Interreligious Relations with No Self: A Mystical Path to Omnilogue?

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Abstract

Various models of interreligious relations have been proposed in recent scholarship, including most prominently the several varieties of inclusivism, exclusivism, and pluralism. One abiding presupposition shared across these models takes the religious adherent (or community of adherents) as a unified individual (or collective of such individuals). This assumption overlooks an important feature of the mystical strains of religiosity, which is to negate selfhood. This article seeks to problematize standard scholarly models of interreligious relations by working through and applying to them such mystical understandings of (non-)selfhood, with particular focus on the Islamic mystics Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭamī, Abū l-Qāsem al-Junayd, ʿAbd al-Karīm ibn Hawāzin al-Qushayrī, Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār Nayshābūrī, and Muḥyiddīn Ibn al-ʿArabī. Based on this textual study, I propose an alternative to interreligious dialogue more adequately termed 'polyglot monologue' or, in order to avoid pluralistic implications, 'omnilogue'.

Keywords: Interreligious relations; interreligious dialogue; omnilogue; Sufism; Islamic mysticism

Various models of interreligious relations have been proposed in recent scholarship, including most prominently the several varieties of inclusivism, exclusivism, and pluralism.[1] One abiding presupposition shared across these models takes the religious adherent (or

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[1]I explain these terms and refer to relevant scholarship below. Here, I note only that interest in specifically Islamic elaborations of interreligious relations and related topics is growing, though of course the number of works published in the field still lags far behind that devoted to Christian perspectives. Introductory summaries include: Ashgar Ali Engineer, 'Islam and Pluralism', in *The Myth of Religious Superiority: A Multifaith Exploration* (ed.) Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, 2005), pp. 211–219; David Thomas, 'Islam and the Religious Other', in *Understanding Interreligious Relations* (eds.) David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt and David Thomas (Oxford, 2013), pp. 148–171; and the chapter on 'Submission to a Divinely Willed Diversity: Islamic Pluralism', in Perry Schmidt-Leukel, *Religious Pluralism & Interreligious Theology* (Maryknoll, 2017), pp. 42–53. Book-length studies include: Jacques Waardenburg (ed.), *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions: A Historical Survey* (Oxford, 1999); Jacques Waardenburg, *Muslims and Others, Relations in Context* (Berlin, 2003); Perry Schmidt-Leukel and Lloyd Ridgeon (eds.), *Islam and Inter-Faith Relations* (London, 2007); and Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge, 2009). Further sources are referenced in the bibliographies of these works.

community of adherents) as a unified individual (or collective of such individuals). In this article, I propose that this seemingly unproblematic assumption overlooks an important feature of the mystical strains of religiosity (howsoever construed), which is to negate selfhood, be it through ontological annihilation, metaphysical union, epistemological realisation of non-existence, or any one of several other related means. In the pages that follow, therefore, I seek to apply such mystical understandings of (non-)selfhood to interreligious relations, with particular focus on the theoretical elaborations of Islamic mystics, or Sufis.[2]

Given that the spiritual path toward realisation/annihilation of selfhood has been the subject of numerous treatises, poems, sermons, and manuals composed by innumerable Sufis of all kinds of personal temperaments and institutional affiliations over many centuries, I can do no more than offer below a 'taste' (*dhawq*) of but a handful of approaches. Thus, I will briefly outline the views in this regard of Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (*circa* 804-74), Abū l-Qāsem al-Junayd (830–910), ʿAbd al-Karīm ibn Hawāzin al-Qushayrī (*circa* 986–1074), Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār Nayshābūrī (*circa* 1142-*circa* 1221) and, last but certainly not least, Muḥyiddīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (1165–1240).[3] I have elected to provide outlines of the positions espoused by several thinkers rather than a more detailed exposition of one because my aim is to present as generalisable an argument as possible within the confines of a single article. And I have chosen these writers as representatives of some of the diverse perspectives on offer within the Sufi philosophical fold. Thus, Bisṭāmī and Junayd (both of whose sayings will find re-elaboration by Qushayrī) are traditionally considered to epitomise the 'drunken' (*sukr*) and 'sober' (*ṣaḥw*) methods of spiritual realisation respectively.[4] Qushayrī, the author of the definitive Sufi *Resāleh* or *Treatise* ("perhaps the most popular classical work on Sufism, admired for its subtlety, acuity, and clarity"),[5] is typical of the synoptic approach toward Sufism prevalent in the Khorāsān of his time. According to this outlook, the various schools of thought and practice elaborated hitherto by Sufis of all stripes were construed as so many threads of a single, multi-coloured tapestry. ʿAṭṭār, meanwhile, is an eloquent exponent of the Persian poetical tradition in which some of the highest summits of the Sufi passage

[2]While I am well aware that the Arabic-derived term 'Sufi' (*Ṣūfī*) is not co-extensive with the English term 'mystic' for many historical and etymological reasons, given the colloquial adoption of it into the English lexicon as more or less denoting 'Islamic mystic', I have not seen any problem in using it in this sense throughout the present article.

[3]Throughout this article, I use the EI3 transliteration system for Arabic as well as Persian terms and names; where the same term is used in both languages but transliterated differently in each, I have let linguistic context dictate which version to use. I have typically included diacritical marks in citations where these are missing in the original. Regarding dates, I have chosen to provide these in the 'common era' (CE) calendar for simplicity, particularly given that the Arabic and Persian contexts use differing systems (that is, the lunar as opposed to the solar Hijri calendar respectively).

[4]See in this regard the discussion in Carl W. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany, 1985), pp. 49–51, in which the author traces the ultimately quite artificial repartitioning of Sufis between these two schools back to the *Kashf al-Maḥjūb* (*Unveiling of the Veiled*) of ʿAlī al-Hujvīrī (*circa* 990–1077). For a more recent scholarly assessment of the distinction, see Jawid Mojaddedi, 'Getting Drunk with Abu Yazid or Staying Sober with Junayd: The Creation of a Popular Typology of Sufism', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 66, 1 (2003), pp. 1–13.

[5]Michael A. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qurʾan, Miʿraj, Poetic and Theological Writings* (New York, 1996), p. 97. Both for the sake of readers' convenience and on account of the excellence of its translations, I have used Sells' anthology for citations from Bisṭāmī, Junayd, Qushayrī and related authors throughout. I provide bibliographical details of original source texts *ad locum* below; these can also be found in Sells' notes to the relevant chapters (pp. 322–374). For details regarding the source texts and translations for ʿAṭṭār and Ibn al-ʿArabī, see notes 35 and 42 below.

were scaled. And Ibn al-ʿArabī, known as the 'Greatest Master' (*al-Shaykh al-Akbar*), represents for many the most complete of all elaborations of Sufi thought.

Given the sheer size of the collective textual corpus attributed to these classical authors, coupled with the complexity of contemporary scholarly debates regarding interreligious relations, the account that I provide here is necessarily incomprehensive. The first major section of my discussion charts the distinctive positions regarding selfhood and its annihilation espoused by the aforementioned mystics, related though these positions are by their exponents' common Muslimhood. In the remainder, I make a series of interventions into scholarly conceptions of interreligious relations based on my foregoing account. My comments there are deliberately suggestive and provocative, as my aim is predominantly a critical one; that is, to interrogate one of the underlying assumptions animating relevant scholarship, and thereby to narrow the ambit of validity within which extant thought on interreligious relations is to be construed. Although I propose several theoretical, methodological, and terminological innovations in the course of that discussion, the constructive task that would formulate a new model of interreligious relations taking account of, or even being squarely based on, such Islamic (and more broadly mystical) understandings of selfhood, I largely leave, owing to constraints of time and space, to future work.[6]

Islam and the *Jihād al-nafs*

In what is perhaps the first example of a Sufi commentary to the *Qurʾān*, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (702–65) asks: "How can that which passes away (*fānin*) find a way to that which abides (*bāqin*)?"[7] This question may be taken to embody the entire spiritual quest of the Sufis, for in it we find already announced the key elements around which this quest will revolve. Firstly, the seeker: s/he who, though temporally created, seeks to attain to her/his timeless Creator, the second element. And stretching between them, the way (*ṭarīqah*) along which transpires what Plotinus had called "the flight of the one to the One".[8]

This path was most typically construed within the Sufi traditions of Islam with which we are concerned as the *jihād al-nafs*.[9] Before turning to specific Sufi thinkers and writers, therefore, it behoves me to say a few words concerning these two central terms of any discussion regarding their conceptions of the self. Both 'jihād' and 'nafs' are terms found in the *Qurʾān*, though each can be understood in a number of (related) senses. 'Jihād' stems from the Arabic verbal root j/h/d, which basically means 'to endeavour, strive' and thus 'to struggle, fight'. It is used in the *Qurʾān* to refer to both the external struggle against enemies of the faith, and

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[6]Studies of Islamic mysticism in relation to interreligious relations include Reza Shah-Kazemi, 'Light Upon Light? The Qurʾan and the Gospel of St. John', in *Interreligious Hermeneutics*, (eds.) Catherine Cornille and Christopher Conway (Eugene, 2010); Mahmut Aydin, 'A Muslim Pluralist: Jalaluddin Rûmi', in *The Myth of Religious Superiority*, (ed.) Knitter, pp. 220–236; Rafal Stepien, 'Rūmī, Balkhī, Mevlevī: The Ambiguities of Identity in the Poetry of Jalāl-Dīn Muḥammad (1207–1272 CE)', in *In Quest of Identity: Studies on the Persianate World*, (eds.) Mirosław Michałak and Magdalena Zaborowska (Warsaw, 2015); and the section on 'The Impact of Islamic Mysticism', in Schmidt-Leukel, *Religious Pluralism & Interreligious Theology*, pp. 48–53, where (passing) mention is made of both Junayd and Ibn al-ʿArabī among other Islamic mystics.

