



Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization (JITC)

Volume 10, Issue 1, Spring 2020

pISSN: 2075-0943, eISSN: 2520-0313

Journal DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc>

Issue DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.101>

Homepage: <https://journals.umt.edu.pk/index.php/JITC>

Journal QR Code:



Article:

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Published:

Spring 2020

Article DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.101.13>

QR Code:



M Awais Shaukat

To cite this article:

Shaukat, Muhammad Awais, and Humaira Ahmad. “A historical survey of evolution in the concept and status of “Man”: Greek to modern times.” *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 10, no. 1 (2020): 235–254.

[Crossref](#)

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Publisher Information:

Department of Islamic Thought and Civilization, School of Social Science and Humanities, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan.

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A Historical Survey of Evolution in the Concept and Status of “Man” Greek to Modern Times

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Abstract

Study of human nature has been one of the most important questions to which man has come across. Right from the period when man started thinking rationally, because of his curious and enquiring nature, he meditated about Universe, existence and nature of Man and his ultimate reality. The religious tradition claims that when Man first came to earth, he knew the answer to these questions in the light of divine guidance. It declared “Man” as the crown of all the creations and all the other things are created to serve him. The civilizations that didn’t have the luxury of divine guidance developed mythological explanations. It were the Greeks who for the first time developed an intellectual discourse to answer the basic question about the reality of Man and the Universe. The medieval period was dominated by religious traditions. All these traditions, though different from one another, seem to agree to the point that Man is a special creation and the center of the Universe with some amount of divinity attributed to him. But after Renaissance, this view changed radically and the status of “Man” shrunk to an animal only who was thought-to-be guided by his own instincts and who was through and through a profane creation. This research aims at studying the concept of “Man” in different civilizations and explores the evolution of this concept from Greek to Modern times through analytical research method.

Keywords: worldview, mythology, western thoughts, epistemology, evolution, creation, ideals

Introduction

The present intellect of Man, with all his glory and progress, is yet to explain all the elements of human nature. Many western eminent scholars of the 20th century have highlighted the importance of how vital it is to study human nature. However, many established facts about human nature are yet to be explained. The traditional concept of “Man” associates a lot of sacredness to him considering him as the most important actor in

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the divine scheme. However, modern scholars of human nature have declared him a social animal, detaching him from the notions of holiness or divinity.

This research presents a brief narrative history of the concept of “Man” in different civilizations from the ancient Greek to the postmodern. The main focus of the study is to explore and investigate the concept of Man in various traditions. The aim of the study is to provide, within the limits of a single article, a coherent account of the evolution of the concept of “Man” from a super creation that was the center of the universe to merely an animal (homo-sapiens) capable of verbal communication only, the one that blindly follows his instincts.

2. Literature Review

The study of “Man” had remained a key question before all the traditions of the past. Valid and reliable answer to this question is necessary to help an individual to form his world-view. In the ancient times when man started to use his rational skills to comprehend the universe, he came across some fundamental questions. The status and reality of Man and his relation with the universe and the ultimate reality was the most important question that arose at that time. The religious traditions claimed to know the answer to this question in the light of divine guidance. The other traditions formed theories based on mythology or derived it by using rational skills.¹ So from the thinkers like Socrates (470-399 BC), Plato (423-347 BC) and others to the saints and philosophers like Ibn e Arabi (1165-1240), Saint Augustine (354-430 AD), etc., the concept of “Man” was an integral part of their teachings.

“Who is Man?” had been one of the most important questions before the intelligentsia of the 20th century. Many of the scholars in the Western side of the world have highlighted the importance of studying and forming a comprehensive theory about the true nature of man, the one that could be used to explain different facts related to his personality.

William McDougall (1871-1938)² writes that the ignorance of the nature of man has prevented and still prevents the development of all the social sciences. And when one talks about different social sciences like Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology, etc., all these names mark great gaps in our minds. Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997),³ in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, one of his major works, has described the shallowness of Western academia in relation to comprehending human nature. He also discusses the split between scientific and humanistic knowledge, which he traces back to the eighteenth century in German *Sturm*

¹W. T. Stace, *A Critical History of Greeks* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1920), <https://ia801608.us.archive.org/13/items/in.ernet.dli.2015.170257/2015.170257.A-CriticalHistory-Of-Greek-Philosophy.pdf>

²William McDougall, *World Chaos* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006).

³Isaiah Berlin, *The Proper Study of Mankind* (London: Straus and Giroux, 2001).

und Drang Movement.⁴ He states that although man has made immense advancement in the field of natural sciences, he is still ignorant of the true nature of man and a meta-narrative is needed in order to explain the underlying facts about human personality and nature.

