Nature of Man in Islam

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to examine the meaning of humankind in relation to the rest of creation, while drawing from a variety of perspectives. There are a myriad of differing theories about the place and purpose of human beings, however there are two major approaches which are at the forefront of this discussion. The first is that the human being is merely created in this world, subjugated to the laws of the universe, and is open to development but they are mortal and limited with a determined life span. The alternative approach is that, as well as being a physical being, humans are spiritual beings with a unique capacity to connect them with the Divine-Eternal Being – a unique quality beyond the scope of nature, life, and intellect. The premise of this paper concludes that humanity’s ability to attain an exalted status over the entirety of creation is not merely a result of their physical capacity, but their metaphysical faculties has given them the potential to connect with the Divine-Eternal Being.

Keywords: Human Nature, Human Identity, Meaning, Universe

Introduction

To date, scholars from different fields have attempted to describe and discuss the existence of the human race and their presence on earth in order to find a proper meaning for their true identity – their place and purpose. In Greek philosophy, sophists placed human beings at the centre of their philosophy and produced many theoretical approaches to identify their essence; which paved way too many scholarly contentions. Since in the dawn of human history, arguably all monotheistic traditions has defined human beings as the best art of God, created with the Divine “hand”, unique and with a special capacity unlike any other beings. The opponents put forward contrary theories deeming humans as part of nature and claiming that human beings are the result of evolution. Because according to the findings of modern physics, our solar system has a tiny place in space and humankind is one kind of species among countless other species. Hence there are countless kinds of species in the universe and this fact enforces the scholars to think about the position and importance of human being in relation to the rest of creation.

Different Views on Human Nature

Anthropologists hold that there is nothing unique about human beings because they have varying identities (and/or egos). For them, the identity is very flexible and can be shaped by culture and history. In other words, the identity or ego of a human being is relative and it is determined with the conditions of culture and time. Human beings are not considered to have any permanent and stable essence. According to this view, a human being is an object whose identity is constituted by other external agencies. The other approach maintains that the essence of the human ego is different from its physical elements. Such an identity is imprinted in their nature by God and is not a mere outcome of external effects only.

In the modern world, instead of trying to refute the meaningless worldview, scholars directly focus on humankind and try to understand their identity based on their abilities. German

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1 Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man (a Christian interpretation), Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York, 1945, pp. 1-2; see also the Surahs al-Baqara 30-33, Hijr 26-40, and al-Furqan 54-55.
3 Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, p. 3.
philosopher Kant holds that the enlightening of mankind depends on intellect, knowledge and rational freedom. He does not deem human beings as being solely of the intellect; rather he gives importance to their sentimental and experimental sides. Another German thinker Schopenhauer explains human beings from the point of view of their feelings.

In the Marxist view, human being is deemed economic entity who works hard to achieve their goals. For F. Nietzsche, man/woman is an entity who is only bound to their natural instincts, and morality should be established upon this view. Their conduct is motivated by their nature but they also do certain things on the basis of belief, and this belief has a greater effect on their life. For example, if one is left to choose one of the two options of either eating his/her sacred animal to survive, surely there will be some people who would prefer to die instead of eating their sacred animal. Existentialists define human identity as the sum of their acts, deeds and thoughts. For them, the most important criteria to define human ego is the desire to exceed the determining (or deterministic) social and cultural conditions on their nature.

Some scholars assumed human being as a machine until half a century ago and they claimed that if the right data is uploaded into this machine, a happy future is attainable. They imagined the utopian future by using good techniques to lead humans to a paved direction and direct them towards certain thoughts. However, it became clear in time that human nature is not as simple as they claimed. From Islamic perspective God relates Himself to the creation on the sound basis of logical and rational which is through logical deduction. However, this deduction necessitates certain preconditions like capacity and intellect. One of the bases for discovering reality is the primordial human nature (fitrah) itself, since the fitrah can obtain information about such reality through the scope and mechanisms of its own nature.

