

Ibn Sina and Mysticism

Sami S. Hawi

S. Inati, translator. *Ibn Sina and Mysticism: Remarks and Admonitions (Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat), Part Four*. London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1996, pp. 114. The book is an English translation and analysis of the fourth part of Ibn Sina's *Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*.

This book "announces" a contribution to a specific aspect of Ibn Sina's thought. Its main focus is the fourth part of his *Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat* (Remarks and Admonitions), which deals in a systematic manner with Islamic Sufism (mysticism), its different modifications, and the kind of temporal and transcendental experience that the soul undergoes in its journey back to its origin. Dr. S. Inati's translation is the first into English of this part of the *Isharat*.¹ It includes Ibn Sina's dissertation in which he employs a form of descriptive psychology and scant aspects of his metaphysical system, as a focal point, to explain the drama of mystical life, its actualities, horizons, and pretensions. The Archimedean point of the *Isharat* is the experience of the Sufi (mystic) described in a crisp, vivid, and resonant Arabic. There is an excited, dynamic, and luminous simplicity in his style with sparse metaphors and practically no symbols or enigmas to hinder a direct comprehension of the themes discussed therein. Dr. Inati's position on the *Isharat* is in harmony with the popularly held belief² that it is entirely a symbolic composition (pp. 2-3) which stands for or represents his otherwise clear naturalistic doctrine.³ I disagree and shall defend this position later. The best part of this work is directly communicated, employing his conceptual categories as a device to illuminate the process of mystical gnosis. He must have believed that an appeal to his rational determinations from his cosmology and theory of the soul would provide models or "ideated structures" that enhance a better understanding of mysticism by himself and by his competent reader. The Shaykh's contribution in *Isharat* lies in his method of description and interpretation and not in major novel themes about mysticism; the

contents are familiar traditional views on the subject. When he was just a child, several older contemporaries produced treatises and terminology that were by far more comprehensive and original than what he pens in the *Isharat*,⁴ for instance, *Kitab al-Luma'* by Abu Nasr al-Sarraj (d. 378/988), *Qut al-Qulub* by Abu Talib al-Makki (d. 386/996), and *al-Risala al-Quraishiyya* (Epistle to the Sufis) by Abu Qasim al-Quraishi (d. 462/1072), to mention just a few. Of course, along with the preceding must go the comprehensive and technical work of Al-Junaid Al-Baghdadi (d. 350/910), who brought mysticism under Islamic law, improved its terminology, and fashioned it into a practical and philosophic doctrine. Again, it was Ibn Sina's exposition of Sufism (mysticism) in terms of his linguistic precision and philosophic modalities that give aesthetic and intuitive lure to this part of *Isharat*.

Ibn Sina and Mysticism presents the sensitive reader with the following structures:

- a. A translation of Ibn Sina's fourth part of *al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat* (Remarks and Admonitions) titled *al-Tasawuf* (Sufism). The author depended on an Arabic edition by the capable and erudite Islamic philosophy scholar Sulayman Dunya, published by Dar al-Ma'arif (Cairo, 1958), and checked this edition against that of Jack Forget, published by E.J. Brill (Leiden, 1892). Also, the translation contains pertinent footnotes for explaining and facilitating the comprehension of the text, along with new titles for each chapter designating its compass and intentions. The whole of part 4 of the *Isharat* consists of seventy-eight short and condensed chapters.
- b. An introduction in which the author describes the strategy and rationale for executing the project and the complexities involved in translating a text such as *al-Isharat*.
- c. A long commentary⁵ that involves careful textual analysis tailored to the three main structures of this part of the *Isharat*, namely, the nature of happiness, the stations of the knower, and the distinguishing signs of knowledge. The link between the preceding topics is the relentless effort by the seeker (*murid*) to achieve mystical gnosis, and Ibn Sina's description of the multiplicity of subjective experiences, kinds of pleasures, and conditions that are conducive to or hinder conjunction (*ittisal*) with transempirical perfection. The seeker's conscious aspirations, the pitfalls he encounters, and the progressive triumph in his journey are faithfully and patiently described by Dr. Inati. These aspirations are both god-centered and self-centered; from an epistemological stance, her commentary focuses on the process of Man's experiencing in relation to the experienced that is the Truth. Man's nobility and his lot of attaining the heights of union with God are due to his natural ability of contemplation through the power of the rational soul.

