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**THE INFLUENCE OF IBN SĪNĀ ON
SADR AL-DĪN QŪNAWĪ AND HIS FOLLOWERS**

Sufism emerged in Islamic society, affecting many affairs, both spiritual and physical, after undergoing through a number of different processes. Sufism was sometimes a “reaction” that preferred poverty to social comfort, sometimes a “turning inwards” that elevated the individual above futile discussions in intellectual life and sometimes it manifested itself as a “joyful expression” that took as its basis divine love and spiritual training as opposed to the strict religious sciences and torpid styles. However, its character as a movement of “morals and piety” was preserved in all these processes¹. The dynamic and complicated interactive process that existed between the Sufi tradition and the conditions of time and space under which Sufism developed acted as a mirror that indicated the social, political, cultural and intellectual transformations that Muslims underwent. Developing this principal idea, we will focus in this article on the influence of Ibn Sīnā on Qūnawī and his followers.

As it is known, the first theoretical trend of Sufism, which developed first as an ascetic movement, emerged owing to such writers as Sarrāj, Qushayrī, and Kalābādhī, who were motivated by the problems that appeared in the ascetic period. The question that they were trying to answer in this period — an era that concentrated on determining the relationship between the *Sharī‘a* and reality — was: what is Sufism and what is its place among the sciences? After a long struggle, the early Sufi historians were able to answer this question thus: “Sufism is one of the religious sciences, like *kalām*, *fiqh*, and *hadīth*”; however, this did not solve the problem. The real problem would fully appear in the conception of Sufism that was to be formed under the leadership of Ibn ‘Arabī and which was systematized by Qūnawī. This period, known as “the period of the formation of Sunni Sufism”, differs from the first period by claiming that Sufism has a **central** and **determining** place among the sciences. If we want to summarize the wide-ranging historical analysis that was first attempted by Ibn ‘Arabī and Qūnawī, it is possible to see the Sufism of the new period as the aim and product of all Islamic sciences².

¹ See e.g.: *Abū Nasr Sarrāj al-Tūsī*. Al-Luma‘ ft ‘l-tasawwuf / Ed. A. Mahmūd. Qāhira: Maktaba al-thaqāfa al-dīniyya, 103/2002. P. 25.

² *İbnü’l-Arabî*. Fütühât-ı Mekkiyye / trans. into Turkish by Ekrem Demirli. Istanbul: Litera, 2006. Vol. I. P. 307.

This meaning must be directly related to the theoretical traditions that preceded Sufism and, therefore, must contain the same problems. According to Qūnawī, what we are talking about now is not Sufism, but *'ilm ilāhī* (divine knowledge, i. e., metaphysics)³. In other words, Sufis called the sciences of the new era *'ilm ilāhī* and thus arrived at a stage, completely different from that wherefrom the first Sufi historians had started. Ibn 'Arabī and Qūnawī, both of whom turned to *fiqh* and *kalām* when they searched for proofs of "legitimacy" of Sufism, also wanted to establish a superior and ultimate science which would be served by all the inferior sciences. This science was called metaphysics by Ibn Sīnā⁴. When one examines the history of Sufism, he notices that the conception of Sufism that appears in the new period is a new concept that is totally different from the conceptions of Sufism that had appeared earlier. For this reason, the Sufism of the new period, from the moment it first appeared, has constantly been a field of contention of different opinions.

