

EASTERN AND WESTERN PHILOSOPHIES OF DIVINITY IN THE ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE AND GENDER COSMOLOGY

Fadlan

Sophia Institute

Email: *fadlanadlan79@gmail.com*

Abstrak

This article examines the issue of divinity from a philosophical perspective by comparing Eastern and Western thought, with a primary focus on analyzing how humans perceive God from these two viewpoints, rather than examining the nature of His transcendent and complex absoluteness. This study specifically limits its scope to two key objects: God in the context of language and God in the context of gender cosmology, with the aim of defining and distinguishing these two concepts, identifying the causes of their differences, and analyzing their influence or implications on life. Through the use of descriptive-analytical and heuristic methods, supported by structuralist approaches, historical analysis, and ideological critique, I found that Eastern conceptions of God tend to be anthropocentric and masculinist, strongly cohesive with patriarchal culture. Conversely, Western conceptions of God, particularly post-Enlightenment, have moved toward more objective and impersonal ideas, even reverting to the feminine attributes of nature—referred to by eco-feminists as “The Mother God”—as a form of resistance against authoritarian religious dogma. Overall, this study affirms that the conception of God is fundamental because human perspectives—whether of God as a cruel or loving entity—are directly reflected in and impact social reality and behavior.

Kata Kunci: *philosophy, theology, God, language.*

Abstract

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Keywords: *philosophy, theology, God, language.*

INTRODUCTION

Rationally understanding the transcendent God is nothing other than a human effort to comprehend the visible and the invisible, aiming to solidify one's belief in the existence of God, who is believed to influence the intricacies of life. At the same time, those who claim not to believe in God also have a desire to rationally negate God's existence, whether by rejecting Him or because they are unable to grasp His existence. At this stage, it may be said that whatever the purpose—whether to understand or to reject God—serves as evidence that God has indeed influenced human life.

Discussions about God, although they have been extensively debated for thousands of years and have undergone much criticism and refinement, remain relevant for discussion in every generation, including the contemporary one. In every field of science, the issue of divinity occupies a significant portion of serious discussion.¹ In fact, the very first central theme in philosophy is the issue of divinity. As written by Louis Leahy, who quotes an American philosopher:

In my opinion, the central theme of philosophical inquiry is the problem of divinity... It is quite strange that Western philosophy, even though it claims to have been liberated from mythology and theology, still debates the problem of divinity with the same fervor as in the past... We must therefore acknowledge that despite various efforts to suppress it, the question of divinity remains a central theme in both Western and non-Western history... The question of divinity occupies the foremost level of philosophical speculation.²

On the other hand, fundamentally, God is a vague figure who seems to be defined more through intellectual abstraction than through imagination. Of all the religious doctrines we have received since childhood, it seems most of us understand the concepts of heaven and hell better; in fact, hell is a reality more terrifying than God Himself because hell is something we can truly grasp imaginatively,³ the same goes for heaven.

Behind all of this, the author is aware that, fundamentally, humans are not only *homo sapiens* but also *homo religious*. Nevertheless, culture and tradition also play a role in shaping human understanding of God. This is because, as Muhammad Abed al-Jabiri argues, human understanding is highly dependent on language, while language itself is rooted in local culture or tradition. Thus, language “sets boundaries and defines the scope of all human knowledge.”⁴

This article is not intended to explain the ineffable reality of God, which exists

¹ In his introduction to the book titled “*God in the Eyes of Philosophers*,” Komaruddin Hidayat states that the issue of divinity is not the exclusive domain of philosophy. Other disciplines also take the discussion of divinity very seriously. See, Etienne Gilson, *God in the Eyes of Philosophers*, trans. Silvester Goridus Sukur, (Bandung: Mizan, 2004), 13.

² Paul Davies, *The Mind of God: The Scientific Basis for a Rational World*, trans. Hamzah (3rd ed.; Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2012), 289.

³ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (A History of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of God in the World's Religions), trans. Zaimul Am (5th ed.; Bandung: Mizan, 2012), 21.

⁴ Muhammad Abed al-Jabiri, *Takwin al-‘Aql al-‘Arabi* (The Formulation of Arab Reason), trans. Imam Khoiri (1st ed.; Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD, 2014), 113

beyond time and change, but rather to explore the history or human perceptions of God, which the author refers to as the Eastern God paradigm and the Western God paradigm. For fundamentally, the human perspective on God is a historical issue inseparable from the context of time, place, and human culture.⁵ Consequently, there is no single unchanging concept regarding the word “God.” Although this word encompasses the entire spectrum of meaning, ideas about it may contradict one another or even cancel each other out; and when a concept of God no longer holds relevant meaning, it will quietly be abandoned and replaced by a new concept.⁶

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Differences in Eastern and Western Concepts of God

Humans hold various kinds of beliefs. How they arrive at these beliefs varies greatly, ranging from reasoned arguments to blind faith. Some beliefs are based on personal experience, others on education, and still others on indoctrination. Many beliefs are, without a doubt, innate: we are born with them. Or, in other words, because that is what our parents and environment believe. This is what has subsequently become the subject of criticism by philosophers.

According to Freud, this belief stems from what is known as the Oedipus complex.⁷ Initially, a child feels a sexual urge toward his mother, which leads to the desire to kill his own father, since the father is perceived as an obstacle to achieving that goal. However, this act of killing subsequently gives rise to a sense of remorse within the child’s psyche, thereby giving birth to a reverence for the father’s spirit. From this, our tentative hypothesis is that belief in something arises from a sense of remorse, which then gives rise to fear. It is that fear that subsequently leads humans to worship something they consider absolute and boundless—as a means to address their own powerlessness and limitations.

According to Karen Armstrong, citing Wilhelm Schmidt, humans originally created a single God. Schmidt states that primitive monotheism existed before humans began worshiping many gods.⁸ This view differs slightly from that of Oxford historian Yuval Noah Harari. According to Harari, it was animism that existed first. Animistic belief was common among ancient hunter-gatherers in the past.⁹ However, unlike Harari, Armstrong, or Schmidt, they do not explain the cause of this belief but focus directly on the core concept of the belief itself.

In his writing, Harari argues that humans do possess a unique ability: the ability to believe in something fictional.¹⁰ Nevertheless, there are many stories that explain how the concept of God came to be, even though ultimately humans were created to grow, mature, and learn to no longer concern themselves with it.¹¹

⁵ Mohamad Anas, “Unveiling God in the Realm of ‘Local Wisdom’: An Attempt to Formulate a Contemporary Philosophy of God.” Universitas Brawijaya Malang, Vol. 6 No. 3, December (2012): 8

⁶ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, 22.

⁷ This name is taken from the Greek myth of Oedipus, who unknowingly killed his father, Laius. He later married his mother, Jocasta. (Source: Wikipedia. Accessed on May 1, 2020).

⁸ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (A History of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), trans. Zaimul Am (5th ed.; Bandung: Mizan, 2012), 27

⁹ Yuval Noah Harari, **Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind** (trans. Damaring Tyas Wulandari Palar; 11th ed.; Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2019), 66

¹⁰ *Sapiens*, 28

¹¹ Jonathan Black, *The Secret History of the World*, trans. Isma B. Soekato and Adi Toha (11th ed.; South Tangerang: PT. Pustaka Alvabet, 2017), 21.

Another explanation might be found in mystical traditions.¹² To put it simply, if the universe truly has an explanation and cannot explain itself, then it must be explained by something outside itself—for example, God. But what evidence explains God? Or the age-old riddle “Who created God?” is dangerous because it plunges us into an infinite regress. It seems the only escape is to assume that God is a necessary and personal being.¹³

Nevertheless, a deity so far removed from humanity—as Aristotle once described *The Prime Mover*—cannot inspire the spiritual quest as mysticism hopes. It must be acknowledged that mysticism arises when humans do not perceive a separation between the two worlds; yet, on the other hand, we must also accept that to a certain extent, all religions are indeed anthropocentric¹⁴ because, historically, the universe is anthropocentric—every particle is oriented and always directed toward living beings (humans).¹⁵ Thus, it is possible that a significant portion of our depictions of God are also inseparable from our human nature. It is no wonder that we will eventually see differences in perspective among the many divine perspectives, as all religions fundamentally stem from anthropomorphism to a certain extent.¹⁶

Mark Booth takes a holistic approach to examining this. Judging God as a human is indeed a problem, but perhaps people of the past had the answer. “The mind of God” might not be any better than the idea of an old man with white hair sitting on a cloud. This is the same mistake—made by children of primitive tribes. Even if we acknowledge that God might indeed exist, why must He be like us? Why must His mind be like ours?¹⁷ Is He angry, jealous, and disappointed just like us?

