



INTERSECTIONS OF WAYS TOWARDS TOLERANCE AND COEXISTENCE: FROM DAOISM AND SUFISM TO KANT AND GÜLEN

RICHARD K. KHURI⁷³

Abstract

Fethullah Gülen's crucial insistence on the need to distinguish between the Hidden and revealed aspects of Oneness has favourable repercussions for the deepening of coexistence at many levels, especially between religion and secularism, and between the various world religions. The paper therefore makes a fourfold movement back and forth between emphasis on Oneness as Mystery and Oneness as revealed, for which Gülen uses the words *Ehadiyet* and *Vahidiyet*. It begins with the Daoist approach to Mystery, moves into the Sufi elaboration of this in conjunction with the Islamic emphasis on revelation, continues with the Kantian retreat back into Mystery in view of the modern aversion to religious authority and explicit religious discourse, and ends with Gülen's synthesizing thought in the light of lessons learned both from the distant past and from the increasingly apparent shortcomings of modernity. Both Kant and Gülen, each in his own way, demonstrate a renewed ability to express Transcendence, the first with almost complete emphasis on the Hidden (or noumenal), the second with a careful balance between the Hidden and the revealed. With both thinkers, we end up with an idiom that stresses the total openness of the Infinite/Eternal while sustaining the sense that one is guided through a life potentially full of meaning. With regard to coexistence, what results is that different religious paths, traditional and non-traditional, can each retain their character while sharing a deep recognition of their common pursuit.

- I -

Among the many ways that humanity finds itself at seminal crossroads, the alternative between dialogue and clash of civilizations looms large. A crucial and subsidiary divide within that alternative lies between religious coexistence and conflict. While almost all eyes are fixed upon the political developments that have bearing on future relations among different religions, there is an altogether different determination. One way that human beings have fought — and fought hard — over their divergent views of religion passes through their conception of transcendence, of what has also been called “ultimate reality”, “truth”, and “the Logos”. In particular, the question is (1) whether these may be viewed in absolutist terms and (2) whether it is possible to be explicit about the Absolute. Whenever religion is *essential* to religious conflict (rather than incidental when the dispute is social,

⁷³ Professor of Philosophy, Religion, and Cultural Studies at the Lebanese American University. PhD in philosophy from the University of California at Berkeley. He is the author of *Freedom, Modernity, and Islam: Toward a Creative Synthesis* (Syracuse University Press, 1998), and several academic papers dealing with philosophy and contemporary science, some published by the American Institute of Physics and the New York Academy of Science. His papers on freedom have been published by Brill, on phenomenology by Kluwer, on the philosophy of art by the American Catholic Philosophical Association, and on the philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr by the Open Court Press. He has also written a series of literary and critical essays for the international newspaper al-Hayat.



economic, or political), the reason seems to be that the adherents of two or more religions are absolutists who also believe they have definite, explicit accounts of the Absolute that unfortunately happen to be at serious odds – or that one or more groups of absolutists decide to “rectify the wrongs” of those who are religious, but for whom absolutism is nevertheless an alien concept (something hardly uncommon since Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and many Hindu interpretations, besides aboriginal religions across the world, are not absolutist, certainly not in the Abrahamic sense).

The same is true of the conflict between religion and science in modern times. It has either arisen because religious absolutism has been transposed into areas of inquiry better left to scientists, or because some kind of scientific absolutism has (comically) taken on a quasi-religious aspect. Only thus can we explain religious officials indignant over the proof that Earth is not flat, or scientists who imagine themselves certain that God – or any other manifestation or naming of transcendence – are fictions that “grown up” human beings ought to leave behind.

How humans conceive transcendence and how explicit they think they can be about it is hence central to the future of coexistence between the various religions of the world (above all the world religions) as well as that between religion and science, and religion and secularism. An overly explicit absolutist conception of transcendence, in view of the excesses to which it obviously leads and *has led*, will often cause – and *has caused* – genuinely concerned enlightened human beings to overreact to the point of attempting to abolish religion altogether (or at any rate create a system so thoroughly secularized as to sustain the hope that religion will wither away someday). Such has been the case of modern Turkey. What is particularly interesting about Turkey is that it has reached the stage where both sides in a conflict that had threatened to tear the country apart are finding more nuanced and considered approaches to secularism and Islam. This is the context for the significance of the thought of Fethullah Gülen. Here, of course, we shall limit ourselves to what is relevant to the foregoing. Before we turn to a leading contemporary Islamic reformist, however, a setting needs to be provided for the always difficult discussion of transcendence (which will henceforth be used as shorthand for the nexus of terms already mentioned, such as “ultimate reality”, “truth”, and “the Logos”). The whole history of philosophy and religious thought (including mysticism) may be surveyed most fruitfully in that regard. But for our purposes, it will suffice to begin with one of the most ancient recorded beginnings, namely in ancient China, and pause with Rumi and Kant before we reach our final destination.

