

**THE IDEA OF BALANCE
BETWEEN SPIRITUALITY AND INTELLIGENCE
ACCORDING TO KHALIL GIBRAN***

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SUMMARY

Considering the Intelligence and Spirituality as two major fundamentals of an individual's integrity and success, it is important to examine them as two compatible components of an individual's personality not as two opposite constituents of it. In other words, they are not two conflicting entity that tend to invariably exclude each other but are like a twin sibling sharing the womb of a mother. Thus, neither Spirituality can be left out for the sake of a rational life nor Intelligence can be left out for a spiritual life.

This article tries to expose Khalil Gibran's intellectual world to understand how he have successfully constructed a balance between Spirituality and Intelligence in his works, as an outstanding mystical poet as well as a great rationalist thinker of his time.

Key Words: *Khalil Gibran, Spirituality, Intelligence.*

HALİL CİBRAN'A GÖRE RUHSALLIK VE AKIL ARASINDAKİ DENGE

ÖZET

Akıl ve ruhsallık denen unsurların beşeri bütünlük ve başarıya götüren iki temel unsur olduğu gerçeğini dikkate alırsak, bu iki olguyu zıt unsurlar olarak değil de birbiriyle uyumlu iki parça olarak ele almak hayati önem taşımaktadır. Diğer bir deyişle, rasyonel bir hayat uğruna Ruhsallık nasıl dışlanamaz ise, ruhi bir hayat uğruna da Akıl dışlanamaz. Bu iki unsur, münhasıran birbirini dışlamaya çalışan 'iki zıt' değildir; aksine, aynı gemide seyahat eden iki erkek ya da kız kardeşir.

Diğer taraftan, mistik bir şair ve büyük bir düşünür olarak Halil Cibran'ın Akıl ve Ruhsallık arasında bir tür denge kurmaya çalışan seçkin simalardan biri olduğu gerçeğini dikkate alan bu makale, Cibran'ın sözkonusu probleme nasıl bir çözüm getirdiği kadar bu çözüme nasıl ulaştığı konusunu incelemeye çalışmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Halil Cibran, Ruhsallık, Akıl.*

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Introduction

One of the two best ways to understand a great historical figure and put him/her in the right place in terms of his/her contributions to human thought is to study line by line his/her corpus definitely with subtle details included, whereas the other way is of course to study and focus on the set of ideas or axioms or some works of such nature already presented by others that define the corpus and function as key points of understanding it.

These two ways of studying the great figures are of equal importance: if taken into account unilaterally, they never form a complete method since each of them constitutes only one half of a whole. If taken into account together, they form the perfect method to get the most out of the great figures in human history. On the one hand, having a set of axioms or some works of that nature saves people time and makes it easy and efficient to an important degree to go over the corpus itself whereas studying the corpus itself thoroughly makes people have a tangible experience on it and probably see all the details not seen before and thus not included categorically in the set of axioms by others. On the other hand, no one can imagine teaching, for instance, an introductory philosophy course by going through the works of all the philosophers that are supposed to be covered in that course. And, works done by different writers on the same historical figure are not bound to come up with the same set of axioms: they might emerge differently from one another based on the ability, competence and inclination of their writers; sometimes even the same writer can change his/her conclusions, i.e., the set of axioms or the key points, with regard to the corpus and legacy of a historical thinker. With this duality, i.e., the duality of corpus *and* works done on that corpus, put forward as two different but complementary ways of studying the legacy of a historical thinker, however, this essay is going to present some key points about the legacy of a great thinker, namely, Khalil Gibran (1883-1931). Being a poet, philosopher and also a painter, he was depicted as one of the great thinkers in the history of thought.

As we have already implied, the idea of duality was prevalent in Khalil Gibran's thinking. Being an artist and a poet, categorically speaking, he chose

the metaphorical language of literature as his way of discourse and became known as philosopher and a poet, or, one might say, a philosopher-poet.¹ It seems that Khalil Gibran, in his corpus, was always conscious of the idea of duality as filled in with various concepts. He was also aware of a duality that can be construed as the duality of Spirituality and Intelligence. Another key point to understand his legacy is that, throughout his corpus, he showed that human beings were always in need of taking over that duality and finally arriving at some kind of combination between its sides. Said differently, Gibran was in favor of a balance between Spirituality and Intelligence as two epistemological orientations of human beings.

Duality in Khalil Gibran

Khalil Gibran was already acquainted with the idea of duality mainly because of the course of his life. He "was born in the shadow of the holy Cedars of Lebanon but spent the mature years of his life within the shadows of the skyscrapers of New York."² Although he mostly wrote in English, he did leave some Arabic works as well. An immigrant with a sincere desire to integrate into the main-stream American society and a strong passion to care about his homeland, Lebanon, Gibran can be best described as an Eastern philosopher-poet writing in/from the West.

The source of the complex descriptions about Khalil Gibran might have stemmed from the East-West problem that he both faced harshly and dealt with genuinely. He "has been described as The Mystic, The Philosopher, The Religious, The Heretic, The Serene, The Rebellious and The Ageless."³ The antinomy realized between these descriptions especially attracts attention. To some degree, it is sagacious to come to the judgment that in his works originally

¹ See: Lou Marinoff, *Plato, Not Prozac!: Applying Eternal Wisdom to Everyday Problems* (New York: HarperCollins, 199), p. 139.

² Joseph Sheban (ed.), "Mirrors of the Soul" in *The Treasured Writings of Kahlil Gibran*, ed. by Anthony Rizcallah, Anthony R. Ferris (a compilation of works) (New York: Barnes & Noble, w.date), pp. 723-811, p. 725. (This work henceforward is going to be referred to only as "Mirrors of the Soul").

