

# Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) on the Masters of Sensation

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## 1 Introduction

Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) is a pivotal figure in the history of Islamic mysticism, and “certainly the most prolific of all Ṣūfī writers” (Ateş).<sup>1</sup> His large oeuvre has given rise to a rich commentary tradition, to many refutations and controversies within the Islamic world, as well as to many modern studies. However, as Alexander Knysh has observed, “[a]lthough his vast work has been analyzed in dozens of academic monographs and in hundreds of articles, Ibn [al-]‘Arabī still poses a major intellectual challenge to his investigators” (Knysh, 1). Ibn al-‘Arabī’s view of the senses is mentioned in studies of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s epistemological theory (notably Chittick, 160, 166–7, and passim), but, as this chapter hopes to demonstrate, it deserves more detailed investigation.

Born at Murcia in 560/1165 and active in Spain and North Africa in the early years of his career, Ibn al-‘Arabī set out, in 598/1202, to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, where he stayed for two years. There, he fell under the spell of a certain Niẓām, the daughter of a Persian scholar who had settled in the city (Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Tarjumān*, xxii–xxv). This event inspired him to compose an anthology of poems, *The Translator of Desires* (*Tarjumān al-ashwāq*), much of which speaks about Ibn al-‘Arabī’s beloved in strongly sensual terms (Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Tarjumān*, 5, 25, 33, passim). Also in Mecca, Ibn al-‘Arabī began to compose his magnum opus, *The Meccan Openings* (*al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*), which would take him three decades to complete. After further travels in the Near East and Anatolia, he settled in Damascus, where, having led an eventful, peripatetic life (see Addas; Hirtenstein), he died in 638/1240. He lies buried in the suburb of al-Ṣāliḥiyya, in a mosque that bears his name and has become a pilgrimage site for Ibn al-‘Arabī’s global community of followers and admirers.

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According to Ibn al-‘Arabī’s own testimony, *The Meccan Openings* are the record of what was revealed to him by the vision of a mysterious youth (*fatā*) he encountered at the Ka’ba in Mecca, an experience Ibn al-‘Arabī recounts in the first chapter of his work (Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 1:175; see Hirtenstein, 151–2). On over 10,000 manuscript pages, *The Meccan Openings* touch on a wide range of topics, including epistemology and the role of the human sensorium in acquiring knowledge of the world and of God. Below follows a translation of five such passages dealing with the senses.

To facilitate comprehension of these passages, it is useful to outline some basic principles of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s theology, epistemology, and cosmology, and then to summarize what appear to be the salient themes in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s theory of the senses. First of all, let us note that Ibn al-‘Arabī stresses the aspect of knowledge in the human relationship with God. God is approached through knowledge rather than love, the latter being emphasized by many other Sufi teachers (Chittick, 147). Knowledge, or at least the kind of knowledge that matters in the ultimate, salvific sense, is attained through experiential states (*aḥwāl*, sing. *ḥāl*). The ability of human reason (*‘aql*) to achieve insight, by contrast, is limited. Ibn al-‘Arabī’s cosmology is essentially Neoplatonic (cf. Ebstein, “Emanation”): God, whom Ibn al-‘Arabī conceives in abstract terms as pure Existence, emanates into the cosmos as a light or by way of the “Breath of the All-Merciful” (*nafas al-Raḥmān*). The cosmos serves as God’s mirror, as the arena of His self-disclosure (*tajallī*) to humankind. Ibn al-‘Arabī envisions a vast hierarchy of living Sufi “knowers” (*‘arīfūn*) and “travelers” (*sālikūn*), presided over by a special elite of saints (*awliyā’*) capable of true and full knowledge of God. These saints are charged with “safeguarding the created world against destruction,” acting as “gatekeepers of the eschaton [and] intercessors with God, and conduits of His mercy” (Gardiner, 38). They are, accordingly, treated with the utmost respect and devotion by their followers. Among other attributes, these saints enjoy special sensory powers: they see, hear, smell, taste, and feel more, and better, than ordinary human beings.

