapter Three: Differences in Style Between Ibn ‘Arabī and Qayṣarī and Their
Implications………………………………………………………………………………………39

Conclusion……………………………………………………………………………………………..62

Bibliography…………………………………………………………………………………………64
INTRODUCTION

This work will examine theoretical epistemology and the transmission of knowledge in Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638 A.H./1240 C.E.) and Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 750 A.H./1350 C.E.) through an analysis of the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* and Qayṣarī’s *Prolegomena*. Ibn ‘Arabī is considered by many to be responsible for the shift to more theoretical expressions of Sufism due to his complex metaphysics and interest in theology. This classification is largely insufficient, however, as it is based on the way in which Ibn ‘Arabī’s disciples transformed his writings rather than what he wrote. Ibn ‘Arabī’s interests were certainly philosophical, yet he remained principally conservative and deeply rooted in mystical practice. While Ibn ‘Arabī’s writings were philosophical in interest rather than method or expression, it cannot be denied that his disciples streamlined his teachings into a philosophical system. In a few generations, Qayṣarī synthesized philosophy and mysticism in his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. This shift has been explained through the historical context of the greater movement in the Islamic Sciences towards a philosophical method of expression; it has been argued that mystics were simply keeping up with the times and lending legitimacy to their worldview.1 While this explanation is acceptable in a strictly historical sense, it is insufficient when considering the subject matter. Ibn ‘Arabī and other mystics asserted a

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vision of Reality which was deeply connected to practice and experience, a path to knowledge which did not require rational or scholarly validation. Thus, it seems problematic at best to argue that mystics could maintain their insistence on experience while expressing themselves in clear, systematic, philosophical terms.

This study will contrast Ibn ‘Arabī and Qayṣarī’s theoretical understanding of knowledge with the way in which they conveyed knowledge by examining their rhetorical styles and vocabularies. Despite his disciples’ transformation, it is only the foundation for the change which can be seen in Ibn ‘Arabī’s writings; he did not express himself in a philosophical style, whereas Qayṣarī’s writing is generally philosophical. While Dagli argues that Qayṣarī’s commentary was lucid and systematic without sacrificing the “profundity” of the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, the means of transmission are problematic to the theoretical epistemology put forth by Ibn ‘Arabī and Qayṣarī. This study will argue that Qayṣarī’s commentary did sacrifice some of the profundity of Ibn ‘Arabī’s epistemology, because the method of expression is less appropriate for presenting the mystical subject matter.

Ibn ‘Arabī has been given considerable attention by scholars in history and religious studies. His theoretical subject matter has led some to view him as a philosopher rather than a mystic, but it will be shown that his own work provided only the foundation for the shift made by his disciples. While there has recently been a push to show the conservative elements of Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought, these works are largely responses to polemics against him. Very little attention has been given to Ibn ‘Arabī’s

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method of expression and its implications on both his own concepts and those developed by the Akbarian School. While his writing is free-flowing, allusive, and at times unclear in the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, these features generally apply only to his metaphysical works; when one reads his works of practical spirituality, one finds clear, straightforward writing. The contrast of writing styles makes it clear that Ibn ‘Arabi was capable of both clear and ambiguous writing and, because of this, his method of expression appears to be consciously chosen and meaningful. While other writings in Ibn ‘Arabi’s vast corpus will be considered, the thesis will focus on the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* in order to provide the most direct contrast with the *Prolegomena*. All works by Ibn ‘Arabi will be studied in English translation.

Qayṣarī, by contrast, has received almost no secondary treatment by scholars, with very little published works on this seminal figure of the Akbarian School. In the context of this study, the *Prolegomena* was chosen due to its importance in both the Akbarian school and the greater Islamic community; Qayṣarī’s commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* was meant to present the text in a clear systematic way and was used in Ottoman schools to teach Ibn ‘Arabi’s metaphysics until the twentieth century. His method of expression, while radically different from Ibn ‘Arabi’s, is not without precedent, as he was removed from Ibn ‘Arabi by two generations of disciples who began the trend of systematizing Ibn ‘Arabi’s scattered thoughts into a coherent philosophy. Yet because his writing style is distinct from even those disciples who attempted to systematize Ibn ‘Arabi, it will be assumed that Qayṣarī’s writing style was conscious as

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5 Dagli II, 1.
well, and this study will concentrate on exploring the implications of changing to this style. The *Prolegomena* will be studied in its original Arabic, aided by Caner K. Dagli’s partial translation.

While previous works have been largely historical, this study will explore the topic in a more theoretical sense, namely examining the implications and problems which arise when attempting to express and transmit mystical knowledge in a clear, systematic way. This tension will be addressed using Ibn ‘Arabī’s and Qayṣarī’s concepts of knowledge as a means of exploration. Epistemology provides the best lens for exploring the divergence between mystical and philosophical methods of expression because it is arguably the very foundation of what separates them, as Dagli asserts, “The real differentiating factor between mysticism and philosophy, at least as conceived by some, is the question of knowledge: what do we know and how do we know it?” In addition to giving the clearest insight into these issues, knowledge is illuminating because it can be considered in both a theoretical and applied sense. Both Ibn ‘Arabī and Qayṣarī discussed epistemology in an abstract metaphysical sense and take clear stances on how correct knowledge ought to be acquired. Thus, we can examine the dual nature of epistemology in its theoretical manifestations and the actual process of transmitting knowledge.

In order to explore these concepts, the study will make use of theories of language in mystical expression which have been developed but not applied to this particular context. While philosophical investigations of mystical expression have been made, they have been largely in studies of Christian and Jewish mysticism with limited attention

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6 Caner K. Dagli, “From Mysticism to Philosophy (And Back): An Ontological History of the School of Oneness of Being,” 114. (Henceforth Dagli I)
given to Islamic mysticism. The theoretical method will enable deeper insight into the
tension of expressing mystical knowledge using a philosophical style within the
framework of an insistence on experienced knowledge. This is a largely unexplored area
in theory of mysticism and language, which tends to focus on the language of mystical union. This method is appropriate as I argue that the shift into a systematic,
philosophical writing style cannot be explained through historical context alone; from the
mystical perspective, Reality is not subject to the human intellect, thus it seems strange
that mystics would subject their writings to other sciences’ standards of justification.

A Note on Terminology

Before beginning, it is important to understand the terminology of the concepts
explored in this work. These are meant only to provide context and understanding for
how the terms are being used rather than give full, detailed definitions. The final section
of the thesis will explore these concepts more fully in order to give insight into the
problems presented, while this section serves only to provide the basic assumptions made
by this study regarding the terms “philosophy,” “mysticism,” and “epistemology.” Terms
such as “rational,” “contemplation,” and “unveiling” will be covered in the body of the
thesis, striving to understand them as intended by the authors rather than modern
interpretation.

For our purposes, “philosophy” is perhaps the most difficult term to define. In the
classical Islamic context, falsafah does not correspond directly to a modern definition of
philosophy, but rather refers to the Islamic rationalist philosophers who followed the
tradition of ancient Greek philosophy. These philosophers sought to understand the
world through rational inquiry alone, and the group came under heavy criticism, with the
Sufis as some of their staunchest opponents. It is often erroneously believed that after al-Ghāzalī wrote his famed *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* Islamic philosophy came to an end, when al-Ghāzalī had actually criticized the specific group of *falāsifah*; the effect of the *Incoherence* was not to end Islamic philosophy, but rather to redefine it.\(^7\)

For these reasons, it is inaccurate to assume that this study is questioning if Ibn ‘Arabī or the Akbarian School belonged in the tradition of *falsafa*; it is without question that Ibn ‘Arabī and the Akbarian School were not *falāsifah*.\(^8\)

Before labeling Ibn ‘Arabī and his disciples’ work as “philosophical,” however, a more refined definition must be reached. Applying the term “philosophy” to the numerous Islamic Sciences it encompasses warrants clarification because of modern, Western understanding of the term. According to Nasr,

> The narrowing of the meaning of philosophy, the divorce between philosophy and spiritual practice in the West and especially the reduction of philosophy to either rationalism or empiricism necessitate making a distinction between the meaning given to ḥikmah by Suhrawardī or Mullā Ṣadrā and the fully mental activity called philosophy in certain circles in the West today.\(^9\)

Thus, while it is incorrect to view Islamic philosophy as limited to *falsafa*, if we are to understand “philosophy” in the modern use of the term, nearly all Islamic Sciences are excluded and would likely be rendered as theology or theosophy. This approach would be anachronistic, however, as this study examines the use of philosophical language and expression in the context of Islam in the sixth/thirteenth and seventh/fourteenth centuries.

Philosophy at that time, in Islamic circles and otherwise, was not limited to “mental

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\(^8\) Left untranslated to distinguish between the modern usage of the term.

activity” as Nasr puts it, but sought to explain Reality with the Divine as an unavoidable starting point.

Nasr argues that when Muslims first began to utilize Greek thought, they defined philosophy by six points:

1. Philosophy is the knowledge of all existing things qua existents.
2. Philosophy is knowledge of divine and human matters.
3. Philosophy is taking refuge in death, that is, love of death.
4. Philosophy is becoming Godlike to the extent of human ability.
5. It is the art of arts, and the science of sciences.
6. Philosophy is a predilection for ḥikmah.\(^\text{10}\)

By this definition it seems less problematic for a Sufi to be a philosopher. The first point may seem to challenge a Sufi framework, as one would assume that a mystic would seek knowledge through God rather than existents, but given Ibn ‘Arabī’s metaphysics of existence\(^\text{11}\) this point could be accepted in a mystical framework. The second point, striving for the knowledge of divine and human matters, is perhaps the most important part of Ibn ‘Arabī’s epistemology, and thus provides no problems. The third point is perfectly in line with the mystic quest to become annihilated within the divine. While becoming “Godlike” is problematic, the search for unveiled knowledge and closeness to the Divine could be seen as attempting to become “Godlike.” The fifth point would likely be the most contentious for mystics, as they would not put philosophy above the esoteric sciences. The final point does not present a great deal of problems as Ibn ‘Arabī and his followers valued wisdom, ḥikmah, highly. These six points, while perhaps incomplete to a mystic worldview are not inherently opposed to it.

Now that it has been clarified what is meant by “philosophy,” let us turn our attention to what is meant by “mystics” or “mysticism.” Though the term is no longer as

\(^{10}\) Ibid., 22.

\(^{11}\) Which will be explored more fully in Chapter One.
problematic as it once was, mysticism is distinct to each tradition and therefore a more specific definition must be reached. In more general terms, this study will begin with Katz’s assertion that mysticism is a conservative movement within religious traditions rather than innovation or incorporation of doctrines from other faiths. Though there is not a direct equivalent for “mysticism” in Arabic, it can still be applied to certain Islamic practices. Nasr argues that “We can speak of Islamic mysticism only if we understand by this term its original meaning as that which deals with the Divine Mysteries.” Thus, Islamic mysticism will be understood at its most basic level as acknowledgement and recognition that Reality lies in the inward and esoteric. More succinctly and specifically, Dagli asserts that,

The real fundamental doctrinal difference between mystical and non-mystical is the acknowledgment of a mode of reality which in its essence remains inexplicable to our powers of rational demonstration, although reason can point to it and it need not be contrary to reason.

Thus, mysticism is not anti-logic or anti-reason as some would claim, but rather appeals to the authority of the esoteric and revealed forms of knowledge over reason.

Though Sufism is generally the term given to Islamic mysticism, this study is aware of its limitations for reasons well-demonstrated by Ernst. The term is problematic when discussing Ibn ‘Arabī as he distinguished himself from “Sufis,” which was already a blanket term for a variety of practices in his time. Though he


13 Dagli I, 2.


15 Dagli I, 3.


occasionally uses the term “Sufi” in the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, more often he uses other terms
to refer to those possessing valid knowledge, such as “Folk of God” and the “Realizers”
(al-muhuqqiqūn), and Qayṣarī also avoids using the term “Sufi.” However, the term is
generally accepted and convenient, thus for ease and clarity, the terms “Sufi” and
“Sufism” will be used when appropriate.

