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Love As Care: Ibn 'Arabi's Ethics of Love and Its Resonances with The Ethics of Care

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ABSTRACT

This article argues that Islam ought to be understood as a love-oriented religion rather than one defined solely by law and regulation. Challenging the reductive characterization of Islam as a purely nomos-oriented tradition, the article examines Ibn 'Arabi's ethics of love through the lens of the ethics of care, employing library research with thematic-comparative content analysis as its methodological framework. Drawing on both primary and secondary sources, the study identifies five key variables within Ibn 'Arabi's love ethics: (1) the undefinability of love, (2) insān kāmil, (3) jamāl-Iḥsān, (4) jamāl and jalāl, and (5) tajallī. Each variable is analyzed in comparative dialogue with the care-ethical thought of Iris Murdoch, Carol Gilligan, Emmanuel Lévinas, and Robert Spaemann, revealing substantive resonances between Akbarian mystical ethics and contemporary Western moral philosophy. The findings suggest that Ibn 'Arabi's love ethics constitutes a viable corrective framework for contemporary religious discourse, pointing beyond sectarian fanaticism toward a spirituality grounded in care, beauty, and universal compassion.

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Introduction

The relationship between Islam and violence has become one of the most contested questions in contemporary religious and political discourse. Terms such as radicalism, fundamentalism, and fanaticism are frequently deployed to characterize the Islamic tradition (Masuzawa, 2005, p. 197; Hourani, 1980, p. 10), and Islam has been described — most influentially by Robert Heiler — as a law-oriented, nomos-centered religion (Baghir, 2005, p. 71). This article contests that characterization. Rather than accepting Islam's reduction to a legal-normative framework, it argues that Islam is fundamentally a love-oriented religion (eros-oriented), and that this claim must be grounded in a serious engagement with the discourse of love within Islamic Sufism.

To substantiate this thesis, the article examines the ethics of love developed by Ibn 'Arabi (al-Shaykh al-Akbar), widely regarded as the greatest mystical thinker in the Islamic

tradition. The urgency of recovering Ibn 'Arabi's thought is not merely historical. For Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Ibn 'Arabi's spirituality functions as an antidote to distorted conceptions of Islam, reaffirming the values of dialogue, understanding, and reciprocity between East and West (Abu Zayd, 2004, p. 173). His thought holds the potential to liberate the Islamic tradition from the grip of fanaticism, offering an alternative trajectory grounded in love, beauty, and relational ethics.

Existing scholarship on Ibn 'Arabi's conception of love is substantial. Ibrahim's study examines the metaphysics of love in Chapter 178 of al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah (Ibrahim, 2014); Beneito explores divine love of beauty within the Akbarian framework (Beneito, 1995); Abrahamov analyzes Ibn 'Arabi's treatment of divine love (Abrahamov, 2009); Addas reconstructs the experiential and doctrinal dimensions of love in his thought (Addas, 2002); Morris offers a thematic reading of Ibn 'Arabi's discourse on love (Morris, 2011); Cavus examines the potential of Akbarian mercy-centrism to overcome religious violence (Cavus, 2019); Derin traces the genealogy of Sufi love from Rābiʿa to Ibn al-Fāriḍ (Derin, 1999); and Lewisohn surveys the religion of love in Sufism from Rābiʿa to Ibn 'Arabi (Lewisohn, 2014).

Despite the richness of this scholarship, a significant gap remains: none of the existing studies situates Ibn 'Arabi's ethics of love within the framework of the ethics of care as developed in contemporary Western moral philosophy. The ethics of care — associated with Carol Gilligan, Iris Murdoch, Emmanuel Lévinas, and Robert Spaemann — foregrounds relationality, attentiveness, and moral responsiveness as the foundations of ethical life. This article argues that these concerns find a striking parallel, and in some respects a deeper grounding, in Ibn 'Arabi's mystical ethics. By reading Ibn 'Arabi through the lens of care ethics, the article seeks to broaden the interpretive horizons of Akbarian scholarship and to present an original contribution to the comparative study of Islamic and Western ethics.

