

PERENNIAL PHILOSOPHY AND AESTHETIC ISSUES IN ISLAMIC THOUGHT

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Abstract

There exists nothing greater for man than the weight of beauty, upon which he is very cautious and under no circumstance could one reason his passionate experience, nor does he have to give account for the value which is tirelessly imposed to him. This beauty in counter is also the substance of the aesthetics and philosophy of arts.

Muslims find difficulty defining art in its absolute shape, which ought to be in accordance with the norms of the absoluteness and authenticity of religion in the Islamic path, which in certain occasions shall result confronting local and historical ortho-practices in various periods of time of Islamic history. As a result we shall come across a major complex issue in regards to defining a digression, which exists among the living active experienced Islam and the Islam present in the pages of literature throughout its centuries. This frame of mind shall bring forth before the reader and the general public two domains of people which are radically against one another in regards to the understanding and comprehending art and aesthetics, yet simultaneously both are identical in the context of theoretical construct of Islamic art and aesthetics, as well as its disposition in Islamic tradition. One domain are chronically of the thought that one should not undertake matters which lack the applicative dimension, thus it is more than enough to comment on the sources of references partially and in predilection. Whereas the other domain shall discuss the cosmopolite viewpoint of the manifestation of the beauty of art and philosophy and its precondition and imperativeness in the Muslim tradition, without undertaking certain analyses and righteous representations of this discourse.

I shall not vastly rest on this matter, more specifically on the difficulties which aesthetics confronts in general, instead I shall strive to bring forth the issues which Islamic aesthetics and the philosophy of art faces, with special emphasize on metaphysics and the transcendental.

Keywords: *Islamic aesthetics; Perennial philosophy; Metaphysics and transcendence; Philosophy of art; Islamic tradition*

The dictionaries of philosophy and aesthetics make one more cautious regarding the specific definitions of metaphysics and the perennial wisdom in the context of the representation of the magnificent beauty.

Metaphysics and transcendence in themselves are absolute occurrences which belong to the beyond comprehended dimension, alike in mathematics where we have the endless numbers, or those dynamic, the energy which cannot be framed or stopped. Inasmuch both of these terms in the aesthetic constellation are represented as incomprehensible, in other words, a foundation beyond the capacity of the senses of each substance. (Honderich, 1995) Albeit it cannot be apprehended by senses, its strength is portrayed as a beauty and magnificence amid all objects which we consider for beautiful or magnificent. (Flew, 1984)

There exists nothing greater for man than the weight of beauty, upon which he is very cautious and under no circumstance could one reason his passionate experience, nor does he have to give account for the value which is tirelessly imposed to him. Resultantly, the beautiful matters and phenomena not only are unparalleled among themselves in the context of their non-reiteration, but in addition they cannot be compared to anything else.

Precisely to this, we come across existing difficulties, dilemmas and distresses, especially today when writing and speaking on aesthetics. From one end we have people who discuss whether one ought to be preoccupied with matters of aesthetics in the period when people's concerns revolve around what is currently taking place and the matters which have to do with or future? Whereas, on the other hand we have an immense frame of mind arising from the perception which has influenced upon the aesthetics frame of all possible social events in history.

Both these impediments are more typical for the humankind, whereas the Muslims venture to appended additional dilemmas in regards to the aesthetics

analyses of the being. Muslims have a problem defining actual art, which ought to be in correspondence with the righteous norms of the absolute and authentic religion in the Islamic path, which in certain occasions shall result confronting local and historical ortho-practices in various periods of time of Islamic history. As a result we shall come across a major complex issue in regards to defining a digression, which exists among the living active experienced Islam and the Islam present in the pages of literature throughout its centuries. This frame of mind shall bring forth before the reader and the general public two domains of people which are radically against one another in regards to the understanding and comprehending art and aesthetics, yet simultaneously both are identical in the context of theoretical construct of Islamic art and aesthetics, as well as its disposition in Islamic tradition. One domain are chronically of the thought that one should not undertake matters which lack the applicative dimension, thus it is more than enough to comment on the sources of references partially and in predilection. While the other domain shall discuss the cosmopolite viewpoint of the manifestation of the beauty of art and philosophy and its pre-condition and imperativeness in the Muslim tradition, without undertaking correct measures of analyses and righteous representations of this discourse.

