Towards an Islamic Psychology:
An Introduction to Remove Theoretical Barriers

به سوی روان‌شناسی اسلامی:
درآمدی برای گذر از سدهای نظری

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Abstract

There have been some suggestions concerning the subject matter of Islamic psychology. It seems that these suggestions could not overcome the theoretical barrier for providing a subject matter for psychology. Some have considered the divine **Spirit (Ruh)** within the human as the subject matter, some others have regarded the **Soul (Nafs)** and still others, the divine creation of the human (**Fitrah**) as the candidates for doing the job. However, these suggestions could be challenged in different ways on being able to provide a suitable subject for scientific studies of psychology. The present essay is an introductory attempt to give an alternative. Accordingly, an alternative to the three above-mentioned suggestions seems to be the important Islamic concept of **Action**. We can consider **Action** as the suitable subject matter for psychology. This is because action is so wide that it could cover all the humans whether believers or non-believers in God, whether their **Fitrah** is active or silent. An action, as it is used in the Islamic texts, refers to a behaviour (being observable or non-observable) that is based on, at least, three kinds of foundations: cognition, emotion, and will. In addition to being a suitable subject for psychology, action is a key concept in referring to the human nature or identity.

Keywords: Psychology; Islam; Ruh; Nafs; Fitrah; Action; Cognition; Inclination; Will;

چکیده

تا کنون درباره‌ی روان‌شناسی اسلامی پیشنهادهایی شده‌است که به نظر نمی‌رسد بتواند بر سدهای نظری در راه فراهم آوردن موضوعی برای روان‌شناسی چیره گردد. برخی روح آدمی، برخی دیگر نفس، و گروه سوم فطرت یا آفرینش خدایی انسان را موضوع آن دانسته‌اند. اما هر یک از این پیشنهادها را می‌توان در زمینه‌ی توانایی فراهم آوردن موضوعی برای پژوهش‌های علمی روان‌شناختی، به‌شیوه‌ای به چالش خواند. این نوشتار، تلاشی آغازین برای فراهم آوردن جای‌گزینی برای این دیدگاه‌ها است. بر این اساس، جای‌گزین پیشنهادهای سه‌گانه‌ی یادشده را می‌توان در مفهوم اسلامی عمل جست‌وجو کرد و آن را موضوعی مناسب برای روان‌شناسی انگاشت. این از آن رو است که عمل از چنان گستره‌ای برخوردار است که می‌تواند همه‌ی آدمیان را در بر گیرد؛ خواه به خدا باور داشته‌باشند یا نه؛ خواه فطرت‌شان بیدار باشد یا نه. عمل، آن گونه که در متون اسلامی آمده، نماینده‌ی رفتاری (دیدنی یا نادیدنی) است که دست‌کم بر سه گونه مبنا استوار است: شناخت، عاطفه، و اراده. عمل، افزون بر آن که موضوعی مناسب برای روان‌شناسی است، همچنین، مفهومی کلیدی در ارجاع به ماهیت یا هویت آدمی است.

کلیدواژه‌ها: روان‌شناسی؛ اسلام؛ روح؛ نفس؛ فطرت؛ عمل؛ شناخت؛ میل؛ اراده؛

Introduction

One of the main differences among psychological theories is rooted in their background conceptions about the suitable subject for psychological studies. These conceptions are deeply connected to particular views on human nature. In psychoanalytic theory, for instance, the suitable subject for psychological studies considered to be human instincts. This view is derived from *Freud*'s conception on human nature as an energetic system composed of some basic instincts. Also, in the more recent computational psychology, the suitable subject regarded as information processing which is related to a background conception of human as a system of information (Boden, 1989).

In the same way, for providing an Islamic psychology, the two related points, namely the suitable subject for psychology and the human nature, should be dealt with according to the Islamic view. This notion can show some kind of theoretical barrier in the way of providing Islamic psychology. In other words, if we cannot formulate the elements of Islamic view on human nature so that it could lead to a suitable subject for scientific studies in psychology, it means that we are confronted with theoretical barriers.

