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PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF NIHILISM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ISLAM

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ABSTRACT

Nihilism knows it impossible to gain insight of the world and believes that any sort of belief and faith related to the universe-related issues is void. It also holds that the human beings and the world have not been created purposively. Decline in the religious mindset is one of the factors having caused the meaninglessness of the life of today's human beings. Essentially, the religious conception is the faith in the idea that there is a plan and objective in the word and that the world is an ethical system featuring a special goal and program. The human life, as well, is based on a goal and meaning; and, the movement and conduct of every individual is based on his or her goals and ideals and it can be perhaps stated that the purposiveness of the human life equals its meaningfulness. The followings are the goals the present study is looking for: investigation and criticism of nihilism philosophy and trying to find solutions for fighting nihilism. The new approach of the present study is criticism of philosophical nihilism based on an Islamic perspective. Moreover, there is made an ontological investigation of nihilism to offer solutions for invalidating and fighting nihilism.

Keywords: *Philosophical Nihilism, Creation's Purposefulness, Human's Teleology.*

INTRODUCTION

Nihilism was proposed during mid-19th century in Russia as a school of thought and it opposes all aesthetical forms and it only defends pragmatism and scientific rationalism. Ivan Turgenev used nihilism in the famous novel "the fathers and the sons" in 1862 to describe the personality of Bazarov and made it known to everyone.

Nihilists constituted a political movement with little organization and they have been active in Russia's political scene since 1860 during the reign of Alexander II till the revolution in October 1917. They challenged the authority of the government, the church and family and supported a type of social order that was laid on the foundation of rationalism and materialism as the only sources of recognition and individual freedom is the only goal they pursue. Nihilists gradually started sabotage and riots and all of the political groups that used terror and nuisance were called nihilists during late 1870.

Such a mindset underwent an increasing expansion as a result of the devastations resulting from the two world wars in Europe. Nowadays, existential nihilism is one of the most important nihilist streams which is a philosophical doctrine realizing the life meaningless and with no external goal or internal ethical values; though many existentialists know themselves as being outside the nihilism realm.

A new world came about with the renaissance evolutions and emergence of a modern era in which the human being, instead of the God, was considered as the pivot and center of all the universe and values. In the course of the humanism propagation in 11th-19th century Europe,

the belief in the existence of any sort of supernaturally sublime being lost its color and the ethereal teachings were denied and the human beings founded and set the values of the principles and ethics and, after a short while, the ground was little-by-little set for skepticism and relativism in cognizance for the fact that the human beings found themselves incapable of finding answers to many of the issues based on their intellect and knowledge. Now, after the elapse of several centuries from renaissance, nihilism (denial of all values) is still posited as a distinct school of thought in this modern world and it has had no outcome but the humiliation of the humans. Having no spiritual philosophy in life, absence of spiritual ideals and aspirations, bad education, failure and defeat of the wants, internal conflicts and inability in resolving them and identity crisis are amongst the most important factors that have caused the emergence of nihilism. It has to be noted in elaborating the present study's topic that originality was given to the nature by persons like Talis and Democritus and/or to idea by Plato or to the form by Aristotle in the ancient Greece's thought history as a result of which the primary subject of thought, i.e. the very question about the truth of the existence of "a supreme being" or the same ideas and notions about the existence ranks and their relationships with one another, was forgotten and, instead, energy or form was given originality in Aristotelean meaning. This way, paying attention to the being, i.e. superficiality, took the place of exploring in the truth of the being and the value and meaning of life and this marks the onset of western metaphysics.

Based thereon, the "being" or "god" is considered nonexistent and the specifications and appearances and aspects as visible beings are given originality. In religious mindset, the principle and pivot revolve about the God and the manifestations and names and characteristics of Him and the thought is rooted in truth and God in both material and teleological terms. But, the nihilist thought becomes inflicted with pluralism and multiplicity and polytheism for the fact that it ignores the existence of the God. Ignorance of the God causes distancing from the truth and frustration, invalidity, meaninglessness and psychological, spiritual and ethical crises are the outcomes and results of neglecting the God (Zarshenas, 2004, 242). Nihilism's traces should be sought in the preliminary communities that pursued a sort of solitariness, self-abandonment, ignorance and disbelief in the purposiveness of the world and expressed ineptness of the human's mental and intellectual power. Extreme skepticism regarding all the things and abhorrence of the social, political, economic, cultural and educational life and expression of their fruitlessness are amongst the genestic sources and seminal themes of nihilism (Arastehkhod, 2002, 103).

