

IBN TAYMIYYAH'S PHILOSOPHICAL CRITIQUE TO IBN 'ARABĪ'S WAḤDAT AL-WUJŪD THOUGHT

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Abstract: *This research aims to describe and analyze Ibn Taymiyyah's philosophical-constructive critique of Ibn 'Arabī's waḥdat al-wujūd thought. The method used in this research is descriptive-analytical. The primary data used in this research are the works of Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn 'Arabī. Meanwhile, secondary data in this research are books, journal articles, and other websites that discuss the thoughts of Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn 'Arabī. The research results show that Ibn Taymiyyah rejected thinking of waḥdat al-wujūd, because of his understanding of the doctrine of waḥdat al-wujūd This is different from the understanding of Ibn 'Arabī and his followers. According to Ibn Taymiyyah, waḥdat al-wujūd is the equating of God with nature. In modern terms synonymous with pantheism. Ibn Taymiyyah said those who adhere to waḥdat al-wujūd say that existence is one, and wajib al-wujūd what God has is the same as possible waḥdat al-wujūd that a creature has. Ibn Taymiyyah's criticism emerged because he only saw aspects of tashabbuh (equation of God with his creatures) from understanding waḥdat al-wujūd, and did not see aspects of tanzīh (purification of God from the likeness of his creatures) from the same understanding. These two aspects are combined into one in the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī. Even according to Ibn Taymiyyah, the understanding that considers God's existence to be united with the existence of His creatures is a form of disbelief for God, a form of disbelief and shirk in Him.*

Keywords: *Constructive, Ibn 'Arabī, Ibn Taymiyyah, Philosophy, Waḥdat al-Wujūd.*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan dan menganalisis kritik filosofis-konstruktif Ibn Taymiyyah terhadap pemikiran waḥdat al-wujūd Ibn 'Arabī. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah metode deskriptif-analitis. Data primer yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah karya-karya Ibn Taymiyyah dan Ibn 'Arabī. Sedangkan data sekunder dalam penelitian ini adalah buku-buku, artikel jurnal, dan website lainnya yang membahas tentang pemikiran Ibn Taymiyyah dan Ibn 'Arabī. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Ibn Taymiyyah menolak pemikiran waḥdat al-

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wujūd, karena pemahamannya terhadap doktrin *waḥdat al-wujūd* ini berbeda dengan pemahaman Ibn ‘Arabī dan para pengikutnya. Menurut Ibn Taymiyyah, *waḥdat al-wujūd* adalah penyamaan Tuhan dengan alam. Dalam istilah modern sinonim dengan panteisme. Ibn Taymiyyah mengatakan mereka yang berpegang pada *waḥdat al-wujūd* mengatakan bahwa *wujūd* adalah satu, dan *wajib al-wujūd* yang dimiliki oleh Tuhan adalah sama dengan *mumkin al-wujūd* yang dimiliki makhluk. Kritik Ibn Taymiyyah ini muncul karena ia hanya melihat aspek *tasyabuh* (penyamaan Tuhan dengan makhluknya) dari paham *waḥdat al-wujūd*, dan sama sekali tidak melihat aspek *tanzīh* (penyucian Tuhan dari keserupaan dengan makhluknya) dari paham yang sama. Padahal, kedua aspek ini berpadu menjadi satu dalam ajaran Ibn ‘Arabī. Bahkan menurut Ibn Taymiyyah, paham yang menganggap *wujūd* Tuhan menyatu dengan *wujūd* makhluk-Nya adalah suatu bentuk pengingkaran bagi Tuhan, bentuk kekufuran dan kesyirikan pada-Nya.

Kata-kata Kunci: *Filosofis, Ibn ‘Arabī, Ibn Taymiyyah, Konstruktif, Waḥdat al-Wujūd.*

Introduction

The struggle between philosophy and sufism continues to be discussed, especially among intellectuals. Not a few contradict it, meaning that philosophy and sufism have no common ground and negate each other. Philosophy and sufism are both efforts to seek the essence of truth. The difference is that the instruments of philosophy are reason and logic. The instrument of sufism is intuition, which is trained with efforts to purify the soul. Regarding its application, philosophy makes us think radically, systematically, coherently, and substantively. As for sufism, its application is by cultivating the soul, for example, through *dhikr*, prayer, and fasting. This means that the meeting point between the two is the same effort to find the essence of the truth. Philosophy has the task of understanding reality and understanding reality requires deep, radical, and systematic thinking. *Tasawwuf* provides a large space for using the intellect to understand God’s message because Islam is a religion that requires its adherents to study science. Likewise, the Qur’an will encourage humans to utilize all instruments of knowledge to understand all realities.

Ibn ‘Arabī (1165–1240 AD) was a philosopher-sufi figure who brought the experience of unity (*ittihād*) in sufism from the epistemological level to the ontological level. This is because his sufism thought does not only talk about the state of a servant who wants to find his God, but furthermore, he has formulated his sufistic experience into a view of being (‘Afifi 1946, 1:24–77). It is because of this that contemporary sufism researchers categorize Ibn ‘Arabī’s sufism as *falsafi sufism* (‘Afifi 1946, 1:24–77). At first, there was no specific name for his philosophy, but later it was called *waḥdat al-wujūd* (Unity of Existence; Ultimate Existence; True Existence) or unity of existence. His sufistic philosophy influenced sufis after him, such as al-Qūnawī, al-Kāshānī, Ibn Sawdakīn, al-Qayṣarī, al-Qāshānī, al-Jāmī, al-Jīlī, al-Nabulsi, and others. They studied and re-explained Ibn ‘Arabī’s philosophy (Zayd 2002, 21). Although there are many followers, there are also many scholars who reject his thoughts,

such as Ibn Taymiyyah and his students, who call the *waḥdat al-wujūd* philosophy the same as the teachings of Pantheism (a religious and philosophical belief that assumes that reality, the universe, and nature are identical to a god or supreme entity) which state that God is in all that exists or all that exists is Allah SWT (Taymiyyah 1995, 2:34).

