AN ASSESSMENT OF DISCURSIVE CHANGES IN ISLAMIC METAPHYSICS
–*Thubūt* as an Interpretation of the Concept of Possibility or Nonexistence and the Nonexistence of Nonexistence–

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Abstract

In its beginnings, Sufism was a moral movement concerned with asceticism *(zuhd)* and poverty *(faqr)*. Later, Sufism's second period, which was called "Sunnī Sufism" with problems arising from a spiritual life of which the theoretical basis is unknown, was again within the limits of a moral content. Finally came an era of maturity with the advent of Ibn al-ʿArabī and his followers, who revealed a set of metaphysical principles for moral life. In this last period, the Sufis, who have always been loyal to their own methods, instruments and (especially) to the objectives that have always aimed at the progress of morals, dealt largely with theoretical problems, interpreted the relations among God, man and the universe, expressed at times the already-discussed traditional problems in a new style, and extended the field of metaphysical thought in Islam by adding and considering new problems. In extending the domain of metaphysics, concentrating on the problem of the relations between God and man, Sufism has represented an attempt to express the intellectual heritage put forth by Islam for a period of four centuries through various philosophical-religious traditions and dialectical relations; consequently, a Sufi language or discourse has arisen that describes traditional problems by means of a renovation of terms and styles. One of the main obstacles facing the academic study of Sufism is determining the relation between this language and the theoretical discourse that has arisen

within Islamic philosophy and within *kalām* (Islamic theology). If this obstacle can be overcome, the origins of Sufism and the degree of its contribution to the heritage of Islamic reflection as a whole will be revealed.

Key Words: Nonexistence, the concept of possibility, Ibn al-ʿArabī, Islamic metaphysics, Sufism.

Introduction

One of the main difficulties in the perusal of Sufi texts developed under the guidance of Ibn al-ʿArabī was the language problems created by the complex style of the text. This style adorned with long phrases that bear the direct and indirect effects of different scientific/intellectual traditions and with terms that are partially old and partially new, but mostly reinterpreted due to addition of adjectives.[1] The problems of the comprehension of metaphysical thought because of language and expression have received considerable focus since the beginnings of Sufism, which is and has been characterized as "knowledge of the state" (*ʿilm al-ḥāl*). Despite the possibilities of language and expression that enable it to overcome certain problems, Sufism has always included a mysticism (as well as the subjective expression that accompanies it) that is opposed to objectivity.[2] In this

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[1] Throughout this article, I will use the expression "metaphysics" sometimes in the Avicennian sense and sometimes in the sense offered by theology (including *kalām* and Sufism) concerning our knowledge of God. In fact, from the Avicennian perspective, it is hard to accept this second part as metaphysics. However, we will make use of the commonly accepted concepts of modern research; we will especially consider the nomenclature of Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī and accept that it is possible to use the terminology he offers. There are still no extensive studies on this matter. Nonetheless, for an assessment, see Ekrem Demirli, *İslâm Metafiziğinde Tanrı ve İnsan* [*God and Man in Islamic Metaphysics*], (Istanbul: Kabalcı Yayınları, 2008), 91 ff.

[2] This research is most readily available in works by Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj, and, after Ibn al-ʿArabī, in studies by Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī and Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī. See Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAlī b. Muḥammad, *İslâm Tasavvufu: Lüma* [*Islamic Mysticism: al-Lumaʿ*], trans. H. Kamil Yılmaz, (Istanbul: Altınoluk, 1997), 21; Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Isḥāq b. Muḥammad al-Qūnawī, *Tasavvuf Metafiziği* [*Metaphysics of Islamic Mysticism: Miftāḥ ghayb al-jamʿ wa l-wujūd*], trans. Ekrem Demirli, (Istanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2002), 11 ff.; Sharaf al-Dīn Dāwūd b. Maḥmūd b. Muḥammad al-Qayṣarī, *Risāla fī ʿilm al-taṣawwuf*, in his *al-Rasāʾil*,

regard, the mystical aspects of Sufism have never been ruled out by Sufi movements, including the new Sufi approach represented by Ibn al-ʿArabī and his disciples. Complaining that their knowledge cannot be comprehended or that it will at least be misunderstood and suffer the reaction of incompetent persons, Sufis have pointed out this mystical facet of Sufism.[3] The most common criticisms have concerned the attempt by those persons called "people of the outward knowledge" (*ahl al-ẓāhir*) to comprehend a domain about which they had no experience. Such criticisms have become widespread through the famous expression that had been made an idiom by Sufis: "one who does not taste does not know". These criticisms have been fed by the notion that Sufism is an *ʿilm al-ḥāl* (knowledge of the state) and an *ʿilm al-asrār* (knowledge of the mysteries) and that its followers are *khawāṣṣ* (elites) or *khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ* (elites of elites), and they reached a point at which they are appreciated by even non-Sufi writers.[4] What is more, certain terms used by Sufis to describe knowledge and wisdom have validated this mysticism.[5] In this context, the term *maʿrifa*[6] has sometimes been used synonymously with (and sometimes as merely similar to) knowledge, and Sufism also makes wide use of expressions such as *dhawq* (to taste), *shurb* (to drink), *riyy* (to be satisfied) and others that refer to individual experience. All of

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(ed. with an introduction by Mehmet Bayraktar; Kayseri: Kayseri Büyükşehir Belediyesi Yayınları, 1997), 110.

[3]   The views in the early works on the matter are clear. Ibn al-ʿArabī has always had similar concerns. See Abū ʿAbd Allāh Ibn al-ʿArabī Muḥyī al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ʿAlī, *Fütûhât-ı Mekkiyye* [*al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*], trans. Ekrem Demirli, (Istanbul: Litera Yayıncılık, 2006), I, 83; al-Qūnawī draws attention to the same issue. See al-Qūnawī, *Tasavvuf Metafiziği*, 12; for an evaluation, see Ekrem Demirli, *Sadreddin Konevî'de Bilgi ve Varlık* [*Knowledge and Being in Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī*], (Istanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2005), 45 ff.

[4]   For an example, we can mention the evaluation by Kātib Chalabī. See Ḥājī Khalīfa Kātib Chalabī Muṣṭafā b. ʿAbd Allāh, *Kashf al-ẓunūn ʿan asāmī l-kutub wa l-funūn*, (ed. M. Şerefeddin Yaltkaya and Kilisli Rifat Bilge; Istanbul: Maarif Matbaası, 1941-1943), I, 159 ff. He has repeated his opinions in his discussion of the subject of "*ʿilm al-ḥikma*". See *ibid.*, I, 676.

[5]   Concerning this aspect of Sufism, see Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fütûhât-ı Mekkiyye*, I, 79 ff.; also see his *Rasāʾil Ibn al-ʿArabī*, *Kitāb al-fanāʾ*, (ed. Muḥammad Shihāb al-Dīn; Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1997), 16 ff.

