

A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN WESTERN AND ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES ON HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND LIFE-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT

Nooraini Othman

Abstract

Psychology and human development play a very important role in environmental sustainability. This article intends to highlight some of the important theories and concepts in order to develop understanding on the subject matter from these angles. The approach is comparative in nature. It seeks to understand the concepts and theories from the Western and Islamic perspectives. Human nature and human development as well as human personality form the important basis of this work. Finally, it is concluded with the aspect of human relationship with the environment.

Keywords: Islamic psychology, human nature, human development, environment, sustainability.



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**Nooraini Othman,
PhD**

Perdana School of
Science, Technology
and Innovation Policy,
UTM International
Campus,
Universiti Teknologi
Malaysia,
Kuala Lumpur,
MALAYSIA.

p-noraini@utm.my

Introduction

The relationship between mankind and the environment is indeed a symbiotic one. One would affect and influence the other. Mankind must take care and observe their duty towards the environment. When the environment is healthy, naturally life is better. Both the *Quran* and *Sunnah* made serious reminders that destructions appear on land and sea as a result of the actions of human hands.

There are two types of ideas when discussing protection of the environment.¹ The first is to protect nature in order to preserve the best environment for human beings and the future generations. The other is to protect nature for its own sake.

A life-friendly environment is certainly a prerequisite to a better quality of life. Psychologically, this relates to good mental health. Life is less stressful and people are healthier physically. This results in a more productive life. In order to attain this, some of the most important elements would be awareness and internalization.

A continuous human development exercise, which begins from the youngest age to the oldest, must consistently take place. Once this is known, it has to be internalized and translated into positive action until it is well embedded in one's life.

This article intends to look at some of the psychological theories and concepts that may help in

¹ Hyakudai Sakamoto, "The Human Genome and the Human Control of Natural Evolution: Genetics – Past, Present and Future" in *Bioethics: Ethics in the Biotechnology Century*, ed. Abu Bakar Abdul Majeed (Kuala Lumpur: Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia, 2002), 9.

developing understanding in relation to human development and the sustenance of a life-friendly environment.

Psychological Perspective

Psychology is not just the study of behaviour as popularly promoted by Western scholars. It has its prime concern over spiritual matters. Therefore in Islam, it is not just the presentation of behaviour that is important, it is the spiritual dimension which triggers a particular behaviour that should be prioritized.

The Prophet said to the effect that: *“Verily in the body, there is a congealed blood, if it is good, the whole body will be good, and if it is bad, the whole body is bad. Verily, that is the heart.”* In another hadith, the Prophet said: *“Verily, Allah does not look at your appearance and physical but He looks at your heart and deeds.”*

Human development covers several important aspects including the physical, mental, personality as well as spiritual. The importance of having an excellent human personality can be seen from the role played in managing his or her individual self, family, fellow men, work, and all his living affairs, not forgetting his *ibadah*. The formation of human society will affect the system that we have now. Islam demands that there be a Muslim community or *ummah* on this planet. On this matter, Allah said in the *Quran*, 3:104: *“And there may spring from you a community who invite to goodness, and enjoin good conduct and forbid indecency. Such are they who are successful.”*

The Muslim community represents a system of social relations meant, among other aims, to maximize the enjoyment of the goods on Earth within the Divine Plan.² Thus, it is a system meant to facilitate the flowering of spiritual aspiration while at the same time representing an ordered way in exercising the *amanah* regarding life, intelligence, power and property.

² Hassan Langgulung, *Research in Psychology: Toward Ummatic Paradigm in Toward Islamization of Disciplines* (Virginia: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1989), 115-121.

Views on Human Nature

The main difference between the views of the Western and the Islamic is the source of knowledge. The Western view relies on their thought and research on the subject matter while the Islamic perspective based its study on the Divine Revelation namely the *Quran* and the *Sunnah*.

Western Perspectives on Human Nature

The West approaches the science of human nature without too much presumption and pride. The understanding of human nature is an enormous problem, whose solution has been the goal of the human culture where its proper objective must be the understanding of human nature by every human being. The Western view claims that few of us know much about human nature owing to the isolated lives that we live. As a result, we approach each other as strangers, not only in society at large but also within the very narrow circle of the family. Most parents complain at one time or another that they cannot understand their children while most children claim that their parents misunderstand them.

Since people's whole attitude towards another person is influenced by their understanding of him or her, where this understanding is fundamental to any social relationship, human beings would get along more harmoniously if they had a better knowledge of human nature.³ In this article, we will discuss closely the views on human nature according to several Western schools of thoughts.

Behaviourism is the school of psychological thought that rejects the study of the contents of consciousness and focuses instead on describing and measuring what is observable, either directly or through assessment instruments. The founder of behaviourism was John B. Watson (1878-1958).⁴ Watson viewed contended that behaviour, not the private contents of the mind, is the proper subject matter of psychology. Among those supporting the study of behaviourism was B. F. Skinner (1904-1990), where he attempted to explain the causes of behaviour by cataloguing and describing the relations among events in the environment (stimuli) and a person's or animal's reactions (response).

³ Robert G. Bartholow, introduction to *Understanding Human Nature*, by Alfred Adler (Minnesota: Hazelden Foundation, 1998), ix-xi.

⁴ Lester A. Lefton, *Psychology* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2000), 149-175.

