PRESUPPOSITIONS IN MYSTICAL PHILOSOPHIES:

AN EXAMINATION OF THE MYSTICAL PHILOSOPHIES OF SANKARA AND IBN ARABI

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Abstract:

This study is a comparison of the philosophical systems composed by the Indian philosopher Sankara (788-830 CE), and the Muslim mystic, Ibn Arabi (1165-1240 CE). The primary thesis found in this study is that the conceptual systems constructed by Sankara and Ibn Arabi are not perfectly new creations derived from the core of their mystical realizations. Rather, they contain fundamental pre-existing principles, concepts, and teachings that are expanded upon and placed within a systematic philosophy or theology that is intended to lead others to a state of realization. A selection of these presuppositions are extracted from within each of these thinkers' philosophical systems and employed as structural indicators. Similarities are highlighted, yet the differences between Sankara and Ibn Arabi's thought, witnessed within their philosophical systems, lead us to the conclusion that the two mystics inhabited different conceptual space.

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INTRODUCTION

The primary goal of this study is to compare and contrast the Indian philosopher Sankara (788-830 CE), and the Muslim mystic, Ibn Arabi (1165-1240 CE). To be more specific, this project is an examination focused on the non-dual mystical philosophies composed by Sankara and Ibn Arabi.

The mystical systems constructed by Sankara and Ibn Arabi are often viewed as being representative of the non-dual mysticism found within their respective traditions. A number of studies have compared Sankara and Ibn Arabi and some projects have focused on the commonalities between these non-dual systems. Furthermore, the striking differences between aspects of Hinduism and Islam have garnered even more interest in the two mystics, who some have claimed have analogous systems of thought. This study will be exploring the systems of these influential thinkers to ascertain if this is true. The claim that a Hindu *sramana* (wandering ascetic) and an Islamic mystic composed markedly similar systems of thought warrants scholarly attention. Comparing Sankara and Ibn Arabi also affords us the opportunity to make observations on religious mysticism and how certain esoteric systems of thought function within their surrounding religious environments. A comparison of Sankara and Ibn Arabi's systems allows for useful insights into each thinker's philosophy and may also provide a better understanding of mysticism in general, as well as methodological issues faced in the scholarly study of spiritual, religious, or mystical experience.

The primary thesis found in this study is that the conceptual systems constructed by the two thinkers are not perfectly new creations derived from the core of their mystical

realizations. Rather, they contain fundamental pre-existing principles, concepts, and teachings that are expanded upon and placed within a systematic philosophy or theology that is intended to lead others to a highly valued state of realization. A selection of these pre-existing principles will be extracted from within each of these thinkers' systems, and employed as structural indicators. Certain ideas in Sankara and Ibn Arabi's body of work are of fundamental importance and cannot be divorced from their systems of thought, and a few of these, in particular, will serve as our focal points.

The relationship between religion and mysticism will not be overly examined and the nature of the mystical-religious interaction will be purposefully vague. Despite his enormously influential early scholarly study of mysticism, we need not go as far as William James in placing the personal experience at the root of religion.[1] An example of the subjective experience being tied to religious experience can be found in James' statement that "Religion, therefore, as I now ask you arbitrarily to take it, shall mean for us the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine."[2] Instead, it is the interaction of thought systems that is of importance in this study, and we will attempt to treat mysticism - certainly articulations about mystical experience - as belonging to a larger family of thought. These thoughts, as expressed in the writings of these mystics, are a legitimate object of intellectual analysis, and at the outset, define the boundaries of this project.

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[1] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), 36.
[2] Ibid., 36.

The study's focus is on the comparison of particular features within writings about transcendental experience by two influential thinkers. Reza Shah Kazemi, in *Paths to Transcendence,* regards such a focus as the "doctrinal dimension of transcendence" because the methodological focus is on doctrine rather than experience.[3] However, this approach is tempered with periodic admissions that highlight the distance between subjective experience, the key feature to which both philosophies point, and the doctrinal language and context used to do the pointing. It is the relationship between doctrine and experience that will provide a majority of our talking points.

Chapter One discusses methodological issues within the study of mysticism. Specific scholarly approaches to mysticism will be examined, with the benefits and hindrances discussed. This chapter will help to identify the aspects of mysticism that are deemed important to this study. A loose definition of mysticism will be provided, yet the majority of attention will be directed towards the non-dual mysticism found within Sankara and Ibn Arabi. Dualistic forms of mysticism and non-religious mysticism are acknowledged – types represented in Hindu and Islamic traditions --but these will only be passing observations that are intended to limit this paper's scope. Another limitation that the methodological chapter examines is the ineffable and noetic features that James recognizes as crucially characteristic of mysticism. This will naturally provide another boundary to which the investigation will adhere.[4] The methodological discussion that precedes the examination of Sankara and Ibn Arabi's thought will identify the capacity for a structural approach to the study of mysticism that is situated within the doctrinal

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[3] Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Paths to Transcendence* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2006), Xiii.
[4] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 414.

level. The topics selected to compare the two mystics will therefore be tempered by this methodology, and it is the goal of the first chapter to clearly identify this approach. It is the comparison of ideas, not experience, that lies at the heart of this project; the discussions will be framed with a focus on concepts and philosophical structures.

An overview of important theories and individuals within Hindu and Islamic mysticism will be provided in Chapter Two. Mysticism found within the Vedas and Upanisads will be examined as possessing noticeable similarities and differences. The sacrificial mysticism within the Vedas will be linked to the philosophical mysticism found within the Upanisads. The Upanisadic internalization of sacrifice is an important difference between the Vedas and Upanisads, yet this need not constitute a major cleavage between the two texts. It will be argued that Vedic and Upanisadic forms of mysticism can be linked if that is one's interpretive goals; however, there are important differences between Vedic and Upanisadic forms of mysticism that should be recognized. Mysticism found within *bhakti* devotionalism and the *Bhagavad Gita* will be examined as being neither identical to, nor completely different than the mysticism found in the Vedas and Upanisads. Bhakti is a spiritual tool more than a theistic belief set or a specific form of mysticism; therefore, *bhakti* can be identified within various forms of Hindu mysticism. The devotional mysticism espoused in the *Bhagavad Gita* is not clearly defined and is frequently adapted to specific mystical goals.

Chapter Two will also entail an examination of Muhammad's role in Islamic mysticism. The importance of Muhammad within esoteric Islam is to such an extent that Sufis have regarded his actions as possessing an element that is believed to be the embodiment of Quranic mysticism. An examination of Sufi literature will reveal that

Muhammad has been interpreted as a prophet, esoteric exemplar, and as a metaphysical principle that is believed to be present in all previous revelations. Muhammad serves an important role in Islamic mysticism that extends beyond scriptural revelation; rather, Muhammad is seen as embodying the totality of Islamic mysticism and as revealing a mystical path that others can follow. Important principles within Islamic mysticism can be derived from interpreting Muhammad as a shaykh and exemplar of esoteric practices. This approach to Muhammad will also provide insights into the varied forms of Islamic mysticism and how the Prophet can be interpreted in situationally specific ways. Like the Vedas and Upanisads, interpretations of Muhammad are not uniform and no single interpretation of Muhammad can be considered as being representative of Islamic mysticism.

Chapter Three begins with a discussion of the philosophy of Sankara Bhagavatpada, whose literary works will provide one basis of comparison. Because this is a comparative study with a circumscribed focus, it will solely deal with Sankara, and not Advaita Vedanta in general, or the thinker's role in the history of Vedanta. Reference will be made to Sankara's teachers and his ideas regarding discipleship, but these discussions will still have the Hindu mystic as their focal points. To be more specific, it is Sankara's mystical philosophies that will be our main concern.[5] Sankara's idea of Brahma-vidya (enlightenment/realization) will be interpreted, but more importantly for our purposes, we will focus on the philosophical scaffolding that supports his idea of realization.

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[5] Please note that I do not use the term philosophy in a Western post-Enlightenment sense. Rather, I employ the term philosophy as signifying a conceptual system that may or may not make reference to religious principles.

Essentially, the role of realization in Sankara's system pertains to the acquisition of a transcendental knowledge "…that the Individual soul is the Supreme Lord Himself."[6] The study's theoretical stance posits that we cannot directly access the transcendental knowledge regarding these subjective experiences, and that is why the methodological approach is to direct our discussions to Sankara's philosophical scaffolding. This contrasts with Kazemi, who, when undertaking a similar comparative project (on Sankara, Ibn Arabi, and Meister Eckhart), limits his focus to the "…vital connection between the awareness of transcendence as a notion, concept, idea, or principle, on the one hand, and the concrete modalities of spiritual attainment on the other."[7] I shall treat Sankara in a similar manner by acknowledging the relationship between literary teachings and experiential modalities, which is a twofold path that many view as being essential to the study of mysticism.[8] However, this study does not dwell on the experiential modalities of spiritual realization. Rather, it is Sankara and Ibn Arabi's philosophical statements that constitute this paper's focal point. These conceptual artifacts (the philosophical statements) show many variations, particularly in the form of presuppositions. By limiting our discussion to philosophical principles, and avoiding metaphysical speculation, it is possible to elicit features within the structures of mystically oriented thought systems that are notoriously elusive. New perspective is offered when mystical statements are interpreted as possessing inherent presuppositions that have foundational influence. Furthermore, this project will demonstrate that the metaphysics that govern one's mystical ascent can be partially credited to the

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[6] Sankara, "Texts on the Soul and the Lord as Not Distinct," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 3,* trans, A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 64.
[7] Kazemi, *Paths to Transcendence,* Xii.
[8] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 496.

suppositions that each mystic employs before the mystical journey is embarked upon. Such foundational differences will also be shown as resulting in differentiated spiritual techniques (the methods used to attain realization).

Sankara's thought will be explored primarily through the *Upadesasahasri,* but also through a variety of other sources found in the corpus of works attributed to him. However, I have made particular efforts to restrict my examination to what the scholarly community has declared as being genuine works by Sankara.[9] Many of the references to Sankara's corpus will be combined with discussions on theoretical and methodological issues within the study of mysticism. Quite notably, I attempt not to stray too far from what Sankara believed his teachings would reveal. To do so would perhaps be a misrepresentation, because the true import of Sankara and his project among adherents of his teachings, as noted by Jonathan Bader, is believed to transcend his literary works and doctrinal positions.[10]

Muhyi al-Din Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn-al 'Arabi will be treated in a similar manner, and is the focus of the discussion in Chapter Four. The dual approach (recognizing the subjective experiential factors within mysticism and simultaneously the theoretical/textual components through which method and experience is expressed) is especially important in Ibn Arabi because we will see an even greater reliance on spiritual embodiment. The Shaykh repeatedly states that spiritual reflection lies at the apex of his

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[9] A.J. Alston, "Sources of Sankara's Doctrine: His Life and Works," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1* ed. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 44-46.
[10] Jonathan Bader, *Conquest of the Four Quarters* (Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 2000), 7.

system and that it is a process of interiorization.[11] Furthermore, many of Ibn Arabi's accounts place the individual in a cosmological position that transcends their singular status, and it is for this reason that we must strike a balance with the metaphysical principles that are believed to operate outside of intellectual comprehension.[12] This approach to Ibn Arabi will also examine his intellectual heritage and his status as a teacher. Like Sankara, Ibn Arabi viewed his hermeneutical venture as being purpose driven and "meant to do something". Texts written by Ibn Arabi must be understood as being simultaneously philosophical and instructive (while pointing to something that is completely beyond description, namely, God).

The text that will be mainly used to reference Ibn Arabi's ideas is the *Futuhat al-makkiyya*, where we will see a familiar combination of theoretical statements in relation to metaphysical propositions. The *Futuhat al-makkiyya*, like Sankara's works, possesses the trademarks of non-dual mysticism that continually seek to undermine strictly intellectual processes.[13] Despite their supplementary nature, the theoretical statements offered by Ibn Arabi will be extracted and used as the material for comparison. There is practical value that Ibn Arabi assigns to the scaffolding that raises one to realization, yet we must continually recognize the stated secondary importance of these spiritual aids. Included within these aids are theological statements that are derived from the Islamic religious structure that surrounds Ibn Arabi's philosophies, and an investigation into these statements will reveal a set of foundational concepts that give direction to the Shaykh's

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[11] William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 344.
[12] William Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 86.
[13] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 154.

ideas of mysticism and transcendence. The theological notions that Ibn Arabi extracts from the Quran are also used within his explanatory ventures outside of the Islamic tradition; such examples will provide us with important information regarding Ibn Arabi's attempt to formulate a comprehensive mystical philosophy (and worldview) that accounts for itself and the surrounding religious systems. However, we will also see that other discussion points reveal a more focused worldview that proves singular.

Chapter Five is dedicated to a direct comparison and analysis of the philosophical systems espoused by Sankara and Ibn Arabi. A number of similarities will be discussed and the metaphysical implications of these points will be highlighted. Identification with a non-dual Absolute is of primary importance to both mystics and will be discussed as such. Furthermore, both Sankara and Ibn Arabi will be shown as constructing philosophical systems that are directed towards the attainment of this state. The topic of illusion, and the need to end it, is quintessential within both systems of thought. Differences in the way Sankara and Ibn Arabi expressed their ideas of illusion will be examined, yet the magnitude of this divergence is lessened when their usages of illusion, as unique conditions that operate in the unenlightened mind, are contrasted. Another similarity will be found in the mystics' opinions on revelation and sacred scripture. Both Sankara and Ibn Arabi believed their systems relied on revelatory information that made esoteric knowledge possible. The Vedas and Quran are approached as necessary conduits that espouse a means to correct understanding. This correspondence will also be shown as demonstrating similar ideas in regards to the spiritual capabilities of the unenlightened individual and the constraints inherent within the unrealized mind. The last likeness that will be investigated is Sankara and Ibn Arabi's usage of seemingly dualistic statements

that are later negated through reference to the non-dual Absolute. This will show both mystics as employing conceptual techniques that are deemed as being of secondary importance when they are contrasted with the goal of realization.

The comparison within Chapter Five will also present Sankara and Ibn Arabi as mystical philosophers with noticeable divergences in thought. All the differences examined reside within the theological suppositions that support each mystics' transcendental claims. The role Sankara assigns to *karma* and *samsara* will be shown as different from Ibn Arabi's ideas of death, judgment, and the afterlife. This will be discussed as an important conceptual difference that distinguishes each respective worldview. Another difference examined is Ibn Arabi's idea of prophecy when compared to Sankara's ideas on Vedic revelation. Ibn Arabi provides a complex revelatory system that attempts to understand religious plurality and the metaphysical importance of revelation.[14] The Shaykh makes an extended effort to place prophets and prophetic messages within a hierarchical system that leads to the primacy of the Quran, while still supporting revelations that had occurred previously. The Abrahamic traditions were the point of Ibn Arabi's main ecumenical focus but this did not prevent the Andalusian mystic from extending his ideas to non-Abrahamic traditions. Sankara, however, will be shown as being much more divisive when it comes to matters of revelation; the Vedas (but more specifically the Upanisads) are recognized as being the sole textual sources that leads to esoteric realization.[15] Sankara's treatment of other

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[14] William Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 126.
[15] Sankara, "Texts on: The Self Can Only Be Known Through The Veda," in *Sankara A Source Book vol. 5,* trans. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 202.

Hindu schools (*darsanas*) will demonstrate a much more exclusive view of realization and the means to its attainment.[16] Sankara believed that there were multiple ways to attain realization, yet these techniques centered on the Vedas (we should also note the importance of *smrti* literature within Sankara's thought).[17] The last difference that will be examined is the need for renunciation. Sankara will be shown as stressing the importance of renunciation in the attempt to obtain realization. Renunciation is not insisted upon, and other techniques are believed to lead to realization, yet Sankara believed renunciation was the most conducive to the attainment of esoteric knowledge.[18] Ibn Arabi does not hold renunciation in an equal regard and frequently turns to human relationships as being means to the attainment of realization (when understood properly).[19] For example, Ibn Arabi believed that love could be an expression of religiosity.[20] Sankara, however, downplayed the role of human relationships and stressed the need for detachment.

These divergences will lead us to consider the possibility that the two mystics arrived at similar worldviews that were built upon differing presuppositions. The conceptual principles that Sankara and Ibn Arabi drew upon and utilized were believed by them to be inherent features of reality. That is, these principles are believed to have inherent mechanisms that operate within the specific worldviews of each of the thinkers.

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[16] Sankara, "Texts on: The Qualifications for the Path," in *A Sankara Source Book vol 5.* trans. A.J. Alston, 71.
[17] Ibid., 71.
[18] Sankara, "Texts on: The Injunction to Adopt the Path," in *A Sankara Source Book vol 5.* trans. A.J. Alston, 65.
[19] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 157.
[20] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 286.

To be more specific, we will note how such notions as *karma, samsara*, death, and judgment are particular concepts and principles that were accepted at the outset by Ibn Arabi or Sankara, as functioning within the realities of their Islamic or Hindu worldviews. These notions have quintessential value to each mystic since they have foundational functions within each system.

Although the actual existence and the metaphysical status of these principles may be eventually brought into question (an example being Sankara questioning *karma* from the perspective of a realized individual), such observations derive from the realized experiential perspective. Appraising the ultimate realties of these principles is therefore beyond the boundaries we have drawn for the purpose of this study. It is these mystics' point of departure that is our concern -- the philosophical/theological frameworks and systems they have constructed either as a result of an experience of spiritual realization or as a template or guidebook for others -- and we are interested in examining the conceptual environment that shaped those systems. This is echoed in William James' second point in the study of mysticism when he claims that mysticism "…is an extract, kept true to a type by the selection of the fittest specimens and their preservation in 'schools.' It is carved out from a much larger mass; and if we take the larger mass as seriously as religious mysticism has historically taken itself, we find that the supposed unanimity largely disappears. To begin with, even religious mysticism itself, the kind that accumulates traditions and makes schools, is much less unanimous than I have allowed."[21] Borrowing a term from William James, we are examining how Sankara and

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[21] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 463.

Ibn Arabi's mystical philosophies relate to the larger mass, and how the composition of this larger mass can bring about distinguished sub-systems.

This study may therefore be viewed as a contextualist approach that binds mysticism to its surrounding religious structures, although, as we will see, religion is only a partner within the mystical process.[22] However, our methodological approach provides a workable terrain that permits certain observations to be made about mysticism without breaching the issue of subjective experience. It is in the region just shy of the personal, subjective, and experiential levels that our interpretive tools are most effective. The theoretical examination that will occur is not intended to be constrictive or critical of the mystical experience, which is regarded as a realization that resides at the summit of both Sankara and Ibn Arabi's philosophical systems. Sankara and Ibn Arabi viewed themselves as elucidating systems formed upon what they believed to be metaphysical realities. This study does not adopt the stance that their philosophies determined the reality to which they point. Instead, this study takes as its point of departure the assumption that the systems erected by Sankara and Ibn Arabi derive from their ideas of the Absolute.

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[22] Ibid., 465.

CHAPTER ONE

METHODOLOGY

It is important that we address the difficulties surrounding the study of mysticism at the outset of this project; an understanding of these problems will better enable us to provide an adequate definition of mysticism. First, any proper discussion of mysticism should recognize the disconnection between mystical philosophies, mystical experiences, the academic study of mysticism, and the socio-religious context in which the mystical experience occurs. One of the most challenging problems facing the academic study of mysticism pertains to how the student should understand the mystic's description of his/her interior experiences, and furthermore, how an ineffable mental state can be understood without causing the object of study serious harm. William James understands mystical experiences as possessing an ineffable and noetic quality that grants the experience a great deal of significance and meaning, despite the fact that mystical truths cannot be framed in an objective manner.[23] Underhill, too, recognizes this problem and claims that it is our duty to understand mystical reports without directly challenging the mystic's claim to having the experience, "… for the mystics are the pioneers of the spiritual world, and we have no right to deny validity to their discoveries, merely because we lack the opportunity or the courage necessary to those who would prosecute such explorations for themselves."[24] More contemporary theorists, such as Frits Staal, continue this line of reasoning by claiming that the study of mysticism requires the

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[23] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), 414.
[24] Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (Stilwell KS: Digireads.com Publishing, 2005), 10.

suspension of belief, which in turn, permits the student access to higher levels of meaning.[25] This sentiment is not limited to Western scholars/mystics, Dasgupta makes it abundantly clear that Upanisadic mysticism also contains an ineffable realization that transcends objective levels of understanding.[26]

Related to the problem of ineffability are the admittedly insufficient descriptions of mystical experiences. The philosophies rendered by figures such as Ibn Arabi and Sankara demonstrate intricate systems of thought that are ultimately subjected to the actual experience.[27] Furthermore, mystics such as Ibn Arabi claim that mystical experiences differ between individuals (on account of God's unlimited self-disclosure and the infinite number of ways this disclosure can be experienced).[28] If this is to be accepted, then we are left with testimonial accounts of mystical experiences that are admittedly insufficient and highly variable. Ninian Smart aptly frames this problem in claiming, "There are two different forms of intelligibility we need to contemplate here. First there is what may be called existential understanding, namely understanding what a given experience is like…Second, there is understanding the explanation of something. Thus we might be uncertain as to how we should understand Paul's conversion. Was it due to an inner psychological crisis of some kind? Was it really Jesus speaking to him?

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[25] Frits Staal, *Exploring Mysticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 7.
[26] Surendranath Dasgupta, *Hindu Mysticism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), 42.
[27] Please note that I do not use the term philosophy in a Western post-Enlightenment sense. Rather, I employ the term philosophy as signifying a conceptual system that may or may not make reference to religious principles.
[28] William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 212.

This kind of understanding may be called theoretical understanding."[29] Note that Smart's approach further complicates the situation by trying to understand the psychological status of the mystic in an attempt to ascertain motivations (such as Paul's psychological condition prior to his conversion). The individuality of mysticism cannot be understated, for as James relates, the mystical experience is the sole property of the individual and any attempt to relate this experience is undermined by conceptual limitations.[30] The attempt to translate subjective/intuitive feeling into a lucid account is impaired by the limitations of language and the problems inherent to the interpretation of deeply emotional accounts (despite the literary skills of the mystic, the account must be interpreted and understood by the reader, which adds another disconnect between the actual experience and our analysis of this experience).

The relationship between religion and mysticism adds yet another degree of complication to our understanding of the topic. A survey of mystics and mystical philosophies will demonstrate a myriad of relationships with organized religion. At times some mystics seem to veer away from accepted dogma, while others fall into lockstep with a particular orthodox community.[31] Underhill recognizes this fluctuating relationship and claims that "…at one end of the scale, pure mysticism shades off into religion- for some points of view seems to grow out of it. No deeply religious man is

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[29] Ninian Smart, "Understanding Religious Experience," in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis,* ed. Steven Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 11.
[30] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 442.
[31] An example of a mystical statement being interpreted as heretical is Al-Hallaj's statement: "I am the real." Sells claims that Hallaj's execution was more to do with political matters than his mystical claims. However, the controversy sparked by Hallaj's statement is a pertinent example of how mystical claims can be understood as being heretical. For more information regarding Hallaj and his mystical statements see Michael A. Sells, ed., *Early Islamic Mysticism* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 266.

without a touch of mysticism; and no mystic can be other than religious, in the psychological if not in the theological sense of the word."[32] This paper does not agree that mysticism is inextricably tied to religion, yet Underhill's observation is still pertinent.

An examination of what constitutes orthodoxy in relation to mysticism is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is worth noting that some scholars look to the relationship between mystical philosophies and sacred scripture as a contextual link that informs certain mystical philosophies.[33] Furthermore, it can be claimed that sacred scriptures provide a foundation of theoretical suppositions that can be expanded and transformed to better facilitate mystical systems of thought. An example of this can be found in Ibn Arabi's interpretation of Noah, which sees the flood as a form of gnostic knowledge and those being drowned as mystics entering into a special union with God.[34] It should once again be noted that this is not a condemnation of Ibn Arabi's interpretation. What I would like to bring attention to is the mystic's use of traditional Islamic scripture (the Noah story) as an opening for mystical analysis. Conversely, there are scholars who hold that mysticism transcends gods and theology: "The view that mysticism has nothing to do with gods is not as revolutionary as it may sound, at least if we remember a well-known fact that is all too rarely taken into account: two of the great religions of the world, Theravada Buddhism and Jainism, though replete with mysticism and divine personages,

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[32] Underhill, *Mysticism,* 53.
[33] Steven Katz, "Mysticism and the Interpretation of Sacred Scripture," in *Mysticism and Sacred Scripture,* ed. Steven Katz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 14**.**
[34] R.W.J. Austin, *Ibn-al-Arabi: The Bezels of Wisdom* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1980), 72.

are atheistic."[35] Staal's idea of atheistic mysticism does not hold true for many of the western traditions that place knowledge of God as the primary mystical goal; however, it is important that we take notice of how mystical systems can range from being highly theological to atheistic in nature.

Furthering this complication are the contradictory stances that many mystics take in concern to divine entities. The works ascribed to Sankara contain many hymns to Visnu, Siva, and Isvara, yet it would be inappropriate to claim these deities as being synonymous with his idea of the highest reality (Brahman).[36] What should be emphasized within these contradictory examples are the theological shades that mysticism can adopt. Furthermore, it is the student's duty to decipher what is a second order theological proposition and what is of primary importance (by this I mean what theological ideas are meant to be transcended and what religious principles are inherently important to the philosophy).

Another problem within the study of mysticism pertains to dualistic and monistic views of the universe. Mystics such as Sankara and Ibn Arabi are strongly monistic and their ideas of monistic union have become predominant in the discussion of mysticism. Furthermore, many commentators and academics have taken this type of monistic mysticism as being the highest and most accomplished form. L. Stafford Betty makes this point when criticizing an assertion that Eckhart was the most accomplished Christian

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[35] Staal, *Exploring Mysticism,* 196.
[36] Yakub Masih, *Shankara's Universal Philosophy of Religion* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1987), 89.

mystic because of his monistic worldview.[37] However, there are examples of mysticism that do not draw upon monistic union. Many *bhakti* mystics view the practitioner and deity as being separate and remaining separate, even during mystical states. An example of dualistic mysticism can be found in the thought of the 13th century South Indian philosopher Madhvacarya, and his Dvaita Vedanta (Dualistic Vedanta), where it is asserted that the status of the liberated soul is different from god and will never be absorbed into the godhead (the individual is dependent on god for existence but separate from god in categorical manners).[38] Contemporary Hindu commentators have stressed this important distinction: "The acceptance of difference amongst the liberated souls in the states of enjoyment and other privileges forms one of the cardinal doctrines of Madhva's system; for, if it is not acknowledged, then the cardinal dualistic doctrine that all individual souls are always different from one another would fail" (sic.).[39] Madhva claims that we as humans have similar qualities to that of God, yet this relationship does not extend beyond similarities.[40] The monistic/dualistic difference is an important distinction and we must distance ourselves from the assertion that mysticism is always a uniformly monistic adventure. To disregard dualistic forms of mysticism would greatly limit our ability to understand mysticism as a pan religio-philosophic phenomenon with substantial variations and complexities.

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[37] L. Stafford Betty, "Towards a Reconciliation of Mysticism and Dualism," *Religious Studies* vol. 14 co. 3 (1978): 296.
[38] Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy vol. 4* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 318.
[39] Ibid., 318.
[40] Ibid., 108.

A final problem in the academic study of mysticism must be addressed before we can continue with our methodological investigation. It is important we understand that the term "mysticism" is a Western academic construct that has been applied to existing religious acts and experiences that long precede the coining of the term. We must be cautious when labeling something as being mystical, because adherents may not understand their practices, experiences, or traditions as such. For instance, mantras and meditation might seem mundane to a yogic practitioner, while academics may label them as esoteric practices that are only taken up by the mystical minded *sramanas* (wandering philosophers). Such an academic evaluation is obviously untrue, and we would be remiss not to remember that mysticism exists in shades and degrees.[41]

Furthermore, it would be misleading to ignore mystical aspects in people's lives because they exist only in small degrees or in manners that do not fit particular definitions. A proper study must not forget that mysticism is not clear-cut, nor can it be easily dissected from the context in which it is found. An overly strict definition of mysticism might either ignore accounts of genuine mystical experiences or require linkages that are tenuous or nonexistent. Prigge and Kessley warn of this when criticizing a useful, but very specific definition of mysticism. They note that "…to say experiences are of the same kind is to say that they are the same in some respect taken as essential for the purpose at hand."[42] Alternatively, an overly inclusive definition often runs the risk of extending the idea of mysticism. This paper agrees with Steven Katz's

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[41] Underhill, *Mysticism,* 53.
[42] Norman Prigge and Gary E. Kessler, "Is Mystical Experience Everywhere the Same?," in *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy,* ed. Robert K.C. Forman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 271.

warnings regarding problems with an overly inclusive mysticism, which "…is more commonly found in the early literature on the study of mysticism, much of it having been generated by missionary and related activity which sought to find some common denominator among people…"[43] Because of the tenuous position of mysticism, we must be ready to amend and alter our definition of it, if necessary.[44] I must also state, however, that the practices and philosophies of mystics are at the center of our inquiry and we must not let our methodological leanings impede our observations. W.C. Smith is completely correct to state that "However 'scientific' the methodological obsession may be, or may appear to be, if it gets in the way of our understanding of what we are supposed to be studying, as I fear that it may, then it is out of place in our work."[45] And it is for this reason that we should not limit ourselves by confining mysticism to a strict monistic definition or an overly broad generalization.

With respect to these difficulties in studying mysticism it is particularly important that students take steps to make mysticism coherent and approachable (or as much as possible). Firstly, reference to the context from which any given mystical philosophy arises will permit a better understanding of that mystical account. Katz promotes a similar method by pointing to the strong ties religious mysticism has with sacred

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[43] Steven T. Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis,* ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 24.

[44] This is not an assertion stating that mysticism cannot be categorized in a useful definition or that our concept of mysticism will always be in a state of flux. What I would like to stress is the importance of a critical understanding of mysticism that draws from a multitude of examples.

[45] Kenneth Cracknell, ed., *Wilfred Cantwell Smith: A Reader* (Oxford: One World, 2001), 112.

scripture.[46] An examination of religious mysticism will reveal that most mystics adhere to a worldview that is based upon sacred scripture: "Their deep and abiding concern with – and their extraordinary immersion in -- these texts is rooted precisely in the belief that the texts are transcendental markers of absolute significance."[47]

Sankara, for example, makes it clear that any person wishing to achieve union with Brahman must be well versed in the Vedas, Upanisads, and Dharmasastras.[48] The aspiring mystic is also advised to have partaken in all the necessary sacrifices and performed all ritual obligations set out by the Vedas.[49] Ibn Arabi is very similar in that he declares prophetic revelation as one of the three valid ways of gaining true knowledge.[50] Ibn Arabi grants validity to prophetic revelations found in other traditions, yet it is safe to say that he regarded the Quran as being the most current and authoritative revelation to date.[51] The relationship between religious mysticism and sacred scripture makes it possible for Smart to state that "This… [link] can be paralleled in the respective teachings of nearly every major mystical traditions vis-a vis its particular canonical source. In other words, only if the Quran 'unveils all the knoweldges' (sic.)… [and the] Vedas 'are unlimited and without end' can the great mystical communities built on these

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[46] Steven T. Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis,* 14.
[47] Ibid., 17.
[48] Sankara, *Upadesasahasri,* trans. Sengaku Mayeda (Albany NY: State University of New York, 1992), 91.
[49] Ibid., 91.
[50] William Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 10.
[51] This paper will later discuss the implications of Ibn Arabi's religious pluralism and his theories regarding the nature of God's revelation.

scriptural foundations function."[52] Likewise, I assert that non-religious mysticism regards certain theories as being foundational to their mystical approach and that subsequent theories and practices, within that particular mystical school, place themselves in relation to these fundamental theories (as articulated in texts).[53] When sacred scriptures (or foundational mystical accounts in the case of nonreligious mysticism) are regarded as providing a backdrop to mystical narratives, then we are able to view mysticism as arising from a particular source (though the actual experience is not be reducible to that source).[54] William Harmless proposes a similar approach to individual mystics and their mystical accounts when he claims that "… we need to step back behind the individual mystics we have studied and chart how the mystical communities to which they belong shaped the contours of their mysticism."[55] It is important that individual mystics (and the *expressions* of their mystical experiences) are understood as being influenced by sources outside of themselves. Mystical communities and their shared beliefs, as found in certain accepted texts, can be considered as examples of this influence.

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[52] Smart, "Understanding Religious Experience," in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis,* 17.

[53] An example of non-religious mysticism can be found in James Horne's *Beyond Mysticism*, where he describes the non-religious mysticism of John Dewey (and the sources he relied on to provide structure to his experience). Many of the trademarks of mysticism are present in this description, yet Horne makes it clear that Dewey's mystical experiences cannot be considered religious in any traditional sence. James Horne, *Beyond Mysticism* (Waterloo: Canadian Corporation for Religious Studies, 1978), 6.

[54] This is an important point. Throughout the course of this paper I will be referring to mystical traditions that arose from tradition X. This does not mean that the experience of the mystic can be reduced to this source; rather, source X should be viewed as providing the impetus for founding that particular mystical tradition.

[55] William Harmless, *Mystics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 239.

It is also important we recognize that mystical philosophies belong within a larger cultural superstructure that makes use of existing thought and theories. By this I mean that mystics and their philosophies are not developed in isolation. This does not mean that mystics necessarily have to accept these surrounding theories or traditions. Rather, a survey of mystical writers reveals a common interest in philosophies outside of their own beliefs and an active dialogue with these rival or co-exisitng mystical philosophical systems.[56] For instance, Sankara's refutation of other *darsanas* (schools of thought) can be just as illuminating in informing us about those schools, as his explanations of his own thought.

Despite the individuality of the mystical experiences of particular mystics, no mystical system, produced by any mystic in hindsight, from the perspective of his or her realization, is an island onto itself. And so, "[i]f we wish to isolate mystical experiences, we must disentangle them from such superstructures. We ourselves approach mystical experiences, like other kinds of experiences, always within existing perspectives and superstructures. We must be aware of these before we can remove them or minimize their impact… After all, many philosophers, especially in the Orient, have constructed superstructures in order to make sense of mystical experience."[57] An understanding of the respective superstructure will permit a better understanding of that particular mystical philosophy. James is correct in asserting that mystical experiences are ineffable and

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[56] Underhill, *Mysticism,* 80.
[57] Staal, *Exploring Mysticism,* 175.

extremely personal; however, this does not preclude us, as academics, from the right to evaluate and contextualize accounts of these occurrences.[58]

Mystical experiences and truths challenge the rationalistic categorization of our worldview. Yet "[n]o authority emanates from them [mystical philosophies] which should make it a duty for those who stand outside of them to accept their revelations uncritically."[59] Included within these critical rights is our right as scholars to understand mystical philosophies as belonging within a larger context (social, linguistic, cultural, metaphysical, etc.) that influences the structure of mystical worldviews. Ibn Arabi may have wished to expound a system that transcended rational thought, yet his commentaries are predicated on, and circumscribed by, the language and literary styles in which his arguments are presented. Both Ibn Arabi and Sankara realized this limitation induced by language and other contextual constraints.

