

RE-INTERPRETING "GOD OF PERCEPTION": UNDERSTANDING COSMOPOLITAN SUFISM OF IBN ARABI

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Abstract: This article analyses the concept of "God of Perception" according to Ibn `Arabi's perspective as an image of cosmopolitanism in his thought. This contribution of his thought implies the construction of awareness of the inevitability of religious plurality. The type of this research is library research, then the collected data is analyzed with a hermeneutic approach to Schleiermacher reconstruction. After conducting an analysis, the researcher gets the conclusion that: first, Ibn `Arabi through his key concept of "tajalli" thinks about the idea of "God of Perception", in which he has criticized the existence of truth claims to the beliefs each individual. Second, Ibn 'Arabi through his "The Religion of Love" seeks to lead every human being to different religions towards harmony and tolerance based on love and peace. Third, Ibn `Arabi's cosmopolitanism here same as his "Religion of Love", which in turn pushes tolerance to a more realistic level.

Keywords: Tajalli, God of Perception, Religion of Love, Cosmopolitan Sufism, Ibn `Arabi.

Introduction

Intra-religious, cultural and ethnic tensions are a fact of life. These tensions lead not only to conflicts, but also to violence and war

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. Nowadays, of course, this is not only evident at the micro level, but there are also some conflict phenomena that have reached the macro level between countries. This was predicted long before by Samuel P. Huntington in his article “The Clash of Civilizations”.

In this context, Ibn `Arabi, as one of the Sufi philosophers, offers his idea “God of perception” as an epistemological basis for understanding the inevitability of religious plurality. Ibn `Arabi is a Sufi figure who has attracted the attention of many scholars through his views on the unity of the essence (*wahdat al-wujud*), which, from this perspective, marks the birth of the notion of the transcendent unity of religions (*wahdat al-adyan*). Both views are often attributed to Ibn `Arabi’s. In fact, Ibn `Arabi’s does not explicitly mention the term *wahdat al-adyan* at all, not even the term *wahdat al-wujud* in his works.

There are several studies that examine Ibn `Arabi response to the fact of plurality. However, some scholars analyse it with *wahdat al-adyan* as Ibn `Arabi’s idea, where it was criticised long before by Karomi when he researched and found that. In addition, there is the same research in the response to the conflicts of diversity, but through the concept of *wahdat al-wujud*.

In this case, the following article seeks to reinterpret Ibn `Arabi thought on the “God of Perception” as an epistemological basis for an awareness of plurality in religion. In this perspective, Ibn `Arabi provides a breakthrough on the attitude to be adopted in responding to the fact of plurality. The researcher considers this study important because his worldview, which is presented as an attitude of tolerance, did not shape the birth of the concept of religious unity. However, it has succeeded in moving some of the shackles of the doctrine of thought towards an epistemological basis that is free of entanglements. Then, on a practical level, this article also seeks to understand the cosmopolitanism in Ibn `Arabi thought, which requires an awareness of plurality in order to achieve religious harmony.

The type of research used is library research. The data sources used are Ibn `Arabi own works, which include: *Fushush al-Hikam*; *Futuh al-Makkiyah*; and *Diwan Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*. In order to obtain the expected data, the researcher examined the topic raised on the basis of his work of thought, which then produced a keyword that needed to be deepened in the form of “God of perception”. This

keyword will serve as an introduction in this article in order to understand Ibn 'Arabi's model of cosmopolitanism. The data obtained will then be analysed using a reconstructive hermeneutic approach. Hermeneutic here (romantic hermeneutic) is the theory of understanding adopted by Schleiermacher.

Re-Interpretation of “God of Perception”: A Critique of The Unity of Religions As a Basis for Tolerance

Before understanding all the concepts in Ibn 'Arabi's worldview, including his notion of the “God of Perception”, it is worth noting that *tajalli* is the linchpin of his thought. No part or ontological structure of his thought can be understood without reference to this key concept. In summary, when we examine various themes and issues related to Ibn 'Arabi's worldview, it is actually an attempt to unravel the various aspects of the concept of *tajalli* itself.¹

Tajalli is the process by which God, who is absolutely unknowable, casts shadows of Himself in increasingly concrete forms. *Tajalli* can mean self-manifestation or it can mean embodiment. If this *Tajalli* of God is realised only through particular and determined forms, then this self-manifestation of His is the process of His self-determination as “God”.²