[6]   For the distinction between knowledge and gnosis *(maʿrifa)*, see Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. ʿUthmān b. ʿAlī al-Hujwīrī, *Hakikat Bilgisi* [*Kashf al-maḥjūb*], trans. Süleyman Uludağ, (Istanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 1982), 533.

these terms draw attention to the subjectivity of Sufism. As a matter of fact, throughout his struggle to place Sufism among the Islamic sciences, al-Qushayrī has worked to take this subjectivity into account. On one hand, al-Qushayrī talks about Sufi nomenclature and tries to place Sufism among the sciences; on the other hand, indicating that he will draw attention to the fact that Sufi nomenclature also includes mysticism, he has abstained from scientifically limiting his interpretations of Sufism.[7] Regardless of its relation to the Islamic sciences, mysticism is one of the characteristics that Sufism always conserves.

With mysticism in mind, we must comprehend two interconnected subjects. The first is that Sufism possesses its own method of reaching knowledge and truth. However, if we are to consider the *ṭarīqa* (order) structure that enables Sufism to attain a large body of followers that are deprived of intellectual interest, it is not always possible to accept its method as one seeking to enable knowledge. In this sense, in order to explain Sufism's method, other concepts than knowledge may spring to mind. For example, using more general expressions such as "making man mature", "purification of self", and "maturation of morality", it may become possible to explain the Sufi method more successfully. From the beginning, Sufis were aware of the fact that they had a genuine method among those other methods offered by the religious sciences. In this regard, the diffusion of Sufism itself (and here, to prefer the word "diffusion" instead of "rising" reminds us of the approach of earliest Sufi writers that was later replaced by the terms "rising" and "birth" preferred by modern researchers[8]) was a kind of reaction with respect to *tafsīr* (Islamic exegesis) that can be deemed an intervention in the method of reaching at knowledge or, in other words, the interpretation of *naṣṣ* (Qurʾān and Sunna) by the theologians who were the first to consider these matters. Later, this method would be called *istinbāṭ* (to reveal the hidden meaning of a word or deed)[9] or *istidlāl* (reasoning), two terms which both refer to

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[7]   See Abū l-Qāsim Zayn al-Islām ʿAbd al-Karīm b. Hawāzin al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālā al-Qushayriyya*, (ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd and Maḥmūd b. Sharīf; Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, 1966), 188.

[8]   On this point, authors such as al-Sarrāj, al-Qushayrī and al-Kalābādhī agree that one can talk about the diffusion or attention-grabbing of Sufism. For example, see al-Sarrāj, *İslâm Tasavvufu: Lüma*, 22 ff.

[9]   On al-Sarrāj's use of the term *istinbāṭ*, see *İslâm Tasavvufu*, 109 ff.; for an assessment of the relation between Sufism and the conventions of the *fiqh-kalām* tradition, see Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābirī, *Arap-İslâm Kültürünün Akıl Yapısı*

objectivity. In the matter of these concepts of method, the Sufis were conscious of the fact that by elaborating a specific method, they gave expression to an intention distinct from objective methods. Sufi mysticism has arisen because of the development of a method that promotes subjectivity against objectivity.

The second subject is the existence of a group of people who actually use this method. These adherents to Sufi's methodology have been called elites and elites of elites, and after the advent of Ibn al-ʿArabī and his followers, have become named by such related expressions as *muḥaqqiq* (researcher of truth), *kāmil* (sage, spiritually wise) or other terms that indicate an elite relationship to knowledge and truth. Nevertheless, as al-Qūnawī insists, there are also those who attain the truth without following a particular method. This fact may not enable us to deduce the presence of mysticism within Sufism if we consider only the question of method.

Such a question may be significant. Although Sufis have the right to dissociate their own methods from the methods of other sciences (because every science possesses its own method), doesn't every science bear the right to deem itself mystical? For Sufis, the answer to this question is "no" because all sciences, despite their differences, share a common role as the "knowledge of the apparent". In this sense, Sufis have qualified these sciences with concepts concerning observable domains and objectivity, giving them names such as *ʿilm al-ẓāhir* (the outward knowledge), *ʿilm al-rusūm* (knowledge of images), *ʿilm al-qishr* (knowledge of shell) and *ʿilm al-ṣūra* (knowledge of forms). This approach can be observed during every period of Sufism. In dissociating their method from the method of the "people of the outward knowledge", Sufis have thus deemed all other sciences common in the way in which they remain within boundaries of form and have affirmed that, on the other hand, one can attain the truth only by methods such as asceticism and efforts in the way of Allah that support the essence and secret of man. Thus, mysticism remains peculiar to Sufism, by transforming into a necessity of being the knowledge of inward *(ʿilm al-bāṭin).*

In addition to this clear distinction between the "knowledge of outward" *(ʿilm al-ẓāhir)* and the "knowledge of inward" *(ʿilm al-*

[*Binyat al-ʿaql al-ʿArabī*], trans. Burhan Köroğlu et al., (Istanbul: Kitabevi Yayınları, 1999), 380 ff.

bāṭin) that appeared with the origin of Sufism, the comparison between the methods of knowledge in Sufism and other method(s) was originally carried out by Ibn al-ʿArabī, al-Qūnawī and their disciples. In this context, al-Qūnawī made the Sufi method as explicit as it had ever been in the hands of the early Sufi writers; indeed, he put it forth as a complete method.[10] Thanks to his studies, the epistemological approach that grounds the method that enables Sufis to call themselves a genuine group has appeared, and the principles of this method have become clear. This method is principally practical. In other words, the Sufis have determined *ʿamal* (practice, deed, act) as the method to make man reach at the terminus; and from this point of view, they have deemed Sufism to be a morality. On the other hand, the comparison method proposed by al-Qūnawī has necessitated a shift towards practices of dispute and of proofs from which Sufis usually try to remain distant. Thus, the first noticeable matter in this method of comparison is the way in which, in considering the epistemological possibilities of man, it can be assumed that all researchers of the truth have a single objective, thus elaborating the grounds for a realistic comparison. The objective of each person is to attain maturity or truth, or, in short, felicity. The methods for this pursuit are deduction *(istidlāl)*, which uses the power of speculation *(naẓar)* and observation *(mushāhada)* that use the power of *ʿamal*. It is no doubt impossible to talk about an exact opposition here. The theoretical method that Sufis attribute to philosophers and, partially, to *kalām* scholars is also used by themselves; in the same way, the methods of asceticism *(riyāḍa)* and striving *(mujāhada)* in the way of Allah that constitute their own method are followed by speculative theologians *(ahl al-naẓar)*. Consequently, as Ibn al-ʿArabī notes, both are well-known methods throughout the history of philosophy. Nevertheless, there is a question of priority; the users of the theoretical approach have neglected the practical or have been deprived of the means to carry it out appropriately. Regarding the latter, the most suitable expression for this approach is a "lack of means", which we can find in the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī. As for the followers of the

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[10] On this matter, *Tasavvuf Metafiziği* and *Fatiha Tefsiri* include significant information. See al-Qūnawī, *Tasavvuf Metafiziği*, 11; Ibid., *Fatiha Tefsiri* [*Exegesis of Sūrat al-Fātiḥa: Iʿjāz al-bayān fī tafsīr Umm al-Qurʾān*], trans. Ekrem Demirli, (Istanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2002), 55 ff.; for a similar evaluation see Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī, *Risāla fī ʿilm al-taṣawwuf*, 110; Demirli, *Sadreddin Konevî'de Bilgi ve Varlık*, 45 ff.

