



The Entity of Man and Efficiency of Mind in Arab Culture

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Abstract- The entity of man and efficiency of mind are controversial issues in Arabic culture. There is no agreement among Muslim philosophers and theologians in defining man and the mind. In their analysis, they relied on translated Greek philosophical works and Arab cultural heritage and then added their thoughts. As a result, some scholars accused Arab culture of sinking into dualism.

To clarify the entity of man and mind, we should answer the following questions: Who is man? Is the function of the mind just to achieve knowledge? What is the theory of equilibrium in Arab culture?

In this paper, I will examine these questions and then investigate the rational trend from Mu'tazili to Ibn Rushd and compare it with another trend (Ibn Hazem and Al-Ghazali), adherence to the text. Researchers have interpreted the existence of such trends together as a reflection of the theory of equilibrium in Arab culture.

Keywords- Entity of Man; Theologians; Efficiency of Mind; Diligence; Dualism

I. INTRODUCTION

The entity of man refers to his existence and status in natural life compared to that of other beings. We can explore the existence of man from four angles or directions: uniqueness, freedom, ethics and knowledge. However, we will confine our study to the uniqueness of man - that is, man as an entity, together with the coherence and efficiency of this notion in Arab culture. Each civilized society has its own ethical concepts that comprise the identity of the society. Within these concepts, one can find an interpretation of the nature of things and the areas in which the society lives.

To clarify the entity of man, we should investigate the definitions of man according to the three trends in theologians' perspectives: Man is the visible, apparent person; man is both spirit and body; and man is the soul, while the body is the tool and bearer.

Most Islamic philosophers (Al-Kindi (801), Ibn Sina (980 AD), and Ibn Miskawayh (932 AD) agree with theologians' division of man into two parts, the body and the spirit, but they view man from different angles.

To consider how Islamic theologians and philosophers view humans, we should examine their views of the mind, which are divided into two doctrines: rational direction and adherence to the text.

In this paper, I will examine these issues to clarify the theory of equilibrium in Arab culture.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study is observational, not experimental. Its design comprises of two basic aspects, namely, the theoretical framework in one hand, and on the other hand evaluation scientific arguments of Muslim philosophers and theologians in defining man and the mind.

Qualitative methods used to examine some philosophical questions related with the identity of human, and function of the mind, then investigate two philosophical trends, the rational trend and adherence to the text. These methods have led to appropriate conclusions.

The references are obtained from variety sources, original Medieval texts, library hard copies, original translations of Greek philosophy books from Greek to English, and Articles from journals Scopus and Google Scholar.

III. THE ENTITY OF MAN

For the purpose of considering the entity of man, we should begin by saying that Islamic philosophers and theologians deal with the Islamic religion from the viewpoint of Arabic heritage and works from the

Hellenic civilization that were translated into Arabic. This influence led Islamic philosophers to divide man into two parts: body and soul. The body represented the mortal physical matter, and the soul represented the constant spiritual matter.

Theologians started to define man before philosophers did, but there were different trends in the interpretation of man according to theologians' points of view. These trends are described below.

Theologians

First trend : Man is the visible, apparent person

Mu'tazili was one of the most important theological schools of Islam. It believed that man was the visible, apparent person who had two hands and two legs. This definition was given by Abu Al-Huthail Al-Allaf (d. 841)¹, and it focused on the body of man rather than the spirit. However, some theologians believed that man is the being that is seen - he is a unique thing that is spiritless and has one essence. Like Al-Allaf, they refused to see the spirit and were concerned only with the body, so the definition of man was concerned with the visual experience. The eyes saw the body and not the human spirit. For the aforementioned theologians, man appeared in front of us as his body and not as his human spirit.

Second trend: Man as both spirit and body

The second trend considers that man has both spirit and body. This opinion was influenced by Aristotle, who considered every natural creature to be composed of matter and to have a substance. This view is represented by Hisham Ibn Al Hakam (d.795AD), who said that man is a term that has two meanings: body and spirit.² This view of Al-Hakam is totally different from that of Al-Allaf. For Al-Hakam, man combines body and spirit. It is true that there is similarity between Aristotle's (384 BC) division of man and Al-Hakam's view, but there is a difference between the meaning of matter and substance Aristotle and that of body and spirit as described by Al-Hakam. The meaning of hyle (prime matter) differs sharply from the meaning of the body in theology: "Hyle refers to matter or stuff. It can also be the material cause underlying a change in Aristotelian philosophy".³ Additionally, the theologian's meaning of spirit is not the same as Aristotle's meaning of substance.

