# An Analysis of Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Tahānawī's Approach in *Kashshāf iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn* – The entry of *huwiyya*

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## Abstract

The erudite Indo-Ḥanafī lexicologist, Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn al-Qāḍī Muḥammad Ḥāmid ibn Muḥammad ibn Ṣābir al-Fārūqī al-Tahānawī (d. 1158/ 1745?), has hitherto been largely overlooked in Western scholarship. This, despite his lexical *magnum opus*, *Kashshāf iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn wa'l-ʿulūm al-islāmiyya*, being widely used by scholars in fields from philosophy to astronomy, and from metaphysics to mathematics. The present study inspects the *modus operandi* of this enigmatic lexicologist by taking a detailed entry, that of *huwiyya*, as a case study to excavate the approach and techniques used by the author to compile his work: What were his objectives? And how does he achieve them? Who were his audience? And how does he cater for them? These, and other, questions will be considered through the window of this entry.

*Keywords*: Al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn*, *huwiyya*, Arabic lexicography.

## Introduction

If history sometimes remembers the merits and contributions of scholars, it more often forgets them. Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Tahānawī, a lexicographer of remarkable stature and learning—as emblematised by his chef-d'œuvre, *Kashshāf iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn wa'l-ʿulūm al-islāmiyya*—is one such victim of historical amnesia. And yet his extraordinary work has, in recent times, exerted a quiet, but persistent, influence. This paper aims to introduce a lexicographer whose *magnum opus* has inspired many, whose erudition has assisted scores, but whose life and approach are known to but a few.

## Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Tahānawī

### Name

The full name of al-Tahānawī is: Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad Ḥāmid ibn Muḥammad ibn Ṣābir al-Fārūqī[1] al-Sunnī al-Ḥanafī al-Tahānawī.[1] Nevertheless, one finds other names, or abbreviations, in biographical works. There are four principle names by which he is known:

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1    Al-TAHĀNAWĪ, Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī, *Kashshāf iṣṭalaḥāt al-funūn wa'l-ʿulūm al-islāmiyya*, 1.

1. Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī
2. Muḥammad ibn Ṣābir al-Fārūqī al-Sunnī al-Ḥanafī al-Tahānawī
3. Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Jābir
4. Muḥammad ibn Aʿlā[2]

The most correct of these names, and the one by which he is most commonly known, is the full name listed above. The ascription (*nisba*) al-Fārūqī refers to al-Tahānawī's genealogy being traced to al-Fārūq, that is, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/644), the second caliph. The Fārūqī dynasty ruled the Khandesh region, which is the north western portion of Mahrashtra state, and became independent from Dehli after the death of Firoz Shah Tughlaq (d. 790/1388). It remained thus until the beginning of the eleventh/seventeenth century.[3]

Other ascriptions are axiomatic: al-Sunnī means he was a Sunni, specifically, a Ḥanafī, and was from the town of Thana Bawan, a small town close to Dehli. It is here that he remained his entire life, and it is here that he is buried.[4] Some renowned scholars who hail from the same town include: ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Tahānawī (d. 1223/1808?), Muḥammad ibn Ḥamd Allāh al-Tahānawī (d. 1296/1879?), his grandson, Aḥmad Allāh al-Tahānawī (d. unknown), and Imdād Allāh al-Fārūqī al-Tahānawī (d. unknown), among others.[5]

**Birth**

Much like most other facets of al-Tahānawī's life, the date of his birth is unknown. In the view of most historians, he was born towards the end of the eleventh/seventeenth century, but precise dates are not given.[6]

**Life**

Al-Tahānawī lived during the reign of the Mughals in India, specifically, Abu'l-Muzaffar Muḥyī al-Dīn Muḥammad (d. 1119/1707), commonly known as Aurangzeb.[7] The life and outlook of Aurangzeb is well-documented and falls beyond the purview of this paper. Nevertheless, it is worthy of mention that, due to Aurangzeb's religious conservatism and commission of the codification of the Ḥanafī school of Islamic jurisprudence in the form of *Fatāwā-e-ʿālamgīrī*,[8] as well as his construction of many Islamic schools (*madāris*), emphasis on learning Islamic sciences at this time was great and the prestige of scholars high.[9]

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2  Al-TAHĀNAWĪ, *Kashshāf*, ed. ʿAlī Daḥrūj, 32.

3  Ibid., 34.

4  *Arab Encyclopaedia*, s.v. "Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Tahānawī." <https://www.arab-ency.com/ar/ البحوث/التهانوي-محمد-علي> (accessed 28 February 2017).

5  Al-TAHĀNAWĪ, *Kashshāf*, ed. Daḥrūj, 33.

6  Ibid.

7  Ibid., *Arab Encyclopaedia*, s.v. "Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Tahānawī."

8  See BROWN 2007: 82–84, SCHIMMEL 2004: 54.

9  Al-TAHĀNAWĪ, *Kashshāf*, ed. Daḥrūj, 33.

Al-Tahānawī himself was raised in an academic and extremely religious household. His father was a renowned Islamic scholar, and was even regarded as the spiritual pole (*quṭb*) of his era.[10] The learned lexicographer mentions, in his preface of *Kashshāf*, that he learned Arabic and the traditional Islamic sciences from his widely respected father. After this, he spent a considerable amount of time—he does not specify how much— studying the more heterodox fields of natural philosophy (*al-ḥikma al-ṭabʿiyya*), metaphysics (*ilāhiyyāt*), and mathematics (*riyāḍa*), including arithmetic (*ʿilm al-ḥisāb*), geometry (*handasa*), and the functionality of astrolabes from books he owned.[11] He also became an authority in astronomy and Sufism.[12] Subsequent to completing his autodidactic learning, he began systematising and codifying all his knowledge in to one work that would serve as a comprehensive lexicon of all terms, finishing it, according to some scholars, in the year of his death.[13]

**Death**

While there is a consensus amongst historians that al-Tahānawī passed away after 1158/1745, there is some discrepancy as to what the exact year was. It has even been suggested, for instance, that he died much later in 1191/1777?[14] as there are legal edicts (*fatāwà*), treatises and official documents (*al-wathāʾiq al-rasmiyya*) up to this date that bear his signature, but none after.[15]

**Works**

Major works attributed to al-Tahānawī, besides his *magnum opus*, the *Kashshāf*, are: *Sabq al-ghāyāt fī nasq al-āyāt*, which is a commentary of the Qurʾan[16] and, the hitherto unpublished *Aḥkām al-arāḍī*, which is a nineteen-page juristic treatise with the following sections: *Fī bayān maʿnā dār al-Islām wa-dār al-ḥarb*, *Fī bayān aḥkām arāḍī dār al-Islām*, *Fī bayān anwāʿ al-arāḍī wa-aḥkāmihā*.[17] Some historians allege that al-Tahānawī also wrote other works on Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Sufism, theology (*kalām*), and philosophy. These attributions, however, have not been verified, though, given the humbling erudition displayed in the *Kashshāf*, it is entirely possible.[18]

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10   Ibid., 34.

