PRIMARY RESEARCH

Sin in the cosmological function of the mystical viewpoint of Ibn 'Arabī: An interdisciplinary approach

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Abstract

This paper approaches mystic's interpretation through a comprehensive and integrated system of existence regarding the theory of the unity of being as a central point in Ibn 'Arabī's thought. This study begins with analysis of the concepts 'sin' and 'repentance', and the theory of the unity of being in Ibn 'Arabī's texts. It also highlights how these concepts and theory were arranged to depict a systemic net of the actions and reactions in the cosmos. In the first step, Ibn 'Arabī's doctrine is explained, and then based on the concepts such as open systems, dynamics, complexity, and chaos a discussion is developed. The result will lead us to answer the question that how Ibn 'Arabī justifies the concept of sin and how his interpretation helps to understand the position of human beings in the universe. He looks at the phenomenon of human as a complex, open, chaotic system that reflects the divine attributes.

INTRODUCTION

Sin is one of the religious conceptions, which have been interpreted in various schools of thought, for example epistemological (Kaldis, 2008), ethical, ontological, historical, mystical (Ibn & Fusus, 1979), and religious (Ghazzali, 2002) interpretations. Since it has roots in religious paradigm, religious interpretations are more famous than other approaches which they started when the scientific study of religion appeared in the 19th century. The scientific study of religion opened a new space for investigation of religion for the religious researchers who used the new approaches that emerged from scientific methodologies and even philosophy. For example, having used phenomenology, religious researches tried to present new interpretations of religious phenomena. The epistemological, ontological, ethical, historical, phenomenological, logical, and legal investigations are some examples of the interpretation of the concept of sin. Sometimes these interpretations are compatible with the religious interpretations, and in some cases, they are not compatible. Although scientific theories concerning the evolution of the human species have presented major challenges for theologies and understandings of original sin, the analysis of the religious concepts based on the other approaches will help the scholars to better understand those concepts in the religious realm and allow for new creative explorations that may deepen our understanding of classic doctrines (Azhar, 2015; Van den Toren, 2016). For example, some of new researches explain the corrosion of the world from a scientific (entropy) and a theological (original sin) perspective and show how potentially these two disciplines reach a position for a more fruitful dialogue (Bradnick, 2009). Some others try to reconcile the original sin and human origin with evolution, and also they demonstrate what in this case seems to be most consistent with science, human experience, philosophy, and theology (Flaman, 2016).

In this paper, I do not investigate the concept of sin based on the ethical, axiological, and jurisprudential aspects, but I ap-

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proach the issue through a kind of cosmological dimension in Ibn ʿArabī's thought. I will investigate Ibn ʿArabī's interpretation of the concept of sin and repentance regarding his main theory, the unity of being. The effort of this article is to submit a cosmological interpretation of sin or human errors in the mystic perspective comparing new concepts such as complexity and chaos. The presupposition is that mystics such as Ibn ʿArabī considered a systemic perspective when encountered with this phenomenon with many dimensions and huge functions. The importance of the issue will be clearer when one knows that many attitudes, sentences, and reactions in religious realms, especially among Islamic groups and societies originate from the authorities' interpretations of the concept of the sin in the human deeds. Today, some part of violence that is related to the religious terrorists and other extremist groups reflects their interpretation of the concept of sin or disobedience of God.

I will begin by analyzing the concepts 'sin' and 'repentance', and the theory of the unity of being in Ibn ʿArabī's texts, then move to see how these concepts and that theory were arranged to depict a systemic net of the actions and reactions in the cosmos. First of all, I explain my approach to the research process positing myself as a critical scholar. The methods which I will use are conceptual analysis and interpretation arguing the function and the use of the concepts such as system, chaos, and dynamic process in Ibn ʿArabī's thought without using new terms of these concepts.

THE METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS

A. Using the conceptual analysis, I analyzed the conceptions 'sin', 'unity of being', and 'repentance' based on Ibn ʿArabī's terminology. In this qualitative research, library and online research including databases were used for collecting data. The main method which I used in this research is the conceptual analysis which comprises explanation, description, and interpretation.

