Spiritual Elitism

Al Ba'uniyyah's profound exploration of repentance, sincerity, remembrance, and love in her work "Principles of Sufism" underscores the spiritual depth attributed to the Sufi path. Her emphasis on these principles is significant as it underscores her belief in the spiritual elite status of Sufis, distinguishing them from non-Sufis or commoners. Throughout her work, she ascribes elevated and esoteric ideas to the Sufis, and ideas commoners may not fully comprehend or attain. This distinction becomes increasingly apparent as we delve into the analysis of each of these four Sufi principles.

For the commoner, repentance entails renouncing sins and adhering to God's commandments. In stark contrast, for the spiritual elite, exemplified by Al Ba'uniyyah's perspective, repentance transcends mere obedience; it involves exclusive dedication to God. In her own eloquent words, she states, "Inner repentance, with which the Sufi folk are concerned, is to turn away from all things and toward God, mighty and glorious."[1] This implies that, for commoners, valid repentance necessitates genuine remorse for transgressions, abstinence from sinful behavior, and a firm commitment to avoid repeating those sins. Without these elements, repentance is deemed inadequate.

However, Al Ba'uniyyah's argument diverges from this formulaic understanding that commoners are expected to follow. She emphasizes that a Sufi's journey through the mystical stages commences exclusively through the gateway of repentance, and the Sufi can attain their spiritual objectives only by steadfastly embracing repentance.[2] However, as the Sufi progresses, the focus shifts from the commoner's repentance to something more

[1] 1.2.5-6
[2] 1.35.3-5

profound. The Sufi's repentance evolves into a dedication to God that transcends the conventional notion of repentance.[3] This advanced form of repentance among Sufis revolves around repenting not just for specific sins but for diverting one's attention from God, forming attachments to worldly matters, relying on anything other than God, and becoming preoccupied with anything other than the divine presence.[4] The author attributes an elevated comprehension of repentance to the Sufis, establishing them as a spiritual elite set apart from the commoners in their profound commitment to God.

For the commoner, sincerity often manifests as superficial compliance, lacking a genuine intention or, at times, motivated by ulterior motives to feign authenticity. In stark contrast, within the perspective of Al Ba'uniyyah's spiritual elite, sincerity transcends surface actions; it harmonizes outward behavior with the elevated inner intentions that Sufis associate with sincerity. She articulates this viewpoint in her own words, "praise Him who singled out for sincerity a distinguished group who made it their habit to conceal their mystical states and good deeds."[5] This suggests that the spiritual elite must not flaunt their virtuous actions but keep them hidden, even when they become perceptible to others.

This starkly contrasts the commoners who may feign sincerity or, in some instances, genuinely possess it without understanding how to manifest it effectively. Furthermore, Al Ba'uniyyah asserts that her spiritual elite can discern and expose commoners' insincerities, even before they become apparent in the afterlife when they are

[3] 1.11.3-5
[4] 1.20.1-3
[5] 2.32.1-2

laid bare for all to witness.[6] The author attributes a heightened comprehension of sincerity to the Sufis, establishing them as a spiritual elite distinguished from the commoners by their profound commitment to aligning inner intentions with outward actions.

For the commoner, remembrance often refers to a mechanical action devoid of profound inner significance. In sharp contrast, within the perspective of Al Ba'uniyyah's spiritual elite, remembrance transcends superficial repetition; it signifies a deeply meaningful communion with God, resulting in the obliteration of self-consciousness and complete absorption in the divine presence. In her own words, "[the Sufis'] remembrance will be by Him and to Him, such that you will disappear from the remembrance into the One recalled, then from the One recalled, into the disappearance of obliteration and annihilation."[7] This implies that God empowers the Sufi to remember Him through conscious and heartfelt action, ultimately merging the Sufi's consciousness into the divine, leading to the complete annihilation of the self.

This profound understanding of remembrance among the Sufis starkly contrasts the commoners' perception, where remembrance of God is often a thoughtless habit or ritual to be observed. In essence, the author attributes an elevated comprehension of God's remembrance to the Sufis, marking them as a spiritual elite, distinct from the commoners, due to their profound commitment to connecting with the divine presence on a significant level.

