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Published in *Muhyiddin ibn 'Arabi*, pp. 73-89

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How to Study the *Futûhât*: Ibn 'Arabi's Own Advice

JAMES WINSTON MORRIS

It is no secret for those who have spent any amount of time with the works of Ibn 'Arabi, even with such relatively 'simple' and straightforward texts as the hagiographical vignettes translated in *Sufis of Andalusia*, that all of his writings are meant to function as a sort of spiritual mirror, reflecting and revealing the inner intentions, assumptions and predilections of each reader with profound - and sometimes embarrassing - clarity. And nowhere is that mirroring (or refractive?) function clearer than in the immense secondary literature attempting to explain or otherwise convey the voluminous teachings of this 'Greatest Master' (*al-shaykh al-akbar*), beginning with the contrasting approaches of his own close disciples and continuing down to our own day.

For if virtually all Sufi writings are meant to be mirrors, Ibn 'Arabi's works are mirrors of a very peculiar and in some ways utterly unique sort. The novel and highly personal manner in which he integrally combined the contrasting approaches of earlier Islamic intellectual traditions that had focused respectively on spiritual disciplines and contemplation, intellectual and scientific inquiry, and the elaboration of scriptural and prophetic teachings - the tripartite scheme of *kashf* (unveiling), *'aql* (intellect), *naql* (religious tradition) found in virtually all his later commentators - was never really repeated or adequately imitated by any subsequent Islamic author. Instead his readers and commentators, whether ancient or contemporary, Muslim or non-Muslim, have almost inevitably tended to focus their attention on one or two of those perspectives.¹ The typical result - and indeed the underlying method - in such cases has been to separate the 'content' from the 'form' of the Shaykh's teachings in ways that tend to ignore and indeed render invisible that remarkably effective spiritual pedagogy which is in fact the unifying aim and persistent focus of his many rhetorical styles and techniques.

One symptom of that neglect is the lack of any detailed study of the complex Introduction (*muqaddima*) to Ibn 'Arabi's famous 'Meccan Illuminations' (*al-Futuhât al-Makkîya*), in which he has provided some essential keys to his underlying intentions and rhetorical methods throughout that notoriously difficult work. Now that extended translations of major sections from the *Futûhat* are beginning to become available,² it may be especially helpful to present these passages in

which the Shaykh gives perhaps his most complete discussion and explanation of the many different audiences and types of readers for whom he composed that work. While his reflections here are obviously relevant to understanding all of his writings (including the better-known *Fusûs al-Hikam*) - and indeed to the study of mystical literature and spiritual pedagogy more generally - they are indispensable for anyone wishing to decipher and integrate the phenomenal diversity and sheer volume of earlier Islamic traditions brought together in the *Futûhât*.

In particular, this Introduction helps to highlight the remarkably active approach which Ibn 'Arabi expects and constantly demands of his truly qualified and spiritually 'ambitious' readers, those who begin to interact with his work with the appropriate intentions and preparation (*himma*). And his writing, as one can readily see, is consciously constructed in such a way that readers without that essential preparation are likely to become quickly discouraged or bored, and hence turn to other, more interesting concerns.

To begin with, the Shaykh's rhetoric intentionally forces his readers to situate themselves - in relation to the text - in at least two ordinarily separate dimensions at the same time: the intellectual, discursive, ostensibly 'objective' dimension (what he calls *nazar*) by which the mind can attempt to piece together the many different theoretical disciplines juxtaposed in the *Futûhât* and then somehow relate them all to the external cosmos and social world; and the inner, experiential, inevitably highly personal spiritual dimension (of *ahwâl* and *asrâr*) within which each serious reader must confront and act upon (rather than 'under-stand') the inspirations, exhortations and paradoxes which Ibn 'Arabi repeatedly brings to their attention. It is easy enough to retreat from that confrontation, whether by closing (or even burning or banning!)³ the book itself or by 'interpreting' it on only the first of those levels. But as Ibn 'Arabi stresses throughout his Introduction, the tension carefully generated by the constantly varied confrontation of those two dimensions is actually meant to *move* the properly prepared reader through a spiral of higher and higher levels of participation and engagement, from conceptual understanding and analysis to the very different plane of spiritual knowing, returning to those mysterious 'Openings' which were the source and aim of this and all his writings.

Limitations of space do not permit a more extensive commentary on the key sections of the Introduction translated here.⁴ But those who take the time to re-read and reflect on that text will themselves provide the only commentary that Ibn 'Arabi would have considered valuable.

In order to help situate the Introduction and its various subdivisions within the opening sections of the *Futûhât*, we have provided the following simplified outline.⁵

1. Opening Address (<i>khutbat al-kitâb</i>) ⁶	Pages 41-58
2. Poetic 'Letter' ⁷	Pages 59-73
3. Table of Chapter Headings (<i>fihrist</i>)	Pages 75-137
4. Introduction (<i>muqaddimat al-kitâb</i>) ⁸	Pages 138-214
(a) (The three levels of knowledge)	138-144
(b) 'Continuation': (How to approach the 'knowledge of secrets')	145-53
(c) 'Supplement': (Dangers of <i>kalâm</i> and importance of relying on Qur'an)	154-61
(d) 'Continuation': The Credo of the Masses and People of Submission and <i>Taqîd</i> ⁹	162-72
(e) (The Three Credos in Relation to the Inner Meaning of the <i>Futûhât</i> : 'Credo of the Quintessence of the Elite')	173
(f) 'Continuation': '. . . Beliefs of the People of External Forms'	174-86
(g) 'Continuation': '. . . Belief of the Elite Among the People of God, Between (Discursive) Inquiry and Unveiling'	187-214

The following translation of selected passages from Ibn 'Arabi's Introduction includes almost all of part 4(a) in the above outline, much of 4(b) and 4(c), and several key sections from the remaining 'credos' in the concluding parts of the Introduction.

