

Human Nature from a Comparative Psychological Perspective

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This paper seeks to advance an understanding of Human Nature through Islamic Sources. The paper also seeks to adopt a self-consciously comparative approach to psychology, comparing Islamic perspective with Western views. The author explores Islamic views on the three dimensions of psychology – the spiritual, the physiological and the behavioral. The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for a theoretical basis to define the psychological vision of human nature and to identify the subject matter of psychology within Islamic framework. Psychology cannot be separated from religious, philosophical and moral issues, the paper insists, therefore it is important that they be integrated in the efforts to articulate Islamic psychology.

Introduction

Dozens of books are available on the subject of “human nature” especially in the English language, but most of them begin with a philosophical, moral, or religious perspective, or even a mixture of these views. It is evident that studies that have a psychological approach to the subject are rather rare, even in the West. Some scholars, like Wrightsman, give the following reasons for the lack of interest in the subject among psychologists:

1. Western psychologists believe that it is futile to explain behavior in terms of human nature and that only laymen tend to explain behavior as a mere part of human nature.
2. Western psychologists have not been concerned with the so-called “universality of social behavior,” except recently. This can be seen in the studies of cross-cultural psychology. Their concern has been with the study of social behavior in a framework of Western culture, rather than the study of human behavior in a wider perspective of the human race.
3. Psychological research has centered on the study of experimental social psychology, and on the concepts that can be studied empirically rather than loose concepts which Western psychology tries to avoid. This made labora-

tory research predominant in the Western psychological research, as it forms an important part of empirical studies which are either descriptive or experimental studies.¹

Anyhow, Western scholars, whether philosophers, sociologists, or psychologists have become more and more interested in the subject of human nature. This has been felt by many scholars such as Stevenson,² Chaney,³ Wrightsman, and Schultz. These authors have studied the subject of human nature from various viewpoints: philosophical, psychological, anthropological, and developmental.

Some books and studies were also published in Arabic, and from an Islamic viewpoint, following various approaches—philosophical, religious, moral, psychological, and anthropological. Among these are works by Al-Akkad,⁴ Bint al-Shati,⁵ Barakat Ahmad,⁶ Amir,⁷ Al-Faruqi,⁸ Sayyid Mursi,⁹ Akbar Ahmad,¹⁰ and Al-Ani.¹¹

This article is a contribution to the field of psychology, hoping to form an introduction to psychological studies from an Islamic perspective. It has two objectives:

- attempt to understand human nature through the texts of some Qur'anic verses and hadith; and
- adopt a comparative approach between the Islamic and Western perspectives of human nature, with reference to postulates made by Schultz (1994) and other Western scholars.

I chose the work by Schultz for two reasons: first, because he puts together six dimensions about the theme, like freedom and predestination; and second, because he enumerates various opinions by Western psychologists on these dimensions that facilitates a process of review and comparison.

Personality from a Western Perspective

In his *Theories of Personality*, Schultz asks several questions about the nature of human personality, concluding that psychologists in the West do not agree upon any single theory of personality.¹² That is why, he uses the word “theories” instead of “theory” in the title. Schultz further stresses that the way human nature is conceptualized by a theorist forms the most important aspect in any theory of personality. He presents 18 theories, which he then groups into nine categories or major tendencies, where each has its own approach, postulates, methods of research, concepts and dimensions of personality, and qualities of human nature. These will be the subject of our comparison.

Schultz advances several reasons for the study of personality, foremost of which is his emphasis that major problems faced by human beings now, like famine, pollution, crime and addiction, are caused by human beings themselves.

Schultz asserts in the introduction of his book the importance of studying and improving personality in order to improve ourselves and save humanity. Since the greatest hope of humanity, as mentioned by Schultz, is to improve its understanding of itself, the study of personality may be psychology's major contribution to humanity. Therefore, human nature, seen in a comparative perspective, assumes great importance on both theoretical and practical levels.

Can psychology, as it is practiced in the world in general, and in the West in particular, save humanity from current and future dangers? Or, can psychology in general, and the Islamic approach in particular, have any role to play in saving humanity in this world and in the Hereafter? I do not claim that I can answer these questions, but posing them shows the important role that can be played by psychology in understanding human nature and personality, and the potential of such an understanding in solving problems faced by humanity.

Therefore, it may be useful to present an Islamic vision of human nature through the characteristics of human nature presented by Schultz as a vision of "personality," in addition to other dimensions, which I may suggest in this respect, bearing in mind that this is merely a relative vision, as it is only a human interpretation. Schultz points out that the psychological theories formulated around personality have no common grounds to answer questions about freedom or predestination, heredity or environment, past or present, individuality and uniqueness or universality, balance or growth, and optimism or pessimism?

I have chosen to present an Islamic vision of these dimensions, depending on my understanding of some Qur'anic verses and hadith texts, adding some dimensions not mentioned by Schultz and other Western researchers. The objective is to formulate these dimensions into a comparative perspective.

Characteristics of Human Nature from an Islamic Perspective

I have intentionally chosen to say "an Islamic" not "the Islamic" vision to show that this is only a relative position, based on my own understand-

ing of the texts, thereby leaving the door open for other research endeavors in this vital field. I would also like to point out that the Islamic vision of human nature and its characteristics, and of the personality of man, is too vital and comprehensive to be summarized. All operations of amplification aim at making such comprehensive vision closer to understanding, in order to use it as a theoretical frame of reference for research in various human and social fields.

