



Conceptualizing Nusantara metaphysics: Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī's sacred metaphysics in Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas views

Mohd Syahmir Alias^{1*}

¹ School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 USM, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia

* Corresponding author: syahmir@usm.my

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Abstract:

Purpose: This article explores the metaphysical framework of Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī, which I refer to as “sacred metaphysics,” through the lens of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas. The primary objective is to analyze al-Rānīrī's understanding of creation and the Divine presence within the context of Nusantara Islamic thought, focusing on its metaphysical implications. This study aims to contribute to the discourse on Islamic metaphysics in the Nusantara, particularly in preserving the purity of theological and cosmological concepts.

Methods: Using a qualitative approach, this research examines primary texts by al-Rānīrī and al-Attas, with an emphasis on al-Attas' interpretive commentary on al-Rānīrī's doctrines. The study involves a textual analysis of classical works, comparing al-Rānīrī's theological stance with broader Islamic metaphysical traditions.

Results: The findings reveal that al-Rānīrī conceptualizes creation as a dynamic and ongoing manifestation (*tajallī*) from the Absolute Existence (*Wujūd Mutlak*), reflecting a divine metaphysical order. Through al-Attas' lens, this framework is positioned within the broader Islamic metaphysical tradition, where the relationship between the Creator and creation is articulated through successive emanations that ultimately return to the Divine.

Conclusions: This article concludes that al-Rānīrī's sacred metaphysics provides a profound understanding of cosmological structure and offers a framework for preserving Islamic metaphysical purity, particularly within Nusantara thought. The study underscores the relevance of this metaphysical perspective in contemporary Nusantara Islamic thought, as it provides insights into the relationship between the sacred and the mundane and affirms the persistence of divine truth through creation.

Keywords:

Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, metaphysics, ontology, sacredness, Nusantara Islamic philosophy

1. Introduction

Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī was one of the scholars who came from outside the Nusantara and played a significant role in shaping the development of metaphysical discourse in the region. He is renowned as a prominent scholar who diligently worked to preserve the purity of the Islamic faith in the Nusantara, especially in Aceh. His profound understanding of metaphysics further solidified the works he produced. In fact, many of



Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī's writings, particularly in the field of Sufism, were counterarguments to the Sufi beliefs held by the people of Aceh at that time, which were dominated by local scholars like Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī and his disciple, Shams al-Dīn Sumatrā'ī. Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī believed that the Sufi practices understood at the time deviated from the true Islamic doctrine (Ahmad Daudy, 2002).

Fundamentally, this opposition arose clearly because he was a scholar of the Ash'arī and Māturīdī theological schools and remained loyal to the teachings of Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jamā'ah, while in his Sufi thought, he adhered to the concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, also known as the unity of existence or *wujūdiyyah*. He positioned himself as a follower of the straight path of *waḥdat al-wujūd al-muwahḥidah*. This philosophy is termed "*wujūdiyyah*" because the discussions, words, and principles of this group revolve around the existence of God Most High (al-Attas, 1986). His outspoken opposition was particularly evident when he was appointed as the Mufti of Aceh during the reign of Sultan Iskandar Thāni. He made the most of his position to eradicate the heretical belief in *waḥdat al-wujūd al-mulḥidah*, which he issued fatwas declaring as *zindiq* (heretical) or a deviation from the true teachings of Islam. This belief was propagated by Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī and Shams al-Dīn Sumatrā'ī (Rusdiyanto & Musafar, 2018).

After Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī's efforts in Aceh came to an end, his work to uphold the religion was continued by 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkilī, who continued spreading the message of Islam across the Nusantara. Aceh was even referred to as the "*Serambi Mekah*" (Verandah of Mecca), symbolizing the prominence and excellence of the Islamic state at the time, which became a guide and example for other regions in the Nusantara (Zulkefli Aini & Che Zarina Saari, 2014). Therefore, this article will focus on the thought of Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī, who has drawn the distinction between the teachings of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, whether in the context of *al-muwahḥidah* or *al-mulḥidah*.

Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī, a metaphysician of the Nusantara, not only wrote extensively on Sufism but also contributed to other fields such as fiqh, hadith, history, and comparative religion. Among his famous works are *Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm*, *Bustān al-Salāṭīn fī Dhikr al-Awwalīn wa al-Akhirīn*, *Tibyān fī Marīfat al-Adyān*, *Jawāhir al-Ulūm fī Kashf al-Malūm*, *al-Faṭḥ al-Mubīn alā Mulḥidīn*, *Laṭā'if al-Asrār li Ahl Allāh al-Aṭyār*, *Raḥīq al-Muḥammadiyah fī Ṭarīq al-Ṣūfiyyah*, *Asrār al-Lisān fī Marīfat al-Rūḥ wa al-Raḥmān*, *Durr al-Farāid bi-Sharḥ al-Aqāid*, *Nubdhah fī Dawā al-Zill maa Ṣāhibihi*, *Hidāyat al-Ḥabīb fī al-Tarḥīb wa al-Tarḥīb*, and many others (Mohd. Muhiden Abd. Rahman, 2006). Thus, this article seeks to examine al-Rānīrī's sacred metaphysics through the interpretive lens of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas. The primary objective of this research is to explore the conceptualization of existence in Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī's philosophy, with a particular focus on the dynamic unfolding of divine manifestations and the sacred nature of all existence. This is framed within a broader discourse on the metaphysics of existence (*wujūd*) and its manifestations in the cosmos.

2. Literature Review

Nusantara or Malay metaphysics encompasses a profound and evolving philosophical tradition that has developed over centuries, influenced by Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic thought. Tee (2023, 2024) explores the historical trajectory of Malay philosophical ideas



from the 7th to the 17th centuries, illustrating how early Malay thinkers engaged with fundamental metaphysical concepts such as causality, the nature of existence, and ultimate reality. During the Buddhist and Hindu periods, Malay metaphysical thought was shaped by notions of karma, dharma, and cosmological structures, which were later reinterpreted within an Islamic framework following the arrival of Islam. The transition to Islamic metaphysics saw a shift toward the doctrine of *tawhīd* (divine unity) and the concept of *wujūd* (existence), aligning Malay thought with broader Islamic philosophical traditions. In this regard, Malay scholars integrated Sufi metaphysics, particularly the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of existence), into their intellectual discourse. This synthesis of Islamic metaphysics with indigenous and earlier philosophical influences highlights the dynamic nature of Malay thought, demonstrating its adaptability and depth. While focusing specifically on one of the prominent Malay thinkers, Hamzani (2023) offers a comparative perspective by examining Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī's epistemological framework alongside French philosopher, René Descartes, highlighting how al-Rānīrī upheld a holistic epistemology that harmonizes reason, revelation, and intuition, in contrast to Descartes' secular and mechanistic approach to knowledge.

Linguistic and literary expressions also serve as a medium through which metaphysical ideas are articulated in Malay culture. Zaitul Azma and Ahmad Fuad (2011) analyze Malay proverbs, revealing that they encapsulate not only metaphysical reflections but also epistemological, ethical, logical, and aesthetic dimensions. Similarly, Jalaluddin (2020) examines the use of objects in Malay metaphors, illustrating how material elements symbolize abstract philosophical and spiritual concepts. This linguistic creativity reflects a distinctive mode of Malay reasoning, where metaphysics is intertwined with language, enabling the transmission of complex ideas through oral and literary traditions. Moreover, Kamaruzaman, Omar, and Sidik (2016) discuss Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas' perspective on the historical development of Islam in the Malay world, highlighting his critique of Western historiographical biases. Al-Attas challenges Eurocentric interpretations that portray Islam as a passive recipient of external influences, instead asserting that Malay intellectual traditions actively engaged with Islamic thought and contributed to its development. His analysis underscores the importance of viewing Malay philosophy through an internal conceptual lens rather than through externally imposed frameworks.

