



# AL-SHAJARAH

ISTAC Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization

Published by IIUM Press

2020 Volume 25 Number 1

# AL-SHAJARAH

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# REPRODUCING THE HUMANITIES: MEVLANA RUMI'S CORPUS IN RESTRUCTURING THE STUDY OF MAN AND SOCIETY

*Ahmad Murad Merican*

## **Abstract**

*The paper seeks to examine the corpus of Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi (d. 1273) in light of establishing new ways of constituting the Human and Social Sciences. It is based on the assumptions that the existing social and human sciences are anthropocentric in nature, and were produced within a culture and civilization that placed man as the centre and the measure of things. That crucible which has become the origin for the production of knowledge operated within a chaotic West in the early modern and the modern periods. Thus, knowledge produced has been secular and disenchanted and sees man as a material object par excellence. As a result, modern man has lost his sense of origin, why he lives and whither he is going. The Infinite Wisdom to Man does not return to the Primordial, but develops a Faustian trajectory. This paper reattaches Rumi's corpus to academic and intellectual levels as it informs daily life and consciousness. We need to reconsume the tenets of a 'devolutionist' History, Art, Sociology, Anthropology and Philosophy. It asks what the Mathnawi<sup>1</sup> and the Fihi Mafihī<sup>2</sup> can contribute to the*

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<sup>1</sup> The *Mathnawi*, composed during the 13<sup>th</sup> century by Rumi is a poem of 27,500 couplets, highly revered in the Turco-Persian world as second only to the Qur'an in its authority over their lives. Judged by modern standards, the *Mathnawi* is a very long poem. It contains almost as many verses as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* together, and about twice as many as the *Divina Commedia*. See James Roy King (1989). "Narrative Disjunction and Conjunction in Rumi's *Mathnawi*." *The Journal of Narrative Technique*. Vol. 19, No. 3 (Fall): 276-286; and Reynold A. Nicholson, *The Mathnawī of Jalālu'ddīn Rūmī*. (London: Luzac, 1926), xii.

<sup>2</sup> Apart from the *Mathnawi*, Rumi also left us with another manuscript that is not so well known, labelled *Fihi Mafihī* which means "You can take out of it, what is in it." This is the collection of discourses given at gatherings with his students. The book

*Humanities from the Islamic perspective. How can they be used to restructure another mode of knowing? What disciplines can the Rumi corpus produce (or reproduce)? The significance of this paper is that it suggests a universalization, and thence, a deethnicization of the Social and Human Sciences, thus embracing the universal while mitigating the uniqueness of man in both his microcosmic and macrocosmic environments.*

**Keywords:** Rumi, *Mathnawi*, Man, Epistemology, Social science

## Introduction

I begin this paper with the story of the blind men and the elephant.<sup>3</sup> I first encountered the problem of generalizing ‘the whole beast’ from a book published in 1973 with the title *The Rest of the Elephant: Perspectives on the Mass Media*.<sup>4</sup> In the parable, Rumi tells us of the impossibility of seeing an elephant in the dark.

Some Hinduspunan elephant (was) on show in an unlit room. Many people came to see it, but because it was impossible to see the elephant in the dark, they felt it with the palms of their hands. One put his hand on the elephant’s trunk and exclaimed, ‘This creature is like a drainpipe.’

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has been translated into English under the title *Discourses of Rumi* by A. J. Arberry in 1961.

<sup>3</sup> A small portion of this paper has been presented at the International Conference on Mevlana: Present and Past, East and West (Commemorating the 804<sup>th</sup> birthday of Mevlana), The Centre of Civilizational Dialogue and the Cultural Centre, Embassy of the Republic of Iran, Kuala Lumpur, 22 September 2011. See “Mevlana Rumi, the Story of Man and Human Thought: Lessons on Modern Notions and Practices of Development.”

<sup>4</sup> John D. Stevens and William Earl Porter, *The Rest of the Elephant: Perspectives on the Mass Media* (New Jersey: Englewood-Cliffs, 1973). I was studying journalism in the late 1970s through the early 1980s. Then it was not known to me that the rest of the elephant parable originates from the *Mathnawi* III (1259-71). I cited this in an earlier article A. Murad Merican, “Rumi and the Rest of the Elephant Parable,” *New Sunday Times*, 28 August 2011.

Another put his hand on its ear saying, 'It's shaped like a fan.'

A third who felt its leg commented, 'It's like a pillar.'

A fourth placed his hand on its back and said, 'Really, this elephant is shaped like a throne.'

In like manner, everyone described the elephant from the part he had touched, and their descriptions differed depending on their particular standpoint, with one describing it as being crooked like an 'S,' another straight like an 'I'. If they had each held a candle, their descriptions would not have differed. Knowledge gained through our senses is comparable to knowledge obtained with the palm of a hand: a palm cannot extend over the whole elephant (*Mathnawi* III, 1259-71)<sup>5</sup>

The story of the elephant reflects much of what was to happen in early-modern civilization in Europe about four centuries later. Then reductionism began to take root, and has since ruled modern epistemology. The crisis of science and knowledge during the period leading to the European Enlightenment, which the West assumes to have produced indisputable 'universal knowledge' was the result of one of the worst and extreme social conditions to have happened to mankind. Europe then faced an agonizing conflict between body and soul. The outcome was an ethnicized Science and Humanities, and a secularized epistemology.

We find that the Rumi corpus and his system of thought embraces the Human and Social Sciences as in the multitude of disciplines and fields informing us on Philosophy, History, Art, Language and Linguistics, Anthropology and Sociology, among others. The epistemological foundation, research and teaching of the

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<sup>5</sup> *Mathnawi* III, 1259-71. Citations from Rumi are also taken from John Baldock, *The Essence of Rumi* (London: W. Foulsham, 2005); William C. Chittick, *Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul: The Pertinence of Islamic Cosmology in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007) and also William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (Albany: State University of New York, 1983).

