In *Sufism and Deconstruction*, Ian Almond brilliantly contrasts the meta-philosophical mysticism of the Andalusian and Damascene writer and teacher Muhyiddin Ibn al-Arabi (d. 1240) with the provocative writing of the celebrated and excoriated gadfly of French post-structuralism, Jacques Derrida (d. 2004). Neither, however, is neatly ensconced in these respective categories. Almond bravely discards undue regard for their historical or cultural distance.
across more than seven centuries and in the process, weaves a narrative as fascinating as those of the two controversial protagonists of this adventure into the "secret of secrets." Both Ibn al-Arabi and Derrida engage in critiques of conventional rationality by exposing the limits of intellective explanations of elementary and ultimate questions, often involving paradox or aporias about the self, forms of existence, reality, the human, God, texts, and the structure of thought. These efforts have led to accusations of virtual heresy against the philosophers, de rigueur for good reading. Parallels between the two philosophers are a consequence of the astounding scale and scope of the critical eye each has cast on entire intellectual legacies: The Shaykh al-Akbar focused on Islamic thought in Seville, Fez, Mecca, Baghdad, Konya and Damascus, and studied Qur’anic commentary (tafsīr), hadith science, spiritual development (taṣawwuf), Islamic philosophy (falsafa), and Ash’ari scholastic theology (kalām). Algerian-born Derrida took on the Western corpus, from Plato to St. Augustine, Eckhart, Kant and Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, Marx, and Foucault. The works surveyed in Sufism and Deconstruction wield bold negations of formidable intellectual edifices, in vastly different contexts, to unsettle views of Islam and western thought.

Ibn al-Arabi has long been regarded as a giant of Sufism and Islamic philosophy, often ranked in the elite company of al-Ghazali, Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra. Derrida, on the other hand, evinced scarce interest in Islam. Late in life, however, the self-professed Jewish/non-Jewish atheist/marrano invoked a religious, messianic or apocalyptic tone in his work, born of profound doubt concerning modernist assumptions and through references to so-called Abrahamic religions. This unexpected foray into the spiritual domain by the popular iconoclast was mostly ignored by his critics from the North American analytic school. A few of Derrida's interlocutors, however, compared his deconstruction to the negative theology of Eckhart or medieval Kabbalism (e.g. Susan Handlemann), but he vehemently denied their relevance.

The growing interest in Ibn al-Arabi's work, still mostly untranslated into western languages, has in turn been influenced by such luminaries as Henry Corbin, Toshohiko Izutsu, William Chittick, and Seyyid Hossein Nasr. Their work translating and publishing Ibn al-Arabi’s work coincided with the Western rediscovery of Islam and Sufism in the midst of the šahwa (awakening) among the Muslim public. Ibn al-Arabi may have attracted the interests of modern scholars due to his liminal status in 20th century Islamic modernism – a result of his focus on the unknowability of God, the Self-disclosure of reality (al-haqq), and the explosive notion that the fixed, orthodox interpretation of the Qur’ān and the sunna could be an idolatrous "will to power," rather than a means of faithfulness to the spirit of the Revelation to the Prophet Muhammad and the global community of Muslims (umma). Almond fondly reminds us that both writers were skeptical of any attempt to build systems (or master narratives) upon their discoveries, despite their prolificity, and instead pointed to something
profundely divergent from such ambitions.\textsuperscript{4} Ian Almond's book is a remarkable effort at restoring serious interest in Islamic philosophy (as are the late Shahab Ahmed's \textit{What Is Islam?} and \textit{Before Orthodoxy}), as well as a hint that the formidable wall between secular and religious thought might be breached by the same "dynamic flexibility" that animates Ibn al-Arabi's conception of Allah.\textsuperscript{5}