B. With the advent of new fields, new horizons to interpret the theories have been prevalent in the context of new methods of research such as interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity, multidisciplinarity, and pluridisciplinarity (Max-Neef, 2005; Rezaei, 2017). Max-Neef stated that "Pluridisciplinary implied cooperation between disciplines, without coordination. The study of each one of them reinforces the understanding of the others" (Max-Neef, 2005; Ranathunga, Karunarathne, & De Silva, 2018). Therefore, new concepts such as chaos, complexity, and systems theory open up new possibilities to perceive meanings of concepts in some fields such as mysticism (which includes many vague concepts and interpretations) and philosophy.

Systems theory and concepts related to that mutually help us to obtain a cosmological base to interpret the concept of sin based on the theory of unity of being in Ibn ʿArabī's thought.

Sin

The notion of sin comes from religions. In the holy books of Abrahamic religions, sin is some deed doing against God's will (Baylor, 1977) and they are from minor errors to the deadly sins. Some people held that sin is the act that believers do while it is against their beliefs (Baylor, 1977). The Holy texts introduce sin in different words; sin is "miss the mark" (John 8: 21) or it is breaking the law of God (1 John 3: 4) to exceed His commandments (Qurʾān 5: 63). The two most commonly used words for sin in the entire Bible are the words chata and hamartia (Willmington, 2018). In the Islamic world, Ghazzālī considered a sin as leaving or doing something opposite to God's will (Ghazzali, 2002). Some interpreters classified sin into the sin which appears and the sin which does not appear (Tabatabai, 1979). Sometimes sins are known as serious crimes such as murder, rape, and so on, but the range of sin can go even to the very private affairs of believers. In ancient times, sin was an act that made the gods and goddess angry. For example, in Hinduism, there are some acts considered sin such as sleeping after sunrise or at sunset or marrying off the young sister while the older is yet not married (Glucklich, 2003). In some religions, sin relates to Adam and Eve, as they did the sin and ate the forbidden fruit they exiled from Heaven, and because of that sin, all of their children were punished up to coming to the Christ. In fact, death and sin are related to Adam while life and righteousness relate to Christ (Romans 5: 11). In some religions, sin is a tendency for disobeying which is rooted in the nature of humans (Qurʾān 33:72; 24:34; 103:2). The human had a capacity and qualification to be a totally divine-being creature, but he did not use his faculty, therefore, he was unjust and cruel about himself (Tabatabai, 1979).

Up to the modern time, religions gave the most important interpretations of the Scriptures and it is important to know the basis of these interpretations. I divide metaphysical perspectives into two groups: Abrahamic or monotheistic and non-monotheistic. In non-monotheist religions, we encounter a variety of gods, metaphysical ideas, and human fate. The central points are evil and good forces and also following one of these two sides. Of course, like monotheist religions, they have faced many changes over time, but they have maintained their bases. Monotheist religions have two histories, one before the Renaissance and the other after

that. We can see some common traits in monotheist religions until the Renaissance and modernism. The task of theology in the Middle Ages was to reduce the creatures into the lowest level as much as possible for the sake of developing the perfection and the power of God absolute but the outcome was to decrease His power and to deny Him. Gilson (1999) explains that pre-modern thought reduced the religious realm into absolute obedience and it declined the whole of creation to maintain the dignity of God although finally it was not respected. The Absolute God governed human beings who were His servants. These interpretations and ideologies around them do not leave any room for human free will. They present a violent and inflexible picture of religious doctrines. One of the most important outcomes of this idea of God always has been the problem of evil. If God is all-powerful, God could prevent all evil. If God is all- good, God would want to prevent all evil and we believe in the existence of God who is all-good, therefore God is either not all-powerful or all-good (or both) (Griffin, 1991). Hence, the problem of evil will yet remain if our picture of God and the world is the same as traditional interpretations.