Building upon this intellectual foundation, Setia (2003) highlights al-Attas' significant contributions to the philosophy of science and education, emphasizing the centrality of traditional Islamic sciences and Malay cultural elements in shaping a distinctly Nusantara Islamic metaphysical worldview. Al-Attas' philosophical framework is rooted in Islamic metaphysics, particularly the notion of *ḥaqīqah* (ultimate reality) and the hierarchy of knowledge, which he integrates into his understanding of Nusantara intellectual history. He argues that the arrival of Islam in the Nusantara facilitated the purification of indigenous metaphysical concepts, aligning them with the principles of Islamic ontology and epistemology. This perspective not only reinforces the continuity between Malay and Islamic metaphysics but also positions Malay thought within the broader Islamic intellectual tradition. Collectively, these studies emphasize the richness and depth of Malay metaphysical thought, highlighting its historical transformations, linguistic



articulations, and epistemological foundations. They reinforce the necessity of examining Malay philosophy through its own internal structures rather than through reductive external interpretations, thereby affirming its intellectual legitimacy and philosophical coherence.

While previous studies have examined Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī's theological arguments and his opposition to distorted Sufi metaphysics, they often treat his thought within a narrow theological or textual framework. This article builds on existing scholarship by repositioning Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī's theology and cosmology within the broader context of Nusantara Islamic sacred metaphysics, guided by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas' interpretive lens. It highlights Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī's role in articulating a comprehensive metaphysical framework grounded in *tawhīd*, the hierarchy of being, and the integration of reason, revelation, and intuition – thus aligning with the intellectual trajectory traced by Tee (2023, 2024) and the comparative insights of Hamzani (2023). By doing so, this article situates Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī not merely as a theologian but as a key metaphysician in the Islamization of Nusantara thought, offering an indigenous philosophical model.

3. Conceptual Framework

In writing this article, I employ the term “sacred metaphysics,” which will be elucidated in due course. It is essential to first establish a clear understanding of both metaphysics and sacredness. The term metaphysics is derived from the Greek words “*meta*” (μετά), meaning “beyond” or “after,” and “*physika*” (φυσικά), referring to the physical or natural world. In its broadest sense, metaphysics is the philosophical inquiry into the fundamental nature of reality, existence, and the underlying principles governing all that is. The Oxford English Dictionary defines “metaphysics” as “the branch of philosophy that deals with the first principles of things, including abstract concepts such as being, knowing, identity, time, and space.” Similarly, Merriam-Webster defines it as “a division of philosophy that is concerned with the fundamental nature of reality and being and that includes ontology, cosmology, and often epistemology.” These definitions reinforce the central role of metaphysics in understanding the ultimate structure of existence. Historically, the term can be traced back to Andronicus of Rhodes, the editor of Aristotle's works, who compiled a collection of fourteen treatises and titled them *Metaphysics*, meaning “after Aristotle's *Physics*.” This designation, however, emerged posthumously, as Aristotle himself was unaware of the term's later classification as an independent field of study (Garrett, 2006).

Despite its etymological origins, metaphysics has since evolved into a cornerstone of philosophical discourse, encompassing inquiries into ontology, causality, and the nature of the divine. Aristotle, however, did not use the term “metaphysics” himself; instead, he referred to this branch of philosophy as “first philosophy,” which he described as the science that examines the essence of things, such as being, change, and possibility. Unlike disciplines such as politics, mathematics, or the natural sciences – collectively referred to as “second philosophy” – metaphysics concerns itself with the fundamental principles underlying all of reality. It is also known as “first science,” “wisdom,” and “theology.” Key discussions in metaphysics include the nature of being itself, the first cause of all things, and the existence of immutable realities. Subfields within this branch include



ontology, causality, cosmogony, cosmology, subject and predicate relations, taxonomy, necessity and possibility, the mind-body problem, and debates on free will and determinism (Carroll & Markosian, 2010).

