

Heidegger and the possibility of revival of the Eastern meditative thought*

Bijan Abdolkarimi

Abstract:

Based on Nietzsche's interpretation of the history of metaphysics as the history of the development of nihilism and Heidegger's interpretation of the history of metaphysics as the history of the development of subjectivism, this article seeks to show that in our time the possibility or impossibility of revival Eastern meditative thought is based on the possibility or impossibility of braking of metaphysical subjectivism.

Keywords: Heidegger, metaphysics, subjectivism, Eastern meditative thought, Being.

1. Subjectivism and meditative thought

Based on Heidegger's interpretation of the history of Western metaphysics, the history of metaphysics is the history of the development of subjectivism. This subjectivism has led to what Heidegger calls "oblivion of Being" and Nietzsche names "nihilism". Heidegger believes that the history of philosophy is the history of the development of oblivion of Being. "Subjectivism", "oblivion of Being" and "nihilism" can be used almost interchangeably in the context of Heidegger's thought.

The hardcore of Eastern meditative religious thought is contemplating a meaning-making *Origin* or *Ground*, which is termed "Being" in both Islamic philosophy and mysticism and in Heidegger's thought. In other words, in my conception and in a Heideggerian discourse, the focus of Eastern meditative thought is "Understanding of Being", "Openness to Being" (Transcendence) and breaking of or overcoming "the oblivion of

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Being”, and encountering this main meaning-making *Origin*, but metaphysical subjectivism is the greatest theoretical obstacle to the “possibility of encountering Being”. To put it simply, it is theoretically unconfirmed and even impossible to have any kind of meditative, religious thought and to encounter Being without considering the possibility of going beyond subjectivism. The analysis of Eastern, meditative thought in terms of a metaphysical, subjectivist paradigm would mean reducing Eastern meditative thought to a subjective thought and thus to humanize and secularize it, which finally leads to the domination of the subjective over the meditative, the death of ontological *meaning* of the universe, and eventually nihilism. This is why, in my opinion, “the question of possibility or impossibility of going beyond subjectivism” is the most important philosophical issue in our time, especially for Eastern theoretical traditions.

The fundamental question concerning “possibility or impossibility of going beyond subjectivism” can be put more simply as: Is going beyond metaphysics possible? In other words, is metaphysical thinking the only possible way of thinking or is it a way among other ways of thinking? Apart from metaphysical thinking, does human being have other choices or not? Mysticism or the religious, meditative, spiritual thinking in the Eastern historical traditions (which this paper considers in their identity) is essentially a way of thinking that is fundamentally different from metaphysical thought. However, those who are infatuated with metaphysical thinking do not recognize meditative, spiritual thinking as a form of thinking, but as a kind of delusion or sentimentalism or a kind of poetic thinking (in a negative or pejorative sense).

If we accept Nietzsche’s interpretation of the history of Western metaphysics as the “history of the development of nihilism”, question of possibility or impossibility of going beyond nihilism is another paraphrase of the questions about the possibility or impossibility of going beyond subjectivism or metaphysics. Let’s remember that the essence of Eastern religious meditative thought is going beyond nihilism and meaningless world and accepting the man’s openness to the spirit and meaning of the world as *the origin* of beings and accepting the possibility of human existence’s transcendence towards *the origin*.

The actual, historical, social meaning of these three metaphysical questions about the possibility or impossibility of going beyond metaphysics, subjectivism and nihilism (which should be understood in their identity) would be a fourth question which is formed as: Is it possible to have a way of thinking and living other than the way the Western culture and civilization provides humanity? The mysticism, religiosity and the Eastern meditative thought, which is a way of thinking that forms the essence of the Eastern traditions, are overshadowed by the hegemony of the metaphysical subjectivism of Western culture and civilization. Then the possibility of “Eastern thinking” — as opposed to subjectivist meta-

physical thinking put forward by Western culture and civilization — can only be shown by considering the possibility of going beyond metaphysical subjectivism. Heidegger's thought and his concepts and categories surely provide Islamic thinkers and other Eastern thinkers with authentic possibilities for going beyond metaphysical subjectivism and conceptualizing the fundamental insights, tacit in the Eastern spiritual religious traditions including Islamic meditative thought.