practical method (and in this matter, Ibn al-ʿArabī and his disciples constitute a party on behalf of Sufism), these put the theoretical method and the speculative (*naẓarī*) competence of man into the background. Interestingly, however, both methods have arrived at the same problems. This becomes particularly obvious in texts by Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Qūnawī. These works apply the terms used beforehand by Islamic philosophers and *kalām* scholars in order to explain their own views. Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Qūnawī deal with the problems discussed by those in the past and, moreover, do so by remaining Sufi, which is to say, special persons having a special method. This fact demonstrates that Sufism has come upon the same problems as have the speculative theologians even though the methods they follow are different. By establishing a connection between this language/discourse and that used by Sufis in the past, which was limited to accurately express the details of the spiritual life of Sufis, Sufis have followed the traces of metaphysical terms in moral life. If we are to approach the matter via a discussion of historical changes, we can say that Sufis have found the metaphysical grounds and interpretations of terms that had been traditionally restricted merely to moral content. The new situation has led to an extension of the meaning or even to a re-expression of the familiar terms of philosophy and *kalām*. For example, the term "relativity" is one of the main concepts of the writings of Avicenna. Avicenna talks about the relativity of everything within being,[11] but he does not give adequate information about the matters that can be included within this term, and, likewise, the other terms that can be derived from it. Departing from this concept, Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Qūnawī treat at first the relation of relativity between God and man and then derive concepts such as *ilāh*ness-*maʾlūh*ness (God-divine thrall, or the Lord-the vassal), *rāziq*ness-*marzūq*ness (being provider-being provided) and others that had not previously been in common use. They use, with regard to the relation between active and passive or with regard to the concept of causality, terms such as father-son, maternity, divine causes, inferior causes and others. A more common nomenclature is the word *nikāḥ* (literally, "spousal") that has been used in order to explain causal connections. In explaining that the whole universe is connected within itself by means of a relation of causality, Ibn al-ʿArabī often resorts to the term *nikāḥ* and

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[11]   See Abū ʿAlī Ḥusayn b. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAlī Ibn Sīnā, *Metafizik* [*al-Shifāʾ: al-Ilāhiyyāt*], trans. Ekrem Demirli and Ömer Türker, (Istanbul: Litera Yayıncılık, 2004), I, 137.

talks about the *nikāḥ* between divine and inferior universes or in the natural universe. An interpretation of this term that we find in the works of al-Qūnawī in particular centers on concepts such as *ithmār* (to prove fruitful), *intāj* (finalization), and *baraka* (benediction) that are used with respect to *ṣudūr* (emanation).[12] Or, accepting the idea that the universe is the most perfect of all possible universes, this concept can be associated with fundamental Sufi concepts such as *tawakkul* (trust), *riḍāʾ* (consent), and submission and interpreted as their principle. A significant portion of the contradictions observed between the texts of philosophers who prefer objective expression and the Sufi texts that arose with Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Qūnawī originates from these differences in language/discourse preference. In other words, even though Sufis have examined similar problems and made use of similar terms, they have made use of these words and concepts by adding Sufi interpretations and by extending their philosophical meanings.

We can estimate various reasons for this Sufi extensions and interpretations. Sufism was under the influence not only of philosophy and *kalām*, but of multiple resources. Given its influences, Sufis have paid attention to the use of revelation- (*waḥy-*)based words while at the same time working to add a new and broader dimension to philosophical expressions by applying them to particular and partial problems. In addition, Sufis have almost accepted those whom they call *ahl al-ẓāhir* as members of the same science, even though they have acknowledged certain differences. It is not always clear whether Sufis mean philosophers or *kalām* scholars when their texts read *ahl al-naẓar*. Such an indistinction of perception has enabled Sufis to benefit equally from both groups. As it is, while studying the God-universe relation, they can easily benefit from different schools of exegetes, *ḥadīth* scholars or the terms of pre-Islamic philosophies as well as from Islamic philosophers. In metaphysical subjects in particular, it is possible for Sufis to overcome the language and style problems between Sufi texts and texts by philosophers and *kalām* scholars only by taking these practical/pragmatist approaches of Sufism into account. This strategy can be observed in the case of the concept of *imkān* (possibility) and its interpretations by Ibn al-ʿArabī and his followers. Departing from the concept of possibility in the sense used by philosophers, these Sufi scholars have interpreted it in

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[12] See al-Qūnawī, *Tasavvuf Metafiziği*, 23.

a more extensive way in an attempt to explore the richness of the concept with respect to meaning.[13] As a result, for them it bears many meanings such as possibility, image, shadow, mirage, poverty, white pearl *(al-durra al-bayḍāʾ)*, light, darkness and others. With this in mind, we should turn to an examination of the way in which Sufis have claimed to discover the richness of the concept of possibility with regard to meaning.

Possibility: Nonexistence and the Nonexistence of Nonexistence

Ibn al-ʿArabī begins his magnum opus *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (*The Meccan Revelations*) with the following expression: "I absolve the one who discloses/creates things from nonexistence and nonexistence of nonexistence".[14] What meaning can be attributed to the opening phrase of a book? Likewise, in the Islamic tradition, what rich meaning can we expect from the first phrase of a book? This sentence would seem to be expected to resonate with the concepts of praise *(ḥamd)* and blessings *(ṣalawāt)*. It cannot be deemed as a prejudice to think that Ibn al-ʿArabī might have overlooked the habits of some of his readers by neglecting to approach the phrase with the necessary meticulousness. In this regard, can the difference between "I absolve Allah who creates things" and "… who creates things from nonexistence" or "… who creates from nonexistence and the nonexistence of nonexistence" be immediately detected? Or, even if it is detected, how can it be explained? When we follow closely the metaphysical thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī, we comprehend an explicit difference between each expression. We see that the last expression is competently constituted in order to signify the competence of an

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[13] One of the terms used frequently by Ibn al-ʿArabī is *miʿrāj al-ʿibāra*. See Mustafa Çakmaklıoğlu, *İbnü'l-Arabî'de Marifetin İfadesi* [*The Expression of Knowledge in Ibn al-ʿArabī*], (Istanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2007), 405. Also for the reasons of this attitude and the problem of understanding Ibn al-ʿArabī, see *ibid.*, 391.

[14] See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fütûhât-ı Mekkiyye*, I, 15. After this expression, Ibn al-ʿArabī mentions the objective of creation as the disclosure of the perfection of divine names; this view is often emphasized by Sufis. See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ibid.*, 16; also see his *Fusûsu'l-hikem* [*Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*], trans. with a commentary by Ekrem Demirli, (Istanbul: Kabalcı Yayınevi, 2006), 23; For the acceptance of divine names as a principle for metaphysical knowledge, see al-Qūnawī, *Tasavvuf Metafiziği*, 11; for an evaluation, see Demirli, *Sadreddin Konevî'de Bilgi ve Varlık*, 45.

author. In addition, this is a key phrase that guides the reader to the main issues of Ibn al-ʿArabī's thoughts, and above all, to the concept of the "unity of being" (*waḥdat al-wujūd*).[15] Therefore, it is extremely significant and fitting to ask why Ibn al-ʿArabī does not merely say "from nonexistence" and instead begins his book by saying "who discloses from nonexistence and nonexistence of nonexistence".

