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Either/both 'Both/And' and/or 'Either/Or'? –

Ibn al-'Arabi's Cosmology and the Critique of Identity

At the heart of the desert, in the growing wasteland, this thought, which fundamentally no longer seeks to be a thought of Being…seeks to liberate itself from the Greek domination of the Same and the One…as if from oppression itself – an oppression certainly comparable to none other in the world, an ontological or transcendental oppression, but also the origin or alibi of all oppression in the world.

Jacques Derrida, '*Violence and Metaphysics'*

"Somewhere along the line," writes William Chittick in the opening paragraph of *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, "the Western intellectual tradition took a wrong turn;" (SPK: ix) evoking a sentiment which would, we suspect, be unequivocally endorsed by a phalanx of contemporary philosophers.[1] Writing from out of the shadow of the gas-chamber, post-Heideggerian French thinkers – from Levinas, through Derrida, to Irigaray and Nancy - have undertaken a relentless re-reading of the Western canon in an attempt to delineate the ways in which the Western mind has led itself so spectacularly astray. *That* something is wrong is largely irrefutable; the horror of the Holocaust has since been joined by a host of other 'crises of modernity,' from environmental degradation to the atomization and alienation of social being which manifests itself alternately in depressive paralysis and explosive violence. However, the fundamental structure of *what* exactly might be wrong is, inevitably, far harder to discern. In the Introduction to *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, Chittick – faintly echoing Adorno and Horkheimer's groundbreaking critique of Enlightenment rationality – suggests that our error resides in "putting complete faith in reason" and a concomitant loss of "certain possibilities of perceiving and understanding not available to the rational mind." (SPK: ix) Such a failure to engage the non-rational faculties has allowed, Chittick continues, "a great body of mythic and religious teachings" to "slip[s] from our grasp," (SPK: ix) and led, in the words of Henri Corbin, to "a devastated spiritual universe." (AWA: 282)

The notion that the world's wisdom traditions – particularly those of the Near and Far East – may offer a corrective to the Western penchant for 'progress' based on technological domination and

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[1] Cf. For example, Luce Irigaray in *Between East and West*: "Western man has come to a standstill at a moment in his journey" (BEW: x)

instrumental calculability, has surfaced on numerous occasions in our recent history, beginning perhaps with Paul Deussen's translations of the Hindu Vedas and Upanishads in the nineteenth century, and ranging through both high and low culture to find expression in the work of Nietzsche, Huxley, Eliot, and Irigaray. Central to this intellectual current is the idea that the traditions of the East represent an understanding of the world as a '*coincidentia oppositorium,*' or 'coincidence of opposites,' as contrasted with the Western mind's predilection – represented paradigmatically by the Aristotelian Law of Contradiction – for binary hierarchies which privilege one pole of a dualism over the other; the elevation of 'reason' over its 'other' (passion/intuition/superstition) being one historically fateful example. There are a number of ways in which this distinction between Western and Eastern attitudes to duality may be codified; as that between 'either/or' and 'both/and' thinking, or, to employ the history of philosophy, as that between the monolith of Parmenidean Being ("Thus [it] must either be completely or not at all." 8.11) and the harmony of opposites instantiated by the Heraclitan Logos ("They do not comprehend how a thing agrees at variance with itself." Fragment. 51). Aristotle, in his famous explication of the Law of Contradiction in *Metaphysics* Book Gamma, derided the absurdity of the "doctrine of Heraclitus" for suggesting "that everything is and is not," (Met: 4.1012a) and thus played a substantial role in ensuring that it was the Parmenidean, or, as Levinas might phrase it, 'Eleatic notion of Being,' which would be inherited by the Western tradition.

