



Rethinking al-Singkili's Islamic Cosmology

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Abstract : *The conception of universe has been one of the significant subjects discussed in the Qur'an. Verses of Qur'an have always encouraged human beings to observe and reflect upon on the creation of universe, seen in Islamic teachings as a sign of God's existence and power. Cosmology is a discipline that concerns about the origin of universe. In Islam, this topic has been a heated debate that comes with deeply theological consequences, in terms of tawhid (belief in God). This research is a library research with using a historical approach to obtain data and conducting content analysis. This research aims to explain further the concept of Islamic cosmology of 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili, an Indonesian philosophical sufi master and thinker. Al-Singkili begins his conception of cosmology by focusing on the definition of universe. This study finds out that he defined universe as all things other than al-Ḥaqq. Universe is created by Allah as a sign to know His Existence. Al-Singkili stated that the universe was not created from nothing to being (creatio ex nihillo), but rather through an emanation (fayḍ). In explaining the concept of emanation, al-Singkili used two terms, namely "fixed entity" (al-a'yān al-ṣābitah) and "potential entity" (al-a'yān al-khārijīyah). Both potentials, according to him, are a shadow of God. The fixed entity is a direct shadow of God, while the potential entity is a shadow of the fixed entity. So, it can be concluded that everything other than God (nature) comes from Him, and its existence depends on the His being.*

Keywords : *Cosmology, 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili, al-Fayḍ, al-A'yān al-Ṣābitah, al-A'yān al-Khārijīyah.*

Abstrak : *Salah satu perkara penting yang dibahas di dalam al-Qur'an adalah persoalan alam semesta. Ayat al-Qur'an mengajak manusia agar memperhatikan dan memikirkan tentang penciptaan alam semesta, karena di dalamnya terdapat tanda-tanda keberadaan dan kekuasaan Allah. Kosmologi adalah teori tentang asal-usul alam semesta. Dalam Islam, teori ini merupakan salah satu pembahasan penting yang memiliki konsekuensi teologis yang dalam dan berimplikasi kepada tauhid. Penelitian ini adalah penelitian kepustakaan dengan menggunakan pendekatan historis untuk memperoleh data dan melakukan analisis isi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan lebih jauh konsep kosmologi Islam 'Abd Ra'uf al-Singkili, seorang ahli sufi falsafi dan pemikir Indonesia. Al-Singkili mengawali konsep kosmologinya dengan menekankan pada defenisi atas alam. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa ia mendefenisikan alam sebagai segala sesuatu selain al-Haqq. Al-Singkili menyatakan bahwa alam semesta tidak diciptakan dari ketiadaan menjadi ada (creatio ex nihillo), melainkan melalui pancaran (fayḍ). Dalam menjelaskan konsep emanasi, al-Singkili menggunakan dua istilah, yaitu "entitas tetap" (al-a'yān al-ṣābitah) dan "entitas potensial" (al-a'yān al-khārijyah). Kedua potensi tersebut, menurutnya merupakan bayang-bayang Tuhan. Entitas tetap adalah bayangan langsung dari Tuhan, sedangkan entitas potensial adalah bayangan dari entitas tetap. Jadi, dapat disimpulkan bahwa segala sesuatu selain Tuhan (alam) berasal dari-Nya, dan keberadaannya bergantung pada keberadaan-Nya.*

Kata Kunci : *Kosmologi, 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili, al-Fayḍ, al-A'yān al-Ṣābitah, al-A'yān al-Khārijyah.*

A. Introduction

The Qur'an has paid great attention to issues of the universe and its processes of creation. Verses of the Qur'an talking about the universe and its phenomena are called the *kauniyah* verses.¹ Their number is numerous in the Qur'an, inviting Muslims to pay attention and think about the creation of universe, as the sign and representation of the power of God's existence. According to Baiquni, the sheer abundance of the *kauniyah* verses had encouraged many Muslims in the past to start conducting observational activities that involved systems of measurement. Such activities had enabled Muslim thinkers to treat science, no longer as a mere contemplative matter as they first learned it from the Greek people, but as parts of the empirical

¹ Quraish Shihab, *Membumikan al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Mizan, 1992), 31.

realities, allowing them to establish the basic foundation of sciences. This scientific method had in turn developed astrology into astronomy,² and in the 12th century AD, enabled Muslim scientists to establish an observational study of the universe, which is called cosmology,³ a science that is close to but different from astronomy, and or astrology.

Yet, the Qur'an does not provide detailed and explicit information about the process of creation of the universe and its contents. Therefore, it is not surprising that Muslim scholars' understanding about them is not only diverse but at some points also contradictory. However, it has been agreed that in relation to the creation of the universe, God is the *khāliq* (Creator) and nature is a creature (creation). Yet, what for common people may seem to be a simple matter, such as a discussion about the creation processes of the universe, often led Muslim thinkers within the field of Islamic cosmology into sharp and fierce intellectual debates, and throwing accusations of infidelity at each other.⁴

As part of their efforts to understand the processes of creation of the universe, Muslim thinkers have been preoccupied with questions about God's relationship with nature. They include as follows. "How did God first create this world?" "Was this nature not existent at all before God created it?" "If yes, does it mean that in the beginning, God was "alone" and then came His desire to create a nature?" "Why did God want to create nature?" "How did it come from God?" "When did God create nature?" "From what material did God create the nature?", and so forth. Answers to these questions are not easy, because all of them have their theological consequences. If the answers were careless, they will damage the God's image. For instance, if nature did not exist in the beginning, then it was God who created the nature. If this is correct, the word of "creation" may still

² Ahmad Baiquni, "Konsep-Konsep Kosmologis," dalam *Kontektualisasi Doktrin Islam dalam Sejarah*, ed. oleh Budhi Munawar Rachman (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1994), 59.

³ Sayyed Hossein Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam* (New York: New American Library, 1970), 92–125. Cosmology is the study of the universe; see Felix Pirani dan Christine Roche, *Mengenal Alam Semesta*, trans. by Andang L. Parson (Bandung: Mizan, 1997), 3; see Longman Group, *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (Great Britain: Longman Limited Group, 1983), 53.

⁴ Al-Ghazali, *Tahāfut Al-Falāsifah*, ed. Sulaiman Dunya (Kairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1966) and see; Kautsar Azhari Noer, *Ibn al-'Arabi: Wahdat al-Wujud Dalam Perdebatan* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1995).

trigger another debate, as to why did it only appear later and emerge from God's actions? In other words, it suggests that God is changing, from the one who did not create in the beginning into the one who created. As such, by extension, is at odds with the principles of monotheism, in which God is barren from a change. Seen this way, the effort to understand and give a logical explanation of God's relationship with the universe contains a very high perspective of monotheism.

According to Sayyed Hussein Nasr, Islamic cosmology, which principally is aimed to establish the oneness of God and the graduation of being, emphasizes that reality is metaphysically singular, but cosmologically may also include this nature that can be perceived by our corporeal sensibilities and imaginative minds. The whole of Islamic science and more specifically cosmology is to show the unity and interrelationship of all existence that leads to divine oneness.⁵ There are at least three Muslim thinkers who have formulated the concept of creation of the universe. They are theologians,⁶ philosophers⁷ and the Sufi. Of course, it is very interesting to examine cosmology from Sufi circles, considering that the Sufi goal is to get closer to God as close as possible, so that he can see God with the eyes of his heart, even his spirit can be united with God's spirit and one of them is seen in cosmology.

This paper will examine the thoughts of 'Abd Ra'uf al-Singkili on cosmology, especially on his concept of creation. Al-Singkili stated that the universe was not created from nothing to being (*creatio ex nihillo*), but rather through an emanation (*fayḍ*). His concept of *fayḍ* is similar to what Ibn 'Arabi has called as *tajallī*. 'Abd Ra'uf al-Singkili is one of the greatest sufi thinkers from Aceh who had significant contribution and played a major role on the development of Islamic mysticism in the Malay-Indonesian world.