Several of the passages that are translated below revolve around this theme. In § 1, Ibn al-‘Arabī makes the case for the special sensory powers of the saints, whom he refers to as “the masters of sensation” (*aṣḥāb al-ḥiss*). On the pages preceding this passage, Ibn al-‘Arabī has stated that perception by reason (*idrāk al-‘aql*) is of two kinds: (1) perception of axiomatic (e.g., mathematical) truths and (2) perception built on sensory data and the activity of the thinking faculty. When the latter kind results in an error, it is the thinking faculty that is to be blamed, not the senses. The senses are never mistaken (see Chittick, 166). He illustrates this principle with the following example. When looking at a ship on the horizon, some people suffer from an optical illusion, concluding

that it is in fact the coast that moves in front of their eyes, not the ship. This failure to perceive things correctly, Ibn al-‘Arabī explains, is a malfunction of the intellect, not of the eyes, which, under normal (*‘ādī*) circumstances, perceive sensibles as they really are. However, there is another, deeper and more mysterious kind of sensory perception. “The perception of intelligibles of some of God’s servants,” he states, “goes beyond normal perception (*khuriqa lahum al-‘āda fī idrākīhim al-‘ulūm*)” (Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 1:639). Thus, a “master of sensation,” by touching an object with the hand, comes to know not only the object’s tactile properties but everything there is to know about it.

In § 2, Ibn al-‘Arabī draws attention to the mysterious fact that certain accidents (*‘awāriḍ*)<sup>2</sup> are perceived only by specific sensory organs. For example, colors can be touched with the hands, but they are only perceived by the eyes. To Ibn al-‘Arabī, this demonstrates God’s divine craftwork, the fact that He is operative in all perceptual events.

In § 3, Ibn al-‘Arabī reiterates the notion that the spiritual elite, “the people of God” (*ahl Allāh*), have special powers of sensation. Thus, they become known to others as “masters of vision,” “masters of smell,” “masters of taste,” and so on. However, in this passage, Ibn al-‘Arabī takes this idea one step further. A master’s sensory virtuosity, he claims, rubs off onto others, to his followers, so that they, too, partake in the master’s sensory knowledge of hidden things. This process of osmotic sensation also connects the master to God. He senses *by* or *through* God (*bi-llāh*). This is how Ibn al-‘Arabī explains the famous divine saying (*ḥadīth qudsī*), according to which God declares that “when I love My servant, I become the hearing by which he hears, the eyes by which he sees, the hands with which he touches, and the feet on which he walks” (Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 1:656; see Ebstein, “Organs”).

§ 4 demonstrates that human understanding, according to Ibn al-‘Arabī, is a deeply embodied, sensory affair. Reason is derivative, as it depends on the data provided by the senses. In fact, as Ibn al-‘Arabī provocatively states, reason occupies a lower epistemological rank than the senses. The senses provide the best access to the Divine. Again, Ibn al-‘Arabī invokes the above-quoted divine saying, and he draws attention to the fact that God, in the Qur’ān, declares Himself to be a sensory being: He is the “Hearing” (*samī*), the “Seeing” (*baṣīr*), and so on. By contrast, He never refers to Himself as the “Thinking” (*‘āqil*), the “Reflecting” (*mufakkir*), or the “Imagining” (*mutakhayyil*). Ibn al-‘Arabī’s musings culminate in the astonishing claim that sensation (*ḥiss*) is “God Himself” (*‘ayn al-Ḥaqq*) and that the senses are “God’s vice-regents” (*khulafā*) on earth. The passage concludes with a biting critique of the detractors of

2 On accidents in Islamic atomism, see Dhanani and the literature mentioned therein.

sensory perception—those who insist on the superiority of the intellect over the senses: they are “blind” and “deaf,” as per the Qur’ān (8:21), and ultimately, are lacking in true knowledge and understanding.