The charges leveled against hierarchical dualism by contemporary thinkers are manifold, but essentially converge in the accusation that the privileging of one pole over another leads to the domination, oppression, appropriation and, ultimately, annihilation of the 'inferior' pole, as Rosi Braidotti observes, the "history of difference in Europe has been one of lethal exclusions and fatal disqualifications." (BW: 45) Thus, in the scientistic domination of materiality inherent in the Enlightenment project (Bacon's (in)famous intent to 'put Nature on the rack'), Adorno and Horkheimer discern the domination of the other/object by the rational subject which, they contend, leads directly to Auschwitz. Somewhat similarly, Levinas, also writing after his own experience of the Holocaust, develops an 'ethics of alterity,' which, as Derrida suggests above, determines the "Eleatic notion of Being" (Cf. VM: 98) to be "the origin and alibi of all oppression in the world." (VM: 92) The Western tradition has, Irigaray observes, taught us "to think starting from a certain number of dichotomies between sensible and intelligible, nature and spirit, body and soul, subject and object etc," and, as a consequence, "we do not know how to transform such categories in order to attain a culture of alterity, of relation with the other." (BEW: 126)

It is in their capacity to 'transform such categories' that the corrective potential of ways of 'perceiving and understanding not available to the rational mind' may reside. Arguably, the essential feature of the operation of the rational faculty is the drawing of distinction, the construction of strictly de-fined or de-limited categories which are held to be entirely separate from their others. Thus, in the Islamic sapiential tradition, reason ('*'aql'*) – deriving from a root meaning 'fetter' - is that which "limits…and ties down," or "knows through delimitation and binding," (SPK: 159) and is, Ibn al-'Arabi reminds us, the faculty by which, in the words of the Koran, man "differentiates the signs." (13:2) By contrast, as we explored in our discussions of Corbin's treatment of the imaginal realm in Sufi cosmology, the faculty of imagination is that which, as Ibn al-'Arabi notes, "makes contraries come together," (Futûhât II 379.3; SPK: 116) and is peculiarly suited the perception of the ambiguity inherent in all contingent or existent entities, an ambiguity which derives fundamentally from the fact that everything in the cosmos – all that is not '*wujûd*' or God – manifests through the interplay of Being and nothingness, and is, as Ibn al-'Arabi would formulate it, both 'He' and 'not He.'

There would, therefore, appear to be a high degree of resonance between Ibn al-'Arabi's cosmology, and its assertion of the "ontological fact" of "fundamental ambiguity," (SPK: 112) and various strands of the recent French tradition which have focused on dealing with binary pairs in a way which, as Irigaray notes, "presents, uncovers, unveils the existence of a third term." (ESD: 20) In Ibn al-'Arabi's thought this 'third-term' is represented by the figure of the '*barzakh*' or 'isthmus,' that which "stands between and separates two other things' and yet also "combines the attributes of both." (SPK: 14) Irigaray, for her part, has employed a wide variety of imaginative symbols to attempt to summon an appreciation of the liminal terrain between the either/or of rational delineation; these include – in a notable echo of Sufi cosmology – the figure of the angel who serves as "an intermediary between pairs of opposites" (ESD: 24) and the chiasmus, or double-loop, which represents, in the words of Merleau-Ponty, "the reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one with the other" (VI: 255) and thus allows for a negotiation of the "classical impasse" generated by the "the birfurcation of subject and object." (VI: 254)

The aim of this paper is to subject the apparent concordance between Ibn al-'Arabi's cosmology and contemporary French thought to further scrutiny in order to develop a more detailed appreciation of aspects of convergence and divergence and thus, it is hoped, open the way to a fuller assessment of the extent to which the 'turn to the East' does, in fact, offer a useful corrective to the errors of Western thought. As previously discussed, to Ibn al-'Arabi's mind, the "outstanding

feature of the cosmos is its ambiguous status," (SPK: 18) the fact that all existent entities are manifest through the interaction of '*wujûd*' and nothingness. Thus, duality is the fundamental principle of the origin of all created things. This is particularly evident when we remember the fact that the cosmos is defined, in Islamic thought, as everything *other* than absolute Being, that is, if there was not anything *other* than God, there would be no cosmos, while equally, in the absence of God, nothing would have been created. Ibn al-'Arabi writes:

> No result can occur – that is, nothing can come into existence – except between two things: the divine power and the possible thing's reception of activity. Were one of these two realities lacking, no entity would become manifest for the cosmos. (Futûhât II 486.7; TI: 58)

Or again:

> [S]ince the cosmos has no subsistence except through God, and since the attribute of Divinity has no subsistence except through the cosmos, each of the two is the provision of the other. (Futûhât III 363; SPK: 61)

The fact that the "the very existence of one side of the polar relationship makes the other side necessary," (TI: 57) is perhaps most amply demonstrated in the relationship between God and man, traditionally characterized as that between a Lord and his servant. As Hegel's discussion of the mutually self-constituting dialectic between master and slave revealed – a motif which has reverberated through French philosophy for nearly a century – "each 'is' itself only to the extent that it *is* the other, because…self-identity is only rendered actual to the extent that it is mediated through that which is different." (SD: 18) In remarkably similar terms, Ibn al-'Arabi tells us that:

> Nothing enters engendered existence save doubling.
> Look – the Lord comes to be from the vassal. (Futûhât IV 276.33; TI: 59)

According to Hegel's account, the dialectic of master and slave is necessary to the evolution of self-consciousness, for, in the simplest possible terms, knowledge must be transitive or reflective, and, in the absence of the duality that arises through difference, there would nothing to serve as the object of knowledge. This necessity of duality to the arising of knowledge also surfaces in the originary myths of the Abrahamic religions and furnishes God's motif for the act of creation:

David is said to have asked God, 'Why dist thou create the creatures?' He replied, 'I was a hidden treasure and I wanted [literally 'loved'] to be known. Hence I created the creatures so that I might be known.' (TI: 61)

The necessity of the duality between God and his creation is further revealed in the spiritual relationship between God and man which Corbin denotes as the 'dialectic of love' and which incorporates the two-fold structure of "the Desire of God…yearning to manifest Himself in beings, in order to be revealed for them and by them" and, concomitantly, the "Desire of the creature for God." (AWA: 147) It should perhaps here be remembered that Desire is also the term by which Hegel – and Lacan following him – denotes the operation of the mechanism of self-consciousness. In the Lacanian account of the origin of self-awareness, interpretable perhaps as "a new myth of genesis," (LMO, 1999: 88) the interaction between God and the first man is reformulated as that between the self and its mirror-image, thus rendering explicit the specular structure Corbin had recognized in the originary relation:

> The nostalgia and sadness of Adam were also appeased by the projection of his own Image, which, separating from him, becoming independent of him like the mirror in which the Image appears, finally revealed him to himself. (AWA: 161)

The elaboration of the significance of the specular relation – the fact that self-consciousness or knowledge is impossible in the absence of the other – has been one of the abiding threads of contemporary French thought. In his recent text, *Being Singular Plural* (2000), Jean-Luc Nancy, punning on Guy Debord's famous Situationist slogan, writes:

> There is no appearing to oneself except as appearing to one another…one could not even begin to be an other for oneself if one had not already started from the alterity with – or of the with – others in general….the truth of the play of mirrors must be understood as the truth of the 'with.' In this sense, 'society' is 'spectacular.' (BSP: 67-8)

Thus it is, Nancy continues, in tones echoing Ibn al-'Arabi's assertion that '[n]othing enters engendered existence save doubling,' that:

Nothing and nobody can be born without being born to and with others who come into this encounter, who are born in their own turn. The 'together,' therefore, is an absolutely originary structure. What is not together is in the no-time-no-place of non-Being. (BSP: 61)

While there is here a clear resonance between Ibn al-'Arabi's and Nancy's account of the origin of existent things, we also detect the first hints of a fissure in their accounts of the nature of reality. Whereas for Ibn al-'Arabi' 'doubling' is the precondition of the entry of all 'engendered things' into existence, for Nancy, the 'with' or 'together' is 'an *absolutely* originary structure,' without which there would only be 'non-Being.' He writes:

Being cannot *be* anything but being-with-one-another, circulating in the *with* and as the *with* of this singularly plural coexistence. (BSP: 3)

