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POSSIBILITY OR IMPOSSIBILITY OF EXTRACTING AN AESTHETICAL SYSTEM FROM MOLLA SADRA'S PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

In the philosophical system of Islamic philosophers, it cannot be found an independent area called philosophy of art and aesthetics. If it has been happened any discussion in this regard here and there, it is scattered and secondarily. This applies in the case of Mulla Sadra as a great Islamic philosopher more than others. Almost all that Mulla Sadra has pointed out in scattered way on the art and beauty, it has been raised under other subjects, especially love. So in his thought there has become into existence an authentic relationship among art, beauty and love. Like other great Islamic mystics and Sufis especially those of school of love and beauty, Mulla Sadra has contemplated beauty and known Almighty God as the absolute beauty and the love as generating from beauty. For him God is the true love and lover and beloved and based on pantheism all being is a manifestation and an image of Infinite Beauty. For Sadra the beauty – like light and existence – is hierarchical. He sees all particles of the universe as having beauty. Mulla Sadra has regarded the earthen and virtual loves and beauties, if they were in divine path, as respectful and valuable. According to the philosophical foundations of Mulla Sadra, love is unity, originality, simplicity and concomitance of existence with attributes of perfection. Love is conceptually evident and he considers it as a universal truth that has characteristics such as beauty, goodness, science, abstraction, power and life. In this study the analytical method has been used and the logical relations of components with each other have been examined.

Keywords: Love, Beauty, Molla Sadra, Aesthetics, Pantheism

INTRODUCTION

Beauty and aesthetics in the thought and works of any great philosopher and mystic is regarded as the key that opens in a best way the door of those ideas. Aesthetics is a science of beauty. In truth, aesthetics is one of the deep foundations of any philosophy and school that without studying it we cannot understand the content of that thinking and the philosophy of art is one result of this science. Aesthetics is derived from the Greek word «*aesthetikos*» meaning the sense perception. From the beginning of life on Earth the human being has faced with three truths: nature, man and God and found the beauty in these three areas. Although in new ages many western philosophers have not seen the very existence neither beautiful nor ugly, but all those who believe in God have not been able to see the existence bereft of beauty; for this reason, we can claim that the religions have been the earliest founders of aesthetics. Outer beauty has been dedicated to man by nature and the aestheticist nature of man has perceived it; but the inner beauty that is the origin of art, spirituality, morality and mysticism, has been concealed in the human infinite interior. In the sight of all those who believe in God, these two beauties have had origin in God. In Islamic and Iranian mysticism, in the field of aesthetics Mulla Sadra is

influenced by Ibn Arabi and Rumi whose views in turn root in the Zoroastrian, platonic and neo-platonic thought. However, the modern aesthetics has taken shape by Kant, Schiller and Hegel. This aesthetics has paid attention to beauty manifestations in the realm of art and ignored from the main part of it. This deficiency has been compensated in Islamic and Iranian philosophy and mysticism. In this spiritual and illuminationist path that Mulla Sadra is its heir is identifiable a kind of comprehensive aesthetics that originates from religion and the belief in the divine beauty. The religion is a beauty order that drives the world in a beautiful way and the central core of such religion is mysticism. (Sura Ibrahim, 24). Sufism that is the same Islamic mysticism is that aesthetic ritual core which gains distance with religious arid dogmatism and the mystics are those who follow the ritual of love. (The Kaviani, 1981, 248). Mulla Sadra follows the school of love and beauty in Islamic mysticism in which the sempiternal beauty is *the* truth. The Muslim Mystics know God as pure Good and absolute Beauty.

