

ANKARA ÜNİVERSİTESİ

# İLÂHİYAT FAKÜLTESİ DERGİSİ

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TARAFINDAN YILDA BİR ÇIKARILIR

Cilt : XXVIII

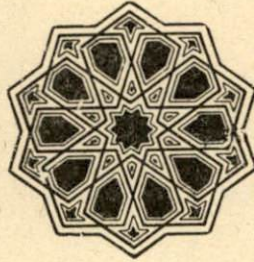


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## COSMOLOGICAL RELATIVITY OF IBN AL-'ARABÎ

Doç. Dr.Mehmet BAYRAKDAR

The present Study is not in the first place an introduction of the cosmology of the Great Master; rather, it is an essay on the very specific aspect of his ontological and cosmological teaching. Anyone who knows al-'Arabi recognizes the difficulty to speak about him. We have done our best to clarify the subject.

In order to understand the cosmological relativity of Ibn al-'Arabi, at the beginning, it is permissible to define his concept of Cosmos. Without doubt, we can say, with Ibn al-'Arabi as well as with his disciples, that the Cosmos as a whole is the exteriorization of the "Hidden Treasure"<sup>1</sup>, which symbolizes the divine eternal science, and in which all the existent things of the past and future in their archetype have been found. With the light of his love upon them, God permeated and permeates them to spread and to reflect themselves through His Names and Attributes. These reflexions of The Hidden Treasure take place as individual existent things in the exterior, whether they are spiritual or material. So, from this point of view, the Cosmos can be defined as the totality of the exteriorized "divine goods."

On the other hand, the Cosmos can be understood as the Words of God (Kalimât al-Allah) or the divine Breath (al-Nafas al-Nafas al-Rahmâni). We can find this definition in the statement of Ibn al-'Arabi: "All creatures are indeed words of God, which are inexhaustible, stemming as they do from the command Be, which is the Word of Good."<sup>2</sup> He further says: "In other words, the Cosmos is manifested in the divine

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1 This term of "Hidden Treasure" is based on the famous saying of the Prophet: "I (God) was a Hidden Treasure, I wished to be known, thus I has created the creatures..." Ibn al-'Arabi and other sufis use abundantly this saying in an ontological context in order to explain the origin and cause of the creation.

2 Ibn al-'Arabi, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, translated by R.W.J. Austin, "The Bezels of Wisdom", the Classics of Western Spirituality, SPCK, London, 1980, p. 178.



Breath by which God relieved the divine Names from the distress they experienced by the nonmanifestation of of their effect."<sup>3</sup>

From these definitions, it goes without saying that the Cosmos in the view of Ibn al-'Arabî is the theophany of the divine knowledge and logos.<sup>4</sup> Some scholars such as Nicholson, 'Afifi, S.H. Nasr, Asin Palacios, interpreted Ibn al-'Arabî's teaching as a kind of pantheism, especially as far as his concept of Nature or Cosmos is concerned.<sup>5</sup> But, in fact, this is not the case. Here, without going into the problem in detail, we just want to point out the cause of thir common confusion.

Their confusion is due to these two main facts: firstly, they do not consider that Ibn al-'Arabî makes a difference between the reality of God as His Essence in His Absolutness and the reality as His Existence in His relation with individual beings through His Names and Attributes; secondly, they do not think that Ibn al-'Arabî's ontology is a kind of objective relativism, according to which everything, except God, exists relatively. As we have said before<sup>6</sup>, we cannot reduce Ibn al-'Arabî's teaching to any kind of pantheism if we consider it from these two points of view, that we have just mentioned. So, for him, God is not Cosmos, and Cosmos is not God; rather, God is, to say, "Something More" than the Cosmos, because His Essence by which He transcends Himself from all the cosmic existential quantities. But, on the other hand, we can perhaps say that God as Existence is Cosmos, because every single thing in the Cosmos is the manifestation of His Existence.