Aristotle analyses substance in terms of form and matter. The form is what kind of thing the object is, and the matter is what it is made of. The term matter is not the name of the particular kind of stuff, nor is it the name for some ultimate constituent of bodies, such as atoms; in fact, Aristotle rejects atomism.⁴ Nonetheless, we can say that the division of man is similar for theologians and Aristotle.

Third trend: Man is the soul, and the body is the tool and bearer

The third trend is represented by Ibrahim ibn Sayyar al-Nazzam (d. 840 AD), who said that "human nature is a spirit, while the body is a tool of spirit".⁵ He means that the body is the bearer of the spirit. The spirit uses the body as a tool and gives it life. If there is no spirit, then there is no life. The source of life is the spirit, so when the spirit leaves the body after death, the body becomes dead.

The Entity of Man: Islamic Philosophers' Perspectives

Islamic philosophers
Al-Kindi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Miskawayh

Theologians were not the only ones who focused on the division of man into two parts (body and spirit); philosophers also used this approach. Al-Kindi (801 AD), in his letter (Al-HeLa on Dafe Al Hzan, "Artifice to Avoid Sadness", asked, Who are we?

Do we exist by virtue of bodies or spirits? Bodies are common to all creatures, so who are we? We exist in life, and our life exists in spirits, not in bodies. Our bodies are the tools of our spirits. It is better to attend to our spirits than to our tool (the body). Thus, Al-Kindi defined man as "being speaking and mortal."⁶ Most Islamic philosophers agreed with this definition.

Ibn Sina (980 AD) defined man as speaking and mortal.⁷ This means that man is a combination of three aspects: life, speech, and mortality. Life and mortality are characteristics shared with animals and plants, while speech is unique to man. Speech is a feature of man. Language does not only express ideas; it also expresses feelings and emotions.

Ibn Miskawayh (932AD) defined man as a mortal, speaking being. This was the same definition presented by Ibn Sina and other philosophers,⁸ but it does not mean that each philosopher copied the definition of man from the others; instead, it means each philosopher agreed with the others regarding this definition. This is not to be considered a limitation in Islamic philosophy but an indication that Muslim philosophers agree in their view and analysis.

A comparison of the views of Muslim philosophers and theologians with those of Greek philosophers regarding the definition of man is provided below.

Greek philosophers (Socrates, Plato and Aristotle)

Socrates (470 BC) viewed man as body and soul. These two parts were considered the linking forces of the universe; the body of man is in harmony with the matter in the universe, while the soul is in harmony with the spirit of the universe. However, Plato (428 BC) considered the presence of the soul in the body a

temporary thing. Plato believed that the body is the prison of the soul. Plato believed that the soul was alive in the world of ideals before it settled in the body and viewed death as a self-liberation of the soul from prison.⁹ Plato perceived human nature as a “difficult text” that can only be deciphered through philosophy because this text is written in small letters that cannot be read. Plato believed that philosophy could magnify these letters, making what is hidden in the text apparent and what is obscure readable.¹⁰

Aristotle (384 BC) defined man in his book (Categories) as a speaking animal in terms of essence, and he divided the essence of man into two parts: the first and second essence. The second essence is the subject and carries the name of that subject: the name of “man”.¹¹ Aristotle’s commentators (Themistius and Ammonius) added death to the definition of man; thus, they define man as a speaking mortal animal. Islamic philosophers have worked these two definitions of Aristotle and his commentators.

In light of the previously provided definitions of man, we can say that Islamic philosophers and theologians depended on the Greek philosophers’ definition of man as the one being concerned with ethics. When we speak about ethics, we speak about human behaviour; specifically, we speak of decisions regarding whether a behaviour is moral or immoral. This is the reason why Islamic philosophers focused on the definition of man: to comprehend man’s behaviour. From this point forward, the human becomes an active component in the motion of civilization.

