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An Islamic Approach to Humanities

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Abstract. The methodology of science is suitable for material substances subject to laws, but not for humans with free will. "Social science" was born from the misconception that application of the scientific method to human beings and societies would lead to remarkable progress. However, this approach has failed in many ways, which is documented in this paper. Islam provides us with a radically different approach to the study of human beings and societies, predicated on human freedom to choose between good and evil. This approach is delineated in this paper.

Key Words: Positivism, Freedom of choice, Morality, Scientific method, Revelation.

KAUJIE Classification: G2, H12

1. Introduction

The message of Allah to human beings starts with the imperative "Read!" and goes on to introduce the Creator of Heavens and Earth as the One who taught man that which he did not know. This knowledge, given to illiterate and backward Arabs, allowed them to overtake established civilizations of the Chinese, Persians, and Romans. Historian Marshall Hodgson (1974, p.71) attests to the power of this knowledge as follows: "Soon after the founding of the faith, Muslims succeeded in building a new form of society, which in time carried with it its own distinctive institutions, its art and literature, its science and scholarship, its political and social forms, as well as its cult and creed, all bearing an unmistakable Islamic impress. In the course of centuries, this new society spread over widely diverse climes, throughout most of the Old World. It came closer than any had ever come to uniting all mankind under its ideals."

It was prophesied that Islam came as a stranger and will soon become a stranger. Chittick (1998) writes that the Islamic intellectual heritage, which was responsible for the preservation, enrichment and transmission of this knowledge, "has largely been lost in the modern

times." Our goal in this paper is to show that Islam offers deep insights into human conditions, and provides essential foundations for any attempt to study human societies. We have deliberately used the term "humanities" because a second goal of the paper is to show that the Western attempt to apply the scientific method to the study of human beings – reflected in the name "social science" – has proven to be a failure.

2. Two Western Misconceptions about Science

As a result of a long and complex historical process sketched in Zaman (2013) two major misconceptions about scientific knowledge came to be widely believed in the West. These are:

1. Science is the only valid source of knowledge.
2. The methodology of science is based solely on observations and logic.

These ideas are clearly opposed to Islam, according to which the Revelation is the most certain source of knowledge, while all other human knowledge is uncertain and doubtful. Similarly, the Qur'ān (2:3) starts by describing those who are Allah-conscious as those who believe in the unseen. It follows that the idea that all valid knowledge is based on observations and logic is obviously false. These arguments are sufficient to show the inherent incompatibility between Islamic and Western epistemology. The two propositions can also be contested on secular grounds as we discuss below.

We have many sources of knowledge that are not "scientific" in the sense of being derived from observations of patterns in the real world. Children are born with the knowledge of how to smile, cry, express their demands, and also empathy. Empirical studies bear out the claim of the Qur'ān (55:1-55:4) – "We created man, and taught him how to speak." Noam Chomsky showed that children must have innate knowledge of an underlying universal grammar, in order to be able to pick up languages with the ease that they display; see Pinker (2007) for an exposition. A vast proportion of essential knowledge that we have is based on experience such as swimming, driving, understanding how others feel, and so on. Experiences are subjective and not easily communicable to others, making this knowledge non-scientific.

Similarly, the idea that scientific knowledge is based purely on observations and logic is wrong. Again, the story of how this wrong idea came to be widely believed in the West is long and complicated. Manicas (1987) provides a detailed history of the key philosophical ideas. For our purposes, it is sufficient to understand that there are two different approaches to methodology – nominalist and realist. According to the dominant nominalist approach, our only access to the real world is through our observations. If there is a reality hidden underneath the observations, this reality is not accessible to us. Science deals only with observables, and not with the underlying hidden reality. This position was most forcefully advocated by the logical positivists and became nearly universally accepted in the early part of the twentieth century. Some details of the emergence of logical positivism, and how it clashes with Islamic philosophy is provided in Zaman (Dec, 2013). Logical positivism had a "spectacular crash" as it became clear in the mid-twentieth century that the fundamental tenets of this philosophy were wrong. Suppes (1977) provide an accessible account of the rise and fall of logical positivism. Suppes also shows that despite the fall of positivism, many ideas associated with this failed philosophy continue to be widely believed. In particular, social sciences, and especially economics, have been heavily influenced by logical positivism. While some of the social sciences have been revised in light of the failure of logical positivism, no adjustments have been made in the methodology of economics.

