ḤANBALĪTE CRITICISM OF SUFISM: Ibn Taymiyya (d. 795/1328), a Ḥanbalīte Ascetic (*Zāhid*)

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Abstract

This article analyzes the Western Orientalist arguments with regards to the characteristics of Ḥanbalīte School and of its criticism of Sufism. Revisiting the primary texts upon which they base their arguments, the article examines the consistency of Orientalists' conclusions. Within this general framework, the article focuses more particularly on the nature of Ibn Taymiyya's understanding of Sufism and describes his intellectual position regarding various leading historical figures in Sufi tradition.

Key Words: *Sufism, Ḥanbalītes, Qādiriyya, Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-'Arabī, Inspiration (ilhām), Independent legal judgment (ijtihād), Ecstatic statements (shaṭaḥāt), Mystical state of annihilation (fanā'), Excessiveness in piety*

Özet

Hanbelīlerin Tasavvuf Eleştirisi: İbn Teymiyye (ö. 795/1328), Bir Hanbelī Zāhid.

Bu makale birbiriyle sıkı bir şekilde irtibatlı üç mevzudan bahsetmektedir. Birinci mevzu, Ḥanbelī mezhebi mesuplarının tasavvufa yönelttikleri tarihī eleştirilerle alakalı olarak Batı akademi dünyasında ortaya konan çalışmaların bir değerlendirmeye tābi tutulmasına dāirdir. Makale, yaygın olan kanaatin aksine, Ḥanbelīlerin tasavvuf hususunda yeknesak ve tek bir çeşit entellektüel tavırlarının olmadığını şahid metinler üzerinden temellendirmeye çalışmaktadır. İkinci mevzu, İbn Teymiyye'nin tasavvuf anlayışı ve tasavvufa yönelttiği meşhur tenkidinin mahiyetinin ne ve nasıl olduğu üzerinde durmaktadır. Üçüncü mevzu ise, daha özelde George Makdisi tarafından konu hakkında İbn Teymiyye merkezli olarak ileri sürülen fikirlerin bir eleştiri süzgecinden geçirilmesi hakkındadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Tasavvuf, Ḥanbeliyye, Ḳādiriyye, İbn Teymiyye, İbnu'l-'Arabī, İlhām, İctihād, Şatahāt, Fenā, Dinde aşırılık*

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Introduction

In this article, I will focus primarily on three closely interconnected discussions. First, I will invite critical attention to the reconsideration of the Western Orientalist arguments regarding the characteristics of Ḥanbalīte School and of their criticism of Sufism. Having reviewed certain eminent Ḥanbalītes' positions against Sufi doctrines, practices, as well as personalities, I will argue that missing the diversity and various intra-Ḥanbalīte tensions within the movement, Orientalists presented a highly reductionist evaluation of Ḥanbalīte tradition.

Second, even though in general I agree with George Makdisi's criticism of this reductionist characterization of Ḥanbalīte movement, I will nevertheless attempt to question his own arguments regarding Ibn Taymiyya's Sufism. Makdisi tries to rescue Ibn Taymiyya, who is regarded as a sworn enemy of Sufism, from general assumptions inherited from Orientalist arguments. I agree with him when he argues that Ibn Taymiyya is not to be considered as a relentless opponent to Sufism. At the same time, however, it seems to me that Makdisi overstates the case when he tries to portray Ibn Taymiyya as an ordinary Sufi of the Qādiriyya order. Given Ibn Taymiyya's own writings on mystical[1] issues, it appears that he does not uncritically celebrate Sufi doctrines and practices. He gives credit only to a particular type of *taṣawwuf* and he had other commitments besides Sufism as well. In this regard, I argue that without taking Ibn Taymiyya's own premises concerning Sufi practice and theory into consideration, Makdisi's argument seems to be a little forced.

Third, I will focus more specifically on Ibn Taymiyya's salient position—which I believe needs a more analytical examination—against Sufism. Ibn Taymiyya has a very complex understanding of Sufism. Although Makdisi wrote on Ibn Taymiyya's personal affiliation to Sufism, his stress falls mainly on the historical and factual side of the matter. Similarly, after Makdisi's writings on the topic, in order to introduce additional evidence indicating Ibn Taymiyya's practical relationship to Sufism, Thomas Michel worked on a limited number of Ibn Taymiyya's texts. My interest, instead, will be primarily theoretically oriented; I am not that much interested in the materials indicating Ibn Taymiyya's practical association with Sufi orders. Rather, examining his writings on purely mystical questions, such as in his commentary on 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī's (d. 561/1166) *Futūḥ al-Ghayb* (Ibn Taymiyya, 1966a: 455-548)[2] and his *al-*

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1 Throughout this article I will use the word "mysticism" as a translation of *taṣawwuf* in a technical sense, but without implying any of its associations with Christian understanding of mysticism or Gnosticism.

2 Thomas Michel studied this work, concentrating on the internal evidence found in the *Sharḥ* to define more closely Ibn Taymiyya's practical relationship to Sufism. Michel argues that Makdisi worked mostly from external evidence, which can be challenged, for chains of Sufi initiation (*silsila*) frequently have been forged. In the final analysis, however, Michel does not present any additional comprehensive arguments to those of Makdisi and he leaves his main question unanswered regarding Ibn Taymiyya's actual relationship to Sufism (Michel, 1981).

Ṣūfiyya wa-al-Fuqarā' (Ibn Taymiyya, 1966b: 5-24)[3], I will discuss his understanding of Sufism and the nature of his critique. I will attempt to determine what his criteria are when he evaluates Sufi beliefs and practices. Since Makdisi most often overemphasizes Ibn Taymiyya's personal Sufi affiliation, he does not seem to pay enough attention to the essence of Ibn Taymiyya's understanding of Sufism. His argument thus overshadows Ibn Taymiyya's original intellectual position vis-à-vis Sufism. Although Ibn Taymiyya acknowledges the viability of Sufism as a practicing of Islam, his endorsement of Sufism is qualified. In this regard, Ibn Taymiyya promotes a particular type of Sufism, which seems more theologically and legally, rather than mystically, oriented. Doing this, I will present my discussions surrounding Ibn Taymiyya's own arguments on three mystical issues: a) spiritual inspiration (*ilhām*) and its relation to legal concept of independent judgment (*ijtihād*), b) ecstatic statements (*shaṭaḥāt*) under the influence of mystical states of annihilation (*fanā'*), and c) excessiveness (*mubālagha*) in piety. Since all three points are closely interconnected I will discuss them jointly throughout the article.

Before going into Ibn Taymiyya's detailed discussions on Sufism, a brief analysis of certain Ḥanbalīte doctors' relations to Sufism would be illuminating in examining historical development of the matter.

Intra-Ḥanbalīta Tensions

In three consecutive articles (Makdisi, 1973; Makdisi, 1974; Makdisi, 1981), Makdisi discusses the theoretical and practical approaches of some eminent Ḥanbalīte authorities throughout the course of Muslim intellectual history toward Sufism. He criticizes general assumptions inherited from classical Western Orientalist scholarship which characterizes Muslim religious movements as juxtaposed to each other like blocks of stone and thus opposed to all other movements.[4] In this context, he argues, due to its relatively small size compared to the other three Sunni schools of law-i.e., the Hanafite, the Shafi'te, and the Malikite-the Ḥanbalīte school has been subjected to additional inaccurate impressions. They came to be considered as rigid opponents to rationalism; literal interpreters of the Qur'an and the Hadith; anthropomorphists who, in their ultra-conservative traditionalism, were opposed both to the theologians

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[3] This *risāla* has been translated into English by Homerin (Homerin, 1985).