⁵ Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam*, 22.

⁶ Nature, according to the theologian, is everything other than God. Allah created nature is not derived from "something", but created by Allah from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*; al-ijad min al- 'adam) then become exist; see Sirajuddin Zar, *Konsep Penciptaan Alam Dalam Pemikiran Islam, Sains Dan Al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Rajawali Press, 1997), 3; see Harun Nasution, *Teologi Islam: Sejarah, Analisa Dan Perbandingan* (Jakarta: UI Press, 1987).

⁷ Nature, according to the philosopher, is a group jawhar arranged from maddah (matter) and shūrah (form) that is on earth and sky; see Zar, *Konsep Penciptaan Alam Dalam Pemikiran Islam, Sains Dan Al-Qur'an*, 5 and 155.

The excellence of 'Abd al-Ra'uf in the field of Sufism is recognized by the authority in Sufism studies such as Annemarie Schimmel. Schimmel affirms that 'Abd al-Ra'uf was a genius man in his interpretation of Sufism. This remark is stated by Schimmel after having read 'Abd al-Ra'uf's work entitled *Daqā'iq al-Ḥurūf* which is, according to her, "very authentic and brilliant".⁸ The greatness of 'Abd al-Ra'uf on Sufism could not be replicated either by any scholar in Aceh in the later period as stated by Bruinessen, "'Abd al-Ra'uf was the last great Ṣufi of Aceh".⁹

The study on 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili has been started by a Dutch scholar namely D. A. Rinkes¹⁰, which investigated the influence of al-Singkili and spreading of his mystical ideas and teaching in Sumatera and Java in particular and in the Archipelago in general. Research concerning of al-Singkili also done by local scholar such as Oman Fathurrahman,¹² Syamsul Bahri,¹³ Ahmad Zaeni,¹⁴ Saiful Mujib,¹⁵ and Siti Halimah.¹⁶ Another

⁸ Annemarie Schimmel, "The Primordial Dot: Some Thoughts about Sufi Letter Mysticism," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam (JSAL)* 9 (1987): 9 see; Azyumardi Azra dan Oman Fathurrahman, "Tanbih al-Māsyī: Otensitas Kepakaran Abdurrauf Singkel," dalam *Tanbih al-Māsyī: Menyoal Wahdatul Wujud Kasus Abdurrauf Singkel di Aceh Abad 17* (Bandung: Penerbit Mizan, 1999), 16.

⁹ Martin Van Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning Pesantren Dan Tarekat: Tradisi-Tradisi Islam Di Indonesia* (Bandung: Penerbit Mizan, 1995), 190; Sir Richard Windstedt and Yusof A. Talib, *A History of Classical Malay Literature* (Selangor: Malaysian Branch Royal Asiatic Society, n.d.), 101–2.

¹⁰ Douwe Adolf Rinkes, *Abdoerraef van Singkel bijdrage tot de Kennis van de mystiek op Sumatra en Java* (Heerenveen: Electriche Drukkerij Nieuwsblad van Friesland, "Hepkema," 1909).

¹² Oman Fathurrahman, *Tanbih al-Masyi : menyoal wahdatul wujud kasus Abdurrauf Singkel di Aceh abad 17* (Bandung: Mizan, 1999).

¹³ Syamsul Bahri, "Tasawuf Syaikh Abd al-Rauf Singkel dan Paham Wujūdiyyah dalam Karyanya Kitab Tanbih al-Māsyī" (Jakarta, Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah, 2004).

¹⁴ Ahmad Zaeni, "Mengenai Tafsir Tarjuman al-Mustafid Karya Abd Al-Rauf Singkel: Analisis terhadap Sumber, Metode dan Corak Tafsir Turjuman al-Mustafid" (Jakarta, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2008).

¹⁵ Saiful Mujib, "Konsep Tauhid dalam Wahdat Al-Wujud 'Abd Al-Rauf Al-Singkili" (Jakarta, Universitas Paramadina, 2011).

¹⁶ Siti Halimah, "Analisis Terjemahan 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili dalam Kitab Tanbih al-Āmil fi Tahqīq al-Kalām fi an-Nawāfil" (Jakarta, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2004).

research has been conducted by Rasyad, Hermansyah and Zulkhairi,¹⁷ Abid Syahni,¹⁸ and Ridwan Arif.¹⁹ Azyumardi Azra (2012) also discussed ‘Abd al-Ra’uf al-Singkili in his Ph.D thesis which was published entitled “*Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII & XVIII*” (The Network of Middle East Scholar and Malay Archipelago 17th and 18th Century). In this work, Azra investigated the relation and connection between Muslim scholars of Malay world and muslim scholar network of Middle Eastern. In this network, Azra placed al-Singkili as one of renewal figures (*mujaddids*) beside Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī and Yusūf al-Makassārī (in 17th Century); ‘Abd al-Samād al-Palimbānī and Daud ibn ‘Abdullah al-Pattānī (18th Century). This research quite informed us the network of Muslim scholars in the Middle Eastern countries. Contrary to al-Singkili who employed the radical approach, al-Singkili, according to Azra, presented himself as evolutionist renewal figure. It means al-Singkili employed reconciliation approach while facing with two contradiction views. Even though Azra touched the mystical thought of al-Singkili, but it was very brief.

This research is a library research. With using using a historical approach to obtain data and conducting content analysis, this research aims to explain further the concept of Islamic cosmology of ‘Abd al-Ra’uf al-Singkili.

B. Brief Account on ‘Abd al-Ra’uf al-Singkili

The full name of ‘Abd al-Ra’uf al-Singkili is ‘Abd al-Ra’uf bin ‘Alī al-Fansūrī al-Jāwī al-Singkili. He was a Malay figure who came from Fansūr,

¹⁷ Rasyad, Hermansyah, and Zulkhairi, “Tanbih Al-Māsyī Al-Mansūb Ilā Tariq Al-Qusyasyī: Analisis Uslub Bahasa Arab Dalam Karya ‘Abd Ar-Rauf As- Singkili,” *Jurnal Adabiya* 18, no. 35 (2016): 62–82.

¹⁸ Ridwan Arif, “The Role of Shaykh Abd Al-Ra’uf Al-Fansuri In The Reconciliation of Sufism And Shari’ah of 17th Century The Malay World,” *Al-Shajarah: Journal of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC)* 23, no. 1 (2018): 207.

¹⁹ Arif, 45.

Singkil (modern: Singkel) in the North West Coast of Aceh. His father was an Arab, named Syaikh 'Alī. It is not known for sure when he was born, but according to Rinkes, as quoted by Azyumardi Azra, al-Singkili was born around the year 1024/1615 and possibly had a relation with Ḥamzah Fansūrī, because in part of his works his name is always followed by the statement "the nation of Fansūrī".²³

Quoting from Peunoh Daly, Azra said, that the father of al-Singkili, Syaikh 'Alī (al-Fansūrī) was an Arab who married a local woman from Fansūr. They lived in Singkil, where their son, 'Abd al-Ra'ūf was born.²⁴ That means that al-Singkili's father was not a Malay, but a settler who came from Arabia. However, regarding the history of al-Singkili's father, no other source confirms this. Then al-Singkili was often called 'Abd al-Ra'ūf 'Alī al-Fansūrī or 'Abd al-Ra'ūf Singkel or 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkili. He was also called "Tengku Syiah Kuala". This title was popular among the local people. At first, the title was "Tengku Syaikh in Kuala" because of his knowledge in the field of religion. For the purpose of simplification however, the people called him Syaikh Kuala and after that changed it to "Syiah Kuala". The Syiah Kuala's title given to 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkili has no relation to the school of Sii'ites school of thought which grows in Iran and Iraq.²⁵

Al-Singkili died in 1693 AD and was buried beside the tomb of Teungku Anjong who is deemed as the most sacred person in Aceh, near Aceh Kuala river, a village of Kuala Dayah Raya district, about 15 km from Banda Aceh. Hence, in Aceh, he was known as the Teungku in Kuala. Until now, his tomb has become a place of pilgrimage for many people, either from Aceh itself or from outside. Because of his fame, the name of al-Singkili is taken as the name of a college in Aceh, the University of Syiah Kuala.