Islamic philosophers and theologians made this contribution despite the absence of a philosophical legacy in Arab culture. Islamic philosophers translated Greek philosophy into Arabic and used it in their thoughts. They did not translate Greek literature because there was no lack of Arab literature corresponding to the lack of philosophy.

IV. EFFICIENCY OF MIND

Arab Muslim civilization allocated a great deal of attention to the mind’s role in governing life. Religion played an important role in the formation of the rational trend because of verses that urge rational consideration and complementation, although some of these verses presented contradictions. The idea here is that determinism and free will are being grounded in religion. This marks the beginning of an interpretation whose requirements were determined later.

This beginning was based on the manifest contradiction among Quranic verses and the need of Muslims to resolve that contradiction. Thus, the rational trend arose from religion, and Mu'tazili was the pioneer in this trend. The other rational trend was resemblance-based measurement. This trend was believed to be attributable to Aristotle; however, it actually arose from diligence. Diligence is a mental function that creates an understanding of something for which no text or consensus exists. Thus, diligence is the beginning of the measurement principle.

Diligence of Mu'tazili

If we are to take a starting point for the school of thought called diligence, we should begin with Mu'tazili as representative of the rational trend in Arab culture. For Mu'tazili, the function of the mind is not just to achieve knowledge but to prevent the sane from becoming subject to the things that the insane cannot prevent.

Abu 'Ali Muhammad al-Jubba'I (d. 915AD) said, ‘It was called a mind because the mind as a tool is used by man to prevent her/himself from making mistakes; however, the insane man does not have the mind to prevent her/himself from making mistakes’, Wasil Ibn Ata (700 AD) said, “The truth is known by the argument of mind’. Abu al Hazail al Alaaf (752 AD) said, ‘Mind includes the science of compulsion, which distinguishes her/himself from the ass and ground. It includes the ability to acquire science’¹².

For Abu al Hazail, as for other Mu'tazili members, the mind falls within the category of science and knowledge, including compulsory knowledge, that distinguishes man from other beings; namely, the ability to acquire scientific knowledge. Accordingly, the theologians sanctified the mind. If there were no mind, no knowledge would be available. At the same time, the theologians believed in human freedom. They believed that the doctrine of taklif (duty) is based on freedom. There is no reward or punishment without freedom. The mind necessarily knows, and man is burdened with, taklif (duty).

Al Mu'tazili united both mind and knowledge. Its theologians have been more consistent with the spirit of doctrine and have rejected Aristotle's idea that mind is equivalent to power or capability. What made Al Mu'tazili unite science and reason is that “taklif (duty) is related to the capacities of man: The person who has a specialised science has a ‘perfect mind’; on the other hand, the imperfect mind is insane and bears no taklif, as man does not know the things he would be charged with.”¹³ A sane person is one who can discover causes. Mental knowledge is superior to sensual knowledge.

The mind according to Islamic philosophers

Al-Kindi defined the mind as a simple essence that recognises all things in their real form.¹⁴ Al-Farabi presented a theory of mind. He regarded it as a mixture of Plato and Aristotle's opinions with his religious creed.

His conclusion of a fourfold division of mind received wide acceptance from Muslim philosophers. The divisions were the hyolanic mind, the actual mind, the beneficiary mind and the active mind.

Al-Farabi said, "Reasoning power, which is a simple essence that contradicts the substance, remains after the death of the body. It is a mono-essence strength that is thereal man."¹⁵ The real man occurs by virtue of mind not body because the mind is the substance of man.

Ibn Sina (Avicenna) united the Greek thought of Plato and Aristotle with the opinions of Al-Kindi and Al-Farabi and finalized the fourfold division of the mind. Ibn Sina considered the mind a common name, e.g., the mind of the accuracy of man's disposition. Thus, it was defined as the strength to distinguish between ugly and good things. It is named 'mind' because it provides man with the experience of wholesome judgements. It has a collective meaning that represents the premises from which interests and phenomena are derived.¹⁶

According to the account of Hayy ibn Yaqdhan, Ibn Sin thought that the mind provides the means of reaching the 'supreme kingdom'. If humans can overcome their lusts and subject themselves the power of the mind, they can reach the highest ranks. Ibn Sin argued that the mind is the right balance.

