

# QUR'ANIC CONCEPTS OF MAN AND NATURE AND THEIR ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN BEHAVIOR: DEVELOPING AN ALTERNATIVE ISLAMIC FRAMEWORK

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The question of ethics in economic development has taken centre stage in recent years. The recurring financial crises and the devastation of the environment provide opportunities to revisit the issue of re-introducing ethics into economics. Even in mainstream academic discourse, global scholarship is searching for appropriate ethical foundations to be the basis of human behavior in dealing with nature while at the same time enabling man to enjoy maximum well-being. Mainstream neoclassical economics is criticized for not having a holistic perspective that would be the basis of genuine sustainable development. This criticism emanates primarily from the microfoundations of neoclassical economics that idealize individual rationality within a framework that glorifies self-interest/selfish behavior and utility maximization postulates. In this paper, we attempt to investigate the Islamic perspective on the relationship of man and nature, vis-a-vis the framework of an ethics-based approach to development. A new micro-foundational framework of the man-nature relationship will be presented. This paper attempts to develop outlines of the conceptual framework based on selected Qur'anic concepts that represent the moral foundations of Islam, which require the individual to attain taqwa (piety) and full consciousness of huquq (rights and obligations) vis-à-vis oneself, others and nature while being motivated to maximize maslahah*

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*(benefit) and avoid mafsadah (harm) to oneself, society and nature. The intended goal is to attain self-betterment/realization that incorporates spiritual transformation. We argue that in this proposed conceptual framework man and nature are recognized as having mutual co-existence, whereby one cannot exist without the other, and the well-being of one depends on the well-being of the other. This will provide balance and harmony to better achieve sustainable development.*

**Keywords:** Ethics, Islam, well-being, *huquq*, *maslahah*, *taqwa*

## 1. Introduction

What is the relationship between man and nature? This question has been asked repeatedly in the face of the destructive impact of climate change, global warming, massive ecological devastation and depletion of natural resources that affect man's life and well-being. Sustainable development has become a catch-phrase since it implies, among others, equilibrium between economic and environmental development. Both intra- and inter-generation equity issues are increasingly being given attention, not because of any inherent philosophical basis, but mainly because it is seen as imperative to the survival of man and planet. Economic growth should be done with consciousness of equitable distribution for the well-being of both present and future generations. The main message is to utilize nature in a judicious manner and conserve it for a better future.

One major stream of criticism of the mainstream growth literature focuses on the foundations of economics itself. Critics highlight the way economics is structured and its mechanistic approach to solving problems by focussing on the monolithic goal of trying to satisfy unlimited human desires without showing concern for other goals such as equity.

Economics treats ethical and environmental concerns as exogenous variables that may or may not be considered in resource allocation or economic decisions. A science that is developed based on such a worldview has an isolative perspective in which the various components of existence and realities are taken to be autonomous and and seen as being independent of each other.<sup>3</sup> Renewed efforts have been put in place to explore ethics that could enrich economics and at the same time contribute to the well-being of humans. The trends show that humanity is now waiting and actively searching for a new

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<sup>3</sup> In this regard, Iqbal's observation (2007: 5) is interesting: "The divorce between human beings and their environment is not accidental; it has occurred through a series of radical shifts in the human understanding of nature over the last three hundred years. These shifts have produced attitudes which consider the vast cosmic realm of nature no more than an aggregate of matter which can be manipulated and exploited in whichever way humans deem fit...these shifts in relationships between the Creator and the created, the earth and its residents, and humanity and the vast cosmic order of nature have all taken place in small increments."

economics that is more humane — one that is inclusive of ethics and morality and at the same time emphasizes environmental sustainability.

In this light, Islamic economics, a relatively new discipline, declares that its ethical notions will be explicitly asserted as ‘endogenous variables’ in its theoretical analysis. These ethical notions are derived from Islamic concepts that serve as ethical guidelines in dealing with natural resources appropriation and the satisfaction of human needs. In general, we will see in the coming paragraph that these values proceed from the Islamic worldview that places man and nature in mutual co-existence, in which man’s existence is supported by nature and nature’s existence is supported by man’s ethical actions. The Qur’an comprehensively delineates the close relationship of man and nature and prescribes proper ethics for how man should deal with nature—a discourse that covers both the rights and obligations of man towards nature.

