FUZZY EPISTEMOLOGY FROM VIEW POINT OF MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

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Abstrak: Isu imanensi dan transendensi sangat penting dalam pemikiran keagamaan. Salah satu alasan mengapa masalah ini tidak pernah terselesaikan adalah bahwa ia memiliki banyak makna dan muncul dalam konteks yang berbeda. Pandangan yang menekankan imanensi dalam satu konteks mungkin menekankan transendensi pada konteks lain. Arti keduanya pun sangat tergantung pada asumsi metafisik mereka yang biasanya secara tidak sadar menggunakannya. Dua sisi yang saling terkait dan bergantung satu sama lain ini pasti hadir di konsep pikiran, jika hubungan antara Allah dan alam semesta, Realitas dan penampilan, benar-benar untuk dipahami. Karena ketiadaanlah bahwa Allah digambarkan sebagai transenden (*tanzīh*), dan karena keberadaan sehingga Ia dikenal sebagai imanen (*tashbīh*). Dua aspek Tuhan, transenden dan imanen diringkaskan oleh Ibn 'Arabi melalui pendekatan ayat Qur'an (42:11). Pakar sejarah agama, peneliti dan mistikus berpegang pada prinsip ini juga dan meyakini bahwa apa yang disebut sebagai "logika panggilan" memiliki dua sisi fungsi yang berarti. Menurut logika ini, seseorang harus mengklasifikasikan panggilan nabi pada kesatuan atau pluralitas seperti dalam kategorisasi panggilan transenden, imanen atau transenden-imanen, dan akibatnya adalah agama Ilahiah akan diperspesi dari sisi ini pula. "Fuzzy logic" atau logika *fuzzy* dipahami berdasarkan preposisi yang paradoks dari berbagai penjelasan dan analisa mistis.

Kata-kata Kunci: Logika *fuzzy,* transenden, imanen, teologi *fuzzy,* paradox

Abstract: The issue of immanence and transcendence is crucial for religious thought. One reason why that is never resolved is that it has so many meanings and turns up in so many different contexts. A view may emphasize immanence in one context and emphasize transcendence in another. What the terms mean depends in part on the metaphysical

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27

assumptions, usually unconscious, of those who use them. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, these two mutually dependent sides must constantly be borne in mind, if the relationship between God and universe, Reality and appearance, is to be truly understood. It is because of nonexistence that God is described as transcendent (*tanzīh*), and because of existence that He is known as immanent (*tashbīh*). The two aspects of God, transcendence and immanence, are summarized for Ibn al-ʿArabī by the Qurʾanic verse "There is nothing like Him, and He is the Hearer, the Seer" (42.11). The religious-historians and researchers and alongside them some mystics insist on it and according to it they consider the logic of the call as a function of the two-valued logic (transcendence or immanence). According to this logic one must classify the call of the divine prophets based on their emphasis upon the unity or plurality in three categories of Transcendental calls, Similar calls and Transcendent-Imminent (T-I) calls and as a result consider the face of divine religions necessarily either Transcendental or Similar or T-I. Fuzzy logic and thought has in understanding of propositions approaches paradoxes and also, in general of any mystical explanation and analysis.

Keywords: Fuzzy logic, transcendence, immanence, fuzzy theology, paradox

Introduction

The main question in this paper arises from the religious-mystical point of view which logic – in the sense of Transcendence and Immanence (or Similarity) – do the divine prophets calls follow up? In other words, what is the general logic of call in this sense for prophets? The current assumption to answer this question is the common point of view which the religious-historians, researchers and mystics insist on, who consider the logic of the call as a function of the two-valued logic (transcendence or immanence). According to this logic, one must classify the call of the divine prophets based on their emphasis upon the unity or plurality just in three categories of Transcendental calls- Similar calls and T-I calls, and as a result consider the face of divine religions necessarily either transcendental or similar or T-I.