[4] Makdisi argues that such categorizations carried out by various Western Orientalists, including D. B. Macdonald, Brockelmann, and especially Goldziher, are open to criticism on several grounds. Above all, they do not have sufficient textual basis to reach such conclusive results regarding the entire history of a certain school. In addition to the lack of the scholarly work on manuscripts presently known to us, there are many other materials in libraries whose works have not yet been catalogued or whose catalogues have not yet been published, not to mention the existence of numerous private libraries that have remained untouched. Therefore, the dearth of documentary materials must be taken into account when assessing such conclusions. Makdisi maintains that in the case of studies on the Ḥanbalīte school, the difficulties increase even further in the presence of the existing insufficient scholarly presentations (Makdisi, 1981: 216-220; Makdisi, 1973: 119-120).

(*mutakallimūn*) and to the mystics of Islam (*Ṣūfiyya*); severe critics of the local customs and morals of the masses; and the like. Orientalists of the nineteenth and early twentieth century in large measure tended not only to underestimate the significance of the Ḥanbalīte religious movement in Muslim intellectual history but also introduced numerous misconceptions regarding the original characteristics of the school. In addition to this, they failed to notice the positions of the particular groups and individuals within this movement, although it is a common phenomenon that there are various tendencies within any particular intellectual tradition.[5]

According to Makdisi's argument, the reason why these Orientalists came to such conclusions was due partly to their arbitrary use of classical Arabic sources. For instance, they most often used the biographical history (*Ṭabaqāt*) of a Shafi'ite-Ash'arite author, al-Subkī (d. 756/1355), who is known to have very definite anti-Ḥanbalīte tendencies. Even though they used Ḥanbalīte biographer Ibn Rajab's (d. 795/1393) *Ṭabaqāt* as well, they nevertheless used Subkī's work much more frequently and much less cautiously than that of Ibn Rajab or of any other Ḥanbalīte author. It is true that the two biographers had extensive knowledge in their respective schools, but it is also true that they both had prejudices against the rival schools. Such scholarly methodology, consequently, blocked these Orientalists from grasping the authentic Ḥanbalīte position within the Islamic theological and legal schools (Makdisi, 1981: 226-228).

It is unavoidable that previous monographic works may misguide us regarding the authentic characteristics of any historical movement and individual. This fact is particularly unfortunate in the field of Islamic studies in which we do not have comprehensive works based on preceding monographic works of any movement elaborating the evolution of the schools over the centuries. Neither are we able to trace back most of their essential doctrines to their origins. Then we tend to resort to generalizations based on evidence from sources whose writers had some particular interest to serve. This methodology then brings us to the point that we commence conceptualizing and categorizing this and that scholar as belonging to this or that movement. Such a tendency naturally includes many pitfalls in capturing the authentic position of a certain intellectual group or individual within the larger Muslim community. For instance, some movements within Muslim intellectual history were opposed to the study of philosophy (*falsafa*) and *kalām* or rationalist theology, while others approved it. There was, however, no unanimous agreement among the supporters of a particular movement on this question. It is further possible for a certain scholar to oppose doctrines which in fact deeply influenced his thinking. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111) and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's (d. 606/1206) positions against Ibn Sīnā's (d. 429/1037) and the Mu'tazilite doctrines respectively exhibit good examples for this phenomenon. Although al-Ghazālī severely criticized certain Avicennan

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[5] Makdisi pays his respect to Henri Laoust as the pioneer European scholar who elucidated the authentic nature of the Ḥanbalīte school and appreciated its significance in the Islamic thought (Makdisi, 1973: 121-122; Makdisi, 1981: 220-226).

theories, nevertheless, he could not keep his mind away from their very influence. Likewise, the famous Ash'arite theologian al-Rāzī was critical of many Mu'tazilite concepts which in fact affected his own thinking greatly. The famous Ḥanbalīte theologian and legal expert, Abū al-Wafā' b. 'Aqīl (d. 513/1119) is another example for this occurrence. Though he was a Ḥanbalīte—since he was very eager to learn everything he could—he studied Mu'tazilite doctrines which in the end markedly influenced his thinking.[6] Depending upon other not uncommon cases in the history of Muslim thought, it is evident that there can be significant doctrinal differences not only between scholars of the same movement, but between successive views of a single scholar during different periods of his life. Taking into consideration of the chronology of his works—though it is not always possible—this fact requires careful study of a given scholar's thought. Being members of the same group or of the same school does not necessarily exclude the possibility that two given scholars could have different views and interests on any given topic. Rather, we have examples indicating that two scholars from the same school—in some cases they had teacher-student relationship—severely criticized one another on certain points. A Shafi'ite theologian, al-Māzarī (d. 536/1141) was critical of al-Juwaynī (d. 487/1085) and al-Ghazālī for having diverged from the primitive doctrine of al-Ash'arī. The Ḥanbalīte school, which has for too long been considered a monolithic movement, had its share of such antagonisms as well. In his work, *Taḥrīm al-Naẓar fī Kutub Ahl al-Kalām*, Muwaffaq al-Dīn Ibn Qudāma (d. 620/1223) criticizes his Ḥanbalī fellow Ibn 'Aqīl of having definite rationalist and Ash'arite tendencies (Ibn Qudāma, 1991: 29-34 and 39-41). Similarly, a famous Ḥanbalīte scholar, Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200), did not hesitate to include in his long list of critiques his Ḥanbalīte predecessors, Ibn Ḥāmid (d. 403/1012), Qāḍī Abū Ya'lā (d. 458/1066), and Abū al-Ḥasan b. al-Zaghūnī (d. 527/1132, the latter having been the author's very own teacher. Again, it was the same Ibn al-Jawzī who wrote a refutation against famous Ḥanbalīte Sufi, al-Jīlānī. The Ḥanbalīte movement, therefore, was not different from other Islamic legal and theological schools in terms of comprising various individual intellectual tendencies and interests within the same tradition (Makdisi, 1981: 240-242).

Received ideas concerning the relationships between various Muslim intellectual movements and personalities present certain common assumptions that need a more critical reconsideration. For instance, there is a notion that Ḥanbalīsm was the great enemy of Sufism. According to the same argument, a relentless hostility existed

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[6] Ibn 'Aqīl was made to give up his Mu'tazilī tendencies and retract a work which he had written in praise of Ḥallāj. In his twenties, Ibn 'Aqīl wrote a work venerating Ḥallāj. A bitter accusation was brought against him by some of his contemporary scholars. Among other things, they forced him to retract his Ḥallājism as well, and he was supposed to destroy his work on Ḥallāj. This work, however, was later found in Ibn al-Jawzī's library in the handwriting of the author himself (Makdisi, 1974: 64-67).

between jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and Sufism[7]. Sufism owes its scholarly legitimacy in the Muslim community to al-Ghazālī who made Sufism orthodox by reconciling it with Muslim orthodoxy, just as he reconciled Ash'arite *kalām* with orthodoxy. I will not go into detailed discussions about how al-Ghazālī is indebted to the previous Sufi authors whose works represented the prototypes of his famous *Iḥyā' al-'Ulūm al-Dīn* and other mystical presentations; for example, how Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī's (d. 386/996) work *Qūt al-Qulūb* was clearly influential on the *Iḥyā'*s form and fundamental concepts; again, how the writings of other previous Sufi authors including 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī's (d. 412/1021) *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya* and Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī's (d. 465/1072) *Risāla al-Qushayriyya* provided essential materials for al-Ghazālī writings on Sufism. At least, however, I would like to point out that Islam did not wait five centuries before al-Ghazālī to reconcile Sufism and orthodoxy. Many recognized Sufi characters and their writings before him, such as al-Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 298/910) and aforementioned al-Makkī –who was described as *shaykh al-sharī'a wa-al-ḥaqīqa* (master of law and of mystical truth)—had been already respected greatly by both Sufi and non-Sufi Muslim authorities (Makdisi, 1981: 242-244). If we turn to the notion that an implacable hostility existed between the Ḥanbalīsm and Sufism, the existence of many great Ḥanbalīte Sufis, such as 'Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī al-Harawī (d. 481/1089) and al-Jīlānī represents contradictory evidence to this argument. Al-Anṣārī passionately favored Ḥanbalīsm to the extent that he eagerly encouraged his Sufi fellows to become Ḥanbalītes.[8]

Furthermore, numerous Ḥanbalīte scholars, who have been characterized as the dominant authorities in the school such as Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350), were interested in Sufi ideas and wrote on them. In Ibn Qayyim's specific case, in addition to his mystical ideas –especially concerning the love of God—throughout his mainstream writings, he wrote a commentary on the famous mystical work, the *Manāzil al-Sā'irīn* of al-Anṣārī al-Harawī.[9] Similar examples indicate quite correctly that Ḥanbalītes had never been unanimous in their condemnation of Sufism in general, nor certain Sufi ideas and personalities in particular.

It is true that some Ḥanbalīte scholars wrote works in which they opposed some Sufis and Sufi practices. For example, in his *Talbīs Iblīs* (Ibn al-Jawzī, 1950) Ibn al-Jawzī did severely criticize Sufis, but the work is not concerned only with Sufism as such. If we take a look at the content of the *Talbīs Iblīs*, we clearly see that in addition to Sufis, he disapproves of certain types of philosophers, pagans, theologians, traditionists, philologists, poets, popular preachers, common people, rich, and the like.

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7 According to Makdisi's argument, even though Western scholars owe a great debt of gratitude to Goldziher's studies on Ḥanbalīte school, Goldziher himself is especially responsible for such Orientalist description of Ḥanbalīsm (Makdisi, 1974: 62).

8 In verse, he recites, *ana ḥanbaliyyun mā ḥayītu wa-in amūt / fa-waṣiyyatī li-al-nāsi an-yataḥanbalū* (Makdisi, 1981: 247).

9 For writings on love theory, though not purely mystical, by the Ḥanbalītes, see for instance (Bell, 1979).

For instance, he begins the work with the necessity of following orthodox doctrines (*fī al-amr bi-luzūm al-sunna wa-al-jamā'a*) in every religious matter (Ibn al-Jawzī, 1950: 5-11). He then takes up the case of innovations and innovators and their blameworthy positions (*fī dhamm al-bida' wa-al-mubtadi'īn*) (Ibn al-Jawzī, 1950: 11-23). He continues his work warning believers against the demonic temptations and tricks (*fī al-taḥdhīr min fitan Iblīs wa-kiyādihi*) (Ibn al-Jawzī, 1950: 23-37). He discusses how Iblīs can deviate scholars in scholarly disciplines (*fī talbīsihi 'alā al-'ulamā' fī funūn al-'ilm*) (Ibn al-Jawzī, 1950: 112-134) in which he, for example, articulates how the reciters of the Qur'an can be open to the deceptions by Iblīs (*dhikr talbīsihi 'ala al-qurrā'*) (Ibn al-Jawzī, 1950: 112-114); how the Hadith scholars can be influenced by Iblīs (*fī dhikr talbīs Iblīs 'alā aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*) (Ibn al-Jawzī, 1950: 114-118); how the jurists can be deceived by Iblīs (*dhikr talbīs Iblīs 'alā al-fuqahā'*) in their understanding of the Qur'an and Sunna (Ibn al-Jawzī, 1950: 118-119); how popular preachers can be vulnerable to Iblīs's attacks (*dhikr talbīsihi 'alā al-wu''āz wa-al-quṣṣāṣ*) (Ibn al-Jawzī, 1950: 123-126); how the philologists can be affected by Iblīs (*dhikr talbīsihi 'alā ahl al-lugha wa-al-adab*) (Ibn al-Jawzī, 1950: 126-128); how poets can be manipulated by Iblīs (*dhikr talbīs Iblīs 'alā al-shu'arā'*) (Ibn al-Jawzī, 1950: 128-129), and the like. Ibn al-Jawzī further talks about the Iblīs' influence on religious practices of pious people (*fī dhikr talbīs Iblīs 'alā al-'ubbād fī al-'ibādāt*) including on their prayer (*ṣalāt*), fasting (*ṣawm*), pilgrimage (*ḥajj*), and so on (Ibn al-Jawzī, 1950: 134-149). Next, in his chapter 10, he examines and criticizes certain types of Sufis and their practices (*fī dhikr talbīsihi 'alā al-Ṣūfiyya*). In this section he is critical of, for example, the spiritual concert of the Sufis (*samā'*), their certain dressings (*libās*), and their certain ecstatic statements (*shaṭaḥāt*) (Ibn al-Jawzī, 1950: 160-378). In the final analysis, except its length, Ibn al-Jawzī's criticism of Sufism is not different from his criticism of other groups, whose doctrines and practices, in his view, contradict to what revealed texts teach. He, therefore, censures every kind of "heterodox" doctrine and practice, which he considers as not having originated from the Qur'an and Sunna. His criticism does not exclude even the groups to which he himself belonged such as jurists, traditionists, and preachers. His opposition to Sufism, consequently, does not have an essential character, rather he contextually criticizes certain types of Sufi religious understandings and moral characteristics. For Ibn al-Jawzī wrote several works in favor of Sufism, for example, he abridged *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'* and *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* by Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1039) and al-Ghazālī respectively. He wrote several biographical accounts in praise of Sufis. He wrote the *Faḍā'il* and *Manāqib* type of works in praise of early Sufis, such as *Faḍā'il Ḥasan al-Baṣrī* and *Manāqibs* on Ibrāhīm b. Adham (d. ca. 165/782), Ma'rūf al-Karkhī (d. ca. 199/815), and Bishr al-Ḥāfī (d. 227/842). Furthermore, it is the same Ibn al-Jawzī who condemned his contemporary Ḥanbalīte Sufi fellow, al-Jīlānī for whom—as it will be explained in the following pages—another famous Ḥanbalīte authority, Ibn Taymiyya had a great respect and admiration; while on the other hand Ibn al-Jawzī wrote a work entitled *Manāqib Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya* in praise of the famous Sufi woman Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya (d. 185/801) (Makdisi, 1981: 249; Makdisi, 1974: 70).

Similarly, in his *Kitāb al-Tawwābīn*, the aforementioned Ḥanbalīte doctor Ibn Qudāma quotes some verses by one of the most controversial names in the history of Sufism, al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), without identifying them. Again, in his *Taḥrīm al-Naẓar*, he condemns Ibn 'Aqīl's theological rationalism, while he consciously passes over the latter's Ḥallājian sympathies without mentioning them (Makdisi, 1981: 250).[10] These reports indicate that the scholars from the same Ḥanbalīte school do not automatically approve or disapprove of the ideas and of the individuals, rather, they have their own criteria and interests in reaching their conclusions.

On the basis of this historical background let us examine Ibn Taymiyya's understanding of Sufism and the nature of his critique.