God in the Eastern Perspective

Rudolf Otto asserts that belief in the supernatural is a natural human instinct, and this forms the basis of belief systems and religion.¹⁸ That feeling, besides preceding any desire to explain the origin of the world or to find a foundation for ethical behavior, also—like Spinoza’s ethical idea that the conception of divinity (*pantein*: nature) plays a crucial role in creating the order of life and cosmic order.¹⁹ When humans began to form myths and worship gods, they were not merely seeking a literal interpretation of natural phenomena,²⁰ but were also giving meaning to their lives.

Humans, from the very beginning of the history of thought, have been aware of forces that transcend humanity—entities considered all-powerful, capable of bringing good or evil, and able to grant prayers and wishes.²¹ There are many reasons to explain this, but at the very least we realize one thing: that such belief is built because humans acknowledge their “weakness”; so that later there will be something to comfort them when they fail or lose something they love.

¹² Paul Davies, *The Mind of God: The Scientific Basis for a Rational World*, trans. Hamzah (3rd ed.; Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2012), 289

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, 91.

¹⁵ Jonathan Black, *The Secret History of the World*, 21.

¹⁶ A History of God, 91.

¹⁷ Paul Davies, *The Mind of God*, 281

¹⁸ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, 80

¹⁹ Rahmad Salahuddin, *Geometric Ethics in Islam (A Comparative Study of Spinoza’s Deus ex Natura and Ibn al-‘Arabi’s Wahdat al-Wujud in Philosophical Mysticism)*, n.d., 1

²⁰ *The Secret History of the World*, 99.

²¹ M. Baharudin, “*Concepts of Divinity Throughout Human History*.” n.d., n.p., Vol. IX No. 1, January–June (2014): 36

Human concepts of God have a history, as these concepts have always held slightly different meanings for each group of people who have embraced them across various time periods. The concept of God formed by a group of people in one generation may become meaningless to another generation²² because humans live in diverse ethnic and cultural contexts, there is also variation in their conceptions of God.²³

Furthermore, it was common in the past for supernatural powers to be depicted as goddesses or mothers. Their nurturing and protective nature toward their children was also likened to the harmony of nature. Unlike modern human perspectives, nature was once humanity's closest ally. Artists created sculptures depicting her as a naked pregnant woman, many of which have been discovered by archaeologists across Europe, the Middle East, and India. The Mother Goddess remained a significant figure in the collective imagination for centuries. Veneration of nature's feminine qualities or these supernatural forces is widely applied to several major traditions worldwide, such as what we know as Hieros Gamos or the sacred marriage, which dates back over 2,000 years. Hieros Gamos was regularly performed in ancient Egypt to honor women's reproductive power and nature's feminine qualities.²⁴ In fact, such feminist depictions of God are very common. Animism is an example of this type of feminist understanding of God. What can we say about the spiritual and mental lives of ancient hunter-gatherers in the past?²⁵

Most scholars agree that animistic beliefs were common among ancient hunter-gatherers. Anthropological and archaeological evidence indicates that ancient hunter-gatherers—animists—believed there was no essential (supernatural) divide separating humans from nature (animals).²⁶ Animism is the belief that nearly every place, every animal, every plant, and every natural phenomenon possesses consciousness and feelings, and can communicate directly with humans. Animists believe that there is no barrier between humans and other beings.²⁷ When animism was still the dominant belief system, human norms and values had to take into account the fate and interests of other beings.²⁸ This fostered a sense of care and respect in humans toward other beings or entities, such as animals and plants. The world—that is, the local valley and the mountain ranges surrounding it—belongs to all inhabitants, and everyone follows a set of shared rules.²⁹ Even in Ancient Mesopotamian society, these shared rules were also observed by the gods, because of how close we are to those gods. A hunter-gatherer might speak to a herd of deer and ask one of them to sacrifice itself. If the hunt is successful, the hunter will apologize to the animal that was killed.³⁰ Animistic beliefs still guide some hunter-gatherer communities that have survived into the modern era. One such group is the Nayaka people, who live in the tropical forests of southern India.

²² Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, 21.

²³ M. Baharudin, 35

²³ M. Baharudin, 35

²⁴ Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code: Young Adult Adaptation* (The Da Vinci Code), trans. Ingrid Dwijani Nimpoeno (2nd ed.; Bandung: Bentang Pustaka, 2017), 107. However, according to Wikipedia, this tradition was performed to honor the marriage of the Sumerian king and the goddess Inanna

²⁵ Yuval Noah Harari, **Sapiens**, 65.

²⁶ Ibid., **Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow** (trans. Yanto Musthofa; 6th ed.; South Tangerang: PT Pustaka Alvabet, 2019), 87

²⁷ *Sapiens*, 67

²⁸ Ibid., 249.

²⁹ *Homo Deus*, 210.

³⁰ Yuval Noah Harari. **Sapiens**, 66

Anthropologist Dany Naveh reports that when a Nayaka walking through the forest encounters a dangerous animal such as a tiger, snake, or elephant, he will speak to that animal.³¹ Indeed, most hunter-gatherers—in order to survive—must understand the supernatural order governing their valley and adapt their behavior accordingly.

Like the ancient sky god, this god then entered the ancient temples and took a position on par with the older gods. This is what later shaped the concept of human cultural belief; the Ancient Sumerians called her Inanna, the Babylonians called her Ishtar, the Canaanites called her Anat, and in Egypt they called her Isis. Strikingly similar stories exist in nearly all these cultures to express her role in human life.³² The method of calculating stars using the zodiac in astronomy is also built upon this principle of paganism. How reverent people of the past were toward nature.³³

Such religions do tend to have a very local perspective and emphasize characteristics specific to location, climate, and phenomena.³⁴ However, for many people, especially monotheists, and even more so for industrialized societies, such animistic attitudes may seem strange,³⁵ due to our monotheistic tradition established thousands of years ago. Nevertheless, this pagan worship eventually faded (though not entirely) after the Monotheistic God entered human consciousness. Monotheism also emerged with sacred figures known as prophets. One of the leading philosophers and theologians of the 18th century, Baron d'Holbach (1723–89), stated that the first humans were worshippers of natural forces. He also observed that corruption began to emerge when humans started to anthropomorphize God in the image of their own likeness.³⁶

The prophets then created a new theological system vastly different from that of their pagan counterparts and proceeded to denounce the pagan gods of neighboring peoples with the most vile insults, viewing the beliefs and practices of others as strange and heretical—a religious experience marked by turmoil, controversy, reform, and revolution.³⁷

In the present day, we may have become so accustomed to the intolerance that has unfortunately become a hallmark of monotheism that we no longer view hostility toward other gods in this manner as a novel religious stance.³⁸ On the other hand, we know that Paganism (or animism) is, at its core, a tolerant belief system; unlike monotheism, ancient cults were not threatened by the arrival of new gods—there was always room for other gods within the temple to stand alongside traditional deities. In fact, when the new ideologies of the Stone Age replaced the worship of the old gods, there was no harsh rejection of the ancient deities.³⁹ And what many of us do not realize is that ancient people never truly regarded those statues as God in the way we have come to understand it. Those statues were created to direct their worship beyond themselves.⁴⁰

³¹ Ibid., *Homo Deus*, 88

³² Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, 30.

³³ Jonathan Black, *The Secret History of the World*, 105

³⁴ Yuval Noah Harari, **Sapiens**, 250.

³⁵ Ibid., **Homo Deus**, 88

³⁶ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, 508

³⁷ *Sapiens*, 67.

³⁸ *A History of God*, 92.

³⁹ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, 92

⁴⁰ Ibid., 91.

This is our Eastern concept of God. One of the most important aspects of this concept is that humans began to change their attitude toward the world. Worshiping one God was an unprecedented step. Because the idea of this one God forced us to set aside other deities, and alongside the agricultural revolution, the patriarchal (male) class began to dominate nearly every aspect of life. The concept of God, like other major religious worldviews of that era, also developed within a market economy driven by the spirit of aggressive capitalism. And for the first time, humans incorporated masculine values into their theology.

For thousands of years, these cultures and traditions have been vital and highly influential. Naturally, as humans fulfill their roles, they cannot be separated from the social realities that surround them.⁴¹ As a result, humans gradually began to distance themselves from nature. Unlike before, when our world and theirs were one, now for the first time humans separated themselves from nature and divided the world into the “divine realm” and the “non-divine realm”—celebrating this by destroying all the altars and of their neighbors’ pagan deities while viewing other humans as separate egos. Exploitation, slavery, and even the monumental narratives underpinning them would later become the blueprint for what would be called theism in the future.

