

IBN ARABI PASSIONS TRUTH TO
DIALOGUE: THE PARADIGM OF
CONNECTIVITY

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ABSTRACT

Inter and intra belief systems dialogue features ceaselessly, because of the new experience and new revelations which bring new challenges and demand new understanding. Emulating truth showcases the mindset of cultures and civilizations; it flourishes when connectivity based on truth prevails. Ibn Arabi passions: Truth to Dialogue; cumulative of universally recognized truths in theological and scriptural material that has usually been interpreted more parochially or exclusively. In a world increasingly divided by a variety of fundamentalisms, theological imperialism, secular indifferentism, misosophical postmodernist belief systems, relativist nihilist and anti transcendentalist ideologies causing *moral chaos*; it is extremely urgent to explore traditional resources for intercultural and interreligious dialogue. This paper highlights '*Truth*', a source for real dialogue between philosophies and religions, tradition and modernity and thus among cultures and civilizations. Ibn Arabi is found aligned with the unified position of all prophets (the founders of world religions) saints and traditional philosophers like Plato. He premises Islam with two composites; primacy of intelligence and objectivity, the most desired in the wake of misosophical and irrationalist. Ibn Arabi's passion to 'Truth' inclined dialogue based on revelation, wisdom, and moral purification; contemplation of love, beauty, mercy, inspiration and commandant makes him admirably to be explored for the resources on the issue of inter-civilization dialogue.

Ibn Arabi would enjoy the company of sages and sage-philosophers of other traditions as all of them were the people of imagination and unveiling and recognized the primacy or rights of the Other, the non-self, the Universal Spirit, the Logos. In a world increasingly divided by a variety of fundamentalisms, theological imperialism, secular indifferentism, misosophical postmodernist cults and epistemic and moral chaos from relativist nihilist and antitranscendentalist ideologies it is extremely urgent to explore traditional resources for intercultural and interreligious dialogue. More important still is to bridge the gulf between traditional and modern sensibilities which seem to be at loggerheads. There have been a variety of attempts to appropriate modern trends in various disciplines in theology but accusations of heresy and inauthenticity have been quite frequent. Religion has been mostly on a losing ground in this clash for ideological supremacy. Most recent attempts at bridge building have been at the cost of religion. Is it possible to evolve a hermeneutic that recognizes the *haqq* of various thought currents that seem to articulate some significant mode of contemporary experience and knowledge? Is it still possible to speak for Truth in the age singularly known for confusion of tongues, relativism and confounding of truth and falsehood? Is it possible to have a decisive *furqan* that denounces error in a prophetic tone and stands for truth that Buddha called the supreme gift? What is modernity worth for and how to show its face in the mirror? Ibn Arabi, the great Muslim sage, claimed to present precisely such a decisive argument of Truth against distortions, obfuscations and ideological misappropriations. He also provides, as this paper will argue, a basis for genuine dialogue between philosophies and religions, philosophy and theology, tradition and modernity and thus between cultures and civilizations.

A few general preliminary remarks are in order regarding what we may call as Ibn Arabi's model for dialogue. This model is neither postmodern relativist or sophistic one that disavows Truth as such and grants the benefit of doubt to everyone as nobody has access to truth nor the one that claims to have a unique access to truth and sees other ideological positions as groping to approximate its privileged position. Ibn Arabi provides a hermeneutic that unearths

universally recognized truths in theological and scriptural material that has usually been interpreted more parochially or exclusively. He aligns himself with what he sees as the unified position of all prophets (thus founders of world religions) and saints and traditional philosophers like Plato. He doesn't base his "position" of no position on any disputable rationalist axiom or proposition. He doesn't take recourse to any "as if" position that propounds cautiously formulated propositions where enough room for ambiguity and uncertainty remains to warrant any interpretation. Remaining loyal to the text with exceptional use of philological resources he excavates treasures of meanings that overturn all exclusivist claims. His is a sharp edged unambiguous statement of some fundamental theses for which all religions have stood and which express the intuition of great mystic masters of all traditions (granting perennialist traditionalist reading of religions and mystical traditions). Ibn 'Arabî demonstrates why and how Islam stands for the rights or primacy of intelligence and objectivity, the elements which our era desperately seeks in the wake of misosophical and irrationalist cults. His dialogues with previous prophets and saints constitute one of the most profound encounters with transcendence and proof of intimations of the higher life of Spirit. Every orthodox tradition can claim him. He has resonances everywhere, in the universe of faiths and philosophies. His notion of man is, arguably, the most comprehensive one in world history. His religious thought is subservient to his metaphysical intuitions. For a sage there is ultimately no problem or contradiction because he, through creative imagination and intellective intuition, transcends all conceptual and logical thought structures and paradigms. At the realizational level all conflicts that are centred on or revolve round reason and language are transcended. Ibn 'Arabî preserves the centrality of Revelation but at the same time pleads for the independent rights of mystical and metaphysical intuitions theoretically available to anyone who takes the necessary pains in self-discipline. He speaks the universal language of love that everybody can not only understand but even identify with. In more than 400 books (according to one estimate) he formulated and promulgated with extraordinary clarity and force the meanings and expression of the principle of unity of existence, which is at the heart of world traditions.

Approaching the fundamental problems of religion and philosophy from a perspective of what Qunawi called *masrab al-tahqîq*, "the school of realization" which is to be differentiated from the twin approaches of philosophy and scholastic theology, Ibn 'Arabî assigns himself the task of not only intellectually knowing but

existentially realizing truth and reality and the rights and worth of everything that is as is implied in the designation of the Supreme Principle as the True, the Real (*Al-Haqq*). Employing metaphysical perspective¹ (which, by definition and as the perennialist authors² point out, corresponds most closely to pure truth and is better called metaperspective or divine perspective due to its universality and comprehensiveness) instead of religious/theological which necessarily anthropomorphizes or rational philosophical approach which inevitably is limiting because of the limiting faculty it uses (reason/reflection/logic/concepts/categories), he achieves, arguably, the most comprehensive synthesis or integration of diverse sciences in Islamic history. He is, by virtue of these multidimensional qualifications, admirably suited to be explored for the resources on the issue of inter-civilizational dialogue. His aim ultimately is to fulfill the human potential for perfection, the vision of truth or knowledge of things as they are (essences/noumena) which is fulfilling the primordial vocation of man according to all traditions.

Engaging with Unbelieving Modernity

How would Ibn Arabi address the modern unbelieving world and overcome the problem of reaching out the other – the disbeliever, the sinner, the ignorant? Modern man is however quite complacent regarding the issue of religion and God. He thinks he has thoroughly examined religion both exoteric and esoteric and found it wanting. He thinks hell is a myth and man must learn to live without need of consolation and lure of heaven. He finds religious position naïve or product of fear or explainable in other terms than the spiritual/metaphysical one. He refuses to enter into the dialogue process considering himself to have progressed into the post-religious age. Most of the important modernist and postmodernist thinkers would consider the option of transcendence/sacred/supernatural closed for themselves and modern educated man. Given such a complacent posturing from the side of secular (post)modernity how will Ibn Arabi find sympathetic audience and how will he establish the case for the primacy of the sacred and theomorphic ethics and prerogative and thus engage with modern atheism/agnosticism? Ibn Arabi can be approached for addressing this complex problem at different levels. Firstly he presents the case of religion in such a way that most of important criticisms leveled by modernity are taken care of. Secondly he appropriates the problem of unbelief in his fundamentally transtheistic theology so that it loses much of its warrant and cutting edge and even pejorative sense in which the theists have understood

the issue. Thirdly he finds roots for all kinds of misguidance in the play of divine names and “exonerates” the disbeliever in a way.

Modernity has many problems with traditional theism. Most of these problems can be avoided if we adopt thoroughly symbolic view of fundamental theistic concepts and keep in consideration metaphysical equivalents of them of which these are not very adequate translations. Ibn Arabi provides such a reading of theological concepts. Here I attempt to present Akbarian view of some fundamental theological notions. Such a presentation, as will be seen, blunts the cutting edge of much of atheistic and agnostic critique of theology.

The Bible says that only the fools say in their hearts that there is no God. The Quran asserts that no doubt can be entertained regarding God and that God is the Manifest Truth. The more they blaspheme, the more they praise God, remarked Meister Eckhart. All things are loved for the sake of the Self rather than for themselves as the Upanisads say. Berdyaev stated that “man can’t exist where there is no God.” Melebranche maintained that we see all things in God. If we accept all these statements as countless generations of humans have accepted until few centuries ago (All traditions have maintained belief in Absolute/Godhead though not personal God, belief in transcendence of Spirit) how can we make sense of the modern “wisdom of the fools” upheld by atheistic/agnostic academia? It is Ibn Arabi who makes such statements comprehensible and even indubitable as we shall see.

For Ibn Arabi God is Reality, immanent and transcendent. In his understanding the Real alone is and there is no distance between us and It. We are already there in the lap of God – we have never been really away and cannot be away from It. God has never been missed. We have forgotten or fallen asleep but this doesn’t alter the fact that God is our very being, our inmost reality. Man is inwardly God and outwardly a creature according to Ibn ‘Arabî. The world is God’s visible face. The real, the obvious, that which is always with us, has been always with us, will always be with us, is God. God is the Isness of things. He is the Meaning of everything. God constitutes all pervasive Environment (*al-Mubîit* in the Quranic parlance) in which normal man lives, moves and has his being.

Modern skeptical thought has problematized an image of God bequeathed by dualistic thought (philosophical and theological) and against the Unitarian view it has few problems. In fact the nonbelievers have most often substituted for doctrines of exoteric theology some sort of monistic or Unitarian doctrine. An utterly transcendent God may be too remote to make it possible to doubt

but the immanent God of mysticism is hard to deny for skeptics. Transcendence understood as mystery of existence too is hard to deny for the unbelieving world. Science and rational thought has not stripped the veil of mystery from the universe and life. As long as one is humble enough to grant this point one can't be labeled as an outright denier of transcendence or straightforward atheist. God is Mystery or He is nothing as Stace remarks (Stace, 1952: 9)

There is no need to prove God's existence; we only need to open our eyes to the All-Pervading or All-Encompassing. For Ibn Arabi, strictly speaking, men don't and can't find God rather they are found by God. Men can't give witness of God but God himself is the real witness. He finds Himself. In strictly nondualistic view God is not sought, because the seeker himself is in Him. One can only get lost in Him. And to get lost is to attain Him. Bewilderment is the highest station and attaining the station of no station is the supreme attainment. Realizing that everything is perfect this very moment or, in Buddhist (Nagarjunian) terminology, that samsara is nirvana is realizing God. Such notions as "sensible transcendental," "Ground of being" "depth of life" "mystery of things or existence" which many moderns have advocated as substitute metaphors for what used to be conventionally called God and most often pictured with a human face by anthropomorphic idolatrous imagination seem to be given some representation in this fundamentally Unitarian view of God as Totality, as Reality.

Because of the fact that in this existence there is nothing but God for Ibn 'Arabi, the question is how to polish the mirror of heart and invite God therein. God is not an epistemological problem at all that our mind/reason can investigate. He is a percept rather than a concept for Ibn 'Arabî. In more poetic terms He is a song to be sung rather than an abstract Being, a Being among other beings. God is "the knownest of the known" and so close that we only need to open our eyes, to cleanse the doors of perception to see how. Belief in God is not a proposition for Ibn 'Arabî but a matter of tasting, experiencing the divine (or the revelations of sheer Being), which, to him, presents itself in all experiences every moment and for everyone – in fact God is the Hearing and the Seeing as is often reiterated in the Quranic verse – and not just to a select few in the so-called religious experience which is a Jamesian construct uncritically accepted by many modern philosophers of religion. All the roads lead to His abode as they proceed from it. God is the name of 'that which is.' He is not something within isness, he himself is that which is. He does not possess existence; rather the very existence is in him. Essence and existence are one for Him.

This is something similar to the understanding of Being as the ground of all beings in Heidegger and God as Being of being in Paul Tillich. Ibn Arabi snatches the “God-given right” to be an atheist. Atheism denies a limited conception of divinity though in itself it is based on a narrow view of Reality. But it is absurd to be an atheist if God is construed as the Essence of existence, as isness of things, as the ground of everything, as *what is*, as Reality. Lest it be thought that Ibn Arabi has no problems with transcendence denying desecralizing and demystifying atheism and materialism, it needs to be noted that he sees the world as ordinarily experienced as consisting of dream though not a sheer illusion, a symbol that needs to be interpreted, an exterior aspect of the larger and fundamental inward or hidden reality he calls *al-haqq* which is his designation for the Absolute. It implies that the modern unbelieving world that only thinks rather than sees with the heart and believes that transcendence is an illusion as it takes sensory world to be *the* world or the only world which should concern us is simply blind or extremely myopic and guilty of idolatry. However atheism nevertheless partly affirms God in His immanent mode because the world that senses experience is the mirror and the symbol of God. It is childish in its veto against the discoveries of more adventurous spirits of saints and prophets which discover God as real, in fact more real than themselves. God as the Self is in fact accessible to all. To know oneself, to know what it means to be human, to properly affirm “I” is what amounts to knowing God as Ibn Arabi tirelessly keeps alluding to a tradition he attributes to the Prophet that states that knowing oneself one knows God. Knowing oneself after denying the illusory desiring ego one comes to subsist in God. Atheism is often on the way to more purified view of God, a mode of passionate disbelief in idols that however goes too far. It is a case of misplaced absoluteness; it misidentifies Absolute with the world. However atheists are true to their personal lords and in a way atheism is an issue only from the dualistic viewpoint of theology which itself is strictly not true from the strictly Unitarian viewpoint which Ibn Arabi upholds. All beliefs and disbeliefs are in the realm of duality and need to be transcended. Ibn Arabi’s Unitarian Metaphysics is transtheistic and transcends both theism and atheism. The Akbarian Unitarianism leads to the realization that the world is ultimately none other than the Absolute and thus finding everything perfect this very moment or seeing eternity here and now.

