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PANTHEISM FROM MODERN PERSPECTIVE

***Shahrbanoo Sahabi¹, Khalil Hadidi² and Said Allah Gharabeglou²**

¹Department of Persian Language and Literature, Tabriz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran

²Department of Persian Literature, Tabriz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran

²Department of Persian Literature, Tabriz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran

**Author for Correspondence*

ABSTRACT

Pantheistic theory is one of the simplest and at the same time the most difficult subjects of the gnostic way. This theory can be considered as the intellectual heritage of great thinkers of human world throughout the history. Since ancient Greek era up to our modern time, every intellectual had tried to provide an acceptable answer to the question of the essence and reality of being and clarify the real existence based on his/her mental beliefs. Islamic gnostics can be considered as the greatest theorists in this exciting and extensive discourse. Also Maulana Jalaluddin Mohammad Balkhi was not an exception to this rule. With respect to real existence nature, he has achieved a degree of insight that sees manifestation of beauty of the real being reflected everywhere. According to this verse from the Holy Quran saying “the East and the West are owned by God and every direction you turn your head, God is there” (Surat Al-Baqarah, 115), he sees nothing other than that real being and believes that God has sent him to the earth out of his love and attention towards him and thus he in turn is eager to involve in a mutual gazing. Nature of this thought and the way in which intellectual has addressed this issue is the subject of present paper. Present paper seeks to describe views of previous and contemporaneous intellectuals using a simple language as possible and also exploit modern knowledge so that it is possible to provide a simpler and clearer definition of the nature of the world of existence: what is pantheistic theory. Does the world of existence is only an illusion? What is real existence and which phenomena are manifestations of the absolute reality. The descriptions in the following may be able to provide clear answers to these questions.

Keywords: *Astronomy, Gnosticism, Reality, Realization, Pantheism, World of Existence*

INTRODUCTION

Since a long time ago, humans have faced this question: what is reality and what is vitality and what can be considered as the source of real “being” and what is beyond our thought and imagination?

Pantheism refers to a wide spectrum of beliefs and schools of thoughts with a history as long as human history and culture. Though we have no complete awareness of perceptions and imaginations of the Bedouin people about Being and its source and origin in pre-historic times, but since appearance of writing and historic periods which captured thoughts of the people of the past, we can see thinkers and intellectuals who sought to justify the basis of the world of existence based on their own knowledge. In such books as “Trajectory of Wisdom in Europe” by Foroughi, “The Story of Civilization” by Will Durant and “History of Philosophy Evolution” by Henry Moore and many other books, we can see name of intellectuals and clear sighted people who tried to justify and explain the nature of existence in their own way. In this historic trend, Platonic philosophy, neoplatonic philosophy, Thales thoughts, etc. and various schools of thoughts including Hinduism, Buddhism, Manichaeism, Sufism and recently findings from various scientific fields including physics and astronomy all have sought to identify the reality of being and its realizations and representations. In the remaining part of the paper, first pantheism is briefly addressed, then unity of creature theory is presented and finally similarities of these theories are addressed from modern scientific viewpoints.

Pantheism

The late Ali-Akbar Dehkhoda in his masterpiece, Dehkhoda Dictionary, provided the abstract of opinions of various gnostics and philosophers about pantheism: “identification of all beings with the Almighty God and assuming that existence of creatures is credited to God. It means that waves, bubbles, whirlpools,

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drops and dews are the same as water.” He continues: “it means the assumption that the world of existence comprising of solid objects, plants, animals, mines and celestial bodies as the same being and all are incorporated by the God being at the top level and all other creatures are located on lower levels based on their closeness and farness. Some are strong and some others are weak. Being has two sides; one side is self-existent and the other side is matter and/or the weakest being.” (Dehkhoda, 1988, descriptions on the word pantheism).

These two definitions are not without mistake; but Dehkhoda should not be blamed for this because he was not a gnostic or philosopher; in these two different definitions, he has provided the extract of opinions of relevant experts in various books in his Dictionary.

In first definition, he identifies waves, whirlpool, bubbles, drops and dews with sea. Waves, bubbles, drops, etc. can have an independent being without water. They are various representations and reflections of water and show that being can be divided into various parts and this challenges the claims of pantheism; but in the next definition there is much ambiguity about the word “beings” because it per se implies “being” and “existence” of things which at least represents two different “beings” “each one having an independent entities.

