

**THE EVALUATION OF THE DISTINCTION OF
MANIFEST (*ZĀHIR*) AND HIDDEN (*BĀṬIN*) IN
THE CONTEXT OF MORAL RELATIVITY IN
THE THOUGHT OF IBN AL-‘ARABĪ**

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Abstract

Ibn al-‘Arabī is one of the most prolific and most discussed authors in the history of Islamic thought. The view of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, that is, unity of existence, which expresses his system of thought, has a philosophical background that dates back much further than him. This concept, which means the unity of existence, has been subjected to many criticisms from different angles. One of the focal points of these criticisms is morality. It has been argued that the idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd* will eliminate good and evil in moral terms, so there can be no question of responsibility in this thought. Moral relativism is a philosophical view that is based on the idea that man is the measure of all things in Ancient Greek thought, and that the moral characterization of events as good or bad can vary according to individuals, societies and conditions. In this study, where we try to determine the moral view of Ibn al-‘Arabī in general, we will examine how the concepts of manifest and hidden, which are important concepts of his system, can be interpreted in the context of moral relativism. Ibn al-‘Arabī divides the known into two as manifest and hidden. Manifest refers to the external appearance of the known, while hidden refers to the inside. It is seen that the evaluation of the events in terms of manifest and hidden aspects in terms of moral value judgments is suitable for different interpretations in some cases in the thought of Ibn al-‘Arabī. In his system of thought, it is a problem that in certain situations, good and bad value judgments change morally in terms of manifest and hidden aspects. This provides us with a richness in addition to providing different perspectives in our evaluations.

Keywords: *Moral Relativity, Waḥdat al-wujūd, Ibn al-‘Arabī.*

1. Introduction

Ibn al-‘Arabī was born in the city of Meriye in Andalusia in 1165. He died in Damascus in 1240, after a lifetime of long travels. He is one of the most discussed authors in the history of thought. In these discussions, we see that he is subjected to accusations amounting to *takfīr* (seen as an unbeliever) as well as being overpraised. According to the general opinion, some of his works, whose number is over 400, have been commented on or abridged many times by his followers, and his name has been identified with the idea of *wahdat al-wujūd*, which can be translated as the 'unity of existence'. Although the foundations of this idea of the unity of being are older than him, it is accepted that it was systematized by him in a philosophical sense.¹

His thoughts have been subjected to many criticisms throughout history. One of the main issues that these criticisms focus on is morality. His tendency to see no one but Haq (Allah Almighty) in existence causes many questions to be answered, such as the problem of evil or responsibility. In fact, this situation constitutes the focal point of the criticisms directed to her in the moral sense.

Imām Rabbānī (d. 1624) says that Ibn al-‘Arabī's system will result in seeing evil as good, and will abolish moral freedom and sharī‘ah obligations.²

Burhāneddīn al-Biqāī (d. 1480) criticizes Ibn al-‘Arabī's system because it would conclude that all sexual intercourse is permissible.³

Al-Sakhāwī (d. 1497) brought together the criticisms made on both Ibn al-‘Arabī's system and his moral views in his work named '*al-Qawl al-Mūnbī*'. The common point of these is the criticism that it eliminates the distinction between good and bad based on the interpretations made from his system, and therefore equalizes *ḥarām* and *ḥalāl*.

Chittick also touched upon the criticisms of Ibn al-‘Arabī's views on morality and stated that these are criticisms shaped around the view of *wahdat al-wujūd*.⁴

Frithjof Schuon (d. 1998), one of the writers described as traditionalist, claims that according to the *wahdat al-wujūd* view, which he calls 'extreme dialectic', the absence of existence outside of Allah Almighty leads to the denial of evil and the conclusion that evil is only a matter of perspective.⁵ Schuon, who sees evil as a necessary consequence of the existence of creatures in the ontological sense,

argues that an evaluation of evil, which has become relative according to Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought system, will also be valid for goodness. Therefore, according to him, the result of this is the elimination of both evil and good.