But the rival assumption which I will defend in this discourse does not take the answer to this question as a two-valued logic. This assumption is implicitly deducible from the tenor of Ibn-ʿArabi's words in Fusūs-al-Hikām

(the bezels of wisdom). He, as we will show, while rejecting this two-valued logic and presenting a more precise and profound explanation and analysis of the essence of the divine prophet's call, replaces it with other logic which I will refer to as **"fuzzy logic"**.

Now to illustrate the present discussion and considering the special place that I think fuzzy logic and thought has in understanding of propositions approaches paradoxes and in a general of any mystical explanation and analysis, at first I will describe the conception of the term "fuzzy" and then deal with Ibn al-'Arabi's epistemological and mystical view point of the logic of the prophets call as fuzzy theology

Epistemological and Historical Considerations.

Fuzzy logic was first invented as a representation scheme and calculus for uncertain or vague notions. It is basically a multi-valued logic that allows more human-like interpretation and reasoning in machines by resolving intermediate categories between notations such as true/false, hot/cold, etc used in Boolean logic. This was seen as an extension of the conventional Boolean Logic that was extended to handle the concept of partial truth or partial false rather than the absolute values and categories in Boolean logic.[2]

Philosophers such as Plato had posited the *laws of thought* and one of these thoughts was the **Law of Excluded Middle**. Parmenides proposed the first version of this rule around 400 B.C. and stated amidst controversy that statements could be both true and not true at the same time. The Greek Philosopher Plato laid the foundations for the fuzzy logic by proposing a third region between true and false where the two notions tumbled together.[3]

The fuzzy set theory was introduced by Professor Lotfi Zadeh in 1965 and can be seen as an infinite-valued logic. Lotfi Zadeh is currently serving as a director of BISC (Berkeley Initiative in Soft Computing). Prior to 1965 Zadeh's work had been centered on system theory and decision analysis. Since then, his research interests have shifted to the theory of fuzzy sets and its applications to artificial intelligence, linguistics, logic, decision analysis, control theory, expert systems and neural networks. Currently, his research is

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2   J.F. Baldwin, Fuzzy logic and fuzzy reasoning, in *Fuzzy Reasoning and Its Applications* E.H. Mamdani and B. R. Gaines (eds.), London: Academic Press, p.123,1981.

3   Zadeh, L., Fuzzy sets, Information Control 8, p. 338–353, 1965

focused on fuzzy logic, soft computing, computing with words, and the newly developed computational theory of perceptions and natural language.[4]

Innovation

Professor Zadeh's paper on fuzzy sets introduced the concept of a class with blunted boundaries and marked the beginning of a new direction by providing a basis for a qualitative approach to the analysis of complex systems in which linguistic rather than numerical variables are employed to describe system behavior and performance. This approach centers on building better models of human reasoning and decision-making. His unorthodox ideas were initially met with some skepticism but have since gained wide acceptance. The basic principles are: 1. In fuzzy logic, exact reasoning is viewed as a limiting case of approximate reasoning 2. In fuzzy logic everything is a matter of degree 3. Any logical system can be 'fuzzified' 4. In fuzzy logic, knowledge is interpreted as a collection of elastic or, equivalently, fuzzy constraint on a collection of variables. 5. Inference is viewed as a process of propagation of elastic constraints. [5]

The fuzzy set theory attempts to follow more closely the vagueness that is inherent in most natural language and in decision-making processes. In a conventional logic approach, this inherent fuzziness of membership and categorization is not incorporated. Fuzzy logic has found many real-world applications that involve imitating or modeling human behavior for decision-making in the real world. Development of intelligent systems incorporating the basics of fuzzy set theory has helped advance techniques for handling imprecision in soft computing. The primary idea in soft computing is to mimic human reasoning through building models of natural language variables, human interpretation and reasoning; it has found numerous applications in business and finance sectors, mobile robotics and also in social and behavioral sciences. The dynamics and complexity of social systems are explained and modeled through the use of fuzzy theory. In geography and environmental sciences, conventional cartographic representations for geographic phenomenon used definite boundaries for demarcation or differentiation in human and physical systems. Research