According to Abū al-'Alā' 'Afīfī, because *waḥdat al-wujūd* is the same as pantheism, it can have implications for *Jabariyyah*, namely that humans do not have freedom in determining their actions. This criticism is very reasonable because Ibn 'Arabī, in his writings, often uses symbols and expressions that can mislead. Because the form of the creature is the form of God, all the actions of the creature are the actions of God, or, in other words, the obedient and disobedient are God, not humans, thus negating the purpose of the imposition of *shari'a* (*taklīf*). Because *taklīf* requires a reward and punishment because the act comes from the human will itself, If the human will is lost to act, then the purpose of *taklīf* is also lost, because the act is not a human act but an act of Allah (Ḥilmī 2007, 34–92; Ṣubḥī 2002, 212; Taymiyyah 1995, 2:112).

In various literature, Ibn Taymiyyah's struggle against Ibn 'Arabī's *waḥdat al-wujūd* thought continues to be debated today. As revealed by Taqiuddin, explaining that the discussion of Ibn Taymiyyah gets a significant portion, the study of this figure is needed, especially his views on sufism, because some Orientalis and some groups of muslims argue that Ibn Taymiyyah is against sufism. This view is inseparable from the background of Ibn Taymiyyah's thought, which is considered *salafi*, and *salafi* is considered a group that is against sufism (Taqiuddin 2010, 65). This is revealed by Amir's intellectual and theological influence as a pioneer of the famous Islamic school and reformer in medieval times. The flow of thought and legal views and his fatwas have colored many contemporary Islamic schools of thought that are impressed with the ideology philosophy and views of the *salaf madhab* that he pioneered (Amir 2022, 133). Some of Ibn Taymiyyah's writings that speak deeply about the problem of sufism are included in the book *Majmū' al-Fatawā*, which is a collection of writings from Ibn Taymiyyah. In addition, Ibn Taymiyyah's views on sufism can be seen in Ibn Taymiyyah's criticism of some concepts of sufism, especially the criticism of Ibn 'Arabī about *waḥdat al-wujūd*.

But it should be underlined, as Usman points out, that Ibn Taymiyyah was not entirely *anti-tasawwuf*. He was very appreciative of some of the early sufis; it was just that he criticized the figures of *falsafi sufism* and the practitioners of the *tariqah* that developed in his day who were only busy thinking about the afterlife. Ibn Taymiyyah strongly criticized the notion of *ittiḥād* initiated by Yazīd al-Bustāmī, strongly criticized the notion of *al-ḥulūl* taught by al-Ḥallāj, and rejected the notion of *waḥdat al-wujūd* initiated by Ibn 'Arabī (Usman 2020b, 1).

Setiawan and Syukur also explained that sufistic ethics, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, is a science that discusses human behavior towards God and humans. Ibn Taymiyyah's sufistic ethics is characterized by being realistic, empirical, and active. This means that humans behave in a real, sensory, and active way because it is human nature that will and moves, as well as sensory beings. A person should practice the teachings of Islam integrally, not piece by piece. The source is reason, heart, and revelation placed proportionally. *First* is knowledge, which will consider one's behavior. *Second*, *maqāmāt* is the essence of *uṣūl al-dīn*, which is the basis of outward behavior. Outward behavior has no value without being based on inner charity. *Third*, *ma'rifatullah*, becomes the starting point for doing good deeds. Because people who know Allah will do good deeds. The good and bad of a person's actions depend on how much a person knows Allah (Setiawan and Syukur 2021, 140).

Mujib and Helmy also explained that sufism in Ibn Taymiyyah's perspective cannot be separated from Islamic law, but each of the two has a relationship that arises from his thoughts that link esoteric understanding and exoteric understanding. The dichotomy between esoteric and exoteric understanding of several concepts of sufism, such as *ahwāl*, *maqāmāt*, *ma'rifat*, and *karamah*, keeps muslims further away from Islamic teachings. The synthesis of Ibn Taymiyyah's understanding is manifested in the form of faith as a form of inner action (*tasawwuf*) and piety as a form of outer action (Islamic law) (Mujib and Helmy 2020, 228). Sukimin, et.al added that Ibn Taymiyyah emphasized that anyone who reaches him is the treatise of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH then he will not become a *wali* of Allah except by following him because whatever is obtained by someone in the form of guidance and true religion must go through the mediation of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. Similarly, the one who reaches him with the treatise of a messenger will not become a *wali* unless he follows the messenger (Sukimin and Salahuddin 2018, 156).

In contrast to Lala, who emphasizes the thought of Ibn 'Arabī's sufism, which explains the relationship between the oneness of God and the diversity seen in the universe. Representation of 'unity of being' (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) as the elimination of the God-Human divide (Lala 2023, 45). Tapp also adds that Ibn 'Arabī uses the mystical approach of *munājāt*, or intimate dialogue, which usually occurs between a servant and his Lord, and how it relates to *waḥdat al-wujūd* (Unity of Being) by using important concepts such as *barzakh*, imagination, and *dhikr* (remembrance). From this, it can be understood that *munājāt* is a direct communication that occurs from God to Himself through the human form (Tapp 2023, 1).

Cheifetz, on the other hand, sees Ibn 'Arabī's *waḥdat al-wujūd* as a 'unity of experience'. Borrowing al-Sha'rānī's term, he interprets the ontological doctrine of the 'existence of oneness' as a psychological and perceptual

state of the oneness of experience (Cheifetz 2023, 1). Likewise, Frolov through Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's (d. 1960) critique of Ibn 'Arabī's *waḥdat al-wujūd* explains that Ibn 'Arabī attempted to replace *waḥdat al-wujūd* with an alternative spiritual method (Frolov 2022, 28).