Although Schuon mentions them as a critique, it should be noted that the good and evil of Ibn al-‘Arabī and the Ash‘arī tradition in general are only the judgments given by Allah Almighty or by us. According to this idea, things and phenomena are not inherently good or bad. Whether these two attributes are given by the divine will or by humans, they are later attributes and are the product of a point of view.

We see that Ibn al-‘Arabī has at least two works on morality that he refers to in his works. One of them is the work that he wrote to Fakhr al-dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209), the content of which is about morality. The other is the work called 'al-A‘lāq fī Makārim al-Akhlāq'.

In some libraries in Turkey, there is a moral book attributed to Ibn al-‘Arabī under three different names. One of them is the work called 'Falsafa al-Akhlāq ' in the Library of the Turkish Historical Society (registered with the number Q/0744). The other is the work which is called 'Maḥāsīn-i Akhlāq' (registered in catalog number 000328) in the Hacı Selim Ağa Manuscripts Library. Another one is registered in the Nation Manuscripts Library with the catalog number 002072 and under the name 'Kitāb al- Akhlāq'. The difference between these works, which are the same, is only in their names. There were some who claimed that this work was named 'Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq' belonging to Yaḥyā bin ‘Adī (d. 975) and was mistakenly attributed to Ibn al-‘Arabī.

The number of studies in which Ibn al-‘Arabī’s texts are examined from different perspectives is increasing. Among these, studies that examine only his views on morality are very few. Among them, we can list the ones we can identify as follows: The doctoral study titled ‘The Problem of Evil in Ibn ‘Arabi’s Metaphysics’ by Şükrü Topuz and the doctoral study named ‘An Enquiry Concerning the Ontic Foundation of Morals in the Line of Muhyiddin İbn al-Arabi and Sadr al-Gunawi’ by Ender Büyüközkara.

William C. Chittick’s “Ethical Standards and The Vision of Oneness: The Case of Ibn al-‘Arabī” and “Time, Space, and The Objectivity of Ethical Norms in The Teachings of Ibn al-‘Arabī” should be mentioned here as article.

Among the studies carried out in Arab countries on the morality of Ibn al-‘Arabī, there is a doctoral study at Minia University in 2003 by Emced Sayyid Muḥammad al-‘Aṭṭār named ‘The Moral Philosophy of Muḥyiddin Ibn al-‘Arabī’. The work named ‘Mūshkiletü'l-İttiḥad ve al-Te‘ālī fi ‘Akīdeti al-Sheikh Muḥyiddīn bin ‘Arabī’, the work of al-Aḥḍar Gūyidrī ‘Aṭāu'llah, which is not specifically about morality, but also touches on moral issues, can be cited here. We should also note that the same author has an article called Muḥyiddīn bin ‘Arabī in his ‘al-Mūshkil al-Akhlāqī fī Nazariyyeti Wahdat al-wujūd’. There is also an article by Lağris Sūhīle called ‘Nazariyye al-Akhlāq fī Ḍav'i' al-Taşavvuf al-Falsafa: Ibn ‘Arabī Nemūzecen’. Likewise, Abū al-‘Alā Afīfī (d. 1966) partially refers to Ibn al-‘Arabī's morals and thoughts in his works.

In this study, we will try to determine the moral thoughts of Ibn al-‘Arabī in the context of his works and related works and to evaluate the distinction between manifest and hidden in the context of moral relativity.

2. Etymological Analysis of the Word *Akhlāq*

The word *akhlāq* (morality) is the plural of *khulq*, which is the infinitive of the Arabic verb *kḥalaqa* (خلق). al-Rāğib al-Işfehānī (d. 1108), who says that the word *Khalaqa* means 'decent planning', gives the dictionary meanings of *khulq* as creating something without its original and pattern, creating something from something else, appreciating, fabricating lies, and tearing and aging of clothes.⁶ al-Tahānawī (d. after 1745) adds religion, bravery, generosity and nature to these meanings.⁷ Mütercim Âsim Efendī (d. 1819) states that the word *khulq* also means straightening the knots of the tree, making an object straight, proportioning, cutting and sewing an object.⁸