Ibn al-Arabi and Derrida assumed from the outset the constantly changing nature of reality, from the multiplicity of possible meanings of words and phrases, whether in the Qur’an or in European languages, to the constitution of objects, the self, beings, temporality, or forces of nature. For Ibn al-Arabi, this meant that God never repeats Himself. In other words, there is no repetition in Allah's Self-disclosure (\textit{lā takrār fi l-tajallī}), and every manifestation of God is unique, including things, souls, revelation, prophecy, or the ultimate meaning of a Qur’anic sura, and none must be rendered banal by rigid interpretation. Almond suggests that for the Shaykh al-Akbar, the Real (\textit{al-ḥaqq}) cannot be defined\textsuperscript{6} and "never assumes a single form":

\textbf{Were the Essence [\textit{Dhāt Allah}] to make the loci of manifestation (\textit{mazahir}) manifest, it would be known. Were it known, it would be encompassed (\textit{ihata}). Were it encompassed, it would be limited (\textit{badd}). Were it limited, it would be confined (\textit{inhisar}). Were it confined it would be owned (\textit{mulk}).}\textsuperscript{8}

Ibn al-Arabi expounded on a multiplicity of interpretations of the Qur’an, as early Sufis such as Sahl al-Tustari of the Salimiyya school in Khuzestan, Iran had done almost four centuries before him. These expositions demonstrate an openness to semantic and interpretative inversions, or reversals, and transgressive readings so characteristic of Derrida, regarding the Canon, as well as popular culture and the media. Ibn al-Arabi has become well known for a doctrine associated with him, \textit{al-waḥdat al-wujūd}, the unity of being (or oneness of existence), but he never used the phrase and it only became elaborated and systematized in the work of his disciple, Mahmud al-Qayshani (d. 1335), three generations after his death.\textsuperscript{9} Ibn al-Arabi's conception of unity should only be cautiously distinguished from or opposed to multiplicity, but he certainly evoked a sense of totality and infinity in relation to Allah. Ibn al-Arabi's work was later dismissed by critics for the "excesses" of various exponents of Sufism, such as the notorious al-Bistami and al-Hallaj, who allegedly subscribed to the doctrine of \textit{al-waḥdat al-wujūd}, i.e. supposed pantheism or blasphemous association with Allah himself. Derrida was condemned for incoherence, nihilism, moral relativism, a "philosophy of hesitation" (undecidability), and delight in semantic gymnastics or gimmicks. The difficulty of both philosophers' writing styles and the complexity of their conceptualizations led to accusations of obscurantism, the "thought crime" so often brandished by those who desire what Almond calls the "illusion of clarity."\textsuperscript{10}
Yet both philosophers were also highly cognizant of the need for intellectual rigor. For Ibn al-Arabi, this included a legendary familiarity with the Qurʾan and the hadith corpus, copious references to them in his voluminous writing, a meticulous and critical examination of philosophy (falsafa) and scholastic theology (kalām), and a pious observation of the shariʿa in his personal life. In Derrida's case, he worked closely with renowned French philosophers and writers of the late 20th century including Althusser, Hyppolite, Marion, Barthes, de Mann, and many North American academics. He paid homage to the masters he so carefully and adroitly dissected, while also collaborating in the teaching of philosophy to public high school students in Paris – hardly the concern of a man anxious to erode or dispense with the fundamental practices of academic philosophy. Both philosophers’ critics accused them of undermining centuries of established intellectual (and/or spiritual) practice through arrogant and unwarranted innovations in methodology, and the labyrinthine and incomprehensible conclusions these methods engendered.

Derrida, ostensibly uninterested in theological or meta-theological absolutes (hyper-essentiality in western metaphysics, or the philosophy of presence), preferred to discuss seemingly far less imposing matters, such as writing and representation, perhaps to avoid metaphysical inflation. Finding that western philosophy had been searching for meaning in all the wrong places, he reexamined the significance of key concepts and texts in a succession of temporal and social contexts, forever shifting what concepts or doctrines might indicate, regardless of the fixed parameters of their authors' intention. Both writers were also committed to exploding binaries. Derrida held that dominant and subjugated pairs of concepts were embedded as dualistic hierarchies in human thought, unconsciously constructed in inaccessible origins of language (speech/writing; presence/absence; good/evil; God/human; man/woman; friend/enemy; human/animal). It was his intent to expose, dismantle, invert, and contaminate these oppositional categories. Ibn al-Arabi held that both elements in dualities were foundational and inseparable, "divided" only by the tain of a mirror, the bezels of gemstones, or the barzakh (isthmus), fastening one mutually exclusive aspect of the divine to the other.11 This infinitesimal division, or trace/supplement in Derrida's lexicon, like a hinge in a door, became an instrument with which the binary could be subverted through the mysteries of deconstruction. In Derrida’s formulation, the vitality of the text (the Qurʾan “comes to mind”) unravels any fixed interpretation we seek to impose upon it.12