I shall now consider the preceding points:

The Translation

The translation is good. One cannot find any problematic sentences or phrases that contain distinct errors even if one were to search for them. The effort at understanding the Arabic and at intuiting the meanings of the Arabic original announces a mind fully grounded in the nuances of the language, its syntax, and semantics. Translating a work like *al-Isharat* demands not only a good knowledge of the language but also a considerable familiarity with the author's other works. The translator, as it were, must "dwell" in the horizons and larger actualities of the author's philosophic schemes in order to comprehend the givenness and import of the text. In this sense, every translation is ultimately an act of interpretation, a recreation of the original. Inati here is "with it" safe and sound. A literal translation would have proven anemic and fatal. For instance, at difficult points in the text, she provides in the footnotes several terms in English that may correspond to the Arabic and gives reasons for her choice. Also, to reveal a passage's complete meaning, she might add a word or two to the original. For example, in using the term "idrak," which is of cardinal importance in the *Isharat*, Ibn Sina says: *inna al-lathata hiya idrakun wa naylun liwusuli ma huwa 'innda al-mudriki kamalun wa khair*. Inati's English version is: "pleasure is the apprehension of, and full arrival at, that which according to the apprehender is a perfection" (p. 71). Here she correctly states that *idrak* has several meanings, such as "grasping," "realization," "attainment," "perception," and "apprehension." But since Ibn Sina employs the term to denote both sensible and intellectual awareness, the translator decided that "apprehension" is the proper term to use. Inati is on target here. However, the original does not convey the meaning "full"; instead, it contains the term *nayl*, which means "to obtain." The term *nayl* was completely eliminated in the translation and was replaced by "full," in which the meaning of "to obtain" was absorbed in the context. This is feasible. The translator acknowledges that she has introduced into the English some terms not found in the original, since "to convey in an English sentence the meaning of an Arabic sentence, one may have to include in the former words for which there is no parallel in the latter" (p. 5). This is, in general, the procedure she adopts in most of the translation. It unfurls rather than weakens the original. For a successful translation is not usually atomistic but contextual. Classical Arabic is not fully accessible even to educated Arabs. However, it differs from modern Arabic not in structure but in syntax, style, and punctuation. Some of the terms, though not many, have dropped out of common usage. Thus, a philosophic reading by an Arab

or a western scholar can be a demanding task. It is unnecessary to give further examples of the translator's method. A more thorough examination of the translation may perhaps yield minor errors in the nuances of terms, but the translation is generally sound.

One would wish to be as appreciative of the Commentary, for its intended significations reveal that it is fraught with both methodological and philosophic difficulties. This will become clear in due course.

The Nature of Happiness

Part of the Commentary, "The Nature of Happiness," the author discusses Ibn Sina's view of pleasure (*al-lathat*) and its different means—the senses, the imagination, and the intellect. The result is that pleasure is construed to be of three kinds: the sensible, the internal, and the intellectual. In terms of quality and rank, the sensible pleasure is considered to be lowest, the intellectual highest, and the internal intermediate between the two. However, only the intellectual pleasure is a quality peculiar to man, emanating from his nobility and special prerogative of sharing it with separate intelligences. "The highest pleasure is a state resulting from goodness" (p. 8), and "pleasure is defined as the apprehension and acquisition of that which, from the point of view of the apprehender, is a good or a perfection" (p. 10). Goodness, according to Ibn Sina, results from satisfying a desire, a craving, or a preference. Dr. Inati does not state whether Ibn Sina endorses the objectivist, subjectivist, or relational view of goodness. For instance, is a thing good because it is desired, or is it desired because it is good? Based on the *Isharat*, Ibn Sina held the objective view of value. This means that for a goodness situation to arise, there has to be a subject where desires or interests are kindled by an object that possesses inherent objective qualities that are intrinsically valuable or good. This is in harmony with his view of ultimate felicity when the 'arif (knower) desires or prefers a valuable object, the Active Intellect or God. Since pleasure is a process, its value is determined by the attracting power of the object sought. Consequently, any value situation must always be in a forward-reaching state (*shawq*), a teleological movement which is never fulfilled until it reaches Him, the Source of all Perfection.

The Commentary overlooks a belief by Ibn Sina contained in the *Isharat* (p. 786, Inati p. 79) which is, at once, of psychological and philosophic significance and which needs clarification. The Shaykh seems to clearly endorse the view that pain or harm (*atha*) and pleasure can exist simultaneously in a state of happiness. In appearance this sounds paradoxical, for pain is not pleasure and the reverse is true. How can one combine both without logical and psychological contradiction? Certainly the Shaykh does not believe that an 'arif is a masochist who derives plea-

sure from pain. However, the implication in the *Isharat* is that yearning for gnostic joy (*bahjat*) may inflict harm or pain but that the expectation of what is to ultimately ensue renders the pain agreeable and pleasurable. This, in my view, is feasible, since pleasure and pain are not opposites but contraries—they can coexist in the same mental or physical state. Opposites necessarily imply utter negation while contraries entail simply difference. This is from a formal standpoint, but from a psychological perspective the coexistence of pleasure and pain is directly “self-presenting” in the sense that it is self-justifying (i.e., the pleasure that obtains from periods of exertion such as tennis, swimming, and hiking). Ibn Sina’s position here is close to Plato’s in the *Phaedo* where Socrates states that pleasure and pain are conjoined together such that when striving for the one we are apt to experience the other. The coexistence of pleasure and pain is hardly a new find, but one must remember that the ultimate Sufi experience, according to Ibn Sina, is not necessarily devoid of pain or harm.⁶