How can God be perceived? In § 5, Ibn al-‘Arabī draws a distinction between seeing God by means of ocular vision (*baṣar*) and seeing Him with the inner eye (*baṣīra*), a faculty he connects to the human heart and to the imagination. Both modes of apprehending God, Ibn al-‘Arabī insists, are legitimate and valuable. Most people worship God only in terms of a transcendent being that is located in the “world of the unseen” (*‘ālam al-ghayb*), that is, with the heart and the imagination. Beyond this ordinary, common form of worship, Ibn al-‘Arabī explains, spiritually advanced people worship God also in the “world of witnessing” (*‘ālam al-shahāda*), the physical world of the here and now. The figure of the “perfect man” (*al-insān al-kāmil*) (see Chittick, 28–30, and passim) embodies this ability par excellence. In fact, not only does the “perfect man” see God, or God’s light, in creation. He *becomes* light himself.

In § 6, Ibn al-‘Arabī explains that all three human modes of perception (*idrāk*)—by the intellect, the senses, and the faculty of the imagination—are grounded in light. He states that all objects of perception—be they rationally apprehended, sensed, or imagined objects—manifest as light. As Ibn al-‘Arabī maintains, all five senses can latch onto (*yata‘allaqu bi*) these manifestations of light, because they are themselves light. In a remarkable move, Ibn al-‘Arabī thus extends the model of extramission,<sup>3</sup> according to which the eye emits light rays that touch visible objects and thus produce visual knowledge, from vision to the other four senses.

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3 On intromission and extramission, see *ISH*, chs. 18 (§ 6), 21, 22, 24 (§§ 1.1.1–5), and passim.

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## 2 Translation

Muḥyī l-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, ed. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Sulṭān al-Manṣūb, 12 vols., Cairo: al-Majlis al-Aḷā lil-Thaqāfa, 1431/2010, vol. 1, pp. 638–9, 653, 655–6, vol. 8, pp. 271–3, 447, 524.

### [§ 1. *The Saints’ Extraordinary Power of Perception* (Book 3, Chapter 34) = Vol. 1, pp. 638–9]

[p. 638] Among God’s servants, there are also those for whom the customary way of perceiving the things that can be known is breached. Some of them are made to perceive [p. 639] intelligibles and sensibles by means of a special faculty of vision, perceiving [by merely looking] what is perceived [by others] by means of all the faculties together. Others [do this] by means of the faculty of hearing. It is like this with all the faculties, and even with accidental things that are unlike the faculties, such as laying on hands (*ḍarb*), movement, rest, and other such things. The Prophet of God said: “God put His hand between my shoulder blades so that I felt the coolness of His fingertips in my chest, and thus I gained knowledge of what was and what is to come.”<sup>4</sup> [...]

We have explained all this in order to introduce something that we want to attribute to the prophets and saints among the People of God,<sup>5</sup> namely, that

4 According to Muslim tradition, both God’s hand and the hand of the Prophet Muḥammad have a cooling, healing effect on those touched by them. See Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 5:243: “I saw Him put His palm between my shoulder blades, so that I felt the coolness of His fingertips in my chest.” For the Prophet’s hand, see, e.g., Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, k. *al-marḍā* 13.

5 The “People of God” (*ahl Allāh*) is one of the terms that Ibn al-‘Arabī uses to refer to a special class of spiritually advanced people.

they perceive things in ways that are out of the ordinary. When they perceive [things in these ways], they are linked to the capacity by which they perceive them. Thus, people say that someone is a “master of vision,” that is, by virtue of vision, he perceives all the things that can be known. This is something that I have experienced (*dhuqtuhu*), in common with the Prophet of God. [Or they say that] someone is a “master of hearing,” a “master of taste,” a “master of breath and fragrances,” that is, of olfaction, or a “master of touch.”