Ibn al-Arabi and Derrida are paired (although not in opposition, nor as identical) in Almond's book primarily because they both critique rationality and embrace multiple interpretations of texts – a consequence of the limits of human cognition, especially regarding the confining metaphysics of binaries in human thought. Ibn al-Arabi rejected the
dilemma instigated by the Muʿtazili (early rationalist) philosophers over whether to regard Allah as utterly incomparable/transcendent (tanzīḥ), or in possession of the 99 (or 70/140, as William Chittick speculates) anthropomorphic virtues delineated in the Qurʾan, which render Allah as immanent in creation (taṣḥīḥ) – a bottom line for scripturalists and Ashʿari practitioners of kalām who could not rationally justify the Attributes/Names (ʾasmāʾ illāhī), except by faith. Ibn al-Arabi insisted on regarding both conceptions (and more) as constitutive, refusing to accept these primal divisions assumed by mere nazār (reflective thought) analogous with confusing one's image in a mirror with reality (al-ḥaqī). He referred to Allah as He/Not He (huwa lā huwa).

As a young man, he was said to have challenged even the renowned rationalist Ibn Rushd – a friend of his father in Cordoba – who was startled by the young man's prodigious insight, derived from a flash of illumination, before his intellectual career had begun. In response to a question of whether revelation adhered to rational analysis Ibn al-Arabi said, "Yes and no. Between the yes and no, the spirits fly from their matter and heads fly from their bodies." Later he ridiculed the contentious debates of the Islamic philosophers and practitioners of kalām. "I hear the grinding but I don't see any flour".13

Derrida conceived of the binary oppositions formulated in the Platonic corpus and iterated endlessly – as a metaphysical structure that expressed a longing for pure origins – a conceit that permeates western thought. In a 1966 Johns Hopkins University forum and in his publication of three key texts the following year, including the influential text Of Grammatology, Derrida took aim at the reigning projects that reinstated those binaries: Saussure's semiotics and Levi-Strauss' structuralism. In his works, Derrida explored the relationship of writing, language, and thought, and sought to destabilize accepted notions of "meaning" through a seemingly limitless shift in the possible interpretation of binary oppositions, such as speech and writing, philosophy and literature, medicine and poison, mind and body, generosity and obligation, etc. His critique of the logocentrism in western thought was also a refusal to accept the centrality or presence of God, Rationality, Philosophy, Science, Liberalism, or the West ("presence" was his term for the centuries-long elevation of speech over writing, beginning with Plato).

Derrida imagined a force (or play) of deconstruction that unbound the dualities, a dynamic with energies of its own – despite its lack of "existence" per se – independent of any subject/author/mediator who hoped to navigate on the wild river of language. The similarity with Ibn al-Arabi is startling, given that he directly challenges the notion that Allah could conceivably be limited to just one element of a dualistic pair, that Allah is this or that. According to Almond, Ibn al-Arabi regarded God “as an experience of the impossible”, and
"between yes and no", a notion Muhammad al-Ghazali (referring to earlier, similar formulations) and other logicians would dismiss as violating the law of contradiction.\textsuperscript{14}