Based on this perspective, this paper aims at (1) delineating a preliminary Qur’anic framework to serve as the basis for deriving an ethical foundation for the man-nature relationship; and (2) elaborating and developing a framework for Islamic economic ethics that forms the basis for proper human behavior. This framework is important in providing not only a comprehensive behavioral guide, but will help in clarifying key Islamic concepts and terminologies in economics. In section three, we will show how these concepts and the Islamic economics framework give a new perspective to sustainable development.

## **2. The Qur’anic Notion of the Man–Nature Relationship**

Within the concept of *tawhid*, the Qur’an addresses the man–nature relationship from an inclusive perspective: the meaningful and sustainable existence of each is only possible through the existence of the other.

Nature is described in the Qur’an as *fadl Allah* (God’s bounties) to humankind. All the created things in the universe are the bounties of God endowed to man to facilitate his twin roles of being ‘*abd Allah* (God’s servant) and *khalifah* (steward) on earth. God has created nature with all its beauty and splendor in sufficient

proportions and has made it subservient to man to develop (*taskhir*) for the betterment of each striving individual and all of humanity (Qur'an, 2:29; 31:20; 45:12; 14:32; 16:12-4; 22:65; 29:61; 31:29; 35:13; 39:5; 43:12).

Nature is also described in the Qur'an as a sign (*ayah*) for man to contemplate over in order to understand the reason for his existence and to attain spirituality towards God (Qur'an, 38:27; 3:191; 21:22; 27:60-64).<sup>4</sup> The existence of nature in this regard is not for the mere physical and material benefit of man, i.e., to satisfy his external needs, but also serves a spiritual function that would guide man in the pursuit of appropriation and utilization of natural resources. This guidance directs man to the right path, liberates him from the cages of the materialistic and mundane world, guides him toward the direction of truth and morality and nourishes his behavior towards nature in a harmonious and unified way.

This principle of 'harmony' between man and nature is founded on the basis that nature belongs to God alone (Qur'an 25:2). It is endowed to human beings as an *amanah* (trust). Man is allowed to have relative ownership of nature and benefit from it with the responsibility of preserving, expanding and developing it for the betterment of all creatures, and for the successful mission of being

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<sup>4</sup> The universe, as we observe, is indeed cosmos, an orderly creation, not chaos. In it, the will of the Creator is always realized. His patterns are fulfilled with the necessity of natural law, for they are innate as has been ordained (Qur'an, 25:2; 35:43). He places within it its power or laws of behavior, called in the Qur'an 'guidance' (Qur'an, 20:50; 87:23), command (Qur'an, 7:54) or measure (Qur'an, 15:21; 25: 2; 54:49), which "...you will never find exception as the patterns of Allah are immutable" (Qur'an, 35: 43). Nature is, however, with its self-sufficient causes, unfortunately, often regarded by man as the ultimate and independent order as Rahman (1989: 69) observes "they do not realize that the universe is a sign pointing to something *beyond* itself [i.e., to its author], something without which the universe, with all its natural causes, would be and could be nothing". The regularity of nature should serve as God's sign for humans (natural sign, *ayah kauniyyah*), since none, but an infinite and unique Being could have created it. It requires a mental-cum-spiritual attitude so that one will 'really hear, really see, and really understand' (Rahman, 1999: 70). This is in contrast to the secular worldview that "views the symbols in nature as merely facts, entities in themselves that are totally divorced from other orders of reality that makes the cosmos at large become opaque and spiritually meaningless" (Nasr, 2003: 22).

*khalifah* (Qur'an 23:115). Man is invited to use nature for good purposes and not to utilize it for corrupting the earth (*fasad fi al-ard*, Qur'an 11: 86).

Central to this perspective is the role of God. Disequilibrium between man and nature is essentially due to the destruction of the harmony between man and God (Nasr, 2003: 21). Man, in this regard, no longer views nature as an *amanah* from God that he must be responsible for. The elimination of God in all public affairs and relationships (a consequence of the process of secularization) in western European history makes man think of himself as the 'master' of nature. Nature is regarded as a mere object to be used and exploited by man for his pleasure as he pleases. Man with his economic motives to maximize his utility, dominates nature. Sometimes this is accompanied with greed triggered by a purely materialistic concept of happiness that makes an ever greater demand upon the environment, leading to the destruction of nature.<sup>5</sup>