There have been some suggestions concerning the subject matter of Islamic psychology. It seems that these suggestions could not overcome the theoretical barrier. Some have considered the divine **Spirit** (*Ruh*) within the human as the subject matter, some others have regarded the **Soul** (*Nafs*) and still others, the divine creation of the human (*Fitrah*) as the candidates for doing the job. These suggestions will be examined below briefly and an alternative view will be suggested. The present essay is, in fact, an introductory attempt to open up a new atmosphere for thinking about the Islamic psychology.

A Theoretical Barrier in Formulating Islamic Psychology

There are different kinds of barriers in the way of Islamic psychology. They might be of theoretical, cultural, practical etc. kind. We are dealing here merely with the theoretical one and in the latter just with the human nature foundation. To put another way, one kind of theoretical barrier in the way of Islamic psychology concerns the bad or unsuitable formulations of human nature as a presupposition for psychology. If the presupposition is formulated in a way that it could not pave the ground for doing experimental studies in psychology or if it is so vague and general that it could not lead us in providing good hypotheses for study, then it turns out as a theoretical barrier. It seems that there are such difficulties in the previous attempts in providing a background for developing Islamic psychology.

Considering the spirit or soul as the subject matter of psychology confronted with different difficulties in the beginning period of the modern psychology. There were, of course, some naïve trends in rejecting the spirit or soul altogether and embracing the observable behaviour as an alternative for them. However, as *Bem* and *Honorton* (2004) have shown, it is not quite simple to consider the spirit or soul as the subject matter of psychology as an experimental science. So far as the existence of spirit or soul is concerned, it shifts to the realm of pure philosophy. However, in the realm of psychology, we need methodological and procedural considerations to be able to defend the study in this real as science.

Among the Islamic investigators, some have appealed to the Islamic concept of the divine **Spirit (Ruh)** as the basic concept for providing a sacred science (Nasr, 1382 A.P.; Hahn, 2005). *Nasr* has considered three dimensions for *Ruh* consisting of intellect, free will, and speech. Some others (e.g. Hoseini, 1364 A.P.) have considered *Ruh* as the subject matter for psychology. Relying on the Islamic view that we as humans have a divine spirit within us, this suggestion indicates that we should consider *Ruh* as the subject matter of psychology.

However, this suggestion could be challenged in different ways. The first point is that the divine **Spirit (Ruh)** might not be known by the human in this world as it is hinted in the *Quran*: "And they ask you about the spirit. Say: The spirit is one of the commands of my Lord, and you are not given aught of knowledge but a little [Al-Isra:85]" (Tabātabā'ī, 1972).

The second point is that the spirit refers to the real or true nature of the human and even if it could be known, it is not suitable for psychological studies because in psychology we need to know factual characteristics not being necessarily related to the true nature of the human. In other words, psychology as a science tries to make the human understandable and predictable so far as it is possible, whether he or she is along with his or her true nature or has ruined it. Islamic psychology, as far as it is a psychology, needs to deal with explanation and prediction at the same extent and try to make the human understandable and predictable as he or she is in the actual fact, instead of dealing merely with the true nature of the human.

Another suggestion for developing Islamic psychology has regarded the **Soul (Nafs)** as the subject matter for psychological studies (e.g. Al-Attas, 1990; Helminski, 2004). The difference between this suggestion and the previous one is that the soul, unlike the spirit, is related to body; hence, in studying the soul, we need to take all its manifestations into account whether high level or low level. That is why the holy *Quran* talks about different kinds of soul including good and bad (*Ammarah*) ones.