Moreover, this theoretical vision, which stems from an understanding of Islamic texts, must be supported by empirical research, taking into consideration such background variables as age, educational level, and gender. Another basic point to study is the relationship between theoretical vision and actual behavior. In addition to all this, we have to consider the following:

- To formulate an Islamic vision about the characteristics of human nature and personality as a modern (Western) psychological concept, we have to clarify the Islamic attitude about three major dimensions with their ramifications: the creation of man, the life of man, and the destiny of man (in the hereafter).
- The study of man from an Islamic perspective should recognize three more dimensions, closely related to the previous ones, with a possible mutual effect. The relationship among these dimensions may not be causal, but could be relative in a statistical sense. These dimensions are: spiritual, physical-biological, and behavioral.

The Spiritual Dimension

What is meant by “spiritual” here is the aspect of “faith”; that is, the belief in Allah, His angels, messengers, scriptures, the day of judgement, and destiny (good or bad). These are the articles of faith which bear no discussion or compromise. But “faith” is higher in degree than “Islam,” as it is what is settled in the heart and endorsed by deed. There is no room in Islam for talking about faith that is separate from deeds and behavior. The Holy Qur’an reproaches the believers for expressing their “belief” and stopping short of action:

O, you who believe! Why say you that which you do not? Grievously odious is it in the sight of Allah that you say that which you do not. (61:2–3).

Clearly, the Qur’anic verses that deal with faith are coupled with actions and deeds. There is no room in Islam for abstract talk about faith, (e.g., faith

residing in the heart alone) and that the religious relationship is a private matter between the worshipper and his Lord alone. That faith which is settled in the heart, confessed in words and endorsed by deeds is attested to by a hadith of the Prophet: "Faith is some and seventy (or some and sixty) branches. The highest is to say there is no God but Allah, the last is to remove obstacles off the road" (accepted hadith by consensus). This is what we mean by the spiritual aspect. The metaphysical aspect of faith is a basic dimension, but it cannot be measured, as it is within the knowledge of Allah. However, the actions can be observed and measured.

The Formative Dimension (Physical-Biological)

The Holy Qur'an specifies that the first man (Adam) was made of clay. "He who has made everything He has created most Good: He began the creation of man with clay" (32:7). Also, "Man We did create from a quintessence of clay" (23:12). Indeed, the Holy Qur'an repeats seven times the fact of creating man out of clay. The origin of propagation in man is the drop of sperm, as it is clearly stated in *Suraths Al-Insan* and *Al-Qiyamah*. Several verses describe the physical-biological dimension in the creation of man, in the embryonic and other stages of life.

We have enjoined on man kindness to his parents: In pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give him birth. The carrying (of the child) to his weaning is (a period of) thirty months. At length, when he reached the age of full strength and attains forty years, he says: O my Lord! Grant me that I may be grateful for thy favor which Thou hast bestowed upon both my parents, and that I may work righteousness such as Thou mayest approve; and be gracious to me in my issue. Truly have I turned to Thee and truly do I bow (to Thee) in Islam. (46:15)

The Qur'an has also described the creation of hearing and sight and other physical characteristics and functions.

Have We not made for him a pair of eyes and a tongue and a pair of lips and shown him the two highways? (99:8-10)

Behavioral Dimension

Modern psychology is broadly concerned with the study of behavior. Thinking is a form of behavior, so is remembering, or writing, or any other form of activity performed by man, be it simple or complex, concerned with worship or with common transactions.

The behavior of man, his education, development, and change is the objective of heavenly messages that indicate the worship of the Creator.

The study of this behavior by observation, experimentation, analysis and induction is the concern of various branches of psychology.

The Qur'an is concerned, from beginning to end, with the behavior of man in this world, and with his destiny in the hereafter (depending on his behavior).

It is noticeable that all branches of faith are concerned with behavior and treatment. The bases of worship in Islam, like salah, fasting, zakah (alms-giving), and hajj are expressions of behavior that have two sides: internal and external or spiritual and material. This expression is an interactive and complementary process which aims at moderation and balance in the behavior of the Muslim. Good deeds represent a higher level of behavior exercised by a man of faith, as the benefactor worships the Lord as if he can see Him, and is certain that Allah can see him in his act of worship.

While the unseen is only known to Allah, visible behavior is the field of psychology. Anyhow, from the Islamic point of view, it is enough to judge by what is visible, leaving what is unseen to the will of Allah. In this connection, a hadith by the Prophet says, "When you see a man frequenting the mosques then say he is a man of faith." However, what is unseen is not a substitute for visible behavior. So when one openly commits a vile act, he cannot justify it by saying that his intention is good. Actions are directed by intentions, but only when those intentions are good and do not lead to intended harm.

Following this definition of behavior and the spiritual dimension, I believe that there is a difference between spiritual and metaphysical dimensions. The definition of behavior in modern psychology is rather inadequate, as it does not take into consideration the dimension of faith which depends on intention. Yet, modern psychology has recently become more interested in the cognitive (rational) aspects of behavior, and even the spiritual aspect, though to a very small extent.

Therefore, we may add to these two dimensions (behavioral and cognitive) another dimension which we may call the "faith dimension" in behavior, realizing the role of intention.