The Sufism of this new era, suggests Ibn Khaldūn, should be considered as the "product of an integrating period"⁵. According to Khaldūn, a comparison can be drawn between the Sufism of the new era and the development of the *kalām*. If we accept this approach, we can consider Qūnawī to be the Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī of the new era, and Sufism, like *kalām*, to be a product of this integrating era. If we keep in mind Ibn Khaldūn's longing to return to the Sufism of the ascetic period, the Sufism purified of philosophy and mysticism, it is very clear that these aspects of the evaluation are justified. The most incorrect and inconsistent evaluation of Qūnawī and his followers is given by Kātib Chelebī (Hājī Khalīfa)⁶. On the basis of weak proofs he attributes Qūnawī and his followers to Suhrawardī and qualifies them as part of the *Ishrāqī* (Illuminationist) movement. It is possible to find more examples of such incorrect evaluations of the concept of Sufism of Qūnawī and his followers. In brief, the conception of Sufism which appeared in this period, if we take into account the entire history of Sufism, is one of the most debated issues. While Ibn Taymiyya, praising the asceticism of common Sufis, attacks the followers of Ibn 'Arabī and the new conception of Sufism, some *mutakallimīn* — e.g. Taftāzānī — choose the entire discussion on existence as the object of their criticism, thus giving it a more theoretical level. Such external criticism provoked a number of discussions among the Sufis themselves. In this connection, Abd al-Karīm Jīlī (I mean particularly his -critical remarks about certain technical aspects of the *waḥdat al-wujūd*), Alā' al-Dawlā Simnānī and, in particular, Imām Rabbānī (Ahmad Sirhindī), in my opinion, are most worthy of attention. Thus, the

³ *Sadreddin Konevi*. *Tasavvuf Metafizigi* / trans. into Turkish by Ekrem Demirli. Istanbul: İz, 2002. p. 9.

⁴ *Ibn Sina*. *Metafizik* / trans. into Turkish by Ekrem Demirli, Ömer Türker. Istanbul: Litera, 2004. vol. I. p. 13.

⁵ See: *Ibn Haldun*, *Mukaddime* (MEB). vol. II. p. 605.

⁶ See: *Katip Çelebi*, *Keşfü'z-zünûn*. vol. I. p. 9, etc.

place of the new era Sufism in the history of science was always debated and, no doubt, this debate will continue.

Modern research qualifies the Sufism of this period as “philosophical Sufism”, thus trying to separate it from the ascetic Sufism of the earlier period. It is hoped that investigations into the Sufism of this period, a time that had a determining influence on Seljuk-Ottoman intellectual life, will lead to the formation of a more correct opinion.

The figure which can be of most help for correct understanding of the conception of Sufism in this era is Sadr al-Dīn Qūnawī. The assessments of the place and importance of Qūnawī play a determining role in understanding the Sufism of the new era. As we know, the first serious academic research on Qūnawī in Turkey was carried out by Dr. Nihat Keklik, who described him as the “13th century Ghazālī”⁷. The basic reason why Nihat Keklik arrived at this conclusion must be that his study was focussed on the letters Qūnawī exchanged with the Avicennian scholar, Nasīr ad Dīn Tūsī. In the letters Qūnawī poses many questions to Tūsī about Ibn Sīnā’s philosophy, expressing doubts about the possibility of an “intellectual science”. The manner of Qūnawī’s criticism must have led Nihat Keklik to such an evaluation. In my opinion, Keklik, whose study is in some aspects quite valuable, used an incorrect analogy. Interpreting Qūnawī’s critical remarks on Ibn Sīnā from a narrow perspective, Keklik was influenced by the common criticism of intellectual reasoning, which was prevalent in Sufism from its very beginning. This did not allow him to correctly understand Qūnawī’s thought as a whole. One of the most important consequences of this is that Qūnawī’s use of the term *‘ilm ilāhī* is overlooked. A sound and insightful study on Qūnawī should be based upon his two main books — the *Miftāh al-ghayb* and the *Ījāz al-bayān* (the commentary on the surah *al-Fātiha*). If we examine Qūnawī’s thought, taking these two works as our basis, we arrive at a conclusion, which is exactly opposite to that of Nihat Keklik’s. The second reason for this error is the exaggeration of the influence of Ghazālī on the later Sufi tradition. This is a more common error than the first.

In this situation, if we use a similar comparison, the conclusion we can arrive at is this: Qūnawī, particularly in metaphysics, is the “Ibn Sīnā of the 13th century”. This comparison could be thought to slightly overstep its mark, or even to be surprising when considering the specific situation of Sufism. However, if we carefully study the critical remarks, which, we suspect, have misled Nihat Keklik, we can see that they are directed towards a totally different aim than the criticisms that are directed towards metaphysical thought as such. An important part of the criticisms are directed towards the use of the art of debate (or disputation) (*jadal*) in metaphysical discussions. Qūnawī, who is opposed to this, insistently defends metaphysical science and metaphysicians against some of Ghazālī’s attacks⁸. Without going into details, what we have to say is this: Qūnawī, sometimes

⁷ See: Nihat Keklik. Sadreddin Konevî’de Allah. Kainat ve İnsan. p. 6—7.

