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# Connectedness: an interdisciplinary approach in response to the Covid-19 pandemic (learning from Ki Ageng Suryomentaram, Ibn 'Arabī and Teilhard de Chardin)

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## ABSTRACT

Connectedness is a concept that can be characterised as personal, cultural-contextual and teleological. By personal, it refers to the relationship in the descending scope directed at the attainment of mindfulness. By cultural-contextual, it points to the encounter in the extending scope embracing the other creations in the universe, including the fellow human beings, by means of creative imagination in order to reach self-disclosure. By teleological, it brings in the ascending scope aimed at the spiritual awareness of the Ultimate Being for achieving self-identification in support of self and social transformation. Those characters of connectedness are noticeable through the interdisciplinary study that is elaborated on the thoughts of Suryomentaram, Ibn 'Arabī and de Chardin. Through their views, one could come out of the self-centred tendencies and arrive at the self-abnegation by developing the self-expansiveness, in such a way that one becomes aware of the sense of connectedness with the self, the other creations in the universe and the Ultimate Being. Such an awareness will open the horizons to the attainment of the transcendental values that can become the basis for 'meaning making' and serve as a framework in responding to various problems, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

**KEYWORDS** Connectedness; cultural wisdom; spirituality; meaning making; transcendental value

## The challenges

The origin of COVID-19 is still under study, but early reports linked it to the illegal trade of wild animals so as to the relation between human beings and other species in nature becomes imbalanced. It creates an ecological dysfunction by which the viruses or microbes or bacteria in animals find ways to adapt to the human body even getting spread uncontrollably (Phelps 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has widespread impacts on various aspects of human life. On the one hand, it has brought negative effects. Some people struggle to preserve or recover their physical and mental health (Karim et al.

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2020). In addition, many families and organisations have to experience economic problems. Suspicions grow in social relations. Similarly, acts of violence occur in families (Kaukinen 2020). Problems are also found in the environment (Rume and Islam 2020), one of which is due to a large amount of garbage (White 2020). The pandemic even affects people's faith life. Some people question the presence of the Ultimate Being, and some others hold an irrational and fatalistic belief to such an extent that they no longer care about health protocol (Akesson et al. 2020).

On the other hand, the pandemic has brought positive effects as well. People become more aware of their physical health and more concerned with others, for example, through humanitarian solidarity. Concerning the environment, during the lockdown, the air becomes cleaner because the pollution is significantly reduced (Rousseau and Deschacht 2020). The pandemic has also fostered faith life as a form of resilience (Almirzanah 2020) and a coping strategy to address the stressful conditions (Almirzanah 2020).

The global challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic have also been faced by Indonesians. In the early phases of the pandemic, one in five Indonesians tends to suffer from mental issues. The Indonesian Psychiatric Association reported that most Indonesians experience emotional conflicts, such as: worry, bad temper, quick anger, tension, etc. (Kaligis, Tri Indraswari, and Irawati Ismail 2020). Suspected or confirmed COVID-19 victims, socio-economic marginalised communities, young women (Anindyajati et al. 2021) and even students (Thahir et al. 2020) are some of the vulnerable groups.

## **A response to the challenges**

As an archipelagic country, Indonesia has a complex diversity in terms of culture, language, ethnicity, and religion. It has 17,504 islands with approximately 7,241 cultures, 742 languages and 1,340 ethnic groups whose one of which is Javanese (41.7%). Out of a population of 270,203,917 inhabitants (<https://indonesia.go.id>), Muslims are the majority (87.2%).

In the context of Indonesia, during the COVID-19 pandemic, psychological, religious and cultural aspects cannot just be disregarded. Religious and socio-cultural factors are clearly connected (Cook 2012). Human religious and cultural experience has also impact to mental and physical health (Dueck and Johnson 2016). All together they are noticeable, for example, from the idea of transpersonal experience (Daniels 2009) about which one is believed to come across a process in the ascending, descending and extending scopes for achieving spiritual awareness, significant values and self as well as social transformation. The emphasis is not on the attainment of the spiritual consciousness as such, but rather on the accomplishment of the positive transformation in life and the development of empathy as well as compassion for

others. By adopting the models of consciousness growth as found in the eastern spirituality of Tao Te Ching, Kenneth Earl Wilber even elaborates some stages of personality in which a human being is connected with the self, the fellow human beings, the other beings and the Ultimate Being (Wilber 2001).

In response to various challenges related to the COVID-19 in Indonesia, the reflection needs to consider an interdisciplinary approach by opening a space for the meeting of eastern and western cultural wisdom as developed particularly through psychology, philosophy, theology, and spirituality. Here we develop a response from psychological, philosophical, theological and spiritual perspectives. Because Indonesia is made up of Muslims and Christians, we are synthesising the ideas from a Muslim theosophical Sufi Ibn 'Arabī (1164–1240) and a Christian philosopher and theologian de Chardin (1881–1955), along with a Javanese sage Suryomentaram (1892–1962) who represents a cultural and spiritual psychology, to produce a comprehensive vision for responding to the problems of the present and of the future. The discourse begins with the views from the perspectives of philosophy and psychology as constructed by Suryomentaram. To broaden the horizon, his points of reflection will be put side-by-side with the ideas developed by Ibn 'Arabī. In the framework of Comparative Theology, the arguments elaborated by de Chardin are undertaken as well. We try to bring them altogether into a single model on how we as human beings who are part of the universe need to develop a sense of connectedness to the self, the other creations and the Ultimate Being, in ways to cope with the challenges of the times. It will be clear that their thoughts reveal some parallels and some complementary ideas.