Man must be guided by higher values and ethics. He, with all the given potentialities and relative authority, has the power and will to dominate and control nature and can either carve a path of destruction or utilize it sustainably. The Qur'an for that reason repeatedly reminds man that nature is an *amanah* trust), which implies that man can freely utilize and benefit from it with strict consciousness of responsibility. Nature is not created to only satisfy the individual's selfish wants and desires (Qur'an, 30:34), rather, man must understand that it is a means to achieving the ultimate goal of life and the ultimate *falah* (success); the material utilisation of nature should be in line with doing good and attaining spiritual advancement (Qur'an, 23: 51-52). As *'abd allah* and *khalifah* (servant of Allah and vicegerent on earth), man is also endowed with capabilities and facilities to implement God's authority on earth. Man can regulate resources, both on earth and beyond, so that they can fulfill his needs, and is to distribute them justly (Qur'an, 3:29; 18:7; 7:32). The sustainable existence of nature is not only important for human existence, but human existence can only be perfected with the

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<sup>5</sup> S.H. Nasr (2003: 26) further observes that "lack of sense of intimacy with nature as a cosmos that conveys to man a meaning that concerns him, is of course due to the loss of contemplative and symbolist spirit which sees symbols rather than facts."

existence of nature. That is because nature is the place where mankind can realize its full potential and moral obligations in implementing God's normative patterns on earth and attain a higher level of spirituality (Qur'an, 51: 56).

### **3. Man and Nature: The Ethics of Sustainability in Islam**

The above guidelines on the Qur'anic notion of the man-nature relationship assist in developing an Islamic ethics of sustainability that would be the foundation of sustainable development in Islam. The ethics developed is not reductionist nor monolithic and does not emphasize supremacy on either man (hence having full rights to exploit nature) or nature (hence having total preservation rights) as found in modern scholarship. The microfoundations of neoclassical economics are of the former and based on three fundamental axioms: the individual agent as a *rational economic man*; the rational economic man acts according to his *self /selfish interest*; and his objective is to *maximize* his *utility* for his self-pleasure.

These axioms governing the man-nature relationship have to be modified or even be replaced in Islamic economics. Reasons for this are as follows: *first*, the philosophies of secularism, reductionism, atomism, and methodological individualism on which ethics in neoclassical economics is based on offering a narrow perspective of ethics and in numerous ways contradict the basic principles of Islamic ethics. *Second*, in practice those foundations are unable to solve the current crisis that we are facing today such as environmental degradation and ecological destruction and cannot satisfactorily answer the trade-off that often emerges in conventional economics between individual-satisfaction versus nature's protection. Therefore, these three foundational axioms should either be significantly and meaningfully redefined or replaced by more comprehensive concepts and axioms. Although there can be a case made to do the former, however, in the following paragraphs we elaborate on the concepts of *huquq*, *maslahah* and *taqwa* as alternative foundations of ethics found in Islamic economics. There are fundamental differences in these concepts and their implications on the ethical (value) system of the man-nature relationship and the structure of economics theory.

### **3.1. The Basis of the Man-Nature Relationship: Self-Interest vs. *Huquq***

Economics starts by assuming that human beings only pursue their self-interest. Man functions only to preserve himself and to persevere in his existence (Fromm, 1990: 26). By this, Man has well-defined the preferences for things and acquired experiences that are self-satisfactory and the oriented in achieving more for the pleasure of self. Self-interest means that man is an autonomous/atomistic being who measures value at the level of personal impulses, desires and preferences (Ryan, 2003: 249). Amartya Sen (1990: 80) describes the structure of self-interested behavior as having three distinct and essentially independent features: (1) *Self-centred welfare*, in which a person's welfare depends only on his or her own consumption (more particularly, it does not involve any sympathy or antipathy towards others); (2) *Self-welfare goals*, in which a person's goal is to maximize based on his or her own welfare while giving uncertainty the probability weighted expected value of that welfare (in particular, it does not involve attaching importance to the welfare of others); and (3) *Self-goal choice*, in which the choice of each individual is guided immediately by the pursuit of his or her own goal. (Hence, it is not restrained to the recognition of mutual interdependence of respective successes allowing others to pursue their goals.) Within this self-interest perspective, nature is treated as subservient to the satisfaction of individuals. This monolithic perspective of dominant behavior puts nature under man's full control without any obligation/responsibility to preserve the right of nature.

