Is Ibn al-'Arabī's Ontology Pantheistic?

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> Being belongs to Him and non-existence belongs
> to you; He does not cease being and you do not
> cease not being.
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> —Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*

The teachings of Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn al-'Arabī (d. 1240), or
al-Shaykh al-Akbar (the greatest master), as he is so
named, have had a tremendous impact on the later Islamic
intellectual tradition. Many would argue that the Shaykh's
influence has been more pervasive than any writer before
or after him and this would not be an unwarranted
statement.[1] A number of reasons can be offered to explain
this, not the least of which would be his profound
metaphysics of Being. In due time, the Shaykh's ontology
came to be known as *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the unity of Being),
although he himself never used the term.[2] The idea that
there is only one *wujūd* in existence, namely, God's Being,
was regarded by Ibn al-'Arabī to be the highest expression
of *tawḥīd* (God's unity). Ibn al-'Arabī was not the first Sufi
to articulate this point—many Sufis expressed similar
views well before Ibn al-'Arabī's time.[3] But what
distinguishes Ibn al-'Arabī from his predecessors in this
regard is that he articulated this concept in a unique way,

[1] James Morris, "Ibn 'Arabī and His Interpreters. Part II: Influences and
Interpretations," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (1986)
106:4, 733−734.

[2] William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabī's
Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, NY: State University of New York
Press, 1989), 79. Henceforth, this work will be abbreviated as *SPK*.

[3] William Chittick, "Rūmī' and Waḥdat al-wujūd," in *The Heritage of
Rūmī*, ed. A. Banani (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994),
70−71.

relating the implications of the unity of Being to almost every branch of Islamic learning to such an extent that it permeates his entire literary corpus. After the Shaykh's death, a "school" sprung up around his name, disseminating his teachings throughout the Muslim world.[4]

Generations of Muslims have been influenced by Ibn al-Arabī's ideas, which reach a wide audience in multifarious ways, from watered-down versions of his metaphysics delivered in popular sermons in Morocco, to commentaries on Rūmī's *Masnavī* circulated in Turkey, Persia, and the Subcontinent.[5] Ibn al-'Arabī is also well known throughout the Islamic world because of the writings and sermons of people who did not view him favorably. During the first four centuries following the Shaykh's death, his teachings were denounced by his detractors as heresies of the worst possible kind; he was often portrayed as an outright nonbeliever. Quite naturally, many medieval Muslim scholars came to the Shaykh's defense. Amidst all the controversy surrounding the Shaykh's name, the debate inevitably returned to one phrase: *waḥdat al-wujūd*.

Ibn al-'Arabī's articulation of the unity of Being is the subject of much debate in modern scholarship as well. His ontology is often regarded in a derogatory or dismissive manner, as pantheistic. But can Ibn al-'Arabī's ontology be described by this term? In this paper, I begin with a concise account of Ibn al-'Arabī's ontology. Since the Shaykh's metaphysics of Being is intimately interrelated with numerous other fields such as anthropology, epistemology, cosmology, and eschatology, I focus on painting as bare a picture of his ontology as possible, without sacrificing the substance of his teachings. I then explain some of the main reasons that Ibn al-'Arabī's

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[4] See William Chittick, "The School of Ibn 'Arabī," *History of Islamic Philosophy*, eds. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (London: Routledge, 1996), 510–523.

[5] On how the Shaykh's doctrines have been integrated into the teachings and practices of certain orders see Michel Chodkiewicz's "The Diffusion of Ibn 'Arabī's Doctrine," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* (1991) 9:36–57 and *An Ocean Without Shore*, trans. David Streight (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 1–33.

ontology has been described as pantheistic. Finally, I put forth several arguments to show why such a term grossly misrepresents his metaphysical worldview.

Ibn al-'Arabī's Ontology:
Necessary and Impossible Existence

For Ibn al-'Arabī, Being and God are inseparable.[6] In other words, Being and God are, in actuality, identical. Being cannot not be and this is how God's existence is defined: He is the *wājib al-wujūd* (the necessarily existent).[7] It may also be noted that the word *wujūd*, meaning "Being" or "existence," can also mean "finding." The primary meaning of the trilateral Arabic root W J D is "to find" and in the passive form (*wujida*) it means "to be found." This has many implications, for it denotes that the One who Is, is also the One who finds. At the same time, the One who Is, is also the One who is found. Through *wujūd*, creatures can find God, because God is Being and everything that exists necessarily participates in some mode of being; nothing in the created order escapes God's Being. What this means is that there is no other type of existence but that it receives its existence from Him. God's Being is necessary and therefore all the other things in their "ontological indigence"[8] depend on Him for their existence, or all the things in the created order have some form of existence, which is, in a way, "borrowed" from God.[9] But how, exactly, does God's Being differ from that of the rest of the created order? Ibn al-'Arabī tells us that God's existence has two aspects: non-manifest Being and manifest Being:

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[6] Chittick, *SPK*, 80–1.

