

Afaq Asadova (National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan)

**THE CRISIS OF MODERN RATIONAL SCIENCE AND
THE TEACHINGS OF IBN ‘ARABI**

The 20th century made global changes in nature and morality through incredible historical cataclysms, which never occurred in the earlier centuries. Rational science reached its highest level. Human beings started to investigate the space. Genetic engineering and cybernetic technologies, which made changes in physical and mental traits of human being, were founded. New technological and non-technological methods of the development of psychology were invented. Classical capitalism left the historical scene, giving a way to post-industrial and information society. The socialistic system and communistic ideology collapsed. Environmental calamities became a commonplace. Population of the world very rapidly approached the critical line.

If at the beginning of the twentieth century Spengler was talking about the end of the European culture, by the end of the century Fukuyama talked about the end of history. The changes of the biological and physiological nature of human being and the change of his social and cultural behaviour are not any longer presented as mere fantasy, but have become a real and serious development, the study of which has itself developed into a new science.

To put this in rational and scientific terms, all this shows the beginning of the historical end of *homo sapiens*, the human culture and a civilizational period. Words like “Apocalypses” and “doomsday” are not used any more in metaphorical meaning but express a genuine fear and doubt, generated by the modern technocratic civilization.

What is happening? Has the development of the rational science during the 20th century changed the form of the world so much that its cognition is now beyond the scope of science? Or is this the exaggeration of the consciousness to change the scene of the world? In both cases there is one outcome. The rational science which dominates over humans has been on the verge of crisis for almost two centuries. The world’s newly obtained knowledge and the achievements made bring the universe to the horrible calamitous state.

Rational science treats the human being as a complex of organic and inorganic substances. It equals all its cultural values with substance and mechanical motion. Human being has descended from the level of absolute value and the seeker of the absolute truth to the level of social animal with its ambitions, appetite, selfishness or that of the toy conducted by instincts, reflexes and physical and economical complexes.

Albert Einstein once said: "The problem of our time is not the A-bomb. It is the human soul".

Martin Heidegger remarked in 1955 that in their speeches the Nobel prize laureates were asserting: "Science (i. e., the modern natural science. — A. A.) leads to the happiness of human being". Reflecting upon this claim, the German philosopher raises a question: "Are these words pronounced with due understanding? Are these words meant about the age of atom?" Heidegger talked with alarm about the technocratic civilization, in which the technical means are ready to destroy the humans' lives and which is more dangerous than the hydrogen bomb: "Even if the hydrogen bomb will not explode and the world will be saved from it, the unpleasant change of the world with the advent of the age of atom is inevitably taking place".

Such criticism of the rational science instigates the scientists to counterbalance the structure, social character and science with cultural relationship.

Modern science concentrates its attention upon the complex self-improvement systems and requires methodologies considering the axiology and social issues. New subject concept is formed as a main structure of biosphere and space. The ideal of this new stage is the synergic approach of the interpretation of combinations of serious mathematical and physical models with social and humanitarian sciences. According to this approach, the universe is a dynamic and complex system, which is significantly dependent on human activities. This pertains to the counter-relation phenomena and the special role of subject's activity.

Modern world outlook systems, based on quantum physics and relativistic cosmology, go behind the traditional rationalistic views and treat such categories as necessity, coincidence, cause and outcome, part and whole in a new and different manner. Modern science has changed the basic attitudes of positivist science, which rested on the repeated experiment and identical outcome. The very notion of experiment is principally changed, since, according to the tenets of modern physics, it is not possible to create the same conditions twice. Such well-known experts in quantum physics as Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg mentioned that, during the experiment, the object interacts with its environment and, consequently, it is impossible to carry out an experiment without changing the microsystem. So, the observed object is not any more the same object. This fact shows the limitations of the rational science and its inability to cognize the world absolutely.

This type of approach constituted the basis of the scientific methodology of the ancient Eastern philosophers. They pointed to the impossibility to fully separate the observer and the observed subject from each other because of the changes occurring in the process of observation.

It is interesting that the integral philosophy of the well-known representative of oriental mysticism Sri Aurobindo, based on the idea of the creative power of consciousness, reveals the physical meanings of field, which had an impact on quantum mechanics.

Most of the philosophical schools of the 19th and 20th centuries, including life-philosophy, different varieties of anthropology, existentialism, phenomenology, hermeticism etc., showed great interest in the problem of life.