On the other hand, the problem of sin in Abrahamic religions is accounted for in different ways. Aforementioned interpretation of sin that we can find in the holy texts refers to forbidden behavior that all of the servants have to avoid. After creating Adam, God placed him in heaven. "Amid the garden are two mysterious trees, the tree of life, whose fruit seems to have the potency of conferring immortality, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, whose fruit is not to be eaten under penalty of death" (Orr, 1915). While in Genesis, Eve was responsible for eating the forbidden fruit (Gen, 3: 17, Revised Standard Version), Islamic sources just mention that "both ate and they do not introduce a sinner. They both were tempted and ate the banned fruit, then their hidden cases appeared" (Qurʾān, 7: 20; 20:121).

While the religious authorities in Islam (jurisprudents), Christian, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and other religions classify the sins and determine some punishments for a sinner, the mysticism has some other ideas about the sin. Although mystics accept to avoid sins, they see the universe in its totality and perfectibility. Therefore, most of their ideas are different from theologians and religious authorities. They consider all phenomena in a system or Meta system because for mystics there is nothing but God, and the other things are just phenomena or manifestations of God as noumenon, hence in this system, there is nothing wrong. Eckhart's who was a Christian philosopher and mystic introduced just one source for truth, he held

that source is the origin of creation and legislation (Ekhart, 1941). Ibn ʿArabī as an Islamic philosopher and mystic believed that only being is God (Ibn, 2000) and the universe is His manifestation (Ibn & Fusus, 1979). Ibn ʿArabī explained the conception of sin regarding other conception such as Tawba (repentance). Ibn ʿArabī interpreted this concept in the meaning of returning to God or confessing being dependent on Him because there is nothing but His manifestation. Therefore, there is no need to repent, but man must remind himself as a dependent being toward Him (Ibn, 1999; Shajari, 2007). Ibn ʿArabī looks at the universe, man, and God as a Being and His manifestations and not as separate entities.

COSMOLOGICAL APPROACH TOWARDS THE ISSUE

The religious traditions have their own concepts and interpretation; sin is a religious concept which motivated many interpretations inside the religious realms. For example, generally in the Judeo-Christian realm, Adam and Eve's sin brought judgment that resulted in disease and death and changed the world (O'Mathúna, 2018). Nevertheless, the religious concepts have many interpretations that originate from outside of the religious realms, for example, philosophical and scientific realms.

Ibn ʿArabī believed that sin and errors are necessary for the evolution of humans and the universe. Besides, sin is necessary for the manifestation of God in the universe because there are some rules through which Ibn ʿArabī explains the relationship between God, humans, and the universe (Ibn & Fusus, 1979). According to his philosophical idea, every event and phenomenon in the universe is a manifestation of one of the divine names which are infinite (Ibn & Fusus, 1979). The divine presence comprises of the Essence, the Divine Attributes, and the Divine Acts. The Attributes and Names are the Barzakh or isthmus between the Essence and the cosmos. They are relationships, not entities, or existing things. Each name denotes both the Essence and a specific meaning peculiar to itself. The specific meaning of a name can be called its reality or its root. The reality of the name determines the effects or properties of the name within the cosmos. The names of the names are words that we see in the divine Law (in Qurʾān) such as All-merciful (al-raḥmān). Every creature, at least, manifests a divine name and the number of the names is unlimited. The man (the perfect man who has the form of God) manifests all the names. Allāh is the most comprehensive name and the perfect man manifests it in the universe.

Writing about Ibn ʿArabī's creative imagination, (Chittick, 1994) depicts a portrait of Ibn ʿArabī in which one can comprehensively see the whole. Chittick refers that since per-

fect humans embrace the realities of both God and the cosmos, they can recognize God and all of the things (Chittick, 1994). Chittick, then, explained the context in which the relationship between human being and God is formed; all of the things in the universe are signs of God and reflect the Real (Ḥaqq) in some manner while human beings are signs of God as God because they are given a share of every attribute of the Real (Chittick, 1994). To understand these explanations, we should return to the key notion in Ibn ʿArabī's thought which is the unity of being that means there is only one Being. From man's viewpoint, the cosmos is full of separate individual consciousness and objects, while Ibn ʿArabī considered the cosmos as the infinite manifestation of the Only Being. Izutsu states that the reason for our inability to grasp of the whole as a whole based on the appearance of reality as a plurality of particulars is in the structure and the nature of human cognition and the finitude of human consciousness (Coates, 2002). Ibn ʿArabī's conception of the Absolute Reality (Al-Haqq) which refers to God (Al-khayre al-Maḥḍ) leaves no room of good and evil, hence, in the eyes of God, all things must be good and only man's ignorance calls some of them good and some of them bad (Landau, 2013). Therefore, there is nothing bad in the universe because there is nothing but a manifestation of God, and the manifestation of God cannot be wrong. Now, to better understand his idea we can get help from new concepts in our era. Therefore, we should look for some characters in systems theory.

