

The Concept and Reality of Existence

By Toshihiko Izutsu

What I am going to say might seem to have no direct connection with the main theme of this Conference.¹ In reality, however, the problems I am going to deal with are not irrelevant to the problem of alienation even within the confines of Islamic philosophy, particularly with regard to the existential and metaphysical aspects of alienation. But instead of trying to connect my problems directly to the topic of alienation, I shall rather explain the basic structure itself of Islamic metaphysics.

I want to bring to your attention one of the most important types of the philosophical activity of the Oriental mind as exemplified by the thought of some of the outstanding philosophers of Iran. I believe this kind of approach has some significance in the particular context of East-West encounter in view of the fact that the East-West philosophers' Conference, as I understand it, aims at creating and promoting a better mutual understanding between East and West at the level of philosophical thinking. It is my conviction that the realization of a true international friendship or brotherhood among the nations of the East and West, based on a deep philosophical understanding of the ideas and thoughts of each other, is one of the things that are most urgently needed in the present-day situation of the world.

Unlike Western philosophy, however, which, broadly speaking, presents a fairly conspicuous uniformity of historical development from its pre-Socratic origin down to its contemporary forms, there is in the East no such historical uniformity. We can only speak of Eastern philosophies in the plural.

Such being the case, it is, I think, very important that the various philosophies of the East be studied in a systematic way with a view to arriving at a comprehensive structural framework, a kind of metaphilosophy of the Eastern philosophies, by means of which the major Oriental philosophies may be brought up to a certain level of structural uniformity.

In other words, before we begin to think of the possibility of a fruitful philosophical understanding between East and West, we shall have to actualize a better philosophical understanding within the confines of the Oriental philosophical traditions themselves. It is with such an idea in mind that I approach the problem of the basic structure of metaphysical thinking in Islam.

Islam has produced in the course of its long history a number of outstanding thinkers and a variety of philosophical schools. Here I shall pick up only one of them, which is known as the school of the "unity of existence" and which is undoubtedly one of the most important. This concept unity of existence, goes back to a great Arab mystic-philosopher of Spain of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Ibn 'Arabi (1165-1240). It exercised a tremendous influence upon the majority of Muslim thinkers, particularly in Iran, in the periods extending from the thirteenth century down to the

¹ The present paper is the manuscript of a public lecture delivered at the Fifth East-West Philosophers' Conference in Hawaii (June-July 1969). The reference is to the main theme of the Conference: *The Alienation of Modern Man*,

16th-17th centuries, when the tradition of Islamic metaphysical thinking found its culminating and all-synthesizing point in the thought of Sadr al-Din Shiraz], commonly known as Molla Sadra (1571-1640).

Thus the scope of my talk today is a very limited one, both historically and geographically. But the problems I am going to discuss are those that belong to the most fundamental dimension of metaphysical thinking in general. Moreover, I would like to point out that the "unity of existence" school of thought is not, for Islam, a thing of the past. On the contrary, the tradition is still vigorously alive in present-day Iran. In any case, I only hope that my presentation of the problems will shed some light on the position occupied by Iran in the philosophical world of the East.

As one of the most salient features of the Iranian thought in the periods which I have just mentioned we may begin by pointing out an unremitting search for something eternal and absolute beyond the world of relative and transient things. Formulated in this way, it may sound a truism; in fact it is a feature commonly shared by almost all religions.

The important point, however, is that this problem was raised in Islam in terms of the reality of existence. "Existence" (wujud) is here the central key-term.

In order to elucidate the real significance of this idea in its historical context I must explain briefly what is usually known in the West as the thesis of the "accidentality of existence" attributed to Avicenna, or Ibn Sina (980-1037). This notorious thesis was attributed to Avicenna first by Ibn Rushd (1126-1198), or Averroes, a famous Arab philosopher of Spain of the twelfth century, and then in the West by Thomas Aquinas who followed Averroes in the understanding of Avicenna's position. In the light of what we now know of Avicenna's thought, their understanding was a misinterpretation. But the Avicennian position as misinterpreted by Averroes and Thomas played a very important role not only in the East but also in the history of Western philosophy.

In fact, from the earliest phase of the historical development of Islamic philosophy, the concept of "existence" (wujud), as a heritage from Greek philosophy, was the greatest metaphysical problem the Muslim thinkers had to face. The problem was first raised explicitly by Farabi (872-950), and it was presented in an extraordinary form by Avicenna when he declared that "existence" is an accident ('arad) of "quiddity" (mahiyah).

The most important question which we must ask here is: What did Avicenna really intend to convey by the above statement? I must first clarify this point.

We constantly use in our daily conversation propositions whose subject is a noun and whose predicate is an adjective: for example: "The flower is white", "This table is brown" etc. On the same model we can easily transform an existential proposition like: "The table is" or "The table exists" into "The table is existent". Thus transformed, "existence" is just an adjective denoting a quality of the table.

And the proposition "The table is existent" stands quite on a par with the proposition "The table is brown", for in both cases the subject is a noun denoting a substance called "table", while the predicate is an adjective indicating grammatically a property or accident of the substance.

It is on this level and on this level only, that Avicenna speaks of existence being an "accident" of essence. Otherwise expressed, it is at the level of logical or grammatical analysis of reality that it makes sense to maintain the accidentality of existence. However, neither Averroes nor Thomas Aquinas understood the Avicennian thesis in that way. They thought that "existence" in the thought of Avicenna must be a property inhering in a substance, not only at the level of logical or grammatical analysis of reality but in terms of the very structure of the objective, external reality. That is to say, "existence" according to Avicenna must be a predicamental or categorical accident, understood in the sense of *ens in alio*, something existing in something else, i.e., a real property qualifying real substances, just in the same way as other ordinary properties, like whiteness existing in a flower, coldness existing in ice, or brownness existing in a table.

It is clear that the Avicennian position, once understood in such a way, will immediately lead to an absurd conclusion; namely, that the table would have to exist before it becomes existent just as the table must exist before it can be brown, black, etc. This is, in fact, the gist of the criticism of the Avicennian thesis by Averroes and Thomas.

Avicenna was well aware of the danger that his thesis might be misinterpreted in this way. He emphasized that we should not confuse "existence" as an accident with ordinary accidents, like "brown", "white", etc. He emphasized that existence is a very peculiar and unique kind of accident, for the objective reality which is referred to by a proposition like "The table is existent" presents a completely different picture from what is naturally suggested by the propositional form of the expression.

However, Avicenna himself did not clarify the structure of the extra-mental, objective reality which is found beyond what is meant by the logical proposition. The problem was left to posterity. In the periods subsequent to Avicenna, this problem assumed supreme importance, and a number of divergent opinions were put forward.