The alternative to the nominalist philosophy of science is "realism". Even though, reality is inaccessible, observations provide us with enough clues to enable us to deduce the nature of reality. According to the realist understanding of science, science works by using observations to infer existence of objects, forces, and causal relations which cannot be observed – for example, electrons, gravity, and quantum effects. Manicas (2006) has provided a detailed book-length argument about why nominalism is a mistaken philosophy of science and argued in favor of the realist position. Zaman (2012) shows that the nominalist philosophy has led to serious methodological problems in econometrics and how those can be rectified by moving to a realist position. Note that the realist position is strongly supported by Islam, which teaches us that all of the creation is full of signs that enable us to recognize the Creator. Accepting the realist position implies that progress in science requires

going beyond the apparent and the observable to the underlying realities. As we shall see, Western social sciences are not well-equipped to move in this direction, whereas Islam provides us with substantial guidance on how this can be done.

3. Three Major Problems with Social Science

In the early twentieth century, logical positivists argued forcefully that the only valid form of human knowledge was science, and this was based solely on observations and logic. Furthermore, scientific knowledge had to be quantifiable and measurable. All of these propositions later turned out to be wrong, but they had a profound influence on the social sciences. Influential intellectuals like C. P. Snow argued that the modern age required mathematical literacy, and knowledge of the laws of thermodynamics was just as important, if not more, than Shakespeare. The humanities struggled to become like science so as to achieve respectability. To do so, they adopted the then dominant logical positivist analysis of the methodology of science. This was a double mistake. In the first place, radical differences between the nature of science and the nature of human beings necessitate use of different methodologies for the respective fields. This error was compounded by a misunderstanding of the nature of scientific methodology. It would take us too far afield to discuss the complex and tangled history of how this came to pass (see Manicas, 1987). Instead, we will list three important consequences of this double mistake.

3.1 Morality is Just Noise

One of the leading positivists Ayer (1936) wrote that: “ethical judgments …have no objective validity whatsoever. They are pure expressions of feeling and … unverifiable for the same reason as a cry of pain”. This position came to be widely believed, with disastrous consequences. Until the twentieth century, intellectuals had assumed that truth had moral dimensions, and had sought to find a ‘scientific’ basis to establish moral propositions. This project was abandoned as impossible, and replaced by the idea that moral propositions were as meaningless as a cry of pain. Charters of colleges and universities had explicitly sought to build character and inculcate a sense of civic duty among students. However, the idea that morality was not part of human knowledge led to a gradual

abandonment of this goal, as well as, removal of courses like 'Civics' from the syllabi. Reuben (1996) has described the historical process by which morality was removed from the educational goals of US universities.

What were the results of the abandonment of the mission of building character, and instilling a sense of civic and social responsibility among students? Over the past century, there has been a distinct and measurable decline in moral standards in the West. Many authors have documented this. Most graphically, an award winning book by Zygmunt Bauman (1989) argues that modern secular democracies create no barriers against the scientific elimination of a sub-population if this is considered favorable to the group interests. As an illustration, US Ambassador Madeleine Albright did not feel embarrassed to declare on public TV that the lives of half a million Iraqi children were a worthwhile cost to pay for achievement of US political goals in the Middle East. Hollywood movies now depict assassins, prostitutes, thieves, and criminals as heroes, whereas this was not possible fifty years ago. Halberstam (2002) has documented how students trained at the finest US educational institutions felt no compunctions in scientific mass murders of innocent Vietnamese population. A 2008 Josephson Institute survey of high school students showed that large numbers cheat, steal and lie, and worse, do not find these actions morally objectionable. As a consequence of the lack of moral development, the leader of the free world has signed more than 300 lists of victims to be assassinated, killing over 3000 civilians, without regret or remorse(1). Klein (2007) writes that the CIA Kubark Manual represents the first genuine advances in the ancient art of torture in centuries. The Congress has approved torture, renditions, and indefinite detentions of children and civilians without any charge or trial. Movies celebrating torturers and extra-legal actions have been made to justify these to the public.

3.2 Mechanization of Human Behavior

In order to apply scientific methodology to humans, it is necessary to deny their essential freedom. The most influential school of psychology in the twentieth century does precisely that. Skinner (1972) laid out the

(1) See "Secret 'Kill List' tests Obama" in New York Times, May 29, 2012, and "Obama's Drone Killing Campaigns" in Counterpunch, Oct. 24, 2013.

foundations of 'Behavioral Psychology', which basically treats human beings as robots who can be programmed by appropriate stimulus-response sequences. This school, which ignores feelings, motivations and other non-measurable and unobservable aspects, rose to dominance in the USA precisely because it was 'scientific'.