Behaviourists focus on how observable responses are learned, modified and forgotten. They emphasize how current behaviour is acquired or modified, rather than dealing with inherited characteristics or early childhood experiences. One of the fundamental assumptions is that disordered behaviour can be replaced with appropriate behaviour through traditional learning techniques. By the mid-1920's, Watson was convinced not that conditioning was a part of how humans learned about the world, but that it was the main theme. He joined a growing enthusiasm for nurture over nature and made the extraordinary claim:⁵

Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take any one of them at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select – doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief, and yes, even beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations and race of his ancestors.

The psychoanalytic approach is the school of psychological thought that assumes that psychological maladjustment is a consequence of anxiety resulting from unresolved conflicts and forces of which a person may be unaware. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was one of the first researchers to develop a theory about emotional disturbance. According to Freud, people are constantly in conflict. They are energized to act the way they do because of two basic instinctual drives: the drive toward life (libido), which is expressed through sex and sexual energy, and the drive toward death (thanatos), which is expressed through aggression.⁶ These instincts are buried deep within the unconscious. For Freud, the energy to deal with conflicts is biologically determined and lies in the structure of consciousness.

The primary structural elements of the brain are three mental forces (not physical structure of the brain) that reside, fully or partially, in unconscious: the id, the ego and the superego. The id works mainly by the pleasure principle, that is, it tries to maximize immediate gratification through the satisfaction of raw impulses. The ego seeks to satisfy the individual's instinctual needs in accordance with reality that is it works by the reality principle. The ego acts as a manager, adjusting cognitive and perceptual processes to balance the person's functioning, to control the id, and to keep the person in touch with reality. The superego is the moral aspect of mental functioning, comprising the ego ideal

⁵ Matt Ridley, *Nature via Nurture: Genes, Experience and What Makes Us Human* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), 185.

⁶ Lefton, *Psychology*, 113-116.

(what a person would ideally like to be) and conscience as taught by parents and society. Thus, the ego and superego attempt to moderate the demands of the id and direct it toward appropriate ways of behaving.

Another important perspective of modern psychology is humanistic psychology that is the school of psychological thought that emphasizes the uniqueness of each human being's experience and the idea that human beings have free will to determine their destiny. Stressing individual free choice, the humanistic approach was part of the response to the psychoanalytic and behaviourist views. Humanistic psychologists see people as inherently good and as conscious, creative, and born with an innate desire to fulfil themselves. They focus on individual uniqueness and decision-making ability and assume that inner psychic forces contribute positively to establishing and maintaining a normal lifestyle.

Proponents of the humanistic view, such as Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers believe that human beings have the desire to achieve a stage of self-actualization. Self-actualization is the ultimate level of psychological development in which a person attempts to minimize ill-health, be fully functioning, have a superior perception of reality, and feel a strong sense of self-acceptance. For the humanists, self-actualization is not only a final stage but also an instinctual and motivational need.

Another secular worldview that is common today is existentialism. The history of existentialism comes from two key thinkers. The first was Soren Kierkegaard, who stressed the power of the individual and put the pressure on humans to create their own moral code and decide their own destiny. Though he believed in God, he encouraged others to look inside themselves for their meaning and purpose in life. The second was Friedrich Nietzsche who took Kierkegaard's ideas to the extreme level. He came to the conclusion that meaning and purpose could never be found outside of the person, which means he completely removed God from their lives and made a statement that "God is dead."

Another existentialist, Sartre claims that existence precedes essence. There is no such thing as a given "human nature," determining how we act and behave. Rather, it is our everyday acts and choices that make up our identity. Man first of all exists and defines himself afterwards. Existentialism sees man as creating himself. The individual must accept total responsibility for all thoughts and actions. It is the nature of man not to have a nature.

Individual psychology was promoted by Alfred Adler (1870-1937). The 1998 edition of Adler's *Understanding Human Nature* which was a new translation by Colin Brett explained that his psychology centers on several key concepts:

- Holism stresses the unity of mind, body, and entire personality. Adler rejected reductionism, which stresses parts of the personality as separate entities.
- Social interest is the English translation of the German term, which actually translates more closely as community feeling. Adler believed that good mental health is equated with the development of social interest and stressed that equality among human beings is essential to social interest and good relationships.
- Private logic is similar to the concept that contemporary psychologists refer to as cognitive schema. This includes one's personal beliefs, rules, values, and attitudes toward self, others and life.
- Life style is Adler's term for the personality style or behaviour patterns unique to each individual.
- Goal striving is the mainspring of human behaviour. The goal of striving for significance, completion, success, meaningfulness, and social or self-centered, on the useful side or useless side of living depending on whether one contributes by one's behaviour or exploits others.
- All human have the same potentialities but its nurture determines different actualization.

The core of Adler's integrated complex of philosophy, theory, and practice was a vigorously optimistic, humanistic view of life. He offered a value-oriented psychology that envisioned human beings as capable of profound co-operation in living together and striving for self-improvement, self-fulfillment, and contribution to the common welfare. Indeed, Adler predicted that if we did not learn to co-operate, we would run the risk of eventually annihilating each other. Thus, if we were to distill his view of the human condition into one main idea, it would be the concept of the Social Human, inextricably interconnected with others and all of nature. The central problem that humans face is how to live on this planet together, appreciating what others have contributed in the past, and making life better for present and future generations.