[§ 2. *Sensing by the Grace of God (Book 3, Chapter 35) = Vol. 1, p. 653]*

Things are known by different means (*turuq*): through hearing, sight, smell, touch, taste, and reason. This is so both in terms of axiomatic truths (*darūriyyāt*)—that is, [knowledge] that is perceived immediately, without [the help of] another faculty—and in terms of sound thinking (*al-fikr al-ṣaḥīḥ*). [That is, knowledge] comes either by means of the senses or by way of axiomatic truths and intuitive understanding (*badīhiyyāt*). There is nothing else. This is what is called “knowledge” (*‘ilm*).

The things that occur as accidents [of substances] (*al-umūr al-‘arīḍa*) and the knowledge that is gained from them also rely on these basic means [of acquiring knowledge]; they are not separate from them. These things are called “accidents” (*‘awāriḍ*) for the following reason. Normally, colors are not perceived by the sense of touch. Rather, vision perceives them. Occasionally, we may observe a blind person “perceiving” them by touching them. But then, the organ of touch is set up against (*‘urīḍa*) a thing that it is not normally meant to perceive. It is the same with the other means [of perception]. When they are set up against things that they are not normally meant to perceive, one says that “He set them up against them (*‘araḍa lahā*).”

God has made it thus in order to alert us to the fact that, contrary to what the people of intellectual examination (*ahl al-naẓar*) claim, there is no reality (*ḥaqīqa*) in which the divine power is not operative. Rather, that reality [i.e., color] is [perceived] only according to the form (*sūra*) that God has made for it. [...] [It is as if] God says: “It is only [perceived] because We made it so.”

[§ 3. *Osmotic Sensation of Hidden Things (Book 3, Chapter 35) = Vol. 1, pp. 655–6]*

[p. 655] God makes every single one of the People of God know things either through all the faculties, or through a specific one. As we have established, this can be the olfactory organ, making the person the “master of the knowledge of smells” (*ṣāhib ‘ilm al-anfās*); or it can be the eye, making the person the “master of vision” (*ṣāhib naẓar*); or it can be laying on hands (*ḍarb*), which is a type of touch

(*lams*), alluded to specifically by the presence of “cool fingertips.”<sup>6</sup> The master of the attribute by means of which [p. 656] knowledge is acquired becomes associated with it, so that he is called “the master of such-and-such.” [...]

Now, the “master of the knowledge of taste” becomes [himself] taste (*yaṣīru dhawq*), and the “master of the knowledge of smell” becomes [himself] smell (*yaṣīru sham*), that is, if he is a “master of taste,” he effects in another person what taste has effected in him, and if he is a “master of olfaction,” he effects olfaction in him [the other person]. He [the other person] judges [things] accordingly, becoming himself the sense (*ma’nā*) by which the person perceives things, in the same way in which a person in a mirror perceives things [located behind his back] that he would not perceive in this situation, were it not for the mirror.

The shaykh Abū Madyan,<sup>7</sup> who was a “master of vision,” had a child from a black woman. This boy, when he was seven years old, would look out [over the sea] and say, “I see on the sea in such-and-such a place a boat, and such-and-such has happened there.” Then, after some days, this boat would arrive in Béjaïa, the city in which this boy lived, and the matter would turn out to be just as he had said. People would ask the boy, “How do you see?” He would say, “With my eye.” Then he would say, “No, rather I see with my heart.” Then he would say, “No, rather I see by my father. When he is present, and I look at him, I see what I report to you; and when he is absent from me, I do not see any of it.”

According to an authentic report (*khābar ṣaḥīḥ*), God said about the people who draw near to Him through supererogatory acts of devotion (*nawāfil*), that He comes to love them: “When I love him, I become the hearing by which he hears, the eyes by which he sees, [the hands with which he touches, and the feet on which he walks] ...”<sup>8</sup> That is, the person hears, sees, speaks, touches, and runs *by* Him (*bihi*). This is what we meant when we said [earlier in the chapter] that the Verifiers<sup>9</sup> reproduce the likeness of the ideational form of what they have realized (*taḥaqqāqa*). So, he [the boy] used to look *by* his father,

6 See above, footnote 4.

7 In the *Meccan Openings*, Ibn al-‘Arabī quotes Abū Madyan Shu‘ayb b. al-Ḥusayn al-Anṣārī (d. 594/1198), a mystic from al-Andalus who settled in Béjaïa (Algeria), more than any other Sufi authority, calling him his “shaykh,” even though he never met him personally. See Addas, 43, and passim; Ateş.