For commoners, love often encompasses purely worldly affection or, at best, a love with the potential for transcendence toward the Divine. However, within the perspective

[6] 2.26.2-4
[7] 3.50.7-9

of Al Ba’uniyyah's spiritual elite, love represents the practical realization of the transmutation of profane love into divine love. In her own eloquent words, "The subtle meaning of God’s love for the worshipper is the selection of the worshipper for this secret… by seizing him with the Beloved’s attractions and effacing annihilations until the worshipper is without a sense of self in the light of the sun of true oneness."[8] Unlike commoners, this means that the spiritual elite experience God's divine love as a transformative force that removes their self-consciousness, immersing them completely in the radiance of God's oneness.

In this context, God bestows the Sufi the understanding and capacity to realize such profound love. The Sufi's love for the Beloved becomes a remarkable manifestation of God's love, a powerful force capable of both delighting the Sufi and eradicating any impediments that obstruct the formation of this love. This sharply contrasts with the commoners, who may remain ensnared by mundane or nascent forms of love without fully comprehending the depth of its transformation toward the Divine. In essence, the author ascribes an elevated comprehension of God's love to the Sufis, designating them as a spiritual elite poised to understand and experience the profound nature of divine love, setting them apart from the commoners in their spiritual journey.

In summary, Al Ba’uniyyah's interpretation of repentance, sincerity, remembrance, and love underscores the Sufis' superior comprehension of these principles when juxtaposed with the commoners. Further research could shed light on how this

[8] 5.16.1-5

differentiation between the commoners and her spiritual elite appears to emanate from the commoners' adherence to rigid rules and regulations, unlike the Sufis, who embrace ecstatic love that transcends such constraints. As the author herself contends, quoting Dhū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī but attributing these words to the Sufis as a reflection of their spiritual state:

> I am the ruler of their affairs, the governor of their hearts, and the power over their mystical states. I do not allow their hearts to find rest in anything but remembrance of Me, for they are intimate with Me alone. They present their hearts before Me in solitude, and their dwelling place is exclusively within My sanctuary.[9]

[9] 1.26.17-21

Love Mysticism & Mystical Poetry in Hafiz

Within Hafiz's anthology of poems, aptly titled "Faces of Love," one might initially discern verses that support only a profane interpretation. However, it is crucial to recognize that Islamic mystical poetry consistently uses language and symbolism associated with profane love to convey the profound nature of divine love.[10] This observation has piqued my interest in this anthology: Hafiz skillfully crafts his poems to be open to divine and profane interpretations, often simultaneously.

This holds significance because when a poem can be read in ways that support either divine or profane interpretations, or even both, it suggests a deeper layer of ambiguity that mirrors the complexity within Hafiz himself – a man who rejects the extremes of prudishness and respectability. In a sense, what might seem profane is only so because it has not yet been transformed into something sacred in Hafiz's worldview. Thus, he presents his poems to guide us in understanding this transformation. This ambiguity in interpretation becomes evident when examining specific lines from two of his poems, illustrating how Hafiz masterfully navigates the fine line between the worldly and the divine in his verses.

The first poem, commencing with the lines "My love for pretty faces…" captures a poignant aspect of Hafiz's work. In this verse, Hafiz poignantly expresses, "I am a man from heaven, But on this path, I see, My love of youth and beauty, Have made a slave of me." Hafiz acknowledges his identity as a seeker of divine love, someone who identifies as "a man from heaven." However, his senses and desires have taken a firm hold over him,

[10] El-Rouayheb's private comment.

leading him to pursue profane physical pleasures. This predicament has resulted in a state of enslavement, both in a factual sense and, perhaps, without full awareness on his part.

One could argue that Hafiz's situation reflects passionate love that need not necessarily culminate in sexual intimacy, thus supporting a divine love interpretation. However, the undeniable dominance of his sensual indulgence and intoxication by wine calls for a thoughtful explanation by those who seek to defend Hafiz as solely professing divine love. The poem's capacity to accommodate both profane and divine love interpretations underscores the inherent ambiguity within Hafiz himself and his lived experiences, suggesting that a complex interplay between these realms marked his life and emotions.