On another light some scholars deem the salvation of human beings totally dependent upon God’s grace and mercy. For them, human being has no capacity or an effective will to save themselves, rather it is God who saves them. Similarly, the Islamic sect Jabariyya holds that people have no real free will; for they are all driven by the compelling force of the Divine Will. Both approaches deny the capacity and abilities of human being and almost inadvertently promote a rather the fatalist view. It is conceded that without God’s mercy mankind cannot save themselves, but God has endowed them with free will, conscience, intellect, and other capabilities. Consequently, they have the ability make their own choices and it is to this therefore that God will account them for. If this responsibility of making choices based on the given capacities that human beings have is ignored and salvation is completely determined by God without considering human’s free choices, then the importance and position of humankind on earth will be totally undermined (to a mere orchestrated object whose lived out a predetermined robotic script).

For Qur’anic view, however, God endowed humankind a capacity to overcome all difficulties and struggle against their evil carnal desires albeit the reality that all those feelings, desires necessary for the survival of the human being, are not given in exact proportion and balance with their pure primordial nature. Nonetheless, they have willpower to control them and utilize them in a beneficial way. For this reason, God has made them responsible for their conduct. If they did not have the capacity to discern between good and bad regardless of the

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8 Liliane Frey-Rohn, Daimon Verlag, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, Zürich, 1984, pp. 39, 68.
conditions of time and culture, their responsibility for every conduct would be meaningless, because they would be subjugated to the conditions of their time and could not use their free will to discern against them.

Although the theories about the nature of man may vary nevertheless they can be addressed within the two general categories; the first is that humankind is created in this world, subjugated to the laws of the universe, and is open to development but they are mortal and limited with a certain life time. The alternative approach is that as well as being a physical being, humans are spiritual beings with unique capacity that connects them to the Divine-Eternal Being, this quality being outside of the scope of nature, life and intellect.

Human Nature in the Qur’an

The prominent Islamic intellectual Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) rejects the aforementioned fatalist theory (of man being a mere physical agency) on the grounds that such approach ignores the immense capacity of humankind. According to Iqbal, in the Qur’an God commands humans to fight against their evil thoughts and desires. This command is not intended to destroy the ego; rather it is to foster a deeper, inner strengthening of its given will which can then defeat evil. Such outlook rejects the idea of passive submission and requires an active and wilful obedience. Iqbal further argues that when the ego matures in accordance with the potential of its nature, then it becomes the beloved one and fulfils its duties according to the will of God. With this ego human beings recognize God’s creative power at deeper levels. After giving this praiseworthy capacity to human beings, God set the goals for them and encouraged them to represent the character of God (khulq al-Allah) in the human dimension. So human beings can be elevated to an honourable, lofty position and represent the names and attributes of God within their own states.

When we examine the Qur’an we see that the essence of the human being is explained in two levels; in the first level, humans are addressed with the Arabic word ‘bashar’ which refers to his physical being. The other reference is ‘insan’ which defines human’s metaphysical nature. While their physical component binds human beings to the system set in nature by God, their metaphysical nature enables them to be the best representatives of God on earth from the point of view to reflect Divine names and attributes.

When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit mankind’s adventure started on earth and the essence of time which was previously monotonous changed for them and it became good versus evil, beauty versus ugliness etc. for them. God taught the names of all things to Adam and with this knowledge and understanding of their meanings Adam gained metaphysical qualities and characteristics beyond his physical self. After this endowment, bashar (which refers to the physical side of humans) developed into insan (which is the metaphysical aspect of humans) at a conscious and cognitively apt level. Following this event, Adam’s private parts became apparent to him (referring to his morality). After this freedom to disobey God, humankind have started to act with their free will and were given the ability for happiness, disobedient and to implore to God to be forgiven. From that moment, the notion of time has been evaluated according to their good or evil acts and it lost its meaning as the real reason for existence or non-existence for them. The result of their creation was free but responsible beings. The Qur’an explains their creation and achievement of high status in the following verses;