The philosophers belonging to the school of thought which I am going to talk about, chose to take a position which might look at first sight very daring or very strange. They asserted that, in the sphere of external reality, the proposition: "The table is existent" as understood in the sense of substance-accident relationship turns out to be meaningless. For in the realm of external reality there is, to begin with, no self-subsistent substance called table, nor is there a real "accident" called "existence" to come to inhere in the substance. The whole phenomenon of a table being qualified by "existence" turns into something like a shadow-picture, something which is not wholly illusory but which approaches the nature of an illusion. In this perspective, both the table and "existence" as its "accident" begin to look like things seen in a dream.

These philosophers do not mean to say simply that the world of reality as we perceive it in our waking experience is in itself unreal or a dream. Nor do they want to assert that the proposition: "The table is existent" does not refer to any kind of external reality. There certainly is a corresponding piece of reality. The only point they want to make is that the structure of external reality which corresponds to this proposition is totally different from what is normally suggested by the form of the proposition. For in this domain "existence" is the sole reality. "Table" is but an inner modification of this reality, one of its self-determinations. Thus in the realm of external reality, the subject and the predicate must exchange their places. The "table" which is the logical or grammatical subject of the proposition: "The table is existent", is in this domain not a subject; rather, it is a predicate. The real subject is "existence", while

"table" is but an "accident" determining the subject into a particular thing. In fact all the so-called "essences", like being-a-table, being-a-flower, etc. are in external reality nothing but "accidents" that modify and delimit the one single reality called "existence" into innumerable things.

Such a vision of reality, however, is not accessible to human consciousness as long as it remains at the level of ordinary everyday experience. In order to have access to it, according to the philosophers of this school, the mind must experience a total transformation of itself. The consciousness must transcend the dimension of ordinary cognition where the world of being is experienced as consisting of solid, self-subsistent things, each having as its ontological core what is called essence. There must arise in the mind a totally different kind of awareness in which the world is revealed in an entirely different light. It is at this point that Iranian philosophy turns conspicuously toward mysticism. So much so that a philosopher like Molla Sadra comes to declare that any philosophy which is not based upon the mystical vision of reality is but a vain intellectual pastime. In more concrete terms, the basic idea here is that an integral metaphysical worldview is possible only on the basis of a unique form of subject-object relationship.

It is to be remarked in this connection that, in this variety of Islamic philosophy as well as in other major philosophies of the East, metaphysics or ontology is inseparably connected with the subjective state of man, so that the selfsame Reality is said to be perceived differently in accordance with the different degrees of consciousness.

The problem of the unique form of subject-object relationship is discussed in Islam as the problem of *ittihad al-alim wa-al-malum*, i.e. the "unification of the knower and the known". Whatever may happen to be the object of knowledge, the highest degree of knowledge is always achieved when the knower, the human subject, becomes completely unified and identified with the object so much so that there remains no differentiation between the two: for differentiation or distinction means distance, and distance in cognitive relationship means ignorance. As long as there remains between the subject and object the slightest degree of distinction, that is to say, as long as there are subject and object as two entities distinguishable from one another, perfect cognition is not realized. To this we must add another observation concerning the object of cognition, namely that the highest object of cognition, for the philosophers of this school, is "existence"² And according to Molla Sadra who is one of the most prominent figures of this school the real knowledge of "existence" is obtainable not by rational reasoning but only through a very peculiar kind of intuition. This latter mode of cognition, in the view of Molla Sadra, consists precisely in knowing "existence" through the "unification of the knower and the known", i.e., knowing "existence" not from the outside as an "object" of knowledge, but from the inside, by man's becoming or rather being "existence" itself, that is, by man's self-realization.

It is evident that such "unification of the knower and the known" cannot be realized at the level of everyday human experience where the subject stands eternally opposed to the object. The subject in such a state grasps "existence" only as an object. It objectifies "existence" as it objectifies all other things, while "existence" in its reality as *actus essendi* definitely and persistently refuses to be an "object". An objectified "existence" is but a distortion of the reality of "existence".

² Cf. Molla Sadra: *al-Shawahid al-Rububiyah*, ed. Jalal al-Din Ashtiyani, Mashhad, 1967, p. 14.

Haydar Amuli³, one of the foremost Iranian metaphysicians of the 14th century says: When man attempts to approach "existence" through his weak intellect (*aql daif*) and feeble thinking (*afkar rakikah*), his natural blindness and perplexity go on but increasing.

The common people who have no access to the transcendental experience of Reality are compared to a blind man who cannot walk safely without the help of a stick in his hand. The stick giving guidance to the blind man here symbolizes the rational faculty of the mind. The strange thing about this is that the stick upon which the blind man relies happens to be the very cause of his blindness. Only when Moses threw down his stick were the veils of the phenomenal forms removed from his sight. Only then did he witness, beyond the veils, beyond the phenomenal forms, the splendid beauty of absolute Reality.

Mahmud Shabastari, an outstanding Iranian mystic philosopher of the 13th-14th centuries, says in his celebrated *Gulshan-e Raz* (v. 114):

Throw away reason; be always with Reality,
For the eye of the bat has no power to gaze at the sun.

Reason trying to see the absolute Reality, says Lahiji in the Commentary⁴, "is just like the eye trying to gaze at the sun. Even from afar, the overwhelming effulgence of the sun blinds the eye of reason. And as the eye of reason goes up to higher stages of Reality, gradually approaching the metaphysical region of the Absolute, the darkness becomes ever deeper until everything in the end turns black. As man comes close to the vicinity of the sacred region of Reality," Lahiji remarks, "the brilliant light issuing forth from it appears black to his eyes. Brightness at its ultimate extremity becomes completely identical with utter darkness." That is to say — to use a less metaphorical terminology — "existence" in its absolute purity is to the eyes of an ordinary man as invisible as sheer nothing. Thus it comes about that the majority of men are not even aware of the "light" in its true reality. Like the men sitting in the cave in the celebrated Platonic myth, they remain satisfied with looking at the shadows cast by the sun. They see the faint reflections of the light on the screen of the so-called external world and are convinced that these reflections are the sole reality.

Haydar Amuli⁵, divides "existence" in this connection into

- (1) pure, absolute "existence" as pure light and
- (2) shadowy and dark "existence": light (*nur*) and shadow (*zill*).

Seen through the eye of a real metaphysician, shadow also is "existence". But it is not the pure reality of "existence".

The ontological status of the shadowy figures, i.e., the objectified forms of "existence" which, at the level of normal everyday experience, appear to the human consciousness as solid, self-subsistent things is, according to Molla Šadra⁶, like that of a "mirage falsely presenting the image of water, while in reality it has nothing to do with water". However, the phenomenal things, although they are of a shadowy

³ Cf. his *Risalah Nodq al-Nuqud*, ed. Henry Corbin and Osman Yahya, Teheran-Paris 1969, p. 625

⁴ Muhammad Lahiji: *Sharh-e Gulshan-e Raz*, Tehran, 1337 A.H., pp. 94-97.

⁵ Cf. *Jami' al-Asrar wa-Manba: al-Anwar*, ed. Henry Corbin and Osman Yahya, Teheran-Paris, 1969, p. 259, p. 261.