[138] In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK

(*FUTUHAT AL-MAKKIYA*)

We said: From time to time it occurred to me that I should place at the very beginning of this book a chapter concerning (theological) creeds,¹⁰ supported by definitive arguments and salient proofs. But then I realized that that would (only) distract the person who is properly prepared and seeking an increase (in spiritual knowledge), who is receptive to the fragrant breaths of (divine) Bounty through the secrets of being. For if the properly prepared person persists in *dhikr* and spiritual retreat, emptying the place (of the heart) of thinking, and sitting like a poor beggar who has nothing, at the doorstep of their Lord - then God will bestow upon them and give them some of that knowledge of Him, of those divine secrets and supernal understandings, which He granted to

His servant Khadir.¹¹ For He said: 'A servant among our servants to whom We have brought Mercy from Us and to whom We have given Knowledge from what is with Us' (18:65). And He said: 'So be aware of God, and God will teach you' (2:282); and, 'If you are aware of God, He will give you a criterion (of spiritual discernment: *furqân*); and 'He will give you a light by which you will walk' (57:28).¹²

[139] Someone said to [the famous Sufi] al-Junayd: 'How did you attain what you've attained?' 'By sitting under that step for thirty years', he replied. And Abu Yazid (al-Bistami) said: 'You all took your knowledge like a dead person (receiving it) from another dead person. But we took our knowledge from the Living One who never dies (25:58)!'³ So the person with concentrated spiritual intention (*himma*) during their retreat with God may realize through Him - how exalted are His gifts and how prodigious His grace! - (forms of spiritual) knowledge that are concealed from every theologian (*mutakallim*) on the face of the earth, and indeed from anyone relying on (intellectual) inquiry (*nazar*) and proofs who lacks that spiritual state. For such knowledge is beyond (the grasp of) inquiry with the intellect.

For there are three levels of knowledge. Knowledge through the intellect (*'ilm al-'agl*) is whatever knowledge you obtain either immediately¹⁴ or as a result of inquiry concerning a 'sign',¹⁵ provided that you discover the probative aspect of that sign. And mistakes with regard to this kind of knowledge (come about) in the realm of that thinking¹⁶ which is linked together and typifies this type of knowledge. That is why they say about (intellectual) inquiry that some of it is sound and some is invalid.

The second (level of) knowledge is the knowledge of 'states'.¹⁷ The only way to that is through immediate experience: it can't be defined intellectually, and no (conceptual) proof can ever establish that knowing. (It includes things) like knowledge of the sweetness of honey, the bitterness of aloes, the pleasure of intercourse, love, ecstasy, or passionate longing, and other examples of this sort of knowledge. It is impossible for someone to know this kind of knowledge without directly experiencing it and participating in it. So (what are termed) 'mistakes' with regard to this kind of knowledge, among those who have immediate experience, are not really such. (For example, in the case of) someone whose organs of taste are overcome by yellow bile, so that they find honey bitter-tasting, what actually touches the organs of taste *is* the yellow bile (and not the honey).

[140] The third (level of) knowledge is knowledge of (divine) secrets:¹⁸ this is the knowledge that is beyond the stage of the intellect. It is knowledge of 'the inbreathing of the Holy Spirit in the heart',¹⁹ and it is peculiar to prophets and saints.

This (inspired) knowledge is of two kinds. One kind is perceived by the intellect, just like the first (category of discursive) knowledge, except that

the person who knows in this (inspired) way doesn't acquire their knowledge through inquiry. Instead, the level of this knowledge bestows it upon them.

The second kind (of inspired knowledge) is of two sorts. The first sort is connected with the second (level of) knowledge [i.e. of 'states'], except that this knower's state is more exalted. And the other sort is knowledge through (spiritual) 'informing'.²⁰ Now things known in this way can be either true or false, unless the person being informed has already confirmed the truthfulness of their source and its infallibility with regard to what it is communicating - as with the prophets' being informed by God, such as their being informed about the Garden (of paradise) and what is in it.

Therefore (to illustrate these three sorts of inspired 'knowledge of secrets'), the Prophet's saying that a Garden actually exists is knowledge through being informed (by God). His saying with regard to the (Day of) Resurrection that 'there is a Pool in it sweeter than honey' is (an example of) knowledge of states, which is knowledge by direct experience; and his saying that 'God was, and nothing was with him' and things like that are (illustrations of immediate) intellective knowing (corresponding to discursive knowledge) perceived through inquiry.

So as for this third type (of inspired knowing), which is the 'knowledge of secrets', the person who knows it knows *all* knowledge and is completely immersed in it²¹ - while the person who has those other (two lower levels of) knowledge is not like that. Hence there is no knowledge nobler than this 'all-encompassing knowledge'²² which embraces the entirety of knowable things!