[7]Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, p. 80. For Jaʿfar's original text, see Paul Nwyia, 'Le Tafsīr Mystique Attribué a Gaʿfar Ṣādiq: Édition Critique', *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 43 (1968), pp. 181–230.

[8]Annemarie Schimmel, *As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam* (New York, 1982), p. 218.

[9]For detailed discussion of *jihād al-nafs* from the Sufi perspective, see Chapter 3 on '*Jihād-Nafs*: The Spiritual Struggle', in Richard Bonney, *Jihād: From Qurʾān to bin Laden* (Basingstoke, 2004), pp. 91–107.

to the internal striving against one's own selfish inclinations—two senses which came to be referred to in Islamic tradition as the lesser and the greater struggle respectively (*al-jihād al-aṣghar* and *al-jihād al-akbar*). Thus, verse 35 of the *sūrah* entitled *Al-Māʾedah* or *The Repast*, in which Allāh exhorts believers to "strive with might and main in His cause" has traditionally been interpreted to refer to the internal struggle, while verse 88 of *Al-Tawbah* or *The Repentance* uses the root j/h/d in the external sense when speaking of "the Messenger, and those who believe with him, [who] strive and fight with their wealth and their persons".[10] This *jihād* on the part of the faithful, be it material or spiritual, is "for their own souls".[11] The word translated as 'soul' in this version of the Qurʾānic verse is the Arabic 'nafs', which can also be rendered as 'mind', 'person', 'inclination' or 'desire' depending on the context. Sufis, interested in the various psychological states in which the wayfarer may find her or himself, came to classify several kinds of *nafs*, ranging from the evil, ever-whispering 'demanding soul' (*al-nafs al-ammārah*), through the repenting 'self-cursing soul' (*al-nafs al-lawwāmah*), to the appeased 'sure soul' (*al-nafs al-muṭmaʾinnah*) unshakeably firm in its faith. In the context of self-annihilation (*fanāʾ*), the *nafs* may be said to designate the selfish element within which hinders the seeker from truly submitting to God: the one overriding aim of all properly Islamic endeavours in that, as is well known, '*islām*' itself etymologically refers to 'submission' and/as 'peace'.

Can we thus say that the annihilation of the self, the *fanāʾ* of the *nafs*, is the goal of the spiritual *jihād* upon which the Sufis were (and are) so intently engaged? I would argue that *fanāʾ* cannot be understood without reference to *tawḥīd* (union), and must thus be considered a means rather than the end of the Sufi spiritual journey. After all, it is not so much the rendering-nothing, but the rendering-one of oneself with one's true Self, that is at the core of the Islamic monotheistic revelation. "There is no god but God" (*lā ʾilāha ʾillā llāh*) declares the Islamic profession of faith (known as 'the *tawḥīd*'), which stands at the origin and end of all Sufi strivings.[12] Rather than merely verbalising this statement upon their tongues, or feeling its truth in their intellects (*ʿaql*) or hearts (*qalb / del*), the Sufis with whom we are concerned could be satisfied with nothing less than the existential embodiment of this statement in their very being. In other words, the Sufis understood the Islamic imperative to recognise no gods but the one true God to imply that there could be no beings but the one true Being. Thus, for example, Rūzbehān Baqlī (*circa* 1128–1209)[13] openly declared that to affirm the existence of anything other than the primordial unity (the '*waḥdah*', the 'being one'—from the same w/ḥ/d root as '*tawḥīd*') amounted to nothing less than infidelity.[14] It is in this context that Henry Corbin has spoken of the "ontological indigence" of the merely existent subject, whose 'I-ness' (*anānīyyah*) cannot suffice to render him in any

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[10]*Qurʾān* 5:35; ʿAbdullah Yūsuf ʿAlī (trans.), *The Meaning of the Holy Qurʾān* (Beltsville, 1998), p. 258, and *Qurʾān* 9:88; ʿAlī, *Holy Qurʾān*, p. 463. All quotations from the *Qurʾān* will cite the *sūrah* and *āyah* (chapter and verse) number, and are taken from the ʿAlī translation, which includes the original Arabic text.

[11]*Qurʾān* 29:6; ʿAlī, *Holy Qurʾān*, p. 988.

[12]See in this regard the comment by Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, p. 45: "the ground of Qurʾanic revelation is the affirmation of divine unity".

[13]The latest scholarly introduction to Baqlī is Kazuyo Murata, *Beauty in Sufism: The Teachings of Rūzbihān Baqlī* (Albany, 2017).

[14]See Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism*, p. 93, where the author quotes Baqlī as saying: "Creation, in the beginning of the act of creating, was 'approved (*mustaḥsan*)' in (the state of) essential union (*ʿayn-i jamʿ*). To become other than that, (to fall) from its own place, in reality is infidelity" (italics and additions in the original).

way existent, active, knowing before the all-encompassing "absolute Subject… the divine Subject who is in fact the active subject of all knowledge of God".[15] In the words of Carl Ernst, "selfhood [is] an exclusively divine prerogative. Only God has the right to say 'I'".[16] Only in this sense can one make sense of the otherwise blatantly blasphemous pronouncement of a Sufi such as Shahāb al-Dīn Sohravardī (1155–91), who famously up-ended the Islamic profession of faith in crying "There is no I but I" (*lā anā ʾillā anā*).[17] It is on account of this centrality of the notion of unity (and thus of union) in Sufi works dealing with the path of self-annihilation that I will, in the writers to whom I now turn, perforce encounter *fanāʾ* as intimately related to, and ultimately spilling into, *tawḥīd*.

Bisṭamī

Although Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭamī did not author any written works, his spoken words concerning *fanāʾ* and *tawḥīd* were so shocking and memorable that they were to form the subject of numerous commentaries in the years following his death.[18] One of Bisṭamī's most famous statements is the following:

> Once, he took me up, placed me before him, and said to me: "O Abū Yazīd, my creation would love to seek you". I said: "Adorn me with your unity, clothe me with your subjectivity, and take me up to your oneness, until when your creation sees me they say 'We have seen you' and you will be *that*, and I will not be there".[19]

This statement embodies in succinct form some of the ambiguities inherent in speaking of self-annihilation and union, particularly as formulated by Bisṭamī. Rather than providing us with straightforward answers as to Bisṭamī's position, it raises questions as to the very

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[15]Henry Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique* (Paris, 1986), p. 357.

[16]Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism*, p. 10.

[17]See Schimmel, *As Through a Veil*, p. 219. Also known as the 'Murdered Sheikh' (*Shaykh al-maqtūl*), Sohravardī was in fact executed for heresy on account of just such pronouncements. For longer discussions concerning this controversial figure and his philosophy and legacy, see e.g. Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Lahore, 2003), pp. 259–263, and Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, pp. 285–305. Book-length studies include Mehdi Amin Razavi, *Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination* (Richmond, 1997), and Henry Corbin, *En Islam iranien: aspects spirituels et philosophiques*, vol. II: *Sohrawardi et les Platoniciens de Perse* (Paris, 1971).

[18]Three of the most famous are the *Book of Flashes* (*Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*) of Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 988), which includes comments by Junayd; the *Ranks of the Sufis* (*Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfīya*) (somewhat misleadingly, given the standard rendering of *walī* (pl. *awliyāʾ*) rather than *ṣūfī* as 'friend of God', translated *Ranks of the Friends of God* by Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, p. 24) of Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Solamī (d. 1021); and the *Commentary on Ecstatic Sayings* (*Sharḥ-e Shaṭḥīyāt*) of Rūzbehān Baqlī. Bisṭamī himself is aching to receive a modern scholarly monograph devoted to him; the best summary of his life, works, and teachings remains: Gerhard Böwering, "Besṭāmī, Bāyazīd", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. IV, Fasc. 2 (Encyclopaedia Iranica Foundation, 1989), pp. 183–186, consulted online at: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bestami-bastami-bayazid-abu-yazid-tayfur-b> (accessed 8 October 2020).