Humanities and the Social Sciences need to be revamped. The Humanities as in the disciplines and fields would have to be redefined, for there is a veil between the human condition and the truth. For example, students of Philosophy, Literature, Linguistics and Language Studies, may learn from Rumi in that “Speech that rises from the soul, veils the soul.” Here Rumi voices the paradox which lies at the heart of his poetry: the inability of words, of language, to convey reality. This also reminds me of the tenets and belief of those residing in schools of communication and media studies. The very belief of the communication academic fraternity including students that words and language empirically observed convey reality, is subverted by the structure of Rumi’s epistemology.

Words interpose themselves between soul and reality like the veil that conceals the beloved’s face from the long-suffering lover. Meisami in her ‘Foreword’ to Franklin D. Lewis’ *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West*<sup>6</sup> asks “What are we to make of a poet who, while confessing to the impotence of language and while constantly reiterating his reluctance to write poetry, is among the most prolific of the Persian poets: producing thousands of lyric ghazals, tens of thousands of narrative-didactic *masnavi* verses?”

### **Dehumanizing the Humanities: Centering the Modern Man in the Science of Society**

The Humanities and the Social Sciences are embedded in the modern project. It is broadly agreed that modernity is a humanistic worldview of the human being and his environment. It is a concept of an ‘open society.’ This concept has changed over time, initially focusing upon a ‘human measure’ mirrored in the self-centered confidence of the ‘new citizen’ of the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and eventually becoming the ‘positive fragmentation’ of the actively ‘de-centered’ subject of the post-industrial late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Despite these changes, modernity has always kept a certain continuity and a relatively stable center of gravity. Commonly considered as ‘modern humanism,’ the concept affirmed “the dignity and worth of all

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<sup>6</sup> Franklin D. Lewis, *Rumi Past and Present, East and West: The Life, Teachings and Poetry of Jalal al-Din Rumi* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008).



people, based on the ability to determine right and wrong by appealing to universal human qualities, particularly rationality.”<sup>7</sup> The transmission of rationality creates a commonality of the human condition.

In other words, modern humanism has invested significant effort in working toward a rational self-awareness of the universal ‘logos’ in its individualized form, stating that the ‘essence’ of the human being must be seen in the unity of the subject (individual) with the objective (universal) ‘logos.’ These two dimensions of logos constitute an ontological unity that at its core can be regarded as the ‘human being.’ The ‘human being’ is viewed as the only known ‘place’ in the world where both subjectivity and objectivity meet and merge; thus, the human being enjoys a privileged status based on the fact that it is conscious of itself. Accordingly, every individual must enjoy a ‘proto-sacred’ status of inviolability and mutual respect, ‘untouchable’ as a unitary ‘event, and therefore having value in and of itself.<sup>8</sup>

Rationality is imbued with a self-determined capacity. The mind is assumed to be superior over matter, and the self-conscious ‘spirit’ over the biological body. The material world is seen as a tool to be manipulated by the hands of the ‘logical’ mind of a human individual. History itself is the continuous striving for increased self-consciousness. Technological progress and ‘humanism’ are not divided, but form a single entity. Hegel’s worldview sees the phenomenon as ‘societal morality,’ or the ‘ethics’ of modern rationality, where social behavior is mediated by self-consciousness.<sup>9</sup>

The ‘modern’ concept of the ‘essence’ of the human being was decisively tied to ideas originating in the Renaissance and antiquarian Greece and Rome. It fostered a self-perception of humanity that accompanied the development of modernity, morality and dignity through the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that accounted for, if not

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<sup>7</sup> R. Benedikter, J. Giordani and K. Fitzgerald, “The Future of the Self Image of the Human Being in the Age of Transhumanism, Neurotechnology and Global Transition,” *Futures* 42, (2010): 1102-1109.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), trans. A.V. Miller (New York, 1998).

upheld, all of the inherent contradictions, dialectics, and implicit and explicit oppositions. It can be said that the ‘humanistic’ self-concept of the human being in European-Western modernity established the groundwork for what has been during the past three centuries in the name of freedom, equality and individualism, and for the representation of pluralism and libertarianism. From the perspective of the history of (scientific) ideas, a sort of ‘guiding image’ of man, closely connected with some image of what a ‘good life’ and a ‘good society’ could be, was always at the center of modernity. It acted to legitimize individual self-empowerment behind the curtains of societal and political events, and it was crucial in both keeping the ideals that were determined to build a ‘rational civilization’.<sup>10</sup> Modern science is centered on the intertwining principles of modernity and the self-concept of man, one informing the other. These are the manifestations of European-Western civilization.

One science that has debased the human being and that of humanity is Psychology. Tracing the growth of science and knowledge over the last 100 years, all branches are expanding and transforming at an unprecedented rate. There is one notable exception. And this is Psychology, “which seems to lie plunged into a modern version of the dark ages.”<sup>11</sup> By Psychology, Koestler means the context of an academic or ‘experimental’ psychology, as taught in contemporary universities, both in the Euro-American world as well as in Asia and Africa. Freud, and to a lesser degree Jung, are immensely influential but their influence is more strongly felt in the Humanities – Literature, Art and Philosophy – rather than in the citadel of official science. Koestler describes Behaviourism as a pseudo-science. It determines the climate of all other sciences of life.<sup>12</sup>

Koestler traces the beginnings of Behaviourism to John Broadus Watson at Johns Hopkins University before the outbreak of the First World War. Watson had published a paper in which he proclaimed: “the time has come when psychology must discard all

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<sup>10</sup> Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> I have cited Psychology as an example of how man is degraded to social animal. See Arthur Koestler, *The Ghost in the Machine* (USA: Macmillan Inc., 1967), 5.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

reference to consciousness...Its sole task is the prediction and control of behaviour; and introspection can form no part of its method.”<sup>13</sup> By ‘behaviour’ Watson meant observable activities, what physicists call ‘public events.’ According to Koestler, since all mental events are private events which cannot be observed by others and which can only be made public through statements based on introspection, they had to be excluded from the domain of science. And so, on the strength of the doctrine, the Behaviourists proceeded to purge psychology of all ‘intangibles and unapproachable.’

