

The Expansion of Human Existence in the Islamic Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Different intellectual schools have each provided their own approach to understanding the human being. Materialistic schools define humans as physical and bodily beings, limiting their existence to material and natural dimensions. In contrast, divine schools consider humans as a complex combination of spiritual and physical, or innate and natural, dimensions, although they do not equate the value of the spiritual and physical aspects. These two interpretations of human existence have significant implications in all areas related to humans, such as psychology, sociology, education, cultural studies, and the study of civilization. This study aims to analyze and discuss various aspects of human existence from the Islamic perspective through a descriptive-analytical approach. In Islam, humans are considered beings with various dimensions, unlike angels and animals, who are singularly dimensional. Animals possess only the physical aspect, and angels possess only the intellectual aspect. According to Islam, human existence consists of various dimensions, including the physical, intellectual, moral, imaginary, ethical, and spiritual aspects, among others. Understanding each of these dimensions and making proper use of them plays a vital and key role in human individual, family, and social life.

KEYWORDS: Islam, human existence, human development

INTRODUCTION

Philosophers and theologians, both divine and materialistic, have struggled throughout history to understand the human being, writing hundreds of books and articles on the subject. They all agree on the complexity of understanding the different dimensions of human existence. Some define humans as purely material beings, while others see them as a combination of spirit and body. Philosophers who consider humans as physical and material beings have proposed various analyses of the human condition, while those who believe in the divine nature of the human spirit have provided different analyses of the soul and its essence. Some consider the soul to be entirely abstract, others view it as partially abstract or semi-abstract, while others regard it as material. Some believe the soul was created before the body, while others say the soul is created when the body reaches a certain stage, and yet others argue that the soul is material during the body's creation and spiritual after its continuation. Some thinkers have claimed that humans are naturally inclined toward evil, while others believe they are inherently good, and others argue that humans are neither naturally inclined toward good nor evil, but are equal toward both. There are also those who believe that humans have tendencies toward both good and bad. Moreover, some have differentiated between nature

and innate disposition, claiming that while human nature is inclined toward bad deeds, their innate disposition (*fitrah*) is inclined toward good deeds.

The disagreements surrounding the concept of the human being demonstrate that understanding the true nature of humans is a very difficult task. It seems that the best and most accurate way to understand humans is to refer to the commandments of God and Islamic teachings. In Islam, humans are seen as beings with multiple dimensions, unlike angels and animals, who possess a single dimension. Animals only have the physical aspect, and angels only have the intellectual aspect. Human existence, from the Islamic viewpoint, includes the physical, intellectual, emotional, imaginative, aesthetic, moral, spiritual, and social dimensions, among others. It is essential for both individuals and societies to recognize and develop these various dimensions of existence.

From the perspective of Islam, a developed and perfected human is one who: 1) recognizes the dimensions of their existence and 2) is able to manage and use these dimensions correctly. Thus, in the Islamic view, a person who does not recognize or is unable to manage the dimensions of their existence is not considered developed; rather, such a person is seen as ignorant and misguided. Therefore, for the development of our existential dimensions, we must take two steps: the first step is recognizing our existential resources and dimensions, and the second step is managing and utilizing these resources effectively. The first step relates to theoretical knowledge, while the second relates to practical wisdom. It should be noted that this study primarily focuses on the first step, that is, the recognition of the resources and dimensions of human existence, while the second step, dealing with how to manage and use these resources, requires a separate study.

Part One: The Purity of Human Beings

Various definitions of humans have been presented, and here we refer to four of them and ultimately derive a more comprehensive and relevant definition based on them.

In the logical sense, humans are defined as a "speaking animal" or a "rational animal." (Hasanzadeh Omuli, 1388, p. 8) In traditional philosophy, humans are defined as "political animals" or "civitas by nature." This definition, "political animal," is regarded as one of the most important in the works of Greek philosophers. (Plato, 1374, p. 114) (Aristotle, 1371, p. 46). Islamic philosophers have also mentioned this definition as one of the philosophical definitions in their books. (Farabi, 1361, pp. 110-251; Ibn Sina, 1374, p. 114; Khawaja Nasir al-Din Tusi, 1373, p. 140).