In order to understand what is meant by “mystical expression,” it is important to
understand that mystical writing is not typically expressed in clear, systematic ways.
Rather, mystical language provides a way for insiders to convey and understand an
esoteric world of meaning; the technical vocabulary communicates concepts using
“limited” language to a group which will understand what is meant by these limited
terms.\(^{18}\) It often employs a variety of rhetorical features including contradiction, negative
imagery and asserting the ineffability of experience. These features allow mystics to
express concepts of a higher reality through writing without sacrificing their meaning or
inward dimension precisely because they are confusing and often inaccessible unless the
reader has had the experience described. If understood specifically with regards to
Sufism, the Sufi worldview asserts that mystical language is necessarily esoteric, viewing
language as a protective mechanism so they are not misunderstood or misinterpreted by
those with no knowledge of their experience.\(^{19}\)

A “philosophical” writing style will be understood more specifically than the
umbrella of inquiry on Reality which encompasses Sufism, *falsafah, kalām*, and other


sciences. For the sake of clarity, a “philosophical writing style” will be seen more narrowly as the clear, systematic, logical style which was adopted by Qayṣari and others. Its features include consistent use of terminology, precise definitions, and a logical progression of subject matter. I call it “philosophical” rather than rational, because it was a feature of Islamic Philosophy from its beginnings in the falsafah tradition and was adopted by other sciences as they were incorporated into the broader meaning of philosophy.

Finally, the term “epistemology” encompasses both knowledge itself and the process of acquiring knowledge. While meaning will be distinguished in use, it must be understood that the study will examine both when considering Ibn ‘Arabī and Qayṣari’s systems of epistemology. In contrast to modern philosophical use, knowledge is a property of Ibn ‘Arabī’s metaphysics rather than a distinct field of inquiry. According to Ibn ‘Arabī, Knowledge exists within and manifests through wujūd. As an attribute of God, Ibn ‘Arabī claims that it is through God’s Knowledge that all things exist, and that humans are only able to know what is already known by God. The knowledge which a seeker must strive for is, for Ibn ‘Arabī and the Akbarian School, knowledge of the ultimate Reality and Being. These concepts, as well as Ibn ‘Arabī and Qayṣari’s exact meaning of knowledge and the process of acquiring valid knowledge, will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters One and Two.

Structure of Chapters

This study will take both historical and theoretical approaches to explore the subject matter. The first two chapters seek to provide outlines of the theoretical

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20 Generally translated into English as “Being,” however, the term will remain untranslated throughout this work.
epistemologies presented by Ibn ‘Arabī and Qayṣarī; the first chapter will provide an overview of Ibn ‘Arabī’s concept of knowledge, the second will cover Qayṣarī’s. Qayṣarī claims to merely describe and clarify Ibn ‘Arabī’s metaphysics, and thus, says less about theoretical epistemology. The *Prolegomena* focuses primarily on metaphysics, and as a result, Chapter Two will be shorter, covering what epistemology can be gleaned from the *Prolegomena*. The third and final chapter will employ a more theoretical method and will discuss the differences in the texts and their respective methods of expression, evaluating their appropriateness for the subject matter.
CHAPTER ONE: AN UNQUENCHABLE THIRST: IBN ‘ARABĪ’S EPISTEMOLOGY IN THE FUṢŪṢ AL-ḤIKAM

Ibn ‘Arabī’s contribution to Sufism and the other Islamic sciences is difficult to overstate. In the context to this study, his greatest influence was laying the foundation for the later synthesis of philosophy and mysticism in the Akbarian school. While this shift arguably began with Ghazālī, Ibn ‘Arabī’s work was so influential that all Sufis who followed him were forced to at least acknowledge Ibn ‘Arabī whether in agreement or to discredit him. Ibn ‘Arabī never advocated a transformation of the Sufi path into a speculative quest yet it is clear that “he saw the metaphysical world in terms that were ultimately philosophical. The great problems of time, space, and motion occupied him constantly.” Epistemology is a key element of Ibn ‘Arabī’s system, and his concept of knowledge is founded on the notion of the superiority of the validity of revealed knowledge over rational consideration. Despite his conservative approach to acquiring knowledge, Ibn ‘Arabī’s preoccupation with, and extensive writings, on the topic of metaphysics garnered him the criticism of moving from mystical expression to the very method he rejected: philosophical, speculative learning. Yet, while Ibn ‘Arabī’s work seems to be a radical departure from previous expressions of Sufism, a closer

21 Dagli I, 88.
23 As will be demonstrated more fully in the chapter, Ibn ‘Arabī’s concept of knowledge is inexplicably bound to practice.
examination of his concept of knowledge reveals that his “philosophy” was actually deeply conservative, an articulation of deeply-rooted Sufi and Islamic concepts.

This chapter seeks to provide an introductory explanation of Ibn ‘Arabī’s epistemology through examining the Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam, The Ringstones of Wisdom. The Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam is a shorter work consisting of twenty-seven chapters which discuss “wisdoms” as demonstrated or exemplified by different prophets. The work is largely metaphysical, but explores a variety of topics including legal issues and ethics. To explore this topic, I will situate knowledge in the greater scheme of Ibn ‘Arabī’s metaphysics and explore his distinction between relevant and useless knowledge, and how knowledge relates to practice. Following the discussion of Ibn ‘Arabī’s basic concepts of knowledge, his theory of how one acquires valid knowledge will be examined, concluding with an exploration of his hierarchy of valid knowledge.

A more detailed discussion of Ibn ‘Arabī’s method will follow in Chapter Three, but it is relevant to note how he viewed himself before covering his epistemology. He was educated in the exoteric sciences beginning in al-Andalus in 577 A.H./1182 C.E., and his formal education is his only documented study of philosophy.25 In contrast to other mystics, Ibn ‘Arabī claimed that his esoteric knowledge was given in a single moment of unveiling from the divine, and that this moment was spontaneous.26 After his moment of realized knowledge it appears that Ibn ‘Arabī formally embarked on the mystic path, studying manuals and becoming more involved in passing on his

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25 Dagli I, 21.
knowledge. He sought to convey mystical experience while deferring to practice at all times.

Before understanding the practical applications of epistemology, it is important to understand that in Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought knowledge is a metaphysical quality, existing only in the Divine, yet able to be manifested within creation. Knowledge is a divine attribute of God, and Ibn ‘Arabī describes it as an all-encompassing attribute, existing on the level of only one other divine attribute, mercy. The attributes of God are mentioned in the Qur’an and are part of a larger system of Islamic theology, split into two categories: beauty, jamāl and majesty, jalāl. “Allah” is the all-encompassing name, but there are a number of Names of God, and though the attributes make up the Divine, they are not necessarily equally weighted; Ibn ‘Arabī and others discussed the names in terms of generality and specificity. Ibn ‘Arabī asserts that “Mercy” and “Knowledge” are the only two all-encompassing attributes. Thus, to say that knowledge is an “all-encompassing” attribute means that it is more general and manifests more pervasively throughout creation.

Though he never called it as such, Ibn ‘Arabī proposed the concept of the “Oneness of Being,” meaning that there is only one ultimate existence, wujūd, and everything else is a manifestation of the Divine, subsisting through God rather than existing as an independent entity. Knowledge has its only real existence in God, as part of the complete unity of being. In the Fuṣūṣ al-hikam, Ibn ‘Arabī states that, “The reality of knowledge is one, and the reality of life is one, and their relationship to the living

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27 Dagli I, 21.
28 Chittick IV, 148.
being and the knower is the same,”\textsuperscript{29} and “the knower is he who sees the Real in everything, indeed who sees Him as identical with everything.”\textsuperscript{30} Therefore, knowledge, as with all other things in the cosmos, can only come from the one source. Since knowledge is at the all-encompassing level, it is extremely close to the source, and is of near-equal importance to existence itself. Thus, to the knower who has acquired true knowledge, the relationship between knowledge and existence is essentially equal.

While knowledge is an all-encompassing divine quality which can only exist within God, humans are able to realize knowledge at the highest level a created thing can. Because humans are a synthesis of divine spirit and creation in Ibn ‘Arabī’s ontology, they are able to manifest the divine qualities so well that eventually they are capable of reflecting the Divine, doing so consciously.\textsuperscript{31} While other beings in the cosmos manifest the divine qualities, it is because they are bound to do so, but because humans are granted intellect and synthesis, they choose to develop their divine qualities through cultivating their knowledge. Ibn ‘Arabī explains this in the Ringstone of Isaac, “The possessors of sense, after plants, all know their Creator through unveiling and clear proof. Now, he who bears the name Adam is bound by intellect, thought, or the necklace of faith.”\textsuperscript{32} Thus, other created beings are given direct knowledge but do not grasp what they are given because it is an automatic part of their being. Humans are tested in a way that other created beings are not by being given intellect to question and reflect on creation. Intellect can be a barrier to humans because it can cause them to doubt true, revealed

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 246.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 13-14.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 67. Italics in original.
knowledge, but it is also part of what enables humans to manifest knowledge in the fullest possible sense in the created world.

Seeking knowledge, therefore, becomes extremely important because humans are given the choice whether to do so or not. God commanded Muhammad to be the most knowledgeable human, and the Qur’ān enjoins all Muslims to practice consideration.\(^{33}\) This scriptural command to pursue knowledge through faith serves as the foundation for the path that Ibn ‘Arabī followed, “approach[ing] God primarily through knowing Him.”\(^{34}\) One aspect of human synthesis of divine and created attributes is that man is able to manifest knowledge, but more importantly, it is precisely because of this synthesis that humans must actively seek knowledge. Because of the importance of synthesis, the idea emerges that “Whoso knows himself by this knowledge knows his Lord, for indeed He created him in His Image; indeed, he is identical with His Selfhood and His Reality.”\(^{35}\) Humans occupy a special point in Ibn ‘Arabī’s metaphysics wherein they are loci of the divine presence, reflections of the Reality. In addition to their potential to know, seeking knowledge is closely tied to the mystic quest to fully embody human potential. In Ibn ‘Arabī’s view, there should be no limit to man’s search for knowledge, because a gnostic’s search for knowledge can never be quenched.\(^{36}\) Thus, humans who fully understand their metaphysical position and role do so through understanding the Divine by His revealed knowledge.

Ibn ‘Arabī’s distinction between valid knowledge and “useless” knowledge is an important dimension of his discussion of man’s search for knowledge. This seems

\(^{33}\) Chittick IV, 147 and 165.
\(^{34}\) Ibid., 147.
\(^{35}\) Ibn ‘Arabī, 134-135.
\(^{36}\) Chittick IV, 153.
contradictory, because if all knowledge exists only within God, how could a human acquire knowledge which is useless? Ibn ‘Arabī explains that for a human with true knowledge, this is impossible, because he will understand the divine source and manifestation of all knowledge. It is only the knowledge which humans do not acquire through unveiling, or do not recognize as such that is useless. Ibn ‘Arabī states “Any knowledge which does not lead back to God... does not deserve to be called ‘knowledge.’”

It is due to the human intellect that the seeming contradiction that knowledge exists which does not lead humans back to God is possible. The idea of knowledge “leading back to God” refers to realizing the Reality of knowledge, and is not simply a rejection of secular or rational knowledge though perhaps a rejection of its usefulness. In Ibn ‘Arabī’s framework, one can certainly have secular knowledge, but with the understanding of the one divine source of knowledge.

With his developed system of metaphysics to explain knowledge, it is important to address the link between knowledge and practice. Despite Ibn ‘Arabī’s highly philosophical explanation of valid knowledge, he asserts that “in our view, knowledge requires practice, and necessarily so, or else it is not knowledge, even if it appears in the form of knowledge.” Knowledge, as will be demonstrated later in the chapter, is acquired through the practices of the path of knowledge, and must be connected with practice before and after it is attained. Regarding this point, Ibn ‘Arabī states, “whosoever knows that the Real is identical with the path knows the affair as it is.”

