

Individual and Social Perfection in Islamic Thought

İslam Düşüncesinde Ferdî ve Toplumsal Mükemmeliyet

Abstract

The notion of individual and social perfection varies according to civilization. Variability in this sense is to be regarded as a characteristic feature of every civilization. The Islamic-influenced notion of perfection describes the personal and communal capacity to bear individual and communal responsibility in a good and constructive sense. This understanding of perfection has not only an intellectual, moral and religious meaning. It also includes a material perspective, such as being socially and economically productive and useful.

Islam as a religion and a way of life, with social and legal dimensions, emphasizes the perfection of man through a constructive social order and shows a determination to prevent situations that would disrupt this order. This religion also rejects the concept of collective salvation and sin and emphasizes individual responsibility and maturity. Islamic thought emphasizes that the society that follows the path of multifaceted progress can be a society in which the good (maruf) can be promoted and the bad (munkar) can be rejected.

This study, based on the analysis of primary and secondary sources, examines the topic-specific insights and thoughts in the referenced sources with a social philosophical hermeneutic approach. This qualitative study discusses the notion of individual and social perfectibility in light of modern social science concepts and theories without falling into an anachronistic and reductionist stance.

In a sense, this study aims to re-understand and make sense of the social thoughts and concepts in the Islamic sources in light of the achievements of contemporary social sciences.

Keywords: Individual perfectibility, communal perfectibility, İslam

Öz

Ferdî ve içtimaî mükemmeliyet tasavvuru medeniyetlere göre değişen bir durumdur. Bu anlamdaki değişkenlik bir yönüyle her medeniyetin özgün ayrıcı sıfatı sayılır. İslam tasavvurunda mükemmeliyet hem sorumluluk ve hem de bu sorumluluğun iyi ve yapıcı şekilde ifa kabiliyeti anlamına gelmektedir. Bu mükemmeliyet anlayışı bir yandan entelektüel, ahlakî ve dinî bir anlam taşırken, diğer yandan maddi anlamda üretken ve faydalı olmayı da içinde barındırmaktadır.

İslam, sosyal ve hukukî boyutu da olan bir din ve yaşam şekli olarak insanın yapıcı toplumsal bir düzen eşliğinde mükemmeliyete ulaşacağına atıfta bulunur ve bu nizamı bozacak durumları önleme azmini ortaya koyar. Bu din ayrıca kolektif kurutuluş ve günah kavramını da reddederek ferdi sorumluluk ve ferdi olgunluğun esas olduğunu belirtir. Çok yönlü ilerleme yolunda yürüyen toplumun iyinin (marufun) teşvik edildiği; kötü olanın (münkerin) ise reddedilebileceği toplum olabileceği İslam düşüncesinde vurgulanır.

Birincil ve ikincil kaynak analizine dayanan bu çalışma, başvurulan kaynaklardaki konuya münhasır bulgu ve düşünceleri sosyal ve felsefî hermenötik bir yaklaşımla yorumlar. Bu nitel çalışma anakronist ve indirgemeci bir tutum içine düşmeden modern sosyal bilim kavram ve kuramları eşliğinde ferdî ve toplumsal mükemmeliyet kavramını tartışmaya açmaktadır. Bu çalışma bir yönüyle de İslam kaynaklarındaki sosyal içerikli düşünceleri ve kavramları günümüz sosyal bilimlerinin kazanımları eşliğinde yeniden anlamayı ve anlamlandırmayı gaye edinmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ferdî mükemmeliyet, toplumsal mükemmeliyet, İslam

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Introduction

Human-centeredness is found in every culture in its own specific way. In Islam, man is at the center as the addressee of revelation and the executor of faith. In the Qur'an, man is a mature individual (Qur'an 2:286) who inhabits the earth as the "caliph (administrator) of God" (Qur'an, 2: 30), who has been breathed into by the spirit of God (Qur'an, 38: 71-74.), who bears great responsibility (amāna) (Qur'an 33:72), before whom the angels had to prostrate themselves as a sign of reverence and appreciation (Qur'an, 38: 71-75.) and who is God's contractual and interlocutory partner (Qur'an 7: 172). These outstanding qualities, attributed only to man, describe his relationship with God and his environment. The description of the human relationship with God is at the same time the explanation of the image of man in the face of God as well as animate and inanimate nature (Polat, 2017).