In line with Frolov, Burhanuddin also expressed his criticism of Ibn 'Arabī's *waḥdat al-wujūd* by borrowing Sirhindī's critical analysis based on the book *al-Maktūbāt li-al-Imām al-Ālim al-Rabbānī al-Mujaddid al-Sirhindī*, which explains that first, Ibn 'Arabī's view of the universe as imagination clashes with the concept of creation which mentions God as the Creator. The mention of the concept of creation is considered very important because this idea can lead humans to the concepts of retribution and punishment. *Second*, the experience of *fanā'* and *baqā'* does not mean involvement in the divine life, but rather like a dream state, such as a dream of being a king who in reality is not a king. *Third*, *Maqām 'abdiyyah* (devotion) is the highest level among the other three stages, namely the unity of Essence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), shadow (*dhilliyat*), and servitude (*'abdiyyat*). The mention of the three stages is intended to show the truth about the Supreme Godhead, as well as mystical criticism of sufis who start from the first stage (*al-jam'*) and then stop at the second stage (*farq ba'da al-jam'*), and do not pay attention to the stage of slavery which confirms that God is very different from creatures. *Fourth*, Sirhindī's critique of *waḥdat al-wujūd* is complemented by the presentation of the concept of *Wahdat al-Shuhud* which is based on the highest sufi experience of divine transcendence through the teachings of the prophets. Thus, the world is not one with God, nor is it in his form. God is one Essence, and the world is another Essence in which the two have nothing in common (Burhanuddin 2022, 93).

Maghribi critiques traditional sufi practices that deviate from orthodox Islamic teachings, positing that genuine sufism should focus on inner purification while remaining firmly rooted in textual authenticity. Maghribi highlights Ibn Taymiyya's stance against what he perceives as excesses in mysticism, advocating for a form of sufism that fosters moral integrity and spiritual discipline without straying into what he considers innovations (*bid'ah*). In his analysis, Maghribi suggests that Ibn Taymiyya's approach provides a framework for a reformed sufism that can coexist with Salafi doctrines, reinforcing the notion that mystical experience need not contradict foundational Islamic beliefs. The synthesis of sufi practices with strict adherence to sharia allows for a holistic understanding of spirituality that is both experiential and grounded in orthodoxy (Maghribi, Hidayah, and Arikhah 2022, 205).

The method used in this research is a descriptive-analytical method of literature study. The primary data used in this research are the works of Ibn 'Arabī and Ibn Taymiyyah. The secondary data in this research are books, journal articles, and other websites that discuss the thoughts of Ibn

'Arabī and Ibn Taymiyyah. The data analysis techniques that will be used in this research are *first*, qualitative analysis which is a research procedure that will produce descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from the discussion under study. *Second*, descriptive analysis. Descriptive analysis in this research is to describe Ibn Taymiyyah's philosophical-constructive criticism of Ibn 'Arabī's *waḥdat al-wujūd* thought (Moleong 2007, 280).

Brief History of Ibn 'Arabī and Ibn Taymiyyah

Sheikh Muḥyi al-Dīn Muḥammad bin 'Alī, commonly known as Ibn 'Arabī, was born in Murcia (a city in Southeast Spain) in 560 AH (1165 AD). He is known in the West as Ibn 'Arabī and in Spain as Ibn Suraqa. He was a Sunni imam, qadi of the Maliki school during the time of Islamic Spain. His father Abū Muḥammad Ibn al-'Arabī was a high official for the Caliph Taifa in Seville. His father was also a student of Ibn Hazm. When he was nine years old, he and his father were forced to migrate abroad in 1901 to escape the political turmoil when Andalusia was ruled by the al-Murābiṭūn Dynasty. They traveled by ship to Egypt and then to Jerusalem, where they lived from 1093–1096. They then moved to Damascus and Baghdad for religious studies (*riḥlah*) where Ibn 'Arabī studied with Imam Ghazālī. After his father died in 1099 at the age of 57, the 26-year-old Ibn 'Arabī returned to Seville to begin teaching and later became a respected scholar there. Ibn 'Arabī was one of the great thinkers of Islam. Asin Palacios argues that Ibn 'Arabī's thought also influenced later sufis and mystics in both the West and East. Because of his high position in sufism, he was called *al-Sheikh al-Akbar*. Ibn 'Arabī dedicated his life to studying, teaching, and writing. His works are found in various fields of knowledge such as hadith, *fiqh*, *uṣūl fiqh*, *'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, adab, Arabic grammar, and history (Rofi'ie 2010, 131).

Ibn Taymiyyah was born on 10 Rabi' al-Awwāl 661 AH/22 January 1263 AD in the city of Harran near Damascus. His father, Sheikh Shihāb al-Dīn, was a scholar among his people. He taught and gave instructions and fatwas in the Jami's Mosque in Damascus. His grandfather, Majd al-Dīn, was a scholar and jurist of the Ḥanbali school in his time. In such a family environment, Ibn Taymiyyah could study from an early age. At a relatively young age, he had memorized the Qur'an. After that, he began to study hadith, *fiqh*, languages, and the exact sciences. He diligently studied Ḥanbali *fiqh*, as his father was a leader of that school. At other times, he studied tafsir and creed. He grew up in a purely intellectual environment. The majority of the community around him was engaged in various fields of knowledge, such as *fiqh* and other religious sciences. Even some of his family members reached the pinnacle of their scholarly careers, which earned them a reputation in the Islamic world. It is well known that Ibn Taymiyyah was a salafi thinker and champion of Islam.