In this connection, Al-Shatibi says,

Actions are governed by intentions, and these in behavior are considered forms of worship and habits. There are numerous proofs of this. Suffice it to say that intentions differentiate between habits and worship; and in worship between what is obligatory or otherwise, and in habits between what is mandatory or elective; what is permitted or prohibited; what is

sound or unsound. One action may have a certain intention and be considered a form of worship; then it may have another intention and becomes blasphemy, like falling prostrate before Allah or before an idol. Moreover, when a deed is joined to an intention, the prescribed judgments are joined likewise. When actions are devoid of intent then judgments are equally unattached, like the acts of a man in his sleep, or those of the unconscious, or the deranged.¹³

Though intention is basic to worship, the psychological study of behavior is not basically performed through the study of the intention but through the study of the observable behavior. Intention is in itself an intrinsic behavior and could be studied through interviews or other techniques of psychological research.

The Metaphysical Dimension

This dimension deals with matters that Muslims should not be over occupied with; it is enough to believe in them in the manner they are described in the Qur'an and in the text of hadith. These matters are the belief in resurrection, heaven and hell, angels and jinn, blowing the spirit into man, etc. The two sources give enough information to make further research unnecessary.

Throughout my contemplation of the Qur'an, I have not found a single verse that encourages the Muslim to ponder over metaphysics. In fact, the entire Qur'an is a call to ponder over the creation of the Almighty (earth, mountains, clouds, stars, animals, and man himself) so observation can serve as proof of the Creator's existence, and of creation's purpose of serving man. Therefore, the "spirit" in the metaphysical sense of the word is not open for pondering and scientific research.

They ask you concerning the spirit. Say: The spirit is a concern of my Lord. Of knowledge it is only a little that is communicated to you. (17:85)

In addition, pondering the creation gives to human nature a further dimension, that of time—past, present, and future.

I would further point out that this comparison, between the Islamic vision and the Western visions of human nature, is a comparison of my relative understanding of the Islamic perspective with another relative understanding of the Western psychologist concerning human nature and personality, based on their philosophic and religious background: Christian or Jewish. It is not a comparison of the absolute with the relative or divine knowledge with human interpretation.

The following are some of the basic issues I want to use in comparing the modern psychological attitudes about the characteristics of human nature and personality with the Islamic attitude, based on the Holy Qur'an and the Hadith texts. I hope to enlarge this study so it becomes a basic reference in an attempt to understand human nature and its characteristics, human personality and its dimensions from a comparative psychological perspective. This can be done by constant reference to the Qur'an and Hadith texts, and the basic references of Western thought that gave rise to psychological concepts about the characteristics of human nature and personality. The following questions need to be addressed:

1. Does man have free will in belief, opinion and behavior, or is he governed by predestination?
2. Is man eternal or destined to nihility?
3. Does man have two dimensions (material-spiritual) or one dimension only (material)?
4. Does man have an absolutely good or absolutely evil nature? Or does he have a nature open to good and evil attractions at the same time?
5. Is man's behavior based on intentions alone, on deeds alone or on both?
6. Is man's past more influential in his behavior, or is it his present, or future, or all of these?
7. Is optimism the basis of human nature, or is it pessimism?
8. Does man try to achieve balance, or is he in a state of constant growth?
9. Is the environment (learning) more influential in the behavior of man or is it heredity?
10. Is every man unique in qualities and character or are there universal and comprehensive qualities in human nature and character dimensions?

The above are the basic questions in visualizing a model of human nature from an Islamic perspective. Therefore, I shall try to answer these questions one by one about this vision, comparing it to other visions within a modern psychological frame, with special reference to the basic personality theories discussed by Schultz. I shall use this book in its treatment of the various visions of the major theories about the psychology of personality like: the analytical, the behavioral, the traits, the humanistic, and the cognitive. These theories are found in most texts about general psychology or modern books on the psychology of personality. In this respect, I do not find it necessary to go beyond Schultz's book on the subject.

Free Will or Determinism

Allah the Almighty created Adam in the best of models. He endowed him with mind and set him above all other creations, giving him knowledge of

what they did not have (i.e., the names), and gave him complete freedom in paradise on one condition, that he should not taste the fruit of a certain tree. Adam failed the test. Perhaps the aim of that test was to show Adam that his knowledge was limited, and that he was open to forgetfulness and temptation. In addition, if man has limited knowledge, he must also have limited freedom.

The question of free will and determinism is discussed in *kalām* (Islamic theology) and the various Islamic schools of thought are not in agreement about it. There are numerous details about the argument in major books on the subject. But we have to be satisfied with what the Qur'an clarifies. Freedom carries with it, its own consequences and responsibilities, and if man has a choice between faith and disbelief then he has to bear the responsibilities of his choice. If he is free in his behavior, then he should also bear the consequences of his chosen behavior. Thus, we read in the Qur'an:

Say, the Truth is from your Lord. Let him who will, believe, and let him who will, reject (it). For the wrongdoers We have prepared a Fire whose (smoke and flames) like the walls and roof of a tent will hem them in. If they implore relief they will be granted water like melted brass that will scald their faces. How dreadful the drink! How uncomfortable a couch to recline on! (18:29)

Belief and disbelief are two behaviors connected with freedom of the mind and will. We cannot talk about the freedom of will without having the ability to choose between belief and disbelief in the general and the religious sense of the words; nor can we talk about responsibility devoid of freedom of will and mind or freedom of behavior. Therefore, the Hadith testify that no responsibility is imposed on a boy until he becomes of age, or the sleeper until he wakes, or the mad man until he regains his normal senses.