On the other hand, the term “sacred” is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “regarded with great respect and reverence by a particular religion, group, or individual,” and “dedicated or set apart for the service or worship of a deity.” Merriam-Webster in the same way defines it as “dedicated or set apart for the service or worship of a deity” and “worthy of religious veneration.” The etymology of “sacred” traces back to the Latin “*sacratus*,” the past participle of *sacrare*, meaning “to make holy” or “to consecrate,” which itself stems from “*sacer*,” meaning “holy” or “accursed.” Over time, the term has maintained its association with divinity, reverence, and sanctity. The Arabic equivalent of sacred originates from the root “*qadusa-yaqdusu-qudusun*,” meaning “flawless, pure, clean, and unblemished.” In the Malay language, this term was borrowed as “*kudus*,” a word that appears in the *Kamus Dewan (Fourth Edition)*, which provides the example *roh al-kudus* (the Holy Spirit), referring to the Archangel Gabriel in Abrahamic religions such as Christianity and Islam. Another Malay term with a similar meaning is “*suci*,” derived from the Sanskrit word “*śauca*” (शौच), which conveys notions of purity, cleanliness, honesty, and clarity. Since the meaning of “sacred” is more precisely articulated within the framework of Islamic teachings, I prefer to use the term in conjunction with metaphysics, thereby conceptualizing “sacred metaphysics” as a distinct and meaningful category within Nusantara Islamic philosophical thought.

This tendency is based on the definition by Nasr (2001), who uses the term “sacred science” or “*scientia sacra*” in Latin. In its highest sense, this term refers to the Supreme Science, or metaphysical knowledge traditionally connected to the Principle of Divinity and its manifestations. This science, or in broader terms, knowledge, is centered on human existence and can be attained by human reason. It also encompasses natural sciences beyond the soul, arts, thought, and human society. Although the Latin “*sacra*” is closer in meaning to “ritual,” Nasr (2001) does not provide a direct Arabic or Persian equivalent. Nevertheless, the term “metaphysics” in this context, as a theoretical knowledge, aligns well with the translation of “sacred.” Therefore, when the concept of sacredness is predicated upon the concept of metaphysics, it becomes “sacred metaphysics.” This refers to a branch of philosophy that investigates the Ultimate Truth, purified in its reality, and made sacred in its discourse by the metaphysician discussing it.

4. Methodology

Through a qualitative approach, this article analyzes the work of Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī, *Hujjat al-Ṣiddīq li-Daf' al-Zindīq*, as well as Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas' commentary on these ideas in *A Commentary on the Hujjat al-Ṣiddīq of Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī: Being an Exposition the Salient Points of Distinction between the Positions of the Theologians, the Philosophers, the Sufis and the Pseudo-Sufis on the Ontological Relationship between God and the World and Related Questions*. These texts were selected because Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī's work provides the primary foundation for understanding Nusantara's sacred metaphysics, while al-Attas' commentary offers a contemporary interpretive framework and serves as



a valuable interpretive tool to understand the deeper metaphysical implications of al-Rānīrī's doctrines within the Nusantara Islamic philosophical tradition. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the ontological distinctions made by al-Rānīrī. The research analysis method involves a textual analysis of secondary sources, where Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī's original works are compared and interpreted alongside al-Attas scholarly interpretations. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas theoretical framework, particularly his emphasis on the sacredness of metaphysical understanding within the Nusantara Islamic intellectual tradition, provides a robust foundation for analyzing the sacred metaphysics articulated by al-Rānīrī.

5. Results and Discussions

Al-Attas (1986) elaborates on Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī's work over 343 pages, divided into 22 sections, while the original text is only about 27 pages. Based on this, the work serves as the primary reference for this overview article. The main discussions involving metaphysical elements are presented as the central exposition in the work, in line with the thoughts and circumstances during Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī's time. The metaphysical discussion generally focuses on the true nature of existence and the meaning of existence. However, this article will focus on two sacred metaphysical elements highlighted by Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī: first, matters related to the nature of God or theology; and second, matters related to the nature of creation or cosmogony.

The Sanctity of the Divine Essence: Sacred Theology

The discussion of the key metaphysical sanctity in the thought of Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī is the discourse on the essence of divinity. The crux of this discussion centers around Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī's efforts to oppose the heretical concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, which he attributed to Ḥamzah Faṣṣūrī and Shams al-Dīn Sumatrā'ī in Aceh. This doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* is considered erroneous by Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī because it seemingly posits the unity of existence between God, humans, and the universe as a whole (al-Attas, 1986). In simple terms, this identification can be symbolized through the equation "A = B," where 'A' represents the existence of God, and 'B' represents the existence of creatures. The main argument presented by Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī is based on a verse of poetry by Ḥamzah Faṣṣūrī, which equates the unity of God Most High with humanity and the universe to the union of ocean waves and seawater. Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī critiques this analogy by noting the separateness of the water from the ocean and its eventual reconnection, contrasting it with the notion that God's Essence changes due to the creation of the universe and humanity. Similarly, he critiques the view of the universe and humanity's unity with God Most High as being akin to the union of seawater and waves (al-Attas, 1963).

Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī's misunderstanding of the analogy used by Ḥamzah Faṣṣūrī led to an interpretation that leaned Ḥamzah Faṣṣūrī toward a pantheistic worldview. However, what Ḥamzah Faṣṣūrī actually meant was that just as the water and waves rise and fall on the shore, it does not affect the ocean, which remains unchanged. This analogy sought to convey the perfection of God Most High as described as *al-Aḥad* (the One) with no alteration to His perfection. In contrast, it is humanity and the universe that depend



on Him. This aligns with God's words in Surah al-Baqarah (2:255), which state: "Allah, there is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of existence. Neither drowsiness overtakes Him nor sleep. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth..." This verse refutes the Greek philosopher Aristotle's view of God as the "Prime Mover Unmoved." Instead, it highlights that God Most High is not limited nor weak in relation to His creation, demonstrating His perfect will (al-Attas, 1963).

However, if Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī's criticism is examined deeply, it sheds more light on the true sanctity of the concept of divinity in Islam. He critiques the belief in *waḥdat al-wujūd*, which posits that the Essence of God is identical or "immanent" to the world, or that God is everything that exists. He categorically rejects the idea that God is equivalent to His creation or that God can incarnate (*ittiḥād*) into any of His creations. This, in effect, implies that in the concept of heretical *waḥdat al-wujūd*, everything is God, or conversely, God is everything (al-Attas, 1986). Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī asserts:

"Maka jikalau tiada berlainan keduanya nescaya jadilah bersuatu. Maka barang siapa mengiktikadkan bahawa Haqq Taala dengan alam itu esa, maka jadilah ia kafir kerana ketahuan daripada perkataannya yang demikian itu bahawa wujud Allah dan alam jadi suatu hakikat dan se-wujud." (transliterated from al-Attas, 1986, p. 56)

Translation: "If there is no difference between the two, then they must be identical. Thus, whoever believes that the Truth (*Haqq*) is one with the world has become an infidel because it is evident from such a statement that the existence of God and the world have become a single essence and being."

In his discussion, Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī outlines two main problems with this belief. The first problem is that if the Essence of God and the creation are one, then all humans and the universe would be God Most High. This would mean that all human actions, such as robbery and murder, would be acts of God. The second problem is that if the Essence of God and creation are one, then humans would possess all the attributes of God. Consequently, all humans would know everything in the universe and can do anything they desire. These issues expose the flaws in the argument of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. These two main problems are sufficient to dismantle the entire belief in the unity of God with the world and humanity in their true essence (Edwar Djamaris & Saksona Prijanto, 1995).

Furthermore, Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī argued that the belief in heretical *waḥdat al-wujūd* is at least associated with four main issues: first, *intiḳāl* (transmigration), meaning the Essence of God moves into creation; second, *ittiḥād* (unity), where there is no distinction between the existence of God and the world; third, *ḥulūl* (incarnation), meaning the Essence of God enters into the essence of creation; and fourth, *ittiṣāl* (connection), meaning a direct relationship between the existence of God and creation. All these issues are impossible for God and cannot be accepted by sound reason, as they diminish the sanctity of God Most Perfect, free from all imperfection, as revealed in the Quran and Hadith of Holy Prophet Muhammad (Rusdiyanto & Musafar, 2018).