Because knowledge is an aspect of Reality, and the mystic essentially seeks to understand

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37 Chittick IV, 151.
38 This point is clarified by Qaṣṣarī and will be explored more fully in Chapter Two, but essentially the mind is capable of “imagining” false knowledge, however, Ibn ‘Arabī would reject not only this type of knowledge as useless, but also valid knowledge of which the seeker does not truly understand its source.
39 Ibid., 151.
Reality through practice, all knowledge is necessarily interwoven with practice.\textsuperscript{41} Knowledge and practice are bound together on such a basic level for Ibn ‘Arabī that he rarely connects them explicitly, yet his insistence on practice is a direct example of the conservative force behind his innovative system of metaphysics and a reminder that his work was not fully philosophical.

Beyond the metaphysical level, in Ibn ‘Arabī’s system, “knowledge can be acquired through reflection, unveiling, or scripture.”\textsuperscript{42} While Ibn ‘Arabī asserts that unveiling and scripture are the highest forms of acquiring knowledge, he is clear that “this is perfect knowledge, which the descended Laws relate to us from God,”\textsuperscript{43} he does not reject reflection\textsuperscript{44} outright. Overall, the revelation is the strongest way to acquire knowledge, with the Qur’ān as the most important source for Ibn ‘Arabī’s philosophy. In the \textit{Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam}, he states:

In order for you to acquire knowledge, God most high has to turn our attention concerning our knowledge of Him, to contemplating the created, and has said that He will show us His signs within it. He has shown Himself to us through us.\textsuperscript{45} This passage indicates the importance of knowing God by what He “said about Himself” through the revelation. By using revelation and the larger metaphysical concept of self-disclosure, Ibn ‘Arabī asserts that God shows Himself to humans through signs in creation. The passage demonstrates one of the most important aspects of acquiring knowledge for Ibn ‘Arabī: passivity of the recipient of knowledge. By saying that God must “turn our attention,” Ibn ‘Arabī suggests that humans cannot forcefully acquire

\textsuperscript{41} Chittick IV, 151.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 159.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibn ‘Arabī, 227.
\textsuperscript{44} For our purposes, “reason,” “reflection,” and “consideration” will be treated as synonyms.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 11.
knowledge, and that while they must actively seek it, they ought to seek by way of desiring or thirsting for knowledge to be unveiled to them.

Man’s search for knowledge is therefore closely tied to proper behavior, *adab*; a seeker of knowledge should not attempt to discuss things which have not been taught to him by God, or are still veiled to him.⁴⁶ A seeker ought to be humble and defer his rational intellect to the signs by which God disclosed Himself, namely the revelation, and if he is granted it, direct unveiling. Therefore, Ibn ‘Arabī asserts, “The heart of the knower or perfect man is like the setting for the stone of a ring. It does not exceed it, but rather follows its measurements and its shape.”⁴⁷ This demonstrates again an ideal of passivity; the seeker displays poor *adab* if he seeks to exceed the knowledge which God grants him. The image of the setting for the stone indicates that the seeker of knowledge should view himself as a receptacle for divine knowledge and “follow [the] measurements and shape” of the knowledge granted to him. Therefore, for the knower, knowledge is acquired passively at the discretion of God.

Ibn ‘Arabī asserts that, in addition to revelation, humans know God through His self-disclosure. His concept of the self-disclosure of God is one of his most central metaphysical discussions and extends far beyond epistemology. The self-disclosure of the Divine is typically used by Ibn ‘Arabī in ontological or epistemological contexts or when distinguishing between the two.⁴⁸ Self-disclosure of the Divine is the process by which God manifests in the world. It is the way in which knowledge can exist on both an existential level within the oneness of God as well as subsist and manifest in the world. This applies at a practical level, because it is the only way in which a human can receive

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⁴⁶ Ibid., 8.  
⁴⁷ Ibid., 127.  
⁴⁸ Chittick IV, 91.
perfect knowledge. Self-disclosure applies to all levels of the cosmos, but reaches its highest point in humans. Through cultivating his attributes and understanding the way in which these attributes are manifest, man is able to reach the point of being a “mirror” and fully reflect the attributes of the Divine. It is important to note that this is limited because humans can only reflect what God discloses, and, according to Ibn ‘Arabī, God only discloses His attributes, never His Essence.49

It is through self-disclosure, however, that humans can come to the fullest understanding of God, as described in the Ringstone of Elias:

As far as its receptions of knowledge through its own meditations is concerned, when the intellect is stripped down to itself, its knowledge of God is based on the assertion of incomparability, not an assertion of similarity. When God gives someone knowledge through self-disclosure, his knowledge of God becomes perfected. He declares Him to be incomparable in one instance and declares him to be similar in another, and he sees the Real flowing in the forms of nature and those of the elements.50

This passage describes the height of self-disclosure in terms of human knowledge. As will be examined later in the chapter, there is a limit to knowledge acquired through the meditations of the intellect. It is only through self-disclosure that a human can comprehend the totality of the divine names. Because Ibn ‘Arabī is always subject to the revelation, he argues that, without displaying poor adab, if a human uses his reason alone he can only understand what God is not. If a seeker of knowledge hopes to understand what God is, then he must resign himself to the self-disclosure, in order to understand the Reality which seems contradictory to a man of reason: that God is both similar and incomparable at the same time.51

50 Ibid., 227.
51 Ibid., 24, 37, 38.
The infinite nature of God’s self disclosure also applies to the quest for knowledge. Ibn ‘Arabī states that,

Indeed, the forms of self-disclosure have no ends where one might stop. Such is the knowledge one has of God, which has no final end at which the knower might stop. Indeed, he is a knower at every moment, and yearns for increase in his knowledge of Him, My Lord, grant me increase in knowledge. (20:114)\textsuperscript{52}

Though God only discloses His attributes, never His Essence, the seeker will never be satisfied, because self-disclosure is a process which is constantly occurring, and infinitely so.\textsuperscript{53} We can only know what God discloses about Himself, and the knowledge of His attributes would take a lifetime of perfect striving to acquire. Through self-disclosure the servant can accomplish the paradox discussed earlier of actively seeking knowledge while passively acquiring it. Because God’s self-disclosure is infinite, the seeker can constantly yearn for knowledge even as he receives it.

While self-disclosure explains acquiring knowledge at the metaphysical level, Ibn ‘Arabī attributes most of his knowledge to the concept of unveiling, \textit{kashf}. Unveiling is a process in which knowledge is given directly by God, though not quite at the level of revelation. Ibn ‘Arabī did not claim that his works were revealed or that he was a messenger or prophet, but the idea of unveiling is a very strong claim. He argues that his knowledge was not learned, but given to him by God, and because God is the All-Knowing, everything in Reality is already known and thus cannot be “learned” by humans.\textsuperscript{54} Therefore, unveiling is likened to remembering something which is already true; in Ibn ‘Arabī’s metaphysical framework, everything which man \textit{can} know is already known. This is why the image of unveiling knowledge is so powerful; “learning” is

\begin{itemize}
\item 52 Ibid., 129.
\item 53 Chittick IV, 153.
\item 54 Ibid., 154.
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rather uncovering something which was always present. Unveiling is also a passive process, because a seeker of knowledge cannot unveil a truth, it is unveiled to him by God.

The fact that Ibn ‘Arabī claimed to obey God without question\(^5^5\) harks back to another essential characteristic of acquiring knowledge through unveiling: proper *adab*. A servant worthy of unveiled knowledge does not attempt to gain more knowledge than he is prepared to receive and, while constantly thirsting after knowledge, does not actively seek beyond his station. In the first chapter of the *Fuṣūṣ al-hikam*, Ibn ‘Arabī states, “I have made myself subject to what was described to me, and have stopped at what was set out to me. If I were to add anything to it, I would not be able; the presence presents this.”\(^5^6\) In addition to asserting his passive role, by making himself subject to the knowledge he receives and not attempting to go beyond it, Ibn ‘Arabī demonstrates what he considers to be proper *adab* when one receives knowledge through unveiling. He claims that he was satisfied with the knowledge given to him, and unable to present anything beyond it, because of the “presence” of the knowledge unveiled to him.

In the processes of both acquiring and transmitting knowledge, Ibn ‘Arabī shows a clear preference for knowledge which is unveiled, and, as demonstrated earlier, unveiling is the practical application of the metaphysical self-disclosure. Because of his emphasis on these types of knowledge, Ibn ‘Arabī is often presented as a complete opponent of the rational tradition. It is important to note that his “rejection” of reason as a valid means to acquire knowledge is one of the most subtle points in his epistemology. For this reason, it is essential to examine Ibn ‘Arabī’s criticism of acquiring knowledge

\(^5^5\) Ibn ‘Arabī, 1-2.
\(^5^6\) Ibid., 17.
through rational means. He did not outright reject the validity of knowledge gained through reflection or consideration, but rather claimed that there were certain problems with acquiring knowledge in this way and that only knowledge of metaphysics are beyond the scope of what can be acquired through rational consideration.\(^57\) It must also be stated that Ibn ‘Arabī did not question the validity of the method in and of itself, as reason is one of the distinguishing features of man, but rather criticized and rejected the possibility of gaining valid knowledge through reason alone.

Despite his concerns, Ibn ‘Arabī clearly states that valid knowledge can be attained through the intellect, but his chief qualm with it is that knowledge attained through rational consideration can be false, while knowledge attained through unveiling is necessarily true.\(^58\) Thus, knowledge attained by the intellect is gained through created things which are subject to change, whereas revealed and unveiled knowledge are gained from existing and unchanging things which are not subject to potential falsehood. This is connected to the idea that there is a greater diversity of intellectual knowledge because it is based on the limitations of being human rather than the highest synthesis of which humans are capable.\(^59\) Reflection of the intellect, Ibn ‘Arabī argues, is based on circumstances which are constantly changing, and attempts to know Reality through things which subsist rather than exist through Reality itself. The ability to reflect and contemplate is one of the highest qualities humans possess, but in order to reach full synthesis, Ibn ‘Arabī argues that man must transcend this to the higher level of knowledge, unveiling. Thus, rational consideration can yield positive results, but above

\(^{57}\) Rosenthal, 4.
\(^{58}\) Ibid., 3.
\(^{59}\) Chittick IV, 159.
all, Ibn ‘Arabī states that those who depend on rational knowledge alone are limited and unable to come to a full understanding of God’s nature.

Ibn ‘Arabī’s most prominent criticism of rational knowledge in the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* is that those who rely on it will only be able to comprehend half of God’s true nature. While he writes at length about specific groups favoring rational consideration in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, he is less specific in the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, only directly criticizing the Mu’tazalites and proponents of *kalām* in a few chapters. In the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* Ibn ‘Arabī generally concentrates on describing acquiring knowledge in positive terms rather than rejecting other methods, however, he includes a fair amount of direct criticism of those who rely on human intellect. With regards to understanding the nature of God, Ibn ‘Arabī asserts that the highest point a man who relies on intellect alone can reach is to assert the incomparability of God, and “the man who asserts incomparability is either ignorant or a man of poor *adab.*”

Ibn ‘Arabī avows that it in order to avoid logical contradictions, a rationalist cannot make any positive claims about God’s true nature, but because God has disclosed himself in revelation and unveiling, it is in poor *adab* to claim this unless out of ignorance. He further stresses the point, saying that “… he displays poor *adab* and gives lies to the Real and the Messengers, God’s blessings be upon them, doing so unawares.”

