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Between Intelligibility and Sensation: Divine Self-Disclosure in Ibn 'Ajība's Mystical Epistemology

Mystical gnosis (*ma'rifa*) stands at the center of Sufi epistemology, anchored in a fundamental contention: that divine inspiration (*ilhām*), or mystical unveiling (*kashf*), alone satisfies the criteria of epistemic certainty (*yaqīn*). Other modes of knowledge (i.e., sensorial, rational, and juridical) occupy, at best, a subordinate position. Whatever their merits, Sufis regard these modes as constitutively fallible, insofar as they stem from human cognition rather than Divine disclosure. This fallibility has a precise metaphysical basis: since God's Unity transcends the ontological duality presupposed by discursive reason, His Self-disclosures (*tajalliyāt*) resist and ultimately dissolve the dualistic reductionism projected onto His Reality by analytical cognition. This claim, and indeed the metaphysical vision that ensues from it, has been disputed by rival intellectual communities (e.g., the philosophers (*falāsifa*), dialectical theologians (*mutakallimūn*), and jurists (*fuqahā'*)) who have historically contested the epistemic legitimacy of Sufi experiential knowledge and the claim to objective authority on which it rests.

This paper interrogates a central epistemological tension within this debate: what ontological standing, if any, does sense data occupy within Sufi metaphysics? Given the primacy of experiential knowledge (*dhawq*), what epistemic authority can sense-data legitimately claim in corroborating or contesting the claims of mystical gnosis?

To illuminate this discussion, I examine the metaphysical elaborations of Aḥmad ibn 'Ajība (d. 1809), the prominent Moroccan Sufi scholar and metaphysician, as articulated in his treatise *Taqyīdān fī waḥdat al-wujūd* ("Two Treatises on the Oneness of Existence"). My analysis attends to the ontological architecture underlying his account of mystical noetic and hypostatic Self-disclosures, particularly how he conceptualizes the continuum between the intelligible (*ma'qūlāt*) and sensorial (*maḥsūsāt*) planes of existence. For Ibn 'Ajība, this indivisible order of Existence/Being is grounded in the intrinsic Oneness (*wahda*) that pervades the Self-disclosures (*tajalliyāt*) of the Divine Essence from the intelligible to the sensory register of existence. Crucially, this Oneness becomes noetically disclosed within the contemplative awareness of the Sufi gnostic (*al-ʿārif*). Ibn 'Ajība offers a metaphysical framework for interrogating the subjective-objective problem in mystical epistemology, reconceiving the apparent duality between the sensory and intelligible order as a cognitive veil (*ḥijāb*) rather than an objective feature of Reality. I conclude by highlighting how his insights may illuminate contemporary debates on the nature of consciousness and related topics in the philosophy of mind.



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