Philosophical Nihilism:

In this type of nihilism, life, being and universe are given no meaning and essential and substantive meaning at all. The authors of such a type of thought are predominantly found with distressed and hopeless thoughts of life and general consider creation as being void and meaningless. Walter Terence Stace, the contemporary English philosopher, believes that the life meaninglessness of the today's human beings has been caused by the decline of the religious mindset. He opines that the religious insight is essentially laid on the idea that there is a plan and goal in the world and that the world is an ethical system and everything would come to a happy ending and the faith in a meaningful and purposive world lies in the depth of the religion's message. So, the decline of the religious mindset can mean the decline of faith in the existence of a universal plan and goal (Stace, 1987, 109).



Put differently, it can be stated that the method proposed by Gorgias, a Socrates contemporary, who denied any sort of being and claimed that even if there is a supreme being, it cannot be recognized is a sort of philosophical nihilism the same way that from the skepticism exercised by pyrrhonism to Hume's criticism method are all the other dimensions of the same philosophical nihilism (Shayegan, 1999: 14). In regard of this subject, Niche believes that "the idea as to for what purpose has this world been created and what are the human beings' goals in life ... should not be more important to us than a joke; because the rudeness of the small human worm is the most ridiculous thing existent in the global scene; by the way, do you ask yourself, as an individual, why do I exist? ... I do not know any better goal for life except (being transformed) to a generous and prodigal mortal animal that seeks pompousness and impossibilities".

It can be stated in elaborating the philosophical nihilism that there is no goal or the questions should be left unanswered (Niche, 2000: 109-110). Therefore, the world gradually becomes valueless and devoid of truth and wandering, distress and various kinds of psychological harms result from such a type of nihilism. The result is that belief in intellectual topics is the cornerstone of nihilism. The value of the world has been compared with things related to a completely imaginary world (Ibid, 67). Those believing in philosophical nihilism assume that the world is purposeless. The phenomenologist Russel underlines the purposelessness of the world as follows: human ideals are created by him and the world outside the human being is not at all a supportive one and the human beings are alone and with no assistant and helper in this world. The medieval era was the period of faith and the modern centuries are the era of faithlessness. The real onset of the evolution in medieval era to the modern era came about when the 17th century scholars turned their faces away from somethings that were known as final causes. By teleology or the final causes, a purposive happening was intended that was going to actualize a thing or an event in the world, to with the cosmic goal thereof ... This goal was preceded by the assumption that there is a cosmic order or plan and every being can be elucidated, in a final analysis, based on its position in this cosmic plan, i.e. based on its goal.

The presumption was governing in Aristotle and Plato's theories as well as in the entire Christianity world. The founders of the new science, like Galilei, Kepler and Newton, were mostly religious individuals who had no doubt about the God's goals but they, in a revolution, separated the ultimate, as a thing that controls and curbs the nature, from naturalism.

From their perspective, the goal of science is the prediction, control and curbing of the events and, thus, the search for the ultimate does not serve the achievement of this goal. The thing one should know for forecasting an eclipse is not its goal rather it is its causes. Due to the same reason, from 11th century on, science was restricted to discovery of the causes. The intention of the world was ignored and nobody was any longer showing any tendency towards it. Since this time on, a new imaginary image of the world was portrayed and developed. Based on this image, the world is purposeless, devoid of wisdom and meaningless and the nature is nothing more than a moving matter. No goal governs the movement of matter and these movements are doomed by blind forces and rules.

After Galilei, Europeans found the world completely purposeless. The religion essentially incorporates the belief in the existence of a plan and goal in the world and it is the faith in the idea that the world is an ethical system and that everything would finally come to a happy ending. But, such a conception by the Europeans about science and religion flawed faith and



the world's purposefulness idea. And, if the system of affairs becomes meaningless and purposeless, then the human life would be purposeless and meaningless. Everything is useless and in vain and every effort would be eventually valueless. Of course, there is still this possibility for the human beings to be in search of such secondary goals as money, fame, art and knowledge and probably enjoy acquiring of them. But, the human life would be meaningless in its substructure and foundation. The dissatisfied, impatient, disappointed and suppressed spirits of the modern human stem from this same fundamental meaninglessness.

