

PLATONIC IDEAS IN ISLAMIC MYSTICS

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When we approach now the theme *Platonic Ideas in Islamic Mystics* we come immediately to the names of Ibn 'Arabi, Ibn al-Farid, 'Abd el-Karim al-Jili and perhaps also to Suhrawardi maqtul, Jelal ed-din Rumi, Ahmed Ghazzali and others. We think of ideas as 'wahdat-al-wujud' existential monisme, 'al-insan al-kamil' the perfect man, 'nur muhammadi' mohammedan light or terms as 'hulul' infusion, incarnation, 'ittihad' identification, 'tajalli' or 'hiqmat al-ishraq' illumination. And of course we are right in associating these names and ideas. Then after a certain reconciliation of the Islamic mysticism or better said of some sufic ideas with the orthodox theology by the famous Imam Abu Hamid Ghazzali we find an influence on a large scale of foreign ideas specially Platonic or more neoplatonic and generally spoken gnostic ideas on the Islamic thought, on its philosophy and mysticism. In examining these ideas let us take first the last important figure for these ideas in the Islamic history: 'Abd el-Karim al-Jili of Bagdad who died 1428, perhaps the last great poet among the sufis of Arabic language. He travelled to India and also perhaps he was there influenced by Hindu ideas. In any case he followed the lines of Ibn al-'Arabi and combined two mythical ideas 'the perfect man (al-insan al-kamil or mard -e tamam) and the nur muhammadi'. The perfect man is the prophet Mohammed before the creation, the prototype not only of every man but prototype of the whole creation and from whom all creatures derive of the *faidun ilahiyun*, the first divine emanation, the Logos, or philosophically spoken the universal intellect.

'Abd el-Karim al-Jili, author of the 'namus a'zam' and *Al-Insan al Kamil fi ma'rifati al Awakhiri wal awal* didn't believe in the eternal reconciliation between the devil (Iblis) and God, ideas which already occur in early Christian Alexandrine theology like in the writings of Origenes (apokatástasis panton).

Let us go back to Muhyi ed-din ibn al-'Arabi (+ 1240). His principal thesis put forward in his writings 'Al-futuhāt al-makkiya and 'Fusus al-hikam', is his theory of the Logos. He uses about twenty terms for the identification of this reality. This Logos can be seen from three aspects: ontologically or metaphysically, mystically and mythically-that means in the myth of the 'perfect man'. 1)

1) Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, chapter II: Al-insan al-kamil. H.H. Schaeder, *Die Islamische Lehre vom Vollkommenen Menschen. ihre Herkunft und ihre dichterische Gestaltung* = ZDMG (1925) 192-268.

Metaphysically the Logos is the reality of the realities – haqiqat ul-haqa'iq - creative principle of the whole cosmos. He is before the whole world – in time and in logic – encompassing all ideas all extent things absolutely.

We can call him God or Universe because out of his essence proceeds the universe as a particular derives from the universal. 2) He is the reservoir of all intelligible ideas and fundamental archetypes. He is God when he is revealing himself as the universal consciousness. The Logos is the first aspect.

The second aspect of the Logos is the mystical aspect: Every prophet is a word, a message, a Logos, the prophet Muhammad, is *the* Logos. Every word of God revealed to his prophets is conceived in only one universal principle that is the spirit or the reality of Muhammad, the active principle of every revelation or inspiration. Ibn 'Arabi believes in the eternity of Muhammad as a cosmic principle. 3)

A little bit more difficult is the description of the 'perfect man'. He is the most pure manifestation of God in the created world. Ibn 'Arabi uses some terms of Hallaj as *nasut* (humanity) and *lahut* (divinity), he describes his body, his spirit, his knowledge as a knowledge of angels, his role in the universe. The perfect man is the mirror which reflects every aspect of the perfections of God. We see here a mixture of ideas coming from different sources. One is certainly the old Iranian myth. 'The first man in the cosmology' other perhaps neoplatonic, gnostic and stoic ideas. The first aspect is very similar to the main idea in the philosophy of Platon and Plotin. Undoubtedly here is one of the most remarkable influence of platonic philosophy.

Also Omar ibn al-Farid (died 1235) shows platonic ideas. As a little quotation only some lines of his famous *Khamriyya*:

*Sharibna 'ala zikril habiebi madamatan
wa sakarna biha min qablu an takhlugul kiram
Taqqaddama kullu Kainati hadietsaha qadieman
Wala shakla hunaka wala rasam*

"We have drunken wine on the memory of the Beloved and got inebriated before the vine was created

The Logos preexisted before all beings when there was no figure and no form . . ." The first idea, the Logos preexisted eternally

2) vgl. auch al-Hallaj. *Kitab at-tawasin*.

3) Abu'l 'Ala 'Afifi. *The mystical Philosophy of Muhyid Din-Ibnul 'Arabi*, Cambridge H. Corbin. *L'imagination creatrice dans le coufisme d'Ibn 'Arabi*, paris 1958.

before the creation of all beings. 'Omar ibn al-Farid describes the eternal beauty of the Logos which he calls his Beloved. We see an evident influence of platonic ideas in the poems of the "Sultan al-'ashiqin".

