

THE REASONABLE EXPLANATION OF ANNIHILATION (*FANĀ*) IN MYSTICISM

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Abstrak: Para mistikus melampaui tahap-tahap (derajat kesempurnaan mistik) dan maqam spiritual dalam perjalanan mereka menuju Allah yang sulit dimengerti oleh non-mistikus. Karena itu, sebagian besar kalangan reflektif berusaha mengandalkan prinsip-prinsip intelektual dan teoritis mereka untuk memperoleh penjelasan atas pengalaman mistis dan ekstasi. Namun, keberhasilan penjelasannya sepenuhnya berada di bawah kuasa dan kekuatan dari prinsip-prinsip tersebut. (*Fanā*) atau kesirnaan adalah salah satu tahap mistis atau keadaan yang sulit dimengerti oleh non-mistikus sehingga memunculkan berbagai teori yang berbeda untuk menjelaskannya. Pencapaian prestasi ilmiah dan filosofis merupakan penjelasan yang tepat atas *fanā*. Bagaimanapun upaya yang dilakukan dalam artikel ini membuktikan bahwa satu-satunya penjelasan yang sukses adalah penjelasan yang didasarkan pada prinsip-prinsip teosofi transendental dan mistisisme teoritis.

Kata-kata Kunci: *Fanā*, mistisisme, penjelasan rasional, mistisisme teoretis, filsafat transendental

Abstract : Mystics are passing through stages (degrees of mystic perfection) and esoteric abodes (spiritual stations) in their spiritual journey to Allah which is difficult for unmystics to understand. Because of this, most of the reflective people are trying to rely on their intellectual and theoretical principles to obtain an understandable explanation of mystical experiences and ecstasy. However the success of such explanation completely lies in the power and strength of the above mentioned principles. (*Fanā*) or annihilation is one of the mystical stages or states which unmystics find very difficult to reasonably understand, hence various and different theories have been provided for its explanation. Various scientific and philosophical achievements are appropriate explanations of annihilation (*fanā*) which is valuable in its place; however effort had been made in this article to

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prove that the only successful explanation is an explanation based on the principles of transcendental theosophy and theoretical mysticism.

Keywords: *Fanā* (annihilation), mysticism, reasonable explanation, theoretical mysticism and transcendental theosophy

Introduction

Mystics, in their mystical journey, are passing through stations of spiritual establishment (*hāl, maqāmat*) which are strange and unknown to the others. Among all these spiritual stations and ecstasies maybe the (annihilation) mode (state) or ecstasy is the most extraordinary one, which its perception and understanding was difficult to un-mystics and even to philosophers and sages. In this article, effort has been made so as to rely on philosophic analysis, and take advantage of the Islamic philosophy achievements especially transcendental theosophy and also of the famous mystics accuracy such as Muhyiddin, the disciples of his school of thought and also his great commentators who are acquainted with the findings of transcendental theosophy like the school of Muhammad Rida komsheye and his disciples, to explain annihilation rationally, an explanation which coheres with Qur'anic and tradition (Reports) teachings, regarding the specificity of the mystic language which is in its great part a metaphoric, allegoric and symbolic language full of the difficulty to read and understand mystics' works which are. It is from this simple supposition that we can imagine the mystics aim and the object about (annihilation) if this word is the same meaning with what is been understood from the lexical and common meaning. Therefore, the fundamental question of this article is as follows, "regarding the given reports by the mystics; what is the reality of annihilation in mysticism?"

Forasmuch as there are different theoretical systems of thought concerning the explanation and interpretation of the essence of annihilation, which the aim is to provide a rationally acceptable explication, therefore we have set the study so as to evaluate the outcome of each of these theories

The Literal Meaning of Annihilation (*fanā*)

In the different Arabic dictionaries different meanings of annihilation have been given such as: nonexistence (to disappear), vanishing, old, and

decrepit and being aged and also nonexistence compared to existence ². Among them *Kitābul iyyin* from the matter (*fanā*) this is how it comes:

(الفناء تقيض البقاء، والفعل: فنى يفني فناءً فهو فان..ورجلٌ من أفناء القبائل، إذا لم يفرق من أى قبيلة هو) ³

Annihilation is opposite duration, and the verb is to annihilate, annihilating, annihilation he is a perishes (annihilator).....a man who's tribes has been annihilated, if it has not been able to recognize from which tribe he belongs to ⁴. According to this dictionary, annihilation is compared to duration, therefore eternity means durability and stability then annihilation is inconstancy and perishability, even the second meaning of the above expression (إفناء القبائل) means someone's tribe should become unknown referring to the disappearance of someone's tribe identity. In *Lisānul Arab* (لسان العرب), the meaning is close to this one,

(فنى؛ الفناء: تقيض البقاء، و الفعل فنى يفنى فناء فهو فان...و تفانى القوم قتلاً: أفنى بعضهم بعضاً، وتفانوا أى أفنى بعضهم بعضاً في الحرب. وفنى يفنى فناء: هرم و أشرف على الموت هرماً، و الجوهري: يقال هو من أفناء الناس (إذا لم يعلم من هو) ⁵

Fanā; al fanā: is contrary to eternity (duration) *baqā* the verb is: to annihilate, annihilating and annihilation, he is an annihilator ... and people are annihilating deadly: They have been annihilated (wiping up) by themselves, and been annihilated means they have annihilated (wiping up) each other in the battle. Annihilated, means he has grown old and being close to death, and in the dictionary by Aljawhari: It is said he is among the unknown (when his identity is not known). ⁶ In this last meaning, losing one's identity, or in another expression having a hidden identity is one of the meanings of *fanā* (annihilation).

