


# God, humanity and nature: Cosmology in Islamic spirituality

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Most of the works on creation theology in the past have departed from a functional point of view with the assumption that creation is for the sake of human use, thus a means to an end. It has been believed that this utilitarian perception is supported by the sacred texts of theistic religions, saying that people were masters and possessors of the natural world. They were created in the likeness of God, 'in His image', and the rest of creation existed solely for human benefit, to serve a human need. If there is an issue regarding the protection of the environment, it is behind the logic of convenience. Thus, eco-theology aims to be a practical ethic controlling and shaping human behaviour towards the natural environment. This article discusses a different approach to nature that is not a utilitarian point of view, but mystical, which regards creation as self-disclosure of God, so that each has its intrinsic meaning for itself and there is genuine and deep respect for the integrity of creation.

**Contribution:** This article gives an alternative approach to the issue on environment in the study of eco-theology. The approach is an Islamic mystical approach. It also promotes inter-religious studies on the subject and demonstrates the textual studies within Christian and Islamic traditions, and beyond.

**Keywords:** Self-disclosure of God; Sufism; Cosmology; Eco-theology; Inter-religious dialogue.

## Introduction

God, man and the universe are the major themes in the Qur'an. Indeed, cosmology is not limited to scientific accounts; even until recently most cosmologies have been religious, philosophical or mythical. The study of the cosmos is not only valid but also a necessary step towards the knowledge of divine reality. 'The world is nothing but the work of Allah and the study of it becomes incumbent on the believers as part of their religious duty' (Ibish [1977] 1978:205).

This article will expound Islamic cosmological doctrine, which describes a total science of the cosmos through which human beings discover where she or he is in multiple structured cosmic reality and where she or he should be going. It will focus on the theory of the universe as God's self-disclosure, God's self-manifestation (*tajalli*), which is one of the important teachings of Sufism (Islamic mysticism), especially Muhyi al-Din Muhammad Ibn 'Ali Ibn al-'Arabi (A.H. 56–638/A.D. 1165–1240), one of the Muslim spiritual authorities, who is famous in the West, and is called *al-Shaykh al-Akbar*, The Greatest Master.

The belief is based on sacred saying (*Hadith qudsi*), which is summarised in the Sufi's conception of creation and its purpose, where we will find how we relate to the environment, and for our comprehension of today's environmental crisis. The sacred saying is as follows:

God says, 'Kuntu Kanzan Makhfiyyan, wa uridu an u'rafa, fa khalaqtu al-khalqa li'arafuuni' [*I was a Hidden Treasure and I desired to be known. Therefore, I created the creatures so that I might be known*].<sup>1</sup>

This model of God's self-disclosure is used as a way of interpreting everything. It is a way to think about, reflect upon divine transcendence in immanence or to think of God as immanent in our world whilst retaining magnifying God's transcendence. It can be called a blend of immanence and transcendence. The Qur'an says, 'God is closer than the jugular vein' (the Qur'an 50:16). It means that God is closer to us than we are to ourselves. God is the breath and spirit that gives life to the billions of different bodies that make up God's self-disclosure. But God is also the power and goal

1. A *hadith qudsi* (lit., 'divine report' or 'saying') in which God is depicted as speaking in the first person, but which is not found in the Qur'an and which is generally understood to be divine logia in the spoken idiom of the Prophet Muhammad.

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of everything. This blinding *coincidentia oppositorum* will always present in every religious thought that God is both immanent and transcendent, for the entire universe is simultaneously *He* as well as *not-He* (*Huwa la Huwa*). Abu Sa'id al-Kharraz, a celebrated Sufi master, when he was asked, 'Whereby do you know God?' He replied: 'By the fact that He is the *coincidentia oppositorum*' ('Arabi [1911] 1972:379).

This tenet entails both an anthropology and theology. Understanding the universe as the self-disclosure of God may move us not only towards a more biocentric and cosmocentric perspective but also towards a more inclusive sense of justice for the need of all creatures. If we realise that everything in the universe is the self-disclosure of God, we will acknowledge that something other than ourselves exists, and then it might follow that we would have to acknowledge the reality of the many, all others. On this basis we might build an ecological ethic – 'a way of being in the world that respects the intrinsic value of the many different beings that comprise our planet' – and begin to see as well where we human beings, like a special family of beings with special gifts and limitations, fit into the scheme of things (cf. McFague 1993:121).

## Creation and the goal

Creation plays a prominent role in all aspects of religious thought of Islam, including mystical thought. The Qur'an uses the word *khalaqa* for creation. In Arabic, the word, *khalaqa* has two basic meanings. Firstly, it means to determine (*taqdir*), that is to give 'measure' (*qadar*) to something or to take something's measure. Secondly, it means to give existence to something (*ijad*). Thus, Creator has two meanings, 'the one who determines, and the one who gives existence' (Chittick 1998:47).

Self-disclosure or self-manifestation (epiphany) is the most basic concept of Ibn al-'Arabi's ontology. According to him everything that exists in the world is after all, nothing but the self-manifestation of the Absolute, and 'no event whatsoever occurs in the world except self-manifestation'. Ibn al-'Arabi says, 'The whole cosmos is the locus within which God's Names become manifest' ('Arabi 1946:II, 34, 3). And the cosmos is the locus in which the Hidden Treasure is known by creatures. 'Through the universe, God comes to be known' (Murata 1992:11).

The concept of self-disclosure says that God is to reveal itself through itself its mystery. In *Fusus al-Hikam* (Bezels of Wisdom), Ibn 'Arabi describes the myth of creation as follows ('Arabi 1946; Austin 1980):

when the real willed from the standpoint of its most beautiful names

which are countless to see their instantiations, or you could say when it willed to see its own instantiation, in an encompassing entity, qualified with existence, that would contain it order entire

to reveal to it (self) through it (self) its mystery...