[19]In Sells *Early Islamic Mysticism*, p. 215, italics in the original. As Sells notes, 'unity' here translates '*waḥdāniyya*', 'subjectivity' '*anāniyya*', and 'oneness' '*aḥadiyya*' (p. 352). For the original texts of Bisṭamī (and Ṣarrāj, cited below), see Abū Naṣr ʿAbdallah B. ʿAlī al-Sarráj al-Ṭusi, *The Kitáb al-Lumaʿ Fi ʾl-Taṣawwuf*, (ed.) R. A. Nicholson (Leiden and London, 1914), pp. 380–395. In translating such passages, Sells deliberately avoids capitalising pronominal references to God so as to preserve "the ambiguity over the object seen (him/it) [which] becomes a centrepiece of linguistic play and mystical meditation" (p. 82) in texts such as this. He explains that: "Because we are in the context of *fanāʾ* (passing away) in which the Sufi passes away in mystical union with the divine, the standard grammatical distinction between self and other, human and divine, reflexive and non-reflexive, begins to break down" (p. 82). Not only do I agree with this principle on hermeneutic grounds, but I consider the absence of a distinction between upper and lower case in both the Arabic and the Persian languages of the original texts under discussion to necessitate such praxis in English-language translation to the extent possible. See Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 49 for an alternative rendering of this saying.

ontological status of the seeking self *vis-à-vis* the sought (or Sought) it was, ostensibly, out to clarify. Thus, the initial declaration by the divinity that his creation "would love to seek" the creature Bisṭamī, posed as it is in the conditional, leaves undisclosed both whether creation actually does so seek him, and whether such a seeking would be loved by the creator himself. Bisṭamī's response, moreover, repeatedly undermines itself by both affirming duality (in speaking of 'me' and 'your') and denying it (in proposing, precisely, that distinctions such as that between 'my' and 'your' be undone in unity, (single) subjectivity, and oneness). The apophatic nature of Bisṭamī's statement finds its most intense expression at the very end where, the *tawḥīd* having been enacted (at least hypothetically) and the 'I' of Bisṭamī transformed into the one and only 'I' of Allāh, that very 'I' disappears in *fanāʾ*, leaving us to wonder whether the self of Bisṭamī has disappeared into the self of Allāh, or whether only the *that* remains, shorn of all selfhood whatsoever.

In commenting on this saying, Abū Naṣr al-Ṣarrāj (d. 988) (in whose book it has been transmitted) cites the following highly important *ḥadīth-i qodsī* or extra-Qurʾānic divine saying:

> My servant continues to draw near to me through free acts of devotion until I love him. When I love him, I am the eye with which he sees, the hearing with which he sees, the tongue with which he speaks, the hand with which he grasps.[20]

This *ḥadīth* was to play a pivotal role in the Sufi understanding of *fanāʾ* and *tawḥīd*. In it too we see an ambiguity as to the existential status of the annihilated self. Though the divine 'I' has taken over all the attributes of the human self, yet that very self persists in nonetheless being the one through whom these very attributes are actualised. Thus, though Allāh is the eye, ear, tongue, and hand, yet the servant remains the one who sees, hears, speaks, and grasps. We will see below that this state may correspond to what Bisṭamī's near contemporary Junayd termed the *fanāʾ* of one's attributes (*al-fanāʾ al-ṣifāt*) but, for the moment, suffice it to say that Bisṭamī, at least in the passage cited, proposes a highly apophatic vision of self-annihilation and union. Though the *nafs* is noughted, yet it remains as the one in whom it vanished. Perhaps Bisṭamī here foreshadows the views of Junayd, for whom the attainment of true union was signalled not by the annihilation of oneself in God of *fanāʾ*, but by the abiding of oneself in God of the *baqāʾ* consequent upon it (a notion that came to be known as *al-baqāʾ baʿd al-fanāʾ*: self-abiding after self-annihilation).[21]

Junayd

Abū l-Qāsem al-Junayd not only commented upon Bisṭamī's statements but also composed his own works, among which is found the treatise entitled simply *Tawḥīd*.[22] In it, Junayd

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[20]In Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 216 and 218. See also in regard to this *ḥadīth* a variant mentioned on p. 353. I will leave undiscussed the entire issue of the disputed status of 'divine' *aḥādīth* such as this, which are considered, like the Qurʾān, to be the actual word of God, and yet do not form part of the Qurʾān. See also Junayd's comments upon this *ḥadīth* (in Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, p. 261), which obviously caused him quite some tribulation: "Now if he is the hearing with which he hears and the seeing with which he sees, then how can that be given a how? How can it be delimited in such a way as to be accessible to a category of knowledge?"

[21]See in this regard Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 59.

[22]The standard book-length source in English on Junayd remains Ali Hassan Abdel Kader, *The Life, Personality and Writings of Al-Junayd* (London, 1962), which includes Junayd's original texts. For a summary, see also, Arthur

proposes three kinds of *fanā'*. In the first, one passes from one's attributes, qualities and dispositions. Next, one passes away from cognisance of such passing away (in what Bisṭamī had already called *fanā' al-fanā'*).[23] Finally, however, "you both pass away and abide, and are found truly existent in your passing away".[24] Immediately prior to this three-fold elaboration of *fanā'* towards final integration with *baqā'*, Junayd writes:

> He protects you from yourself, and brings you to himself through the passing away of your passing away in your attainment of your aim. He abides in your abiding, that is, the unity of the affirmer of unity abides through the abiding of the one who is one, even as the affirmer of unity passes away. Then you are you. You lacked yourself, and then you came to abide insofar as you passed away.[25]

Another passage of the same work may help us shed light on Junayd's meaning. He says:

> Then he was, after he was not, whereby he was—was! He was he after he was not-he. He was an existent after being a non-existent existent, for he had emerged from overpowering intoxication into the clarity of waking.[26]

We thus see that Junayd proposes a dynamic notion of *fanā'*, whereby one stage succeeds upon another in spiralling fluctuations between annihilation and abiding. After having passed through successive stages of self-annihilation, in which the self has been stripped of its own qualities, self-consciousness, and being, the now not-self abides in its unity with the one abider. In enacting this union, the not-self is restored to itself, not only in that it drowns in the undifferentiated ocean of its origin, but also in that it realises its own differentiated identity as a water-drop.[27] Junayd is unsatisfied with the 'intoxicated' states typical of Bisṭamī, in which one loses sight of one's pronominal referent in a heady haze of apophatic inter-identification.[28] Rather, Junayd advocates a further stage, in which one sobers up into the "clarity of waking", in which one is able, once more, to abide in one's own self-identity, though only as transformed into the one self-abiding identity that is reality (*al-Ḥaqq*).

Qushayrī

In contrast to the inter-penetration—be it drunken or sober—of identity/identities and concomitant self-annihilation/self-abiding espoused by the likes of Bisṭamī and Junayd, the doxographer ʿAbd al-Karīm ibn Hawāzin al-Qushayrī is concerned to maintain the orthodox separation between oneself and the One Self, and consequently adopts a more 'rational'

J. Arberry, "al-Djunayd", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition, (eds.) P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W. P. Heinrichs (Leiden, 2012), consulted online at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_2117> (accessed 8 October 2020).

[23]See in this regard Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, p. 222, who calls this "the passing away of passing away… in which the Sufi passes away from consciousness of passing away".

[24]*Ibid.*, p. 255.

[25]In *Ibid.*, p. 255.

[26]In *Ibid.*, p. 254.

[27]The image of the ocean and drop is taken from Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (1207–72); for discussion, see Annemarie Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun: A Study of the Works of Jalaloddin Rumi* (London, 1980), pp. 79 and 315.

[28]See in this regard Junayd's comment on Bisṭamī's requesting to be adorned with God's unity: "These are the words of one who has not been clothed with the realities of the experience of *tafrīd* (singularity) in the completeness of the true *tawḥīd*" (in Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, p. 216).

approach to *fanā'* and *tawḥīd*.[29] For Qushayrī, who typically refers to Allāh as *al-Ḥaqq* (the Real), there can ultimately be only one abiding Reality, to which creation aspires but which it can never actually reach. As he puts it, "No created being attains union with him",[30] for no created being possesses the existential force, the real being (*wujūd*), required to truly abide. As he puts it elsewhere, "What he [the servant] has passed away from could not truly have existed in the first place".[31] In other words, 'that which passes away (*fānin*)' can never 'find a way to that which abides (*bāqin*)'. It is for this reason that, as Qushayrī cites Abū ʿAlī Daqqāq (d. 1015) saying, "*Wujūd* entails the extinction of the servant"[32] or, in the words of Qushayrī himself, "the appearance of the real, Most Praised, is the disappearance of the creature".[33] This, of course, can never amount to any actually existential annihilation, for there never was and never can be any other Being but God. *Fanā'*, for Qushayrī, is thus a realisation in the epistemological sense of the term; the realisation, that is, of the eternal reality of the being of the One Being. Passing away is but the passing away of ignorance, a process concomitant with the raising to consciousness of an ontological truth or reality which always was and will be the case. As Qushayrī puts it: "His [the servant's] passing away from himself and from creatures occurs through the cessation of his *perception* of himself and of creatures… Whoever passes away from his ignorance endures through his knowledge".[34] Thus, *tawḥīd* (union) can only ever be an epistemological recognition of the permanent ontological state of *waḥdah* (unity). To use Plato's image: the sun was always shining, but we—benighted in the ignorance of the cave—saw it not.

ʿAṭṭār

The Persian poet Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār Nayshābūrī also deals at length with the notion of *fanā'* and *tawḥīd* throughout his epic *mathnavī* poems.[35] In the following verses, ʿAṭṭār appears to

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[29]For recently-published book-length studies of Qushayrī, see Martin Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur'an Scholar: Abū'l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī and the Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* (Oxford, 2012); and 'Al-Qushayrī and His Legacy' (special issue, (eds.) Martin Nguyen and Matthew Ingalls), *Journal of Sufi Studies* 2, 1 (2013).

[30]In Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, p. 141. For Qushayrī's original text, see *Al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya fī al-Taṣawwuf*, (eds.) ʿAbd al-Kalīm Maḥmūd and Maḥmūd ibn al-Sharīf (Cairo, 1966).

[31]In Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, p. 120.

[32]*Ibid.*, p. 114.