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4   Smithson, M. J. Applications of fuzzy set concepts to behavioral sciences. *Journal of Mathematical Social Sciences, 2*:257–274, 1982

5   Fuzzy Thinking Author(s): Bart Kosko Source: Flamingo. An Imprint of Harper Collins Publishers, p. 65, 1993.

and analysis of remotely sensed data has explored the use of fuzzy logic for representation of transition zones and imprecise categories. Again soft computing techniques have resulted in interesting developments in the field of geographic modeling, representation and analysis. The infinite-logic approach in fuzzy-set theory has also been one of the few attempts to respond to the "sorties paradox." The integration of fuzzy logic in relational database systems has also advanced conventional query techniques to incorporate linguistic variables and semantic concepts.[6]

We are inundated with facts, daunted by data, overwhelmed with complicatedness; our senses are more overloaded than ever before. My use of the word "complicatedness" is intentional. It is my intention to draw a distinction between what is complicated and what is complex, between fuzzy and fussy. Lifelong learning reflects our lifelong urge to know about our personal and social worlds; fuzziology focuses on fuzziness (uncertainty, imprecision) inherent in what we consider as known. The famous paradox of knowing, formulated by Socrates nearly 2500 years ago bridges lifelong learning with fuzziology:

> The less we know, the more certain are our explanations; the more we know, the more aware we are about the limitations of being certain.

Because we are aware of the limitations of what we consider as certain, we avoid categorical and precise statements and use explanations that are less certain. The acknowledgment of the fuzziness that is present in our knowledge is a stimulus for a lifelong seeking of truth and wisdom; and it is the search for truth and wisdom that makes human life meaningful.

What is Fuzziness?

Everything that we do not know for sure, we usually think, speak or write in a fuzzy way, that is, by using words and expressions, which convey uncertainty, ambiguity and doubt. The truth contained in a fuzzy statement can neither be proved nor disproved, as fuzziness contains both 'truth' and 'non-truth' at the same time.

Fuzziness is a *holistic* characteristic - it does not relate to our thinking only - it permeates our feelings and emotions, dreams and aspirations,

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6   Zadeh, L., Knowledge representation in fuzzy logic, IEEE Trans. on *Knowledge and Data Engineering 1*:89–100, 1989

spiritual beliefs and endeavors. The fuzziness of our feelings does not need words - it 'voices' through innumerable facial expressions, movements of eyes and body, nerve signals and gestures, body position and muscle tone, voice timbre and volume. Fuzziness is expressed in our actions - when we act without being sure about what we really do and aim for, or act with information about the goal we seek but are ignorant of how to approach it. This is usually the case when we act a complex or sensitive-to-change situations. Our life is full of such kind of situations. Fuzziness is our companion in the processes of learning, generating hypotheses and proving theorems. In 1932, Gödel proved that in any axiomatic mathematical system (theory), there are *fuzzy* propositions, that is, propositions which cannot be proved or disproved within the axioms of this system.

The Engine of Fuzziness

Fuzziness is not something that exists 'over there', as a quality of an external object; it is *in* our understanding of complexity in which we live and constantly create and re-create through our experience, through our thoughts, words and actions. It is in the ways complexity reflects our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual experience and thus constantly creates and re-creates us. So the source of fuzziness is in the *self-referential* nature of our beings: we are simultaneously creators and products of the existential complexity.

Fuzziness in our understanding of complexity of nature and society is a reflection of the fuzziness of our knowing about ourselves. According to Heisenberg - one of the greatest physicists of our time, "The same regulating forces, that have created nature in all its forms, are responsible for the structure of our psyche and also for our capacity to think". Every time we *learn* how to deal with some conundrum of our 'inward' individual life, we simultaneously reveal a secret of complexity in which we live, a secret of our 'outward' social life.

Generation after generation of humans have lived, live and will continue to live together with a constantly reproducible fuzziness 'energized' by what we do not know about ourselves, about our lives, about nature and existence. And the deeper the processes of our *learning* and *knowing* go into the enigmas we live with, the broader the spectrum of manifested fuzziness. The famous message of Socrates: "the *only thing we know for sure, is how little we know*" relates to the never-ending renewal of the fuzziness in human knowledge.

