
THE SHARED CONCERNS OF NIETZSCHE AND RUMI ON HUMANITY

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Nietzsche and Rumi belong to two different time and spaces: one a German Post-modern Philosopher, the other an Afghani Middle Ages Sufi. After an introduction about both figures and methodology used here, this paper presents a detailed discussion on commonalities between Nietzsche and Rumi. The first section illustrates on the shared methodology of writings which are the rousing language, hidden ideas amid simple points, and the paradoxical teachings. The second part studies the shared fundamental concepts among these philosophers. These concepts are Anti-idolism, the intuitional knowledge, and the authenticity of person. The last section of this paper called “inspirations” explains how those shared methodology and ideas serve two aims: mutual understanding between two different philosophies as well as enhancing our comprehension of humanity.

Key words: Nietzsche, Rumi, anti-idolism, institution, paradoxical teachings, criticism, humanism

BACKGROUND

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844—1900) and Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Balkhi Rumi (1207—1273) belong to two different times and spaces: one a German Post-modern Philosopher, the other an Afghani Middle Ages Sufi. The former can be understood in the context of history of Western philosophy and the latter in the Islamic mysticism. Nietzsche is known for his shocking announcement: “God is dead”, and Rumi for his vital invitation to fully dedicate oneself to God.

However, they are outstanding and appealing to other cultures as well. By focusing on the existential demands of humanity, they, more or less, go beyond their historical and geographical limits. Since their work concentrated on the core of their culture, dealing with them connects readers with various fundamental aspects of their respective civilization. Nietzsche’s books are very popular within Muslim intellectuals, particularly Farsi readers in Iran and Afghanistan, including the hometown of Rumi; and Rumi’s poems are very popular among Western audiences, particularly North Americans. Both have been greatly inspiring to their adherents and for subsequent philosophical movements. Nietzsche is considered as a precursor to expressionism, existentialism, and post-modernism. The German philosopher Martin Heidegger canonized Nietzsche as the “last metaphysician”, as such; Nietzsche’s works reflect the entire potential of Western metaphysics in multiple aspects. In salient ways, Nietzsche is also considered the greatest metaphysician because not only did he develop the apex of metaphysical thought, but he prepared the ground for the possibility of a fundamental ontology, thus, as Heidegger noted, a seminal turning-point in the history of philosophy [1. P. 9].

Rumi is one of the most important figures of Islamic Sufism, promoting the idea of love, highlighting the merciful aspect inherent in Islam. His followers established a mystical order called the “Mawlawiya”, well known in Western culture as the “Whirl-

ing Dervishes” or performing “Sama” (1). Through meeting with an itinerant Sufi named Shams ad-Din of Tabriz (1185—1248), Rumi experienced a full change from an ordinary Muslim scholar to a great Sufi. He described his spiritual change in this famous quote:

“The outcome of my life is not more than three key words: I used to be raw, then I was cooked, and now I am on fire”.

Rumi’s most influential work is the 27,000-verse didactic poem, *Spiritual Couplets* (*Mathnawī-yi Ma‘nawī*) which explores the discovery of his Sufi experience. Recognized by many commentators, both within the Sufi tradition and outside it, the collection is considered the greatest mystical poem ever written [2. P. 13]. It is a more didactic book in Islamic Sufism than *Divan-e Kabir*, another of Rumi’s poems. Referring constantly to Quranic verses, and Islamic authorized narrations, Rumi’s work seeks to explain mystical issues in metaphors and examples in order to help people reach God. Moreover, it plays a big role in spreading Sufi ideas worldwide. For many intellectuals and for Sufis, *Mathnawī* is as important as the Holy Quran is among Muslims. This paper explains the subject matter of *Mathnawī* which is more detailed, systematic, and methodical than another poetic work of Rumi.

While Rumi was concerned with the true nature of religion, thus contributing to a Sufi version of Islam, Nietzsche was concerned with the health of civilization suffering greatly from the “nihilism”, characterized in his own term of the “death of God.” In a philosophical attempt, Nietzsche dedicated himself to “de-deification of nature”, the “translation of man back into nature”, the “reevaluation of values”, the tracing of the “genealogy of morals” and their critique, and the elaboration of “naturalistic” accounts of knowledge, value, morality, and our entire “spiritual” nature. While Rumi worried about replacement of the substantive with growing superficial religiosity in Islam, Nietzsche distinguished between “master” and “slave” moralities, warning that the latter threatened to become the dominant type of morality in the modern world. Thus, both figures illustrate the possibility of overcoming the faithful and infidel or good and evil dualism. Nietzsche’s first book, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), represented both a break from classical scholarship and a highly critical rethinking of Socrates and modern scholarship. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche looked to the Greek myth for clues and to the German composer Richard Wagner (1813—1883) for inspiration, in order to nurture human flourishing in the face of superficial religious faith and their substitutes, namely reason and sciences. However, Nietzsche’s book remains one of the three most significant philosophical treatments of tragedy along with those of Aristotle and Friedrich Hegel (1770—1831) and the soil from which Nietzsche’s later philosophy grew (REP. N).