11   Al-TAHĀNAWĪ, *Kashshāf*, 1: 1.

12   *Arab Encyclopaedia*, s.v. "Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Tahānawī."

13   Al-TAHĀNAWĪ, *Kashshāf*, ed. Daḥrūj, 33.

14   Al-RASHĪD 2001: 139; al-ʿALĀWINA 1998: 261-62.

15   Al-ʿALĀWINA 1998: 261-62.

16   Al-BAʿLABAKKĪ 1992: 144.

17   Al-TAHĀNAWĪ, *Kashshāf*, ed. Daḥrūj, 35.

18   *Arab Encyclopaedia*, s.v. "Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Tahānawī."

**Teachers and Students**

Despite the reign of Aurangzeb being a propitious time to be a Ḥanafī scholar, and that free-exchange of knowledge was pervasive amongst teachers and students of this jurisprudential school, no information exists as to the principal students of al-Tahānawī.[19] In terms of his main teachers, only one is named, and he is named by al-Tahānawī himself, and it is he from whom the lexicographer learned Arabic and the conventional sciences of *sharī'a*: his father.[20]

**Legacy**

That posterity is a fickle mistress and bestows favour with wanton caprice and wild abandon is something that is put into sharp relief by al-Tahānawī's consignment to the shadowy recesses of historical anonymity, when he was once regarded as one of the foremost scholars of the twelfth/eighteenth century.[21] Indeed, such was his renown that he was hailed as the "skilful (*barī'*) imam, *the* Indian language scholar (*bāḥith hindī lughawī*)", and one who was "knowledgeable in natural sciences and its nomenclature," by linguists and historians alike.[22] Some even panegyrised him as a "benefaction (*ḥasana*) from among other Indian benefactions."[23]

Yet centuries of literary dormancy and bibliothecal languishment could not efface the dazzling scholarship of al-Tahānawī, as paraded in the *Kashshāf*, which, though once forgotten, has now re-emerged as an indispensable source of lexicographical data, and is used by many contemporary academics in the varied fields of philosophical theology,[24] Qur'anic commentary,[25] sufism,[26] doctrinal beliefs,[27] and religion in general,[28] to name but a few. It is to al-Tahānawī's approach and *modus operandi* in this work that we now turn.

*Kashshāf iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn*

**Versions**

There are four principal versions of this work:

1.   The 1862 Calcutta edition by Jam'iyyat al-Bengāl, edited by Muḥammad Wajīh,

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19   Ibid.

20   Al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf*, 1: 1.

21   *Arab Encyclopaedia*, s.v. "Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Tahānawī."

22   Al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf*, ed. Daḥrūj, 34.

23   Ibid.

24   Morewedge (ed.) 1979: 235.

25   Abrahamov 1996: xvi.

26   Heer 1979: 72.

27   Haddad 1999: 21.

28   Smith 1991: 291.

‘Abd al-Ḥaqq and Ghulām Qādir. It is printed in two volumes, and has 1564 pages.

2. The 1899 Astana edition. It has 955 pages, but is incomplete, and covers only the letters from *ṣād* to *yāʾ*. It comes with a five-page addendum detailing all the errors in it.

3. The 1963 Egypt edition, edited by Luṭfī ‘Abd al-Badīʿ and ‘Abd al-Munʿim Muḥammad Ḥasanayn. It is printed in four volumes, but is incomplete, and covers only the letters from *ṣād* to *yāʾ*.

4. The 1995 Beirut edition by Dār Ṣādir. This is based on the Calcutta edition and is the source of modern reproductions of the text.[29]

**Approach**

Such is the vast scope of al-Tahānawī's work that it is sometimes difficult, not only to see the wood for the trees, but to see if there is even wood in the trees. ‘Alī Daḥrūj writes that, in his treatment of a term, al-Tahānawī includes the linguistic meaning (*al-dalāla al-lughawiyya*), the meaning derived from transmitted sources (the Qur'an and Ḥadīth) (*al-dalāla al-naqliyya*), the intellectually-derived meaning (*al-dalāla al-ʿaqliyya*), and the scientific meaning (*al-dalāla al-ʿilmiyya*).[30] Oftentimes, he punctuates his analysis with examples in order to illustrate his point. Furthermore, when conducive to conferring a deeper comprehension of a term, al-Tahānawī also avails himself of Persian citations, these grow in volume as his work progresses. He is also punctilious in stating the sources of all his citations, going as far, at times, as to impart biographical information on the authors.[31]

It may be observed, notes Daḥrūj, that al-Tahānawī's general approach orbits around three principal vertices:

1. *Arabic* – Under this general heading are subsumed the following ten fields: language (*lugha*), declension (*taṣrīf*), rhetoric (*maʿānī*), eloquence (*bayān*), usage of metaphors (*badīʿ*), prosody (*ʿarūḍ*), rhyme (*qawāfī*), syntax (*naḥw*), the science of the rules of writing (*ʿilm qawānīn al-kitāba*), and the science of reading (*ʿilm qawānīn al-qirāʾa*).

2. *Islamic Sciences* – Under this title are the fields of: theology (*kalām*), mainly Abū Ḥanīfa's (d. 150/772) *al-Fiqh al-akbar*, and especially concepts pertaining to God's unity (*tawḥīd*) and Attributes (*ṣifāt*); Qur'anic commentary (*tafsīr*); Qur'anic recitation (*qirāʾa*); the chain of transmission (*isnād*); Ḥadīth; principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*); jurisprudence (*fiqh*); inheritance law (*farāʾiḍ*); and Sufism.

3. *Intellectually-derived Sciences* – Under this general section are: logic (*manṭiq*), metaphysics, mathematics, natural sciences.[32]

So these are the fundamental pillars upon which al-Tahānawī constructs the edifice of his analysis.

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29  Al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf*, ed. Daḥrūj, 36.

30  Ibid., 38.

31  Ibid.

32  Ibid., 40.

**Objectives**

The keen reader cannot fail to ascertain the sheer breadth of learning on display in the work. But what is it that drove al-Tahānawī to produce this work? And who is his primary audience? The answer to both is the same: the autodidact. Al-Tahānawī intimates as much in his own words:

> The thing that is needed most in acquiring [knowledge of] recorded disciplines (*al-ʿulūm al-mudawwana*)[33] and fields that are predominantly [taught] among teachers, is [dispelling] the incomprehensibility of specialised terms. This is because each specialised term (*iṣṭilāḥ*) has [a particularity] that is specific to it (*khāṣṣ bihī*), which, if not known, makes it difficult for the lawgiver to guide to his path and is a proven source of not understanding him. The way to learn about them [*sc.* the terms] is to have recourse to them [*sc.* teachers] or to books in which the specialised terms are compiled … and I have not found any books that encompass the specialised terms of all the disciplines that are prevalent among people, and others besides. So the [sense that the] time to author a comprehensive work filled my heart, [one] that would cover the specialised terms of all disciplines, and which would be sufficient for a student such that they would not need to have recourse to teachers, as, after the student has learned Arabic, he would not need them, except if he seeks to establish a chain of transmission (*sanad*) to them, as a source of blessing (*tabarrukan*), and voluntarily.[34]

So it is the autodidact that al-Tahānawī seeks to guide by authoring his lexicon because, not only does he appreciate the full complexity and significance of terms, which, as Josef van Ess makes clear, have their own realities[35] "that [are] specific to [them]," and which they offer up only grudgingly, but also because he recognises that the first obstacle the autodidact faces, the first hurdle he must clear, is that of understanding terms. If he fails in this, then his journey is finished before it has even begun, as it "makes it difficult for the lawgiver to guide to his path."