Islamic Perspectives on Human Nature

Man has a dual nature that is body and soul.⁷ Man is a being composed of clay, which belongs to the world of creation and subject to motion, change and alteration, bound by time and space. The *ruh*, which belongs to the world of command, is free and not limited by these two binding factors. Man is composed of body and spirit. Spirit is transcendent and is the center of man's being. The soul is attached to the body in its downward tendency and to the spirit in its upward or spiritual tendency.⁸

The Self or *qalb*, as al-Ghazzali calls it, is the essence of man. It is the spiritual entity which abides in his physical body and controls his organic and psychical functions.⁹ It is connected with the physical heart, therefore it is called *qalb* (heart) even though the connection is merely transcendental. In other words, the physical heart is the form while the spiritual heart is the substance. According to al-Ghazzali, the concept of the Self is expressed in Arabic by four terms, namely *qalb* (heart), *ruh* (soul), *nafs* (desire-nature) and *'aql* (intellect or reason).

The concept of *fitrah* is associated with Islam. For Muslims, this concept is also viewed in terms of the *shahadah*. As stated in the *Quran*, 30:30, to the effect that: "*Set your face to the Deen in sincerity which is Allah's fitrah upon which He created mankind. There is no changing the creation of Allah. That is the right Deen but most people know not.*"

Imam al-Nawawi defined *fitrah* as the unconscious state which exists until the individual consciously acknowledges his belief. Hence, if a child were to die before he attains discretion he would be one of the dwellers of paradise. This applies to children of polytheistic parents.

Although man is born in a state of *fitrah*, he also has the potential of committing wrongs, *kufr* (rejection of *tawhid*), and breaking the Divine Law¹⁰. These are all part of the Divine Scheme of Creation; their functions are important and decisive for man. Allah

⁷ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *The Nature of Man and the Psychology of the Human Soul: A Brief Outline and a Framework for an Islamic Psychology and Epistemology* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1990), 1.

⁸ Hassan Langgulung, *A Psycho-Pedagogical Approach to Islamization of Knowledge* (Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia, 2002), 8.

⁹ M. Umaruddin, *The Ethical Philosophy of Al-Ghazzali* (Kuala Lumpur: A. S. Noordeen, 2003), 89-97.

¹⁰ Yasien Mohamed, *Fitra: The Islamic Concept of Human Nature* (London: Ta-Ha Publishers Ltd, 1996), 101.

has endowed man with the inborn capacity to distinguish right from wrong through intellect, free will and revelation. Although man is not born evil, he is vulnerable to evil stimuli or external sources of misguidance. This property of the human constitution is intrinsic to man and is referred to as psyche or the self (*nafs*) of man.

Man stands midway between animals and angels, and his unique characteristic is intelligence (*'aql*).¹¹ He can rise to the level of the angels with the help of the intellect or stoop to the level of the animals by permitting his anger and lust to dominate him. Allah has created all bodily organs and faculties of the self to help man realize his *fitrah*. However, al-Ghazzali emphasized that the realization of *fitrah* can be achieved only when the intellect has been fully applied. A prerequisite for the application of the intellect is thorough knowledge.

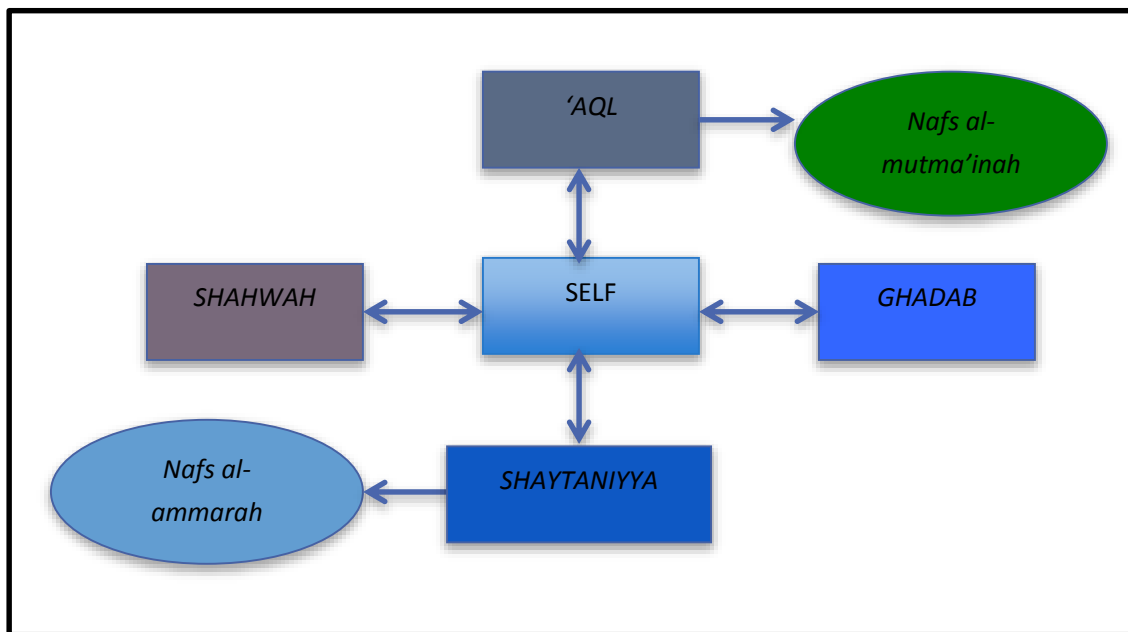


Diagram 1: Al-Ghazzali's Theory of Dynamic Interaction¹²

¹¹ Yasien, *Fitra*, 101.

¹² Yasien, *Fitra*, 112.