As an adherent of the *salafi manhaj*, Ibn Taymiyyah was famous for his call to invite Muslims to return to the Qur'an and Sunnah (Maghribi 2024, 75-76). While strongly rejecting other *manhaj* or schools of thought that he considered not derived from the pure teachings of Islam. Namely Islam at the time of the Prophet PBUH. and the time of *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ* (Usman 2020a, 37).

Ibn Taymiyyah was a salafi Islamic thinker and fighter. He is considered the founder of the salafi school besides Ibn Ḥanbal. His thinking was generally inspired by the Ḥanbali school, as he spent most of his education at this school. Ibn Taymiyyah sought to synthesize knowledge derived from reason, a tradition derived from *naql*, and the doctrine of *irādah* (will) into a solid doctrinal construct commonly called "conservative reformism". In the area of dogma, Ibn Taymiyyah focused on following the Qur'an and Sunnah. Because of both, we can know God as God describes Himself in His book and as the Prophet describes God in his Sunnah (Madjid 2020, 48).

Overview of Ibn 'Arabī's *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* Thought

The meaning of *waḥdat al-wujūd* is that There is only One Form, all of this universe is a manifestation of that One. The One Form is Allah SWT. That One encompasses all phenomena that exist and is the source of reason that emanates throughout the universe (Rofi'ie 2010, 136). In this context, He is called *al-Ḥaqīqah al Muḥammadiyyah* (The first creature created by Allah SWT was *al-Ḥaqīqah al Muḥammadiyyah*, which is a part of God Himself that is separated from Him because he was created from His Essence and wants to see the surah (image) of Himself). That One is the source of the cosmos that governs the universe; hence He is called the Universal Soul. That One manifests His actions in each of the (micro) forms that exist in the universe, hence He is called the Universal Body. The One, when seen from its existence as a distant facing all forms of events, is in the form of *al-habā'* (Romadlon, Ihsan, and Istikomah 2020, 179).

Abdul Hadi argues that *waḥdat al-wujūd* means understanding the unity of being or the transcendent unity of being. If Pantheists argue that everything is God, then the *waḥdat al-wujūd* argue that everything that exists comes from one and is covered by one, and that one is God (MH 1985, 68–69), as expressed by Ibn 'Arabī:

There is nothing in reality except Allah, His attributes, and His *af'āl*, and all of it is Him, and it is from Him that it comes and to Him that it will return ('Arabī 1914, 56).

Thus, the conception of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in Ibn 'Arabī's philosophy of sufism is a teaching of *tawḥīd tanzīh*, in which there is no deity except only God who is powerful in everything. Apart from Him, then there is nothing, all creatures are only an image (*mir'ah*) of His power, a very great Creator, namely God the Supreme (Atjeh, 1965, 34).

In concise language, *waḥdat al-wujūd* is a concept that states that “*lā mawjuda illa al-wujūd al wāḥid*”. This means: “Nothing exists except the One Being”, and that One Being is multiple in number *ta’ayyunāt*. However, multiplicity does not mean that there is multiplicity in the essence that exists, just as the multiplicity of human beings does not mean that the essence of human beings is multiplicity (Mūsā 1963, 248).

In one understanding of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, *al-nāsūt* (elements of humanity) in *ḥulūl* (God takes place in the body of a particular human being who has lost his human nature through *fanā’*) is changed by Ibn ‘Arabī *khalq* (something created) and *lāhūt* (elements of divinity) into *ḥaq*, *khalq* and *ḥaq* are two aspects of each thing. The outer aspect is called *khalq* and the inner aspect is called *ḥaq*. The words *khalq* and *ḥaq* are synonyms of *al-‘arḍ* and *al-jawhar*, and synonyms of *al-zāḥīr* and *al-bāṭin*. According to this view, everything that exists has two aspects. The outer aspect is *al-‘arḍ* and *khalq* which are the nature of humanity and the inner aspects which are *jawhar* and *ḥaq* which have a divine nature. This *waḥdat al-wujūd* philosophy arises from the understanding that Allah wants to see Himself outside Himself and therefore He made this nature (according to the Hadith *kuntu kanzan makhfiyan faaradtu an u’rafa fakhalaqtu al-khalq fabihi arafūnī*) which means, “*I was originally a hidden treasure. Then I wanted to be known, so I created creatures, and through Me, they came to know Me.*” So, this nature is a mirror for Allah. When He wants to see Himself, He looks at nature, at the objects in nature (‘Arabī 1980, 16).

Because in each object there is a divine nature, God sees Himself. From this comes the notion of unity. What exists in nature appears to be many, but it is only one. This is not unlike a person who sees himself in several mirrors placed around him. In each mirror he sees himself, in that mirror he appears to be many, but he is only one (Nasution 1973, 75–76).

The Hadith “*Kuntu kanzan lā u’rafu, fa ahbaltu an u’rafa, fa khalaqtu khalqan, fa ‘arraftuhum bī, fa ‘arafūnī*”) above expression is indeed often referred to as hadith Qudsi by most discussants of sufism, among them, Harun Nasution in “*Islam Ditinjau dari Berbagai Aspeknya Jilid II*”, with the expression: “*According to this hadith, God can be known through His creatures and the higher knowledge is to know God through Himself*” (Nasution 1985, 73). The above expression is also contained in the book of Ibn Arabī in “*al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyah*” (‘Arabī 1979, 167), and al-Sha’rānī in “*al-Ṭabaqāt al-Qubrā*” (Sa’ad 2001, 5).