8 This famous divine saying (*ḥadīth qudsī*) is known as the “*ḥadīth* of the supererogatory acts of devotion” (*ḥadīth al-nawāfil*). See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, k. *al-riqāq* 38.

9 See Chittick, 389 n11: “In general the Shaykh al-Akbar [Ibn al-‘Arabī] applies the term ‘Verifiers’ (*al-muḥaqqiqūn*) to the highest category of the friends of God. They follow no one’s authority (*taqlīd*), since in themselves they have ‘verified’ (*taḥqīq*) and ‘realized’ (*taḥaqquq*)—through unveiling and finding—the truth (*ḥaqq*) and reality (*ḥaqīqa*) of all things.”

like a person looks with his eyes by means of a mirror. Know this. It is the same with all the “masters” of any of these faculties. It is even possible that a single person combines the entirety [of these faculties], so that he looks with every faculty, hears with every faculty, and smells with every faculty. This is the most perfect combination.

[§ 4. *The Value and Nobility of the Senses (Book 22, Chapter 346) = Vol. 8, pp. 271–3*]

[p. 271] My friend, think about how you relate to this [particular] human form (*hādhihi l-ṣūra al-insāniyya*),<sup>10</sup> whose spirit and articulate soul (*nafsuḥā l-nāṭiqā*) is Muḥammad (may God’s blessings and peace be upon him). Do you partake in its abilities? Do its abilities inhere in you? Which of its abilities *are* you? Are you its sight? Or its hearing? Or its olfaction? Or its touch? Or its taste? I know, by God, which of the abilities of this type *I* am. Praise be to God for this.

And do not presume, my friend, that by occupying this special position in relation to this type, that is, the position [characterized by the use] of the human sensory faculties (which are also those of animals), we are deficient in respect to the position [characterized by the use] of the spiritual faculties. No, do not so presume! In fact, they [the sensory faculties] are the most powerful of the faculties, for they have the [divine] name of “the Ever-Giving”<sup>11</sup> attached to them. For they give to the spiritual faculties the things with which they employ themselves, the things by means of which they thrive in knowledge, whether by way of the faculty of the imagination, of reflection, of memorization, of image-making, of estimation, or of reasoning. All these [faculties] feed off the sensory faculties.

This is why God Exalted says about the servants whom He loves: “I become the hearing by which he hears, the eyes by which he sees, [the hands with which he touches, and the feet on which he walks].”<sup>12</sup> He refers [in this saying] to the sensory organs (*al-ṣūra al-ḥissiyya*), saying nothing about the spiritual faculties. He does not lower Himself to their level [the level of the spiritual faculties], for they are in a position of dependence (*iftiqār*) on the senses. God (*al-Ḥaqq*), however, does not lower Himself to the level of someone who depends on another. The senses [by contrast] are dependent on God, nothing

10 As the preceding paragraphs make clear, Ibn al-ʿArabī is talking here about human beings who have the ability to witness, through their senses, God’s self-disclosure (*tajallī*) in the cosmos.

11 “The Ever-Giving” (*al-Wahhāb*) is one of the epithets of God in the Qurʾān. See Q 3:8, 38:9, 38:35.