[33]*Ibid.*, p. 132. In his note to this quote, Sells states what he calls "a fundamental theological point"; that is, that "In Sufi understanding of mystical union, there is no 'meeting of two parties', but rather one party disappears and the other emerges" (p. 341). While this may be true of one such as Qushayrī eager to avoid the charge of unification (*ittiḥād* – from the same root as *tawḥīd*), the positions of Bisṭāmī and Junayd we have already seen are significantly more ambiguous; we will see below, moreover, that explicit affirmation of mutual inter-penetration, inter-identification, or inter-unification is far from taboo in the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī.

[34]Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 120 and 121, italics and addition added.

[35]In the limited space available here, I will look only at a very few passages from the *Manṭeq al-ṭayr* or *Speech of the Birds*, and the *Asrār nāmeh* or *Book of Secrets*. Translations are my own. For the original Persian texts, see Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār Nayshābūrī, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, (ed.) Muḥammad Reżā Shafīʿī Kadkanī (Tehrān, 1384 *shamsī* / 2005– 6 CE); and Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār Nayshābūrī, *Asrār nāmeh*, (ed.) Muḥammad Reżā Shafīʿī Kadkanī (Tehrān, 1386 *shamsī* / 2007–8 CE). For a much more detailed study of ʿAṭṭār on related themes, and one from which I have had occasion to draw directly here, see Rafal Stepien, 'A Study in Sufi Poetics: The Case of ʿAṭṭār Nayshābūrī', *Oriens* 41, 1 (2013), pp. 77–120. The definitive monograph on ʿAṭṭār remains Hellmut Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul: Man, the World and God in the Stories of Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār*, translated by John O'Kane, (editorial assistance) Bernd Radtke (Leiden, 2003). For a more recent volume comprising contributions by many of the major contemporary scholars on ʿAṭṭār, see Leonard Lewisohn and Christopher Shackle (eds.), *ʿAṭṭār and the Persian Sufi Tradition: The Art of Spiritual Flight* (London, 2006), and on the topic under consideration here especially the chapters by Leili Anvar-Chenderoff, "Without Us, from Us We're Safe': Self and Selflessness in the *Dīwān* of ʿAṭṭār' (pp. 241–

agree with Junayd in asserting that the Sufi is able to attain the abiding self-identity of *baqā'* only through having extinguished himself in the self-annihilation of *fanā'*. He writes:

> Whoever has left the midst: this is self-annihilation
> Once self-annihilated from self-annihilation: this is self-abiding[36]

And:

> Know It by It and annihilate the self
> In that very self-annihilation become very self-abiding
> Your self will abide if you annihilate your self
> You will remain whole if you remain without you[37]

This process continues until all remnants of self (be it in self-annihilation or self-abiding) are lost:

> First unself yourself from yourself
> Then drive forward a *Borāq* from nothingness
>
> …
> Lose yourself, and in the next instant lose this loss too
> Then lose this second loss too
>
> Keep going in such ease
> Until you reach the world of losthood[38]

Although, as we have seen, ʿAṭṭār does posit a *baqā'* following on from *fanā'*, these last lines suggest a progressively more intense self-annihilation, without any subsequent 'clarity of waking' as espoused by Junayd. Indeed, ʿAṭṭār's poetry is replete with tales involving the figure of the 'divine fool' (*dīvāneh*)[39] who, freed from the constricting bonds of sober

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254), and Eve Feuillebois-Pierunek, 'Mystical Quest and Oneness in the *Mukhtār-nāma* Attributed to Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār' (pp. 309–329) therein.

[36] ʿAṭṭār, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, v. 3999.

[37] ʿAṭṭār, *Asrār nāmeh*, vv. 1584–5. For further discussion of these and the precedently cited verses, as well as explanation of my use of 'It', see Stepien, 'A Study in Sufi Poetics', pp. 112, 104, and 82 fn. 18.

[38] ʿAṭṭār, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, vv. 4005 and 4011–2; see also Stepien, 'A Study in Sufi Poetics', p. 113. 'Borāq' is the name of the horse-like beast which the Prophet is said to have ridden on his Ascension (*meʿrāj*). These verses are reminiscent of Bisṭāmī's statement:

> I came upon the domain of nothingness (*laysīyya*). For ten years I continued flying in it until I arrived from noth-ing in nothing through nothing. Then I came upon perdition, which is the domain of *tawḥīd*. I continued to fly through nothing in perdition until I was lost in the loss of being lost. I was lost to the extent that I was lost from perdition in nothing, nothing in the loss of perdition. Then I came upon *tawḥīd* in the vanishing of creatures from the knower and the vanishing of the knower from creatures (in Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 222–223).

[39] ʿAṭṭār uses a wide variety of terms (and the proper names of certain Sufis, including – often – that of Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (Bāyazīd Basṭāmī in ʿAṭṭār's Persian) to designate this category of antinomian, anti-establishment seekers, whose role often merges with that of the 'holy beggars' (*darvīsh*). They are generally referred to as 'insane savants' *ʿoqalā-ye majānīn*) in the wider Islamic context. For more on this figure in ʿAṭṭār's poetry, see Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul*, pp. 165–187, and, more recently, Lucian Stone, 'Blessed Perplexity: The Topos of Ḥayrat in ʿAṭṭār's *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*', in *ʿAṭṭār and the Persian Sufi Tradition*, (eds.) Lewisohn and Shackle, pp. 95–111. For a discussion of

ratiocination, is able to enter into a state of 'bewilderment' (*ḥayrat* or *taḥayyor*) wherein he loses himself in the utter intoxication of sheer divinity:

> When the bewildered man reaches this position
> Baffled by bewilderment, the road lost
>
> Whatsoever Oneness branded upon his soul
> Is all lost to him, even 'loss' itself
>
> If they ask him "Are you drunk or not?
> Do you exist? Do you say you are, or are not?
>
> Are you in between, or outside betweens?
> Are you removed, or hidden, or apparent?
>
> Are you self-extinguished, or self-abiding, or both?
> Or are you neither? Are you you, or not you?"
>
> He will say "I don't know anything at all
> And I don't know that 'I don't know' either"[40]

In the context of lines such as this, Leonard Lewisohn has stated that:

> God may and in fact *must* be apprehended in all His diverse, contradictory forms, whichever divine quality, Name or theophany be displayed. But only in a state of drunkenness, when the mystic is bereft of the false discernment of his ratiocinative understanding and becomes immersed in God's Existence, can the underlying unity of this confusing diversity of manifestation be understood.[41]

However, rather than leading to any 'understanding' wherein one would be able to discern any 'underlying unity', ʿAṭṭār's verses point out that it is precisely in the confusion embodied in the ambiguous state between opposites that true *tawḥīd*—the loss of both oneness and plurality—is found. Indeed, our very vocabulary pushes us toward seeking some end to the spiritual quest, for implied in the very terms 'seeking' and 'quest' are the teleological ends for which these are said to be undertaken, just as 'understanding' is implicitly privileged over 'ignorance'. ʿAṭṭār's fools reject precisely such an understanding, an outcome—they would say—of merely intellectual (ʿaqlī) thinking. Rather, they 'keep going in ease', wandering lost in the liberty of what never can be lost nor found.

'mōrosophia' or "the way of foolish wisdom" (p. 18) specifically as a resource for interreligious relations, see Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, 2004), pp. 3–22.

  [40]ʿAṭṭār, *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, vv. 3832–7. My use of masculine pronouns here is in accordance with ʿAṭṭār's original, which speaks explicitly of a *mard-e ḥayrān* ('bewildered man'). While the Persian term '*mard*', like the English 'man', can well apply to the whole of humanity, considerations of both the sense and fluency of the translation of this passage led to the rendering given.

  [41]Leonard Lewisohn, 'Sufi Symbolism in the Persian Hermeneutic Tradition: Reconstructing the Pagoda of ʿAṭṭār's Esoteric Poetics', in *ʿAṭṭār and the Persian Sufi Tradition*, (eds.) Lewisohn and Shackle, p. 279, italics in the original.

Ibn al-ʿArabī

In the foregoing discussions of Bisṭāmī, Junayd, Qushayrī, and ʿAṭṭār, I have been obliged, in the space provided, to offer but glimpses of synecdoche in but a handful of passages of what are in fact great expanses of thought and feeling. In turning now to the writings of Muḥyiddīn Ibn al-ʿArabī, I am even more keenly aware of the insufficiency of the exposition that follows in giving voice to the vast vistas of spiritual attainment on offer in his body of work. This is so not only owing to the sheer size of his corpus, (which vastly exceeds those of the other writers under consideration), but also due to his conception of the divine names, which William Chittick, his foremost Western interpreter, designates "the single most important concept to be found in Ibn al-ʿArabī's works".[42] Since, in Ibn al-ʿArabī's world, "Each creature is a word (*kalimah*) of God",[43] each creature manifests a different aspect of the one reality. As such, there are as many levels of reality as there are beings, which implies that any one truth is true only on that level of divine manifestation, even though all such manifestations/truths/realities/names are but so many expressions of the One.[44] Thus it is that Ibn al-ʿArabī seems to contradict himself when taken out of context. In context, he is but formulating the particular truth valid for that particular divine name.[45] For my summary purposes, this presents something of a challenge for, in order to convey anything approximating the complete view of the *Shaykh*, I would need to be constantly qualifying my statements, backtracking and reformulating them in the light of further truth-

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[42]William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany, 1989), p. 10. All citations and translations from Ibn al-ʿArabī are taken from this authoritative source, which together with its follow-up volume—William C. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-ʿArabī's Cosmology* (Albany, 1998)—remain the best book-length introductions to Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought. For Ibn al-ʿArabī's original text, see *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, (ed.) O. Yahia (Cairo, 1972).

