



**UNDERSTANDING  
THE CONCEPT OF ECOSUFISM:  
Harmony and the Relationship of God, Nature and  
Humans in Mystical Philosophy of Ibn Arabi**

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**Abstract:** This paper examines Ibn Arabi's concept of *ecosufism*, a new philosophical foundation and paradigm in understanding nature, domination and control over natural resources amidst of global environmental crisis, caused by anthropocentric exploitation towards nature. This *ecosufism* is related to the constellation of religious orientation amongst monotheism, polytheism and pantheism and the relationship between God and nature in response to the environmental problem. This paper explains Ibn Arabi's philosophical thought on ecology and examines how this notion is based on his Sufi view on the relationship of God, humans and nature. This study shows that Ibn Arabi's concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unification of being) and *al-insān al-kāmil* (perfect human) generate his perception of nature preservation. These two fundamental concepts are relevant to be used as a paradigm for promoting *ecosufism*, which consider nature as God's manifestation. A perfect human is the one who could realize such a perspective. Protecting nature is necessary because of its position as God's manifestation.

**Keywords:** *Ecosufism*, God, nature, humans, mystical philosophy.

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## Introduction

THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS faced by humans in any part of the world today has encouraged experts and philosophers to find a solution in order to answer the root of the current global environmental crisis and disaster. Fritjof Capra, a physicist, in his book entitled *The Turning Point*, argues that at the beginning of the second

decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, humanity discovered a global crisis, a complex and multidimensional problem.<sup>1</sup>

One solution for the global crisis is by practising religious teachings. Religious teachings are considered capable of strengthening human consciousness to implement the task of environmental conservation which is degraded due to the continual aggression of modern excessive natural exploration. Since the last several years, religious and environmental studies have become popular in some parts of the world. "Religion and ecology" are academic fields of study, but since the beginning, they have not been "purely academic." They incorporate both scholarly interests and theological, ethical concerns about environmental problems.<sup>2</sup>

One of the religious dimensions developed in response to the environmental crisis is religious spiritualism. Sufism, as a religious, spiritual dimension in Islam, has contributed to the spiritual and intellectual life of Muslim. The influence of Sufism in the spiritual life is not only limited to the religious elites but has reached all levels of society. Even Sufism alternatives are sought after by identity seekers of Western society in the midst of a crisis which undermines all dimensions of modern human life.

Nowadays, the treasures of Islamic science in the field of theology, philosophy, *fiqh*, especially Sufism, have developed so rapidly in responding to the global phenomena and crisis faced by modern humans. The emergence of Sufism-based ecological thinking known as *ecosufism* reflects a new, more severe shift to settle the problems of environmental crisis from the perspective of Islamic spiritualism. Initially, Sufism focuses on studying the spiritual dimensions that are individual, ascetic and exclusive. Theology and philosophy, which are at the onset only talking about God, have now expanded their discussion to deal with the

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<sup>1</sup> Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point: Science, Society and the Rising Culture* (New York: Bantam Book, 1987), 39; *Future Shock* (London: PanBooks Ltd, 1970), 56; Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation in the 1980s* (Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, INC, 1981), 416.

<sup>2</sup> Zainal Abidin Bagir, "The Importance of Religion and Ecology in Indonesia," *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 19, no. 2 (2015): 99–102.

problems of environmental crisis. Likewise, in the contemporary *fiqh* tradition, this scientific treasure has moved towards a more genuine and universal effort to respond to global problems such as the environmental crisis and environmental conservation.

Undeniably, the sparks of environmental wisdom, in the sense of ideas that support environmental conservation actions, from Islamic treasures can be found in the theological, Sufism, and Islamic ethical concepts written by Muslim scholars in the 10th century. One of the scholars is Ibn 'Arabi, a descendant of the ancient Arab tribe, namely Tayy. His full name is Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn Muhammad ibn al-'Arabi al-Tai al-Hutami and was born on the 17th of Ramadan 560 H or 28th July 1165 AD in Mursia, Central Spain.<sup>3</sup> He was a Sufi philosopher who used the method of philosophical Sufism with a *waḥdat al-wujūd* teaching system. He does not always prioritize to the metaphysical transcendental dimension in the system of teaching, but also emphasize elements of ethics, personality and even basic concepts of nature and the environment.

There are a number of studies or works written about Ibn 'Arabi. Corbin,<sup>4</sup> Palacio,<sup>5</sup> and Morris<sup>6</sup> are among the pioneers of Western scholars who wrote about this Sufi. The more scholars writing this figure include Chittik<sup>7</sup> and Affifi.<sup>8</sup> Their research focused on Ibn 'Arabi's thoughts on theology, philosophy and mysticism. Ibn Arabi's teachings still drew the interest amongst recent researchers, such as Halligan,<sup>9</sup> Rustom 2006,<sup>10</sup> Kamada

<sup>3</sup> Asian Palacios, *Ibn 'Arabī: Ḥayātuh wa Madhhabuh / El Islam Cristianizado, Estudio del Sufismo a Trave's de las Obras de Abenarabi de Murcia*, trans. 'Abd al-Rahman Al-Badawi (Beirut: Dār al-Qalam, 1979), 12.