In Islamic economics, while self-interest is recognized as a legitimate human virtue, it does not consider self-interest as the all dominating motive of human behavior. Individual interest is neither exclusive nor absolute from an Islamic perspective since all beings (society, animals, and plants) have their own rights. Therefore, in Islamic literature, we find the discussion is more on the concept of *huquq* (rights) rather than that of self-interest. Every being has a distinct right that is exclusive to its nature and expects certain obligations to be delivered to others. The concept of *huquq* could



better explain the man-nature relationship and provide the ethical foundations for sustainability.

*Huquq* (sing. *haqq*) is translated as truth, real, certainty (*al-thubut*), right, claim (*al-nasib wa al-haz*), obligation, and responsibility (*al-wujub, al-mas'uliyah*) (Sharbasi, 1981: 117). It also means beneficence and public good (*al-khayr wa al-maslahah*) (Kamali, 1994: 11). These meanings signify two dimensions of *huquq*: (1) right and responsibility (as also denoted in the Quran, 6:141, 51: 19 and 70:24-25). This implies that while the individual is acknowledged as having an exclusive entitlement (*ikhstisas hajiz*) that establishes authority (*sultah*), he or she still has a responsibility and obligation (*al-wujub*). (2) The claim of right should be directed towards higher values such as justice ('*adl*), righteousness (*ihsan*) and public good (*maslahah*). *Al-haqq* is one of the most repeated names of God in the Qur'an, which implies that not only does the concept have a broader perspective and metaphysical connotation, but it also gives a central role to God in the conceptual notion of *huquq*.

There are several conceptual differences between the two above-mentioned concepts and their implications in developing ethics for sustainability as follows:

First, while the concept of self-interest is based on a *unitary self-view*, the concept of *huquq* is based on a *holistic and integrated self-view*. Realities in a secular worldview, according to the natural law of gravitation, have been reduced to the level of the individual. Man is considered as an autonomous/atomistic being that measure value at the level of personal desires and preferences for all activities (Ryan, 2003: 249). He or she is at the centre of all beings (anthropomorphic in nature) and is purely an earthly creature, isolated, divorced and cut off from the Divine source and is not responsible to anyone, but himself or herself, and hence independent of any external elements of society and the environment (Nasr: 1982). Humanity, in a unitary self-view, has one single identity; either individual identity (as in capitalism) or a social identity (as in socialism). Both identities are always in conflict and cannot exist simultaneously unless at the expense of the other. While capitalism glorifies the individual identity of self, socialism sees the ultimate

identity of self to be a social being in which the individual is dissolved into society.

Islamic economics upholds a holistic/integrated self-view of an individual. Mankind composed of Divine and earthly component, physics and metaphysics has the free-will to choose either a positive or negative behavior. Human beings are unique creators with complex behavior with multiple needs and goals which are broader than the pursuit of mere physical/material pleasure. The self has dual identities — self-being and social-being — which are pursued simultaneously. In this perspective, the instincts that serve human virtue — sacrifice, generosity, sharing - are the same as those that suit man's sense of aggressiveness, material acquisitions, selfishness and egotism (Azzam, 1993: 284).

Second, while human behavior in the concept of self-interest is *unitary and static*, however, in the *huquq* concept it is *reciprocal and dynamic*. Individual behavior in the concept of self-interest is one-way and static in its process of choice. The basic axiom of these concepts is that the individual makes decisions based on his or her. Therefore, the individual will aim at maximizing his or her own utility for the sake of pleasure even at the expense of others, as implied in the Pareto optimality principle or at the expense of nature. From this perspective, individuals tend to demand for his rights rather than fulfill the rights of others. Hence, nature is viewed as something to be exploited for the desire of the individual with or without any internal responsibility and obligation to preserve its right.

In the concept of *huquq*, individual behavior is viewed from an integrated perspective as having a dynamic and two-way (reciprocity) choice process. All beings in the Islamic worldview have particular *huquq*. The *huquq* is the *inherent self-right* that should be respected by other beings, and the *inherent self-obligation* that should be delivered to others. The concept of *huquq* views that individual behavior is not motivated merely by *self-interest* (which simply demand rights), but also by *self-obligation* and *self-sacrifice* to society and nature by giving, caring, preserving and developing. This right is the Islamic basis for economic affairs in resource allocation

as well as in making choices and decisions at the micro and macro level.

