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Eternity Made Temporal

Ashraf ʿAlī Thānavī, a Twentieth-Century Indian Thinker and the Revival of Classical Sufi Thought

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Abstract

This study investigates the Deobandī engagement with classical Sufi thought through the writings of one of modern South Asia's most influential Sufi thinkers, namely Ashraf ʿAlī Thānavī (d. 1943). The article brings to focus Thānavī's contributions to South Asian Sufism by showing how he sought to preserve, defend, revive, and disseminate classical Sufi teachings in a climate of social reform. The article documents how Deobandī scholars such as Thānavī – far from being propagators of shallow fundamentalist discourses – immersed themselves in the ocean of some of the most sophisticated strands of Islamic learning such as Sufi metaphysics that often employ rational methods of argumentation, alongside symbols and imageries to articulate complex metaphysical doctrines in both prose and poetry.

Keywords

Sufi metaphysics – Ibn ʿArabī – selfhood – the perfect human – Thānavī – Ḥāfiẓ

1 Introduction

In today's global media the name Deoband – probably the most influential Muslim revivalist movement outside the Middle East – is usually associated with "madrasaphobia," fundamentalism, Wahhabism, and the Taliban.[1] But

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[1] As SherAli Tareen notes, the global phenomenon of "madrasaphobia" and associated stigmas of fundamentalism in relation to the Deoband is common across the border in India,

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as recent scholarship has shown, such facial characterizations of one of the world's largest madrasa networks hardly do justice to the internal diversity of the Deoband movement, whose complex history shows a close association with Islam's spiritual and mystical tradition (i.e. Sufism), alongside myriad attempts of social and individual reform (*iṣlāḥ*).[2] Yet, what has been heretofore neglected in Deoband scholarship is the movement's engagement with the giants of classical Sufism such as Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) and Ḥāfiẓ (d. 792/1390). While existing scholarship has uncovered the Deobandīs' checkered relationship with Sufism (e.g., the legal status of Sufism or Sufism as ethics) or their polemical wars with rival groups such as the Barelvīs concerning *bidʿa* (heretical innovation), *mawlūd* (the celebration of the prophet Muḥammad's birthday) or *ʿurs* (the commemoration of the death date of a Sufi saint),[3] their engagement with such strands of Sufism as Sufi metaphysics[4] still awaits a scholarly investigation which the present study seeks to accomplish.

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elsewhere in South Asia and the global South, and the Western world. While it is true that many in the Taliban leadership hail from a Deobandī madrasa in northwestern Pakistan, it is unfair to stigmatize an entire religio-intellectual tradition because of the actions of a select few within it. See SherAli Tareen, *Defending Muḥammad in Modernity* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019), 386. Moreover, Contrasting the credibility of the madrasa-trained scholars vis-à-vis Western-educated Muslims who often look down on the former, Muhammad Qasim Zaman reflects: "Indeed, some of [ʿulama's] success in reaching broader audiences rests precisely on an ability to demonstrate a familiarity with modern forms of knowledge, including the English language. It is no exaggeration to say that the contemporary ʿulama have done better at acquiring Western learning, and at benefiting from so doing, than the modernists have in developing a credible grounding in the Islamic tradition and in enhancing the religious credentials that go with any such accomplishment." Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Islam in Pakistan: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 266.

[2] For a thorough analysis of these topics, see Brannon Ingram, *Revival from Below: The Deoband Movement and Global Islam* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018); and Tareen, *Defending Muḥammad*.

[3] For some of these debates and others such as *imkān-i kidhb* and *imkān-i naẓīr*, see e.g., Tareen, *Defending Muḥammad*, 26, 28–29, 40, 41, 51, 55, 97–99, 101, 133, 138–42, 154–55, 160, 163, 191, 197, 206–7, 299, 302, 348–9.

[4] Sufi metaphysics aims to express metaphysical doctrines concerning being and selfhood through both rational and supra-rational instruments of knowledge, alongside emphasizing Sufism as a way of life. From the earliest period of Islamic history, there was a trend among a number of leading Sufi figures to actively engage with Islamic theology (*kalām*), either by way of refuting or accepting theological doctrines. From the eleventh century CE onward, Sufi authors not only discussed philosophical ideas, but also appropriated them into Sufi discourse. From the twelfth century onwards, the previously rigid barriers between "philosophy" and "theology" became permeable, at which point Sufi thinkers began to formulate a synthetic metaphysical and philosophical discourse aimed at articulating the principal teachings of the Sufi *Weltanschauung*. All these developments gradually led to the birth of

As is well known, both Ibn ʿArabī[5] and Ḥāfiẓ[6] had been tremendously influential in the subcontinent and elsewhere, or in what Shahab Ahmed calls the "Balkans-to-Bengal complex."[7] More specifically, it is significant that some of the most influential Deobandī scholars such as Ashraf ʿAlī Thānavī (d. 1943) have composed commentaries on the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* of Ibn ʿArabī and the *Dīvān* of Ḥāfiẓ, since the *Fuṣūṣ* is probably the most controversial and most metaphysical of all Sufi works penned by the most influential Sufi figure in the post-classical period (c. 1200 CE onward), while the *Dīvān* of Ḥāfiẓ, with its ambivalent wine-and-love poetry containing sensual imageries, is equally celebrated by Sufis and non-Sufis, the latter hardly holding a favorable view of religion.

Accordingly, the present study will focus on the most influential scholar to come out of the Deoband, namely Ashraf ʿAlī Thānavī, and in particular, investigate his writings concerning Sufi metaphysical anthropology.[8] While

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a new discipline, in which philosophically trained Sufi authors consistently employed rational methods of argumentation (within certain limits), alongside the vocabulary of Islamic theology, logic and philosophy to articulate complex metaphysical doctrines in both prose and poetry. For our purposes, it would be most appropriate to characterize this new form of Sufi discourse as "Sufi metaphysics." For more information, see Muhammad Faruque, "Sufi Metaphysical Literature," in *Sufi Literature* (*Handbook of Sufi Studies*), ed. Alexander Knysh and Bilal Orfali (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

[5] On the pervasive influence (both positive and negative) of Ibn ʿArabī across the Islamic world including the subcontinent of India, see the many works of William Chittick, James Morris, and others. See e.g., James Morris, "Ibn ʿArabī and His Interpreters II: Influences and Interpretations," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106.4 (1986): 733–56; William Chittick, "Notes on Ibn al-ʿArabī's Influence in India," *Muslim World* 82 (1992): 18–41; "Waḥdat al-Wujūd in India," *Ishraq: Islamic Philosophy Yearbook* 3 (2012): 29–40; Michel Chodkiewicz, "The Diffusion of Ibn ʿArabī's Doctrine," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabi Society* 9 (1991): 36–57, and Alexander Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999).

[6] According to Shahab Ahmed, the *Dīvān* of Ḥāfiẓ is "the most widely-copied, widely-circulated, widely-read, widely-memorized, widely-recited, widely invoked, and widely-proverbialized book of poetry in Islamic history – a book that came to be regarded as configuring and exemplifying ideals of self-conception and modes and mechanisms of self-expression in the largest part of the Islamic world for half-a-millennium." See Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam?: The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 32. Moreover, between the fifteenth and the late-nineteenth centuries, the *Dīvān* had a profound and pervasive literary presence in the discourse of educated Muslims in the vast regions extending from the Balkans through Anatolia, Iran and Central Asia down and across Afghanistan and North India to the present-day Bangladesh.

[7] For this expression, see Ahmed, *What is Islam*, 32.

[8] The most extensive treatment of Thānavī's biography (in Urdu) can be found in Azīz al-Ḥasan, *Ashraf al-sawāniḥ* (Thana Bhawan: Maktaba-yi ta'lifāt-i Ashrafiyya, 1984). For an English biography, see Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Ashraf ʿAli Thanawi: Islam in Modern South*

scholars such as Qasim Zaman, Margrit Pernau, Brannon Ingram, SherAli Tareen, and Ali Mian have uncovered valuable aspects of Thānavī's thought, none of them have dealt with his commentaries on Ibn ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* and the *Dīvān-i Ḥāfiẓ*.[9] This study thus frames Thānavī as an interpreter, reviver, and popularizer of classical Sufi thought. It is also worth mentioning that Thānavī's significance derives not only from being a commentator of the *Fuṣūṣ* or the *Dīvān*, but also from how, as a leading Deobandī voice with a massive following, he was able to disseminate abstruse and controversial doctrines of classical Sufism to a select few audiences (more on this later). As Nile Green and others have observed, until the colonial period Sufism in its various manifestations had been a ubiquitous feature of Muslim societies from the Maghrib to the Malay world.[10] Yet, beginning in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, one can observe the practice of accusing Sufism by rival Muslim groups for the perceived moral and intellectual decline of Islamic societies. This is clearly evident in the writings of such modernist thinkers as Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938), who, in addition to being critical of aspects of

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Asia (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008). For a brief description of Thānavī's works regarding modern thought, see Fuad S. Naeem, "A Traditional Islamic Response to the Rise of Modernism," in *Islam, Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition* (Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 2004), 79–116; and for Thānavī's revivalist project, see *idem*, "Sufism and Revivalism in South Asia: Mawlānā Ashraf ʿAlī Thānavī of Deoband and Mawlānā Aḥmad Razā Khān of Bareilly and their paradigms of Islamic revivalism," *The Muslim World* 99.3 (2009): 435–451. On Thānavī's notion of agency in Bihishti Zewar, see Usman Y. Ansari, "The Pious Self is a Jewel in Itself: Agency and Tradition in the Production of 'Shariatic Modernity'," *South Asia Research* 30.3 (2010): 275–98. On Thānavī's views on gender, see Barbara Metcalf, *Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf ʿAli Thanawi's* Bihishti Zewar: *A Partial Translation with Commentary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 1–38. For a general treatment of Thānavī's thought in relation to the Deobandī *ʿulamāʾ*, see Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 203–10. For more contexts of Thānavī's thought, see Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The "Ulama" in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 21–36; Dietrich Reetz, "The Deoband Universe: What Makes a Transcultural and Transnational Educational Movement of Islam?," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27.1 (2007): 139–59.

[9] It should also be noted, in this connection, that while other influential Deobandī scholars such as Muḥammad Qāsim Nānautvī (d. 1880) and Rashīd Aḥmad Gangōhī (d. 1905) wrote on the general topic of Sufism (particularly its legal status), none of them, as far as I know, have authored any commentaries on Ibn ʿArabī or Ḥāfiẓ. Nānautvī authored a number of philosophical and theological treatises such as *Taqrīr-i dilpazīr*, *Mubāḥathā-yi Shāhjahānpūr*, and *Ḥujjat al-islām*, some of which show extensive discussions on existence (*wujūd*), the modalities of the intellect (*ʿaql*), and self-knowledge. See e.g., Muḥammad Qāsim Nānautvī, *Taqrīr-i dilpazīr* (Deoband: Shaikhulhind Akaḍimī, 1996), 50ff.