First of all, we have to lay stress on the expression: there are two terms of equal importance in the sentence, and they are connected with the conjunction "and". The first one is "nonexistence" (*ʿadam*), whereas the second one is the "nonexistence of nonexistence" (*ʿadam al-ʿadam*). Ibn al-ʿArabī expresses them as ʿ*an ʿadam* and ʿ*adamihī*. In daily language, we have no difficulty in using expressions such as nonexistent, nothing or nothingness. When it comes to metaphysics, however, this usage becomes a serious problem with regard to the proper sense and context for the use of the word nonexistence (*ʿadam*). What do we mean exactly by "nonexistence" and "nonexistent"? On the other hand, if we consider other words that might describe nonexistence, the obstacles preventing comprehension are multiplied. This results from the fact that it is not known what nonexistence actually signifies because, as Avicenna indicates, man comprehends being explicitly, and it is not the counterpart of the nonexistent.[16] In the case of nonexistence, we do not possess anything according to which we can define the concept. Nonetheless, our mind perceives nonexistence as a continuous thing and envisions it according to and with regard to being. In the end, as Ibn al-ʿArabī indicates, the human mind defines it as the "nonexistence of being" (*ʿadam al-wujūd*). The thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī is thus based on the acceptance of the impossibility of nonexistence as a consequence of the priority of being and of the fact that being is comprehended explicitly.

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[15] For exhaustive information about the term *waḥdat al-wujūd*, see Demirli, "Varlık Olmak Bakımından Varlık İfadesinin Sufiler Tarafından Yeniden Yorumlanması [A New Interpretation of the Sufi Phrase 'Being qua Being' and the Metaphysical Results of This Interpretation]", *İslâm Araştırmaları Dergisi* [*Turkish Journal of Islamic Studies*], 18 (2007), 43. See Ibn Sīnā, *Metafizik*, I, 63.

[16] See Ibn Sīnā, *Metafizik,* I, 27.

We should recall some of the contexts in which Ibn al-ʿArabī talks about nonexistence (*ʿadam*).[17] His first significant point is the classification of nonexistence. Nonexistence is divided into three classes. The first one is called "necessary nonexistence". This concept can be explained by the example of the impossibility of the existence of a partner of God. The lack of a partner of God is a necessary principle that the mind accepts absolutely. The second class is called "possible nonexistence". We can estimate existence or nonexistence; thus, it can be called relative nonexistence. As with the nonexistence of possible things, nonexistence in daily language generally refers to this category. Considering the universe as an imagination/phantasm and mirage, Ibn al-ʿArabī takes this type into account and extends it to apply to the universe. The third class is the "impossible" or "absolute nonexistence" (*al-ʿadam al-muṭlaq*). "Absolute nonexistence is impossible" constitutes one of the fundamental principles of Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontological thought. "The absolute nonexistence is impossible"; this is to say, there is no such thing as a fact and it is impossible to reason for man. We can therefore summarize Ibn al-ʿArabī's views as follows: absolute existence does not exist and the only nonexistence that we can talk about is relative nonexistence.

The second point to which Ibn al-ʿArabī draws attention concerning nonexistence is its obligatory connection with evil, or rather, the sameness of the two categories. Nonexistence (*ʿadam*) means evil, and disclosing a thing from nonexistence means bringing it forth from evil to good. The expression "nonexistence is evil" is a consequence of the verdict "*wujūd* (being) is good", and it recalls the metaphysical views of Avicenna. This conviction finally reaches at accepting God as pure, absolute being and pure good.[18] Likewise, there is an absolute evil in the form of God's counterpart, but under the connection

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[17] See Kamāl al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Razzāq b. Aḥmad al-Kāshānī, *Tasavvuf Sözlüğü* [*A Dictionary of Islamic Mysticism: Laṭāʾif al-aʿlām fī ishārāt ahl al-ilhām*], trans. Ekrem Demirli, (Istanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2005), 577; Rusūkh al-Dīn Rusūkhī Ismāʿīl b. Aḥmad al-Ānqarāwī, *Minhāj al-fuqarāʾ*, (ed. Safi Arpaguş; Istanbul: Vefa Yayınları, 2008), 484 ff.; M. Erol Kılıç, *İbn Arabî Düşüncesine Giriş* [*Introduction to the Philosophy of Ibn al-ʿArabī*], (Istanbul: Sufi Kitap, 2009), 88; William C. Chittick, *The Self-disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-ʿArabī's Cosmology*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), xx; Demirli, *İslâm Metafiziğinde Tanrı ve İnsan,* 175; Ibid., "Varlık Olmak Bakımından Varlık İfadesinin Sufiler Tarafından Yeniden Yorumlanması", 41.

[18] See Ibn Sīnā, *ibid.*, II, 108 ff.; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fütûhât-ı Mekkiyye*, I, 129.

of nonexistence and evil, no such evil actually exists. Regardless, the necessary relation or equivalence between nonexistence and evil leads to the consequences that we have observed with regard to nonexistence: there is no absolute evil, and we can talk about evil only relatively. The two phrases, one proceeding from the other, are logical consequences of Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology; moreover, interpreting the above phrase, we can establish both these expressions as a framework for a further consideration of nonexistence.

Based on this framework, we can draw attention to several issues regarding the term "nonexistence" (*ʿadam*) in the aforementioned sentence by Ibn al-ʿArabī. Above all, the nonexistence in his phrase should not be considered to be "absolute nonexistence" because the latter is, as he indicates, impossible. In other words, absolute nonexistence can neither be comprehended by the mind nor realized. The nonexistence from which things are derived can only be relative nonexistence. Later, we will treat the problems of this expression in this sense in addition to Ibn al-ʿArabī's efforts to overcome them. For the moment, the issue we shall consider is that nonexistence, which we identify here as "relative", is also equivalent to relative evil. According to this interpretation, in disclosing things from nonexistence, Allah has also saved them from evil because of the intimate relation between evil and nonexistence. In other words, to be and to remain nonexistent are the biggest evils, whereas creation is the greatest good. This is why creation is a consequence of divine blessing and generosity. The *optimistic* ontological views of Sufis are based on this conviction. Ibn al-ʿArabī expresses this view metaphysically by the expression "the best and the most perfect of all possible universes"[19], used by Sufis to indicate this world in order to reveal their consent and submission. Explaining the sublimity of mercy and goodness in the act of creating, Ibn al-ʿArabī also draws attention to the relation between creation and *mashīʾa*[20] and says that no greater goodness can exist than the creation and being-giving of God.

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[19]   For more about Sufi interpretation of the expression, see Demirli, *İslâm Metafiziğinde Tanrı ve İnsan*, 229; about Ibn al-ʿArabī's citation from al-Ghazālī, see *Fütûhât-ı Mekkiyye*, I, 23.

