
PANTHEISM THROUGH CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM; EXPLORING THE CONCEPTS OF RELIGION IN THOREAU'S WALDEN

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Abstract: The tale of Walden Pond is an exquisite art of experimental living and personal growth in an utterly natural environment. Thoreau's journey of pursuing happiness by 'sucking out all the marrow of life' is a unique pilgrimage of pondering the existence. The era of industrialization in the 1960s and 1970s invoked the contemporaries of Thoreau to start seeking for their inner harmony and life simplicity. The picturesque landscapes depicted in the Walden Woods represent the environment of a potential guru as Thoreau would be called nowadays. Living as a dour hermit, Thoreau is often associated with the belief that equates God with the Universe. Pantheism, which declares that God is everything and everything is God, represents the Walden Pond writings as a remarkable work that professes a pantheistic philosophy. Along with many other famous scientists and thinkers, such as Einstein, Rumi, Dickinson, Tesla and many others, Thoreau valorously declared himself as a pantheist. Even though many of them avoided being publicly labeled as the pantheists believing that would limit their thoughts and ideas, he willingly identified himself with the concepts of pantheism. The paper is not an ordinary observation of religious concepts in the work of Thoreau's Walden but rather a thorough exploration of pantheistic concepts in Christian and Islamic philosophical thought. Due to different definitions and formulations of pantheism, whether of religious or philosophical nature, the paper will attempt to analyze the possibility of overlapping components and segments of pantheism with two monotheistic religions. The paper tends to study Thoreau's pantheism particularly and analyze the postulates of Islam and Christianity and as such, to highlight the possible moments of coincidence. Also, the level of the mutual spirituality will be expressed separately regarding both Islamic and Christian doctrines. Transcendentalism, as a philosophical movement which is founded on the right of personal freedom and individual power, will also be taken into the consideration when analyzing the basis of pantheism in Thoreau's Walden Pond. The truth that Thoreau believed in then and the truth that both religions confess today are the truths that should be returned to. Beyond the human being and beyond nature is an ultimate truth. To discover that fundamental truth, a man should return back to his roots, to innate nature. A synthesis of a man with his solitude and the natural environment, according to Thoreau, is a pathway to a meaningful life. One of the main goals the authors tried to achieve is a contribution to the understanding of Thoreau in modern times, and when understood, to apply the knowledge in order to connect different groups of people around the similarities they share. Let the Walden Pond be a touchstone and nature be the one that connects us all!

Keywords: Pantheism, Christianity, Islam, Thoreau, Walden

THE POSTULATES OF PANTHEISM

In order to investigate the possible similarities between the religions such as Islam, Christianity and Pantheism, it is essential to analyze and define the term pantheism as well as its philosophy, practice, problems, and beliefs. Comparing pantheism with monotheism, Wittichii (Thomas MacFarlan, 1969:53-54) excellently noticed that 'there are two and only two systems of philosophy that can be offered. The one posits God as the transcendent cause of things; the other makes God the immanent cause. The former carefully distinguishes and separates God from the world; the latter shamefully confounds God with the universe... The former establishes a foundation for every religious devotion and for all piety, and thus the latter fundamentally overturns and takes away.' For Pantheist, the concept of God is equalized with the universe while for monotheistic religions the God is a supreme over the Universe. Furthermore, Owen (1971:65) says that 'Pantheism'...signifies the belief that every existing entity is, only one Being; and that all other forms of reality are either modes (or appearances) of it or identical with it'. They believe in God as immanent and impersonal Being, the importance of Science since the Universe and the God is the one, the unity of Being and they are ultimately religiously tolerant. Baruch Spinoza is taken to be a central figure of Pantheism, but there are certain claims that Giordano Bruno hit the foundation of this kind of philosophy. Spinoza (1677) described God as:

- God is one, that is, only one substance can be granted in the universe. (14)
- Whatsoever is, is in God, and without God nothing can be, or be conceived. (15)
- Besides God there can be no substance, that is, nothing in itself external to God. (17)

- Individual things are nothing but modifications of the attributes of God, or modes by which the attributes of God are expressed in a fixed and definite manner. (25)
- The human mind has ... an adequate knowledge of the... infinite essence of God. (47)
- The more we understand particular things, the more we understand God. (24)
- God is without passions, neither is he affected by any emotion of pleasure or pain . . . Strictly speaking, God does not love anyone.” (17)