Regarding Nietzsche, this article refers to his various books since they together give a clearer image of his work. Although he passed three different phases in his productive period of work, in all stages Nietzsche remained dissatisfied and critical of many aspects of modern Western culture, though in his middle period he celebrated the valuing of sciences and empirical truth. Consequently, his original thought must be understood throughout the totality of his work. In contrast, Rumi’s work is understood only during the second half of his life which is centered with *Mathnawī*.

SHARED METHODOLOGY OF WRITINGS

Although Nietzsche and Rumi bestowed extraordinary pieces of literature, philosophically their *thoughts* are more important than their written forms. Tiring of repeating ideas, they felt what might be termed a “prophetic mission” to transport their audiences to a new realm. To break the common sphere of thoughts and values, they chose a different style of writing: a non systematic method which paves the way for opposite interpretations. This fact also connects their special way of writing to their unique ideas. There are three common features in their writings:

The rousing language: Nietzsche and Rumi do not consider themselves teachers to deliver information to the audiences, but missionaries who want to wake up their audiences. The aim of teaching changes to guidance and the informative language changes to evoking create spirit of hesitation about accepted concepts. Rumi exhibits how guidance requires a continuous struggle, rebirth, and a full resurrection instead of organized and clear propositions. This guidance is associated with the language of love which consists of a strong dynamic rather than the static tongue of science (see Mathnawi, Book 2:1878—1922; 4: 1468—1481). This is the same for Nietzsche who calls himself “Dynamite” instead “human being” [3. P. 143—144] and believed that seeking to establish a system of thought contradicts integrity of humanity [3. P. 159]. The Zarathustra, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, finally leaves his disciples saying, lose me and find yourselves, “Alone I go now, my disciples! You also should go now, and alone! Thus I want it. Indeed, I counsel you to go away from me and guard yourselves against Zarathustra! And even better: be ashamed of him! Perhaps he deceived you” [4. P. 58—59].

Hidden ideas amid simple points: Nietzsche and Rumi apply two different meanings to their words and distinguish between their esoteric and exoteric ones. The latter is for ordinary people and pave the path to systematize; however, the former, the real ones, are not for the public and need a heart similar to the authors, a heart wanting movement and authenticity. What is nourishes and cultures nature, can be harmful and unhealthy if they taken superficially (2). Rumi’s words work like a sword — if there is no protection, it is better to not approach (see, Rumi: 1-691-2). He concludes, “When I speak of “lip”, ’tis the lip (shore) of the Sea; when I say “not”, the intended meaning is “except”. By reason of (inward) sweetness I sit with sour face: from fullness of speech I am silent” (1:1759—1760).

Nietzsche also distances himself from his writings. His beloved protagonist Zarathustra keeps people busy with loud sounds without letting them know his intention, “My favorite malice and art is that my silence learned not to betray itself through silence. Rattling with diction and dice I outwit the solemn waiting ones; my will and purpose shall elude all these fierce watchers” [4. P. 139]. *Beyond Good and Evil* explicitly distinguishes between exoteric and esoteric teachings, the same teachings have an inverse value for the soul and the body, and they are dangerous, disturbing, unsettling for those with lower vitality because they are herald-calls which makes the brave even braver [5. P. 30—31].

Thus they both call readers to remove masks and leave masks for ordinary people. The true audiences must transcend, removing the mask. Again, Rumi and Nietzsche reproach people for their masks and they seek to address minds similar to their own because lack of common blood between them may cause death to readers.