[20]   *Mashīʾa* is the general will (*irāda*) of God, and this will means to give existence to something without any value judgment. The word thing (*shayʾ*) is also connected with this word. In this sense, a thing means the one that is willed. Nevertheless, the will is a disposition about the good or bad condition of a thing given

After interpreting the first part of the phrase, we can now deal with the second part in which Ibn al-ʿArabī mentions the "nonexistence of nonexistence" (*ʿadam al-ʿadam*). The nonexistence of nonexistence is most certainly equivalent to being. Here, there can be no reason for us to hesitate. As a matter of fact, Ibn al-ʿArabī has personally expressed this view. After this explanation, assuming that we have arrived at a more explicit interpretation of Ibn al-ʿArabī's expression, we can rewrite it as follows: "Allah, who evinces things from nonexistence and existence, is *munazzah* (far from any deficit and lacking)". In this sentence, Ibn al-ʿArabī connects the two major terms with the conjunction "and", thus forming a new term. We can express this term as "nonexistence and nonexistence of nonexistence", or, following the meaning we have given to the second part of the phrase individually, "nonexistence and being".

At this stage, we have a more complex problem when compared with the first one: how can something be conceived to be "existent and nonexistent" (or existence and nonexistence) at the same time? It seems that here we have arrived at one of the paradoxical concepts that occupy a central place in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought. Paradoxical expressions frequently occur in Ibn al-ʿArabī's texts, and as a whole, Ibn al-ʿArabī explains everything in the universe through paradoxes.[21] One of the most important manifestations of paradox is that man himself is a paradoxical being. Ibn al-ʿArabī's view on man can be followed via the concept of *al-kawn al-jāmiʿ*[22], which is to say, the being who harbors and accumulates oppositions in himself. Man is *al-kawn al-jāmiʿ* because Allah is the being who accumulates all oppositions within Himself. Man and the universe benefit from this paradox to the extent that they are created according to divine form (*ṣūra*). The source for these paradoxes of Ibn al-ʿArabī is the paradox

existence. This relation of generality and particularity between *mashīʾa* and *irāda* can be equally observed within the relation between *al-Raḥmān* and *al-Raḥīm*. Creation comes from the breath of *al-Raḥmān*, and this is determined by the fact that nonexistence is evil. See Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī, *Maṭlaʿ khuṣūṣ al-kilam fī maʿānī Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, (ed. Muḥammad b. Ḥasan Saʿīdī; Cairo: Dār al-Iʿtiṣām, 1416), I, 157.

[21] Concerning these paradoxes, see Çakmaklıoğlu, *İbnü'l-Arabî'de Marifetin İfadesi*, 380 ff.

[22] The term is most comprehensively used in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. See Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fusûsu'l-hikem*, 23; for the term, see Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī, *Maṭlaʿ khuṣūṣ al-kilam fī maʿānī Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, I, 158.

and antilogy that arose with the creation of the universe. The universe came into existence from a paradox, and we can define its origin as follows: *nonexistence and existence* or *nonexistent-existent*. The universe came into existence from the "nonexistent-existent". We witness here another of the paradoxical expressions frequently used by Ibn al-ʿArabī.

We can analyze this paradox by returning to the Islamic tradition of metaphysics. In other words, this expression by Ibn al-ʿArabī bears the problems of Islamic theoretical schools of thought in their diverse traditions; however, the solution of this paradox is possible only through a return to that heritage. "Nonexistence and existence", as the origin of things, requires that we interpret in a new context the ontological views of the *kalām* schools (such as the Ashʿariyya and the Muʿtazila) and the metaphysical theories of Islamic philosophers. In essence, *The Meccan Revelations* (*al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*), *The Bezels of the Wisdom* (*Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*) and above all the heritage of Ibn al-ʿArabī are deeply concerned with interrogating (sometimes for critical purposes and sometimes for purposes of consummation) the heritage of these three (or two, *kalām* and philosophy, excluding any denominational seperations) theoretical schools. Revising the heritage he inherited with a new language, Ibn al-ʿArabī *consummate*s that heritage by means of the epistemological possibilities of the Sufi method. We can interpret the opening phrase of *The Meccan Revelations* from just such a background and just such a profound point of view. Here, Ibn al-ʿArabī removes the veils of habits and their effects on comprehension, and explores the depth of meaning of a term. From this aspect, a term incites us to eternal discussions, as if it were a mirror to reflect many discussions. Ibn al-ʿArabī insistently emphasizes that nomenclature is only a gloss and an interpretation and that, if the terms are taken away from their objective of disposition, they can detract us from the truth. The disclosure of the content of terms, and the exploration of what they actually imply, are among the characteristics of the interpretative method of Ibn al-ʿArabī. We can see an explorer attitude in many of the concepts offered by Ibn al-ʿArabī in his interpretations of tradition. Because of its relation with our subject, we can take the term "creation" as an example.

The *kalām* scholars have desired to explain the relation God-universe by the idea of "create from nothing" and by an accompanying faith in an Omnipotent (*al-Qādir al-muṭlaq*) God. However, the ontology of Ibn al-ʿArabī indicates that "creation from nonexistence"

does not provide us with any knowledge. It is not clear what we are to understand from the expression "to create", and thus the phrase "God created the universe from nothing" is an expression without content. If we ask a *kalām* scholar what God's creation of the universe means, and what the meaning of the verb "to create" is in this context, he shall not be able to give a clear response. However, Ibn al-ʿArabī thinks that to discover the meaning of the term "creation", to provide an understanding of the relation God-universe (or at least to recall the nature of this relation) is the duty of the *muḥaqqiq* (verifier), which means metaphysician. We can take the same approach for terms such as *kufr, īmān* that occupy a fundamental place in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought. Thus, in saying "nonexistence and nonexistence of nonexistence", Ibn al-ʿArabī tries to restore the meaning of a term that was developed by Islamic metaphysicians, but that, in time, has lost its depth of meaning. The term in question is "possibility".

The term "possibility" (*imkān*), which is used synonymously with the word "faculty" (*quwwa*), can be defined as "one, the existence and nonexistence of which is equal".[23] What does this mean? We can interpret the phrase in two ways. The first aspect of this definition of possibility is that it serves as a proof used by Islamic philosophers for the deduction of necessary being, since, if everything in being were necessary, everything would come into existence at the same moment, and no distinction (between the categories of being) would have taken place. When we propose the nonexistence of certain things as if they existed, our mind thus does not fall into a dilemma. Therefore, possibility in itself is a proof that ensures a distinction of "possible" and "necessary" regarding existence. But the problem does not end here. The second aspect of possibility, which is to say, the question of its nonexistence, constitutes the essence of the distinction between the possibility argument of Islamic philosophers and the notion of *ḥuduth* (to be created in time) produced by *kalām* scholars. According to Islamic philosophers, possibility means one, the existence and the nonexistence of which are equal; and possibility can never exist by means of itself. What is possible can come into existence because of a preferring one. From this point of view, possibility

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[23] For possibility, see Abū Naṣr Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Ṭarkhān al-Fārābī, *Felsefenin Temel Meseleleri: Uyûnü'l-mesâil* [*Major Themes in Philosophy: ʿUyūn al-masāʾil*], in Mahmut Kaya (ed. with translation), *İslâm Filozoflarından Felsefe Metinleri* [*Selected Texts from Islamic Philosophers*], 2nd ed., (Istanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2003), 118; Ibn Sīnā, *Metafizik*, I, 36.

can be defined as follows: possibility is the one that is existent in one aspect or condition and nonexistent in another aspect. Therefore, we can express the term possibility as "both existent and nonexistent" or "existent in one aspect, nonexistent in another". In considering non-existence, Ibn al-ʿArabī draws attention to the first point we stated about possibility, whereas, in his second expression, the nonexistence of nonexistence, he attracts attention to the second aspect of possibility and indicates that "Allah has disclosed things from non-existence and from nonexistence of nonexistence, namely, from exis-tence", since the nonexistence of nonexistence means exis-tence/being.