Ibn Bajjah (Avempace) (1085 AD) designated three levels of the mind: spiritual, rational and active. His theory of mind depended on the idea of differences among people based on their ranks of mind. The more a person transcends his or her senses, the greater the degree to which he or she is elevated to spiritual forms and achieves his or her human goals.¹⁷

Ibn Tufail (1105 AD) is an illuminist philosopher who developed his theory of mind in his book (Hayy ibn Yaqdhan), which is based on moving from the bottom to the top, from the sensory to the abstract and from the multiple to the one. He thought that knowledge has two paths: the first is rational, while the second is traditional. This book focused on the rational path because man, by his nature, is prepared to know the facts of faith.¹⁸

Ibn Rushd (Averroes) (1126 AD) noted that the Muslim community was torn by divisions. This community needed to be united, and its unity could be achieved by returning to its fixed assets. These assets include the Holy Quran and the prophetic traditions, which represent the first asset. The second asset is reliance on the logic of mind. The Quran must be understood rationally, and all misrepresentations of it must be removed. Thus, Ibn Rushd developed three important requirements for interpretation, as follows:

1. Respecting the aspects of Arabic style.
2. Respecting the internal unity of the religious discourse.
3. Considering the mental level of those targeted by the interpretation.

Philosophers can only understand the essence of the Quran because of the rigid rational approach they use. It is through such an approach that they can interpret the Holy Quran. If this approach fails, they resort to the manifest approach.¹⁹

Finally, we can say that the rational trend in the Arab civilization from Mu'tazili to Ibn Rushd is parallel to another trend calling for adherence to the text. This trend is represented by Ibn Hazem and Al Ghazali. The researchers interpreted that these trends exist together as a reflection of the theory of equilibrium in Arab civilization.

V. DUALISM OF ARAB CULTURE

According to the interpretation of the entity of man and the mind, we can say that Islamic philosophers and theologians used dualism in their interpretations. Dualism is a characteristic of Arab civilization. Examples of dualisms are numerous, including sky and earth; transcription and mind; religion and life; manifest and hidden; simplicity and contraction; opinions and desires; voice and meaning; unseen and witnessed; and spirit and body.

The idea of Arab dualism is similar to that of Aristotle's golden mean. Aristotle's golden mean in general means that morally good people are those who live a life of moderation in all things. They choose the 'mean' between extreme types of actions. For example, courage is a value because it is the mean between the extremes of cowardice, on the one hand, and recklessness, on the other hand. Generosity is a value because it lies between the extremes of stinginess, on the one hand, and being overly generous, on the other.²⁰ Aristotle's golden mean is one of the sources of dualism in Arab culture. The golden mean is similar to other Greek attempts to create a pattern that resembled cosmology. Accordingly, Greek thought became comprehensive and encompassed the whole world, and it has affected other cultures.

Arab civilization experienced criticism on the grounds that it was sinking into dualism. In fact, this line of thought is moderate, consolidative and dualistic. It resembles Aristotle's golden mean to a great extent. The Arab civilization adopted acentrist approach between materialism and idealism.

The disposition towards dualism in Arab culture takes many forms. Dualism is present in both ethics and

religion. The goal of ethics is to live a good life, and religion is a way for humanity to attain happiness. This is Ibn Miskawayh's attempt at *Tadhib al-akhlaq* (Ethical Instruction). Additionally, dualism is present in general guidelines in both religion and philosophy despite the different approaches of these disciplines. This application of dualism is present in the works of Al Kindi, Al Farabi and Ibn Rushd.