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“Remember (when) your Lord said to the angels: ‘I am setting on the earth a vicegerent.’ The angels asked: ‘Will you set therein one who will cause disorder and corruption on it and shed blood, while we glorify You with Your praise (proclaim that You are absolutely free from any defect and that all praise belongs to You exclusively,) and declare that You alone are all-holy and to be worshipped as God and Lord.’ He said: ‘Surely I know what you do not know.’ (Having brought him into existence, God) taught Adam the names, all of them. Then (in order to clarify the supremacy of humankind and the wisdom in their being created and made vicegerent on the earth), He presented them (the things and beings, whose names had been taught to Adam, with their names) to the angels, and said, ‘Now tell Me the names of these, if you are truthful (in your praising, worshipping, and sanctifying Me as My being God and Lord deserves).’ (In acknowledgement of their imperfection, and their perception of the truth of the matter, the angels) said: ‘All-Glorified You are (in that You are absolutely above having any defect and doing anything meaningless, and Yours are all the attributes of perfection). We have no knowledge save what You have taught us. Surely You are the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.’ (In order to demonstrate the superiority of humankind more clearly, God) said: ‘O Adam, inform them of these things and beings with their names.’ When he (Adam) informed them with their names, He said (to the angels), ‘Did I not tell you that I know the unseen of the heavens and the earth, and I know all that you reveal and all that you have been concealing?’”

Muhyiddin ibn ‘Arabî, the great Sufi master of the thirteenth century, defines that among the reflections of God in the universe the human being is the most polished and capable mirror which shows God.18 For him, humankind consists of two parts; the first part is Haqq (the ultimate reality) and the second part is ‘alâm (the universe). The physical component is ‘alâm and the spiritual or metaphysical component is the image of God (surah al-Rahman) which is strongly related with the spirit that God has breathed into the body.19

This theory explains both the goal of creation and also vicegerency of humankind who has the free will, conscience, intellect and knowledge. According to this definition, human being is not only the most capable mirror which reflects God to the best of his or her potential but also an index to the entire universe. For this reason he even names every person as a unique universe, a microcosm. So, God manifest His names, attributes and essential qualities in the universe but also in every human nature therefore the universe and human nature are two separate mirrors which reflect and indicate the Divine. For this reason, Muslim Sufî scholars deem every human being as a unique universe.20 The unique elements which give them this high status are related to their metaphysical nature and in particular the human capacity for knowledge and its attainment. With this capacity they are able to approach almost everything in the universe and as well as the names, attributes and essential qualities of God.

According to the Qur’ân, mankind has some responsibilities towards their Creator and also to the other beings. Thus, God gave them the capacity to carry out their duties. The Qur’ân rejects those theories which impede thought and responsible action and rather promotes the understanding of the exalted value that human beings have been created for – the representative of God on earth. It emphasizes the achievement of a perfected ego is only possible by actualizing its innate capacities and unleashing them. With perfected ego they can contribute towards a matured appreciation of the universe. The history of humankind is indicative of such capacities that were proven through the ages and continual levels of human progress across times.

17 Qur’ân 2: 30-33.
19 ibn Arabî, Fusûsu’l-Hikam, p. 55.
The Effect of Culture on Human Nature

Human beings are shaped in the culture in which they live. Across the many disciplines from social sciences to psychology there has been age-old debate between nature vs nurture. There seems to be a symbiotic relationship between man and its immediate environ and/or culture; while they influence culture, culture also contributes to their nature. Culture is the product of human conducts, thoughts, feelings and all their achievements. We use the language of our own culture when we speak and think. Our world view is strongly interrelated with our culture. When we investigate the history we see that man is represented in every aspect of life, every school of thought and every kind of art.\(^{21}\) For this reason, there is no escape or isolation from one’s culture. Human civilization however is the outcome of human intellect. This includes Divine guidance and revelation, because it is also related to human capacity and uniqueness as they have capacity to receive revelation and be guided by God. Culture is directly related to humans but civilization is about producing, managing and progressing. In other word, culture is changing the identity continuously but civilization is developing the conditions of life without stopping.\(^{22}\)