While this suggestion, compared to the first one, is in a better position to be dealt with in psychology, there are doubts in its being a good enough suggestion for developing an Islamic psychology. The main point is that regarding the soul, as a whole, as the subject matter of scientific psychology is too general to be able to distinguish psychology's realm as a scientific discipline. In fact, when we talk about studying and investigating the **Soul (Nafs)**, it might imply a philosophical as well as a mystical kind of study. As it is clear in the history of Islamic thought, knowing the soul has been the target of Muslim philosophers and Sophies (Othman, 1973). However, philosophical as well as mystical questions about the soul and its characteristics are different from the questions that are important for psychology as a scientific study. Thus, even if we accept that the soul could be regarded as the subject matter of psychology, it still needs to be declared that of what particular aspect soul could be considered as the subject matter of psychology.

For instance, *Fodor* (1983; 2002) has suggested his theory of *The Modularity of Mind* which is a kind of faculty psychology reminding us of the Aristotelian faculty psychology. However, *Fodor* has regarded the faculties (modules) in a way that they could be dealt with in an experimental way. However, when the soul is suggested as the subject matter of Islamic psychology (Al-Attas, 1990), the Aristotelian schema of the soul is in fact Islamized with the presupposition that it is a perfect psychology without its being sensitive to experimental world.

In another suggestion, the divine dimension of the human (*Fitrah*) is regarded as the candidate for psychological studies (Mohamed, 1996; Ahmadi, 1362 A.P). This

suggestion could also be challenged in some ways (for a challenge on the general meaning of innate characteristics used by *Chomsky* among others, see *Wilkin* (1999)).

Firstly, it is not clear that *Fitrah* has been used in the Islamic texts in a wide extent so that it could cover all kinds of human behaviour concerned in psychology. In fact, it seems that *Fitrah* refers merely to an innate knowledge and inclination toward God and this is too limited to be able to cover all what is concerned in psychological studies. Almost, all the traditions (*Hadith*) mentioned in the interpretation of the Quranic verse of *Fitrah* [Rum:30] (like what is mentioned by *Tabātabā'ī* (1972) under the verse) refer to an inner knowledge and inclination in human beings towards God.

Tabātabā'ī and *Motahhari* (1350 A.P.) has suggested a theory on the Islamic concept of *Fitrah*. According to this theory, *Fitrah* has a very extensive realm which includes all basic human perceptions and inclinations. In the realm of perceptions, for instance, evident perceptions (like "The whole is bigger than its parts") are regarded innate. Also, in the realm of inclinations, basic human inclinations toward truth, beauty, virtue, and the like are considered as parts of *Fitrah*.

But, as *Javādi Āmoli* (1375 A.P.) has said, this extensive conception of *Fitrah* does not correspondent to the characteristics of **Fitrah** mentioned in the *Quran*. He refers to *Fitrah*'s capability of being forgotten according to the *Quran* [A'araf:172]. However, evident perceptions like "The whole is bigger than its parts" are not capable of being forgotten. *Javādi Āmoli* concludes that these kinds of perceptions cannot be considered as a part of *Fitrah*, in accordance with the Islamic conception of the word.

Secondly, given that *Fitrah* is not necessarily active all the time and that it might be overlooked by the human, again, a question is raised as to what psychology could deal with when *Fitrah* is silent.

Having briefly explained the theoretical problem in determining the realm of Islamic psychology, we are going now to introduce an alternative.

Islamic View on Human Action: Metaphysical Presupposition for Psychology

An alternative to the three above-mentioned suggestions seems to be the important Islamic concept of **Action**. Some of the contemporary thinkers (Harre, 1983) have pointed out that the Islamic concept of **Action** has an important role to play in the realm of ethics and morality. What is needed is to analyze this concept and find out its dimensions or foundations according to the Islamic texts.

We can consider **Action** as the suitable subject matter for psychology. This is because action is so wide that it could cover all the humans whether believers or non-believers in God, whether their *Fitrah*'s are active or silent. An action, as it is used in the Islamic texts, refers to a behaviour (being observable or non-observable) that based on, at least, three kinds of foundations: cognitive, emotive, and voluntary. In addition to being a suitable subject for psychology, action is a key concept in referring to the human nature or identity.