Although *akhlāq* as a concept is not mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān, the infinitive of the verb *kḥalaqa* is used as both *khulq* and *kḥalq*. Although both are translated as creation, al-Işfehānī states that the word *kḥalq* denotes visible shapes and forms, while the word *khulq* is used to express forces and characteristics that can only be perceived with forethought.⁹ As a matter of fact, the word *khalq* means shape in the Quranic verse “There is no change in Allah’s creation”.¹⁰ The word *khulq* means character in the verse “And you are surely on an excellent standard of character”.¹¹ al-Işfehānī gives the definition of the character as ‘the state of being on a person’.¹²

Akhlāq is expressed with the words morality and ethics in western languages. Morality (in Latin) is derived from the root of *mores*, meaning nature, habit, character and such.¹³ Ethics (in Greek) is derived from the root of *ethos*, meaning custom/customary.¹⁴ However, the word ethics is commonly used in this sense: moral

philosophy or branch of philosophy which studies the principles of right or wrong in human conduct. Therefore in this study we will use the word *akhlāq* as morality.

Based on the root of *khulq*, morality is defined as follows: It is the trait that enables a willed behaviour to emerge spontaneously in a person without leaving any coercion. In this sense, it has not been found correct to evaluate the behaviours that do not have the mind and will of the human being and the behaviours that are forced to be made by humans as moral.

3. Etymological Analysis of the Word Relative

Relativity is translated into Arabic with the words *iḍāfet* (إضافة) and *nisbet* (نسبة). *Iḍāfet* is derived from the root *ḍāfe* (ضاف), which means to host. In the dictionary, it corresponds to meanings such as completing, adding, including, assigning, welcoming. *Nisbet*, on the other hand, is derived from the root *nasaba* (نسب), which means lineage and kinship. In the dictionary, it means ratio, connection, relation, kinship, closeness, relationship.

Ibn Manzūr (d. 1311) states that the word *iḍāfa* means to complement, to be attached, and says that the purpose in relativity is allocation and description. Therefore, according to him, it is not right to attribute something to itself.¹⁵ Stating that *nesebin*, which is the root of the word *Nisbet*, means lineage, Ibn Manzūr states that the word *Nuseyb*, which comes from the same root, is a male name, but it is used only for Ibn al-‘Arabī. However, he does not give an explanation as to why such a name was used for Ibn al-‘Arabī.¹⁶ Al-Tahānawī defines the word *iḍāfa* as follows:

“Relativity (*iḍāfa*), according to linguists, is the relative of one thing to another. Philosophers use relativity in three senses: The first is repeated relativeness. This is a relativeness that can be said in comparison to each other, such as paternity and sonship. The second is the phrase [expressed] because of the complement, and the third is the relativeness [expressed as] complemented with the complement. These two are known as *muzaf* (commentary)”¹⁷

al-Tahānawī says that the word *nisbet* (relativeness) has two meanings. He says that one of them is saying something in comparison to something else, and this is in terms of the meaning of a universal explanation, equality, generalization and a universal wording. He states that the other meaning is the relativity found in the categories.¹⁸

The word relativity has been transferred to western languages by being derived from the word *relativitas*, which is the Latin equivalent of the word. The origin of the Latin word *relativitas* is the verb *φέρω* (pronounced *fero*), which means to carry, to bear, to bring in Ancient Greek. This word has been translated into Latin with the verb *ferre*. The perfect form of this verb is expressed with the word *latus*. In this sense, *relatus* is a word used to express meanings such as bring back, concern, attach.

4. Conceptual Framework

Ethics that investigates the nature, source, and value of moral behavior is divided into three: metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics. While metaethics is more concerned with the epistemological and metaphysical dimensions of morality, normative ethics is concerned with the forms of behavior that must be followed. Applied ethics, on the other hand, emerges as a field that morally evaluates the emerging problems related to private and public life that changes and develops technologically.