[43]Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 127.

[44]He says:

> Though Being is One Entity, the entities of the possible things have made It many, so It is the One/Many (*al-wāḥid al-kathīr*)… Without Him, we would not be found, and without us, He would not become many through the many attributes and the names diverse in meaning which He ascribes to Himself. The whole situation depends upon us and upon Him, since through Him we are, and through us He is (Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 214).

Corbin glosses the whole situation as follows:

> [E]ach being is an epiphanic form (*maẓhar, majlà*) of the Divine Being, who in it is manifested as invested in one or more of His Names. The universe is the totality of the Names by which He is named when we name Him by His Names. Each divine Name manifested is the lord (*rabb*) of the being who manifests it (that is, who is its *maẓhar*). Each being is the epiphanic form of his own Lord (*al-rabb al-khāṣṣ*), that is, he manifests only that aspect of the divine Essence which in each case is particularized and individualized in that Name. No determinate and individualized being can be the epiphanic form of the Divine in its totality, that is to say, of all the Names or 'Lords' (Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn ʿArabī*, (trans.) Ralph Manheim (Princeton, [1969] 1997), p 121.

Note also that Ibn al-ʿArabī's statement above to the effect that "through us He is" directly challenges the "fundamental theological point" made by Michael Sells cited above (see note 33). Ibn al-ʿArabī makes this point in various ways throughout his writings, as cited, for example, in Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, pp. 124 and 129 respectively: "By knowing Him, I give Him being"; "We have given Him the power to manifest Himself through us, Whereas He gave us (the power to exist through Him). Thus the role is shared between Him and us."

[45]See in this regard Sells' study of what he calls "mystical languages of unsaying", wherein he reads Ibn al-ʿArabī, among others, as engaging in "a discourse of double propositions, in which meaning is generated through the tension between the saying and unsaying" (Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago, 1994), p. 12).

manifestations. In order to avoid this, I will focus on but one particular theme (that of the fundamental ambiguity of being) and wistfully discard, here above all, any pretence to comprehensiveness.

Speaking with the voice of Allāh, Ibn al-ʿArabī addresses creation thus:

> [Y]ou are between Being and nonexistence… So look not upon Me with a gaze that will anni-hilate (*ifnāʾ*) you from your shadow. Then you would claim that you are I and fall into ignorance. And look not upon your shadow with a gaze that will annihilate you from Me. That would leave you deaf, and you would remain ignorant of why I created you. So be sometimes this and some-times that.[46]

This state of being both-this-and-that is referred to by the *Shaykh* in myriad ways through-out his writings. Thus, to give but two examples, he says that "every entity qualified by exist-ence is it/not it… He/not He… limited… not limited… seen… not seen", and that one who has attained to gnostic 'tasting' (*dhawq*) "is not He, yet he is He".[47] It is statements such as these that have led commentators such as Chittick to speak of the existential situation of beings as being fundamentally ambiguous, between absolute nonexistence and absolute existence: "all things are neither/nor, both/and, but never either/or".[48]

This ambiguous ontological situation holds several implications for the spiritual quest cul-minating in *tawḥīd*. Firstly, Ibn al-ʿArabī maintains that the 'perfect man' (*al-insān al-kāmil*), who has attained to complete vision of all levels of reality, must 'see with both eyes'. It is by so doing that he realises the dual nature of being: "Ontologically speaking, one eye sees Being and the other perceives nothingness. Through the two eyes working together, man perceives that he himself and the cosmos are He/not-He".[49] Furthermore, it is by thus sim-ultaneously seeing the individuality of each thing as self-abiding in its own unique identity and the universality of all things in the self-annihilation of their sum total before the One that the perfect man attains to the All-Comprehensive Name (*al-ism al-jāmiʿ*) of 'Allāh': "Just as Allāh designates nothing specific, but rather everything, Being and all its attributes —so also perfect man is nothing specific, since he is all things".[50] Thus, finally, the perfect man is he who is neither lost in self-annihilation in the one, nor found in self-abiding in oneness. In allowing each name to find its proper place in the equilibrium of the All-Comprehensive Name, he appears "totally ordinary",[51] yet brings together the sum total of all ontological possibilities. Surely this is a fitting end for the mystic's unending spiritual seeking?

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[46]In Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 94.

[47]*Ibid.*, pp. 116 and 149 respectively. Ibn al-ʿArabī refers explicitly to Junayd in the passage from which the latter quote is taken, and indeed the entire 'He/not He' motif may be seen to be prefigured in passages by Junayd such as the one cited in note 26 above.

[48]Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 29. See also, among many possible examples, "Every existent thing other than God dwells in a never-never land of affirmation and negation, finding and losing, knowing and not-knowing. The difference between the Finders and the rest of us is that they are fully aware of their own ambiguous situation" (pp. 3–4); "The outstanding feature of the cosmos is its ambiguous status, the fact that it is He/not He" (p. 18); and "Ambiguity… is an ontological fact, inherent in the nature of the cosmos. Nothing is certain but Being Itself, yet It is the 'coincidence of opposites' (*jamʿ al-aḍdād*), bringing all opposites together in a single reality" (p. 112).

[49]Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 362.

[50]*Ibid.*, p. 375.

[51]*Ibid.*, p. 372.

Islamic Mysticism and Interreligious Relations

The Mystics' No-Self

Having surveyed some of the most sophisticated and celebrated accounts of (non-)selfhood in Islamic mysticism, in this final portion of the article I want to apply their insights to the rather disparate sphere of interreligious relations.[52] In order to do so, I need first to draw one general conclusion as to the nature of selfhood from the internally varied positions of Bisṭāmī, Junayd, Qushayrī, ʿAṭṭār, and Ibn al-ʿArabī. This is by no means an easy task given the intricacies into which our Sufis have delved. What is there, after all, linking the drunken ontological ambiguities of Bisṭāmī, for whom the self appears to remain as the one and only Self only insofar as it has been apophatically noughted; the dynamically dia-lectical *fanāʾ* of sober Junayd, for whom the self passes through ever-deeper levels of anni-hilation only to find itself finally annihilated into self-abiding; the collapsing of *tawḥīd* into *waḥdah*, union into unity, of Qushayrī, for whom no-self can really be in the Being of the One Self; the self-annihilation from self-annihilation of ʿAṭṭār, for whom the bewilderment of the divine fool issues in the abjuration of both self-identity and other-difference; or the simultaneously neither/nor and both/and selfhood of Ibn al-ʿArabī, for whom the self may best be characterised as He/not He? Well, I propose that one denominator common to all of these accounts is the abnegation of individual selfhood in the face of what is taken to be the one true reality. To put it in terms analogous to the Islamic *shahādah* to which I referred earlier, there is no creature (*lā ʾilāha*) but the Creator (*ʾillā llāh*). Or, to use the formulation of Gerhard Böwering,

> The crucial point of passing away is reached when the Sufi's own self is stripped off, like a snake shedding its skin, and the mystic's own self-identity is obliterated. In shedding the self of ordinary self-perception—the self that is identifiable by a person's name—the mystic reaches his true self that is ultimately and profoundly one with God.[53]

In fact, we can discern two distinct ontological positions here, though the distinction will not affect the vision of interreligious relations entailed by either of them. On the one hand, the weaker claim is that one is undone in union with the One, where 'one' in the lower case denotes an individual existent independent of what turns out to be the one and only reality —that denoted by 'One' in the upper case. That is, one's being is unbeinged, one's very existence is rendered non-existent when united with the only real Being. Or, to put it yet another way, what was a plurality of beings is rendered a unity in union with Being. The stronger claim, on the other hand, is that no such union (*tawḥīd*) really takes place because unity (*waḥdah*) was and remains the only ontological fact. That is, there was and is no one to be noughted into the One, no being to be unbeinged, for there only ever

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[52]For omnibus compendia delineating the state of the field, see Cheetham, Pratt, and Thomas, *Understanding Interreligious Relations*; and Catherine Cornille (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Chich-ester, 2013). For critical engagement with many of the issues surrounding competing models of interreligious rela-tions, see Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions* (London, 2010); and Philip L. Quinn and Kevin Meeker (eds.), *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity* (Oxford, 1999).

[53]Gerhard Böwering, '*Baqāʾ wa fanāʾ*', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. III, Fasc. 7 (Encyclopaedia Iranica Foundation, 1988), pp. 722–4, consulted online at: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/baqa-wa-fana-sufi-term-signifying-subsistence-and-passing-away> (accessed 8 October 2020).

was the One Being. What merely appeared to be a plurality of existents turns out to be illusory insofar as they are rightly seen to be but metaphysically insubstantial manifestations of God. Naturally, where precisely to plot each of our mystics on this twofold schema is difficult, for every one of them, with the likely exception of Qushayrī, expresses a position that in some way melds the two—a melding hardly inconsistent with the matter of metaphysical melding itself at play, of course.