It is true that “matter”, according to definition by philosophical books, has a completely unknown nature and if it does not have nine dimensions then it would not lead to reality, but in any case matter has an independent being” (Tousi, 1980) and believing in independent existence for “matter” do not remain any space for unity, because if it is assumed that matter, which according to opinions of past thinkers is among five substances, has an independent being, we have to acknowledge that it is eternal and this acknowledgment not only questions the pantheism but also it causes the problem of “multiple eternals” being in clear opposition to monotheism issue.

Cause of this problems and opposed definitions is not so much related to specific perceptions of a certain person but it mostly associated with difficulty and complexity of pantheism and since a long time ago, gnostics and philosophers have provided various definitions for “pantheism” and added to the complexity of this issue.

Fazlollah Zia-Nour, in his book titled “Pantheism” wrote: “all scholar gnostics and a group of theologians who tried to recognize world realities (through conscience or reasoning) and addressed the pantheism in a general way believe that being has a single reality and this reality has various levels of strength and weakness from philosophical view point and based on opinions of some philosophers and every being whether self-existent or contingent existent has a degree of reality based on its level; they share the same origin and abolition but they are not the same with respect their rank and status (Nour, 1990). To obviate doubts and objections about this definition and also in order to prevent misunderstanding in interpretation and clarification of this statement, it is necessary to look at the issue from three different view points:

First point is associated with existence of all beings in the world. These beings have different qualities in their appearance considered as factors distinguishing them from other beings, realizing them and making them distinct from other beings. This is a specific endowment from God, for example differences between various types of solid objects, plants and animals may be mentioned. But it should be mentioned that these differences are not substantive and inherent.

Second point is the unity of all beings from viewpoint of their origin. According to various traditions and narratives in various books, truth of the world of existence and all things being seen within it is the pure light of Mohammad (pbuh).

The fact that pure soul of Mohammad (pbuh) is the source of existence is confirmed by that gnostics and even theologians and they all pointed it in their works. For example Sheikh Attar in *Manteqoteir* in the chapter “In praise of the Prophet (pbuh) states that:

Both worlds obtained their high-level and famous name and status because of his existence,

Also the heaven found peace and comfort by his name,

He came from the sea of being as dew,

And both worlds owe their existence to his being

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*Ultimate destination of creatures was his light,
And he was the origin of beings and non-beings,
When God developed that absolute light,
Created hundred seas of light from his light*

*The first thing appeared from the invisible world,
Without any doubt was his pure light,
Then that high status light put up its flag,
And became the heavens, the plate and the pen,
A flag from its pure light is a world,
A single flag is both the man and its off springs.*

Attar, who is among the founders of romantic Gnosticism, considers pure light of Mohammad (pbuh) as the origin and basis of the specific divine system and continues his poem as following:

*The heaven and sky were appeared from reflection of his substance,
Then angels originated from his qualities,
Secret of soul is only from the world of God order,
Thus creatures gained life based on [theverse saying] "I blew into him from my soul,
When these secrets and blowing were aggregated,
Then many souls were appeared,
Since nations owe their existence to his light,
Thus he inevitably was sent as a prophet to all of them.*

(Attar, 1353)

All of the above couplets refer to the prophetic hadiths among them the followings may be mentioned:

"I did not create the world and future life and heavens and earth but for Mohammad and I did not create mankind but for Mohammad" (Goharin, quoted from Sharhe-Tarif, p.278) and "The first thing God created was my light (ibid quoted from Yanabiol Mawaddah) and "I was created from God's light and my "People of the House" were created from my light." (ibid, quoted from Beharol Anvar).

According to these hadiths and traditions, the whole world from beginning to the end is from a single source with respect to its being.

It means that the world has been created from luminosity of Islam prophet (pbuh) and reality of his substance derived from of high blessing of the absolute being; in other words, source of pure light of Mohammad (pbuh) is the divine blessing and all creatures of the world of existence originate from the holy prophet being. According to this perception and given the fact that the reality of divine being is not understandable for all people, thus Islamic prophet may be considered as the cause of being and source of pantheism and holy existence of prophet (pbuh) can be imagined as water without all beings would disappear.

Some notable points may be mentioned with respect to this theory. First is a sense of plurality or at least duality; it means that Mohammad (pbuh) light is across to divine being; but the above-mentioned valid prophetic hadith which said that "I was created from God's light and ..." converts this sense of duality into a sense of unity. Pure light of the prophet (pbuh) is from divine light and their relationship is the same as those between sun and its light which comprise a single source but appear to us as a duality.