[7] Ibid., 80.

[8] Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, trans. Claude Addas in *The Voyage of No Return*, trans. David Streight (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 29.

[9] See William Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-'Arabī's Cosmology* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), 12–13. From here onward this work will be abbreviated as *SDG*.

> God reported about Himself that He possesses
> two relationships: a relationship with the cosmos
> through the divine names which affirm the
> entities of the cosmos, and the relationship of His
> independence from the cosmos. In respect of His
> relationship of independence, He knows Himself
> and we know Him not.[10]

All that we can say about God's non-manifest Being is that it "is" God's Essence (*dhāt*). Ibn al-'Arabī calls it "the most indeterminate of all indeterminates" (*ankar al-nakirāt*).[11] In other words, God's non-manifest Being is only known to Him and cannot be spoken of in any determinate fashion whatsoever. The cosmos, on the other hand, is brought about by God's manifestation through His divine names, which I examine in due course.

Impossible things, on the other hand, do not share in Being at all. They are non-existent in every sense of the word. It must be noted that "impossible" for the Shaykh does not simply mean that which cannot come into being. His understanding is slightly more nuanced, because he argues that things such as the objects of our thoughts, however unrealistic they may be, do in fact have some kind of "being." Unicorns cannot be said to actually exist in the world like a car can be said to exist in a parking lot. However, what unicorns and cars do share in common is that they both exist in the created order in some way or another. Unicorns may not "physically" exist like cars do, but we can nonetheless imagine them, draw pictures of them, and talk about them. So they can be said to have some type of existence, because they can exist mentally, pictorially, and even linguistically. Impossible things, on the other hand, are those things that cannot even be discussed or imagined. As the Shaykh reminds his readers,

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[10] Ibn al-'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:533.4, trans. Chittick in *SPK*, 64.

[11] Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 188, trans. Toshihiko Izutsu in *Sufism and Taoism,* 2nd edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 23. At 36n1 Izutsu notes that in another passage on the same page of the *Fuṣūṣ*, the Shaykh also uses this expression to refer to the word "thing."

impossible things are absolute non-being (*al-ʿadam al-muṭlaq*) and thus, the exact opposite of Absolute Being:

> The Real possesses the attribute of Being and the attribute of Necessary Being through Himself. His contrary is called absolute nonexistence (*al-ʿadam al-muṭlaq*), and it possesses an attribute through which it is called "impossible" (*muḥāl*). Because of this attribute, it never receives existence. So it has no share in existence, just as the Necessary Being through Himself has no share in nonexistence.[12]

Thus, absolute non-being is the polar opposite of Absolute Being. Absolute Being is necessary, for it is that which cannot not be, whereas absolute non-being is impossible, for it is that which can never be in any way whatsoever.

Possible Existents: Immutable Entities and the Loci of God's Manifestation

It is God's manifest Being that brings about existence, not His Absolute, non-manifest Being. On the other hand, things that can never come into any type of existence are the exact opposite of God's non-manifest Being. What lies between Absolute Being and absolute non-being is possible being, which is the realm of the possible existents or possible things. For Ibn al-ʿArabī, the possible things are equivalent to the cosmos or "everything other than God."[13] That is, the possible things are in an intermediate state, an isthmus (*barzakh*) between necessary and impossible existence. The reason for this is given in the following passage of the *Futūḥāt*:

> If the possible thing were an existent which could not be qualified by nonexistence, then it would be the Real. If it were a nonexistence which could not

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[12] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:248.24, trans. Chittick in *SPK*, 87.

[13] Ibid., 3:443.5, trans. Chittick, *SPK*, 83.

be qualified by existence, then it would be impossible.[14]

In reality, the possible things are non-existent, but not in an absolute sense. They are characterized by a relative non-existence, as opposed to an absolute non-existence, "So the things are never in sheer nonexistence. On the contrary, the apparent situation is that their nonexistence is a relative (*iḍāfī*) nonexistence."[15] Since only God can be characterized by pure Being, all the other things in creation, although they may be existents that do receive their being from God, are always in a state of possibility. This ambiguous situation renders the possible things "poor" before the Lord of the Worlds, and is one of the meanings of the Qurʾānic verse, *God is rich and you are poor* (47:38).

