

REASON IN THE STOIC ‘HORATIO’ IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE’S HAMLET AND JALA AL-DIN AL RUMI: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Enas ALRUDAINI¹
Karabuk University

Abstract

The debates over the individual’s awareness of reason, power and repression of feelings are identified as the image of Stoic philosophy that is depicted by Zeno of Citium around 300 BC. This current of self-management that prevents the turnings of life to depict the traits of one’s personality is known as Stoicism. The core of this study is to investigate how influential is this philosophy on the minor character, Horatio, in William Shakespeare’s Hamlet. The study will also shed the light on another Stoic figure whose spiritual world of ethics, particularly reason, is set in comparison to Horatio; Jelal Al-Din Al Rumi: Rumi. For the aim of establishing a good setting, the article illustrates a summary of Stoicism, its historical background, definition, and practices. In addition, a description about Horatio and Rumi and how they are compared as antique Roman-like Stoics in terms of power over thinking and judgement. The final part of this research will take in consideration the findings and the influence of how this philosophy could be probably part of the individual’s active life in which reason is dominant as ‘eudaimonia’.

Keywords: Reason, Stoicism, Philosophy, Horatio, Comparison, Rumi

1. Introduction

The main source of judgment in the human mind is reason. It is the focus of most research since it controls human behaviors and ethical attitudes. The article discusses reason from a Stoic point of view. The main argument concerns Hamlet’s loyal friend ‘Horatio’, whose reactions and speeches recognized as Stoic. In *Hamlet*, Horatio copes with different incidents that lead to the collapse of the Royal family. He never influences with the chaotic atmosphere of the play. In terms of the effect of reason, Shakespeare frames his characters, as in Horatio, with philosophical notions, and this discussion shows how morals or ethical standards control virtue. According to Aristotle, reason involves certain “morally virtuous activity” (May, 2010, p.2), or activities that are based on logic in terms of being conscious and aware of the surroundings, hence comes the understanding of virtue (May, 2010). In addition, it introduces Horatio, reason, Rumi’s way of dealing with reason, and finally a comparison between Horatio and Rumi.

¹ Corresponding author: enas.rudaini67@gmail.com

People, today, drive by anger and aggression, they act without a second thought. They mostly need to reconsider, thinking of serious issues: activate reason in their views. In the play, Hamlet's reaction to his father's death, his mother's adultery with a haste marriage to his uncle bring a disastrous conclusion. Horatio, on the other hand, keeps his mind focused, balances his reactions and decisions: he is the only righteous survivor.

The article introduces a historical background of Stoicism, Horatio as a sample to apply the philosophy, Rumi's views of reason, and a comparison between the two selected characters to show how important to accustom our lives, at least, to the principals of this philosophy.

2. Historical Background

Stoicism is a school of philosophy finds by Zeno of Citium around 300 BCE in Athens. The name of the school and its contemporary members 'Stoics' derive from a public location where they used to meet on the northern edge of the Agora - a marketplace - under a covered colonnade or Painted Stoa (Sellars, 2006). The widespread of Stoicism includes Rome and several geographical and cultural backgrounds during the first century BC, and its prevailing is not only influential centuries ago, but it also keeps on its effect to date (Sellars, 2006). Sellars identifies Stoicism as: "Stoic philosophy is not merely a series of philosophical claims about the nature of the world or what we can know or what is right or wrong; it is above all an attitude or way of life" (Sellars, 2006, p. 2). In addition, Lawrence C. Becker explains Stoic notion as a virtue which resembles an act of certain activity, a kind of remedy needs to be practiced perfectly (Becker, 1998).

According to the Stoics, virtue can stand alone as an adequate standard to gain happiness. Therefore, any other circumstances will be irrelevant such as emotions that lead to a fallacy of judgment. In addition, this philosophy requires humans to control their natural feelings, not denying them. In other words, it deals with understanding human's responses in terms of experiencing different emotions that are free from any misconception. In his argument of Stoicism as an ancient philosophy, John Sellars states that: "In fact, the emotions are strictly speaking merely the symptoms of a deeper mental disturbance, namely false beliefs that are the product of faulty judgements" (Sellars, 2006, p. 34). He continues that: "the task of philosophy, conceived as this art of medicine for the soul, is to cure us of those false beliefs by teaching us how to avoid making faulty judgements" (Sellars, 2006, p. 34). Therefore, a real image of this doctrine presents the Stoic as an ideal character in terms of being rational, mindfulness, controlling emotions, and indifferent towards aside circumstances. In addition, individuals are encouraged to concern with their own judgments: they are the fruit of the one's interpretation to issues, and such issues are not the main source of false emotions and pain, instead, it is the involved interpretation which brings negativity (May, 2010).

