WORLD IS AN IMAGINATION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO
THE ONTOLOGY AND HERMENEUTICS OF IBN AL-'ARABĪ

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ABSTRACT

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The aim of this study is to analyze the intertwined ontology and hermeneutics of the famous Muslim figure Ibn al-'Arabī with a phenomenological hermeneutical approach. The research subject Ibn al-'Arabī is to be scrutinized in comparison with Western phenomenology and hermeneutics. Hence, both phenomenology and hermeneutics will be not only the subject of the present study, but also its method of analysis. Throughout the study, Ibn al-'Arabī's question of being and hermeneutics will be compared with Western phenomenology and hermeneutics, with particular focus on Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Gadamer. In his account of ontology, the encounter of human being with the world happens always subjectively. On the side of hermeneutics, the world, which is textual, unfolds itself always through and only with interpretation. These two points can be unified and summed up in Ibn al-'Arabī's claim that world is an imagination. World is disclosed always subjectively and via interpretation; it is an imagination both hermeneutically and ontologically.

Keywords: Ibn al-'Arabī, phenomenological hermeneutics, comparative philosophy, imagination, interpretation

ÖZ

DÜNYA BIR HAYÂLDİR: İBNÜ'L 'ARABÎ'NİN ONTOLOJİ VE
HERMENEUTİĞİNE GÖRÜNGÜBİLİMSEL BİR YAKLAŞIM

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Bu çalışmanın amacı, ünlü İslamî figür İbnü'l 'Arabî'nin girift ontoloji ve hermeneutiğini görüngübilimsel hermeneutik bir yaklaşımla ele almaktır. Araştırmanın nesnesi olan İbnü'l 'Arabî, Batılı görüngübilim ve hermeneutik ile karşılaştırmalı olarak incelenecektir. Bu yüzden, görüngübilim ve hermeneutik bu çalışmanın sadece konusunu değil, aynı zamanda onun analiz metodunu teşkil edecektir. Çalışma boyunca, İbnü'l 'Arabî'nin varlık sorusu ve hermeneutiği, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty ve Gadamer özelinde, Batılı görüngübilim ve hermeneutik ile karşılaştırmalı olarak irdelenecektir. Ontoloji cephesinde, İbnü'l 'Arabî'de insanın dünya ile karşılaşması hep öznel bir biçimde olmaktadır. Hermeneutik cephesinde ise, metinsel olan dünya kendisini hep ve ancak yorum aracılığı ile açmaktadır. Bu iki nokta, İbnü'l 'Arabî'nin dünyanın bir hayâl olduğu tezinde birleştirilebilip özetlenebilir. Dünya kendisini hep öznel bir biçimde ve yorum üzerinden açar; hem ontolojik hem hermeneutik açıdan bir hayâldir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İbnü'l 'Arabî, görüngübilimsel hermeneutik, karşılaştırmalı felsefe, hayâl, yorumlama

Dedicated to my mum, like everything.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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List of Arabic Transliterations

The system of transliteration used for Arabic characters in the study is as follows:

ء	'		ض	ḍ
ب	b		ط	ṭ
ت	t		ظ	ẓ
ث	th		ع	'
ج	j		غ	gh
ح	ḥ		ف	f
خ	kh		ق	q
د	d		ك	k
ذ	dh		ل	l
ر	r		م	m
ز	z		ن	n
س	s		ه	h
ش	sh		و	w
ص	ṣ		ي	y

Long vowels ي ,و, اى are written as "ā," "ū" and "ī" respectively.

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO A BRIDGE STUDY

1.1. Proposal for a Corporate Inquiry

In this study, it is envisaged to analyze the intertwined ontology and hermeneutics of great Muslim figure Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (1165-1240) with a comparative phenomenological approach, and cyclically, to put forward the phenomenological and hermeneutical implications of the fusion of these multifaceted readings. The present study attends a salient focus on phenomenology, particularly on Heidegger, Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty; and tries to decipher and unfold Ibn al-ʿArabī through the proposed encounter with phenomenological hermeneutics. Hence, in the full sense of Gadamer, a "fusion" of seemingly disinterested literatures will be undertaken in the following pages.

The study consists of five parts and nine chapters. In the first part, which encompasses the first two chapters of the present inquiry, I will start with an extended introduction into my research subject and my methodology in the study. Only after the clarification of these two points I will be entitled to interrogate my research subject; Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology and hermeneutics.

In the second part, I will elaborate Ibn al-ʿArabī's understanding of existence/Being [*wujūd*] that constitutes only a small part of his broad cosmology. With the help of the bridge-concept "thickness" which is to be borrowed from Merleau-Ponty, the ontology of Ibn al-ʿArabī will be scrutinized. Rather than an encounter or an extended comparison, I will contend with a conceptual bridge, an implementation of a concept of phenomenology. Via the concept "thickness," I will analyze Ibn al-ʿArabī's approach to the phenomena and to the question of being. This conceptual lever will not only provide us a deeper understanding of this famous figure, but also a vantage point from which the philosophical implications of his ontology will be rendered visible. At the end of the second part,

we will arrive at a central discussion concerning the definition of "text," "language" and "interpretation."

The third step of the study will take off from the crux where we will end up the second part. This point will be Ibn al-ʿArabī's theory and praxis of hermeneutics, to which the ontological discussions in the second step will directly lead us. The textuality of phenomena in Ibn al-ʿArabī will insert the question of being [*seinsfrage*] into the realm of hermeneutics, and will transform the understanding of being into a problem of "reading," or more accurately, "reciting." I will try to underline the intimate bond of his ontological and hermeneutical position. The realm of hermeneutics, the quiddity [*wasgehalt, māʾhiyya*] of language and a web of interrelated problems concerning hermeneutics will be handled in integrity within his ontology introduced in the second part. In this third part, hermeneutics of Ibn al-ʿArabī will be analyzed in comparison with the Heideggerian ontological turn that handled with hermeneutics as being primarily ontological rather than epistemological.

Gadamer's parallel thesis for the universality of hermeneutics is worth elaborating in comparison with the ontology and universal hermeneutics of Ibn al-ʿArabī. This comparative analysis will display what differs and what coincides/converges between these two parallel claims for universality. The difference behind these two claims for universality of hermeneutics will reveal itself in their approach towards language, text and interpretation. Besides, a fundamental similarity will be observed. The most evident convergence points are their theory of truth (as unveiling) and understanding of interpretation (as an *amethodic,* or better, *para-methodic*, existential inquiry). Both for Ibn al-ʿArabī and Gadamer, truth is understood as a certain kind of "unveiling" that passes beyond any methodical, preestablished prescription. In addition, the place of "imagination" in hermeneutics will be of paramount importance for hermeneutics that underpins not only the interpretation of any text but the whole cosmology of Ibn al-ʿArabī.

The claim of textuality of being and universality of hermeneutics in Ibn al-ʿArabī emerges with a dual problem: the problem of objective reality and objective truth. The fourth part of the study will handle these two central problems in a comparative way. The latter problem, the objectivity of truth, is shared with the ontological turn in hermeneutics, in particular with Gadamer, who spent most of his post-*Wahrheit und Methode* academic life discussing on the possibility of a genuine reading or "understanding" of a text. Concerning the first problem, Ibn al-ʿArabī will introduce a seemingly naive, but rather rigorous and charming solution: *world is an imagination* [*khayāl*]. This statement generally taken as a metaphor or explained away is in fact perfectly literal that provides an exquisite and indispensable synthesis of the dual theses of universality of hermeneutics and the ontologically subjective structure of being-in-the-world [*inderweltsein*]. To apprehend this seemingly fanciful claim, the central and positive position of "imagination" has to be "understood." Imagination will also play a central role in Ibn al-ʿArabī's contention with the second major problem, the objective truth. Ibn al-ʿArabī presents a creative dialectical resolution on the possibility of a "better" reading, consistent with his ontology and hermeneutics. His approach also provides interestingly valid insights for contemporary discussions on the problem of objective truth that even today escapes from a consensus of solution. The fourth part will end up with a comparison of Ibn al-ʿArabī's and Gadamer's hermeneutics, which will be undertaken at the end of the sixth chapter. The convergence of Ibn al-ʿArabī's and Gadamer's hermeneutics will be crystallized after facing up with these two serious problems. The central implications for the contemporary hermeneutics and philosophy will be derived from these convergences.

In the fifth and last part, I will embark on the fusion of Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology and hermeneutics. Having displayed that the question of being and the interpretive encounter with the world (including one's self) are intermeshed, the implications of these two "leaves" of his thought will be elaborated together. The phenomenological implications of interpretation in his thought (as a *para-methodic* inquiry belonging to the realm of *phronesis* rather than *techne*, as an ontological,

irreducible mode of *Dasein*) will be laid bare. Ibn al-ʿArabī's "preparedness" [*istiʿdād, qabūl*] and Gadamer's "openness" will be comparatively scrutinized and the Socratic "creative negativity" in both theses will be underlined. The inherently context/tradition dependent position of human being, along with the thickness of the phenomena and the Socratic creative negativity will suggest interpretation as an existential, non-methodical, aesthetical positioning towards life and as an endless, non-stop task in converging to (self)knowledge. Arguably, Ibn al-ʿArabī's claim that "world is an imagination" provides a good synthesis of his ontology and hermeneutics.

The study encompasses a relatively wide and seemingly disinterested burden of readings from different literatures and languages. Yet, the scope of the study is clearly and narrowly drawn as the phenomenological elaboration of existence/Being and hermeneutics of Ibn al-ʿArabī. The methodology of the study and the envisaged comparative analysis demand this manifold reading. Before starting the analysis, a very short explanation of the inspiring motives and methodological requirements behind this study might be illuminative. Therefore, the next chapter (*Facing up with Ibn al-ʿArabī*) is reserved to evince the methodology and main motives of the present study.

1.2. A Short Literature Review on the Meeting of Phenomenology and Islamic Studies

Ibn al-ʿArabī is by far one of the most influential figures in the Islamic history. "In the Islamic world itself, probably no one has exercised deeper and more pervasive influence over the intellectual life of the community during the past seven hundred years."[1] Hence, as one may expect, his works and life has been always bone of contention; a huge literature and an extensive academic study has been devoted to his peerless work, seminal historical role and personality. Even attempting to count

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[1] Chittick, William C. (1989). The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabī's Metaphysics of Imagination. Albany: SUNY Press. p.x.

the recent scholars from all over the world studying him would far exceed the borders of this study, and also would risk me not being able to mention all of them. Therefore, I will not analyze the broad literature on Ibn al-'Arabī in this part.[2]

One of the most famous early scholars of Sufism, Arberry observes that despite the huge literature on him, Ibn al-'Arabī remains intellectually as "an unexplored mountain peak."[3] Since Arberry's *Sufism*,[4] serious studies that tackle Ibn al 'Arabī in a more philosophical perspective have been undertaken. Through these studies, Modern Western philosophy and Ibn al-'Arabī have been introduced to each other. The literature on this encounter of Western philosophy and Ibn al-'Arabī's thought crawling at the time of Landau[5] and Nicholson has grown into a huge corpus in a relatively short period of time. Therefore, the extensive Western philosophical literature on Ibn al-'Arabī's thought is too broad to provide a complete and concise review. Instead, I will be here able to tenuously review only the intersection of Occidental phenomenology and Ibn al-'Arabī. In the scope of this study, a short literature review of this encounter may be possible, necessary and enlightening.

The most well-known and explicit example of the meeting between (Occidental) phenomenology and Ibn al-'Arabī was undertaken by Henry Corbin; the preeminent Orientalist, theologian and philosopher. By his celebrated *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī*, the encounter of phenomenology with

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[2] James Morris, in three articles published in two consecutive years undertakes this difficult task and presents an insightful critical literature review of both the scholarly and traditional works on Ibn al-'Arabī. See Morris, James Winston and Ibn al-'Arabī (1986a). "Ibn 'Arabī and His Interpreters Part I: Recent French Translations." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 106, No. 3 (Jul. - Sep.), pp.539- 551. Morris, James Winston (1986b). "Ibn 'Arabī and His Interpreters Part II: Influences and Interpretations." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 106, No. 4 (Oct. - Dec.), pp.733- 756. Morris, James Winston and Ibn al-'Arabī (1987). "Ibn 'Arabī and His Interpreters Part II (Conclusion): Influences and Interpretations." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 107, No. 1 (Jan. - Mar.), pp.101-119.

[3] Arberry, A. J. (1942). *An Introduction to the History of Sufism.* Oxford University Press. p.58.

[4] Arberry, A. J. (1950). *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam.* Ethical and Religious Classics of East and West, No.2. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.

[5] The early studies on the issue are not perfect, just today's are not and no study genuinely is. Nevertheless, in Landau, the general misconceptions are the most salient.

Islamic literature may be thought to be inaugurated.[6] Corbin was also the one who translated Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* to French and contributed into the extension of phenomenology to France. "...[I]t was actually Heidegger's phenomenology, the search for the logos of the *phainomenon* that 'shows itself,' that gave him [to Corbin] the hermeneutic key…"[7] for a cross-cultural perspective through which he accomplished his studies. He was an Orientalist, but also an early critique of Orientalist methodology, who fought "...against agnosticism, historicism, positivism, psychologism, and sociologism–all being forms of reductionism deeply rooted in the Western academic tradition."[8]

Corbin in *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī*, with a precious knowledge and full openness, tried to decipher one of the most opaque, paradoxical, notwithstanding, influential figures of the whole Islamic history, Ibn al-'Arabī. Corbin's inquiry focused on Ibn al-'Arabī's cosmology, while phenomenology was embedded as an implicit component, as the method of the study. When compared to the exquisite *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī*, the present study aims to attend a more salient focus on phenomenology and phenomenological hermeneutics; Heidegger, Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty in particular. Ibn al-'Arabī's thought is to be comparatively analyzed with phenomenological hermeneutics through a tentative but decidedly genuine encounter within the scope of the present study. Phenomenological hermeneutics will not be just the method within this present study, rather a central part of it, and one of the horizons of the proposed fusion.

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[6] See Corbin, Henry (2008). *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī*. Ralph Manheim (Trans.) Bollingen Series XCI, Princeton Unversity Press. Vol. 46. Routledge & K. Paul (Original work was published in 1969).

[7] Landolt, Hermann (1999). "Henry Corbin, 1903-1978: Between Philosophy and Orientalism." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 119, No. 3 (Jul. - Sep.), p.485.

In the footnote, Landolt, following Jambet's "introduction to Itineraire d'un enseignement" (published in *Bibliotheque iranienne*, vol. 38, Teheran and Louvain, 1993, 26 ff.), notes that Corbin is methodogically nearer to Husserl than to Heidegger. Accordingly, it was Husserl who inspired and guided Corbin in all his Oriental Studies. The question that by which subbranch Corbin was influenced is not a central discussion for this study. The subranch of phenomenology which Corbin was engaged in remains secondary to his adherence to phenomenology in his studies.

[8] Ibid, p.485.

Another central study on Islam in which phenomenology remains as a latent component is Annemarie Schimmel's famous *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam*. Such study provides a general introductory phenomenological approach to Islam.[9] Albeit being an exquisite study and a lucid introduction to Islam, the inquiry envisages phenomenology as merely a descriptive method of inquiry. Reminiscent of Wittgenstein's maxim, Schimmel exploits phenomenology merely as "not interrogating the spider web." Schimmel undertook a wonderful descriptive analysis of Islam, a particularly thorny task for such a comprehensive subject. Nevertheless, I have to underline that phenomenology has a much richer potential contribution to offer to this research subject.

An explicit, relatively new and wider proposal for an encounter with Islamic philosophy and phenomenology is carried out by A. T. Tymieniecka's extraordinary inquiry.[10] The series of books and conferences gather a multitude of literatures and display promising possibilities for philosophy. From the fusion of these rooted literatures, a colorful synthesis and a variety of philosophical implications are engendered that has not expected before, and even could not have dreamed of. Among the contributors of this multifaceted corporate inquiry, Dobie, El-Bizri, Aminrazavi, Khalilov and Murata are only the leading names, whose works are particularly relevant, aspiring and pioneer for the present study. In addition, within recent years, individual inquiries in cross-readings of Islamic

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[9] See Schimmel, Annemarie (1994). *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam*. SUNY Press.

[10] Currently, three exciting books have appeared within the context of the project titled *Islamic Philosophy and Occidental Phenomenology in Dialogue*. See Tymieniecka, A-T. (Ed.) (2003). *The Passions of the Soul in the Metamorphosis of Becoming. Islamic Philosophy and Occidental Phenomenology in Dialogue*. Vol.1. Springer. Tymieniecka, A-T. (Ed.) (2006). *Islamic Philosophy and Occidental Phenomenology on the Perennial Issue of Microcosm and Macrocosm*. Vol.2. Springer. Tymieniecka, A-T. (Ed.) (2007). *Timing and Temporality in Islamic Philosophy and Phenomenology of Life. Islamic Philosophy and Occidental Phenomenology in Dialogue*. Vol.3. Springer.

literature and Occidental phenomenology have substantially increased, which try to open the "sister traditions" to each other.[11]

Last but not least, a particular emphasis has to be given to William C. Chittick, who is undoubtedly one of the most productive contemporary scholars having written many worthwhile books and spent a long tenure with studying Ibn al-ʿArabī. Chittick in several of his books and articles presents excerpts or long quotations from the books of Ibn al-ʿArabī. In particular, almost the entire of his voluminous *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabī's Metaphysics of Imagination* is devoted to competent translations of attentively selected passages from Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*. Phenomenologically speaking, this means that Chittick *lets* Ibn al-ʿArabī speak himself and *unfold* himself to the English reading world. This original unfolding is a vital contribution to the studies on Ibn al-ʿArabī. In this sense, Chittick provides a most central contribution of Ibn al-ʿArabī's encounter with phenomenology. He never refers, however, neither to the literature of phenomenology nor to that of philosophical hermeneutics.

1.3. Ibn al-ʿArabī, History and Modern Hermeneutics

In his *Black Book* [*Kara Kitap*], Orhan Pamuk semi-seriously asserts that Ibn al-ʿArabī was in reality the first profound existentialist in the world.[12] Whether we take this imaginative claim seriously, I contend that Ibn al-ʿArabī is highly relevant to a secular-minded modern hermeneuticist (whose task is to cross the

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[11] Arguably, Almond's recent comparative study represents the beautiful epitome of these inquiries. In the following pages, particularly when dealing with Ibn al-ʿArabī's hermeneutics, Almond's work will provide us crucial insights. See Almond, Ian (2004). *Sufism and Deconstruction: A Comparative Study of Derrida and Ibn al-ʿArabī*. Routledge.

Kamal's article where he compares al-Ghazālī with Husserl's hermeneutics is another good example of these individual inquiries. Kamal, Mohammad (2004). "Al-Ghazālī's Hermeneutics and Phenomenology." *Religion East & West*, Journal of the Institute for World Religions, Issue 4, June. pp.77-89.

[12] Pamuk, Orhan (1990). *The Black Book*. Guneli Gun (Trans.) London. p.73.

boundaries, as the word *"hermeneuen"* itself suggests[13]), and to the phenomenologist, the perpetual beginner (whose fate is to be always on the way). Ibn al-ʿArabī's interpretation of the Koran, the organization and writing style of his voluminous "vast encyclopedia of the Islamic sciences,"[14] *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya fī Maʿrifat al-Asrār al-Malikiyya v'al-Mamlukiyya* with its paradoxical and ciphered language[15] presents a real intellectual treasury even for the most disinterested minds.

For phenomenological hermeneutics, a research proposal for reading and understanding of Ibn al-ʿArabī would be a valuable case study of a central problem. It is the investigation of a vantage point from which the subject of research, as an "other" to the Western tradition, "can show itself to itself on its

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[13] Palmer, Richard E. (1977). "Postmodernity and Hermeneutics," *Boundary 2*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Winter). p.385.

[14] Chittick 1989, p.xi.

Futūḥāt consists of 560 chapters which make about 15.000 pages. Many ideas of Ibn al-ʿArabī which remain ciphered in his other smaller books are handled in the voluminous *Futūḥāt* more extensively and detailed, albeit some of them remain still ciphered. Currently, it has not been translated to any other language in its totality. Ekrem Demirli has undertaken this difficult task to translate the entire book to Turkish. The translation project has embarked on in year 2000, and currently 10 volumes of the envisaged 18 volumes have been published in Turkish. The emerged volumes of *Futūḥāt* translated to Turkish by Demirli have also been analyzed within the limits of this study.

Among the translations of *Futūḥāt* to the Western languages, Chittick 1989 is the most well-known and genuine one. Due to their inability to reach to *Futūḥāt*, the early Orientalists such as Landau and Nicholson generally focused on *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* that is presented as a concise, abbreviated book of *Futūḥāt*. The inability of reaching to other sources may be an important factor in the unfortunate misreading of both Landau and Nicholson. Both defined Ibn al-ʿArabī as a pantheist, which was an evident misconception.

[15] In the following passage, Morris best summarizes the perplexing structure of *Futūḥāt*:

> "The initial reaction of readers of the *Futūḥāt*, no matter what their training and where they begin, is likely to include a certain confusion or even bewilderment in the face of the profusion and apparent disorder of the subjects treated, the immense literary and cultural background that is assumed, the frequent lack of any visible connection between the contents of a chapter and its title or opening verses, the allusive (indeed often completely enigmatic) and fragmentary nature of many discussions, and the constantly shifting perspectives from which Ibn al-ʿArabī tends to approach a given issue."

(Morris, James Winston (1990). "Ibn ʿArabī's 'Esotericism': The Problem of Spiritual Authority." *Studia Islamica*, No. 71, p.40.)

own terms."[16] How to undertake a cross-cultural study and interpret the "other" is a phenomenologically valuable question. Besides, Ibn al-ʿArabī's theory and praxis of interpretation, and his approach to the phenomena themselves, however, are also so attractive and revolutionary. His hermeneutics may deconstruct the preestablished categories and reductive generalizations in our mind related to the medieval Islamic thinking. New frontiers and invaluable implications for modern phenomenology and hermeneutics may open up themselves by such category-deconstructing and horizon-expanding readings.

1.3.1. Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Reductionist History of Interpretation

> He strecheth out the north over the void, and hangeth the earth above nothing.[17]

Hermeneutics, when defined as the "method of interpretation" and "art of understanding," the two seemingly congenial components "art of interpretation" and "method of understanding" are thought to have been in a genuine clash in the medieval times. The clash is thought to end in favor of the second part of the definition. The "art of interpreting" has been allegedly sacrificed in order to find a unified, orthodox, "true" method to understand/interpret the sacred word of medieval god. Accordingly, the variety of meanings and different ways of interpretation are freed from the slavery to one legal meaning only owing to the recent emancipating attacks of deconstructivism.

Indeed, there are very good reasons behind the thesis that alternative readings of the text were sacrificed in the quest for an orthodox, literal view in the medieval times. It may suffice to remind the famous persecution case of Galileo Galilei to find strong collateral evidence. Rather than his radical alternative claim for

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[16] Schmidt, Lawrance K. (2006). *Understanding Hermeneutics.* Understanding Movements in Modern Thought Series. Acumen Publishing Ltd. p.60; Heidegger, Martin (1996). *Being and Time.* Joan Stambaugh (Trans.) Albany, New York: SUNY Press. p.16.

[17] The Bible: Job, 26:7.

cosmology, his attempt to interpret the Bible differently than the authority was the real cause behind his condemnation. Who had the right to interpret the Bible? The unique and unrivalled interpretation of the Church was allegedly infallible, or at least, it had access to the most accurate interpretation. The authority of the Church, and its reading of the text was surely the literal one; and of course unmatched by that of Galileo or anyone else.

The primary conflict was not about the absolute Truth of the holy Bible. No one was suspicious regarding Bible's truthfulness or trustworthiness. What Galileo, on the other hand, was concerned was that the Bible could be interpreted differently than the legal authority in Vatican anticipated. In his defense in the *Letter to the Grant Duchess Cristina*, he stated that Bible could not say something except the Truth, but it could sometimes be allegorical and it might convey different things than the literal reading.[18] "...[U]nder the surface meaning of its [the Bible's] words, this passage may contain a different sense."[19] Hence, all the passages which have been read/understood literally or allegorically had to be reconsidered, and revised. Bible, for Galileo was not about *how the heaven goes, but how one goes to heaven*.[20] For its own safety, the Bible *should not* be used to tackle such worldly matters and challenge the demonstrated truths. Needless to say, even this "should" of Galileo was to be considered as rampancy.

Galileo, wholeheartedly invited the Vatican to interpret the Bible in accordance with the demonstrated truths of reason.[21] This invitation, however rational and friendly, connoted to overstep the limits and challenge the authority. The courtesy of the letter was shrug off and in 1616, the inquisition anathemized anyone believing in the motion of the earth. The Biblical verse "who moveth the earth

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[18] Galileo Galilei (1957). "Letter to Madame Christina of Lorraine Grand Duchess of Tuscany." In *Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo*. Stillman Drake (Trans., Intro. and Notes.) Anchor Books. p.181.

[19] Ibid, p.179.

[20] Ibid, p.186.

[21] Ibid, p.183.

from its place..."[22] kept being held as allegorical, as the authority did. Galileo was sentenced and was asked to read seven psalms a week. In the case of Galileo, with Gadamer's words, we clearly observe that "…the dogmatic tradition of the Christian Church remained the unshakable basis of all interpretation."[23]

When we turn to the Islamic world, we cannot find such a general supreme authority equivalent to the Church in Christianity. Nevertheless, radical alternatives to the literal and orthodox [*ahl al-Sunna*] readings of the Koran were observed in the Islamic history, some of which have been bloody persecuted. Some of those alternatives have been labeled as *bāṭini*, *mulḥid* or *zindīq*, (as being understood as "worse than an infidel [*kāfir*]") throughout the Islamic history. Such inquiries, which are gathered under the umbrella concept "*heterodox Islam*" by the contemporary scholarly work, conflicted with the legal authorities of their time and the ordinary interpretations of the Koran. To be sure, "...the heretics of each religion have so much in common."[24] Allegedly, those "unruly friends of God" and the colorful rainbow of manifold meanings had to wait for emancipation until the last century and recent deconstructive movements and postmodernism.

Yet, the hermeneutics of Ibn al-'Arabī presents the best and most extraordinary counter-example to this reductive picture of the history of hermeneutics. He displays that the "...semantic multiplicity is no fancy trend of the twentieth century – it is old..."[25] We find that the infinite readability of the text is the most salient aspect of Ibn al-'Arabī's approach to the text. Not only the infinite mind of the God-Author, who intends to all the possible meaning in His words [*lafẓ*], but also the very many possibilities of language, infinite variety and nonstop flux of the context bestow the endless deepness on the text. The reader is absolutely free in

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[22] The Bible: Job, 9:6.

[23] Gadamer, Hans-Georg (1976a). "On The Problem of Self-Understanding." (Original work was published in 1962.) In David E. Linge (Trans. and Ed.) *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p.47.

[24] Shafak, Elif (2005). "Linguistic Cleansing," *New Perspectives Quarterly Interview*, Summer.

[25] Almond, p.65.

understanding anything from any sentence, and in finding what s/he desires from the rich multiplicity of meanings.

Ibn al-ʿArabī does not contend with the argument that the text is endlessly deep, pregnant with infinite possible meanings and fertile for manifold possible readings. He not only defends the openness to different meanings, the ability to search for novel reading possibilities and continuous excavation of the text as the necessary condition of the reverence towards the text. He also sees this openness to search as the main path towards wisdom and self-knowledge. As Almond extensively analyzed, this position has a deconstructive sound; a distinct openness, which may be compared even to one of the most famous deconstructivists, Jacques Derrida.[26]

In modern hermeneutics, following the allegedly recent, postmodernist emancipation of meanings and deconstruction of the text, the criterion of validity and the possibility of a "genuine" or "true" reading of the text became a main problematic. The absence of a theory of truth, or a criterion for accurate interpretation in Gadamer, for example, was Ricouer's most serious criticism towards him. Nevertheless, the same paradoxical problem was also faced by Ibn al-ʿArabī, as we will investigate in the sixth chapter. Besides affirming the infinite plurality in reading, he also tried to preserve and venerate the literal reading. When elaborating his hermeneutics, his inseparable connection between the manifest [*ẓāhir*] and the deeper [*bāṭin*] of the text, his theory of truth, the positive effect of the forgotten (if not underestimated) concept "imagination" [*khayāl, takhayyul*] in his cosmology and its intimate relationship with the decisive role played by reason [*ʿaql*] will all present surprisingly insightful implications for modern hermeneutics. Arguably, Ibn al-ʿArabī is a figure highly relevant to the modern hermeneutics. His relevance stems not only from his enormous historical importance, but also his potential for expanding the discussions of modern hermeneutics by his strikingly creative, imaginative and charming hermeneutical theory and application.

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[26] See Almond who undertakes this difficult comparison.

1.4. Last Remarks

Generally, Ibn al-'Arabī is discussed in the context of Islamic philosophy (as the inclination of philosophers) or theology (as that of theologians). Rather, the present study handles with the subject in the unusual context of Occidental phenomenology and modern hermeneutics. Ibn al-'Arabī will be discussed and elaborated with the tools phenomenology presents. The phenomenological method utilized will follow what Heidegger (and to some extent, Merleau-Ponty) put forward.

Any researcher is historically oriented and context dependent by definition. Even when setting forth an inquiry, the researcher approaches to the matter with unavoidable, preestablished fore-structures. Understanding, hence research, is only possible through the prejudices [*vorurteile*] through which the research subject can be encountered. Hence, rather than trying to get rid of those prejudices and seeking for a zero-point, I will try to search for the possibilities to unfold the subject "...by working out these fore-structures in terms of the research subject itself."[27]

Studies of previous masters have featured and exemplified how such comparative studies supported by phenomenological methods may be successfully accomplished. Of those masters, the crowning ones are Corbin and Eliade. Corbin representing the Heideggerian path in Oriental Studies and Eliade the famous representative of Husserlian approach in religious studies will guide the current proposal of a phenomenological approach to Ibn al-'Arabī. As Eliade underlined and applied with an excellent praxis, a phenomenological approach to the research subject necessitates a simultaneous reading of manifold and seemingly incompatible literatures.[28] The unfolding of the transcendental rock bottom, i.e.,

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[27] Gadamer, Hans-Georg (1991). *Truth and Method*. 2nd, Revised Edition. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. (Trans.) New York: Crossroad (Original work was published in 1960). p.266.

[28] Eliade's *Traite d'histoire des religions* in an exquisite fruit of this approach. See Eliade, Mircea (2000). *Dinler Tarihine Giriş*. Kabalcı Yayınevi. Lale Arslan (Trans.) İstanbul.

lebenswelt [life-world], requires the ability to approach it from different angles. To develop such a multi-perspectivist position, not only the ability to approach the subject from different point of views, but also a multi-dimensional openness is the necessary condition. A stubborn perseverance and a phenomenological courtesy is also necessitated, as the subject does not open itself at one go and easily. Rather, it deepens more and more, and hides itself simultaneously by its unfolding.

Schleiermacher revealed that the part and the whole are in a cyclical interplay to understand, which is called as the celebrated "hermeneutic circle."[29] As a logical extension of the circle, the whole historical context of the subject has to be fathomed to facilitate the genuine apprehension of the topic under investigation. Dilthey revealed that this is an impossible task to be accomplished. One can at most approach more and more to a better understanding, as an asymptotical convergence. For this aim, Chodkiewicz, Morris, Chittick, Nasr, ʿAfīfī, Corbin and many others who study Ibn al-ʿArabī and Islam in general will help us fundamentally to draw the historical context of the subject. Nevertheless, the main aim of this study, as I tried to explain, is not to deal with Ibn al-ʿArabī in the perennial context. Rather, the effort will be given to situate Ibn al-ʿArabī to an unorthodox context and to adopt an unusual, phenomenological perspective by this inquiry.

Having all these at hand, one may wonder what makes Ibn al-ʿArabī such a valuable subject that all of these multi-dimensional difficulties become worth being confronted. At the outset, I feel obliged to reckon with the philosophical value, costs, risks, behind lying motives and potential rewards of the current proposal. In the next part, I will undertake this working-out which will also serve as a short introduction to the subject matter of the study.

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[29] Abulad, Romualdo E. (2007). "What Is Hermeneutics?" *Kritike*, Volume One, Number Two, Dec. pp.15-17.

CHAPTER 2

FACING UP WITH IBN AL-ʿARABĪ

2.1. "Yes and No": Ibn al-ʿArabī as a Historical Figure

To discuss Ibn al-ʿArabī's central importance and influence in the Islamic tradition by far exceeds the limits of a doctoral dissertation. Even to present a synopsis of his unrivalled position in a few sentences would also be dangerously reductive and difficult to undertake. Hence, in order to avoid falling into such a trap, to remind Whitehead's famous words on Plato will be sufficient and "safer": "The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato."[30] Whitehead's assessment of the influence of Plato on the history of Western philosophy may be thought to be exaggerated to some extent. Nevertheless, it is the most abbreviated and accurate way to display the unrivalled centrality of Ibn al-ʿArabī in the Islamic history.[31]

The mere existence of more than hundred commentaries [*sharḥ*] on just one of his works represents[32] only one visible aspect of his multidimensional effects on the Orient as a gnostic, neo-platonist, philosopher, mystic-critic. Out of the incredible corpus of his 700 works, 400 are extant.[33] Putting a question mark to the last two-hundred years throughout which period the Islamic world encountered a sharp transformation in political and socio-cultural sphere, Ibn al-ʿArabī since 13th

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[30] Whitehead, Alfred North (1967). *Process and Reality*. The Macmillan Company: New York. (Sixth Printing.) p.63.

[31] Morris 1986b, p.733.

[32] For the complete list, see Yahia, Osman. (1964). *Histoire et classification de l'oeuvre d'Ibn 'Arabī*. Damascuk: Institute Francais de Damas.

[33] Chittick 1989, p.xi. See also Yahia.

ʿAfīfī states that the exact number of Ibn al-ʿArabī's works are uncertain. Shaʿrānī gives the number 400 in his *Yawāqīt* while Muḥammad Rajab Ḥilmī enumerates 284 works. Famous Persian follower of Ibn al-ʿArabī, Jāmī gives the number of 500 that ʿAfīfī finds much exaggregerated. See ʿAfīfī, A. E. "Ibn ʿArabī." (2002). In *A History of Muslim Philosophy*. M. M. Sharif (Ed. and Intro.) Published by Pakistan Philosophical Congress. Chapter 20. p.400.

century onwards has been the most influential figure in almost all intellectual discussions.[34] He has been deviated between being called as "the greatest master" [*shaykh al-akbar*] and "the master of infidels" [*shaykh al-akfar*]. If we recall that the critical readings, accusations and ceaseless attacks throughout the centuries also represent a historical influence (even if not positive), he has always been a reference in discussions of various kinds; intellectual or spiritual.[35]

Besides having been always at the bone of contention in every intellectual discussion, he is the explicator and systematizer of many ideas, which are known and defended even today extensively, and thought to be rather anonymous traditionally. We know that many of his ideas were held to be heretical; making an explicit reference to him was mostly a huge risk to take. In addition to the lack of explicit reference to him, many different kinds of sources, for example, poems, stories, idioms, different kinds of arts, etc., may (and certainly do) convey important knowledge concerning the ideas and influence of Ibn al-'Arabī. Nevertheless, the scholarly work generally relies upon textual evidences of specified kinds of historical texts. Hence, not only the unwritten, oral transfers in tradition, but also different kinds of sources generally elude the disciplinary study. Ibn al-'Arabī's extensive intellectual effect revealed by scholarly work is probably just the visible part of the iceberg. His wide anonymous influence not only in intellectual history but also in different components of the tradition is waiting for further illumination.

Scholars generally accept two symbolic crossroads which symbolize the split off between the "two sisters,"[36] i.e., the Oriental and Occidental civilizations from each other. The first one is the celebrated polemic between Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī

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[34] 'Afīfī 2002, p.401.

[35] "It is probably true to say that no one, after the Koran and the Prophet, has had more influence on the way Muslims have thought about God for the past six hundred years." (Murata, Sachiko and William C. Chittick (1996). *The Vision of Islam: The Foundations of Muslim Faith and Practice.* I.B.Tauris Publishers. p.247.)

[36] Nasr, Seyyed Hossein (1964). *Three Muslim Sages. Avicenna, Suhrawardī, Ibn 'Arabī.* Harvard Studies in World Religions, Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts. p.54.

and Averroes [Ibn Rushd]. *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* [*Tahafut al-Falāsifah*] of al-Ghazālī, which attacked to the *mashshā'ī* (peripatetic, Aristotelian; broadly speaking, Greek) philosophy in the figure of Avicenna [Ibn Sīnā] left the influence of the subsequent defense of Averroes far behind. Both *The Incoherence of The Incoherence* [*Tahafut al-Tahafut*] and *The Decisive Treatise* [*Faṣl al-Maqāl*] of Averroes did not find much repercussion in the Islamic world. On the contrary, the "destructive" influence of Averroes in the Western world would have an enormous effect, which would finally traverse itself and end up with a considerable influence in the Renaissance.[37]

The second symbol of the split off is the "decisive meeting" of old Averroes with the teen Ibn al-'Arabī.[38] Ibn al-'Arabī conveys us this celebrated meeting in his *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*.

> He [Averroes] said, "How did you find the situation in unveiling and divine effusion? Is it what rational consideration gives to us?" I replied, "Yes and no. Between the yes and the no spirits fly from their matter and heads from their bodies."[39]

Averroes and Ibn al-'Arabī, the two great figures say just a few but ciphered words to each other that symbolize the decisive separation of the two worlds.

These two symbolic meetings (and simultaneously, separations), however far from drawing a non-reductive genuine picture of the process, provide a good starting point to begin to a comparative study on the crossroads of the two sisters. Teen Ibn al-'Arabī's famous words to Averroes, "yes and no," will be the most abbreviated way of conveying not only his bewildering and exquisite thought, but also a crossroad in the intellectual history of Islam.

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[37] "…[H]is defense had little effect in the Muslim world and it was primarily the West that he was heard." (Nasr, p.54.)

[38] See Stelzer, Steffen (1996). "Decisive Meetings: Ibn Rushd, Ibn 'Arabī, and the Matter of Knowledge." *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, No. 16, Averroes and the Rational Legacy in the East and the West. pp.19-55.

[39] Chittick 1989, p.xiii.; Ibn al-'Arabī (1911). *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya.* Cairo, repr. Beirut: Dar Sadir, n.d. Osman Yahia (Ed.) Cairo: Al-Hay'at al-Misriyyat al-'Amma li'l-Kitab. Vol. I, 153.34.

Here on, the references to *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* will be abbreviated as "*Futūḥāt.*"

In any case, in the thirteenth century, philosophy withers away according to the traditional Orientalist perspective.[40] According to this view, the only motive behind why the "...so-called 'Arabic philosophy' should be taken into consideration at all was a historical one: the fact that it was thanks to the Arabs that the Greek philosophical tradition had survived through the Middle Ages."[41] Muslim territories had supposedly been just a medium to transport the Greek heritage to the West. When the role of Islamic world played in the transportation has finished in the twelfth century, its potential contribution to the intellectual activity also came to an end.

> [T]he verdict passed by al-Ghazālī upon the Islamic philosophical tradition was accepted as final. Whatever philosophy the Muslim East continued to produce after al-Ghazālī was generally either ignored, or dismissed as "Oriental syncretism," or confused with some sort of degenerate Sufism.[42]

There supposedly remained nothing worth scrutinizing except the exotic, erotic or mystical aspects of the silent Orient. This was the "Orientalization" of the Orient in a nutshell.[43]

It is a truism that Greek philosophy, represented by Averroes started to fade away in the thirteenth century.[44] However, it does not follow the truth of thesis that the intellectual activity in the Islamic realm has passed away. The highly common mistake in this picture lays in the fact that *mashshā'ī* - Greek philosophy,

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[40] See the entrance titled "Orientalism ve Islamic Philosophy" in the Routledge *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* for a condensed but good introduction to the subject.

[41] Landolt, p.484.

[42] Ibid, p.484.

[43] Needless to say, the most famous description of the process of "Orientalization" is presented by Said's celebrated *Orientalism*. Said's critique was so influential that what the term "Orientalism" means has substantially changed after his masterpiece. Arguably, no book can be said to discuss the issue genuinely, if it does not face up with Said's *magnum opus*. See Said, Edward W. (1979). *Orientalism, Western Conceptions of the Orient*. Vintage Books.

Said's *Orientalism*, as Palmer has noticed, has a second importance that concerns hermeneutics. The interpreter, portrayed by Said, is not just a "knower," "...but a constructor, like the original writer of the text, of a meaning. Meaning is constructed, not given to man." (Palmer 1977, p.384.)

[44] There are some alternative voices that defend the antithesis. However, I find these inquiries as more reactionist responses and do not inquire into an extended discussion.

"…which is only one school among several that have existed in the Islamic world but which is the only one well known in the West"[45] is often identified with Islamic philosophy as such. There is no point to reject that the Aristotelian philosophy has started to its demise in the thirteenth century. Nevertheless, through towering figures, the most influential of whom was Ibn al-ʿArabī, the Greek heritage immersed in and gave birth into novel ways of philosophizing, with which the West is not so conversant. The illuminationist [*ishrāqī*] philosophy of Suhrawardī, the school of Mullā Ṣadrā, the Neo-Avicennian tradition, all of which are living schools of philosophy in the contemporary Muslim world, have all been molded through the enormous effect of Ibn al-ʿArabī and his school. If we remind that *philo-sophia* did not wither away but rather changed its channel, Ibn al-ʿArabī will tower as playing the central role in this transition. He is one of the most central chains through which the philosophical, scientific and mystical knowledge was transferred to new territories and to the subsequent generations throughout the history.

2.2. Encountering Ibn al-ʿArabī – An Accounting

The historical importance of the subject matter of this inquiry, as I tried to evaluate very abstractly, is evidently so central and conspicuous. The historical prominence of Ibn al-ʿArabī, however, is secondary and indirect for this philosophical study. When analyzing Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology and hermeneutics, the main concern in the present study is rather to elaborate his potential contributions to phenomenology and modern hermeneutics. Thus, in terms of philosophy, it must be enlightened that what makes this proposal a valuable inquiry for an encounter with this Islamic figure. Having shortly evaluated the historical importance and the most salient aspects of the subject, now I may be able to crystallize the main motives of the proposed encounter. Besides, possible threads and the methodology of this proposal also need to be illuminated at the outset.

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[45] Nasr, p.9.

2.2.1. Potential Contributions of the Proposed Encounter for Phenomenology and Hermeneutics

We have set roughly three main properties of the historical figure Ibn al-ʿArabī up to now: 1. a very influential figure in the Islamic history, 2. a prominent intellectual, 3. a figure standing at the crossroads. Arguably, each of these peculiarities separately may suffice to display the potential benefits of a comparative philosophical inquiry. As the core of this study is hermeneutics and phenomenology, I want to focus, even very tenuously, merely on these two dimensions from the manifold services of such multi-literal, "intertextual" studies. Only through crystallizing its potential contributions into phenomenology and hermeneutics, I may feel able to state why this encounter is not only necessary, but also normatively unavoidable.

2.2.1.1. Creative Distance for Hermeneutics

A multi-literal case study of Ibn al-ʿArabī may present us a vantage point from that a comparative analysis of civilizations' worldviews [*weltanschauung*] and the patterns of thought may be initiated. As Gare and many scholars of intercultural studies emphasize, the invisible codes of traditions are visible from such vantage points.[46] Simultaneous readings from different traditions harbor the capability to reveal the prejudices [*vorurteile*] of each other and themselves. This potentiality is one of the most basic utilities of intercultural studies and comparative analyses. Patterns of thought and presuppositions that compose the structures of understanding operate and are reproduced implicitly and unconsciously. They also permeate all the tradition. These structures are to be deciphered by the encounter with their alternatives. This encounter necessitates a fusion that is possible not through a "leap" from one tradition to the other, but with a meeting of both. This

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[46] See Gare, Arran E. (1995). "Understanding Oriental Cultures." *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 45, No. 3, pp.309-328.

two-sided openness is the task of hermeneutics and the hallmark of Hermes; who is the messenger of gods and the creative bridge of gaps.

Hermeneutics requires distance between present and past; between what is familiar and what is strange. *"The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between."*[47] Any new text comes with something familiar and something strange, and every strange brings every familiar (which we find generally already accepted and operating unconsciously) into question. Hermes is always in a tension: either between the interpreter and the text, or between individuals. Dilthey and Schleiermacher tried in vain to close the distance, and attempted to the impossibilities. Hermes uses this distance creatively and opens the two sides of the abyss to each other. What is important is that Hermes does not attempt to close the distance. On the contrary, it exploits the distance in the most productive way and transfers what the text tells.

> It [the distance] is important since we can call our own prejudices into question only through the confrontation of the other, different prejudices. The greater the distance is between the interpreter and the text, the more likely it is to lead to different prejudices. The initial recognition of these different prejudices calls our own prejudices into question.[48]

The more the distance between the text and the interpreter, the better the interpreter can extent his horizon and investigate his presuppositions. As Gadamer puts it, via this distance new possibilities unfold themselves.[49] To study such "distant" figures like Ibn al-ʿArabī may furnish us with this invaluable distance to the Western philosophy.

Hermeneutics reminds us that any reading brings by itself both novelty and familiarity. Nevertheless, this twofold emergence is much more salient in such many-faceted research. The novelty arises from the new mixture and expands our horizons. The familiarity comes from the *Mitsein*; the shared, common rock

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[47] Gadamer 1991, p.295.

[48] Schmidt, p.104.

[49] Gadamer 1991, p.299.

bottom of our being-in-the-world. The simultaneous strangeness with this acquaintedness is the result of the expansion of the horizon via the encounter with what is novel. In this sense, a study on a prominent figure from another tradition may not only contribute to extending our horizons, but also to revealing of the fore-structures of our horizons and the neighbor-horizons. It may mirror our prejudices to us. Any mirror stands in a distance and the present study aims to put a distance via studying a distant figure to Western philosophy. Openness to the distant, i.e., "intertextuality," as a manifold openness to various cultures, contexts, traditions and texts is to be a central, guiding dynamic of the present study and the hallmark of the philosopher/intellectual.[50]

2.2.1.2. Potentials for Phenomenology

Occidental phenomenology, given birth by Husserl, grew as a post-Kantian hope for universally valid knowledge stemming from shared human experience. Besides having undergone to variation in the hands of Husserl's followers, its claim of universality has always been preserved. Cross-contextual studies just as the present one have a central importance for this claim of universality of phenomenology. Via phenomenological inquiries which present an Oriental-Occidental dialogue,

> …phenomenology may partly reassert its premises, and hence
> found new pathways for drawing inspiration from a history of ideas
> that in many regards has been absorbed within the folds of
> European thought as the tradition of the *other* within the *same*.[51]

The forgotten intellectual heritage of Islamic tradition and the "arrested idioms" of medieval times can be thought to present novel realms to test the universal claims of phenomenology. The opportunity of extending its realm of application through the encounter with the Islamic world may be a positive asset for phenomenology. It may be able to test its methods, to interrogate its validity and to deepen its

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[50] See Roy, Abhik and William J. Starosta (2001). "Hans-Georg Gadamer, Language, and Intercultural Communication." *Language and Intercultural Communication*, Vol.1, No.1, pp.16-17.

[51] El-Bizri, Nader (2006). "The Microcosm/Macrocosm Analogy: A Tentative Encounter Between Graeco-Arabic Philosophy and Phenomenology." In A-T. Tymieniecka (Ed.) *Islamic Philosophy and Occidental Phenomenology on the Perennial Issue of Microcosm and Macrocosm*. Vol.2. Springer. p.4.

insights by the genuine encounter. The extensive dialogical inquiry edited by Tymieniecka is a good example of this insightful expansion. The present study, however limited, also aims to serve to the same purpose. Phenomenology may display its universal validity by such horizon-expanding research.

A second crucial point for phenomenology is concerning the language [*Sprache, lughah*]–the disclosure of the world. While Husserl forgot the paramount importance of it,[52] Heidegger rehabilitated the position of language in philosophy and revived its original sense in Greek, *logos*. Language draws the limits of the world. By learning a language, we are introduced the world it permeates. In this sense the study on Ibn al-ʿArabī will be germane to phenomenology. Within the scope of the study, Arabic words and pronouns that do not exist in Occidental languages (and concepts that can only be translated with a considerable compromise) will be extensively exploited. Arabic, the most important language in Islamic civilization, is a Semitic language which represents a new world for Occidental phenomenology. Besides, the subject, Ibn al-ʿArabī, has a particular characteristics concerning language. He is regarded as the father of Ṣūfī language. He played a central role in the formation of the Ṣūfī language and many concepts of that literature owe themselves to his works. The present study focusing to the prominent figure of an "other world" may extend the limits of our world by the proposed encounter. "...[T]he role of language in the production of an intercultural mosaic of different types of knowledge and concepts of distinct origin"[53] is so central that a language may be held to present a particular world. This significance of language for phenomenology increases the importance of such studies that rely on sources from different languages.

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[52] Bübner, Rudiger (1981). *Modern German Philosophy*. Eric Matthews. (Trans.) Cambridge University Press. p.13.

[53] Benlabbah, Fatiha (2004). "The Idea of Human Unity in Ibn Arabi and Ramon Llull." *Quaderns de la Mediterrània*, 9. Retrieved 10 January 2009, from http://www.iemed.org/publicacions/quaderns/9/q9_031.pdf p.35.

I will not open up the discussion whether Ibn al-ʿArabī may be called as a phenomenologist.[54] Rather, I will undertake elaborating his ontology and hermeneutics in the context of Occidental phenomenology. Even this elaboration will suffice to come up with invaluable insights both for phenomenology and hermeneutics.

2.2.1.3. A Reminder – Tradition, Prejudice and Historicity

I have briefly touched on the influence of Ibn al-ʿArabī in the Islamic world throughout its history. I have also mentioned that the manifest influence of him is just the upper part of the iceberg due to several reasons.[55] Even today, his many ideas are mostly implicitly roaming and keep molding the fore-structures of understanding in the Islamic territories. At this point, it recurs to the mind that how an emphasis on "historicity" of human being or even "tradition" can be made simultaneously with neglecting such prominent and historically influential figures in the history.

Particularly, modern German philosophy has crystallized the historical structure of being-there [*Dasein*]. Historicity [*geschichtlichtkeit*], as the thrownness of understanding, forms the way the world opens itself to *Dasein*. Through acculturation [*bildung*] and language, the prejudices are presented that open the world to *Dasein*. The reflective consciousness of this process, the historically effective consciousness [*wirkungsgeschichtliche bewusstsein*] in its narrow sense in Gadamer, is the normative requirement of these transcendental circumstances.

Today, we are producing lots of academic studies which concern phenomenology or hermeneutics. Many studies make a ceaseless emphasis on the historicity of

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[54] When I add the concept "Occidental" before "phenomenology," the discussion on the idea that phenomenology has various forms in the Orient is in my mind. For example, there is a good deal of studies on the similarity of phenomenological reduction, *epoche,* and, say, Budist contemplation. By the constriction added with the concept "Occidental," I avoid from such secondary discussions.

