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Literary Arts

E-ISSN: 2322-3448

Document Type: Research Paper

Vol. 16, Issue 2, No.47, Summer 2024, pp. 51-56

Received: 08/06/2024 Accepted: 10/09/2024

A Comparative Study of Rumi and Schopenhauer's Thoughts on Blissfulness

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Abstract

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) is one of the great philosophers in the world. He is a pessimistic philosopher who has his own special view toward life and the pleasures and pains of life. He is known as the philosopher of pessimism, as he articulated a worldview that challenges the value of existence. On the other hand, in the mystical and intellectual world of Islam, Mawlana Jalal al-Din, known as Rumi, (604-672 AH) stands. Unlike Schopenhauer, he is a 'happy' (optimistic) mystic. The importance of "blissfulness" and the ways to achieve it in life made us examine this issue comparatively in the thoughts of Rumi and Schopenhauer. With this aim, library resources were studied and necessary data were collected. The research method was descriptive-analytical. The results of the study showed that, unlike Schopenhauer, Rumi is a religious person and believes in God. This issue has created a significant difference in their definition of blissfulness and their hypotheses about the ways to achieve a blissful life. However, issues such as "who we are", "what we have", and "what we show" which Schopenhauer stated have an effect on the creation of happiness, and are similar to parts of Molavi's ideas. The interesting part is that, according to these two thinkers, the mental treatment of human beings with phenomena has an effect on feeling satisfied with life. 'Who we are' is a rich source of happiness. Rumi's and Schopenhauer's recommendations are still applicable to humans today since we are trapped in the machine and industrial world and are struggling with great sorrows.

Keywords: Rumi, Arthur Schopenhauer, Blissfulness, *Fih Ma Fih*, the Wisdom of Life, Mysticism.

1. Introduction

The desire of many people is to achieve happiness in life. This desire can have a life as long as a person's life. Those who considered happiness in life attainable and those who denied happiness in life and considered it unattainable should have had a definition of happiness in the beginning. Apart from this, some philosophers, sages, and thinkers have also tried to provide a definition of happiness and guide people to a blissful life. Therefore, it is clear that we are faced with many and varied definitions of happiness and solutions for a blissful life.

In spite of all this, it cannot be denied that there are issues that challenge any certainty in judging people's blissful lives. The most obvious characteristic of these issues is that although a blissful life is mainly based on inner satisfaction, it is very possible to consider someone blissful in life when he considers himself 'unblissful'. The reverse of this case is also true. It should be noted that our judgment will be affected by our personal attitudes regarding this issue. For example, our answer to the question "Did Rumi live a blissful life?", on the one hand, can be an answer that, even if it is positive, is not the same as Rumi's own opinion. On the other hand, even if our answer and Rumi's interpretation are the same, it is not guaranteed that our definition of happiness, which is the basis of this conclusion, was the same definition of happiness that Rumi believed in.

These issues are exactly the same about Arthur Schopenhauer, the German philosopher of the 19th century. The difference is that Schopenhauer was a pessimistic philosopher and Rumi, regardless of the definition of happiness, was a happy (optimistic) mystic. Despite the great distance between Rumi's mystical thought and Schopenhauer's philosophical thought, on what basis was the comparative study of their concept of a blissful life? It is enough to consider that these two famous mystics and philosophers have each presented solutions for a blissful life, which are interesting and enlightening to study. Schopenhauer collected his opinions about this in the book chapter *Chosen Words on the Wisdom of Life*, which is the last and most famous chapter of the book *Adjuncts and*

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Gholami, M. (2024). A comparative study of Rumi and Schopenhauer's thoughts on Blissfulness. *Literary Arts*, 16 (2), 51-56.



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10.22108/liar.2024.141768.2384

Complements. There he expressed his opinions with a coherent and thoughtful plan. This chapter of the mentioned book, which itself is a commentary on Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* (1818), has been separately translated into Persian with the title *The Wisdom of Life* and has been in many books for years. But Rumi's opinions about blissful life are scattered in his works of poetry and prose. In this study, due to the breadth of the discussion, only the book *Fihi Ma Fih* has been examined. Due to the fact that *Masnavi* and *Ghazaliyat Shams* have been paid more attention by Rumi's fans, the book *Fihi Ma Fih* and its values have been relatively less reviewed. The book has 72 short discourses. In addition, this book is an edited and written version of Rumi's oral statements, therefore the words and the structure of its sentences should be considered the middle ground between the spoken language and the written language.

