

Theosophy and the artistic scope of Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi

Pr.Dr.Metin Izeti

Abstract: Undoubtedly, one of the most renowned personalities of the Islamic mysticism and philosophy is Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi. Various illustrations presented by him regarding knowledge, cognition, God and the universe introduce certain theosophy and a special theological and artistic-philosophical system whose roots are deeply rooted above any other in the Islamic holy scripture, and then in the abundant artistic-philosophical tradition of the East and antique, its branches stretch to a large number of mental and artistic systems of the Middle ages and the present times. His eternal style remains fresh and attainable for the spirit in every time and space. Hence, the figure of Mawlana continues to stand solid between East and West.

Index Terms: absolute intellect, Islamic mystics, Islamic epistemology, Jalal al-Din Rumi, Masnawi, sacred reflection, transcendental Oneness.

Art and reason do not oppose one another, yet not always do they correspond or coincide with each other. Both as unique disciplines to the being portrayed in the most beautiful shape (*ashen-I takvim*), in other words man, are present throughout the history of man's development. Oftentimes in societies there was an unhealthy mindset of art present. For instance the Arabic world in its pre-Islamic era was enriched with poets, but that still did not manage to hinder the labeling of that period as "*the period of ignorance*". As a consequence, in the various time frames there were poets who did not have a solid platform or even a mindset regarding the being or metaphysics. The history of mankind has been confronted with eras of pure rationality which have lacked artistic values. As an example are the verbose discussions and polemics regarding several apologetic issues such as Islam and Christianity in the middle age.

The XIII century is the period where the poet, the thinker and the Sufi has lived and created his literary works whose mindset has been composed of art and unparalleled comprehension for the time which he lived and beyond. The particular eminent personality of the Islamic world who shall manage to position and set the throne of love in people's hearts even

eight centuries post his existence both in the east and west, is Mevalan Jelaluddin Rumi [3] ¹.

Through shredding the veils of time and space, and acknowledging his outstanding artistic-mental mindset, Mawlana has succeeded to foster love in various aspects of the personality as well as his work being present among many nations and different religions.

The principal written piece upon which nowadays one has the privilege to re-read upon the establishing essence of the mentality and artistic mindset in the philosophical teleological-mystical system of Mawlana, is resembled in his well acknowledged and diverse work, Masnawi. We are speaking of the work which poet Robert

¹ Mawlana Jelaluddin Rumi was born in Belh in the year of 1207. He is the scholar acknowledged for the past two millenniums. As a child with his father's lead, Bahaiddi Veledi (year 1231), they moved from Belhi and after a long journey they settled in Konya. Mawlana stayed there until meeting with Shems-I tebrizi in the year 1244 and proceeded with his duty as teacher. After meetin with Shemsi, his life changed completely. He left the religious school and engrossed himself in esoteric disciplines. He died the year of 1273. His most acknowledged work is Masnawi. He also wrote other works such as: *Divan-I Kebir*, *Mexhalis-I seb'a*, *Fihi ma Fih*, and so on. See more: Eflaki, Ahmed, *Menakibu'l-Arifin*, trans. In Turkish. Tahsin Jayixhi, p.1/8,16, 17, 40; *Sipehsalar*, p. 19; Sultan Veled, *Istidatname*, pp. 195-96.

Bly has commented on Rumi as having successfully managed to construct both the physical and metaphysical dimension of society. "When I first read Rumi's poetry" Bly [2] says, "I felt as if I was approaching this house I well knew: trees along the way, a house in grand width, flowers and fruits on the garden, all of it very familiar to me. Yet this familiarity did not come from my past, but rather from the historical vertical primordial past: the descend from above".

Mawlana's system has a primary focus on the austere revelation of the semantic and symbolic profoundness in the phraseology of the sacred texts regarding the genuine values of man's personality.

If we motion through the pages of Mawlana's work we could notice how each page represents an art and discipline of itself, and yet what drives all parts united is the healthy philosophic-theology and systematic fond. Mawlana[4] himself in Masnawi says the following:

"My secrets are not alien from my plaintive notes,

Yet they are not manifest to the sensual eye and ear".

By this he means that within these verses there is a hidden artistic and mental fond which in the above lines is represented with the symbol of the eye and the ear. Yet the comprehending of the veiled calling can only be enabled by a healthy eyesight and hearing.