Another definition of humans is found in mysticism. While mystics accept the logical and philosophical definition, they claim that such definitions are superficial and limited. Divine mystics regard humans as the most complete expression of the unseen and the most perfect manifestation of the Necessary Existence. (Hasanzadeh Omuli, 1392, p. 5). They believe that humans possess virtues, perfections, assets, and talents that, when fully realized, transform one into a true human being. Therefore, in the definition of humans, it is said that humans are beings endowed with numerous potentials, and when these potentials are actualized, they become true humans. If these potentials are not actualized, they remain as "rational animals." (Hasanzadeh Omuli, 1388, p. 8)

Some have defined humans as living, self-interested, and mortal beings. According to this definition, the nature of humans is defined as a synthesis of vegetal, animal, and human life, which is akin to the rational animal. (Javadi Omuli, 1385, p. 150). However, this definition's

final part, which addresses the limits of humanity, relates to self-interest; that is, self-interest related to self-awareness and the tendency to dissolve into the divinity. (Javadi Omuli, 1390, p. 17). However, since angels also possess self-interest, this raises the question of whether this definition excludes them, and it is therefore specified that mortality is mentioned in the definition to exclude angels from it. (Ibid). Others have stated: humans are beings with voluntary consciousness. (Yadollah Yazdanpanah, 1401, p. 211).

The consciousness referred to here is not absolute consciousness but intellectual consciousness, and the will is not absolute will; it refers to the concept of choice. That is, humans are beings capable of making choices, but these choices are based on thoughts. Based on the above definitions, we can conclude the following final definition of humans: "Humans are beings with various dimensions and relationships, striving to perfect these dimensions and achieve their relationships." This definition is somewhat comprehensive and limiting. It is comprehensive in the sense that it includes all of human dimensions and personality types. It is limiting in that it does not include animals and angels because they have uniform tendencies and relationships. Angels have only intellectual relationships, and animals are solely driven by physical desires, thus both are beings with singular dimensions. In contrast, humans are created with both intellectual and physical tendencies.

Section Two: The Dimensions of Human Existence in Islamic Thought

In the Islamic worldview, a human being is considered a vast creature, extending from the earth to the heavens, endowed with limitless and boundless capacities. That is, in Islamic thought, a human possesses infinite dimensions, infinite potentials, and endless possibilities for growth and perfection. Therefore, it must be emphasized that what is discussed in this section is a small fragment of the dimensions of human existence in Islam, not the entirety of human being's existence.

1. The Physical Dimension

One of the aspects of human existence is the physical dimension, and Islam places great importance on the protection of the body and maintaining its health. In fact, it can be said that in certain cases, Islamic teachings regarding hygiene and the well-being of the body are more emphasized than spiritual matters. It can also be claimed that no other school of thought has given as much attention to the physical dimension and health as Islam has.

The great Islamic philosopher, Martyr Mutahhari, says: "Islam advocates for hygiene and the nurturing of the body, although it is against indulgence in bodily pleasures in the metaphorical and literary sense. There is no doubt that Islamic teachings are based on preserving, developing, and maintaining the health of the body. The reason for the respect for many things in Islam is that they harm the human body. This is a general principle in Islam: anything that harms the human body is considered unlawful (haram). On the other hand, in many cases, the Sunnah recommends eating specific fruits or vegetables because they strengthen the teeth and remove certain illnesses from the body. These examples are common in the Sunnah, where the criterion of whether something is unlawful, recommended (mustahabb), or disliked (makruh) is based on its harm or benefit to the body. For example, something beneficial to the stomach is recommended. Therefore, from the Islamic perspective, nurturing the body in terms of hygiene, health, and strengthening it is considered a form of perfection." (Mutahhari, 1390, p. 181)

He further states: "The true nurturing of the body involves its care, strengthening, maintaining its health, and fortifying it. This is certainly praiseworthy and is nearly one of the necessities of Islam. Even the philosophy behind other aspects of cleanliness, bathing, and all the health-related commands in Islam is focused on strengthening the body. What we call indulgence is actually sensual and ego-driven pleasure. We have no doubt that Islam opposes indulgence and the pursuit of sensual pleasures. How many indulgent people weaken their bodies? A person who is indulgent (pleasure-seeking and ego-driven) and constantly seeks bodily pleasures, the first result of his actions is that he weakens and damages his body. True nurturing of the body is usually accompanied by enduring certain physical deprivations." (Ibid., p. 50)

Therefore, in Islamic thought, indulgence is not a form of physical development, but rather it is a pursuit of pleasures that harms the body, which is why Islam strongly opposes it. However, true physical development, according to Islam, involves maintaining health and hygiene and avoiding harm to the body.