<sup>4</sup> Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī* (Princeton: Bollingen, 1969), 10.

<sup>5</sup> Asian Palacios, *Ibn 'Arabī*, 10.

<sup>6</sup> James W Morris, "Ibn 'Arabi's 'Esotericism': The Problem of Spiritual Authority," *Studia Islamica* 71, no. 1 (1990): 37–64.

<sup>7</sup> William C Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn Al-Arabi's Cosmology* (Albany: Sunny Press, 1989), 16.

<sup>8</sup> A.E. Affifi, *The Twenty-Nine Pages: An Introduction to Ibn 'Arabi's Metaphysics of Unity* (Cambridge, Eng.: Beshara Publications, 1998), 7.

<sup>9</sup> Fredrica R Halligan, "The Creative Imagination of the Sufi Mystic, Ibn 'Arabi," *Journal of Religion and Health* 40, no. 2 (2001): 275–287.

2010,<sup>11</sup> Shahzad,<sup>12</sup> and Akbar.<sup>13</sup> These studies are mainly still concerned with the theological and philosophical aspects of the central teachings of Ibn Arabi's *wahdat al-wujūd*. They analyze the conceptual basis of creation, esotericism, pantheism, humans and God. In addition, there are several studies that contextualize Ibn Arabi's mystical-philosophical thinking with global humanitarian issues. These include studies by Burchardt,<sup>14</sup> who focused on the astrology aspects, Chittick<sup>15</sup> and Kakaie<sup>16</sup> on the relevance of Ibn Arabi's teachings with issues of religious diversity and interfaith dialogue. Yiangou<sup>17</sup> focused on the study of religious awareness from the psychological aspects of religion and Webb elaborated on the human relations in Ibn Arabi's teachings.<sup>18</sup> However, those researchers have hardly explored Ibn 'Arabi's spiritual and mystical thought on the environment. In fact, his mystical-philosophical teachings are very relevant to new ecological perspectives and paradigms that see and treat equally and harmoniously between God (the creator), humans and nature.

This paper will examine Ibn 'Arabi's philosophical Sufi thought about ecology, which this present study calls as *ecosufism*.

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<sup>10</sup> Mohammed Rustom, "Is Ibn Al-'Arabī's Ontology Pantheistic?," *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 2, no. 1 (2006): 53–67.

<sup>11</sup> Shigeru Kamada, "Mulla Sadra's Imama/Walaya: A n Aspect of His Indebtedness to Ibn Arabi," *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 6, no. 1 (2010): 67–78.

<sup>12</sup> Qaiser Shahzad, "Accommodating Trinity: A Brief Note on Ibn 'Arabi's Views," *Journal of ecumenical studies* 48, no. 1 (2013): 114.

<sup>13</sup> Ali Akbar, "Looking at Ibn 'Arabi's Notion of Wahdat Al-Wujud as a Basis for Plural Path to God," *Journal of Islamic Studies and Culture* 4, no. 1 (2016): 45–51.

<sup>14</sup> Titus Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology According to Ibn 'Arabi*, vol. 1 (Granite Hill Publishers, 2001), 21.

<sup>15</sup> William C Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn Al-'Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity*, *Choice Reviews Online*, vol. 32 (SUNY Press, 1995), 21.

<sup>16</sup> Ghasem Kakaie, "The Dialogue Between Islam and Christianity as Viewed by Ibn Arabi and Eckhart," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 14, no. 2 (2004): 177–201.

<sup>17</sup> Nikos Yiangou, "Is a New Consciousness Emerging? Reflections on the Thought of Ibn 'Arabi and the Impact of an Integral Perspective Is a New Consciousness Emerging?," *World Futures* 73, no. 7 (2017): 427–441.

<sup>18</sup> Gisela Goodrich Webb, "The Human/Angelic Relation in the Philosophies of Suhrawardi and Ibn Arabi," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 7, no. 1 (1989): 128.

This study examines his main thought's about the teaching of pantheism *waḥdat al-wujūd*, the relationship of God, nature and human and the concept of perfect human as God's chosen people in preserving the natural existence and environment.

### ***Eco-Sufism in the Constellation of Changing Paradigm of Environmental Issue***

The environmental crisis is related to the human perspective about nature, environment, ecosystem, the nature of the universe and human and human relations with all ecosystems. This process and dynamic lead to consciousness and a paradigm shift.<sup>19</sup>

Environmental damage is largely contributed by the world-view or paradigm that is too anthropocentric and humanistic. This view forms an ideological orientation which considers that nature must be controlled for economic and development purposes. This kind of perspective places humanity apart from the environmental ecosystem.<sup>20</sup>

The awareness of religious people, including Muslims, towards the global environmental crisis, has increased since the World Summit on Sustainable Development was held in 2002. Then, many religious leaders attended one of the international seminars such as the Muslim Seven Year Action Plan (M7YAP) in Kuwait in 2008 and followed in 2012. The Leiden Institute for Religious Studies (LIRS), Leiden University, wrote a report entitled 'Globalized Eco Islam: A Survey of Global Islamic Environmentalism. This report mentions the re-thought of Islamic Theology in relation to environmental issues. It was to form the Principles of Islamic Environment and Ethic from 1970 to 2000, from intellectual pioneers involved with the declaration of world religion related to environmental issues, and academic platforms.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Sonny Keraf, *Environmental Ethics* (Jakarta: Kompas Publisher, 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Mudofir, "Argumen Konservasi Lingkungan Sebagai Tujuan Tertinggi Syariah," *Dissertation* (Program Doktor Pascasarjana, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2009), 20.