Metaetic theories have been classified from different perspectives. In terms of language, metaethics theories are divided into descriptive and non-definist, and subjectivist theory is included in the non-definitive group. According to this classification, descriptive theories are divided into two as theological and cognitive theories. Non-descriptive theories are divided into two as objectivist and subjectivist. Descriptive theories accept the identifiability of the good in the moral sense, and non-definitive ones do not accept the definability of the good in the moral sense.¹⁹

Ontologically, metaethical theories are divided into two as realist and anti-realist. While realist theories argue that moral facts and qualities exist independently of people's ideas about them, anti-realist theories argue that moral facts and qualities do not exist independently of people's opinions. According to this classification, moral naturalism and moral intuitionism are evaluated within realist theories. Anti-realist theories include non-cognitive theories such as emotivism (emotivism) and imperativeism (prescriptivism), as well as subjectivist and nihilist theories.²⁰

In this respect, whether morality is relative or universal is seen as a problem that concerns the metaethics field, which is more concerned with the meaning, scope and source of morality. The relativity related to the metaetic field is called 'metaetic relativism'. Metaetic relativism does not accept the existence of moral principles with universal validity. Accordingly, every moral principle is valid for a certain time, region or person. The relativism that asserts that the behaviour of a particular society should be evaluated only with

the norms of that society is called 'normative relativism'. According to normative relativism, it is wrong to criticize and interfere with that society for any form of behaviour because we do not have a supracultural criterion in order to evaluate the moral understanding of different cultures.²¹

Discussions on the subject are shaped around two basic views on whether the principles of morality will change according to individuals, societies or time. The first of these is the idea that moral principles that are valid for everyone and every society cannot be mentioned, as claimed by the sophists, who are considered to be the first advocates of relativity in a philosophical sense.

The other is the idea that there should be universal moral principles, as claimed by Socrates and Plato, who were the first to criticize the sophists.

Moral relativism is divided into two as moderate and extreme in terms of accepting all moral principles as relative or not. Although measured moral relativism accepts the existence of some universal principles for the moral field, it accepts that there may be differences in practice. Extreme moral relativism, on the other hand, argues that no one's moral judgment can be criticized and that there is no absolute moral value.²²

5. Universal and Relative Dimension of Morality

The undeniable fact in the opinions put forward about the source of moral judgments is that there are differences between cultures in terms of moral judgments, as in many other fields. The Greek historian Herodotus (d. 425 BC) refers to an event that took place in the presence of the Persian king Darius (d. 486 BC), and points out the difference in the way the Greeks and the Kallatiye tribe treated the corpses of their deceased ancestors. He presents this situation as evidence that each society's own tradition is superior to them. For it is not a question of who is right, who has only one right answer. While accepting the naturalness of this difference for cultures supports a relative perspective and being tolerant towards different cultures, it is also open to opposing criticism. The implication that it is intolerant for those who do not have a relative perspective emerges as a new problem. Because claiming that different practices of different cultures are wrong on certain issues does not necessitate being intolerant towards them.

It can be argued that a person who advocates relativism takes a great risk for his own system by emphasizing tolerance in these differences. That is, if tolerance is a trait to be admired and encouraged (which is how its recommendation will be interpreted),

then tolerance is presented as a universal principle. The distinction between situations that should be evaluated as relatively and situations that should not be evaluated as relatively in the resulting situation will lead us to accept the existence of different types of relativity.

Since morality is a concept related to human beings, it is inevitable for every human being to have some common characteristics that will reveal the phenomenon called humanity. Although this has grown up in different cultures, it is open to interpretation that it has a supra-cultural situation resulting from being human after all. The extent to which this will affect moral values is an issue that continues to be debated. The objection that value judgments that only human thoughts and feelings will be taken as a measure will not have any moral value is an important issue that needs to be answered. Because morality is a social concept and it has to be based on value judgments accepted in society. The other will simply express a personal value. The response of these personal values in society depends on the fact that the individual grew up in a society and culture.

On the other hand, it is thought that the claim that human beings have an innate inclination towards good and beautiful places morality on a universal basis. Regardless of how we decide what is good and beautiful, the observation of virtues, such as helping those who are similar to oneself, from a very young age, lays the groundwork for the claims that morality exists in human nature. According to this idea, the existence of an innate moral ground that directs the behaviours will lead us to the interpretation of universality. There are also those who claim that similar behaviours are observed in animals as evidence that there is a biological evolution in living life.