But before we start to examine the terms 'Lover and Beloved' let us consider the metaphysical or gnostical mysticism of Shihab ed-din Yahya as Suhrawardi or Suhrawardi maqtul. I want to limit my remarks. You know the tragical destiny which he has in common with Hallaj and 'Ain al-Qudat al-Hamadani. And Louis Massignon is right in forming the expression 'L'histoire tragique des vocations mystiques de l' Islam' and this in the East as well as in the West (for instance Ibn al-'Arif of Almeria + 1141 or Ibn Qasyi + 1151). Perhaps you know also the splendid works of Suhrawardi as 'Hayakil al-anwar' (temple of lights), or 'Hiqmat al-ishraq' or 'Qissat al-ghurba al-gharbiyya' and other ones.

Suhrawardi is himself without doubt a center of junction of different ideas neoplatonic and neopythagoreic as well as old Iranian - Zoroastrian ones, all this in an Islamic perspective. We must also presume a strong influence coming from Hallaj. Suhrawardi tried to explain the only hiqma (wisdom) occurring in all mystical currents on an Islamic basis. Being devoted the old Iranian Cult of the eternal light there can be no astonishment that he takes as a basis the Qoranic verse as:

*Allahu nur al samawati wal ardi
Nurun 'ala nurin yahdillahu linurihi man yasha' wayadribullahu al
Amtsa'la linnasi wallahu bikulli shaiin 'aliem.*

In the context of this concept are the different reflects and irradiations of this original light, that means the different degrees of the angelic and archangelic lights. Afterwards there are other rulers who as well as pertaining to the sphere of light also control every created body and being in the mortal sphere.

Everything has his guide in the world of light which is in itself a complete separated intelligence (intelligentia separata) - in opposition there exist the barzakh as 'receptacula tenebrarum'. I am not sufficient specialist to judge if we could also assume a larger influence from the purely neoplatonic angelology of Pseudodionys Areopagita who himself was certainly influenced by gnostical and also more or less by Iranian ideas. In his personal life Suhrawardi had similar mystical experiences as Hallaj. The mystical aim is for him loosing every duality and plurality and the coming to the divine tauhid in the instantaneous dialectic of the *fana'* the annihilation and *baqa'* the perennisation. (similar to the mystical 'Nu' of Meister Eckhart where every concept of time is destructed).

Not being able to separate completely mystics from philosophers we must notice that about the same time the big current of the influence of hellenistic philosophy – especially in its neoplatonic form – was not only spread among Islamic mystics but also among the muslim philosophers as Farabi, Ibn Tufail and especially Ibn Sina who certainly gave some guide lines for later generations.

In the Islamic society philosophers and mystics were more closely related than in Christian society. So we shouldn't be surprised that Ibn Sina writes some treatises on mysticism such as his '*isharat*' and some other fragments in which he accepts completely the mystical way.

Let us come now to the mystical terms 'Lover, Beloved and Love' '*ashaga* – '*ashiqu* – '*ma'shuqu* Ibn Sina uses these terms sometimes in his writings. I think that Ibn Sina took these terms from Plato or Plotinus. According to the neoplatonic philosophy God is always the first lover, the '*ashiq kat*' exchen and the Logos and in him the whole creation and thus every single human being the beloved. The comprehension of both comes about by love. May I remind you of the Platonic theory of the '*enneadoi*': All existence comes from the One in his Oneness as flowing from the original source. The creation participates according to its singular measure in the divine essence. So every duality must find its way back to the divine unity.

We find the theory of lover and beloved expressed in a little book which became one of the most important early mystical works in the Persian language, in the *Sawanih* of Ahmed Ghazzali, the brother of the Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali. This little book written about 1110 shows already a very abstract concept of love.

Nearly every aphorism has these three correlatives 'Lover-Beloved-Love. This little opusculum has no example in the Islamic world. May the author also be influenced by the ideas of Ibn Sina and the neoplatonic school, the style of his writing is really original. It is a writing of a mystic. But on the other hand it would be wrong to ask if here is a treatise or only human or platonic or only mystical love. The object or subject, the direction, the Qibla of this love is not essential. Leila and Majnun, Mahmud and Ayaz are only symbols not historical personalities. Love is hypostasized, that means for the external world (*berun*) there is no place. Also the terms lover and beloved became more and more abstract. The beauty of the beloved becomes exemplary and is the absolute beauty *Jamal mutlaq* the reality of reality *Kallos ahethes* and this is in fact a fundamental platonic idea.