In conclusion, indulgence in the sense of pursuing sensual and ego-driven pleasures is not related to the health of the body; it is detrimental to the body and against its development. That is, if a person is constantly pursuing his desires and bodily pleasures, it harms both his body and soul. A person who seeks only to gratify his stomach cannot maintain a healthy body. Instead, to maintain the body's health, one must resist overindulgence. An indulgent person will sacrifice sleep from night until morning in order to attend a luxurious gathering to satisfy his desires, which will inevitably weaken his body and sadden his soul. Islam strongly opposes such indulgence. From the Islamic perspective, nurturing the body in terms of maintaining its health and hygiene is a fundamental obligation, and causing harm to it is religiously forbidden. This aligns with the logic of Islam, which emphasizes the health and development of the body.

2. The Scientific Dimension

One of the most important aspects of human existence is the scientific dimension, which holds a special position. The noble religion of Islam views knowledge as the root of all goodness and ignorance as the root of all evils.

The Prophet of God (PBUH) said: "Knowledge is the source of all good things, and ignorance is the source of all evil." (Majlisi, 1403, vol. 74, p. 175)

The Prophet of God (PBUH) also said: "The goodness of both the world and the hereafter lies in knowledge, and the evil of both the world and the hereafter lies in ignorance." (Ibid., vol. 79, p. 170)

Imam Ali (AS) said: "Knowledge is the root of all good, and ignorance is the root of all evil." (Omid, 1374, vol. 1, pp. 818-819)

From these sayings, it becomes clear that knowledge is the root of all good deeds, and a person cannot attain any worldly or spiritual goodness unless they are aware of it. On the other hand, ignorance is the root of all evils, and without knowledge, transformation and progress in human levels of existence are impossible. Therefore, if we want peace and tranquility to prevail in society and for evil to be eradicated, we must develop the scientific dimension of society and eradicate ignorance. For the movement toward goodness and the healthy environment of society is not possible without knowledge and awareness.

Imam Ali (AS) said: "There is no movement or action except that it requires knowledge and awareness." (Haroni, 1404, vol. 1, p. 171)

Movement is linked to power and strength. A person who lacks strength and power cannot move. Knowledge is the power and strength that enables anyone who possesses it to move toward the heights of progress. However, a person and a society lacking scientific potential will become paralyzed and powerless and will have to follow the capabilities of others.

Imam Ali (AS) said: "Knowledge is power and strength; whoever acquires it will be victorious, and whoever does not will be defeated." (Ibn Abi al-Hadid, vol. 20, p. 319)

Abulqasim Ferdowsi wrote:

"He who is knowledgeable is powerful,
With knowledge, even an old heart becomes young.
Learn and listen from every wise one,
You will find peace from every learned one.
Whoever gains wealth through knowledge,
Their actions will be better than their speech.
With knowledge, a man gains honor,
Without knowledge, avoid boasting of strength.
Listen to my advice,
The words of the wise bring benefit.
Do not despair of learning,
If you wish to ignite your soul."

In summary, scientific development is the foundation and basis of all transformations and progress in both individuals and societies. If a person wants to develop in various dimensions of life, they must acquire adequate knowledge. Progress is impossible without knowledge and awareness. A person or a society with weak scientific dimensions will be stagnant and powerless and will lack the ability to move toward the peaks of advancement. Therefore, we have no other option but to develop our knowledge and understanding. The path to knowledge development involves two steps: the first step is to recognize both internal and external scientific resources. In the second step, one must utilize these resources for personal scientific growth. Thus, a person or a society that does not recognize its scientific resources, or recognizes them but fails to use them correctly, is not truly developed in the realm of knowledge and wisdom.

3. Intellectual Dimension

One of the other aspects of human existence that requires growth and development is the intellectual dimension of humans. The intellect is one of humanity's greatest assets. In a sense, it can be said that one of the main goals of the mission of divine prophets (a) was to cultivate and develop the intellectual dimension of humanity.

Imam Ali (AS) has defined the reason for the mission of the divine prophets as: bringing people back to their human nature, which is accompanied by honor and dignity; reminding them of forgotten blessings from God and awakening their intellects. (Ibn Abil-Hadid, Vol. 1, p. 113)

In the Holy Quran, there are more than 300 verses in which God calls humanity to intellect and reasoning. This shows the special attention that Islam gives to the growth and development of the intellectual dimension of humanity.