The second poem commences with "If that Shirazi Turk would take…" which encapsulates another facet of Hafiz's intriguing poetry. In these verses, Hafiz intriguingly asserts, "You slandered me, and you spoke well – May God forgive what you said! A bitter answer suits such lips, So sugar-sweet and ruby-red." In these lines, Hafiz, who presents himself as a lover of wine and someone seemingly intoxicated by God's presence, paradoxically reproaches his beloved while invoking God's name, as if absolving himself of any wrongdoing. This portrays Hafiz as someone who may not readily admit fault in his actions. Moreover, these verses in the poem manifest the inherent ambiguity within Hafiz. On the one hand, he professes a profane love for the young Turk; on the other, he hints at perceiving divine love within this profane affection.

This becomes evident as he calls upon his ultimate Beloved, God, in response to the anguish caused by his earthly love. Indeed, the metaphors of "sugar-sweet" and "ruby-

red" further substantiate this ambiguity, as Hafiz grapples with the pains of his affection for this "ruby-red" young Turk while seeking solace in the "sugar-sweet" love of God, a love that neither deceives nor disappoints him. Hafiz presents himself as a figure who defies the extremes of respectability and prudishness. He identifies as a "man from heaven" but remains entangled in the complexities of earthly love. His poetry's intricate interplay of divine and profane love reflects the multifaceted nature of his existence and experiences.

Hence, Hafiz's anthology of poems serves as a testament to how the ambiguity within the lines mirrors the complexities inherent to the man himself. Indeed, this very ambiguity may well have contributed to his enduring appeal. Over the ages, readers have discovered concealed reflections of their own lives and desires in Hafiz's poetry, drawing them closer to the profound enigma of his verses.

Hayy Ibn Yaqzan

In his work "Hayy Ibn Yaqzan," Ibn Tufayl asserts that he offers an insight into Avicenna's dimension of mystical thought. This assertion highlights the contrast between Ghazali's mysticism and Avicenna's broader philosophical inclinations. Ibn Tufayl's incorporation of Avicenna's more mystical dimension within his narrative enables him to present Hayy's journey as the outcome of meticulously reasoned contemplation. These themes will become more apparent as I summarize the story, culminating in a conclusion where I share my thoughts on the central ideas conveyed in the narrative.

The narrative centers around a character named Hayy, whose origins are enigmatic; he may have been born without parents, or perhaps he was abandoned and raised by a doe. Isolated from other humans and living among animals, Hayy develops a profound attachment to the female doe that nurtures and sustains his existence. In this wild habitat, he not only imitates the doe but also adapts to the ways of various animals. As Hayy matures, he becomes increasingly attentive to the natural world around him, recognizing it as a potent teacher that fosters his innate capacity for reasoning.

This heightened awareness sets him apart from the other creatures he shares his environment with and prompts profound questions about his origin and essence. One poignant moment that underscores this divergence is Hayy's realization that, unlike the animals around him, his private parts are inadequately concealed, a realization that stirs deep disquiet within him. While Hayy maintains a deep connection with the doe he perceives as the source of his life, he also begins caring for his distinct human body,

becoming acutely aware of its disparities and limitations.

Once, Hayy encounters the lifeless body of an animal and is gripped by curiosity about the cause of its motionlessness. His keen observations lead him to a significant discovery: he notices an empty cavity on the left side of the animal's body, roughly where the heart would be located, and infers that whatever had bestowed life upon it had departed. Hayy conceptualizes this life-giving force as something ethereal, akin to vapor.

As fate would have it, a fire erupts within a cluster of reeds, providing Hayy with a crucial clue. He discerns a connection between the nature of fire and the essence of the elusive "something" he had identified earlier. Through a series of experiments involving the combustion of various objects in the fire, Hayy comes to a profound realization: the vapor-like fire, akin to the "something" that had left the dead animal's body, is what had extinguished its life. This revelation sparked a deep fascination within Hayy, driving him to systematically study material bodies and the inner workings of fire.

