EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

A well-known Hadith tells us that one day the Prophet Muhammad was in the presence of his Companions when he was approached by the Angel Gabriel, who appeared in the form of a man. He asked the Prophet to explain the meaning of *islām*. The Prophet replied by delineating the five pillars of practice: the *shahāda*, prayer, fasting, the alms tax, and pilgrimage. When asked about *īmān*, the Prophet listed the six pillars of faith, namely belief in God, prophecy, the angels, scriptures, the Final Day, and the divine measuring out. And then when asked about *iḥsān*, the Prophet replied, "It is that you worship God as if you see Him; but if you do not see Him, He nevertheless sees you." For many authors in the Islamic tradition, these prophetic responses came to designate the three spheres which encompass Muslim life, that is, "right action," "right thinking," and "doing the beautiful."

By extension, the areas of knowledge that covered these domains respectively came to be identified with law (whose focus is the body), theology and philosophy (whose focus is the mind), and Sufism (whose focus is the heart).[1] Since the locus of *iḥsān* is the human heart, this third dimension of the religion is directly related to introspection, interiority, and the cultivation of the virtues of the heart, beginning with *ikhlāṣ* or sincerity.[2] This explains why *iḥsān* has been commonly equated with the science of *taṣawwuf* in the Islamic tradition.

As a historical phenomenon, the precise origins of Sufism have been the subject of extensive debate in Western scholarship.[3] From the point of view of the tradition itself, needless to say, it is to be retraced to the inner life of the Prophet, his own "mystical" experiences, as well as certain teachings that were transmitted to a select group of companions who in turn taught others as they moved to regions as diverse as Kufa, Fustat, Khurasan, and Basra in the rapidly expanding Islamic world. Basra was particularly important for the development of ideas and practices later associated with *taṣawwuf* since it was here that the great Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī (d. 44/665) was placed in charge not only over the affairs of the city, but also of teaching the recital of the Quran.[4] Famous for his own austere life as well as his sermons that aroused a fear of the Resurrection and a desire to break one's ties with the world, he helped to shape the religious ambience of the city and to carve out the contours of a mode of piety for those serious about seeking God. Among the most important of his successors was al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), who would also emphasize the need to nurture detachment, humility, self-discipline, the fear of God, and scrupulous self-accounting.

1. The best overview of Islamic thought and practice through the prism of this Hadith is to be found in William Chittick and Sachiko Murata, *The Vision of Islam* (New York: Paragon, 1994). See in particular pp. xxv–xxxiv.

2. See also the helpful analysis in Chittick, *In Search of the Lost Heart: Explorations in Islamic Thought*, ed. Mohammed Rustom, Atif Khalil, and Kazuyo Murata (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 10–17.

3. See Nile Green, *Sufism: A Global* History (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 15–70 and Alexander Knysh, *Sufism: A New History of Islamic Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), pp. 15–34. A still very useful overview can be found in Victor Danner, "The Early Development of Sufism," in *Islamic Spirituality*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (New York: Crossroad, 1987–1991), 1:239–264.

4. Gavin Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam: The Life and Works of al-Muḥāsibī* (London: Routledge, 2011), 24.

More than two centuries later, Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996) would credit al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī with laying the foundation for the "science of the heart" (*ʿilm al-qulūb*), a name which for many would be identified with Sufism. The communities out of which the early tradition would sprout included the *qurrāʾ* (Quran reciters), *quṣṣāṣ* (preachers), *bakkāʾūn* (weepers), *ʿubbād* (worshippers), and *nussāk* (ascetics).[5] The role that the love of God played in the spiritual quest in this climate also cannot be ignored, even if one questions the historicity of the many legends concerning the great female mystic Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya (d. 185/801) which depict her as the archetype of the selfless lover of God.[6]