3 Ibid., p. 181

4 It is interesting to compare the idea of Ibn al-'Arabî with that of John the Scot (Scotus Erigena), — who was born in Ireland and who wrote his major opus *De Divisione Naturae* between 864 - 866, — According to him also, the essence of every individual existence is God's existence. And the World is as theophany "Il mondo come teofania.", see Allegro (G.), *Scoto Eriugena, Fede e Ragione*, Rome, 1974, p. 285; cf. Nasr (S.H.), *Knowledge and The Sacred*, Edinburgh University Press, 1981, p. 21

5 All these scholars thought that Ibn al-'Arabî identified God's Essence with the Cosmos or Nature. Nasr says: "The Universe is thus a theophany of the Divine Essence.", see, *Three Muslim Sages*, Caravan Books, New York, 1976, p. 112; A.'A. 'Afifi says: "As for the use of the expression of Cosmos (al-Ṭabî'at) of Sûfis, the Cosmos is identified with Divine Essence which manifestes under the form of the Divine Name of Existentiator (al-Mûjîd).", see, *Fuṣûṣ al-Hikam wa Ta'ligât 'alayhi*, Vol., I, Cairo, 1946, p. 53; cf. Nicholson, *The Idea of Personality in Sufism*, Cambridge, 1923, p. 27; cf. Palacios Asin, *El Místico Murciano Abenarabi*, Vol., IV, Madrid, 1928, pp. 36-38; Vol., II, Madrid, 1926, pp. 9-14; see, Husaini (S.A.Q.), *The Pantheistic Monism of Ibn al-'Arabî*, Lahore, 1970, pp. 17-27

6 Bayraktar (M.), *Ibn al-'Arabî'de Oluş ve Varoluşsal Çeşitlenme*, in A.Ü. İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi, Vol., XXV, 1981, pp. 350-351



And it is thus in this sense that Ibn al-'Arabī states Cosmos is God's form<sup>7</sup>, and he describes God as Reality manifested or created in the Reality manifested or created in the exterior as well as in the belief or knowledge of individual<sup>8</sup>. Also, it is quite true that Ibn al-'Arabī says sometimes that God is the essence of the Cosmos; for example, in his statement that "He (God) is the essence of the possibles"<sup>9</sup>; but, for us, this statement is not susceptible of proof that God as Essence is the essence of Cosmos, rather it shows that God as Existence is the essence of Cosmos. Therefore, Ibn al-'Arabī's doctrine of Being cannot be interpreted as pantheism. This is very obvious in the following statement of Ibn al-'Arabī: "All we perceive is the Existence of the Reality in the essence of the possibles"<sup>10</sup>. So, God is immanent in the Cosmos only by His Existence but He is transcendent by His Essence. Ibn al-'Arabī's doctrine of *Tanzih-Tashbih* is itself a proof against pantheism. And therefore, H. Corbin has translated Ibn al-'Arabī's expression "*Wahdat al-Wujūd*" as Transcendental Unity of Being"<sup>11</sup>. So, his doctrine *Wahdat al-Wujūd* does not signify existential unity, i.e., unity is not in material and manifested Cosmos but rather in the God's Attribute of All-Knowing.

According to Ibn al-'Arabī, the Cosmos goes through the cycle of contraction and expansion of the Divine Names and Attributes, and that is why it is renewed at every moment without being repeated identically. There is no temporal separation between the phases of instantaneous annihilation and of re-creation. The Cosmos changes instantaneously. As other sufis, Ibn al-'Arabī admits that there is no repetition in re-creation and theophany.<sup>12</sup>

From the point of view of the phenomenal determination, the Cosmos is described by Ibn al-'Arabī by several different cosmological and ontological schemes in each of which diverse existential aspects

7 Ibn al-'Arabī, *op. cit.*, p. 73

8 *Ibid.*, p. 224; cf. al-Qāshānī, *Commentary*, Cairo, 1321, p. 225

9 Ibn al-'Arabī, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 102

10 *Ibid.*, p. 103

11 He says: "La fameuse expression *wahdat-al-wojūd* ne signifie pas un "monisme existentiel" (ce n'est ni du Hegel, ni du Haeckel), mais une unite transcendante de l'Être.", *L'Homme de Lumière dans le Soufisme Iranien*, Editions Presence, 1971, p. 172.

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 153-154; cf. Bālī Efendī, *Commentary On Fusūs al-Hikem* Istanbul, 1309, p. 228; Burckhardt (T.), *The Renewing of Creation at Each Instant*, in *Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, Chapter IV; Corbin (H.), *L'Imagination Créatrice dans le Soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabī*, 2 ed., Flammarion, Paris, 1976, pp. 155-158



of cosmic quantities are depicted. These determinations can be considered in any number of ways. However Ibn al-'Arabî reduces them to a few principal presences which contain within themselves the main levels of cosmic existence.<sup>13</sup>