- II -

My Master Teacher! My Master Teacher!

He judges all life but does not feel he is being judgemental;

he is generous to multitudes of generations

but does not think this benevolent;

he is older than the oldest

but he does not think himself old;

he overarches Heaven and sustains Earth,

shaping and creating endless bodies



but he does not think himself skilful.

This is what is known as Heavenly happiness.

The words belong to Chuang Tzu, twice over (Chuang Tzu, 107). They occur in his book, and they are also a direct quote of his own words within his book. He was the first major Daoist after Lao Tzu and is believed to have lived during the fourth century BCE. The verse is typical of the Daoist insistence on the impossibility of expressing what is truly beyond in our terms. It is also shows typical Daoist ambiguity. The words may equally refer to a great (human) sage, or the Ultimate Sage (The *I Ching* is also ambiguous in the same way). But there is nothing ambiguous about the intent, which is to remind us that the Ultimate Judge is no judge at all viewed from “the other side”, the Ultimate Work (of Creation) is no work at all, the Immortal is forever young, and so on. Logically, we are faced with paradox upon paradox. Yet in our words, if we are really referring to *transcendence*, we *must* be paradoxical. Elsewhere, Chuang Tzu argues that

words have value but only in terms of their meaning. Meaning is constantly seeking to express what cannot be said in words . . . (Chuang Tzu, 115)

Ibn ‘Arabi, Rumi, and many Sufi thinkers will find their own Islamic rendition of such timeless awareness. Transcendence cannot be limited in any way by our words. It is fundamentally open. It is *openness itself*. One of the many recurring paradoxes at this level involves the convergence of complete emptiness with perfect fullness. Buddhism refuses to speak in any theistic terms and acknowledges only the “Great Emptiness”. Precisely so, it acknowledges the greatest imaginable plenitude, or — we should say — unimaginable plenitude. Note the apparent precariousness: We normally associate emptiness with nothingness. Literally, by talking about emptiness at the highest ontological-spiritual level, we seem to be implying the abyss that frightens masses of humanity into the rush to transform it into something closer, something they are more comfortable with, something seemingly fuller — and so they promptly lose the depth of what it was they had fearfully, through misunderstanding, been staring into. On the contrary the abyss, just so, has the openness to allow the most gigantic creature to fly, as is narrated in the opening passage of Chuang Tzu’s book (Chuang Tzu, 1-3). Similarly, for us, an *apparent* emptiness is the right state, not only to begin a proper awareness of transcendence, but also to live rightly and happily:

Empty, still, calm, plain, quiet, silent, non-active, this is the centredness of Heaven and Earth and of the Tao and of Virtue. The Emperor, king, and sages rest there. Resting, they are empty; empty, they can be full; fullness is fulfilment. From the empty comes stillness; in stillness they can travel; in travelling they achieve. In stillness they take actionless action. Through actionless action they expect results from those with responsibilities. Through actionless action they are happy, very happy . . . Empty, still, calm, plain, quiet, silent, actionless action is the foundation of all life. (Chuang Tzu, 106-7)

Being (of the world and everything in it), wisdom, just rule, right action, and human action — all these have their root in stillness (a view also found in Parmenides, Plotinus, and the *Upanishads*). Again, we are far from the common misunderstanding of stillness as lifelessness. On the contrary, what is intended by Chuang Tzu and other ancient sages is a stillness that underpins the very possibility of life, that is “more alive” than life itself, as Plotinus might put it. How far such stillness and clarity are from the noise and frequent anger that accompany the insistence on presenting and representing Transcendence in terms generally accessible to human beings!