[55] See the "Introduction" part of Chodkiewicz, Michel (1993). *An Ocean Without Shore: Ibn ʿArabī, The Book, and The Law*. SUNY Press, Albany. pp.1-18.

human being and on the central importance of tradition. The normative result of these studies to the historically reflective mind is a vital reminder to deal with one's own historicity. Considering the prevailing, bold stress on tradition and historicity, it appears as a dramatically unfortunate incoherence[56] in the scholarly philosophy that the general inclination is to give cold shoulder and just neglect the Medieval Islamic heritage. It is a mystery how a scholar in a Muslim territory can speak of "tradition" or the "historicity" of *Dasein* without an encounter with the historical, influential figures (like Ibn al-ʿArabī) of that territory. History functions in every experience. It permeates in all aspects of the cultures: in poems, lullabies, idioms, arts, and such. It establishes the horizon of understanding. History is an unavoidable present one cannot give back, run away or turn behind. *To leap out from a horizon is not possible*; that is the logical result of the historicity of *Dasein*. One can at best work out in the historical horizon in a productive, open but also reflectively critical way to bring it into a fusion with other horizons. Very concisely, the present study is just an ethical response to the normative demand of the historically effective consciousness.

2.2.2. Possible Traps and Problems for the Inquiry

To approach the research topic from unusual perspectives is by no means challenging. I will dispense with the conservative research methods, the oversensitivity of which to the abstraction between the researcher and her/his subject limits original thinking to an important point. For the sake of preserving the subject, conservative methods constitute unimaginative restrictions. Having oriented by phenomenological directives, my inclination is to adopt phenomenological methods of investigation and open hermeneutics[57] that emancipates and trusts to Hermes in bringing more from the research topic. Via phenomenology and open hermeneutics, I will try to surmount these unimaginative

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[56] In terms of al-Ghazālī, it would not be false to name the inspired neglect of modern scholarship in the Islamic history as a modern *tahafut al-falāsifah*.

[57] Here I am following El-Bizri, and trying to avoid the modes of study which "censor original thinking in the name of avoiding *anachronism*." See El-Bizri, p.3.

restrictions. Nevertheless, Hermes is not so reliable, as the ancient Greek poems remind us.[58] The method adopted here has its own limitations that the researcher needs to take into consideration. At the outset, I have to evince these limitations and shortly deal with them.

2.2.2.1. Philosophical Validity of the Subject Matter

It is quite a challenge to place Ibn al-ʿArabī at the heart of a study in philosophy. This problem is tantamount to the question whether Ibn al-ʿArabī (who has been termed as a *philo-sopher*, mystic, mystic-critique, theology-critique, philosophy-critique, and simultaneously as none of them) can be defined as a philosopher. Is it true to put into the heart of a study in philosophy a figure that can hardly be defined as "philosopher"?

Burckhardt, in his preface to Ibn al-ʿArabī's ciphered *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, conveys us that Ibn al-ʿArabī was called as "the son of Plato" [*Ibn Aflāṭūn*] even when he was alive.[59] Ibn al-ʿArabī cites Plato in different passages with an unpaired respect. "Those among the people of Islam who dislike Plato only dislike him because of his relationship to philosophy and because of their ignorance of the meaning of this word."[60]

It is not the interest of this study whether Ibn al-ʿArabī can be defined as philosopher[61] or what possible criteria can be found to define someone as a

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[58] For example, Plato speaks of him not only as "interpreter" or "messenger," but also as "thief," "liar," or "bargainer." See Abulad, p.12.

[59] See Ibn al-ʿArabī (1980a). *The Bezels of Wisdom.* Ralph W. J. Austin (Trans. and Intro.), Titus Burckhardt (Preface) Paulis Press. p.xiii.

Corbin also makes the same point: see also Corbin, p.41.

[60] Chittick 1989, p.203; *Futūḥāt* II 523.2.

[61] Rosenthal discussed the issue in an article, which he titled with Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī's claim that "sufism and philosophy are neighbors and visit each other." [*fa-inna at-taṣawwuf wa-t-tafalsuf yatajāwarāni wa-yatazāwarāni.*] Rosenthal provides a good deal of textual evidence in the article. He defines Ibn al-ʿArabī's position between philosophy and mysticism, as one may expect, in accordance with Ibn al-ʿArabī's maxim "yes and no." He is both a philosopher and a mystic; and in

philosopher. Because these questions are at best of secondary importance if they are at all, I am not interested in the search of an answer for these questions. What we have to bear in mind is that any answer to these questions will be tightly bound to what we understand from "philosophy."[62] Ibn al-ʿArabī himself defines philosophy by an etymological analysis of the concept. "The meaning of 'philosopher' is lover of wisdom, since *sophia* in Greek is 'wisdom,' and *phil* is 'love,' so the word means 'love of wisdom.' Every man of intelligence loves wisdom."[63] Hence, he establishes a relationship between himself and philosophy in its ancient and broad sense. This position reminds us not only that our answer to the question concerning the philosophical validity of Ibn al-ʿArabī will be strictly connected with what we understand from "philosophy," but also that we have to avoid from ethnocentrism and anachronism in making such evaluations and categorizations.

More important than the discussion of Ibn al-ʿArabī's categorization is that a phenomenologist is the one who is aware of the fact that the categorization the research subject undergoes is heavily dependent on one's approach and presuppositions related to it. These presuppositions function (or malfunction) in the unfolding of the research subject. Hence, the path to fare well with these presuppositions, i.e., to demarcate the fertile presuppositions from the false and non-productive ones, may be paved by such deconstructive readings which compel the preestablished categories.

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narrow sense, none of them. See Rosenthal, Franz (1988). "Ibn ʿArabī between 'Philosophy' and 'Mysticism': 'Sufism and Philosophy Are Neighbors and Visit Each Other.' fa-inna at-taṣawwuf wa-t-tafalsuf yatajāwarāni wa-yatazāwarāni." *Oriens*, Vol.31, p.35. As I have mentioned, I am interested neither in the discussion whether Ibn al-ʿArabī is a philosopher is not, nor in the thesis that philosophy and mysticism are interrelated [*al-ʿirfān w-al-falsafah innaha min abī-waḥidan*].

[62] See Chittick, William C. (1996a). "Ibn ʿArabī." In Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (Eds.) *History of Islamic Philosophy*. Part I. Routledge History of World Philosophies, Vol.1. Chapter 30. p.497.

[63] Chittick 1989, p.203; *Futūḥāt* II 523.2.

2.2.2.2. Danger of Distortion

Generally, it is ambiguous where the researcher ends and her/his research subject starts. Yet this ambiguity is not peculiar to g*eisteswissenschaftler* but intrinsic to any research. Not only phenomenology but also philosophy of science teaches us that the distinction between the researcher and her/his subject becomes ambiguous in all research. Nevertheless, the more the hermeneutic density in the inquiry, the more apparent becomes this ambiguity and the less visible becomes the distinction between the researcher and the subject.

This unfriendly ambiguity showed itself as the doubt of distorting the research subject; the flaw which Chittick saw in Corbin's creative reading of Ibn al-'Arabī.[64] As just one example, Chittick observes that "…in his zeal to revive the honor due to the imaginal realm, Corbin tended to de-emphasize the cornerstone of Islamic teachings, *tawḥīd*, the 'declaration of God's Unity',"[65] that was so central to Ibn al-'Arabī. The present study is also not immune to the same risk of distorting its subject for the sake of phenomenological analysis and interpretation. Fully aware of this danger, but also cyclically, I will search the recipe within phenomenology and hermeneutics. As Merleau-Ponty reminds us, any research is inherently distortive at least in two ways. First, language that is a mode of understanding and interpretation is inherently distortive and is the unrivalled, ubiquitous medium in research. Second, the research itself compels the Cartesian *res cogitans – res extensa* distinction; the subject interrogates the object in any research.[66] Hence, Chittick's claim that it is unclear "where Ibn al-'Arabī ends and Corbin begins"[67] in the *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī* is a true

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[64] "Corbin's hermeneutical flights, however, stretch the concept of imagination beyond the conservative bounds of Chittick's contextual interpretations." (Akkach, Samer (1997). "The World of Imagination in Ibn 'Arabi's Ontology," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1, May. p.99.

[65] Chittick 1989, p.x.

[66] See e.g., Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1962). *Phenomenology of Perception.* Colin Smith (Trans.) Routledge & Kegan Paul. New Jersey: The Humanities Press. p.174.

[67] Chittick 1989, p.xix.

contention, but there is only a difference of degree in the distortion the subject undergoes in the research process' of different scholars. *Distortion of the subject is the intrinsic property of any research.* Hence, the question is not "how can we undertake a research with no distortion," rather, how can it be accomplished with *less distortion* or genuinely.

Any epistemological inquiry is an interrogation. Nevertheless, among them philosophy, as the self-conscious inquiry, has an advantage in this sense. Following Gadamer, "…the important thing is to be aware of biases so that the text can present itself in all its otherness."[68] The danger of distortion may be avoided best through a philosophical reflection on methodology. In addition to the essentially reflective awareness of philosophy, hermeneutics will also enable us with a reflection on the methodology. Hermeneutics (following Palmer's Gadamer-oriented approach) applied in this study will be "a closing of the gaps," a "critique of method," rather than a "technical method."[69] Hence, I will try to exploit this twofold advantage provided to me by philosophy and hermeneutics. By their help, I will try to unfold Ibn al-ʿArabī through a self-conscious interrogation, which means a simultaneous unfolding of my methodology and presuppositions with my research subject.

2.2.2.3. Problem of De-contextualization

The last problem I feel obligated to face up with is the frequently encountered trap (for a multi-sourced proposal like this in particular) to detach the research subject from its context.

> …[C]omparative philosophy and perspectivism may run the risk of becoming trivial undertakings that do not heed the gravity of thinking and may lead to a trivializing de-contextualization of thought that betrays the seriousness of its determining historicity.[70]

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[68] Roy and Starosta, p.13; Gadamer, Hans-Georg (1989). *Truth and Method*. 1st Edition. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. (Trans.) New York: Crossroad. p.269.

[69] See Palmer 1977, pp. 386-387.

[70] El-Bizri, p.13.

Nevertheless, immediately after confessing this risk of comparative inquiries in philosophy, El-Bizri explains the possible rewards of them. "Nonetheless, when certain concepts are displaced from one language to another, a new horizon for addressing old questions gets opened."[71] In comparative philosophy, the risk comes with its award, as the familiar and strange come together. Generally a new horizon opens itself by such multi-sourced research. From the "crossing" of different literatures, a new space for test and implementation is given birth that would remain latent in the ingredients separately.[72]

To avoid from non-sense de-contextualization and a meaningless list of similarities and differences, relying on the sources on Ibn al-ʿArabī does not suffice. Besides, the whole context into which the subject is embedded must be understood. As the logical extension of the hermeneutic circle, philosophy, mysticism, arts and history of Islam altogether are required to be analyzed simultaneously. While tackling with a tiny problematic, the whole context in which it culminates, the manifold sources and aspects of the whole picture must be evaluated, with which the problematic is in a permanent interplay. However, no research subject can be analyzed from all aspects, and the analysis of the context goes to infinity. Hence, this study, like any phenomenological inquiry, acquiesces from the beginning its destiny to be incomplete. As a matter of fact, the fate of any "thesis" or assertion in philosophy is to remain incomplete, false or imperfect.

In these two chapters, I tried to make a very short introduction to this bridge-proposal. This study represents a very modest inquiry into an intertextual research. It will present unusual meeting of two separate charming literatures. The study will

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[71] Ibid, p.13.

[72] Contemporary philosopher Eugene Gendlin's process model that yields to a rigorous critique of cultural particularism is, I suppose, of fundamental importance for the cross-cultural studies, because it engenders creative fusions of various contexts. Accordingly, from the fusion (that Gendlin calls "crossing") of two cultures, very different colors arise which do not exist in neither of them. See Gendlin, E.T. (1997). "On Cultural Crossing." (Paper presented at the *After Postmodernism Conference*.) Retrieved December 19, 2007, from http://www.focusing.org/gendlin_articles.html

hit the mark if it can only point the doors of a fruitful fusion to more extensive and deeper prospective research. The only requirement to anticipate those doors is merely "openness"; *eumenis elenchoi* in Plato's terms.

In the next chapter, eventually after all these extensive but tentative evaluations, I feel myself able to begin to this encounter.

PART TWO: ONTOLOGY

CHAPTER 3

IBN AL-'ARABĪ AND PHENOMENOLOGY OF BEING

One of the main perennial problems in the history of philosophy is "*the question,*" i.e., the problem of being. In the Western philosophy, the revolutionary name of the twentieth century concerning the problem of being is Martin Heidegger. In the Orient, on the other hand, the first name coming to one's mind concerning the problem of being is generally Ibn al-'Arabī, who is famous with his theory of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. These two towering figures from two different traditions stand light-years distant from each other. They both, however, committed themselves to find an answer to the most awesome and complicated question of all times and places: question of being [*seinsfrage*].

The main problem for Heidegger was the meaning [*sinn*] and truth [*wahrheit*] of Being [*Sein*]. Accordingly, *Sein* is the central problem for everyone; but we forget it when wrestling with *Seiende as Seiende* and ignore it in everydayness. This "forgetfulness of Being" [*Seinsvergessenheit*] which culminated in the put of *Sein* on par with *Seiende* was the focus of Heidegger's ontological critique of the long quest of Western philosophy. *Seinsfrage* is rehabilitated as the central question in Heidegger's philosophy and has become the main current issue.

In a considerably distance of time, context and place, the same intricate question of human worldliness was also the main current issue in the medieval Islamic world. By the prominent figure Ibn al-'Arabī, the problem of being and the whole multi-dimensional intellectual heritage up until his time was questioned. Being plays a central role in all of his work, while forming a small component of Ibn al-'Arabī's huge cosmology. "What is 'being' and 'existence' in Ibn al-'Arabī" is the main concern which I will undertake to unfold in this part. A suitable starting point to elaborate Ibn al-'Arabī's understanding of existence and being may be a condensed etymological archeology that Heidegger undertook when making his analysis of human being's situatedness [*befindlichkeit*]. The word "*befindlichkeit*"

was derived from the word "*finden,*" which led Heidegger to handle with existence as something we find, we discover. Our *befindlichkeit* in the world is a transcendental category that is pregiven to us. We find ourselves thrown [*geworfen*] into the world. After shortly contending with Heidegger's understanding of being, I will turn my focus to that of Ibn al-ʿArabī. This dualist approach will not only enable us to unfold the ontology of Ibn al-ʿArabī within the context of Western philosophy, but also to observe that very rich and different discussions on *Sein* are possible, while traditional metaphysical discussions delimit themselves with *Seiende*.

3.1. Heidegger on *Sein*: An Introduction

There is no need to say that an extensive elaboration of Heidegger's phenomenology of *Sein* in a few pages is not possible. His philosophy has also underwent to a conversion [*kehre*] in 1930s, after which Being and being (*Sein* and *Seiende*, rendered to English by different commentators in various ways[73]) would mean substantially separate things. Heidegger's focus turned to the truth of Being from the meaning of it. However, what has always remained at the center of his quest in philosophy has been the ceaseless concern with Being. In his *What Is Metaphysics*, Heidegger refers to and criticizes the onto-theological essence of tradition's "forgetfulness of Being." What he turns back is not only Husserl's suggestion, i.e., "the things themselves," but also the most fundamental question of philosophy–*die seinsfrage*.

Heidegger finds the traditional concept of "ontology" to be an "indefinite and vague directive..."[74] Accordingly, "...traditional ontology was merely 'ontic,' in

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[73] To avoid confusion and for the sake of uniformity, I have followed a certain path in the translation of German words. See *Appendix-B: Note on German Translations*.

[74] Schmidt, p.52; Heidegger, Martin (1999). *Ontology: Hermeneutics of Facticity*. John van Buren (Trans.) Bloomington, Indiana University Press. p.1.

that it occupied itself exclusively with entities, or what is (*das Seiende*)...”[75]
“Ontology means the organized body of knowledge about the different ways
entities are, whereas ontic refers to the actual ways individual beings are.”[76]
Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* told about the blindness of the night birds to the blaze:
Heidegger reminds this metaphor of Aristotle to our blindness to Being.[77] The
metaphysical tradition equates *Sein* with *Seiende*; it is blind of what it is immersed
into. “It names it *Sein* but means *Seiende as Seiende*.”[78]

Heidegger mentioned in his *Being and Time* [*Sein und Zeit*] of the three general
and traditional prejudices concerning Being:

1.“‘Being’ is the most ‘universal’ concept.”[79]

2.”The concept of ‘being’ is indefinable.”[80]

3.”‘Being’ is the self evident concept.”[81]

As the answer of the question is allegedly evident, there fall out those general
prejudices concerning Being. “Metaphysics has already formulated Being
beforehand in its answer to the question about being as such. ... But metaphysics
never answers the question about the truth of Being because it does not ask the
question.”[82]

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[75] Carman, Taylor (2003). *Heidegger's Analytic: Interpretation, Discourse, and Authenticity in Being and Time*. Modern European Philosophy, Cambridge University Press. p.9.

[76] Schmidt, pp.59-60.

[77] See Heidegger, Martin (1987). *The Zollikon Seminars*. Medard Boss (Ed.), Franz Mayr and Richard Askay (Trans.) Illinoi, Northwestern University Press.

[78] Heidegger, Martin (1929). *What Is Metaphysics?* Miles Groth (Trans. And Notes) Retrieved June 17, 2009, from http://www.wagner.edu/departments/psychology/sites/wagner.edu.departments.psychology/files/download/Martin%20HeideggerWHAT_IS_METAPHYSICS.pdf p.9.

[79] Schmidt, p.59; Heidegger 1996, p.3.

[80] Ibid, p.59; Heidegger 1996, p.4.

[81] Ibid, p.59; Heidegger 1996, p.4.

[82] Heidegger 1929, p.8.

To be able to talk about Being accurately, a proper access to it is necessitated. This access is for Heidegger nothing but the pregiven *Dasein* that is a specific type of Being.[83]

> In order at the same time to find *one* word for the relationship of Being to the essence of man and for the essential relation [*wesensverhältnis*] of man to the openness ['there [*Da*]'] of Being as such, the term "*Dasein*" was chosen for that essential sphere in which man is man.[84]

Dasein is the proper starting point at that one can analyze the meaning of Being, because it is pregiven in advance. Even when I embark on questioning the Being, there is already *Dasein* which is primarily and primordially given to me. Being is already opened to me as *Dasein*. We do "...all the same find ourselves somehow placed in the midst of the generality of bare [*enthüllt*] being."[85] We find ourselves *Dasein* as pregiven, which already opens to me to the world. "*Dasein* is 'our' 'own' *Dasein*."[86] It is the place [*Da*] Being discloses itself as being. This disclosure [*erschlossenheit*] is temporal and in the form of "Being-for-me."[87]

Being unfolds itself in the world as being. "*Seiende* appears as *Seiende* each time in light of *Sein*. Whenever metaphysics formulates *Seiende*, it has there shed light on *Sein*."[88] This unfolding is temporal and spatial, and finite, delimited. Being unfolds itself temporally as being; but this unfolding occurs only through *Dasein*. Hence, Being and time are not objects, as *Dasein* is not.[89] It means that Being and time unfold and present themselves in the world and as the world-for-me. Being is what the subject *finds* itself *already immersed into*. Heidegger, having religious connotations, calls this primordial property of *Dasein* as "thrownness" [*geworfenheit*]. *Dasein finds* itself [*sich befinden*] thrown into the world as being-

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[83] Schmidt, p.59.

[84] Heidegger 1929, p.10.

[85] Ibid 1929, p.26.

[86] Schmidt, p.52; Heidegger 1999, p.5.

[87] Park, Hyeon-Jong (2009). "'Meaning of Being' in Early Heidegger Compared to 'Meaning' in Late Wittgenstein." *The Third BESETO Conference of Philosophy*, Session 3. p.78.

[88] Heidegger 1929, p.5.

[89] Heidegger 1987, p.3.

in-the-world. The world is the primordial basis of all experience in which *Dasein* is always "*Da*" with its own peculiarities.

Being-in-the-world is to be already immersed into being in a particular mode. Being manifests itself in the world as "being of" [*Sosein*]; remembering the words of Merleau-Ponty, *Sein* exists always as *Sosein*.[90] This mode of *Dasein*'s being is its existence in the world. It is *Dasein*'s concern with its own being; existence is *Dasein*'s reflectivity. "*Seiende* in the mode of life is human [be-ing]. Only man exists. A rock is, but it does not exist. ... God is, but he does not exist."[91] Existence is the reflexivity of *Dasein* on its being-in-the-world. *Dasein*'s primordial structure is its being-in-the-world [*inderweltsein*], its being the "being of man" and temporal unfolding Being in the world. *Dasein*'s essence is unfolded to itself and to the world through existence. *Dasein*'s being is always in a particular structure, a mode. It is always in the world in this or that way.[92] As Gadamer claims, "...the structure of *Dasein* is thrown projection."[93]

Heidegger states that we can speak of Being only so far as it unveils itself to us. "Being has arrived with[in] emergence [*unverborgenheit*],"[94] which implies that "[o]ntology is possible only as phenomenology,"[95] as the etymological analysis of the concept "phenomenology" displays. The original, Greek sense of the concepts "phenomenon" and "logos" has been distorted, which Heidegger rehabilitates by his twofold etymological analysis. Phenomenology, as the unfolding of the logos (in the sense of *a-letheia*) is "to let what shows itself be seen from itself, just as it shows itself from itself."[96] Phenomenology elaborates Being as it appears. Being is unfolded to *Dasein* through phenomenology in the Being-for-me structure. I am

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[90] Merleau-Ponty 1962, p.109.

[91] Heidegger 1929, p.12.

[92] Heidegger 1996, p.12.

[93] Gadamer 1991, p.264.

[94] Heidegger 1929, p.5.

[95] Schmidt, p.61; Heidegger 1996, p.35.

[96] Ibid, p.61; Heidegger 1996, p.34.

able to know Being in this particular structure of its unfolding. Being *qua* Being transcends the phenomenological *Daseinsanalysis* of Heidegger. The truth of Being remains concealed in the everydayness of experience. *Sein* is not a phenomenon; it is not unveiled as an object. Being is not a being; rather Being is what manifests itself through the world unfolded to *Dasein*. This manifestation occurs through beings, in time, and for *Dasein*.

Being-in-the-world is intrinsically in temporally finite structure, which means that time is equiprimordial with Being. "Heidegger's Being is throughout timely. Being unfolds itself at every moment and in every diversity, and does so only through understanding of *Dasein*."[97] Being and time are not things; rather, they are the preconditions of the *Dasein*; they present us the things and co-determine each other. "The meaning of *Dasein* is temporality." ["*Der Sinn des Daseins ist die Zeitlichkeit*."[98]] In German language, the concepts "Being" [*Sein*] and "time" [*Zeit*] are used in the passive structure of "*es gibt*" ["it gives"]. *Sein* and time are given to us inherently. We "find" them pregiven to us. As they are the transcendental conditions of all the worldly *es gibt*, "…what we need to think is not 'Being' or 'time' … but we need to think their presencing: the 'there is' or 'It gives' of time and Being."[99] Being and time set up the *Dasein*, which means that they are not things. They are events [*ereignis*], while "…'event' is not simply an occurrence, but that which makes any occurrence possible."[100]

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[97] Park, p.79.

[98] Merleau-Ponty 1962, p.410. (The passage is quoted by Merleau-Ponty from an early German edition of *Being and Time*. I am giving the full information of the publication to impede confusion in references: *Sein und Zeit*. Erste Hälfte. Sonderdruck aus: Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung, Band VIII. p.331.)

[99] Dobie, Robert J. (2007). "The Phenomenology of *Wujūd* in the Thought of Ibn Al-'Arabī." In Tymieniecka, A-T. (Ed.) (2007). *Timing and Temporality in Islamic Philosophy and Phenomenology of Life. Islamic Philosophy and Occidental Phenomenology in Dialogue*. Vol.3. Springer. p.314.

[100] Dobie p.315; Heidegger, Martin (1972). *On Time and Being*. Joan Stambaugh (Trans.) University of Chicago Press. p.19.

Dasein is being-in-the-world in either of two modes: authenticity or inauthenticity. However, these two modes represent two poles which do not exist in the world purely. Full authenticity or full inauthenticity is not possible. Full authenticity is not possible, because we are not enveloped in our skin or abstracted from the world. We are rather always defined with reference to the world. Full inwardness, a full carefulness is not possible, as we live always towards something. Consciousness is always the consciousness of something – we live not only in the world, but also towards it. Full inauthenticity, as the full forgetfulness of Being, is also out of reach, because we are unique *Dasein*s with unique structures, from which we cannot escape. One cannot be so forgetful to forget his own Being into which *Dasein* is thrown and that is always "*Da.*" We are in the world, always in-between the two poles of authenticity and inauthenticity. "Since Being is always a concealing as well as an unconcealing, Being is never completely present,"[101] Being *qua* Being is a *noema* while Being *qua* being-for-me is the phenomenal world. Thus, *Dasein* is always in the betweenness [*zwischenheit*] of these two poles. To be in the world is to be *in-between*.

For Heidegger, without reflecting on Being, which is the question of all questions, knowledge of entities must not be even discusses. Being is what is the manifest and the already-there, what is hidden in our forgetfulness of daily "they-self" [*das Man*]. *Sein* -which is *Dasein*'s *Sein* in the Being-for-me structure- hides itself in "whence" and "whither." Simultaneously, *Sein* discloses itself through *Dasein*'s unavoidable thrownness in the world. Via phenomenology, which is the most appropriate way of dealing with Being, we can unfold it to us. Being as Being is out of reach, but we can perceive it [*vernehmen*] in its relation to the world in the form of Being-for-me.

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[101] Schmidt, p.164.

3.2. Ibn al-'Arabī's Phenomenology of *Wujūd*

> O, sky! Are you luminous,
> so much as me?
> And dark?[102]

Now I may be able to turn back to Ibn al-'Arabī to undertake Heidegger's parallel etymological analysis of *befindlichkeit* in Arabic. The words "existence" and "being" are met by the same word in Arabic: *wujūd*. This concept is of central importance in the thought of Ibn al-'Arabī. When the name of Ibn al-'Arabī is pronounced, the idiom coming to one's mind (if there comes any) is generally "oneness of Being" [*waḥdat al-wujūd*]. Generally, non-familiar minds, following the early Orientalists studying Ibn al-'Arabī (Landau,[103] Nicholson,[104] etc.) define him as a pantheist, panentheist, existential monist or natural mystic because of this phrase.[105] As a matter of fact Ibn al-'Arabī never exploits this phrase in none of his 400 extant books and treatises.[106] We owe the phrase to his followers, particularly to his famous vicegerent [*khalīfa*], disciple [*murīd*] and commentator [*shariḥ*] Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī.[107] I will not elaborate what this phrase means or how it has to be understood. For, the famous phase and the discussions around it represent only a very narrow and contentious dimension of Ibn al-'Arabī's extensive phenomenology of being. The concept "being," without a need for an additional word (like "oneness"), is on its own of fundamental importance for him. The

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[102] Yıldız Tilbe.

[103] In the preface of his *The Philosophy of Ibn 'Arabī*, he introduces Ibn al-'Arabī as a "legend of pantheism." Such conceptual baggages and schemas one has present at hand sometimes obstinate one's understanding of her/his research subject rather than making understanding easier.

[104] See Nicholson, p.103. Nicholson is also full of unfortunate misjudgments. (See e.g., Nicholson, p.90, p.93.)

[105] Nasr presents a synopsis of such misconceptions, and an insightful answer to them. See Nasr, pp.104-106. In addition, Nasr gives a very short but good critique of the Orientalist inquiry on Sufism. See Nasr, p.156.

[106] Chittick 1996a, p.504.

[107] Chittick, William C. (1996b). "The School of Ibn 'Arabī." In Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (Eds.) *History of Islamic Philosophy*. Part I. Routledge History of World Philosophies, Vol.1. Chapter 31. pp.511-512.

historical derivativeness of the term "*waḥdat al-wujūd*" reminds us again to question the perennial prejudgments and to reflect on our preestablished categories concerning Ibn al-'Arabī's understanding of being.

The Arabic word *wujūd* is derived from the root *wajada* (or just *w.j.d.*). In Arabic, "...*wujūd* means 'existence' or 'being' only derivatively and in its passive sense: originally and actively it means, 'to find,' 'to hit upon,' 'to meet with,' 'get' or 'obtain,' 'to invent' or 'to find (good or bad)'."[108] Ibn al-'Arabī exploits the concept "*wujūd*" both for "existence," "Being" and also "finding" depending on the context. *Wujūd* is not only existence; it refers also to something we find, like "*finden*" in German. In short, following Dobie, we may conclude that

> …if we look at all of these different but related meanings of the root *wajada* we have before us in the thought of Ibn al-'Arabī and in the Arabic language itself a phenomenological understanding the "matter" or *Sache* of Being and time. "To be" is "to be found"… in the world.[109]

For Ibn al-'Arabī, being is itself not a quality of the things themselves. It is a pregiven condition of the things for their worldliness. "It cannot not be."[110] We *find* [*wajada*] ourselves as human beings existing in the world; immersed into being.[111] In Ibn al-'Arabī's account, to be means to be contingent, temporal, embodied, and hence, finite. Being is unfolded to me as temporal. Besides, I find myself existing in the world subjectively, but Being-in-itself [*Sein-an-sich*] as such cannot be known objectively. I can speak of Being only as it appears to me; as a phenomenon. Being manifests itself, *appears* as being-in-the-world. The world is

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[108] Dobie, p.313.

Chittick also provides an etymology of the term "*wujūd*": "...it also means finding, grasping, perceiving, knowing, experiencing, enjoying." Chittick, William C. (2007a). "The View From Nowhere: Ibn Al-'Arabī On the Soul's Temporal Unfolding." In Tymieniecka, A-T. (Ed.) (2007). *Timing and Temporality in Islamic Philosophy and Phenomenology of Life. Islamic Philosophy and Occidental Phenomenology in Dialogue*. Vol.3. Springer. p.4.

[109] Dobie, p.313.

[110] Murata and Chittick, p.248, p.260.

[111] The famous phrase, *waḥdat al-wujūd* may also be handled in this sense, as the "oneness of finding." What we "find" in the world has a shared unity.

the locus of temporal, continuous and never-ending manifestation [*maẓhar*] of Being.[112] Being unfolds itself temporally and in the form of beings that appear to us.[113]

We encounter with a useful distinction of Ibn al-ʿArabī that corresponds to Heidegger's distinction between *Sein* and *Seiende*. Ibn al-ʿArabī distinguishes objective Being from our worldly subjective being-for-me. Objective Being [*wujūd muṭlaq*] is transcendent, and has an "in-itself" nature. The worldly, temporal, bodily and imperfect being of things [*wujūd muqayyad*] that is also the intrinsic truth of being-in-the-world is fully subjective as being-*found*-as-"being-for-me." To be in the world means to have only relative and temporal existence, into which the human being is thrown. Being is a gift having no possibility of sending back.[114]

The distinction between being and Being is transcendental, but is not fully Platonic. Moreover, the relationship between the two is not necessarily causal, as in ancient Greek, Plotinus, St. Augustine or Avicenna. Being is not the unmoved mover [*muḥarrak bilā-ḥaraka*], *prima causa*, etc., as in any cosmogeny of *creatio ex nihilo*. Ibn al-ʿArabī's cosmogeny does not fit under the umbrella of *creatio ex nihilo*.[115] Rather, the temporal self-manifestation [*tajallī*] of Being and creation of the world are equivalent. This unfolding of Being is a nonstop process of inflow. Being flows every second to being; Being ceaselessly and temporally unfolds itself

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[112] Chittick, William C. (2002). "The Disclosure of the Intervening Image: Ibn ʿArabī on Death." *Discourse*, 24.1, Winter, p.53.

[113] Dobie, p.316.

[114] Neyzen Tevfik, the late Turkish mystic, mawlawī, ḥurūfī and bektashī, called this *felix culpa* as "the sacred torment" [*ʿazab al-muqaddas*].

[115] Uluç, Tahir (2006). "İbn ʿArabī'de Mistik Sembolizm." *Tasavvuf: İlmi ve Akademik Araştırma Dergisi.* 7, 16. p.157, pp.160-161.

to the world as the being-for-me. Therefore, Being is defined with temporality. Time [*Dahr*] is equiprimordial with Being.[116]

Rather than *creatio ex nihilo*, being-in-the-world is a temporal, continuous manifestation of the Being. Being manifests itself *in the world*, and as beings – *as the world*. Being-in-itself transcends the world, and is not a worldly property: Being is not a thing. Humans are human *beings* the mode of which is Being-for-me, not Being-in-itself. Existence, i.e., the worldly human being is temporal, embodied, imperfect and already pregiven. We are condemned to the world into which we are immersed for a particular time and a specific but unknown period.

As being however finitely condemned to the world, nothingness is impossible for us. Nothingness is not equal to non-existence, rather they point to opposites. Nothingness is impossible for human being, for by definition I find me as being-in-the-world. However, non-existence is rather the destiny of being-in-the-world; since it is temporal. Existence means temporality. Existence is existence for a while. Existent things are also non-existent in a longer term or in another second. Existence is a matter of time. Non-existence is the non-existence of beings; not that of Being. Nothingness is impossible for beings, and non-existence is the definite prospect of them due to their temporal definition. Beings are presented to me temporally in the world, and as beings-for-me; always subjectively open to me.

What we observe here is a paradoxical betweenness [*zwischenheit*] parallel to that of *Dasein* in Heidegger. Ibn al-ʿArabī deepens his analysis of existence/Being as betweenness by the phenomenology of light.[117] We *find* the things and ourselves

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[116] For the equiprimordial time, the concept "*Dahr*" is exploited rather than "*waqt*." See Chittick 1989, p.107; *Futūḥāt* III 198.33. See also the related discussion on *Dahr* in his useful endnote 7: Chittick 1989, p.395.

[117] Uluç points that an ontological theory of light has been first formulated by al-Ghazālī. (Uluç, p.178.) Contrarily, the first explicit formulation of an ontological account of light may be inaugurated by Avicenna, who also devoted a separate book on the nature of light. It is evident that al-Ghazālī's formulation of *al-Nūr*, particularly in his *Mishkat al-Anwār*, has had substantial influence on Ibn al-ʿArabī just as on many intellectuals, Suhrawardī included. Nevertheless, the figure famous with his "phenomenology of light" is rather Suhrawardī. His conception of *wujūd*

appear to us through light. Pure darkness in the world is impossible [*muḥāl*], which would be tantamount to nothingness. When we consider Being as pure light [*al-Nūr*[118]] (or as sun), we reveal that the visible things are not pure light. In the pure light, the appearance of the world would be again impossible. Phenomena appear to me in-between pure darkness and pure light. *Dasein* in Ibn al-ʿArabī is this seemingly paradoxical betweenness; always open as being, and never fully open as Being.[119] Ontologically speaking, being-in-the-world is *being dim*; never pure light and never pure darkness, an always deviating betweenness.

An important concept of Ibn al-ʿArabī is the "self" ["*al-nafs*"] what has been very hard to comprehend in Western terms for a long period of time. This difficulty in transposition is not a problem special to Ibn al-ʿArabī. On the contrary, the general understanding of the self in the Islamic tradition has remained perplexing for the Occidental apprehension. I will devote a caption of the structure of the self in Ibn al-ʿArabī. However, the insights brought by the Heidegger's *Daseinsanalysis* allow me to elaborate the self in Ibn al-ʿArabī to some extent. It is really charming to observe the convergences and differences between the two understandings of the self.

The Arabic word "*nafs*" is the reflexive pronoun and applies to everything; everything has a *nafs*. There is animal *nafs*, human *nafs*, stone's *nafs*, etc. *Nafs* only in a special and narrow context refers to a human property – the "soul"; but in a nonreifiable way.

> …[*N*]*afs* cannot designate any specific thing, since in each case the
> *nafs* is simply the very thing that was mentioned or implied,

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was a theophanic one, instead of the perennial "Being of beings." Rather than the perennial understanding of *wujūd* as the underlying reality, "...Suhrawardī employed the term *light* (*nūr*) to designate ultimate reality." (Murata and Chittick, p.249.) Suhrawardī's teachings are similar to that of Ibn al-ʿArabī in many aspects. For the symbolism of light in al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-ʿArabī, see Uluç, pp.178-189.

[118] There is a Koranic reference in this allegory. *Al-Nūr* is one of the sacred names of God, *asmā' al-ḥusna*.

[119] Chittick 1989, p.7.

whatever it may be. … [E]ach *nafs* is simply what the thing is, and
no other creature is exactly the same thing…[120]

The human self, in the light of these insights, is nonobjectifiable, nonreifiable and nonspecifiable from its environment. Then what is the self? This question is false structured, and the answer will be just an abstraction from the real nature of it. When questioning the self, "[i]nstead of asking, 'what is the self,' each of us has to ask 'who am I?'"[121] It cannot be reified and objectified, because primordially, it has no limits. "Few Muslim authorities make the mistake of reifying the self, since they know that the self has no specific limits."[122] The self is primary than the Cartesian distinction of object-subject; one cannot talk about the self in objective terms. The self is always myself.

The "self" in Ibn al-ʿArabī is the nonobjectifiable locus of the temporal manifestation of Being. It changes *instant by instant.*[123] "It is the I of the moment, and each moment is new."[124] Temporality is the intrinsic mark of the self. Here we encounter an amazing etymological analysis which displays the intrinsic temporality of the self. The self, *al-nafs*, is written as the same with its time indicator, *al-nafas*. *Al-nafas* means literally "breath" and "instance." In every breath [*nafas*], Being discloses itself *in* the self and *as* the self. *Al-nafs* opens itself in *al-nafas*. Self is temporal like breath. Its bond to Being is necessarily temporal, for time is the structure of the self's thrownness as being-in-the-world. The *nafs*, "…[l]ike a dream image, … undergoes constant transformations. It is sufficient to sit down in a quiet place and turn one's gaze within oneself to realize that the objects of our awareness undergo a never-ending flux."[125]

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[120] Chittick, William C. (2007b). *Sufism: A Short Introduction*. Oneworld Publications. p.54.

[121] Ibid, p.54.

[122] Ibid, p.53.

[123] Murata and Chittick, p.313.

[124] Chittick 2007b, p.55.

[125] Murata and Chittick, p.218.

We inescapably *find* ourselves as human *being*, and also not Being. We are condemned to being in this particular imperfect mode. "Imperfection is itself a kind of perfection. … All things are 'imperfect' and thereby perfectly adapted to the roles they play…"[126] To be imperfect is the hallmark of the worldly being; imperfection perfectly defines being-in-the-world.

Being unfolds itself always as being-for-me, and can never be exhausted.[127] I can talk about Being only as it appears to me, as Being-for-me, i.e., as subjectively. Being-in-itself, i.e., objective Being is what I have no access to. "I *find* myself in the world" is a possible description while "objectively I am" is not. Objectively, only "*Being is.*" And any other word which follows "*Being is*" overthrows me, since it overthrows my subjectivity. It transcends the limits of the world opened to me; and I am able to only negate everything attributed to the Being. Being is transcendent in the full sense of Kantian transcendental philosophy. Concerning the Being *qua* Being, with Wittgenstein's famous words with which he finished the celebrated *Tractatus*, "…we must pass over in silence"[128] ["*darüber muss man schweigen*"]. At this boundary point, the silence of transcendental philosophy, neo-Kantian positivist turn and negative theology converge to each other. As it is the transcendent, Being is not limited with anything; even with transcendence/nondelimitedness.[129]

We observe that Ibn al-ʿArabī's phenomenology of being is skeptical in the sense that is places the positivist presupposition of objective Being into the parenthesis

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[126] Chittick 1989, p.294.

[127] "None knows God but God." (Ibid, p.153.) Being is unfolded to the subject is a certain form, which is unique to that specific second, for Being unfolds itself temporally. The specific unfolding of Being for that second corresponds to Ibn al-ʿArabī's term "*rabb khaṣṣ.*" In every second, Being is disclosed to us in a certain form (Being-for-me, i.e., *rabb khaṣṣ*), but never manifest as Being as it is (which corresponds to *rabb muṭlaq*).

[128] Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1990). *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus.* C. K. Ogden (Trans.), Bertrand Russell (Intro.), Routledge. p.190.

[129] By freeing Being even from nondemitedness, Ibn al-ʿArabī criticizes those groups (particularly the ash'arite *mutakallīm*s) who engage in merely to *tanzīh*. Instead, Being can not be delimited with delimitedness.

of suspicion. A presupposition of objective Being would be a fundamental abstraction and a disastrous mistake to understand the truth of being. Being unfolds itself always in the structure of being-for-me, and being-in-the-world, not as Being as such. I cannot speak of Being objectively, as Being *qua* Being that transgresses the limits of my world. *Sein* unfolds itself only as *Seiende*.[130]

3.3. Keeping Unfolding Being

Through the help of Heidegger, I tried to analyze the meaning of being in the account of Ibn al-ʿArabī. Within the limits of the present study, I will not be able to provide a detailed comparison how the two figures approached to the question of being.[131] However, I think, it is evident that both have very similar phenomenological approaches to Being, to its unfolding and to the structure of this unfolding.

Both Heidegger and Ibn al-ʿArabī assert that Being and beings are ontologically disparate.[132] *Sein* [Being, *wujūd al-muṭlaq*] is not a "property" of human-beings; rather "finding-itself-in-the-world" [*befindlichkeit*] is the structure of being-in-the-world. Worldliness is for both in a *felix culpa*,[133] "fortunate sin," nonreturnable gift structure. Finding [*wajada*] itself [*sich befinden*] in the world is the mood of being which is the result of our thrownness into the midst [*wasaṭ*] of the world.

For both of them, Being is timely, and "appearing as Being of beings at every moment."[134] Time is equiprimordial with Being for both of them. The structure of unfolding of Being is subject bound (as "Being-for-me"), temporal (i.e., finite and

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[130] See Ibn al-ʿArabī 1980a, p.93.

[131] Dobie has already undertaken a tentative but extensive meeting of Heidegger's and Ibn al-ʿArabī's analyses of being. See Dobie.

[132] Correlatedly, their approach to nothingness has also of distinct similar sound.

[133] See Chittick 2007b, p.144.

[134] Park, p.76.

for a specific time period), and spatial (always in the world). The traditional Aristotelian understanding of Being as constancy [*ständigkeit*] or presence [*anwesen*] is traversed by a temporally unfolding Being, which is manifest in every moment and in every diversity in the world.[135] By this way, Heidegger criticizes the perennial understanding of Being. Similarly, Ibn al-ʿArabī leaves the widespread *creatio ex nihilo* paradigm on cosmogeny through this theophanic understanding of the world. The disclosure of Being is not only *as* the world, but also it happens always *in* the world. The world correlates Being to beings, and unifies the phenomenal diversity of beings. Heidegger's and Ibn al-ʿArabī's conceptions of the self, i.e., *Dasein* and *nafs* have also parallel structures. Both are primordially temporal, nonobjectifiable, nonreifiable and nonspecifiable. It means that they both precede the object-subject distinction. Both *nafs* and *Dasein* present the nonreturnable locus through that Being discloses itself. This disclosure is temporal that is the mood of being-in-the-world.

Instead of an extended comparison, I want to turn to my subject, Ibn al-ʿArabī, as I am now able to keep unfolding his approach to the truth of being-in-the-world after this general introduction in ontology. We have observed an emphasis on the transcendent nature of Being-in-itself. An allegedly objective analysis of Being is to be handled as a phenomenologically-philosophically unwarranted position. A competent critical analysis of this objectivism of modern science and an exquisite phenomenology of being is simultaneously provided us by eminent phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty. My intention for the next step is to apply to Merleau-Ponty and keep unfolding Ibn al-ʿArabī's understanding of being in the context and via the conceptual support of Occidental phenomenology.

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[135] Ibid, p.79.

CHAPTER 4

IBN AL-'ARABĪ AND THICKNESS OF THE PHENOMENA

The unexpected death of the famous representative of classical phenomenology, Maurice Merleau-Ponty has interrupted his fertile travel in phenomenology which was full of wonders.[136] However, what he has produced in this relatively short period of time was so central that his ontology may be claimed to be the pupil of the Occidental phenomenology. His exquisite *The Visible and The Invisible* shows the limits of the ontology with a phenomenological approach. Arguably, "...phenomenology can read its own future in Merleau-Ponty's ontology."[137] In the present chapter, I am planning to approach the ontology of Ibn al-'Arabī with the help of this special figure.

As Heidegger claims, phenomenology is the only way to inquire in ontology. Description of Being so much as it unfolds itself to the consciousness is the hallmark of phenomenology. What of Being revealed by phenomenology is only possible with the unique way of phenomenology. "Phenomenology is accessible only through phenomenological method."[138] Considering this bondage between phenomenology and ontology, Merleau-Ponty has a special and considerable in elaboration of Ibn al-'Arabī's ontology.

Merleau-Ponty's working notes for his unfortunately unfinished inquiry *The Visible and The Invisible* starts with the statement "our state of philosophy—never

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[136] Phenomenology is a never ending, with Husserl's well-known words, a "perpetually beginning" venture, which will remain unfinished in any way. Nevertheless, the death of Merleau-Ponty was so unexpected and his works were so promising that one cannot help but wondering what phenomenology has missed due to the his early death.

[137] Barbaras, Renaud (2004). *The Being of the Phenomenon: Merleau-Ponty's Ontology.* (Trans. Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor) Indiana University Press: Bloomington and Indianapolis. p.320.

[138] Merleau-Ponty 1962, p.viii.

has the crisis been so radical."[139] He recognizes the "necessity of a return to ontology"[140] as a vehicle for dealing with the problems of not only philosophy but also science. The possibilities of epistemology lies in the realm of ontology, but also conversely, ontology manifests itself in the epistemological realm. In other words, the invisible is in the visible, and the visible is in the visible; each manifests itself through the other one. Ontology, suggested by Merleau-Ponty, is a crucial aspect of "having the world" that the scientist has to be aware of. Hence, the early interrupted, unfinished venture of Merleau-Ponty in ontology has suggested important implications not only to phenomenology, but also to science. Ontology is not just necessary for epistemology. Besides, a phenomenological approach is required for ontology.

These preliminary remarks suffice to display the necessity of studying ontology and of developing a phenomenological link to Merleau-Ponty. These remarks may be summed up in three important points. First, the return to ontology, even with an unfamiliar figure such as Ibn al-ʿArabī, is central for contemporary philosophy. Second, the best way to deal with ontology is arguably phenomenology. Third, it is Merleau-Ponty who compelled the limits of ontology with phenomenology, and any ontological inquiry lacking reference to him, I suppose, is not genuine.

After this abstract introduction, it is a good time to take a look at the carnal ontology of Merleau-Ponty and inquire into deeper aspects of his philosophy. One of the main fruits of this inquiry will be the introduction of the bridge concept "thickness" of the phenomena. In addition to this proposed conceptual support for the unfolding of Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological method in ontology will also be what I will exploit in the current study. Therefore, his philosophical project has to be well apprehended in general.

[139] Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1968). *The Visible and The Invisible*. Followed by Working Notes. Hazel E. Barnes (Trans.) Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois. p.165.

[140] Ibid, p.165.

When dealing with Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, my task here is two-fold. First, the context and the original conceptual schema have to be drawn to build the conceptual bridge in harmony with the original sense of the concepts. By apprehending the concepts in their original context, the risk of de-contextualization and non-sense distortion will be reduced. Second, by elaborating the general schema of Merleau-Ponty, the ground of a wider bridge-proposal may be proceeded. In this part, I will abstain from an extended comparison between Merleau-Ponty and Ibn al-'Arabī. Rather, what is envisaged is to build a conceptual bridge between Occidental phenomenology and Ibn al-'Arabī. Via the proposed conceptual bridge and phenomenological method, I will seek the possibilities of deepening our understanding of Ibn al-'Arabī's ontological position.

4.1. The Unfinished Project of Merleau-Ponty

Like the wings of seagulls: captive…[141]

The phenomenological ontology of Merleau-Ponty from a broad point of view reveals four salient aspects of his philosophy, which are central in understanding the ontology of Ibn al-'Arabī. These four main aspects those are central in the unfolding of Ibn al-'Arabī's ontology are;

1. The rejection of the objectivist – scientist ontology by Merleau-Ponty. Also for Ibn al-'Arabī, being unfolds itself primarily in a purely subjective manner, similar to Heidegger who was introduced in the third chapter.

2. Merleau-Ponty's establishment of the body and flesh [*leib*] as isthmuses. The "body" mediates and reconciles the infinitely distant object and subject to each other without unifying them. The transcendental "wild logos," "flesh," functions as the isthmus [*barzakh*] between the visible and the invisible. Two parallel isthmuses in the macro level were to be developed by Ibn al-'Arabī. One is the

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[141] Yıldız Tilbe.

world which is an isthmus between existence and nonexistence, while the other is imagination that mediates the visible and the invisible. World is a unifying betweenness for existence and nonexistence, and the imagination is the parallel betweenness for the visible and the invisible.

3. Being is a primordial language. Meaning is the prerequisite of *inderweltsein*. Body is the primordial expression, and the world is a web of signs. *Inderweltsein* is to be condemned into meaning that cannot be detached from the world. Content cannot be detached from the form and meaning permeates the worldly experience.

4. Thickness of the Phenomena. The phenomenological understanding of the world parallel to Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology.

All of these four conspicuous aspects of Merleau-Ponty's thought, with no exception, are germane to the comprehension of Ibn al-ʿArabī. As those aspects by themselves may not tell much, the promising and unfinished project of Merleau-Ponty in general needs to be first analyzed.

The best way to investigate what Merleau-Ponty's project was about seems to begin with what he was against. He criticizes both the opposing camps of objectivism and intellectualism, the false dilemma of which stems from the Cartesian distinctions between the object and the subject, between the mind and body. The two positions place either the world into the subject, or conversely, the subject into the world.

Merleau-Ponty's struggle is a simultaneous criticism and reconciliation of these two camps which have engaged themselves with opposing sides resulting from the supposedly transcendental Cartesian distinctions.[142] To elaborate the deeper aspects of conscious experience and the transcendental foundations of object and the subject, Merleau-Ponty applies phenomenology. His phenomenological

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[142] Whitehead calls this perennial misunderstanding as "fallacy of misplaced concreteness." To make a division is not a mistake. The mistake lies in taking these divisions as a starting point, and "neglecting the degree of abstraction" in them. See Whitehead, p.11.

See also Gendlin, E.T. (1992). "The primacy of the body, not the primacy of perception." *Man and World*, 25 (3-4), pp.341-353.

approach entails a two-fold rejection concerning ontology and a "…resolution of traditional oppositions or the liquidation of apparent dichotomies…"[143] The first part of the rejection is early Husserl's transcendental subjectivism that culminates in Sartre's full self-consciousness and absolute freedom. As a position stemming from the subject – object distinction, the world is located in the subject. The subject is claimed to be able to "purify" itself from the world. Via the full self-consciousness, the self can attain absolute freedom in the world. With Sartre's famous words, "we are condemned to freedom" that is an open possibility and a task for existence.[144]

Merleau-Ponty states that "...each [subject] experiences himself as involved with the others..."[145] Experience is the experience of the world, and consciousness is always the consciousness of something. Hence, the consciousness is never able to abstract itself totally from the world into which the subject is immersed. In the case that consciousness was genuinely separate from the world, it could say nothing about the world and also about itself. Allegedly genuine freedom and self-consciousness of Sartre, and the transcendental subject of Husserl are simultaneously rejected as "...the organism cannot be conceived ... as a great self-transparent All-in-all."[146] "...[A]gainst Sartre's self-transparent *cogito*," the self is something "thick" that cannot be exhausted ultimately.[147] We are not totally free, as being bodily, intentional and temporal beings. "...[S]ince experience consists of in being involved with the world, a description of subjective experience is not a description of something 'purely' inner..."[148] There is no abstract subject, nor

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[143] Lewis, Philip E. (1966). "Merleau-Ponty and the Phenomenology of Language." *Yale French Studies*, No. 36/37, Structuralism, p.19.