[10] E.g., Nile Green, *Sufism: A Global History* (Malden, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2012), 159–60.

Sufism, was also against Ibn ʿArabian or Ḥāfiẓian mysticism.[11] It is thus hoped that an analysis of Thānavī's metaphysical anthropology through his commentaries on the *Fuṣūṣ* and the *Dīvān* will shed light on the history of South Asian Sufism at the beginning of the twentieth century. In what follows, I will first describe and contextualize the broad contours of Thānavī's writings by incorporating relevant theoretical insights from the recent studies of Margrit Pernau and Brannon Ingram. In the later parts of the article, I will proceed to analyze Thānavī's metaphysical anthropology by initially discussing his conception of the self, which is a necessary step for a thorough examination of the doctrine of the perfect human (*al-insān al-kāmil*) that lies at the heart of Thānavī's metaphysical anthropology. Instructively, by "metaphysical anthropology," I mean a metaphysical perspective of human nature that takes into account its moral and spiritual dimensions in relation to the question of "what it means to be human." As is known, Sufi authors often address this question through the doctrine of the perfect human that seeks to explain, *inter alia*, the human's metaphysical origin, the question of what it is to be human in relation to God and His manifestation, and the human's existential return or spiritual ascent to God.[12]

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[11] See for instance, the following poem in Iqbal's *Asrār-i khūdī*:

> "Beware of Ḥāfiẓ the drinker
> His cup is full of the poison of death….
> There is nothing in his market except wine
> With two cups his turban has been spoiled.
> He is a Muslim but his belief is girdled with the unbeliever's belt
> His faith is fractured by the beloved's eyelashes.
> He gives weakness the name of strength
> His musical instrument leads the nation astray….
> The sound of his music betokens decline
> The voice he hears from on high is the Gabriel of decline."

Muḥammad Iqbāl, *Mathnavī-yi asrār-i khūdī* (Lahore: Union Steam Press, n.d. [1915]), 66–72, translated by Qasim Zaman, based on Abu Sayeed Nur-ud-Din, "Attitude towards Sufism," in *Iqbal: Poet Philosopher of Pakistan*, ed. Hafeez Malik (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 287–300, at 294; in Zaman, *Islam in Pakistan*, 198. When the poem was first published in 1915, these lines caused a great deal of commotion in influential circles, which forced Iqbal to omit them from later editions of the *Asrār*. In his *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, Iqbal attributes the pejorative label of pantheism to Ibn ʿArabī and others. See Muhammad Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia* (London: Luzac, 1908), 59, 60, 65, 68, 91, 94, 114, 120–1, 135–36, and 143–45. Although Iqbal himself denounces parts of this work later in life, one does see the resurfacing of some of its conclusions such as pantheism in relation to Sufism or Magianism in relation to Persian culture in later works such as *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. On Iqbal's own reservation about the work, see B. A. Dar, *Anwār-i Iqbāl* (Lahore: Iqbāl Academy, 1977), 20. For some perceptive remarks on Iqbal's relation to Sufism and Ibn ʿArabī, see Muhammad S. Umar, "Contours of Ambivalence. Iqbāl and Ibn ʿArabī: Historical Perspective (in three parts)," *Iqbal Review* 35.3 (1994): 46–62.

2 Setting the Context

Thānavī's significance lay not only in his reputation as an *ʿālim* (scholar) or a Sufi, but also in his role in molding and consolidating the Deoband movement itself.[13] As a protagonist of the early Deobandīs, he did much to reinforce Deobandī aspirations to Sufi piety, connecting it to earlier recognized Sufi figures.[14] Thānavī's lasting influence also spread through his disciples many of whom became the leading *ʿulamāʾ* (religious scholars) of their day. Among Thānavī's disciples Ẓafar Aḥmad ʿUthmānī (d. 1974) and Muftī Muḥammad Shafīʿ (d. 1976) were among the most productive and well-known Deobandī scholars of the twentieth century. ʿUthmānī, who was educated at the Kanpur madrasa where Thānavī had once taught, went on to teach at the madrasa in Thana Bhavan, but his prolific career also took him to an unusually large number of other educational institutions. At various times in his career, he taught at the Maẓāhir al-ʿUlūm madrasa; at a madrasa in Rangoon (Yangon), in Myanmar; at several institutions in Dhaka (in Bangladesh), including Dhaka University, the Madrasa-yi ʿAliyya, and two other institutions of Islamic education; and finally, from the mid-1950s, at a madrasa in rural Sind. Toward the end of Thānavī's last years and especially after his death, ʿUthmānī and Shafīʿ played a key role in supporting the movement for the establishment of a separate homeland for the Muslims of India, and they remained active in Pakistani politics in post-separation and post-independence period.[15] Thānavī's devotees and followers have continued to embody and represent his legacy through his teachings. Thus, the abovementioned Shafīʿ, together with Qārī Muḥammad Ṭayyib (d. 1983), became the head of two the largest and most influential Deobandī madrasas of South Asia: Dār al-ʿUlūm in Deoband itself and Dār al-ʿUlūm of Karachi.[16]

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[12] See for instance, Richard Todd's fine study on Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī's (d. 672/1274) metaphysical anthropology. Richard Todd, *The Sufi Doctrine of Man: Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī's Metaphysical Anthropology* (Leiden: Brill, 2014). It is also worth mentioning Charles Stang's study on Pseudo-Dionysius in this regard, which also employs the methodology of "metaphysical anthropology" in relation to Christian mystical philosophy. See Charles Stang, *Apophasis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius Areopagite: "No Longer I"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[13] Thānavī's Sufi lineage goes back to Imdād Allāh al-Makkī (d. 1899), who mentored a generation of Deobandīs including Nānautvī and Gangōhī. Imdād Allāh's legacy was complicated by his lack of formal training in Islamic jurisprudence, which led to a disagreement between him and some of his disciples such as Gangōhī. See e.g., his *Fayṣala-yi haft masʾala*, which was written in response to intensifying intra-Muslim rivalries and conflicts on critical questions of law, theology, and religious practice. For a partial translation and analysis of this text, see SherAli Tareen, "Faysala-yi Haft Mas'ala (A Resolution to the Seven Controversies): Haji Imdadullah's Hermeneutic of Reconciliation," *Sagar: A South Asia Journal* 21 (2013): 1–16.

[14] Zaman, *Ashraf ʿAli Thanawi*, 10. Among other influential Deobandīs, one should also count Mawlānā Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī, who was known for his anti-British stance and for his advocacy of Indian Muslim nationalism. A documentation of his views can be found in a 1939 pamphlet entitled *Muttaḥidah qawmiyat awr Islam* (United Nationalism and Islam), in which he advanced the notion of a pluralistic Indian society and argued that Muslims could, without sacrificing their identity or interests, thrive within it. For more information on this, see Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 32ff.

At any rate, as a leading Sufi thinker Thānavī also wrote widely on several subjects ranging from Sufi metaphysics, gender dynamics, and mystical psychology to intra-religious polemical discourses, and socio-religious reform (*iṣlāḥ*) through which he sought to make various facets of the Islamic tradition relevant to the public and private lives of the subcontinental Muslims in the face of colonial modernity.[17] As discussions of "modernity" in academic literature are highly contested, one should take care to explain in what sense this word or its cognates such as "colonial modernity" are applicable in the present context.[18] Following Ingram, I take "colonial modernity" to be the sum total of new ideas, practices, institutions, and socialities within and against which the Deoband movement (alongside other Muslim groups) emerges.[19] But since modernity implies many interrelated phenomena at the same time, one should not attempt to reify the term here, as though it is a "thing" that happened to the Deoband movement. As scholars have pointed out, modernity is a global and conjectural phenomenon that simply does not travel or spread from one place to another (i.e., from Europe to India if we are talking about colonial modernity).[20] On top of this, we should do well to remember that the Deoband movement itself is grounded in a tradition of texts and discourses that long predate colonialism.

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[15] Zaman, *Ashraf ʿAli Thanawi*, 29ff.

[16] Ibid., 105.

[17] As noted by Thānavī's biographers, the former wrote hundreds of treatises covering practically all the different issues from mysticism to Islamic law. For instance, Thānavī's massive *Bawādir al-nawādir*, which deals with a set of social, legal, mystical, theological and philosophical issues based on the questions that were posed to him, still awaits a scholarly investigation, see *Bawādir al-nawādir* (Lahore: Shaykh Ghulām ʿAlī, 1962), 94, 109, 129, 131, 165, 177, 454–64. Thānavī also wrote a defense of Ibn ʿArabī's mystical philosophy, especially the latter's notion of sainthood (*walāya*) based mostly on ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī's (d. 973/1565) ruminations on the subject, see *al-Tanbīh al-tarabī fi tanzīh Ibn al-ʿArabī* (Thana Bhawan: Ashraf al-matabi', 1927), *passim*. Another important work devoted to showing the scriptural foundation of Sufi practices such as *dhikr* or doctrines such as *fanāʾ/baqāʾ* is *Ḥaqīqat al-ṭarīqa min al-sunnat al-ʿanīqa* (c. 1909), published as part of *al-Takāshshuf ʿan muhimmat al-taṣawwuf* (Deoband: Maktaba-yi Tajallī, 1972), 491–722. In addition, Thānavī wrote a number of treatises concerning social and legal issues, see e.g., *al-Maṣāliḥ al-ʿaqliyya li-l-aḥkām al-naqliyya* (Lahore: Kutub khāna-yi Jāmilī, 1964) and *Imdād al-fatāwā*, ed. Muftī Muḥammad Shāfiʿ (Deoband: Idāra-yi Taʾlifāt-i Awliyā, 1974).

[18] For studies on colonial modernity in South Asia, see Saurabh Dube, "Introduction: Colonialism, Modernity, Colonial Modernities," *Nepantla: Views from South* 3.2 (2002): 197–219; *Subjects of Modernity: Time-Space, Disciplines, Margins* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017); *Unbecoming Modern: Colonialism, Modernity and Colonial Modernities*, ed. Saurabh Dube and Ishita Dube (Delhi: Social Science Press, 2006); and

Be that as it may, modernity also means, among other things, a self-conscious attitude of valuing the present over the past.[21] According to Habermas, the nineteenth-century romantic modernism makes an abstract opposition between tradition (conceived as the past) and the present. The dominant understanding of modernity, as Habermas stresses, that has gained ascendency since the nineteenth century is the idea of the "newness of the age."[22] From another vantage point, the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor puts forth two different theories of modernity. According to Taylor, "modernity" in Western culture can be understood as *cultural* or *acultural*.[23] Cultural modernity sees the difference between the present and the past as being applicable

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Lakshmi Subramanian, "The Master, the Muse and the Nation: The New Cultural Project and Reification of Colonial Modernity in India," *South Asia. Journal of South Asian Studies* 23.2 (2000): 1–32. For some critical notes, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Difference – Deferral of (A) Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in British Bengal," *History Workshop* 36 (1993): 1–34.

[19] Ingram, *Revival from Below*, 33–34.