Molla Sadra's role in Islamic philosophy

Without a doubt, we can say that in a period of its history the philosophy by Muslims has found its essence with Mulla Sadra and in his expression has reached its peak. Mulla Sadra is an Avicennian a la Suhrawardi; he has gone not only beyond them, but also he has provided a certain expression of transcendent philosophy with his existential philosophy through some illuminationist interpretations. His transcendent philosophy is like a massive plan for the existential leap that travels from the depth and non-organic elements towards flourishing the human and territorial forms and beyond; the direction of this movement is longitudinal and perfection-oriented, from the beginning towards the end. Mulla Sadra's important task is the demonstration of immateriality. With many reasons he demonstrates that the imagination is immaterial and thereby he solves a lot of philosophical problems that seemed to be unsolvable, including the most important of these problems, the proof of bodily resurrection. Philosophers before Mulla Sadra regarded the bodily resurrection impossible, while appealing to the immaterial imagination Mulla Sadra claimed it to be an intellectual issue and then proved it. In addition, relying on the immaterial imagination, he proves that the soul's perceptual representations that are achieved through imagination are things that the soul emanates them by its creative power; in fact, the soul is agent and these representations have subsistence of issuing towards it and are emanated out of soul. The subsistence of issuing of these representations is in themselves possible through the imagination. According to this point, Mulla Sadra has reread many of the issues in the philosophy and provided a new interpretation of them. Of course, despite the theological similarities, it must be said that imagination has a different role in the system of Mulla Sadra other than that in Ibn Arabi, because Ibn Arabi's imagination is the key to all of his intellectual issues; Ibn Arabi knows the imaginary knowledge in reaching the nearness to god superior to intellectual knowledge. For Ibn Arabi the world is an ideal and imaginal world and the imagination is of such greatness without which the thoughts seem unjustifiable. But the imagination by Mulla Sadra is not of such a role. The imagination is an intermediary for Mulla Sadra and since in the travel of existence the intellectual world is superior over the sense and imagination one – because it is perfect and immaterial – also in the gnoseological travel the intellectual knowledge is so much superior over the imaginary one. Therefore, it seems that in the perspective of Mulla Sadra the role of imagination regarding the perfect man is fainter than its role by Ibn Arabi. While from the perspective of Ibn Arabi, the mystic cannot journey on the path but through the imagination, for Mulla Sadra the imagination



is a passageway through which the mystic should pass to intellectual knowledge. In the philosophy of Mulla Sadra the principle of substantial movement can be a way to prove the world of imagination.

Beauty and art in Islamic philosophy

As it can be seen based on the works of Islamic philosophers, unlike the West philosophers, such as Kant, Nietzsche, Hegel, Heidegger, Gadamer, etc. - who work on the philosophy of art and aesthetics some independent treatises – none of our philosophers create an independent treatise about aesthetics and the philosophy of art. Even the treatise of Farabi's *great music* (which is on the specific art, i.e. music, it deals with defining the music scales and distances and songs instead of discussion of the principles of art) does not seem to be able to provide a comprehensive viewpoint in this field; because it is dedicated to a particular art and not the totality of the arts or an overall point of view on founding their principles. To be more precise, there is not any work on the philosophy of art and aesthetics.

Among the thinkers and philosophers of the world of Islam the Brethren of Purity, the Neo-Pythagoreans of Islamic world, have spoken more than others in the wake of and influenced by Pythagoreans on the art in general and music specifically. It is interesting to know that in the fifth treatise of the mathematics, i.e. before other sciences and arts, in the first volume of their collection they have discussed the music, its significance and function (Brethren of Purity, 1995 AH, 193-235). As it is clear, following Pythagoras they considered the music as a part of mathematics; to say more exactly, they knew the music having the mathematical regular rules. Then in the seventh treatise of mathematics under the title "on the scientific arts and their end" Brethren of Purity discuss not only the theoretical sciences, but also they have allocated a chapter to the practical sciences for which they apply the term "art" (ibid, 266-251). This means that like Plato the Brethren of Purity believed in the educational dimension of art and especially music and its effect on the individuals' soul; whereas the Islamic philosophers paid less attention to this aspect of art and almost drove it to the margins.

"Perhaps the subject of philosophy of art and aesthetics of Muslim philosophers appears in reality to be a strange question; because either they have not dealt independently with this category, or they have explained primarily and less secondarily some of the arts. (Ansarian, 2007, 209).

On the nature and status of the visual arts and beauty in the Islamic culture and especially Islamic philosophy, Francesco Gabrielli also in his short article, *Islamic aesthetics*, points out rightly:

"the regular research on the nature of beauty, in literature or the visual arts, did not find any importance in Islamic philosophy, because the theoretical interests of Islamic culture did not come to that point where the idea of beauty appears to be a common source to the entire artistic appearance, but it was limited only to assess the literary phenomena (rhetoric and poetic). (Etinghausn, 1995, 87).