Purposiveness of the World:

Purposiveness of the world and teleology are amongst the most important and most basic discussions in divine and spiritual schools. In ontology, the purposefulness of the world and the entire creatures therein is discussed. In this regard, many religions have come about but they all point to two general beliefs:

- A. Deists' Idea: the world of creation has a creator named God and it is moving towards a certain ultimate goal and result based on the divine wisdom. From the perspective of the deists, purposefulness and goal-seeking constitute a regulation governing the world of creation; it means that the creation system and the creatures of the world naturally move forward towards a certain ultimate destination based on a wise strategy. Belief in resurrection and reincarnation and purposefulness of the world and the human beings is one of the essential pillars of the religious faith that is especially taken into account by every divine religion and ethereal creed in such a way that its denial equals exiting the realm of religion. Deists opine that resurrection is amongst the principles of religion and the beliefs and opinions forming the foundation and essence of religion are intended by the principles of religion" (Safa'ei, 1989, 7).
- B. Materialists' Idea: materialists believe that the entire universe is limited in matter and every being should be material and tangible and the nonmaterial and intangible things cannot be recounted as being existent and that all the affairs beyond matter like intellect, abstracts, revelation and prophecy are superstitions and myths (Javadi Amoli, 2005: 65). Materialist philosophers know every other phenomena of the world than the things created by the humans and animals as haphazard and purposeless and believe that the world has been created of matter and no external factor has been involved in its creation hence the world of nature would be never chasing a goal for its coming into existence based on physical and chemical actions and reactions.

Marxists reckon that matter is the entire eternal truth of the universe and consider the occurrence and actualization of creation as something more of a stochastic and random nature. There is no room for the presence of the ultimate cause or purposiveness of the universe in this perspective meaning that predetermined goal and destiny do not hold true. Materialists know matter equal to the entire universe and consider the material world as the generator and creator of themselves as well as something eternal, everlasting and independent. Now, how has this matter per se created and generated itself and how has such a huge diversity of the creatures formed are the questions they refer to randomness and chance for answering. Marxists explicitly declare that "every necessary phenomenon occurs in the form of a haphazard incident. The objective and regular necessity is always hidden behind a mass of accidents that are per se deemed as the manifested and emerged forms of that necessity" (Nick A'ei, 1979: 250).



Now, the question is raised as to which of these two ideologies hold about the world of existence disregarding the long discussions posited by each. It can be discerned via objective observation of the world of creation that the deists' theory is authentic because the order and coordination existent amongst the entire phenomena of the world of nature is substantial evidence to the claim that each of them features certain goal and intention. First of all, the creatures in the world of creation have been brought into existence out of an order and a program and there is relationship and coordination between the entire components of the universe. Secondly, the order and coordination in the world of creation is an indicative of the idea that the phenomena and elements of the world have been created for a given goal and intention without which it is insensible for the creatures and phenomena to have come about out of a program and/or coordination; furthermore, it can be stated that the order and coordination of the world displays the truth that a supreme power, characterized by a sagacious wisdom and volition, has created it and the purposiveness of the world of creation is the prerequisite to this wisdom and volition.

Ultimate Cause:

As for the ultimate cause, there are also two theories: A) all of the world's creatures have an ultimate goal whether those that have will and awareness or those that do not, like plants; B) only the creatures with will have ultimate goals.

The unwise creatures and subjects have not been created for an ultimate goal because they lack the volition such as plants and the involuntary organs of the body. Deists support the first theory and believe that all the components of the world of creation are directed at a certain goal. In other words, all of the creatures move in line with the achievement of a goal. This has been proved in the researches by the experts of natural sciences and, simultaneously, it is logically envisaged completely acceptable that there is a goal beyond the world of nature (Monesma, 1995: 172). Deists follow the "originality of ultimate goal" meaning that they believe that the world's system has been arranged out of a will and volition for a certain goal and intention.

In a book about the purposiveness of the life, Rouviere writes: "every individual of a species begins from a generative fetus to evolve towards a predicted destiny. This trend moves based on a regular and even method as demonstrated in the entire anthropogenic stages, including maturation (Rouviere, 1980: 263). Donald Robert Kerr states that "the world's order and organization as needed by a scientist not only necessitates the existence of the God in terms of creation but also entails the existence of a supreme wisdom for the continuation of this order and organization and guidance of the world of beings and this is the issue posited in the ethereal holy book hence the existence of a world with no order and organization is annulled and invalidated (Monesma, 1995: 114).

Purposefulness of the Creation from the Perspective of the Holy Quran:

From the perspective of the holy Quran, the world has not been created purposelessly rather the entire of its constituent elements and components serve a special goal and intention. The human creation is a calculated one and not random. The human being is a selected and appointed being (Motahhari, 1993: 59). Then, he was chosen by his Creator who bestowed life to him and guided him (Holy Quran, TAHA: 122).

Surely, there are signs in the creation of the heavens and earth and the coming and going of the day and night for those who possess intellect and thought. The owners of the wisdom and



intellect are those who remember the God when standing and sitting as well as when sleeping on their sides and think about the creation of the skies and earth and say: “O God, you have not created this world in vain; you are clean. Keep us away from the chastisement of fire” (Holy Quran, Al-e-IMRAN: 191-194).