So the only remaining point is that the person reporting (this sort of knowledge) must be considered truthful and infallible²³ by those listening to them. Or rather this is (taken to be) a precondition by the common people.²⁴

But as for truly intelligent and sensible people, who follow their own good counsel, they don't reject someone reporting (such inspired knowledge). [141] Instead they say: 'In my opinion it is possible that this person may be speaking truthfully or not.' And that is how every intelligent person ought to behave whenever someone who's not infallible comes to them with this sort of (inspired spiritual) knowledge, as long as they're speaking truthfully concerning the matter about which they've been informed. . . . For giving credence to such a person will not harm you, as long as what they are reporting is not rationally impossible . . . and so long as it doesn't undermine one of the pillars of the Sharia and doesn't contradict one of its essential principles.²⁵ Therefore if someone brings something (which they've spiritually experienced) that is rationally conceivable and about which the giver of the Sharia was silent, we mustn't at all reject it, but are instead free to choose to accept it. ...²⁶

And I am the most worthy of those who follow their own good counsel

with regard to this. For if this person were only informing us about something (already) brought by the infallible (prophet) - only recounting to us what we already had from that (prophet) through another account²⁷ - then their report wouldn't give us anything beneficial beyond what we already have. But the (saints)²⁸ - may God be pleased with them - *only* bring secrets and wise points concerning the secrets of the Sharia concerning that which is *beyond* the power of thinking and acquisition (of traditional reports), secrets which are never ever attained in any way *except* [142] through direct witnessing and (divinely given) confirmation and other paths like those. This is the beneficial point in (Muhammad's) saying: '[Among the communities who were before you] there were "those who are spoken to" (by God),²⁹ although they were not prophets, and] if there are "those who are spoken to" in my community, 'Umar is among them'. . . .

For if people did not tend to deny the very existence of this kind of (spiritual) knowledge, there would have been no point to Abu Hurayra's³⁰ saying: 'I have committed to memory two vessels (of teachings) from the Messenger of God: One of them I have widely disseminated; but as for the other, if I had disseminated it this throat of mine would have been cut!'³¹

[143] .. . Nor [if people did not often deny such inspired knowledge] would there have been any need for the saying of Ibn 'Abbas, when he said in regard to God's saying 'God it is Who created the seven heavens, and of the earth like them; the (divine) Command descends through them' (65:12)³²: 'If I were to mention the (Prophet's) interpretation of this verse you would stone me!' Or according to another version: 'You would say I was an unbeliever!' . . .³³

[144] And (were it not for people's ordinarily denying the existence of such spiritual inspiration), the saying of al-Radi, one of the descendants of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib - may God's blessings and peace be upon him³⁴ - would have been meaningless, when he said:

How many a precious gem of knowledge, if I divulged it -
They'd say to me: 'You're with those who worship idols!'
The men of the Muslims would judge killing me licit;
They'd consider the worst of what they do to be good.

Now all of these outstanding and righteous gentlemen, in my own judgement and as is widely known, *did* acknowledge this (inspired spiritual) knowledge and its rank, as well as the position of most people in the world with respect to it and the fact that most of them deny its existence. Therefore it is incumbent on the intelligent, truly knowing person not to reproach them for denying it. For in the story of Moses with Khadir (in the *Sûrah* of the Cave) allowance is made for them, and there is an argument for both sides. . . . And it is precisely with this story that we would argue against those who deny (the existence of this 'knowledge of

secrets'), although it does not permit us to quarrel with them.³⁵ Instead we say, as the 'upright servant' (Khadir) did (to Moses): This is a parting between me and you!(18:77).

[145] Continuation³⁶

And don't let yourself be fooled, you who are inquiring into this type of (inspired) knowledge (of divine 'secrets') which is the prophetic knowledge inherited from them,³⁷ if you should come across one or another of their topics which was also mentioned by a philosopher, *kalâm* theologian or (rational) inquirer in any other science - so that you say about this speaker, who is the realized Sufi,³⁸ that he is (for example) a philosopher, because the philosopher (also) mentioned that topic and professed and believed it, so that he (must have) transmitted it from them. . . . [Ibn 'Arabi - clearly alluding to his own experiences in this regard - goes on to defend this accomplished Sufi against the accusations of 'irreligion' popularly associated with the philosophers, and continues by pointing out that philosophic teachings in the areas of ethical discipline, in particular, closely mirror the prophetic teachings and standpoints of Islamic religious sciences].³⁹

[146.8] Don't you see that if someone brought you (these inspirations) as if they were a dream he'd seen - wouldn't you try to interpret them and figure out what they really mean? So likewise, take whatever this Sufi brings you and let yourself be rightly guided by it for a little while. And open up the place of your (heart) for what he's brought you, so that their inner meanings can become manifest to you. That is better for you than if you had to say on the Day of the Rising: (When the True Promise draws near . . .) 'But we were heedless of this, indeed we were doing wrong!(21:97).

Now any knowledge whose meaning can be easily understood once it has been clearly explained, or which is easily accessible, without difficulty, to the quick-witted learner, belongs to (the lowest level of) knowledge (attained by) the inquiring (discursive) intellect, because it falls under its domain and includes what can be grasped independently by someone if they should inquire (about it).

But the 'knowledge of secrets' isn't like that. For when the (rational) interpretive faculty takes it up it becomes disagreeable, difficult and trying for the understanding [147] to grasp. And sometimes weak and fanatic minds, those which haven't been successful in properly employing the reality of the intellect God gave them for inquiry and investigation, even spit out that knowledge! So this is why those who possess this (inspired) knowledge most often make it more approachable for (most people's) understanding by using symbolic images and poetic forms of speech.

And as for the 'knowledge of states', that is between this knowledge of secrets and knowledge (gained by) intellects. Most of those who have faith in the knowledge of states are people who rely on their own experiences (*ahl al-tajârib*). And the knowledge of states is closer to the knowledge of secrets than it is to the intellectual knowledge gained by inquiry. . .⁴⁰

Therefore you should know that if this (kind of report concerning spiritual knowledge) seems good to you, and you accept it and have faith in it - then rejoice (in your good fortune)! For you are necessarily in a state of immediate 'unveiling' (*kashf*) concerning that, even if you aren't aware of it. There's no other way: for the heart is not gladdened except by what it knows for sure to be true. And the intellect can't enter in here, because this knowledge is not within its grasp - unless an infallible (prophet) brings this information, in which case the heart of the intellectual person may be gladdened. But if (this knowledge is brought by) someone not (known to be) infallible, then the *only* one who will take pleasure in what they say is the person relying on immediate (spiritual) experience (*sâhib al-dhawq*).