In the schema of Sufi cosmology, of course, Being or '*wujûd*,' is exactly that beyond the sphere of all created or engendered things, that which is *not* the cosmos, and thus, that which escapes the ambiguity inherent in all existent entities. Being is "the absolutely Real" which "in contrast to everything else, has no admixture of nonexistence," (TI: 67) and must, therefore, be understood, Ikhwân al-Safâ' reminds us, as "the One, the Unique, the Everlasting, 'who did not give birth and was not born.' (112: 3)" (Jâmi 79; TI: 59) This association of the absolute singularity of the One with the denial of duality or conjunction necessary to engendered existence (and material birth) is present in both the Abrahamic religions and in the Western philosophical tradition, most obviously in its Parmenidean and – by inheritance – Platonic and Neo-Platonic formulations. Parmenides' '*En*' – and the Platonic '*eidos*' which it sired – are distinguished by the absolute denial of both spatial and temporal multiplicity. Parmenides writes of Being:

Nor is [it] divisible, since [it] all alike *is*;
Nor is [it] somewhat more here, which would keep it from holding together,
Nor is [it] somewhat less, but [it] is all full of what-is.
Therefore [it] is all continuous. (8.22-24)

Nor was [it] once, nor will [it] be, since [it] is, now, all together,
One, continuous. (8.5-6)

The eternal perdurance and perfect self-identity of Parmenidean Being are necessarily derived through a visceral rejection of the duality through which all other beings are born:

> In the midst of these is the goddess who steers all things;
> For she rules over hateful birth and the union of all things,
> Sending the female to mingle with the male, and again conversely
> Male with female. (12.3-6)

Similarly, the Platonic '*eidos*,' Irigaray observes, possesses the "completeness of what has not been engendered in an empirical matrix," the "*[u]nity*," and "*totality…of one who…abstains from any conjunction whatever*." (S: 312) The 'abstention from conjunction' of that which "neither indicates nor indexes anything other than itself," (S: 298) is, Irigaray notes, the "[g]uarantee of immortality," (S: 338) for, as Derrida tells us in *Plato's Pharmacy*, the "immortality and perfection of a…being would consist in its having no relation at all with any outside." (PP: 104) External imbrication, Derrida suggests, always constitutes a threat to internal integrity, figured as "an *allergy*, a reaction to the aggression of an alien element." (PP: 103) The eternal Being, by contrast, must exhibit complete immunity to all external assaults and, hence, Derrida notes wryly, "God has no allergies." (PP: 104)

Ibn al-'Arabi' would most likely concur with such an observation, but the status of such a statement is markedly different in each tradition. For an Islamic thinker like Ibn al-'Arabi', the 'Oneness of Being,' or '*wahdat al-wujûd,*' is the first article of faith, whereas, to the majority of contemporary French thinkers, the 'domination of the Same and the One' is the primary locus of their critique. To some extent, this rejection can be viewed simply as the expression of a thoroughly secular world-view, to Nancy's mind, for example, there is nothing beyond the sphere of engendered entities and thus he can assert, with relative ease, that the conjunction of the 'with' is an 'absolutely originary structure' without which Being *is not*. However, the principal concern of the French tradition is the way in which the Parmenidean and Platonic notions of Being – or in Plato's case the 'good beyond being' / '*epekeina tes ousias*' – are linked with a consistent effort in Western thought to assert the priority of identity over difference and effectively annihilate the quotidian fact of duality. This maneuver – which we can perhaps denote as the 'operation of identity' – has two moments. The first is the structuring of duality in binomial hierarchy, a gesture – stemming perhaps from the Pythagorean table of opposites – by which one pole of a duality is privileged over its other. The second, is the attempt – through a series of logical, mythic, or

symbolic contortions – to deny existence to the 'inferior' pole and thus construct a perfectly self-identical sphere which is entirely free from contamination by its 'other.' Irigaray writes:

> Being's domination requires that whatever has been defined - *within the domain of sameness* - as 'more' (true, right, clear, reasonable, intelligible, paternal, masculine…) should progressively win out over its 'other,' its 'different' - its differing - and, when it comes right down to it, over its negative, its 'less' (fantastic, harmful, obscure, 'mad,' sensible, material, feminine…).
> (S: 275)

This gesture – characteristic of a system Irigaray calls the 'economy of the Same,' and Derrida terms the 'metaphysics of presence' – is, as we have alluded, charged with being 'the origin and alibi of all oppression in the world,' or, as Levinas tells us in *Totality and Infinity*, the "visage of being that shows itself in war is fixed in the concept of totality that dominates Western philosophy." (T&I: 21) To Nancy's mind, denying the necessary fact of the 'with' is analogous to, or rather, a precursor to, lethal violence:

> [E]vil is only ever [found] in the operation that fulfills the with. One can fulfill the with either by filling it up or by emptying it out…In the first case, the singular becomes a particular within a totality, where it is no longer either singular or plural; in the second case, the singular exists only on its own...as a totality. In either case, murder is on the horizon, that is, death as the operative negativity of the One, death as the *work* of the One-All or the One-Me. (BSP: 92)

The question we must therefore confront if we want assess the extent to which Sufi cosmology may offer a palliative to Western modalities of thought is whether the assertion of the 'Oneness of Being' replicates the errors and dangers of 'identitarian' metaphysics. The answer to this complex question would seem to be, in a manner perhaps fitting to Ibn al-'Arabi's style of thinking, both yes and no. In the first instance we can note, as we explored in our discussion of his solution to the 'problem of the one and the many,' that the unity of God in Ibn al-'Arabi's cosmology is itself two-fold, consisting of both 'exclusive unity' ('*ahadiyya*' or 'the unity of the one') and 'inclusive unity' ('*wâhidiyya*' or 'the unity of the many'). Arguably, God as an 'exclusive unity' shares some of the characteristics of the singular, self-identical, essentialist construction of Being in the Western tradition, it is that which is to be understood in terms of its

'incomparability' ('*tanzîh*'), that which is "pure and free of something else," (MBIR: 1) and which is thus, as we have explored, exempt from the arising and passing away of temporally originated entities. In theory, no positive ontological qualities can be given to this formulation of God, for, as Ibn al-'Arabi' tells us:

> As for the unity of the Essence in itself, no whatness is known for it, no properties can be ascribed to It, for It is not similar to anything in the cosmos and nothing is similar to It. (Futûhât II 289.25; SDG: 179)

However, as Sachiko Murata's analysis of duality in Islam suggests, it would seem that, in practice, the juridical and authoritarian aspects of the tradition, those which emphasize the 'incomparability' of God, also characterize Him in terms which may be understood as 'yang' or masculine in nature:

> [I]n…dogmatic theology…the position that gains ascendancy is that of divine incomparability…To conceive of God as distant, through his greatness, power, majesty…is to understand him as the yang element in a yin/yang relationship…
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> The Sharia emphasizes God's overwhelming power and authority, the kingly and lordly aspects of the divine reality, the fact that human beings must obey His will because of the negative consequences of His wrath. (TI: 51, 53)

Here we detect a definite trace of the tendency in Western logocentric thought to endow the sphere of the self-identical – that which Derrida will designate as the "good-sun-father-capital" (PP: 167) – with dominant, masculine characteristics. While it must be rightly remembered that Sufi spirituality is inclined to give greater attention to "the names that imply God's closeness to human beings…such as Merciful, Compassionate, Kind, Generous and Forgiving" it is, nonetheless the case that "even those Muslims who place great stress upon similarity normally give priority to incomparability," (TI: 53) for, as William Chittick tells us, "[b]oth logically and ontologically, incomparability precedes similarity." (SPK: 9)

Echoes of the schema associated with Western logocentrism are also found in the fact that the relation between a number of the dualisms which structure Sufi cosmology are clearly hierarchical in nature. This is particularly evident in the fact that – in concordance with the Platonic analogy of the '*idea*' to the sun – absolute Being is conceived as "sheer Light," (Futûhât III: 274.25; SPK: 214) the "higher, more powerful, more luminous, and prior

dimension of reality" (TI: 63), whereas nothingness is "sheer darkness." (Futûhât III: 274.25; SPK: 214) Traditionally, the Western mind has associated darkness with the corporeal, material, earthy and feminine whereas light has signified the intelligible dimension of the paternal '*eidos*.' As discussed, this type of binomial hierarchy has been a significant moment in an identitarian operation aimed at the radical overcoming of the 'inferior' pole, notably exemplified by Socrates' delivery of the prisoner from the dark – and duplicitous – materiality of the cave into the blinding light of the intelligible sun. The fact that the Sufi cosmos is strung along a vertical axis between the two absolute poles of darkness and light would, therefore, be a cause of concern for a number of the thinkers in the French tradition, who would, one suspects, rather balk at the suggestion that the "cosmos…demands hierarchy and the reduction of all the dispersed qualities to their purest, incomparable formless Essence." (TI: 58)