The article proceeds as follows. Following this introduction, the theoretical framework section surveys the ethics of care tradition, establishing the conceptual vocabulary for the comparative analysis. The discussion section examines five key variables within Ibn 'Arabi's ethics of love — the undefinability of love, insān kāmil, jamāl-Iḥsān, jamāl and jalāl, and tajallī — each analyzed in dialogue with the care-ethical thinkers identified above. The conclusion draws together the comparative findings and reflects on their implications for contemporary religious discourse.

Method

This article employs library research (kajian pustaka) as its primary research method, a qualitative approach suited to the study of classical and contemporary philosophical texts. The primary sources consist of Ibn 'Arabi's own works, principally al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah and Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam. The secondary sources comprise books, scholarly articles, journal publications, and interpretive studies bearing on Ibn 'Arabi's thought and the ethics of care tradition. Data analysis is conducted through thematic-comparative content analysis: key ethical concepts in Ibn 'Arabi's Sufism are systematically identified, reconstructed, and examined in dialogue with the ethics of care as the overarching theoretical framework. This methodological choice is appropriate because it enables a rigorous conceptual reconstruction of classical Sufi ethical thought while allowing its analytical extension through a contemporary philosophical lens, thereby generating an original contribution to the comparative study of Islamic and Western ethics.

Theoretical Framework

The ethics of care emerges as a broad moral-philosophical orientation that foregrounds relationality, attentiveness to the particular, and responsiveness to the needs of others as the foundational structures of ethical life. Unlike ethical frameworks centered on abstract

universal principles — such as Kantian deontology or utilitarian calculus — care ethics insists that morality is constitutively embedded in concrete relationships and lived experience. This section surveys four key thinkers whose work collectively defines the intellectual landscape of care ethics as employed in this article: Carol Gilligan, Iris Murdoch, Emmanuel Lévinas, and Robert Spaemann. Though operating from distinct philosophical traditions, each thinker converges on the insufficiency of justice-centered, rule-based ethics and points toward love, attentiveness, and relational responsibility as the deeper ground of moral life.

The feminist critique of dominant ethical frameworks finds its most influential formulation in Carol Gilligan's In a Different Voice (1983). Gilligan's work emerged in direct response to Lawrence Kohlberg's stage theory of moral development, which posits that moral consciousness evolves through six stages, from self-centered concern to autonomous adherence to universal principles. Gilligan argues that Kohlberg's sixth and highest stage reflects specifically male moral assumptions: women's distinctive moral intuitions — centered on empathy, care, and relational attunement — are rendered invisible within his framework, with the result that women are assessed as remaining at a lower stage of moral development. For Gilligan, this reflects not a deficiency in women's moral reasoning but a fundamental flaw in Kohlberg's evaluative criteria, which she characterizes as "sexist" (Suseno, 2000, p. 149). Against the ethics of justice, Gilligan articulates an ethics of care grounded in women's relational experience: women tend to prioritize emotional attunement to relationships with others, exhibiting altruistic tendencies oriented toward the maintenance of relational bonds rather than the application of abstract principles (Gilligan, 1993, p. 45). Gilligan's work proved genuinely seminal for the ethics of care tradition, even as scholarly debate has continued over whether the caring ethic constitutes a distinctively feminist contribution or a gender-neutral moral orientation that women were the first to articulate.