Views on Human Development from Western Perspective

The Psychoanalytic Theory argues that we are driven by the unconscious motives and emotions, shaped by experiences very early in life. Sigmund Freud insisted that early experiences establish patterns that endure through the entire life span. It focuses on three components: the id, ego and superego. The id is present at birth and it is the force that presses for immediate gratification of bodily needs and wants. The ego is the practical, rational component of personality. The ego begins to emerge during the first year of life, in response to the fact that the infant cannot always have what it wants. Between the third and fourth years of life, the superego of personality develops as the child begins to incorporate adult standards of right and wrong.

Freud also proposed that development occurs in universal stages that do not vary in sequence. These stages are largely determined by an innate tendency to reduce tension and maximize pleasure. He also believed that development proceeds best when children's psychosexual needs at each stage are met but not exceeded. Children whose needs are not met adequately become frustrated and reluctant to move to other, more mature forms of stimulation. If children find one source of stimulation too satisfying, they see little need to progress to more advanced stages.

John Watson was among the first psychologists to champion the English philosophy John Locke's view that the infant's mind is a blank slate on which experience writes.¹³ He argued that learning determines what children will be. He assumed that with the correct techniques, anything could be learned, by almost everyone. In other words, in Watson's view, experience was just about all that mattered in determining the course of development.

Watson did little research to support his claims but Skinner came out with his study of operant conditioning in which the consequences of a behaviour determine whether a behaviour is repeated in the future. Skinner showed that two kinds of consequences were especially influential. A reinforcement is a consequent that increases the future likelihood of the behaviour that it follows. Positive reinforcement consists of giving a reward and negative reinforcement consists of rewarding people by taking away unpleasant things. A punishment is a consequence that decreases the future likelihood of the behaviour that it follows. Punishment suppresses a behaviour by either adding

¹³ Robert V. Kail and John C. Cavanaugh, *Human Development: A Life Span View* (Belmont: Wadsworth/Thompson Learning, 2000), 18.

something aversive or by withholding a pleasant event. Although his research was done primarily with animals, human development researchers soon showed that the principles of operant conditioning could be extended readily to people, too.

The Cognitive Development Theory focuses on how children construct knowledge and how their constructions change over time.¹⁴ Children naturally try to make sense of their world. Throughout infancy, childhood, and adolescence, youngsters want to understand the workings of both the physical and the social worlds. He also argued that in their efforts to comprehend their worlds, children act like scientists in creating theories about the physical and social worlds. They try to weave all that they know about objects and people into a complete theory and these theories are tested daily by experience because their theories lead them to expect certain things to happen.

Piaget also believed that at a few critical points in development, children begin to construct knowledge in new ways. When this happens, they revise their theory radically and these changes occurred three times in development: once at about age of two years, a second time at about age seven, and a third time just before adolescence. There are two basic mechanisms which supposed to account for development that is assimilation and accommodation.¹⁵

Psychological and biological assimilation is the transformation of the external world in such a way as to render it an integral part of oneself. Accommodation is therefore a tendency of the organism to compensate for resistance of the object to assimilation by creating a new alternative between the application and non-application of a schema to a certain object.

In the Ecological Theory, which gets its name from the branch of biology dealing with the relation of living things to their environment and to one another, human development is inseparable from the environmental contexts which a person develops. The best known proponent of the ecological theory is Urie Bronfenbrenner who proposes that the developing child is embedded in a series of complex and interactive system.¹⁶ He divides the environment into the four levels shown in Diagram 2.

At any point in life, the microsystem consists of the people and objects in an individual's immediate environment. These are the people closest to a child, such as

¹⁴ Jean Piaget, *The Psychology of Intelligence*. (Cornwall: TJ International Ltd, 2002), 171.

¹⁵ Piaget, *The Psychology of Intelligence*, 8.

¹⁶ Kail and Cavanaugh, *Human Development*, 23.

parents or siblings. Some children may have more than one microsystem, for example, the daycare setting. Microsystems strongly influence development. Microsystems themselves are connected to create the mesosystem. The mesosystem provides connections across microsystems, because what happens in one microsystem is likely to influence others. Perhaps if a child has a stressful day at school, he is often grouchy at home.