Although the words of the book are not directly from Rumi's pen, one should not think that everything that Rumi said and came out of his mouth has been recorded in the pages of this book. Rather, there are hints to confirm that the notes prepared from Rumi's statements were reviewed, compiled, and revised after they were put on paper. It can even be said with certainty that some parts of the book were seen and rewritten by Rumi or Hossam al-Din Chalabi (Rumi, 1996, p. 25). However, Rumi did not give this title to this collection, and apparently, after Rumi's death, his disciples and followers adapted the title *Fihi Ma Fih* from the works of Ibn Arabi.

1-1. Methodology

This study is developmental research that was done using the descriptive-analytical method. In descriptive research, the researcher looks for the nature of the subject. He wants to know what the nature of a phenomenon, variable, object, or matter is. Descriptive research examines the current situation. It describes the existing situation in a structured way and examines its features, attributes, natures, processes, and trends. If necessary, the relationship between the variables is also checked. Descriptive research has both practical and basic aspects (HafezNia, 2018, p. 69). Library sources are used in this research. From these sources, after evaluation, necessary notes have been extracted. Finally, in the comparative study of the research questions in the thought of the above-mentioned Western philosopher and Iranian mystic, these notes are used to guide us to the expected results. *Fihi Ma Fih* and *The Wisdom of Life* are two outstanding works of Rumi and Schopenhauer. We realized that the contents of these two books can be compared from the viewpoints related to the goals of this research. Therefore, these two books were chosen as the main sources. We also used other works of these two thinkers when necessary.

1-2. Research Background

Blissfulness and ways to achieve it have been examined in the thoughts of some Iranian and non-Iranian thinkers and experts. Among them is the article *Virtue and Blissfulness in Socrates' Moral Thought* (2012) by Mahboubi Arani. In addition, the books in which Western philosophy is discussed in a historical-analytical way, such as *The History of Philosophy in Europe: from the Pre-Socratic Period to the End of the Enlightenment* by Halabi (2013) or in the works written in the thoughts of Rumi have been explained and interpreted, such as *What does Rumi say?* by Jalal al-Din Homai (1996) and *Ba Pir Balkh* by Mosaffa (2008), sometimes traces of reading happiness and its approaches can be seen in the thoughts of these two thinkers. The comparative analysis of "Blissfulness" in the thoughts of these two, especially relying only on Rumi's *Fihi Ma Fih* and Schopenhauer's *The Wisdom of Life*, and on the other hand, the comparative analysis of the opinions of these two in this regard, has apparently not been paid attention to.

2. Discussion

First and foremost, it is better to talk briefly about the basic foundations in Rumi and Schopenhauer's worldview. Islamic philosophy and mysticism make a sharp distinction between different categories of believers. Some, and indeed most, believers follow Islam in an unquestioning and intrinsic manner. They adhere to the legal requirements of the religion, carry out the basic rules concerning worship, pilgrimage, charity, and so on, and generally behave as orthodox and devout Muslims. Some are more devout than others; however, on the whole, for an ordinary believer, Islam presents no serious theoretical problems. Rumi is also a mystic and his world is a world in the presence of God. Rumi's faith in God and his belief in the resurrection have an effect on his worldview. In Rumi's thought, blissfulness in life is equal to God's satisfaction of his servants. However, the absence of God in Schopenhauer's worldview has made his thoughts related to the material world. A mystic looks at "human" as God's creation and praises him greatly for this aspect. In the mystical worldview, human is God's substitute in this world. God has placed his "trust" on the shoulders of man. But in Schopenhauer's worldview, man is a wild creature and a terrible monster that has been tamed by civilization.