Iris Murdoch's moral philosophy offers a complementary, though distinctively Platonic, critique of post-Kantian ethics. For Murdoch, the central problem with Kantian and post-Kantian moral philosophy — including Hare's principle of autonomous decision, Sartre's existential leap, and Mill's utilitarianism — is their shared failure to capture the texture of genuine moral experience. Since Kant, a dogma has prevailed that reality and value — "Is" and "Ought" — must be sharply separated, reducing morality to a matter of will and rational decision. For Murdoch, the central challenge of moral life is not the exercise of will but the redirection of attention: the problem lies in breaking free of self-centeredness, which conceals itself behind fantasies and distorted perceptions of reality (Suseno, 2006, pp. 131–158). The solution lies in what Murdoch calls attention to "The Good" — a real though indefinable moral reality that draws the self outward. Following Plato's allegory of the cave, Murdoch insists that moral development occurs through the cultivation of loving attention to reality, particularly to other persons: "Care" and "obedience" are foundational moral dispositions, not mere decisions. This loving attentiveness works gradually, enabling one to perceive the "little perfections" immanent in particular things and persons — a habitual orientation that progressively draws the self toward Perfection as its ultimate telos. Such obedience to reality requires patient and honest observation, the overcoming of prejudice, resistance to temptation, and the disciplining of imagination and reflection (Murdoch, 2013, p. 40). For Murdoch, inner moral experience is irreducibly primary — a dimension inaccessible to behavioristic approaches that measure only observable action from the outside (Murdoch, 2013, p. 25).

Emmanuel Lévinas approaches ethics from a radically different phenomenological register, yet arrives at a similarly relational and responsive moral vision. For Lévinas, the dominant tradition of Western philosophy — oriented toward totality and the self-perpetuation of the Same — is disrupted by the irreducible presence of the Other. Prior to any

deliberation or judgment, the encounter with the Face of the Other already constitutes an ethical event: the Face appears in its nudity and destitution, issuing the primordial appeal "you shall not commit murder," an appeal that precedes and exceeds every rational consideration (Lévinas, 1979, pp. 199–200). This responsibility for the Other is, for Lévinas, the most fundamental reality: more primordial than consciousness, more primordial than ontology. The Face cannot be comprehended or contained; it is an exterior of Being, the Other in their Otherness, whose infinity ensures that it always exceeds the ego's totalizing grasp (Bertens, 2014, pp. 279–280). Subjectivity, on this account, is constitutively ethical: what is most primordial is always a moral event — the opening of the self toward the Other in their infinite alterity.

Robert Spaemann completes this constellation of care-ethical thinkers by situating love at the center of ethics within a Platonic and Augustinian framework. Spaemann's point of departure is the diagnosis that Christian ethics, Kantian ethics, utilitarian ethics, and discourse ethics alike fail to unite happiness and obligation — a failure he traces to their shared inability to account for love as a moral phenomenon. Drawing on Leibniz's formula delectatio in felicitate alterius ("delight in the happiness of others") and Aristotle's account of friendship, Spaemann argues that love constitutes the point at which happiness and moral obligation converge (Spaemann, 2000, p. 78). In a loving relationship, taking responsibility for the well-being of the beloved is both an obligation and a source of happiness; egoism and altruism become inseparable (Suseno, 1997, p. 245). Spaemann further draws on Augustine's formula — ubi amor ibi oculus, "where there is love, there the eye sees" — to argue that love opens the heart to reality most truly, while hatred blinds. All moral imperatives, on this account, ought to be animated by love, transforming ethics into an ordo amoris — an order of love.

Taken together, these four thinkers articulate a moral vision in which relationality, attentiveness, and love — rather than abstract principle or autonomous will — constitute the ground of ethical life. Gilligan foregrounds the relational and empathic dimensions of women's moral experience; Murdoch regrounds ethics in loving attention to reality and the irreducibility of inner moral experience; Lévinas locates the origin of ethics in the infinite responsibility disclosed by the Face of the Other; and Spaemann recovers the convergence of love, happiness, and obligation within an Augustinian-Platonic framework. It is against this collective background that Ibn 'Arabi's ethics of love will be examined in the following section.