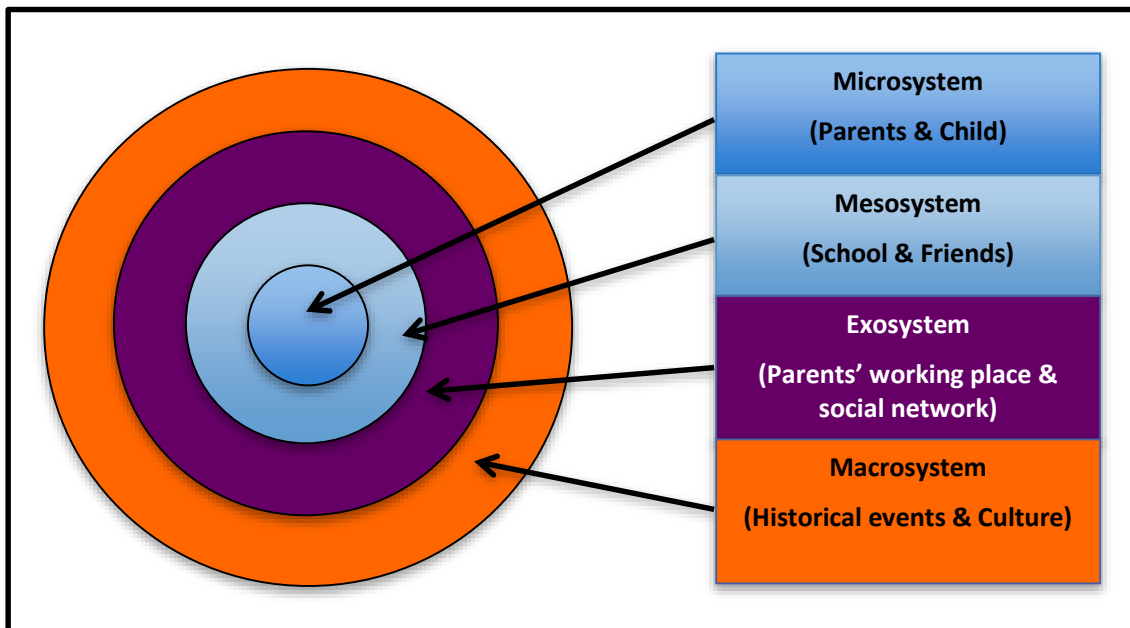


Diagram 2: Bronfenbrenner's Theory¹⁷

The exosystem refers to social settings that a person may not experience first-hand but that still influence development. For example, a mother may pay more attention to her child when her work situation is going well, and less attention when she is under a great deal of work-related stress. Although the influence of the exosystem is at least second-hand, its effects on the developing child can be quite strong.

The broadest environmental context is the macrosystem, the subcultures and cultures in which the microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem are embedded. A mother, her workplace and her child are part of a larger cultural setting. Thus, each successive generation of children may develop in a unique macrosystem.

¹⁷ Kail and Cavanaugh, *Human Development*, 23.

Islamic Perspective on Human Development

Allah stated in the *Quran*, 40:67-68, which is translated thus: “It is He Who created you from earth, then from a drop of sperm, then from an ‘*alaq* (embryo), then He brings you infants into the world; you reach manhood, then you decline into old age though some of you may die young so that you may reach a predetermined age and so that hopefully you will grow in wisdom. It is ‘He Who ordains life and death. When He decides on something, He need only say: ‘*Be!*’ and it is.”

Harun Yahya in his book, *The Miracle of Human Creation*, described:¹⁸

The human body is the most complicated machine in the world. We see with it, hear with it, breathe with it, walk and run with it and sense pleasure with it. Its bones, muscles, arteries, veins and internal organs are organized with marvelous design, and when we examine this design in detail we find even more amazing facts. Every part of the body, though each may seem to be so different from another, is made up of the same material: cell. The essence of a human being composed of 60-70 kilos of flesh and a mass of bones was originally contained in a drop of fluid. It is certainly a wonder that an intelligent, feeling human being with the faculties of speech and hearing and with remarkably complex physical structure could come into existence from a drop of fluid. This development was certainly not the result of a random process or the operation of chance, but rather of a conscious process of Creation.

In another verse in the *Quran*, 2:28, it is stated thus: “How can you reject the faith in Allah? Seeing that you were without life, and He gave you life; then He will cause you to die, and will again bring you to life, and again to Him will you return.”

This verse mentions the five stages of human development, namely:

- Without life: After conception, prior to being given the *ruh*.
- He gave life: The foetus gains its life (after given the *ruh*), birth and face the life.
- Cause to die: The *Ruh* is taken back from the body.

¹⁸ Harun Yahya, *The Miracle of Human Creation* (New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2003), 9.

- Again bring to life: During resurrection.
- Again return to Allah: Eternal life in the Hereafter.

Allah said in the Quran in 23:14, thus: “*Then We made the sperm into a clot of congealed blood; then of that clot We made a (foetus) lump; then We made out of the lump bones and clothed the bones with flesh; then We developed out of it another creature. So blessed be God, the best to Create.*”

The stages of the formation of human being constitute a chain of wonders. Cell uniting according to a certain order giving shape to the body. They construct the hands, the eyes, the ears, the blood vessels, the legs, the heart, the brain, and the nerve cells. How a cell can interpret the information in the DNA is certainly something worth thinking about.

According to the claims of evolutionists, the miracle is all due to chance, as for them, it comes about as a result of the decision of unconscious atoms which produce the human cells. They claim that one day, the atoms suddenly decide to come together and produce organs that they had never seen or known before. They believe that everything happens as a work of chance without intervention.¹⁹

Allah has created human being to be the best creature in this world with the purpose of prospering and not destroying the nature. Thus, awareness and efforts must come together in developing a life-friendly environment.

Views on Human Personality

Personality is a set of degrees falling along many behavioural dimensions, with each degree corresponding to a trait.²⁰ Although some people may share a particular trait, there are individual differences in possession of the trait. Therefore, there will be no personalities that are exactly alike. However, it is evident that this definition is inadequate as trait is merely the outward expression of ideas modified by the culture.²¹ Even though all the authorities on personality research define personality as “the sum

¹⁹ Yahya, *The Miracle of Human Creation*, 159.

²⁰ Bem P. Allen, *Personality Theories: Development, Growth and Diversity* (Needham Heights: Allyn & Bacon, 2000), 1-3.