[20] See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Hearing Voices: Vignettes of Early Modernity in South Asia, 1400–1750," *Daedalus* 127.3 (1998): 75–104.

[21] Also, in the wake of the French Enlightenment, the word "modern" came to characterize a belief in the infinite progress of knowledge and in the gradual amelioration of social and moral betterment with the passage of time. See Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity versus Postmodernity," *New German Critique* 22 (1981): 3–14 at 9. On "modernity" as a sociological and philosophical concept, see Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourses of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. F. Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987); Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); and Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London and New York: Verso, 2002).

[22] Habermas, "Modernity," 3–4. It should be made clear that a comprehensive discussion of the contours of "modernity" is not the intended objective here, hence the plausibility of these brief remarks.

[23] Charles Taylor, "Two Theories of Modernity," *The Hastings Center Report* 25.2 (1995): 24–33.

across different civilizations, each with their own culture. On the contrary, acultural modernity is premised on the notion that the change from earlier centuries to today involves the demise of a "traditional" society and the rise of the "modern."[24] Another understanding of modernity worth noting is the one argued by the literary theorist Fredric Jameson, for whom it is a "narrative category," and not a philosophical concept. For Jameson, modernity represents the paradoxical idea of both a break from the past as well as its own emergence as a "well-defined period" (i.e., becoming a tradition unto itself) over time.[25]

Considering some of the above connotations of modernity, I agree with Ingram that the Deoband movement cannot be characterized as "modern," if by modernity we have in mind a self-conscious attitude of breaking with the past to usher in a new age.[26] But this does not negate the fact that the Deobandīs were indeed shaped by the first modality of modernity, since the ideas, policies, practices, and institutions introduced by the British had a profound impact on their existence.

To shed further light on the above discussion, let me now turn to Margrit Pernau, who approaches this issue from a slightly different angle. Speaking of modernity in colonial India, Pernau suggests that the word with which people began to make sense of colonial experience was "new."[27] This is because new technologies, from the railway, steam ships, and the printing press to the local sugar mill and factories began to shape the daily life of an increasing number of people. New forms of knowledge transformed the frame of social intercourse, while new forms of relationship began to change family life and gender dynamics.[28] According to Pernau, while these phenomena could have been perceived as random changes, what held them together was the actors' interpretation that these were the harbingers of a new age.[29] Indeed, it is no coincidence that there was an efflorescence of new phrases (or words with new connotations) in Urdu, Persian, and Arabic to describe the "newness" of the age. Words such as *nāya daur* (the new epoch), *na'i roshnī* (the new light or enlightenment), *na'i taḥzīb* (the new civility), *jadīd* (new), *tajdīd* (renewal), and *al-ʿaṣr al-jadīd* (the new age) became increasingly common.[30] It is also highly instructive that Deobandīs such as Thānavī himself employed the phrase "the new age" (*al-ʿaṣr al-jadīd*) to describe the changing circumstances of their day.[31] But while the Deoband movement itself was molded by the social, technological, political, economic, and institutional changes introduced by the British (colonial modernity), it nonetheless, rejected the more epistemological valuation of modernity.[32] That is, Deobandīs such as Thānavī would reject or oppose modernity if it means a radical break with their Islamic past.[33]

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, 31. In his essay "What is Enlightenment?," Michel Foucault talks about the "attitude of modernity" rather than "modernity" itself, which, for him, is "a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task." Foucault likens this to the Greek idea of ethos. Drawing on Baudelaire, Foucault continues to describe the "attitude of modernity" in various terms such as a consciousness of the discontinuity of time, a break with tradition, and a feeling of novelty or of vertigo in the face of the passing moment. See Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. P. Rabinow, trans. Catherine Porter (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 32–50, at 38.

[26] Ingram, *Revival from Below*, 34.

[27] Margrit Pernau, *Emotions and Modernity in Colonial India: From Balance to Fervor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 5–6.

[28] Pernau, *Emotions and Modernity*, 5.

An instance of this can be seen in Thānavī's *al-Intibāhāt al-mufīda ʿan al-ishtibāhāt al-jadīda*, in which Thānavī tells us that the characteristic feature of this new age is "newly arisen doubts" concerning the various tenets of religion.[34] He further informs us that he felt obliged to respond to the challenges that he saw were emanating from various quarters. The main issue has to do with how, in light of the new scientific findings, certain people demand that the doctrinal beliefs of Islam and its practices be modified in such a way that they will be brought to agreement with the worldview of modern science. Moreover, he identifies some of these misgivings and principles as emanating from modern science and the European West. The rest of the book is a detailed refutation of these misgivings, which he reckons threaten the foundation of religion. Elsewhere, he also criticizes blind submission to "customs" and superstitions of the bygone eras as being the mark of his time, i.e., the new age.[35] Thānavī then alludes to the wide-ranging upheaval that has disrupted centuries old, normative Muslim praxis in the wake of British policies. He attributes this upheaval to the weakening of Muslim religiosity on the one hand and the invasion of anti-religious colonial modernity introduced by the British and adopted by Western-educated Muslims on the other.[36] So it is clear that for Thānavī, the notion of "a new age" is inextricably linked to the colonial experience and misfortunes of the present. It can scarcely be doubted that colonialism brought about changes not only in political and social life of Muslims living in South Asia, but also caused major shifts in epistemological paradigms including new ways of envisioning history, hermeneutics, authority, knowledge, scripture, and the human self, among others.[37]

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[29] Pernau, *Emotions and Moderniy*, 5.

[30] Pernau, *Emotions and Modernity*, 6.

[31] See for example, the title of one of his books: *al-Qaṣd al-mashīd li-l-aṣr al-jadīd* (*Lofty Intentions for the New Age*).

[32] Needless to say, the two senses of modernity are mutually implicated.

[33] This is shown in Tareen's erudite book on *Defending Muḥammad in Modernity*, which focuses on competing visions of the relationship between divine sovereignty, prophetic charisma, and the practice of everyday religious life in colonial Muslim South Asia. While documenting the long-standing debate between the Deobandīs and the Barelvīs, Tareen urges us to distinguish between the technological and institutional conditions of modernity, and its epistemic sources and traditions. This is because the participants of the debate, who were undoubtedly indebted to the technologies of colonial modernity, nonetheless drew on a long-running intellectual heritage of texts, authorities, and practices irreducible to the political and conceptual force of modernity. See Tareen, *Defending Muḥammad, passim*.

[34] Thānavī, *al-Intibāhāt al-mufīda ʿan al-ishtibāhāt al-jadīda* (Deoband: Maktaba-yi Nashrulqur'ān, n.d.), 1–3. It is highly significant that the aforementioned treatise is based on Thānavī's lectures given at the M.A.O. College (i.e., the historical Aligarh Muslim University, which was a bastion of modern education/science) when he was invited there in 1908 by a group of Aligarh students. Thānavī tells us in the *Preface* that the students showed great eagerness in his lectures, which ultimately propelled him to turn them into a book. But he is quick to note that the topics treated in it should serve as a preliminary to a more advanced treatment of the subject, and he hopes that someone will take up that responsibility in the future. English translation of the *Intibāhāt* can be found in *Islam, the Whole Truth*, trans. Muhammad Hasan Askari and Karrar Husain (Multan: Idaratalifat-e-Ashrafia, 2003). The book, interspersed with Arabic and Persian technical

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vocabulary, was originally composed in Urdu. The translation, unfortunately, is tainted by numerous errors ranging from mis-rendering of the terms to incorrect usage of English. Moreover, the translators seemed to add an "ideological" flavor whenever the arguments took on a polemical turn. For ease of reference, I will make use of this translation with modification while quoting directly from the original.

[35] Ibid., preface.

[36] Naeem, *Sufism and Revivalism*, 443. In opposition to the Deobandīs however, Sir Sayyid Ahmad thought Muslims need to catch up with the Hindus and the wider world in their pursuit of modern science. It was his idea that Muslims, being politically ineffective in the aftermath of the Mutiny, need to cooperate with the British and make use of their language, i.e., English in order to reestablish their dominance in India. Although himself a promoter of a certain brand of modernist Islam, the Aligarh movement of Sir Sayyid was widely castigated by other Muslims in general and the Deobandīs in particular. David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 71–100 and 106–22.

[37] SherAli Tarin, "Narratives of Emancipation in Modern Islam: Temporality, Hermeneutics, and Sovereignty," *Islamic Studies* 52.1 (2013): 5–28 at 5–6. For the notion of "epistemological colonialism," see Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 3–15.

2.1 *A Metaphysical Notion of the Shariah*

As Pernau further explains, colonialism did provide a frame of reference within which various new challenges associated with the new age (i.e., modernity) could be encountered.[38] But this does not mean everything that the Deobandīs were saying or doing can either be reduced to colonialism or to modernity, since Islamic reformism (i.e., intra-Islamic debates concerning customs, practices, and doctrines that are thought to be heretical) was under way long before the advent of colonial modernity. A case in point is the eighteenth-century Sufi theologian Shāh Walī Allāh (d. 1176/1762), whom the Deobandīs hold in particular high esteem and whose vision of the Madrasa Raḥīmiyya played a crucial role in the founding of the Deoband itself.[39] For instance, there was a long-standing opposition between the Sufis and the jurists long before the advent of colonialism. For his part, Walī Allāh believed that this opposition between Sufism and law is somehow misplaced. Thus, in order to dispel the undue opposition between Sufism[40] and the Shariah, Wālī Allāh formulates an innovative definition of the Shariah that contains both an exoteric and an esoteric aspect:[41]

> The sacred arrangement (*tadbīr*) of the Shariah (*sharīʿa*) with regard to the foregoing is developed in two directions. The first involves effecting a reform (*iṣlāḥ*) through good deeds, the abandonment (*tark*) of the major sins, and the establishment of the marks of the true community. For these three things the observances and limits are laid down, and all followers of the Shariah are required to abide by them. This is the outward form of the Shariah (*ẓāhir-i sharʿ*), and is called Islam. The second direction consists in the purification and refinement (*tahdhīb*) of the different levels of self (*nafs*) through the reality of the four virtues, and passing

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[38] Pernau, *Emotions and Modernity*, 255.

[39] Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, 138–90, and 235–63; On revivalist/reformist movements, see Jamal Malik, *Islamische Gelehrtenkultur in Nordindien: Entwicklungsgeschichte und Tendenzen am Beispiel von Lucknow* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), *passim*, but esp. 211ff. On Walī Allāh's Madrasa Raḥīmiyya and revivalist project, see e.g., Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenge and Choices of Interpreting the Prophet's Legacy* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2014), *passim*; Abulhasan Ali Nadvi, *Saviours of Islamic Spirit, vol. IV, Hakim-ul-islam Shah Waliullah* (Lucknow: Academy of Islamic Research & Publications, 2004), 91–114.

[40] Provided that we take Sufism to be as diverse as Islam itself, which escapes a simple definition.

[41] On the relationship between Sufism and the Shariah in Walī Allāh's thought, see Muhammad Faruque, "Sufism contra Shariah?: Shāh Walī Allāh's Metaphysics of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*," *Journal of Sufi Studies* 5.1 (2016): 27–57.