12 See the Introduction and above, footnote 8.



else. God lowers Himself to the level of those who [only] depend on Him and do not associate anybody with Him. He richly provides for them [the senses]. The senses are the ones by way of, and from which, things are taken. They do not take [anything] from the other faculties, [they] only [take] from God. Know, then, how noble and how valuable sensation (*ḥiss*) is: it is God Himself (*‘ayn al-Ḥaqq*). This is why the afterworld (*al-nash‘a al-ākḥira*) would not be complete without the presence of sensation and sensibilia (*al-ḥiss wa-l-maḥsūs*): it could never be complete without God. The sensory faculties, in reality, are God’s vice-regents (*khulafā’*) on this earth.

[p. 272] Don’t you see how God Exalted describes Himself [in the Qur’ān] as “hearing,” “seeing,” “speaking,” “alive,” “knowing,” “capable,” and “willing”? These are all attributes that affect sensed objects, and human beings feel the impact of these [divine] faculties on themselves. [By contrast,] He Exalted does not describe Himself as “thinking” (*‘āqil*), “reflecting” (*mufakkir*), or “imagining” (*mutakhayyil*). He retains only the spiritual faculties for Himself that have a certain connection with sensation. He is “the Preserver” (*al-ḥāfiẓ*) and “the Image-Maker” (*al-muṣawwir*), for sensation has a [direct] impact on [mental] preservation (*ḥifẓ*) and image-making (*taṣwīr*). If they [these two faculties] did not have a connection with sensation, He would not describe Himself with them. He is, however, “the Preserver” and “the Image-Maker.” These two attributes are spiritual *and* sensory.

Therefore, be alerted to what I am calling your attention to, lest you feel deflated when I bring you down to the level of the sensory faculties, because you hold sensation to be ignoble and reason to be noble. I am teaching you that sensation is an entirely noble thing, and that you have been ignorant of what it really is; of how valuable it is. If you knew yourself, you would know God—just like God knows you and the world by His knowledge of Himself. You are [made according to] His image;<sup>13</sup> it is inevitable, therefore, that you share in this knowledge. You know it by knowing yourself. [...]

If you possess keen understanding, [you will realize that] we have indicated to you how things really are; no, in fact, we have clearly explained this. In doing so, we have suffered the allegations made against us by the blind people who deny what we have alluded to concerning this matter. They are the ones who “know but what is apparent of the worldly life, while they are heedless of the afterlife” (Q 30:7). By God, were it not for this verse, we would have judged them to be blind in regard to both what is apparent of the worldly life and the afterlife, in the same way in which God has judged them to be deaf, despite their having hearing, by cautioning [p. 273], “Do not be like those who say, ‘We

13 See Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, k. *al-janna* 11: “God [...] created Adam in His image.”

have heard,' while they do not hear" (Q 8:21). Despite the fact that they heard, He declared them to be non-hearing. Likewise [non-existent] is the knowledge of these people, [their knowledge] of what is apparent of this worldly life, based on the sensibilia (and nothing else) that their senses perceive. For God Exalted is neither their hearing nor their seeing.

[§ 5. *Worshipping God According to the Sensible World*  
(Book 24, Chapter 355) = Vol. 8, p. 447]

When God created the microcosm of your body (*arḍ badanika*), He placed a Ka'ba inside it: your heart. He made this high abode [the heart] the noblest of all the abodes in [the bodies of] the believers. It is related that neither the heavens, in which there is the Frequented House,<sup>14</sup> nor the earth, in which there is the Ka'ba, encompass Him [God]. [p. 448] They are too small for Him. However, this heart [of yours], which is a part of [the bodies of the group of] created human believers (*min al-nash'a al-insāniyya al-mu'mina*), does encompass Him.<sup>15</sup> What is meant by "encompassing" here is that God Exalted is *known* (*al-'ilm bi-Llāh*). [...]

