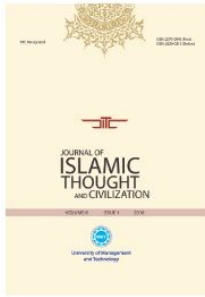


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Delusive Versus Genuine Human Needs: An Islamic Response to Global Resource Scarcity

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Abstract

This study looks at the issue of human needs from an Islamic perspective. Many political theorists and philosophers have tried to deal with the issue of human needs but many aspects of this issue still remain unresolved. This paper aims at looking at the issue from an Islamic perspective. In doing so, it examines the issue of human needs comparatively from western and Islamic perspectives. Then the study discusses the nature of human beings and their needs as well as the purpose behind their pursuance. The key objective of the study is to contribute in regulating the pursuance of needs. It argues that all human needs are not necessarily genuine, rather a significant number of them are delusive. To distinguish genuine needs from delusive ones, the study suggests the purpose behind the pursuance of needs as the key criterion. In doing so, the paper comes up with a model labeled *Orbit of Needs*. This model comprises four circles or orbits. The most central circle is of necessity, followed by comfort, beautification and exhibition. According to the model, all those needs that fall into one of the first three circles in terms of purpose are genuine, while any need which falls into the fourth circle is delusive.

Keywords: Desire, Global resource scarcity, Islam, Human needs, Necessity, Orbit of Needs

Introduction

It is often said that ‘human needs are unlimited while resources are scarce,’ although the authenticity of this statement is rarely checked. Instead, the prevailing paradigm concentrates on managing the available resources to meet maximum human needs. To be specific, economics as a science doesn’t engage itself with the question of needs meaningfully; instead it focuses on allocating resources under the condition of scarcity. As a result, fundamental questions about needs themselves are left to political theorists and philosophers.

The author disclaims any originality for the views found in this paper. The key ideas have been extensively discussed by both classical and contemporary Islamic scholars. Nonetheless, the study attempts to organize these ideas and put them into a framework so that their value can be appreciated easily in the modern world.

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The study will be important for both intellectuals and policy makers. Intellectuals play an important role in substantiating human needs in the world and policy makers are always under pressure from their respective societies to come up with programs and initiatives to meet the ever increasing societal needs. Therefore, the ultimate objective of this paper is to contribute in the reorientation of human needs and to make them more objective as well as attainable.

2. Analytical Consideration

‘Human need’ has always been the subject of discussion. Paolo Bisogno defines ‘need’ as a “state of dissatisfaction provoked by the lack of something felt as being necessary.”¹ According to Carlos Mallmann:

We call needs the common characteristics of those elements — satisfiers — without which human beings are in one way or another impaired or become ill; e.g., their functioning falls below potentially attainable levels in relation to optimum average performances observed in other human beings. Needs are therefore universal. They are present in every human being.²

There are many universal human needs. However, it is the related culture and society that determine their value. Therefore, setting a universal set of standards for all human needs is difficult. As noted by Forti, needs are to be understood in material, cultural and social contexts; hence, needs should be defined within a dynamic environment.³

It is also necessary to note that ‘human needs’ evolve which shows that they are dynamic and keep on changing. They also change in terms of priority. In this regard, the key determinants are two factors of ‘time’ and ‘space.’ Thus, a ‘need’ may not remain a ‘need’ when the relevant situation alters.⁴ To put it another way, although ‘needs’ exist in every society among all individuals, their intensity depends on secondary environmental factors. It is the environment which decreases or intensifies the desire for meeting these ‘needs’.

One may use the terms ‘need’ and ‘necessity’ interchangeably; yet they are distinct. The fact is that “a need becomes a ‘necessity’ when its satisfaction is absolutely indispensable to a given state of affairs.”⁵ Similarly, ‘need’ and ‘desire’ are two different things.⁶ Christian Bay argues that “while men know what they want or desire, they may not know what they need.”⁷ However, some scholars make no distinction between ‘desire’ and ‘need.’ For instance, Hobbs does not recognize any

¹Augusto Forti, and Paolo Bisogno (ed.), *Scientific Research and Human Needs* (Rome: Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, 1981), 11.

²Augusto Forti, and Paolo Bisogno (ed.), *Scientific Research and Human Needs*, 1-10.