²¹ Hasan Langgulung, *Asas-Asas Pendidikan Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka, 1997), 301.

total of the characteristics of the individual,” nowhere was this totality of it evident in their writings. Besides having the physical and intellectual level, the psychologist should include spiritual and supra-conscious elements of which supported by the *Quran* and *Sunnah*.²²

Western Perspective on Personality

According to Freud, personality has a definable structure consist of id, ego, and superego. Personality is an iceberg. Only the tip of the iceberg is above the “waterline” which represents the part of the psyche that is available to awareness. Some of the psyche below the waterline is available with effort – the preconscious- but most is unavailable – the unconscious. This relationship is shown in the diagram below:²³

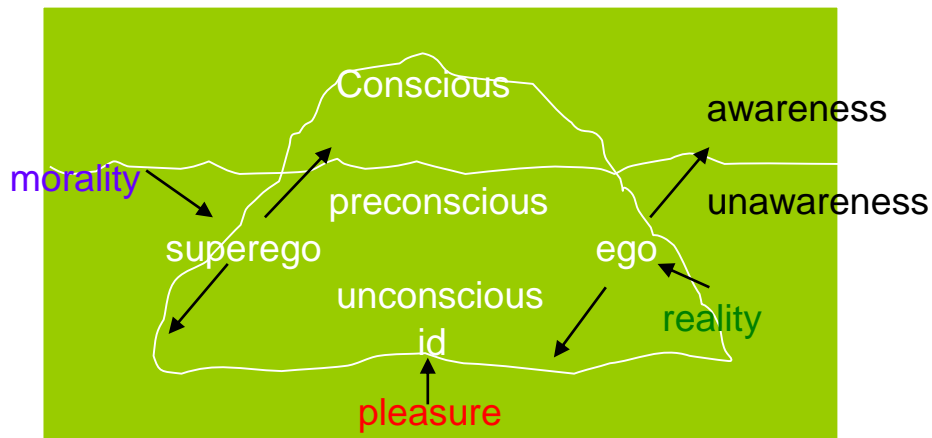


Diagram 3: Personality as an Iceberg

Freud claimed that personality develops over time from immature beginning state to a later mature state. He hypothesized a series of five sequential stages of personality development namely, oral stage, anal stage, phallic stage, latency stage, and genital stage. He also believed that people’s basic personalities are established by the age

²² Langgulong, *Research in Psychology*, 115-121.

²³ Allen, *Personality Theories*, 24.

of five. His brand of determinism allows little room for free-will, conscious purpose, or routine changes in one's personality or habitual behaviour.

There are two constructs that are fundamental importance to this theory and may be regarded as the footing upon which the whole theory rests. These are the organism and the self. The organism, psychologically conceived, is the locus of all experience. Experience includes everything potentially available to awareness that is going on within the organism at any given moment. This totality of experience constitutes the phenomenal field. The phenomenal field is the individual's frame of reference that can only be known to the person. How the individual behaves depends upon the phenomenal field (subjective reality) and not upon the stimulating conditions (external reality).

A portion of the phenomenal field gradually becomes differentiated. This is the self or self-concept. In addition to self, there is an ideal self, which is what the person would like to be. The basic significance of the structural concepts for Roger's theory, organism and self, becomes clear in his discussion of congruence and incongruence between the self as perceived and the actual experience of the organism.²⁴ When the symbolized experiences that constitute the self faithfully mirror the experiences of the organism, the person is said to be adjusted, mature and fully functioning. Such person accepts the entire range of organismic experience without threat or anxiety. He or she able to think realistically. Incongruence between self and organism makes individuals feel threatened and anxious. They behave defensively, and their thinking becomes constricted and rigid.

A person's personality depends on the way he or she views himself (self-concept). If a person's ideas are in line with the world around them, they develop with few problems, if not problematic behaviours occur.

George Kelly took a more scientific approach to the development of personality theory. He believed that there are organized ways that people use to interpret themselves and the world around them. Behaviour of a person changes according to the rules or perceptions that the person makes about society which are then acted upon.

²⁴ Calvin S. Hall, Gardner Lindzey and John B. Campbell, *Theories of Personality* (Canada: John Wiley & Sons, 1998), 461-485.

Islamic Perspective on Personality

Personality is the manifestation of our character in everything we do in life. Moral character is thus not simply a goal within the life of a Muslim, but the end goal of the Islamic faith itself. On this matter, Prophet Muhammad was asked, "Which Muslim has the perfect faith?" He answered: "He who has the best moral character." Human personality in Islamic tradition, is understood through the total make-up of human being-body, mind and soul. To understand the overall psychological nature of man and his personality development, one must understand the inner workings, the essence, of the whole person. According to the *Quran*, all psychological phenomena originate in the self. The self is the essence of man, and is often referred to by one of four terms in Arabic, namely; *qalb* (heart), *ruh* (soul), *nafs* (desire-nature) and *'aql* (intellect/reason). Each of these signifies spiritual entities. Islamic scholars typically highlight the three most commonly referred to states of the self in the Quran as:

- *Nafs Ammarah* (The lower self) – This self is prone to the lower aspects of the self, representing the negative drives in man. It can be viewed as the Freudian concept of id. In other words, it is the animalistic level of the self.
- *Nafs Lawammah* (The self-reproaching self) – corresponds to the self when it becomes aware of wrong-doing.
- *Nafs Mutmainah* (The peaceful self) – the state of inner peace and happiness, content with that which Allah is pleased with.

Given the Western definition of personality that is "the sum total of the characteristics of the individual," it is actually nowhere was this totality of the characteristics evident in writings.²⁵ Hassan Langgulung suggested that psychologists have to go beyond the physical and intellectual level to enter into spiritual and supra-conscious stages which the *Quran* and the *Sunnah* have given us evidence and support. He agreed that the human personality is tri-dimensional having physical component, a psychological part and spiritual aspects where the third part is missing in the Western theories of personality and suggest that its utilization as a model of personality development, both individually as well as collectively.