Although the recognition of context and the surrounding conceptual superstructure should not be ignored, it is possible to fall into reductionism if we are not careful. Reza Shah Kazemi, in *Paths to Transcendence,* warns us that context should not at all determine content: "While none would doubt the need to respect the context in which mystical experience occurs, there seems to be no reason to accept the axiom that the context will necessarily determine the content of all possible mystical experiences and consciousness."[60] To become overly dependent on contextualization binds the scholar to his/her respective methodology and does not permit for an unhindered representation of

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[58] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 465.
[59] Ibid., 460.
[60] Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Paths to Transcendence* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2006), 229.

mystical thought (as much as an unhindered representation is possible). An example of a scholar falling into this trap is R.C. Zaehner, who claims the "otherness" of the Islamic God does not lend itself to mysticism and that the Sufis were introduced to monistic mysticism as a result of Abu Yazid's promotion of Vedantic philosophy (instead of recognizing the immanence credited to Allah).[61] Frits Staal comes to a similar conclusion, stating, "Zaehner's approach contributes little to the serious study of mysticism. It does not establish a position from which one can do more than scratch the surface of Hindu and Muslim forms of mysticism."[62] Staal credits Zaehner's inability to accept Sufi mysticism to dogmatic reasons, yet I credit Zaehner's shortcomings more to his overly strict categorization and contextualization of mysticism.[63]

Conversely, it is possible to become an overly strong proponent of essentialist approaches that can ignore key differences in the study of mysticism. This urge to find commonalities can lead to the dismissal of important theories and conceptual categories that should not be divorced from the mystic's metaphysical system. Essentialist approaches offer valuable insights into commonalities between esoteric practices, yet it is the duty of the academic to understand the totality of each metaphysical system in their particularities before generalizing extensions can be made. Kazemi falls into this error when he claims that Eckhart, Sankara, and Ibn Arabi all experienced the same mystical summit despite their respective contextual differences.[64] I contest that such an assertion falls into the same methodological problems that Smith warned us against, that mistake

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[61] R.C. Zaehner, *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 105.
[62] Staal, *Exploring Mysticism,* 69.
[63] Ibid., 67.
[64] Kazemi, *Paths to Transcendence,* 193.

being the urge to fit data into preconceived approaches, assumptions, and conclusions. This paper will later deal with Kazemi's comparison of Ibn Arabi and Sankara in detail and explicate how key ideas are ignored or marginalized in the attempt to find and elucidate commonalities.[65] Frithjof Schuon runs into the same problem when he comments on the different manifestations of God; "The diverse manifestations of the Good in the world clearly have their source in a principal and archetypal diversity, whose root is situated in the Supreme Principle itself, and which pertains not only to the Divine Qualities, from which our virtues derived…"[66] This, however, rests upon the supposition that revelation can manifest itself in multiple forms with the same potency, and that all divine revelations are equally correct and informative.

The need to find commonalities and justify differences has led many commentators and philosophers to engage in creative hermeneutics that stray away from the original intention of various mystics. This is not to claim that the original intention of each mystic is easily discernable or widely agreed upon, yet there still remain touchstones in each mystical philosophy that ground a particular metaphysical system to a set of basic assumptions (such as the uniqueness Madhvacarya grants to the liberated soul in states of mystical euphoria). Furthermore, the dismissal or radical reinterpretation of mystical philosophies is an inappropriate venture for the academic and should only occur with the explicit recognition of hermeneutical reorganization. Katz agrees with this and claims that "… in the employment of all these mystical hermeneutical gambits, in the exercise of all these forms of creative reading, one notes the continual striving to uncover an inner

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[65] Cracknell, ed., *Wilfred Cantwell Smith: A Reader,* 119.
[66] Frithjof Schuon, *Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism* (Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 2000), 17.

meaning, an essential verity, that can only be revealed by strenuous and unusual intellectual and religious exertion."[67]

Interpretation, in the attempt to ascertain commonalities, is perfectly acceptable and the application of these commonalities to a theory of unified mysticism is a natural and permissible venture. However, these projects must recognize their own intentions in relation to the systems being analyzed. The assertion that only mystics can speak to the "coming together of mystical paths" should be countered with the assertion that "… mystical feeling of enlargement, union, and emancipation has no specific intellectual content whatsoever of its own. It is capable of forming matrimonial alliances with material furnished by the most diverse philosophies and theologies, provided only they can find a place in their framework for its peculiar emotional mood."[68] Therefore, any essentialist attempt to unite all mystical experiences under one common understanding must first recognize the nature and purpose of its own hermeneutical pursuit.

At this point it would be beneficial to put forth some perspectives that will demonstrate the aforementioned reductionist and essentialist perspectives. This brief survey will provide the opportunity to show that neither position has to be taken in full and that a balanced approach to mysticism can avoid the pitfalls associated with hard-line reductionism and essentialism. Steven T. Katz has often been labeled as being a reductionist and for that reason I have chosen his works as being representative of reductionism. Yet as we shall see, the concept of reductionism and essentialism is not

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[67] Steven Katz, "Mysticism and the Interpretation of Sacred Scripture," in *Mysticism and Sacred Scripture,* 31
[68] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 464.

static. In *Mysticism and Sacred Scripture* Katz makes it abundantly clear that from his perspective, mystical accounts have to be understood through the use of contextual methods.

> "The role of scripture, contrary to much scholarly opinion, is essential to the major mystical traditions and to the teachings and experience of their leading representatives. And because it is, I attempt to explain in this essay, consistent with my previously developed contextualist reading of mystical experience and mystical sources, how this seminal connection has functioned during the history of mysticism across traditions and why the failure to appreciate its correct value and inescapable significance leads to a mistaken morphological and phenomenological deconstruction of the relevant literary and experiential data."[69]

It is clear that Katz places mysticism within a contextual superstructure that is supported through a number of smaller suppositions that can be analyzed and understood.[70] The benefit of following Katz's example is that we are provided with a conceptual tool that allows for the identification of mysticism as a *natural* extension of existing forms of thought.

This rationalizing tendency can be found to a lesser extent in Underhill, who identifies mystical approaches as being dependent on the temperament and intellectual disposition of the mystic.[71] Underhill's categorization of mysticism is of a mild manner but this does not negate the fact that she believed it beneficial to apply some form of categorization to the topic. Staal also acknowledges mysticism as containing rationalistic aspects that can be analyzed as such; this is in contrast to the belief that mysticism is

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[69] Steven Katz, "Mysticism and the Interpretation of Sacred Scripture," in *Mysticism and Sacred Scripture,* 8.
[70] Ibid., 19.
[71] Underhill, *Mysticism,* 90.

irrational and beyond fruitful categorization.[72] Recognition of rational/attainable and irrational/transcendent aspects within mysticism can lead to the conclusion that "… the experiential study of mysticism should obviously begin with the study of the former [the rational/attainable]. Whether the results of such an exploration will also be valid for the latter domain [irrational/transcendent] can only be determined after that domain has come within reach too. But this step need not cause anxiety now, when we have not well begun."[73] The application of rational methods and categories to the study of mysticism need not be treated as an "all-or-nothing" method that forms permanent cleavages in the study of mysticism. As demonstrated in the three aforementioned approaches, the use of rational/categorizational techniques can be done in a relative manner that does not challenge the core of the mystical experience.

However, we need only look as far as Ibn Arabi and Sankara to find a strong denunciation of rationalism within mysticism. Ibn Arabi's idea of *wujud* (unity with God), as the ideal form of knowledge, rapidly undermines the categories and labels employed within contextualist approaches to mysticism; this is because *wujud* is more related to "witnessing" than to logical understanding.[74] A careful reading of Ibn Arabi will reveal that true knowledge (gnostic knowledge) is gained through the heart's unveiling and not through processes/systems employed within rationalistic deconstruction.[75] Since all knowledge leads back to God, at least according to Ibn Arabi, it is worthwhile to note that realization is believed to extend beyond the application of

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[72] Staal, *Exploring Mysticism,* 19.
[73] Ibid., 126.
[74] Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 266.
[75] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 169.

rational thought. "Rather, he [Ibn Arabi] wants to urge his readers to go beyond the role of learning, to achieve understanding of their own, and to realize and verify for themselves the truth that is written out in the signs and verses of scripture, the universe, and the soul."[76] It follows, upon sympathetic acceptance of Ibn Arabi's situationally specific denunciation of rationalism, that the categories and contexts used to deconstruct mystical accounts are undercut by true realization. Ibn Arabi does find a use for rationality and it can be frequently found in his philosophical musings.[77] However, the rational process is understood as having a limited role in actualizing the subjective mystical experience. Rationality can help to understand mystical statements and the philosophical presuppositions that those statements are built upon, yet rationality is believed to find its limit when it comes to the subjective mystical experience, which is understood as being beyond any form of rationalization.[78] It would be a mistake to think that Ibn Arabi does not employ rationality. Rather, rational philosophical analysis is used in a specific manner and is combined with reminders that philosophy is a provisional tool with limited scope.

Similarly, Sankara and the Vedantins assert that rationality is useful but must be subjugated to the *srutis* (divinely revealed literature) and that any contradiction between divine revelation and reason must be settled on the side of revelation.[79] This is an example of rationalistic thought being subverted to religious revelation. With the identification of rational/categorical thought as second order beliefs, it is important that

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[76] William Chittick, *Ibn Arabi: Heir to the Prophets* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007), 69.
[77] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knoweldge,* 157.
[78] Ibid., 353.
[79] Sankara, *Upadesasahasri,* trans. Mayeda, 49.

we realize Katz and other accused reductionists employ epistemological methods that are denounced by mystics (in that rational thought does not properly describe the mystical experience nor can it give rise to one's own mystical experience).

On the opposite side of the scale we run into approaches that group together all mystical experiences as being of a similar nature. Furthermore, these essentialists assert that all mystics attempt to achieve the same end. Kazemi claims that "…the forms of the traditions may be seen as so many paths leading to a transcendent essence, realized as one by the mystics only at the summit of spiritual realization; short of this summit the differences between the traditions are to be seen as relative but nonetheless real on their own level."[80] Seyyed Hossein Nasr is a strong proponent of this essentialist understanding of mysticism, and by extension, the religious traditions that provide the superstructure to the respective mystical traditions.[81] Nasr's discussion of the secular minded Promethean man and the theo-centric Pontifical man demonstrates a concerted effort to identify an inherent divine/religious nature to humanity, which is believed to have been diminished with the increase of secularization.[82] *Traditional Islam in the Modern World* provides us with an excellent example of how Nasr sees traditional religious societies as being more organic and holistic, as compared to modern society that is believed to alienate the individual from the collective whole (this whole being comprised of the religious natures inherent within all people).[83] Nasr's call for the return

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[80] Kazemi, *Paths to Transcendence,* 251.
[81] Seyyed Hossein Nast, *The Essential Seyyed Hossein Nasr,* ed. William Chittick (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2007), 134.
[82] Ibid., 172.
[83] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World* (London: KPI, 1987), 117.

to a traditionalist worldview makes abundant reference to Massignon, Corbin, and Burckhardt, which demonstrates his essentialist perspective (in that he is not hesitant to reach beyond his own religious tradition to find justification).[84] Such universalism can also be seen in Nasr's idea that religiously minded individuals "… who are endowed with intellectual intuition can anticipate intellectually the Centre where all the radii meet, the summit which all roads reach."[85] It clear that Nasr views the ethos of traditional Islam as being able to accommodate other religious traditions, and furthermore, that all traditional religions have this complementary ethos.[86]

Frithjof Schuon is another strong proponent of mystical essentialism. Schuon, like Nasr, differentiates between what is recognized as dogmatic orthodoxy and the inherent spirit that binds all true religions together.[87] It is also claimed that this understanding of religion shapes dogmatic differences into complementary opposites; "One should never lose sight of the fact that dogmas are key-coagulations of supra-formal light; to acknowledge a coagulation is to acknowledge a form and hence a limitation and exclusion. The Spirit can be manifested, but it cannot be enclosed…"[88] Schuon asserts, like Nasr, that religious experience are the fundamental principles within the world's religious traditions and that any attempt to assert dogmatic difference over esoteric similarity would mistake the form for the essence.

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[84] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 129.
[85] Ibid., 150.
[86] Ibid., 150.
[87] Fritjof Schuon, *Form and Substance in the Religions* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2002), 27.
[88] Ibid., 27.

An issue that we, as religious studies scholars, encounter with the aforementioned essentialist theorists is their underlying postulation that esoteric realizations are more important than exoteric dogma. We may acknowledge that in this regard, they are often better aligned with the opinion of the mystics whom they are studying than those theorists who opt for a contextualist focus. However, as religious studies scholars, we are not constrained to submit to, and accept the hierarchical structures of religious value presented to us by practitioners, theologians, and other "insiders." For instance, religious studies scholars do not only read the scriptures deemed canonical by a particular religious group and ignore other pertinent literature that is not valued or dismissed by parishioners. A balanced academic approach should grant a sympathetic ear to the practitioner without accepting the "truth-value" claims made by insiders. In this context, we cannot let assertions of esoteric predominance and value come to influence our attention to exoteric matters to such a degree that we ignore the latter altogether. The approach adopted by Nasr and Schuon, although illuminating, relies heavily on accepting the predominance of esoteric realization.

Katz counters this by stating that an understanding of "…how mystical fellowships work and how individual mystics pursue their ambitious metaphysical goals… [means that] one not only has to concentrate attention of the rarified, and rare, moments of ecstasy, adhesion, supernal marriage, mindlessness, satori, nirvana, and unity, but one also has to pay close attention to the sorts of exegetical techniques, and the ways of studying scripture…"[89] We must recognize that mystics place great value in

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[89] Steven Katz, "Mysticism and the Interpretation of Sacred Scripture," in *Mysticism and Sacred Scripture,* 56.

esoteric realization above exoteric dogma, however, we as neutral observers cannot adopt this position when taking a broad survey of mysticism. The predominance granted to the content of the mystical experience has long been a popular focus within the study of the topic, with much less attention given to scholarly efforts to contextualize mystical claims. With the inherent supremacy of a necessary focus on the mystical experience deflected, it is easier for a religious studies scholar to evaluate features of mysticism as artifacts of a particular religious system (or more correctly, as artifacts of a particular metaphysical worldview).

This study aligns itself with Katz, who says, "In other words, mystics and students of mysticism have to recognize that mystical experience is not (putatively) solely the product of the conditioned act of experience as constituted from the side of the experiencer, but is also constituted and conditioned by what the object or 'state of affairs' is that the mystic (believes he) encounters or experiences."[90] We need not take this statement as claiming a Durkheimian reliance on culture for meaning. Rather, I submit that a particularly beneficial methodological approach can be used to examine features of mysticism as products of a particular tradition and then understand them as instances or components within the category of "general mysticism".[91] This involves an explicit

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[90] Katz, Steven "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis,* 64.

[91] I do not claim that this contextualist approach is the only proper method or that it can explain all instances of mysticism. The mystical experience that turned Saul into Paul provides an apt rebuttal to my argument. Paul's mystical experience involved a rapid reorientation in his worldview, which led to the rejection his previous system of thought. This is obviously a problem in that Paul's new metaphysical system cannot be directly attributed to principles in his old. This shows how religious beliefs can be changed through mystical experiences and that the mystical experience need not be the direct result of standing beliefs. However, me must also recognize that Paul's new Christian

recognition of the exoteric superstructure that frames mystical accounts. An examination of the surrounding superstructure will allow us to postulate on how each mystical philosophy is partially related to its religious (or cultural) context (even though it can be claimed that the realized mystic no longer needs the contextual support base provided by exoteric traditions).

This is in keeping with William James' assertion that non-mystics need not grant superiority to esoteric practices and the propositions rendered by mystics.[92] Furthermore, the mystics that we are examining make it clear that knowledge of the exoteric tradition must precede any attempt at esoteric practices. The later subjugation of exoteric practices to esoteric realization (especially in the case of Sankara) arises from propositions within the exoteric tradition that are interpreted as pointing to a higher reality. Each instance of esoteric religious mysticism can be treated as having some form of conceptual relationship with the surrounding exoteric traditions, which is something the essentialist viewpoint devalues, focusing instead on esoteric similarities to the neglect of the surrounding conceptual and contextual landscape.

A middle position between reductionism and essentialism will provide us with a more suitable approach to the study of mysticism. Sacred scriptures and the surrounding exoteric traditions are able to provide a contextual structure to our study, yet we need not reduce the positions examined to that exoteric context. James attempts a similar line of

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system of thought entailed a rejection of his previously held Judaic system. This can be interpreted as a continued relationship between the pre-mystical and post mystical systems of thought. A negative relationship this may be, yet it still demonstrates a form of conceptual relationship (as Sankara and Ibn Arabi point out, a rejection does not entail a negation).

[92] James, *Varieties of Religious Experience,* 466.

reasoning by questioning the relationship between mystical experiences and the underlying theological propositions.[93] The rooting of mystical experiences within a theological foundation does not negate the mystical experience or the transcendence of dogma that is claimed to occur. In fact, Underhill claims that most mystical philosophies are openly "… founded upon the formal creed which the individual mystic accepts. It is characteristic of him that in so far as his transcendental activities are healthy he is generally an acceptor and not a rejector of such creeds (sic)."[94] Similarly, the transcendence of dogmatic theology need not entail a complete rejection of orthodoxy. A survey of religious mystics will demonstrate that there is great respect for the orthodox base that makes transcendence possible.[95] I propose that religious orthodoxy can help provide a *general indication* of mystical direction and substance (please see footnote 91 for the requisite caveats to this statement). The subjective substance of mystical experiences cannot be fruitfully examined without running into major difficulties, and that is why second order descriptions and religious dogma should be used as indicators for general observations regarding mysticism.[96] With this position, we need not go as far as Katz in claiming that "There are no pure (unmediated) experiences. Neither mystical experience nor more ordinary forms of experience give any indication, or grounds for believing, that they are unmediated."[97] Understanding the relationship between religious

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[93] Ibid., 435.
[94] Underhill, *Mysticism,* 70.
[95] Schuon, *Form and Substance in the Religions,* 15.
[96] By second order descriptions I mean the admittedly unsuccessful attempts to describe mystical experiences. While these accounts may not be a precise description, they can still indicate the general structure that the mystic believes to be at the root of his/her experience.
[97] Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism." in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis,* 26.

orthodoxy and mystical accounts provides us with general indications of mystical direction without forcing us to negate the claimed validity in unmediated-irreducible mystical experiences. The treatment of mystical claims as being second order descriptions allows us, as academics, to point out how certain accounts and positions indicate a divergence or convergence in experience without actually speculating on the substance of those experiences. Furthermore, the "context-as-second-order-indicators" approach permits us continued reference to context, which reduces problems when we deal with the mystic's claims of transcending knowledge and orthodoxy.

Kazemi is not able to completely overcome this problem and is forced to diminish the value of contextual meaning, as demonstrated in this quote: "The overriding conclusion is that, based on the pronouncements of the mystics studied here, one can justifiably speak of a single, transcendent essence of spiritual realization, whatever the religious starting point. The stress here is on the word transcendent; anything short of this level inescapably entails multiplicity and hence differences as well as similarities, but not unity: unity in an absolute sense is only to be found at the level of the Absolute, that is, at the transcendent level…"[98] The method propounded within this paper does not require the abandonment of contextual references when dealing with transcendent experiences, nor does it reduce these experiences to the context in which they are found and presented. The ineffability credited to mysticism is still maintained yet not to the hindrance of our observations; all that needs to be conceded is the level on which our analysis occurs (that being second order).

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[98] Kazemi, *Paths to Transcendence,* XIV.

It is now appropriate, after this lengthy examination of methodological techniques, to render our working definition of mysticism that will be employed throughout this paper. First, our definition of mysticism must include a theory of interconnectedness that takes place between higher and lower realms of consciousness (the idea of higher and lower realms of consciousness is intended to imply that there are objective and hierarchical levels of consciousness that can be achieved). This interconnectedness also includes the transmission of special knowledge, which may take the form of experience or traditional revelatory moments. James believes the noetic quality of mysticism to be one of its four major characteristics, and that mystical events are "…states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, inarticulate though they remain; and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for after-time."[99] Second, as touched upon in the previous quote, mystical events carry with them a sense of authority that is believed to supersede forms of knowledge achieved through rational means. As a point of sympathetic interpretation, this paper will not challenge this assertion, but it will, similar to Staal's assertion, treat mysticism as being a partially rational system that can be examined as containing aspects common to all systems of thought.[100] Third, mysticism need not be limited to a monistic experience where the mystic sees his/herself as being identical with God and the universe (pantheism). As mentioned previously, Madhva and other *bhakti* mystics demonstrate that dualism can

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[99] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 414.
[100] Staal, *Exploring Mysticism,* 19.

accommodate mystical experiences.[101] The binding of mysticism to monism is an unproductive view that greatly limits our understanding of mysticism.

As informative as Underhill is on the topic of mysticism, I am forced to disagree with her in regards to her idea of mystical ascent, which is "…an ordered movement towards ever higher levels of reality, ever closer identification with the Infinite."[102] It is appropriate to conclude that a majority of mystical experiences are strongly monistic/pantheistic, yet in order to uphold neutrality, we cannot limit mysticism to these instances. It is not our job to make mysticism a coherent, uniform, and pan-religious phenomena. It must also be acknowledged that disagreement exists within the broad category of mysticism. Staal similarly feels the need to highlight tensions found within mysticism, without actually coming to a solution; "Many of the different views of mystics on mysticism are inconsistent with each other; most of them result from prior convictions and are mere dogmatic assertions. One may turn out to be the correct one; or all may be wrong; but, since they differ, they cannot all be right."[103] Our definition of mysticism must be left lacking in order to facilitate the different varieties of mysticism that we will encounter. Nevertheless, I will venture to assert that mysticism is a noetic event that involves the transfer of special knowledge that is beyond rational thought. Furthermore, mystical events are believed to carry with them an authority that is bestowed upon the mystic by accessing a higher level of consciousness. This is to be understood in an objective manner that indicates a hierarchical ascent of consciousness, which ultimately leads to a relationship with the Real (though it need not be a pantheistic

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[101] Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy vol. 4.,* 318.
[102] Underhill, *Mysticism,* 60.
[103] Staal, *Exploring Mysticism,* 66.

identification). Throughout the course of this project our definition will be found to be incomplete, yet the project's intention is to focus on Ibn Arabi and Sankara as mystical philosophers, and therefore, our definition of mysticism will be in relation to these two figures (as opposed to making these two figures fit my definition of mysticism).

Another constraint to which this paper adheres is in regards to the ineffability of mystical experiences. William James claims there is an inherent ineffability to the mystical experience that creates a cleavage between the actual mystical experience and the subsequent descriptions of that modality.[104] Ineffability is an equally important feature in Sankara's mystical philosophy: "Things are known determinately (*vijnana*) through the sense-organs and the mind. But we cannot know the Absolute determinately as 'such and such' because the Absolute does not fall within their range."[105] Mystical experiences are claimed to reside outside the range of categorical thought, meaning that Sankara's descriptive statements, regarding his own mystical experiences, are approximations based on his own ineffable experiences.[106] Ibn Arabi makes a similar distinction between knowledge that is gained through reflection (*aql*) and the knowledge that is gained through the heart (*qalb*).[107] The Shaykh believes that both forms of knowledge ultimately lead back to God, yet the knowledge gained through the heart is understood to be fluid in nature and is contrasted by reflective knowledge, which creates seemingly stable categories and logical formulations.[108] However, the stability of rational

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[104] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 414.
[105] Sankara, "Texts on: Going Beyond the Mind," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1,* trans. A. J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 169.
[106] Ibid., 169.
[107] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 159.
[108] Ibid., 159.

thought is claimed as a hindrance that binds the individual to specific concepts of God.[109] The ineffable knowledge that is gained through the heart is not limited to specific forms of belief and is thought to be more representative of God's never ending, non-repeating, self-revelation.[110] This is why Ibn Arabi frequently references the heart's unveiling as being vital in the attainment of God knowledge (even though this knowledge does not produce stable forms of categorical knowledge).

This project focuses on the philosophical statements and presuppositions that are present in Sankara and Ibn Arabi's mystical systems. However, there will be continued recognition that the knowledge gained through esoteric realization is ineffable and highly subjective. The philosophical presuppositions that this study discusses should not be understood as determining the nature of the mystical experience itself. Furthermore, the philosophical and experiential statements that Sankara and Ibn Arabi provide are not direct translations of their own personal experiences. Rather, these statements are believed to be indirect explanations that provide general orientation for those who want to attain their own mystical experience. Both mystics recognize the need to achieve personal mystical experience and that the subject of mystical experiences "…immediately says that it defies expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words. It follows from this that its quality must be directly experienced; it cannot be imparted or transferred to others."[111] The contextualization of the mystical experience is beyond the scope of this paper and is viewed as highly inappropriate by mystics and mystical commentators alike. The contextual components of this paper are directed

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[109] Ibid., 159.
[110] Ibid., 159.
[111] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 414.

towards the philosophical systems constructed by Sankara and Ibn Arabi (and not towards their ineffable experiences).

CHAPTER TWO

OVERVIEW OF HINDU AND ISLAMIC MYSTICISM

This section consists of a brief overview of theories and figures within Hindu and Islamic mysticism. Hindu mysticism will be examined as being neither homogeneous nor completely incongruent. Similarities and differences become apparent when Vedic sacrificial mysticism is compared to the philosophical mysticism found within the Upanisads. Certain Vedic sacrifices will be examined as vehicles that are believed to facilitate a specific type of mystical experience. Mysticism is equally present in the Upanisads, yet there are substantial differences between Vedic and Upanisadic ideas of mysticism. It will be argued that these differences are worthy of attention yet do not constitute a major cleavage within Hindu mysticism. Mysticism will also be demonstrated as being present in the *bhakti* devotionalism espoused within the *Bhagavad Gita*. Because *bhakti* is very adaptable we will encounter numerous ideas about the mystical goal of *bhakti* worship; furthermore, an investigation into the varied principles within *bhakti* mysticism will demonstrate that *bhakti* is a spiritual tool more than a theistic belief set or a specific form of mysticism. Reference to Dasgupta, Radhakrishnan, and Dimock establishes that *bhakti* can serve as a commonality between mystical systems that would otherwise be seen as very different. Study of mysticism within the Vedas, Upanisads, and *Bhagavad Gita* demonstrates a common concern for mysticism and a uniform account of Hindu mysticism can be found if that is one's interpretive goal. However, it is equally important that mystical statements derived from the Vedas, Upanisads, and *Bhagavad Gita* are understood as possessing important philosophical and theological differences.

Important principles within Islamic mysticism can be derived from interpreting Muhammad as a shaykh and exemplar of esoteric practices. This approach to Muhammad will also provide insights into the varied forms of Islamic mysticism. Sufis have frequently interpreted Muhammad as a shaykh that attained a transcendental union with God, and then provided a means for others to achieve this union. This interpretation sees Muhammad as an archetypal Sufi that experienced the "…passing away of the human ego-self in union with the divine beloved."[112] Furthermore, Muhammad's Night Ascent has been used as a prototype for the Sufi mystical path. There has been a great deal of Sufi literature that interprets the Night Ascent, and much of this literature centers on Muhammad's experience at the lote tree. These interpretations are important because Muhammad's "nearness" to God has been understood as the apex of Islamic mysticism. Muhammad is believed to have achieved a union with God that no other human had achieved, and for that reason Sufis use the Prophet as a model in the formation of mystical practices. The importance of Muhammad within Islamic mysticism is to such an extent that Sufis have regarded his actions as possessing an esoteric element that is believed to be the embodiment of Quranic mysticism.

Hindu Mysticism

There are aspects within Vedic sacrifice that identify a non-particularized undercurrent to the worldly realm.[113] Furthermore, this cosmic order is claimed to become accessible to the devotee through specific sacrificial rites.[114] Zaehner claims that

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[112] Michael A. Sells, ed., *Early Islamic Mysticism* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 21.
[113] Uma Marina Vesci, *Heat and Sacrifice in the Vedas* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass), 271.
[114] Ibid., 271.

participation in these rites involves a 'creative self-immolation' where the participant is transported to a primal and undifferentiated beginning.[115] Dasgupta makes this claim when he states that "…Vedic mysticism prepared the way for the rise of the other forms of mysticism that sprang up in India."[116] *Heat & Sacrifice in the Vedas* by Uma Marina Vesci similarly describes how Vedic sacrifice became directed towards a center that was considered the matrix for all creation: "Sacrifice is, therefore, no longer an action which is directed towards the Deities, but an action which draws the Deities towards its Centre. Henceforth it is simply the very source of the existence of the Deities as also of men and of all the created in general."[117] There is a duality recognized within each human: one part biological that is bound to the earth, and another that possesses the ability to transcend earthly existence and become unified with the One (*daiva atman*).[118] It should be noted that the idea of the One in Vedic and Upanisadic literature differs significantly, yet in both the Vedas and Upanisads there exists the idea of realms of consciousness and forms of esoteric knowledge that are mystically achieved.

Mysticism found in Vedic ritualism is not far removed from the transcendental mysticism of the Upanisads. Sacrifice is not abandoned within Upanisadic mysticism; rather, it is used as a "…reference point [and] metaphor, for the focus upon the realization of the self (*atman*) and the identity of the self with the all-important force that

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[115] R.C. Zaehner, *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* (New York: Schoken Books, 1969), 23.
[116] S.N. Dasgupta, *Hindu Mysticism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1959), 17.
[117] Vesci, *Heat and Sacrifice in the Vedas,* 271.
[118] Rajendra P. Pandeya, "The Vision of the Vedic Seer," in *Hindu Spirituality,* ed. Krishna Sivarman (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 22.

animates the world."[119] Dagupta does not recognize a total abandonment of Vedic ritualism within the Upanisads.[120] Differences between the Vedas and Upanisads can be claimed as a shift in focus, and are often described as a process where the material sacrifice is intellectualized.[121] Upanisadic criticism of the overly formalized ritual does not constitute a complete rejection of the sacrificial system or of the Brahmin priests. "The authors of the Upanisads had a sufficient sense of the historic to know that their protest would become ineffective if it should demand a resolution in things. They therefore ask only for a change in the spirit. They reinterpret sacrifice and allegorize them."[122] The Upanisadic authors did not reject the Vedas nor did they seek a complete overhaul of Vedic rituals. The aspect I wish to highlight is not the disjunction between Vedic Hinduism and Upanisadic Hinduism; rather, attention should be paid to the Upanisads' innovative focus on the self as the vehicle for transcendence and mystical union.

The Upanisadic internalization of sacrifice is a particularly useful view because it allows for continuity between the Upanisads and the Vedas, and accounts for new individualistic tendencies seen within the Upanisads.[123] "Priests are no longer praised for the sacrifices they perform, but rather their marks of authority are teaching, discussing,

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[119] Laurie Patton, "Veda and Upanisad," *The Hindu World* ed. Sushil Mittal Gene Thursby (New York: Routledge, 2004), 46.
[120] Dasgupta, *Hindu Mysticism,* 18.
[121] Ibid.,18.
[122] Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy: Volume I* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971), 148.
[123] Brian Black, *The Character of the Self in Ancient India* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 1.

learning, and debating."[124] The Upanisads hold that the Brahmin class is no longer the principal spiritual linkage between the devotee and the Absolute.[125] Rather, through the internalization of sacrifice, the Upanisadic follower is believed to gain the ability to independently actualize their spiritual goals (*moksa*). No longer do the mystical powers reside "…in the external performances, but in specific forms of the meditator's thinking. This represents an approach towards a consciousness of self and toward a recognition of the mystical powers of thought and meditation of a peculiar type."[126] The internalization of sacrifice is not against the Vedic ethos because Hindu sacrifice is considered a means to a spiritual end, and remains pertinent only through reevaluation of its function and form.[127] Vedic mysticism does not seek Brahmanic identification as witnessed in the Upanisads; rather, the Vedas describe a form of transcendence and union with a cosmic center that is achieved through sacrifice.[128] I argue that the conceptual base created within Vedic mysticism is still operative in the Upanisads, though the definition and means to transcendence has changed.

It would be wrong to declare *bhakti* as originating in the *Bhagavad Gita* or the *Bhagavata Purana*; instead, *bhakti* should be considered as first being present within the Vedas. David Lorenzen similarly recognizes *bhakti* devotionalism in certain Vedic hymns: "…what is missing in early Vedic texts is not *bhakti* in this wide generic sense but the association of *bhakti* with Puranic mythology, with the key ideas of Hindu metaphysics such as Brahman, *dharma, karma, samsara, and moksa,* and with the social

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[124] Ibid., 34.
[125] Ibid., 34.
[126] Dasgupta, *Hindu Mysticism,* 20.
[127] Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy: Volume I,* 148.
[128] Vesci, *Heat and Sacrifice in the Vedas,* 271.

ideology of caste and class."[129] This is in keeping with Sharma's assertion that the key to understanding *bhakti* is not the deity that is the object of devotion, but the emotional attachment that is exercised within *bhakti* worship.[130] At this point it is important that we make a distinction, *bhakti* that is directed towards a deity (Krsna, Siva, or Kali) is called *saguna-bhakti,* while *bhakti* worship that is directed towards the formless Brahman is called *nirguna-bhakti*.[131] Bhakti need not be directed towards Krsna or any deity, and there are many instances where the devotional approach has been applied to the attainment of realization.