Ibn al-Arabi obviously based his life and his intellectual work on a metaphysical center (contra Derrida), an omniscient Divine Essence that anticipated every possible interpretation of the Qur’an, and \textit{al-Haqq}, i.e. the Real: the multifaceted reality or truth which is ultimately unknowable by human beings. Ibn al-Arabi discovered early in his life that the key to comprehending all of these "secrets" was in personal revelation (openings; \textit{futūḥ}), a method of divine transmission and imaginal perception that distinguishes him from Derrida. Most Islamic philosophers and writers in various disciplines were keen to analyze the relationship of rationality to revelation and Ibn al-Arabi followed in this vein, five centuries after the life of the Prophet Muhammad and nearly a century after the definitive synthesis of al-Ghazali, who wrote the classic work, \textit{The Incoherence of the Philosophers} (\textit{Tahafut al-Falasifa}) – an endorsement of the Ash’ari theological consensus and a denunciation of the work of more innovative rationalists such as Muhammad al-Farabi (d. 950-51) and Ibn Sina (d. 1037). Ibn Rushd, who met Ibn al-Arabi in his youth, sought to refute al-Ghazali in his \textit{The Incoherence of the Incoherence} after his death in 1111 CE.\textsuperscript{15} This was the intellectual environment in which Ibn al-Arabi sought to establish his own contribution, one in which Aristotelianism, Platonism, and Neo-Platonism had profoundly influenced Islamic rationalism and Sufism, and in which all of the non-Islamic traditions had been challenged as antithetical to orthodoxy and faith. Whatever similarities exist with those non-Islamic trends was coincidental, because Ibn al-Arabi claimed his knowledge flowed directly from his openings, in Seville and later, in Mecca.

According to William Chittick, a major interpreter of Ibn al-Arabi whom Almond cites throughout this text, the Shaykh most probably regarded his project as distinct from other forms of Islamic thought of his era, as his son-in law and disciple Sadr al-din al-Qunawi (d. 1274) referred to it as the School of Realization (\textit{ma’ṣūbab al-tahqiq} – distinct from \textit{falsafa}, \textit{kalam}, and \textit{tasawwuf}). It was focused on the speaking, writing, teaching, affirmation and actualization of the Real/Reality. Like Islam itself, it was ontological and existential, rather than merely intellectual or epistemological. Many critics in the period between the 13th and 16th centuries, however, viewed his focus on "realization" as a misguided and dangerous effort to seek proximity to Allah. He held that everything – entity, creature, and soul – had its own truth (\textit{haqq}) appropriate to itself, and that knowledge about these realities could be attained directly through divine transmission. Secondary detail was acquired through conventional knowledge, often in imitation of other scholars. Allah’s Divine Essence manifests itself (\textit{Dhāt Allah}) by will, possibility, and necessity through the Breath of the Merciful (\textit{al-Nafas al-Rahmān}) as a "deployment of existence."
Humanity can only know "that It is" not "what It is." The "words" of Allah are renewed in continuously new forms every instant, with every breath, requiring a spiritual vigilance as to their trajectory. The quintessential human task is to bring one's own soul into harmony with the Real by striving to attain the characteristics of the Attributes (ṣifāt), with the life of the Prophet Muhammad as a model. Human beings are unique creatures as they have the power of naming (language). From Ibn Sina, Ibn al-Arabi accepted that our existence (wujūd) has its root meaning in "finding" and he described it by utilizing the image of Light (al-Nūr) as the preeminent metaphor, a force that through its own Self-Disclosure bestows existence upon all that it "illuminates" through its radiating effusion.\(^\text{16}\)

Were it not for Light, nothing whatsoever would be perceived (idrak), neither the known, nor the sensed, nor the imagined. The names of Light are diverse in keeping with the names of the faculties...smell, taste, imagination, memory, reason, reflection, conceptualization, and everything through which perception takes place are Light. As for the objects of perception...they possess manifestation to the perceiver, then they are perceived, and the manifestation is Light...Hence, every known thing has a relation to the Real, for the Real is Light. It follows that nothing is known but Allah.\(^\text{17}\)