[The rest of this section, pp. 148-53, is devoted to Ibn 'Arabi's extremely abbreviated reply to the request to 'summarize this path which you claim to be the noble path leading the voyager on it to God', a reply which includes his initial outline of the spiritual states, waystations and stages discussed so profusely throughout later chapters of the *Futûhât*. He concludes, on p. 153, by referring ahead to his far more extensive discussion in chapter 177 of the seven types of 'fundamental knowledge which is peculiar to the people of God'.]⁴¹

[154] Supplement⁴²

Next let's return to the reason for which we forbade the person properly prepared to receive God's Self-manifestation in their heart⁴³ from inquiring about the truth or falsehood of credal beliefs by means of the science of *kalâm* (dialectical theology). Part of that (reason) is that the ordinary people (*al-'awwâm*) have sound credal beliefs, not differing from any sound-minded person following the Sharia, and are (practising) Muslims despite their never having studied anything at all from Kalam theology and not knowing anything about the disputing (theological) schools. Indeed God has preserved them in the soundness of their primordial state (*al-fitra*), which is their knowledge of the existence of God, through the instruction of a parent or early teacher following the Sharia. As far as their understanding of God (*al-Haqq*) and His incomparability (*tanzîh*), they are in the state of the understanding and (comprehension of) transcendence that is given in the outer aspect (*zâhir*) of

the Clear Qur'an. And they are in a healthy and correct (state) as long as none of them seeks to go off into (their own personal) interpretation: whenever anyone goes off seeking (such) interpretation, they're no longer part of the masses (*al-'amma*) . . . For the credal beliefs of the masses are sound because, as [155] we've mentioned, they take them from the outer aspect of the Precious Book in a way that leads to assurance. . . .

So if things are as we've just stated, the properly prepared person should take their credo from the Precious Qur'an.⁴⁴ It will be (for them) like the rational premise in a (theological) argument, since It is the Veracious Saying that 'untruth cannot approach from in front or from behind, sent down from the Most-Wise, the Most-Praised' (41:42). So the properly prepared person, who has confirmed this Source, doesn't need intellectual arguments, since they've realized the Decisive Sign!

[Ibn 'Arabi, closely following the influential critical remarks of al-Ghazali, goes on to explain his own conviction that the only religiously valid purpose for *kalâm* is 'to confirm the knowledge of God in the souls' of the small set of intellectuals who might otherwise be led astray by opposing arguments. He is especially vehement in denying any claims that a particular theological understanding or formulation of religious beliefs might be *necessary* for knowing God. The drastically limited usefulness of the *kalâm* schools, from that perspective, is underlined in his later remark (at p. 161.8) that: 'The science of *kalâm*, despite its dignity, is not needed at all by most people; indeed a single theologian is enough for one country.']

[157.14] So if an individual has faith that the Qur'an is God's Speech, and is absolutely assured of that, let them take their credo from the Qur'an itself, without any (personal) interpretation or bias. . . .⁴⁵

[162] Continuation

Including What Ought to be Generally Believed: It is the Credo of the People of (Outward) Submission Accepted Without Any Inquiring Into Arguments or Proofs⁴⁶

[The contents of this section, divided according to the two parts of the Islamic testimony of faith (*shahâda*), are largely an extension and amplification of the basic Quranic affirmations concerning the nature of God, Creation, Prophecy, and mankind's 'Return' already outlined in the preceding section.⁴⁷ Much more important for all readers of the *Futuhât* are the general explanations concerning these different 'credos' (*'aqâ'id*) that Ibn 'Arabi added at the very end of this section in his fuller, revised version of this Introduction.]

[173] So that, in abridged and summary form, was the credo of the masses (*'awwâm*) among the people of outward submission (*islâm*) and unthinking compliance (*taqlîd*), and the people of inquiry (i.e. *kalâm*).

Next I shall follow it - God willing - with the credo of 'the educated youth',⁴⁸ in which I've included an extremely abridged summary of *al-Iqtisâd*.⁴⁹ In it I've alluded to the sources of the (theological) proofs for this religious community, in rhymed prose to help the student remember it. I've named it The Treatise Concerning What is Well-Known Among the Beliefs of the People of External Forms (*ahl al-rusûm*)'

Then I shall follow that with the credo of the elite among the people of God, the 'verifiers' (*muhaqqiqûn*) among the people of the path of God, the people of (spiritual) unveiling and finding⁵⁰. . . . And that completes the Introduction to this book.

But as for presenting the credo of the quintessence (of the spiritual elite), I have not given it in detail in any one place, because of the profundities it contains. But I have given it scattered throughout the chapters of this book, exhaustively and clearly explained - but in different places, as we've mentioned. So those on whom God has bestowed the understanding of these things will recognize them and distinguish them from other matters. For this is the True Knowing and the Veridical Saying, and there is no goal beyond It. 'The blind and the truly seeing are alike' in Its regard.⁵¹ It brings together things most far and most near, and conjoins the most high and most low. . . .

[187] Continuation (*Wasl*)

Concerning the Belief of the Elite Among the People of God, Between (Discursive) Inquiry and (Spiritual) Unveiling

Praise be to God, Who bewilders the intellects (of human seekers) in (what He bestows as) the results of their spiritual aspirations . . . ! Now (our) intellects have a limit at which they stop, insofar as they are (discursively) thinking, not insofar as they are receptive (to God's inspiration). So we say with regard to something *we* consider 'rationally' impossible that it may not be impossible in relation to God - just as we say with regard to what the intellect considers possible that it may be impossible in relation to God. . . .