I shall not vastly rest on this matter, more specifically on the difficulties which aesthetics confronts in general; instead I shall strive to bring forth the issues which Islamic aesthetics and the philosophy of art faces, with special emphasize on metaphysics and the transcendental.

The primary concern of Islamic aesthetics and philosophy of art is to exploit and act as a unique aggregate of knowledge, which initially shall bring to light the spheres where the Muslims have lived and created in the life sustenance and later in the entire human sphere.

This taking place amid the first group, in order to develop analyses on the artistic and aesthetics work, and amid the second group ascribable to the influence and the continuity of the human inheritance in general. Only when the adequate relation shall take place amid the past in order to integrate it and thus to grow a member of the present, can one realistically concept the Islamic aesthetical unadulterated substance, as an inheritance of the perennial wisdom, in the context of our contemporary thought.

Each art and aesthetical perception which embraces the religious prefix, encompassing Islam, despite the materialistic and objective dimension, in itself contains an unending sphere of subjectivity, the non-material and the

spiritual. Henceforth each discern in literature, in architecture, miniature, music from the Islamic aesthetics specter ought to have in mind the symbolism, the metaphor, the allusion which on a affixed stage is found on the dimension of the substance being scrutinized. By this, the substance under examination attains the dimension of the magnificent, in other words, it takes the shape of the metaphysical and transcendental beauty.

The metaphysical and transcendental beauty is multiple dimensional. It is interconnected with aesthetics but moreover with ethics, as a result it contains the all encompassing philosophical dimension as well as the all encompassing psychological. It can thus be interpreted from the political and rhetorical stand, inasmuch as from the linguistic and sociological.

The aesthetic dimension of metaphysics and transcendence is the least discussed dimension and standing in the context of the Islamic intellectual inheritance. The magnificent has undergone several philosophical and aesthetical stages, yet the initial stage is the one embarking most importance, the one rooted in the sacred creation. (Tatarkiewicz, 1980) At the verge when in this context the Islamic art is mentioned, it is referred to an immense sphere which expands from music hither architecture, from the design of the doors to the cover of the books and so forth. The most solid way to appreciate this immense sphere, is to begin from the existential substances and to direct oneself hither the metaphysical foundation, indubitably to also consider the written and the dispersion of documents throughout various libraries of the world throughout history.

The problem of art and aesthetics among the Muslims...

Muslims are possessors of a monumental civilization, which in itself has synthesized the culture and art of the medieval populations which became Muslims post that period, as were the Arabs, Persians, Egyptians, Hindus, Turks and so forth. As a result, an art was established which encompasses the characteristics of the above mentioned cultures and arts, which in addition are canalized with the reveal of the constitutive tradition of the Prophet (PBUH)... This art and aesthetics inasmuch as the horizontal spread on the world has in contact and as such has influenced the entire human inheritance, as a result it has generated impact on the contemporary culture and civilization. Yet, the

most significant issue stands in the fact that Muslims themselves are not well acquainted with this matter and have not well discerned it.

One of the most frequent phrases used by the Muslims is “to return to ourselves”... This is one is true, yet foremost we ought to ask ourselves who actually, in reality are we? This is one fundamental question beholding importance to which forthwith we ought to give an answer. To return to oneself means to return to our culture. It means that it is inevitable for us to scrutinize culture, the substance and the ideas of art and our aesthetics by the modern methods. Under no circumstance does this mean what we ought to percept art and aesthetics as theories which expand from its roots on the ancient philosophy hither the contemporary artistic and aesthetical inclinations, yet this should serve as an open book which shall act as an impulsion for righteous analyses of the Muslim individual in the past and today.

The second problem, also important, of art and aesthetics among the Muslims is the fact that the most religious ones are least acquainted with this matter. It is true that nowadays the cruelest and agonizing matters have been dedicated to art. Albeit I believe that to all of us it is clear, that the role of art and aesthetics is antithetical completely. Art and aesthetics ought to be in correspondence with the constructive metaphysics of man.