> from these forms of goodness to the splendors which they contain, and progressing from the mere outward abstention from sin to a repudiation of its very essence. This is the inward form of the Shariah (*bāṭin-i sharʿ*), and it is called *iḥsān*[42] (inward virtue and beauty).[43]

Now, what is striking about the above passage is that it does not conform to a general conception of the Shariah as pertaining to things legal. While "*sharīʿa*" is a highly complex term in Islamic thought, it does not generally contain Sufism or the mystical tradition under its wing.[44] Although often confused with *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principle of jurisprudence), or simply, the so-called Islamic law, the Shariah is the prophetic "framework" based on the sacred sources of Islam, i.e., the Qurʾan and the Sunna, that seeks to regulate all contingencies of Muslim life. As such, it is not a monolithic structure or a rigid set of rules that can be filtered only through *fiqh*.[45] Yet, in Wālī Allāh's rendering the Shariah is a comprehensive framework whose inner dimension can be identified with Sufism (the idea being that Sufism is intrinsic to Islam).[46]

While a definition of the Shariah that harmonizes Islam's legal and mystical traditions is still plausible, Thānavī in his *Intibāhāt* stretches it further and incorporates even metaphysics and philosophy into his conception of the Shariah:

> The first subject of discussion which comes under the scope of the Shariah is metaphysics (*ʿilm al-ilāhiyya*), one sub-division of which is the science of doctrines and beliefs (*ʿilm al-ʿaqāʾid*) that deals with Revelation (*waḥy*), prophecy (*nubuwwa*) and the Resurrection (*maʿād*). The second subject of discussion is called practical philosophy (*al-ḥikma al-ʿamaliyya*), which is sub-divided by the Shariah into the injunctions concerning the relationship between a) God and man, b) man and society (*muʿāshara*),

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[42] That is, Sufism is identified with "*iḥsān*." On Sufism as "*iḥsān*," see William Chittick, *Sufism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 4, and 25–37.

[43] Walī Allāh, *Alṭāf al-quds* (Gujranwala: Madrasa Nuṣrat al-ʿUlūm. 1964), 53.

[44] See Wael Hallaq, "What is Sharia?," *Yearbook of Islamic and Middle Eastern Law*, 2005–2006, vol. 12 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 151–80.

[45] A relevant example is that of "*adab*" (social and spiritual etiquette), which is a comprehensive term meaning several things and plays a crucial role in the social life of Muslims.

[46] On the relationship between the Shariah and the *ṭarīqa* (the Sufi path), see also Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. after 787/1385), *Asrār al-sharīʿa wa-aṭwār al-ṭarīqa wa-anwār al-ḥaqīqa*, ed. Riḍā Muḥammad Ḥidarj (Beirut: Dār al-Hādī, 2003), 8–15, 73–89, 120–28; ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad al-Bakkārī, *al-ʿAqīda, al-sharīʿa, al-taṣawwuf ʿinda al-Imām al-Junayd Abī al-Qāsim al-Khazzāz al-Baghdādī* (al-Dār al-Bayḍāʾ: Markaz al-Turāth al-Thaqāfī al-Maghribī, 2008), 25ff.

> and injunctions concerning c) social transactions (*muʿāmalāt*), d) ethics or moral development (*akhlāq*).[47]

I have to admit here that I have not seen a similar conception of the Shariah elsewhere.[48] Since such a discussion of the Shariah is broached in the aforementioned context of the *Intibāhāt*, one can safely surmise that Thānavī is aware of the deeply entrenched battle between the theologians (*mutakallimūn*) and the philosophers (*falāsifa*) in Islamic intellectual history and of the disputed status of *falsafa* after al-Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111) famous attack on the philosophers.[49] While Thānavī does not clarify whether or not he sympathizes with the philosophers, there is little doubt that his hermeneutical move to incorporate metaphysics and philosophy into the definition of the Shariah is meant to legalize or normalize the disputed status of philosophy in Islam, which is reminiscent of Walī Allāh's strategy in regard to Sufism. That is to say, just as many Deobandīs thought the teachings of Sufism can be used to bring about an ethical self-transformation in the masses, Thānavī probably believed the same will be true of philosophical doctrines, which can be utilized to counter the worldview of European science. Before turning to a specific example in this regard, let us further elucidate Thānavī's conception of the Shariah. Making use of the "classification of the sciences"[50] scheme in Islamic philosophy, Thānavī further justifies his vision of the Shariah by arguing that all the different branches of philosophy (save natural philosophy and mathematics) are concerned with the human's obligations to God and other creatures in the cosmos, and as such, they are part of the Shariah:

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[47] Thānavī, *Intibāhāt*, 7–8 (trans. Askari and Husain, modified, 121).

[48] Like Walī Allāh, Thānavī also claims that Sufism and the Shariah are the two sides of the same coin. See Ingram, *Revival from Below*, 122.

[49] See Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* [= *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*], ed. and trans. M. E. Marmura (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2000), introduction; and Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, ed. M. Bouyges (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1930). Space here will not allow me to even outline the rich history of Islamic philosophy and theology in Muslim India, but during Thānavī's time the Khayrābādī school, representing the rationalist (*maʿqūlāt*) tradition, was still active, as were individual luminaries such as Barakāt Aḥmad Ṭūkī (d. 1929). A contemporary of Thānavī, Barakāt Aḥmad studied Mullā Ṣadrā's (d. 1050/1640) *Sharḥ al-hidāya* with ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq al-Khayrābādī (d. 1900), and in turn, taught this work along with Ṣadrā's *magnum opus Asfār*. In his *magnum opus al-Ḥujja al-bāzigha*, Barakāt Aḥmad explains various Ṣadrian doctrines from Ṣadrā's *Asfār*, commentary of the *Shifāʾ*, *Sharḥ al-hidāya*, and his glosses on *Sharh Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* of Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 710/1311). See Barakāt Aḥmad, *al-Ḥujja al-bāzigha fī sharḥ al-Ḥikma al-bāligha* (Decan: ʿUthmān Baryasī, 1916); *Itqān al-ʿirfān fī taḥqīq māhiyat al-zamān* (Lucknow: Shāhī Pirīs, 1337); and *Imām al-kalām fī taḥqīq ḥaqīqat al-ajsām* (Kanpur: al-Maṭbaʿ al-Anẓāmī, 1333). For a general account of the history of Islamic philosophy and theology in India, see Asad Ahmed, *Palimpsests of Themselves: Rationalism, Commentaries, and Glosses in Post-Classical Islam* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, forthcoming); "The *Mawāqif* of Ījī in India," in *Ashʿarism in the Later Periods*, ed. A. Shihadeh and J. Thiele (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming); "What Was Philosophy in Muslim India?," in *What Was Philosophy Outside Europe?*, ed. Ulrich Rudolph (Springer, forthcoming); "The *Sullam al-ʿUlūm* of Muḥibballāh al-Bihārī," in *Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Khaled El-Rouayheb and Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 488–508; and "Post-Classical Philosophical Commentaries/Glosses: Innovation in the Margins," *Oriens* 41.3–4 (2013): 317–48.

> Thus, we are left with only one branch of theoretical philosophy, which is metaphysics and all the branches of practical philosophy. Since all of them are involved in the attainment of the goal mentioned above, they fall within the [configuration] of the Shariah.[51]

After explaining the Shariah in such a manner, Thānavī turns his attention to dismantling the underlying materialism of modern science. For instance, in a very dense passage concerning the "temporality of matter" he brings out the subtle Aristotelian doctrine that it is "form" in contrast to "matter" that is the principle of substance.[52] That is to say, although each entity is a hylomorphic compound, it is the "form" that makes an entity what *it is*. His whole point behind using such an argument is to expose the inconsistencies of a materialistic worldview, which he associates with the new age. Thānavī writes:

> If we turn now to Ancient philosophy (i.e., Greek philosophy), and adopt its perspective assuming that matter (*mādda*) possesses some kind of form (*ṣūra*), we shall find that no bodily form (*ṣūrat-i jismiyya*) can exist without a species form (*ṣūrat al-nawʿiyya*), and no species form can exist without an individual form (*ṣūrat-i shakhṣiyya*). So when we posit some kind of form in matter, we inevitably posit its individual form as well … *The individuality of an entity lies in its individual form.* If there happens to exist two individual forms in one entity, it means that there are two

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[50] For an extensive analysis of the "classification of the sciences" in Islamic philosophy, see Osman Bakar, *Classification of Knowledge in Islam: A Study in Islamic Philosophies of Science* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1998).

[51] Thānavī, *Intibāhāt*, 7 (trans. Askari and Husain, modified, 121).

[52] On form and matter (hylomorphism) and "form" as the cause of substance in Aristotle, see e.g. Bernard Williams, "Hylomorphism," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 4 (1986): 189–99; Michael Wedin, *Aristotle's Theory of Substance* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), chs. 6–8; and M. L. Gill, *Aristotle on Substance: The Paradox of Unity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), chs. 3 and 4.

> entities, not one. Thus it leads to the idea that an individual entity is at the same time two separate entities, which is obviously absurd.[53]

His argument in the above also has repercussions regarding his notion of selfhood (see the next section). That is, according to Thānavī the individual is characterized by the "permanence" of her form, which, as we shall see, is none other than the "form" of God's all-encompassing name, Allah.[54]

Thānavī also takes issue with those Muslims who are eager to harmonize their holy scripture with the discoveries of modern science. In Thānavī's mind, such an attitude is simply disgraceful:

> For if we make the interpretation of the Holy Qurʾan contingent upon scientific discoveries, will not the European scholars point out to us that even though the Qurʾan was revealed long time ago, yet no Muslim including the Holy Prophet himself, has ever understood it, and that Muslims should be grateful to the West for having made possible the understanding and correct interpretation of their Holy Book?[55]

3 The Self as the Perfect Human: Thānavī's Metaphysical Anthropology (1)

In the previous section, I provided a sketch of Thānavī's socio-intellectual context and myriad writings that showed his familiarity with a range of Islamic sciences such as philosophy, Sufism, and theology. In the following sections, I will first discuss Thānavī's notion of the self before investigating his metaphysical anthropology through his commentaries on the *Fuṣūṣ* and the *Dīvān*.