Just as positivism collapsed against the weight of evidence, so the behavioral school of psychology has received many setbacks. An excellent illustration of the type of problem created by denying unobservable is the "theory of revealed preference" due to Samuelson. Economic theory was regarded as 'un-scientific' because it utilized the idea of the utility derived from consumption – this was a feeling that was not observable. Following the behavioral idea, we can translate this unobservable to the observable choices made by the consumer. The observable choice behavior reveals the unobservable hidden preference: the consumers choose X over Y when they prefer X to Y and when consuming X generates greater utility than consuming Y. Samuelson sought to make Economics a science by replacing the unobservable preferences and utilities by the observable choices. A number of authors contributed to the field, and ultimately came up with a set of axioms on choices that were shown to be equivalent to the standard axioms on preferences. The Nobel Prize awarded to Samuelson mentions this feat of turning economics into a science by removing the reference to the unobservable utilities.

However, as Wong (2002) has pointed out at book length, this was a hollow victory. Samuelson was mistaken in thinking that he had eliminated unobservable by replacing preference with choices. Imagine a person who has achieved the Buddhist ideal of complete indifference to worldly affairs. All worldly choices are the same to him. In this case, there is no reason for his choices to obey any axioms, or display any pattern or consistency. The axiom of transitivity imposed on choices reflects our understanding of the nature of human preferences. The observable choices display regularities only because they are based on the invisible utilities that we derive from consumption, and the stability of these feelings.

It is important to note that this is an illustration of the 'second mistake' – the idea that the methodology of science is based purely on observations and logic. Scientific theories utilize many unobservables like positrons, energy quanta, gravity, electro-magnetic forces and others. Positivists thought that all these unobservables could be replaced by equivalents in terms of observables, but this turned out to be a mistake. This mistaken understanding of scientific methodology was made the basis of the development of a methodology for social science, and an attempt was made to remove all unobservables from social science theories. As just illustrated, this attempt fails, and one must refer to unobservables in order to understand human behavior. Despite this failure, no serious attempts have been made to revise fundamental methodological principles of economics. Karacuka and Zaman (2012) provide a long list of examples showing that economic models are extremely poor at explaining actual observed human behavior because they neglect 'unobservable' dimensions of human motivations.

3.3 The Search for Simple Universal Laws

The achievement of Newton in utilizing a simple law to provide an explanation for a variety of physically observed phenomena was universally admired. As Mirowski (1990) documents, the prestige of physics led neoclassical economists to copy models from physics "term for term, symbol for symbol". The idea of appropriating the methodology of physics for use in economics has had immensely harmful consequences. Economists look for simple universal laws of economics, which are invariant across time and space, just like the laws of physics. Thus, methodology of science (as misunderstood by economists) restricts the subject of economics to those laws and principles which operate equally in the Middle East, Africa, Latin America and Europe. These laws must also be invariant across time as well, holding equally for colonial India, contemporary Chile and Brazil, as well as pre- and post-unification Germany. Because historical events are particular, special, and unique, they have no place in a scientific study of invariant laws. After all, the law of gravity continued to hold without any change before, during and after the World Wars.

It is a dangerous illusion to think that we can understand the economics of twentieth century Europe without any reference to the two

World Wars – yet modern economic theory tries to do exactly this. Similarly, it is impossible to understand development and under-development without understanding the history of colonialism and imperialism. However, today one can get a Ph.D. in economics without studying any of the major historical events which shaped the economic landscape of the twentieth century. It is natural to study economic events within their historical context, and this was the dominant approach to the subject throughout the nineteenth century. However, an extremely important "battle of methodologies" between the German historical school and Menger's Austrian school led to a decisive victory for the scientific quantitative and a-historical methodology of the Austrian school. The consequence, documented by Hodgson (2002) was the removal of historical and qualitative elements from the methodology of modern economics.

Many famous economists are on the record as asserting that the status of economic theories is on par with that of physics as a science. Thus, the law of supply and demand is like the law of gravity. However, no act of parliament or congress can have the slightest impact on the operations of the law of gravity. But if parliaments act to support prices or wages, their legislation will override the law of supply and demand to determine the price or wage. The law of supply and demand states that if the legislated minimum wage is above the equilibrium level, unemployment will result. Yet extensive empirical investigation by Card (1995) found no support for this proposition. The most dramatic failure of the law of supply and demand is furnished by the Great Depression, which created unemployment rates of above 20% for more than a decade. Keynesian Economics was invented to explain this phenomenon, and argued that real wages were sticky in the downward direction, preventing the law of supply and demand from operating. Ariely (2009, Chapter 4) provides many more examples of the failure of the law of supply and demand in the real world. Just using the word "law" and claiming that economics is like physics does not actually provide economics with the universal laws that it seeks on the basis of the borrowed methodology of physics.