The ignorance about the unknown and the uncertainty about the known, which ever moves, reshapes and changes, keeps the engine of fuzziness going. Powerful accelerators of this engine are the self-propelling dynamics, spontaneity and the stunning variety of life unfolding with its unpredictable rhythm of never-ending 'stretching', 'shrinking' and 'transforming'.

Need for Fuzziness

Our growth in intelligence and wisdom is hardly compatible with the establishment of rigid mental and emotional patterns. Every fixed idea, prejudice, stereotype and standard in thinking, every pre-imposed emotional or spiritual restriction, every blindly followed behavioral pattern, attachment and addiction decrease our ability to fully experience the journey of life and acts as an obstacle on the way of realization of our creativity.

When consciously 'fuzzifying' the rigidness of our thoughts and beliefs, we empower our capacity to see the flow of the events of life and to learn directly from it. The development of our ability for *direct* learning from the lessons of life - from the circumstances and eventualities of own experience - helps us to see the limitations which fuzziness puts on our knowing and continually explore ways of transcending them.

The fuzziness inherent in human knowing is what 'fuzziology' explores, not in order to reduce or eliminate it (this is an impossible task!), but to understand and go beyond its limitations. The words of the ancient wisdom are always fuzzy; therefore they reach the hearts of many different people and make sense for them at different situations in different times of human history. Fuzziology is that hidden interpreter of the words of wisdom - the interpreter who makes them understandable to the heart and soul, to the mind and spirit of an individual. Very distinguished from the approach of fuzziology, are the approaches embraced by the education system of today's society.

Learning to Solve Problems

In today's society, the process of learning is predominantly towards acquisition of various kinds of expert knowledge - a knowledge which can be used for solving specific problems. This kind of learning is centered

in our minds (conceptual knowledge) and bodies (practical skill), and crucially depends on the development of our ability to think in a rational way, to analyze and synthesize, to extract and study cause-and-effect relationships, to generate hypotheses and test them experimentally, to draw out logical conclusions and master skills for performing certain actions.

The major goal of problem-oriented learning is to reduce or eliminate fuzziness imbedded in the process of knowing. In artificially designed systems, subjected to precise description and control, this goal can be achieved. When dealing with life and nature, this goal can *never* be achieved; *the deeper we go in exploring ourselves, society and the universe, the larger becomes the field of our inquiry*, as we constantly come across phenomena and processes which we were initially unable to see. It is like zooming into infinite numbers of scales (fractal levels) nested into one another; every scale reveals more subtleties to be noticed for than the previous.

Life is Not a Problem to be Solved

"Life is not a problem to be solved but reality to be experienced" - these words belong to the Danish philosopher S. Kirkegaard (1813-1856). Infinite is the number of levels through which reality manifests - from the macro level of the whole universe to the micro level of a single quark. And all the levels project on human experience - not only because everything relates to everything else in the impossible-to-separate web of existential dynamics, but also because it is through our experience that we can grasp the meaning of the manifestations of these dynamics and ride on their inexhaustible power. We are endowed with a limitless potential to sense - recognize and understand - the meaning of the events of our experience. In every creative act of realization of this potential, a level of reality opens some of its secrets to us.

Unfortunately, our systems of education do not teach us how to listen to and understand the 'voice' of our experience. This voice often appears too subtle, too soft and too fuzzy in comparison with the loud, sharp and determinate voice of our minds when hurrying to explain 'precisely' how the surrounding world works and how to utilize this 'precise' knowledge for the purpose of control and exercising power over nature and people, systems and machines.

Holistic Experience versus Partial Reasoning

Human experience emerges out of the complex interplay of the four vital constituents of our nature -*body, mind, soul and spirit*, while in constant dynamic interactions with the environment. However powerful the body-mind tandem seems to be as a coordinator of our sense perceptions, it can only see a part of the holistic picture of reality; therefore the *mind-body* - centered models of reality - models which profoundly underpin today's systems of education are *partial*.