Can we split this statement of Ibn al-ʿArabī? For example, if we say that "Allah has created things from nonexistence", will we find our-selves contradicting Ibn al-ʿArabī's thoughts? In my opinion, such an approach will lead to comprehending Ibn al-ʿArabī through the crea-tion theory offered by *kalām* scholars, and prevents us from seeing his genuine thought. Nevertheless, we have to remember that Ibn al-ʿArabī himself offers several sentences that might be seen as giving way to this fault. Ibn al-ʿArabī does something different here, how-ever, and as we already stated, this is a new composition and gloss. Recalling the Ashʿarī approach, Ibn al-ʿArabī points out nonexistence as the origin of things, at first. Because Ashʿarīs ground their thoughts on the omnipotence of God, they do not accept the thingness or con-tent that might constitute an origin for the universe and limit God's puissance. Instead, they assert that Allah may have created things from nonexistence. In Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought, however, nonexistence "is not an aforementioned thing" in terms of both existence and value.[24] The nonexistence he mentions thus bears no value other than an expression of the way in which things do not come into existence by themselves but by means of one who continuously prefers (to bring into existence or not). This situation of things, which is to say, their nonexistence with regard to themselves, takes us to another term within the scope of the relation between God and things: pov-erty. Things have not left nonexistence on their own; they were dis-closed by someone, and they are dependent on the one who brings them into existence. In addition, this neediness is a necessary attrib-

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[24] For an interpretation of this expression, see al-Qūnawī, *İlâhî Nefḥalar: en-Nefeḥâtü'l-ilâhiyye* [*al-Nafaḥāt al-ilāhiyya*], trans. Ekrem Demirli, (Istanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2002), 24 ff.

ute that accompanies things, and it maintains its existence after its original expression. In this sense, according to Ibn al-ʿArabī, the most important equivalent of the word "possibility" is "dependent", whereas the equivalent of necessary being is "Rich" (*al-Ghaniyy*). In other words, necessity is identified with completeness and perfection, whereas neediness is identical with insufficiency and requirement. Thus, the first "nonexistence" in the expression points out this sense and bears the traces of *kalām* scholars' conception of an omnipotent God. For now, however, we are merely at the first stage of the problem.

Is it possible that things are created only from nonexistence, in its Ashʿarī sense? According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, this is impossible. Moreover, before Ibn al-ʿArabī, Muʿtazila and Islamic philosophers had also not accepted the idea of creation from nothing in the Ashʿarī manner. The Muʿtazilī school tried to escape from the idea of absolute nonexistence by an intermediary situation it called "the thingness of nonexistent"[25], the meaning of which it could not, however, explain; thus, in an uncertain way, it moved closer to the Islamic philosophers' idea of content. Nevertheless, it is evident that Ibn al-ʿArabī took into account the arguments of the Muʿtazilī school regarding this term in his analysis discussed above. No matter which aspect of the problem we treat, it is necessary a condition that prioritizes createdness of things. This can be assessed from two perspectives. First, in the Qurʾān, in a verse that explains the problem of creation, a being that has not yet been created is called a "thing". Other verses repeat this conceptualization. If we are to adopt al-Qūnawī's approach, we cannot explain the relation between the eternal and the existent in time (*ḥādith*) unless we accept an intermediary situation or stage between the two.[26] On the other hand, if we consider the eternality *(qidam)* of God's attributes, there has to be a situation that we may describe as the truth of things prior to creation.

With regard to the problem of attributes, Ibn al-ʿArabī tries to attain a solution by considering Avicenna's theory of possibility and

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25 See Abū l-ʿAlā al-ʿAfīfī, "İbnü'l-Arabî'nin Ayân-ı Sâbitesi ve Madûmât [*al-Aʿyān al-thābita* and *al-maʿdūmāt* in Ibn al-ʿArabī]", *İslâm Düşüncesi Üzerine Makaleler* [*Articles on Islamic Thought*], ed. with trans. Ekrem Demirli, (Istanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2000), 232; Demirli, *İslâm Metafiziğinde Tanrı ve İnsan*, 250.

26 See al-Qūnawī, *Tasavvuf Metafiziği*, 14; for its interpretation, see Demirli, *Sadreddin Konevî'de Bilgi ve Varlık*, 282 ff.

eternal contents (*māhiyya*), the Muʿtazilī theory of thingness of non-existence, and the Ashʿarī theory of attributes. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, in the first place, we have to establish the existence of attributes; because he states the God is the only Absolute and Necessary Being, if we do not accept God's attributes, we cannot escape from deism. Deism is the most important problem for Ibn al-ʿArabī, a problem that he attributes to philosophers and deems to be a failure of mind regarding metaphysics.[27] Thus, the most important concern of Ibn al-ʿArabī's philosophy is to pick apart deism. In this sense, whereas Avicenna deemed the objective of metaphysics to be the verification of God's existence[28], according to Ibn al-ʿArabī, the main problem is deism. We cannot pick holes in deism by making use of any source of knowledge, but only through revelation (*waḥy*). Here, one of the distinctive characteristics of the epistemological method of Sufism appears: even though Sufis defend their method of purification of the heart against deduction and reasonable demonstration, they do not denote a "mystical experience" based on purification of the heart. According to Sufis, the Sufi method is above all nothing but obedience *(ittibāʿ)*, which is to say, obeisance to revelation and to the Prophet. We can overcome the problem of deism only by the help or guidance of revelation. From this perspective come Ibn al-ʿArabī's criticisms of the Muʿtazilī school. Ibn al-ʿArabī clearly conceives the Muʿtazila to be among the speculative theologians (*aṣḥāb al-naẓar)*. Nonetheless, it is difficult to detect whether he deems the Muʿtazila to be deist or not. However, the criticisms of the Muʿtazilī school defending the difference between the acceptance of the attributes of God and the acceptance of only His Essence (Self) are correct, even though this is a distinction that exceeds its purpose. As a matter of fact, Ibn al-ʿArabī considered this Muʿtazilī assessment and, through it, developed a new approach to the problem of essence and attributes. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, the Ashʿarīs are inconsistent, and they can be criticized in two ways in their defense of their opinions concerning attributes against the Muʿtazila. First, the acceptance of attributes gives way to a kind of multiplication, as if it justifies the Muʿtazilī idea of *taʿaddud al-qudamāʾ* (multiple eternal beings). However, for Ibn al-ʿArabī, the mistake of the Muʿtazila in this regard is to extend this multitude to a real one, beyond relativity. Even though we do not deem this relative multitude identical with the

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[27] See Demirli, *İslâm Metafiziğinde Tanrı ve İnsan*, 170 ff.

[28] See Ibn Sīnā, *Metafizik*, I, 4.

oneness that is identified with the meaning of absolute simplicity, we can overcome the problem of plurality by virtue of a new concept. As a matter of fact, the types of oneness that Ibn al-ʿArabī explains in a gradation as *waḥda* (unity, oneness), *aḥadiyya* (absolute unity), *wāḥidiyya* (inclusive oneness, the station of awareness of unity) and *fardiyya* (uniqueness) point out this difference that appears alongside the concept of attributes.