4. The Consequences of Freedom

This world was created as a test for human beings. Both the desire for evil [12:53] and the knowledge of the good [9:49, 75:14] have been implanted within the human heart, and the test is to see who can rise above temptations and chose the good. Holy Qur'ān states:

> "Blessed is He in Whose hand is the Sovereignty, and He is Able to do all things. Who has created life and death that He may try you as to which of you is best in conduct; and He is the Mighty, Forgiving" [67:1,2]

Had Allah (SWT)(2) desired it, he could have compelled everyone to obedience (32:13), but since the purpose of the creation was to test men, He implanted within the heart of every human being, simultaneously, the potential for tremendous good and tremendous evil. He then showed him what is good and what is bad.

> "Have We not shown him the two ways (of good and evil)? [90:10]"

In initial shaping, Allah created man with a good "nature" and gave him the liberty to choose the good or the bad path. It is man's choice, what he eventually becomes.

> "Verily, We create man in the best conformation, and thereafter We reduce him to the lowest of low [95:4,595:4,5]"

Thus a man can rise above the angels or fall to be worse than the beasts. Those who struggle against their lowly desires will find the path to their Lord (29:69, 79:40,41), and achieve the potential for excellence present within their souls.

The ability to make free choices brings great rewards and also carries with it a great responsibility. We must acquire knowledge of the choices facing us, learn to differentiate between right and wrong, and also choose the right path even when this is made difficult by external and internal circumstances. This gift of volition, of free choice, was offered to the others among the creations of Allah, but they all refused it and shrank from the responsibility [33:72]. Human beings accepted this

(2) For meaning, please see Glossary in the Intro- pages of the issue.

gift of freedom but have not been able to fulfill the associated responsibility for the most part. That is men have been foolish – failed to learn of and to evaluate the choices facing them, and evil – they had failed to choose the best action even when they had knowledge of it.

One implication of this verse is that most of creation is subject to laws and has deterministic behavior – and hence is subject to study by scientific methods. However, human beings have a certain amount of freedom in their choices and hence their behavior cannot be described via universal and invariant mathematical laws. We discuss the implications of freedom in greater detail, to establish that the scientific method is of extremely limited value in studying human beings and societies.

4.1 The Purpose of Human Existence

Human beings have different ends and priorities for themselves.

> "Verily, (the ends) you strive for are diverse. [92:4]"

It is only within the context of these diverse motives that we can understand human behavior. Human beings are free to choose their goals, and changing these goals is a key to creating positive changes. Instead of striving for a variety of often conflicting goals, the Qur'ān encourages us to develop a single-minded focus on one goal:

> "Say; Lo! my worship and, my sacrifice and my living and my dying are for Allah, Lord of the Worlds. [6:162]

As the Qur'ān [51:56] states, human beings were created for this purpose – to obey and worship Allah. However, they are free to choose other goals for themselves. In general, men have an excessive love of wealth and material possessions [100:8]. However, this love must be overcome, or else it will lead to a bad end [92:8; 92:10]. This requires constant struggle, as we have been given a disposition to like evil; this is what creates a test. If there was no tendency towards evil then there would be no test. If we succeed in this trial by continuously choosing good over evil, this purifies the heart and allows us to realize the potential for excellence within each human being. If we fail by following dictates of our nafs (evil desires) over the good, this leads us to become worse than the beasts.

> "Those who believe, and suffer exile and strive with might and main, in Allah's cause, with their goods and their persons, have the highest rank in the sight of Allah; they are the people who will achieve (salvation)". [9:20]

The purpose of our study is to learn how to create the transformation towards excellence in human beings. We must also learn how to organize societies so as to bring out and nourish the best tendencies within human beings. The purpose of Islamic social organization is described in the following verse of the holy Qur'ān:

> "Those who, if We establish them in the land, establish regular *ṣalāh* and give regular *zak*āh, enjoin the right and forbid wrong: with Allah rests the end (and decision) of (all) affairs. [22:41]

It is only with reference to these goals that it is possible to evaluate human and social activity. It is impossible to study human beings and societies without knowing the purpose of human existence. According to standard secular Western thought, human life is meaningless. As Bertrand Russell (1903) puts poetically:

> "That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins -- all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built".

But if human life is ultimately meaningless, then the study of human beings is equally meaningless. This is all the more so if human beings are deterministic robots, as suggested by Skinner (1977). If we have no choices to make, then our study of human beings and society is equally constrained to be whatever it must be.

4.2 An Important Inversion: Using the World for Spiritual Struggle

Because of materialist focus on measurable outcomes, even Muslims sometimes forget that while we are required to struggle for justice, we will not be evaluated on the basis of outcomes. Prophet Mohammad (SAW)[3] was required to spread the message of Islam, but was told that guidance towards Islam was entirely in the hands of Allah. Similarly, there have been prophets who did not succeed in converting anyone to the message that they carried. Nonetheless, they will be counted among the successful because they carried out the struggle to spread the message, which is all the Allah (SWT) requires.