²³ Azyumardi Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur tengah dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII dan XVIII, Melacak Akar-Akar Pembaruan Islam di Indonesia* (Bandung: Mizan, 1994), 189.

²⁴ Peunoh Daly, "Naskah Mir'at al-Thullab Karya cAbd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkili," dalam *Agama, Budaya, dan Masyarakat* (Jakarta: Balitbang Depag RI, 1980), 133 in; Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur tengah dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII dan XVIII, Melacak Akar-Akar Pembaruan Islam di Indonesia*, 190.

²⁵ Fuad Mahbub Siraj, "Islamic Theology in The Seventeenth Century Aceh," *Epistemé: Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Keislaman* 15, no. 1 (2020): 121.

Al-Singkili had produced many of essays and such of his works were written in Arabic and some in Malay. Many of his works are very famous in Malay. Some of his works are *Tanbīh al-Māsyī al-Mansūb ilā Ṭarīq al-Qushāshī*; This book contains an explanation of the ontological relationship between *al-Haqq* and *al-Khalq*. The explanations given were intended, among other things, to answer questions such as the ontological status of *al-khalq* (universe) whether nature is identical with God or whether universe has no form at all? The opinion of al-Singkili to the problems above is revealed in this book, which is the only book written by him in Arabic. *Kifāyah al-Muhtājīn ilā Maṣrab al-Muwaḥḥidīn al-Qā'ilīn bi Waḥd al-Wujūd*; The book consists of the explanation of concept of *waḥ dāh al-wujūd*. *Daqāiq al-Ḥurūf*; This book contains the teachings of mysticism and theology. In the work of interpretation of the "four-line phrase pantheistic" of Ibn 'Arabī, al-Singkili emphasizes God's transcendence vis-a-vis human beings and nature, while recognizing the importance of intuition (*Kashf*) in a mystical way to understand the nature of God because of the limitations of human reason.

It is interesting to take note that among of the works of al-Singkili, almost all are entirely in the form of prose. There is one work in the 'genre' of poetry, the poem of *ma'rifah*, one manuscript of which was copied in Bukit Tinggi in 1859 AD. This poem suggests about the four components of the Islamic religion: Faith, *Islām*, *Tawhīd* and *Ma'rifah*. This poem also asserts that the four components of religion that will determine if a person is considered as the perfect man (*Insān al-Kāmil*).

According to Braginsky, the data shows that al-Singkili can be considered as the true successor of the tradition of writing of 'religious-mystical poetry' which previously has been initiated by Hamzah Fansuri. Braginsky's conclusion is quite interesting because he did not choose ar-Rānirī as a successor of that tradition, although in the *Bustān al-Salāṭīn* for example, al-Raniri revealed many verses of poetry.

C. The Teaching about Universe and Humans

As a scholar and expert in various fields of religious sciences, al-Singkili had written a variety of essays that covered the fields of Islamic jurisprudence, *hadīs* (prophet's tradition), Islamic mysticism, Qur'anic commentary, and other religious sciences.²⁶ The doctrines of Sufism discussed by al-Singkili in *Tanbīh al-Māsyī* are distinguished into two types, i.e., the metaphysical doctrine and practical teachings. Cosmology is part of the metaphysical aspect, which is called by al-Singkili as the concept of creation.²⁷ It comes from the Greek words, "cosmos" (composition or arrangement) and "logos" (science). More precisely defined as a rational principle, and best categorized as a branch of metaphysics,²⁸ it discusses the origin of the universe and the processes of creation. It becomes one of the main subjects not only in Islamic philosophy, but also in Islamic mysticism.²⁹ As a science examining the universe, cosmology can be found the Qur'an in many of its verses that talk about natural phenomena.³⁰ The Arabic equivalence of the English word 'universe' is *al-ālam* or *alāmah*, which means sign or address. Both words originate from the same root: 'i-l-m ('*ain*, *lām*, dan *mīm*), which forms the word '*ilm* (knowledge). Another word with the same meaning is *alāmah* or *āyah*, which also means a sign.³¹ Therefore, according to al-Singkili, universe is created by Allah as a sign to know His Existence. He explained this with an analogy of universe with a *khātām* (stamp), the tool with which we understand that an object has had its owner or its creator. Al-Singkili wrote the followings:

Universe, like some people's opinion, is the name for all objects except the *al-Ḥaqq 'azza wa jallā*. The word universe is formed as it is because it is a name of something that became a tool to know the existence of God. Like the word *khātām* (stamp), which is used as a tool to know the being of thing stamped, universe is the name of a

²⁶ Fuad Mahbub Siraj, 143.

²⁷ Arif, "The Role of Shaykh Abd Al-Ra'uf Al-Fansuri In the Reconciliation Of Sufism And Shari'ah of 17th Century The Malay World," 207.

²⁸ Burhanuddin, Nunu, dan Usman Syihab, "Cosmological Dimensions in The Teachings of The Naqshabandi Sufi Order," *Kalam* 13, no. 2 (t.t.): 143.

²⁹ Fuad Mahbub Siraj, "Tasawuf dan Kosmologi," *Hipius: Jurnal Ilmu Ushuluddin* 2, no. 1 (2014): 53.

³⁰ Siti Nurjannah, "Kosmologi Dan Sains Dalam Islam", *Akademika: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 18, no. 1 (2013): 109–22.

³¹ Noer, *Ibn al-'Arabi: Wahdat al-Wujud Dalam Perdebatan*, 59.

tool to know the existence of Allah, because that existence of Allah is evidence that shows the existence of Allah *ta'ālā*.³²

Al-Singkili stated that this universe was not created from nothing to being (*creatio ex nihillo*), but rather through an emanation. He said:

Students, please be understood that everything is not created by *al-Haqq* (SWT) from nothing to being, but rather with His *Rahmah*" (grace). Allah said, "Then, with the *Rahmah* of Allah, Allah makes and creates everything appropriate to His divine Knowledge at the beginning in an orderly manner."³³

With the *Rahmah* of Allah (SWT), universe and its content, including human, become exist. Al-Singkili quoted the statement from one of his teachers in *Bulghah al-Masir*:

In the end, the existence of universe does not stand by itself, but is created through emanation (*fayḍ*). It is understood here as how knowledge is emanated from God. This way, the universe is not the real substance of God, because it is a new being. Yet at the same time it is not totally different from Him either, because it is not the second being that stands by itself outside the God. This is because, since the eternal times, no one has accompanied God for He is the first Being before any other things were created. Such has been the case until now. In other words, universe is a novel being, because it created through the emanation of His Being: it is not the being that accompanies God, but the being that was created by God. So, the universe is not in the same stage with God, but under the stage of God.³⁴

The concept of *fayḍ* (emanation) is similar to what Ibn 'Arabī has called *tajallī*, as they share the same meaning. The concept of *tajallī* by Ibn 'Arabī is based on the view that God in His alone (before the universe exist) wanted to see Himself outside of Himself (universe). Therefore, He created this universe. Thus, this universe is a mirror of God. When He wants to see

³² Abd al-Rauf al-Sinkili, *Tanbīh al-Māsyī al-Mansūb Ilā Ṭarīq al-Qusyāsyī* (Jakarta: National Library, n.d.), 2–3. and the library of the Leiden Universitas (Cod. Or. 7030 and Cod. Or. 7031]. Next will be state as al-Sinkili, *Tanbih al-Māsyī*.

³³ Al-Sinkili, 16.

³⁴ Al-Sinkili, 6.