⁶ Cf. al-Shawahid al-Rububiyah, op. cit., p. 448.

nature in themselves, are not wholly devoid of reality either. On the contrary, they are real if they are considered in relation to their metaphysical source. In fact even in the empirical world, nothing is wholly unreal. Even a mirage is not altogether unreal in the sense that its perception is induced by the actual existence of a wide stretch of desert land. But in a metaphysical perspective, the desert land which is the empirical basis of a mirage must itself be regarded as something of the nature of a mirage, if it is compared with the ultimate ground of reality.

This Islamic approach to the problem of the reality and unreality of the phenomenal world will rightly remind us of the position taken by Vedanta philosophy as represented by the celebrated dictum of Shankara which runs: "The world is a continuous series of cognitions of Brahman." (*Brahma-pratyayasantair jagat*)⁷. For Shankara, too, the phenomenal world is Brahman or the absolute Reality itself as it appears to the ordinary human consciousness in accordance with the natural structure of the latter. In this respect, the world is not a pure illusion, because under each of the phenomenal forms there is hidden the Brahman itself, just as a rope mistakenly perceived as a snake in darkness is not altogether unreal because the perception of the snake is here induced by the actual existence of the rope. The phenomenal world becomes unreal or false (*jagan mithya*) only when it is taken as an ultimate, self-subsistent reality. It is not at all false and illusory qua Brahman as perceived by our non-absolute consciousness.⁸

Likewise in Islamic philosophy, the phenomenal world is real in so far as it is the absolute truth or Reality as perceived by the relative human mind in accordance with its natural structure. But it is false and unreal if taken as something ultimate and self-subsistent. A true metaphysician worthy of the name is one who is capable of witnessing in every single thing in the world the underlying Reality of which the phenomenal form is but a self-manifestation and self-determination. But the problem now is: How can such a vision of Reality be obtainable as a matter of actual experience? To this crucial question the Islamic philosophy of "existence" answers by saying that it is obtainable only through an "inner witnessing" (*shuhud*), "tasting" (*dhawq*), "presence" (*hudur*), or "illumination" (*ishraq*).

Whatever these technical terms exactly mean, and to whatever degree they may differ from one another, it will be evident in any case that such an experience of Reality is not actualizable as long as there remains the subject of cognition as a "subject", that is to say, as long as there remains in man the ego-consciousness. The empirical ego is the most serious hindrance in the way of the experience of "seeing by self-realization". For the subsistence of the individual ego places of necessity an epistemological distance between man and the reality of "existence", be it his own "existence". The reality of existence is immediately grasped only when the empirical selfhood is annihilated, when the ego-consciousness is completely dissolved into the Consciousness of Reality, or rather, Consciousness which is Reality. Hence the supreme importance attached in this type of philosophy to the experience called fana, meaning literally annihilation, that is, the total nullification of the ego-consciousness.

The phenomenal world is the world of Multiplicity. Although Multiplicity is ultimately nothing other than the self-revealing aspect of the absolute Reality itself, he who knows Reality only in the form of Multiplicity knows Reality only through its variously articulated forms, and fails to perceive the underlying Unity of Reality.

⁷ Vivekacudamani, 521.

⁸ Cf. S.N.L. Shrivastava: Samkara and Bradley, Delhi, 1968, pp. 45-47.

The immediate experience of Reality through "self-realization", consists precisely in the immediate cognition of absolute Reality before it is articulated into different things. In order to see Reality in its absolute indetermination, the ego also must go beyond its own essential determination.

Thus it is certain that there is a human aspect to the experience of fana inasmuch as it involves a conscious effort on the part of man to purify himself from all the activities of the ego. Abd al-Rahman Jami, a famous Iranian poet-philosopher of the fifteenth century, says, "keep yourself away from your own ego, and set your mind free from the vision of others"⁹. The word "others" here means everything other than absolute Reality. Such efforts made by man for the attainment of fana are technically called tawhid, meaning literally "making many things one" or "unification", that is, an absolute concentration of the mind in deep meditation. It consists, as Jami explains, in man's making his mind cleansed (*takhlis*) of its relations with anything other than absolute Reality, whether as objects of desire and will or as objects of knowledge and cognition. So much so that in the end even the consciousness of his own fana must disappear from his consciousness. In this sense the experience of annihilation (*fana*) involves the annihilation of annihilation (*fana al-fana*), that is, the total disappearance of the consciousness of man's own disappearance¹⁰. For even the consciousness of fana is a consciousness of something other than absolute Reality. It is significant that such an absolute fana where there is not even a trace of the fana-consciousness, which, be it remarked in passing, evidently finds its exact counterpart in the Mahayana Buddhist conception of shunyata or nothingness, is not regarded as merely a subjective state realized in man; it is at one and the same time the realization or actualization of absolute Reality in its absoluteness.

This point cannot be too much emphasized, for if we fail to grasp it correctly; the very structure of Islamic metaphysics would not be rightly understood. Fana is certainly a human experience. It is man who actually experiences it. But it is not solely a human experience. For when he does experience it, he is no longer himself. In this sense man is not the subject of experience. The subject is rather the metaphysical Reality itself. In other words, the human experience of fana is itself the self-actualization of Reality. It is, in Islamic terminology, the preponderance of the self-revealing aspect of Reality over its own self-concealing aspect, the preponderance of the *zahir*, the manifest, over the *batin*, the concealed. The experience of fana is in this respect nothing but an effusion (*fayd*) of the metaphysical light of absolute Reality.

The force of the self-revealing aspect of Reality is constantly making itself felt in the things and events of the phenomenal world. Otherwise there would be no phenomenal world around us. But there, in the phenomenal world, Reality reveals itself only through relative, and spatio-temporal forms. In the absolute consciousness of a mystic-metaphysician, on the contrary, it reveals itself in its original absoluteness beyond all relative determinations. This is what is technically known as *kashf* or *mukashafah*, i.e., the experience of "unveiling"¹¹.

Fana as a human experience is man's experiencing the total annihilation of his own ego and consequently of all things that have been related to the ego in the capacity of its objects of cognition and volition. This experience would correspond to a spiritual event which is known in Zen Buddhism as

⁹ Lawaih, ed. M.H. Tasbihi, Tehran, 1342 A.H., p. 19.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹¹ Cf. Nihat Keklik: *Sadreddin Konevinin Felsefesinde Allah, Kainat ve Insan*, Istanbul, 1967, pp. 6-9.

the mind-and-body-dropping-off¹² (*shin jin daisu raku*), i.e., the whole unity of "mind-body", which is no other than the so-called ego or self, losing its seemingly solid ground and falling off into the bottom of metaphysico-epistemological nothingness. However, neither in Zen Buddhism nor in Islam does this represent the ultimate height of metaphysical experience.

