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IBN ‘ARABI’S GOD, ECKHART’S GOD: GOD OF PHILOSOPHERS OR GOD OF RELIGION?

1. Prelude

It is difficult to provide such a definition of God in which all various views are included and all schools agree upon. The dominant view is that Religion’s God is the Origin of the universe and enjoys some kind of transcendence and sacredness. In philosophy, however, there are various images for God: the Gods of ancient Greece, the unmoved mover of Aristotle, the necessary Being of Avicenna, the God of Aquinas’s theism, the God of Spinoza’s the pantheistic, panentheism God in some mystical philosophies, the One in Neoplatonism, the God of process philosophy, the God of existential philosophies, ultimate concern of Tillich, God as the impersonal ground of Being, and aspects of Heidegger’s Dasein are different concepts of deity.¹

The God of philosophy is often an object, not a person; something, not someone, unchangeable, absolute and unlimited. But the God which is worshiped in ordinary religion “is a person and to be a person, an entity must think, feel, and will. In spite of being called unchangeable, he is angry with us today, pleased with us tomorrow.”²

The meaning of God, of course, is to some extent different in the ordinary versions of various religions and even between Abrahamic religions. The God who has no son according to Islam, for example, may differ from the God who has a son as is believed in Christianity. Various Divine religions in general, and Abrahamic religions in particular, have many commonalities concerning God. We consider them the attributes of Religion’s God, and deem theism from among philosophical views, to be closer to the Religion’s God.

There are fundamental differences between the God in a view that is well-known in the West as Pantheism and the God in theism. Some people have tried to present Eckhart and Ibn ‘Arabi’s “Unity of Being” (*waḥdat-i wujūd*) as a sort

¹ *Levine M.* Pantheism. London: Routledge, 1994. P. 12.

² *Stace W.T.* Mysticism and Philosophy. London: McMillan, 1961. P. 179.

of pantheism. But there are great gaps between the Unity of Being and Pantheism. If we are to make a comparison between the Doctrine of Unity of Being and some Western attitude, it may be closer to panentheism rather than pantheism.

The important point is, however, that Ibn 'Arabi, and to some extent Eckhart, have managed to look from the point view of the unity of Being, while keeping the aspects of the Religion's God; and in other words, they have managed to identify the Religion's God and the God of the Unity of Being. In this article, we try to provide a picture of the Religion's God in theistic reading, then we will mention the God of pantheism and panentheism; and finally we will discuss God in Eckhart and Ibn 'Arabi's theory of Unity of Being.

2. God of Theism

As is said, the God introduced by Revelation is more consistent with theism's God than with the other philosophical gods. Theism's God is a sacred power which dominates the universe and influences it. He is in a mysterious way present in our very being, and has special effects such as revelation or miracles in some occasions in special historical events.³

This God is personal; that is, He is Aware and Willing. It means that some qualities, such as knowing, believing, and willing, may be attributed to Him, although he is free from sentiments and wishes.⁴ He is a person who is eternally free, Omnipotent, Omniscient. He is a spirit which is present everywhere. He is absolute good. He is the origin of moral obligations.⁵ He has some sort of deity which makes Him prayable. While He undertakes the creation of the Universe, he is needless of, and independent from it.⁶ The necessary condition for His divinity is to be free from constraints as well as personality, and at the same time to be unchangeable and impassive.⁷

According to Macquarrie, among all creatures' qualities, personality is the most suitable attribute to simile God, for a thing which is impersonal does not deserve to be called God. Though traditional theism suffers somehow from anthropomorphism, God may be better to be called *Supra-Personal*.⁸ In this way, His transcendence also may be kept. For in this view, God is beyond the world of creatures and is not similar to anything. Thus, theism is able to keep the main attributes of the Religion's God, which are as follows: unity, personality, transcendence, creativity, holiness and being the origin of moral values.⁹

³ *Levine*. Pantheism. P. 107–8.

⁴ *Ibid*. P. 159.

⁵ *Ibid*. P. 53.

⁶ *Ibid*. P. 158.

⁷ *Owen H.P.* Concepts of Deity. London: McMillan, 1971. P. 142–3.

⁸ *Levine*. Pantheism. P. 150.

⁹ *Owen*. Concepts of Deity. P. 150.

Despite all this, because of accepting these religious elements on the one hand, and commitment to rational justification on the other, theism confronts problems and difficulties, which have to be solved. Some of the problems and the difficulties faced by theism are as follows: Is the concept of the eternal and timeless God coherent and can one conceive of a “timeless” being? Did time begin when the universe did? Where was God before creation? How can something be created out of nothing? Why did creation take place when it did and not before — and what was God doing in the meantime? Why did God create this world and not some other — better — world? Should God have created anything at all? How can an immutable being create? Are immutability, impossibility and simplicity compatible with the efficacy of prayer and God’s responsiveness to human action? Is God’s timelessness compatible with biblical theology?¹⁰

3. Pantheism’s God

Pantheism is regarded as a philosophical approach to the problem of God. Though its origin may be mystical, in the last analysis, it is deemed to be a philosophical view.