⁸ See: Ekrem Demirli. Sadreddin Konevî’de Bilgi ve Varlık. Istanbul: İz 2005. p. 110ff.

accepting the earlier criticisms, sometimes dismissing them, came to the conclusion that “despite all the objections, metaphysical knowledge is possible”.

It is clear that this conception presents a completely new trend in the history of Sufism. At this period the main problem, as evidenced in the Sufi works, was the determination of the relationship between Sufism and philosophy. While the early Sufis tried to correlate Sufism with *fiqh* and *kalām*, in Qūnawī’s time the problem was the determination of the place of Sufism in relation to philosophy; that is, the position of the Sufis vs. the metaphysicians. Starting with Ibn ‘Arabī, writers like Sadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, Mu’ayyid al-Dīn Jandī, Sa‘īd al-Dīn Farghānī, Dāvud Qaysarī and Mullā Fanārī examined this subject, trying to determine in what ways Sufis differed from philosophers, to what extent they could benefit from the teachings of the latter, and the relationship between the methods of Sufism and those used by philosophy⁹. However, something more important can be seen in an idea expressed by Qūnawī in his correspondence with Tūsī. When discussing the position of Sufism in relation to the *kalām* and philosophy, Qūnawī uses an expression that perhaps cannot be found in any other era of Sufism: According to him, while Sufis disagree on almost every subject with *kalām*, the issues in which they differ from the mystic philosophers — here with the phrase ‘mystic philosophers’ Qūnawī is primarily referring to Ibn Sīnā — are few. The difference of this statement from the words of Kalābādhī, who said: “Sufi belief is in complete agreement with the beliefs of the Sunnis”, is evident.

We would also like to draw attention to some terms used by Qūnawī that testify to Ibn Sīnā’s influence: such influence of Ibn Sina on Qūnawī and his followers can be best seen in their use of the expression *‘ilm mā’ ba’d al-ṭabī‘a*. In other words, we can have definite knowledge about that which comes after nature — whatever it may be — just as we have it in other natural sciences. In my opinion, the matter that has most influenced the Sufis is the clarity and certainty of the contents of this synthesis. Sufis have to a large extent adopted the thoughts that Ibn Sina expressed on this point. The criticisms that Sufis have made about intellect and its power can only have meaning against this common background. The criticism of the information that intellect provides about God is focused on the discussion of God’s attributes. Here, Sufis usually criticize their opponents in a general way, using the expression *ahl-i naẓar* or “rationalists”, but sometimes they refer to Ibn Sīnā by name. The most important point of their criticism consists in the assertion that intellect can only provide negative information about God. Claiming that there is a necessity to counterbalance *tanzīh* (incomparability or the belief that God is free from any fault) and the negative, Sufis who accept *wahdat al-wujūd* base their understanding of God on this principle. Bringing to the fore comparison rather than negative information - because *wahdat al-wujūd* is not negative — they defend the existence of the set of attributes that are solely possessed by God. This subject is the heart of Ibn Sīnā’s criticism on Sufis. This

⁹ See: *Ekrem Demirli. İbnü’l-Arabî ve Vahdet-i Vücûd Ekolü. İstanbul: Kabalıcı 2008. p. 77ff.*

matter is one in which the Sufis, contrary to what Qūnawī suggests, take a position that is closer to that of the *kalām* theorists.