2-1. Distinct Hypotheses about the Correlation of Blissfulness with Longevity

Arthur Schopenhauer believes that there has been no significant progress in philosophy between Kant and him. With this statement, it is possible to consider him a proud philosopher or even ignore him. But there is no doubt that Schopenhauer's philosophical thought is attractive, although it is mixed with despair, darkness, and pessimism. Schopenhauer is a manifestation of pessimism in nineteenth-century Europe; A disintegrated world that breathes in the death of revolution, unbelief, chaos, and the decay of the European spirit. A world in which "Goethe" thanked God that he is not young in it, which has been so messed up!

The truest face of Schopenhauer should be seen in the book *The World as Will and Representation* (1818). The book has been interpreted as "a huge collection of suffering and misery" (Durant, 2015, p. 252) and "epic of despair" (Thomas & Donali, 2011, p. 277). In addition, this book, without Kant's linguistic difficulties and the complexity of Hegelian philosophy and Spinoza's geometrical method, expresses the idea that the world begins with will, expands in conflict, and finally ends in misery. Thus, in Schopenhauer's philosophy, which is opposite to the optimistic philosophy of absolute semanticists, it is not possible to avoid pessimism. Although "art", "sympathy", and "the opportunity to give free will and complete indifference to life" are three solutions that relatively have the possibility of escaping pessimism, these are not the final aim. In fact, there are promises of salvation that have been made before to continue life and no one can live in them forever (Halabi, 2013, pp. 2, 65).

Therefore, Schopenhauer's book *On the Wisdom of Life*, as a work concerned with drawing a plan for a happy life, is somehow the

result of this pessimistic philosopher's abandonment of his "superior positions" (i.e. the metaphysical and moral positions on which his philosophy, in its most original form, is based). In this work, Schopenhauer sees the wisdom of life in the art of organizing life in such a way that it is as pleasurable as possible. But what kind of life is such a life, which is guided by Schopenhauer's philosophy? Schopenhauer's answer to this question is clear: "Perhaps it is possible to define a blissful life in such a way that if we look at it purely objectively, or to be more precise, with enough impartiality and contemplation (because happiness is a matter of subjective judgment), it certainly has precedence over nothingness. The result of this view is that we depend on it for life itself, not only because we are afraid of death, and from this, it also follows that we want life to be endless" (Schopenhauer, 2013, p. 17).

It might not be wrong if we consider this idea of life as the most basic and main difference between Schopenhauer's philosophical thought and Rumi's mystical thought. In the discourse of Islamic mysticism, the world and the objects of the world are not worthy to be valued and loved. The blissfulness that can be given to humans in life in this world, in contrast to the happiness in the next world, is an illusion and only a representation of existence. Therefore, longevity has not been very attractive and important for the mystics of Islam and Iran. Most of them consider themselves prisoners who are trapped in two prisons: the world and the body. They are counting the moments to get out of these two prisons. Due to the fact that ending one's life with voluntary death and suicide is prohibited by religion, mystics have gone to meet death before death (cutting off from the world and worldly things) and have theorized this code in the discourse of Sufism. Therefore, for Rumi, the dependence of someone like "Galen" (Greek: Κλαύδιος Γαληνός; September 129–216 AD) on life, who is ready to live even in the most ugliest way, on the condition that he always lives and never dies, seems extremely ridiculous (Rumi, 1929, pp. 3, 226). They also informed us about his life that one day he was standing at the door of the school and all his friends were present. He turned to his companions and said: I swear to God! I swear to God! There is no one in the world except one person, and that person is with you and for you and strives for you and wants you; As he said:

من از برای مصالحت در حبس دنیا مانده‌ام حبس از کجا من از کجا مال که را دزدیده‌ام

(Aflaki, 1983, pp. 1, 413)

2-2. The Triple Foundations of Human Destiny

In Schopenhauer's philosophy, the destiny of humans is based on three foundations:

- 1) Who we are,
- 2) What we have, and
- 3) What we show.

"Who we are" about humans includes their personality and moral characteristics, intelligence, and beauty. Ownership and possessions make up "what we have". "What we show" is an image of a person in the mirror of the mind and consciousness of others, and includes reputation. Among these, 'who we are' is different from 'what we have' and 'what we show'. It is the most basic factor in blissfulness and is involuntary from the point of view that it is created and dealt with by nature.