Opposing to monotheist understanding Marx and Engels reject the notion of Divine guidance and pay attention to the words, imaginations and perceptions of mankind for they are the means for knowledge and truth.\(^{23}\) They hold that the products invented by humans are the indication of their theoretical (or only intellectual endeavours) development.\(^{24}\) However, humankind sometimes may go beyond the borders of their culture or the development of their time and they can produce very advanced products, even though they do not use expensive tools or mediums to achieve this success.\(^{25}\) For instance, Copernicus, Galileo and Newton did not use expensive or advanced tools to be successful. Newton discovered gravity through the simple experience of an apple falling from a tree. So, scientists must be free from the biases or obstacles that cloud thought and intellect; they should investigate everything ethically and with moral scrutiny and express their ideas through their empirical/rational studies.\(^{26}\) For the prominent scholar Al-Attas in education of mankind body and soul as well as spiritual and physical environment should be considered together.\(^{27}\) Comprehensive vision is needed to satisfy their needs and actualize their capacity in modern world.\(^{28}\)

The scholars who deem humans not only as physical but also as ethical agencies hold that free will can fulfil the mission of a moral system independently. If a person has self-esteem they can control their feelings and avoid negative conduct on their own. With this opinion they maintain that humans have integrity, honesty and sincerity. Hence, they can manage to live their life without having help from the church or the priests.\(^{29}\) As a result, for them, sin is forgiven by man, human is loved by another human and everyone is saved without the need for a divine.\(^{30}\)

\(^{23}\) Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, p. 47
There are various elements such as free will, spirit and intellect to constitute human nature. In order to deduce the whole picture of human identity these elements must be analysed well. The sciences which have been developed in history are the result of human thoughts and efforts. Interestingly, the sciences, in turn, contribute to the constitution of human identity and their world views. Understanding human being depends on understanding the essential elements of human identity and their development in time, culture and its surrounding conditions. The cultural sciences primarily deal with the products of human intellect and their achievements. One of the essential elements of human identity is the notion of belief and its effect on life. This fact necessitates corroboration between the human sciences and religious sciences.

**Effort of Cognitivist Man**

Human being has been struggling to understand their role on earth and also the meaning of the universe. The inquisitive human mind has been the source of discovery for meaning, purpose as it has navigated the earth. Even among the first nations there was an effort to understand the world and its origin. There are usually three types of answers for this question: a) eternal world, b) temporary world created in a certain time frame, c) world in continuous evolution.\(^{31}\) The question about the nature of the universe, “does it have meaning, goals and value or is it isolated from all these and being neutral?” has great importance in the effort of mankind to understand themselves and the nature surrounding them. In the western world the universe is isolated from its values, meanings and symbols; accordingly, it is only a subject of descriptive science.\(^{32}\) In this perspective, God is excluded from nature and the universe is deprived of any theological connotations.

Understanding nature has two bases: cosmology and life.\(^{33}\) The notion of a created world in a certain time frame which has an end gets its basis from monotheistic religions. In this view, God has absolute power and created humans in the center of universe and made them the most honourable beings among all His creation. However, this paradigm has been questioned by J. P. Sartre, Albert Camus and F. Kafka during the 20\(^{th}\) century\(^ {34}\) because for them there was no set of laws which enabled harmony on earth before humankind, rather they are created later. For this reason, there are no pre-existing natural laws which humankind must adopt, no divine goal or objectives to be achieved. B. Russel states this notion as follows:

Man is determinist result of causality and they do not have goals to achieve in the earth. Their origin, existence, hopes, fears, love and faiths are the random result of atoms. No heroism, thought or feelings can pass beyond the grave. Every conduct, vow, inspiration and discoveries are bound to die in the Solar system.\(^ {35}\)

To view existence in a meaningful way requires a meaningful view about mankind and their nature. Accepting blind coincidence and deeming mankind as a result of evolution do not satisfy the needs of human nature. For the intellect and rationale faculties continue to be in search for the truth.