In contrast, S. H. Nasr although acknowledges that the aesthetics and the art have not attracted the Islamic philosophers' attention independently; but without discussing the possibility or impossibility of "philosophy of art» and «aesthetics» in the Islamic philosophy, he speaks explicitly of the term "Islamic aesthetics". The title of his article confirms that he believes without doubt the possibility of "Islamic aesthetics" (NASR, 2010, 33). So he says: "without doubt, the most evident document of Islamic aesthetics is the brilliant and in appearance mute presence of



the very Islamic art" (ibid, 47). Unaware of the fact that the aesthetics and philosophy of art is a discussion in the second order and is not equivalent with artworks in various areas.

In this time, we are looking up the why of this adventure, but it originates from the relation of art and beauty with Islamic doctrines. Since the Islamic philosophers in their philosophical systems has after all interested in the foundations of Islam and the consolidation of these foundations and at least defending them through the philosophy and rational reasons, so in some of the issues they have necessarily to overlook the overall problem or to make it somewhat to appear consistent with the fundamentals and principles of Islam. According to this background the Islamic philosopher has to make consistent his approach with the teachings of Islam regarding the general questions of philosophy and specifically the art and aesthetics; because based on this approach, the art is not human and earthen art, but it carries a spiritual and sacred truth. Therefore, since the teachings of Islam had not partly consistence with some of arts like painting, sculpture, music etc., and created for them some limitations, thus not only these arts did not grow so it should be, but nobody attempted toward establishing coherently philosophical foundations for the arts and aesthetics; if these questions have been addressed, they were fallen under other ones like the divine beauty, love etc. (see below: *beauty, art and love*).

Relation of beauty and art by Molla Sadra

This deficiency in the field of art is in Mulla Sadra's school more than other philosophers Mulla Sadra is in proportion with other Islamic philosophers; this is in turn unusual, because he has not only dealt with this category but avoided it too. Although during his life Mulla Sadra has made poems and has never been unfamiliar with some arts, but based on a few pieces of poetry or expressions here and there on the art, it cannot found a coherent theory about aesthetics.

As we know, in Mulla Sadra's works we do not find any trace on the philosophy of art and aesthetics. This shows that depending on Mulla Sadra's philosophical system, not only the question is not important for him own, but the philosophy of art and aesthetics has not had in truth a specific, independent and superior position in his philosophical system. Of course, it must be noted that the lack of a specific and independent status of the philosophy art and aesthetics is not because of the weakness of this intellectual system; this can be justified due to his time (the discourse in which he thinks) and depending on his intellectual system.

One of the reasons that in the introduction of *journeys* Mulla Sadra brings about lack of attention to all branches of science is as follows:

"Since the sciences are of various branches and a variety of perceptions are plentiful and they cannot be dominated or at least it is difficult, so the efforts in those sciences are also various, so that the steps of people are various in arts; thus the scientists are divided in groups and the difference came into existence. Some of them went toward the intellectual and the traditional, some toward the principles and minor parts. So it is obligatory for the intellectual and wise who turns to the science that is more important and more necessary; he/she must be cautious and allocate his time for studying a science in which is possible the completion of his/her nature." (Mulla sadra, 1999, vol. 1, 5). We can see that he puts the human perfection and nearness to God as criterion and criticizes the science and arts with regard to it; every science that is more dynamic in reaching God and perfection should be paid great attention to it.

In his works Mulla Sadra uses many times the term "art" or "arts" and "creation". Of course, it must be noted that the term *art* for Mulla Sadra does not mean precisely art in modern sense, but the art by him has a wider meaning, so that the art is a little part of it. In the same way,



"artifice" and "artisanship" also is not solely dedicated to the art and the artist. In *journeys* he uses the "figure of demonstration" that is the same *techne* in Greece. (Mulla Sadra, 1999, vol. 1, 357)

Mulla Sadra mixes together the art, creation and love and knows God as artisan and lover and considers the world as to be created by Him on the basis of love. In his *journeys* he narrates a story about God's love in Himself; it has all of these matters in itself:

«One who read Qur'an in the presence of Abolsaid Abolkhair, read this verse: *يحبهم و يحبونه* (Al-ma'ida, 54). He said: He really likes them, because He does not like other than Himself; so there is nobody other than He, the others are not but His creation, and the artisan when praising his artifice, he praises really himself, hence this truth: if there was no love, there was not any sky, no earth, no sea. (Mulla Sadra, 2003, vol. 1/2, 288).

