

Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society & SOAS Middle East Department

**Thirty-fourth Annual Symposium
May 6th, 2017**

Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre, SOAS

Ibn 'Arabi & The Philosophers

**Reason,
Revelation
& Inspiration**

The Speakers & Abstracts



Professor Eric Geoffroy is an expert in Islamic thought and spirituality, he teaches Islamic studies at the University of Strasbourg, and other centres. He is specialist of Sufism and also works on issues of spirituality in the modern world (globalization, ecology). He is president of the International Foundation ‘*Sufi Consciousness*’ / ‘*Conscience Soufie*’. He is a member of several international research groups, such as Kalam Research & Media (KRM), and acts as scientific advisor and editorial on Islam (Fondapol, The notebooks of Islam, Religions / Adyan ...). He is a columnist in the magazine *Ultreïa*, and writes regularly for ‘*Le Monde des Religions*’. He wrote twenty articles in the Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2 and 3, and is the author of over a dozen books.

Some Aspects of ‘Supra-Reason’ in Ibn ‘Arabî’s Epistemology

The fact that human reason is utterly limited in the perception of spiritual Reality and that it cannot grasp a sound knowledge of it, was already a common topic before Ibn ‘Arabî. In traditional Sufi epistemology, “there is a knowledge beyond the stage of reason”, which can be reached through inspiration (*ilhâm*) and unveiling (*kashf*). Most of the time, Ibn ‘Arabî confirms, develops and systematizes what has been previously said or written by his predecessors. For instance, the influence of al-Ghazâlî (d. 1111) is quite evident in his epistemological perspective. But obviously, he adds his own genius into the consideration of this dialectic between reason and supra-reason. Taking his rich and complex terminology as the starting point for reflection, may allow us to understand what is at stake in the debates between theologians and philosophers on one hand and Sufis on the other. Ibn ‘Arabî’s insistence on a supra-logical perception of reality, based on paradox, also seems very specific to him. His non-binary and all-inclusive method evokes some modern paradigms in quantum physics and logic, which leave most of our contemporaries in a “wonder without end” (*hayra*).



Dr. Salman Bashier is an independent researcher who obtained his doctorate from the University of Utah. His PhD was published in 2004 under the title ‘*Ibn al-‘Arabi’s Barzakh: the Concept of the Limit and the Relationship between God and the World*’. He was formerly a Fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin and a Polonsky Fellow. He is the author of several articles on Islamic mystical and philosophical thought in English, Hebrew, and Arabic. His book, ‘*The Story of Islamic Philosophy: Ibn Tufayl, Ibn al-‘Arabi, and Others on the Limit between Naturalism and Traditionalism*’ was published in 2012, and his book (in Arabic) ‘*A Window On the Unseen: Between Ibn al-‘Arabi and Averroes, On Imagination, Conjunction, and Knowledge of the Self*’ was published in December 2016.

Ibn ‘Arabi, Ibn Rushd & the Merging of the Two Seas of Mysticism & Philosophy in Islam

It is generally believed that Islamic philosophy died with the death of Ibn Rushd and that its death was caused at least partly by the ‘decisive blow’ that Ghazali (d. 1111), the Asharite theologian, dealt to it in his ‘The Destruction of the Philosophers’ (*Tahafut al-Falasifa*), to which Ibn Rushd (d. 1198) responded in his ‘The Destruction of the Destruction’ (*Tahafut al-Tahafut*). Salman Bashier argues however that Ibn Rushd conceived the threat posed by Ghazali to philosophy as coming primarily from Ghazali the mystic and in particular from his Sufi method of acquiring knowledge which he articulated in his ‘The Revival of the Religious Sciences’ (*Ihya Ulum al-Din*). Salman Bashier argues further that it was Ibn al-Arabi (d. 1240) who was responsible for the full actualization of Ghazali’s Sufi method, a mission which he started in his early works while still in Andalusia and completed in his major work *The Meccan Revelations* (*al-Futuhat al-Makiyya*). Salman Bashier explicates the manner in which Ibn al-Arabi with his innovative attitude toward rational philosophical and theological sciences attempted to create a novel approach to the investigation of intellectual problems in the Islamic world and the extent to which his attempt was successful. He also provides some hints as to why the intellectual turn, which was initiated by Ghazali and advanced by Ibn al-Arabi, and which resulted in synthesizing the rational and mystical sciences was precluded from taking place in the Latin Christian world and whether that had something to do with Ibn Rushd’s influence.



Dr. Maria De Cillis is a Research Associate and the Managing Editor of the Shi'i Heritage Series at the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London. She received an MA degree in Islamic Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London in 2004. She continued her PhD studies at the same University, completing it in October 2010. She is the author of *'Free Will and Predestination in Islamic Thought. Theoretical Compromises in the Works of Avicenna, al-Ghazālī and Ibn 'Arabī'* (London/New York, 2014). She is among the editors of *'L'ésotérisme shi'ite, ses racines et ses prolongements / Shi'i Esotericism: Roots and Developments'* (Turnhout, 2016), and her ongoing projects include the monograph *'Decree and Salvation: al-Kirmānī's Ismaili Perspective'* (forthcoming, 2017).