An even account of *bhakti* mysticism cannot be achieved because *bhakti* is incorporated in different ways. "Bhakti as an emotive part of the religious quest has an important place in every religious tradition in a general sense of devotion."[132] However, mystical aspects are surely found within *bhakti* literature. One commonality is the direction of *bhakti* mysticism towards a deity as being the endgame of religious adherence (this is to the exclusion of *nirguna bhakti*, to which I will later attend). Mysticism within *saguna-bhakti* seeks a personal relationship with god, a relationship that requires both parties remain distinct.[133] Radhakrishnan claims that this particular type of devotee does not seek to be subsumed within god; a division between both parties

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[129] David N. Lorenzon, "Bhakti," in *The Hindu World,* ed. Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby (New York: Routledge, 2004), 187.
[130] Krishna Sharma, *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharal, 1987), 6.
[131] Ibid., 10.
[132] Ibid., 42.
[133] Bowes, *The Hindu Religious Tradition: A Philosophical Approach,* 201.

must exist for the ultimate state of bliss to continue between the devotee and the god.[134] The *gopis* longing for Krsna idealizes a form of devotional love because the *gopis* always have a degree of separation between themselves and their beloved (except for Radha, however, she is considered to embody a different form of *bhakti* love).[135] In describing the Vaisnava-sahajiya cult Edward Dimock relates that "[t]he separation of lovers is the best illustration of the proper attitude of the worshiper towards God, because it draws the mind away from the satisfaction of the self…"[136] Through longing the devotee is claimed to become transfixed on god, thus making god the sole object of contemplation. Some *bhakti* commentators have claimed that this blissful state only occurs when the sole object of one's contemplation permits the "…continuous stream of remembrance …uninterrupted like the flow of oil…"[137]

The idea of loving devotion towards Brahmanic identification, as demonstrated within *nirguna bhakti,* should be understood as being derived from a number of different sources. First, a practitioner can develop a longing for the realization of Ultimate Reality that is similar to the *gopis'* desire for Krsna. This might not include such a large degree of sexuality, however *nirguna bhakti* can still be considered a form of desire, as a lover feels lost without their beloved. "Whereas *saguna bhakti* can be connected with various Hindu traditions and the worship of personal deities, the genesis of *nirguna bhakti* can be traced back to the Upanishadic speculations about the *Nirguna Brahman* and the monistic

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[134] Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy: Volume* II (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971), 559.
[135] The *gopis* are 'cow-herd-girls' that longed for a young Krsna. Tales of the *gopis* and Krsna can be found in the *Bhagavata Purana* and other Puranas.
[136] Edward Dimock, *The Place of the Hidden Moon* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 11.
[137] John C. Plott, *A Philosophy of Devotion* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1974), 2.

view of reality."[138] The Atman-Brahman relationship (and the Atman's tendency to seek identification with Brahman) is an instance of the Atman longing for the realization of its natural state. The Upanisads need not be viewed as emotionless; rather, the Upanisads can be seen as entailing a form of *nirguna bhakti* that allows the Atman to achieve its desired end. Radhakrishnan claims that all forms of *bhakti* eventually lead to *nirguna bhakti* because the formless Brahman is the true pinnacle within the *bhakti* tradition.[139]

> "The Gita… recognizes *nirguna bhakti*, or devotion to the qualityless, as superior to all else, then the absolute becomes the most ultimate category. When devotion is perfected then the individual and his God become suffused into one spiritual ecstasy, and reveal themselves as aspects of one life. Absolute monism is therefore the completion of the dualism with which the devotional consciousness starts."[140]

Practitioners of *saguna bhakti* would not agree to this claim (as explained previously, dualism is required for an eternal state of bliss within some forms of devotional worship). However, it is important to recognize that devotionalism can be attached to different mystical systems, and how it need not be assigned to Visnu, Siva, Kali, or any god. Rather, bhakti mysticism is a means that can be adapted to seek a particular ends.

Islamic Mysticism

The apex of Muhammad's importance as an exemplar of esoteric practices can be found within the *Isra* and *Mi'raj*. The *Isra* is Muhammad's journey from Mecca to Jerusalem, where upon arriving he leads the prophets of Abrahamic descent in prayer and

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[138] Krishna Sharma, *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement: A New Perspective* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharal, 1987), 10.
[139] This includes forms of *saguna bhakti* because, in Radhakrishnan's opinion, a deity is only a lesser form of Ultimate Reality that can be transcended.
[140] Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy* v.2*,* 565.

then begins the second stage of his journey. The *Mi'raj* is Muhammad's ascension from Jerusalem, through various levels of heaven, to the "…Lote-tree beyond which none may pass."[141] It is here that the Quran claims that Muhammad "…saw some of the greatest Signs of his Lord…"[142] This journey is used as the archetype for spiritual ascension within Sufism. There is a horizontal and a vertical element in the *Isra* and *Mi'raj*. The horizontal aspect is represented by Muhammad's travel to the centre of Islam, which at this time was Jerusalem and not Mecca, and it is in Jerusalem that Muhammad demonstrates his seniority over the other prophets by leading them in prayer.[143]/[144] Some commentators have interpreted Muhammad's journey to Jerusalem as being representative of a spiritual journey to the center of one's being.[145] This can also be interpreted as travel to an *axis mundi*, where the link between earth and heaven can be bridged.[146] The verticality of the *Mi'raj* can be understood as being comprised of hierarchical states that see Muhammad come to a center where "…the Prophet's pure body could reach an immediate proximity to God that the normal believer, nay, even, the greatest saint, can reach only in the spirit."[147] Once again the superiority of Muhammad is observed in his unprecedented access to the divine. Gabriel accompanies Muhammad through the different levels of heaven and his interviews with the residing prophets. Ultimately, Muhammad is lead to a point where even Gabriel cannot pass. "This idea of

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[141] N.J. Dawood, trans., *The Koran* Quran (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 327.
[142] Ibid., 327.
[143] AnneMarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 160.
[144] It should be noted that Abu Bakr is claimed to have became leader of the community because of, in part, Muhammad's electing Abu Bakr to lead prayers while absent. John L. Esposito, *Islam: the Straight Path* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 36
[145] Martin Lings, *What is Sufism* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1995), 38
[146] Ibid., 38
[147] Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, 162.

the Prophet's superiority to all creatures, human and angelic, appears to have held considerable interest among the early Sufi sages in their discussion of the mystical meaning of the Ascension."[148]

There is a clear hierarchy within Sufi mysticism that can be partially credited to the hierarchical nature within accounts of the *Isra* and *Mi'raj*.[149] Descriptions of Muhammad's heavenly journey contain important language that uses "…spatial referents, such as proximity (*qulb*) and distance (*bu'd*)."[150] Sells claims that the hierarchy of spiritual stations is greatly expanded upon in later Sufi descriptions of the different heavens and hells.[151] The importance of this spiritual hierarchy is present in the works of Sufi commentators, and is particularly important within the works of Bistami and Ibn Arabi, both of who wrote accounts of their own spiritual ascent and union with the Divine. It is even possible that the heavens and stations described in the *Mi'raj* influenced Dante's *Divine Comedy*.[152] I contend that Muhammad's ascension into heaven and 'nearness' to the Divine acts more as an example of transcendence than an objective explanation of how to achieve transcendence. At no point does the Quran clearly explicate the details of Muhammad's ascent, however, the *Isra* and *Mi'raj* are briefly mentioned in Sura 17, where praise is sung to the servant who journeyed "…by

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[148] Muhammad ibn. al-Husayn Sulami, *The Subtleties of the Ascension,* trans., Frederick Colby (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2006), 171.
[149] To define what this hierarchy actually entails and how one transcends spiritual states is a complicated venture that this paper does not engage in; however, it can be simplistically claimed a hierarchical structure does exist and the ascension through these states plays an important role in Sufi theory.
[150] Mohammed Rustom, "Approaches to Proximity and Distance in Early Sufism," *Mystics Quarterly* Vol. 33 (2007): 4.
[151] Sells, ed., *Early Islamic Mysticism,* 48.
[152] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Muhammad: Man of God* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1995), 30.

night from the Masjif al-Haram to the Majid al-Aqsa around which We have blessed so that We cause him to see Our Signs."[153] Detailed descriptions of the *Isra* and *Mi'raj* are found within *hadith* and later commentaries. The formalization of techniques to transcend spiritual states and achieve a union with the Divine is a task left to later Sufi thinkers. This is on par with other religious texts that identify a spiritual goal, yet do not provide an objective means of obtaining this goal.[154] Furthermore, it is within the individual's subjective emulation of the Prophet that he (Muhammad) is identified as the shaykh par-excellence. This is in accordance with Schimmel's claim that "In the understanding of classical Islamic religious theory, Muhammad's *sunna* consists of his actions (*fi'l*), his words (*qaul*), and his silent approval of certain facts (*taqrir*)."[155] A tripartite approach to understanding the Prophet allows for different truths and spiritual techniques to be found within his teachings and actions. It follows that Muhammad can be viewed as embodying Quranic teachings and all the esoteric elements within.

> "On one occasion after the death of Muhammad when his favorite wife A'ishah was asked what he was like, she replied: 'His nature was the Quran.' This must be taken to mean that from her intense and intimate experience of the Prophet she formed the impression that he was an incarnation of the revealed Book."[156]

The esoteric insights achieved by Muhammad are claimed to have survived through chains of transmission (*isnads*) that are facilitated by the master-disciple relationship (*wali* to *wali* transmission- note that *wali* is a term that can be used to describe both the

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[153] Dawood, trans., *The Koran* Quran, 197.
[154] One of the most famous examples of subjective realization being 'taught' can be found in the Upanisads. The Upanisadic conversation between Uddalaka Aruni and his son Svetaketu, is an example of a teacher that attempts to bring about a subjective realization in his student/son, instead of using objective teachings techniques.
[155] Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, 26.
[156] Martin Lings, *What is Sufism* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1995), 33.

master and the protégé).[157] Manny Sufi orders believe themselves to be in possession of esoteric knowledge that is linked to Muhammad.

It is clear that Muhammad is regarded as being more than a prophetic figure who transmitted the Quran. The Prophet is also identified as the ideal Muslim who embodied all Quranic principles. For this reason many Sufis have regarded his actions as possessing an esoteric element that is representative of the mysticism found within the Quran. However, Sufi interpretations of Muhammad have expanded to identify The Prophet as being a manifestation of God's revelation. The Light Verse (24:35) is frequently referenced as a mystical passage that describes God's revelation as being a light onto the world: "God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is as a niche in which there is a lamp."[158] Schimmel credits early Sufis such as Muqatil and more importantly al-Tustari, as being the first proponents of the Mohammedan Light as a feature that, among many other things, links the creation to the Creator.[159] Al-Tustari further interprets the Light Verse through reference to Sura 53:13, where Muhammad is claimed to have had a mystical experience of God that predates the *Mi'raj*: "Indeed he saw in another time, near the Lote Tree of the Final End…"[160] In this regard, Muhammad can be seen as a cosmic principle that predates creation and provides the means for a relationship with God. Al-Hallaj's *The TS of the Lamp* claims Muhammad as the one "…who brought an eternal Word, not temporal, not spoken, and not made, which is united with God without separation, and which passes beyond the

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[157] Jean-Louis Michon and Roger Gaetani, ed., *Sufism: Love & Wisdom* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2006), 65.
[158] Dawood, trans., *The Koran* Quran, 249.
[159] Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, 125.
[160] Dawood, trans., *The Koran* Quran, 372.

understanding."[161] Some Sufis view Muhammad as more than an ideal Muslim and a transmitter of the Quran. To many, the Prophet is the principle through which God makes himself known and a means in which God experiences himself.[162] Schimmel claims that the identification of Muhammad as a metaphysical principle occurred relatively early within the Islamic tradition and that it is possible Hellenistic influences helped inform this mystical interpretation of the Prophet.[163] Regardless of influencing factors, the idea of a Mohammedan Light had become accepted very early within the development of Islamic mysticism, and would later become a commonality within Sufi literature.

A myriad of interpretations can be derived from the aforementioned sources and it has been the purpose of this section to highlight this potential plurality. Vedic, Upanisadic, and *bhakti* forms of mysticism need not be understood as being harmoniously applied throughout Hinduism. However, the differences between these forms of mysticism can also be understood as being stylistic differences that do not constitute major philosophical cleavages. For this reason, mysticism can be viewed as being homogeneous within the Hindu tradition if that is the intent of one's interpretation. Muhammad's role in Islamic mysticism provides a similar hermeneutical opportunity and Sufi commentators continually find new meaning within The Prophet's sayings and actions. Reference to the *Isra* and *Mi'raj* demonstrated that Muhammad can be recognized as an exoteric prophet above all previous prophets, which is confirmed in Muhammad's ascension through heaven and his leading the other prophets in prayer.

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[161] Carl Ernst, trans., *Teachings of Sufism* (Boston: Shambhala, 1999), 19.
[162] Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger,* 131
[163] Ibid., 129.

Certain interpretations of Muhammad also view him as an esoteric example. Muhammad is claimed to have achieved an unparalleled "nearness" to God, and his experience at the Lote Tree is discussed in many mystical treatises and serves as a continued point of mystical reference. Furthermore, some interpret The Prophet as being a metaphysical principle that extends beyond his role as a transmitter of the Quran and an exemplar of Islamic practices. This metaphysical interpretation of Muhammad sees him as a prophetic light that makes possible God's revelation.

CHAPTER THREE

SANKARA

The objective of this section is to examine Sankara as a mystical and philosophical thinker; however, such an examination would be lacking without some degree of historical contextualization. Our historical examination of Sankara will not extend beyond a terse treatment of his teachers, stages of life, familial background, and ascribed works. Given the overall contextual nature of this examination it would be problematic to devalue historical approaches to understanding Sankara, yet it should be remembered that this examination is mostly concerned with Sankara's theoretical propositions, and therefore, historical contextualization must take a backseat to our philosophical focus. It also should be noted that many hagiographic accounts of Sankara's life are intended to provide a compelling narrative, rather than an objective historical account.[164] In *Conquest of the Four Quarters* Jonathan Bader rightly points out that early biographers of Sankara were mainly concerned with "…locating Sankara in the realm of the sacred (hagios)."[165] And, as we will see, there is much contention as to Sankara's place in the Hindu landscape.

It is generally held that Sankara was born in the town of Kaladi in central Kerala.[166] Sankara's date of birth and death is still debated within scholarly and religious circles, with a majority believing that the mystic was born around 788 CE. and died in or

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[164] Jonathan Bader, *Conquest of the Four Quarters* (Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 2000), XI.
[165] Ibid., 7.
[166] Sengaku Mayeda, "Sankara's Central Doctrine and His Position in the History of the Vedanta," in *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* trans. Sengaku Mayeda (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 7.

around 820 CE.[167] Recently, however, there has been a push to locate Sankara's life somewhere between 650 CE. and 800 CE.[168] Some religious commentators have even claimed that Sankara was born around 509 BCE, which vastly differs with the common scholarly consensus.[169] We do know that Sankara, upon renunciation, traveled and studied under Govinda, who had been a student of Gaudapada. Information regarding Govinda is lacking, yet it is known that Gaudapada lived from 640-690 CE.[170]

An understanding of the historical Sankara becomes much easier to achieve if he is understood within the larger Hindu discourse. This permits us, as scholars, to use the content of Sankara's works as a means of dating him (in that Sankara was *partially* writing in reaction to existing schools and debates). Dasgupta echoes a similar claim when he states, "Sankara did not claim to be the inventor or expounder of an original system, but interpreted the sutras and the Upanishads in order to show that there existed a connected and systematic philosophy in the Upanishads which was also enunciated in the sutras of Badarayana."[171] Teachers, opponents, rival schools and alternate theories can all be used as means to reconstruct the historical conditions surrounding Sankara's life and works. In a similar manner biographies/hagiographies are vastly important in understanding Sankara and the religious context in which he was immersed. Bader provides an excellent comparison of hagiographic accounts of Sankara's life in relation to

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[167] Bader, *Conquest of the Four Quarters,* 18.
[168] Ibid., 19.
[169] Ibid., 19.
[170] Sengaku Mayeda, "The Life and Works of Sankara," in *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* trans. Sengaku Mayeda (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 4.
[171] Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy vol. 1.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 430.

known historical facts.[172] Such a historical/hagiographic undertaking is able to demonstrate certain historical trends in relation to Sankara and how he was adopted and interpreted by different Hindu groups.

For our limited historical purposes we can divide Sankara's life into three stages. This might not be the most ideal way of examining the historical Sankara, yet it allows us the opportunity to make distinctions that will later become beneficial for our analysis of features of his philosophy. The first stage consists of Sankara's childhood where he is claimed to have easily mastered Sanskrit and the Vedas. The *Sankara Digvijaya*, written by Madhva posits that Sankara was born into the Brahmin caste and more specifically into the Nambudari sub-caste (*jati*).[173] Other early instances of religiosity (or references to religious heritage) can be seen in myths that Sankara's parents were childless and partook in intense *tapas* that impressed Siva so much that he granted the couple a child that was an incarnation of himself.[174] Later hagiographic material contains a great number of assertions that Sankara was an incarnation of Siva. Some academics have come to understand these claims of incarnation as later additions to Sankara lore; furthermore, modern scholarship has tended to attribute the mystic with Vaisnava sympathies.[175] Alston believes that "When he [Sankara] comes to criticize the philosophical theories of the theists of his day, he praises the followers of Visnu for worshipping Narayana, whom he identified with the Absolute, but he can find nothing to

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[172] Bader, *Conquest of the Four Quarters,* 21.
[173] A.J. Alston, "Sources of Sankara's Doctrine: His Date, Life and Works," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1*, ed. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 39.
[174] Bader, *Conquest of the Four Quarters,* 79.
[175] Alston, "Sankara's Date, Life and Works," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1,* 41.

say in defense of the worshippers of Siva at all."[176] Mayeda also recognizes that the philosophies of Sankara are more aligned with Vaisnavism, rather than Saivism or Saktism.[177]

There is, however, unanimous agreement that Sankara left home at an early age and became a *sannyasin* and disciple. It is his time as a disciple that I arbitrarily term Sankara's second stage. Most traditional hagiographies relate that Sankara was destined to die young and was at death's door when a crocodile snatched him from the banks of a river; it was only upon his mother's promise to let young Sankara become a *sannyasin* that the crocodile let the boy go.[178] Sankara's near death as a boy provides an interesting parallel with the symbolic death that occurs when one adopts the *sannyasin* lifestyle. It was shortly after his renunciation that Sankara met and became a pupil of Govinda, who himself had been a student of Gaudapada.[179] The link between Sankara and Gaudapada is clearly evident in Sankara's works. Dasgupta claims that it is "…particularly significant that Sankara should credit Gaudapada and not Badrayana with recovering the Upanisad's creed. Gaudapada was the teacher of Govinda, the teacher of Sankara, but he was probably living when Sankara was a student, for Sankara says that he was directly influenced by his great wisdom, and also speaks of the learning, self-control and modesty of the other pupils of Gaudapada."[180]

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[176] Ibid., 41.
[177] Mayeda, "The Life and Works of Sankara," in *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 4.
[178] Natalia Isayeva, *Shankara and Indian Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York, 1993), 75.
[179] Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy vol. 1,* 423.
[180] Ibid., 423.

There has been much debate surrounding Gaudapada's relationship with Buddhism. Dasgupta interprets Gaudapada as being a Buddhist who approached the Upanisads as consistent with Buddhist principles.[181] Furthermore, Gaudapada's writings show a great deal of respect to the Buddha and other prominent Buddhist thinkers.[182] We should also note that commentators such as S.S. Roy, in *The Heritage of Sankara,* claims that the similarities between Gaudapada and Buddhist thought does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that he was a Buddhist.[183] Regardless of Gaudapada's affiliation, Mayeda sees the relationship between Gaudapada, Sankara, Vedanta, and Buddhism as important, for Sankara's commentary on the *Gaudapadiyakarika* is believed to be an important reorientation of Advaita Vedanta away from Buddhist beliefs and towards more orthodox Hindu principles.[184] Sankara's refutation of what some commentators have termed "Buddhist Nihilism"[185] demonstrates a firm commitment to Hinduism and the principles taught within the Vedas (for it should not be forgotten that Sankara is, first and foremost, a Hindu apologist).[186] Roy declares that the three seals (*mudras)* of Buddhism are incompatible with Sankara's system of thought, the three seals being "…(a) *Sarvam ananatmanam* (universal non-soul-ness) (b) *Sarvam anityam* (universal impermanence), and (c) *Nirvanam santam* (the quenching of everything in nirvana)…

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[181] Ibid., 423.
[182] Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy vol. 2* (New York: Humanities Press Inc, 1971), 452.
[183] S.S. Roy, *The Heritage of Sankara* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1982), 61.
[184] Mayeda, "Sankara's Central Doctrine and His Position in the History of the Vedanta," in *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 13.
[185] By no means should I be considered as making a comment on the nature of Buddhism. Rather I would like emphasis to be focused on Sankara's commitment to Hindu principles such as *atman*.
[186] Alston, "Sources of Sankara's Doctrine: His Date, Life and Works," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1,* 7.

Sankara on the other hand maintains (a) that the Atman is the highest reality, (b) that beyond the impermanent, momentary and fleeting procession of the appearances, there is the Brahman… (c) that in the highest state -- the state of absolution, nothing is quenched or annihilated, but everything attains to its real and noumenal form, which is non other than the form of Brahman…"[187] For our purposes, we need not attribute Buddhism to Gaudapada; nor do we need to place Sankara within a Buddhist lineage. All that needs to be conceded is that Sankara and Gaudapada formed metaphysical systems that were in some way cognizant of Buddhist philosophy.

The third stage of Sankara's life is marked by travel, philosophical debate, and the formation of religious schools (*mathas*). An examination of Sankara's corpus will inevitably reveal that Sankara viewed himself as a teacher propounding a specific system of thought; this sentiment is further reflected in his founding different *mathas.*[188] A majority of hagiographic material claims that Sankara began to found different schools around the age of thirty, which "…were established in the following order: Dvaraka, Badarinatha, Puri, Srngeri and Kanci. Sometimes, though, this sequence varies; and usually the list of monasteries is supplemented by other *mathas* in various combinations."[189] The actual role that Sankara had in forming these religious schools has been brought into question. Bader warns us that Sankara's hagiographic descriptions are prone to embellishment and that not all *mathas* have a historical link to the mystic.[190] Aside from theoretical similarities between the *mathas* and Sankara, many schools trace

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[187] Roy, *The Heritage of Sankara,* 64.
[188] Bader, *Conquest of the Four Quarters,* 231.
[189] Isayeva, *Shankara and Indian Philosophy,* 81.
[190] Bader, *Conquest of the Four Quarters,* 240.

their lineage back to Sankara for reasons of legitimacy (as opposed to direct historical linkages).[191] This need not be a major issue in our understanding of Sankara, yet it should be regarded as another instance of historical fact being interwoven with myth.

Another instance of history being combined with legend is found in Sankara's infamous debates with rival *darsanas*. While still a young man Sankara is believed to have traveled throughout India engaging other gurus in philosophical debate, and given the nature of these hagiographies, it is only natural that Sankara is said to have defeated every opponent.[192] The focus Sankara had on oral debates can be found in his own writings; the question and answer format that dominates much of Sankara's writing further indicates a strong disposition towards oral debates.[193] Bader posits "Sankara's own works clearly reflects his preoccupation with demonstrating the superiority of the way of knowledge over the way of ritual action. Since his claim rests on the 'true purport' of the *sastras*, his compositions are filled with complex arguments concerning the interpretation of the sacred texts."[194] Prominent in most of the hagiographies is Sankara's defeat of Mandana/Visarupa; accounts of Sankara's life have this as an important event in which Sankara defeated one of the foremost Hindu ritualists.[195] Sankara's philosophical debates also included Buddhist, Jain and Carvakin opponents; these debates not only provide us with insights into Sankara's metaphysical system, they also provide a multifaceted account of how Sankara applied his system of thought. The

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[191] Isayeva, *Shankara and Indian Philosophy,* 90.
[192] Ibid., 79.
[193] Sankara, "Texts on the Self and the Not-Self," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1* trans. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 101.
[194] Bader, *Conquest of the Four Quarters,* 184.
[195] Ibid., 184.

myriad of opponents that Sankara is claimed to have faced is only mirrored by the quantity of his rebuttals. Radhakrishnan aptly describes Sankara as a keen intellect pursuing ever-greater challenges and truths;

> "One sees him in youth, on fire with intellectual ambition, a stiff and intrepid debater; another regards him as a shrewd political genius, attempting to impress on the people a sense of unity; for a third, he is a calm philosopher engaged in the single effort to expose the contradictions of life and thought with an unmatched incisiveness; for a fourth, he is the mystic who declares that we are all greater than we know."[196]

It must be reiterated that this treatment of the historical Sankara and his hagiographic accounts are only a terse examination meant to provide context to the forthcoming philosophical discussion. Much of Sankara's life remains shrouded in mystery and legend, yet scholarly work has provided valuable insights into the historical Sankara. In the quest to find the historical Sankara, one should acknowledge that the legendary Sankara described in hagiographies has been very influential on our current understanding of Sankara (which is something that seemingly strict historical investigations have a propensity to ignore).

One more clausal issue must be examined before we launch into the substance of Sankara's mystical philosophy, that being the issue of literary authenticity. This has remained a point of contention within both the religious and academic community, and with more than three hundred different works ascribed to Sankara this issue will not be resolved in the near future.[197] Paul Hacker is recognized as formulating the current

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[196] Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy vol. 2,* 450.
[197] Mayeda, "The Life and Works of Sankara," in *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 6.

scholarly method for discerning authentic Sankara works from the inauthentic.[198] "First of all, Hacker suggested that one should pay more attention to the colophons of the manuscripts, where the author (allegedly, Sankara) appears under different names and is bestowed with different titles…The second investigative method makes use of evidence from the immediate disciples of Sankara… And finally, the third principle consists in analysis of the content, as well as of the special terminology of the work in question."[199] The *Brahmasutrabhasya* (*A Commentary on the Brahmasutra*) is commonly regarded as one of the indisputably authentic works of Sankara, and Mayeda holds it to be the yard-stick by which all other works are measured.[200] Mayeda established the authenticity of the *Upadesasahasri* (*A Thousand Teachings*) through a comparison of terminology to that found within the *Brahmasutrabhasya*.[201] For example, the *Brahmasutrabhasya* categorizes *avidya* (ignorance) as belonging within the larger category of *klesa* (affliction/impurity, defilement); the *Upadesasahasri* follows a similar line of reasoning in stating that "…*avidya* (or *ajnana*) is the first member of a series."[202] Mayeda admits that the *Upadesasahasri* does not use the term *klesa,* yet Mayeda asserts that *avidya,* being a member of a series, is an indirect reference to *klesa*.[203] With regards to Mayeda's study and the *Upadesasahasri*, Alston claims "… the only verse work which it is safe to rely on as a source for Sankara's doctrine is the verse section of the *Upadesa Sahasri*

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[198] Alston, "Sources of Sankara's Doctrine: His Life and Works," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1,* 44.
[199] Isayeva, *Shankara and Indian Philosophy,* 93.
[200] Mayeda, "The Life and Works of Sankara," in *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 6.
[201] Sengaku Mayeda "The Authenticity of the Upadesasahasri Ascribed to Sankara," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* vol 85. No. 2 (1965): 179.
[202] Ibid., 180.
[203] Ibid., 180.

[sic.]."[204] Through the use of textual analysis the academic community has been able to make persuasive claims for the authenticity of certain works, which then serve as a platform for further inquiries into authenticity.

The *Upadesasahasri* is particularly interesting because it is the only authenticated non-commentary work ascribed to Sankara.[205] There are multiple non-commentary treatises ascribed to Sankara, including the *Vivekacudamani*, yet the authenticity of these texts has recently been called into question.[206] The *Upadesasahasri* is divided into two sections consisting of a metrical and a prosaic part (Mayeda's translation of the metrical part is rendered into prose, yet it is noted that the *anustubh* meter, with 8 syllables to a quarter, dominates much of the metrical section).[207] The clarity and directness of language within the *Upadesasahasri* makes it an ideal text for introducing students to non-dualistic Vedanta; furthermore, the *Upadesasahasri* is one of the few instances where Sankara is able to control the direction of the text (as opposed to commentaries where the author is limited to a reactionary role). The *Brahmasutrabhasya* eclipses the *Upadesasahasri* when it comes to in-depth analysis and the range of topics covered, however, the directness and relative simplicity of the *Upadesasahasri* can be regarded as a boon that provides a distilled account of Sankara's philosophy. This practicality is also reflected in the prosaic part that Mayeda feels "… must have been written on the basis of Sankara's practical and pedagogical experiences. The question and answer exchanges

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[204] Alston, "Sources of Sankara's Doctrine: His Life and Works," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1,* 44.
[205] Ibid., 45.
[206] Ibid., 45.
[207] Sengaku Mayeda, preface to *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara* by Sankara (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), XVI.

between a teacher and his pupil in the Prose Part probably were based upon such interchanges between the author and his disciples. The Prose Part is a handy guide for teachers, while the Metrical Part is, as it were, a textbook for the pupils."[208] It is possible that the prosaic part and the metrical part were once completely separate works that were then synthesized into the current form we have today, yet this should not factor greatly into our discussion.[209] Although we do not have a precise date regarding the composition of the *Upadesasahasri,* it can still be maintained that Sankara had already formulated many of his theories that underpin the more general *Upadesasahasri*. The question and answer format of the text further adds credence to the belief that the *Upadesasahasri* was composed around an already existent system of thought.

Sankara's direct exposition within the *Upadesasahasri* is particularly useful to our current purposes in that it allows for relative ease in cross comparison (as opposed to the multilayered *Brahmasutrabhasya* that requires a great deal of attention and internal comparison to discern through the enigmatic and contradictory statements). A few quintessential points will be extracted from the *Upadesasahasri* and will be further supported through reference to some of Sankara's larger and more thorough commentaries. This paper will not provide a blow-by-blow account of the *Upadesasahasri* in relation to Ibn Arabi, for such an examination is beyond the scope of our current purposes and the *Upadesasahasri* would be lacking the requisite detail for such purposes. However, the *Upadesasahasri* can be approached as a terse schematic of Sankara's religious system, and as such, can be used as a functional example to compare

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[208] Ibid., XVII.
[209] Ibid., XV.

principles within Sankara and Ibn Arabi. A further benefit in using the *Upadesasahasri* is the loose contextual nature of each section; early *Upadesasahasri* manuscripts indicate, "… that any single chapter could be selected, copied, and studied apart from the rest. This means that reading of the text may begin anywhere."[210] This is a great benefit to our purposes because many of Sankara's metaphorical and symbolic statements should only be understood in the context in which they are presented (meaning that many statements made in commentaries on the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Brahmasutra* are later subjugated, within the same commentary, to more important principles).[211]

The first topic that will be examined within the *Upadesasahasri* (and Sankara's other works) will be Brahman as the immanent and transcendent matrix to phenomenal existence, the esoteric truth taught within the Vedas, and as being the unrealized individual. Sankara recognizes two distinct modes of experiencing self-identification with Brahman, one that starts with Brahman and another that begins with the inner Atman.[212] Our examination of dreamless sleep and Vedic revelation will explain these two techniques and comment on what this means for the individual's spiritual potential. This will lead us to the second point of discussion, which is the hierarchies Sankara recognized within Brahman's manifestation. Despite the non-dualism that is espoused throughout Sankara's project we can still witness instances of hierarchal organization. This ranking is present in Sankara's interpretation of theistic statements and the benefits

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[210] Ibid., XV-XVI.
[211] Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles Moore, *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy* (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 1989), 506.
[212] Sangaku Mayeda, "Atman's Identity with Brahman," *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri by Sankara,* trans. Sangaku Mayeda (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 18.

of spiritual practices (some practices being more beneficial than others). Sankara will be witnessed as placing *smrti* and *sruti* texts in a specific order that pertains to their metaphysical value.[213] Even the physical world is believed to possess a certain hierarchy, in that material composition can be ranked from the most transcendent to the grossest and most limited (according to Sankara).[214] Much of Sankara's ranking and hierarchical interpretation is in reaction to what he perceives as the ignorance and delusion that pervades the un-realized worldview.[215] An examination into Sankara's ideas of *maya* and *avidya* will provide us better perspective on what Sankara viewed as the cause of bondage. The metaphysical status of *maya* and *avidya* will also provide us with the opportunity to understand Sankara's ideas on the power of illusion and the resultant phenomenal effects. The importance of negation will become apparent as Sankara's idea of misinterpretation becomes clearer. Our discussion of negation, as used by Sankara, will be tied into his non-dual philosophy and his ideas on the correct way to express the non-dual Absolute. The use of negation is also present in Sankara's textual hierarchies and his understanding of Vedic revelation. Negation will be investigated as a tool that Sankara employed to guide his way through seemingly contradictory revelations. Lastly, we will investigate transmigratory existence and *karmic* consequence. Karmic accumulation and the resultant *samsaric* rebirths will be shown as fundamental aspects within Sankara's thought and will be tied into our previous discussions on *maya, avidya,*

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[213] Alston, "Sankara's Date, Life and Works," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1,* 5.
[214] A.J. Alston, "Dreamless Sleep," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 3.* trans A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sedan, 2004), 127.
[215] Sankara, "Texts on: The Standpoint of Nescience and the Standpoint of Knowledge," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1,* trans. A. J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 110.

and negation. It will be demonstrated that Sankara viewed *karma* as an important aspect within reality that testifies to the individual's existence within a world of illusion.

Brahman

The first line of the metrical section in the *Upadesasahasri* is in recognition of a transcendent being that permeates all existence: "Salutation to the all-knowing Pure Consciousness which pervades all, is all, abides in the hearts of all beings, and is beyond all objects [of knowledge]."[216] This is a very apt beginning for it cuts to the core of Sankara's teachings, namely, the need to realize Brahman as Pure Consciousness, or more appropriately, the realization of Brahman as one's true identity and the only objective reality that can be experienced.[217] Firstly, we should note that Brahman is held to be indivisible and transcendent of anything that can be thought or said about it (this is a good example of the ineffability that James and Underhill recognized in mystical experiences).[218] Sankara looks to the *sruti* and *smrti* corpus for proof of this undifferentiated Brahman: "…the Self is not subject to determination by any means of knowledge other than the Veda as traditionally interpreted (*agama*). Other entities are subject to determination by the empirical means of knowledge such as perception and inference conducted in a physical manner and independently of Vedic revelation."[219] Moreover, Sankara claimed that Brahmanic realization constituted a unique type of knowledge because the individual is not able to separate him or herself from Brahman in

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[216] Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* trans. Sengaku Mayeda (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).
[217] We will later clarify what is meant when one 'experiences Ultimate Reality'
[218] Yakub Masih, *Shankara's Universal Philosophy of Religion* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1987), 69.

[219] Sankara, "Texts on: The Absolute as not Known as an Object," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1,* trans. A. J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004),130.

order to understand it as a distinct entity (in other words, to understand Brahman as an object of knowledge).[220] The prosaic part of the *Upadesasahasri* goes to great lengths to demonstrate how a proper guru should instill within his pupil a sense of self-identification with Brahman.[221] Sankara further claims in the *Brahmasutrabhasya* that any quality ascribed to Brahman, as the ground of all reality and the locus of each individual, is negated through the collapsing distinction between object, agent, and experiencer (it should also be added that the *atman,* as the experiencer, is later subjugated to Brahman as the only experiencer possible).[222] A common explanatory technique is to liken the phenomenal world to foam and Brahman to water; foam is regarded as different than clear water, yet the nature of foam is completely dependent on water for its manifestation.[223] Similarly, the manifest world and the multitude of divisions within are experienced as being separate from Brahman, yet these manifestation are completely dependent on Brahman and will eventually return to Brahman and be reabsorbed into the undifferentiated state that is Brahman (just as foam is enveloped back into the tide). We will later explore how Brahman is presented in different contexts, yet it is of primary importance we recognize that on the level of "…transcendent Brahman there can only be one reality, and no qualifiable Brahman can exist in the ultimate sense in which this Transcendent has its being."[224]

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[220] Ibid., 130
[221] Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* trans. Sengaku Mayeda, 215.
[222] Sankara, *Brahmasutrabhasya,* trans. Swami Gambhirananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983), 117.
[223] Mayeda, "Atman's Identity with Brahman," in *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 23.
[224] Eric Lott, *Vedantic Approaches to God* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1980), 122.