This freedom of behavior between belief and disbelief, with all that goes between positive and negative behavior (irrespective of absolute value judgment) may explain to us why man is variously described in the Qur'an: some of these descriptions are positive and some are negative.

Man's liberty entails responsibility. And, despite this complete freedom in belief and behavior, the Qur'an tells man very clearly that his abilities are limited, and consequently his freedom is also limited. For example, man cannot choose when to be born.

In pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give him birth.
(46:15)

Nor can man choose when or where to die.

When their term is reached, not an hour they can cause delay, nor (an hour) can they advance. (7:34)

Nor does anyone know in what land he is to die. (31:34)

While we find the Qur'an calling man to adopt the causes and laws of Allah in society and the world in general, the Muslim entertains a decisive conviction that there is a cause of all causes Who is not caused by any cause, and that is Allah the Almighty, who has power over everything, and on whom all depend, to whom all matters refer, and whose will comes above every will. The behavior of the Muslim should not be separated from this vision, even though he has to adopt the causes.

Nor, say of anything, I shall be sure to do so and so tomorrow, without adding, so please Allah. And call your Lord to mind when you forget, and say: I hope that my Lord will guide me ever closer than this to the right road. (18:23–24)

So, how do theories of psychology stand on this subject? If we look into theories of personality in modern psychology, we find a lack of agreement on the subject. For instance, the Freudian theory believes that man has no free will. That is to say that man is controlled by the unconscious, being in constant struggle with unconscious forces like the instincts (such as sex and aggression) which he can never conquer. According to Freud, the role of the ego is to coordinate between the pressures of the id (instincts and desires) and those of the super ego (conscience and morals). This Freudian attitude about the freedom of man is not accepted by the neo-Freudian, Fromm (1900–1980).¹⁴ Though he is a follower of the psychoanalytic approach, Fromm has a positive attitude toward the free will of man, as he believes that personality is not formed by social, political, and economic factors alone, since man has certain psychological characteristics that help to form his own nature (personality) and his society's as well.

The behavioral school shares with the analytical school their belief in determinism. Skinner (1904–1990),¹⁵ as a forerunner of modern behaviorism, though not in agreement with Freud about the existence of internal forces that control personality, believes that man's behavior is like a pre-programmed instrument whose activity and function are decided beforehand. Therefore, man has no freedom in behavior or spontaneity, as his behavior is controlled by stimuli received from his environment. Despite

their different theoretical starting points, the two schools, the analytical and the behavioral, do not believe in man's freedom.

The trait theory, represented by the American psychologist Gordon Allport (1897-1967)¹⁶ holds a moderate attitude. Allport believes that man is capable of controlling his future with a degree of freedom. But he also believes that the behavior of man is defined by traits and personal inclinations that are difficult to change once they are formed.

If we turn to the humanistic theory, we find that its upholders, like Abraham Maslow (1908-1970),¹⁷ stress the free will of man, who has the potential to choose the way to satisfy his needs and realize his capabilities. Therefore, man, according to this theory, is responsible for the degree or level of the growth he achieves.

The cognitive theory, represented by modern psychologists led by George Kelley (1905-1967),¹⁸ believes that man is free in choosing, controlling, and modifying his behavior when there is need. He is free to revise his old concepts and replace them by new ones. According to this theory, man is always looking toward the future.

Finally, the theory of social learning, represented by Albert Bandura (1925-)¹⁹ holds a moderate attitude about the freedom of man. Bandura believes that people are not powerless entities monitored by the forces of society, nor are they absolutely free to do anything they choose. Man and his environment mutually affect each other.

To sum up, we find wide disagreements among modern theories of psychology about the freedom of man. Most of these theories hold a moderate attitude and say that the behavior of man, though stemming from a will, are influenced by hereditary (biological) and social (environmental) forces that direct his behavior despite his will. In fact, most psychologists agree that the major determinants of personality are biological as well as environmental factors.

An overall observation of the above indicates that existing theories ignore the will of Allah in directing and determining the destiny of man. They also ignore the spiritual determinants (belief in Allah) and their affect on personality and behavior. To correct this shortcoming, one may refer to the Qur'anic vision explained above. For more details, one may also refer to the various Islamic schools of thought like the Mu'tazilī and the Ash'arī.

Eternity and Nihilism

Schultz does not approach this dimension, nor do psychologists in general, as they consider it a metaphysical subject within the realm of philoso-

phy. Though basically a metaphysical subject, eternity has a great influence on the behavior of man.

The man who firmly believes that he is answerable to Allah for his behavior and that he will be held accountable for his deeds on the Day of Judgement, which will destine him to eternity in paradise or in hell, will certainly have a different behavior from a man who has no belief in paradise or hell, or in eternity. When no difference is detected in the behavior of the believer and the nonbeliever in eternity, then that lack of difference may be ascribed to various factors, among them is a weak belief in the Day of Judgement, or in the eternity of paradise or hell.

Does Man Have One Dimension (Material Only) or Two Dimensions (Material and Spiritual)?

Schultz does not mention this point when dealing with aspects of human nature treated by various psychologists. Yet, a survey of opinions by psychologists on this point shows disagreement. Some are concerned with physical and biological aspects only; others add the behavioral aspect to these two. The spiritual aspect connected with faith hardly finds any followers in modern psychology; still, the American Psychological Association recognizes religious psychology as one field in modern psychology.