For Ibn al-ʿArabī, God's knowledge of the cosmos is the same as His knowledge of Himself.[16] This is because nothing, whether it has already existed, is existing, or will exist, can be outside of God's knowledge. Those entities in God's knowledge before they are existentiated, are known as the *al-aʿyān al-thābitā* (the immutable entities).[17] Thus, the things in existence are known to God before they actually exist, since they have always been objects of His knowledge in their fixity. It must be noted that the immutable entities are not the same things as the Platonic forms.[18] The immutable entities are the "things" forever fixed in God's knowledge, whereas Plato's forms act as ontological archetypes for everything (be they concepts or physically existing things) in existence.[19]

It should also be noted that the immutable entities, like the actual existent possible things, are always in a state of possibility and, thus, are relatively non-existent.[20] But,

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[14] Ibid., 3:275.5, trans. Chittick, *SPK*, 82.

[15] Ibid., 3:193.3, trans. Chittick, *SPK*, 87.

[16] Ibid., 1:90.23, trans. Chittick, *SPK*, 84.

[17] Chittick, *SPK*, 83–84.

[18] Ibid., 84.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, 161.

when they become entified, they take on relative existence.[21] When God wants to existentiate them, He orders them to become through the divine fiat expressed in the Qur'ān: *Be!* (35:7). This is an act of kindness since the possible things begged God for existence: "They ask the Necessary Being with the tongue of their immutability to bring their entities into existence, so that their knowledge may become tasting. Hence He brings them into existence for themselves, not for Himself."[22]

But, if as Ibn al-'Arabī tells us, there is nothing in being but God's Being, and the things are existentiated by the divine fiat, what is the difference between their state in their immutability and their "existing" as entities? In terms of their fixity, there is no difference. However, each immutable entity, when existentiated, acts as a locus (*maẓhar*) for God's manifestation (*ẓuhūr*) or self-disclosure (*tajallī*). As Ibn al-'Arabī himself explains in the *Futūḥāt*:

> The existence of the possible thing is necessary through Him, since it is His locus of manifestation, and He is manifest within it. The possible entity is concealed (*mastūr*) by the Manifest within it. So manifestation and the Manifest become qualified by possibility.[23]

Although there are many loci of manifestation, it is God's *wujūd* that permeates all of them. Along with this, Ibn al-'Arabī upholds the idea put forth before his time, that the divine self-disclosure never repeats itself. Because of His divine Vastness, God continually creates, perpetually permeating the cosmos with His *wujūd*. This is why Ibn al-'Arabī speaks of creation as being in a state of perpetual renewal (*tajdīd al-khalq*). Since all things in the cosmos are "ontologically indigent," they depend on the One who is infinitely rich for their existence at every single moment.[24]

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[21] Addas, *Voyage*, 88.

[22] Ibn al-'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 3:306.19, trans. Chittick, *SPK*, 86.

[23] Ibid., 2:56.16, trans. Chittick, *SPK*, 90.

[24] See Chittick, *SDG*, 85–6.

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The Role of God's Divine Names

Through the divine names, which are found both in the Qur'ān and the prophetic traditions, we can come to know God, for they refer to concepts familiar to us. Thus, when God says He is the Merciful, we know what mercy is because it exists—albeit, in an imperfect manner—amongst us in the world. For Ibn al-'Arabī, all of this holds true, but he also assigns a very unique role to God's divine names in his ontology. It was shown above that the things in existence act as loci for God's manifestation. However, it is not God's Essence that manifests itself to these loci, for this is impossible since God's Essence is entirely outside the grasp of the created order and is only known to Him. This is why in Islam there is the famous tradition, cited by Muslim thinkers belonging to every intellectual persuasion, which forbids reflection upon the divine Essence (*lā tafakkarū fī al-dhāt*). If God's Essence were to somehow inhere in a "thing" this would result in divine indwelling or incarnation (*ḥulūl*), which is absolutely forbidden in Islam. Rather, the Shaykh argues, it is God's divine names that permeate the cosmos, assuming a relational status to it.[25] What this implies is that the cosmos is the conglomeration of God's divine names.[26] The divine names themselves are dispersed throughout the cosmos through the *nafas al-raḥmān* (the "Breath of the All-Merciful")[27] and each thing receives a particular name in accordance with its preparedness or receptivity (*istiʿdād*) which has always been a part of the thing's immutability: "Just as God gave the cosmos the name *wujūd*, which belongs to Him in reality, so also He gave it the most beautiful names through

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[25] A. E. Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyīd Dīn-Ibn ul 'Arabī* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), 35.