Regarding divisions and subclasses of pantheism, there are Physicalist Pantheism, Naturalistic Pantheism, Idealist Pantheism, Dualist Pantheism, Dualist Substance Pantheism and Dualist Attribute Pantheism. One of the problems Pantheism confronts is a question of creation where Jantzen(1984:131) wonders ‘Whatever the doctrine of creation is, it is not a scientific explanation for the origin of universes...creation ex nihilo is...a theistic label to the mystery of why there should be something rather than nothing... “He that formed the eye, shall he not see...” (Psalm 94:9–10 AV)...the one who originated our ability to perceive can hardly be without that ability himself; the creator of persons is personal.’

CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES AND PANTHEISM

The *Creation of Adam*, a cornerstone art of Renaissance painted by brilliant Michelangelo, perfectly illustrates the fundamentals of the Christianity established on the belief that the Creator and creation are disparate. Such a momentous scenery of the God and the newly-created Adam is interpreted not as God’s continuation but as His creation. Thus, the idea of pantheistic concepts of identifying the God with everything and vice versa is unacceptable in Christianity. It declares that the God is endless, absolute and sublime and a Creator of everything. Many biblical verses oppose the philosophy of Pantheism and teach that God is a Creator of the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1), that He created the skies, stars, and seas (Nehemiah, 9:6), He is disparate with man (Numbers 23:19), man is made by Him (Genesis 1:27), and so forth.

Furthermore, the texts illustrate God and man speaking to each other (Genesis 3:9–10; Exodus 3:4–5), representing God as a judge to a man (Isaiah 2:4; 33:22), and disembodied Himself from beings (Revelation 20:12–15). In addition, the concept of spiritual praying suggests the existence of One who hears the prayers (Matthew 6:9). The omnipresence of God (Psalm 139:7-10), as well as the sovereignty of His divine Being (Isaiah 45:5), are the concepts of Christian theism where pantheist found the possibility to prove their philosophical theories. The worth of mentioning is a term ‘Christian pantheism’ as a movement by joining biblical beliefs and the pantheistic principles of the God’s presence in everything. This oxymoronic theory proved not be successful among the believers of monotheism.

ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY AND PANTHEISM

The conception of God’s existence has always been a controversial topic concerning all religions and philosophies. From the day he was created until the very today, a man wanted to ascertain into the form of the Being that created him. Paving the path through various understandings of God, Muslim scholars did contribute to the perception and insight on contentious issues. Some of them were guided by the sacred book of the Qur’an, describing Him the way He described Himself, and some were led by the phenomenon of mysticism in Islam. Rather entitled Mystics than Sufis, they associated the concept of oneness in Islam with the notions of pantheism. Claiming that ‘everything is a part of and a manifestation of the oneness of God’, Hoque (2014:50) states that one of the great mystics, Ibn al-‘Arabi, implied the possible consistency with pantheistic beliefs. The reasons for such a theory may lie in a selective reasoning of the Quranic verse ‘Wheresoever you turn, there is the face of God’ (2:115).

Analyzing only the first part of the verse, they tend to avoid explaining the other part where it is said that ““ they say-Allah hath begotten a son--glory be to Him—Nay, to Him, belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth; everything renders worship to Him” (2:116). This verse in one of the many of genuine Islam as was relieved to all of the Prophets, neither recognizes any of its aspects nor coincides its teachings with the pantheism. And even though Sufi scholars don’t identify their principles with pantheism, it is undeniable that their mystical ideology does greatly remind of pantheistic. The Sufis are famous as the seekers of profound knowledge and cognition and often emphasize the characteristics of God, claiming that the creation manifests the Singular. They observe the religion from the philosophical perspective rather than traditional and conservative. Meanwhile, the scholar of traditional Islam asserts the oneness of God as the base ground of Islamic doctrine. Pure monotheism declares a full submission of everything to only One God. The all existing, nature, man, and animal submits to the One.