As Hayy matures in his mastery of naturalistic reasoning, he keenly observes the cycles of existence unfolding around him. He witnesses the inexorable progression of birth, death, old age, and disease in all living beings. Hayy's discerning mind leads him to a profound insight: he deduces that the spark of life, the fiery spirit that animates a body, is distinct from and perhaps originates from a different source than the mere physical matter that gives birth to the body itself. This revelation prompts Hayy to contemplate whether the same cycle of birth, death, aging, and disease affects the celestial bodies of the stars that adorn the heavens above him. Through rigorous reasoning, he concludes that despite their immense size and grandeur, the stars are also finite. This conclusion arises from the

understanding that, like all material entities, including himself, the stars are composed of matter and lack the unique essence of the spiritual fiery spirit that sets them apart.

In due course, Hayy's profound reasoning leads him to a pivotal realization: inherently different from the finite, the spirit must have an origin that transcends finitude. In his relentless quest to fathom the elusive source of this infinite spirit, he arrives at the profound notion of an Uncaused Cause. This Uncaused Cause, he deduces, emanates all things as an integral aspect of its Being. Driven by this revelation, Hayy embarks on a rigorous regimen of ascetic practices, ultimately attaining a state of meditation, trance, and union with the Uncaused Cause. Within this mystical communion, he finds profound solace and refuge.

The narrative is intriguing when Hayy encounters other humans who adhere to a revealed religion. Initially, he approaches their rituals and practices with philosophical skepticism, pondering the seeming absence of reasoned introspection in their actions. However, a more profound, mystical realization dawns upon him: the Uncaused Cause, which he has come to understand through his philosophical journey, offers diverse paths tailored to the unique needs of different human beings. Ultimately, Hayy recognizes that his philosophical journey, culminating in profound mystical insight, might be too radical for others to comprehend or embrace fully. His story underscores the notion that the Uncaused Cause provides many spiritual paths, each tailored to suit the individual characteristics and inclinations of human beings.

In my interpretation, the narrative of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan unfolds as a testament to the early stages of a budding philosopher's exploration of his bodily limitations. With subtle

and astute employment of his intellectual faculties, Hayy gains insight into his body's gross and subtle constituents, recognizing that it is composed primarily of flesh and bones. As Hayy's intellectual journey progresses, he delves even more profoundly, uncovering the infinite nature of the spirit within him. In doing so, Ibn Tufayl introduces readers to a perspective that is notably distinct from the Abrahamic traditions but instead aligns more with a Neoplatonic-Aristotelian framework, offering a unique realization of the self.

Through Hayy's philosophical odyssey, Ibn Tufayl skillfully weaves together a tapestry of ideas drawn from contemporary philosophy, including the exploration of mind-body dualism, ethical considerations such as vegetarianism versus meat-eating, metaphysical inquiries concerning identity, purpose, and the afterlife, among others. In this narrative, he challenges readers to consider how we can apply Hayy's insights to enhance our understanding of self-realization and our place in the world. In essence, the narrative of Hayy offers a window into Ibn Tufayl's exploration of the notion that the practices of revealed religions are not absolute necessities for individuals whose spiritual journey aligns with that of Hayy. It is important to emphasize that this perspective does not seek to discredit revealed religions entirely; instead, it suggests a place for them within human society. Nevertheless, the narrative serves as a guidebook, particularly for those with a philosophical inclination, as is evident in Hayy's character.

Further research could delve into how, if one considers the Qur'an as an aesthetic manifestation of Hayy's philosophical truths, its aesthetics might relate to the interplay between the universal and the particular ideals inherent in Hayy's philosophical journey. It can be argued that the Qur'an's aesthetics may resonate with each individual's

uniqueness, allowing their distinct qualities to harmonize with and be illuminated by the universal ideals proposed in Hayy's philosophical journey. Ultimately, as Ibn Tufayl aptly notes, he has not entirely unveiled the secrets within his narrative, leaving them veiled, albeit with a sheer veil easily pierced by those who possess the capability to do so. This encourages readers to engage with the text and its philosophical nuances, seeking their interpretations and insights.[11]

[11] Ibn Tufayl, 166

Creeds

In Watt's work, "Islamic Creeds: A Selection," several notable observations stem from the challenges inherent in establishing a clear rationale for explaining the Qur'an's utterances as the direct speech of God. While it could be argued that an overly precise definition may not always be necessary, the absence of such clarity significantly complicates the comprehension of numerous creeds that address the reception of the Qur'an's words. This perplexity becomes particularly apparent when examining creeds such as Ibn Hanbal's, which asserts that there exists no intermediary between God and a human being, and Al-Ash'ari's creed, which paradoxically contends that the Qur'an, being the speech of God, is neither created nor uncreated.