³Ibid., 6.

⁴Augusto Forti, and Paolo Bisogno, *Scientific Research and Human Needs*, 13-14.

⁵Ibid., 11.

⁶Ibid., 12.

⁷Ross Fitzgerald (ed.), *Human Needs and Politics* (NSW: Pergamon Press, 2011), 12.

distinction between needs and desires. From Hobbes' perspective, "all that matters is desire and desire is, as we have seen, infinite."⁸

Against this background, this paper tries to explore the issue of 'human needs' from an Islamic perspective. It tries to address questions such as are all human needs genuine? What is the mechanism to distinguish genuine needs from delusive ones? How are human beings supposed to pursue and fulfil their needs? To what extent are human beings allowed to pursue their needs?

3. Western Scholars and the Question of Human Needs

The history of human needs began with the creation of human beings. This subject has attracted many scholars who have endeavored to understand human needs. In this regard, the role played by psychologists and political philosophers is particularly evident.

From the psychological tradition, perhaps the most popular account of human needs is given by Abraham Maslow using the 'Pyramid of Needs.' He arranged human needs into seven categories including physiological, safety, belongingness, esteem, self-actualization etc. According to Maslow, the higher category emerges after the lower level needs are satisfied to an acceptable level.⁹ However, he asserts that "need gratification leads only to temporary happiness which in turn tends to be succeeded by another and (hopefully) higher discontent. It looks as if the human hope for eternal happiness can never be fulfilled."¹⁰

While Maslow's theory relies on theoretical deduction, Alderfer Clayton in his study tries to base his arguments on empirical deduction. In doing so, he suggests three categories of human needs namely existence, relatedness, and growth. His theory is also known as the ERG theory. Essentially, Clayton's theory is a reasonable adaptation of Maslow's theory.¹¹ He criticizes Maslow both in identification and categorization of human needs and then comes up with his own classification. His most important contribution is to add the element of regression to his theory which suggests that the satisfaction of needs is not always a way forward, rather human needs can regress at a time of frustration.¹²

Similarly, A. H. Murray argues that human personality is controlled by needs. He categorizes needs under various labels such as 'primary' and 'secondary' needs,

⁸Jeff Noonan, *Democratic Society and Human Needs* (Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 13.

⁹Clayton Alderfer, *The Practice of Organizational Diagnosis: Theory and Methods* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), 207-208.

¹⁰Abraham H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1970), 15.

¹¹Clayton Alderfer, *The Practice of Organizational Diagnosis: Theory and Methods*, 206-208.

¹²Debra L. Nelson, and James Campbell Quick, *Organizational Behavior: Science, The Real World and You* (OH: South-Western Cengage Learning, 2013), 167.

‘reactive’ and ‘proactive’ needs, and ‘conscious’ and ‘unconscious’ needs.¹³ A key feature in Murray’s theory is the phenomenon of ‘fusion of needs.’ It means that while a person is satisfying anyone of his/her needs, some of his/her other needs will also be satisfied along the way.¹⁴ Murray also mentions the need of the individual for power. To him “people have a basic need or desire to be in control of their environment.”¹⁵ Another major theory is that of McClelland’s theory of ‘Manifest Needs.’ He suggests three learned needs including ‘achievement,’ ‘power’ and ‘affiliation.’ To him an individual needs ‘to excel,’ ‘to make an impact on others,’ and ‘to have a circle of people with whom he can share his emotions.’¹⁶

While most of the above mentioned views have found their place within the narrow scope of theories about organizational behavior, several political philosophers have approached the issue of human needs in a quite broader perspective. They have focused on the nature of human needs, their origins and the way they should be realized. For instance, Younger Marx talks about ‘human needs’ and ‘crude needs.’ According to him, ‘crude needs’ are natural, illusory and thus are imaginary appetites, while ‘human needs’ have their origin in human nature. Therefore, he emphasizes satisfying human needs because it will contribute to the self-realization of human beings.¹⁷

Also, in his 1844 manuscripts, Marx in a discussion on ‘Need, Production and Division of Labor’ gave different binaries such as ‘true and false’ needs and ‘real and artificial’ needs. For Marx, the need for money is artificial. Therefore, in Marx’s ideal society all human beings have only real needs and that can only happen when the nature of human beings is reset to its original form.¹⁸ Initially, the Marxian concept of need was viewed mainly within the framework of economic needs, the latter interpretations attempted to include anthropological, sociological and historical needs as well.¹⁹ Similarly, Herbert Marcuse categorizes human needs into ‘true’ and ‘false’ needs. His category of ‘true needs’ is almost similar to that of Maslow’s which includes food, shelter, etc. while ‘false needs’ are those that are “superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression.”²⁰ Interestingly, Marcuse argues that the individual himself is the key arbitrator of what is true and what is false

¹³Henry A. Murray, *Explorations in Personality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 140-150.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 175.