Ibn 'Arabi classifies this *tajalli* of God into two types: *tajalli ghaib* (vague, hidden) and *tajalli syabadab* (concrete, real).³ *Firstly*, it means God's self-manifestation in the occultation or the most holy emanation. In this first stage, God is still absolutely unknowable and He leaves Himself in a state of being a “hidden treasure” and wants to be known. *Secondly*, God's self-manifestation in concrete nature or holy emanation. In this second stage, God has begun to manifest Himself in various forms in concrete nature.⁴ The process of *tajalli* itself is continually updated and continues forever. That is, it is a continuous process with no end, no beginning and no end, which has

¹ Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufisme: Samudra Makrifat Ibn 'Arabi*, terj. Musa Kazhim dan Arif Mulyadi (Jakarta Selatan: PT Mizan Publika, 2015).

² Chafid Wahyudi dan Ainul Yaqin, “Pandemi dalam Tafsir Sufi: Dialektika Trilogi Sufistik ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, Ibn ‘Arabi dan Achmad Asrori al-Ishaqi,” *Mutawatir: Jurnal Keilmuan Tafsir Hadith* 13, no. 1 (2023): 149–68, doi:<https://doi.org/10.15642/mutawatir.2023.13.1.149-168>.

³ Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi, *Fushush al-Hikam* (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, t.th).

⁴ Izutsu, *Sufisme: Samudra Makrifat Ibn 'Arabi*.

existed and will continue to exist forever. This is what Ibn `Arabi narrates with “*al-daim al-ladzi lam yazal wa la yazal*”.⁵

Revealing about God in the creation of ideas, or in this case called “God of perception”, Ibn Arabi mentions many terms in his *Fushush*, including “*al-ilah al-mu`taqad*; God of belief”, and “*al-ilah fi al-i`tiqad*; God in belief”.⁶ The “God of perception” or “belief” is the form or ideas, thoughts and notions about God created by the intellect of every human being. This kind of God is not God in the sense of who He really is, but merely God in the creation of human ideas and perceptions. Thus, this “God of perception” is merely the creation of humanity’s limited ideas, which are then believed and bound with strong beliefs.⁷

In this connection, Ibn `Arabi refers in his *Futubat* to QS. al-Baqarah (2): 115.⁸ Through this verse, he recalled al-Junaid’s statement in the form of “*lawn al-ma’ lawn inaibi*, the colour of water (essence) is according to the colour of its container (perception)”. This expression explains that when one sees water, what is judged as the form of water is the form/colour of its container.⁹ Through this metaphor, God who is believed is a form of thought (perception) that is adapted to the capacity of “readiness” (*al-isti`dad*) or human receptivity, which is certainly different from one capture to another.¹⁰ This means that people respond to the meaning of God according to their ability to grasp it, which then gives rise to a belief or creed. That is why Samiri calls “*ilabu musa*; God of Musa”, QS. Thaha (20): 88 as an image that God’s revelation to him is not the same as that experienced by the Nabi Musa.¹¹

So this self-manifestation of God to the prophets would have experienced the same thing. He would have different versions between one capture of *tajalli* and another. Since there is no end to this process of knowing Him, His Self-manifestation also experiences the same.¹² This cannot be separated from the type of *tajalli* already

⁵ Ibn `Arabi, *Fushush al-Hikam*.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Bahri, *Satu Tuban Banyak Agama: Pandangan Sufistik Ibn `Arabi, Rumi dan Al-Jili*.

⁸ Muhyiddin Ibn `Arabi, *al-Futubat al-Makkiyyah*, 1; 5; 8 vol. (Lebanon: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiah, 1999)..

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibn `Arabi, *Fushush al-Hikam*.

¹¹ Ibn `Arabi, *al-Futubat al-Makkiyyah*.

¹² Ibid.

mentioned by Ibn `Arabi, namely *tajalli ghaib*. In which God is still in the “hidden treasures” and difficult to know.

From all that has been described about the 'God of Perception' above, Ibn 'Arabi severely criticises the various truth claims in each belief, so as not to be shackled by the beliefs or doctrines adopted. Where the opposite effect is the occurrence of disbelief and denial of beliefs or doctrines that are felt to be different from what has been adopted. In this case, Ibn `Arabi wants people to be able to accept and appreciate the various differences of each existing belief. In fact, Allah Swt is the Exalted and Great. He can never be limited by any grasping or perception.¹³ Therefore, the variety of arrests in knowing Him is actually still at the level of *ẓanniy*, prejudice. So, it is appropriate to believe that Allah Swt is not limited to the beliefs and perceptions constructed by the human mind.¹⁴

To further explore the worldview of Ibn `Arabi, there is a poem written in his work “*Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*”:¹⁵

“My heart has become the receptacle for every form,
a pasture for gazelles, a monastery for monks,
A house of idols, a Ka`ba for the circumambulator,
tablets for the Torah, a volume for the Quran.
I have embraced the religion of love. Wherever it sails,
Love is my religion and my faith.”