In Mawlana's expressions there is an enriched platform of scholars who have been represented in various roles but they remained in the shadowing of their philosophical systems. Mawlana mentions Pythagoras, Plato, Gale nine, Farid al-Din Attar, Razi and many others which he considered highly significant personalities of the west. In addition, the number of poets, writers and scholars whose opinions Mawlana has conveyed are also highly immense. In summary, Mawlana presents himself as the portion within the entire philosophical artistic theology of the times when he lived and even prior to him. He would comment as the following

Alike the compass, one foot we have engrossed in religion,

Whilst the other foot travels seventy two of the rest of beliefs and thoughts

Apart from this, one ought not to forget that Mawlana's crucial inspiration arose from the Revelation. Sulltan Veled, Mawlana's son and other similar mystics to him have said: "The poetry from God's followers is nothing but an elucidation of the secrets of the Revelation". They dissolve their ego and beset with God".² The Revelation in Mawlana's poetry has always maintained its two-dimensional spheres. He has never abstracted a portion of the being from the understanding of the Revelation. In his work, *Fihi Ma Fih*³ regarding the Revelation he commented: "The Koran is a double-sided brocade. Some enjoy one side, and some the other. Both are true, since God desires that everyone should gain benefit from it. In the same way, a woman has a husband and a child. Each enjoys her in a different way. The child's pleasure is in her breast and her milk. The husband's pleasure is in the intercourse with her. Some people are infants of the Way- they take pleasure in the literal meaning of the Koran, and drink that milk. But those who have reached years of full discretion have another enjoyment and a different understanding of the inner meanings of the Koran" [296].

Moreover, a great effort has been made to identify Mawlana's philosophy and teleology with the Neo-Platonist thoughts, yet it is of impossible that the diverse colored threads rasped in his coated work to mingle only with one philosophical ground. There is no doubt that within the verses of *Masnewi* and other acknowledged works by Islamic Mystics topics of Neo-Platonist and have been presented as well as those of the Persian philosophical

² *Sipehsalar*, pp. 71.

³ *Fih Ma Fih* is Mawlana's work as a collection of his discussions with his students and other known figures, which he sometimes mentions their names and sometimes does not. Oftentimes his colloquial mate is Munuddin Pervane, one of the most acknowledged ministers of that time. The discussions are presented in a form of answering questions, and later according to his inspiration and circumstances Mawlana broadens the discussions.

religious tradition, the Hindu, Egyptian and so on. Yet all of these are delivered as a final product with the eternal characteristics of the Revelation.

Through Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi ⁴, Mawlana became aware of the veteran mindset of the Islamic mystic Ibn al-Arabi, whilst through Konya's intellectual tradition and any other citified areas of Anatolia, Mawlana grew aware of the Christian and Hellenist religious philosophical traditions of that time. The presented symbols in Mawlana's work represent almost all the intellectual and religious traditions of his and prior his time. Thus in his work Mawlana, though an artistic engagement highlights that the process of thought is not clustering knowledge from various angles of the world and its demonstration on paper, with a remark that the bee cannot possibly deliver honey without initially airing gardens with various flowers. Alike the bee which transforms the assembled nectar from different flowers into honey, the thinker does alike with his thoughts, claims Mawlana.

The fields traveled by Mawlana are certainly great in number, but also the numbers of various flowers within the gardens are versatile.

In this paper we shall seek to only present two of them.

Mawlana's Epistemology

The epistemology in Mawlana's work is an organic continuum of the Islamic mystic tradition. This mystical tradition which par excellence is presented as Islamic esotericism, in Tasawwuf's discipline represents a spiritual phenomena within the general Islamic philosophical-teleological frame which is distinguished not only by its shape and content but also in its linguistic and literary aspect of the presentation of the various theosophical disciplines.

Precisely to this, it is said that the language of the Sufis is meta-language [6].

Epistemology as such route puts forth a highly complex spiritual process, a process through which one arises and develops hither the absolute sensibility or fusion in the Highest (*Fena*) and the remaining with the Highest (*Beka*). Mawlana as a traveler of the spiritual Sufi path, enamored to the highest emitting peak of the mystic Hira⁵ perceives himself as an eternal visitor of the sacred veiled comprehending both the vertical and horizontal aspects. Respectively, Mawlana through having undertaken the width and metaphysical height arrives at Shariah's peak and further reaches for the boroughs of the absolute truthfulness (*the Hakikat*). He achieves this through two crucial dimensions: *dhikr*, the continuum of remembrance of the Sacred truth and *fikr*, the meditation of epicenter absolute truthfulness.