The paradoxical teachings: both thinkers clearly espouse paradoxical statements because they open the field for a strong mind to exercise their will. While will is the substance of humanity, it appears in a contradictory state. Rums narrates how the Prophet confirmed two opposite claims about himself, to being beautiful and ugly at the same time, providing an opportunity for the audiences to reflect on their inner characteristics (Rumi, 1:2362—2370). As we saw earlier, once Rumi said by “exclusion” he means “inclusion”. This is why there are huge controversies among Rumi scholars on his theological, epistemological, or social perspectives. A stronger case appears in Nietzsche so that, for example, within the same text he denounces and recognizes socialism [6. P. 77]. His position on women, human rights, justice, virtues, the death of God, belief and faith, all move between two extremes. The Jesuit philosopher Frederick Copleston also observes there is a capacity to deduce opposite ideas from within Nietzsche’s philosophy. This is why there is a huge dispute going on about his position on socialism, human rights, justice, moral values, the death of God, and feminism. As the result, the “perfect person” in Rumi and Nietzsche’s “true philosopher” represent the richness of the whole world with all its contradictory and opposite phenomena; Rumi discussed this issue when discussing God’s manifestation and opposite names [7]. Nietzsche believed that the true “philosopher is a brief abstract of the world”; the quality “that usually destroys a man” [6. P. 511—12]; If Rumi’s desired man reflects God’s attributes, then Nietzsche’s man reflects a Dionysian relationship to existence as well [6. P. 536—537].

These common features in the writings of Nietzsche and Rumi bring the two closer together. For some, however, these features make it difficult to interpret and to take them seriously so that some have taken them to repudiate the traditional philosophical enterprise of seeking reasoned conclusions. For example, some readers draw attention to Rumi’s belief that philosophy in and of itself is impractical; it is based on syllogism, a weak form of argumentation that Rumi saw as akin to a “wooden column”, adding that, “the leg of the syllogisers (3) is of wood: a wooden leg is very infirm” (Rumi, 1:2128). However, this interpretation ignores both Rumi’s emphasis on rationality and his own illuminative philosophy. He exalts rationalization so greatly that he prays God keeps his enemies alive with it, because a lack of rationality creates much suffering for humanity. Rumi concludes that religious founders love rational enemies more than non-rational friends (4:1944—1951; also see 2:277—9).

Similarly, some erroneously conclude that Nietzsche heralds in the “death” not only of religious and metaphysical thinking, but also of philosophy itself. They overlook how Nietzsche suggested a way of overcoming the nihilism, recasting notions of truth and knowledge, and his last attempts to contribute to the comprehension of a broad range of phenomena [8. P. 1—18].

We can see now that Rumi’s and Nietzsche’s methodology is sometimes similar. Their content is sometimes similar as well.

SHARED FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPT

Nietzsche and Rumi were very critical of their contemporary dominant world views, seeing them as characterized by uncritical “idol” worship. Human life and spirit, they believed, is needlessly sacrificed to these idols. Both encourage their audiences to follow their guidance by evaluated common ideas with inherent human intuition.

Anti-idolism: Rumi considers himself a successor to the historical chain of idol-breakers. The prophets and original thinkers have not come to construct ideology for humanity to imprison them within. While prophets and original thinkers are sometimes associates with idols and temples, Rumi is solely concerned with highlighting how these figures *expose* idols as fake; ideas and concepts have to serve humanity, humanity should not serve ideas (Rumi, 4:814—817). Ironically, people often make icons and idols of the prophets or leading intellectuals, while, in reality, they were idol-breakers. They have invited people to an absolute free-consciousness. Thus, Rumi calls people to thank previous idol-breakers, and to free both their minds and their hearts from all idols, regardless of their labels (2:74; 366; 370). Nietzsche accuses the previous philosophers of neglecting a historical approach, one lacking the courage to face change, one constantly creating new idols. The “Twilight of the Idols” attempts to show, “How to Philosophize with a Hammer” and be strongly critical of all accepted philosophical concepts and propositions.

The intuitional knowledge: Rationality is common good for humanity, although it depends on its meaning and application. It is inherently gifted, and — like dignity — it is inseparable from human nature. Philosophers consider rationality as composed of at least two opposite ideas: first, logical arguments based on clear and distinct concepts; second, justified arguments based of personal intuition. While the former focuses on fixed and stabilized concepts the latter precipitates vital and flexible ideas. Some emphasize this difference by distinguishing reason from intellect. However, there is no doubt that some great ideas come from in-depth intuition as a result of individual achievement, not the conclusions of others. Although philosophy in general advocates individual exploration and an original struggle for the truth, an *illustrative* philosophy looks for a *particular* type of individuality. This individuality leads Nietzsche and Rumi to emphasize love and intuition rather than rationalism and common sense. They share a common perspective regarding the supremacy of love and intuition.