Ibn ‘Arabī is strongly opposed to making a single-minded claim about the nature of God, because anyone who would make such a claim clearly does not understand the full, paradoxical Reality. To demonstrate, he states “likewise, one who

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60 Ibn ‘Arabī, 37.
61 Ibid., 37.
asserts His similarity but does not assert His incomparability qualifies Him and limits Him; he knows Him not.”\textsuperscript{62}

In addition to Ibn ‘Arabī’s rejection of rational thought as a means to understand metaphysical Reality and the nature of God, he also finds it inferior to experienced knowledge throughout the \textit{Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam}. Ibn ‘Arabī asserts this hierarchy through direct comparison between knowledge from reason and knowledge from taste. He claims that “knowledge of this reality is dependent on witnessing, and is far removed from the results of thought,”\textsuperscript{63} and more strongly, with regards to the Sufi path:

As for the Folk of Faith, they are imitators. They imitate the prophets and the messengers in what they have related to us of the Real. They are not those who follow men of speculation, who interpret the transmitted sayings by means of their intellectual proofs.\textsuperscript{64}

Here, Ibn ‘Arabī not only asserts the superior means of gaining knowledge, but also criticizes subjecting the revelation to human reasoning. God’s knowledge is perfect, and thus what He said about Himself through revelation is not subject to human rational proofs. In cases where the revelation is at odds with logic or human rational norms, Ibn ‘Arabī is insistent that this points to a flaw in human knowledge rather than the revelation, stating, “If one is a slave of the Lord, the intellect will defer to Him, but if he is a slave of speculation, the truth will defer to its judgment.”\textsuperscript{65} Thus, the revelation is not to be reconciled with the limits of human understanding, but a human should strive to transcend these limits and understand the revelation through unveiled knowledge.

Ibn ‘Arabī continues to build nuance to his epistemology as he describes a hierarchy of knowledge which exists on two levels: knowledge acquired through rational

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 38.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 44.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 131.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 234-235.
consideration and within the realm of unveiled knowledge. A hierarchy of knowledge may seem to be irrelevant once a seeker has been granted unveiled knowledge, but it is of the utmost importance to continuously strive for knowledge, as Ibn ‘Arabī instructs readers to “contemplate the fact that the hierarchy of mankind in their knowledge of God is their very hierarchy in terms of their vision on the Day of Resurrection.” This assertion is quite striking because Ibn ‘Arabī does not often connect knowledge with eschatology in the Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam. Ibn ‘Arabī makes it clear that he considers unveiled knowledge to be superior to rational consideration, and thus makes little explicit discussion of a hierarchy with relation to those who place intellectual reasoning above experienced knowledge. Most typically, direct discussions of the hierarchy of knowledge occur in relation to fellow Sufis.

When discussing other mystics, Ibn ‘Arabī states that though all of the Folk of God are “more exalted” because they gain knowledge through unveiling, there is a hierarchy among them:

There are those among them who know it in a general way and those who know it in detail. The one who knows in detail is more exalted and more perfect than the one who knows in a general way, for he knows what is contained in God’s knowledge of him—which concern the knowledge of him his identity grants Him—or through the unveiling to him of his immutable identity and infinite transitions of the stages it encounters.67

In this, the men of knowledge are ranked in excellence: there are those who know, and those who know more.68

As these passages demonstrate, it is not enough to accept that valid knowledge comes from unveiling, or even to receive knowledge through unveiling. Ibn ‘Arabī asserts that because God’s knowledge is infinite, a human can and should continuously seek

66 Ibid., 115.
67 Ibid., 23.
68 Ibid., 100-101.
knowledge, building upon each level that is unveiled to them. As part of man’s thirst for knowledge, each level of unveiling prepares him for the next level of knowledge. Thus, seekers who receive knowledge through unveiling are ranked based on the level of knowledge which has been given to them, and this hierarchy has eschatological consequences. Despite the infinity of God’s knowledge, man can understand a great deal, but there are certain things which, “God only grants understanding of [them] to those whom he has distinguished with perfect knowledge.”

Though this overview of epistemology in the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* is not by any means exhaustive of Ibn ‘Arabī’s larger philosophical framework, it provides a basic account of and insights into his larger concept of knowledge. Throughout the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* Ibn ‘Arabī is consistent as he applies his metaphysical concepts of knowledge to the process of acquiring knowledge. This is demonstrated through the discussions of how Ibn ‘Arabī viewed himself and his method, exploring knowledge as he envisioned it on the metaphysical level, and finally his philosophy of acquiring valid knowledge and the hierarchy of the knowledgeable. His work remained deeply conservative, exploring the concept of knowledge within a framework which deferred to practice and revelation above all else.

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69Ibid., 149.
CHAPTER TWO: MY LORD, INCREASE ME IN KNOWLEDGE! CLARIFICATION IN QAYṢARĪ’S PROLEGOMENA

Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī was an influential member of the Akbarian school who studied with ‘Abd al-Razzāq Qāshānī (d. 730 A.H./1330 C.E.). Very little is known about his early life or education, but he was born in Kayseri, Anatolia, traveled and studied in Egypt at some point in his life. Qayṣarī was a prolific writer, composing a number of commentaries on Sufi works, notably the Wine Song of Ibn al-Fāriḍ and the Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam, as well as several original works. Though his influence was not as profound as Ibn ‘Arabī’s, Qayṣarī deserves recognition for making Ibn ‘Arabī’s teachings much more accessible and widespread. Qayṣarī was the head of the first Ottoman school system, beginning in 736 A.H./1336 C.E. until his death. Through this position and his writings, Qayṣarī’s interpretation of Ibn ‘Arabī was pervasive throughout the Muslim world. As mentioned earlier, his commentary on the Fuṣūṣ-al-ḥikam was used in the Ottoman school system to teach Ibn ‘Arabī’s metaphysics due to its clear expression of Ibn ‘Arabī’s complex philosophy. The work is a line-by-line commentary of the Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam, and begins with the Prolegomena as its introduction. While Qayṣarī does not stray significantly from Ibn ‘Arabī’s concepts of theoretical epistemology, he often adds nuance and truly elucidates the subtleties of Ibn ‘Arabī’s complex thought.

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71 Ibid.
This chapter will present an overview of the theoretical epistemology presented in the *Prolegomena* of Qayṣarī. The structure will mirror the first chapter in order to provide an analysis of the features shared by Ibn ‘Arabī and Qayṣarī in their theoretical “systems” of epistemology. While Ibn ‘Arabī’s various threads of epistemology were consciously systematized Qayṣarī’s work is already systematic. Thus, while the epistemology outlined in Chapter One was collected from the entire *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, it is much easier to concentrate on certain sections of the *Prolegomena* to come to an understanding of Qayṣarī’s theoretical understanding of epistemology. As such, this chapter will focus on the introduction, chapters one, two, three, and seven of the *Prolegomena*.

Qayṣarī firmly places himself in the mystical tradition through his subject matter and the way he describes the process of acquiring knowledge. Not only did he provide commentary on significant Sufi works, but his original works, such as *Treatise on the Science of Sufism* were deeply mystical in their content. The introduction to the *Prolegomena* serves as his primary means to connect himself to Ibn ‘Arabī and the Akbarian school. He praises Ibn ‘Arabī and seldom refers to him again throughout the text. He uses passive language throughout and states that “the truth was lifted to me,” and that he simply “recorded some of what God opened to me [in the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*].”

He claims that he had no access to the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* before receiving the commentary in a passive fashion. By claiming to acquire knowledge in this manner, Qayṣarī asserts his alignment to Ibn ‘Arabī’s method of epistemology. Through placing himself in this

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72 Ibid.
74 Ibid., 5.
75 Ibid., 6.
line of unveiled knowledge, Qayṣarī clearly states his position; he is not merely a
commentator elucidating complex subject matter, but rather a seeker on the Path, gaining
knowledge through the means of unveiling.

Qayṣarī’s firm grasp of Ibn ‘Arabī’s epistemology is demonstrated throughout the
*Prolegomena* as he presents the most difficult concepts of Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought in a
succinct, clear manner. Qayṣarī’s discussion of the metaphysical role of knowledge is
much more lucid than Ibn ‘Arabī’s. Qayṣarī develops his explanation of the oneness and
reality of *wujūd* throughout the *Prolegomena* but most clearly in the first chapter, where
he qualifies its ability to manifest in a seemingly multiple way. He also discusses the
levels of manifestation, and similar to Ibn ‘Arabī, places Knowledge at one of the highest
levels. He presents an ontological schema where *wujūd* is the singular pure existence,
followed by its highest manifestations: Life, Knowledge, Power, and Will.76 At the
singular level, Qayṣarī asserts that these qualities are all present within *wujūd*, but “At the
second level, Knowledge is distinguished from Power, and Power from Will; thus the
qualities become multiple.”77 Therefore, Knowledge is at the very first level of
distinction within the singularity of existence. Qayṣarī further explains these
metaphysical qualities and divides them into categories of non-rational, partially rational,
and fully rational, with Knowledge as a partially rational quality.78

Using this abstract quality of Knowledge, Qayṣarī is able to clarify one of the
more difficult aspects of Ibn ‘Arabī’s metaphysics: reconciling the oneness of *wujūd* with
the multiplicity of creation. He states,

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77 Ibid.
78 Ibid., 16.
Multiplicity stems from the Essence’s Knowledge, since His knowledge is of His Essence and for His Essence… Then the Divine Love requires that each of them attain individuation and entification, first in the presence of knowledge, then in the presence of entities.\(^7^9\)

Therefore, Knowledge exists in God’s qualities, as a “part” of the oneness of \textit{wujūd} before manifesting at the highest level possible. It is through God’s knowledge of everything that multiplicity becomes manifest. Qayṣarī asserts that creation is completely encompassed in God’s knowledge, “Glorified be He, of whom it is said, \textit{Nothing escapes His Knowledge, neither in the earth nor the heavens, and He is the Seeing, the Knowing.}”\(^8^0\) Everything in creation already exists within the divine Knowledge, and therefore human knowledge is nearly limitless, if one understands the process and source of knowledge.

In addition to his succinct discussion of the place of knowledge in the greater ontological system, Qayṣarī provides an excellent clarification on the distinction between valid and useless knowledge. This distinction is one of the most challenging points of Ibn ‘Arabī’s epistemology, because as Qayṣarī states, “So long as things do not exist in the realm of knowledge, they cannot exist in the realm of entities.”\(^8^1\) Once one understands the metaphysical status of knowledge, it would seem impossible for false knowledge to exist within Ibn ‘Arabī and Qayṣarī’s frameworks. However, this subtle point is brilliantly elucidated by Qayṣarī, and is worth reproducing at length:

\(^7^9\) Ibid., 17.
\(^8^0\) Ibid., 20.
\(^8^1\) Ibid., 19.
With respect to the possibility or impossibility of their *wujūd* in the external realm, the entities can be divided into two groups. The first consists of contingent things while the second consists of impossible things. This second group can be further divided into two groups. The first consists solely of postulations made by the intellect such as ‘God’s partner,’ ‘the coming together of contradictories,’ ‘the presence of opposites in certain substrate or locus,’ and so forth. These are imaginary, resulting from an intellect polluted by imaginings…the second consists of those which are not simply postulations made by the intellect and which are indeed fixed aspects of the affair in itself, existent in the realm of knowledge, consequents of the Essence of the Real, because they are forms of the Names of the Unseen, peculiar to the Inward with respect to its being the opposite of the Outward. The Inward has an aspect that comes together with the Outward, and an aspect that does not. The first is the domain particular to contingent things, while the second is the domain of impossible things.\(^\text{82}\)

Therefore, Qayṣarī points to God’s all-encompassing knowledge to explain why humans are able to conceive of useless or invalid knowledge, claiming that “God has knowledge of this subdivision [imagination of the intellect] by virtue of His knowledge of the intellect, the imagination, and that which is a consequent of them.”\(^\text{83}\) This explanation of the problem of humans acquiring knowledge which does not bring them back to God is an exceptional clarification of Ibn ‘Arabī’s original concept; Qayṣarī defers to God’s knowledge and provides the explanation in terms of the limits of human intellect rather than saying that this points to a way in which rational thought surpasses the revelation. He asserts that invalid or useless knowledge exists at some level within the divine Reality, or else humans could not conceive of it, but the imaginations of the intellect should never be confused for the superiority of the intellect, but rather are an indication of the limitlessness of God’s Knowledge.