### **Suryomentaram**

Suryomentaram is described by Marcel Bonneff, in French, as *Prince et Philosophe Javanais* (Bonneff and Crossley 1993, 49). On philosophy, however, he understands it in a loose sense, as the knowledge of all that exist, with the view that it gives answers to the question 'what is the nature of all that exist in this world and under the sky' (Suryomentaram et al. 1985a, Vol. I, 56). Moreover, the aforementioned term 'knowledge' should be understood in the Javanese cultural worldview, not primarily as conceptual knowledge but rather sapiential knowledge or wisdom of life (Darminta 1980, 15), to such an extent that it does not stop at theoretical consideration but offers a comprehensive guide to praxis: 'The wisdom of life is carried out by manner of action, accompanied by a firm will in the sense of the desire to make the common good, through continuous efforts to destroy self-love' (Adimassana 1986, 80).

To start with, Suryomentaram speaks about the position of human beings among all existing matters in reality. In his mind, human beings are part of

matters. Among two categories of matters, living and non-living, human beings are regarded as living matters along with animals and plants (Suryomentaram et al. 1985a, Vol. I, 56). He says further that, as part of living matters, a human being is composed of a perceptible body and an imperceptible soul. Although imperceptible, he argues that the existence of the soul can be identified with *rasa*. Darminta says that '*rasa*' means the interior affection, the deepest consciousness of life, which orients man's life, the principle of man's life and action (Darminta 1980, 57). It is a state of consciousness by which motion can take shape and the sign of being alive can be detected. It is present in all living matters, but only human beings who are aware of it; and thus it marks the distinction between plants or animals and human beings. Considering the specific and distinctive meaning contained in the Javanese term *rasa*, here the usage of that term will be maintained.

Bonneff argues that Suryomentaram's writing entitled *Kawruh Jiwa* (the science of the psyche) refers to the science of self-knowledge (Bonneff and Crossley 1993, 55; Suryomentaram et al. 1985b, Vol II, 48). Bearing in mind that *rasa* is the key point, *Kawruh Jiwa* is built in the framework of phenomenology by taking as the point of departure what appears through experience and consciousness. It deals with a psychological state, particularly that which is related to inordinate affections. As something common in real life, *rasa* arises as a result of desire (*karep*), in such a manner that its fulfilment will make happy and, on the contrary, its unfulfilment will make unhappy. People are often caught up in the belief that happiness can be experienced unendingly. He affirms that this belief is wrong because what people search for, or reject, will not be able to make them feel happy or unhappy ceaselessly. *Rasa* can be experienced just as a result of perception in the form of a portrait, or as a consequence of a reasoning process in the form of ideas (Suryomentaram et al. 1985b, Vol. II, 116–120). The discernment of *rasa* is to be practiced now (*saiki*), here (*kene*) in this way (*ngene*) (Suryomentaram et al. 1985b, Vol. II, 49), because *rasa* is always changing from time to time, neither yesterday nor tomorrow nor there sometime. In short, it is necessarily based on reality and not a part of expectation.

Self-examination is another topic about which Suryomentaram elaborates. The Javanese term used here is *mawas diri* which means 'being mindful of one's self' (Bonneff and Crossley 1993, 57). In dealing with *rasa*, one must make a discernment critically about what becomes cause and effect, and also make a response in a way of *tantum quantum* under the principles: as needed (*sabutuhe*), as required (*saperlune*), as necessary (*sacukupe*), as should be (*samestine*), in an appropriate way (*sakepenake*), in a proper way (*sabenera*) (Suryomentaram et al. 1985a, Vol. I, 13). Dealing with 'fear of death' (*rasa wedi mati*), for example, one should react in a suitable manner; and accordingly medicine may be a necessary precondition (Suryomentaram et al. 1985a, Vol. I, 100). In turn, the discernment of *rasa* through self-examination will lead to

self-transcendence along with liberation (*rasa bebas*), peacefulness (*tentrem*) and timelessness (*langgeng*).

Closely linked to such ideas is Suryomentaram's view on self-awareness (Suryomentaram et al. 1985b, Vol. II, 52). At this point, he distinguishes between 'self-centered ego' (*aku kramadangsa*) and 'true self' (*aku sejati*). The existence of self-centred ego appears like a slave who is subjected to a number of personal calculations with excessive interests, about which he classifies further into three main areas, namely material wealth (*semat*), positions or public recognition (*drajat*) and magical powers (*kramat*) (Suryomentaram et al. 1985b, Vol. II, 36–37). On the contrary, true self is characterised by the courage to step out from the self-interests. Self-awareness can be achieved by the practice of sharpening *rasa* for identifying which one becomes part of the self-centred ego and which one becomes part of the true self. The emphasis is, of course, on the true self.