Realization of Brahman is considered vastly different than coming to learn about Brahman. The reason for this pertains to the non-duality of Brahman and the duality implicit in the rest of existence. Knowledge of Brahman entails a division between what is known and the knower (an inappropriate proposition in Sankara's radical non-dualism). The following quotation is from Sankara's commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* and demonstrates the need for realization of Brahman as opposed to the impossible task of learning Brahman;

> "In the case of an object of knowledge, like a pot, the knower seeks to encompass the object with his knowledge. If this were also the case with knowledge, the knower would seek to encompass every cognition with another cognition. But (this would lead to infinite regress and) we do not find that this is so. Knowledge, therefore, is immediately evident, as also is the knower. Hence no effort has to be made to gain knowledge of the Self. It is to put an end to false identification of the Self with the not-Self that efforts have to be made. The path of knowledge, therefore, is something perfectly within our grasp."[225]

This approach is in accordance to the *Upadesasahasri* where Sankara claims that transmigratory existence is the result of nescience and the lack of discriminating knowledge.[226] The individual *atman* is believed to possess all the requisite means for self-realization, yet it is the overwhelming force of nescience that causes the *atman* to misinterpret its true inner-nature.[227] Sankara credits this misinterpretation to Pure Consciousness permeating through the individualistic mind/ego; furthermore, the composite and ephemeral *buddhi* is then believed to be the seat of individualistic

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[225] Sankara, "Texts on The Absolute as Already Known in a General Way," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1.* trans. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 124.
[226] Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 175.
[227] Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy vol. 1,* 443.

consciousness (when in fact it is Atman that provides the impetus for the whole process).[228]

The *Upadesasahasri's* treatment of misinterpretation and discriminating knowledge (*pramana*) is found in the metrical chapter concerning the intellect. Sankara claims that one without discriminating knowledge "…holds that the highest [Atman] does not exist, just so when there is discriminating knowledge, nothing but the highest [Atman] exists, not even [the intellect] itself."[229] It is important to our investigation of Sankara that we realize the mystic did not believe himself to be presenting new philosophical truths. Rather, Sankara believed his project to entail an epistemological reorganization (the employment of discriminating knowledge), which would lead to self-identification with Brahman.

To be more specific, Sankara believed himself to be synthesizing truths already taught within the Vedas, Upanisads, *Brahmasutra*, and *Bhagavad Gita*. This stance can also be found in Advaita Vedanta's nearest relative engaged in scriptural apologetics, Purva Mimamsa.[230] At no point did Sankara see himself as expounding anything other than a mystical path clearly laid out in *sruti and smrti* literature. Radhakrishnan insists that Sankara's interpretation of the Upanisads are true to those works' original intentions, yet Radhakrishnan also states that the same cannot be said for Sankara's treatment of the

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[228] Mayeda, "Atman's Identity with Brahman," in *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 37.
[229] Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 118.
[230] Anantanand Rambachan, *Accomplishing the Accomplished* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), 33.

Brahmasutras.[231] Dasgupta echoes Radhakrishnan in claiming, "… dualistic interpretations of the Brahma-sutras were probably more faithful to the sutras than the interpretations of Sankara."[232] This project will not render an opinion on the original intention of the *Brahmasutras*, yet Sankara's claim to textual synthesis and not textual exegesis should be taken with a grain of salt.

Unlike the *Brahmasutras*, non-dual interpretations of the Upanisads are relatively easy to defend with a majority of academics and Hindu pundits referring to the discussion between Uddalaka and his son Svetaketu as idealizing this monistic ethos. The most cited instance of monism within the Upanisads is found in the claim *tat tvam asi* (that thou art); "That which is the finest essence -- this whole world has that as its soul. That is Reality. That is Atman (Soul). That art thou, Svetaketu."[233] These non-dual interpretations extended beyond the Upanisads and *Brahmasutra*; Sankara even found instances in the ritualistic Vedas to facilitate his non-dual metaphysical system. An examination of sacrificial texts can identify a non-particularized undercurrent to the worldly realm, which is believed to be solely accessible through ritualistic action.[234] The idea of a Vedic cosmological substratum is in keeping with Mimamsa apologists who concerned themselves with orthopraxy. Mimamsa commentators, like their Vedantic cousins, claim the Vedas to be eternal and uncreated; furthermore, both *darsanas* place

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[231] Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy vol. 2,* 469.
[232] Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy vol. 1,* 421.
[233] Robert Ernest Hume trans., *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1931), 246.
[234] Brian Smith, "Ritual Perfection and Ritual Sabotage in the Vedas*," History of Religions vol. 35 no. 4* (1996): 289.

high priority on the Vedas as retelling universal truths that were channeled through the *risis* and then passed down through the Brahmins.

Is a relationship with a universal force, as partially seen in the Vedas, indicative of Upanisadic non-dual mysticism? Sankara definitely believed so. There are significant differences between Upanisadic and Vedic forms of transcendence, yet both contain mystical systems that emphasize the cosmic order (*rta)*. Dasgupta makes a similar claim, stating "…Vedic mysticism prepared the way for the rise of the other forms of mysticism that sprang up in India."[235] The Vedas speak about *rta* as a universal law that is beyond individuals, yet incorporates human participation. *Rta* can be affected through ritualistic action from within the mundane realm. The only way that this manipulation is facilitated is through the correct performance of rituals prescribed within the Vedas. Smith describes *rta* as a cosmic blueprint, which he claims is prominent in the *RgVeda* but scholastically ignored.[236] Brahmanic emphasis on correct procedure during ritual can be interpreted as being closely linked to the universal order (*rta*). It is the deific ability to perform perfect rituals that make Vedic deities godlike, and the human intention is to mirror these perfect rituals.[237] *Heat & Sacrifice in the Vedas* by Uma Marina Vesci similarly describes how Vedic sacrifice became directed towards a center that was considered the matrix for all creation. "Sacrifice is, therefore, no longer an action which is directed towards the Deities, but an action which draws the Deities towards its Centre. Henceforth it is simply the very source of the existence of the Deities as also of men and

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[235] Dasgupta, *Hindu Mysticism,* 17.
[236] Jeanine Miller, *The Vision of Cosmic Order in the Vedas* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 48.
[237] Smith, "Ritual Perfection and Ritual Sabotage in the Vedas*,"* 289.

of all the created in general."[238] Dasgupta also holds that the power of Vedic deities resides within their ritualistic control over *rta*, and it is the Brahmanic intent to imitate such powers.[239]

Another example of Sankara finding monistic sentiment in an unusual place is the *Bhagavad Gita*; Alston cites the *Bhagavad Gita* as providing a major platform for Sankara's non-dual system of thought.[240] Theistic and dualistic statements are abundant throughout the *Bhagavad Gita* and it should be admitted that "…Sankara does in some cases have to bend the texts to make them conform to a systematic [non-dual] view."[241] However, the subjugation of dualistic/theistic statements to more important non-dual interpretations is a constant theme throughout Sankara.[242] The *Upadesasahasri* explicitly claims that any god deemed to be *other* than a second order manifestation of Brahman should not be dwelt upon nor seen as a stepping-stone on the path to liberation.[243] Sankara's commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* does recognize a theistic Lord that possesses control over *maya,* and it is through the power of *maya* that the Lord is able to hide his identity as Brahman (the Lord spoken of by Sankara is often identified with Visnu, Vasudeva, Krsna, Narayana, and Hari).[244]

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[238] Uma Marina Vesci, *Heat and Sacrifice in the Vedas* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985), 271.
[239] Dasgupta, *Hindu Mysticism,* 10.
[240] Alston, "Sources of Sankara's Doctrine: His Date, Life and Works," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1,* 13.
[241] Ibid., 14.
[242] N.K Devaraja, *An Introduction to Sankara's Theory of Knolwedge* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1972), 36.
[243] Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 110.
[244] Alston, "Sources of Sankara's Doctrine: His Date, Life and Works," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1,* 13.

An example of Sankara using divine personages to lead the pupil to realization can also be found in the *Upadesasahasri,* where Krsna's conversation with Arjuna is cited; "Just as Vasudeva (=Krsna) said [to Arjuna] that He himself was the same in the holy *asvattha* fig-tree and in his own body, he who knows himself to be the same is the best knower of Brahman."[245] Sankara invested a great deal of effort to support his non-dualist theory in regards to the *Bhagavad Gita* and other theistic literature. We need not evaluate Sankara's success at promoting *jnana* yoga as the highest form of yoga propounded in the *Bhagavad Gita*, nor do we need to reconcile Sankara with some of his more contradictory theistic statements; it is important, however, that we recognize the efforts put forth by Sankara to find a thread amongst the seemingly juxtaposed Hindu corpus. Sankara's commitment to describing Brahman as the highest reality within the Hindu corpus is quintessential to understanding Sankara as an apologetic interpreter rather than an innovative philosopher.

Sankara's approach to the Vedas, Upanishads and *Bhagavad Gita* demonstrate a reliance on *sruti* and *smrti* literature as a valid source of knowledge (*pramana*). Furthermore, Sankara viewed the Vedas as telling cosmic truths that could not be discerned through reason.[246] Sankara, like thinkers in other *darsanas*, listed certain epistemological techniques as being able to bring about correct knowledge.[247] However, it is also believed that certain metaphysical truths could not be attained through philosophical/spiritual reflection. "According to Sankara, the two categories of knowledge inaccessible to all other *pramanas* and attainable exclusively through the

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[245] Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 143.
[246] Rambachan, *Accomplishing the Accomplished,* 39.
[247] Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India* (New York: Meridian Books, 1958), 463.

Vedas are *dharma* and *Brahman*."[248] The reason for this is related to the transcendental nature of Brahman, which is beyond empirical observation (this is not to say that Brahman cannot be partially realized through self-reflection and verbal testimony-*sabda*). Sankara's insistence on the need for Vedic revelation is found in his belief that "… the Absolute, like the unforeseeable results of our future deeds, is something that can only be known from Vedic revelation."[249] Radhakrishan claims the Vedas do not contain anything that one's own intellectual faculties could not discover, yet I am more inclined to agree with Rambachan on the need for revealed truths in regards to Sankara's metaphysical system (it should be noted that different *darsanas* accept different numbers of categories for the acquisition of valid knowledge).[250] An examination of *dharmic* obligation in relation to the different Hindu *yugas* (cosmological time periods) will show a certain degree of flux and relational responsibility: "An act that may be sanctioned at a certain time and place and under some circumstances may not be approved with a change of these factors. It is impossible therefore, to learn of *dharma* from any other source [than the Vedas]."[251] This position might seem contradictory in relation to Sankara's eventual denunciation of *dharmic* obligations (for the realized mystic), yet the transcendence of *dharmic* obligation only occurs as an end result, which in turn, has no effect on the unrealized practitioner's *dharmic* obligation. An opening line in metrical part of the *Upadesasahasri* directly states that the disciple must have performed all necessary rituals and have lived in accordance to *dharmic* obligation before that

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[248] Rambachan, *Accomplishing the Accomplished,* 39.
[249] Sankara, "Texts on: The Self Can Only Be Known Through The Veda," in *Sankara A Source Book vol. 5,* trans. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 202.
[250] Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy vol. 2,* 518.
[251] Rambachan, *Accomplishing the Accomplished,* 39.

individual can undergo Sankara's path to liberation.[252] Dharmic and theistic statements made by Sankara provide us with an opportunity to examine the theoretical base from which Sankara launches his mystical system; furthermore, understanding of mystical transcendence and non-dual realization cannot be scholastically appreciated if it is not seen as possessing some form of relationship to its theoretical birthing ground (even though the relationship can eventually be transcended).[253]

Sankara believed the Vedas were meant to negate improper beliefs and positions more than they were meant to explicate a clear and precise means to the realization of Brahman.[254] It can be stated that "… the negation employed by the *sruti* is twofold. Contrary attributes are side by side denied in order that the negation of one attribute does not lead to the supposition that *Brahman* is characterized by its opposite."[255] Sankara's view that prescriptive Vedic statements are later negated by more important claims, meant to bring about realization, is suiting in a metaphysical system that is based on realization as opposed to actualization or the process of "becoming".[256] Sankara's claim that the Vedas are a valid source of knowledge is a double-edged sword in that ritualistic injunctions are positivistic and layout clear rules, while the statements made in relation to Brahman are negative and attempt to bring about realization through the negation of

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[252] Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 103.
[253] This paper will not render an opinion on Sankara's relationship with Hindu orthodoxy. However, we should note that there is a certain ambiguity regarding this matter. Sankara could have perhaps felt the need to recognize certain aspects of orthodoxy out of obligation. It is also possible that this acknowledgement was out of a desire for conformity, or at the very least, the appearance of conformity.
[254] Rambachan, *Accomplishing the Accomplished,* 70.
[255] Ibid., 70.
[256] Michael Comans, *The Method of Early Advaita Vedanta* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000), 172.

improper knowledge. Recognition of Sankara's hierarchy of Vedic statements is an important observation because this approach can be found in the *Upadesasahasri*, where hierarchical states of self-identification are amply evident; "The notion '[I am] this' arises from the *atman* [which is identified with] 'this' (=non-Atman) and is within the range of a verbal handle. As has its origin in the negated *atman*, it could not become [accepted as] a right notion again [as before]."[257] Sankara's interpretation of the Vedas as rendering both positive and negative statements that are hierarchical in nature can also be witnessed in the *Brahmasutrabhyasa*, where a Great Being is described as composing all categories outlined in the Vedas, and simultaneously, transcending all these categories.[258]

As mentioned previously, Sankara held that an innate knowledge of Brahman is found in the human intellect. More specifically, every person experiences a state of consciousness that sees their personal *atman* shed its limiting adjuncts and expand to a state of Pure Consciousness (albeit very briefly).[259] However, before we examine this undifferentiated state of consciousness we need to understand Sankara's other two categories of consciousness. Firstly, the waking state of consciousness is marked by nescience and the illusory 'I' notion, which is comprised of a continuous series of mental impositions and limiting adjuncts (*upadhi*).[260] Alston describes this situation as "The erroneous cognition that sets up the objects of the world is, when evaluated from the

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[257] Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 108.
[258] Sankara, *Brahmasutrabhasya,* 19.
[259] Sankara, "Texts on Going Beyond the Mind," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1,* trans, A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 163.
[260] Mayeda, "Atman's Identity with Brahman," in *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 44.

waking standpoint, a beginningless and endless self-perpetuating mechanism."[261] In this state the individual believes his/herself to be the experiencer of pain, pleasure, anger, and love (most usually marked by statements such as 'I am…'). This can be understood as the Atman being attributed with specific qualities when filtered through mental activity.[262] A helpful analogy that Sankara employs is in regards to water and how it takes on the qualities of the vessel that contains it (e.g. the water appears to be pink when it is contained within a pink glass).[263] At no point can the water be considered truly pink and it is well understood that the pink hue is only a situationally specific attribution. The same process also occurs in dreaming states where the mind continues to create images and effects. The dreaming mind may not rely on sense perception, as in the waking state, yet "[a]nything experienced in the state of nescience is a superimposition on the Absolute and has no reality whatever except as the Absolute. This holds equally true of waking experience, dream and sense-illusion. For there can be no perception without a perceiver, and the perceiver himself, as we have seen, is the result of an erroneous mutual superimposition of the Self and the not-self."[264] A commonality between waking and dreaming states is the continuous employment of the 'I' as the base of all cognition (such as: I am an experiencer within dream consciousness that is experiencing pink cows, and I am currently seeing pink cows); and it is this inappropriate usage of the 'I' that Sankara is, in part, writing in reaction to. In his interpretation of Sankara, Mayeda credits waking

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[261] A.J. Alston, "The Self and the Not-Self," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1* (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 90.
[262] Mayeda, "Atman's Identity with Brahman," in *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 40.
[263] Kazemi, *Paths to Transcendence,* 34.
[264] A.J. Alston, "The Standpoint of Nescience and the Standpoint of Knowledge," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1,* trans A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 105.

and dreaming states as partially providing the locomotion for transmigratory existence.[265] As an interesting aside, we can interpret the continuity between waking states and dreaming states as Sankara identifying *upadhi* as the source of illusion (instead of sense-perception being blamed for misinterpretation).

These false attributions and functions of the mind are claimed to cease during dreamless sleep. It is during this state of consciousness (or, more precisely, the state that lacks nescient consciousness) that the mind is silenced and the undifferentiated substrata (Brahman) is experienced. Dasgupta aptly describes this dreamless state in relation to the bliss of realization: "As all being of the world-appearance is but limited manifestations of that one being, so all pleasures also are but limited manifestations of that supreme bliss, a taste of which we all can get in deep dreamless sleep."[266] It is correct for Dasgupta to explain that dreamless sleep is not the same as true realization, for the dreamless sleep must come to an end and nescient consciousness will thereafter return (the seed of mental turning still exists in dreamless sleep). The state of dreamless sleep is an accidental/ephemeral event that is not brought about by realization or the realignment of one's self-identification. The truly realized individual possesses Brahmanic self-identification that recognizes itself as the underlying, ever-present, consciousness behind all cognitions (even previous cognitions). The *Upadesasahasri* credits the realized individual as possessing a state of consciousness[267] that is self-dependent and objectively

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[265] Sengaku Mayeda, "Transmigration and Final Release," in *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahari of Sankara,* trans. Sengaku Mayeda (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 71.
[266] Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy vol. 1,* 491.
[267] The term 'state of consciousness' is not an appropriate term to describe the deluded individual nor the realized individual. For one who has realized their inner Atman as

real: "Whether in the state of deep sleep or of waking or of dreaming, no delusive perception appears to pertain to Me in this world. As those [three states] have no existence, self-dependent or other-dependent, I am always the Fourth, the Seeing and the non-dual."[268] It is the potential power of *upadhi* (imposition/limitation), lying dormant during the dreamless state, which makes the dreamless sleep different from the realized individual who has completely negated the power of *upadhi*.[269] Moreover, for most people there is no sense of consciousness when in the state of deep dreamless sleep. Thus deep dreamless sleep does not appear to be exactly the same as the realized state of consciousness, but for its potential to have the power of *upadhi* re-emerge. Sankara emphasizes that the Fourth state is different from the nature of consciousness in the other three states (i.e., waking, dreaming, and deep, dreamless sleep), because it is always "the Seeing" state. This appears to imply a qualitative difference in the nature of the Fourth and the deep sleep state. Methodological constraints in this study inhibit further exploration into the nature of "the Fourth."

The Hierarchy of Brahman's Manifestation

An examination of Sankara's various commentaries will readily demonstrate a hierarchical cosmological organization, or stated differently, an order to the manifestation

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being identical with Brahman has transcended the individuality associated with consciousness and has replaced it with a 'world-consciousness'. Therefore, any reference to the realized individual, as possessing a state of consciousness, should only be understood on a superficial level. The realized individual is believed to see that nothing other than Brahman has ever existed and that realization does not constitute anything more than a clarification. It can therefore be posited that Pure Consciousness is the only state of consciousness that is possible (at times, however, Pure Consciousness can be assigned misleading attributes that create division and multiplicity).

[268] Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 123.

[269] Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy vol. 2,* 600.

of Brahman. This organization pertains not only to the universe's hierarchical manifestation but also to revelatory texts and spiritual practices. A textual example of Sankara's hierarchical system would be his belief that theistic statements were less direct and more metaphorical when compared to statements in regards to non-dual Brahman (or more precisely, statements that attempt to bring about realization of Brahman).[270] Alston recognizes a similar type of organization when dealing with ritualistic meditation (*upasana*): "Sankara differentiated the performance of prescribed Vedic meditations (*upasana*) from knowledge on the one hand and from ritualistic action on the other."[271] This hierarchical organization extends to Sankara's understanding of material composition. Sankara held that this manifestation ranged from the most subtle and transcendent to the grossest and most limited.[272] We must keep in mind that all phenomenal existence is believed to be a manifestation of the one, non-dual Brahman; therefore, Sankara was forced to elucidate a cosmological system that could be "folded back into Brahman" and simultaneously be nothing other than Brahman. The *Upadesasahasri* provides an example of this, which consists of Sankara describing his cosmological scheme from the standpoint of the Realized Individual: "As the intellects of all beings are always to be illuminated by My Pure Consciousness, all beings are the body of Me who am all-knowing and free from evils."[273] The process that sees the universe come into fruition starts with the finest element (ether) and progresses to the

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[270] Alston, "Sankara's Date, Life and Works," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1,* 5.
[271] A.J. Alston, "Meditation in the Context of the Vedic Ritual," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 6.* trans. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sedan, 2004), 1.
[272] A.J. Alston, "Dreamless Sleep," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 3.* trans A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sedan, 2004), 127.
[273] Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 121.

grossest and least pervasive (earth).[274] In regards to individual manifestation Sankara believes that it is the soul (atman) that is the finest aspect of human composition and it is the earth-based body that is the grossest.[275] Earth (the body) is the least permanent, while the soul continues throughout transient existence.[276] Furthermore, the unrealized soul is attached to a subtle seventeen-fold body that, when illumined by Atman, aids in the illusion of individual existence. Sankara's division of the seventeen-fold body goes as such:

> "These (five) sense-faculties[277] are said to exist for the sake of knowledge, while the (five) powers of speaking, handling, walking, excretion and generation are for the sake of action. The mind (manas), standing within the whole group and consisting the eleventh faculty, selects from the reports of the other ten. The intellect (buddhi) stands for fixed determination. And finally the ultimate knower, called the Self (atman), stands ever illumining the intellect with its own light as the latter goes on assuming different forms corresponding to the object of its cognition."[278]

What is crucial for us to recognize is that Brahman, as Atman, provides the impetus for our individual world experiences (the foundation). Neither the illusory adjuncts attached to Atman nor the material elements energize the process (by this we mean that the Absolute is believed as a requisite principle within manifestation and nothing has the power to start the process of manifestation, save Brahman).[279]

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[274] A.J. Alston, "The Organs and Bodies of the Soul," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 3.* trans. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sedan, 2004), 26.
[275] Ibid., 33.
[276] A.J. Alston, "Dreamless Sleep," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 3,* 127.
[277] The five sense faculties are comprised of hearing, touch, sight, taste and smell.
[278] Sankara, "Texts on The Organs and Bodies of the Soul," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 3.* trans. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 33-34.
[279] Examples of these adjuncts can range from notions of being a daughter, a doctor, or even the larger and more general concept of the individual I.

We can further see how Sankara understands the grosser emanating from the finer with reference to the *Upadesasahasri* chapter entitled 'Consisting of Earth'.[280] It is here that Sankara reiterates an often used and important point; "Nothing which has something else as its nature can become an object of the latter, as fire can neither burn nor illumine itself."[281] Through this Sankara attempts to establish Brahman as the active principle that begets Unevolved Name and Form, which in turn gives rise to ether. Unevolved Name and Form is highly important to Sankara because it is the first instance of materiality in his cosmological system.[282] For obvious reasons Sankara could not attribute Brahman as being directly responsible for the composition of ether (for such a relationship would challenge the transcendent nature ascribed to Brahman, which as we have seen, is of the utmost importance to Sankara). Unevolved Name and Form is given a vague and indeterminable status as the parent of ether, for "…Unevolved Name-and-Form is the supersensible seed of the world (*jagadbijabhuta*), which is not describable as 'this' or anything else and is known only to Brahman itself."[283] The idea of a supersensible seed that facilitates the cosmic building blocks is directly borrowed from the Upanisads but most notably the *Chandogya Upanisad*.[284] A relevant passage in the *Chandogya Upanisad* is found in the fourteenth *khanda*; "Verily, what is called space (*akasa*) is the accomplisher of name and form. That within which they are, is Brahma. That is the immortal. That is the Self (Atman, Soul)."[285] We can interpret Sankara ascribing Unevolved Name and Form an intermediate status as a conceptual distancing of Brahman

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[280] Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 149.
[281] Ibid., 150.
[282] Mayeda, "Atman's Identity with Brahman," 22.
[283] Ibid., 22.
[284] Ibid., 20.
[285] Hume trans., *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads,* 273.

from the specifics of material composition; no matter how fine and pervasive ether is considered, it still is bound to the limitations inherent to physical manifestation.[286]

Mayeda recognizes Sankara's theory of Unevolved Name and Form as an obvious attempt to rescue non-dual Vedanta from the pitfalls of duality that plague monistic creation accounts.[287] Furthermore, Sankara directly recognizes this problematic situation and the need to ascribe creation to Brahman, while not limiting Brahman through creation. He states "This name and form, being originally unmanifest, manifested out of this Self in the name and form of the 'ether' (*akasa*). And in this way, the element (*bhuta*) called 'the ether' was born from the Supreme Self, like the impure foam from clear water, and yet it is not completely different from water, for it is never found apart from water."[288] Once again Sankara turns to the foam/water metaphor to explain the dependent relationship manifestation has on the world, and the simultaneous difference and independence water has from the altered foam. The reliance foam has to water and ether to Unevolved Name and Form is yet another example of hierarchical dependence that leads to an Ultimate Principle (Brahman), which independently stands as the matrix of creation.[289] If we approach this in a hierarchical manner we can readily see how foam has water for its nature just as the human soul is claimed to have Brahman as its real nature (it is also important to understand that neither water nor Brahman has its nature based in something below it, such as foam or the individual soul).

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[286] Sankara, "Texts on the Organs and Bodies of the Soul," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 3,* 41.
[287] Mayeda, "Atman's Identity with Brahman." *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri by Sankara,* 22.
[288] Sankara, "Texts on: Name and Form: Indeterminability," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 2.* trans. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 150.
[289] Ibid., 149.

Another important point in understanding Sankara's hierarchical system is the function of Pure Consciousness as the active principle, which is experienced as individuality. The *Upadesasahasri* asserts that when Atman is filtered through ephemeral notions of self and ego it results in delusion and rebirth.[290] We can alternatively state, in congruence with the hierarchical structure of Sankara's metaphysical system, that each intellect has Pure Consciousness as its nature and can therefore be reduced to a misappropriated manifestation of this Universal Consciousness.[291] Sankara makes this causal relationship abundantly clear when he states, "The intellect receives a reflection of the light of the Self as Pure Consciousness first, since it is transparent and stands in immediate proximity to the Self.[292] Hence even persons of discrimination identify themselves initially with the intellect. Consciousness next illumes the lower mind, as the next inmost principle immediately through its contact with the mind, and next the body through its contact with sense-organs."[293] Pure Consciousness is not truly appreciated in Sankara's system if we let the matter rest at this point. It should also be noted that Sankara understood the Atman as being the actual witness to all these individual experiences brought about by Pure Consciousness, interpreted through nescience.[294] Thus, in a roundabout way, it is actually Brahman experiencing Brahman through different individual experiences. Dasgupta echoes this in his claim that Sankara regarded the perceiver and the perceived as possessing an identical

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[290] Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 114.
[291] A.J. Alston, "The Light that Illumines the Soul," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 3,* trans. A. J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 49.
[292] This duality should be understood as provisional. We will discuss Sankara's use of provisional statements later in the paper.
[293] Sankara, "Texts on The Light that Illumines the Soul," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 3,* trans. A. J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 60.
[294] Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 118.

reality that is facilitated through the same cosmic principle (Brahman).[295] "Moreover, being the Witness (*saksin*) of all other cognitions, it is itself changeless and omnipresent. If the Witness underwent modification of any kind, its range of knowledge would be limited, like that of the mind and sense-organs. But there is no break in the seeing of the Seer, as there is in that of the eye and the other organs."[296] Sankara believed that misunderstanding, on the part of the individual, is a product of nescience that segregates the individual consciousness from the Universal Consciousness, and subsequently, it is upon realization that one's personal *atman* is identical to the universal Atman that true understanding arises.[297] It is the Atman that provides the light that illuminates individual experience and when this realization occurs, individuals are stripped of all personal adjuncts that had previously inhibited their understanding.

As previously mentioned, a prolonged examination of Sankara's ideas concerning self-identification reveals systematic and hierarchical organizations. Sankara's view of atman/Atman contains a great deal of ranking in the attempt to understand subjective experience. And as we have previously seen, religious texts are rated in accordance to revelatory worth, with the most indirect being subjugated to the highly prized metaphysical texts that speak about one's non-identity in relation to Brahman. We are given an example of this when Sankara claims that theistic texts are a means to "…teach something else, and only to those persons who, while possessed of faith in the Veda, were not endowed with deep discrimination, and who consequently believed in the existence

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[295] Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy vol. 1,* 450.
[296] Sankara, "Texts on Dreamless Sleep," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 3.* trans. A.J. Alston (Londong: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 154.
[297] Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 129.

and substantial nature of the world. For them it is appropriate enough."[298] Sankara's treatment of Vedic meditation (*upasana*) incorporates a multitude of contextual uses that are rated in accordance to function.[299] Meditation and ritual action can be used to gain special knowledge that will garner the practitioner specific benefits; these practices can also be performed with the intent of gaining *karmic* merit, and most importantly for Sankara, these forms of practices can *facilitate* identification with Brahman.[300] We have also seen that Sankara categorized deities in accordance to their ability to lead the devotee to identification with Brahman; "For instance, Sankara himself identifies Hari and Narayana (names of Visnu) with the Absolute in his *Brahma Sutra* commentary, but does not mention Siva in this way. When he wishes to illustrate the processes of worship of a deity in the course of the same commentary, he does so seven times for Visnu-worship but never once for the worship of Siva."[301] And at the beginning of this section we examined how Sankara developed a complex cosmological theory that relied on the grossest and least pervasive elements being absorbed into, and emanating from, the finest and most pervasive (as seen in the eventual emergence of the earth element from ether).[302] However, much like Tibetan Buddhist sand *mandalas*, Sankara's cosmological system is destroyed in its final step, being absorbed into the undifferentiated Brahman that contains no limits or distinctions. Upon dissolution of the world nothing material

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[298] Sankara, "Texts on: Creation-texts as a Device to Teach Non-Duality," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 2.* trans. A. J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 227.
[299] Alston, "Meditation in the Context of the Vedic Ritual," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 6,* 2.
[300] Ibid., 2.
[301] Alston, "Sources of Sankara's Doctrine: His Life and Works," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1,* 41.
[302] Mayeda, "Atman's Identity with Brahman," in *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri by Sankara,* 22.

can remain, and will therefore not warrant Sankara's system of explanation and realization.[303] We therefore need not spend a great deal of time expounding this hierarchical system, yet I believe it important that we can partly recognize Sankara as a systematic theologian. Moreover, the categories of material manifestation accepted by Sankara in his descriptive scheme belong largely to metaphysical systems within Hindu tradition (e.g., Sankhya and Yoga), and predate Sankara.

Maya and Avidya

Much of Sankara's metaphysical system draws from his concepts of illusion (*maya*) and ignorance (*avidya*); we would be greatly remiss not to discuss the role and function of these two ideas. Firstly, we should note that Sankara excluded the Self as the object of nescience, claiming that the transcendent and limitless status of Brahman surely excludes any relationship with *maya.*[304] However, *maya* can also be used as a term referring to the creative power of the lord or as an indirect reference to the manifest world.[305] Alston is not comfortable with crediting *maya,* as a form of power, to Sankara's philosophy; rather, Alston claims "Sankara speaks of nescience not as a power (*sakti*) but as a state (*avastha*), an undesirable state or passion (*klesa*) which afflicts the individual. He was not speaking about anything he conceived to be real but merely a hypothesis that would account for our everyday experience…"[306] Alston is correct to downplay the status of *maya*, for it would surely be contrary to Sankara's system to

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[303] Sankara, "Texts on: World-periods and Theory of the Elements," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 2.* trans. A. J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 167.
[304] Sankara, "Texts on: The Soul and the Lord are not Distinct," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1,* trans. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 71.
[305] Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy vol. 1,* 470.
[306] A.J. Alston, "The Nature and Results of Nescience," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1,* trans. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 66.

establish an independent power (*maya*) that existed outside of Brahman. However, Dasgupta is simultaneously correct to assert that Sankara treated *maya* as a power wielded by divine personages.[307] These two explanations need not be contradictory, for, as we have often seen, Dasgupta's claim can be accommodated on a lower theistic level, while Alston's statements are more congruent with the abstract metaphysical Sankara. This distinction is echoed by Sankara in his treatment of personal perspective: "Before the rise of clear knowledge that man's Self is the Absolute, all practical experience can be defended as real, just as dream-experience is real before waking. Before he is aware of the unity and sole reality of the Self, no one entertains the notion that such transient modifications (*ikara*) as perception and other means of knowledge and the cognitions arising from them, are illusory."[308] A similar line of reasoning can be found in the *Upadesasahasri*, where Sankara claims that, in his oft used perspective as the realized individual, "I am the Beholder of modification of the mind and also of the mind [itself]…"[309] For this reason that I propose we not spend a great deal of time explaining Sankara's contradictory statements in regards to nescience; rather, as demonstrated in the previous discussion on hierarchy, we can understand Sankara as jumping between levels of meaning (and the implicit hierarchy that exists within those statements).

Maya cannot be understood as being coeternal with Brahman, nor can it be properly understood as a property of Brahman.[310] The reasons why *maya* cannot be

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[307] Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy vol. 1,* 470.
[308] Sankara, "Texts on: The Standpoint of Nescience and the Standpoint of Knowledge," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1,* trans. A. J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 110.
[309] Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 126.
[310] Sankara, "Texts on: The Absolute as the Lord of Maya," in *Sankara A Source Book vol. 2,* trans. A. J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 84.

either is that it would limit Brahman and introduce a force existent outside of Brahman, something that is obviously unacceptable in Sankara's radical non-dual system.[311] In his commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* Sankara credits *maya* as being coexistent and dependent on notions of division such as "My act" or "I am the agent".[312] It is through nescience that one becomes finite and the continuation of this mindset reinforces the power of nescience (note the vicious circle).[313] A useful analogy that Sankara uses to explain this problem relates that a group of ten boys who sought to cross a river; upon reaching the far bank one of the boys took a head count to make sure all had crossed safely. The boy counted everyone he could see and was thrown into a panic when he counted only nine boys, forgetting that he himself was the tenth.[314] Such mistakes occur when the individual externalizes all phenomena and only accounts for what can be seen; "Just as [the lad who] was himself the tenth thought that he was among the nine [others], so these deluded folk [think that Atman is] among the objects of knowledge [such as the intellect] and do not [understand] otherwise."[315] The ethos of this story pertains to our external search for understanding, which in turn, only creates further misconceptions and ignorance (*avidya*).

