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AL-GHAZALI ON THE ESSENCE OF LOVE¹

Резюме. В статье «Аль-Газали о сущности любви» автор рассматривает «любовь человека к себе, своему совершенству и самосохранению». Он разделяет концепцию Аль-Газали (1058–1111) о том, что «человек любит вечность своего бытия», и указывает на присутствие этой идеи в доктринах христианства, Людвига Фейербаха и Эриха Фромма.

Abstract. In his paper, the author considers “the humans’ love of themselves, of their perfection and self-preservation.” He shares Al-Ghazali’s postulate “humans love the eternity of their being” and highlights the presence of this idea in the doctrine of Christianity, in the conceptions of Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872) and Erich Fromm (1900–1980).

Introduction

Once Al-Ghazali’s biographer said: “If there were a prophet after Muhammad, then he would be, of course, Ghazali” (see Naumkin 1980: 9). Obviously, many people would agree with this opinion, having read Ghazali’s works.

In this paper, I would like to discuss Al-Ghazali’s notion of love. Considering the place of love in relations between people and regarding it as one of the motives of human behavior, Ghazali (1058–1111) names five kinds of love.

The first kind is man’s allegedly inherent love of himself and his perfection, which is capable of being one of the main factors determining the human behavior. Love of continuing life is coupled with the hatred of non-being. The human striving for perfection and everything that helps him to prolong his existence and to achieve perfection, both material and spiritual, is declared to be the consequence of such love.

The second kind of love is love for the one who has done good to the man who has been his benefactor. In the first case, man loves his perfection and in the second the one who confers it on him.

The third and fourth kinds of love are associated with the theme of inherent selfless morality: it is love of everything superb, of beauty and those whose actions

¹ This paper was presented in the Symposium “Modern Age and Al-Ghazali” (May 12–14, 2011) at the Divinity School of Suleyman Demirel University (Isparta, Turkey). Later it was published: Omelchenko, Nikolay. “Al-Ghazali on the Essence of Love.” In *Reflections. Journal of Philosophical Anthropology* 1 (2012): 9–18: <http://www.institute-for-human-sciences.org/images/2012-15.pdf>

are kind and noble. And the beauty of human actions can be appreciated only by those in whom “love of internal objects is greater than of external.”

The fifth kind of love – through likeness – is connected with the idea of microcosm – macrocosm. On the premise that people of kindred souls are attracted to each other, Ghazali concludes that man must love God after whose image he has been created.

Ghazali also tries to prove that all other kinds of love can be fully manifested only in the love of Allah, and “He alone” deserves love (Al-Ghazali 1980: 238).

The First Object of Love

In particular, I want to consider the first kind of love, since Al-Ghazali’s idea strengthens my conception of secular theology, or my philosophical interpretation of religion. The essence of this conception is as follows.

According to the Bible, when Moses wondered about His name, God answered: “I am that I am” (Ex. 3: 14). In philosophy’s language, this reply means: “I am Being.” In other words, God’s name is Being. God Himself informed all people about it. His mystery is a mystery of nature, Cosmos, life, human being; His characteristics are properties of infinite being, of rational-irrational essence of the Universe.

This metaphysical interpretation of God invites to remember Parmenides’ categories of being and non-being. Now let us make the following comparisons:

God and devil,
 being and non-being (nothing),
 life and death,
 good and evil,
 love and hatred,
 beauty and ugliness,
 truth and falsehood,
 “yes” and “no,”

plus and minus,
affirmation and negation,
creation and destruction.

One may meet such a logic in Heidegger's works: "'Nothing' is more original than the No and negation"; "The No does not come into being through negation, but negation is based on the No, which derives from the nihilation of Nothing"; "Nothing is the source of negation, not the other way about" (Heidegger 2000: 217, 220).

Using the religious terminology, one may explain these quotations: "Devil preceded the No and negation"; "Devil is the source of negation," and so on.

Of course, a special thorough research of these oppositions is required. Obviously, we will be able to get very interesting results. But now we can note that truth, good, love and beauty acquire the single ontological foundation in metaphysical being which, in terms of religion, is named as God.