[The rest of this long section - Ibn 'Arabi's longest addition to this second version of the Introduction - takes up some sixty-five different theological topics, which together include virtually all of the questions covered in the remainder of this book. In many of those cases he focuses on or at least alludes to the *contrasts* between what the 'intellect' (usually presented here in terms of the conclusions and methods of Ash'arite

kalâm) would consider possible and what might actually be the case according to either the Qur'an or the results of authentic spiritual unveiling. As such, these discussions illustrate both the limitations of intellectual reasoning and the tensions and interplay between the intellect, Scripture, and Ibn 'Arabi's (or other Sufis') spiritual 'openings' which are the recurrent structural leitmotif of the rest of the *Futûhât*: the whole book can well be viewed as an extended commentary on this concluding section. Finally, Ibn 'Arabi's last words in this section, and the Introduction as a whole, are a pointed reminder of the many challenges raised by this multi-levelled process of writing - and the multiple readings and practical spiritual efforts it demands:]

[213.11] Now this was the credo of the elite among the people of God. But as for the credo of the quintessence of the elite concerning God, that is a matter beyond this one, which we have scattered throughout this book because most intellects, being veiled by their thoughts, fall short of perceiving it due to their lack of spiritual purification (*tajrîd*).

The Introduction to this book is finished. . . . God speaks the Truth, and He guides on the right Way.

NOTES

1. For a historical and philosophic overview of some key figures in that process, both in past Islamic tradition and among more recent Western students of the Shaykh, see our three-part survey of 'Ibn 'Arabi and His Interpreters' in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society* vol. 106 (1986), pp. 539-52 and 732-56, and vol. 107 (1987), pp. 101-20. For Ibn 'Arabi's problematic attitude toward philosophy and the 'intellectual' sciences, one of the primary subjects of the passages from the Introduction to the *Futûhât* translated below, see the recent study by Franz Rosenthal, 'Ibn Arabi Between "Philosophy" and "Mysticism" ' in *Oriens* vol. 31 (1988), pp. 1-35, as well as the extensive translations from the *Futûhât* on this subject in W. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany, NY, 1989). [This anthology is referred to in subsequent notes as Chittick, *SPK*.]
The underlying autobiographical reasons for Ibn Arabi's consistent focus on the Qur'an and *hadîth* - grounded in his experience and understanding of his unique role as 'Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood' - have recently been greatly clarified in the detailed studies by M. Chodkiewicz and C. Addas (bibliographic references below).
2. See especially the recently published volumes of *Les Illuminations de La Mecque/The Meccan Illuminations: Selected Texts* (Sindbad, Paris, 1989) and Chittick, *SPK* (preceding note), as well as several additional projected studies or translations announced in both of those anthologies.
3. See the discussion of some of the more notorious efforts to do one or the other of these things to the *Futûhât* in our monograph cited at the beginning of Note 1

- above. The most recent public controversies in Egypt surrounding the new, more accessible, scientific edition of the text by O. Yahya are discussed in Th. E. Homerin, 'Ibn 'Arabi in the People's Assembly: Religion, Press, and Politics in Sadat's Egypt', pp. 462-77 in *The Middle East Journal* 40 (1986). As a sign of its ongoing sensitivity, one may note that the new edition is still subject (as of this writing) to a strictly enforced ban on its commercial export outside Egypt.
4. Some important philosophic and practical implications of the Introduction are outlined (with illustrations from many sections of the *Futûhât*) in our article on 'Ibn 'Arabi's "Esotericism" : The Problem of Spiritual Authority' in *Studia Islamica* LXXI (1990), and related studies (delivered as conference papers) are forthcoming.
 5. Page references, unless otherwise specified, are to vol. I of the new edition of *al-Futûhât al-Makkîya* by Osman Yahya (Cairo, 1972/1392); the entire Introduction corresponds to vol. I, pp. 31-47 in the older, four-volume Cairo edition. Within the translated sections below, page numbers from the Yahya edition (vol. I) are given in square brackets []. Some minor subdivision markers added in the second, longer version of the Introduction are not indicated in this outline, but are given in the translation below.
 6. Major autobiographical sections of the *khutba* regarding Ibn 'Arabi's role as 'Seal of the Muhammadan Saints' were translated by M. Valsan (originally in *Études Traditionnelles*, 1953) and are reprinted under the title 'l'Investiture du cheikh al-Akbar au centre supreme' in the volume *l'Islam et la fonction de René Guénon* (Paris, 1984), pp. 177-91. A much shorter passage has more recently been translated by L. Shamash and S. Hirtenstein as 'An Extract from the Preface to the *Futuhât*', in *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* IV (1985), pp. 4-6.
 7. To Ibn 'Arabi's close friends in Tunisia, who are presented as key members of the spiritual hierarchy. Together with the *khutba*, this section concludes the first *juz'* of the manuscripts (portions that were read together with or dictated to Ibn 'Arabi's disciples, as indicated by the elaborate *samâ'*-certificates recorded in Yahya's edition); the *Fihrist* makes up the second *juz'*.
 8. Only pages 138-72 in Ibn 'Arabi's original version; the last two long sections were added in his second recension. This section makes up the third *juz'* of the manuscripts.
 9. This was originally the *conclusion* of Ibn 'Arabi's Introduction in his first version of the *Futûhât*; the important explanation at p. 173 of the relationships of the three 'credos' outlined here to the inner meaning of the rest of the *Futûhât* was likewise added in his second, longer version of the book. For the partial (and indirect) French translation of this section, see the full references - and important cautions - at Note 47 below.
 10. Or 'statements of belief': *'aqâ'id* (singular *'aqîda*) refers to the formal doctrinal tenets promulgated by the various schools of *kalâm* theology. It is the same term Ibn 'Arabi applies to the three longer 'statements of belief' or 'credos' that actually conclude this Introduction.
 11. The long-lived prophet and archetype of direct divine inspiration - alluded to in the Quranic account of Moses' initiation in the following passage from the *Sûrah of the Cave* (18:65 ff.) - who played an important role in Ibn 'Arabi's own development, as well as in Sufism and popular Islamic spirituality more generally.