Individual rights over nature are rights of sustainability based on moderation, balance, and conservation. Nature's rights over mankind include the rights to protection from misuse, degradation and destruction. The attitude of greed and waste are considered as a form of tyranny against nature and a transgression of those rights. All patterns of man's consumption and production should be based on an overall order and balance of nature. The rights of man are not absolute and unlimited. Human beings cannot consume and pollute nature carelessly as they wish. Instead, man is responsible for preventing emergence of corruption on earth (*fasad fi al-ard*) by having no wastage or over-consumption of natural resources, no unlawful obstruction or destruction of any component of natural resources, no damage, abuse or distortion to the natural environment, and by sustainable development of the earth, its resources, elements and phenomena (Al-Damkhi, 2008: 28).

Third, as mentioned in the earlier paragraphs, while the process of choice in the concept of self-interest is one-way and static, the process of choice in the concept of *huquq* is two-ways and dynamic. The process of making decisions in the self-interest framework is not complicated. With an autonomous/atomistic self-view and unitary behavior, a rational individual will make a decision according to his or her self-interest to pursuit his or her self-utility. However, a dualistic view of material and spiritual, body and soul, self and society, makes the process of choice even easier by preferring self-utility over social-utility, physical-material satisfaction over moral-social well-being. The individual in this regard is viewed as the ultimate decision-maker who acts in a 'social vacuum' in which he is not responsible for others and their interests are not considered. Society's welfare, in general, and environmental sustainability is viewed as an exogenous variable (externalities in individual economic calculations). Man is also living in a 'spiritual vacuum' whereby he or she is not responsible to God and his behavior is directed towards attaining material/physical achievement. In the concept of *huquq*, the process of making choices is both complex and dynamic. The rights of being should be taken into

consideration since all realities are viewed in totality and should be studied as a whole, which according to Nasr (1994) “reflects the principle of Unity (*tawhid*) in its wholeness as well as in its parts.” A particular domain of reality cannot be considered totally independent of other domains nor lose sight of the whole at the expense of some parts. The process of choice in the concept of *huquq* is made based on the Islamic considerations for morality (*akhlak*), public benefit (*maslahah*), and the hereafter (*akhirah*). This makes the individual’s self-interest not ultimate, but rather restricted by the interest of others. This is then directed toward achieving a self-characterized higher moral standard and firm spiritual foundation which implies that nature should be explored and utilized wisely. One could conclude that in the concept of self-interest we are discussing independent utility functions while in the concept of *huquq* the focus is on interdependent utility functions.

### **3.2. The motive of relationships: Maximization of Utility versus *Maslahah***

Maximization is one of the main postulates in economics that says (1) that firms in general desire to maximize their profits, and (2) consumers attempt to maximize their utility (satisfaction). We believe that the maximization postulate, as it has been developed in modern economics, is not value-free. It is founded on the Western, secular worldview, and later it was shaped and justified further through certain cultural experience.

Therefore, in the case of Islamic economics, the concept of maximization cannot be accepted as it is. Critical evaluation has to be made in terms of (1) its substantive contents of what is to be maximized: the utility or *maslahah*, the pain or the pleasure, the benefit or the harm, (2) the purpose of maximization: for self-satisfaction or self-transformation, and (3) the methods to reach such maximization.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> In addition, the concept of maximization should also be restructured in accordance with (1) the Islamic concept of success and progress (*falah*) and failure (*khusran*) in the framework of choices and decisions, (2) the Islamic principle of balance and moderation (*tawazun*) in the ethical domain, and (3) the Islamic concept of the nature of human beings and the purpose of existence.

For Islamic economics, the concept of utility maximization being replaced with a new concept of *maslahah* maximization that motivates the individual in his or her relationship with nature. *Maslahah* is different from utility in its philosophical foundations, objectives and means to realize them.

The substantive content of utility can be pleasure-pain (Bentham, 1987: 65), desire-fulfilment (Sen, 1981 and 1991) or preferences-representation (Broome, 1991: 3). In an atomistic/autonomous self-view, methodological individualism and reductionist framework, this pain and pleasure, desires and preferences fulfillment are defined and calculated at the level of the individual and reduces happiness into an observable and quantifiable pleasure. The basis of utility is the individual's desires and the purpose of utility is the individual's self-satisfaction. Every action/choice is approved or disapproved based on the perceived pain and pleasure experienced by the individual.<sup>7</sup> A rational individual will maximize his utility by fulfilling all his wants (desires or preferences) with the purpose of self-pleasure. The more his or her desires are fulfilled, the more pleasure is attained. A rational economic man, therefore, in this framework will necessarily behave purely for his self-interest in a strong sense by "paying no attention to the interests of other people, but also that he always prefers exactly what is in his own interests" (Broome, 1991: 4).