And when the real had brought into being

the world entire as a shape form without spirit

the world was like an unpolished mirror

for the divine providence never shapes a form

unless it received divine spirit

which is called the 'inspiring'

which is the activation of the potential of that shaped image

to receive the overflowing, the eternal manifestation

That always was and always will be outside of which there is the only vessel ... (pp. 50-51)

From these passages, it is clear that the divine is revealing itself or is being actualised through the world, which is its mirror, through the human being who is the reflection in that mirror. Thus, 'the real (God) creates the world as its mirror and reveals to itself through the polished mirror its mystery' (Sells 1994:73).

The universe is the mirror of God, and by this mirror, God knows and presents God's face. As said in the Hadith above that God is a 'Hidden Treasure', God could not be known unless through the universe. This Hadith implies that God desires and loves to be known and for this reason, God creates the universe. In other words, creation is the way for God to be known.

God, who is The Hidden Treasure, is called *al-Butun* [the interior], which is the essence (*dzat*, *al-Haqq*, Godhead, *Gottheit*), and is beyond all dualism, all names and all quiddity and eternal. *Al-Haqq* in his essence can never be known and always the Hidden Treasure. But in his names and attributes that manifested in the universe, He can be known. *Al-Haqq* on the level of Hidden Treasure is transcendent and cannot be known. Here the Hiddenness, which can be translated as the mystery and causes loneliness, makes *al-Haqq* desire and love (*ahbabbtu*) to be known in order not to be hidden anymore. The way to be known as said before is by creating the universe. This activity can be called *tajalli* [self-disclosure]. Thus, *tajalli al-Haqq* is God's self-disclosure by creating the universe, and the universe is the locus of God's self-disclosure.

Self-disclosure can be called revelation. It is God who revealed God-self. A divine being is alone in his unconditioned essence. This primordial solitude makes God yearn to be revealed in beings which can manifest to itself. The Hadith Hidden Treasure mentioned above represented the sadness of the divine names and attributes suffering anguish in non-knowledge because no one names them. Corbin (1997) thinks as follows:

And it is this sadness that descended in the Divine Breath (*tanaffus*) which is compassion (*Rahmah*) and existentionation (*ijad*) and in which in the world of Mystery is the Compassion of the Divine Being with and for Himself. (p. 184)

Thus, creation is essentially the revelation of God (Divine Being). In other words, *tajalli* is self-disclosure of *al-Haqq*

[God], which is unknown, into something more concrete. This *tajalli* is called '*ta'ayyun*' [entification], to be or become an entity.

When God decided to bring something into existence or decided to be known, God simply says to it, 'Be!' and it is. The notion of *creatio ex nihilo* seems to hold true. But the difference between this principle and the ordinary Islamic *creatio ex nihilo* is that for Ibn al-'Arabi, '*nihil* is not a total unconditional "non-existence," but "non-existence" in the particular sense of something being as yet non-existence as an empirical or phenomenal thing'. 'His nihil is the "possible" (*mumkin*), that is something that has the power (or possibility) to exist' (Izutsu 1987:201). This teaching is based on his view that all things have enough power to come out from the concealment into the field of existence in response to the ontological Command of God. The divine breath (*Nafas al-Rahman*) gives beings their forms, which is actually 'show Himself' to himself by manifesting to himself the virtuosities of his names and attributes.

According to the self-disclosure model, cosmos is essentially a set of mirrors where divine realities are reflected. It is a theophany of divine names and attributes. It is also an ever-flowing river whose water is renewed at every moment, but which preserves its general form determined by the structure of its bed. The water is a symbol of the light of Being which emanates at every moment throughout the universe, and the bed of river symbolised the archetypes, which determine the general direction of the flow (Nasr 1976:112). It is for this reason that Ibn al-'Arabi argues that creation or self-manifestation of the Absolute (God) is a perpetual process, a never-ending process. He says that 'the world goes on being created anew at every single moment. This he calls "new creation" (*al-khalq al-jadid*)' (Izutsu 1983:205). He bases his opinion on the Qur'an, 'Every day He is (engaged) in some affair' (the Qur'an 55:29). The word 'new' here means 'ever new' or which is renewed from moment to moment. Thus, the new creation means the process of an everlasting and ever new act of creation (Izutsu 1983:205). Nasr (1976):

It is annihilated at every moment and recreated at the next, without there being a temporal separation between the two phases [...] it is renewed at every moment without being repeated identically. (p. 112)

This concept of the continual re-creation of the cosmos becomes a mainstay of Islamic cosmological thinking. The continual re-creation can be interpreted as an interplay of the diverse divine names. At each instant, the divine mercy and gentleness create all things in the universe (Murata 1992):

At each instant, God reaffirms His similarity with things and His presence in the cosmos. But God is also incomparable and hence, just as His mercy creates, His wrath destroys ... At each instant, the divine gentleness brings the world into existence, and at each instant the divine severity destroys it. (p. 11)

Ibn al-'Arabi also uses the Plotinian term 'emanation' (*al-fayd*) as a synonym of the term *tajalli* (Izutsu 1983):

But 'emanation' here does not mean, as it does in the worldview of Plotinus, one thing overflowing from the Absolute one, then another from that first thing, etc. in the form of a chain. Emanation for Ibn al-'Arabi, simply means that the Absolute itself appears indifferent, more or less, concrete forms, with different self-determination in each case. (p. 154)