¹⁵Christopher M. England, *Outsourcing the American Dream: Pain and Pleasure in the Era of Downsizing* (New York: Writers Club Press, 2001), 20.

¹⁶Debra L. Nelson, and James Campbell Quick, *Organizational Behavior: Science, The Real World and You*, 167-169.

¹⁷Ross Fitzgerald (ed.), *Human Needs and Politics*, 10.

¹⁸Marx and Engels, Trans. Gregor Benton, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, first published 1932, 1974), retrieved from: https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_Economic_and_Philosophical_Manuscripts.pdf

¹⁹Augusto Forti, and Paolo Bisogno (ed.), *Scientific Research and Human Needs*, 13-14.

²⁰Ross Fitzgerald (ed.), *Human Needs and Politics*, 11.

need; yet, he asserts that only free individuals can determine it truly, not the oppressed and manipulated ones.²¹

4. Muslim Scholars and the Question of Human Needs

Muslim scholars have also been interested in the subject of human needs. They have approached the subject from two dimensions. One group has tried to approach it from the perspective of *Maqāsid ul Shari'ah*. *Maqāsid* is defined in terms of the higher objectives of *Shari'ah*. It tries to look at the fundamental worldly and divine purposes of Islamic law. According to the scholars of *Maqāsid*, apart from their religious orientation *Shari'ah* laws are subject to worldly expediencies as well.²² In line with this school of thought, Imam Abu al-Maali al-Juwaini (d. 478 AH/1085 CE) in his book '*al-Burhān fī Usūl al-Fiqh*' (The Proof in the Fundamentals of Law) introduced his theory of the 'levels of necessity.' He suggested five levels of *maqāsid* including necessities (*dharuriyyāt*), public needs (*al-hājah al-āmah*), moral behaviour (*al-makrumāt*), recommendations (*al-mandubāt*), and 'what cannot be attributed to a specific reason.' He argued that the real objectives of Islamic law is to protect people's faith, soul, mind, private parts, and wealth. Later on, his student Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 505 AH/1111 CE) in his book *al-Mustasfa* (The Purified Source) grouped his teacher's levels of necessity into the following categories, (1) faith; (2) soul; (3) mind; (4) offspring; and (5) wealth. Perhaps the most notable theorization about human needs by Islamic scholars is a three-fold classification proposed by Imam Abu Ishāq al-Shatibi (d. 790 AH/1388 CE). In his famous work *al-Muwafaqāt*, Imam al-Shatibi classified human needs into three categories including the inevitable (*daruriyyāt*), the needed (*hajiyyāt*) and the luxuries or refinements (*tahsiniyyāt*).²³ In the recent past, his theory has been refined further by Imam Ibn Ashur (d. 1973) and as such its current form is almost similar to that of Maslow's.²⁴ To this theory of categorization of human needs, one would need to add the efforts by some contemporary philosophers and theologians. In this regard, one can mention Murtaza Mutahari who categorizes human needs into 'primary' and 'secondary' needs. According to him, primary needs originate from physical and spiritual structures as well as the nature of social life. Therefore, as long as human beings remain human and continue to live a social life, this group of needs will continue to exist. These needs include physical needs such as food, shelter, and sex; spiritual needs such as beauty, worship, and respect; and social needs such as interaction, justice, freedom and equality. Secondary needs are those that originate from primary needs and are different across time and space. He argues that primary needs are the driving force behind human beings toward their evolution, while secondary needs are caused by

²¹Ibid., 12.

²²See. Imam Ghazali, *Al-Mustasfa [On Legal theory of Muslim Jurisprudence]*, edited by Muhammad Abdul Salam Abd al-Shafi (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 1993).