The prevailing concept of human nature popular in the West is very deficient of spiritual and moral side of self and finds its roots in the theories and philosophies of modern and postmodern period. Humanism, which is the key concept behind all the intellectual movements from renaissance to enlightenment and from modernity to post modernity, has played its part in shaping this concept. The evolution theory⁵ of Charles Darwin (1809-1882) and his concept of survival of the fittest; the *Übermensch* or superman⁶ of Nietzsche (1844-1900) and his concept of slave morality; the dialectical materialistic theory⁷ of Karl Marx (1818-1883); the Freudian (1836-1939)⁸ concept of subconscious dominance over human personality and his explanation of sexual instinct as the sole dominant urge of man; and Alfred Adler's (1870-1937) theory of urge for dominance and existentialism of 20th century are the major philosophies which formed the basis of the present concept of human nature. Moreover, the immense advancements in the field of Natural and Physical Sciences are also responsible for the ignorance related to the spiritual self of man. It is evident that certain facts about human nature like his love for ideals, his sacrificing capabilities and his endurance of sufferings, have yet to be investigated and explored by the West. Moreover, a meta-narrative, that cannot only explain human nature but can also interconnect his transcendence and animal instincts, is yet to be formed.

3. Concept of "Man" in Ancient Times

The early concepts about human nature, just like other fields of knowledge, are found in the thoughts of classical Greek thinkers and philosophers. The consideration of human nature as a philosophical study finds its origin in the undertakings of Socrates (470-399 B.C.), who focused on the knowledge of his time including Universe and metaphysics for proper and systematic study of the Man.

The most important questions before philosophers of pre-Socratic era included: "What is universe," "What is the ultimate Reality," etc. A few researchers claim that even before Socrates, the Sophists were first to focus and shift their philosophical endeavors from universe to man. According to Protagoras, "Man is the measure of all things."⁹ However,

⁴German literary movement of the late 18th century that exalted nature, feeling, and human individualism and sought to overthrow the Enlightenment cult of Rationalism.

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Sturm-und-Drang>

⁵Charles Darwin, *Origin of Species* (London: Taylor and Co, 1961).

⁶Frederic Nietzsche, *Joyful Wisdom* (New York: The McMillan Company, 1924).

⁷Karl Marx, *Das Capital* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997).

⁸Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (Munich: Modern Books, 1936).

⁹B. R. Herghanin, *An Introduction to the History of Psychology* (Wadsworth: Cengage Learning, 2005), 41.

it was Socrates who formally tried to study human life and the ways through which it could be improved individually and collectively for mutual harmony of the whole society. He tried to give precise definitions of the abstract concepts like friendship, love, wisdom, justice etc., and addressed the means through which an individual could lead a happy, satisfied and virtuous life.¹⁰

Following the Platonic Vision, the Greek not only held the concept of divine in their traditional Greek public religion, but they also used philosophical path of the human soul to attain knowledge of its own divine immortality. The human soul in its thoughts is born through the knowledge of divine, but as it is caged in the body, man becomes ignorant of this knowledge.¹¹ In his views about the Human Nature, Herghanin advocated the view of innate ideas and how one can use his/her intellectual skills to dig out their innate ideas. According to him, the process of acquiring knowledge could be defined as the reawakening of the dormant knowledge within human soul through their intellectual skills and education. Herghanin was an idealist because he considered ‘world of ideas as the ultimate reality,’ adding to these ideas were the sole and actual knowledge.¹² Moreover, he rejected observation or sensory experience, as a source of knowledge.¹³

Plato says that Human personality/Psyche encompasses three parts of rationality, will and appetite.¹⁴ Appetite was related to the instincts or bodily needs, ranked as the lowest quality of man. Will was defined as the driving force behind all kinds of activities, while rationality was the highest good in Man.

According to Plato, intellect was the quality to understand things, while will was the motivational force behind. Plato often tended towards the thought that mankind gradually degenerated from the earlier original state that was pure and simple and thus became less capable of knowing the divinity. Plato also recognized irreducible element of stubborn errancy and irrationality in the world’s composition, which he referred to as *ananke* or Necessity.

After Plato the most prominent person who discussed Man, was Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), a student of Plato. Aristotle at the start was under immense platonic influence. But soon he developed his own philosophical system of thoughts which was clearly different from that of his master. Aristotle’s view about human nature was based on the idea of “teleological perfection.”¹⁵ Aristotle argues that every form of activity is directed toward

¹⁰Bertrand Russel, *A History of Western Philosophy and Its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945),85-88.

<http://www.ntslibrary.com/PDF%20Books/History%20of%20Western%20Philosophy.pdf>

¹¹Ibid., 91-94.

¹²B. R Herghanin, *An Introduction to the History of Psychology*, 54.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Plato, *Republic. Book IV* (Chicago: Peter and Milane House, 1990), 145.

¹⁵B. R Herghanin, *An Introduction to the History of Psychology*, 56-60.

reaching its natural end. But the overall natural end for humans is “happiness” or “well-being.” Humans are perfectible, according to Aristotle, only if they are able to achieve happiness or well-being. Aristotle did not agree with his master about the concept of the transcendent world of forms. Rather, he presented the view that both form and matter are present in a substance simultaneously. He made a hierarchy and placed God on top of it as the pure form and placed matter at the bottom of his hierarchy. He in his book *De Anima*, which means “the Soul,” gave his views about Nature and Personality of Man.¹⁶ Since the concept of soul was evident in all traditional civilizations, different thinkers belonging to these civilizations gave their views about human. Aristotle also gave his views about it, however, he considered soul and body as a single organic whole and not as separate entities. According to Aristotle, man is a biological being whose functions include,¹⁷ thinking, perceiving, eating, having children and doing things.