Ibn ‘Arabî asserts categorically that only the Absolute is absolute and refuses to commit the cardinal error of attributing absoluteness to the non-absolute. Taking only Absolute as absolute and all else as

relative – even the personal God of theism – he does away with all idolatries and exclusivist theological metanarratives. Modernity is a plethora of isms because it has substituted pseudoabsolutes for the Absolute.

Ibn ‘Arabi’s emphasis is on the Absolute, the One, the Supraformal Essence or *Abadiyyat*, the divine darkness of Godhead, utter destruction of subject consciousness before the Infinite rather than on the personal God that comes to be foregrounded in theology corresponding to the level of *wahidiyah* whom he sees as the first determination of the Absolute and not the Supreme Principle itself. Modern man’s problems are primarily with a constricted dualistic theological view of God and static absolutes of idealistic philosophies. Ibn ‘Arabi’s conception of divinity is not vulnerable to these standard critiques of theistic and idealistic philosophical pictures. Most empiricist-positivist-postmodernist critiques look beside the point and based on faulty construction of religious experience. Modern philosophy of religion seems to have gloriously misunderstood the central experience of religion if Akbarian exposition is accepted.

Ibn Arabi, while commenting on the verse that states that “God has decreed that you worship none but God” is able to convincingly show that all people regardless of their belief or unbelief worship God in their own ways though this doesn’t mean all ways of worship or unbelief lead to felicity. Ibn Arabi’s view is transtheist and metaphysical as distinguished from theological or religious one with which modernity and postmodernity has formidable problems. He shows that total rejection of transcendence which lands one in hell is hardly an option available to man. The modern unbelieving world has one of the most sympathetic critics in Ibn Arabi even though he shows that all disbelief is a form of belief. Conceding most criticisms of God-talk he grants that no belief goes as far as the Essence and all beliefs are really construction of the self. As Ibn Arabi explains difference between believers and nonbelievers, the enlightened and the ignorant:

The stages of the spiritual journey between the unenlightened heart and the divine Throne are between the divine Name “God” (Allāh) and the divine Name “the All-Compassionate” (al-Rahmān)... No-one denies some ultimate reality of God... But the station of immediately witnessing God’s “Absolute Compassion” (*rahmāniyya*) is only known and recognised by those who receive the compassionate blessing of Faith. (Qtd. in Morris, 2005:27)

The conception of *Abadiyyat* or pure Being or Beyond-Being of which Being/God is a determination makes it possible to transcend theism, metaphysics of presence and Being centred finitistic

philosophical thought currents which we find in many modern philosophies. This crucial notion is central in handling such problems as theodicy and many other theological and philosophical problems and in fact makes him a true universalist who can be approached from and appropriated in diverse perspectives, as diverse as Buddhism and Taoism or Vedanta and Christianity.

Agnosticism and skepticisms of various orientations in the contemporary world have a point if understood as the declaration of impossibility of conceptually knowing the Reality, Transcendent Principle, the Ground of existence, the whole Truth, the Mystery. However these are often presented in cruder versions that deny men any knowledge of the supraphenomenal or the very existence of the sacred for which the Shaykh will have zero tolerance. The Pure Absolute or Essence (*Dhat*) in its fundamental aspect – and thus Meaning/Truth/ Presence/ Identity/ Reality *per se* – is beyond the human quest and all attempts to reach It, track it, pinpoint It, catch It in the net of language or realm of the finite or time, to conceptualize It, to imagine It, to speak about It, to affirm anything of It are doomed. Before the Ipseity or *Dhat* one can only be bewildered according to Ibn ‘Arabî. The world is ultimately a Mystery, a Mystery of Mysteries and no rational or scientific approach could finally and completely demystify it. The world being ultimately a mystery that resists being demystified by means of conceptual intellect is what transcendence implies as Stace has explained in his *Time and Eternity*. There is no humanly discoverable ultimate truth. All representations of the Real are provisional. Godhead/ Absolute/ *Zat-uṣṣ-Zat* is opaque, deep deep darkness, impenetrable, the absolutely inscrutable unknowable Other. Gnosis consists in knowing that God can’t be known as Abu Bakr is quoted time and again by Ibn Arabi. As the world is not-He and man ever a worshipper of *his* Lord or conditioned by his belief and nothing is ever repeated as God’s theophanies change ceaselessly imply that the world will never cease to be an object of wonder and fascination and Beauty never cease to be worshipped and act as an efficient net through which God catches most of his servants vas Plato also noted. God is ever glorified by every creature and exalted over whatever man can say about Him as Ibn Arabi keeps us reminding of the Quranic statements such as “Glory be to God the exalted.” This implies that the Real or Truth can’t be appropriated in absolute terms. Man must be content to have only relative knowledge of things or God. There are countless veils on the countenance of God which though continuously being lifted can’t be wholly lifted. Man can’t afford to behold the naked truth. The Real has infinite aspects

and can be approached from infinite contexts and thus perspectives. Man must travel ceaselessly as *Kitab-al-Isfar* attempts to argue. Ibn ‘Arabî says in *Risâlat al-Annâr*: “You should know that man has been on the journey ever since God brought him out of non-being into being.” The goal is not reached. For it is “the unspeakable, the impossible, the inconceivable, the unattainable.” The goal is only glimpsed, sensed, and then lost. Meaning or Truth is never grasped in its fullness. It ever recedes. Truth escapes all our searching. We can have a vision of it, rather a glimpse of it through the phenomena which are Its symbols. This follows from the doctrine of God as Infinite and All-Possibility. God is not an object that one could somehow ever encompass or possess or grasp. Man’s quest for the Absolute will have no full stop in all eternity. Life is perpetual becoming as God’s infinite riches are inexhaustible and the Beauty that never ceases unveiling its infinite faces never ceases to attract its seekers to move on and on. Artists, scientists, mystics, philosophers and lovers shall never be out of business. God is continuously experienced, ever afresh in all new experiences. Rationalization, familiarization, demystification and descralization of the world that ultimately make it inhuman, alienating and absurd and disrespectful towards the environment can’t happen in the Akbarian perspective that sees the mysterious, sacred divine face in everything. Western philosophy, as Heidegger pointed out, is oblivious to the ground of being. It is not open to the sacred mystery of Being. It is not the philosopher but the poet who can show the track of the holy, to the sacred mystery of Being. Nothing in the world of known can express the Divine Darkness. All quests end in wonder. In the last analysis man knows nothing to its depth by means of senses and reason. Other modes of knowledge such as intellectual intuition give us another kind of knowledge that instead of making things comprehensible dissolves the knowing subject in the object preserving the ultimate mystery of things in the process. If to comprehend means to have discursive conceptual knowledge we comprehend nothing ultimately. All our explanations, analyses stop at a certain point. Things are as they are. There is something instead of nothing. Being or *wajud* is in the last analysis a miracle or a scandal to reason. Why should there be a knowing subject and why should our universe be comprehensible are perhaps unanswerable. Man knows but little and this applies to everything from God to quarks. God is incomparable, transcendent. Symbols are all we know. God alone knows or is Knowledge. The knowledge of reality given to mystics and prophets is of a different order. God remains inscrutable and the sacred inapproachable. Man’s prerogative is to contemplate

and dissolve in the mystery of being. Though being is aware of itself this awareness has no analyzable or knowable structure. We must ceaselessly move and act and desire. All our movements are because of love according to Ibn Arabi. Man loves and worships beauty without ever knowing why. Love drives everything to the Beauty that there is. Neither love nor beauty can be grasped or explained. This simply is the case. As Ibn Arabi would see it, man, by virtue of his existential state, is poor, absolutely poor in relation to the Merciful who bestows existence. Man worships by virtue of his very state of being a creature. We are here and there is no cure for it. But, more precisely, we are not. Only God is. Only the play of divine names is and man happens to be a locus of their action rather than some independent subject or agency. The cloak of mystery can't be removed from the universe. All human knowledge is progressive unveiling of the ultimate impenetrability of the veil that disguises Reality. Essences are not discursively known. Existence is a mystery and its grandeur and sublimity defy our reason and its categories. Rereading of Kantian sublime by such writers as Derrida or Lyotard is based on increasingly felt inability of reason to contain the brutal power of imagination. We can't conceptualize or represent in language the infinity which human beings do encounter. The highest station is that of bewilderment according to the Shaykh. All this implies that dogmatism is unwarranted. Ibn Arabi, despite what his theological critics assert, maintained divine transcendence uncompromisingly. His emphasis on similarity (*tashbih*) that Sufism has been characteristically associated with never encroaches on the rights of transcendence of the Essence. It is God and not the name of God that religions seek. Exoteric theologies may not always distinguish between the Truth and the descriptions or representations of Truth. Nothing can capture the Reality in rational propositional framework. This means we can only know our inability to know God and this means humility in the face of the Great Mystery that God is. This vetoes all self righteous fundamentalist ideologies. Jaina doctrine of *syadvada* is a corollary of the fundamental mystery and transcendence of the First Principle, the Absolute. This rules out all totalistic or totalitarian claims. Ideological conflicts are based on one's exclusive claim to have access to truth and denying one's fallibility. Religions by relegating truth to transcendent realm and its access to transcendent intellect (which is in us but not ours) veto all quarrels about accessibility to it of any worldly ideology and self-centric person. Secular philosophies that require no moral purification on the part of the philosopher are barred from entering the doors of the great King or Truth.

Agnosticism/atheism, as full blooded secular humanist manifesto would take them, is a product of spiritual myopia. Denying man the knowledge of himself which is the knowledge of macrocosmos and God is denying him intelligence which demands and is capable of certainty and objectivity. Man is Reality, so to speak. Imprisoning man in his subjective feelings and denying him knowledge of Reality leads ultimately to the nightmare of Becketean heroes.

Ibn ‘Arabi’s mystico-metaphysical exegesis of religion is a great corrective to traditional theological understanding which modernity finds difficult to accept. It is difficult to see him advocating any exclusivist dogmatic theses that we need to contest. The essential Ibn Arabi ethics is constituted by such virtues as disinterest, self-denial, charity and love which form the ethical core of all religious/mystical traditions. God is experienced by everyone who sincerely cultivates these virtues. (Post)Modernity has essentially no argument against these values and indeed affirms them. Ibn ‘Arabi has nothing to argue for and against – he only invites us to experience things afresh, to be open to the Real which alone is really experienced in every experience. God is not a hypothesis that one needs to prove or could question – He is the ground of every perception, every imagination, every conception or thought, every experience. He is sought by everyone including idolaters and atheists and all kinds of sinners. To be human is to glorify/worship Him under different names – personal lords of all of us.

Dialogue with Philosophies, Ancient and Modern

In order to understand how Ibn Arabi would evaluate modernity and its thought currents and thus work out contours of possible dialogue between him and modernity we need to see how he relates to philosophers who are traditionally seen as iconic intellectual figures and supposed to articulate a coherent worldview. It is religious philosophers who have been the finest spokesperson of respective worldviews of their traditions. Modern world having relegated religious thinkers and sages to the background is especially fashioned by its philosophers. Ibn Arabi is not himself a philosopher in the modern sense of the term which sees reason as the chief if not the only tool for understanding or approaching reality. His view of modern philosophers could not but be largely negative. For projecting Ibn Arabi as a philosopher we need to refer to perennialist conception of philosopher and philosophy. His denunciation of rationalism and much of what today passes for intellectuality aligns him to perennialist critics of modern thought. More than a philosopher or a Sufi Ibn ‘Arabi can better be understood as a spokesperson of the Tradition which is more comprehensive term

which in its more universal sense can be considered to include the principles which bind man to Heaven or as “the chain that joins civilization to Revelation.” Ibn ‘Arabî’s colossal output and contribution and his synthetic view of diverse disciplines from metaphysics to astrology and psychology is better categorized as contribution to *Sophia Perennis* that lies at the heart of revelation and mystical traditions and ancient philosophies which were never purely rationalistic or divorced from the founts of religion. Perennialist authors have rightly extolled him as a master promulgator of Islam’s universal metaphysical and esoteric teachings and have hardly any difficulty in classifying him with other grand masters such as Chuang Zu, Nagarjuna, Sankara and Eckhart. His Unitarianism transcends all binaries and dualisms that have plagued the Western philosophical and theological tradition, and resolves all contradictions in the One, the Absolute, *coincidentia oppositorum*.

Ibn ‘Arabî is a philosopher himself despite his critique of Muslim philosophers and the fact that he was not very well versed with the works of philosophers. He didn’t consider the rational philosophical path as entirely vain. He could be understood as a philosopher-sage in the Orphic-Pythagorean-Platonic sense. Philosophy in the primordial sense of the term that prepares one for death and assimilation to God as Plato said is not a rational logical abstract discipline only and is allied to gnosis, a way of life or realization of the good. Ibn ‘Arabî’s denunciation of rationalism and his praise for Plato – whom he called divine Plato – and thus his conception of philosophy as allied to wisdom (*bikmah*) is to be understood in this context. It is not a prerogative of *ratio* or mental faculty of reason but of *nous*, the supraindividual universal faculty of intellect. It is not a mere theoretical rational inquiry but a realization, intellection or noetic vision that transcends subject-object duality and demands something like ethical discipline that Plato argued for. Philosophy as an abstract philosophical discourse based on rationalistic scientific method and its methodically obtained “truths” is what Ibn ‘Arabî often critiques. Philosophy implies for all of the ancients a moral conformity to wisdom: only he is wise, *sophos*, who lives wisely as Schuon notes (8:136). Philosophy in the traditional Orphic-Pythagorean sense is wisdom and love combined in a moral and intellectual purification in order to reach the “likeness to god.” (Uzdavyns, 2005). It is contemplation of Beauty and Good. This is attainable by gnosis. By philosophizing ancients meant “both noetic activity and spiritual practice” and if philosophy is the knowledge of the nature of things as for Heraclites or the knowledge of the Changeless and of the Ideas as for Plato or the knowledge of first

causes and principles, together with the sciences that are derived from them as for Aristotle and sages alone can be true philosophers as oriental traditions generally maintain then Ibn ‘Arabî qualifies as one of the greatest philosophers of history and most modern philosophers would not deserve a place in the annals of wisdom. The Greek word *nous* covers both spirit and intellect (*intellectus*, ‘*aql*) of Medieval Christian and Islamic lexicon. Platonic philosophy, understood as a spiritual and contemplative way of life leading to illumination or enlightenment; an intellectual discipline based on intellection culminating in union (*henosis*) with ideal Forms is what Ibn Arabi relates with instead of more rationalistic Aristotelian view or extremely narrow free speculative inquiry and rationalism of moderns. Philosophy, understood in the above sense of the term, has ever been alive and recent skeptical currents can’t have any significant bearing on its vitality. It is mysticism and traditional metaphysics that can come to the rescue of philosophy in the postmetaphysical postmodern age and reclaim for it its lost dignity and sanctity attacked by science inspired positivism and linguistic turn in philosophy. The Western paradigm in philosophy can’t accommodate him as a philosopher in his own right because of its own prior commitment to exclusive rational inquiry alone that needs no dabbling with polishing the mirror with the help of virtues as the normative mode of philosophizing. For oriental traditions western rationalistic philosophy will hardly qualify as a philosophy proper and if we judge the tree by the fruits it appears that it indeed is the case. Western philosophy having severed its ties with the pursuit of wisdom and substituted thought for intellection has been reduced to linguistic analysis and analysis of concepts and handmaiden of science and in fact is claimed to be dead by many postmoderns.