System and Systems Theory

Today, we know about the sy stem and theory of systems. New technologies provide complex machines, then, the interaction of machines, men, and the environment came into play and innumerable problems arose. Therefore, the system approach became necessary. This approach was not limited to science and technology, but man uses it to deal with the complexities in all of the fields of knowledge. Discoveries in biology, psychology, theory of organization in management, and economical parts disclosed more complex aspects of living creatures, humans, and societies. In this way, the system approaches found their room in natural and social sciences. Having introduced general system theory, Von Bertalanffy (1973) discussed that the root of this theory may be found in LeIbniz, Cusa, Ibn-Khaldun, Marx, and Hegel. The general system is a general science of wholeness that its subject matter is a formulation of rules which are valid for systems in general irrespective of the nature of their component elements and the relations of forces between them (Von Bertalanffy, 1973).

As Bertalanffy explains we can define a system as a set of elements with interrelation among themselves and with their environment (Von Bertalanffy, 1973). In this definition, at least, there are three levels: elements, interaction, and interrelation between them and the environment. Also, since the whole is not a sum of components or the set but is more, it is another level of the system. In other words, a system is a set of components, which interact with each other and serve for a common purpose or goal. A system may be abstract or physical. An abstract system is a product of the human mind that includes concepts, ideas, and theories such as social or theological systems. In a physical system, components are materials. Bertalanffy divided systems at this level into two groups: real systems such as a cell, a dog, and a galaxy, and conceptual systems such as logic, mathematics, and like them. With abstracted systems which are a subsystem of the latter, conceptual systems are corresponding with reality (Von Bertalanffy, 1973).

Among real systems, since living organisms are open systems (Von Bertalanffy, 1973), living creatures are exchanging matter and energy with the environment. In a closed system that is supposed to be isolated from their environment, the final state is determined unequivocally by the initial conditions, while in an open system the same final state may be reached from different initial conditions and different ways. The other character of the open system is to be in a steady-state while the entropy increases. In an open system, we see the production of entropy resulting in irreversible processes and import of entropy while the system maintains itself in the steady-state; for example, living organism imports complex molecules in free energy. A generalized version of an open system can be seen in other fields; for example in psychology where neurological systems are considered as open dynamic systems (Krech, 1950) and in philosophy, trans-actional and self-actional, and also interactional point of views approach the open systems (Bentley, 1950).

The other conception related to the system theory is feedback. The simple explanation for feedback is that the system takes input and gives out output and again takes the output as an input. Living systems, complex machines, and social systems follow the feedback scheme. Dynamic interactions in open systems consider a broader aspect which causes the system to develop over time and conforms to its environment. The capacity for self-organization and synergy (additional effectiveness in the interaction of components with each other) are important traits for dynamic interactions. Capra (1996) accounted for some specific features of complex systems such as complexity, networking, non-linear,

non-equilibrium, openness, being teleological, uncertainty, order resulting in entropy, self-organization, synergy, self-production so that system reconstructs itself and its elements constantly. Every complex system should be able to make differences and contrasts for creating unity and to reduce exclusiveness for most equilibrium. Changing attention from one level to another and vice versa, the system should keep the variety for maintaining stability (De Rosnay, 1979).