Although there are sometimes differences in the contents of the concepts of good and bad according to cultures, we see the existence of these concepts in every culture and in every individual. In other words, regardless of whether something is called good or bad, good and bad are concepts that a person cannot act without being affected by them in his life. These basic value judgments are an important ground on which people build their moral understanding. When we talk about a relative morality, we are talking about the difference in the content of good and evil on this ground and what the reasons may be. Therefore, the idea that there can be a consensus on the definition of good and evil in some way can be a proof that can be put forward for the existence of a universal dimension of morality.

In this case, it is possible to talk about morality, whose subject is human behaviour and values, in both a universal and a relative dimension. It is not possible for all cultures and individuals to unite in the same values and behaviours, and it is not possible for them to produce completely different values and behaviour patterns.

6. *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* Thought

The term *waḥdat al-wujūd*, which is generally used in the meaning of unity of existence and unity in existence, is used specifically to express Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thoughts about existence. *Waḥdat* is a name derived from the Arabic root *vāḥid* (واحد) meaning 'one' and means unity. *Tawḥīd* is the indivisibility of something. This meaning is also expressed with the words *aḥadiyyet* and *waḥdāniyyet*, which come from the same root. In some texts, the terms *eḥadiyyetü'l-vücüd* or *vaḥdaniyyetü'l-vücüd* are also used to express *waḥdat al-wujūd*.

The *wujūd* is derived from the root of ecstasy (وجد), which means to find, to enrich, to love, to be sad, to get angry. The verb to find, which is meant here, expresses an internal process for the meaning determined as a result of perception with the five senses. This leads us to the interpretation that the concept of *vejd* (ecstasy), which comes from the same root, exists within the integrity of meaning. Likewise, the emotional meanings attributed to the word show that there is a moral dimension besides the epistemological dimension in the perception of existence. As a matter of fact, the meanings attributed to the concept of *viḍān* (conscience), derived from the root of *vejd*, show the moral dimension of the concept. Two of the concepts used to meet existence in the history of Islamic thought are *vejd* and *tawajud*. al-İşfahānī gives the meaning of *vejd* as love and sadness.²³ It is seen that the use of the word *vejd* (ecstasy) as the opposite of absence (in the sense of being) emphasizes a state of consciousness and awareness. It is possible to see this in the meanings attributed to these words by Ibn al-‘Arabī. As a matter of fact, Ibn al-‘Arabī, who defines the body as ‘to find the Allah Almighty in *wajd*’, defines *wajd*’ as ‘a state that arises in the heart’. According to him, *tawajud* is ‘calling *wajd* (ecstasy) and showing ecstasy’.²⁴ In this sense, it is possible to understand and translate *wajd* as invention and body as presence.²⁵

The problem of how the being, expressed as multiplicity, emerges from the One (unity) is one of the important problems in the history of philosophy. Multiplicity allows for knowledge that can be proved by being perceived by the senses, and the idea of oneness and unity (*waḥdat*) behind all existence corresponds to a type of knowledge that the mind perceives (convinces/intuits). Both of these situations correspond to the science of manifest and hidden in the

expressions of Ibn al-‘Arabī. In this case, the comprehension of unity in existence seems possible with an esoteric knowledge (*bāṭin*).

7. The Distinction of Manifest and Hidden in Ibn al-‘Arabī

The word *zāhir* (manifest), which is a derived name from the root *zahara* (ظهر), meaning to appear in Arabic, is one of the most important concepts of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought system. He tried to explain the creation and the created things with the words *zuhur* and *mazhar*, which come from the same root with *zāhir*, along with some other words such as *tejelli* and *ta‘ayyun*. The word *bāṭin* (hidden) is derived from the root *beṭane* (بطن), meaning abdomen, womb, hiding, and is a word used to express the inner face of something.