Anyone who has undertaken a demanding task such as writing a literary essay, playing a piece of music, or performing a dance, understands that such tasks are only accomplished successfully when they feel effortless. There is a sense in which work that demands a maximum intensity does not feel like work at all as it flows. And it only flows when one is free from other distractions, when one becomes “still” in one’s relaxed concentration on the task at hand. The more profound the work, the more capacious one must be to get it done. From the everyday point of view, one becomes “empty” to make room for the work. The more “empty” one is, the better the work that gets done. This contemplative or meditative state in action can then be extended into the areas of human and divine governance, where good human governance refers both to self-mastery as well as wise and just rule over society at large. More pertinent for our immediate purposes, it is this same meditative-contemplative state that occasions an adequate human awareness of Transcendence and makes it virtually impossible either to descend into the inferno of religious conflict or tread on turf well covered by broadminded science.

There is a kind of scepticism that is a blessing for humanity: In saying that whatever words we try to assign literally to Transcendence will come across as nonsense, one does not thereby dismiss Transcendence. Rather, one *heeds* it. For how can it be otherwise? How can Transcendence fail to turn contradictory and worse when reduced to what our words can convey literally? In this as well, Transcendence shows Its love for humanity. For to be beyond human expression is to be open to many kinds of expression, each offering a new perspective, each helping us on our way so long as we do not mistake the perspective *for the whole*.

- III -

As far as we are able to ascertain, Rumi never read the work of ancient Chinese sages. He knew neither Lao Tzu nor Chuang Tzu. He did not have to, for what is timeless is available equally to whoever finds a path to it. And so it was that Rumi wrote, in the *Mathnavi*:

Whatever you can think is perishable.

That which enters no thought, that's God! (M II 3107)

The unthinkability of Transcendence is another way to state that for thought of the ordinary kind, which readily expresses itself in our language, God is nothing and nowhere. Indeed, the Arabic word ‘*adam*’ often comes up in Rumi’s and other Sufi writings, a word normally translated as “nothingness” or “non-being” (In spoken Arabic, something that is ‘*adam*’ is of the lowest quality). Rumi sees ‘*adam*’ as the Buddhists saw the Great Void: To us in our everyday stance, It is nothing, yet everything emerges from It. In his *Diwan-i kabir*, he writes: “To be nothing is the precondition of Being.” (D 2642)

Waves of being come out of it constantly,

so that from their movement a hundred mills are set in motion. (D 155)

Being and non-being are brothers, as contrasts are hidden in each other:

Did not the Qur’an say (Sura 31:18): “He brings forth the living from the dead”? (M V 1018-9)



We are dealing here with the ultimate paradox. Existence, all of existence, presupposes what from its standpoint can only be metaphorically termed “non-existence” for it to be possible. Parmenides had already noted the mysterious link between Being and Non-being, so much so that all his affirmations of Being had to be made against the backdrop of a contrast with Non-being. And the misinterpretation began almost immediately! Is Non-being literally nothing, so that, as Parmenides *seemed* to state it and Plato would do so again in the *Sophist*, the question arises: “How can Non-being be?” Or is it Non-being in the sense of *beyond* Being, so that only when we are confined to Being, as we usually are, we have no choice but to use that strange term Non-being? The ancient Chinese already understood this difficulty, and so they had two words, *Wu* for Non-being (or Beyond-being, a key concept in the mystical-philosophical theology of Ibn’Arabi), and *Yu* for Being. A Chinese can easily understand that *Wu* is more encompassing than *Yu*.

In philosophy, it is *dialectics* that enables the thinker, faced with a hopeless tangle within a certain domain of thought, to see that domain *as a domain*, in other words as bounded and relatively limited, beyond which there has to be another realm, less limited, intimated by the very recognition of boundaries. The less limited realm is invisible within those boundaries. It vanishes. The dialectical thinker, from Heraklitus and Parmenides to Hegel and Nietzsche, risks reliance on (and places trust in) what ordinarily vanishes and thereby finds he is able to think more deeply. The Sufi risks *himself*. Before God, he vanishes. In vanishing, he becomes a universal or cosmic Self in an Islamic rendition of the Hindu motif, namely the unity of Atman and Brahman. When the Sufi returns to himself and tries to find words for Transcendence, he has recourse only to paradox, symbolism, and metaphor.