The process of self-growth from 'self-centered ego' to 'true self' follows four stages about which Suryomentaram calls with the term measurement (*ukuran*) (Darminta 1980, 69; Suryomentaram et al. 1985b, Vol. II, 36). The first is the stage in which human beings experience *rasa* but are very limited. The most dominant characteristic in this stage is sensory perception. In the second stage, *rasa* is already developed yet accompanied by inadequate comprehension. As a result, mistakes often take place. In the third stage, *rasa* is already developed but merely directed to self-interests. The fourth is the stage in which human beings experience *rasa* with adequate comprehension in such a way that it transcends the ego and goes beyond self-interests.

One of the characteristics of the fourth stage is social awareness. Suryomentaram argues that 'to know oneself, one must know others, feel what they feel' (*ngraosaken raosing tiyang sanes*) rooted in the values of love and mutual respect (Bonneff and Crossley 1993, 58). 'There is no contentment but to content others because others are not you', he affirms (Suryomentaram et al. 1985a, Vol. I, 40–41). Concerning the non-ego, he also speaks about the creatures in the real world and suggests the idea of ecological awareness. In his lessons to parents, he emphasises that children must be taught on the beauty of all creatures in the universe (Suryomentaram et al. 1985b, Vol. II, 136–140). How about the Ultimate? His response to this question seems very limited. In an opinion quoted by Bonneff, this is understandable because Suryomentaram wants to restrict his teachings as a philosophy of existentialism based on the realities of everyday life here and now (Bonneff and Crossley 1993, 67). Moreover, one can also figure out that, for Suryomentaram, the issue is already clear; the Ultimate Being is indeed present in all things in this universe. In the light of the Javanese cultural worldview, he uses an expression '*loro-loroning atunggal*' (Suryomentaram et al. 1986, Vol. III, 136), meaning both the creatures and the creator are connected each other to form a relationship: 'Man's soul is as one with his

desire, which has neither beginning nor end; it occupies a human form for a time, then disappears again into the universe' (Bonneff and Crossley 1993, 58).

To sum up, through his *Kawruh Jiwa*, Suryomentaram offers a way of dealing with self and transcendental values by which one can step out from self-centred ego towards true self. This would lead to the notion of 'the perfect human' as it is also highlighted in the Javanese cultural wisdom, for example, in *Serat Wedhatama* (the Epistle of Perfect Wisdom) and in the Sufism.

### Ibn 'Arabī

Several thoughts, including that of Suryomentaram, suggest that human beings are made up of two main elements, namely soul and body. Based on some other understandings, however, in the perspective of a trialism view, human being is said to consist of body, soul and spirit (Ibn al-'Arabī n.d., 88). The soul is located in the middle between the spirit and body. It has a connectedness to physical or material entities as well as to spiritual ones. Such a view is supported by Ibn 'Arabī (Chittick 1987, 17; 2016, 10, 15).

Ibn 'Arabī argues that human being has a double dimension, namely *al-ḥaq* referring to the exoteric dimension and *al-khalq* indicating the esoteric one (Chittick 1987, x-xi). The former represents the realm of the universe as a whole and is characterised as being in time, whereas the latter stands for the divine realm as beyond time. A certain connectedness is present in human beings and the universe, for a human being is regarded as a micro universe (*'ālam ṣaghīr*) and the universe as a macro human (*al-insān al-kabīr*) (Chittick 1987, 12–17). By a micro universe, it means that a human being becomes a miniature of the universe, while by a macro human, it shows that such a big universe is present in some way in a human being.

As such, human being occupies the highest hierarchy of all parts of creation. The superiority of human being lies in the fact that God the Creator has brought together, in human beings, all the beings scattered in the universe (Chittick 1987, 18–19). If all creatures other than human beings only receive the appearances of God's names and attributes partially, then human beings receive the appearance of all God's names and attributes in a holistic way. The existence of human beings has become the sign by which God seals His treasure. The relationship of human beings with the universe is present like the relationship of the bezel of the seal ring with the seal ring (Chittick 1987, 19–21). For this, God calls human beings to be the vicegerent and the guardian of the universe to preserve His creatures, just as the seal ring preserves the treasures.

The aforementioned conception has a link with Ibn 'Arabī's view of the perfect human (*al-insān al-kāmil*), whose influence in Southeast Asia

including Indonesia has been undeniable (Woodward 2011, 141). For Ibn 'Arabī, the perfect human is characterised with self-consciousness and self-realisation that prompt divine manifestation, to some extent that inner knowledge (*ma'rifa*) may grow fully towards the self-awareness and the awareness of God. Hence, human beings receive a special existence with a specific nature, as a locus of divine manifestation, in which God perceives Himself as manifested in the cosmos, and through which the cosmos can recognise its source. The perfect human serves as an intermediary or the isthmus (*barzakh*) between the cosmos and God as well as between the Creator and His creatures (Woodward 2011, 13–16). Ibn 'Arabī says further that, so long as the perfect human remains, the universe will not cease to exist. As such, the entire universe was brought into existence without a spirit, like an unpolished mirror, whereas a human being is a spirit and the very polishing of that mirror. The universe serves as the mirror through which the splendour of the Creator manifests. Human beings have, therefore, a responsibility to polish the mirror so that the image of God can be displayed clearly (Ibn al-'Arabī 2009, 208; Zildzic 2012, 48). In addition, the universe also plays an important role as the medium through which God the Creator discloses (*tajalli*) Himself by manifesting the attributes of His names.