Theism, in its usage, is defined as belief in a god or gods. This term was first used by Ralph Cudworth. Theism is categorized into many types, one of which is monotheism.⁴² Theism (from the word “theos,” “god” in Greek) is the view that the cosmic order is based on a hierarchical relationship between humans and a group of supernatural beings.⁴³

In some cultures, monotheism has essentially been practiced. The belief that only one absolute entity binds the entire universe. Quoting Wilhelm Schmidt and Karen Armstrong, whom the author has previously discussed, humans originally created one God. Because He was too exalted for human worship, which was inadequate, this became the beginning of a crisis and the breakdown of faith. Anthropologists assume that this God had become so distant and exalted that He was effectively replaced by lesser spirits and more accessible deities.⁴⁴

We will see that the monotheistic God did not continue to be the liberating God (from paganism/animism)—cruel and harsh—though that myth remains significant in all three monotheistic religions. The stories of the sacrifice of Abraham’s son and the drowning of Pharaoh demonstrate that from the very beginning, the monotheistic God has indeed demanded harsh suppression and rejection of other beliefs.⁴⁵

However, one thing is certain: both animism and monotheism are equally forms of human expression (anthropocentric). Hence, it is no surprise that this concept gave rise to a personal God. We will soon see that there is scarcely any activity, belief, or even emotion that is not mediated by the objects we create ourselves⁴⁶ in our minds—which are nothing more than projections of human needs and desires.⁴⁷ Expressions or concepts of divinity would become crucial to religion thereafter. They would inspire and influence every form of decision, law, and even the way of life of those who

⁴¹ Sabhamis, “A Feminist Approach to the Interpretation of the Qur’an and the Bible.” n.p., n.d., 8

⁴² Wikipedia. *Theism*, Accessed on May 1, 2020.
(<https://id.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/teisme>)

⁴³ Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens*, 67

⁴⁴ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, 27

⁴⁵ Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus*, 60.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, *Sapiens*, 32.

⁴⁷ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, 21.

believed in them. In other words, the nature of religion depends on how they understand God Himself.

In the hunter-gatherer era, it was natural for people to carry out their activities with great caution, even going so far as to perform special rituals just to hunt a donkey. This was because they believed that God lived alongside them and was always watching over them through animals or plants. It is such animistic relationships that bind their activities. This applies equally to us, who express our conceptions of God in our daily activities as religious believers. However, one thing remains: a concept will always remain a concept. When a conception of God no longer holds meaning or relevance, it will quietly be abandoned and replaced by a new theology or conception.

God in the Western Perspective

By the end of the sixteenth century, the West had begun processes of technicization that would give rise to a form of society vastly different from the ideals of the new humanism. Inevitably, this subsequently influenced the Western perception of God's role and nature—linked to natural theology as a critique of the Middle Ages.⁴⁸

We have witnessed how the Eastern concept of God emerged. Of course, that concept continues to evolve with various variations over time. Polytheism continues to give rise to other monotheistic religions here and there, yet these religions remain marginal, partly because they fail to fully grasp their own message.⁴⁹ For instance, while monotheism vehemently opposes polytheism and animism's conception of gods or deities as being too human-like, at the same time, monotheism does the very same thing. There is always a gap between theological theory and historical reality. Another aspect humans should consider when understanding this concept of divinity is to recognize the limitations of their own conception of God.⁵⁰ Most people find it difficult to fully grasp the idea that monotheism itself also draws heavily from the very pagan traditions of their neighbors that they mock on a daily basis.⁵¹ Nevertheless, even though monotheists fundamentally reject the myths of their pagan neighbors, those myths often find their way back into their own faith.⁵²

The idea of a personal God has long been developed within Judaism, Christianity, and to a lesser extent within Islam. This leads us to tend to think that this idea represents the best form of religion.⁵³ Unfortunately, however, in this era of industrialization—especially during the scientific upheaval in the West in the 18th century—religious leaders often still struggle to distinguish between religion and spirituality. Consequently, religion has recently become merely a stepping stone and can serve as a dangerous weapon for the interests and dark desires of religious leaders. For religion, particularly in the Middle Ages (whether Islam or Christianity), spirituality was a dangerous threat,⁵⁴ as was science.

Of course, we are no strangers to the dramatic deaths of al-Hallaj and many other Sufis at the hands of religious authorities in their time. Why must people die simply because their views differ, or because their conception of God is different? Regardless

⁴⁸ Uu Adkur Sutendy, "The Impact of Scientific Discoveries on the Concept of God During the Enlightenment." n.p., n.d., Vol. 2 No. 2, August (2015): 222

⁴⁹ Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens*, 257

⁵⁰ Win Ushuluddin Bernadien, Ludwig Wittgenstein: Thoughts on Divinity and Their Implications for Religious Life in the Modern Era, (1st ed.; Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2004), 2.

⁵¹ Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens*, 261.

⁵² Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, 25

⁵³ Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus*, 227.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 213

of whether al-Hallaj's experiences aligned with the religious views of that era or not.⁵⁵ However, the most common conflict was between science and religion in medieval Europe. It is important to note that most misunderstandings regarding science and religion stem from a flawed definition of religion. The issue is that people too often confuse religion with superstition, spirituality, belief in supernatural powers, or gods.⁵⁶

Following the decline in the number of animism adherents, as explained in the previous subsection, polytheism emerged—a belief system that, in reality, differs little from animism. Polytheism views the world as governed by powerful gods and goddesses, such as the goddess of fertility or the god of war. One commonality between the two is that both animism and polytheism are inherently local in nature. However, the greatest impact of the rise of these great gods and goddesses concerns the status of humanity. Animists believe humans are merely one among many creatures inhabiting the world. In contrast, polytheism increasingly views the world as a reflection of the relationship between the gods and goddesses and humanity.⁵⁷ Just like monotheism; our prayers, our sacrifices, and our deeds determine the fate of the entire ecosystem. The story of Noah's great flood, for example, wiped out billions of ants, locusts, turtles, giraffes, elephants, and so on, simply because of a handful of foolish humans who angered God or the gods.⁵⁸

Two thousand years of monotheistic brainwashing have led most Westerners (through Eastern ideas) to view polytheism and animism as foolish and childish forms of worship.⁵⁹ At least until the Enlightenment era arrived. The first monotheistic religion we know of emerged in Egypt, around 350 BCE, when Pharaoh Akhenaten proclaimed that one of the lesser gods in the Egyptian pantheon, the god Aten, was in fact the supreme power governing the universe.⁶⁰ However, what became the subject of criticism by Western Enlightenment thinkers thousands of years later is a theological problem that remains unresolved and often raises immanent issues: the concept of a personal God.

A personal God does indeed seem to have greatly helped monotheists to honor the sacred and inalienable rights of the individual and to foster an appreciation for the human self. These values were initially exalted in a personal God who acts like a human: loving, judging, punishing, seeing, hearing, creating, and destroying just as we do. A personal God reflects an important religious perspective that such lofty values can also be attained by humans. Thus, personalism is an important and, for most people, irreplaceable stage in the development of religion and morality. Yet a personal God can become an idol trapped within our own image, a projection of human needs, fears, and limited desires. We might assume that

He likes what we like and hates what we hate, reinforcing our prejudices rather than encouraging us to let them go. When He seems to fail to prevent a disaster or even appears to will its occurrence, He can seem heartless and cruel. The naive belief that

⁵⁵ 55 Karen Armstrong, **Fields of Blood: Religions and the History of Violence** (trans. Yuliani Liputo; 1st ed.; Bandung: Mizan, 2016), 253.

⁵⁶ Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus*, 207.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, *Sapiens*, 252.

⁵⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Antichrist*, trans. Hartono Hadikusumo (1st ed.; Yogyakarta: Narasi-Pustaka Promethea, 2017), 78.

⁵⁹ Yuval Noah Harari, **Sapiens**, 253.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 257.

misfortune is God's will can lead us to accept things that are fundamentally unacceptable.

This theology has become increasingly foreign in the West, while in the East it is experiencing a golden age; the West, however, seems to be finding new hope. But not in the church and the Semitic religions that like to dictate their gods, but in how to harness their hidden experiences and qualities in what would later be called science.

Philosophy during the Enlightenment developed into two major branches: rationalism and empiricism. Yet both are alike; through their scientific approaches, they sought to formulate a new conception of what is termed the supernatural power or God, one more easily understood than that of religion.⁶¹ For at its core, religion is inherently pragmatic; the idea of God need not always be logical or scientific, even if you do not understand it—what matters is that you accept it.⁶² Thus, the only way is to follow what the church or religious leaders desire. Of course, this contradicts the spirit of “enlightenment.” Meanwhile, in reality, religious figures always exploit crises of understanding to project and define their own gods.⁶³

Therefore, a personal God can be dangerous. Instead of leading us out of our various limitations, He actually encourages us to remain content with that state. He can make us just as rigid, unyielding, self-satisfied, and partisan as He is. Instead of inspiring the compassion that characterizes all progressive religions, He actually encourages us to judge, condemn, and exclude.