Himself, He sees the universe. Through that mirrors He also manifests and introduces His Face. On the other hand, God is “the Hidden Treasure” that cannot be known except through the universe. This idea is based on a *hadīṣ Qudsī*: “*Kuntu kanzan makhfiyyan fa aḥbabbtu an u'rafā fa khalaqtu al-khalq fa bī'arafūnī*, which means, “I was the Hidden Treasure and wanted to be known, so I created a creature through which they knew about Me”. This hadith means that the creation of the universe is a path that is done by God in order for him to become known. The creation of universe, in other words, is equal to *tajallī* (manifestation).³⁵

Tajallī can be interpreted as a process of creation in which God manifested His Self onto His creatures.³⁶ The occurrence of *tajallī*, or the creation of universe is made possible because God wanted to be known by His creatures. In other words, it is God's desire to see ‘His Self’ that has become the cause of creation of the universe. Universe is referred as a mirror to see His self. All in all, “universe” is a sign that indexically refers to the existence of the creator, who is the One Allah. Without His *tajallī*, the universe will never exist.

Ibn ‘Arabī drew his term from Plotinus’ “emanation” (*ḥayḍ*), which is synonymous to *tajallī*. However, ‘Arabī’s term of emanation is distinct to that of Plotinus’, understood as a condition in which the One is set to present upon a thing, which will present upon another thing, and upon another thing until this presence becomes a cycle. “Emanation” for Ibn ‘Arabī is understood as *tajallī*, or a manifestation of *al-Ḥaqq* (the ultimate reality) in a form that is different from Him, that is, from less concrete creatures to more concrete ones. The ultimate reality shows His Self directly in many different forms.³⁷

In his explanation on the concept of emanation, al-Singkili often mentioned two terms: the fixed entity (*al-a’yān al-ṭābitah*) and the potential entity (*al-a’yān al-khārijīyyah*). Both entities according to him are the shadow of God. The fixed entity is a direct shadow of God's essence, while the potential entity is the shadow of the fixed entity itself. Thus, it can be concluded that any things other than God (universe) come from Him, and

³⁵ Noer, *Ibn al-‘Arabī: Wahdat al-Wujud dalam Perdebatan*, 57–58.

³⁶ Noer, 57.

³⁷ Noer, 61–62.

the existence depends on His existence. In *Kifāyah al-Muḥ tājīn*, he explains about this as follows:

“... so, *a’yān ṭābitah* (the fixed entity) is the shadow of the Substance of *al-Ḥaqq* (the True Reality). Thus when all influences and laws of *a’yān ṭābitah* (the fixed entity) are becoming visible upon *a’yān khārijīyyah* (the potential entity), then *a’yān khārijīyyah* (the potential entity) becomes the shadow of *a’yān ṭābitah* (the fixed entity) too.”

Considering al-Singkili’s explanation above, it seems that he drew his theory from the concept of *tajallī* developed by Ibn ‘Arabī. As such is evidenced by the fact that Ibn ‘Arabī has divided his concept of *tajallī* into two types: the most Holy emanation (*al-fayḍ al-aqdās*) and the Holy emanation (*al-fayḍ al-muqaddas*).

Al-fayḍ al-aqdās (the most Holy emanation) is an emanation that takes place at the *martabat wāḥidiyyah* (the essential stage). Usually it is called as the essential self-disclosure (*al-tajallī al-ẓāṭī*) and the mystical self-disclosure (*al-tajallī al-ghaibī*). This is the stage for the first disclosure or the first determination (*ta’ayyun al-awwāl*), also known as the *tajallī* stage of the attributed substance and His *Asmā* (Names). At this stage, *al-Ḥaqq* does not show His Self before many things, but only to His Self alone. This *ta’ayyun* (determination) only exists in the intellectual levels, not in the empirical entities. This reality is similar to what was explained by al-Singkili in *Kifāyah al-Muḥ tājīn*, as “the fixed entity” (*al-a’yān al-ṭābitah*).³⁸

Fayḍ al-muqaddas (the Holy emanation) is the emanation that takes place at *martabat tajallī syuhūdī* (the empirical self-disclosure), also known as the existential self-disclosure (*al-tajallī al-wujūdī*) and *ta’ayyun al-ṣāni* (the second determination). On this stage, the permanent entities appear from the potential entity which exists from the rational universe to the empirical universe (*min al-‘ālam al-ma’qūl ilā al-‘ālam al-maḥṣūs*), or the appearance of what is potential in the form of actuality. This reality is similar to what was explained by al-Singkili *Kifāyah al-Muḥ tājīn*, as the potential entity (*al-a’yān al-khārijīyyah*).³⁹

³⁸ Noer, 62.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 62–63.

The universe was created by Allah from the so called *Nūr of Muhammad* (the Light of Muhammad). Before everything was created by Allah, universe was on the Divine Knowledge of Allah, or called *al-a'yān al-ṭābitah* (the fixed entity). It is the shadow of the Substance of Allah. After the change of *al-a'yān al-ṭābitah* into *al-a'yān al-khārijīyyah* (the potential entity), *al-a'yān al-khārijīyyah* becomes the shadow of the owner of that shadows, and He is not other than God. Al-Singkili quotes the *hadīs* of Muḥammad SAW:

The first creature created by Allah was the *rūḥ* (the spirit) of Muḥammad SAW, as informed by a hadith tradition in which the Prophet was asked by Jabir about the first creature created by Allah. At that time the prophet answered: Hi Jābir! Before creating any things, Allah had created the light of your prophet from His light, then He span that light with His power according to His will, and at that time there did not yet exist the *lauḥ* (sheet), pen, heaven, hell, angels, sky, earth, sun, moon, *jīn*, or even humans. So, when Allah wanted to create other creatures, he divided that light into four parts. From the first part, He created a pen; from the second He created *lauḥ*; and from the third He created *'arsy* (throne). And for the fourth part, He further divided it into another round of four parts. The first is *ḥamālah al-'arsy* (the buffer to the throne *'arsy*), the second is the throne, and at the third is the angels. Then the fourth part is further divided into another four parts. From the first part of it He created the sky, from the second part is the earth, and from the third part are the heaven and the hell. Then the fourth part is further divided into four parts. From the first part of it He created the light of the Muslim vision, the second part of it is the light of heart, that is the *ma'rifah* to Allah, and the third part of it is the light of humanity, that is the light of tawhid, *lā ilāha illā allāh muḥammad rasūl Allāh*.⁴⁰

Azyumardi Azra states, "in *Kifāyah al-Muḥtājīn*, al-Singkili defended the transcendence of God to His creatures. He rejected the opinion of *Wujūdiyyah* that emphasizes the immanency of God over the creatures. He explained that before God created the universe (*al-'ālam*) He always thought about His Self alone, that caused the creation of *nūr*

⁴⁰ Al-Singkili, *Tanbih al-Māsyī*, 16–17.

Muḥammad (the light of Muhammad). From that *nūr Muḥammad* God created the fixed entity (*al-a'yān al-ṭābitah*), that is the form of the universe, that becomes a source from outside of the potential entity (*al-a'yān al-khārijīyyah*), the creatures on the concrete form. Al-Singkili concludes that even though *al-a'yān al-khārijīyyah* is the emanation from the essential being or existence, they are different from the God Himself: the relation of both is like the hand and shadow, the latter is different from the former. We can see that al-Singkili has tried to confirm the transcendence of God over the creatures.