Regarding the relationship between all existing beings and God, according to Chittick, Ibn 'Arabī is often said to refer to the universe as the 'mother' while to the Divine Spirit as the 'father' (Chittick 1987, 2). When the two marry, they give birth to the partial spirit, 'The partial soul is born from the universe, which is its mother, but the Divine Spirit is its father!' (Chittick 1998, 304). Human beings are, therefore, necessary to preserve the universe just as how the sons or daughters should treat their mother.

God whose attributes are self-existence and inconceivable is exhibited through the universe. This corresponds to the Islamic Hadith Qudsi saying, 'I was a hidden treasure; I loved to be known. Hence I created the creation so that I would be known' (Chittick 1989, 391). The belief that God loved to be known through what He created insinuates that God has opened the space for building connectedness, and it will take place when one develops a vision of *hierophany*. Ibn 'Arabī emphasises that human being will only be able to know God because He lets Himself be known (Corbin 1998, 323). At this point, Ibn 'Arabī also speaks about a certain disposition of mystical relationship (*maqām*) and a specific spiritual condition (*ḥāl*) as God's continuous disclosure to His creatures (Corbin 1998, 148).

Through self-consciousness and self-realisation, human beings are aware of the duty for themselves and for the others: 'I loved (*aḥbab-tu*) my essence, a love of one to another'. Ibn 'Arabī points out that human relationships to other beings, including the fellow human beings, must not be part of the subjugation due to the lust of bestiality (*nafs al-ḥawaniyya*). Instead, it should be based on human responsibility that springs out of love. In this manner,



human beings are made aware of the duty for themselves and for the other in the spirit of esteem and respect (Ibn al-‘Arabī, n.d., 24).

Ibn ‘Arabī’s view of human beings relating to the Creator and the creation cannot be separated from his main concept commonly known as the oneness of being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). It shows that what comes to exist as being in all things does not have a true form, because it is only present as an appearance of the ‘Real Being’ or the ‘Divine Truth’. The existence of the Divine Truth can be maintained at all times, because it is the Real Being, not a being of creation. Beyond the Real Being, it is just a shadow (Abrahamov 2015, 70). The Divine Truth is one in essence; and, in reality, this has manifested in various existences of creation.

The real existence is not but the Real Being, and this Real Being appeared in the realm of creation insomuch that all existing things are only present in the Divine Truth. For this, being does not only refer to the existence of something but also the expression of an awareness as a self-disclosure and the achievement of infinite possibilities behind all existing things. In sum, anything other than the Real Being is only the manifestations or the outward appearances of the Divine Truth, as ‘the colorful rays of light’ (Al-‘Arabī 2012, 127).

In Ibn ‘Arabī’s concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, everything that manifests in creation is only a shadow of the Real Being as a form of imagination. For him, imagination plays an important role. From the perspective of ontology, he distinguishes three levels of imagination, namely the transcendental-absolute imagination, the detached-inherent imagination, and the attached imagination. Chittick explains further the relationship of these three forms of imagination in three *loci*, namely: cosmos in which the whole imagination becomes real as a form identical to the transcendental-absolute imagination, macrocosm in which the world becomes the intermediary between spiritual and physical matters, and microcosm in which human soul is present as a different reality between spirit and body (Akkach 1997, 103; Chittick 1987, 115–116). In the light of Ibn ‘Arabī’s view, one must make any effort to attain self-consciousness and self-realisation that prompt divine manifestation, by entering into the dynamics of the oneness of being, in the realm of cosmic, macrocosmic and microcosmic. It deals with a mental process and a manner of action in which one has creativity in identifying various possibilities and making new meanings so that the complexity of the challenges faced in reality can be released with the presence of different responses of innovation.

## De Chardin

The idea about the human continuous transformation that takes place in a web of connectedness within the self and with the environment, including

the other fellow beings and the Ultimate Being, has a strong echo in the work of de Chardin. As part of the universe, human beings continue to experience a development, and it occurs not only to the physical elements but also the consciousness. Physical evolution also refers to the evolution of consciousness, because 'evolution is an ascent towards consciousness' (De Chardin 1955, 258). As such, the universe has evolved from geogenesis to biogenesis to noogenesis; and human beings are a result of that evolution. It is at the stage of noogenesis that consciousness takes shape. Consciousness itself has three main characteristics, namely the ability: (1) to focus on something but only on a part of it as an un-integrated perception, (2) to focus on itself regularly and gradually with subjectivity, and (3) to experience connectedness in unity with other realities surrounding it, about which de Chardin calls it a planetization-reflection (De Chardin 1964, 117–132).