Ibn al-‘Arabī divides the known (known) into two as manifest and hidden in epistemological sense. When these are combined in the mind, they become either in the form of meaning or imagination or form. *Bāṭin* here means to know the inside of something. The manifest is the subject of the senses, *hidden* is the thing which soul perceives.²⁶ In other words, the apparent is *manifest* and the known is *hidden*. This can be explained with an example as follows. The image of a fruit on the table is its outward appearance. The eye sees it. But its taste is the inner side. The one who sees it does not know it, the person who eats that fruit can know it. Ibn al-‘Arabī thinks that expressions such as debts in the verses and hadiths as a rope, knowledge in the form of milk, or that Surah Baqara is a witness to the one who reads it should be understood esoterically (*bāṭin*).

According to Ibn al-‘Arabī, who explains ontological appearance with the verb *evcede* (وجد), which means to invent, to bring into being, all created existence is the manifestation of Allah Almighty’s manifestation. Allah Almighty is the esoteric of these emerging things. He describes it as “Allah Almighty is *hidden* and creatures are *manifest*”. Adam’s body is his outward form, and his soul is his inward form. While explaining this situation, Ibn al-‘Arabī says, “in this case, it is both Allah Almighty and the creatures.”²⁷ While explaining the degrees of the realms, he says that the realms have outward and inward aspects. According to this, the outward (*zāhir*) of the world of *ceberut* becomes the interior (*bāṭin*) of the realm of real world. The outward appearance (*zāhir*) of the kingdom of heaven is the interior (*bāṭin*) of the realm of tyranny.²⁸

Ibn al-‘Arabī says that Allah, the Exalted, is manifest by appearing and manifesting, that his esoteric (*bāṭin*) is gone, but at the same time he is esoteric.²⁹ He says “Allah is exempt from all kinds of naming and characterization and he cannot be qualified as *hidden*. As a matter of fact, he states that greatness is beyond the outward (*zāhir*) and the inward (*bāṭin*). Again, in *‘al-Fütūḥāt*, while Allah Almighty

says that things are the same, he says that this sameness is only in appearance, and that things can never be the same as Allah Almighty's essence. He said, "Allah Almighty is Allah Almighty, and things are things."

Allah Almighty is the manifest itself. He is also the esoteric thing in its manifestation. In existence, there is no one who can see him other than himself, and there is nothing hidden from him (nor is there anything hidden from him).³⁰ In The Holy Qur'ān, "He is the First (al-awwal) and the Last (al-ākhir) and the Manifest (al-ẓāhir) and the Hidden (al-bāṭin)."³¹ While interpreting the verse, just as Allah is both before (al-awwal) and after (al-ākhir), he also makes the assessment that the hidden thing is the same in his manifest thing. He states that this indicates multiplicity and unity in the context of the creator and the created. As a matter of fact, he says in the book called *Fuṣūṣ*:

“Manifest refers to multiplicity, and hidden to unity.”

Ibn al-‘Arabī, who stated that Allah Almighty appears to the creatures in the nights of the days called '*ayyāmi biḍ*' in the Arabs and which refers to the nights with the full moon (13th, 14th and 15th nights of each lunar month), said that in The Holy Qur'ān “Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth”.³² In these nights, the Sun appeared to the Moon as apparent and revealed everything that was hidden in the darkness of the night and revealed them.³³ As a matter of fact, Allah said: "and has made the moon a light therein."³⁴

In his evaluation in terms of morality, Ibn al-‘Arabī says that the person to whom Allah Almighty turns with his hidden will never be miserable, and the person to whom he turns with his *manifest* will never be happy. If a person knows that the real perpetrator, both in the events around him and in the events that happened to him, is Allah Almighty in the hidden sense, and if he submits to him and consents to what comes from him, it is out of the question for this person to be unhappy. While evaluating this submission in the sect, Ibn al-‘Arabī says that ṣūfī will see nothing but beauty in the world, even if the divine decrees are manifested in a bad way.

