

The Influence of Ibn Sîna on Ğadr ad-Dîn Qîlawî and His Followers

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Abstract:

This article is an investigation into the nature of the Sufi metaphysics of Ğadr ad-Dîn Qîlawî and his followers. In contrast to previous scholars, who have considered Qîlawî to be dismissive of philosophy in a way similar to Ghazâlî, the author shows that in fact philosophical metaphysics, and in particular the formulations of Ibn Sîna, had a great impact on Qîlawî and his followers in the school of Ibn ‘Arabî in their attempt to develop *‘ilm ilâhî* (divine knowledge, i.e., metaphysics). Indeed, the influence of philosophical metaphysics is one of the crucial factors which distinguish the thought of this school from the earlier phase of theoretical Sufism.

The article begins with an overview of the two important phases in the history of theoretical Sufism, the school of Ibn ‘Arabî being the second. Then the author considers how this second phase has been interpreted by traditional and contemporary scholars. Following this, in the main section of the article, the author analyses the metaphysics of Qîlawî and indicates the way in which it was influenced by the philosophy of Ibn Sîna.

Key Terms: Ibn Sîna, Ğadr ad-Dîn Qîlawî, sufism, the school of Ibn ‘Arabî, metaphysics, *‘ilm ilâhî* (divine knowledge).

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Introduction

Two Phases in the History of Sufism

Sufism emerged in Islamic society, affecting many affairs, both spiritual and physical, after undergoing a number of different processes. Sufism was sometimes a “reaction” that preferred poverty to social comfort, sometimes a “turning inwards” that elevated the individual above futile discussions in intellectual life, and sometimes it manifested itself as a “joyful expression” that took as its basis divine love and spiritual training as opposed to the strict religious sciences and torpid styles. However, its character as a movement of “morals and piety” was preserved in all these processes.¹ The dynamic and complicated interactive process that existed between the Sufi tradition and the conditions of time and space under which Sufism developed acted as a mirror that indicated the social, political, cultural and intellectual transformations that Muslims underwent. Developing this principal idea, we will focus in this article on the influence of Ibn Sînâ on ʿĀdīr ad-Dīn Qīnawī and his followers.

As it is known, the first theoretical trend of Sufism, which developed first as an ascetic movement, emerged owing to such writers as Sarrāʾj, Qushayrī, and Kalābādhī, who were motivated by the problems that appeared in the ascetic period. The question that they were trying to answer in this period – an era that concentrated on determining the relationship between the *Sharīʿah* (Divine Law) and the *Ēaqīqah* (Divine Reality) – was: what is Sufism and what is its place among the sciences? After a long struggle, the early Sufi historians were able to answer this question thus: “Sufism is one of the religious sciences, like *kalām*, *fiqh*, and *hadīth*”; however, this did not solve the problem.

The real problem would fully appear in the conception of Sufism that was to be formed under the leadership of Ibn ʿArabī and which was systematized by Qīnawī. This period, known as the “period of the formation of Sunni Sufism,” differs from the first period by claiming that Sufism has a **central** and **determining** place among the sciences. If we want to summarize the wide-ranging historical analysis that was first attempted by Ibn ʿArabī and Qīnawī, it is possible to see the Sufism of the new period as the aim and product of all Islamic

sciences.² This meaning must be directly related to the theoretical traditions that came before Sufism and, therefore, must contain the same problems. According to Qīnawī, what we are talking about now is not Sufism, but *‘ilm ilāhī* (divine knowledge, i.e., metaphysics).³ In other words, Sufis called the sciences of the new era *‘ilm ilāhī* and thus arrived at a stage, completely different from that wherefrom the first Sufi historians had started. Ibn ‘Arabī and Qīnawī, both of whom turned to *fiqh* and *kalām* when they searched for proofs of the “legitimacy” of Sufism, also wanted to establish a superior and ultimate science which would be served by all the inferior sciences. This science was called metaphysics by Ibn Sīnā.⁴ When one examines the history of Sufism, the conception of Sufism that appears in the new period is a new concept that is totally different from the conceptions of Sufism that appeared earlier. For this reason, the Sufism of the new period, from the moment it first appeared, has constantly been a field of contention of different opinions.