Discussions and Results

Having established the conceptual framework of the ethics of care in the preceding section, this discussion turns to a systematic analysis of Ibn 'Arabi's ethics of love, organized around five conceptual nodes: the undefinability of love, insān kāmil, jamāl-Iḥsān, jamāl and jalāl, and tajallī. Each node is examined first through close engagement with Ibn 'Arabi's own texts, and subsequently brought into comparative dialogue with the care-ethical perspectives of Murdoch, Gilligan, Lévinas, and Spaemann. The analysis aims to demonstrate not merely surface-level resemblances but substantive structural resonances between Akbarian mystical ethics and contemporary Western moral philosophy — while remaining attentive to the points at which the two traditions diverge.

Undefinable Love

In the Akbarian tradition, the question of love does not concern the essence of love as such, for that essence cannot be expressed in discursive language. This epistemic limitation is articulated in Ibn 'Arabi's own terms: love is logical in meaning even though it cannot be defined; it can be understood with feeling, and by those who live it and explore its characteristics, but not through formal definition. Anyone who defines love does not actually know love, and anyone who does not feel it will never know it. Love is, in Ibn 'Arabi's formulation, "a perception whose reality is unknown" — to which he rhetorically exclaims: "By Allah, is this not wondrous?" (Ibn 'Arabī, 2006, p. 429).

Ibn ‘Arabi distinguishes two approaches to the discussion of love. The first belongs to the veiled (maḥjūb) — those who seek to apprehend love through intellectual investigation (ahl al-‘aql) by constructing formal-categorical boundaries in pursuit of a definitive account of its essence. Of this approach, Ibn ‘Arabi writes that such a person has “drunk just one sip and has never been thirsty again” (Ibn ‘Arabī, 2006, p. 429). The second approach belongs to those who inhabit love (ahl al-kashf), who deny that any direct answer to the nature (māhiyyah) of love is possible. Ibn ‘Arabi here cites Abū Yazīd: “A person who drinks the ocean still has his tongue sticking out to his chest because of thirst” (Ibn ‘Arabī, 2006, p. 429). The contrast is decisive: the first approach reduces love to a closed conceptual object; the second recognizes love as inexhaustible, always exceeding the categories brought to bear upon it.

This exposition demonstrates that love in Ibn ‘Arabi’s framework transcends all classificatory boundaries and cannot be subsumed under any genus. The undefinability of love is evident in his repeated insistence that love is “unknown,” “cannot be understood,” and “cannot be spoken.” These formulations presuppose that the being of love entails an inherent negation immanent to its very existence, such that to comprehend love is always to comprehend it together with the negation implicit within it. Love can be approached only at the level of its effects, attributes, and meaning — describable only at the level of its manifestation (Izutsu, 2015, p. 23).

The structural resonance with Murdoch’s treatment of “The Good” is here most evident. Just as Ibn ‘Arabi holds that love cannot be captured in any definition, Murdoch — following G. E. Moore — holds that “Good” is a real and knowable trait that nonetheless resists definition, since it is a primary characteristic known only intuitively. Murdoch extends Moore’s position through her notion of “fidelity to reality”: “Good is indefinable because of the infinite difficulty of the task of apprehending a magnetic but inexhaustible reality” (Murdoch, 2013, p. 42). Both Ibn ‘Arabi and Murdoch thus affirm an irreducibly apophatic dimension in moral-spiritual reality: the highest value — whether love or The Good — cannot be fully objectified without being diminished. The divergence, however, is equally significant: for Murdoch, The Good is approached through loving attention to particular objects and persons within the phenomenal world, whereas for Ibn ‘Arabi, the undefinability of love is grounded in the ontological structure of divine being itself — specifically in the Ahādiyyah, the absolute unity that precedes all determination. Murdoch’s is a phenomenological apophaticism; Ibn ‘Arabi’s is a metaphysical one.

Insān Kāmil

The concept of perfection at the individual level implies that perfection is not uniformly distributed among human beings but constitutes a multi-leveled ontological achievement. Ibn ‘Arabi identifies three ontological distinctions between the authentic human being (insān kāmil) and the non-authentic human being (insān ḥayawān).