[144] For the discussion on "freedom," see the Chapter-3 in the third part of *Phenomenology of Perception.* Merleau-Ponty 1962, pp.434-456.

[145] Merleau-Ponty 1968, p.63.

[146] Langan, Thomas (1962). "Maurice Merleau-Ponty: In Memoriam." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Dec.), p.207.

[147] Ibid, p.207.

[148] Matthews, Eric (2006). *Merleau-Ponty: A Guide For The Perplexed.* The Guides For the Perplexed Series, Continuum, New York. p.20.

object. What existence is condemned to is not freedom, rather the pregiven "life-world" ["*lebenswelt*"], the context and the meaning.

As consciousness cannot be detached from the world, being is always "being-in-the-world," and being relational with the world. Thus, "...there is no brute world, there is only an elaborated world."[149] All the experience is relational, and all the discourses are distortive. Merleau-Ponty clearly states that "...language is a power of error,"[150] and to suppose that language is a non-biased, objective instrument is to fall prey to an illusion that he calls "the error of scientism." There is nothing "pure" in the world, as *inderweltsein* itself is an interrogation. Similarly, there is "[n]o absolute pure philosophical word."[151] There is no purified angle, and moreover, Merleau-Ponty defends that the search for such an angle is not only impossible but also undesirable. The visible opens itself; it is always, inevitably, unavoidably and inexhaustibly opened to me. However, this openness accords to the vision of mine; it opens itself with a *texture*.[152] Hence, rather than seeking for an impossible purity, to accept, to learn about and to keep "interrogating" through the never-purified point of view that is unavoidably given to me has to be the method of the philosopher. What forms and hence distorts is inherently given to us, and provides rather an incommensurably valuable point of view through which the world can open itself differently. Life is itself an interrogation. Philosophy, as the reflective, *self-conscious interrogation*,[153] provides important insights to

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[149] Merleau-Ponty 1968, p.48.

[150] Ibid, p.125.

[151] Ibid, p.266

[152] Ibid, p.137.

[153] Taminiaux in his preface to *The Incarnate Subject* writes that for Merleu-Ponty, "...there is no better way to understand a system rather than to interrogate it philosophically..." Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (2001). *The Incarnate Subject*. Jacques Taminiaux (Preface), Paul B. Milan (Trans.), Andrew G. Bjelland Jr. and Patrick Burke (Eds.). Contemporary Studies in Philosophy and The Human Sciences. Humanity Books, New York. p.12 and p.31.

Also see Merleau-Ponty 1968, p.260.

human sciences and has an advantage against other moods of interrogation; "[t]rue philosophy consists in relearning to look at the world…"[154]

In a similar vein, the objective understanding of Being which places the subject into the object is also challenged by Merleau-Ponty. The special attention to this critique of Merleau-Ponty will be given in the next part.

4.1.1. Being and Objectivity

Under the headline of "the crisis of philosophy" discussions in 19th century, the objectivist ontology of scientism has been one of the bones of contention. The rejection of this scientist engagement in objectivity was also a main starting point of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. He follows the tradition that opposes to the subject-object dichotomy. His main focus is on the mediating factor, i.e., the "body," which precedes this duality. As he aims to transform the body into this primordial original position, he uses the term "*leib,*" rather than "*körper*" for the phenomenal body. The phenomenal body is different from the objectified, spatial body. In the phenomenal body, the object and subject are in an "intertwining." This intertwining is not simply unification. Rather, it is the inseparable togetherness of consciousness and its object that are always in a certain distance from each other.

The realist understanding of the body as objectively existing in space -the subject is put into the object- represents a high degree of abstraction in which philosophy cannot engage. "…[T]he total philosophical error which is to think that the visible is an objective presence…"[155] Rather, the body which is tried to be objectified is always my body. My consciousness is always carnal; I find myself always in "this" body. The two opposites of the Cartesian body – mind distinction is to be

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[154] Merleau-Ponty 1962, p.xx.

[155] Merleau-Ponty 1968, p.258.

reconciled. Rather than being an "impartial spectator"[156] [*uninteressierter zuschauer*], mind is always bodily. "…[M]y body is not only one perceived among others, it is the measurant (*mesurant*) of all, *Nullpunkt* of all the dimensions of the world."[157]

The conception of the self as an ob-jective spatiality that yields an *ego uninteressiert* is an abstraction and deviation from the lived status of experience.[158] "The I, really, is nobody, is the anonymous; it must be so, prior to all objectification…"[159] Before the conscious separation of the object from the subject, there is the primordial, anonymous unity of them in the experience. The primacy is of the body through which the world (which I am living towards, and which is always insurmountably distant from me) opens itself to me.[160] My consciousness is always towards the world, but is never unified with it. The world remains distant, because the world-in-itself is never accessible for me. The world is never exhausted by me, for I am immersed into it and overthrown by it. The objects in the world -because the world transcends me- are "representations of the unrepresentable." The object of consciousness and what it is towards are inseparably together, and infinitely distant to each other. The ubiquity of this productive distance that opens the object to the consciousness never bestows me an objective, vantage point from which the world may *appear* abstracted from myself and as the world in its totality.

I cannot objectify myself as an object in the world, as I do not "have" the world in that way. Whenever I objectify myself, I forsake the primordial subjectivity in my experience. My two hands when touching to each other describe this difference between the subjectivized subjective experience and the objectivized subjective

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[156] Merleau-Ponty 1962, p.xx.

[157] Merleau-Ponty 1968, pp.248-249.

[158] Ibid, p.227.

[159] Ibid, p.246.

[160] See Gendlin 1992.

experience. Whenever I conceive my hand as touched, it is no longer the touching hand of mine.[161] There remains always a distance between the two touching and touched hands of mine. "To touch and to touch oneself (to touch oneself = touched-touching). They do not coincide in the body: the touching is never exactly the touched."[162] Hence, when I objectify my experience of touching, I sacrifice the original subjectivity of experience as distancing myself from its primordial, intricate nature. Objective description of empirical data is a form of "blindness," which is possible "…only through an act of renouncing large blocks of subjective or otherwise nonobjectifiable sides of phenomena."[163]

We may remind here that for Ibn al-'Arabī, we have also no possibility to speak of the Being objectively, to which we have no access. With Thomas Nagel's words, we have no "view from nowhere." Whenever we try to speak of Being objectively, we render it an object of our consciousness, mold it, and hence, add another obstacle/veil to our access of being. Objective Being, i.e., Being-as-it-is transcends the phenomenal world. Nevertheless, it unfolds itself through and as the phenomenal world.

4.1.2. Body and Flesh as Isthmuses

The transcendental idealism of early Husserl is a hope for the necessarily certain knowledge. By the phenomenological reduction, *epoche*, the object will appear in the consciousness in its naked, cleaned state. With the proposed absolute reduction, the distance between the object and the subject will fade away, and the object as it is will be accessible to the subject. This Cartesian hope for the genuine knowledge of the world and for philosophy to be the "rigorous science," as a matter of fact, is contradictory with the nature of consciousness that Husserl inherited from his teacher Brentano. Consciousness is intentional means that it is

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[161] Merleau-Ponty 1968, p.9.

[162] Ibid, p.254.

[163] Palmer 1977, p.379.

always towards an object with which it never merges. Even if consciousness and its object could merge, consciousness could not say something on the object. Hence, phenomenological description requires a distance from the object to let it *appear* and *un-fold* itself. The object is always distant from me, if it is to be an object. Therefore, "...there is no experience of the other."[164] The other is unreachable, though ubiquitously everywhere. "I will never live any but my own life and the others will never be but other myselves."[165] The other, as the permanent "other" of me, is always there, and acts (even passively, i.e., as being the "*Urpräsentation of the Nichturpräsentierbar*,"[166] [the presentation of the unpresentable] in the conscious, worldly experience.

Merleau-Ponty's main concern in his early writings was "...the paradoxical reality of an incarnated liberty, of a cogito-in-situation..."[167] This paradox led him to elaborate the mediating and ubiquitous existence -hence the ontology- of the body. The traditional Cartesian engagement culminated in two opposing apprehension of the world and the body; "body in the world and the seer in the body" and "the world and the body in the seer as in a box."[168] In the experience of the world, however, the object and the subject are together, in a crisscrossing in the ubiquity of the body. The body is a sedimentary, historical, primordial body which establishes the harmony between the subject and the world. The experience of the world is anonymous. In its primordial nature, there is no object – subject distinction. Merleau-Ponty, in the *Phenomenology of Perception* underlines that our embodiment gives us the mere means for our being in the world.[169] Being is always being incarnated, embodied. Hence, body is not merely an object and does not merely exist as a spatio-temporally. It rather unites the objective and the

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[164] Ibid, p.71.

[165] Ibid, p.71.

[166] Ibid, p.217.

[167] Langan, p.206.

[168] Merleau-Ponty 1968, p.138.

[169] Ibid, p.82.

subjective aspect of being. "The body is neither the subject nor the object, but the mediation of the subject and object."[170] It extends to the world, presents me the world, and makes me the world. "The thickness of the body ... [is] the sole means I have to go unto the heart of the things, by making myself a world and by making them flesh."[171] In the thickness of the body, I am harmonized with the world. The consciousness is together with the object intended. The object and subject always distant from each other are reconciled in the body. The body does not just unify or merge the object and the subject. Rather, it provides the distance in which object and subject are inseparably together. It is the "dimension of all dimensions."[172] The preestablished harmony between the object and the subject sediments in the "isthmusness," betweenness of the body.

In a parallel way, Merleau-Ponty's newly introduced concept, "flesh" has a parallel function of isthmusness between the visible and the invisible. The visible is "what shows itself"; "[t]he sensible thing is the place where the invisible is captured in the visible."[173] *The Visible and The Invisible* presents a new ideal conception, which is not defined in opposition to the sensible,[174] but united in the flesh, which is "…a prototype for Being universally."[175]

For Merleau-Ponty's concept "flesh," there was no name in traditional philosophy to designate.[176] "The flesh is not a matter, is not mind, is not substance."[177] Therefore, Merleau-Ponty exploits the ancient term "element"; flesh is "an 'element' of Being."[178] This element is not only "…the formative medium of the

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[170] Barbaras, p.7.

[171] Merleau-Ponty 1962, p.135.

[172] See Barbaras p.xii.

[173] Merleau-Ponty 1968, p.xli.

[174] Ibid, p.li.

[175] Ibid p.liv.

[176] Ibid, p.139. See also ibid, p.147.

[177] Ibid, p.139.

[178] Ibid, p.139.

object and the subject…"[179] via the body, but it also unites the body and the soul,[180] the form with the content, the visible with the invisible. Being is to be defined always as negativity, where flesh is the elemental, positive definition of Being as it unfolds itself as *inderweltsein*. "The *urpräsentierbarkeit* is flesh."[181] It is the unifying, wild logos, which makes the world a shared one. It renders the thickness of the world convergent and different aspects of the same transcendent, elaborated world. Flesh has already established the harmony between me and the world, because "... [t]his other who invades me is made only of my own substance..."[182] "The flesh *is a mirror phenomenon* and the mirror is an extension of my relation with my body."[183]

To sum up, the body and flesh function as two-sided productive openness', which unite the visible and the invisible, the ideal and the perceptual, the object and the subject. The other and the subject are similar to Merleau-Ponty's example of the hands when they touch to each other. Both are object, both are subject, both are ontologically *kin*, intertwined, but also absolutely distinct that distinction itself permits this intertwining.

4.1.3. Primordial Meaning and Language

Inderweltsein means to be immersed into the world, to "find" oneself as already "having a world." As the body is the way of our having the world, *inderweltsein* is also being bodily, finite and historical. My body is already there in all experience, the ubiquity of which precedes the object – subject distinction. *Inderweltsein* is an anonymous chiasm of the togetherness in conscious experience. The body is the

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[179] Ibid, p.147.

[180] The visible and the invisible are indistinguishible: they are two leaves of what *appears* to the incarnate subject. "Body and soul are no longer distinguished." Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1963a). *The Structure of Behavior*. A. L. Fisher (Trans.) Boston: Beacon Press. p.203.

[181] Merleau-Ponty 1968, p.135.

[182] Ibid, p.11.

[183] Ibid, p.255.

sediment of all my experience. It is a sedimented history of the incarnate subject from which Merleau-Ponty will begin to the elaboration of the nature of language. *Phenomenology of Perception* has a chapter titled *The Body as Expression and Speech.*[184] The phenomenological understanding of language developed by Merleau-Ponty in the chapter is of paramount importance when discussing Ibn al-ʿArabī.

Dasein is essentially historical. This historicity of *Dasein* sediments in the body that is already there as the mediation of the subject with the world. The history may be read from the body. It is a silent language. "The body comes now to be understood positively as primordial expression."[185] It is the primordial expression which is able to convey the preconceptual experience from which the speech is derived. "Bodily actions are gestures of humans which are not mere signs; they are symbols of themselves and express significance and meaning beyond themselves."[186] As the body is the primordial expression, the locus of the meaning is not just the speech abstracted from the speaker. Nevertheless, according to Merleau-Ponty, this tendency of abstraction of speaker has been the ill ground of the discussions on language.

In the traditional empiricist – intellectualist dialectic, "[t]here is no speaker…"[187] Speech has been understood as a mere instrument for transmitting the meaning that is supposedly enveloped in the word. In this functional understanding of speech, "…man can speak as the electric lamp can become incandescent."[188]

> For the empiricist, the word is only a psychic phenomenon comparable to a neurological stimulus; for the idealist, it is an exterior sign which is unnecessary to the interior operation of recognition, it is only an empty envelope which does not possess the

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[184] Merleau-Ponty 1962, pp.174-199.

[185] Barbaras, p.x.

[186] Olson, Carl (1986). "The Human Body as a Boundary Symbol: A Comparison of Merleau-Ponty and Dogen." *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Apr.), pp.117.

[187] Merleau-Ponty 1962, p.175.

[188] Ibid, p.175.

meaning… In both cases, then, language is no more than external
companion of thought, a sign or messenger.[189]

In both cases, the word, accordingly, understood as just an empty container, does not bear the meaning, "…it is only the external sign of an internal recognition…"[190] Merleau-Ponty's counter position to both approaches is summarized in *le mot a un sens*, "…*the word has a meaning*."[191]

We do not first have the world and then give meaning to it. Instead, we find the world already full of meaning. Merleau-Ponty, speaking through Bergson, adds that "…there is nothing in history that is completely without meaning."[192] The experience of the world is presented as already meaningful and in a preestablished harmony. *Inderweltsein* is to be swimming in the world of meanings, as conscious experience is always meaningful. It is not a chaos, indeed a meaningful harmony towards which consciousness intends. Consciousness finds meaning as pregiven in the world. Meaning and language in its primordial, silent form permeate the world.

As a result of their sedimentary embodiment and historicity, objects do *speak*. "It is the things themselves, from the depths of their silence that it wishes to bring to expression."[193] What a primordial expression is cannot be limited just to the body and has to be extended to all the phenomena. The objects meet both the historicity, and experiential sedimentation. Hence, the world, the universal flesh is itself a kind of expression; "…meaning first held captive in the thing and in the world itself."[194] For the world is a shared one, what the world speaks about is shared. *Sein* is always *Mitsein*; being means being-with. The mere existence of

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[189] Lewis, p.22.

[190] Merleau-Ponty 1962, p.176.

[191] Ibid, p.177.

[192] Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1963b). *In Praise of Philosophy*. John Wild and James M. Edie (Trans and Preface). Studies in Phenomenology & Existential Philosophy. Northwestern University Press. p.27.

[193] Merleau-Ponty 1968, p.4.

[194] Ibid, p.36.

communication as such is evidence of this "one sole world." [195] Owing to this shared rock bottom of experience, what the objects tell builds a language. Objects express different meanings from the same, common world. The deep silences of objects are the fertile soil of language and meanings. Whenever I gaze at an object, what I encounter is an "insurmountable density."[196] The meaning in its most primordial structure dwells in this density of the objects in the world.

The above discussion risks the perennial definition of what has to be understood as "language." Language, from Merleau-Ponty's point of view, is a primordial ontological structure of *inderweltsein* which cannot be reduced to speech. Nevermore, language accomplishes itself in speech. Speech is not the mere instrument of transmitting. It is the most perfectly manifest form of *Dasein* and thought.[197] Thought is incomplete when it is not yet manifested as speech. It is speech via which thought and *Dasein* complete themselves. Therefore "...it is necessary to have words. It is by the combination of words ... that I *form* the transcendental attitude, that I *constitute* the constitutive consciousness."[198] The language, which is the power of error,[199] is the sole means to build the consciousness. "Everything has meaning… [and]... because we are in the world, we are *condemned to meaning*..."[200] The world, already full of meanings which surmount me, is fully manifest in speech. What we have to remind is that language is not reducible to this audible, complex web of signs. What is visible is also itself a primordial web of signs.

The world is open to me with a silent readiness of web of meaning; the experience of any object is not only meaningful. It is also in a preestablished harmony with

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[195] Ibid, p.11.

[196] Ibid, p.5.

[197] At this point, the opposition of Merleau-Ponty of the form – content dichotomy is highly evident. In the part on hermeneutics, this opposition will be elaborated in the figure of Gadamer.

[198] Merleau-Ponty 1968, p.171.

[199] See Ibid, p.125.

[200] Merleau-Ponty 1962, p.xix.

the world. I am in an ontologically kinship with the world from that I cannot abstract myself. As the visible is a web of signs, *inderweltsein* turns to an exegesis inspired by the visible itself. The vision is understood as an interrogation, an "inspired exegesis." Vision is inspired by the visible that points to its deeper meanings, to the invisible, in its silent language. The ancient word "exegesis" implies a monist, unique way of reading. Rather, this exegesis does not suggest such a standard, accurate unfolding of the visible that stems from the "thickness" of the visible.

4.1.4. Thickness of the Phenomena

It is only by Merleau-Ponty's philosophy that the concept "thickness" has been used in a central way and turned out to an attractive noun for phenomenological description. For our further understanding of Ibn al-ʿArabī's sophisticated ontology and hermeneutics, the concept "thickness" will be a central contribution provided by Merleau-Ponty. To avoid any distortion in both sides of this study, the concept in its original context has to be well apprehended and identified.

As phenomenology puts it, consciousness is always the consciousness of the world; i.e., consciousness is intentional, and always towards something. The finding of intentional nature of consciousness that was bequest from Brentano to Husserl is fundamental to phenomenology. This toward-nature of consciousness implies that it has to have a necessary distance from its object; even in the case of self-consciousness. I objectify myself and my access to the "what-is-it-like-to-be-a-subject" is always provided to me from an objectifying, hence different point of view.[201] We have to objectify ourselves in the case of self-reflection. We are objects and subjects time to time; but not both at the same time. And the thickness of the phenomena is this always remaining, inexhaustible distance between *cogito* and *cogitatum*, consciousness and its object; *noesis* and the *noema*.

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[201] Comp. Nagel, Thomas (1974). "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 83, No. 4, pp.435-450.

> The world achieves visibility only to the extent that it fills me up, circumscribes me in such a way that I cannot traverse its thickness, bring it to transparency, and transform this vision into a possession without remainder.[202]

The world transcends the vision, for the vision is in the world. Vision cannot encompass the world into which it is *thrown*; hence, the world surrounds the vision as an inexhaustible whole.

> If, on looking at a mountain scene, we adopt a critical attitude and isolate part of the field, then the color itself changes, and this green, which was meadow green, when taken out of its context, loses its thickness and its color as well as its representative value.[203]

The world is experienced as an irreducible unity and insurmountable thickness.

Thickness as the inexhaustible distance between the consciousness and its object displays itself in two different structures. It is both the property of the visible and also the invisible. Thus, thickness of the phenomena is, as I call, both "horizontal" and "vertical." The phenomenon is thick and resembles to a *matryoshka* in two senses. First, there is a distance between me and the world that engenders a horizontal thickness particular to the visible. Besides, there is also *a distance in the visible itself* that culminates in an endless, vertical thickness.

4.1.4.1. Horizontal Thickness

Visible does not unfold itself at one go. "…[T]he visible, which is always 'further on,' is presented as such."[204] It shows itself step by step, with a perspective, and with a particular manner. This may be called as the "horizontal," or perspectivist thickness of the phenomena, as it belongs to the visible. Whenever I gaze at an object, I am engaged in a particular point of view, and I miss the vision of other possibly visible parts of the object. The visible encounters my gaze with a density:

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[202] Barbaras, p.156.

[203] Peacocke, Christopher (2001). "Phenomenology and Nonconceptual Content." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 62, No. 3 (May), p.613; Merleau-Ponty 1962, p.313.

[204] Merleau-Ponty 1968, p.217.

a thickness which always changes itself in accordance with my position to it. The visible shows itself stepwise, and it is never exhausted by any vision. The distance, i.e., the thickness of the phenomenon bestows me the vision of it, but it does never vouchsafe me a "view from nowhere." Such a "god's point of view" in which the thickness has melt away is not possible. Such a melt-away would also bang the door on the vision of the visible. For Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, different visions open different aspects of the phenomena. "... [A]s we refine our skills for coping with things, things show up as soliciting our skillful responses, so that as we refine our skills, we encounter more and more differentiated solicitations to act..."[205] The visible, with its infinite potential to open itself differently, provides me a horizontal infinity in my experience of it.

4.1.4.2. Vertical Thickness

The most intricate part of the phenomenological description is, as Merleau-Ponty declares at the end of *The Visible and The Invisible*, the intricate relation of the flesh to the ideal. The thickness of the visible in the sense that it opens the invisible, which means "…the visible and the interior armature which it conceals"[206] is a central question Merleau-Ponty dealt with. In addition to the distance between me and the world, there is also a distance in the thing itself.

For Merleau-Ponty, the invisible is not non-visible.[207] It means that what is related to thought, i.e., the ideal, is not the opposite of the perceptual. Rather, the invisible has to be understood as the complementary, integral lining, the depth of the visible.[208] "…[T]he experience of the visible world are … the exploration of an

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[205] Dreyfus, Hubert (1997). "The Current Relevance of Merleau-Ponty's Phonemenology of Embodiment." *After Postmodernism Conference.* Retrieved January 12, 2008, from http://www.focusing.org/apm_papers/dreyfus2.html/

[206] Merleau-Pony 1968, p.149.

[207] Ibid, p.227.

[208] Ibid, p.149.

invisible and the disclosure of a universe of ideas."[209] In opposition to the scientific ideas, the invisible cannot be clearly separated from the sensible appearances. This chiasm of the visible and the invisible converges to the inseparability of form and content in hermeneutics that will be elaborated in the next chapter. The invisible, in the absence of the body and sensibility, would not be understood more genuinely. Rather, bereft of the visible, the invisible would be inaccessible.[210] This intertwining between the visible and the invisible does not merely mean that carnal experience is the locus of the ideas. Besides, the ideas become transparent through the sensible. The visible and the invisible are like the sea and strand:[211] The sea fluctuates, it ebbs and flows sometimes; the waves lick the beach.

We cannot see the things as "all naked," for "…the gaze envelops them, clothes them with its own flesh."[212] The gaze touches towards what it intends. My look "envelops, palpates, espouses the visible things."[213] *The gaze is a tailor*. When unveiling the objects, the gaze veils them with its own flesh. What I look at is always enveloped [*maẓrūf*]. When looking, I see that I cannot see all naked. The visible harbors the invisible, which always hides to the deeper of the visible howsoever I inquire into it. The invisible never becomes an object. "The invisible is *there* without being an *object*, it is pure transcendence, without an ontic mask."[214] *I see the invisible as what I cannot see*. As much as I see, I understand that I cannot see entirely, as "all-naked." The invisible does never turn to a visible. It is not another visible,[215] rather, *it is perceived with its absence*. "[I]ts [the invisible's] absence counts in the world."[216]

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[209] Ibid, p.149.

[210] Ibid, p.150.

[211] Ibid, pp.130-131.

[212] Ibid, p.131.

[213] Ibid, p.131.

[214] Ibid, p.229.

[215] Ibid, p.251.

[216] Ibid, p.228.

"...[W]hat is proper to the visible is ... to be the surface of an inexhaustible depth: this is what makes it able to be open to visions other than our own."[217] The visible does not remain on its own: it also points to the invisible. The invisible -as the invisible of the visible- cannot be separated from the visible through that it is seen as the unseen. This interplay between the visible and the invisible bestows the phenomena an inexhaustible depth, a vertical thickness. The invisible, the idea, is not the contrary of the visible; rather, it is the invisible of the visible and escapes always further: "... '[R]eality' does not belong definitely to any particular perception, that in this sense, it lies *always further on*...there is no *Schein* without *Erscheinung*... every *Schein* is the counterpart of an *Erscheinung*..."[218] Phenomena harbor such an endless thickness stemming from the interplay between the visible and the invisible.

4.1.4.3. Thickness and *Mitsein*

"The world is what I perceive, but as soon as we examine and express its absolute proximity, it also becomes, inexplicably, irremediable distance."[219] The world, both horizontally and vertically, harbors an endless density when I have conscious experience of it. The objects in the world open themselves to me in different ways depending on my gaze and position towards them. In this sense, the objects are "thick," always richer than they are presented to me. They have dimensions or always more possibilities which I cannot exhaust. "It is that the thickness of the flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication..."[220]

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[217] Merleau-Ponty 1968, p.143.

[218] Ibid, p.41.

[219] Ibid, p.8.

[220] Ibid, p.135.

Thickness cannot be reduced to a relativist position in ontology, hence the vertical and horizontal thickness together unveil the same shared world from different aspects. We all share the "elaborated," common *lebenswelt* to which we are inherently condemned, and through which we open ourselves to it and to ourselves. My body unites me with the world in a primordial, *elementary* level, which is the wild logos, i.e., flesh. The thickness of the phenomena, together with the unifying transcendental rock bottom, flesh, is what makes plurality in the world convergent, and hence, invaluable for each other. Prior to all conscious distinctions, flesh unifies me with the world via the ubiquitous existence of the body in every realm of experience and presents the "pre-established harmony" between me and the world. "It is that the thickness of the flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication..."[221] This thickness, the "irreducible figure of the perceived"[222] renders the world transcendental.[223] The world is the shared, elaborated and pregiven rock bottom of our experience. Thanks to this ontological transcendental unity and to the thickness of the phenomena, what is "other," novel, different, alien or risky bestows us different perspectives of the same shared world. "Each perception is ... only an opinion.... possibilities of the same world.... variants of the same world.... not as all false, but as 'all true'... as progressive approximations."[224]

Language is the most concrete evidence for that the world is a shared one. We dwell in a shared world into which we are thrown. Any experience is the experience of the shared world. Meaning, in any experience is already there. It is "the generator of language rather than as generated by language."[225] The phenomenological reduction undertaken via language cannot be therefore ever

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[221] Ibid, p.135.

[222] Barbaras, p.13.

[223] See Merleau-Ponty 1968, p.xlvii.

[224] Ibid, p.41.

[225] Lewis, p.34.

completed. *Epoche* and subsequent phenomenological description is undertaken in language that cannot exhaust the meaning. "Nothing historical ever has just one meaning; meaning is ambiguous and is seen from an infinity of viewpoints. Everything is *becoming* meaningful…"[226] To consume all the possible meanings would imply to reach to the limits of meaninglessness, which is not possible in our *inderweltsein*. There is nothing meaningless; meaning is the sedimented condition of our shared experience. Therefore, language is always biased, distortive and interrogative that hinders one from a theoretically purified encounter with the phenomena. Anything what can be said is thick. The lived experience and its linguistic expression do never coincide. There remains the distance culminating from the thickness of the world as it is spoken. However I try to describe and consume the object, its original experience hides further, and the description goes to infinity. Phenomena cannot be exhausted by description; a full phenomenological reduction is not possible owing to this thickness of the phenomena. Language is a phenomenon where the thickness the world is conspicuous.[227]

Not only the world and objects, but also the subject is a phenomenon. It appears to itself even if with an inexhaustible structure. Hence, when I turn my attention to my body, I find the same ubiquitous, horizontal and vertical thickness. Whenever I look to myself, I see at most a part of my body; not "me in a totality" and as a whole. I have many points of view to observe myself, all of which provide a different approach to me and simultaneously lose some other parts of mine. Whenever I turn to myself, I confront a body which is perfectly thick. In addition to this horizontal density, my subjectivized subjective experience is always distant from my reflective, objectivized experience. The self is both vertically and horizontally thick.

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[226] Merleau-Ponty 1963b, p.xix. (The preface is written by Wild and Edie.)

[227] Lewis, p.34.

The world is built on a unifying, ontological transcendental *arche*, nevertheless, various languages and contexts open manifold windows to each other. This manifold unity owes itself to the togetherness of the thickness of the phenomena with the universality of flesh. Different contexts and points of view are the different manners of "singing the world."[228]

> …[W]ords, vowels, and phonemes are all just various ways of singing the world… The predominance of vowels in one language, of consonants in another, and the systems of form and syntax would just represent various ways for the human body to celebrate the world and ultimately to live it.[229]

The diversities among cultures, languages and contexts imply experiential sediments which may potentially enrich each other. "The full meaning of one tongue cannot be translated to another, that we can speak several languages but normally live in only one. Completely assimilating a language requires the speaker to assume its world."[230] The existence of the "other," with its alien language, culture and historicity, rather than being threatening, provides an invaluable dimension to which the subject has no access. The phenomenal world lying at the rock bottom is a thick, inexhaustible, transcendental world. Hence the existence, language, vision, and context of the other are each an opening of a new *veil* of the shared world to which we are thrown de facto. We share the same *weltlichkeit* [worldliness],[231] hence the same world, which has simultaneously a shared unity and an inexhaustible twofold thickness. The experience of seeking for a new dimension to the shared world opens more and more veils of the world. It is to experience different *dimensions* of the world which is the rock bottom of all experiences.[232]

I have tried to sketch what the concept "thickness" is in its original context. The emphasis was on the fundamental importance of the concept for Merleau-Ponty, as

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[228] Ibid, p.30.

[229] Lewis, p.30; Merleau-Ponty 1962, p.218.

[230] Ibid, p.30.

[231] Merleau-Ponty 1968, p.242.

[232] Merleau-Ponty 1962, p.xviii.

it describes the twofold original, infinite density, i.e., thickness of the phenomena. Now, I may turn to Ibn al-ʿArabī by exploiting this concept as a lever for further questioning of his ontology.

4.2. Ibn al-ʿArabī: Phenomena as Veils and Possible Things

> He who sees the Real plainly and openly
> sees Him only from behind a veil.
> … he is the Seer – no, he is the veil.[233]

From Merleau-Ponty's point of view, the concept "thickness" tells the intrinsic structure of the phenomena. It not only expresses the infinity of the visible; it also tells the vertical density of the phenomenon which stems from the interplay between the visible and the invisible. However pluralist, the thickness of the phenomena does not yield a relativist position in ontology. The insurmountable density opens manifold aspects incommensurable and inaccessible to each other, but relates them to the same shared, elaborated world. After apprehending the concept "thickness" in its original context, turning back to our subject Ibn al-ʿArabī affirms that thickness, in the full and original sense of the term, is the intrinsic property of all the phenomena.

> Everything what is perceived is close to the eye, even if it is
> physically remote, for the sight makes contact with it by perception,
> or else does not perceive it at all. Either that or the object itself
> makes contact with the sight. There is therefore a certain proximity
> between the perception and the perceived.[234]

The vision is understood as the intimacy between the eye and what it sees: when looking at an object, my eyes touch to it. It is surprising that the passage quoted is of Ibn al-ʿArabī, rather than the prominent phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty. ʿAfīfī (in his *Taʿlīqāt* that provides supplementary keys for reading Ibn al-ʿArabī) carries back the corporal understanding of vision in Ibn al-ʿArabī to the ancient Platonic

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[233] Chittick 1989, p.230; *Futūḥāt* IV 18.32.

[234] Ibn al-ʿArabī 1980a, p.216.

approach to vision.[235] It seems that Ibn al-'Arabī's understanding of "perception as touch" mostly follows that of Plato explicated in his dialogue *Timaeus*.

For Ibn al-'Arabī, there is a close relationship between the subject and what it perceives, which makes the knowledge possible. The objects and also the perceiving subject are defined with temporality that is the hallmark of worldly existence. Hence, they undergo a constant change, and the objects in the world open themselves always in totally novel ways. The relation of the subject with the world (and also with her-/himself) does not repeat itself. Any knowledge, as the knowledge in the world, involves knowledge on Being. For, Being unfolds itself as the world and we may attain knowledge of Being so far as it unfolds itself. Any knowledge is knowledge of Being disclosed as being-for-me. "For man, the seeker of knowledge, the acquisition of knowledge is endless, since the objects of knowledge are endless."[236] This endlessness of the phenomenal world is not only horizontal, but also vertical in the sense that I introduced when dealing with Merleau-Ponty's ontology.

The world is horizontally infinite. The infinity does not stem from our thrownness into it. On the contrary, the infinity owes itself to the temporality and finitude of worldliness. As the phenomena do not encompass the time, rather are defined by temporality, they are principally infinite. The possible objects are endless in principle. Some of them may not exist currently, but may emerge in the endless change of the world. Some of them may exist for the time being, but may disappear through time. *Sein* manifests itself temporally as the *Seiende*; and there are infinite possibilities for the *Seiende*. There is no limit in form for the Being to unfold itself in the flow of time. Hence, the visible is finite in time, but infinite in its possible varieties. The world is horizontally endless, which is engendered from its own temporality. The objects in the world are called as *mumkināt*, "possible

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[235] 'Afīfī, E. A. (2000). *Fuṣūṣu'l-Hikem Okumalari Icin Anahtar*. Ekrem Demirli (Trans.) İz Yayincilik, İstanbul. p.364.

[236] Chittick 1989, p.153.

things," which tells the horizontal thickness of the phenomena perfectly. There is no logical limit to the possibilities; the existence of everything is possible in the temporal unfolding of the Being as the phenomenal world.

Besides, what is invisible also displays itself through the visible for Ibn al-ʿArabī. The locus of the invisible is not another invisible. On the contrary, it is the world, the visible that harbors the invisible in its endless deeps. Being is "found" ["*befinden*"] in everything, because there is nothing that is not the temporal self-disclosure of Being. The locus of the invisible is nowhere but the visible. They cannot be separated from each other. The invisible hides always deeper to the visible, and never unveils itself as it is. It is disclosed always as a new veil [*ḥijāb*] on the invisible. "To emerge from one veil is to enter into another."[237] This endless deepness expresses the vertical thickness of the phenomena. Through the being [*Seiende*], the face of the Being [*Sein*] is unveiled, but only as a negativity; as a new veil. This endlessness, which is called by Chittick as "the paradox of the veil,"[238] is engendered by the vertical thickness of the world. "'All veils are He.' Yet, none are He. This simultaneous identity and difference is the paradox."[239] The veil, the thing is not Being, but Being is rendered visible only through it. The self-disclosure of Being is its own veil. "In reality, there is nothing but passage from veil to veil,"[240] for no manifestation repeats itself and unfolds the Being as it is.

Being-in-the-world means to be veiled from the Being *qua* Being. Being itself is in ceaseless temporal manifestation in the world and *as the world*, not *as it is*. "…[E]very entity qualified by existence is it/not it. The whole cosmos is He/not He [*huwa/lā-huwa*]. The Real manifest through form is He/not He. He is the limited who is not limited, the seen who is not seen."[241] In his *Mawākif*, Niffarī

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[237] Chittick 2007b, p.193.

[238] See the chapter 10 in Chittick 2007b, pp.178-200.

[239] Chittick 2007b, p.178.

[240] Chittick 1989, p230; *Futūḥāt* IV, 105.3.

[241] Ibid, p.116; *Futūḥāt* II 379.3.

who is the writer of one of the earliest Ṣūfī books speaks on behalf of *Sein* in an exquisite way:

> I am gazing upon you, and I love for you to gaze upon Me, but all appearance veils you from Me. Your self is your veil, your knowledge is your veil, your gnosis is your veil, your names are your veil, and My making Myself known to you is your veil.[242]

All *Seiende* are "veils" [*ḥujūb*] which cover the face [w*ajh*] of the invisible. "This Heraclitean flux of constantly differing manifestations ensures that the Real itself 'remains forever unseen'."[243] A witnessing [*shuhūd*] of the invisible in an absolute sense[244] is impossible in the world; the gaze falls only upon the veils. However, at the same time, every veil is a face of the invisible and on its Truth. Therefore, there is no other way to find the Truth except its veils. Whenever we unfold a veil, we encounter a new veil before us.

> The dark and luminous veils through which the Real is veiled from the cosmos are the light and the darkness by which the possible thing becomes qualified in its reality because it is an intermediary (*wasaṭ*). It [the thing] only looks upon itself, so it only looks upon the veil. Were the veils to be removed from the possible thing, possibility would be removed, and the Necessary and the impossible would be removed through its removal. Hence the veils will be hung down forever, and nothing else is possible.[245]

The vision of Truth occurs necessarily only by its veils. "He is not seen except from behind a veil."[246] Nevertheless, this "thickness" is not peculiar to Truth. The vision of the world and even of our selves [*anfās*] harbors such an inexhaustible thickness. The objects, the self and the text all share the intrinsic thickness. Now I want to focus one by one to all these three aspects of this triangular thickness of the phenomena, supported with readings from Ibn al-'Arabī's works.

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[242] Chittick 2007b, p.196.

[243] Almond, p.31.

[244] Chittick 2007b, p.72; *Futūḥāt* II 229.24.

[245] Chittick 1989, p.214; *Futūḥāt* III 274.25, *Futūḥāt* 276.9,18.

[246] Ibid, p.231; *Futūḥāt* IV 18.32, *Futūḥāt* 19.22,34.

4.2.1. Thickness of the World

The objects are the loci of disclosure [*maẓāhir*] of Being. Being is unfolded in the world, timely, and as being-for-me. The world, as the locus of manifestation of Being, assumes inexhaustible deepness and provides the source of our knowledge. I can never exhaust the knowledge of the objects. They are capable of infinite possibilities of opening themselves.

To tell this inexhaustible nature of the objects, Ibn al-ʿArabī uses two terms which express together the two-fold thickness of the world. These terms are, as introduced already, "*mumkināt*" and "*ḥujūb*": "possible things" and "veils." These two terms convey the infinite potentiality the world presents to me.

4.2.1.1. Horizontal Thickness of the World

Being manifests itself as being-in-the-world, which is defined by temporality, spatiality and limitedness. Being *qua* Being, as a transcendent to which we have no access, is not delimited with those attributes. It is not delimited even with nondelimitedness. Any positive quality adhered to Being has to be simultaneously negated. Thus, there is no logical limit to the manifold self-disclosure of Being as being-for-me. The possibilities of self-disclosure for Being *qua* being are infinite. The world, as the sum of possible alternative forms for the manifestation of Being, is limitless. The world named as "possible things" is infinite.[247]

"The possible thing is that reality whose relationship to existence and nonexistence are equal."[248] The world[249] as the sum of possible things means that the existence which the worldly objects enjoy is a matter of time and possibility. Possible things

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[247] Ibid, p42, *Futūḥāt* IV 288.1.

[248] Ibid, p.82.

[249] Ibid, p.82-83; *Futūḥāt* III 443.5.

have no end, being horizontally infinite.[250] There is no pure impossibility [*mumteni'* or *muḥāl*]: anything may become possible in the world.

> "Possibility" is the fact that things stand midway between necessity and impossibility. In themselves, they have no claim on existence. They are nonexistent things that have the potential to exist. … No thing can escape its own possibility, for its possibility pertains to its very essence.[251]

The world is the endless domain where the nonexistent turns to be an existent, owing to the temporal disclosure of Being which consumes and presents new "possibilities" [*imkānāt*] through time.

"Possible things," as the alternative name of the "objects," express the horizontal thickness of the world. The world presents me an endless variety of objects which I cannot exhaust. Throughout time, as Being keeps unfolding itself as different beings-in-the-world, the thickness of the world renews itself. Every second is pregnant with a new disclosure of Being. The world, with its endless "possibilities," eludes and encompasses me. It is an infinite horizon where the impossible turn to be possible through time.

The possible thing is a veil,[252] for it indicates the horizontal infinity of the world. The world in its horizontal infinity with endless possible forms reminds me that the knowledge of the world is never perfect. Through the possible things, I understand that the world with its all horizons is veiled from me. The horizontal thickness of the world expresses that the world opened to me at this time and in this manner is merely a partial, ephemeral vision of the world. There remains always a distance, another possibility between me and the world. The world is both manifested and veiled through its vision via possible things. This simultaneous ontological veiling and unveiling is not only horizontal, but also vertical as the concept "thickness" suggests.

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[250] Ibn al-ʿArabī 1980a, p.55.

[251] Chittick 2007b, p.190.

[252] Chittick 1989, p.82; *Futūḥāt* III 217.7.

4.2.1.2. Vertical Thickness of the World

The infinite temporal variety in the world harbors also the unique access to the invisible. In *Fuṣūṣ*, there is a central philosophical discussion for this issue.[253] In the fifth *chapter*,[254] which is titled *The Wisdom of Rapturous Love In The Word of Abraham*, Ibn al-ʿArabī criticizes those thinkers and sages (one of which is the renowned Ṣūfī and theologian Abū Ḥamīd Al-Ghazālī) who "…have asserted that God can be known without any reference to the created Cosmos…"[255] For Ibn al-ʿArabī, it is not possible, due to the inseparability of the visible from the invisible. "…[W]e neither know Him nor find Him except along with the creatures."[256] The ideal dwells in the sensible; they are not contraries, rather inseparables. The invisible is found with the visible. There is no pure sensible or pure ideal in the world we dwell in.

The invisible unfolds itself through the visible. The visible is the locus of the invisible, parallel to *Seiende* that is the locus of *Sein*. The sensible world, which is horizontally infinite, is also the realm of the ideal. Nevertheless, the infinity of the sensible world is not limited with its horizon. Along with the horizontal thickness, the world as the home of the invisible assumes a thickness that cannot be exhausted.

The distinction between the *Sein* and *Seiende* -between Being and being- is decisive. That is why the *Seiende*, albeit unfolding the *Sein*, cannot exhaust it in its totality. Objects attain an insurmountable density, which renders them vertically thick. Ibn al-ʿArabī exploits the concept "*ḥijāb*" ["veil"] to refer to this vertically thick structure of the world. *ḥijāb* is a general name for things which cover

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[253] *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* is an enigmatic, condensed book which consists of 27 chapters, all of which refer to a name of a prophet.

[254] Originally Ibn al-ʿArabi calls every chapter of the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* [*Bezels of Wisdom*] as a "bezel," i.e., a *faṣṣ*.

[255] Ibn al-ʿArabī 1980a, p.93.

[256] Chittick 1989, p.365; *Futūḥāt* III 376.22.

something else. Abū Naṣr Sarrāj (d. 988), in his *Kitāb al-Luma'* [*The Book of Flashes*], presented one of the earliest definitions of *ḥijāb* as a technical term. "The veil is any barrier that bars the intending seeker from what is intended and sought."[257] In this sense, "[t]he universe itself is a veil…,"[258] hence it veils the Being as it is. Everything what is visible is but a sign saying, "I am not the invisible." However deeper I inquire into the object I never arrive at its Being as "all-naked." Rather, what I unfold is different layers and aspects of the object, which are also different manifestations of Being as being-in-the-world. Objects present to me always the "Being as" [*Sein als*], but never just the Being. "…[T]he Real becomes manifest by being veiled, so He is the Manifest/the Veiled. … No eye witnesses anything other than He, and no veils are lifted from Him."[259] The world veils the invisible by in its infinite vertical thickness, as Ibn al-ʿArabī explains in a magnificent passage:

> The forms seen by the eyes and perceived by rational faculties, and the forms imaginalized by the faculty of imagination are all veils, behind which the Real is seen … Hence the Real remains forever absent behind the forms that are manifest in existence. … They [people] will never cease being sleepers, so they will never cease being dreamers. Hence they will never cease undergoing constant variation within themselves. Nor will that which they perceive with their eyes ever cease its constant variation. The situation has always been such, and it will always be such…[260]

Sein presents the unifying rock bottom of all experience. It is manifest in infinite forms in the world. The world presents us the invaluable plurality [*kathra*]. A term Ibn al-ʿArabī exploits to call the objects in the world explains his approach in the most abbreviated way: He/not-He [*huwa/lā-huwa*]. For Ibn al-ʿArabī, everything in the world is He/not-He. Phenomena are "He," in the sense that they manifest the Being. They are "not-He," in the sense that that they cannot exhaust Being; and it remains always in the deep, veiled from us by its own manifestation. The Universe

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[257] Chittick 2007b, p.180.

[258] Ibid, p.178.

[259] Ibid, p.198; *Futūḥāt* III 547.8.

[260] Ibid, pp191-192; *Futūḥāt* IV 19.5, 34.

['ālam] is a veil from itself.[261] "There is nothing in existence but veils hung down. Acts of perception attach themselves only to veils, which leave traces in the owner of the eye that perceives them."[262] The conception of Being forever hidden and inaccessible in the rock bottom is not uncommon in the traditional ontology. In the old negative theology, the ideal always hides unreachably deeper. "If you were able to throw aside the veils, where would you throw them? Throwing is a veil, and the 'where' to which it is thrown is a veil."[263] However we endeavor to elaborate the being of the world, it is an impossible attempt to access to the inaccessible, to speak of the unspeakable. This negative understanding is a hallmark of the negative theology. In the account of Ibn al-'Arabī, this negation concerning the nature of Being is mediated with the affirmation of being as the manifestation of Being.

Also for Ibn al-'Arabī, whenever we think or speak of the being of the world, we "interrogate" to it, and add another veil between Being and us. However, Ibn al-'Arabī articulates this negativist understanding of Being, with an affirmative understanding of being into which we find ourselves already immersed. The Being of the world is nothing but what I have already "found," for *Sein* is manifest only as *Seiende*. For Ibn al-'Arabī, the negativist understanding of "invisible with infinite veils in the rock bottom" is supported with an understanding of infinite faces of the invisible. The covering is simultaneous with an opening. The invisible shows itself through these barriers. "If people can never see the realities, they can only see the veils, or the names of the realities."[264] What is visible is also a manifestation of the invisible. Every veil is another face of the invisible.[265] *Face appears in veils*. Namely, *Being is rendered invisible exactly by which it is*

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[261] Ibn al-'Arabī 1980a, p.56.

[262] Chittick 2007b, p.189; *Futūḥāt* III 214.25.

[263] Ibid, p.195. This passage is taken from Niffarī's *Mawāqīf*.

[264] Ibid, p.191.

[265] Ibid, pp.178-179.

rendered visible.[266] "…[V]eil is the same as the face, and the name is identical with the reality. The negation is the affirmation."[267] In this sense, there is no veil. Every phenomenon is a different manifestation of the Being.

> The Real is named the Manifest and the Nonmanifest. … "Reality" is the manifestation of the attribute of the Real from behind a veil.… [T]he attribute of the servant is the Real itself, not the attribute of the Real, since the Manifest is a creature and the Nonmanifest is Real…[268]

Nothing hides the Being except its own appearances. With the beautiful words of the great Persian poet Saʿdī, "each sheet of the book of the universe opens a different window" to us, which we cannot exhaust by one go.

Hence, the face and the veil, i.e., the visible and the invisible cannot be separated from each other. The ideal is the ideal of the sensible. What is sensible is also nothing but the manifestation of the ideal. Visible and invisible are intertwined. "…[T]he name is nothing but the reality, but the reality stands infinitely beyond the name. … Self and Lord are inseparably intertwined, like name and reality, veil and face."[269] The alleged essence-existence, form – content, truth-beauty dichotomies are to be challenged by Ibn al-ʿArabī. The togetherness of the visible and invisible is beyond dichotomies.

The absence of the sensible would imply also the absence of the invisible. Without the visible, the invisible cannot be also found as they are intertwined. "The veils will not be lifted when there is vision. Hence vision is through the veil, and inescapably so."[270] The absence of what is visible and the finding of the invisible in its purity is also impossible, hence we are thrown into the world. The world is defined by the chiasm of the visible and the invisible. In this place of betweenness, pure experience of the invisible is not possible. "The veils of secondary causes are

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[266] Ibid, p.197.

[267] Ibid, p.200.

[268] Chittick 1989, p.135; *Futūḥāt* II 563.19.

[269] Chittick 2007b, p.179.

[270] Ibid, p.191; *Futūḥāt* III 276.

lowered down but never be lifted … So wish not for that which cannot be wished for…"[271] *Sein* is nonmanifest behind the veils of the *Seiende*. "Were He to remove [all of the veils], the glories of His face would burn away everything that the eyesight of His creatures perceives."[272] The removal of all veils implies impossibility. Hence, the vertical thickness of the world with all its awe and deepness is already and always there. The objects are always ready to tell a novel thing on their truth. The objects present an aspect of their truth, but never exhaust it. The invisible hides in the infinite deeps of the thickness of the world.

The intertwining means that the sensible has two faces; one of which is the visible, the other being the invisible. The visible is temporal, spatial, and limited with the world into which it is thrown. Its second face is the invisible, which unfolds itself through the veils, and as the veils. The visible share the same worldliness and manifest the Being through time. Being itself is inaccessible, as it is transcendent in-itself: "…it transcends all transcendence."[273] That is why 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī in a charming poem in the *Lawa'īḥ*, compares the invisible to "flirting girls." "Unlike the beauties of your world, in the curtain I'm seen, but without it I'm hidden."[274] The paradoxical intertwining of the visible and invisible is one of the most intoxicant affairs of thought. The vertical thickness the world possesses is a simultaneous veiling and unveiling. The perplexing and intoxicant chiasm of the visible and the invisible is the structure of the world that is both vertically and horizontally an endlessly rich rock bottom of experience and existence. Hence, the words *mumkināt* [possible things] and *ḥujūb* [veils] perfectly fit to draw the picture of the two-fold thickness of the world as understood by Ibn al-'Arabī.

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[271] Chittick 1989, p.179; *Futūḥāt* III 249.22.

[272] Chittick 2007b, p.181.

[273] Chodkiewicz, p.109.

[274] Chittick 2007b, p.178.

4.2.2 Thickness of the Self [*Nafs*]

When I said: What have I sinned? She answered:
Your existence is a sin with which no sin can be compared.[275]

According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, the main, insurmountable veil is the being of my own, i.e., my self [*nafs*] from which all other veils stem. By being defined by embodiment, temporality and imperfection, I, my "self" is the founding veil of myself. I can never know well and acknowledge myself fully. Full self-knowledge, and self-consciousness in the sense of Sartre, is not possible for the *inderweltsein*.