In the Western cultural world, human dignity or the position of people at the center of thought and action is expressed by the term "humanism". The consistent transfer of Western-culturally coined terms such as humanism to the Islamic world of knowledge and culture is not always easy (Schöllner, 2001). Every term in the humanities and social sciences is very often culturally determined and has its own epistemological development and specific context in the culture where it was born. Nevertheless, it is worth the scientific effort to search for and understand the parallelism and adequacy of a certain body of thought in different cultures - comparatively - without falling into egalitarianism and simplification. The concept of humanism, which has different meanings and contents from antiquity to the Western Enlightenment, today rather describes values such as freedom, equality, solidarity and peace etc. and often emphasizes a secularist attitude (Zichy, 2010). Even a religiously emancipatory and atheistic worldview is very often expressed with this term (Groschopp, 2010). The new atheism gained a significant cultural space, particularly in America, through its intellectual connection with the new secular humanism.

Until the 19th century, the perception of man with his abilities, rights and duties in the Islamic world was predominantly from the Islamic theological and philosophical perspective (see Hajatpour, 2013). Islam views a person as an individual, but this individuality is always considered in relation to God, society, community and family. In the Tasawwuf (Islamic theological-spiritual philosophy) of the 13th century in particular, the position and significance of humans in the world of creation and their relationship to God is very often addressed. Man was regarded as God's caliph on earth and his heart as God's dwelling place. Serving man was considered a service to God and doing wrong to man (breaking his heart) was one of the worst deeds of all. Mawlana (Öztürk, 2002) and Yunus (Emre, 1986; Schimmel, 1991) are considered to be the most important representatives of this humane (humanly respectful) thought in Anatolia in the century in question.

The human being in Islam

In order to fully perceive the image of man in Islam (Polat, 2017), it is first necessary to describe the relationship between God and man. The image of man in Islam is simultaneously the image of his relationship with God and the description of his position in creation. In this respect, it can be said that the Islamic image of man is a relational image. In Islam, man is always perceived in the face of God, his existence is placed in relation to all other existing beings. In this respect, the main objectives of Islamic education can be summarized as the empowerment of man in the service of humanity and the peaceful shaping of his relationship with God and creation. The following statement (hadith) by the Prophet Muhammad (al-'Ağlūnī, n.d., 1/421) can be understood in this sense:

"The head of wisdom (ḥikma) is godliness."

The Qur'an also establishes a relationship between knowledge (in the broader sense of acquiring knowledge and education) and reverence for God as follows (Qur'an, 35: 28):

"Only those of His servants who possess knowledge fear Allah. Verily, Allah is Mighty, Most Forgiving."

According to the Qur'an, religious education, also in the sense of education for humanity (moral education), means the maintenance of the relationship and bond between God, the Speaker (al-Mutakallim), the Seer (al-Baṣīr), the Hearer (as-Samī'), the Listener (al-Muḡīb) and the people (Qur'an 2: 2; 3: 103), the "caliphs of God on earth" (Qur'an, 2: 30, 6: 165, 27: 62, 35: 39, 38: 26).

The Qur'anic description of people as "caliphs (trustees) of God on earth" describes God's relationship with people in a comprehensive way (Polat, 2010). This description as an Islamic-anthropological concept is therefore groundbreaking for the

definition of the Islamic image of man and the education of man. It defines a demythologized relationship between God and man and enables the appropriate perception of both the essential differences between God and man and the close connection between the two. Religious education as a place of education towards respect for God and appreciation of people should convey to children and young people the awareness that they are special, distinctive, unique and independent individuals. Without exception, every individual was created in their uniqueness and independence as a caliph of God on earth, regardless of gender, origin, etc. This caliphhood is a characteristic that unites all people. The responsibility of human beings as "caliphs of God on earth" includes respect for God, the preservation of creation and the acceptance of cultural, religious and ethnic differences as well as the observance of human rights. This responsibility is expressed in the Quran with the term *al-amāna* ("pledge" or "entrusted property"). This is what the Qur'an says (33: 72):

"Indeed, we offered the Trust [al-amāna] to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man [undertook to] bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant."