It does not matter how precisely we can describe and formulate a partial model, the precision can never make it holistic. The effects that one's soul and spirit have on one's life and experience remain excluded from the picture of reality provided by a mind-centered model. Often this picture appears as a distorted image of reality.

Partial models are suitable for describing artificial (human-made) systems; these systems can be precisely described, dissemble into subsystems and parts, and then assemble again. Partial models do not make much sense when used to describe holistic phenomena and processes like those in nature, life and society. When applied to a description of such phenomena, a partial model (be it deterministic or probabilistic, precise or fuzzy) leads to delusion, to false views on reality - views which can be used for manipulative purposes by those with greatest influential power in society.

The '*s*'-components of human nature - *s*oul and *s*pirit - cannot be eliminated; they emit mystery and wisdom, and therefore *fuzziness*, into our experience, into the process of our knowing about ourselves and about the world with which we continuously interact, co-adapt and co-evolve.

Is God Immanent or Transcendent?

Immanence means the nearness, presence or indwelling of God in creation. When God is regarded as Immanent He is believed to be active in sustaining and preserving creation as well as being concerned about the affairs of individuals. The term is usually contrasted with Transcendence which means that God's activity and power are apart from the world. Christian Theology has always asserted both the immanence and transcendence of God thus rejecting both Deism and Pantheism.

The issue of immanence and transcendence is crucial for religious thought. One reason that it is never resolved is that it has so many meanings

and turns up in so many different contexts. A view that emphasizes immanence in one context may emphasize transcendence in another. What the terms mean depends in part on the metaphysical assumptions, usually unconscious, of those who use them.

One important distinction is between epistemological and ontological discussions. For some the crucial question is whether God can be conceived and talked about in a more or less coherent way. Those who deny this call God "transcendent". The human mind, they believe, is capable of dealing with ordinary mundane things but is not capable of understanding God. God is mystery, and that mystery is not like detective stories that call us to use our wits to solve the mystery, or like the extremely puzzling questions that confront physicists. It is inherently and necessarily mystery, a mystery before which we can only stand in awed silence.

Some of those who emphasize this epistemological transcendence believe that there are forms of mysticism through which God can, nevertheless, be experienced. The experience is ineffable, but there are expressions that come from it that in some way point to the mystery. Others believe that the utterly mysterious God is revealed in particular events. For Christians, these are events recorded in the Bible and especially the event of Jesus Christ.

There are some who emphasize the divine mystery without allowing for either mysticism or revelation as a bridge between creatures and God. This is the most extreme form of epistemological transcendence. David Hume pointed out that one can hardly distinguish this form of belief from atheism, since nothing intelligible is actually affirmed in asserting belief in such a God. With respect to epistemological transcendence, process theology is strongly on the immanentalist side. Whitehead taught that God is not an exception to the metaphysical categories. God is an actual entity as are all the creatures; so that God exemplifies all the features that pertain to actual entities as such. When we say that God loves us, we mean that there is a real similarity between God's relation to us and the most ideal aspects of a mother's relation to her daughter.

Of course, God is very different from His creatures. All other actual entities are actual occasions, that is, have finite spatiotemporal locations. God does not. In important ways, God remains very mysterious. God's everlastingness and relatedness to all things boggle the mind, and we are far from having a fully coherent doctrine of God's being and activity. But the mind is boggled by what we are learning of subatomic entities and of cosmic origins and by the relation of brains and personal experience as well. It seems that the more we know the more mysterious our world becomes.

But this is not the kind of radical, impenetrable mystery that accompanies views of epistemological transcendence.

The denial of radical epistemological transcendence has implications for ontological transcendence as well. Usually the affirmation of epistemological transcendence is connected with the idea that God's being and nature are of a wholly different order than that of creatures. I have already indicated that process thought is at an opposite pole in this respect. It seeks metaphysical categories that are applicable to both God and the actual occasions that constitute empty space, as well as all our human experiences.