I "find" [*wajada*] myself already as necessarily having the being [*wujūd*] which opens me the world. What I cannot escape is not only my being-in-the-world, but also my self. I am condemned to the world and to the self definitively. I am the unavoidable, reflective locus through which Being unfolds itself as being. My self sinks me into the world and opens me the Being as Being-for-me. Nevertheless, it obstacles the manifestation of Being as it is; it is the pregiven, unavoidable veil on the face of the invisible. It is the founding of all veils, as the world is opened to me through the self. From the self stem all the veils, which will "…never be lifted. The greatest of these veils is your own entity. … It is impossible for *you* to be lifted… …He 'obliterates' you from yourself…"[276]

For Ibn al-ʿArabī, human beings carry their own insurmountable veil that is their own self, from which all other veils stem. My self is the greatest veil between me and objective Being, "…for it brings all the other veils into existence."[277] The self of mine, as an unavoidable gift, is the curtain between me and Being. "He placed no veil upon you but yourself."[278] Ibn al-ʿArabī writes in a charming passage,

[275] Schimmel, Annemarie (1975). *Mystical Dimensions of Islam.* The University of North Carolina Press. p.142; Abū Naṣr Al-Sarrāj (1914). *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ Fī't-taṣawwuf.* R. Nicholson (Ed.).

[276] Chittick 2007b, p.194; *Futūḥāt* II 553.5.

[277] Ibid, p.192.

[278] Chittick 1989, p.105; *Futūḥāt* III 215.3.

"…you veil yourself from you, and you are His curtain over you. …[E]ye will never fall upon anything but a curtain… There is no escape from the curtain, for there is no escape from you."[279] As being "beings in the world," "condemned to meaning" and "embodied," we veil our totality from our own. We have the Being as unfolded as being-for-me; we are beings in the world; it means that we are veiled from the truth, by our very definition and existence. We can never know ourselves entirely. Through time, as my self unfolds itself in manifold structures, I stepwise come to learn who I am. I perceive and know myself as it unfolds itself in the temporal unfolding process of Being as being-for-me. I never exhaust the knowledge and acquaintance of my self, which surprises me sometimes. I come to know my self with its impassable density and endless veils which obliterates its vision as what it is.

> No one knows what is within himself until it is unveiled to him instant by instant [*nafas*]. It cannot be unveiled all at once, since that would require restriction (*ḥaṣr*), and we have said that it is infinite. Hence man only knows one thing after another, ad infinitum.[280]

The veils on the face of the full self consciousness are, as discussed above, two-fold. First, the world defined as the rock bottom of existence which provides only a limited openness but endless possibilities for me to experience. The world (both as veils and as possible things) never leaves us. Being is being-in-the-world. "The property of possibility [*imkān*] never leaves us, so we never encounter Being except through ourselves.[281] Secondly, the self itself shares this thickness with the world and remains always creatively distant from the invisible. Even if *Dasein* could accomplish the impossible to come out [*khurūj*] of the world [*'ālam*], "…how could he come out of himself?"[282] What I cannot escape and fully exhaust is not only the world into which I am thrown, but also my own self. The vision of

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[279] Chittick 2007b, p.193; *Futūḥāt* II 554.4, 21.

[280] Chittick 1989, p.154; *Futūḥāt* II 686.4.

[281] Ibid, p.337; *Futūḥāt* III 516.14.

[282] Ibid, p.157; *Futūḥāt* III 263.16, 35.

the invisible; i.e., the unveiling of the veiled [*kashf al-maḥjūb*] is to fall out in my worldliness.

Ibn al-ʿArabī's maxim of "vision through veil" applies also to seeing the self, as everything else.[283] *I am the veil of my self.* What appears as my self is never fully apparent and consumed. My self is the locus of Being, which unfolds Being as being-for-me and simultaneously curtaining Being *qua* Being. The more I inquire to gaze at the invisible in me, it "as it is" conceals in its manifestation which appears in the "self as I" structure. In an exquisite passage in the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn al-ʿArabī deciphers this paradox of "I-ness":

> …He made you identical with His curtain (*sitr*) over you. … Look at your human nature (*bashariyya*). You will find it identical with the curtain of yourself from behind which He speaks to you. … He may speak to you from yourself, since you yourself are His veil and His curtain over yourself. And it is impossible for you to cease being human, for you are human in your very essence. …[Y]our human nature subsists in its entity. Hence the curtain is let down, and the eye falls upon nothing but a curtain, since it falls upon a form.[284]

What I encounter as the "I" is rather a veil on it. The visible I and the invisible I cannot be separated from each other. Hence, the invisible of the I, which I can never exhaustively see, hides in the thickness of the visible I. The visible I -the I as it *appears* to me- is not an I bereft of the invisible, but together in its manifestation. However, it cannot exhaust the I, which is always further from what I observe in the surface of the thickness of my self. "You are identical with the curtain over yourself."[285]

As our invisible is "...buried within our own breasts,"[286] everything man knows is "a recollection [*tadhakkur*] and a renewal (*tajdīd*)"[287] of what is forgotten, in a

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[283] Chittick 2007b, p.191.

[284] Chittick 1989, p.176; *Futūḥāt* II 554.3.

[285] Ibid, p.105; *Futūḥāt* III 29.12.

[286] Almond, p.99.

[287] Chittick 1989, p.154; *Futūḥāt* II 686.4. Also see Almond, p.74.

Platonic sense. "So man's knowledge is always recollection."[288] The objects in the world and the subject unfold themselves simultaneously, when we learn something. "To learn," as a cooperative result of a relation between the object and the subject, is "to learn about" not only the world, but also learn about the self at the same time. The knowledge of the world and the knowledge of myself develop simultaneously. Any understanding is a self-understanding for Ibn al-ʿArabī. The inexhaustible thickness of the world parallels that of the self. I come to know who I am when dealing with the world in its variety. I unfold myself when undertaking an alien unfolding in the world. Trying to "purify" oneself from the world to attain self-knowledge is not reasonable. Rather, one has to immerse into the world with all of its limitless richness. Who I am displays itself when encountering with different phenomena which are the loci of Being manifest in various forms.

The parallel structure of the world and the self is a conception which also can be found in Plato. In his *Timaeus*, the universe is understood "...as an all inclusive living Creature, a *mega zoon*, that is endowed with soul (*psuche*) and reason due to the province of God."[289] The human body and the universe, *anthropon* and *kosmos* as Plato confirms in *Philebus*, have similar structures.[290] The bequest of anthropomorphic configuration of the world has been a widely known conception both in the Oriental and Occidental philosophy. "Epistles of the Brethren of Purity" ["*Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*"], Avicenna and al-Fārābī are some leading figures, which exemplified an eclectic syncretism. They applied to all kinds of sources and to the ones from different traditions of thought. Similarly, the conception of human as "the small universe" [*ʿālam ṣaghīr*], and the universe as the "big human" [*insān kabīr*] seems to be inherited, digested and originally developed by Ibn al-ʿArabī.[291] Both the world and the self have a horizontal and vertical thickness, which is

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[288] Ibid, p.155; *Futūḥāt* II 686.4.

[289] El-Bizri, p.5.

[290] El-Bizri handles with the perennial issue of microcosm and macrocosm in a broad perspective with abundant historical informations and extensive philosophical references. See El-Bizri.

[291] It must be underlined that Ibn al-ʿArabī exploited any source of knowledge available to him. His method, *taḥqīq*, necessitates "...to utilize every available path to knowledge." (Chittick 2002, p.52.)

beyond finitude. The self and the world are inseparable from each other, as the self extends to the world horizontally. The world is open only through self and Being is in the Being-for-me structure. Besides, the self is in the world through that it encounters itself and the Being.

The thickness of the self, arguably, may be understood in the most abbreviated way by the "secret [*sirr*] of Tustarī," which Ibn al-ʿArabī likes to quote in various places.[292] It is the seventh bezel [*faṣṣ*] of the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* titled *The Wisdom of Sublimity in the Word of Ishmael* where Ibn al-ʿArabī deals with this problem. A saying of the famous Ṣūfī figure, Sahl al-Tustarī quoted by Ibn al-ʿArabī is as follows: "The divine suzerainty has a secret, and it is *thou*–this *thou* is the being to whom one speaks; if (this thou) should disappear, this suzerainty would also cease to be."[293] This is "the secret of divine suzerainty" [*sirr al-rubūbiyya*] Ibn al-ʿArabī deciphers by applying to al-Tustarī. The "secret" is that Being is only manifest through my self, as Being-for-me. If my self would disappear, the Being would also be invisible, which is impossible. Ibn al-ʿArabī pays attention to an elusive, but extremely important grammatical point in the passage he quotes from Sahl al-Tustarī. Ibn al-ʿArabī reminds the reader that the "if" [*law*], in the passage quoted is used for impossible things in Arabic.[294] Hence, the removal of *thou* is impossible. Being will be always veiled from thou by the ubiquity of *thou*. The ubiquitous self, immersed into the world, never becomes transparent. It opens me the world in its own form and as a *felix culpa*; it cannot be removed. The Being permeates [*yastaḥlaqa*] the self into and through the thickness of which it discloses itself.

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[292] Additionally, "the secret of Tustarī" is also elaborated in various places in the *Futūḥāt*. See e.g., Ibn al-ʿArabī (2000). *Futūḥāt-i Mekkiyye*. Ekrem Demirli (Trans.) Vol.1. Litera Yayıncılık, İstanbul. p.110.

[293] Corbin p.121; *Fuṣūṣ* II, pp.86-87. I have quoted the original translation of Corbin and have not exploited that of Austin. For his translation, see Ibn al-ʿArabī 1980a, p.106.

[294] Ibn al-ʿArabī 1980a, p.106.

4.2.3. Thickness of the Text and Meaning

The third pillar of the triangular affair of thickness of the phenomena is the text. Coherent with the *weltanschauung* Ibn al-ʿArabī draws, we observe the same two-fold thickness possessed by the text. The definition of "text" extends to all the phenomena as what is a "text" permeates the entire phenomenal horizon. Besides, as the text is vertically thick, it welcomes infinite possibilities of reading. The text generally appears as having a literal meaning, a surface, which is fecund to endless varieties of meanings in its depth. Besides respecting to the literal meaning, as it is the visible of the text, any novel reading is warmly welcomed by him.

The text is a form, a locus of the temporal manifestation of Being. However, it does not mean that the text is an object as any other object in the world. On the contrary, rather than text being an object, the objects in the world are in the form of text. The phenomenal world has a textual structure. When dealing with the thickness of the text, we reveal that the world is understood as a text for Ibn al-ʿArabī. The text unfolds itself in various forms in accordance to the way one reads and interprets it. Similarly, the world presents a text which is open to totally novel and manifold readings.

Ibn al-ʿArabī understands the Koran as the most genuine and archetypal text. When he mentions from "the text," he generally refers to Koran. "Every existent thing finds in the Koran what it desires."[295] It is a text which includes anything, from which "nothing has left out,"[296] and in which "all things are numbered."[297] However, as we shall see, his understanding of "text" permeates all the phenomena, which crosses the limits of the traditional realm of hermeneutics. Therefore, his understanding of interpretation exceeds the narrow conception of "exegesis" and has to be analyzed in the frame of hermeneutics.

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[295] Almond p.67; *Futūḥāt* III.94.

[296] Koran 6:38.

[297] Koran 36:12.

A two-fold thickness which enables an infinite richness of readability is the hallmark of the text in Ibn al-ʿArabī. This radically conspicuous pluralist approach to text attracts attention as it bares certain similarities with the recent radically deconstructivist emancipation of the text. Nevertheless, even if both pluralist views have salient convergences, their backgrounds are contradictory. Considering all the similar and different aspects of those two understandings of text and meaning, a radical pluralism and deconstructivist reading which does not fit into the general image of the medieval Islamic context is salient in Ibn al-ʿArabī. This interpretation practice and theory is worth comparing with deconstructivism. I will not undertake such a difficult comparative task, which is well accomplished by Almond. Rather, I will contend with reminding Jacques Derrida's deconstructivist conception of infinity of the text and the decisive way in which deconstructivist plurality differs from the thickness understood by Ibn al-ʿArabī.

4.2.3.1. Derrida, Negative Theology and the Thickness of the Text

For Derrida, the text is nothing but a set of symbols gathered together. The symbols refer to other symbols, and all those symbols that refer to each other compose a web. What a text refers is another text which refers to other ones. There is no reference on its own, which stands devoid of symbol and outside of this web of symbolization. Hence, the text is not infinitely rich but infinitely poor with respect to meaning.[298] There are only symbols that have endless possibilities to come together and to compose different combinations. The texts "…semantic flexibility stems from this very loss of identity."[299] Signs devoid of meaning as such refer to each other in infinite ways. The "meaning" which stands on its own, outside the web of signs, is a heritage from the ontotheological tradition. "The truth of the text" is a mistaken idea, as there is nothing but representations. There

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[298] Almond, p.71.

[299] Ibid, p71.

can be no representation of representation.[300] The presupposed meaning as a habitual sediment of the ontotheology is to be exposed to the deconstruction by Derrida's hermeneutics (or anti-hermeneutics,[301] or non-hermeneutics,[302] alternatively). What Derrida claims for reading is the "the absolute *un*readability of the text."[303] To express this infinite poverty of the text, the "aboriginality of the textual condition," Derrida defines "the text as abyss, bottomless well, orphan, vagrant."[304]

Parallel to Derrida's absolute *un*readability, in Ibn al-'Arabī "…the text itself is never touched; it goes on, forever producing meanings without ever revealing itself…"[305] However, the unreadability stems not from poverty, rather from the infinite wealth of meaning in the text. The truth of the text hides in the depths, in the density of the text. To this extent, the infinite deepness is what Ibn al-'Arabī shares with negative theology and Derrida attacks to. Derrida sees negative theology, which negates any predicate to the absolute, as a phase of ontotheology. Even when negating any predicate, negative theology makes a reference to the absolute, and does follow the ontotheological tradition defined by Heidegger. The God of negative theology, even not the Being, is the Being of beings. Hence, for him, "'[t]he negative moment of the discourse on God is only a phase of positive ontotheology."[306]

As a matter of fact, the extent to which Derrida can avoid from his own criticism is suspicious. He exploits the celebrated concept "*differance*" to establish his anti-

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[300] Ormitson Gayle L. and Alan D. Schrift (2002). "Hermeneutiğe Giriş." In *Hermeneutik ve Hümaniter Disiplinler*. Hüsamettin Arslan (Ed. and Trans.) Paradigma Yayınları. İstanbul. p.50.

[301] Almond, p75.

[302] Ibid, p.81.

[303] Ibid, p.72.

[304] Ibid, p.75.

[305] Ibid, p.72.

[306] Ferretter, Luke (2001). "How to avoid speaking of the other: Derrida, Dionysius and the problematic of negative theology." *Paragraph*, Vol. 24 Issue 1, p.51; Jacques Derrida (1978). *Writing and Difference*. Alan Bass (Trans.) London, Routledge. p.337.

hermeneutics without a reference to ontology. He claims that "[d]ifferance is not, it is not a being and it is not God."[307] *Differance* as defended by him is a break from the ontotheological tradition. Allegedly, "...deconstruction differs from negative theology insofar as the latter is a species of onto-theology."[308] Derrida, parallel to his review of negative theology, made a criticism of Heidegger and Gadamer for their ontotheologic engagement. In his *Spurs*, he attacks to the primordial meaning and continuity of understanding which he calls "onto-hermeneutics."[309]

Gadamer, in his *Reply to Jacques Derrida*, implies that Derrida's own position, as someone who wants to understand and to be understood, is not devoid of the presupposition which he criticized.[310] The absence of dialogue, the absence of communication[311] and the absence of invisible implied by Derrida limps his own position. Besides, the immunity of *differance* from ontology is highly suspicious. "Deconstruction … is to the Western metaphysical tradition what negative theology is to any given theological tradition."[312] The apophatic, absent god is not a super being; rather, it seems to be convergent with Derrida's *differance* as ulteriority.

Where the above abbreviated discussion leads us is a forking concerning the density of the text. Does the infinity of the text emanate from the very many combinations of signs (visibles) which are themselves poor? Or, is the meaning together with the signs an inseparable deepness? Ibn al-ʿArabī is in the latter side.

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[307] Ibid, p.51; "The Original Discussion of 'Differance'," in *Derrida and Differance*. David Wood (Ed.) (Warwick, Parousia, 1985). p.132.

[308] Ibid, p.55.

[309] See Dallmayr, Fred (2002). "Hermeneutik ve Dökonstrüksiyon: Gadamer-Derrida Diyaloğu." In *Hermeneutik ve Hümaniter Disiplinler*. Hüsamettin Arslan (Ed. and Trans.) Paradigma Yayınları. İstanbul. p.351.

[310] See Gadamer, Hans-Georg (2002a). "Jacques Derrida'ya Cevap." In *Hermeneutik ve Hümaniter Disiplinler*. Hüsamettin Arslan (Ed. and Trans.) Paradigma Yayınları. İstanbul. pp.325-327.

[311] Dallmayr, p.360.

[312] Ferretter, p.60.

For him, there is no visible alone in the world. Every visible is a "representation of the unrepresentable." The visible and the invisible are in a chiasm. Meaning and form cannot be separated from each other, the togetherness of which is always open to manifold readings. The visible deepens both horizontally and vertically. Even when the text appears as very clear to apprehend, behind this "illusion of shallowness" lie endless meanings ready to unfold themselves to the reader. Thickness, in its original, twofold sense, is the intrinsic property of all the phenomena and text is not an exception.

4.2.3.2. Vertical Thickness of the Text: Ocean and Shore

The understanding of "text" in Ibn al-ʿArabī is special and (as I have shallowly introduced) radically pluralist insomuch as it represents a towering counter example to the reductive history of hermeneutics. To embark on elaborating the endless deepness of the text, it is a good starting point to recall the etymology of the word "text." "Text" is a Latin word that comes from the same etymological root with "*texus*." "*Texus*" means "woven cloth," "web."[313] It is what clothes and veils. Here we encounter the same structure which we observed when dealing with the vertical thickness of the world and that of the self. Here again, the vertical thickness of the text is met by the name "*texus*," which shares the form of the veil. The text is a *texus*. It unveils the meaning, the invisible to the reader, but simultaneously clothes, veils it in its own impassable density. The "clothness" of the text, nevertheless, cannot be separated from what is the meaning of it. My cloak is a cloth of mine. My skin is also my cloth. And my body is my cloth. Then, who am I? *I am also a cloth of myself*. The answer hides into the deeps of my self. Similarly, the *texus* as the cloth of the invisible is nothing but the unfolding of the invisible as the visible. The truth of the text, as what the text tells "all naked," is never presented as naked to me. It is presented always in a *cloth*. Due to the interplay between the visible and the invisible, what appears in the text cannot ever be distinguished from what does not appear.

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[313] See http://www.online-dictionary.biz/latin/english/vocabulary/reference/textus.asp

> His [Ibn al-'Arabī's] hermeneutics offer, within a medieval Islamic context, a deconstructive rejection of "authentic" meaning and a thoroughly contemporary freeing of the text, but at the same time still retain the concept of the author as Sender who is trying to tell us "something." The only difference being that this "something" varies infinitely from person to person, from moment to moment, from place to place.[314]

The reader has the task of Hermes, i.e., to derive the "meaning-for-her-/himself." Nevertheless, the meaning varies infinitely, both depending on the reader and on the ceaseless flux in the world engendered by the temporal unfolding of Being. The text, as the "never-to-be-depleted-reservoir-of-meanings"[315] is "perpetually new for any of those who recite it."[316]

"Ibn al-'Arabī's Heraclitean view of a world constantly in flux … easily finds its microcosmic equivalent in the act of interpretation."[317] The temporal and ceaseless manifestation of Being culminates in a novel world and self [*nafs*] by every instant [*nafas*]. Hence, any reading of a text is fertile for new meanings to be derived by the reader. For Ibn al-'Arabī, to read and/or interpret a text "…is to humbly add one more response to an infinite storehouse of readings, to modestly provide one more variant on something inexhaustibly original."[318] Behind the clothing of infinite veils, the truth of the text discloses itself, even not fully, as different readings. If one reads the same text twice, and understands the same thing in both readings, he has made a misreading and has not understood the text genuinely. "He whose understanding is identical in two successive recitations is losing. He whose understanding is new in each recitation is winning."[319] What we encounter in these sentences of Ibn al-'Arabī is a strikingly, and admittedly charming Heraclitean

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[314] Almond, p.79.

[315] Ibid, p.71.

[316] Chodkiewicz, p.25; *Futūḥāt* III p.93-94. For *khalq jadīd*, also see *Futūḥāt* III, p.108., *Futūḥāt* p.127., Ibn al-'Arabī 2005, p.33.

[317] Almond, p.75.

[318] Ibid, p.88.

[319] Chodkiewicz, p.27; *Futūḥāt* III pp.128-129.

understanding which frees the text in an absolute sense. One cannot read the text twice: not only the one who reads it, but also what the text presents has already changed.

The ever-flux of the world, of the self, and the related permanent change of the context, all the possibilities that may be intended by the author when the text is written and all the possibilities of language and words bestow the text an inexhaustible deepness. As a result, the text welcomes always different ways of reading and interpreting. Any attempt to legalize and dogmaticize a specific reading, as it veils the reader from different potential point of views, is sharply rejected by Ibn al-'Arabī. Different readings and interpretations are not only stimulated, it is a prerequisite for self-knowledge and respect to the text. Ibn al-'Arabī himself displays the most incredible examples of different ways of interpretation. By incredibly creative methods, he comes up with very different interpretations than it appears. Even the most salient, clear verses are interpreted by him in different ways, and he shows that every text is deeper than it appears. For example, the words, which refer to the unbelievers, such as dumb, ignorant, infidel are all interpreted as the fundamental properties of real believers. So he not only reaches to different interpretations but also comes up with just the opposite meanings of the apparent ones. This position of Ibn al-'Arabī, as Almond recognizes, is a thoroughly deconstructive approach to the literal, orthodox reading and to the allegedly legal meaning.[320]

> In Ibn al-'Arabī's terms, the preface is the attempt to limit the text's infinite possibilities (*bāṭin*) to one interpretation only (*ẓāhir*), the others being considered heretical. It chains the semantic infinity of the text to one manifestation only…[321]

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[320] Almond disagrees in Chittick's claim that Ibn al-'Arabī venerates the literal meaning. He also exemplifies his claims with textual evidences from Ibn al-'Arabī where he interprets the text in just the opposite sense of how it apeears. (See Almond, p.85.) Nevertheless, the deeper shows itself only as the apparent meaning in the account of Ibn al-'Arabī. As there is a chiasm between the deeper and the literal, Ibn al-'Arabī's readings which compel the legal reading must not be understood as a lack of respect.

[321] Almond, p.16.

which would be an ignorant attempt of limiting the Absolute. Applying to the etymology of the Latin word "*textus,*" i.e., "cloth"; it may be said that the meaning can explicate itself by "wearing" infinitely different cloths. The truth of the text is nothing but what is unfolded to the reader. What one understands from the text is the meaning the text presents to the reader. Nevertheless, the meaning unfolded in any reading is always the "meaning-for-me," not the "meaning-as-it-is." The Truth of the text remains "...forever changing from one form to another, forever manifesting itself in different ways to different groups, whilst remaining untouched by any of them."[322] This simultaneous veiling-unveiling structure of the text is its vertical thickness which we encounter in all the phenomena.

The text, with Ibn al-ʿArabī's words, is in one aspect "an ocean without shore," but also "a shore without ocean" simultaneously.[323] The "shore" here represents here the visible of the text, while the "ocean" refers to the invisible of it. In one respect, what I derive in any reading presents something new to me. Any reading unfolds the invisible of the text in a different and novel manner. The more I read, the more I am immersed into the ocean of the text.

> There is no veil and there is no curtain. Nothing hides Him but His manifestation. Were the selves to halt with what has become manifest, they would know the situation as it is in itself. However, they seek something that is absent from them, so their seeking is identical with their veil. … Nothing is nonmanifest. The lack of knowledge has made it nonmanifest.[324]

I am already in the ocean in any reading. The invisible of the text is unfolded to me, and I am immersed into it like having immersed into an ocean. Nevermore, simultaneously, what the text tells to me always conceals itself from me in the deepness of the text. In any reading, I observe that there remains something invisible to me in my reading. *I understand that I do not understand genuinely* when I read the text. I always remain in the shore with respect to the invisible of

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[322] Ibid, p.18. Hence, every reading is an interpretation which does not exhaust what the text is able to present to the reader. (Murata and Chittick, p.xvi.)

[323] Chodkiewicz, p.35; Ibn al-ʿArabī (1855). *Diwān*. Bulaq, pp.31-32, Anqa Mughrib, Cairo.

[324] Chittick 2007b, p.198; *Futūḥāt* IV 407.22.

the text. The face-veil [*wajh-ḥijāb*] paradox, with its all awe is again in front of me. Now, the vertical thickness which stems from the interplay between the visible and the invisible of the text is presented to me in the paradoxical form of ocean-shore or text-texus. The text speaks to me in an endless richness, and what it tells remains always silent. The text is "both rigorously identical to itself – and yet unheard: it continually brings new meaning…"[325] The text is the speaking [*al-mutakallīm*], and simultaneously, the silent [*ṣāmit*]: another expression of its thickness. The text is the speaking/silent.

Chodkiewicz uses the term *coincidencia oppositorum*,[326] [the coincidence of the opposites] to refer to the paradox of vertical thickness. Nevertheless, the term may be misleading, for the visible and the invisible are not opposites for Ibn al-ʿArabī. They are in a chiasmatic relationship, which unfold and complement each other. They are "two leaves" of Being as it appears. The invisible and visible of the text do not exclude each other. Indeed, they are "the two daughters of a single father" ["*bintāni min abīn wāḥid*"][327] that are intertwined. *Sein* and *Seiende*, the content and the form in which the content appears cannot be separated. The vertical thickness of text in Ibn al-ʿArabī is this intertwining of visible and invisible which is pregnant with endless possibilities of reading and understanding.

4.2.3.3. Horizontal Thickness of the Text: Textuality of Phenomena

The horizontal thickness of the text is to mean that what a text is permeates to all the phenomena. The extension of the text to the visible means the textuality of the phenomenal world. This textuality is a conspicuous aspect of Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought for whom an object is one of the "inexhaustible words." The objects in the

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[325] Chodkiewicz, p.26.

[326] Ibid, p.28.

[327] Chodkiewicz p.10. The phase *bintāni min abīn wāḥid* is an original term of Denis Gril which appears in his *Ishārāt al-Qurʾān*.

world are names of the unnamable; "representations of the unrepresentable," in terms of phenomenology.

What Ibn al-ʿArabī understands from "language" [*lughah*] is not merely the written or spoken. The world itself is a language, a primordial expression. The *Seiende* is a language. It is a web of signs which are manifold and temporal disclosures of *Sein*. All those loci of manifestations share the same *weltlichkeit*. They all constitute the world as Being-for-me. This common world forms the web of signs into a holistic, primordial, meaningful system of language. The world as a silent language has a textual structure. It has to be read and interpreted. Expression extends from the narrow understanding of speech to the phenomenal world. *Seiende* is an expression. The horizontal thickness of the world, together with the horizontal thickness of the text, transforms the world to a language. The world is a language that is endless ceaselessly tells something, renews itself and what it tells. The textuality extends to all the phenomena via the horizontal thickness of the text.

The subject is veiled from the world and from her-/himself not only because of the vertical deepness of the phenomenal world. In addition, the world is a text with an endless horizon. It is an inexhaustible text which remains always concealed in its totality. With Niffarī's charming words, "[t]here is a veil that is not unveiled, and an unveiling that is not veiled. The veil that is not unveiled is knowledge of Me, and the unveiling that is not veiled is knowledge of Me."[328] Speech is a high-level, concrete, elaborated, biased and never pure system to accomplish the unveiling in a full sense. Written Speech can be understood easier than the "cosmic Speech," because "the written Book has the advantage of having been given a linguistic form…"[329] Nevertheless, no language can reach to the meaning of the text as it is, nor exhaust the thick ocean of meaning. Meaning is always the "meaning-for-me." That is why "…the lifting of one veil is simply the letting down of another."[330]

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[328] Chittick 2007b; p.199. Quoted from the *Mukhaṭabāt* of Niffarī.

[329] Chittick 1989, p.xv.

[330] Chittick 2007b, p.194.

What the phenomena express in their textuality remains always veiled in their unveiling.

For Ibn al-ʿArabī, the world of the objects and also the self are texts. All of them have infinite possibilities of reading and necessitate interpretation. As the self and the world also share the textuality, they are in need of interpretation. An interpretation of them may be undertaken in infinitely different ways owing to their thickness. *Inderweltsein*, for Ibn al-ʿArabī, turns out to be interpreting the phenomenal world that has an inexhaustible thickness with respect to our position in it. When finishing the analysis of Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology, we strikingly reveal that his ontology is strictly germane to interpretation. The textuality of the phenomena leads us directly to the majestic doors of hermeneutics.

4.3. *World as an Imagination* – Ontologically

> Existence is nothing but image
> But in truth it is the Real…[331]

Before dealing with its hermeneutical implications, I want shortly summarize Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology. In addition to the thickness of the phenomena, what needs particular attention is that Being is always in Being-fo-me structure for Ibn al-ʿArabī. When underlining this understanding of Being which is never objectively open to us, I want to exploit his thesis that world is an imagination.

The world is unfolded as always Being-for-me. I cannot speak of Being objectively. This point, which I have tried to underline, is a salient aspect of Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology. We cannot speak of Being in objective terms. Even if it is our own Being, it is always subjective. I have no objective access to Being. It is an unwarranted position to approach Being as something "present-at-hand." Being is never objectively open to *inderweltsein*. Indeed, in daily life and particularly in

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[331] Chittick 2002, p.51; Ibn al-ʿArabī (1946). *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam.* E. A. ʿAfīfī (Ed.) Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī. (Second Edition, 1980b.)

science, we generally assume that "there exists something." Without this assumption, scientific inquiry cannot be even progressed. Merleau-Ponty called this scientific objectivist assumption as "the perceptual faith."[332] In terms of the perceptual faith, Ibn al-ʿArabī is a skeptic who does not engage in this objectivist faith. We can never warrant ourselves to speak of Being objectively. We have no access to a vantage point to claim that "there is something objectively."

The intrinsically subjective roots of worldly experience may be traced in the proposal that "world is an imagination." The worldly experience has no more ontologically objective support than our imaginations. Both are ontologically subjective, and in the for-me structure. Both deviate between existence and nonexistence.[333] Ibn al-ʿArabī's claim, "world is an imagination" is not just an allegory; he is serious more than poetical. World and imagination are ontologically the same.[334] At the end of the elaboration of Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology, we can conclude that ontologically, world is an imagination for Ibn al-ʿArabī.

In one sense, every phenomenon is a disclosure of Being, hence it manifests Being, even if not entirely. In another sense, every encounter with the phenomena veils me from Being, as Being-as-itself remains always invisible, untouched and veiled. *Inderweltsein* is, in this paradoxical sense, Being/non-Being. It is a betweenness. Ibn al-ʿArabī exploits the concept "*barzakh*" ["isthmus"] to convey this betweenness.[335] In *Futūḥāt*, he defines *barzakh* as follows: "A *barzakh* is something that separates (*fāṣil*) two other things while never going to one side

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[332] Merleau-Ponty 1968, p.26.

[333] See Chittick 2002, p.56.

In objective terms, the world cannot be claimed to exist: objective existence transcends the limits of my world. Nevertheless, in subjective terms, the world exists necessarily as I am unavoidably thrown into it just as a dream.

[334] Akkach presents a very good synopsis of Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontological account of imagination. See Akkach.

[335] Needless to say, this concept, like any other one, is not devoid of Koranic reference. See Koran 23:100, 25:53, 55:20.

(*mutaṭarrif*)...”[336] In his sense, “[e]very existent thing is a *barzakh*…”[337] The world has this peculiar “both/and,” “neither/nor,” “*yes and no*” structure between Being and nothing, which it shares with imagination.

> ...[T]he ontological status of the imaginative world is neither a place nor a nonplace but …[is] settled between the sensible world and the intelligible one. He [Ibn al-ʿArabī] thus suggests that the hiatus between the pure intelligible and the sensible worlds must be filled by the imagination as an intermediary.[338]

World, as an imagination, is neither a place of Being, nor the “nonplace” of non-Being. It is a betweenness, an isthmus between Being and non-Being.[339] Similar to an imagination I see, the world is always subjectively open to me. I have no vantage point outside the world, to speak of the *world as it is*. As a dream I see is a dream only for me, Being is present to me as Being-for-me similar to an imagination. Hence, the world is ontologically an imagination, a place of betweenness.[340] “There is nothing in existence but *barzakhs*, since a *barzakh* is the arrangement of one thing between two other things…”[341] We are *barzakhī*; the ones who pertain to the ontological betweenness.

> According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, the reality of “He/not He” finds its clearest expression in the cosmos through imagination (*khayāl*). In dreaming, for example, which is a function of imagination, a person sees corporeal things which are not corporeal things.[342]

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[336] Chittick 1989, p.117; *Futūḥāt* I 304.16.

[337] Ibid, p.14.

[338] Berger, Adriana (1986). “Cultural Hermeneutics: The Concept of Imagination in the Phenomenological Approaches of Henry Corbin and Mircea Eliade.” *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 66, No. 2 (Apr.), p.146.

[339] “…[T]he intermediary world of the *barzakh* forms the borderline between Absolute Being and Absolute non-Being. As one might perceive the borderline between light and shadow, the *barzakh* delimits the extent of the two neighbouring domains, and prevents each of them from being qualified with the qualities of the other, acting as a common horizon which reflects the realities of both bordering worlds.” (Akkach, p.100.)

[340] For a more extensive introduction on *barzakh*, see also Murata and Chittick, pp.223-226.

[341] Chittick 1989, p.14; *Futūḥāt* III 156.27.

[342] Ibid, p.115.

More than a metaphor, the world is a betweenness with respect to Being. "… [T]he cosmos only became manifest within imagination. It is imagined in itself. So it is it, and it is not it."[343]

This ontological betweenness resembles to that of imagination. "Just as our imagination is the *barzakh* between our spirits and bodies, so also existence is the *barzakh* between Being and nothingness."[344] We are not totally nonexistent, but also not objectively present. We, sharing the same fate with the world, are present subjectively and unavoidably. The world and our selves are similar to imagination; a subjectively present betweenness. Thus, ontologically, the phenomenal world, "…existence as a whole can be called 'imagination'."[345]

Suppose, I say to you "I saw *you* last night in my dream." Is it true? "Yes and no." "Yes"; because who I saw was you, and you existed in my dream subjectively. "No"; because you was not in my dream objectively.[346] The worldly experience of the human beings in the world is similar to this example.[347] Hence, the main aspects of Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology may be abbreviated in the seemingly naive, but rather comprehensive claim that world is an imagination.

4.4. From Ontology to Hermeneutics

In this chapter, I have tried to elaborate the ontology of Ibn al-ʿArabī with the concept "thickness" of Merleau-Ponty. It was a task which necessitated a manifold reading from different literatures. To avoid distortion and nonsense decontextualization and to accurately accomplish the task of building a conceptual bridge, I firstly analyzed the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty to apprehend the

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[343] Ibid, p.118; *Futūḥāt* II 313.12.

[344] Ibid., p.113.

[345] Ibid. p.15.

[346] Murata and Chittick, p.221.

[347] Chittick 1989, p.119.

concept in its contextual "spider web." The thickness of the phenomena in Merleau-Ponty appeared as a two-fold density and richness which one can neither surpass nor consume. Then, I tried to "implement" the concept, and try to unfold Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology by using this concept as a lever. Three phenomenal categories, the world of objects, the self, and the text, which cannot be separated from each other, have been the subject of my analysis respectively. Both horizontally and vertically, these three categories met the thickness fully. I have intentionally avoided from a comparative study between Merleau-Ponty and Ibn al-ʿArabī to preserve the limits of the research subject. Besides, the conceptual bridge established in this chapter has rendered a comparative study quite possible. The thickness of the phenomena extended with their textuality has culminated in a pluralistic picture in which beings can be read in different ways. In the last part, I have tried to make it clear that textuality is the common point of phenomena, which means that interpretation is everywhere. Ibn al-ʿArabī, via his understanding of being, transfers hermeneutics from the realm of epistemology and extends it to the realm of ontology. Hence, the ontology of Ibn al-ʿArabī, elaborated so far, leads us directly to hermeneutics. After having crystallized the main aspects of Ibn al-ʿArabī's understanding of Being, it seems to be mandatory, rather than voluntary, to question Ibn al-ʿArabī's hermeneutics which is germane to his ontology.

For Ibn al-ʿArabī, the world is a language, a web of texts which are primordial expressions. The text, as a *texus*, is an endless cloth to the deeps of which the reader never accesses as all naked. The reader dresses the text with its own self. The self and the world undergo a ceaseless change due to the ceaseless temporal unfolding of *Sein* as *Seiende*. The text attains thereby an insurmountable but creative density with infinite possibilities to offer to the reader. This deconstructively pluralist position of Ibn al-ʿArabī clearly does not fit into the medieval picture in which everyone is chasing the literal meaning of the monotype reading of the sacred text. For him, the twofold thickness applies to all the phenomena, which renders the phenomena a text. *There is nothing but text*. Nevertheless, this text is not a referenceless, infinitely poor web of symbols. On

the contrary, it is to provide an endless store of meaning. The visible and the invisible cannot be separated. The chiasm unfolds itself in accordance with my interpretation, and presents me the meaning-for-me and simultaneously conceals what is further in this presentation. The world is the textual representation of the unrepresentable.

In terms of modern hermeneutics, the celebrated *objekt – gegenstand* distinction of Betti and Hirsch fades away in Ibn al-ʿArabī. All the objects [*objekt*] are hermeneutic objects [*gegenstand*]. The phenomenal world, into which the self is also added, is a *gegenstand*.[348] Our gaze at and relation with ourselves and with the world harbors hermeneutics de facto. "To be" is for Ibn al-ʿArabī, "to be interpreting." This is, of course, a maxim that we are familiar with from the Occidental phenomenological hermeneutics. The structure of this universal interpretation is to be enlightened in the following chapters.

Inderweltsein finds itself in a language; in a "unity of finding." The world is a web of signs which have a unity, as they appear and manifest the same shared world. Ibn al-ʿArabī's understanding of "language" [*lughah*] goes beyond what is written and spoken. Language is the inherently expressive structure of *Seiende*. Ontology leads us to hermeneutics. To put it differently, the addressee of *seinsfrage* is replaced to Hermes, as "to be" means "to be interpreting" in Ibn al-ʿArabī. Reminding the Socratic maxim, we may say that *the uninterpreted life is not worth living*. Hermeneutics attains universality in Ibn al-ʿArabī as all the phenomena require interpretation. This claim of universality, which is the issue of the next chapters, comes with its own problems which Ibn al-ʿArabī will face up with.

There is a very important implication of that interpretation permeates all the realms of experience. Any experience in the world including epistemology is bound to interpretation. Consequently, there is no realm for the secular.

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[348] For the distinction between *objekt* and *gegenstand*, see Figal, Gunter (2004). "Life as Understanding." *Research in Phenomenology*, 34. Elizabeth Sikes. (Trans.) p.25.

Everything, the world itself, falls under the realm of hermeneutics, and is unfolded in accordance with a certain positioning of interpretation. "[W]ithin such a worldview which sees every *ẓāhir* [visible] … as having divine possibilities, what room can be there for the secular?"[349] The answer is surely "no room." The ubiquity of interpretation extends to every realm of experience, and nothing escapes from it. In a passage in *Futūḥāt*, which is intoxicating, Ibn al-'Arabī writes:

> …none but God is loved in the existent things. It is He who is manifest within every beloved to the eye of every lover–and there is nothing which is not a lover. So the cosmos is all lover and beloved, and all of it goes back to Him… Though no one loves any but his own Creator, he is veiled from Him by the love of Zaynab, Su'ād, Hind, Laylā, this world, money, position, and everything loved in the world. Poets exhaust their words writing about all these existent things without knowing, but the gnostics never hear a verse, a riddle, a panegyric, or a love poem that is not about Him, hidden beyond the veils of forms.[350]

The modes of interpretation permeate every realm of experience.[351] No experience remains secular. Everything is encountered in the realm of hermeneutics and via a certain interpretive mood. I suppose, this passage makes it clear that there is no possibility for the secular in this view.[352]

The ubiquity of interpretation intercepts us from calling Ibn al-'Arabī's theory and practice of interpretation as "exegesis" ["*tafsīr*"]. Ibn al-'Arabī's hermeneutics cannot be limited with reading/interpreting the text of Koran. This would be a dramatically narrow term for an understanding which claims for the universality of interpretation. Interpretation understood by Ibn al-'Arabī is a transcendental structure of the *inderweltsein* that grants no realm for secular. Hermes, even latent, permeates and influences the Islamic tradition. Today's discussions of modernism

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[349] Almond, p.68.

[350] Chittick 1989, p.181; *Futūḥāt* II 326.18.

[351] Also see Chittick 2002, p.53, p.56.

[352] "...Muslims do not make the same distinction between the religious and the secular, or the sacred and the profane, that has been made in the West. Everything, after all, is a sign of God, but it takes eyes to see the signs." (Murata and Chittick, p.302.)

and secularism generally and unfortunately lack the necessary attention to the historical importance of hermeneutics in Islam. To understand the problems of secularization, it must be first revealed that Islamic tradition is a generally hermeneutic one. Hermes is at work at any experience. Without reference to and apprehension of the importance of hermeneutics and Hermes, today's problems of Islamic world can hardly be apprehended and solved, just as the ontology of Ibn al-ʿArabī cannot be understood genuinely. Therefore I feel it incumbent to introduce first what Hermes means for Islamic tradition, when starting to deal with Ibn al-ʿArabī's charming hermeneutics.

PART THREE: HERMENEUTICS

CHAPTER 5

IBN AL-'ARABĪ'S HERMENEUTICS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF HIS ONTOLOGY AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS

> A fact is always interpreted.[353]

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word "hermeneutics" has entered to English very recently. Accordingly, it appeared firstly in Daniel Waterland's *Review of the Doctrine of the Eucharist*, in 1737,[354] which makes it a relatively novel word. Even when we come to the 1900s, the word "hermeneutics" keeps being weird and uncommon. Even in 1959, it was so unheard and unfamiliar that when Hans-Georg Gadamer presented to the publisher his *Fundamentals of Hermeneutics* which was the fruit of long years' labor, the publisher would find the title of the book too obscure. Gadamer expunged the "obscure" word from the title of the book which was published in 1960 with the revised title, *Truth and Method* [*Wahrheit und Methode*]. The new name was not obscure now, but it would turn out to be truly dramatic in the subsequent years.[355]

This short historical reminder warrants the situation that almost all books on hermeneutics start with explaining what the word means. Palmer's *Hermeneutics*, for example, starts with a long and elaborate etymological and historical analysis of hermeneutics.[356] Seemingly, to question the identity, properties and duties of the Greek god Hermes is the best way to introduce what hermeneutics is.

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[353] Merleau-Ponty 2001, p.30.

[354] Schmidt, p.6.

[355] Ibid, p.2.

[356] See Palmer, Richard E. (1969). *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. pp.12-45.

5.1. Introduction: Hermes the Silent Horseman and Islamic Tradition

> Hermes, neither god nor mortal, but a messenger… traversing distances…[357]

Considering the seeming novelty of the concept "hermeneutics" in Western thought, one may be trapped into the idea that it is the evolutionary alternative of the medieval term "exegesis" [*tafsīr, ta'wīl*] in Islamic tradition. The difference between exegesis and hermeneutics seems just the realm of application, which encompasses the sacred text in the former and additionally the secular ones in the latter. "Hermeneutics" at the first sight appears as just the new-fashion word of the Koranic "exegesis." However, curiously enough, hermeneutics in the Islamic tradition has always been more than the interpretation of sacred text. Instead, hermeneutics is arguably *the essential structure of the Islamic tradition*. The central and concrete position of hermeneutics, which Heidegger finds in Saint Augustine[358] is salient in the Islamic tradition and in Ibn al-ʿArabī particularly. The essentiality of hermeneutics in Islamic tradition does not merely derive from the centrality of the Koran. In addition to the derivative importance in opening the sacred text, the main significance of hermeneutics stems from the magical figure from which the word "hermeneutics" is derived. This figure is no one but celebrated Hermes.

Hermes himself is an unacquainted but central figure in Islamic tradition that has a distinct hermeneutic nature. Rather than "the Divine Plato" or Aristotle [*al-muʿallim al-awwal*], it is their predecessor "Hermes, who was thus considered throughout the Middle Ages, in the East as well as in certain schools in the West,

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[357] Abulad, pp.22-23.

[358] Schmidt, p.54; Heidegger 1999, p.10.

For a concise introduction to the hermeneutics of Saint Augustine, see Abulad, pp.13-15.

as the founder of philosophy and the sciences."[359] This position points to an unfamiliar epistemological tradition for a modern Western gaze. Nasr makes a striking determination that Aristotle, "…for Suhrawardī was not the beginning but rather the end of philosophy among the Greeks, who terminated this tradition of wisdom by limiting it to its rationalistic aspect."[360] Aristotle, the father of philosophy, symbolizes accordingly the death of *philo-sophia*. For the Islamic tradition in general, not anyone else, but Hermes is the father of all knowledge. He is the "ancestor of the Sages."[361]

'Afīfī, in his *Ta'līqāt*, tells that Hermes as an ancient Greek figure has been reinterpreted in the Islamic tradition in an original way. Hermes has proceeded to exist in the Islamic context. He was, however, renamed and divided into three different and novel names; Elias [Ilyas], Unnūh and Enoch [Idrīs]. Those three names are the reinterpreted and appropriated, adjusted names of Hermes in the Islamic tradition.[362] Elias, Unnūh and Idris are actually the same person, and refer to the same figure from the Greek heritage; Hermes.

The 22th bezel of *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* is titled *The Wisdom of Intimacy in the Word of Elias*.[363] Elias is identified with knowledge and wisdom in the history of religions. We observe that he has a parallel position which symbolizes knowledge in the Islamic tradition. Elias and Idris, two prophets meet Hermes in Islamic tradition. Supporting this idea, "The Wisdom of Intimacy in the Word of Elias" starts as follows: "Elias is the same as Idris..."[364] Elias and Idris is the same person, nevertheless, they represent two faces one of which is turned to the Absolute and the other is to the engendered world. The two-faced Hermes, as the Elias-Idris, is a

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[359] Nasr, p.61.

[360] Ibid, p.61.

[361] Corbin, p.36.

[362] 'Afīfī 2000, p.122.

[363] Ibn al-'Arabī 1980a, pp.228-235.

[364] Ibid, p.229.

bridge between the Absolute and the world. "Whoever wishes to discover this Wisdom of Elias and Idris, which God established twice, then let him know that Idris was a prophet before Noah, and was then raised up and set down again [as Elias]."[365] In this sentence Ibn al-ʿArabī is mentioning actually of Hermes. He was sent by God to a settlement and mounted on a fiery horse.[366] It is not a coincidence that Ibn al-ʿArabī's focus in the chapter is the true nature of knowledge and gnosis, and that Elias is the "intellect without any lust."[367]

Ibn al-ʿArabī continues with conveying the two essential signs of Elias. First one is the revelation graced to him the source of which is the God. "The second sign is his dumbness, so that even if he wanted to speak of what he sees, he cannot do so."[368] Hermes in Islamic tradition does not speak himself. He is *the silent horseman* who has two faces to two separate worlds which conveys knowledge from one to the other. Hermes is a *barzakh*, an isthmus, a two-fold openness, a bridge. With the words of Palmer, he is the "god of the gaps,"[369] of the isthmus, *barzakh*, *a'rāf*.

In the languages which use Arabic letters, the vowels are not written. Hence in Arabic, Ottoman and Persian, there is a variety of possibilites to read what is written. To give an example, the self [*nafs*] and breath, instance [*nafas*] are written as the same, as I mentioned when dealing with the temporality of self in the third chapter. One has to assess many possibilities, consider the whole context, decide and select the most appropriate word which fits best. This is evidently a highly interpretive process. In the Islamic tradition, interpretation is understood "as mercifully giving life to a text."[370] As a logical extension of the centrality of

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[365] Ibid, p.235.

[366] Ibid, p.230.

[367] Ibid, p.230.

[368] Ibid, p.235.

[369] See Palmer 1977, pp.385-388.

[370] Almond, p.75.

hermeneutics, there appears an unrivalled abundance of interpretive, explanatory, supplementary texts, in addition to novel writings.

Hermes has been the messenger of the celestial who "because of the ignorance of the masses, expressed … [his] sayings in secret symbols."[371] Not only gnosis, but also knowledge and science depended upon deciphering his secret symbols. Hence, even "hermeneutics" is not a common and seemingly modern word referring to a novel discipline. As a matter of fact, it represents the latent, interpretive structure of Islamic tradition. Any kind of knowledge is founded on hermeneutics. It will be a fatal mistake to define it as a new age, secular alternative of exegesis and disregard its foundational position in epistemology and existential importance in Islam. Islamic tradition posits hermeneutics to a central position due to this interpretive definition of knowledge.[372] It is clear that interpretation is not limited with the understanding of the sacred text. On the contrary, interpretation extends to every realm of experience thanks to the centrality of Hermes in epistemology.

Interestingly however, even when hermeneutics is understood in its narrowest sense as the modern name of the medieval concept "exegesis," it will surely preserve its centrality in Islamic history. It is because Islam is a "religion of the book" par excellence. "In the modern context, we find it difficult to imagine how a book [Koran] could be so important…"[373] As Koran is of existential importance, the interpretation and reading/reciting of it has been a central task of the Muslims for centuries. Islam is obviously a religion that most strictly relies on a written text. With a very rough comparison, Koran (as the "central theophany of Islam"

This "bringing a text to life through interpretation" is also a highly emphasized Occidental turn in hermeneutics. See Palmer 1977, p.388.

[371] Nasr, p.63.

[372] The present study that aims to develop a hermeneutical approach to Ibn Arabi tries to connect its methodology with this traditional understanding of hermeneutics. See *Appendix-A: Supplement to 5.1–On the Present Study and Mu'allaf: In Praise of Hermes*.

[373] Murata and Chittick, p.178.

and "the source *par excellence* of Islamic spirituality" [*rūḥaniyyah, ma'nawiyyat*])
is to Islam what Jesus is to Christianity. It is the primary source of Islam, and
veneration of the text, with its tiniest formal structure is apparent. Arguably, it is
difficult to observe the same central emphasis on the text in any other tradition.
Koran has been understood as contending the answers of any worldly and after-
worldly question of all times and territories. Even a letter of it cannot be omitted,
explained away, or changed with another one. Due to this special focus on the
revealed text, hermeneutics would be central in Islamic history even when
understood in the narrowest sense, as a novel term for exegesis.

This abstract introduction to Hermes displays that it is not a coincidence that the
ontology of Ibn al-ʿArabī leads to hermeneutics. Instead, the questioning of
hermeneutics turns out to be the vital requirement to apprehend his ontology, and
vice versa. The existential importance of interpretation is crystallized in Ibn al-
ʿArabī's thought.