The verse mentioned at the beginning of this writing, where Allah Almighty says: “[And say, “Ours is] the religion of Allah. And who is better than Allah in [ordaining] religion? And we are worshippers of Him” (Al-Baqarah 2:138), speaks on the aesthetics writings of man on behalf of Allah as well as man’s creation in the finest and most beautiful shape in the context of his positioning on this world. The beautiful, as a fundamental matter of aesthetics, within the Islamic conception of art and aesthetics, does not merely refer to the objective and subjective beauty, as we come across in the Western discussions, but here it infers the absolute and immanence beauty of that which is manifested in the universe.

For the Muslim artist, the rose is not merely beautiful in itself, nor is the experience of our being in it (einfuhlung), but he instead represents the manifestation of the sacred attributes, of the beautiful/ Jamal. The defacement or the ugly as an antonym of the beautiful, which exists in the western aesthetics as a term is not a substance under study for Islamic aesthetics, since the latter is relative and is not even noticed when put front, before the absolute beauty.

The preoccupation of the artist is to capture the beautiful in its state of source, in other words, to reveal what is embodied in the platform of the manifested subject. Art throughout Islamic artistic works is represented without the individual, inasmuch as it alters into a metaphysical game.

The artist, at this stage, is not the creator of the artistic work, he is merely a seeker, a finder. As a result, the substance which manifests Him, as the example of the tree, represents a sign which leads to the gates of transcendence and the metaphysical, which vacillates in the background. Moreover, even the experienced catharsis by unveiling one artistic work is merely a synthesis and an inner aesthetical integration of that work. (Ajvazoglu, 2002) Such a catharsis, is experienced in discern of the world itself, which in reality is merely a symbolic work.

The entire universe is a book, the letters contain the cosmic elements, which, through the crucifying and under the sacred ideas embrace the worlds, the living and the substance.

The words and sentences of this book are a manifestation of the creating occasions, words are subject to the content, whereas sentences subject to the Container; sentences in reality are put precisely on the role of the interval and the universe which contain a number of predestined containing and thus enable the so known "Sacred Plan." This symbolism of the book is divorced from the symbolism of the word, as a result of the silence virtue which it contains, whereas the act of speaking is established in continuum and embraces repetition and in addition it is also actual, taking place at the moment. (Schuon, 2008)

From the above mentioned it is clear that art and aesthetics in the reflection of religion and the acquaintance.

Aesthetics appends to religion/din and acquaintance/irfan, the symbolic and state-of-substance dimension.

Yet if one conducts a thorough analyses on the Islamic philosophy, one shall reveal that aesthetics and art, are understood by defined mistakes arising from itself. Oliver Leaman has correctly discerned, when in his book *Islamic Aesthetics* he has mentioned a number of examples on the manner of perception of Islamic art, within which deviations take place, initially those religious, cultural and of the nature of civilization.

In this book the author speaks on eleven mistakes made by philosophers and artists which have preoccupied themselves with analyses on Islamic art and aesthetics.

The first question is regarding the defining of the fundamentals of Islam. Is such a defining possible and what would its conclusion be, stating that Islam is static and in the context of the Kaba, as Sejjid Husein Nasr says, or is it rather dynamic which in itself embarks the dynamic universality of God. Is the unaltered statics general or it has to do specifically only with the platform of religion and the religious orto-practice?

The second question which he brings forth is regarding the existence or non-existence of Islamic aesthetics. Oleg Grabar, one renewed interpreter of Islamic art, confirms that we cannot speak on Islamic aesthetics for we do not know the motive and the conception of the artist when the latter drew the flower or a miniature. Moreover, when the essence of the Islamic teaching becomes clear to us, encompassing here art as a specification, then it easier to also classify the artists in the context of cultural continuity, says Leaman.

The third question discusses the matter whether Islamic art is Sufic in its essence. Despite the most dignified art taking place in the Sufi provinces, this is a mistake says Leaman, since the Muslim devotes attention both to the esoteric as well as to the exoteric sphere. This frame of mind influences on the formation of civilization not only in harmony with the metaphysical and transcendental thoughts, but also of the function speaking within the understanding of this world. By this he means enriched colors of tapestry, photographs, buildings, songs and so forth.