12. In each of the translated passages the pronoun 'you' is in the *plural*; the mysterious term *al-furqân* ('criterion', 'separation') also appears six other times in the Qur'an, usually in reference to a mysterious type or source of revelation or spiritual awareness and divine guidance (cf. *sakîna*, *al-hudâ*, etc.) granted to several prophets. The multifaceted verb translated here as 'to be aware of God' comes from the central Quranic term *taqwâ*, which refers both to the spiritual condition of fearful awe and reverence of God and to the inner and outer actions of piety and devotion flowing from that state.
13. This particular saying attributed to the famous early Iranian Sufi, al-Bistami, is frequently discussed by Ibn 'Arabi, especially in passages where he is disputing with more literalist jurists and theologians the proper ways to understand the spiritual intentions or meanings of *hadîth* and other scriptural passages. (See, for example, the long discussion at I, 279, translated in Chittick, *SPK*, pp. 248-9.)
14. *Darûratan* ('necessarily'): i.e. anything that is known 'of necessity' or self-evidently, in such a way that it cannot possibly be refuted or rejected. Here this term refers to the most basic, intrinsic logical grounds of all reasoning, such as the principle of non-contradiction, etc. But later (at p. 147.4-9) Ibn 'Arabi also admits that the 'knowledge of states' - the 'second level' discussed here - is also 'necessary' or 'immediate' in this broad psychological sense. It should be stressed that the technical terminology for discussing the processes of reasoning here and throughout this Introduction is mostly drawn from the specifically Islamic religious discipline of *kalâm* (dialectical theology), not from the intellectually more sophisticated Aristotelean philosophy and logic of the time. (See the further illustrations of this point in the article by F. Rosenthal cited at Note 1 above).
15. *Dalîl*: in the language of *kalâm*, this can refer very broadly to a premise or argument or proof-text, or even to a natural phenomenon or event underlying such an argument - hence the importance of the inquirer's grasping the relevant 'aspect' (*wajh*) of the sign in question.
16. As will become clearer in the course of the following discussion (p. 140), Ibn 'Arabi's emphasis here is not on the intellective dimension of this sort of knowledge as such, but rather on the discursive mental processes of conceptual 'thinking' (*fîkr*) and 'inquiry' or 'investigation' (*nazar*) that can lead to all sorts of error and delusion. In fact, purely 'intellective' knowing (*'ilm al-'aql*) is one of the two types of 'inspired' spiritual knowledge making up the third and highest level outlined below.
17. *Ahwâl* (singular *hâl*): in the traditional technical language of Sufism this term usually refers to specifically *spiritual* states (corresponding to the third level of 'knowledge of mysteries' below). Here, however, Ibn 'Arabi is using it - and the related expression for 'direct personal experience' (*dhawq*, literally 'tasting') - in an unusually restricted sense limited only to the most basic levels of external and internal sensation.
18. *'ilm al-asrâr* (singular *sirr*): depending on the context or perspective, the latter term could also be translated as spiritual 'mysteries'. For example at the end of Ibn 'Arabi's opening 'Letter (to al-Mahdawi)' he describes the purpose of this Introduction as 'setting forth the knowledge of the divine secrets/mysteries this book contains' (p. 74.2).

19. The opening section of a famous *hadîth*, recorded by Muslim and Ibn Hanbal, in which Muhammad alludes to his experience of divine inspiration: see Lane, s.v. *rû'*, and Wensinck, *Concordance*, II, p. 320. 'Saint' here translates *al-walî*, the 'friend of God'; the term 'prophet' (*nabî*) is to be understood - following Ibn 'Arabi's own usage - as a very broad term extending from the saints through the many pre-islamic prophets to the much smaller group of lawgiving prophetic 'messengers' (*rusul*).
20. That is, through God's 'informing' (*ikhbâr*) the prophet or saint, by means of one or another of the various forms of divine communication mentioned in the Qur'an and *hadîth*, and frequently analyzed by Ibn 'Arabi. The same Arabic phrase could also be read as 'through reports' (*akhbâr*) - i.e. as communicated by God or some other angelic agency, and perhaps eventually by a prophet or saint receiving such inspiration.
21. Literally, 'knows all knowledges (or "sciences")'; the last part of the phrase can also mean 'is completely filled with them' or 'completely masters them'.
22. This Arabic phrase strongly - and no doubt intentionally - recalls many of the Quranic descriptions of God's Knowledge, reflecting Ibn 'Arabi's underlying metaphysical insistence on the cosmic 'mirroring' reality of the 'Perfect Human Being' (*al-insân al-kâmil*).
23. *Ma'sûm*: i.e. divinely 'preserved' from any possibility of moral or spiritual error and deviation - a rare state that most Sunni theologians would typically restrict to the prophets (although Shiites and some Sufis have often extended it somewhat more broadly).
24. Or 'the (ignorant) masses' (*al-'amma*), whom Ibn 'Arabi connects with the first, most dogmatic and theological credo he outlines below (pp. 162-72).
25. It is important to underline here that the Arabic terms Ibn 'Arabi is using (*rukn* and *asl*) are clearly meant to stress the extremely narrow character of this limitation - restricted to the most fundamental and indisputable dimensions of Islamic *scripture*, as distinct from the historically elaborated systems of intellectual interpretation developed in the later schools of *kalâm* and *fiqh*. The broader political implications of the practically *alternative* understanding of Islam based on the experience and guidance of the 'friends of God' (*awliyâ'*) which he begins to suggest here - and develops far more elaborately throughout the *Meccan Illuminations* - are summarized (based on key passages from the *Futûhât*) in our article on 'Ibn 'Arabi's "Esotericism": The Problem of Spiritual Authority', in *Studia Islamica* LXXI (1990).
26. In the short passage omitted here (p. 141.8-13) Ibn 'Arabi draws an analogy to the acceptance of the testimony of witnesses considered reliable and responsible in the actual application of Islamic law with regard to people's lives and property. As in those cases, he concludes (quoting verse 43:19), the responsibility for any false or misleading testimony will eventually be taken up between that soul and God.
27. *Riwâya*: clearly Ibn 'Arabi is alluding here to the familiar historical, oral (or written) chains of transmission of *hadîth* in particular.
28. Ibn 'Arabi does not explicitly identify the individuals he is referring to here, but in the context it can only be those having the 'knowledge of secrets' who - unlike the prophets - are *not* universally known to be truthful and without sin: i.e. the