In his account about God's transcendence, al-Singkili has tried to explain to the followers of the essential *wujūdiyyah*, which emphasizes God's immanence in the creation, that God is neither fully immanent, nor identical to the creatures: but God is different from His creatures. The concept of immanency and transcendence was also discussed by Ibn 'Arabī, especially through his statement of "He and not Him", "*tanzīh* and *tasybīh*". Evidence to al-Singkili's borrowing of 'Arabī's concept of "*tanzīh* and *tasybīh*" can be seen in the quotation below:

As much as this universe is not squarely the Substance of God (*zāt al-Ḥaqq*), due to it being a creation, it is not totally different from Him either. The universe is not the second being that stands alongside the God.⁴¹ "... that was our intention, this universe is not God (*al-Ḥaqq Ta'ālā*), but it is at the same time not different from God..." This universe is different from God, even though it does not really separate from Him, because separation requires two independent beings, whereas the One who is Super Independent (*qiyāmuḥu bināfsihī*) is only God, the One and the Almighty.⁴²

Al-Singkili's concept of God's transcendence above can be explained through the following examples:

The first example is a mirror's reflection. If a man stands in front of a mirror, he will see that the right side of his reflection on the mirror is in fact his left side, and vice versa. Moreover, if the man stands in front of many mirrors, these mirrors will reflect several figures, who are in fact a reflection of a similar person. The second example is the

⁴¹ Al-Singkili, *Tanbīh al-Māsyī*, 6.

⁴² *Ibid.*,

relationship between a hand and a movement of that hand. A movement of a hand is not the hand itself but only part of the hand. The third example is a man who is knowledgeable in writing Arabic letters. Before he is able to write Arabic letters on a white board, the letters have been fixed (*ṣābit*) inside his knowledge. Knowledge always stands on its substance and is erased only from its inside. The essence of the Arabic letter is not the man's essence (despite the letters have resided inside his knowledge): the letters remain the letter, and the man remains the man. This example is aptly justified by the following maxim: "*Fa al-kullu Huwa al-Haqq*", which means, 'the presence of all things is but a manifestation of the Most Righteous One.

According to al-Singkili, humans are part of the universe, because universe includes all things other than *al-Haqq*. Therefore, the universe is also a shadow of *al-Haqq*, or a shadow of His shadow. As he said, "If it is related to *al-Haqq*, the universe is like shadow. It is not the other essence that stood apart from the essence of Allah, which has been observable since the beginning, and when later He has had a being. Thus, according to this concept, human is a shadow to *al-Haqq*, or a shadow of His shadow".⁴³

Al-Singkili acknowledged that humans in their stage of being a God's servant can ascend to stages closer to God (*taraqqī*). But essentially, when they do it, they are still and will always be a human, a God's creature. Just like God when He descends from spirituality to universe through the process of *tanazzūl*, He is essentially still a God, or *Khāliq*, the creator. It means that the essence of humanity will not change into the essence of Allah, and vice versa, even though at the beginning (of the creation?):⁴⁴

Syaikh Muhy al-Dīn gave some explanations over the hadith stating that every God's creature is created from the light of the prophet Muhammad PBUH, who is the primary being and the noble one close to Allah, and also the leader of all beings. In his explanation, the Syaikh said, "based on this *hadīṣ*, it is clear to you, that the prophet is identical to all universes, and that seen from the perspective of its unity, every part of the universe is a picture of the prophet. On the other note, seen from the perspective of its

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

distinction and dependence, universe is part of the prophet, of its parts, and of what's other than itself, because the light of the prophet that manifests in the form of reason is the foundation of the creation of the universe, as you might have known.⁴⁵

D. The Ontological Relation between God and Universe

From the explanation above, we can draw an ontological relation between God and universe. In the concept of *wahdah al-wujūd*, the ontological relation between God and universe is the main theme. As I have explained before, the definition of *wahdah al-wujūd* or the *Tauhīd wujūd* is an ism which forms a belief that the ultimate being or the ultimate existence is only one, that is the existence of God, thus suggesting that what other than God does not exist (or that their existence is relative). This definition, however, has triggered several questions for debate, such as the followings: “Does the universe not have a form of being at all?”, and “Is the universe identical to God?”.

Al-Singkili began his description by explaining the meaning of the universe. In summary, he recognized the universe as everything other than *al-Ḥaqq*, because it is bound to the *mumkināt* attributes (the possible attributes).⁴⁶ From his definition, it is clear that he wanted to emphasize the transcendence of God to the universe. But he did not stop at that definition. He continued his explanation by stating, “And if it is related to *al-Ḥaqq*, the universe is like His shadow, it is not the other of essence beside the essence of Allah that has been known at the early time, and then has a being”.⁴⁷

Al-Singkili embraced changing opinions with regards to the relation between God and the universe. At first, he emphasized God's transcendence over His creation. Yet, later in his life he did not refuse that the universe is not totally different from God, because it is in any way a shadow of His shadow, as he has explained before through the concept of emanation. To strengthen his view, al-Singkili quoted what Ibn 'Arabī said in his *Fuṣūṣ al-*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 17–18.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

Hikam, “our potential is essentially the shadow of Allah, no other than Him”.⁴⁸

Al-Singkili continued his explanation by saying that “the shadow will not become the existence, but become a being or an existence of the owner of the shadow. Therefore, the existence of a being largely depends on the being of the owner of that shadow. So, because the existence of a shadow depends on other's existence, then that other's existence is the ultimate existence, so are other elements related to that existence”.⁴⁹ So the shadow and the source of the shadow are essentially one. Nevertheless, although they are one, they still have differences and similarities. He continued saying, “With that belief, you know that this universe belongs to *al-Ḥaqq*, and because of His existence this universe can exist, as was told by the Prophet Muḥammad PBUH, “*wa mā naḥnu illā bihi wa lahu*”, which means “And we all exist is because of Him, and for Him”.⁵⁰ It means that the universe and its content are other than God Himself. Our beings, or our existence, is a relative being, because the ultimate beings or the ultimate existence is the existence of *al-Ḥaqq*. This is what he meant by his concept of *tasybīh al-Ḥaqq* with regards to His creation.

After explaining the side of *tasybīh* between *al-Ḥaqq* and *al-khalq* (the creation), al-Singkili continued his explanation by saying that, “this universe is not the true essence of *al-Ḥaqq*, because if so, then it will break the *kalam* (Speech) of Allah “Who has created everything”, because it is impossible for a creature to create his own substance. Allah said to Prophet Muhammad (SAW), *Let say (O Muhammad)! Allah is the creator of everything*”, He does not say, “and Allah is the creator for Himself”. Also, Allah said, “*All praise be to Allah, God all of the nature*”, He does not say, “All praise be to Allah, God who creates His own substance”.⁵¹

These explanations are evidence to al-Singkili's concept of *tauḥīd ḥaqīqī*, which believes that Allah is *Wājib al-Wujūd*, the one true God that has neither duality, nor plurality, nor similarity.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

The next evidence supports al-Singkili's concept of *tauḥīd ulūhiyyah*, that is an attitude that embraces the oneness of God, worshipping no other beings than the God Allah. In these regards, al-Singkili states, "the other evidence is that if universe is an ultimate essence of God, He will not impose upon the universe a set of heavy legal obligations such as fasting et cetera"⁵²

The evidences have shown that the universe that is not truly the substance of Allah is human. If human beings wants to create something that they do not have, then they say "be!" and that things cannot become into being, of course they will be aware that they are not truly the substance of Allah, because if they really are, it is confirmed that anything that they said will be created and exist, because the Qur'an has said, "If He has a will, He will only say to it: Be! Then it will be". So, it cannot be the things commanded by the man. It is evident that this universe is not truly the essence of Allah. For one thing, the creation of no things is due to the lack of synchrony between the will of human beings and the will of *al-Ḥaqq*."⁵³ This argumentation is called by al-Singkili as *Tauḥīd Af'āl*. For him, *Tauḥīd Af'āl* is a belief that Allah is the creator, the ruler and the controller of the universe.

All of these evidences show that universe is different from God, although it is not really separate from It too. Because separation needs two beings that are equally independent, whereas the being that can stand on itself is only Allah the One. This is the relation between *al-Ḥaqq* and *al-khalq* according to al-Singkili. Both of them are the same but also different, or different and same at once. Al-Singkili got that understanding from Ibn 'Arabī, especially from his thought about *waḥdah al-wujūd*, evidenced by the fact that al-Singkili quoted Ibn 'Arabī in many of his works.