Al-Tahānawī identifies two means by which seekers of knowledge may become fully apprised of the realities of terms, which, as he mentioned, are propaedeutic to gaining expertise in any discipline: teachers and books. Not everyone may have recourse to the former, after all, he never did after he diversified following his primary, patriarchal instruction. And there was a yawning paucity in the availability of the latter, as he bemoans, which is why the compulsion to remedy this situation "filled my heart." *Kashshāf*, then, endeavours to fill the instructional lacunae left by a lack of credible teachers, it seeks to be so sensitive to, and proficient in, explicating terms that it "would be sufficient for a student such that they would not need to have recourse to teachers."

Now, if the primary conduits to knowledge, as al-Tahānawī identifies, are teachers and books, then it is axiomatic that the result of such instruction must also be bifurcated.

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33  This refers to disciplines such as morphology (*ṣarf*), grammar (*naḥw*), logic (*manṭiq*), an so on, as al-Tahānawī makes clear in his introduction.

34  Al-TAHĀNAWĪ, *Kashshāf*, 1: 1.

35  VAN ESS (trans. TODD) 2006: 10-11.

Indeed, this is the case. So the autodidact is not the institutionally-trained student, and the institutionally-trained student not the autodidact, which conduces to a difficulty in their classification, as al-Tahānawī is the first to acknowledge. He writes:

> Know that scholars differ, so it is said that it is not a stipulation for a person to be regarded as a scholar (*ʿālim*) to have knowledge with proof [of acquisition],[36] and it is said that that is a stipulation, such that if one acquires knowledge without proof, he is called a "relator" [of knowledge] (*ḥākī*), and not a scholar. [37]

It is telling that the lexicographer addresses this issue before any other in his introduction. He is keenly cognisant of the implications of autodidacticism in scholarly circles, and the penchant to dismiss those who have garnered knowledge in such a manner as bookish dilettantes. Yet he does not disregard the opinion out of hand, though, from his biography, and his aims for *Kashshāf*, it is self-evident where his proclivities lie. Instead, al-Tahānawī embarks upon an investigation as to what knowledge actually is, how it may be classified, and what it means to be "knowledgeable," his treatment of this issue is as conspicuous for its discernment and perspicacity as it is for its even-handedness and neutrality. Al-Tahānawī remarks:

> The word "knowledge" (*ʿilm*) is used to mean three things … it literally means comprehension (*idrāk*), or the faculty (*malaka*) that results in comprehension and is the means of its preservation, or those things that are related to (*mutaʿallaq*) comprehension, which are [specific] issues (*masāʾil*) [that foster understanding].[38]

There are three ways, then, of viewing knowledge: as understanding of a subject matter (*idrāk*) in general terms, as having the aptitude for, and the capacity to master, a particular topic (*malaka*), or—a bottom-up approach—where being aware of examples allows one to gain a holistic appreciation of what the subject is. Al-Tahānawī conducts a detailed inquiry into the relative merits and shortcomings of each denotation of knowledge with his distinctive detachment. His final word on the issue is dismissive of the conduits of knowledge and hones in on manifestations of knowledge alone. He concludes his discussion thus:

> Calling someone a jurist (*faqīh*), or a grammarian (*naḥwī*), or a physician is an allusion (*kināya*) to his expertise in that field, so it is as if he has mastered it completely. And generally, the faculty (*malaka*) to acquire knowledge is not [the same as] knowledge. The debate surrounding whether the faculty to summon most of the issues (*masāʾil*), along with the faculty to acquire the rest, is only whether this constitutes knowledge or not. So whoever wishes to confer [the title of] "jurist" upon imams literally, despite their inability to answer issue some religious edicts (*fatāwā*), adheres to this. As for what we follow—that the conferral [of this title] is metaphorical—it does not require this.

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36   Al-Tahānawī refers to a formal authorisation (*ijāza*) or a chain of transmission (*sanad*), as is evident from his discussion.

37   Al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf*, 1: 2.

38   Ibid.

Al-Tahānawī is adamant that the capacity to acquire knowledge cannot be equivalent to, or synonymous with, having knowledge. As for whether mastery of a subject matter entails mastery of every instance of its application, such as in the field of jurisprudence, al-Tahānawī adopts the latitudinarian (and pragmatic) view that it does not, as long as one knows many of the issues of the discipline, and has learned the principles from which individual rulings or judgements may be derived.

Al-Tahānawī's has spilled considerable ink on this matter, his interest in and concern for it emanates, not only from the manner in which his long-distance, self-study students will be viewed, but also from the manner in which he himself is viewed, having gained much of his knowledge in the way he advocates throughout his work. His final analysis, pivoting the limelight from modes of knowledge acquisition to the modes of knowledge manifestation, is a subtle, but deliberate, venture in recalibrating societal scholastic formalisms.

## Merits

*Kashshaf*'s eminence rests, not only on al-Tahānawī's encyclopaedic erudition, but also on his intense predilection for classification. He taxonomises and divides all facets of knowledge and the terms associated with them, and this compartmentalisation leaves a strong impression in the mind of the reader. One perceives vestiges of this acute affinity for and attachment to systemisation in the introduction where al-Tahānawī ramifies knowledge first into theoretical (*naẓariyya*) or practical (*ʿamaliyya*)[39] then into whether they are instrumental (*āliya*) in gaining knowledge of other sciences, such as knowledge of Arabic grammar, which is necessary for comprehending Qurʾanic commentary (*tafsīr*), or whether the discipline is an end in itself (*ghayr āliya*).[40] Subsequent to this, he probes parts (*ajzāʾ*) of knowledge which he segregates into subject (*mawḍūʿ*), issues (*masāʾil*) and foundations (*mabādiʾ*).[41] After this, he proceeds to the eight isagogical headings of any work (*ruʾūs al-thamāniya*).[42] These are: benefit (*manfaʿa*); aim (*gharaḍ*); reason for title [of the book](*sima*); author or compiler [of the book] (*muṣannif/ muʾallif*); which categeory of knowledge it is (*min ayy ʿilm huwa*), that is, knowledge that pertains to certainties (*yaqīniyyāt*) or speculations (*ẓanniyyāt*), knowledge that pertains to theories (*naẓariyyāt*) or sciences (*ʿilmiyyāt*), and knowledge that pertains to religious laws (*sharʿiyyāt*) or not; rank [of the book] (*martaba*); division (*qisma*), that is, the different parts of a book; and modes of instruction (*anḥāʾ al-taʿlīmiyya*). At this point al-Tahānawī begins to catalogue individual sciences, and then the sub-sciences that are their off-shoots.[43]

The trajectory of his increasingly focussed gazed, homing in on ever more specialised branches of knowledge is rectilinear and distinct. Nor is this the only way in which he succours the autodidact: his style is concise and perspicuous, the alphabetical organisation

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39    Ibid., 3.