Interpretations of the Second Phase of Sufism

The Sufism of this new era, suggests Ibn Khaldīn, should be considered as the “product of an integrating period.”⁵ According to Khaldīn, a comparison can be drawn between the Sufism of the new era and the development of the *kalām*. If we accept this approach, we can consider Qīnawī to be the Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī of the new era, and Sufism, like *kalām*, to be a product of this integrating era. If we keep in mind Ibn Khaldīn’s longing to return to the Sufism of the ascetic period, the Sufism purified of philosophy and mysticism, it is very clear that these aspects of the evaluation are justified. The most incorrect and inconsistent evaluation of Qīnawī and his followers is given by Kātīb Chelebī (Hājī Khalīfa).⁶ On the basis of weak proofs he relates Qīnawī and his followers to Suhrawardī and qualifies them as part of the *Ishrāqī* (Illuminationist) movement. It is possible to find more examples of such incorrect evaluations of the concept of Sufism of Qīnawī and his followers. In brief, the conception of Sufism which appeared in this period, if we take into account the entire history of Sufism, is one of the most debated issues. While Ibn Taymiyya, praising the asceticism of common Sufis, attacks the followers of Ibn

‘Arabî and the new conception of Sufism, some *mutakallimîn* – e.g. Taftâzânî – choose the discussion of existence as the object of their criticism, thus giving it a more theoretical level. Such external criticism provoked a number of discussions among the Sufis themselves. In this connection, Abd al-Karîm Jilî (particularly his critical remarks about certain technical aspects of the *wa‘dat-al wujûd*), Alâ’ al-Dawlâ Simnânî and, in particular, Imâm Rabbânî (Aĕmad Sirhindî), in my opinion, are most worthy of attention. Thus, the place of the new era Sufism in the history of science was always debated and, no doubt, this debate will continue.

Modern research qualifies the Sufism of this period as “philosophical Sufism”, thus trying to separate it from the ascetic Sufism of the earlier period. It is hoped that investigations into the Sufism of this period, a time that had a determining influence on Seljuk-Ottoman intellectual life, will lead to the formation of a more correct opinion.

Ĝadr al-Dîn Qīnawî

The figure who can be of most help for the correct understanding of the conception of Sufism in this era is Ĝadr al-Dîn Qīnawî. The assessments of the place and importance of Qīnawî play a determining role in understanding the Sufism of the new era. As we know, the first serious academic research on Qīnawî in Turkey was carried out by Dr. Nihat Keklik, who described him as the “13th century Ghazâlî”.⁷ The basic reason why Nihat Keklik arrived at this conclusion must be that his study was focussed on the letters Qīnawî exchanged with the Avicennian scholar, Naĝîr al-Dîn Tîsî. In these letters Qīnawî poses many questions to Tîsî about Ibn Sînâ’s philosophy, expressing doubts about the possibility of an “intellectual science.” The manner of Qīnawî’s criticism must have led Nihat Keklik to such an evaluation. In my opinion, Keklik, whose study is in some aspects quite valuable, used an incorrect analogy. Interpreting Qīnawî’s critical remarks on Ibn Sînâ from a narrow perspective, Keklik was influenced by the common criticism of intellectual reasoning, which was prevalent in Sufism from its very beginning. This did not allow him to correctly

understand Qīnawī's thought as a whole. One of the most important consequences of this is that Qīnawī's use of the term *'ilm ilâhî* is overlooked. A sound and insightful study on Qīnawī should be based upon his two main books – the *Miftâġ al-ġhayb* and the *I'jâz al-bayân* (his commentary on the *Fâtîġah*). If we examine Qīnawī's thought taking these two works as our basis, we arrive at a conclusion which is exactly opposite to that of Nihat Keklik's. The second reason for this error is the exaggeration of the influence of Ghazâlî on the later Sufi tradition. This is a more common error than the first.

In this situation, if we use a similar comparison, the conclusion we can arrive at is this: Qīnawī, particularly in metaphysics, is the "Ibn Sinâ of the 13th century". This comparison could be thought to slightly overstep its mark, or even to be surprising when considering the specific situation of Sufism. However, if we carefully study the critical remarks, which, we suspect, have misled Nihat Keklik, we can see that they are directed towards a totally different aim than the criticisms that are directed towards metaphysical thought as such. An important part of the criticisms are directed towards the use of the art of debate (or disputation) (*ġadal*) in metaphysical discussions. Qīnawī, who is opposed to this, insistently defends metaphysical science and metaphysicians against some of Ghazâlî's attacks.⁸ Without going into details, what we have to say is this: Qīnawī, sometimes accepting the earlier criticisms, sometimes dismissing them, came to the conclusion that "despite all the objections, metaphysical knowledge is possible."