Regarding the above expression, al-‘Ajlūnī in his book “*Kashf al-Khafā*” explains, “Ibn Taymiyyah said, the above expression is not the word of the Prophet (PBUH), nor is the validity of its sanad, nor is it clear that it *ḍa’if*” (‘Ajlūnī 1988, 67). According to Ibn Taymiyyah, the status of the Qudsi hadith above is “*lā aṣla lahu*” (no basis/unclear source), al-Sakhāwī also expressed the same thing in his book “*al-Maqāṣid al-Ḥasanah*” (Sakhāwī

1979, 838). So did al-Suyūṭī in his book “*al-Durar al-Muntathirah*” (Suyūṭī 1988, 330). Al-Suyūṭī and al-Albānī even categorized the above expression as “*mawḍūʿ*”.

In another form, this philosophy can be explained as follows: Beings are made, and their existence depends on the existence of God, the cause of everything tangible other than God. That which has form other than God would not have form if God did not exist. It is God who has the ultimate form. What is made only has a form that depends on the form outside itself, namely God. Thus, the one who has the true form is only God and the made form is essentially dependent on the form of God. What is made has no form. The one who has the true form is only God. Thus, there is only one form, namely the form of God. The form other than the form of God is a shadow form (Burhanuddin 2022, 93).

Ibn ‘Arabī’s Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam (“*The Bezels of Wisdom*”) is a cornerstone of his metaphysical philosophy, presenting divine wisdom through the lives of prophets. The work articulates his vision of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (Unity of Being), asserting that all existence reflects divine reality while emphasizing God’s transcendence (‘Afifi 1946, 1:24–77). William Chittick’s studies, especially in *The Sufi Path of Knowledge and The Self-Disclosure of God*, interpret Ibn ‘Arabī’s complex cosmology, epistemology, and the role of divine names and attributes. Chittick highlights Ibn ‘Arabī’s vision of reality as a dynamic process where the divine continually manifests within creation without merging with it, showcasing Ibn ‘Arabī’s nuanced approach to unity, imagination, and knowledge (Chittick 1989, xx).

He emphasizes that Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought invites believers to recognize the divine presence in all aspects of life while maintaining the ultimate transcendence of God. Chittick argues that Ibn ‘Arabī’s nuanced metaphysics challenges the rigid dichotomies often found in Islamic theology, providing a more integrative understanding of spirituality that accommodates both rational inquiry and mystical experience.

Moreover, Chittick highlights Ibn ‘Arabī’s innovative epistemology, which blends revelation and experiential knowledge. Ibn ‘Arabī posits that true understanding arises not merely from intellectual reasoning but also through inner experience (*dhawq*), which leads to a deeper awareness of God’s manifestations in the world. This perspective fosters a more holistic approach to spirituality, encouraging practitioners to engage with both exoteric and esoteric dimensions of faith (Chittick 1989, 91–94).

The tension between Ibn ‘Arabī’s mystical insights and the critiques of figures like Ibn Taymiyyah reflects a broader discourse within Islamic thought regarding the legitimacy of mystical practices. While Ibn Taymiyyah sought to uphold a strict interpretation of *tawḥīd*, warning against potential pantheistic implications, Ibn ‘Arabī’s work provides a framework for reconciling these concerns. He insists on the necessity of *tanzīh* to safeguard the transcendence of God, even as he emphasizes the

immanence of divine presence in creation.

Contemporary scholars, inspired by the works of Ibn 'Arabī and Chittick, are increasingly exploring the relevance of sufi metaphysics in discussions of religious pluralism and reform movements within Islam. They argue that Ibn 'Arabī's insights can foster greater tolerance and understanding among different faith traditions, as his philosophy encourages believers to seek the divine in diverse expressions of spirituality.

In conclusion, Ibn 'Arabī's contributions to Islamic philosophy, particularly through *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, continue to resonate in modern contexts. His integration of mysticism with rigorous philosophical inquiry offers valuable perspectives for contemporary discussions on theology, spirituality, and the complexities of religious identity. The dialogues sparked by his thoughts challenge rigid orthodoxies and promote a richer, more inclusive understanding of the divine (Afifi 1946, 1:24–77).

Ibn Taymiyyah's Criticism of Ibn 'Arabī's *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* Thought

Sufi who is often mentioned as the founder of *waḥdat al-wujūd* is Muḥyi al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī. This doctrine is always associated with this great sufi figure. The doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* Ibn 'Arabī (Andalusia, 1165–Damascus, 1240), teaches that nothing exists except the form of God. There is only one ultimate being, namely God. The existence of beings depends on the existence of God. If God does not exist, which is the source of shadows, nothing else exists, because the whole of nature has no form and only God has form. In other words, there is only one form, the form of God, and everything else is just a shadow. This doctrine seems to be a continuation of the *ḥulūl* doctrine brought by al-Ḥallāj; *al-nāsūt* (human nature) in *ḥulūl* is termed by Ibn 'Arabī as *al-khalq* and *al-lāhūt* (divine nature) as *al-Ḥaqq* are two aspects found in everything; *al-Khalq* is the outer aspect and *al-Ḥaqq* is the inner aspect. It can also be said that *al-Ḥaqq* is the substance of *jawhar* and *al-khalq* is *'arḍ* (things attached to the deity, not the essence). The most important of the two is the inner aspect. The doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* arises from the philosophy that God wants to see Himself outside Himself. Then He created nature as a mirror that reflected His self-image. Whenever He wants to see Himself, then He looks at nature because, in every natural object, there is an aspect of *al-Ḥaqq*. So, although all these objects seem to be many, there is only one being, which is *al-Ḥaqq* ('Arabī 1979, 310). The philosophy of God's desire to be with His creation and to be recognized is based on Hadith Qudsi: It means: "I was originally a hidden treasure, then I wanted to be recognized. So, I created beings, and they came to know Me through Me".