Today, what we understand from the word "hermeneutics" or "interpretation" is
highly influenced by Heidegger's student Gadamer. The philosophical meaning of
the concept is molded primarily by his lifelong studies.[374] In the end of the 20th
century, there has been an important revolution, an ontological turn in German
hermeneutic tradition (and consequently in the whole Western metaphysics)
cultivated by Heidegger and Gadamer. With Heidegger's critique of Dilthey and
von Humboldt, hermeneutics turned into an ontological profession from an
epistemological one. This expansive shift in the realm of hermeneutics was
followed by the thesis of universality [*allgemeinheit*] of hermeneutics. Gadamer's
academic career was devoted to crystallize and develop this contention of
universality and the ontological turn in hermeneutics. These two interrelated theses
were also conspicuous in Ibn al-ʿArabī, as I labored to illuminate in the last
chapter. Through the comparative study which will be attempted in the following
chapters, other central and salient aspects of both this Heideggerian turn and the

[374] Schmidt, p.2.

hermeneutics of Ibn al-ʿArabī are to unfold themselves. What will be developed hereafter is an extensive comparative analysis of two alien traditions of interpretation. Via this comparison, a distance from each approach to interpretation and hermeneutics will be availed. Through this creative distance, valuable insights into the basic aspects of these two approaches that are not visible from inside of them will be ready to disclose themselves.

5.2. Ontological Turn and the Claim for Universality in Philosophical Hermeneutics

5.2.1. From Schleiermacher to Heidegger: Reconstruction or Integration

The claim for universality of hermeneutics brought forward by Heidegger and Gadamer is hardly novel. The conscious attempt to establish a universally valid, general theory of interpretation may be regressed at least to Schleiermacher.[375] He set forth to expand the realm of hermeneutics "from the biblical and ancient texts to *all* texts."[376] Schleiermacher's criticism to his predecessors Friedrich Ast and Friedrich A. Wolf was based on their reduction of hermeneutics to the study of

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[375] To remind, Gadamer's aim declared in the preface of *Truth and Method* "…is not to offer a general theory of interpretation and a differential account of its methods … but to discover what is common to all modes of understanding and to show that understanding is never a subjective relation to a given 'object' but to the history of its effect…" (Gadamer 1991, p.xxxi.) He does not chase a universal theory of hermeneutics, but his phenomenological understanding of interpretation will transform it into a universal prestructure of life.

To display the difference between Schleiermacher and Gadamer's understandings of universality of hermeneutics, the claim "universality" has to be brought up in two different ways. In the first conception, the claim may be understood as the establishment of a universal method for texts in interpretation. In the second conception, which we encounter with Heidegger and Gadamer, "…interpretation is not limited only to the text, it becomes a way in which we relate to the world." (Negru, Teodor (2007). "Gadamer-Habermas Debate and Universality of Hermeneutics." *Cultura. International Journal of Philosophy of Culture and Axiology*, Issue 7, p.113.) Where Schleiermacher's inquiry into the universality of hermeneutics may be understood in the first sense of normative – methodic universality, Heidegger and Gadamer's claim may be understood in the second sense.

[376] Günok, Emrah (2004). *Reformulation of the Concept of Understanding in Heidegger's and Gadamer's Hermeneutical Theories*. Master's Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School of Social Sciences of the Middle East Technical University, Department of Philosophy. p.4.

classical language.[377] His alternative inquiry to extend the borders of hermeneutics as a methodical art that has a universal applicability brought a fundamental transformation in the hermeneutic aim, content and method.

The unrivalled interpretive authority of the Church started to faint with the rise of natural sciences with the Enlightenment. The hermeneutical procedure became the fundamental presupposition of romanticism, and hermeneutics has been universalized through this methodization. It became the universal organ of the historical method. Until this transition, "[m]odern hermeneutics [had] developed in biblical interpretation and the philological investigations of the classics."[378] It was meant to be an instrument to understand the meaning of the text. For Chladenius, who died just nine years before Schleiermacher's birth, hermeneutics was a method to be resorted only when the meaning is not clear. It was applied in emergency to integrate the truth of the text to life. This understanding underwent a thorough transformation when Schleiermacher developed his general hermeneutics. It turned into a "recreation of the creative process of the author."[379] In the hands of his biographer and follower Dilthey, this transition would accelerate.

Gadamer claims that for Schleiermacher, hermeneutics was to avoid from misunderstanding.[380] Indeed, Schleiermacher makes fruitful distinctions not only between "qualitative misunderstanding" and "quantitative misunderstanding,"[381] but also between "passive misunderstanding" and "active misunderstanding"[382] in

[377] Schmidt, p.10.

[378] Ibid, p.96.

[379] Ibid, p.96.

[380] Gadamer, Hans-Georg (1976d). "The Universality of The Hermeneutical Problem." (Original work was published in 1966.) In David E. Linge (Trans. and Ed.) *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p.7.

[381] Schleiermacher, Friedrich D. E. (1994). "General Hermeneutics." In Kurt Mueller-Vollmer (Ed., Intro. and Notes) *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present*. Continuum, New York. p.82.

[382] Schleiermacher 1994, p.83.

his *General Hermeneutics*. These conceptualizations provided him insightful instruments in achieving the task which he formulated as "misunderstanding should be avoided."[383] Nevermore, he has an aspiration to develop a positive definition of hermeneutics. He claims that "[t]he rules for the art of interpretation must be developed from a positive formula…: 'the historical and divinatory, objective and subjective reconstruction of a given statement."[384] Now, hermeneutics at the hands of Schleiermacher is to be turned into a *disciplinary art of reconstruction*. This disciplinary reconstruction of the utterance is to be so rigorous that via this reconstruction we will be enabled to understand the author better than her-/himself.

> "To understand the text at first as well as and then even better than its author." Since we have no direct knowledge of what was in the author's mind, we must try to become aware of many things of which he himself may have been unconscious.[385]

The aim of hermeneutics as presented by Schleiermacher is to enter to the mind of the author, and to replace one with her/his position.[386] To put it differently, the aim of hermeneutics turns "…to *re-construct* the object in the subject, without disrupting the *essence* of it."[387]

For Schleiermacher, owing to the distance from her/his time and context, we are able to understand the author better than s/he did. For, we are now aware of the contextual conditions s/he was embedded. At the same time, the same distance renders the task infinite, since the reconstruction of the author in its whole context is an endless process, even if not impossible. "So formulated, the task is infinite, because in a statement we want to trace a past and a future which stretch into infinity."[388] Schleiermacher was a romantic who was aware of fate of his infinite task. The infinity stemmed basically from the circular nature of hermeneutics. Due

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[383] Ibid, p.81.

[384] Ibid, p.83.

[385] Ibid, p.83.

[386] Ibid, p.83.

[387] Günok, p.5.

[388] Schleiermacher 1994, p.83.

to the circle between the part and the whole, reconstruction of text or the individuality of the author turned into the reconstruction of the whole historical context. To tackle the whole to understand the individual was demanding an endless endeavor Schleiermacher was fully aware of. The "...move from the more indeterminate to the determinate is an endless task in every process of explication."[389]

Hermeneutics, presented as a reconstruction by Schleiermacher, has a conspicuously dualist nature in method. It is forking as grammatical and technical (or psychological) interpretation.[390] These two pillars have to complete and converge to each other. The grammatical interpretation side means the linguistic analysis of the text and the context into which the text and its author is embedded. This is a highly tough reconstruction process. It needs the consideration of the authentic structure of that language, its change through time, the addressee the texts is oriented to, and many other possible inputs. Nevertheless, the second side - the technical interpretation- seems much more complicated. For the reconstruction of the author's individuality, not only the motives and principles moving the author to what s/he wrote, but also the "basic characteristics of the composition"[391] must be illuminated.

"...[O]ne must move from one to the other, and no rules can be given for how this is to be done."[392] That is why hermeneutics is an art for Schleiermacher. There are pregiven rules and recipes to follow, but the interpretive practice exceeds them. Hence, hermeneutics is to be also an aesthetic recreation. It is a creative, artistic process for Schleiermacher. For hermeneutics exceeds the rules in its application, it is defined by him as an art. In this context, "art" has to be understood in a wide

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[389] Schmidt, p.16; Schleiermacher, Friedrich (1998). *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Witings*. Andrew Bowie (Ed.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.31.

[390] Ibid, p.12.

[391] Ibid, p.19.

[392] Ibid, pp.12-13; Schleiermacher 1998, p.11.

sense. Schleiermacher says that "[a]rt is that for which there admittedly are rules. But the combinatory application of these rules cannot in turn be rule-bound."[393] The conception of "art" in this context encompasses not only the fine arts, but also technical arts. There are established rules to follow, but the implementation exceeds the preestablished limits. Art is understood as a creative combination of rules. The grammatical and technical endeavor must go along with the sphere of the author and the text. This means the simultaneous, artistic reconstruction of the author and the text in their original contexts. As grammatical and technical interpretations are set forth to enlighten complementary ingredients of the same event, they will converge to each other according to Schleiermacher. He is aware of the fact that both inquiries are undertaken from within language. Hence, considering this situation, he writes that "[g]rammatical interpretation comes first."[394] The access to the hermeneutic circle occurs with the access to that language. Thus, grammatical interpretation would become more dominant in the hermeneutical tradition in the course of time. The rise of grammatical interpretation will continue in the subsequent centuries until the critique of Heidegger.[395]

Dilthey searched for an exit from the hermeneutic circle through a path that is similar to early Husserl's transcendental subjectivity. This path to exit was paved by his understanding of experience [*erlebnis*].

> The nonindividual or universal aspect of lived experience permits the intersubjective elementary understanding within a group. If they were absolutely individual there could be no bridge to understand others. ... All human beings also share very general ways of manifesting their lives.[396]

This conception of experience was the key to realize Dilthey's "critique of historical reason" ["*kritik der geschichtischen vernunft*"] and to render

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[393] Ibid, p.11; Schleiermacher 1998, p.229.

[394] Scleiermacher 1994, p.86.

[395] Gadamer, while finding Schleiermacher's conception of grammatical interpretation brillant, claims that psychological interpretation has become dominant in hermeneutics in the course of time.

[396] Schmidt, p.47.

hermeneutics the legal, universal, rigorous method of human sciences [*geisteswissenschaften*]. This "nonindividual" and "universal" understanding of experience created in Dilthey an illusion that experience could underpin the universal validity criterion for hermeneutics. Experience would provide the transcendental point through that one could escape from the hermeneutic circle.

This transformation in the aim and scope of hermeneutics would not escape from Heidegger. The central integrative power of hermeneutics that Heidegger observed in medieval times had vanished. The Augustinian picture of language, which means that "every word has a meaning,"[397] was replaced with a transporting, instrumental conception of language. The history of hermeneutics had been its history of going astray; "…as a falling away from the true and original meaning of hermeneutics."[398] Heidegger paved the way to the rehabilitation of hermeneutics. With him, hermeneutics was to turn back to its integrative task to interpret *Dasein* to itself.[399]

5.2.2. Heidegger and the Ontological Turn in Hermeneutics

By Heidegger, a "*development of phenomenology into hermeneutics*"[400] was embarked on. Phenomenology was to turn into the *hermeneutics of Dasein* as the central problem to be tackled.[401] Heidegger approached to hermeneutics in a polemical way to Dilthey. He radicalized Dilthey's understanding as a category of life into an existential category.[402] As presented in *Being and Time*, everything turned on the hermeneutics of existence.[403] Understanding, conceptualized by

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[397] Park, p.75.

[398] Schmidt, p.54.

[399] Ibid, p.55.

[400] Bübner, p.22.

[401] Ibid, p.25.

[402] Mueller-Vollmer, Kurt (1994). (Ed., Intro. and Notes) *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present*. Continuum, New York. p.215.

[403] Bübner, p.30.

Dilthey turned into what Gadamer calls a "universal philosophical concept."[404] Hermeneutics, rather than a set of rules and methodology to be followed in distinct human sciences, had to be understood as "…an original attitude towards the peculiar structure of the *Dasein*. … The essential character of human existence -to constitute a world and to understand Being- forces philosophy directly towards hermeneutics."[405] Hermeneutics envisaged by Dilthey as the methodological hope for the human sciences to attain legality is given up by Heidegger. Hermeneutics developed by him "…is not a methodology of the human sciences, but the quest for an understanding of what the human sciences are in truth beyond their methodical self-consciousness…"[406] The domain of hermeneutics extends to the existence itself. Hermeneutics is understood as the elaboration of the forestructure of existence. This elaboration relies inherently on interpretation.

Descartes had mistakenly understood Being as an object for the mind.[407] The disinterested, purified point of view necessitated for such an objectivization "...can be thought to be stemming from Plato's *ideas* and consummated in scientific endeavors."[408] Accordingly, mind is essentially separate from the body. Supposedly, understanding is an act of mind that is mathematically structured, clearly separated from the world, and transparent to itself. Understanding envisaged as the inquiry of mind into itself, is understood as reflection. Therefore, allegedly, if the mind can isolate itself from the distortive, external factors in the world, it can fulfill its task for the genuine understanding of *Sein*.

Heidegger reverses this reflective conception of understanding and its founding distinctions. He frees understanding from subjectivity and reflexivity. Existence is *ek-sistence*; it surmounts the allegedly distinct borders of the subject and intends

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[404] Gadamer 1976a, p.49.

[405] Bübner, p.29.

[406] Bübner, pp.53-54.

[407] Günok, p.16.

[408] Ibid, p.2.

towards the world. Parallel to the intentionality of consciousness, existence as the mode of Being of *Dasein* finds itself as *inderweltsein*.

> Heidegger changes the spelling of the word *existence* into *ek-sistence* in order to emphasize that there lies the meaning 'to be out' in the "ex-" of existence. By this move, Heidegger rends human being off from the "I Thing" in which it is imprisoned and put it into the "world" again.[409]

Being is not in the mind, it is in the world.[410] Whenever we inquire into the fundamental question, Being, our questioning is inescapably undertaken from within Being itself. Being cannot be exhausted by consciousness, for any question of Being is undertaken from within it. Consciousness is already immersed into and encompassed by Being. Consciousness cannot apprehend Being fully; "…Being cannot be subjected to any ontological investigation as long as it is envisaged as an object'."[411] *Dasein* is already immersed and thrown into the world. *Inderweltsein* is not a property of *Dasein*. It finds *Sein* inherently and unavoidably disclosed as Being-for-me. *Dasein* is always *Da* and *Sein* always *is as*.

Originally, world is not encountered as something "present-at-hand," objectified, static and separated from *Dasein*. Rather than such a theoretical one, the encounter of *Dasein* with the entities in the world occurs as "ready-to-hand"[412] for Heidegger. In this primordial encounter, entities are presented in an equipmental whole. Entities are provided in a context in which they are meaningful and already embedded. An object is unfolded as already appropriated for a distinct task. The more we deal with the objects in accordance with this "in-order-to" structure, says Heidegger, the more "unveiledly" we encounter with them.[413] This form of "unveiling" is, as a structure of *preinterpretedness*, handed down over history.

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[409] Ibid, p.30.

[410] [*Sein ist inderwelt, nicht indervernunft.*]

[411] Günok, p.24.

[412] Ibid, pp.17-18.

[413] Ibid, p.20; Heidegger, Martin (1962). *Being and Time*. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Trans.) New York: Harper and Raw. (Original work published in 1927). p.98.

I *find* the world as already unfolded to me with a pre-given meaning and in a preestablished form. The encounter of mine with the world has a mood – a form in which it is presented in a distinct structure. This means that *Dasein* is in a mood or another one. *Dasein* is already immersed into world, and it has encountered with the world "as" something. The encounter of the consciousness with the world occurs in one or another "as" structure. Moodless *inderweltsein* is not possible. Whenever consciousness intends to an object (or to itself), the object [*noema*] is found presented in a texture. This preconscious familiarity of *Dasein* with the world is understanding. Understanding does not belong to the subject. It is *the anonymous texture between the world and existence*. Thus, it is always historical. "Understanding is itself not to be thought of so much as an act of the subjectivity, but as an insertion into a process of tradition, in which past and present constantly adjust themselves."[414] It is possible with establishing a nexus with the history. It is never related to just today. Instead, understanding is the merge of the history with today. It is in the form of a dialogue. Understanding is the way *Dasein* meets with the world. It is the Being-in of *Dasein*.

Sein is disclosed to *Dasein* in a certain form; in the *Sein-as* or *Seiende* structure. I find *Sein* already unfolded to me somehow. There is an interpretedness between the world and me. This particular way of interpretation engendered by our intrinsic historicity establishes itself through language and acculturation [*bildung*]. The world is presented to me already as interpreted, as "ready-to-hand." *Interpretation is the transcendental structure of inderweltsein*. Being is already open and interpreted to me. I *find* myself in a world in which I am already preinterpretedly thrown. Finding-oneself-in-the-world [*befindlichkeit*] is always in "finding as" form. This form -handed down by the historicity of *Dasein*- provides the preinterpretation in which *Dasein* cultivates. The mood of *Dasein* as the essence of it is its *ek-sistence*. Existence is always towards something: it is "towardsness." The Being of *Dasein* unfolds itself to me only in this habitat, which means, only

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[414] Bübner, p.61. Bübner quotes the passage above from the 1960 - Tübingen edition of the *Wahrheit und Methode*, p.274f.

with interpretation. *Dasein* finds the world as already preinterpreted. The primordial texture between me and the world is understanding. Besides, any understanding includes interpretation necessarily.

"'*Being*-thrown' means finding oneself in some state-of-mind or other."[415] Understanding is always "to understand as." "In every act of understanding, *Dasein* projects its Being upon possibilities."[416] An attunement to the environment is necessitated, for the world unfolds itself in accordance with this attunement. Being is presented to me always in the Being-as form. This form is shaped by our state-of-mind. *Inderweltsein* means to be in a state-of-mind, in a particular mood.[417] We are never free of moods, on the contrary, always in a mood or in another one.[418]

Understanding is a mode of being. It is intrinsically historical and handed down to us by tradition, language and *bildung*. Understanding opens the world to me as a world; in a particular mode. Hence, understanding is always interpretive understanding. It always includes interpretation. "...[B]ecause *Dasein*'s mode of being is existence, ...hermeneutics in its primary sense is the interpretive understanding."[419] Life means interpretation. The interrelation of the subject with its environment is in the form of interpretation. *Sein* is always *Sosein*. It unfolds always in a distinct structure, never bereft of form. Heidegger's understanding of hermeneutics which -as "the bearing of message and tidings"[420]- makes an explicit reference to Hermes, turns into an existential, phenomenological inquiry into the Being of *Dasein*.[421]

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[415] Günok, p.34.

[416] Ibid, p.41.

[417] Ibid, p.35.

[418] Günok, p.36; Heidegger 1962, p.175.

[419] Schmidt; p.62.

[420] Schmidt, p.85; Heidegger, Martin (1971). "A Dialogue on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer." In *On the Way to Language*. Peter D. Hertz (Trans.) New York: HarperCollins. p.29.

[421] Ibid, p.62.

> The methodological meaning of the phenomenological description is *interpretation*. The logos of the phenomenology of the *Dasein* has the character of *hermeneuein*… Phenomenology of the *Dasein* is *hermeneutics*…[422]

Heidegger's conception of understanding and rehabilitation of hermeneutics as an ontological interrogation would be revolutionary for the literature of hermeneutics. Nevertheless, his main concern was Being and the primary problems he dealt with were generally ontological. Hence his focus on hermeneutics was extraordinary, but indirect and secondary. It was with his student, Gadamer, that the hermeneutical implications of Heidegger's ontology were developed and culminated in a comprehensive hermeneutical theory. By Gadamer, the ontological shift with all its hermeneutical implications and problems is to be fully manifested. Gadamer was the important figure who devoted his career to develop the phenomenological-philosophical hermeneutics and to tackle its manifold problems.

5.2.3. Gadamer: Universality of Hermeneutics

Heidegger's conception of temporal *Dasein* has pointed that understanding does not belong to the subject like one of his behaviors. On the contrary, understanding is a mode of Being of *Dasein*. For this reason, understanding is already in the play in a transcendental level for *Dasein*. It is comprehensive and universal.[423] The possibility of this universal prestructure of *Dasein* is the main focus of Gadamer. In *Wahrheit und Methode*, Gadamer contends with the Kantian question "how is understanding possible." Gadamer identifies that understanding is the fundamental structure of *Dasein*'s primordial contextuality, *Mitsein*, into which *Dasein* is inherently embedded. In this sense, life means to *understand interpretively*. Understanding is in the form of "understanding as," hence interpretation is omnipresent in every experience.

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[422] Bübner, p.27. (Bübner quotes the 1957 - Tübingen edition of *Sein und Zeit* p.37.)

[423] Gadamer 1991, p.xxx. (Translator's note in the preface.)

The ontological turn in hermeneutics is cultivated by Gadamer and crystallized with all its implications. Hence, the similarities and differences of phenomenological hermeneutics with my research subject, Ibn al-ʿArabī, is more conspicuous and clear in Gadamer's hermeneutics. Therefore, the hermeneutics of Gadamer will be introduced and comparatively elaborated with that of Ibn al-ʿArabī in the following two chapters.

Along with his contenion with the Kantian question, "how is understanding possible," Gadamer provides an extensive review of the former ideas presented on the issue. One of those figures with whom Gadamer faces up with, and Heidegger approached critically is Wilhelm von Humboldt. Humboldt envisaged understanding as a result of the human nature. Human beings have, accordingly, a linguistic nature. Consequently, Humboldt claimed that "[l]anguage is the formative organ of thought."[424] Heidegger's criticism to this understanding is that it relies on the illusion that language is our own. Heidegger's conception of existence as *ek-sistence* followed by Gadamer serves to the aim to emancipate language from the I-thing to Being's unfolding of *Dasein*. Gadamer states, "[l]anguage is not just one of man's possessions in the world; rather, on it depends the fact that man has a world at all."[425] The conscious encounter of *Dasein* with the world is linguistical, it happens in the language. "Language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells."[426] Language permeates everything, for understanding is linguistical and interpretive. Understanding as our primordial relation to the world and to human beings is universal and of irreducibly *linguistic* character.[427]

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[424] Von Humboldt, Wilhelm (1994). "The Nature and Confirmation of Language." In Kurt Mueller-Vollmer (Ed., Intro. and Notes) *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present*. Continuum, New York. p.100.

[425] Gadamer 1991, p.443.

[426] Schmidt, p.83; Heidegger, Martin (1993). "Letter on Humanism." In *Basic Writings*. 2nd revision and expanded edition. David F. Krell (Ed.) New York: HarperCollins. p.217.

[427] Bübner, p.56.

Due to the universality of understanding, Dilthey's distinction between *erklären* and *verstehen* is destructed in favor of the latter. The dichotomy of nomothetic-idiographic methods, i.e., the allegedly mutually exclusive distinction of *erklären* and *verstehen* that culminates in the *geisteswissenschaften - naturwissenschaften* dichotomy is tried to be surpassed by Gadamer. Accordingly, "…understanding and explaining frequently or always intermesh. The gross dualism of methods is an illusion willingly sustained by both sides in the polemics."[428] *Verstehen* is already there in all experience in the world. It is also required for *erklärung* and any epistemological inquiry. Hermeneutics cannot be bound with *geisteswissenschaften*, because the distinction of *geisteswissenschaften – naturwissenschaften* that relies on the distinction between *erklären* and *verstehen* is surpassed. Interpretation is not a method for *geisteswissenschaften*. It underpins any epistemological question as the fundamental ontological structure of *inderweltsein*. Understanding, which is always interpretive, is the universal condition of all experience.

Language the primordial form of understanding is handed down to us by history. It means an evolutionarily selective, long historical tradition of words and thought patterns into that we are born. Language is a heritage, which includes interpretation. Besides, language molds the prestructure of unfolding of the world to *Dasein*. Being discloses itself to me in the boundaries of and in accordance with language. "The place where Being and man encounter each other … [is] *language*."[429] Understanding happens always within language. "Every human mode of behavior, to the extent that it is meaningful, has a linguistic foundation."[430] The world discloses itself so far as it is linguistical. Thus, language attains with Heidegger and Gadamer its importance which it has lost by Husserl's

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[428] Ibid, p.52.

[429] Ibid, p.47.

[430] Ibid, pp.56-57.

forgetfulness towards language. Being as unfolded to me, i.e., Being-for-me is encompassed by language.

> Thus, hermeneutics, as a *philosophical theory of understanding*, is as it were the new "*prima philosophia.*" It opens our eyes to "a universal ontological structure, that is, the fundamental condition of everything to which understanding can in general direct itself. *Being that can be understood is language.*"[431]

Understanding, which is linguistical, includes necessarily history. *Wirkungsgeschichtliche bewusstsein* [historically effected consciousness] is not only a normative concept. It also expresses the necessarily historicality of consciousness in its wide sense. "*Understanding is, essentially, a historically effected event.*"[432] Consciousness and understanding are necessarily historical.

Another implication of the historicity of language and understanding is their finitude. The spoken language never exhausts the limits of the language. We find ourselves embedded and born into a language that is a particular tradition of interpretation. The world unfolds itself in the borders of language. With Wittgenstein's famous words, "[t]he limits of my language [*die grenzen der Sprache*] mean the limits of my world."[433] Dissimilar from the implication of Wittgenstein, these borders are not strict and reducible to the empirical for Gadamer. Rather, they are flexible, shape-shifting horizons. The linguisticality and historicity of understanding points to its finitude. We have limits to our understanding. There particular, preestablished ways of unfolding the world to us that display our horizons. Horizon, as the whole of inherited prejudices, shows the preliminary limits of our understanding. Everyone with her/his peculiar historicity has a horizon of her-/himself. Everyone has her/his unique historicity, acculturation and language; i.e., her/his own set of primordial inheritances. For Gadamer, understanding is a fusion of these horizons [*horizontverschmelzung*]. It "happens" as a dialogue in which the selves interact and change themselves. In the fusion of horizons which is called "understanding," selves are risked and the object

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[431] Ibid, p.57. (Reference to 1960 - Tübingen edition of *Wahrheit und Methode*, p.450.)

[432] Gadamer 1991, p.300.

[433] See Wittgenstein, p.150.

– subject distinction is transgressed. *Dasein* is inherently "horizontal." *Dasein* without horizon is not possible, as we are embedded in the world. The world is inherently unfolded to us, but always in a certain manner of interpretation. Its unfolding is in a particular "as" structure handed down to us by history that also determines the limits of our horizons. Our horizons are established by our historicity that is transmitted to us through language and acculturation.

Heidegger determines three fore-structures of understanding that are v*orhabe* [fore-having], *vorsicht* [fore-sight], and *vorgriff* [fore-conception].[434] The opening of *Dasein* to the world is conditioned with those three prestructures only through which we encounter the world.[435] Gadamer unifies these three structures in the concept "*vorurteil*" ["prejudice"].[436] This is a provocative conception for it challenges and purges the conventional negative connotations of the concept. Gadamer identifies a "prejudice of prejudice" inherited from the Enlightenment and he challenges this perennial apprehension. "*Understanding ... is an event of tradition*, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated."[437] Understanding cannot be separated from the historical heritage of *Dasein*, for it necessarily includes its prejudices, productive or futile. Prejudices include the fore-structures of the individual. They are the sedimentation of history as brought up to day. Prejudices are the fore-structures, the necessary conditions of understanding, which happens always in a definite "as" structure. We understand always "as" something, always interpretively. This particular way of interpretation is provided to us through prejudices. "All understanding begins from our prejudices."[438] Prejudices are natural, logical results of our own historicity. "The temporality of understanding discovered in the fore-structures of understanding

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[434] Schmidt, pp.71-72.

[435] Hence, for Heidegger and also his follower Gadamer, a presuppositionless, unbiased interpretation is not possible. See Palmer 1969, pp.135-137.

[436] "Heidegger was interested only by the ontological perspective of hermeneutics Gadamer wants to exceed this conception [of fore-structure of understanding] and to discover the historicity of understanding." (Negru, p.114.)

[437] Gadamer 1991, p.290.

[438] Schmidt, p.101.

implies that all of our prejudices have come from the past. One always stands within tradition(s)."[439] We cannot totally "get rid of" them, the idea and attempt of which is itself a prejudice. Nevertheless, we can try to differentiate the fruitful prejudices from the futile ones. This differentiation is also to be undertaken within a language and a historical heritage. Hence, the hermeneutical circle of Schleiermacher is again at work. Prejudices are not always transparent to the consciousness, for they form our consciousness. They are preconsciously present and generally latent in our daily life. Prejudices are our invisible ingredients functioning in all our *inderweltsein*. To distinguish the productive ones from the other ones is destined to happen in the hermeneutic circle, for there is no escape from them.

As presented by Gadamer, there is an already preestablished harmony, an interpretational texture according to which *Dasein* encounters the world. The fore-structures/prejudices through which the world is disclosed to *Dasein* precede their consciousness of *Dasein*. "The consciousness of being conditioned does not supersede our conditionedness."[440] Therefore, consciousness is already affected by those historical elements. Gadamer exploits a central term to express this fore-structure of consciousness: "*wirkungsgeschichtliche bewusstsein*" ["historically effected consciousness"]. The historically effected consciousness in its broad sense is the description of a de facto position of consciousness. It is inherently historical. Our consciousness of the world, the history, and even our self-consciousness is historical. The encounters of consciousness with them are cultural acts, while culture is also historical. Consciousness is always historically affected.

The title of Gadamer's *magnum opus*, *Truth and Method* is itself dramatic, because truth [*wahrheit*] is presented by Gadamer as something that cannot be found by

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[439] Ibid, p.102.
[440] Gadamer 1991, p.448.

following a method.[441] Hermeneutics is an inquiry into the truth of *ek-sistence* and truth itself belong to *phronesis* rather than to *techne*. While *techne* "…corresponds to the poetical field, …*phronesis* is a medium that helps us to get our bearing in the world of *praxis*…"[442] Therefore, philosophical hermeneutics

> …shows how derivative and secondary is all methodical knowledge in the form of scientific specialization. One method ought not to be played off against another, nor should any dogmatic methodological point of view be presented as superior to another.[443]

There is no predetermined way, no "royal path" leading to truth. For Gadamer, finding of the truth belongs to "not-method" ["*nicht-methode*"]. Alternative to the coherence and correspondence theories of truth, Gadamer, following Heidegger, envisages truth in its Platonic sense, as *a-letheia*; as "un-concealment." Truth of the text is what discloses itself in it to the reader. This unconcealment has no method as it belongs to *phronesis* rather than *techne*.[444] "There are no universal principles at disposal in this field, rather one should behave in a particular situation according to the general rules. … Practical knowledge cannot be developed as methodical science."[445] For, there is no well-defined, preestablished method to read a text, to perform an exhibition, to write a love poem, to ask a question or to inquire into Being.[446] Hermeneutics deals with what discloses itself non-methodically. It is an existential positioning belonging to the practical realm, not reducible to a set of theoretical prescriptions.

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[441] "The title is thus not to be mistaken for an attempt to provide a method for the discovery of truth; indeed, any method is almost surely to lead one to the opposite of truth, at least the truth of the humanities which is not to be confined to formulas." (Abulad, p.17.)

[442] Dobrosavljev, Duska (2002). "Gadamer's Hermeneutics As Practical Philosophy." *Philosophy, Sociology and Psychology.* Vol.2, No 9. p.606.

[443] Bübner, p.53.

[444] For the ancient distinction revived by Gadamer, see Roy and Starosta, p.7. See also Rockmore, Tom (1997). "Gadamer, Rorty and Epistemology as Hermeneutics," *Laval theologique et philosophique*, Vol.53, No.1. p.123.

[445] Dobrosavljev, p.606.

[446] "There is no such thing as a method of learning to ask questions, of learning to see what is questionable." (Gadamer 1991, p.365.)

Gadamer conceives "…interpretation as a process by means of which the past continues to exert its influence. He connects interpretation in this way very closely with the past."[447] Thanks to the omnipresence of understanding that is necessarily interpretive, hermeneutics is claimed to be universal by Gadamer. Concerning the realm of hermeneutics, not merely written texts but also Being itself is at stake, because Being is what presents itself only in language. Gadamer sees interpretation together with understanding as a transcendental structure of *inderweltsein*. "To be" means "to be understanding interpretively." The world unfolds itself to us according to our preestablished approach. The unfolding is in harmony with one's form of "letting it show itself" that is inherited from the history via language and *bildung*. Hermeneutics is not a methodical discipline for empirical inquiries. It is the questioning of Being itself, which transgresses method and is an "heir of practical philosophy."[448] In this sense, hermeneutics is universal.

In this part, Gadamer's understanding of hermeneutics is tried to be clarified in the most abbreviated and analytic way. Gadamer's position in comparison with Ibn al-'Arabī's hermeneutics will be further illuminated in what follows.

5.3. Ibn al-'Arabī's Hermeneutics

I have pointed to the salient aspect of Ibn al-'Arabī that any different manner of reading and interpreting is warmly welcomed by him. "…[A]ny interpretation supported by the literal text is valid."[449] To put it in terms of modern hermeneutics, Ibn al-'Arabī accepts any interpretation in the wide boundaries of the grammatical interpretation. The only criterion for an interpretation to be correct is to have sense with respect to the grammar of that language. There is no other delimiting criterion or further limit for an interpretation to be correct. In the wide borders of the grammatical "garden" of the language, one is free to roam between different ways

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[447] Bübner, p.61.

[448] Dobrosavljev, p.610

[449] Chittick 1989, p.243.

of reading. The realm of hermeneutics is in Ibn al-ʿArabī as wide as possible. This wideness is both vertical and horizontal. First, hermeneutics is horizontally infinite since it has an endless realm application as worldliness means to be interpreting for Ibn al-ʿArabī. The phenomenal world requires interpretation because it is textual. Thus, interpretation is an existential act ubiquitous in all worldly experience. Secondly, Ibn al-ʿArabī's hermeneutics is also vertically as wide as possible, in the sense that it is deconstructively pluralist. His hermeneutics is set for the emancipation of any different way of reading and interpreting the text. The world, which is textual and always novel, is to be read in endlessly different ways. The text as the temporal unfolding of Being has to present always something new to the reader. Any reading in any instance comes with a novel meaning. One has to deconstruct the current interpretation and try to understand what novel is brought by Hermes.

To develop a genuine understanding of Ibn al-ʿArabī's hermeneutics, I will firstly distinguish what "interpretation" means for him. "Interpretation" is met by two words in Arabic, which mean totally different things for Ibn al-ʿArabī. Crystallizing the distinction will enable me to delineate the salient aspects and the meaning of interpretation in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought. Finally, I will point to textual evidences and exemplify some applications of his hermeneutics.

5.3.1. *Ta'wīl* and *Ta'bīr*

> There is nothing more harmful …
> than to interpret (*ta'wīl*) things.[450]

There are two common words in Arabic which can be rendered to English as "interpretation." When starting to elaborate Ibn al-ʿArabī's hermeneutics, these two concepts must be identified and distinguished because they -*ta'wīl* and *ta'bīr*- have totally different connotations for Ibn al-ʿArabī.

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[450] Ibid, p.269.

Ta'wīl means, literally, "to take back to the original," "to return" or "regress." Under the name of *ta'wīl*, the text is interpreted in accordance to the tradition and to what is called the "literal meaning." For Ibn al-'Arabī, it has a negative connotation as *ta'wīl* does not belong to the originality of the reader. Instead, *ta'wīl* is to follow the authority of reason in interpretation. However, as Ibn al-'Arabī reminds, reason is not something free from its context, tradition and the desires of one's own. "Reason is the tool of the theologians and philosophers who insist on interpreting the revealed texts in keeping with their own presuppositions."[451] Hence, *ta'wīl* turns to interpret the text in accordance with one's own desires rather than with what the text presents. In the name of *ta'wīl*, the clearly expressed parts of the text are taken as allegorical and allegorical parts are held to be literal. It is to explain away what does not fit into the preconceived ideas of the interpreted. One follows her/his own desires and just dogmatically accepts the interpretation handed down to her/him.

Corbin in various places attributes the word *ta'wīl* to Ibn al-'Arabī.[452] Nevertheless, the concept has a generally negative connotation for Ibn al-'Arabī. He appears to have a critical approach to *ta'wīl*. Accordingly, instead of letting the text present itself, *ta'wīl* is to control it through the power of reason. As an attempt to explain away, *ta'wīl* is to fit the text into historical reason and to shape it in accordance with the historical approach to the text.

For Ibn al-'Arabī, in contrast with *ta'wīl*, one has to let the text unfold itself in any form and with infinitely different meanings. One has to be shaped by the encounter with the text rather than shaping the text. Instead of establishing a judging standard, which is necessarily historical, "…man must allow himself to be judged,

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[451] Ibid, p.193.

[452] Ibid, p.199.

Chittick claims that Corbin, through ascribing this term to Ibn al-'Arabī's hermeneutics, introduces him mistakenly as a Shi'ite character.

shaped, and formed by"[453] the text. The text demands courtesy and openness towards it so that it unfolds itself to the reader/interpreter. There is no guarantee for the text to present itself anyway: "…success is never assured."[454] No academic background, methodical knowledge or linguistical training does "guarantee access to the book."[455]

The second concept in Arabic for interpretation is *ta'bīr*. *Ta'bīr* is derived from the root *'br*, which means to "traverse," "to cross" and "to pass." This is the term Ibn al-'Arabī exploits with a positive connotation. What we have to understand from the word "interpretation" is "*ta'bīr*" that is commonly used in manifold ways. Through *ta'bīr*, not only the texts, but also imaginations and the phenomena are to be interpreted. *Ta'bīr* is used for all of them. The way of interpreting in the case of *ta'bīr* is to *traverse* what is visible and try to *pass* to the invisible of the text, of the imagination or phenomenon.

5.3.2. Ibn al-'Arabī's Hermeneutics

According to Ibn al-'Arabī, the relation of the subject with the world is an interpreter-text relationship. As the possible things [*mumkināt*] are temporal and infinite, this text turns out to an endless one. Possible things have endless forms because the Being temporally unfolded as the world. Besides, possible things have a textual structure. One understands an object in accordance with the way how s/he approaches and tries to read it. Very similar to the phenomenological hermeneutics, Ibn al-'Arabī calls every vision as "interpretation." Any encounter with the world is an encounter with a text that harbors a two-fold impassable density. What is presented to us is to be read and interpreted, like a text. The self, the objects and the text possess the same textual structure; all of them have to be interpreted. All the interpretations of them vary infinitely and open a new aspect of

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[453] Ibid, p.242.

[454] Figal, p.27.

[455] Murata and Chittick, p.xviii.

themselves. All of them share the thickness of meaning which cannot be exhausted by any reading.

Ibn al-'Arabī's understanding of the world as language recalls the medieval conception of "the Book of Nature." Indeed, it is clear that this textual understanding of the phenomena is transmitted to Ibn al-'Arabī from Koran. In the Koran, the idiom "*āya*" appears to refer to the objects. *Āya* means not only "verse," but also "sign." The signs [*āyāt*], in the Koranic context, permeate horizons [*aflāq*] and the selves [*anfās*].[456] The common understanding of the world as the "words of God" is surely transferred to Ibn al-'Arabī. Nevertheless, as scrutinized up to here, this textual conception of the phenomena is also a logical extension of Ibn al-'Arabī's ontology. The intellectual background of this conception seems highly strong more than a dogmatic ontological engagement. Textuality of the phenomenal world appears as a reasonable point his ontology culminates in.

The encounter with the text that extends to the world includes interpretation. World is a text, a primordial language, which needs to be interpreted. What is to be interpreted expands from the written text to the entire phenomenal world. A phenomenon is a text, a primordial language to be understood and interpreted. Interpretation permeates the worldly experience. World presents itself to me only through an interpretive encounter. If I do not interpret the world, I have neither encountered the world nor myself yet.

Interpretation is not a merely rational inquiry. "Hermeneutics is not a rational process, but an encounter with the divine self-disclosure, an opening of the heart toward infinite wisdom."[457] Two complementary faculties of human being, reason and imagination must function together in genuine interpretation. "*Abstraction …*

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[456] Koran 41:53.

[457] Chittick 1989, p.30.

is a characteristic of rational operations."[458] Imagination frees the reader in arriving to novel meanings, while reason fetters her/him by delimitation. They must function together in a genuine interpretation. As a matter of fact, they cannot be separated from each other. There is no pure reason or imagination in the world, rather always a mix in-between.

Chittick summarizes the hermeneutical understanding of Ibn al-ʿArabī in an important passage where he speaks on behalf of Ibn al-ʿArabī. It is a long but crucial quotation that displays Ibn al-ʿArabī's position in a most condensed way.

> I do not object to your interpretations, though I consider them bound and constricted by your limited perspective. And you should not object to my interpretations, since they are supported by the literal text, usually much more so than yours. If you say that my interpretation is wrong, you are saying that God could not have meant that in this verse, and you reach this conclusion through your constricting rational faculty, which would tie God down to your idea of what He is. But God cannot fit into your constrictions. Or rather, though He discloses Himself within them, He also stands infinitely beyond them. … Your interpretation at best is based upon your own understanding of the text. Unveiling allows me to see that your interpretation is also correct in a certain limited way. It is unfortunate that you cannot make the same concession to me. Instead, you prefer to squeeze God into your own mold.[459]

In terms of Schleiermacher's distinction of grammatical and technical interpretation, the only limit for Ibn al-ʿArabī's hermeneutics is the grammatical interpretation. The main reason of the broadness of technical interpretation, in terms of Schleiermacher, is that the mind of the writer, i.e., God is infinite.

> Every sense (*wajh*) which is supported (*iḥtimāl*) by any verse … is intended (*maqṣūd*) by God in the case of that interpreter (*muta'awwil*). For His knowledge encompasses all senses. … Hence, every interpreter correctly grasps the intention of God in that word (*kalima*).[460]

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[458] Murata and Chittick, p.252.

[459] Chittick 1989, p.243.

[460] Ibid, p.244; *Futūḥāt* II 119.21.

In the revealed text, God may intend any meaning. One cannot delimit the meaning to what s/he understands.[461] The writer with an infinite "mind," intends any meaning the reader derives. "…[N]o man of knowledge can declare wrong an interpretation which is supported by the words (*lafẓ*). He who does so is extremely deficient in knowledge."[462]

Thinking in terms of modern hermeneutics, the distinction between object and hermeneutic object (i.e., between *objekt* and *gegenstand*) disappears in Ibn al-ʿArabī's account. *All the objects are hermeneutic objects.*[463] The realm of hermeneutics does not stop at the limits of what is written and spoken. Hermeneutics extends to the phenomenal world that is a primordial expression, because the distinction between *objekt* and *gegenstand* disappears. The phenomena, as the loci of the temporal unfolding of the Being, are in perpetual change. Therefore, the world and the self [*nafs*] (which are essentially textual) are novel in every instance [*nafas*].[464] They are texts which have to present always something new to the reader/interpreter. He claims that "[h]e whose understanding is identical in two successive recitations is losing. He whose understanding is new in each recitation is winning."[465] To "win," Ibn al-ʿArabī compels the limits of language to unveil novel meanings. The thickness of the text allows him to this archeological inquiry. Nevertheless, the real meaning of the text remains always in the deeper, the more and more interior [*bāṭin*].

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[461] For him, "...the differing individual interpretations of scripture (and ultimately, the full variety of intimate beliefs more generally) are a natural, positive result of the profound divine intentions..." (Morris 1990, p.55.) Also see *Futūḥāt* I 392.14-21.

[462] Chittick 1989, p.244; *Futūḥāt* II 119.21.

[463] "...[W]orldly life as a whole becomes hermeneutic object." (Figal, p.29) Figal's hermeneutical stance is not fully identical with that of Ibn al-ʿArabī, because Figal seems to preserve the distinction of *objekt* and *gegenstand*. Nevertheless, as the above sentence displays, their stances are substantially convergent. See Figal, pp.25-30.

[464] The concept "*nafas*" does not only express the essential temporality of *inderweltsein* in Ibn al-ʿArabī. It also underpins his mysticism of letters [*ḥurūf*] which is germane to his hermeneutics. (Uluç, pp.166-178.) In this study, I will not be able to elaborate the position of letters in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought.

[465] Chodkiewicz, p.27; *Futūḥāt* III, p128-129.

> ...[T]he text itself is never touched; it goes on, forever producing meanings without ever revealing itself, in the same sense the Real (*al-ḥaqq*) is the ineffable source of all manifestations without ever actually manifesting himself.[466]

In the Islamic history, different groups and interpretive traditions offered their own interpretation. "Each legitimized themselves and criticized the other through interpretations of the sacred texts of the religion."[467] They have generally accused the other ones with not understanding the text. "Yet all of them walk in the same path"[468] for Ibn al-ʿArabī. All those schools of thought longed for the same aim; to understand the text. All the ways they understood the text were correct, and they received what the text had to present to them for Ibn al-ʿArabī. Theologians have tended to condemn most of things as heresy to the meaning of which they could not access.[469] Rather, one has to refrain from condemning as infidelity [*kufr*] all that one is incapable of understanding.[470]

> ...Ibn ʿArabī, when he examines a legal question, mentions all the responses that have been offered by the different schools of jurisprudence, and if he mentions the one that has his preference, *he validates them all without exception*.[471]

By Ibn al-ʿArabī, we arrive to a totally different hermeneutics which does not fit into the common monist approach. Ibn al-ʿArabī's hermeneutics has a radically pluralist sound.

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[466] Almond, p.72.

[467] Buchman, David (2004). "Structuralism Reconsidered: Ibn al-ʿArabī and Cultural Variation in Muslim Societies." *The Muslim World*, Vol. 94 (Jan.). p.132.

Buchman claims further that there was a shared mode in all these various interpretations. By appealing to the dyadic categorical analysis of Levi-Strauss, Buchman undertakes a structuralist understanding of different Islamic traditions of interpretation. He claims that "...while interpretations were particular to individuals, they remained within a shared framework or mode of interpretation that reflected structuralist theory of how human thought processes are related to cultural behavior." (Buchman, p.132) Nevertheless, the figure who does not fit into the model presented by Buchman is probably the one who is supposedly an example for his model: i.e., Ibn al-ʿArabī. Rather than an example, Ibn al-ʿArabī seems to be a counter-example against the structuralist schema.

[468] Chittick 1989, p.247; *Futūḥāt* I 279.7.

[469] Chodkiewicz, p.21.

[470] Ibid, p.21; *Futūḥāt* II, p.79.

[471] Ibid, pp.56-57.

All different manners of reading are each tying a knot. Ibn al-ʿArabī, to convey this approach, makes the archeology of the concept "belief," which may be translated as "ʿaqīda." The primary and common meaning of the concept ʿaqīda is "contract," "the form of belief," and "the basics of religion." It is derived from the root "ʿaqda," which means "to knot." Any tradition, ʿaqīda or way of interpretation means to knot oneself to a certain manner of reading and understanding. However, the text is vertically thick, i.e., infinitely deep with respect to meaning. Thus, it presents a fertile soil for infinitely different meanings to be derived by the reader/interpreter. Ibn al-ʿArabī not only challenges the limits of language to derive manifold meanings; he tries to come up with just the opposite interpretations to the apparent meaning. His opposite readings to the literal meaning satisfies grammatical conditions. Therefore, no one has the right to falsify them.

After displaying examples of such creative interpretations, he states in the subsequent passage in *Futūḥāt* as follows: "Proceed in a similar manner [to that which precedes] and likewise transpose any characteristic that is worthy of praise."[472] In what follows, it is convenient introduce just a few examples of this practice of challenging the literal reading in favor of emancipating the text.

5.3.3. Some Examples from Ibn al-ʿArabī's Readings

The third bezel of *Fuṣūṣ* is titled *The Wisdom of Exaltation in the Word of Noah*.[473] A motif that exists in different religions is told in this part. In the parable, the ones who did not subordinated to what Noah brought with were drowned in the flood from which only the adherents of Noah were rescued. For Ibn al-ʿArabī, the ones who accredited stubbornly their belief in their gods and turned a deaf ear to Noah's call were in fact the real believers. "Ibn al-ʿArabī interprets the final

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[472] Ibid, p.52; *Futūḥāt* II, p.138.
[473] Ibn al-ʿArabī 1980a, pp.71-81.

drowning of the unbelievers not as just punishment upon the sinful, but as the drowning of saints in the shoreless oceans…"[474] I want to quote that passage from *Fuṣūṣ* that makes an abundant reference to Koran. As a matter of fact, he comes up with just the opposite interpretation with the apparent [*muḥqam*] one:

> *Because of their transgression,*[475] going beyond themselves so that they drowned in the sea of the knowledge of God, which is what is meant by perplexity. *And they were cast into the fire,*[476] which means the same as drowning according to their heirs. *When the seas swell,*[477] where the same verbal root is used to denote the heating of an oven. *Nor will they find any helpers apart from God,*[478] since their helpers are [in essence] nothing other than God and they are annihilated in Him forever.[479]

In this short passage from *Fuṣūṣ*, we observe an abundant reference to the Koran. Nevertheless, all of the verses are unexpectedly interpreted in just the opposite way of the conventional meaning. The seemingly infidels are interpreted as the real believers. He applies to the traditional allegory of the Real as an endless ocean. Then, he interprets their drowning in the flood as being dived in the absolute Reality. Ibn al-ʿArabī's interpretation applied here is an unusual and challenging one that is on the contrary of the conventionally apparent meaning.

A second example may be the attributes Ibn al-ʿArabī exploits for the *malāmī*s. *Malāmiyya* is the most exalted and distinguished group of people for him. Nevertheless, when referring to this group Ibn al-ʿArabī quite systematically exploits the attributes that are ascribed in the Koran to the unbelievers.[480] "They are deaf, dumb, blind, and intellectually deprived. They are deaf, dumb, blind, and irrevocably lost."[481] The "they" is understood conventionally as the unbelievers.

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[474] Almond, p.56.

[475] Koran 71:25.

[476] Koran 71:25.

[477] Koran 81:6.

[478] Koran 71:25.

[479] Ibn al-ʿArabī 1980a, pp.79-80.

[480] Chodkiewicz, p.50.

[481] Ibid, p.50; Ibn al-ʿArabī (1967). *Kitāb al-Tajalliyāt*. O. Yahia (Ed.) p.372.

Nevertheless, Ibn al-ʿArabī refers here to the exalted *malāmī*s. He uses the attributes "deaf, dumb, blind, and irrevocably lost" as positive features of these venerable people. They are deaf and blind, for they see only the God. They are drunk in the presence of Absolute. Ibn al-ʿArabī reverses the conventional meaning by this interpretation and challenges the literal reading for the sake of emacipating the text.

Similarly, the word "infidel" *-kāfir-* describes the exalted sages, *malāmiyya,* for Ibn al-ʿArabī. To support this claim and underpin it grammatically, Ibn al-ʿArabī applies to the etymology of the concept "*kāfir.*" The root "*kfr*" means primarily "to conceal," "to hide." In addition, it also means "to sower," "to cultivate." When a farmer seeds, s/he sowers and cultivates what s/he has disseminated to the soil. Hence, the exalted sages are the ones who *hide*, *conceal* their spiritual stations.[482] "They are the *sowers* who *hide* their seeds in the earth."[483]

The above passages are just tiny examples from Ibn al-ʿArabī's abundant and amazing interpretations of the Koranic verses.[484] His unmatched readings of the Islamic texts are one of the most creative fusions of the horizons of the interpreter and the text one may ever see.[485] He interprets the verses about the heretics to be rather about the real sages. The seemingly humiliating words such as deaf, dumb, blind, unaware, ignorant, etc. are interpreted as the real properties of sages. Even the word "infidel" ["*kāfir*"] is interpreted by Ibn al-ʿArabī in just the opposite way

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Chodkiewicz also reminds that the same usage can be found in the 5th and 73rd chapters of the *Futūḥāt*.