²⁵ Hassan Langgulung, "Integrated Personality and Integrated Education: A Psycho-Socio-Spiritual Approach," *Muslim Education Quarterly* 8(4) (1991): 37.

The model is an attempt to respond to the challenge of developing the total personality and the balanced growth of personality.²⁶ In one *Hadith Qudsi*, it is stated thus: “Allah has said: Whoever shows enmity to a friend of mine, I shall be at war with him. My servant does not draw nearer to me with anything more loved by me than the religious duties I have imposed on him, and my servant continues to draw near Me with *Nawafil*, so that I love him... When I love him, I am his hearing with his ears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes, and his foot with which he walks. Were he to ask something of Me, I would surely give it to him, and were he to ask refuge, I would surely grant it to him.”

Thus, this implies the stage of a person who has reached the stage of *radiyatan mardiyah*, as he is already achieved the totally developed personality. Personality development covers two aspects, namely the individual and the *ummah*.

At the individual level, the development of personality must cover three dimensions, i.e. physical, psychological and the most important part is the spiritual elements. The development of the total personality will mean the development of *insan kamil* or a perfect man.

At the level of the *ummah*, development would refer to the quality of life i.e. economy, education, etc. This is not only to have good personality but also good quality of life – balance and integrated developments. Civilizational development would be dependent upon the integration between quality human being with quality of life of a country.

The Muslims are very fortunate for having Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) as a the best role model, and a symbol for a healthy and balanced personality. The ideal human personality belonged to him. This is what the West is missing that is having no such role model as the Muslims. The importance of having a good personality is supported by the *Quran* and the *Sunnah*, as well as in their interpretations by Muslim scholars. Thus, there is a need for Muslims to have their own method or tool for assessing personality from the Islamic perspective, given that the existing personality assessment instruments are based on Western perspectives and interpretations.²⁷

²⁶ Langgulung, *Integrated Personality*, 38.

²⁷Nooraini Othman, “Exploring the Ummatic Personality Dimensions from the Psycho-Spiritual Paradigm,” *International Journal of Psychological Studies* 3(2) (2011): 42, accessed April 14, 2014, doi:10.5539/ijps.v3n2p37.

Western Perspective on Relationship between Man and the Environment

The different views from the Islamic and Western perspectives in terms of relationship between man and the environment are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Islamic and Western Perspectives on the Relationship between Man and the Environment

Islamic Perspective	Western Perspective
1. Islam is rooted in verse 29:20 of the Quran which says: "Discover the world."	1. The West believes in the law of genesis which says, "Conquer the world."
2. "Discovery of the world" is done to take lessons from those who did not manage their action well and to ponder over the marvelous creation of Allah.	2. The world is conquered to survey what natural resources it holds and what prospects are there for economic exploitation.
3. Natural resources should benefit everyone, not only selected elite.	3. The West stands for personal gain and exploitation.
4. Islam stands for restorative justice, it thus takes the future generations into consideration.	4. All the West strives to suction as much resources from the ground as possible, it is individualistic.
5. All man-made and natural disasters have divine wisdom and linked to our deeds.	5. All disasters have a logical explanation, no divine intervention.

The problem faced by the West is stated aptly below:²⁸

Today, almost everyone living in the urbanized centres of the Western world feels intuitively a lack of something in life. This is due directly to the creation of an artificial environment from which nature has been excluded to the greatest possible extent. Despite all the official clamour about the ever increasing domination over nature, and the so-called progress which is supposed to be its economic concomitant, many realize in their hearts that the castles they are building are on sand and that there is a disequilibrium between man and nature that threatens all man's apparent victory over nature. The dangers brought about by man's domination over nature are too well known to need elucidation. Nature has come to be regarded as something to be used and enjoyed to the fullest extent possible. Rather than being like a married woman from whom a man benefits but also towards whom he is responsible, for modern man nature has become like prostitute – to be benefited from without any sense of obligation and responsibility toward her. The difficulty is that the condition of prostituted nature is becoming such as to make any further enjoyment of it impossible. It is precisely the 'domination of nature' that has caused the problem of over-population, the lack of 'breathing space', the congestion of city life, the exhaustion of natural resources of all kinds, the destruction of natural beauty, the abnormal rise in mental illnesses and a thousand and one other difficulties.

Islamic Perspective on Relationship between Man and the Environment²⁹

Allah says in the *Quran* in 7:128, to the effect that: "Surely the earth belongs to Allah, and He bequeaths it to such of His servants as He pleases. An the end (is best) for the righteous."

The panorama of Allah's wonderful creation, particularly in the heavens and earth, carries within it a testimony (*shahadat*) that it is a uniquely artistic creation. The existence of completely harmonious order and arrangement within the gigantic universe, together with its life-support mechanisms and synchronized function leads us to the

²⁸ Seyyed Hossien Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (Chicago: ABC International Group, Inc, 1997), 17.

²⁹ Sustainable development, December 2005, <http://www.islam.co.za>.

belief of an All-Powerful Being, Allah, the Nourisher and Sustainer of all the worlds. Neither the huge planets that swim in outer space, nor the tiny particles of sand that lie scattered under the ocean, can deviate slightly from their course. In other words, the entire universe with its order, speaks the language of submission to the will of Allah, and implicitly asks human to do the same.