The fourth question presents the issue on whether there exist specific shapes of Islamic art. This is one generalization which is not supported by evidence whatsoever. For instance, Keith Critchlow regarding Islamic art says:

Islamic Art is a harmony which expands amid the prudent geometrical shape and that which we can call centric biomorphic shape: polarization which embraces associative values from the four specters of philosophical values as well the the state-of-experience values, the cold and the dry – which in reality represents the crystallization of the geometrical form – and the warm and misty – which represent the arising shape energies behind the vegetative and vascular states...” The book, as Leaman would claim, is enriched with speculation in regards to the magical features of the numbers, the policy of representation of the spheres and planets and so forth. In addition there is no proving evidence whatsoever which can argue the author's claim.

The fifth question is regarding the matter whether or not Islamic art in its essence contains a religious character? Indubitably if one discerns one artistic work, regardless of which sphere it belongs, one shall recognize something

which shall remind him of a religious symbol, which happens with other art as well, yet anew as Leaman confirms, it is wrong to claim that Islamic art has religious and sacral essence.

The sixth question states whether Islamic painting is distinguished by other forms of painting. Leaman does not agree on the statement that Islamic painting is any different from the rest. He does not support the thought that Arabic / calligraphy writings in Islamic traditions are more than supplementary for the physical and spiritual expressions and that it can completely replace painting. There is no doubt that images are forbidden in the religious context, ascribed to the fact that they can be used in the sense of idolatry, prostration before images or that in the images it is clearly forbidden. It is a fact that image is present in Islamic art, as it is found in other arts as well.

The seventh question states whether has Gazali perished Islamic painting. It is defensible that Gazali is being accused on a number of matters which took the wrong direction, or it can be considered as wrong in Islamic culture, yet he should be least inculpated for the early decay of Arabic painting.

The eighth question declares, does Islamic art and aesthetic have weight and importance. Islamic painting, encompassing the functional dimension, in several cases is considered as reproductive. Yet if one ventures to currently assay painting and miniature in Islamic tradition, as the examples of Yusuf and Zuleyha, Leyla and Mecnun, one can come across an unparalleled symmetry, a harmony and a complementary gathering in their figurative construction.

The ninth question admonishes the matter whether Islamic art is automatic and as a Asharit kalam. The clear conflict between decorum and shape is one distinguished feature of Islamic art. This is found in separated portions on the buildings, as are the mosques, castles where the complex and repetition of the décor itself creates difficulties for distinguishing the shape in the context of the substance.

The tenth question is whether or not calligraphy is Islam's centric art. Essentially we ought to distinguish whether calligraphy could encompass the features of becoming art. Calligraphy has nothing in mutual with words, but instead it seeks to represent the beauty of the image. Even though there are a number of theoreticians which claim that Arabic letters have their cosmic dimension, as Annemarie Schimell would claim. The truth is that calligraphy represents one form of art, which in a number of cases can learn to attain importance, yet one ought not to forget that it cannot possibly represent the verge of Islamic art.

The eleventh question is regarding the gaps within Islamic art. It is true that in the works of Islamic artists there were spatial gaps which represent the overloading of cities, avoidance of deserts as spatial gaps and the decamp from deserted spheres, considering it as an artistic weakness... (Leaman, *Islamska Estetika*, 2005)

The renewed transmission of the Prophet (PBUH), have forfeited the images of the living and sculptures. This prohibition, regardless of its interpretation and commenting, had a profound influence in the orientation of the Muslim artists on the non-representing and non-figuration.

Freely one can state that behind this prohibition stands the idea of fighting idolatry and polytheism (shirk), and this has clearly proved functional since in the mosques images and sculptures are not present.

Louis Masignon says that the Muslim artist, which is not Pygmalion in his work, with conscience directs oneself hither the non-real. As a result, the artistic disciplines which were present in various cultures naturally have permeated in the Islamic society. Henceforth, image, despite being forbidden, in Islamic art is found in various shapes, but most often in the fashion of miniature.

Decisively, it is important that the principles of Islam art to be mentioned anew, by encompassing the Islamic architecture, urbanization and so forth, these are all closely interrelated with the Islamic revelation. Inasmuch, we come across this relation in various states, in the direct and indirect state. These principles directly arise from the inner dimensions of the Qur'anic revelation as well as the magnificent teachings which are found within. They arise from the domain of the soul of the Prophet (PBUH), the accepter of the Word, as a result of the metaphysical embracement of the Prophet (PBUH). As well as, it is important to mention the significance of analyses and absorption and of these words and their correct representation in our actual time.

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