The terms ‘consciousness,’ ‘mind,’ ‘imagination,’ and ‘purpose,’ together with a score of others, were declared to be unscientific, treated as dirty words, and banned from the vocabulary. In Watson’s words, the Behaviourist must exclude ‘from his scientific vocabulary all subjective terms such as sensation, perception, image, desire, purpose, and even thinking and emotion as they were subjectively defined.’<sup>14</sup>

Almost a century has passed. Watsonian Behaviourism is much alive and configured in our psyche. While Psychology in European, American and Asian academia used to be defined in dictionaries as the science of the mind, Behaviourism did away with the concept of mind and put in its place the conditioned-reflect chain. The consequences were disastrous not only for experimental Psychology itself but also felt in clinical Psychiatry, Philosophy, the Humanities and Social Sciences. In fact, it dominated the outlook of scholars and students alike.

Watsonian Behaviourism became the foundation of more sophisticated and immensely influential neo-Behaviourist systems such as that of B.F. Skinner. Skinner had proclaimed an even more extreme form of the same views. Having based his doctrine on Watson’s 1913 *Behaviourism*, Skinner of Harvard University expressed his influence through his standard work *Science and Human Behaviour*. In the 1953 work, Skinner told the world that ‘mind’ and ‘ideas’ are non-existent entities “invented for the sole

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<sup>13</sup> Koestler, *The Ghost in the Machine*, 5. Citing Watson.

<sup>14</sup> Koestler, 6.

purpose of providing spurious explanations...Since mental or psychic events are asserted to lack the dimensions of physical science, we have an additional reason for rejecting them".<sup>15</sup>

Art, Language and Science and their practice are deemed to be observable, predictable and controllable. Skinner's two best-known books, *The Behaviour of Organisms* and *Science and Human Behaviour* are based on experiments with rats. But nothing in their resounding titles indicates that the data in them are almost exclusively derived from conditioning experiments on rats and pigeons, and then converted by crude analogies into confident assertions about the political, religious and ethical problems of man.<sup>16</sup> According to Skinner

Behaviour which has been strengthened by a conditioned reinforce varies with the deprivation appropriate to the primary reinforce. The behaviour of going to a restaurant is composed of a sequence of responses, early members of which (for example, going along a certain street) are reinforced by the appearance of discriminative stimuli which control later responses (the appearance of the restaurant, which we then enter). The whole sequence is ultimately reinforced by food, and the probability varies with food deprivation. We increase the chances that someone will go to a restaurant, or even walk along a particular street, by making him hungry.<sup>17</sup>

The structure of knowledge about man then and now does not make man different from the lower animals. The unique attributes of man, verbal communication and written records, science and art are considered to differ only in degree, not in kind, from the learning achievement of the lower animals.<sup>18</sup> This is the 'prediction and

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<sup>15</sup> B.F. Skinner, *Science and Human Behaviour* (New York: The Free Press, 1953), 30-31.

<sup>16</sup> Koestler, *The Ghost in the Machine*, 9-10.

<sup>17</sup> Skinner, *Science and Human Behaviour*, 50.

<sup>18</sup> See Koestler, *The Ghost in the Machine*.

control' principle: the principle behind the theory of information<sup>19</sup> which subsequently became the root theory for the whole gamut of the social and human sciences ranging from Philosophy to Psychology to Art and Language. How the Humanities have operated is through the principle of Behaviourism – based on ill-defined verbal concepts which willingly lend themselves to circular arguments and tautological statements. It is based on *S-R theory* (stimulus-response theory) as first defined by Watson. The rule or measuring rod, which the Behaviourist puts in front of himself always is: “Can I describe this bit of behaviour I see in terms of ‘stimulus and response’?”<sup>20</sup> Koestler suggests that if the R for ‘response’ were eliminated from the terminology, the chain (of behaviour) would fall to pieces and the whole theory would collapse.<sup>21</sup>

The ghost of mechanistic physics is still with us. By the same logic, the physicist may reject the existence of radio waves, because they are propagated through a so-called ‘field’ which lacks the properties of ordinary physical media. We may ask: If mental events are to be excluded from the study of psychology, what is there left for the psychologists to study?

But the modern concept of the essence of man is still with us, tied to and having its origins in the Greek, Roman and Renaissance crucible. To use the Attasian argument on Islam and secularism, modes of knowing in the Social and Human Sciences have been disenchanting, desacralized and deconsecrated.<sup>22</sup> The Humanities would have to be reproduced against the scenario of secularization. Here it is critical to view what has happened to the Humanities. al-Attas, in relying on Harvard theologian Harvey Cox’s *The Secular City* (1965), defines secularization as the deliverance of man “first from religious and then from metaphysical control over his reason and his language.”<sup>23</sup> It is “the loosing of the world from religious

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<sup>19</sup> Claude E. Shannon and Warren Weaver (eds.), *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1949).

<sup>20</sup> Watson, *Behaviorism*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> Koestler, *The Ghost in the Machine*, 12.

<sup>22</sup> See Syed Muhammad Al-Naqib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia, 1978).

<sup>23</sup> Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 13.

and quasi-religious understandings of itself, the dispelling of all closed worldviews, the breaking of all supernatural myths and sacred symbols... the ‘defatalization of history,’ the discovery by man that he has been left with the world in his hand, that he can no longer blame fortune or the furies for what he does with it...; [it is] man turning his attention away from worlds beyond and toward this world, and this time.”<sup>24</sup> Secularization encompasses not only the political and social aspects of life but also inevitably the cultural, for it denotes “the disappearance of religious determination of the symbols of cultural integration.”<sup>25</sup> It is a “liberating development,” and the end product of secularization is historical relativism.<sup>26</sup> History is then a process of secularization and History, as a discipline taken as such in the Humanities as a mode of knowing, is rooted and integral to the secularization.