In contemporary scholarly discourse the word "self" evokes all sorts of connotations, so the questions of "how should one use the word 'self' in the Islamic context" and "what are the ambiguities one must void while discussing self" must be addressed first.[56] In the Islamic context, there is no single term that renders the self, but a few have overlaps such as *nafs*, *dhāt*, *huwiyya*, *anāʾiyya* and *anāniyya*. Broadly speaking, these terms refer to the relationship between human consciousness (or, the human self), God and the cosmos. The lexical meanings of *nafs* in Arabic include, soul, self, spirit, mind, desire and appetite, among others. However, it also denotes reflexivity, as in *nafsī* (myself) and *bi-nafsihi* (by himself). What is important to note however is that in mystical and philosophical texts (unless it is used as a compound word), the word normally connotes either self or soul. In Sufism, selfhood is seen as a phenomenon which is ultimately indefinable and unknowable (i.e., ultimately it involves an apophatic discourse).[57] Nevertheless, the basic of sense of self involves an ethical "split" within itself in terms of its higher and lower nature – the higher nature being the state of perfect peace, while the lower nature being the site of negative thoughts and emotions. It is also helpful to view selfhood as both received and achieved. That is, a self is not something that we automatically are; rather a self (i.e., an aspirational self) is something we must become. Thus, it is possible to describe the self (the received aspect of the self) in terms of scientific and social facts, but at the same time it is equally possible to articulate it in terms of aspirational ideals that are yet to be realized (i.e., the achieved aspect).[58]

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[53] Thānavī, *Intibāhāt*, 21 (trans. Askari and Husain, modified, 148). These are some of the stock examples of the very dense philosophical passages found throughout the *Intibāhāt*. However, further investigations are needed to properly unpack Thānavī's philosophical treatment of some of these abstruse issues, since neither Naeem's "A Traditional Islamic Response" nor my analyses in the present study were not able to do full justice to them.

[54] For a detailed explanation of the last point, see 234ff. of the present study.

[55] Thānavī, *Intibāhāt*, 36 (trans. Askari and Husain, modified, 181). Thānavī actually mentions Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898) by name in the *Intibāhāt*, as the latter was perceived as a great enthusiast of modern science.

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[56] For an in-depth analysis of all these theoretical issues, see Muhammad Faruque's forthcoming book *Sculpting the Self: Islam, Selfhood and Human Flourishing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021), which is the first book-length treatment of selfhood in premodern and modern Islam. For some general literature on the self, see Raymond Martin and J. Barresi, *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self: An Intellectual History of Personal Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); *The Oxford Handbook of the Self*, ed. Shaun Gallagher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Richard Sorabji, *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life, and Death* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge (MA: Harvard University Press, 1989). The historical origin of the word "self," however, goes back to John Locke's famous *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, in which he seeks to provide a new philosophy of human nature. For more information on Locke and the self, see George Makari, *Soul Machine: The Invention of the Modern Mind* (NY: Norton, 2015), 115.

[57] This is because for the Sufis selfhood is an on-going and ever-changing manifestation of the divine names (*al-asmāʿ al-ilāhī*) that are infinite.

[58] There are also philological difficulties when it comes to discussing selfhood in Sufism, although it is beyond the scope of the present endeavor to deal with them here. But at the very least, one has to realize that there is a cluster of terms such as *nafs*, *dhāt*, *khūd*, *rūḥ*, *sirr*, *khafī*, *akhfā*, etc., that various Sufi authors employ to talk about the self, and without discerning if the connotations of these terms point to a common reference, one would not be able to discuss the self in Sufism. For a detailed discussion, see Faruque, *Sculpting the Self*, 24–25, 43–47.

For Thānavī, the word *nafs* and its equivalents in Persian and Urdu such as *khūd* or *khwīshtan* refer to the "self" in the sense of either 1) the inner reality of human nature, or 2) the "aspiration" of realizing the ideal of the perfect human (*al-insān al-kāmil*). In his view, the term *nafs* and its compounds signify the inner, psycho-spiritual states of the self, such as the vulnerable, evil-inciting self or the profoundly tranquil self. The primary impetus behind such a conception seems to derive from the Qurʾanic understanding of the self that describes its progressive states through such terms as *al-nafs al-ammāra* (the vulnerable, evil-inciting self), *al-nafs al-lawwāma* (the blaming self), *al-nafs al-mulhama* (the inspired self), and *al-nafs al-muṭmaʾinna* (the profoundly tranquil self). So, for instance, in his exegetical work *Ashraf al-tafāsīr*, Thānavī states that the self (*nafs*) is characterized by two fundamentally contrasting possibilities, namely the tendency to incite evil (*al-ammāra bi-l-sūʾ*) and the tendency to promote good (*al-ammāra bi-l-khayr*).[59] That is to say, human nature contains the seed of both good and evil as innate possibilities. Nonetheless, Thānavī asserts, evil dominates over human nature (except in the case of the prophets and the saints) because of its indulgence in worldly pleasures, which is the source of all negative personality traits such as greed, pride, arrogance, and envy.[60] So the lower self or *nafs-i ammāra*, which is governed by the senses and follows their whims and desires, must be spiritually disciplined in order to attain the tranquility of the higher self or *nafs-i muṭmaʾinna*. Thānavī refers to Rūmī's (d. 672/1273) *Mathnavī* in order to affirm that the "tranquil state" of the self which the Qur'an mentions (i.e., *nafs-i muṭmaʾinna*) is the primordial, inner state of human beings, which is the sought-after goal.[61] Although Thānavī sometimes draws on the writings of classical Sufis such as al-Qushayrī (d. 466/1074) and al-Ghazālī, the broad contours of his conception of selfhood are molded by the cosmological doctrines of Ibn ʿArabī and the love-metaphysics of Rūmī and Ḥāfiẓ.[62]

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[59] Thānavī, *Ashraf al-tafāsīr*, ed. Muḥammad Ṭaqī ʿUthmānī (Multan: Idāra-yi Taʾlīfāt-i Ashrafiyya, 2003), 2:325.

[60] Thānavī, *Ashraf al-tafāsīr*, 2:325–27.

[61] Thānavī, *Ashraf al-tafāsīr*, 4:295–97. He cites the following verse of Rūmī from the *Mathnavī*: "Anyone one who has remained far from his roots, seeks a return (to the) time of his union," See Rūmī, *Mathnavī-yi maʿnawī*, ed. and trans. R.A. Nicholson as *The Mathnawī of Jalālu'ddīn Rūmī* (London: Luzac, 1924–40), 1:4.

[62] Both Ali Mian and Brannon Ingram have discussed aspects of selfhood in Thānavī's thought. While Mian's unpublished PhD dissertation explores Thānavī's "passionate self," Ingram's study focuses on the "ethical self" in Deobandī thought in general. In contrast, the present study, while paying attention to the psycho-ethical dimensions of the self, directs the reader's attention to the "metaphysical self" (i.e., the perfect human) in Thānavī's works. Mian, for instance, shows how passionate love (*ʿishq*) constitutes the

In view of the above, I will now analyze Thānavī's notion of the self insofar as it is exemplified by the "perfect human."[63] Although the doctrine of the "perfect human" bears resemblance to the ancient idea of "microcosm," it is much more encompassing and variegated than the latter.[64] Thānavī begins his discussion of the perfect human by explaining human nature through the microcosm/macrocosm analogy.[65] Then he goes on to affirm the Sufi idea that

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essence of Thānavī's conception of human subjectivity, with such associated elements as *ṭabīʿat* (natural inclination), *fiṭrat* (primordial nature), *dhawq* (aesthetic sensibility), and *mayl* (tendency). See Ali Mian, "Surviving Modernity: Ashraf ʿAlī Thānvī (1863–1943) and the Making of Muslim Orthodoxy in Colonial India" (Unpublished PhD diss., Duke University, 2015), 120–22, 143. See also, Ingram, *Revival from Below*, 166–37. It is to be noted that the self is a multidimensional entity in Thānavī's thought, which means an interrelationship is presupposed between different aspects of the self, such as the metaphysical and the ethical.

[63] The idea of the perfect human (Gr. *anthrōpos teleios*), which became a foundational doctrine of Islamic mysticism, goes back to Iranian and Hellenistic (Gnostic) sources; see e.g. A. Christensen, *Les Types du premier homme et du premier roi dans l'histoire légendaire des Iraniens* (Leiden-Uppsala, 1917–34); M. Molé, *Culte, mythe et cosmologie dans l'Iran ancien : le problème zoroastrien et la tradition mazdéenne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), 469ff.; H. H. Schaeder, "Die islamische Lehre vom Vollkommenen Menschen," *ZDMG* 4 (1925): 192–268. On the notion of *anthrōpos teleios*, see Bryan S. Turner, *Orientalism: Early Sources*, vol. 1 (London, NY: Routledge, 2000), 577ff. As for Islamic sources, see Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Insān al-kāmil / min kalām Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn al-ʿArabī*, ed. Maḥmūd al-Ghurāb (Damascus: Maṭbaʿat Zayd ibn Thābit, 1981); ʿAzīz-al-Dīn Nasafī, *al-Ensān al-kāmel*, ed. M. Molé (Tehran and Paris: A. Maisonneuve, 1962); ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, *Al-insān al-kāmil fī maʿrifat al-awākhir wa-l-awāʾil* (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Tārīkh al-ʿArabī, 2000); Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 247–86; R.A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* (Richmond: Curzon, 1994), 77–142; A.E. Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyid Dín-Ibnul ʿArabí* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1939), 78ff.; F. Meier, "Der Geistmensch bei dem persischen Dichter ʿAṭṭār," *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 13 (1945): 283–353; L. Massignon, "L'homme parfait en Islam et son originalité eschatologique," *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 15 (1947): 287–313 (*Opera Minora*, vol. 1, 107–25). See also ʿA. R. Badawī, *al-Insān al-kāmil fīʾl-Islām* (Kuwait: Wikālat al-Maṭbūʿāt, 1976).

[64] Masataka Takeshita seems to equate the reality of the perfect human with that of microcosm, which I think is incorrect because the former encompasses all levels of reality, and not just microcosm, see Masataka Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's Theory of the Perfect Man and Its Place in the History of Islamic Thought* (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1987), 170ff.