<sup>21</sup> Fardan Mahmudatul Imamah, "Menghadapi Kapitalisme: Pendekatan Eco-Sufism dalam Gerakan Environmentalisme Islam Indonesia," *Kontemplasi*:

Not only that, in conjunction with the roots of the global environmental crisis, spiritual scholars such as Fritjof Capra argues that the crisis is a result of worldview and human greed of nature, which in turns results in poverty, ignorance or greed to accumulate a lot of wealth. Likewise, the function of the transcendental value is not functioned, especially spiritual values.<sup>22</sup>

Sayyed Hossein Nasr, another Muslim scholar, has published various works describing the condition of the earth which has been damaged by the impact of science, technology and capitalist economics which is actually rooted in the crisis of modern human spirituality. Nasr stressed the need to re-embrace spirituality for a modern human to overcome the environmental crisis. Nasr said that the ecological crisis and various types of damage to the earth since the last two centuries were rooted in the modern human spiritual crisis because of the victory of absolute humanity. In some of his works such as *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man* (1975), *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (1978), *Religion and the Order of Nature* (1996), *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man* (1997), Nasr argues that religious values and moral wisdom - which he calls eco-theology (ecological perspective with theological perspective) and sacred cosmology - are very necessary for maintaining the balance and sustainability of the earth. Nasr's statement implies that Muslims also contribute their thoughts on environmental conservation issues. Muslims are challenged to explore the formulation of the main concepts of nature conservation, express them in modern ecological concepts in the form of works and subsequently practice them as a set of moral guide in the reality of everyday life.<sup>23</sup>

In contrast to Nasr, who recommends religious values, especially the spiritual dimension as the basis of global

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*Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 5, no. 1 (2017): 21, <http://ejournal.iain-tulungagung.ac.id/index.php/kon/article/view/744>.

<sup>22</sup> Capra, *The Turning Point*, 39.

<sup>23</sup> Abdul Quddus, "Respons Tradisionalisme Islam Terhadap Krisis Lingkungan (Telaah Atas Pemikiran Seyyed Hossein Nasr)," *Doctoral Thesis* (SPs. UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2010), 32, <http://repository.uinjkt.ac.id/dspace/handle/123456789/6983>.

environmental ethics, some modern Western scholars such as Lynn White, Toynbee and Daisatsu Ikeda, conclude that world views anthropocentric religion monotheistic religion cause the ecological crisis. The command to dominate nature has resulted in the emergence of approaches to nature that are exploitative. This is then a factor for the development of destructive science and technology for the environment.<sup>24</sup>

Specifically White, as quoted by Schwencke, revealed that one of the causes of the crisis of environmental damage is the religious paradigm that leads to the anthropocentric, materialistic and exploitative attitude towards the world and further evolves into the dominance and exploitation of nature.<sup>25</sup> According to White, to overcome this problem, religious people must abandon monotheism and turn to Eastern pantheism and religious tradition to build cosmology that has spiritual insight.

When turning to pantheism in understanding God's relationship and nature, the conventional interpretation of religions violates the spirit of God oneness. God as the Supreme Being is the basic reference for the world's major religions. Even though among religious scholars understand mystically and philosophically about God's relationship and nature cannot be understood as monotheism understands it.

But another perspective, the view of pantheism contributes significantly to the solution of environmental problem. This understanding also encouraged the birth of other works that look at the environment from the optical point of pantheistic theology. Pantheism is used as an ethical foundation to affirm the necessities of protecting nature as a manifestation of God. The view of pantheism is not to present the structure of polytheism, but as a tool to foster respect for nature as part of human and God. Therefore, this attitude or view is very positive for environmental conservation.<sup>26</sup>

In addition, according to Harold W. Wood, pantheism provides various means to understand the reality and divinity

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Quddus, "Respons Tradisionalisme Islam," 34.

<sup>26</sup> Mudofir, "Argumen Konservasi," 20.

phenomena in nature, and this notion should be considered as a method to promote environmental ethic. He states

"If humankind is to develop better relations with the environment, a renewed sense of reverence for nature will undoubtedly aid that relationship. To accomplish this, religion needs a new recognition of the sacredness can come best through experiential religion. Pantheism provides a means to experience the divine in nature, and as such deserves consideration as a method promoting environmentally sound ethics<sup>27</sup>".