The emergence of *taṣawwuf* as a distinct phenomenon is usually retraced to the so-called School of Baghdad. By the end of the eighth century, Baghdad was a thriving, multicultural metropolis where various currents of thinking merged to produce a rich intellectual and spiritual climate.[7] As for the School of Baghdad, its towering personality was Junayd (d. 298/910), a silk-merchant by trade who studied the religious sciences under the tutelage of some of the leading scholars and saints of the city.[8] The formation of his ascetic-mystical outlook came through mentors that included his uncle Sarī al-Saqaṭī (d. 253/867) and al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857). While these two figures differed considerably on the value they attached to rational theology, both were deeply affected by the interiorizing moral psychology of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, which they in turn transmitted to Junayd. He would quietly emerge as the leading Sufi master of his day, and would be conferred with such titles as the "master of masters" (*shaykh al-mashāyikh*) and the "chief of the tribe" (*sayyid al-ṭāʾifa*).

Among the doctrines characteristic of Junayd and his circle was a view of *tawḥīd* that emphasized the necessity of a direct encounter with ultimate reality in order to grasp its rationally elusive, ineffable nature.[9] This was one reason why the early Sufis, especially those coming out of his circle, were sometimes known as "masters of *tawḥīd*" (*arbāb al-tawḥīd*): they had plunged into and effaced themselves in a reality the mystery of which could only be intimated through allusion, or a mind-bending blend of apophatic and cataphatic language. Among Junayd's contemporaries and students, the Baghdadi milieu also included those who discoursed about the passionate love of God, representing an intoxicated, antinomian, and even subversive form of Sufism that departed from Junayd's own emphasis on sobriety and self-control. But what was common to all of them was a profound reverence for the sacred sources of faith, as well as a view of existence that saw both the world and the human ego as illusory in relation to God. More important for our purposes, the Sufis belonging to the School of Baghdad also shared a vision that placed a

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5. Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam*, 24–25.

6. In her recent book, *Rabiʿa from Narrative to Myth* (London: Oneworld, 2019), Rkia Cornell takes a middle ground between those who entirely reject and accept representations of her in the hagiographical literature. On Rābiʿa as a lover, see pp. 147–212. For far-reaching inquiries into female Sufi modes of divine love, see, inter alia, Maria Dakake, "'Guest of the Inmost Heart': Conceptions of the Divine Beloved among Early Sufi Women," *Comparative Islamic Studies* 3, no. 1 (2007): 72–97 and Éric Geoffroy, *Allah au féminin* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2020), chapters 7–9.

7. Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam,* 27.

8. For recent scholarly treatments of him, see Erik Ohlander, "al-Junayd al-Baghdadi: Chief of the Sect," in *Routledge Handbook on Sufism*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (London: Routledge, 2020), 32–45 and John Zaleski, "Sufi Asceticism and the Sunna of the Prophet in al-Junayd's *Adab al-muftaqir ilā Allāh*," *Oxford Journal of Islamic Studies* 32, no. 1 (2021): 1–26.

9. Ahmet Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 16.

concern for ethics and, more specifically, the refinement of character, squarely at the center of the mystical quest.

This explains why, at a very early period in the history of Sufism, we see Sufis who not only spoke of a kind of knowledge that was a fruit of mystical realization, but also of the states (*aḥwāl*) and stations (*maqāmāt*) which lead to the end of the path and the realization of this knowledge itself. These usually began with repentance, and then proceeded through the cultivation of other qualities of the soul such as patience, gratitude, detachment, contentment, fear, hope, trust, love, longing, and intimacy.[10] While their order, number, and precise features varied from one master to another, their acquisition entailed not only a divestment of their corresponding vices, but also a general process of self-transcendence where one peeled away baser qualities of the self, stripping away the thick layers of the ego in order to encounter the divine presence that resides in the heart.