40    Ibid.

41    Ibid., 4.

42    For more details on the eight headings, see Robert WISNOVSKY 2013: 189-90.

43    Al-TAHĀNAWĪ, *Kashshāf*, 1: 10-11.

of the work easy and welcoming. Moreover, if a term requires foreknowledge of another discipline, al-Tahānawī will say as much in his prefatory remarks so as to circumvent losing the reader later on.[44] A profound sensitivity, then, does this work display to the numerous and inevitable problems associated with autodidacticism and attempts to dispel them in an anticipatory fashion.

Another feature of *Kashshāf* that strikes the reader almost immediately is its heavy emphasis on Islamic law. Al-Tahānawī was the son of a prominent legal expert[45] and his work, which is punctuated with recurrent and detailed digressions into this arena, bears an indelible imprint of his proficiency in this sphere. Indeed, his introduction concludes with a moral judgment, interpreted through the prismatic lens of jurisprudence (*fiqh*), on the various kinds of knowledge. He begins, as is his wont, with a general classification of knowledge, which he divides into praiseworthy (*maḥmūda*) and blameworthy (*madh-mūma*). Thereafter, he explores further and interrogates the numerous kinds of praiseworthy knowledge. He remarks that they are either an individual obligation (*farḍ ʿayn*) or a communal obligation (*farḍ kifāya*). The most well-known tradition on the former is then adduced, which runs: "Seeking knowledge is an obligation (*farīḍa*) upon every Muslim man and woman."[46] Al-Tahānawī explains that, unsurprisingly, each proponent of a discipline believes this tradition refers to their field specifically:

> Scholars disagree as to which [kind of] knowledge it is an obligation to seek. So the theologians say it is theology (*kalām*), and the jurists say it is jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and the Qurʾanic commentators and Ḥadīth experts say it is Qurʾanic commentary (*tafsīr*) and prophetic traditions [respectively] since it is with these that all types of knowledge may be accessed. Some of them [that is, scholars] say it refers to knowledge of the servant [of God], in terms of his state (*ḥāl*) and station (*maqām*) vis-à-vis God, the Exalted.[47] And it is said that it is knowledge [gained] with sincerity and by annihilating the self. And it is said that it is esoteric knowledge (*ʿilm al-bāṭin*). And the Sufis say that it is knowledge of Sufism. Then, again, it is said that it is what he, [that is, the Prophet] upon him be peace, referred to when he said, "Islam is based on five things."[48] They are also those who aver that it means that which God has enjoined upon His servants, in terms of decrees relating to beliefs and knowledge. And it is said in *al-Sirājiyya*[49] that seeking knowledge that is

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44    Ibid., 2.

45    See above.

46    I have been unable to locate the tradition, as al-Tahānawī cites it. There is a Ḥadīth that is identical to the one he mentions, but with "believing woman" (*muslima*) omitted at the end. It is recorded in IBN MĀJA, *Sunan*, 1: 151; al-BAZZĀR, *Musnad*, 1: 172, among others.

47    The difference between a "state" (*ḥāl*) and a "station" (*maqām*) is a temporal one: the former alludes to a condition that is transitory, whereas the latter denotes something more permanent, as al-Tahānawī himself explains under the entry for "station" (*maqām*). Al-TAHĀNAWĪ, *Kashshāf*, 3: 1227.

48    This refers to the immensely famous tradition which states that Islam is founded on five "pillars:" faith, prayer, alms-giving, fasting and pilgrimage. It is recorded in numerous Ḥadīth compilations, including: al-BUKHĀRĪ, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1: 8; MUSLIM B. AL-ḤAJJĀJ, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1: 34.

49    This refers to *al-Fatāwā al-Sirājiyya* by Sirāj al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad ʿAlī ibn ʿUthmān al-Taymī al-Ḥanafī (d. 569/1173).

commensurate with what is absolutely necessary, such as the rules of ritual ablution (*wuḍūʾ*) and prayer (*ṣalāh*), and all [quotidian] ritual laws, and matters pertaining to [social] life, is an obligation, what is beyond that is not an obligation: if he learns it, it is better [for him], if he leaves it, he is not sinful.[50]

The primary impression left by this fabulously large bandwidth of opinions is its comprehensiveness. Al-Tahānawī fastidiously name-checks every opinion he could possibly bring to bear on the interpretation of this tradition. The reason for this is clear: his work runs the entire gamut all these interpretations, it goes from Qurʾan to Ḥadīth, from jurisprudence to Sufism, and from theology to sociology. What al-Tahānawī says, through presentation of such an exhaustive list of opinions, in essence, is that no matter what the interpretation of the tradition is, and it is likely all of them, his work has it covered.

Al-Tahānawī, having effectively dealt with individual obligation (*farḍ ʿayn*), turns his attention to illustrations of communal obligations (*farḍ kifāya*); here, too, consensus remains elusive. He begins with the study of medicine, which, in the opinion of some scholars, is a communal obligation as it is a requirement for responsible stewardship of the body. Other jurists, like Sirāj al-Dīn, nevertheless, attach far less importance to this and pronounce it to be recommended (*mustaḥab*) only.[51] There are those scholars who believe that knowledge of arithmetic, commensurate with the necessities of deciphering bequests (*waṣāyā*) and inheritance (*mīrāth*), is a communal obligation. Whereas, others still, deem knowledge of fatwas to be in this category.[52] Again, we note, not only al-Tahānawī's familiarity with Ḥanafī jurisprudence manuals, but his intellectual egalitarianism: he does not overtly champion one opinion over another or obtrude his opinions upon his readers; rather, he maintains a scholarly distance and showcases all the opinions with the objective insouciance of an indifferent man of letters.

Having investigated the different kinds of praiseworthy knowledge, al-Tahānawī's attention and keen intellect converge upon types of blameworthy knowledge. He writes that, according to *al-Fatawa al-tātarkhāniyya*,[53] knowledge of magic (*siḥr*), tattooing (*nīlanjāt*) and talisman-making (*ṭalsamāt*), astrology (*ʿilm al-nujūm*), and others, are blameworthy. This is yet another exemplification of al-Tahānawī's deep acquaintance with Ḥanafī law manuals and his fiercely methodical *modus operandi*, which bifurcates a general topic, then follows each sub-section until they are exhausted, after which point, the same procedure is followed for the other branch.

## Weaknesses

Such is the breadth and depth of learning, the coherent and concise presentation of entries, the judicious and scholarly objectivity of this work, that to mention weaknesses is to split hairs. Yet, for all its merits in the Arabic entries, *Kashshāf* is not without its weaknesses in

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50  Al-TAHĀNAWĪ, *Kashshāf*, 1: 51.