It is clear that this conception presents a completely new trend in the history of Sufism. During this period the main problem, as evidenced in the Sufi works, was the determination of the relationship between Sufism and philosophy. While the early Sufis tried to correlate Sufism with *fiqh* and *kalâm*, in Qīnawī's time the problem was the determination of the place of Sufism in relation to philosophy; that is, the position of the Sufis vs. the metaphysicians. Starting with Ibn 'Arabî, writers like Ğadr al-Dīn Qīnawī, Mu'ayyid al-Dīn Jandî, Sa'īd al-Dīn Farghânî, Dâwud Qaysarî and Mullâ Fanârî examined this subject, trying to determine in what ways Sufis differed from philosophers, to what extent they could benefit from the teachings of the latter, and the relationship between the methods of Sufism and

those used by philosophy.⁹ However, something more important can be seen in an idea expressed by Qīnawī in his correspondence with Tīsī. When discussing the position of Sufism in relation to the *kalām* and philosophy, Qīnawī uses an expression that perhaps cannot be found in any other era of Sufism: According to him, while Sufis disagree on almost every subject with *kalām*, the issues in which they differ from the mystic philosophers – here with the phrase ‘mystic philosophers’ Qīnawī is primarily referring to Ibn Sinā – are few. The difference of this statement from the words of Kalābādhi, who said: “Sufi belief is in complete agreement with the beliefs of the Sunnis,” is evident.

We would also like to draw attention to some terms used by Qīnawī that testify to Ibn Sinā’s influence: such influence of Ibn Sina on Qīnawī and his followers can be best seen in their use of the expression ‘ilm ma’ ba’d ah-ḥabī’ah. In other words, we can have definite knowledge about that which comes after nature – whatever it may be – just as we have it in other natural sciences. In my opinion, the matter that has most influenced the Sufis is the clarity and certainty of the contents of this synthesis. Sufis have to a large extent adopted the thoughts that Ibn Sina expressed on this point. The criticisms that Sufis have made about the intellect and its power can only have meaning against this common background. The criticism of the information that the intellect provides about God is focused on the discussion of God’s attributes. Here, Sufis usually criticize their opponents in a general way, using the expression *ahl-i naīar* or “rationalists”, but sometimes they refer to Ibn Sinā by that name. The most important point of their criticism consists in the assertion that the intellect can only provide negative information about God. Claiming that there is a necessity to counterbalance *tanzīh* (incomparability or the belief that God is free from any fault) and the negative, Sufis who accept *wa‘dat al-wujūd* base their understanding of God on this principle. Bringing to the fore comparison rather than negative information - because *wa‘dat al-wujūd* is not negative – they defend the existence of the set of attributes that are solely possessed by God. This subject is the heart of Ibn Sinā’s criticism on Sufis. This matter is

one in which the Sufis, contrary to what Qīnawī suggests, take a position that is closer to that of the *kalām* theorists.

Qīnawī considers himself to be a metaphysician in the full sense of the word. In this regard, the subject, problems and principles of metaphysics have been discussed by Qīnawī in a detailed way. In all these matters he reiterates the opinions of Ibn Sīnā. Sometimes Qīnawī, who presents metaphysics with the different designations given to it by Ibn Sīnā, labels it as *maʿrifat Allāh*, *ʿilm rabbānī*, *ʿilm ilāhī*, or *ʿilm al-ʿāqāʾiq*, or sometimes as *taʿqīq* (verification) or *ʿilm al-taʿqīq*; those who possess these qualities are *muʿāqqiqīn*, *ahl Allāh*, or *awliyāʾ kāmīlah*, etc.¹⁰ There is a specific reason and justification for each of these designations: First of all *maʿrifat Allāh* and *ʿilm ilāhī* can be considered to be synonyms. Here the designation is not according to the subject of the science, but rather according to the matter and the aim. In other words, *ʿilm ilāhī*, meaning knowing God and the divine, is much clearer in the first expression. Calling this *ʿilm al-ʿāqāʾiq* is in keeping with Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics of the *knowledge of the first causes of the natural and mathematical existence and the cause of causes and the origin of the origins*.¹¹