Ibn al-'Arabi differentiates between twofold of emanation: the Most Holy emanation (*al-fayd al-aqdas*) and the Holy emanation (*al-fayd al-muqaddas*) ('Arabi 1946:49). The Most Holy emanation is also called 'essential self-manifestation' (*tajalli dhatiy*) and 'self-manifestation in the Unseen' (*tajalli al-gayb*), whereas the second emanation is called 'sensuous self-emanation' (*tajalli shuhudiy*). The Most Holy emanation is the first decisive stage in the self-disclosure of *al-Haqq* [the Absolute]. As mentioned in the Hadith, the Absolute, which is unknown, desires to leave the state of being the Hidden Treasure and desires to be known. In this stage *al-Haqq* [the Absolute] manifests itself not to others but to itself. It is to be remarked here that the word '*in potentia*' (*bi al-quwwah*) indicates that *al-Haqq* has not yet actually manifested into many; it still maintains its original unity. This emanation is the first of entifications (*ta'ayyunat*), but philosophically is pure intelligible, and not yet real concrete existence. 'On this level, there is as yet nothing existent in actuality. The world itself is not existent' (Izutsu 1983:155). This first *tajalli* is to himself and for himself in the archetypal essences, which aspire towards their concrete manifestation.

The second type of emanation, the Holy emanation (*al-fayd al-Muqaddas*), is usually called 'existential self-manifestation' (*al-tajalli al-wujud*) and 'sensuous self-manifestation' (*al-tajalli al-shuhudiy*). This emanation is the manifestation or epiphany of the Absolute in the infinitely various forms of the Many in the world of concrete Being. It is the manifestation of the permanent archetype, which has been brought into being by the Most Holy emanation, from the philosophically intelligible only into sensible things (*min al-'alam al-ma'qul ila al-'alam al-mahsus*), or the manifestation from the potentiality into actuality and thus causes the sensible world to exist in actuality ('Arabi 1946:9). Using Aristotelian's terminology, 'it means the ontological process of the transformation of things in *potentia* into corresponding things in *actu*', which means the manifestation from potentiality into actuality, as mentioned (Izutsu 1983:156). This twofold of emanation (*tajalli*) is typified in the divine names 'the Hidden and the Revealed, the First and the Last', which Ibn al-'Arabi offers experiential verification in his theosophical practice of prayer (Corbin 1997:195).

Ibn al-'Arabi usually says that creation in the sense of giving existence is exclusively a divine attribute, whereas the creation of determination is a shared attribute. Nevertheless, on another occasion, he also speaks of human participation in the given divine existence. Here Ibn 'Arabi refers to a Hadith in which the Prophet describes how God will send a letter to the people of paradise in which it is written ('Arabi [1911] 1972):

From the Living, the everlasting, who never dies, to the living, the everlasting, who will never die: I say to a thing 'Be!' and it is. I give to you to say a thing 'Be!' and it will be. (p. 295)

Then, God would be understood as continuing Creator, and we human beings might be partners in creation, as the self-conscious, reflexive part of the creation that could participate in furthering the process.

Creation thus can be called the actualisation of the names and attributes. Before creation, the names and attributes were not actualised. It can be actualised only through the entities of the cosmos. Thus, the process of creation is called by Ibn al-'Arabi, 'the breath of the compassionate' (*nafs al-Rahman*) (Sells 1994:66). The breath of the compassionate (*nafs al-Rahman*) externalises the divine possibilities in the form of external objects and everything in existence emanated from an articulated 'breath of Him' *kun fayakun* [Be! And it was].

## God and the cosmos

The predominant tone in the Qur'an is an invitation to marvel at and investigate the mysteries and wonders of the cosmos and human beings. The Qur'anic text frequently describes the universe as the book of God. It is said that everything that exists, every phenomenon, every event is a 'sign' (*ayat*) of God, which means that everything gives news about God's nature and reality. Ibn al-'Arabi employs the term *dalil* to refer to the fact that the cosmos points to God. 'The term means to guide, directive, pointer, indication, signifier, evidence, proof, denotation' (Chittick 1998:3). He said, 'everything in engendered existence is a sign of Him' ('Arabi [1911] 1972:IV 411.20). 'All possible things are signs' ('Arabi III 492.11).

The fact that the whole cosmos signifies and names God explains its beauty and goodness. The cosmos has an innate eminence (*sharaf*), so it must never be condemned. The model of the cosmos as God's self-disclosure as described here will prevent the action. All beings are the epiphanies of the Divine, and all serve as the gateway to the infinite or as the Persian poem by Hatif of Isfahan states, 'If you dissect the heart of an atom you shall behold a sun within it' (Nasr [1977] 1978:196). With this model, we might say that the cosmos is the body of God (if we may use some anthropomorphic language). 'As the body of God, the cosmos is wondrously, awesomely, divinely mysterious' (McFague 1993:vii). The Qur'an says that on seeing God's 'waymarks' (*sha'a'ir*), those who possess 'godwariness' (*taqwa*) – an attribute that is constantly praised – should 'magnify' (*ta'zim*) these waymarks, which is to say, in Ibn al-'Arabi reading, that they should acknowledge the majesty and greatness of everything that signifies God, not because of its worth, but because of what it signifies (Chittick 1998:10).

In Christian tradition St. Francis of Assisi (1181–1226) was an outstanding representative of Christians who delighted in and

cared deeply for nature and had a genuine and deep respect for the integrity of creation. He lived long before the age of the democratic revolutions and did not speak of the 'rights' of birds, worms, wolves and rocks. He removed them from the category of 'things' by including them with humans in a single spiritual fellowship (Nash 1989:93; Armstrong 1973:71). His compassion extended to all creation, 'All Nature is the language in which God expresses His thought' (Inge 1899:250). In the year 1979, pope Paul John II proclaimed Francis Assisi as the Heavenly Patron for those who promote ecology (Gottlieb [1996] 2004:2008; Fanning 2001:87).