To look at man as a being of various dimensions (physical, biological, spiritual, and behavioral), in an interactive and integrative manner, may fill a gap in modern psychological theories, which look at man from a narrow viewpoint, limited by biological factors (hereditary and biochemical), and social and environmental determinants.

Does Man Have an Absolute Good or Absolute Evil Nature?

Again, Schultz does not approach this point in his book. This is probably due to the fact that this is a philosophical and moral question, and not a psychological one. To deal with it requires a value judgement and a moral attitude which many psychologists try to avoid. It is also due to a strong desire to separate psychology in subject and method from philosophy and ethics. Yet, it is not possible to separate psychology from philosophy and ethics completely. Therefore, I believe that the Islamic vision of man is an objective one, since it looks at man from various perspectives. Man is not all good or all evil, but is claimed by forces of good and evil, and he is always

fighting against the evil tendencies. The Islamic view of man is concerned with individual differences in this field, and with the aspect of faith in the nature of man. No matter how good the man may be, he cannot be immune to evil; and, no matter how evil the man may be, he cannot be completely deprived of good. But education, environment, biology, and personal values are the factors that direct man toward the dominance of either good or evil. Some Muslim scholars add to this the Satanic inducement and its negative effect on man's behavior, which may lead him to committing evil deeds. To avoid such inducement, one has to pray for divine protection against the accursed Satan, by word and deed. This behavior, again, does not fall within the frame of Western psychological theories.

In brief, man is not all good nor all evil; he is a mixture of angelic and satanic qualities. Therefore, he is a different being, neither angel nor devil; he is man.

Exploring the attitude of modern psychologists to the relation of good and evil to man, we find that Maslow in his humanistic theory affirms that the innate human nature is basically good; however, Maslow does not rule out the existence of evil among human beings. Freud is extremely pessimistic. He says, "I found little that is 'good' about human beings on the whole."²⁰ Freud has a strong belief that aggression and sex are two instincts of biological origin, and that they form a basic component of human nature.

Is the Behavior of Man Based on Intentions and Deeds, on Intentions Alone, or on Deeds Alone?

The question of intention is not a concern of psychology, as it is a religious concept, connected with the practice of worship in behavior. Intention is basic to worship in Islam. Since we are told in the Qur'an that the purpose of the creation of man and jinn is to worship the Creator, the concept of worship in Islam becomes comprehensive in all forms of behavior when the intention is to come closer to Allah and worship Him. This relation was qualified by the quotation from Shatibi. Though modern psychology is not concerned with intentions, it does not ignore drives and incentives and their influence on behavior. But Schultz does not mention this dimension in the vision of human nature by various psychologists, or its influence on behavior and personality.

A hadith tells us: "Deeds are by intentions, and every man is requited in accordance with what he intended." So, the intention determines the regard with which a Muslim views his behavior. But in Islam, especially in

jurisprudence, consideration is of deeds and their consequences, not of their intentions. The intention is basic in ownership only, and the reward is in the hands of Allah. This distinction is basic to avoid misbehavior on the pretext of good intention. These intentions cannot be judged by persons or organizations, irrespective of their status.

Briefly, then, all deeds in worship are seen through channels of intentions, which are known only to Allah and the doer of those deeds. The rewards or punishments of the human being are seen through consequences of deeds, not through intentions. The more the deeds match the intentions, the better the reward.

Which Is More Influential in Man's Behavior: His Past, Present, Future, or All Three?

Modern psychological theories about personality vary a great deal about the influence of the past or the present on the formation of the individual's personality. Some theories lay more emphasis on childhood (from birth to 12 or 13 years). Other theories feel that personality is free from influence of the past, as it may be influenced by events and experiences of the present, and by hopes and aspirations for the future.

The analytical theory, especially the Freudian tendency, feels that the past of the individual is basic in forming the personality, and that the id, which is the major part in forming the personality, is an inherited physiological factor, and that the stages of psycho-sexual development are also inherited. It is well-known that the Freudian theory lays more emphasis on the id, the unconscious, in the formation of personality. It believes that the psycho-sexual stages of development that the child experiences from birth to puberty are basic in the formation of personality, for the present and the future. Freud thinks that the period of the first five years is the primary factor in forming the personality of the adolescent person.

In addition to this emphasis on heredity, the analytical theory does not deny that part of personality is acquired by learning at the early stages of life, and through interaction with parents in particular.

It is also well-known that Freud's pupils and early followers like Alfred Adler and Karl Jung were strongly opposed to Freud for his extremist vision of personality and his over-emphasis on the sexual and aggressive instincts in their decisive formation of personality. This is no place to review all criticism of Freud, but we may point out that Adler, for instance, has a more balanced view, as he holds that the formation of personality is

a result of the past and the present of the individual. Similar to this attitude is that of Jung, Fromm, and Erickson, as they all see the importance of the various stages of life, not the early stages alone, which is the Freudian stand.

The traits theory, led by Allport, puts more emphasis on the present in the formation of personality. Therefore, Allport thinks that personality is more influenced by present events and by looking to the future more than looking into the past.

The humanistic theory, led by Maslow, has a balanced attitude on this subject. He recognizes the importance of early childhood experiences in enhancing or obstructing the development of personality. But he does not think that we are victims of those experiences. Maslow is one of few psychologists who lays more emphasis on various stages of life.

On this subject, the behavioral theory has a balanced attitude like that of the humanistic theory. Skinner believes that past and present experiences have an equal influence on our behavior and personality.

