

Categories Of Human and Being In Ibn Al-Arabi's Philosophy Of Knowledge

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Abstract: The article analyzes the categories of human and being, which occupy a central place in Ibn al-Arabi's philosophy of knowledge. It reveals the position of the human as a cosmic being in the thinker's doctrine, showing the inseparable connection of the "microcosm" (al-'alam al-saghir) with the "macrocosm" (al-'alam al-kabir) — existence itself. Furthermore, the study highlights the role of the human in perceiving divine truth within Ibn al-Arabi's gnoseology, the concept of the Perfect Man, and the relationship between man and the universe in the framework of the theory of the Unity of Being (wahdat al-wujud). Through the harmony of the categories of human and being, it is substantiated that Ibn al-Arabi's philosophy of knowledge holds profound gnoseological significance not only for Sufi thought but also for the entire history of philosophical thought.

Keywords: Being, human, Sufism, wahdat al-wujud, pantheism, Perfect Man, Hazrat al-Khams, Ghayb al-Ghuyub.

Introduction: Within the philosophy of knowledge of Muhyiddin Ibn al-'Arabi, the doctrines of the Unity of Being (wahdat al-wujūd) and Islamic pantheism occupy a central position in defining the relationship between existence and God, as well as between the human and the divine. Although his conception of wahdat al-wujūd shares certain features with classical pantheism, it is not identical; rather, it is firmly grounded in the principles of Islamic tawhīd (divine unity). The thinker argues that rational and logical reasoning alone is insufficient for attaining truth and comprehending existence. Knowledge, in his view, begins with self-understanding, which—through divine inspiration and the heart—leads to the perception of ultimate reality. This reality is none other than God, the Creator of all worlds. What draws the human closer to God beyond rational means is the pure soul, a quality attributed only to the Perfect Human, who serves as a bridge of love between existence and the divine. In the contemporary context of globalization, questions of spiritual and moral perfection, the pursuit of human maturity, and values related to understanding existence are being reinterpreted. Ibn al-'Arabi's insights thus provide a significant theoretical framework for addressing modern gnoseological issues, grasping the essence of knowledge, and clarifying the spiritual-existential connection between

the human and God. In the history of Islamic philosophy, Ibn al-'Arabi holds a distinctive position through his original gnoseological perspectives and doctrines of existence. Central to his thought are the concepts of the Unity of Being, Islamic pantheism, and tawhīd. For him, the relationships among existence, the human and existence, and the human and God form the primary foundation of philosophical cognition. Furthermore, he insists that logical reasoning must be complemented by the heart, divine inspiration, and spiritual experience, which together constitute the true sources of knowledge.

Literature Review and Methods

The legacy of Ibn al-'Arabi has been extensively studied by both Western and Eastern scholars. Researchers such as A. Knysh, H. Corbin, W. Chittick, and A. Afifi have provided in-depth analyses of his views on the relationship between being and the human, as well as between the human and God. In Uzbekistan, Ibn al-'Arabi's Sufi teachings have been examined primarily within the framework of spiritual heritage; however, his gnoseological principles and the contemporary significance of his doctrine of the Perfect Human remain insufficiently explored. This article employs philosophical-analytical, comparative-historical, and gnoseological methods. These approaches make it possible to conduct a theoretical analysis of Ibn al-

'Arabi's doctrines, compare them with other philosophical traditions, and synthesize them within the context of modern philosophical discourse.

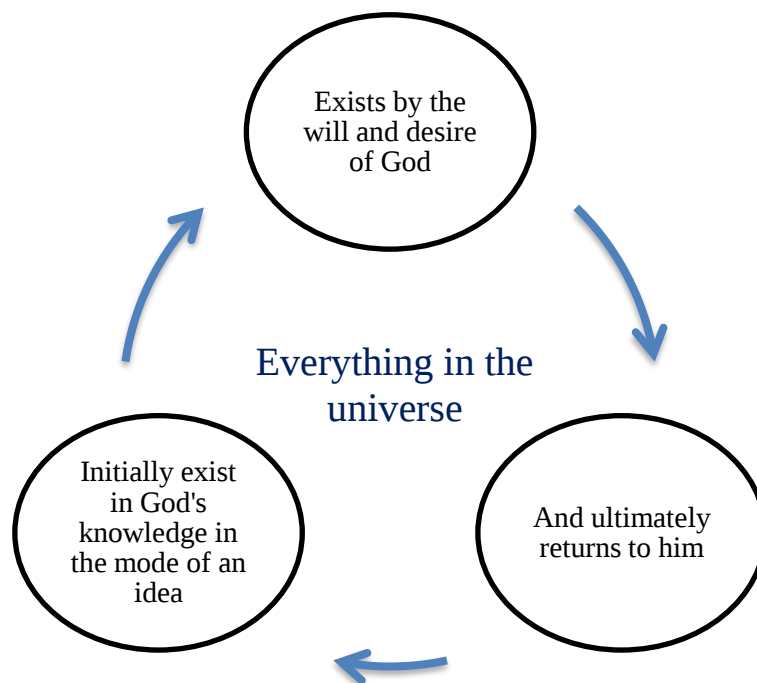
Results and Discussion

In Ibn al-'Arabi's philosophical-mystical system, existence is fundamentally one. Creation itself is the self-disclosure (tajallī) of God, brought forth for the purpose of manifesting His own being. All contingent entities and material forms exist not through independent reality, but solely by virtue of the

Absolute Reality (al-Ḥaqq)—through His existence, will, and creative capacity. This ontological position constitutes the metaphysical core of Ibn al-'Arabi's doctrine of the Unity of Being (wahdat al-wujūd).