In these qualities the latter four are common in men and other animals. According to him, the attribute of thinking is one of the exclusive qualities of man. Moreover, he claimed Man as the higher form of living being because he uses his mind and rational powers. He declared Man as a conjugal animal because he forms couples on becoming adult, thus building a home¹⁸ (*oikos*). He also declared Man as a political animal who possesses innate urge to develop more complex communities. Moreover, he also presented his opinion that Man is mimetic animal who is capable of using his imagination and rational qualities.¹⁹ Many of these thoughts remained effective up to the seventeenth century.

Describing human nature, Aristotle also expressed his views about the source and types of motives in human beings. Aristotle classified human motives in two types which²⁰ are: Primary Motives and Secondary Motives. Primary motives are the basic human motives mostly related to animal instincts such as hunger, sex, thirst, anger and need for rest. These motives are common in human beings and other animals. Human are born with these motives, therefore, he also called them the inherited motives. Secondary motives on the other hand are those motives which are acquired and learned by individuals throughout their life span and later these become a part of their habits. For example, the habit of socialization according to him was an example of secondary motive. Other examples of secondary motives included the urge to dominate, the urge to love or hate, etc. Aristotle also gave the concept of Catharsis²¹ and described it as an important source of learning.

Aristotle was probably the first person who recognized that every individual is unique and because of this uniqueness, the nature offers a certain role for him to play. One may

¹⁶Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (University of Chicago Press, 1953), 34.

¹⁷B. R. Herghanin, *An Introduction to the History of Psychology*, 47.

¹⁸Ibid., 49.

¹⁹B. R. Herghanin, *An Introduction to the History of Psychology*, 48-50.

²⁰Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. as quoted by B R Herghanin, *An Introduction to the History of Psychology*, 54.

²¹Ibid., 53.

have the natural tendency and talent to become a teacher, but he has no skills at all to become a sportsman. Some of these personal characteristics are inherited and some of them are learnt through experience. And if one wants to succeed in life, he should choose the field of which he has natural capability.²² For Aristotle, all natural things which have existed, whether living or nonliving (animate and inanimate), possesses a certain unique role to play in the overall grand design of the nature. He described “happiness” as the goal of human life which is not possible without virtue. The Greek strived for finding the ultimate reality and comprehending the world using rationality, originating from Thales who found its climax in comprehensiveness explored by Aristotle.²³

The Greek period focused on the notions of universe and metaphysics for proper and systematic study of Man, ultimate reality, notions of divine morality, uniqueness of each individual, biological being, individual or collective roles of Man in society, functions they perform including thinking, perceiving and eating, human personality and psyche of humans, primary and secondary motivations and abstract conceptions of love, friendship etc.²⁴

4. Medieval Period

The medieval period in the history was dominated by Christian thought. During that period no further advancement was made towards knowledge and was described as the *Dark Age* of west in the history. From about 400 to 1200 AD, Europe was mostly under the direct influence of the church and due to the strong hold of dogma, the grandeur and intellectual richness of the west were gradually lost and were replaced by mysticism, superstition, and anti-intellectualism.²⁵ It was far and away from any kind of intellectual and scholarly exercises. This intellectual decline in the west resulted in the overall downfall of the western civilization. Although the great Byzantine Empire was present as an expression of dominance, for centuries no further advancements were made in any field of knowledge.²⁶

²²Bertrand Russel, *The History of Western Philosophy*, 167-188.

<http://www.ntslibrary.com/PDF%20Books/History%20of%20Western%20Philosophy.pdf>

²³Ibid.

²⁴William Turner, *History of Philosophy* (Boston: Ginn and Company Publishers, 1903), 124-157.

²⁵John Herman Randall, *The Making of the Modern Mind: A Survey of the Intellectual Background of Present Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1954), 12-14. <https://ia801602.us.archive.org/15/items/in.ernet.dli.2015.236818/2015.236818.The-Making.pdf>

²⁶Ibid.

The term “Dark Ages” however, was used for the period between 4th to 12th century but was said in the context of Western world only.²⁷ This period led to no further advancement of the concept of Man and is regarded as the Dark Age, the one that was dominated by the Christian thought-process or Church.

4.1. Christian Concept of Human Nature

Like every religious literature, the Bible also contains a good portion of information about human nature. As William James explained it in his *Study of Human Nature from a Religious Perspective*, that “religion” has a “department of human nature.”²⁸ In Christian theology, there are two schools of thought regarding human nature. The first describes human as a theistic and spiritual being, while the other describes it as a natural and cosmological being.²⁹ So the Christian theologians inferred and described various views of human nature. These thoughts have been the most important and prominent explanation of human nature during the medieval period.

The Bible contains no single doctrine of human nature. Rather, it provides material for more philosophical descriptions of human nature.³⁰ In the New Testament, human nature is described as having intelligence, emotions, free will, moral responsibility and the possibility of eternal life. The Gospels indicate that the views of Jesus regarding human nature are essentially those of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament.³¹ The concept of the physical body, expressed by either “body” or “flesh,” represents the whole person or personality, with no sharp distinction between body and soul, as mentioned in the Greek thought.