THOREAU'S PERSPECTIVES OF RELIGION

Due to the political, social and religious background than, Thoreau chose not to belong to either side by advocating a freedom of religious expressions. As a form of his rebellion and demonstration, he became one of the members of the Transcendental Club along with the famous thinker Ralph Waldo Emerson. Transcendentalism arose as an opposition of spirituality imposed at that time in the US. In fact, the movement gathered like-minded intellectuals often characterized as the theological liberalists. So how did Thoreau perceive a religion? In a letter he wrote to Horace Greeley, an editor of the *New-York Tribune*, Thoreau (Hodder, 2001:131) simply declared that he was "born to be a pantheist". As a reader of Eastern philosophy, it inspired him to display some of his spiritual perspectives in *Walden* saying that "heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads" (2005:238). Thus a pure inclination to a pantheistic philosophy is given to confirm his beliefs that God is everything and everything is God. Well-known is his immense love for nature and his descriptions of it in *Walden* that resulted in a written form inspired by other cultures. The most famous passage from *Walden* when he wrote "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms", is actually a representation of a whole new beginning, a new life.

Inspired by Hinduism, Calvinism, Gospels, Sufism, Mysticism, Puritanism, Cynicism, Roman mythology and Buddhism, Thoreau successfully integrated all religious and philosophical theories establishing a belief of his own and living a life of his measures.

THE SIMILARITIES TRIANGLE IN WALDEN

Thoreau's *Walden* as a collection of spiritual experiences is a great source for exploring not only religious but every aspect of life. Every phenomenon related to the human and the world can be analyzed through the wisdom of a man who went back to his innate roots. Because of the limited space, we examined only some of the concepts of Thoreau's numerous principles written in *Walden*. The initial point was to evaluate Thoreau's lines and then compare with the conceptual lines in both Qur'an and Bible whether fully or partially similar. Thus we dared to construct a so-called "triangle of similarities" concerning religious postulates in Islam, Christianity, and Pantheism.

Morning Prayer

Thoreau (2005:73) celebrated the daybreak as a merciful gift from nature testifying that "every morning was a cheerful invitation to make my life of equal simplicity, and I may say innocence, with Nature herself. I have been as sincere a worshipper of Aurora as the Greeks. I got up early and bathed in the pond; that was a religious exercise, and one of the best things which I did. They say that characters were engraved on the bathing tub of King Tchingthang to this effect: "Renew thyself completely each day; do it again, and again, and forever again." I can understand that. Morning brings back the heroic ages."

The moment he presented as a morning prayer is easily compared with one of the five daily prayers in the Qur'an (30:17,18) "so glorify Allaah when you come up to the evening and when you enter the morning". Thoreau's bathing in the pond suggests what is called wudu in Islamic terminology, a ritual purification where some part of the body is washed before the prayer.

Also, a morning prayer is one of the rituals the Bible recommends to its believers. One has to feed his soul by connecting to God, thanking Him for the life (Psalm 5:3) "in the morning, O LORD, hear my voice. In the morning I lay my needs in front of you, and I wait." The first triangle of similarities was related to the very beginning of life, to the morning which symbolizes the procreation of the world.

Importance of Time

The transience of time has often been a philosophical enigma, and many thinkers have been trying to resolve the mystery of it and define the features of time in the best manner. But the crucial dilemma shouldn't have been to explain it, but to recognize the importance of the most obvious nature of the time, temporality. Thoreau (2005:80) depicted time as "the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it, but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. I would drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars." Time is but a river, flowing, running, rolling, often changing courses, bringing various situations ahead.

Comparing our lives with a breath, the lines allude that we are a stream, we are the time. The following verses (Psalm, 39:4-5) point out that "you have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath".

Islam also gave a special place to the concept of time as Allah took an oath by time and named a chapter of the Qur'an (103:1-3) 'by time, indeed, mankind is in loss, except for those who have believed and done righteous deeds and advised each other to truth and advised each other to patience.'

Solitude

A famous quote when Thoreau enlightened his auditorium that 'I never found a companion that was so companionable as solitude,' is one point more to add to our sequencing the similarities triangle of different religions. Solitude is often misinterpreted as loneliness. Solitude is a state of mind and being when you are closest to your inner self, often seeking for the faith in God within yourself. Thoreau enjoyed solitude. He associated it with Nature, the genuine and innate nature.

The Prophet of Islam himself experienced solitude as a spiritual journey. He went to the cave to receive a Revelation, the Qur'an. Based on this practice, many scholars claim that Muslim forgot that in order to get closer to their Lord, they need to embrace solitude.

The same way the Bible (Isaiah, 30:15) recommends the solitude as crucial for illumination and spiritual growth reciting that 'in repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust, is your strength.'