In Islam, it is also the model the Prophet Muhammad gave Muslims to follow that he honours each of God's signs of grace, even though it might be small and never found blame in anything. He is also known for his love of animals. He even had a special liking for cats. Aflaki mentioned that the Prophet did cut the sleeve from his coat when he had to get up for prayer and yet did not want to disturb the cat that was sleeping on the sleeve. One of his cats gave birth to kittens on his coat and special blessings were extended to Abu Huraira's cat, who killed a snake that tried to harm the Prophet and bite him despite the kindness he had shown it. Also, because he petted this cat's back, the cat never falls on its back and because his five fingers left a mark on her forehead, every cat has some black stripes over her eyes (Aflaki [1959] 1960:478; Schimmel 1985:49).

Ibn al-'Arabi argues that God (in essence/*mahiyah*) is incomprehensible and unapproachable. God in this sense is unknowable because He transcends all qualifications and relations that are humanly conceivable (Izutsu 1983:23). In fact, according to Ibn al-'Arabi, there are two modes of the real (God). The first mode is the *dzat* [the essence], which means beyond all dualism, all names and all quiddity. Using the word of a medieval German mystic, Meister Eckhart, the essence is called Godhead (Forman 1991:209). It is the ultimate reality that is the fountainhead of all other realities, the absolute unity beyond all relation. The essence cannot be known in a positive term; it can only be known negatively or in an apophatic way. In Christian tradition, this way of understanding of God was not unknown. Augustine (354–430), bishop of Hippo in North Africa, for example, often wrote of the inexpressibility of God and that one cannot know God but only what God is not (*via negativa*). Other mystics, like Meister Eckhart, said that 'God is transcendent, he is beyond all knowledge' (Eckhart 1994:236–237). The second mode consists of the divine names (*asma'*) or attributes, that is the name God designates. Ibn 'Arabi calls the level that is God's specific position concerning any other realities that we might want to take into account (Chittick 1998:xvii).

Those concepts are in accordance with traditional Islamic teaching that God is infinitely beyond the cosmos (*tanzih*), which means to 'declare God incomparable' with everything that exists. In Islamic terminology, the cosmos can be also defined as 'everything other than God' (*ma siwa Allah*).

From this point of view, God is completely inaccessible to his creatures and beyond their understanding (Murata 1992:8). Nevertheless, God who is unknowable and incomprehensible will transform God-self into something known and knowable. As in the Hadith mentioned above, 'the Hidden Treasure' unveils itself because it 'desires to be known'. 'Self-manifestation must mean nothing other than the Absolute becoming knowable and known' (Izutsu 1983:32).

The creation is an everlasting process. This means that the Absolute (God) is continually manifesting God-self in the infinity of possible things. This worldview employs that 'nothing remains static; the world in its entirety is in fervent movement' (Izutsu 1983:207). In other passages, Ibn al-'Arabi also emphasises that the particular aspect of the new creation in which the concretely existent things in the phenomenal world are after all infinitely various forms of divine manifestation and are ultimately reducible to the One ('Arabi 1946:124–125).

## God and human beings

In Islamic tradition, the Qur'an gives almost the same attention to the human being as to God. Even in Sufi's tradition, there is a saying, '*man 'arafa nafsahu faqad 'arafa rabbahu*', which means 'he who knows himself knows God'. Thus, knowing himself or herself is the station humans should pass to go to the higher station to know God. Knowing himself or herself also means knowing what it means to be human.

The crucial problem that we face now is that today humans are finding more and more difficulties in knowing their nature. By the development in science and technology and also the development in specialities, differentiation of the profession in living, making the portrait or concept of human being becomes more fractional and not integral. The integrity of what is the nature of human beings becomes more difficult to address. Almost all the disciplines of science, such as psychology, sociology, biology, physics, politics, economy, anthropology, theology and so on, take human beings as the object for their studies, but all have different approaches and goals. The differentiation of methods or approaches, although the object is the same (human beings), will have different conclusions about who and what the nature of a human being is. Thus, a human being always becomes a mystery in himself or herself, and this mystery has called the curiosity of the scholars to find answers. The more a scholar goes deeper in one aspect of the human being, the more she or he imprisons himself or herself in the cave she or he enters, which means the more she or he gets off from a comprehensive understanding of human being. Ernst Cassirer (1978) argued this oxymoron of the nature of human beings explicitly as follows:

Nietzsche proclaims the will to power, Freud signalizes the sexual instinct, Marx enthrones the economic instinct. Each theory becomes a Procrustean bed in which the

empirical facts are stretched to fit a preconceived pattern. Owing to this development our modern theory of man lost its intellectual centre. We acquired instead a complete anarchy of thought. (p. 21)

Both Western modern thinkers and Islamic tradition realise the crisis about the nature of human beings. The ideologisation of the science of religion has led to the segregated perception in viewing human beings and their relationship with God. In the *fiqh* [Jurisprudence in Islam] tradition, this science indirectly tends to present the face of God as wrathful, who warns human beings constantly about hell and punishment. God is distant, dominating and a powerful ruler whose command must be obeyed, whereas the human being is the subject which tends to go astray and should be ready to receive punishment from the wrath of God, the sovereign ruler. At the same time, the human being will also demand a reward for his or her devotion in following and performing God's decrees. Thus, if *fiqh* tends to introduce God as the wrathful, and theology has underlined the image of God as the most rational, then Sufism projects God as a Beloved, 'whose mercy precedes His wrath'.