The last part of this āya (Qur'anic verse) draws people's attention in the form of a criticism to the fact that they should fulfill their responsibilities on the basis of justice, benevolence and wisdom. People can acquire the necessary knowledge for this. In addition, the revelation of God offers itself to man as a companion (Qur'an, 2: 2; 3: 3-4).

This responsibility, namely the *amāna*, is to be understood as a consequence of being human. The limits of an individual's *amāna* lie where the limits of his possibilities and abilities lie. With regard to this humane determination, the Qur'an states (2: 286):

"Allah does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity. It will have [the consequence of] what [good] it has gained, and it will bear [the consequence of] what [evil] it has earned."

In the Qur'anic creation story about the first man and first prophet Adam, the imperfection of man is brought up, and yet man is dubbed "God's caliph on earth" (Qur'an 2: 30.). Regardless of human shortcomings, God's relationship with mankind is characterized by the constant granting of freedom and mercy. On this the Qur'an (6: 12):

"[...] He [God] has prescribed mercy for Himself [...]."

God's mercy is shown when man acts freely, even though he may make mistakes. In this respect, it can be argued that human imperfection and susceptibility to error (Qur'an 33: 72) is an occasion for the realization of, among other things, the attributes of God "the Forgiving" (*al-Ġaffār*) and "the Merciful" (*ar-Raḥmān*). This way of granting mercy can certainly be understood as a humane attitude.

Faith and piety in Islam are also a way in which man shapes his relationship with God. A believer who is in a mature phase of religiosity and morality feels a spiritual connection with God without understanding himself as an existential ontological part of God. His relationship to God - and at the same time to creation - is characterized by profound love, attentiveness, awareness and connectedness. Through these skills, he constantly reflects on and improves his intentions, attitudes and actions. This person has undergone a development of consciousness, achieved intellectual and moral maturity and purity in their intentions. This maturity should ultimately lead to people carrying out their actions as if God were personally accompanying them. Authentic Islamic education aims to keep this accompaniment of God alive as a conviction and to develop a constant awareness of it. This awareness also means that man frees himself from the need for an intermediary to achieve the love and goodwill of God and changes his reciprocal relationship to God and his fellow human beings in favor of a loving and liberating bond.

According to Ibn Sina (Avicenna, d. 1037), humans are the only living beings who are not only aware of their physical existence, but also of their spiritual and intellectual existence. Although other living beings also recognize their physical existence and have instincts and drives, they have no spiritual or intellectual consciousness. Only humans are able to know what they are and what they know (quoted from Durusoy, 2008). Regardless of the fact that Ibn Sina's opinion on animal cognition has been largely refuted today, he did recognize that humans, unlike other living beings, can recognize their mental and intellectual deficits as well as their potential for development and consciously deal with them, and that they can take an interest in knowledge, technology, art, etc. beyond their everyday needs. This realization is an important basis for the postulate of the educability of human beings in the sense that education can be understood as an essential characteristic of human beings and thus as part of their dignity and rights. The right to education, including religious education, is a human right. Thus, knowledge has the highest priority in Islam. In the hadith works, special chapters were even dedicated to knowledge (see as-Saḥāwī, 2003, *Kitāb al-'ilm* [the chapter on science]).

Respect for human dignity, the promotion of man's natural disposition, the fiṭra (hereinafter: the fitra) and the preservation of animate and inanimate nature are to be understood as important goals of the Islamic concept of education. Human dignity and human nature (fiṭra) are almost synonymous in this sense. The Qur'an (30: 30) defines Islam as the religion that corresponds to human nature (dignity):

"So direct your face toward the religion, inclining to truth. [Adhere to] the fitrah of Allah upon which He has created [all] people. No change should there be in the creation of Allah. That is the correct religion, but most of the people do not know."