When Jesus says in Mark 14:38 “The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak,” it seems as if he is adopting a dualistic view of human nature. But this is not the case, as Jesus fully adopts the Hebrew approach of thinking of the whole personality—mind, body, and spirit—as a psychosomatic unity. Jesus frequently uses the terms “flesh” and “body” to represent the whole personality, as for example in Matthew 5:29 “that your whole body be thrown into hell.” When Jesus uses the word “life” as in Mark 8:35, “Whoever would save his life will lose it,” or the word “soul” as in Mark 14:34, “My soul is sorrowful,” it is the Hebrew term *nephesh* (life or self-including the body, its organs and blood) that is meant.³²

²⁷In all those centuries Islam appeared in the arena and within decades became the most dominant force in the world and Islamic civilization was born and flourished during the dark ages of the west. (Author)

²⁸William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: The Modern Library, 1902), 473.

²⁹Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al., ed., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (London: Baker Academic, 2005), 56.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 310.

³¹Harold Coward, *The Perfectibility of Human Nature in Eastern and Western Thought* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2008), 55.

³²*Ibid.*, 56-58.

In his teachings, the basic aspect of Jesus' views are human nature in the terms of intelligence, free will, and emotions that require discipline. A lot of diversity is present in the expressions related to human nature in the Bible but in a nutshell following points can be seen in all *biblical anthropology*.³³

- God; the creator and the originator of Mankind.
- Man is the expression of God.
- Man is the supreme creation and is the master of all other creations.
- Humans are composed of two parts i.e. the Body and the Soul.
- Humans have the ability to transcend themselves.³⁴

But all these points are not present in a single chapter and these expressions about human nature have not been explained in a concrete fashion. However, one can easily find certain statements or propositions describing human nature. For example, creation is described in the *Book of Genesis*.³⁵ It describes that there are two elements present in human. The first is the body and the second is the breath or spirit of life breathed into it by God.³⁶ The scholars have interpreted that the meaning of being created in the image of God, distinguishes human nature from that of the beasts.³⁷ Humans are created by God as a mind-body-spirit unity, and in the image of God. Further, all humans have God's natural law within, as a kind of innate conscience written upon their hearts.³⁸

An important personality who explained human nature according to biblical teachings was Augustine. He was the first Christian theologian to focus on human nature and its perfectibility. He was born in 354AD and died in 430AD and is considered as the most important Christian theologian of all times. His thoughts are still a source of inspiration for many. The first thing he noticed of human nature was that things are not as they should be. People seek happiness but instead encounter overwhelming pain. As a newly elected bishop in the community of Hippo, North Africa, Augustine wrote a journal, *The Confessions*, in order to understand his own experience.³⁹ In it, he focuses on the anxiety he feels in his habitual grasping of different objects that cross his path, out of fear that something will be missed which he calls, concupiscence.⁴⁰

Saint Augustine stated that it is the freewill of man which is responsible for evil or sin. For him, the acceptance of free will made personal responsibility meaningful. So there

³³Justo L. González, *Essential Theological Terms* (Westminster: John Knox, 2005), 8.

³⁴Harold Coward, *The Perfectibility of Human Nature in Eastern and Western Thought*, 55-78.

³⁵Kenneth Ackerman, "Anthropology and Human Nature," Online at <https://www.udel.edu/anthro/ackerman/syllabus08F205.pdf>

³⁶Louis Berkh, *Systematic Theology* (Eerdmans, 1996), 183.

³⁷Kevin J. Vanhoozer, gen. ed., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (London: Baker, 2005), 318-319.

³⁸Epistle to the Romans; Rome; 2:14-15.

³⁹Augustine, *The Confessions* (Toronto: Mentor-Omega, 1963), 34.

⁴⁰Harold Coward, *The Perfectibility of Human Nature in Eastern and Western Thought*, 59-64.

should be checks upon this free will to keep a person within the limits and that is why religion imposes certain limitations.⁴¹ These limitations are not merely like the commands of the Lord but also are for the wellbeing of humanity. The goal is to transcend human to a level of purification: a level at which the urge to commit sin disappears. This raises humans to a higher spiritual and moral level is known as “Total Transformation” in biblical nomenclature.⁴²

Most of the thoughts of Augustine revolved about religious teachings. For example, in describing human nature he said pride is a basic sin which is also the root cause of many other evil acts that a person might commit. In this way he pointed out some pivotal attributes of human personality. His concepts about human nature were based on biblical explanations. In his interpretation of human life, he considered it to be constantly under pains, sorrows and under punishment. His famous saying is that, “God has some sons without sin, but no son without suffering.”⁴³ He found the experiences of concupiscence and death to offer clear evidence of this “state of punishment.” Death and separation of the soul from the body was seen by Augustine as a “harsh and unnatural experience” and was an evidence of how humans were punished.⁴⁴

Augustine’s concept about consciousness is also noteworthy and he said that it is constantly in a state of a flux. This concept of flowing consciousness is also related to his idea of introspection according to which one should look within, in order to resolve the problems, instead of the outer world.⁴⁵ According to this doctrine, the inner self is greater than the outer ontological self. He rejected the Greek idea of body, as the soul’s prison and argued that the Christian doctrines of creation, the incarnation of Christ and the resurrection of the body, giving the body a high metaphysical status as an integral, good and permanent part of human nature. Thus, we find in Augustine a significant reshaping of the Neoplatonic views of human nature that dominated numerous writers before him as well. With Augustine’s contribution the theology came closer to the Biblical explanation.⁴⁶

This era focused on different schools of thoughts including theistic and spiritual being of Man; philosophical descriptions of human nature in terms of intelligence and emotions; overall human personality including mind, body and spirit, representation of God as the master of all creations, notions of happiness and pain; how free will of man leads to evil and sin, concept of death and separation of soul: and how inner self was greater than ontological self.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Henry Chadwick, *Augustine: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 132.

