

Burnout Societies, Narcissistic Netizens, Mental Health Crisis and the Bane of Social Media

A Socio-Philosophical Critique from the Perspective of Islamic Sufism

By [Prof. Henry Francis B. Espiritu](#)

Global Research, June 25, 2022

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First published on June 24, 2022

The insightful book “The Burnout Society” authored by South Korean philosopher, Prof. Dr. Byung-Chul Han argues that our contemporary society is characterized by burnout, boredom, anxieties, hyperactivity, attention deficiency, depression, downward spiraling of mental health, suicidal tendencies, existential ennui and narcissism.

These personal and societal pathologies are caused by the constant feeding of our individual ego with exaggerated social media expectations and unnecessary imagined competitions caused by our incessant need to be affirmed, to be appreciated, to be applauded, to be acknowledged and thereby succumbing our psyche and ego to the tendency and propensity of comparing ourselves with social media personalities, celebrities and internet influencers. The book says that if we want to escape burnout and depression, we just have to accept who we really are, simply do what we can do naturally, and appreciate ourselves without comparing ourselves and our achievements with that of others.

In this age of social media, people think that to be happy means to be affirmed, to be liked, appreciated, applauded and approved constantly by others and by society. These social media markers and popularity rankings by which many people use to measure happiness are individually and socially pathological.



Happiness is never a creation of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok or whatever platform one utilizes in today's social media; no matter how these social media platforms are helpful in conveying our interconnectedness and intercommunication in this day and age. Happiness is not even an absence of conflict and pain. Happiness is in facing our life with hope despite the daily endeavours, struggles, conflicts and all the problems that we face in our daily grind for existence.

From our capitalistic and corporatocratic society, we have been conditioned to think that happiness is something to be earned by our hard efforts and by our trying our utmost to prove our mettle and to show to others our successes and achievements. This utilitarian-cum-capitalistic and instrumentalist view of happiness has made us extreme workaholics and having a tattered self-image that we are not enough and we do not have intrinsic value until we have delivered something huge like those great achievers who are projected and featured by social media. However, the hard truth is this: we cannot chase happiness. Happiness is in facing life despite the cramped and crappy circumstances that we are living.

It is crucial for our consumerist society to take lessons from the words of the physically blind yet great woman philosopher Helen Keller: "From now on, let us cease chasing the merry-go-round ride of happiness and just be happy."

It is really a great tragedy in our so-called contemporary civilized society that extractive capitalism and exploitative consumerism have programmed and conditioned us to think that to be happy, one has to work like an abused donkey, accumulating loads and loads of banknotes and hoard them to no end. Toxic and abusive religion has likewise programmed our minds into believing that we have to earn our happiness by our hard efforts of pleasing the Divine and wait for our happiness in the Hereafter as the reward of our good works that are somehow used as our means to bribe Divinity so that we can enter into the Golden Portal of the Sweet-By-and-By.

The great Turkish Sufi sage of Sunni Islam Hazrat Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi has a better view than these abusive perspectives of achievement-based happiness and escapist concept of salvationism peddled by toxic and exploitative religions on us. Hazrat Maulana Rumi says that we cannot bribe our way to please the Supreme Consciousness since the Supreme has already loved each one of us from eon to eon, and this Cosmic Love is bestowed upon us solely through unmerited favor without religious bribery and sanctimonious transactional business of being good and of looking good so that the Supreme Entity can reward us. Hazrat Maulana Rumi says that we can never escape from this Divine Love and Grace; and it is this Grace from the Supreme Consciousness that will see us through and not our own merits which we thought that we can use to buy divine approval, forgiveness, love, affirmation and self-esteem. The Cosmic Consciousness loves and forgives us unconditionally and solely through unmerited favor and unconditional compassion.

In contrast to our capitalistic-consumeristic-utilitarian-instrumentalist society's skewed

view that happiness is in being always applauded and acknowledged by others and in the obsessive seeking for the approval and affirmation from others, the great Turkish Sufi thinker and mystic Hazrat Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi says that authentic happiness is in letting ourselves be, in being content and satisfied of who we truly are, of what we have, and of what we can realistically achieve without comparing ourselves with others and their accomplishments. In short, bonafide happiness is an existential choice: a free decision that we have to make and an autonomous volition that we have to face moment-by-moment in our lives. Genuine happiness is in simply choosing to be happy despite circumstances that life offers to us. Happiness is right before us in the “Here-and-Now” when we free ourselves from the consumeristic dictates of a hyper-materialistic society which is founded, constructed and fabricated by greedy capitalism and extractive corporatocracy.

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About the Author

Prof. Henry Francis B. Espiritu is Associate Professor-7 of Philosophy and Asian Studies at the University of the Philippines (UP), Cebu City, Philippines. He was former Academic Coordinator of the Political Science Program at UP Cebu from 2011-2014.

He was former Coordinator of Gender and Development (GAD) Office at UP Cebu from 2015-2019. His research interests include Theoretical and Applied Ethics, Islamic Studies particularly Sunni jurisprudence (Fiqh), Islamic feminist discourses, Islam in interfaith dialogue initiatives, Islamic environmentalism, Classical Sunni Islamic pedagogy, the writings of Imam Al-Ghazali on pluralism and tolerance, Islam in the Indian Subcontinent, Turkish Sufism, Central Asian Affairs, Ataturk Studies, Ottoman Studies, Muslim-Christian Dialogue, Middle Eastern Affairs, Peace Studies and Public Theology.

He is a Research Associate of the Centre for Research and Globalization (CRG).

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