To give a more detailed account of an Islamic metaphysical presupposition for psychology, we will deal with two points in what follow; firstly the Islamic view on the human as an agent or actor and secondly the foundations of action.

The Human as the Agent

The human's being or personality, referred to in the Quran as the **Soul**, is a field in which different elements and factors are involved from inside or outside. These elements or factors are briefly as follow (*Al-Mizan* (Tabātabā'ī, 1972) is used for checking the meanings of the verses):

1. Divine Nature- An innate acquaintance with God along with an innate inclination toward Him. This is called *Fitrah* in the *Quran* [Rum:30]. Whenever *Fitrah* becomes active in the human, his or her soul experiences a deep relaxation and in this state the soul is called *Mutmainnah* (at rest) [Al-Fajr:27].

2. Sensuality- A strong inclination toward what supply the initial or instinctual needs. This inclination could be so strong that it breaches the moral boundaries. The soul is called in this state *Ammarah* (commanding the evil) [Yusuf:53].

3. Wisdom- An element for recognizing right/wrong and good/bad and seeking a way toward rightness and goodness. This is the reason or wisdom which is called **Aql** in the *Quran* and it is actually used as verb, though there are nouns as synonym for it like *hijr* [Al-Fajr:5].

4. Conscience- An element for criticizing and blaming oneself in case of breaching moral boundaries. The soul is called here **Lawwamah** (self-accusing) [Qiyamah:2].

5. The Will- an element for accomplishment. This is the will which is called in the *Quran Eraadah* and is used as verb [Al-Ahzab:13].

6. Social Factors- influential social factors (family, culture, politic, economy, etc.) that provide the background for the development of social aspect of the human identity. These relationships between the individual and social factors are discussed in different places in the *Quran*. The term of **Community's Book** (*ketaabul ummah*) is used to refer to these kinds of relationships that shape the social aspect of human identity [Jassiyah:28].

7. Limitations- Finally, there are limits or weaknesses involved in the humans. These might be potential or factual, as they might be due to hereditary situations or social conditions. These kinds of limitations are referred to in different places in the *Quran* [e.g. Nissa:28].

As the above-mentioned points show, the field of human soul is full of different contrastive elements or factors. Now, the question is that what could be the product of these quarrels, as far as the human nature is concerned? In other words, what is the final picture of the human beyond these interactions?

It seems that the *Quran*'s answer is this: as far as the different periods or situations of the human life are concerned, the products of these interactions and quarrels could appear as different kinds of victories in favour of different factors or forces within or without the human. However, in the long run or in a comprehensive look, it is not the case that the human is subject to forces that push him toward different direction at different times. Rather, the point is that, in the final analysis, the product of these interactions is the human **Action**; the action that could be attributed to him or her and, at the same time, constitutes his or her real identity. In other words, these complicated interactions do not prevent the human from being an agent and an origin for his or her actions.

Thus, we read in the *Quran*: "And that man shall have nothing but what he strives for; And that his striving shall soon be seen. Then, shall be rewarded for it with the fullest reward [Al-Najm:39-41]".

Tabātabā'ī (1972) says in the interpretation of this verse that the possession of attempt and action by the human is not like the possession of a thing by him, rather is indicates that the result of actions are deeply within the heart of the individual and could not be separated from him even by death and he carries them by himself.

This is not, of course, to say that all the humans are responsible for their actions in the same way; rather, given that different people have different capacities and limitations, each person will be responsible for his or her actions, parallel to the relevant capacities and limitations: "... Allah does not lay on anyone a burden except to the extent to which He has granted it [Talaq:7]" Nevertheless, the final thing that should not be forgotten is that all the humans are origins of their actions and that they are responsible for their actions.