³ "Mirrors of the Soul", p. 725.

written in Arabic such as *Spirits Rebellious* (1908), *The Broken Wings* (1912), *A Tear and A Smile* (1914) and *The Procession* (1918), he appeared to be heretic, rebellious and, as someone representing rationality or rational thinking, philosopher, while in his works originally written in Arabic such as *The Madman* (1918), *The Forerunner* (1920), *The Prophet* (1923), *Sand and Foam* (1926) and *Jesus, the Son of Man* (1928), he appeared to be Serene, Religious and, as a figure representing an intense spirituality, mystic. However, it is safe and sound to say that, in all of his works, Gibran appeared to be Ageless.

“Gibran wrote in two languages: Arabic for Lebanon, Syria and the Arabic world; English for the West.”⁴ When some of his Arabic writings that he wrote for the Arabic population, which at the time was engaged in a struggle for a search of independence, were first “translated into English without benefit of explanations gave the impression that Gibran was calling the people of his adopted country of America to rebellion. Hence we find in Gibran a dual personality; he wrote in Arabic calling for arms, and in English calling for contentment and peace.”⁵

Writing for the East and as well as the West, Gibran especially considered what they essentially lacked: He preached rationality to the East and mysticism to the West. In other words, Gibran was not only a man who came from the East and brought a much needed spirituality to the West for the complementarity and thus well-being of its societies, he was also a man who, speaking from the West, preached rationality and adherence for reason to the East.

Mainly because of his life and thought experience Gibran was so acquainted with the idea of duality that in his works a dual structure always manifested itself. For example, in his *The Madman*, Gibran described a woman whose face manifested a dual appearance:

ON THE STEPS OF THE TEMPLE

Yestereve, on the marble steps of the Temple,

⁴ “Mirrors of the Soul”, p. 726.

⁵ “Mirrors of the Soul”, p. 746.

I saw a woman sitting between two men.

One side of her face was pale, the other was blushing.”⁶

The dual structure of Gibran’s way of looking at things is so essential rather than coincidental to his thinking that even his first book in English, *The Madman*, and the most popular book of his, *The Prophet*, might be seen as reflecting a very interesting and dramatic duality. As though pointing out the harshly dual structure between these two works of his, Gibran said the following: “Only an idiot and a genius break man-made laws; and they are the nearest to the heart of God.”⁷ In other words, Gibran implied that, most probably in a metaphorical sense, being an idiot is not necessarily a bad condition, since being an idiot and being a genius might be the two different appearances of one single man. Perhaps, just as he defied the conventional approach that it is expected of an ethical man not to break with man-made laws, he defied the conventionally literal meaning associated with the word idiot and offered another one as not being all negative. In *The Wanderer*, Gibran attracts attention to the wisdom of a madman pointing out that the firm antagonism of the madman and the insane might go in vain:

It was in the garden of a madhouse that I met a youth with a face pale and lovely and full of wonder. And I sat beside him upon the bench, and I said, “Why are you here?”

And he looked at me in astonishment, and he said, “it is an unseemly question, yet I will answer you. My father would make of me a reproduction of himself; so also would my uncle. My mother would have me the image of her seafaring husband as the perfect example for me to follow. My brother thinks I should be like him, a fine athlete.

⁶ Khalil Gibran, *The Madman: His Parables and Poems* (New York: Dover, 2002), p. 41.

⁷ From Khalil Gibran, *Sand and Foam*: <http://leb.net/gibran/> (August 1, 2007), p. 4. I first found this aphorism in the following Turkish translation of the two of his books, *The Sand and Foam* and *The Wanderer*, published together in one volume: Halil Cibran, *Kum ve Köpiik: Aforizmalar-Avare: Meseller*, çev. İlyas Aslan, (İstanbul: Kaknüs, 2000), s. 43. It should be noted that here in this Turkish translation, instead of the word *aptal* (idiot), the word *deli* (madman) was preferred.

“And my teachers also, the doctor of philosophy, and the music-master, and the logician, they too were determined, and each would have me but a reflection of his own face in a mirror.

“Therefore I came to this place. I find it more sane here. At least, I can be myself.”

Then of a sudden he turned to me and he said, “But tell me, were you also driven to this place by education and good counsel?”

And I answered, “No, I am a visitor.”

And he answered, “Oh, you are one of those who live in the madhouse on the other side of the wall.”⁸

It seems that Gibran, in the above-mentioned excerpt, used the word madhouse in the first passage literally and the one in the last passage metaphorically yet in a way so as to point out the thin line between the madman and the sane. However, it should be noted that, having chosen a heavily metaphorical style in all of his works except for his letters, he did not take refuge in metaphors in a way so as to all escape the literal meanings. More specifically, the categorical distinction between literal and metaphorical is only another duality that lies in the making of his corpus and emerges only as another duality of his thought. An application of this distinction could be realized as extremely useful to understand the legacy of Gibran between ‘*The Prophet*’ and ‘*The Madman*.’ Gibran even brought about a duality as ‘Good God’ and ‘Bad God’ but, alas, it is in *The Madman* which is strictly metaphorical compared to *The Prophet*:

THE GOOD GOD AND THE EVIL GOD

The Good God and the Evil God met on the mountain top.

The Good God said, “Good day to you, brother.”

The Evil God made no answer.

And the Good God said, “You are in a bad humour today.”

⁸ Kahlil Gibran, *The Wanderer*, <http://www.kahlil.org/wanderer-23.html>, (August 1, 2007).

"Yes," said the Evil God, "for of late I have been often mistaken for you, called by your name, and treated as if I were you, and it ill-pleases me."