Many thinkers with various attitudes have been considered to be pantheist. To gather all of them under the same title is extremely difficult. What can be said in brief is, however, that “What all pantheists do have in common (by the very definition of pantheism) is that the totality of all that is does not divide into two great components, a creator God, and a created world.”¹¹

In other words, theism’s God is transcendent and personal; while pantheism accepts neither existential transcendence of God nor His personality. Now, if theism’s God is transcendent and that of pantheism is immanent in things, one cannot say that the two views differ in the number and quality of God’s attributes, but their debate is that whether theism’s God exists or not.¹² For, according to theism, a God which is immanent in things is not God.

Concerning personality, the debate between the two is over God’s attributes. Most versions of pantheism deny that God is a person. Pre-Socratic philosophers, Spinoza, Bruno, and even Plotinus and Lao Tzu do not regard God as a person. One of the researchers claims: “I know of no prominent versions of pantheism that conceive of God as a person.”¹³

Thus, two main aspects of pantheism are as follows: it does not regard God to be transcendent beyond the world and makes no distinction between the Creating God and the created world; and the other is that it does not regard God to be per-

¹⁰ Levine. Pantheism. P. 177.

¹¹ Sprigge T.L.S. Pantheism // *The Monist*, 80 (1997).

¹² Levine. Pantheism. P. 94.

¹³ Levine. Pantheism. P. 11.

sonal. Some pantheists even deny consciousness for God, we do not mention other personal attributes.¹⁴

Pantheism is able to solve some problems faced by theism. "For example by rejecting the principle of creation and interpreting it as the disclosure of the absolute, it solves some difficulties related to the theory of the creation from nothingness. But by denying the personality of God and also by denying his transcendence, it distances itself from the religious viewpoint. Because, firstly, it does not know God as the creator of the world, and, secondly, it is unable to justify the anthropomorphic characters attributed to God in sacred scriptures. Especially, it cannot justify consciousness of God in all religions, and incarnation in Christianity."¹⁵

On the other hand, since pantheism's God is close to the absolute God of philosophers, some problems of theism become more difficult for pantheism. For example, if God is not personal and no change is admitted in Him, He cannot be loved. And the love felt by the believers in praying makes no sense for pantheists. In their school, there is no trace of the interaction that some like Ibn 'Arabi have with their God. In general, the God worshipped by them is other than the God about Whom Ibn 'Arabi speaks as follows:

"Because of piety (*taqwa*), we are given Divine intuition, and God through theophany undertakes to teach us, and we understand what the reasons are not able to understand through thinking. I mean the things that are introduced in the sacred texts through transmitted evidence but the reason regards them to be impossible. Thus, the believer's reason goes on to interpret them, and the pure believer accepts them... [mystic, however, intuitively]. Then the people of unveiling see God's right hand, His hand, both of His hands, God's eye, God's eyes which have been attributed [in the sacred texts] to Him. They see His step and His face as well. They see attributes such as God's delight, His surprise, and His transformation from one form to another... all and all. Thus, the God worshipped by the believers and the people of intuition is not the same as the God which is worshipped by the people of thinking."¹⁶

3.1. Ibn 'Arabi, Eckhart, and Pantheism

Many authors called Eckhart a pantheist. Ibn 'Arabi also is not free from such accusation. Some authors like Charles Adams claimed that Ibn 'Arabi was teaching a sort of pantheism according to which only one reality exists, that is God, with the interpretation that God is nothing other than the sum of all things.¹⁷

¹⁴ Levine. Pantheism. P. 148.

¹⁵ Levine. Pantheism. P. 147.

¹⁶ *Ibn al-'Arabī*. Al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya. Beirut: Dār al-Šādir. Vol. 2. P. 38.

¹⁷ See: Sells M. *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994. P. 261, note 40.

As seen from this phrase, “sum of things” is not more than the sum of its members. Beyond the apparent world, Ibn ‘Arabi and Eckhart, however, believe in an essence which is free from any relation and correlation and completely independent from the universe. Thus, Ibn ‘Arabi and Eckhart’s God is not compatible with the mentioned God. There is a deep gap between the one who believes in the absolute hidden world and the one who sees nothing other than the visible world and regards God as the sum of the parts of this very world. Thus, as some researchers mentioned:

“To attempt to categorize Ibn ‘Arabi’s teachings in different ways, such as pantheism or monism, impedes rather than assists in understanding his vision of Reality. His doctrine of the Oneness of Being means that God is far more than the sum of its parts or aspects.”¹⁸