This is why, in my opinion, “the question of possibility or impossibility of going beyond subjectivism (metaphysics/ nihilism/ the West)” is the most important philosophical issue in our time, but ignored and neglected by most of the thinkers in Eastern countries as well as Muslim contemporary thinkers. Therefore, most of the theoretical attempts to revive and defend religious and spiritual thinking do not enter the realm of philosophical thought and instead remain behind theological, ideological, rhetorical and populist controversies and stay inconsistent and consequently without foundation and futile.

2. The meaning of religion, spiritual thinking (Eastern wisdom) in the light of above-mentioned questions

Spiritual or religious thinking or the Wisdom, which is the essence of thought in the Eastern traditions, may find its meaning in the light of above-mentioned questions in our time, in the face of modern rationality.

Therefore, the proof for the possibility of spiritual thinking and the attempt to revive this kind of thought can only be achieved through showing the possibility of another kind of thinking that can be away from the metaphysical subjectivist thought and rescue itself from secularism and nihilism, which are the consequences of subjectivist metaphysical thinking. Only by showing such a possibility can we revitalize and defend the possibility of Eastern spiritual thinking and the “eastern-ness” element of thinking against the culture and thought provided by Western intellectual tradition and civilization. That is why I believe that Heidegger's radical critiques and analyses of metaphysics and metaphysical subjectivism can be very necessary and helpful to the thinkers in Eastern communities in order to find a new way of thought in face to global westernization.

It should be noted that considering the “historicity” of human being, all the concepts and phenomena including mysticism, spiritual thinking, religion, reason, truth, meaning of the universe and life etc. are always interpreted and understood in a historical and cultural horizon. Therefore, we cannot think and speak about categories like religion, mysticism, wisdom or Eastern spiritual thinking in an absolute manner or in an ethereal and meta-historical space. All the religions, mystical traditions and authentic spiritual thoughts were

formed in the pre-modern historical world. However, today we live and think in a modern and postmodern world. Hence, everything we say about showing the essential possibility of religion, mysticism and Eastern spiritual thinking is within the borders of current modern/postmodern subjectivist world. Put more simply, our fundamental question consists in: In current metaphysical, scientific and technological world with the dominance of subjectivist thinking and scientific and technological rationality, that is in the world with the hegemony of metaphysical civilization of the West, how can we revive the East and the possibility of Eastern spiritual thinking?

3. The importance of question concerning the essential possibility of religion and meditative (eastern wisdom) thinking

As I said, the most important philosophical question for us (*so-called* the eastern people or the religious people) is “question concerning the essential possibility of religion and meditative thinking” that is answering this question: “Is religion or spiritual thinking essentially possible?”

Without the backbone of thinking and without questioning the possibility or impossibility of the man’s openness to the transcendental/ the sacred and without thinking seriously about this possibility, the concepts like “Revelation” or “speaking with the divine” or “man as the listener of Being” that form the hard core of the great Hebrew-Jewish historical tradition, will be absolutely reduced to a myth and lose their effective power and life in current demythologized world, as we observe.

On the other hand, the demonstration of the possibility of the phenomenon of Revelation or that of sacred texts is based on the possibility of going beyond subjectivism. According to the metaphysical subjectivism, especially modern Cartesian-Kantian subjectivism, consciousness has only access to itself and not to the transcendental which is behind or beyond human consciousness. Based on subjectivism, we cannot speak of texts which are not the product of human subjectivity, and hence the possibility of being sacred (that is being non-human or heavenly) is impossible for a text and all texts including sacred/divine ones are human, profane, and the product of man’s subjectivity and certain historical cultural horizons.

According to this subjectivist and essentially secular view, the concepts like Revelation, divine texts and thinking and acting in accordance with “God’s will” would be meaningless because access to such a divine will or knowledge is essentially impossible. So the whole of Eastern religious history and culture is without philosophical — in a non-Greek sense) foundation and meaning. That is not to say that certain texts should not be considered sacred,

but the main argument is that if we assume them to be sacred without contemplating about the philosophical foundations of their sanctity, then instead of an alive mode of thought for living in modern world, faith will become a kind of myth (the myth of speaking with the divine and the angels as revealers), or culture (a collection of ancestors beliefs) or dogmatist theological system whose result is the complete overthrow of Eastern thought and tradition and its elimination by the global Western metaphysical culture. On the other hand, there are many dangers in the heart of these mythologies and cultures that are without enough philosophical backbones.