Islam pays great attention to the childhood period as it has a vital role in the formation of personality and behavior. Yet, the relevant texts do not indicate that the individual is destined to remain a prisoner of his past. Historically, Islam was able to change the behavior and personality of the Prophet's companions, who embraced Islam out of belief and conviction, thus leading them in a new direction. Islam can radically change entire nations and civilizations in the field of creed and belief in particular. While man is answerable to his past, there is room for repentance to change the consequences of that past if it is marred with sins and bad deeds. This change can be achieved by performing good deeds, quitting sins and evil deeds, and proclaiming repentance. Islam views the period of childhood as the time for learning and training. It is the period when the person is not held answerable until he reaches puberty.

The future is an important dimension in the formation of the personality of the Muslim. This is because the future in Islam is not limited to this world alone, but extends to the Day of Judgment. The best summary of the Islamic attitude on this subject may be found in the following verse:

But seek, with the (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on you, the home of the hereafter, nor forget thy portion in this world: but do thou good, as Allah has been good to thee. (28:77)

It is also expressed in the wisdom of “Do for your present world as if you were to live forever, and for your life in the hereafter as if you were to die tomorrow.”

Does the Environment (Learning) or Heredity Have More Influence on Man’s Behavior?

Islam recognizes the influence of heredity (the biological factor) in the nature and personality of man. An individual is created from a man’s sperm and a woman’s egg. Modern science has shown that the sperm and egg carry within them the hereditary qualities that shape the individual in various stages of his life. The Qur’an reads:

It is He Who has created man from water; then has He established relationships of lineage and marriage: for thy Lord has power (over all things). (25:54).

The *Jalalain* exegesis says that “water” denotes “sperm and egg,” and “relationship of lineage” indicates the father’s side while “marriage” indicates the mother’s side, that is, the biological (caused by heredity) and the social (caused by marriage).

In addition to heredity, Islam puts great emphasis on the role of parents and society in the formation of the personality of man. A hadith tells us that “no one is born except on innate character: His parents turn him into a Jew, a Christian or a Magian.” The hadith shows the influence of both heredity and environment in the formation of personality. The Qur’an reproaches the unbelievers for following their forefathers in their behavior in general and in their deviant beliefs in particular.

When they do what is shameful. They say: We found our fathers doing so; and, Allah commanded us thus. Say: No, Allah never commands to what is shameful: Do you say of Allah what you know not? (7:28).

Judging by several experiences in the history of individuals, groups and nations, it is clear that man’s personality is capable of learning, changing, and excelling in the various stages of life. There are several examples to prove this, foremost among them are the changes effected by Islam in the souls of people of various ages, and in the conditions of tribes and nations when they embraced Islam. Therefore, Islam does not endorse a belief in the decisive influence of the past, but it keeps the door open for soul-searching to accommodate and align oneself with the teachings of Islam. So

Islam discards what is committed before, and opens, through repentance and asking forgiveness, new horizons which restore hope to man. Nor does Islam encourage a belief in a decisive influence of environment and learning: it holds that both heredity and learning have their own significant effect.²¹

However, a general overview of the Islamic texts shows a greater concern for the influence of learning and the environment more than for heredity. This indicates the role of will and capability to change on various levels: the individual, the communal, and the social; it shows the importance that Islam attaches to learning and teaching in effecting change.

Psychologists vary greatly on this issue, at times contradicting each other. Some give more importance to heredity, denying the significant influence of the environment. Others give the environment more influence in the formation of personality and relevant psychological qualities like intelligence, incentives and emotion. But this conflict has been lately brought to an end by adopting a compromised stand which recognizes the influence of both environment and heredity in the formation, accommodation, and change of personality and behavior.

This interactive, integrative attitude recognizes the influence of traits and individual needs in addition to the influence of environment in the formation of personality and behavior. This attitude was adopted after 20 years of disagreement among Western psychologists, from the 1960s to the 1980s.²²

Is Optimism or Pessimism Basic In Human Nature?

When Allah created Adam and informed the angels about this new creation who was to become a vicegerent on the earth, the angels asked the Almighty how could He put on earth someone who would cause evil and bloodshed.

Behold, your Lord said to the angels: I will create a vicegerent on earth. They said: Will You place there one who will make mischief and shed blood? While we celebrate your praises and glorify Your holy (name). He said: I know what you know not. (2:30)

Though the angels wondered about the wisdom in creating Adam, the Almighty ordered the angels to fall prostrate before Adam as Allah the Almighty knows what the angels do not know about the creation of Adam.

Although Adam forgot the order of the Almighty while he was in paradise with his wife, Allah pardoned Adam after he repented. And even after the fall of Adam and Eve from paradise, the death of Abel at the hands of his brother Cain, and the bloodshed and disobedience committed by man against his fellow man throughout the ages, man is not all evil nor all good. Man's deeds differ between good and evil according to nature (biological or hereditary determinants) first; then according to education and learning; and third, according to deeds and faith. Despite pressures and difficulties of life, the Qur'an encourages man to do good deeds and to achieve the vicegerency of Allah on earth. We find in a hadith that the Prophet encourages optimism and discourages pessimism.

The Prophet said, "No omen but the good one." They said, "And what is a good omen?" He said, "The good word you may hear. (Related by Al-Bukhari in "The Book of Medicine")

In another hadith in Al-Bukhari, the Prophet says, "I like the good omen: The good word."