Ibn Taymiyya and his Critique

Perhaps one of most interesting contextual criticisms was initiated by an eminent doctor of the Ḥanbalīte school, Ibn Taymiyya, who has been considered as the sworn enemy of Sufism.[11] Both Laoust and Makdisi speak of Ibn Taymiyya's affinities for Sufism.[12] Makdisi further argues that he personally was affiliated to the Sufi brotherhood of al-Jīlānī.

It is true that he did oppose certain types of mystical tendencies, especially mystical monism (*ittiḥādiyya*), but it is the same Ibn Taymiyya who expressed his admiration for the works of pioneer Sufis, such as al-Junayd, Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896), Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, Abū Ḥafṣ al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234), and al-Jīlānī (Makdisi, 1981: 249).[13] He wrote a commentary on al-Jīlānī's *Kitāb Futūḥ al-*

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[10] Furthermore, Makdisi refers to a *silsila* in which Ibn Qudāma is mentioned as having received the Sufi robe (*khirqa*) directly from the *shaykh* 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī. In addition to Ibn Qudāma, some other Ḥanbalītes, such as 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Tamīmī (d. 371/981) and 'Abd al-Wāḥid al-Tamīmī (d. 410/1019), are mentioned in the *silsila* as well (Makdisi, 1981:250; Makdisi, 1974: 64-71).

[11] In his *Riḥla,* Ibn Baṭṭūṭa describes Ibn Taymiyya as a man "with a screw loose" (*illā anna fī 'aqlihi shay'an*)." Makdisi states that Goldziher was the first great Orientalist scholar to give this statement currency in the West. Next, Macdonald took it up and described Ibn Taymiyya as one who, "had no use for mystics, philosophers, Ash'arīte theologians, or, in fact, for anyone but himself." Makdisi argues that the reason why Ibn Taymiyya was treated like that by such Orientalist scholars was due partly to his works –for example, *Takhjīl man Ḥarrafa al-Injīl* and *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ li-man Baddala Dīn al-Masīḥ*—in refutation of certain Christian and Jewish ideas (Makdisi, 1973: 118-119). For Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's description of Ibn Taymiyya and polemics surrounding it, see (Little, 1975, 93-111).

[12] Fazlur Rahman speaks of Ibn Taymiyya's affinity for Sufism. Rahman describes Ibn Taymiyya and his foremost disciple Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya as neo-Sufis (Rahman, 1979: 195).

[13] On the basis of the manuscripts he mentions, Makdisi gives further details about Ibn Taymiyya's practical Sufi affiliation. According to the *silsila* Ibn Taymiyya receives his *khirqa* in the following historically-not-impossible descending order: (1) 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 561/1166); (2) a) Abū 'Umar b. Qudāma (d. 607/1210); b) Muwaffaq al-Dīn b. Qudāma (d. 620/1223); (3) Ibn Abī 'Umar b. Qudāma (d. 682/1283); (4) Ibn Taymiyya (d.

Ghayb in which he describes al-Jīlānī and Ḥammād al-Dabbās as trustworthy Sufi *shaykhs*, even though the first had been criticized by Ibn al-Jawzī and the second by Ibn 'Aqīl. He approves their ideas as consistent with the revealed texts, while on the other hand, he disapproves another Ḥanbalīte *shaykh* al-Anṣārī al-Harawī—whom Ibn Taymiyya's own disciple Ibn Qayyim greatly admired and on whose work *Manāzil al-Sā'irīn* he wrote a commentary—of being confused with monist doctrines. It appears that Ibn Taymiyya is not to be considered as an enemy of Sufism, but nor a blind admirer of Sufis and their doctrines either. Rather, he is a critical follower of Sufism, just as al-Ghazālī who had also criticized certain forms of Sufism, such as their "improper" practice of confidence in God (*tawakkul*) leading them to the indifference to their earthly obligations and their monistic ideas as contrary to the *sharī'a* (Makdisi, 1981: 251). In this respect, Ibn Taymiyya's position against Sufism can be comparable to that of al-Ghazālī on the ground that they both endorse Sufism but not unconditionally.

In order better to be able to analyze Ibn Taymiyya's own understanding of Sufism, an examination of his writings on purely mystical issues would shed further light on the question. For this reason, let us examine his two works, *Sharḥ Kalimāt li-'Abd al-Qādir fī Kitāb Futūḥ al-Ghayb* and *al-Ṣūfiyya wa-al-Fuqarā'* with special reference to his discussions on mystical terms, *ilhām*, *shaṭaḥāt*, and *mubālagha* in religion.

a) *Sharḥ Kalimāt li-'Abd al-Qādir fī Kitāb Futūḥ al-Ghayb*

Ibn Taymiyya's commentary does not cover the entire *Futūḥ al-Ghayb*, which is a collection of short treatises brought together by al-Jīlānī's son after his father's death (Al-Jīlānī, 1973). Ibn Taymiyya makes citations from *Futūḥ al-Ghayb* around which he articulates his arguments. The resulting commentary is, not surprisingly as Ibn

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728/1328); (5) Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350); (6) Ibn Rajab (d. 795/1393). In one of these manuscripts, Ibn Taymiyya's own statement confirms this Sufi genealogy when he says, "I wore the blessed Sufi cloak of 'Abd al-Qādir (al-Jīlānī), there being between him and me two (Sufi Shaykhs)." (*Labistu al-khirqa al-mubāraka li- al-Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir wa-baynī wa-baynahu ithnān.*) Ibn Taymiyya also states, "I have worn the Sufi cloak of a number of Shaykhs belonging to various *ṭarīqa*s, among them the Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, whose *ṭarīqa* is the greatest of the well-known ones." In Makdisi's view, the fact that Ibn Taymiyya was buried in the Sufi cemetery in Damascus where other members of his own family, also Sufis, had been buried before him also supports Ibn Taymiyya's Sufi affiliation (Makdisi, 1974: 67-69; Makdisi, 1973: 123-126).

Makdisi also introduces material in which Ibn Taymiyya approves of the *nisba*s al-Qādirī and al-'Alawī among the *nisba*s which Muslims may use. In the latter's view, in addition to *nisba*s referring to the founders of the four Sunni schools of law, Muslims are allowed to use *nisba*s referring to the founders of mystical *ṭarīqa*s. Makdisi argues that one should not be surprised with such accounts, for in his *Dhayl'alā Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila* in which he lists Ḥanbalītes' biographies, a Ḥanbalīte biographer Ibn Rajab mentions over one hundred Ḥanbalīte Sufis, which is more than one-sixth of the Ḥanbalītes mentioned in the work (Makdisi,1981: 249-250; Makdisi, 1974: 63).

Taymiyya's other works, away from being a systematic and complete analysis of al-Jīlānī's work.

