

## MEVLANA JELAETTIN RUMI'S MYSTICAL ITINERARIES: THEIR MODELS AND REPLICAS

It has been widely accepted that Jelaettin Rumi was an Iranian philosopher who exposed his thoughts in Farsi, the literary language by far of his time in the muslim world, although Greek was also familiar to him, since he evidently was inspired by Neoplatonism under its mystical aspect which also operated as a source of inspiration for Christian, Islamic and even Jewish medieval traditions. One has to refer respectively to the Capadocian Fathers and to pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita whose works got broadly known in the West thanks to John Scotus Eriugena; to the Iranian thinker Ahmad Ghazali and his *Intuitions of the Faithful of love*; and to the masters of the Kabbala. It is well known (and I shall not insist on this issue) that the core of Neoplatonism is contained in Plato's dialogue *Parmenides* entitled after the name of the Presocratic philosopher from Elea, who first spoke about the identity of the being and the One. Indeed, in his own dialogue, which denotes a crisis in his thought, due to his turbulent pupil's Aristotle criticism of his theory of ideas, Plato repeatedly approaches the problem of the relation between the being and the one, without however providing a concrete solution to the question raised. Nevertheless, the initial signal for a long and pertaining series of attempts in this direction had already been given.

It was Plotinus who assured a real shift in the formulation of the path to follow in order to attain the One which he placed even *beyond the being*, thus conceiving of it in the same way as Plato had conceived of the Good. More precisely, Plotinus placed the One as a principle in itself and as the starting point of a whole process which the Intellect, the Soul and Matter derive from. He qualifies such a descending scale as a *procession* conformingly to which the consciousness becomes aware of the totality of reality, but is still avid to return again, as soon as possible, where it emerged from, i.e. to the One, by following a reverse way, which Plotinus calls a *conversion* and which consists in traversing all the stages it had travelled through and in finally reaching its aim and unite with it. This is the utmost meaning of Neoplatonism. Whereas for Plato what was important was contemplation; in other words, the profound knowledge of ideas, i.e. of the real beings, what is significant for Plotinus is the very unification with the universal principle which, besides, cannot be subject to any kind of knowledge. For Plotinus, the *hypostases* or entities roughly correspond to the four ontological values enumerated by Plato in his dialogue *the Sophist*, where his late theory of the mixed is first mentioned. These values are: the being; the non being of being; the being of non being; and the non being of non being. Now, let us imagine that these four values, placed along a horizontal line, are placed along a vertical line resulting from a pivoting around one of its extremities, e.g. that which corresponds to the prolongation of the value of being. Such a disposal will exactly correspond to the Plotinian system. Starting from the One, which is located beyond being, we encounter all the other hypostases: the Intellect, the Soul and Matter (a wholly non being).

With Proclus, one of the latest pagan Neoplatonists, whose influence has been decisive



even upon Hegel and his posterity, we assist to a further multiplication of hypostatic entities. According to him, it is impossible to conceive of the procession and the conversion in terms of direct progressions. The sequence of hypostases is too abrupt, sudden and discontinuous to allow the understanding of a kind of flow between them. Consequently, a kind of continuity within a discontinuity has to be instaurated. This is precisely what Proclus, a mathematician attempted to do in his commentaries on the Platonic dialogues, by combining rationalistic and irrationalistic views. He especially introduced additional entities in his system, starting with the *henads* which are supposed to directly emanate from the One and constitute intermediary beings, thus assuring the transition towards major and minor divinities, then towards the Intellect and the intelligibles and, further on, between the universal Soul and the individual souls and so on. Even the Matter has not a precise status according to Proclus. It is not a mere non being, like in Plotinus; it is a quasi being and a quasi non being, since it participates in both statuses. Pure non being resides beyond Matter. Such a conception of continuity within discontinuity entails a vision of what one would call, in mathematical language, an *infinitesimal calculus*. This enables one to envisage a valid and cogent solution to many a philosophical problem, and this is why Neoplatonism has diachronically enjoyed such a success, including its mystical aspect. Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita (probably Petrus of Ghaza) successfully adapted in his *Celestial Hierarchy* Proclus' mystic to the Christian dogmas, thus initiating a long sequence of mystic thinkers in the Middle Ages.

So far about the main forerunners of Jelaettin Rumi. I have already metioned the case of Ahmad Ghazali whose philosophy is nearly mystic. His main purpose consists in considering and interpreting man's attitude towards the perspective of his union with the Absolute by means of love understood in an allegorical way. The butterfly, he asserts in substance, just as the lover, is being attracted by the flame. It tries to penetrate into it. But as soon as the butterfly has reached the flame, it is the flame that penetrates into it and consumes it. This, he concludes, is the supreme wonder. For a *unique* moment (I would add: a *kairic* moment), the flame has become the butterfly and the latter is being consumed by itself. This is a perfect union. The case of Jelaettin Rumi sounds quite different. He proceeds not through metaphors, but rather through allusions, images, and symbols. He even has recourse to tales for their symbolic virtue and their frequent reference to values. What is of the foremost importance to him is to depict the epistemological approach as well as the ethical preconditions of man's religious experience. His particular method appeals to all intellectual faculties and to all affective energies in order to capture the absolute reality under its most spiritual aspect. This is, I believe, the true meaning of the title of his main work, *Mesnevi*, explicited as *mystical itineraries into the impenetrable depths of the soul and the mind*. Such a formulation is indicative of a rather discursive process instead of an intuitive one which is the kind of process attributed to mysticisms of Neoplatonic origin. In fact, the term *mystical* which characterizes the subtitle of Jelaettin's work refers to a direct intuition of reality. Such a reality is conceived of as an internal and subjective one, but also as an external and objective one. It has to do with the experiences of states of the soul and with the experience of the world and of God as well. Such experiences result from introspection which is the path leading to the encounter of the Absolute and to the consciousness of the human condition in respect to the divine presence. In contrast to the methodical procedure of Plotinu's thought and even more in opposition to the mathematical way of thinking of Proclus who, in addition, comments in a genial way the masterpieces of a genial original philosopher, Plato, Jelaettin follows in his *Mesnevi* no precise method. The conditions under which his own