For Ibn ‘Arabî modern rationalistic philosophy pursued in secular contexts and for mundane pursuits is not the philosophy proper of which prophets are the teachers. The Prophet teaches *hikmah* among other things according to the Quran (65:2). Ibn ‘Arabî stood for the wisdom of the prophets as his most famous book shows. Ibn ‘Arabî, like traditional philosopher-sages, expressed by means of reason certainties “seen” or “lived” by the immanent Intellect, as did the best of Greeks (8:138). Cracks, crises and emasculations of the discipline of philosophy in the modern West could have been avoided if the West had not opted for Latin Averroism and Cartesian rationalism and consequent dualisms and irresolvable problems that still haunt its epistemology and other areas like ontology. Logos of which Ibn ‘Arabî speaks figures in Plato, Neoplatonism and the perennialists is not renderable exclusively as

reason or discursive reasoning (*dianoia*). That has been scrutinized by intuitionists and postmodernists.

Ibn ‘Arabî denies originality to himself and the dubious virtue of thinking for oneself that individualistic modernism has promoted at its own peril. He says that he has written what he has been inspired and commanded to write, an assertion incomprehensible to modern philosophers. Ibn ‘Arabî, like Sankara, is a commentator and not an original philosopher because he would make us aware of the non-human and participate in it and get absorbed in it. He is primarily a teacher, a Sufi Master, a guide, who leads to the revealed word, the word that turns into reality the moment an innocent soul approaches it after its long sojourn in hell and purgatory though the typical modern hero is adamant to remain in hell and can’t allow baptism by fire to thoroughly consume him and transform him. He pleads for dialogue between the self and the world which both modern subjectivism or objectivism fail to conduct properly. Disenchantment of the world because of desacralization and consequent alienation and vulnerability to nihilism are a result of modern man’s refusal to open the self towards grace emanating from revelation which is geared towards opening ordinarily closed channels of communication between God and man. God responds to human call only when man becomes nothing.

Ibn ‘Arabî, in his *Futûhât*, recounts a conversation with Ibn Rushd in which he explained to the philosopher the limits of rational perception. This was, as Corbin reads it, a symbolic parting of ways between Islam and the West: the West was to fatefully pursue soon, (mis)appropriating Ibn Rushd, an exclusively rationalistic path leading “to the conflict between theology and philosophy, between faith and knowledge, between symbol and history” (Corbin, 1969: 13). For Muslim thinkers, in contrast, respect for reason could not degenerate into rationalism that really debases reason because of ignorance of Intellect (*Nous*) or the rights of intuition (unveiling or *kashf* in Ibn ‘Arabî’s terminology) and revelation.

Ibn Arabi pleads for employing the faculty of imagination and instrument of heart as well with reason – in short reason illumined by Intellect – so that philosophy can hit the right target. Western philosophy having severed its ties with the pursuit of wisdom and substituted thought for intellection has been reduced to linguistic analysis and analysis of concepts and handmaiden of science and in fact is claimed to be dead by many postmoderns.

Ibn ‘Arabî’s foregrounding of the in-between realm – the realm between the world of spirits and the world of bodies or between the intelligible and the sensible realms which he called *mundus*

imaginalis (*‘alam al-khayâl*) – bridges the gap between symbolism of esoterism and metaphysics and literalism of exoteric authorities and thus paves a way for dialogue between theology and philosophy, science and religion and mysticism and empiricism.

Ibn Arabi corpus helps us in clarifying and adding precision to certain fundamental notions of comparative philosophy. For him metaphysics should be redefined as the science of supraphenomenal which is not the prerogative of mere reason and those who employ – being unaware of discoveries of imagination and unveiling – reason and experience only in building conceptual edifices or philosophizing are simply ignorant people. This approach that emphasizes the need of taking into account intellection and revelation would exclude most modern philosophers from Descartes to Rorty from the arena of genuine philosophy. To their rationalistic or empiricist critiques of suprarational discoveries Ibn Arabi would simply reply in principle that the blind are no judge of colours. For him knowledge of other than God is a waste of time, since God created the cosmos only for knowledge of Him. As Chittick explains: “all true and useful knowledge comes from God and takes the knower back to Him” (Chittick, 2009: 50). To secular pragmatic philosophies, to different strains of humanism from Sartrean atheistic existentialist to Marxian and Huxleyean brands of it he would say that pragmatically the only significant question is how to become perfect individuals. Judged from this perspective modern secular thought is a huge failure. It even hardly knows the meaning of becoming man. Modern secular thought can’t conceive of man as microcosmos, as vicegerent of God, as the one who is the pupil of the world and perfect image of God. No wonder there is no cure for alienation in secular (post)modernity. Absurdism is the logic of modern thought ignorant of transcendence. Marxists too have only an impoverished view of human potential for perfection. The fact that they see salvation primarily and perhaps exclusively in the social or the collective shows only their pitiable state and their refusal to take into account our theomorphic constitution, the Akbarian premise that we are made for the Absolute and without knowing It we are even lower than minerals, not to speak of animals. According to Ibn Arabi the faculty of reason which is peculiar to man and which is taken as the mark of his superiority to other creatures if not under the tuition of intellection and revelation weaves around him an opaque veil which develops into an “ego” which hinders man from knowing the Absolute. Other creatures including minerals – this might come as a shock to modern ears – know their Creator through natural intuition (*khashf*) or through an immediate evidential knowledge (*idab burhan*)

but man is “shackled by Reason and Thinking or is in the pillory of Belief” (Qtd. in Izatsu, 1966: 234). Ibn Arabi clarifies differences between different senses of intuition and it is in this light that we can understand perennialist critique of Bergsonian intuitionism as infrarational.

In the Akbarian formulation of integral epistemology we find appropriated all the three traditionally recognized sources of knowledge which include reason, experience and unveiling/intuition – mystical and prophetic. Pure reason can't take us very far and the rationalist must follow the path of the gnostic and prophet, a suggestion that modern secular philosophers reject. This dissolves the problems which have bedeviled purely rational philosophies as Landau has also argued in his *Philosophy of Ibn 'Arabi*. But he doesn't reject the role of reflection and is critical of pure intuitionism. Like al-Ghazali he synthesizes in a comprehensive way the complementary demands of reason, experience and intuition/revelation without letting any one way to be absolutized or ignored and thus avoids the sterilities of rationalism, empiricism and intuitionism. Dialogue between different philosophical schools or between faith and modernity could proceed smoothly if this attempt at synthesis is kept in view. Muslim thought never degenerated into an array of incompatible philosophical schools or downright skepticism and never gave rise to irresolvable problems which have marked the history of Western philosophy largely because many of its greatest scholars and thinkers have been simultaneously mystics, theologians and philosophers. Even Ibn Rushd respectfully treated Sufis such as Ibn 'Arabî and accommodated the claims of revelation. Against all relativists and skeptics Ibn 'Arabî believes that one can take knowledge direct from the fount of knowledge which is God or Ultimate Reality and his comments on Abu Yazid's remark that saints take knowledge from the Living God while others – philosophers and theologians – take it from the dead are a standing challenge to all philosophies that fight for audience in the contemporary world. Anyone who follows the authority of other than God (sensory and rational knowledge), declares Ibn Arabi, follows the authority of him who is visited by mistakes. Ibn Arabi provides a possible exit point from the choking morass of antimetaphysical nihilistic groundless antifoundationalism and relativism of postmodernists and other skeptical thought currents which otherwise doom us to abysmal ignorance regarding our most important questions in life including possibility of certain knowledge. Ibn Arabi can't afford dialogue, on equal terms, with those who refuse to listen to the single voice from countless saints, prophets,

great poets and artists, traditional philosophers from all cultures which Ibn Arabi also articulates. No philosophy can sustain man for much time that fails to take account of our eternal quest of light of knowledge and certainty. The blind and the seeing are not equivalent according to the Quranic verse which Ibn Arabi is fond of quoting. There can't therefore be meaningful dialogue with prophets of darkness and ignorance. Modern era is largely ignorance and darkness from Ibn Arabi's perspective. Reminding modern man of what he has lost is not the same thing as reviling the era which the Prophet forbade and Ibn Arabi often recalled. We may share Peter Coates' reading of Ibn Arabi's view of the march of history and signs of the times and accept his largely positive estimate of modernity but we must keep in mind that from the human perspective that seeks peace, joy and blessedness that follows from orientation towards God the Guide (post)modernity is a scandal and though scandals must come as the Bible grants but woe to those from whose hands they come. Never has, in history, man been more lonely, more alienated from the Real, more complacently forgetful of God and thus of his essence and potential for perfection and thus more in need of prophetic heirs amongst which Ibn Arabi claimed to be. Never was the counsel of the one who was asked to broadcast the glad tidings of divine mercy which encompasses everything more needed than at the time when so many despair of God/Love/Mercy and even the finest minds counsel us to live disconsolately or accept "unyielding despair" as the sign of our maturity. We need to take heed of the Shaykh's denunciation of most forms of complacent posturing towards the transcendent which we find everywhere today. God is not in hiding. Every moment He speaks. Every event is a message from Him. To quote from *Futūbāt* "Nothing walks in the cosmos without walking as a messenger (*rasūl*) with a message. This is a high knowledge. Even the worms, in their movements, are rushing with a message to those who can understand it." The only question is: Do we have the eyes that see and are our hearts the polished mirrors?

Ibn Arabi, in arguing for cognitive importance of imaginal faculty, offers invaluable tool for bridging philosophies. He reconciles the poles of transcendence and immanence by seeing the heart as unitary consciousness which must become attuned to its own fluctuations and see God's incomparability with the eye of reason on one beating, and His similarity with the eye of imagination on other beating. Imagination perceives the unifying oneness of Being and reason the diversity of divine faces. The scientific West sees with one eye Manyess only while the Vedantic and Buddhist East has largely

emphasized the eye that sees One only. Man needs binocular vision to see the depth of things. Modern man lacks the unifying eye of imagination and all his knowledge is “dispersion in detail.” Much sought after unity of knowledge is impossible to be achieved without the use of the currently atrophied eye of imagination. Modern physics has been relearning the use of this eye to comprehend otherwise paradoxical reality that defies conceptualization. Postmodern thinkers have pointed out problems with all categorical frameworks and all attempts to eliminate the mysterious, the incomprehensible, the irrational and the paradoxical. Poverty of all totalitarian metanarratives that seek to explain everything under the sun by means of some overarching framework is easily understandable from Ibn Arabi’s epistemology which forecloses any attempt at meaning closure and finalistic interpretations by showing how reason limits by definition and how imagination and unveiling come to affirm the paradoxical character of all reality. Everything being He/not-He is partly veiled and partly revealed and oscillates between existence and nonexistence and is thus ambiguous. Both/and rather than either/or binary logic helps us in understanding this ambiguous character of reality. Between yes and no or affirmation and negation spirits take wings and life displays its wondrous show. One recalls Nagarjuna’s merciless destruction of all conceptual schemes and foregrounding of emptiness of the world of form and colour, logic and reason. Antinomies are there to haunt all attempts at building a metaphysics on the basis of pure reason. God alone is Reality. Other than God is nothingness.

For Ibn Arabi the Unseen alone is there as genuinely real. The manifested being has only a derived existence, given it on loan by the Real and in reality it is nonexistent and will not last a moment where the Real cease to manifest. The natural is really the supernatural. The world of form and colour or space and time is a dream in need of interpretation. Modern penchant for sensualist and empirical epistemology could not get a stronger refutation. There is no external world of which we can acquire knowledge. The subjective element provides the key to the knowledge of the “external” world. Modern scientific objectivism puts things upside down. Those who have not seen God have not seen anything. Modern secular vision that excludes God is worse than blindness. Philosophy (literally and traditionally love of wisdom) which is ignorant of God has nothing to do either with love or wisdom.

Dialogue with Modern Academy

Modern thought is oblivious of the grandeur of man though quite conscious of his misery. Modern humanism and most forms of other

modern thought currents that have no scope for transcendence and man's otherworldly destiny including absurdist nihilistic thought are antihuman from the Akbarian viewpoint regarding human dignity. Nihilists are mostly right in asserting that nothing merely phenomenal makes sense. Man with all his dreams and aspirations goes to naught.

By the standard of *taḥqīq*, which is to give everything its *ḥaqq*, modern academic disciplines that assume God either dead or irrelevant and have little to do with symbolism and vertical reference are “diversions and pastimes for the heedless, because they result only in forgetfulness of the Absolute *Ḥaqq*, who determines the nature and reality of all things in existence.” To quote Ibn Arabi:

No benefit accrues save in knowledge of God. . . . As for their knowledge of other than God, it is a diversion through which veiled human beings divert themselves. Those who have achieved the equitable balance have no aspiration save toward knowledge of Him (Qtd. in Chittick :1998:246).