But sometimes the meaning of immanent is more spatial than qualitative. Is God to be found inside nature or inside human experience in contrast to outside? If one supposes that the world is made up of substantial things each of which occupies a distinct space, then that question has a quite straightforward meaning. The idea that God is immanent then means that God is an element in the constitution of some or all of these substantial things. For example, God may be identified with the true self of every person, so that by going beneath the superficial flow of experience one may find God.

It is hard to see how pure immanence can be affirmed even in this case. If God is the true self of every person, then God as a whole seems vastly to transcend each individual person even if God is to be found within each. The alternative would be a vast plurality of gods, one in each person that would make the use of the word "God" extremely problematic. In fact this doctrine as historically developed in India leads to the identification of the true self, Atman, with the ground of all being, Brahman, and Brahman is in many ways transcendent. Nevertheless, the movement toward God, when understood in this way, may be purely immanent.

When transcendence is affirmed in this spatial sense, God becomes very remote. If God is not present in the creatures, and the creatures jointly occupy all space, then God is outside of space. What we call "deism" often pictured God in this way as outside the universe acting on it from without or simply leaving it alone. It has become extremely difficult to fit such a vision with the picture of the universe emerging from ongoing developments in science. Nevertheless, much Christian language suggests that God acts on creatures from outside them. Sometimes this is the meaning of "transcendence". In this sense, process thought rejects "transcendence."

What it means to be immanent or transcendent changes when one thinks, with process thought, of the world as made up of events

or occasions of experience. These are largely constituted by their relations to past events or occasions of experience. These relations are internal rather than external in the sense that the relations participate in constituting the occasions of experience. But these relations are to occasions that are external, that is, to occasions that have their own, different, spatiotemporal standpoint. Whitehead's most original contribution, the idea of "prehension", explains how what is external becomes internal, how that which is spatiotemporally transcendent becomes immanent.

Do we then seek God within or without? The answer is both/and and neither/nor because the language of external and internal comes from a metaphysics that process thought rejects. God is a truly constitutive part of our experience moment by moment. But the God who is constitutive of our experience is present in this way throughout the universe, drastically transcending us.

Process theologians see this relationship as the one that the church tried to express in its idea of incarnation and in the way the Holy Spirit works within us. The God who was incarnate in Jesus radically transcended the finite Jesus but was truly constitutive of Jesus' being. The Holy Spirit that indwells believers is radically transcendent of believers but is truly immanent with them. In the process vision, there is nothing especially mysterious about this. Everything that is immanent is transcendent, and everything that is transcendent is immanent. Immanence and transcendence are mutually implicatory.

Nevertheless, in relation to the teaching of divine transcendence in many churches, there is no question but that the emphasis of process theology is that the transcendent God is immanent in every creature and especially in human experience. We think that both the Gospels and the Pauline letters support this way of thinking. Jesus addresses God as Abba, in a way that does not suggest divine remoteness or utter mystery. When Paul says that Christ is in us and we are in Christ, Christ cannot be only a transcendent being.

We may seek God in our own quiet immediate experience. We may seek God in the stories of the Bible and especially in Jesus. We may seek God in the ongoing life of the church. We may seek God in cosmic evolution. We may even try to imagine what it is like to be God. However we approach God, it is the same God, both immanent and transcendent, whom we approach.

Ibn al-Arabi's Thought

Ibn al-'Arabi's writings reflect a comprehensive explanation of *tawhīd*, the "Unity of God," or the assertion that God is One. While this has often been taken to mean the doctrine of the Unity of Being *(wahdāt al-wujūd)*, the concept his school was later associated with, the crux of his teaching is perhaps better described as the perfectibility of Man, that is to say, the human potential for the fullest realization of Unity, the true nature of existence and the place and function of the human being within the universe. The one who asserts God's Unity and believes it to be true is capable of being transformed into one who knows what it means *('ārif)*. It is becoming a "knower" or Gnostic that is the prime purpose of all of Ibn al-Arabi's teaching.