As it is clear, in this respect there is an intrinsic link between the world of creation as God's action and art on the one hand and God as an artisan by love. The role of love and God's inherent bliss in creation and in general in Sadraean ontology is more apparent in the following expressions: » Being is not only love himself and jubilation in itself and its effects, including the effects « (ibid, 447). For Mulla Sadra the art and beauty is not purposeless (art is not free), but it serves a specific purpose; but it is only our perception with our modern mentality, but he does not state explicitly such expression. So one commentator says: "the beauty of Islamic art is not based on the mental and personal expression, but like the beauty of nature, is independent of the person." (Azam, 2002, 550).

Beauty

In Islam the beauty is one of the divine attributes. On this basis and based on his philosophical system Mulla Sadra embarks upon the question of beauty. He speaks Beauty of Lord of the Worlds. (Mulla Sadra, vol. 7, 111) based on which that the humans are very eager to it and fall in love with it. (ibid, 182). Mulla Sadra does not consider the beauty of God and the beauty of the universe as an artistic act and the beauty of God is not for him a thing added to His essence, but it is an emanation from him. Mulla Sadra understands that the truth of these things is not other than existence. This approach is based on the thesis that the ontology of Mulla Sadra and his aesthetics are related one together and, in fact, his philosophy of art and aesthetics are based on his ontology. However, among his works there is not found any definition of beauty. One of the commentators has a justification for this matter; on his belief based on Mulla Sadra's truth of existence and truth of science (these are undefinable for him) we can say that the beauty is like the truth of existence and science and so cannot be defined. Therefore, the beauty is evident and does not need any demonstration. He continues: "since the beauty is coextensive with existence, it can be concluded what is true about the existence, and what we can also attribute to it. It is true about and can be attributed to beauty". In other words, the principality of existence corresponds with the principality of beauty; the unity of existence corresponds with the unity of beauty; the non-definability of existence corresponds with the non-definability of beauty etc. (Ansarian, 2007, 6-245).

Since Mulla Sadra, based on the rule of the higher possibility, describes the highest rank until the lowest rank and the hierarchy of the spheres and heavens, on the starry sky over our heads. (Mulla Sadra, vol. 7, 110). These short hints cannot be considered as a coherent theory on art and beauty. In other place he calls God as "an agent of images and motifs" (ibid, 128). Where using the Koranic verses Mulla Sadra, by the Lord's language, speaks of the universe and



hierarchy and its ornaments, we can understand that he prefers "natural art" and "natural beauty" over artificial art and beauty, although he does not use none of these terms. From his viewpoint if we accept the correspondence between beauty and existence, then it is better to put the existence as a genuine standard of beauty.

Of course, since the existence is equivocal, also the beauty will be equivocal. As a result, creatures' beauty is hierarchical. One of the commentators claims that since Mulla Sadra lived in a period that the principality of quiddity and existence was raised, in response to this trend he accepted the principality of existence; he could take the principality of life, science, perfection or the principality of beauty etc. Therefore, he concludes what he has said about existence, it is also true on beauty, i.e. we can speak of principles like principality of beauty, unity of beauty, analogical gradation of beauty, move in quantity and quality of beauty etc. in correspondence with existence. (Akbari, 2006, 96-95). It must be noted that although the dominant atmosphere of Mulla Sadra's time was the discussion on the principality of existence and quiddity, and he has been involved in this subject, but the most important thing is that the Islamic philosophers claim the existence and its concept is the most general concept, but this is not true in the case of other concepts like life, power, beauty, science etc., though they may have one extension. But there is no other concept such as beauty, perfection, life, science etc. that is equal with the concept of existence.