In contrast to Ibn ‘Arabī, Qayṣarī has little to say about why man must seek knowledge or the relationship of knowledge and practice. While the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* is

\[^{82}\text{Ibid., 19-20.}\]
\[^{83}\text{Ibid., 19.}\]
rife with discussions of the importance of practice, the Prolegomena is a theoretical discussion of Ibn ‘Arabī’s metaphysics. While it could be said that a work on the metaphysics of knowledge need not discuss practice, this indicates a way in which Qayṣarī differs from Ibn ‘Arabī. Even in the midst of metaphysical discussions, Ibn ‘Arabī asserts the importance of practice; it is difficult to think of a work by Ibn ‘Arabī which does not defer to the Path over the metaphysics he expounds. Qayṣarī, however, presents a strictly theoretical discussion of knowledge in the Prolegomena. Despite being more clearly organized, this shift away from incorporating practice in theoretical discussions is a clear distinction between Qayṣarī and Ibn ‘Arabī.

Qayṣarī’s discussions of the process of acquiring knowledge mirror Ibn ‘Arabī’s, stressing the importance of gaining knowledge through self-disclosure, unveiling, and challenging the process of rational consideration. God’s self-disclosure is the very foundation of the process of acquiring knowledge. Qayṣarī echoes Ibn ‘Arabī’s assertion that it is by divine self-disclosure that humans are able to know anything. Divine self-disclosure is the process by which wujūd becomes manifest in creation. On that matter, Qayṣarī states,

… Wujūd self-discloses in one quality, and then is distinguished from the self-disclosed wujūd through some other quality. It becomes one of the realities that are the Names. The form of that reality in the Knowledge of God is called a quiddity or a fixed entity.84

He later asserts that the process of self-disclosure is not only the “starting point” of how man acquires knowledge, but also represents the pinnacle of knowledge;

When you learn this, you will know that the realities of the world in the realm of entities and in the realm of knowledge, are all loci of manifestation for the reality of man, which itself is a locus of manifestation for the Name of God.85

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84 Ibid., 21.
85 Ibid., 32.
Therefore, humans know everything by self-disclosure, but those who are aware of this process are aware of the highest Reality and are at a high station of knowledge.

In Qayṣarī’s epistemology unveiling is the most important point in the process of acquiring knowledge as the highest and most trustworthy means of gaining knowledge after revelation. In addition to affirming Ibn ‘Arabī’s thoughts on unveiling, Qayṣarī also provides a stronger distinction between unveiling and revelation. He asserts that revelation is a higher type of knowledge than unveiling, despite the fact that unveiling takes place without an intermediary. Unveiling does not bring a new message, but rather is the uncovering of a meaning present in the revelation. Similar to the idea that the imaginings of the intellect seem to be original and are therefore indicative of the superiority of the intellect, at first glance, unveiling may seem superior to a revelation because it comes directly from God. Qayṣarī asserts that revelation is necessarily above unveiling, despite the presence of an intermediary. By asserting the superiority of the revelation, Qayṣarī remains conservative by placing the revelation above everything else. He also fends off any potential criticisms of the concept of unveiling as claiming new revelation by making it clear what he means by “unveiling.” This systematic and thorough discussion is different from Ibn ‘Arabī and elucidates one of the points of his epistemology which is almost too bold when left allusive.

Excluding the clarification of terminology and expanding on the hierarchy of acquiring knowledge, Qayṣarī’s concept of unveiling follows Ibn ‘Arabī’s. He sees unveiling as a passive process by which a seeker gains true knowledge, and instructs readers to “Remember that God says And they comprehend not anything of His.

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86 Qayṣarī, Sharḥ-i muqaddamah- ʿi Qayṣarī bar Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam, ch. 7.
knowledge save such as He Wills” (2:255).\textsuperscript{87} This quote from the Qur’ān serves to remind seekers that all valid knowledge is a divine gift, and that it is done through God’s will, not the will of the intellect. Despite the passivity of the actual unveiling, Qayṣarī, like Ibn ‘Arabī, asserts that man must actively seek knowledge. Qayṣarī goes into detail on the levels of unveiling, stating, “There are levels to this unveiling based on how many veils—all or some of them—are removed.”\textsuperscript{88} This suggests both a hierarchy of valid knowledge and the importance of the continued search for knowledge.

The most specific chapter on epistemology in the Prolegomena, Chapter Seven, “Unveiling,” begins with a precise definition and distinction of the types of unveiling, clarifying in detail not present in the Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam. The chapter includes a long discussion of the unveiling of the senses, as well as the levels of unveiling attained by the saints and prophets. Qayṣarī also describes the different type of knowledge a seeker can achieve through unveiling. He states, “‘openings’ are of two varieties: the opening in the soul, which gives perfect knowledge in terms of transmission and intellect, and the opening of the spirit which grants gnosis in wujūd, not transmission and intellect.”\textsuperscript{89} Again, Qayṣarī points to the hierarchy of knowledge attained through unveiling; he argues that even after knowledge is unveiled to a seeker there is a higher level to strive for. He also distinguishes between the perfect knowledge of the intellect, and the ultimate knowledge of wujūd, which cannot be transmitted or understood intellectually. This is a fascinating nuance to the concept of unveiling, which is perhaps alluded to in the Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam, but one which Qayṣarī makes perfectly clear to all seekers in the Prolegomena.

\textsuperscript{87} Qayṣarī, Prolegomena, trans. Caner K. Dagli., 31.  
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 30.  
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 31.
Just as Ibn ‘Arabī’s criticism of knowledge acquired through rational consideration is one of the more subtle points of his epistemology, Qayṣarī presents an equally balanced critique. As seen in the previous section, unveiled knowledge is subject to intellectual consideration, which serves to strengthen the seeker’s understanding of his knowledge. Qayṣarī’s primary criticism of the intellect is that it often serves as a hindrance to man’s understanding of Reality rather than an aid. His clarification of useless knowledge serves to explain this phenomenon; because man is capable of being subject to the “imaginings” of his intellect, he mistakenly concludes that when there is a disparity between the revelation and his intellect that this points to a flaw in revealed knowledge. For Qayṣarī, however, it is the very fact that the mind is capable of imagining things beyond Reality which prevent it from acquiring the highest knowledge of the oneness of wujūd. He repeatedly asserts the oneness of ultimate Reality, of which, “The intellect judges there to be a difference between these two in the intellect just as it judges there to be a difference between quality and qualified object in the intellect, although they are unified in wujūd itself.”  

90 Ibid. 14, italics in original.
91 Ibid., 32.

Like Ibn ‘Arabī, Qayṣarī not only suggests that the intellect hinders the process of acquiring valid knowledge, but asserts that there is a level of knowledge which is simply inaccessible to the intellect. When discussing a nuance of metaphysics, Qayṣarī states, “Theoretical thinkers are unaware of the subdivision, for the intellect has no access to it.
The likes of these ideas can only be attained from the niches of prophecy and sanctity, and from faith in both of them.”\textsuperscript{92} Through this statement, Qayṣarī rejects the possibility of knowing Reality through the intellect alone; while the intellect can yield knowledge, it also confuses a seeker and can never access certain realms of knowledge. Qayṣarī further points to the inadequacy of rational knowledge because when one has been given knowledge through unveiling, “One cannot point this [the reality of \textit{wujūd}] out, nor can one clarify it with explanation.”\textsuperscript{93} Through this statement, Qayṣarī takes what could be a criticism of mystical knowledge, that it cannot be explained rationally, and inverts it; unveiled knowledge, like revelation is \textit{above} the intellect and human logic. To emphasize this, at one point in his first chapter, Qayṣarī decisively states

\begin{quote}
This is enough for one who possesses discernment when it comes to this subject. He whose vision has been illuminated by God, who understands what has been said, and who devotes himself to its study will have no trouble in fending off the doubts caused by his imagination, nor in countering false arguments.\textsuperscript{94}
\end{quote}

This brief statement demonstrates that even when clarifying Ibn ʿArabī in a clear way, Qayṣarī does not always feel compelled to fully discuss his concepts in a logical, syllogistic fashion.

As mentioned previously, Qayṣarī follows Ibn ʿArabī by asserting distinctions in station even after a seeker has been granted unveiled knowledge. He states that the highest station of knowledge is that of the prophets and saints, and that “He who witnesses the fixed entities in the presence of knowledge is at a higher level than all

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 20.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 31.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 12.
others." Yet he also clarifies that it is not only prophets and saints who acquire these high stations of knowledge. Qayṣarī asserts that,

> This manifestation intensifies or weakens in function of the proximity to, or distance from, the Real, as well as in function of the paucity or abundance of intimations and the purity or pollution of the preparedness.

Thus, the level of knowledge which a seeker attains is directly related to his preparedness. This alludes to his assertion that unveilings “seldom occur in the absence of the attainment of meanings of the unseen.” Though it is possible to have an unveiling which does not lead to full knowledge of Reality or even a deeper understanding of Reality, it is precisely through this distinction that Qayṣarī constructs his hierarchy. Those who are not fully prepared simply do not receive as high and meaningful unveilings.

Qayṣarī was a disciple who understood Ibn ‘Arabī’s epistemology with the utmost precision. His ability to systematize and clarify Ibn ‘Arabī’s scattered and allusive tracts of thought was truly remarkable. Qayṣarī’s writing style is distinct from Ibn ‘Arabī’s, yet the concepts presented in the *Prolegomena* do not differ a great deal on a theoretical level from Ibn ‘Arabī’s epistemology. Qayṣarī is truly aligned with Ibn ‘Arabī in terms of his theoretical understanding of the subject matter, as demonstrated through examining his metaphysical understanding of knowledge, distinction between valid and useless knowledge, discussion of unveiling and criticism of the limits of the intellect. While Qayṣarī’s clarification and systematization is useful for later scholars and students, it is the theoretical agreement outlined in this chapter which necessitates the final chapter’s exploration of the problematic elements of Qayṣarī’s method of expression.

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95 Ibid., 30.
96 Ibid., 22.
97 Ibid., 30.
CHAPTER THREE: DIFFERENCES IN STYLE BETWEEN IBN ‘ARABĪ AND QAYṢARĪ AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

After covering the respective theoretical epistemologies of Ibn ‘Arabī and Qayṣarī, it is now possible to examine their methods of expression and evaluate their effectiveness and appropriateness. As mentioned in the Introduction, while philosophical questions of the role of language and expression have been addressed extensively in Jewish and Christian mystical movements, these issues are largely unexamined in Islamic mystical expression. For this reason, members of the Akbarian School are generally classified as “mystics” regardless of their style of expression because of their subject matter and lineage with Ibn ‘Arabī. At the very least, it is important to understand that the school of Ibn ‘Arabī was neither purely mystical nor purely philosophical. While Qayṣarī’s subject matter remained mystical, the shift to a philosophical writing style while not enough to disqualify him as a mystic overall, excludes him from being easily categorized as a mystical writer. Through analyzing the rhetorical features of the Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam and Prolegomena, it will become clear that they are written in distinct styles; the former is characterized by mystical features whereas the latter is generally philosophical. Qayṣarī’s Prolegomena is mystical in content and has enough features of mystical writing to minimally classify it as “mystical expression,” but the overarching systematic, philosophical tone creates a significant tension between his content and method of expression.

98 Dagli I, 1
As understood by this study, in order to be classified as mystical writing, the text will be unsystematic, “alogical,” and makes use of rhetorical devices intended to create confusion rather than clarity. These features are taken from the theoretical assumption that mystical writing attempts to “[express] the inexpressible,” and seeks to describe experiences which “burst all conventional bounds in their intensity” and that these features aid accomplishing these goals. Overall, it is essential that the writer be self-aware of the limit of language in order to remain consistent with their insistence that the “essence of mystical terminology is experience.” The acknowledgement of the limits of language allows the mystic to employ a variety of styles of expression all with the intention of hinting at an experience rather than expressing it fully. A mystic can bolster this goal by utilizing an unsystematic, alogical, and confusing writing style to maintain the supremacy of experience by making his writing accessible only to those who already understand what is being covered. These concepts will be fully examined later in the chapter, but first, it is essential to cover these features as they apply to Ibn ‘Arabī in the Fusūṣ al-ḥikam and are largely absent from Qayṣarī’s writing in the Prolegomena.