The following comments are worth quoting:

Nonetheless, knowledge defined by human efforts and heedless of divine guidance is the warp and weft of the modern world, the backbone of science, technology, politics, business, finance, government, the military, and the “information age” in general. The consequences of following systematic ignorance dressed up as knowledge can only be what the Qur'an calls “misguidance” (*ighwā', dalāl*). It is people who follow such falsified knowledge “whose scales are light—they have lost their own souls” (Qur'an 7:9) (Chittick, n.d.).

Modern psychology/psychiatry is ignorant of the spiritual realm and confounds the realm of the psyche with the realm of the spirit. Therefore Freud, Jung and Lacan are all researchers of that which hardly concerns the adventurers of the world of spirit. Ibn Arabi would not be much interested in meeting them. Modern biologists are far from understanding man and human possibilities. Concerned exclusively with the most exterior or the lowest form of human personality and ignorant of profound correspondences and symbolism of this microcosmos biologists have hardly anything significant or beneficial to teach us. Modern social sciences are ignorant of the fundamental constitution of both the self and the Other. Modern poetry and fiction have little acquaintance of the treasures of transpersonal Spirit and focus attention on mortal soul and fragmentary images of Man and therefore can't effect enlightenment or even catharsis. Parapsychology dabbles with the occult rather than the spiritual world. There are some positive

meanings scattered here and there in modern disciplines that claim to be sciences of man. Ibn Arabi's anthropology and anthroposophy is built on quite different metaphysical and ontological foundations of which modern disciplines have no inkling. Modern disciplines lack sound foundation and orientation towards the sacred and thus can't be relied on for getting true knowledge, essences or what Ibn Arabi calls God's *haqq* pertaining to them. Modern evolutionism doesn't know archetypes and thus sees things upside down. Frithjof Schuon refused to lecture in modern academies. Plato refused to give public talk on the idea of the Good. Perhaps Ibn Arabi too would hesitate to hold classes on *Fusus* in modern academic institutions. God and His wisdom are far too exalted to be dispersed in the audience that hardly cares for moral purification. In the Akbarian framework most forms of modern ideologies cultivated in secular context such as positivism, atheistic existentialism, Marxism and other major schools of modern philosophy which have explicitly secular or antireligious/antitraditional outlook are gross ignorance because they are unaware of God or transcendence. It has little room for even such things as theistic existentialism whose subjectivism, voluntarism and irrationalism is in opposition to his non-self or Reality-centric gnostic intellectual perspective), intuitionism of Bergson (seeing it as subrational and thus dangerous, perverted idea) and even process philosophy which doesn't recognize the rights of transcendence of the First Principle.

Mystical vs. Metaphysical Realization

In contrast to the mystical realization we find metaphysical realization³ emphasized in Ibn 'Arabî as it is this which provides the foundation for the transcendent unity of being. Modern discourse in the philosophy of religion and mysticism has focused mostly on mystical realization and criticized it on various accounts. In fact the very category of mystical experience is a modern invention as has been pointed out by many scholars including Adnan Aslan (Aslan, 2003). There is no such thing as mysticism in the East as Guenon has provocatively remarked (Guenon, 2000:124). Ibn 'Arabî's position is metaphysical instead of mystical and this key shift removes the cutting edge of most of criticisms of modernity and postmodernity on mysticism and intellectual content of religion. He puts the thesis of metaphysical realization, which also helps to answer theological critiques on transcendence of servant-Lord polarity in him, thus, "The final end and ultimate return of the gnostics ... is that the Real is identical with them, while they don't exist." It is through the metaphysical realization that one realizes that the Self withdraws from the "servant-Lord" polarity and resides in its

own transpersonal being. The subject-object dichotomy is transcended by virtue of pure intellect or Spirit, which is identical with the divine Essence” (Qaisar, 2002:133). Once the soul or *nafs* has withered away in the experience of *fana*, the self-identity of mystic realization is transformed into the Self-identity of metaphysical realization. In the metaphysical perspective the reality of the ‘I’ doesn’t belong to man or *nafs* but to the Spirit which is the divine spark at the center of man’s being identical with the unmanifest consciousness or Divine Essence. The crucial distinction between soul and Spirit is necessary to understand the Akbarian metaphysical conception of religious experience. This distinction is largely forgotten by most philosophical critics of religious experience. Numerous misunderstandings and debates of theological vs. mystical debate in Islam and exoteric vs. esoteric in other traditions and meaning of such notions as soul/spirit, God/man, could be resolved if we keep these key points in mind. A fruitful dialogue with critics of religion and mysticism and in fact with secular thought in general is possible if we keep in mind ingenious interpretations put forward of many exponents of nondualism in the contemporary world.

Language and the Sacred

The contrast between Ibn Arabi and modern thought is evident on almost all points. His view on language illustrates this point well. According to him language vehicles wisdom and can be a portal to transcendence. He asserts that the world is a work endowed with rhyme and rhythm. He relates poetry to wisdom and divine providence and says that its fundamental principles are divinely instituted. How different and refreshing these views are in the atmosphere of profanation and trivialization of language and literature. The Prophet is referred to as the Master of language and the holder of the ‘sum of words’ (*jawâmi’ al-kalim*). Poetry – wisdom poetry – could indeed save him or at least point the way to the holy. God is Beauty and everything is there to love this Beauty. Encountering the Real in the poetic way is what the key practice of *zikr* aims at. Modern man feels alienated from the world because he doesn’t know how to contemplate and forecloses possibility of communicating with it. Both art and religion are essentially contemplation. In a world where art has little to do with beauty as Ananda Coomaraswamy lamented there exists neither great art nor religion and the great priest and poet of Divine Beauty Ibn ‘Arabî is direly needed.

Faustian Man

Modern civilization dictates terms to reality and doesn't let reality to dictate and this is its undoing. Ibn 'Arabî champions the premodern view which privileges the rights of the Reality against us but which modernity rejected by emphasizing individualism and subjectivism which dictate terms to Reality and advocates a discipline that silences the mind so that the unknown shall speak. Our problem is we are not receptive to the revelations of the Real. Modern man is arrogantly after interpretations, questioning and refining them but the encounter with the Real in all its nakedness eludes him. Because of his denial of intellectual intuition and revelation of any nontextual supralinguistic knowledge postmodernists like Derrida are unable to transcend the relativistic plane of language. Analytical philosophical tradition too is trapped in the cobwebs of language and linguistic analysis and all the time ignorant of its traditional symbolism. These imply that these philosophers who can't look beyond language to the Real that it partly houses are denied the deliverance by truth or self realization – achieved when we transcend the textual world – as understood in the Akbarian worldview. The Faustian man, obstinately committed to perpetual interpretation, doesn't open himself to reality as has been remarked by many a critic of modernism. He dictates terms to reality and doesn't allow himself to be consumed/annihilated by it which is universally recognized as the condition of entering the higher life, life divine or birth in the kingdom of heaven as a *jivan mukta*. Modern man doesn't taste the Real as he has chosen to alienate himself from it; he wishes to eliminate the element of mystery and thus the sacred from the world. Life as a mystery invites us to be dissolved by it, consumed by it. The more one questions and interprets, the more he loses contact with the Real.

Is God Hidden?

Modern man's key problem in engaging positively or creatively with religion/mysticism arises from felt absence/hiddenness of God in contemporary experience. But taken as synonymous with Reality the complaint seems to lose all warrant. God is the only Experiencer, Knower and Actor. For Ibn Arabi we don't see but God sees and we don't hear but God listens. God is immanent in every experience. As he says:

If we gaze, it is upon Him; if we use our intelligence, it is towards Him; if we reflect, it is upon Him; if we know it is Him. For it is He who is revealed in every face, sought in every sign, worshipped in every object of worship, and pursued in the invisible and the visible. The whole world prays to Him, prostrates itself before Him and glorifies His

praise; tongues speak of Him, hearts are enraptured by love for Him, minds are bewildered in Him (*Futûbât*, III: 449-50).

For Ibn Arabi God is neither absent nor on leave nor hidden as many moderns have complained. What is needed is only receptivity, a polished mirror of the heart and God will teach it. Ibn ‘Arabî invites man to “direct knowledge from the most ancient place. In this way there are no real states or stations to be brought through. There is no platform of understanding to be brought about. There are no conditions to be changed or attributes to be attained. All that is required is the proper response, the request to be informed directly from the most interior place.” He prayed: “Lord grant me as a gift the perfect aptitude to receive from the most holy effusion.”

For Ibn ‘Arabî, every-day experiences are God’s constant revelation to us. To quote from the *Futûbât*: “God has placed His ‘signs’ (*ayât*) in the cosmos as ‘habitual’ and ‘non-habitual’. Only the people who have understanding from God in a special way take the habitual [signs] into account, and the rest of the people do not know what God intends by them.” For him modern man need not anxiously wait revelatory discourse or complain that God doesn’t listen to man’s call or refuses to interfere in history. He says: Nothing walks in the cosmos without walking as a messenger (*rasûl*) with a message. This is a high knowledge. Even the worms, in their movements, are rushing with a message to those who can understand it.” It is the fault of modern man that he fails to read the message or symbolism. He has atrophied imagination and chooses not to see.

One can hardly understand modern complaint of God on leave when we take Him to be synonymous with Reality. Ibn Arabi deploys a series of notions that provide a very different reading of the data on evil, the supposed preponderance of which has been the greatest obstacle in the positive dialogue between religious or more precisely theistic and secular views or between man and God. He identifies existence as such with good and nonexistence with evil. For him existence is synonymous with mercy being the expression of the ‘Breath of the All-Merciful.’ This is one of the most provocative insights and absolutely needed in an age that finds hard to fight nihilistic despair and absurdist orientation of its major thought currents and justify God’s works or excuse him for supposed mismanagement. There is no such thing as absurdity because there is only God mirroring Himself and enjoying Himself and sharing His love. Absurdity appears only when we are veiled, when we see only phenomena. As other than God is ultimately and essentially illusory absurdity and nothingness must characterize it. For those who see essences, who penetrate the veil of phenomena with the light of God

there can be no absurdity. And God is available to everyone though few are ready to receive Him. What is needed is a disinterested vision. Modern man has rebelled against God on the basis of unexplained evil in the world. Ibn Arabi offers to give him eyes to see what he, in his blindness, fails to see.

Comparative Philosophy

If finding common principles of world religions is the most important task that comparative philosophy has today as Coomaraswamy noted, Ibn Arabi is a great contributor to the current debates in comparative philosophy. Distinguishing between the Principle (Essence) and manifestation (form), the Absolute and the relative, Ibn ‘Arabî places absoluteness at the level of the Absolute and this means transcendence of purely theological plane. Contradictory claims of different religions have a warrant only at the theological plane. His perspective though rooted in one tradition honours all of the prophetic traditions – known and unknown – and has a place for even those who seem to profess no faith and no morality. He grants that atheists too have a *tawbid* of their own though it must be a truncated view of it and consequently necessitating a place in hell for them which he interprets as distance from God. (People choose their stations in the other world. God only unveils their reality. People judge themselves in the light of the Absolute. Choosing to live inside the cocoon of limiting self amounts to obstructing Divine Mercy or choosing separation from the Real. Prayer establishes the dialogue between the self and transcendence. Refusing to pray – which is, for Ibn Arabi, simply gratitude to Existence for the gift of life – amounts condemning oneself to self referring and self enclosed windowless subjective space. Hell is self love and nothing burns there but self will as one Christian mystic has said). Man as such is the locus of divine manifestations for him and wherever he and in whatever state God finds him and he is in fact, in a manner unknown to him, seeking to adore God. He disallows condemning sinners such as those addicted to carnal appetites in *Nasab al-kbirqah* and warns against comparing mystics famous for piety with those ordinary sinners notorious for moral weaknesses in his *Kitâb al-Nasâ’ih*.