Regarding this tradition of rationalism – derived from both the Qurʾan and the legacy of the Greeks, and challenged by those Muslims suspicious that an unbridled rationalism could shake the foundations of faith of ordinary Muslims – Ibn al-Arabi took a curious middle ground, insisting that revelation was a far more authentic and personally validated method of knowledge of Allah's infinitely variegated self-disclosure, made clearer and more accessible, however, by meticulous analysis. His bold claims that he was also experiencing periodic "openings" or revelations (jutūḥā) and imaginal visions (khayāl) that stimulated his use of rational understanding made him quite suspect to some Egyptians, who interpreted his claims as a blasphemous pretension to prophethood.\(^\text{18}\) In this sense, he reinforced al-Kindi (d. 873) of the Bayt al-Hikma academy in Baghdad, who had insisted that al-Haqq had to be experienced through a process of realization (al-ta'allūb). This climax of the Sufi path, in which the human both "finds" and loses (fanāʾ) its own identity in al-Haqq, Ibn al-Arabi called the sirr al-sirr (the Secret of Secrets). His reputation for exhaustive, penetrating knowledge from both intellectual and intuitive sources, and an encyclopedic familiarity with all manner of Islamic textual traditions made him quite a pivotal figure in medieval Islam and Sufism, especially in Damascus, where he settled in 1223 CE. Realization became an essential path of his epistemology, a contention about which western logicians such as Wittgenstein (and Derrida after him) could only remain silent.\(^\text{19}\)

Representations of the Real (al-Haqq) are remarkable if unreliable for both Derrida and Ibn al-Arabi, as is demonstrated in this passage from Fusus al-Hikem:
Try when you look at yourself in a mirror to see the mirror itself and you will find that you cannot do so... the recipient sees nothing other than his own form in the mirror of reality. He does not see the Reality itself, which is not possible; although he knows that he sees his [true form] in it. As in the case of a mirror and the beholder, he sees the form in it, but does not see the mirror itself... the analogy of the mirror is the closest and most faithful for a vision of a divine Self-revelation.

The images or texts/phrases which constitute our confusingly partial impressions of the truths we seek to know thereby mislead us. We are then caught in traps which prevent us from understanding. Derrida would say that after deconstruction unravels the perceptual knots holding our garments/structures together, we are then caught in an endless deferral of meaning from one vaguely conceived concept/word/orientation to another (differance), never arriving at any destination, save a certain emptiness: "dissemination endlessly opens up a snag (accroc) in writing that can no longer be mended." Ibn al-Arabi refers to a similar process as shifting from one veil to a deeper and more profound veil, from one divine Self-disclosure to another, until these "stations" collapse and fall away in realization that we are not truly separate from the source of these overwhelming images. His visionary companion, Ahmad al-'Assad al-Hariri exclaimed, "I am frightened and terrified lest I lose myself through what I see..."

For Derrida, this consternation may deliver us from illusions of certainty ("God deconstructs himself," in the confusion at Babel) but abandons us in limbo, at an edge of the knowable/unknowable. Almond elucidates this "confusion" by defining it as "flowing together" and cites the Hadith, "O Lord, increase my perplexity (al-ḥayra) concerning Thee." For the secular Derrida, "God's Secret is that there is no secret." In this sense, the two writers are most definitively not sending the same message. For Ibn al-Arabi, Allah's secret knowledge transforms life itself, and the self that "experiences" It, dissolves in realization of al-Ḥaqq. Ibn al-Arabi's inverted narration of Noah and the Flood is a parable of this, where Nuh pursues the safety of an Ark (of certainty) in the midst of a deluge of sinfulness/confusion. This inversion of the conventional reading of the Qur'an was an instrumental textual strategy deeply akin to that of Derrida. As Almond observes, both writers were considerably attuned to visions, dreams, ghosts, illusions, and disorientation. Izutsu's study of Ibn al-Arabi led him to the conclusion that the Shaykh al-Akbar perceived the "ontological ambiguity of all things."