In one part of *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah* Ibn 'Arabī said:

"Therefore, the universe can be seen as something that is alive (*zāhara*), that is hearing, seeing, knowing, willing, that has power and is talking. He works at His will, as He said: "Say it: 'everything is working like His way.'" (QS. 17:84). Universe is His deed; therefore, it can be seen (*zāhara*) with the attributes of *al-Ḥaqq*. If you say something about nature, "he (nature) is *al-Ḥaqq*," you have

⁵² *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵³ *Ibid.*,

said the truth, because Allah said, “*and Allah has thrown.*” If you say something about nature, “he (nature) is the creation (*al-khalq*), you have said the truth, because Allah says, “*when you throw.*” (QS. 8:17). Therefore, He is uncovered and covered, affirming and negating. So (that is) Him and not Him. He is what is known and what is unknown. “*and the beautiful names are God's*” (QS. 7:180), but His appearance through those names by way of absorbing those names (*al-takhallūq*) is nature.⁵⁴

In showing the radical ambiguity, Ibn 'Arabī always uses the surah above, which is the surah related to the history of the Prophet PBUH when he threw sand to the enemy in the war of Badar, which was won by the Muslims. About that verse Allah has said: “You are not throwing when you throw, but Allah who is throwing.” (QS. 8:17). This verse confirms the individuality of the Prophet's reality, and then negates it by saying that Allah is the true reality beyond this seen phenomenon.

In facing that issue, like the paradox of his system of thought, the answer of Ibn 'Arabī is ambiguous: “universe is God (*al-Ḥaqq*) and not God at once”, or in Ibn 'Arabī's own term, “Him and not Him” (*Huwa lā Huwa*). For 'Arabī, the universe is the appearance (*tajallī*) of God, and with that, everything inside it is His manifestation. Therefore, God and universe cannot be understood except as the unity between the ontological contradictions. It can be seen from what the Qur'an has stated, that Allah is the *al-Baṭīn*, also *al-Zāhir*, *al-Wāhid* also *al-Kaṣīr*, *al-Qādim* also *al-Ḥadīs*, *al-Wujūd* also *al-'Adam*.

However, Ibn 'Arabī himself recognized how difficult and complicated it is to understand the ontological relation between God and universe. He pointed to it many times: “but the clear formulation on this thing is really complicated. The verbal expression is not sufficient for him and the conceptualization cannot define it, because he is losing fast with the attributes opposite to each other.”⁵⁵ Another expression with the same intent is: “for us in the divine knowledge there is no problem that is ambiguous, difficult to understand except in this thing.”⁵⁶ Therefore, it is no

⁵⁴ Noer, *Ibn al-'Arabī*, 47.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*,

wonder that so many people misunderstood Ibn ‘Arabī’s thoughts, especially his *waḥdah al-wujūd*. In this regards, they misunderstood Ibn ‘Arabī’ by calling him a man who equated God with universe, which in modern terms is called as “phanteis”, “monis”, “monis phanteis”, etc.

Difficulties to understand the ontological relationship between God and universe are due to the fact that their relationship is always ambiguous: they have some contradictions that yet constitute as part of their harmonious unity. In order to support his theory, Ibn ‘Arabī quoted a statement from Abū Sa’īd al-Kharrāz, a well-known Ṣūfī from Baghdad in the 9th century AD: “...that Allah (SWT) cannot be known except by unifying the contradictions.”⁵⁷ “Allah is al-Ẓāhir and al-Bāṭin” (QS. Al-Hadid, 57:3). It means that what’s visible to the sight of one’s eyes is God. “Wherever you turn, there is the face of God.” (The Qur’an, 2:115). This statement shows the aspect of *tasybīh* (immanence) that is parallel to the conception of God that can be visible. On the other side, the Qur’an stated that human’s vision cannot comprehend (the light of) God, “*lā tudrikuhu al-abṣār wa huwa yudriku al-abṣār*” (The Qur’an, 6:103). This last statement shows the aspect of *tanzīh* (incomparability) that is parallel to the conception of God that can be invisible.

In this regards, al-Singkili states, “He is real in term of knowledge, but not real in term of form. There is no one similar to *al-Ḥaqq*, but He covers all things. It is similar to what was explained by Ibn ‘Arabī, that God has two aspects, the visible and the invisible. Moreover, he states that the one who can observe Allah is only Allah Himself. As such is due to the limited ability of human’s reason to know the essence of Allah, and that the highest state of knowing the God is the feeling of confusion. Yet this confusion is commendable, because it belongs only to those who are knowledgeable about the process of God’s emanation and the transmission of His light.”⁵⁸

The visible aspect is the appearance aspect (*ẓuhūr*) of the names and the attributes of God that appears to universe. The universe is a place for the appearance (*al-maẓhar*) of the Names and His Attributes. In this context, *ẓuhūr* is the synonym of *tajallī*. In this way, God is immanence in the universe. This is the aspect of *tasybīh*. The unseen aspect is His hidden

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁵⁸ Al-Singkili, *Tanbīh al-Māsyī*, 13–14.

aspect, which is the Substance of Him, which is symbolically called as *kanz makhfi* (The Hidden Treasure). God, in term of His substance, is unknown and cannot be known; He still hides. This way, God is the ultimate in His absolute, the metaphysical, and the transcendence. This is the aspect of *tanzih*.⁵⁹

Universe has similarities to God in a special level. The universe is a sign that tells the identity of God. Through the universe, man can know God. So, from Ibn 'Arabi's point of view, God has two sides: the mysterious and the appearance of self. The first side is called as *tanzih* and the second side is called as *tasybih*.⁶⁰ The unseen aspect of God is the oneness of His substance (the aspect of *tanzih*) and the visible aspect of God is the nature and its components (the aspect of *tasybih*). Therefore, a definition about *al-Haqq* should cover a whole definition of all existents (*al-maujudat*). This is what is meant by Ibn 'Arabi's statement that "*al-Haqq* is restricted to some limits" It means that His definition covers definitions of all things.⁶¹ But a perfect definition of *al-Haqq* is impossible to reach because His definition holds on a definition of the universe that is also impossible to reach, because of the limitation of human ability to know all forms that are limitless in their details. With regards to the impossibility of formulating a perfect definition of *al-Haqq*, Ibn 'Arabi said the followings:

Forms of the universe cannot be confirmed and comprehensively observed, and definitions of each form are unknown, except the forms that are included in the definition of the universe. Therefore, the definition of *al-Haqq* is totally unknown because such a definition is unknown except as far as the definition of each form of the universe is known and such definition is also impossible to exist. Therefore, the perfect definition of *al-Haqq* is impossible to reach.⁶²

In this regards, al-Singkili also maintained the difficulty or inability of human beings to know God and to know themselves, as suggested a hadith tradition that calls for observing the God through humanities. On interpreting the hadith "*man 'arafa nafsahu faqad 'arafa rabbahu*", which

⁵⁹ Noer, *Ibn al-'Arabi*, 67.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 95.

means “those who have comprehended their selves, they have comprehended their God”, al-Singkili argued that in order to know the God, human beings must take the road that they are capable of affording it. This way, he shared his opinion with that of Abū Hasan al-Syāzīlī, saying “those who knew that their selves are *fāqir* would know that their God is the rich; and those that their selves are weak, would know that their God is the strongest”.⁶³

According to al-Singkili, human cannot know himself perfectly. He stated:

For me, that *hadīs* can be seen as a statement related to things that do not exist (are invisible?), because a human’s soul will never reach its substance comprehensively (*iḥāṭah*). This statement is evidenced by the speech of God: “Say it (O Muhammad) that spirit is an affair knowledgeable only to my Lord!”. Through this verse, God wanted to inform that human beings cannot comprehensively know their God. So, if a man cannot know himself, which is part of all creatures, whereas he is close to those creatures, he is unlikely able to know his God (who has no comparable entities). Even, he will never be able to know the essence of God’s words and all His Attributes and His actions.⁶⁴ God is real in term of knowledge, but is unreal in term of forms. Those who have acknowledged that He is too great to be comprehensively understood, they most likely have known Him.⁶⁵

The perfect knowledge of God is one that unites the conception of *tanzīh* and *tasybīh* of God in a general way. It is impossible for a human to unite both of them in a specific way, because of the human’s inability to know the limitless forms of the universe, which are the locus of the appearance of the *al-Ḥaqq*, both in a general and specific way. Ibn ‘Arabī warned us against holding on either the *tanzīh* or the *tasybīh*, but encouraged us to hold on both of them. This warning was stated by Ibn ‘Arabī in his poetry:

⁶³ Al-Singkili, *Tanbih Al-Māsyī*, 10.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 10–11.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

If you only hold the view of *tanzih*, you tie Him; if you only hold the view of *tasybih*, you limit Him.