According to the author, Ibn Sina posits two conditions for the actualization of pleasure, namely, an object considered good by the subject and the ability to attain that good. Furthermore, “goodness” is intricately and necessarily interwoven with the natural perfection of a being, toward which that being gravitates. This view is Aristotle’s, and as in other areas, such as ethics, metaphysics, and epistemology, the Shaykh seems to be inextricably Aristotelian. One is reminded of what Aristotle says in the *Ethics*, namely, that pleasure is a perfection or a crown of an activity and the reward bestowed by nature for the perfect and proper functioning of a being.⁷ Inati also contends that Ibn Sina denies that evil possesses ontological status, considering it to be a negative concept or the privation of goodness. In this sense God is not responsible for its creation because whatever He has created is good in relation to the rest of the universe. The Shaykh defines evil by contrasting it with goodness. It is, in a special sense, a form of defect in the proper functioning of a being, whereas pleasure is a form of perfection. One can infer from Inati’s exposition that pleasure for Ibn Sina is an activity that is experienced and not simply known (p. 13). The same applies to pain. Ultimately, the source of the highest pleasure (and consequently happiness), is the rational soul whose distinctive function is the contemplation of the intelligibles divested of corporeality, inherently perfect and forever eternal. For only the rational soul, through the intellect, can grasp the essence of a thing; and since essences are nonpolluted with matter, the pleasure that follows from their apprehension is higher and more intense. But, according to the Commentary, Ibn Sina does not believe in perfect happiness in this life except in certain moments of short duration extinguished by the various degrees of the soul’s bondage by the body. Eternal happiness is of the Afterlife, and even then not every soul can achieve that state; only those

who are able to purify themselves from corporeal contamination can achieve it. Nevertheless, the author correctly states that Ibn Sina did not believe in reincarnation or in the dissolution of certain souls after death. All souls survive death in varying degrees of happiness or misery. Also, he denies the prior existence of souls in the world of intelligibles (pp. 16, 18–19). It is in these views (along with others in his psychology), that Ibn Sina's originality lies. Such views are well-presented and logically argued in *Najat* and *Al-Shifa'*. Still, though a great conceptualist and intuitive visionary, and despite "clever" additions and changes, he does not seem in his metaphysics or physics to have gone beyond the Aristotelian and especially, the Farabian conceptions. One subtle difference between him and Al-Farabi is in epistemology. Whereas Al-Farabi considers the act of intellection to be the extraction of universals from the particulars of sense, universals for Ibn Sina emanate from the Tenth Intellect or Active Reason. Apart from his contribution to the natural sciences in general, one has to look for the Shaykh's originality in his psychology, his phenomenological understanding of the self, and his excellent differentiation between essence and existence. On these issues, he was a pioneer. It is gratifying that such Islamic scholars as Michael Marmura, Parviz Morowedge, Lenn Goodman, and Sami Hawi have actively dealt with these significant issues in a timely fashion. More of this quality labor is sorely needed for a modern illumination (in a multiplicity of invigorating contextual perspectives) of the legacy of great Islamic philosophers.⁸

Inati states that according to Ibn Sina, both moral and theoretical perfections are guarantees in their own way for achieving infinite happiness in the Afterlife. When the intellect in its transcendental journey finally grasps the pure intelligences in the divine world, the soul merges with this world and experiences perpetual joy.

Inati's competence in treading through the winding morass of Ibn Sina's multileveled thought is unquestionable. She resorts to other works by him such as *Risala Adhawiyya* and *al-Mabda' wa al-Ma'ad* for verification, assurance, and refinement (pp. 17–26). However, in all of that, she does not explain why it is critical to read Ibn Sina on these issues and what his contribution is in relation to his predecessors.

Two serious questions arise from the preceding: (a) Does Ibn Sina equate pleasure with happiness, like the Epicureans, Bentham and Mill? and (b) Is the ultimate goal of man (soul), according to Ibn Sina, the achievement of happiness? My distinct impression is that Inati responds to these questions in the affirmative. I am, however, impelled to differ with her on both points, especially (b), which must be of more concern to us because it involves our understanding of Ibn Sina's teleology of human life. Concerning (a), Ibn Sina does not equate pleasure with happiness even though a life devoid of pleasure can hardly be called happy.