In the dictionary of Qur'an, it has also come with this explanation under the matter *fanā* (فناء) means to be perished.) (كل من عليها فان) meaning all that

2 Rida Mehyar, *Arabic alphabetical dictionary-persian* 16th century, p. 672

3 Khalil Ibn Ahmed Farahidi, *Kitab al Ayn* (Qom: Hidjrat, 1410), Vol. 8, p.377

4 Farahidi, *Kitab al Ayn*, Vol. 8, p.377

5 Mohammad bin Mukrim Ibn Manzur, *Lisānul-Arab* (Beirut: Dār al-Sadr, 3rd edition, 1414), Vol.15, p. 166

6 Ibn Manzur, *Lisānul-Arab*, p.166

is on the earth will perish, (55:26) the meaning of perish is the destruction of the form and the external construction.⁷

In *Attahqīq* book: they say to annihilate, annihilating and annihilation, God the exalted has annihilated him (made him disappear)

قالوا (فنى يفني فناءً ، والله تعالى أفناه)

والفرق بين الفناء والفناء الفروق ٨٤ وذلك إذا انقطع ، والله قطعه أى ذهب به....

And this when it has been cut off (disconnected), God has cut it off means it has been gone or taken, the difference between al-fanā and al-nafād is that the last is the annihilation of the end of something after the annihilation of its beginning, the word al-nnafaad cannot be used for something that annihilates completely. And actually, as a fundamental in a matter is the disappearance of its peculiarities and properties. It is before annihilation (disappearance) hence it is the destruction of a thing's essence completely. It can be observed in the al-nafād that: there is a gradual process of annihilation until the complete annihilating of the thing apparently. And it can be said: the salt has disappeared in the plenty water. And the water has been annihilated in the container if it becomes vapor.⁸ The main point to consider in the last expression is the differences between nonexistence and annihilation which in the non-existence of something there is a complete disappearance of the thing but in the annihilation there is a disappearance of the properties and specifications of the thing but the thing will not disappear completely. These are some examples of meanings that have come in the language dictionaries based on the common and literal of annihilation which may help to some extent in research about the state of annihilation in mysticism. But as indicated lately, the aim of mystics concerning annihilation which is an esoteric abode (mystical station) and states of the mystics' ecstasies, considers a very high reality than the instance opinion of linguistics and common consent, furthermore it shall be indicated that the word annihilation with the supportive letters (in-في) and (from-عن) is used in sentences such as (فناء في الله) to annihilate in God (فناء عن ما سوى الله) to annihilation just in God, in such usage there's no doubt that there were points which need to be considered in these statements

7 Sayed Ali Akbar Kurshi, *Kamusul-Qur'ān* (Tehran: Darul kitabul Al-Islami, 6th edition, 1371), Vol. 5, p. 205

8 A research on the Qur'anic verse, Vol. 9, p. 146

concerning the meaning of annihilation which were not considered in the language books

Annihilation in the Qur'an

Only one case has been used in the Qur'an from the derivative of (فنى) in the form of active participial. اسم الفاعل (فانٍ), that is in the holy verse

كل من عليها فانٍ ويبقى وجه ربك ذو الجلال والإكرام

“All that is on it (earth) will perish, but forever will abide the countenance of the face of your lord, full of majesty, bounty and honor”. (55: 26-27)

Qur'an commentators interpreted differently the word fanā in this verse, although most of them emphasized that the verse considered the word who (من) which is related to rational beings, with the fact that the speech is addressing jinn and mankind in this chapter, and annihilation is not only on rational beings but rather all beings are annihilable or perishable transient and the only forever is the face of your lord. (وجه الله), similar to the meaning of this Qur'anic verse

كل شيء هالك إلا وجهه (28:88)

But related to the meaning of the word (*fani*) perishable in this verse, whether it includes the present beings or is only providing their state later (as a result of the sound of the doomsday or the resurrection or the death) that will perish or annihilate them, various expressions have been made on this word. Whatsoever, some commented that (*fanā*) is about the annihilation and perishing of the earth creatures from the state of being to the state of nonexistence⁹

In other Qur'an commentaries fanā has been commented as to be nonexistence and they went on further explaining their view that, the existence of anything is equal to its nonexistence¹⁰. It also has been commented as not mere nonexistence, and that the meaning of the perishing

9 Muhammad bin Habibullah Sabzavari Najafi, *Irshad al-Azhān ilā Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: compliment abode of editions, 1st edition, 1419), vol.12 p. 378

10 Sayed Abdul al-Hussein Tayyib. *Atyābul-Bayān fī Tafṣīri al-Qur'ān* (Tehran: Islamic publication, 2nd edition), Vol.12, p.378

and the annihilation of living creatures is about their death and transitions toward another world, finally its meaning is not (to become nothing) ¹¹

Others explain with a similar commentary, they went on by saying that *fanā* is about the changing of the forms of the creatures in their course of perfection, hence creatures are changing their own forms into various forms in this course because these forms are always in the state of changing and annihilations, for that matter what will be forever is the act of creation of God which manifests in these forms ¹². One of the most interesting commentaries about (*fanā*) in the holy verse is what comes in *Al Balagh fi Tafṣīr al Qur'ān* is this

فانٍ كل من عليها، على الخلقه اياً كان، هو
الآن وبعد كما كان قبل الخلقه، لأنها في ذواتها فقراء إلى الله

(All that is on earth, no matter what the creation looks like, is perishable now and later like before its creation, because creatures in their very essence, every moment, need God)¹³ because firstly the pronoun in the sentence (عليها) refers to all creatures not only earth.

Secondly, another prevailing meaning of *fanā*, according to which creatures are at the present time and even eternally in the past or in the future perishing. Because when you consider their own essence and their true nature it is real poverty and need for God the exalted and this natural poverty and need shall never be negated or taken away from the creatures at all and the face of God which is the divine manifestation is there and will always be. Later it will be clear that what mystics mean by *fanā* is very close to this meaning. Even though the apparent meaning of *fanā* in surah-al Rahman doesn't show this meaning and what can be understood from the verse addressing mankind and jinn is that, the verse is talking about death and conveyance to the hereafter but the verse from the suratul-qasas (كل شيء هالك) is easy to be understood. This is why Allama Thabataba'i, however he interpreted annihilation (*fanā*) by death, this is how he commented on (هالك):

(Everything is perishable, nothing in itself has a reality except what was emanated to it by God and whatever that cannot be related to Him the

11 Makarim Shirazi, Nasir, *Al-Amthāl fi Tafṣīr Kitābil-llah* (Qom : The school of Imam Ali bin Abi Talib, 1st edition ,1421), Vol.17, p. 398.