According to al-Attas, there are three integral components in the dimensions of secularization. These are the disenchantment of nature, the desacralization of politics, and the deconsecration of values. Borrowing the term ‘disenchantment’ from sociologist Max Weber, he means the freeing of nature from its religious<sup>27</sup> overtones, separating it from God and distinguishing man from it, so that man may no longer regard nature as a divine entity, which thus allows man to act freely upon nature, to make use of it according to his needs and plans, and hence create historical change and development. All forms of knowledge in the Humanities and the Sciences are also political in the sense that their epistemological constituents inform on the political, which in turn constitutes a complimentary component. The configuration between politics and political life and the humanities can be seen in the institutions, authority and values present in modern societies.

As such, the second component of the ‘desacralization’ of politics means the abolition of sacral legitimation of political power and authority, which is the prerequisite of political change and hence

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<sup>24</sup> Cox, 2, 17; and al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 15.

<sup>25</sup> Cox, 20.

<sup>26</sup> See an elaboration, see Cox, *The Secular City*, 30-36.

<sup>27</sup> Also involves the dispelling of animistic spirits and gods and magic from the natural world. See al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 16.

also social change allowing for the emergence of the historical process. Finally, by the 'deconsecration' of values he means rendering transient and relative all cultural creations and every value system which includes religion and worldviews as having ultimate and final significance. As such, "history, the future, is open to change, and man is free to create the change and immerse himself in the 'evolutionary' process" al-Attas reminds us is the process of the consciousness of man from the 'infantile' to the 'mature' states.<sup>28</sup>

### **Rumi on Man and the Concept of Society**

Rumi was a man who was conscious of his environment both at the microcosmic and the macrocosmic levels. He was part of the sacred community. Then there was no notion of society comparable to modern society. He observed, analyzed and evaluated things and people around him. He made empirical observations of people and things. To a certain extent, he was shaped by the language around him. He was integral to his society. I would not want to describe Rumi as an artist, a philosopher, a sociologist or an anthropologist. He was all at once a human being and integral to the Divine Language.

Rumi's metaphors and analogies are drawn from daily life. For example the changing seasons, especially the transition from winter to spring, becomes a metaphor for our spiritual awakening. The kitchen is equated with the world, cooking with our spiritual evolution, for it is either food for the sensual self or food for the heart. The ocean is Divine Unity, while the drop of water is the human individual drawn inexorably towards the Source of his/her being. Baldock identifies two other themes central to Rumi's teaching.<sup>29</sup> The first, which permeates Rumi's references to the world of everyday experience, is an affirmation of the Divine Unity in that *Wheresoever you return, there is His Face [or Presence]* (Qur'an 2: 115). But recognition of and awakening to the Divine Unity is merely the first step in our path. The second step is expressed in another theme sometimes implicit, sometimes overtly

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<sup>28</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 16.

<sup>29</sup> J. Baldock, *The Essence of Rumi*, 63.

stated, namely *We belong to God, and unto Him we are returning* (Qur'an 2: 156). These two themes are also expressed in terms of 'being' and 'non-being,' or 'existence' and 'non-existence,' for in awakening to the fact that the Divine Unity is all that exists, we realize that no 'thing,' including ourselves, exists independently of it. In this sense, the self we perceive as 'me' is deemed to be non-existent, an illusory reality as opposed to the 'me' in modern society which is perceived as an "unique individual, whole and indivisible," where the ego, or individual, is at the centre of the stage.<sup>30</sup>

Why do we exist/not exist? Bear in mind that the human consciousness of existence is strong, hence the idea of self-annihilation (*fana'*). Our nature, which we are generally not aware of, or falsely made aware of by the Humanities and the modern sciences, can be seen in *Fihi Mafihi* and the *Mathnawi*. In both works, Rumi describes three kinds of creatures and two kinds of intelligence. Based on the Prophet's *Hadith*, Rumi comments that "God created the angels and placed within them the intellect, and He created the beasts and placed within them sensuality, and he created the children of Adam and placed within them both intellect and sensuality. So the one whose intellect prevails over his sensuality is higher than the angels, and the one whose sensuality prevails over his intellect is lower than the beasts."<sup>31</sup>

The two kinds of intelligence can be summarized as follows: Rumi says that the first is acquired through learning in the manner of schoolchildren; from books and teachers, from reflection and memorizing facts, from forming concepts and from the study of subjects that are new. In this way our intelligence surpasses that of others, but in reality the retention of all the knowledge in our mind is a burden. In our quest for knowledge we have become a little more than a tablet on which information is recorded. Yet there is another kind of tablet, manifesting another form of intelligence. It is Divine. It flows from within us, from the depth of our soul. As is quite common, here Rumi uses the metaphor of water. Unlike the first intelligence, the water of Divine Knowledge never stinks with

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<sup>30</sup> T. H. Eriksen, *What is Anthropology?* (London: Pluto Press, 2009), 20.

<sup>31</sup> Baldock, *The Essence of Rumi*, 165.



stagnation. It does not matter if it is prevented from flowing into the outside world, for it pours forth from the heart in an unending flow. On the other hand, acquired intelligence is like water supply entering a house from the outside; if it gets blocked, the house ends up without any water. So seek the fount of knowledge within you.<sup>32</sup>

Seeing is a critical method of developing a science, a method, an epistemology. It informs us of the object/subject dichotomy and debate in the modern scientific corpus. For Rumi what we see is what we are; what we see changes who we are.

You are not your body; you are the Eye. When you see the Spirit, you are free of the body.

A human being is an eye; there is just flesh and bones. Whatever your eye sees, you are that<sup>33</sup>

In modern Social Science the conceptualization of society is often problematic.<sup>34</sup> Seen as entities, there are dichotomies as well as boundaries. But a society denotes people; an assemblage of human beings subject to some form of power, an abstract entity. Again, the entity is dependent on our senses and observation. But it is not only how we see what we see that reveals whether our inclination is towards material or spiritual reality. The company we keep, who we are drawn to and who avoids us also reveal our inner qualities.<sup>35</sup>

When two people keep company, they clearly have something in common.