Having grown out of various philosophical trends (such as Schopenhauer’s pessimism, Nietzsche’s nihilism, Dilthey’s “historical consciousness”, Simmel’s “intuitivism”, Spengler’s “condemnation of the western civilization’s insight”, Bergson’s “creative evolution”, Husserl’s “nature”, which distinguishes the individual from social life, Heidegger’s “time and human being”, the life-philosophy today has reached its most complete expression. The human values in the 21st century are not limited to material well-being, but also include qualitative life parameters in combination with inter-human relations. The quality of life is determined by the overall morality of its system, because morality is a crucial condition of human life. Morality is the deepest expression of the human nature and constitutes the basis of human society and human being. For thousands of years the concept of morality has been connected with religion. If we treat the fundamental moral values as purely relative ones, the world will face a moral calamity.

The search for absolute values is determined by this attitude. If we accept the approach of Nietzsche, who thought that the major mistakes of previous cultures and philosophies were caused by their attempt to establish an eternal and absolute truth, the world which has no origin or foundation and which tries to become separated from its creator and to build on relative and transitory values, is inevitably doomed to calamity.

The current economical crisis shows that the economical basis without faith and morality is doomed to corruption and decay. Time shows that if apparent economical progress involves the destruction of moral values, material well-being can disappear in an instant.

Modern science is a complex and dynamic aspect of social development. It gradually extends its horizons and speeds up the pace of scientific and technical development. But the well-known paradox of intellect tells us that the more we know, the more the sphere of potential knowledge (i. e., what we haven’t learnt yet) extends for us. Knowledge of tiny things leads to ignorance concerning great matters. Rationalism has embraced all aspects of science, life and psychology, and tied them with material and immaterial (such as globalism and information society) shackles, the latter often being tighter than the former. Nowadays, to get rid of these shackles, people turn to psychotherapeutic and meditative practices. Human thought wants to extend its horizons, human soul looks for its source, because in the mentality and memory of human being all these extended horizons and sources exist. As a result of the domination of rational science, the growing illiteracy alongside with literacy must prove the existence of this source. All these are the revelations sent upon the history and intellectual and revealed sciences (such as esotericism, Sufism, mysticism etc.). Rationalism leaves behind all the contributions which can be made by these sciences. Unfortunately, during the last hundred years, because of the predomination of the scientific rationalism, which sealed the

intellect of humans and closed their eyes, all these things have usually been treated as fictional and unworthy of the attention of science. But nowadays, when knowledge about science is extending, it is hard to think about the improvement of world without these sciences.

One of the well-known scholars who did a lot to improve the world is Ibn 'Arabi. The course of his life was determined when he was fifteen, at which age his thoughts separated from the trend followed by the fifty years old Ibn Rushd, who is considered the patriarch of Muslim rational sciences. The path of Ibn 'Arabi has been considered a new trend in human consciousness. Unlike Ibn Rushd, Ibn 'Arabi considered the human mind limited in its intellectual progress. But it was not a new discovery. New was the emphasis Ibn 'Arabi placed on the imagination, which was based on the revelation. In the 16th century an Egyptian thinker agreed with the ideas of Ibn 'Arabi and called them a poison for religion (as the meanings were flowing, signs were detailed and words were closed). Nowadays Ibn 'Arabi's views are considered to be a remedy of the crisis of human consciousness and human being itself.

In the later Sufi tradition Ibn 'Arabi is usually referred to as *al-Shaykh al Akbar* ("the Greatest Chief") and his thoughts and ideas are clear, convincing and concern a large variety of issues. The meaning of the revelation is explained with the deepest depth and beauty which can be attained by human intellect. If there is no biological or physical discovery in his thought or no equipment is used to measure the stages of human soul (which might not be possible at all), it does not mean that his teaching is not true. Objectivity is not and does not have to be the same as truthfulness. The truth is a wider and more inclusive concept. It is the measurement of things which are expected to be, or have already been, visible and invisible. If the source and root of life and our motive forces are invisible and there is no other measuring tool than the human heart, it does not mean that what is invisible, is untrue. Throughout the history of science this dilemma was left unsolved by both the scientism and anti-scientism (i.e., the supporters of natural sciences and their opponents). The very existence of thinkers like Ibn 'Arabi confirms the existence of sources of true knowledge other than observation and experiment. In this respect, the ideas of the twentieth-century Russian philosopher Lev Shestov are interesting.

He focuses on the contradiction which lies in the heart of the rational science. Different facts in huge quantities are left behind by it. Science only takes into account, he argues, those things which are constant, and follow certain patterns, substituting each other; in which case the most important thing is that the cases can be regenerated again (when the experiment is possible). But what about the unique, non-repeating and non-regenerating cases? If all people were blind and out of all only one suddenly saw the world, its beauty and magnificence, science would not be satisfied and content with his testimony. But this person's testimony is immensely more important than the testimonies of the blind ones. Do we really have not to take into account the testimony of the only seeing individual, as not existing in normal conditions and non-regenerable? Modern science seems to require this.