Regardless of which particular flavour of this ultimate annihilation of the mystic in her or his very identification with the ultimate reality we adopt, it is very much worth observing that it is not limited to Islam, but constitutes a consistently repeated feature in mysticisms the world over, be they monotheistic, polytheistic, or non-theistic. I am not to be taken to be espousing a form of perennialism in so saying, for not only does the meagre textual evidence I have presented here not justify such universalisation, but I am also all-too-aware of the differing conceptions of the various terms under discussion utilised by mystics trained in different traditions.[54] Besides which, this is not the place to attempt a typology of the world's mysticisms. Rather, I am concerned to underline what I take to be a hitherto unappreciated and significant implication of such general mystical conceptions of selfhood for the study of interreligious relations. This is, that regardless of which particular mode of interreligious relationality one favours (on which more in a moment), all three of the standard types of interreligious relations discussed in relevant scholarly literature take for granted the substantiality of the self, be this conceived as the unified individual religious adherent or the collective of such individuals as the community of adherents. This makes perfect sense given the pragmatic aims of much of the scholarship on religious pluralism, which "has come to represent a powerful ideal meant to resolve the question of how to get along in a conflict-ridden world".[55] But it nevertheless ignores a strand of religiosity that is both immensely authoritative and enduringly productive within not only Islam but well beyond.

Now, if we are to adopt an emic perspective according to which the formulations of exemplary adherents of a given religious tradition (in this case those of Islam) are taken seriously at their word (and not at our deformative reformulation of it in accordance with our own, typically substantialist, naïvely ontologically realist, presuppositions), then we must own that the reification of what, to them, is strictly-speaking, ultimately or always, a non-entity (the individual and, by extension, the communal self) invalidates the standard models of interreligious relations (re)cited and (re)affirmed by scholars, students, practitioners, and public figures alike.[56] In order to do justice to this claim, I must at least briefly delineate the models to which I refer: pluralism, exclusivism, and inclusivism.

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[54]To refer the matter to the relevant debate in the study of mystical experience, I thus side with the contextualist-constructivist approach associated with the likes of Steven Katz and Wayne Proudfoot over the universalist-perennialist approach associated with the likes of Robert Forman and Walter Stace. For details, see e.g. Steven T. Katz (ed.), *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York, 1978); Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley, 1985); Robert K. C. Forman (ed.), *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy* (New York, 1990); and Walter T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London, 1961).

[55]Courtney Bender and Pamela E. Klassen, 'Introduction: Habits of Pluralism', in *After Pluralism: Reimagining Religious Engagement*, (eds.) Courtney Bender and Pamela E. Klassen (New York, 2010), p. 1.

[56]One particularly influential defence of the standard typology is that of Perry Schmidt-Leukel, 'Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology – Clarified and Reaffirmed', in *The Myth of Religious Superiority*, (ed.) Knitter, pp. 13–27. The typology is assumed, albeit as standing in "need of numerous refinements" (p. 11) by

Interreligious Relations and Ultimate Irreligiosity

Pluralism is most closely associated with the figure of John Hick, and for present purposes may be summarised in Hick's own words as the position that

> there is a transcendent and immanent Real, or Ultimate Reality, which is universally present to humanity and of which humans are aware, to the extent that they allow themselves to be aware, in the various ways made possible by their different conceptual systems and spiritual practices.[57]

In other words, the idea here is that the various religions are equally valid mundane expressions of the one supra-mundane reality. To this may be contrasted the two other positions, which both take one religion to be superior to others. (This has in actual fact typically been taken to be Christianity on the part of scholarly defenders, but I will generalise from that particular case here). Exclusivism I define as the position that one religion (that is, one's own) is uniquely (that is, exclusively) right (where 'right' may mean 'metaphysically real', 'epistemologically true', 'soteriologically efficacious', or some other such designator depending on context). Inclusivism likewise takes one religion to be superior (in any of the senses just mentioned) but admits that other religions may be accounted valid means toward the realisation of the one ultimately true religion's ends. Or, to put it in the words of Harold Netland, "exclusivism holds that true religious claims are found only among the teachings of one's own religion, whereas inclusivism maintains that it is possible that both one's own and other religions teach truth".[58]

My claim is that none of these three models of interreligious relations is applicable to religious adherents of any stripe if these are taken according to the mystical understanding of selfhood I have outlined based on Islamic sources. For all three—pluralism, exclusivism and inclusivism—presuppose a substantially existent religious adherent on the base of which interreligious relations may be built, as it were, on their competing architectural

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Robert McKim, *On Religious Diversity* (New York, 2012), and is taken as the starting point for discussion of interreligious relations, religious diversity, and religious dialogue throughout relevant scholarship.

[57]John Hick, 'Religious Pluralism', in *Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, (eds.) Chad Meister and Paul Copan (Abingdon, 2012), p. 246. Hick's 'pluralistic hypothesis' is spelled out most influentially in John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven, 1989) (2nd edition, 2004), though Hick has continued to reiterate and revise his hypothesis in a multitude of works (for which, see the list in John Hick, *The Rainbow of Faiths* [London, 1995], p. 151). Hick's position has, predictably, also come under criticism from various quarters, perhaps most conspicuously by Gavin D'Costa (see especially Gavin D'Costa, *John Hick's Theology of Religions: A Critical Examination* [New York and London, 1987]) and Alvin Plantinga (see especially Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* [Oxford, 2000]). For a compendium of dissenting views, see Gavin D'Costa (ed.), *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered* (New York, 1990). Hick's *The Rainbow of Faiths* is a book-length response to various critiques; this includes an extensive list of critical discussions in the form of 'Appendix II', pp. 151–156.

[58]Harold A. Netland, 'Inclusivism and Exclusivism', in *Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, (ed.) Meister and Copan, p. 255. For his part, Perry Schmidt-Leukel defines exclusivism as maintaining that "salvific knowledge of a transcendent reality is mediated by only one religion"; inclusivism as maintaining that "salvific knowledge of a transcendent reality is mediated by more than one religion (not necessarily by all of them), but only one of these mediates it in a uniquely superior way"; and pluralism as maintaining that "salvific knowledge of a transcendent reality is mediated by more than one religion (not necessarily by all of them), and there is none among them whose mediation of that knowledge is superior to all the rest" (Schmidt-Leukel, 'Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism', pp. 19–20). (This article also provides a typology of and responses to critiques of the threefold typology.) Of course, I am well aware that my summary elides important distinctions within the dominant threefold typology that I am adumbrating, such as between extreme and aspectual pluralism, Trinitarian and Christological inclusivism, or theological and formal exclusivism, for instance. Since my stated argument is a general one (one, moreover, which I consider valid across these various sub-types), I hope to be forgiven for painting my picture here in rather broad strokes.

plans. Without substantially existent individuals as such, there are no individuals identifying as adherents of individual religions, therefore no communities comprised of such individuals, and thus no relations between them and others—be these conceived in pluralist, exclusivist, or inclusivist terms. But for mystics such as Bisṭāmī, Junayd, Qushayrī, ʿAṭṭār and Ibn al-ʿArabī, the point, the very teleological end, of religiosity is the undoing, as it were, of religiosity. For one hitherto unappreciated consequence of the annihilation (or the nihility) of selfhood, of the identification (or the identity) of self with Self, being with Being, one with One, as per these and like-minded mystics, is that to self-identify as a Muslim is precisely to fail at being a Muslim, and all the more so the more fully one self-identifies as such. One cannot self-identify *as* a Muslim, after all, if one does not identify *as* a self at all. On such a schema, then, the true Muslim is no Muslim at all; rather, s/he is not-s/he, or to adopt the even more precise formulation of Ibn al-ʿArabī, s/he is not-S/He: S/he has realised (epistemically and/or ontologically) the absence of a self with whom to identify at all in the very union/unity of self with Self. In the words of Corbin's gloss to Ibn al-ʿArabī cited above, the "determinate and individualised being" has been united with/realised preternal (*azalī*) and posternal (*abadī*) union with "the Divine in its totality".[59] As such, the true adherent (be s/he nominally, conventionally, adherent of any one religion), is one who, having traversed the spiritual path, the *ṭarīqah* of *jihād al-nafs*, no longer has (or better: is) any substance with which to ad-here, with which to be-long.

While such an ultimate disavowal of any and all belief positions/identity markers may be found, *mutatis mutandis*, in the formulations of mystic-metaphysicians not only within Islam but across various religious traditions,[60] among the thinkers under study here it is Ibn al-ʿArabī who elaborates this notion of a 'station of no station' (*maqām lā maqām*) most clearly and comprehensively.[61] For Ibn al-ʿArabī, "No one worships anyone but himself",[62] but since "knowledge of God is knowledge of self",[63] and the self truly known is known to be nothing other than the "One Being",[64] in reality "nothing is worshiped in itself except God".[65] Now, God cannot be bound in any way, but a "belief is [precisely] a knotting, a tying, a binding".[66] This leads Ibn al-ʿArabī to the radical conclusion that "The gnostic

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[59] *Azal* and *abad* are technical terms in Islamic mysticism usually translated as 'pre-eternity' and 'post-eternity' respectively. I have preferred to devise 'preternity' and 'posternity' (and their adjectival forms 'preternal' and 'posternal') as potentially more eloquent alternatives hopefully susceptible to incorporation into the English language.