Through the content of this poem, Ibn `Arabi promotes the idea of the “religion of love”. He combines “love” and “religion” into one, so that the religion (Islam) that Ibn `Arabi recognises feels more universal and can appreciate the existence of religious plurality. Although the text of this poem brings together the beliefs of different religions, this is actually still within the framework of the concept of “God of perception” that is mentioned. In a sense, the existing religions are different ways of accepting His self-expression among themselves.

In this context, Ibn `Arabi does not claim that “the essence of all religions and beliefs is the same and unique”, including Islam. Thus, some scholars have misunderstood the views of this Sufi figure. Among them is Karam Amin Abu Karam, who reveals that in this

¹³ Ibn `Arabi, *Fushush al-Hikam*.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Muhyiddin Ibn `Arabi, *Diman Tarjuman al-Asywaq* (Lebanon: Dar al-Makrifah, 2005).

context Ibn `Arabi believes in *wahdat al-adyan* or the unity of religions, although the interpretation he reveals is deflected on the basis of affirming inter-religious harmony.¹⁶

According to Nurcholish and Dja'far, Ibn 'Arabi's Religion of Love is not a new religion. It is simply a term that encourages the bringing together of different beliefs in the sphere of togetherness and peace.¹⁷ Confirmed by Muhammad Salim al-Ansi, *din al-hubb* (religion of love), which he previously promoted, is in fact based on the contents of QS. Ali Imran (3): 31. Therefore, the religion of love desired by Ibn `Arabi is certainly the religion brought by the Messenger of Allah, namely Islam, because he did not remove the basis of the idea from the Qur'an as a guide to Islam. Then, “love” in his terminology is only as self-motivation to accept all *taklif* (religious burdens) given by the Beloved (Allah SWT) with a sense of *ridla*, love, and without difficulty. In conclusion, Ibn `Arabi does not want to understand the unity of religions (*wahdat al-adyan*). However, the religion he wants is still Islam, which according to him is sufficient to bring religious plurality to peace.¹⁸

From this it can be understood that this “God of Perception” can, in Ibn `Arabi's view, be an epistemological basis for promoting tolerance of existing religious plurality. At the same time, the religion of love that he promoted has also encouraged itself to be able to appreciate every existing belief and to lead it towards harmony and peace rather than conflict and division among people. If all the concepts of this proposal are taken into account, it will be possible to create a way of thinking and acting that is able to face the fact of religious plurality, which is undoubtedly a fact of life.¹⁹

¹⁶ Karomi, “Penolakan Ibnu Arabi terhadap Pluralisme Agama.”

¹⁷ Ahmad Nurcholish dan Alamsyah M. Dja'far, *Agama Cinta: Menyelami Samudra Cinta Agama-Agama* (Jakarta: PT Alex Media Komputindo, 2015).

¹⁸ Muhammad Salim al-Ansi, *Dzakhair al-A'laq Syarh Tarjuman al-Aywaq* (Beirut: al-Matba'ah al-Ansiyah, 1312).

¹⁹ M. Amaruddin and Amursid Asra, “Studi Tafsir Qur'an Karim Karya Mahmud Yunus,” *Syahadah* 3, no. 2 (2015): 2, <https://doi.org/10.32520/syhd.v3i2.78>; Achmad Najib et al., “Epistemologi Tafsir Surat al-Fatihah Karya Mahmud Yunus dan Peunoh Daly,” *Relinesia: Jurnal Kajian Agama dan Multikulturalisme Indonesia* 2, no. 2 (2023): 5, <https://doi.org/10.572349/relinesia.v2i2.621>.