For the thinker, the ground of the entire cosmos—even its smallest elements—derives from God alone. Nothing has being apart from Him, nor can anything subsist outside His command. Absolute unity belongs exclusively to the Divine.

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According to the doctrine of the Unity of Being (wahdat al-wujūd), which constitutes Shaykh al-Akbar's ontological conception, everything in the universe first exists in God as an idea, then comes into existence through Him, and ultimately returns to Him. The cosmos represents the outward, visible aspect of that single reality, while God is its inward, unseen dimension. He is also the sole foundation of all existence. Ibn al-'Arabi regarded debates concerning the comprehension of God as fruitless, especially the arguments advanced by scholars, which he considered groundless. Nevertheless, he gave precedence to the intellect in understanding existence, since God had endowed humanity with reason and cognition—unique faculties not granted to other beings—through which the mysteries of the universe may be unveiled. At the same time, he emphasized that God bestowed upon the human a gift superior to intellect, namely, the heart. Through the heart, one may discover reality in an extra-rational manner when reason fails to grasp it. Yet this supreme gift is not available to everyone; it is reserved only for those who truly know God, restrain

their ego, and embody inner goodness and spiritual radiance. Only such individuals are capable of perceiving and comprehending existence.

In Ibn al-'Arabi's view, the intellect is powerless to comprehend God and His attributes; no matter how diligently it strives, this remains an impossible task. Instead of engaging in impossible endeavors, the intellect should acknowledge God's greatness and His sovereignty over the worlds. In the seventh chapter of al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya, Ibn al-'Arabi examines the role of the intellect in knowing God, explaining: "The Lord assigned to the intellect the duty of knowing Him, directing it solely to self-knowledge, and so that it not be distracted by other matters, He commanded, 'Do they not reflect?' (Qur'an 30:8). Yet the intellect misunderstood this command, striving to know God through speculative thought. It sought proofs and treated them as true knowledge. However, the prophets, saints, and the people of the spiritual path realized the proper way to perceive the Real: God cannot be known through thought or speculation, for this is prohibited. The only path to divine knowledge is

through divine self-disclosure. Thus, God granted them the capacity to recognize Him, and through this they understood the divine relationship and discovered the true path to knowledge of the Real. Hence, true knowledge of God is attained only through divine self-definition.” In this sense, Ibn al-‘Arabi’s ontology of knowing existence approaches agnosticism, while at the same time not entirely rejecting gnosticism. In one respect, he maintains that existence cannot be comprehended by human intellect, which is limited; yet, through divine disclosure (*ma’rifa*), it can be known—though only apart from the essence and attributes of God Himself. According to him, God was hidden in the realm of the unseen, and through His *tajallī* (emanation/self-disclosure) the *a’yān thābita* (immutable entities—beings originating from the realm of nonexistence) came into being, from which the cosmos was created. He compares this process to sunlight striking glass and refracting into multiplicity. Interpretations of the *a’yān thābita* vary, and Ibn al-‘Arabi’s understanding differs significantly from that of the Mu’tazilites. For the Mu’tazilites, the immutable entities manifest directly as external beings in the world, whereas Ibn al-‘Arabi argues that worldly entities are not identical with the *a’yān thābita* but only reflect their signs and qualities.

In brief, the doctrine of the *a’yān thābita* in Ibn al-‘Arabi’s teaching refers to all beings and objects that exist in the cosmos—perceived through intellect and senses—as realities that had already existed, from pre-eternity (*azal*), in God’s knowledge in a form inaccessible to human intellect or perception. The phenomenal world (*‘ālam al-shahāda*)—visible, created beings and objects—is thus but the materialized reflection of these immutable entities. The *a’yān thābita* remain eternally established in God’s knowledge, hidden from manifestation, without beginning and without end. They do not appear directly in existence; only their signs and reflections emerge. Therefore, they are not something separate from God’s Essence, but belong to Him. They are not created entities; rather, they are the transcendent reality that serves as the ground for the creation of all things in the external world.

Within Ibn al-‘Arabi’s conception of the relationship between being and God, the doctrine of the *ḥaḍarāt al-khams* (“Five Divine Presences”) holds particular importance. The *ḥaḍarāt al-khams* describe the five stages of divine self-disclosure (*tajallī*) through which the Absolute Being manifests throughout all existence.

1. The first stage is *Ghayb al-ghuyūb* (“the hidden of the hidden,” or the primordial unseen). In this stage, all things—whether material or immaterial—are not yet distinguished, not even in imagination; they exist in

an undifferentiated unity. In the second unseen, however, the *a’yān thābita* (immutable entities) acquire intellectual conception, though not yet form or shape. Compared to the first unseen, the divine essence here begins to take conceptual determination.