The Arabic word *sa'adah* (happiness) is a state which seeps into all dimensions of man's being and is not short-lived but is of long duration, whereas pleasure is temporary, transient, and often localized. From his description of sensible, internal, and intellectual pleasure, the Shaykh seems to be referring to a particular, highly temporary agreeable feeling of short duration which may not be pervasive. For the possibility of being unhappy and still experiencing pleasure, the pleasures of eating or love making are obvious examples. Unhappiness and pleasure can coexist in the same person (soul) at the same time, whereas happiness and unhappiness cannot, since the one negates the other. But if happiness is equated with pleasure as Inati indicates (p. 17), it can exist simultaneously with unhappiness, which is absurd (*khilf*). Therefore, on formal grounds, Ibn Sina could not have equated the two, but only that the attainment of the latter necessarily includes or generates the former. When Ibn Sina says: *khalasu ila 'alim alqudsi wa al-sa'adah . . . wa hasalat lahum al-laththat al-'ulya* "they have attained the world of holiness and happiness . . . and have gained the loftiest pleasure"⁹ (*Isharat*, p. 774). This means that the world of *sa'adah* is not only the world of pleasure but also the world of *intrinsic* reality and of self-realization. Thus, Ibn Sina does not believe that the *telos* of an '*arif* (gnostic) is pleasure but rather *al-Haqq* (Truth). Pleasure is conducive to happiness, but the latter is irreducible to the former.

The question in (b) is necessarily linked to the answer in (a). Inati states: "The ultimate objective of a human being is happiness . . ." (p. 26). This is both logically and factually wrong. Facts from the *Isharat* do not support her contention. Logically, as I have concluded earlier, Ibn Sina must have endorsed the objective theory of goodness. What accrues between the '*arif* and the world of intelligences is a form of intellectual pleasure due to the qualities of the Divine that are ontologically and intrinsically valuable or good. The value situation arising must be directed toward intrinsic goodness and not as a means to happiness. The witnessing of *al-Haqq* is logically antecedent or prior to the outcome. *Happiness is posterior to gnostic intimacy*. In other words, the attainment of happiness for the '*arif* must not be the intention but only its effect or byproduct. This conclusion is supported by the text of *Isharat*, namely, *al-'arif yurid al-haqq al-awwal la li shay'in ghayrahu . . . la li raghatin aw rahba* "the knower seeks the First Truth not for anything other than Itself . . . not because of desire or fear" (*Isharat*, p. 810; Inati, p. 83). Ibn Sina warns that those who seek the truth for the sake of achieving happiness or any other gain are commercially minded (*Isharat*, p. 801; Inati, p. 82). Therefore, contrary to what Inati states, Ibn Sina does not believe that happiness is the highest good of man. Only the contemplation of the truth (good) is the loftiest of Man's activities. This conclusion points to the following three points:

1. Its import is purely Aristotelian, for it was Aristotle who declared that the highest mode of life is man's contemplation of the Prime Mover and this is prior in significance to all other modes because it is self-sufficient.¹⁰
2. Rabi'a al-'Udawiyya (d. 291/801), years before Ibn Sina, stated: "I do not love God out of greed for, or fear of, Him but for His own sake." Like other Sufis before her, she rejected commercialism with God.
3. On this issue, Ibn Sina is disappointingly unoriginal, and, as stated earlier, any contribution by him, lies in his ability to understand Sufism and cast it in terms of his naturalistic metaphysical system.

The Stations of the Knower

Part B of the Commentary deals with the stations of the knower. Inati claims that this section of the *Isharat*, the Ninth Class, "which focuses on the experience of the Sufi" (p. 4) "is the most original part" (p. 30), but no justification is offered in defense of this position, and no mention of the sense in which it is the "most" original. In fact, S. Hawi in his *Islamic Naturalism and Mysticism* argued, with evidence from Ibn Sina's works and others, against the alleged originality and the "enigmatic" symbolism of this part of *Isharat*. Also, the Shaykh's recitals or allegories were shown not to be his own creation. Arabic folkloric tales and Hellenic elements were the source.¹¹ Furthermore, the analysis and interpretation of the contents of the Ninth Class were *done* in a comprehensive manner years before Inati by Corbin, Hawi, and Heath.¹² No mention of these works is made in her text or bibliography.

In relation to the stations of the knower, the author presents Ibn Sina's views on the multiplicity of metamorphoses which the soul undergoes in its attempts at reaching mystical intimacy. Ibn Sina relates that the knower passes through different stations and ranks while enjoying glimpses of the immortal holy world. Here he mentions, with no elaboration whatsoever, the story of Salaman and Absal as an example of the individual gnostic and his elevation in mystical knowledge. (Only in the footnotes one finds Tusi's commentary on the story.) At this stage Inati presents what she believes are her interpretations while at once using and ignoring other works on the subject.¹³

In this part of *Isharat*, Ibn Sina defines what the Sufis before him had done, namely, the terms *al-zahhid* (ascetic), *al-'abid* (worshipper), and *al-'arif* (knower). Then he mentions the stages which the gnostic must go through in order to achieve his goal. However, the seeker must prepare himself for these stages for which he has to possess the will (*irada*) to effect contact (*ittisal*) with the holy world and must undergo training (*al-riyada*) while his mind is intending the Divine. According to the author, the stages are as follows: 1) moments (*awkat*), 2) deep penetra-

tion into viewing the Truth, 3) breaking the cognitive barriers between the knower and the Truth, 4) increase in conjunction, 5) delving further into knowledge, 6) attaining knowledge at will, 7) attaining conjunction with the Truth, 8) attaining conjunction without exercise, and 9) complete consumption in the Truth (pp. 36–38). When the seeker arrives at the ninth stage, he beams friendliness and generosity and is immune to harm by others. The author correctly states that the idea of this immunity is derived from Plato but does not provide a reference. This is actually found in the *Crito* and *Meno*.