The first distinction concerns the mode of knowledge. Insān kāmil is grounded in concrete practice or ma‘rifah, rather than in reflective-theoretical cognition. As Ibn ‘Arabi explains, whereas insān ḥayawān apprehends divine address through reason alone, insān kāmil “knows through his very being” (Masrukhin, 2015, p. 511). In Ibn ‘Arabi’s technical vocabulary, al-ma‘rifah is distinguished from ‘ilm (conceptual knowledge) by its primarily practical character — a knowledge derived from direct disclosure (al-kashf) that admits of no doubt, in contrast to knowledge obtained through reflective investigation (al-naẓr al-fikrī), which is never wholly free from doubt and indecision (Ibn ‘Arabī, 2006, p. 297). Ma‘rifah thus functions as the path and condition for the mystical practitioner’s preparedness (isti‘dād al-‘abd), enabling him to receive the disclosure of the theophany of al-Wujūd. Whereas ‘ilm seeks

to subsume its object within closed laws of thought, ma'rifah is a form of knowing that remains open — grounded in the recognition that no object, and certainly not God, can be reduced to fixed criteria of truth.

The second distinction is that, beyond ma'rifah, insān kāmil actualizes the divine attributes and names, becoming God's vicegerent (khalīfah) in the cosmos, whereas insān ḥayawān fails to manifest those divine attributes. Insān kāmil transcends ordinary human beings through the actualization of the divine names, exceeding the level at which all human beings share a common condition (Masrukhin, 2015, p. 511).

The third distinction is love itself. As Ibn 'Arabi states: "There is no creature whose love is greater than that of insān kāmil, and there is no creature more violent and tormenting than a human being who has not attained this perfection" (Masrukhin, 2015, p. 511). Love, on this account, is the hallmark of authentic human existence: insān kāmil is characterized by perfect and universal love and compassion, while insān ḥayawān tends toward hatred and violence.

Comparatively, Ibn 'Arabi's insān kāmil resonates with Murdoch's concept of Perfection. In her essay "The Idea of Perfection," Murdoch employs the term to render Plato's "The Good" — conceived as an objective reality that functions as "a magnetic but inexhaustible reality" and "a real though infinitely distant standard" (Murdoch, 2013, p. 42). No one fully achieves Perfection; it functions as the ultimate measure of moral life, drawing individuals progressively toward their ultimate telos. For both Ibn 'Arabi and Murdoch, the movement toward perfection is never complete, always asymptotic: insān kāmil represents the horizon of authentic existence rather than a state permanently achieved. The crucial divergence lies in their respective anthropological frameworks: Murdoch's conception is shaped by the Christian understanding of the human moral condition — the "fallen" state and the call to recover perfection (Murdoch, 2013, p. 30) — whereas Ibn 'Arabi grounds perfection in the ontological capacity to actualize divine names and attributes, a capacity inherent to the structure of human existence as God's vicegerent. Murdoch's path to Perfection proceeds through loving attention to "little perfections" immanent in the phenomenal world; Ibn 'Arabi's proceeds through ma'rifah — a form of practical-mystical knowledge that transcends rational cognition entirely.

Jamāl and Iḥsān

Ibn 'Arabi traces the origins of love to the twin principles of Beauty (Jamāl) and Goodness (Iḥsān). In short, for Ibn 'Arabi, love exists because of beauty and virtue. This claim is grounded in a hadith: "Allah is Beautiful, and He loves beauty." Additionally, all goodness (Iḥsān) originates in Allah, and there is no good except Allah. It follows that one who loves beauty (Jamāl) and virtue (Iḥsān) loves Allah, since Allah is al-Jamāl (the Most Beautiful) and al-Muḥsin (the Good) (Ibn 'Arabī, 2006, p. 431).