Despite the criticism of being too philosophical leveled at Ibn ‘Arabī, we will see that his writings are still firmly in the mystical tradition. In the Fusūṣ al-ḥikam Ibn ‘Arabī provides a work which, given these assumptions, can be categorized mystical based on both his content and writing style. One feature which aligns with mystical expression is the process of unveiling mentioned in Chapter One extends not only to receiving knowledge, but also to the process of writing; Ibn ‘Arabī claims to have

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99 Above logic.
101 Ernst, 191.
102 Ibid., 189.
transmitted information rather than taking an active, creative role in writing the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. His introduction to the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* will be quoted at length to illustrate this point:

Praise be to God, who by the unity of the path of the peoples and from the most external station makes wisdom descend into the hearts of the Words, even though sects and communities, owing to the diversity of peoples may differ.\(^{103}\)

Ibn ‘Arabī begins his work by first praising God, who “makes wisdom descend into the hearts,” asserting that God actively causes knowledge in humans’ hearts. Relating specifically to the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, Ibn ‘Arabī states that Muhammad visited him in a dream and:

In his hand, may God bless him and grant him peace, was a book, and he said unto me, “This is the book *The Ringstones of Wisdom*. Take hold of it, and with it go out to the people so that they may benefit from it.” I said, “I hear and obey God, His Messenger, and the men of authority among us, as we have been commanded.” And so I realized my hope, made my faithful intention and purified my purpose and resolution to present this book as set out to me by the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, with neither addition nor omission… I asked God to… bestow upon me in what my fingers write, what my tongue utters, and what my heart holds through the glorious dictation of the exhalation of the spirit into the breathing heart, with a giving of strength that will protect me, so that I may be an interpreter and not dictate over it, and so that whosoever from amongst the Folk of God and the Men of the Heart who occupy themselves with it will realize that it comes from a station of holiness, far removed from those designs of the soul which are granted entrance by deception.\(^{104}\)

This opening describes Ibn ‘Arabī’s view of his process of both acquiring knowledge and transmitting knowledge. He views himself as utterly passive in the process and the declaration that Muhammad visited Ibn ‘Arabī in a dream and gave him the book is a bold assertion of the capacity of the concept of unveiling. This passage borders on claiming new revelation, as he states that he did not add or omit anything from the book

\(^{103}\) Ibn ‘Arabī, 1.

\(^{104}\) Ibid., 1-2.
which Muhammad gave him in the dream. This shows that Ibn ʿArabī was passive to the unveiling process. The fact that Muhammad asks him to share the book with others so that they may benefit from it both supports Ibn ʿArabī’s claim of purely unveiled knowledge but also presents a tension. While the knowledge was directly unveiled to Ibn ʿArabī, how can he share it with others who have not experienced the unveiling directly?

Perhaps to address the concern of claiming a new revelation, Ibn ʿArabī carefully states that he asked God to “bestow upon [him] in what [his] fingers write,” thus acknowledges some role in the process. In addition, while he claims that he did not “dictate over” the work, he also credits himself as an interpreter. Ibn ʿArabī is aware that he is not directly transmitting a new revelation, and that while the knowledge may be unveiled to him, he is still interpreting it on a level. He feels that, to fellow Sufis, it would be apparent that the work came from “a station of holiness.” Through these Sufis’ own experiences of unveiling, they would know what he means to a greater extent than the untrained reader. While he transmits knowledge acquired by that means, he states that he “hears and obeys God,” implying that he was commanded to transmit the knowledge and did not question this command.

Another feature which lends to mystical categorization is that Ibn ʿArabī’s writing is thoroughly unsystematic, including overlapping “families” of ideas, cosmology, and metaphysics. In order to systematize his work, one must take one of those approaches and analyze it on its own. Rosenthal asserts “in speaking of the ‘method’ of [Ibn ʿArabī’s] al-Futūḥāt, [he] probably had no fixed system in mind, certainly no system that

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105 Referred to as the “Folk of God.”
106 Dagli I, 27.
was in the least ‘philosophical.’”107 This statement applies equally to the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. Though his work gave rise to a more logical, systematic approach in mystical philosophy, Ibn ‘Arabī’s writing is described as a “torrent of consciousness flow[ing] so wildly that it cannot easily be dammed up into quotable segments,”108 and “free flowing meditation.”109 In terms of the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* in particular, while each prophet is aligned with a specific “wisdom,” the connection between the prophet and wisdom is often strained at best, with a variety of topics within a single chapter, with the style of writing varying tremendously from chapter to chapter. The work is quite dense and must be heavily glossed before his meaning can be accessed. The epistemology spoken of in this study is not presented in single section of the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, rather it is scattered throughout in chapter, paragraphs, and sections. These pieces were collected to present what could be called a system, but only for the sake of clarity; while the concepts presented were discussed by Ibn ‘Arabī, he did not lay them out into a system or official theory of epistemology.

In addition to being unsystematic, Ibn ‘Arabī presents his ideas in their fully-developed state with no lead-in or explanation,110 which lends itself to mystical categorization. Ibn ‘Arabī makes his writings accessible only to seekers who are already quite far along on the path of knowledge by presenting his ideas in this way. A key feature of rational expression is logical progression, and a rationalist must take care to fully develop his ideas in order to form a coherent argument. In contrast, Ibn ‘Arabī is unconcerned with providing rational proof or validation for his knowledge, and therefore

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107 Rosenthal, 6.
108 Ibid. 7.
109 Ibid., 34.
110 Dagli I, 89.
presents information which he claims was unveiled to him without explanation or syllogisms to justify it. This can be categorized as mystical because mystical expression’s “…place is not to be logical, but not to be illogical either,” but rather alogical.\footnote{Barrett, 69.} Because Ibn ‘Arabī views his subject matter as something which was unveiled to him by God, it is above rational proof or logic. Presenting ideas in their fully developed form makes them more esoteric, with technical vocabulary conveying concepts to a group who will understand what is meant by these limited terms.\footnote{Katz II, 20.}

While presenting a concept in its full form does not make the information fully inaccessible, it does limit it. It is difficult to give a specific example, because it would require too much context to demonstrate the “fully developed” idea in the midst of Ibn ‘Arabī’s discussions. There is a refrain throughout the \textit{Fusūṣ al-ḥikam} of “it is known,” followed by a statement which is hardly objective or intuitive. While a reader could possibly understand what Ibn ‘Arabī means \textit{conceptually} with these fully-presented ideas, it is only through extensive commentary, explanation or background knowledge; on its own, the \textit{Fusūṣ al-ḥikam} would be very difficult to decipher for those who do not have the experience of unveiled knowledge or an extensive background in the exoteric and esoteric sciences.

In addition to the basic features of being unsystematic and alogical, Ibn ‘Arabī employs a variety of rhetorical features typical of mystical expression to create a sense of confusion to veil experience to those who are not yet ready for the information the mystic is trying to convey. Mystics often use linguistic devices to establish and contemplate their experience such as contradiction, impossibility, paradoxes, negative imagery and
ineffability. As mentioned earlier, these features serve primarily to make the work confusing in order to protect the information therein. The content need not be threatening, simply not appropriate in some way for untrained audiences. These devices also establish the self-awareness of the limitation of language which must be assumed for a writing to qualify as “mystical.” When experienced knowledge is rendered superior to rational consideration, there is necessarily an inability to fully express oneself through writing and to use rhetorical devices which intentionally confuse the reader allows a greater ability to convey a representation of experienced knowledge.

One of the most powerful mystical devices is evoking a sense of ineffability, to imply that an experience cannot be expressed. Yet asserting ineffability simultaneously conceals and expresses an experience; by using these negative terms, one still has some description, often hinting at sublimity or bliss. In the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, Ibn Arabī states,

> Among us are those in whose knowledge there remains ignorance, who say that the inability to achieve perception is a perception. But there are those among us who do know and do not speak so, which is a more exalted thing to say. Indeed, knowledge bestows silence upon them, not inability. They are the most exalted of those who know God.

He asserts that silence is a “more exalted thing to say,” as it conveys a self-awareness from the mystic of the limits of language to describe Reality and experienced knowledge. By asserting ineffability Ibn ʿArabī is able to protect the true meaning of unveiled knowledge, because he places it at a station above human expression. He argues that an ignorant person, perhaps one overly concerned with rational proof and validation, would

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113 Ibid., 8.
114 By “protection,” I simply mean that the information is seen as powerful in some capacity, and that receiving it without adequate preparation is inappropriate at best and harmful at worst.
argue that a person’s silence points to inability to express himself. For a rationalist, the inability to express oneself indicates a flaw in the information they are presenting or in their intelligence. To the mystic, however, ineffability does not point to the limit of their experience, but rather the limit of human conventions and intellect to describe and comprehend that experience. The sense of ineffability also lends some understanding to the outside reader by giving the impression that what lies beyond the realm of human expression is amazing, reserved for the “most exalted of those who know God.”

In addition to ineffability, contradiction is one of the most prominent features of mystical writing because when a mystic states a contradiction he gives a description of Reality which is only intuitive to someone who understands this Reality. One can understand a contradiction on a conceptual level when he reads it, but it will remain conceptual unless he experiences it. A similar phenomenon was discussed by Ninian Smart when describing Hindu mystical experience, “You do not realize the truth of impermanence simply from a textbook or scripture. It is something to which experience and impact have to be added.”

In our context, one does not understand the oneness of wujūd mentioned by Ibn ʿArabī in his unveiling through his writings, he understands it by having a similar experience of unveiling. Thus, the confusing devices serve to point to experience rather than fully convey knowledge gained from that experience. As he states in the *Ringstone of Adam*,

For just as knowledge determines what subsists through it, such that one calls it “knower,” so too does the possessor of the quality determine knowledge as coming to be in the case of what comes to be and eternal in the case of eternal. Each one is determining and determined.  

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117 Smart, 123.
118 Ibn ʿArabī, 10.
This description of a knower as being both “determining and determined” refers to the importance of the seeker striving for knowledge while passively receiving it. While it can be understood in some capacity by those who have not experienced this Reality, it will again remain conceptual, and when considered in a more critical way it becomes clear that it is impossible to truly understand this in an abstract way. Using contradictions implies an all-encompassing Reality which not only allows for, but necessitates opposites. Ibn ‘Arabī’s metaphysics revolve around this point, and it cannot be accessed logically. Thus, he cannot logically explain the multivalent nature of a single Reality, he can only allude to it to those who understand him already.

While all mystical expression need not be conservative, Ibn ‘Arabī’s conservatism is worth noting as it furthers his mystical thought. Chittick’s observation that Ibn ‘Arabī “was both intensely loyal to the tradition and exceedingly innovative”\(^\text{119}\) calls into question what is meant by the concept of conservatism. “Conservative” expression need not be intuitive or orthodox by plain sight, but rather conservative in the sense that the mystic is attempting to reconcile his experience or knowledge to the revelation and not the other way around. As Katz notes,

> Mystics do stretch texts in all directions through their employment of allegorical and symbolic reading; yet this very use of allegory and symbolism, as well as other varied hermeneutical devices, functions to maintain the authority of the canonical sources under interpretation rather than to destroy or transcend them, as is usually assumed.\(^\text{120}\)

The Qur’ān and hadīth serve as the basic starting point for all his writings. His deference to revelation over the human laws of logic further demonstrates his conservatism. This feature, while not applicable or beneficial to all mystical expression serves to strengthen


\(^{120}\) Katz I, 30.
Ibn ‘Arabī’s overall message by ensuring consistency of theory and expression. He states,

In order for you to acquire knowledge, God most high has turn our attention, concerning our knowledge of Him, to contemplating the created, and has said that He will show us His signs within it. He has shown Himself to us through us. 121

Thus, Ibn ‘Arabī demonstrates that man has been already been given guides to acquiring knowledge, and the most important is what God said about Himself, not what the human mind dictates. The conservative nature of his writings is perfectly aligned with his insistence of the superiority of the revelation to human reason, as he utilizes his reason to explain how his knowledge affirms the revelation.