[65] My analysis is primarily based on Thānavī's Urdu (cum Arabic) commentary on Ibn ʿArabī's famous *Fuṣūs al-ḥikam*. It is there that Thānavī lays out his conception of the self as the perfect human. In the *Preface* he mentions that someone had made him promise to write a commentary on the *Fuṣūs*, and in order to fulfill that promise he had undertaken the task, see Thānavī, *Khuṣūṣ al-kalim fī ḥall Fuṣūs al-ḥikam* (Lahore: Nazir Sons Publishers, 1978), 2–3. Thānavī's commentary is an addition to the long line of the *Fuṣūṣ* commentaries that had been composed over the centuries all the way from the Islamic heartlands to

the perfect human is the locus of manifestation of the Supreme Name of God (i.e., Allah), in virtue of which she is capable of reflecting all of God's names and qualities in a unified manner. Thānavī writes:

> Adam is like a spirit for the entire cosmos, while the angels are like the various faculties (*quwā*) of the form of the cosmos, which is called macrocosm (*insān-i kabīr*) in the language of the Sufis. So the angels are like the faculties of sense and spirit, which humans have in their constitution.[66]

In accordance with the general interpretive framework established by the School of Ibn ʿArabī, Adam or the perfect human prototype is the synthesis of both macrocosmic (pertaining to the universe) and microcosmic (pertaining to the human being) realities in that only she is made on the image of the all-encompassing name of God Allah.[67] Thus the universe as a whole reflects all the divine names and attributes of Divinity (or the name Allah which encapsulates all other names) through countless number of species and entities, but each entity or thing reflects only a particular mode of a given divine name. In other words, a particular entity like quartz crystal may reflect its perfection only through a particular given name of God, which is the cause of manifestation of the former. In like manner, angels are similar to the various faculties of human, which bear their own "conditional" perfection in that each sense-faculty may be perfect in terms of its particular function, e.g., sight when it comes to seeing, and can know a particular aspect of reality perfectly. So the underlying argument is that angels, although perfect in what each of them is supposed to perform, are not capable of knowing the Divine in all of Its illimitable aspects because the angels, much like the cosmos, manifest only some particular combination of divine names and attributes. Humans, on the contrary, are the locus of manifestation of the all-comprehensive name (*ism jāmiʿ*),

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China and Malay islands. However, it is probably one of the first commentaries in Urdu, although famous Sufi philosophers such as Muḥibb Allāh Ilāhabādī (d. 1058/1648) and many others have written commentaries on the *Fuṣūṣ* in both Arabic and Persian. But Thānavī often quotes the Ottoman Sofyalı Bālī Efendī (d. 960/1553) and the Persian ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 898/1492) more than any other figures in his own commentary. As for the Urdu commentaries on the *Fuṣūṣ*, Mehr ʿAlī Shāh (d. 1937), an influential Sufi, delivered daily lectures on the *Fuṣūṣ*, which were published as *Maqālāt al-mardiyya* (date unknown). It is to be noted that Seyyed Mubārik ʿAlī was perhaps the first to translate the *Fuṣūṣ* into Urdu, which was published as *Kunūz asrār al-qidam* (Kanpur, 1894).

[66] Thānavī, *Khuṣūṣ al-kalim*, 15. Cf. Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. A. E. Afifi (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1966), 49–50; Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī, *Maṭlaʿ khuṣūṣ al-kalim fī maʿānī Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (*Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*) (Tehran: Intishārāt-i ʿilmī wa farhangī, 1998), 326–30.

[67] See al-Qayṣarī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 329–33.

i.e., Allah. But it should be noted that humans qua humans are the locus of the "Name" in *potency*, while the perfect human is the only one who reflects it *in actu*:

> The cosmos (*ʿālam*) is the locus of manifestation (*maẓhar*) of the Divine names, while the human being is the locus of manifestation of the all-comprehensive name (*ism jāmiʿ*), i.e., Allah.[68]

That is to say, the human is the synthesis of the manifestation of all the divine names and attributes found in the cosmos. Whatever is found in the former is also found in the latter. However, it is crucial to note that whereas in the cosmos God manifests His names and qualities in a differentiated manner (*tafṣīl*), i.e., each entity can be distinguished from one another in terms of a given divine attribute, in the case of humans His manifestation takes on the form of a non-differentiated, unified object, i.e., the "mode" of existence of the divine names and qualities in human cannot ordinarily be distinguished as in case of the cosmos. Thānavī thus says:

> The forms of the divine names (i.e., entities that exist in the cosmos) remained distinct from one another, but they all become manifested in the human state. Entities that exist are the manifestation of the Real, which is why they are called divine forms. The human state is capable of attaining the degree of all-comprehensiveness.[69]

The central argument thus is that humans are capable of *knowing* God in a comprehensive manner because they have the potential to embrace the all-encompassing reality of the Supreme Name of God (Allah), which encompasses all other names.[70] So in Thānavī's metaphysical anthropology, the perfect human is the supreme goal of creation, as we shall see in the next section.

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[68] Thānavī, *Khuṣūṣ al-kalim*, 10. This point is also explained from viewpoint of the Muḥammadan Reality (*ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*) by the 14th century mystic Maḥmūd Shabistarī, see Shabistarī, *Gulshan-i rāz*, ed. Parvīz ʿAbbāsī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Ilhām, 2002), 33–34.

[69] Thānavī, *Khuṣūṣ al-kalim*, 20. On the all-comprehensive nature of the perfect human embodied in the human self, see ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, *Naqd al-nuṣūṣ fī sharḥ Naqsh al-fuṣūṣ*, ed. W. Chittick (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1977), 61–64.

[70] Thānavī, *Khuṣūṣ al-kalim*, 20–21; cf. Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Insān al-kāmil*, 7–11.

4 The Perfect Human as the Supreme Goal of Creation (II)

According to the well-known Sufi doctrine, the perfect human is the ultimate goal of God's creation or manifestation.[71] In response to the question "why did God create the world," Sufis assert that God brought the cosmos into being for the sake of the perfect human. Thānavī states:

> The Real (*al-ḥaqq*) wanted to witness the all-encompassing, perfection of His Essence in a comprehensive being (*wujūd-i jāmiʿ*), which is the reason why Adam was created with all-inclusive attributes.[72]

That is to say, God brings into existence a comprehensive being, identified here as the perfect human so that He may see His own perfection in the mirror of the former.[73] Thus, Adam was created in the *form* of the name Allah in contrast to the angels and all other beings, who, as mentioned earlier, are created upon particular forms of a given divine name. Now it may be asked at this point that why did God, whose Essence already contained infinite perfection (*kamāl*), wish to see Himself in the mirror of another being? Did not God already "see" His perfection before the creation of the perfect human? As Thānavī himself writes:

> Question arises as to whether or not before the existence of this all-comprehensive locus of manifestation (i.e., the perfect human), the Real witnessed His Essence or His Names, so that He would need the former for a witnessing.[74]

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[71] See al-Qayṣarī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 328–31. According to al-Qayṣarī, God (referring to the Divine Essence) was a "hidden treasure" (*kanzan makhfiyyan*), who loved to be known which is the reason He brought the cosmos into being. But the final cause (*ʿilla ghāya*) of the cosmos is the perfect human through whom God is known in a comprehensive manner, since the former contains all the perfections. On the *ḥadīth* of the "hidden treasure" and Ibn ʿArabī's explanation of it, see Claude Addas, *Ibn ʿArabī: The Voyage of No Return* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2010), 91–92. See also, Mu'ayyid al-Dīn Jandī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. S.J. Āshtiyānī (Mashhad: Dānishgāh-i Mashhad, 1982), 157ff.

[72] Thānavī, *Khuṣūṣ al-kalim*, 10–11.

[73] It is to be noted that even though the "tense" of the sentence suggests that this "divine wish" is a "temporal" event, in reality this should be taken to mean an "atemporal" act transcending time. Thus, Thānavī asserts that humans are eternal as long as their noetic existence (*wujūd-i ʿilmī*) is considered, which is also known as the fixed entities (*aʿyān-i thābita*). And at this level, all things are pre-eternal (*azalī*), but since humans possess pre-eminence as compared to all other beings, this should be reflected at the level of [noetic existence too], see Thānavī, *Khuṣūṣ al-kalim*, 18.

[74] Thānavī, *Khuṣūṣ al-kalim*, 11.

Thānavī then offers the following response to this very salient question:

> A thing's witnessing of its own essence in itself through itself is not the same as witnessing its essence through another, which will be like a mirror for it. That is to say, to see the essence through the mediation of something is not the same as seeing it without one. The effects and properties (*āthār wa aḥkām*) of these two contrasting witnesses differ in nature.[75]

That is to say, even though God did witness Himself (i.e., His names and qualities) before the creation of the perfect human, this witnessing was through His own Essence, and not through an external form. For the act of seeing oneself in oneself is *different* from the act of seeing oneself in another being, which would be like a mirror to the former. In the case of the former, i.e., seeing oneself in oneself, the witnessing takes place without any intermediary (*wāsiṭa*), whereas in the case of the latter the act of seeing is materialized through an "intermediary," which is the reality of the perfect human.[76] Moreover, although this act of vision is still within the Essence in the sense that nothing can be outside of God, yet it is an outward projection of the Divine Self manifested in external reality. So the perfect human is the very mirror in which the Divine Essence manifests Itself. In Thānavī's own word:

> If before the existentiation (*ījād*), the locus of manifestation, both in respect of the Essence and manifestation, were already present in the Real, then why would He bring it into existence again? The answer is that the aforementioned locus of manifestation had been present as an object of divine knowledge, while now it has been brought into being in external reality. And the difference between the two is manifest.[77]

Furthermore, when the Divine Self (i.e., God's Essence) knows Itself through Itself, the mode of Its self-knowledge is undifferentiated (*ijmāl*), whereas when It knows Itself through the mirror of the perfect human, Its knowledge of Itself becomes differentiated whereby all the names and qualities are distinctly reflected. Thānavī further expands on the question posed earlier and asserts that "divine infinitude" which is the very nature of the Essence requires the latter to manifest different possibilities contained within It.[78]

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[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid., 12.

[78] Thānavī, *Khuṣūṣ al-kalim*, 11–12. Since the Divine Essence is infinite, it must contain all the possibilities of manifestation.

Seen from another point of view, when God created the cosmos it was like an unpolished mirror and lacked a spirit. And as the forms of the divine names and qualities reflected in the cosmos could not be seen clearly on an account of the latter's being an unpolished mirror, God created the perfect human, who is the very polishing (*ʿayn-i jalāʾ*) of this mirror and the spirit of this form (*wa rūḥ tilka-l-ṣūrā*), since she completes its perfection.[79] It is also the exigency of the Divine command (*amr-i ilahī*) that if a locus (*maḥall*) is created it is bound to accept the Divine spirit in it. So, the cosmos, for the perfection of its manifestation, needed an order/entity (*amr*), which is the perfect human.[80]

5 The Perfect Human as the Fullness of the Self (III)

The doctrine of the perfect human comprises three principal modalities, namely the individual, the cosmic and the meta-cosmic.[81] The individual self, since created upon the form of the name Allah, contains the perfection of all the divine names and attributes *in potentia*. But seldom does one attain to the exalted station of the perfect human, with the exception of the prophets and the great saints.[82] As for the cosmic dimension, every individual self is also the mirror of the macrocosm, since it reflects the realities of the cosmos. Finally, as a meta-cosmic reality, every self by virtue of the fact that it is a potential perfect human encompasses all the different levels of reality from the Divine Essence to the terrestrial realm.[83] The metacosmic function of *al-insān al-kāmil* is an answer to the philosophical conundrum of how the many can proceed from the one – that it is an all-comprehensive, pre-existential, uncreated, reality out of which all things in creation unfold. God issues His creative command "be!" (*kun*), and what comes to be through the act of existentiation is the reality of the perfect human that subsumes all other realities. It is thus the greatest sign of God, in that it encapsulates all things in a pre-created/non-eternal, quasi incomprehensible ontological in-betweenness – like the first rays of the sun that are neither ray nor sun, and from which all of the sun's light radiates. It is the form of God from which both microcosm and the macrocosm take their forms. It also explains why microcosm and macrocosm are related, since they take their respective forms from the perfect human.[84] Thus, the perfect human even transcends the cosmos in that it can arrive at the threshold of the highest level of reality, i.e., the Divine Self. Thānavī writes:

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[79] Ibid., 13. On the "mirror symbolism" and its semantic analysis, see Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 63–89; idem, "Ibn ʿArabi's Polished Mirror: Perspective Shift and Meaning Event," *Studia Islamica* 66 (1988): 121–49.