The 15th and 16th centuries were the most decisive centuries for all religious communities. This period was the most crucial, particularly for Western Christianity, which not only succeeded in catching up. These two centuries witnessed the Italian Renaissance, which rapidly spread across Europe. This period was a time of transition and was therefore marked by anxiety and various achievements. This is clearly evident in the Western conception of God during that period. Amid their secular successes, Westerners increasingly turned their attention to faith more than in previous eras. Many laypeople were dissatisfied with the form of medieval religion, which could no longer meet their needs in the new “ ” world.⁶⁴ Here, in the author's view, we must not merely view this massive transformation and renewal (Renaissance) as pertaining solely to the Christian world, but also as a sharp critique of all religious adherents leaning toward conservatism and doctrinal apologetics.

The West is the newcomer, and ultimately it also offers us a body of thought that, if one may say so, can serve as a second option—especially as the seeds of feminism began to spread in the 18th century and reached their peak in the 20th century. From this, it is not only misogynistic interpretations of women that are dismantled, but also issues of a faith-based nature. However, this is not the place to discuss feminist critiques of society and religion, as the author does not deal directly with those issues.

a) Deism

Deism (derived from the Latin “deus,” meaning “god”).⁶⁵ In practice, deism is not significantly different in meaning from theism. Like theism, in deism God is regarded as a first cause without a cause, responsible for the creation of the universe. However,

⁶¹ Uu Adkur Sutendy, “The Impact of Scientific Discoveries on the Concept of God During the Enlightenment.” n.p., n.d., Vol. 2 No. 2, August (2015): 223.

⁶² Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, 23.

⁶³ Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus*, 207.

⁶⁴ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, 38

⁶⁵ Wikipedia. Deism. Accessed on July 10, 2020. (<https://id.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/deisme>)

while theism portrays God as an all-caring being who actively participates in life, deism portrays God as a being generally considered apathetic. Deism leaves no room for the disciplines of mysticism and imaginative mythology. Deism turns away from the myths of revelation and traditional mysteries that have long shackled humanity in superstition.⁶⁶ Instead, deism professes allegiance to an impersonal God whom humans can discover through their own efforts.

The philosophers of the Enlightenment did not fundamentally reject the idea of God. What they rejected were the conceptions or depictions of God itself that were often arbitrarily imposed by religion, particularly Christianity—promising an imaginary hope of heaven while spreading threats and fear of hell.

In the *Philosophical Dictionary*, Voltaire argued that believing in one God is more rational and more natural than believing in many gods.⁶⁷ At least that is what Voltaire said in public, even though he actually softened his own definition. Baruch Spinoza also came to a similar understanding in his later years. After being expelled from the Jewish synagogue and labeled an atheist, he developed ideas that diverged significantly from conventional Judaism and were undoubtedly influenced by thinkers and scientists such as Descartes. Yet Spinoza's conception of God actually began with his divergence from Descartes' arguments. Like most philosophers, he viewed revealed religion as inferior to scientific knowledge. Religion had become a collection of fleeting beliefs laden with prejudice, a web of meaningless mysteries.

Deism leaves no room for the disciplines of mysticism and imaginative mythology. Deism turns away from revelatory myths and traditional mysteries such as the Trinity, which have long shackled humanity in superstition. Instead, Deism professes allegiance to an impersonal "Deus" whom humans can discover through their own efforts.

b) Pantheism

As far as the author can determine, the term "pantheism" was first used by John Toland.⁶⁶ However, the concept itself had been articulated long ago by the ancient Greek philosophers. Pantheism holds that God is nature itself. His activities operate according to the laws of nature. All debates regarding the origin of the universe presuppose that the universe has an origin. Most ancient cultures tended toward a view of time in which the world had no beginning, but instead experienced an endless cycle of repetition. Primitive tribes consistently lived in close harmony with nature, relying on the rhythms of the seasons and other natural cycles for their survival. This line of thought returns to ontological evidence regarding the existence of God. The most fundamental idea of God is that of a perfect being that does not give rise to contradictions within itself. Humanity's scientific understanding of nature shows us that nature is governed by eternal and unchanging laws. For the philosopher Spinoza, God is the principle of those laws, the sum of all existing eternal laws.

Although it seems so straightforward, this doctrine has inspired so many philosophers—even with extraordinary mystical awe. As the aggregate of all existing laws, God is the highest perfection that unites everything into unity and harmony (pantein). Spinoza himself used the word "God" solely for historical reasons. He agreed with the atheists who claimed that reality cannot be divided into two parts: God and the non-God part. If God cannot be separated from everything else, it is impossible for Him

⁶⁶ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, 461.

⁶⁷ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, 462

to exist in the ordinary sense.⁶⁸ What Spinoza says is exactly the same as what Wittgenstein later said, meaning that there is no God corresponding to the meaning we usually attach to the word.⁶⁹

Divinity in Language

Most doctrinal and theological disputes ultimately boil down to a matter of language; that is roughly what Al-Jabiri conveys. Furthermore, if we examine what contemporary studies affirm, we can find that languages are quite limiting, or at the very least, play a fundamental role in constraining human perspectives and conceptions, both generally and specifically.⁷⁰

There are two approaches that can be taken in discussions regarding God. First, He can be approached as something to be argued about, in which case the formal object is everything related to theism, atheism, non-theism, deism, and agnosticism. The second approach involves positioning God as something to be sacrificed for, which in this context pertains to all social activities in community life, whether in the form of commitment, dedication, or involvement. Another point to consider when humans strive to understand God is that humans must recognize the limitations of their own conceptions of God, as no one can truly know God except God Himself.⁷¹

Thus, we can identify two understandings: God as conceived by humans and God who is far beyond human conception. According to Hasan Hanafi, when examining an issue or problem, one must at least consider three methodologies: First, relying on Western tradition, specifically its scientific methods, particularly in the fields of hermeneutics or semiotics. This naturally pertains to language. Second, relying on the classical tradition. However, the weakness of this method is that we tend to repeat what the *qudama* have said without offering a new interpretation. Third, relying on pure rational logic and the analysis of experience.⁷²

A German thinker, Herder (1773–1803), initiated a shift in focus from scientific activities toward efforts to establish the relationship between language, thought, and the boundaries of language.⁷³ That is why one of the essential tools for analyzing a concept or thought is the very foundation of thought itself: language. For, of course, the characteristics of language depend on the characteristics of its speakers, and the characteristics of the speakers also depend on the culture in which they are situated. Thus, language sets boundaries—for all human knowledge,⁷⁴ including knowledge of God.

The philosopher of language, Jacques Derrida, employs a specific methodology in his deconstruction to analyze the concept of divinity. For now, let us set aside the distinctions between Western and Eastern theology; first, we will focus on how the term “divinity” and the concept behind it influence our perspective.

⁶⁸ Paul Davies, *The Mind of God*, 40.

⁶⁹ Win Ushuluddin, Ludwig Wittgenstein, 28

⁷⁰ Muhammad Abed Al-Jabiri, *Takwin al-‘Aql al-‘Arabi* (Formulation of Arab Reason: A Critique of Tradition and Religious Discourse), trans. Imam Khoiri (1st ed.; Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD, 2014), 212.

⁷¹ Win Ushuluddin Bernadien, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Thoughts on Divinity and Their Implications for Religious Life in the Modern Era*, (1st ed.; Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2004), 2

⁷² Hasan Hanafi, *Studies in Philosophy 2: A Reading of the Modern Western Tradition*. Trans. Miftah Faqih (1st ed.; Yogyakarta: LkiS, 2015), 373.

⁷³ Muhammad Abed Al-Jabiri, *The Formation of the Arab Mind*, 112.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 113

Derrida's deconstruction possesses a "theological" dimension. Regarding divinity, Derrida assesses that it constitutes an impossibility, in the sense that we will never truly comprehend God. Because truth in the text is never present and continually postpones the possibility of attaining it.⁷⁵ Furthermore, the "theological" dimension in deconstruction points more to the impossibility of speaking about God.⁷⁶ The philosopher and Muslim Sufi, al-Ghazali, held a similar view that perhaps the most accurate statement we can make about God is that He cannot be understood, for He is indeed far beyond the reach of our intellect.⁷⁷ For Derrida, a text (about God) cannot always be grasped by the interpreter in its entirety due to epistemological limits, because in reality, people always speak as they think, and think as they speak.⁷⁸

Within the framework of the socialization of thought, language plays a primary role when one engages in verification, which is a scientific requirement.⁷⁹ Thus, the author believes that Western conceptions of God have resolved this issue; however, on the other hand, the Western conception of God cannot imbue it with meaning in the same way that Eastern conceptions generally do. The role of language is so strategic and central that Ernest Cassirer viewed humans as "animal symbolicum."⁸⁰