In addition, there is the concept of polytheism in environmental perspective that leads to an environmental ethic based not only on the dimensions of locality but also on "polyamory head to the place." Against the bioregionalism idea that humans need to learn to be "authentic" to one place to overcome global problems, Bauman, as quoted by Peterson, argues that we need to "learn to love many places to understand the planetary connection." He calls this approach "nomadic", "polyamorous", and "polytheistic". Unlike "monotheistic monadic ethics" which lead to global similarity, Bauman's polytheistic nomadic ethics connect planets through differences. He argues that while environmental ethic derived from place-based thinking requires a love that deep and monogamous with one place, a *polyamory* place needs love from many places as part of a larger plan.<sup>28</sup> He believes that such approach is needed, given the concrete reality of the world in which we live now, and more importantly, considering the failure of essentialist and monistic ways of understanding the world (or something else).

From a logical and spiritual point of view, the polytheistic approach of local religions only shows limited irrationality and perception. The concept of natural grandeur and intrinsic value inherently shows a practical and respectful approach to life and is documented in all religious traditions through ritual expressing thanksgiving for plants, food, water, earth, air, sea, animals, birth, death, and life itself. Gottlieb, as quoted by White, observes that

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<sup>27</sup> See Harold W. Wood Jr, "Modern Pantheism as an Approach to Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 7, no. 2 (1985): 1.

<sup>28</sup> Anna Peterson, "Religion and Ecology: Developing a Planetary Ethic, Written by Whitney Bauman," *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 21, no. 1 (2017): 100–102.



the phenomenon called "deep spiritual ecology" recognizes ancient rituals and actively creates, redefines, and emphasizes religious practices that are "designed to help us respect the earth." These rituals show the power of sensible and "holy" religious interactions as experienced and through human relations with the physical and natural world. Thus, the ethical use of water, land, other species, places and common property in general, is an ancient religious concept based on the practicality of common sense for survival and respect.<sup>29</sup>

These serious adherents to polytheism are embraced by bioregionalism scholars such as Wendell Berry and Wes Jackson as quoted by White, who revealed that the emergence of this paradigm was motivated by a radical challenge to the economic and political hegemony that ruled the world. The postmodernism paradigm seeks to help to perfect the treatment of "global capitalism," which is often referred to as an enormous environmental and social crime but has never been directly involved. Elsewhere, he offers concrete examples, such as in the use of the costs of education, health care, and several other contemporary issues.<sup>30</sup>

However, the concept of polytheism in the ecological paradigm has not been established and tested in general. The case of local religion exemplified by this paradigm is still partial and localized, and thus cannot be used as a handle and a general paradigm. The postmodernism paradigm that underlies adherents of polytheism in seeing God's relationship and the cosmos in ecological matters is still based on criticism and has not been based on the basis of their paradigm on an adequate philosophical basis.

From the description of the changes and the constellation of paradigms in overcoming various environmental crises, the result is that the anthropocentric secular worldview of modern humans produces science and technology that often have a negative impact on the environment. Nowadays, the world needs a new, holistic worldview of ecology, which is not only based on modern science

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<sup>29</sup> Anne White, "Religious Environmentalism as a Vital Contribution to Sustainability," *Journal of Enterprising Communities* 4, no. 3 (2010): 268–278.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

but also adopts and synergizes with the spirituality of world religions and the wisdom of local traditions. Then the concept of ecology based on spiritualism needs to be developed. This study aims to fill the gap. It sheds some lights on Ibn Arabi's spiritual thought to answer the weaknesses and uncertainties of the above paradigms. Ibn Arabi's *ecosufism* proposes an understanding of the cohesive relationship between God, nature and humans in dealing with nature.

### ***Waḥdat al-Wujūd: The Fundamental Thought of Ibn 'Arabi's Ecosufism***

Ibn 'Arabi is a Sufi philosopher who underlies his discovery not only on spiritual experience with God but also on rational ontological arguments. The thought of Ibn Arabi is integrally interconnected with one another. His thoughts about God, nature and humanity are derived from the concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the unification of being). This understanding is also the basis of ecological concepts in Sufism in a more extreme perspective. Ibn 'Arabi says that nature is *tajallī* (manifestation) of God. As a manifestation, nature is the appearance of God.

*Waḥdat al-wujūd* is the basic concept of Ibn Arabi's *ecosufism*, which demonstrates the essence and existence of God between the existence of nature and human. Etymologically, *waḥdat al-wujūd* comes from two words, *waḥdah* and *wujūd*. *Waḥdat* means one while *wujūd* mean existence. The word *wajada* has a *ma'lūm* or subjective meaning, which means to find. While the word *wujida* has the meaning *majhūl* or objective which means "being sought".<sup>31</sup> It can be understood that the essence of God can find being, and God can also be found in accordance with human capacity.

In technical terms, *waḥdat al-wujūd* is interpreted as a form of God, one discovery and one that is found in God. According to Ibn Arabi, there is no other *wujud* similar to the *wujud* of God.<sup>32</sup> In another term, it is explained that all belong to Allah and with

<sup>31</sup> Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 12.

<sup>32</sup> 'Abd Ḥāfiz Al-Farghalī, 'Abd Ḥāfiz al-Farghalī, *al-Shaykh al-Akbar Muḥyi al-Dīn ibn al-'Arabī Sultān al-'Ārif* (Cairo: Al-Misriyyah al-Kitāb, 1986), 65.