For Ibn Arabi man needs revealed religion and Law to discipline the self, to purify the mind and move smoothly towards felicity. It is not difficult to see that many Eastern philosophical religions have been precisely designed to achieve these ends and have been employing similar means for achieving them. If Plato is characterizable as divine such great sage-philosophers such as Nagarjuna, Lao Tzu, Sankara, Ramanuja, Eckhart deserve this epithet

preeminently. Ibn Arabi would enjoy the company of sages and sage-philosophers of other traditions as all of them were the people of imagination and unveiling and recognized the primacy or rights of the Other, the non-self, the Universal Spirit, the Logos. If philosophy is a way of life and its end communion with Ultimate Reality and ethics or cultivation of virtues integrally connected with it and not science of ratiocinative arguments or mere linguistic analysis or clarification of concepts then perennialist contention that there is unity amongst different – in fact all – traditions, Semitic and non-Semitic, archaic and “advanced” ones can be granted without much difficulty. All traditions teach the doctrine of two selves, one lower and the other higher divine one. All traditions are for self transcendence. All traditions advocate a vision of hierarchy of existence consisting of a series of gradations from matter to Spirit. All traditions believe in the other or deeper world that encompasses or complements this world. The primacy of the moral but transcendence of good-evil binary by sages is discernible in all major traditions. Transcendence of binary thinking and the principle of simultaneous negation and affirmation serves not only as a critique of the given in both individual and social realms – and thus answer Marxist critiques that complain that religion and mysticism are complicit with the given or dominant sociopolitical reality which is never the ideal and always in need of transcendence or negation from the perspective of social justice and individual’s freedom from most forms of alienating and exploiting power structures – but also allows us to see relative validity of divergent philosophical and theological points of view which are often couched in terms of binaries in divine economy. Ibn Arabi while resisting every attempt to make absolutes from philosophical and theological positions would not be much troubled by such seemingly antagonistic formulations in different schools that sharply categorize and distinguish them in such terms as presence or absence of personal God in them, prophetic vs. mystical, mayaistic vs. world affirming, rational vs. intuitional, pantheistic/polytheistic vs. theistic or transcendentalist, idealist vs. realist/pragmatic, theological vs. philosophical. All beliefs are limiting though have some truth at their own levels. The perfect man can accommodate all the sects that there are as Rumi, Ibn Arabi’s contemporary said in his famous *Diwani Shams-e Tabrizi*, or appropriate all points of view or beliefs seeing the aspect of truth in all of them but without identifying with any of them as Ibn Arabi would like to put it. Dualistic binary thinking is transcended in the metaphysical standpoint as knowing and being become one. By excluding modern episteme on principle

grounds – dubbing it ignorant of the twin sources of knowledge intellection and revelation and ignorant of the self and committed to false views of scientism, evolutionism and progress and the cult of the ugly – the Akbarian framework would be able to make sense of traditional religious and wisdom traditions including the much misunderstood and wrongly reviled archaic traditions which preserve the essentials of metaphysical worldview though couched in mythological or difficult symbolic language. Philosophies are not static or monolithic but do evolve in some sense though not in the manner conceived by most modern historians of philosophy. That there can be no new discovery of truth concerning our ultimate destiny and most fundamental issues – and man is advised to be passive recipient of knowledge from the only Knower by perfecting the art of contemplation which might demand retreats in Ibn Arabi’s Sufi discipline for achieving poverty of spirit or renunciation/detachment – to use preferred expression from Christian and Indian traditions – is a claim that runs counter to modernist evolutionary thinking. Humanism and individualism are the prime follies of modern age against which Ibn Arabi keeps guard though he recognizes the metaphysical reality of the subject when it comes to subsist in the state of *baqa* after passing through the stage of *fana* which burns the dross of carnal self. Ibn Arabi is ultimately underscoring clearly and unambiguously the unity of all human endeavours at all planes as he foregrounds the sacred science – *scientia sacra* – of metaphysics, the realization of the One as Infinite and All-Possibility and the essence of everything that comprehensively provides a foundation for all sciences and arts and thus for unity of knowledge which modern world misses so terribly.

The themes of spiritual ascension, irreducible centrality of the individual spiritual relationship to God, universal guidance and recognition of plurality of beliefs as, everyone being under specific Lord, preeminence of divine mercy and “spiritual realism” are amongst the important features of Akbarian thought that not only question all exclusivist ideologies and also provide a perspective to accommodate divergent claims of rationalism, traditionalist theology and spiritual “unveiling” and a defense of creativity and diversity of spiritual expressions. Ibn ‘Arabî shows why religious diversity is demanded by the very nature of things and why we must welcome it as there is great good in it. He is not for theological uniformitarianism. He supports the theses upheld by perennialists and many others regarding transcendent unity of religions. His pluralism doesn’t entail rejection of respect for the parent tradition

and even certain exclusivity of the latter which is necessarily associated with all belief systems.

The Akbarian distinction between the planes of *Abdiyyat* and *Wahdiyyat* has important implications in reconciling apparently divergent Semitic and non-Semitic or more specifically theistic and transtheistic theologies as the perennialist attempt based on the distinction between Beyond-Being and Being shows. Positing Absolute as more primordial conception of Divinity (which is to be found in all major traditions) reconciles “atheistic” or transtheistic Buddhism and Taoism with Semitic theism. No religion absolutizes personal God. The key importance of the notion of Divine Relativity or what Vedantic thinkers call as *Maya* in Ibn Arabi is an important tool in the dialogue of theologies or religions. Perennialist defence of transcendent unity of religions is very much indebted to this concept. Frithjof Schuon time and again turns to this concept in many works including *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* and *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*. The Shaykh’s masterful reconciliation of otherwise divergent conceptions of creation *ex nihilo* and emanationist accounts or creation/manifestation ideas which have been seen as distinguishing point between Muslim philosophical/Vedantic and Semitic theological approaches.

Ibn Arabi displays remarkable gifts for putting seemingly opposite theological/philosophical conceptions in proper perspective in order to reconcile them. This is an important qualification for doing comparative philosophy. By having recourse to the fixity of entities in the divine knowledge, Ibn ‘Arabî traces the dispute between theologians and philosophers over the eternity of the world back to their perception of the entities. Those who maintain that the world is eternal have understood that “the Real is never qualified by first not seeing the cosmos, then seeing it. On the contrary, He never ceases seeing it.” Those who maintain that the world is qualified by new arrival (*hudûth*) “consider the existence of the cosmos in relation to its own entity,” which is nonexistent. Hence they understand that it must have come into existence (*Futûbhât*, II:666). This is only one example of Ibn Arabi’s style of resolving disputes between rival schools and interpretation such as regarding free will and determinism, Quran’s createdness etc. He would even extend his reconciliatory hermeneutic to idolatry vs. monotheism controversy and even to divergent religious beliefs. He reconciles different seeming oppositions by the familiar method of logic of polarities that juxtaposes opposites while both affirming and negating them seeing them aspects of higher unifying principle. The way he approaches Lord-servant polarity is illustrative of his general approach. By

affirming similarity and incomparability or immanence and transcendence of the Real which is the essence of everything and manifest in all the limitless forms and all polarities he sees our knowledge of everything characterized by this fundamental yes/no or similarity/incomparability binary.

He can provide the paradigm in which we could appropriate not only the great traditional philosophers like Plato and Plotinus, Nagarjuna and Sankara, Eckhart and Cusanus, Chaung Zu and Lao Tzu, Dogen and Confucius (serious attempts have been made in this direction already) but the saints of all hues, from almost all traditions and even modern philosophers like Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida. In fact the whole gamut of Tradition, as the perennialists use the term, is his province. Buddhism and antiessentialist postmodern thought could be read, without much stretching, as proving the negative part of the thesis of Ibn ‘Arabî regarding essential nothingness of all phenomena. His metaphysical view of the Muhammad as the Principle of Manifestation, as positivity of manifestation, as Logos rather than a mere historical personality can hardly be characterized as exclusivist. All prophets partake of the Logos that is Muhammad. Being that which manifests or unveils Essence the Messenger is green in the leaves, red in the roses and gold in the rays of the sun. He is this life in its positivity, in its totality. And he is the silence of the darkness. And he is the joy of abounding life of the world.

He provides a possible approach to achieve unity of sciences or knowledge which is increasingly becoming difficult to achieve for modern education. He leads to an all-inclusive point of view, which is not limited to the world of nature, or to humanity, to science, economics or religion, but which sees all of these as faces of a single reality described by the doctrine of unity the kernel of which is, in the apt words of Young,

love and the love of that love, which is movement and life, and the perfection of completion, simple, positive, joyful news of their intrinsic and inseparable unity with their origin, offering freedom from the tyranny of the thought of otherness, in exchange for the certainty in one, absolute and all-embracing Reality, to Which, to Whom all service is due (Young 1999).

His Absolute doesn't engulf the concrete existential individuality and the awful reality of suffering that marks the odyssey of life. He charts out a method to move from majestic to beautiful names of God and thus securing the rights of the man of flesh and blood with all his agonies. His God is not just a cold unconcerned impersonal divinity but living personal one also which responds to prayer of every individual and even lauds human "weakness" to complain

about all kinds of pains. Existentialists would hardly have any problem with the account of concrete human individuality presented by Ibn Arabi even if it is Absolute centric and essentialist metaphysics to which he remains committed. Ibn Arabi's "system" demonstrates that there is much that is wrong with modern man's understanding of metaphysics. Metaphysics is not an abstraction, existence devaluing essentialism, a supraindividualism that fails to take ample note of the individual with all his frailties, atemporal ahistorical bragging of eternity that brackets off temporality and history, a dissolution of the finite in the Infinite but recognition of the integral reality of plurality or diversity in the One or the Infinite itself which otherwise divorced from the mirror of attributes that the world of form and colour is gets reduced to empty abstraction. Ibn Arabi's Absolute is not static but dynamic ever revealing or manifesting itself, eternally in love with its exteriorized manifestations, realizing other modes of perfection in spatio-temporal realm, even in what is called as sin and failure. Thus passion, thought and will all are real in the life of God which is the life of everything.

It is religion taken as a metanarrative, a system, an ideology explaining things, as privileging of the otherworld or eternity at the cost of this world and time here-now, elaborate creedal formulae coached in terms of propositions privileging the religious as distinct from or opposite to the secular, as unqualified belief in the representation of Reality and their absolutist exclusivism that Ibn Arabi pleads for transcending by virtue of his Unitarianism that puts the Real at the centre while questioning absolutization of all conceptions and theorizations of It. The Real is the essence of everything and no dualistic apprehension or categorical framework can capture it. It is the totality of all existents, a metaphysical whole that can't be reduced to an object of knowledge by a subject that is thought to be separate from the object. All this implies that meaning closure, epistemic chauvinism, totalistic thought and consequent war on the basis of a particular conception or delimitation of the Reality/ Truth are unwarranted. Truth rather than discourse *about* Truth which is the prerogative of exoteric theology and rational philosophy is what the gnostic comes to realize and as it is the One and All it necessarily follows that the knower transcends all particular beliefs and views. Living Truth, dissolving in Truth rather than talking about it and fighting for it is the way to end all conflicts that arise from dualistic theological and rationalistic philosophical approaches.

Ibn Arabi avoids self defeating relativism and agnosticism that knows no Absolute by putting Absolute at the centre and declaring

that personal knowledge of the Real is possible. This knowledge is not the conceptual knowledge but realizational knowledge where the subject is identified with the object and one becomes knowledge itself. Man is made for the Absolute and has access to It though not conceptually or discursively. This avoids nihilism and relativist anarchism that bedevils postmodernism by recognizing relative truth of all human understandings as the Absolute manifests itself differently in different forms and different souls. It also provides a framework for appreciating all viewpoints and all beliefs while acknowledging their relativity. Secular philosophical and scientific thought can be put in the proper perspective without conceding its absolutist claims but conceding at the same time that it is one way of approaching the God identified with the Era and that nothing happens except in strict conformity to the requirements of divergent Divine Names.

We can't label Ibn Arabi's description of Unitarianism as the "Islamic concept of unity" or some such thing. There is only one reality and it transcends all human views of it. He builds his thesis on the most universal of categories – existence or being. The Quran is not a perspective among other perspectives on Truth or Existence but simply an invitation to be open to Truth or Reality. "It is the description of Existence as it is." And it is "this understanding of existence which lies at the core of all the true religious and philosophical traditions – that has always been at once the starting point and the goal of human knowledge."

Dialogue with other Sects and Religions

Ibn Arabi was self avowedly a Muslim who affirmed all the articles of faith that traditional Sunni Islam upholds. He takes Islam to be the perfection of religions and for him Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, appropriates all the perfections of previous prophets. The detailed statement of his beliefs at the beginning of *Futûhât* shows his commitment to all the important articles of traditional Sunni Islam. He critiqued Judaism and Christianity on different grounds and wrote for holy war against Christians at a time when Muslims were under invasion from them. He criticized many religious sects and unambiguously expressed his inclination for Sunni Islam. He is emphatic that felicity is attainable only through *tawhid* though he is not very well informed about non-Semitic traditions and his reading of Judaism and Christianity need not be wholly accepted. His complex relationship with other sects and traditions is best understood, in my opinion, from the perennialist perspective. He grants that in later times as the second coming of Jesus comes closer

the secrets of other traditions will be better accessed and he himself has primarily unveiled the secrets of Islam only.

Exoteric vs. Esoteric Approaches

Ibn ‘Arabi’s approach dissolves the much hyped conflict between exoteric and esoteric perspectives in religions, the thesis of two truths that we find across many traditions. This puts in perspective the religion of the masses and the mystical/philosophical elite without denigrating the former. His catholicity and universality is thus attested in his inclusive view of diverse spiritualities and religious practices. By asserting that man sees only himself when he claims to see God as the Essence never unveils and God reveals Himself according to man’s belief and emphatically asserting that it is bewilderment and perplexity that overtakes all travellers on the path and all knowers he questions all grounds that anyone may deploy for special. The more further one moves forward on the path, the clearer it becomes to the traveller the realization of his progressive ignorance until at the end of the path one knows that one can’t know the Essence. One does progress in spiritual knowledge and witnesses normally unseen realities as one progresses on spiritual journey but not as a knower that could justify the claim of one being a special person. As God is the only knower and it is levels rather than individuals to which the appellation of higher or lower is attachable according to the Shaykh there remains no ground whatsoever for epistemic chauvinism or for ‘more knowledgeable than thou’ attitude. The Shaykh saw himself as heir to guardian of prophetic wisdom and thus sacred law which is respectful of dualities at the plane of relativity. Prophets address all people irrespective of intellectual or spiritual attainments of the addressee. Of course everyone will interpret their words according to one’s ability or spiritual attainment. None is above law. Humility is the royal road to God for all and sundry. The highest station is becoming pure servant where no trace of Lordship remains as Ibn Arabi describes about himself this station. It is Pharonic attitude to claim lordship and Satanic attitude to assert one’s superiority. Ibn Arabi’s is a mysticism respectful of law and *haqiqah* identical with *sha’riah*. His respect for the sacred law is so unambiguously stated in his understanding of *furqan* that one hardly needs to refute his theological critics who accuse him of nullifying divine commandments or erasing distinction between lawful and unlawful. To quote him:

He who stops with the Quran inasmuch as it is a *qur’ân* has but a single eye that unifies and brings together.... however, it is a *furqân*.... When I tasted the latter..., I said, “This is lawful, that is unlawful, and this is indifferent. The schools have become various and the religions diverse.

The levels have been distinguished, the divine names and the engendered traces have become manifest, and the names and the gods have become many in the world (*Futūbāt*, III:94).