The project of rational criticism once proposed by Al-Jabiri and Muhammad Arkoun, although it explicitly does not address divinity, can still be drawn into the realm of eschatology, such as God. As we have seen previously, the context or concept of divinity in human history tends to be reduced to a human-centered perspective and confined within existing texts and traditions. This is evidenced by the many differing conceptions of "God" across cultures worldwide, both in literal and general terms. The critical philosophy of reason, whether from Al-Jabiri or Arkoun, shares the same foundation: to break free from the shackles of tradition and text.⁸¹

Harari explains that humans created language to interpret existing reality, and then combined it with their fiction. For example, in the hunter-gatherer era, humans understood gods, spirits, or deities as merely one of many types of beings inhabiting the earth, and they realized they were not the only ones. Humans viewed nature as another force that provided them with shelter and food, including animals and plants. When animism was still the dominant belief, human norms and values had to take into account the fate and interests of various other creatures because they believed the gods were inseparable from nature⁸² —the fact that humans hunt sheep does not make sheep inferior to humans, just as the fact that tigers hunt humans does not make humans inferior to tigers. Therefore, the first religious effect is to transform plants and animals

⁷⁵ Choiron Hamzah, *The Foundations of Epistemology of Divinity (A Comparative Study) Between Jacques Derrida and Muhammad Iqbal* (Thesis submitted to the State Islamic Institute Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Faculty of Ushuluddin in 2011), 35.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 34

⁷⁷ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (trans. Zaimul Am; 5th ed.; Bandung: Mizan, 2012), 295.

⁷⁸ Muhammad Abed Al-Jabiri, *The Formation of the Arab Mind*, 113.

⁷⁹ Win Ushuluddin Bernadien, Ludwig Wittgenstein, 4.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Rumadi, "Critique of Reason: A New Direction in Islamic Studies," *Tashwirul Afkar*, no. 10 (2001), 63.

⁸² Karen Armstrong, *Fields of Blood: Religions and the History of Violence* (*Fields of Blood: Unraveling the History of the Relationship Between Religion and Violence*), trans. Yuliani Liputo (1st ed.; Bandung: Mizan, 2016), 43

into equal spiritual partners.⁸³ It is no wonder, then, that many ancient human discoveries sought to convey this relationship through descriptive/symbolic representations of animals and plants. This is what is referred to as language, which limits our ability to speak and also restricts our capacity to think.⁸⁴

On the other hand, in Eastern traditions, there remains a certain fear: when we treat God as an object of objective study, it is often underpinned by reverence and a sense of “hesitation.” This makes Eastern traditions more closed-off when faced with new ideas about divinity, as they tend to revert everything to what is written (revelatory texts).⁸⁵ In contrast, the West is gradually attempting to reconstruct its traditional concepts of God. While Eastern traditions generally glorify concepts of divinity based on final sacred texts, the West tends to view concepts of divinity as historical ideas. Therefore, in the general Western philosophical perspective, “God” must be willing to be treated in an “unconventional” manner and also be subject to criticism.⁸⁶

Thus, however, we must acknowledge that the classical traditions largely upheld by Eastern ideas are nothing more than the mental constructs of past generations⁸⁷ — mere products of their interaction with the environment, particularly the socio-cultural context—and furthermore—the manifestation of that external philosophy does not apply to the reality of the divine.⁸⁸ Thus, it is not difficult for us to understand how the environment and language play a crucial role in shaping thought.⁸⁹ Therefore, it is no surprise that in every era where such a tradition thrives, it always possesses its own ideas or concepts regarding “God” or that absolute reality.

At this point, we can understand that language is essential to the ideas within a tradition. The key to human understanding of a concept lies in how a person expresses and describes a thing or reality using language. Furthermore, by considering the traditional context in which a concept arises, we can see that history is a determining factor for that concept. Then the question arises: Is our behavior a reflection of our conception of divinity, or is it our conception of divinity that determines our behavior?

This question draws us back to the debate between the two major schools of thought in philosophy: empiricism and rationalism. For followers of rationalism, such as Descartes, who believed in innate ideas, they tend to view the concept of divinity as influencing our behavior. Because it exists first and is an innate idea.⁹⁰ This understanding was widely used by scholastic philosophers. One of the proponents of this rationalist theory was Hegel. He held the view that ideas or concepts greatly influence physical activities or events. Thus, it can be said that Hegel regarded our world as one constructed from human mental faculties and ideas.

⁸³ Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind), trans. Damarling Tyas Wulandari Palar (11th ed.; Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2019), 250

⁸⁴ Muhammad Abed Al-Jabiri, *The Formation of the Arab Mind*, 114.

⁸⁵ Rumadi, “Critique of Reason: A New Direction for Islamic Studies,” 63.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*,

⁸⁷ Hasan Hanafi, *Studies in Philosophy 1: A Reading of the Contemporary Islamic Tradition*. Trans. Miftah Faqih (1st ed.; Yogyakarta: LkiS, 2015), 17

⁸⁸ Choiron Hamzah, *The Foundations of Epistemology of Divinity (A Comparative Study) Between Jacques Derrida and Muhammad Iqbal*, 82

⁸⁹ Muhammad Abed Al-Jabiri, *The Formation of the Arab Mind*, 24

⁹⁰ Ayatullah Muhammad Baqr Shadr, *Our Philosophy (Filsafatuna: Matter, Philosophy, and God in Western Philosophy and Islamic Rationalism)*, trans. Ariif Maulawi (1st ed.; Yogyakarta: RausyanFikr Institute, 2013), 7

Hegel's idea resembles what Nietzsche referred to as the "will to believe." This approach, rather than leading to rational argumentation as the name implies (in the sense of examining the content of thought), instead seeks to understand why such ideas are believed?⁹¹ Because, as previously explained, our concept of divinity tends to be relative, dependent on various underlying factors, including socio-cultural ones.

Immanuel Kant himself, although he did not reject the idea of a monotheistic God, once argued that traditional arguments—such as those typically made by religious philosophers regarding the existence of God—are unhelpful because our minds are only capable of understanding things that exist within space and time, and we lack the capacity to think about reality beyond these categories.⁹²

Does this mean, then, that the empiricist view is correct? Literally speaking, not always. Because from an ontological perspective, rationalism is superior to empiricism as it seeks to uncover absolute reality without objective bias. Meanwhile, empiricism has methodological advantages. Because, in reality, methodologically speaking, God cannot be known.⁹³ So it is reality that determines the conception of Him, rather than God Himself. It is this conception that then translates into action.⁹⁴

Empiricism, too, cannot escape Kant's criticism. Just as he once stated that God cannot be known, he also harbored skepticism toward empiricism. Drawing somewhat on Hegel's concept of the Idea, Kant held that objective reality is not merely what our senses perceive, but also what our understanding grasps. For it is impossible to comprehend reality without a specific perspective shaped by meaning and language.

In this regard, Kant viewed both rationalism and empiricism as confined within the realm of "skepticism" and subjectification. The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) also had his own perspective on examining language as a tool for theological analysis. He argued that the reality of God is indescribable. The efforts made—particularly religious and scientific dogmas—do not seek to explain God but rather turn these dogmas into new idols.⁹⁵

With language as a tool for thinking, humans can create a cultural order that encompasses language, myth, religion, art, and science. From this perspective, humans cannot be understood solely through their functional behavior. Language distinguishes humans from other creatures, and in examining and experiencing various religious issues, language is also the most fundamental issue.

DIVINITY IN GENDER COSMOLOGY

The term "gender" originates from the English word meaning "sex." However, it is important to distinguish between "sex" (which refers to biological function—i.e., biological sex) and whether, anatomically, one is male or female.⁹⁶

Culture and tradition are crucial and highly influential aspects of human life. When humans fulfill their roles, they cannot be separated from the social realities surrounding them.⁹⁷ Society's perceptions of gender also stem largely from religious traditions. Social role inequalities based on gender are often viewed as a divine creation

⁹¹ A. Setyo Wibowo, *The Style of Nietzsche's Philosophy*, (Yogyakarta: PT. Kanisius, 2017), 214.

⁹² Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, 468.

⁹³ Ivan J. Weismann, "Plato's Philosophy of God," n.d., 12.

⁹⁴ Muliadi, "The Relationship Between God and Humans," *Religious: A Scientific and Cross-Cultural Journal* 1 (2017): 3

⁹⁵ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, 522.

⁹⁶ 96 Sabhamis, "A Feminist Approach to the Interpretation of the Qur'an and the Bible." *Jurnal Al-Ta'lim*, Vol. 1 No. 3, October (2012): 2.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1

(originating from God). This is further supported by justifications from Eastern religions (Abrahamic Religions).⁹⁸

In reality, we generally categorize our species using the terms “male” and “female.” And from a religious perspective, this is viewed as nothing more than a trivial difference. However, this religious dogma is not truly practiced because we still tend to harbor sentiments regarding these differences. Harari, in his book **Sapiens**, argues that while it is biologically accurate to use the terms “male” and “female,” these are not the same as “man” and “woman.” Since these two terms are social categories—⁹⁹ —they are not natural, or in religious terms: they are not a divine creation.