In the Sunnah (sayings, actions and tacit approval) of the Prophet Muhammad, the word fiṭra is also used in the sense of pure faith (ability to believe) that corresponds to the nature of people and is breathed into them. The following hadith states (al-Buhārī, Ḡanāiz, 79-80, 92; Ibn al-Ḥaḡḡāḡ [Muslim], Qadar, 22-25; Ibn al-Aṣ'at [Abū Dāwūd], Sunnah, 17):

"Every child is born according to the fitrah. Only later is it brought up by its parents as a Jew, Christian or fire-worshipper."

According to the Qur'an, God breathed his soul into man. This can be understood as an ontological and spiritual appreciation of man by God. The Qur'an states the following:

"[So mention] when your Lord said to the angels: 'Indeed, I am going to create a human being from clay. So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My [created] soul, then fall down to him in prostration.'" (38: 71-72; see also 32: 7-9; 15: 26-33).

By breathing his soul into man, God gave him a sign that he, as an intellectually and spiritually capable being, is the addressee of God's message and that this message can be understood, felt and experienced by him. This breathing in also signifies the ontological equality of human beings and their potential to be bound to God, who is the sole and only Lord (ar-Rabb) of all who exist. It also means that all people have a divinely bestowed dignity within them and must therefore be treated with respect without exception.

The Perfectibility of Man and Society: An Interplay

Man's self-perception consists in realizing that he is imperfect but has the ability to strive for perfection (Qur'an 95: 4-5). How does man imagine himself? What does he want to become and do? Man's answers to these questions about himself describe the human self-image and his personal responsibility. This self-image is at the same time a self-education of human beings, also in a religious sense. The perfection of man is demonstrated by the fact that he is constantly able to change for the better. The perfection of human beings consists, so to speak, in constantly being on the path to perfection: The path is the goal. Human perfection is not a being, but a becoming (process of becoming).

In Islam, man is seen as a creature striving for self-realization, which develops and unfolds according to its possibilities. This self-realization for the better is expressed in Islam with the term "*al-insān al-kāmil*". The concept of the "perfect human being", namely "*al-insān al-kāmil*", expresses the holistic and holistic endeavor to achieve intellectual, ethical and religious maturity. This effort aims to realize the highest achievable human development and, in turn, to use it humanely and in accordance with creation. What this effort (self-education) looks like and which spiritual and scientific modalities must be possessed by a perfect human being vary according to time and place. The expectations and requirements of a person striving for perfection are dependent on time and place. Striving for perfection is only a socially relevant possibility, because morality and contribution to the well-being of people can only be qualified and realized in social coexistence.

Man possesses the ability to attain the highest level of ethical maturity, spiritual erudition and technical ability and also possesses destructive power that can have the worst consequences (Qur'an 95: 4-6; 33:72). These ambivalent abilities are the indicators that man is capable of learning on the one hand and in need of learning on the other. The human being striving for perfectibility ("*al-insān al-kāmil*") freely chooses to develop and use his material possibilities and spiritual abilities not only for his own good, but also for the good of humanity as a whole.

As God's contact and contractual partner (Qur'an 7: 172), man should attain the maturity to devote himself to God as a free, conscious and mature creature. This surrender (becoming a Muslim) can be described as freedom, maturity and intentional attachment, not as blind submission and naïve faith. It is therefore to be expected that people are not only taught, subdued, instructed and made compliant in education, but that they are listened to, appreciated and their reality of life is taken into account. Only through this fair treatment of people in pedagogical interaction can people learn to realize themselves

independently and with conviction towards the good through faith and in faith, namely to embark on the process of "*al-insān al-kāmil*". This ideal of perfection is based on the assumption that man, as a mature individual, is himself a whole, but at the same time a part of the whole (a part of the Islamic community, of all humanity and creation). Consequently, striving for betterment and perfection is nevertheless a contribution to the perfectibility and virtuousness of society. In this article, I would like to describe Islamic social perfection using the term "*al-madīna al-fādila*" (the virtuous city [society]), which is also the title of a work by the famous Islamic philosopher al-Farabi (d. 950). In this work, Farabi (2001) describes the modalities of a virtuous community and the characteristics of the leaders who guide such a society. Like Plato (n.d.), he emphasizes the importance of values such as justice and scholarship, which should be regarded as prerequisites for righteous and wise leadership.