²³Jasser Auda, *Maqasid Al-Shariah: A Beginner's Guide* (Washington DC: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008), 21-22.

²⁴Abdullahi Abubakar Lamido, "Maqāsid al-Shari'ah as a Framework for Economic Development Theorization," *International Journal of Islamic Economics and Finance Studies*, no. 2 (2016): 32-33.

evolution and at times become the driving force for further evolution. Primary needs always exist and are never spoiled but secondary needs can get old or even spoiled.²⁵

There is another group of Muslim scholars who have based their arguments on western literature; their works are by and large critical appreciation of the works of western scholars. Anke Iman and Aisha Wood take Maslow's model of hierarchy of needs and consider it lacking in spiritual elements. They are particularly suspicious of those Islamic scholars who try to harmonize Maslow's model with the higher objectives of *Shari'ah*.²⁶ Khaidzir et al, in their study focus on self-esteem and through a statistical approach try to make a distinction between western constructs of self-esteem and that of Islam. They argue that the western construct of self-esteem fully contradicts with that of Islam, as higher Islam psychosocially reduces the intensity of the need for self-esteem.²⁷

Similarly, Nadrullah Khalili believes that the fulfillment of human needs is related with human development and the western human development models cannot be a guide for Islamic society. He divides human needs into two categories. The first category is 'human oriented needs' and the second is 'animal oriented needs.' Any need which is not common between humans and other animals falls in the first category. At the peak of the first category is 'salvation,' while at the peak of the second one is 'lust.' To him, there is a constant struggle between the two categories to counter balance each other.²⁸

On the other hand, M. Zakaria, and N. A. Abdul Malek, (2014) in their studies try to integrate Maslow and *Maqāsīd* categories of needs.²⁹ Similarly, Muhammad Shujaee tries to harmonize Maslow's model with Islamic spiritual needs. To put it another way, he tries to Islamize Maslow's theory. In doing so, he breaks down spiritual needs into five categories and distributes them according to Maslow's categories of needs. He modifies 'physiological needs' into 'existential needs,' 'security' into 'spiritual security through trust in God' (*tavakul*), 'love' into 'love for God,' 'respect' into 'dignity (*kiramah*) and moral needs,' and 'self-realization' into 'self-realization through closeness to God.'³⁰

²⁵Murtaza Mutahari, *Majmoe Gofarha* [Collection of Speeches], vol. 3 (Tehran: Sadra Publication), 183-184,

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Khaidzir Ismail, Khairil Anwar, and Hanina H. Hamsan, "Measurement of Self-esteem: Comparison between the Constructs of West and Islam," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, no. 13 (2011): 196-201.

²⁸Nasrullah Khalili Tirtashi, "Criterion for Distinguishing Genuine Needs from Delusive Needs from Islamic Perspective," *Marifat*, no. 75 (2004): 105-120.

²⁹M. Zakaria, and N. A. Abdul Malek, "Effects of Human Needs Based on the Integration of Needs as Stipulated in *Maqāsīd Syariah* and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs on *Zakah* Distribution Efficiency of *Asnaf* Assistance Business Programme," *Jurnal Pengurusan*, no. 40 (2014): 41-52.

³⁰Shujaee, and Muhammad Sadeq, "Theory of Spiritual Needs from Islamic Perspective, and its Compatibility (*tanazur*) with Maslow Pyramid of Human Needs," *Do Fashnamih Mutaliat e Islam va Rawanshinasi* 1, no.1, 88-116.

5. In Search of a Sane Society

As noted in the above discussion, different people from diverse backgrounds have tried to find out what is meant to be human and what human needs are but none of them has produced a complete picture of human beings and their needs. It reminds us of a poem by the medieval Muslim poet and Sufi Mevlana Jalaluddīn Rūmi which reads, “In every company I uttered my wailful notes / I consorted with the unhappy and with them that rejoice // Everyone became my friend from his own opinion / non sought out my secrets from with me.”