These categorizing terms, of course, bring many problems. Cultural myths assign men or women to certain roles and certain traits; this is what we then refer to as masculinity and femininity. For example, men must be involved in politics or perform military service. Meanwhile, women are expected to simply stay at home, care for the children, look after their husbands, and, of course, be obedient to their husbands.

Therefore, myths—not biology (let alone divine decree)—determine roles and rights; the reality is that the meanings of “masculinity” and “femininity” vary greatly from society to society,¹⁰⁰ depending on where that society is located. However, to reduce confusion, scholars typically distinguish between “sex,” which is a biological category, and “gender,” which is a cultural category. What we know as “masculine” and “feminine” is intersubjective and undergoes constant change.¹⁰¹ Of course, we are fully aware that the categories of women in both Western and Eastern contexts differ. And the categories of feminine women in the 17th century versus the 21st century in the East also differ. According to Kamla Bhasin in **Understanding Gender** and Elaine Showalter, gender refers to all culturally constructed attributes and behaviors—and is fluid.¹⁰² Thus, according to them, gender is not innate.

However, what distinguishes them is—patriarchal culture. Even today, the patriarchal culture that has long been established leaves little room for balance, which is not limited to gender issues within the scope of men and women alone, but also gender relations concerning natural characteristics (ecology) or even theology. Various values are directed and used to maintain the status quo of gender relations deeply rooted in society.¹⁰³

A look back at our history reveals that, when our society lived by hunting and gathering, the status between men and women was equal. If men could hunt, of course women could do so as well. In fact, during that time, many male hunter-gatherers performed domestic tasks, such as caring for children, rather than women. However, this changed when humans began to practice agriculture.

To understand the nature, history, and psychology of humanity, we must delve into the minds of our ancestors, for history is a record of life and a mirror of spirituality. This is affirmed by the philosophy of human civilization.¹⁰⁴ The field of evolutionary psychology, which is currently flourishing, argues that many of our social and

⁹⁸ Tri Astutik Haryati, “The Feminist Dimension of God: A New Paradigm for Gender Equality,” *ibid.*, 2, n.d., 2.

⁹⁹ Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens*, 177

¹⁰⁰ Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens*, 179

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Sabhamis, “*A Feminist Approach to the Interpretation of the Qur’an and the Bible*,” 226

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 224

¹⁰⁴ Hassan Hanafi, *Studies in Philosophy 1: A Reading of Contemporary Islamic Tradition*. Trans. Miftah Faqih (1st ed.; Yogyakarta; LkiS, 2015), 177.

psychological traits were shaped during the agricultural era. The transition from the hunter-gatherer era to the agricultural era began around 9500–8500 BCE; scholars believe that agriculture spread from a single point of origin in the Middle East and then spread to all corners of the world.¹⁰⁵

Life in the agricultural era subsequently became a tradition. Most historians agree that the agricultural era offered a life vastly different from that of the hunter-gatherer world. Women, who had previously held an equal status, were subsequently confined to domestic tasks such as caring for children, cooking, and so on. This marked the beginning of humanity's recognition of feminine traits.

The shift in women's roles marked the beginning of male dominance. However, this does not mean women's roles became insignificant. It is important to note that women's roles in domestic work would shape a new perspective on how people at that time viewed reality, including their thoughts on theological matters. Although this may sound taboo, history has shown that the concept of divine theology is a purely cultural and political endeavor, not sacred knowledge,¹⁰⁶ leading each region to determine its own choices and alternative ideas,¹⁰⁷ so it is natural that each religion has its own perspective on God because every religion has its own theology.¹⁰⁸

As previously explained, there is a fundamental difference between sex and gender (Harari, 2019); sex pertains to biology, while gender pertains to tradition or culture. In the discourse on divinity, the concept of gender is no longer uncommon. Gender in divinity can be viewed literally or as an allegorical aspect of God. In polytheistic religions, we know that the gods appear to have literal genders.¹⁰⁹

In the agricultural era, nature was a vital pillar of human survival. And for people back then, it was essential to respect what nature had provided. Nature was like a woman who sheltered, nurtured, and cared for her children. She possessed a loving nature. Thus, it is no wonder that in those days we find many stories or myths concerning these "feminine" traits or womanhood itself. Generally, they referred to her as the goddess of fertility or Mother Earth. For example, in Egypt, we know of Isis, the most important figure in Egyptian history, who provided them with fertile fields, brought rain, and kept the rivers flowing to sustain their lives. This idea was common at the time; even the famous Sufi, Jalaluddin Rumi, once stated that the nature of the Mother is present everywhere: generally, everything in the cosmos is like a mother (feminine).¹¹⁰ That is quite rational, given that the relationship between reason and nature is a direct one. Thus, nature and its existence are inseparable from reason and God.¹¹¹ The first humans were worshippers of the forces of nature.¹¹²

However, as society's mindset evolved, culture and traditions also developed through myths or stories that were, to a certain extent, misogynistic.¹¹³ Over time, these

¹⁰⁵ Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens*, 94.

¹⁰⁶ Hassan Hanafi, *Philosophical Studies 1: A Reading of Contemporary Islamic Tradition*. Trans. Miftah Faqih (1st ed.; Yogyakarta; LkiS, 2015), 20.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Franz Magnis-Suseno, *Reasoning About God* (1st ed.; Yogyakarta; Kanisius, 2015), 21.

¹⁰⁹ "Gender of God," *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*. https://id.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jenis_Kelamin_Tuhan (August 10, 2020)

¹¹⁰ Sachiko Muratha, *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relations in Islamic Thought*, trans. Rahmani Astuti and M.S. Nasrullah (7th ed.; Bandung: Mizan, 1999). 16.

¹¹¹ Muhammad Abed Al-Jabiri, *The Formation of the Arab Mind*, 46.

¹¹² Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, 508.

¹¹³ Sabhamis, "A Feminist Approach to the Interpretation of the Qur'an and the Bible," 225

feminine deities were marginalized and replaced by gods deemed more powerful. Of course, newly created gods with more “masculine” traits also emerged to replace Mother Earth; we are familiar with some of these gods, such as Zeus, Yahweh, and so on. In fact, what we later came to call God’s messengers (prophets), saints, and sages were mostly men. Does that mean women are unfit to hold such roles? Can women not be saints and sages just like men? Of course, this remains a major question in history.

The 15th and 16th centuries were the most decisive centuries for all religious communities. This period was the most crucial, particularly for Western Christianity, which not only succeeded in catching up. This period was a time of transition and was therefore marked by anxiety and various achievements. This is clearly evident in the Western conception of God during that period. Amid their secular successes, Westerners increasingly focused on faith (rather than religion) more than in previous eras. Many laypeople were dissatisfied with the form of Eastern religion in the Middle Ages, which could no longer meet their needs in the new world.¹¹⁴ The Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) were merely projections that had created a god¹¹⁵ representing the selfishness of their priests and clergy. For no one can see through God’s eyes, except His own.¹¹⁶

This is evidenced by the fact that most of our history is a history of war and violence,¹¹⁷ while the West is a newcomer and ultimately also offers us a product of thought that, if one may consider it, can serve as a second option—especially as the seeds of feminism began to spread in the 18th century and reached their peak in the 20th century. From here, it is not only misogynistic interpretations of women that are dismantled, but also issues of faith. Thus, they must adapt to the Western conception of religion.¹¹⁸ However, this is not the place to discuss feminist critiques of society and religion, as the author does not directly address these issues.

Sachiko Muratha notes that, fundamentally, feminist criticism of religion is primarily moral in nature.¹¹⁹ Since belief in God serves as a guiding principle in life.¹²⁰ Morals change with the times and vary by place; thus, they demand reform, whether explicitly or implicitly.

Of course, the renewal they desire is one based on modern Western standards. This renewal stems from the same lineage as Western imperialism, which originally emerged in the East in the form of Christian missionary activities. Salvation no longer depends on religion—whether Christian, Islamic, or Jewish—but is instead found in science and progress.¹²¹ This is not surprising; Franz Magnis holds the view that a paradigm shift is a step toward intellectual maturity.¹²² Therefore, this is—extremely important.

Many other reformers with a Western mindset share a similar goal of doing good for others, even if those others are unaware that they are receiving such benefits; that the world’s balance is not found in closed, rigid beliefs driven by a masculine

¹¹⁴ Karen Armstrong, **Fields of Blood: Religions and the History of Violence** (trans. Yuliani Liputo; 1st ed.; Bandung: Mizan, 2016), 387

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, *A History of God*, 508.

¹¹⁶ Franz Magnis-Suseno, *Reasoning God*, 59.