The general definitions from Dehkhoda Dictionary mentioned in the first part of the paper and described the sea water and its various manifestations including dews, drops, bubbles and waves as the same, is not appropriately fit in this definition because thought is true that drops and dew have no origin but seawater, but the sea being has divided and a small part of it has formed a water drop.

But with respect to the relationship between sun and light, there is no space for division and proliferation and as the sun and its light cannot be separated, also pure light of Mohammad (pbuh) is a radiation of divine holy light and it is not a dividend part of it.

Because of the same fact Islamic prophet (pbuh) said "everybody who sees me, then he sees God" (Goharin, 1987). Creation of all beings from pure light of Mohammad (pbuh) should not be considered as

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plurality of beings. The best example for obviation of any doubt in this respect is the relationship between presence of sun and sunlight and brightness of the room. Reflection of God's light develops holy existence of Mohammad (pbuh) and reflection of the prophet light, lit up all the world and the relationship between these three elements can be conceived as proposed by philosophers who states that the first reason originates from divine will (the unit in all aspects, does not not create but a unit) and next reasons and souls all are reflective of the first reason and beings are created by the tenth soul.

Third point is that pantheism realizes the reality of all beings and this merely is derived from the being of the Almighty God and no other being is able to share it with god. In a simpler word, the only real being in the world of existence is pure divine substance and there is no other thing but God; thus plurality of being cannot be assumed. This is the God will to present non-existence to us as creatures which indeed have not a real being and no stable and eternal being may be assumed for them.

According to this theory, all thoughts and imaginations of humans are based on illusion. Human is not able to understand the God's substance and qualities because of its limited mind and also the fact that he is not able to visualize God for himself based on holy names mentioned for God in Quran. Thus he is not able to understand this fact that how non-existence transforms into existence by will of God and appears to him as a reality and this superficial existence finally will return to its non-existence status.

The roots and bases of human thoughts should be sought in the same point.

As mentioned above, human is not able to find out that how non-existence and non-being may appear as existence and being and again transforms into its first condition. Holy Quran, given its conciseness in description of all phenomena, has pointed out the creation of world from non-existence and final return of it to its first condition. Perhaps the best known instances are verses 26 and 27 of Surat-Al Rahman saying "all things in the world are annihilable and the only remaining thing is the holy and exalted being of God".

By accepting the fact that the only thing which is worthy of the name of being is the Almighty God, there is no other being but it and existence has appeared from non-existence by his will and will return to its first condition, we may appreciate the high thoughts of the founders of pantheism. The only real being is God and all things we consider as beings indeed are non-beings visualized to us as a being based on God will.

One of the greatest problems about pantheism theory is that humans are not easily accept that nothing has a real being and even their own being is not anything but an illusion. How a man who considers himself not the minor world but the major one, the man who according to Kant opinion believed that "I think, therefore I am" (Foroughi, 1972), can accept that he has no external real existence and according to Plato, is not anything but a shadow. Based on the same non-belief and ignorance, human considers himself as the basis of the world which has no existence like a bubble on the water or an image in the mirror.

Plato likened the world to a shadow on the cave wall and Maulana considers us as the hunters of the shadows saying:

*The bird in the sky and its shadow on the earth,
The shadow like the real bird runs on the earth,
A crazy man seeks to hunt the shadow,
And runs after it to the point of exhaustion,
He does not know that it is the image of the bird in the sky,
And is not aware of the separation between the real bird and its shadow.*
(First Book, 417)

Some people think that the world is within them and have interpreted "pantheism" as "unity of creatures". They believe that the real being is within all things and all things are a part of the real being which is seen in various forms. According to this theory, nothing is separate from the real being; in other words all things are a part of God substance: "some Sufis who are indeed imitator and far from the gnostic status and way, because of weakness of their reason think that "the status of oneness" being called as "the invisible identity" and "the most hidden" does not have a separate realization and actuality and what is on

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the outside, is apparent world or macrocosm which consists of spiritual and physical forces and God consists of all of them...cause for appearance of such thoughts is that people who believe them do not understand the real meaning of words of great gnostics and thinkers and their meaning for predication of existence and absolute existence; because sometimes they have used absolute existence for referring to God and in other cases, to general existence or its extensive blessing (Nour, 1990). Nour (1990) quotes from Molla Sadra saying: the belief that God is an extensive existence which in each thing is same as it (i.e. it is created in created beings, it is eternal in eternal beings and it is body in bodies) implies unity of God with contingent beings and its characterization by their qualities. Also it means that all things are allowable for humankind and he has no responsibility" (ibid, p.44).