We can conclude that the *Quran* sees the human as an agent who could be regarded as the main origin of his or her actions; the actions that constitute his or her identity. To see the human as an agent and actor provides a comprehensive view on the human that goes beyond the small classifications of people in terms of their gender or race and even in terms of their beliefs, like believers and non-believers in God. In other words, the highest horizon that the *Quran* invites us to look at the human from it is that the human is an agent and actor. Men or women, white or black, believers or non-believers in God, all are the agents that are in the process of shaping their identities by their actions. Even though their actions are of different kinds, but nevertheless they are all the origin of their actions.

Thus, in a general address to the humans, it is stated: "Your striving is most surely (directed to) various (ends). Then as for him who gives away and guards (against evil), And accepts the best, We will facilitate for him the easy end. And as for him who is niggardly and considers himself free from need (of Allah), And rejects the best, We will facilitate for him the difficult end [Lail:4-10]".

Makārem Shirazī (1366 A.P.) says this verse indicates that all people will try and do something but some of them are in the way of their freedom and others in the way of becoming slaves of their passions. *Tabrassi* (1350 A.P.) also refers to the big difference that exists between the actions of two types of people, one leading to heaven and the other to the hell.

As it is clear, in the first verse, all the humans are considered as agents who are looking for some ends, even though their strivings are not in the same directions. Thus, in the highest level, the human is regarded as the actor.

In a lower level, given the different kinds of actions, a grand dual classification is accomplished: the action that leads to relief and the action leading to difficulty. In consequence, two kinds of human and two constellations of human souls will appear. In the first case, the human's striving leads to a constellation in his or her soul in which evil inclinations are dominant, will is the servant, and wisdom and divine nature are the captives. In the second case, the constellation of the soul is like this: Wisdom is the leader, which is, at the same time, harmonious with the divine nature, will is the agent of wisdom, and the captives are the soul's own evil inclinations and those of others which might be accepted by the soul.

What is mainly concerned here is the most general view on the humans, namely seeing them as actors. This is because in providing a metaphysical presupposition for psychology, what we need is such a general view to be able to explain behaviours of people in general. Thus, in the next section, in order to provide a detailed account of human action, we will deal with the foundations of action.

Foundations of Human Action

The question concerns us here is: What is an action? Action is different from behaviour in that action requires that there be some foundations for the outer behaviour. Thus, all actions are behaviours but not vice versa. In other words, all actions have behavioural manifestations, but it is not the case that all behavioural manifestations could be considered as actions. Now, the real question is this: What foundations are needed to make behaviour an action?

In looking for the foundations of action as they are seen in the *Quran*, we find at least three kinds of foundations: Cognition, inclination, and will. These three points will be explained briefly in what follows. In most of the cases bellow *Al-Mizan* (Tabātabā'ī, 1972) is used for checking the meaning of the verses.

<u>*Cognition*</u>

In some cases in the *Quran*, the human action is introduced in a way that we could infer its reliance on some cognitive foundations. These foundations are of different kinds or different strengths. At least, three kinds could be recognized in the *Quran*: imagination, guess, and certainty.

As for imagination, some behaviour of people has been accounted for in the *Quran* in terms of their underlying imaginations. This is an example: "And (as for) those who disbelieve, their deeds are like the mirage in a desert, which the thirsty man deems to be water; until when he comes to it he finds it to be naught… [Al-Noor:39]". In this verse, the behaviour is called an action because of its underlying imagination. As the interesting analogy of a thirsty person in a desert shows, he strives toward a place in the desert because he imagines of the mirage as water.

Tabātabā'ī (1972) says in *Al-Mizan,* under the verse, that the analogy indicates that these people's false calculations and thoughts led them to do actions that are useless as the action of a person looking for the mirage is due to his false thoughts and is likewise useless. *Tabrassi* (1350 A.P.) also says in the interpretation of the verse that it refers to the people who do the false actions and think that their thoughts are right.