The above poem is an illustration of the incomplete efforts that have been made about projecting human beings and their needs. It is particularly true about the western concept of human needs which has been shaped under the influence of the liberal tradition. Besides this tradition, there has been another stream of thought which has been too inclined toward spirituality to the extent that it has defied or even denied human needs. As a result, throughout human history two phenomena have always existed which are contradictory to each other. On one hand, there has always been a group of people who has opted and encouraged monasticism and austerity.³¹ On the other hand, there has been a group of people who has adopted the philosophy of pursuing maximum pleasure and material consumption. They have been obliged to do whatever they can for self-satisfaction. Both of these directions have been problematic. It is particularly true about the materialistic view of the universe which has projected the world as something to be changed in accordance with human desires. In line with this school of thought, world resources are being utilized in such a way that is leading to environmental imbalance.³² It has also led to disparity among the residents of the planet earth. There is a small community of wealthy people in the world, while rest of the humanity is struggling with poverty, deprivation and other socio-economic ills. As noted by Augusto Froiti, “The world’s total resources, both intellectual and material, are potentially adequate to provide all the world’s population with its basic needs of food, shelter and health but present-day distribution prevents this from being achieved.”³³ The overall situation has made some philosophers so desperate that they are calling for anti-natalism. In this regard, one can mention the South African philosopher David Benatar whose book *Better Never to Have Been* is gaining a wide audience.³⁴

That said, one would need to re-examine human beings and their nature. It can help in identifying their genuine needs and it is essential for establishing a fair, just, and sane society. As argued by Eric Fromm, the question of what is a ‘sane society’ should begin “with a concept of man, his nature, and the laws which govern his

³¹Shafi Usmani, *Islam and Music* (Karachi: Maktabah Dar-ul-Uloum, 2004), 36.

³²Nasrullah Khalili Tirtashi, “Criterion for Distinguishing Genuine Needs from Delusive Needs from Islamic Perspective,” 117.

³³Augusto Forti, and Paolo Bisogno (ed.), *Scientific Research and Human Needs*, 1.

³⁴David Benatar, *Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming into Existence* (South Africa: Oxford University Press, 2016).

development.”³⁵ A sane society is that which “corresponds to the needs of man; not necessarily to what he feels to be his needs.”³⁶ This discussion leads to the fundamental question about the purpose of creation, a key issue which has engaged many over the course of centuries. A poem attributed to Molana Rūmi reads:

In days my thought is and in nights it is my talk/ that why I am unaware of my heart's condition// where I am from, what I have come for / where am I heading to? finally you won't show me my fatherland // I am extremely amazed why he created me / what was his point in creating me // surely my spirit is from the higher world / I am going to spread my bed in there again// I am the bird from kingdom not from earthen world/ it's just a couple of days they have made a cage from my body// I haven't come here by myself, to go by myself / whom got me here, will take me to my fatherland.³⁷

As illustrated in the poem, human beings have two dimensions, that is, material and non-material. Therefore, they should be seen beyond their physical existence. Ignoring the non-physical dimension of human beings makes any picture of them incomplete. As a matter of fact, the material aspect of human beings represents their animal dimension, while their non-material aspect represents their spiritual dimension. Because of this uniqueness, they possess certain features that distinguish them from other creatures.

Among various specifically human features are freedom, talent, and the ability to evolve. Thus, human beings have the freedom to decide, the ability to materialize, and the talent to evolve in two opposite directions, that is, the ‘animal direction’ and the ‘spiritual direction.’ It is these directions that determine human needs. Once human beings opt for developing their spiritual dimension, they need divinity to identify the purpose of their creation and shape their world view, since it is beyond the capacity of positive science to solve this issue.³⁸

It is necessary to note that abilities and talents of non-human creatures develop without any intervening environmental factors. Therefore, they do not have any control over their abilities and talents but human beings have a significant control over their talents. Moreover, human beings have the ability to develop their animal and spiritual dimensions simultaneously,³⁹ and of course, each aspect has its own needs that need to be met.

Islam defines needs in terms of instinct. Such needs do not need to be learned, rather they are taught by nature itself. The main characteristic of instinct is its constancy and persistency. Instinct is like an engine which drives human beings toward attaining their needs. Any attempt to underestimate human instinct is lead

³⁵Erich Fromm, *The Psychology of Normalcy* (Nigeria: Lantern Books, 2010), 139-143.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Muhammad Reza Shafie Kadkani, *Guzidih Ghazaliat e Shams* [Ghazliyat-e-Shams] (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1982), 578.