Islam offers communal (legal) principles and premises for shaping a humane society. G. Endress (2002, 21) writes in this regard as follows:

"The principle of proportionality of retribution and the prohibition of charging the avenger anew with blood guilt prevented the devastating blood feuds of the past; the recommendation to accept blood money instead of retribution paved the way for a more humane practice. Witness evidence was elevated to the basis of contract and procedural law."

The principles that are relevant for the organization of humane social life include "recommending the good and advising against the reprehensible: "*al-amr bi l-ma'rūf wa nahy 'an il-munkar*". Islam understands individual and social commitment to the community and society simultaneously as an act of upbringing and education and demands its constant maintenance. The Qur'an (3: 104) states the following:

"And let there be [arising] from you a nation inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful."

The quality of "inviting to what is right and discouraging what is wrong" is attributed not only to sincere Muslim believers (Qur'an 3: 110), but also to conscious believers in other religions. The corresponding aya (verse) in the Qur'an (3: 113-115) reads as follows:

"They are not [all] the same; among the People of the Scripture is a community (Ummah) standing [in obedience], reciting the verses of Allah during periods of the night and prostrating [in prayer]. They believe in Allah and the Last Day, and they enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and hasten to good deeds. And those are among the righteous. And whatever good they do - never will it be removed from them. And Allah is Knowing of the righteous."

In the sense of the above Qur'anic statement, the members of the intact community have an ethical responsibility towards each other. As a result of this responsibility, they motivate each other and support each other with advice and action. However, this collective pedagogical functionality must not have the character of incapacitating the individual and restricting their lifeworld. Rather, it aims to help the individual to reflect and self-reflect.

Another principle that enhances collective opinion-forming and is thus conducive to the development of liberal discursive culture in society is the shura principle, i.e. the principle of consultation. The shura, i.e. consultation on matters between individuals, groups and nations, called for by the Qur'an (42: 38; 3: 159) can contribute to reaching consensus on solutions to problems and to jointly shaping a humane future. Consensus, i.e. ijma ("*iğmā'*"), is also recognized as an important source of Islamic jurisprudence (Kirchhof, 2019). Moreover, deliberation and consensus are also fundamental principles affirmed by democracy, so they are capable of further development and consequently universal acceptance. Ijma (consensus), as the decision-making process achieved through joint deliberation, facilitates the viability and acceptance of decisions by those affected. If all parts of society, regardless of their origin and religion, are allowed to participate in a consensus-building process, the consensus principle gains the ability to function as a basis for decision-making in today's heterogeneous societies.

It would also be beneficial here to briefly discuss the idea of community in Islam and to focus on the perspectives of a humane society.

Community or society is expressed in the Islamic cultural world with the term "ummah". The term "ummah" easily has a neutral, i.e. not politically pre-modified meaning (al-Ğawharī, 1998, I/1384). Nevertheless, the Qur'an describes the premises

that serve to designate a certain group/set of people as a community, an ummah. In this sense, the Qur'an (5: 48, further see also 2: ,148) states as follows:

"To each of you We prescribed a law and a method. Had Allah willed, He would have made you one nation [ummah], but [He intended] to test you in what He has given you; so race to [all that is] good. To Allah is your return all together, and He will [then] inform you concerning that over which you used to differ."

The main modalities of the ummah concept can be read from this Quranic verse (Polat 2014):

- Guidelines and values that define and regulate social coexistence, such as social contract, universal ethics, constitution, all religions prevailing in society (heterogeneous ummah). This element is also repeatedly emphasized in the following ayat (verses):

"And [mention] when Abraham was raising the foundations of the House and [with him] Ishmael, [saying], "Our Lord, accept [this] from us. Indeed You are the Hearing, the Knowing. Our Lord, and make us Muslims [in submission] to You and from our descendants a Muslim nation [in submission] to You. And show us our rites and accept our repentance. Indeed, You are the Accepting of repentance, the Merciful." (Qur'an 2: 127-128).

"You are the best nation produced [as an example] for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah [...]" (Qur'an 3: 110).

- Diversity that ensures the existence of different religious, political, ethnic and cultural communities and groups.
- A positive goal for humanity as a whole, which the Ummah competes with the other Ummahs (nations) to achieve.
- Preservation of responsible individuality in an intact community.