[482] Ibid, p.50.

[483] Ibid, p.50; *Futūḥāt* II p.136. Italics are mine.

[484] Another interesting example for Ibn al-ʿArabī's perplexing hermeneutics is his controversial discussion on the faith of the Pharaoh. The related chapters in the *Fuṣūṣ* have been a bone of contention for a long time, and dozens of commentaries have been written about his account of Pharaoh. As Ernst elaborately analyses, many of those works were "polemical works written for and against his theories." (Ernst, Carl W. (1985). "Controversy over Ibn ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ*: The Faith of Pharaoh." *Islamic Culture* LIX. p.260.)

[485] For a good synopsis of them, see Chodkiewicz, pp.50-53.

of one expects. He challenges the *illusion of clarity* in the text.[486] After a creative process, he comes up with incredible interpretations, which would not only difficult anticipate, but also just the opposite of the conventionally apparent meaning.

5.4. Imagination in Hermeneutics Rehabilitated

> [M]ethod kills the art, especially since art requires a creative spirit.[487]

In Western philosophy, there has been observed a "rediscovery of the importance of imagination."[488] Particularly the human scientists who adhere to phenomenological hermeneutics have recognized and tried to cultivate imagination in human sciences for a century. Corbin and Eliade are two towering figures who adopted imaginative approaches in their studies.[489] Accordingly, understanding as the primordial encounter of man with the world necessarily includes imagination [*einbildungskraft*]. Understanding is something which cannot be understood as decomposed to its parts. Understanding rather necessitates an imaginative, creative faculty through which the perceptive inputs intermesh as giving birth to something novel. It is the name of the faculty "to bridge gaps and make connections."[490] *There is no "pure reason"* ["*reinen vernunft*"], because understanding is always imaginative. Concerning Ibn al-ʿArabī, we observe a spectacular mix of reason and imagination in his interpretation of texts. Imagination is not only a concept necessary to understand to his hermeneutics. But imagination is also a central concept that expresses his approach to our worldliness. Imagination is a

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[486] Any verse held to be clear/literal [*muhkam*] is also allegorical [*mutashhabih*]. In a similar vein, any verse held to be *mutashhabih* is also *muhkam*. Ibn al-ʿArabī knows no preestablished, historical limit to the understanding of the Koran.

[487] Abulad, p.22.

[488] Chittick 1989, p.ix.

[489] See Berger for a good introduction.

[490] Chittick 2007b, p.30.

fundamental concept in Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology. Hence, when dealing with Ibn al-ʿArabī, a particular emphasis has to be devoted to imagination.

As Corbin claims, what needs to be demarcated is that imagination is not tantamount to what is imaginary or *phantasie*. On the contrary, imagination is a peculiar faculty ubiquitously functioning in understanding. As the encounter of man with the world, *understanding is always understanding interpretively*. We have a world "as" a world and this "as" structure is shaped always unavoidably by history. In addition, any experience includes also some different and novel peculiarities to be understood, which renders it an "experience." In any experience we bind some old input with something novel in a creative way. In understanding, we creatively and interpretively fetter the pregiven parts so that something novel emerges. "Understanding arises out of a creative imaginative process of interpretation … and in that sense, all interpretation is an imaginative process which is meaningful and real."[491] Imagination is necessitated both to understand and interpret.[492]

Phenomenological hermeneutics in particular relies on imagination. "The expressive agenda in phenomenological text making wants to encounter and give voice to this imaginal, pre-analytical mode of knowing and being."[493] Phenomenology itself leads us to imagination and to gaze at the objects imaginatively. Only by this way can the phenomena unfold themselves in manifold and novel ways. Without imagination, we cannot inquire into the depths of the world, which is infinitely, both vertically and horizontally thick. Hermeneutics is necessarily an imaginative event. To inquire into what the text tells and to attempt "to illuminate areas hidden to 'objective' analysis,"[494] one needs to approach the

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[491] Berger, p.145.

[492] Ibid, p.148.

[493] Willis, Peter (2004). "From 'The Things Themselves' to a 'Feeling of Understanding': Finding Different Voices in Phenomenological Research." *The Indo-Pasific Journal of Phenomenology*, Vol. 4., Edition 1 (July). p.8.

[494] Berger, p.142.

text in manifold ways. The text has to be let creatively to speak in various ways. Phenomenological hermeneutics' aim for describing the world as it discloses itself reaches to its climax through imaginative thinking. It is their imaginative content what renders phenomenology and hermeneutics "both an art and a science."[495]

Gadamer writes in *Truth and Method* that imagination is at work most fruitfully "...only when imagination is in free harmony with the understanding–i.e., where it can be productive. This imaginative productivity is not richest where it is merely free..."[496] Imagination reaches to its zenith and to the most fruitful level when it functions together with reason. Instead of roaming alone, imagination must be supported and limited by reason. A scholar is a wo/-man of thought, hence what s/-he needs at most is imagination. "It is imagination (*phantasie*) that is the decisive function of the scholar."[497] Only through imagination can the scholar produce a meaningful integrity of the individual parts of knowledge.

Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and The Invisible* has remained unfinished, but we understand that imagination was a forthcoming issue in it. In Merleau-Ponty's working notes, we observe his plan to develop a "phenomenology of the imaginary"[498] which he envisaged as one of the limits of phenomenology. He understands "…dream starting from the body: as being in the world (*l'etre au monde*) without any body, without 'observation,' or rather with an imaginary body without weight."[499] In dreams, accordingly, we encounter with the world in a way in which our main access to the shared world, i.e., the body is not formed fully. The subject is also anonymous in dreams. "The 'subject' of the dream … is the *one*."[500] Imagination seems to open the doors of a totally different world, which

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[495] Ibid, p.156.

[496] Gadamer 1991, p.46.

[497] Gadamer 1976d, p.12.

[498] Merleau-Ponty 1968, p.229.

[499] Ibid, p.262.

[500] Ibid, p.263.

does not belong to me. In the world opened in via imagination there is content without a full-fledged form.

"Two original personalities, Henry Corbin and Mircea Eliade, have revived a positive notion of the imagination, understood not merely as fantasy but as the scene of an encounter with other worlds."[501] Mircea Eliade (a famous representative of Husserlian hermeneutics in social sciences) and Henry Corbin (as a well-known and successful Orientalist and interpreter of Ibn al-ʿArabī who attains a Heideggerian hermeneutics) are the towering examples who use phenomenological hermeneutics in their research in social sciences and humanities. Following phenomenological hermeneutics, they argue that there is an abyss between perception and reason. Therefore, hermeneutic creativity lies in imagination the locus of which is this gap between the two. Corbin emphasizes that the imaginal world, *mundus imaginalis* must be distinguished from the imaginary.

> The imagination accomplishes at every instant a "new creation" and ... the image is the recurrence of creation.... Without imaginative presence… there would be no manifest existence, that is, no theophany, or in other words, no Creation.[502]

5.4.1. Imagination in Ibn al-ʿArabī's Hermeneutics

> He who does not know the status of imagination is totally devoid of knowledge.[503]

"Few notions are more central to Ibn al-ʿArabī's conceptual arsenal than *khayāl* ('imagination' or 'image')."[504] He is famous with his imaginative hermeneutics. Arguably, he shares a familiar hermeneutic methodology with Occidental phenomenology, which is pointed by different scholars. Nevertheless, imagination

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[501] Berger, p.141.

[502] Corbin, p.244.

[503] Akkach, p.98; *Futūḥāt* II, p.313.

[504] Chittick 2002, p.54.

does not have just a hermeneutical meaning for Ibn al-ʿArabī. On the contrary, imagination is fundamentally an ontological concept that expresses the real ontological status of man and the world. Similar to imagination, world exists never objectively. Rather, it is unfolded always subjectively. Phenomena appear to me as existing, but I can never confirm or verify this appearance. Imagination coincides with the phenomenal world and the subject in their ontological structure. "The things pertain to 'imagination,' since they are neither existent nor nonexistent."[505] In the chapter devoted to Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology, we have elaborated this ontological coincidence of imagination and the world. World is ontologically an imagination for Ibn al-ʿArabī.

Along with this ontological coincidence, imagination is also a central faculty of human being tying her/him with the world. Imagination is the faculty of human being that frees what reason delimits. Reason and imagination are two essential faculties of human being. They are two complementary aspects of human being which are in tension.[506] Reason is the faculty that functions as delimiting, while imagination is the faculty which frees what is perceived. Similar to Gadamer's assertion of imagination, they work best together rather than alone. Ibn al-ʿArabī claims in an exquisite passage that imagination is the intrinsic faculty of human being, for they coincide ontologically.

> Everyone who perceives through one of the internal or external
> faculties in man imagines. … Man never stays safe from
> imagination, if he apprehends anything, since his configuration

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[505] Chittick 1989, p.205.

[506] Chittick 2007b, p.31.

Reason focuses on the "rational" separation between the Being and being, while imagination intends to the "imaginative" immanence of the Being in the beings. There is a creative, dialectical tension between the two faculties of human being, which are two poles never bereft of the other in the world. These two poles are today represented in the Islamic world by the degenerate Sufism and fundamentalist movements. What Ibn al-ʿArabī emphasizes is the ability to bind these two functions to each other. These two faculties are to function in the best way if they are together. *Their freedom is in their captivity*. Both reason and imagination open the same *worldhood*. Ibn al-ʿArabī conveys this convergence of the two faculties with the analogy of vision. One has to "see with two eyes," which means to unify these two faculties. Two eyes do not see different things. Instead, they gaze at the same phenomenon and complement each other. Reason and imagination are in this creative dialectic for Ibn al-ʿArabī.

demands this. … So look how hidden and strong imagination is when it permeates man! He can never be safe from imagination and fantasy. How can he be safe? *The rational faculty cannot escape his humanity*.[507]

As clearly stated in this charming passage, *thinking is always thinking imaginatively*. Imagination interrogates and partakes into reasoning which can never be tackled as something pure. "…[E]ven rational perception is governed by imagination,"[508] which means that there is no "pure reason" ["*reinen vernunft*"]. Reason is always intermeshed with imagination. "Man can never escape the property of imagination."[509] Imagination, together with the faculty of reason, meets me with the world. Vision harbors imagination. Touching is to touch imaginatively. When I hear, I hear always "something," which is presented to me through imagination. In Kantian sense, thinking is never bereft of imagination. "The propositional mode of knowing is based on the deeper less known imaginal mode."[510] In any way, I am immersed into imagination and defined through it.

In our dreams, we encounter with the ideas that attain a form in our imagination. In my imagination, when I see a beautiful lady in a white toilette and an apple in her hand, what I encounter is a set of symbols "dressed" in the form of a lady, an apple, and whiteness. My imagination is a *barzakh* which lies in between the ideal and the perceptual; i.e., the visible and the invisible. In this sense, it coincides with the world. The world is also a betweenness of the visible and the invisible, of the existence and non-existence. "How wide is the Presence of Imagination! Within it becomes manifest the existence of the impossible thing. Or rather, nothing becomes manifest within it in verification except the existence of the impossible thing."[511] This betweenness corresponds to the status of imagination.[512]

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[507] Chittick 1989, p.339; *Futūḥāt* IV 420.28. Italics are mine.

[508] Ibid, p.339.

[509] Ibid, p.339.

[510] Willis, p.8.

[511] Ibid, p.124; *Futūḥāt* II 312.4.

[512] "Know that you yourself are an imagination. And everything that you perceive and say to yourself, 'this is not me,' is also an imagination. So that the whole world of existence is imagination within imagination." (Akkach, p.103; Ibn al-'Arabī 1980b, p.104.)

Ibn al-ʿArabī claims that

> [t]he sensory thing cannot be a meaning, nor can the meaning be a sensory thing. But the Presence of Imagination -which we have called the Meeting Place of the Two Seas-[513] embodies meanings and subtilizes the sensory thing.[514]

Imagination gives the form to the ideal.[515] Being unfolds itself through imagination. To understand what Hermes brings to me by the text/phenomenon/imagination, I have to interpret the symbols and transgress to the invisible of the visible. The meaning of the imagination I see can be that a woman wants to give me an apple and I simply refused it as I was not hungry. This interpretation is an alternative of reading of what I saw. It is shallow reading, and the imagination I saw is able to tell more to me. To access to this "more," I have to interpret the symbols I saw in the dream. The apple may symbolize "knowledge." The woman may symbolize "love," or may also be something dangerous. In any case, even in the literal reading of a text, even in the shallowest understanding of an imagination, or in the basic encounter with the world, I am interpreting. Imagination/text/phenomenon necessarily needs interpretation in the most basic level to be encountered.[516] My encounter with the world harbors interpretation and imagination.

An interpretation deprived of imagination culminates in a corrupt interpretation which remains on the surface of the text. Ibn al-ʿArabī criticizes the ones who explain away an imagination that necessarily needs interpretation. Those who claim that an imagination is "corrupt" cannot access to the deeper meaning of what they see. They are ignorantly standing aside the ocean presented to them.

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[513] Which means, *barzakh*. There is also a reference to the Koranic verse, see Koran 18:60.

[514] Chittick 1989, p123; *Futūḥāt* III 361.5.

[515] Ibid, p.123; *Futūḥāt* III 361.5.

[516] Palmer's comprehensive analysis displays that Ricoeur's definition of "hermeneutics" in his *l'interpretation* (1965) converges with Ibn al-ʿArabī's which is presented here. In Ricouer's account, "dream is the text," as "[t]he object of interpretation, i.e., the text in the very broadest sense, may be the symbols in a dream or even the myths and symbols of society or literature." (Palmer 1969, p.43.) As the world is a set of symbols, a dream in Ibn al-ʿArabī, the world enters into the borders of hermeneutics.

"…[T]here is no corrupt imagination whatsoever; on the contrary, all of it is sound."[517] What is corrupt is not what they encounter, rather their approach to it. The illusion of the shallowness must be surmounted. One has to remind oneself that the phenomenon what is encountered is never exhaustible. It is never just merely what appears. "The meanings become corporealized in the Presence of Imagination…"[518] The invisible of the phenomena is presented in the form provided by imagination. It forms the invisible and de-forms the visible. The world unfolds itself to us through imagination. It is the intermediary between Being and its self-disclosures in the form of beings.[519]

When interpreting, which is the mode of encountering with the world for Ibn al-ʿArabī, we necessarily have to imagine. Interpretation bereft of imaginative freedom is incomplete. Human reasoning "provides the indispensable checks and balances,"[520] along with controlling and guiding imagination. *Imagination imaginates* and *reason reasons*. Both faculties have complementary tasks. They open the world to the subject via their creative tension.

5.5. *World as an Imagination* – Hermeneutically

At the end of the fifth chapter of the study, I want to shortly summarize what we have derived concerning the hermeneutics of Ibn al-ʿArabī.

The elaboration of his ontology has displayed that the world has a textual structure. Phenomena compose a set of symbols which unfold the same shared world. The world presents itself as a text: it is textual. As a text, it necessarily needs interpretation, which yields the universality of hermeneutics in Ibn al-ʿArabī. The phenomena require to be interpreted ceaselessly. The relation of wo-

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[517] Chittick 1989, p.123; *Futūḥāt* III 361.5.

[518] Ibid, p.126; *Futūḥāt* II 311.12.

[519] See Akkach, p.98.

[520] Chittick 2007b, p.30.

/man with the world and with her/himself is an interpreter-text interrelationship. Without interpretation, we have no access to the world. The world is always "as-a-world"; always a world which is interpreted in a particular mode. By Ibn al-ʿArabī, interpretation becomes a universal, existential act, instead of an epistemological one.

I contend that a very good abbreviation for Ibn al-ʿArabī's hermeneutics is, again, his claim that "the world is an imagination." Just as an imagination requires interpretation (which is inherently imaginative), the world itself is also in need of interpretation. The world unfolds itself always as "a world-as," i.e., only with interpretation. It is a wide and deep, which means, "thick" text. It can be read differently in every second owing to the temporal self-unfolding of Being. In every second, Hermes brings novel meanings. The world has to be interpreted ceaselessly, because it exists through interpretation just as an imagination. Besides, every interpretation is an imaginative interpretation. There is no pure reason in the world.

Imaginations, not only in their depth, but also even as they appear, present themselves through interpretation. Imagination is a web of symbols. Any approach to it includes interpretation and no interpretation can consume the meanings which may be derived from it. Similarly, we cannot ever exhaust the experience of any phenomenon. The phenomenal world presents itself always as novel and with an unending density. I can never exhaust the world with a single interrogation. The world escapes from the interpretation of mine. Nevertheless, my interpretation presents the world to me, as a "world-for-me." An imagination is always an imagination for me; it depends to my interpretation through that it unfolds itself. My imagination discloses itself to me in accordance and only with my interpretation, which never consumes its thickness. Similarly, through interpretation, *the world unveils itself to me by its veiling*.[521]

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[521] "A *veil* is something that separates, that prevents seeing and understanding: It can be a piece of cloth hanging down, a wall, a bush, a cloud, a facial expression, night. It can be the human body

In these ways, the world is hermeneutically tantamount to an imagination. "World is an imagination" is a fruitful abbreviation of Ibn al-ʿArabī's hermeneutics.

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itself... The veil can also be light. ... It prevents vision." (Murata and Chittick, p.253.) Due to their twofold thickness, every encounter with the phenomena means a simultaneous veiling of them. The "veilness" of the phenomena provides the unrivalled distance that is necessary for hermeneutics. A veil is what "...separates us from the other, that which prevents our understanding of the other." (Ibid, p.254.) This separation is what makes understanding possible. Interpretation turns out to an unveiling, to a phenomenological task. *Unveiling*, which closes the gap and "removes separation," turns out to the task of Hermes. *Phenomenology and hermeneutics complement each other.*

PART FOUR: COMPARATIVE RESOLUTION

CHAPTER 6

PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS TO BE ENCOUNTERED BY IBN AL-'ARABĪ'S PHENOMENOLOGY OF *WUJŪD* AND UNIVERSAL HERMENEUTICS

In the first two chapters of the thesis, an extensive introduction to the research subject is undertaken. In the third and fourth chapters, the question of Being in Ibn al-'Arabī is elucidated. In the fifth chapter, a general view of his hermeneutics, to which his ontology necessarily led us, is sketched. In this chapter, before starting to the fusion of his ontology and hermeneutics, one has to deal with the general problems that have emerged up to here. The most serious philosophical problems to deal with emerge concerning objectivity for both his ontology and hermeneutics. Ibn al-'Arabī's assertion that "the world is an imagination," as I tried to display, is a thesis that covers both his ontology and hermeneutics. Therefore, the two central problem concerning ontology and hermeneutics find expression in the same assertion. These dual problems are the ontological objectivity, i.e., objective Reality and the hermeneutical objectivity, i.e., objective Truth. In the following pages, we will first deal with this binary problematic concerning objectivity. After having evinced how Ibn al-'Arabī tackles these two problems concerning objectivity, an extended comparison between the hermeneutics of Gadamer and Ibn al-'Arabī will be inquired.

The ontological and hermeneutical positions of Ibn al-'Arabī, as the analysis undertaken hitherto has displayed, carry certain resemblances with Occidental phenomenology. We will deal with these ontological and hermeneutical problems in comparison with Occidental phenomenology and phenomenological hermeneutics respectively. In the last fifty years, problems of objectivity in ontology and hermeneutics have been discussed in Western philosophy particularly in connection with and as a criticism towards the ontological turn and phenomenological hermeneutics. Due to this striking convergence in the theses and their anti-theses, I will deal with the dual problematic comparatively. This

comparative study will be contributing to both of these different views from different traditions and times. It will also harbor the potential to elucidate important implications extending from these different theses. Following the analysis of Ibn al-ʿArabī's understanding about reality and truth, a more general comparative study on hermeneutics will be initiated. After the accomplishment of this comparative analysis, I will be entitled to begin to the fusion of Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology and hermeneutics. This fusion will be the task of the seventh chapter. His ontology and hermeneutics will be analyzed together in the seventh chapter. Besides, the implications of this fusion will be brought out as extensive as possible.

6.1. The Ontological Problem: Objective Reality

According to Ibn al-ʿArabī *Sein* unfolds itself always as *Sein*-for-me. It is never present as it is (as *Sein qua Sein*). Hence, Being is not objectively accessible for Ibn al-ʿArabī. We have just a subjective access to it. Ibn al-ʿArabī's maxim that "the world is an imagination" is the most abbreviated way to express this ontological analysis of *seinsfrage*. The world is ontologically an imagination. It is always unfolded in subjective form and its reality is granted only in subjective sense. The world is a dream I have already had: a dream I am thrown into.

This claim for the imaginative identity of the world is a highly skeptical position concerning ontological objectivity. The objective ontological question of "what is there in the world?" remains unanswered. Not only the objectivist foundation of science, but also the problem of other minds arises. If the world is my dream, what about the other minds? Is everyone living in his own dream? Curiously enough, what about the real existence of the world and even of ourselves? There is no objective vantage point from which I can validate my existence objectively. Therefore, the problem of objective Reality is fully manifest in the ontology of Ibn al-ʿArabī.

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A parallel turn against the objectivist ontology was, as I have introduced by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, the focus of phenomenological tradition. Heidegger initiated *Sein und Zeit* with a critique of the presupposition of objective Being, with a *critical reflection on the methodological dogmatism*. Accordingly,

> [t]raditional philosophy regards Being as transcendental universality, analogical oneness by contrast with the diverseness of actual facts. In that way "Being" is objectified and becomes the most universal and still the darkest at the same time.[522]

His review of the ontotheological tradition goes hand-in-hand with a critique of the Aristotelian comprehension of Being. His fundamental ontology and *Daseinsanalysis* enabled him "...to disclose the naiveté of an ontology of the world based on the objectivism of mathematical natural science."[523]

Husserl's Neokantian project of "philosophy as a rigorous science" envisaged to derive the objectivity from the transcendental subjectivity. Allegedly, with the possibility of the fully realized *epoche*, the shared rock bottom of experience, which was introduced by later Husserl as "*lebenswelt*," would be accessible. The central concept "experience" ["*erlebnis*"] here enables us the access to objectivity. Hence, it refers, accordingly, to the primordial shared world to us. *Erlebnis* assumes a central position for the Neokantians because it paves the path towards objectivity.[524] Nevertheless, the main flaw in this picture that Husserl did not realize was, in Gadamer's view, as follows:

> [Husserl] …did not recognize that in the bracketing of all objects in the world … the belief in the world as such … was not also suspended – and that meant precisely that uncontrolled prejudices might slip into the constitutional research that claimed to build up every objective validity by starting with transcendental subjectivity.[525]

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[522] Park, p.77-78.

[523] Gadamer, Hans-Georg (1976c). "The Science of The Life-world." (Original work was published in 1969.) In David E. Linge (Trans. and Ed.) *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p.184.

[524] Gadamer 1991, p.60.

[525] Gadamer 1976c, p.189.

This inaccessibility of the objectivity was the point from which Heidegger's fundamental ontology and Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics would take off.[526] *Epoche* in a full sense is never possible, and the shared world does never unveil itself to me in its objective, "all-naked" state.

The difficulty Gadamer identifies in Husserl is that "…the universal horizon of the life-world also necessarily embraces transcendental subjectivity. As a matter of fact the life-world manifests itself in its subjective and relative structure."[527] In Heidegger's terms, Being is never present as it is; it is always in Being-for-me structure. In unfolds itself with interpretation and in the "as" form. Heidegger and Gadamer participate to Husserl's conception of *lebenswelt* that is the shared rock bottom of experience and temporal unfolding of Being. Nevertheless, they do not agree with the claim that objectivity in ontology (i.e., Reality as it is) can be accessed.

Having this background, I will analyze the problem of objective Reality, i.e., the accessibility of an objectivist, scientist ontology. The question "how does Ibn al-'Arabī and phenomenology tackle this problem" will undergo a comparative analysis in what follows.

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[526] Laverty identifies that "...'phenomenology' and 'hermeneutic phenomenology' are often referred to interchangeably, without questioning any distinction between them." (Laverty, Susan M. (2003). "Hermeneutic Phenomenology and Phenomenology: A Comparison of Historical and Methodological Consideration *ta'bīr* os." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods 2*, Sept., Article 3., p.3.) Nevertheless, as the latter starts from the Heideggerian critique of Husserl, it also ends up with distinct differences in its practical implications. Laverty not only scrutinizes the differences between Husserlian and Heideggerian-Gadamerian phenomenology extensively, she also provides an analytical and elaborate table of differences of the two approaches in the appendix. See Laverty, p.26.

[527] Gadamer 1976c, pp.190-191.

6.1.1. Ibn al-'Arabī on Objective Reality

> She's witnessed everywhere, but
> she's never shown her *face*.[528]

Ibn al-'Arabī assumes a highly skeptical position concerning the question of objectivity in ontology. There is nothing in the world as "objective Reality." To be able to speak of Being as it is, I had to *escape* from my self and from my worldliness. Rather, I am defined with my thrownness; with the immersion into the world and to my self. *There is no escape from my* self. Thus, I am a veil between myself and the objective Reality. Objectivity belongs to the noumenal realm.

However, if we cannot speak of "what is there" objectively, there remains nothing in hand to cultivate epistemology. Being is a de facto given for the subject, as one can derive from what has been evinced hitherto. Nevertheless, it unveils itself by its veiling. As Being is never fully manifest in the world, phenomena are "veils on the *face* of Being." If we are totally different from the real Being, and just veils and occasions of manifestation, then our own existence becomes questionable. Does the world exist? Do we exist "really"? The answer of Ibn al-'Arabī is, again, his hallmark: *yes and no*. "Yes," we exist "really" and unavoidably so far as Reality is understood in subjective terms. "And no," we do not exist, for we have no objective transcendental, out-of-world point to prove our objective existence. The world exists just as an imagination does. It is always subjective and we have no transcendental ground to justify it objectively. There is *no out-of-world point in-the-world*.

Hence, the absence of the worldly access to an objective Reality is the consistent logical result of Ibn al-'Arabī's phenomenology of *wujūd*. Accordingly, the epistemological inquiry, which relies on objective Reality, is pure optimism. Merleau-Ponty called this optimistic presupposition with respect to "what is there"

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[528] Ḥāfiẓ, *Diwān*. See Chittick 2007b, p.200; *Diwān*, M. Qazwinī and Q. Ghani (Eds.) Tehran: Zuwwar. 1320/ 1941. p.352. Italics are mine.

as "perceptual faith,"[529] without which science would not be possible. Epistemology presupposes that there *is* something. In Ibn al-ʿArabī's account, this is an unwarranted presupposition concerning the ontological status of the world. Hence, Ibn al-ʿArabī's point ends up with a critique of naturalist ontology. Consistently, Ibn al-ʿArabī denies our "real," objective existence. As mere veils, the universe has no real, objective existence. "All existence is an imagination within an imagination."[530] We exist in the world subjectively and de facto, but it is not an objectively real existence. The Being has no meaning in itself, it has to be read and interpreted, like one interprets an imagination or a text. Ibn al-ʿArabī and Occidental phenomenology meet on the critique of the objectified naturalist portrait of the world. Following Ibn al-ʿArabī, we can talk about the existence only from a subjective point of view. Objective existence transcends our worldly limits.

We encounter a highly skeptical position in ontology with Ibn al-ʿArabī. To remind the well-known example of skepticism, Descartes doubted on the accuracy of the data percepted. Sitting in front of the heater, he suspected from being deceived by mischievous evils. The self-transparent cogito provided him the starting point and paved the outward road from his skeptical position. Yet, for Ibn al-ʿArabī the self is never transparent to itself. Rather, one is always veiled from and ignorant of her/his self. I can never know myself fully; it remains always blurred. In this sense, we face with a more skeptical positioning by Ibn al-ʿArabī. He accepts no "zero point" accessible. *Sein* is *inderweltsein*. We are deprieved of an objectivist point of access from Reality by definition. Reality is always Reality-for-me, and in the form of Reality-as-it-appears-to-me [*rabb khaṣṣ*].[531]

Ibn al-ʿArabī's skeptical positioning concerning Reality displays itself in his claim that the world is an imagination. To remind, "world is an imagination" does not

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[529] Merleau-Ponty 1968, pp.26-28.

[530] Ibn al-ʿArabī 1980a, p.125.

[531] Ibn al-ʿArabī (2005). *Özün Özü.* [*Risale-i Lubb-ul Lubb ve Sirr-ul Sirr*] Ismail Hakki Bursevi (Trans.) Kırkambar Kitaplığı, İstanbul.

mean that "the world does not exist." Imagination does exist but always subjectively. *Imagination is my imagination*. Imagination has, as I elaborated, a positive meaning for Ibn al-ʿArabī. It is the betweenness, the isthmus, *barzakh* between the existent and the nonexistent. The world has also the same form. There is no "royal path" through which I may access to the world objectively. The world is, in any case, both horizontally and vertically infinite. In addition to the existential fact that *Sein qua Sein* is veiled from me, the manifold, timely unveilings of *Sein-als-Seiende* [Being-as-being] are endless in forms. One can only speak of the world as it appears to one in its infinity. Imagination is the reality of the worldly existence.

Concerning the problem of objective Reality, there is a last point that may be a summary of the above discussion. In Arabic, the "reality" of a thing is met by the word "face" [*wajh*].[532] The reality of an object is its face. In this context, the world's "Reality as it is" remains always hidden from me. The "face" of the world is always veiled from me; I encounter the Reality of the world only through the veils on its face.[533] Not only is the world, my self is also thick. It does never permit me access to an objectivist point of view and condemns me into my self. Hence, *my gaze at the world envelops it with "me."* The face I encounter hides always a deeper Reality; the Real face is always invisibly distant from me. I encounter with the face only as it appears to me; never as it is. Famous Persian poet Ḥāfiẓ's lines which I quoted at the start of this chapter may be applied to objective Reality -the face as it is- never presents itself as fully manifest. It is always veiled through which it unveils itself. "In the last analysis, each thing remains forever veiled from all things."[534] Hence, the Reality is never objectively present for Ibn al-ʿArabī. This means that the world (including the self) is never objectively "there." Being is objectively a noumenon. It appears only subjectively, like an imagination. Ibn al-ʿArabī, in Occidental terms of ontology, is a pure skeptic in this sense.

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[532] Chittick 2007b, p.197.

[533] Ibid, p.197.

[534] Ibid, p.191.

6.1.2. Phenomenology on Objective Reality

> Understanding … can never be objectified, for it is within understanding that all objectification takes place.[535]

Merleau-Ponty's ontology proceeded from the elaboration of the scientist presupposition on objective Reality. He writes that "... 'reality' does not belong definitely to any particular perception, that in this sense, it lies *always further on*..."[536] Accordingly, "science presupposes the perceptual faith and does not elucidate it."[537] The scientist has a presupposition relating to the "inherence of the world." The faith of the scientist is provided by perpectual data,[538] and it is beyond proofs.[539] It is this perceptual faith about "what is there" through which science is possible. The philosopher who is not adhered to such a faith cannot accept Reality as something present-at-hand. "...[B]ecause the reality of this world is at least partly contributed by me, it does not have to be conceived as being 'out there,' unalterable, ahistoric; the *a prioris* can be changed, just as habits can be changed..."[540] In this sense, Merleau-Ponty challenges the objectivist approach in ontology. Langan criticizes Merleau-Ponty, having noticed the relativistic connotations in his ontology. Accordingly, "...very object is always and in every respect being imperceptibly made and unmade"[541] in Merleau-Ponty's ontology. The reality is never visible in Merleau-Ponty's account, as the world hides by its disclosure. The world is perceived, but its Reality in objective sense, is always further and inaccessible. Stability is only relative and eternal truths in such a view can hardly exist according to Langan's criticism.[542] Nevertheless, Merleau-Ponty

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[535] Palmer 1969, p.228.

[536] Merleau-Ponty 1968, pp.40-41.

[537] This claim is the title of a long chapter of the incompleted *The Visible and The Invisible*. See Merleau-Ponty 1968, pp.14-49.

[538] Ibid, p.26.

[539] Ibid, p.28.

[540] Langan, pp.209-210.

[541] Ibid, p.212.

[542] Ibid, p.212.

escapes from this criticism of relativity by following Husserl. Phenomenology, talking in broad terms, surmounts the problem of objective Reality by apprehending the Being-for-me as a variant of the world that is understood as the transcendental category. Epistemology is rendered possible by this transcendental engagement.

Husserl, after the Heideggerian critique, introduced the celebrated concept "life-world" ["*lebenswelt*"] in his *Krisis*. Life-world is the shared rock bottom of all worldly experience. It is the habitat, the "niche" into which the subject is embedded. Husserl's presupposition (that life-world as "all-naked" is accessible through phenomenological reduction) has been left by his followers Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Nevertheless, the concept is preserved in favor of a common experiential basis for human being.

In Heidegger, *Sein* is always a *Mitsein*. *Dasein* finds itself thrown into a world that it shares with other *Dasein*s. Being unfolds itself through language. *Dasein* is embedded into language that is shared with other *Dasein*s. Language, which means *logos* and defines human being in ancient understanding, unites and opens *Dasein* to a world which it shares with other *Dasein*s. *To be in the world* means *to be in the world together with*. World is a with-world [*mitwelt*].

> We share reality through common signs … through the mediation of our symbolic world … through a "text" of some sort, which text has … many contexts. ... When one "understands" another, one assimilates what is said to the point that is becomes one's own, lives as much as possible in the person's contexts and symbols.[543]

In Merleau-Ponty, this transcendental rock bottom of experience presents itself in the form of flesh [*leib*]. Flesh, ubiquitously, precedes every experience in the world and provides the shared transcendental rock bottom of all experience. This transcendental unification through flesh transforms every perception to an "opinion." Every perception is a different point of view that is opened to the same shared world. Every perception, even if misleading, verifies that the experience

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[543] Lye, John (1996). "Some Principles of Phenomenological Hermeneutics." Retrieved January 14, 2009, from http://www.brocku.ca/english/courses/4F70/ph.php

pertains to the same world. According to Merleau-Ponty, perceptions are *possibilities of the same world*; progressive approximations to each other and to objectivity. "Each perception is ... only an opinion.... possibilities of the same world.... variants of the same world.... not as all false, but as 'all true'..."[544] The world unfolds itself to everyone in a different manner. Everyone has a unique horizon through which the world presents itself differently. Nevertheless, as Gadamer puts, "[t]he multiplicity of these worldviews does not involve any relativization of the 'world.' Rather, what the world is is not different from the views in which it presents itself."[545]

Heidegger's in-language-embedded *Mitsein* and Merleau-Ponty's flesh provide the rock bottom of worldly experience and render the world a shared and transcendental one. This transcendental common bottom authorizes them to speak of a shared, objective Reality. *Sein* keeps being understood as *Sein*-for-me, but these *for-me*s open to the same shared world. The for-me structures gaze at different things that are different aspects of the same shared world. There *is* the common world. It is "pregiven." The world is always *there* [*Da*]. Thus, the ontological problem of objectivity is surmounted by Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger by different ways but with similar transcendental foundations. Objectivity, rather than an Ibn al-ʿArabī-like inaccessible impossibility, turns out to be just a high level abstraction of the self. Hence, we observe that *inderweltsein* (which is understood by phenomenology as the *transcendental*, founding category of experience) is not held to be transcendental but *transcendent* for Ibn al-ʿArabī. Ibn al-ʿArabī, in this sense, assumes a comparatively skeptical position in ontology.

In the account of phenomenology, the world, which is communicable and common, is the foundational, transcendental bottom of experience. *Worldliness is togetherness*. This ontological understanding of withness helps phenomenology to tackle the problem of objective Reality. Being is Being-for-me, but the world that

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[544] Merleau-Ponty 1968, p.41.

[545] Gadamer 1991, p.447.

is unfolded to me in the for-me structure is a shared, common world. Different intentionalities unfold the same world. They are different ways of "singing the world." Therefore, the phenomenologist critique of scientist ontology does not yield a relativist ontological engagement. Rather, it culminates in an ontological conception of the world, which is transcendentally shared and underpinning all experience.

Due to that the transcendental rock bottom is shared by the "other," he/she/it provides an invaluable dimension to which the subject has no access. The existence, language, vision, and context of the "other" are each the opening of a new *veil* of the shared world. The other and the subject are like Merleau-Ponty's example of "hands" when they touch to each other. Both are object, both are subject, both are ontologically kin, intertwined, but also absolutely distinct. Rather than seeking for a zero-point, an objective position to the world from where all the things would appear equal, the ability to look from within different contexts and different points of view is necessitated to unfold the world. The "other" and the self open to each *other* the same, real, common, thick, transcendental world.

The phenomenological distinction of "subjectivized subjective experience" and "objectivized subjective experience" helps us to reveal that consciousness of an experience is not tantamount to that experience itself. Whenever I undertake the phenomenological reduction, there remains always a distance between the lived subjectivity of experience and my objectivization of it. The consciousness of an experience supervenes that experience. They are never identical. Therefore, "[a]ll knowing is at one level subjective since it is always related to, and constructed by, the person engaged in knowing."[546] However, this does not mean that the world depends on the subject, as it was in the dreamlike ontological understanding of the world in Ibn al-ʿArabī. Phenomenological ontology emancipates the world from being "subject dependent" to an understanding of it as the transcendental rock bottom of experience. It is worth mentioning of Spielberg's beneficial

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[546] Willis, p.2.

conceptualization at this point. Spielberg makes a distinction between what is "subject dependent" and "subject related." Phenomenology "...is subjective in the sense that its objects are subject-related but not in the sense that it makes them completely subject-dependent."[547] This distinction between "subject dependent" and "subject related" does not appear in Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology. He is skeptical in the transcendence of the world, and he would probably suspect such a transcendental presupposition. The answer of "what is there" is to remain always subjective (in the sense that "subject dependent," like an imagination) for him.

The problem of objective Reality is tackled by phenomenology in the way tried to be explained above. Nevertheless, the hermeneutical problem of objectivity is seemingly a more complicated challenge for phenomenology. Phenomenological hermeneutics' approach to objective Truth is a bone of contention and seems to remain a hot debate for a while.

6.2. The Hermeneutical Problem: Objective Truth

The claim for universality of hemeneutics has brought to Western philosophy one of the most heated debates of the last century. Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode* (which was written under high influence of Heidegger) expanded hermeneutics to the realm of ontology. Interpretation was to be the "first order necessary condition" of existence. Hermeneutics was developed an identity that could not be limited to *geisteswissenschaften*. It turned out to a self presentation and production of *Dasein*. After 1960s, in the years following the publication of his masterpiece, Gadamer found himself at the center of hot debates on hermeneutics. The focus of these discussions has been the interrelated problems of developing a method peculiar to *geisteswissenschaften* and providing an objectivity criterion of validity in interpretation. In this part, this problematic with a focus on Gadamer will be elucidated.

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[547] Ibid, p.2.

Coming back to the subject of this research, Ibn al-ʿArabī, there is a radical deconstructive position in the readability of the text, as it is analyzed in the last chapter. The text is twofold thick: first, it can be (and has to be) read in manifold ways, all of which are embraced by Ibn al-ʿArabī. Secondly, text is horizontally thick: phenomena are hermeneutical objects, and there is nothing but text. Having such a wide understanding of "text" and such a pluralist approach towards readability, one wonders how Ibn al-ʿArabī tackles the problem of objectivity in hermeneutics. If the text is able to be read with a limitless variety, there hardly may be found a criterion for objectivity. Nevertheless, Ibn al-ʿArabī's hermeneutics surprises us with its complicated check-balance mechanism. The interplay between the visible and the invisible of the text, along with the balance between the reason and the imagination, enable him together to develop a rigorous theory and practice of interpretation.

6.2.1. Ibn al-ʿArabī on Objective Truth

The concern of the Truth of the text is one of the most central discussions of hermeneutics. When elaborating Ibn al-ʿArabī's approach to our access to objective Truth we meet with the same maxim that abbreviates his position. It is again "yes and no." "...'[Y]es and no'. The contradiction alludes to the incapacity of reason to achieve absolute truth..."[548] "Yes," there is a vertical thickness of the text which tells that there is always an invisible in what is rendered visible. "And no," there is no invisible-as-invisible in the world. What appears and becomes visible to me is always in the form of *invisible-as-visible*, and never *invisible-as-invisible*. There is no such thing as "absolute Truth" in the world. "The Truth" transcends the world. The Truth of the text is always in the Truth-for-me for a particular instance. What the text has to present to the reader is in constant flux. *One cannot read a text twice*. What the text has to tell in that second and for that subject is presented via the companionship of reason and imagination. The

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[548] Benlabbah, p.33.

meaning that is appropriate for "the me of that second" becomes visible by this joint working. The Truth unfolded is for the particular me of that particular second and context, which adjust themselves instance by instance.

The title of the voluminous magnificent work of Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, has been rendered to English in various ways. "*The Meccan Openings*" and "*Meccan Revelations*" are two examples. The differences stem from the manifold meanings of word "*Futūḥāt*," which means "openings," "unveilings," "disclosures," "revelations" and "revealings." The title itself displays the approach of Ibn al-ʿArabī to the nature of knowledge. "The word 'opening' suggests that this type of knowledge comes to the aspirant suddenly after he had been waiting patiently at the door."[549] Truth understood by Ibn al-ʿArabī is, hence, something which is to be *un-veiled, dis-closed, un-folded*. It does not fit into the modern scientist approaches to Truth. The two main approaches of science, i.e., the coherence and the correspondence theories of Truth both do not overlap with Ibn al-ʿArabī's Truth as unveiling. Rather, Ibn al-ʿArabī's understanding of Truth falls under the ancient category of Greek *a-letheia*. Truth is an unveiling. All interpretations supported by the text are correct. That is to say, in terms of modern hermeneutics, the unique limit of hermeneutics is determined by the broad realm of grammatical interpretation. Besides, Ibn al-ʿArabī establishes a twofold control mechanism ensuring a genuine reading but also enabling manifold interpretations possible.

Given that we are all veiled [*maḥjūb*] from the ultimate Truth, everyone seems to be equally distant from it. Ibn al-ʿArabī says that false interpretation is the one that excludes and condemns the accuracy of the other possible readings. As all readings remain at the same relativist level, the truths which we hold as objective may turn out to be relativist. There may remain no objective truth, and no better reading of a text as the truth varies according to the eye of the seeker. Nevertheless, this is not

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[549] Chittick 1989, p.xii.

the case. Arguably, the hermeneutics of Ibn al-ʿArabī is much rigorous than this shallow portrait.

Ibn al-ʿArabī is aware of the trap of relativism. He avoids from this trap by emphasizing the strict bondage between the exterior [ẓāhir] and the interior [bāṭin].[550] The literal reading is never undervalued or rejected. Taʾwīl has been the general interpretative way of esoterics through which they came up with manifold readings. Taʾwīl has been used as a method for rejecting the exterior and choosing the interior reading. Ibn al-ʿArabī, as it is shown in the fifth chapter, has a negative understanding of taʾwīl. For him, taʾwīl is the method of interpretation the motive of which is to mold the text in accordance with one's own historicity. On the contrary, Ibn al-ʿArabī does never reject the literal reading and does never challenge it by interpretative methods. Rather, literal meaning is the apparent part of the text. Literal reading is the visible of the text, which is also the door of the invisible of the text. The Truth of the text, as the invisible, is disclosed always as the visible. In other words, Truth of the text is unveiled by its veil. Invisible unfolds itself only through the visible. Invisible appears as the visible, there is a chiasm between the visible and the invisible of the text. What appears is only the visible with an insurmountable density. Thus, the literal meaning has to be challenged in favor of the search for deeper senses.

Derrida distinguished the medieval approaches to interpretation to two broad categories as "rabbis" and "poets."[551] The rabbi is chasing "the Truth" of the text while the poet is letting the meanings free. The text has a Truth for the reader; nevertheless it changes in every reading and for every reader. Ibn al-ʿArabī is, "in Derrida's terms, *both* a rabbi and a poet."[552] He venerates both the literal meaning and the search of the Truth of the text. Besides, he lets the text express itself in

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[550] Almond would hardly agree on this claim. He thinks that the attribution of the veneration of the legal, apparent meaning of the text means to show Ibn al-ʿArabī more orthodox than he actually was. Comp. Almond, p.85.

[551] For the discussion, See *Rabbis and* Poets in Almond, pp.76-81.

[552] Almond, p.79.

manifold ways. Ibn al-ʿArabī may be claimed to represent "a hybrid intermediary" in the general schematization of Derrida.

For an accurate interpretation, there must be a "fetter" [*ʿiqāl*] between the appearing [*ẓāhir*], literal meaning and the interior [*bāṭin*] ones. Any fetter is warmly welcomed and different fetters are stimulated. However, if there is no fetter, than the interpretation is far-fetched and misguided. Ibn al-ʿArabī develops here an etymological analysis of utmost importance. The word "fetter" [*ʿiqāl*] shares the same etymological root with the word "reason" [*ʿaql*].[553] Interpretation, while it belongs to a totally free realm of creative imagination, has to be "fettered." It has to be bound to reason. The reason has to involve into all creative activities as the controlling, binding element and function together with the imagination. Imagination functions most fruitfully and genuinely when it is together and bound with reason. The Truth of the text presents itself in this togetherness of the visible and the invisible. Reason and imagination must work together. As a matter of fact, they function together *de facto*: there is no pure reason or imagination in the world. One must not neglect or ignore one of these essential aspects of her/his own structure and has to pay attention to both of them in her/his hermeneutical encounter with the phenomena. *Reason has to reason and imagination has to imaginate*.

What is unfolded to me as Truth is identical with my own approach to the text. Truth is unfolded in the text in accordance with my gaze at it. My gaze gives Truth its form of disclosure; it is unfolded with a preestablished form.[554] According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, some "ignorant" people cannot unfold it in another form but a certain one. The claim to limit the Truth of the text to one's own reading and attempt to shape the text is a real ignorance of the one whom Ibn al-ʿArabī calls as the "companion of a single self-disclosure."[555] Hence, it is evident from this

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[553] Chittick 1989, p.107.

[554] See Ibn al-ʿArabī 1980a, p.120.

[555] Chittick 1989, p.106; *Futūḥāt* II 554.16.

discussion that what is of paramount importance in reading/interpreting is "an individual's preparedness [*isti'dād*] for opening."[556] There must be a preestablished openness in the reader to embark on an endless process of "excavation" of the text.[557] One has to have openness [*qabūl*] in the sense that unveiling demands to wait at the door with the determination and perseverance [*thabāt*] to unfold the Truth of the text.

To sum up, Ibn al-'Arabī establishes two control mechanisms to avoid relativism in reading. The first one is the interplay between the reason and the imagination, both of which are active in all worldly experience. They balance each other and have a dialectical texture. Reason fetters imagination while imagination renders any understanding possible. Imagination is "blind" in itself; it cannot alone distinguish the source of the unveiling. What kind of knowledge is attained, if Truth is understood as something to be unveiled? To be sure, every inrush [*wārid*] is not an unveiling. Unveiling is accomplished via imagination, but it has to be checked by reason. The most salient evidence for confusion is the inability to distinguish the source of the inrush. In the companionship of reason and imagination, the source of the inrush is questioned and new inrushes are welcomed simultaneously. The second control mechanism is the bondage between exterior [*ẓāhir*] and the interior [*bāṭin*]. The inseparable interplay between these two aspects of the text does never permit one to falsify the apparent meaning. The literal meaning, if there is any conventionally apparent one, has to be understood as the surface of a deep ocean. Anything deeper in the text appears in the form of the surface. Any reading is welcomed by Ibn al-'Arabī, if it respects to this bondage between the visible and the invisible. The interior of a reading is the exterior of a subsequent reading. Truth of the text (that hides always in the thickness of the text) is understood as unveiling and demands a preestablished openness towards the text to disclose itself. An alternative reading can challenge the literal reading, but it must not ever falsify it.

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[556] Ibid, p.xiii.

[557] Ibid, p.91.

6.2.2. Gadamer on Objective Truth

The ontological turn has left its mark in the discussions of hermeneutics in the twentieth century. Gadamer's Heideggerian approach to hermeneutics, which has been discussed, came with its own problems. One of the most problematic aspects of phenomenological hermeneutics has been seemingly its truth theory, or the lack of a truth theory. Phenomenological hermeneutics presented by Gadamer seems to lack a criterion of Truth according to which what is presented via the text may be distinguished. At the heart of Hirsch's criticism of Gadamer lied the absence of this validity criterion. In any hermeneutical theory, there had to be presented a criterion, or a set of criteria through which a good and bad reading/interpretation can be distinguished. According to Hirsch, there was no better criterion than the intention of the writer of the text. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics did not seem to produce any such criterion. Arguably, this absence would yield a relativist position in hermeneutics.

On the other hand, for the famous representative of deconstruction, Derrida, there is nothing but text and nothing defined as truth. The symbols refer to other symbols and the "bottom" of this web of signs is empty. There is no meaning the signs refer to. This infinite "poverty" of the text enables it open to endless possibilities of reading. All these different readings are all doomed to that symbolic system, for there is nothing outside of it. Hence, Derrida's claim was that there is nothing as "truth." Gadamer was accused by Derrida of being not sufficiently radical.

A theory of truth in Heidegger and Gadamer is not absent but highly radical. In the 44th section of *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger establishes an account of truth as "unconcealment." He introduces "truth as discovering and discoveredness of beings."[558] He reminds the ancient Greek concept *Aletheuein* [being un-concealed] and rehabilitates it to refer to truth. By apprehending truth as unconcealment, he

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[558] Schmidt, p.77.

enables it to free from the traditional understanding as "correctness."[559] Accordingly, this traditional understanding of truth as correctness was engendered by Plato's allegory of the cave.[560] Correspondence is a procedure of confirmation instead of a theory of truth for Heidegger. This confirmation is not truth, rather "...*the being's showing itself in its self-sameness*."[561] Both Heidegger and Gadamer criticize the traditional truth theories. These traditional theories are the coherence and the correspondence theories of truth. Accordingly, truth is rather an unveiling. "The *being true (truth)* of a statement must be understood as *discovering*. ... Being true as discovering is in turn ontologically possible only on the basis of being-in-the-world."[562] It transcends the scientific methods. With the conceptulization of Aristotle, truth does not fit into the category of *techne*. Instead, it belongs to *phronesis*.

Gadamer says that Truth and method are not in dichotomy. Method is a valuable instrument in dealing with truth. He wants to point to the high level of reduction in method. The Truth of the text, rather, exceeds such reductions. Hermeneutics, in this sense, is an art. Schleiermacher, thinking of "art" in the way that it includes technical arts, tried to develop a method for an "accurate" reading. Gadamer reverses this understanding of interpretation to an art in the sense that it falls under the category of *phronesis*. Hence, objective, well-defined methods are absent in his hermeneutics. Truth, in its nature, cannot be known through following methodological procedures. Truth (when we think in the etymological terms of *a-letheia*), *un-folds, unveils* itself. This unveiling happens as a sudden shine. With an "a-ha experience" ["*a-ha erlebnis*"], Truth manifests itself suddenly. Hence, for Gadamer Truth cannot be unveiled by methological prescriptions, just as it is not objectified. There is no criterion or method to arrive at Truth, for there is no

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[559] See Tonyalı, Zehra (2005). *Martin Heidegger'in Teknoloji Yorumu*. Master's Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School of Social Sciences of Ankara University, Department of Philosophy. p.19.