The famous rope-snake analogy is yet another example used by Sankara to demonstrate that mistakes in perception cannot be rectified by further reference to

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[311] Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy vol. 2,* 566.
[312] Sankara, "Texts on: The Soul and the Lord are not Distinct," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1,* 69.
[313] Avidya can be considered as further supporting the idea of individuality but it cannot be credited as being the sole cause of individuality, for the presence of *avidya* is dependent on individuals for existence and it would be a logical misstep to place the effect before the cause.
[314] Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 129.
[315] Ibid., 129.

external sources (such as claiming that there is a special type of snake that can change itself into a piece of rope and then back into a snake… instead of just admitting a mistake in perception).[316] The only proper method to achieve understanding is through a process of internal reflection that leads one to the realization that phenomenal existence is an illusion that depends on nothing beyond the ignorance of the perceiver. It follows that all experiences within nescience are false attributes "…on the Absolute and have no reality whatever except as the Absolute. This holds equally true of waking experience, dream and sense-illusion. For there can be no perception without a perceiver, and the perceiver himself, as we have see, is the result of an erroneous mutual superimposition of the Self and the not-self."[317] It is abundantly clear that *maya* is not granted objective reality in Sankara's metaphysical system and that *maya* is only an illusory effect.[318]

Despite this lack of objectivity, Sankara readily admitted the phenomenal effects of *maya*.[319] Avidya and *maya* bring about action and should not be considered completely non-real.[320] Like objects seen in a dream, the individual "…sees objects of various grades and degrees of value and takes this knowledge for authentic perception, without, at the time, having the remotest suspicion that such perception is a mere appearance of perception. In just the same way, one takes waking perception for genuine

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[316] Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy vol. 2,* 569.
[317] Alston, "The Standpoint of Nescience and the Standpoint of Knowledge," in *Sankara A Source Book vol. 1*, 105.
[318] Sankara, "Texts on: The Absolute as the Lord of Maya," in *Sankara A Source Book vol. 2,* 85.
[319] Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy vol. 1,* 439.
[320] Ibid., 443.

perception before enlightenment…"[321] Sankara maintains that all instances of duality in the Vedas can be considered true within the realm of *maya*.[322] Therefore, injunctions and rules that do not lead to the realization of Brahman possess conditional relevance; this line of reasoning also leads to Sankara's belief that the realized practitioner transcends certain Vedic rules.[323] In the *Upadesasahasri* Sankara uses a very pertinent metaphor by comparing the effects of *avidya* to a fever that is cured through the use of medicine (the Vedas); however, after the fever has broken, continued use of these medicine can only create more problems.[324] The conditional reality of *maya* also forces Sankara to deal with "states of being" in both the realized and unrealized individual. Foremost, Sankara stresses that there is no substantive difference between the realized and the unrealized; to accept change in one's personal *atman* would diminish the conditional status of *avidya* and give it objective status (meaning that *avidya* could force change upon the *atman*).[325] "Moreover, if bondage and liberation be taken to be two states following on one another successively, then the state of bondage must be taken as occurring first and as being begininningless and yet as having an end, and that contradicts known laws."[326] Sankara has no room in his metaphysical system for anything other than Brahman, therefore, *maya* must be granted a liminal/conditional status that permits functional explanations that do not challenge the non-duality of Brahman.

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[321] Sankara, "Texts on: The Standpoint of Nescience and the Standpoint of Knowledge," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1,* 111.
[322] Ibid., 110.
[323] Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 133.
[324] Ibid., 203.
[325] Sankara, "Texts on: The Nature and Results of Nescience," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1,* trans. A. J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 75.
[326] Ibid., 76-77.

Sankara's Use of Negation

Sankara believed negation an important tool in the communication of his radical non-dual system. Mayeda claims this as a strikingly realistic aspect within Sankara's illusionistic worldview, yet we can more easily understand his negation as a practical tool in an illusionary universe.[327] The previous examinations of *avidya* and the non-duality of Brahman should have made it abundantly clear that Sankara subjugated phenomenal existence and knowledge to the transcendental "other-ness" of Brahman. Sankara looked to the Upanisads as teaching through the use of negation, yet "Sankara did not invent this method of interpreting the texts, but inherited it from earlier teachers such as Gaudapada and Dravida. It is known as the method of false attribution and subsequent denial (*adhyaropa* and *apavada*)."[328] Reference to the *Katha Upanishad* will provide us with a quintessential usage of negation that is employed by Sankara; "What is soundless, touchless, formless… Without beginning, without end, higher than the great, stable- by discerning that, one is liberated from the mouth of death."[329] In poetic fashion Sankara describes his method as traversing the perilous and doubt-filled forest of "this-ness", meaning the path to the realization must occur *within* the illusory world of duality.[330] Our mystic did not employ this repudiating method as an attempt to form a concrete idea about Brahman, for that would undermine his assertion that Brahman is beyond the realm of ideas; rather, the use of negation can be seen as a conceptual exercise that demonstrates the futility of epistemological categories, which in turn, encourages the

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[327] Mayeda, "Atman's Identity with Brahman," in *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri by Sankara,* 47.
[328] A.J. Alston, "The Path of Negation," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1,* trans. A. J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 143.
[329] Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads,* 353.
[330] Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 108.

disciple to move beyond such means.[331] This line of reasoning (if negation can be called a form of reasoning) is intended to lead the individual to Brahman as the Universal Principle that underlines all negated categories; "Without negating a previous notion, a following view does not arise. The Seeing (= Atman) is one alone, self-established. As it is the result [of the right means of knowledge], It is not negated."[332] In an Upanisadic commentary Sankara claims that the realized individual sees nothing to negate or affirm; this is because the realized person has found their way to the undivided state[333] of being.[334]

In constructing his metaphysical system Sankara did not completely rely on negation. Many attributions find their way into Sankara's explanations and ignoring these would miss a key methodological technique. For example, Sankara states that "The supreme Self can very well have the attribute of 'Controller' in the sense of abiding within this whole complex of modifications (i.e. the universe), differentiated into the various realms such as that of the gods, and subjecting it to his control. For that which is the material cause of all modifications can very well be thought of as possessed of all powers."[335] Similar attributions can be found in the *Upadesasahasri*, where Sankara claims the realized person to be all knowing and all pervading.[336] These statements should not be completely dismissed as Sankara speaking down to the unrealized, for as

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[331] A.J. Alston, "The Path of Negation," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1,* 133.
[332] Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 108.
[333] Use of the term state, in this instance, is not to be understood as an actual discovery of a new state of being that did not exist previous to realization.
[334] Sankara, "Texts on: Enlightenment is not a Change of State," in *A Sankara Source Book vol 6,* trans. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 232.
[335] Sankara, "Texts on: The Absolute as the Material and Efficient Cause of the World," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 2*, trans. A.J. Alston (Londond: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 27.
[336] Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 120.

our discussion of *avidya* has shown, certain statements can be conditionally true when they are considered within a larger hierarchical system of thought. Firstly, Sankara claims that the path of negation incorporates inherent assertions that work to negate corresponding adjuncts.[337]

To be more specific, Sankara believes that the unreal cannot be fully rejected through reference to correspondingly unreal properties. For this reason, and in accordance to his hierarchical system of truths and quasi-truths, Sankara uses attributing statements as tools to negate certain adjuncts.[338] This should not be confused with subjectivism or relativism, Sankara's appointment of Brahman as Ultimate Reality provides an objective grounding that limits this regress. Instead of being turtles all the way down; Sankara uses turtles to refute other turtles until all turtles are eliminated and Brahman remains alone in an undifferentiated turtle-less reality. When turtles (attributions) are used by Sankara, our attention should not focus on each turtle; instead, focus should be directed to the space that is created between refuting turtles. An example of these refuting turtles can be seen in Sankara's approach to emotional states and how "… contradictory notions are successively superimposed onto one and the same Self in the form of such feelings as 'I am happy, sad, deluded, born, subject to death… But amidst all these various conflicting notions, the notion of the Self is constant and identical…"[339] In many ways there is a negating aspect to Sankara's attribution related statements. While the term *neti-neti* ("not this - not this") is most synonymous with

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[337] Sankara, "The Path of Negation," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1*, trans. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 156.
[338] Ibid., 156.
[339] Ibid., 132.

Upanisadic negation, we can also view the contradictory nature of attributes as also being a form of negation. Sankara is abundantly clear that attributes do not lead to objective truths; rather, attributes only lead to further contradictions. This hypothesis is in keeping with Sankara's refutation, for "… in order to show that it [Brahman] exists, it is first spoken of in its false form set up by adjuncts, and fancifully referred to as if it had knowable qualities… For there is the saying of those who know the tradition (*sampradaya-vid*) 'That which cannot be expressed (in its true form directly) is expressed (indirectly) through false attribution and subsequent denial.'"[340] And, as we have seen, contradictory attributions can be used as a form of denial.

Of course, this means that the entirety of Sankara's metaphysical system, including teachings such as found in the *Upadesasahasri*, could be said as belonging to the realm of indirect attribution through false attribution. The ultimate validity of this intellectual or descriptive superstructure would be ultimately denied or regarded as false in the face of the highest realization.

Transmigratory Existence and Karmic Consequence

Cessation of the pain and suffering associated with phenomenal existence lies at the heart of Sankara's project. However, a large amount of attention is paid to the waking, dreaming, dreamless states, and the enlightened state called *turiya*. While investigating these states, Sankara claims that "[t]he soul exists in these three abodes alternately, identifying himself with them through natural nescience, afflicted for ages with an overpowering sleep from which he does not awake even under the hammer-like

[340] Ibid., 151.

blows of many hundreds of thousands of painful disasters."[341] Waking, dreaming, and dreamless states are not just experiences within the larger category of transmigratory existence; rather, they constitute their own form of transmigratory existence (that being the movement between states within the larger category of *samsara*).[342]

Mayeda claims that Sankara's understanding of *samsara* inherently includes the migration between waking, dreaming, and dreamless states; Mayeda further claims that Sankara was most concerned with the differences in mental states, for these states were believed to provide a key to realization.[343] Future lives were viewed as nothing more than a continuation of *samsara* and another opportunity to attain the state of realization (*turiya*).[344] It is the fluctuating states experienced within daily life that provide insights into one's hidden nature. Most important of these states is dreamless sleep because it is understood as a state *similar* to realization; this being a similar experience because mental activity remains in unmanifest seed form, ready to reactivate upon awakening.[345] In a manner that is very characteristic of his style, Sankara interprets Vedic claims of heavenly residence as indicating the difference between dreamless sleep and true realization: "The text calls the Absolute 'heaven' in order to indicate that apart from what happens in dreamless sleep, on the death of the body, too, knowledge of the enlightened one will necessarily bear fruit (and he will be once and for all united with the

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[341] Sankara, "Texts on: The Soul as the Self viewed under External Adjuncts," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 3,* trans. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 7.
[342] Sengaku Mayeda, "Transmigration and Final Release," in *A thousand Teachings: The Upadesashasri of Sankara*, trans. Sengaku Mayeda (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 70.
[343] Ibid., 71.
[344] Ibid., 71.
[345] Sankara, "Texts on: Dreamless Sleep," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 3,* trans. A.J. Alston (London: Shati Sadan, 2004), 160.

Absolute)."[346] Consequently, our discussions of *samsara* within Sankara must be multidimensional, recognizing the atman's continuance into future lives and its persistence through the three mental states (*turiya* cannot really be considered a mental state because the realized individual surpasses all notions of individual mentality).[347]

It is the *atman's* persistence through these cognitive states and into future lives that helps separate Sankara from his Buddhist contemporaries. We can also understand the continuation of the individual *atman* as yet another objective aspect in Sankara's philosophy.[348] Despite the heavy dose of illusion in Sankara's system, he still felt the need to recognize a continuing agent that persisted through mental states and into the future.[349] Furthermore, this continued agent is cited as the means and end to individual transmigratory existence. An examination of Sankara will reveal two different styles of arguments concerning the continuation of the *atman*. Firstly, we can witness a metaphysical argument in statements such as: "If your true nature as Consciousness were lost in dreamless sleep then it would stand destroyed or could be negated as non-existent."[350] This type of argument makes use of Brahman as the ground to all existence and as a necessary principle within Sankara's cosmological system.[351] We can also find psychological and cognitive arguments for a continued self; "The Knower, the Absolute, pure Consciousness, rests in that external adjunct called the inner organ… In order to

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[346] Ibid., 158.
[347] Sankara, "Texts on: Turiya," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 3,* trans. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 175.
[348] Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy vol. 2,* 472.
[349] Ibid., 472.
[350] Sankara, "Texts on: The Absolute as the Self-Luminous Principle," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1,* trans. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 212.
[351] Sankara, "Texts on: The Absolute as the Material and Efficient Cause of the World," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 2*, 19.

minister to its empirical experience, the inner organ is said to assume the following modes to convey both external objects and mental states…"[352] This line of reasoning looks to knowledge and memory to prove a continued psychological agent that remains relatively static throughout the different mental states. The *Upadesasahasri* combines both approaches in claiming Brahman as the source of the manifest world, and crediting individual experience as being enabled through Universal Consciousness.[353] This is markedly different than Sankara's Buddhist rivals that staunchly rejected a continuing self (the *anatman* doctrine).

Sankara's Advaita Vedanta, like many of the other Hindu *darsanas*, referenced *karma* as being quintessential to bondage and the *samsaric* cycle. At no point does Sankara overtly question the existence of *karma*, instead taking it as a fact of life.[354] This is a common occurrence in Hinduism writ large and some prominent scholars have even declared *karma* as a pre-Vedic phenomenon that can be traced to early agrarian tribes.[355] We need not spend a great deal of time investigating this point, yet the prominence of *karma* in Indic religions was, and continues to be, so definite that many Hindu commentators did not feel the need to justify or explain its existence. This does not, however, mean that the idea of *karma* has remained static throughout the history of Hinduism. Tull rightly asserts that the composite nature of the Hindu corpus has lead to a myriad of opinions regarding *karma* and its role within the tradition (if we can refer to

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[352] Sankara, "Texts on: The Light that Illumines the Soul," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 3,* 53.
[353] Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 112.
[354] Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy vol. 2,* 634.
[355] Herman W. Tull, "Karma," in *The Hindu World,* ed. Sushil Mittal & Gene Thursby (New York: Routledge, 2007), 311.

Hinduism as a single tradition).[356] For example, *karman* in the Vedic sense can simply refer to action with emphasis on ritualistic action, yet Upanisadic usage of *karma* is more in line with the formulation of a complete doctrine.[357] Furthermore, it is during this transition that Upanisadic texts denouncing *karmic* sacrifice become informative; such an example can be found in the *Mundaka Upanisad*, where Brahmins are criticized for "Thinking sacrifice and merit is the chiefest thing… Having had enjoyment on top of the heaven won by good works, They re-enter this world, or a lower."[358] The use of *karma* as an explanation of good and bad deeds is still valued in the Upanisads, yet the incorporation of *karmic* consequence into a system of transcendental enlightenment quickly altered certain understandings of *karma* and made it a much more relational concept (by this I mean *karma* no longer stood on its own as mere good and bad, but was approached through the desire to break *samsaric* existence).

It can be said that Sankara adopted a post-Upanisadic view of *karma* that is related to previous Vedic treatments of sacrifice and *karma*: "Each sort of activity garners its own result; whereas meditation in the forest leads to the acquisition of a certain esoteric knowledge and thus eventually to the path of the gods and freedom from rebirth and sacrifice, giving gifts to the priests leads to the attainment of the path of the fathers and rebirth in the world."[359] Reference to Sankara's ideas of realization readily demonstrates an action-less state that has overcome the accumulation of *karma*.[360] This

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[356] Ibid., 311.
[357] Ibid., 312.
[358] Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads,* 369.
[359] Tull, "Karma," in *The Hindu World,* 319.
[360] Sankara, "Texts on: The Enlightened Man as Actionless," in *Sankara A Source Book vol. 6,* trans. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 272.

is not the attainment of a new state of being that is beyond the accumulation of *karma*; rather, it is the negation of nescience that spurs on *karmic* accumulation. The prosaic part of the *Upadesasahasri* relates that nescience is the superimposition of unreal qualities onto the real, which then forms a receptacle of *karmic* consequences.[361] It is the individual who has realized his/her Brahmanic nature that comes to exist for his/herself, and these individuals find their sole sustenance in this knowledge. Sankara's rhetorical guru tells his pupil that this form of independence negates the *karmic* acquiring desire, which is associated with nescient existence: "So, then, you exist for you own sake since you are conscious. You are not driven [to act] by an other. A conscious being is neither dependent on another nor driven [to act] by another, for it is not reasonable that a conscious being should exist for the sake of another conscious being since they are equal like to lights."[362] In his commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* our mystic denounces the desires of a householder in order to direct the aspirant to a state that is self-sufficient, in that there is nothing outside of that individual that would cause longing and *karmic* accumulation.

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[361] Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 235.
[362] Ibid., 239.

CHAPTER FOUR

IBN ARABI

For our purposes it is particularly important that a historical investigation of Ibn Arabi precede a philosophical examination of his works.[363] The reason for this is twofold: firstly, an understanding of Ibn Arabi within the context of his predecessors and intellectual environment will better enable us to understand the various components within his system of thought. Secondly, a historical understanding of Ibn Arabi is important to the spiritual transmissions (*silsila*) that he claimed to inherit.[364] And, as we will later see, Ibn Arabi places himself within a specific spiritual heritage that proves quintessential to understanding his larger system of thought.[365] We need not go to the contextualist extremes of Katz, yet it is of the utmost importance that Ibn Arabi is understood as a link within a greater chain of spiritual transmission.[366] Our historical inquiry will not extend beyond a terse treatment of his familial background, education, travels, and intellectual environment. As a result of this historical approach we will see distinctive phases of Ibn Arabi's life that relate to his spiritual status (or stated differently, the waystations that he came to inhabit).[367] The thoughts and experiences related by Ibn Arabi are of primary importance to us, and under no circumstances should

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[363] Please note that my usage of philosophy in relation to Ibn Arabi and other mystical thinkers does not denote the narrow post-Enlightenment usage of philosophy that has come to dominate academia. Rather, my usage of the term philosophy relates to conceptual systems that can, yet need not, incorporate theological suppositions.
[364] William C. Chittick, *Ibn Arabi: Heir to the Prophets* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007), 16.
[365] Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur,* trans. Peter Kingsley (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 39.
[366] Katz, "Mysticism and the Interpretation of Sacred Scripture," in *Mysticism and Sacred Scripture,* 22.
[367] Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur,* 43.

a theoretical examination of Ibn Arabi subject his thought to mere historical contextualisation. Underhill is amply correct to state that mysticism "… shows itself not merely as an attitude of mind and heart, but as a form of organic life. It is not only a theory of the intellect or a hunger, however passionate, of the heart, it involves the organizing of the whole self, conscious and unconscious, under the spur of a hunger…"[368] It is for this reason that we must simultaneously meet our obligation to historical facts while not letting these assertions undercut Ibn Arabi's theoretical propositions.

Ibn Arabi was born into a noble Arab family in Islamic Spain in 1165 C.E. Hirtenstein posits that Ibn Arabi's father was a high-ranking military officer who had access to Andalusian courts and nobility.[369] However, Claude Addas is not prepared to make such a specific assertion, instead claiming that Ibn Arabi's father was some type of high-ranking dignitary in Ibn Mardanish's government and held a similar position in the following Almohad government under Abu Ya'qub Yasuf.[370] Onomatology suggests that Ibn Arabi's paternal relatives emigrated from Yemen to the Iberian Peninsula shortly after the Muslim invasion.[371] This assertion cannot be completely validated, yet in his writings Ibn Arabi frequently celebrates his Arab lineage.[372] Ibn Arabi's mother is understood to have descended from Berber nobility and to have been well educated.[373] Ibn Arabi's "…writings seem to not contain even the slightest allusion which would help

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[368] Underhill, *Mysticism,* 66.
[369] Stephen Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier* (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 1999), 33.
[370] Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur,* 18.
[371] Ibid., 17
[372] Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier,* 33.
[373] Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur,* 24.

us to form at least an approximately accurate picture of her personality. However, she is mentioned twice in the *Ruh al-quds*. From the first passage it emerges that Ibn Arabi was an obedient son who was extremely respectful towards his mother… From the second passage we learn that his mother died shortly after his father."[374] The death of both parents left a young Ibn Arabi responsible for both his unwed sisters. This proved to be a problematic scenario for the young mystic, who had already renounced many mundane concerns in his quest for spiritual development.[375] A myriad of family members pleaded with Ibn Arabi to take his worldly responsibilities more seriously and care for his sisters, yet he remained dedicated to his spiritual vocation. The mystic relates that he was preemptively warned by his teacher, Salih al-'Adawi, that mundane concerns would challenge his spiritual dedication.[376] Ibn Arabi did, however, move his family to Fez where his sisters were quickly married, allowing Ibn Arabi to dedicate himself to spiritual goals.[377] In addition to his immediate family, Ibn Arabi had a multitude of paternal and maternal uncles who are described as being pious and faithful Muslims.[378] Ibn Arabi even relates multiple stories of his uncle's religious awakening and subsequent devotion.[379] From this we are able to assert that Ibn Arabi, previous to his first revelation, was no stranger to esoteric matters or religious devotion.

As a youth Ibn Arabi did not receive any extraordinary teachings nor did any famed Sufi masters instruct him. Chittick relates that a majority of Ibn Arabi's childhood

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[374] Ibid., 24.
[375] Ibid., 123.
[376] Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier,* 110.
[377] Ibid., 110.
[378] Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur,* 31.
[379] Ibid., 31.

was spent in the innocent gaiety that is afforded to the wealthy and privileged.[380] Unlike his poorer Muslim neighbors, Ibn Arabi did not attend a Quranic school; instead, he was privately tutored in Quranic matters (as was the norm for wealthy families at the time).[381] It initially appears that Ibn Arabi was being groomed to follow in the steps of his father and enter into a life at court.[382] Furthermore, recent scholarship has shown that Ibn Arabi underwent military training and was briefly employed as a scribe.[383] There is little known about the formal education he received prior to his first revelatory experience. However, an education in 12th century Spain should not be scoffed at, for Moorish Spain was very much a cultural and intellectual icon of its time.

This period witnessed an Islamic renaissance of sorts, consisting of revivals in philosophy, science, architecture, and literature, which accompanied intensive studies in the traditional Islamic sciences. It was during this period that the famed Ibn Rushd (Averroes) reintroduced the works of Aristotle to Europe and composed many lengthy commentaries on these philosophical treatises.[384] Ibn Rushd is present in the intellectual development of young Ibn Arabi. This influence did not come in the form of instruction, rather, Ibn Rushd provided the opportunity for the youth to demonstrate his inherent understanding of spiritual truths. The only physical meeting between the two occurred

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[380] Chittick, *Ibn Arabi: Heir to the Prophets,* 5.
[381] Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur,* 29.
[382] Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier,* 40.
[383] Chittick, *Ibn Arabi: Heir to the Prophets,* 4.
[384] Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier,* 57.

around 1179 CE; Ibn Rushd asked for the boy to be sent to his house so that he could take stock of the boy's insights.[385] Ibn Arabi writes of the encounter:

> "One day I went to Cordoba to visit the qadi Abu al-Walid Ibn Rushd. He wanted to meet me personally because of what he had been told concerning what God revealed in my retreat, for he showed great astonishment at what he had heard. So my father, who was one of his friends, sent me to him on the pretext of doing some errand or other, but really in order for him to meet me. At the time I was still a boy, without any hair on my face. When I entered, he rose from his place, greeting me with great warmth and honor. He embraced me and said: "Yes!", to which I replied; "Yes!" He was even more pleased with me because I had understood him. Then I became aware of what had given him pleasure and said to him: "No!" At this consternation gripped him, the color went out of his cheeks and he seemed to doubt his own thought. He asked me: "What kind of solution have you found through divine unveiling and illumination? Is it identical with what we have reached through speculative thought?" I replied 'Yes-No! Between the Yes and the No, spirits take wings from their matter, and necks are separated from their bodies." Ibn Rushd turned pale, started to tremble and murmured the phrase: 'There is no power or strength save in God.' For he knew what I had alluded to."[386]

The role of revelation and spiritual "tasting" is essential to Ibn Arabi and to understanding his denunciation of rational logic. The previous quote demonstrates a form of knowledge that Ibn Arabi explains as being superior to any form of rational knowledge.[387] In the *Fusus* Ibn Arabi reflects on the division between rational knowledge and unveiling that is demonstrated in his meeting with Ibn Rushd: "The way of gaining knowledge is divided between reflection (*fikr*) and bestowal (*wahb*), which is the divine effusion (*fayd*). The latter is the way of our companions…"[388] From the outset

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[385] Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur,* 34.
[386] Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier,* 57.
[387] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 163.
[388] Ibid., 168.

of Ibn Arabi's intellectual journey there is an emphasis placed on revelation and unveiling over rational knowledge and this principle serves as a longstanding pillar in the Shaykh's intellectual system.

How exactly did Ibn Arabi arrive at such a definitive theory regarding knowledge? Furthermore, how did the young Andalusian come to such a complex metaphysical stance with no formal training? The answer to these questions can be found in a tomb outside of Seville, or so relates the haphazard descriptions that Ibn Arabi gives of his initial illumination.[389] Addas echoes this sentiment when she claims Ibn Arabi was purposely silent on matters relating to his realization.[390] What we can gather from Ibn Arabi is that around the age of eighteen he attended a dinner party with friends; upon accepting a goblet of wine Ibn Arabi claims to have heard a voice telling him that such frivolities were not what he was made for.[391] Upon hearing this "…he threw down the goblet and left in a daze… He decided to stay in the cemetery: in the middle of it he discovered a tomb in ruins, which had turned into a cave. He entered it and started practicing the invocations (*dhikr*), only coming out at the hours of prayer."[392] It is during this retreat that Ibn Arabi had a vision of Jesus, Moses, and Muhammad; this vision would reveal to Ibn Arabi the secrets and esoteric truths that he would later impart in his writings.[393] What makes this episode particularly interesting is that young Ibn Arabi was granted immediate illumination (*fath*) that tradition holds can only be achieved through

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[389] Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier,* 51.
[390] Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur,* 36.
[391] Ibid., 36.
[392] Ibid., 36.
[393] Ibid., 53.

divine intervention.[394] The importance of his instantaneous realization is fully supported by Ibn Arabi's subsequent treatises that promote *fath* as being the most dependable form of knowledge; "Sound knowledge is not given by reflection, nor by what the rational thinkers establish by means of their reflective powers. Sound knowledge is only that which God throws into the heart of the knower."[395]

Addas understands Ibn Arabi's vision of Moses, Muhammad, and most importantly of Jesus, as being representative of the mystic's first three teachers; furthermore, it is Jesus who Ibn Arabi considers his first Shaykh.[396] Hirtenstein similarly claims Jesus as Ibn Arabi's first teacher, and as a figure who holds a salient position throughout Ibn Arabi's corpus.[397] Jesus is later credited as transferring special knowledge to Ibn Arabi: "For example, he [Ibn Arabi] declares that thanks to the spiritual influx (*rujaniyya*) of Jesus he obtained at the start of his wayfaring the station of the famous Qadib al-Ban, who through his 'imaginal strength' (*quwwat al-khayal*) had the power to assume any form he desired."[398] This special relationship is understood as not challenging the role of Muhammad, whose final revelation permitted Ibn Arabi to actualize his spiritual destiny as the Muhammadan Seal (according to Addas).[399] Rather,

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[394] Ibid., 38.
[395] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 170.
[396] Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur,* 39.
[397] Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier,* 54.
[398] Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur,* 47.
[399] Ibid., 79.

Ibn Arabi and Jesus are believed to be linked through their both being Seals[400] -- Ibn Arabi being the Muhammadan Seal and Jesus being The Universal Seal of Sainthood.[401]

One last figure should be mentioned in Ibn Arabi's spiritual development and that is the mythical figure Khidr. Khidr is featured in numerous Islamic myths that have the immortal sage imparting valuable information to prophets and saints.[402] The Quranic telling of the Khidr story involves his travels with the prophet Moses; during this voyage Khidr is claimed to have performed a multitude of puzzling acts that brought Moses to repeatedly question Khidr.[403] In explaining the reasoning behind his actions, Khidr revealed that God had instructed him to perform the actions and that each act had a specific purpose, despite Moses' initial interpretation.[404] Sufis have interpreted this encounter as pertaining to esoteric meaning that runs contrary to appearance.[405] However, Khidr's involvement with Ibn Arabi, according to the Shaykh's biographical accounts (despite Khidr's mythical nature), is far less enigmatic and much more direct.[406] The first meeting between the two took place in Seville after Ibn Arabi's first revelatory experience.[407] Khidr's appearance occurred when Ibn Arabi questioned his master's (Abu l-'Abbas al-'Uryabi) interpretation of a prophetic utterance. Khidr apparently approached Ibn Arabi after this disagreement had occurred, reprimanding the young

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[400] This project will engage in a detailed examination of Prophetic Seals and Saintly Seals later in this paper.
[401] Ibid., 78-79.
[402] Ibid., 62.
[403] Laleh Bakhtiar, trans., *The Sublime Quran* (Chicago: Islamicworld, 2007), 346 (18:65).
[404]Ibid., 348 (18:83)
[405] Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur,* 67.
[406] By this I mean that some of the tensions witnessed in Ibn Arabi's relationship with other spiritual masters is not present in his encounters with Khidr.
[407] Ibid., 62.

mystic for his lack of proper courtesy (*adab*).[408] Despite the fact that Ibn Arabi had been correct in his rebuttal, Khidr declared that it is not the role of the disciple to question the master.[409] The second encounter reportedly occurred off the cost of Tunis. Ibn Arabi testified that Khidr walked to his boat without even getting the soles of his feet wet, and upon reaching the boat Khidr spoke a language that none could understand save Ibn Arabi.[410] The third meeting with the mythic master occurred while Ibn Arabi was traveling with a person who denied the existence of miracles.[411] Upon stopping for midday prayers, Khidr and a group of ascetics approached Ibn Arabi and his companion. "At the end of the prayer… I stood talking with him at the door to the mosque, when the man who I said was Khidr took a prayer-rug from the *mihrab* of the mosque, stretched it out in the air seven cubits above the ground and got onto it to perform the supererogatory prayers."[412] Khidr later explained to Ibn Arabi that he had performed this act for the sake of his disbelieving friend.[413] Hirtenstein interprets these three encounters as being hierarchical in nature, and as possessing a special degree of knowledge that relates back to God.[414] For our purposes we need not elicit the esoteric meaning of Khidr's actions; rather, it is important for us to note the continued presence of Khidr in Ibn Arabi's autobiographical accounts. Khidr's repeated interventions within Ibn Arabi's life can be used as an indicator of the mystic's self-proclaimed spiritual importance and the

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[408] Ibid., 62.
[409] Ibid., 62.
[410] Ibid., 116.
[411] Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier,* 90.
[412] Ibid., 90.
[413] Ibid., 90.
[414] Ibid., 91.

Shaykh's assertions regarding his realization of the Muhammadan inheritance (*wiratha*).[415]

It should be noted that Ibn Arabi did not follow one particular master, nor did he belong to a specific Sufi order.[416] This was not particularly unusual for Western Sufism at the time.[417] Addas claims that "Suhba, 'spiritual companionship', was still an informal practice and had not yet acquired the characteristics of a structured and more or less regulated institution that it began to assume at the close of the twelfth century -- in the East, where an organized and therefore more rigid system came into being which would soon be given the name *tariqa*."[418] Therefore, much of Ibn Arabi's spiritual development and the direction of his progress rested solely on his shoulders, for he did not have one particular master to walk him through the waystations he would later achieve. It can also be stated that the initial revelation Ibn Arabi received outside of Seville indicates an early level of spiritual development/insight that surpassed many of the masters he would later visit.[419] In congruence with Ibn Arabi's spiritual autonomy, our Shaykh often refers to Khidr as being master of the masterless and claims the appearance of Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad during his first vision as his spiritual masters revealing themselves.[420] Morris, in *The Reflective Heart,* comes to a similar conclusion regarding Khidr and Ibn

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[415] Ibn Arabi and the Muhammadan inheritance will be discussed later in the paper.
[416] Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur,* 68.
[417] Esoteric practices that have generally fallen under the term 'Sufism' did not evolve in an equal manner throughout Islam. *Sufism: A Short Introduction* by William Chittick provides a sufficient discussion of how certain esoteric practices evolved and then came to be known as Sufism. This includes a discussion on how certain spiritual orders came into existence and the spiritual environments from which they emerged.
[418] Ibid., 68.
[419] Ibid., 97.
[420] Ibid., 62.

Arabi's spiritual wandering; it is during this "…period of nearly constant journeying, throughout the wider Maghrib, that gave rise to many of the significant spiritual encounters with memorable saintly personalities later recorded in the *Ruh al-Quds*".[421] The importance of Ibn Arabi's independence can be seen as a precursor to his later actualization of the Muhammadan Inheritance (in that Ibn Arabi would attain a spiritual station that none of his teachers possessed). It is therefore important that we keep Ibn Arabi's future achievements in mind when we are approaching his spiritual development.

A final biographical detail must be included before we can embark on our analysis of Ibn Arabi's mystical philosophy. As we have previously seen, Ibn Arabi was forced to balance his worldly responsibilities with his spiritual aspirations.[422] The death of both his father and mother required the young mystic to take his sisters into his care and find them suitable husbands, yet the solitary path of religious devotion remained dominant in his mind.[423] After relocating to Fez and the subsequent betrothal of his sisters, Ibn Arabi was quick to continue his spiritual wanderings; however, this does not appear to be the end of his worldly relationships.[424] Addas claims that "[v]arious references in the *Futuhat* indicate that he had at least two wives."[425] It is also known that Ibn Arabi fathered a child with his wife Fatima bint Yunus Amir al-Haramayn during his stay in Mecca (the date of his son's birth is believed to be around 1203).[426] These familial relationships are particularly important because they not only allow us a glimpse

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[421] James Winston Morris, *The Reflective Heart* (Louisville KY: Fons Vitae, 2005), 19.
[422] Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur,* 123.
[423] Ibid., 24.
[424] Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier,* 151.
[425] Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur,* 86.
[426] Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier,* 150.

into Ibn Arabi's private life, but such relationships also indicate that the Shaykh did not find it problematic to reconcile his spiritual aspirations with his husbandly obligations. By no means can Ibn Arabi be considered a mystic who withdrew himself from the mundane world in an attempt to attain realization; rather, the Shaykh immersed himself in his surrounding environment and took on the inherent responsibilities of a worldly life.[427] Ibn Arabi's relationship with his family runs contrary to Underhill's assertion that "[t]he unitive life, though so often lived in the world, is never of it. It belongs to another plane of being, moves securely upon levels unrelated to our speech; and hence eludes the measuring powers of humanity."[428] It is important that we see Ibn Arabi not as a naked ascetic that lived on the fringes of society; rather, he was an active participant that held his worldly responsibilities as non-contradictory. This paper will not embark on a discussion of non-dualism in respect to ascetic lifestyles, yet it is worthy to note that a non-dual worldview can accommodate a variety of lifestyles. It can be (yet need not be) argued that non-dualism allows the mystic to see his/herself as actively participating in the same mystical reality they desire to "taste"; or stated more directly, mystics may undertake worldly activity while still recognizing the non-dual environment in which they act. Ibn Arabi's family life should not be interpreted as his "stepping back" from mystical aspirations, the balancing of his spiritual responsibilities with his familial responsibilities appears to have posed little problem to the Shaykh, who viewed the prophets (most notably Muhammad) as worldly participants that fully embraced their surrounding environments.