It goes without saying that this theory assumes that world of existence is same as god being and believes in plurality and multiplicity and divisibility of the eternal being. It attributes the quality of variability to God and it is in complete opposition to the pantheistic theory. From the author's viewpoint, the pantheistic theory seen from all angles, demonstrates the same elements of "annihilation" and "eternity" of course in its general and common meaning.

As noted earlier, according to the theory of pantheism, nothing but the holy existence of God may be named as a being and all things seen as beings in our views are only illusions which will disappear sooner or later and eternity and survival only belong to the Almighty God. Of course in our views, the universe has "existence" though it is superficial; thus according to beliefs of thinkers and religious teachings how is the eternity and annihilation of all things found in the world?

For all humans throughout the history, it has been rather unbelievable that human will disappear someday after his short-term life in the world. Every nation and tribe, according to its culture and civilization, has tried to develop different meanings for eternity and annihilation based on its beliefs. Since we address pantheistic theory from Islamic Gnosticism, it is necessary to study eternity and annihilation from this perspective.

From viewpoint of Islamic Gnosticism, annihilation is not that thing we commonly assume. Imam Mohammad Ghazali in volume 4 of "Ahya Uloom -ud- Deen" writes that "the fourth level of theology is realized when the gnostic sees nothing in the world of existence but a single being and this is only observable to pure companions of God called by Sufis as annihilation in monotheism (Rahimi, 1972).

Ghazali's words can be interpreted in this way: a true gnostic does not give importance to anything but God and only pay attention to him and look at him. Such a person is to such an extent surprised and by greatness of God, the creator of the universe that even does not feel himself and indeed he is annihilated in divine unity. The question may be raised here is that if the Gnostic has lost his power to pay attention to the world because of his passion and love towards God or through intuition and self-discovery he has reached to this truth that the world with all of its attraction and greatness is not anything but a dream and all things that seen by others as real beings are representations and reflections of the absolute reality which is not visible because of its greatness. The author believes that great gnostics and thinkers follow teachings of the divine Books, and building on it, understand the reality of being and emphasize on their heart beliefs in pantheism.

According to author's view point, progress and development of science and technology in our modern time is better able to show the non-existence of the world and the fact that the world is only a superficial and apparent being compared to thoughts of previous philosophers and gnostics. Owing to modern technology, today approximately all of us are familiar with nature of cinema, television, cell phone, etc. Assume that a tragic film is broadcast by TV and all viewers feel and experience happiness and sadness of film characters, they laugh with them, get angry with them, cry with them, etc. to the extent that they believe in their reality and after the film ended, they think of the characters' fate for several hours and consider various solutions to their problems in their minds. The main question being raised for an insightful viewer of the film is that if bright and dark shadows moving and sliding on the TV or cinema screen does exist really or they are only an illusion which introduces those sliding shadows as reality to us. On this screen nothing is found except for brightness which itself originates from another source. Strength and weakness of that brightness presents the virtual as the real to us and the shadows are seen by us as

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external real beings; we give existence to them in our minds and then with this illusion in our mind, we make ourselves excited forevents which havenot real existence.

Thus from pantheistic view point, it can be said that the whole universe is nothing but various degrees of strength and weakness of a light.

The divine blessing and will are the source of light which present thenon-existent things to us as real beings and we see them as existent using our imagination power and feel ourselves among those shadowsand a part of it. But the fact is that there is nothing on TV and cinema screen and we deceive ourselves and imagine “the non-existent” as” the existent” and avoid thinking of non-reality of those figures.

Since along time ago, only a few numbers of philosophers and thinkers believed in metaphysics and considered the world of existence as a shadow of the reality. Other scholars and scientists oriented towards the physical worlds and did the ir best to demonstrate the reality of existence of things in the world. They thought and theorized for thousands years and proposed theories that finally brought us to the levelon which we see ourselves now.

But the same scholars and scientists who sought to understand and demonstrate the real being of the world, today have no solution but to acknowledge that nothing is within the world of existence and the whole is nothing but an illusion.

Approximately all physicists have on single opinion with respect to the world of existence: “in several billion years ago there was no earth, sun, stars and galaxies; but about 12 to 14 billion years ago, there was a very compact concentration of energy which suddenly exploded. This explosion is called Big Bang. Time and space appeared from this explosion and matter was formed and from fusion of material particles atoms and molecules and then stars were formed (adopted from Smith Lohan 1982).