As far as the historical question of whether or not Ibn Taymiyya belonged to the Qādiri or some other Sufi order is concerned, the *Sharḥ* leaves this question unanswered. Although he calls al-Jīlānī our master (*shaykhunā*) and praises the latter's statements (*kalām sharīf*) throughout the treatise, such statements in praise of preceding authorities are common ways of addressing and thus do not necessarily indicate Ibn Taymiyya's practical relationship to the Qādirī Sufi order. Throughout the *Sharḥ*, he speaks of Sufi terminology: *ilhām, dhawq, wajd, maḥabba, kashf, ḥaqīqa, muḥaqqiq, kamāl al-nafs, bāṭin, ẓāhir, zuhd, wara', ḥāl, maqām,* and the like. In Ibn Taymiyya's view, the sole touchstone in religious issues is the revealed law (*sharī'a*). Any type of Sufism which is not based on this *sharī'a* is heretical. In this regard, being their respective correspondings, a remarkable harmony exists between the terms *sharī'a* and its authentic understanding truth (*ḥaqīqa*). At every spiritual station (*maqām*) and state (*ḥāl*), every single Sufi must observe thoroughly divine command (*amr*) and prohibition (*nahy*), as Ibn Taymiyya underlines (Ibn Taymiyya, 1966a: 524-524),

> The upright among the followers of the path -like the majority of the early masters (*al-mustaqīmūn min al-sālikīn ka-jumhūr mashā'ikh al-salaf*), such as Fuḍayl b. 'Iyāḍ, Ibrāhīm b. Adham, Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī, Ma'rūf al-Karkhī, al-Sarī al-Saqaṭī, al-Junayd al-Baghdādī, and others of the early authorities (*mutaqaddimīn*), and such as al-Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir, al-Shaykh Ḥammād, and al-Shaykh Abū al-Bayān [d.551/1156] and others of the later authorities (*muta'akhkhirīn*)- do not let the follower (*sālik*) to depart from divinely established command and prohibition, even were that person to have flown in the air or walked on water. Rather, he is responsible for performing what is commanded and for avoiding what is forbidden until he dies. This is the truth (*ḥaqq*) which the Book (*Kitāb*), Prophetic practice (*Sunna*), and the consensus of the early authorities (*salaf*) have indicated (Ibn Taymiyya, 1966a: 516-517).

One of the most striking remarks in the *Sharḥ* is Ibn Taymiyya's understanding of Sufi inspiration (*ilhām*). Makdisi considers Ibn Taymiyya's discussions on *ilhām* as a clear indication of the latter's practical Sufi affiliation. I agree with Makdisi's argument to the extent that Ibn Taymiyya does not deny the epistemological credibility of *ilhām* and other related Sufi concepts in religious matters. At the same time, however, it seems to me that Makdisi disregards the fact that, in the final analysis, Ibn Taymiyya reads these mystical concepts in light of exoteric legal and theological principles, rather than Sufi doctrines. For according to Ibn Taymiyya's explanations, *ilhām* is a type of independent judgment (*ijtihād*), and it has a validity in the legal and theological issues. When all other appropriate legal sources (*al-adilla al-shar'iyya*) fail, *ilhām* must be put into practice on the level of legally valid evidence on which one bases a preference for one action as against another. *İlhām* is neither to be denied, nor to be affirmed

absolutely, but it can serve as a legal source when the primary legal sources are not applicable in a given situation. He asserts,

> If the *sālik* has employed his efforts in the external evidence of law (*fī al-adilla al-shar'iyya al-ẓāhira*), while seeing no clear sign concerning the preferable action in them, then relying on his goodness of intention (*ma'a ḥusn qaṣdihi*) and reverent fear of God, he may feel inspired (*ulhima*) to chose one of the two actions as preferable one. This kind of inspiration is a valid (*fī ḥaqqihi*) indication. It may be even a stronger indication than weak analogies (*al-aqyisa al-ḍa'īfa*), weak hadiths (*al-aḥādīth al-ḍa'īfa*), weak literal arguments (*al-ẓawāhir al-ḍa'īfa*), and weak *istiṣḥābs* which are employed by many of those who delve into the juristic school (*al-madhhab*), divergences of the law (*al-khilāf*), and principles and sources of Islamic jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) (Ibn Taymiyya, 1966a: 473).

Ibn Taymiyya argues that the revealed instructions are originally compatible with man's disposition (*fiṭra*) as long as he does not attempt to corrupt it (Ibn Taymiyya, 1966a: 466). Since God has placed this disposition in man directing him to the truth, in the instances when a believer is unable to determine the precise will of God, his heart will show him the preferable course of action. Such an inspiration is one of the strongest signs to pick up the superior alternative (Ibn Taymiyya, 1966a: 474). In Ibn Taymiyya's view, even though—just as a *mujtahid* in juristic questions—the one who guided by his *ilhām* may err, he is still an obedient believer. Relying on *ilhām* and intuitive perception (*dhawq*) does not mean following one's own whims (*ahwā'*) or arbitrary personal preferences. This *ilhām* may appear in the heart as an opinion (*qawl*), knowledge (*'ilm*), assumption (*ẓann*) and belief (*i'tiqād*); it sometimes occurs as an action (*'amal*), love (*ḥubb*), will (*irāda*) and wish (*ṭalab*). The heart of a believer then inclines to more preferable one of the two options. In this regard, Ibn Taymiyya employs another essential Sufi term, the spiritual unveiling (*kashf*). In his view, a believer may resort to the *kashf* in his complicated questions; it will certainly lead him to the appropriate solution as its exemplary instances that can be seen in many early Sufi authorities. He further reminds the Qur'anic story of Moses and Khidr as an example of possibility that the appearance of a given situation may be deeply different from its reality. The knowledge based on the *kashf* can clarify such situation, while ordinary means of human perception may not be capable of understanding it. Ibn Taymiyya, therefore, does not deny the epistemological credibility of such Sufi concepts (Ibn Taymiyya, 1966a: 479-480).

Ibn Taymiyya pays his respect to al-Jīlānī for his explanation of another controversial Sufi term, annihilation (*fanā'*). According to Ibn Taymiya, al-Jīlānī articulates *fanā'* quite moderately when al-Jīlānī prefers to keep the mystical utterances

close to the revealed instructions, rather than promoting ecstatic statements.[14] Accordingly, al-Jīlānī explains other Sufi terms such as trust in God (*tawakkul*) when he calls his disciples to participate in everyday life and works, instead of isolating themselves from society and practicing passive mystical rituals (Ibn Taymiyya, 1966a: 490-497).

Ibn Taymiyya does not give credit to extreme Sufi practices, especially in permissible (*mubāḥ*) matters. He asserts that every servant (*'abd*) is responsible for his physical health; he, for example, is supposed to eat when he is hungry and he is supposed to take care of his body against possible dangers (Ibn Taymiyya, 1966a: 462-463).

Ibn Taymiyya states that no Muslim can be a better Muslim than the Prophet Muhammad who is the best and unique example for every believer. The Qur'an describes the Prophet as, "Surely you have a Sublime Character (*khuluq 'aẓīm*)." (Q; 68/4) It is the same Qur'an instructing him as, "And worship your Lord until what is certain (*yaqīn*) comes to you." (Q; 15/99) Not a single believer, including the Prophet himself, is excepted from this basic requirement. Accordingly, the Prophet states, "By God, if Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad, would steal, I would cut her hand." 'Ā'isha, the Prophet's wife, describes him as, "His character was the Qur'an (*kāna khuluquhu al-Qur'ān*)" (Ibn Taymiyya, 1966a: 503-504). Thus a believer may increase or decrease in his spiritual strength in accordance with his devotedness to the revealed laws. Ibn Taymiyya further compares some extreme Sufi practices, such as their excessive practice of asceticism (*zuhd*) and celibacy, to the Christian monks (*ruhbān*). He argues that there must be a balance between the extent of spiritual exercises and of this-worldly responsibilities in such practices. In the case of celibacy, since marriage is recommended by the Prophet to every qualified believer, he is supposed to follow this recommendation (Ibn Taymiyya, 1966a: 510-511).

Ibn Taymiyya further criticizes some Sufis of their understanding of God's pre-destination (*qadar*). In his explanation, these Sufis diminish man's role in his actions, whereas God's pre-destination never removes man's active participation in his actions. Otherwise, the idea of human responsibility in his actions would lose its very foundation. In this respect, Ibn Taymiyya even criticizes al-Anṣārī al-Harawī, whom the former's many Ḥanbalīte predecessors had treated very respectfully (Ibn Taymiyya, 1966a: 487-495).