After having passed through this crucial stage, the philosopher is supposed to ascend to a still higher stage which is known in Zen as the dropped-off-mind-and-body (*datsu raku shin jin*) and in Islam as the experience of *baqd* or "survival", i.e., eternal remaining in absolute Reality with absolute Reality. At the stage of *fana* the pseudo-ego or the relative self has completely dissolved into nothingness. At the next stage man is resuscitated out of the nothingness, completely transformed into an absolute Self. What is resuscitated is outwardly the same old man, but he is a man who has once transcended his own determination. He regains his normal, daily consciousness and accordingly the normal, daily, phenomenal world of multiplicity again begins to spread itself out before his eyes. The world of multiplicity appears again with all its infinitely rich colors. Since, however, he has already cast off his own determination, the world of multiplicity he perceives is also beyond all determinations. The new worldview is comparable to the worldview which a drop of water might have if it could suddenly awaken to the fact that being an individual self-subsistent drop of water has been but a pseudo-determination which it has imposed upon itself, and that it has in reality always been nothing other than the limitless sea. In a similar manner, the philosopher who has attained to the state of *baqa* sees himself and all other things around him as so many determinations of one single Reality. The seething world of becoming turns in his sight into a vast field in which absolute Reality manifests itself in myriad different forms. This vision of reality has produced in Islam a typically Oriental metaphysical system based on a dynamic and delicate interplay between unity and multiplicity. I want to discuss some aspects of this problem in what follows.

At this point I would like to repeat what I have previously said: namely, that in this type of philosophy metaphysics is most closely correlated with epistemology.

The correlation between the metaphysical and the epistemological means in this context the relation of ultimate identity between what is established as the objective structure of reality and what is usually thought to take place subjectively in human consciousness. It means, in brief, that there is no distance, there should be no distance between the "subject" and "object". It is not exact enough even to say that the state of the subject essentially determines the aspect in which the object is perceived, or that one and the same object tends to appear quite differently in accordance with different points of view taken by the subject. Rather the state of consciousness is the state of the external world. That is to say, the objective structure of reality is no other than the other side of the subjective structure of the mind. And that precisely is the metaphysical Reality.

Thus to take up the problem of our immediate concern, *fana*, and *baqa*, "annihilation" and "survival", are not only subjective states. They are objective states, too. The subjective and the objective are here two dimensions or two aspects of one and the same metaphysical structure of Reality.

I have already explained the subjective *fana* and *baqa*. As to the objective *fana*, it is also known as the ontological stage of "unification" (*jam*, meaning literally "gathering" or "all-things-being-put-together"),

¹² This and the following expression: *datsu raku shin jin* appearing in the next paragraph belong to the technical terminology of the celebrated Japanese Zen master Dogen (1200-1253).

while the objective baqa is called the stage of the unification of unification (jam al-jam), "separation after unification" (*farq ba'd al-jam*), or "second separation" (*farq thani*). I shall first explain what is really meant by these technical terms.¹³

The word "separation" (*farq*) primarily refers to the common-sense view of reality. Before we subjectively attain to the stage of fana we naturally tend to separate the Absolute from the phenomenal world. The phenomenal world is the realm of relativity, a world where nothing is absolute, where all things are observed to be impermanent, transient, and constantly changing. This is the kind of observation which plays an exceedingly important role in Buddhism as the principle of universal impermanence. The world of multiplicity, be it remarked, is a realm where our senses and reason fulfil their normal functions.

Over against this plane of relativity and impermanence, the Absolute is posited as something essentially different from the former, as something which absolutely transcends the impermanent world. Reality is thus divided up into two completely different sections. This dichotomy is called "separation" (*Jarq*). The empirical view of reality is called "separation" also because in this view all things are separated from one another by essential demarcations. A mountain is a mountain. It is not, it cannot be, a river. Mountain and river are essentially different from one another.

The world of being appears in a completely different light when looked at through the eyes of one who has reached the subjective state of fana. The essential demarcations separating one thing from another, are no longer here. Multiplicity is no longer observable. This comes from the fact that since there is no ego-consciousness left, that is to say, since there is no epistemological subject to see things, there are naturally no objects to be seen. As all psychological commotions and agitations become reduced to the point of nothingness in the experience of fana, the ontological commotion that has hitherto characterized the external world calms down into an absolute Stillness. As the limitation of the ego disappears on the side of the subject, all the phenomenal limitations of things in the objective world disappear from the scene, and there remains only the absolute Unity of Reality in its purity as an absolute Awareness prior to its bifurcation into subject and object. This stage is called in Islam "gathering" (*jam*) because it "gathers" together all the things that constitute the phenomenal world and brings them back to their original indiscrimination. In theological terminology this is said to be the stage at which the believer witnesses God, and God alone, without seeing any creature. It is also known as the stage of "God was, and there was nothing else". This stage would correspond to what the Taoist philosopher Chuang Tzu calls "chaos" (*hun tun*)¹⁴.

The next stage which is the ultimate and highest is that of baqa. Subjectively, this is the stage at which man regains his phenomenal consciousness after having experienced the existential annihilation of its own self. The mind that has completely stopped working at the previous stage resumes its normal cognitive activity. Corresponding to this subjective rebirth, the phenomenal world also takes its rise again. The world once more unfolds itself before the man's eyes in the form of the surging waves of multiplicity. The things that have been "gathered" up into unity are again separated from one another as

¹³ The following description is an elaboration of what Lahiji says about these technical terms in his Commentary on *Gulshan-e Raz* (*op. cit.*, pp. 26-27).

¹⁴ For an analysis of the Taoist concept of "chaos" see my Erano Lecture: *The Absolute and the Perfect Man in Taoism* (Erano Jahrbuch XXXVI), Zurich, 1967, pp. 398-411

so many different entities. This is why the stage is called "separation after unification" or the "second separation".

There is, however, an important difference between the first and the second "separation". In the "first separation", which is the pre-fana stage both subjectively and objectively, the innumerable things were definitely separated from one another, each being observed only as an independent, self-subsistent entity. And, as such, they are made to stand opposed to the Absolute, again as two entirely different ontological domains between which there is no internal relationship. At the stage of the "second separation", too, all phenomenal things are unmistakably distinguished from one another through each one of them having its own essential demarcation which is peculiar to itself. And this ontological dimension of Multiplicity qua Multiplicity is also unmistakably differentiated from the dimension of Unity.

The "second separation", however, is not sheer Multiplicity, because at this stage all the essential demarcations of the things, although they are clearly observable, are known, to be nothing other than so many self-determinations of the absolute Unity itself. And since the "unity" annihilates in its own purity all ontological differences, the whole world of being is here found to be ultimately reducible to one single metaphysical root. From such a viewpoint, what can be said to exist in the real sense of the word is nothing but this unique metaphysical root of all things. In this sense the Multiplicity which is observable here is Unity. The only important point is that "unity" at this stage is unity with inner articulations. And this stage is called "gathering of gathering" (*jam al-jam*) for the very reason that the phenomenal things that have all been once reduced to the absolute unity of total annihilation at the stage of fana, i.e., the primary "gathering", are again "separated" and then again "gathered" together in this new vision of Unity.