51  Ibid.

52  Ibid.

53  This manual of Ḥanafī jurisprudence is written by ʿĀlim ibn ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn d. 800/1398?

the Persian, says Daḥrūj.[54] Indeed, he avers that al-Tahānawī's expression in this language is ponderous, and his ineptitude conspicuous, with phraseology ranging from nonidiomatic to scandalous, especially owing to the volume of Urdu words that are used instead of Persian.[55] However, even a cursory analysis of the entries in Persian casts serious doubt on this view, since, not only does al-Tahānawī display a firm grasp of Persian: both in expression and grammar, but his prose is as concise and stately as its Arabic counterpart. Nevertheless, there is a difference between al-Tahānawī's Arabic entries and his Persian ones, for the latter are few, and their treatment perfunctory. Thus, though it may be inaccurate that al-Tahānawī was not proficient in this tongue, it is correct that he does not take the Persian facet as seriously as he does the Arabic.

If the redoubtable erudition and scope of *Kashshāf* is discernible—with the total number of entries being approximately 2343, depending on how they are enumerated, as some entries may be classified as being part of a broader definition, or may be considered to be independent[56]—so too are the limits. As, in the general alphabetical construction of *Kashshāf*, lexical lacunae are present, significant terms that al-Tahānawī, for all his punctiliousness, still omits.[57] Yet, to charge any lexicographer with cataloguing every important term appears as tyrannical as it is unreasonable. *Kashshāf*, thus, may have notable cavities, but they are scarce, and, in the overall schema of the work, inconsequential.

At this point, it would be instructive, I believe, to showcase the approach of al-Tahānawī through his surgical diachronic analysis of a term—*huwiyya*—so as to furnish the reader with an illustration of his methodology in *Kashshāf*.

### Huwiyya

If it is true that to take one entry, however detailed, as elucidative of a three-volume work, is to overreach and essentialise, it is also true that one may still use it as suggestive of the author's overall method and approach. For though it may not divulge every contour of the text, yet it may still faintly adumbrate the vague topology. It is this latter objective that the present paper seeks to achieve.

The significations of *huwiyya*, the third-person abstract noun from *huwa* (he), and a term that superseded the apodictically inadequate *mawjūd* (present) in Arabic translations of Hellenistic writings, have been well-documented.[58] First seen in the works of Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī's (d. 259/ 873) circle,[59] the consanguinity of the term with the abstract noun *anniyya* and their use as translations of the Greek words *on* ("being") and *einai* ("to be") are established.[60] This study, nevertheless, does not seek to perambulate the well-trodden

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54   Al-TAHĀNAWĪ, *Kashshāf*, ed. Daḥrūj, 43.

55   Ibid.

56   Ibid., 40.

57   Ibid., 39.

58   See *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. "*Huwiyya*;" ADAMSON 2002: 125-56; MASSIGNON 1982, 3: 8; WALZER 1963: 5-9.

59   ADAMSON 2002: 125.

path of the etymology of the term, as observed by numerous Western scholars; rather, it inspects al-Tahānawī's presentation of it, to disinter his style and methodology.

Examination of al-Tahānawī's exhaustive treatment of *huwiyya* exhibits the way in which he chaperones the would-be autodidact, much like himself, through the many evolutions and denotations of the term to arrive at a holistic comprehension that is steeped in diachronic complexity and utilitarian nuance. He begins by stating that *huwiyya*

> … is a term of individuality that is known among the scholars and theologians. It may be applied to external existence (*al-wujūd al-khārijī*) or to a particularised quiddity (*māhiyya maʿl-tashakhkhuṣ*), and it is the partial reality (*al-ḥaqīqa al-juzʾiyya*), as is written in *Sharḥ al-tajrīd wa'l-khayālī*.[61]

Al-Tahānawī opens by acknowledging the prominence of this term among the scholars and theologians. Indeed, *huwiyya*, being a direct descendant of the Hellenistic tradition,[62] entered the Arabic tradition early and was embraced whole-heartedly such that it became part of the quotidian nomenclature of Arabic philosophers.[63] Al-Tahānawī then cites a definition that complies with his assessment that it is a term, essentially, denoting individuality. The term, nonetheless, according to *Sharḥ al-tajrīd wa'l-khayālī*, may be applied to (a) something that has "external existence" (*al-wujūd al-khārijī*) or (b) "a particularised quiddity" (*māhiyya maʿl-tashakhkhuṣ*).

The term "external existence" (*al-wujūd al-khārijī*) requires some scrutiny: al-Tahānawī himself supplies a comprehensive definition of what he means by this term in this *chef-d'œuvre*. He remarks:

> Both actually and intellectually existent [things] are used to mean two things, as is written in some of the footnotes of *Sharḥ al-maṭāliʿ*. One of them is that [an] externally existent thing (*al-mawjūd al-khārijī*) is that which may be described as being existent outside the intellect, and something that is intellectually existent is what is described as being existent in the intellect….

The second of them is that the externally existent thing is that which is described as having pure existence (*wujūd aṣīl*), it is the source of effects (*maṣdar al-āthār*) and the manifestation of [divine] decrees (*maẓhar al-aḥkām*), irrespective of whether the place of the characterisation is the intellect or external to it. The intellectually existent thing (*al-mawjūd al-dhihnī*), [on the other hand,] is that which is described by shadowy existence (*wujūd ẓillī*), and that characterisation cannot be but in the intellect.[64]

Al-Tahānawī informs us that a binary distinction may be conferred upon all existents: external existence or intellectual existence. However, this categorisation itself may refer to one of two things: either it is a positional articulation, denoting whether an existent is in the

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60  Ibid., 126.

61  Al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf*, 3: 1539.

62  It could also have been a loan-word based on the Syriac *hāywā*. See Adamson 2002: 219, ft. 30; Lizzini 2003: 117.

63  See above.

64  Al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf*, 3: 1457.

intellect or outside of it; or it is an ontological classification, designating whether a thing has actual, physical existence in the sensible realm, or whether it is relegated to the obscurities of an incorporeal existence, having only a "shadowy existence."

Al-Tahānawī seems to be saying that *huwiyya* is applied to anything with external existence, or to a particularised quiddity. Yet he may be using "external existence" as a synonym of "particularised quiddity." Therefore, al-Tahānawī would be explicating that everything which exists in the world is a particular with a certain essence or quiddity. In either case, *huwiyya* signifies the individuality of that thing. This is its most basic meaning,[65] and it is with which al-Tahānawī launches his investigation.

The citation is concluded with the ambiguous declaration that *huwiyya* is "the partial reality" (*al-ḥaqīqa al-juzʾiyya*). This means that *huwiyya* denotes an essence not as a universal, but in its concrete existence in a particular thing; it is the universal reality (*ḥaqīqa*) as particularised, in a *juzʾī* manner, rather than in an universal (*kullī*) one.[66] This is conveyed by the context and corroborated by al-Tahānawī's pronouncement that reality (*ḥaqīqa*) can connote "quiddity (*māhiyya*), meaning what makes a thing what it is, and it is also called "being" (*dhāt*). [But] the reality (*ḥaqīqa*) with this meaning, is more general than [categorisations of] universal (*kulliya*) or partial (*juzʾiyya*)."[67] Quiddity (*māhiyya*), then, is more general because it denotes everything that "makes a thing what it is," as opposed to *huwiyya*, which merely expresses its individuality.