Briefly then, Islam is a call for optimism and a rejection of submission to dejection, even by those who have gone too far in sin.

Say: O my servants who have transgressed against their souls: Despair not of the Mercy of Allah for Allah forgives all sins and He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (39:53)

The Position of Psychological Theories on Optimism and Pessimism

The Analytical School does not have a consensus on this issue. Freud is extremely pessimistic about human nature. He describes man in negative terms, saying that man is destined to struggle with his inner forces (instincts) all the time, and is doomed to become a victim of struggle, restraint, and anxiety. Contrary to this, Jung is optimistic about human nature, as he sees man capable of growth, improvement, and development. The same attitude is adopted by Adler, Fromm, Murrey, and Horney.

Allport, representing the Traits School, describes man in optimistic terms. He believes in man's ability to improve. Raymond Catell (1905-)²³ has a slightly different attitude from Allport. In his youth, Catell was more optimistic about man's ability to solve the problems facing society, through gaining the knowledge necessary to control the environment. But reality was not up to Catell's aspirations, so he came to the conclusion that both

human nature and society have deteriorated. Followers of the humanistic school have a positive attitude toward this issue, as they are optimistic about human nature. Therefore, they emphasize the psychological health rather than the psychological disturbances, the growth and development rather than stagnation and fossilization, the positive aspects of man rather than his weaknesses and shortcomings. Though Skinner and other behaviorists believe that the environment controls the behavior of man, they affirm that man is responsible for designing this environment and the formation of its various aspects, like buildings, tools, clothes, food, government institutions, social system, language, habits, etc. Therefore, man can introduce modification into that environment to realize his own interests. Man becomes controller and controlled at the same time. Or, according to Skinner, man designs a controlling culture, but he ultimately becomes a product of that culture.

The cognitive school believes that man is a rational being who can form concepts through which he can see the world and formulate a unique approach to reality. Kelley believes that man himself plans his own destiny and that he is not a victim of that destiny.

Does Man Endeavor toward Balance or Is He in Constant Development?

We gather from the Qur'an that man is in constant growth physically and psychologically (emotionally and mentally) until he becomes forty years old. Then he gradually deteriorates, also physically and psychologically, until he dies. (This does not apply to Allah's messengers.) Allah says:

If We grant long life to any, We cause him to be reversed in nature: Will they not then understand? (36:68)

Despite this general law of growth, the Qur'an and Hadith encourage the search for knowledge and the education of the soul in the various stages of life, though responsibility begins with puberty and ends with death. The various schools of psychology have the following stands:

Freud and the Analytical School believes that man is forced to restore balance and keep a state of physiological equilibrium in order to protect the organism against stress and strain. This is an instinctive force which constantly leads the organism to feel stress, and therefore tries to lessen that stress and achieve pleasure, and so on. Contrary to this, Jung believes that

man is in a state of constant growth, and that major changes in personality begin to appear around 35 to 40 years of age.

Adler believes that man is constantly endeavoring to achieve supremacy, and that such an endeavor increases rather than decreases stress. Contrary to Freud, Adler believes that to relieve stress is not the only drive that man has, because the endeavor toward excellence demands greater effort, which is opposite to the state of balance characterized by relief of tension and stress. Moreover, Adler believes that the endeavor for excellence is an individual and societal process. Briefly, all followers of psychoanalysis, except Freud, emphasize growth rather than balance as a quality of human nature and personality.

Allport in the Traits School thinks that the main objective of life is not to release tension, as Freud thinks, but to raise that tension which sets man looking for new aims and new challenges. When man achieves one objective he has a new drive to face another challenge for another objective. The reward in the process, according to Allport, is not the achievement itself, but the process of meeting the challenge. The same holds true for the endeavor to reach an objective. What matters is the effort, not reaching the objective. Therefore, man is constantly in need of new objectives to move and drive him, and to keep a necessary level of tension in his personality.

The followers of school believe that man is in a state of constant growth and development. Maslow thinks that man is driven by innate needs which graduate, in a pyramid fashion, from basic physiological needs like food, drink, propagation, sleep, and breathing up to the need for safety, for a sense of belonging, love, appreciation and up to the need for self-realization, which lies at the top of all needs. Maslow further thinks that this final need is not realized except in mid-life, and only to a small percentage of successful people.

The behaviorists are not concerned with inner drives and tensions which move man to realize objectives because they believe that behavior is formed by learning, which, in turn, is formed by external factors. This leads to the denial that innate (hereditary) or internal (subjective) factors drive man to achieve some objectives. An objective, according to Skinner, is not individual, but social. Though behaviorists affirm that basic behavior is formed in childhood, they do not deny the possibility of modification or change of that behavior during adolescence which leads to acquiring new forms of behavior. Briefly, then, the behaviorists have a moderate attitude toward the issue of "balance-growth."

Does the Individual Have a Distinctive Quality and Personality, or Is There Universality in Human Nature and Personality?

Most psychologists who write on the subject of personality agree that it is characterized by individuality and consistency throughout time. But they disagree about individuality and universality as a quality of human nature.