[26] Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn al-'Arabī*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), 121.

[27] See Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, 115–6 and Chittick, *SPK*, 127. This term is inspired by several prophetic traditions, although it is not found in the standard *ḥadīth* collections. See Chittick, *SPK*, 398n8.

its preparedness and the fact that it is a locus of manifestation for Him."[28]

Thus, the immutable entities become entified through the divine fiat and receive their particular realities through the divine names, receiving the names in accordance with their preparedness. The names are innumerable since the existent things, as objects of God's knowledge, are also infinite. But the divine names must be differentiated since they do not all mean the same thing, each name being different because each locus of manifestation is different. Further, although they do signify aspects of God's divinity, they in no way name the divine Essence. They do, however, point to it, and also to their own realities:

> The Name the Strengthener is not understood in the same way as the Name the Abaser, and so on. However, from the standpoint of the Unity, every Name evinces both the Essence and its own reality, for the One named is One. Thus the Strengthener is the Abaser in respect of the named One, whereas the Strengthener is not the Abaser in respect of its own [relative] reality, the signification being different in both of them.[29]

The names are all subsumed under the divine name Allah, which is the "all-comprehensive name."[30] The name Allah itself, like the name *aḥad* (One) is not manifest. However, as William Chittick points out, *aḥad* and Allah, although designating the Essence, are also slightly different. *Aḥad* is "as close as we can get to a name that denotes the Essence Itself."[31] On the other hand, Allah "designates the divine Essence inasmuch as It comprehends all attributes in an exclusive manner."[32] Thus, God is known through the multiplicity of His names, but He is never known as Allah or as *aḥad*. From one side

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[28] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:122.14, trans. Chittick, *SPK*, 95.

[29] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, trans. R. W. J. Austin in *The Bezels of Wisdom* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 109.

[30] Chittick, *SPK*, 66.

[31] Chittick, *SDG*, 53.

[32] Ibid.

of the spectrum, He is qualified by transcendence (*tanzīh*), while from the other side, He is qualified by immanence (*tashbīh*). In an oft-quoted Qur'ānic verse (42:11), we are told that *There is nothing like unto Him, and He is the Hearing, the Seeing*. The verse affirms God's transcendence in the first part, but in the second part it affirms His immanence. Hence, the cosmos as such only has access to God in His state of being manifest or immanent, which itself is a result of His divine name, the Manifest (*al-ẓāhir*). This is why the Shaykh al-Akbar says, "Every name in the cosmos is His name, not the name of other than He. For it is the name of the Manifest in the locus of manifestation."[33] On the other hand, in His hidden or transcendent state, He remains forever unknown to the cosmos, which is a result of His name, the Hidden (*al-bāṭin*).

In terms of His He-ness or transcendence, God remains alone, "So He is Manifest in respect of the loci of manifestation, while He is Non-manifest in respect of His He-ness (*huwiyya*)."[34] This is why Ibn al-ʿArabī says that the cosmos is He/not He (*huwa lā huwa*). He explains how this is so in the following passage:

> So in existence "they are/they are not": The Manifest is their properties, so "they are." But they have no entity in existence, so "they are not." In the same way, "He is and is not": He is the Manifest, so "He is." But the distinction among the existents is intelligible and perceived by the senses because of the diversity of the properties of the entities, so "He is not."[35]

Therefore, the cosmos is not God with respect to His non-manifest Being, but it is Him with respect to His manifest Being. That is to say, the cosmos is not God insofar as His Being remains outside the grasp of the cosmos, but it is Him insofar as the created order receives being through His self-disclosures. As for the entities, they

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33 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2:122.14, trans. Chittick, *SPK*, 95.

34 Ibid., 2:93.33, trans. Chittick, *SPK*, 90.

35 Ibid., 2:160.1, trans. Chittick, *SPK*, 95.

themselves "exist" from the perspective of the cosmos being not He, but they do not exist from the perspective of the cosmos being He.