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\(^{34}\) Griffin, *God and Religion in the Postmodern World*, p. 17.

Religious Approach to Human Nature

Theology, parallel to social sciences, explains God, nature and human being with its own concepts and establishes the meaningful connection among them. Some scholars reject theology and its importance for people, because they offer an alternative world view for them. On the other hand, the Qur’ān puts this world next to the other world and explains success as prosperity in both worlds because there is no separation between this worldly and other worldly, religion and science, or belief and life.30 In order to achieve this, the Qur’ān encourages human beings to utilize their capacities and abilities at the highest level. So, religion establishes a connection between nature and life; therefore, it is not only theoretical but also practical for it conveys our responsibilities at various levels such as individual, family, and social and regulates the relationships in and among them. In short, Islam argues that without Divine guidance, providing real justice and attaining the harmony among humankind is not possible.

When the names and attributes that are used for defining humans in the Qur’ān are taken into consideration, understanding human nature and their importance become easier. The basis of this view is a validated responsibility. An examination of the Qur’ān reveals that many names and attributes of God are also used to define human beings. For example the names Rahim (merciful), ‘Alim (the one who knows), Başır (the one who sees), Qadîr (Mighty) and many more are used in the Qur’ān for God and also for humankind as attributes. With this expression we do not mean to associate humans as partners to God, rather try to understand the place and responsibility of mankind in the light of those names and attributes. In this paradigm, theology does not only focus on God, but it also focuses on human nature.37

Traditionally, within some Islamic theological school of thought theology over-emphasized the notion of God and their neglect in explaining the mission of man in the realm of existence has brought many problems with it.38 As a result, they isolated human beings from their freedom and responsibility. They deemed humans as secondary and subjugated to God in every respect. This view weakened the notion of responsibility and the mission of actualizing human capacity to its full potential. God gave authority to man, but it is taken away by fatalist scholars such as Jabariya sect and also who follow similar doctrines. This paradigm resulted in constituting a submissive ego that is powerless in the face of difficulties and challenges. The mission of vicergerency and establishing justice on earth on behalf of God is taken away from humankind. With this view, man lost his creative power which would change the world and thus became weak, ignorant and wrong doer.

According to the Qur’ān man represents the Divine names and attributes in his dimension. This status is given by God to fulfil a very important mission, not to be a rival to God. In this view, there is encouragement to utilize the human potential according to Divine guidance and carry out the responsibilities with the dynamism that is intended for human development. However, the free and active man, instead of achieving his objective goal, tries to find a natural or supernatural power to hand over this mission. When the notion of freedom and feeling of responsibility became heavy on man’s shoulders he tried to get rid of them.39 Nevertheless he is obliged to choose to be human. No matter what the result of this preference is, being human is the highest rank of creation in the universe.

37 B.Spinoza, Tractatus Theologico-Politicus, tr. Hasan (Risāla fi ’l-lâhîta wa ’s-siyâsa), Egypt undated, p.13.
Meaning and Value of Humankind

**Insan (Human)**

In the Qur’ān the word *insan* is used in the derivative forms of “*ins*,” “*nās*,” and “*anāsiy*” and the root word has the opposite meaning to hatred. The words also mean to perceive, to recognize, to feel and to be familiar. *Insan* is defined by the early scholars as “the speaking being.” It is also defined as being “the one who forgot their promise.” Another word to define human is the Arabic word *adam* which refers the prototype of mankind and their essence. There is a dispute about the root word of *adam*; some holds that it is derived from *udma* which means dark-skinned or from *adama* which means type, example, or from *udm* meaning familiarity and harmony. The soil from which mankind is created is expressed as *adimât ul ard*. Another key word which is used in the Qur’ān to define human is the Arabic word *bashar* which means “skin.” This word conveys the meaning of man or woman either in singular or plural forms. Human being is defined by the Sufi masters as “a sacred being who represents the names of God.”