Ibn al-‘Arabī also distinguishes worships as manifest and hidden. According to him, sensory worship with the body is outward (*ẓāhir*) worship, and what is done with the mind is esoteric worship (*bāṭin*). and people of *jem* and *wujūd* combine these two.³⁵ It seems that Ibn al-‘Arabī describes seeing *tawḥīd* in the body as the worship of the mind.

8. The Relative Dimension of Moral Provisions in the Meaning of Outward and Inward Distinction

In Ibn al-‘Arabī’s whole system of thought, manifest is about appearance and directs the discussions on how basic religious texts are or should be understood by people. The important point here is the acceptance that there is not/will not be an interpretation suitable to be understood differently from the text for everyone. Because in such a case, the divine text, whose main purpose was to be understood and applied by people, would have deviated from its apparent purpose.

On the other hand, *bāṭin* concerns an area based on personal inner religious experiences. One of the key concepts here is discovery (*kashf*)³⁶. In the dictionary, discovery (*kashf*) means opening, revealing, and expresses the ingenuity attained by those who reach spiritual competence in the term of mysticism. The spiritual education process that results in discovery (*kashf*) and volunteering for this education, which is described as a disciple, is called asceticism. This inner experience is considered as a state of competence that is achieved as a result of taking control of the soul by not complying with the wishes of the soul, which is seen as one of the sources of evil.

What we will focus on here is the subjective value of the knowledge gained through discovery (*kashf*), which is a personal religious experience. First of all, this information does not apply to other people according to general acceptance. The extent to which it will apply to the owner of the *kashf* maintains its importance. An important issue that the Sufis insistently emphasize and convey is that this information should not be taken into account if it contradicts the apparent nature of the *sharī‘ah*, which Ibn al-‘Arabī repeats several times. Here the following question would be relevant. Isn’t it accepted that the discovery (*kashf*) of knowledge based on an esoteric basis (*bāṭin*) can be considered contrary to the outward appearance (*ẓāhir*) of the *sharī‘ah* according to this warning? It has been argued that when outward and esoteric knowledge conflicts, manifest should be taken as the basis. However, despite this, it is understood that the provision to be taken as basis was given outwardly.

The following statements of Ibn al-‘Arabī leave the distinction between actions that should and should not be done for a morally responsible person, provided that ingenuity is taken as a basis on an exploratory basis:

“The skill that eliminates the distinction between what is permissible and what is not permissible for the obligant is not respected.”³⁷

In his '*al-Fütuhat*', answering the question "Can you be a rebel if *kashf* is based?" with "no" can be interpreted that there will be no rebellion against Allah Almighty in terms of the fact that everything happens within the framework of divine knowledge in knowledge based on discovery.³⁸ In fact, this is in harmony with his view of coercion and unity in general, as mentioned before. From this, it can be interpreted that there is some justification for the criticisms made against his moral view. The conclusion that this draws us to the subjective nature of ingenuity based on discovery. In other words, this is not binding for anyone else, nor is it always binding for the owner.

In The Holy Qur'ān, While explaining the verse "Allah will replace the evils of such people by good deeds",³⁹ Ibn al-‘Arabī draws attention to the fact that goodness and evil are interpretations made on actions.⁴⁰ That is, when we evaluate and qualify something as bad, we face a sin in return according to the *sharī‘ah*. Therefore, this precedes a perspective from our point of view. According to the people of *kashf*, since we cannot attribute evil to Allah, the punishment or reward given in return for this action will again be from the point of view of man. In this case, turning evil into good will turn into a personal truth as a result of his servant's assumption for Allah Almighty.

According to Ibn al-‘Arabī, another point that show this is that according to him, Khidr expressed in The Holy Qur'ān that he wanted to make the ship defective by piercing it.⁴¹ For, according to him, this indicates a commonality between things that are praised and condemned. In other words, the same situation can be both good and bad in a relative way.⁴²

Khidr, who acted according to Allah’s advice, learned the knowledge of the hidden, Ḥaḍrat Mūsā, on the other hand, represents *manifest*. According to Ibn al-‘Arabī, Ḥaḍrat Mūsā was not aware of the esoteric knowledge (*bāṭin*) that Khidr had.⁴³ Khidr attained this knowledge as a result of his love for Allah. The quality that distinguishes him from other scholars was his knowledge of Allah. The knowledge about Allah is called *ma‘rifetullah*, and this knowledge is obtained not by understanding the outward appearance of the being, but by perceiving the truth behind it, namely hidden. Khidr, for whom Allah said, 'We gave him knowledge from us', shows the knowledge given to him by making situations that Mūsā had no way of accepting outwardly (*zāhir*). In one of them, he killed a small child and the reason for this was not told to Mūsā.