[60] For a detailed study of the 'abandonment of all views' (*sarvadṛṣṭiprahāṇāya*) in the pivotal Buddhist thinker Nāgārjuna (circa 150–250), see Rafal K. Stepien, 'Abandoning All Views: A Buddhist Critique of Belief', *The Journal of Religion* 99, 4 (October 2019), pp. 529–66. While I see numerous parallels with this notion among Christian mystics in the form, for example, of Meister Eckhart's (circa 1260–circa 1327) position *vis-à-vis* what he calls "God beyond God" (*Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, [trans.] Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn [Mahwah, 1981], p. 35; for further details, see Bernard McGinn, 'The God beyond God: Theology and Mysticism in the Thought of Meister Eckhart', *The Journal of Religion* 61, 1 [January 1981], pp. 1–19), I will leave it to scholars of Christianity to advance, or reject, that particular claim based on their own expertise.

[61] The reference is to Ibn al-ʿArabī's statement that "The Muhammadan is only distinguished by the fact that he has no station specifically. His station [*maqām*] is that of no station [*lā maqām*]" (in Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 377).

[62] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 341.

[63] *Ibid.*, p. 345.

[64] See *Ibid.*, p. 356: "We are faced with plurality wherever we look, though not necessarily an ontological plurality, since there is only One Being."

[65] *Ibid.*, p. 343.

[66] *Ibid.*, p. 340. See also p. 347: "Each 'belief' ties a knot in the heart of the believer and fixes him upon a path, the object of his belief being the end of the path."

believes in every belief".[67] Indeed, "Because the perfect gnostic is not defined by any specific attribute… he is able to believe in every belief".[68] Having completely denuded himself of personal attributes (in perfect consummation of what I referred to earlier as *al-fanāʾ al-ṣifāt*), and thereby fully identified himself with the All (*al-kull*),[69] "The perfect gnostic recognizes Him in every form in which He discloses Himself and in every form in which He descends".[70] After all, "He who frees Him from every delimitation never denies Him. On the contrary, he acknowledges Him in every form".[71] Such a one, liberated from any and all particular beliefs, "believes in every belief concerning Him. He recognises Him in faith, in proofs, and in heresy (*ilḥād*), since *ilḥād* is to deviate from one specific belief to another specific belief".[72] In this final statement we find the endpoint of Ibn al-ʿArabī's position, according to which heresy, the very rejection of 'true' belief, is identified not with the affirmation of any particular 'false' belief, but rather with the affirmation of any particular belief at all. To be a believer of any single belief (and *a fortiori* of any belief system such as a religion) is precisely to show oneself to be a non-believer, a heretic. The only belief position adequate to 'all-inclusive Being' (*wujūd ʿāmm*)[73] is one that foregoes any one belief position, accepts no one (none) but all.[74]

Now, critics may point out that, though this may be the end of the spiritual quest, practically no-one attains to such mystical heights, and that my point is therefore irrelevant to interreligious relations as these play out on the ground. They may also press the point that, though mystics such as Ibn al-ʿArabī may themselves have espoused such abolition of identification as the ultimate end of Muslimhood, yet they nevertheless did self-identify as Muslim, as opposed to identifying as adherents of any other religion. Finally, critics may accuse me of smuggling in a form of pluralism by the back door insofar as my claim may be construed as implying that mystics stemming from diverse religious traditions ultimately attain to what turns out to be the one true reality shared among them all. To these points I would respond as follows.

Firstly, I would reiterate that mystics such as those I have treated are typically taken as exemplary figures within their respective religious traditions. In the case of those I have drawn upon directly in the foregoing, their works continue to be read, their ideas continue to be discussed and debated in homes, universities and madrasahs spanning the Islamic world (and beyond), and their lavishly endowed tombs continue to be pilgrimage destinations. Nor are they atypical in this regard. As such, I have referred to them as 'exemplary' precisely in the denotative sense of the word, to refer to the fact that they constitute spiritual heroes,[75] role models for those many who strive toward emulating their accomplishments. As

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[67]*Ibid.*, p. 353.
[68]*Ibid.*, p. 375.
[69]*Ibid.*, p. 346.
[70]In *Ibid.*, p. 352.
[71]In *Ibid.*, p. 340.
[72]In *Ibid.*, p. 349.
[73]See *Ibid.*, p. 354.
[74]This is reminiscent of Bisṭamī's quip that "Those who are unable to bear pure knowing, he has occupied with worship" (Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, p. 237).
[75]As Evelyn Underhill wrote of John Tauler (*circa* 1300–61), disciple of Meister Eckhart, his sermons "are trumpet-calls to heroic action upon spiritual levels". See Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (Woodstock, [1910] 2017), p. 241.

archetypal epitomes of religious achievement, mystics play an important role in embodying the very paradigms according to which less able religionists structure their relationships to their own religion and religiosity. The mystics' authority is undiminished by the fact of their supremacy; indeed, if anything they are looked up to all the more devotedly precisely insofar as their status is taken to be perfectly unattainable. If we are to discount mystics, then, as models according to which ordinary religious adherents learn what it means to fulfil the mandate of their religion, then we will be forced *a fortiori* to dismiss non-mystic religious authority figures such as *mufti*s, *imam*s, and *ayatollah*s from interreligious discourse, precisely insofar as these latter derive their religious authority from the extent to which they partially embody spiritual ideals perfected by mystics.[76]

My response to the second criticism follows naturally from my response to the first: it is precisely to the extent that mystics are taken to embody the highest ideals of their religion that they are accounted mystics. But the attainment of the mystical state is, as mystics themselves aver repeatedly, neither easy nor constant. Rather, these paradigms of religiosity too demonstrate significant variations among their individual states, not least owing to the exigencies of the terrestrial life to which they are still, prior to bodily death, albeit reluctantly, attached. The accepted distinction among Sufis between fluctuating spiritual states (*aḥvāl*; sg. *ḥāl*) and relatively constant spiritual stations (*maqāmāt*; sg. *maqām*) is testament to their awareness of the difference between momentary and lasting attainments. Besides which, as finders and traversers of the road that ultimately, as per their own pronouncements, leads to where "the road [is] lost" (as per ʿAṭṭār's verse cited above), they are all the more aware of the need to find and traverse *a* path—and to do that, one (that is, the individual adherent) must identify and identify with one such path (that is, a particular religion). There is no contradiction here, just as there is no contradiction in using the water's current to arrive at the water's shore. What this means for our purposes is that the ideal of what I would call 'ultimate irreligiosity' remains as the end goal of these mystics' religious striving, and cannot therefore be discounted simply on account of their only occasionally living up to its absolute demand.[77]

From Negative Theontology to Omnilogue

Finally, it behoves me to respond to what I have identified as the third potential criticism of my argument by explaining how my account differs from pluralism. I admit that the textual evidence, both among those thinkers studied here and others, evidently allows, even encourages, an interpretation according to which Sufis' "understanding of religion and religions can serve as a guide toward a genuinely pluralistic Muslim theology of religions in our

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[76]The class of mystics is hardly co-extensive with that of monastics, of course, but insofar as a substantial portion of the world's mystics have been monastics, and insofar as monastics – like mystics – are typically invested with religious authority precisely in proportion with their perceived holiness, Pierre-François De Béthune's discussion of interreligious dialogue as undertaken by monastics may be a useful companion to my discussion here. See Pierre-François De Béthune, 'Monastic Inter-Religious Dialogue', in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, (ed.) Cornille, pp. 34–50.

[77]My notion of 'ultimate irreligiosity', as elaborated here through study of Islamic mystics, may be found to correspond in ways worthy of further exploration to what, in a Christian context, John Caputo calls "mystical atheism". Regarding this, see John D. Caputo, 'Fundamental Themes in Meister Eckhart's Mysticism', *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 42, 2 (April 1978), p. 211; the notion is also referred to in McGinn, 'The God beyond God', p. 10.

increasingly pluralistic world".[78] After all, if on the analysis I have presented every religious adherent turns out to be traversing a path (*ṭarīqah*) that leads to her ultimate undoing in and/ as identification with its one and only end much as ʿAṭṭār's 'thirty birds' (*sī morgh*) turn out to be traversing a series of valleys that lead to their ultimate undoing in and/as identification with the one and only *Sīmorgh*, then this begins to sound rather reminiscent of the idea that all religions are but diverse approaches towards a common Ultimate "the standard presentation of the pluralistic hypothesis [calls] 'the Real'"[79] (*ḥaqīqa*). Moreover, the "distinction between the Real in itself… and the Real as phenomenally experienced by us humans… [a] distinction [which] is fundamental to the pluralistic hypothesis",[80] finds clear analogues in the thought of a Sufi such as Ibn al-ʿArabī, who distinguishes in like manner between "God in Himself and God in His self-disclosure".[81]

However, I would consider it to be a superficial reading of my argument that would appear to entail a form of pluralism, even if this were to be in a form modified in line with the mystical strands of religiosity I have been exploring. One immediate reason for this is that, while "Within the rich tradition of Islamic mysticism one… finds a number of statements pointing in a pluralist direction", nevertheless, "This"—as Schmidt-Leukel (whom I quote) himself immediately qualifies—"does not imply that they actually were pluralist. It rather appears that they were usually inclusivists with pluralist inclinations".[82] More substantively (and of more direct relevance to the specific argument this article is making), I would repudiate the identification of (my reading of) these mystics' ultimate position as pluralistic on the same grounds as I would repudiate them being accounted exclusivist or inclusivist; that is, that any and all of these necessitate the presence at base of an individual adherent of one religion relating to an individual adherent of another. But as I have been at pains to point out, this very basis upon which interreligious relations on the individual, communal, societal, civilisational, and even global scale has been predicated is precisely what the mystics under study here abjure. I have belaboured this point precisely because it is so counter-intuitive. But of course, if the esoteric utterings of mystic sages run not counter to common sense, then I am at a loss to see what does.