In Rumi's blissful life, there is neither a sign of dependence on what we have, that is, worldly possessions and relationships, nor a sign of dependence on what we show, that is, fame and social status. The desire to show off is one of the human obstacles in the path toward liberation. In the story of the proud parrot, in the story of an old musician, and also in many stories, Rumi tries to make people aware of the harm and loss of showing off (Mosaffa, 2008, p. 363). Perhaps the most beautiful and at the same time the most profound confession of Jalal al-Din Mohammad is this part of *Fihi Ma Fih* in which he tells the story of the head of the garbage dump with his servant (Rumi, 1990, p. 211). Isn't the fact that Rumi sacrifices all the prestige and greatness of his social and religious status to Shams Tabrizi a clear proof of the worthlessness of these things from his point of view? For Rumi, Shams Tabrizi was a "visible result of love and visible love" (Abbasi Dakani, 2007, p. 253). As it was said, we should know more than these reminders and advice said and written by Rumi about avoiding such issues. It has been said that one day Rumi cherished his companions and said: As much as our fame increased and people came to meet me and expressed their enthusiasm, from that time until now I have not been relieved from its harm and damage. Good job! How nicely the Prophet of Islam said that fame causes harm and comfort lies in anonymity. But the command is like this: Nothing can be done. أخرج بصفاتي الى خلقى من رآك رآنى و من قصدك قصدنى. Rumi constantly warned his companions against the evil of fame and said:

خویش را رنجور سازی زار زار تا تو را بیرون کند از اشتها
که اشتها خلق بند محکم است در ره این از بند آهن کی کم است

(Aflaki, 1983, pp. 1, 226)

At the same time, it should not be forgotten that in Rumi's thought, there is a being called "God" whom all the issues of Rumi's life are interpreted and defined in connection with Him; a notion that is greatly absent in Schopenhauer's philosophy. But in Schopenhauer's modified philosophy, there is an interesting fact to note about the three elements affecting human destiny. The gift inherent in human existence (that is, who we are) plays the main role in the creation of blissfulness and includes greatness, good thinking, physical balance, and so on. Among the three elements, according to Schopenhauer, "happiness" is the only component that directly causes a blissful life (Schopenhauer, 2013, p. 32).

Schopenhauer's praises of happiness are reflected in his work with beautiful expressions: "When happiness knocks on the door, instead of repeatedly doubting whether it is allowed to enter or not, let's open all the doors to it; because happiness never comes out of time" (Schopenhauer, 2013, p. 33), "Only happiness is the coin of happiness and everything else is paper-like money; because only happiness fills the present with happiness and this is the greatest gift for us. Because we are beings whose existence and life are a very short moment between two eternities" (Schopenhauer, 2013, p. 34).

Appreciating happiness and valuing it is the strongest rope that connects Schopenhauer's philosophical thought and Rumi's mystical thought and justifies the comparative examination of the thoughts of these two thinkers. In the entire realm of Persian literature, one cannot find anyone whose writings, poems, and behaviors are full of happiness. In Islamic mysticism, there have been three views about the levels of "contraction of the soul" (Ghazb) and "expansion of the soul" (Bast). Some people have preferred the contraction

of the soul to the expansion of the soul. Some accepted the opposite of this and some considered both with the same meaning. Those who believed the expansion of the soul to be superior argued that the contraction of the soul comes before the expansion of the soul in *the Qur'an* (والله يقبض و يبسط), due to the fact that the virtue of the latter comes before it. In addition, there is happiness in the expansion of the soul (Hojviri, 1925, p. 489). By influencing this division in our evaluations, it is clearly inferred that Rumi is a happy mystic. Therefore, the secrets of happy mysticism have a worthy place in Rumi's thought and practice. For example, if among the mystics, two people are introduced who have paid special attention to the establishment of mystical dance (Raghse Sama), one of them is Rumi and the other is Abu Saied Abol Khayr. Rumi's happiness should be seen especially in his lyrical poems known as *Ghazaliat Shams*. In these poems, there are many sentences or parts that shine with laughter (Dashti, 1983, p. 162). In these lyrical poems, he speaks of his covenant with happiness (Rumi, 1999, p. 2/30)¹, considers his heart to be the place of happiness (Rumi, 1999, p. 5/21)², and compares himself to a parrot that is used to eating sugar and hates all the sorrows of the world (Rumi, 1999, p. 5/19)³.