In Christianity and Buddhism and many other traditions, spiritual progress demands isolation and withdrawal from the world. Islam offers a radically different approach: spiritual progress is the result of our engagement and struggle with the world, along the lines commanded by Allah (SWT). For example, it is not the meat and blood of our sacrifices that reaches Allah (SWT), but the spirit with which the sacrifice is done. Similarly, we are required to feed the poor for the sake of the love of Allah (SWT) – the same act done with the intention of acquiring fame and popularity is not acceptable. The general principle is that we must use our lives and wealth to earn paradise:

> "Behold, Allah has bought of the believers their lives and their possessions, promising them paradise in," [9:111]

The same principle which applies at the individual level also applies at the social level. An Islamic state is an effort to realize the spiritual by material means through human organization. In popular idiom, it is not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game that matters. Islam is process-oriented; more than outcome-oriented. Whereas conventional wisdom is concerned with the achievement of favorable outcomes, Islam is concerned with how to carry out the struggle for justice, whether or not this outcome is achieved. If the outcome is achieved, that is a gift from Allah and an added-value.

(3) For meaning, please see Glossary in the Intro- pages of the issue.

4.3 Engaged Participation instead of Detached Observation

An important scientific methodological principle is that of objectivity; one must be a neutral and detached observer in pursuit of scientific truth. Lack of neutrality may result in biased judgments and consequent errors in analysis. This may be a reasonable principle for the study of materials subject to laws (though even here, scientists are frequently passionate about their theories). This principle is completely inappropriate for the study of humans and societies. In fact, Islam prohibits us from remaining neutral when we see injustice:

> Abu Saeed al-Khudri (may Allah be pleased with him) relates that: "I heard the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) saying, "Whosoever of you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then [let him try changing it] with his tongue; and if he is not able to do even that, then with his heart (consider it to be bad in his heart) — and that is the weakest degree of faith." [Muslim Book 1 (Faith) aḥādīth 79 and 81]

This difference between the scientific method and the Islamic approach is directly due to human freedom to choose between good and evil. When studying material objects subject to laws, the question of good and evil does not arise. However, in studying human beings and societies where there is a constant struggle between good and evil both on an individual and on a social level, Islam requires us to struggle for the good, and does not allow us to remain neutral. The requirement to be engaged in an effort to change the world also creates another radical difference between the Islamic approach and conventional scientific methodology. Islamic source materials strongly suggest that it is in the process of struggle that we will be provided with the relevant knowledge:

> "And those who strive in Our (cause),- We will certainly guide them to our Paths: For verily Allah is with those who do right." [29:69]

Neutral and detached observation required by conventional (mis)-understanding of scientific methodology will not generate knowledge. When actions are chosen according to social norms, a positive and objective description will fail to achieve understanding and explanation required for scientific analysis. For example, suppose we observe

someone driving at the maximum legal speed of 55 miles per hour. This purely positive and objective fact hides within it the fact that the driver chose to adhere to legal norms. This objective fact would have changed had the legal norms been different, or if the driver had chosen not to obey them. Understanding norms and reasons for which human being choose to adhere to norms or to violate them is essential to understanding behavior. A purely objective description which does not take the normative elements into account will be unsatisfactory.

As another example, consider the question: are people selfish or cooperative? [which is incidentally the title of Section II in Ledyard's (1995) survey of Public Goods]. This is a valid question based on the idea that the scientific methodology consists of description and observation. However, from the Islamic point of view, all human beings have the potential for good and evil, and hence, both characteristics are simultaneously present within all human beings. Different types of environments can evoke one or the other type of behavior, and this is also what the experiments show. Depending on how the situation is framed, different types of cultural norms may be evoked, leading to different types of behavior. Man's freedom to choose to follow norms or to violate them leads to a failure of the scientific methodology.

5. The Essential Importance of Norms

The positivists argued that norms are not scientific knowledge. That is true – norms cannot be derived from observations and logic. Their mistaken idea that science is the only valid source of knowledge led them to the conclusion that there can be no valid knowledge about morals. Indeed it is true that knowledge about morality can only be acquired through Revelation. In some sense, Muslims are in agreement with the secular position: knowledge about morality cannot be obtained by reason, but only by revelation. Of course, since secular thinkers do not believe in revelation, they are forced to conclude that there can be no knowledge about morals.

5.1 Failure of Secular Approaches to Morality

First, we briefly review two standard secular approaches to morality and show that both are failures. One approach is based on consensus: whatever

members of a society agree to; is moral. In the 1970's, homosexuality was listed as a mental disorder in the official manual of the American Psychological Association. It was considered a social evil and was also a criminal offense. In 1990's, homosexuality was classified as normal behavior, and legislation to support gay marriages was passed in many states. To disapprove of this act and to speak against it in public became a criminal offense. Obviously, social consensus does not provide a stable basis for the construction of norms.