If, as stated here, the first step to know God is by knowing oneself correctly, so the first step that we should undertake is how to know ourselves correctly. This is the problem that will be discussed in the next paragraphs. Ibn al-'Arabi said that 'the self is an ocean without shore. Gazing upon it has no end in this world and the next' (Chittick 1998:xiii). According to Islamic cosmology, especially Ibn al-'Arabi's teaching, God created the human being as the last creature, having employed all the other creatures to bring humans into existence. 'Human beings embrace all the hierarchy of all things within existence, from the most luminous to the darkest' (Chittick 1989:17). Not only do they have mineral, vegetal and animal components, but they also replicate the invisible and visible cosmic hierarchy, beginning with the first intellect and including the universal soul, prime matter, the universal body, the throne of God, God's footstool, the starless sphere, the sphere of constellations, the seven planets and the four elements. In some mysterious way, every human being contains everything in the cosmos (the Qur'an 15: 28–29, 32:7–9, 38:71–72). They were created from God's Spirit breathed into the clay of this world, and thus 'they combine the most intense light of existence and awareness with the dullest and most inanimate dust of the universe' (Chittick 1989:17).

It is said in the Hadith, 'God created Adam in His form'. It means that God created them in the form of all the divine names, including All-Merciful, Forgiving, Just, Creator, Generous, Powerful, Exalter, Abaser and so on. God placed every one of God's attributes within human beings. This is one of the interpretations that God taught Adam, All Names (the Qur'an 2:30). As a result, human beings display an indefinite variety of divine aspects or 'faces' (*wajh*) (Chittick 1994:32). It is precisely this human all-comprehensiveness that allows for the existence of every sort of human

possibility, every imaginable attribute, every conceivable act, whether good or evil, noble or base, just or unjust, compassionate or cruel.

If Adam had been created not in the form of God, but in the form of All-Compassionate, no human being could have been angry or cruel. If he had been created in the form of Vengeful, no one would have ever forgiven his or her enemy. If the human being had been created in the form of the Almighty or the Inaccessible, no one would have ever obeyed God or anyone else. But as human beings have been created in the form of all names, they can manifest any conceivable attribute. Thus, as human beings comprehend all names, each human individual reflects every divine attribute to some degree. But during their lifetime, the divine names manifest themselves in all sorts of intensities, combinations and inter-relationships. The result may or may not be a harmonious and balanced personality. The mode in which the names display their properties will determine human destinies in this world and the next.

A human being is indeed a theomorphic entity made upon the form of all the divine names; however, there is a right way and a wrong way to assume the divine traits. The wrong way is exemplified by the sin of Satan who perceived that the light within itself was more intense than in Adam and to say as a result, 'I am better than he – thou created me of fire and him of clay' (The Qur'an 7:12; 38:76). The result is that he claimed the greatness which did not in fact belong to him. For this pride, Ibn al-'Arabi says (Chittick 1989):

[H]e came to manifest the divine name Magnificent outside of its proper limits within the created world. He claimed incomparability for himself and as a result, came face to face with the Divine Wrath. (p. 24)

Human being, as mentioned, was created in the form of God. The same was the cosmos, so God also placed all of God's attributes or names within the cosmos. Both human being and the cosmos are similar in this sense, where God's attribute or names are there. Nevertheless (Chittick 1989):

[I]n the cosmos, the attributes are scattered and dispersed, while in man they are gathered and concentrated. In the cosmos, the divine names are relatively differentiated (*mufassal*) while in man they are relatively undifferentiated (*mujmal*). (p. 17)

As a result, every divine name displays its properties and effects in the cosmos singly or in various combinations with other names or group of names (Chittick 1994:33). Fazlur Rahman (1989) said:

[T]he only difference is that while every other creature follows its nature automatically, man *ought* to follow his nature; this transformation of *is* into *ought* is both the unique privilege and the unique risk of man. (p. 24)

If the Qur'an says, 'Verily, We created man in the best mould' (The Qur'an, 95:4), which means that to man God gave the purest and the best nature, and human has to preserve the pattern on which God has made him or her. It does not mean that God created human in the best mould or form physically,

for here the Qur'an uses the word *insan*, not *bashar*. Unlike *bashar*, which always related to the biological character of human being, such as eating, drinking, walking, the word *insan* is related to human privilege in three categories. The first is *insan* as related to human privilege as *khalifah* [vice-regent] or the one who bore *amanah* [trust], the second is *insan* as related to the predisposition of the negativity of human being and the third is related to the psychological and spiritual characters. We will discuss later in the principle of *d'être* of human beings.

If we come back to the model of the universe as God's self-disclosure, we will say that everything, not only a human being, in the universe, has its intrinsic value; they all embrace God in them. The tenet of God's self-disclosure will also remind us that in the universe human beings are not aliens or tourists on earth; human beings evolved on this earth with other creatures. Thus, the universe, the place we live in, is not a hotel but a home that we belong here, and we as human beings with our privileges and limitedness have responsibilities to preserve the pattern on which God has made. Every creature, including human beings, is, for good or evil, intertwined with the life and death of the others. We are locked together on this earth into a common destiny. We are radically inter-related with and dependent on everything else in our earth. If we can use the language of Martin Buber, it is the 'I-thou' relationship, and is a subject-to-subject relationship (Buber 1958). Unlike the *I-It* relationship, which exists whenever a person or object is utilised to achieve an end, the primary word *I-Thou* can only be spoken with the whole being. This relationship is between me and the Thou and for the I and the Thou. As a result of this relationship, there is the becoming one of the soul, 'I become through my relation to the Thou; as I become I, I say Thou.' (Taylor Stevenson 1963:193–209).