In another verse, 3:83, it is stated thus: “*And to Him submits whatever is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly, and to Him do they return.*” If the entire being the manifestation of Allah’s power, then it comes as no surprise that everything we see around has been created in due proportion and weight, both quantitatively and qualitatively. It is stated in the *Quran* in 13:8 that: “*Verily all things have We created by measure.*”

According to Islam, the universe has been created by Allah with specific purpose and for a limited time. The utilization of natural resources (*ni’matullah*) is a sacred trust invested in mankind, and considered as the right and joint property of the entire humankind. Thus, Muslims in particular have to utilize the Earth responsibly for their benefit, honestly maintain and preserve it, use it considerately and moderately, and pass it on to future generations in an excellent condition. This includes the appreciation of its beauty and handing it over in a way that realizes the worship of Allah, and not its value in terms of economic exploitation and selfish profit.

The utilization of all natural resources – land, water, air, fire, forests, oceans – are considered the right and the joint property of the entire humankind. Since he is *khalifatullah* (the vicegerent of Allah) on Earth, he should take every precaution to ensure the interests and rights of others, and regard his mastery over his allotted piece of land as a joint ownership with the next generation.

Islam views the environment as a source of life, not only for human beings but for all living organisms. This view is based on protection, and it encourages revival, construction and development. However, development does not connote modern symbols of lavish lifestyle where forests are annihilated, rivers polluted and redirected, groundwater contaminated and depleted, and societies destroyed.

When our endeavour to improve our lifestyles contributes towards the gap between the rich and poor, results in sexual licentiousness and broken homes, in delinquency and AIDS, in high rate of crime and suicide, then it is time to question such development and progress. This is not the type of progress which Islam advocates. At this

juncture, faith plays its role in controlling human misconducts. It is stated in 30:41 of the *Quran* that: “*Mischief has appeared on land and sea because of (the deed) that the hands of men have earned.*”

Allah has appointed and fixed the amount of sustenance and the abode of residence of all living beings from the day the universe was created. However, there is still poverty, mass relocations as well as, previously unheard of, man-made and natural disasters. Surely, it is not a problem with resources, as they are there in abundance. Instead, this is a problem of mismanagement. Man has abused his trust as caretaker of the environment.

The solution to all these problems then seems to lie in a proper value-system, as values influence the concepts of development as well as man’s attitude towards his environment. Islam surely provides a system of values that can be used to unravel the development issues of today. The term ethics is defined as the intrinsic control of good behaviour and in contrast to law which acts as the extrinsic control of good behavior.³⁰

In the end, we can say with all certainty that there is no peace possible among men unless there is peace and harmony with nature. And in order to have peace and harmony with nature, one must be in harmony and equilibrium with heaven, and ultimately with the Source and Origin of all things. He who is at peace with God is also at peace with all His creations, both with nature and with man.

Conclusion

For decades, the *ummah* has suffered a great humiliation and being subdued to the lowest. Not only that their territories fall into the capture of colonialization but also way of life transcending a myriad of dimensions has been equally spoilt and corrupted. According to Mahathir Mohamad, former Prime Minister of Malaysia:

The last four centuries have done us, the Muslim ummah, little credit. We have not reflected the essence of Islam which was once the pacesetter of humanity. Our future must reflect a new approach; we must have clearly crystallized ideas and well-articulated goals. We can carry out orderly and constructive

³⁰ Abu Bakar Abdul Majeed, *Bioethics: Ethics in the Biotechnology Century* (Kuala Lumpur: Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia, 2002), 51.

work only when the planning is thorough and we labor toward recognized and acceptable goals. Unfortunately, the vast majority of Muslims, including intellectuals and those involved in the Islamic movements, have overlooked what to most builders is obvious. They know they must go somewhere but they do not know exactly where to go. We must therefore plan for the future and this means we need to analyze the past and take stock of the present.

Much has been said about the calamities of the *ummah*. It is now time for everyone to put their hands together and contribute towards the betterment of the *ummah* in order to gain the pleasure of Allah. This is in conformity with the verse of the *Quran*, as stated in 61:4 which is translated thus: *“Truly Allah loves those who fight in His cause in battle array as if they were a solid cemented structure.”* On a similar matter, Allah said in 8:60 of the *Quran* to the effect that: *“Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into the enemies, of Allah and your enemies.”*

In the age of green technology, the *ummah* has to be sensitive of protecting the environmental health. Many tragedies in the world which are disastrous and hazardous to human health and conditions could perhaps come as a result of human insensitivities. We need to build the people. Human must be developed to consciously understand and appreciate their roles in promoting healthy environment. Education is certainly one of the most important tools to embed such consciousness.

Allah has created the air and water being fresh and pure. Allah also created the Earth as a habitable place for people to live in healthily. The environment is perfectly good. Human came to pollute them. It is now the responsibility of mankind to find the remedy. Biotechnology is certainly one of the sciences that could provide the solution in order to make this earth that we are living in as a life-friendly environment. We cannot in the name of technological progress destroy the “freshness” of the air and water. We cannot also reduce the quality and value of habitability for the same reason.

When we speak of education, it is not just an in school education. Education must necessarily mean the awareness and participation of the widest community – the industries, policy-makers, politicians, and civil servants to name some. Each must play their role. As an example, the industry must have in their programme the means of ensuring a healthy environment in their daily business affairs. To cite an example, their waste disposal programme must conform to the healthy environmental standard. The industry as an organization must continuously learn and implement this throughout their

activities. If necessary, this would even mean to relocate their activities far from human settlements. Education must mean the creation of consciousness and awareness as well as internalization within them to act on what ultimately is the creation of a life-friendly environment.

In conclusion, the humanity of human is presented in the best shape to realize its function being the servant of Allah and of good service to the *ummah* and finally moving towards the development of life-friendly environment.

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