The trend of this philosophy suffers from texts loss and decreases at the beginning of the third century CE. It regains its strength again during the sixteenth century and continues up to date to contribute to the understanding of self-nature and the power of human reason such as in the Western philosophy presented by Michel Foucault's later works 'care of the self' to proof the constant presence of its principles.

Being in harmony with 'Nature' brings happiness, therefore, the Stoic lives in a covenant status with the internal soul of morals and beliefs without depending on the material conditions such as luck or fortune (Stephens, 2007). In this philosophy, deeds and actions are highly appreciated, hence the Stoic requires material facts rather than depending on luck which is unpredictable and cannot be forced. Further, the philosophy is also known as the "art of living" (Stephens, 2007, p.84) which means like any other craft, needs fulfillment of practices and exercise to be attained (Stephens, 2007). Likewise, in his *The Art of Living*, Sellars describes the way of this philosophical developmental concept of wisdom as an art of living which transforms an individual into a sage (Sellars, 2009). Human's source condition, according to the Stoics, classifies as good and vice. For instance, justice, courage, prudent are beneficial, while lack of judgment and injustice produce harm.

Human beings are distinctive with reason. It is the cause of nature, for being rational in accordance with Zeno's visionary. In the path of Stoicism, reason is the source to distinguish the constitutive of happiness and unhappiness. Consequently, reason leads to the correct judgment through discriminating the good, and takes the correct actions depending on the circumstances. Moreover, it represents man's essence in terms of vice or virtue. It has the power to form man's linguistic presentation. On the other hand, Epictetus refers to the term of "prohairesis" (Stephens, 2007, p. 16) which is the container of volition: it is the elevator of distinguishing the good and the vice (Stephens, 2007). The scale of Stoicism is prohairesis which indicates man's true spot and the self: well-being. Stoicism, however, is how to deal with pain silently and coping with the outer circumstance through endurance and acceptance. In this philosophy, virtue finds its place when reason presents, and controls logical judgment (Stephens, 2007).

3. Discussion

Hamlet: "... For thou hast been
As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing;

A man that Fortune's buffets and rewards

Hast ta'en with equal thanks; and blest are those

Whose blood and judgment are so well commingled

That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger

To sound what stop she please. Give me that man

That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him

In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,

As I do thee ..." (III i 1945)

The controversy on William Shakespeare as a writer and the creator of his characters is still on stake in the battlefield of the contemporary criticism of new historicists and cultural materialists. Although he is one of the greatest writers who ever lived, therefore his works, particularly the tragedies remain dominant in the literary arena, and *Hamlet*, is the most studied work to date (Parvini, 2012). Shakespeare deals with universal, independent topics concerning humans, and counting them fills the page with only topics of his works that are of excessive ambition, revenge, treason, deception, corruption, hatred, ...etc.

In this article, the spotlight turns from Hamlet to his loyal, selfless friend, Horatio, who has little to say, but is available whenever needed. Hamlet describes Horatio as a real observer: he speaks few lines, notes the surroundings, and writes down what he sees. While Hamlet, on the contrary, as if he is in a battlefield where all the clashing of the inner and the outside occurs. From the opposite of such impulsive confusion that rocks the drama, Horatio comes in the middle of the actions to practice his role in a wise calmness. Horatio is "As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing" (III ii 1945) resembles the playwright in his stance. He moves forward with the events, catches the thread of every plot, weaving the sufferings, and noted them down as if he prepares for his own story to tell.

The guards, Marcellus and Bernardo, invite the "Scholar" (I i 54) to speak to the Ghost of Hamlet's father, because he can proof what their eyes' saw. Horatio almost believes his eyes. He fears and wonders for the likeness of the ghost: seeing-is-believing (Hamlin, 2005). In a second thoughts, with the prevailing of the rational awareness, Horatio opposes his eyes, prevails over the ghost, and charges him to speak. Horatio informs Hamlet of his visionary describing it as "A mote it is to trouble the mind's eye" (I i 129). The "antique Roman" (V ii 4000) character, whose paradigm emphasis the stability of his mind of such a phenomenon, once happens then it will be out of his "philosophy". He already tells the guards how he would not believe their assumption unless he himself sees with his own eyes "mind's eye" (Williams, 2014)