The fact that the Sufis who came after Ibn ʿArabī and Qīnawī perceived their science as *ʿilm ilāhī* or metaphysics, rather than as a system of concepts that explain Sufi spiritual life, opened the way to the creation of a conception that would explain existence. For example, while the terms *qabḡ* and *baṣḥ* ('contraction' and 'spreading out') in the early (pre-Ibn ʿArabī) period of Sufism referred to two states experienced by Sufis, in the new era these terms alluded to two states that were constantly experienced by the universe as a result of their being two attributes of God. Sufis have explained the idea of continuous creation with the aid of these two concepts, which they developed on the basis of the *jawhar-ʿaraq* theory of the *kalām*; this latter replaced the connection through causation of the contingent by the necessary that was included in the manifestation theory derived from Ibn Sīnā. For this reason, the ethical contents of the concepts of the early Sufism were replaced, due to the influence of the teachings of Muslim philosophers and some *mutakallimīn*, with metaphysical ones.

Qīnawī deeply influenced subsequent Sufi and scientific conceptions. The commentaries written in this tradition, primarily on the *Fuḡḡ al-ĕikam* and *Miftāĕ al-ghayb*, contributed to his influence a lot, giving an important place to him in philosophical discussions. The influence of Ibn Sīnā upon Ibn ‘Arabī and Qīnawī can be seen clearly in the change of the contents of Sufi literature. To show the change in the content of Sufi literature it is enough to compare the books of this period, in particular, *Fuḡḡ al-ĕikam* and *Miftāĕ al-ghayb*, with any Sufi work belonging to the previous period. For example, the *umīr ‘āmmah* (‘common affairs’) are discussed at the beginning of the *Fuḡḡ al-ĕikam*.¹² The main problems discussed in the *Fuḡḡ* are the problems like why God created the universe, the place of human being in the universe,¹³ the relationship between the beings/things in the universe and God. *Miftāĕ al-ghayb* starts with a discussion of scientific classifications and subjects, as well as their matters and principles. In this regard, starting with the theory of *nafs*, the most important issues in which the Sufis were influenced by philosophers include the relationship between God and the universe, causality and manifestation. On the other hand, the relationship of the prior and the posterior, cause and effect, and, in connection with this, the relationship of the macrocosm to the microcosm and the issue of oneness and manyness were the most important problems of Sufism in this period. As it is well known, all these issues occupy an important place in post-Avicennian metaphysical thought.

Probably the most important part of the Akbarian Sufi literature are the so-called “*wujūd* treatises”. These treatises were written as common introductions to Sufism and almost all of them begin with the expression “existence in so far as it is considered [only] as existence” (*wujūd bi mā’ huwa wujūd*) – a phrase that we are familiar with from the metaphysics of Ibn Sīnā.¹⁴ However, Sufis, unlike Ibn Sīnā, considered this to be an expression that indicates God. Thus, the phrase “existence in so far as it is considered [only] as existence is God” is frequently quoted in Sufi texts as the first premise of the concept of *waĕdat-al wujūd*. Another area of literature which is as important as this subject is the “*a’yān thābitah*” treatises. The issue of the *a’yān thābitah* was perhaps the most important issue of the new

age of Sufism. While the issue deals with the attributes of God on the one hand, on the other it discusses the relationship between possible existence and God. The Sufis sometimes express their views on these matters in a comparative manner. For example, what the Sufis call *a'yân thâbitah*, the philosophers refer to as “nature”, while the *mutakallimîn* call it *ma'lîm ma'dîm* (‘the known non-existent’).¹⁵

Moreover, the concepts of necessary existence and contingent existence have an important place in the arguments of accidental relationship, causation and destiny in Sufi texts; in all these discussions the Sufis refer to the views of the philosophers. For example, in Jandî's commentary on the *Fuġîġ*, after presenting a variety of views concerning astronomy and cosmography, attention is focused on the difference in opinions between Sufis and philosophers. In his treatise on time, Dâvud Qaysarî discusses in detail the views of Muslim philosophers, criticizing the view of Abî Barakât al-Baghdâdî on time.¹⁶ Mullâ Fanârî gives a lot of attention to the discussion of existence in his *Miġbâġ al-uns* and defends the Sufi view of existence against the views of philosophers. Other commentators of the *Miftâġ al-ġhayb*, like Qutb al-Dîn Izniqî, Atpazarî, Uthmân Ilâhî and Bursawî, quote the views of Ibn Sîna, sometimes referring to him by name, sometimes alluding to the *Shifâ'* or his other books. Because of this, Ibn Sîna and his works have spread over a wider area and have been read sometimes through Qînawî's works and sometimes directly through his works themselves. On the other hand, if we also take into account some commentaries on books which were of great importance in Sufism, in particular Rîmî's *Mathnawî*, and some other texts which had a great impact on the Akbarian tradition, we can better estimate the influence of Avicennian metaphysics on the later Sufi tradition – the influence which spread mostly through Qînawî and his followers.