⁴⁶Ibid.

4.2. Muslim Contribution

The Prophet of Islam Muhammad (SAW) was born in Mecca in 571 AD. In the age of forty, he received his first revelation from Allah. The Divine guidance that was revealed to him was contained in the Holy Qur'ān. The Muslims view human nature as a unity of body, mind, and spirit. They also believe in the resurrection of the body after death. Although the Qur'ān presents human as inclined to err, and recognized the good through reflection, reason, or instinct, innate human responses to good and evil reveals that human nature is not fatally flawed and can be rightly guided. Unlike Christianity, in Islam there is no notion of original sin. In the Holy Qur'ān's view of human capabilities, there is nothing to suggest humans cannot act ethically, thus there is no need for supernatural grace—although ideas of God's help and even predestination do developed in later theology. However, Qur'ānic teaching for the most part assumes that ethical and virtuous action is possible. Indeed, “In its description of human nature, the Qur'ān maintains an artful tension between the possibility of human perfection and the reality of human moral deficiency.”⁴⁷

Like all other religions, the major concern of Islam is also Man and the whole guidance present in the Holy Qur'ān and in the teachings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad SAW is related to the wellbeing of Man in this world and in the hereafter.⁴⁸ So it was natural that Holy Qur'ān has its own view about human nature. According to Holy Qur'ān, human beings are noble creation, as it has been mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān, “We have certainly created man in the best of stature.”⁴⁹

The purpose of the human creation has been explained in the Qur'ān as, “And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me.”⁵⁰ The word worship here means submission, which is to love and serve Allah. According to the Holy Qur'ān, God created humans out of dust and clay by blowing into them his divine spirit, thus making humans capable of being God's viceroy (*khalifa*) on Earth.⁵¹ Having created Adam and breathing his spirit (*Rooh*) into him, God granted Adam (and his progeny) the faculty of knowledge, conceptual thinking, a conscience, free choice and the ability to progress towards human perfection. Allah created man with His own hands with clay and then injected the soul (*Rooh*) in it. The origin of this soul lies with the creator and this is the main source of divinity present in Man. As described in Holy Qur'ān, “When I have created him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My spirit, fall down in obeisance to him.”⁵²

As a mixture of clay and God's breath or Spirit, human nature represents a mixture of darkness and light, ignorance and knowledge and activity and passivity. All the divine attributes are present in human nature, but they are obscured. Between the divine Spirit and

⁴⁷Jane D. McAuliffe, *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an* (Boston: Brill, 2002).

⁴⁸B. R. Herghanin, *An Introduction to the History of Psychology*, 84.

⁴⁹al-Teen 95:4

⁵⁰al Zaariyaat 51:56

⁵¹al Baqarah 2:30.

⁵²al-Hijr 15:29.

the body there are many admixtures and permutations where the divine light is reflected brightly, dimly, or not at all. This mixture of spirit and body is a microcosm of the human person that has been provided with guidance by the Holy Qur'ān. In it, each person has his or her own unique capacity to respond to God's guidance. This has also been stated in *Surah Al-Noor* of the Holy Qur'ān that human heart is the resting place of the "Rooh" and also the center of Allah's *Noor*.⁵³

The Holy Qur'ān describes the process of creation and how it was triggered with the word "kun," the commandment of Allah which means "Be."⁵⁴ The Holy Qur'ān describes at many places that whenever Allah wants to create something, He just orders it to be and it comes to existence. In the words of the Holy Qur'ān, "and whenever He wants (to create or perform) a thing (*amr*) to be, He just says unto it, "Be" --- and it is."⁵⁵

The Holy Qur'ān also described different phases of embryo taking place in the womb of the mother. The most important description is found in *Surah Al-Muminūn*, "We created Man with quintessence (of clay); then we placed him in the form of a drop (sperm) in a fixed place; then We converted it a clot of congealed blood; then of that clot We made a (fetus) lump; then We made out of that lump bones and clothed the bones with flesh; then We created out of it another creature. So blessed be Allah, the Best of creators."⁵⁶

The first verse out of the above beautiful passage of three verses --- Man We did create from a quintessence (of clay) --- refers to a major and long phase of the creative work of Allah long before the birth in this world. Then stated, is the biological process taking place in the womb of the mother after the process of fertilization. It is very clear that each new phase is differentiated with the word "*Summa*" (سُمَّا) in the Arabic text. When the bones and flesh of embryo is created, another creation is formed out of it. This according to many scholars including Dr Israr Ahmad⁵⁷ is the indication of the blowing of Soul in the child's body. The Messenger of Allah (*SAW*) narrated about the injection of this *Rooh* in the human body after the fourth month of pregnancy. "Each one of you, during the creation in the mother's womb, remains in the form of a seed for forty days, then it is in the form of a clot for the same number of days, then it is in the form of leash and then an angel is sent to him to blow *Rooh* into it."⁵⁸

It is clear from the above verses of the Holy Qur'ān and from the saying of the Holy Prophet (*SAW*) that *Rooh* enters the body of a child when it is 120 days old in the womb of mother. This *Rooh* or the Spirit is main reason which makes Man the vicegerent of Allah. This makes Man a spiritual being. This is a divine spark in Man which makes him the

⁵³An-Noor 24:36.