³⁸Nasrullah Khalili Tirtashi, “Criterion for Distinguishing Genuine Needs from Delusive Needs from Islamic Perspective,” 106-107.

³⁹Ibid., 110-111.

astray. Qur'ān clearly mentions that nature cannot be changed and advises to try not to alter these instinctual characteristics.⁴⁰

More importantly, Islam encourages to maintain a balance between pursuing physical and spiritual needs. Therefore, the key challenge for human beings is to keep the balance. It means that none of the two dimensions should be neglected. It also means that they should not be prioritized either. As argued by Anke Iman and Aisha Wood, spiritual aspect in human life is not “reserved for those who have their basic needs saturated. Islamic experience is, rather, reminiscent of actualizing the link towards one’s creator prior to and whilst saturating these needs by evaluating any action within the five values of the Islamic legal rules: (obligatory, recommended, legally indifferent, discouraged, or prohibited.)”⁴¹

Although some human needs are materialistic such as eating, drinking, shelter and sex and in essence have no connection with their beliefs, the way to satisfy these needs has a direct connection with the belief and the worldview of the concerned individuals. This is the reason that human beings satisfy their common needs in different ways. Therefore, while the satisfaction of needs is a must, it should be properly regulated.⁴² Qur'ān says that “...those who disbelieve enjoy themselves and eat as grazing livestock eat.”⁴³ Therefore, if human beings spare their spiritual side at the time when their material needs are met or pursue the material needs without any system of divine check and balance, they will enter into a downward vicious trajectory. As a result, their animal dimension starts to evolve. This evolution takes place in several stages.

Initially, such persons fall onto the ‘domestic’ creature level. In this stage, they only pursue their own needs and care about themselves or their children at the most. They are not dangerous and also do not cause any harm to people in their surroundings, rather they may give some benefits to their fellow human beings. For instance, a sheep beside eating and drinking and caring about its offspring gives some benefits to its owner.

However, while other creatures are destined to remain as they are, it is not the case with human beings. They can decide to what extent they want to be human or inhuman.⁴⁴ Therefore, given their evolutionary nature, their downfall continues further to the level of ‘predatory’ creatures. This is the stage of wild creatures such as lions and wolf and eagle. Unlike domestic animals, these animals rely on harming other creatures in order to satisfy their needs; otherwise, they are not able to survive. When human beings reach this stage, they try to fulfill their needs at the expense of their fellow human beings. Yet, they do not stop here. Their downfall may continue to

⁴⁰al-Qur'ān: al-Rūm 30:30.

⁴¹Anke Iman Bouzenita, and Aisha Wood Boulouar, “Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs: an Islamic Critique,” 75.

⁴²Nasrullah Khalili Tirtashi, “Criterion for Distinguishing Genuine Needs from Delusive Needs from Islamic Perspective,” 113-114.

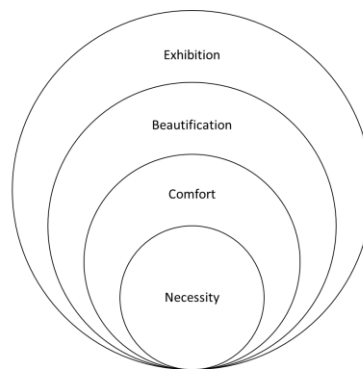
⁴³Al-Qur'ān: al-Muhammad 47:12.

⁴⁴Nasrullah Khalili Tirtashi, “Criterion for Distinguishing Genuine Needs from Delusive Needs from Islamic Perspective,” 106.

another level that is the stage of ‘venomous’ creatures, such as snakes and scorpions. These creatures’ survival does not depend on biting as such but it is a part of their nature to harm others. A person downgraded to his stage will enjoy harming fellow human beings finding it necessary.

While predators and venomous creatures are all considered animals, there is another level of downfall which makes human beings worse than animals. This is why Qur’ān says “They have hearts with which they do not understand, they have eyes with which they do not see, and they have ears with which they do not hear. Those are like livestock; rather, they are more astray. It is they who are the heedless.”⁴⁵ Downfall unto this level makes human beings dangerous even for themselves. Human history is full of people who have been very harmful for themselves as well as their fellows. They have inflicted a huge loss on the entire humanity and have justified their actions under different pretexts.