"Why should the poor be flatter'd?" (III ii 1938). The indications of Horatio's status are not very clear in the play. We do not know exactly who he is except for Hamlet's loyal friend. He is either old because he remembers Old Hamlet's armor when he resists Norway long ago, or a student fellow with Hamlet in Wittenberg, or probably a good young lad as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. There are no references of his social background for a one involves with the Royal family, but Hamlet's statement of the poor probably presupposes his social level. Hamlet excludes Horatio from his struggle, because the container of his confusions and distractions are completely far from Horatio's philosophy, from his mental capacity (Bourne & Bourne, 2019). Horatio's sanity controls his responses and the dominant of reason prevents him from any reckless reactions:

Hamlet: "Give me that man

That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him

In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,

As I do thee ...” (III ii 1945)

This is a clear statement, rather, a confession of what Hamlet lacks which makes him envies Horatio: a reasonable man. On the other hand, Horatio gives Hamlet the sense of a hero and avoids correcting his morals, because he already recognizes it would be hopeless. Horatio understands that he is unable to protect Hamlet from maniacal responses, because his reason diminishes and deformed, and his rational context still untrusted. Among all events, Horatio still quiet, unreacted towards Hamlet's endeavors.

Hamlet: “As th'art a man,
Give me the cup. Let go! By heaven, I'll ha't.
O good Horatio, what a wounded name
(Things standing thus unknown) shall live behind me!
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
To tell my story” (V ii 4005)

Horatio's character is not as clear as Hamlet's, it is of intensity despite his few valued words, and less actions. He does not take advantage of his steadfast relation with Hamlet, and the trust he gains from the Royal family. Rather, he keeps his nobility with a complete virtue, stands alone from all equally to write their suffering as being part of it:

“Never believe it. I am more an antique Roman than a Dane.
Here's yet some liquor left” (V ii 4000).

He confesses of being a Stoic than any other thing: a typical Roman whose philosophy appears with pain. Along the play, all his actions identify his stoic mode. His attempt to die after the prince in a noble way retreats immediately because of his active reason that controls his false emotions. For Horatio, living is the only way to accomplish his ethical standard and reports Hamlet's story. Unexpectedly, he accomplishes his role despite his tepid responses towards the tragedy.

The selected characters in this article have the priority to describe their Reason. Horatio's actions and speeches present a Stoic figure. Another character compares to Horatio in terms of reason: Rumi. Understanding Rumi is a very challenging process once indulge to his philosophy and concepts, he is an essential participant in the Sufi practice whose essence and nature resembles Stoicism (Kaya, 2016). Rumi's philosophy carries most Stoicism practices in terms of virtue, justice, and reason which is the main concern of the comparison.

4. Comparison

Jalal al-Din Al Rumi (1207-1273) becomes a universal phenomenon and a unity because he is a spiritual guide not only for Muslims, but also to people all over the world. He has the accessibility and knowledge among all the differences and beliefs in terms of psychology of reason, tolerance, and judgment (Arberry, 2000). Few people have a supreme power to control their natural instinctive of mind or feelings. Therefore, understanding Rumi's ideal way of spiritual unity and his perception are seen from different perspective which differs from the prevailed recognition of his works. Unlike Horatio, Rumi echoes his visions and thoughts loudly in his works such as *Mathnawi* and *Fihi Ma Fihi*, and many other works that influencing the world. Most of his concepts are shadowing Stoicism.

In addition, human's attempts of perfection are attained once there is a complete understanding of the real essence of man. Therefore, thoughts and actions require harmony as the truth-measurement. According to the capacity of the human mind in accustom the outer circumstances such as pain or suffering, reason steps in to be the source of the individual's central, because it will be the scale of the relation between man and himself then man and society (Arberry, 2000).

Rumi comprehends the individual and society, he assumes that educating oneself brings self-perception: freeing from prejudice and reducing ambitions which control man's sensualities. Resembling Stoicism, both currents of Horatio's path in life, and Rumi's pursuit of reflection are calling human's natural feelings rather than denying them. In other words, understanding human's responses towards experiencing different emotions which are free from any false beliefs. In his *Discourses of Rumi (Fihi Ma Fihi)*, A. J. Arberry translates Rumi's discourses of reason. He says:

“When someone goes mad and acts crazy, everyone knows that reason has left them, and no longer casts its shadow over them. They are far away from the shadow and shelter of Spirit” (Arberry, 2000, p. 129).

If reason blocked then it would be no reason, hence comes madness. However, reason is constant, never changes or ends in the process of thinking. Therefore, it has its own struggle, its endeavors of understanding, and obtain the quality of judgement:

“In every act you perform, reason guides you and initiates your action, but you cannot see your reason. You see its effect, but you cannot see its essence” (Arberry, 2000, p. 309).