Rumi is well-known as the master of love, experiencing love in his entire being, especially after meeting with Shams. Rumi talks about nothing but love in the form of stories. “The King and the Maid” in Book I, “Moses and the Shepherds” in Book II “the life of Sadr-e-Jahan” in Book III and IV, “The story of Mahmood and Ayaz” in Book V, and “Leili and Majnoon” in the Book VI provide only a few examples of Rumi’s concept of love. The combination of love and intuition in Rumi has a different echo in Nietzsche’s “Gay Science.” Nietzsche passionate style and missionary feel reflects his intuition or “instinct”, a unique property of authentic original thinkers. Nietzsche demands that philosophers be honest in declaring their ideas as being “a prejudiced proposition, idea, or ‘suggestion,’ which is generally their heart’s desire abstracted and refined, defended by them with arguments sought out after the event” [5. P. 5]. The classical philosophers — “these lords of concept idolatry” — kill the things they love Nietzsche observes. Thus, with such dead ideas, philosophers look for reasons why their ideas are in disharmony with reality [3. P. 167]. Here, there is a sort of harmony between the philosophers’ weak character and impractical teachings [6. P. 235, 276—281].

To conclude, since the intuition is not transferable, societal teaching and informative language does not work. Rumi and Nietzsche’s thinking is merely based on their personal and unique experiences, both in style of comprehension and style of life. Moreover, their word is more a kind of self-unveiling.

The authenticity of a person: Uniqueness and associated individuality is central for both Rumi and Nietzsche. Rumi, like all Sufis, believes there is no repeated entity in all of nature (4:423—4). He sees each person as a unique reflection of God as well as humanity as the perfect reflection of God. “Therefore Man is in appearance a derivative of the world, and intrinsically the origin of the world. Observe this!” Rumi says, “A gnat will set his outward frame whirling round (in pain and agitation); his inward nature encompasses the Seven Heavens” (4:3767—8). Thus the love of God leads Rumi to love of humanity in each individual. Nietzsche’s idea of “having the courage to confront the eternal recurrence of the same” links him to openness to others, each single person, no matter who they are. This context brings both thinkers to see humanity in a vast graded circle, “The eternal recurrence, a prophecy” [6. P. 35, 543]. For Rumi, humanity begins from dust and finishes with God; for Nietzsche, humanity moves from the animal — “herd” — to the superhuman, or “Übermensch”. The point is, there is an open field for everyone, one that gives the individual the opportunity to determine their own spot. This is the matter of movement and change, not of fixed stability. Humans must determine what they want to be, as opposed to what is given to them. To Rumi and Nietzsche, such distinctions are necessary in order to highlight the difference between the current and the desired states of humanity. The first one is given and based on nature, in Nietzsche, or God in Rumi. The second is based on human actualized will, the “will to power” for Nietzsche, the “will to annihilate in God” for Rumi. The authenticity of a person comes from his/her will to be. However, regardless of the present state of each person, Rumi and Nietzsche advocate a different individualism, one which respects the diversity of humanity because all people emerge from their will, whether consciously or not.

These two features of human dignity, namely that the current situation of a person is not a desired state and that the very highly esteemed dignity of a person depends on each individual and must be actualized, motivates Nietzsche to criticize rationalism and modern humanism. Similarly, Rumi to criticize rationalism and the superficial understanding of religion, particularly Islam. Modern humanism is based on a stable nature of humanity which defines people as limited rational animals, reducing them to a very low level of commonality. The superficial understanding of Islam, as Rumi criticizes, leads to a high respect of mosques but severely insults a realized man (2:3109—11). It reduces humanity from a manifestation of God to a tool for the interests of religious leaders.

At the realm of ordinary people, Rumi and Nietzsche do not devalue common sense and rationality, but in terms of the ultimate ideal, they radically criticize rationalism. Rumi considers it improper to categorize animals and other temporal beings with humans who are eternal manifestations of God. Nietzsche considers it living in everydayness and gregarious morality [9].

INSPIRATIONS

The above-shared ideas serve two aims: mutual understanding between two different kinds of thought as well as enhancing our comprehension of humanity. Regarding humanity, the German philosopher and Muslim Sufi from two opposite contexts, anti-

religious and religious, philosophical and mystical, Western and Eastern, Post Modern and Pre-Modern perspectives, Nietzsche and Rumi come to the same point of a unique dignity of humanity. The core of their thought is human dignity and actualization of their own unlimited capacity. According to Rumi, the real identity of mankind is the awareness of the particular relation to God. It also means self-improvement, a fact that has an interconnection with individuality connected with authenticity. A Sufi tries to discover his/her inner capacity and the names and attributes of God within. Since there is a unity between different names and attributes of God as well as similar and distinct features, humans can learn through communication, to explore the beauty of the “other”; “Know the truth to be this, (that) all these (various persons) are not in the right; nor (again) are this herd entirely astray”, Rumi states, “He that says, ‘All are true’—’tis folly (on his part); and he that says, ‘All are false’—he is damned” (2:2927 & 2942). Everybody discovers a side of reality that is one shade of truth. This knowledge leads to love of life in all its manifestations. Then we not only have to tolerate and accept “others”, but must also respect them as several manifestations of God and as the best guide to self-improvement. One outcome of self-consciousness is awareness of the essential differences of people. There is only one reality; God (Haq). Other entities are only His manifestations [7].