Rumi revelled in paradox. From the interplay between Being and Non-being, other paradoxes followed abundantly. Faithful to his Muslim heritage, Rumi associated those paradoxes with the Names (and attributes) of God that for Ibn ‘Arabi (with whose work Rumi was familiar) were the origin of everything in the world (Chittick, 47-58). Thus in our terms, God is at once merciful and wrathful, at once beautiful and powerful, at once the giver of life and death - but only in our terms. The Sufi whose mysticism culminates in direct awareness of Non-being is thereby aware of the dissolution of those paradoxes “from the other side”. However, from the side of ordinary mortals like ourselves, they must ever remain paradoxical.

The “problem” with Transcendence, from the general human standpoint, is that it eludes common expression and only resolves itself in contradiction and paradox. To the common eye, It vanishes. Yet humans have an innate longing for Transcendence and many among them find Its elusiveness intolerable. So it is that Christianity and Islam have gained a wide following. In claiming Revelation, they have brought Transcendence into the human domain with greater clarity, or so the faithful believe. Even if we suppose for the sake of argument that there is indeed greater clarity about Transcendence as a result of Revelation, this has come at a price, the extent of which will perhaps be better evaluated by future generations.

That explicitness about Transcendence has been exploited by those more interested in power than religion ought not detract from the legitimacy of the longing for Transcendence to “come out of hiding”, at least to some degree. After all, emergence from deep ambiguity into the light of clarity is how the ancient Greeks understood “truth”, as their word “*aletheia*” suggests. As the disclosure of what is normally hidden, the sense of *aletheia* is lost to our modern word “truth”. In Arabic, the relation between *al-haqiqah* (‘truth’ in our sense) and *al-haqq* (‘truth’ in the sense of ‘ultimate reality’, also a metaphor for God) is closer to the spirit of *aletheia* than modern English. However, in Greek mythology and the worldview forever preserved by it, the Hidden has to be persuaded, cajoled,



sometimes even tricked into disclosure. The notion of the Hidden *wanting* to disclose Itself was novel. It was introduced by the Abrahamic religions in conjunction with pagan mystical thinkers like Plotinus.

The foregoing can be refined further. For the ancient Greeks, what first came out of the primordial Chaos (“Non-being” in our sense) was Love. All other differentiation on the way to order (Cosmos) came afterwards. Since Love is what most primordially brings forth the Cosmos, there is already an implicit sense that a kind of desire is crucially at work in emergence from the Chaos. If we wish to be more precise, it is not the notion of the Hidden wanting to disclose Itself that was introduced by the Abrahamic religions, but *a more explicit affirmation* of Love. Thus we have the setting for the famous divine pronouncement that, while believed to be part of Revelation, is actually not in the Qur’an, but is rather a *hadith qudsi*:

I was a hidden treasure and I wanted to be known, so I created the world!

All Sufis gave pride of place to this pronouncement. So far, so good. To see the world itself and much that is in it as full of signs signifying Transcendence in no way leads to the idea that humanity is now in possession of the truth about the Hidden and should therefore make sure that everyone is set along the right path. For those of us who are concerned with tolerance and coexistence, the question now becomes: To what extent can the Hidden be explicit without endangering communal harmony and peace, without subjecting individual human beings to repeated abuse in Its name? We can see where the problems begin. For example, so far as individuals are concerned, Abrahamic theodicy repeatedly assures those whose lot in life is cruelly unfortunate that they are “part of God’s plan” and ought to see their allotment through a broader perspective. Even a man like Rumi, so obviously filled with Love, succumbs to the temptation to urge those upon whom the worst evils are visited to praise God for His hand in their fate. Is this acceptable? Is it humane? Meanwhile, whole communities have been crushed — by Christians and Muslims alike — as a consequence of the Abrahamic belief that the truth about Transcendence is known, which becomes the basis for passing judgment on every other form of human life. Recipients of a negative verdict are rarely in an enviable position. Is this an act of love?

Such questions stirred the passions of those who sought to change the direction of human life in Europe more than five hundred years ago. And for all their success, we still find ourselves gathered at many meetings in order to discuss issues pertaining to tolerance and coexistence. No doubt, it is unsatisfactory for a more tolerant environment to arise at the expense of religion. It would not be so tolerant in any case if it must be intolerant to religion. However, what seems to be necessary is a more mindful approach to Transcendence, an acceptance that the Hidden must largely remain so, at least so far as the possibility of explicit and detailed statements is concerned. And if one must feel oneself in possession of the Truth, then let this not lead to the temptation to impose such truth on others. The Hidden, even when revealed, is never revealed completely, nor can It, given human limitations. Thus Christians and Muslims both acknowledge Mystery. The concept of Mystery is the key to the depth and breadth of Abrahamic tolerance at the religious level.