For the development of the intellectual dimension, first: a person must gain awareness of intellectual processes. Second: they must benefit from all of these processes in their appropriate place. Therefore, merely recognizing intellectual processes is not enough; one must also benefit from them in order to improve this world and achieve happiness in the afterlife. In this way, a person will intellectually develop.

The intellect possesses various powers and abilities, such as the power of analysis, which is called analytical intellect; the power of description, which is called descriptive intellect; the power of reasoning, which is called reasoning intellect; the power of planning, which is called strategic intellect; the power of witnessing, which is called witnessing intellect; the power of worship, which is called devotional intellect; the power of synthesis, which is called synthesizing intellect, and so on. These are intellectual resources within us that we must be aware of and use for our own development and that of society.

Among the intellectual processes in the scientific domain and in the interpretation of religious matters, reasoning intellect is used more frequently, while other intellectual abilities are less utilized. For example, strategic intellect holds a special place.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said about strategic intellect: "There is no intellect like the intellect of a planner." (Ibn Majah, Vol. 2, p. 1410)

The task of strategic intellect is to understand the priorities of life. In other words, the strategic intellect decides that this advice is good, and that advice is better; this advice is bad, and that advice is worse; this time is appropriate for doing a certain task, and another time is not. In conclusion, strategic intellect is concerned with identifying the best advice and the best time.

Imam Ali (AS) said about strategic intellect: "A wise person is not one who can distinguish between good and bad, but one who can distinguish the greater benefit between two benefits." (Muhammad ibn Talhah Shafi'i, p. 183). This means that being wise is related to having strategic intellect. A person with strong reasoning intellect but who cannot understand the priorities of life is not considered wise in the logic of Islam. Likewise, a person with witnessing intellect but who cannot understand the wisdom of life is not wise according to Islam. Similarly, someone who has synthesizing intellect but cannot understand life's priorities is not considered wise. Therefore, in Islamic logic, a wise person is one who can understand the priorities of life and the priorities of servitude to God. Thus, strategic intellect should be prioritized, and it should be nurtured and developed in educational institutions.

4. Imaginative Dimension

The imaginative dimension is one of the most important and remarkable aspects of human existence, and a person must recognize this valuable asset and use it for personal and societal growth. The role of imagination is to illustrate and visualize intellectual meanings. Whether in the descent (downward movement) or ascent (upward movement), the intellect finds and uncovers partial and total meanings, and the power of imagination shapes these meanings. Thus, the work of imagination is the visualization of the meanings discovered by the intellect. The philosopher and contemporary mystic Allama Hasanzadeh says: "The power of imagination is linked to the creation and reflection of meanings, just as the power of sight is linked to seeing, and the power of hearing is linked to listening, and similarly, other external and internal powers are linked to their respective tasks." (Hasanzadeh Amuli, 1388, p. 65)

If imagination is governed by sound intellect and managed properly, it can have a significant impact on the upbringing and development of a person's level. However, if it is under the influence of a corrupt intellect and worldly desires, it can lead to misleading thoughts.

The contemporary Islamic philosopher Jawadi Amuli says: "If imagination is under the guidance of the intellect and purified from material concerns and illusions, it will become a vessel for acquiring knowledge and spiritual understanding and will help one gain access to the world of ideas, becoming a tool for perceiving truths. A mind that obeys the intellect is true, and one that obeys desires is false." (Jawadi Amuli, 1386, p. 74)

The power of imagination can be used in many fields, especially in strengthening thoughts and ethics. For example, one can visualize the beauties of paradise and the punishments of hell, as described in the Quran, through the power of imagination. Or, one can use imagination to distinguish between good actions and bad ones.

For example, God says in the Quran: "Gossip is like eating the flesh of your brother." (Surah Al-Hujurat, verse 12) Or, eating the wealth of orphans is like eating fire. (Surah An-Nisa, verse 10)

There are many verses where God describes the blessings of paradise and the punishments of hell, and all of the examples He gives in the Quran are meant to inspire and develop the power of imagination.

The arts, such as screenwriting, novel writing, painting, music, and others, are also influenced by the power of imagination. An artist with a healthy imagination can guide and direct the emotions of society in the right direction. On the other hand, an artist without a healthy imagination can lead society to engage in trivial and misguided issues, deviating from the path of reason. Therefore, the imaginative dimension of human existence is one of the most important and great assets that a person can use for their own development and for society.