The author claims that the whole composition of the *Isharat* “is a symbolic philosophical work and must be treated as such” (p. 3). She also states that “the lengthy commentaries on this text, however, have not made its *enigmatic* nature accessible enough even to the philosophers” (p. 3).¹⁴ This view is not in harmony with what the *Isharat*, in a neutral sense, announces to the reader. If one suspends the views of such scholars as Corbin, Heath and Mehren that are similar to Inati’s, then the book is presented in a “pure form” that contradicts their assertions. The expression is straightforward, though rarely economical; it is clear and contains exposition, form, and method typical of classical philosophical writings. A reader familiar with the literature and the sufi doctrines requires no effort to comprehend what the Shaykh is saying even when he is attempting to describe the heights of intimacy with God. Apart from employing only four sentences to refer to the story of Salaman and Absal in the *Isharat* (pp. 791–93; Inati, p. 82), the book contains no symbols to interpret or resolve. Compared to Ibn al-Farid’s (d. 625/1230) poetic and symbolic language, for example, the *Isharat* is transparent and clear.

In that connection, Inati’s mistake along with the above-mentioned scholars is the following: Since Ibn Sina was justifiably considered by Tusi and others to be writing symbolically in his recitals of the *al-Tayr* (the Bird) and *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, which he does not include in the *Isharat*, Inati erroneously imposes the symbolism on the whole fourth part of the *Isharat*. Consequently, she and those who share her views¹⁵ commit the fallacy of irrelevance. Also, by ascribing a minor quality of the book, namely, the symbolic nature of Salaman and Absal, to the book as a whole, she commits the fallacy of generalizing from insufficient evidence. The reason for giving this issue serious consideration here is that this particular misunderstanding of the *Isharat* is pervasive in the literature. “Symbolism and poetry were perhaps games for Ibn Sina, lacking the authenticity and honest resolve of his *Shifa’* (healing).”¹⁶ For instance, in his *‘aniyya* poem about the soul, “his poetic vision falls short of the imaginative impulse and vision of the average poet.”¹⁷ Other writers, with their “scholarly rich” and “creative mind(s),” imbue his symbolic writings with interpretations that are vastly disproportionate to the

original, in which a new Ibn Sina is invented and is only dimly grounded in the original.¹⁸

Hermeneutic interpretation, though necessary for illuminating the implications of a thinker's views, can be a dangerous business. One can be carried away by the large horizons and perspectives of one's scholarly mind, resulting in a new consistent and harmonious synthesis substantially alien to the intentionality immanent in the work being interpreted. While Inati's Commentary is innocent of this charge, her characterization of the *Isharat* as symbolic is erroneous. For a work to be symbolic, it should stand for the direct expression and the clear reproduction of the author's ideas. The work would then be a representation and concealment of the writer's themes. In Ibn Sina's case, the treatment of mysticism in *Isharat* contains no representation of his philosophic system as a whole. Instead, some concepts of this system like the "theoretical intellect," "practical intellect," and "rational soul" are employed as points of reference for his study of mysticism. If symbolism implies hidden meaning, it does not follow that every hidden meaning is symbolic. True, in his occasional economical expression, Ibn Sina intended to bar the public from access to the genuine meaning of mysticism, but there are no symbols in the book symbolizing the entire drama of the phases and struggles to attain mystical gnosis. To economize in communication is not necessarily to symbolize, even though symbolic expression may be economical. By using such a method, Ibn Sina falls into the tradition of Aristotle and Al-Farabi. These thinkers believed that philosophy should be confined to the capable few.¹⁹ However, if one of the intended functions of symbolism is to prevent the common (*'amma*) from access to the intimate nature of Truth and to instruct them to heed the precepts of Islamic law, then Ibn Sina's symbolism in his recitals does not fulfill its purpose: A reader either does or does not comprehend the hidden meaning represented by the symbols. If he does not, the story will be enjoyed just as an aesthetic and luring product of sheer imagination; and if he does, symbolism would have failed in veiling the intended meaning. Consequently, direct expression would have been preferred because it can be precise in communicating the Shaykh's ideas. Simply put, the recitals as an indirect philosophic expression can be fertile grounds for confusing and perhaps contradictory hermeneutic interpretation; and despite this fact, scholars will continue to engage endlessly in futile attempts to guess their meanings. If it is objected that symbolic tales allow readers to grasp from them each according to his abilities, then what would be the common criterion/criteria upon which their comprehension is based? In the absence of clear pointers or criteria, readers may infer or decipher conflicting themes that are not in harmony either with Islamic law or with Ibn Sina's intentions. Also, if it is said that symbolic communication among philosophers is necessary in times of political