In his work *Hujjat al-Ṣiddīq li-Daḡ' al-Zindīq*, Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī attempts to reconcile the beliefs of the *mutakallimūn* (theologians) represented by al-Ash'arī and the beliefs of the Sufis represented by Ibn 'Arabī, concerning the sanctification of God Most High from the belief that He is identical with the universe. He explains as follows:



“Kata ahli al- ṣūfi: Bahawa kami pun kabullah akan iktikad dan perkataan mutakalimīn itu. Adapun pada istilah kami bahawa wujud itu esa jua iaitulah Zat Allah Taala. Dan alam itu tiada berwujud dan tiada layak dinamai akan dia dengan nama wujud kerana ia ‘adam al-mahḍ (semata-mata tiada). Dan wujud Haqq Taala itu wujūd al-mahḍ (semata-mata wujud), maka manatah jadi se-wujud ‘adam al-mahḍ dengan wujūd al-mahḍ? Hanya sanya adalah alam itu mazhar dan zill, maka bagi Haqq Taala, yakni tempat nyata Haqq Taala dan bayang-bayang seperti umpama rupa kelihatan dalam cermin badal tamsil: Haqq Taala itu umpama yang menilik cermin dan alam itu rupa yang kelihatan dalamnya. Maka wujud Haqq Taala dengan alam berlain pun tiada bersuatu pun tiada.” (transliterated from al-Attas, 1986, p. 56-57)

Translation: “The Sufis say: We accept the belief and words of the theologians. In our terms, existence is one, and that is the Essence of God. The universe does not have existence and is not worthy of being named existence because it is ‘adam al-mahḍ (pure non-being). The existence of God is wujūd al-mahḍ (pure existence), so how can the non-being of the universe become one with pure existence? The universe is simply a manifestation and shadow, a place where the Truth appears, like the reflection seen in a mirror: the Truth is like the one looking at the mirror, and the universe is the image reflected in it. Thus, the existence of the Truth and the universe are distinct, but not united.”

Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī further explains that unity and difference require two separate existences. In the Sufi understanding, only the existence of God is One, and the universe has no existence. Therefore, there is no difference or multiplicity of existences. While the universe appears to have its own being, it does not in reality associate God with another existence because it has no essence. According to al-Attas (1986), Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī’s statement about the agreement between the theologians and the Sufis applies only to part of their understanding of the universe, not entirely. Certainly, the harmonious view of both groups in sanctifying God Most High from the universe arises because both agree on the eternal doctrine of creation, as will be explained in the next section.

The Sanctity of the Reality of Creation: Sacred Cosmogony

Before I explain the doctrine of eternal creation as a sacred cosmogony by Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī, it is necessary to clarify that this discussion is a detailed commentary by al-Attas (1986) on Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī’s introductory theology. He states:

“Maka ditahkikkan mereka itulah akan Tuhannya dengan sebenar-benar tahkik. Serta dibezakannya jalan yang benar daripada jalan yang batil dengan tasdik. Dan ditahkikkan mereka itulah segala ilmunya dan dinyatakan jalan agama.” (transliterated from al-Attas, 1986, p. 53)

Translation: “Then they verify their Lord with the truest verification. They distinguish the true path from the false path with confirmation. And they verify all their knowledge, and the path of religion is made clear.”

“They” in this context refers to the prophets and the righteous, or the ‘*ārif bi’Llāh* (those who have attained gnosis of God). Thus, al-Attas elaborates on the phrase “the truest verification... with confirmation...” based on the understanding of Sufis adhering to the concept of *wahdat al-wujūd* and their approach to the reality of creation or *tanazzulāt* (the



ontological descent) from the Absolute Existence, which is God Most High. Furthermore, al-Attas (1986), as also stated by Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī, mentions that the explanation of the reality of creation is based on *kashāf* (spiritual unveiling through the intermediary of the eye of the heart) and *dhawq* (direct spiritual experience) in relation to existence. This method follows the use of both rational and textual proofs.

In short, this theory of creation seeks to explain how the One, the Unique, and the Singular—the Essence of God—creates a multiplicity and diversity of existence. According to al-Attas (1986), this ontological hierarchy must be understood to occur beyond space and time. This is because, if it happened within space and time, then it would be a creation within the perceptible world, the empirical realm. However, based on logical principles, the first existence can be said as “unconditional.” This means that the first level of existence is the Highest Essence that is “not conditioned by anything.” It is unknowable and cannot be grasped by human cognition. At this level, it does not manifest itself (*lā ta’ayyun*). However, at this level, existence has two aspects based on two Hadith Qudsi. First, there is the internal aspect, where the Essence is completely hidden in “the dark mist”; and second, the external aspect, where God Most High or the Absolute Existence is like a “hidden treasure” desiring to be known, expressing a tendency to manifest (*tajallī*) itself, which leads to the creation of beings. To further develop this existence, the first emanation occurs, the most sacred emanation (*al-fayḍ al-aqdas*).