De Chardin is so convinced that everything in the universe is alive and sentient with vitality. Where is, then, a human being to be placed? De Chardin maintains that, in the movement of the cosmos towards the highest degree of consciousness, a human being is situated at the topmost point. It is unquestionable because the human being, in his term, is the last-formed, most complex and most conscious of 'molecules' (De Chardin 1964, 59). The basic characteristic of a human being, namely the root of all their perfections, is their gift of consciousness in the second degree. In comparison to other creatures, the human being is superior because 'he does not only know, but he knows that he knows' (De Chardin 1964, 126). In the line of progress, the human being is considered the topmost point, while the lower creatures, such as plants or animals, will perish naturally, just as what has occurred in so many organisms.

De Chardin calls to mind that human beings have their root in this universe (De Chardin 1968, 59), for they do not exist outside this universe. Consequently, human beings have a responsibility to preserve the universe in which the close relationship takes place. The duty to conserve other organisms is indeed a necessity because 'plants and animals are excessively fragile in their structure' (De Chardin 1964, 250). It is therefore necessary for human beings to preserve and sustain the integrity of the natural ecosystem. At this point, the important condition is 'the know-how to do, sufficiently expert at avoiding various obstacles such as politico-social mechanization, administrative bottlenecks, over-population, counter-selections so frequently occur on the way, followed by a vast whole in process of totalization' (De Chardin 1956, 118).

De Chardin argues further that the most radical human evolution at the noosphere stage comes into realisation with the development of spiritual sense in the form of the ability to make a self-reflection (De Chardin 1964, 153). Through this process, human beings are made able to draw closer to the others in the mutual relationship. In this perspective, the fullness of the self-

awareness will be achieved when one is not self-centred but directed at the Ultimate Being. That is the Omega Point which is the peak where the connectedness between the personal self and the self of the universe will occur (De Chardin 1955, 263).

De Chardin maintains that there is no duality of spirit and matter. Instead, physical matter is the matrix of spirit. In a concrete sense, there is no matter and spirit. All that exists is a matter of becoming a spirit. There is neither spirit nor matter in the world; the 'stuff of the universe' is spirit-matter (De Chardin 1971, 146). De Chardin argues that 'physical matter' along with 'spirit' is so concomitant that forms a *Weltstoff*. It refers to an essential cosmic element that serves as spiritual-energetic forces to make the whole universe and its existing beings alive. Consequently, the universe has creative power that makes it proceed to move towards its completion. Just as human beings are alive as a result of the spiritual-energetic forces so is the universe. In the last formation of the evolution of the universe, the general convolution of the *Weltstoff* has occurred in the most intimate depths of being (De Chardin 1956, 118).

Such ideas lead us to the conclusion that, in some manner, physical matter – as a cosmic element – can be regarded as having the potential to become 'conscious'. Concerning consciousness as an inner aspect of itself, de Chardin argues that 'there is a within to things' (De Chardin 1959, 56). Through spirit-matter, there must have been a 'rudimentary consciousness' that precedes the emergence of life in all existing beings of the universe.

De Chardin describes that human beings and other beings existing in the universe are 'drawn' ultimately to the Omega, God himself, 'God draws them to the full extent that they are capable of being drawn' (De Chardin 1971, 146). Just as human beings are being drawn so close to having communion, so the universe as a whole is also being drawn towards an ultimate unity. He envisions God as the Ultimate Being who takes possession of the cosmos and gathers up all things to Himself. All those become possible because of the consciousness that potentially has been present in all existing beings of the universe and continues to develop as well as proceed towards its fulfilment at the Omega Point. Based on the principle of consciousness, in de Chardin's opinion, one will be astonished at the extent and the intimacy of the relationship of the Creator with the creatures, and that of the human being with all beings existing in the universe, to such a degree that the universe becomes the cosmic spiritual centre identified as divine. Thus, the universe becomes the field of God's presence, for in the universe 'God is all in all' (De Chardin 1964, 308; 1968, 114).

De Chardin's theological argument indicates that the total oneness of all beings which are present in the universe live in the divine milieu, in the sense of the Divine Presence in all things. De Chardin says that human beings are the collaborators in creation, 'Man finds himself capable of experiencing and

discovering his God in the whole length, breadth and depth of the world in movement' (De Chardin 1959, 297). The more human reason adequately understands the nature of cosmic being, the more it recognises the divine presence. This view also corresponds to *The Spiritual Exercises* (no. 235–236) in 'the Contemplation to Gain Love' as elaborated by Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus, to which de Chardin as a Jesuit belonged: 'God dwells in creatures. . .; God works and labors for me in all creatures upon the face of the earth' (Mullan 2013, 141–143). Undoubtedly, love plays a vital role, 'Love is the most universal, the most tremendous and the most mysterious of the cosmic forces' (De Chardin 1969, 32).

### Principle of connectedness

The thoughts presented by Suryomentaram, Ibn 'Arabī and de Chardin reveal a concept of connectedness in the sense of harmony that takes place in the attainment of mindfulness, the achievement of self-disclosure through a relationship with the other creations in the universe, and the realisation of self-identification in the spiritual awareness to the Ultimate Being. For Suryomentaram, harmony becomes a key to his concept of 'true self' in which human beings have an openness to go beyond their own interests. It is rooted in some way in the Javanese cultural wisdom about the harmony between microcosm and macrocosm (Bonnett and Crossley 1993). The same point is also emphasised by Ibn 'Arabī in his mystical concept of the harmony between *'ālam ṣaghīr* and *al-insān al-kabīr*. Likewise, de Chardin's theological argument affirms that human beings experience a spiritual value in such a way that they can give meaning to their harmonious relationship with other beings towards the Omega Point.