¹¹⁷ *Fields of Blood*, 59.

¹¹⁸ Karen Armstrong, **Fields of Blood**, 381.

¹¹⁹ Sachiko Muratha, *The Tao of Islam*, 24

¹²⁰ A. Setyo Wibowo, *The Style of Nietzsche’s Philosophy*, 368

¹²¹ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, 193

¹²² Franz Magnis-Suseno, *Reasoning About God*, 59

interpretation. Although the Western approach also includes religious elements, it is not intended to be a religion. In **The System of Nature or Laws of the Moral and Physical World**, Holbach (1724–89) frequently criticized Eastern (Abrahamic) religious ideas as a source of spiritual aridity.¹²³

Looking back at gender; the attributes of masculinity or perspectives associated with men. Characteristics inherent to the term “masculine” include courage, independence, assertiveness, and selfishness. However, these characteristics vary depending on social and cultural factors.¹²⁴ This concept has been deeply ingrained in humanity even to this day, influencing many aspects including social, cultural, and religious spheres. Ancient literature dating back to around 3000 BCE mentions that masculinity has long been implied in the myths of gods and heroes.¹²⁵ Throughout history, humans have adhered to strict cultural standards. Kate Cooper wrote about an ancient concept of femininity: “A woman’s character is often judged by a man’s character.”¹²⁶ This stems from the conception or understanding of a personal God. According to Freud, a personal God is nothing more than a father figure who is both revered and feared. God is merely a projection of such desires and fears.¹²⁷ Freud’s idea is widely supported by other great Western philosophers, such as Nietzsche, Feuerbach, Kierkegaard, Sartre, and so on. The Baron of Holbach also attempted to trace the history of divinity—that the stain began to appear when humans started to personify things, such as the sun, the wind, and the sea, to create gods in their own likeness, and then uniting them into one great God, who is nothing but a collection of projections and contradictions.¹²⁸

In the Middle Ages, neither Islam nor Christianity differed significantly. The desire to dominate, intimidate, and assert superiority remained hallmarks of the Abrahamic religions. However, during this era, masculinity began to take the form of dogma and was reinforced by religious arguments. This is precisely what we continue to uphold to this day. From a values perspective, there is likely nothing inherently wrong with the religious status quo; the problem arises when a religious interpretation or representation is drawn from an unbalanced viewpoint. When religious leaders interpret and present a specific moral value—such as—it is possible for that value to be misinterpreted and misused.¹²⁹

It must be emphasized that religious values are not inherently bad from a Western perspective. Responding to Freud, psychologist Alfred Adler (1870–1937)—while agreeing with Freud’s view that the religious God is nothing more than a projection of desires and fears—maintained that religion remains essential for humanity; religion is an effective symbol of goodness. Carl Jung (1875–1961) agreed with this view, although Jung’s conception of God leaned more toward the mystical, with a psychological orientation.¹³⁰ Thus, for Western philosophers, the God we know is a God of conception and construction. There is no worship of Him, except on the basis of good deeds.

¹²³ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, 508.

¹²⁴ Sabhamis, “A Feminist Approach to the Interpretation of the Qur’an and the Bible,” 226

¹²⁵ Jonathan Black, *The Secret History of the World*, trans. Isma B. Soekato and Adi Toha (11th ed.; South Tangerang: PT. Pustaka Alvabet, 2017), 129

¹²⁶ Sachiko Muratha, *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought*, 23

¹²⁷ *A History of God*, 526

¹²⁸ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, 508

¹²⁹ A. Setyo Wibowo, *The Style of Nietzsche’s Philosophy*, 230

¹³⁰ *A History of God*, 527

In her address at the International Congress of the History of Religions in Rome in August 1990, Annemarie Schimel proposed a re-reading of religious texts that remain skewed, particularly regarding gender—the traditional Western perspective on analyzing women’s roles is considered significant. However, other interpretations, such as the “feminine spiritual role” in the history of religion, have also been discussed by Professor Friedrich Heiler. Heiler often quotes with a certain sadness the words of Moriz Winternitz: “Women have always been friends of religion, but religion has generally not been a friend to women.”¹³¹

Yet today, despite a lack of significant support from religious communities, many women have entered the masculine sphere and are actively participating alongside men. Behind this success, many argue that women have not only entered the masculine sphere but have also adopted the very masculine values they once criticized.¹³²

The feminist paradigm of the 1980s has shifted, now celebrating the superiority of feminine qualities and emphasizing the natural differences between men and women; that, at their core, men and women are different. Whereas feminine qualities were once considered inferior, they are now even regarded as superior. Georg Wilhelm Hegel (1770–1831) held the view that the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) are responsible for a primitive conception of God that has sparked many grave errors. According to Hegel, the God of these religions is a tyrannical god¹³³ who prioritizes feminine traits. Thus, the time has come to cast aside this barbaric god and develop a more enlightened view of the human condition. In this way, as we know, Hegel has reaffirmed the ancient monotheistic view—that God is not separate from worldly reality, but is intimately bound to humanity. Then what kind of human being is worthy of reflecting (becoming the Tajalli) of God? Most feminist theologians would agree: Ibn Arabi.¹³⁴ Because he symbolizes the separation of Eastern and Western perspectives.¹³⁵

Ibn Arabi seems to have paid special attention to this idea. Like Sachiko Muratha, he dedicates a specific section to examining this topic. In the present day, many might be disappointed if a prominent theologian were to state that God leans toward feminine attributes. As previously mentioned, God cannot be perceived in His own self or essence because God’s essence lies beyond our reality. However, according to Ibn Arabi, God can be witnessed when He reveals Himself (Tajalli). Naturally, His way of revealing Himself is through everything He has created. In his view, the most appropriate way to reveal God is through the very being of a woman. In short, Ibn Arabi believes that witnessing God in the form of a woman is the most perfect form of witnessing.¹³⁶

The essence of his explanation is that by witnessing God in a woman, a man sees Him as both yang and yin, as encompassing both majesty and beauty, the distant and the near, the left hand and the right hand.¹³⁷ The strong emphasis on masculine superiority over the feminine has long created the impression that women are inferior to men, that

¹³¹ Sachiko Muratha, **The Tao of Islam**, 15.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 8

¹³³ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, 519–520

¹³⁴ Tri Astutik Haryati, “The Feminist Dimension of God: A New Paradigm for Gender Equality,” *op. cit.*, 6

¹³⁵ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, 355

¹³⁶ Sachiko Muratha, *The Tao of Islam*, 8. What needs to be emphasized in this context is that Ibn ‘Arabi stated this not as a rational thinker, but as a mystic

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

an authoritarian state (as in the ideas of monarchy and Hume) is better than a democratic one, and so on.¹³⁸

Recently, feminist theory has begun to address spiritual aspects, particularly within the eco-feminist movement. Divinity is now interpreted through a gender lens to foster a more equitable interpretation of sacred texts, free from the skewed masculine biases that have historically dominated. Eco-feminists refer to nature as Mother Nature; unlike existentialist philosophy, eco-feminists believe that humans possess an eternal essence, namely consciousness. This consciousness is an integral part of nature, where the essence of the whole is one (pantheism); in the tradition of Lao-Tzu (570–470 BCE), this is referred to as the Tao.¹³⁹

However, modern civilization is said to have separated human consciousness from nature, causing everything to become fragmented, separated, and atomized. Humans view other humans as competing egos. Humans and nature have become so isolated—that is, as subject and object. Thus, the domination and exploitation of nature by humans occurs.¹⁴⁰ According to eco-feminism, the differentiation and fragmentation of everything—whether within the human being (spirit and body), between humans, or between humans and nature—is due to humanity’s excessive veneration of “The Father God” and insufficient veneration of “The Mother God.” Consequently, humans identify themselves with The Father God as powerful, active, separate, independent, distant, and dominant. Not only that, but the perspective of a personal and masculine God also leads to a haphazard interpretation of God’s activities, which are later perceived as judgmental and overly emotional.¹⁴¹

In his study of Taoist philosophy, Toshihiko Izutsu found that Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu’s conception of the Divine relates to the feminine aspect of natural reality. Lao Tzu described the primordial reality of nature through the image of a woman, whom he called a “shaman.”¹⁴² As in Ibn Arabi’s earlier depiction, the shaman is also portrayed as a woman holding a jade stone (the source of origin) in her right and left hands.¹⁴³ And elsewhere in his book, surprisingly, he interprets the Tao—meaning “the Way”—as a metaphor for the concepts of “the infinite,” “the highest good,” and “the spirit of the eternal valley,” all of which point to feminine qualities. Izutsu quotes a poem by Lao Tzu:

For example, “The Way” is the Mother of ten thousand things. The Nameless is the beginning of Heaven and Earth. All things under heaven have an origin that must be regarded as the Mother of the universe.¹⁴⁴

This poem by Lao Tzu seems to describe a definition similar to the ecofeminist concept of “Mother Earth.” Yet again, this is not a new idea or perhaps something surprising, because as previously discussed, the concept of divinity within gender cosmology—and particularly within the perspective of feminine qualities—was very

¹³⁸ Tri Astutik Haryati, “The Feminist Dimension of God: A New Paradigm for Gender Equality,” op. cit., 6.