Ibn Arabi's synthetic view should not be confounded with modern eclecticism and uniformitarianism or "all is okay" cheap spirituality or some interpretations of *anekantvada* that liquidate the claim of absoluteness of truth or loss of distinction between truth and falsehood. He has very precisely formulated doctrines. His pluralism doesn't mean he is for everything or everything could be read in him. We need formal religion. New Age spirituality and NeoVedantic antinomian mysticism and libertine spirituality of many famous modern mystics would be emphatically rejected in his worldview. Even many modern appropriations of Sufism that involve wild dancing and music performances without observing prescribed requirements as defined by masters has no warrant from Akbarian viewpoint. Addas has quoted his condemnation of *shahid bazji* (contemplation of beautiful young men to provoke ecstasy), *sama* (communal spiritual recital) etc. in this connection (Addas, 1993:163).

Against the Cartesean construction of man as body and soul Ibn 'Arabî follows the traditional ternary division of body, soul and spirit. Because the soul dwells in an in-between realm it must choose to strive for transformation and realization. 'All is ok' or 'feel good' spirituality quite popular today is therefore simply a simplification and naivety. The sacred law is important for keeping the body and soul in the service of spirit. Against those extreme idealists and monists who find hardly any reality in body and soul, in their great struggles, falls and jumps and in the name of Unitarianism declare time to be illusory, the world to be a unreal distraction, the body to be a prison he is for integral view of man which recognizes the rights of body, soul and spirit. Below the level of Absolute personal God and finite self of the servant are real. The servant must unceasingly pray. Body imposes limitations and therefore man is not God. The Spirit alone is one with God. The body and soul are not. Servitude can't be denied, the reality of individual self can't be wished away as long as we exist as entities in space and time. Absolute unification is not possible. God ever remains the exalted – and of this Ibn Arabi doesn't tire of reminding us. One must guard against "spiritual Titanism." The insights of Semitic religions and theologies that emphasize our in-between nature – that we are situated between earth and heaven, time and eternity, beasts and angels, existence and non-existence and are in Rumi's words "midway between, and struggling" – and distinction of the Creator and the created are there to stay. For Ibn 'Arabî we are situated in this world but really belong to the next and are "at a doorway between existence and non-existence."

Dialogue with the Other and Theomorphic Ethics

Modern world is largely convinced that ethics is relative and everything is permissible. There is no ontological foundation for ethics. There are some isolated thinkers who challenge dominant model but in almost all spheres of secular life there are no imperatives like those bequeathed by religions. In contrast Ibn Arabi's Sufi ethics is grounded in ontology. Noble character traits are not merely extraneous qualities that have no bearing upon our mode of existence. They define our mode of existence and the extent to which we participate in the fullness of the Light of Being. There exists certain hierarchy among the divine names and it depends on their ontological status which names should be acquired and which should be avoided (Chittick, 2009: 22-23). The general rule is that attributes of beauty need to be foregrounded in accordance with the prophetic saying that Divine Mercy precedes His Wrath. This means that ethical commandments of the Law have to be observed if man desires felicity. Modern wishy washy do goodism or absolutization of ethical relativism or de Sadean and ethics complicit with Capitalism and other power centric ideologies are not compatible with Ibn Arabi's theomorphic ethics. Capitalism and State Capitalism disguised as Marxism have little room for attributes of beauty. There is no warrant for ignoring the Scale of the Law which provides the norm. Antinomianism which has been popularized by certain libertine Gurus has no place here. Men with all their limitation and imperfections can't claim to be infinitely beyond this world and thus beyond good and evil which we encounter at every stage of existence. Man must always separate divine viewpoint which is corollary of his incomparability from his own human, all-too-human viewpoint which is a corollary of divine similarity (Chittick, 2009: 292). Ibn Arabi would feel extreme discomfort with the moral chaos in the modern world where men have forgotten Law and their prerogative to assimilate divine traits and mostly fail to distinguish between base and noble traits. However all this should not be construed to imply that he countenances moralism which is typical modern heresy. The deadly criticism of Nietzsche on morality doesn't apply to his view of ethics. Like Nietzsche's Zarathustra Ibn Arabi's perfect man too is beyond good and evil. The perspective of Law is not the perspective of engendering command which precedes it and even in reality overcomes it. The perfect man has transcended the desiring self that seeks self gratification at the cost of the other. He is, by no means, immoral. Postmodern probematization of ethics and modern scientific discoveries implicating relativism of morals can't

problematize Akbarian position as he too, like Nietzsche's Zarathustra, speaks from the high mountains of the Spirit which transcends all actions, good or evil. There is no such thing as virtue and sin (and thus moral evil) at the deepest level. Moral evil appears so from the perspective of law only which is not necessarily the same thing at the plane of *haqiqah*. God is beyond good and evil and so is the sage. Transcendence of good/evil dualism is a thesis shared by traditional mystical figures. Nietzsche's superman, as Coomaraswamy points out, exemplifies this mystical thesis rather than any heterodox conception. In fact modern relativism poses hardly a problem in Ibn 'Arabî's perspective and it is subsumed in the higher absolutist view of Sufism without denying its (relative) truth at a certain plane. In fact metaphysical-esoteric perspective of Ibn 'Arabî distinguishes itself from all kinds of moralisms and inadequate absolutisms (based on absolutizing something less than the Absolute) and ideologies to which modernity has succumbed.

In the chapter on ascension in *Futûbât* Ibn Arabi quotes Yahya as saying that everyone travels on his own path on which he alone travels. So there is no scope for set recipes applicable for all the people. God is experienced differently by every person. This vetoes all fundamentalisms for good though this should not be interpreted as license to believe or do anything. In fact this problem of license and misuse is avoided in Ibn Arabi ethics as he formulates a set of advices distilled from scriptures and Sufi authorities which can be practiced by the pious alone. The central requirement is renunciation of self will or conquest of desiring self and with it pleasure/pain centric action. No selfish or hedonist person can afford to be a disciple of Ibn Arabi or a follower of Sufi path.

I quote some of his maxims which enshrine the true spirit in which dialogue with the other persons and collectivities should be held. These might appear almost superhuman for ordinary mortals like our party politicians. But the ideal set by the Shaykh, like the one set by Jesus when he said that one should offer another cheek, is based on the ontological considerations that all share one Self of God and it is in our real self interest to lose the self in humility, love, charity and compassion. These maxims align him with the great tradition of ethics in both Semitic and non-Semitic traditions. The following are from *The Mantle of Initiation*.

- Care nothing for the ignorance of him who does not know your worth; rather, it is not seemly that there be any sense of your worth even in your own eyes.
- Have no desire that people should listen to your speech.

- Be not anxious to give answer to anything displeasing said about you.
- Be content with [God's] Decree not necessarily with each thing decreed, but, rather, with its Decree itself. And receive with joy whatever may come from Him.
- Do favors for both friend and foe, treating all alike with humility, gentleness and long-suffering.
- Pardon the one who has harmed you, that is, do not even defend yourself [from harm].

The following passage sums up essential Ibn 'Arabî and the central message of *all* integral traditions as A. K. Coomaraswamy and other masters of traditions formulate it. Here is the basis for ethics on which all traditions are united i.e., transcendence of lower self to subsist in the divine self. Here is his formulation of the theory and objective of mystical discipline. Here is also a manifesto for coexistence of traditions or plurality of modes of experiencing or relating to the divine.

Now you must know that if a human being (*al-insân*) renounces their (own personal) aims, takes a loathing to their animal self (*nafs*) and instead prefers their Sustainer/Teacher (*rabb*), then the Real will give (that human being) a form of divine guidance in exchange for the form of their carnal self... so that they walk in garments of Light. And (this form) is the *sharî'a* of their prophet and the Message of their messenger. Thus that (human being) receives from their Lord what contains their happiness – and some people see (this divine guidance) in the form of their prophet, while some see it in the form of their (spiritual) state.

Ibn 'Arabî says in *The Kernel of the Kernel*: "You will be all when you make nothing of yourself." This is the golden rule that allows to know all truths and achieve all perfections and absolute certainty. Modern man, especially the academician, the philosopher of religion, the phenomenologist is more interested in speculation about Truth or God or phenomenological "objective" idle inquiry without being prepared to sell everything including the dearest self, as Jesus would say, or make nothing of himself for the sake of Truth. That explains why there is so much knowledge and so little wisdom today and why man is farther from God and nearer to dust. It is only by becoming nothing, by absolute detachment or poverty of spirit that one can attain the central point, the still centre of existence where lasting peace and felicity lie. The Friend doesn't tolerate duality as Ibn 'Arabî reminds us and comes to live in the sanctuary of a perfectly polished mirror of the heart.

Ibn ‘Arabî establishes a universal brotherhood based on the most fundamental ontological basis that all things, animate and inanimate are essentially Absolute or its countless faces. We love our neighbour or a tree because at the most fundamental plane we are our neighbour and we are the tree. There is no other in absolute sense. To see the other is to see duality rather than the One Essence. The Beloved smiles in every face and invites us for a meeting in every form. God is Love. As separate individualities we are not. The One is all. All are one. In his words “you are everything, in everything, and from everything.” So why assert our exclusive claim to be and why impose our desire on the other?

Everything is in communication with everything else. All things share in the life of God. Ibn ‘Arabî chooses – and asks us to choose – life over death, love over hate, mercy over wrath and thus dialogue over conflict. In this choice alone do we fulfill our vocation and will continue to live in an increasingly fragile world and deteriorating environment.

Metaphysics of Love

Self transcendence achieved through love is the crux of Akbarian vision as it is of the esoteric religion and wisdom traditions of the world. Love is the greatest unifying factor and metaphysics of love can’t be but most universal.

Sufi poets in general often choose to speak of Reality or Absolute in terms of Love. The Akbarian Sufi doctrine put in the language of love states that “there is but One Reality: Love or Sheer Being, which manifests Itself in two forms, the lover and the Beloved.” One quote from the *Futûbât* will suffice to show how great a lover he is. “By God, I feel so much love that it seems as though the skies would be rent asunder, the stars fall and the mountains move away if I burdened them with it: such is my experience of love “ For him love is the universal and unifying theme in his worldview. He wrote in the *Tanazzulât al-mawsiliyya*: “All praise to God who made love (*al-hawâ*) a sanctuary towards which the hearts of all men whose spiritual education is complete make their way and a *ka’ba* around which the secrets of the chests of men of spiritual refinement revolve.” For him the world of manifestation is nothing but the activity of love as God loved to be known or share his love (the Good tends to diffuse as Augustine puts it) and created the world, a mirror of His attributes. The world is the “other” to God so that he could see mirror Himself. In a way it is His object of love. The worlds are markers or traces of the incessant loving activity of God through unveiling by means of creation/ manifestation. Because the

different worlds or realms of manifestation are Divine Self-determinations they acquire a reflection of Divine Existence and this “reflection is the movement of life called love.” He says: “No existence-giver ever gives existence to anything until it loves giving it existence. Hence everything in *mujûd* is a beloved, so there are nothing but loved ones” (*Futûbât*, IV 424). Ibn ‘Arabî is not the one who could countenance dualism of body and soul and saw the body as the vehicle of spirit and thus essentially divine. Even desire and passion are not as such distractions but divine in their roots.

As opposed to every romantic and dualistic understanding of love, he envisions love as lying at the centre of reality as is the case in Plato, world mystical traditions and in fact in all religions. Love and self-denial go hand in hand. Self transcendence achieved through love is the crux of Akbarian vision as it is of the esoteric religion and wisdom traditions of the world. If God is Love and man consciously or unconsciously and every creature is incessantly driven by love we have the most comprehensive and solid foundation for dialogue. Love as the essence of everything implies all grounds for conflict are context bound and contingent. Dialogue with the other is ideally achieved when there remains neither the self nor the other but only Love. Jane Clark sums it so well.

Ibn ‘Arabî points out that the deepest understanding is not just to know intellectually that Divine Love is the beginning, the motive power and the end of everything in creation: it is to discover through our own lives and experiences – through our own “taste” – that everything that happens to us is, essentially, a manifestation of God’s love for us, and that our return to Him is equally motivated by love – not by fear (Clark, 2005).

The Muhammedan Saint as the Ideal Interlocutor

Ibn ‘Arabî gives the most universal definition of Muhammadan where this becomes

not a designation of a particular historical community but the very name of universality and perfection. It is the name of a station, theoretically available to everyone, attainable to the select few who travel on and on, perfectly realizing all stations until he arrives at the station of no station in which one has nothing of one’s own and therefore mirrors the Real most perfectly and is not defined by any particular divine name or attribute but brings together all standpoints or stations (Twinch 2004).

A Muhammedan saint, as Ibn Arabi conceives him, is the ideal interlocutor. He has nothing to lose and nothing to win as he has transcended the fog of passions and the distorting veil of desires and become a mirror in which the Truth or God sees itself. He shows mirror to everything. By appropriating all the divine names and becoming pure servant in whom not a trace of Lordship remains he

represents the rights of all existents. Representing the rights of the other, the non-self, the Universal Will or Tao he will best represent the case of Nature in the world facing environmental crisis. He has nothing personal impose on the other. He is not attached to any view whatsoever but sees things as they are and gives each created thing exactly what is due to it on the basis of seeing it as a unique self-disclosure (*tajallî*) of the absolute *Haqq*. Seeing the oneness of the Real and the manyness of creation allows them “to give each thing that has a *haqq* its *haqq*,” as demanded by the Prophet (Chittick 1998). For him a Muhammedan is one who realizes the perfections of all the prophets – an ideal worthy of emulating for every man and who can assert that he is truly a Muhammedan and who can be more inclusivist than a Muhammedan in this sense? He demands, as Qunawi puts it, that one should perceive each thing only through that thing itself and inasmuch as one is identical with each thing and thus one is the attribute of every attribute and the quality of every essence and one’s act is the act of every actor (*Nafabat*, 265). The highest station of no-station demands disengaging oneself from all qualities, bonds, limitations, and constrictions and standing naked before Non-delimited *Wujūd* i.e., to be absolutely open to the Real with no imposition or will of one’s own. It is what Jesus calls the poverty of spirit and other scriptures such as the Bhagwat Gita detachment. His vision of the unity of Being demands transcendence or cessation of all inequalities and distinctions of class, creed, colour, race, gender, nationality, regionality etc. He demands the sacrifice of the ego which thinks in terms of its rights over and against the rights of the other. “I” must be annihilated in fana so that one mirrors Existence or God and flows with the Tao. Ibn ‘Arabî thus demands nothing less than Universal Compassion and encountering the other with infinite humility and care – an ideal which Levinas attempts to appropriate.