Beyond ascribing beauty and goodness solely to Allah, Ibn 'Arabi correlates the essential divine meaning (Ma'na al-Dhātī) with beauty (Jamāl) and the actual divine meaning (Ma'na al-Fi'lī) with goodness (Iḥsān). As an essential meaning, beauty pivots on tajallī, in which beauty becomes the relational structure between God as the one who undergoes tajallī and creatures as the loci (mawḍi') of tajallī. Beauty is therefore the essential meaning of every being at each locus of manifestation — present in every tajallī because every creature is a tajallī of the beautiful divine names (Asmā' al-Ḥusnā wa al-Ḥasanah) (Corbin, 1969, pp. 134–135). If a creature is a mirror of the Beauty of al-Ḥaqq, then the very existence of that creature is a mirror of that Beauty (Ibn 'Arabī, n.d., p. 48).

Alongside beauty as an essential meaning, Ibn 'Arabi analyzes virtue as an actual meaning (Ma'na al-Fi'lī). Goodness (Iḥsān) constitutes the second ground of Sufi love because for Sufis, goodness signifies the awareness that existence itself is a gift from God. As Ibn 'Arabi states: "Existence is light and non-existence is darkness. Ugliness is nothingness and we exist, so we are in goodness" (Ibn 'Arabī, 2006, p. 439). The abundance of existential goodness is the

actual goodness (Iḥsān) of Allah: He created creatures to fulfill the call of divine love, thereby establishing a reciprocal relationship between al-Ḥaqq and al-Khalq, lover and beloved.

The resonance here is with Spaemann's diagnosis that Christian, Kantian, utilitarian, and discourse ethics alike fail to unite happiness and obligation. Spaemann finds a way beyond this impasse through Leibniz's formula delectatio in felicitate alterius ("delight in the happiness of others") and Aristotle's account of friendship, in which love constitutes the point at which what makes one happy and what is morally required converge (Spaemann, 2000, p. 78). In friendship, one loves the friend for the friend's own sake, and the friend's company is itself a source of happiness; yet love is not reducible to happiness, entailing also a duty toward the beloved (Spaemann, 2000, p. 97). Spaemann thus identifies in love the phenomenon in which egoism and altruism are rendered inseparable — a convergence that finds a striking structural parallel in Ibn 'Arabi's account of Iḥsān as the reciprocal relation between al-Ḥaqq and al-Khalq. The divergence, however, is ontological in character: whereas Spaemann's account of love operates at the level of interpersonal and creaturely relations within a broadly theistic moral framework, Ibn 'Arabi's Iḥsān is grounded in a metaphysics of divine self-disclosure — the gift of existence as an expression of divine love — which transforms the entire created order into a theater of reciprocal love between Creator and creation.

Jamāl and Jalāl

Drawing on Murata's analysis, Ibn 'Arabi divides the Asmā' al-Ḥusnā into two complementary categories: the names of Majesty (Jalāl), bearing masculine qualities, and the names of Beauty (Jamāl), bearing feminine qualities (Murata, 1999, p. 10). Both categories possess qualities that are equal and balanced. At the human level, masculine and feminine characteristics each carry positive and negative traits that are mutually complementary.

Ibn 'Arabi holds that everything in the created world is a manifestation (tajallī) of God, and that each manifestation embodies both the feminine and masculine divine names. However, the masculine image — deeply ingrained in monotheistic discourse — tends to obscure the fact that many of God's names are grammatically and ontologically feminine. Ibn 'Arabi grounds his argument for the elevation of the feminine in the Prophetic example, citing the hadith: "I am fascinated by three things: women, fragrances, and the pleasure of looking at prayer" (Ibn 'Arabī, n.d., p. 218). The grammatical structure of this hadith is itself significant: the masculine word (al-tīb, "fragrance") is placed between two feminine words (al-nisā', "women," and al-ṣalāh, "prayer"), mirroring the way masculinity (Adam) is situated between two forms of femininity (God and Eve). Even the Arabic grammatical gender of God's essence (Dhāt), attributes (Ṣifāt), and power (Qudrah) — all of which are feminine in form — privileges the feminine.