The abovementioned AYAT invite the mankind to think and ponder about the creation of the skies and the earth and the sequence of day and night so that every individual human being can discern the secrets of the creation as much as his or her talent permits. Using scrutiny, the mankind can become aware of the objective of the world’s creation. The aforesaid AYAT point to the idea that one should think and contemplate to gain insight over the universe because the mere observation of the world without thinking and contemplation cannot show the purposiveness of the world of creation. In fact, if a person gets involved in the observation of the universe, s/he can figure out the order and the law governing the entire components and elements therein. And, it is following thinking in this regard that the mankind can perceive that the order governing the world cannot be only relying on the components of the world themselves rather they should be connected to a power beyond the world of matter and nature. The source of existence has created the world for moving towards an ultimate cause and a taut truth and the whole world is moving towards an objective (Tabataba’ei, 1995: 38).

“He created the skies and the earth rightfully and endowed you the form you are currently in and made your faces beautiful and everybody’s return is to Him” (the Holy Quran, TAQABON: 3). Underneath the AYA, Allameh Tabataba’ei writes: “rightfully has been here used for a meaning other than the opposite of in vain that means the skies and earth have been created with no fixed purpose and intention” (Tabataba’ei, 1995: 31).

The collection of these AYAT implies that not only the world has not been created in vain but also the world has a destination and intention for the achievement of which it has been created. Imam Ali (PBUH), as well, has the following order about the purposiveness of the world of creation: “the praised God has not created you purposelessly and he has not left you on your own” (NAHJ AL-BALAQA, sermon: 85).

And, he orders elsewhere that:

“The prophet has not been sent to you purposelessly and for a game and the skies and earth and the things that are in them have not been created in vain” (Ibid, motto: 73). After emphasizing on the idea that the world and the human beings have not been created in vain and purposelessly rather they serve a wisely devised purpose, the Holy Quran introduces setting of the ground for the humans’ examination and free choice as the objective of the world creation, on the one hand, and points to the worshipping of the God as the purpose of human creation, on the other hand, and finally realizes the approximation to the divine mercy and enjoyment of the eternal felicity, redemption and deliverance as the ultimate goal (Mesbah Yazdi, 1991: 71).

The occurrence of human creation has not been originally in vain and his life continuation has not been left unsupervised. The mankind continues his life by passing through a domicile and entering the other so as to reach the ultimately destined domicile, i.e. the other world wherein he begins his real life and takes a position before his Creator. This truth has also been pointed out in a great many of the AYAT and narrations. Essentially, a person cannot have faith in the purposiveness of the creation, including the human creation, and deny the resurrection. The



idea that a human being figures out the purposiveness of his creation via self-recognition or other ways exerts a highly considerable effect on his ethical life (Najjarzadegan, 2009: 63).

Many AYAT have been mentioned in the holy Quran regarding the purposiveness and goal-seeking of the universe and the human beings. The followings are some examples of the holy Quran's explicit stances about the "goal -seeking of the human and the world":

"Whatever the thing that exists in the skies and the earth are all possessed by the God and the return of all the creatures is to the Creator" (Holy Quran, AL-e-IMRAN: 149).

"Have you thought that we have created you in vain and for a game and you would never return to Us" (Holy Quran, MO'MENUN: 115). "O God, you will indeed gather the people on a day in which there is no doubt and the God would never break His promises" (Holy Quran, AL-e-IMRAN: 9).

In this regard, Allameh Tabataba'ei orders that "by giving various cues, the holy Quran succinctly conveys the idea that the world of creation with all its components is in an evolution that is constantly getting perfected and the human beings, as a component of the world with a certain specialized perfection via wisdom and knowledge, are rushing towards their God. The human beings and the world are directed towards a fixed being and a more complete existence that is neither destructible nor declinable" (Tabataba'ei, 1991: 103).

The most important criticism posable to nihilism is its loss of its goal that renders the whole life insensible and meaningless.

CONCLUSION:

One of the most important reasons for the human beings' inclination towards nihilism is the lack of proper recognition of the creation philosophy. Therefore, to fight with pessimism and nihilism, a sort of correct recognition of the creation's goal should be attained in the first step. Generally, from the perspective of the holy Quran, the world of creation has not been created purposelessly and there are principles governing the universe, including the followings:

- 1) The world has been created by the God and the universe has not been and will not be needless of the God even for a moment. This that we say the world has been created by the God means that the world has been created by His will and the relationship between the world and the God is not like that of a father and a son
- 2) The current system of the world is not eternal and everlasting rather the current system would be disordered after a while and there would come about another system, i.e. the resurrection and the otherworldly system.
- 3) The world is a guided reality and, no matter in what rank, all of the particles in world enjoy an amount of guidance that is in proportion to their size. The ranks of this general and overall guidance are natural, intrinsic and evolutionary.

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