To prevent himself or herself from falling victim to this vicious trajectory, it would be fatal for human beings to delay their spiritual upgradation until the time of fulfilling their all animal oriented needs. Moreover, while human beings should pursue their needs, it is essential for them to adopt the right way and observe certain rules. In this regard, the most important rule is to follow only their genuine needs according to criteria set forth by *Orbit of Needs* explained in the following section.⁴⁶



6. Orbit of Needs and Desires: An Islamic Model

In conformity with human nature, Islam is against monasticism. Qur’ān asserts that monasticism is not an instruction of God, rather it is an invention of human beings themselves⁴⁷ because it goes against human nature and needs. Contrarily, the Qur’ān refers to world resources as *marvels* and specifically mentions the term “for you.”⁴⁸ It means that these things are destined for human beings and should not be abandoned.⁴⁹ Qur’ān strongly commands “do not forget your share of the world.”⁵⁰ Yet, it seriously forewarns against excessiveness and reads, “Indeed, the

⁴⁵Al-Qur’ān: al-A’rāf 7:179.

⁴⁶Shafi Usmani, *Islam and Music*, 34.

⁴⁷al-Qur’ān: al-Hadīd 57:27.

⁴⁸al-Qur’ān: al-Rahman.

⁴⁹Shafi Usmani, *Islam and Music*, 42-43.

⁵⁰al-Qur’ān: al-Qasas 28:77.

wasteful are brothers of the devils.”⁵¹ According to the Islamic perspective, there should be a balance between income and consumption.⁵²

No doubt human beings have certain needs. However, the question is what are the sources of the origin of human needs? Islam is not against pursuing human needs; rather it encourages their pursuance. However, what Islam encourages is to pursue genuine needs and not delusive ones. Consequently, the key challenge is to distinguish genuine needs from delusive needs. In order to determine which need is genuine and which one is not, one should refer to their purpose. The *Orbit of Needs* model aims at addressing the above challenge. The central element in this model is the “purpose of pursuance of a need.” The model identifies four levels of pursuance. They are labelled as *necessity*, *comfortability*, *beautification*, and *exhibition* (Figure I).⁵³

Unlike Marxism, where there is no place for individual desires, the *Orbit of Needs* model does not aim at suppressing human desires and wants. It simply tries to regulate their pursuance of needs, though it gives significant freedom to individuals. It means that an individual is free to pursue his or her needs for the sake of necessity, comfort, and beatification. Moreover, based on the *Orbit of Needs*, at all four levels similar needs are pursued. Only the purpose of their pursuance changes. Likewise, there is no prioritization and/or categorization of human needs in this model. For instance, one of the key points in Maslow’s theory is that needs are orderly organized in a straight-line continuum. It means that if basic needs are not met, then the individual would not feel the need for respect but the fact is that an individual needs self-respect and has a motive for it even though he or she is struggling for basic needs. A laborer struggles to provide basic needs for his family so that he is not embarrassed in front of his family members. It is the same element of respect that many people, despite facing problems in fulfilling their basic needs, prefer dying rather than begging. Similarly, although clothing seems a simple physiological and physical need; in reality, it has something to do with self-respect as well. Because covering the body is also related to protecting and preserving the dignity. Therefore, based on the *Orbit of Needs*, ‘need’ is ‘need,’ be it food, safety, respect, or self-esteem, provided it is genuine. To determine the needs as genuine, it is enough to identify the purpose of its pursuance.

At the ‘necessity’ oriented level of pursuance of needs, human beings pursue a need because they feel that meeting that particular need is essential for their survival. It is the lowest level of the pursuance of human needs. Realizing the ‘necessity’ level of needs is essential for human survival, without them social and psychological dignity are seriously affected and physical survival also falls in danger. This category in fact includes all physiological needs asserted by theoreticians such as Maslow. However, they are viewed in a more comprehensive way. For instance, in Maslow’s model, physiological needs are defined as those needs which are essential for physical survival while self-esteem and respect are placed in the upper category.

⁵¹al-Qur’ān: al-Isra 17:27.

⁵²Muhammad Taqi Uthmani, *Islam aur Hamari Zindagi* [Islam and Our Life, Urdu] (Lahore: Idarah Islamiyat, 2010), 109-110.