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[427] Stephen Hirtenstein, "Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi: The Treasure of Compassion," accessed on January 2, 2011, http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/treasureofcompassion.html
[428] Underhill, *Mysticism,* 280.

The longing that lovers feel for each other did not pose a problem to Ibn Arabi. In a manner that is very characteristic of Ibn Arabi's interpretive style, the Shaykh claims that human beings love what corresponds to themselves and love what they see as God's reflection in other people and worldly things.[429] In the *Futuhat* the Shaykh declares that when a person loves another person, "…there is nothing in himself which does not find its corresponding part in his beloved. There remains nothing left over within him which would allow him to remain sober. His outward dimension is enraptured by his beloved's outward dimension, and his inward dimension by his inward dimension… Hence love of God and love of his similars absorbs man totally…"[430] Thus, in a roundabout manner, Ibn Arabi's familial love can be understood as being a particular manifestation of his love for the Divine. Ibn Arabi is far from the disimpassioned ascetic that rejects all relationships; rather, Ibn Arabi's mystical system incorporates emotion as a form of divine longing and celebration.[431]

Emphasis should be placed on the aspect of longing within Ibn Arabi's theory of love, for the Shaykh believed that love strives for what it does not possess.[432] Chittick further states that when the universe is viewed as being identical to God (as Ibn Arabi

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[429] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 285.
[430] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 286.
[431] I will not go into a detailed discussion of Ibn Arabi's theory of love at this time. Such a task would be too large for the current project and would direct us away from our current biographical project. For a further discussion of love in Islamic mysticism please see William Chittick, "The Divine Roots of Human Love," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society* 17 (1995) or Biyamin Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003). It also should be noted that love is a major factor in Ibn Arabi's explanation of God's self-revelation and the subsequent creative and destructive cycles.
[432] William Chittick, "The Divine Roots of Human Love," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society* 17 (1995): 57.

did), "…the object of human love can only be God. And since God in His Essence is forever nonmanifest, unknowable, and unattainable, the true object of love is always nonexistent in relation to human beings."[433] For our current biographical purposes we need not go into depth relating Ibn Arabi's theory on divine love and how it factors into his cosmology, yet it is important that we note Ibn Arabi's incorporation of "mundane love" into a longing that is directed towards God. From his metaphysical standpoint on love, it becomes apparent how Ibn Arabi did not feel his relationships drew him away from God; on the contrary, such emotions were viewed as a manifestation and longing that each human has for their Divine Origin.[434] Another spiritual interpretation of sensual love can be found in Ibn Arabi's *The Crown of Epistles and the Path to Intercessions*, where he describes his love affair with the Kaba.[435] In this account Ibn Arabi describes the Kaba as taking "…the form of a young girl such as I had never seen and of a beauty that cannot even be imagined. On the spur of the moment I improvised some verses which I addressed to it in order to calm its irritation towards me."[436] It may seem odd to view the Kaba as an object of sensuality but in the poetic style of Ibn Arabi, a style that is fraught with meaning, it aptly demonstrates a concerted focus on God as the object of all love.

The metaphysical and theological topics discussed in relation to Ibn Arabi cannot be considered as being completely representative of the Shaykh's system of

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[433] Ibid., 67.
[434] Ibn Arabi, *The Universal Tree and the Four Birds,* trans. Angela Jaffray (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 2006), 22.
[435] Denis Gril, "Love Letters to the Kaba" (paper presented at the 3rd Internal Congress of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society, Murcia, November 2-4, 1994).
[436] Ibid.

thought. Rather, this paper has selected a limited number of topics that will be discussed as being partially representative of Ibn Arabi's metaphysical system. These topics have been identified as being important to the Shaykh's larger system of thought, but I do not wish for these talking points to be contextually divorced from the topics that will not be discussed. Ibn Arabi's notion of God will be our first point of examination and will be demonstrated as residing at the apex of the Shaykh's metaphysical system. The non-dual Absolute will be shown as permeating throughout the Shaykh's philosophy and will serve as a continued point of reference in our subsequent discussions. The non-duality of the Absolute will lead to our discussion on the veils and how veiling acts as a sign of God's immanence and transcendence. Themes of immanence and transcendence are common in Ibn Arabi's writings and we would be remiss not to discuss the veils as facilitating this duality (and the underlying unity behind this apparent duality). Divine revelation and spiritual verification will follow our discussion of the veils. The importance Ibn Arabi assigns to revelation will be examined as demonstrating principles that the Shaykh believed inherent to the spiritual condition of humanity. Issues of spiritual realization and the human potential to arrive at these 'truths' will be of vital importance and will lend itself to a better understanding of Ibn Arabi's mystical thought. Related to spiritual potentiality is the topic of prophetic and saintly Seals (and the figures who hold these titles). The importance of these spiritual figures will reveal certain metaphysical mechanics that Ibn Arabi believed quintessential within the Islamic cycle of prophecy and to the attainment of realization. Lastly, the Shaykh's ideas on death and judgment will be explicated. Many of Ibn Arabi's prescriptive statements are in regards to death and the individual's preparedness for the subsequent judgment. Matters of spiritual

preparedness are vital to the Shaykh's eschatological system and a discussion on revelation and veiling will further situate spiritual preparedness within Ibn Arabi's worldview.

Ibn Arabi's Notion of God

The importance of God in Ibn Arabi's mystical system cannot be overstated nor can it be understood outside of its proper context; stated more precisely, God is the be all and end all of Ibn Arabi's metaphysical system.[437] Ibn Arabi does not have room for anything other than God and certainly does not grant any objective existence to "things" outside of God. It is for these reasons that our first discussion of Ibn Arabi must be anchored in the concepts that he identified as being fundamental. One such touchstone is the notion of *wujud* that permeates our mystic's writings. On a definitional level *wujud* can be understood as Being and in the context of Ibn Arabi it can be understood as God's essential unity with all of creation (for there is nothing outside of Being).[438] It is important that we understand Ibn Arabi's insistence that all existent beings and all their components subsist through God, and it is through this dependence that God is considered the essential Wujud.[439] In many instances created beings are said to exist within the Sea of Necessity, meaning that it is only through God's *wujud* that beings can come into existence.[440] Wujud can also be used to denote the Essence of God; in this

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[437] Islam is itself a God centered religion and Ibn Arabi does not stray from orthodoxy when placing God at the center of his system.
[438] William C. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 12.
[439] Ibid., 12.
[440] Ibn Arabi, "The Imprint of the Bezels of Wisdom," trans. William Chittick, *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society* 1 (1982): 35.

usage Wujud implies our inherent inability to truly understand how this Essence is manifested throughout the universe in its apparent plurality. Chittick states: "What do we know about *wujud* as *wujud*? First, we know nothing. Or rather, we know that *wujud* is indefinable and inaccessible, because we can know it only to the extent that we have it."[441] In a certain respect *wujud* can be approached as the underlying fabric of reality that supports all of creation; at no point can it be fully conceptualized nor can it be divided or compounded. Wujud is the basic structural makeup of God's creative manifestation. Furthermore, the disclosure of Wujud is never-ending and non-repeating, meaning that God's cosmic self-disclosure is an endless display of His unity, which is perpetually renewed at every instant.[442] The perpetual and non-repeating disclosure of Wujud points to God's omnipotence; moreover, the all-encompassing nature of *wujud* points to the singularity of God and the non-existence of anything considered to be other than God. Both these topics will be examined in detail below, but for now it is worth noting how Wujud/*wujud* can be used as a blanket term that signifies humanity, God, creation, and the potentiality of future creations.[443]

Another touchstone that we must regard is Ibn Arabi's theory on the Divine Names of God. Chittick makes some important distinctions in regards to Ibn Arabi's theory of the divine names; firstly, the Names are considered different than the words used to describe them.[444] Just as our notion of God does not encompass the Essence of God, the usage of the name Power does not embody the totality of God's Power.

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[441] William C. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 20.
[442] Chittick, *Ibn Arabi: Heir to the Prophets,* 38.
[443] William C. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds,* 15.
[444] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 34.

Secondly, the names are not independent entities that stand outside of God; Chittick stresses that the names should be considered as relationships and not as existent entities.[445] This point has created quite a bit of confusion, for Ibn Arabi has authored texts where the Names are anthropomorphized and hold a dialogue amongst themselves.[446] These conversations can be found in *The Book of the Fabulous Gryphon, The Composition of the Columns and Circles,* and chapter 4 and 66 of the *Futuhat al-makkiyah*.[447] However, as we will later see, these anthropomorphic characterizations are ultimately subjected to Ibn Arabi's idea of non-dualism.[448] We can therefore credit these anthropomorphic conversations to a provisional literary technique and not a concrete statement regarding the Names. Thirdly, each Name performs a twofold function by pointing to the Essence and then to the particular relationship that the Name comes to specify in manifest existence.[449] Fourthly, what a Name comes to represent is its root or reality; to be more specific, the microcosmic representation that a Name displays is rooted within the larger essence of that power (the transcendent aspect of the Name).[450] Lastly, the essence of a particular Name determines how the name relates and functions within manifest existence.[451] Ibn Arabi relates that the relationship between Name and Essence is like that between a sign and what is signified.[452] In a certain respect we can consider Ibn Arabi's theory on the Divine Names as forcing a duality onto our

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[445] Ibid., 34.
[446] Gerald Elmore, "Four Texts of Ibn al-Arabi on the Creative Self-Manifestation of the Divine Names," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn'Arabi Soceity* 29 (2001): 1.
[447] Ibid., 1.
[448] Ibid., 1.
[449] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 34.
[450] Ibid., 34.
[451] Ibid., 34.
[452] Michel Chodkiewicz, "The Banner of Praise," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society* vol. 21 (1997): 15

understanding of the Names; on one hand the Name specifies a particular manifestation of God, while on the other, the Divine Names points back to their transcendent roots. Peter Young sums this divergence eloquently when he explains that "What enables a symbol to be a symbol -- to stand for something else -- is the fact that it is essentially identical to that which it stands. That is the ground. But the difference lies in the plane of manifestation, the form resulting from the place. So here we have the essential unity and the empirical diversity."[453] The Divine Names cannot be treated as if they were definite representations; the Names are signs that are meant to turn the viewer towards their Source.[454]

Ibn Arabi furthers his theory of Divine Names by hierarchically ranking the names in accordance to the reality or level to which they point.[455] This theory of levels does not pertain to the Essence and does not introduce any form of division whatsoever; rather, it is the nonexistent aspects in creation that superficially manipulate the hierarchy of Names.[456] "The Speaker reveals himself through the attributes of creation as Merciful, Alive, Knowing, Powerful, Speaking, and so on down the list of the most beautiful names that he pronounces in the Qur'an."[457] Manifestation is sustained through Being (God) and it is through the diversity of Names that each existent thing takes on its particular characteristics.[458] The Names of God are reflected throughout the universe and it is

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[453] Peter Young, "Ibn Arabi," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society* vol. 1 (1982): 6.
[454] Ibn Arabi, "The Imprint of the Bezels of Wisdom," trans. William Chittick, *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society* 1 (1982): 43.
[455] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 47.
[456] Ibid., 48.
[457] Chittick, *Ibn Arabi: Heir to the Prophets,* 61.
[458] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 76.

manifestation that reflects these individual Names back onto God (for God is the origin of the Names and the source for all 'loaned' existence).[459] Certain Names that get reflected back onto God are more representative of his totality when compared to other Names, and it is through this provisional order that the universe and man comes to display the hierarchy of God's Names. The term provisional is important because the hierarchy of Names does not possess its own continued existence and will eventually be folded back into the indivisible Essence. The transience of manifestation witnessed throughout the universe, and most notably in human beings, can be partially credited to a change in the reflected names; "Things increase or diminish, but their immutable entities do not, by definition, undergo any change."[460] This does not mean that every existent thing can choose what Name it will reflect; rather, Ibn Arabi credits humans as the only beings that are able to reflect all the Names.[461] In the *Fusus* Ibn Arabi declares that this hierarchy of reflected Names is a necessity for, "If there were no ranking in degrees in the cosmos, some of the levels would remain inoperative (mu'attal) and uninhabited. But there is nothing in existence inoperative; on the contrary, all of it is fully inhabited. Every level must have inhabitants whose properties will be in keeping with the level. Hence He made some parts of the cosmos more excellent than others."[462] We can therefore see that something base does not have the potential to display the vast array of Names, unlike human beings that have inherited this ability from their primordial ancestor, Adam.

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[459] Ibid., 77.
[460] Jakko Hameen-Anttila, "The Immutable Entities and Time," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society* 39 (2006): 19.
[461] Kazemi, *Paths to Transcendence,* 77.
[462] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick, 51.

Humans, Ibn Arabi claims, have an inherent ability to reflect the Names back onto God (and with the achievement of their theomorphic potential, these people gain the ability to reflect all the Names back onto God), yet it is impossible for the Essence of God to be comprehended or compacted so that it could be represented in its totality.[463] The summation of all Levels and the Essence can only be referenced through the name Allah, which is the most comprehensive of all the Names. Ibn Arabi credits the name Allah with certain transcendental qualities that extend beyond the bounds of its linguistic shell: "You say 'Allah.' This name brings together the realities of all the divine names, so it is impossible for it to be said in a nondelimited sense ('*ala'l-itlaq*)."[464] We should note the independence that Allah has in comparison to the other names, for no name is as comprehensive nor can any name, save Allah, be used as a capstone designation for the Essence and the Levels. Ibn Arabi claims the supremacy of Allah derives from our ability to understand the Name, yet the inability of the Name to "step down" and become manifest. "So the Level of the name Allah is known, but it is impossible for its property to become manifest within the cosmos, because of the contrariety (*taqabbul*) it contains."[465] Chittick claims *al-ism al-jami* is an adjective for Allah, in that the term is understood as representing a unitive principle.[466] We should also note that the term *jami* can be used in accordance to the perfect human's ability to unite all names. However, on

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[463] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 66.
[464] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick, 66.
[465] Ibid., 66.
[466] Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God,* 170.

the divine level the use of *jami* harkens to Allah's combination of the Names and the Essence.[467]

Ibn Arabi, in explicating his mystical philosophy, often makes provisional distinctions that can be used on particular levels of analysis, but many of these distinctions are later rendered inappropriate or misleading when used within a different level of analysis.[468] The previous examination of the Divine Names offers us a useful example of how an attribute can be used in situation X, yet the same attribute would hold no existence in comparison to the all-encompassing Essence.[469] Such distinctions continue in Ibn Arabi's understanding of the Divinity and the Essence. Chittick renders this relationship as such: "The Divine Essence is God in Himself, without reference to the relationships which may be established between God and the creatures. In contrast, the Divinity is the Essence considered in relation to created things."[470] The Divinity is the active principle in the name Allah and can be considered the Lord overseeing creation. It is made clear that the Divinity can be reached through rationality and it is the Divinity that makes demands onto existent beings (such as the prohibitions laid out in the Quran).[471] Furthermore, the Divinity can be considered the requisite principle that creation rests upon: "Since the cosmos has no subsistence except through God, and since the attribute of Divinity has no subsistence except through the cosmos, each of the two is the provision (*riqz*) of the other; each takes nourishment (*taghadhdhi*) from the other so

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[467] Ibid., 171.
[468] Angela Jaffray, "Watered with One Water: Ibn Atabi on the One and the Many," *The Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society* vol. 43 (2008): 64.
[469] Omar Benaissa, "The Degrees of the Station of No-Station: Regarding the End of the Journey," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Soceity* 37 (2005): 79.
[470] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 59.
[471] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick, 61.

that its existence may subsist."[472] The Divinity cannot be considered absolutely free/unbound (as the Essence is) because the Divinity relies on the relationship between created and creator. The Divinity depends on the manifest universe to fulfill its position as the Divinity, and as such, the Divinity requires a relationship for its status to remain intact. In Ibn Arabi's theory of causality we see that cause and effect demand each other; therefore, any reliance on manifestation, which is a partially unreal effect, cannot be ascribed to something that is absolutely free (the Essence).[473] We can find Ibn Arabi walking this fine line in the *Fusus* where he states that "…the Real's creation cannot be assigned a cause, this is what is correct in itself, so much so that in Him nothing can be rationally conceived of that would require the causation of this creation of His that becomes manifest. On the contrary, His creation of creatures is a gratuitous favor toward the creatures and a beginning of bounty, and He is independent of the worlds."[474] There is a definite tension in the previous quotation between the need to base the phenomenal world on a cause/effect relationship, yet we also witness a simultaneous distancing that is meant to protect the Essence from inappropriate conditions.[475] This is a particularly important distinction because much of Ibn Arabi's theoretical approach draws from the distinctive levels of Divinity and Essence; however, the distinction between the Divinity and the Essence is another set of provisional distinctions that cannot be left to stand on its own. Thus, Ibn Arabi forces us to simultaneously confirm and negate the duality in creation and even in God; for, "It is vital to preserve the 'vision with two eyes' or the

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[472] Ibid., 61.
[473] Ibn Arabi, *The Self-Disclosure of God,* trans. William Chittck (Albany: State University of New York, 1998), 17.
[474] Ibid., 18-19.
[475] Ibid., 19.

taste with many tongues. Unified vision, yes. Single origin of water, yes. But we must also revel in and give thanks for the sights, sounds, and tastes of God's infinite manifestation in forms."[476] Indeed, Ibn Arabi places his readers in a precarious spot between confirmation and denial, multiplicity and non-duality, yet it is in this state of bewilderment that Ibn Arabi feels the mystic is best suited.

The Veils

Our discussion of the veils could have been inserted into numerous places throughout this paper. The reason for this pertains to Ibn Arabi's usage of the veils as being both personal and cosmological in nature; stated differently, the veils possess immanent (*tashbih*) and transcendent aspects (*tanzih*). Furthermore, the veils hold a precarious position as being both real and unreal at the same time. Chittick is adamant that Ibn Arabi considered the veils as the manifestation of God, which grants the veils an aspect of reality.[477] Unfortunately, the unrealized individual does not understand this immanent disclosure and makes wrongful judgments in ignorance.[478] We can therefore understand a certain duality when Ibn Arabi contests that "…There is no veil and no curtain, nothing hides Him save His manifestation."[479] It is only through the use of veils and occasions (another term used by Ibn Arabi to describe veils) that God, in his manifest form, is able to come forth from the indistinguishable Essence.[480] It follows that the veils facilitate existence and therefore cannot be completely escaped, this permanence within

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[476] Jaffray, "Watered with One Water: Ibn Atabi on the One and the Many," 70.
[477] Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God,* 105.
[478] Ibid., 104.
[479] Ibn Arabi, *The Self-Disclosure of God,* trans. William Chittck, 104.
[480] Osman Yahya, "Theophanies and Lights in the Thought of Ibn Arabi," *The Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society* vol. 10 (1991): 36.

manifestation makes the veils real; however, the veils can be misunderstood and credited to something other than God; it is through this mistake that the veils introduce unreality into our worldview.[481] "Since His Entity is identical with the curtain, nothing veils us save the fact that we make what we see a curtain, so our aspiration attaches itself to what is behind the curtain, that is, the curtained."[482] The veils possess a degree of immanence (*tashbih*) because they are partially composed of God's direct manifestation, yet this immanence is also laden with signs of transcendence (*tanzih*). Transcendence, indicated through the veils, is in respect to the fact that the veils point to the transcendental Essence that is beyond the immediate representation and humanly comprehension.[483]

Ibn Arabi furthers his idea on veiling by positing that we, as human beings, are veils onto ourselves.[484] The veiling that occurs through human individuality is credited to our mortal nature, which has subjectivity at its base. Ibn Arabi believed that individuality also possess the immanent and transcendent marks of God that accompany all veils;

> "So He Has made you identical with His curtain over you. If not for this curtain, you would not seek increase in knowledge of Him. You are spoken to and addressed from behind the curtain of the form from which He speaks to you. Consider your mortal humanity. You will find it is identical with your curtain from behind which He speaks to you. For He says, *It belongs not to any mortal that God should speak to him, except by revelation, or from behind a veil* [42:51]. Hence, He may speak to you from you, since you veil yourself from you, and you are His curtain over you."[485]

Our Shaykh posited that it is the inability to recognize God's essential Wujud, including this unity with one's own self, which leads to the creation of dualistic worldviews.

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[481] Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God,*106.
[482] Ibid.,107.
[483] Ibid., 104.
[484] Ibid., 109.
[485] Ibn Arabi, *The Self-Disclosure of God,* trans. William Chittck, 109.

However, human beings have an inherent knowledge (or a longing for) that leads them to seek the transcendental source behind their theomorphic manifestation (we should note that humans are still claimed to be theomorphic entities before the realization of this status occurs).[486] An end to this longing is not reached through the rational faculties, just as veils cannot be understood through the employment of logic; rather, the imaginal ability inherent within each person is able to access the *barzakh*[487] between the immanent veils and the transcendental source to which the veils point.[488] Mirroring this transcendent/immanent *barzakh* is Ibn Arabi's concept of the veils, which possesses degrees of unreality and Ultimate Reality.[489]

Ibn Arabi considered the Quran and all previous revelations as being veils. Revelations that indicate certain aspects of God, such as the Names, are believed to contain God in a form that is intelligible to human beings.[490] Chittick claims that Ibn Arabi's idea of revelation pertains to a "…specific form of divine self-disclosure in which God addresses certain creatures from behind a veil with a message directed toward their specific situation."[491] Our understanding of Ibn Arabi would be greatly remiss if we failed to recognize that the Shaykh understood revelation to be a *barzakh* itself. The

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[486] Ibid., 109.
[487] Barzakh can best be understood as an isthmus between two distinct modes of being (or un-being in the case of anything other than God). For a good discussion on Ibn Arabi's understanding of the Barzakh please see James W. Morris, "Divine Imagination and the Intermediate World: Ibn Arabi on the Barzakh," *Postdata* vol. 15. No. 2 (1995): 42-49.
[488] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick, 231.
[489] James W. Morris, "Divine Imagination and the Intermediate World: Ibn Arabi on the Barzakh," *Postdata* vol. 15. no. 2 (1995): 46.
[490] This principle can be applied to more philosophical issues such as the limitation of human language or the limitations within human cognitive abilities. Therefore, we can say that revelation required God's message to be restricted to a form that would be coherent.
[491] Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God,* 110.

revelations received by Muhammad contain specific Names, attributes, and demands but these statements also point to the Essence beyond these categories.[492] In a certain manner revelation has an immanent (*tashbih*) aspect that pertains to specific qualities or demands, yet the gnostic is not satisfied with this level of devotion. Ibn Arabi's mystical system rests heavily upon experience that goes beyond the rules and regulations stipulated in the Quran; therefore, Ibn Arabi's interpretation of the Quran also points to the transcendental aspects of God that lies beyond exoteric submission (*islam*).[493] Through the process of spiritual development (or direct revelation in rare instances) the gnostic is able to experience the esoteric reality that the Quran alludes to. To achieve this form of realization, according to Ibn Arabi, one must "…transcend the limitations of all modes of knowing save the one mode that recognizes the relative validity of each mode while not being bound or restricted by any. This is precisely 'the station of no station… It is achieved by 'the Muhammadans,' those who receive the inheritance of all prophetic wisdom from Muhammad."[494] Furthermore, revelation can act as a negative influence if it is inappropriately followed or employed in a manner that wasn't the original intent (as witnessed in the need for the cycle of prophecy). In commenting on the difference between faith and reason, within Quranic interpretation, Ibn Arabi claims that "Reason possesses a light through which it perceives specific affairs, while faith possesses a light through which it perceives everything…"[495] It is possible to apply reason to revelation, yet the most appropriate method is the balancing of faith and reason, just as the veil must

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[492] Ibn Arabi, *The Self-Disclosure of God,* trans. William Chittick, 112.
[493] Maurice Gloton, "The Quranic Inspiration of Ibn Arabi's Vocabulary of Love-Etymological Links and Doctrinal Development," *The Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society* vol. 27 (2000): 50.
[494] Chittick, *Ibn Arabi: Heir to the Prophets,* 78.
[495] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick, 196.

be understood as being simultaneously immanent and transcendent, or stated differently, revelation possess a dual nature of immanent decrees (the dos and don'ts) and transcendental signs (aspects that encourage personal experience).

There is an obvious duality that Ibn Arabi recognizes within the veils and signs; this requires the gnostic to employ a spiritual method that is able to discern these divergent principles.[496] Being in possession of two eyes is an important, and oft-used, allusion that Ibn Arabi employs to describe the gnostics that are able to realize the immanence and transcendence of God.[497] The Shaykh makes this abundantly clear when he asserts that "The eye which looks in the direction of the nonmanifest declares God's incomparability and places all emphasis upon His Unity…The eye which looks in the direction of manifest acknowledges the reality of manyness and declares His similarity, since it sees all things as God's self-disclosures."[498] This divergent approach is clearly evident in Ibn Arabi's method and it is very appropriate that he eventually 'switches' the roles assigned to the immanent and the transcendent; more specifically, Ibn Arabi claims that we must recognize the veil as the face of God and the face of God as a veil.[499] This reversal keeps the gnostic in an awkward state of bewilderment that does not permit static understanding. Furthermore, Ibn Arabi's bewilderment is an ideal state of recognition when dealing within a metaphysical system that is based on God's perpetual, non-repeating, self-disclosure.[500] Ibn Arabi makes it evident that the true gnostic sees "…God as he discloses Himself within the limits of the created things. Inasmuch as they know

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[496] This duality should be considered provisional and impermanent.
[497] Ibid., 362.
[498] Ibid., 361.
[499] Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God,* 123.
[500] Ibn Arabi, "The Imprint of the Bezels of Wisdom," trans. William Chittick, *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society* vol. 1 (1982): 90.

the self disclosure for what it is, the limits serve to increase them in the bewilderment that is one of the highest stages of knowledge."[501] It is also important that we recognize God as the constant behind each veil and form; at no point does the multitude of veils or the myriad of forms challenge God's Wujud.

There are an infinite number of veils and the mystic cannot expect to penetrate all veils; furthermore, the state of bewilderment cannot be completely transcended by the mystic.[502] Chittick aptly states this problem when he claims "Veils are inescapable, yet people need to recognize the face of God within them and beyond them. The test of their humanity is tied to knowledge discernment, recognizing things for what they are, giving things their *haqqs,* and putting things in their proper places."[503] Ibn Arabi was extremely dedicated to a mystical system that was based on personal experience, yet the achievement of gnostic tasting should not be confused with the attainment of a permanent state.[504] Because the veils are infinite, one cannot expect to achieve a static form of knowledge that will carry into the future.[505] The limitlessness of God's self-expression does not allow for stability in one's mystical experiences; rather, each gnostic is granted moments of illumination and then is forced back into the tensions of bewilderment. Ibn Arabi warns of this when he states "Beware of becoming delimited by specific knotting and disbelieving in everything else, lest great good escape you. Or rather, knowledge of the situation as it actually is in itself will escape you. Be in yourself a veil for the forms

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[501] Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God,* 83.
[502] Ibid., 106.
[503] Ibid., 106.
[504] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick, 349.
[505] Osman Yahia, "Theophanies and Lights in the Thought of Ibn Arabi," *The Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society* vol. 10 (1991): 40.

of all beliefs…"[506] To achieve what Adam, the first gnostic, was endowed with one must have a metaphysical/spiritual plasticity that can transform with God's infinite self-expression. It can be argued that the achievement of pure reflection on the part of the individual is a permanent state, but attention should also be paid to the fact that this reflective ability entails a flexibility that allows for continued reflection. In *Imaginal Worlds*, Chittick describes this position as such: "The human task is to embody the divine attributes in a manner that does not allow any of them to play too great or too small a role. Actualizing the divine form in oneself results in nearness to God, whereas failing to keep the proper equilibrium among the names leads to imbalance, or a distorted divine form, and the result is distance from God."[507]

Revelation and Verification

The role of revelation is immensely important in Ibn Arabi's mystical philosophy. As previously noted, the Essence is beyond any form of conceptualization nor can it be reached through rational thought alone. But Ibn Arabi becomes even more insistent on the need for revelation when he claims that all forms of knowledge eventually lead back to God and we, as humans, depend on God's self-expression to achieve any form of knowledge whatsoever.[508] This principle can be found in Ibn Arabi's discussion on human beings as microcosms of God's cosmic revelation; "God never ceases creating within us ad infinitum, so the knowledges extend ad infinitum. By 'knowledge' the Tribe means only that which is connected to God through unveiling (*kashf*) or denotation

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[506] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick, 355.
[507] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds,* 43.
[508] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick, 153.

(*dalala*)."[509] Ibn Arabi does claim that rational thought can lead to the realization of a "transcendent God of necessity", meaning that one can use logical suppositions to realize the need for a divine orderer.[510] However, our Shaykh claims that this form of reasoning depends on logic and the arbitrary distinctions made within logical thought; because of this dependency the rational approach is "…lower than the first way [revelation], since he who bases his consideration upon proof can be visited by obfuscations which detract from his proof, and only with difficulty can he remove them."[511] Through this principle any form of knowledge can be considered a veil of sorts, an associated idea is that knowledge, in its immanent nature, denotes multiplicity and rejects unity.[512] Instead of realizing the inner-meaning of revelation, a person can become fixated on the outward form of revelation, or the outward form of any type of knowledge. This results in a superficial knowledge that does not extend beyond external appearances (or to use another veil metaphor, the external form of understanding only witnesses with one eye).[513] Without revelation stipulating the correct methods for the attainment of knowledge, and the true nature of that knowledge, the devotee is doomed to become mislead.[514]

In accumulating revelatory knowledge it is "… not enough to simply accept prophetic instructions and put it into practice. The full and integral inheritance demands receiving knowledge directly from God by way of 'bestowal and witnessing.' The

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[509] Ibid., 153.
[510] Ibid., 196.
[511] Ibid., 169.
[512] Chittick, *Ibn Arabi: Heir to the Prophets,* 74.
[513] Michel Chodkiewicz, "The Endless Voyage," *The Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society* vol. 19 (1996): 41.
[514] Ibid., 41.

messengers themselves, the paradigms of human perfection, received their knowledge precisely by this route."[515] The need for revelatory knowledge is obvious, but Ibn Arabi believes that true understanding of revelation can only come through verification (*tahqiq*).[516] What is required is a "knowing through the heart" (*qalb*), which is vastly different than the epistemological means employed by philosophers and theologians.[517] There is an inherent actualization within Ibn Arabi's idea of verification that demands the individual extend beyond rational thought and rational approaches to revelation; "Realization is true knowledge of the *haqq* that is demanded by the essence of each thing. The person gives it its full due in knowledge. If it happens that he also puts it into practice as a state, he is the one over whom the authority of realization prevails."[518] In the *Fusus* Ibn Arabi makes this clear when he asserts that it is only the spiritual knowers (*arif*) who comprehend the totality of God's revelation.[519] When describing the attainment of spiritual knowledge, Ibn Arabi follows Quranic precedence and looks to the heart as being the true seat of one's understanding and actions.[520] Furthermore, it is the heart that reflects the individual's spiritual status; overdependence on rational understanding will result in a heart that is unable to capture the multidimensional ethos of Quranic revelation (in that the Quran speaks to a multitude of spiritual levels and dimensions).[521] Morris describes the process of unveiling as being the soul's awakening to its interior reality and the actualization of its potentiality; the combination of spiritual

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[515] Chittick, *Ibn Arabi: Heir to the Prophets,* 77-78.
[516] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 166.
[517] Morris, *The Reflective Heart,* 2.
[518] Ibn Arabi, *The Self-Disclosure of God,* trans. William Chittick, 97.
[519] Morris, *The Reflective Heart,* 28.
[520] Ibid., 47.
[521] Ibid., 49.

actualization and revelatory understanding becomes synonymous within Morris' assertion.[522] In this extended example we can find Ibn Arabi combining the idea of revelation with the subjectivity of experience: "…start employing the forms of knowledge given by the divine revealing (*shar*) in (purifying) your own essence; and use the knowings of the Friends and the true Knowers who took them from God in your own spiritual exercise… For if you cannot distinguish between those waters (i.e., which ones are truly pure and divinely revealed, and which polluted by human interference), then know that something is wrong with your nature."[523] The individual is encouraged to use revelatory accounts from saints and prophets, yet these testaments are employed as a means to reach self-verification. Revelation is absolutely necessary in Ibn Arabi's system, yet it does not and cannot replace the verification that each individual gnostic must achieve. Ibn Arabi further claims that the prophetic traditions, ending with Muhammad, were aids in the endeavor to actualize the individual's original disposition (that being the reflectivity that Adam once possessed).[524]

Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood

In the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood we once again encounter a subject that could have easily been inserted into numerous places throughout this paper. Ibn Arabi's ideas on the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood could have been placed in his biographical section, yet the metaphysical implications of this title warrants its own discussion. Our initiatory point of adherence is Ibn Arabi's identification of three cosmic Seals; the first

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[522] Ibn Arabi, *The Reflective Heart,* trans. James Morris (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2005), 85.
[523] Ibid., 85.
[524] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds,* 52.

being Muhammad as the Seal of Prophecy, meaning that no other revelation will be extended from God.[525] Muhammad being the end to the cycle of prophecy is a very orthodox notion: we need only look to the Quranic passage 33:40 to find scriptural support for this claim. There, it is clearly stated that Muhammad "… is the Messenger of Allah and the Last of the prophets."[526] Secondly, Ibn Arabi turns to Jesus as the Seal of Universal Sainthood.[527] It is the eschatological role assigned to Jesus that leads Ibn Arabi to label him as the Seal of Universal Sainthood.[528] The identification of Jesus as Seal of Universal Sainthood is obvious and no ambiguity can be claimed to Ibn Arabi's identification of Jesus: "When Jesus descends at the end of time, he will judge only according to the Law revealed to Muhammad. He is the Seal of the Saints. One of the favors accorded to Muhammad was that the sainthood of his community and the sainthood in general be sealed by a noble Messenger prophet."[529] Looking back to our biographical discussion of Ibn Arabi, we can see sustained linkages that the Shaykh makes between himself and Jesus.[530] Firstly, Jesus was present during Ibn Arabi's first revelatory experience outside of Seville.[531] Secondly, Ibn Arabi frequently claims Jesus as his first spiritual master.[532] We will also see that Ibn Arabi considered himself and Jesus to be mutually encompassing Seals. In another eschatological passage we can see the role our Shaykh assigned Jesus as "…the Seal of Sainthood in an absolute sense. He