Each creature also has intrinsic value in and for itself, for one another and God. Thus (McFague 1993):

[O]ther creatures as well as our planet as a whole was not created for our benefit. Some parts are not merely for other parts, for all parts are valued by God and hence should be valued by us. (p. 185)

The other creature is also our relative, they are not something to be misused or even just used, for each attribute of God manifests itself in varying intensities within the things of the Cosmos. We are a part of and with each creature we can encounter many different beings that comprise our earth as valuable in themselves and to God. The difference between us and other creatures is that we share responsibility with God for the well-being of our planet. We, human beings also are part of the cosmos so that the cosmos is not a complete divine form without them. But the human being knows the cosmos and can shape it to his or her end, whereas the cosmos does not know the human being and cannot shape him or her except to the extent that it is a passive instrument in the hand of God (Chittick 1994:34). Besides that, although human beings share with animals, for example, in possessing the attributes of life, knowledge, desire and power, these

attributes can be found in human beings with much greater intensity than in animals. Moreover, only human beings can manifest the remaining attributes, such as speech, specifically. Generosity and justice cannot be ascribed to animals either.

Creation, of which we are a part, is an ongoing, dynamic story that we human beings alone understand, and hence have potential to help continue and thrive or let deteriorate through our destructive, greedy way. For this partnership creation, the Qur'an mentions either for the welfare or the '*fasad fi'l ard'* [corruption on the earth]. Thus, the human being has preference over other creatures. The reality that the microcosm (human beings) dominates over the macrocosm (the universe) leads Ibn al-'Arabi to write at the beginning of the *Fusus al-Hikam* that the human being is the spirit of the cosmos, whereas the cosmos without a human being is like the proportioned and well-balanced body, ready and waiting for God to inhale his spirit into it, but lifeless as long as the human being does not appear. Similarly, al-'Arabi wrote in *Futuhat* as follows (cited by Chittick 1994):

The whole cosmos is the differentiation of Adam, while Adam is the all-comprehensive book. In relation to the cosmos, he is like the spirit in relation to the body. Hence human being is the spirit of the cosmos, and the cosmos is the body. Through bringing together all of this the cosmos is 'the great human being', so long as the human being is within it. But if you look at the cosmos alone, without human being, you will find it like a proportioned body without a spirit. The perfection of the cosmos through the human being is like the perfection of the body through spirit. The human being is 'blown into' the body of the cosmos, so he is the goal of the cosmos. (p. 34)

From the given quotation, it is obvious that the human being is higher than other creatures, in this case the cosmos. She or he is the spirit and the goal of the cosmos. Nevertheless, what is important for theological anthropology is that the so-called higher levels depend on the lower ones rather than *vice versa*. This is the case with human beings and plants; the plants can do very nicely without us, in fact better, but we would quickly perish without them. So 'The higher and more complex the level, the more vulnerable it is and dependent upon the levels that support it'. For theological anthropology, this is a very sobering thought, especially for tradition that has been accused of advising human beings to subdue and has dominion over all other created beings. It has profound implications for reconceiving the place of human beings in the scheme of things (McFague 1993). Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179), a mystic, wrote:

The High,  
the low  
all creation,

God gives to humankind to use. If this privilege is misused,  
God's Justice permits creation to punish humanity. (p. 107)

We may also recall another source of this humbling concept, that is the philosophy of animism or organism, the belief that

a single and continuous force permeated all beings and things, making the world, in effect, one large organism. Henry More (1614–1687), an animist, said, there was a 'Soul of the World, or Spirit of Nature' (he called it the '*Anima Mundi*') present in every part in nature. This mysterious 'plastic power' literally held the world together (Jacob [ed.] 1987:xx–xxi). John Ray (1627–1705), an English Botanist who learned about animistic philosophy from Henry More, developed a global perspective as well as a profound admiration for natural processes. He was convinced that the idea that the whole natural world existed only for people's benefit was arrogance enough. After turning from botany to philosophy, he wrote *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of Creation* (1691), and said, 'It is a generally received opinion, that all this visible world was created for Man; that Man is the end of the Creation; as if there were no other end of any Creature, but some way or other to be serviceable to Man ...' yet, continued Ray, 'wise man nowadays think otherwise.' (John Ray 1735:175). Ray believed that animals and plants exist (in the words of More), 'to enjoy themselves'. Their value, their right to life, in other words, did not depend on their utilitarian function.

Just like the interdependency amongst all creatures on the earth, the interdependency amongst human beings themselves can also be inferred from the model of God's self-disclosure. And just like we feel profoundly connected with all other forms of life realistically, we also feel deeply related to all other human beings, our closest relatives. Together we need to learn to live responsibly and appropriately in our common home. The Qur'an assumed, affirmed and confirmed this equality of the entire human race, which is the essence of all human rights. It obliterated all distinctions amongst human beings except the goodness and virtue (the Qur'an, 49):

O you who believe! Let not one group of men among you deride another, for they may be better than them; nor one group of women deride another, for they may be better than them, nor slander each other, nor call each other names—how bad it is to call (each other) by bad names after all of you became Believers. Whoever does not desist (from this), they are the unjust ones. O you who believe! Avoid most suspicion, for some suspicion, is sinful, and do not pry into other's affairs and do not backbite each other; would anyone of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? – how distasteful would it be to you! So fear God—indeed God is forgiving and merciful. O people! We have created (all of) you out of male and female, and We have made you into different nations and tribes (only) for mutual identification; the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one most possessed of *taqwa* (righteousness, not one belonging to this or that race or nation); God knows well and is the best informed. (pp. 11–13)

Here the Qur'an emphasises essential human equality with the reason that 'the kind of vicious superiority which certain members of this species assert over others is unique among animals. This is where human reason appears in its most perverted forms' (Rahman 1989:45).