Defining Pantheism

Before beginning to discuss Ibn al-'Arabī's ontology and the question of pantheism, the term "pantheism" must be defined. The English word "pantheist" was first used by John Toland (d. 1722), who identified himself as a pantheist, but did not employ the term "pantheism."[36] Toland taught that the cosmos and God were identical and, thus, in due course the term "pantheism" came to serve as a proper noun for the beliefs of someone who claimed to be a pantheist.[37] The word pantheism itself also has definite pejorative shades of meaning, as is evidenced by its earliest English usage in 1735, when it was referred to as a form of atheism, and in 1867, when pantheism was understood as the veneration of "all" the deities in existence.[38] Etymologically, the term pantheism means that all is God, or that God is everything.[39] The term is derived from the Greek words *pan*, meaning "all" and *theos*, meaning "God."[40] Hence, pantheism denotes God's identity with the cosmos.[41] Having defined pantheism in this way, one must distinguish it from panentheism and monism, which are also terms that have been used to describe Ibn al-'Arabī's ontology. Panentheism means that the things in the

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[36] "Pantheism," *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. 1989. Online resource.

[37] Charles Hartshorne, "Pantheism and Panentheism," *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 11, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 169.

[38] "Pantheism," *OED*.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Hartshorne, "Pantheism and Panentheism," 165.

[41] A. P. Martinich, "Pantheism," *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 604; Keith Yandell, "Pantheism," *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 7, ed. Edward Craig (London: Routledge, 1998), 202.

universe are in God, whereas pantheism means that the things in the universe are God.[42] The distinction between pantheism and monism is a little harder to draw, for the definition of monism depends on a number of interpretive factors that are not always altogether clear.[43] Although it is well beyond the scope of this paper to address the terms pantheism and monism with respect to Ibn al-ʿArabī, the arguments offered below that seek to defend the Shaykh's ontology against the accusation of pantheism can apply to these terms as well.

Ibn al-ʿArabī's Ontology and Pantheism

It is worth noting that although there is no medieval Arabic equivalent to the English word "pantheism," in the medieval Islamic world Ibn al-ʿArabī was often misunderstood to be a pantheist. As Alexander Knysh notes, the Shaykh's explications of God's self-disclosure, "shocked his opponents who (mis)took it for a veiled acknowledgement of the substantial identity between God and the world."[44] The medieval polemic against Ibn al-ʿArabī has undoubtedly exercised a great deal of influence on subsequent generations of scholars down to modern times. It is partly for this reason, and partly because of the reductionist tendencies among the majority of scholars writing in the nineteenth and early/mid-twentieth centuries, that Ibn al-ʿArabī's worldview was defined vis-à-vis such simplistic expressions as "monism," "pantheism" or "panentheism." In the first half of the twentieth century, the Indian scholar S. A. Q. Husaini confidently named his book on Ibn al-ʿArabī's metaphysics *The Pantheistic*

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[42] Hartshorne, "Pantheism and Panentheism," 165.

[43] See R. A. McDermott, "Monism," *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 10, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York, Macmillan, 1987), 57–64. In the opening paragraph of this article, the author acknowledges the elusive nature of the term and hence, seeks to "establish one or more definite examples of a monistic system and to abstract from such examples the specific features that render them monistic."

[44] Alexander Knysh, *Ibn al-ʿArabi in the Later Islamic Tradition* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 14.

Monism of Ibn al-'Arabī. In fact, Husaini was guided through his research by Orientalists such as Miguel Asín Palacios, who himself used a host of misleading terms to "classify" Ibn al-'Arabī's writings.[45] Scholars have also tried to subsume Ibn al-'Arabī's ideas under neat categories because of their own intellectual shortcomings. As James Morris remarks, these were "reactions to the difficult challenge of unifying and integrating such diverse and challenging materials."[46] With regard to those Orientalists who dismissed Ibn al-'Arabī's thought, William Chittick notes, "The easiest solution was to call Ibn al-'Arabī a pantheist or to claim that he stood outside of orthodox Islam and to move on to greener pastures. . . After all," Chittick sarcastically asks, "what would be gained by admitting that the Orient had produced forms of knowledge that cannot be filed into neat cubbyholes?"[47]

Clearly, we must approach a topic with the intention to understand its subject matter on its own terms, not on our terms. Thus, if we were to interpret the thought of Nietzsche (d. 1900), who was an anti-systematic thinker, and label it within the framework of our own points of reference and terminology, we would be grossly misrepresenting him. Needless to say, the same rule applies to Ibn al-'Arabī's worldview. As Seyyed Hossein Nasr argues in his *Three Muslim Sages*, pantheism is a system whereas Ibn al-'Arabī's worldview is not.[48] If the Shaykh did not claim to formulate his ideas into a metaphysical system of any sort, then from whence comes the impetus to put them into one? Any word used to describe Ibn al-'Arabī's ontology without recourse to the Shaykh's own terminology will definitely paint the wrong

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[45] See James Morris, "Ibn 'Arabī and his Interpreters. Part 1: Recent French Translations," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 106:3 (1986), 542–545, where Morris appraises Palacios' studies on Ibn al-'Arabī.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Chittick, "Rūmī and waḥdat al-wujūd," 88.