God changes to “becoming” in Nietzsche. The superhuman fully actualized himself and wants everybody be an authorized self. All are diverse manifestations of “becoming”. Regardless of how people possess authenticity, they have value. Value is not something external or to be given. A noble soul “has no doubt that the exchange of honors and rights, as the essence of all intercourse, belongs also to the natural condition of things” [5. P. 212]. The “Gay Science” requires not taking anything serious, including the external position of the superhuman. The superhuman truth is true merely to him. He is valid merely for himself; inspiring to others but nobody knows what will be inspired because there are not simple, passive and active roles [5. P. 48].

As a result, the positive sides of both thoughts are to respect and to accept the differences; the uniqueness of every person means we can’t anticipate others to live, think, believe, behave and feel like us. Plus, if they are in a situation that seems wrong and bad to us, it is not actually so. They expose God’s name and attributes in Rumi and faces of “becoming” in Nietzsche. They also inspire us that we are not allowed to reduce humanity to rational beings; rationality is a common base but not the last step. Awareness of this limitation paves the path to intuition/instinct which, in turn, breaks the dominance of totalitarianism. However, here a new meaning of humanism appears; love of each single part of humanity as a huge potential and open world rather than a fixed and defined entity. This meaning of humanity covers various stages of people with different backgrounds, races, cultures, interests, and needs. Humanity is not more a special species of beings, but everybody is a unique species. This approach can be related to cultural and social aspects as well.

Thus, categorizing people under fixed sorts only keeps philosophers inside human-made limitations. They need to break the intellectual idols, to explore their inner con-

sciousness, and to connect people directly. In addition, going beyond good and evil in both Nietzsche and Rumi calls for people to overcome the institutionalized category of sacred and secular, black and white, false and true, and material and spiritual. Nietzsche and Rumi seem elitist, but they do not want to kill ordinary people in favor of selected peoples.

Finally, when Nietzsche highlights Zarathustra as the origin of ongoing metaphysical dualism of the Western civilization in philosophy, ethics and even sciences, he clearly wants to show how world civilizations are interrelated together and borrow from each other in their substantial nature. Also, when Rumi criticizes dominant ideas in the Islamic world and concentrates on all peoples as various manifestations of God, he apparently inspires them to be constructive contributors to world life. Thus, they both encourage us to mutual cooperation for a meaningful life.

NOTES

- (1) Sama is a significant part of the Mawlawiya spiritual path. The word Sama in Arabic means “the audition”. As such, the Sama dance consists of three parts: classical music, recitation of mystical poetry, and various forms of ritual and whirling movement. In Islamic mysticism, Sama historically started with Abu Said Ibn Abi L-Khayr (967—1049), who first introduced this dance. Ahmad Ghazzali (d. 1126) expanded the theory of Sama. Attar (1145—1221) and Iraqi (1213—1289) developed rules for the dance. Finally, it was perfected by Rumi. See Akhlaq, 2012, p. 183.
- (2) An example of this is Nazi interpretation of Nietzsche’s philosophy. With Rumi, similar misunderstandings include narrow-minded Shariah practitioner or Western perceptions that Rumi’s philosophy is limited to simple notions of “love”.
- (3) Syllogism in the classic thought of Islam equates philosophy, in contrast to the path of love and intuition referring to Sufism. Both are different of polemic arguments which associate with the revealed theology (Kalam).

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ОБЩЕЕ В ПОНИМАНИИ ГУМАННОСТИ НИЦШЕ И РУМИ

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Ницше и Руми принадлежат к разным эпохам и культурам: один — немецкий философ пост-модерна, а второй — афганский суфий Средневековья. После введения в философию обоих авторов, в статье детально рассматриваются общие для Ницше и Руми взгляды. Первая часть раскрывает общую методологию мыслителей, которые анализируют фигуры речи, скрытые смыслы в простых положениях, а также их парадоксальные учения. Вторая часть посвящена общим фундаментальным понятиям в трудах обоих философов, таким как анти-идол, интуитивное знание и подлинность человеческого бытия. Последняя часть статьи под названием «вдохновение» объясняет как общая методология и идеи мыслителей служат двум целям: взаимопониманию между двумя философами и расширению нашего понимания гуманности.

Ключевые слова: Ницше, Руми, анти-идол, институт, парадоксальные учения, критицизм, гуманизм