Ibn al-'Arabî divided the Cosmos first of all into two main realms: one unseen, one sensory; he says: "Know also that the Reality has described Himself as Being the Outer and the inner (Manifest and Unmanifest). He brought the Cosmos into being as constituting an unseen realm and a sensory realm..."<sup>14</sup>

Ibn al-'Arabî divided secondly the whole Cosmos into five hierarchical planes and determinations. They are as following: 1-Hadharat 'Âlam al-Ghayb or al-Mutlaq, i.e. the Divine Existence; 2-Hadharat 'Âlam al-A'yân al-Thâbita, i.e., the presence of the archetypes, 3-3-Hadharat 'Âlam al-Malakût, i.e., the presence of the purely spiritual and angelic existences; 4-Hadharat 'Âlam al-Mulk, i.e., the presence material existences; 5-Hadharat 'Âlam al-Insân al-Kâmil, i.e., the presence of the Perfect Man.

On the other hand, according to Ibn al-'Arabî, the Cosmos as a whole is evolutionary, and it is a result of the continuous evolutionary process of the divine order "Be" As everything is a gradual expression of God's power, it belongs to a defined level of graduation in the Cosmos, and the Cosmos has 28 different kingdom of existential graduation. The last kingdoms are earthly existences, and for our sūfi, between every kingdom is a transitional species and some link. Ibn al-'Arabî says: "Then creation continued in the earth, minerals, then vegetations, then animals, and then Man. God made the last of every one of these kingdoms of the first of the next kingdoms. The last of the

13 S.H. Nasr says that the cosmological scheme of Ibn al-'Arabî and others, is based essentially on the "Throne Verse", (see al-Qur'ân 2: 254), Three Muslim Sages, op. cit., p. 167 fn. 71 many sufis have expounded cosmology in terms of the symbolism of the letters of Arabic alphabet as well as in terms of the Divine Names. For example, in his Astrology and Futūhāt, Ibn al-'Arabî combines astrological symbolism with the science of names and letters by making each of the 28 stations of the moon correspond to one of the 28 letters, each planet to one of the prophets, and each sign of the zodiac to one of the Divine qualities, so that the Cosmos is "Muslimized" and the revolution of the heavens appears as a process by which the light of Being is disseminated throughout the Cosmos by the various qualities which polarize its light; see, Ibn al-'Arabî, Clé Spirituelle de l'Astrologie Musulmane, transl. by Bruckhardt, Paris, 1949; cf. Idem., Kimya al-Sa'ada, transl. by St. Ruspoli, "L'Alchimie du Bonheur Parfait", L'Île Verte, Paris, 1981, part II.

14 Ibn al-'Arabî, Bezels of Wisdom, op. cit., p. 55



minerals and the first of the vegetations is the "tuffe". The last of vegetations and the first of the animals is the date-palm. The last of the animals and the first of mankind is the monkey."<sup>15</sup>

Whatever it may be, the Cosmos in the view of Ibn al-'Arabî is relative. It does not exist in and by itself but in reference to God. The Cosmos as a whole is dependent on God's Existence, and it has its cause in Him. Unlike spiritualists and idealistic immaterialists such as, for example, Berkley, Ibn al-'Arabî believes that the Cosmos has its material existence but he does not accept that it is real and absolute. Therefore, according to him, the Cosmos is relative and its existence is expressed as illusion and shadow. Ibn al-'Arabî states: "Beware you, everything besides The Mighty God is fancy pure."<sup>16</sup> He further says: "All (relative) existence is an imagination within imagination, the only Reality being God, Self and the Essence, not in respect of His Names."<sup>17</sup>

As we have said, the Cosmos is relative because it is not absolute and real, and because it is dependent on the Reality. Ibn al-'Arabî sums up better his doctrine of the cosmological relativity in his saying: "Thus, the dependence of the Cosmos on the Reality for its existence is an essential factor..."<sup>18</sup>

According to Ibn al-'Arabî, like the Cosmos itself, all the cosmic spiritual and physical phenomena such as, for example, time, space, movement, and so on, are relative. They have not substantial existence in the Cosmos.<sup>19</sup> Their existence is only supposed according to their

15 See Ibn al-'Arabî, *Uqlat al-Mustafiz*, ed. by H.S. Nyberg, in *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn al-'Arabî*, Leiden, 1919, pp. 93-94.