It should be noted that some phrases of Ibn ‘Arabi and Eckhart, and in particular the former, may point to some sort of pantheism. Even phrases similar to those of Spinoza may be found in Ibn ‘Arabi. That is, he may regard God as a single substance who receives various attributes:

“Verily, God is All-Subtle. It is because of His Subtlety and Mercy, that in everything, which is called with some name or limited to some limitations, He is the same as that object... Though concerning the beings of the world it is said that this is the sky, this is the earth, this is rock, tree, animal, angel, sustenance or food; in every object there is the same essence. As Ash‘aris say, the entire world is one concreted substance. That is it is a single substance. This is the same as what we say that [in all objects], the essence is the same. Ash‘aris also said that the substance comes into difference because of accidents. This is also the same as what we say that the essence comes into difference and plurality because of forms and relations so that making a distinction may be possible. Thus, it can be said that this object differs in terms of form or accident or temperament — or whatever other name you like — and it is the same in terms of existence”.¹⁹

Ibn ‘Arabi and Eckhart, and in particular Ibn ‘Arabi, regard God to be existence non-conditioned as the source of a division (*lā bi shart-i maqsamī*). Pantheists’ God is conditioned by something (*wujūd bi shart-i shay’*) and at the level of existents or, at most, existence non-conditioned as a division (*lā bi shart-i qismī*). These two Gods are quite different. To explain the issue, existence can be classified in terms of the levels of theophany, as follows:

¹⁸ Austin R.W. (trans.). Ibn al-‘Arabi. The Bezels of Wisdom. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1988.

¹⁹ *Ibn al-‘Arabī*. Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam. Ed. Abū ‘l-‘Alā ‘Afifī. 3rd ed. Tehran: al-Zahra Publications, 1366 / 1987. Vol. 1. P. 88–9.

The non-conditioned existence as a source of division	1. negatively conditioned existence = oneness 2. existence conditioned by names and attributes = unity	= hidden world
	3. existence non-conditioned as a division = Divine breath (Truth by which the world is created) 4. existence conditioned by creatural determination = world	= visible world

For philosophers, God is the same as existence negatively-conditioned, that is, He is free from all conditions and independent from all things. Pantheists’ God is the same as the existence conditioned by creatural individuations. This existence, according to Ibn ‘Arabi and Eckhart, is not God but the universe. No mystic, but some of the unaware Sufis who believe in some kind of eminence and regard God to be eminent in the world, conditions God to the fourth level. The noble verse “And He is Who in the heaven is God, and in the earth God” (the Holy Quran 43:84) suggests that God is specified to no level. He is in the heaven God, and in the earth God. While pantheists say that He is in the heaven, heaven; and in the earth, earth.

What Ibn ‘Arabi regards as the essence of the world and the same as all things is “divine breath,” that is existence conditioned as a division, and that is what has been manifested through the Holy Emanation; and according to the eternal rule “He / not He,” one can say that the universe is, at the same time, Him and not Him:

“As regards the universe, say whatever you like. You are free to believe that it is creature or to maintain that it is the God, and if you like you can say that it is the God and the creature. And if you like, say that it is in all aspects neither God nor creature. And if you like, believe in bewilderment”.²⁰

Some pantheists may regard God to be associated with all existents, not in a conditioned way, but absolutely; Ibn ‘Arabi and Eckhart’s God, however, is free even from this absoluteness. It is “non-conditioned as a source of division” which is present at all four mentioned levels. Thus, Ibn ‘Arabi and Eckhart’s belief in the station of Oneness and station of Unity makes them distinct from pantheists and brings them closer to another view which is called panentheism.

4. Panentheism’s God

Unlike pantheism, panentheism believes in some sort of God’s transcendence from the universe. That is, it believes in the hidden beyond the visible.

²⁰ *Ibn al-‘Arabī*. *Fuṣūṣ*. P. 112.

Those who believe in the Unity of Being speak sometimes of union “with” God and some other times they talk about union “within” God. The first is an indicative of some kind of becoming and suggests that the two essences of God and the creature “come into” union; and the second implies some kind of being. That is, it says that the two objects “are” in unity. According to Ibn ‘Arabi and Eckhart and the like, this becoming and that being are the same;²¹ the second is, however, closer to what is called pantheism.