As such, harmony is attainable because a human being is characterised with self-expansiveness. It is based on the ability of human beings to go beyond the boundaries around themselves, including the cultural and religious ones. It does not only focus partly and partially on the spatial-temporal here-and-now scope but also considers various aspects found outside them. Self-expansiveness leads human beings to do an identification by taking into consideration what has existed, what exists here-and-now, and what probably will exist (Friedman 2018, 232–233). It can serve as a very potential variable to construct a person to such an extent that the 'meaning making' will be reachable in different situations. In addition, the construct of self-expansiveness can also lead a person to the areas of exploration that have so far been unreachable to achieve a more fully human development (Friedman and Hartelius 2013).

Self-expansiveness then leads to the experience of self-transcendence in which one's consciousness becomes more fully developed beyond their identifications and self-images, in such a way that through relational, reflective and reparative stages (Schlapobersky 2016), they are opened to be in unity with the

others. Hence, the principle of harmony implies the value of union. It does not mean that they will experience a loss of the self; instead, they will have a more growing awareness of the existence of the other (Davis 2011). An element of the other to which Wilber refers is a non-duality (Wilber 2001). This sense of a non-duality becomes obvious in Suryomentaram's concept of *loro-lorong atunggal*, in which human beings can appreciate their other beings in the connectedness with the Creator who, indeed, transcends the *jagad cilik* or microcosm. Similarly, it can be also found in Ibn 'Arabī's argument about *wahdat al-wujūd* that all things are not but the manifestations of the Divine Truth. The same point is emphasised by de Chardin. He maintains that, just as a human being is drawn to have union with other beings as a result of the spiritual energetic forces, the universe as a whole is also being drawn to a certain point towards a union with the Ultimate Being. The universe itself becomes a cosmic spiritual centre and a field of God's presence in which all beings are connected to make communion in a 'divine milieu'.

Table 1 is a summary of some parallels and some complementary ideas as elaborated by Suryomentaram, Ibn 'Arabī and de Chardin.

### Implications at the level of theory and praxis

The findings on the notion of harmony and non-duality have shown an implication at the level of theory. The first field is related to Eco-Theology.

**Table 1.** The dimensions of connectedness as elaborated by Suryomentaram, Ibn 'Arabī and de Chardin.

Structure and Concept	Ki Ageng Suryomentaram	Ibn 'Arabī	Teilhard de Chardin
Elements of human being Energy in motion	body and soul <i>rasa</i> and <i>karep</i>	body, soul, and spirit inner knowledge	body, soul, and spirit mystical vision with the inherent objective
Structure of human consciousness	<i>aku kramadangsa</i> and <i>aku sejati</i>	' <i>ālam ṣaghīr</i> and <i>al-insān al-</i> <i>kabīr</i>	subjectivity and planetization/self- reflection
Connectedness to oneself	self-awareness through <i>mawas diri</i>	<i>ma'rifa</i>	self-reflection
Connectedness to the human beings and the other beings in the universe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>ngraosaken raosing tiyang sanes</i></li> <li>• the awareness of the beauty of the creatures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'I loved my essence, a love of one to another'</li> <li>• human behaviour to nature is like the way the son/daughter treats the mother</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• new perception and values: love for the common good</li> <li>• the connectedness with the universe as a whole</li> </ul>
Connectedness to the Ultimate Being	<i>loro loroning atunggal</i>	<i>wahdat al-wujūd</i> and <i>tajallī</i>	total oneness of all beings with the Omega Point

The reflections elaborated by the three thinkers can be the responses to these questions. Who is a human being? How do human beings work out to deal with the suffering due to environmental damage? What does cause ecosystem problems? How can human beings play a central role in overcoming ecological dysfunction? (Roszak 1995).

Based on Chittik's argument, one can easily notice that Ibn 'Arabī describes the connectedness between the universe – of which human beings become part – and the Creator as the relationship between 'mother' and 'father'. This idea corresponds to the two models of connectedness between human beings and nature. First, nature is portrayed as a home and its inhabitants as a family. Second, nature is portrayed as being in itself in such a way that human self-identification will be expanded and deepened to include the non-human world. Nature is even regarded as having a self like a human being (Ingulli and Lindbloom 2013).

The *hierophany* perspective offered by Ibn 'Arabī about nature as a mirror of the Creator's majesty and the role of the human being as a mirror polisher is very significant. In that view, human beings serve as the guardian of the universe and the vicegerent to preserve God's creatures. In this understanding, the relationship of the human beings and the other beings in the universe must be based on the human responsibility that springs out of divine love. As such, in Suryomentaram's opinion, all creatures found in the universe are good and beautiful. Similarly, de Chardin also brings awareness that human beings are part of nature, and that human growth goes hand in hand with the evolution of the universe. One of the main problems behind the environmental damage is a dualistic, mechanistic, and materialistic outlook that wants to put human beings as a subject while nature as an object. The main point emphasised by de Chardin is that human beings should consider nature in the same way as human beings look upon themselves.