Thus, while, as Ian Almond notes in his comparative study of the thought of Derrida and Ibn al-'Arabi', there are resonances between the deconstructive and Sufi attitude to duality, Derrida departs from Ibn al-'Arabi' in his rejection of a sphere of 'hyperessentiality' which remains, in Derrida's eyes, "ultimately metaphysical" and thereby serves to "reaffirm the onto-theo-logic" (SD: 45) tendency of the Western tradition. Nonetheless, as Derrida's invocation of 'hyperessentiality' reminds us, the sphere of 'exclusive unity' in Sufi thought is strictly demarcated from the ambiguous status of the cosmos and, moreover, much of the force of the French critique of identity derives from its pertinence to identitarian operations executed *within* the sphere of engendered existence, those which lead to the construction of, for example, oppressive ethnic, national or gender identities. By contrast, Sufi cosmology is at pains to continually emphasize the fact of quotidian duality, a duality which is, however, brought into unity – rather like the Heraclitan Logos or the Chinese Tao – through the recognition of the necessary imbrication and interrelation of the twin poles which stand as "two complementary dimensions of a single reality." (TI: 49)

This 'belonging together,' as Heidegger would have it, of complementary principles is, in some sense related to the nature of '*wujûd*' as the 'unity of the many,' the consideration of God in terms of the 'divine names' or attributes which are shared, like a '*barzakh*,' between Him and the cosmos. The fact that God is connected to existent entities through relations of 'similarity' ('*tashbîh*') is at the root of the ambiguous status of the cosmos, for all the created beings manifest divine attributes and thus, partake of the light of 'wujûd,' while, at the same time, they are other than God in their quiddity. As we explored, in the absence of the

distinction between God and the cosmos, the 'divine names' would have been unable to manifest and Being would have remained unknown in its 'undifferentiation.' "Differentiation," Murata reminds us, "is equivalent to God's bestowal of existence upon things," (TI: 63) and thus, to Ibn al-'Arabi, *shirk* – "the root of the vision of two or more" (SDG: 188) – is not be understood as a sin, for "God Himself establishes shirk in the cosmos through creating those who are associated with Him." (SDG: 188) This, we should note, is a markedly different attitude to the genesis of the world than that betrayed by the Judeo-Christian figuring of the catastrophe of The Fall, that descent into toil, pain and suffering provoked by Adam's original sin - the consumption of the fruit from 'the tree of knowledge of good and evil.'

God, viewed from the perspective of 'similarity' is, therefore, to be understood as '*jâmi'*', or 'He-who-brings-together' and unites the cosmic poles of the "high and low, sensory and suprasensory, compound and solitary." (Futûhât III 289; SDG: 187) There is, Ibn al-'Arabi tells us, "nothing in *wujûd* unless its own contrary is also in it," (Jalal 4; SDG: 185-6) a fact which confers on Being the name of '*ahadiyyat al-majmu*,' 'the unity of what has been brought together' or 'the unity of totality.' The question must then be raised of whether this type of unity – a unity derived from the necessary complementarity of pairs – suffers from the same type of dangers as an identity structured through mechanisms of exclusion. The answer to this question would seem to be a qualified no. As we have explored, 'exclusive unity,' in both the Western and Islamic traditions, is understood as a pure and absolute singularity, One constructed through a denial of relation to anything *other* than itself, and thereby rendered completely coherent, self-identical and eternal. By contrast, 'inclusive unity,' is not a singularity that, as Derrida observes of the 'Eleatic notion of Being,' "would demand that multiplicity be…subjected to the domination of unity." (VM: 98) It is, rather, as Corbin notes of the com-passionate bond of mystical love, "at once *one* and *two*, a bi-unity." (AWA: 147)