12 Sayed Muhammad Hussein Husseini Hamadani, *Anwār-e Derakhshān* (Tehran : Lutfi's book shop, 1st edition 1404), Vol.16, p. 88

13 Sayed Muhammad Hussein Husseini Hamadani, *Anwār-e Derakhshān* (Tehran : Lutfi's book shop, 1st edition 1404) Vol.1, p. 532

exalted is nothing but a mere illusion, or imagination or a mirage which was imagined by someone and it's just like idols... It's nothing but names created by its worshipers... And so are all the rest of creatures have no reality except what was emanated to them by God because they are his signs which show his generous attributes such as favor, grace, wealth, mercy etc...there is only one fixed truth in reality that doesn't perish which is his generous attributes and signs which refer to its essence, and all the rest depend on his holy essence ... and here is a different aspect which is more precise than the first provided that what we mean the face is the essence of the thing ... the meaning is that all beings except God are contingent and the contingent being even though it exists by the creation of God but by regarding its essence it's nothing, perishing. And the only truth and reality which can never be vain nor perish is the essence of the supreme necessary by its essence)¹⁴.

Truly the explanation of Allama in the commentary of this verse is based on the foundations of the transcendental wisdom (*al Hikmah al Muta'aliyah*) which is an appropriate explanation and coherent with mysticism and its findings. This topic will be much emphasised in the next discussion which is talking about the commentary of *fanā* (annihilation) in mysticism.

The result of this discussion in Qur'an, which says that all beings shall perish and vain except God explaining however that this will happen in future as a result of death or the first blowing of the horn or as the result of dooms day. But it is clearly that in the Qur'an the meaning was not limited to this truth but rather the meaning of (*halak*) vain and (*fanā*) perish is about the state of the essence of the beings which they are having and possessing and shall have and can never be separated from it. This matter is an important result in the understanding of *fanā* (annihilation) in mysticism, which we shall talk about.

The Term or the Common Meaning of *Fanā* (Annihilation) in Mysticism

As it has been often explained one of the modes and ecstasy in mysticism is *fanā* (annihilation) in God. In the noble book of Hajji Abdullah (*Manāzil*

14 Sayyed Muhammad Hussein Thabataba'i, *Al-mizān fi Tafīri Al-Qur'ān* (Qom: The Scientific Districts of Teachers Universal Islamic Publications Office, 5th edition, 1417), Vol.16, p. 91

al-Sā'irīn) he has stated that *fanā* is one of the stations of the doors of the ultimates. Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi also has devoted a whole chapter to discuss *fanā* in his great book *Futūhāt Al-Makkiyya*¹⁵. Whatever has been written in this and other mystical works concerning *fanā* is the reflection of what they receive and experience in their stages and states of ecstasy in their wayfaring, but in the end their description about these states and ecstasies cannot be explained or formulated in terms of a theory. And to have a sound explanation about *fanā* needs philosophical contemplation so that, its epistemological and ontological position is clear.

Here, we are in the position of describing ecstasies and stations of *fanā* (annihilation) therefore some of mystics expressions are to be taken into consideration. It has been stated that: (*fanā* is about the disappearance in God) or (*fanā* is the ultimate stage in the wayfaring to God), also (a devoting servant to God) and (*fanā* is the appearance of the divine greatness, so that you forget everything, which hides everything from you, except the One which nothing resembles him, or you can say it's witnessing Al Haqq (The Real) without al khalq (the creatures)¹⁶ and (*fanā* is the appearance of greatness and reverence to the servant which makes him forget about the world, the hereafter life, ecstasies, stations, and prayers (*al-azkār*), it perishes him or annihilates him from everything, annihilates him from his mind, from himself, annihilates him from all things even annihilates him from his annihilation, because he will be drowned or submerged in veneration)¹⁷. In the book *Al-Lumā'*, Al-Sheikh Siraj Tusi said: (*al-fanā* is the annihilation of the vision of a servant in his acts for his own acts which subsist by God), means his act is the act of God¹⁸. And Sheikh Abubakar Kalabazi also said: (*al-fanā* is the absence of human character of someone)¹⁹. Qushairi says in *Rasā'il* (*al-fanā* is the disappearance of sins)²⁰. And Alhaji Abdullahi Ansari has described *fanā* as follows in the book *Manāzil al-Sāyirīn*: (*al-fanā* is the disappearance of whatever is other than Al Haqq (Truth) at the level of knowledge, denial and truly)²¹. Sheikh

15 Ibn 'Arabi, *Al-Futūhāt Al-Makkiyya*, Vol. 2 p. 512

16 Ahmad Ibn Ajibah, *Aykāzul-Himām fi Sharh al-Hikām* (Egypt : gracefulness edition, 1913), Vol. 2, p. 235

17 Muhammad al-Talmisani, *Mi'raj al-Tasawwuf ilā Haqāiq al-Tasawwuf* (Damascus : Moderation publication , 1st edition, 1355 /1937), p.30

18 Al-Tusi, al-Sheikh al-Siraj, *Kitāb al Luma' fi al-Tassawwuf al-Islamīyah* (Beirut : Nowful publication, 1st edition, 1999), p. 341

19 Abu Bakr Kalabadzi , *Kitāb al-Tā'arruf Li-Madhāb Ahl al-Tasawwuf*, p. 126

20 Al-Qusyairi, *Arba Rasā'il fi al-Tassawwuf*, p. 67

21 Al-Hirwa, al-Sheikh Abdullah al-Ansari. *Kitābul Manāzil al-Sāirīn* (Bagdad:Maktabatu Al- Sharq al-Hadidah), p. 127

Abu al-Hassan Hujwiri has an interesting description which has a unique recommendation besides it can indicate something about *fanā*: (*al-fanā* is the annihilation of the servant's will in God's will, not the servant's existence in God's existence)²². On another side the description of Sheikh Abdul-Kadir Gilani is a different view, according to his explanation (*al-fanā* is the remaining of God as he was before he created creation). This is what Attar says about *fanā* (according to Sufi *fanā* means to be released from all kinds of desires and even from his own will and all his thoughts and acts are for the sake of God)²³. Ibn 'Arabi also has an expression in the book *Futūḥat*, he said: (*al-fanā* is the annihilation of the vision of a servant of his acts and that they subsist by God, and it is similar to eternity duration (*al-baqā*)²⁴ .