Given these statements, it appears that Ibn Taymiyya embraces a quite moderate and sober type of Sufism. His explanations have very direct references to the formal theological and legal theories instead of nuanced Sufi conceptions. In this regard, even though in general I definitely agree with Makdisi that Ibn Taymiyya is not to be regarded as a sworn enemy of Sufism, I am not inclined to disregard the characteristics

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[14] On the other hand, Ibn Taymiyya praises one of the most controversial Sufis Abū Yazīd Bisṭāmī (d. 261/874) whose *shaṭaḥāt* widely circulated among Sufi circles (Ibn Taymiyya, 1966a: 518).

of Ibn Taymiyya's peculiar understanding of Sufism either. Considering his strict application of theological and legal doctrines to the mystical matters, a simple designation of Ibn Taymiyya as being a practicing Sufi does not seem to be a complete description. Without dealing with such textual issues, therefore, Makdisi's arguments introduce incomplete conclusions concerning the essence of Ibn Taymiyya's discussions on Sufism.

In another chapter of his *Fatawā'*, Ibn Taymiyya expresses his opinion about Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī and al-Ghazālī and their works, *Qūt al-Qulūb* and *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* respectively. In his view, al-Makkī was more knowledgeable in classical Muslim scholarly fields—including hadith, theology (*kalām*) and the Sufi disciplines related to hearts (*'ulūm al-qulūb min al-Ṣūfiyya*)—than al-Ghazālī who in his *Iḥyā'* basically followed the former's methodology and ideas. Al-Makkī's statements are reliable and far from innovation (*bid'a*) with the exception that he uses some weak (*ḍa'īf*) and forged (*mawḍū'*) hadiths and other inadmissible (*mardūd*) materials (Ibn Taymiyya, 1966c: 551).

So far as the *Iḥyā'* is concerned, Ibn Taymiyya maintains that al-Ghazālī borrowed from the *al-Ri'āya* of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857), regarding his writings on Sufi terms—such as pride (*kibr*), conceitedness (*'ujb*), hypocrisy (*riyā'*), and jealousy (*ḥasad*)—some of which are admissible, while some of which are not, and still the reliability of some of which are arguable. According to Ibn Taymiyya's discussion, there are many useful ideas in the *Iḥyā'*, while there are some objectionable materials in it as well. There are further misleading (*fāsid*) ideas originating from the arguments of philosophers pertaining to the unity of God (*tawḥīd*), prophecy (*nubuwwa*), and hereafter (*ma'ād*) in the *Iḥyā'*. In the cases when al-Ghazālī uses such philosophical arguments to articulate Sufi concepts, most of his efforts result in failure. On account of such speculative thoughts, Ibn Taymiyya asserts, some authorities disapproved al-Ghazālī's writings saying that he was incurably influenced by the *Shifā'* of Ibn Sīnā. Still, Ibn Taymiyya states, there are many useful arguments compatible with the Qur'an and Sunna in al-Ghazālī's work (Ibn Taymiyya, 1966c: 552).

In his *al-Ṣūfiyya wa-al-Fuqarā'*, Ibn Taymiyya presents similar and still further discussions regarding his understanding of Sufism.

b) *Al-Ṣūfiyya wa-al-Fuqarā'*

In this epistle, Ibn Taymiyya treats briefly his view on the origin and background of Sufism. He evaluates various types and degrees of behavior among the Sufis with reference to conventional legal categories based on the revealed texts. He then categorizes Sufi beliefs and practices as praiseworthy ones, excusable ones, and reprehensible ones. In this work, unlike his general tendency, Ibn Taymiyya does not speak in a polemical tone, instead, he expresses his position with regard to the mystical experiences and Sufi practices in an explanatory style.

In the introductory section of the epistle, Ibn Taymiyya presents historical data concerning the origins of Sufism. He asserts that the term Sufis (*al-Ṣūfiyya*) was not

well known in the first three centuries of Islam (Ibn Taymiyya, 1966b: 5-6). He then points the city Basra where there was an excessiveness (*mubālagha*) in asceticism (*zuhd*), worship (*'ibāda*), fear of God (*khawf*), and such things, which did not exist to such extent among the people of other major cities, and thus it has been said, "The jurisprudence of the Kūfan and the worship of the Baṣran" (*fiqhu kūfi wa-'ibādatu Baṣrī*) (Ibn Taymiyya, 1966b: 6-7). Ibn Taymiyya mentions reports regarding the excessive piety among Basrans, such as the story of those who died or swooned upon hearing the Qur'an. Ibn Taymiyya disapproves of such excessiveness when he argues that there was no one among the Companions of the Prophet who had this condition. He refers to a group of Companions such as Asmā' bint Abī Bakr (d. 73/693) and 'Abd Allāh b. Zubayr (d. 73/692) who disapproved the excessiveness that appeared in their days (Ibn Taymiyya, 1966b: 7). Ibn Taymiyya, nevertheless, mentions that majority of the authorities are of the opinion that if someone is overcome (*maghlūb*) by ecstasy, he is not to be reproved, even though the state of stability (*ḥāl thābit*) is more perfect. He refers, for example, to an instance when Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal did not approve to censure Yaḥyā b. Sa'īd al-Qaṭṭān (d. 198/813) when the latter swooned upon hearing the Qur'an. Ibn Taymiyya further cites Qur'anic statements praising similar states (*aḥwāl*) of the Companions, "The believers are only those whose hearts feels fear (*wajilat qulūbuhum*) when God is mentioned, and when His signs (or verses) (*āyāt*) are recited to them, they increase in faith, and those who trust in their Lord." (Q; 8/2) and "God has sent down the most beautiful statement in the form of a Book, consistent with itself; the skin of those who fear their Lord tremble (*taqsha'irru*), then their skins and hearts soften to (*talīnu*) the remembrance of God." (Q; 39/23).[15] Thus the piety of believers and their exemplary devotedness to the heavenly principles have their basis in the Qur'an. According to Ibn Taymiyya's articulations, nevertheless, there are two extreme opposites regarding the state of those who start out in search of mystical experiences. While on the one hand, due to their superficial interpretations of the revealed instructions and still due to hardness of their hearts and crudeness in religion, people who have in themselves certain blameworthy characteristics severely condemn Sufi beliefs and practices; on the other hand, considering themselves as superior to other believers certain Sufis suppose that their spiritual state is the most perfect state. In Ibn Taymiyya's view, both extremes in this matter are reprehensible (Ibn Taymiyya, 1966b: 8-9).

As for the controversial Sufi terms, such as intoxication (*sukr*) and annihilation (*fanā'*), Ibn Taymiyya argues that even though notorious statements under the influence of these spiritual states indicate the weakness of the pious believer to bear what afflicts his heart, as long as his afflictedness is not based on an illegal cause he is not supposed

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[15] Similarly, "And when the signs (or verses) (*āyāt*) of the merciful are recited to them they fall down prostrating and crying." (Q; 19/58); "When they listen to what has been sent down to the Messenger, you will see their eyes overflow with tears (*tafiḍu min al-dam'*) because of their recognition of the truth." (Q; 5/83); and "And they fall down on their faces, weeping, and it increases them in humility." (Q; 17/109)

to be reproved. For the cause to vanish his intellect appears without his choice; if the cause is not legally forbidden (*maḥẓūr*), then the intoxicated one is not censured (*madhmūm*), rather he is excused (*ma'dhūr*) because he is without the power of discrimination (*bi-lā tamyīz*). If a similar state, however, derives from having an intoxicating thing, such as wine (*khamr*) and *hashish*, this is no doubt is forbidden among Muslims. According to Ibn Taymiyya's explanations, God has not permitted man to allow his heart and soul to enjoy pleasures which cause the cessation of his intellect (Ibn Taymiyya, 1966b: 9-12). Arguing this, again, Ibn Taymiyya tries to apply formal theological and legal criteria to the ecstatic statements of Sufis. For he is chiefly interested in the cause of intoxicated statements; if the intoxication arises due to the cause in which the servant has no responsibility, such as an unintended audition which drives him into a state of unconsciousness, he is not to be blamed. Since his intellect ceases to perform its natural act without his intended participation, he is excused on the basis of a basic juristic rule that "the pen (judgment) is lifted from everyone who has lost his intellectual faculties with a legitimate reason" (*al-qalam marfū' 'an kull man zāla 'aqluhu bi-sabab ghayr muḥarram*) (Ibn Taymiyya, 1966b: 11).

