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ISLAM'S PERSPECTIVE REGARDING HUMAN-ORIENTATION AND ITS EFFECT ON ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

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ABSTRACT

The interaction between the human beings and the nature is amongst the important challenges of their life in the contemporary era. The human lifestyles and the governments' managerial policies have exerted undeniable and serious effects on the environment. Bioenvironmental ethics is a branch of applied ethics that seeks correcting the relationship between the human beings and the nature. Some of the thinkers are of the belief that the religion causes irresponsible behaviors in the human beings in respect to the nature by inducing its addressees with a human-oriented discretion. The human-oriented mindset provides the means of uncalculated exploitation hence destruction of the environment. The present article seeks elaborating the perspective of Islam in regard of the human-orientation as well as its relationship with the bioenvironmental ethics. Emphasizing on the idea that the human beings are the lords of creatures, Islam denies the human-orientation approach and delineates and elucidates God-orientation for the human life and interaction on the other hand.

INTRODUCTION

It is now for years that the human life has been threatened by the bioenvironmental dangers and even bioenvironmental crises; air pollution, waters' contamination, water shortage, chemical contaminations, global warming and a large number of other issues. In order to fight with such dangers and crises, national and international physical reactions were exhibited. A group of the environment proponents came to the conclusion that the physical interventions are not alone sufficient for counteracting the foresaid dangers rather there is a need for bringing about changes in the

human beings' attitudes towards the nature as well as insertion of ethical codes in this relationship for conserving the nature and this can set the ground for the emergence and exhibition of bioenvironmental ethics.

Arnold Toynbee, a 20th century philosopher and historian, in the book "the study of history" and also Lynn White, the historian and professor of university in an article called "the historical roots of the contemporary bioenvironmental crises" believe that the theology of the Abrahamic religions has created an attitude in the human beings through inducing the mindset of the human beings' divine succession and gentility and human-orientation that 1) they see themselves as superior to all of the creatures in the nature; 2) give themselves any right for any sort of exploitation of the nature in line with fulfilling their interests and 3) believe in no ethical prestige for the creatures other than the human beings. So, religion is one of the most original enemies of the nature (Mohaqqeq Damad, 2016, pp.73-74).

The present article is not seeking to investigate the perspectives of Judaism and Christianity about human beings but efforts are made herein to elaborate the perspectives of Islam about the position of the human beings following which the relationships between such perspectives and bioenvironmental ethics as well as their effects on it will be delineated.

1. Human Beings, Lord of the Creatures:

Such a mindset as the human beings' superiority to the other creatures and, in other words, the idea that the human beings are the lords of all the other creatures is rooted in the revelation teachings; in Islam's teachings as well as in numerous ĀYĀT in the holy Quran, the human superiority to all the other creatures has been implicitly stated: "and, verily, we venerated the offspring of Adam and helped them ride on land and in sea [on a means of transportation] and provided them with clean things and granted them a well-identifiable superiority to many of the other things we have created" (SŪRAH 17, ĀYA 70). The human species feature an inherent reverence and it is by the power of such a divine reverence that the human beings have been considered superior to the other creatures. Of course, the thing that should be taken into account in regard of this type of the Holy Quran's ĀYĀT is that the intention has been expressing the mankind's states and positions without letting the virtues and pieties as well as the acquirable depravities and inferiorities get involved therein (Tabataba'ei, 1996, 13/155). So, it has to be stated that the human creation is in such a way that the human beings are unique in terms of structure, properties, talents and capabilities in such a way that the God praises Himself after the human beings' creation for doing so: "we established it as a seed in a position; then, we transformed the seed into an enclosed clot of blood then to a piece of meat to which we granted bones; then, we covered them with meat and then we granted it another creation; so, magnificent is the God who is the best of the creators" (SŪRAH 23, ĀYĀT 13 and 14).