Later we will explain that the description of Ibn Arabi is compatible with the epistemological explanation of *fanā* (annihilation). Kashani said: (*al-fanā* is fading away and disappearing)²⁵. Dawud Qaysari has an expression which is related to some views concerning the explanation of the reality of *fanā*, he explains: (the meaning of *fanā* is not absolutely annihilation of the nature of the servant, but what it means is the annihilation of his human side into the divine side)²⁶. From the book *Khātmul-Awliyā*, this expression has also been narrated from Sayyed Haidar Amuli: (*al-fanā* is the annihilation in the mystical consciousness not in the entities because that is not possible)²⁷ this expression is compatible with epistemological views. But it seems that the expression of Gorgani in *al-Tarīfat* (definitions) is much compatible with the ethical views. Because he says that: (*al-fanā* is getting rid of obnoxious character traits, likewise *al-baqā* (subsistence) which is possessing the laudable or admirable character traits²⁸ likewise, Abdul Karim Jillī's about the perfect Man (*Insān al kamīl*) is almost close in meaning to the epistemological view. He said: (*al-fanā* in terminology means the absence of one's personal feelings and even its correlatives)²⁹. It is obvious that all the descriptions mentioned above are somehow considering

22 Taha Abdul Baki Surur, *Al-Sharani wa Tasawufil-Islami*, p. 86

23 Al-Tasawuf wa Farīduddīn Al-Attar, p. 112

24 Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya, Vol.2, p. 133

25 Al-Tayifu Al-Ilan fi Ishārati Ahlil El-ham, p. 463

26 Al-Hakim al-Tirmizi, *Khātmul Awliyā*, ed. Osman Ismail Yahya (Beirut: *al-Matba'ah al-Katulikiyyah*, 1965), p. 491

27 Al-Tirmizi, *Khātmul Awliyā*, p. 503

28 Al-Sheikh Ali bin Muhammad bin Ali al-Gerjani, *Al-Tarīfat* (Beirut : Darul Kitabul-Arabi, 1st edition, 1405), p.176

29 Al-Sheikh Abdul Karim al-Jilli, *Insān al Kamīl fi Marīfat al Awākhir wa Awail* (Egypt: The publication and the school of Muhammad Ali Sabih and his children), Vol.1, p 49

the instance of privation and negating all relation that is beyond God, but it doesn't talk about what is the reality of *fanā*? Most of the descriptions above mentioned don't have a clear definition about it. Nevertheless, the expressions of the mystics' descriptions can be the subject of philosophical analysis so that to obtain a theory concerning the reality of *fanā* in God. Meanwhile it shall be pointed out that even *fanā* in God can be categorized in levels, and each of which are based on special and distinct views from the those connected to *fanā*. However, in the coming part of this article, efforts will be made by highlighting theories that explain the reality of *fanā* to approach the essence of this stage and state of the mystics' wayfaring.

Explanation of Fanā According to Different Theories.

What was lately explained was all under the phenomenological description of *fanā* in mysticism, i.e: *fanā* the way mystics are tasting in their ecstasy experience. But the actual question is how we can have a rational explanation of this ecstasy. From the works of scholars, we can get various explanations to this answer. And based on the researcher's investigation, all the propounded views can be classified under five general approaches. But before speaking about these views it's better to have some deliberation on the fundamental problem related to the claim of annihilation. It seems that if mystics likewise scripture expressed their ultimate relation with God in terms of esteem (*qurb*) servitude, devotion (*'ubūdiyyat*) and; at least it wouldn't cause any particular problem in terms of theological and philosophical point of view, but when it comes to its highest point of connection with God by expressing (*fanā*) which according to common sense and language entails a kind of nonexistence and annihilation the fact that cannot be theoretically understood. Therefore, if the mystic is really annihilating at the end of his ultimate wayfaring to God, firstly, this cannot be said to be a perfection which deserves bearing up all that mortification and wayfaring through stages and abodes to achieve it, secondly the returning of the mystics from this mode of nonexistence and annihilation to the mode and the ecstasy (*baqā* after *fanā*) (eternity or duration after perishing or annihilation) could not have a rational explanation. In addition, the mystics report about ecstasy of *fanā* that it is not only their annihilation in God but rather *fanā* of all other than God (their *fanā* observation of all that is other than God in God which in this case, entails the presumption of nonexistence of the world during the mystic *fanā* (annihilation) and which

is completely not sound, since even though a mystic perceives all that is beyond God as nonexistent but the rest of people witness the existence and fixity of the universe. As a conclusion, attributing mystical *fanā* to its real meaning (nonexistence and annihilation) and even the meaning of death is not absolutely a correct expression of their mystical witnessing. Thus, there is no alternative but to have a different explanation of this experience. After this prologue, now we shall start with the study of the propounded views.

1. Psychological Explanation of Annihilation (*fanā*)

One of the approaches to explain *fanā* in mysticism is the psychological approach. Based on the extremist commentary of this view, whatever mystics experience and find in their spiritual journey, are not more than just mental phenomena which occur within their mental realm and their mental states. This experience and ecstasies cannot be considered as factual world and objective. In this case, *fanā* was also counted as that mode and the reflection of submergence and the excessive attention of the mystic in something such as God and consequently forgetting everything that is around him except Him, like what happens to the person who is in a deeper concentration or meditating on one particular thing, does not pay attention to anything else, in that instance it is like nothing exists except what he is concentrating on. Based on the most moderate commentary however all the mystical experiences are not from the psychic category, but *fanā* should be considered as a kind of these modes, therefore *fanā* expression, is only a metaphor which is used as a figurative meaning to indicate psychological submergence mode.³⁰

Assessment:

In assessing this view, it can be said that the extreme interpretation of this view, regarding the prevailing epistemological and ontological properties of mystical experiences, cannot be accepted. Note that, if mystical experiences were only states and qualities in the mental realm of mystic, then the impact of these states in the discovery and recognition of some realities or in the change of some phenomena would be inexplicable, because the personal world and the person's privacy named psychological domain, lacks epistemic and existential interaction with the objective world. Meanwhile, the moderate interpretation of this approach, Although its positive side, has no problem in the sense that the mystic while in his experience of

30 Ali Fahimi Khashim, *Ahmed Zaruq wa Zarukeyah* (Tarabils: Darul Maktabatil-fikri, 1st edition, 1390), p. 230.

annihilation pays no attention to multiplicity and other than God. But it could be critical in its negative side, by the explanation that the existence of a psychological absorption (immersion) condition does not conflict with its epistemic and anthological properties, therefore if an epistemological and ontological explanation of the of the mystic founding could be given, then psychological interpretation would be incomplete. Any way some of the mystics' interpretations in the description of annihilation in Allah is emphasizing much this psychological property, such as the interpretation of Sheikh Obaid Allah Haidari: (annihilation is the forgetfulness of others)³¹ or the interpretation of Sheikh Ahmad Zaruk: (annihilation is considering all otherness, including ourselves as non-existence besides His existence and absence besides His presence....) according to the interpretation of the commentator of this remark Ali Fahmi Khathim.. (Annihilation on this basis, has a psychological significance which leads to the servants self-ignorance before war, and this doesn't mean the denial of the individual's consciousness or self-negation, but rather helps in perceiving God and witnessing him in all of the manifestations of existence as creator and sustainer of that existence)³². Therefore, the explanation of annihilation is a psychological affair which is under the influence of the servant's position related to God which appears in the consciousness of the mystic. Or the interpretation of Abdul-Karim Jilli which says (annihilation in terminology is the lack of sense about a person's self and its concomitants)³³ because apparently in this description of the truth of annihilation is about the forgetfulness and unconsciousness of the mystic about himself and its concomitants which is a psychological state. But as it was explained, the emphasis is on this psychological feature due to submergence in spiritual love and rapture, has no inconsistency with the existence of epistemic or ontological properties in annihilation.

2. Ethical and Cognitive-Value Explanation of Annihilation.

Another theory to explain the annihilation as the mystics find it is the interpretation of this condition based on character traits and the valuation of the mystic qualities and actions. Some of the mystics' expressions in the description of annihilation experience depend on its ethical effects, with the meaning that, in the first place; in the annihilation condition motives and affections are no more the source of the mystic's behavior, and all of his acts weather esoteric or exoteric are going to be set according to the wish and

31 Zubdatul-Rasāil al-Faruqiya/Makhtuta, p. 89

32 Khashim, *Ahmed Zaruq wa Zarukiyah*, p. 230

33 Al-Jilli, *Insān al kamil*, vol. 1, p. 49

recommendation of God, and secondly his will is somehow subordinate to the will of God, and he demands only what accords with the divine will and demand, so he himself behaves according to God's orders and scruples also his orders and scruples are a manifestation of the divine orders and scruples. As a conclusion, the meaning of annihilation in Allah is to fulfill God's character traits. And this is not meant to eliminate the multitude of the mystic's intuition, and the domination of unity on him or somehow the deletion of the creatures existence by God's existence. This interpretation is more consistent with the expressions of some mystics. For example the explanation of the Abubakar Kalabadzi which says that (annihilation is the disappearance of the pleasures, so that no pleasure remains for him) or the interpretation of Qushairi which says (annihilation is the disappearance of the sins) and also the expression of Hujwairi which says (annihilation is the disappearance of the servant's will in God's will, not the annihilation of the servant's existence in God's existence) the same as the explanation of Sheikh Fariduddin Attar which says (annihilation in the eyes of the Sufis is the deliverance of the human being from his passions and his own will so that all of his thoughts and acts become for God's sake and by God)³⁴ perhaps a clearer expression is the interpretation of Jarjani in the definitions which says that: (annihilation is the lapse or falling of the reprehensible attributes likewise duration (permanence) is about the existence of the lauded (praised) attributes)³⁵ and the explanation of Sheikh Waliyullah is also similar to this:(annihilation is about the disappearance of the major sins and abstaining from insisting on the minor ones and any pleasure that is not a subject of God's satisfaction)³⁶ and also his other explanation (annihilation is the disappearance of all kind of joy and pleasure except the pleasure of evocation (invocation of God) and watching out oneself, and he will not feel any pleasure of fervent prayer in him anymore because of the direction of his insight toward Allah the exalted)³⁷.

Assessment:

In the study and the assessment of this view likewise the first view, it must be said that even though these ethical and valuation results are among the concomitants and results of annihilation experience in mysticism but exclusively knowing the content of annihilation in the ethical effects

34 Abdul Wahab Izam, *al-Tassawwuf wa Faridul deen al-Tar*, p. 112

35 Al-Gerjani, *Al-Tarifat*, p.176

36 Attafhīmat al-Ilahīya, vol.1, p. 52

37 Attafhīmat al-Iahīya, vol. 2, p.193

and value is a judgment that is incompatible, firstly with most of other mystics' interpretations that have ontological and epistemological aspects, and secondly that if we can give an analysis and explanation of the reality of annihilation in such a way that it accounts for the ontological and epistemological position of *fanā* as well as not underestimating the ethical value, without hesitation this explanation would be preferred to the ethical view. Anyway, it seems that the lack of an epistemological analysis and also the absence of an ontological hierarchy (system) which could be a basis for the explanation of annihilation, is the reason that some resort to the ethical commentary of mystical annihilation.

3. Epistemological Explanation of Annihilation

Among other explanations related to annihilation in mysticism, is the explanation that is more widespread among researchers related to other interpretations. Perhaps this is because, firstly the mystics' expressions emphasize more the intuitive (witnessing)–unveiling side of the experience of annihilation and from this angle psychological explanations or cognitive value cannot be the only accepted and perfect explanations, and secondly the lack of a satisfactory ontological explanation which can account and rationally explain some of the apparent expressions of mystics that bear an ontological meaning, In this regard we shall talk in more details about other theories.