The Russian-American philosopher Pitirim Sorokin divided the human knowledge into three systems — ideational, sensate and ideal. The ideational system is based on the revelations of God’s messengers, mystical practices and esoteric knowledge, inventions etc. The sensate system, in turn, expresses and cognizes the information, provided by sense organs. Modern rational science is based on this latter principle. Ideal truth is the synthesis of these two truth systems, created by our intellect.

Of course, there are methodologies, principles, structures, aspects and forms to distinguish these truth systems from each other. Throughout the history these truth systems either were put against each other or one was dominant or they existed in some coordination. The 20th century created the dominance of senses. In general, the 20th century is considered the sense culture century. Modernism is the sun of this culture. The huge social and political cataclysms, world wars, countless military defence technologies, environmental crisis which lead humans to destruction, together with moral decline, all are the products of sense culture. That is why post-modernism is against the value systems created by modern thought and is supported by two other ideational and idealist truth systems. So, in this horizon we have to consider the truth systems of Ibn ‘Arabi.

The importance of Ibn Arabi’s knowledge increases almost daily and this is because it is based on the imagination of the human being as well as on the rational system of religion — namely, the Koran, the Prophet and his hadiths, symbols, analogies and allegories — as reality and continuum. According to Ibn ‘Arabi, the knowledge revealed to the prophet pertains to the domain of human imagination. The brain receives the data from the sense organs and starts to reflect on it. The infinite objects are the names of things which have been taught us by God. The names revealed to us by God are the keys of the closed doors of invisible world. The intellect can create new concepts about God, previously unknown to the human being, but it can never tell anything about the resemblance between the macrocosm and the microcosm. In turn, revelation comprises the knowledge of God, which is not available to the intellect — knowledge, which is provided by the imagination. If intellect works in cooperation with imagination, based on revelation, it can lead people to perfection. Of course all Sufis, mystics and esoteric thinkers note that intellect has its own frames and limits. Most philosophical trends accept this idea. Kant in his “Critique of Pure Reason” tries to determine the boundaries of human intellect. But no other philosopher could define the boundaries of human intellect so precisely as Ibn ‘Arabi did. If one reflects upon the history of the development of human intellect, he will certainly see the impact of Ibn ‘Arabi’s thought. All Muslim thinkers after him, mediaeval Christian mysticism and philosophy, modern Western philosophy, and even the psychoanalysis, in which the 20th century takes pride, carry the traces of Ibn ‘Arabi’s theory of imagination. In Kant’s agnosticism and Hegel’s theory of the Absolute Spirit and in the 20th century — in existentialism and the recent postmodernist theories, which destroy all boundaries between modern and mystical imaginations, one can easily see the influences of Ibn

‘Arabi’s theory of the “unity of soul and body”. The hidden and mysterious world of human psychology, the dreams’ theory of Freud in positivist outlook is the modern version of Sufi — in particular, Ibn ‘Arabi’s — teachings. All these claims require scientific investigation. Such investigation is very important, because such knowledge constitutes the ideological basis of the outlook of rational science.

It is not only important to examine them in order to prove Ibn ‘Arabi’s theories (or those of other oriental thinkers), but also to determine the depth of the impact of speculative intellect on human knowledge. Otherwise the knowledge will be distorted and false conclusions, which can have negative influence on both individual and society, will be drawn. For example, this happened, when the dialectics of Hegel was distorted by Marxist and Leninist ideology in order to justify the creation of the dictatorship of the proletariat, making a devastating impact on mankind on the whole. In reality, Hegel’s efforts to improve human knowledge and eventually presenting it as a gift to Prussian kingdom resembles the tale of the mountain which gives birth to a mouse and can serve as an example to show what happens when lofty ideas are placed in the Procrustean bed of narrow rationality.

Of course, we do not intend at all to reject or diminish the merits of rational thinkers and rational intellect. But we have to admit that the rational thought in its initial source is inseparable from imagination, and if it is separated from its moral basis and mixed with human spontaneous movement, it will eventually lead nowhere.

But it is also truth that science never gives its knowledge the form of dogma, and that every scientific theory can change when new, previously unknown, cases present themselves. Modern science has made significant achievements in exploring the micro- and macrocosm and requires the extension of the rational outlook to the new unprecedented cases (events). Up to now, rational science has recognized only the values of technocratic civilization, while rejecting the pre-modern or traditional cultures. But the cul-de-sac it is facing now, makes it widen its world outlook and incorporate other systems which accept its achievements. Its rationality is gradually becoming more open. Nowadays the science not only presents its achievements in terms of technocratic values, but also compares them with other world outlooks. Modern science easily joins the dialogue of cultures, becoming a major element of cross-cultural relationship between East and West.

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