In interpreting this Hadith Ibn 'Arabī says that God would not be known if He did not create nature. In other words, nature is the external appearance of God; because in sufism, every time God creates an object (a human), it must leave a mark or impression on the object, and this

is what is known as *haḍrah* (a useful method to open the way to the "heart"). Furthermore, Ibn 'Arabī explains that besides wanting to be known through His creation, God also wants to know and see Himself in a form that reveals His attributes and names in detail and as perfectly as possible in the mirror of nature ('Arabī 1979, 4:420). According to Ibn Taymiyyah, "The essence of this belief is summarized in the sentence: 'Verily, the form of creation is the form of Allah SWT. There is no form other than His form, and there is nothing other than Him.' In their view, Allah SWT is all that exists, there is no form other than Allah SWT, and all creatures are manifestations of Allah SWT's knowledge, will, and grace (Taymiyyah 1997b, 22).

This thought is openly declared by the *falsafi sufis* to all human beings. The leader of this group was Ibn 'Arabī. He surmised that the sufis who have attained the essence establish that there is nothing in this existence except Allah SWT. Although we exist, our existence is with Allah SWT. Whoever exists because of other than Allah SWT is deemed not to exist (Taymiyyah 1997b, 24). Ibn 'Arabī's statement "Verily, the being of the creature is the being of Allah too" although words that cause disbelief, Ibn 'Arabī closer to Islam than others, because many of his words are good. In addition, he was also inconsistent with the idea of *ittihād* (a stage in sufism where a sufi feels himself united with God). Often he was still caught in doubt about that theory (Taymiyyah 1983, 31). Ibn Taymiyyah, therefore, claims the followers of this doctrine are far more disbelievers than Christians, for several reasons: *Firstly*, because the essence of what they say is that Allah SWT' did not create anything. For if all that exists is nothing but His existence, then He can't create His Essence. It is a matter that cannot be denied by reason that something cannot create itself. Every creation must have a creator. Even the polytheists believe that. As in Q.S. At-Ṭūr verse 35 which means: 'Were they suddenly created, or did they create themselves?'

However, the followers of *waḥdat al-wujūd* consider that nothing was created by Allah SWT. *Second*, for them, Allah SWT does not give sustenance, bounty, love, favor, knowledge, guidance, and benefits to anyone because, essentially, according to the followers of this understanding they are in the form of Allah SWT itself. *Third*, according to them, those who prostrate, bow, worship, fast, feel hunger, sleep, experience pain, and are attacked by enemies are Allah SWT. Because all that exists is Allah SWT. So, when anyone is freed from this calamity it is Allah SWT. *Fourth*, for them, those who worship other than Allah are not considered polytheists, because all that exists, both those who do obedience and disbelief are Allah SWT, too (Taymiyyah 1983, 88).

Ibn Taymiyyah rejects this understanding because his understanding of the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* is different from that of Ibn 'Arabī and his followers. According to Ibn Taymiyyah, *waḥdat al-wujūd* is the

equation of God with nature. In modern terms, it is synonymous with pantheism. Ibn Taymiyyah says those who hold to *waḥdat al-wujūd* say that form is one, and the *wajib al-wujūd* owned by God is the same as the *mumkin al-wujūd* owned by creatures (Taymiyyah 1997b, 26). According to Ibn Taymiyyah, creatures before being created already existed in the form of knowledge, *kalam* and the book of God that can be known and written even though in essence in the concrete form they have not yet manifested. Because, according to him, if the form manifests outside of His form, it cannot be said to be nonexistent (*al-ma'dūm*), but if it is still in the form of knowledge and desire then it is still possible if it has not yet manifested and its manifestation is also very possible even all creatures will not exist before their existence in God's '*ilm* and *irādah*' (Taymiyyah 1997a, 8:428–29). About the creation of nature, Ibn Taymiyyah and most theologians from the Ash'ariyyah, hold the view that nature was created directly by God from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) without any cause. The creation was solely at the will of Allah SWT. Therefore, according to this concept, nature is new. Nature exists because it was created by Allah SWT. If it is said that nature was created from something that already existed, then there are many *qadīm* (eternal). There is only one *qadīm*, namely Allah SWT (Taymiyyah 1997a, 8:300).

For this reason, Masyharuddin added that the terms highlighted by Ibn Taymiyyah and considered to contain problems, especially theological-philosophical problems, were not all rejected. That is, certain sides are tolerated by Ibn Taymiyyah. For example, he accepted the doctrine of *ma'rifah*, which means the opening of the veil between God and receiving knowledge directly from Him. Even with the note that knowledge must be in control (Al-Qur'an and Sunnah). Indeed, Ibn Taymiyyah did not reject the terms of sufism, but it must be given an interpretation by Islamic teachings and he still tried to keep these teachings always in the frame of a straight *tawḥīd* creed (Masyharuddin 2007, 130–31).

According to Ibn Taymiyyah, people who are inclined to sufism are divided into two parts; *first*, people who admit the truth and falsehood, *secondly*, those who reject the truth and falsehood, as is the attitude of some groups of experts in *kalam* and *fiqh*. Furthermore, Ibn Taymiyyah argues that people who understand sufism are divided into three patterns, namely: 1) Sufism is characterized by the science of essence (*ṣūfiyyah al-ḥaqā'iq*), 2) Sufism is pragmatic (*ṣūfiyyah al-arzāk*), and 3) Sufism is formalist (*ṣūfiyyah al-rasm*). According to him, the true sufis are those who concentrate on worship and undergoing monasticism in the world. They are the ones who consider a sufi to be 'one who is cleansed of impurities, filled with *tafakkur* (thinking or contemplating about the creatures created by Allah SWT) and for whom gold and stone are equal in value.' (Taqiuddin 2010, 78).