Heidegger, in his frequent discussions of the necessary co-dependence of both 'concealment' and 'unconcealment' to the process of presencing (perhaps analogous to the Sufi distinction between the 'undifferentiated' and the 'differentiated'), was at pains to underline the fact that the motif of 'the Same' – which runs through Western thought from Parmenides to Irigaray – conceals two distinct concepts; 'sameness' as identity, and 'sameness' as 'belonging together.' These are not, Heidegger warns us, 'the same.' (Cf. ID: 26-36) Arguably, the tendency of anti-identitarian thinkers to reject all forms of unity is based on an assumption of the correspondence between the notion of unity and the notion of identity, one which is itself derived from a binomial structure

predicated on the mutual exclusivity (either/or) of unity and multiplicity. If we allow that something may be *both* one *and* more-than-one – a 'Being-singular-plural' as Nancy might have it – then it becomes clear that an assertion of unity is not necessarily an attempt to annihilate difference.

A number of qualifications are, however, required here. Firstly, it should be remembered that the mutual exclusivity of unity and multiplicity is not an 'error' initiated by the identitarian critique but is rather, an abiding feature of the way in which the Western tradition has, from its inception, thought unity; according to, we might say, a Parmenidean, rather than a Heraclitan, model. It is against this figure of a pure and exclusive unity that an appreciation of the '*coincidentia oppositorium*' stands as an important corrective, enabling us to understand difference, not a 'struggle' or 'battle' between opposing foes which can be pacified only by the victory of one party, but rather as a harmonious and ontologically necessary co-dependence. Secondly, we should be alert to anti-identitarian concerns that, even within a schema of 'bi-unity,' the aspect of unity is privileged over the aspect of duality. In Sufi thought, this would appear to be necessarily the case, for ultimately, '*tawhîd*,' or "the profession of God's Unity…forms the core of Islam." (SPK: xi)

The tendency to collapse duality back into the singularity of the 'absolutely Real,' is, to a certain extent, intimated by the fact that, as we have explored, some polarities central to Sufi cosmology are hierarchically organized. To Irigaray's mind, the "Domination of the One, of the sameness of the One," which has marked "Western logic…supports itself on" a "*binarism*," (LM: 196) which frequently functions by defining the 'inferior' pole as an absence or deficiency of the privileged quality. Hence, in Sufi thought, the Light of '*wujûd*' is juxtaposed with the darkness of non-Being which is, in fact, denied a "positive reality of its own, since its defining characteristic is the absence of Light." (SPK: 7) Somewhat similarly, in the Western tradition, the others of *logos* – emotion, intuition, madness, irrationality, superstition – are understood as a deficiency of reason, just as, Irigaray would tell us, following Aristotle in the *Generation of Animals,*[2] the female is

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[2] "The male and the female differ from each other in the possession of an ability and in the lack of an ability. The male is able to concoct, formulate and to ejaculate the sperm which contains the origin of the form. The female, on the other hand, is that which receives the seed but is unable to formulate or to ejaculate it." (GA: 765b) Irigaray's argument concerning the problems of woman defined as the deficient 'other' of the active male principle – 'the Other of the Same' – are complex and range through the history of Western thought. The central notion is however, demonstrated by the observation that in the Lacanian schema of the mirror-stage – which, as we have seen, serves as an allegory for the specular nature of all polar relation – the mother is effaced in the figure of the mirror, her function being only to serve as a screen for the reflection of masculine identity. Woman is thus, Irigaray contends, denied any positive identity of her own, she becomes, "a hole in

defined by a lack of the potency – or seed-bearing power – conferred by the visibility of the phallus. In order, therefore, for a 'coincidence of opposites' to stand as a useful corrective for the identitarian tendency to collapse duality into singularity, it is necessary to be attentive to the nature of the relation between poles and to insist on their, as Irigaray would phrase it, 'irreducibility.'