But what is the advantage of having a philosophical conception of God for morality and human knowledge in general? From the secular theology viewpoint, the question "Why should I be moral?" can get the following answer. We should be moral to keep our living, to co-create life, to affirm the existence of the human race. Life is good, and death is evil. "To be good" means to enforce life (being), "to commit evil" means to increase death (nothingness). Therefore, we should learn to distinguish the forms of life (God) and death (devil), of good and evil.

Thus, God is being, life, good. Devil is nothing, death, evil. Being and non-being, life and death, good and evil, plus and minus constitute two opposite principles of the cosmic order and human nature.

Let me give an example. A few years ago I (together with Dr. Ayse Oktay and other colleagues) participated in the Parliament of the World's Religions (Barcelona, Spain, July 7–13, 2004). The topic of our session was "Human Moral Development in Islam, Christianity and Buddhism." When my American colleague Dr. Deborah Peterson suggested that we come up with a general postulate to conclude the session, I proposed just one thesis: "Do not kill." It was very

interesting that all the presenters had no objections. Every of them did agree that their religion shares this principle. Then we could suggest this maxim as a starting point for international mutual understanding in other spheres. The imperative “Do not kill” means a principle of preservation of life, of human being. Or, in terms of Ghazali’s philosophy, we should love “the eternity of our being.”

Obviously, the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” (Matt. 5: 21) is possible because humanity is based on the divine principle of being. Consequently, an attempt upon human life means an attempt upon God (infinite being). For example, in his paper arguing against death penalty (1906), the Russian religious philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev wrote: “According to genuine Christians, those who kill join the torturers of Christ; they kill not only humans but also God” (Berdyaev 1989: 202). In other words, saving a human being (endowed with the divine principle), we are saving the very divine principle.

According to Ghazali, man does not hide that he loves himself and can love others for the sake of himself. He himself is the first object of love. The meaning of his love is in his sympathy towards the continuation of his being and in his aversion to non-being and his death. Humans love the eternity of their being and hate death and murder not only because of fear of agony or of what would be after death; they do not like non-being and death in general – perhaps, with the exception of the moments when they experience pain or suffering; for if someone is suffering from misfortune, his love is directed towards the deliverance from this misfortune, and if he indeed will like non-being, it is not because it is non-being, but because of the disappearance of misfortune in it. Non-being and death are the objects of hatred, and the prolongation of being is the object of love (Al-Ghazali 1980: 231–232).

Thus, for Ghazali, the human essence (i.e., he himself, his health, his property, money, family, friends) is the first object of the human love. One should like one’s property since it is a means for the continuation of being. For example, a man loves his little son, in spite of difficulties, since he would be the heir after

father's death and the preservation of his family's existence is a partial continuation of his own existence (Al-Ghazali 1980: 233).

Humans Love “the Eternity of Their Being”

Ghazali's idea on the infinity of human being is objectively opposite to the limited understanding of individual life. Ghazali's approach justifies the human life the meaning of which has a transcendent character and is connected with the Absolute, i.e., with infinity. Every time, when we choose life (but not death), we make ourselves rooted in life and at the same time strengthen the very life. In other words, by means of our individual life, we strengthen the life of our family, community, society, the whole humankind. It appears that we are not alone in our existence, and every individual life has a social, historic and cosmic justification. An infinite being needs our personal life.

“I also wanted to be... – that is the clue of my life.” These words from Nausea (1938) of Jean-Paul Sartre could be an epigraph for his project of existential psychoanalysis. In *Being and Nothingness* (1943), he noted it was not matter that this psychoanalysis would really exist but it was important that it was possible.