In the horizontal dimension reaching Mawlana *fikr*, the rational meditation, has undergone several stages of development. Ever since the first days on this Earth, man has always meditated around the "how" and "what" questions, and thus has always sought to attain answers to these questions

A century before Mawlana, Ghazali (d. 1111) claimed that knowledge gained through senses and experimenting is not sufficient for grasping the truth, and that reasoning does not possess the strength to walk the metaphysical spheres. Ghazali, along with declaring the powerlessness of reasoning has in addition declared heretic the ones who believed in absolutization of reason and the ones who, apart from the genuine of the Revelation represented the truthfulness of the rational mind as identical with the first, in other words the philosophers. Ghazali shall not be the only one to present the incompetence of pure rationalism in the metaphysical dimension. I. Kant (d. 1804) declares this reasoning as "*pure reasoning*" and with further explanations reinforces the tradition began by Ghazali [13].

Although the ones which Ghazali criticized, such as Farabi (d. 950) and Ibn Sina (d.

⁴ Sadreddin Konevi lived in the same time as Mawlana, and he is a representative of the philosophical presentation of the oneness of the being (*vahdet-i vujud*) of Muhjuddin Ibn Arabi in Anatolia.

⁵ Hira is the hill where Muhammad (PBUH) accepted the first revelation from God the Almighty.

1037), did not use reason only in the frame of the Aristotelian meaning of rationalism as “strength which responds in accordance to logical rules”. Exactly to this Ibn Rushd (d. 1198), defending the philosophers, would say that they used reasoning in far different context than Aristotle. Mawlana was well exposed to this tradition, and thus uses it with eloquent mastery in his work [1].

Albeit in the vertical aspect of attaining knowledge and wisdom, Mawlana pursues Ghazali's example and other's mystics. In many occasions in the Masnawi, Mawlana through a very eloquent style portrays how senses and the exoteric experiences do not permit thorough penetration to the austere knowledge. In addition Mawlana, contrary to Ghazali, in his viewpoint on reasoning is far more enriched and diverse. He does not perceive reasoning as an undistinguished primordial platform, rather analyzes it in its functional and consequential aspect. Mawlana by relying on the terminology of the Islamic classical literature discusses reason as relative and absolute (*Juz'i-Kul-li and Idafi-Mutlak*). *Kul-l'i or Mutlak'i* which represents the absoluteness is perceived as the never ceasing light (*nur*) or as source of light (*mishkat*). Mawlana through delineating on the sacred geographical screen of the divine and human segment, upon which the ideal man walks and within which each individualistic act is ascertained in the epistemological representation, clasps with the symbolic existence. In other words the sapiens existence of the Qur'anic verse which for God says that *He is Light above lights*⁶ which also descends upon the entire dimensions of the being. This source of light in different placements and some meanings represents reflections. As a result the horizontal being portrayed has the attribute of portions and thereof the presented intellect in it is only a partial reasoning. Yet again in the reflecting placement it is represented on behalf of the absolute reason, although its success depends on the emitting and the rays of space and time. This is how this differentiating is expressed in Mawlana's language

Relative reasoning, at times harvests success, and at times bows its head

The partial reasoning has exhaled for ill reasoning,

man, to whom the world was dedicated, has remained without any wish to make.

The partial reasoning seems to behold the veiled secret

Yet she, the meta-ardor dares deny

“In word and act a man may be a friend of ours;

But when it comes to heart and mind, he huffs and lours”[204].

The reasoning which man beholds, Mawlana says, is relative and does not behold the strength to traverse the misleading from senses and emotions. The reasoning which is endlessly on a ongoing warfare with them ought to seek another path for traversing. The walk itself on this path throughout Mawlana's entire work is represented as extremely existential and it is expressed through the *sejr-i suluk* phrase which means undisrupted mental integrity towards wisdom and knowledge within the being, which in Islam is also acknowledged as microcosm (*zubde-i alem*). This path is not a common trail upon which man can oscillate, rather it is a path which seeks devotion of immense epistemological remembrance (*dhikr*) and rationalism (*fikr*) confided on the meta-imperialism spiritual stellar. Mawlana follows by saying:

Reasoning ought to be wings for man,

If man is in lack of nausea, he then ought to seek guiding intellect else by

When reasoning is found accompanying another

Light shall embrace and the path shall guide

⁶ Nur, 24:35

"Of wisdom, in thy head, a glimmering thou hast;

Seek then for perfect wisdom; be to it steadfast" [207].

Thy partial reasoning dwells absolute in the universal

The Absolute reason is thus the alternation of the self

In these allegorical expressions, through the absolute intellect, at time the ideal man is represented (*insan-i kamil*), at times the primal reasoning (*prima intellect*) and at times the Absolute Being. In mystical Islamic epistemology, Mawlana encountered, epistemology beholds an absolute parallelism with ontology. The levels of the essence (*meratibu'l-vujud*) are in proportional correspondence with the levels of the assured knowledge (*makamat*). As a result of all this, Mawlana through remembrance and by contemplating his soul (*dhikr*), sews his soul to the sacred meta-cosmic Universal Soul, whereas through contemplating his reasoning and pursuing the ultimate reasoning (*fikr*), he incorporates his reasoning to the teo-cosmic domain of light of the *Prima Intellect*.