masterpiece was composed being extraordinarily peculiar, imposed, so to speak, its specific apparent structure. To tell the truth, the work displays no structure at all, since it consists out of unconnected meditations on various issues, which have been occasionally exposed by Jelalettin himself and recorded by Husameddin Celebi, his follower. It is a fragmentary but breathtaking composition which captivates through its spontaneity and its poetical frame.

The *Mesnevi* is, for sure, the outcome of what one would call an accomplished philosophical wisdom rather than a pure philosophical system. It could never be such, since it mingles religious thought, axiological and moral principles based on experience and, above all, «mystical» intuitions of the Absolute towards which the whole human existence is supposed to tend. For Jelalettin, all human feelings are experiences that lead to God. Love is the most human of them and, consequently, the strongest and the more adequate to directly prepare the way to the revelation of the divine presence. This characteristic feature of the *Mesnevi* spontaneously brings to our mind the importance given to love, as an intrinsic value, by Ahmad Ghazâli. The parallel that can be driven between the two thinkers at this level is really astonishing, though either of them considers the issue in his own personal way: Ahmad Ghazâli examines it in the light of a more or less authentic Plotinian tradition; being in constant connection with non Muslims, Jelalettin, on his own side, does not disdain to envisage love as an appeal to an individual as well as to a collective communion with both the human and the divine. Similarly, all human values are paths leading to happiness and vices are defects that ultimately lead to mental suffering, misery and despair. Love, thus, becomes the cardinal virtue which entails the possibility of grasping any opportunity of feeling cheerful, light hearted, hopeful and, hence, peaceful, in harmony with oneself, with the universe and with the Eternal being. Wickedness does not exist in itself. It comes out of an erroneous understanding of reality, i.e. out of a precise kind of ignorance. This was Socrates' thesis; this was also, *mutandis mutatis*, Plotinus' opinion about the origin of evil. The core of Jelalettin's wisdom is undoubtedly humanistic. He celebrates human dignity in respect to divinity and claims the prevalence of two major activities, a spiritual one: prayer, which confirms faith; and a practical one: labor, which assures biological survival. He even grants labor a predominant place in the faithful's life, thus preceeding the sixteenth century's protestant, namely calvinistic, theology. Jelalettin proved to be, at this level, not only a forerunner himself, but also, as I have already stressed in the beginning, a neglected unknown master of several modern philosophers who have unwillingly formulated their own replicas to his views. Out of a multitude of thinkers I shall select only three whose specific teachings seem to me to be the closest ones to Jelalettin's speculations: Schelling, Nietzsche and Bergson, and deal very briefly with each one of them.

Schelling's philosophical course is extremely complicated. He started by following Spinoza's monism as far as it is the discursive expression of the continuity between the *natura naturans* and the *natura naturata*, but in fact he reverts this relation by conceiving of it as the foundation of the liability of an intuition of the divine. Such a teaching would also contain germs of the so-called Rhenan mystic whose most illustrious representative during the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> century had been Jacob Boehme. In a further stage Schelling elaborated the idea of a continuous divine creation, which roughly coincides with Jelalettin's teaching of the continuous creative evolution of the universe, a teaching defying the rival classical cosmologies, that of Plato who defends the thesis of creation on the basis of the opposition of two principles, and that of Aristotle who admits of the existence of an eternal and unchangeable universe. In his later philosophy, which has been



qualified as relating the «odyssey of consciousness», Schelling stated that the consciousness itself evolves from the status of potentiality to that of actuality in its course towards the universal being.

The case of Nietzsche is quite different. For him, one may speak of the death of God. Such a nihilistic view, however, is counter-balanced by the idea of man's own power. Besides, Nietzsche's philosophy displays several common at least external, characters, with Jelalettin's *Mesnevi*. Nietzsche's later works, for instance, such as *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, *Beyond good and evil*, *Ecce homo*, have been written under a fragmentary and spontaneous form. They often contain images, allegories, allusions to symbols and other rhetoric figures which strongly remind of those contained in the *Mesnevi*. The occasional symbolic use of the names of animals is also a frequent equivalent feature. In any case, notwithstanding some flagrant exaggerations on man's might and superiority, Nietzsche excels in illustrating the human being as an absolute value in contrast with Jelalettin's conception of man as the faithful *par excellence*.

Finally, in the case of Bergson one encounters again the notion of intuition, but in the reverse meaning of subjective insight (instead of the traditional exclusively objective one) which is also one of the aspects this notion is invested with in the *Mesnevi*. Nevertheless, the difference between either conceptions resides in the fact that the Bergsonian acceptance of the term alludes to the inner reality of the self, which is *duration*, opposed to *time* which is not a reality, but a purely fictitious notion. Bergson's reversion of the meaning of intuition meets in a way, and to a certain extent, Jelalettin's vision of human reality. All three of the above mentioned examples represent and denote the spirit of the numerous modern tentatives to rivalize with the wisdom of the *Mesnevi* which remained in principle still unknown to their authors such a spirit testifies to the inherent value of the work and to the perspicacity of its creator.

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