[560] See Tonyalı, p.17.

[561] Schmidt, p.77; Heidegger 1996, p.218.

[562] Ibid, p.77; Heidegger 1996, pp.218-219.

method of unveiling. "To recall the unthinking preunderstanding or the implicitly used background knowledge in all processes of scientific enquiry breaks down the dogmatic belief in the ultimate superiority of method."[563] Truth belongs to *phronesis* rather than to *techne*.

> *Dasein* is both in truth, since it has always and already disclosed the world in understanding as thrown projection, and in untruth, since *Dasein* has mostly fallen prey to the they and so misunderstands. Truth is the unconcealing (*a-letheia*) of what was concealed from *Dasein*.[564]

Inderweltsein means to be already thrown into the world and to have disclosed the world in accordance with a particular interpretation.[565] Life is a ceaseless interpretation of what *Dasein* "finds" in the world. With Heidegger's words, "...being true as discovering is a manner of the being of *Dasein*."[566] Through interpretation, life understands and unveils itself. Hermeneutics is existential. It has a central function as *Dasein*'s understanding of the world and of itself. If one cannot adopt an accurate hermeneutics, one cannot unveil the Truth that is already opened to her/him in one's thrownness. At this point, authenticity comes into play in Heidegger. Truth finds its place ubiquitously in the world via authentic interpretation. "...[M]eaning, or the unconcealed as truth, is encountered in the lived experience itself. ... This sense of truth is quite different from the traditional correspondence theory of truth."[567] Truth is not something objective. On the contrary, it varies with the interpreter's authentic encounter with the text. *Dasein* is in-between truth and untruth in its worldliness. The towardsness to authenticity yields the towardsness to truth.

Hence, for Gadamer, there is no objective criterion for the truth of the text, just as there is no method to interpret the text. There is nothing as "objective Truth."

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[563] Bübner, p.67.

[564] Schmidt, p.78.

[565] Ibid, p.78; Heidegger 1996, p.221.

[566] Ibid, p.77; Heidegger 1996, p.220.

[567] Ibid, p.54.

Hermeneutics is a *para-methodical*, existential inquiry. Life is interpretation and in accordance with interpretation truth suddenly shines and unfolds itself to the reader/interpreter.

6.3. A Hermeneutic Comparison with Gadamer

Even a glance over the accounts of Gadamer and Ibn al-ʿArabī reveals certain similarities in their understanding of hermeneutics that are worth of and helpful to analyze comparatively. In the last part of this chapter, I want to summarize their hermeneutics in a comparative way. Through this comparison, the strengths and weaknesses of both approaches to hermeneutics will display themselves in a more salient way.

6.3.1. Universality of Hermeneutics

Both by Gadamer and Ibn al-ʿArabī, we encounter with the same claim of universality of hermeneutics. Life is interpretation; the subject encounters the world with interpretation.[568] The subject is already interpreting the world. The world is unfolding itself in accordance with the mood of this interpretation.

Interpretation, as the universal mood of existence, exceeds any methical understanding and turns out to be an art for both Ibn al-ʿArabī and Gadamer. Existence is an aesthetical act. Existence is an art, because it meets with the world necessarily through interpretation. Interpretation is (rather than a method of *geisteswissenschaften*) the mood of *inderweltsein*, and every encounter with the world harbors interpretation. There is no realm out of hermeneutics; no realm for the secular. Hermeneutics belongs to existence, and nothing escapes from it in the world.

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[568] To remind, Gadamer's account of "life as interpretation" is highly indepted to Heidegger for whom "to be human was to interpret." (Laverty, p.9.)

In this general glance over their hermeneutics, Ibn al-'Arabī and Gadamer converge to each other substantially. Nevertheless, if we devote a more elaborate examination, we face up with some important differences in their ontological presuppositions. Even if their hermeneutical claims end up with the claim of universality, they have different backgrounds and approaches to language and understanding.

In Gadamer, the claim of universality in hermeneutics stems from the universal mood of *Dasein*, which is "understanding." For him, understanding is the universal medium of human being to encounter with the world. Understanding is "understanding as," which means that understanding is always in a certain interpretive structure. Hermeneutics is universal, because understanding is universal and necessarily interpretive. Gadamer, in his *Text and Interpretation*,[569] defines "text" as broad as possible. Nevertheless, he does not extend textuality to the Being itself, like Ibn al-'Arabī or Derrida do. The universality of hermeneutics follows the universality of understanding in Gadamer.

On the contrary, the universality of hermeneutics stems from the universality of language for Ibn al-'Arabī. The world is a text. Hence, the realm of hermeneutics extends automatically to all the phenomena. In the world, there are just *gegenstände*, but no *objekt*. All the objects are hermeneutical objects. The encounter of human being with the world is necessarily interpretive, since the world itself is a text. The world requires necessarily a certain interpretation to unfold itself. Language not only permeates the world, but it is also the world. This textuality of the world ends up with the universality of hermeneutics. The world, as the ordered set of symbols, has an ontological textuality. Every text is infinitely thick and new in every second, because the temporal unfolding of Being is nonstop. Thus, phenomena are open to endlessly different interpretations. With Derrida's maxim, there is nothing but text. The phenomena require reading and

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[569] See Gadamer, Hans-Georg (2002b). "Metin ve Yorum." In *Hermeneutik ve Hümaniter Disiplinler*. Hüsamettin Arslan (Ed. and Trans.) Paradigma Yayınları. İstanbul. pp.284-319.

interpretation. "To be" means "to be interpreting." Hermeneutics is universal in Ibn al-'Arabī, for *Seiende* itself is linguistical.

Hence, even if both yield universality for hermeneutics, there is an important difference concerning the nature of language in Gadamer's and Ibn al-'Arabī's view.

6.3.2. Nature of Language

According to Gadamer, following Heidegger's maxim, language is the house of Being. Being unfolds itself within the limits of language. Language is the universal medium of *Dasein*'s encounter with the world. *Sein* as disclosed in the world is what is shared and one can talk about. *Sein* unfolds itself as the world that is a shared one – a *mitwelt*. This means that language, the universal medium of unveiling of *Sein* as *Mitsein*, permeates the world and encompasses the world. Therefore, for Gadamer, language as the limits of my world draws the border within that *Dasein*'s interpretive encounter with the world, i.e., understanding occurs. Language is the realm "where the world and the subject meet."[570] Every experience emerges in the language: it is the transcendental category of our worldliness.[571]

Instead, the world is itself a language according to Ibn al-'Arabī. The world is a set of symbols which speaks. The phenomenal world is a primordial language. *Seiende* is a language. In Gadamer's account, *Seiende* is the linguistic unfolding of *Sein*, but it is not itself language as it is in Ibn al-'Arabī's account. For Gadamer, language is the house of Being, not Being itself. In Ibn al-'Arabī, rather, language is the world itself. The world is textual, which demands to be read and understood.

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[570] Rockmore, p.129.

[571] Roy and Starosta write that "Gadamer's notion of language points to something transcendent." (Roy and Starosta, p.9) This claim seems to me misleading, because language is the founding requirement (in mathematical terms, the "first order necessary condition – FONC") of the worldly experience for him. Language is not *transcendent* in the account of Gadamer; it is rather *transcendental*.

However, for Gadamer, "Being that can be understood is language."[572] Every act of thinking and understanding includes interpretation. Therefore, Being unfolds itself in language. However, "[t]his claim does not mean being is language..."[573] Language is a particular world view and displays the borders of the subject's horizon that is historical.

Phenomena compose a web of symbols, a language, which is the world according to Ibn al-ʿArabī. All random sets of symbols would not be called as language. They must build a unity; a web of interrelated symbols. What renders the phenomena a language is that they satisfy this condition. They are different aspects of the same world that is the locus [*maẓhar*] of manifestation of the Being. In other words, Being unfolds itself in the world and in no other place. Beings [*wujūd muqayyad*] are different forms in that *Sein* [*wujūd muṭlaq*] unveils itself. Beings, which we "find" in the world, are found in a whole, not as particulars. Thus, they constitute a language.

For Gadamer, understanding is linguistical, hence interpretive. *Dasein*'s encounter with the shared world happens in language. Being unfolds itself in language. Therefore, it is not possible to think and understand without language. Habermas disagreed with Gadamer by pointing to the preconceptual ways of understanding.[574] According to Habermas' Piaget based critique, just as we cannot conceptualize all of our experiences every time, thinking is not always linguistical. We may have experiences that cannot be conceptualized and escape from language. Gadamer accepts that our worldliness precedes all conceptualizations and abstractions. Nevertheless, experience [*erfahrung*] has something special that renders it an "experience." Experience necessitates its consciousness. One defines retrospectively a historical event as an experience. Experience belongs necessarily to historical consciousness, which is linguistical. If one is not aware of it, one has

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[572] Gadamer 1991, p.474.

[573] Schmidt, p.125.

[574] See Negru, p.118.

not lived an experience. Experience is necessarily linguistical, because its consciousness is linguistical. Experience necessitates its awareness. Experience is the experience of something; and even this definition of experience carries it into the realm of consciousness and language. Experience is linguistical in the approach of Gadamer.

This difference of Ibn al-ʿArabī and Gadamer in their accounts of language does not appear in their general view that hermeneutics is universal. However, this ontological difference in their hermeneutics displays itself in practical realm. The difference emerges in the question of private language. Is a personal language possible? This is the famous issue on the private language [*privat sprache*] that was discussed by Wittgenstein. For Heidegger and Gadamer, a private language is not possible, because language is necessarily shared. Language mediates *Dasein* with other *Dasein*s. There is no experience which cannot be shared via language.[575] *"The hermeneutical experience is intrinsically linguistic."*[576] Language, in its nature, is something shared; it is not our own. On the contrary, we belong to language. We are living in language in accordance with its certain structure and limits.

On the contrary, private language is possible in the account of Ibn al-ʿArabī. It is possible that we have an experience that does not fit into the concepts present at hand. Any experience is new. Thus, it is not so weird, rather just normal that language does not meet the lived experience. Every second brings something novel the genuine expression of which necessitates new concepts. The old ones may not suffice for the new experience to be expressed. The insufficiency of the concepts in expressing the experience is the normal result of their nature. Language is not shared necessarily, on the contrary of Heidegger supposed. One may live something that one cannot conceptualize and convey through language. However,

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[575] As I have elaborated, the impossbility of private language stems from the linguisticality of understanding. For a short but instructive synopsis, see Palmer 1969, pp.228-229.

[576] Palmer 1969, p.242.

one may "have" it as an experience in Ibn al-ʿArabī. Experience does not necessitate language for Ibn al-ʿArabī, contrary to Gadamer. The hallmark of the "mystic" is her/his opinion of language as an imperfect instrument to convey and share the lived experience. One's approach to the question of private language displays where one posits oneself between mysticism and philosophy.

6.3.3. The Task of Hermeneutics and Method

The task of hermeneutics, according to Gadamer, starts where one passes beyond the apparent meaning of the text. For Dilthey, hermeneutics had to bring the reader/interpreter to the meaning which was to be intended by the writer. Hermeneutics, as the method to bring to this original intention, accomplishes its task by reconstruction and ends at this point. Nevertheless, for Gadamer, the real task of hermeneutics is given start at this point. One has to pass beyond this meaning; and hermeneutics is the theory of this travel beyond.

Ibn al-ʿArabī's understanding of interpretation is, as I have emphasized, a travel. Ibn al-ʿArabī's concept "interpretation" ["*taʿbīr*"] stems from the same root of "crossing," "traversing," "passing beyond." Interpretation starts where the literal, apparent meaning is traversed. Hermeneutics is the theory of traveling in the thickness of the text. Interpretation is a travel in the depths of text for Ibn al-ʿArabī as the concept "*taʿbīr*" suggests. The methodical prescriptions chain the free and imaginative reading. There is no procedural chain to be committed in interpretation. The only limit in interpreting is a grammatical connection. In the wide garden of the syntax of the language, one is totally free in coming up with new readings of the text. Interpretation is a non-methodical travel in the deepness of the text.

Similarly, Gadamer's account is also famous with its attack on the methodical approaches in hermeneutics. There is no method of encountering the text. The

encounter with the text is in the form of a dialogue, which happens in a mixed question – answer form.[577] There is no method to ask a question. The text unfolds itself in accordance with the questions of the reader, and asks its own questions to her/him. There is also no method to give the "true" answer, because there is no such a thing. There is no "best" dialogue with the text. There is only a "genuine" dialogue, which passes beyond methodology. Interpretation does not belong to *techne*, rather to *phronesis*. It is an art that cannot be exhausted and determined by technical, methodical procedures. Hermeneutics exceeds methods, for what the text presents, i.e., the Truth of the text does not fit into the scientist conceptions for Gadamer.

Gadamer's account on truth does neither fit into the coherence, nor in correspondence theory of truth schema. On the contrary, Gadamer follows Heidegger in apprehending truth as *a-letheia*. Truth is an un-veiling, un-concealment, dis-closure. As it is presented in ancient Greece, truth itself "shines" suddenly. It does not appear with methodological procedures. Instead, it necessitates an openness to unveil itself.

Rather than preestablished methods, both Gadamer and Ibn al-ʿArabī emphasize "openness" in practical realm in interpretation. Instead of a technique, interpretation necessitates an open positioning to what is alien and novel. Interpretation requires openness to the fusion with the text. The ability of being open to novel meanings and to an endless quest into the text is the best way to deal with the existing presuppositions and the "knots" one has devoted oneself. Without this fusion that necessitates application, one cannot enter into what is novel in the text encountered.

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[577] For the structure of questioning, See Palmer 1969, pp.198-201.

 In Ibn al-ʿArabī, method in interpretation is what is presented by the tradition. It is like a ladder; to be venerated but also surmounted.[578]

6.3.4. The Relevance of Authority and Tradition

6.3.4.1. Ibn al-ʿArabī's Account of Authority

Tradition, in the hermeneutics of Ibn al-ʿArabī, has an unrivalled authority. Tradition reveals itself in the literal reading of the text. It presents a certain way of reading which is tested many times throughout the flow of time. Tradition is a trusted, corroborated convention of reading, understanding and interpreting. Tradition presents *the non-risky habit of reading* a text. The one who is committed to the literal reading of the tradition does not risk her/him. S/he walks on the conventional, trusted, already walked path that leads to a definite, historically conventional truth in reading.

Tradition provides a certain form of reading and behaving in accordance with it, which is called "*ʿakidāh*." It means that every *ʿakidāh* is a form of "binding," "tying" oneself with a certain form of reading and understanding. The word "knot" ["*ʿaqd*"] and *ʿakidāh* come from the same root in Arabic. *Every manner of reading is a knotting*. The one who knots oneself to a certain manner of reading devotes her/himself to its accuracy and excludes other ways of reading the text. The reading one knots her/himself is the venerated one for her/him. There is no possibility of being alone, free and abstracted from all authoritarian pregivens in the hermeneutical experience. One is already tied to an authority or another one. The access to the text is sustained always through a knot.

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[578] Kartal provides an informative synopsis of the practice of interpretation of Ibn al-ʿArabī in the example of a famous chapter of *Fuṣūṣ*. Kartal understands Ibn al-ʿArabī's practice as a "method of interpretation." Nevertheless, I contend that Ibn al-ʿArabī's practice transcends any *technical* prescription and his practice cannot be called as an "interpretation method." Comp. Kartal, Abdullah (2008). "Ibnü'l-Arabi'nin Yorum Yöntemi ve Muhammed Fassında Bu Yöntemin Tatbiki: Her Varlık Bir Ayettir." *Tasavvuf: İlmi ve Akademik Araştırma Dergisi*. 9, 21, pp.257-282.

> Belief is a knot tied in the heart, a conviction that something is true.
> In Ibn al-ʿArabī's way of looking at things, everyone has beliefs,
> since everyone is a delimited and defined existent thing with a
> delimited and defined consciousness, a knotting of the heart.[579]

To be finite means to be involved in a particular tradition and to be immersed already into a certain hermeneutical positioning. A position from nowhere is not possible. Every encounter with the text happens through a historical bias that becomes concrete in the authority of the tradition.

To be knotted to a reading is to have engaged into a tradition. To be situated in a tradition means to access and venerate just one possibility of reading of the text. Nevertheless, the text is by definition an always novel, endless fountain of meanings. It is pregnant always with more than one can consume. Hence, one has to be able to access to these manifold meanings the text presents. This access can be possible only when one *unties* her/himself from a reading, and ties to another reading.[580] To tie oneself to two readings at the same time is not possible. One has to engage into a particular way of reading, and then change it to another way of reading. These ways of readings are presented via traditions to the human being who is temporal and finite (which means, historical). Thus, tradition, as the source of legal meaning, must be venerated, but also transcended. Ibn al-ʿArabī understands the "cumulative" tradition "as the surface of an inner reality, as a means and not an end…"[581] Tradition is present at hand to unveil the text in a particular manner, and to simultaneously veil it in this way. It is like a ladder to be transcended in favor of the text.

"The preconditions for understanding preclude the possibility of a 'novel' or 'original' interpretation."[582] Understanding is definitively historical, hence limited.

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[579] Chittick 1989, p.335.

[580] Ibn al-ʿArabī 2005, p.9, p.28.

[581] Chittick 2007b, p.27.

[582] Chittick 1989, p.232.

It happens as situated in a tradition. Human being is embedded into a tradition or another one. S/he is never free of it when encountering the text.

> A new interpretation must first take into account those interpretations that have been made… If it adds another dimension to the tradition and harmonizes with previous interpretations, while the interpreter possesses all the requisite personal qualities, then it might be valid.[583]

Therefore, text presents itself in a traditional web into which the reader is already embedded, or s/he has to enter to face up with the text. Thus, one is necessarily in a tradition or in another one. Ibn al-'Arabī says, "…there is no escape from following authority! Do not follow your rational faculty in its interpretation (*ta'wil*)!"[584] The word for interpretation is here, *ta'wil*, which has a negative connotation for him. As there is no other way except authority to enter to the context of the text, Ibn al-'Arabī warns the reader from trusting to one's own "free" reasoning. On the contrary, reasoning is never free but always historical. Every reading is a molding of text and shaping it into one's own reading. Nevertheless, text carries a two-fold thickness I have already introduced. Hence, to accept one's own reason as the supreme authority in reading is to reduce the text to one's own interpretation,[585] but the text always transcends it.

In every encounter with a text, one is necessarily following an authority, consciously or not. Therefore, for Ibn al-'Arabī, one must be aware of the authority to which s/he is committed. The access to the text is always from within a tradition, and understanding necessarily includes the imitation [*taqlīd*] of the way of reading and understanding present at hand. Besides, one must not bind oneself to a distinct "knot." Rather, one has to try to untie her/himself from it and traverse [*'ubūr*] to other new readings.[586] The definitive imitation in the tradition must be

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[583] Ibid, p.232.

[584] Ibid, p.168; *Futūḥāt* II 298.2.

[585] See Morris 1990, p.57.

[586] Carney examined authoritarianism in Islam in his Nietzsche-oriented article, *Twilight of the Idols*. Elaborating the Arabic term "*tagut*," he claims that the common "…authoritarian closure is the prime form of 'idolatry' in the Muslim world today." (Carney, 'Abd al-Hakeem (2008). "Twilight of the idols? Pluralism and mystical *praxis* in Islam." *Int J Philos Relig,* 64, p.3) Carney,

perfected by its giving up in favor of the new authentic search [*taḥqīq*]; "…*taḥqīq* completes perfect *taqlīd*."[587]

6.3.4.2. Gadamer's Account of Tradition Compared

Husserl allowed

> ...the life-world to be constituted *anonymously*. The life-world is in an essentially indeterminate way an intersubjective phenomenon. … Anyone may enter the framework of the life-world, since no-one has exclusively created it. The character of subjectivity of the community which sustains the life-world must thus remain indeterminate.[588]

This underestimation if not trivializing of tradition in Husserl was replaced by Heidegger. Tradition is understood by Heidegger as the accumulation of history and turns out to the central habitat of human beings. Tradition, in Heidegger, is a certain form of interpretation through which *Dasein* "finds" the world already unfolded. We are already embedded into the tradition, like we are in the hermeneutical circle.[589] He writes in *Sein und Zeit* that "…everyday circumspective interpretation … is grounded in *something we have in advance* – in a *forehaving*."[590] When we understand something, the "act of appropriation" always accords to a distinct point of view. "...[I]nterpretation is grounded in *something we see in advance* – in a *fore-sight*."[591]

Gadamer, following Heidegger, undertakes a radical rehabilitation of tradition. We understand in a distinct way or in another one. This particular way is handed down

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by appealing to Ibn al-'Arabī, elaborates the possibilities of a religious pluralism in Islam. See Carney.

[587] Chittick 1989, p.168.

[588] Bübner, p.38.

[589] In this sense, "[h]ermeneutic circle is paradigmatic for any understanding and we can enter it only by virtue of our prejudices." (Dobrosavljev, p.608.)

[590] Heidegger, Martin (1994b). "Understanding and Interpretation." In Kurt Mueller-Vollmer (Ed., Intro. and Notes) *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present*. Continuum, New York. p.223.

[591] Heidegger 1994b, p.223.

to us by tradition. Being unfolds itself to us in a certain manner that is presented to us and molded by tradition. Understanding, which is the ontological structure of human being, is formed by the inherited tradition.[592]

Parallel to the traditional "prejudice of prejudice," what is handed down by tradition is generally suspected. However, what we inherit from the tradition is not necessarily false, nor necessarily true. One must not necessarily and dogmatically commit to what tradition claims. Tradition does not have an absolute authority. The relation of reason to tradition is, indeed, not in antinomy. Truly legitimate knowledge may be provided to us through tradition.[593] The classical works are exemplar of those legitimate heritages of tradition. They have been preserved in the long quest of the tradition. It is a mark of their content of truth that they have not been excluded from the heritage, but carried to day.[594] "The authority of tradition is a justified [or at least, corroborated] source of legitimate prejudices."[595]

The tradition is transferred through time mostly by language. The prejudices of us are linguistical. "The mode of being of tradition is language..."[596] There is no perfect language in that the world in itself would appear in Gadamer.[597] No language encompasses all the projection possibilities. Just as there is no perfect language, there is also no perfect interpretation which would embrace all possible meanings and let present the text as itself. There is no interpretation that would give the totality of the subject matter. Thus, every interpretation is incomplete. It is produced from within a certain tradition, from which another possible point of view escapes.

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[592] Schmidt, p.100.

[593] Ibid, p.102.

[594] Ibid, p.102; Gadamer 1991, p.287.

[595] Ibid, p.114.

[596] Ibid, p.123.

[597] Ibid, p.121.

In Gadamer's account, one cannot leap away/escape/exit from inside the tradition into which s/he is embedded. The tradition establishes one's horizon and opens the human being to the shared world in a certain way. Along with the fact that it may include many false presuppositions, it presents the horizons of the human being. What human being deals with "...can never be completely detached from historical circumstances and the force of tradition."[598] Tradition unfolds the world to us in a particular way.

This salient pre-eminence of tradition in Gadamer was criticized by Habermas. Accordingly, Gadamer's account of tradition is distinctly passive before the authority.[599] He claimed that a critique of ideology and tradition is not possible in Gadamer's approach.[600] This criticism ignores the fact that even the criticism of a tradition comes from within itself or only after a genuine encounter with it. Arguably, Habermas has two false presuppositions. First, he presupposes that authority is always wrong. Second, he thinks that authority is absolute. These two false presuppositions envisage the reason and the tradition as absolute antitheses.[601] On the contrary, the critique of the tradition is only possible through an interaction with it.

Ibn al-'Arabī's and Gadamer's accounts of tradition share a common positive connotation concerning tradition and authority. One cannot escape from the tradition in that one dwells. Human being is necessarily living in a horizon, which is presented to her/him through tradition. Without tradition, the encounter with the text is not possible.[602] Through acculturation, which one is introduced with the tradition, and also learned how to encounter with the world. "*Bildung*

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[598] Bübner, p.6.

[599] See Negru, p.118.

[600] Schmidt, p.9.

[601] Ibid, p.145.

[602] Ibn al-'Arabī 2005, p.52. "The perfect man" [*al-insān al-kāmil*] is not the one freed from all beliefs. S/he is rather the one who has access to all beliefs.

[acculturation] helps us to keep us 'open to what is other – to other, more universal point of view.'"[603]

Tradition has such an inherent and central nature for human being. It shows how a text has to be read. Nevertheless, it is surely never enough to present the truth exhaustively. Thus, tradition has to be transcended. This transcendence cannot happen as a change of horizon, which would not fit to the historicity of human being. Rather, human being has to open her/himself to novel readings through that one's horizon expands.

6.3.5. The Form - Content Dualism in Hermeneutics

In *Futūḥāt*, Ibn al-ʿArabī tells an amazing anecdote that is central in our discussion on the unity of form and content in hermeneutics. In the anecdote, famous jurisprudent Mālik b. Anas is asked about his opinion on the lawfulness of the flesh of a fish called "*khinzir al-ma'*." The fish normally belongs to the family of the marine animals whose flesh is lawful. Nevertheless, the answer of Mālik b. Anas to the question is negative; the flesh of the fish is not lawful to eat. The name of the fish is *khinzīr al-ma',* which means literally "water pig." When he is asked why the flesh of the fish is not lawful, he replies that it is not lawful, for they called the fish a "pig" ["*khinzīr*"].[604] Hence, the ones who call the fish with this name must not eat it. For others, it is legal. The name decides to the property of the object. This anecdote Ibn al-ʿArabī tells in *Futūḥāt* displays the "authority of the name" ["*ḥukm al-ism*"] over the named. There is an inseparable togetherness between the named and the name, i.e., the form and its content.[605] The mere

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[603] Roy and Starosta, p.16; Gadamer 1989, p.17.

[604] Chodkiewicz, p.19; *Futūḥāt* I, p.411. (OY, VI, p.207.) and *Futūḥāt* IV, p.465.

We have to remind the reader that the flesh of pig is forbidden to eat in Islamic law.

[605] "…[T]he way in which it [an expression] is said is in fact not separable from 'what is said.'" (Palmer 1969, p.237.) See also Gadamer 191, pp.39-52.

existence of the word is the source of meaning.[606] In the words, the form and content are given inseparably together. The word is not just the form that attains subsequently an external meaning. Instead, where there is a word, there is already its meaning. In the word, the form and the meaning, the visible and the invisible are together for Ibn al-ʿArabī.

To be sure, the inseparability of the form and the content yields an extraordinary respect to the form of text. The form is not only the source, but also the locus of the meaning, because the meaning appears always through and as the word. Any tiny change in a mere word, even in punctuation or emphasis means a change of what the text presents in its totality. Therefore, even the most captious translations are "simply interpretations."[607] The invisible displays itself always as the visible. What appears is the visible together with the invisible. What the subject encounters in the world is presented with an insurmountable thickness. In this thickness, the visible and the invisible are harbored as intermeshed. As there is no pure reason and imagination in the world, there is no form and content distinctly abstracted from each other.

Interpretation [*taʿbīr*], as I have discussed, is a travel, a crossing over [*ʿubūr*] from the apparent meaning to the more inward senses.[608] In this process, the interpreter/reader has to be always bound with the visible of the text due to this inseparability. The meaning is strictly related to the form. Hence, every letter in the text has a central and unrivalled importance. If the form changes, then the meaning unfolded to the reader will also change. Every letter is a different gate to the invisible that unfolds itself in endless forms. The unity of form and content engenders an unrivalled veneration of the form of the text in Ibn al-ʿArabī. The Being "appears" as the appearances, i.e., as the phenomena (which hide Being *qua* Being). Similarly, the meaning appears in the form. "The Truth as it is" hides

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[606] Chodkiewicz, p.25.

[607] Murata and Chittick, pp.xv-xvi.

[608] Chittick 1989, p.245.

always in the text. The words (along with the phenomena that are textual by definition) open infinitely different meanings. The veil and the face are inseparably intertwined.[609] Face (meaning) appears in veils (words). Besides, every word is the meaning already at hand in the account of Ibn al-ʿArabī. "For those who see, the veil is the face."[610]

The Husserlian phenomenology was chasing the Kantian aim of pure knowledge clarified from all presuppositions and judgments. Through the skeptics' suspension of judgment, i.e., by *epoche*, pure content of conscious experience would be possible. Phenomenological reduction was the method of a new science that was in the promise of "absolute certainty arising from experience."[611] Heidegger emphasized the impossibility of such full phenomenological reduction. There remains always a necessary distance between *noesis* and *noema*; between consciousness and its content. There is *no pure content* possible in the world. The content is always presented in a form from which content can ever be "clarified" entirely. Meaning is never "all naked," rather always within a form. This unity in the form and content cultivated when Heidegger questioned art. Especially in his later philosophy, he focused on art when dealing with the question of Being.[612] It was Heidegger's idea that "[e]very work of art seems to present a distinctionless unity of subjectivity and objectivity or of form and matter…"[613] His rehabilitation of the unity of form and content was to be developed by Gadamer with a special focus on hermeneutics.

In the first chapter of *Wahrheit und Methode*, Gadamer elaborates the perennial dualism of form and content. After Kant, the dualism of form and content yielded relativism in art. For there was allegedly no relation between the form and beauty,

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[609] Chittick 2007b, p.179.

[610] Ibid, pp.178-179.

[611] Laverty, p.5.

[612] Bübner, p.49.

[613] Ibid, p.50.

aesthetic taste was to be relativized. Gadamer claims that this distinction fades away especially in the case of art. The form in the work of art cannot be separated from its content. Similarly, the distinction vanishes in the hermeneutics that is an art. "*Verbal form and traditional content cannot be separated in the hermeneutic experience.*"[614] Not only perception, but also interpretation always includes meaning. When we encounter the world, the meaning is already presented in a certain form from which it is not separated.

> Pure seeing and pure hearing are dogmatic abstractions that artificially reduce phenomena. Perception always includes meaning. Thus to seek the unity of the work of art solely in its form as opposed to its content is a perverse formalism...[615]

To put it short, both for Gadamer and Ibn al-'Arabī, the form – content distinction is not valid; it is just an abstraction. In the world, there is no pure content or pure form. Instead, they are intertwined. The rejection of the distinction is conspicuous in both figures.

6.3.6. The Problem of Truth Content in Unveiling

As I have tenuously touched, there have been many criticisms to the ontological turn in hermeneutics most of which have reached to a climax. "…[B]ut the question of the true knowledge-content of hermeneutics … is still open."[616] Heidegger's account of truth as unveiling does not distinguish this problem on content. What kind of knowledge or truth is revealed/unconcealed by hermeneutics? Once the truth is defined in terms of *a-letheia*, the relationship betweeen truth and what is unveiled must be clarified. By Heidegger, Truth is understood as an unveiling, but not developed into a full-fledged theory. Neither Heidegger, not Gadamer does develop the phenomenology of truth as disclosure. Because the nature of *a-letheia* is not so clear, what follows the "*a*" of the "*a-*

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[614] Gadamer 1991, p.441.

[615] Ibid, p.92.

[616] Bübner, p.65.

letheia" is not necessarily *truth* in their hermeneutics. It is not guaranteed in Gadamer and Heidegger that what is unveiled is the truth of the text.

By Ibn al-ʿArabī, the content of unveiling is warranted by his twofold mechanism. In a medieval context, "unveiling" [*kashf*] is understood as the most competent way of attaining knowledge by Ibn al-ʿArabī. Truth, similar to Gadamer, has the form of disclosure in Ibn al-ʿArabī. Nevertheless, every disclosure, what is called "*wārid*" ["inrush"] may not be truth. To ensure the truth content, Ibn al-ʿArabī "fetters" imagination by reason so that the inrush is controlled and its source is validated. Secondly, the interplay between the visible and the invisible of the text must never be separated. The interpretation has to rely on grammatical rules of that language. These two mechanisms control the content of the inrush.

In Gadamer, the distinction between "inrush" and "unveiling" does not appear. Hence, the content of unveiling remains suspicious. Arguably, the unveiling is not necessarily truth. Ibn al-ʿArabī undertakes to surmount this problem through the bondage between the meaning and the grammar and through reasoning because imagination is alone blind. What is unveiled must be checked by rational faculty. Reason itself is also not capable of freely roaming in the text and deriving new meanings. The reason and imagination must function together to sustain the most genuine unveling. There is no "best" unveiling, since the truth is always hiding in the thickness of the text. We encounter a more elaborate discussion on the nature of unveiling in Ibn al-ʿArabī.

In this chapter, I have displayed how my research subject, Ibn al-ʿArabī posits himself in the face of the ontological and hermeneutical problems of objectivity. Due to its particular relevance, the ontological problem of objectivity has been discussed in comparison with Heidegger's and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. The hermeneutical problem of objectivity in Ibn al-ʿArabī, i.e., the objective Truth is analyzed in comparison with Gadamer. Gadamer has distinct similarities in hermeneutics, but also clear ontologically different presuppositions which yield different hermeneutical implications. By this comparative inquiry, the general

picture of hermeneutics in Ibn al-ʿArabī has been sketched. Here on, I will be able to undertake the fusion of Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology and hermeneutics. This fusion will be the task of the next chapter.

PART FIVE: SYNTHESIS

CHAPTER 7

INTERPRETATIO ERGO SUM: LIFE AS INTERPRETATION

We have already revealed that Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology leads us directly to hermeneutics. In the third and fourth chapters, his understanding of Being have been scrutinized. In the last two chapters, i.e., in the fifth and sixth ones, his hermeneutics has been elaborately and comparatively analyzed. Now, I will be able to merge these two pillars and draw a holistic picture of his hermeneutics and ontology. Because they are intertwined, Ibn al-ʿArabī's question of Being and hermeneutical approach will be presented as a whole.

According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Seiende* is a text; a set of symbols. These symbols require interpretation to be encountered. Every object, including one's self, is a *gegenstand*, an object that unfolds itself through interpretation. Hermeneutics is not the task or method of interpreting a sacred text. Instead, it is the art of *inderweltsein*. One does exist because he is interpreting. *Interpretatio ergo sum.* "To be" means "to be interpreting."

Human beings are finite and historical, which means that they are embedded in certain horizons. To be historical means to be embedded in the world in a particular historical position that is pregiven by one's tradition. Because the historicity of one is unique, no two people have the same horizon. Everyone has a unique horizon that is in a nonstop change. Due to the nonstop temporal unfolding of Being, everyone is in a ceaselessly changing horizon. The hermeneutical context is in perpetual change.

The world harbors a thickness. One reason of this thickness is the perpetual self manifestation of *Sein* as *Seiende*. The ever-novelty of the world does never let any exhaustive and repeated encounter with it. Any encounter with the world happens through interpretation that is to encounter the world in a certain mood of unfolding. Every interpretation is a certain point of view. Any interpretation

misses other possible ways of unfolding, which have no theoretical limit. Every meeting with the world, i.e., every interpretation of the world is undertaken from within the world. There is no infinite point of view or an endless horizon, from which the world would appear in its totality. Being is never fully manifest and does not appear as all-naked. There is no limit to the possible projections of Being. *Seienden* [*mumkināt*] are infinite, and no *Seiende* consumes all the possibilities of projection of Being.

The world is called generally in the Islamic tradition as *'ālam mithāl* [world of images]. The Arabic word *mithāl* comes from the same root with *mathal* [similitude].[617] Parallel to a tale, a similitude, a speech or a text, the world needs to be understood and interpreted. Life means interpretation according to Ibn al-'Arabī. Without interpretation (which means "as objectively"), neither one nor the world does exist. One exists with one's interpretation. In this chapter, I will sketch the general properties of this interpretive understanding of life in Ibn al-'Arabī. Interpretation, which is an existential category (through that human being encounters the world and her/himself) has to be elaborated in the light of his ontology. The accomplishment of this fusion is the main task of this chapter.

The salient aspects of Ibn al-'Arabī's hermeneutics that is an existential act of the subject for him will be elaborated in the following chapter. In the first part, reminding the etymological roots of interpretation [*ta'bīr*], the structure of interpretation will be analyzed. Interpretation is not a methodical inquiry, rather a travel parallel to that of Hermes. Due to the interplay between the visible and the invisible of the text (that is envisaged as *texus*), interpretation is understood as "diving" into the thickness of the text.

In the second part, I will focus on "openness," which is the main existential position enabling the encounter with the text possible. The third part will focus on self-understanding that is only possible for Ibn al-'Arabī through the encounter

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[617] See Chittick 1989, p.117 and p.14.

with the world. The final point to be scrutinized will be the Socratic fate of human being to be sentenced to ignorance of the world and of one's self. This Socratic creative negativity is the source of the openness that one develops in one's encounter with the world.

The points we will come up in what follows carry clear implications for phenomenological hermeneutics. Not only Gadamer, but also Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty would have much to add on the issues discussed below. Nevertheless, a part in that all these figures are handled comparatively will not be added to this chapter. Such an inquiry would be certainly a very insightful contribution, but it would expand the volume of this study substantially and compel the limits of it. Instead, it will be contended with introducing the main points of their approaches on the issues discussed below. In some places, where the thinkers converge to each other, I will mix the terminology they exploit and exchange their concepts. This mixture will be the most abbreviated way to display their convergences with each other.

7.1. Interpretation as a Traversal [*'Ubūr*]

As I have introduced, the Arabic word Ibn al-'Arabī exploits for "interpretation," i.e., "*ta'bīr*" comes from the same root with "traversing," "crossing over" ["*br*"]. When interpreting, the reader makes a travel towards the text and ventures between different possible meanings.

> The process of interpretation is a crossing over (*'ubūr*), as we have already seen in speaking of the "interpretation" (*ta'bīr*) of dreams. Once crossing over is made, one "gives expression" (*'ibāra*) to the inward sense through outward forms. But in making this crossover, [ideal interpreters] … never let go of it [i.e., the outward sense].[618]

Interpretation is a vertical travel from the visible to the invisible of the text. *Text is texus*, i.e., it is a cloth, the visible part of the chiasm of the visible and the invisible.

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[618] Chittick 1989, p.245.

Suppose that I have seen a beautiful lady in a white toilette in my dream. She was holding an apple in her right hand and asking for me to eat that red apple. I kindly rejected her and woke up subsequently. What did it mean? Apparently, I was asked by someone to eat something and refused it: this is a possible interpretation of what I saw. However, what I saw in my dream may also be interpreted in different ways from this apparent meaning. The real task of interpretation starts where I enter inside the *texus*, where I traverse the apparent meaning. What showed itself to me is an apparent part of which is always ready to be worked out and to be deepened. What appears to me is, in one respect, an unveiling and a vision of what shows itself to me. Nevertheless, what appears is also just the door to the meaning that has not appeared yet. In this sense, what appears is a veil to me concealing the meaning of the text. Through unveiling the meaning of the text, an interpretation veils it from me simultaneously. Every symbol is open to manifold readings. Thus, the possible interpretations of the text are endless. This inexhaustibleness is the common textual structure of all phenomena. Hermes exploits this inexhaustible gap between the reader/interpreter and the text. He ceaselessly excavates the text. The task of Hermes begins where one traverses this gap and makes a travel, a quest in the text. Indeed, there is no preestablished method in traveling. Interpretation as traversing turns into a three-time infinite travel in the inexhaustibleness of the text, in the endless richness of the language and in the infinite variety of the context.

In this three-fold infinity, the truth of the text derived by the reader/interpreter is the truth of that second of that person. Throughout the travel in the wide garden presented by the text, the meanings one can derive have no theoretical limit. The text, the world, and the self are always novel in every encounter that is realized in every reading. Therefore, to remain in the same understanding means not to keep traveling. It shows one's disability of getting what the text presents for that particular reading. Hermes is always at work, but one has to be open to accept what Hermes brings in every interpretive encounter with the hermeneutical object.

7.2. Openness [*Istiʿdād, Qabūl*]

> Be open-minded: but not so much
> so that your brain falls out.[619]

Ibn al-ʿArabī has two concepts, receptivity [*qabūl*] and preparedness [*istiʿdād*] that convey the existential, interpretive, non-methodical positioning before the world. When encountering a text (hence the world), one has to have a preestablished openness and readiness towards it. Ibn al-ʿArabī writes that the ability to understand the text demands receptivity [*qabūl*] and preparedness [*istiʿdād*], a preestablished openness towards the text.

> One listener understands one thing from it, another listener does understand that thing but understands something else, while a third understands many things. Therefore each of those who consider this verse cite it in accordance with the diversity of the preparedness of their understandings.[620]

There have been some followers of him who have drawn a separation between these two concepts. Nevertheless, these two concepts will be exploited interchangeably due to practical reasons in this thesis. Here, both concepts will be understood in a narrower sense than Ibn al-ʿArabī uses; in the way that they meet what Plato introduces and Gadamer rehabilitates as "openness." In expense of this conceptual narrowing, I will be able to preserve the contextual focus in this study. Therefore, these two concepts will be handled in the narrow way that they refer to Plato's *eumenis elenchoi*, i.e., openness.

Gadamer sees *eumenis elenchoi* [openness] not only as the necessary condition of encountering a text, but also as an existential term of utmost importance. For him, following Plato, *eumenis elenchoi* is an existential, artistic positioning towards life. Derrida's criticism to this Platonic engagement of Gadamer was the alleged metaphysical baggage it carried. Gadamer answers to this claim of Derrida in his

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[619] Dictum.

[620] Chittick 1989, p.92; *Futūḥāt* I 287.10.

Reply to Jacques Derrida.[621] H argues that the concept "openness" does not have a metaphysical baggage. Anyone, even the most immoral person, wants to be understood and to understand. The concept of openness means a "good will," it is a principle of charity. It belongs to *phronesis*, and refers to an aesthetical positioning of oneself to life. Instead of having metaphysical reference, openness is the requirement of any encounter in the world.

For Ibn al-ʿArabī, one has to be open to let the text present itself in manifold ways and through novel interpretations. This "letting it show itself" is not something which is to be learned through following a methodological, procedural, technical prescription. It is a general, existential positioning of oneself towards life. Interpretation is a non-methodical travel that initiates with openness to the text. Openness is an art, which belongs to *phronesis* and thus, exceeds method. The text, in accordance with the openness of the reader/interpreter, becomes able to present itself in various ways. Hermes brings novel meanings in every second to the extent that the reader/interpreter has openness [*istiʿdād*] to it. Ibn al-ʿArabī understands openness an essential structure of human being: one receives what Hermes brings only to this essential extend. As two wo-/men are not absolutely equal in openness, what they get from the hermeneutic encounter is different. Two people understand not the exactly same thing from the same text due to that their preestablished openness-receptivity-preparedness is not equal.

The self-disclosure of the Truth of the text "...is always delimited and defined by the preparedness of the receptacle."[622] One has to have a readiness, without which the text cannot be unfolded, or even met.[623] The reader/interpreter does not

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[621] See Gadamer 2002a.

[622] Chittick 1989, p.280.

[623] The central necessity of preparedness in the hermeneutic encounter has historically engendered what Morris calls "the paradox of mystical writing." (See Morris 1990, p.37) The writer is responded by the reader, who is deprieved of sufficient preparedness, in two general ways. In one case, the writer is rejected completely and accused of heresy. In the alternative case, the reader applies what s/he has read in an inappropriate way. This means, the encounter becomes a danger either for the writer, or for the reader. Historically, "[o]ne possible (and historically popular)

encounter the text without this openness. When dealing with a text, the reader has a question, a presupposition, a judgment or just curiosity which canalizes her/him to that text rather than another one. The text is encountered by the reader in this preestablished mood. Ibn al-ʿArabī writes that what the text presents is received only in the measure of one's own preparedness [*istiʿdād*].[624]

Every form of reading is a certain "knotting," a tying firmly to which one commits to encounter the text. To let the text present itself in manifold ways means to untie all the knots one has committed. When encountering a text, one ties oneself to a tradition, to a certain way of reading/interpreting/knotting [*ʿakidāh*]. There is no possibility of encountering the world without tying oneself with a distinct, good or bad, authority. To access to the manifold meanings presented by the text, one has to change her/his point to the text and attain a different position. This means to untie the knot one has committed and to open oneself to a novel manner of knotting through that the text presents itself differently (even maybe contradictorily). Before untying a knot, a novel knot cannot be made. Therefore, one has to commit and even immerse into a certain knotting, but s/he has to never stop in that particular way of unveiling which is a simultaneous veiling. One has to untie the knot and move to a novel way of unveiling. Man of "openness" ["*eumenis elenchoi*"] is the one who carefully unties oneself from the knot s/he has made in favor of a novel, risky and alien encounter with the text. Openness demands always a readiness to the novel unfolding of the hermeneutical object.

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response to this situation was not to write at all, to speak only to a few chosen disciples with the appropriate 'preparedness'..." (Morris 1990, p.44)

Ibn al-ʿArabī's position has been rather to write in such a ciphered and dialectical way that he avoided from the "recurrent pitfalls" resulting from the lack of "preparedness," and simultaneously reached to the ones who had a preestablished openness to what he wrote. In this sense, *he both veiled and unveiled* in his works coherently with his general paradoxical "yes and no" schema. His *Futūḥāt* [*openings*] "opened" itself only to the readers with sufficient preparedness and openness. (See Morris 1990, p.47.)

[624] Chittick 1989, p.257; *Futūḥāt* III 55.29.

This hermeneutical approach of Ibn al-ʿArabī, in practice, means not to "quench" in adhering to any religion, tradition, *ʿakidāh*, authority, and path [*madhhab*].[625] No preestablished (and to be established) form of reading/interpreting exhausts the infinite possibilities of meeting with the text. Meaning is already there: unfolded in all forms, but never fully manifest and never exhausted by any methodology. The given methods of interpretation are the religions, traditions, paths and sets of rules. Openness is the ability of traverse one of these structures and to travel to a novel one through that the text shows itself from another point of view. One must not stick to one of these paths all of which are manifold ways of unfolding of the Truth of the text. Every religion, tradition and path presents a different structure of reading. The interpretive access to Truth presented by one of them escapes from the other ones.

The lack of openness means to be adhered to a particular reading. It means to be guaranteed: one does not risk her/himself. One is stuck to a determined authority, to a certain way of interpretation and to a guaranteed, conventional meaning in the text. Openness is to risk one self. One has to embark on a travel to alien meanings which are currently invisible. Openness is to take the risk of an uncertainty of a quest that is not known how one will come to an end. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, openness is to leave a shelter, an authority and traverse to a novel one. It is to loosen all the knots one has committed her/himself with her/his whole existence in favor of the unfolding of the truth of the text.

The ones adhered to a particular unfolding of truth can only recognize that particular manifestation.[626] They can not reveal the truth that is available from another point of view. "Each receives Being's self-disclosure to the measure of its own capacity."[627] This preestablished capacity resembles to the objects which

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[625] This is "...Ibn ʿArabī's famous (or in some quarters notorious) openness and sensitivity to *all* forms of 'belief' (*ʿaqāʾid*)" which is a "characteristic aspect of his religious and metaphysical thinking." (Morris 1990, p.59.)

[626] Chittick 1989, p.336; *Futūḥāt* I 266.15.

[627] Ibid, p.91.

become visible in the sun. Using this resemblance Ibn al-ʿArabī develops his phenomenology of light.

> Each locus attributes the effect [of light] to the sun and forgets its own preparedness. The person with a cold temperament enjoys the sun's heat, while the person with a hot temperament suffers from its heat. … The sun blackens the face of the washerman, while it whitens the clothing.[628]

The ability to understand the text demands receptivity [*qabūl*] and preparedness [*istiʿdād*]. They are non-methodical, essential structures that one has to attain before life. To the extent of and owing to this preestablished openness towards the text, the truth of the text presents itself.

> One listener understands one thing from it, another listener does understand that thing but understands something else, while a third understands many things. Therefore each of those who consider this verse cite it in accordance with the diversity of the preparedness of their understandings.[629]

Truth becomes to me visible to the extent I have an already established openness towards it. "…[T]he loci receive in the measure of the realities of their preparedness."[630] I am never fully open to the text. I am not only historical, hence finite, but also embedded into an authority or another one that is a particular, interpretive, limited and certainly biased point of view through which the text discloses itself. Hence, openness is always completed with the ubiquitous "knot" of tradition and authority in Ibn al-ʿArabī. One is never on one's own when dealing with a text and encountering the world. The tradition and authority into which s/he is engaged is always molding one's mind and one's encounter with the world. The historicity of human being yields the de facto immersion into a tradition. The openness that is authentically peculiar and unique to anyone, functions together with the "knot" of the authority in the encounter with the world.

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[628] Ibid, p.92; *Futūḥāt* I 287.10.

[629] Ibid, p.92; *Futūḥāt* I 287.10.

[630] Ibid, p.91; *Futūḥāt* I 287.10.

7.3. Knowledge as Self-Knowledge

In the third chapter, we have introduced the temporal understanding of the "self" in Ibn al-ʿArabī in comparison with Heidegger. Both of Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology and hermeneutics are centered on the conception of the self through that the world presents itself always in a subjective manner. When dealing with Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology in a more elaborate way in the fourth chapter, we saw that the self is something thick and never transparent. It shares the textuality with all the phenomena and presents itself always with interpretation and in a particular form. In the fifth chapter when dealing with his hermeneutics, we saw that the encounter with one's self, similar to that of the world, happens through interpretation. The self is a hermeneutical object. Now, in the following part, I want to merge Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology and hermeneutics when dealing with the knowledge and understanding of the "self."

Ibn al-ʿArabi's position, again, has central similarities and dissimilarities simultaneously, compared to the Occidental phenomenology. Therefore, before dealing with Ibn al-ʿArabī, I have added an introduction to the self-knowledge in Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger and Gadamer. All these Occidental figures point to the same opaqueness of the self. The self always hides from my gaze upon it. For all these figures, knowledge is the knowledge of the self and one is learning who s/he is through the experience of the world. The self is embedded in the world through that it encounters itself. One cannot be separated/abstracted from one's environment, which molds the self through a nonstop interrelation. To be in the world means to never know exactly who one is.

7.3.1. Merleau-Ponty: Learning the Self Invaded by the World

I have already introduced that for Merleau-Ponty the phenomenal world, which lies at the rock bottom, is a thick, inexhaustible, transcendent, shared world and that the existence, language, vision, and context of the "other" is the opening of a new *veil* of this common world. The other and the subject are for Merleau-Ponty

like two hands when touching to each other. Both are object, both are subject, both are ontologically kin, intertwined, but also absolutely distinct. "... [T]his other who invades me is made only of my own substance..."[631] and its elaboration will provide me great enrichment. "... '[R]eality' does not belong definitely to any particular perception, that in this sense, it lies *always further on*...there is no *Schein* without *Erscheinung*... every *Schein* is the counterpart of an *Erscheinung*..."[632]

The self is embedded into the world; and self-consciousness is always interrogated in the presence of the world. There is no self-transparent cogito like that of Sartre envisaged and Husserl theorized. Self is something thick, never known fully and never transparent to itself.

> I do not lucidly grasp every facet of what I am, but neither is anything about me utterly hidden from me in a "sub-conscious," the things that well up from my past to affect my present are at least in principle subject to becoming better and better understood, just as I can come to know a person better and better the more I have seen him in action in varying situations.[633]

I learn myself in the world. I see who I am through the worldly experience. The self cannot be abstracted from the world into which it is thrown and through which it constitutes itself. "...[E]ach [subject] experiences himself as involved with the others..."[634] The experience is shared with the self and with the world. Both are in any experience unavoidably. Hence, if we would bracket out the world -which means that if we reached to the transcendental subjectivity-, there would remain nothing to consciousness to intend and to the subject to be able to speak of.