If a thinker considers the Eastern religious and spiritual doctrines a way of thinking and a possibility among various possibilities of human existence (and not merely a kind of culture or social ceremony) and seriously think about the essential possibility of religion and spiritual thinking (Eastern wisdom), then the question concerning possibility or impossibility of going beyond metaphysical subjectivism (and the modern Cartesian-Kantian subjectivism which is the outcome of metaphysical intellectual tradition) will be very important to him, because the religious and spiritual doctrines in our age are understood in the context of the Western metaphysical subjectivism. In other words, if we cannot understand the Western subjectivism and try (knowingly and most of the time unknowingly) to interpret Eastern religions and spiritual thoughts in the context of metaphysical subjectivism and subjectivist rationality, then the very subjectivism can annihilate religious and spiritual thinking like a Trojan Horse. It radically denies the “divine thinking” or transforms it into a secular phenomenon.

In addition, if we cannot find a way to go beyond metaphysical subjectivism, the implication is that all Eastern traditions and religions are without foundation. Therefore all of them would be transmuted into Western metaphysics (and we have seen this trend in recent centuries) and surrender to current secularism and nihilism. In short, if religion, spiritual thinking and Eastern historical and theoretical traditions are to have an authentic meaning in today’s world and have historical influence (like they had in the past, but not in the same exact way), we should find a way beyond subjectivism. According to Heidegger’s view, metaphysical subjectivism is the main obstacle to human existence’s transcendence to the transcendental, that is the man’s encounter with the Being (Being itself or Being-in-itself), and the very openness of human being in relation to *logos* or the truth of Being which should be contemplated in its identity with the divine, is the essence of that mode of thinking which is called religiosity, spiritual thinking or Eastern thought.

Now the main claim of this paper is: Metaphysical subjectivism is the greatest theoretical obstacle to “encountering with the Being”; then unless we can show the possibility of going beyond metaphysical subjectivism including modern Cartesian-Kantian

subjectivism, encountering with the Being and having religious or spiritual thought will be essentially impossible. In our time, Heidegger's thought (more than any other thinker) can provide us with the categories and conceptual tools for revising, reinterpreting and conceptualizing the doctrines of Eastern traditions.

According to metaphysical subjectivism, human being cannot access anything beyond his/ her consciousness. Therefore, the man's consciousness is the foundation of the phenomenal world. Providing the philosophical backbones for the possibility of a religious and spiritual interpretation of the world and the possibility of speaking with a divine or transcendental truth (responding to call of Being or *logos* in Heidegger's words) would depend on providing the philosophical backbones for going beyond metaphysical subjectivism and showing a foundation for human existence's transcendence beyond the realm of consciousness and his direct encounter with the Being or a transcendental truth. This transcendental truth is called "the Divine" in the Eastern spiritual, religious thinking.

In addition, showing that man's being precedes his consciousness and subjectivity and showing that the subject's consciousness is not the most certain and available truth for the subject and it is rather Being that is the most certain and accessible truth for him/ her, would be a fatal blow to the metaphysical subjectivism generally and modern Cartesian-Kantian subjectivism specifically.

Moreover, in the context of metaphysical consciousness-based subjectivism, we always face such question as "does a Supreme being exist or not?" However, in Heidegger's thought as well as in Eastern meditative traditions, on the base of an ontological understanding (instead of *ontic*) of the divine truth and interpreting it as the Being, the transcendental truth — that is Being in itself identical to *the sacred* — is indubitable and encompassing, which can never been suspended. Therefore, the Cartesian subjectivist idea of the subject independent of the world/ Being is a mere delusion, and the very existence of consciousness or subject signifies something out there (that is the transcendental or Being). It is an important step forward to go beyond subjectivism to demonstrate that Being in itself — as the only divine truth — (and not subject and its consciousness) is the foundation of the world and the consciousness itself. In such a horizon, we can rescue ourselves from *ontic* thinking, turn our look from entities to Being itself, and speak of the possibility of Eastern spiritual and religious thinking and dwelling in *the Encompassing* (Being/ the Sacred).

It should be noted that in all Eastern theoretical traditions especially in Iranian-Islamic wisdom, there are many ontological or epistemological components that are against metaphysical subjectivism and parallel to Heidegger's radical criticism of western metaphysical tradition. Proving this point requires another opportunity.