The science of anthropology which studies human beings consists of two words: *anthropos* (human) and *logos* (theory). This science investigates the root of man and where and how they came to the earth, the races, their conduct, in short everything related to human beings. Scholars used the following words to define human nature; *homo loquax* (speaking being), *homo sapiens* (wise man), *homo faber* (doer man) and *homo patheticos* (hearing man). These words indicate the rational, experiential and sentimental aspects of mankind.

Theology explains man’s belief, identity, nature, character, conduct and responsibility while anthropology interprets their life experiences in different societies. According to anthropology humankind is part of nature and has existed through evolution. However, theology rejects this understanding and today there are many debates about it. According to other modern approach man is perceived as an unimportant object that is a result of a mathematical system. Contrary to this notion, in Islamic thought, man is the only being who resembles God from the point of view of His names and attributes but not from the point of His Essence. The basis of this notion is that, God created very capable being who can appreciate His works and understand His names and attributes manifest through the entire universe.

The contemporary Islamic scholar Gulen states that God is understood best by the perfect man (*insan al-kāmil*), because they are the brightest mirror of God’s Acts, Names, Attributes, and even His Essential Qualities that qualify Him as God. The perfect man is understood by the scholars differently; for the philosophers such as Fārābī (d. 950) and Ibn Sinā (d. 1037), he is the first intellect, the universal intellect, the comprehensive word, the encompassing point; for the Sufis, man is the guide who leads to the truth, the perfecting one and the greatest cure. Being the essence, the voice and translator of the entire existence, he not only demonstrates “the Hidden

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49 Ibid.
Treasure” (the Divine Being) in all realms of existence and connects everything to the Divine Being, but he is also an articulate expression of the Being that is in the depth of his consciousness and the richness of his nature. This notion is the interpretation of the following hadith: “I (God) was Hidden Treasure and I wanted to be known, therefore I created the worlds”. Those who bring to the fore such innate potential and utilize their capacities at the highest level can understand God best. Similarly, others can understand their position and goals on earth in proportion to the realizations of their potentials. The perfect man is the perfect example for all humanity and he constitutes the ideal model for humankind to be happy both here and in the hereafter. He always practises the best moral values, good character and helps others in their journey to attaining perfection just like him.

The perfection for humankind is about purifying the spirit, cleansing the carnal desires with Divine guidance, developing and actualizing their capacities, controlling and disciplining their negative feelings and achieving tranquillity by representing the character of God in the human dimension. Since the perfect man is a comprehensive mirror to God’s Existence and His Essential Qualities, he is a summary or index of all existence; it is highly probable that this is one of the reasons why angels were commanded to prostrate before the first perfect, universal man, Prophet Adam. Mankind are Caliph (the vicegerent) of God on earth, who is intended to observe and know the meaning of this universe and therefore they are responsible to provide and attain justice on behalf of God. Additionally they have great compassion and capacity which can embrace everyone in need of attention.

Human beings have both earthly and heavenly aspects to them; they are like the wolves of the earth and angels of the heaven. Their feelings are not in balance and harmony. Their nature is not only about deep realities, distinguished capacities but also frightening deviations and the most evil corruptions. In other words, the nature of man consists of morality (virtue) and evilness (vice) together. This approach is parallel to the following Qur’anic descriptions:

By the human selfhood and that (All-Knowing, All-Powerful, and All-Wise One) Who has formed it to perfection and Who has inspired it with the conscience of what is wrong and bad for it and what is right and good for it. He is indeed prosperous who has grown it in purity (away from self-aggrandizing rebellion against God) and he is indeed lost who has corrupted it (in self-aggrandizing rebellion against God)