Would a bird fly with birds that are not of its own kind?...

A wise man said, "I was amazed to see a crow with a stork. So I set out to see what they had in common.

Bewildered, I drew closer to them and saw that what they had in common was that both were lame.

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<sup>32</sup> Baldock, 167; citing the *Mathnawi* IV, 1960-8.

<sup>33</sup> *Mathnawi* VI, 811-12.

<sup>34</sup> See for example arguments by Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1958), and Edmund Leach, *Culture and Communication: The Logic by Which Symbols are Connected* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

<sup>35</sup> Baldock, *The Essence of Rumi*, 169.

Why would a royal falcon, a bird of the highest  
heaven, seek out an owl, which is of the lowest earth?<sup>36</sup>

How we observe (see) and the company that we are drawn toward remind us of the Kuhnian paradigm in the definition of science and scientists. If science is defined by scientists and scientists and intellectuals are defined by their peers or their own community, then it is critical to appropriate that definition. But who appropriates that? Who defines standards and knowledge in and of the Humanities and Social Sciences? How do we measure what we measure of man in all his manifestations, including of other men and societies? This is where the Rumi corpus is critical. Chittick has drawn our attention to a fundamental methodology employed by Rumi in defining, analyzing and synthesizing our world. To Rumi, what we see is a veil over reality: “The world is a dream, a prison, a trap, foam thrown up from the ocean, dust kicked up by a passing horse. But it is not what it appears to be.”<sup>37</sup> In his *Fihi Mafihi*, Rumi refers to the cry of Prophet Muhammad (SAW):

If everything that appears to us were just as it Appears,  
the Prophet, who was endowed with such penetrating  
vision, both illuminated and illuminating, would never  
have cried out, “Oh Lord, show us things as they are!”<sup>38</sup>

Rumi draws a fundamental distinction between ‘form’ (*surat*) and ‘meaning’ (*ma’na*). “In the face of meaning, what is form?” asks Rumi.<sup>39</sup>

Know that the outward form passes away, but The  
world of meaning remains forever.

How long will you make love with the shape of the  
jug? Leave aside the jug’s shape: Go, seek water!

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<sup>36</sup> *Mathnawi* II, 2101-2, 2103-6.

<sup>37</sup> William C. Chittick. *The Sufi Path of Love*, 19.

<sup>38</sup> *Fihi Mafihi*, 5/18.

<sup>39</sup> *Mathnawi* I, 3330.

Having seen the form, you are unaware of the meaning. If you are wise, pick up the pearl from the shell.<sup>40</sup>

The world then is form, or a collection of a myriad forms. By its very nature, each form displays its own meaning, which is its reality with God. It is man's task not to be deceived by the form. He must understand that form does not exist for its own sake, but manifests a meaning above and beyond itself.<sup>41</sup>

Pass beyond form, escape from names! Flee titles and names toward meaning!<sup>42</sup>

The dichotomy between meaning and form is a mainstay of Rumi's teachings and must be kept constantly in mind. He refers to it in many different contexts and through a great variety of images and symbols. In fact, there is no overriding reason to label the fundamental dichotomy within reality as that between "form and meaning," except that this pair of terms seems to be the widest in application of all the pairs Rumi employs and he probably refers to it more often than any other.<sup>43</sup> Subsequent to the interplay between form and meaning, and operating within that framework, Rumi pairs together the terms secondary causes (*asbab*) and First Cause (*musabbib*), outward (*zahir*) and inward (*batin*), dust and wind, foam and ocean, picture and painter, shadow and light. These terms are critical in restructuring the concepts and categories in the Social and Human Sciences lest man be assumed and posited to be lesser than humans, that is analogized as 'social animals.'

The following are essential statements in light of the above:

People look at secondary causes and think that they are the origins of everything that happens. But it has been revealed to the saints that secondary causes are no more than a veil.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *Mathnawi* II, 1020-22.

<sup>41</sup> Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 20.

<sup>42</sup> *Mathnawi* IV, 1285.

<sup>43</sup> Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 20.

<sup>44</sup> *Fihī Mafihī* 68/80.

These secondary causes are veils upon the eyes, for not every eye is worthy of seeing His craftsmanship.

One must have an eye which cuts through secondary causes and tears aside all veils,

To the end that it may see the First Cause in no-place and know that exertion, earnings, and shops are nonsense.

Every good and evil arrives from the First Cause. Oh father, secondary causes and means are naught but a phantom materialized upon the highway, so that the period of heedlessness may endure some time longer.<sup>45</sup>

Whoever looks upon secondary causes is for certain a form-worshipper. Whoever looks upon the First Cause has become a light which discerns meaning<sup>46</sup>

The world is dust, and within the dust the sweeper and broom are hidden<sup>47</sup>

Day and night, the sea keeps on churning the foam. You behold the foam but not the sea – how strange!<sup>48</sup>

The world's foam are forms upon the sea. If you are a man of purity, pass beyond the foam!<sup>49</sup>

Before the painter and brush, the picture is helpless and shackled like a child in the womb<sup>50</sup>

The picture derives its movements only from the painter's brush, the compass's foot revolves around its point<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Mathnawi* V, 1551-55.

<sup>46</sup> *Divan*, 25048.

<sup>47</sup> *Divan*, 131164.

<sup>48</sup> *Mathnawi* III, 1271.

<sup>49</sup> *Divan*, 28722.

<sup>50</sup> *Mathnawi* I, 611.

<sup>51</sup> *Divan*, 10955.

Light is the First Cause, and every secondary  
cause is its shadow<sup>52</sup>

Another set of categories employed by Rumi is existence and non-existence, emphasizing the 'negative' face of meaning in relation to the 'positive' side of form.<sup>53</sup> From this perspective, very much relevant to disciplines like Geography and History and fields and themes like Phenomenology and the Built Environment, form is 'place' and meaning is 'no-place.' Or if we like, the reverse is also true; form is space, meaning is place. In another example, foam is 'colour' and the sea is 'colourlessness.' Meaning is opposite to form and can only be attained by form's negation of 'formlessness.'