Anyway, according to this view, the mystics due to the abstinence and self-purification and transiting esoteric abodes (spiritual station) in their spiritual wayfaring, finally they come to witness a reality which cannot be perceived through sensory, imaginal or even intellectual faculties. We know that the ordinary perception faculties such as senses, imagination and intellect have the ability to know the world in its multiple aspects and when facing reality, for the human being only plurality and distinct creatures appear to him. Meanwhile, Existence from the channel of senses is more multiple, but from the currents of imagination and higher than that the intellect, unity appears to be dominating multiplicity. Zaid, Bakar, Omar and other thousands of single individuals of human beings for the senses they appear to be thousands of different and distinct existents, but the intellect can notice the hidden species unity beyond the multiplicity of individuals, without being in opposition with that multiplicity. Yet, perceiving the intellectual unity of multiple beings given by sensible multiplicity is getting to a deeper layer of reality which is appropriate with philosophers and sages understanding. Only them can see the supremacy of the intellectual unity

upon sensible multiplicity, the reality that is hidden from the observation of common people. Therefore existence consists of two dimensions unity and multiplicity where common people view multiplicity as dominating and unity dominated and as a result neglected.

Now, the same relation can be noticed between intellectual findings and mystical-intuitive ones. In fact the mystic by means of insight can perceive a unity which far deeper than the intellectual unity. In such a manner that beyond multiplicity and distinctions based on which the intellect finds beings as plural and distinct; he finds that unity dominates that intellectual multiplicity. The unity that is the source of all multiplicity, the unity that represents a mirror in which all multiplicity can be witnessed. And expressing this esoteric abode and ecstasy as annihilation doesn't have any meaning of non-existent and nothingness of his He-ness and Ipseity (identity) or other beings, rather the source of subsistence, the presence and dominance of the manifestation of God through His divine attributes and acts in the multiplicity of beings, which causes their non-visualization under the effect of the dominance of witnessing the divine oneness. Hence, annihilation is actually the description of a mystic's inspiration (intuition or witnessing). Because in his witnessing, himself and all creatures are annihilated in witnessing the Truth, Divinity, Haqq and His attributes, not the description of beings so that it is said how can beings be annihilated and decomposed in the Truth (Haqq)? Then annihilation in the view of a mystic is an epistemic affair not existential. Among the mystical interpretations indicating this commentary; an expression of: Sheikh Sayyed Haydar Amuli about the definition of annihilation. With this explanation that (annihilation means annihilation in knowledge not in entities because that is not possible)³⁸ and also the interpretation of Sheikh Abul-Kasim Faris (annihilation is a condition of he who doesn't witness his own attribute but rather witnesses it immersed within he who hides it)³⁹ or (annihilation is witnessing the Divinity (Al Haqq) without creatures)⁴⁰ and also the interpretation of Dawud Qaysari which says (annihilation doesn't mean . . . absolutely disappearance of a servant's essence but it rather means annihilation of his side of humanity into the side of Lordliness)⁴¹, or the interpretation such as this: (annihilation is the witnessing of your own Being (this-ness) annihilating in the Divinity (Al Haqq) duration, and witnessing your own acts under the will of Al Haqq

38 Al-Tirmizi, *Khatmul-awlia*, p. 503

39 Abu Bakr Kalabadzi, *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf Li-Madhab Ahl al-Taṣawwuf*, p. 126

40 Ahmed bin Ajibah, *Iqāzul-himām fi sharh al-Hikām*, Vol. 2, p. 235

41 Itlāqul-Quyūdi fi Sharhi Mir-ātil Wujūdi, makhtutah, warkihī, p. 76

and witnessing the permeation (infusion) of that will in all contingent beings, in its manifestations, entities and essences) ⁴².

(Annihilation is the repulse of witnessing all multiplicity by witnessing the dominion of the One)⁴³. One of the famous writers who have chosen this explanation is Afifi. In his opinion, the meaning of annihilation in the language of mystics doesn't mean nonexistence (nothingness) and disappearance as the result of death and such kind of examples, but rather firstly, the meaning of annihilation is pure ethical adoration or servant-hood, and secondly witnessing the Divinity (Haqq) in the context of existence in such a way that other than God (Haqq) is not seen.

This is the expression of Afifi: (annihilation of mystic (Sufi) is a condition that makes the effect (impression) of will, personality, essence and all that is beyond God to disappear, hence the mystic (Sufi) becomes not seeing anything in existence except Divinity (*Haqq*) and he doesn't feel anything but the Divinity, His will and Acts..... meaning that he doesn't witness anything but Al Haqq) ⁴⁴, and surprisingly Ibn Taimiya who is a clear enemy of mysticism and mystics, also has brought their interpretation concerning annihilation in some of his articles accounting for this aspect with this explanation that: (but the second kind (of annihilation) is the annihilation of not witnessing other than God, and it's been happening to a lot of holy wayfarers (one who actually treads upon the spiritual path) because of their hearts' excessive affinity and attraction to the invocation of God (remembrance of Allah), his affection (love) and religious devotion (worship) weakened their hearts from witnessing something other than what they worship and see something other than their aim (quest), nor shall occur in their heart other than God but rather they feel nothing other than God)⁴⁵. Nevertheless, his intention was a psychological or ethical explanation and not epistemological. Anyway this approach is widespread and prevalent (popular) among most of those who have written about mysticism.