- IV -

With Kant, we have perhaps the most sophisticated modern outlook that at once acknowledges the importance of both science and religion. Kant was at the same time a contributor to science (in his younger years) and an outstanding metaphysician. Transcendence is consistently acknowledged



throughout his philosophy, in its epistemological, metaphysical, ethical, and aesthetic phases. It sometimes makes a humble appearance in the course of a complex and rigorous argument, sometimes a grand entrance as more general statements are made about human beings, the world, and lies beyond. Above all, since we have just concluded the section about Rumi with an affirmation of the importance of Mystery for the consolidation of coexistence and tolerance, Kant offers us a modern, philosophical rendition of Mystery in the manner that he approaches Transcendence. The transcendent (or *noumenal*) is unknowable, ineffable to our everyday empirical mindset and methods. Yet It shapes and motivates our scientific undertakings, our moral lives, and art. We have “presentiments” of Transcendence in our affirmation of freedom, the immortality of the soul, the moral good, the beautiful, and the Supreme Being. Kant’s philosophy offers us an excellent example of dialectics as discussed earlier. Again and again, in great detail, his philosophy lays out various domains of inquiry and living that seem to have strict boundaries, yet are only laid out successfully owing to our ability to transcend them. This is why Kant has no problem at all accommodating himself to the most comprehensive and unfettered scientific undertakings. Wherever science arrives, this will only add to the means by which Transcendence radiates Its Presence silently. In Kant, the silence with which we address Transcendence is therefore not the silence of dismissive sceptics, but that of genuine respect. For us, then, Kant offers a model of coexistence between religions (because of the centrality of Mystery in his view of Transcendence and the dogged of an explicitness that he believes would be futile for human beings to attempt), as well as between religion and science (because of the complete openness to science just mentioned). Therefore, any serious evaluation of Fethullah Gülen’s philosophy in that regard ought to pass through the Kantian legacy.

However, as we have noted in a series of questions raised towards the end of Section III, the early modern period that began (philosophically and scientifically) with Bacon and Descartes and was ended by Kant as he propelled modernity into its latter stage (which continues to shape contemporary life) was marked decisively by repugnance over the excesses of religious institutions and organizations that had gained widespread power over the lives of most Europeans. We need only bear in mind three interrelated motivations for secular attitudes: Religious wars, especially the 1618-1648 conflict; nation building, driven by strong rationalist yearnings after the Thirty Years’ War (Toulmin, 69-80, 89-129); and the successes of scientists in improving public health and increasing rigour and precision in the human understanding of nature, particularly the physical world, after religious authorities had opposed the undertaking of free inquiry into, say, the anatomy and physiology of the human body with a view to a better grasp of the nature of illness and wellbeing.

Against the backdrop of developments that would define modernity in both its early and latter stages, Kant could hence only be vigorously opposed to any explicit statement of religious doctrine, to any claim about Transcendence that is epistemologically grounded. For Kant, when it comes to Transcendence, nobody can claim to have the truth or any clarity about It whatsoever. Even if Transcendence matter most to us, even if knowledge be bathed with transcendent intimations at its limit that drive it onward and forward, even if morality be ultimately impossible without It, even if art and nature reveal purpose and harmony that suggest It, Transcendence cannot be *known*. What can be known about nature ought to be left to the natural sciences. Philosophy *qua* theory of knowledge simply shows how the scientific pursuit of knowledge within the empirical world is metaphysically well grounded.