All categories in society inclined to Rumi because he goes far beyond the components of standards in his own visionary, he embraces everyone in his tolerance and virtue. He considers virtue as “a free choice” and distinguishing between good and vice is the true wisdom (Ebadi Jokandan, 2015).

According to Rumi, reason distinguishes humans from lower creatures, it is the true essence of man through which he can qualify his nature and survive (Tekin, 2001). In addition, his

mystic features represent clear resemblance of Stoicism. In his definitions – explanations- of reason and dealing with its concepts, Afzal Iqbal introduces how Rumi identifies the role of human conscious by reason. For him, reason is “the light hearts” (Iqbal, 1991, p. 77), through which one never goes wrong. It is the “discursive knowledge” (Iqbal, 1991, p. 179) of man which produces pain through language when using it but cannot be avoided (Iqbal, 1991). For Rumi, reason is the faculty of man’s greatness: it either indulges man in safety or in danger, a pause to rethink of an action. In terms of high quality of order, reason represents man’s dogma, his utmost point of fact hence comes his reality.

5. Conclusion

Shakespeare's embodiment of Stoicism presents in Horatio whose virtue is too powerful to be defeated. Rumi, on the other hand, brings virtue explicitly, he makes use of language to convey his thoughts rather than using abstract visions to spread his wisdom. Stoicism is a group of different concepts of eudaimonism, it concerns of “what we ought to do or to live well” (Becker, 1998, p. 20). Its aim is to rescue ourselves from living under certain misfortunes and enables us to control sudden changes and circumstances. A Stoic pursuit a certain type of a good life, through which all conflicts are encountered by reason to solve. Otherwise, a Stoic may act as indifferent to the situation. In the agency of Stoicism, virtue has the upper hand in all its concepts. Therefore, living in society with authentic thoughts influences the formation of individuals and society in general. Horatio appears to be the opposite of Hamlet in terms of dealing with circumstances, because reason is the prevailing notion in his actions. On the other hand, Rumi's views of reason identifies that it is the base of virtue, it has the power to protect man's essence in terms of thinking and living. He resembles the thoughtful mind as if a flame burns and never rest. Having ethical integrity brings about a complete satisfaction. Stoicism offers an unconditional relation among individuals as in Horatio’s; thus, it has that mutual belief of free giving with happiness where there is no space for pain.

References

- ARBERRY J. (Trans.). (2000). *DISCOURSES OF RUMI (OR FIHI MA FIHI)*. Ames, Iowa, U.S.A: OMPHALOSKEPSIS. Retrieved 2020, from <http://www.littleknownpubs.com/RumiIntro.htm>
- Becker, L. C. (1998). *A New Stoicism*. Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Y Princeton University Press.
- Bourne, C., & Bourne, E. C. (Eds.). (2019). *THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO SHAKESPEARE AND PHILOSOPHY*. New York, U.S.A: Routledge.
- Ebadi Jokandan, S. K. (2015). The Concept of Calmness and its Reason at Rumi’s Thought. *European Online Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*, 4(3), pp-469.
- Hamlin, W. M. (2005). *Tragedy and Skepticism in Shakespeare’s England.*, New York, U.S.A: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN.
- IQBAL, AFZAL. *The LIFE AND WORK of Jalal-Ud-Din RUMI*. Barqsons Printers (Pvt) Ltd., 1991.

- Kaya, Ç. (February 2016). Rumi from the Viewpoint of Spiritual Psychology and Counseling. *SPIRITUAL PSYCHOLOGY AND COUNSELING*, 1(1), 9-25. doi:10.12738/spc.2016.1.0001
- May, H. (2010). *Aristotle's Ethics Moral Development and Human Nature*.
- Parvini, N. (2012). *Shakespeare and Contemporary Theory New historicism and cultural materialism*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Quotations of the play from Open-Source Shakespeare:
<https://www.opensourceshakespeare.org/views/plays/playmenu.php?WorkID=hamlet>
- Sellars, J. (2006). *Stoicism Ancient Philosophies*. Durham, UK: Acumen.
- Sellars, J. (2009). *The Art of Living: The Stoics on the Nature and Function of Philosophy*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Stephens, W. O. (2007). *Stoic Ethics: Epictetus and Happiness as Freedom*. UK: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Tekin, M. (2001). Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi's Understandings of Human and Society. *Necmettin Erbakan Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 12(12).
- Williams, M. H. (2014). *HAMLET IN ANALYSIS Horatio's Story—A Trial of Faith*. London, UK: Revised edition published in 2014 for The Harris Meltzer Trust by Karnac Books.