Thus the difference from this particular point of view between the Unity at the stage of fana, i.e. "gathering", and the Unity at the stage of baqa or "gathering of gathering" consists in the fact that the Unity at the stage of fana is a simple, absolute Unity without even inner articulation, while the Unity seen at the stage of the "gathering of gathering" is an internally articulated Unity. And Reality as observed at this latter stage is philosophically a *coincidentia oppositorum* in the sense that Unity is Multiplicity and Multiplicity is Unity. It is based on the vision of Unity in the very midst of Multiplicity and Multiplicity in the very midst of Unity. For as Lahiji remarks, Unity or the Absolute here serves as a mirror reflecting all phenomenal things, while Multiplicity or the phenomenal things fulfil the function of a countless number of mirrors, each reflecting in its own way the same Absolute — a metaphor which is singularly similar to the Buddhist image of the moon reflected in a number of different bodies of water, the moon itself ever remaining in its original unity despite the fact that it is split up into many different moons as reflections¹⁵.

He, who has reached this stage is known in the tradition of Islamic philosophy as a "man of two eyes" (*dhu al-'aynayn*). He is a man who, with his right eye, sees Unity, i.e., absolute Reality, and nothing but Unity, while with his left eye he sees Multiplicity, i.e., the world of phenomenal things. What is more

¹⁵ The same metaphor is very frequently used for a similar purpose in Oriental philosophy. Thus, to give one more example, Chu Tzu, (1130-1200), famous Confucian philosopher of the Sung dynasty, remarks, on the problem of how the Supreme Ultimate (*tai chi*) is related to its manifestations in the physical world, that the Supreme Ultimate in relation to Multiplicity is just like the moon which is reflected in many rivers and lakes and is visible everywhere without being really divided up into many. (Cf. *Chu Tzu. Yu Lei*, Book 94).

important about this type of man is that, in addition to his simultaneous vision of Unity and Multiplicity, he knows that these two are ultimately one and the same thing. Such being the case, he recognizes in every one of the actually existent things two different aspects: the aspect of fana and the aspect of baqa. It goes without saying that the terms fana and baqa are here taken in the ontological sense, although they are not unrelated to the subjective experience known respectively by the same appellations.

The aspect of fana in a thing is the aspect in which it is considered as something determined, individualized, and essentially delimited. In this aspect every existent thing is properly non-existent, a "nothing". For the "existence" it seems to possess is in reality a borrowed existence; in itself it is unreal (*batil*) and subsists on the ground of Nothingness.

The aspect of baqa, on the contrary, is the aspect in which the same thing is considered as a reality in the sense of a determined form of the Absolute, a phenomenal form in which the Absolute manifests itself. In this aspect, nothing in the world of being is unreal.

Every concretely existent thing is a peculiar combination of these negative and positive aspects, a place of encounter between the temporal and the eternal, between the finite and infinite, between the relative and the absolute. And the combination of these two aspects produces the concept of a "possible" (*mumkin*) thing. Contrary to the ordinary notion of ontological "possibility", a "possible" thing is not a purely relative and finite thing. As a locus of divine self-manifestation (*tajalli*), it has another aspect which directly connects it with absolute Reality. In every single thing, be it the meanest imaginable thing, the mystic-philosopher recognizes a determined self-manifestation of the Absolute.

This metaphysical situation is described by Mahmud Shabastari in his *Gulshan-e-Raz* through a combination of contradictory terms as "bright night amidst the dark daylight" (*shab-e roushan miyan-e ruz-e tarik*)¹⁶. The "bright night" in this expression refers to the peculiar structure of Reality as it discloses itself at the stage of the subjective and objective fana in which one witnesses the annihilation of all outward manifestations of Reality. It is "night" because at this stage nothing is discernible; all things have lost their proper colors and forms and sunk into the darkness of the original indiscrimination. This metaphysical "night", however, is said to be "bright" because absolute Reality in itself — that is, apart from all considerations of the limitations set by the very structure of our relative consciousness — is essentially luminous, illuminating its own self as well as all others.

The second half of the above expression reads "amidst the dark daylight". This means, first of all, that this absolute Unity is revealing itself in the very midst of Multiplicity, in the form of determined, relative things. In this sense and in this form, the absolute Reality is clearly visible in the external world, just as everything is visible in the daylight. However, the daylight in which all these things are revealed to our eyes is but a phenomenal daylight. The things that appear in it are in themselves of the nature of darkness and non-existence. This is why the "daylight" is said to be "dark".

These two contradictory aspects of Reality, namely, light and darkness, which are said to be observable in everything, bring us directly to the question: In what sense and to what degree are the phenomenal things real? The problem of the "reality" or "unreality" of the phenomenal world is indeed a crucial point

¹⁶ *Gulshan-e Raz* (*op. cit.*), v. 127, p. 100. Cf. Lahiji's Commentary, p. 101.

in Islamic philosophy which definitely divides the thinkers into different classes constituting among themselves a kind of spiritual hierarchy. Haydar Amuli in this connection proposes a triple division:¹⁷

1. the common people (*'awamm*) or men of reason (*dhawu al-'aql*),
2. the privileged people (*khawass*) or men of intuition (*dhawu al-'ayn*), and
3. the privileged of all privileged people (*khawass al-khawass*) or men of reason and intuition (*dhawu al-'aql wa-al-'ayn*).

The lowest stage is represented by those of the first class who do not see except Multiplicity. They are those who are firmly convinced that the things as they perceive them in this world are the sole reality, there being nothing beyond or behind it. From the viewpoint of a real mystic-philosopher, the eyes of these people are veiled by the phenomenal forms of Multiplicity from the view of Unity that underlies them. The phenomenal things, instead of disclosing, by their very mode of existence, Something that manifests itself through them, function as impenetrable veils obstructing the sight of that self-revealing Something. This situation is often compared in Islamic philosophy to the state of those who are looking at images reflected in a mirror without being at all aware of the existence of the mirror. In this metaphor the mirror symbolizes absolute Reality, and the images reflected in it the phenomenal things.

Objectively speaking, even the people of this type are perceiving the images on the surface of the mirror. There would be no image perceivable without the mirror. But subjectively they believe the images to be real and self-subsistent things. The metaphor of the mirror happens to be one of those important metaphors that recur in Islamic philosophy on many different occasions. Another metaphor of this nature is the sea surging in waves, which, in the particular metaphysical context in which we are actually interested, indicates that the people notice only the rolling waves forgetting the fact that the waves are nothing but outward forms assumed by the sea. Describing how phenomenal Multiplicity veils and conceals the underlying Unity of Reality, Jami says:¹⁸

Existence is a sea, with waves constantly raging,
Of the sea the common people perceive nothing but the waves.
Behold how out of the depth of the sea there appear innumerable waves,
On the surface of the sea, while the sea remains concealed in the waves.