And the Good God said, "But I too have been mistaken for you and called by your name."

The Evil God walked away cursing the stupidity of man.⁹

Depending on the account of the distinction between literal and metaphorical meanings, it becomes easy to side with the idea that Gibran did not intend to establish that there were two gods as in the ancient Persian religion; rather, he brought forth the stupidity of man who was seriously doubtful of the goodness of God.

Probably because of his conscious choice of heavily metaphorical style in his writings, it always became difficult for readers to infer what he meant. However, it should be pointed out that his writings, even though heavily metaphorical, reflected a dual structure between prose and poetry: no wonder he was defined as a man of prose-poetry. According to Robin Waterfield, "prose poetry may be defined as prose with poetic emotion and rhythm; Gibran took it over from Whitman and perfected its form in Arabic."¹⁰ In other words, one could say that Gibran had a message to deliver to people like a prophet and he found the language of emotion and love as the best way to convey that message. Thus he chose prose poetry as his style of discourse in his corpus: he chose prose for the sake of message and poetry for the sake of love.

In an essay titled 'The Voice of the Poet', Gibran somewhat clarified why he chose a heavily metaphorical style:

Human beings cling to matter that is cold as snow whereas I seek the flame of love so that I might place it in my breast, where it will devour

⁹ Gibran, *The Madman*, p. 45.

¹⁰ Robin Waterfield, "introduction", in Kahlil Gibran, *The Vision: Reflections on the Way of the Soul*, trans. by Juan R. Cole, (New York: Penguin, 2004), pp. vii-xiii, p. xiii.

my ribs and destroy my insides. For I have discovered that matter kills painlessly, but love revives us through torments.¹¹

Gibran's choice of a heavily metaphorical style is closely associated with his spirituality. Although his writings always reflected a dual structure his first standpoint was spirituality because he tried to bring a much needed spirituality into the American society of the time with strong materialistic tendencies. The dual structure in Gibran's writings can be located through an ordinarily careful reading; however, it is important to realize and keep in mind that his first moving point was spirituality. As an Arab immigrant in America, he preached about spirituality and the gift of intelligence for the sake of human complementarity. But the direction of his discourse was not from rationality to spirituality; rather, it was from spirituality to rationality. Had he lived in his homeland, Lebanon, and never immigrated to America the direction of his discourse would have been otherwise, namely, from rationality to spirituality.

Gibran who once described the people of his homeland, Lebanon, as "the poets who pour their souls in new cups"¹² talked about his choice of prose poetry pointing out the difficulty of the project that he embarked upon as in the following:

I am a stranger in this world.

I am a poet.

I write in verse life's prose, and in prose life's verse.

Thus I am a stranger, and will remain a stranger until death snatches me away and carries me to my homeland.¹³

He consciously chose prose poetry that, according to him, was the language of love. Moreover, even in the realm of poetry Gibran was inclined to be short and concise, and this put an extra burden on the reader going through his corpus

¹¹ Gibran, *The Vision*, p. 19.

¹² In "Mirrors of the Soul", p. 752.

¹³ Kahlil Gibran, *The Storm: Stories and Prose Poems* (New York: Penguin, 1997), p. 27.

to depict the true picture of his legacy. Gibran told a parable regarding two kinds of poetry:

THE TWO POEMS

Many centuries ago, on a road to Athens, two poets met, and they were glad to see one another.

And one poet asked the other saying, "What have you composed of late, and how goes it with your lyre?"

And the other poet answered and said with pride, "I have but now finished the greatest of my poems, perchance the greatest poem yet written in Greek. It is an invocation to Zeus the Supreme."

Then he took from beneath his cloak a parchment, saying, "Here, behold, I have it with me, and I would fain read it to you. Come, let us sit in the shade of that white cypress."

And the poet read his poem. And it was a long poem.

And the other poet said calmly, "And what have you been writing these days?"

And the other another, "I have written but little. Only eight lines in remembrance of a child playing in a garden." And he recited the lines.

The first poet said, "Not so bad; not so bad."

And they parted.

And now after two thousand years the eight lines of the one poet are read in every tongue, and are loved and cherished.

And though the other poem has indeed come down through the ages in libraries and in the cells of scholars, and though it is remembered, it is neither loved nor read.¹⁴

Always thinking in a dual structure Gibran made a perfect choice which was the heavily metaphorical style. Right at this point, it should be noted that some people influenced by his discourse thought that Gibran was agnostic and believed in the reincarnation of the soul. Gibran who "had read deeply of both

¹⁴ Gibran, *The Wanderer*, <http://www.kahlil.org/wandererlp-35.html>. (August 1, 2007).

Christian and Islamic theology” and was also influenced by such people as “Buddha, Zoroaster, Confucius, Augustine, Avicenna, Voltaire, Rousseau, Nietzsche, Jefferson, Emerson and even Lincoln¹⁵ believed in the existence of God, in the existence of the soul and its rebirth but not according to the doctrine of Nirvana.”¹⁶

First of all, Gibran was against organized religion in its most strict sense.¹⁷ More specifically, he was against a church or any other religious establishment that was run by priests like a company. Gibran wrote an Arabic story called ‘Kahlil the Heretic’ in which a young priest (novice) wanted the monks to get rid of their worldly possessions, return them to people and to go preach among the poor:

Let us restore to the needy the vast lands of the convent and let us give back the riches we have taken from them. Let us disperse and teach the people to smile because of the bounty of heaven and to rejoice in the glories of life and of freedom.¹⁸

It seems that just because of his heavily metaphorical style of writing and the essentially dual structure of his thinking, Gibran was mistaken for someone who was an advocate of the idea of reincarnation and agnosticism. Actually he was in favor of neither. It can be argued and even to an important extent

¹⁵ See: “Mirrors of the Soul”, p. 770.