Pantheism which has been coined by combining four words “pan” (= all), “en” (= in), “theo” (= God) and “ism” (= believe in), means belief in “all things in God.” Ibn ‘Arabi and Eckhart have been regarded to believe in pantheism because they believe in a transcendental existence for the objects in the Divine world. As Ibn ‘Arabi says:

“No one of the beings of the world and no object is outside God. But, every quality which is manifest in the world, has an essence in the presentation of the Truth... It is God’s dignity that existence of nothing be outside Him. Since if the existence of something is outside Him, then He has no command on that thing.”²²

That is, one who grants something cannot lack that thing. God’s encompassing of all things means that he contains all things. “Eckhart believes that the objects have come out from God but they have remained inward. It means they are in God: ‘I yet remained in the father.’ ” One scholar says that this view is a sort of pantheism: “It means that all is in God and God is in all. Such a doctrine differs from heterodox pantheism, which means literally all is God and God is all.”²³ The following may confirm the claim that Eckhart believes in some sort of pantheism: “He created all things in such a way that they are not outside himself, as ignorant people falsely imagine. Everything that God creates or does he does or creates in himself, sees or knows in himself, loves in himself. Outside himself he does nothing, knows or loves nothing; and this is peculiar to God himself.”²⁴

5. Ibn ‘Arabi’s God and Eckhart’s God

In defining the nature of mysticism it is common to affirm that mystical experience is the experience of the immanence of the divine, and of unification and unity in essence with it, in contrast to the experience of the divine as transcendent. But the religious thought emphasizes the transcendence of God.²⁵ So when a religious mystic speaks about union with God, the union becomes one of con-

²¹ *Sells M.* *Mystical Languages*. P. 169.

²² *Ibn al-‘Arabī*. *Futūḥāt*. Vol. 2. P. 484.

²³ *Fox M.* *Breakthrough*. New York: Image Books, 1991. P. 72.

²⁴ *Fox*. *Breakthrough*. P. 73.

²⁵ *Otto R.* *Mysticism East and West*. New York: McMillan, 1976. P. 158.

templation, similarity, love, anything short of absorption. But the nonreligious mystics talk seriously of absorption and less of the self and real union with God.²⁶

Regardless of how much this concept is right, it is certain that Ibn 'Arabi's and Eckhart's God is the same as the God of the two Abrahamic religions, i.e. Islam and Christianity. Ibn 'Arabi's God is the same as the God who manifests Himself with all his names and attributes of beauty and glory in the Holy Quran. God of Eckhart, who is a Christian preacher and a disciple of Aquinas, is the God of the Bible and very close to theism's God.

The most important aspects of theism's God, which make it other than pantheism's God, are, first, His transcendence and, second, His personality. While preserving these two aspects, Ibn 'Arabi and Eckhart try to establish their intellectual systems based on the unity of existence and seat the religion's God at the top of it.

In this regard, Muslim thinkers inspired by the Holy Quran and verses such as the verses of the sura of *Ikhlās*, have put main emphasis on God's transcendence from creatures and His Glory, and less emphasis on His personality. In contrast, in the Christian theology, since God has been personified and manifested as Jesus Christ, emphasis on God's personality is unavoidable and more emphasis is put on His beauty than His glory to the extent that this God is either Himself a man and lives among us or, at least, He is that man's father. That is why, in such a theology, love is emphasized more than fear. According to Eckhart, this is why many prayers begin with "Our Father" and not "Our Lord," because it shows more kindness and love.²⁷

What is surprising is that, in spite of these two different kinds of emphasis put by Muslim and Christian theologians, Ibn 'Arabi and Eckhart go in the opposite directions. That is, Ibn 'Arabi puts more emphasis on God's personality and Eckhart pays more attention to God's transcendence. To explain, it should be noted that most philosophers regard God not as a person but as an object and mention Him as "that." Ibn 'Arabi, however, thinks that mystics regard God as a person and not as an object and their approach to God is of three sorts, which is manifest in three kinds of remembrance (*dhikr*). The highest remembrance of some mystics is "He" (*huwa*). That of some others is "Thou" (*anta*), and that of still some others such as Abu Yazid is "I" (*anā*).²⁸

From Ibn 'Arabi's ideas as a whole, it is seen that he is concerned mostly with "He" or "Thou." Eckhart, however, sometimes speaks of "He," which is the same as the station of the essence of One and the absolute hidden, and some other times he talks about "I," which is the station of annihilation, and he speaks less of "Thou."

²⁶ Levine. Pantheism. P. 135, note 14.

²⁷ Fox. Breakthrough. P. 495.

²⁸ *Ibn al-'Arabī*. Futūḥāt. Vol. 2. P. 297.

Thus, it can be inferred that Ibn 'Arabi puts more emphasis on the servitude on the creatures' side and on personality on God's side; Eckhart, however, puts more emphasis on the Lordship on the creature's side and the absolute transcendence on God's side. Both mystics, however, may be regarded to be modifying the ideas of theologians and the cultures of their own times. And this modification causes the emphasis to be put on an aspect which had been ignored in that culture and at that time. None of the two, however, forgets the other side entirely. That is, both of them have discussed both God's transcendence and His personality, though to different extents.