Assessment:

In the assessment of this view it must be said that in the analogy with the two previous approaches this explanation has more advantages, because firstly, it accounts for cases of mystical experience explained by those two approaches (ethical and psychological), and in addition to that, it explains

42 Sayyed Muhammad Abu al-Fayid Al-Manukhi, *Ma'ālim al-Tārik ilaLlāh*, p. 398

43 Al-Sirhindi, *Maktūbāt*, Vol. 2, p. 44

44 Ahmed Attah, *Al-Tasawuf al-Islāmi*, p.182

45 Ibn Taimiya, *Al-'Ubūdiyya*, p.96

some mystical expressions which the previous approach were unable to explain, we mean the expressions in which the mystic say explicitly that they witness the single unity that encompasses all multiplicity. Secondly, according to this approach and the commentary in addition to the affective, psychological and ethical- value aspects, also it accounts for the epistemological aspect. Beside that this epistemological explanation also is compatible with the Mulla Shadra ontological gradation, as according to his gradational School, existence consist of gradation in levels, and unity and perfection in the upper grades is stronger than unity and perfection in the lower grades, and the highest existential grade is the exalted Divinity in which power (strength) and intensity are in a sort of degree in which witnessing and observing it will have the consequence of the invisibility of the lower grades, even the existence of the mystic besides the dominant unity of the highest existential grade will disappear from the sight, without truly the disappearance or annihilation of the existence of lower grades or the existence of the mystic. In fact witnessing the dominant unity of the exalted Divinity (*Haqq*) will leave no space for witnessing creature's multiplicity, although this multiplicity is a concrete reality ⁴⁶.

Assessment:

However with the prevalence of this explanation we also cannot give a perfect explanation to mystic experience and their expressions related to annihilation in Allah. Because in some of the mystical expressions, multiplicity of beings in the experience of *fanā*, or the duality mystic and *Haqq*, is far less intense to the extent that, in the gradation theory of Mulla Shadra, it is related to the contingent and creational multiplicity. Therefore, if we can have an explanation of annihilation in which, at the same time preserving the identity and existence of multiplicity, and their relation to Unity of the exalted Divinity should be in feebler degree, such explanation could have be more compatible with the mystics' experience which they themselves inform about. And this explanation will lead to the explanation that will be later entitled as the satisfying explanation (ontological–epistemological). However, in this part we will talk about another commentary and explanation of annihilation which in some non-Islamic mystical traditions (western-eastern) was more often emphasized and sometimes even the opinion of Muslim mystics is interpreted according to this invalid meaning by antagonists.

46 Ashtiyani, *Sharh-e Mukaddim-e Qaysari*, p. 385. See more, p. 870

4. Ontological Explanation of Annihilation (Incarnation, Union and Dissolution)

One of the opinions related to the mystical annihilation is the opinion propounded by the antagonists of mysticism, and most of them have made use of this explanation to accuse mystics of being faulty and pagan. Approximately despite that all prominent Muslims mystics such as Ibn 'Arabi and the fellow of his school, Sheikh Abdul-Karim Jilli, Sayyed Haidar Amuli, Rumi, Shabistari and ect..... have rejected this explanation; some of the researchers of mysticism such as Nicolson and his students Abu al-la Afifi propounded this explanation of mystical annihilation.⁴⁷ Anyway, most of the time this view has been explained as union or incarnation, actually it has an origin in some of the eastern religions in the frame of (pantheism) and also related to the teachings of Christianity (corporealization - Incarnation). Perhaps Nicolson related the incarnation view to the mystics because he has been influenced by this Christian view. The reason that this view is known as an ontological one because what they understand from *fanā* is not only the annihilation of the cognitive state of the mystic, (without his existential annihilation) but rather his existence in some way connects with the existence of God, a connection in which we consider God's incarnation and arrival in the mystic's existence, or like the union of the mystic with the existence of God or like the dissolution of a drop in a sea. Hence, according to this view, in the beginning the existence of the mystic is in duality and distinction with the existence of God, but in the process of annihilation it achieves oneness and union with the existence of God, so that the prior real multiplicity becomes a posterior real unity, where two real distinct beings become one.

Assessment:

But as it was pointed out, prominent Muslim mystics disapprove this view because it opposes mystical findings from one hand and the teachings of Qur'an- tradition from the other hand. Some of their expressions in denial of incarnation are as follows:

Sheikh Abdul-karim Jilli said : (The perception of the high essence should be known by the way of Divine illumination that you are Him and He is you, and there is no incarnation nor union, and indeed a servant is a servant and the Lord is a Lord and a servant never becomes a Lord neither the Lord becomes a servant)⁴⁸ and Sheikh Abdul Ganiyu Nabilsa has also talked about that (Incarnation is one of the worst believes and in which

47 Abu al-la 'Afifi, *Fusūs al-Hikām*, p.26

48 Al-Jilli, *Insān al kamīl*, vol.1, p.21

there is equality between Lord and servant even from some aspect and this is never valid)⁴⁹. And also in another expression in which he denies incarnation, and refers to the reason of its invalidity: (incarnation can only be conceived between two things sharing the same property, and there is no affinity between God and the servant, not even in their very existence, how come to conceive about the incarnation of one in the other or the union of one with the other⁵⁰ even Ibn Taymiya who is one of the mystics' enemies, has renounced the idea which accuses mystics with unification and incarnation : (Among the people of knowledge of Allah (Gnostics), no one is believing in incarnation of the Lord in him or in other creatures, and if something like that was heard reported from the great Sheikh, it is not true but something fabricated by the liars among the group⁵¹ (who are misled by Satan, and I count them among the Christians)⁵² Gazali has also criticized this view in details in the book⁵³, Ibn 'Arabi also has it in the book *al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*: (The eternal existence can never be a locus for a newly created thing, and which in turn can never be a locus for the eternal)⁵⁴ and also he has talked about it in the chapter of secrets : (He who claims incarnation is sick, because believing in incarnation is an indestructible disease, and nobody believes in unification except atheists, as the believer of incarnation is an ignorant and intruder (meddler))⁵⁵. From this expression we can deduce firstly, that union and incarnation is about the union of two realities which are existentially multiple and distinct, secondly, the meaning of annihilation or oneness of being by the masters of mysticism is not this meaning of oneness (transcendental unity of Being). Even the meaning of the expression of Bayazid (nothing is in my garment except God) or the expression of Hallaj (I am (*Al-Haqq*)) is not such kind of Oneness or unity. And as expressed by Sheikh Mahmud Shabistsri in the *Gulshān-e Rāz*:

Is impossible here union and incarnation

Is an absolute aberration (astray or misguidance) in the oneness of two

49 Qasidah al-Nadīrat al-'Aynīyah li Abdil Karim al-Jilli ma Sharh al-Nablisi, p. 165

50 Abdul al-Qadir Ahmed Attah, *Al-tasawwuf Islami Baynal Asālat wal Iktibāsi fi Asāri al-Nabilisi*, (Beirut : Darul Al-jail, 1st edition, 1987), p.314