¹⁶ “Mirrors of the Soul”, p. 767.

¹⁷ In *Sand and Foam*, Gibran also said the following: “Long ago there lived a man who was crucified for being too loving and too lovable. / And strange to relate I met him thrice yesterday./ The first time He was asking a policeman not to take a prostitute to prison; the second time He was drinking wine with an outcast; and the third time He was having a fist-fight with a promoter inside a church.” See: Gibran, *Sand and Foam*, <http://www.kahlil.org/sand.html>. (August 3, 2007).

¹⁸ In “Mirrors of the Soul”, p. 771. In *Broken Wings*, Gibran also said the following words: “The heads of religion in the East are not satisfied with their own munificence, but they must strive to make all members of their families superiors and oppressors. The glory of a prince goes to his eldest son by inheritance, but the exaltation of a religious head is contagious among his brothers and nephews. Thus the Christian bishop and the Moslem imam and the Brahman priest become like sea reptiles who clutch their prey with many tentacles and suck their blood with numerous mouths.” (Gibran, *The Broken Wings*, in *The Treasured Writings of Kahlil Gibran*, pp. 341-438, p. 380.)

inferred that Gibran was influenced by Sufism and so many great historical figures such as Augustine, Ibn Sina, Emerson, Nietzsche and so on. But it should be realized that in the final analysis, Gibran strived for a kind of monism or, simply, a kind of synthesis between the two sides of all dualities he introduced or even referred to. The idea of synthesis, that can be even called perfect combination in most cases, can be categorically reiterated as a synthesis between reason and intuition or intelligence and spirituality.

The psychologist Jerome Bruner, seeing the necessity to come to a synthesis between the rationality of science, which has basically a literal style of language, and the non-rationality of art, which has basically a metaphorical style of language, wrote the following words only pointing out another appearance of the human question of duality: "The elegant rationality of science and the metaphoric non-rationality of art operate with deeply different grammars; perhaps they even represent a profound complementarity."¹⁹ What Gibran did was to put many more categorical concepts into the two sides of duality such as, to mention just a few, West *and* East, body *and* soul and pain *and* pleasure.

The idea of duality was so essential to Gibran's thought that, according to him, someone's misery could be someone else's blessing. In *The Madman*, Gibran told the following parable concerning ambition which points out that he dramatically leaned on thinking in dual structure or guided by it in almost every way possible:

AMBITION

Three men met at a tavern table. One was a weaver, another a carpenter and the third a ploughman.

Said the weaver, "I sold a fine linen shroud today for two pieces of gold. Let us have all the wine we want."

"And I," said the carpenter, "I sold my best coffin. We will have a great roast with the wine."

¹⁹ Jerome Bruner, *On Knowing: Essays for the Left Hand* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1962), p. 74.

"I only dug a grave," said the ploughman, "but my patron paid me double. Let us have honey cakes too."

And all that evening the tavern was busy, for they called often for wine and meat and cakes. And they were merry.

And the host rubbed his hands and smiled at his wife; for his guests were spending freely.

When they left the moon was high, and they walked along the road singing and shouting together.

The host and his wife stood in the tavern door and looked after them.

"Ah!" said the wife, "these gentlemen! So freehanded and so gay! If only they could bring us such luck every day! Then our son need not be a tavern-keeper and work so hard. We could educate him, and he could become a priest."²⁰

As is seen in the above-mentioned excerpt, Gibran took the idea of duality to its extreme since according to him even someone's misery could be someone else's blessing and happiness. This is the reason why it is most plausible to come to the conclusion that the idea of duality is one of the most salient key points in understanding and getting the most out of the legacy of Gibran. The idea of duality was so basic to his thought that one could even assert that it has also something to do with just the form of his corpus along with the content of it. In other words, Gibran used the idea of duality upon which he was to construct his work, instead of just pointing out the secrecy of life. In *The Wanderer*, he told a parable in which the notion of crocodile tears and the notion of a hyena's laughter formed a dramatic duality:

TEARS AND LAUGHTER

Upon the bank of the Nile at eventide, a hyena met a crocodile and they stopped and greeted one another.

The hyena spoke and said, "How goes the day with you, Sir?"

²⁰ Gibran, *The Madman*, p. 29-30.

And the crocodile answered saying, "It goes badly with me. Sometimes in my pain and sorrow I weep, and then the creatures always say, 'They are but crocodile tears.' And this wounds me beyond all telling."

Then the hyena said, "You speak of your pain and your sorrow, but think of me also, for a moment. I gaze at the beauty of the world, its wonders and its miracles, and out of sheer joy I laugh even as the day laughs. And then the people of the jungle say, 'It is but the laughter of a hyena.'"²¹

The notion of crocodile tears and hyena's laughter does not constitute a profound duality in terms of unveiling the secrecy of life or the reality of life. In other words, considering the fact that there is the duality of content and form which can also be expressed in other different concepts as an ages-old question in literary critique and theory, the idea of duality is in the content of Gibran's corpus as well as in its form. Thus, it is absolutely a safe conclusion that the idea of duality has sometimes a lot more to do with the form of Gibran's corpus than its content. It is almost not reasonable to side with the idea that Gibran overlooked the content-form duality. He was perfectly aware of the fact that the idea of duality was beneficial both to the content and to the form of his corpus. Another good example of this kind of duality could be the following advice of Gibran: "Do not be delighted because of praise, and do not be distressed because of blame."²² In short, Gibran used the idea of duality with respect to the content of his writings and the form of them as well. But again, even though one could assert that Gibran used the idea of duality especially for the sake of the content of his writings, it seems that in the final analysis the idea of duality was beneficial both to the form and to the content of his corpus.