We are back to our ancient beginnings, with the movement appropriately modified. Again, we are left wondering how the human longing for explicitness and clarity regarding Transcendence can be fulfilled constructively, with due regard for the unprecedented need for coexistence and tolerance in



our globalized world. Let us then recapitulate the movement with regard to the deepest foundation for tolerance and coexistence through Kant:

- In ancient times, as evidenced in pre-Socratic, neo-Platonic, Hindu, Buddhist, Daoist, and Aboriginal awakenings, there was an accommodation with the ambiguity and opacity of Transcendence and comfort with the idea that the Chaos or the Empty are indeed respectively a Chaos beyond all order (and so sustaining every conceivable order) and an Emptiness fuller than all plenitude (and so sustaining plenitude). There was no question of conflict between religion and the study of nature, for all was encompassed within the broadest and most open outlook imaginable.
- With the emergence of revealed (Abrahamic) religion, the idea took hold that human beings now have the truth about Transcendence (Note as well the crucial idea that truth is something that can be “had” in the first place, and how this differs radically from the ancient Greek notion of truth as disclosures of the Hidden, with emphasis always on the Hidden rather than the disclosed). It is well known that as soon as Christianity became a state religion, no other possibilities for religious expression were allowed except for Jews for obvious Biblical reasons. Scientific and free philosophical inquiry were also suppressed or integrated into the overall views of the Church. Islam was initially far more tolerant than Christianity on all counts. The Qur’an stipulated that followers of other Abrahamic faiths be treated with respect, and this was extended to Hindus, Buddhists, and others as Islam spread across Asia. Meanwhile, the Qur’an’s explicit urgings to study Nature combined with Muslim exposure to ancient holistic and intellectual traditions to create a vast cultural flowering that reached its zenith during the 9th and 10th centuries CE, and would be repeated during the early Ottoman centuries and sporadically in places like Cordoba and Samarqand. However, for reasons that are now fairly well understood, many of which are *internal* (meaning *not* related to imperialism/colonialism), this flowering came to an end and eventually, many of the motivations for the modern rebellion in Europe took hold of Muslim aspirations (Khuri, 213-276).
- The modern rebellion, for its part, was often unable to distinguish between religious organizations and institutions, and religion *itself*, perhaps because the Catholic Church had habituated Europeans so much to the idea that the two cannot and ought not be separated. Thus, whatever might be fairly blamed on institutions was attributed to religion as such, with the result that modern methodology and practice all too frequently suppressed or ignored a human concern so central that it is possibly at the heart of what it is to be human. Even Kant can be said to have kept Transcendence “safely” locked within a Mystery that would not allow any conceivable practical abuse. However, several historical developments combined to cast doubt on once all-powerful institutions that had reinforced indifference or hostility to religion. It should be noted, however, that the reality was always far more complicated. The USA in effect knowingly encouraged religious life by keeping the state away from it. Religious symbolism was maintained at the top of the British monarchy, since the monarch is also head of the Church of England. The Federal Republic in Germany has taxation policies that indirectly support the various churches. So the main examples in Europe of states opposed to religion were France and the Soviet Union — as well as Kemalist Turkey at least until 1950. So what has re-emerged is not so much religious life as a more serious attitude towards it.
- The post-modern phase, then, has two relevant aspects, the one more sceptical than ever, the other more mindful of religion. Now, however, the requirement is for religious life to encapsulate



the lessons that must be learned from a long authoritarian past as well as the extremism of the present. Specifically, the question here is whether a contemporary way has been found for Transcendence to regain its resonance and place without the kind of explicitness that gives rise to misinterpretation and abuse, in short to intolerance. This is the historical-existential setting for the consideration of the thought of Fethullah Gülen.

- V -

In the thought of Fethullah Gülen, one finds several ways that Transcendence as Mystery is indeed heeded so that It regains Its resonance in a contemporary spirit, in particular with regard to the great care shown for the promotion of tolerance and coexistence. We may single out three moments in such renewal: In the first place, Gülen highlights a faculty by which one finds continuity with the Hidden; second, and crucially, Gülen highlights a mediating level between the Hidden and the disclosed (or the Unseen and the seen in the Islamic conception); and third, Gülen directly emphasizes the Hidden within the many faces and modalities of the Divine. Let us see how.