⁵⁴al-Baqarah 2:117.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶al Muminoon 23:12-14.

⁵⁷Dr Israr Ahmad, *Bayan ul Qur'ān* (Lahore: Anjuman Khuddam ul Quran, 2013).

⁵⁸Muhammad Bin Ismaeel, *Sahih Bukhari*, Khalq-e-Adam and his progeny #3085 (Lahore: Maktaba Rahmania, 2009).

special creation of Allah. Thinkers like Ghazali and Ibn e Taimiyah also affirm that the presence of *Rooh* in Man makes him a lover of Allah because its origin is Divine. Moreover, this *Rooh* has experienced the pleasure of being in the presence of the Lord when he created all the souls at once and ask them about who their Lord was. This has been described in the Holy Qur’ān in Surah al-A’arāf.⁵⁹

The Muslim contribution is in the development and evolution of the conception of Man discussed about the unity of body, mind and spirit, resurrection of body after death, concept of good and evil, guidance of mankind through Qur’ān and *Sunnah*, purpose of human creation and his birth and the presence and significance of *rooh*.

5. Fundamental Agreement between Ancient and Medieval Concept of “Man”

Hitherto a brief account of traditional thoughts about human nature have been given. In this description two different types of intellectual traditions have been discussed. One is the Greek tradition which was based purely on intellect and rationality, and the other is the religious tradition comprising mainly of Christian and the Muslim thought which were based upon revelation and divine guidance. Although both these traditions have different epistemology and differ a lot with each other in many respects but at certain points they agree with each other also. All these traditions agree on the point that Man is not merely a material self. The real dignity of Man lies in the fact that he is a spiritual and moral being. The knowledge and the morality are the basis of real supremacy of man. Therefore, the civilizations with high moral values and intellect were actually considered as the better examples of Human beings. This traditional concept considered Man as the center of all the creation. But gradually the advancements in knowledge shattered this conventional perspective of human Nature.

Passmore⁶⁰ summarizes the various classical views of human nature as follows:

- Man is a spiritual being;
- He is the centre of the universe;
- Man has a flawed nature which needs to be perfected;
- The moral self of the Man is more important;
- He is capable of wholly subordinating himself to God’s will;
- He by performing certain acts of purification can entirely clear his inner self of any moral defect;
- He can make himself a being who is metaphysically perfect;
- He can live in the manner of an ideally perfect human being; and
- He has divine attributes in him so he can become godlike.

⁵⁹Al A’arāf 7:172.

⁶⁰John Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1970), 27.

This era emphasized on the similarities as well as the differences between the religious and traditional schools of thought. While the religious schools of thought focused on the notions of divine guidance, the traditional Greek school of thought talked about human intellect and rationality. However, they agreed that man held high morals and knowledge and was more than material self.

6. Modern Concept of “Man”

The advancements in different fields of knowledge from 15th to 18th century completely changed the course of history. Man in the past failed to come across such enormous intellectual revolution. In all the classical traditions there had been a certain amount of sacredness attached to the Man. The main milestones of the formation of modern World view was as follows:

- Renaissance
- Reformation
- Scientific Revolution
- Philosophical Revolution

Before coming to study the modern theories about human nature, the process of renaissance needs to be examined as well. This term is related to the rebirth of the intellectual tradition in west. This movement was possible because of some events that took place in the 13th and 14th century. Without these events renaissance was not possible. Moreover, the church also played its part to initiate the re-birth of knowledge and intellect in the West. Although as a result of that intellectual revolution the institution which suffered the most was the institution of church. The pivotal changes, occurred due to this revolution, included the revival of the view that human reason was a reliable tool for solving all types of problems.⁶¹ The individuality of man which had been ignored in the collectiveness during the medieval period, was again brought to focus. Moreover, many beauties of life including love, art, literature, etc., which were ignored due to the influence of church and strong hold of the Empire were also reconsidered.⁶²

Renaissance was both an age in itself and a transitional phase between the modern and the medieval period. Leonardo Da Vinci (1452-1519) one of the prime examples of the intellectual aptitude of this era was equally committed to research for the beautification of

⁶¹John Herman Randall, *The Making of the Modern Mind: A Survey of the Intellectual Background of Present Age*, 14-16.
<https://ia801602.us.archive.org/15/items/in.ernet.dli.2015.236818/2015.236818.The-Making.pdf>;

Vivian Hubert Howard Green, *Renaissance and Reformation: A Survey of European History Between 1450-1660* (London: Edward Arnold Publishing, 1974), 23; Stainley J. Grenz, *A Premier on Postmodernism* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 58.