Indeed, in closing I would like to make one final proposal based on such mystical pronouncements as I have been considering. The study of interreligious relations is intimately wedded to the study of interreligious dialogue, in the sense that the study of how religions have related and do relate has often, if not always, been undertaken so as to further understanding of how religions may come to more meaningfully engage in ecumenical dialogue.[83]

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[78]Aydin, 'A Muslim Pluralist', p. 234. Aydin is referring specifically to Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, but his comments elsewhere regarding "a core mystical experience in different faiths… [and thus] a core Mystical Reality within all of them" (p. 222) and "a type of universal faith belonging to all religions" (p. 227) justify, to my mind, extrapolation.

[79]Hick, 'Religious Pluralism', p. 244.

[80]*Ibid.*, p. 245.

[81]In Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 357. Cf. also the analogous distinction between 'Being', "attributed to God in respect of His incomparability", and 'existence', "attributed to Him in respect of His similarity" (p. 337). More generally, the distinction between what Hick, drawing on Kant, refers to as the 'noumenal' and the 'phenomenal' aspects of God can be found denominated by various terminological distinctions throughout Sufi literature.

[82]Schmidt-Leukel, *Religious Pluralism & Interreligious Theology*, pp. 48–49.

[83]See for example the statement by S. Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana opening her section on 'Objectives of interreligious dialogue': "Within the context of peacebuilding, most dialogues aim to facilitate a change from narrow, exclusionist, antagonistic, prejudiced attitudes and perception, to a more tolerant and open-minded attitude". See S. Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana, 'Inter-Religious Dialogue and Peacebuilding', in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion*

On my understanding of the mystical texts I have studied here, the dialogical model is exposed as inadequate insofar as it presupposes on the discursive level what has already been rejected on the metaphysical one: a speaker. What Böwering refers to as "the mixing of human and divine consciousness in mystic speech uttered in the experience of *fanāʾ* and *baqāʾ*"[84] entails that the basis upon which any dialogue must proceed—two individual speakers—is not the case, for the speaker has, depending on which model of union/unity we are adopting, been in all senses silenced and/or found to have ever been silent. This is not, or not merely, an Islamic form of 'negative theology', but what may be called a 'negative ontology' insofar as the ontological status of the mystical subject has been negated, or seen to be at bottom negative, nil, in the face of the one and only Real.[85] Indeed, given that for Ibn al-ʿArabī "the Real enters into creation, and creation enters into the Real",[86] we may well go so far as to speak here of what I would call 'negative theontology', for just as any given 'he' has been rendered 'not-he' in divine identification, so 'He' has been rendered 'not-He' in its mirror image.[87]

Rather than dialogue (or monologue, or polylogue), then, we may posit here what I would perhaps call 'polyglot monologue'—in the sense that the mystics hypothetically communicating, 'loguing', do so here each in the 'language' of her or his own religious tradition (hence 'polyglot'), though their very voice turns out to be nothing other than that of the One Speaker (hence 'monologue'). I said that I would 'perhaps' call this a polyglot monologue, for although this terminology goes some way toward mitigating the metaphysically substantialist presuppositions informing 'dialogue' as standardly understood, nevertheless I feel this may too easily be misinterpreted as amounting to a form of naïve pluralism such as that I have already rejected as inconsistent with mystical self-annihilation/self-nihility. Instead, then, I will propose to call this a model of 'omnilogue'.

In omnilogue, the one and only All-Comprehensive Name (*al-ism al-jāmiʿ*) of Allāh speaks Itself to Itself; a speech encompassing all words (and recall that "Each creature is a word (*kalimah*) of God"),[88] yet for all that only ever, preternally and posternally, saying One. This unity, however, is not the utterly transcendent 'Unity of the One' (*aḥadiyyat al-aḥad*) but the 'Unity of Manyness' (*aḥadiyyat al-kathra*)[89] within which—*as* which—'the

to Inter-Religious Dialogue, (ed.) Cornille, p. 154. Note that Kadayifci-Orellana is drawing here on Mohammed Abu-Nimer, 'Conflict Resolution, Culture, and Religion: Toward a Training Model of Interreligious Peacebuilding', *Peace Research* 38, 6 (2001), pp. 685–704.

[84]Böwering, *Baqāʾ wa fanāʾ*.

[85]For a philosophical treatment of negative theology in the context of religious diversity, see Roger Trigg, *Religious Diversity: Philosophical and Political Dimensions* (Cambridge, 2014), pp. 52–56; for a feminist re-reading of it in the context of religious diversity, see Sara Rosenau, 'Excess, Reversibility, and Apophasis: Rereading Gender in Feminist Trinities', in *Divine Multiplicity: Trinities, Diversities, and the Nature of Relation*, (eds.) Chris Boesel and S. Wesley Ariarajah (New York, 2014), pp. 168–171.

[86]In Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 178. See also my comments and further citations in note 44 above.

[87]The prospect of a negative theontology within Islamic mysticism merits further research and elaboration. As it is tangential to the concerns of the present article, however, I will not pursue this line of thought further here. Suffice it for present purposes (that is, in relation to interreligious relations) to note that the notion of 'Spirit as Destabilizer of Static Ontologies' within Christian Trinitarian theology, as espoused by Holly Hillgardner, 'Spirited Transformations: Pneumatology as Resource for Comparative Theology', in *Divine Multiplicity*, (eds.) Boesel and Ariarajah, especially pp. 145–146, evokes thought-provoking parallels.

[88]Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 127, cited above.

[89]*Ibid.*, p. 25. Sam Laurent's discussion of "the Spirit's unifying diversification" (Sam Laurent, 'The Holy Spirit, the Story of God', in *Divine Multiplicity*, [eds.] Boesel and Ariarajah, p. 198) in the context of Pseudo-Dionysius the

Breath of the All-Merciful' (*nafas al-raḥmān*)[90] "assumes the form of all the existent things in the cosmos".[91] Now, 'all the existent things in the cosmos' include—*are*—the infinite names by which the "name of the name"[92] is manifested in—*as*—the cosmos, meaning that in omnilogue the human speaker, what I may call the 'nil-yet-name', "calls with every tongue".[93] This in turn means that, far from embodying a form of interreligious relations abstracted from 'real world' interactions, a mystical conception of selflessness and the omnilogical discourse it entails enables a model of interreligious relationality that obviates the charge of relativism that plagues standard dialogical models,[94] insofar as it fully supports the soteriological telos of diverse religious traditions. It also facilitates the harmonisation of interreligious relationalities typically considered particularly, if not inveterately, problematic, such as that between a theistic tradition such as Islam and a non-theistic one such as Buddhism,[95] insofar as it assumes a 'non-self' position consonant with (if not, of course, identical in) both. And finally, omnilogue models a mode of what appears to be *inter*-relationality that turns out in the final analysis to be a mode of *intra*-relationality, insofar as the speakers, howsoever nominally manifold, ultimately find themselves existentially folded within the one and only 'Oneness of Being' (*waḥdat al-wujūd*).[96] This precludes both inclusivistic and exclusivistic claims to superiority just as it transcends criticisms of pluralistic relativity. Besides, if seeing one's other to be nothing other than one's own self(lessness) is not a propitious orientation toward relating harmoniously, what is?

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Areopagite (late fifth-early sixth century) offers an analogue to Ibn al-ʿArabī's conception rich with comparative resonance.

[90]For further details, see *Ibid*., pp. 127–130.

[91]*Ibid*., p. 337. See also e.g. p. 338, where the *Shaykh* even more directly declares that "He is identical to each thing". It perhaps merits underlining here that, while Ibn al-ʿArabī's philosophy may be amenable to pantheistic (or panentheistic) interpretations, these "cannot begin to do him justice" (*Ibid*., p. 80) given his unambiguous maintenance of divine unity (*waḥdah*) in the face of union (*tawḥīd*) with it.

[92]*Ibid*., p. 37.

[93]In *Ibid*., p. 378.

[94]See for example the criticism by the then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, that dialogue "has become the very epitome of the relativist credo" (cited in Trigg, *Religious Diversity*, p. 59). As Trigg goes on to note, "Dialogue has to be an anti-relativist concept" (p. 59), and "the underlying paradox of pluralism is that, unless it descends into relativism, it has to rule something out" (p. 109).

[95]For scholarship relating to interreligious relations between Islam and Buddhism, see esp. Johan Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road* (Philadelphia, 2010); 'The Buddha and the Prophet', in Schmidt-Leukel, *Religious Pluralism & Interreligious Theology*, pp. 185–203; Imtiyaz Yusuf, 'Islam and Buddhism Relations from Balkh to Bangkok and Tokyo', *Muslim World* 100 (2010), pp. 177–186; Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Common Ground between Islam and Buddhism* (Louisville, 2010); Alexander Berzin, 'Buddhist-Muslim Doctrinal Relations: Past, Present and Future', in *Buddhist Attitudes to Other Religions*, (ed.) Perry Schmidt-Leukel (St Ottilien, 2008), pp. 212–236; Majid Tehranian and Alexander Berzin, 'Islam and Buddhism', in *Islam and Inter-Faith Relations*, (eds.) Ridgeon and Schmidt-Leukel, pp. 211–260.

[96]Although he himself never used the term, '*waḥdat al-wujūd*' has come to function as an effective moniker for Ibn al-ʿArabī's entire philosophy.