Foregrounding supraformal, supraindividual, metaphysical and esoteric instead of the limiting rationalist and divisive exoteric theological which is anthropomorphic, individual, formal and sentiment affected Ibn Arabi puts in perspective conflicting schools of thought. It is love/knowledge/reality/mercycentric which are all integrating or universalizing entities.

Diversity of Interpretations

Dialogue is best possible when we listen to every point of view and disallow epistemic chauvinism. When all readings possibly supported by the text are in principle allowed we have a manifesto

for freedom of thought. However our Shaykh will not allow what today passes for unrestrained freedom of thought. For the Shaykh the text can't be written off or crossed unlike the approach of extremist Derrideans. Modern penchant for dozens of "isms" that result from this pseudofreedom to proceed without restraint, to make a god of thinking or merely human faculty of mind is itself a problem that we must guard against. Ibn 'Arabî says that there is not one intention of God that we need to get to. There is not one determinate meaning only. He opens up the space for potentially infinite meanings – every new reading should disclose new meanings of the sacred text according to him. He says that the author of the Quran intends every meaning understood by every reader, and he reminds us that human authors cannot have the same intention. Meaning closure that postmodernists are very much concerned about never happens in his view. The real meaning is with God but all meanings participate in that divine meaning. All things speak of the Beloved and are portals to the Infinite. Polysemy for him results not from infinity of contexts but because of multiplicity of souls or addresses. All this implies that fundamentalism and theological imperialism have no warrant.

Meanings in the three books – the book of verses, the book of universe, the book of the soul – are never repeated according to him. He accordingly tells us that if someone re-reads a Quranic verse and sees exactly the same meaning that he saw the previous time, he has not read it "properly" – that is, in keeping with the *haqq* of the divine speech (Chittick, 2008). We may note that polysemy results not from infinity of contexts but because of multiplicity of souls or addresses. However, we can't be allowed the typical irresponsible Derridean play with the text where one makes it a point to misread, to deconstruct, to question, to hunt for the gaps. Ibn 'Arabî affirms multiplicity of meaning rather than no given or potential meaning to be laboriously, in all humility searched, a process which may require moral qualification also of which it is absurd to talk in the Derridean context. However there are convergences between the two approaches. There is no such thing as unique meaning or final interpretation or the only true interpretation for both Ibn 'Arabî and Derrida. Ibn 'Arabî's Quran is an open intertext that contains layers upon layers of hidden meanings. Nothing can be a better antidote to theological imperialism.

It means no complacency can be entertained. We must be ever humble at the door of the King and humility is the prerequisite of real dialogue. The unbelievers lack this virtue as they complacently dismiss claims that anyone else is given access to the Truth. Humility

comes from being nothing and waiting for God to teach. Modern skeptic is neither able to consent to be nothing nor acknowledge any Knower or Teacher.

Ibn Arabi says something about hermeneutic method that is incomprehensible to moderns. He maintains that the act of interpretation involves self sacrifice or self transcendence and carrying out the wishes of God as a servant. The real hermeneutics does not depend upon the knowledge of the interpreter, but upon his “unletteredness” (*ummiyya*) and receptivity to Divine instruction. He says of the man who truly recites the Qur’ān that God instructs and he listens passively as he suspends all his personal reason and reflection (Chodkiewicz, 2005:27).

Divine Names and Roots of Diversity of Beliefs

Approaching from the gnostic rather than the voluntaristic perspective the Akbarian “mysticism of infinity” shows how in our denial of truth we nonetheless affirm it – a curved path too is a straight path (more precisely we don’t need to travel at all on any path, to think of taking the straight path is to wrongly imagine a distance between the Real and its “children” which we are) – we are always equally close/distant from the center called God/Reality. All things are on the straight path even if it deviates for, as Ibn ‘Arabī says in the *Futūbāt*: “... curvature is straight in reality, like the curvature of a bow since the straightness which is desired from it is curvature ... and all movement and rest in existence is divine because it is in the hand of the Real” (*Futūbāt* II, 563). This is a vision of spiritual democracy too profound to be assimilated for even the most catholic and tolerant of theologies. His ingenious reinterpretation of key terms of exclusion such as *kaafir*, *fajir*, *zalim* shows his catholicity. Even Iblis is ultimately no outsider. How can there be any exclusion or marginalization in a perspective of complete nondualism? Adopting basically metaphysical instead of religious perspective allows him to transcend dogmatic exclusivism that has traditionally been associated with religious perspective and in fact all exclusivism based on anything less than the Absolute and there is nothing which is Absolute. With him the question is of man and his happiness or felicity and traditional religion, if properly read, is a means to that end rather than an end in itself in the name of which men could be divided or killed. His concerns are basically existential and thus universal to which everyone could relate. He submits to Truth only (that is his definition of a Muslim) and Truth is his only God, much in the manner of Gandhi who emphasized the Vedantic equation of *Sat* with Brahman. He finds Truth/ Reality of

the substance of Joy and one with man and that is the good news he brings to the despairing nihilistic world. He has ultimately no dogmas to preach except openness to the reality without any imposition from conjectural self or mind. He brings the glad tidings that the world is indeed our home or we are the world and we are loved and Love is the be all and end all of all existence, all endeavors. The Real is, it can't and needn't be found or searched – rather it finds us. Wherever one turns there is the face of God as the Quran puts it and Ibn 'Arabî reiterates time and again. Realizing this one becomes a flute and God the flute player. A love affair with the Real commences and one enjoys orgasm with the whole universe. This overwhelming desire for love can't stop at any human substitute as the *Tarjuman* narrates.

Ibn Arabi doesn't place misguidance at the same plane as guidance even if both of them are effects of divine names. He weighs everything in the scale of law – a procedure secular modernity would vehemently reject. Although everything is a “face” (*wajh*) of God—”Wherever you turn, there is God's face” (Quran, 2:115) — we need to make distinctions among the omnipresent faces to account for the mutiplicity around. Everything is ultimately an effect of one of the infinite specific divine names. We can't write off distinctions and refuse to recognize distinct *haqqs* of everything. All perspectives are valid but all of them don't lead to felicity. All of them are not straight for man though they are so for God. A plethora of perspectives are all valid due to the very nature of Absolute which is infinitely rich and the essence of everything and the object of every conception and perception but man needs to face the right face, the face of beauty and not of majesty. Man can ill afford distance. He is made for love and love leads him to proximity of God. Outside God there is no felicity, no bliss. Modern man is self exiled to hell where he imagines to hide from God. But this is impossible as is evidenced from the painful tone of modern literature. Lost in fragmentary images that modern art form depict modern man is still, badly and painfully, in search of his soul.

Ibn 'Arabî 's perfect man is open to all forms, to infinite disclosures of God which change every instant. He lives moment to moment as he is *abdul waqt*, the servant of the Instant. For him, as for Zen, ultimately, there is no distinction between the immediate and the ultimate and there is no goal as such, each step is the goal, each moment is the goal. A blade of grass is inwardly the Absolute. There is no particular or exclusive way to salvation because all ways are already blessed. There is no need of salvation because all alienation or bondage is really illusory. All are saved; all are embraced

by God because none has ever left God or the Garden of Eden except in his imagination. And it is that cursed mind and imagination which is the bane of man. God is loving enough (*Wadud*) and strong enough to overcome all resistance on the part of man and willy nilly arranges his return to Himself. If everything is in way perfectly as it should be what point is in sending prophets and exhorting people to truth? Ibn ‘Arabî ‘s commentator and author of *Bursevi Fusūs* answers the question thus: “This one cannot say, because this invitation is the invitation from the Name Misleader (*mudill*) to the Name Guide (*bādî*) to Truth, and the invitation from the Name Compeller (*jabbār*) to the Name Just (*‘adl*).” We can add that it is, in general, an invitation from the Names of Majesty to the Names of Beauty, from what necessitates suffering on a human plane to that which engenders peace and bliss. We need to invoke the Names of Beauty to be relieved of the effect of the Names of Majesty. To Ibn ‘Arabî are credited, like Sankara, great devotional hymns and invocations or prayers. For Ibn ‘Arabî the great samsaric drama has a climax in universal salvation as Mercy overcomes all resistance in the end. Because Divine Mercy has precedence over wrath hell too becomes sweet or enjoyable after some time. Evil is noughted as it has always been parasitic on good possessing no real existence. The Goodness of God has the final word.

From Ibn Arabi’s understanding of divine names it follows that we should not expect to see manifestation of only selected divine names. The theatre of the universe can’t go on if effects of the names of severity – distance, strife, conflict, disequilibrium – are absent. Men have differed and will continue to differ until all veils are torn asunder when the reality of differences in beliefs shall become known. Differences will never be fully obliterated and pain and conflict or disequilibrium never cease to characterize our state in the world which is by definition a state of disequilibrium because of our ontological distance or difference from the Principle which alone is Good. The world is not God or it will cease to be what it is. We must remember the somber point which Ibn Arabi emphasizes that the Absolute is beyond good and evil. Everything is an expression of this universal and primordial Principle. There is nothing ugly and discordant in the play of God from the gnostic’s perspective because he doesn’t evaluate existence in terms of any binary opposition such as of pleasure and pain and even ugly and beautiful or good and evil as usually understood. Certain types of sufferings are unavoidable as long as there are sentient creatures caught in the vortex of space and time. It is humanism and not religion which has denied the reality of man’s fallen nature or sin and believed in man’s perfectibility, a

heaven on this earth and man usurping Godhead and forgetting his vicegerancy. Man is made not only of the noblest stuff as he is created in the image of God but also of the vilest of clay. The human constitution contains a natural tendency to wrong doing (Quran, 12:35). Wrongdoing or moral evil thus can't be wished away. Moral evil is not unconnected with intellectual misjudgment or error. Men shall, therefore, be eternally busy to clear the obstacles of misunderstanding, myopia, hamartia and move forward towards creating a more tolerant and pluralist society. Ibn Arabi's importance lies in offering valuable insight into grounds of human conflict and its role in divine economy. Imperfect individuals given to haste, forgetfulness and heedlessness as the Quran characterizes them need to be ever in the process of dialogue in order to reduce impact of centrifugal forces.

The lover of the Real sees neither sin nor guilt, neither distance or real alienation from the Real nor damnation for those who have gone astray – in fact there is no going astray ultimately, no slackening of God's control. Nothing needs to be done to reach God, just awakening from the sleep of inattention or heedlessness. The world is the playground of God's attributes and it is human, all-too-human weakness to evaluate in anthropocentric and moral terms. The attributes of majesty are not to be loathed at. Iblis is a friend in disguise as for Hallaj and the leader of the lovers as for Rumi. For Ibn 'Arabî God's trickery (*makr*) is educative. What we ordinarily call evil and sin is not so at root or in the larger framework of divinely willed action. The sage is situated beyond good and evil. But all this doesn't mean he makes a joke of traditional eschatology and commandments and is blind to the painful reality of suffering here and hereafter. Though *kafir* may not be pejorative term for him in one sense his position remains traditional one which sees them as deluded, ignorant folk who cover up truth and are heedless of their own souls. Modern unbelieving world will thus come under a serious condemnation from him. Modern secular man doesn't know what it means to be human as he is ignorant of God or what it means not to be concerned with our theomorphic nature and this also explains his incomprehension regarding need or role of hell. Ibn Arabi's genius lies in respecting the traditional understanding of religious doctrines which make religion a serious thing, a matter of life and death but at the same time pleading for a deeper understanding at the plane of *haqiqah* where theological or religious notions get a metaphysical translation and become quite comprehensible.

All exclusivist ideologies are ultimately blind to all comprehensiveness of the Name Allah which the perfect man

represents/appropriates and worship particular names only (postmodernism, for instance, seems to be under the Name *Al-Mudbil*). Ibn ‘Arabî invites the world torn by ideological conflicts and religious exclusivism to the Muhammedan station of no-station where no particular name/belief/form is absolutized. The only exclusivity or hierarchy that he recognizes is the Quranic one of those who know and those who are ignorant and asks God refuge from being amongst the latter. This is absolutely warranted distinction from the human viewpoint as on it hinges felicity. Man can’t afford worshipping *Al-Mudbil* or *Az-Zar* (Who inflicts loss). Piety or righteousness follows from knowledge. Indeed *avidya* is the sin in all traditions and it is in knowledge that lasting peace and blessedness lies. Suffering is consequence of *avidya*. Perversion of will or moral sin too follows ignorance. No man is willfully bad, says Socrates. So sinners are not to be hated but pitied and given eyes to see. This is the task Ibn ‘Arabî proposes himself as a teacher, as a counselor to the people. He doesn’t make a joke of religion and its threat of hell in the name of Unitarianism and vastness of Mercy. That there is *dukkha* in the world, that people are terribly ignorant of the joy and peace that God is, none can dispute. We need the religion’s glad tidings that Reality/ Truth is one with us and thus sorrow can be conquered and ignorance or alienation can be overcome. The wisdom of the prophets is not dispensable as long as man is man and seeks joy, love and peace. What is God but Beauty and Truth (for both Plato and Ibn ‘Arabî as in fact for all traditions) and who doesn’t worship them? God is also Bliss (*Ananda*). Life seeks joy and that is the meaning of life. No absurdist can deny this. Yes Mercy encompasses all things. One can easily understand the Akbarian perception of the universality of worship. The quotation with which this paper begins also becomes comprehensible. The very choice to be is a mode of worship – for thereby we choose life and Mercy as Ibn ‘Arabî understand it and God is Life and Mercy.