> The world and the one who perceives it cannot be separated from each other. Thus reflection is not an introspection accomplished by an isolated self; it represents an extrospection, a reestablishing of one's direct contact with the world in which one finds oneself and things interrelated in the world…[635]

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[631] Merleau-Ponty 1968, p.11.

[632] Ibid, p.41.

[633] Langan, p.210.

[634] Merleau-Ponty 1968, p.63.

[635] Olson, p.115.

The self and the world that "invades" it are made of the same substance, i.e., "flesh" which unites them in the wild, preconscious level.

The self knows/learns in Merleau-Ponty through the experience of the world. Every experience of the world is the experience of one's self, as the self is always there even if cannot be distinguished easily from its environment. The world and the self are in a chiasm, they are mediated through the body. "…[O]ur body is a being of two leaves, from one side a thing among things and otherwise what sees them and touches them."[636] The body is the subject and the object, but never both at the same time. It has a "double belongingness," it is an isthmus. The body does not merge the world and the self. On the contrary, it opens them to each other in a productive way.

The self is known through the world and in the world. The self and the world are in a bilateral interrelation, through which knowledge of both is derived. The self unfolds itself in every experience. "To touch is to touch oneself."[637] Self projects itself into the world and knows itself in this projection. For Merleau-Ponty, "...thought and objective language are simply two manifestations of the one fundamental operation by which man projects himself toward a world."[638] The self can never know itself without projecting itself into the world. The world as the projection implies the self. Besides, the self, which is always interrogated with the world and never "clarified" from the world, cannot be abstracted from it. It is very meaningful what Merleau-Ponty writes in *The Visible and The Invisible*: "…philosophy is the set of questions wherein he who questions is himself implicated by the question."[639] The self is implied by its interrelation with the world. One learns oneself when dealing with the world into that one is thrown.

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[636] Merleau-Ponty 1968, p.137.

[637] Ibid, p.255.

[638] Lewis, p.31.

[639] Merleau-Ponty 1968, p.27.

7.3.2. Heidegger and Self-Understanding

According to Heidegger, interpretation is the mode of *Dasein*'s being. Interpretation is a possibility of it.[640] The encounter of *Dasein* with the world and with one's self is enabled through the hermeneutics of *Dasein*. *Dasein* faces up with itself by interpreting the world. "Thus the hermeneutics of facticity means the interpretive self-understanding of *Dasein*..."[641] My interpretation of Being unfolds not only "Being-as-something," but also my self to me. I manifest myself in the world through my interpretation. *Dasein*'s interpreting goes hand in hand with its self-interpreting.[642]

Dasein's aim in the world is to attain authenticity [*eigentlichkeit*] in Heidegger. In other words, *Dasein* aims "*wakefulness* for itself"[643] that means a clear self-understanding. *Dasein* is living in a "they" world. It loses what is authentic to it in daily forgetfulness and in the average intelligibility of the inauthentic. Full authenticity is not possible in this shared world. Self-understanding turns to a thrown project and a never ending interpretive process by Heidegger. The self is already there [*Da*] in every experience of *Dasein*. This ubiquity yields the ontological necessity that "…understanding is always the understanding of one's own existence."[644]

Being is unveiled to me as "always-being-my-own-being."[645] It is never present in an objectified, abstracted way: "*Dasein* does not exist as a thing or object, as objectively present..."[646] On the contrary, *Dasein* encounters with itself and with the world after a hermeneutical process that one finds already started. This

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[640] Schmidt, p.55.

[641] Ibid, p.56. See also ibid, p.58.

[642] Günok, p.43.

[643] Schmidt, p.55; Heidegger 1999, p.12.

[644] Figal, p.23.

[645] Schmidt, p.63; Heidegger 1996, p.42.

[646] Ibid, p.63.

hermeneutical process may be an inauthentic explain-away that is presented by "the they" ["*das man*"]. Instead, the process may also be a self-conscious, authentic choice. "The self of everyday *Da-sein* is the *they-self* that we distinguish from the *authentic self*, the self which has explicitly grasped itself."[647] The difference between the genuine interpretation and the inadequate one is the difference between the authentic interpretation and the interpretation of "the they." The interpretive mode in the they-self is to rely on the mode that is presented to *Dasein* by the they. The they-self, as the belonging to the others, brings a substantial irresponsibility with it. On the other hand, the *authentic self* is only possible through "understanding."[648] An authentic existence -that is to have attained a genuine encounter with the world and with one's self- means to be careful [*angst*]. *Dasein,* both in authentic and inauthentic interpretation, encounters itself after a hermeneutical process. In any case, self-understanding necessitates interpretation. The ideal interpretation occurs through phenomenology. In phenomenology, I am trying to see the Being as it shows itself, not in the way that I am dictating to it. Thus, phenomenological method is the key of the genuine interpretation. Phenomenology shows the doors of *Dasein*'s interpretation of itself and the world.

When disclosing the Being through interpretation, I am also disclosing my self. The self is partaken in the process of interpretation. Interpretation is a fusion in that the self melts away. The self is risked in every experience. *Erfahrung* [experience] means *gefahr* [danger] for the identity of the self. The self is not preserved, because the experience is that of the world into which *Dasein* is thrown. Understanding is not a self-conscious project; it is an event [*ereignis*]. This hermeneutical approach to the self of Heidegger will be developed by his student Gadamer.

[647] Ibid, p.68; Heidegger 1996, p.129.

[648] Günok, p.51.

7.3.3. Gadamer's Self in the Play

According to Gadamer, hermeneutics can never fulfill its task in the absence of application due to the necessity of appropriation in understanding. Experience is my experience. In understanding, what I encounter is appropriated for me.[649] "What is experienced is always what one has experienced oneself."[650] Understanding is not genuine if not applied to one's self. Interpretation realizes itself through application. Therefore, application is an indispensable part of understanding and interpretation. Application is not just a transportation or transposition. "To project the text's horizon, the interpreter must apply or translate the text to her own ... horizon of meaning. Therefore, interpretive understanding always requires application."[651] The necessity of self-application for understanding means that every understanding is necessarily a self-understanding.

One has to be open to let the text present itself in different ways and through novel interpretations. This "letting it show itself" is not something that is to be learned through following a methodological, procedural, technical prescription. It is a general, existential positioning of oneself towards life. Openness is an art. It belongs to *phronesis* and transcends method.

We have necessarily prejudices we inherit from tradition and only through which we encounter the world. The prejudices into that we are embedded are good and bad, fertile and futile, all intermeshed. Hermeneutics has to show how we can distinguish those productive prejudices from other ones. Heidegger and Gadamer, who state that we have to rely on the things themselves to unfold them in the most accurate way, have also to show how relying of one's presuppositions on the things themselves will be possible. This question of distinguishing of the futile and

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[649] Understanding, for Gadamer, necessarily includes appropriation not only to one's self, but also to the present. See Palmer, pp.190-171.

[650] Gadamer 1991, p.61.

[651] Schmidt, p.114.

fertile prejudices is answered by Gadamer within the context of his approach to truth as unveiling. The productive prejudices are to suddenly shine and unveil themselves when dealing with them.[652] The fruitful prejudices will unconceal themselves in the form of *a-letheia* just as truth unconceals itself in the fusion with the text. The prejudices cannot be distinguished just theoretically; one has to work them out and apply in practical matters. Only when applying and dealing with them practically, the fruitful prejudices will unexpectedly shine. The self is already there in any application and un-veiling.

In Gadamer, knowledge is always in the form of self-knowledge. The self is present in all worldly experiences through that one encounters the world and attains its knowledge. The self is unavoidably there ["*Da*"] in every experience. "…[T]he human being and the world belong 'originally together' in understanding."[653] The understanding of one's self does not happen in an abstracted, reflective way. Gadamer uses the concept "play"[654] ["*spiel*"] to refer to the form of the hermeneutic experience. As hermeneutics is universal, play is the general form of the experience. "…[T]he savage himself knows no conceptual difference between being and playing."[655] This "*primacy of play over the consciousness of the player*"[656] is not peculiar to the savage. Instead, this primacy molds the universal structure of *inderweltsein*. "To be" means "to be in play." Because the self is always a self in the play, self-understanding happens within the well-defined boundaries of the play it is immersed into.[657] The self is not an abstracted one; it is always a playing-self. The self is risked in the play. "…[T]he game itself is a risk for the player."[658] This risking and fading away is not an

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[652] Ibid, p.127.

[653] Figal, p.21. See also particularly Figal pp.22-24.

[654] David E. Linge translates the German word "spiel" as "game," while other translators use the concept "play." See *Appendix-B: Note on German Translations*.

[655] Gadamer 1976a, p.55.

[656] Gadamer 1991, p.104.

[657] Gadamer 1976a, p.55.

[658] Gadamer 1991, p.106.

"ecstatic self-forgetting" in that one loses her/his self-possession. Rather, it happens "...as the free buoyancy of an elevation above oneself."[659] In this buoyancy, the self is the part of a larger whole, of a process. The "I" of play cannot be distinguished in this process. In the experience, "I" is never clearly separated. We never say "I am understanding," for in understanding, the "I" is the "understanding I." Rather, we say "I have understood." "It is not really we ourselves who understand: it is always a past that allows us to say, 'I have understood.'"[660] We refer to the "I" separately only retrospectively, after the process ends.

Thus, one encounters her/his self as an "understanding self," as a self in a process, in a play. The self as understood is the self encountered and merged with a text. One learns oneself through the encounter with the world. There is no self-understanding except one encounters the world. The self, even if it is ubiquitous, loses itself in the play. Experience transforms the self. "The structure of play absorbs the player into itself, and thus frees him from the burden of taking the initiative..."[661] Self consciousness, in this risking of the self, is *only a flickering in the closed circuit of a historical life*," with the words of Gadamer.[662] I want to quote a short passage from his *On the Problem of Self Understanding* where he explains the nature of self-understanding.

> …[T]he relation between the understanding and what is understood has a priority over its relational terms. ... [U]nderstanding involves a moment of "loss of self" that is relevant to theological hermeneutics and should be investigated in terms of the structure of the game.[663]

This means that the self-understanding is of the self in an experiential process that necessarily includes understanding and interpretation. One unveils her/his self through an interpretive encounter. "To understand a text is to come to understand

[659] Gadamer 1976a, p.55.

[660] Ibid, p.58.

[661] Gadamer 1991, p.105.

[662] Figal, p.24.

[663] Gadamer 1976a, pp.50-51.

oneself in a kind of dialogue."[664] In every dialogue, something novel is experienced and the self is unveiled to itself in a different manner.

Self-understanding (as a happening in the form of play) occurs always in relation with the world, with the "other." There is no knowledge of the self except with interpretation. Similar to other phenomena, the self is disclosed to *Dasein* through the experience of play that is an interpretive process. "The futurity of *Dasein* … is limited by its … 'thrownness,' which not only specifies the limits of sovereign self-possession but also opens up and determines the positive possibilities that we are."[665] Our thrownness in the world does not enable us to reach to a full self-knowledge, just as the full knowledge of the world is not possible. Our thrownness in the world shows us our possibilities. Moreover, it presents us the plays that we can dive into and we may meet with who we are. The thrownness unveils the world and our selves to us, and veils them from us simultaneously.

Every experience is a mode of self-understanding and aesthetical experience is not excluded from this assertion. Thus, aesthetical experience is also a mode of self-understanding.[666] Because hermeneutics is an art and the "self" is encountered through interpretation, self-understanding is an aesthetical experience. Life is an art, and one's relation with her/his self is a hermeneutical, hence, aesthetical process. Besides, to remind, it is definitively historical, thus finite. Self-understanding is a cultural act. It happens in a distinct mode that lacks other endless modes of unfolding of the self. The self never appears in its entirety and certainty. What Gadamer calls the "false claim of gnostic self-certainty"[667] must be corrected to a context-based, perpetually unfolding conception of self-understanding.[668] "In the last analysis, all understanding is self-understanding, but

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[664] Ibid, p.57.

[665] Ibid, p.49.

[666] Gadamer 1991, p.97.

[667] Gadamer 1976a, p.49.

[668] Such a "context-sensitive approach" is implied by Gadamer to be adopted not only in self-understanding, but also in intercultural communication. See Roy and Starosta, pp.11-13.

not in the sense of a preliminary self-possession or of one finally and definitively achieved."[669] The knowledge of the self is acquired only through its companionship in the play and always with the understanding of a subject matter. Play has a characteristic peculiar to itself and "...playing is always a playing of something."[670] Thus, the assumption of the theologian that to escape from one's "abysmal ignorance" is possible when dealing with the sacred Word [*verbum dei*] is mistaken.[671] Instead, *Dasein* is historical and "[t]o be historical means never to rise to self-knowledge. All self-knowledge arises from historical givenness…"[672] The self is never known certainly and totally. Through the temporal and contextual encounter with the world, *Dasein* comes to meet with itself that is a never-ending play-structured process.

7.3.4. Ibn al-'Arabī: Self Lurking In Its Appearance

In the third chapter, the bondage between "*nafs*" and "*nafas*," i.e., the "self" and the "instance" or "breathe" has been underlined. The self "…does not stay the same for two successive *instants*."[673] They are written in the same way in Arabic. The self is essentially temporal. Being ceaselessly unfolds itself temporally to the self in every instance.[674] The self is perpetually novel due to this temporal manifestation just as the phenomenal world. The self is new in each moment. At each moment a new self arrives "...just as, in this body, a new breath arrives."[675] This ever-novelty of the self and of the world render them inexhaustibly rich for experience. They are capable of presenting themselves always in manifold ways.

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[669] Gadamer 1976a, p.55.

[670] Gadamer 1991, p.107.

[671] Gadamer 1976a, p.55.

[672] Bübner, p.62. (Quoted from Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode*, Tübingen edition.)

[673] Murata and Chittick, p.218. Italics added.

[674] Chittick 2007b, p.55.

[675] Ibid, p.56.

Ibn al-'Arabī in his *Kitāb Insha' al-Dawā'ir al-Iḥaṭiyya* conveys that one can know her/his self [*nafs*] only through the knowledge of the world.[676] The locus of self knowledge is the world in that human being dwells, and into which s/he is thrown. Therefore, according to Ibn al-'Arabī, "[k]nowing the world becomes a mode of knowing one's own self…"[677] In the part on the thickness of the self in Ibn al-'Arabī, the bondage between the self and the world was introduced. The self and also the phenomenal world share with texts the same property of textuality. Textuality is common to them and they cannot be separated or abstracted from each other. The world unfolds itself through the self, with interpretation, and always subjectively. The self, on the other hand, permeates the world and is a microcosmos. Just as the twofold thickness of the world never lets one encompass and exhaust it, the self enjoys the same twofold infinity. The self is never known to me. It is always behind a veil through that it discloses itself. Self-knowledge "...is hidden deep beneath the dross of ignorance, forgetfulness, outwardly oriented activity, and rational articulation."[678]

There is a strict bondage between my gaze at the world and my gaze at my self. They (i.e., the self and the world) enjoy the same textuality and present themselves to me through interpretation. There is a dialogue between these texts. They are in a chiasm with each other that cannot be separated from this companionship. They are not accessible in the absence of the other one. The world is accessible to me only with the self. And the self is always the self in the world. The self dwells in the world and the knowledge of whatever it derives is necessarily in the world through the enabling existence of the "secondary causes." What is understood necessarily includes one's self. There is no subject – object distinction in understanding. The abstraction of the self vanishes in the understanding that is a fusion with the world. The self is never pure in the world. In every experience of the world, there is the self but never as a separate, enveloped, "purified" self.

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[676] El-Bizri, p.7.

[677] Ibid, p.7.

[678] Chittick 2007b, p.39.

Instead, the self is an inseparable part in the chiasm of understanding. In every encounter and attainment of knowledge of the world, the self is already and unavoidably there. Knowledge is a self-knowledge.

Our encounter with the world happens in the form of interpretation. Every relation is an interrelation and when unfolding the world to us, we are also unfolding our selves to us. The self [*nafs*] (as elaborated in comparison with Heidegger in the third chapter), which is embodied and temporal, is not what is in the skin envelope or abstracted from the world. In the meeting with the world, the self is already and always there; it is a *felix culpa*. The knowledge of the world harbors the knowledge of the self. When dealing with the world into that we are thrown, we are also dealing with our own selves. The self shares the same textuality and hence the twofold thickness that all the phenomena assume. One fold of this thickness is the horizontal one: the self permeates to the world. It cannot be exhausted horizontally, as presented by Merlau-Ponty. Whenever I turn to myself, I miss another side of me. I cannot encompass me. Secondly, the self is also vertically thick. What the self is always hides in itself. I cannot know my self fully. The search of the "secret" of the self knowledge [*sirr man 'araf*] is a never ending process. My interrelation with the world and with my self is in a perpetual and contextual inflow.

Due to its textuality, the self is encountered always through hermeneutics. "The human self is the greatest of all books…"[679] Along with its ubiquitous presence, it never appears in its entirety. The way in which my self appears does not exhaust it all. Therefore, I veil my self from me. I am condemned to the self that is the main veil from which other veils between me and the *Sein qua Sein* stem. It is the greatest of veils. I cannot know my self.[680] The self is a meeting of darkness and

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[679] Chittick, p.103.

[680] Here exists a reference to a famous prophetic saying [*ḥadīth*]: "he who knows [*'arafa*] himself knows his Lord." God cannot be known in His essence. Hence, I cannot ever know my self. Knowledge of the self, which is the key of existence, is not possible in full sense. See Chittick 2007b, p.39.

light:[681] it is veiled by its unveiling. I am condemned to remain ignorant of my self. Nevertheless, as "openness" [*istiʿdād, qabūl*] in Ibn al-ʿArabī suggests, this ignorance is never an undervaluation of self-knowledge. Instead, the awareness of one's ignorance from one's self implies knowledge and moves one to an unending process of unveiling. This process is a simultaneous disclosure of one's self with the world. When dealing with the world, one is also learning who s/he is. The knowledge one acquires is the knowledge of one's ignorance of both the world and one's self. The movement to one's self never rests. The rest is in the movement, because the self is novel and permanently moving through the temporal unfolding of *Sein* [*rabb muṭlaq*] as *Sein*-for-me [*rabb khaṣṣ*].[682]

7.4 Condemned to Ignorance: Socratic Creative Negativity

Incapacity to attain comprehension is itself comprehension.[683]

Merleau-Ponty's twofold thickness, which immerses the human being into an endless world, is at work in the approach of Ibn al-ʿArabī. In the world, one has no vantage point from that "the things as they are" can appear. Knowledge of the world implied by this ontological positioning turns out to be an endless task. Knowledge of the world (envisaged here as an endless unveiling) does not lead Ibn al-ʿArabī to a hopeless, trivializing or passive positioning towards epistemology. On the contrary, his approach to epistemology leads us to the patron saint of philosophy, Socrates, because the "…inadequacy of knowledge implies the *obligation to know more*."[684]

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[681] Chittick 2002, p.54.

[682] For an extensive and focused discussion on the self-knowledge in Ibn al-ʿArabī, see Kakaie, Ghasem (2007). "'Know yourself' according to Qurʾān and Sunna: Ibn ʿArabī's View." *Journal of Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society*, Vol.42. pp.1-19.

[683] Chittick 1989, p.4. See also Chittick 1989, p.345, *Futūḥāt* III 121.25.

[684] Bübner, p.8.

Merleau-Ponty after being selected as the chair of the College de France, made an inaugural lecture in January 15th of 1953. This lecture, later published with the title *In Praise of Philosophy*, started in the memory and yearning of the "patron" of philosophers,

> …a man who never wrote, who never thought, at least in any official chair, who talked with anyone he met on the street, and who had certain difficulties with public opinion and with the public powers. We must remember Socrates.[685]

The judgment of Socrates was the judgment of the entire city, for he obeyed to all the laws, and believed to the gods more than anyone else. Socrates knew that "…there is no absolute knowledge, and that it is by this absence that we are open to the truth."[686] This absence is a negativity that is creative and moving one to the heart of the world for knowledge. Man, carrying this negativity, "... is not a force but a weakness at the heart of being…"[687] *Dasein* is always incomplete. Similarly, philosophy, as the self conscious interrogation of the world, harbors this creative negativity; "…it is useless to deny that philosophy *limps*."[688] This Socratic awareness of the limping of philosophy and the weakness of the man yields an openness that knows no quenching. "What makes a philosopher is the movement which leads back without ceasing from knowledge to ignorance, from ignorance to knowledge, and a kind of *rest in this movement*."[689]

Smilarly, Gadamer also does not miss that what he presents as Platonic "openness" relies on the Socratic creative negativity. "Socrates teaches that the important thing is the knowledge that one does not know."[690] The worldly, temporal experience does never exhaust the world. "The truth of experience always implies an orientation toward new experience. ... The dialectic of experience has its proper fulfillment not in definitive knowledge but in the openness to experience that is

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[685] Merleau-Ponty 1963b, p.34.

[686] Ibid, p.39.

[687] Ibid, p.44.

[688] Ibid, p.58. Emphasis mine.

[689] Ibid, p.5. Emphasis mine.

[690] Gadamer 1991, p.365.

made possible by experience itself."[691] Therefore, experience is a process that is "essentially negative."[692] It changes one and transforms one's relation with the world. What is repeated and confirmed is not experience.[693] As Heidegger reminds, the concept "experience" ["*erfahrung*"] comes from the same root with *gefahr*, which means "risk" or "danger."[694] In the experience, one risks oneself. In every experience, we risk our selves. The self undergoes a danger as it changes through experience. The "self" is not preserved in the experience. One's whole knowledge is changed in the experience, because one cannot have "the same experience twice"[695] and one is appropriated for more. The creative negativity points to an openness towards experience, to what is new and alien. Experience that is defined as negativity implies more experience. Due to this creative negativity in experience, the one who is called "experienced" is not only the one who experienced a lot, but also who is open to novel experiences.[696] Experience opens oneself to more experience. "...[T]he negativity of experience has a curiously productive meaning."[697] Thus, any knowledge and experience calls for more as a step in an endless unveiling. Indeed, knowledge is an improvement even if it has no quenching.

In Ibn al-'Arabī's phenomenology of *wujūd* and universal hermeneutics, the parallel Socratic point is highly evident. For him, the subject is always ignorant of the world and also of one's self due to the inexhaustible richness of them. This richness is both vertical and horizontal. The world, with its infinite possibilities of being read and interrogated, shows us our desperate ignorance compared to its thickness. Firstly, the world is vertically infinitely thick: I cannot exhaust the experience of infinite objects in it. The world presents to me such a depth that I

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[691] Ibid, p.355.

[692] Ibid, p.353.

[693] Ibid, p.353.

[694] See Tonyalı p.103.

[695] Gadamer 1991, p.353.

[696] Ibid, p.355.

[697] Ibid, p.353.

can never quench in any experience. My knowledge is never full concerning the object. The truth of the world always hides however deeper I try to dive. The vertical infinity; i.e., the vertical thickness of the phenomena never lets me to avoid from my ignorance. Any unveiling implies that it has more to bestow, because any experience demands further experience. The truth of beings is never fully open as Being is not an object. Thus, the truth of beings-as-themselves is veiled to me. What unfold themselves are just veils before the Truth, Truth as itself is never unveiled from me. What I unveil is just another veil: I always remain ignorant compared to the thickness the world assumes. Secondly, the possible things [*mumkināt*] are also infinite. They present a horizontal infinity. Being's temporal unfolding may occur in limitless different structures, which are the beings. Beings are temporally finite in definition. They hide the Being but open it as the *Sosein* that is thrown into the world temporally, spatially and inescapably. *Sosein* enjoys a non-limited variety of temporal structures which cannot be consumed by the finite human being. Therefore, I am condemned to ignorance at any rate.

All knowledge is the knowledge one's incompleteness. Knowledge belongs to our ignorance. Ibn al-'Arabī tells this negativity of knowledge with reference to Abū Bakr's famous maxim [*al-ajz 'an dark al-idrāk, idrāk*].[698]

> The most knowledgeable of the knowers is he who knows that he knows what he knows and that he does not know what he does not know. … Abū Bakr said, "Incapacity to attain comprehension is itself comprehension." In other words, he comprehended that there is something which he is capable of comprehending. So that is knowledge/not knowledge.[699]

There is no full knowledge in the world. The world, with both its vertical and horizontal infinity, unfolds itself with an endless variety. Having faced this endlessness, ignorance becomes man's destiny. Every object of interpretation (the

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[698] Chittick 1989, p.396.

[699] Ibid, pp.155-156; *Futūḥāt* IV 313.22.

world, the text and the self) is inexhaustibly thick. *Sein qua Sein* is known only in its negativity.[700]

> You attach your knowledge to Him and apprehend (*ḍabṭ*) some specific thing in your knowledge. But the highest you apprehend about Him in your knowledge of Him is that He cannot be apprehended and is nondelimited… Hence He is not apprehended, but He is apprehended by His being distinguished from that which is apprehended. So that which cannot be apprehended has been apprehended. This is like your words, "Incapacity to attain comprehension is itself comprehension."[701]

This incapacity of full-knowledge is an ontological fact, a logical result of this finite structure of *inderweltsein*.[702]

Nevertheless, this awareness of one's own ignorance, following Socrates, is another unveiling of the world. The knowledge of one's ignorance is to reveal the inexhaustible thickness of the world and one's self that cannot be consumed by our interrogation. It comes with openness to further knowledge. The desperate, dense ignorance of human being in the world does not lead to a trivialization of knowledge. Instead, this fate of human being renders knowledge more central. Ibn al-'Arabī writes in *Futūḥāt*, there is "…within the soul of the possible thing something through which he [human being] finds within himself the joy which eliminates the pain of seeking."[703] The ignorance that we come up with through knowledge has a creative nature. It is a "creative ignorance" that implies more knowledge. In other words, the knowledge of ignorance is open/receptive to more knowledge. The ideal seeker's simultaneous regret of ignorance and bewilderment [*ḥayra*] of openness does never end. One "strives to achieve that which cannot possible be achieved."[704] Besides, the exact "path is not known"[705] due to the absence and incapacity of a preestablished technique to follow on this path. The

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[700] Ibid, p.349; *Futūḥāt* II 211.29.

[701] Ibid, p.112; *Futūḥāt* I 289.20.

[702] Ibid, p.112.

[703] Ibid, p.158; *Futūḥāt* III 263.16, 35, and *Futūḥāt* 265.1.

[704] Ibid, p.349; *Futūḥāt* II 211.29.

[705] Ibid, p.349; *Futūḥāt* II 211.29.

path is not only infinite, but also unknown and alien. Socratic *docta ignorantia*, i.e., creative negativity together with Plato's *eumenis elenchoi*, i.e., openness, imply always more to know and to experience.

Thus, it is evident that knowledge is not undervalued or neglected by Ibn al-'Arabī. On the contary, he has an understanding that cares for knowledge arguably more than anyone else in the Islamic tradition. We generally encounter in Sufism with positions that trivialize worldly knowledge. Contrarily, Ibn al-'Arabī places the knowledge of the world, of the self and of the Absolute to the center of worldly experience. In *Fuṣūṣ*, in the bezel[706] where Ibn al-'Arabī criticizes Al-Ghazālī, he claims that the locus of manifestation of Absolute is the world and nowhere else. The knowledge of the Absolute is only possible through the knowledge of the world. No knowledge of the world means no knowledge at all. Therefore, he opposes the general ascetic tendency to abstain and "clarify" oneself from the world. Instead, every possibility expresses itself in the world, and all knowledge presents itself in the world. Rather than choosing renunciation [*zuhd*], one has to open one self to the world as much as possible. Instead of trying to escape from the world into which we are embedded, one has to undertake to unveil it with a full "openness." The world is the locus of temporal disclosure of Being. It unfolds itself with an endless variety in the world.[707] Knowledge, as the knowledge in and through the world, has to update and renew itself in accordance with this endless richness of the world.

Knowledge is never introverted. Thinking is never reflection. Subject is never enveloped. World is never objectified.

> "Renunciation" [*zuhd*][708] of things can occur only through the ignorance and lack of knowledge of the one who renounces and

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[706] Ibn al-'Arabī 1980a, p.93.

[707] Chittick 1989, p.156; *Futūḥāt* II 671.5.

[708] *Zuhd*, as the "methodological" abstinence from the world, may be claimed to represent the general tendency of many Ṣūfīs. Hence, the passage may be read as a critique of Sufism initiated by Ibn al-'Arabī.

> through the veil which covers his eyes, that is, the lack of unveiling and witnessing…[709]

Knowledge is the knowledge of the world from which the human being cannot be separated. Trying to renounce the world means to renounce the "secondary causes," which are our unique instruments for attaining knowledge.[710] Knowledge cannot be attained by abstracting oneself from the world, rather only by opening oneself to it.

Any knowledge of the world and of our selves which we attain points to its invisible, to what we have not attained yet. This status of knowledge expresses our desperate ignorance. Nevertheless, if we approach from the side of the visible, every veil we encounter is a truth. Truth unfolds itself by its negativity; it unveils itself by its veil. What veils the invisible truth of the object is a visible truth of it. Every unveiling of mine is a truth particular for me and for that second. *The veil of truth is itself*. Every text introduces me something new in every reading. Every truth of the text points to the thickness of it and to my ignorance simultaneously. I am *abysmal ignorant* before the world and before my self. This dense ignorance does not stop. Indeed, it is open to more and makes one move rather than rest. This ignorance as a creative negativity knows no quenching in Ibn al-ʿArabī. There is no escape from ignorance, the awareness of which yields a never quenching simultaneous movement to knowledge that is also self-knowledge. One has to find rest in this permanent movement.[711]

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[709] Chittick 1989, p.157; *Futūḥāt* III 263.16, 35.

[710] Ibid, p.157.

[711] *Al-tamkīn fi'l-talwīn.* See also, ibid, p.108.

CHAPTER 8

THE SYNTHESIS: *WORLD AS AN IMAGINATION* [*KHAYĀL*]

Ibn al-ʿArabī has a phenomenological conception of being, as the Arabic word for being and existence, i.e., "*wujūd*" suggests. The things as they appear are separate from their Being. Being as it is, which means, *Sein* objectively [*wujūd muṭlaq*] is transcendent in Kantian terms. It is what exceeds the phenomenal world. One cannot speak of *Sein* objectively. What one says on Being must be negated, which is also a salient aspect of negative theology. Nevertheless, for Ibn al-ʿArabī, the negation is supported by the affirmation in the phenomenological level that is our thrownness in the world. The being of the phenomena is affirmed in subjective terms. We exist somehow even if *Sein* objectively is never accessible. We exist subjectively in the world. The world appears to me as the world-for-me. Even if we cannot objectively justify the being of our worldliness, we exist in the world necessarily and unavoidably. The distinction between *wujūd muṭlaq* and *wujūd muqayyad* in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought corresponds to Heidegger's distinction of *Sein* and *Seiende*. *Sein* is not the traditional "Being of beings," which means the traditional God of *creatio ex nihilo*. On the contrary, *Sein* is never present in the world as it is according to Ibn al-ʿArabī. *Sein* unfolds itself in the world as the world. This is a temporal, theophanic understanding of *Sein*. *Sein* manifests itself as the *Seiende*. Because *inderweltsein* is necessarily finite, timely and contingent, *Sein* has no timely or horizontal limit to unfold itself. The world is infinite timely, vertically and horizontally. Through the temporal unfolding of *Sein*, the world and the self [*nafs*] receive a novel disclosure of *Sein* in every instant/breath [*nafas*]. Merleau-Ponty's concept, "thickness" provides a good conceptual lever at this point. The world is presented to the human being in an inexhaustible richness. This richness stems, first, from the inexhaustibleness of what *appears*; and second, from the interplay of what appears and what does not.

Therefore, for Ibn al-ʿArabī, the world is presented to the subject always in subjective, or better, subject-dependent terms. I can never objectively verify my

existence, just as I cannot justify anything objectively. I have no access to what is objective. Nothing appears to me in its entirety. I am condemned to the world for a specific period of time. I exist in subjective terms, but not in objective terms. The world exists, but only in subjective terms. Objectively, the world along with my self cannot be presupposed to exist. Thus, the world is ontologically tantamount to imagination [*khayāl*]. It is presented to me always over my self from that I cannot escape. The world is present to me through my ubiquitous self, just like a dream. World is ontologically an imagination. It does not mean that it has no meaning or ontological non-existence. Instead, it has a subjective necessity and subjective truth. The world is existence/non-existence, real/non-real. Phenomena "appear" to me in-between this ontological interplay of *Sein* and *Seiende*, between pure darkness and pure light.[712] The world is a dim place; a betweenness of pure light and darkness. The world is a betweenness [*zwischenheit*]; it is an isthmus, a *barzakh*. It is the veiled/unveiled, the Being/not-Being, *He/not-He* [*Huwa/lā-huwa*], visible/invisible, manifest/nonmanifest [*ẓāhir/bāṭin*], light/darkness, a black sun [*nūr al-siyah*]. The world is none of them; and also both. "Yes and no"; only Ibn al-ʿArabī's watchword explains this intricate ontology.

I am condemned to the world that is the locus of timely manifestation of *Sein*. *Sein* appears as *Seiende* in the world. The visible is the disclosure of the invisible-as-visible. Therefore, what appears to me is a veil on the "face" of the invisible. This is the paradox of veil that is the hallmark of worldliness. What appears to me is the unconcealment of the concealed. The world veils itself through its unveiling. This necessarily subject-dependent unfolding of *Sein* renders the world ontologically tantamount to imagination.

> [Nothing] remains upon a single state... Rather, it undergoes continual change from form to form constantly and forever. And imagination is nothing but this. ... The universe has become

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[712] "The world and the soul are neither fully real nor fully unreal, neither existent nor nonexistent, neither known nor unknown. Both shimmer endlessly between light and darkness." (Chittick 2002, p.54.)

> manifest only in imagination. It is imagined in itself. It is, and it is not.[713]

Ibn al-'Arabī's phenomenological approach to *seinsfrage* culminates in an arguably pessimistic approach concerning objective reality. As analyzed comparatively, Occidental phenomenology also criticizes the naturalistic objectification of Being and understands Being unfolded always as Being-for-me. While Ibn al-'Arabī comes up with a radically skeptical approach to objective reality, phenomenology avoids from this problem by understanding the world as the transcendental rock bottom of experience. Even if Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty have different ways to render the world transcendental, the world is necessarily shared in their phenomenology. This necessity does not appear in Ibn al-'Arabī's phenomenological ontology and he remains skeptical in the transcendentality of the shared world. A claim in favor of a shared, objective world is a transcendent idea rather than transcendental in the approach of Ibn al-'Arabī. The world is ontologically an imagination.

Ibn al-'Arabī's ontology leads us to his hermeneutics. The world, as we have observed, has a textual structure in Ibn al-'Arabī. One's encounter with the world happens via interpretation: the world is in the realm of hermeneutics. The twofold thickness of the text permeates the world. The first is the horizontal thickness of the text. What is a text cannot be exhausted vertically. The world as a text has no horizontal limit. Secondly, the interplay between the visible and the invisible of the text creates an infinite deepness that cannot be consumed totally. The text is a never ending source of truth. The inexhaustible deepness of the text, the endless richness the language provides and the infinite variety of the context that is ever new due to the self-disclosure of *Sein* as *Seiende*, present a three-time infinite area for hermeneutics. Interpretation is an existential act through that one encounters the world. It cannot be limited to the reading methods of some specific texts, or to exegesis. Interpretation is an aesthetical positioning towards life. The specific "sacred" text as its realm of application is not what is written, rather the world

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[713] Chittick 2002, p.55; *Futūḥāt* II 313.17.

itself. There is no room for the secular. What is sacred and in need of interpretation permeates the world. Life is interpretation.

The world including one's self presents itself only through interpretation. The phenomena are the surface of a thickness, because every visible is in an inseparable interrelation with its invisible. One has to traverse this surface and enter into this inexhaustible depth that happens through interpretation. One does exist with her/his interpretation, which, as an endless travel, is a non-methodical, existential, aesthetical act. Worldliness is an aesthetical process due to this universality. The inability of interpreting what appears as the world means the incapacity to meet with the world genuinely. The world and the self, which share the textuality with what is written, need to be interpreted ceaselessly. "To be" means for Ibn al-ʿArabī "to be interpreting." Therefore, the world is identical with an imagination in the hermeneutics of Ibn al-ʿArabī. What appears in the imagination is a set of signs that has a literal-apparent meaning what also harbors an endless variety of being interpreted. The world is an imagination in the sense that it presents itself only through a particular interpretation. It demands interpretation to be encountered. Every worldly experience harbors interpretation. There is no limit of interpretive approach to the phenomena because every second brings a novel truth to the text. What the text presents to the reader/interpreter is always novel in every reading owing to the temporal unfolding of *Sein* [*wujūd muṭlaq*].

Besides, what appears as the truth of text is an appearance to the reader/interpreter for that particular reading. The objective truth of the text as it is does not manifest itself fully. Hence, every veil on the truth of the text is a face. There is no other way to find the truth except its veils. Whenever we unfold a veil, we encounter a new veil. The vision of truth of the text occurs only by its veils. Every veil is another face of truth. It is a different interpretative encounter with the face/veil [*wajh/ḥijāb*]. Namely, interpretation that renders visible what is invisible is a simultaneous veiling and unveiling. There is no veil; every phenomenon is a different reading/interpretation of the truth of what is textual. Nothing hides the

truth of the text except its own appearances [*phenomena*]. Every text/being presents us veils we cannot totally uncover. Every reading/interpretation is another encounter with the text from a different point of view. Each one is a novel fusion and another mood of unveiling.

Ibn al-'Arabī's perplexing but exquisite hermeneutics carries a radical pluralism that challenges the deconstructive readings of Derrida. Deconstruction, Gadamerian phenomenological hermeneutics and Ibn al-'Arabī's hermeneutics all have to face up with the same problem of objective truth of the text. While Derrida does not accept something as "truth" considering it as a Platonic, perennial metaphysical engagement, Gadamer sees Derrida suffering from his own assertion.[714] Ibn al-'Arabī and Gadamer understand truth as an unconcealment in its ancient Greek sense of *a-letheia*. Moreover, they converge on the Platonic *eumenis elenchoi*, which is an aesthetical, non-methodical existential act necessitated to be already established to encounter the text. No interpretation exhausts what is encountered in the hermeneutical process. What is encountered enjoys a twofold thickness. Every interpretation is from a certain point of view and context, under the sovereignty of a certain authority and from within a certain historical tradition.

The above elaborations of Ibn al-'Arabī's ontology and hermeneutics converge on the point that the world is an imagination. The twofold focus on Ibn al-'Arabī's ontology and hermeneutics summarizes itself in the claim that "world is an imagination." The world does not only present itself subject-dependently, it also needs to be interpreted to be encountered. This claim is not a romantical or allegorical watchword. On the contrary, it is a strong argument Ibn al-'Arabī comes up with after his elaborate ontology and hermeneutics. The world is an imagination: positive, interpretive and always in the for-me structure. In the account of Ibn al-'Arabī (as this one preposition displays and summarizes)

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[714] See Schmidt, pp.161-164.

hermeneutics and ontology intermesh. *Hermeneutics is an ontological necessity. Ontology is a hermeneutical inquiry.*

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

In this study the ontology and hermeneutics of Ibn al-'Arabī is tried to be analyzed with a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology has been exploited not only as a fruitful method to elaborate the research subject, but also a really challenging and insightful companion to analyze Ibn al-'Arabī. Famous masters of phenomenology, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty have played a role of paramount importance in building a conceptual bridge and in providing invaluable comparative insights.

Throughout the study, I have also appealed to hermeneutics to unfold my research subject to let it "show itself such as it shows itself to those to whom and by whom it shows itself."[715] The aim was to let Ibn al-'Arabī unfold itself with the least possible distortion that would only be possible via an accurate and "open" hermeneutics. Hermeneutics has not been merely one of the two questions dealt with throughout the study. On the contrary, it has been also the indispensable "not-method" of it in unfolding the research subject. Instead of following an "-ism" or a methodical procedure, as Palmer suggests, hermeneutics has been the critique of method.[716] It has been used to close the gap between the writer and the subject. Arguably,

> Hermes has many gaps to preside over today … –the gap between modern and "postmodern" consciousness: God and man, language and language, past and present, man and woman, parent and child, ordinary and nonordinary reality, Eastern mind and Western mind, mountaintop and everyday experiences, man and dolphin, Black and White, Native American and Immigrant American…, doctor and patient, expert and layman, man and superman, and of course modern and postmodern consciousness.[717]

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[715] See Berger, p.144.

[716] Palmer 1977, p. 386.

[717] Ibid, p.386.

The present study has exploited hermeneutics in this ancient sense that has particular relevance to closing the contemporary gaps. Hence, the study has been an inquiry "in praise of" Hermes.[718] Now, coming to the end of the study, we may shortly summarize what Hermes has brought to us.

In the first two chapters, a long but necessary introduction to the subject has been undertaken. The introduction is supported with a concise literature review on the meeting of Occidental philosophy and Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought. A very short introduction to Ibn al-ʿArabī's historically central position is also provided. The introduction has been finished with strength – weakness analysis of the present study.

In the second part that was devoted to ontology, the *seinsfrage* of Ibn al-ʿArabī was elaborated in comparison with Heidegger. Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology has been analyzed with Merleau-Ponty's conceptual contribution of utmost importance. Merleau-Ponty's prominent ontology (particularly his understanding of the phenomena as "thick") has provided us an invaluable conceptual bridge to enlighten Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology. The twofold thickness of the phenomena in Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology has led us directly to hermeneutics.

The third part was devoted to comprehend Ibn al-ʿArabī's hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is never a new-age, secular alternative word for "exegesis." On the contrary, it is the implicit but perennial ingredient of Islamic tradition. In the sixth chapter, I have analyzed what means hermeneutics and Hermes in Islamic history. Hermeneutics is the most central concept to acquire a genuine understanding of such a tradition that is generally accused of having contributed nothing in intellectual heritage since the thirteenth century. This central concept in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought has been comparatively analyzed with the German hermeneutical tradition (particularly with its most controversial and acclaimed, towering representative, Gadamer). The hermeneutics of Ibn al-ʿArabī has been introduced

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[718] See *Appendix-A: Supplement to 5.1 – On the Present Study and Muʾallaf: In Praise of Hermes.*

in the fifth chapter in comparison with the ontological turn proceeded by Heidegger and with the universal hermeneutics theorized by Gadamer. I have not abstained to mix their original concepts where the figures converged to each other substantially.

In the sixth chapter, I have dealt with the arising problems that Ibn al-ʿArabī's phenomenological ontology and universal hermeneutics had to face up with. Again, when contending with the twofold problem of ontological and hermeneutical objectivity, how phenomenology and phenomenological hermeneutics avoid or solve the two-fold difficulty of objectivity has been analyzed comparatively. After elucidating the problematic and the proposed solutions to surmount it, I have inquired into a fusion of Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontology and hermeneutics in the seventh chapter that was titled *Interpretatio Ergo Sum*. Interpretation, as an existential act, has been analyzed with its most salient aspects and in the invaluable companionship of phenomenology. The seventh chapter was followed by the chapter in which the ontology and hermeneutics was summed in one famous preposition: *world is an imagination*. Far from being a merely romantical idea, the claim that "world is an imagination" seems to be the logical result one comes up through a subject-dependent ontology and a hermeneutics that is claimed to be universal and existential.

The way proceeded in the thesis has been not only long, but also a colorful encounter that harbors endless implications. It is not suprising since every meeting brings something novel. Nevertheless, if the *fusion* of "two sisters" is aimed in favor of thought, the present study will be at best just a tentative prelude to be surpassed. However, this damnation to be surpassed is the fate of any "thesis" in philosophy: it keeps *limping*.

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APPENDICES

Appendix-A: Supplement to 5.1–On the Islamic Hermeneutical Tradition and the Concept "*Mu'allaf*": In Praise of Hermes

As it has been introduced in the first two chapters, this study aims to be a phenomenological hermeneutical inquiry. The methodology of the study has been envisaged to let the subject unfold itself properly and with the least distortion possible. Hence, hermeneutics is not only one of the two focuses of the comparative research on Ibn al-'Arabī. On the contrary, hermeneutics is also a central part of its methodology when interrogating the research subject.

Concerning its format, this study has a conspicuous difference from the similar inquiries. As the thoughtful reader will reveal, the present study has a salient abundance in its references. Throughout the study, to the extent the academic writing format permits, I have tried to refer to the original source/-s of any idea and novel expansion throughout the study. I have played the transmitter rather than the originator in any idea in the study. To the limit the academic style lets, I have avoided playing the one who says something novel. Instead, I have inclined to posit myself as someone who compiles, selects, orders and transfers what is already said before. Imitating Hermes and trying to be a silent horseman, I have tried to transfer what I have derived from my research subject so far as the method to show itself be seen "from itself, just as it shows itself from itself"[719] permits. This phenomenological hermeneutical position that permeates this study actually harbors a yearning to Hermes. In the following passages, I want to develop an important reason of this yearning.

In the Islamic traditional historical works, the authors are named as *mu'allaf*. *Mu'allaf*, which is today rendered to English as "author" or "writer," is

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[719] Schmidt p.61; Heidegger 1996, p.34.

historically, in fact, a more comprehensive term with hermeneutical connotations. *Mu'allaf*, as one may look up from the Ottoman Dictionary *Qāmūs al-Turkī*, means actually the one who compiles; who orders and selects [*ta'līf*].[720] *Mu'allaf*, in addition to the meaning "the one who writes," means also "the one who orders, gathers [*jam'*]" what is present, rather than creating something original or novel. This meaning can be seen as a modest positioning of one self. On the contrary, it refers to a hermeneutical tradition that has been forgotten. Curiously enough, in the modern Turkish dictionaries, the older meanings about compilation, ordering, gathering and choosing are already faded away.[721] This disappearance of the meaning of the "author as the gatherer" displays a certain disregard of the historically effective consciousness [*wirkungsgeschichtliche bewusstsein*]. This disappeared meaning points to a forgotten hermeneutical tradition, in which the writer-author is primarily dealing with her/his historical givenness. What s/he "finds" historically is worked out by her/him, which compels one to be aware of one's own historicity. When we speak on behalf of the *mu'allaf*, the writer-gatherer in this hermeneutical tradition, s/he would express her/himself as follows: "There is nothing totally new to say under the sun. I do not encounter the world in a way except my historicity. As a *mu'allaf*, I compile, select and gather what has been said before and handed down to me. I do not state something novel or present an original idea. I merely compile what has been said, and transfer it selectively. I am not saying something new, or something of originally mine. Personally, I am hushing and only transferring what is present-at-hand to me. I transmit what I *find* historically. I am a silent messenger who is quiet of his own and transmitting just what is presented to me through history."

In this forgotten etymological meaning of *mu'allaf*, the historical hermeneutical position lays itself bare. As Ibn al-ʿArabī denoted, one of the hallmarks of Hermes

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[720] For the item "*mu'allaf*" in the Ottoman-Turkish dictionary, see Şemseddin Sami (2006). (Ed.) *Qāmūs al-Turkī*. Çağrı Yayınları. İstanbul. p.1433.

[721] For the item "*mu'allaf*" in the novel, formal, Turkish-Turkish dictionary, see Türk Dil Kurumu (1974). *Türkçe Sözlük.* 6th Edition. p.585. The older meaning cannot be found in this dictionary; there exists only the meaning of *mu'allaf* as "writer."

who has been envisaged as the father of all knowledges in the Islamic tradition, is his personal silence. His task is the bare transfer of what is presented. In this study, I have also tried to wear the same identity and undertook the same task of Hermes. I have tried to remain silent so that my research subject expresses and presents itself. Practically, this position has culminated in the abundance of the references in the study. The abundance is both to show respect and to make speak the originators of ideas. We come to see that such a self-silence is also a hermeneutical positioning. Even if the hermeneutist hushes her/himself, what s/he transfers is endless. The task of the silent horseman Hermes to transfer meaning through the never-closing gap between the text and the reader/interpreter is never ending. Gadamer, at the last sentence of *Wahrheit und Methode*, alludes to this endlessness when having trouble with interrupting the hermeneutical process. At the last sentence of the book, he writes as follows. "But I will stop here. The ongoing dialogue permits no final conclusion. It would be a poor hermeneutist who thought he could have, or had to have, the last word."[722]

It is needless to say that what I have brought about from the subject matter of the research is open to criticism. The thoughtful reader will decide to what extent I have been successful in putting myself in the shoes of Hermes. Indeed, one must never forget that Hermes can be also uncanny, as the ancient literature reminds us.

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[722] Gadamer 1991, p.579.

Appendix-B: Note on German Translations

In the writing of the thesis, some problems concerning the translations of some German words have emerged. In the literature referred, there are slight differences of some words. To avoid incoherence, some words have rendered to English in a selective way and some words have left untranslated in the study.

Sein and *Seiende* are translated here as "Being" and "being." The alternative translation of Groth is "be-ing" and "*be*[ing]." The second translation seemed to be a more confusing one. I have exploited both the original German concepts and the first way of translation as "Being" and "being" together in the study.

In a source of this study, *Dasein* was translated as "existence." The translation is apparently controversial. Another translation of the concept was "being-there"; and also it was left untranslated in some places. I followed the last way, and did not translate *Dasein*.

As Palmer points, *wirkungsgeschichtliche bewusstsein*, which "defies any adequate translation,"[723] means literally "consciousness in which history is ever at work." Among various translations available, I have used "historically effective consciousness," following Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall – the translators of *Truth and Method*.

A parallel plurality was also on the concepts *das Man* and *seinsvergessenheit*. For both, the conventional translations have been preferred: *Das Man* is translated as "the they." For *seinsvergessenheit*, there was more alternative at hand. Rather than "forgottenness of *be*[ing]," "forgottenness of Being" and "oblivion of Being," the more common translation as "forgetfulness" is selected.

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[723] Palmer, p.191.

The concept *inderweltsein*, which is conventionally translated as "being-in-the-world," has also been left untranslated in the study.

In *Truth and Method* and *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, Gadamer's *spiel* is translated differently as "play" and "game," respectively. "Play" seems a better translation, for it also points to the verb form of the concept. Nevertheless, as there is no important difference between the two, both have been used in the study interchangeably.

The English word "experience" is used to refer both to *erlebnis* and *erfahrung*. To avoid confusion, the original German concept is given in square brackets together with the translation.

Appendix-C: Shortlist of the Authors

Ibn Sīnā [Avicenna] (981-1037)

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (1058-1111)

Ibn Rushd [Averroes] (1126-1198)

Suhrawardī, Shihāb al-Dīn [al-Maqtūl] (1153-1191)

Ibn al-ʻArabī, Muḥyī al-Dīn (1165-1240)

Galileo Galilei (1564-1642)

Chladenius, Johann Martin (1710-1759)

Von Humboldt, Wilhelm (1767-1835)

Schleiermacher, Friedrich D.E. (1768-1834)

Dilthey, William (1833-1911)

Husserl, Edmund (1859-1938)

Heidegger, Martin (1889-1976)

Gadamer, Hans-Georg (1900-2002)

Sartre, Jean-Paul Charles Aymard (1905-1980)

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1908-1961)

Ricoeur, Paul (1913-2005)

Hirsch, Eric Donald (1928-)

Habermas, Jürgen (1929-)

Derrida, Jacques (1930-2004)