These verses explain that man has two contradicting sides; carnal and spiritual. Man’s carnal, or physical component is the basis for all kinds of blameworthy conduct and his spiritual component represents the rational and moral side of man. Natural instincts of mankind provide some benefits to them therefore they are necessary, but sometimes they may be in conflict with the intellect and morality. However, these negative feelings or elements in human nature cannot be the basis for debasing them. In order to understand human nature better the Qur’anic concept of “nafs” (selfhood) should be addressed here.

The Concept of Nafs (Selfhood)

The concept of nafs (selfhood) refers to (part of the mechanism within the human identity that is meant to facilitate self-awareness). Nafs has negative and positive faculties and its happiness is dependent upon which side would prevail in their identity. Each side of nafs (positive and negative) has its own capacity and power. Human desires have the capacity to perceive and

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55 Gulen, ibid, p. 286.
57 Gulen, ibid, p. 287.
58 Gulen, Ibid.
59 Qur’an 91:7-10.
60 N. Muhammad Attas, Prolegmana to the Metaphysics of Islám, Malaysia: ISTAC, 1993, p. 163.
motivate. The motivating faculty is composed of desires, lust and the anger. The perceiving capacity is related to the external world and it constitutes the five senses. Besides the five external senses there are also five internal senses which understand, separate or complete the meanings of the images that come through external senses and they also memorize these meanings and comprehend their content with logical reasoning.

In religious terminology, nafs is the origin of certain states or faculties such as lust, anger, ill-will, grudge, hatred, and irritation, and it is a transformable, reformable, and refinable mechanism connected to human corporeality. There is continuous connection between the body and the soul and because of such connection human beings perceive, recognize, understand, feel; they can make connections with metaphysical realms through these faculties. Any experience that happens in the spirit has an effect on the body. This effect motivates it to certain direction. For example, thinking about food may cause the body to produce feeling of eating. Unfortunate events which bring distress to the spirit may cause some physical illnesses on the body. Similarly, if evil or unseemly thoughts prevail the spirit it may then lead the body towards such behaviours. The decision between positive and negative faculties of nafs is left for human beings, so they will choose what to be.

The rational faculties of nafs represent the capacity of acting, motivating and comprehending. The motivating faculty works as an intellect and it is the essential part of human conduct. This is practical reasoning and controls acts to be in harmony with the theoretical intellect. To desire or to avoid something directs free will to act in certain way, and this is related to natural aspect of nafs; this side is a source of human feelings. The perceptive faculty consists of imagination and predicting. This part of nafs manages physical objects and it is the basis of the artistic capacity in human nature. When the rational faculty is involved in human acts the intellect has the potential to comprehend cause-and-effect together and such discernment can result in moral conduct. However, if nafs is under the effect of negative feelings, the spirit suffers from it. Despite its satanic characteristics such as haughtiness, arrogance, egotism, jealousy, injustice, and enmity, the soul has a fundamental potential to rise to the highest rank of humanity if man leaves arrogance and turns to God in worship and prayer and seeks refuge in Him from the potential evils in their nature.

The Muslim philosopher Kindī (d. 873) holds that nafs is pure and honourable element and with this approach he is different than other Muslim thinkers, because they usually deem nafs bad, evil or source of all evil conducts;

“Nafs is honourable and effective; its value is great. Its honour comes from its Creator as the light of sun comes from the sun directly. Even though nafs has some negative faculties, still its essence is free from material. It is spiritual and holy. Sometimes negative feelings may urge man to do bad things but nafs prevents them like a cavalry who controls a wild horse with leash.”