God and Earth in Mawlana's work

Mawlana's fundamental mystical-philosophical point of view regarding God as the absolute Truth and the world as a reflection to this reality, lies on the transcendental oneness of the Being (*vahdet-i vujud*). Konya's great poet and mystic has advanced this standpoint by bringing it to a close correlation with the symbolic Sufi language represented in Farid al-Din Attar's work as well as the existing in the shadow (*Vujud dhil-li*) as continuum of the mystical philosophy and practice represented in philosophic-mystical tradition of Ibn al-Arabi. The absolute truth lies in the pre established primal (*Dhat Mutlak*) upon which only the presence of The Highest can take place (*vujudullah*), and all else but this (*masivallah*), Mawlana says, is merely a reflection of Allah's 99 most beautiful names. Despite oftentimes Mawlana being accused for developing a pantheistic philosophy along with a number of other Sufis, they in reality, as Henry Corbin

would elaborate, have presented a sacred Sufic oneness (*tevhid sufi-teomonistic sufik*) [5]. Mawlana's works in a very captivating manner discuss God as the only one being closest with man. Based on the Qur'anic verse "*....And We have already created man and know what his soul whispers to him, and We are closer to him than [his] jugular vein...*"⁷ and through a considered number of symbols, allegories, metaphors and various literary figures, Mawlana harvest his outmost to bring the magnificent, the unattainable and the greatness of the macrocosms of God to the microcosmic layer, respectively to man. To Mawlana, God is as He has presented himself in the Qur'an. He is Sovereign and Creator; He is the Most Beneficent and Most Merciful. In addition, as transmitted by sacred Prophetic traditions (*hadith kuds*i), He wished to denote His Almighty presence and thus created the universe. According to the transmission "*Was I merely a hidden ark, wished I be known, thereof the universe I created*"⁸ the universe and life within are a reflection of the sacred beauty (*jemalullah*). This reflection might not be fully visible at times and in different placements, yet anew God's Almightiness does not depend on His partial representation in man. The represented teomonism in Mawlana's work is a stream of the Qur'anic notions for God. In the below cited fragment from the Qur'an one can note how its enhancing light is threaded in harmony in Mawlana's inspiration: "*...Allah - there is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of [all] existence. Neither drowsiness overtakes Him nor sleep. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. Who is it that can intercede with Him except by His permission? He knows what is [presently] before them and what will be after them, and they encompass not a thing of His knowledge except for what He wills. His Kursi extends over the heavens and the earth, and their*

⁷ Kaf, 50:16

⁸ This *hadith kuds*i is significantly valued by Sufis and takes place in all the Sufi writings beginning with the most Classical works, whereas researchers on the science of hadeeths in most cases consider this an apocrypha, since it does not correspond with the transmitting norms of the prophetic transmissions of this discipline.

preservation tires Him not. And He is the Most High, the Most Great..."⁹

God has created all the spheres of the universe and He himself is presented throughout all of them, yet unfortunately man allows to be misled and by being preoccupied with the visible external aims only he concludes the latter as universal truth. Their instance is quite similar to an ant's life manifestation. Once some ants had gone for a walk on a piece of paper upon which a garden with flowers was drawn. They were mesmerized by the beauty and art presented on the drawing and thought it was a handwritten skill. Later they discover the writing is driven by the hand. Yet unfortunately they did not understand that the genuine handwrite of the pen was the Soul.¹⁰

The Qur'anic verse: "every day He is bringing about a matter"¹¹ clearly states that God is being conveyed through various penetrating rays in each passing moment. His reflections never resemble anew alike and never repeat.