The second secular approach to morality is via utilitarianism. The ultimate and only goal of human existence is the pursuit of pleasure in this life. Anything that contributes to pleasure is moral, while anything that causes pain is immoral. Jeremy Bentham, the founder of this philosophy, considered himself to be a prophet and explicitly proposed this as a new religion for mankind. Unfortunately, on key matters, this philosophy fails to provide guidance. If a society decides that the greater good of the greater number will be achieved by scientific extermination of six million Jews, utilitarianism cannot pose any objections. Similarly, if someone pursues short-term pleasures which harm both society and him in the long run, utilitarians cannot persuade him to make sacrifices against his perceived self-interest. The contradictions between social and individual interests and long and short run pleasures cannot be resolved. So this philosophy fails to provide a satisfactory basis for morals.

Note that we are not arguing that secular atheists behave immorally; such people can, and often do, choose to behave morally. We are arguing that there is no logical basis for derivation of morals on secular grounds.

5.2 All Human Behavior is Value-Laden

Human lives are infinitely precious. As the Qur'ān states:

> "… if anyone kills a human being-unless it be [in punishment] for murder or for spreading corruption on earth-it shall be as though he had killed all mankind; whereas, if anyone saves a life, it shall be as though he had saved the lives of all mankind" (5:32).

When we spend time on any activity, this imbues it with a value, since our actions testify to the normative idea that this action is worth doing. In human actions, and in social sciences, there are no neutral,

value-free grounds on which one can stand. This is in direct opposition to the widely accepted idea of Weber that social science should be value-free. *This idea itself is normative*. Since it is impossible to study human beings and society without normative ideas, the attempt to keep social science value-free – in order to acquire the prestige of science – has led to the *hiding* of moral values behind apparently objective propositions. This illustrates Foucault's thesis that "modern human sciences (biological, psychological, social) purport to offer universal scientific truths about human nature that are, in fact, often mere expressions of ethical and political commitments of a particular society"(4).

We give a specific and concrete example of how values are hidden within apparently objective formulations of economic theories. Economists accept only the Pareto principle as being valid for welfare comparisons: if everyone has more, then the society as a whole is better off. If income re-distribution takes place then social welfare cannot be compared as there is no scientific way to aggregate utilities or to make interpersonal comparisons. The Pareto principle is supposedly scientific and objective and does not involve value judgments. Consider however the following situation: a small group of people (0.01% of the population) control 99% of the resources and wealth in a given society. The remaining 1% of wealth is not adequate to feed, clothe or house the remaining 99.99% of the population. If we argue that there is no scientific basis for redistribution of income, then in effect we endorse the status quo. Thus, the Pareto principle implicitly states that the right of the owners of wealth to their property is stronger than the right of the hungry to be fed. The Qur'ān teaches us the opposite principle:

> "The Believers are those in whose wealth is a recognized right of the needy." (70:24)

In contradiction to the Pareto principle, the Qur'ān places the right of the needy over the right to private property. The point of this discussion is that the apparently objective and scientific Pareto principle hides a normative commitment to private property. This commitment conflicts with Islamic norms. In a similar way, as many authors have

(4) Quoted from entry on Michel Foucault in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (accessed 23 February 2008): http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/foucault/

shown, economic theories are based on hidden normative principles. See for example Zaman (Sep. 2012) and Hausman and MacPherson (2008).

5.3 Norms as Guides for Our Efforts

As discussed earlier, our goal is to strive for the good on an individual and social level.

> "You are indeed the best community that has ever been brought forth for [the good of] mankind: you enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and you believe in Allah". (3:110)

Norms, which define the good, are essential guideposts for this struggle. Without having a clear definition of the ideal state, we cannot carry out this transformative struggle – for which we were created. Since knowledge about norms cannot be achieved by scientific methods, the Western misconception that all human knowledge is purely scientific led to many mistaken ideas about normative statements. Some of these relevant to our analysis are listed below.

Error 1: It is possible to cleanly separate the normative and positive.

In fact, as Hilary Putnam (2002) has shown in a number of essays and books, there are many statements where the normative and the positive are mixed in such a way that it is impossible to separate the two components. Thus, the idea that economics consists (or should consist) of only and entirely of the positive statements taken in isolation is not valid. Most economic theory consists of statements where positive and normative aspects are combined.