and religious stress, then one has to resign oneself to the fact that in such a communication, philosophic precision is unavoidably sacrificed. For it is impossible to discern, with certainty, exactly what lurked in Ibn Sina's mind; what intricate processes, possibilities, and motives at that fine point of his creative act were responsible for one form of expression or another. Here we are faced with the "bête noire," the renowned epistemological problem of intersubjectivity or egocentric predicament. However, dismissing the philosophic or religious effectiveness of Ibn Sina's symbolic tales does not diminish the impressive and enriching function of symbolism in poetry and literature in general but not necessarily in philosophic expression.

The Distinguishing Signs of Knowledge

Part c of the Commentary, "the distinguishing signs of knowledge," deals with the manifest qualities and signs of the gnostic from the outside. For instance, his patient endurance of not eating for an extended period, his power for action in certain areas that cannot be emulated, and his ability to reach the hidden domains. In general, these actions are due to the capacity of the intellect to control the vegetative powers in the body, the excitement and flickering joy due to *ittisal*, and the disposition of the *sensus communis* to receive the knowledge of particulars from the intelligible world (pp. 42–49). This is followed by a familiar discussion of the role of the faculties of the soul in the actualization of knowledge, the relationship of the *sensus communis* to the imagination, and how the forms of objects are reflected in both. This is actually a Farabian and Aristotelian theme to which the Shaykh contributed little: "the rational soul uses the imagination as an instrument on the occasion of the soul's conjunction with the divine realm" (p. 53). This sounds like Al-Farabi! In his description of the role of the imagination in relation to prophetic and visionary knowledge, the Second Master anticipated modern views by such thinkers as Coleridge, I.A. Richards, and George Santayana. Ibn Sina further presents the different conditions under which the rational soul can penetrate the hidden realm and draws knowledge from it. Hidden or invisible things according to him cannot only be cogitated but also "experienced." Such experience cannot be proven or spoken about since our sensible or phenomenal language is limited in scope and focus. It is impossible for our sensible form of discourse to describe the transphenomenal realities. This is reinforced by a correct and substantially pertinent methodological remark typical of the Shaykh in most of his writings, especially the *De Anima*: "Your strong rejection of that whose clarity is not yet made evident to you is no less a mistake than your strong belief in that whose evidence does not lie in your hands. Rather you must hold on to the line of suspending judgment" (*Isharat*,

p. 902; Inati, p. 107). This is admirable methodology from a man of his time. At the end of the *Isharat*, Ibn Sina informs us that he revealed the "cream of truth" about the sufi gnostics and besieges us not to divulge this truth except for those who are competent to receive it. However, these beliefs are not necessarily Ibn Sina's, nor do they determine the practical life he himself chose to lead.

Again, here Inati's perspicacity and ability to understand both the Arabic and the philosophical complexities involved in the *Isharat* is indubitably apparent. Her Commentary is clear and direct and shows scholarly competence from the point of view of precision and sensitivity to the text. Her method of not engaging in excessive "scholarly archeology" and in emphasizing textual analysis and interpretation is to be commended. However, the introduction, though faithful to the original, is "skeletal," follows the text slavishly, and does not surpass it in clarity and content. On the whole, the analysis presented is self-contained and monadic. There is a little appeal to other works by Ibn Sina, which does not really facilitate the reader's comprehension. A succinct and separate statement of the salient and distinct aspects of Ibn Sina's metaphysical scheme and different faculties of the soul should have been included in the commentary as a "nexus" to which the reader could refer in understanding what the Shaykh means in the *Isharat*. This monadic aspect of the commentary should have been fleshed out in terms of coordinates and broader issues such as Ibn Sina's contributions to sufism and the influence of Al-Farabi and even comparison with recent views on mysticism. In other words, an interactive introduction would have expanded the horizons of Ibn Sina's thought and would have philosophically resuscitated his dormant significance. "For to be properly assessed and to discern their merits and relevance Islamic philosophers must be *actively* treated from a philosophic standpoint and not from [a] purely" introductory or scholarly point of view.²⁰ However, this demand is perhaps partially unjustifiable in this context, since Inati's main purpose was to translate and explicate the text. G.F. Hourani's work *Islamic Rationalism* and P. Morowedge's *Essays in Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism*²¹ are examples of what this reviewer has in mind. Furthermore, the author's references and bibliography, other than works by Ibn Sina, are skimpy and inadequate in relation to a familiar subject frequently discussed by both western and Muslim scholars. The author cites only nine sources and discounts, knowingly or unknowingly, works that have direct bearing on the multiplicity of issues contained therein. Consequently, the Commentary owes a "hidden debt" to other authors. More specially, the controversial issue of "illuminative philosophy," and the influence of Ibn Sina on Ibn Tufayl (pp. 62-65), have been satisfactorily dealt with before. Her short and passing remarks subjecting Ibn Tufayl's mysticism to the "arresting shadow of Ibn Sina,"²² are unwar-

ranted. The greater influence on Ibn Tufayl stems predominantly from Al-Ghazzali's views of sufism, along with those of Al-Junaid's (d. 300/910), Al-Hallaj's (d. 312/922), Al-Bistami's (d. 265/875), and definitely, but to a lesser extent, from Al-Farabi's views. The author states that "Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, its ideas are basically those of *al-Isharat*" (p. 65). This is a mistake pure and simple.²³