I would take this opportunity to point out that Muslim philosophers tend to use metaphors and similes in metaphysics, particularly in the explanation of the seemingly self-contradictory relation between Unity and Multiplicity, or absolute Reality and the phenomenal things. The frequent use of metaphors in metaphysics is one of the characteristic marks of Islamic philosophy, or indeed we might say of Oriental philosophy in general. It must not be taken as a poetic ornament. A cognitive function is definitely assigned to the use of metaphors.¹⁹

¹⁷ cf. *Jami al-Asrar* (*op. cit.*), p. 113, p. 591.

¹⁸ *Lawa'ih* (*op. cit.*), p. 61.

¹⁹ On the distinction between the ornamental and the cognitive function of metaphors, see Marcus B. Hester: *The Meaning of Poetic Metaphor*, The Hague-Paris, 1967, Introduction.

This may rightly remind us of Wittgenstein's understanding of the concept of "seeing as". According to Wittgenstein, "seeing as" involves a technique in a way which normal "seeing" does not. Thus one might well be able to "see" but not be able to "see as". He called this latter case "aspect-blindness"²⁰.

In the same way, to discover an appropriate metaphor in the high domain of metaphysics is for Muslim philosophers a peculiar way of thinking, a mode of cognition, for it means discovering some subtle features in the metaphysical structure of Reality, an aspect which, no matter how self-evident it may be as a fact of transcendental awareness, is so subtle and evasive at the level of discursive thinking that human intellect would otherwise be unable to take hold of it.

This said, we shall continue our consideration of the various stages in metaphysical cognition. Those of the common people who perceive nothing beyond Multiplicity and for whom even the word "phenomenon" does not make real sense have been said to represent the lowest stage in the hierarchy. A stage higher than this is reached, still within the confines of the common people, by those who recognize something beyond the phenomenal. This Something-beyond is the Absolute — or in popular terminology God — which is conceived as the Transcendent. God is here represented as an absolute Other which is essentially cut off from the phenomenal world. There is, in this conception, no inner connection between God and the world. There is between them only an external relationship like creation and domination. Such people are known in Islam as "men of externality" (*ahl-e zahir*), i.e., those who see only the exterior surface of Reality. Their eyes are said to be afflicted with a disease preventing them from seeing the true structure of Reality. The reference is to a disease or deformity peculiar to the eye called *hawal*. He who is infected with it always has a double image of whatever he sees. One single object appears to his eyes as two different things.

The second class of people according to the above-given division, are those who have attained to an immediate vision of absolute Reality in the experience of fana, both in the subjective and the objective sense, that is, the total annihilation of the ego and correspondingly of all the phenomenal things that constitute the external, objective world. But the people of this class just stop at this stage and do not go any further. To state the situation in more concrete terms, these people are aware only of absolute Unity. They see everywhere Unity, nothing else. The whole world in their view has turned into absolute Unity with no articulation and determination.

Certainly, when these people come back immediately from the experience of fana to their normal consciousness, Multiplicity does again become visible. But the phenomenal world is simply discarded as an illusion. In their view, the world of Multiplicity has no metaphysical or ontological value because it is essentially unreal. The external objects are not "existent" in the real sense of the word. They are just floating gossamers, sheer illusions backed by no corresponding realities. Such a view is in its fundamental structure identical with the Vedantic view of the phenomenal world in its popular understanding, in which the notorious word *maya* is taken to mean sheer illusion or illusion-producing principle.

Just as this popular understanding does gross injustice to the authentic worldview of Vedanta philosophy, the exclusive emphasis on the Absolute to the irreparable detriment of the phenomenal

²⁰ Wittgenstein: Investigations, p. 213.

world in Islamic metaphysics fatally distorts the authentic view of its representatives. It is in this sense that Haydar Amuli accuses Ismailism of disbelief and heresy.²¹

From the viewpoint of the highest mystic-philosopher, even the people of this type, when they experience the vision of the Absolute, are actually doing nothing but perceiving the Absolute as it is reflected in the phenomenal things. But dazzled by the excess of light issuing forth from the Absolute, they are not aware of the phenomenal things in which it is reflected. Just as, in the case of the people of the first class, the Absolute served as the mirror reflecting upon its polished surface all the phenomenal things, so in the present case the phenomenal things serve as mirrors reflecting the Absolute. In either case, man usually takes notice of the images in the mirror, and the mirror itself remains unnoticed.

It is at the third stage, that is, at the stage of the "privileged of all privileged people" that the relation between the Absolute and the phenomenal world is correctly grasped as the *coincidentia oppositorum* of Unity and Multiplicity. It is, moreover, in this region that the cognitive value of metaphorical thinking to which reference has been made earlier is most profusely displayed.

Those whose consciousness has been raised to the height of *baqa* after the experience of *fana*, experience the relation between the Absolute and the phenomenal as the *coincidentia oppositorum* of Unity and Multiplicity. Theologically speaking, they are those who are able to see God in the creature and the creature in God. They can see both the mirror and the images that are reflected in it, God and the creature at this stage alternately serving as both the mirror and the image. The one selfsame "existence" is seen at once to be God and the creature, or Absolute Reality and the phenomenal world, Unity and Multiplicity

The sight of the Multiplicity of phenomenal things does not obstruct the sight of the pure Unity of ultimate Reality. Nor does the sight of Unity stand in the way of the appearance of Multiplicity.²² On the contrary, the two complement each other in disclosing the pure structure of Reality. For they are the two essential aspects of Reality, Unity representing the aspect of "absoluteness" (*itlaq*) or "comprehensive contraction" (*ijmal*), and Multiplicity the aspect of "determination" (*taqyid*) or "concrete expansion" (*tafsil*). Unless we grasp in this way Unity and Multiplicity in a single act of cognition, we are not having a whole integral view of Reality as it really is. Haydar Amuli calls such a simultaneous intuition of the two aspects of Reality the "unification of existence" (*tawhid wujfudi*) and regards it as the sole authentic philosophical counterpart of religious monotheism.²³ The "unification of existence" thus understood consists in a fundamental intuition of the one single reality of "existence" in everything without exception. In the Absolute, which corresponds theologically to God, it sees "existence" in its absolute purity and unconditionality, while in the things of the phenomenal world it recognizes the concrete differentiations of the selfsame reality of "existence" in accordance with its own inner articulations. Philosophically this is the position generally known as "oneness of existence" (*wahdat .ai-wujud*), which is an idea of central importance going back to Ibn 'Arabi.

The particular type of metaphysics based on this kind of existential intuition begins with the statement that the Absolute only is real, that the Absolute is the sole reality, and that, consequently, nothing else is real. The differentiated world of Multiplicity is therefore essentially "non-existent" (*'adam*). To this initial

²¹ *Jami' al-Asrar* (op. cit.), p. 217, p. 221.

²² *Ibid*; p. 113.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 113-115.

statement, however, is immediately added another; namely, that it does not in any way imply that the differentiated world is a void, an illusion, or sheer nothing. The ontological status of the phenomenal things is rather that of relations, that is, the various and variegated relational forms of the Absolute itself. In this sense, and in this sense only, they are all real.