Everyone has turned his face toward some  
direction, but the signs have turned in the direction  
without directions<sup>54</sup>

In the direction without directions all is spring; any  
other direction holds nothing but the cold of December<sup>55</sup>

He appears to be still and in movement, but He  
is neither this nor that; He manifests Himself in place,  
but in truth He has no place<sup>56</sup>

You are from place, but your origin is no-place:  
close down this shop but open up that shop!<sup>57</sup>

Colourlessness is the root of all colours, peace the  
root of all wars<sup>58</sup>

Colourlessness is the root of colours,  
picturelessness the root of picture, wordlessness the root  
of words and the mine the root of coins – so behold!<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *Divan*, 525.

<sup>53</sup> Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 23.

<sup>54</sup> *Mathnawi V*, 350.

<sup>55</sup> *Divan*, 20089.

<sup>56</sup> *Divan*, 6110.

<sup>57</sup> *Mathnawi II*, 612.

<sup>58</sup> *Mathnawi VI*, 59.

<sup>59</sup> *Divan*, 13925.

Discerning between form and meaning in terms of ‘existence’ (*wujud*) and ‘non-existence’ (*adam*) is complicated since each of the two words may refer either to form or to meaning, depending upon the context. From one perspective, we see this world as an existent thing. Hence form is existence, while meaning is formless and non-existent. But if we look carefully, we see that this form or ‘existence’ is but dust upon the wind. Compared to the ocean, the foam may truly be called ‘non-existent.’ So, from the second point of view, God and meaning are existence, while form and the world are non-existence.<sup>60</sup> In the *Mathnawi*, Rumi reminds us that

This world of nonexistence appears as existent things, and that the world of existence is exceedingly hidden.

Dust is upon the wind, playing – deceptive, it sets up a veil

That which is doing the work has no work; it is only skin. But that which is hidden is the kernel and origin<sup>61</sup>

Operating within the spheres of form and meaning is Man. Rumi often employs the name of Adam or ‘Adam-related’<sup>62</sup> to mean ‘man’ who exists in the ultimate state of perfection, occasionally the ‘Perfect Man.’ Chittick argues that if Adam is the prototype of human perfection, then the Prophet Muhammad who said “I was a prophet when Adam was between spirit and body” may be called the “prototype of the prototype.”<sup>63</sup> In the Qur’an, God tells the angels about His creation of Adam with the words, “I am setting in the earth a vicegerent.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 23-24.

<sup>61</sup> *Mathnawi* II, 1280-82.

<sup>62</sup> Adamic or Adami.

<sup>63</sup> Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 61.

<sup>64</sup> *Mathnawi* II, 30.

God created us in His own form: our description  
has taken instruction from His description<sup>65</sup>

Chittick explains that Adam in his 'limitless purity' became a mirror for God's attributes. So, all knowledge and all things were to be found within his breast. He was the form of God's Meaning, that is, the locus within which all God's Names and Attributes found outward manifestation. It is in the light of this teaching that Rumi interprets the Qur'anic verse "He taught Adam the names, all of them."<sup>66</sup>

Another ubiquitous category in the Human and Social Sciences is 'opposites,' or the 'other.' Things become clear through their opposites. Human society was conceived through the principle of opposites, and this is especially so in the context of Orientalism/Occidentalism. Chittick ruminates that everyday experience confirms the clarity arising from opposites: "for the existence of the myriad things of the world only becomes possible through differentiation and opposite. If two things were not different, and therefore 'opposed' in some respect, they would be one and the same." Opposites are seen in a pair of entities; day and night, perfection and imperfection, wholeness and brokenness, happiness and sadness, newness and oldness, spirit and body. Each of the correlative terms can only exist and be known because of its opposite. And so it is with all things, except God. He alone has no opposite, but transcends all opposition. Rumi's reflections on opposites seek a deeper dimension on society, ethnicity and identity at various levels of discourse:

God created suffering and heartache so that  
joyful-heartedness might appear through its opposite.

Hence hidden things become manifest through  
opposites. But since God has no opposite, He remains  
hidden.

For the sight falls first upon light, then upon  
colour: opposites are made manifest through opposites,  
like white and black.

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<sup>65</sup> *Mathnawi* IV, 1194.

<sup>66</sup> *Mathnawi* II, 31.

So, you have come to know light through light's opposite: opposites display opposites within the breast.

God's light has no opposite within existence. That through its opposite it might be made manifest.

Therefore, our eyes comprehend Him not, but He comprehends the eyes<sup>67</sup>

The following example is useful for those in Language Studies, Literature and Communication Studies:

Know that form springs from meaning as the lion from the thicket, or as voice and speech from thought.

Form was born from speech and then died. It took its wave back to sea.

Form comes from formlessness: then it returns, for unto Him we are returning.<sup>68</sup>

### **Distrusting Knowledge**

In a lecture by Ali Shariati in the 1970s, he begins by asking the question: "Where Shall We Begin?"<sup>69</sup> Shariati calls for awareness in the enlightened soul. Since knowledge is power and enlightenment light, the Humanities is of necessity a bearer of wisdom. To Shariati, wisdom is "not in and of themselves the desired light of awareness," it is Divine Light and a Source of Consciousness. In this regard, in the epigram in one of my books<sup>70</sup> published in 2005, I cited Rumi as saying "Every one who is left far from source wishes back the time when he was united with it." This is indicative of Rumi's devolutionist thinking.<sup>71</sup> We live and in turn create both the tangible

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<sup>67</sup> *Mathnawi* VI, 104.

<sup>68</sup> *Mathnawi* I, 1130-36, 40-41.

<sup>69</sup> See Ali Shariati, *Where Shall We Begin? Enlightened Thinkers and the Revolutionary Society* (Pulau Pinang: Citizens International, 2002).

<sup>70</sup> See Ahmad Murad Merican, *Media History: Worldviews and Communication Futures* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 2005).