From Newton, nature and its components were good machines that worked with determined principles so humans could easily control them if they gained the rules. Having developed new machines, industrial and business realm, technology, huge organizations, and complex interactions among the elements in organizations in one hand and between organizations and their environment, on the other hand, the need for new approaches increased because reductionist viewpoints could not find answers for increasing complexities. Although, general system theory stated at first in biology and living sciences, it soon spread out in all fields of knowledge. This approach responded to problems that were not solvable by mechanic approaches. One of the characters in complex systems is chaos. There is chaotic behavior in complex systems that seems do not follow any model while these systems have teleological order. Chaos theory and butterfly effect (Lorenz, 1972) showed that the nature of most phenomena has a nonlinear, disorder, and chaotic behavior that is not accessible by normal algorithms. This uncertainty increased when the surveyed phenomenon was in the humanistic realm because human beings whether individuals or societies are complex, open, nonlinear, chaotic, and dynamic systems.

Human Beings as a System

Specialism started from the 17th century focused on components of phenomena to analyze and to know them, but this extremist specialism soon led to reductionism and reduced the knowledge to the science (natural science). Therefore, human beings are considered as complex machines that could be analyzed by their components. The reductionist biologists declined human beings to the living organisms and when the human body decomposes, there will be nothing. They reduced the whole of the human phenomenon to their bodies, molecules, and cells (J. Polkinghorne, 1930). In psychology, logical behaviorism tries to decrease the mind into the physical-behavioral phenomenon or physical reaction (Kim, 1998). The key factor for brainwashing the scientists (LaRouche, 2004) was reductionism and dogmatist empiricism.

As mentioned above, most interpretations of religious texts tend to refer to humans as God's bondservant who is subjugated his God's power. Among the religious interpretations, the mystic understanding of humans is more complete. Rūmi said that human is a microcosm (small universe) in outer form while in real form, a human is a macrocosm (or big universe who includes every character of the universe). Rūmi in his statement refers that human includes the whole universe with all actual and potential objects, conciseness, and phenomena. He was affected by mystics such as Ibn ʿArabī who believed that the most important part of humans is their heart which is not an organ of the body, but it is the place where accepts the divine form. Then, he explained that this heart can accept all of the forms of phenomena: the form of the other humans, plants, animals, and everything God created (Arabi, 1911). In every moment, the heart of humans can manifest one of God's names (or one of His creatures). From Ibn ʿArabī, man alone can know God perfectly and on the other hand, God just knows Himself through a man who is God's consciousness which becomes visible. Man can know God in His levels, Real (Ḥaqq or noumenon) and the phenomenal; because man alone is both real and phenomenal, external and internal (Landau, 2013). In the ethical realm, our thoughts and behaviors are marked as good and evil, but the fact is that human beings are mixed with a collection of opposite and sometimes contradictory ideas, wishes, behavior, and beliefs. They live in a universe that is full of events, changes, exchanges, effects, and affection. While they live in a Metasystem as the universe, they are themselves complex systems that are interacting with the universe. The behavior of other creatures, for example, animals or other humans affects our relationship with them and to others. When someone steals our belongings, we get angry, shout, critique the security services and forces, and sometimes accuse some people even our neighbor of theft. The behavior of the thief has some effects on us so that we may lose our thrust on people or even be cruel to some people such as the poor. When we analyze why a thief steals, we conclude that he or she was under the pressure of many events. We, as human beings, have made of many elements that work together as a system, an open, chaotic system with free will. In such a chaotic system, we will be able to create a new realm, to develop new ideas, to expand new understanding, to exchange the resolves, to pose questions, to produce dynamic tensions, and to make new decisions which result in new worlds that manifest His names and the creativity that human beings inherited from their God. As Polkinghorne states "a world with the possibility of sinful people is bet-

ter than one perfectly programmed machine" (J. C. Polkinghorne, 2003). Some concepts were created just because of sin. One of the most important concepts which are related to sin is repentance (tawba) and return to God. God said in the Qur'ān that He loves those who turn much to (Kim, 1998). If there was no sin how the concept of repentance could produce, the concept which God likes it. The real meaning of repentance because of Ibn 'Arabī is not to promise to avoid of that action but to remember God as the First and just Being (Ibn, 1999). He refers that without sin, Adam could not be chosen as a selected being. Adam did whatever was according to his existence and knowledge, but in his knowledge, there was nothing of avoiding the actions or to promise to be just such as programmed obedient.