Ecology matters

Not only a science, ecology is also a movement, approach, attitude, mode of perception and personal consciousness about the living world. The level of ecological awareness has made Thoreau a true ecologist who wrote about nature preservations. In his Ph.D. thesis about the ecological perspective of Thoreau, Garand (1969:2) claims that 'his ecological observations grow both quantitatively, as other critics have noted, and qualitatively. From individual ecological observations, his chief interest in which is as a basis for transcendental correspondence.'

A thorough description of the creation of Nature in the Bible is an indication of the importance of the environment. In the Chapter of Genesis (9-13) is a detailed explanation of how did God created the world picturing that 'And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.'

Nature is one of the aspects of His Creation in Islam and consequently, it has to be cherished and cultivated. The Qur'an (28:77) calls over everyone who disturbs the balance and equilibrium in the Nature corrupters 'but seek, through that which Allah has given you, the home of the Hereafter; and [yet], do not forget your share of the world. And do good as Allah has done well to you. And desire not corruption in the land. Indeed, Allah does not like corrupters.'" The preservation of human habitat is the obligation by Allah and if not done, it will be punished.

Science Naturalist

Naturalism as a movement or a style can be associated with the art, philosophy or science. Naturalism study nature in a particular context, investigating the manner and the cause of a certain phenomenon. Thoreau was then called a naturalist, but today he would be called a scientist since both terms are almost synonymous. Thoreau indicated that if a man could comprehend how nature and its element function, only then he will be able to fully understand his own nature and this is a perception of a naturalist. In contrast to naturalistic conceptions, a scientist observes humankind and nature as two different species. Buell (The Cambridge Companion to Henry David Thoreau:171) stated that 'Thoreau is today considered the first major interpreter of nature in American literary history, and the first American environmentalist saint'.

Many believers claim that in Christianity there is a symbiosis between science and faith, fact and faith. If we go back in the genesis of the Bible, the term science wasn't in use, but the idea of knowledge, researching and exploring, is to be discussed. Many verses in the Bible (Proverbs, 25:2) encourages the wisdom as a feature of the chosen kings and nobility stating that 'It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out', and in another verse (Exodus, 31:1-5) it is said that 'The LORD said to Moses, "See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft.'" Many other verses are the proofs that Christianity commands the studying of the physical and abstract world.

Gaining knowledge is the first commandment in Islam and therefore the Qur'an represents a great source of scientific findings related to the astronomy, expansion the universe, water cycle, formation of mountains, high altitudes, origin of life as in (21:33) where it is said about the motions in orbit 'God is the one who created the night, the day, the sun, and the moon. Each one is traveling in an orbit with its own motion.'

The phenomena called ‘air hunger’ is literally explained in the Qur’an (6:125) in the way that ‘those who God wills to guide, He opens their breasts to Islam. Those who He will lose their way, He makes their breasts narrow and constricted, as if they were climbing the sky.’ The quantity of oxygen is decreased and it causes the breathlessness when you climb high mountains. The verse (21:30) about the origin of life is that illustrates the complexion of every being ‘and We got every living thing out of the water. Will they then not believe?’ All of the scientific facts are expressed in a concise and profound manner in the Qur’an.

CONCLUSION

The idea of Pantheism is essentially opposite to the singleness of God in both Christianity and Islam, but it can be inspiring to those who seek for the cognition of God through the natural world. The impression and demonstration of Thoreau’s affections towards nature, environment, and the universe are simply impressing and even though he believed in partial monotheism, God is in every natural element, he didn’t deny the existence of Him.

The tendency of this paper was not only to emphasize the similarities of Islamic, Christian and Pantheistic teachings through the writings of a famous transcendentalist and naturalist, Henry David Thoreau, but to raise interreligious tolerance on the basis of what we share in common. The lines and verses we examined are not definite, but only some of the numerous and analogous concepts of all three ideologies. This time the goal of the work was to search only for the similarities and that led and encouraged us to explore the differences in one of the next projects. We think that Thoreau, if alive today, would completely agree with one of the Quranic teachings (88:17-20) on how to see and behave ourselves towards Nature:

‘Do they not look at the camels, how they are made? And at the sky, how it is raised high? And at the mountains, how they are fixed firm? And at the earth, how it is spread out? Therefore do thou give admonition, for thou art one to admonish.’

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