,” n.d., 6

¹³⁹ Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (Taoism: The Philosophical Concepts of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, and Their Comparison with the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabi), trans. Musa Kazhim and Arif Mulyadi (1st ed.; Jakarta: PT Mizan Publika, 2015), 10.

¹⁴⁰ 140 Sachiko Muratha, *The Tao of Islam*, 9

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, 23–24

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

common in the ancient world. Worship of the Feminine Divine, according to this philosophy, aims to realize the origin of all existence—that is, Mother Earth or Mother Nature. This worship is intended to help humans identify with qualities such as closeness, love, receptivity, nurturing, passivity, surrender, and all other feminine qualities. In his poem, Lao Tzu writes:

Humans, at birth, are soft and weak (natural feminine qualities). However, at death, they become hard and rigid (natural masculine qualities)—hardness and rigidity are companions of death, while softness and weakness are companions of life.¹⁴⁵

Most Taoist symbols represent feminine qualities (flexibility, softness, and humility). These feminine qualities are intended to help humans realize that the elements within the human self, between humans, the earth, the sky, and the entire cosmos are, at their essence, one—originating from the Mother God.¹⁴⁶ This indicates that the recent development of feminist theory in the West is also attempting to return to ancient cosmological ideas and has touched upon spiritual aspects.

This concept of the interconnectedness of nature and God was then further developed during the Enlightenment era. However, it was no longer limited to mystical ideas as practiced by Ibn Arabi and Lao Tzu, but had come to encompass rational boundaries. In addition to the idea of the interconnectedness of nature and God, another concept born out of skepticism toward orthodox traditions began to emerge. This concept later became known as Deism.

The religious concept of divinity seemed too difficult and, it appeared, too far-fetched to be understood. As Wittgenstein thought, the idea could not be understood literally. After the Enlightenment, the West began to find itself in a world of skepticism; although they remained faithful to God, it was in a different sense than before. Deism was born from this dilemma.

A religion that does not tolerate mysticism and imaginative mythology while turning away from revelatory myths.¹⁴⁷ However, this does not mean that Enlightenment philosophy rejects God. What they rejected was the orthodox or religious conception of God as something cruel, sadistic, and threatening humanity with the fires of hell. What they rejected were the mysterious doctrines that defied reason. Yet, their belief in God remained the same.¹⁴⁸ Thus, the God of Deism exists within the boundaries of ambiguity.

Baruch Spinoza, as a major figure of the Rationalist school, also took part in the rejection of these orthodox doctrines, yet his ideas differ fundamentally from Deism. In the following millennium, these ideas became the greatest inspiration for contemporary scholars and scientists up to the present day. Like Descartes, Spinoza returned to the ontological proof of God's existence. Starting from his pantheistic awareness, which states that—Deus in Natura¹⁴⁹—showing us that nature is governed by eternal and unchanging laws. For Spinoza, God is the principle of these laws, the synthesis of all existing eternal laws.¹⁵⁰ Unlike Deist thinkers, Spinoza returned to ancient philosophical ideas (such as those of Lao Tzu and Plotinus) regarding emanation. Since God is

¹⁴⁵ Toshihiko Izutsu, **Sufism and Taoism**, 202.

¹⁴⁶ Sachiko Muratha, **The Tao of Islam**, 9

¹⁴⁷ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, 461

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Rahmad Saluhuddin, "Geometric Ethics in Islam: A Comparative Study between Spinoza's Deus ex Natura and Ibn al-'Arabi's Wahdat al-Wujud in Philosophical Mysticism," unpublished, 2.

¹⁵⁰ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, 464

inherent and immanent in everything—both material and spiritual—God can be defined as the law governing all existing things.¹⁵¹ If Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu called it the Tao (The Way), then Spinoza called it the law of nature (Deus in Natura). Spinoza's idea brings the theology of God into alignment with science.

Later, whether directly or indirectly, scientists came to agree with this. Doctrinally, some “conceptions” of God may conflict with science, yet Spinoza's vision—which still places God at the core of reality—remains valued within the scientific spirit.

On January 3, 2013, a channel dedicated to scientific inquiry called Big Think conducted an exclusive interview on the theme “Is God a Mathematician?”¹⁵² with a renowned author and astrophysicist named Michio Kaku. He explained that most scientists believe in this somewhat embarrassing fact—that God is a mathematical law or perhaps a rhythm of nature. According to Kaku, this is because nature is governed and moves according to a “law” that is supremely intelligent. The fact that an object falls downward and not upward (gravity) already demonstrates that all events in nature are governed by a certain mysterious law. So it is possible that God is the embodiment of that law itself. This is a scientific and rational concept that science can understand. This view appears not too different from Spinoza's. Through Spinoza, for the first time, theology and science could collaborate.

The connection between nature and God, whether implicit or explicit, has been a subject of debate for centuries. This view may be unsettling for monotheistic concepts that hold that nature and God are separate. Yet, in reality, nature will always embody harmony, care, gentleness, and sustenance through its laws. In feminist theology, this is referred to as:

“Mother Earth.” If one knows “the Mother,” one must know “her child.” If, after knowing “the child,” one relies on “the mother,” then one will be spared from error, even until the end of one's life.¹⁵³

CONCLUSION

Thus, God is indeed difficult—or even impossible—to describe, define, visualize, and represent. Any rigid attempt to describe, define, visualize, and represent God will end in exclusive worship. Likewise, any religious doctrine that attempts to visualize God will, sooner or later, be abandoned; such an endeavor will degenerate into nothing more than a mythological system, the effect of which will be the loss of the meaning of life for the believers in question.

Therefore, based on what has been presented above, I can conclude several points, namely:

1. Eastern Divinity is a view of divinity that existed both before and after the emergence of monotheism, characterized by anthropocentrism (*tasybih*)—a conception of divinity that tends to be masculine in nature—due to theological historical reasons that were largely dominated by the “fathers” (men). Meanwhile, Western Divinity is a view of divinity that rejects the anthropocentric nature of divinity as portrayed by the church, patriarchs, or religious figures, especially the inclusion of masculine traits deemed aggressive that do not depict a Merciful and Compassionate Ruler. The theological

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² This interview can be viewed at <https://bigthink.com/videos/dr-michio-kaku-math-is-the-mind-of-god>

¹⁵³ Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, 158

foundation of Western Divinity refers to pantheism. Spinoza and eco-feminist ideas view nature as tending toward maternal or feminine qualities: protective, nurturing, and beautiful.

2. From the perspective of the philosophy of language and gender cosmology, the reason why Eastern divinity tends to be anthropocentric in its theology is due to the strong influence of its culture. Historically, the East was the center of civilization in the past, where traditions and culture flourished. Patriarchal ideas (those of fathers/men) in the old social order gradually began to infiltrate theological aspects, which ultimately not only depicted God as resembling humans but also portrayed God as embodying masculine or male characteristics.

Meanwhile, Western theology emerged from the disillusionment of scientists and philosophers with church or religious doctrines, which, instead of portraying the teachings of love as touted, actually depicted oppressive and restrictive teachings. For some philosophers, such as Spinoza, the source of dogma that distorts the meaning of love stems from a misguided conception of divinity. According to him, God should not be viewed as an entity separate from the natural world, but rather as an entity one with the natural world itself. This is the origin of Pantheistic theology. It was from Spinoza's Pantheism that the pioneers of eco-feminist theology later conceived of a Feminine Divinity.

3. For Western divinity, the concept of "God" is always linear; however, it is not subjective as understood in Eastern divinity, but rather objective. The relationship between Eastern thought—which tends toward dogmatism and gender bias—and Western thought, supported by science, is highly varied. Western divinity can contribute to the journey of transcendent seeking, while Eastern divinity offers its abstract value to the development of science, though the opposite sometimes occurs. Eastern divinity, confined within blind dogmatism and having almost no room for

differing views on "divinity," will lead to the stagnation of science, or conversely, will face opposition and ultimately be abandoned. Conversely, although it may seem ambiguous, Western divinity takes a theoretically balanced approach. It is true that witnessing God in terms of His Essence is impossible, but witnessing God in terms of the reflection of His manifestation (Tajalli) is possible. As has been constructed by eco-feminists, particularly by Spinoza. In short, God reveals Himself in all created things, so that God can be witnessed at the locus of His self-manifestation. According to eco-feminists, having understood that God reveals Himself through His creation, an attitude of supremacy regarding a particular concept of divinity should be avoided.

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