If you hold both of them, you are right, as an imam and a master of mystical knowledge.

For those who hold the view of God's duality with universe, they are a *musyrik*, while those who hold the view of God's separation from universe, they made mistakes in their way to comprehending the oneness of God.

Be careful about the *tasybih* if you acknowledge the duality, and be careful about the *tanzih* if you acknowledge the oneness.

You are not Him, but you are Him and you see Him in every single entity, be it the limitless or the limited one.⁶⁶

God as the limitless is far away from the cosmos: in a theological term, it is called *tanzih*, which means that "the state of Allah is transcendence" to everything that exists. From this point of view, Allah cannot really be reached by His creatures and far away from their understanding. There are many verses of the Qur'an that support this view. Example of them is as follows: "*All praises be to Allah, the unreached God, far from what they attributed*" (The Qur'an, 37:180), and "*There is no one that is similar to Him*" (The Qur'an, 42: 11). In this regards, Allah is the impersonal reality that is far from the human reach. He is a God in the form of negative theology.⁶⁷

A God that is full of affection and love is the God that can be loved because He cares His creation. In a theological term, God must be able to brave an experience of "immanence" (*tasybih*) to some of His creatures. As the Qur'an said, "*He loves them, and they also love Him*" (QS. 5: 54). We can better understand Him through human attributes. This view attests to the omnipresence of God in all things, and as such is supported by the Qur'an, for example, in the following verse: "*Wherever you face off, there is the face of Allah*" (the Qur'an, 2: 1s15), and "*He is always with you wherever you have been*" (The Qur'an, 57: 4), and "*We are closer to human than to*

⁶⁶ Noer, *Ibn al-'Arabi*, 96.

⁶⁷ Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam: Kitab Rujukan tentang Relasi Gender dalam Kosmologi dan Teologi Islam*, trans. oleh Rahmani Astuti dan M.S. Nasrullah (Bandung: Mizan, 1996), 29–30.

their neck veins" (The Qur'an, 50: 16). This time, Allah is a personal God and as such to a certain extent confirms a positive theology. The negative or positive of theology is needed in order to create a better understanding about the reality of God.⁶⁸

This is the concept of *wahdah al-wujūd* according to al-Singkili, which differs from the concept of ultimate *wahdah al-wujūd* (the ultimate of *wujūdiyyah*). He explicitly argued that the ultimate of *wahdah al-wujūd* is incorrect. He explained his view as follows:

If you come across with people who embraced the view that the universe and all within it are the substance of *al-Ḥaqq*, you must know that this view is wrong, except in the context of *zaman azalī* (the beginning of time). It is possible for a person to state that in the beginning of time, all things were a substance that is based on the existence of Allah, not on the essence of those things. Because in the beginning of time, there was no being other than the being of God, and there was no possible being (?) except the possibility of God's being. We can also say that *al-kull* (the comprehensiveness) is Allah, and it only exists in Him. That (refers to what?) is in the union (*al-aḥadiyyah*), there is no distinction between the union of God and the union of other than Allah *ta'ālā*. So, it is wrong to view that everything had been the substance of *al-Ḥaqq* in the beginning of time, and then it changed into another thing, and then into a possible thing: as such is a wrong understanding.⁶⁹

With regards to the substance of God, it does not have a name, because it is not a locus. God's substance is unknowledgeable to anyone. His names are meant to show the substance of God, and to differ it from others, yet the door (to know) it is prohibited to everyone, except to Allah, because no one knows Allah except Allah Himself.⁷⁰

What is called as the aspect of *tanzīh* is but the substance of God itself. The substance of God or God, seen from the view point of His Substance, is free and different from universe, as it cannot be known nor pictured. God's substance is ultimately transcendent. It can only be

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁶⁹ Al-Singkili, *Tanbīh Al-Māsyī*, 8–9.

⁷⁰ Noer, *Ibn al-'Arabi*, 98.

described by the names of *tanzīh*, denying Him from any similarity with all things that are discernable. In other words, the substance of God only has the attributes and names that do not belong to the universe. For example: if the universe is attributed with *al-ḥadaṣ* (the novel), then the attribute of God has to be its opposite, that is, *al-qidam* (the eternal) and *al-azal* (always eternal).⁷¹

Our teacher, Burhān al-Dīn Mullā Ibrāhīm bin Ḥasan al-Kūrānī said:

In the beginning of time, there was nothing but Allah. Everything was in His knowledge, no different from *al-Ḥaqq*. He is present because of His presence, and exists because of His existence. This is the so called '*ainiyyah* (one being) in the beginning of time. For during the beginning of time, the being of all creations was obligatory, before it later become a possibility (*mumkin al-wujūd*). In fact, substance of a being will never change and contaminated with that of other beings. Allah knows the truth better.⁷²

If universality is viewed as Allah, then it is similar to pantheism, that is, a conception that views that God is every single thing, or conversely, that all things are God, and that there is no one that exists that is not God. According to pantheism, creatures are similar to God. The identicalness of God with nature is the main teaching of pantheism, even though this identicalness is understood differently among various types of pantheism.

Al-Singkili refused to combine these things. He argued that the servant will never reach the essence of Allah, even in the beginning of time. He stated, "Say it and make sure that the servant is still a servant. Even if he ascends to a high level (*taraqqī*), Allah will still be Allah. And even when He descends to universe (*tanazzūl*). The essence will never change, that is, the essence of servant will never change to be the essence of God, and vice versa, even though in the beginning of time."⁷³

For Ibn 'Arabī, al-Singkili's statement can be read as an encouragement to think of the substance of Allah, an act that is impossible to comprehend by His creatures, as reverberated from the following

⁷¹ Al-Singkili, *Tanbih Al-Māsyī*, 9.

⁷² Noer, *Ibn al-'Arabī*, 9.

⁷³ Al-Singkili, *Tanbih Al-Māsyī*, 9.

quotation: “think about the creation of Allah, but do not think about the Substance of Allah”. To strengthen his view, Ibn ‘Arabī often quoted a verses from the Qur’an, which reads: “*wa yuhāẓẓirukum Allāh nafsah*”, which means, “Allah warns you about Himself” (QS. 3:28). According to him, this ban is confirmed by *syara’* (Islamic law) because the substance of God is not comprehensible to anyone. The substance of God is unreachable by human knowledge because that substance is free from any relation with the names of God and universe. The one who can comprehend the substance of God is only God himself.⁷⁴

Most religion will agree that it is impossible to describe God’s transcendence in a casual language. According to monotheistic religions, the transcendence is God; yet this view comes with essential requirements. In Jewish tradition, for instance, it is not allowed to mention the holy name of God, and in Islam, iconography has been a controversial issue. Such restriction is a reminder that what we call God is beyond human’s expression.⁷⁵

That is the state where there is no one accompanying Him, both in the beginning or in the end of the time. There is only Allah. Or to say it bluntly, there is no one else other than Allah, either in terms of His substance or of His independency. The contexts of ‘Arabī’s statement “*al-kulli* is taking place only in that condition, that is, the condition when there is one who can accompany Allah”. This means that all things are originated from that condition, just like a letter that comes from voice or from a pen and ink, or from the movement of people who moved. Letters that come from a pen before it being extended to the universe of *lauh* are the letters themselves, not the others. Yet, after it being exposed to the universe of *lauh*, those letters are neither a pen nor a *lauh* anymore. So are those letters: they were in the ink before in the pen. When they were in the pen, they were neither the ink nor the pen anymore, as what you have seen it after being written. This example contains a concept of difference (*al-ghayriyyah*) and unity (*al-‘ainiyyah*). So is in the motion of people in move: all things are inside the

⁷⁴ Noer, *Ibn al-‘Arabi*, 98.