2. The Meaning of the Human Beings' Being the Lord of Creatures:

What are the criteria and indicators that have made the human beings become the lord of the creatures? The answer to this question can be sought in the holy Quran which has per se offered this perspective:

“The God has introduced the human beings as the possessors of talent of the type that is even missing in the angels; human beings have been presented as the “God’s successors”: “and, then, your God ordered the angels that ‘I want to appoint a successor on earth’; they said: ‘are you going to appoint those who perpetrate vices on earth and shed blood while we are worshipping you purely and admirably and we consider you as a clean God’; He ordered that ‘I know something you do not’”. The source of this caliphate and succession is the blowing of the divine soul into the human body: “We blew something of our soul into him” (SŪRAH 38: ĀYA 69). The human beings’ gain of the divine soul has granted him the capability of characterization by the divine moralities and dispositions and properties which are called “knowledge of the names” and this is the secret of becoming “the God’s successor”: “and, he taught all the names to Adam; then, He presented him to the angels and said: ‘tell me their names if you can’” (SŪRAH 2, ĀYA, 31).

Undoubtedly, the knowledge of the eminent names of God is a truth featuring certain ranks; the more the divine names are put into practice in the human existence, the more the divine succession will emerge. Every human being only has the talent of succession in the beginning of his or her creation and there are individuals who are in a low or intermediate level of characterization by the divine characteristics in the course of their life so they are also weak or intermediate in the emergence of the divine characteristics because the knowledge of the divine nouns is weak or intermediate in them; on the contrary, there are perfect human beings who are enjoying a high rank of the knowledge of the divine names so they are in the highest ranks of the divine succession (Javadi, 2011, 3/40). Therefore, the nobility of the human beings in the creation pertains to the man’s kind and it is not so that such a characteristic can be actualized by every individual member of the human community rather the enjoyment of such a position entails the enjoyment of the knowledge of the divine names in their existence.

The supreme divine names are characteristics with which the God has been described in the holy Quran. Some of these characteristics are as stated in the following words: knowledge “know that the God is knowledgeable about everything” (SŪRAH 2, ĀYA 231); wisdom “the God is a wise knowledgeable being” (SŪRAH BAQARAH, ĀYA 18); mercifulness “the God is merciful and kind” (SŪRAH 57, ĀYA 28); justice “your God does not mistreat the servants” (SŪRAH 41, ĀYA 66) and many of the other good virtues. Now, each of the human beings who willfully and based on his or her choices increases his or her gain of such characteristics more and more will become closer and closer to being the lord of creatures and each of the human beings who willfully and based on his or her choices lowers his or her gain of such characteristics more and more will get more and more distant from being the lord of creatures. So, the human beings can choose one of these two ways by their own choices and based on their will: “we created the human beings of a mixed seed and we test them; (this is why) we have made them capable of hearing and seeing. We showed them the path whether they be thankful [and accept] or unthankful” (SŪRAH 76, ĀYĀT 2-3). And, it is this property that distinguishes the human beings from the other creatures. Now, if an individual or some individuals choose not to take their shares of such names, they will be no longer having a room in the position of the

creatures' lord and they also lose their inherent veneration; as put by the Holy Quran, they are in animal rank or even lower than that: "they have hearts that do not understand and they have eyes with which they do not see and they have eyes by which they do not hear; they are like animals and even more digressed" (SŪRAH 7, ĀYA 179). That is because it is not so that the human beings could only have the talent of becoming the God's successor and subsequently become so rather they also have another dimension which is termed "carnal aspect"¹ and a person would become inferior and abject as much as this aspect is corroborated: "swear to the human life and the one who created with a perfect system and inspired it with the good and evil, he who cleans his life and soul of sins will be emancipated and he who stains it [with sins] will be suffering losses" (SŪRAH 91, ĀYAT 7-10).

3. Islam's Perspective is God-Orientation not Human-Orientation:

In the God-orientation perspective wherein the ethereal canons emphasize, the goal of human creation or, in a more general and brief sense, the recognition of the God² and His servitude and obedience³ and movement towards Him can be achieved through such a recognition and obedience⁴. These goals are recognized through the divine revelation and God-given intellect and, in other words, religion in a more detailed manner. Religion is a sum of beliefs, ethics, rules and regulations that have been codified for the administration of the human beings' individual and social affairs and supplying them with felicity in this and the other world (Javadi, 2012, p.20).