From Duality to Synthesis

The idea of duality so immanent in the work of Gibran even to the extent of its form which cannot be separated from the content in most of the cases brings us to the idea of synthesis. Always thinking in dual terms or with some kind of

²¹ Gibran, *The Wanderer*, <http://www.kahlil.org/wandererlp-5.html>, (August 5, 2007).

²² Kahlil Gibran, *The Voice of the Master*, in *The Treasured Writings of Kahlil Gibran*, pp. 439-642, 545.

duality in mind, Gibran conclusively aimed at the idea of synthesis between the two sides of all kinds of dualities. It has been already established that the idea of duality was essential to Gibran's thought. However, it should also be noted that always thinking in dual terms such as earth *and* soul, work *and* love, body *and* soul, joy *and* sorrow or pleasure *and* pain, etc., he enthusiastically pointed out the necessity of a synthesis between the two sides of these dualities. The idea of synthesis and the struggle to search for it is valid for all kinds of dualities that Gibran introduced in his works. Out of the dualities in his works that do not have strong epistemological connotations, two dualities attract special attention: the duality of body *and* soul and the duality of pain *and* pleasure. But let us take a first look at how he pointed out the necessity of synthesis between two sides of dual concepts.

Speaking in a categorical sense, an important epistemological duality in Gibran is the one between soul and 'knowledge' or reason. Keep in mind that this duality can be substituted for the one between intuition and reason or idealism and realism or, to be more precise, spirituality and intelligence. Gibran in an effort to put emphasis on the importance of soul as if there is nothing else more important, cried out as in the following:

My soul is my friend who consoles me in misery and distress of life.
He who does not befriend his soul is an enemy of humanity, and he
who does not find human guidance within himself will perish
desperately. Life emerges from within, and derives not from
environs.²³

As can be seen from this excerpt, according to Gibran, the soul is as if the most important treasure that human beings have and it is the only entity that people must be dependent on when making decisions and trying to have a way of life. Nevertheless, Gibran also emphasized the importance of Knowledge and Reason as though these two concepts were in conflict with the concept of Soul or the concepts that have connotations for the Soul:

²³ Kahlil Gibran, *Tears and Laughter in The Treasured Writings of Kahlil Gibran*, pp. 3-97, p. 85.

Each day look into your conscience and amend your faults: if you fail in this duty you will be untrue to the Knowledge and Reason that are within you.

Keep a watchful eye over yourself as if you were your own enemy: for you cannot learn to govern your own passions and obey the dictates of your conscience.²⁴

The last two excerpts mentioned above can also be read as crying out for necessity for a synthesis toward the complementarity of human epistemology between reason and intuition or intelligence and spirituality. The idea of synthesis as well as the idea of duality was so essential to Gibran's thought that he even exalted the idea of synthesis on entities of the same kind. And by doing so, Gibran realized that even in one side of a categorical duality, there is another duality which only effects his profound sophistication as a philosopher. In *The Wanderer*, Gibran told a parable as to encounter of two philosophers one of whom was looking for 'the fountain of youth' and the other was looking for 'the mystery of death.' When they knew about each other's quest they looked at each other suspiciously and thought that they covered it in their great science. And naturally they began "to wrangle, and to accuse each other of spiritual blindness":

Now while the two philosophers were loud upon the wind, a stranger, a man who was deemed a simpleton in his own village, passed by, and when he heard the two in hot dispute, he stood awhile and listened to their argument.

Then he came near to them and said, "My good men, it seems that you both really belong to the same school of philosophy, and that you are speaking of the same thing, only you speak in different words. One of you seeks the fountain of youth, and the other seeks the mystery of death. Yet indeed they are but one, and as they dwell in you both."

Then the stranger turned away saying, "Farewell sages." And as he departed he laughed a patient laughter.

²⁴ Gibran, *The Voice of the Master*, p. 482.

The two philosophers looked at each other in silence for a moment, and then they laughed also. And one of them said, "Well now, shall we not walk and seek together."²⁵

Gibran was prone to see duality or dual structure in every entity, phenomenon and thus concepts. With an analogy, one might depict him as someone who sees duality on both higher and lower spots in the same axis. In other words, he saw duality in more or less categorical concepts. However, he was not a dualist and cannot be considered as one in the final analysis because whenever he was done setting or spotting a duality he hastily became in favor of synthesis.

The Ageless Gibran who said that "all life is twain, the one a frozen stream, the other a burning flame, and the burning flame is love"²⁶ made the idea of synthesis with regard to dual concepts of body and mind. In Khalil Gibran, the duality of body and mind appeared as the duality of body and soul because he pointed out the proximity and categorical relation between mind and soul saying the following: "The mind manifests itself by looks and works. For the soul is our dwelling-place, our eyes are its windows, and our lips its messengers."²⁷

Just like every duality or dual concepts that Gibran somehow included in his corpus, it seems that the duality of body and soul was set up by him to get to the idea of synthesis. Consequently, it should be noted that Gibran, instead of just saying that the core wisdom for human beings is to be in favor of wholeness or integrity, he just set the table in dual terms and made them prone to come down to a synthesis.

In the corpus of Gibran, who occasionally divided beauty into bodily and spiritual ones,²⁸ the duality of body and soul is one of the most profound

²⁵ Gibran, *The Wanderer*, <http://www.kahlil.org/wandererlp-42> (chapter 42).

²⁶ Khalil Gibran, *Little Book of Love* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007), p. 30.