The rise of the phenomenal world as we actually observe it, is due primarily to two seemingly different causes which are in reality perfectly coordinated with each other: one metaphysical, another epistemological. Metaphysically or ontologically, the phenomenal world arises before our eyes because the Absolute has in itself essential, internal articulations that are called *shu'un* (sg. *sha'n*) meaning literally "affairs", i.e., internal modes of being. They are also called existential "perfections" (*kamalat*), a conception similar in an important and significant way to Lao Tzu's idea of "virtues" (*te*) in relation to the way (*tao*).²⁴ These internal articulations naturally call for their own externalization. As a consequence, "existence" spreads itself out in myriads of self-determinations.

Epistemologically, on the other hand, this act of self-determination on the part of Reality is due to the inherent limitations of the finite human consciousness. The Absolute or pure "existence" in itself is sheer Unity. The Absolute remains in its original Unity in no matter how many different forms it may manifest itself. In this sense the world of Multiplicity is essentially of the very nature of the Absolute; it is the Absolute itself. But the original Unity of the Absolute appears to the finite human consciousness as differentiated into countless finite things because of the finitude of the consciousness. The phenomenal world is the Absolute that has hidden its real formless form under the apparent forms which are caused by the very limitations inherent in the epistemological faculties of man.

The process here described of the appearance of the originally undifferentiated metaphysical Unity in many different forms is called in Islamic philosophy the "self-manifestation" (*tajalli*) of "existence". The conception of the *tajalli* is structurally identical with the Vedantic conception of *adhydsa* or "superimposition", according to which the originally undivided Unity of pure *nirguna Brahman* or the absolutely unconditioned Absolute appears divided because of the different "names and forms" (*nama-rupa*) that are imposed upon the Absolute by "ignorance" (*avidya*). It is remarkable, from the viewpoint of comparison between Islamic philosophy and Vedanta that *avidya* which, subjectively, is the human "ignorance" of the true reality of things, is, objectively, exactly the same thing as *maya* which is the self-conditioning power inherent in *Brahman* itself. The "names and forms" that are said to be superimposed upon the Absolute by *avidya* would correspond to the Islamic concept of "quiddities" (*mahiyat*, sg. *mahiyah*) which are nothing other than the externalized forms of the Divine "names and attributes" (*asma' wa-sifat*). And the Vedantic *maya* as the self-determining power of the Absolute would find its exact Islamic counterpart in the concept of the Divine "existential mercy" (*rahmah wujudiyah*).

However, even at the stage of self-manifestation, the structure of Reality as seen through the eyes of a real mystic-philosopher looks diametrically opposed to the same Reality as it appears to the relative consciousness of an ordinary man. For in the eyes of an ordinary man representing the common-sense view of things, the phenomena are the visible and manifest while the Absolute is the hidden. But in the unconditioned consciousness of a real mystic-philosopher, it is always and everywhere the Absolute that is manifest while the phenomena remain in the background.

²⁴ Cf. my *The Key Philosophical Concepts in Sufism and Taoism*, II, Tokyo, 1967, pp. 122-123

This peculiar structure of Reality in its *tajalli*-aspect is due to what I have repeatedly pointed out in the course of this lecture; namely, that the differentiated world of phenomena is not self-subsistently real. No phenomenal thing has in itself a real ontological core. The idea corresponds to the celebrated Buddhist denial of *svabhava* or "self-nature" to anything in the world. In this sense, the philosophical standpoint of the school of the "oneness of existence" (*wahdat al-wujud*) is most obviously anti-essentialism. All so-called "essences" or "quiddities" are reduced to the position of the fictitious. The utmost degree of reality recognized to them is that of "borrowed existence". That is to say, the "quiddities" exist because they happen to be so many intrinsic modifications and determinations of the Absolute which alone can be said to exist in the fullest sense of the word.

In reference to the ontological status of the phenomenal world and its relation to the Absolute the Muslim philosophers here proposed a number of illuminating metaphors. In view of the above-mentioned importance of metaphorical thinking in Islam I shall give here a few of them. Thus Mahmud Shabastari²⁵ says in the *Gulshan-e Raz*:

The appearance of all things "other" (than the Absolute) is due to your imagination (i.e., the structure of human cognition),
Just as a swiftly turning point appears as a circle.

Concerning these verses Lahiji makes the following observation. The appearance of the world of Multiplicity as something "other" than the Absolute is due to the working of the faculty of imagination which is based on sense perception and which is by nature unable to go beyond the phenomenal surface of the things. In truth, there is solely one single Reality manifesting itself in a myriad of different forms. But in this domain sense perception is utterly untrustworthy. For it is liable to see a mirage as something really existent when it is in truth non-existent. It sees drops of rain falling from the sky as straight lines. A man sitting in a boat tends to think that the shore is moving while the ship stands still.²⁶ When in the dark a firebrand is turned very swiftly, we naturally perceive a burning circle. What is really existent in this case is the firebrand as a single point of fire. But the swift circular movement makes the point of fire appear as a circle of light. Such, Lahiji argues, is the relation between the Absolute whose state of Unity is comparable to a point of fire and the world of Multiplicity which in its essential constitution resembles the circle produced by the movement of the point.²⁷ In other words, the phenomenal world is a trace left behind by the incessant creative acting of the Absolute.

The philosophical problem here is the ontological status of the circle of light. Evidently the circle does not "exist" in the fullest sense of the word. It is in itself false and unreal. It is equally evident, however, that the circle cannot be said to be sheer nothing. It does exist in a certain sense. It is real as far as it

²⁵ *Gulshan-e Raz* (op. cit.), v. 15, p. 19.

²⁶ To be compared with what the Zen master Dogon says about the same situation in his *Sha Bo Gen Zo* (III *Gen Jo Ka An*): "If a man on board a ship turns his eyes toward the shore, he erroneously thinks that it is the shore that is moving. But if he examines his ship, he realizes that it is the ship that is moving on. Just in a similar way, if man forms for himself a false view of his own ego and considers on that basis the things in the world, he is liable to have a mistaken view of his own mind-nature as if it were a self-subsistent entity. If, however, he comes to know the truth of the matter through immediate experience (corresponding to the experience of fana in Islam) and goes back to the very source of all things (corresponding to the Islamic idea of 'existence' in its original state of Unity), he will clearly notice that the ten thousand things (i.e., all phenomenal things) are egoless (i.e., have no self-subsistence)."

²⁷ *Sharh-e Gulshan-e Raz* (op. cit.), p. 19.

appears to our consciousness and also as far as it is produced by the point of fire which is really existent on the empirical level of our experience. The ontological status of all phenomenal things that are observable in this world is essentially of such a nature.

Another interesting metaphor that has been proposed by Muslim philosophers is that of ink and different letters written with it.²⁸ Letters written with ink do not really exist qua letters. For the letters are but various forms to which meanings have been assigned through convention. What really and concretely exists is nothing but ink. The "existence" of the letters is in truth no other than the "existence" of the ink which is the sole, unique reality that unfolds itself in many forms of self-modification. One has to cultivate, first of all, the eye to see the selfsame reality of ink in all letters, and then to see the letters as so many intrinsic modifications of the ink.