Thus, Ibn Taymiyyah's criticism arises because he only sees the

tashabbuh (equating God with his creatures) aspect of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and does not see the *tanzīh* (purification of God from the likeness of his creatures) aspect of the same understanding. These two aspects are combined into one in Ibn 'Arabī's teachings. In fact, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, the understanding that considers God's form to be one with the form of His creatures is a form of denial for God, a form of *kufr* and *shirk* on Him. For him, the unity of two substances is impossible. God's substance remains his substance, just as a creature's substance is its substance. They remain distinct and will never merge. Allah is Allah as is clear in the Book and the Prophet's hadith. It is not wrong to say that the model of sufism offered by Ibn Taymiyyah is a model of sufism whose main measure is what has been outlined by sharia (Madjid 2020, 49).

This compatibility between sufism and sharia is the main characteristic of his model of sufism. Moreover, if sharia is the first step of the spiritual journey for Sufis, for Ibn Taymiyyah, sharia is the ultimate goal of sufism. According to him, the quality of a person's piety is no longer measured in terms of his mystical experience, but in terms of the quality of his moral purity as mentioned in the Qur'an and Sunnah.

To provide a more balanced perspective, it's essential to consider both Ibn Taymiyyah's criticisms of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and Ibn 'Arabī's nuanced explanations of the doctrine.

Ibn 'Arabī's concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (Unity of Existence) revolves around a complex metaphysical view where all of creation reflects God's reality. While this doctrine may blur the line between Creator and creation, Ibn 'Arabī's writings emphasize both *tashbīh* (similarity) and *tanzīh* (transcendence) ('Afifi 1946, 1:5). For Ibn 'Arabī, creation is indeed a "mirror" through which God perceives His attributes, yet he carefully insists that this mirroring doesn't equate created beings with God Himself. Rather, it acknowledges that God's essence remains beyond comprehension, fully transcendent, and never limited to any created form. This concept of *tanzīh* serves as a cornerstone in Ibn 'Arabī's thought, where he repeatedly distinguishes between God's absolute essence (*dhāt*) and the contingent nature of creation ('Arabī 1979, 4:310).

On the other hand, Ibn Taymiyyah's critique primarily targets what he saw as theological risks in the doctrine. For him, the merging of the Creator and creation potentially confuses divine transcendence and promotes views akin to pantheism. Ibn Taymiyyah viewed such ideas as compromising *tawḥīd*, the oneness of God, and argued that *waḥdat al-wujūd* might lead believers into *shirk* (associating partners with God) by ascribing aspects of God's essence to creation.

However, Ibn 'Arabī addresses this potential misunderstanding in his works by emphasizing that God's presence in creation does not imply a literal merging but rather a reflective manifestation. In his view, creatures have a "borrowed" existence, meaning they manifest divine attributes

in an indirect, symbolic manner. Thus, while the essence of existence is singular, individual entities are distinct from God's essence. This is critical to Ibn 'Arabi's concept of *tanzih*, where he strives to maintain that God's essence remains transcendent and unknowable (Cheifetz 2023, 1).

This balanced view allows us to see that Ibn Taymiyyah's critique of *waḥdat al-wujūd* stemmed from his focus on maintaining a clear separation between God and creation to protect the integrity of *tawḥīd*. Meanwhile, Ibn 'Arabi's perspective, though complex, upholds a nuanced transcendence within unity, where God is seen as both manifest and hidden, immanent and beyond.

The Contribution of Sufism Epistemology to Ibn Taymiyyah's Criticism of Ibn 'Arabi's *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* Thought

From the previous description, there is a contribution of sufism epistemology to Ibn Taymiyyah's criticism of the thought of *waḥdat al-wujūd* Ibn 'Arabi. *First*, in terms of the principles of sufism epistemology is a course study of the correlation between *sharia*, *ṭarīqah*, and *ḥaqīqah*, as well as spiritual experience with revelation. The source of knowledge and the ability of intellectual potential that perceive the object of knowledge. *Secondly*, sufism's epistemology accommodates an empiricist view of external reality, given its existential status as sensory data. In this case, it recognizes revelation as the scope of knowledge that includes all three (Syukur and Masyaruddin 2002, 82). *Third*, the nature of sufism's epistemology is that it continues to use reason as the basis of its knowledge, although it mainly uses intuition (*dhawq*). Reason is used to observe the symptoms that are caused, especially those related to the workings of the five senses so that whatever the results, the rationalization process still refers to the empirical world and has a materialistic outlook. Therefore, revelation is felt to be the only way that can guarantee the validity and objectivity of sufism (Tebba 2003, 73).

Fourthly, the methodology adopted in the study of sufism is open. That is, it is not bound by certain patterns of thought, for example using the paradigm of *falsafi sufism*, *Sunni sufism*, or sufism in the context of mysticism (Bakir 2019, 8–9). Sufism scholarship in general emphasizes the importance of building a spiritual journey or sufistic experience above all else. Among sufis, the heart is so concerned, that it becomes the main basis for performing external worship (exoteric), as well as internal worship (esoteric) (Syukur 2012, 109). Because the core of sufistic life is inner cleansing and inner experience (esoteric), this cleansing is intended so that the heart is prevented from envy, spite, *riyā'*, *'ujub*, and arrogance contained in the self. Meanwhile, inner experience is intended so that a sufi can reach the essence of everything and feel its pleasure. That way, there is continuity between human spiritual life and physical life, and a good personal life will give rise to good social attitudes as well.

In *Ibn 'Arabī in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam (Suny Series in Islam)*, Alexander Knysh critically examines Ibn Taymiyya's opposition to Ibn 'Arabī's doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. Knysh highlights that Ibn Taymiyyah viewed this doctrine as potentially undermining *tawḥīd*, the fundamental oneness of God. He believed that Ibn 'Arabī's teachings blurred the distinction between the Creator and creation, leading to theological implications akin to pantheism, which could foster shirk (associating partners with God).