⁵³Ibid., 109-110.

However, in the *Orbit of Needs* model, needs are categorized as delusive needs and genuine needs. Since, if the purpose of pursuance is necessity and survival then they are genuine.

After the realization of their needs at the ‘necessity’ level, human beings pursue similar needs with a different purpose that is labelled as ‘comfort.’ For instance, they seek shelter which is more than a simple four-wall. While at the necessity level, they would seek shelter without any further requirement; at the ‘comfort’ level, they want their shelter to provide them comfort as well. Similarly, at the previous level, they would seek a job to earn a living but at the level of ‘comfort’, they would want this job to be easy and comfortable as well.

As soon as their needs are realized at the ‘comfort’ level, human beings would think of beautification. Again, similar needs are sought, but the purpose is changed from ‘comfort’ to ‘beauty.’ For instance, they may think of the exterior design of their shelter. They may also want their blanket that is already comfortable to have a beautiful design on it. Obviously, the exterior design of the shelter does not enhance their comfort level.

Having realized all the three levels of their needs mentioned above, human beings may pursue similar needs further but with a different purpose, that is, they aim at exhibiting their superior wealth to their fellow human beings. At this stage, they may use gold or silver on their buildings or use a vehicle with its body made of gold. This level of human needs is not genuine and Islam strictly forbids it. Qur’ān refers to it as “they are brothers of the Satan.”⁵⁴ It is necessary to note that Qur’ān defines extravagance more than material overindulgence. A Qur’ānic verse says “And indeed, Pharaoh was haughty within the land, and indeed, he was of the transgressors.”⁵⁵ Therefore, if an individual expects others to worship him, or bow down before him, it has nothing to do with one’s need for self-respect. It is in fact this level of pursuance of human needs that pushes them into the vicious trajectory of downfall explained in the previous section.

Although the *Orbit of Needs* has been derived from Islamic teachings, it is not a religious model at all. It deals with human nature. Consequently, it is applicable to every society far better than other models. For instance, despite claiming cross-cultural validity, the idea of *self* in Maslow’s theory seems to be very individualistic, based on the traditions of western society and does not reflect the ground realities of eastern societies. This is why in his study based on the Chinese society, Yang rejects the universality of Maslow’s theory on the grounds that it is derived from a highly individualistic and self-worshipping society. In line with this argument, Yang suggests collective self-actualization needs, given the strong family ties in China.⁵⁶ By the same token, based on observations in the tribal systems, a single member of the tribe may struggle for the basic needs of the entire tribe at the time of necessity.

⁵⁴al-Qur’ān: al-Isra 17:28.

⁵⁵al-Qur’ān: Yunus 10:83.

⁵⁶K. S. Yang, “Beyond Maslow’s Culture-bound Linear Theory: A Preliminary Statement of the Double-Y Model of Basic Human Needs,” *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, no. 49 (2003), 175–255.

Interestingly, he does it for the sake of tribal esteem. He also does it because otherwise there would be no respect for him in the tribe and the society at large.

7. Conclusion

Identification of human needs and their classification has been the focus of attention of many social scientists. Among them Maslow's *Pyramid of Human Needs* is particularly famous. Maslow interprets human personality and human motivation but his views reflect the western conception of human needs and personality. His theory has gained the attention of economists, politician and policy makers and has been influencing their views and policy preferences. However, exploring the nature of human needs is not a western invention, rather non-western thinkers and scholars including Muslim scholars have also looked into the nature of human needs and have classified them. Invariably, the views of Muslim scholars are guided by Islamic principles. In the this regard, the *Orbit of Needs* which is based on the view of classical and contemporary Islamic scholars identifies human needs according to four categories of purpose, that is, 'necessity,' 'comfort,' 'beautification' and 'exhibition.' The advantage of *Orbit of Needs* is that it can easily distinguish 'delusive needs' form 'genuine needs.' It can also place limits on their fulfilment and provides an indication of their levels of saturation. On the contrary, western perspectives only focus on the details of needs and their classification. They don't give a meaningful definition of delusive needs and also do not provide a clear indicator of the saturation of genuine needs. A thorough application of the *Orbit of Needs* will give balance to life and will eventually lead to a balanced social and economic policy making.

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