Allah, even all of it is Allah. Another expression found in work *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* is as follows:

“Being is nothing other than *al-Haqq* (Supreme/Absolute Being) because there is nothing in existence other than Him. Nothing appears in *wujud* but *wujud* except *al-Haqq*, because *wujud* is *al-Haqq* and He is one”.<sup>33</sup>

This expression explains that anything other than God does not have a *wujud*. The use of *wujud* is only referred to as God. As for the use of term toward being, Ibn ‘Arabi uses the notion of *majaz* to maintain only one *wujud*, while the existence of *wujud* in nature is a shadow of the *wujud* of God. This is in accordance with the analogy of the sun and light, where light only belongs to the sun.

The doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* teaches ecological principles based on Islamic metaphysics which state that all cosmic reality consists of a combination of theophany (*tajalliyāt*) of various attributes and God's names that have the roots and backs of all realities or phenomena in this world.<sup>34</sup> In Ibn ‘Arabi's language, there is no ownership in the cosmos without the backing and attributes of divinity.

The *tajallī* teaching is the pillar or key to understand more about *waḥdat al-wujūd* because *tajallī* is interpreted with creation, which is how the emergence of this multitude of the Supreme Sole, so that one gives rise to this abundant nature. Nature as *tajallī* must be understood that nature actualizes indirectly through a form of natural activity which is summarized in dignity as a process of interceding for God as the Absolute One with nature.

In addition to *tajallī* (apparitions), Ibn ‘Arabi also uses other terms in explaining the process of creation of nature including *fayḍ* (emanation and abundance), *ẓuhūr* (appearance and delivery) *tanāzul* (decrease) and *fath* (opening). Although according to some researchers on Sufism, there is a difference between *fayḍ* (emanation) and *tajallī* (appearance) of vertical and horizontal

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<sup>33</sup> Muḥyi al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, vol. 2 (Cairo: al-Hay‘at al-Miṣriyyat, 1972), 517.

<sup>34</sup> Bambang Irawan, “Kearifan Ekologis dalam Perspektif Sufi,” in *Proceeding of Annual Conference on Islamic Studies (AICIS) XII*, ed. Nur Kholis and Imas Maesaroh (Surabaya: IAIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, 2012), 2489–2509.

mechanisms because all empirical phenomena emerge and change as the manifestation of God.<sup>35</sup>

The process of natural creation through *tajallī* occurs because of God's longing to be known by His creation. God created nature in order to see Himself and show Himself. God knows and introduces Himself through nature. Nature is a mirror of God, although this mirror does not reflect the appearance of God. God's appearances in nature through the process of *tajallī* will give birth to *ta'ayun* (apparitions).<sup>36</sup> According to Ibn 'Arabi, the process of seeing God is multilevel. *Tajallī* consists of two forms namely; *tajallī gaib* or *tajallī dhāt* and *tajallī shuhudī* as quoted by (name):

"God has two types of *tajallī*: *tajallī ghayb* and *tajallī shahadah*. With *tajallī ghayb*, God provides readiness that requires an attitude of the heart. This is a *tajallī* of the essence which is not reality. So if readiness occurs for the heart, according to *tajallī syuhudī* appears to him in nature that can be seen".<sup>37</sup>

The understanding of *waḥdat al-wujūd* of Ibn 'Arabi subsequently developed to adorn the treasures of Islamic intellectuals and the world in general. The writers about Sufism, always refer to the thoughts of this character. However, there are differing responses among the authors in assessing the teachings of Ibn 'Arabi's *waḥdat al-wujūd*, including the pros and cons among Islamic writers and the assessment of the Western scholars. As for the critics to the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, especially amongst jurists (*fuqaha*), the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* is negatively connoted and labelled *kufr*, *zindiq* and *bid'a*. Nevertheless, many agree with Ibn 'Arabi's understanding. Moreover, this term is synonymous to the highest thought of Islamic theology (*tauḥid*).<sup>38</sup>

In the studies of modern Western scholars, the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* is given various labels including pantheism, monism and pantheist monism. Western scholars study Ibn

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<sup>35</sup> Yunasril Ali, *Manusia Citra Ilahi: Pengembangan Insan Kamil Ibn al-Arabi oleh al-Jilli* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1996), 51.

<sup>36</sup> Mu'ayyid al-Dīn Al-Jandī, *Sharḥ Fuṣuṣ al-Ḥikam* (Mashad: Danishham, 1982), 22.

<sup>37</sup> Muḥyi al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabi, *Fuṣuṣ al-Ḥikam*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār Kitāb al-'Arabi, n.d.), 120.

<sup>38</sup> Sayyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (London: Unwin Paperback, 1979), 137.