Ibn al-'Arabi deconstructs all systems and reference points except for Being itself, the essence of the Real. This is the only absolute, the base for all phenomena, from which they have come and to which they return. At the same time, we may intellectually conceive of another absolute, pure nonexistence, even though this cannot actually exist, and it is this conception that allows us to distinguish different aspects of Being. Sheer Being or Light cannot be perceived, embraced, or understood by any other than itself, so none knows God but God. In fact this Absolute One is a total negation of all things, without exception. It is absolutely non-manifest, undetermined, unarticulated: even Allah, God, can only be considered as Its outward face with regard to things. Being is refracted as "things," which lie in the relative ambiguity of being both existent/light and nonexistent/dark. Thus the world of creation, which is everything other than God, from the highest spirits to the densest matter, can be viewed as either dark or light, relative nonexistence or existence. In one respect, the thing is He; in another respect, it is not Him. This plurality is one of aspects, not an ontological multiplicity. All aspects refer to God, the One who is named by all Names. "The creation is intelligible," Ibn al-'Arabi writes, "and God is perceptible and visible, according to the people of faith and the people of unveiled insight and experience" [7]. He emphasizes the mutual dependence of God and the world: without the world of creation, God cannot be known as Creator; without living things, God cannot be recognized as the Living.

According to Ibn al-'Arabi, these two mutually dependent sides must constantly be borne in mind, if the relationship between God and universe, Reality and appearance, is to be truly understood: on the side of nonexistence there are all the possibilities of being or immutable entities *(al-a'yān al-*

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7   R.W.J.Austin , *The Bezels of Wisdom* (New Jersey : Paulist Press,1980), p.108.

thābita), which he says "have never smelt the breath of existence" [8]; on the side of existence there are the divine names, attributes, qualities, and actions. It is because of nonexistence that God is described as transcendent *(tanzīh)*, and because of existence that He is known as immanent *(tashbīh)*. The first qualification is accomplished through the use of reason, whereas the second is made through the exercise of imagination. By employing faculties, reason and imagination, together properly, the mystic becomes "the one with two eyes," that is to say, someone with perfectly balanced vision. The two aspects of God, transcendence and immanence, are summarized for Ibn 'Arabi by the Qur'anic verse *"There is no thing like Him, and He is the Hearer, the Seer"* (42 :11).

Ibn al-'Arabi's creed of rigorous Unity is at the same time one of supreme tolerance of diversity and openness to fresh understandings. Throughout his writings, he frequently cites an earlier author who wrote that "in everything there is a sign pointing to the fact that He is One" [9]. Each created thing is at once a "receiver" of Divine Being and a "place" where God is manifests *(mazhar)*. Whether it is a gnat or an angel, every created thing has a particular dignity and closeness to God that demands respect. Insofar as it has no being of its own, its quality is what is implied by nonexistence, i.e., total dependence and humility; insofar as it manifests the Divine Being, it is imbued with divine qualities such as Knowing and Living.

The two fundamental aspects of all existence, which give rise to all the paradoxes and ambiguities of life, are reconciled for Ibn al-'Arabi in the heart of Perfect or Complete Man, who is receptive to all possible manifestations at every level, and has no particular inclination to one side over the other. While everything in the universe manifests certain divine aspects, it is only in and to Man that God is fully revealed and the meaning of the universe is made clear. Ibn 'Arabi uses a Qur'anic account to contrast, for example, the elevated glorification of God by which the angelic hosts praise Him with the divine command for them to prostrate before Adam. Although the angelic nature appears to be the closest to the divine, the angels do not possess the all-embracing nature of Man, who is created in the divine image and possesses knowledge of every level and degree.