living saints or 'Friends of God' (*awliyâ' Allâh*). The italicized points in the following sentences reflect strong explicit emphases in Ibn 'Arabi's own Arabic syntax here.

29. *Muhaddathûn*: see Ibn 'Arabi's more detailed phenomenological discussion of this particular type of divine inspiration (involving 'hearing' of an inspired message without any vision) - and of many other forms of reception of this 'knowledge of secrets' at III, 38-9 (translated in Chittick, *SPK*, pp. 261-3). Bukhari (*fadâ'il al-ashâb*, no. 38) records two versions (both from Abû Hurayra) of this important *hadîth*, which are apparently conflated in Ibn 'Arabi's allusion to that *hadîth* here. Ibn 'Arabi concludes this paragraph with a vague reference to Abu Bakr's similar willingness to share some of the special spiritual 'knowledge of secrets' bestowed on him.
30. One of the most famous and prolific transmitters of *hadîth* among the Companions of Muhammad, source of many reports in the canonical Sunni collections of Bukhari and Muslim, including the *hadîth* regarding 'Umar that Ibn 'Arabi had just cited (at the preceding note).
31. Ibn 'Arabi goes on to describe in detail (pp. 142.6-143.9) four different occasions (extending from Ceuta, in 589, and Seville in 592, to Mecca in 599) and specific chains of transmission for this same *hadîth*, in each case going back to al-Bukhari (*K. al-'ilm*, no. 42). This unusual repetition seems intended to underline the practical importance of this issue and the pre-occupation of his Sufi contemporaries with defending this pre-eminent practical 'complement' to externally transmitted forms of Prophetic tradition.
32. The problem concerning the meaning of this verse is apparently connected with the following two points: both of the pronouns ('them') referring to the 'seven heavens' (and earths) are unexpectedly in the personal (feminine) plural form usually reserved for *animate* beings; and the further connections between those seven heavens and the spiritual 'realities' or 'abodes' of various prophets (as described, for example, in the various Ascension *hadîth*) raise a number of critical questions - which were heatedly debated in early Shiite and later Sufi thought - about the forms of earthly manifestation of the spiritual hierarchy of intermediaries between the Absolute and terrestrial humanity.
33. Ibn 'Arabi traces his source for this *hadîth* back to the prolific Sufi writer Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, through his celebrated Andalusian disciple, the Maliki Qadi Abu Bakr Ibn 'Arabi (no direct relative of the mystic himself), who was influential in introducing Ghazali's writings in Muslim Spain.
34. It is remarkable that Ibn 'Arabi here (apparently in all three of Osman Yahya's manuscript sources) uses the longer formula of blessings ordinarily reserved for the Prophet. The Sharif al-Radi, a Twelver Shiite scholar of the fourth century AH, is best known for his collection of the sayings and sermons attributed to 'Ali, the celebrated *Nahj al-Balâgha*.
35. Since one of the main points of the same Quranic story is precisely the necessity of keeping such spiritual insights from all those who are not yet prepared to benefit from them.
36. *Wasl* (given as a separate 'Section' / *fasl* in the original recension), pp. 145-53; I, pp. 32-4 in the four-volume standard Cairo edition.
37. Here Ibn 'Arabi is continuing to speak about the inspired 'knowledge of divine

secrets' discussed in the preceding section. For him, all such inspired knowledge of the saints or friends of God is in fact 'inherited' from the spiritual 'Realities' of one or more of the prophets: see the detailed explanations of this complex relationship (assumed throughout the celebrated *Fusûs al-Hikam*) in M. Chod-kiewicz, *Le Sceau des saints: Prophetie et saintete dans la doctrine d'Ibn Arabi* (Gallimard, Paris, 1986), and many illustrative passages translated from the *Futûhât* (English selections by W. Chittick and J. Morris) in Ibn 'Arabi, *Les Illuminations de La Mecque/The Meccan Illuminations: Selected Texts* (Sind-bad, Paris, 1989), index s.v. *wraith/héritier*.