This advocacy of the "mystery of difference that is irreducible to sameness," (FA: 124) requires, therefore, the ascription of a positive ontological status to both aspects of a binary structure, and is analogous, within the context of a '*coincidentia oppositorium*,' to the assertion of the 'equiprimordiality' – to use another phrase culled from Heidegger – of both unity and difference. As Nancy informed us the 'with' is an 'absolutely originary structure,' and no entity – at least within engendered existence – can be cleaved from its dependence and interpenetration by others. However, in the absence of all unity there would be no entities between which there could be a 'with,' and we would be left with the 'undifferentiation' of non-creation. To some extent then, there is a positive moment to the negation by which an entity is defined within its limits as being *not* the same as its others, and a sub-species of exclusive unity – one which acknowledges that negation depends on its other – can be seen to also have its place within the pantheon of relations between the one and more-than-one.

The problems of identitarian thought are, perhaps like all problems, derived from absolutism, from the assertion of the one over and against its other and the failure to recognize, as Nancy notes, that the "One as purely one is less than one; it cannot be, be put in place, or counted." (BSP: 40) Arguably, it was a necessary historical moment for the deconstructive strain in French thought to undertake a dialectical reversal of the 'domination of the One' and to insist on the absolute primacy of difference. However, if we are to now move forward, into a future we might like to imagine as 'post-identitarian,' it will be necessary, once again, to redress the balance. There can be no question of recapitulating to an either/or metaphysics of pure singularity, but perhaps also, we can begin to recognize the ways in which the multiplicity of unities and the unity of multiplicity, are necessary moments to the fabric of reality. As Ibn al-'Arabi writes:

> The least of the bringing togethers is two, and then everything beyond that. Were the affair
> not a bringing together, no property would have become manifest for the manyness of the

men's signifying economy." (S: 50) This motif is also clearly expressed in the analogy Corbin draws between the relation between God and Adam, and that between Adam and Eve: "Just as Adam is the mirror in which man contemplates his own Image…so woman is the mirror…in which man contemplates his own Image." (AWA: 161) This clearly raises the question, in what mirror does woman contemplate her own image, or does she, in fact, not have one?

names, the attributes, the relations, the correlatives, and number – even though unity accompanies every bringing together…

  (Futûhât: IV 306.20; SDG: 189)

Index of Abbreviations/References

<u>Primary Sufi Texts</u>

Ibn al-'Arabi, *al-Futûhât al-makikiyya*
Ibn al-'Arabi, *Fusûs al-hikam*
Ikhwân al-Safâ, *Jâmi' at al-jâmi'*

<u>Primary Western Texts</u>

<u>Classical:</u>

Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* (Loeb Classical Library) ed. and trans. A. L. Peck, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953)

Aristotle, *Metaphysics* (Loeb Classical Library) trans. Hugh Tredennick (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933)

Heraclitus from Charles H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979)

Parmenides of Elea, *Fragments*, trans. D. Gallop (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984)

<u>Contemporary:</u>

BEW   Irigaray, Luce, *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community*, trans. Stephen Pluháček (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002)

BSP   Nancy, Jean-Luc, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000)

ESD   Irigaray, Luce, *An Ethics of Sexual* Difference, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (London: Athlone, 1993)

FA   Irigaray, Luce, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, trans. Mary Beth Mader (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1999

ID   Heidegger, Martin, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York and London: Harper and Row, 1969)

LM   Irigaray, Luce, 'The Language of Men,' trans. Erin G. Carlston, *Cultural Critique* 13, 1989: 191-202

PP   Derrida, Jacques, 'Plato's Pharmacy' in *Dissemination*, ed. and trans. Barbara Johnson (London and New York: Continuum, 2004)

S   Irigaray, Luce, *Speculum of the Other Woman,* trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1985)

T&I   Levinas, Emmanuel, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingus (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991)

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BW   Braidotti, Rosi (2003) 'Becoming Woman: or Sexual Difference Revisited,' *Theory, Culture and Society,* 20(3), 2003: 43-64

LMO   Barzilai, Shuli, *Lacan and the Matter of Origins* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999)

MBIR   Murata, Sachiko and Chittick, William C., 'Muslim Beliefs on Intermediate Realms' from *The Vision of Islam* (New York: Paragon House, 1994)

SDG   Chittick, William C., *The Self Disclosure of God* - Manuscript

SPK   Chittick, William C., *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989)

TI   Murata, Sachiko, *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992)