Ibn Taymiyya asserts that despite their intoxicated utterances that cause controversial opinions regarding their understanding of religion, these people are better than those who did not arrive at their spiritual state due to the deficiency in their faith or to the hardness of their heart. For the former group has a strong inclination toward what God loves and doing what draws near to God, which by itself is an indication of their higher spiritual rank. There is, however, a third group who experience mystical truths as the intoxicated pious people do, but still retain their consciousness. According to Ibn Taymiyya, these last people attain a more excellent spiritual state than afflicted Sufis. That is the perfect state which the Companions and the Prophet Muhammad enjoy in their devotional lives. In this regard, Ibn Taymiyya further makes a comparison between the spiritual positions of the prophets Muhammad and Moses. The former was made to travel by night into the heaven, and God revealed to him what He revealed. Upon his miraculous journey, yet, his apparent state did not change. The latter, however, "fell swooning" (*kharra Mūsā ṣā'iqa*) (Q; 7/143), when his Lord manifested Himself to the mountain. Being a prophet himself, Moses' state was a splendid and excellent one, but the state of Muhammad was more excellent, and perfect in that matter. Therefore, in Ibn Taymiyya's view, moderate (*muqtaṣid*) pious practices that lead one to seek what God loves and to avoid what God dislikes are more preferable than excessive ones. For the Qur'an does not give much credit to extreme positions overburdening human capacity. It says, "Fear God as much as you can." (Q; 69/16) and "God does not charge a person with more than his capacity." (Q; 2/286) Nor does the Prophet recommend excessive pious rituals as he says, "When I give you an order try as much of it as you can." (Ibn Taymiyya, 1966b: 12-15).

In this epistle, just as in his commentary on al-Jīlānī's *Futūḥ al-Ghayb*, Ibn Taymiyya focuses on the notion of *ijtihād*. He argues that Sufis basically exercise their independent judgment in obedience to God just as the others who have also done the same (*annahum mujtahidūn fī ṭā'at Allāh ka-mā ijtahada ghayruhum min ahl ṭā'at*

Allāh). It may be arguable that with the word *mujtahidūn* Ibn Taymiyya simply refers to the sense of striving, instead of its technical meaning in the Islamic jurisprudence. His following statements, however, reveal that he uses this word in its technical sense, for he argues that among Sufis there are those who draw near to God (*al-sābiq al-muqarrab*) through their diligent efforts; those who embrace a moderate position and who belong to the "People of the Right Hand" (*ahl al-yamīn*). Among both Sufis and non-Sufi believers there may be individuals who strive diligently but err, as well as there may be those who sin and then repent or do not (Ibn Taymiyya, 1966b: 18). Thus Ibn Taymiyya calls attention to the parallelism between the methods-which are based on the very concept of *ijtihād*-of Sufis and non-Sufi Muslims in the course of their understanding of religion. If a Sufi errs in his *ijtihād*, he would be pardoned just as it is in the case of a *faqīh*'s *ijtihād*.

Ibn Taymiyya further classifies Sufis under three major categories: a) Sufis of the True Realities (*al-ḥaqā'iq*), b) Sufis of Nourishment (*al-arzāq*), and c) Sufis of Convention (or Ceremony) (*al-rasm*). He expresses his sincere admiration for the first group. For the second group, he argues that they have some both praiseworthy and blameworthy beliefs and practices needed a reconsideration and careful examination. And for the third group, Ibn Taymiyya asserts that they are not that much interested in the real spirit of Sufism. Their main concerns are restricted to the certain type of dressings, conventional rules, and the like. They do not have intellectual capacity to comprehend the original foundations of their beliefs and practices either (Ibn Taymiyya, 1966b: 19-20).

As far as a more speculative Sufism is concerned, Ibn Taymiyya does not consider them as genuine Sufis. He asserts that among those who claim affiliation with Sufis, there are those who are unjust to themselves (*ẓālim li-nafsihi*), disobedient to his Lord (*'āṣin li-rabbihi*). Still there are those who belong to the people of innovations (*min ahl al-bida'*) who make an attempt to affiliate themselves with Sufism. As an example of the last group Ibn Taymiyya gives Ḥallāj, who was not welcomed by many early Sufi authorities such as al-Junayd al-Baghdādī, and 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (Ibn Taymiyya, 1966b: 18).

Ibn Taymiyya concludes that no matter how they are called-i.e., poor (*faqīr*), Sufi, jurist (*faqīh*), scholar (*'ālim*), merchant (*tājir*), soldier (*jundī*), artisan (*ṣāni'*), emir, ruler (*ḥākim*), or something else-the "friends of God (*awliyā' Allāh*)" are the pious believers. For the Qur'an says, "Surely, the friends of God; no fear will be on them, neither will they grieve. They are those who believe and are God-fearing." (Q; 10/62-63) The Prophetic practice also confirms this conclusion, as the Prophet Muhammad articulates,

> God—He is most high—has said, 'Whoever treats a friend (*walī*) of mine as an enemy, takes the field against Me in battle. Nothing draws My servant near to Me like the performance of what I prescribe for him as religious duty. Then My servant continues draw nearer to Me by supererogatory acts (*al-nawāfil*) until I love him. So that, when I love him, I become his ear by which he hears, his eye by which he sees, his hand bay which he grasps, and his foot by which he walks.

> Thus, by Me he hears; by Me he sees; by Me he grasps, and by Me he walks. If he asks Me [for something], I certainly give it, and if he seeks refuge with Me, indeed I protect him. I never hesitated from doing anything like My hesitating to seize the soul of My believing servant who hates death, and I have to hurt him, but he cannot escape it (Ibn Taymiyya, 1966b: 23).[16]

Conclusion

During the early stage of this research, a part of my project was to focus on Ibn Taymiyya's famous criticism of Muḥy al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 638/1240) and his school as well.[17] For, to my belief, without dealing with his severe condemnation of the latter who has been considered as one of the foremost Muslim mystics, *al-Shaykh al-Akbar* (the Greatest Master), deeply interested in the intellectual side of Sufism, an examination of Ibn Taymiyya's criticism of Sufis and their doctrines would not be complete. I was reading and taking notes from the writings of both sides of these highly polemical works presented by either the supporters of Ibn al-'Arabī or of Ibn Taymiyya after the latter's condemnation.[18] In the course of my considerably long-lasting research, a surprising occurrence was constantly attracting my attention; because whenever Ibn Taymiyya begins his censure of Ibn al-'Arabī and his followers, Ibn Sīnā and his doctrines sit right next to them.[19] On the other hand, whenever Ibn Taymiyya articulates his thoughts regarding purely mystical issues—needless to say within the

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[16] For the translation of the hadith, I have mainly followed Homerin's translation (Homerin, 1985: 236).