Ibn al-Arabi sought to problematize conventional readings of the Qur'an, remarking that if a Muslim found the same meaning in reading it each time, she had profoundly misunderstood it: from the Qur'an: "Everything is new forever.” Thus, as Allah's self-disclosures proceed,
the reader's comprehension of its depths must also be transformed into ever-deepening interpretation. Surfaces are to be pierced, not preserved. Such machinic readings "conceal the radical unthinkability of God,"27 by offering pablum to preserve our ordinary lives from the challenge that the Qur’an poses to our selves and our socio-political and ethical aporias. Ibn al-Arabi reminds us that "Every existent thing finds in the Qur’an what it desires," whether that be "love for Zaynab, Su’ad, Hind, or Layla", or "money, status, position."28 Derrida similarly warned against clinging to anachronistic or regressive meanings of concepts or texts, despite possibly innovative, discordant interpretations.29 Ian Almond astutely notes that both thinkers sought to "restore an originary difficulty/darkness" in the texts and traditions they worked so exhaustively to explicate and transfigure.30

Derrida questions certain forms of orthodoxy by introducing the irrevocable choice (another binary?) between the rabbi and the poet, the literal and the lyrical. For him, the text could become an encounter with the "wholly other," not routinized iterations that reproduce the Same, ad nauseam. Difference becomes for Derrida, in reading a text or perceiving reality, an opening to an unpredictable semantic horizon that allows the reader to also become something or someone "else," or "an irruptive track...that breaks ground and constructs itself as it goes along."31 Similarly, Ibn al-Arabi wrote that "the root of all things is difference (tafrīqa). Were there no forms, no entity would become distinguished from any other."32

According to Almond, Ibn al-Arabi believed, like many Sufis, that the arrogance of intellectuals and scholars was a grave danger to the shari’a and the sunna. A humility and modesty in the presence of the Divine Essence were the only modes by which those seekers he most admired – the malamiyya/those who accept blame (although these were not the Syrian-based extreme ascetics who adopted this name in the 19th century) – were willing to be changed by destroying previous limits, yet only "ironically." These Ur-Sufis (arif or rend in Hafez’s poetry) would "keep their secrets to themselves," no matter how their passions or beliefs had been altered, and carry on their lives "as if nothing had happened." This totalizing transformation would remake the world and the self, "while seeming to leave everything intact."33

Derrida, in one of his last interviews, enigmatically confessed that he had "learned nothing" regarding "how to die" or even "how to live."34 He seems to imply far more than the obvious when describing floating signifiers:

...this discourse that doesn’t amount to much, is like all ghosts: errant. It rolls this way, and that, like someone who has lost his way...lost his rights, an outlaw, a pervert, a bad seed, a vagrant, and adventurer, a bum, wandering in the streets, he doesn’t even know who he is, what his name is...uprooted, anonymous, unattached...
to any house or country, this almost insignificant signifier is at everyone’s disposal, can be picked up by the competent and the incompetent, by those who nothing about it, can inflict all manner of impertinence upon it…

Ibn al-Arabi’s inverted tales from the Qur’an surprise us with new possibilities, just as Derrida does in his analysis of Abraham’s ethical dilemma when required to sacrifice his son Isaac in obedience to God. This challenge and Abraham’s response became a secret the Prophet was forced to keep from his own family and community, for this act was simultaneously a significant ethical act and, as in any duality, its opposite—a form of unimaginable cruelty to one’s own child, and even more dramatically, the progenitor of the Hebrews as the chosen people of the Covenant (although this is conceived differently for Jews and Muslims). Abraham must commit an act without knowing whether it is madness, a crime, or the highest form of obedience to God. This ethical aporia, Derrida argues, is much like other human choices for how to live an ethical life, one in which all the possible information for weighing a decision is never available.

For Derrida this *undecidability* is an impossible yet necessary condition nevertheless, somewhat akin to those decisions facing Muslims in Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Yemen, of whether to risk bloody conflagration in order to stand for justice against tyrants. Derrida saw a similar dilemma in the moral obligation to offer unconditional hospitality to foreigners/migrants/refugees. Such choices, like all choices for human beings must be made without clear guidance from the Qur’an or hadith, or any source, east or west. We are forced by necessity to face critical questions in our own space-time and we will surely suffer the consequences. Thus ethical dualities, like philosophical and spiritual ones, evaporate in the moment of decision, when despite our finite circumstances, and the partiality of the truths we seek to embody, we must make a move. Ali Shariati, the towering theorist of militant Islam in Iran in the 1960s called for a synthesis of Islamic political radicalism with the esoteric *Irfan* of Sufism, and often retreated to the desert near Mashhad for his own illuminations. Whether Ibn al-Arabi addressed or encountered this dilemma, is still to be determined.