## Principe D'être of human beings

According to Ibn al-'Arabi, there is no creature better than human beings. Allah makes him or her alive, knows, leads with power, has a desire, speaks, hears, sees and decides, and those are divine attributes (*sifah rabbaniah*). The Qur'anic *Weltanschauung* sees the human being as a biological, psychological and social creature. There are three key concepts, as mentioned before, to denote the essential meaning of a human being: *bashar*, *insan* and *al-nas*. A human being as *bashar* is related to the material component, symbolised by the clay component. In all the verses *bashar* refers to a human being as a biological creature (the Qur'an 3:47; 18:110; 41:6; 33:33; 25:7; 25:20; 12:31). The word *bashar* always relates to the biological character of a human being. In this condition, a human being is automatically surrendered to God's law in the universe, the same way as the sun, animal and plant surrender to the law. She or he is *musayyar* [directed, controlled, not endowed with free will]. But the human being as *insan* and *al-Nas* is related to the breath breathed by God. God introduces him or her with the rules and laws, but God also gives him or her the power to follow, obey or astray. She or he becomes *mukhayyar* [having the choice or option] creature. She or he observed the divine attributes, as Ibn al-'Arabi marks, like *bashar*, *kalam*, *qadar*. She or he bore the divine realm, thus she or he is demanded to be responsible. The magnificence of a human being is a being that differs from animals. According to the Qur'an, the human being is the creature 'given with knowledge, who has taught by the pen, taught that which he knew not' (the Qur'an 94:4-5), 'He taught him eloquent speech (*bayan*)' (the Qur'an 55:4). Human beings have also been given the capacity to develop their knowledge and intellectual abilities. It is also for this reason that the word *insan* is often related to the word *nazar* [think]. The human being is commanded to think of what she or he strives for (the Qur'an 79:35), to think about where his or her food is from, how God poured down water in torrents, broke open the earth, splitting it with sprouts, and caused grain to grown within it (the Qur'an 80: 24-27). Besides, a human being as *insan* is a creature who bore the *amanah*, the 'Trust' (the Qur'an 33:72). God offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth, but they refused to accept it, being frightened of the burden involved; it was accepted by a human, whom the Qur'an tenderly rebukes as 'unfair to himself and foolhardy (*zalum* and *jahul*)' – for human, 'has certainly not yet fulfilled God's primordial command' (the Qur'an 80:23). *Amanah* is finding natural law, leading it or in the Qur'anic language knowing the names and then using them, with the *humanum* moral initiative to create the better world (cf. Fazlurrahman 1967:1-19).

Human beings bore *amanah*; thus, *insan* according to the Qur'an is also related to the concept of responsibility (the Qur'an 75:36; 75:3; 50:16). She or he was enjoined to be good and dutiful (the Qur'an 29:8; 31:14; 46:15), she or he has nothing but what she or he does and his or her deed will

be seen (the Qur'an 53:39-40). For his or her spirituality, *insan* is deeply influenced by the environment. When harm affects humans, they tend to worship sincerely, but when they are delivered, they tend to be boastful even *mushrik* [polytheist] (the Qur'an 10:12; 11:9; 17:67; 17:83; 39:8, 49; 41:49, 51; 42:48; 89:15). The word *insan* is also connected to the negative predisposition of human beings. According to the Qur'an, the human being tends to be an extreme wrongdoer and disbeliever (*zalim* and *kafar*) (the Qur'an 14:34; 22:66; 43:15).

Ibn al-'Arabi considers the human being on two different levels. First is the cosmic level. On this level, a human being is treated as a cosmic entity. In other words, here human being is a species. On this level also, a human being is the most perfect of all beings of the world, for she or he is *imago Dei*. Here a human being himself or herself is perfect; a human being is the 'perfect human', which is viewed as a perfect epitome of the universe, the very spirit of the whole world of being, a being summing up and gathering together in himself or herself all the elements that are manifested in the universe. A human being is a microcosm (Izutsu 1983:218). At the second level, human as an individual, not all humans are equally perfect.

In describing the *principe d'être* of human being, the concern is on the perfect man in the first level, which is a human being as a microcosm. Ibn al-'Arabi describes the mysterious process by which the self-manifestation of the Absolute is activated by the inner requirement of the divine names, leading towards the creation of the world, and in particular the creation of humanity as the being who sums up in itself all the properties that are diffused in the whole universe. The passage begins with the following words ('Arabi 1946):

When the Absolute God, at the level of His beautiful Names that exceed enumeration, wishes to see the (latent) realities of the Names – or if you like, say, His inner reality itself – as (actualised) in a 'comprehensive being' which, because of its being qualified by 'existence', contains itself the whole universe, and (wished) to make manifest to Himself His secret through it (i.e., the 'comprehensive being'). (p. 48)

In the Qur'an, Allah firmly says that a human being is the last creation who is created in the most perfectness and uniqueness compared with other creatures (the Qur'an 95:4). Allah, however, says that his human quality is incomplete, unfinished and thus he or she has to struggle for his or her perfection (the Qur'an 91:7-10). This process of perfection is possible because of his nature as *fitri*, *hanif* and rational. Besides, for a Muslim, there are prophets with their scriptures as the guidance for their life (the Qur'an 4:174).

## Human being and the process of self-perfection

The issue of human perfection is for a human being to be fully human. Humans are different from other creatures because they are forms of the whole, whereas other creatures



are parts. 'God creates Adam in His form', and God likewise created the cosmos in God's form. Both the cosmos and the human being are integral forms of God (Chittick 1998:xiii). To be perfect, human beings also live up to and realise their true role in this world as *khalifah* (vice-regent) on earth, reflecting the divine names and attributes. Being as *khalifah* on earth, and the theatre where the divine names and attributes are reflected, a human being can reach felicity only by remaining faithful to this nature that is by being truly himself or herself. It will imply that a human being should become integrated. God is one, and therefore the human being should become whole to reflect the One (Nasr 1972:144).