According to Sartre, “fundamentally man is the desire to be...” The original project which is expressed in each of our empirically observable tendencies is then the project of being. There is not first a single desire of being, then a thousand particular feelings, but the desire to be exists and manifests itself only in and through jealousy, greed, love of art, cowardice, courage, and a thousand contingent, empirical expressions which always cause human reality to appear to us only as manifested by a particular man, by a specific person. If it is true that human reality identifies and defines itself by the ends which it pursues, then a study and classification of these ends becomes indispensable. Moreover, the best way to conceive of the fundamental project of human reality is to say that man is the being whose project is to be God. “To be man means to reach toward being

God. Or if you prefer, man fundamentally is the desire to be God” (Sartre 1996: 302).

One may suggest the following interpretation of Sartre’s words. Here God is a symbol of infinite being. Therefore, one’s desire to become God means a desire to acquire an infinite being, immortality. But, in fact, every of us can gain “part of immortality and eternity” (Plato), so we may expect only a part of the divine. So an individual has no luck to occupy a place of God and become a new Absolute. It would mean that he found a total infinity. At the same time people should strive to prolong their particular life up to infinity. I prefer to share Al-Ghazzali’s idea: humans love the eternity of their being. Moreover, they should love the eternity of their being. This is a genuine human goal.

Let us turn to Sartre’s postulate: “man is the desire to be.” Remember that Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872) gave approximately the same interpretation of human essence. His work *On Eudaimonism* started from the following explanation:

Every creature which is living loves, even if only itself, its life; it wants to live since it lives; it wants to be since it is; by this, it wants to be only in good state, healthy, happy... (Feuerbach 1995: 427)

In his view, drive-to-happiness is a basic drive of every living organism which lives and loves, exists and wants to exist. Happiness includes all that concerns life, at least all healthy drives. So the deepest human essence is expressed in the sentence “I want, hence, I exist.” By this, the words “I want” mean “I want to be happy and do not want to suffer.” Before John Locke (1632–1704), Nicholas Malebranche (1638–1715), Claude Adrien Helvétius (1715–1771) developed similar ideas.

Feuerbach argues that even suicide does not contradict drive-to-happiness. The human acts in contradiction with drive-to-happiness only for the sake of drive-to-happiness, and such contradictory action is possible only when the evil, which man ventured for, seems to him as a good in comparison with another evil which he wants to remove or overcome by means of this action. He says a self-murderer wishes for death not because it is an end of his evils and misfortunes but because it

is an only (even if only in his notion) medicine against already existing or just yet threatening and unbearable contradictions with his drive-to-happiness.

Drive-to-happiness is omnipotent, however it argues its omnipotence not in happiness but in misfortune. One may say the torments of existence came in my flesh so deeply, so sucked any joy and energy of life out myself that I know just one being, i.e., the being of torment, and one non-being, i.e., the non-being of torment (Feuerbach 1995: 430, 431, 437).

Thus, in Feuerbach's opinion, self-murderers and prostitutes act from drive-to-happiness. Obviously, it must be admitted that criminals and destructive individuals also live in accordance to the principle of happiness. So every of them could say using Sartre's words: "I also wanted to be..."

In my view, we may obtain original results in our searches of human behavior using the principle of being or principle of happiness, or principle of Ghazali "love to the eternity of the human being."

Love and Knowledge

In Ghazali's words, first, we should understand that "love can only be a result of knowledge since humans love only what they know." Stones cannot love: love is a property of cognitive creatures (Al-Ghazali 1980: 230).

At the same time the philosopher affirmed that "love is an innate sympathy of individuals to pleasant things. If this sympathy is very strong, we could talk about being in love. In its turn, hostility is an innate aversion of individuals to unpleasant things. If this hostility is very strong, they call it hatred. "This is the first thing one should know about the essence of love" (Al-Ghazali 1980: 230).

By this, he asked a rhetorical question: "Where else is the essence of love, if not in a sympathy towards those things that are pleasant to learn?!" (Al-Ghazali 1980: 231).

Obviously, here is a kind of contradiction. For Ghazali, on the one hand, love is a result of knowledge, i.e., an acquired quality. On the other hand, love is an innate property, i.e., it is in humans before any cognition. I am ready to share

this latter, “apriori” interpretation of love the essence of which is “in a sympathy towards those things that are pleasant to learn.” However, one may see how love can be also a subject and result of education.