In order to correctly evaluate Qînawî and his followers, it is necessary to constantly have in mind two sources of his inspiration: the first of which is traditional Sufism. Traditional Sufi practices and methods, those things that make a Sufi a Sufi, compel us to consider Ibn 'Arabî and his followers as Sufis. The second source is the metaphysical thought, whose main champion was Ibn Sîna. Sufis who relied on this method expressed their views of existence

predominantly in the terms of Ibn Sîna's metaphysical perceptions. However, important contributions were also made by a number of *Mutakallimîn*.

Conclusion:

The Sufi conception, formulated by Ibn 'Arabî and Çadr al-Dîn Qînawî, aimed to reconstruct Ibn Sîna's conception of metaphysics. However the change of the aim and methods used here did not change the general situation. Thus, if we leave aside the Sufi conception, the new era – in particular as manifested in the texts of Qînawî, from the point of view of the language and concepts used – can be designated, in the true sense of the word, as the era of following in the footsteps of Ibn Sîna. In particular, when we consider the ideas about God's existence, the relationship between the necessary and the contingent, destiny, the issue of the *nafs*, and existence, we can see that Sufi thought is based on that of Ibn Sîna.

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2. İbnü'l-Arabî, *Fütûhât-ı Mekkiyye*, trans. into Turkish by Ekrem Demirli, Istanbul: Litera 2006, vol. I, p. 307.
3. Sadreddin Konevî, *Tasavvuf Metafizigi*, trans. into Turkish by Ekrem Demirli, Istanbul: İz, 2002, p. 9.
4. İbn Sina, *Metafizik*, translated into Turkish by Ekrem Demirli and Ömer Türker, Istanbul: Litera 2004, vol. I, p. 13.
5. See: İbn Haldun, *Mukaddime* Çev: Zakir Kadîri Ugan, *MEB*, İstanbul 1991, vol. II, p. 605.
6. See: Katip Çelebi, *Keşfü'z-zünûn*, vol. I, p. 9, etc.
7. See: Nihat Keklik, *Sadreddin Konevî'de Allah, Kainat ve İnsan*, , İ.Ü.Edebiyat Fak.Yay. İstanbul, 1967, pp. 6-7.
8. See: Ekrem Demirli, *Sadreddin Konevî'de Bilgi ve Varlık*, Istanbul: İz 2005, p. 110ff.

9. See: Ekrem Demirli, *İbnü'l-Arabî ve Vahdet-i Vücûd Ekolü*, İstanbul: Kabalcı 2008, p. 77ff.
10. Sadreddin Konevî, *Tasavvuf Metafiziği*, p. 9ff; idem., *Fatiha Suresi Tefsiri* (translated into Turkish by Ekrem Demirli), İstanbul: İz 2002, p. 55ff.
11. İbn Sina, *op. cit.*, p. 11ff.
12. İbnü'l-Arabî, *Fusûsu'l-Hikem*, trans. into Turkish by Ekrem Demirli, İstanbul: Kabalcı 2006, p. 25
13. İbnü'l-Arabî, *Fusûsu'l-Hikem*, p. 23; İbnü'l-Arabî, *Fütûhât-ı Mekkiyye*, vol. I, p. 23.
14. For example, see: Dâwîd al-Qayğari, "Muqaddimah", in his *Risâ'il*, Cairo: Dâr al-thaqâfah 1997, p. 35, Abdülğani Nablusi, *Gerçek Varlık*, translated into Turkish by Ekrem Demirli, İstanbul: İz 2004, p. 23.
15. See: Sadreddin Konevî, *Tasavvuf Metafiziği*, p. 25; idem., *Yazışmalar*, translated into Turkish by Ekrem Demirli, İstanbul: İz 2002, p. 110.
16. See: Dâvud al-Qayğari, "Nihâyat al-zamân fi dirâyat al-zamân", in *Risâ'il*.

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