Ibn 'Arabī on Free Will and Predestination. Between Philosophy and Mysticism

This study investigates Ibn 'Arabī's view on free will and predestination, assessing to what extent his stances were influenced by philosophical, mainly Neoplatonic, currents of thought and how he managed to harmonise philosophical approaches to his mystical perspective of reality. In particular, through the lens of the doctrine of the unity/unicity of existence (*wahdat al-wujūd*), by looking at the notions of the divine names (*asmā'*), attributes (*ṣifāt*) and immutable prototypes (*a'yān thābita*), this study aims at drawing some comparisons between Ibn 'Arabī's idea of predestination and Avicenna's natural deterministic perspective. The analysis will reflect on Avicenna - arguably one of the most significant and well-known thinkers of the entire Graeco-Arabic philosophical tradition - and his re-elaboration of al-Fārābī's Neoplatonic emanative schema attempting to investigate how its constitutive elements - deemed conducive to determinism - seem to have tiptoed in Ibn 'Arabī's mystical approach to the issue of *qaḍā'* and *qadar*. The discussion will probe into the notions of 'creation', 'divine creative knowledge' and 'causality'. Whilst differentiating between the concepts of servanthood (*'ubūdiyya*) and servitude (*'ubūda*), the discussion will end with a review of Ibn 'Arabī's understanding of freedom (*ḥurriyya*).



Dr Husam al-Mallak is a Senior Teaching Fellow at SOAS where he lectures on *'Modern Trends in Islam'*. He completed his PhD thesis in January 2016, under Dr Cosimo Zene, Dr J.P. Hartung and Dr Nasr Abu Zayd (d. 2010), on how the mystical thought of Ibn al-'Arabī can be considered as an Islamic overcoming of Nietzschean nihilism. His MA dissertation at Birkbeck was *'Beyond Postmodernism and the Crisis of Truth: Re-Reading Ibn Al-'Arabī's Qur'anic Hermeneutics'* and he has given public lectures on this subject at The Islamic College, the Royal Asiatic Society and the Oriental Institute in Oxford. He has published book reviews in the Journal for Shi'a Islamic Studies and has forthcoming articles in the Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies.

Ibn al-'Arabī and the Postmodern Philosophers: The Return to God After the Death of God

From the perspective of postmodern philosophy, Ibn al-'Arabī's thought represents a (re)turn to god after the 'death of god'. Heidegger argued that western philosophy had concluded with the thought of Nietzsche. Specifically, the 'end of philosophy' is characterised by nihilism, which Heidegger interprets with reference to Nietzsche's 'death of god' statement. Nihilism was a crisis (ontological and ethical) underpinning western philosophy, defined by Nietzsche as the 'self-devaluation of the highest values' (and this is a crisis which also underpins modern Islamic thought). According to Nietzsche and Heidegger, the 'death of god' was a concept that defined modernity. Accordingly, it is hereby argued that the atheistic re-turn to god represents an attempt to overcome nihilism.

The overcoming of nihilism was a project that was not clearly articulated by Nietzsche, but he nevertheless outlined features of this 'overcoming of nihilism' (revaluation / transvaluation of the highest values). These features are arguably characteristic of Ibn al-'Arabī's mystical philosophy. His thought can thus be argued to represent an 'overcoming of nihilism' from an Islamic perspective. The contemporary significance and pertinence of Ibn al-'Arabī's mystical philosophy lie precisely within this post-modern anathesitic context, which is founded upon Nietzsche's concept of nihilism.

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Programme

Saturday 6th May

- 8.45 am Registration
- 9.15 Welcome and introduction
Stefan Sperl & Richard Twinch
- 9.30 Salman Bashier: *Ibn al 'Arabi's Encounter with Ibn Rushd and the Merging of the Two Seas of Mysticism and Philosophy in Islam*
- 10.30 Coffee & Tea
- 11.00 Maria de Cillis : *Ibn 'Arabi on Free Will and Predestination. Between Philosophy and Mysticism*
- 12.00 Eric Geoffroy: *Some Aspects of 'Supra-reason' in Ibn 'Arabi's Epistemology*
- 1.00 pm Lunch
- 2.30 Husam al Mallak: *Ibn al-'Arabī and the Postmodern Philosophers: The Return to God After the Death of God*
- 3.30 Tea & Coffee
- 4.00 Workshops with speakers until 5.00 pm
- 5.15 Plenary
- 5.45 Finish

Sponsorship

The Society is very grateful to SOAS Middle East Department for sharing this event and hosting it.



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