6. Sum up and Conclusion

God of the "unity of Being," as introduced by Ibn 'Arabi and Eckhart, differs from philosophers' God on the one hand, and from pantheists' God on the other. Their God is God of the Holy Quran and God of the Bible. Philosophers' God and pantheists' God share in that they are not persons. Both of them are things, and not persons. The former is, however, existence negatively-conditioned and the latter is existence non-conditioned as a division. None of these two Gods are changeable and transformable. Even attributes, such as knowledge and will and freedom, can be hardly attributed to Him, we do not speak of attributes such as mercy, kindness, delight, disgust, doubt, and the like.

In his *Incoherence of Philosophers*, while criticizing philosophers who have regarded God in His creation to be caused and not free, al-Ghazali says: "The agent must be willing, choosing, and knowing what he wills to be the agent of what he wills." Averroes criticises him thus: "This is not self-evident ... He who chooses and wills, lacks the things he wills, and God cannot lack anything he wills. And he who chooses makes a choice for himself of the better of two things, but God is in no need of a better condition. Further, when the willer has reached his object, his will ceases and, generally speaking, will is a passive quality and a change, but God is exempt from passivity and change."²⁹

As we can see, if we regard God so transcendent, there will be a deep gap between this God and the religion's God. How can we worship such a God of whom we have no knowledge? How can such a God become angry with us? How can we appease Him when He is angry? How can one repent in His presence? How can a God who is not passive accept one's repentance? And, above all, how can one love such a transcendent God? History of Paganism shows that mankind always avoids a God who is perfectly transcendent and cannot love Him. Man seeks for a God between whom and himself he can find some similarity. Paganism is an exaggeration in this similarity.

²⁹ Sells M. *Bewildered Tongue // Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. New York: Continuum, 1996. P. 222, note 21.

Anyway, philosophers who believe in pure transcendence, can never call people toward God. As Ibn 'Arabi puts it:

“If there was no trace of religion which has brought Divine news, no one would know God; and if we contented with the intellectual evidence which rationalists think that lead one to Godhead, and if we stopped in stating that He is not such and such, then no creature would love God. When divine news came down through the language of religion, suggesting that God is so and so — news that are inconsistent with the appearance of rational evidence — we love God because of these affirmative attributes. ... God has not introduced himself but only through the news about Himself, such as He is kind toward us, His mercy applies on us, He has kindness, mercy and love, and He comes down in limitations and conditions... [this is because] we simile Him and imagine Him in our heart, in our *Qibla*, and in our imagination as if we see Him. Nay, but we see Him in ourselves, for we know Him through His own definition and not through our thought and idea.”³⁰

Ibn 'Arabi claims that Noah's tribe did not accept his call since he called them toward pure transcendence. His call was discriminatory (*furqānī*). But if he had combined transcendence with analogy, and if his call had been like that of the Holy Prophet (Muhammad), which was combinative (*qur'ānī*) of transcendence and assimilation, he would have been followed.³¹

Ibn 'Arabi's theology is the same as the theology of religion. In other words, it is the knowledge of names and not that of the essence; for religion calls people toward the names of God and not his essence (Godhead). Although Ibn 'Arabi's God has a single essence, he has many names and manifestations. He is One God and, at the same time, He is various. Every day, every moment, and for every one, He is of a new manifestation. He has not the same manifestation for two persons at the same moment and for the same one at two various moments. Not only in various religious creeds, but also for Muslims who follow the same Imam in congregation prayer and pray towards the same *Qibla*, God is different, though there is no more than One God:

“In Congregation, every prayer in his privacy converses with his God and God encompasses him... for the people of congregation, God manifests in the totality of oneness and not in the oneness of totality. For every person in the congregation converses with his Lord according to his intention and knowledge, as is required by His presence. That is why He becomes manifest for them in the totality of oneness. That is, they are preceded by totality. Then He relates that to oneness, so that, despite their various aims, ideas, qualities, temperaments and relations, they may not regard, in their worships, something to be associated with God. That is why their questions and demands

³⁰ *Ibn al-'Arabī*. Futūḥāt. Vol. 2. P. 326.

³¹ *Ibn al-'Arabī*. Fuṣūṣ. P. 70.

may be various. But if God became manifest for them in the oneness of totality, because of the precedence of oneness, no one would be able to look at the totality. And if this was the case, their aims would become the same aim, their requests would become the same request, their quality of presence would become the same quality and their knowledge of God — the Exalted — become the same knowledge. But this is not the case.”³²

According to Ibn ‘Arabi, every one has her/his own Lord, which is other than that of the others; and if one knows her/his own self, she/he knows her/his Lord. For, God is not manifest as the oneness of essence (Godhead); but only in the station of names and attributes, and according to the demands of fixed entities, He will become manifest. There is a manifestation for every name, and that name is the Lord of that manifestation. And, since names are numerous, their manifestations as well will be numerous, and, accordingly, lords will be numerous; and every one in every condition has a lord devoted to her/him and to that condition. The lord of everyone, in every condition, is the manifestation of God as a name which fulfils one’s need in that moment and one has to call Him through that name; the sick call Him the Healer, sinners call Him the Forgiver, and the poor call him the Giver. God is One and is not conditioned; but every one has his own lord at every moment:

“Every being is satisfied by its Lord. If some being is satisfied by its lord it is not necessary to be satisfied by the lord of the others. Since every being has received a particular form of Lordship [from among the various forms of Lordship], and it is not the case that all beings receive from a single form. Thus, for every bondman, only what is suitable for him is determined, which is the same as his lord. No one receives from Him because of His oneness. That is why people of Allah deny manifestation in oneness.”³³

Unlike philosophers’ God, Ibn ‘Arabi’s God is not only agent but receptacle as well. Some materialist philosophers sought to build the universe only with matter. Some other said that “Give me matter and direction, and I will build the universe,” and still some others thought that, in addition to matter and direction, motion (and time) is (are) necessary as well. Divine philosophers regarded the matter to be receptacle; and some agent and mover to be necessary to make changes in it. In Ibn ‘Arabi’s intellectual system, which is based on the unity of Being, it is God who plays the roles of all these. In other words, the substance of the universe is the Divine breath; the forms of the world are His manifestations; changes in the world are changes in His manifestations:

“All the world is contained in three mysteries: its substance, its form, and transformation. There is no fourth thing. If you ask wherefrom transformation was found in the world, we will respond that God has described Himself as

³² *Ibn al-‘Arabī. Futūḥāt. Vol. 3. P. 193–4.*

³³ *Ibn al-‘Arabī. Fuṣūṣ. P. 91.*

'Every day He exercises (universal) power' (the Holy Quran 55:29). There are various attributions. God has described Himself to be cheerful because of the bondman's repentance. The Holy Prophet has also said: 'God will not become tired unless you may become tired'. Those who know Him, i.e. prophets, have said that on the Resurrection Day, he will become so angry with us as he has never been and will never be, as His glory requires. Thus, they attribute to Him the state before this anger, when He has not been described with this anger. It has been reported in reliable traditions that on the Resurrection Day God will change into various forms. And change is the same as transformation... God chooses to become manifest in various forms for His bondmen. Also, He has not created the world at the pre-eternal time, but after that. At the pre-eternal time, He had been described to be able to create the world and to become manifest in the form of the creation of the world or not."³⁴

Thus, Ibn 'Arabi's God, receiving all forms, is continuously changing. He is both the Giver and the receptacle, He both loans His bondmen and takes loan from them. He becomes hungry, thirsty, and ill with his bondmen; and, at the same time, He Himself is the Feeder, Satisfier and Healer:

"Only he who does not believe denies Divine attributes. God says: 'And lend unto Allah a goodly loan' (the Holy Quran 73: 20). And He says I was hungry and you did not feed me, I was thirsty and you did not satisfy me. All of these, He has stated. Thus, God — the Exalted — does not shrink from attributing such things to Himself. In this way, He warns us that He will become manifest in the manifestations in accordance with their potentiality. ... There is no relation, unless it has a relation with the God and a relation with the creation."³⁵

Ibn 'Arabi's God is continuously interacting with His bondman. He loves us so that He receives every attribution which is related to us:

"The truthful lover is he who will be attributed with the beloved's attributions, and not he who brings the beloved to the level of his own attribution. Don't you see that God — the Glorified — when he loves us, comes down towards us through His hidden graces; and in a form which is suitable for us and far from His own greatness and majesty? When we come to His home to pray to Him, He will become cheerful. When, after returning from Him, we again repent, He will become cheerful. When He sees a youth who should be under the influence of youthful desires, free from these desires, He is surprised... He degrades on behalf of us, and reveals Himself in our hunger, thirst, and illness."³⁶

³⁴ *Ibn al-'Arabī*. Futūḥāt. Vol. 2. P. 254.

³⁵ *Ibn al-'Arabī*. Futūḥāt. Vol. 1. P. 587.

³⁶ *Ibn al-'Arabī*. Futūḥāt. Vol. 2. P. 256. This is a hadith cited from the prophet Mohamad. When one of God's servants is hungry, He says to the others, "I was hungry, but you did not feed me." He says to another of his servants, "I was ill but you did not visit me." When the servants ask him about this, he replies to them: "Verily such and such was ill, if you had visited

Eckhart's God suffers together with mankind. In the Bible it has been written: "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink. I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungered, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me."³⁷ Inspired by these verses, Eckhart says: "God suffers with man ... God suffers with me, and suffers for my sake through the love which he has for me."³⁸ He teaches that perfect detachment of the mystic forces God to act.³⁹