Again, the author states, with emphasis, that Ibn Sina was a mystic of a special kind: "Ibn Sina's mysticism is speculative, theoretical or philosophical" (p. 62), and "according to his conception of mysticism, he must have been a mystic" (p. 63). One cannot agree with the author's logic in the last quotation. One's conception of mysticism does not necessarily make one a mystic. There are several writers who expressed varying conceptions and special views about mysticism, but such views do not necessarily make them mystics. Inati defends, in substance, her position by stating: "Since Ibn Sina wrote a number of treatises on the subject . . . one would have to assume that he knew what a mystical experience is" (p. 63). Here, "knowing" and "experiencing" are two different terms with different import. "Knowing" implies a cognitive subject, whereas "experiencing" implies an existentially involved self, which cannot be predicated of Ibn Sina. The cognitive subject is sterile while the experiencing subject is dynamic. Furthermore, "philosophical mysticism" is a homeless phrase and has been classically used in a very broad sense by different writers. Such broad usage renders the term practically meaningless; it covers a multiplicity of philosophically different "reflective individuals" with different ultimate concerns and principles, it is a vacuous piece of verbiage, a blanket term covering a strange conglomeration of "family resemblances" between different doctrines. It excludes one of the most distinctive qualities of a mystical experience, namely, the existential transformation of the whole personality after encountering the Divine. Ibn Sina did not manifest an experience of such a transformation. He indulged in the intoxicating pleasures of immediacy and experienced the "thorns of the flesh." To dub the Shaykh a mystic of any strain is a misnomer.

I am dwelling on this issue of mystic characterization at some length because it is unjustifiable and misleading and has polluted philosophical literature. One can perhaps speak of postrational intuition, an experience shared by philosophically and metaphysically elevated minds who are not genuinely mystics. Technically, the term "mystic" did not even exist in Greek philosophical literature. It emerged when the Greek rationalistic spirit came in contact with the revealed message of Islam and Christianity. However, there were elements of ritualistic asceticism immanent in man's experiences before these religions. Here I am not questioning the retrospective employment of the term or phrase posterior to some philosophic tendencies. Such an application can be profitable

when employed in a relevant fashion. But to predicate “intellectual mysticism” of Ibn Sina or other thinkers is confusing and unproductive.

It does not make sense to consider Plato, Aristotle, Ibn Sina, Hegel, Descartes, Spinoza, and Kierkegaard (the arch enemy of mysticism) as philosophical mystics. These were philosophers who with their *rational* passion encountered the *limits* of their intellect without surrendering. Their stubborn rationality compensated for its encounter with the divine or “unknown” by intuitive illumination, post-rational, philosophically relieving but cognitively questionable.

The prejudice for the ill-fated use of “philosophical mysticism” (hardly employed in the West) may have sprouted in Islamic philosophy at the hands of Al-Mahasibi (d. 228/838). He combined his mysticism with some philosophical elements of Greek thought. Also, Thu an-Nun Al-Misri (d. 251/861) fused his behavioral (ritualistic) mysticism with the conceptual rational elements of Neoplatonism. Subsequently scholars, mistakenly perhaps, confined the usage of the term to one element, namely, the intellectual and philosophical. Again, “philosophical mysticism” eliminates one essential dimension of mysticism which is the existential impact, overpowering, deeply penetrating, that redirects the powers of the soul in behavior. There seems to be a conditional relationship between genuine *ittisal* and the corresponding modification of one’s life. This means that mystical (sufi) experience, by and large, determines character that is essentially a transformed will. In a reportive (lexical) sense no sufi experience is achieved without a corresponding change in will and consequently in action. Neither this reviewer nor Ibn Tufayl can genuinely consider Ibn Sina a mystic. The way Ibn Tufayl puts it, Ibn Sina is one of the people of theoretical knowledge (*ahl al-nazar*), and not one of those of immediate knowledge (*dhawq*). Ibn Sina, according to Ibn Tufayl, “in his reference to and description of mystical states, was not an *arif* (gnostic). His superior intellect permitted him to depict and discuss mysticism as an “imitator,” not as one who experienced it or belonged to the order.”²⁴

It is futile for scholars to assent to a proposition or predicate about the “inner man” and its subjective experience when no external behavior is available as an indication of the nature of his subjectivity. This again confronts us with the problem of intersubjectivity. In his *Isharat*, Ibn Sina was not doing more than an empathetic phenomenological description of the nature of the Sufi experience. In order to be successful, as it is with writers of similar vein, he had to employ “imaginative variation” in order to identify from within with the sufi states, ranks, and doctrines. Through empathy with and sympathetic penetration of the field of consciousness of the sufi masters, and the description of both their internal and external behavior, he was able to theoretically grasp the intellectual and emotional states which the self of the sufi undergoes.