The next metaphor — that of the sea and waves — is probably more important in that, firstly, it is shared by a number of non-Islamic philosophical systems of the East and is, therefore, apt to disclose one of the most basic common patterns of thinking in the East; and that, secondly, it draws attention to an extremely important point that has not been made clear by the preceding metaphors; namely, that the Absolute in so far as it is the Absolute cannot really dispense with the phenomenal world, just as the "existence" of the phenomenal world is inconceivable except on the basis of the "existence" of the Absolute, or more properly, the "existence" which is the Absolute itself.

Of course, the Absolute can be conceived by the intellect as being beyond all determinations, and as we have seen earlier, it can even be intuited as such, in its eternal Unity and absolute unconditionality. We can go even a step further and conceive it as something beyond the condition of unconditionality itself.²⁹

But such a view of the Absolute is an event that takes place only in our consciousness. In the realm of extra-mental reality, the Absolute cannot even for a single moment remain without manifesting itself.

As Baydar Amuli says³⁰, "the sea, as long as it is the sea, cannot separate itself from the waves; nor can the waves subsist independently of the sea. Moreover, when the sea appears in the form of a wave, the form cannot but be different from the form of another wave, for it is absolutely impossible for two waves to appear in one and the same place under one single form."

Haydar Amuli recognizes in this peculiar relationship between the sea and the waves an exact image of the ontological relationship between the stage of undifferentiated "existence" and the stage of the differentiated world. He remarks,³¹ "Know that absolute existence or God is like a limitless ocean, while the determined things and individual existents are like innumerable waves or rivers. Just as the waves and rivers are nothing other than the unfolding of the sea according to the forms required by its own perfections which it possesses qua water as well as by its own peculiarities which it possesses qua sea, so are the determined existents nothing other than the unfolding of absolute existence under those

²⁸ Cf. Haydar Amuli: *Jami' al-Asrar* (op. cit.), pp. 106-107.

²⁹ This is known as the stage at which "existence" is conceived as *la bi-shart maq-sami*, i.e., an absolute unconditionality in which "existence" is conceived as not being determined even by the quality of being-unconditional. The stage corresponds to what Lao Tzu calls the "Mystery of Mysteries" (*hsuan. chih yu hsuan*) and what Chuang Tzu designates by the repetition of the word wu or "non-existence", i.e., *wu wu* meaning "non-non-existence".

³⁰ Jami' al-Asrar (op. cit.), pp. 161-162.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 206-207.

forms that are required by its own essential perfections as well as by its peculiarities belonging to it as its inner articulations.

"Further, the waves and rivers are not the sea in one respect, while in another they are the same thing as the sea. In fact, the waves and rivers are different from the sea in respect of their being determined and particular. But they are not different from the sea in respect of their own essence and reality, namely, from the point of view of their being pure water. In exactly the same way, the determined existents are different from the Absolute in their being determined and conditioned, but they are not different from it in respect of their own essence and reality which is pure existence. For from this latter viewpoint, they are all nothing other than existence itself."

It is interesting that Haydar Amuli goes on to analyze this ontological situation from a kind of semantic point of view. He says:³² "The sea, when it is determined by the form of the wave, is called waves. The selfsame water, when determined by the form of the river, is called a river, and when determined by the form of the brook, is called a brook. In the same way it is called rain, snow, ice, etc. In reality, however, there is absolutely nothing but sea or water, for the wave, river, brook, etc. are merely names indicating the sea. In truth (i.e., in its absolutely unconditioned reality) it bears no name; there is nothing whatsoever to indicate it. No, it is a matter of sheer linguistic convention even to designate it by the word sea itself." And he adds that exactly the same is true of "existence" or "reality".

There are still other famous metaphors such as that of the mirror and the image, and that of one and the numbers which are formed by the repetition of one. All of them are important in that each one throws light on some peculiar aspect of the relation between Unity and Multiplicity which is not clearly revealed by others. But for the particular purposes of the present paper, I think, enough have already been given.

The most important conclusion to be drawn from a careful consideration of the metaphors that have just been given is that there are recognizable in the metaphysical Reality or the Absolute itself two different dimensions. In the first of these dimensions, which is metaphysically the ultimate stage of Reality, the Absolute is the Absolute in its absoluteness, that is, in its absolute indetermination. It corresponds to the Vedantic concept of the *parabrahman*, the "Supreme Brahman", and to the neo-Confucian idea of the *wu chi*, the "Ultimateless". Both in Vedanta and Islam, the Absolute at this supreme stage is not even God, for after all "God" is but a determination of the Absolute, in so far at least as it differentiates the Absolute from the world of creation.

In the second of the two domains, the Absolute is still the Absolute, but it is the Absolute in relation to the world. It is the Absolute considered as the ultimate source of the phenomenal world, as Something which reveals itself in the form of Multiplicity. It is only at this stage that the name God—Allah in Islam—becomes applicable to the Absolute. It is the stage of the *parameshvara*; the supreme Lord, in Vedanta, and in the neo-Confucian worldview the position of the *t'ai chi*, the "Supreme Ultimate" which is no other than the *wu chi*, the "Ultimate of Nothingness" as an eternal principle of creativity.

Such is the position generally known as "oneness of existence" (*wahdat al-wujud*) which exercised a tremendous influence on the formative process of the philosophic as well as poetic mentality of the Muslim Iranians, and whose basic structure I wanted to explain to you in this paper. It will be clear by

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 207-209.

now that it is a serious mistake to consider—as it has often been done—this position as pure monism or even as "existential monism". For it has evidently an element of dualism in the sense that it recognizes two different dimensions of reality in the metaphysical structure of the Absolute. Nor is it of course right to regard it as dualism, for the two different dimensions of reality are ultimately, i.e., in the form of *coincidentia oppositorum*, one and the same thing. The "oneness of existence" is neither monism nor dualism. As a metaphysical vision of Reality based on a peculiar existential experience which consists in seeing Unity in Multiplicity and Multiplicity in Unity, it is something far more subtle and dynamic than philosophical monism or dualism.

It is interesting to observe, moreover, that such a view of Reality, considered as a bare structure, is not at all exclusively Iranian. It is, on the contrary, commonly shared more or less by many of the major philosophical schools of the East. The important point is that this basic common structure is variously colored in such a way that each school or system differs from others by the emphasis it places on certain particular aspects of the structure and also by the degree to which it goes in dwelling upon this or that particular major concept.

Now, by further elaborating the conceptual analysis of the basic structure, taking into consideration at the same time the major differences which are found between various systems, we might hopefully arrive at a comprehensive view of at least one of the most important types of Oriental philosophy which may further be fruitfully compared with a similar type of philosophy in the West. It is my personal conviction that a real, deep, philosophical understanding between the East and West becomes possible only on the basis of a number of concrete research works of this nature conducted in various fields of philosophy both Western and Eastern.