Objections will, no doubt, arise to the categorization of Ibn ‘Arabī’s writing in the Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam as “conservative” due to the reliance on Qur’ānic expressions alone, but these objections are insufficient. Mystics operate on the notion that their sacred texts have multiple layers of interpretation, layers which can seem unintuitive to the untrained reader. Ibn ‘Arabī would not only agree with this, but argue further that the deeper meanings within the Qur’ān are unveiled to a person by God. While the sincerity or validity of Ibn ‘Arabī and other mystics cannot be known, one cannot reject Ibn ‘Arabī’s method outright based on his own notions of epistemology and impose his process of acquiring knowledge onto Ibn ‘Arabī. To be “conservative” is not merely to preserve the original meaning of the Qur’ān,122 but to preserve a meaning which was already present in the Qur’ān. To Ibn ‘Arabī, the knowledge he presented to others was uncovered by him, and thus, preserved. While it is important not to blindly accept that Ibn ‘Arabī received knowledge through divine unveiling simply because he claimed to acquire

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121 Ibn ‘Arabī, 11.
122 And other sacred texts.
knowledge in this manner, it is equally important to note that despite his radical interpretations and writings, it is plausible that Ibn ‘Arabī was being, at the very least, internally consistent with his system of epistemology.

Qayṣarī is similarly conservative by utilizing hadīth and the Qurʾān throughout the *Prolegomena*, though less than Ibn ‘Arabī. In terms of what we can call Qayṣarī’s “theory” of epistemology, he is conservative to the ideas present in Ibn ‘Arabī’s writings. Interestingly, he rarely refers to Ibn ‘Arabī, suggesting a deeper conservatism; Qayṣarī implies that this is unveiled truth, not Ibn ‘Arabī’s theory or system by choosing not to cite Ibn ‘Arabī as the source for the metaphysical system. Just as Ibn ‘Arabī asserts that he did not do anything except transmit the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, Qayṣarī takes a similarly passive position as interpreter. Despite his radical change in style of expression, he states, “Now this is none other than what is said by the Folk of God”\(^{123}\) in his first chapter. In line with Ibn ‘Arabī, perhaps it is not wrong to categorize Qayṣarī as conservative, for despite the difference in his writing style, he attempts to maintain the authority of Ibn ‘Arabī rather than undermine it.

Despite attempting to remain true to his source, Qayṣarī loses some of the meaning, and he presents writing which, given our assumptions, are quite difficult to classify. Qayṣarī expresses himself in a way which presents a tension to these theoretical assertions; while he still asserts that his purpose to express the inexpressible, and the theoretical epistemology he puts forth is in line with Ibn ‘Arabī’s concepts of unveiling, passivity, and the inadequacy of rational consideration. He does so by being systematic, giving clear definitions, and arguing for metaphysics using logic. This is not to say that the *Prolegomena* is simple or easily understood by any reader, it assumes a fair amount

of knowledge and would be difficult to follow without a strong understanding of Ibn ‘Arabi’s terminology and thought. It also includes a variety of mystical devices, and asserts itself to be in line with the concept of a passivity of knowledge. Yet, even with these devices and approach, his commentary is presented in a way which makes the text accessible, and in doing so, Qayṣari’s metaphysics are not radically different from the Akbarian school, but rather the way he expresses them is much more philosophical than his predecessors.124

Qayṣari’s writings are first and foremost systematic; presenting clear and unified chapters which build on what was written in the previous chapter. His subject matter progresses logically, moving from general to specific, simple to complex, making his writing relatively comprehensible without the aid of extensive glossing. According to Dagli, “Unlike the work whose commentary it is meant to introduce, the Prolegomena is systematic and pedagogical, written largely in philosophical style, employing stock philosophical vocabulary alongside symbols and terms drawn from revelation and tradition.”125 While each chapter in the Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam could be read separately, the Prolegomena develops its information so that it would be confusing to read the chapters out of order; they progress from the most basic discussion of metaphysics, wujūd, to the ultimate Muhammadan Reality. Indeed, as a commentary the Prolegomena attempts to clarify rather than confound, yet this itself presents a tension as Ernst asserts that, “the vocabulary of Sufism is meant both to facilitate understanding amongst Sufis and

124 Dagli I, 113.
125 Dagli II, 2.
frustrate others” Qayṣarī’s writings make the Fūṣūṣ al-ḥikam accessible to non-mystics, putting his writing at odds with the concept of protecting esoteric knowledge.

This is reflected throughout Chapter One of the Prolegomena, “On Wujūd and That It is None Other Than the Real.” He begins with a long discussion of wujūd and progresses logically to the conclusion of the chapter, ending with “And thus you know that wujūd is the Real.” While not definitive, one could read this statement as an implication that if the reader has understood what he has covered, he will now know the nature of wujūd. The conclusion of the chapter is followed by several “notes” which clarify the subject matter, respond to potential objections, and correct possible errors in understanding. For example, he distinguishes his terminology from other groups:

What is referred to in the terminology of the philosophers as the ‘uncoupled intellect’ is referred to in the terminology of the Folk of God as ‘spirit,’ and thus one called the First Intellect the Sacred Spirit. What the philosophers call the ‘uncoupled soul’ the Folk call ‘heart,’ since the universals are explicit in this soul, and this soul witnesses them in entity. When they say ‘soul,’ they are referring to the animal imprintable soul.

When reading the first chapter, it becomes clear that Qayṣarī was thoroughly conscious of his expression; he presents a topic, explores it fully, builds on each point, moves from general to specific, and responds to any possible shortcomings of his initial treatment in his notes section. The chapter is well-organized and well-executed, without digression or unnecessary information, and this is strikingly different to Ibn ‘Arabī’s rhetorical style.

As mentioned in the Introduction, Qayṣarī did not radically change his expression

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126 Ernst, 184.
127 Examples to demonstrate Qayṣarī’s writing style will be drawn from Chapter One, which serves as a representation of his style throughout the Prolegomena.
129 Ibid. 13.
without precedence, the trend to systematizing Ibn ‘Arabī began as early as Qūnawī, but Qayṣarī clearly represents the height of this synthesis.\footnote{Dagli I, 88.}

In addition to the progression from chapter to chapter, it is important to consider how Qayṣarī wrote within each chapter. He begins by defining his terms carefully and precisely, something utterly foreign to Ibn ‘Arabī’s writing. His definitions facilitate the metaphysical discussions which he expands on, yet in terms of mystical writing this is problematic when considering the goal of expressing the inexpressible; by precise definition, there is an implication that the thing defined is expressible and can be done clearly. Yet, “It is inherently meaningless to attempt to define anything about this realm because the language used to do the defining is forever denied access to it.”\footnote{Michael Huntinton, “Mysticism and the Limits of Language,” (In \textit{Language and Religion}, edited by Humphrey/Tonkin and Allison Armstrong Keef, 35-44, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989), 38.} Thus, by his precise definitions, and consistent use of these definitions, Qayṣarī’s expression moves closer to the philosophical style of expression.

Consider the following passage on \textit{wujūd}:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Wujūd} is not a substance. Substance refers to that which, in the external realm exists independently of a subject; it also refers to a quiddity which, when it exists is independent of the subject. \textit{Wujūd} could not be a substance, because it would then be like all other entified substances, in need of \textit{wujūd} outside of itself, and in need of the consequents of that \textit{wujūd}.\footnote{Qayṣarī, \textit{Prolegomena}, trans. Caner K. Dagli, 7.}
\end{quote}

This is representative of his style throughout the \textit{Prolegomena} as a whole, making a statement and logically proving or defending it. He lays out his premises, and then is clear and philosophical about why \textit{wujūd} cannot be a substance. In contrast Ibn ‘Arabī rarely makes such philosophical arguments, rather he states a “fact” and moves on. Qayṣarī takes care to logically develop Ibn ‘Arabī’s ideas, and present a unified
cosmology and metaphysics through precise discussion. As mentioned earlier, he continues to develop his ideas throughout the chapter, stating in one of his notes that “Moreover the possibility of its non-existence would then be a necessary aspect of its essence, but \textit{wujūd} inescapably and essentially requires itself, as we have said.”\textsuperscript{133} This statement is entirely philosophical, building on a previous point and asserting through logic that non-existence cannot be part of \textit{wujūd} as he has defined it.

While Qayṣarī is systematic and uses a philosophical style of definition and argumentation, he does make use of contradictions and other mystical devices. He begins the chapter by attempting to present a full vision of \textit{wujūd} by stating several paradoxes about it, such as:

\textit{Wujūd} as such, unconditioned is not bound by being absolute, nor is it bound by being relative. It is neither universal nor particular, neither general nor specific."\textsuperscript{134}

Nothing is more evident than \textit{wujūd}, neither in being nor in being real, so much so that we say that \textit{wujūd} is self-evidently known. Yet, it is also the most hidden of things, both in its quiddity and reality.\textsuperscript{135}

These contradictions are certainly not a feature of clear, logical writing. Qayṣarī is attempting to show the oneness of \textit{wujūd}, and this is possible only through explaining that it encompasses these apparent contradictions. It would be inconsistent to put a limit on the oneness of \textit{wujūd}, and perhaps the only way to express this infinite nature is to assert that \textit{wujūd} contains contradictions. This section is the most mystical because Qayṣarī resigns himself to the fact that “It \textit{[wujūd]} possesses neither genus nor specific difference, and therefore possesses no logical definition.”\textsuperscript{136} Though he is alogical and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., 11.
\item Ibid., 7.
\item Ibid., 8.
\item Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
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presents \textit{wujūd} as contradiction, Qayṣarī presents as clear a picture of \textit{wujūd} as possible through expanding his point and developing the idea as much as possible. Qayṣarī’s use of \textit{some} mystical features when absolutely necessary is enough to indicate that he was conscious of the limits of language, these features are only minimally enough to categorize his writing style as “mystical;” while Qayṣarī sought to express mystical concepts and was self-aware of the limits of language, overall, it might be better to understand his writing as by and large philosophical with mystical content.

Now that we have examined the difference between mystical and philosophical writing styles, we can turn to the main issue: why is it inappropriate to convey mystical knowledge using a philosophical style? Though it should be clear by this point what constitutes a mystical writing style, it is not yet clear why these features are better suited to describing mystical knowledge or mystical experience. This section seeks to establish the assumptions and implications of using clear language and demonstrate why it is less appropriate for mystical knowledge. First, several consequences to using plain, straightforward language will be established. Once these have been examined, the tension between clearly expressing mystical concepts will be discussed as well as suggesting a more appropriate method of expression.

In the broadest sense, we use language or expression to communicate our ideas with others; however, all expression is not equally clear. When we are being straightforward, the implication is that we \textit{want} others to fully understand what we are trying to convey. In order to do so, it is essential to give all relevant background information, and fully and logically explain ourselves. If we are trying to be clear and a person does not understand, we have failed in our effort to communicate with them, and
would start over, explaining ourselves in a different way. The information we wish to communicate need not be simple or unambiguous, nor must it be superficial; we can clearly express issues of the utmost complexity and profundity, it will only take more background or logical steps to reach a conclusion. For whatever reason we want to convey information however, when we are clear and straightforward we are aware that we are actively communicating information which we want others to comprehend.

For this reason, the first and foremost feature of clear expression is that it is accessible and those who express themselves in a straightforward manner are aware of this feature. Consider the difference between a religious legal code and a more poetic, metaphorical story. The information in a legal code is presented in a straightforward manner because it is important that it is understood and followed. The reasoning may not be intuitive and may require extensive explanation, but the information is presented in the clearest possible reason for the reason that the content applies to all followers of the religion and must therefore be accessible to them. The fastest way to make a text accessible is to be sure that the content is clearly expressed. The writer of religious obligations must be very precise and clear when expressing what is expected of the followers because the content is so foundational to practice; if the code were to be confusing then clarification would be written, we would not assume there was a higher meaning in need of protection.