In a book that collects many of his writings on fundamental questions and topics, namely *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance*, Gülen almost from the beginning turns to what many modern philosophers have avoided. He talks about the inner depths hidden within each one of us and relates those depths directly to the Hidden. In the spirit of what has been argued throughout this paper, what is truly profound within human beings remains invisible to a positivistic ideology. In our words, it vanishes. Yet from its ancient beginnings and clearly so in the Socratic stance, the importance of what seems to vanish had been acknowledged. For one thing, there was the Delphic oracle “Know thyself”, for which Socrates had the utmost reverence. The Socratic dialogues preserved by Plato are exemplary on showing how what is superficially elusive is also decisive, not only at a deeper level, but because it is depth itself. Socrates relentlessly wanted the inner spirit of his interlocutors to come forth, and because this does not happen through argument alone, the arguments always seemed to fail to reach their conclusion. But it is an instructive failure. Among all levels of irony known attributed to Socrates, the greatest might well be this: In their failure, his arguments reveal what is most important about human beings, which is whatever it is that allows them to know themselves. Thus, Gülen writes

Our interest in our environment and our love for humankind – that is, our ability to embrace creation – depends on knowing and understanding our own essence, our ability to discover ourselves, and to feel a connection with our Creator. In parallel with the ability to discover and feel our inner depths and hidden potential within our essence, we will be able to appreciate that others also possess the same potential. Moreover, because these inner values are directly related to the Creator, and because a respect for the riches that are hidden in every creature is nurtured, we will start to see every living thing from a different perspective and in a different manner. (Gülen, 6).

With a few words, Gülen is able to encapsulate so many crucial interconnected insights. He does not waste time on arguing for the depth that he affirms because of the long history that shows the futility of such argument and the readily available example of Socrates, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Marcel, and others whose work instigates awareness of depth in the sincere and open-minded reader who has not yet forsaken that perennial human potential. Thus, Gülen feels free to go ahead and further affirm the intimate link between human and divine inwardness. At its most profound, all inwardness is one in the mystical philosophy. However, Gülen is not content to leave things at that. He wishes to extend



such human potential to all human beings and to make *this* the basis for the solidarity that cuts across religious, sectarian, cultural, ethnic, and other lines. Even more, he extends inwardness to all life, hence anchoring sensitivity to the environment far more substantially than in ordinary environmentalism. Our inner aspect, the presence of the Hidden within every one of us, becomes the strongest possible basis for tolerance, coexistence, and care for the environment.

Emphasis on the Hidden, on Mystery, within the overall approach to Transcendence is unproblematic for Gülen because there is an inherent continuity with the hidden within all human beings, actually within all being. In a manner characteristic of the Sufi mindset, upon attainment of the overall vision and union that underpin mystical thought, the duality hidden/disclosed pervades all being and connects them to what is beyond Being. The hidden and the disclosed are themselves two aspects of the divine (as we shall see). And — setting Abrahamic mysticism apart from other mystical traditions — the Hidden, crucially, *wills* disclosure.

As for what it is that allows human beings to become aware of themselves as harbouring such hidden treasures, Gülen did not have to reinvent the wheel for it has already been said many times. However we may mean it, there is *soul*; and just as a compass is always oriented towards the magnetic north, so does the soul turn towards God (Gülen, 11).

- VI -

Quite often, however, thought genuinely turned towards Mystery in intense mindfulness of the integrity of Transcendence leaves us without a bridge between the Hidden and the disclosed. However, this is not the case with Gülen. The strength of mystical thought is, having a view of Reality “from the inside”, however fleeting, it is then able to proceed through a graded dynamic that expresses the turning of Reality from “inside” to “outside”. Instead of the Platonic duality of Forms (or Ideas or Archetypes) and beings in the world that are instantiations of those Archetypes, Gülen follows in the footsteps of a trinitarian tradition stretching from Plotinus to Ibn ‘Arabi. For in addition to Archetypes, called *Âyân-i Sabite* in Turkish, and the physical entities (for which no technical name is usually given, not even in Plato), there is the *mediating* level, the world of images, or *Alem-i Misal* (Eris, 134). Archetypes become physical entities through images. It is not accidental that ‘image’ is related to ‘imagination’. Our creative imagination is what helps us make the turn successfully beyond the physical. This is universally true. How much art is there that is far from explicitly religious, yet it invites us to behold the material in a “dematerialized” state? Art, dreams, other imaginings — these are the pole with which we vault over the empirical world. Kant acknowledged this in his third critique, when he turned to art and explained as clearly and rigorously as he could how it transformed the rules through which judgements of beauty are made. This could only be done through what he termed “genius”, which among other things involves an exceptional imagination (Kant, 1987, 9-67 and 174-188).