²⁷ Khalil Gibran, *The Eye of the Prophet*, translated from French by Margaret Crosland, (Berkeley: Frog, 1995), p. 78.

²⁸ Khalil Gibran, *The Broken Wings* in *The Treasured Writings of Khalil Gibran*, pp. 341-437, p. 363.

dualities that attract special attention. When talking about the poet in his book called *The Storm*, Gibran referred to both concepts. It is plausible to think that Gibran in a chapter about the poet that begins as "I am a stranger in this world"²⁹ was basically describing and talking about himself. In this chapter, as a way of pointing out the duality between body and soul and the necessity of a synthesis between them, Gibran said that "I am a stranger to my soul"³⁰ and that "I am a stranger to my body."³¹ It seems that Gibran was implying that being stranger to both body and soul is actually being close to both of them: the situation of 'neither this nor that' as presumably the exact opposite of 'either this or that' actually amounts to both of them.

The duality of body and soul can also be seen as a manifestation of a more categorical duality, i.e., the one between realism and spirituality or intelligence and spirituality. Gibran was in favor of realism or intelligence as much as he was in favor of spirituality. In his book titled *The Forerunner*, Gibran told a parable about four poets that "were sitting around a bowl of punch that stood on a table."³² The first three poets showed a poetic attitude that might be called otherwise spiritual, or idealistic or emotional one towards the punch. Yet the fourth poet presenting a more realistic attitude or one that would go perfectly along with the notion of intelligence drank the punch to the very last drop. Upon the more realistic action of the fourth poet, "the three poets, with their mouths open, looked at him aghast, and there was a thirsty yet unlyrical hatred in their eyes."³³ Consequently, based on this parable, one might contend that just as Gibran was in favor of spirituality he was in favor of intelligence as well, showing strong adherence for it. And by doing so, he actually pointed out the need for the synthesis between spirituality and intelligence.

The duality of body and soul as a lower manifestation of the one between intelligence and spirituality was a salient example of how Gibran cried out for

²⁹ See: Gibran, *The Storm*, p. 24.

³⁰ Gibran, *The Storm*, p. 24.

³¹ Gibran, *The Storm*, p. 25.

³² Kahlil Gibran, *The Forerunner: His Parables and Poems* (New York: Dover, 2000), p. 27.

³³ Gibran, *The Forerunner*, p. 28.

synthesis between the two sides of any dualities and especially the ones that he introduced in his corpus. Considering the fact that, in Middle Ages, “a man who deeply loved and respected a woman would find it impossible to associate with her the idea of sexual intercourse, since all sexual intercourse would be to him more or less impure”³⁴ Gibran thought differently and sided with the idea of a synthesis between bodily and spiritual loves. Simply, according to Gibran, “real beauty lies in the spiritual accord that is called love which can exist between a man and a woman.”³⁵

Gibran also expressed the same idea more sharply yet somewhat covertly in *The Wanderer* as a parable entitled ‘Body and Soul’:

A man and a woman sat by a window that opened upon Spring. They sat close one unto the other. And the woman said, “I love you. You are handsome, and you are rich, and you are always well-attired.”

And the man said, “I love you. You are a beautiful thought, a thing too apart to hold in the hand, and a song in my dreaming.”

But the woman turned from him in anger, and she said, “Sir, please leave me now. I am not a thought, and I am not a thing that passes in your dreams. I am a woman. I would have you desire me, a wife, and the mother of unborn children.”

And they parted.

And the man was saying in his heart, “Behold another dream is even now turned into mist.”

And the woman was saying, “Well, what of a man who turns me into a mist and a dream?”³⁶

Gibran even drew some parallels between the duality of body and soul and the duality of reason and learning as if trying to attract attention to the fact that some dualities are more categorical compared to others and some of them might be made explicit through the others with the idea of synthesis duly stressed and

³⁴ Bertrand Russell, *Marriage and Morals* (New York: Bantam, 1966), p. 46.

³⁵ Gibran, *The Broken Wings*, p. 359.

³⁶ Gibran, *The Wanderer*, <http://www.kahlil.org/wandererlp-12.html>, (August 6, 2007).

kept intact. For instance, the duality of reason and learning is more categorical than that of body and soul and, again, the former one can be made more explicit in terms of its content through the latter one: according to Gibran, "reason and learning are like body and soul. Without the body, the soul is nothing but empty wind. Without the soul, the body is but a senseless frame."³⁷

In Gibran, another duality that dramatically stresses out the importance of looking at things in dual terms and the necessity of a synthesis at the same time is that of sorrow and joy, sometimes expressed in different yet closely related terms. Gibran referred to the duality of sorrow and joy as the duality between being miserable and being happy³⁸ and described the voice of a woman, a bride, as "a voice that vibrated with hope and despair, with pleasure and pain, with happiness and misery, with need for life and desire for death."³⁹ In Gibran's point of view, beauty "is a magnificence combined of sorrow and joy"⁴⁰ and thus both sorrow and joy must be taken into account and be welcomed enthusiastically because life is a phenomenon that revolves around them.⁴¹ He actually stated that "and now I only remember my dead Joy in remembering my dead Sorrow."⁴² In other words, said more explicitly, when one of them, i.e., sorrow and joy, is dead the other one is also dead inevitably.⁴³

The most explicit expression of the duality of joy and sorrow, as more or less categorical manifestation of the duality of pleasure and pain, and the idea of a synthesis between the two sides of this duality is presented in his monumental

³⁷ Gibran, *The Voice of the Master*, p. 481.

³⁸ See: Kahlil Gibran, *Thoughts and Meditations in The Treasured Writings of Kahlil Gibran*, pp. 523-642, p. 526.

³⁹ Gibran, *Tears and Laughter*, p. 91.