Nafs has a critical function in the development of human character; it is like a mainspring allowing them to rise from being only potentially human to true humanity. It continuously keeps human beings busy, without allowing them rest. This continuous struggle against its negative characteristics is intended to strengthen the will power, determination and morality of people. That which makes human experience unique within the notion of ego or identity is acknowledged by the Qur’an as being the trust, or amanah:

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61 Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Kitābu’s Shīfā, Cairo, 1975, p. 33; Kitābu’n Najāt, Beirut, 1985, pp. 197-198.
62 Ibn Sina, Shīfā, p. 33-34; Najāt, p. 198.
64 Al-Attas, Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islām, Malezya Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: ISTAC, 1993 p. 164.
65 Gulen, p. 218.
67 Gulen, p. 219.
We offered the Trust to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains, but they shrank from bearing it, and were afraid of it (fearful of being unable to fulfil its responsibility), but human has undertaken it.68

This Qur’anic verse is interpreted by the well-known Turkish scholar Said Nursi as follows:

“Human selfhood is one aspect of the Trust which the heavens, the earth and the mountains shrank from bearing. Selfhood is the key to the Divine Names, which are hidden treasures. Selfhood is the measure or means of comparison that makes the attributes of Lordship and characteristics of Divinity known.”69

Conclusion

There are theories considerably differ about the identity of humans; while the field of anthropology hold that there is nothing unique about human beings because they have varying identities or egos. For them human is an object which the other things constitute their identity. In the Marxist view, man is seen as an economic entity and works hard to achieve his goals. For F. Nietzsche, mankind is entity who is only bound to the natural instincts. The scholars who deem humans not only physical but also ethical agencies hold that free will can fulfill the mission of a moral system independently. On the other hand, the Qur’an connects this world to the next one and explains the real success as being prosperous in both. Islam views that the universe is full with the meanings and symbols. Human intellect is capable to comprehend them. However, some argued that the salvation of humankind totally depends on God’s mercy because humankind has no capacity to save themselves. For them, they have no free will; rather they are like a feather before the wind. But the Qur’an rejects this idea and recognizes humankind as capable being who can overcome all the difficulties by their free will. In the Qur’an God commands them to fight against all kinds of evils. This command does not ignore human ego, rather it strengthens it to defeat evil.

In Islamic perspective human being is the most polished and capable mirror where God can potentially be reflected. The essence of human nature is pure and it is the only nature which is capable to receive the holy trust (selfhood) which the heavens, the earth and the mountains could not bear. Such profundity affords only the human beings such a level of comprehensibility that they can recognise, understand and relate to, God as potentially the perfect man (insan al-kāmil).

In conclusion, According to Islam human nature in relation to the rest of creation is unique. Mankind is the most valuable being in the entire universe due to the faculties they have been endowed with and the Divine names and attributes they manifest. In this context, the Qur’an evidently promises mankind both eternity and everlasting bliss. These lofty promises prove that human beings are indeed the most outstanding and matchless Divine art amidst and essentially above the rest of creation.

68 Qur’an 33:72.
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The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society aims to create an intellectual frame of reference for the academic study of religion and spirituality, and to create an interdisciplinary conversation on the role of religion and spirituality in society. It is intended as a place for critical engagement, examination, and experimentation of ideas that connect religious philosophies to their contexts throughout history in the world, places of worship, on the streets, and in communities. The journal addresses the need for critical discussion on religious issues—specifically as they are situated in the present-day contexts of ethics, warfare, politics, anthropology, sociology, education, leadership, artistic engagement, and the dissonance or resonance between religious tradition and modern trends.

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But in Islam, the relation of man with nature resembles that of a farmer with the farm, of a merchant with the market, and of a devotee with the temple. For a farmer, land is not the goal but the means. His home is elsewhere but he uses the land to secure livelihood, and the means of comfort, and happiness. A Man lives in nature, like his mother's lap, and it is here that he undergoes evolution, and perfection. Islam says; if you do not rise higher from this natural position, you will remain here in the lowest of the low, and in the hell hereafter. The Holy Qur'an says: "What is the terrible calamity!"