Ian Almond admits that the two great thinkers he analyzes so perceptively in this book did not always practice the openness they preached. Both were highly conscious of the need to preserve their legacy from those that might corrupt, obfuscate (!), or distort it, and were far more uneasy with multiple interpretations of their own ideas than they were with the sacred texts or canons they interpreted so creatively themselves. Each had reason to do so, for Ibn al-Arabi has been saddled with the baggage of the Sufi doctrine of *al-wahdat al-wujud*, articulated by his followers and later scorned as problematic by millions of Muslims. Similarly, Derrida was forced to endure untold derision for the supposed absurdities of
postmodernism and relativism, whatever those cliches came to signify. Neither writer will be understood by future generations if readers rely on the rumor mill of history and critics’ summations of their complexity in cursory accounts such as my own or even Almond's. The Qur'an and the entire Islamic tradition must be read and considered carefully with an alertness to nuance as the reader matures, as Ibn al-Arabi and legions of others have so urgently reminded us. Ibn al-Arabi’s revelations remain open to those not satisfied with the consensus.

Reading Derrida carefully on Islam, however, can be very disconcerting indeed. Late in life, he published several pieces on religion and Islam/Islamism that included *Faith and Knowledge* (1996), *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (from lectures in 2002), and his conversation with Algerian Muslim philosopher Mustapha Cherif in *Islam and the West* (2004). In these works, Derrida asserted that certain forms of Islam or even Islam itself constitutes the “Other of Democracy” – not necessarily a condemnation, except that Derrida so effusively praised the “democracy to come” as the only political system that accepts its own historicity and self-criticism, and “the right to criticize...democracy in the name of a democracy to come.”

He writes, “Islam, or a certain Islam, would thus be the only religious or theocratic culture that can still, in fact or in principle, inspire and declare any resistance to democracy.”

Derrida also linked the Islamic “deficit” or “refusal” of democracy to premodern violence and a demographic threat:

> [E]verything that is hastily grouped to ‘Islam’ seems today to retain some sort of geopolitical or global prerogative, as a result of the nature of its physical violence, or certain of its declared violations of the democratic models and of international law (the Rushdie case and among others-and the right or literature), as a result of both the archaic and modern forms of its crimes in the ‘name of religion, as a result of its demographic dimensions, of its phallocentric and theological-political figures.

Derrida associated the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) with the gravest threat to democracy and asserted the seemingly absolute necessity to separate the political from the theological, in order to achieve the democracy to come, which he hoped would be universal. These clumsy associations of various “Islams” with anachronistic violence are not just failures to deconstruct absurd and dangerous binaries, but render Derrida an Orientalist with serious Islamophobic tendencies. That he also condemned Western wars, aggression against Muslims, Eurocentrism, and Americentrism, and called for religious freedom and the deconstruction of European constructs of Islam, hardly excuses these problematic positions.
Viennese philosopher and physicist Moritz Schlick, founder of the logical positivist school and the illustrious Vienna Circle (of scholars including Godel, Carnap, Wittgenstein, and Feyerabend, who were certainly not all adherents of logical positivism), once claimed, "There is no unfathomable mystery in the world." He and others in that milieu (such as Russell and Whitehead) sought to demolish metaphysics with a form of empirical demystification that so clearly expresses the scientific, rational worldview of the transparency of knowledge. Schlick was murdered in 1936, by a former student who blamed his anti-metaphysical positions for undermining his moral restraint. Traditions such as Islam, Sufism, and even Derrida's work of deconstruction can easily be regarded as "wholly other" to this predominant ethos underlying the crackpot realism of the West. For technical efficiency and making the missiles, drones, and iphones run on time, there has never been a better vehicle. For engaging with the secrets and aporias of life, or our spiritual struggle and ultimate destiny, it just won't do.