In my view, love is a natural property of the human soul coinciding with one’s cognitive abilities and having an effect on the process and result of knowledge. I believe that it is love that contributes to a heuristic success.

In 1968, the Argentinean professor Louis Farre wrote: “An anthropologist cognizes himself in his existence but not as an abstraction. In philosophical anthropology, self-knowledge is not only a purpose but also a method. An anthropologist as though pecks his flesh and soul without regret and quite indifferently” (Farre 1995: 176). As for me, I do not agree. To my mind, such a method is not adequate for our comprehension of human nature.

I believe that horror, hatred, love, respect, and other our feelings are a kind of human relation to the surrounding world. Any emotional relation to objects in the world is not neutral for our understanding of those objects. The so-called “pure cognition,” i.e., cognition without the feelings, does not exist. Our feelings influence our cognitive process. They are able to promote finding the truth or misrepresenting the facts; moreover, our feelings themselves are a type of human cognition.

The philosophies of Martin Heidegger and Albert Camus are relevant to this issue. In Camus’ view, “horror is when our mind falls into contemplation of death” (Camus 1990: 36). Obviously, Heidegger has chosen his own, so to say, methodical mood. He held that “Dread reveals Nothing.” In other words, we can know death only due to horror.

As for me, I believe if dread reveals Nothing, then love opens Being.

According to Erich Fromm (1955: 31), “Love is union with somebody, or something, outside oneself, under the condition of retaining the separateness and *integrity of one’s own self*.” This is an interesting definition, but it does not display entirely that human emotional relation which makes love to be love.

In my view, love is the most optimal relation for the understanding of the world, including human being. It means, for example, that only a mother who loves her children is able to understand them.

In 1973, the German philosopher Hans-Edward Hengstenberg (1995: 216) spoke about “sympathetic objectivity.” According to his approach, we can reach the truest knowledge of the human being thanks to our sympathy with humans. It is our sympathy alone which allows us to see the truth of human nature.

If sympathetic objectivity progresses into love, then non-objectivity progresses into hatred. Max Scheler (1874–1928) calls the latter to be speculation *a la baisse* (speculation on a fall). The hater does not want another individual to realize his life and meaning. The hater strives to find defects in the other; he observes the other’s merits only in order to interpret them in a negative sense and thus to see them somehow annihilated. From the humanistic viewpoint, the hater gets an unnatural satisfaction from the humiliation of the other.

So if it is true, according to Heidegger, that dread reveals Nothing, then it must be true that love opens Being. We can see a genuine human essence only in the light of love, of sympathetic objectivity. That is why in particular we need a metaphysics of respect for humans.

Thus, the comprehension of human being depends not only on faculties of intellect but also on the feelings of the researcher, on his or her, so to say, methodical mood. We may assume love is a heuristic aid in the philosophical and scientific studies. Love for humans ensures the objectivity of their understanding and makes all illusions to be superfluous.

Love accompanies the deepest revelations of being. Being lays down one indispensable condition for its revelation – the thinker’s love. By this, being reminds us about its *ordo amoris* (Scheler). Nothing but reason filled with love is able to discover the essence of being. Therefore, to see the truth, the human reason must observe the surrounding world with love. One may say love makes us clever, wiser, and more sagacious. In other words, the truth of being reveals itself to the loving reason. This means, in particular, that an anthropological truth may be

discovered (under all other equal conditions) only by a sympathetic soul. Only those who love humans will be able to know the truth about them.

Conclusion

In my view, Al-Ghazali suggested a very interesting approach to the understanding of human nature – through the essence of love.

Al-Ghazali says that humans love “the eternity of their being.” It means that humans love their immortality, they strive, in religious terms, to get to paradise. This idea reveals that the human is a transcendent creature, his life is not limited to his today’s affairs and immediate interests – his life aims towards infinity. Al-Ghazali recommends people to love themselves, their families and children, to love what they do, and love their future. This is what constitutes the genuine life for humans.

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