The second field is associated with Spiritual Psychology. It brings an awareness that human being has a demand to pay attention not only to the needs which are qualified as basic physical but also that which are qualified as transcendental with a certain frame of orientation. It leads further to the state of consciousness and experiences in which one discovers constructive beliefs and values, and through which one encounters a transformation at the level of inner purification, enlightenment of mind and spiritual awakening. Through the connectedness with the Ultimate Being, one will experience the transcendental power that manifests in real life and, in turn, make it possible to deal with some challenges in reality (Danon 2019).

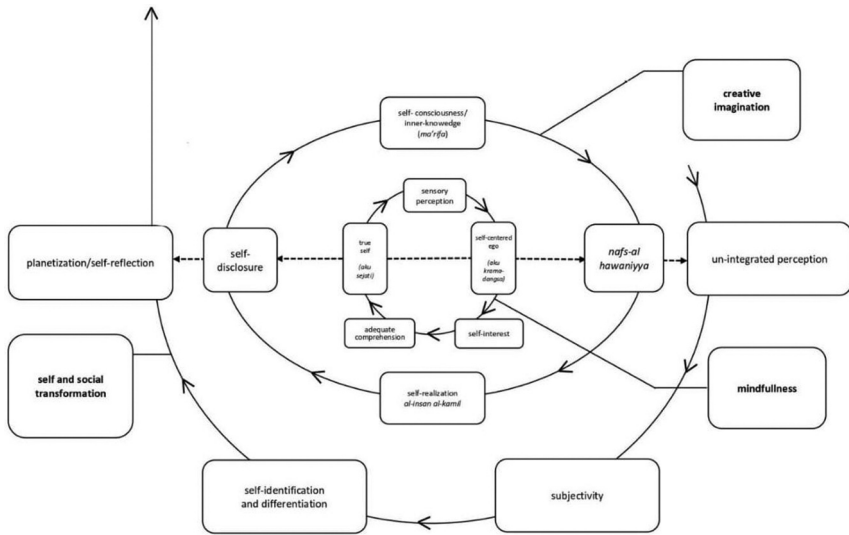
Suryomentaram's thought is related more to the process of how one should struggle to achieve self-integration as accomplished in true self, whereas Ibn 'Arabī's reflection concerns more on the consideration that one should embrace the enormous universe as a locus of sacred space and develop an imaginal descent that brings about a mystical nearness to God.

Similarly, de Chardin's elaboration focuses more on the way how one lives along with other matters in the universe as the divine milieu, and enters into a process of evolving towards the Omega Point.

In addition, the arguments developed by Suryomentaram, Ibn 'Arabī and de Chardin also carry implications at the level of praxis related to cultural and spiritual awareness. First of all, one needs to bear in mind that, in the eastern culture, *rasa* may be regarded as more influential than ideas or concepts. In Suryomentaram's understanding, *rasa* is what comes first at a certain moment. For him, *rasa* is neither planned nor intended; they just happen and come about spontaneously. The process to realise the presence of *rasa* at the moment of here and now is indeed important. It is a process of mindfulness in which one is aware of what is experienced and opens oneself to deal with what is happening in such a way that it can even become the basis for value building. Being experienced as a result of perception or as a consequence of a reasoning process, *rasa* can serve as a motivational power to stir the self strongly or intuitively, like fuel for operating an engine. Yet one needs to go deeper than what is felt. If it is joy, one should go deeper into the joy, and if it is anger, one should go deeper into the anger. One will realise that a tension is always present due to the various motivations and interests in the interior self, some of which are related to self-centred ego and some others to true self. For this, one must be in touch with the inner life and honest with reality.

Next is a process in which one makes attempts to find meaning creatively. Ibn 'Arabī's elaboration about inner knowledge and de Chardin's reflection about cultural, social and spiritual wisdoms are indeed valuable for employing a rational consideration in order to reflect on what is felt or experienced or found in reality. The fact that human beings are granted with spirit and reason, besides physical body, enables them to build a rational consideration and to strive for something that transcends themselves. Moreover, the self-transcendent longings and spiritual values presented by Ibn 'Arabī and de Chardin, in turn, serve as reflective visions in the process of appraisal and adaptation. Through a discernment, by considering what occurs in reality, one can develop an attentiveness and a form of creativity with the different responses of innovation. This process will then lead to a decision in a way of *tantum quantum*, as stated by Suryomentaram, that results in a constructive praxis for the common good and takes effect in personal as well as social transformation.

Based on the summary made from the three thinkers in [Table 1](#), here we make an attempt to synthesise their core concepts into a single system on the process of self-growth in support of spiritual awareness. The process begins with an effort to develop a sensory perception for mindfully recognising the situation. At this first step, one needs to take a distance from the self-interests in order to have a comprehensive awareness on the realities. It is a way, in Suryomentaram's thought, to come out from the self-centred



**Figure 1.** The Process of Self-Growth in support of Spiritual Awareness.

ego to arrive at the true self. The second is an attempt through a creative imagination to reach self-disclosure and build a sense of connectedness to the fellow human beings as well as the other creations in the universe, as Ibn ‘Arabi stresses, for identifying some possibilities and finding new meanings. The third is a way to build self-reflection in the light of the total oneness, in de Chardin’s term, with the Omega Point. It takes place through a process of self-identification and differentiation for making constructive responses towards a self and social transformation. The more detailed process of self-growth in support of spiritual awareness can be illustrated in Figure 1.