So, devote yourself to it [your heart] as if you were able see it with the eyes. For your heart is veiled from your ocular vision (*baṣar*), being inside you. Likewise, "worship God as if you saw Him"<sup>16</sup> inside yourself, as befits His loftiness. It is the eye of your inner vision (*baṣīra*) that witnesses Him. To it [the inner vision], He appears in the form of knowledge, so that you see Him with the eye of your inner vision. As regards [the expression] "as if you saw Him" with your ocular vision, combine these two aspects in your worship, [that is, the worship that] He Exalted is due in the [heart's] realm of the imagination (*fī l-khayāl*) and the worship He is due outside of the realm of the imagination. [...] Only we, believing human beings (*hādhihi l-nash'a*), are able to do this. [...]

All created beings worship God according to the [world of the] unseen (*'alā l-ghayb*)—with the exception of the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) of faith, who worships Him according to the witnessed world [i.e., the seen world] (*'alā l-mushāhada*), all worshippers requiring faith (*īmān*) for their perfection. He

14 In Islamic tradition, the Frequented House (*al-bayt al-ma'mūr*), sometimes imagined as a tent made of red hyacinth, is the celestial counterpart of the earthly Ka'ba.

15 Ibn al-'Arabī refers here to the divine saying (*ḥadīth qudsī*) that "My heavens and My earth are not vast enough for Me, but the heart of My believing servant (*qalb 'abdī l-mu'min*) is." See al-Ghazālī, 315.

16 According to a Prophetic saying, "good behavior (*al-iḥsān*) [...] is to worship God as if you see Him, for although you may not see Him, He sees you." See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, k. *al-īmān* 37; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, k. *al-īmān* 57.

[the Perfect Believing Man] has the brilliant light; nay, he *is* the brilliant light that erases all darkness. Now, when he worships Him in the [world of] witnessing (*‘alā l-shahāda*), he sees Him [manifesting Himself in] all His powers. None but he worships Him in this way, and nobody else should.

[§ 6. *Light as the Ground of Perception (Book 24, Chapter 360) = Vol. 8, p. 524*]

Were it not for light, nothing at all would be perceived—no object of intellection (*ma‘lūm*), no object of sensation (*maḥsūs*), and no object of the imagination (*mutakhayyal*). The names given to the faculties [of perception] differ from “the light,” but these [names] are [just] the names that common people use for them. According to the Knowers,<sup>17</sup> [they are] names that refer to the light by which we perceive. If you perceive sounds (*masmū‘āt*), you refer to this light as “hearing.” If you perceive visible objects (*mubṣarāt*), you refer to this light as “vision.” If you perceive tactile objects (*malmūsāt*), you refer to what makes you perceive it as “touch.” It is the same regarding the things you imagine. It [light] is [in reality] the faculty of touch, nothing else, as well as [the faculties of] olfaction, taste, imagination, memorization, reasoning, reflection, and image-making. Everything by which something is perceived is but light.

As for the objects that are perceived, if they were not in themselves made ready in a way that facilitates the perceiving subject’s perception of them, they would not be perceived. They provide a manifestation (*zuhūr*) to the perceiving subject, and then perception latches on to them (*yata‘allaqu bihā*). The manifestation is light, so that every perceived object is necessarily connected to light. By means of it [the light], it is made ready for being perceived.

[Further,] all objects of intellection are connected to the truth. Truth is light. Therefore, every object of intellection is connected to light. You perceive [even] the “impossible thing”<sup>18</sup> by means of light. Were it not for the manifestation of the “impossible thing,” and were it [the “impossible thing”] not amenable to the perceiving subject’s perception according to what it is, you would not perceive it. Thus, it [light] applies to all categories of reasoning.

17 As noted in the Introduction, Ibn al-‘Arabī often refers to the saints, or “Friends of God” (*awliyā’ Allāh*), as the *‘arifūn*, “the Knowers,” or “the Gnostics.” As William C. Chittick notes, the *‘arifūn* “and recognize God wherever they look.” See Chittick, 4.

18 According to Ibn al-‘Arabī, the “impossible thing” (*al-muḥāl*), one of three basic ontological categories, cannot exist within the cosmos, but “it can exist in a certain fashion in the mind of man or God.” See Chittick, 82, 87, *passim*.