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[525] Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints* (Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 1993), 116.
[526] Bakhtiar, trans., *The Sublime Quran,* 489. (33:40)
[527] Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints,* 118.
[528] Ibid., 120.
[529] Ibn Arabi, *Seal of the Saints,* trans. Michel Chodkiewicz (Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 1993), 120.
[530] Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur,* 39.
[531] Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier,* 52.
[532] Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur,* 39.

is the saint who par excellence possesses the non-legislative prophetic function in the time of this Community…When he descends at the end of time, it will be as the heir and the Seal, and after him there will be no saint to be the holder of prophethood in general…"[533] In the previous passage Ibn Arabi makes a concerted effort to maintain Jesus as a subordinate messenger (*rasul*) to Muhammad, despite the fact that they are both Seals. When Jesus is employed as the Seal of Sainthood it does not affect his status as a prophet; furthermore, Ibn Arabi's metaphysical system makes it impossible for any prophet to supersede Muhammad, for Muhammad was granted the most comprehensive of all revelations.[534] The Shaykh considered Muhammad the archetypal prophet that had been partially represented by all previous prophets. Stated differently, all previous prophets displayed revelatory aspects that were to culminate in Muhammad and his message.[535] We can see Ibn Arabi employ Muhammad as the apex of God's revelation when the Shaykh claims, "The Koran is God's Speech and His attribute, Muhammad in his entirety is the attribute of God."[536] Ibn Arabi terms this the Muhammadan Reality (*haqaqiqa muhammadiyya*), and points to Muhammad's claim that he, in his prophetic function, predated Adam's creation.[537] This can be understood as Muhammad asserting a prophetic link that originated within himself and then became present in all subsequent prophets and finally reaching its pinnacle with Muhammad and the Quranic revelation.[538] Regarding the contextual function that Ibn Arabi assigns to each Seal, it is safe to claim

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[533] Ibn Arabi, *Seal of the Saints,* trans. Michel Chodkiewicz, 117.
[534] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 239.
[535] Ibid., 239.
[536] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick, 241.
[537] Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints,* 60.
[538] This principle can also be called the Muhammadan light (*nur muhammadi, nur Muhammad*).

that the Shaykh's understanding of the three Seals incorporated a hierarchical order that was built upon situational importance.[539]

As previously mentioned, Ibn Arabi believed the Seal of the Saints (Jesus) and the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood were mutually encompassing positions. This is made clear in Ibn Arabi's account of how the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood was elected: "He [i.e. the Prophet] saw me behind the Seal [i.e. Jesus], a place where I was standing because of the community of status that exists between him and me, and he said to him, 'This man is your equal, your son and your friend. Set up for him before me the Throne of Tamarisk'… Then the Seal set up the Throne in that solemn place. On its front was written in blue light: 'This is the most pure Muhammadan station!'"[540] The Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood is believed by Ibn Arabi to be the individual who had attained the station of no station. The Shaykh claims that the station of no station is only achieved when the individual has come to display all the divine Names in perfect equilibrium, meaning that the they reflect God's self-disclosure in the most appropriate way possible.[541] Referring back to the hierarchy of Divine Names, we can see that some names are more reflective of God than others, therefore, the individual who reflects a specific Name or attribute is said to inhabit that station (with each station being designated by a particular Name or aspect of God).[542] Chittick understands each particular station as a place where the individual stops and meets God: "Hence the term *manzil* or 'waystation' is the place where one descends from one's mount to rest during a

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[539] The topic of prophetic lineages, as understood by Ibn Arabi, will not be discussed within this paper. This topic is another lengthy discussion that cannot take place at this moment. For a proper discussion please see *Seal of the Saints* by Michel Chodkiewicz.
[540] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick, 131.
[541] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 375.
[542] Chittick, *Ibn Arabi: Heir to the Prophets,* 65.

journey. In a 'mutual waystation,' both God and the servant descend in order to meet each other, as travelers might descend from their horses in order to meet in camp."[543] When an individual comes to inhabit a waystation, that person is in fact coming to display a degree of God's manifestation and being within a specific waystation means that one is not displaying the full spectrum of God's revelation (the individual is only reflecting the particular waystations that they inhabit).[544] However, Ibn Arabi believes that the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood is more than an individual who belongs in the station of no station; rather, the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood is said to be Muhammad's plenary inheritor.[545] By this the Shaykh means "… no one after him [the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood], with the exception of Jesus, would inherit the totality of prophetic works, states, and knowledge -- a totality that had been realized only by Muhammad among all the prophets."[546] Therefore, the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood is the individual who is able to inhabit the station of no station in a manner that only Muhammad could teach and to a degree that cannot be repeated within this epoch.[547]

So who did Ibn Arabi identify as the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood and the last individual to display the totality of Muhammad's teachings? Ibn Arabi claimed that title for himself. While describing a vision that he had during his stay in Mecca (599 CE), Ibn Arabi maintains that his "…place among the followers, in my own category [i.e. the category of *awliya*], is like that of the Messenger of God among the prophets, and

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[543] Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God,* 114.
[544] Chittick, *Ibn Arabi: Heir to the Prophets,* 50.
[545] Ibid., 16.
[546] Ibid., 16.
[547] Ibid., 16.

perhaps it is through me that God has sealed sainthood."[548] Ibn Arabi was speaking about himself when he claimed the Prophet demanded that Jesus take him as an equal and set him upon the Throne of Tamarisk.[549] Chodkiewicz believes that Ibn Arabi came to solidify this position within his greater cosmological scheme during his stay in Mecca; however, Ibn Arabi and Chodkiewicz both claim there were early indications of the Shaykh's spiritual destiny.[550] Ibn Arabi regarded himself as the complete manifestation of Muhammad's revelation, all other gnostics and "Friends of God" would be partial inheritors of Muhammad's prophetic message.[551] In a certain respect this self-proclaimed title can be theologically accommodated within the Islamic cycle of prophecy. This is because within each prophetic cycle there is a natural degradation of the revealed law, which further implies that there would be an individual who would display the greatest degree of that revelation before revelatory degradation began.[552] Ibn Arabi considered himself the capstone to Muhammad's prophetic cycle; all the following inheritors of prophetic lineages would originate from other prophets or would be partial inheritors in the case of Muhammad's spiritual lineage.[553] By no means should this be considered as Ibn Arabi claiming to be the only person who has inhabited the station of no station. Rather, "[t]he modalities of the inheritance will be defined by their connection to specific prophets embraced by Muhammad's all-comprehensive prophethood. After the

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[548] Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints,* 128.
[549] Ibn Arabi, *Seal of the Saints,* trans. Michel Chodkiewicz, 130.
[550] Ibid., 131.
[551] Ibid., 138.
[552] Souad Hakim, "The Spirit and the Son of the Spirit," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society* vol. 31 (2002): 20
[553] Chittick, *Ibn Arabi: Heir to the Prophets,* 16.

Muhammadan Seal, 'No Friend will be found upon the heart of Muhammad.'"[554] Many have criticized Ibn Arabi on his self-proclaimed title; however, when such claims are understood within the context of the Shaykh's cosmological system, they become less controversial. Much like Jesus being a Seal, Ibn Arabi's claim to the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood belongs within a strict hierarchy that is meant to protect the status of the prophets, and ultimately, Muhammad as the climax of all prophecy. Ibn Arabi makes it clear that his role is one of facilitation and not revelation: "As God has sealed legislative prophethood through Muhammad, through the Muhammadan Seal he has sealed the sainthood which comes from the Muhammadan heritage, not the sainthood which comes from the heritage of other prophets: among the saints, in fact, some, for example, inherit from Abraham, some from Moses, some from Jesus, and after this Muhammadan Seal there will be others; whereas no other saint will ever be 'on the heart' of Muhammad."[555] Ibn Arabi's concept of sainthood is very specific in that the Muhammadan community is able to display all previous revelations through their saints.[556] The saint's revelatory embodiment includes knowledge and a spiritually active quality that is best termed realization.[557] Within the idea of realization it is important that we note the active aspect that is claimed to realign one's worldview and spiritual disposition. When Ibn Arabi claims to have been the Seal of Muhamadan Sainthood he

[554] Ibid., 16.
[555] Ibn Arabi, *Seal of the Saints,* trans. Michel Chodkiewicz, 118.
[556] Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints,* 86.
[557] Ibid., 86.

means that he demonstrated the totality of this revelation, and not to have introduced anything new to the existing revelatory system initiated by Muhammad.[558]

Eschatology in Ibn Arabi

Death plays an important function in Ibn Arabi's mystical philosophy. To properly understand the Shaykh's eschatological system we must start by making reference to knowledge and spiritual preparedness.[559] We have previously noted Ibn Arabi's assertion that all forms of knowledge lead back to God; therefore, our spiritual awareness and level of understanding is, in part, tied to our ability to recognize the underlying Divine Reality.[560] The spiritual embodiment of this knowledge is believed to permit us the ability to actualize our full theomorphic potential (in that we are purported to display all the Signs and Names of God).[561] The synthesis of understanding and spiritual embodiment can be seen in Ibn Arabi's statement regarding The Folk of Allah: "The Folk of Allah display their poverty toward God through their faith in Him, in order to reach knowledge of Him, which he has prescribed in the Law. They know that what God desires for them is their return (*ruju*) to Him in that and in every state."[562] This struggle is claimed to be the main objective to human life and it is only the gnostics who

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[558] This paper will not enter into a detailed discussion on Ibn Arabi's idea of sainthood (*wali*). Ibn Arabi's incorporation of spiritual Poles and Pillars is very complex and would require a great deal of space to properly explain. For a more than sufficient discussion see Chodkiewicz's *Seal of the Saints* or *Way of the Walaya* by Souad Hakim.
[559] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 150.
[560] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick, 150.
[561] Ibid., 151.
[562] Ibid., 164.

are able to reflect God in this manner.[563] The attempt made to actualize this state, and the degree to which this is achieved, becomes very important in Ibn Arabi's eschatological system.[564]

Upon death the Shaykh believes that our spiritual condition becomes our outward form.[565] Ibn Arabi speaks of this as an inversion of sorts, in that "God created man in an inverted configuration, so he finds the afterworld in his inwardness and this world in his outwardness."[566] The shade to which one reflects God's Light back onto God becomes that person's outward form after death.[567] Furthermore, God will confront the individual on the Day of Resurrection and it is only through a recognizable form that the individual will come to acknowledge God.[568] The form that the individual will recognize as God will correspond to their spiritual nature; "… on the Day of Resurrection He will transmute Himself in self-disclosure from form to form. But that form from which He transmutes Himself does not disappear from Him, since the one who believed that concerning Him will see it. Hence He does nothing but remove the veil from the eye of the one who is perceiving the form…"[569] The gnostic who is able to reflect the summation of God's Light will be the one best prepared to recognize God on the Day of Resurrection; it is only the Perfect human that is able to reflect the totality of God's self-

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[563] Ibn Arabi, *The Meccan Revelations vol. 1,* trans. Willian Chittick (New York: Pir Press, 2002), 36.
[564] This paper will not endeavor into an explanation of Ibn Arabi's concept of the Garden (heaven) and Fire (hell). A discussion of this nature would require a great deal of reference to the Shaykh's ideas on Divine Mercy, forgiveness, the permanence of hell, and details about each respective plane.
[565] Chittick, *Ibn Arabi: Heir to the Prophets,* 119.
[566] Ibn Arabi, *Ibn Arabi: Heir to the Prophets,* trans. William Chittick (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007), 119.
[567] Chittick, *Ibn Arabi: Heir to the Prophets,* 119.
[568] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick, 336.
[569] Ibid., 226.

disclosure, therefore, it is only the Perfect human that will be able to recognize the infinite forms that God will display on the Day of Resurrection.[570] This state of preparedness must be honed and refined during one's lifetime, for after death the internal spiritual form will become one's external and permanent form.[571] The individual best prepared to reflect God will know themselves as nothing more than a microcosmic manifestation of God's self-disclosure, but those ignorant of their spiritual responsibility will only reflect in degrees and shades.[572] Ibn Arabi progresses this claim by stating that the ignorant are bound to introduce multiplicity and incorrect notions of the 'I'. While describing this feature Ibn Arabi often turns to the servant as the locus of perceived multiplicity: "The entity of the servant possesses a specific preparedness that displays its effects in the Manifest and gives rise to the diversity of forms within the Manifest which is the Entity of the Real."[573] When death occurs all preparations end and one's spiritual status becomes fixed. The Day of Resurrection will entail judgment in accordance to each person's (now external) spiritual form.

Ibn Arabi believed that all created things eventually return to God.[574] This type of return is labeled as the compulsory return to God, and as a stipulation within engendered existence.[575] The voluntary return to God is much more limited and only pertains to human and *jinn*. Only humans and *jinn* have the ability to enact spiritual change; therefore, the development of one's spiritual potential is considered the voluntary return

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[570] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 91.
[571] This does not, however, presuppose that one's ill-preparedness will ultimately lead to eternal suffering. Ibn Arabi's idea of hell is underwritten by God's mercy.
[572] Morris, *The Reflective Heart,* 48-49.
[573] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick, 92.
[574] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 19.
[575] Ibid., 20.

to God because there is an aspect of free will within the process.[576] This type of return is also voluntary because it requires the seeker's spiritual development and metaphysical awakening (coming to see that they are nothing more than a microcosmic reflection of God's Light). The following quote by Chittick nicely sums up the idea of spiritual potential and the individual's voluntary return to God;

> "The crux of knowledge, then, is to understand one's own soul. The voluntary return teaches people how to interpret themselves by discerning the wisdom present in both revelation and the cosmos. The return reaches its fruition on the Day of Resurrection. What we should want to learn is who we are now and who we will be when we arrive back at the meeting with God. All other knowledge should be subordinate to this knowledge."[577]

Included within this process is a realignment of self-identification. The voluntary return to God involves the servant coming to realize that they have no objective status of their own; all ideas of independent existence are dismissed and the individual sees themselves as nothing more than reflections of God.[578] While in this state of recognition, the individual is best prepared to reflect the totality of God's Light, for the delusory ego is no longer present and able to inhibit one's power of reflection.[579]

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[576] Ibid., 20.
[577] Chittick, *Ibn Arabi: Heir to the Prophets,* 58.
[578] Morris, *The Reflective Heart,* 181.
[579] Ibn Arabi, *The Reflective Heart,* trans. James Morris, 131.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS

The purpose of this chapter is to compare and contrast the mystical philosophies of Ibn Arabi and Sankara. This comparison is not a comprehensive examination of all aspects in Ibn Arabi and Sanakra; rather, it will be limited to the topics covered in the preceding sections. A number of commonalities will be presented but it is important that we remember the limited nature of these philosophical assertions.[580] Sankara and Ibn Arabi both believed their philosophies were of secondary importance when considered in relation to their ideas of mystical realization and the attainment of this state.[581] The mystical philosophies being discussed are only aids in their respective system and in the attainment of realization; both mystics insist that we not mistake the ends (realization) for the means (the philosophies being employed). Furthermore, this analysis will not render an opinion on the subjective mystical encounters that lie at the heart of both philosophies. Underhill is perfectly correct in stating that the subjective experience "…is the valid part of mysticism, the thing which gives to it its unique importance amongst systems of thought, the only source of its knowledge. Everything else is really guessing aided by analogy."[582]

The current task is to examine the philosophical scaffolding that both mystics use to help explain their mystical summits; both mystics ultimately pull their scaffolding down, yet the nature of these conceptual aids will display important aspects within each mystic's worldview. William James treats these mystical discoveries as phenomena that

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[580] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 471.
[581] Kazemi, *Paths to Transcendence* 194.
[582] Underhill, *Mysticism,* 74.

undermine "…the authority of the non-mystical or rationalistic consciousness, based upon the understanding and the senses alone. They show it to be only one kind of consciousness. They open out the possibility of other orders of truth, in which, so far as anything in us vitally responds to them, we may freely continue to have faith."[583] It is the constant subjugation of conceptual assertions to subjective experience that forces this project to walk a fine line. As academics within the discipline of religious studies we ought not to render statements that bind or limit the mystical experience; to do so would run the risk of collapsing the entire system that we seek to study. Moreover, the philosophical statements made by the mystics cannot and should not be understood as conveying the totality of their mystical experience, because they themselves state that these statements are inadequate. Thus both sets of writings (academic and mystical) are subordinate and distanced from the subjective mystical experience that form the core of the topic we label "mysticism". A sympathetic approach to mysticism must force itself to make balanced observations in regards to the whole system of thought (contrasted by investigations that embellish certain mystical aspects to the detriment of the conceptual whole). The similarities between Ibn Arabi and Sankara will be first examined because it is particularly important that we take note of how these two conceptual systems function in similar manners. Investigating these similarities will also allow us to properly understand the philosophical divergences and how each system has its own special mechanisms that are adapted to perform within a specific set of suppositions. Understanding similarities will better enable us to decide what issues are matters of diverging emphasis and what constitutes true difference.

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[583] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 460.

Similarities

The first similarity that we will discuss is the non-dualism that pervades both mystical systems. We can look to Sankara's discussion of pure consciousness to find non-dual assertions that see the individual as being identical with Brahman: "I am one alone; No other than that [Brahman] is thought to be Mine. In like manner I do not belong to anything since I am free from attachment. I have by nature no attachment. Therefore I do not need you nor your work since I am non-dual."[584] This statement goes beyond identifying the individual with Brahman; it states that all things in manifest existence belong to a singular cosmic principle. Sankara directly states that the process of Brahmanic self-identification is not the attainment of a new type of knowledge; rather, the individual is claimed to recognize their Brahmanic nature by employing a means of discrimination that enables realization.[585] This discrimination entails a rejection of singularity and individuality, making it impossible for the non-realized *individual* to see themselves as Brahman: "According to Sankara, the true nature of the Self must ever remain a mystery for the mind in its thinking capacity, for in this capacity it inhabits the realm of subject-object dualism, which the Self transcends."[586] The transcending of individualism and the attainment of universal identification is similarly found in Ibn Arabi when he addresses self-knowledge.[587] The base of God knowledge is found in one's recognition of the self as a theomorphic being. This principle is readily evident in

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[584] Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 120.
[585] Sankara, "Texts on Going Beyond the Mind," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1,* ed. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 167.
[586] A.J. Alston, "Going Beyond the Mind," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1* (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 161.
[587] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick, 346.

Ibn Arabi's oft-used statement that "[t]he root of the existence of knowledge of God is knowledge of the self."[588] We must be careful at this instant because the Shaykh emphasizes that each person only knows his or her personal Lord, which is God's self-disclosure to that particular person.[589] However, the Perfect Man (the realized individual) is able to reflect the totality of God's revelation, and with this ability the individual recognizes himself or herself as nothing more than a non-different aspect within this revelatory process.[590] Both mystics clearly place a singular principle (God or Brahman) at the centre of their mystical systems and explain all manifestation and plurality as emanating from this point. Furthermore, both Sankara and Ibn Arabi credit ignorance as being the impetus for all perceived duality.

In *Paths to Transcendence,* Kazemi makes an important distinction between Sankara and Ibn Arabi when it comes to matters of non-dualism, Sankara adopts an approach that primarily focuses on the individual as being the transcendent Brahman, while Ibn Arabi's theory centers on God's immanence.[591] This results in Sankara focusing a great deal of attention on *maya* and the falsity of appearance. By contrast, Ibn Arabi urges people to understand themselves and the world around them as being an aspect of the Divine Manifestation.[592] However, this divergence need not pose us a problem; Kazemi is perfectly correct to state that Sankara and Ibn Arabi's focus is not on the denial of the complementary/divergent position (as immanence is to transcendence

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[588] Ibid., 345.
[589] Ibid., 346.
[590] Ibid.,165.
[591] Kazemi, *Paths to Transcendence,* 218.
[592] Ibid., 218.

and viceversa).[593] Both Ibn Arabi and Sankara recognize the immanent and transcendent aspects within their philosophies and both thinkers balance these positions despite their particular focus: "As between the respective dialectical positions of Sankara and Ibn Arabi, then, it is again a question rather of emphasis and point of view than of mutually exclusive alternatives: the difference of emphasis is real enough on its own level, but it is a difference which is overcome inasmuch as the complementary perspective is simultaneously affirmed within each perspective."[594] Aspects of immanence and transcendence can be found in both theories and it would be incorrect to view either mystic as not holding these principles in balance. In accounting for the effect of *maya*, Sankara is explicit that the Absolute does not lose its transcendent aspects when it is considered as being immanent.[595] Ibn Arabi combines ideas of the transcendent and immanent within the gnostic's bewilderment. Chittick nicely summarizes Ibn Arabi's idea of bewilderment when he claims that "[a]ll things, inasmuch as they are God, are unknowable, but, inasmuch as they are other than God, they display nothing real to be known. Bewilderment (*hayra*), then, is one of the highest stages of knowledge. It is the realization of the incapacity to know…"[596] The focus that Ibn Arabi places on the immanence of God's Self-Disclosure is offset by the transcendence that keeps the gnostic in a state of bewilderment. Each mystic employs immanence and transcendence in situationally specific manners, yet these usages do not threaten their idea of metaphysical

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[593] Ibid., 220.
[594] Ibid., 220.
[595] Sankara, "Texts on: The Absolute as the Lord of Maya," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 2,* trans. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sedan, 2004), 84.
[596] Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God,* 64.

non-duality. After all, the tension between immanence and transcendence is itself a dualistic notion.

The idea of illusion plays a major role in both mystical philosophies, yet it would be inappropriate to identify this idea as illusion. Sankara is adamant that illusion does not hold its own objective status. Thus we should not understand the term illusion as being an independent function.[597] Nescience is a subjective problem and not an objective condition. Sankara's insistence on there being nothing outside Brahman requires the notion of illusion to reside within the subjective individual who then mentally extends this chimera (it should be noted that there is a difference between the ignorance (*avidya*) of the individual and the idea of illusion (*maya*) as a form of cosmological power). The falsity of illusory perceptions means that Sankara "…speaks of nescience not as a power (*sakti*) but as a state (*avastha*), an undesirable state or passion (*klesa*) which afflicts the individual."[598] We can see Sankara, in the *Upadesasahasri,* assigning the pain of individual existence to the inadvertent projection of false perception.[599] Many of Sankara's prescriptive statements are in regards to this projection and how to break the *samsaric* cycle by ending these illusory mental extensions (and the resultant *karmic* accumulation). When the mind ceases to turn and misappropriate Brahmanic experience, then the nescient worldview "…is brought to an end… and transmigratory experience no

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[597] Alston, "The Nature and Results of Nescience." In *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1,* 63.
[598] Ibid., 66.
[599] Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 123.

longer continues."[600] The individual is the source of multiplicity and is the driving force behind *karmic* accumulation and the cycle of *samsaric* rebirth.

In Ibn Arabi we see a similar account of the reality and unreality behind subjectively processed understanding. The people who suffer from these delusions are believed to be those who have not come to realize the theophany that surrounds them and equally consumes them. The Shaykh claims that on a superficial level God's veils can be understood as something that hides the face of God from humanity.[601] However, the veils are nothing but God's disclosure and it is the interpretation of these veils that leads to misappropriation; once again we can point to the subjective individual as the one who initiates this process.[602] Ibn Arabi understands this misappropriation as relating to wrongful association and not as an objective mechanic within his cosmological system; "Those human beings who are overcome by the veil of nature associate others with Him. At root, they are not in the habit of hearing, obeying, and worshiping any but a Lord that they witness."[603] We have partially touched upon this when we discussed each individual witnessing their own personal Lord, which is nothing more than what they have come to accept as being associated with God; it is the Folk of Allah that are able to reflect God's disclosure without superimposing anything onto this disclosure.[604] These are the people who "…return to God in knowledge of Him. They leave reflection in its own level and give it its full due (*haqq*): They do not make it pass on to that which it is improper to

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[600] Sankara, "Texts on The Wheel of Transmigration," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 5.* trans. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 9.
[601] Ibn Arabi, *The Self-Disclosure of God,* trans. William Chittck, 104.
[602] Ibid., 105.
[603] Ibid., 105.
[604] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick, 164.

reflect."[605] Within this appropriate mode of behavior the individual seeks to reflect God as perfectly as possible and not extend beyond this reflective vocation; by doing this one hopes to cease imposing illusory notions onto God's theomorphic manifestation.

The importance that Ibn Arabi and Sankara place in subjective interpretation and the subsequent cognitive extensions should be apparent by now. It is this principle that is believed to separate the realized from those who are under the sway of their delusory mental projections. Sankara terms these people as being influenced by *maya* and further credits their own mental activities as being the guarantor of this illusory system: "Hence it is nescience itself which appears to cause the subject to feel attachment to a happiness which is not really part of its own true nature… that is, it makes that (the Self) which is essentially unattached to appear to be attached and that (the non-self, including the body and mind and their states) which intrinsically has nothing to do with happiness, to appear to be happy."[606] This approach can also be found in Ibn Arabi who adopts an immanent stance in regards to the veils being God's self-manifestation, yet he remains similar to Sankara in that it is the un-realized subjective experience that is believed to shackle non-reality to these immanent manifestations (the veils). The existence of illusion within both mystical philosophies is a mundane observation that does not add anything innovative to the discussion, but, this correspondence indicates that both Ibn Arabi and Sankara interpreted plurality as an illusory mechanism within their non-dual systems. Ibn Arabi's comments on God being the First and the Last displays this ethos by explaining the underlying *wujud* (unity) to manifestation: "God does not disclose Himself in the name

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[605] Ibid., 165.
[606] Sankara, "Texts on: The Absolute as the Lord of Maya," in *Sankara A Source Book vol. 2,* trans. A. J. Alston, 82.

One, and there cannot be self-disclosure within it, nor in the name God. But self-disclosure does occur in the other names that are known to us."[607] The necessary plurality in manifestation and the inherent unity in Essence is a feature within both systems of thought. Furthermore, this feature can be simultaneously found in the subjective/illusory experiences that are projected onto the world.[608]

Another important similarity can be found in the need for revelation. Both Ibn Arabi and Sankara hold that the human cognitive ability is unable to reach the cosmological reality that is described as Brahman or as God's *wujud*. These two conclusions are framed differently, yet we can still find parallels in how revelation is seen as an embedded principle within their mystical systems. Looking to Sankara, we can find these assertions in regards to his refutation of rationalistic thought as a means to liberation.[609] Attempts to gain knowledge of Brahman, without Vedic revelation, are equated to knowledge of the future, for both are believed to be out of the purview of the rational process.[610] The Absolute "…having no color or other perceptible quality, is not an object of perception. And because it can have no inferential signs (which are derived from the observation of regular patterns in previous perceptions), it cannot be the object of inference or of other indirect means of cognition…"[611] Sankara did believe that one

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[607] Ibn Arabi, *The Self-Disclosure of God,* trans. William Chittck, 53.
[608] Please note that this section does not include a discussion on the potential for the individual to experience personal subjectivity from the realized perspective. It can be argued that a realized descent back into plurality can act as an expression of essential unity.
[609] A.J. Alston, "The Veda and the Teacher," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 5,* ed. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 195
[610] Sankara, "Texts on: The Self Can Only Be Known Through The Veda," in *Sankara A Source Book vol. 5,* trans. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 202.
[611] Ibid., 202.

could catch glimpses of this undivided reality through dreamless sleep and testimony (*sabda-pramana*); however, these are only glimpses and momentary phenomenon. Sustained realization depends on the Vedas for knowledge of "…the true nature of Being, utterly transcendent as it is, and the cause of liberation from earthly existence, cannot be so much as conceived except in the light of Vedic revelation as interpreted in a traditional school…as there can be no inferential sign."[612] Testimony (*sabda*), as witnessed within the teacher-student relationship, is claimed to be able to impart insights and general understanding, however, this understanding is ultimately rooted in the Vedas and then imparted by those who have actualized this path to realization. The importance of Vedic testimony is such that we must acknowledge the Vedic roots behind this form of transmitted knowledge (even though no knowledge about the transcendent Brahman can be truly imparted).

Ibn Arabi's insistence on revelation is a little different in nature when compared to Sankara's revelatory interpretation. The Shaykh explains that reason has limits to its applicability and that spiritual matters do not reside in this territory.[613] Chittick claims this as the Shaykh insisting that "…man must come to know God through God, or at the very least, through the revealed guidance of God. Any attempt to know God without taking the Law into account is simply a lack of wisdom and courtesy."[614] Ibn Arabi takes the existence of prophets and the cycle of prophecy as indicating reason's inability to properly guide.[615] It is believed that our usage of rationality would skirt past areas of

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[612] Ibid., 200.
[613] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 179.
[614] Ibid.,179.
[615] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick, 180.

spiritual understanding that can only be accessed through the heart (*qalb*).[616] The heart's understanding qualifies as a form of knowledge to Ibn Arabi. Furthermore, the type of knowledge that is received through the heart is subsequently reflected as that person's spiritual nature.[617] It is important to note the spiritual ramifications of this type of understanding, which is contrasted by the one-dimensional form of knowledge that is purveyed through the rational faculties.

> "They only came to know God through that which He reported about Himself: his clemency, His tenderness, His loving kindness, His descent into limitation that we may conceive of him in imaginal form (*tamthil*) and place Him before our eyes within our hearts… Or rather, we do indeed see Him within ourselves, since we have come to know Him through his giving knowledge, not through our own rational consideration."[618]

The previous reference gives evidence of revelation being a necessity within Ibn Arabi's system. Knowledge of God is the explicit result of the heart's unveiling (*qalb*) and not the result of an intellectual process.[619] Therefore, revelation becomes a necessity because love for God is only made possible through the love that God shows within his revelation.[620]

Another similarity between Ibn Arabi and Sankara is a methodological approach that makes use of theological statements that are seemingly dualistic; however, these statements are later negated through reference to a transcendent Lord that exceeds all forms of dualism. Sankara made use of theological statements to provide a frame for his

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[616] Ibid., 180.
[617] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 180.
[618] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick, 180.
[619] Ibn Arabi, *The Self-Disclosure of God,* trans William Chittick, 112.
[620] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick, 180.

non-dual philosophy.[621] Examples of this include the idea of a supreme Lord as ruler and controller of manifest existence and theism of this nature can be found in Sankara's discussion of the Lord's conformity to external adjuncts.[622] However, these statements are always accompanied by claims of non-duality and a shared identity between the Lord and the individual *jiva*: "And within the realm of human experience, he rules over the conscious being called individual souls (*jivas*), who are in truth nothing but his own Self, but who assume the limitations of body, mind and senses in the same sense in which the ether assumes the shape of the pots in which it is apparently enclosed."[623] We can also look to the *Upadesasahasri* for examples of Sankara paying homage to Indra who is claimed to be the teacher of teachers and upholder of the *srutis*.[624] Alston makes a similar observation when he claims that Sankara praised the worshippers of Narayana and dismissed those who worshipped Siva.[625] As previously mentioned, Sankara did not view this theism as problematic within his non-dual system; his theological assertions are undercut by non-dual statement that recognize the individual as being identical to the transcendent Brahman. In a particularly telling passage we can find Sankara relating the Lord's worth to his ability to bring about knowledge of the Atman: "If the Lord is non-Atman, one ought not to dwell upon [the knowledge] 'I am He'. If he is Atman, the knowledge 'I am the Lord' destroys the other [knowledge]."[626] In many instances

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[621] A.J. Alston, "The Absolute as Creator and Controller of the World," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 2,* ed. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 1.
[622] Sankara, "Texts on: The Absolute as Creator and Controller," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 2,* trans. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 6.
[623] Ibid., 6.
[624] Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 172.
[625] Alston, "Sources of Sankara's Doctrine: His Life and Works," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 1,* 41.
[626] Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 110.

Sankara writes from a perspective that pertains to the un-realized individual who is subject to the thralls of nescience; in other instances, Sankara takes the vantage point of the realized individual who has transcended the Lord of cause and effect.[627]

A similar methodological approach can be found in Ibn Arabi, however all his theological and dualistic statements must be understood in the context of monotheistic Islam. For examples of theistic statements that imply dualism we can look to Ibn Arabi's employment of the Divine Names and Relationships. The Shaykh recognizes a provisional duality in the Names: "One form is with us in our breaths and in the letters we combine. These are the names by which we call upon him…Then the divine names have another kind of form within the Breath of the All-merciful in respect of the fact that God is the Speaker (*al-qa'il*) and is described by Speech…"[628] It is through the Names that God enters into a relationship with his self-manifestation.[629] Names such as The Speaker, Merciful, Powerful, and Avenger openly suggest a relationship with their surrounding environment.[630] To be called The King requires some form of relationship where there is a ruler and a subject. This title is an obvious referral to God's role as the governor of the universe, however, these theological statements are subverted by the Essence that is believed to stand beyond such titles.[631] "In other words, although the Essence is non-determined and nondelimited (*mutlaq*) in Its absolute Ipseity (*al-huwiyyah*). It manifests Itself outwardly in certain modes that can be summarized as the

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[627] Sankara, "Texts on: The Absolute as Creator and Controller," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 2,* trans. A.J. Alston, 15.
[628] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick, 34.
[629] Kazemi, *Paths to Transcendence,* 76.
[630] Chittick, *Ibn Arabi: Heir to the Prophets,* 61.
[631] William Chittick, "Chapter Headings of the Fusus," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society* vol.2 (1984): 43

Divine Names mentioned in the Koran."[632] The Names can be approached as being conditional indicators that serve as aids in God-knowledge. These aids are provisional in nature and do not possess continued value (by this I mean the Names are only applicable to entities under the purview of God's manifestation). Ibn Arabi makes this provisional status evident when he claims "The names of the names are diverse only because of the diversity of their meanings (*ma'na*). Were it not for that, we would not be able to distinguish among them. They are one in God's eyes, but many in our eyes."[633] The Divine Names are obviously different than Sankara's discussion of Narayana and Siva, yet our current point of interest is the usage of theological statements that are later subsumed within the larger non-dual system. The existence of second order indicators within both systems can be understood as conceptual mechanisms that help bring rise to transcendental understanding (realization).[634]

Differences

The differences examined between Ibn Arabi and Sankara will reside within the theological suppositions that support each mystic's transcendental claims. It must once again be stated that these difference pertain to the theological realm, and therefore, any difference discussed within this section will not make assertions regarding the subjective aspects within mysticism. William James was correct in being apprehensive about the rigid categories that scholars apply to mysticism.[635] These subjective experiences are at

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[632] Ibid., 43.
[633] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick, 36.
[634] By second order indicators I mean any revelatory statement that is later negated in the light of greater truths. The same process can be witnessed
[635] William Harmless, *Mystics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 13.

the root of both mystical philosophies and should be understood as the pinnacle of each mystic's account. It is for this reason that the conceptual differences examined will remain within a specific context (that being theological and second order). Yet, this subjective imperative need not handcuff us in regards to our comparison; both mystics have clearly developed systems of thought that are built upon premises and assertions that permit some degree of examination. And it is within these suppositions that this paper presents the divergences between Ibn Arabi and Sankara.