For instance, Al Kindi, in his textbooks, pointed to increasing confrontation between philosophy and religion because there is no contradiction in either of them regarding the search for the truth. Faithful messengers and prophets received their messages through revelation, proclamation or commandment and sought to avoid harm. The property of this knowledge agrees with what the philosophers claimed about the divinity of God and adhering to virtues and avoiding sins. "First, philosophy means the knowledge of True One. Whereas every thing is the effect of what precedes and the cause of what follows, the True One is the only cause".²¹

Al Kindi considered the relationship between religion and philosophy in his definition of philosophy. He defined philosophy as the science of knowing things in their reality according to man's capacity. In this definition, he drew on the science of divinity and the other useful sciences. His solution was to understand the religious view from the philosophical point of view; thus, philosophy becomes a subsidiary of religion: "Philosophy and theology served one end: the knowledge of the True One, of God"²². For Al Farabi, dualism takes a number of axes: the first is the dualism between Plato and Aristotle. The apparent disagreements between them are only superficial and not fundamental, as their origins are the same. Al Farabi devoted his book, entitled *Kitab al-jamh baina rayai al-hakimain aflatun al-ilahi wa aristutalis* (The Book of Harmony

Between the Ideas of the Two Sages, Plato the Divine and Aristotle), to the justification of these disagreements, which some may consider fundamental agreements between Plato and Aristotle. The six main similarities between Plato and Aristotle are as follows:

1. Their way of living, regarding the asceticism of Plato and the luxury of Aristotle.
2. Their style of editing and classification.
3. Their opinions regarding ethics.
4. Their opinions regarding ideals.
5. Their opinions regarding the antiquity of the world.
6. Their explanation of the theory of knowledge.²³

In fact, Al Farabi's attempt to establish a relationship between Plato and Aristotle is considered one of his weak points because he combined the trends of two different philosophers; Plato was an idealist, while Aristotle was a realist. Al Farabi used Plotinus' book *Enneads*²⁴ to combine the thoughts of Plato and Aristotle because he thought that Aristotle had written that book.

The second path of Al Farabi's dualism is between philosophy and religion. Al Farabi thought that there was no conflict between philosophy and religion because both are right, and right does not disagree with right. People note the disagreement in method between philosophy and religion. Philosophy seeks the truth through sensible and logical argument, while religion uses the imagination and psychological conviction.

Philosophy appeals to specific intellectuals and those who have clear minds, while religion appeals to ordinary men.²⁵

Ibn Rushd thinks that what is mentioned in the Quran is true and should be believed and that religion requires philosophical, rational consideration. Thus, there is no contradiction between religion and philosophy, and the relationship between the two is the relationship between theory and application.

Other dualisms in Arab culture include the means of achieving impartial, free thinking regarding the great beliefs of religion, such as proving the existence of God, as Ibn Massrah did. This attempt is based on adopting some philosophical terms and principles and then explaining them according to the religious point of view as an emanation, e.g., as Al Farabi espoused. This approach was an attempt to prove the mind's capacity to grasp the same facts that religion proclaims and to replicate religion's connection to God, the ever existing.

The same attempt was made by Ibn Sina in his study, *Hayy ibn Yaqdhan*, as well as in the story of *Hayy ibn Yaqdhan* by Ibn Tufail and in the story of *Al Suhrawardi* in *Al Ghrba Alghreba* (Strange Alienation).²⁶

For Ibn Sina, *Hayy ibn Yaqdhan* represented the mind, while for Ibn Tufail, *Hayy ibn Yaqdhan* represented man searching for truth, and for *Al Suhrawardi*, he was the mind that had not been completed yet and wanted to recognise God through exploration and the tastes.

VI. CONCLUSION

1. In their definition of man, Islamic philosophers and theologians depended on the fact that man is the

active component of the motion of Arab culture.

2. The rational trend in Arab culture from Mu'tazili to Ibn Rushd is paralleled by another trend calling on adherence to the text (Ibn Hazem and Al Ghazali). The researchers interpreted the existence of these trends together as a reflection of equilibrium in Arab culture.

3. Arab culture experienced criticism on the grounds that it was sinking into dualism, but it adopted a centrist approach between materialism and idealism. This notion is centrist in the literal meaning of the word and applies to both the spiritual sense of centrism as goodness and grace and the sensual sense of centrism as moderation and temperance.

4. We should accept cultural diversification as a basis for the development of our society as other cultures have done in their cultural heritage, for example, as Greek civilization did in acknowledging the benefit it gained from Eastern wisdom.

We should seek out intercultural aspects to develop and strengthen society. Additionally, we should believe that diversity of cultures does not threaten society but strengthens it.

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