The main characteristics (modalities) of the ummah concept mentioned above can be described in more detail as follows:

The first characteristic describes contractuality and righteousness. Despite its diversity, the ummah is not a loose coexistence, but a legally defined bond and agreement of interests between individuals and groups on the basis of the legitimization principles accepted by all. The first historical experience of Islam in this respect was documented in the "Medina Treaty" of 622, a multi-legality. Each part of this ummah, the Muslims, Jews and pagans in Medina, had its own legal autonomy. Nevertheless, on the basis of the joint treaty, the parties undertook to reconcile their interests and resolve their conflicts peacefully, with the Prophet Muhammad being commissioned to act as mediator. In this respect, the concluded Ummah Treaty served as the constitution of this Ummah, the confederation of peoples and tribes, for the realization of which the Prophet was responsible. The "Medina Treaty", which is regarded as the first ummah treaty, united and allied religiously diverse groups on the basis of a legal document, namely the treaty, and defined them as a common ummah. The preamble to this treaty reads as follows (Ibn Hišām, 1996, I/110):

"By the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate. This is a charter of the Messenger of God Muhammad, which regulates the relations between the Muslims from the tribe of Quraysh and from the city of Yathrib (Medina) as well as their non-Muslim fellow citizens, partners and allies. They form an ummah and are distinct from the rest."

Not only the Medina Treaty just mentioned, but also other Islamic practice shows us that this community, namely the ummah, is not defined in an exclusivist way. Non-Islamic groups that have a contractually regulated, constructive, solidary and cooperative relationship with the Islamic community are also regarded as part of the Islamic ummah. These groups must not be appropriated and must be granted legal and religious autonomy.

The second modality of the ummah idea is the acceptance of diversity. Ethnic, cultural, religious and political diversity in the world is announced as God's will, because only in diversity does man have the free choice to be and act better and can compete with others. In the Koran (42: 8, see also 16: 93) this is stated as follows:

"If Allah had so willed, He could have made them a single people (ummah); but He admits whom He will to His Mercy; and the Wrong-doers will have no protector nor helper (wālī)."

Diversity is seen as a work of God. The ummahs of the many peoples and the multi-ethnic ummah should have the character of "getting to know each other", of *"ta'arrūf"*. This characteristic of the ummah, which is also its consciousness of existence,

is expressed in the Qur'an (49: 13; see also 30: 22) as follows:

"O humanity! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may 'get to' know one another. Surely the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you."

The above-mentioned Medinan ummah had a multi-religious, multi-legal and multi-cultural character. The treaty that served as the basis for this provided for mutual recognition, solidarity and peace in Medina as a basic goal.

The third characteristic of the ummah is to have a common goal. This common goal must not be unethical and go against the interests of humanity as a whole. The Qur'an states (5: 2):

"[...] And cooperate in righteousness and piety (at-taqwā), but do not cooperate in sin and aggression [...]."

An important implication of the quality of "solidarity" is competition with the other ummahs, which may only take place for the good. The Qur'an calls for "competition for the good". This competition should be a humane and ethical competition. Destructive and self-centered competition at the expense of others is not permitted. The Qur'an sees doing good and recommending it as well as refraining from evil and advising against it as a characteristic of all members of the Ummah, both in Islam (Qur'an 3:110) and in Christianity (Qur'an 3: 113-114). This quality and task provide an ethical basis for competition and prevents indifference to developments within and between ummahs that disturb peace. In the community, this principle remains valid without one group trying to impose and force "its good" on the others, as in the Qur'anic statement (2: 256):

"There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion."

The Qur'an rejects coercion, regardless of whether this coercion stems from the religion or is exercised against the religion.

The "diversity" mentioned as the second characteristic of the ummah guarantees precisely the competition desired in the ummah. Without diversity there is no competition and without competition there is no progress. These are also the most important recognized prerequisites for the development of modern society. The Qur'an (2: 148) states:

"For each [religious following] is a direction toward which it faces. So race to [all that is] good. Wherever you may be, Allah will bring you forth [for judgement] all together. Indeed, Allah is over all things competent."