[48] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 105.

picture. Simplistic expressions cannot account for the Shaykh's dynamic and elaborate metaphysical formulations, mainly because his teachings themselves defy classification. Any attempt to classify Ibn al-ʿArabī's worldview with an expression or even a combination of expressions will inevitably miss a great deal of what he was trying to say.[49]

Pantheism emphasizes one aspect of the divinity, namely, immanence. But it would be a plain misreading of Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology to say that he only focuses on God's immanence. While Ibn al-ʿArabī emphasizes God's immanence, he definitely never ceases to stress His transcendence. In fact, much of his writing is devoted to demonstrating God's transcendence. Ibn al-ʿArabī's conception of the cosmos as He/not He could only be possible if God were transcendent. If He were only immanent, then Ibn al-ʿArabī would have no need to call the cosmos Not He. But, even in the realm of the cosmos being He, it is not He with reference to His Essence. As Titus Burckhardt points out, pantheism denotes that God and the cosmos are united by their substance.[50] In other words, if God and the cosmos are identical, this would mean that the same "substance" that comprises God also comprises the universe. Yet God's utter transcendence

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[49] There are certain similarities between monism and Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology. For example, just as Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology acknowledges the manyness and relative reality of things, certain monistic worldviews also have this feature. For more on this see McDermott, "Monism," 63–4 and Craig, "Monism," 474. But one of the main reasons why Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology cannot be called "monistic" is due to the fact that, like pantheism, monism often implies a system of some sort, whereas the Shaykh's writings are anything but systematic. Moreover, such terms as "monism" cannot do justice to Ibn al-ʿArabī's complex understanding of the multiple relationships and interconnections between God and His creation implied by the notion of the cosmos being both He and not He. Even the expression *waḥdat al-wujūd* has limitations. See Morris, "Ibn al-ʿArabī and his Interpreters," 544–545n21. As was pointed out in the introduction, though the expression is not used by the Shaykh himself, *waḥdat al-wujūd* nevertheless does come closer than any other term in conveying the spirit that underlies his metaphysical teachings.

[50] Titus Burckhardt, *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, trans. D. M. Matheson (Lahore: Sh. M. Ashraf, 1959), 23.

means that there is nothing at all by which He can be identified, including substance.[51] This is why for Ibn al-ʿArabī, the Qurʾānic assertion that "there is nothing like unto Him," is taken in its most literal sense. God's absolute transcendence does not allow for His Essence to resemble any "thing" in any fashion, let alone be identical with the cosmos. If the cosmos is simply a manifestation of God's self-disclosures, then it would not in any way imply that God is somehow diffuse throughout the universe. This is because His self-disclosures occur through His divine names, or through His manifest Being, not His Absolute, non-manifest Being. This is why there does remain a distinction between God in His non-manifest state and the things in existence. As the Shaykh al-Akbar himself says, "Hence He is identical to all things in manifestation, but He is not identical to them in their essences. On the contrary, He is He and the things are the things."[52] As we have outlined earlier in this paper, the loci of manifestation, which are nothing but the existentiated objects of God's eternal knowledge, receive His self-disclosures through the dispersal of His divine names. From this perspective, even when the cosmos is He, it is never He in the same way as He is He to Himself. Each thing in the universe manifests one of His names, and each name points us to the divine Essence. However, in His Essence, God remains alone and hidden forever.

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[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*: 2:484.23, trans. Chittick, *SPK*, 90.

ERRATA

1. P. 55: trilateral → triliteral

2. P. 58: *iḍāfi* → *iḍāfī*

3. P. 58: *al-aʿyān al-thābitā* → *al-aʿyān al-thābita*

4. P. 58: the *al-aʿyān al-thābita* → *al-aʿyān al-thābita*

5. P. 64 (4 lines before the next section): pantheism → panentheism