Through this emanation, qualities of opposition, such as divine and created attributes, are “descended.” This is the result of the contemplation of the Absolute Existence upon the perfection of Its Essence. The opposing qualities are manifested through the first determination (*ta’ayyun awwal*) within the unity of existence (*wāḥidiyyah*). Thus, at this second level of existence, the Absolute Existence is known as the Unity of Divinity. The opposing qualities in potential now need to be actualized, and so they are manifested through the second determination (*ta’ayyun thāni*) into the Names and Attributes (*al-asmā’ wa al-ṣifāt*) of the Absolute Existence, which are infinite. Therefore, at this third level, the Absolute Existence is known as the Divine Names and Attributes. The potential created attributes also require actualization and are manifested through the third determination (*ta’ayyun thālith*) into fixed entities. Hence, at the fourth level of existence, the Absolute Existence is known as the Fixed Entities (*al-a’yān al-thābitah*). These second through fourth levels of existence remain unseen or concealed. To bring existence into the visible realm, the second emanation or sacred emanation (*al-fayḍ al-muqqadas*) occurs (al-Attas, 1995; al-Attas, 1986).

Through this emanation, the Fixed Entities are manifested in external entities. These entities are diversified into specific individuals and manifested through the fourth determination (*ta’ayyun rābi’*) into the diversity of existence. Thus, at the fifth level of existence, this is known as the External Entities (*al-a’yān al-khārijiyyah*). These diversified entities are in potential to be actualized, and so they are manifested into empirical existence, the sensory world, and sensory experience through the fifth determination (*ta’ayyun khāmis*). The sixth and lowest level of existence is known as the Empirical World (*‘ālam al-shahādah*). However, this process does not end here. This is because it is a dynamic and perpetual development of existence (al-Attas, 1995; al-Attas, 1986). The

gradation of existence is illustrated in Figure 1 below, adapted and modified from al-Attas (1995, p. 260).