Because the ordinary perception of the world is that of multiple existences, each self-subsistent and different from others, it follows that human beings are veiled from their true reality by ideas of self-existence. Revelation, in different forms at different times but culminating in the total

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8   Austin, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, p. 76
9   Ibn 'Arabi, *Al-Fūtuhāt al-Makkīya.* Vol. I.491

revelation granted to Muhammad, is needed to establish proper divinely guided modes of living. True fidelity to the essentials of religious law, however, is only possible for one who realizes its inner spiritual significance. To return to one's primordial nature voluntarily while in this world (rather than by the inevitable way of death) demands the shedding of illusions. This journey of awakening ends with the complete annihilation *(fanā)* of all other than God, out of which arises a new kind of existence (*baqā*, literally "remaining") in full consciousness. Here the true human being becomes "the one with two eyes," seeing the One and the many, God in the creature and the creature in God, without being veiled by either. The world is seen as the theater of divine theophanies *(tajallī)*, renewed at each instant by the "breathing-out" of God. This Ibn 'Arabi calls "the Breath of the All-Compassionate," a loving outpouring relieving the Divine Names from their state of constriction in latency and allowing them fullness in expression. There is, he stresses, "no repetition in revelation": no two moments are the same for anyone, nor is one moment the same for two people.

Prophets and saints are those who have realized their essential nonexistence, and return again to the world as guides who act in accordance with the celebrated divine saying *(hadīth qudsī)*: "I was a Hidden Treasure and I loved to be known; so I created the world that I might be known." [10]. For them God is forever manifest, as the veil of their own selfhood has been rent.

The NOAHian Bezel and the Problem of Transcendence and Immanence

This Bezel is perhaps the most difficult and controversial of the chapters of The Bezels of Wisdom by reason of the unusual extraordinary and interpretations of the Qur'anic that feature in it. Certainly from the standpoint of exoteric Theology, Ibn al-'Arabi's approach to the Qur'anic material in this chapter is at best reckless and at worst flagrantly heretical.

The Situation described in this approach concerns Noah attempts to persuade his people of their folly and wickedness in worshiping transcendent Unity of the urgent necessity to repent and recognize the transcendent Unity of the true God.

Ibn al-'Arabi begins by discussing the tension between the notion of Transcendence and that of Immanence or comparability, and it becomes clear

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10   Ibn 'Arabi, *Al-Fūtuḫāt al-Makkīya*, II.399

on reading further into the chapter that he regards Noah as representative of the former and the people of Noah as committed to the latter view. He writes:

> For those who truly know the divine Realities the doctrine of transcendence imposes a restriction and a limitation on the reality for he who asserts that god is purely transcendent is either a fool or a rogue even if he be a professed believer. For if he maintains that God is purely transcendent and excludes all other considerations he acts mischievously and misrepresents the Reality and all the apostles albeit unwittingly He imagines that he has hit on the truth while he has completely missed the mark being like those who believe in part and deny in part.

Furthermore he continues:

> If you insist only on His transcendence you restrict Him
> If you insist only on His immanence you limit him.
> If you maintain both aspects you are right An Imam and a master in the spiritual sciences.
> Whoso would say He is two things is a polytheist while the one who isolates Him tries to regulate Him.
> Beware of comparing Him if you profess duality and if unity bewares of making Him transcendent.
> You are not He and you are He and you see Him in the essences of things both boundless and limited.

The explanation early in the chapter that both positions are mutually related and cannot properly be considered in isolation from each other also makes it clear that he regards both sides of the dispute in the Qur'an not as right or wrong but as both necessarily representing the two fundamental modalities of divine Self-experience as being at one and the same time involved in and assimilated into cosmic creation and utterly removed from and beyond it [11]. Based on this fuzzy theology Ibn al-'Arabi adds:

> God says **there is naught like unto Him** asserting His transcendence and He says **he is the Hearing the seeing** implying comparison. On the other hand there are implicit in the first quotation comparison

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11   Austin, *Bezels of Wisdom* , p. 73

and duality and in the second quotation transcendence and isolation are implicit.

In this context Ibn al-'Arabi does not regard the people of Noah as necessarily misguided but rather as exponents albeit unconscious ones of the reality of the divine Self-manifestation (*tajallī*) in the ever-changing Multiplicity of cosmic forms implying that had Noah tempered his extreme Transcendentalism with a little concession to divine Immanence his people might have been more responsive to his exhortations. [12]

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12   Austin, *Bezels of Wisdom* , p. 72

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