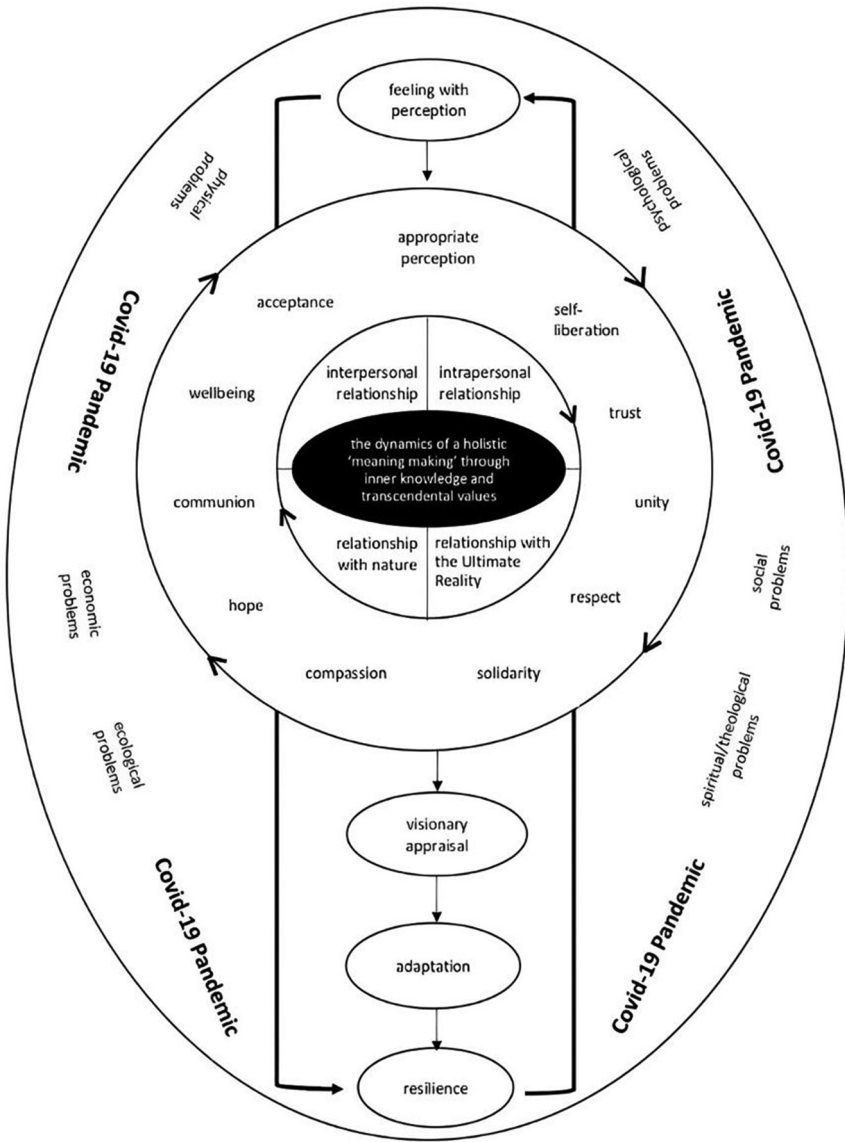
**Conclusion**

Human beings live in a stress culture and a world of varying conflicts. In the encounter with living and non-living materials, human beings struggle with various and mixed motivations. Thus, it is natural to feel solitude, insecurity, suspicion, anxiety, fear, or other similar emotional reactions in times of the pandemic.

The reflections offered by Suryomentaram, Ibn ‘Arabi and de Chardin on connectedness have opened the eyes that the physical, mental, psychological and spiritual health becomes the key points to respond to the challenges of the times. Their thoughts are valuable for broadening the horizons and deepening the understanding on the process of self and social



transformation in several scopes. First is the descending scope in which one is led to the mindfulness on what is happening. Second is the extending scope in which one needs to develop relationships with the other beings. Third is the ascending scope, namely the awareness on the importance to build a spiritual acquaintance with the Ultimate Being. All those would open space for developing what is stated in the [Figure 1](#) as creative imaginations.



**Figure 2.** Resilience with the process of meaning making.

As such, creative imaginations pave the way to a process of finding new meanings. Figure 2 illustrates a dynamics in which one can develop a process of 'meaning making' as a crucial practice of resilience in dealing with the challenging life experiences. As a starting point, by referring to Suryomentaram's argument, one can work out on feeling with perception. Then, one is called for developing an intrapersonal, interpersonal and transpersonal construct of self-expansiveness – as Ibn 'Arabi and de Chardin highlight – by means of inner knowledge and transcendental values, such as: appropriate perception, acceptance, wellbeing, communion, compassion, hope, solidarity, respect, unity, trust, self-liberation, etc. These values will in turn play an important role as a framework for building a visionary appraisal and a human adaptation in ways to cope with various problems, including the COVID-19 pandemic with its impacts.

### Disclosure statement

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