⁴⁰ Kahlil Gibran, *The Wisdom of Kahlil Gibran in The Treasured Writings of Kahlil Gibran*, pp. 811-900, p. 817.

⁴¹ See: Gibran, *The Madman*, p. 65-68.

⁴² Gibran, *The Madman*, p. 68.

⁴³ For Gibran's another usage of the duality of pleasure and pain along with the terms of joy(s) and sorrow(s), see: Kahlil Gibran, *The Beloved: Reflections on the Path of the Heart* (New York: Penguin, 1997), p. 92.

book, *The Prophet*. In it, Gibran said that “your joy is your sorrow unmasked.”⁴⁴ According to him:

When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you shall find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy.

When you are sorrowful, look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight.

Some of you say, ‘Joy is greater than sorrow,’ and others say, ‘Nay, sorrow is the greater.’

But I say unto you, they are inseparable.⁴⁵

As can be seen in this above-mentioned excerpt, Gibran looked at the struggle of life that every individual has to go through in dual terms of joy and sorrow, but again, in pointing out the necessity of a synthesis between them, he attributed equal importance to them. Moreover, Gibran saw life itself as a fluctuation between joy and sorrow: “Verily you are suspended like scales between your sorrow and your joy.”⁴⁶ At this point, it is noteworthy to realize that Gibran in his approach toward the relationship between joy and sorrow got in the same line with La Rochefoucauld, a seventeenth century French philosopher who is renowned for his aphorisms. Ages before Gibran, La Rochefoucauld wrote as in the following: “However great the discrepancies between men’s lots, there is always a certain balance of joy and sorrow which equalizes all.”⁴⁷ The resemblance between La Rochefoucauld indicates how deeply rooted Gibran’s thought was, if nothing else.

Just as Gibran thought in dual terms and quickly came to the idea of synthesis between them, such as between body and soul, joy and sorrow, he went through the same structure of thought with regard to mysticism and

⁴⁴ Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet* (London: Wordsworth, 1996), p. 16.

⁴⁵ Gibran, *The Prophet*, p. 16.

⁴⁶ Gibran, *The Prophet*, p. 16.

⁴⁷ Cited in David G. Myers, *Social Psychology* (New York: Random House, 1982), p. 448. Another translation of this excerpt is the following: “However diverse people’s fortunes may seem, they are equalized by certain compensation between good and bad.” See: La Rochefoucauld, *Maxims*, trans. by Leonard Tancock (London: Penguin, 1959), p. 43.

realism, and thus, as more categorical concepts, between spirituality and intelligence. In other words, Gibran clearly showed that one should be in favor going beyond all kinds of dualities, as a way of being in favor of synthesis. More specifically, Gibran, by saying 'neither this nor that' was actually aiming at all of them, since the opposite of the expression 'neither this nor that' is not the expression 'either this or that'; rather, it is 'all of them' or 'both of them.'

In *The Madman*, Gibran put forth a parable entitled The Greater Sea by which he told that he (or the madman) embarked upon a search for the great sea to bathe along with his soul: "My soul and I went to the great sea to bathe."⁴⁸ As they reached the shore of the great sea they met a pessimist and they decided to leave the place where the pessimist was, for the reason that they could not bathe there. However, after walking a while they saw an optimist and decided to walk away for the same reason; both pessimist and optimist were left behind.

In the same way he met a philanthropist, a mystic, an idealist, a realist, a puritan and left them all behind "to seek the Greater Sea."⁴⁹ By deciding to search for a greater sea Gibran and his soul expressed a strong desire to find a place where there were no dualities but a synthesis between an optimist and a pessimist, between a mystic and a realist...

Gibran, both as a 'madman' and a 'prophet' exalted the idea of synthesis with respect to dualities. Another duality that he introduced was the one between reason and passion, which can also be seen as the one between reason and intuition or realism and idealism or, more categorically, between intelligence and spirituality. It should be noted that Gibran, espousing the duality between reason and passion, i.e., seeing some kind of antagonism or simply a polarity between them, actually followed the path paved by David Hume, the great English philosopher and one of the most important philosophers who marked the Anglo-Saxon philosophy. Because according to David Hume, "nothing is more usual in philosophy, and even in common life, than to talk of the combat of passion and reason, to give the preference to

⁴⁸ Gibran, *The Madman*, p. 53.

⁴⁹ Gibran, *The Madman*, p. 56.

reason, and assert that men are only so far virtuous as they conform themselves to its dictates."⁵⁰ In other words, not only David Hume saw and acknowledged a duality between reason and passion, he also came to the idea of synthesis between them, because in his point of view "reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will and (...) it can never oppose passion in the direction of the will."⁵¹ Keenly in favor of the idea of synthesis and balance between reason and passion, Gibran went on to say the following:

I would have you consider your judgement and your appetite even as you would two loved guests in your house.

Surely you would not honour one guest above the other, for he who is more mindful of one loses the love and the faith of both.

Among the hills, when you sit in the cool shade of the white poplars, sharing the peace and serenity of distant fields and meadows –then let your heart say in silence, 'God rests in reason.'

And when the storm comes, and the mighty wind shakes the forest, and thunder and lightning proclaim the majesty of the sky –then let your heart say in awe, 'God moves in passion.'⁵²

Just like David Hume, Gibran espoused the duality of reason and passion and pointed out the necessity of a synthesis between them. In Gibran's point of view, reason and passion were twin brothers or sisters and they needed each other to the degree that one without the other was almost useless: "For reason, ruling alone, is a force confining; and passion, unattended, is a flame that burns to its own destruction."⁵³ Thus, just like every other duality, the duality of reason and passion is bound to a synthesis. Again, it should be kept in mind that the duality and the idea of synthesis between reason and passion in Gibran, who was a mystic as well as a philosopher, amount to the duality and the synthesis between rationality and mysticism or intelligence and spirituality.