Plotin uses in this context the expression *Kallos hyper Kallos* beauty over beauty, that means the absolute beauty which is mith God identical. That all beauty in this world is only a reflection of the divine beauty taught already Pseudodionys Areopagita before

the Islamic mystics. It is in fact very difficult to verify in the aphorismes of Ahmed Ghazzali who is the lover and who the beloved. As I mentioned above according to neoplatonic philosophy is God the lover and the Logos and in him the whole creation the beloved. In the Sawanih lover and beloved are equal reflecting themselves in a mirror which is the love. This symbol of the mirror is often used in Islamic mysticism.

As an illustration a little quotation out of the Sawanih :

عشق عجب آینه ایست هم عاشق را و هم معشوق را هم در خود
دیدن و هم در معشوق دیدن و هم در اغیار دیدن و اگر غیرت
عشق دست دهد [... تا واغیری ننکرد ؟] هرگز کمال جمال معشوق
بکمال جز در آینه عشق نتواند دید و همچنان کمال نیاز عاشق
و جمله صفات - نقصان و کمال - از هر دو جانب

The pupil of Ahmed Ghazzali which gives in his 'Risalat al-Lawaih' a larger comment to the Sawanih develops its sense in a special way. About 100 years later Raymundus Lullus, the Spanish Christian mystic and philosopher - undoubtedly basing on the Sawanih of Ahmed Ghazzali and other mystical Islamic sources shows in his 'Book of Lover and Beloved' the theory of Lover and beloved more in a theological sense. His little book is in its form - form of short aphorisms and its content very similar to Ahmed Ghazzali, Sawanih. The only clear difference is that for Raymundus Lullus the lover is always the human soul and the beloved is God. Lullus has over-taken also the symbol of the mirror when he says :

"The lover looked at himself in order to be a mirror in which he could see his beloved, and he looked at his beloved that he should be a mirror in which he could see himself. And we don't know to which of the mirrors his spirit was closer". 1) Lullus couldn't speak some parts of them became known in the Sawanih of Ahmed Ghazzali or Arabic translation and under the name of his great brother Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali.

So Lullus became acquainted with these mystical pearls. May I be allowed to give a second example out of Lullus' 'Book of lover and beloved! : "The beloved hovers in the highest height over the love and the lover lives in the deepest depth under the love. And the

1) Aphorism No. 350

love existing in the middle let the beloved descend to the lover and the lover rise to the beloved. So the love is beginning and living from this descent and this elevation". 2)

Before we start to discover the other mystical patterns which Lullus and other Christian Sufies took out of the current of Islamic tradition, let us have a look to the development of Platonic ideas which may have influenced Ahmed Ghazzali. As you certainly know are the 'Ikhwan as-Safa' as more philosophical and the Mu'tazilites as more theological group who show the greatest influence from the side of hellenistic and Platonic philosophy. Two important personalities as Muhammad ben Zakaria al-Razi (+ 930) the famous doctor, and the poet and writer Nasir-i-Chosrau (+ 1088) are closely related to the Ikhwan as-Safa. Specially Nasir-i-Chosrau who defended in his voluminous writing 'Zad al-musafirin' the 'creatio ex nihilo', the idea of the 'ibda'' shows in his philosophical system Platonic principles and terms as:

'aqlu kull	universal intellect
Nafsu kull	universal soul
Aflak	spheres
'Anasir	elements
Taba-i'	natures, temperaments
Mawalid	minerals, plants

We have here the typical platonic idea of a cosmos which is divided into some steps. It is also an interesting fact that some of these terms intend Christian Ethiopic philosophy and theology. All these ideas derive from the so called 'Theologia Aristoteles' the pseudo-theology of Aristotle, a pure neoplatonic work which had an enormous influence on the Ikhwan as-Safa' and everyone being in contact with them. In the pseudotheology of Aristotle occurs also the term 'Al-Insanul Awwal' "the first man" meaning "the perfect man" which became so important for the later Islamic mysticism.

We dont know if Ahmed Ghazzali studied this theology, but in any case the relations between mystics and philosophers in earlier time were closed as well as in later periods. When we follow the terms 'Lover and beloved' 'Ashiq wa ma'shuq as well as Muhibbu wa mahhub au habieb back to their origine we notice that even in the time of the beginning of Tasawuf these expressions are more or less used by Hallaj, Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya and Dhu Nun al-Misri.

The theory of 'Lover and Beloved' is - wordly expressed - in the writings of Hallaj more in the background. But Dhu Nun al-Misri (+ 859) who was highly influenced by Platonic ideas uses often words as 'habib' or mahbub for God.

2) Aphorism No. 250.

Also his philosophical contemporary Husain Tirmidhi – called al-Hakim – (+ 898) shows in his main work 'Khatam al-walaya' strong platonic influences and a gnostical angelology as the later Suhrawardi.

Drawing our conclusions we may say :

1. The Islamic mysticism has as fundamental and essential basis the meditation of the Holy Qoran.
2. Beginning with the 9th century (AC) the Islamic mysticism was more and more influenced by foreign ideas specially by Platonic, Neoplatonic and Gnostic ones.
3. The Islamic mysticism influenced the Christian mysticism, specially in Spain (Raymundus Lullus and the Carmelite order).



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