Thus, the focus in early Sufi literature was by-and-large not on expositing metaphysical doctrines (although these were not absent), but on the rules that governed the inward transformation that accompanied and made the fallen soul's return Home possible. In a general sense, this involved the convergence of overlapping domains—what in modern academic parlance we might call "virtue ethics," "moral psychology," "moral theology," and "mystical theology"— that combined to give Sufi ethics its distinctive character. And at the heart of this convergence there lay a conviction in the belief that man is an exile from a homeland to which he could only return through the inner life. In other words, the exile of Adam and Eve which began the drama of human terrestrial existence involved not only a descent, but also a corresponding exteriorization. Not only was it a fall; it was also an inversion that cast the human being away from his own Center. If the outward message of prophecy brought a method to return to the God's Paradise above (that is, after death), its inward message, as articulated by the Sufis insofar as they were the inheritors of the prophets, brought a method to return to the God of Paradise within, in the eternal Now.[11]

The ethical concerns of the Sufis always lay at the forefront of their teachings, even if ethics was, in the final analysis, no more than a means to an end that transcended it altogether. This distinctive feature of their literary output was highlighted decades ago by Marshall Hodgson when he observed that "Most [Muslim] mystical writers have spent far more time speaking of the everyday virtues . . . as they appear in the mystical perspective, than of ecstasies or even of the cosmic unity these ecstasies seem to bear witness to."[12] Even a work such as Ibn ʿArabī's (d. 638/1240) *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (*The Meccan Openings*)—which is often considered to be an encyclopedia not of praxis (*ʿilm al-muʿāmala*) but of

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10. For inquiries into a number of the virtues, see the studies of Atif Khalil, some of which include *Repentance and the Return to God: Tawba in Early Sufism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018); "On Cultivating Gratitude in Sufi Virtue Ethics," *Journal of Sufi Studies* 4, nos. 1–2 (2015): 1–26; "Contentment, Satisfaction and Good-Pleasure: *Rida* in Early Sufi Moral Psychology," *Studies in Religion* 43, no. 3 (2014): 371–389. For a survey of the development of Sufi ethics, see Mukhtar A. Ali, "Classical Sufi Ethics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Ethics*, ed. Mustafa Shah (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

11. A fine exposition of this point can be found throughout Seyyed Hossein Nasr's *The Garden of Truth* (New York: HarperOne, 2007).

12. Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 1:396.

the knowledge of unveiling (*ʿilm al-mukāshafa*)—dedicates lengthy sections to the virtues "as they appear in the mystical perspective." To be sure, in no sub-tradition of Islam has so much collective intellectual energy been devoted to probing the ontology and teleology of the virtues as we see in *taṣawwuf*. And this, as noted, rested on the Sufis' conviction that the inner journey remained impossible except through *tabdīl al-akhlāq*, or the "transformation of character." This was why as early a figure as al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. ca. early 4th/10th century) could say of the *abdāl*, or the "substitutes" who were a special class of God's friends (*awliyāʾ*) in the hierarchy of saints, that they were given this name on account of having replaced or substituted (through *tabdīl*) their vices or base character traits for virtues or noble character traits.[13]

While it is true that ethical questions, especially centering around the virtues, were also explored in Islamic philosophy, the ethics of the *falāsifa* never had anywhere near the influence over the collective consciousness of Muslims throughout history as compared to the more scripturally inspired *ʿilm al-akhlāq* of the Sufis. As for *fiqh* or jurisprudence, although ethics was not entirely relegated to its margins, the principal aim of the discipline was always on *aʿmāl al-jawāriḥ* (actions of the limbs) as opposed to the *aʿmāl al-qulūb* (actions of the heart). This is why Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) argued that while the jurist can tell you everything you need to know about the outward requirements of canonical prayer, qua jurist he will have next to nothing to say about its interior requisites, beginning with sincerity and the presence of heart. Ethics proper was certainly a major concern of *kalām*, but there the inquiries centered around much broader issues having to do with the foundations and ontological status of categories such as "right" and "wrong." Yet virtue ethics and the psychology of virtue per se were not major concerns for the *mutakallimūn*, content as they were to focus largely on the epistemological roots of good and evil, the beautiful and the ugly, etc.