Clear writing can be profound, beautiful, and can point to the very Reality that Ibn ‘Arabī discusses, but those who use it do not begin with the assumption that Ibn ‘Arabī does. When we express ourselves clearly, we assume that we are able to fully convey a piece of information to another person, and that we can do so using logic and rational
proof. Thus, we criticize those who fail to present information in this manner, pointing to
gaps in their logic and reasoning. While there are varied forms of rhetoric, the overall
goal of clear writing is often to convey subject matter which can be convoluted or
difficult. It is no surprise that when writing about Ibn ‘Arabī scholars attempt to
systematize his thought as much as possible in order to explore his thought in an
academic setting. However, it is precisely because of the secular, academic setting that is
type of systematization and clarity is appropriate. The scholar’s mission is not to hide his
meaning under layers of complex rhetoric, it is to make information accessible to others
and he does so by writing clearly.

Qayṣarī is akin to an advanced student who assumes background knowledge and
delves into his topic directly. As mentioned earlier, Qayṣarī is not easily understood to
the untrained reader, but this does not make his writing less clear. While he is more
advanced and assumes a base of knowledge, he still has the goal of expressing Ibn
‘Arabī’s metaphysics in a straightforward manner. As Qayṣarī’s text was used in the
Ottoman school system to explain the metaphysics of Ibn ‘Arabī, there can be no doubt
that his text, while advanced, is written in clear style with the intent of elucidating this
complex system. The act of bringing high-level Sufi metaphysics to a systematized
curriculum setting is impossible to do without sacrificing some meaning and profundity.
In the same way, it could be argued that academic religious studies are not as meaningful
as those who pursue religious knowledge at a seminary. For Qayṣarī, perhaps more
meaning is lost because he systematized and clearly conveyed esoteric religious
knowledge.
Yet the central question remains unanswered, why is mystical knowledge, particularly that discussed by Ibn ‘Arabī, the type which ought not be expressed clearly? Mystical knowledge in general is seen by those who possess it as esoteric, and something to be protected. As was made clear in Chapters One and Two, the concept of unveiling is absolutely central to epistemology for Ibn ‘Arabī and Qayṣarī. While it is possible to acquire some valid knowledge through rational consideration, the exoteric sciences and philosophy have a place and it is always below metaphysics, which is only learned through unveiling.137 Recall also that knowledge is a metaphysical concept for Ibn ‘Arabī which must be acquired through unveiling. If one begins with the assumption that a person cannot acquire valid knowledge without experience and unveiling, there is an inconsistency to using clear expression because to do so makes the information more accessible. For reasons covered above, clear writing carries the assumption that whatever is being conveyed can be done so fully in an abstract, intellectual, non-experiential way. Thus, to write in a clear style implies that not only is it possible to understand it without experience, but the author wants people to, which is quite problematic when an author begins with an insistence on experience and unveiled knowledge as Qayṣarī did.

For Ibn ‘Arabī and his followers, the reason which most clearly suggests the need to express themselves in an opaque way is the hierarchy of knowledge discussed in Chapters One and Two. Ibn ‘Arabī makes it clear that preparedness is key for receiving unveiled knowledge, and Qayṣarī asserts the very hierarchy which he undermines by presenting the metaphysics of Ibn ‘Arabī in a philosophical way. Because of the hierarchy which Ibn ‘Arabī and his followers assert it is inappropriate to express knowledge in a philosophical, systematic way. The concept of the hierarchy of

137 Rosenthal, 22.
knowledge asserts that a seeker cannot and should not receive knowledge which is beyond what he is prepared to receive. Thus, assuming one can express mystical knowledge in a clear way, it could make it accessible to those who are not prepared for such a station of knowledge. To return to the scholar systematizing Ibn ‘Arabī, it is not problematic for him to systematize and present Ibn ‘Arabī’s metaphysics in a clear manner because he does not begin with the assumption that one must be prepared to receive this knowledge. Qayṣarī, in contrast, does and therefore undermines his theoretical framework when he systematizes the metaphysics of Ibn ‘Arabī and presents them in a clear way.

With it now understood that clear expression is not well-suited for conveying mystical knowledge, if this argument were to be taken too far, it could be concluded that mystics ought not attempt to express themselves in writing at all; after all, if they cannot fully convey themselves with language, why bother? This is conclusion is erroneous, as “mystical experience, despite being a form of cognition that transcends all concepts is yet communicable and accessible to some diminished discursive representation.”\textsuperscript{138} As mentioned earlier, mystical expression is possible in writing, provided that the writer does not compromise his meaning by insisting on experience while implying the ability to express this experience clearly. A mystical writer must be self-aware of the limitation of language to express his experience, and set out only to provide a reference to the experience rather than a full description of the experience or knowledge gained from it.\textsuperscript{139} Thus, the problem lies not in the attempt to convey mystical knowledge, but rather when that expression takes on the form of clear, systematic writing.

\textsuperscript{138} Rizvi, 227.
\textsuperscript{139} Katz II, 19.
When we do not want to make information accessible, there are various ways to convey that information in an allusive way, such as through metaphors and other rhetorical devices. For a variety of reasons, a person may want to express himself but keep the information he conveys to a closer circle. Consider discussing a secret in with another person present. The two people who discuss the secret must already know it, either through previous clear expression or experience, and discuss it in an allusive way. To have a plain discussion would give the secret away, but to discuss it in an allusive way allows the two people to communicate information which should not be accessible to the third person present. This is possible because they will hint at something which is already known, communicating this secret in plain sight, but with others unaware that they are doing so.

Not only is it possible to discuss a secret in this way, it is more appropriate to do so. While in private the two could openly discuss their secret, and they could do so because the information was at no danger of being accessed by someone who, for whatever reason, should not access it. Once the two people deem information secret, they necessarily must communicate in opaque, allusive ways. If two people agree that something is secret and then openly and clearly discuss it in front of others, we see rightly that they are contradicting themselves. This simple example serves to demonstrate that not only can we use language and expression in such a way that it simultaneously conveys and conceals information, but it is necessary to do so when expressing certain types of knowledge.

Allusive expression is appropriate when the information conveyed by it is deemed as something worthy of protection. For example, the use of a metaphor can make the
simple meaning more interesting or beautiful, but it can also conceal the true meaning of
a text in order to protect it for some reason. If the true meaning is too damaging to
express plainly, or he simply wants to veil his true meaning, a writer can use a metaphor
to convey his true meaning to others who will understand it. Whenever content is
deemed as something worthy of protection it is more fitting to use an allusive style of
expression, such as in the case of Ibn ‘Arabī’s hierarchy of knowledge. This is
accomplished through the features of mystical writing discusses earlier in the chapter.
Paradoxically, the sense of bewilderment cultivated by an unsystematic writing style and
confusing rhetoric actually expresses the inexpressible in a more effective and internally
consistent way. In giving contradictions and allusions to reality, the mystic is able to
maintain a level of protection on the knowledge they convey and thus the sense of
hierarchy of those who know.

A systematic writing style implies consideration and reverence to the man-made
rules of logic, whereas a flowing, discursive style indicates a lack of regard for this
system. Even if the features of mystical writing are as well-planned as Qayṣarī’s logical
treatise, they are more consistent with the concept of unveiled knowledge over rational
consideration. When Ibn ‘Arabī asserted, “I have made myself subject to what was
described to me, and have stopped at what was set out to me. If I were to add anything to
it, I would not be able; the presence prevents this,”\textsuperscript{140} it seems more sincere due to the
style of the text. It is not surprising that other texts which claim revelatory or unveiled
status are similarly disorganized and unsystematic; the assumption is that they are above
logic and of a higher station than the human mind. Thus, when a mystic presents a
flowing, allusive, contradictory text, it is more believable that it came from the station of

\textsuperscript{140} Ibn ‘Arabī, 17.
unveiling than a considered, redacted philosophical document. Ibn ‘Arabī did use some elements of philosophical expression, however, he “used their terminology and methods only insofar as they were useful as raw materials for the construction of his own intellectual edifice.” Though it is impossible to assess the truth in his claim of unveiled knowledge, his style of writing lends itself to this assertion more so than Qayṣarī.

The differences in the styles of expression in the *Fuṣūṣ al-hikam* and the *Prolegomena* are generally accepted in the scholarly community, yet due to the similar subject matter they have been grouped together in the same school. At times, Ibn ‘Arabī has been erroneously categorized as a philosopher due to systematic manifestations of his ideas such as Qayṣarī’s. Yet the false-attribution has been a two-way street, with Ibn ‘Arabī categorized as a philosopher because his disciples were philosophical, and his disciples categorized as mystics because Ibn ‘Arabī was a mystic. Through the comparative overview of their writing styles with the incorporation of philosophical approaches to mystical expression which have heretofore been woefully lacking in studies of Islamic mysticism, this study asserts that not only are their writing styles distinct, but that Qayṣarī’s is rather problematic when considered in terms his mystical content. Based on the assumption that Ibn ‘Arabī attempted to convey Reality as alogical and ahistorical, this study rejects a purely historical explanation for Qayṣarī’s shift into a philosophical writing style. Because of this framework, I argue that Qayṣarī’s method of expression presents a tension to his stated theory of how a person ought to acquire knowledge.

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141 Dagli II, 27.
CONCLUSION

Ibn ‘Arabī and Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī present a fascinating “snapshot” of the transition into more philosophical expressions of Sufism. Given the understanding of philosophy presented in the thesis, philosophical interest is not the problem. While some may point to a shift towards philosophy as a decline in the mystical experience, Morris asserts that philosophical developments did not hinder mystical practice and they existed alongside one another. Indeed, when looked at in a broader sense, in the mystical tradition after Ibn ‘Arabī, there was a strong tradition of what can accurately be called Islamic Philosophy and in terms of subject matter, and I argue that this is not problematic. It is in terms of expression that the tension lies between mysticism and philosophy. Thus, if the members of the Akbarian School wrote about metaphysical concerns in the opaque, allusive way of Ibn ‘Arabī, this would be acceptable. It is when they shifted to a precise, logical, systematic style when mystical meaning was compromised, due to their theoretical understanding of acquiring knowledge.

The problem occurs because for a rational thinker language can express Reality, but for a mystic this is impossible. Language can point to experience, but one must taste knowledge before he truly understands reality. If a person relies on human intellect, he must necessarily be able to express his concept of Reality fully, or else he admits that there is a limit to the human mind. For a mystic, and Ibn ‘Arabī is no exception, language can only hint at a much larger reality, and the human intellect is useful, but

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142 Morris III, 297.
equally limited. It is not useless however, as Katz points out, “Language, special language, read in particular ways, following agreed-upon rules, including the authority of religious masters communicated secretly to their disciples, conveys a precise and didactic meaning.”\textsuperscript{143} Thus, in a mystical context it is possible to use language to convey experience using their shared vocabulary taught by spiritual masters, however, this language is understood to be inadequate and to point to reality understood through experience rather than to fully convey this reality.

The interest in philosophical subject matter such as theology and metaphysics is found in Ibn ‘Arabī, while his expression remained mystical rather than systematic or philosophical. Throughout the Prolegomena, Qayṣarī asserts a theoretical agreement with Ibn ‘Arabī but changes the style of expression by using a systematic approach. While he was able to remain in the mystical fold by acknowledging the limitations of this method of expression, his place as a “mystic” is problematic due to his method of expression. Through the discussion of Ibn ‘Arabī and Qayṣarī’s theoretical concepts of knowledge in Chapters One and Two and the examination of expression in Chapter Three, it becomes clear that their agreement of the concepts of unveiling and hierarchy of knowledge is the cause of the tension when Qayṣarī systematized and clarified the metaphysics of Ibn ‘Arabī. Despite his acknowledgement of the limitation of language, Qayṣarī’s method of expression presents a problem when viewed with his theoretical notions of experience knowledge, unveiled knowledge, and hierarchy of the knowers.

\textsuperscript{143} Katz II, 19.
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