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65   For a detailed analysis of "basic" and "relational" meanings, see Izutsu 1998: 18-26.

66   The concept of a partial reality is very prominent in Shiite prophetology, where the Muḥammadan reality (*al-ḥaqīqa al-Muḥammadiyya*) is seen as absolute prophecy, and the prophecy of all prophets and esoteric prophecy of all imams after the first, are viewed as partial realities of this absolute prophecy. See Corbin 2014: 42-3. The partial reality, when applied to God, may also denote His individual Names such as the Rewarder, the Punisher etc. as elucidated by Shāh Walī Allāh (d. 1176/1762) (Ansari 1988: 208.) Al-Tahānawī, nevertheless, does not use *al-ḥaqīqa al-juzʾiyya* in this sense. According to him, the term conveying this kind of meaning of incompleteness would be "the limited reality" (*al-ḥaqīqa al-qāṣira*). He comments that it is a term denoting partialness, and goes on to explicate it with the example of the juristic term "obligation" (*wujūb*). He writes:

> Obligation (*wujūb*) is a term for the permissibility of doing something as well as the imper-missibility of not doing it. So if it is used in the sense of a recommendation (*nadb*), which is a term for the permissibility of doing something along with an approval for doing it; or, if it is used in the sense of permissibility (*ibāḥa*), which is acceptability of doing something or not doing it, then, according to some, it is a limited reality because each of the two meanings is implied in the meaning of obligation.

He is more concise a little later when he writes:

> Obligation (*wujūb*) is permissibility of doing something along with the impermissibility of not doing it, permissibility (*ibāḥa*) is the acceptability of doing or not doing something, and recommendation (*nadb*) is the approval of doing something along with the permissibility of not doing it. (Al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf*, 1: 334.)

For a list of Islamic legal terms and their meanings, see al-Miṣrī, *ʿUmda*, trans. Keller 1994: 13. – The significations of recommendation (*nadb*) and permissibility (*ibāḥa*), then, are subsumed in that of obligation (*wujūb*). However, says al-Tahānawī, if only these are referred to, then they would be limited realities as recommendation (*nadb*) and permissibility (*ibāḥa*) do not impart the impermissibility not doing something—which is also part of the definition of obligation.

67   Al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf*, 1: 331.

Al-Tahānawī continues his definition of *huwiyya*:

> In *Kashf al-lughāt*, it states that *huwiyya* is a rank of pure being (*al-dhāt al-baḥta*) and alludes to the rank of unity (*aḥadiyya*) and divinity (*lāhūt*) … and it refers to the absolute being (*al-dhāt al-muṭlaqa*). It is said in *al-Insān al-kāmil* that the *huwiyya* of the Truth is His essence, which cannot be manifested except in terms of all the Names and attributes, so it is as if it is an allusion to the inner aspect of oneness (*wāḥidiyya*).[68]

*Huwiyya*, according to *Kashf al-lughāt*, is therefore "pure being" (*al-dhāt al-baḥta*), which combines unity (*aḥadiyya*) and divinity (*lāhūt*). This, we are informed is "absolute being" (*al-dhāt al-muṭlaqa*), what al-Tahānawī describes in another section as "true existence" (*al-wujūd al-ḥaqīqī*), which is "existence that exists of its itself, necessary (*wājib*) in its self."[69] It is interesting to note that al-Tahānawī goes from articulating *huwiyya*, as a term for mundane particulars, to a designation for God.

There is a patent leap here that he doesn't even seem to acknowledge. The reason for this is that al-Tahānawī traces a reverse trajectory from the effect, which is external existence, to its cause: God. This is clear in his analysis of quiddity (*māhiyya*)[70] as, directly after mentioning the quiddity of existents, he remarks, "The agent (*fāʿil*) is He, on account of whom, a thing is externally existent."[71] Al-Tahānawī illustrates his point saying:

> Man, for example, only becomes man, distinguished from that which he is not, because of the Agent (*fāʿil*). And his coming into being is necessary, as a non-existent [entity] cannot be man and, furthermore, cannot be distinguished from that which he is not.[72]

Returning to al-Tahānawī's definition of *huwiyya*, we see he uses the term "*lāhūt*" (divinity) as a synonym of "*aḥadiyya*" (unity) in this designation. Here *aḥadiyya* plainly refers to God. However, at other times, al-Tahānawī seems to question such a clear-cut definition, such as when he cites Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jāmī's (d. 898/1492) commentary of Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ʿArabī's (d. 634/1240) *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, in which the latter discloses the reality of *aḥadiyya*. He writes:

> The realities, according to the Sufis, are three. The first is an absolute reality (*ḥaqīqa muṭlaqa*). [It is the reality of] one lofty Agent (*faʿʿāla wāḥida ʿāliya*) [who is] necessarily existent in His being (*wājiba wujūduha bi-dhātihā*), and that is the reality of God, be He praised. The second is a contingent (*muqayyad*), passive (*munfaʿila*), lowly (*sāfila*) reality, accepting existence from the necessary reality through [His] outpouring (*fayḍ*) and manifestation (*tajallī*), and that is the reality of the Cosmos. The third is the unified reality (*ḥaqīqa aḥadiyya*) that combines the absolute and the contingent, the active and the passive, the influencer and the

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68   Ibid., 3: 1539.

69   Ibid., 3: 1456.

70   See above.

71   Al-TAHĀNAWĪ, *Kashshāf*, 1: 332.

72   Ibid., 1: 331-32.

influenced. So it is absolute in a sense and contingent in another, active in a sense and passive in another. This reality of unity thus combines both realities.[73]

Existence, therefore, is not only either necessary—that of God—or contingent—that of the Cosmos, but something in between the two as well, one that is absolute in one sense but contingent in another.[74] This is the existence of the Perfect Man,[75] as is evident from Ibn ʿArabī's bezel of Adam in his *Fuṣūṣ*.[76] *Lāhūt*, it appears, is bereft of the ambiguity of *aḥadiyya*, for al-Tahānawī writes that "according to the Sufis, it is the life that pervades [all] things."[77] By this statement, al-Tahānawī seems to be alluding to the doctrine of qualified monism espoused by Ibn ʿArabī and his followers.[78]

After citing different sources and their interpretations of *huwiyya*, al-Tahānawī proceeds to unobtrusively give his view of it, commenting:

> In my opinion, it is as though it is not in the domain of a name, description, rank, attribute, or an absolute being without reference to the Names and attributes; rather, *huwiyya* is an allusion to all this together and individually. Its purpose is to denote

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73  Ibid., 1: 333. For a detailed discussion on Jāmī's take on the Perfect Man, who combines both these realities, see CHITTICK 1979.

74  For a detailed account of the all-encompassing nature of man, as promulgated in the metaphysics of Ibn ʿArabī, see CHITTICK 1982: 110.