Referring to Rumi's poems and songs and what biographers have reported about him, it is possible to examine Rumi's blissfulness and happiness from at least two perspectives:

1) Spiritual Aspect

Manouchehri Damghani and Farrokhi Sistani and others like them are delighted by the natural beauty. They have a comfortable and happy life that has a material aspect. However, Rumi's happiness and his blissfulness have a spiritual aspect. It is enough to compare Rumi's descriptions of "spring" with the descriptions of other poets to understand that he sees other beautiful things in the beauties of spring that are almost hidden from the eyes of others; things that make Rumi's soul dance and have a great impact on his soul.

2) Reliance on Love

It is not surprising if we consider "love" the main reason for Rumi's blissfulness in his life and happiness. In his works, there are many expressions and poems in which Rumi confirms this point. He even believes in two periods of life for himself: the period that passes without love with tears, blackness, and bitterness, and the period that passes with the blessing of love, laughter, whiteness, and sweetness. However, it is clear that in Rumi's opinion, love is the most fundamental factor in achieving happiness in life. He is very kind and thoughtful and invites people to achieve happiness and prosperity, be kind to each other, and speak well of each other:

If someone says good things about someone, that good will come back to him. In fact, he praised himself as if someone has planted beautiful flowers around his house. Every time he looks at these beautiful flowers, he gets pleasure. It's like living in heaven. When a person does well to someone, it is as if he has become friends with him, and therefore when he remembers him, it is like a garden and trees. It brings comfort. Also, if a person speaks badly to someone, he has made enmity with him. Since then, when he remembers him, it is as if a snake or a scorpion or a thorn is imprinted in his mind. Now, if you can be in paradise and in beautiful green gardens during the day and night, why do you live among thorns and snakes? Love everyone so that you will always be among the gardens. But if you are an enemy to everyone, it's as if you live day and night among thorns and snakes and move between them (Rumi, 1990, p. 201).

Rumi, in his life, considered human beings very valuable. Images of this issue can be seen in his biographies and in books such as *Managheb ol-Arefin* and *Resaleye Sepahdalar*. Of course, we should note that these books "gradually move from reality to exaggeration, story-making, forgery, and myth-making" (Fotouhi & Wafa'i, 2013, p. 32). In addition, according to the Shams Tabrizi as the closest person to Rumi's proud life, "he has qualities that no pious person can match with Rumi even with great efforts. What tolerance does he have? What knowledge does he have? What humility does he have? What kindness does he have?" (Shams Tabrizi, 1990, p. 129).

Even with the negative view of women in our traditional society and its reflection in classical Persian texts, Rumi's words and his life in connection with his wife and family show attention to family and marital relationships. On the other hand, 'love' for Arthur Schopenhauer is nothing but the deception of nature. Therefore, he considers marriage to be the cause of the exhaustion of love and claims that philosophers do not marry! He himself did not marry until the end of his life. While Rumi considers marriage to be a matter for the stability of the world, according to the lofty goal that he has in mind in connecting the universe with God; even if it is apparently done to satisfy basic needs.