Following Ibn al-Arabi and Derrida into the thickets of duality, realization, and Divine Vastness is a daunting prospect. If we decide to move that way, we will have to decipher the "signs" where the Wholly Other lies just behind and beneath the familiar. Ian Almond’s *Sufism and Deconstruction* serves us well as a travelogue from that strange terrain. If binaries are thus far the tracks of human thought, then perhaps between or beyond them lay the secret aporias of *al-Ghayb Muṭallaqa*.

Richard Wood is a sociologist and political organizer originally from Appalachia. He currently lives on the Left Coast of the U.S. and is writing a history of Muslim resistance to Western imperialism. He has been active in anti-war, anti-racist, and Palestinian solidarity movements for years.

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2 Ibn al-Arabi was accused of unbelief by Ibn Taymiyya and his modernist Salafi disciples (despite Ibn Taymiyya’s and others’ admiration for the 15,000 page *Futuhat al-Makkiyya*), premodern Ash‘ari ‘ulama, Ibn Khaldun and Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi; and Derrida, by critics such as W.V.O. Quine, Searle, and Habermas for daring to challenge prevailing norms and assumptions in signification. Ibn Taymiyya equated al-Arabi’s innovative assertions in *Fusus al-Hikem* (*Bezels of Wisdom*) with unbelief for advocating the alleged doctrines of 1) the eternity of the world vs. creation; 2) incarnation of Allah in His creatures vs. monotheism, and 3) union
(ittiḥād) of Sufi saints with Allah. For Quine and Searle, Derrida was guilty of a lack of clarity, triviality, misunderstanding of basic concepts, incoherence, and for Habermas, a dangerous flirtation with apolitical aesthetics and irrationality. See Alexander D. Knysh, Ibn ‘Arabī in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam (New York: SUNY Press, 1999), 87-112; See the "Derrida Letter" to the University of Cambridge from nineteen philosophers opposed to awarding Derrida with an honorary doctorate there (www.ontology.buffalo.edu/smith/derridaletter.htm); Jacques Derrida, Limited Inc. (Northwestern University Press, 1977).

3 Ian Almond, Sufism and Deconstruction, 16-18.
6 Almond, Sufism and Deconstruction, 12.
7 Ibid., 30.
9 Caner Daglı, Ibn al-Arabi and Islamic Intellectual Culture: From Mysticism to Philosophy (Routledge Press, 2016), 3; Chittick, The Sufi Path; Almond, Sufism and Deconstruction, 56.
10 Almond, Sufism and Deconstruction, 19.
12 Ibid., 32, 27.
13 Cited in Almond, Sufism and Deconstruction, 14-15; Chittick, The Sufi Path, xiii.
14 Almond, Sufism and Deconstruction, 24, 26.
16 Almond, Sufism and Deconstruction.
18 On the imaginal as opposed to imaginary see Chittick, The Sufi Path, ix-x, 145-159.
19 Almond, Sufism and Deconstruction, 4; On Wittgenstein’s silence regarding what lies beyond his philosophical propositions once they have been “surmounted” see his Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (Routledge, 2001), 7, 188.
24 Almond, Sufism and Deconstruction, 66; On the profound difference between the two men’s “secret knowledge” see 113-115.
25 E.g. the hauntology of the innumerable ghosts in Marx’s writing as an inversion of his professed materialism. See Jacques Derrida, Specters of Marx (Routledge, 1993).
26 Cited in Almond, Sufism and Deconstruction, 74.
27 Ibid., 60.
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50 Almond, *Sufism and Deconstruction*, 28

51 Ibid., 81.


53 Ibid., 108-110.


59 Almond, *Sufism and Deconstruction*, 82-86.


64 Cherif and Derrida, “Islam and the West,” 42-45.

65 Despite his lack of serious attention to Islam Derrida was a mildly engaged advocate for the Palestinians, as I can attest from having urged him on in 2002, at a Stanford event, while watching him grapple awkwardly with polemics and performatics.


51 The Absolute Unseen/Depths.