Ibn 'Arabi further advances deconstructive arguments that subvert conventional oppositional hierarchies, rethinking the binary oppositions operative in religious texts: active/passive, male/female, Adam/Eve, sun/moon, day/night, wrath/love, power/gentleness, incomparability/likeness (Murata, 1999, p. 129). Against the tendency of religious discourse to place the "feminine" at a negative pole — coding it as powerless — Ibn 'Arabi initiates a reversal toward the feminine axis. He proposes a subject-object dialectic that underscores the mutually constitutive character of the subject-object relation: the subject is more subordinate than the object precisely because the subject requires the object (Ibn 'Arabī, 2006, p. 466). Moreover, Ibn 'Arabi regards women as the most perfect locus of God's theophany — more complete than the theophany of God in men — because women embody both the creative-active and the receptive-passive dimensions of existence, whereas men embody only the former (Ibn 'Arabī, n.d., p. 217).

This Akbarian rehabilitation of the feminine resonates with Gilligan's parallel critique of Kohlberg. Gilligan argues that Kohlberg's reliance exclusively on male subjects, and his failure to account for differences in gender socialization, renders his theory structurally blind to women's moral experience. Men are conditioned to be autonomous and independent, while women are assumed to be dependent and passive — yet Gilligan contends that women's relational and empathic mode of moral reasoning represents not a deficiency but a distinctive and equally valid moral orientation (Gilligan, 1993, pp. 18–23). Both Ibn 'Arabi and Gilligan contest the privileging of a masculine paradigm — whether theological or philosophical — at the expense of feminine experience and value. The divergence lies in their respective frameworks: Gilligan's rehabilitation of the feminine operates within a sociological-developmental framework concerned with lived gender experience, whereas Ibn 'Arabi's operates within a metaphysical and cosmological framework in which the feminine is elevated not merely on social grounds but as the more perfect locus of divine theophany. For Ibn 'Arabi, the dignity of the feminine is grounded in the structure of being itself.

Tajallī

Hidden love (al-Ḥubb al-Majhūl wa al-Mabtūn) is beyond description, construction, conceptualization, and representation, concealed within the absoluteness of Ahādiyyah. In His solitude, hidden love constitutes an absolute negativity that is inaccessible to the intellect. Yet within this condition of absolute negativity, al-Wujūd harbors a desire to be recognized by that which is other than Him. There thus arises a movement from love in its negative condition — hidden and unknown within divine knowledge — toward actual and manifested love (al-Ḥubb al-Mutaḥaqqaq). This movement constitutes the origin of divine love. As Ibn 'Arabi states: "If it is said that Allah's love has a beginning, it is al-Ḥaqq's love to be known" (Ghurab, n.d., p. 49).

This recognition occurs in what Ibn 'Arabi terms tajallī — the manifestation of al-Wujūd from His previously unknown condition to being known, the "uncovering" of al-Wujūd from impossibility of recognition to possibility of recognition. Ibn 'Arabi grounds this in the Hadith Qudsī: "I am a hidden treasure and I love to be known; so I created beings and made Myself known to them, that they might know Me." Through tajallī, the negative and mysterious al-Wujūd (Allah) becomes al-Khāliq ("Creator"), and all that exists becomes al-Khalq ("creation").

In Ibn 'Arabi's taṣawwuf, the manifestation of love is articulated through three stages. The first is the manifestation of al-Ḥaqq's Essential love (al-Tajallī al-Wujūdiyyah al-Dhātiyyah). The second is the manifestation of love at the level of existence (al-Tajallī al-Wujūdiyyah al-Ṣifātiyyah), which operates at the level of ontological unity-differentiation ('ālam al-waḥdah), mediating between the most sacred emanation (al-Fayḍ al-Aqdas) and the sacred emanation (al-Fayḍ al-Muqaddas). The third is the manifestation of love at the level of actual existence (al-Tajallī al-Wujūdiyyah al-Af'āliyyah) — that is, at the stage of phenomenal reality (Izutsu, 2015, p. 139).