Waḥdat al- Wujūd

For Ibn 'Arabī humans contain all of the things, the more complete creature, the more manifest God's names. If the creature cannot manifest one of His names, it will lose one of the faculties. Human beings are capable to manifest His entire names, and therefore they can be complete creatures or the perfect humans. Since all of the creatures are His manifestations, and according to Ibn 'Arabī, there is nothing but Him, hence all of our deeds return to Him as our existence return. In this level, our thoughts, behaviors, and deeds do not have any attribution, good or evil, sin, or right. According to this doctrine, Ibn 'Arabī explains that real repentance is just to remember that we are all depending on Him.

Regarding an open, chaotic, complex system on the human being, Ibn 'Arabī does not reject any existential possibility which man can accept. As such a system, human beings will present all of their qualities and faculties. Although they do many disorder behaviors in their life, from the whole perspective they will manifest His names which have teleological patterns. Chittick (1994) emphasizes that according to Ibn 'Arabī's teachings, human beings were created as the last creatures while all of the other creatures have been employed to bring him into existence. As a final chain of being, not only does the human being has mineral, vegetal, and animal elements, he replicates the invisible and visible cosmic range being connecting with the First Intellect, Universal soul, Prime Matter, and the Universal Body. Then, mysteriously every human being contains everything in the cosmos (Chittick, 1994). Such a huge organization with the multi-dimensional aspects interacts with God, other parts of the cosmos, and other human beings while the other two dimensions (other parts of the universe and other human beings) are themselves vast complex systems with an intricate and woven network of interacts. Humans are chaotic

systems because they have traits of the chaotic systems, for example, the butterfly effect, dynamic conformity, and self-similarity. Every little effect on our body, mind, and environment sometimes leads to huge results in our life. We are creatures more or less with free will that is the most important characteristic of human beings as the manifestations of God. God is the complete being who includes all of the cosmos. According to this rule, we cannot say He is not a cat or He is not a tulip. According to waḥdat al-wujūd, God is all things and creatures; it means that there is a Real existence who is found in everything or everything depends on Him. Thus, our behavior and thoughts ontologically belong to God as well as our existence. Since God is a complete Being, hence, He includes all of the things even contradictions. As all things belong to Him such as our deeds and concepts, thus sin is of concepts that He determines to be sin (Shajari, 2007) and His decree shows this meaning. Every phenomenon that attributes to God is beautiful and if it attributes to man is evil even worship or pray. Therefore, the concept of sin for our behaviors is not authentic, but it is non-essential.

CONCLUSION

The mystics especially Ibn 'Arabī believe in the central concept of waḥdat al-wujūd and explain the universe and God according to that. One of the results of the theory of waḥdat al-wujūd is connected to the conception of sin. Ibn 'Arabī interpreted sin as a necessary element for the universe, especially for expanding creative understanding of the universe in human beings and also for manifesting the Names of God and for creating new interactions with God. To understand the meaning of sin in view of Ibn 'Arabī, we need some approaches that can explain his idea in the language of modern humans. We can find some patterns of the new theories by which we restate some vague statements in mystical language; the theory of general systems and its notions are new approaches. Using a general system theory, I analyzed the conception of sin based on waḥdat al-wujūd. As the infinite and complex phenomenon who is reflecting One Being or God, we create our universe and ourselves every moment by a free will which is another manifestation of God. Through the infinite creations, we do, we think, we analyze, we critique, we adjust, we conclude, we pray, and we repent but we do not stop because we include and realize His Names and attributes. Therefore, we do not do anything, but His will and decree; and He wants to complete His picture. The mystics believe that His entire picture is beautiful.

LIMITTAIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are numerous new approaches which must be used to explain the ideas of Ibn ʿArabī. This study only used the lens of waḥdat al-wujūd. The mystic perspective on sin will open to question about many judgments on human beings, and the concepts such as sin, freedom, punishment, and so on. Moreover, more work ought to be done to explain his idea in the language of modern humans.

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