A similar case is this: "Who amasses wealth and considers it a provision (against mishap); He is thinking that his wealth will make him immortal [Al-Humazah:2-3]". The word **Thinks** is a translation of *Yahssabo* which might be more accurately translated into **Imagines**. Now, the behaviour of gathering money and counting it is regarded as an action because of its underlying imagination that it could make the person immortal. The importance of this underlying imagination is in that that the behaviour could neither be understood without it, nor could it be regarded as an action.

Tabātabā'ī (1972) says that the continuous meaning of the verb *Yahssabo* indicates that the person imagines that his gathering of money will reject the death from him, that is to say, his false action is based on his false thought. *Makārem Shirazi* (1366 A.P.) also in his *Tafsir-eNemooné* says that the reason of the person's deed is his conception of overcoming death.

In other cases, **Guess (Dann)** is referred to as an underlying factor of behaviour which renders it an action. Compared to **Imagination**, **Guess** is stronger, but it is also a cognitive foundation for action. Consider this example: "And as to him who is given his book behind his back…Surely he was (erstwhile) joyful among his followers. Surely, he thought that he would never return [Inshiqaq:10-14]". Again, the word *Danna* is translated here into **Thought**, but the more accurate translation is

Guessed. The joyful behaviour of the person could not be regarded as an action without referring to its underlying **Guess**. Thus, *Makārem Shirazī* (1366 A.P.) in the interpretation of the verse says that the false belief of the person leads to his or her losing happiness.

Finally, the third case of cognitive underlying is certainty. The difference between certainty, on one hand, and imagination or guess, on the other, is that the former is quite firm and established. In the following example, patience and perseverance is at issue which is regarded in relation to its underlying foundation of certainty: "Therefore be patient; surely the promise of Allah is true, and let not those who have no certainty hold you in light estimation [Rum:60]".

Therefore, some behaviour is explained in the **Quran** in terms of their underlying cognitive foundations. Cognition, in its different kinds or degrees, constitutes one of the foundations of human action.

Inclination

In other cases, people's behaviours are referred to in the **Quran** in terms of their underlying inclinations or desires. With regard to this foundation, behaviour is an action on the ground that its meaning is related to its underlying inclinations.

These inclinations could appear in positive or negative shapes, namely as attraction or escape. "And do not abuse those whom they call upon besides Allah, lest exceeding the limits they should abuse Allah out of ignorance. Thus have We made fair seeming to every people their deeds... [An'am:108]".

The point that every people find their deeds fair seeming indicates that one of the foundations of people's actions could be sought in their inclinations or in their being impressed by the attractiveness of what they do. *Tabātabā'ī* (1972) says in the interpretation of the verse that **Zinat** refers to every beautiful and interesting thing and the person who looks for it is looking for its beauty. He adds that what makes people's deeds beautiful and interesting for them is the pleasure that they take from them, being material or mental.

This impression could be mild or quite stormy. This is an example of the former: "What! he who is obedient during hours of the night, prostrating himself and standing, takes care of the hereafter and hopes for the mercy of his Lord!... [Zumar:9]". Here, the worship behaviour of the person is explained in terms of its underlying inclination of **Hope** for the mercy of God.

The following example referring to the story of the prophet *Joseph* indicates an action with an underlying stormy inclination: "And she in whose house he (*Joseph*) was sought to make himself yield (to her), and she made fast the doors and said: Come forward...And women in the city said: The chief's wife seeks her slave (*Joseph*) to yield himself (to her), surely he has affected her deeply with (his) love... [Yusuf:23; 30]".

Makārem Shirazī (1366 A.P.) says in the interpretation of this verse that the word "Shaghafaha" indicates that the behaviour of this woman is due to a deep love that has invaded her heart. Referring to the same word, *Tabrassi* (1350 A.P.) also says that it indicates the deep penetration of love in the heart.

Thus, the second foundation of action is inclination in its two positive and negative shapes.