⁶²David West, *An Introduction to Continental Philosophy* (Oxford, UK; Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 10.

knowledge and was voraciously involved in scientific research of wide range.⁶³ The focus shifted from the contemplative quiet of the countryside to cities like Florence with their amalgam of businessmen, scholars, statesmen, artists, and scientists, cities that ushered in the notions that humans and human society could be perfected.⁶⁴ Artists such as Leonardo and Michelangelo (1475-1564) produced their master pieces, Columbus discovered America, Luther started a rebellious movement against the authority of the Church and Copernicus presented the view of the heliocentric universe which opened new horizons for the scientific revolution.⁶⁵ These changes transformed Man virtually into a superman, as compared to the medieval predecessors.

Tarnas stated that “In Renaissance man embraced the enrichments of life” which the cultural and intellectual environment of that time provided them with. As a result, a man with entirely different world view was born. This new world view was almost in total contrast to that of the previous traditional views. Individualism with freedom and secularity were integral part of the thinking of patterns of man in the Renaissance. He also had the “strength, the will, the multiplicity of interest and impulse, creative innovation and a willingness to defy traditional limits on human activity.”⁶⁶ Soon these values and concepts gained popularity and soon the entire Europe came under their influence.

The next advancement in the intellectual domain of the West was the scientific revolution which was regarded by many as the final expression of the renaissance. Beginning in the 16th century it became the most important and in some cases the decisive criterion for establishing a fact. It gave a strong challenge to all the orthodoxies and its influences were so massive that no other meta-narrative could stand before it. The world view of the coming centuries was formed under the direct influence of science. The key person who was most responsible for igniting the drastic changes in scientific studies was Copernicus (1473-1543)⁶⁷ who lived when the phenomenon of renaissance was in its full blossom. He was born in Poland and received his education in Italy which was the center of renaissance. Tarnas considered him as the most important contributor. It was his “insight that provoked and symbolized the drastic, fundamental break from the ancient and medieval universe to that of the modern era”.⁶⁸

Copernicus gave a new explanation to the ancient problem about the planets, the Earth and the Sun. Before him, all the conventional thoughts and the religious traditions

⁶³J. Bronowski, *The Western Intellectual Tradition* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1960), 3-27.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of Western Mind*, 112-156.

⁶⁶Ibid., 153.

⁶⁷Nicholas Copernicus, “On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Sphere,” *The Great Books of the Western World*, vol.16, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc, 1952), 501-838; Copernicus declared that earth is not stationary and not the center of the universe despite the sun is the center of the planetary system.

⁶⁸Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of Western Mind*, 213.

considered the Earth, as the center of the universe. This geocentric interpretation of the universe had a direct relation with the doctrine of considering Man, as the super creation and that the whole universe was created to serve him.⁶⁹ Copernicus with the help of mathematical formula proved that the universe was heliocentric and not geocentric.

The scientific revolution also played its part in enriching this enlightenment movement. This movement with its liberal and individualistic character rectified the role of religion in the society. God who was once considered as the Prime Mover and the Omnipotent was now reduced to the role of a creator only. This fact was successfully established that universe was governed by forces of nature and through physical laws and not through supernatural or metaphysical forces, including God.⁷⁰ With the discoveries of Galileo (1564-1642), Descartes (1596-1650), and Newton (1643-1727), science became capable of giving a new concept of cosmology. “The new universe was a machine, a self-contained mechanism of force and matter, devoid of goals or purpose, bereft of intelligence or consciousness; and its character fundamentally alien to that of man. The pre-modern world had been permeated with spiritual, mythic, theistic and other humanly meaningful categories, but all these were regarded by the modern perception as anthropomorphic projections. Mind and matter, psyche and world, were regarded as separate realities.”⁷¹

Man, fully aware of his abilities and armed with the weapons of science and materialism, attacked all the external authorities, including religion, ethics, dogmas etc. and affirmed that none of them could retain their position. But this also alienated Man from the Universe and Nature because the process of creation was considered as an automatic process with no real purpose behind it. Tarns has described it as:

The scientific liberation from theological dogma and animistic superstition was thus accompanied by a new sense of human alienation from a world that no longer responded to human values, nor offered a redeeming context within which could be understood the larger issues of human existence. Similarly, with science’s quantitative analysis of the world, the methodological liberation from subjective distortions was accompanied by the ontological diminution of all those qualities—emotional, aesthetic, ethical, sensory, imaginative, and intentional—that seemed most constitutive of human experience. These losses and gains were noted, but the paradox seemed inescapable if man was to be faithful to his own intellectual rigor. Science may have revealed a cold, impersonal world, but it was the true one nonetheless. Despite any nostalgia for the venerable but now disproved cosmic womb, one could not go backward.⁷²

Darwin further affirmed the new world view developed by science. His theory of evolution took Man away from any kind of remaining dogmatic assumptions regarding the metaphysical status of the Universe and of Man himself. His view of the survival of the

⁶⁹J. Bronowski, *The Western Intellectual Tradition*, 113-125.