The Concept of God Perception as The Basis of Ibn `Arabi's Cosmopolitanism

Through Schleiermacher's proposed hermeneutic approach, the researcher must go beyond Ibn `Arabi's text and discover the context of his creation, as the interpreter's image of art is better able to understand the work than its author. This highlights the importance of looking at the influence or context of Ibn `Arabi's thought in giving birth to the idea of the "God of Perception". However, for Bahri, Ibn `Arabi never revealed the specific context that triggered the birth of the idea. Thus, to talk about the context of Ibn `Arabi's thought on the subject in question is to talk about the influence of his entire world of thought. This is because Ibn `Arabi's Sufism is considered to be interconnected, as all his thoughts return to the key concept of *tajalli*.²⁰

In spite of all the above-mentioned influences, the great works of Ibn `Arabi, such as *al-Futubat* and *Fushush*, are considered to be an inspiration or a kind of *laduni* that comes directly from God. Not influenced by anyone. Indeed, Ibn `Arabi himself claimed that this product of his thought came from his spiritual experiences and Sufi revelations as a reward for obeying the Rasulullah Saw. However, historically speaking, Ibn `Arabi, who cannot be separated from his involvement in socio-cultural conditions as well as a long regular learning process, certainly cannot ignore historical influences.²¹

Understanding the "religion of love" that he initiated clearly brings interfaith harmony to a more realistic level. It is not very different from the concept of cosmopolitanism. A morality that requires every human being to live within a moral boundary characterised by peace and harmony, without exclusion or anything of the kind. In short, this morality should be seen as an ideology that is diametrically opposed to the nature of fundamentalism. Where, whatever ideas and practices are produced by the foundation of fundamentalism, they are often synonymous with violence and struggle.²²

The concept of cosmopolitanism itself is explored in a statement made by Diogenes of Sinope in 412 BC. He said: "I am a

²⁰ Bahri, *Satu Tuban Banyak Agama: Pandangan Sufistik Ibn `Arabi, Rumi dan Al-Jili*.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Muhammad Said, "Nalar Islam Kosmpolitan: Studi Pemikiran Feethullah Gulen 1990-2004" (Tesis, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2016).

citizen of the world”. This statement is understood in Greek as “cosmopolites”. Diogenes expressed this as a breakthrough of all boundaries of identity, be it individual or social identity.²³ This means that cosmopolitanism does not recognise the boundaries that morally distinguish nations, countries, races or social societies. In this understanding, every human being with any identity should abide by the same moral boundaries.²⁴

Thus, Ibn 'Arabi's cosmopolitanism requires the construction of an awareness of religious plurality in every human being. Through the concept of “God's perception”, Ibn `Arabi seems to show a way for every believer in every religion and belief not to fight over truth claims, which instead lead to mutual accusations. Since each belief is only a creation of human thought and understanding, the true God is the Most Extensive, beyond the boundaries of their beliefs. Then the “religion of love”, which is an extension of the previous concept, reflected the cosmopolitanism in Ibn `Arabi's thought. Interestingly, unlike the notion of *wahdat al-adyan* (unity of religions), this idea suffices to be an offer that can place harmony between followers of different religions based on love and peace, without dissociating themselves from the existence of their respective religions individually, including Islam.

Conclusion

Through his key concept of “*tajalli*”, Ibn `Arabi produces another interesting concept related to his response to religious plurality, namely “God of perception”. With this concept, Ibn `Arabi states that differences in religion and belief are only differences in understanding and recognising the God they believe in. At the same time, his concept provides a space for every human being not to be trapped by religious rigidity. Thus, everyone can be tolerant of the undoubted religious plurality. Moreover, Ibn `Arabi's concept of the “God of perception” is the epistemological basis for the birth of his “religion of love”. This last idea, although not more precisely interpreted as an understanding of *wahdat al-adyan* (unity of religions), is sufficient to lead religious diversity towards harmony and peace.

²³ M. Habibullah, “Kosmopolitanisme dalam Budaya Islam,” *As-S Huffab: Journal of Islamic Studies* 1, no. 2 (2019): 19, doi:<https://doi.org/10.19109/as.v1i2.4859>.

²⁴ Bahrul Ulum dan Siti Raudhatul Jannah, *Kosmopolitanisme di Persimpangan Jalan: Hegemoni Sosial-Politik Putra Daerah* (Yogyakarta: Magnum Pustaka Utama, 2017).

Through this idea, it is possible to understand the cosmopolitanism of Ibn 'Arabi's thought, which brings together all different religious people in "one space" on the basis of love and peace. Although it has responded to the existing symptoms of plurality, further research on religious harmony must certainly continue to be carried out by future researchers so that this idea can be realised at a more realistic level, especially since this plurality conflict always surrounds the life of humanity.

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