The fourth characteristic of the Ummah is the preservation and promotion of individuality, which goes hand in hand with social responsibility and solidarity. The just and humane shaping of society is the sum and result of individual responsibilities and achievements. One expression of this solidarity-minded individuality is the imposition of the social tax (zakah) by Islam.

Unity in the Ummah is not tantamount to monotony. In fact, each individual should contribute to the well-being, healthy development and peace of the community with different legal and legitimate views, methods and means. These means, views and methods may and should even be different. The analytical synthesis of thoughts, the dialectical interaction of concepts and the open access of groups to common resources, as well as the mutual acceptance of others and of otherness, do more for the good of the Ummah than ossified egalitarianism, monologues and group domination. The Prophet praised constructive criticism, reflection, dialogical discussion of ideas and competition among the groups in the community (ummah) in order to advance society. In this sense, the Prophet Muhammad said (as-Saḥāwī, 2003, section kitāb al-'ilm):

"The disagreement of my ummah is blessing."

The above hadith (words of the Prophet) does not praise constant discord and disagreement in religion. This is the appreciation of learning from and teaching each other and the promotion of scientific openness to the new.

Another hadith clarifies this meaning as follows (as-Saḥāwī, 2003, section: Kitāb al-'ilm):

"My ummah does not agree on error."

Liberal elements can be clearly seen in these statements: In the ummah, everyone is allowed to have something to say, even if their utterance does not conform to the mainstream. Abraham's efforts to seek his own path despite the socially accepted opinion are exemplified in the Qur'an. Abraham as an individual was referred to in the Qur'an as ummah (Qur'an 16:120), because ummah is not a crowd or mass, but a qualitative conscious common path. The great religions began to exist socially when some individuals followed the new path as believers against the indoctrination of the ruling majority.

Conclusion

The educational ideal of Islam on an individual level is expressed through the concept of *al-insān al-kāmil* ("the perfect human being"). On a societal level, the pursuit of perfection can be expressed through the concept of *al-madīna al-fādila* ("the virtuous city/society"). According to the Islamic philosopher Molla Şadrā, individual perfectibility is an independent self-design of the individual and not an external design. This self-design, which is simultaneously self-education and self-justification (Hajatpour, 2013), also means self-qualification to take on personal and social responsibility. The path to perfection is a multifaceted and lifelong process. In this sense, the path itself is perfection and thus the goal. Islamic education can make direct and indirect reference to these anthropological and pedagogical concepts and premises inherent in Islam.

It would not be wrong to say that attributes and names of God (Molla-Djafari, 2001) not only introduce God to thinking human beings, but also describe God's relationship with human beings and show them the way to virtuous society/community. In this sense, people's effort to realize the contents and consequences of the names and attributes of God in their communal life within the scope of their powers can be evaluated as an effort on the way to perfection.

In Islam, the effort in establishing the collective mind in the form of an *ijma* (consensus) is appreciated. The *ijma*, which in Islamic law (*fiqh*) is counted among the sources of law-making, presupposes, as expected, freedom of opinion. In this sense, it can be said that decision-making in the Ummah should be based on the people. Another democratically liberal element is the advisory institution, namely the *shura* (Qur'an 3: 159; 42: 38). Although the *ijma* and the *shura* seem to be granted more to the legal scholars as specialist powers, they are also granted to the people as a whole on a civil and political legal level.

Faith, the *iman*, as constant attentiveness towards God and creation and as a conscious bond with them, leads to the awareness that what is not humane cannot and must not be God's will. This conclusion is also a theological-anthropological basis for legitimizing education for peace and human rights.

Ultimately, it can be said that the pursuit of perfection, which is to be regarded as education and upbringing in itself, is only possible according to Islam with reference to God and fellow human beings. This is where religion and morality come together. A good person is a good fellow human being who, as the caliph of God, strives to realize the names and attributes of God, such as mercy (*ar-Rahmān*: the Most Merciful), justice (*al-'Adl*: the Righteous) and peace (*as-Salām*: the Peacemaker) within the scope of his powers on earth. According to the Islamic concept, the virtuous society is a place of solidarity where such people can realize their potential and play a constructive role in shaping community life.

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