75  The most important work on this concept, and the one chiefly responsible for its dissemination, is that of ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 812/1408?). However, it must be noted that al-Jīlī's conception of the Perfect Man differs slightly to that of Ibn ʿArabī. See al-JĪLĪ, *al-Insān al-kāmil*. For an in-depth analysis of the Perfect Man, as conceived of by al-Jīlī, see NICHOLSON 1994: 77-272.

76  See IBN ʿARABĪ, *Fuṣūṣ*, 58-67. It must be remarked here that although al-Jāmī seems not to make the distinction explicit here, Ibn ʿArabī maintains that there is still an indissoluble difference between the existence of God, who is truly necessarily existent and the Perfect Man, who can never be this. See IBN ʿARABĪ, *Fuṣūṣ*, 1: 54. The concept of the Perfect Man, though it existed before Ibn ʿArabī, in the works of Avicenna, for instance, was not a comprehensive theory until the Andalusian. (See HEATH 1992: 187.)

77  Al-TAHĀNAWĪ, *Kashshāf*, 3: 1312.

78  The distinction must be made here between the metaphysics of Ibn ʿArabī and the pantheism of which he is accused. This distinction is deftly articulated by Collinson et al. who write, "Ibn Arabi's central doctrine of the Unity of Being … is probably best approached by first making clear what it is not. In asserting a unity of being he was not espousing a pantheism in which God and the universe are taken to be identical. Nor has his doctrine anything to do with philosophical monism, nor even, it is maintained, with pantheism … Such beliefs would certainly have been unacceptable to orthodoxy … In Ibn Arabi's doctrine, God is always transcendent and is never contained by the universe. He declares God to be eternal, infinite, the cause of all things and manifest in every thing … The unity of being Ibn Arabi affirms is 'the integration of paradoxes and ontological contrasts … the union of all the diverse qualities which characterize the order of multiplicity.'" COLLINSON / PLANT / WILKINSON 2000-: 53. Indeed, we need only to look at what Ibn ʿArabī himself says on this issue to be convinced that whatever his metaphysics is, pantheism it is not. He states, "Do not fall in the blasphemous error of the sect called *Ḥulūliyya* (incarnationists), who believe that another soul, even another being, can be infused into them. Know that He is never in anything, nor is anything in Him." (IBN ʿARABĪ, *The One Alone*, trans. BAYRAK 1997: 234.)

innerness and hiddenness (*ghaybūba*). It is derived from the word "he" (*huwa*), which connotes that which is not present.[79]

In al-Tahānawī's opinion, then, *huwiyya* is an all-encompassing term that refers to all facets of the inner aspect of something, an aspect that is not in plain sight and cannot be referred to directly. He arrives at this conclusion based on a linguistic breakdown of the term, which, he says, is derived from the third person pronoun: he (*huwa*). Al-Tahānawī concludes that, since a third person pronoun is commonly employed for someone who is absent, it means the term refers to that which is absent from the senses. His rationale seems perfectly logical in the context of phenomenally existent beings. But what does it mean for God, who is not accessible to the senses anyway? Al-Tahānawī responds:

> However, when "he" is applied to God, the exalted, it alludes to His essential being (*kunh dhātih*) in terms of His Names and attributes, with an acknowledgement of their hiddenness. A poet writes:

> *Huwiyya* is the essence (*'ayn*) of the One being
> > And it is impossible for it to be manifested in the sensible world

> So it is as though it is a description applied to
> > A matter of the unseen, who none disbelieves[80]

The *huwiyya* of God, therefore, is an allusion to His Names and attributes, not as they are manifested in the world, but in their essential hiddenness. From al-Tahānawī's selection of couplets, we see that he employs the term "essence of the One" as a synonym of *huwiyya*, and to mean a unification of all the Names and attributes. The couplets also impart that though everyone believes in these Names and attributes, which are the essence of God—His *huwiyya*—it can never be manifested in the sensible world.

Al-Tahānawī then carries out a more detailed linguistic assay of the term. He writes:

> Know that this name [*huwa*] is more specific than His name, Allāh and it is the secret of the name Allāh. Do you not see that the Name Allāh—as long as this name is present within it—has a meaning that denotes the Truth. And if it is split from it, its letters remain useful for that meaning? For example, if *alif* is elided from the Name Allāh, *lāh* remains, so in it is usefulness, and if the first *lām* is elided, *lah* remains, and in it is usefulness, and if the second *lām* is elided then *huwa* remains. The main component of *huwa* is the *hā'*, without the *waw*. The *waw* is not appended except as filler and out of continuing convention in order to make it one word,[81] so the Name *huwa* is the most superior and greatest Name.[82]

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79  Al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf*, 3: 1539.

80  Ibid.

81  This assertion is given linguistic credence by Ibn Sīda (d. 458/1066), who cites al-Kasā'ī (d.189/805) as having said, "Some [Arabs] discard the *waw* of *huwa* if before it is a vowelless *alif*. So they would say 'Until he (*hattā hū*) did that' and 'only he (*innamā hū*) did that.'" See Ibn Sīda, *Muḥkam*, 4: 345.

82  Al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf*, 3: 1539.

*Huwa*, the origin of *huwiyya*, is therefore the "secret of the name Allah,"> according to al-Tahānawī who claims that the word, though not ostensibly present in the name Allāh, is its essence as *waw* is appended to *hā'* only "out of continuing convention." The main component of Allāh is thus the *hā'* that denotes *huwa*.[83]

Al-Tahānawī then resumes his scrutiny of the pronoun, and its connection to that which is absent. He remarks:

> And know that *huwa* is a term for something that is present in the mind, for that which is absent in the imagination returns to it [the mind] through it by allusion because of that which is present by sensory perception (*ḥiss*). And that which is absent, though it is absent only from the imagination, cannot correctly be called "he." So the word, "he" cannot be applied save to that which is present. Do you not see that the pronoun does not refer save to that which has [already] been mentioned either by name, context, or situation, like a subject or a story?[84]

Since the term *huwa* denotes something that has already been referred to, being essentially a pronoun of reminder, al-Tahānawī comments that it is the nexus of the imagination (*khayāl*) and sensory perception (*ḥiss*), the latter acts as the instrument of primary discernment, and the former the repository of it. *Huwa* is thus the key that allows access to the primary discernment embedded in the imagination. It is for this reason that *huwa* cannot be applied to something that is truly absent from the imagination, that is, something that has never been perceived by primary perception, for as al-Tahāwanī says, "that which is absent, though it is absent only from the imagination, cannot correctly be called 'he.'" He therefore reasons that "the word, 'he' cannot be applied save to that which is present." The definition of "present," however, is that which is present in the mind, as we see from his scrutiny.