5. The Belief Dimension

The belief or faith dimension is one of the most fundamental aspects of human existence, which, if properly nurtured and managed, is unmatched in the holistic development of individuals. The evolution of the belief dimension leads to the creation of values in a person, and the divine prophets (peace be upon them) would first bring about the spiritual development of society before instilling other values (Muttaqi Hindi, 1401, Vol. 12, p. 451). In the Islamic view, no action can lead to human development without faith, and no faith is complete without action. In other words, humans need both the beauty of intentional action and the beauty of deeds for their development. For this reason, in the Qur'an, faith is often mentioned alongside righteous deeds (Surah Al-Baqarah, verses 25, 84, 277; Surah Aal-E-Imran, 57; Surah An-Nisa, 57, 122, 173; Surah Muhammad, 2, 12; Surah Al-Asr, 3).

The essential components of faith include belief in God, belief in the prophets of God, and belief in the afterlife. The growth and development of the belief dimension lie in first: correctly understanding the elements of faith, and second: using them to develop ourselves and society. For instance, we should recognize God and believe in Him, and use our belief in Him to improve our lives. Of course, belief in God should be comprehensive and inclusive. That is, a believer should perceive God as present and observant in all aspects of their personal, family, and social life—not just in their private life but also in their social life. In other words, the faith that Islam speaks of is not secular or minimalistic; rather, it is a faith that should permeate all human relationships. Whether in relation to oneself, family, society, or history, such a faith

expands the soul of a person and adds joy to their life. Therefore, humans must recognize the prophets of God and the afterlife, believe in them, and utilize these great assets of faith to purify their lives. Islam's perspective on belief in the divine prophets and the afterlife is also maximalist, not minimalistic or isolated. People often struggle with the second pillar of faith, meaning they cannot utilize their faith for their own development or the development of society. Many people believe, but they lack spiritual development, because spiritual growth requires the ability to manage the power of faith and properly benefit from it.

6. The Ethical Dimension

One of the other dimensions of human existence is the ethical dimension. This dimension is so significant that the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) considered the goal of his mission to be the cultivation of the ethical dimension of humanity: "Indeed, I was sent to perfect good character" (Muttaqi Hindi, 1401, Vol. 3, p. 16). If the ethical dimension of a person truly evolves and matures, the family and social environment will improve. For this reason, Islam has placed special emphasis on the ethical development of individuals. Many of the personal, familial, and social problems in modern life are related to the decline or absence of ethical values. Ethical values such as piety and God-consciousness, chastity and purity, love and affection, selflessness and sacrifice, patience and endurance, modesty, gratitude, reliance on God, loyalty, honor, humility, courage, and others are crucial ethical assets that are highly impactful in improving the family and social environment.

For example, if selflessness and sacrifice, as an ethical value, are highlighted in society and widely accepted, becoming part of the public culture, the culture of stinginess and greed will disappear, and many material and spiritual problems will be resolved. Or, if the culture of chastity and purity takes root in a society, many familial and social harms will be eliminated. Because a person can prevent themselves from engaging in divine prohibitions through chastity, such as avoiding illicit sexual behavior, forbidden food (known as the chastity of the stomach), forbidden sights (the chastity of the eyes), and forbidden speech (the chastity of the tongue). Many familial and social harms arise from the failure to control speech, such as falsehood, slander, incitement of discord, and so on, which we often observe in social media today. Therefore, if chastity, as an ethical value, is realized and practiced, many familial and social problems will be alleviated.

Humanity today faces a severe ethical crisis, which has manifested in familial and social relations. Therefore, to heal the foundation of the family and society, there is no alternative but to develop the ethical dimension and bring ethical values to the forefront.

Summary

In the Islamic worldview, humans are remarkable beings, stretching from the earth to the highest realms. Humans possess infinite and boundless capacities. That is, a person has endless potential, limitless dimensions, an ongoing state of becoming, and the ability to achieve endless perfection. Unlike materialist schools, which define humans purely as physical and material entities and limit their lives to the material aspect, the continuation of human life in the material realm is contradictory. This way of thinking is a great injustice to humanity, and slowly but surely, it manifests in various aspects of personal, familial, and social life. This study discusses six dimensions of human existence in the Islamic school of thought, briefly exploring them: physical, intellectual, cognitive, imaginative, spiritual, and ethical dimensions. Each of these dimensions, if developed and perfected, has a remarkable impact on improving the

environment of life. However, it must be noted that what is presented in this research is only a small part of the human existence dimensions in Islam, not the entirety of human existence.

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