According to Ibn al-‘Arabī, there are two moral aspects in this case: these two cases, one in terms of goodness and the other in terms of evil, indicate the difference in evaluations about the event. The aspect of goodness belongs to Allah, and according to Khidr, there is goodness for both the child and his family in the death of the child.⁴⁴ As a matter of fact, Khidr also attributed this matter to Allah using a plural expression: "We, therefore, wished that their Lord would replace him with someone better than him in piety"⁴⁵ According to Mūsā, the evil belongs to Khidr and this is not a situation that can be described as good in appearance (*ẓāhir*).

9. Conclusion

Although there are thinkers who argue that morality has or should have a universal aspect that can appeal to all humanity in terms of dealing with people and their behaviours, there are also thinkers who do not see a consensus in moral value judgments in practice. Where this last view leads us is to the relative dimension of morality. Throughout the history of thought, moral relativism has continued to be discussed from different perspectives.

Although mystical characters are dominant in Ibn al-‘Arabī's texts, it is an undeniable fact that philosophy is a discipline that affects him in the background of his thought system. As a matter of fact, it is commented that he placed Sufism on a philosophical ground for his system. One of the most emphasized definitions of Sufism is that it is moralizing with the morality of Allah. Here, Sufism was identified with morality and aimed at a moral life as a means of spiritual competence. It is thought that the meaning of each name from *asmā al-ḥusnā*, which takes the moralization references mentioned here from The Holy Qur'ān and is mentioned as the most beautiful names of Allah Almighty, manifests in human beings.

When all of these names are manifested in human beings in the form of moralization, this person will be qualified as a perfect human being and deserve to be called the caliph of Allah Almighty on earth. The perfect human being is also worthy of being referred to as the small realm (microcosm) because it is a manifestation that gathers the characteristics of all levels of existence within itself. It is striking that there is a constant emphasis on morality in the texts of Ibn al-‘Arabī. In the history of Islamic thought, it is accepted that he systematized the idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. According to the idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, there is only the existence of Allah Almighty in the real sense. All other beings consist of its manifestation at different levels. However, this idea has faced objections and criticisms on morality as well as on many different issues. These criticisms focus on the fact that this idea removes moral responsibility from the

servant of Allah Almighty, as it equates the creator with the servant at one point.

To argue that the morality of Ibn al-‘Arabī is a purely relative morality, primarily based on religion, would be to fail to fully understand it. Because one of the main concerns of a religion-based morality is to be inclusive for different times and grounds. However, we see that Ibn al-‘Arabī does not base the basis of good and evil only on religion, especially in the moral sense. For this reason, we think that he accepts the existence of an understanding of good and evil that changes according to the societies, based on some grounds such as reason and custom. In the context of relativity, we think that it would be more accurate to evaluate this not as a subjectivism that can be reduced to individuals, but in the context of a cultural relativism that can be reduced to societies.

While dealing with the subjects, Ibn al-‘Arabī evaluates them from two different perspectives: manifest and hidden. It is seen that the judgments he gives outwardly and the judgments he gives according to the inner part of the event may differ in matters concerning morality. He can judge a situation that he describes as bad outwardly to be good inwardly. However, it should be noted that the criticisms made especially about his moral views stem from a commentary on his system. Although he is inclined to accept some things that seem bad on the outside, based on the distinction between the outward and the inward, we see that there is no sentence in his texts that is put forward in the criticism. However, it is a paradox that he states that a kashf (internal knowledge) that contradicts the apparent contradiction of a scripture should also be rejected.

Notes and References

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