Al-Tahānawī then takes this preliminary reasoning and applies it to God. He writes:

> The benefit of this is "*huwa*" is only applied to Him who is purely existent (*al-wujūd al-maḥḍ*) and for whom non-existence would not be appropriate. Nor does He resemble non-existence due to being hidden or annihilation (*fanā'*) [in Him]. This is because that which is hidden is non-existent from the perspective that it is no longer seen, which is not appropriate for that which is referred to by the word "He."[85]

Only He who is purely existent, or we may say, has absolute existence (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*), can be referred to as *huwa* in its most fundamental sense, as it has to refer to something that is always present, and has always been so. We perceive here a return to the original purpose of the term, which supplanted *mawjūd* as it did not denote the eternally existent.[86] There does, nevertheless, seem somewhat of an inconsistency between al-Tahānawī's initial dissection of *huwa* and its application to God. For the author writes that

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83  It is interesting to note that Ibn ʿArabī comes to a somewhat different conclusion regarding the word *huwa* in his analysis of verse 59:23, which, he asserts, is more general than the name Allāh. IBN ʿARABĪ, *Futūḥāt*, 6: 317.

84  Al-TAHĀNAWĪ, *Kashshāf*, 3: 1539.

85  Ibid.

86  See above.

*huwa* is a pronoun of reminder, a means of transference from the recesses of former sensory perception to the imagination. But God, al-Tahānawī claims, cannot be perceived in the phenomenal world. How then can the basic meaning of *huwa* be an indication of something that has never been sensed in the first place? How can it be an allusion to something that is never seen, since the central reason for *huwa* being employed is to denote something that is always present and does not even "resemble non-existence due to being hidden?"

On the one hand, al-Tahānawī alleges that God cannot be perceived in the sensible world, and that *huwiyya* is an allusion to this hidden aspect of His. On the other, he suggests that the basic meaning of *huwa* is God as He is manifested in the world, as even a semblance of non-existence—that of not being seen—is impossible for Him. This is the crucial dichotomy inherent in this term. And it is the one that al-Tahānawī both acknowledges and addresses, for in his closing remarks on this term, he writes:

> So it is known from this analysis that *huwiyya* is pure, clear existence which encompasses all existential, visible perfection. However, the reason for the application of *huwa* upon that which is concealed is because it is not possible to encompass it. So because it is not encompassed, it is not perceived. It is thus said *huwiyya* is concealed as it cannot be perceived, so understand![87]

*Huwiyya*, therefore, denotes something that is perceived by the senses; it is seen in the material world. It is a term that recalls this initial sensation. This is why it "encompasses all existential, visible perfection." In other words, everything that is apparent in the Cosmos is designated by *huwiyya*. It is God as seen in the sensible realm, in all His innumerable manifestations and expressions. But there is also an intimation rooted in the term that God cannot be manifested in the phenomenal world, that He is, in His essence, beyond encompassment. Al-Tahānawī perspicuously remarks, "The reason for the application of *huwa* upon that which is concealed is because it is not possible to encompass it. So because it is not encompassed, it is not perceived." God is thus seen in the Cosmos as all existents therein are manifestations of Him, but these can never express all that He is, or, indeed, what He is in His true essence, and because He is not "encompassed," He is not perceived, and that which is not perceived, is hidden. So *huwiyya* denotes the manner in which God is seen and not seen, His visibility and His concealment.

The author, in the final paragraph, delves further into this paradox:

> For the Truth does not have concealment that is not an aspect of His visibility, nor does He have visibility that is not an aspect of His concealment, as opposed to man. Indeed, every creation is like that: it has a visible and a concealed [aspect]. However, its visibility is in one way and one sense, and its concealment is in another way and another sense. As for the Truth, His concealment *is* His visibility and His visibility *is* His concealment, so He is not unseen or seen from Himself; rather, in His Self He is concealed in a manner that befits Him and He is seen in a manner that befits Him as He knows of Himself. To [try to] understand this about Him is not

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87    Al-Tᴀʜᴀɴᴀᴡɪ, *Kashshāf*, 3: 1539.

proper as no one knows His concealment and His visibility as they are in Him, be He praised and exalted.[88]

The difference between God and the creation, says al-Tahānawī, is that whereas the creation has clearly disparate and demarcated visible and concealed aspects, in the case of God, there is no such circumscription, "His concealment *is* His visibility and His visibility *is* His concealment." This means that "He is concealed in a manner that befits Him and He is seen in a manner that befits Him." And if this makes little sense to the reader, it is only because "to [try to] understand this about Him is not proper as no one knows His concealment and His visibility as they are in Him, be He praised and exalted."

So this is the author's final word on this dichotomy: a capitulation of reason at the altar of faith. The nature of God, according to al-Tahānawī, lies fundamentally beyond the ken of human comprehension and we must therefore not even try to understand it. Yet his treatment of the term betrays an incontestable attempt to do so, insofar as it is possible. More than that, however, it represents al-Tahānawī's success in this regard; success, not in articulating the ineffable, nor, even, in comprehending its true meaning—he steadfastly proclaims these to be futile—but success in plumbing the depths as far as it is feasible to go. He does not lay down his spade before he has even started to dig; rather, he will go as deep as he can, whilst simultaneously asseverating that there is a frontier beyond which he may not advance. Indeed, in his prefatory remarks, he bewails the dearth of teachers from which he could learn heterodox disciplines, once his formal Islamic training had concluded.[89] But this did not lead him to abandon the enterprise entirely; nay, it galvanised him "to rally all my forces" (*shammartu ʿan sāq al-jidd*) in order to study these sciences independently until "God, the Exalted, revealed their [meaning] for me."[90] His examination of *huwiyya* bears the same hallmark of Tahānawian tenacity: pursuit on a path as far as it will lead, and then a reliance on divine providence to reveal the true meaning, if, that is, it behoves him to fathom it.

Al-Tahānawī's encyclopaedic knowledge of Sufism, of jurisprudence, of theology and philosophy, are all paraded in this entry, it is a dazzling panoply of erudition in which the author, though characteristically laconic, engages with the topic in exhaustive detail, addressing every minutia, and every nuance.

## Conclusion

The foregoing has unearthed the painstakingly methodical manner in which al-Tahānawī grapples with an extremely arcane term in Arabic, and his formula for doing so. First he catalogues all the denotations of the term in creation, then he conducts a retrograde analysis by proceeding from creational connotations to that of the Creator, from the concrete to the abstract, in imitation of the creation itself that proceeds from the Creator. He scrupulously names his sources to underscore that these are not his opinions. After this propaedeutic

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88   Ibid., 3: 1539-40.

89   Ibid., 1: 1.

90   Ibid.

survey, however, he gives his own opinion predicated on, but also supplementing and enriching, the sources he has theretofore cited. In his subtle and penetrating analysis, he exhumes nuances of the term, the dichotomy inherent in it, the essential numinosity of it when applied to God, mooring it in a linguistic substructure that is sure and stout. His exploration is honeycombed with etymological periphrasis and philosophical preciosity, but never overleaps itself, as his final conclusion, for all its subtlety and intricacy, relents at the palisade of aporesis. Throughout his linguistic peregrinations, though, he never lets go of the autodidact's hand, whom he delicately takes from one connotative plateau to another: first the creational, then the divine, and finally the personal; or, from the broad, to the specific, and finally to a melange of the two, all the while, his grip remains as sure as it is consolatory. Seldom has there been an author more sensitive to the desiderata of his audience. Perhaps it takes an autodidact to know what an autodidact needs.

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