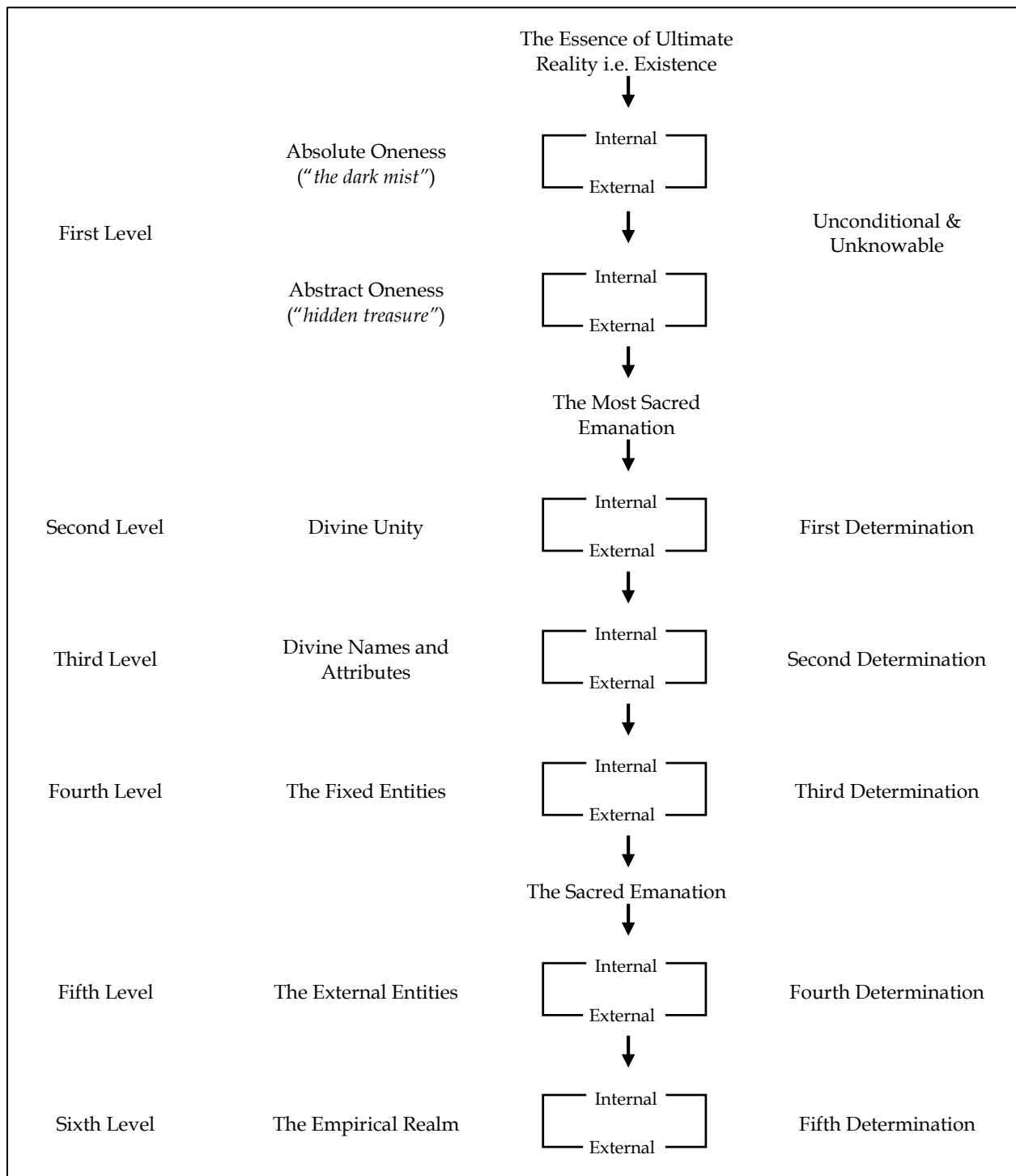


Figure 1: Sacred Ontological Gradation of Existence



The empirical world does not persist in its true reality. It continuously changes, as each moment erases the previous one. As the world and its parts vanish, a new version replaces it, only to face the same fate. This process continues eternally. From one moment to the next, creations are renewed and then perished. This means that only the existence of God Most High remains eternal. This aligns with the Quranic verse of al-Rahman (55:26-27): “Everything on it (the earth) will perish. But will remain the Face of your Lord, full of majesty and honor” and “There is no god but Him. Everything perishes except His Face (God’s Essence). To Him belongs the power to judge, and to Him you shall return” (al-Qasas, 28:88). Therefore, this process of creation is perpetual, harmonizing the views of theologians and Sufis alike, making it a process that is always sacred in the sight of God Most High (al-Attas, 1986).

6. Conclusion

The metaphysical understanding of Islam that Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī explicate enabled him to undertake a purifying effort for the Islamic faith of the Muslim community in general. Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī believed that the existence of the universe was a manifestation of the true existence of God Most High, and thus, the existence of God Most High and the universe possess different levels of existence. Here, he attempted to demonstrate the sanctity of theological or divine discussions, a branch of metaphysics. In another branch of metaphysics, namely cosmogony or the origin of the universe, Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī likened the universe to an image in a mirror, observed by the Almighty. Thus, the universe is the manifestation of the God’s Essence. This article clarifies Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī’s sacred metaphysics, demonstrating its significance in Nusantara Islamic thought. By distinguishing Divine Essence from creation, his work contributes to theological discourses that seek to preserve the purity of Islamic metaphysical doctrines. These insights remain relevant in contemporary discussions of metaphysics within the Islamic intellectual tradition. His great contribution should be celebrated by contemporary Muslims. Through his efforts, the faith was preserved from deviation and the intrusion of elements that do not align with Islamic creed. The intellectual community must be more aware of such intellectual issues to ensure that the sanctity of Islamic metaphysics is maintained, ultimately creating a social environment that is intellectually enlightened, moving from worldly concerns to the hereafter.

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