51 Al-Ittihadiyah al-Ibahiyah

52 Ibn Taymiyah, *Majmū'ah al-Fatāwa*, Taufiyah, vol. 11, p. 74-75

53 Al-Maksad al-Uns, p. 168.

54 Al-Maksad al-Uns, Vol.1, p. 80- 81

55 Al-Maksad al-Uns, Vol.1, p. 80- 81

Actually based on the view of the prominent figures of Islamic mysticism the fundamental problem of the dissolution or union and incarnation theory is the assumed existential real multiplicity of the mystic and the Real or the world and the Real, meanwhile according to the correct view in mysticism, the witnessed multiplicity of beings, is not a real multiplicity so that it turns into unity under the effect of union or incarnation. Then since multiplicity, is not existential and real, the unity witnessed in the mystical stations and annihilation ecstasy cannot be of the kind of incarnation, union or dissolution. However If multiplicity is not real, Then how come that witnessing unity and annihilation to appear as unity for the mystic? This is the question which will be in the next approach, which seems to be the correct commentary of mystical annihilation; where effort will be made in order to give an appropriate answer to it.

5. Existential- Epistemic Explanation of Mystical Annihilation (True Unity of Being and Multiplicity of Its Manifestation)

It seems that to present an acceptable explanation of mystical annihilation, we need to make clear the relation between multiplicity and the unity. Because based on common perception of reality by making use of senses and discursive reasoning or intellect, what is perceived in beings is the dominant real multiplicity, and what mystics are experiencing in the condition or demeanour of annihilation in Allah (effacement in God) is absolute Oneness in which multiplicity is immersed or annihilated, now we need a comprehensive theory that can unite between these two findings about the existence of beings and oneness of reality. But until now the prevailing explained theories, even though that of Mulla Sadra's gradation view in which he presents existence as multiplicity in unity and unity in multiplicity, is not also a satisfying explanation of the relation between unity and multiplicity so that to solve the problem of mystical annihilation. But it seems that the followers of the school of Muhideen especially the commentators of theoretical mysticism in the Shiite mysticism school such as Mohammed Ridah Kumsheyi, Mirza Hashim Ashkuri, Sheikh Mohammed Ali Shah Abadi, Mirza Mahdi Ashtiyani and finally Imam Khomeini, they have explained about the multiplicity and the unity relation, which is the appropriate way for solving the problem of annihilation. But to explain in details about this view we need to investigate problems such as the reality of existence, the kinds of unity, the real unity of Being, the problem of manifestation and disclosure of existence, and much more other problems which demands more space so they cannot be discussed in this article. But

we can discuss briefly so that to picture out concisely this theory, based on the ontological view of the great mystics, in the domain of Islamic mysticism, the reality of existence is an absolute unconditioned oneness, which means a unity against which no multiplicity can be supposed, however this Unique reality has innumerable loci of manifestation and manifestations that can be found in the form of multiplicity, like a person confronted with many mirrors that show his innumerable faces without confronting his personal unity or to incarnate the mirrors or to be united with them. In fact reality is one that seems to be numerous (multiplicity). Those who don't see the above mentioned person and their observation is fixed on the mirrors, they only see many individuals, but he who knows the reality of mirrors, and knows that one person is facing them, his perception about the illusive multiplicity will turn out in witnessing the real oneness. Without inducing the multiplicity of the person nor the unification of the multiple things. Then the reality of existence according to mystics is one reality which has many manifestations and disclosures, and ordinary people (or common people in the mystics' terminology) are only seeing the reality from the multiplicity of loci of manifestations through their senses and even the intellect, so they think that the perceived multiplicity is a real one, while this multiplicity initially is not real. Rather it is a mirroring and manifestation multiplicity. But when the mystic achieves the annihilation degree he finds reality of the thing as it was from the beginning; means the real Dominant unity in which multiplicity is nothing but its appearances. Therefore the witnessed unity in the annihilation ecstasy (spiritual experience) is not only a visionary unity, rather is the fundamental and original Unity which the mystic achieves to witness by presence. That's why in the expressions of mystics we can see : (there was God and nothing was with him, and he is presently as he was) then mystical annihilation is only about the result of going away of the veils of senses and intellect in which Oneness of existence is shown many and multiple, and something other than God is pictured to be real, and veils by going away, the fundamental and real of existence appears, and the mystic in the abode and state of fanā will be tasting this instant.⁵⁶ the realities that some of the verses of the Qur'an also pointed to, such as:

هو الأول والآخر والظاهر والباطن (He is the first and the last, the exterior (outward) and the Concealed (the Hidden)) (57:3)

56 Mulla Shadra, *Al-Shawāhid Al-Rubūbiyah* (Qom : Butane kitab, 1386), p.160,172 and Dawud al-Qaysari, p.34

and also *فأينما تولوا فثم وجه الله* (so wherever you turn, there is the face of Allah (2 : 115)

Or *أينما كنتم هو معكم* He is with you wherever you may be. The esoteric true reality that will be obtaining manifestation for all perhaps in the Great Resurrection (57 : 4)

لمن الملك اليوم لله الواحد القهار (Who is the dominion to Day? Belongs to Allah the One the Omnipotent (conquering force) (40 :16)

Conclusion

From what has passed, we can understand that annihilation in mysticism needs a reasonable explanation and for this aim it is necessary to benefit from a theoretical system. There are different explanations of annihilation were given based on the distinguished scientific or philosophical systems, which one aspect of the experience of annihilation is stressed. But it was clear that, only the explanation based on the epistemology and ontology of transcendental theosophy and theoretical mysticism is compatible with the mystics' description about annihilation experience. Thus, according to these theories, the true explanation of annihilation is that the reality of existence is a Unique reality, which beings are the manifestations and Loci of manifestation of that, and what mystics experience in the annihilation esoteric abode is a direct witnessing by presence of this reality.

We are nonexistence outward appearance of existence
Our existence and the absolute existence is you

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