'Arabi's system of thought with paradigm and Western references which they consider to be correct and valid.<sup>39</sup> However, this labelling certainly draws its own criticism and notes for these adherents because the term and labelling are tendentious and can be understood incorrectly in the constellation of the concept of tauhid in Islam. Among Muslim scholars who disagree with the label of pantheism toward the notion of *waḥdat al-wujūd* is Seyyed Hossein Nasr. He views that the label of pantheism, monism and pantheism monism cannot be used to describe the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. God, according to this doctrine, is transcendental to nature even though nature in its level as a real cannot be completely different from God. Everything in this world is His appearance.<sup>40</sup> Mir Valiuddin is one of the Sufism scholars who disagree with such labelling and proves that this teaching still maintains God's differences and nature, including humans. Sufism still maintains God's transcendence.<sup>41</sup>

Regardless of the debate and the validity of the pantheism of Ibn 'Arabi in conventional theology, the embodiment of the ideology that teaches manifestations of God can be used as a basis for ethics to protect nature because of its position as a manifestation of God. According to Sukarni<sup>42</sup> and Mudoffir,<sup>43</sup> the view of pantheism is not subjected to present the structure of polytheism, but as a tool to foster respect for nature as part of human and God. Thus, this view has a positive contribution to environmental conservation.

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<sup>39</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hil: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 83–97; Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, *The Idea of Personality in Sufism* (Lahore: Sh Muhammad Ashraf, 1970), 36.

<sup>40</sup> Sayyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages* (Delmar: New York Books, 1976), 105–108.

<sup>41</sup> Mir Valiuddin, *The Qur'anic Sufism* (Delhi: Mototal Banarsidass, 1981), 48.

<sup>42</sup> Sukarni, "Isu Lingkungan dalam Perspektif Kalam, Fiqh dan Tasawuf," *ISLAMICA: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 7, no. 2 (2013): 446, <http://islamica.uinsby.ac.id/index.php/islamica/article/view/164>.

<sup>43</sup> Mudofir, "Argumen Konservasi," 20.

## Harmony and Relationship of God, Nature and Human in Ibn 'Arabi's Thought

In a Sufi perspective, nature has its own existence. Nature is not merely a dead object that serves humans. Nature is a form of life that is able to love and be loved, and mutual understanding can emerge between both (human and nature). From that explanation, we can study the relationship between humans and nature. Whatever human beings do will impact on nature. Now, it depends on us whether we will continue to do damage nature or create peace and harmony between the two. God has given us, as a *khalifa* (deputy/vicegerent), to manage nature in a responsible way because we, at the same time, are masters and protectors of nature.<sup>44</sup>

The human perspective on nature should also be rectified through Sufism. The Sufistic viewpoint shows that heaven and earth are active actors who do something 'blessed' as actors that have life, actions, and rights and that is why we should be able to respect. This view has been explained in the verses of the Qur'an, which state that the mountains and birds of glory (al-Anbiyā': 79) heaven and earth glorified (al-Isrā': 17, and al-Shaf: 1). They also pay attention to human ethics in dealing with nature. However, because they are only seen as part of creation, they are often treated as objects.<sup>45</sup>

In the tradition of Ibn 'Arabi' Sufism, the relationship between God and nature or the cosmos is very close. In Ibn 'Arabi's *waḥdat al-wujūd*, nature is *tajallī* (manifestation) of God. His manifestation, the cosmos is the actual appearance of God. In this sense, positioning very special on nature is not as an attitude of *kufṛ* or *shirk* but an embodiment of the attitude of *tauhid*.

The accusation of *waḥdat al-wujūd* of being *kufṛ* and *shirk* because this is like equating nature with God is false. According to Ibn 'Arabi, God is the One Who transmits Himself through nature, so nature manifests in the form that God emits.

To counteract the accusation of equating God with the nature that leads to *kufṛ* and *shirk*, Ibn Arabi argues that despite the

<sup>44</sup> Irawan, "Kearifan Ekologis," 2489–2509.

<sup>45</sup> Imamah, "Menghadapi Kapitalisme," 23.

similarities between God and nature, they are different. This is because the *wujud* emitted with emitting *wujud* differs substantially. This side of equality and side of difference is in accordance with the teaching of Ibn 'Arabi's Sufism about *tashbīh* (equation) and *tanzīh* (purifying). According to Dahlan, this understanding is a philosophical argument to answer the question if nature is a manifestation of God and God and nature are equal.<sup>46</sup>

*Tashbīh* and *tanzīh* are key words in understanding *waḥdat al-wujūd* of Ibn 'Arabi. The term *tashbīh* was found in the theological debates about *mutashabbihāt* verses which mention the hand of God, God's chair and other references. There is an opposition among theologians who argues that God does have hands and chairs as a sign of texts that are understood verbally (*ẓāhir*). While in other perspectives, it is argued that the *tashbīh* (equation) statement must be regionalized because if this metamorphosis verse is understood literally, it will damage the image of *tauhid* because it equates God with nature. Therefore, any opinion that equates God with nature or beings must be dismissed.

Ibn 'Arabi created a new understanding that was different from the theological flow above. According to Ibn 'Arabi, the right understanding of God's relationship with nature is combining *tashbīh* with *tanzīh*. These two understandings are a unity that cannot be separated from one another. God and nature have similarities due to the manifestations of God, but they differ in form and substance. According to Ibn 'Arabi, Islamic law comes with verses from the Qur'an which declares *tanzīh* to God. Besides that, there are also verses that imply *tashbīh* to God with nature as *mutasyabihat* verses. Therefore, God must be *tanzīh* with *tanzīh* which does not deny *tashbīh*. In addition, God must be cleansed with the *tashbīh*, which does not deny *tanzīh*. This argument is found in Ibn 'Arabi's opinion. He says "*al-ḥaq* (God) on every occasion is punished from two dimensions, then His *tanzīh* with

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<sup>46</sup> Abdul Azis Dahlan, *Penilaian Teologis atas Paham Waḥdat al-Wujūd: Tuhan, Alam dan Manusia dalam Tasawuf Samsuddin Samatrani* (Padang: IAIN IB Press, 1999), 37.