In Ibn Hanbal's initial creed, a foundational assertion is made regarding God's ability to communicate with human beings through speech without any intermediary. In Ibn Hanbal's words, he states, "God speaks to human beings, and there is no interpreter between Him and them."[12] However, this position introduces a potential challenge, as it might lead one to perceive a contradiction in the role of Muhammad. On the one hand, Muhammad is depicted as receiving the speech of God within his heart,[13] enabling him to convey it to others, while, on the other hand, he is considered a messenger and interpreter of this divine speech.

The conundrum arises from the fact that, according to Ibn Hanbal, the speech of

[12] Watt, 31
[13] —, 32

God is deemed uncreated.[14] This prompts a deeper inquiry into how we can reconcile Muhammad's role as the one who reveals, delivers, and interprets the speech of God, particularly within the context of the belief in the speech's uncreated nature.

Initially, I considered the solution to this paradox might lie within Al-Ash'ari's creed. Unlike Ibn Hanbal, Al-Ash'ari, while still paradoxically leaving certain aspects unexplained, approaches the question of Muhammad's utterance of the Qur'an differently. In Al-Ash'ari's own words, the "utterance of the Qur'an is not said to be created, nor is it said to be uncreated."[15] This implies that Al-Ash'ari suggests that Muhammad's utterance of the Qur'an neither falls into the category of created nor uncreated but instead shares the essence or nature of the Qur'an itself. If the sounds or words of the Qur'an are considered uncreated, then Muhammad cannot be perceived as somehow creating them when he conveys the divine message to the people.

Nonetheless, this perspective remains somewhat unsatisfactory, as the ambiguity persists in several other creeds that follow the line of thought presented by Al-Ash'ari. For instance, Al-Tahāwī asserts that the speech of God "proceeded from Him amodally."[16] Abū Hanīfa posits that the speech of God is written on paper, recited by tongues, and remembered in the hearts, but not inherent in them.[17] Al-Ghazālī argues that the speech of God does not undergo division and separation by being transferred to the hearts and pages.[18] Lastly, Al-Ījī leaves us grappling with yet another paradox: what is written is

[14] —, 37-38
[15] —, 43
[16] —, 49
[17] —, 58
[18] —, 76

distinct from the writing, what is recited is distinct from the reciting, and what is remembered is distinct from the remembering.[19] These varying stances demand further clarification to enable a comprehensive understanding of the numerous propositions surrounding the utterance of the speech of God, including whether it is created, uncreated, or neither created nor uncreated.

Due to its reluctance to embrace reasoning as a necessary and safe practice, the Hanbali school appears to lean towards the belief that the Qur'an is uncreated. Indeed, attempting to explain the creation of an uncreated text would undoubtedly be a perilous endeavor for those who do not possess a natural inclination for rational inquiry, akin to the character of Hayy in Ibn Tufayl's tale, as mentioned earlier. This perspective echoes Ibn Tufayl's evaluation of the potential drawbacks of adhering solely to revealed religion.

Conversely, it seems that the Asharis and Maturidis, who generally regard the mere acceptance and repetition of revealed religion as sinful and indicative of disbelief, primarily because it seemingly excludes the use of reason, approach this matter by affirming the Qur'an as an uncreated speech that transcends any human language. While revealed to a prophet in his human language, this perspective is not seen as a product of that language, as it is believed to exist independently.

It appears to me that a potential solution to this puzzle may take the form of a modus ponens argument. If we assume that the Prophet refrains from interpreting the Qur'an, he also refrains from translating it into his language. Given the premise that the

[19] —, 87

Prophet does not interpret the Qur'an, we can logically conclude that he refrains from translating it into his language. This argument is valid, but its soundness hinges on the proposition that the act of translation lies beyond the scope of what reason can infer. As El-Rouayheb[20] succinctly articulates, this implies that the Prophet's role primarily involves reciting what the speech of God reveals to him rather than engaging in translation or interpretation.

[20] Private comment.

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