In fact, the idea of biological evolution rose up, for the first time with al-Nazzâm (d. 840) and al-Jâhûz (d. 868); and it was developed by some later muslim thinkers such as Ibn Miskawayh, al-Bîrûnî, Ikhwân al-Şafâ, al-Qazwîni. Like Ibn al-'Arabî, some other sûfis such as Mawlânâ, Shabistarî, also accepted the idea of evolution in both senses: biological and spiritual. See Bayraktar (M.), *Al-Jâhûz and the Rise of Biological Evolution*, in *Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam's 83 rd Birth Anniversary Magazine*, London, 1982.

16 Ibn al-'Arabî, *Futûhât al-Makkiyya*, Vol., Cairo, 1329, p. 378. The imaginary character of the Cosmos is argued by Ibn al-'Arabî with these saying of the Prophet: "All men are asleep and when they die they will awake." See, *Idem.*, *Bezels of Wisdom*, op. cit., p. 177

17 *Ibid.*, p. 125

18 *Ibid.*, p. 57

19 It were al-Kindî, the first muslim philosopher, who first originated the relativity of Cosmos and its physical phenomena such as time, space, motion, ect., see al-Kindî, *Kitâb al-Falsafat 'ül-ülâ*, ed. Abû Ridha, Vol., I, Cairo, pp. 119, 143; cf. Bayraktar (M.), *Kindî ve Einstein'e Göre Rôlativite ve Benzerlikleri*, in *Bilim ve Teknik*, no 150, August 1980, pp.10-11



interrelations in the Cosmos. That is why Ibn al-'Arabi says: "Know that time is only a relation and that it has no substantial existence."<sup>20</sup> He further says: "Moreover, time and space are the adjuncts of physical bodies. Time is an imaginary entity having no real existence."<sup>21</sup> The relations, synthesis and analysis between cosmic bodies and cosmic phenomena are themselves relative. Ibn al-'Arabî states as follows: "The relation between time and the possible has only a supposed and not a substantial existence."<sup>22</sup> For Ibn al-'Arabî, like bodies themselves, all their properties such as colours, shapes, lightness, heaviness, incorporeality, corporeality, softness and hardness are relative.<sup>23</sup>

In essence, the cosmos with all the properties is relative. Ibn al-'Arabî's cosmological doctrine is in fact an objective relativism, and in no way whatsoever a kind of pantheism. But Ibn al-'Arabî's doctrine was interpreted by some of this disciples really in a pantheistic way: for example by Jâmi.

Although accepting the fancy of Cosmos,<sup>24</sup> Jâmi tried to identify contrarily God with the Cosmos, as later Spinoza will do so. He says: "Being's the Essence of the Lord of all,

All things exist exist in Him and He in all:

This is the meaning of the Gnostic phrase,

All things are comprehended in the all'.<sup>25</sup>

On the other hand, some other disciples of the Great Shaykh have interpreted his doctrine in the traditional way, without introducing to it any pantheistic idea. For example, Dawûd Qaysarî interprets the teaching of Ibn al-'Arabî in a way of absolute transcendentalism. He pointed out that the Cosmos is the theophany of God's Existence, not of His Essence; otherwise, he says that it may be supposed God's association and composition with created things; for Dâwûd al-Qaysarî this is a contradiction with God's Absolutness.<sup>26</sup>

20 Ibn al-'Arabî, *Futûhât*, op. cit., Vol., III, p. 546

21 Ibid., Vol., II, p. 458

22 Ibid., Vol., I, p. 291

23 Ibid., Vol., II, p. 458

24 Jâmi, *Lawâ 'ih*, transl. by E.H. Whinfield and M.M. Qazwîni, Lahore, 1928, pp. 5-6

25 Jâmi, Op. cit., p. 39; cf. Bhatnagar (R.S.), *Jâmi's Concept of God*, in *Islamic Culture*, Vol., LVI, no 1, 1982, p. 2

26 Dâwûd al-Qaysarî, *Muqaddima*, Bombay, 1300, pp. 5-9, 30

Like his Master Ibn al-'Arabî, Dâwûd al-Qaysarî emphasized on relativity of Cosmos. According to him, the existences in the Cosmos, whether they are intelligible or sensible, are relative and related to God's Existence. Dâwûd al-Qaysarî says: "From the point of view of its quiddity , the relative existence is attributed to the Cosmos, the the Comos is nothing but one of the divine shadows, which are caused by God's Essence."<sup>27</sup>

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27 Idem., *Risāla Kashf al-Ĥijāb'an Kalām Rabb al-Arbāb*, Ms., Süleymaniye, No: 1682/9  
İstanbul, f. 75b