Qunawi, the great disciple and commentator of Ibn Arabi, reads the notion of All- Comprehensiveness of the Names as implying that God is “well-pleased” with all things, even those that are “astray” from the point of view of the commandments of religion, since they are only displaying the properties of His Names. Ibn ‘Arabî often translates misguidance as perplexity and his defence of Noah’s community in *Fusus* is one of the most original things in the history of Muslim thought though most shocking to theologians and few Unitarians or nondualists could wholeheartedly join their hands with him on this issue. In the poem at the beginning of the chapter on Hūd in the *Fusus al-Hikam* Ibn ‘Arabî writes:

The Straight Path belongs to God (*Allāh*). It is manifest in all, not hidden. He is present in the small and the great, In those who are ignorant of how things are and those who know. Because of this His mercy encompasses everything, No matter how base or magnificent.

He reads pejoratively treated notions of getting astray or misguidance in more positive light as perplexity in his most famous commentary on the wisdom of Noah. For him *kafiruun* are the highest saints who conceal their station by inviting blame (*malamatiya*). His *Fusūs* has ever been targeted for such assertions. If everything is decreed and nothing goes against divine will and God is in full control every moment and guides everything perfectly as the Quran affirms and Muslim creed states, a sort of Hegelian thesis of rationality of the real gets vindicated though we must note that Ibn ‘Arabî, like the sacred texts, never tires of emphasizing the need of discernment and action and responsibility and ever fighting evil with all one’s resources. There is no contradiction between these two views as the later too is ultimately part of the divine programme as clearly formulated in scriptures which stress *sha’ria* as well as *haqiqah*. Ibn ‘Arabî’s position can be better appreciated if we keep in mind that for numerous Sufis there is no real contradiction between the perspectives of gnosis (*haqiqah* in Sufi terminology) and *sha’ria*.

Unitarianism and Universalism

If indeed the inner core of our Era is a movement of Love and Beauty as Peter Coates says we can proceed ahead for making these names/values the central features of our lives, both individually and collectively. This will be the greatest contribution of Ibn Arabi and his admirers to self-other dialogue which is the foundation or basis of all dialogues. Attracted to Beauty that God is the lovers shall celebrate every moment of their eternal journey that we call life and there shall scholars. I believe that all well meaning persons from diverse ideological backgrounds – even Iblis is ultimately under God’s control and is thus His agent in consistent Unitarian world-view, a Sufi story to the effect that God whispered into his ear not to prostrate as otherwise the whole drama that this universe is will not be possible – will and in fact are contributing to this enormously complex dialogue process. The last words must be for the Seal of Universal Sainthood Jesus who said ‘Judge not.’ A thoroughly decreed person such as Ibn Arabi doesn’t judge anyone but shows everyone the mirror and help them in seeing and judging themselves in the right perspective, in the perspective of Absolute.

Dialogue is possible when the heart or imagination instead of the head takes the reign. Thought must be transcended to commune with the other, the Reality (*Al-Haqq*) because conceptual intellect

divides and posits dualism of subject and object. The ego which divides part from the whole, man from Existence or Divine Environment must be annihilated in *fana*. Hell as retreat into the cocoon of individuality that accepts separation from the Real because of inability to love. Thus hell is refusal to open for dialogue – which might include total transformation of the self and taking divine robes. Since the world and the divine are everywhere in contact there is no problem of geographic displacement – and thus the whole discourse of identity politics, of exile and nostalgia for homeland and endless clashes over borders and visas – in Ibn Arabi. There is no space for usury and corporate capitalism and thus for wars occasioned by greed of wealth. The problems – political, social, economic – over which modern world is in perpetual conflict arise from the wrong view of self and our vacation in the world. Ibn Arabi would approach all of them by first targeting the view of the self vis-a-vis the other/God. Right view is the first step towards conquest of suffering or conflict. Modern world has got fundamentally wrong view of almost everything vitally important for life and peace. It is naïve to expect that fruitful dialogue process between traditions, nations, identities, ideologies can go on our world without drastic reconstruction of fundamental premises of modern world-view. Ibn Arabi would demand nothing short of this – taking loathing of the self and thus rejection of the received definition of man as *Homo economicus*. Ibn Arabi had strongly rejected the political authorities for their vices which nowadays have grown more rampant and almost into a norm for modern power seekers. As long as the political and civil administration is tied to the interests of economic institutions such as big corporations and banks it is difficult to talk about Ibn Arabi's message of universal love, compassion and understanding. When it pays to create conflicts and misunderstanding and there are big mafias that sponsor them one wonders how much space is there for prophets of love. Will Ibn Arabi be heard when the roots of conflict are primarily economic? Yes – though on a limited scale by isolated individuals – as he targets the self that seeks riches which he sees as pursuing illusion. For him all evils are ultimately traceable to ignorance which is curable. No man is willfully bad as Socrates said. Man being created in divine image is fundamentally good and is being guided to felicity.

Some Possible Criticisms

Some serious questions may arise here. If it is all really a play of divine names including the worst misunderstandings and conflicts how can dialogue succeed or really matter? The answer is that Divine Mercy and thus the names of Beauty have priority and as humans we

must strive to move from being under the influence of the names of Majesty. We are condemned, so to speak, to choose love over hate and peace over conflict. Another question is if all things are happening as per archetypal preparedness and thus perfectly in way what becomes of conscious efforts to create space for dialogue and tolerance? The answer that Ibn Arabi would give is that our effort itself is ultimately a divine act as God is the only Agent or Actor. Conscious effort to change is not outside the comprehensive meaning of destiny. We are destined to eternal felicity. Mercy is destined to prevail upon forces of hate and disunity. We are well advised by *sha'ria* to be willing agents of this predestined plan. Another problem is the view that this historical era is the era of progressive decay, the era of scandals and doesn't it mean certain pessimism regarding all efforts made for change towards the better or the efforts for dialogue. The answer is that this era is also progressing towards the time of Jesus when the religion of truth and peace shall be established. And another point is that if everything is providentially designed the enormous space for intercultural dialogue created due to shrinking of geographical boundaries and diffusion of information regarding other cultures and traditions is also providence. Proliferation of social and political movements that seek to further the dialogue process at various levels are thus manifestation of Mercy which providence is actualizing. Ibn Arabi gives us additional reasons to believe why we must strive to fight against obstructions to Divine Love and Beauty and Mercy. He assures us that man shall overcome someday and to eternal peace and felicity all are driven.

Conclusion

Acknowledgment fundamental mystery and unity of existence in Ibn Arabi amounts to possibility of dialogue with the other that transcends our comprehension and granting that it can be accessed/known or spoken to, in a way, means that we can have a dialogue with everything that exists beyond the narrow cocoon of our self. As all creatures are alive and rational and praising God man is not condemned to the hell of closed subjectivity in a gratuitous and indifferent universe. The stars are not silent. In fact there exists none other than the Self which is in all as the essence of all. Man's call to the Lord doesn't go unheard and the Creator itself is in need of continuous manifestation or dialogue with the created. From Ibn Arabi's viewpoint, the challenge for each new generation is to see new meaning of revelation. It is to see God in the new form of revelation that each era brings in the form of new social structures, art forms, scientific discoveries. Seeing God with one eye and the

phenomena with the other eye is a continuous challenge and if man succeeds in this endeavour he can carry out all dialogues on all levels as in every thing or event there is to be discerned God's *haqq*. (Saints see God's severe face in the taunt of their enemy and take it with smile fresh world). Dialogue demands self giving and humility. This is an act of sacrifice which most people today are not willing to make. We need to carry out dialogues ceaselessly as we experience new revelations which bring with them new challenges and demand new understanding. Whether men know it or not dialogue is going on despite our reluctance. Everything is in the process of continuous change. Life being He/not-He is dialogic, dialectical play of binaries, of God and the inexistent world or transcendent divinity and the world of forms. Life is a dialogue.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ In the perennialist perspective metaphysic constitutes an intuitive, or in other words immediate knowledge, as opposed to the discursive or mediate knowledge which belongs to the rational order. (Most protagonists as well as critics of concept of religious experience hardly leave this rational order in their discourse. "Intellectual intuition is even more immediate than sensory intuition, being beyond the distinction between subject and object which the latter allows to subsist." (Qaisar, 2002: 168) Subject and object are here identified competently and this complete identification is not an attribute of any inferior or non-metaphysical type of knowledge. A consequence of this is that knowing and being are fundamentally one or two inseparable aspects of a single reality. Knowing and being are indistinguishable in the sphere where all is "without duality" (Qaisar, 2002: 169.) From such a perspective the various "theories of knowledge" with metaphysical pretensions which occupy such an important place in modern Western philosophy (which dominate everything in case of Kant) are purposeless. The debate over cognitivity of religious experience similarly appears purposeless in the metaphysical perspective. As Guenon says such theories arise from an attitude of mind that originated in the Cartesian dualism and is shared by almost all modern philosophers. This attitude consists in artificially opposing knowing and being. This is antithesis of true metaphysic. The identity of knowing and being is not merely dogmatically affirmed but realized as well in the integral metaphysic. (Ibid., p.170)

The theory and meditational and other practices are a means or aids to such a realization. It need not and could not be certified or verified by other means, other persons or any kind of tests. Of course these considerations appear strange to Western people. Mystical realization is only partial and rather distant approximation or analogy of metaphysical realization (Qaisar, 2002: 172).

The very fact that such realization is of a purely religious character shows that it is confined entirely to the individual domain; mystical states are in no sense

supraindividual, since they only imply a more or less indefinite extension of purely individual possibilities. Realization of this kind cannot have a universal or metaphysical bearing, and it always remains subject to the influence of individual elements, chiefly of a sentimental order. This realization is also always fragmentary and rarely controlled and doesn't presuppose any theoretical preparation (Qaisar, 2002: 173). Metaphysical realization is common to all Oriental thought and "mysticism."

² The traditionalist perennialist perspective began to be enunciated in the West at the beginning of the twentieth century by the French metaphysician Rene Guenon, although its precepts are considered to be timeless and to be found in all authentic traditions. It is also known as Perennialism, the Perennial Philosophy, or *Sophia Perennis*, or *Religio Perennis* or sometimes simply referred to as the traditionalist or metaphysical school. The term *Philosophia Perennis* goes back to the Renaissance, while the Hindu expression *Sanatana Dharma*, Eternal Doctrine – and the Islamic expression the *jawidani kbird* or *al-bikmat al-khalidah* has precisely the same signification. The other important figures of the Traditionalist School were the German Sufi-metaphysician Frithjof Schuon and the Ceylonese art historian A. K. Coomaraswamy. *Philosophia perennis* pertains to a knowledge which has always been and will always be and which is of universal character both in the sense of existing among peoples of different climes and epochs and of dealing with universal principles. This knowledge which is available to the intellect (which in the traditionalist perspective is a supra-individual faculty distinct from reason though the latter is its reflection on the mental plane) is, moreover, contained in the heart of all religions or traditions. At the heart of the *philosophia perennis* "lies pure metaphysics, if this later term is understood as the science of Ultimate Reality, as a *scientia sacra* not to be confused with the subject bearing the name metaphysics in post-medieval Western philosophy" (Nasr, 1993: 54). Revelation and intellection are the twin sources of metaphysical knowledge. Traditional metaphysics finds its fullest expression in the Hindu doctrines. The phenomena of religion, theology and mysticism is a falling from the intellectual purity of the doctrine, though religion has also been seen as an existential formulation of metaphysics rather than falling away from it.

³ Understanding the notion of metaphysical realization is central to the debate on religious experience from the Eastern and Sufi "mystical" or metaphysical perspective. A few remarks are in order in this connection. In the act of metaphysical realization individual domain is altogether left out. There is no room for feeling and sentimentalism. The mind or everything that contributes to a separative distinctive selfhood or subjecthood has to be transcended completely in order to experience the divine in the fullest sense of the term in the Eastern context. In fact as Guenon has provocatively remarked there is no such thing as mysticism (and religious experience in the modern sense of the term in the East. Here we must point out, from the perennialist (more precisely the Guenonian reading of it) point of view the difference between religion and metaphysics. As Guenon points out the metaphysical point of view is purely intellectual while as in the religious or theological point of view the presence of a sentimental element affects the doctrine itself, which doesn't allow of its complete objectivity. The emotional element nowhere plays a bigger part than in the "mystical" form of religious thought. Contrary to the prevalent opinion he declares that mysticism, from the very fact that it is inconceivable apart from the religious point of view, is quite unknown in the East (Guenon, 2000: 124). The influence of sentimental element obviously impairs the intellectual purity of the doctrine. This falling away

from the standpoint of metaphysical thought occurred generally and extensively in the Western world because there feeling was stronger than intelligence and this has reached its climax in modern times (Guenon, 2000: 125). Modern theistic appropriations of mystical experience by choosing to remain at the level of theology and not cognizing the metaphysical point of view (that brilliantly and convincingly appropriates such apparently divergent varieties of mystical and metaphysical realization as that of Buddhism and Christianity) cannot claim total truth as theology itself cannot do so. And it is not always possible to fully translate metaphysical doctrines in terms of theological dogmas. Only one example will suffice here. The immediate metaphysical truth “Being exists” gives rise to another proposition when expressed in the religious or theological mode “God exists.” But as Guenon says the two statements would not be strictly equivalent except on the double condition of conceiving God as Universal Being, which is far from always being the case in fact (Tillich comes close to holding this view of God), and of identifying existence with pure Being or what the Sufis call *Zat* or Essence which is metaphysically inexact. The endless controversies connected with the famous ontological argument are a product of misunderstanding of the implications of the two formulae just cited. It is the inadequate or faulty metaphysical background that contributes a lot to controversies on either side of the debate on religious experience in modern discourses of philosophy of religion. Unlike purely metaphysical conceptions theological conceptions are not beyond the reach of individual variations. Those who discuss such matters as the “proofs of God’s existence,” should first of all make sure that in using the same word “God” they really are intending to express an identical conception. However this is hardly the case usually and we see altogether different languages being used. Antimetaphysical anthropomorphism comes to the fore in this realm of individual variations. (Guenon, 2000: 128-29)

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