For its part, modern scholarship has tended to emphasize the influence of Greek ethics on the traditions of *falsafa* and *kalām*. And to a certain extent that is a sensible mode of inquiry. But to view *taṣawwuf* and its vast and complicated ethical traditions with the same lens is quite problematic. This is for two reasons, the second of which builds off of the first:

1. The failure to account for the mysticism and ethics nexus as a native concern of Islamic civilization perpetuates a misunderstanding which has characterized scholarship for far too long; that is, the facile notion that Islamic civilization's ethical achievements are to be measured against the ethical achievements of the ancient Greeks.
2. Given (1) above, the distinctive nature, language, and concerns of Islamic ethics as enshrined in the vast repository of Sufi texts will consequently be lost upon us.

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13. Sara Sviri, "The Self and its Transformation in Ṣūfism, with a Special Reference to Early Literature," in *Self and Self-Transformation in History of Religions*, ed. David Shulman and Guy Stroumsa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 195–215. For the most recent study of al-Tirmidhī, see Aiyub Palmer, *Sainthood and Authority in Early Islam: al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī's Theory of wilāya and the Reenvisioning of the Sunnī Caliphate* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

One example shall suffice. The Sufis have developed a very complicated and involved understanding of the various stations along the Sufi path. These Sufi stations correspond to what we would normally refer to as the "virtues," which explains why, as indicated above, some modern scholars of Sufism speak of "Sufi virtue ethics." If one insists on understanding the Sufi stations along solely Greek lines and as informed by Greek ethical categories, many of the subtleties that characterize Sufi ethical discourse must be passed over in silence. This is because the Sufi stations are what most Sufis, regardless of their intellectual persuasion and manner of expression, understand to be the "stuff" of the Sufi path.

After all, how are we supposed to understand the Sufi virtue of poverty (*faqr*) if not through laying bare the inner logic of Sufi ethical discourse and the Sufi emphasis on the dawning of the divine qualities (*al-takhalluq bi-akhlāq Allāh*)? Likewise, what sense can we make of the Sufi understanding of humility (*tawāḍuʿ*), which, for many of the ancient Greeks, was anything but a virtue? The same can also be said about other major Sufi stations, such as witnessing (*shuhūd*—considered by some Sufis to be a station proper) and love (considered by many Sufis to be the virtue par excellence).

Apart from some of the studies already noted and several important books,[14] the relationship between Sufism or Islamic mysticism and ethics is therefore largely untilled land. The present volume attempts to survey this fertile area of investigation by attempting to come to a clearer idea of precisely what is meant by the terms "ethics" and "mysticism" vis-à-vis Islam and vis-à-vis each other. Needless to say, any such attempt demands a broad lens through which one can identify, study, and analyze the geographic expanse and various regional contexts in which these two terms have historically been enacted.

Discerning readers will note that some of the articles in *Mysticism and Ethics in Islam* do not have an eye so much on defining what mysticism and ethics in Islamic civilization are per se, but more on coming to terms with the parameters and boundaries within which they have historically fallen and been conceptualized. This allows us to better demarcate the terms, issues, concepts, and even figures which must be taken into account when approaching the question of the relationship between mysticism and ethics in Islam from past to present.

For the most part, the volume falls into four clearly demarcated time periods and foci: early, classical, late pre-modern, and modern and contemporary. Taken as a whole, these sections give us rich insights into some of the most important Sufi ideas and expressions which have animated the tradition, zeroing in on how concepts such as wealth and ownership or grief and godwariness factor into the