⁷⁵ Karen Armstrong, *Sejarah Tuhan: Kisah Pencarian Tuhan yang Dilakukan oleh Orang-orang Yahudi, Kristen, dan Islam selama 4.000 Tahun*, trans. by. Zaimul Am (Bandung: Mizan, 2009), 23.

movement. When those people are moving, their movement will change into something that is different from itself and from the object of its movement.⁷⁶

According to al-Singkili, 'Arabī's parable about the letters could help us better understand his explanation. Yet at the same time, such parable might cause confusion. Several Muslim scholars argue that the relation between the first and the second is the relation of an effect and its cause, or the cause-effect relation or a relation that has no its equivalence, or a relation that is difficult to explain. These types of relation may sometime help improve our understanding, but may also not. In other words, if that relation is far from the main problem, it will draw us away from the solution, but if it is viewed as giving a potential solution to the problem it may improve our understanding.⁷⁷

Even though the being of God is one, He can show Himself in whatever forms of, and available in nature.⁷⁸ Seen from the perspective of both the metaphysical and the mathematical structures, the many is a product of the one; and the many will finally be reduced into the one.⁷⁹ According to Ibn 'Arabī, a one (1) in a mathematical structure is the main source of all numbers, and these numbers are but the other forms of manifestation of the one. The one itself is not a number, but it embodies a number. Every single order of number is one reality that is different from other realities of numbers, but each of the numbers constitutes as the unity (*jam' al-aḥad*).⁸⁰

On the parable Ibn 'Arabī distinguished the relation between the one and the many, the relation between human as a universal meaning, and humanity as a particular one. Human in its universal meaning is one in entity but many in forms and persons. It can be said that, *al-Ḥaqq* and *al-Khalq* is one in entity but many in forms.⁸¹

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷⁸ Noer, *Ibn al-'Arabī*, 74.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 80.

On one aspect, *al-Ḥaqq* and *al-khalq*, then think about it,
On the other aspect, He is not *al-khalq*, and then contemplates it.
For those who understand what I am talking about, their vision will
not blur,
No one can catch it, except those who are given the vision.
Unite it and different it, actually, the entity is one,
But He is the many, the fixed and unfixed.⁸²
If you understand this, then you need to come back to the
explanation about the validity of the unity (*'ainiyyah*) of all things
and their absence. Know it dear students that the unity of all things
is invalid before the appearance of those things in the beginning of
time (*zaman azali*). Therefore, we cannot say that *al-kull* is *al-Ḥaqq*,
except in term of unification and at the absence of difference in
oneness. If everything has been visible in reality, then the unity of all
things is not valid anymore because the outward nature was born in
its own law, and so is the unseen nature, or the absence (*'adam*),
while the outward law is the law of the existence (*wujūd*).⁸³

This explanation shows the prudence of al-Singkili in explaining the
concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. He stated, “Know it and do not be mistaken.
Because it is dangerous for people to misunderstand it. They will be
perverted and misleading. We beg forgiveness and health to God in religious
matters, and Hereafter”.⁸⁴

If the parable seeing *al-khalq* as a mirror for *al-Ḥaqq* emphasizes the
ontological aspect (of God?), the other parable viewing *al-Ḥaqq* as a mirror
for *al-khalq* emphasizes the epistemological aspect. Both aspects, according
to Ibn 'Arabī, cannot be separated from each other because *al-Ḥaqq* and *al-*
khalq are subject and object simultaneously. Both are one and have similar
reciprocal roles. Yet, the being and the role of *al-Ḥaqq* are ultimate, while
those of *al-khalq* are relative.

Al-Singkili refused the literal understanding of Sufis's expressions,
and supported his argument by citing the words of Ibn al-'Arabi, which

⁸² *Ibid.*, 82.

⁸³ Al-Singkili, *Tanbih Al-Māsī*, 15.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

states: "We are people forbidden to read our books". Al-Hāfidz al-Suyūti⁸⁵ in *Tanbih al-Ghabi* argued that such prohibition was due to the fact that the Sufis often used an expression that has a special meaning: anyone understanding it on the basis of the common sense used among experts of the outward knowledge would undoubtedly fall into a well of non-believing.

Al-Ghazali, in some of his books, mentioned that Sufi expression is similar to the verses of *mutasyābihāt* in the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Whoever holds its literal meaning of his birth they will fall into being a non-believer, because expressions such as the word *al-wajh* (Face of God), *al-yad* (the hand of Allah), *al-'ain* (Allah's Eyes), and *al-istiw'* (Allah sits), all have their special meanings.

Finally, al-Singkili advised us to return to the Qur'an and Hadīṣ, for both are the great legacy that Prophet Muhammad PBUH has bequeathed to his followers. In facing the problems of life, al-Singkili argued that both are the true formula, citing a hadith from the Prophet, which reads, "I leave two things for you, the Book of Allah and my Sunnah, then explain the Qur'an with my sunnah, for your eyes will not be blind, your feet will not slip, and your hands will not be cut off as long as you hold fast to both. By pointing to this hadith, al-Singkili wanted to emphasize the following: "Understand and hold fast to the al-Qur'an and the noble Prophet's Sunnah, you will surely be guided, and remain on the straight path ".⁸⁶

E. Conclusion

Al-Singkili argued that universe is a name that refers to all things but *al-Haqq 'azza wa jalla*. It is made by God as a sign or a means to know His existence. According to him, this realm was not created from nothing to being, but happened through emanation thanks to His mercy. It is the grace of God that has made nature and all its contents, including humans, into being. In explaining the concept of emanation, al-Singkili used two terms,

⁸⁵ Jalal al-Din 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Abi Bakr Muhammad ibn Sabiq al-Din al-Khudhairi al-Suyuthi (1445-1505), a scholar who controls various religious disciplines, such as interpretations, hadith, jurisprudence, language, history and others. His work is no less than 600 pieces, including: *al-Itqān fi Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, *al-Asybah wa al-Nadzā'ir fi Furū' al-Syāfi'iyah*, *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*, *Tafsīr al-Jalālain*.

⁸⁶ Al-Singkili, *Tanbih Al-Māsyī*, 7.

namely "fixed entity" (*al-a'yān al-ṣābitah*) and "potential entity" (*al-a'yān al-khārijīyyah*). Both potentials, according to him, are a shadow of God. The fixed entity is a direct shadow of God, while the potential entity is a shadow of the fixed entity. So, it can be concluded that everything other than God (nature) comes from Him, and its existence depends on the His being.

Al-Singkili did not stick to one position in viewing the relationship between God and nature. Initially, he emphasized the transcendence of God towards His creation, but then he did not deny that this nature was none other than God completely. Because after all, He was a shadow or a shadow of His shadow, thanks to the concept of emanation. For al-Singkili, this universe is different from Allah, even though it really is not separated from Him. For a separation requires the existence of two beings, each of which stands on its own. And the being that stands on its own is only Allah the Almighty and the Mighty. This is clearly explained by al-Singkili through the relationship between *al-Ḥaqq* and *al-khalq*, both of which are different and evolving at the same time. In this case, al-Singkili stated, "He is real in terms of knowledge, but is not real in terms of form." That *al-Ḥaqq* SWT does not resemble Him, but It covers everything. []

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