<sup>71</sup> Being conscious of the center, always in the state of returning to the Source. This



and the intangible environments. We create words and structures. We allow our epistemological and cultural space to be invaded. Subconsciously we extend that knowledge in our lives. We trust it. But our trust (of knowledge) is created and justified by what we have built. In other words, we have looked at the intellect from our perspective not that of God's, whereas in our covenant we have avowed to return to God. The goal of what we know and of our existence and that of the knowledge that we call the Humanities is to remember God, to phrase Chittick "by recollecting the divine image within the self and awakening the intellect."<sup>72</sup>

Rumi calls for a distrust of the knowledge that have come to us, and that we have extended to our environments which in turn becomes the environment itself. It is like building skyscrapers until it surrounds and overwhelms us, blocking the light from the sun. We are cloistered in the shadows. We are obliterated from our source.

Knowledge comes from God and to Him it returns. To Rumi, knowledge raises the dignity of Man through refining his character and improving his life. The need for knowledge by Man is related to intelligence ('aql) and character (adab). On account of Man's intelligence and aptitude for knowledge, Rumi first singles out human beings among all other creatures and then subjects them to further hierarchical classifications within themselves. He assigns the highest position to those who have mastered the knowledge of the heart.<sup>73</sup> Is the present corpus in the Humanities and Social Sciences embedded in the knowledge of the heart?

The corpus in the Humanities and the Social Sciences is rooted on rationalism, and the praxis of rationality. To Rumi, all knowledge acquired by study and practice in this world constitutes the knowledge of the body. But man does not consist of the physical body alone as we are informed in the modern disciplines such as

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should be understood in contrast to an evolving state of being where gradually we become obliterated from our Source.

<sup>72</sup> Chittick, *Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul*, 126.

<sup>73</sup> Bilal Kuspinar, "Illuminative Knowledge in Mawlana Rumi," in *Knowledge, Language, Thought and the Civilization of Islam*, eds. Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud and Muhammad Zainiy Uthman (Skudai: UniversitiTeknologi Malaysia, 2010), 135-162.

Anthropology, Sociology and History. Consciousness is discarded, replaced by rationality. And in modern knowledge, rationality then gathers its own life, a capacity self-determined.

The mind, then, is assumed to be superior over matter, and the self-conscious 'spirit' over the biological body. The material world was seen as a tool to be manipulated by the hands of the 'logical' mind of a human individual. History itself is the continuous striving for increased self-consciousness. Technological progress and 'humanism' are not divided, but form a single entity.

The 'modern' concept of the 'essence' of the human being was decisively tied to ideas originating in the Renaissance and antiquarian Greece and Rome. It fostered a self-perception of humanity that accompanied the development of modernity, morality and dignity through the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that accounted for, if not upheld, all of the inherent contradictions, dialectics, and implicit and explicit oppositions. It can be said that the 'humanistic' self-concept of the human being in European-Western modernity established the groundwork, for what has been during the past three centuries in the name of freedom, equality and individualism and for the representation, pluralism and libertarianism. Man is then conceived as a social being, subsequently forged by the 18<sup>th</sup> century French philosophes. Among the features that characterized the philosophes from the earlier intellectuals in Europe were that they developed a doctrine of anti-clericalism, and a belief in the pre-eminence of empirical and materialist knowledge. This mode of thought about man and society, having its roots in the Scientific Revolution of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the subsequent diffusion from about 1700 onwards of scientific concepts and methods, led to the creation of a small group of 'moral sciences' as David Hume called them.<sup>74</sup>

From the perspective of the history of (scientific) ideas, a sort of 'guiding image' of man, closely connected with some image of what a 'good life' and a 'good society' could be, was always at the center of modernity. It acted to legitimize individual self-empowerment behind the curtains of societal and political events, and it was crucial for both to keep the ideals that were

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<sup>74</sup> Antony Flew, *David Hume: Philosopher of Moral Science* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

determined to build a 'rational civilization.'<sup>75</sup> Modern knowledge is centered on the intertwining principles of modernity and the self-concept of man, one informing the other. These are the manifestations of European-Western civilization.

Man has a soul, a spirit and a heart,<sup>76</sup> not just the body and not only a material existence. In studying the disciplines in the Humanities, the heart is a window opening to the realm of spirituality and heavenly knowledge. Rumi advises us to liberate ourselves from the world of forms and remove the veil that hinders our vision from seeing reality. The body as an accident cannot guide the heart which is the substance.<sup>77</sup>

In the non-Western Humanities, ignorance is also an integral structure of knowing. If there is no ignorance, then Man would have vanished. It is both complimentary and opposite.

Knowledge of and through the heart is not the same as what we call factual knowledge, the latter acquired through external and internal faculties of particular intelligence. The bodily senses are tools of rationality in comprehending tangible objects in the external world. Rumi gives the example of a rose (in our minds, we can imagine human society as the object of study).

By looking at a rose...we can only perceive its image from the appearance of that rose and not its reality. In the same way, when we bring a rose into our imagination or representation, we think of it as an abstract image away from its real referent outside. Or if someone mentions 'rose' in our presence, we cannot go beyond the quality and attribute of that rose. It is true, on the other hand, that all that appears to exist in the world is the manifestation of God's Names and Attributes, ...from the standpoint of this manifestation, every apparent being has an inward reality, the knowledge of which should be obtained by man who aims to attain perfection. But this is in no way possible for a person who just clings to the forms of the object

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<sup>75</sup> Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies* (London: Routledge, 2006), 73.

<sup>76</sup> *Mathnawi* V, 3342.