Will

Finally, the third underlying foundation of human action is will. In some places of the **Quran**, people's behaviours are explained in relation to their

underlying wills: "And when a party of them said: O people of Yasrib! There is no place to stand for you (here), therefore go back; and a party of them asked permission of the prophet, saying: Surely our houses are exposed; and they were not exposed; they only wanted to fly away [Ahzab:13]".

It is worth mentioning that the *Quran* does not equate will and desire. The difference is that while in the latter, just inclination is concerned, in the former, selection and choice is taken for granted. Thus, a desire could be the subject of will; that is to say, a person can select his desire to be fulfilled as he can decide to reject it. This point is referred to in this verse: "Have you then considered him who takes his low desires for his god... [Al-Jassiah:23]". This statement indicates that the person has chosen to follow his low desires, in the same way as a person might choose a god to worship.

Tabātabā'ï (1972) says that this person who has taken his desire as his god, knows that Allah is in fact the God, but this knowledge does not help him because knowledge is not enough for taking guidance and what is needed other than that is an inner commitment for acting according to the knowledge's implications.

We can conclude from what have been said in this section that three kinds of foundations are considered in the *Quran* for human action: cognition, inclination, and will.

The final point which is worth noting here concerns the sequence of these three kinds of foundations. There are some hints in the *Quran* indicating that the sequence is in the same way as they explained above; namely cognition is in the first step, inclination in the second, and will in the third. This verse gives such a hint: "And that the hearts of those who do not believe in the hereafter may incline to it (Satan's suggestion) and that they may be well pleased with it and that they may earn what they are going to earn (of evil) [Al-An'aam:113]".

Three steps might be recognized in this verse: inclination toward Satan's suggestion; becoming pleased with it; and earning evil according to it. The second and the third steps refer more or less explicitly to what we called **Inclination** and **Will** respectively as the second and the third foundations of action. However, the first step in the verse is also apparently continuous with the second step because of the explicit usage of word **Inclination**. The original word used in the verse is *Letussqa* which literally means **May Listen** (to Satan). Thus, we might say that the first step implicitly refers to cognition.

Makārem Shirazï (1366 A.P.) says in the interpretation of this verse that *Letussqa* refers to an inclination due mostly to hearing something, then what is known by means of hearing leads to a deep inclination (*Leyarzoh*) and then to committing the sinful actions (*Leyaghtarefu*).

But, perhaps, the question of sequence of the foundations of action is an experimental question which needs to be dealt with in the studies of human sciences, rather than being a necessary element of metaphysical presuppositions for these sciences. There might be complicated relationships between cognition, inclination, and will. However, seeking metaphysical presuppositions, we concern here just about the main characteristics of human action.

An Outline of Islamic Psychology

Now, to develop an Islamic psychology, we need to take the above-mentioned view on human action and its foundations as the metaphysical foundations. Hence, it is required that researchers in psychology provide hypotheses inspired by these

foundations and then try to confront them with the experimental world. On the condition of finding evidence for these hypotheses one can talk about the experimental data in the realm of Islamic psychology.

On the whole, Islamic psychology will be, accordingly, an action psychology. In other words, in this psychology, the human is considered as an agent for his or her actions. One might ask about the place of unconscious or unintentional behaviours in this kind of psychology. Talking about the human as an agent could be reconcilable with unconscious or unintentional behaviours. These behaviours could be temporarily classified in two categories: normal and abnormal. Examples of the former are the behaviours in the early childhood which are unintentional and those of the latter are obsessive-compulsory behaviours which might be unconscious and unintentional.

In the Islamic psychology as an action psychology, these two kinds of unconscious and unintentional behaviours could be taken into account in terms of action. As for the normal behaviours of the early childhood, they could be regarded as the antecedents of the genesis of action. In other words, since actions are regarded according to the Islamic view as the heart of psychology, the early childhood behaviours are taken into account as backgrounds for the genesis of action proper. In fact, behaviours and activities of the childhood provide the different materials needed for the genesis of action, namely cognitive contents, inclinations, and will. It is assumed, accordingly, that these preparatory materials are reorganized in a critical point in the course of development from then on the individual could be regarded as the agent who has actions. Thus, the early childhood behaviours should be explained in a teleological manner for providing the background for the genesis of action.