2. The second stage is characterized by the formation of the spiritual realm, in which intellect (*‘aql*) and soul (*nafs*) become distinct from one another.

3. The third stage is the imaginal world (*‘ālam al-khayāl*), where representations and forms are transferred into things and objects. At this level, they acquire quasi-material qualities, though they still cannot yet be perceived by the senses.

4. The fourth stage is the domain in which all entities in existence attain material embodiment; the immutable entities now take shape and can be apprehended by the senses.

5. The final stage may be regarded as the synthesis of all the qualities of the preceding four stages. Here, the reality of the Perfect Human (*al-insān al-kāmil*) shines forth.

According to Ibn al-‘Arabi, the manifestation (*tajallī*) of the “Five Divine Presences” (*al-ḥaḍarāt al-khams*) represents five levels of divine disclosure. The first four stages pertain to God’s manifestation in being and in the objects within it, whereas the final stage is the human world. Yet this last stage is not only the most perfect and complex of realms but also the synthesis of all existents. This doctrine occupies a central place in Ibn al-‘Arabi’s treatment of the relationship between the human being and existence. The concept of the “Perfect Human” (*al-insān al-kāmil*) is repeatedly emphasized in his *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. His theory of the Perfect Human is intrinsically linked with his doctrine of the unity of being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), the two being inseparable counterparts. As the Japanese scholar Masataka Takeshita observed, these doctrines are “twin ideas” that demand one another; to understand them in isolation would be to miss their essential meaning. Indeed, Ibn al-‘Arabi—revered as “the greatest master” (*al-Shaykh al-Akbar*) of the Muslim world—envisioned the true Perfect Human as one who is not enslaved by the lower self (*nafs*), who befriends the intellect, and who recognizes God. He frequently connects the concept of the Perfect Human with the “Muhammadan Reality” (*al-ḥaqīqa al-Muḥammadiyya*) and the “Reality of Realities” (*ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqā’iq*), thereby portraying the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as the supreme exemplar of realized perfection. For Ibn al-‘Arabi, the image of the Perfect Human is ultimately reserved for the prophets, who were sent as God’s deputies on earth to guide errant souls back to the Divine. Chief among them is

Muhammad (peace be upon him), whom Ibn al-‘Arabi regarded as the true embodiment of human perfection, uniquely endowed by God with extraordinary powers not granted to ordinary men, sages, or saints. True perfection, he insisted, lies in the awareness that before the Absolute Power—God and His infinite possibilities—one is less than a mere particle. The intellectual and spiritual universe of Ibn al-‘Arabi remains, for many scholars, an undiscovered cave: its existence is undeniable, yet its inner mysteries remain only partially revealed, often misunderstood or insufficiently studied. This explains the continuing fascination of both Eastern and Western scholars with his works. Among them is the Iranologist William C. Chittick, who served at a prominent American university and made significant contributions to the study of Ibn al-‘Arabi. Chittick’s engagement with Ibn al-‘Arabi was partly inspired by the great Persian poet and thinker ‘Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī. For Ibn al-‘Arabi, the ultimate purpose of divine creation lies in humanity. Without humankind, existence would lack meaning and purpose—and even God would have no need for such a purposeless world. Meaning resides in humanity, and the purpose of creation is to ensure human existence. Thus, the cosmos exists to serve humanity, not humanity for the cosmos.

Conclusion

Muhyiddin Ibn al-‘Arabi understood the ultimate purpose of creation not merely as ensuring the existence of human beings, but as bringing forth the Perfect Man (al-insān al-kāmil) and enabling humanity to attain perfection. At the very beginning of his works, he explicitly states: “The entire cosmos without man is purposeless, and without them the whole universe would fall into ruin.” He consistently emphasized that human beings must strive for perfection, for the world itself was created for that very reason. Existence without man is unimaginable, just as man cannot be conceived apart from existence. Ibn al-‘Arabi’s philosophy of knowledge interprets the categories of man and existence as inseparable from their divine source—God. According to him, man cannot attain a full understanding of existence without first realizing his own essence. This process is not confined to the rational faculty alone, but requires the participation of the heart, the spirit, and divine inspiration. Consequently, Ibn al-‘Arabi places man at the very center of the epistemological process, portraying him as a bridge to God, whose perfection enables communion with the Divine.

For Ibn al-‘Arabi, existence itself is the manifestation of the Absolute Being, and humanity’s position within existence is determined only in relation to this absolute reality. Thus, the categories of man and existence form

an inseparable unity within his philosophy, constituting a gnoseological system that guides the human being toward divine truth. These insights remain profoundly relevant in contemporary times, as they provide a solid theoretical foundation for understanding human spiritual development, the pursuit of knowledge, and the integration of rational inquiry with spiritual wisdom. Ibn al-‘Arabi’s synthesis of ontology and epistemology not only illuminates the relationship between man, existence, and God, but also continues to serve as a timeless source of intellectual and spiritual guidance.

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