[17] See for instance (Ibn Taymiyya 1930a: 61-71; Ibn Taymiyya 1930b: 72-120; Ibn Taymiyya 1930c: 161-183; Ibn Taymiyya 1930d: 3-112).
Throughout his critique, Ibn Taymiyya basically opposes Akbarian teachings which, he argues, do not pay attention to the Qur'anic absolute differentiation of the Creator from the creation. To his view, Ibn al-'Arabī's concept of *a'yān al-thābita* (immutable entities or archetypes of empirical beings) evidently disassociate God, the unique Creator of the universe out of nothing and its absolute everlasting Sustainer, from His Qur'anic attributes. In this context, he compares Ibn al-'Arabī's ideas to the Platonic Ideas as well as Christian doctrines regarding the nature of Jesus, and further states that Ibn al-'Arabī was highly influenced by the Mu'tazilī concepts of existent (*mawjūd*) and non-existent (*ma'dūm*) things (*shay'*)–more particularly of their hypotheses regarding whether the *ma'dūm* is to be considered a *shay'* or not. Ibn al-'Arabī's theories concerning the manifestation of the Divine attributes (*tajallī*) are treated by Ibn Taymiyya as heretical ideas fraught with the doctrines of unification and incarnation. Furthermore, Ibn al-'Arabī's loose interpretations of the Qur'anic and Prophetic statements fundamentally deviate from the authentic understanding of Islam by *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥūn* who never gave credit to ambiguous mystical terms, allegorical exegesis, meaningless paradoxes and extensive use of obscure symbols. Ibn Taymiyya, therefore, condemns every metaphysical premise upon which Akbarian thinkers rested their "heretical" tenets. Another interesting point in his writings is when Ibn Taymiyya accuses of al-Bisṭāmī, whom he considers pious believer in his *Sharḥ* on *Futūḥ al-Ghayb*, of misunderstanding of the concept of *tashbīh* (similarity or anthropomorphism).

[18] For a reference to this polemical literature see (Kynsh, 1999).

[19] See for instance (Ibn Taymiyya, 1997: 164-170; Ibn Taymiyya 1930a: 68).

framework of his own beliefs and considerations regarding Sufism—he never mentions Ibn al-'Arabī nor any of his disciples at all. For instance, in his commentary on *Futūḥ al-Ghayb*, which is around one hundred page long, he never speaks of Ibn al-'Arabī and his teachings; nor a single time does he mention them in his epistle *al-Ṣūfiyya wa-al-Fuqarā'*. In the process of my readings through Ibn Taymiyya's writings, I gradually came to the conclusion that Ibn Taymiyya's condemnation of Akbarian ideas was not supposed to be considered as a criticism of Sufism; instead, a criticism of philosophy in the context of his another well-known attack directed to the Muslim philosophers, especially to Ibn Sīnā. During this course, consequently, considering them not his mystically-oriented arguments, I eliminated my detailed discussions concerning Ibn Taymiyya's writings condemning Ibn al-'Arabī and his teachings.

Ibn Taymiyya basically denounces Ibn al-'Arabī's ideas as dangerous innovations unfamiliar to the correct belief of the pious ancestors (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥūn*). He does not consider Ibn al-'Arabī as a genuine Sufi, rather, a pseudo Sufi whose mind is confused with philosophical argumentations, especially with metaphysical speculations and exegeses. He calls the latter's teachings philosophical mysticism (*taṣawwuf al-falāsifa*). Ibn Taymiyya, accordingly, criticizes Ibn al-'Arabī's metaphysically-oriented concepts, with special reference to, what the former calls, Unity of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), incarnation (*ḥulūl*), and union (*ittiḥād*).

Instead, Ibn Taymiyya appreciates Sufi practices and theories leading to a moderate asceticism, world-renouncing piety, attaining moral self-perfection, and purifying soul from blameworthy characteristics. Despite his approval of Sufism in such a moral and ethical framework, however, he does not agree with Sufis who consider asceticism as an essential basis, but not an ultimate goal in the course of spiritual journey. In their argument, Sufism is the way through which a Sufi seeks to understand metaphysical questions including Divine mysteries. In Ibn Taymiyya's view, however, a Sufi is not supposed to comprehend God's unknowable essence, but he should simply follow His command explicated in His Book. Metaphysically-oriented speculative Sufi ideas are not compatible with the fundamental doctrines of the *sharī'a*, nor with the practice of the *salaf al-ṣāliḥūn*.[20]

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[20] So far as their epistemological theories are concerned, Ibn Taymiyya does not agree with the speculative Sufis on the extent of the application of their distinctive methodology, for they describe knowledge in an experiential and existential manner. They mostly employ a rather symbolic instead of straightforward and literal language—often in the form of poetry and stories—to express their ideas. On the basis of their particular understanding of an ontological hierarchy of existence, which postulates a distinct subject-object relationship, they introduce a peculiar balance between ontology and epistemology. According to this epistemological theory, different explanations for the same object at different stages of the mystical path are quite possible. This exclusive theory of knowledge ultimately considers knowledge as a form of individual taste which can be neither tested nor even described completely by others. They, therefore, commence interpreting revealed texts in accordance

If I go back to my introductory statements regarding the Ḥanbalīte School in general and Ibn Taymiyya in particular, it appears that Ḥanbalīte movement, like other Muslim intellectual groups, comprises various tendencies within its tradition. The representatives of this school had never been unanimous in their condemnation of Sufi concepts nor individuals. They mostly evaluate mystical theories in light of their understanding of the fundamental revealed doctrines; then in accordance with these criteria, they present their contextual criticism.

In Ibn Taymiyya's specific case, he gives credit to many Sufi concepts—he approves, for instance, of the epistemological credibility of *ilhām*, *kashf*—though he examines them under exoteric theological and legal principles. Likewise, he examines Sufi terms, such as *sukr* and *fanā'*, declaring that as long as those who utter ecstatic statements do not lose their intellectual act due to a cause in which they have legal responsibility, they are not to be censured. He, therefore, makes a plain effort to apply formal legal and theological principles in mystical theories.

Ibn Taymiyya's position vis-à-vis Muslim religious groups and their theories is based solely on his own understanding of the *sharī'a*. Any given idea is admissible or reprehensible in accordance with its compatibility with the heavenly regulations realized by the early Muslim generations in their practical lives. On this basis, Ibn Taymiyya does not differentiate Sufi beliefs and practices from the ideas of any other Muslim theological or legal group. He certainly appreciates spiritual significance of Sufism to the religious life of every believer. In this regard, within the framework of Ibn Taymiyya's own ideas and beliefs, Sufism performs an indispensable role in the Muslim community. Since he does not appreciate a pious life based simply on external rituals, he welcomes Sufi practices insofar as they internalize religious beliefs. In order to overcome some negative characteristics, such as egoism, hypocrisy, and pride embedded in human personality, Ibn Taymiyya promotes moderate Sufi methods to discipline the human self. Whenever, however, he comes to the intellectual and speculative Sufi teachings and personalities, considering them not genuine Sufi ideas and individuals he severely criticizes them. He repeatedly emphasizes that the literal understanding of the Qur'an and Sunna represents the only criterion for testing every religious belief and practice. He, therefore, gives an impression that a *mutakallim* and *faqīh*, rather than a Sufi, is evaluating Sufi concepts.

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with this epistemological method. Not surprisingly, Ibn Taymiyya does not acknowledge such an epistemological theory.

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