⁷⁰Stanley J. Grenz, *A Premier on Postmodernism*, 59-73.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 267.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 271.

fittest further enhanced the materialistic view of life.⁷³ Man had now become the fittest and the most successful animal. The creation which once was considered as a conscious effort of a creator was now considered as an automatic process with lot of accidents involved in it. Darwin gave the view that life came into existence as the result of some accident in the course of the evolution of matter. Man was considered as species out of millions of other species that had no pre-birth or after death existence.⁷⁴ This view destroyed all the dignity attached to Man, who was not only recognized as the rode forth at the crest of evolution's advance, nature's most complex and dazzling achievement; but also as an animal of no "higher" purpose.

Freud expanded the premise of the Darwinism to the psychological realm and presented a very persuasive evidence of the presence of un-conscious forces. He related all the human behavior and personality traits with learning of the unconscious mind. He described human personality as a slave of his unconscious mind, while the unconscious mind got all his drive from the urge of sex. As a result, all the work and struggle that Man do throughout his life is just to satisfy this blind urge. If this urge does not get proper satisfaction it will cause certain personality disorders in that Man. Consequently, all the psychological disorders like neurosis, schizophrenia etc. according to him are the results of an unsatisfied urge of sex.⁷⁵

The work of Freud attracted the attention of many and within a few years gained popularity and received huge applause from the academia around the world. The world after Freud was different to the world before him. Now sexual urge was no more a taboo rather it was a normal orientation. Perhaps in more concise words, sexual urge was now regarded as the most potent urge of Man. Freud thereby represented a brilliant culmination of the Enlightenment project, bringing even the human unconscious under the light of rational investigation.

As Freud revealed the personal unconscious, Marx exposed the social unconscious. The philosophical, religious, and moral values of each age could be plausibly comprehended as determined by economic and political variables, whereby control over the means of production was maintained by the most powerful class.⁷⁶ The entire superstructure of human belief could be seen as reflecting from the basic struggle for material power. He considered all the human effort as the struggle for material progress. He said that even the high ideals which Man has tried to achieve over the course of history, whether at individual or collective level, are the distorted reflections of their economic conditions. The elite of Western civilization, for all its sense of cultural achievement, might recognize itself in Marx's dark portrait as a self-deceiving bourgeois imperialist oppressor.

⁷³Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (London: Taylor and Co, 1961).

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (Munich: Modern Books, 1936).

⁷⁶Karl Marx, *Das Capital* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997).

Class struggle, not civilized progress, was the program of the foreseeable future—and again, contemporary historical developments appeared to bear out that analysis.

Between Marx and Freud, with Darwin behind them, the modern intelligentsia increasingly perceived man's cultural values, psychological motivations, and conscious awareness as historically relative phenomena derived from unconscious political, economic, and instinctual impulses of an entirely naturalistic quality. The principles and directives of the Scientific Revolution—the search for material, impersonal, secular explanations for all phenomena—had found new and illuminating applications in the psychological and social dimensions of human experience.

The modern concept of man laid the foundation of a new philosophical and scientific era, coupled with the effects of renaissance, changing the outlook of man towards life and religion. Conceptions of individuality and human reason over-powered external authorities and religious dogmas, diminishing the impact and role of religion in society. Man was seen in the light of his strength and willingness which was completely different from the representation of man in the previous eras. God was seen as creator, whilst man with the weapons of science and materialism attacked religious dogmas. Moreover, the concept of conscious and unconscious, theories of Darwin, Freud and Marx's class struggle also became an important topic of discussion in this era.

7. Conclusion

After all the intellectual advancements of the past five centuries, Man who once was the center of the Universe, a super creature with a spiritual and moral self, declined to merely an animal self, with consciousness going after his instinctual impulses. There was no special purpose for his creation and there is no transcendent goal or ideal which he has to achieve. "The domains of religion and metaphysics became gradually compartmentalized, regarded as personal, subjective, speculative, and fundamentally distinct from public objective knowledge of the empirical world. Faith and reason were now definitively severed. Conceptions involving a transcendent reality were increasingly regarded beyond the competence of human knowledge as: useful palliatives for man's emotional nature; aesthetically satisfying imaginative creations; potentially valuable heuristic assumptions; necessary bulwarks for morality or social cohesion; political-economic propaganda; psychologically motivated projections; life-impoverishing illusions; and superstitious, irrelevant, or meaningless."⁷⁷

Armed with all the tools of science, modern man is now capable of comprehending and explaining cosmos by using his empirical faculty alone. Not only universe but also the Human Nature is now understood and studied in the scientific realm only. As a result, Man has become a biological being only, who is composed of certain chemical elements and practically is a biological machine. This attitude has not only deprived Man of his dignity but also has ignored the ethical, moral, aesthetic, emotional and imaginative aspects of his

⁷⁷Richard Tarns, *The Passion of Western Mind*, 270.

personality. The philosophy evolving from Renaissance and flourishing in Enlightenment and Modernity has now touched the boundaries of existence. The existentialism, which was the last theory of Modernity, almost liberated Man from all the external authorities. In the last decades of the Nineteenth Century when Nietzsche claimed that God is dead was actually the most vocal expression of the intellectual spirit of not only his time but of the coming centuries also. This expression has been interpreted by many, as the announcement of death of Man who required a God. Now, the very same man has placed himself in that place of deity with no obligation whatsoever towards any authority.

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