Freud recognizes the quality of universality in human nature; he believes that everyone goes through the same stages of psycho-sexual development and is moved by the same forces and instincts (the id). Yet, Freud affirms that a part of the personality is distinctive. Therefore, the ego and the super ego, though performing the same role for every individual, because they were formed through personal experiences, differ from one person to another. Jung attitude is similar to Freud's, but he differs in explaining this dimension of personality. Jung believes that there is a difference in personality until mid-life. After that, there is a universality in the formation of personality. Differing from Freud and Jung, Adler clearly affirms the distinction and individuality of the personality. Fromm stands in between. Fromm believes that there is a universal and comprehensive quality in the personality, which is seen in a common social quality within a certain culture. At the same time, Fromm believes that each individual is different from another.

Allport believes that each individual differs from another because each has his own traits and capabilities which clearly denote his character and set him apart. Yet, Allport does not deny the existence of common traits among people.

Maslow believes that needs and drives are common among people (universal). But, the ways these needs are satisfied differ from one person to another because this is a behavior that can be learned. Therefore, Maslow and Rogers stand on the middle ground of this subject.

Individuals differ from one another because behavior forms by learning, as experience forms behavior, and people have different experiences, especially in childhood. Therefore, we cannot find two persons behaving in exactly the same manner. That leads the behaviorists to say that distinctiveness is the basic quality of human nature and personality.

As far as Islam is concerned, we clearly see from the Qur'an that people were created out of one soul. This is repeated four times in *Al-Nisa*:1, *Al-An'am*:98, *Al-Araf*:189, and *Al-Sumar*:6. Yet, Islam recognizes differences

among people, whether physically or psychologically, or both. In Islam, the individual is responsible for his deeds and behavior.

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things). (49:13)

We see by this verse that differentiation is on two levels: individual and societal (nations and tribes). The Almighty made the differences in color and language a sign to those who are capable of thinking.

And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the variations in your languages and your colors; verily in that are signs for those who know. (3:22)

About the difference of some people from others, which is now called “the individual differences,” the Qur’an says:

Their Prophet said to them: Allah hath appointed Talut as king over you. They said: How can he exercise authority over us when we are better fitted than he to exercise authority. And he is not even gifted with wealth in abundancy? He said: Allah hath chosen him above you and hath gifted him abundantly with knowledge and bodily prowess. Allah grants His authority to whom He pleases. Allah is all embracing, and He knows all things. (2:247)

We conclude from the above verses that human nature and personality are based on differentiation, though the origin is one (one soul) and that this differentiation is based on physical, psychological, and spiritual levels (of the individual) and on social and racial groupings (tribes, nations, colors, and languages).

Finally, we can visualize the model of human nature from an Islamic perspective, and in accordance with the above-mentioned qualities and dimensions. The major aspects of this model are the following:

1. Emphasis on the spiritual aspect and its influence, as a belief concept, on behavior.
2. The direct relation between faith and behavior cannot be severed.
3. The integration and interaction among spiritual, biological, and physical aspects determine the personality and behavior of the individual.
4. Man has a free will in some issues and is predestined in others at the same time.

5. Apparently, the environment is more influential than hereditary in the formulation of behavior and personality, thus recognizing the influence of both heredity and biological factors.
6. The Islamic view emphasizes the importance of growth, change, and learning in the formation of personality and behavior rather than the realization of balance, which basically aims at relieving tension and achieving pleasure.
7. Despite the negative aspects in the personality and behavior of man, the Islamic perspective of personality is more optimistic than that of some psychologists. It calls for optimism, the desertion of pessimism and ominousness and the surrender to despair, dejection, and bad dreams.
8. Despite the emphasis of the Islamic perspective on the origin of creation from one soul, the difference on spiritual, psychological, biological, and physical levels is considered more important than the similarity or typicality of personality and behavior. The Islamic position calls for competition among people in the field of good deeds.
9. Islam considers the present and future of personality and behavior more important than the past. The period from childhood until puberty is not accountable before the Islamic law (Shari'ah). But this period in education, parents' responsibility and social institutions is of basic importance in Islam.

Conclusion

It is difficult to conclude the issue of human nature from a comparative perspective. So, this is the conclusion to this essay and not to the issue. I do not claim that I have exhausted the subject, as the visions of human nature vary according to various philosophical, intellectual, religious, psychological, and societal schools of thought. Therefore, this issue needs further debate and discussion. Muslim scholars have, for a long time, ignored the study of human nature and human sciences, despite the importance of these disciplines in the development of civilization, and despite the fact that man is the center of the Qur'anic message, as he is to establish the vicegerency of Allah on earth.

Though I claimed at the beginning of the essay that I shall run a comparison among various views and theories about human nature from an "Islamic perspective: psychological and comparative," I did not always clearly show the similarities and differences among those views and theories, leaving that sometimes to the imagination of the reader.

However, this essay may help those interested in the subject to make postulates about human nature, from a psychological perspective in general,

and the relative theories on human personality and social behavior in particular. These postulates must be liable to empirical or logical study or both, and also liable to comparison among cultures and religions. This may form a theoretical basis for further studies on the subject, and to theoretical psychological and empirical studies relating to personality and social behavior from an Islamic perspective.

In fact, the Islamization of psychology must begin with laying the theoretical bases of a psychological vision of human nature on the one hand, and defining the subject matter and methodology of psychology on the other. It is obvious that a vision of human nature from a psychological point of view cannot be separated from religious, philosophical, and moral issues. Vision of that nature should take the various fields into consideration.

Finally, there is a need for further studies to clarify the attitudes of various Islamic schools of thought on the issues related to a vision of human nature. Muslim psychologists and others are required to lay the theoretical bases to the understanding of human nature in a manner helpful to induce theories and applications.

Notes

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