Qūnawī considers himself to be a metaphysician in the full sense of the word. In this regard, the subject, problems and principles of metaphysics have been discussed by Qūnawī in a detailed way. In all these matters he reiterates the opinions of Ibn Sīnā. Sometimes Qūnawī, who presents metaphysics with the different designations given to it by Ibn Sīnā, labels it as *maʿrifat Allāh*, *ʿilm rabbānī*, *ʿilm ilāhī*, or *ʿilm al-ḥaqāʾiq*, or sometimes as *taḥqīq* (verification) or *ʿilm al-taḥqīq*; those who possess these qualities are *muḥaqqiqīn*, *ahl Allāh*, or *awliyāʾ kāmila*, etc¹⁰. There is a specific reason and justification for each of these designations: First of all *maʿrifat Allāh* and *ʿilm ilāhī* can be considered as synonyms. Here the designation is not according to the subject of the science, but rather according to the matter and the aim. In other words, *ʿilm ilāhī*, meaning knowing God and the divine, is much clearer in the first expression. Calling this *ʿilm al-ḥaqāʾiq* is in keeping with Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics of the *knowledge of the first causes of the natural and mathematical existence and the cause of causes and the origin of the origins*¹¹.

The fact that the Sufis who came after Ibn ʿArabī and Qūnawī perceived their science as *ʿilm ilāhī* or metaphysics, rather than as a system of concepts that explain Sufi spiritual life, opened the way to the creation of a conception that would explain existence. For example, while the terms *qabd* and *bast* ('contraction' and 'spreading out') in the early (pre-Ibn ʿArabī) period of Sufism referred to two states experienced by Sufis, in the new era these terms alluded to two states that were constantly experienced by the universe as a result of their being two attributes of God. Sufis have explained the idea of continuous creation with the aid of these two concepts, which they developed on the basis of the *jawhar-ʿaraḍ* theory of the *kalām*; this latter replaced the connection through causation of the contingent by the necessary that was included in the manifestation theory derived from Ibn Sina. For this reason, the ethical contents of the concepts of the early Sufism were replaced, due to the influence of the teachings of Muslim philosophers and some *mutakallimīn*, with metaphysical ones.

Qūnawī deeply influenced subsequent Sufi and scientific conceptions. The commentaries written in this tradition, primarily on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* and *Mifāḥ al-ghayb*, contributed to his influence a lot, allocating him an important place in philosophical discussions. The influence of Ibn Sīnā upon Ibn ʿArabī and Qūnawī can be clearly seen in the change of the contents of Sufi literature. To show the change in the content of Sufi literature it is enough to compare the books of this period, in particular, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* and *Mifāḥ al-ghayb*, with any Sufi work belonging to the previous period. For example, the *umūr ʿamma* ('common

¹⁰ *Sadreddin Konevī*. Tasavvuf Metafizigi. p. 9ff; idem. Fatiha Suresi Tefsiri / tran. into Turkish by Ekrem Demirli. Istanbul: İz, 2002. p. 55ff.

¹¹ *Ibn Sina*. op. cit. p. 11ff.

affairs') are discussed at the beginning of the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*¹². The main problems discussed in the *Fuṣūṣ* are the problems like why God created the universe, the place of human being in the universe¹³, the relationship between the beings/things in the universe and God. *Miftāḥ al-ghayb* starts with a discussion of scientific classifications and subjects, as well as their matters and principles. In this regard, starting with the theory of *nafs*, the most important issues in which the Sufis were influenced by philosophers include the relationship between God and the universe, causality and manifestation. On the other hand, the relationship of the prior and the posterior, the cause and the effect, and, in connection with this, the relationship of the macrocosm to the microcosm and the issue of oneness and manyness were the most important problems of Sufism in this period. As it is well known, all these issues occupy an important place in the post-Avicennian metaphysical thought.

Probably the most important part of the Akbarian Sufi literature are the so-called “*wujūd* treatises”. These treatises were written as common introductions to Sufism and almost all of them begin with the expression “existence in so far as it is considered [only] as existence” (*wujūd bi mā 'huwa wujūd*) — a phrase that we are familiar with from the metaphysics of Ibn Sīnā¹⁴. However, Sufis, unlike Ibn Sīnā, considered this to be an expression that indicates God. Thus, the phrase “existence in so far as it is considered [only] as existence is God” is frequently quoted in Sufi texts as the first premise of the concept of *wahdat-al wujūd*. Another area of literature, which is as important as this subject, is the “*a'yān thābita*” treatises. The issue of the *a'yān thābita* was perhaps the most important issue of the new age of Sufism. While the issue deals with the attributes of God on the one hand, on the other it discusses the relationship between possible existence and God. The Sufis sometimes express their views on these matters in a comparative manner. For example, what the Sufis call *a'yān thābita*, the philosophers refer to as “nature”, while the *mutakallimīn* call it *ma'lūm ma'dūm* (‘the known non-existent’)¹⁵.