The Ashʿarīs have rightly determined that the Muʿtazilī conception of God will lead us to deism; however, the Ashʿarī school has been ineffective when it comes to understanding oneness and has not been able to correctly explain the connection between attributes and essence. Concentrating on the relation between essence and attributes, they disregarded the relation between attributes and universe.[29] The second point at which to criticize the Ashʿarīs is thus their failure to explain the relation between divine attributes and the universe that is the consequence of these attributes. If God has created the universe through His attributes, and if His relations with the universe were realized via His attributes, the universe, like the attributes, has to be qualified as *qadīm* (eternal) in a determined sense. In this sense, if we accept that God is omniscient and that knowledge is God's attribute, this knowledge should have a subject. What does God know? Islamic philosophers respond to this question with the assertion that God knows Himself and thus that God is intelligent *(ʿāqil)* and intelligible *(maʿqūl).*[30] The Sufis also accept this view. Accordingly, God has to know everything He knows (i.e., the universe and each particular in it) in an eternal way.

What does it mean to know something in eternity? Can an idea of eternity *(qidam)* arise from this point? This is the most principal problem of Ibn al-ʿArabī's metaphysical conception. In order to exceed it, Ibn al-ʿArabī has developed an extensive theory about the truths of things that he calls "immutable essences" (*aʿyān thābita**). Ibn al-ʿArabī applies this term in order to explain the relationship between divine attributes and the universe, and, in fact, his expression of the disclosure of "things from nonexistence and existence" refers to this term. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, things should be eternally "immuta-

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[29] For this question, see Demirli, *Fusûsu'l-Hikem Şerhi*, 505 ff.

[30] See Ibn Sīnā, *Metafizik*, I, 41.

* The archetypes of all that exists.

ble" in divine knowing[31] because if we assume that things are not eternally known by God, we will be accepting that there is a renewal or increase/decrease in God's knowledge in the wake of creation. However, like any other attribute of God, His knowledge is also eternal and no increase/decrease can be in question with respect to the eternality of this knowledge. Because we are talking about an attribute of God, Ibn al-ʿArabī's interlocutors should be the Ashʿarīs because the Muʿtazila rejects eternal attributes and because no problem of attributes exists for the Islamic philosophers. Divine attributes, in the way Ibn al-ʿArabī deals with them, are accepted by only Ashʿarī *kalām* scholars; thus, we can compare his thoughts only with theirs.[32]

According to the Ashʿarīs too, there can be no renewal or *ḥudūth* (to exist afterwards) when it comes to God's knowledge. It seems that the difference between Ibn al-ʿArabī and Ashʿarī *kalām* scholars emerges from the more systematical approach of Ibn al-ʿArabī. Ibn al-ʿArabī follows the traces of the metaphysical tradition and asserts that the usage of an attribute or an act about God will consequently reveal a ruling and a situation, whereas the Ashʿarīs do not deem this necessary, or, more precisely, have overlooked the problems of this concern via their "omnipotence" approach. This is to say that, according to the Ashʿarīs, God's knowledge of things in eternity is merely a knowing, whereas Ibn al-ʿArabī deduces a situation and determination from the state of "being known".[33] If God has known things, their name should consequently be "the known" (similar to the Muʿtazilī term, *maʿdūm maʿlūm* [the known nonexistent]). To be known is a situation different from not being known. Knowing means distinction and designation. al-Qūnawī interprets this approach as the distinctive characteristic of "actual knowledge" in opposition to passivity, which consequently gives way to the judgment that "God's knowing means His creation". If God has known something, a known thing is created from this knowledge.

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[31] Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī draws attention to the same thought while explaining the truth of something as "its immutable thingness in divine knowing". See al-Qūnawī, *Tasavvuf Metafiziği*, 23.

[32] For criticism by Ibn al-ʿArabī regarding the Ashʿarī view on attributes, see Demirli, *İslâm Metafiziğinde Tanrı ve İnsan*, 220.

[33] For comparison by al-Qūnawī between immutable essences and the known nonexistent (content), see *Tasavvuf Metafiziği*, 23.

This approach enables the possibility of deeming the universe eternal as a whole, a larger problem that the Ashʿarīs seem to have tried to keep away from. If we consider the gradation of God's attributes, it is an obligation to accept that being exists externally to composition. At this point, Ibn al-ʿArabī interprets the "*ḥudūth* argument"* of the *kalām* scholars and the possibility argument of Islamic philosophers in the same context in order to determine this gradation. The existence of an order in the universe must correspond to divine attributes. More precisely, this gradation in the universe is the consequence and outcome of the gradation in divine attributes. In his gradation of attributes, Ibn al-ʿArabī deems the attribute of knowledge to be the first and most extensive attribute. After knowledge comes the will (*irāda*) and then puissance. This classification has a determining role in Ibn al-ʿArabī's metaphysics. Although by accepting that every act or attribute has a judgment, an intermediary situation that we call "to be known" appears, there is no other way of accepting that a situation of "*ḥādith*" (existing in being, not eternal, but dependent on time). In this case, while things had taken place as "known" in God's eternal knowing, they had not appeared yet externally. The attribute of puissance shall disclose them in a time that will be determined by the attribute of will, and the so-called disclosure shall be synonymous with creation (*iḥdāth*). The relative difference between being eternally known and being disclosed within time can be explained through the relation between decree (*qaḍāʾ*) and destiny (*qadar*). Decree is a general state of being known and determined, whereas destiny consists of the planning of this knowing in time and space (*taqdīr*).

But how will things be expressed in divine knowing between the conditions of being distinguished and not existing externally? Here, the meaning of the sentence in the beginning of Ibn al-ʿArabī's work appears: things obtain a situation of being by being known in divine knowing. However, this is not a complete being because we can only attribute to things here the situation of being known by God, and what makes them a "thing" consists of this state of being known. Things do not exist in respect to themselves. Therefore, as God knows them, things have gained a state of being and determination,

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* The *ḥudūth* argument can be summarized in the following way: 1) everything that has a beginning requires a cause; 2) the universe has a beginning; 3) consequently, the universe has a cause other than itself.

but they continue to remain in nonexistence with regard to themselves. The genius of Ibn al-ʿArabī shows itself as he proposes an intermediary concept in order to express this paradoxical situation; he calls this state between nonexistence and existence (*thubūt*). For Ibn al-ʿArabī, *thubūt* means the distinction and emergence of things in divine knowing as a truth and an eternal content. Ibn al-ʿArabī refers to this with the phrase the "nonexistence of nonexistence", which is to say, existence. Thus, "nonexistence and existence" signify *thubūt*; things have been disclosed from being immutable in divine knowing towards the external universe, which is another way of saying, towards the situation of existing for themselves.