Knysh points out that Ibn Taymiyya's critiques were not merely personal attacks but reflected a broader struggle within Islamic thought regarding mysticism's place within orthodoxy. He argues that Ibn Taymiyya's emphasis on a strict separation between God and creation served to safeguard the integrity of Islamic monotheism. This tension has implications for contemporary discussions on religious pluralism and the acceptance of various theological perspectives within Islam.

Furthermore, Knysh suggests that the polemical image crafted by Ibn Taymiyyah against Ibn 'Arabī contributed to the latter's controversial status in later Islamic scholarship. Ibn 'Arabī's thought, while initially influential, became increasingly scrutinized and often rejected by traditionalists who adhered to Ibn Taymiyyah's vision of a more rational, sharia-based approach to spirituality. This historical backdrop illustrates how debates around metaphysics, mysticism, and orthodoxy have shaped the understanding and reception of sufism within the Islamic tradition.

Knysh concludes that the legacy of Ibn 'Arabī, as filtered through the lens of Ibn Taymiyyah's critiques, underscores a significant dichotomy in Islamic philosophy: the tension between mystical experience and doctrinal orthodoxy. This ongoing discourse remains relevant today, influencing contemporary Islamic reform movements and discussions on theological pluralism, as scholars and practitioners continue to grapple with the implications of these foundational debates.

Overall, Knysh's work elucidates how the criticisms of Ibn Taymiyyah not only shaped perceptions of Ibn 'Arabī but also reflected broader theological concerns that resonate within modern Islamic thought.

In another, Kaya examines how Ibn 'Arabī's epistemology emphasizes experiential knowledge and the unity of existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), proposing that all creation reflects the divine. This perspective contrasts sharply with Ibn Taymiyyah's rationalist approach, which prioritizes textual sources (the Qur'an and Sunnah) and maintains a strict separation between the Creator and creation, advocating for a clear understanding of *tawḥīd* (the oneness of God) (Kaya 2016, 578).

Kaya illustrates how these differing views impact their theological stances, particularly regarding the nature of divine attributes and the implications for religious practice. While Ibn 'Arabī fosters a more mystical and inclusive interpretation that accommodates varying spiritual

experiences, Ibn Taymiyyah's approach seeks to safeguard orthodoxy and critique any notions that blur the lines between God and creation, viewing such ideas as potentially leading to shirk (associating partners with God).

Kaya's analysis highlights the enduring relevance of their debate in contemporary Islamic thought, particularly in discussions surrounding mysticism, theology, and religious pluralism. The comparative study suggests that integrating the strengths of both perspectives could enrich modern understandings of spirituality and faith within the muslim community, offering pathways toward a more comprehensive theological discourse (Kaya 2016, 580).

Contemporary Implications

The philosophical debate between Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn 'Arabī carries meaningful implications for modern Islamic thought, especially regarding religious pluralism, theology, and reform movements. Ibn 'Arabī's *waḥdat al-wujūd* encourages a perspective that all existence is interconnected with the Divine, offering a foundation for interfaith understanding and inclusivity by recognizing divine qualities within diversity. This perspective can support pluralistic frameworks and theological dialogues, where mutual respect is fostered without erasing religious distinctions (Chittick 1989, 125–27).

On the other hand, Ibn Taymiyyah's staunch commitment to *tawḥīd* (the oneness of God) and adherence to sharia serves as a crucial reference for contemporary Islamic reform movements that emphasize a return to foundational texts and a more structured, orthodox expression of faith. His critique of what he saw as potentially pantheistic elements in *waḥdat al-wujūd* highlights the importance of upholding divine transcendence, which many modern reformists see as essential to preserving Islamic identity in secular and pluralistic contexts (Maghribi 2022, 223).

This historical debate also speaks to the ongoing tension between mysticism and orthodoxy in Islamic societies today, inviting modern scholars to explore how spirituality and legalism can coexist without compromising core principles. In Islamic theology, spiritual discourse, and interfaith dialogue, these classical perspectives offer frameworks for addressing questions around religious identity, authenticity, and the coexistence of varying theological approaches within a diverse and interconnected world.

By linking Ibn Taymiyyah's concerns with purity in worship and Ibn 'Arabī's mystical inclusivity, this discourse remains relevant, showing how classical Islamic thought can engage with today's challenges of pluralism, reform, and spiritual renewal. This analysis allows for a nuanced view of Islam that respects tradition while addressing the spiritual and social needs of contemporary muslims.

Conclusion

Ibn Taymiyyah strongly criticized Ibn 'Arabī's thoughts on *waḥdat al-wujūd*, even judging him as a pagan by equating the servant and his God. Some people distinguish it as a stage in the notion of unity of being which culminates in the notion of *waḥdat al-wujūd* which views that there is only one form, namely God. Ibn Taymiyyah's criticism of *waḥdat al-wujūd* is aimed at two basic foundations of thought that he thinks are wrong: the philosophical view of creation and the understanding of religious propositions. According to him, the error of the adherents of *waḥdat al-wujūd* stems from these two understandings. *First*, the knowledge that what is absent (*ma'dūm*) essentially exists (*thābit*) in nothingness (*al-'adam*). This thinking suggests that the creature's new form is also the entity of God's form, nothing else but Him. *Second*, Ibn Taymiyyah also gave a scathing criticism to *Falsafi Sufism* experts and adherents of *tariqah* who tended to run away from the reality of social life, so that Muslims experienced a decline and were only concerned with their happiness and were busier with the rituals of their *tariqah*. The students were very *taqlid* to the *murshīd*.

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