In line with Christian culture, he believes that there is more love in the word "father" than the word "Lord." In other words, because of His love, God has become manifest as man's father; thus, many supplications begin instead of "Oh, our Lord" with "Oh, our heavenly father." God, because of His love and kindness, came in the form of man and received human essence. "Now you must know that lovable humility brought God to the point in which he lowered himself into human nature."⁴⁰ So it is said that Eckhart's God is a caring, passionate God and it distinguishes his God from many Gods of Philosophers.⁴¹

In my opinion, however, God of Eckhart as a Christian, is the same Christian familiar God; but when he steps into the field of mysticism and the unity of Being, he seeks no more such a God. He distinguishes Godhead and God in the station of divinity. Christian three Persons are in the station of divinity. Eckhart, however, seeks annihilation in the Godhead and achieving that station. That is why he says: "We pray that God may release us from God."⁴²

As we saw, Ibn 'Arabi's God is in the station of Divinity and not in the station of the essence. He is a God who becomes manifest through various names and not a God which is placed in the darkness of the essence. Thus, Ibn 'Arabi seeks to know the names and not the essence. It is here that Ibn 'Arabi's God goes away from Eckhart's God; for Eckhart loves Godhead and not the names: "Thou shalt love God as he is, a non-God, a non-spirit, a non-person, a non-form. He is absolute bare unity."⁴³

him, you would have found me with him. Such and such was hungry, if you had fed him, you would have fed me with him" (ibid).

³⁷ Bible, King James Version, Matthew, 25:42–25:45.

³⁸ Fox. Breakthrough. P. 157.

³⁹ McGinn B. Comments // Mystical Union. P. 188.

⁴⁰ Smith C. Meister Eckhart on the Union of Man with God // Mystics of the Books. New York: Peter Long Publishing, 1993. P. 244.

⁴¹ Fox. Breakthrough. P. 157.

⁴² Sells M. Mystical Languages. P. 188.

⁴³ Inge W.R. Christian Mysticism. New York: Meridian Books, 1956. P. 160, note 1.

He who seeks to arrive at the Godhead, does not tolerate even the plurality of names. That is why Eckhart's God, unlike Ibn 'Arabi's God who is various and plural, is a God in whom no variety and plurality is admitted: "A person who truly loves God as the one and for the sake of the one and union no longer cares about or values God's omnipotence or wisdom because these are multiple and refer to multiplicity. Nor do they care about goodness in general, both because it refers to what is outside and in things and because it consists in attachment."⁴⁴

Thus, Eckhart in fact loves a God who has no name and definition. "He is nameless; He is the negation of all names. He has been never given a name."⁴⁵ Every one, whatever desire and potential he has, should ignore them and seek only for a God who is beyond his desires and potentials. Even the sick should not call him the Healer, for in this way, the Healer which is in the station of divinity, will become for him more beloved than Godhead: "If you are ill and you ask for health, then health is dearer to you than God. Then he is not your God."⁴⁶

Thus, it can be said that Ibn 'Arabi and Eckhart each seeks a different aspect of God. For, according to one researcher, God in the station of God and God in the station of Godhead, are two aspects of the same God, and approaching these two aspects is approaching two kinds of God. Some mystics seek unity and union with God, among them is included Ibn 'Arabi, and some other seek for the God without modes.⁴⁷ Eckhart belongs to this second group.

Now, our question is that how one can make a relation with such a God without modes and know him. For such a God is inaccessible for reason and is beyond our knowledge. And, according to Eckhart, a god of whom we can have knowledge is not God: "If I had a god whom I was able to know, I would never be able to regard him as God."⁴⁸

Thus, the way to arrive at such a God is knowing nothing, seeking nothing and having nothing, i.e. annihilation. If I become colourless, I will arrive at that colourless one: "Since it is God's nature that he is unlike anyone, we must of necessity reach the point that we are nothing, in that we can be removed into the same essence he himself is."⁴⁹

According to Eckhart, in that unity of essence (Godhead), all dualities and distinctions go away and we come from being something to being nothing.⁵⁰

This Eckhart's view concerning God and the way recommended by him to arrive to God remind one of the views of Eastern mysticism, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, where man's end is to arrive at annihilation and *Nirvana*. This kind of mysticism, which puts more emphasis on negation, is quite different from Ibn

⁴⁴ Teacher and Preacher. New York: Paulist Press, 1981. P. 224.

⁴⁵ Fox. Breakthrough. P. 175.

⁴⁶ Davis O. God Within. New York: Paulist Press, 1988. P. 63.

⁴⁷ Otto. Mysticism East and West. P. 158.

⁴⁸ Fox. Breakthrough. P. 183.

⁴⁹ Fox. Breakthrough. P. 328.

⁵⁰ McGinn B. The God Beyond God // *Journal of Religion*, 61 (1981). P. 11.