[80] Thānavī, *Khuṣūṣ al-kalim*, 13.

[81] Izutsu thinks that the perfect human comprises two modalities rather than three, as I mentioned above. He leaves out the meta-cosmic dimension of the perfect human. This may be due to his restricting the reality of the perfect human below the Divine Essence, which however is not the position embraced by Thānavī or by most of the commentators of Ibn ʿArabī. On Izutsu's explanation of this issue, see Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, 247ff.

[82] However, even in the cases of the prophets and great saints, the actualization of the perfect human involves a hierarchy of degrees. Thus, the prophet Muḥammad is the supreme prototype of the perfect human as compared to other prophets.

[83] The multiple levels of reality can be summarized in five or six principal states, which the Sufi metaphysicians call the "five divine presences" (*al-ḥaḍarāt al-ilāhiyyat al-khams*). These states of being (or presence) encapsulate the entire reality as envisaged in Sufi metaphysics. The different "presences" signify the manner in which the Divine Essence becomes determined at various levels of manifestation. Generally speaking, they are as follows: *hāhūt* (Divine Self), *lāhūt* (Divine Names and Qualities), *jabarūt* (the archangelic

> Divine comprehensiveness pertains to the lot of humans only, and the nature of such comprehensiveness is unfathomable through rational reflection. Thus mystical unveiling (*kashf*) is required to understand [such a truth] … This comprehensive being (*mawjūd-i jāmiʿ*) is called the human (*insān*) or the vicegerent (*khalīfa*). It is named human in virtue of its "comprehensive state" (*nashʾa-yi ʿām*). That is, all the divine realities (*ḥaqāʾiq-i ilāhiyya*) belong to the particularity of the human state (*nashʾa-yi insāniyya*). Also, [since the human state] has a relationship with all other realities, it is named human … It is through him/her that the Real (God) sees His creation.[85]

For Thānavī, it is clear that such "comprehensiveness" of the perfect human as attributed to the human self can only be gleaned through mystical unveiling (*kashf*), and not through any form of rational analysis. He also gives reasons why humans are called human, which, according to him, is due to their

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world), *malakūt* (the imaginal world), *mulk* (the physical world) and/or the level of the perfect human. It should be noted that other terminologies such as *dhāt*, *aḥadiyya*, *wāḥidiyya*, etc., may also be used to account for the various Divine Presences. This doctrine is expressed with a slight variation by practically all the important members of the School of Ibn ʿArabī. For a detailed historical analysis of this doctrine, see William Chittick, "The Five Divine Presences: From al-Qūnawī to al-Qayṣarī," *The Muslim World* 72 (1982): 107–28.

[84] The word "*insān*" in the phrase "*insān al-kāmil*" could be misleading at times, as it tends to evoke a "superman image," whereas its reality far transcends the function of the terrestrial human.

[85] Thānavī, *Khuṣūṣ al-kalim*, 17.

possessing the "comprehensive state" (*nash'a-yi ʿām*).[86] This comprehensive state contains all the divine realities as they are manifested in the cosmos. And it is through such a comprehensive state that humans can relate themselves to all other beings in the cosmos. Moreover, Thānavī also alludes to the teleological significance of the perfect human, which suggests that it is through him or her that God looks at His creation. Before we explain fully what this means, it would be helpful to elaborate why humans are called "vicegerent" (*khalīfa*):[87]

> She/he is called a vicegerent because she/he is supposed to act as the custodian (*ḥāfiẓ*) of the rest of creation, just like the king who guards his treasures. God's attribute of the guardian of creation is bequeathed to human so that she/he would safeguard nature (lit. cosmos). The world (*dunyā*) should remain guarded as long as the perfect human exists.[88]

Thānavī maintains that humans have the function of custodianship in relation to nature (i.e., the rest of creation other than God). Humans are God's vicegerents on earth because they are charged with the guardianship of the cosmos, suggesting that it is their duty to safeguard the order of nature and maintain balance in the cosmos.[89] It is *as though* the human being is supposed to play the role of God as King on earth in the absence of the latter. This is because a vicegerent must possess the attributes of the person she represents, otherwise she would be an imperfect vicegerent. That is why Thānavī asserts that the world should remain guarded as long as there are perfect humans in it.[90] Needless to say, such an assertion of the custodianship of nature makes sense if only one takes into account the human self's cosmic dimension as one of the modalities of the perfect human.

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[86] Ibid.

[87] The political meaning of *khalīfa* (vicegerent) as the person who rules over the Islamic world is well known. But for Sufis the word also has a metaphysical meaning, which is expressed through the concept of the perfect human (*al-insān al-kāmil*). In simple terms, the doctrine expresses one's latent capacity for wholeness and perfection including the capacity for human flourishing. Note, however, that this ethico-spiritual imperative is not a given, which means every individual self has to attain the station of vicegerency by leading an ethical life and purifying their heart.

[88] Thānavī, *Khuṣūṣ al-kalim*, 19. Thānavī also mentions the tradition found in the *Muslim* that states "The Hour will not come so long as there are persons on earth saying: Allah, Allah…." According to Ibn ʿArabī, the purpose of this particular invocation is to make the presence (*istiḥḍār*) of the Named, i.e., Divine Reality concrete on earth. Thus, if no one is present to continue such a practice, the reason for the world's subsistence will come to an end. For Ibn ʿArabī's commentary on this *ḥadīth*, see Tayeb Chourief, *Spiritual Teachings of the Prophet* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2011), 300–1.

[89] Thānavī, *Khuṣūṣ al-kalim*, 19. Unfortunately, Thānavī does not elaborate much on the notion of the "custodianship of nature," which is a very relevant topic in today's world due to the environmental crisis. Numerous studies on Muslim environmentalism are now available. See e.g. Anna Gade, *Muslim Environmentalisms: Religious and Social Foundations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019); and *Environmentalism in the Muslim World*, ed. Richard Foltz (New York: Nova, 2005). For works on Islamic environmental philosophy, see e.g., Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

As stated earlier, the perfect human is the final cause or the *telos* of God's creation. It is through her that the meaning of the creation of the cosmos is fulfilled, since she becomes "the eye" with which God sees His creation.[91] As such, the full significance of the doctrine of the perfect human becomes more apparent when it is anchored within the spiritual economy of Sufism. It is also in this context that the relationship between the individual self and the perfect human becomes all the more transparent. That is to say, from the vantage point of ordinary human experience, the cosmic and meta-cosmic dimensions of the perfect human may appear to be a farfetched ideal devoid of any practical significance. But that is precisely what Sufi masters such as Thānavī would deny because for them the spiritual philosophy of Sufism makes perfect sense when we understand the importance of the doctrine of the perfect human in spiritual life.[92] To wit, the goal of every spiritual traveler (*sālik*) is to transcend her "individuality" or the conditioned self (*nafs*) through the mystical experience of annihilation (*fanā'*) so that when in the cases of the rare few such a culminating moment does occur, the Divine Self is able to reflect Its image on the polished mirror of the individual ego, now empty of its individual content.[93] It is precisely at that moment that the individual becomes the "eye" with which the Divine sees His creation, i.e., when the individual self is transcended by the Divine Self. That is the reason Thānavī devotes pages to explicate the modalities of spiritual life leading to the culminating experience of "*fanā'*."

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[90] Thānavī, *Khuṣūṣ al-kalim*, 19.

[91] Thānavī, *Khuṣūṣ al-kalim*, 17.

[92] Thānavī devotes several passages to explicate the "psychology" of the spiritual life. For example, in his *Bawādir al-nawādir*, he explains extensively the inner architecture of "thought patterns" that often prevents the initiate from reaching the ultimate spiritual goal. He identifies various features of the inner life such as perpetual soliloquy, sub-vocal thinking, indecision etc. as great impediments to the fulfillment of spiritual selfhood. For more information, see Muhammad Ajmal, *Muslim Contributions to Psychotherapy and Other Essays* (Islamabad: National Institute of Psychology, Quaid-i-Azam University, 1986), 44–45.

[93] I.e., the individuality of the ego-consciousness is transcended by a higher mode of consciousness. Mullā Ṣadrā brings out this point nicely in one of his Qur'anic commentaries, see *Tafsīr surāṭ al-jumuʿa*, ed. M. Khwājawī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mūlā, 2010), 290.

In his *ʿIrfān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, which is an extensive commentary on the *Dīvān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, he unearths the symbolism latent in each verse.[94] For instance, he maintains that the meaning of "the cupbearer" (*sāqī*) in the first verse implies the real beloved (*maḥbūb-i ḥaqīqī*), which can either be God or the spiritual master. The goblet of wine (*ka's*) in the same place denotes love-induced attraction (*jadhb-i ʿishq*).[95] That is, the verse states that "*O my beloved, make me intoxicated with thy love*."[96] He then goes on to suggest that "*ʿishq*" in the second hemistich implies the path of love (*rāh-i ʿishq*), i.e., spiritual wayfaring (*sulūk*) in Sufism.[97] Thānavī explains that the spiritual path may appear easy at first because its difficulties are not foreseen. But as the novice traveler progresses upon the Sufi path, she encounters different challenges and temptations, both inwardly and outwardly. The couplet as a whole entails that wayfaring without attraction is not enough to attain union at the end of the journey. Thānavī continues his commentary of the first few couplets by saying that spiritual wayfaring involves attaining different stations (the *maqāmāt* in Sufism), i.e., the inner virtues that one must acquire, which are the foundation of the extrinsic virtues such as fulfilling the tenets of the Shariah.[98] However, according to Thānavī, when it comes to acquiring the inner virtues one's own effort is not sufficient. One also needs heavenly grace to attain such a goal. Thus, the spiritual life is often characterized by divine attraction (*jadhb*), which is a mysterious emanation and divine support (*fayd-i ghaybī wa ʿināyat-i ḥaqq*) from Heaven.[99] As the initiate treads the tortuous alleyways of the spiritual path, the alchemy of the divine attraction becomes intense in her, which ultimately transforms the limited ego-consciousness, leading to a union with God (*uṣūl ilā Allāh*).[100] Following Ḥāfiẓ, Thānavī asserts that such a transformation of the self occurs most concretely through the retreats[101] of the Sufis or the dervishes. In such a state of mind, Thānavī claims, one experiences nothing less than divine peace. Thānavī quotes the following poem from *Dīvān-i Ḥāfiẓ*:

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[94] Ashraf ʿAlī Thānavī, *ʿIrfān-i Ḥāfiẓ* (Karachi: Nafīs Academy, 1976), 9ff.

[95] On the symbolism of "love" and "wine," see also Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī's commentary on ʿUmar Ibn al-Fāriḍ's famous poem *al-Khamriyya*, in Th. Emil Homerin, *The Wine of Love and Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 12–13 and 40–41. According to al-Qayṣarī, "wine" in mystical poetry refers to the wine of gnosis.