As simple illustration consider the famous Cambridge Controversy on the measurement of capital. On the surface, it appears to be a purely technical and mathematical discussion about the conditions under which capital of different types can be aggregated to come up with a single measure of the amount of capital K, which is an input to the production function. This is essential in order to be able to define the marginal product of capital and labor. However, underlying this purely technical question is a moral concern of great importance. One of the key arguments of Karl Marx was that returns to capital are not justified because only labor produces value. In addition, he argued that laborers were exploited by the

capitalists, and not paid the full value of what they produced. Both of these arguments are countered by the production function into which capital and labor enter in a symmetric way. This means that the justification for payments to capital is on par with the justification of payments to labor. In addition; both factors are paid their marginal product so that the reward received by each factor is a fair and just payment for the value produced by each. By doing the mathematics differently (for example, by introducing fixed, non-malleable capital of different vintages) we can change the moral implications of these models. The two aspects, positive and normative are mixed and cannot be separated.

Error 2: The norms are ideals that can never be achieved. Hence, they are irrelevant to the real world.

Human beings are strongly motivated by social ideals, and strive to conform to the behavior that will be praised. The celebration of the achievements of the Brazilian football star Pelé led thousands of children to try to imitate him, even though none could match his achievements or rival his fame. Thus, ideals strongly shape society even if they are impossible to achieve.

For Muslims, Prophet Muhammed (S.A.W.) is a perfect example in all dimensions of life. His excellence is such that it is impossible for anyone to aspire to achieve it. Yet, he serves as an inspiration in the lives of billions of people. Just like the North Star allows ships to navigate in the northern direction, while remaining unattainable as a goal; similarly ideals guide us even when they are remote from practical possibility.

Error 3: Observable behavior is the proper object of scientific study – idealized norms are subjective and unobservable.

This is a widespread misconception current among social scientists. The idea is the people often mouth high sounding ideals, while behaving in an entirely different way. We should pay attention to actual observed behavior, and not be misled by lip service to impractical ideals. For example, a Wall Street firm might write about its mission of providing service while being engaged in systematic deception of its own clients. The empirical attitude requires us to pay attention to the observed behavior.

Recent research on social norms provides substantial clarity on these issues; see Biccieri (2006). Social norms govern our expectations about the behavior we expect of others as normal. Such expectations influence our own behavior. If we expect others to be honest, cooperate and fulfill trusts, then our own behavior is also along these lines. If we do not expect these characteristics, this also impacts our own behavior. Furthermore, these expectations can be changed in various ways, and such changes have strong impacts on individual behavior. Thus, unobservable ideals do make a difference in real world environments.

We offer three examples as illustrations of how "impractical" ideals affect real world outcomes. A large number of studies on philanthropy have established that Muslims give substantially more in charity than other communities with comparable incomes(5). Also, the research shows that this difference is directly due to the emphasis on giving and generosity contained in Islamic teachings. As a second example, Pfeifer's (2001) shows that Islamic firms in Egypt offer significantly higher wages (and have lower profits) than comparable non-Islamic firms, which have higher profits and lower wage shares. This is due to Islamic teachings on the dignity of labor. As a third example, there are several major hospitals in Pakistan, which have branches run entirely on charity. At SUIT in Karachi, Pakistan, one million patients were treated without any charge. Similarly, the Indus Hospital is unmatched as a private hospital which serves all patients free of charge and has treated more than 1.5 million patients since it opened in 2008. The idea of providing healthcare, education, and other social services as worship – fulfilling our responsibilities to the creation of Allah – was introduced to the world by Muslims. Current western hegemony has reversed these ideas and turned all these into means of making a profit, to the loss of all.

5.4 All Social Science is Guided by Norms

The main contention of this paper is that social science proceeds by defining an ideal state, and then examining deviations from this ideal, and how these flaws may be rectified. Defining an ideal state is obviously a normative activity, about which Islamic ideals provide us with much guidance. In addition, the life of our Prophet Mohammad S.A.W. also

(5) **See Najam** (2007), or "Muslims are Britain's top charity givers" by Ruth Gledhill in The Times, July 20, 2013.

provides a vast amount of practical guidance on how we can successfully struggle to create changes in individuals and societies.

Many modern social scientists would claim that their studies are objective and scientific, based on value free descriptions and observations. After the collapse of positivism, many alternative approaches have also emerged, and been adopted in different degrees in different fields of social science. Nonetheless, since there is no scientific basis for norms, few social scientists would accept the description in the first paragraph of this section above as a valid description of their activities. Our goal in this section is to show that despite their own disagreement, social scientists do, in fact, practice this same methodology in economics, as well as in other fields.

Economists posit an ideal world of perfect competition, in which all agents selfishly maximize their utilities, and all firms maximize profits. For example, one of the leading textbooks by Mankiw & Taylor (2006) states that:

> Why do decentralized market economies work so well? Is it because people can be counted on to treat each other with love and kindness? No; not at all. Modern interpretation of Smith's "invisible hand" metaphor says that participants in a market economy are motivated by self-interest, and that the 'invisible hand' of the marketplace guides this self-interest into promoting general economic well-being.