The book, being about Ibn Sina's views on mysticism, necessitated the preceding remarks in the hope that the controversial issue of his mysticism will finally be put to rest. The book is a valuable contribution to the English translation of Ibn Sina's works and can be used by scholars of Islamic thought. The author should be encouraged to continue to translate other works. However, it is advisable that she lists all her sources.

Notes:

1. I shall employ *Isharat* in my subsequent discussion to refer to the fourth part of Ibn Sina's *al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*.
2. Henry Corbin is one example of an author who believed that this part of *Isharat* is symbolic. See Henry Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recitals*, translated by W.R. Trusk (London, 1960). For a rejection of Corbin's position, see S. Hawi, *Islamic Naturalism and Mysticism* (Leiden, 1974), 266n. and 268–69. See also 25–31.
3. "Naturalism" means science-oriented.
4. He has of course written other works on the subject.
5. Hereafter, I shall refer to Inati's analysis of Ibn Sina's text as Commentary.
6. I am employing "harm and pain" interchangeably, while further analysis may point out differences.
7. W.D. Ross, *Aristotle* (Oxford, 1967), 228.
8. For example, see Michael Marmura, "Avicenna's Flying Man in Context," *The Monist* 69, no. 3 (1986): 383–95; P. Morowedge, *Essays in Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism* (New York, 1995). Lenn Goodman, *Ibn Tufayl's Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* (Los Angeles, 1983). Examples of what is needed here are Goodman's and Hawi's works on Ibn Tufayl—basically comparative studies with western philosophy from an interdisciplinary point of view that involve active philosophical analysis *qua* philosophy.
9. Translation is mine.
10. Richard McKean, *Aristotle* (New York, 1947): 535–537.
11. Hawi, *Islamic Naturalism and Mysticism*, 259–269.
12. *Ibid.* See Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recitals*, and P. Heath, *Allegory and Philosophy in Avicenna* (Philadelphia, 1992). Heath's book is problematic. In his interpretations of Ibn Sina's recitals (pp. 93–96), he practically reiterates the views of previous writers on the subject, and his chapters dealing with Ibn Sina's philosophy are traditional views familiar to scholars in the western and Muslim traditions. Instead of independent interpretation of the recitals and detailed motives for their employment by Ibn Sina, he focuses on insignificant hair-splitting differences between what he claims are his views and those of Corbin, Goichon, and Gutas. See Heath, pp. 153–154. Heath seems to have imposed from outside a scheme of what he calls *logos and muthos* to interpret Ibn Sina. Such a scheme is selective and inhibits a neutral multifarious interpretation of Ibn Sina. The exotic terms of *logos* and *muthos* are in plain English, not more than Ibn Sina's naturalistic and mystical themes. For the possible motives for the use of allegories or narratives, see S. Hawi's article "Ibn Tufayl, His Motives for the Use of Narrative Form and His Method of Concealment in *Hayy Bin Yaqzan*," *The Muslim World* (Hartford, 1974): 322–337.
13. See Hawi, *Islamic Naturalism*, 266–267 and 262; Inati, 32–33. Also see Hawi, *Islamic Naturalism*, 11–12n., 60; Inati, 62; Heath, *Allegory and Philosophy in Avicenna*, 7.
14. Emphasis is mine.
15. Such as Morowedge, *Essays in Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism*, 196.
16. Hawi, *Islamic Naturalism*, 69.
17. *Ibid.*
18. See Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recitals*, and Heath, *Allegory and Philosophy in Avicenna*.
19. For a detailed explanation, see Hawi's article in *The Muslim World*, 333.
20. Hawi, *Islamic Naturalism*, 4.

21. G.F. Hourani, *Islamic Rationalism, the Ethics of 'Abd al-Jabbar* (1974); and Morowedge, *Essays in Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism*. These two books are an excellent example of employing modern philosophic themes in interpreting Islamic philosophers.

22. Hawi, *Islamic Naturalism*, 58–59.

23. *Ibid.*, 57–59 and 80–83.

24. *Ibid.*, 56. For further discussion of Ibn Sina's mysticism, see P. Morowedge, "The Logic of Emanationism and Sufism in the Philosophy of Ibn Sina," in two parts, *The Journal of American Oriental Society* (1973): 467–476. Also see A.F. Mehren, *Traite mystique d' 'abou 'Ali Hassan b. 'Aabdallah b. Sina ou d 'Avicenne* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1889–1899).