‘Arabi’s mysticism which rests upon the affirmative aspect of the Divine names. According to some scholars, in this type of mysticism Eckhart is similar to Asian mystics who wish to sink in the bottomless sea of the Infinite.⁵¹ For example, he says: “People must ... be quite divested of all similarity and no longer resemble anyone. Then they are truly like God. For, it is God’s peculiarity and nature to be without any equal and to be similar to no one. May God help us to be thus one in the unity that is God himself.”⁵²

When we arrive at this stage, we have no more various gods; God of all will be the same. All varieties, pluralities, and debates will vanish away, and this is precisely in contrast with Ibn ‘Arabi’s God. For Ibn ‘Arabi’s God will become manifest for mankind through the totality of oneness and Eckhart’s God through the oneness of totality. In the oneness of totality, there is no motion, no movement, and no sound. All and all is silence, stillness, and the darkness of Godhead. As Eckhart says: “Everything in the Godhead is one, and of that there is nothing to be said. God works, the Godhead does not work, there is nothing to do; in it is no activity, God and Godhead are as different as active and inactive⁵³ ... The Godhead in itself is motionless unity and balanced stillness.”⁵⁴ “Eckhart’s God in that darkness of essence which is empty even of knowledge and will.”⁵⁵

Thus, to sum up, it should be said that Ibn ‘Arabi and Eckhart call to two Gods. For, Ibn ‘Arabi seeks to worship God even if He is in this very world of corporal forms, but Eckhart wants to go even beyond the Divine world and arrive at Godhead. There even worship makes no sense, for there is the station of liberty and not that of servitude. Like Eckhart, Ibn ‘Arabi sees “other than Allah” as “not He” in which “He” is manifest. Thus, he seeks to achieve a station where he is able to see “He” and “not He” together, and thus to come to affirmation of “He/not He.” Eckhart, however, seeks only for “He,” i.e. that hidden identity.

According to Eckhart, all causes will vanish or at least will be invisible for the mystic. For Ibn ‘Arabi, however, the perfection of man’s perception requires that all things be seen as they are. That is, both incomparable with God and similar to Him. And this means to give every thing what it deserves. That is why Ibn ‘Arabi, though he believes that “there is nothing other than Allah,” criticizes those who claim to see only God.⁵⁶

One of the reasons behind the difference between the two mystics is perhaps that Eckhart, in addition to being a Christian, is a great philosopher. That is why one researcher says: “Although he speaks of laughing and suffering God, but when he put on his philosopher’s cap, he was apt to lose touch with the biblical God and mistake the stillness of love for the unmoved Mover. In his view, the

⁵¹ *Inge*. Christian Mysticism. P. 160, note 1.

⁵² *Teacher and Preacher*. P. 358.

⁵³ *Happold F.C.* Mysticism: A Study and Anthology. London: Penguin Books, 1963. P. 273.

⁵⁴ *Gilson E.* History of Christian Philosophy. New York, 1955.

⁵⁵ *Mileman B.* Suffering God // *Mystical Quarterly*, 22 (1996). P. 77.

⁵⁶ *Chittick W.C.* The Self Disclosure of God. New York: SUNY Press, 1998. P. 194–5.

Incarnation and Passion of the eternal word affected the immovable detachment of God as little as if He had never become man. God having no motives acts without them."⁵⁷

Eckhart's Neo-Platonist attitude regarding God beyond existence has helped his view and caused him to go away from belief in a God like Ibn 'Arabi's God. For there is a great distance between Ibn 'Arabi's God and that of Philosophy, even Neo-Platonism. According to Lossky: "God revealed to us in the Judeo-Christian revelation is a Personal God, concrete and alive, rather than some cold, impersonal abstract Essence. A transcendent Essence is really just a philosophical notion, so Eckhart's mysticism, which is concerted on perception of the Divine Essence, is not truly Christian but a form of Gnosticism."⁵⁸

To defend Eckhart and justify his difference from Ibn 'Arabi, the issue can be seen from another point of view, that is, these two great mystics responded to the theological exaggerations which were dominant in their times and cultures. Their dual emphasis on the personified God and transcendent Godhead stemmed from the exaggerations made by the thinkers of their times. For Muslim philosophers and theologians made God so transcendent that even regarded him as an un-conceivable essence of whom no knowledge can be obtained and with whom no relationship may be established. In the face of them, Ibn 'Arabi puts emphasis on God's personal attributions which have been abundantly mentioned in the Holy Quran and traditions but the theoreticians deny those attributions according to their reasons. On the other hand, in Christianity, God is not only personal but the same as man. Jesus is the same as God who has been incarnated in man's form. Thus, this God is not transcendent at all and has all human attributions, such as body, blood, and flesh. That is why, in the face of them, Eckhart put emphasis on a Godhead, which is beyond Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

⁵⁷ *Rast D.S.* Meister Eckhart from whom God Hid Nothing. Boston-London: Shambhala 1996. P. xiv-xvi.

⁵⁸ *Smith C.* Meister Eckhart on the Union of Man with God. P. 243.