

HUMAN NATURE AND THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE
SHARĪ'AH: FIṬRAH AND MAQĀṢID AL-SHARĪ'AH IN THE
WORKS OF SHĀH WALĪ ALLĀH AND IBN 'ĀSHŪR*

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Introduction: The Problem

Human history has never seen before such a systematic and constant denial of human nature as it has seen in the modern age. This is due to the influence of the triumphant Promethean-Faustian spirit that has dominated modern Western civilization—European at the start, Euro-American at the end. That spirit does not seem to be content with the far-reaching techniques and processes developed to condition and mould human beings according to its reductionist secular-materialist world-view whose devastating moral, social, cultural and political consequences have already become highly visible. Thus, it has entered a new phase of its dehumanizing of human life and society.¹ Even the conception of human nature as a blank slate or *tabula rasa* that has served to underpin the various social and political theories formulated to regulate society over the last few centuries is now foundering under the onslaught of unfettered subverting forces that use effective means provided by science and technology to attain their goals.

The problem has reached unprecedented degrees of gravity going far beyond the implications of the reductionist and secular theories of human nature that have prevailed in Western thought since the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods and affected in varying degrees philosophical and social thought in the world. The

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¹ On the notion of dehumanization and alienation of man from his nature, see for example René Dubos, *So Human an Animal*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968 and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man*, Chicago: ABC International Group, Inc, 1997 (1967).

alarming gravity we are now witnessing is more than the enhancement and refinement of the techniques and means of social control and engineering aimed at shaping human personality and directing it in accordance with some specific ideological models. It consists of a sort of demonic manipulation of the very human constitution to reengineer human beings and make them come into existence at will and upon demand. Carried out in the name of science and progress, this manipulation threatens not only to undermine the human socio-political order by sapping its philosophical and moral foundations, but also to usher in what Francis Fukuyama calls our 'post-human future'. That is, the end of mankind as a sequel to the end of history.²

Many thinkers, notably in the West, have been ringing the bell by pointing to the dangers menacing to push humanity into the abyss of self-destruction. A recurrent argument in the literature produced by such scholars is that the universal and fundamental values that used to sustain human society and ensure continuity and understanding between cultures and civilizations are now being extremely corroded. Therefore, it is suggested by some that there is necessity to bridge the widening gap between nature and culture. As Masters has put it, there is need for a new paradigm that should integrate "nature and nurture" in order to overcome this situation in a truly positive and constructive way.³

However, the dangers against which such scholars have warned us do not only consist of the relativist view that has prevailed especially in the realm of values, nor do they simply concern the question of the nature-culture/nurture dichotomy. They rather reside at a more essential level than just reducing the human personality to the biological make-up and its chemical equations that are governed by specific physical processes and environmental factors. Thus, the essence of human beings has been dreadfully summed up in the cerebral area of the human being. Like computer chips, so the self-

² This is the main theme discussed by Francis Fukuyama in his book *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of Biotechnology Revolution*, London: Profile Book Ltd, 2002.

³ Masters, Roger D., *Beyond Relativism: Science and Human Values* (Hanover & London: University Press of New England, 1993), pp. 135-57.