Utility accepts any goal preferred by the individual as long as they can bring him or her satisfaction (Leightner, 2005: 375). The maximization of utility, therefore, is no more than each person doing as he or she wishes. The maximization of utility concept is silent on social origins or the moral basis of human desire; how it is constructed and for what purpose (Hunt, 2005). The substantive content of utility can also be anything, even though it might not be accepted by religion or is harmful to the self or society (Broome, 1991). That approach has been criticized as an attempt to avoid the value problem inherent in the selection among goals (Hunt, 2005). Therefore, the concept of utility in the sense of desired-ness or

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<sup>7</sup> Schackle (1972: 10) in this regard comments "economics might almost be defined as the art of reducing incommensurables to common terms. It is the art of heroic simplification."

wants-fulfillment is a purely subjective concept (Black: 2008: 577), and there will not be a value-standard or a decisive answer in conventional theories of ethics.<sup>8</sup> In addition, in the absence of a religious or metaphysical perspective of happiness (as in the secular worldview), pain and pleasure is calculated merely based on sensual and material considerations, excluding moral and spiritual considerations. An individual's preference ordering is then simply stimulated by materials-driven for self-pleasure through one's needs. In this perspective, therefore, it is no wonder that the environment has been destroyed; the ecological system is in a state of chaos, and the earth is moving toward destruction.

The basis of *maslahah* on the other hand is a concept of benefit (*salah*) and harm (*darar*). Benefit is something which is good, right, bring easiness and lawful, and harm is something which is bad, wrong, evil, cause difficulties and unlawful. A choice is made based on the calculation of whether it could bring benefits or it could eliminate harms from one self and others. The stimulus of the actions of human beings in this regard is the ethical goodness aimed at self-realization and self-betterment, rather than mere sensuous and material pleasure for self-satisfaction.

In this *maslahah* framework, a man is aware of his *huquq* (his rights as well as his obligations towards others) as well as the *huquq* of others *huquq* (the rights of other's and obligations towards him). Islamic economics, therefore, cannot accept the notion that all goals can be accepted as long as they bring pleasure to the self, where there is no distinction between right and wrong, benefit and harm or virtues and vices. In the concept of *maslahah*, only good and beneficial goals to individual, community and nature are accepted. Likewise, any immoral means, exploitative and unethical behavior, although giving self-pleasure, are also not valuable. In the *maslahah* oriented behavior, exploitation and consumption of nature is strictly limited only in the area of *halal* (permissible) and *tayyib* (good and

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<sup>8</sup> Knight (1969: 40) in this matter expresses his concern "this is of course intellectually unsatisfactory. The scientific mind can rest only in one or two extreme positions, that there are absolute values, or that every individual desire is an absolute where one is as 'good' as another. But neither of these is true; we must learn to think in terms of 'value standards' which have validity of a more subtle kind."

beneficial) (Qur'an, 2: 168); wasteful and excessive spending (*israf, tabzir*) is not preferred although it might increase one's utility (Qur'an, 6:141; 17:27). Instead, a moderate spending - neither extravagance nor niggardliness - is preferred as it brings benefit to the individual, society and environment (Qur'an, 4:36-7). Likewise, unlawful means and exploitation to reach self-satisfaction are not allowed; instead, individuals should have a disciplined generosity (Qur'an, 25:67), with the purest motives, i.e., love of God (Qur'an, 2:177), rather than mere wants-fulfillment wrapped up by sensual desires (Qur'an, 23: 71 and 28: 50) that would cultivate the spirit of being *excessively attached to wealth* (Qur'an, 89: 20), hence marginalizing the spirit to help, care and sacrifice for others (Qur'an, 89: 17-18). Therefore, nature in the concept of *maslahah* has never been considered as an external-being to man and any choice he makes and goals he wants to achieve from it is done with consideration of *maslahah*, i.e., for the benefit of both man and nature. Self-pleasure is not the ultimate goal, rather self-betterment and self-realization of a spiritual transformation to benefit from nature becomes the target.

### **3.3 The Cardinal Virtue of the Relationship: Rationality vs. *Taqwa***

As the two above-mentioned foundational concepts of human behavior are different, self-interested behavior and utility-maximization for economic man (*homo economicus*) and the *huruq* perspective of behavior and *maslahah*-oriented behavior of an Islamic man (*homo Islamicus*), the "cardinal virtue" of the respective economic agent will also differ.