It is widely and freely acknowledged that this ideal state has never existed; the required of complete information to all, no transaction costs, etc. can never be fulfilled in real life. Nonetheless, the focus of efforts of economists is to remove imperfections that distort perfect competition, and strive to create a better approximation to this ideal state in the real world. The economists claim that the idea that all human beings behave selfishly, embodied in the utility maximization theory in every microeconomic textbook, is descriptive. In fact, as many have shown, this is prescriptive – students who learn these theories of "rational" behavior, learn to be selfish, while students in other disciplines are more generous. Amiruddin and Zaman (2013) provide a detailed discussion of the quote from Manikiw, and show that this is wrong on many counts, including the false attribution of the doctrine of selfishness to Adam Smith.

Any study of human beings must be guided by some purpose, which is inherently and inevitably normative. The attempt to imitate scientific methodology led to the hiding of this purpose, since mentioning it would attract the contemptuous label of "un-scientific." As a result, modern social science is full of normative assumptions that have been buried underground, and are rarely explicitly acknowledged. By using an explicit normative framework, Islam offers a far more honest and coherent approach to the humanities than is currently available in the west.

6. Conclusions

There are two major areas where western social sciences are seriously deficient:

First, there is no explicit acknowledgement of norms for behavior both at individual and social levels. Furthermore, secular thinking is not well equipped to deal with the purpose of human existence, or to the discovery of suitable social and personal norms. The core message of Islam is normative, and therefore, an Islamic approach to humanities can comfortably be built around an explicit purpose for human existence and an explicit set of norms.

Second, western theories do not take serious account of human freedom. To do so would seriously interfere with the application of scientific methodology. Scientific theory requires predictable and deterministic behavior subject to universal laws of motion. It is clear that freedom makes human behavior unpredictable, and not subject to description by mathematical laws. One response to this objection was that statistical laws made human behavior predictable in the aggregate, even though they were not predictable individually. There are many ways to rebut this argument; one is the Black Swan theme of Nicholas Nassim Taleb (2010), who argues that statistics fails in certain situations that are fundamentally unpredictable.

Taking human freedom seriously immediately leads to the question of how we should use this freedom. This question does not arise in the proper domain of science, where objects have deterministic behavior. For human beings, the response to this question is contained in the guidance

from Allah revealed in the form of the Qur'ān. The Revelation contains vital information about how to evaluate choices open to us, to differentiate between good and evil, and how to summon the spiritual energy required to make good choices. These vital questions cannot be formulated within a scientific approach to the humanities, showing the necessity of an Islamic approach.

When Ali R.A. Was asked by the extent of human freedom, he asked the questioner to raise one foot. When he did so, Ali (R.A.) asked him to raise the other foot as well. The lesson is that we are free to raise one foot above the ground but not free to raise both feet. While there are deterministic elements in human behavior, it is essential to understand the nature of our freedom. Each human being is unique, with a set of life experiences that is entirely different from everyone else. Each moment of our life presents us with unique opportunities to recognize our Creator and to take steps towards Him. The scientific search for patterns blinds us to the unique and one-time opportunities, as well as the unique characteristics of ourselves and others which do not fall into patterns. For example, coming of communism to Russia and China, the Arab Spring, and many other events signal possibilities for change of types never before seen in history. Scientific methods cannot deal with unique events since science based on repeated patterns. Islamic teachings allow us to recognize these unique opportunities to reach the best that is available to mankind. To take advantage of these, we must cast off the spell of the western sciences and study our own intellectual heritage in obedience to the first command of Allah:

"Read. in the name of thy Lord who Created"

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مقاربة إسلامية للعلوم الإنسانية

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المستخلص: إن المنهجية العلمية الصارمة مناسبة لدراسة علوم المادة التي تخضع لقوانين ثابتة، غير أنها غير مناسبة لدراسة السلوك الإنساني المتسم بحرية الإرادة. نشأت "العلوم الاجتماعية "من الاعتقاد الخاطئ بأن تطبيق المنهج العلمي في دراسة السلوك البشري والمجتمعات سوف تؤدي إلى تقدم كبير. بيد أن هذه المقاربة فشلت من عدة أوجه كما هو موثق في هذه المقالة. إن الإسلام يقدم لنا مقاربة مختلفة جذريا لدراسة السلوك الإنساني والمجتمعات التي تقوم على حرية الإنسان في الاختيار بين الخير والشر. لقد تم إيضاح المقاربة الإسلامية في هذه المقالة.

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