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14.   We particularly have in mind here Francesco Chiabotti, Eve Feuillebois-Pierunek, Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen, and Luca Patrizi, eds., *Ethics and Spirituality in Islam: Sufi adab* (Leiden: Brill, 2017); Mayeur-Jaouen, ed., *Adab and Modernity: A "Civilising Process"?* (*Sixteenth–Twenty-First Century*) (Leiden: Brill, 2017); Cyrus Zargar, *The Polished Mirror: Storytelling and the Pursuit of Virtue in Islamic Philosophy and Sufism* (London: Oneworld, 2017), part two. One may also profitably consult a number of the articles in the special issue of the *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 4, nos. 1–2 (2020) on the theme of *futuwwa*, which is guest-edited by Cyrus Zargar, as well Amir Hossein Asghari's fine discussion on the relationship between Sufism and ethics in modern Shīʿī Islam: "Replacing *Sharīʿah, Ṭarīqah* and *Ḥaqīqah* with *Fiqh, Akhlāq*, and *Tawḥīd*: Some Notes on Shaykh Muḥammad Bahārī (1325/1908)," *Journal of Sufi Studies* 9, no. 2 (2020): 202-214.

spiritual life, and why the pursuit of love and human wholeness have always been envisioned as its ultimate telos. Other articles examine the form and function of ethics and spiritual practice in the writings of several major Sufi authors (and even philosophers and rational theologians influenced by Sufism) hailing from various regions of the Islamic world ranging from Egypt and India to Central Asia and China. Still other contributions seek to outline the different genres and writing styles that have enshrined a range of familiar and not so familiar Sufi literary tropes, motifs, and images.

Since Sufism is of course not only a historical tradition but one that also has shaped and continues to shape the texture of ethical and spiritual discourse in the modern world, a good degree of emphasis in this book is dedicated to coming to terms with this important insight. What makes the modern reception of Sufism particularly interesting is, of course, the colonial and post-colonial contexts in which it has been performed. The papers in the last section of this collection therefore examine how the classical Sufi tradition was received, naturalized, and refigured by some of the most important nineteenth- and twentieth-century Sufi personalities against the backdrop of these two contexts and in regions as diverse as West Africa and Russia.

In terms of Sufism and ethics today, we had originally conceived of including a chapter on the important contemporary Moroccan philosopher and mystic Abdurrahman Taha. Yet, given the fact that there are now two exceptional volumes dedicated to exploring his ethics in English,[15] we decided to conclude our volume with a contribution on the surprisingly understudied ethical thought of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, whose critique of modernity and alternative Islamic metaphysics, ethics, and epistemology predate those of Taha by some two decades.

This volume grew out of a conference which was held at the American University of Beirut on May 2nd and 3rd, 2019 under the auspices of the Sheikh Zayed Chair of Arabic and Islamic Studies at AUB, and was organized by Bilal Orfali, Radwan Sayyid, and Mohammed Rustom.[16] The event marked 100 years since the birth of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the founder of the United Arab Emirates who was famous for embodying the ethical ideals and values discussed throughout our volume. Sixteen of this collection's twenty-five contributions are derived from papers delivered at the conference, while the remaining nine represent contributions that came our way after it had concluded. Radwan Sayyid's important role as co-organizer was matched by the editorial efforts of Atif Khalil, who replaced him as a co-editor of this volume.

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15. See Wael Hallaq, *Reforming Modernity: Ethics and the New Human in the Philosophy of Abdurrahman Taha* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019) and Mohammed Hashas and Mutaz al-Khatib, eds., *Islamic Ethics and the Trusteeship Paradigm: Taha Abderrahmane's Philosophy in Comparative Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

16. For further details, see the conference report by Louise Gallorini in *al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* 27 (2019): 267–272.

We wish to thank the Sheikh Zayed Chair for making this book and that splendid international gathering a possibility, as well as the hard work of the conference organizers' assistants, particularly Aida Abbass. We also wish to express our gratitude to the AUB Press Editor in Residence Mary Clare Leader and the many excellent scholars who participated in the event and/or contributed to this published volume. Without their collegiality and belief in the importance of interdisciplinary approaches to the study of Islam, this volume would not have been able to address the question of the relationship between mysticism and ethics in Islam in so rich and variegated a manner.

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SHEIKH ZAYED BIN SULTAN AL NAHYAN SERIES

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