Rationality is the cardinal virtue in economics that explains the nature of man, his behavioral patterns and also predicts the future outcome of this behavior. This is applied on all entities in the economic realm: the firm, institutions, the family and the government. An individual who acts according to his self-interest and aims at maximizing his utility is said to behave rationally. Thus, the representation of rationality has been criticized massively for lacking an ethical structure, for it does not address social concerns such as sympathy and commitment (Hausman and McPherson: 1996; Sent:

2008;). Sympathy or concern for others is viewed as irrational as it will directly affect one's own welfare and would reduce the utility of individuals. Likewise, commitment to the concerns of others is irrational as such action involves that which is counter-preferential to one's choice, *even though it does not affect one's welfare* (Sen, 2008: 897). A rational economic man in general is a half-person who directs all his actions according to his self-interest for his self-pleasure. Therefore, some alternatives to rationality have been proposed and its dimensions have been broadened to incorporate proper ethics to explain human behavior in a more comprehensive perspective (for example Sen, 1990; Hausman and McPherson, 1996).

In Islamic economics, some scholars have proposed "Islamic rationality" to explain the rational behavior of an Islamic man by incorporating: (1) the *akhirah* (i.e. reward and punishment in the hereafter) dimension in individual behavior; (2) social concerns, and (3) Islamic norms in individual calculation. While this approach of providing an enlightened or modified meaning of these central fundamental concepts in modern economics is a valid approach to developing an alternative framework representing an Islamic perspective, it has not been attempted here. In this paper we have put forward the concept of *taqwa* as an appropriate cardinal virtue with a clear behavior commitment to ethics and could be a more meaningful guide for the behavior of an Islamic man.

Unlike rationality, *taqwa* encompasses the ethical relationships of man-God, man-man and man-nature and depicts a "unique balance of integrative moral action that denotes the fully integrated and whole personality of man" (Rahman, 1999: 28). *Taqwa* is essentially God-consciousness. *Taqwa* is a state of mind in which a person brings God to mind and is conscious of the Divine presence in all his actions; therefore, it functions as a moral safeguard against decay and destruction (Rahman, 1999: 9). *Taqwa* is then a prime value that emerges from the principle of *tawhid* (belief in the oneness of God).

With *taqwa*, an individual has an internal self-consciousness that emerges from a strong foundation of faith (*iman*) that will protect one from committing a harmful or evil action (*mafsadah*) towards others or nature (Qur'an, 52:27; 40:9; 40:45; 76:11). *Taqwa*



ensures that one's animal self is controlled by the rational self (Qur'an, 15:42; 16: 99; 17:65) while preventing the individual from transgressing God's limits (Qur'an, 2: 187; 229-230; 4:13; 9:112; 58:4; 65:1); and should the individual transgress, it instantly leads to remorse and repentance and redresses the imbalance of one's personality (Qur'an, 2:187,229,230; 4:13; 9:112; 58:4; 65:1). *Taqwa* cultivates God-consciousness that would always remind one of the meaning and purpose of life (Qur'an, 59:19); it ensures the cementing of personality and commitment to morality where all details of life and particulars of human activity are properly integrated and synthesized (Rahman, 1999: 21). With *taqwa*, all behaviors are directed toward gaining God's pleasure (*mardatillah, ridwan Allah*) (Qur'an: 5:114; 3:162; 5:80; 47:28) and to avoid His anger (*ghadab*) (Qur'an: 3:77; 80:40-41; 10:27; 68:43; 70:44).

Islam conceives a unique relationship of man and nature and only those who are behavior-based on *taqwa* could grasp properly this positive relationship in actuality. The Qur'an uses the terms of *khayr* (good) and *fadl Allah* (God's abundance) to denote both *moral or religious goodness and favour* and also specifically to denote wealth (Qur'an: 2:108, 100:8). Natural endowments and wealth endowed to human beings are essentially the bounties of Allah (*fadl Allah*) and *al-khayr* (good) to be properly used to achieve the objective of human life on earth and to prosper in the hereafter (Qur'an: 16: 30). In addition, the efforts to create wealth denoted by the Qur'an as *amal* (work or labor) and *kasb* (earning) are often called as *ibtigha' fadl Allah* (seeking the abundance of Allah) (Qur'an: 62:10, 16:14, 17:66, 30:46, 35:12, 45:12) which signifies that those endeavors are part of positive values of *ibadah* (worship). This also signifies that (1) material satisfaction is allowed in Islam since a material object itself is not evil *per se* and it is inherent within the nature of man who was created as *khalifah* with earthly elements (*unsur al-ard*) that motivates him to satisfy his physical and material needs. All creations are good in nature and Allah made creations subservient to the well-being of human-beings. (2) According to Rahman (1995: 22), this also shows "a moral and spiritual uplift" that signifies the virtues of man's work that could uplift his morals and serve as a means for spiritual improvement. The Qur'an also

imperatively states that nature should be filled with value through moral vision and action, which is the purpose of the creation of humans (Qur'an, 31:20).<sup>9</sup>