Humanism is in contrast to the "human-orientation"; it was proposed after renaissance; humanists share their opposition to supernatural ideology with materialists and naturalists; although this does not necessarily mean that they are materialists or naturalists (Kurtz, 1994, p.50). They realize the human beings and their experiences as the source of the ethical values and they hold that the values should not be sought in the supernatural matters; they believe in intellectualism and self-adequacy and independency of the human intellect in the recognition of the self, the universe and the real felicity and method of arriving thereat (Luik, 1998, p.530). In this mindset, the human beings are the main axis of the world and their thoughts and tendencies should be considered as the criteria in the ethics, art, cognizance, philosophy and science (Mashgi, 2017, p.78). Belief in the idea that the human beings are the scale of everything's assessment is a principle founded seminally inter alia by Protagoras, an ancient Greek sophist (Mohammadi, 2006, p.108). This mindset infiltrated into the European Christian tradition, to wit the Christianity that was not rooted in Judaism, and was replaced for "God-orientation". The prerequisite to such discretion is accepting that the God is at the service of the human beings and that He is there to satisfy their needs and the human beings are the original owners of the nature hence they can make any sort of exploitation and as much as they can. Of course, church made repeated efforts in the course of history to break down the "human-

¹ See also, SŪRAH 4, ĀYA 28; SŪRAH 70, ĀYA 19; SŪRAH 100, ĀYA 6; SŪRAH 33, ĀYA 72 and SŪRAH 14, ĀYA 34

² SŪRAH 65, ĀYA 12

³ SŪRAH 51, ĀYA 56

⁴ SŪRAH 2, ĀYA 156; SŪRAH 84, ĀYA 6

orientation” belief and adjust it to the church regulations and commands; or, at least, limit it. However, the human-orientation force overwhelmed the western society and totally freed it of the constraints and limitations (Ma’arefat, 2009, p.287).

Human-orientation is deviation and exaggeration in human veneration; emphasis is made therein on the humans’ being the primary scale and their needlessness whereas, in the perspective holding that the human beings are superior to all the other creatures, they are creatures borrowing their existence and persistence from the God with religion being the scale of their thoughts and deeds; the source of such a religion is the divine revelation and a God-given intellect which is free of any chains and carnal wishes and grown based on the revelation teachings.

4. The Perspectives of Islam about the Method of Human Beings’ Relationship with the Nature:

One of the most important indicators of the divine succession is rendering green the lands and saving them from any sort of wastage and darkness. The holy Quran has commanded the human beings to plant trees and vegetables on the lands. It has also seriously demanded them to make efforts for rendering the earth greener: “he made you emerge out of the earth and assigned you to making it green” (SŪRAH 11, ĀYA 61). In this ĀYA, “green” means supplying the bioenvironmental principles for persisting the human life and earth means the extents of the humans’ living realm; such a vast breadth encompasses from the depth of sea to the top of the sky. Therefore, the bioenvironmental culture is interlaced with the superior rank of god’s succession. Attempting to preserve and render continuous and expand reconstruction and greening of the earth has been considered as the human beings’ biological and living piety and, on the contrary, destruction and annihilation of the environment has been recalled with such a term as “depravity and corruption”: upon becoming the supervisor of a task, they would make efforts with all their power to expand corruption on earth and destroy the farmlands and generations and the God does not like corruption” (SŪRAH 2, ĀYA 71). So, the perspective of Islam about the type of human beings’ interaction with the environment is in such a way that the humans should treat the environment and the nature based on knowledge, wisdom, kindness, compassion and justice and fairness.

CONCLUSION:

The holy Quran introduces human beings as possessors of inherent veneration granted to them by the Eminent God; such veneration is due to the purposefulness of the mankind’s corporeal life and his eternal continuance in the other world as well as his enjoyment of such a talent as the divine succession and also becoming of the Gods successor. This talent can be actualized through acquisition of the divine characteristics that help him get closer to the goal of his creation and assist him reach an acquired and eternal reverence. Characterization by the divine characteristics through the recognition of the God and via His obedience can be objectified based on the revelation teachings and guiding of the inherent intellect or, in other words, God-orientation. God-orientation is against human-orientation as the downgrading of the humans’ being of the lord of creatures. Besides

expressing the quality of the relationship with the God as well as the human beings' selves and the other fellow mankind, Islam elaborates the humans' relationship with the other creatures from animals and plants and seas and lands to whatever the thing that is termed nature; Islam underlines on their possession of certain rights and holds the human beings responsible for them in such a way that the humans are to have informed, wise, compassionate and fair relationships with their peripheral environment from the bottom of the sea to the apex of the skies.

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