Art, beauty and love

In Mulla Sadra's thought there is a close relationship between beauty and love. In fact, love is resulted from the perception of beauty. So whatever Mulla Sadra says on arts and beauty, is fallen under discussion of divisions of love. He knows one of the divisions of love as to be eagerness and affection of the Creator for His creation. (Mulla Sadra, vol. 7, ۱۶۵). He makes clearer this link when he speaks of the "love of youths". According to him the "subtle icons", "member proportion" and "beautiful form" arouse the sever love and pleasure. Therefore, love and pleasure are associated with the beautiful form, the proportion of parts and subtle icons. As it is evident, the discussion of art and beauty, if we read it in this way, is proposed under the discussion of love. God as the perfection of beauty is the origin of love originates and the cause of friends of the beautiful, because Allah is beautiful and loves beauty (ibid, 174).

Therefore, until achieving the intellectual world in order to know the real beauty and beloved himself not only we should pass by the physical and material world, but also the ideal world. On this basis, according to one of the commentators ", "the art and beauty in this system consist of achieving a superior and higher existence in the realm of the worlds of idea and intellect and the extreme perception of general forms of these dimensions" (Bolkhari Ghohi, 2006, 469). Since the world is thoroughly God's art and creation and God Himself is the manifestation and origin of beauty, so the beauty is general and all-embracing and it is not limited to artistic beauty and human artifact. Therefore, the love of world and all that is in it, as the divine work and art and also love of Supreme Being as the origin of beauty, lead to intuition of the absolute beauty and to see everything beautiful. Notwithstanding, it must be noted that none of these views are considered as a coherent and independent viewpoint on art and beauty. Such expressions here and there do not cause that we conclude that for Mulla Sadra the philosophy of art and aesthetics are distinct, this could be a merely subjective rereading; he never deals with these subjects systematically. The fragment on which some commentators rely it and try to derive Mulla Sadra's



philosophy of art and aesthetics is mentioned in the seventh volume of *journeys*. (Mulla Sadra, vol. 7, 142).

Mulla Sadra's expressions indicate that with a more evaluative, objective and concrete discussion he divides peoples and nations in two groups in proportion with the perception and education of industries and arts and the beautiful things – this disposition is a result of a particular type of love. According to him, some of them are of a subtle heart, a pure mind and a gentle soul who perceive the beautiful forms and icons and can easily learn the sciences; but instead some others have a dense soul, dark heart, cold temperament unable to understand the beauties and subtle forms and learning sciences and arts.

However, it does not appear to be able to speak of the philosophy of art and aesthetics of Mulla Sadra with certainty. Although based on the philosophical system of Mulla Sadra and some important questions of this system, such as the world of imagination and the creation of forms by the imagination, we can provide an interpretation of his texts, and reconstruct and develop an overall perspective on the art and beauty; Some commentators have suggested this approach and tried to construct "a Saraeen philosophy of art and aesthetics" based on the Sadraean philosophical system.

CONCLUSION

Generally, in the Islamic philosophy the art and aesthetics has been not defined as an independent research area and consequently incorporated into other topics; this is the case especially about Mulla Sadra the great Islamic philosopher.

Lack of attention to the question of art and aesthetics and lack of effort in establishing and justifying its foundations among the Islamic philosophers are related in part with the teachings of Islam based on prohibition and limitation of some of arts. Mulla Sadra, also, as a Muslim philosopher is not exception with respect to impediments of Islam. However, the more fundamental problem relevant in this ignorance is the kind of philosophical system and discourse in which have thought these philosophers.

The claim of those commentators who believe in the superior and independent position for the philosophy of art and aesthetics by Mulla Sadra is not so justified and is partly exaggerated. But it must be acknowledged that the absence of a specific and independent domain in the art and beauty in Mulla Sadra's philosophy is not a reason for the weakness of his thought.

According to the opinion of some commentators, on the basis of Mulla Sadra's ontology we can offer an approach to the art and aesthetics that may be called "Sadraean philosophy of art and aesthetics" instead of "Sadra's philosophy of art and aesthetics".

In fact, only indulgently we can speak of Mulla Sadra's philosophy of art and aesthetics. However, it can be confessed that regarding Sadra's exact and perfect explanation of the existence and his belief in the concomitance between the good and existence, he provided a system of thinking about beauty on the basis of which the beauty is a running principle on the whole existence.

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