Islam, in this regard, calls for a proportionate perspective of wealth, material satisfaction and spiritual achievement in the sense that it does not ask individuals to abandon life or material possessions; instead it enjoins man to positively enjoy nature and fulfill his physical needs. However, man is also reminded that this is not the entire purpose of life and that material-satisfaction is merely a delusion (*mata' al-ghurur*, Qur'an, 3:14) and a short-term gain (Qur'an, 4:77; 13:26; 16:117; 57:20). The domination of material satisfaction unto one's-self could trap one into a lowly position and could mislead one from the very essence of his creation, i.e., to fulfill God's patterns on earth.

*Taqwa* equips and enhances individuals with the spiritual dimensions that would redirect the self (with all his material facilities) to a caring, sympathetic, respectful and loving being and furthermore obedient to God. Therefore, the Qur'an urges man to purify the self (Qur'an, 87: 14-15; 91: 9-10), and it promises prosperity in *akhirah* that he should strive for in his earthly life (Qur'an: 4:77; 9:38; 10:23; 10:70; 28:60; 40:39; 42:36; 43:35, 57:21). Islam in this regard opposes the single-minded pursuit of wealth where it is accumulated for merely one's own utility and satisfaction (Qur'an: 102:1-2), or where it is viewed as the ultimate purpose of an individual's life (Qur'an: 9:24), when in fact it should be directed toward spiritual achievement by using it to help the deprived (Qur'an: 51:19, 70:25). Wealth in Islam should be spent for the purpose of achieving the pleasure of Allah which is the ultimate

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<sup>9</sup> Meaning to say that wealth (*khayr*) could only truly mean *khayr* (good) once it is acquired in good means (*khayr al-'amal*, *khayr al-kasb*) and utilized for good purpose to prosper the individual, society and the earth (*islah al-fard*, *al-jama'ah wa al-ard*) for the cause of Allah (*fi sabil Allah*). Al-Faruqi (1992: 165), filling this world with value "is not only important for religion, but it is the very whole business of religion." Such a moral position of Islam is in contrast with two extreme values of material-hedonism, and spiritual-asceticism. The economic matters in Islam are seen as part of religion that seeks to order human life so as to make it actualize the pattern intended for it by its Creator (Al-Faruqi, 1992: 170).

goal (Qur'an: 2:272, 30:39, 76:9, 2:268) and the real success (Qur'an: 30:38).

## CONCLUSION

The ethical basis of the man-nature relationship and their sustainability in Islamic economics is developed from the Qur'an, the primary source of knowledge in Islam. Being God's words verbatim, the Qur'an thoroughly describes the nature of man (his characteristics, tendencies, potentialities, well-being, tasks and goals) and the nature of the universe (its characteristics, role and functions). Islam firmly declares that both man and nature are created to mutually co-exist supporting each other. Nature provides facilities for man to play his role as *khalifah* on earth, while at the same time man, through his utilization of nature is to be held responsible for his actions and usage of nature. Therefore, massive exploitation and environmental abuses are not ethically acceptable. Man's role as *khalifah* can only be maintained by the stability and preservation of nature.

The moral foundation of the Islamic views is developed based on the ethical guidelines of the Qur'an. In this framework, the concern is not only about humanity's existence and sustainability, but also about nature's existence and sustainability. The moral/ethical foundations of Islam has placed the man-nature relationship in the right balance and centers both beings in harmony. The basis of this relationship is based on the concept of *huquq* in which both have "self-inherent rights" and "self-inherent obligations" to enjoy, fulfill and protect. The motivation is to realize *maslahah* (benefit) and avoid *mafsadah* (harm). The fountainhead virtue of this relationship is *taqwa*, a God-consciousness that is internalized in man's attitude and reflected through his behavior and dealings with nature. The Islamic perspective for sustainable development is placed in such a framework.