<sup>77</sup> Kuspinar, *Illuminative Knowledge in Mawlana Rumi*, 135-162.

and becomes content just with their names. That is why Mawlana quite aptly poses the question: “Have you ever seen a name without a reality (denoted by the name)? Or have you plucked a rose (*gul*) from the letter *gaf* and *lam* of (the word) *gul*?<sup>78</sup>

We must caution ourselves that Rumi never underestimates the importance of the sense and sense-perception in acquiring factual knowledge. Rumi however reminds us that sensory knowledge is accidental and imitative (*taqlid*). Significant to the Humanities from Rumi is the fusion of the spiritual-illuminative mode and perception, in that all senses, the physical and the spiritual, be brought under the command of the heart that “has been cleansed and polished through an arduous process of inward training. Once the five external and internal senses become subject to the heart and in particular to the internal eye of the heart, then all heavenly spheres become disclosed to that heart.<sup>79</sup> Rumi’s concept of knowledge is praxis, in terms of collaboration and coordination of the senses such as how sight informs us on the facility of speech, while speech in turn facilitates what we see.

### **Some Reflections and Concluding Remarks**

The contribution of Mevlana Rumi’s corpus can be reflected in our ideas on development, on the ideology that has woven itself into the epistemology of the Social and Human Sciences, and thereby usurped our very being, obliterating us from the Source. The developmentalist ideology, embedded in a Social Darwinist paradigm has governed practically every policy at the national and organization levels. The universities are no exception, so much so that the modern university is seen to be subscribing to many gods in the name of quality and standards. In so doing, meaning is lost. Instead of conceptualizing development as a linear process attending to materialistic growth, we reflect on the ever existing process of returning, in extending Rumi’s philosophy. We begin our definition by asking “If to *velope*, as explained in *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*:

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 135-162.

<sup>79</sup> *Mathnawi* II, 3249. See also Kuspinar, 135-162.

*Complete Text Reproduced Micrographically*<sup>80</sup> is “to wrap up” as in a garment or outer covering, therefore, to *de-velope*<sup>81</sup> is to unwrap, to open, to expose what is wrapped inside. And something is usually wrapped up not for hiding but for care, for protection.

Thus, this process of *development*, this process of *de-wrapping* is either to expose the seed within the clime and season of growth or to expose the pearl, the diamond, the beauty within to light, to let shine, sparkle and dazzle. Another definition explains *develop* as “to unfold, unroll (anything folded or rolled up); to unfurl (a banner) to open out of its un folding cover.” The same dictionary explains *development* as such:

1. A gradual unfolding, a bringing into fuller view.
2. Evolution or bringing out from a latent or elementary condition.
3. The growth and unfolding of what is in the germ.
4. Gradual advancement through progressive stages, growth from within.
5. A developed or well-grown condition; a state in which anything is in vigorous life or action.
6. The development result of a product; a developed form of some earlier and more rudimentary organism, structure, or system.

The analogy for the process of ‘development’ is that of a tiny seed, when exposed to the proper clime and condition, will grow and grow in peace and security into a huge, healthy and magnificent tree, grateful and glorious in the light of the sun. Since man is the apex of God’s creation, there is in man the seed, valuable beyond measure, carefully and lovingly wrapped – ‘veloped’ – and always eager and ever-ready, awaiting the *de-wrapping* process, awaiting ‘de-velopment.’

This spiritual dimension is embedded in the spiritual seed. The ‘seed’ as being mysterious and ‘unknown.’ ‘To know’ is to understand the Laws intrinsic, embedded in the very nature of the

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<sup>80</sup> *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary: Complete Text Reproduced Micrographically* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 897.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 651.

thing. And as such inherent in our *submission to God* is to devolve oneself to the center. The aim of development in this context is the devolution of man toward his primordial state of being.

We are nothing but thought, but our destiny is dependent on our consciousness. Devolution brings us toward remembrance from forgetfulness. Rumi reminds us of thought's primacy when he says:

Brother, you are this very thought –  
The rest of you is bones and fiber.

If roses are your thought, you are a rose garden,  
If thorns, you are fuel for the furnace.

If rose water, you will be sprinkled on the deck,  
If urine, you will be dumped in the pit.<sup>82</sup>

Reflecting on the human condition, it is critical to understand that we are essentially thought and awareness. But we forget it constantly. Our consciousness is intervened by other consciousness. Our daily lives are fooled by how we see things around us. Chittick asserts that we are too busy to remember God and apply the principle of *tawhid* to life, a principle that guides all true thought back to the One Origin of thinking. Without the constant reorientation of thought by the remembrance of the One, people can only forget their innate human disposition. Rumi tells us about the proper object of thought, reminding us that true thought is living intelligence or another kind of vision.

According to Rumi, human beings are governed totally by their awareness of goals and desires. Any thought, any vision, any understanding that is not informed and guided by the awareness of God's overwhelming and controlling reality loses sight of the nature of things and forgets the purpose of human life.<sup>83</sup> The intellectual tradition has to be kept at its moorings.

For this to happen, Rumi makes a distinction between someone who thinks for himself and someone who imitates others in the following verses:

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<sup>82</sup> *Mathnawi* II, 277-9.

<sup>83</sup> William C. Chittick, *Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul*, 44.

A child on the path does not have the thought of men.  
His imagination cannot be compared with true *tahqiq*

The thought of children is of nurses and milk, raisins and walnuts, crying and weeping.

The muqallid is like a sick child, even if he offers subtle arguments and proofs.

His profundity in proofs and objections drives him away from true insight.

He takes the collyrium of his secret heart and uses it to offer rejoinders.<sup>84</sup>

What is important in Rumi are human limitations and the limits to thought and expression. The limitations of human speech is that it stimulates us into searching for meaning, even though we cannot see the reality of meaning. Surely Rumi has a place in the Social and Human Sciences. A Humanities from an Islamic perspective may be embedded in Rumi. A Social Science from a non-Occidental context may find Rumi as a fundamental source for the study of human behaviour. Rumi and his works have to be structured in the Humanities and the Social Sciences. The *ma'na* of man's story on his advancement must return to its *fitrah*.

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<sup>84</sup> *Mathnawi* IV, 1289-93.

AL-SHAJARA  
Vol. 25, No. 1, 2020  
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WoS-Indexed under *Arts & Humanities Citation Index, Current Contents/Arts and Humanities* and *Scopus*

ISSN 1394-6870



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