The style of reflection by Ibn al-ʿArabī does not allow us to produce firm decisions at any stage of our metaphysical inquiry. Each solution carries us to a new unsolvable situation and to further research, and we find ourselves engaged in trying to comprehend within a continuous renewal of the situation because there is no "golden mean" (*iʿtidāl*) in being that would connote death, namely, inertness. Ibn al-ʿArabī's dynamic approach can be seen in the expression "the immutable essences have not smelled the external being", a saying of the Sufis who adopt *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of being). In other words, the truths of things in divine knowing never become externally visible. What then does "external being" mean? External being, namely, the universe of the created, is the shadow of the immutable truths within eternal knowing. Disclosure, appearance or creation (and it is not at all important which of these terms we utilize) is nothing but the appearance of the shadow. This time, Ibn al-ʿArabī applies the expression "nonexistent-existent" for the universe and interprets the universe as "shadow being". Shadow is something that exists in one side and does not exist in another. The universe exists in eternal knowing with respect to its immutable truth but not regarding itself. Other words that, in this context, are synonymous with shadow are imagination (*al-khayāl*) and mirage; both exist in one sense and do not exist in another. Imagination is synonymous in this context with guessing. The universe is an imagination. Man-in-the-universe is an imagination within an imagination. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, who is a moralist and humanist thinker, "to be human" means to be able to interpret an imagination or dream when one is already in it. The ones who can interpret a dream without waking up are actually dead, which is to say, the ones who have reached at the truth.

Conclusion

In a historical analysis that included an account of the ages of the Islamic community, Ibn al-ʿArabī estimated his day to be an era in which all sciences had reached maturity. This means that, in a sense, Sufism was to constitute the objective of all the sciences. In this context, speaking of the maturity of his time, Ibn al-ʿArabī does not merely mention a maturity or perfection of Sufism. He talks about the maturity obtained by each science (by virtue of reinterpretation of these sciences with respect to an objective) and of the establishment of their connections. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, during this period, the task for Sufis (who quest for truth) is to realize a kind of finalization process in all the Islamic sciences and in metaphysics above all. Thus, by virtue of this approach, Ibn al-ʿArabī considers his period to be capable of interpreting all ages and making judgments about them. Today, even though research on Ibn al-ʿArabī and his followers has seen a relative increase, little attention has been paid to determining the origins of varying schools of thought. In my personal view, the conception of Sufism that appeared in those days (especially the approaches of Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Qūnawī) holds significant possibilities for allowing us to comprehend the theoretical traditions of Islamic world. In other words, Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Qūnawī can be seen as the explicators of the theoretical traditions that preceded them. These acts of explanation are also acts of interpretation that inherit thought, reinterpret it and add new aspects to important points. This explication discloses thought and follows its traces, especially in particular fields. In this respect, this act of explication should be evaluated separately from any interpretive act that emerges from a scientific tradition that tries to overcome the obscurities and the contradictions of a system of thought. Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Qūnawī have tried to reveal (first) the objective and methodical unity and (second) the deficiencies of all theoretical sciences, and they have aimed to interpret both purposefully. Thanks to this approach, they are distinguished from explicators in the sciences. For instance, when we consider Avicenna, it is clearly evident that Ibn al-ʿArabī and his followers are deeply influenced by Avicennian metaphysics. However, almost as important as this influence for these explicators is the production of new interpretations and the disclosure of the richness of concepts in this Avicennian thought. Ibn al-ʿArabī has applied the abstract/universal language of Avicennian metaphysics to particular issues and has unfolded in detail the dimensions of this thought (es-

pecially the particular-universal relations). What is more, Ibn al-ʿArabī has given metaphysical thought a broader foundation by dealing with some of the relations between God-man and universe that had not been handled by that thought. In this respect, research about Ibn al-ʿArabī, al-Qūnawī and their disciples will result in useful consequences not only for Islamic philosophy, but also for *kalām* and for theoretical thought in a more general sense. Nonetheless, the appearance of such a contribution depends on attending to several important points. One of these is that Sufis, even when dealing with a theoretical concept or thought, aim at deducing practical consequences. In other words, it is necessary to consider practical intentions of Sufis in every interpretation. Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī draws attention to this problem and has responded by considering the question of what place Sufism occupies among the theoretical sciences given its concern with practice. This practical approach, which in a certain sense is necessary to call Sufi pragmatism, has to be considered among the motives that result in the emergence of an (at least formally) eclectic structure within Sufi texts. This can be deemed as an indicator that Sufism has maintained its main features throughout all its periods of development. In this sense, for Sufis, the primary aspect of a question is that of the moral consequences to be deduced from it by man. This Sufi approach towards theoretical matters has enabled them to see and interpret abstract issues in more particular conditions. As a result, Sufis have made contributions to philosophical texts, and they have been able to extend the domain of philosophical thought. By these means, the concepts and thoughts of metaphysics have been able to reach the masses. A further interesting point that requires attention is the extensity of the target group of Sufism. Addressing the masses, Sufism has benefited from the possibilities of imagination as well as those of theoretical language. However, as we understand from the assessment by Ibn al-ʿArabī of the relations between theoretical power and imagination, the latter does not only bring with it a possibility of expression. Imagination is also, like the abstracting power of thought, one of the powers by which man can comprehend the truth. That is why the necessity of understanding imagination to be a means of comprehension and of using all powers of man for the comprehension of the thing-in-itself occupies a central place in Sufi epistemology. With regard to the question of the possibilities generated by the Sufi conceptions of imagination, Sufis have produced the possibility of explaining an abstract concept by way of more than one word; they have tried to rule out the limitedness of conceptualization by

considering the secondary and tertiary meanings of a word, and thus, more terms and words have appeared regarding each given conceptual subject. This is the situation with respect to the concept of possibility. In this sense, possibility, which consists of faculty and act, also corresponds to words such as imagination, mirage, illusion, or even man, dream and, as Ibn al-ʿArabī indicates in some of his works, white pearl and egg, because all of these acknowledge possibility or space.

A third interesting issue is in fact very closely related to the first. In the first problem, we drew attention to the relation between practical and theoretical thought. We should now shift our attention to the increase of knowledge as a result of practice that emerges from this relationship. Sufis have drawn an analogy between moral maturity and the level of human comprehension. The comprehension of man increases as he matures; finally, he reaches perfection. This question is expressed by the terms *ʿilm al-yaqīn* (the knowledge of certainty), *ʿayn al-yaqīn* (the essence of certainty) and *ḥaqq al-yaqīn* (the truth of certainty), each of which concerns the gradation of knowledge. At this stage, the important issue is the level of our comprehension with respect to *yaqīn*, or precision or certainty. In these formulations of the relation between maturity and knowledge, the term *yaqīn* is common. As a result, Sufis have found it possible to deal with diverse sciences and to see and criticize their deficiencies. There are continuous references to this matter, especially with regard to metaphysical matters. For example, Ibn al-ʿArabī indicates that with respect to many issues, speculative theologians assert views in which the respective expression is right but the content is not entirely known. Hence, to obtain certain and ultimate knowledge about the truth of affairs can be possible only by reaching perfection. Otherwise, any comprehension is only apparent and superficial. This gradation of exactitude emphasizes that the Sufi method for attaining knowledge/truth is complementary and that, in this sense, it should be considered a kind of "verification" (*taḥqīq*)[34] or, in other words, a method that aims at reaching exact and immutable knowledge about things.

Taking these issues into account, one may better comprehend both how Sufism utilizes and interprets the terms of diverse theoretical traditions and what it has contributed to them.

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[34] For the term, see Ismāʿīl al-Ānqarāwī, *ibid*., 480.

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