Beginning from the nonorganic ants all through to the human, God has shaped everything in perfect systematic manner and in harmony. With the synchronization of two elements of a lower grade comes forth an element of a higher grade. For instance, both the stone cliff and iron bring forth the fire.¹² As a result everything in the universe, Mawlana explains, is a mother "umm"¹³ and is always undergoing pains of giving birth thus giving birth to higher enlightened and integrated beings. Indubitably God created each thing with His mere ordering "Kun – Be"¹⁴, yet some time is required in order for the created particle to take its perfect shape.¹⁵ The highest ultimate degree of perfection, in relation between God and the

creatures, can only be attained by His mercy and compassion. Thus Mawlana in his writing makes one of his protagonists say the following prayer

The rich was overly altruist, yet even his outmost altruism cannot compare to Thy Mastery

He gifted a hat, yet thee gifted a thoughtful mind... He gifted a sheath, yet thee gifted the beauty of the flesh

He gifted gold to me, yet Thee granted a hand to sense... He has gifted me a mule, and yet Thee conferred a mind to saddle it

The rich one gave a candle to myself, and yet Thee gave me the enlightened eye, He offered food to myself and Thee granted me a mouth to take it

*He gave myself prosperity, Thee gifted myself with life, rejoicing. His promise is the gold yet Thy promise is **the eternal treasure***

In Mawlana's work God's relation to the world, or better said the universe is represented by taking the sun for the example. Simultaneously, He both transmits mercy and also scalds:

"The sun that lights and warms this nether world,

If brought too near, had all to ruin hurled"[105].

God's symbolic representation with the sun's symbol is a very old and medieval tradition in religious history, beginning with the most primitive times hither the most celestial. Yet in Mawlana's work this symbolism attains a specific characterization through Shemsuddin the character¹⁶ (The Sun of religion). Just as we cannot perceive the sun through the naked eye, says Mawlana, alike, the light of God is overwhelming and blinds one's eyes. As a result a veil is needed, namely enriched colorful

⁹ Bekare, 2:255.

¹⁰ *Masnawi*, VI-3721.

¹¹ Rrahman, 55:29.

¹² *Masnawi*, II-1964.

¹³ *Masnawi*, III-3562.

¹⁴ Bekare, 2:117.

¹⁵ Mawlana by this thought pursued Senaiun dhe Attarin which say that the universe's garden ought to wither thousands of flowers until the seed of the rose can be thrown and sown. [In classical Islamic poetry the rose is a symbol of the Prophet (PBUH)].

¹⁶ Shemsuddin Tebrizi is a mystic leader (murshid) of Mawlana. The life and work of this eminent Sufi, who is the father of the mystical path of eros in the mystical Islamic literature, is not very well known to us, yet what is known is through Mawlana's relations with him in Konya and of what is said about him in the works of Mawlana.

glasses in order to see Him. Mawlana, in his work *Fihi Ma Fih*, and in reference to the Qur'anic verse regarding Musa at the time when he wished to see God, advocates his student Husameddin Chelebi by saying

"God has created these veils for a good purpose. For if God's beauty were displayed without a veil, we would not have the power to endure it. Through the intermediary of these veils we derive life and enjoyment. Look at the sun through its light we can distinguish good from bad, and find warmth. Trees and orchards become fruitful from its heat, and their fruits—unripe, sour and bitter, become mature and sweet. Through its influence, mines of gold and silver, rubies and carnelians are produced. But if the sun were to come nearer it would bring no benefit whatsoever. On the contrary, the whole world and every creature would be burned up and destroyed" [65,66].

The above delineated veils by Mawlana are the beauty of this world behind which lays the inconceivable and perfect beauty of God. To those who do not abide by this metacosmic reality, Mawlana compares them to the bats which despise the sun:

"Just like the bat, man cannot bear full light of day;

So, in despair, he seeks the darkness, shuns noon's ray" [295]

Using the symbolism of the sun Mawlana develops a quotable symbolism of the colors' symbolism. The color gifted to us upon this world, says Mawlana, is a result of the breakage of the light and the oneness of the sacred transcending rays (*fejdih ilahi*) and are prerequisite for contemplating man's soul. At the time of the meeting (*vuslat*), the moment when man dives onto the colors of the sacred oneness, the rest perish and merely the prudent light of Allah (*Nurullah*) remains, the essence of the being in the universe.¹⁷

¹⁷ This idea of this Mawlana supports by the Qur'anic verse: *"The dye of God! And who is better than God at dying? And we are worshippers of Him."* Al-baqara 2:138

The enriched illustration given to us by Mawlana regarding knowledge, acquaintance, God, universe, present a theosophy and a specific teleological philosophical-artistic system profoundly rooted foremost in the Islamic sacred scriptures, and later in the fruitful philosophical-artistic tradition of the east and the antic, whereas its branches spread out far towards a great number of systematic and artistic mindsets of the middle age and the new era. Precisely to this, Jelaluddin Rumi has an acknowledged merit in various artistic and scientific spheres both in the east and the west. His firmament style remains fresh and applicable for the soul in all timeframes and periods.

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- *Metin Izeti is a PhD professor in the Faculty of Arts at the State University of Tetovo, Macedonia, E-mail: metinizzeti@gmail.com*

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