Moreover, the concepts of necessary existence and contingent existence have an important place in the arguments of accidental relationship, causation and destiny in Sufi texts; in all these discussions the Sufis refer to the views of the philosophers. For example, in Jandī's commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ*, after presenting a variety of views concerning astronomy and cosmography, attention is focused on the difference in opinions between Sufis and philosophers. In his treatise on time Dāvud Qaysarī discusses in detail the views of Muslim philosophers, harshly

¹² *İbnü'l-Arabî. Fusûsu'l-Hikem / trans. into Turkish by Ekrem Demirli. Istanbul: Kabcacı 2006. p. 25*

¹³ *İbnü'l-Arabî. Fusûsu'l-Hikem. p. 23; İbnü'l-Arabî. Fütühât-ı Mekkiyye. vol. I. p. 23.*

¹⁴ For example, see: *Dāvud al-Qaysarî. Muqaddima // Dāvud al-Qaysarî. Risâ'il. Cairo: Dār al-thaqāfa, 1997. p. 35; Abdülgani Nablusi, Gerçek Varlık, translated into Turkish by Ekrem Demirli. Istanbul: İz, 2004. p. 23.*

¹⁵ See: *Sadreddin Konevî. Tasavvuf Metafiziği . p. 25; idem. Yazışmalar / trans. into Turkish by Ekrem Demirli. Istanbul: İz 2002 . p. 110.*

criticizing, in particular, the opinion of Abū Barakāt al-Baghdādī¹⁶. Mullā Fanārī gives a lot of attention to the discussion of existence in his *Misbāḥ al-uns* and defends the Sufi view of existence against the views of philosophers. Other commentators of the *Miftāḥ al-ghayb*, like Qutb al-Dīn Iznīqī, Atpazarī, Uthmān Ilāhī and Bursawī, quote the views of Ibn Sīnā, sometimes referring to him by name, sometimes alluding to the *Shifā'* or his other books. Because of this, Ibn Sīnā's views spread over a wider area and were learnt sometimes through Qūnawī's works and sometimes directly from the works of Ibn Sīnā himself. On the other hand, if we also take into account some commentaries on books which were of great importance in Sufism, in particular Rūmī's *Mathnawī*, and some other texts which had a great impact on the Akbarian tradition, we can better estimate the influence of Avicennian metaphysics on the later Sufi tradition — the influence which spread mostly through Qūnawī and his followers.

In order to correctly evaluate Qūnawī and his followers, it is necessary to constantly have in mind two sources of his inspiration. The first of them is the traditional Sufism. Traditional Sufi practices and the methods, those things that make a Sufi a Sufi, compel us to consider Ibn 'Arabī and his followers as Sufis. The second source is the metaphysical thought, whose main champion was Ibn Sīnā. Sufis who relied on this method expressed their views on existence predominantly in terms of Ibn Sīnā's metaphysical perceptions. However, important contributions were also made by a number of *Mutakallimīn*.

Conclusion:

The Sufi conception, formulated by Ibn 'Arabī and Sadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, aimed to reconstruct Ibn Sīnā's conception of metaphysics. The change of the aim and methods used here did not change the general situation. Thus, if we leave aside the Sufi conception, the new era — in particular as manifested in the texts of Qūnawī, from the point of view of the language and concepts used — can be designated, in the true sense of the word, as the era of following in the footsteps of Ibn Sīnā. However, when we consider the ideas about God's existence, the relationship between the necessary and contingent, destiny, the issue of the *naḥs*, and existence, we can see that Sufi thought is based on Ibn Sīnā.

¹⁶ See: *Dāvud al-Qayṣarī. Nihāyat al-zamān fī dirāyat al-zamān // Risā'il.*