In hundreds books and articles and TV speeches across the world this phenomenon (i.e. Big Bang) emerged formnon-existence has been mentioned and the credible Journal of “Nojoom” (Astrology) publishes articles in this field monthly. But no physicist or astronomist is able to answer the question that where this infinite energy which caused the first explosion came from? However according to this theory, energy which there is not a definition for it, achieved a degree of compactness in which it suddenly exploded and matter which forms the world of existence emerged from particles of this compact concentration of energy. In other words, matter is another form of energy which has existence in our view and indeed there was no such thing as matter at first. Matter can be converted into energy again. Albert Einstein, the famous physicist, introduced the theory of conversion of matter into energy by a seemingly simple formula: $E = MC^2$

“Atomic bomb was developed from this seemingly simple and small formula. During almost one century since Einstein proposed his theory, scientists have tried to find out that how matter was formed from a compact concentration of energy. Gradually atomic particles were identified: electron, neutron, proton, quark, etc. After several years of research, a particle was found and named Higgs boson. This particle is the boundary between being and non-being. It is not matter but forms it; it has no mass. But it is a source to generate it (adapted from the scientific encyclopaedia, Wikipedia).

Conclusion of atomic physicists is completely compatible to scriptures and religious texts especially Holy Quran. Energy has no definition and explanation and no one is able to say it has been existed since what time or how and where it has emerged. But it suddenly created the world of existence. However it is nothing but the same unknown energy; it is merely a manifestation of that invisible source and again according to findings of physicists, finally it will return to non-existence. It is reminiscent of the above mentioned verses of Surat-Al Rahman: all things in the world are annihilated and the only remaining thing is the holy and exalted being of God”.

From scientific viewpoint, it has been demonstrated that the world of existence will annihilated and return to non-existence situation. According to most books and papers on astronomy, “stars also have a definite lifetime and as other beings, pass various stages of birth, living and death” (Journal if Nojoom, p.10). As George Gamow stated in his book “The birth and Death of the Sun”, sun of our solar system is among the stars of second generation. Previously there were stars in this point of the world which died as their other

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billion counterparts; it collapsed about five billion years ago and sun of solar system was formed which will be living for another four billion years; finally its fuels will be consumed completely and it will move toward death and extinction (adapted from Persian translation of *The Birth and Death of the Sun* 1971).

Another example with respect to this fact is the interesting book by Isaac Asimov titled “The Neutrino: Ghost Particle of the Atom”. In this very interesting book, the insightful author explains that there are particles with zero mass separating from atoms known as “graviton”. He demonstrated that indeed over time atoms become smaller and smaller and finally after 10^{100} years there would be nothing but non-existence and matter will be converted to energy (adapted from Persian Translation of Isaac Asimov book “The Neutrino: Ghost Particle of the Atom” 1968). If scientific theory is compared to gnostic theory of pantheism, the same conclusion is obtained. Holy Quran and other Divine Books have referred to it with perfect conciseness. The world of existence emerged from non-existence and finally it will return to non-existence again and nothing will remain but the holy being of God.

CONCLUSION

Similarity of two gnostic and scientific theories on reality of existence derived from two different intellectual dispositions is truly surprising. Gnosticism wants to find out the reality through intuition and self-discovery; while science, especially astronomy is based on reason, inference and experience. Despite apparent opposition between these schools of thoughts, their conclusions are similar and the only difference between them is with respect to specific terms and statements of them and the way of achieving that identical conclusion. Both of them believe in eternity in explanation of the main subject of the being. From view point of gnostics, creator of the world of existence is eternal and no description and quality is sufficient to express its nature. Also scientists in the field of astronomy provide no explanation for the compact concentration of existed about 14 billion years ago and they only believe in availability of that energy. Both schools of thoughts believe that existence suddenly emerged from non-existence. Both of them completely accept gradual evolution and development of the world and also both acknowledge that the world is an imaginary and factious being. They consider the same fate for the world of existence and believe that existence will be converted into non-existence as it was emerged from it in some point. Both of them believe in another type of survival and eternity. Gnostics consider the world of meaning as the next home for humans and according to scientists, conversion of matter into energy is the fate of material world; in simpler words, the subject and conclusion are the same but statements, terms and methodology seem different. Human is still on the edge of infinite world of science. Will results of research and thoughts achieve the same point someday? In view of the author it is absolutely the case though point-to-point clarification and super position of findings take a lot of time. However it demonstrates us the miracle of divine knowledge with its extensive dimensions and shows that the Divine Books especially Holy Quran have clarified beginning and end of the world with miraculous accuracy and perfection.

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