As for the abnormal behaviours, they could be regarded as disturbances of the course of action in different ways. For instance, what Freud referred to as fixation, could be explained as a disturbance in the inclinations of the person which is due to the intervention of the external factors like parental punishment. Finally, they should be understood in terms of the big picture of **The Human as Agent** and accordingly the extension or depth of the disturbances to this picture should be accounted.

Thus, different kinds of unconscious or unintentional behaviours could be considered as disturbances in either antecedents or consequences of actions. Since the Islamic psychology is an action psychology, the explanation of different behaviours should be done somehow in terms of actions.

Conclusion

One of the main differences among psychological theories is rooted in their background conceptions about the suitable subject for psychological studies. These conceptions are deeply connected to particular views on human nature. In psychoanalytic theory, for instance, the suitable subject for psychological studies considered to be human instincts. This view is derived from *Freud*'s conception on human nature as an energetic system composed of some basic instincts. Also, in the more recent computational psychology, the suitable subject regarded as information processing which is related to a background conception of human as a system of information.

In the same way, for providing an Islamic psychology, the two related points, namely the suitable subject for psychology and the human nature, should be dealt with according to the Islamic view. This notion can show some kind of theoretical barrier in the way of providing Islamic psychology. In other words, if we cannot

formulate the elements of Islamic view on human nature so that it could lead to a suitable subject for scientific studies in psychology, it means that we are confronted with theoretical barriers.

There have been some suggestions concerning the subject matter of Islamic psychology. It seems that these suggestions could not overcome the theoretical barrier. Some have considered the divine **Spirit (Ruh)** within the human as the subject matter, some others have regarded the **Soul (Nafs)** and still others, the divine creation of the human *Fitrah* as the candidates for doing the job.

However, these suggestions could be challenged in different ways on being able to provide a suitable subject for psychological scientific studies. As for the divine **Spirit (Ruh)**, one thing is that it might not be possible to know it in this world, as this point is hinted in the *Quran*. The second point is that the spirit refers to the real or true nature of the human and even if it could be known, it is not suitable for psychological studies because in psychology we need to know factual characteristics not being necessarily related to the true nature of the human.

Concerning the second suggestion, namely the soul, it should be noted that it is too general to be able to show the distinct subject matter of psychology. In other words, the soul is not limited to psychology because one might say that the soul is a subject matter for philosophy as well as for spiritual studies. In fact, we need to maintain that in what particular aspect the soul could be regarded as the subject matter for psychology.

Finally, the third suggestion, namely *Fitrah*, could also be challenged in some ways. Firstly, it is not clear that *Fitrah* has been used in the Islamic texts in a wide extent so that it could cover all kinds of human behaviour concerned in psychology. In fact, it seems that *Fitrah* refers merely to an innate knowledge and inclination toward God and this is too limited to be able to cover all what is concerned in psychological studies. Secondly, *Fitrah* is not necessarily active all the time; rather it might be overlooked by the human. Again, the question is raised that what psychology could deal with when *Fitrah* is off.

The present essay is an introductory attempt to give an alternative. Accordingly, an alternative to the three above-mentioned suggestions seems to be the important Islamic concept of **Action**. We can consider **Action** as the suitable subject matter for psychology. This is because action is so wide that it could cover all the humans whether believers or non-believers in God, whether their *Fitrah* is active or silent. An action, as it is used in the Islamic texts, refers to a behaviour (being observable or non-observable) that is based on, at least, three kinds of foundations: cognitive, emotive, and voluntary. In addition to being a suitable subject for psychology, action is a key concept in referring to the human nature or identity.

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