The first bifurcation that we will examine is how *karma* and *samsara* contain fundamental dissimilarities when compared to Ibn Arabi's philosophical system. The cessation of *karmic* accumulation and the subsequent end to *samsaric* rebirth is a core principle within Sankara's system. Sankara is very much in parallel with other Hindu *darsanas* in using both *samsara* and *karma* as major touchstones.[636] Considering the importance of this stance, we will offer another extended quote that illustrates Sankara's thought;

> "In the present life, merit and demerit are amassed and their fruits experienced solely through attachment and aversion arising from false identification with the body-mind organism. And we are bound to infer that the same must have been the case in the previous life too, and also in those before it, so that transmigration is a beginningless and endless process resting on nescience. And this shows that the total cessation of transmigratory experience can only occur through devotion to the path of knowledge, associated with the renunciation of all action. And because self-identification with the body is based on nesceince, when nescience is brought to an end, one is no longer embodied, and transmigratory experience no longer continues."[637]

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[636] Sankara, "Texts on The Wheel of Transmigration," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 5.* trans. A.J. Alston, 9.
[637] Ibid., 9.

Among other things, *karma* performs a binding function that links consequence to one's *samsaric* status.[638] Barbara A. Holdrege, in describing *karma* and *samsara* within Hindu orthodoxy, claims it as an unavoidable and fundamental feature.[639] Sankara does not avoid the suppositions that *karma* and *samsara* affix to the Hindu worldview. The tree of transmigratory existence is said to take root in the Absolute and is an inherent, although avoidable, aspect within manifestation.[640] This extension from the Absolute, in Sankara's view, cannot be considered as anything other than an aspect of Brahman.[641] Furthermore, Sankara's claims this cosmic tree as a principle expounded by the theomorphic deities.[642] Karmic accumulation and rebirth is fundamental to Sankara's system and the greater Hindu cosmological outlook; any consideration of Sankara's project must include these features; to not do so would be a mistake.

Ibn Arabi does not address the idea of *karma, samsara*, or any of their subsequent ramifications. Ibn Arabi's metaphysical system does incorporate notions of judgment and consequence that can even be said to occur over a myriad of states that the soul finds itself in (something that is akin to the idea of *samsaric* rebirth).[643] The Shaykh believed that one's spiritual status could be manipulated to better display God's self-revelation.[644] Upon death, the nature of one's soul becomes their outward and continued form, thereby

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[638] Barbara A. Holdrege, "Dharma" in *The Hindu World,* ed. Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby (New York: Routledge, 2004), 236.
[639] Ibid., 236.
[640] Sankara, "Texts on The Wheel of Transmigration," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 5.* trans. A.J. Alston, 14.
[641] Ibid., 11.
[642] Ibid., 14.
[643] Chittick, *Ibn Arabi: Heir to the Prophets,* 118.
[644] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick, 375.

solidifying that soul's situation in the afterlife.[645] This resonates in Ibn Arabi's belief that "…God will bring the works of the children of Adam [on the Day of Resurrection], even though they are accidents (*a'rad*), as self-subsistent forms placed in the Scale to establish justice."[646] Reference to the previously examined eschatological chapter will demonstrate that Ibn Arabi employed his mystical system within a specific theological context, which understands the soul as living an earthly life that is followed by an afterlife where the implications of one's actions are played out (such as one's residence in heaven or hell and the nature of these resting places).[647] Similar to Sankara, Ibn Arabi uses the Islamic idea of life, death, and afterlife as a touchstone for his mystical system. One can also see Ibn Arabi's cognizance of how his system functions within the larger religious structure (the Islamic exoskeleton): "Simply put, useful knowledge leads to deliverance (*najat*), which is none other than happiness of 'felicity' (sa'ada) and the avoidance of 'wretchedness'' (*shaqa*) in the stages of existence after death."[648] Ibn Arabi's ideas on judgment and death can act as a measuring stick, whereby useful knowledge benefits the adherent and ignorance results in "wretchedness" and by no means should we consider the Shaykh's own system as being above his measure of fruitfulness. Islamic orthodoxy provided a meta-structure in which Ibn Arabi constructed a sub-system that would help one achieve the best possible outcome within the meta-structure.

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[645] Chittick, *Ibn Arabi: Heir to the Prophets,* 119.
[646] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick, 124.
[647] Ibid., 124.
[648] Ibid., 150.

The Shaykh believed that each soul had a unique experience within the afterlife, and that each reunion with God was tempered by that soul's disposition.[649] A combination of belief and preparedness affects this process: "The state after death are determined not only by works, but also by the ideas and thoughts that bring work into existence. Hence beliefs about who we are, where we can go, and what we can become play a major role in determining the actual manner in which human potential holds."[650] It is possible to interpret this statement as promoting a God of belief that corresponds to one's afterlife experience; and preparedness is an undeniably important feature that Ibn Arabi employs in understanding religious diversity.[651] Human beings are claimed as natural servants that possess the ability to reflect God's manifestation, and this reflective ability is tempered by the specific revelatory system that they employ.[652] Such a position may be able to reconcile Ibn Arabi and Sankara; however, we will demonstrate that there exists fundamental difference in the way each worldview functions and the conceptual mechanics that are built upon these differing principles.

The difference between Sankara's ideas of *karma/samsara* and Ibn Arabi's notion of death/judgment has hopefully become apparent. It is crucial that we look to the surrounding theological environment, for each mystic has inherited a set of beliefs from their tradition. Furthermore, the mystical systems they constructed paid heed to the

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[649] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds,* 138.
[650] Ibid., 138.
[651] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick, 92.
[652] Ibid., 93.

principles that were established within these larger traditions.[653] In pointing out these differences we find ourselves in a tumultuous position, for we cannot forget that both mystics understood reason (including religious philosophy) as being nullified in consideration of the non-dual Absolute. We can turn to William James once again to provide us with the warning that "… the existence of mystical states absolutely overthrows the pretension of non-mystical states to be the sole and ultimate dictators of what we may believe."[654] It is important that the logical categories we employ are recognized as foreign impositions and not organic constructions, yet this need not bother us greatly because our proposed disagreement is based upon the supplementary level (the theological level that is later negated). The differences between Hindu *samsara* and the Islamic afterlife indicate a difference in conceptual mechanics that would subsequently require different mystical tools. This is less a mystical difference than a difference extracted from the employment of theological logic; however, such a observation would comply with Ibn Arabi's assertions that "…the Divinity and the Lordship (*rububiyya*) can be understood by this faculty [reason]…"[655] Sankara is equally clear that *karma* and *samsara* are matters of the nescient world, which permits a degree of conceptual understanding.[656] Difference between Sankara and Ibn Arabi's worldviews should include reference to *samsara* and the afterlife as different conceptual mechanisms that were employed. Clooney is adamant that the doctrinal assertions made within Advaita

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[653] By physics I mean that every system of thought has suppositions and rules. These principles establish philosophical physics that loosely dictate how that system will function.
[654] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 465.
[655] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick, 60.
[656] Sankara, "Texts on: The Self Can Only Be Known Through The Veda," in *Sankara A Source Book vol. 5,* trans. A.J. Alston, 207.

(and by Sankara) must be understood as attempting doctrinal congruity with a larger set of Hindu orthodox beliefs.[657] We can therefore imagine both mystics as building philosophies that sought to encompass and understand a myriad of orthodox principles (and it is equally important that both mystics are seen as approaching certain orthodox principles as being a priori to their own thought). Both Sankara and Ibn Arabi made reference to ideas and principles outside their own traditions, and we have even seen that Ibn Arabi made an effort to account for religious diversity in the afterlife. However, *samsara* and the Islamic afterlife should be viewed as fundamental issues that result in strong divergences in the way both mystics viewed death and the nature of life.

Another point of divergence between Ibn Arabi and Sankara can be found within the area of prophecy and the implications that are associated with the revelatory process. It is appropriate to start this discussion with Ibn Arabi because the Shaykh maintains a multifaceted position that requires some initial explanation.[658] A major feature in Ibn Arabi's understanding of revelation can be found in the Quranic verse 10:47, which is interpreted as claiming that a prophet was sent to every nation.[659] This is a major point of departure for Ibn Arabi's explanation of religious diversity. At the base of every revealed religion is a "…message of *tawhid*, which declares that experienced reality comes from the One and returns to the One."[660] This does not mean that all religions are believed equal avenues onto knowledge of God; rather, each religious revelation is believed to

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[657] Francis X. Clooney, "Samkara's Theological Realism," in *New Perspectives on Advaita Vedanta,* ed. Bradley J. Malkovsky (Boston: Brill, 2000), 47.
[658] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds,* 124.
[659] Dawood, trans., *The Koran* Quran,151.
[660] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds,* 124.

possess aspects of truth that relates knowledge of God.[661] This is not problematic to the Shaykh, for he believed that "To maintain the particular excellence of the Koran and the superiority of Muhammad over all other prophets is not to deny the universal validity of revelation nor the validity of revelations appearing in particularized expressions."[662] Ibn Arabi believed in a singular reality that was inhabited by humanity and their different belief systems.[663] Furthermore, all knowledge was thought to lead back to God, which requires all revelatory systems to be imbued with a degree of reality and correctness.[664] Expressions of belief are regarded as unified in essence and "[t]hrough its own specific nature -- its own special limitations that distinguish it from other colors -- each color delimits and defines the invisible light [God], thereby making it visible."[665] Because of Ibn Arabi's pluralistic stance we cannot accredit the Shaykh's ideas of revelation as being unable to account for Vedic revelation. We must actually do the opposite at this moment and claim Ibn Arabi's notion of revelation as being a unitive aspect that sought to incorporate instead of negate; furthermore, Ibn Arabi's belief that revelatory truth was displayed in other traditions corresponds to God's self-disclosure and is not believed a mere display of verisimilitude.

When we turn to Sankara we are able to witness a much more divisive approach to revelation. We have already shown that Sankara, like Ibn Arabi, did not believe that

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[661] Ibid., 124.
[662] Ibid., 125-126.
[663] Balent Rauf, Concerning the Universality of Ibn Arabi," in *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society vol. 6* (1987): 4.
[664] Ghasem Kakaie, "Interreligious Dialogue: Ibn Arabi and Meister Eckhart," in *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society vol 45* (2009): 32.
[665] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds,* 140.

reason could ascertain metaphysical truths.[666] The Hindu mystic believed that knowledge of one's Brahmanic nature required the Vedas, for "…The Veda is eternal and the one source of right knowledge, and hence that which it teaches can be a fixed reality."[667] Sankara sees little chance for the attainment of liberation outside Hindu orthodoxy and specifically states the need for Vedic revelation.[668] Furthermore, Sankara is dismissive of "Buddhists nihilists" because of their rejection of the Vedas and their dismissal of the *atman*.[669] Sankara places himself squarely in the Vedic tradition and makes a great effort to harmonize his Upanisadic emphasis with other claims throughout the Hindu corpus.[670] Much of Sankara's effort was focused on his exegetical projects and we can readily see the mystic's fancy footwork when it comes to matters of contradiction and hermeneutic congruity. Like the Sufi Shaykh, our Hindu mystic was primarily concerned with the effects of his system, speaking of higher and lower forms of knowledge based upon realization.[671] "The 'higher knowledge' here means immediate awareness of that Imperishable Principle which is to be known of (in the first instance) from the upanishadic texts. It does not mean mere committing to memory of the words of the Upanishads, whereas 'knowledge of the Veda' always means mere knowledge of the

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[666] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 179.
[667] Sankara, "Texts on: The Self Can Only Be Known Through The Veda," in *Sankara A Source Book vol. 5,* trans. A.J. Alston, 201.
[668] Sankara, "Texts on The Wheel of Transmigration," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 5.* trans. A.J. Alston, 62.
[669] Mayeda, "Sankara's Central Doctrine and His Position in the History of the Vedanta," in *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 13.
[670] Ibid., 13.
[671] Neither mystic believed he invented a new system; both mystics believed these methods of realization existed prior to their discussions and philosophies.

series of words contained in the Vedic texts."[672] Sankara saw very little chance for the individual to better their metaphysical status outside of the Vedic prescriptions. It is clearly stated that the most beneficial result (realization) can only be discovered through the Vedas (and more specifically the Upanisads).[673] Sankara further states that the attainment of realization by a Sudra (a member of the lowest class in the Hindu caste system) is a product of their proximity to the Vedas and the benevolent deeds they had performed in past lives (Sudras were not allowed direct access to Vedic knowledge).[674] In regards to the Indian mystic, we are able to observe an ethos that embeds realization within a strongly Vedic context.[675]

The last divergence examined will be in regards to renunciation. The two mystics lived lives that were marked by religious devotion, with both Ibn Arabi and Sankara traveling great distances to expand and hone their spiritual practices. When we contrast their opinions on renunciation it should be observed that the two were more similar than distant. However, their positions on the need for renunciation present a stark contrast (especially in regards to sexuality and marriage). Sankara was a strong proponent of renunciation, which he believed would aid in detachment.[676] The metrical part of the *Upadesasahasri* informs the guru that the pupil must abandon the desire for sons, wealth,

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[672] Sankara, "Texts on: The Qualifications for the Path, in *A Sankara Source Book vol 5.* trans. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 77.
[673] Sankara, "Texts on: The Self Can Only Be Known Through The Veda," in *Sankara A Source Book vol. 5,* trans. A.J. Alston, 202.
[674] Sankara, "Texts on: The Qualifications for the Path," in *A Sankara Source Book vol 5.* trans. A.J. Alston, 73.
[675] Ibid., 71.
[676] Sankara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 211.

and worlds if they are to become true ascetic.[677] Mayeda recognizes this in Sankara's choice of pupils and the people he chose to expound his theories to: "Sankara would not teach his doctrine to city dwellers…Consequently he propagated his teachings chiefly among *samnyasins*, who had renounced the world, and intellectuals in the villages…"[678] City dwellers were believed to be under the sway of Buddhism and imbued with hedonistic values that limited their spiritual faculties.[679] Sankara believed it possible for individuals to become realized without renunciation, yet these are rare instances and depended heavily on divine grace.[680] Insistence on the need for renunciation is clear, because "…wandering forth from one's house as a homeless monk (*parivrajya*), being the renunciation of all means to (ritualistic) action, is implicitly entailed as part of the discipline."[681] Despite the allowances made by Sankara for the bestowal of divine grace, we can still find the mystic insisting on renunciation and viewing renunciation as the best disposition within his metaphysical system.

Ibn Arabi did not believe renunciation as important when compared to his Hindu counterpart.[682] Renunciation was viewed as a possible step towards realization but he did not believe that severe asceticism constituted a spiritual station or an overly beneficial endeavor.[683] The biographical accounts of Ibn Arabi claim the Shaykh as being fully

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[677] Ibid., 211.
[678] Mayeda, "Sankara's Central Doctrine and His Position in the History of the Vedanta," in *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara,* 5.
[679] Ibid., 5.
[680] A.J. Alston, "Preliminary Qualifications for the Path," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 5,* ed. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 69.
[681] Sankara, "Texts on: The Self Can Only Be Known Through The Veda," in *Sankara A Source Book vol. 5,* trans. A.J. Alston, 123.
[682] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 157.
[683] Ibid., 157.

immersed within his social environment.[684] Upon the death of his parents Ibn Arabi was endowed with custodianship of his two younger sisters.[685] This forced the young mystic to stop his wanderings and make provisions for his sisters.[686] We also know that Ibn Arabi married and fathered children, with the Shaykh eventually settling down in Damascus for the last 17 years of his life.[687] Ibn Arabi believed that total subsistence in God and complete renunciation "…may serve rhetorical purpose and alert some people to the direction in which efforts should be directed, but such renunciation is impossible and in any case, since to renounce the cosmos is to renounce the possibility of increasing one's knowledge in God."[688] In this quote we can detect Ibn Arabi's concern with the immanent manifestation of God, and such immanence was thought to demand worldly interaction (for renunciation would constitute a turning away from God).[689]

Relationships between people are viewed as theomorphic symbols that find their origins in God and become manifest between people (the most significant being love); in describing the love between individuals Ibn Arabi claims that "[t]here is nothing in himself which does not find its corresponding part in his beloved. There remains nothing left over within him which would allow him to remain sober. His outward dimension is enraptured by his beloved's outward dimension, and his inward dimension by his inward dimension… Hence love of God and love of his similar absorbs man totally…"[690] The

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[684] Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier,* 149.
[685] Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur,* 123.
[686] Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier,* 151
[687] Stephen Hirtenstein, "Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi: The Treasure of Compassion," accessed on January 2, 2011, http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/treasureofcompassion.html
[688] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 157.
[689] Ibid., 157.
[690] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick, 286.

Shaykh's approach to love and human relationships should be seen as different than the renunciation proposed by Sankara. Human emotions are assigned a religious nature and fostered as symbols rather than vices. Such a difference need not be labeled as being radical or overly important, yet it can serve as another instant of hermeneutic re-appropriation between the two. Sankara rooted such emotions in attachment while Ibn Arabi believed the correct understanding of love finds itself divine in origin.

CONCLUSION

The intention in this project was to engage Sankara and Ibn Arabi as mystical philosophers who constructed particular systems of thought that were built upon premises found in their respective religious traditions. In comparing these two mystics we were able to identify their usage of a number pre-existing principles, concepts, and teachings that are expanded upon and placed within a systematic philosophy or theology that is intended to lead others to realization. This examination used a contextualist approach that relied on comparison to provide further clarifications to both systems of philosophical/theological thought. The study was grounded upon various descriptive and prescriptive statements attributed to the two mystics and there was no intent to extend beyond these materials.[691]

Despite the contextualist nature of this study it is vital that our discussion is not understood as postulating on what can be subjectively experienced. There was no intent to opine on the validity or nature of the subjective mystical experience. This is why this contextual approach theoretically differs from Katz, who binds the personal experience to its surrounding social constructs. For example, Katz simply states that "…what is being argued is that, for example, the Hindu mystic does not have an experience of x which he then describes in the, to him, language and symbols of Hinduism, but rather he has a Hindu experience, i.e. on what will be experienced, and ruled out in advance and what is

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[691] The Chatper Two overview of Hindu and Islamic mysticism was meant to highlite the interpretive similarities and differences that can be derived from the Vedas, Upanisads, *bhakti* devotionalism, and the Islamic prophet Muhammad. By no means should this overview be considered as being completely representative of Hindu and Islamic mysticism.

inexperiencaeble in the particular given, concrete context." [692] This study employed a contextualist approach that shares some commonalities with Katz's perspective, yet it does not extend its observations into the realm of experience. Moreover, it does not bind the mystical experience to its cultural and linguistic surroundings.[693] Rather, this project has sought to understand the "thought" of Sankara and Ibn Arabi within their epistemological landscape, which was then used to provide *orientation* in regards to the subjective mystical accounts. To be more specific, this study demonstrated that the two mystics engaged in system building philosophies (or theologies) that make use of ideas found within their respective traditions.

According to Sankara and Ibn Arabi, these philosophical systems may then be used, by others, for transcendent realization. This project did not extend to evaluating the reality or nature of the purported realizations, but restricted itself to each mystic's foundational philosophies. Such a self-imposed limitation respected the ineffable, noetic, transient, and passive aspects that James believed essential to mysticism.[694] An analysis of the ineffable elements within mystical experience would have required different methodologies than those utilized in this study. Remaining within Sankara and Ibn Arabi's theological/philosophical levels of discourse assented to Underhill's assertion that mysticism "… shows itself not merely as an attitude of mind and heart, but as a form

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[692] Steven Katz, "Mysticism and the Interpretation of Sacred Scripture," in *Mysticism and Sacred Scripture,* ed. Steven Katz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 26.
[693] By this I mean that our approach does not seek to limit possible experience to thought boundaries set by a linguistic community. An example of thought being bound to language can be found in the Principle of Linguistic Relativity as explained by Sapir-Whorf. This project asserts that possible experience is not defined by the parameters of language (which is something that both mystics would agree with).
[694] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 414.

of organic life. It is not only a theory of the intellect or a hunger, however passionate, of the heart. It involves the organizing of the whole self, conscious and unconscious, under the spur of a hunger…"[695] The study's focus was on a few aspects of this self-organization in mysticism, namely, the intellectual articulation of certain principles concerning reality, and the methods of discerning it clearly. The boundaries set by James and Underhill proved beneficial for they have allowed one to focus on the theological and philosophical beliefs that underpin the thought systems of these influential mystics.

Sankara's thought revealed multiple instances of system building that makes use of philosophical scaffolding.[696] His discussion of the principles of *karma,* and the resultant *samsaric* rebirths, is one such example. This study demonstrated that these principles are implicit in Sankara's mystical system and that much of his thought was directed towards the cessation of the cosmological process of rebirth in *samsaric* reality. In other words, Sankara accepted the reality of these principles at the outset, principles that derive from systems of thought pre-existing in Hindu philosophies. True, Sankara did ultimately question the ontological status of *karma* and *samsara*. However, these considerations result from a realized perspective that ultimately transcends many of the principles governing transmigratory existence.[697] Put differently, Sankara accepted a variety of the concepts and principles utilized by his predecessors in the construction of his system, and only questioned their validity from the vantage point of liberation or realization. However, the pre-realization, system-building Sankara retained a collection

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[695] Underhill, *Mysticism*, 66.
[696] What I term 'philosophical scaffolding' are the secondary statements made by mystics that are believed to be of limited worth when considered from the realized perspective.
[697] Sankara, "Texts on 'The Self Can only Be Known Through The Veda': Group C," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 5*, trans, A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 216.

of situationally specific concepts and principles (as seen in the notion of *samsara* and the operation of *karma*). Much of Sankara's hierarchical ranking is in respect to the relative value and nature of theistic statements, spiritual practice, and the material world. Our discussion of Sankara's theistic statements provides an example of this ranking. Alston recognizes this interpretive order when he claims: "Sankara differentiated the performance of prescribed Vedic meditations (*upasana*) from knowledge on the one hand and from ritualistic action on the other."[698] Our discussion of hierarchal organization identified Sankara as a system building philosopher that made use of certain key presuppositions.

The provisional nature of these scaffolding concepts in the light of realization should not cause them to be summarily dismissed as trivial. They are important to Sankara for we noted the Hindu mystic repeatedly refer to his philosophical system as an essential base, which leads to the attainment of realization. In this regard, it is crucial to recognize that Sankara's system is functionally directed, for as he pointedly states: "It is not the question whether a text proclaims a matter of fact or enjoins an action that settles whether or not it is authoritative. The real test that has to be applied is 'Does it produce knowledge that is of undeniable practical benefit to man?"[699] Sankara, as previously discussed, even approaches the Vedas as being functional guides that derive value from the truths they convey.[700]

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[698] A.J. Alston, "Meditation in the Context of the Vedic Ritual," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 6.* trans. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sedan, 2004), 1.
[699] Sankara, "Texts on The Veda, Smrti and Reason: Group B," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 5,* trans, A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 250.
[700] Ibid., 252.

Sankara was undoubtedly a system builder who made use of a wide variety of pre-existing philosophical distinctions and conceptual categories that were understood as being vital to his mystical system. His references to the Vedas are another indicator that Sankara's mystical system was firmly rooted in certain presuppositions. He mounts a strong defense of the Vedas as being the only means to realization and as being the only conduit to the metaphysical knowledge that escapes reason.[701] There is a surprising lack of ecumenical sentiment when Sankara launches into his criticism of Buddhism, materialism, and other *darsanas*.[702] Despite commonalities in worldviews, Sankara is often critical of those he believed as misinterpreting the theological/philosophical foundation that Hinduism rests upon.[703] These instances should be viewed as Sankara vehemently defending the basic principles that are incorporated into his mystical system. One might reasonably suggest that the nod to orthodoxy was merely Sankara's attempt to stay firmly within the framework of orthodoxy, rather than risk criticism or ostracism from those quarters. However, it was beyond the scope of this study to look into the historical social contexts of Sankara's period.

Like Sankara, Ibn Arabi situated himself firmly within orthodoxy. He spent a substantial amount of time and effort in defending and interpreting the classical tenets of Islam that encapsulate his mystical theories. References to the Islamic cycle of prophesy, and the importance of Muhammad as the Prophetic Seal, illustrated the Shaykh's reliance

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[701] Sankara, "Texts on The Veda, Smrti and Reason: Group E," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 5,* trans, A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 290.
[702] Sankara, "Texts Refuting The Buddhists: Group A, The Buddha," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 4,* trans. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 285.
[703] Sankara, "Texts on Refutation of Liberation Through Action: Group A," in *A Sankara Source Book vol. 5,* trans, A.J. Alston (London Shanti Sadan, 2004), 13.

on foundational pre-existing Islamic theological points of reference.[704] The Quran stands at the center of Ibn Arabi's system of thought, and it acted as the point from which his hermeneutic ventures began. As we have seen, the Quran even served as the foundation for Ibn Arabi's notion of religious diversity.[705] The specific verse that we examined Ibn Arabi as employing is 10:47, which states: "An Apostle was sent to each community."[706] The Shaykh found a great deal of plasticity within this verse and our examination found that a similar ecumenically hermeneutic ethos pervaded the rest of his work.[707] This study has not been overly concerned with the practical 'work' that Ibn Arabi's interpretations might have performed, namely, how these ideas might have led or continue to lead others to a state of realization. Rather, attention was directed towards Ibn Arabi's objects of interpretation (the principles extracted from the Quran). Our focus is centered on the foundation of Ibn Arabi's interpretive system, and when these premises were thoroughly examined we were able to make better sense of the epistemic mechanisms extracted from the Quran. The hierarchy that Ibn Arabi assigns to the Divine Names provided us with an example of Quranic declarations (The Names of God) that were organized and then integrated into a larger cosmological system.[708]

Even matters of behavior, such as the value of renunciation, can be seen as indicators that provide shape to Ibn Arabi's underlying structuring principles. The relative value of renunciation and the importance of human/divine love were specific notions that Ibn Arabi identified within his theomorphic worldview. Our discussion of

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[704] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 239.
[705] N.J. Dawood, trans., *The Koran* Quran, 151.
[706] Ibid., 151.
[707] Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds,* 124.
[708] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick, 51.

love and the metaphysical properties Ibn Arabi assigned to love provided an example of human sentiment being highlighted within philosophical principles.[709] Chittick further states that when the universe is viewed as being identical to God (as Ibn Arabi did), "…the object of human love can only be God. And since God in His Essence is forever nonmanifest, unknowable, and unattainable, the true object of love is always nonexistent in relation to human beings."[710] Basic suppositions (such as the metaphysical role of the Names) found within the Quran and other sources enabled us to understand the Shaykh as a builder of an intellectual, philosophical, or theological system, which is conducive to the highest states of divine realization. This system building legacy of Ibn Arabi's is often neglected and subordinated to his mystical raison d'être, for which he is appropriately renowned. Our discussion of Ibn Arabi, as the Seal of the Saints, and Muhammad, as the Prophetic Seal, identified spiritual embodiment as being highly important within the Shaykh's system of thought.[711]

When Ibn Arabi and Sankara are compared as system builders it is important that we take notice of the great number of similarities, with especially attentive recognition that their emphasis on subjective experience is one of their greatest commonalities. Another similarity discussed was the mystics' use of illusion as being a phenomenal cause of action and as also having a degree of objective reality.[712] Related to the power of illusion is the need for revelation, something that was identified in both mystical

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[709] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 67.
[710] Ibid., 67.
[711] Ibn Arabi, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* trans. William Chittick, 131.
[712] Ibid.,164.

philosophies.[713] Ignoring these crucial similarities would have been detrimental to our project and would have limited our understanding of both mystical philosophies (and non-dual mysticism as a whole). Kazemi, in comparing Ibn Arabi, Sankara, and Eckhart, is correct to make general observations regarding the primacy of non-dualism and how non-dual experience is the pinnacle of the three mystical philosophies: "The methodic efficacy of this interiorization is grounded in a metaphysical principle of the utmost importance, a principle affirmed by all the mystics: the inmost essence of the individual is not other than the transcendent Essence of the Absolute. It is because of this preexisting identity at the inmost degree of being that interiorization is put forward as the principle means of realizing the Transcendent."[714]

Both Ibn Arabi and Sankara constructed systems that were "meant to do something", and to approach either mystic as engaging in idle speculation would have been a distortion of their agendas. Commonalities became abundant when we viewed the two mystics as constructing systems of thought that are directed towards realization of the non-dual Absolute, and all our observations were tempered by this recognition. Underhill describes this as being the dichotomy that combines religion and mysticism, and it is through this amalgamation that we can see a myriad of shades and degrees that diversify how mystical goals are understood.[715] When religion is rooted in personal experience, as believed by James, the role of mystical commonalities becomes that much

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[713] Sankara, "Texts on: The Self Can Only Be Known Through The Veda," in *Sankara A Source Book vol. 5,* trans. A.J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 2004), 202.
[714] Kazemi, *Paths to Transcendence,* 202.
[715] Underhill, *Mysticism,* 53.

more prominent.[716] It is for this reason that some scholars accept experiential suppositions as foundational, which leads to studies on the ineffable experience as a universal commonality.[717]

It has been our methodological goal to avoid the pitfalls that surround contexualist approaches to mysticism that center on experience, while still being able to make observations about the nature of Sankara and Ibn Arabi's mystical systems. The previous methodological chapter illustrated the problems with such an approach, but we have also established that the theological and philosophical contextualization, when employed correctly, has merits. The contextualist method, which recognizes itself and the limitations to which it must adhere, is able to provide fruitful insights into the nature of these mystical systems. By limiting our discussion to philosophical principles, and avoiding metaphysical speculation, we were able to elicit features within the structures of mystically oriented thought systems that are notoriously elusive.

William James is highly skeptical about the philosophy of religion and deems it of secondary importance in understanding direct experience.[718] However, James does recognize a role for religious philosophy if it "…will abandon metaphysics and deduction for criticism and induction, and frankly transform herself from theology into science of religions, she can make herself enormously useful."[719] This is the methodological tightrope that this project has sought to walk, and by avoiding direct metaphysical speculation we are able to achieve this. When theology and philosophy are treated as

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[716] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 470.
[717] Underhill, *Mysticism,* 42.
[718] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 495.
[719] Ibid., 496.

conceptual aids, and not deterministic statements, we become better able to study mystical systems. The theoretical context that lies at the heart of our methodology seeks to demonstrate how mystical philosophies are dynamic conceptual systems that simultaneously embed and transcend their conceptual surroundings. Our dualistic approach is able to locate itself between reductionism and essentialism by balancing philosophical statements with the perceived endgame that both mystics believed their systems were directed towards (the non-dual Absolute as discussed in our analysis). Furthermore, this methodological technique can be applied to alternative forms of mysticism that do not correspond to Sankara and Ibn Arabi's idea of non-dualism. The adaptability of this method resides in the fact that our approach does not place all its eggs in one basket; by this I mean that the combination of theoretical contextualization with subjective recognition is able to identify structures within mystical worldviews, while still allowing the system to function as intended by the mystic (for we have not divorced the subjective experience through theoretical speculation).

This theoretical working space, provided by our methodology, has allowed us to make some crucial distinctions in regards to the two mystics and their systems of thought. Reference to the differences between Sankara and Ibn Arabi's thought, witnessed within their theological/philosophical systems, can lead to the conclusion that the two mystics inhabited different conceptual universes. The conceptual artifacts that are left by Sankara and Ibn Arabi show many variations, particularly in the form of presuppositions, which were examined in our comparison. It is these presuppositions, inherent in each mystical system, that lead us to the conclusion that the two systems inhabit different theoretical worldviews. The discussions of *karma, samsara,* death, and judgment illustrated some of

these presuppositions, and it is important that these conceptual categories and principles are viewed as emanating from and belonging to fundamentally different notions of the metaphysical make-up of manifest reality.

This conclusion contrasts somewhat with Kazemi's claim that "[i]n respect of conceiving and realizing transcendence the evidence presented here leaves no doubt that the sages are indeed speaking of the selfsame reality."[720] It has been the purposes of this project to demonstrate that the methods used to conceive of each respective transcendent reality find their roots in radically different environments. These environments have differing theoretical mechanics for the attainment of the transcendent realities, which indicates that the two mystics possessed worldviews that were built upon differing cosmological schemes. We cannot render an opinion on matters of transcendence and spiritual experience, which has been stated throughout this paper, yet the presuppositions that Sankara and Ibn Arabi employ suggest a difference in initial outlooks.

It is conceivable that the two mystics experientially describe near identical transcendent realities that suggest a similar (or even identical) mystical summit. However, the conceptual notions that we have examined in their philosophical writings force us to the conclusion that these described realities have differing philosophical foundations that demand explicit recognition. These foundational differences resulted in Sankara and Ibn Arabi constructing systems that were adapted to unique challenges within their perceived environments. Like the limitations imposed on William James, we are forced to construct a base camp at the foot of this cloud-shrouded, mystical mountain

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[720] Kazemi, *Paths to Transcendence,* 193.

range and render opinions (and not factual conclusions) about the summit or summits through reference to the mountaineers' (the mystics) accounts.[721] However, the differing techniques used by these mountaineers and descriptions rendered upon their return force this study to focus on the differences between the two accounts. To continue the analogy, the base camps are different (Hindu and Islamic traditions), the equipment different (conceptual categories, such as rebirth, or the afterlife), the scaling techniques varied (to become a wandering ascetic or not**)**, and articulated outcomes diverging (non ecumenical versus ecumenical). The metaphysics that govern one's ascent can be partially credited to the suppositions that each mystic employs before the mystical journey is embarked upon, and such foundational differences lead to further difference in spiritual techniques (the methods used to attain realization).

Ultimately, however, we are forced to side with William James and declare mystical experiences as being beyond our speculative abilities. This handicap is nicely captured by James when he claims that it is "[i]n all sad sincerity I think we must conclude that the attempt to demonstrate by purely intellectual processes the truth of the deliverances of direct religious experience is absolutely hopeless."[722] It is our intellectual burden to remain at the foot of the mystical mountain and receive secondhand accounts, yet these testimonies and prescriptive statements can grant us the ability to locate each mystical system within the multi-dimensional universe of thought systems. Furthermore, our comparison of Sankara and Ibn Arabi has allowed for important insights into each respective philosophy and has also provided a methodological approach to help

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[721] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* 496.
[722] Ibid., 496.

understand mysticism within its native conceptual environment. The methodological technique employed within this project has allowed us to examine the philosophical similarities and differences between Sankara and Ibn Arabi, while not making direct comments on their subjective experiences.

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