The concept of tajallī must be distinguished from two traditions with which it might superficially be confused. Against the theology of creatio ex nihilo, Ibn 'Arabi holds that creation is a trace (athar) of the tajallī event, such that a genuine relation between al-Ḥaqq and al-khalq is maintained — whereas in the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo, no intelligible relation between Creator and creation is established. Against Neoplatonic emanationism, Ibn 'Arabi presupposes no genus-species relation between To Hen and the series of creation; his account departs from the starting point of Absolute non-determination (al-muṭlaq bilā sharṭ), interpreting Being as the ultimate Reality of the One and Only One, admitting of no duality or plurality (Yahya, 1988, pp. 20–23). Whatever is other than Him is merely a manifestation with no independent ontological status.

Through tashbīh ("resemblance"), waḥdah (oneness) becomes kathrah (plurality); the "Single" becomes the "Many"; and solitude becomes relation. The unrecognized and wholly negative divine love becomes a recognized "divinity" (al-rubūbiyyah), open to relationships

and to the possibility of being immanent, manifesting, and incarnating in its creatures (Al-Fayyadl, 2012, p. 199). It is here that Ibn ʻArabi anchors love in the phenomenal: he refuses to make the essence of love the point of departure, insisting instead on the event of al-Wujūd's unfolding through the creation of phenomena — an unfolding lived from within.

This Akbarian vision of tajallī as a movement from solitude toward relation resonates most deeply with Lévinas's analysis of the ego's tendency toward totality and its disruption by the infinite. For Lévinas, the ego inhabits the world as an exclusive dwelling, perpetuating the Same at the expense of the Other (Lévinas, 1979, p. 37). This totality is radically disrupted by the presence of "the Infinite" — the Other in their Otherness — whose Face ensures that the Other always exceeds the ego's totalizing grasp (Bertens, 2014, pp. 279–280). The epiphany of the Face is an ethical event that demands responsibility precisely because it cannot be reduced to any prior understanding or notion; it is present in its refusal to be contained (Lévinas, 1979, p. 194). The most primordial expression of the Face — in its nudity and destitution — is the appeal "you shall not commit murder," an appeal that arises from ethical demands that precede every rational consideration (Lévinas, 1979, pp. 199–200).

The structural parallel with tajallī is significant: in both frameworks, an originary solitude — whether the absolute concealment of al-Wujūd within Ahādiyyah or the ego's self-enclosure within totality — is broken open by a movement toward the Other. In Ibn ʻArabi, this movement is divine in origin: God's desire to be known generates the entire created order as an expression of love. In Lévinas, the movement is ethical in character: the Face of the Other disrupts the self's totality, constituting the subject as irreducibly responsible. The divergence is therefore profound: for Ibn ʻArabi, the movement from solitude to relation is grounded in divine ontology and issues in a cosmology of love; for Lévinas, it is grounded in the phenomenology of the ethical encounter and issues in a philosophy of infinite responsibility. Yet in both cases, relationality — the opening of self toward Other — is the most fundamental structure of existence.

Conclusion

This article has explored two principal themes—the ethics of care and the thought of Ibn ʻArabi—bringing them into productive dialogue to offer a critical intervention on prevailing stereotypes surrounding Islam. Through a systematic analysis of Ibn ʻArabi's theoretical framework, the article has sought to uncover the ethics of caring within Islamic mysticism and to demonstrate the complexity of his ethics of love. Five key variables have been identified: (1) the undefinability of love, (2) insān kāmil, (3) jamāl-Ihṣān, (4) jamāl and jalāl, and (5) tajallī. Each of these variables exhibits substantive resonances with the care-ethical perspectives of Gilligan, Murdoch, Lévinas, and Spaemann, as analyzed in the preceding sections. By presenting Ibn ʻArabi's ethics of love in this way, the article argues for a conception of diverse expressions of human religiosity as shared spaces of love rather than arenas of exclusive confessional claims. Ultimately, Ibn ʻArabi's ethics of love offers a viable corrective trajectory for religious life, pointing beyond fanaticism toward a spirituality grounded in care, beauty, and universal compassion.

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