[96] Thānavī, *ʿIrfān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, 9. The first couple of the *Dīvān* reads:

"Ho, the cupbearer, haste, the beaker bring,
Fill up, and pass it round the ring;
Love seemed at first an easy thing –

But alas! the hard awakening." Trans. A. J. Arberry, with slight modification, in *Fifty Poems of Ḥāfiz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 81.

[97] Thānavī, *ʿIrfān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, 9. On the concept of the "path of love" in Sufi thought, See William Chittick, *Divine Love: Islamic Literature and the Path to God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 195ff.

[98] Thānavī, *ʿIrfān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, 10.

[99] Ibid., 10.

[100] Ibid.

> The highest garden of heaven is the retreat (*khalwa*) of the dervishes (*darwishān ast*).
> The substance of wealth lies in the service of the dervishes …
> That which turns the black heart into gold by its radiance,
> Is an alchemy (*kīmiyā*) that is found in the spiritual company (*ṣuḥbat*) of the dervishes.
> That in front of which the Sun submits its crown of pride,
> Is the pride that comes from the grandeur of the dervishes.
> The wealth which is not in danger of decline,
> Without exaggeration, is the wealth of the dervishes.
> The kings are the direction to which people turn in their needs, but
> From pre-eternity (*azal*) to post-eternity (*abad*) is the opportunity of the dervishes.
> The goal that kings seek in their prayers is manifested
> In the mirror of the countenance of the dervishes.
> Ḥāfiẓ, be courteous here, for sovereignty and kingdom are
> All due to servitude and the presence of the dervishes.[102]

In his commentary, Thānavī notes that the highest paradise is to be found in the retreat of the Sufis (i.e., the dervishes).[103] This is because the retreat opens up the possibility of attaining the mystical state of *fanāʾ* (annihilation), which is the summit of spiritual journey.[104] Approving Ḥāfiẓ, Thānavī holds that the spiritual path entails service, servitude, and spiritual company of the dervishes, all of which can transform the black heart (i.e., the lower self which is full of desires and concupiscence) into gold (i.e., the profoundly tranquil self which is permeated by peace and serenity).[105]

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[101] The practice of constantly invoking the divine name in a solitary cell.

[102] Ḥāfiẓ, *The Divan of Hafez: A Bilingual Text, Persian-English*, trans. Reza Saberi (Lanham: University Press of America, 2002), 62–63, trans. modified.

[103] Thānavī, *ʿIrfān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, 88–89.

[104] On the relation between *fanāʾ* and *khalwa*, see Thānavī, *ʿIrfān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, 197, 203, and 231. For a classic treatment of *khalwa* in Sufism, see Najm al-Dīn Kubrā's *Risāla fi-l-khalwa* translated by Gerhard Böwering in his article "Kubrā's Treatise on Spiritual Retreat, *Risāla fi-l-khalwa*," *al-Abhath* 54 (2006): 7–34.

[105] Thānavī, *ʿIrfān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, 89–90.

Thus, the doctrine of the perfect human comes full circle when the individual self is able to overcome and transcend the "accidentalities" of her personal identity, i.e., the individual consciousness usually shaped by heredity, personality, personal tendencies, capacities, fate and vocation, the fact of being born at a given place, given moment and undergoing given influences and experiences, and so on. In short, the socio-cultural milieu that is responsible for the construction of one's identity and conditioned self. According to Sufis, the spiritual goal of *fanāʾ* is to casts off all such accidentalities, paving thereby the way for the realization of the cosmic and meta-cosmic dimensions of the individual self associated with the perfect human. So, it is clear that the perfect human is not to be confused with the "individuality" of any particular human; rather it refers to the trans-historic and trans-generic reality lying at the center of the human state that can be actualized in different degrees by following a spiritual path.

6 Summary and Concluding Remarks

This study investigated the Deobandī engagement with classical Sufi metaphysics through the writings of one of modern South Asia's most influential Sufi thinkers, namely Ashraf ʿAlī Thānavī. At the very least, the article showcases how Deobandī scholars, far from being propagators of shallow fundamentalist discourses, immersed themselves in the ocean of some of the most sophisticated strands of Islamic learning such as Sufi metaphysics that often employ rational methods of argumentation, alongside symbols and imageries to articulate complex metaphysical doctrines in both prose and poetry. More importantly, however, this article brings into the open Thānavī's contributions to South Asian Sufism by showing how he, in contrast to many of his contemporaries such as Iqbal, sought to preserve, defend, revive, and disseminate classical Sufi teachings in a climate of social reform (more on this below).

As discussed earlier, while the Deobandīs were opposed to the epistemic connotations of modernity (e.g., a radical break with the past), they were nonetheless affected by the colonial policies and practices of the British. So, when Persian was no longer the official language or when Arabic was understood only by a few, religious scholars such as Thānavī felt the need to use the print media and turn to Urdu, which was increasingly becoming more popular. It is thus no surprise that Thānavī chose to author both his commentaries on Ibn ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ* and Ḥāfiẓ's *Dīvān* in Urdu. But it may be asked who were Thānavī's intended readers for these works, since he explicitly suggests that such esoteric Sufi treatises must be kept hidden from the masses, and since

Ibn ʿArabī's legacy in particular has been so controversial?[106] This is significant, since Thānavī wrote numerous popular works on Islam covering such topics as rituals (*ʿibādāt*), reform (*iṣlāḥ*), theological doctrines (*ʿaqīda*), Muslim life (*muʿāsharāt*), social transactions (*muʿāmalāt*), and Sufi counsels (*malfūẓāt*), all for the purpose of providing religious guidance to what the Deobandīs call the *ʿawāmm* or the masses. Yet, Thānavī's massive following also included the likes of ʿAbd al-Mājid Daryābādī (d. 1977), the renowned author who was trained in European philosophy and psychology and who came to Thānavī after losing his faith in Western, enlightenment values. As Mian perceptively remarks, Daryābādī's story is a telling example of numerous intellectual concerns shared by Muslim thinkers of various ideological persuasions in colonial modernity, at the heart of which lies the question: what are the ethical and spiritual resources within the Islamic intellectual tradition that can help those who were facing various personal and political crises?[107]

In light of the above, it will not be far from the mark to suggest that Thānavī's intended audience for composing metaphysical commentaries on the *Fuṣūṣ* and the *Dīvān* was probably Western/English educated Muslims like Daryābādī, alongside fellow scholars who were versed in classical Sufi literature. For instance, Thānavī had many conversations on the complex psychology and metaphysics of love with Daryābādī in light of the latter's personal crises, and even went so far as to attribute the epithet "*ʿāshiq*" (lover) to him.[108] These discourses on love are very reminiscent of what one encounters in the *Dīvān* of Ḥāfiẓ itself, which is full of metaphysico-spiritual ruminations on love. They also show that unlike many other Deobandīs who only discussed the legal status of Sufism or certain controversial Sufi practices, Thānavī's erudition in classical Sufi thought led him to successfully present some of the most intricate Sufi doctrines such as the doctrine of the perfect human. The above assertion can be better contextualized when we direct our attention to some of Thānavī's contemporaries such as Iqbal, who held mixed, if not pejorative, views of both Ibn ʿArabī and Ḥāfiẓ and whose interpretations of such classical figures as ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. c. 832/1428) or ʿAbd al-Qādir Bīdil (d. 1133/1720) were mediated by Hegel or Bergson, with tons of philological errors.[109] Likewise, Iqbal's formulation of the perfect human is more indebted to Nietzsche and Darwin and less to Sufism itself, even though he suggests otherwise. That is to say, even though Iqbal claims that he adopted the doctrine from the Sufis, his interpretation of the perfect human bears only superficial resemblance to the original Sufi doctrine. Iqbal significantly modifies the doctrine of the perfect human when he asserts that it represents the "completest ego, the goal of humanity, and the acme of life both in mind and body" in whom "the discord of our mental life becomes a harmony."[110] Moreover, according to Iqbal, the perfect human is the last fruit of the tree of humanity, who justifies "all the trials of a painful evolution" because he is to come at the end.[111] Needless to say, such an interpretation of the perfect human would hardly make sense to the likes of Ibn ʿArabī or Thānavī for whom the doctrine is primarily understood in its spiritual and metaphysical context.

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[106] See e.g., Ingram, *Revival from Below*, 131. It is interesting to note that Thānavī defends al-Ḥallāj's (d. 309/922) controversial saying "*anā al-ḥaq*" (I am the Truth) by arguing the latter did not deny divine transcendence since he would continue to offer his prayers. As for Ibn ʿArabī's legacy, the controversy and enthusiasm surrounding the personality of this influential Sufi have been as intense today as it had been for the past seven hundred years. Interested readers can simply "google" or "YouTube" Ibn ʿArabī's name in various Islamic/European languages to get a sense of his colorful legacy.

[107] Mian, "Surviving Modernity," 117.

[108] Mian, "Surviving Modernity," 143.

However, my intention in saying all this is not to either lionize Thānavī or excoriate Iqbal, since that is not the objective of this study. Rather, the point is to bring out the significance of Thānavī's commentaries in light of the general climate of the Muslim thought of his time. That is to say, while many other contemporary thinkers such as Iqbal sought to reconstruct or reform the traditional understanding of selfhood (the perfect human signifies the highest degree of selfhood) based partly on Western and partly on Sufi ideas, Thānavī revived and reaffirmed the Sufi doctrine of the perfect human, which encapsulates the notion of the self in his metaphysical anthropology through its individual, cosmic, and meta-cosmic dimensions. On the whole, in Thānavī's view, the perfect human is the synthesis of both macrocosm and microcosm because she is made in the form of the all-encompassing name of God, Allah. Thus, even though the universe as a whole reflects all the divine names and attributes of God, it is only the perfect human who is able to synthesize all the divine names within her being.

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[109] See Muhammad Iqbal, "The Doctrine of Absolute Unity as Expounded by ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī," *Indian Antiquary* (1900): 237–46; and *Bedil in the Light of Bergson*, ed. and annot. Dr. Tehsin Firaqi (Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 2000). Iqbal's assessment of the Islamic intellectual tradition was based on the problematic (and now-proven untenable) Orientalist thesis that the Islamic philosophical tradition ceased to be of relevance after the famous attack of al-Ghazālī on the philosophers in the eleventh century. See Sajjad Rizvi, "Between Hegel and Rumi: Iqbal's Contrapuntal Encounters with the Islamic Philosophical traditions," in *Muhammad Iqbal: Essays on the Reconstruction of Religious Thought*, ed. Chad Hillier and B. Koshul (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 123. For the problematic aspects of Iqbal's interpretation of classical Sufi thought, see Muhammad Faruque, "The Crisis of Modern Subjectivity: Rethinking Iqbal and Iqbal Studies," forthcoming.

[110] See Muhammad Iqbal, *Asrār-i khūdī*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson. (Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1964), xxviii–xxix.

[111] Iqbal, *Asrār-i khūdī*, trans. Nicholson, xxvii–xxviii.