38. *al-Sûfi al-muhaqqiq*: Ibn 'Arabi often uses the latter adjective to distinguish the relatively small set of so-called 'Sufis' who have actually accomplished, realized and 'verified' the disciplines and teachings of the spiritual path. Here in the Introduction this term is a thinly veiled allusion to Ibn 'Arabi's own personal contributions regarding this prophetic 'knowledge of secrets' throughout the *Futûhât*.
39. This passage summarized here (145.7-146.8) is partly translated on p. 12 of the recent article by Franz Rosenthal cited at Note 1 above. Despite Ibn 'Arabi's disingenuous reference here to similarities in the field of ethics, the most striking correspondences in the *Futûhât* to positions of contemporary Islamic 'philosophy' (including the physical science) are almost certainly in the closely related areas of cosmology, physical theory (elements, humours, etc.) and the more cosmological aspects of metaphysics. (Most of those points of contact are at least summarized in the above-mentioned article by F. Rosenthal.) The less controversial correspondences between his 'inspired' Sufi knowledge and the 'rational' teachings of *kalâm* are of course far more extensive, reflecting their common sources in Qur'an and *hadîth*.
40. In the few lines omitted here (p. 147.6-9) Ibn 'Arabi points out that both the 'knowledge of states' and the inspired 'knowledge of (spiritual) secrets' are indeed 'self-evident' or 'immediate' (*darûri*) in a way resembling the logical first principles of rational, discursive knowledge. But he goes on to point out that such inspired knowledge is also entirely *different* in that 'it is only self-evident to whoever witnesses it' - and that direct witnessing (*mushâhadd*) is limited to the prophets and friends of God.
41. See vol. II, pp. 297-320 of the older, four-volume edition of the *Futûhât*. This lengthy chapter on spiritual knowledge (*ma'rifa*), immediately preceding the more frequently studied and translated chapter on Love, deals in much greater detail with many of the basic epistemological questions raised here in the Introduction.
42. *Tatîmma*, pp. 154-61. This subheading was added in the second recension; it was not in the earliest manuscript version.
43. The reference here is to Ibn 'Arabi's opening discussion of the ideal reader (*al-muta'ahhib*: i.e. someone with the right spiritual aptitude practically following the Sufi path) at the very beginning of the Introduction above.
44. To avoid any possible misunderstanding, it should be emphasized that Ibn 'Arabi here is *not* saying that the 'properly prepared person' should be just like ordinary people. It is precisely their special aptitude that enables them to experience directly the 'inner aspect' (*bâtin*) of the Qur'an which, for Ibn 'Arabi at least, is virtually coextensive with the cosmic 'Reality of Muhammad'.

For the autobiographical underpinnings of this perception, manifested throughout all of Ibn 'Arabi's works, see the key passages analyzed by C. Addas in *Ibn 'Arabi, ou la quête du Soufre Rouge* (Gallimard, Paris, 1989). See also our translation of one of the most important of those passages, from chapter 366 of the *Futûhât*, in Ibn 'Arabi, *Les Illuminations de La Mecque/The Meccan Illuminations: Selected Texts* (Sindbad, Paris, 1989), pp. 134-5. (e.g. 'Everything about which we speak, both in my (teaching) sessions and in all my writings, comes only from the presence of the Qur'an and Its treasures. . . .')

45. In the following pages (158-61) Ibn 'Arabi sketches out his first and simplest Quranic credo, beginning with some of the basic divine Names, the existence and functions of prophecy, and affirmations about the aims and sufficiency of the Qur'an itself in helping human beings to reach their ultimate end. The same basic outline is followed, albeit in much greater depth, in each of the succeeding credal statements.
46. Originally this section (pp. 162-72; I, 36-8 in the older Cairo edition) was the concluding part of Ibn 'Arabi's Introduction. This subtitle was added in the second recension, when the last two 'credos' were also appended.
47. More than half of this section is included - albeit with highly significant additions and omissions - at the beginning of a much later Hanbalite (and Qadiri Sufi) polemic work translated by R. Deladriere (and attributed throughout to Ibn 'Arabi), *La Profession de foi* (Editions Orientales, Paris, 1978), pp. 91-101. [See the important cautions concerning the dangerous misattribution of this entire Hanbalite text to Ibn 'Arabi discussed in our survey of 'Ibn 'Arabi and His Interpreters, Part II: Influences and Interpretations', in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106.4 (1986), pp. 741-4.]
48. Or 'the singing youth' (?): moreover, the narrator of that strange colloquium (see following note) is placed in the feminine here, but appears in the masculine within the story itself (at 174.3 and 186.13).
49. Possibly (following the suggestion of O. Yahya) an allusion to al-Ghazali's well-known *kalam* catechism, *al-Iqtisâd fî al-'Itiqâd* ('The Mean With Regard to Belief). While the discussion does use *kalâm* language (and carefully avoids the Quranic quotations used in the preceding discussions), it must be admitted that the further possible connections to Ghazali's work are not entirely obvious. The narrator of this section claims to describe the encounter at the centre of the world of 'four learned individuals' from the four corners of the globe, and their common search for the knowledge truly worth knowing. It consists of four didactic monologues dealing successively with God; His Attributes; creation and prophecy; and mankind's salvation and eschatology - roughly the same order as in the previous credo.
50. Or '(true) Being': *ahl al-kashf wa al-wujûd*. All of these are terms Ibn 'Arabi frequently uses more or less equivalently to refer to those he considered the (relatively) accomplished or realized Sufis. (See the many illustrations from the *Futûhât* in Chittick, *SPK*, Index s.vv.)
51. Unless the editor has left out a negation here, Ibn 'Arabi appears to be playing with the expected Quranic *contrast* of the blind and seeing (cf. 6:50, etc.): in that case these final remarks may be alluding to the particularly metaphysical, universal character of the wisdom in question here.