Many philosophers have strangely failed to pay sufficient attention to the imagination, which reinforced the modern predicament with regard to the apparently insurmountable barrier between the individual subjective consciousness and the external world. However, Sufi thinkers, like post-Kantian Idealist and Romantic philosophers and poets, were able since Ibn ‘Arabi to posit an “imaginal world” that lies between the Hidden and the disclosed. Ibn ‘Arabi colourfully called that world the *barzakh* or Isthmus, which was readily adopted by Gülen (Eris, 136). An isthmus readily suggests a world between two others, and we might try to imagine the emergence of a cosmic shore of



possibility from the Mystery of Beyond-being behind which the contours of the physical universe begin to form. This imaginary cosmic shore is a world in transition, where the images have formed but have yet to become materialized. This pre-existing tendency to physical form is surprisingly finding recognition among some contemporary astronomers and physicists.

Gülen adds another dimension to Ibn 'Arabi's notion of the *barzakh*. For him, not only is the imaginal world ontologically between the mysterious Source and physical entification (or *taayyün*), but it is *spiritually* between earthly life and the afterlife (Eris, 136). The mediating spiritual domain in Gülen's mystical ontology strikes one as being rather more compassionate and appealing than the traditional notion of limbo. This reminds us that the role of mercy should not be overlooked in Gülen, although it is not immediately related to our chosen subject. Nevertheless, mercy is a central concept in his thought and, of course, it informs his commitment to tolerance and coexistence.

- VII -

We now turn to the third moment in Gülen's renewal of the human connection with Transcendence: his emphasis on Mystery or the Hidden even as he also acknowledges what Transcendence reveals to Muslims. As he evokes the sophistication of Ibn 'Arabi's mystically grounded ontology, Gülen makes some fundamental conceptual distinctions of his own. Of special interest is that between *Ehadiyet* and *Vahidiyet* (Eris, 125-8). The two terms take full advantage of the subtleties that can be expressed through the derivation of different words from the same Arabic root (In fact all of the technical terms in Gülen that we have mentioned are Arabic in origin, Turkified only phonetically). They both pertain to the word for 'One' or 'Oneness'. The reason why Gülen needs two terms is his need to distinguish between the aspect of Oneness by which it envelops multiplicity, and that by which Oneness shows Itself in multiplicity. To the extent that Oneness envelops multiplicity (which is our world), It cannot be known. It is incomprehensible. Nothing can be said about It. In the Kantian sense, It is the purely noumenal. To the extent that Oneness reveals Itself, It is not only known but *desires* to be known. The phenomena are signs of the One turning outward in a primordial act of Love.

In this way, Gülen is able to heed both the demands of Mystery and the demands of the faithful. Mystery forever and inherently abides with and within Itself in a manner beyond the reach of all but those whose mystical commitments have led them to the One. Even then, they are unable to say anything definite about It. *Ek-stasis* in ancient Greek automatically evokes a state outside of oneself. One is at a loss for words and only symbols accessible to initiates — and then only indirectly — begin to convey the depths that have been attained. The purely noumenal aspect of the One, always encompassing the phenomena and all words and qualities conceivable to humanity, is hence always open, always available for another path or another interpretation. In and of Itself, it guarantees coexistence and tolerance. For who dares claim to be in possession of the final word about It?

On the other hand, Gülen remains faithful to his Islamic calling and so heeds the significance of Revelation. The same Oneness that embraces all Being and so is Beyond-being at the same time has left traces with all beings — for which 'soul' has been used in reference to humans — thus enabling them to rise to an awareness of connectedness with It; and to add emphasis to Its outward turn, It has "spoken" to the faithful, thus letting Itself be known in a manner accessible to human beings.

Intolerance begins only when the Word of Oneness is taken literally and interpreted in partisan language ("Us believers against them unbelievers"). It begins when humans, their being confined and



their existence impoverished for a great variety of reasons, individual and collective, psychological and political, act as though they were not the fortunate repositories of traces of the outward Turn taken by Oneness — in short, as though their souls were asleep. For nobody with a living soul needs to assert his spirituality in opposition to those he deems in error. This is what is often forgotten by those who wish to emphasize that the Hidden has willed Its disclosure to some extent: They only remember the words of disclosure (and often fail to remember them particularly well and more often still are oblivious to their true meaning) and forget about the hidden treasure within not only each one of us, as Gülen so aptly reminds us, but there as a sign of its Origin in all beings, so that we have abundantly what it takes for us to coexist with all forms of life and with our environment.