⁵⁰ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (London: BiblioBazaar, 2006), p. 45 [Book II, Part III, Section 3].

⁵¹ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, p. 415.

⁵² Gibran, *The Prophet*, p. 30-31.

⁵³ Gibran, *The Prophet*, p. 30.

From Spirituality to Ratio

It has been so far established that the idea of duality along with synthesis was etched into Gibran's mind which can be observed throughout his corpus. One might contend that Gibran, who was so immersed in the idea of duality and synthesis that according to him "a great man has two hearts; one bleeds and the other forbears"⁵⁴ put emphasis on intelligence when speaking to the East whereas he put emphasis on spirituality when speaking to the West.

However, Gibran was a spiritual man in the first place: although he adopted America as his second homeland, he was originally from the East and immensely tried to introduce spirituality to be espoused even in every-day life. In other words, Gibran felt that "ultimately human beings will be able to understand the mystical truths of creation and apply them to every-day living."⁵⁵ In this sense, one can enthusiastically contend that, though he was ultimately favoring the perfect synthesis between spirituality and intelligence, his standpoint was spirituality.

Spirituality was Gibran's first concern. Especially in his adopted homeland, America, Gibran mostly dealt with spirituality to introduce and collaborate it into the American culture which, according to him, lacked mysticism as opposed to materialism. In other words: "Impressed by the great technological achievements of America, and mindful of the material well-being of the majority of its citizens, Gibran viewed his adopted home from the vantage-point of his own cultural heritage and recognized that the picture was incomplete. Consequently he sought to infuse some Eastern mysticism into Western materialism, believing that humanity was best served by a man capable of bestriding the two cultures and acknowledging the virtues of each."⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Gibran, *Sand and Foam*, <http://www.kahlil.org/sandfp>, (August 8, 2007).

⁵⁵ Nancy Corinne Miller, *Prophet or Madman: The Enigma of Kahlil Gibran*, unpublished master's thesis presented to Texas Western College of the University of Texas, 1954: El Paso, p. 61.

⁵⁶ Suheil Bushrui & Salma H. Al-Kuzbari, "introduction", in Kahlil Gibran, *Love Letters: The Love Letters of Kahlil Gibran to May Ziadah*, translated and edited by S. Bushrui, S. H. Al-Kuzbari (Rockport, MA: Oneworld Publications, 1995), pp. ix-xiii, p. x.

As can be seen from the above-mentioned excerpt, Gibran was in favor of a synthesis between Eastern mysticism and Western materialism which, with more categorical words, can also be called a synthesis between spirituality and rationalism or spirituality and intelligence. However, given the fact that Gibran dealt with spirituality and generally tried to introduce it into the Western culture, one can contend that Gibran's standpoint was spirituality: he was in favor of a synthesis between spirituality and intelligence; he was both a spiritual and a rational poet, thinker and author; but first, he was a spiritual man.

Therefore, it can be contended that another key point in understanding and learning the most out of Gibran's corpus, is to know that he came to the idea of synthesis from a spiritual point of view. That Gibran was a spiritual man in the first place can also be drawn from the fact that, when confronting a tragic state, Gibran withdrew to a spiritual attitude.

Barbara Young described an incident in which Gibran was about to be deceived of his money in a real estate transaction. However, Gibran did not feel the strength to defend himself in front of the court because two women involved in the court action had approached him waving a copy of *The Prophet* and saying "You have written this book: Now what are you going to do about it?"⁵⁷ At that point, instead of espousing an appropriately rational attitude he withdrew to a spiritual one. And by doing so, one could assert, he himself could not show the high level behavior of synthesis that he put forth for other people to espouse in the same book.

Conclusion

No set of axioms or precepts can contain completely all the phenomena that it aims at explaining. In this sense, no sets of axioms can be explanatory for each and every aspect of the whole corpus of Gibran. However, the following key points as a set of axioms or precepts are extremely useful and thus can never be overlooked in trying to get the most out of Gibran's corpus: first, it should be noted that the idea of duality is essential to Gibran's thought. Gibran

⁵⁷ Barbara Young, *This Man from Lebanon* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), p. 13.

was conscious of the fact that it was almost necessary to look at things in a dual structure. Secondly, the idea of synthesis is also essential to Gibran's thought such that the notion of duality only paves the way for the notion of synthesis. In other words, the figure that Gibran depicted does not lean on this or that side of a duality to which all multiple structures can be reduced down. A third key point could be that Gibran was a spiritual man in the first place. In other words, even though he favored the idea of synthesis and thus balance between rationality and idealism or intelligence and spirituality he arrived at that point of synthesis coming from a merely spiritual point of view.

There could be thousands of forms of synthesis between intelligence and spirituality. In order to get the clearest picture of the form that Gibran put forward, one should study the whole corpus of Gibran wholeheartedly. But these key points also form an axiomatic picture of Gibran and surely will help people get a sound understanding of his corpus.

The notion of duality and the notion of synthesis are two main subjects that people coped with in the history of thought. And the legacy of Gibran provided great contributions to these subjects. Those contributions are indeed the whole corpus of Gibran. And the key points that we laid down in our paper are the ones that cannot be overlooked by endeavors in search of coming up with any – or the most inclusive– sets of axioms in deciphering Gibran. Sometimes like a madman and sometimes like a prophet, Gibran actually provided people with a slow-motion picture of the dynamic activity both from duality to synthesis and between duality *and* synthesis.