This concept is based on the view that Islam is the religion of *tawhid* [unity]; thus, all veritable aspects of Islamic doctrine and practice should reflect this central principle. The whole programme of Islamic spirituality is to make human beings whole, for only by being whole that man can become holy. In other words, the goal of Islamic spirituality is 'the integration of man in all the depth and breadth of his existence, in all the amplitude which is included in the nature of the universal man (*al-insan al-kamil*)' (Nasr 1972:144).

Al-Ghazali (c.1056–1111), one of the most prominent and influential philosophers, theologians, jurists and mystics of Sunni Islam, claimed that every human being is born and bound to be an aspirant to know God. It is said in the famous Hadith, 'Everyone who is born is born with a "pure nature" (*fitrah*), that is, an innate disposition to seek and know God' (Othman 1960:i). Thus, according to him, hunger and thirst to be close with God is not the result of the culture, but it is the deepest nature of human being. However, its development is often blocked by the vegetative and animalism in him or her. In other words, the divine spirit, which has been a driver for his or her body's vehicle, sometimes forget himself or herself; thus, he loses his or her autonomy as a master. For this matter, he or she may sin. Moreover, whilst human beings are pre-existent endowed with heart (*qalb*), spirit (*ruh*) and intellect (*'aql*), the human receives the principles of the lower self (*nafs*), the negative psychic force within a human, at the moment of creation (Bowering 1980:253). This lower self (*nafs*), which the carnal soul always incited to evil (*al-'amarah bi's-su'*), is the worst enemy. The view of *nafs* that 'habitually incites to evil (*al-ammarah bi's-su'*)' can be inspired by the temptation of Qur'anic figure of Joseph (Yusuf) who is solicited by Potiphar's wife (the Qur'an 12:23ff). Thus, the soul of a human being can be perceived as the theatre of a struggle between a God-oriented force and self-centred tendency within humans. Then, the task of a human being consists in 'overcoming the carnal and egoistic drives of this lower self (*nafs*) which militates against the impulses of the heart (*qalb*) that direct human totally to God' (Bowering 1980:260). In this world, human beings have to overcome this instinctive nature, to realise the sacred of this identity, which is the inmost being.

In general, there are three stations or steps for a Muslim to increase his or her soul's quality. First, *zikr* or *ta'alluq*, remembrance of Allah, that is, trying to remember and bound

his or her heart and intellect to God. Anywhere a Muslim has been, she or he should not get off this thinking and *zikr* to Allah (the Qur'an 3:191). This *zikr* led to the second station, *takhalluq* (character traits), which means assuming the character traits of God, the process whereby human comes to manifest the divine attributes. This process can also be called actualisation of the attributes of God into a human being. In this context Sufi is usually based on the Hadith, '*takhallaq bi akhlaqi Allah*' (assume the character traits of God!). The third station is *tahaqquq*, the capability to actualise consciousness and capacity as a Mu'min (believer) who is dominated by God's attributes, which then is expressed into action. This station is following the Hadith, which says that anyone who attains the state of the closest to God, God will see his servant's closeness. God says in the famous Hadith qudsi (Graham 1977):

My servant draws near to Me through nothing I love more than that which I have made obligatory for him. My servant never ceases drawing near to Me through supererogatory works until I love him. Then, when I love him, I am his hearing through which he hears, his sight through which he sees, his hand through which he grasps, and his foot through which he walks. (pp. 173–174)

By these stations, *ta'alluq*, *takhalluq* and *tahaqquq*, the believer will attain the status of *khalifah* Allah (the vice-regent), with his overwhelming capacity but at the same time full of love and peace. The good God's servant is also his *khalifah* to build an image of paradise on earth.

In mystical language, as a human being is created in God's form, hence every attribute of God is found in the innate disposition (*fitra*) of a human being. The path to perfection then is 'bringing these attributes out from hiddenness to manifestation' (Chittick 1998:xxiii). However, because of *tanzih* (that God is different from the creation), people cannot understand their innate disposition, made in the form of God, without God's help. This help comes as prophetic guidance. Thus, the only way to reach perfection is to follow the authority of the prophets (the Qur'an 33:21). To achieve full humanity, a human being must move towards the mercy, light and unity, which stand at the centre of the circle of existence. Guidance or *hidayah* that is presented by the prophets in the form of divine messages is the only door, which leads to that direction.

Ibn al-'Arabi sums up his position on the end of contemplation in a masterly way (Buckhardt 1959):

Thus God is the mirror in which you see yourself, as you are His mirror in which God contemplates His Names; now His Names are not other than Himself so that the analogy of relations is an inversion. (p. 142)

## Conclusion

The de-sacralisation of the non-human world paved the way for domination of the non-human world, leading to the environmental crisis. A mystical approach to the concept of

creation that defines creation as self-disclosure of God asserts the intrinsic worth of the non-human world. The non-human world has just as many rights to its internal integrity as does the human world. The non-human world was created not for the benefit of humans. Every creature is the work of God and deserves human treatment; thus, following Primatt, cruelty to any form of the creature is atheism and infidelity (Primatt [1776] 2000:321). Protection of non-human creatures (nature) and other parts of nature is not because they sustain humanity. Protection of nature should be based on the love of nature, which is disinterested love (love without a 'why'), in the words of Angelus Silesius, the author of *The Cherubic Wanderer*, "The rose is without "why"; it blooms simply because it blooms" (Angelus 1986:54).

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