2-3. How to Perceive Pleasure

So far, it has become clear that blissfulness is an important issue in Rumi's and Schopenhauer's thoughts. These two thinkers agree that happiness is a prominent factor in creating a blissful life. However, there are differences of opinion among them. Ignoring this will cause incorrect evaluations and judgments. One of the most important differences is that although Schopenhauer abandoned his main positions in defining happiness and theorizing its foundations, the deposit of pessimistic philosophy is evident in his opinions. Because Schopenhauer interprets pleasure in the absence of suffering. According to this hypothesis, happiness becomes meaningful when there are no difficult mental and physical pains in life. Schopenhauer explains this hypothesis and says that if someone wants to measure the life of others with another index, he has chosen the wrong scale. This idea that pleasure leads to happiness is a madness that regret creates for its own punishment. But suffering, unlike pleasure, is positively felt and hence its absence is an indicator of a blissful life. If in a situation, there is neither suffering nor boredom and restlessness, blissfulness in this world has largely been achieved. We conclude that one should never buy pleasure at the price of suffering. Otherwise, we have exchanged something imaginary with something positive and real. On the contrary, it is very profitable if we give up our pleasures in order to escape suffering. For him, the biggest mistake is that instead of trying to escape from suffering, we want to turn this house of sorrows into a palace of happiness, as many people do. To Schopenhauer, looking for pleasure and happiness is basically a big mistake. According to him, the person who looks at this world pessimistically and considers it to be hell is much less wrong: "Ignorant people seek the pleasures of life and see that they have lost. Wise people avoid calamities. If they do not win, it is the fault of fate, not his stupidity" (Schopenhauer, 2013, p. 148).

But for Mawlana Jalal al-Din, happiness and pleasure have nothing to do with the presence or absence of suffering. He does not want to turn the world for himself and for us into a place for indulgence and pleasure. He believes in God and the reward in the next world. Therefore, this world for him is not a house of sorrows, but a "market of good things. In the world market, sell goods and buy

goods that you will not regret in the other world. Whoever did not buy a good product regretted, and whoever bought less regretted why he did not buy more" (Rumi, 2000, p. 157).

3. Conclusion

Until today, different definitions of "blissfulness" have been presented. It is necessary to pay attention to these definitions in order to recognize right from wrong and use the best and most complete of these definitions in our lives. According to Aristotle, happiness or "Eudaimonia" is the ultimate goal in human life. It is the highest end and is always sought for itself. In other words, happiness is something that alone makes life pleasant and without the need for everything. This definition of happiness has also been expressed by some Muslim thinkers such as Farabi and Ibn Miskawayh. With the aim of knowing some definitions of blissfulness and the ways to achieve a blissful life, we focused on the ideas of Jalal al-Din Rumi and Arthur Schopenhauer, two prominent thinkers, and compared the books *Fihi Ma Fih* and *The Wisdom of Life* written by them. In connection with the present topic, there are interesting differences and similarities between Rumi's mystical and Schopenhauer's philosophical thoughts:

1. The Effect of Religious Beliefs on Worldview

First of all, it is understood to what extent religious belief has an effect on the orientation of a person's view of the world and his expectations of life and blissful life. One of the most fundamental differences between Schopenhauer's philosophical thoughts and Rumi's mystical ideas about blissfulness is formed here. According to Schopenhauer, a happy life is a life that we want to continue; however, in Rumi's thought, the value of life in this world is because this world is the farm of another world. As a result, longevity is not necessarily associated with blissfulness.

2. The Ratio of Pleasure to Pain

Another difference between Rumi and Schopenhauer is the difference in opinions about the relationship between pleasure and pain. In Schopenhauer's thought, pleasure is a negative issue and it acquires meaning in the absence of suffering. But Rumi considers pleasure as an affirmative issue.

3. Happiness is the Most Valuable Capital of Life

In Schopenhauer's writings, it is stated that man consists of: 1) who he is, 2) what he has, and 3) what he shows. "Who we are" has the greatest contribution to human happiness. Rumi also has a similar opinion especially since the most effective element in creating blissfulness is happiness. Happiness is Rumi's favorite subject and his life is full of happy moments. In addition, in Rumi's works, there are attractive praises about happiness that surprise the readers.

Footnotes

۱. مرا عهدهی است با شادی که شادی آن من باشد
مرا قولی است با جانان که جانان جان من باشد
(Rumi, 1999, v. 2/578)

۲. خانه شادی است دلم غصه ندارم چه کنم
هرچه به عالم ترشی دورم و بیزارم از او
(Rumi, 1999, v. 5/2146)

۳. طوطی قند و شکرم غیر شکر می نخورم
هرچه به عالم ترشی دورم و بیزارم از او
(Rumi, 1999, v. 5/2142)

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