*tanzīh* is not out of *tashbīh*. And do not recite with the *tashbīh* that comes out of *tanzīh*".<sup>47</sup>

According to Ibn 'Arabi, the position of humans in the natural constellation is that human beings are the totality of nature, because humans are called miniatures of nature (*mukhtasar al-ālam*) or in terms of *al-ālam al-ṣaghīr* (microcosm). If humans, according to Ibn 'Arabi, are a small realm or microcosm, then the universe is *al-ālam al-kabīr* (macrocosm). In fact, he also describes humans as small humans or micro-anthropos (*al-insān al-ṣaghīr*) and nature is called a great human or macro-anthropos (*al-insān al-kabīr*).<sup>48</sup> This depiction affirms a position of interdependence and mutual harmony between nature and human.

Based on the explanation above, it can be understood that humans are not a category that is outside the natural category. Humans are not God, and therefore, humans are part of nature. Even so, in a deep religious thought, humans are not only part of nature but are a central part of nature.

Thus, the construction of constructive thinking through strong and ethical relations about God, cosmos (environment), and humans is basically an effort to build the environment and the integrity of the surrounding ecosystem. The thought of Sufism Ibn 'Arabi is a religious, intellectual contribution in seeing the relationship between God as the goal and centre of relation, with humans and the environment being two sides to the same coin. The stronger and ethical human beings are, the stronger and ethical the environment will be. On the contrary, the more critical and corrupt human beings are, the more critical and corrupt human morals will be. Therefore, it is difficult to expect the presence of a healthy and ethical relationship and to stably walk toward God as the center of the cosmos from inharmonious and broken relations.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 2:516.

<sup>48</sup> Kautsar Azhari Noer, *Ibn al-'Arabi: Wahdat al-Wujud dalam Perdebatan* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1995), 129.



## ***Insan Kamil* and Ethics in Ibn Arabi's *Ecosufism* Nature Conservation**

The idea of Sufism generally argues that humans, the earth, and other creatures in the universe are ecosystems that are sustainable. All these ecosystems are very dependent on human morality as *khalifah* on earth. Although this thought is more anthropocentric (humans are the rulers of nature), but there are orders to manage it with all the responsibility and ethical awareness that humans are part of anthroponomic reality.

Etymologically, the word *khalifah* is taken from the word "*khalafa-yakhlufu*" which means "to replace", "behind", and "change or succeed." When associated with the word "Allah", the meaning is the representative of Allah. In the concept of the Qur'an, humans as *khalifah* have two functions, as representatives and trustees. The concept of *khalifah* means more clearly when used to refer to post-apostolic leadership.

The concept of *khalifah* as referred to in verse 30 of sura al-Baqara means responsibility. The meaning of being God's representative on earth will only be meaningful if humans are able to preserve the earth so that all their worship and charitable deeds can be peacefully fulfilled. This makes sense because worship or devotion to God and humans cannot be done if the environment is corrupt or damaged.<sup>49</sup>

In addition, the concept of *khalifah Allāh fi al-arḍ* (God's vicegerent on earth) can also clarify the relationship between God, humans, and nature in the context of the unity of God. Even, the concept of *khalifah* has the meaning of political authority. This is very logical because, in order to carry out the mandate, political power is essential. Therefore, it can be understood that the meaning of *ūli al-amr* (rulers) mentioned in verse 59 of sura al-Nisā' stating the obligation of every believer to obey Allah and the Messenger and the ruler indicates that the authority holders are responsible to carry out the mandate.<sup>50</sup>

The teaching of Ibn 'Arabi about the *khalifah* was clarified in his thought about *al-Insān al-Kāmil* (perfect humans), a doctrine

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<sup>49</sup> Mudofir, "Argumen Konservasi," 20.

<sup>50</sup> Sukarni, "Isu Lingkungan," 21.

that was closely related to the understanding of *wahdat al-wujūd* and was the essence of Ibn Arabi's Sufism. The concept *al-Insān al-Kāmil* was coined by a scholar before Ibn 'Arabi,<sup>51</sup> but studies show that Ibn 'Arabi was the first to introduce it used in technical terms.<sup>52</sup>

Ibn 'Arabi said that nature is a mirror of God. Nature has many forms that are unlimited in number. Similar to someone standing in front of many mirrors around him, God is one but His form or image is as much as a mirror that reflects, shapes or images. The clarity of the image in a mirror depends on the quality of the mirror's clarity. The clearer or cleaner a mirror is, the more precise and more perfect the images it reflects. The perfect mirror for God is a perfect man or *al-Insān al-Kāmil* because a perfect human reflects all the names and attributes of God.<sup>53</sup>

The intensity of names of God appearance in each nature varies according to each readiness to receive that appearance. Humans have the highest readiness to accept the appearance of the names of God. With this theomorphic nature, humans can show an infinite variety of names and attributes of God; any name and character of God can appear in human's appearance.

Human perfection or *al-Insān al-Kāmil* lies in what is called a blend in the sense that human combine or embrace within themselves all the names and characteristics of God and every subjective reality. The combination of the name and nature of God in humankind is a privilege for humans, including the position of *khalīfah*, that is not given to other creatures. Ibn 'Arabi explains:

"The *khalīfah* just belongs only to Adam, not to other creatures in nature, because God has created Adam according to His wujud. The *khalīfah* must appear for what is under his *khalīfah*, in the form of who gives him this position. If not, then actually he is not the *khalīfah* among them.

Satan is a part of nature which does not have such a combination (*jam'iyya*). Because of this combination, Adam is the caliph. If he does not appear in the form of Creator appointed him as *khalīfah*, then he is not a caliph. If in him, there are not all

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<sup>51</sup> Masataka Takeshita, "The Theory of the Perfect Man in Ibn Arabi's Fusus Al-Hikam," *Orient* 19 (1983): 87–102.

<sup>52</sup> Noer, *Ibn al-'Arabi*, 126.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

characteristics that are demanded by citizens who are under his reign, he is not a caliph of them. Therefore, the term *khalifah* is only valid for perfect humans.<sup>54</sup>

As the *khalifah* of God, humans rank the highest of all beings. In fact, it is higher than nature and very important for nature. Natural perfection depends on human's leadership. For Ibn 'Arabi, humans to nature are like spirit for the body.

"Humans are the souls of nature and nature are bodies. If you pay attention to nature without humans, surely you will find like a formless body without spirit. Natural perfection because humans are like perfect bodies because of spirit. Humans are blown into the body of nature. Therefore, it is a natural destination<sup>55</sup>"

Based on the information above, it was explained that humans were explicitly created as *khalifah* with their privileges; therefore, humans must equip themselves with sufficient knowledge to understand the concept of environment that they need to manage. With awareness and realization of the mandate and the shari'a, humans in harmonious interaction with the environment are guaranteed.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, the concept of *khalifah Allāh fī al-'arḍ* is not a value-free concept that places humans as ruler or king. It is not only anthropocentric (human as the centre), but also anthropocosmic (seeing a higher aspect of value, namely God) and anthropocosmic (humans as part of nature).

The concept of the *khalifah*, which was developed into the concept of *al-Insān al-Kāmil*, explains that humans are the pioneers of nature and environmental conservation. This perspective was developed a little differently. Religious ethics was also offered by Sofyan Anwar Mufid, who offered a new paradigm of the ideals of building an environment in the perspective of Islamic teaching. In his book, *Islam and Human Ecology*, he stresses that it is not enough to discuss ecology only in the perspective of relations between

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<sup>54</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 2:263.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 2:62.

<sup>56</sup> Mohd Nor Mamat, Siti Fatahiyah Mahamood, and Ismaniza Ismail, "Islamic Philosophy on Behaviour - Based Environmental Attitude," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 49 (2012): 85–92.

humans and nature without involving and emphasizing the mental, spiritual component of human which he calls something universal, because every human being is entitled with potentials. Spiritual potentials can be in the form of religion, belief, sacred rites, and worship.<sup>57</sup> He maintains that ecological piety will not be completed with rules originating from customary norms and positive legal norms, but instead must involve the norms of God in the form of religious rules.

The view of ecological piety has been emphasized by Ibn 'Arabi in his *insān kāmil* through the role of a human's role as the *khalifah* of God. He acknowledged human welfare as the highest goal of creation. These perfect humans have personal piety, social piety and even ecological piety. Achieving such piety through *maqam* and things in Ibn Arabi's Sufism, humans are ecologically positioned in the middle of the macrocosm as a component of the biotic type of microcosm, especially compared to nearly two million other types of living things. Spiritually, humans are required to have commitment and integrity to the Creator and the surrounding environment. Accountability is then reflected through interactions in unique ecosystems that are built on physical, non-physical, and metaphysical natures.

## Conclusion

The concept of Ibn 'Arabi's ecosufism was built from his teachings on *wahdat al-wujūd*, an understanding of the existence of God manifestations in nature that can be used as a foundation for the necessity of protecting nature, because of its position as God's manifestation. This teaching is also a tool to foster respect for nature as part of God creation.

Ibn 'Arabi's Sufism is about the relationship between God as the goal and centre of relations, with humans and the environment being like two sides of the same coin. Therefore, unharmonious and broken relations, it is difficult to expect the presence of a healthy and ethical relationship to stably walk toward God as the centre of the Cosmos

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<sup>57</sup> Sukarni, "Isu Lingkungan," 2.

Ibn Arabi's *ecosufism* also emphasizes ecological piety through the concept of the human soul as the *khalīfah* on the earth chosen by God. These perfect humans have personal, social and even ecological piety. Thus, the concept of Ibn 'Arabi's *ecosufism* has a positive contribution to environmental conservation because of the new paradigm offered in understanding spiritual and philosophical relations of God, humans and nature.

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