

Comments of

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on

The Quantum Enigma and Islamic Sciences of Nature: Implications for Islamic Economic Theory

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1. Utility Value Theory: An Islamic Critique

A critique of modern utility theory must start with a brief outline of its tenets. Ekelund And Hebert (1990) explain that modern utility theory has been formalized at the hands of Jeremy Bentham (1748- 1832) who summarized the motives of human activities in the maximization of pleasure and the reduction of pain. Self - interest, however was not sufficient to Bentham, to bring about the social common good. The evidence to him was that the existence of crime disproves the existence of a natural social order and harmony. Consequently, the policy implication is that the individual's self – interest must be brought artificially in harmony with societal interest. It was the task of the legislature to bring about such harmony. Bentham's argument was in contrast to that of Adam Smith, who believed in a natural order that harmonizes individual self- interests. Accordingly, Smith championed a policy of laissez fair. Bentham believed that the principle of utility serves to explain a theory of both morals and legislation, just as gravity is the basic principle of Newtonian physics. He believed that pain and pleasure can be quantified in terms of money! Bentham's theory has been subjected to further improvements and criticisms. From a purely philosophical point of view the most important criticisms to Bentham are the following. "Bentham's view of human nature is essentially passive. People are "pushed" about by the search for pleasure and the avoidance of pain. Hence there are no " bad' motives or "moral" deficiencies; there are only bad calculations regarding pleasure and pain. Indeed the utilitarians placed a great deal of emphasis on education as a means of social reform." [what kind of education?] "Indeed, little or no room is given to behavioural motives other than the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. Even to this day, welfare economists have never been able successfully to solve the problem of interpersonal utility comparisons in such a way to derive truly objective criteria on which to base

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welfare decisions." Nevertheless, "Bentham's approach to economics remains influential even today, however, having served to inspire contemporary extensions of neoclassical theory into such areas as the economics of crime [Has it been going down in Western societies?!] and the economics of franchise bidding" (Ekelund & Hebert, 1990, Pp.127-132).

One may ask why, in spite of all its deficiencies, of which only a few are reported above, has the utility theory been dominant in the West? Three reasons can be given. First, the theory is too simple that it can appeal at the outset to a lay man's common sense. Second, in spite of some strong and good criticisms, other theories in the West could not offer better operational alternatives. But the utility theory itself does not have much of operating rules to guide legislation and policy. That is left for pure human speculation. In spite of the fact that Europe has learned a lot from the Islamic World during the crusaders' wars, yet Europe's antagonism to Islam has deprived it from learning the operational alternatives, which were of course based on a different philosophy about the nature and role of the human being. Whether social relations were the outcome of a natural order as Adam Smith and the physiocrats believed, or whether it was artificially created as Bentham argued, the idea of self interest as the centre of social order finds its origins and inspiring principle in Greek philosophy which contends that "man was the centre of all things" (Ekelund & Hebert, 1990, P.15 & P.101.)

But the deficiency in utilitarian philosophy is not limited to its inspiring principle. It is also manifested in the spell-over (externality) effects of preferences, sometimes reorganized and sometimes not. While the positive externalities are in many cases not a point of debate, except may be on how to promote them further, it is the negative extremities that are usually the source of heated debate. The demarcation between self-interest and social interest is not always clear. What makes matters worse is the fact that self-interest does not activate (let alone promote) social responsibility except may be as determined by Man-made laws. Not only such laws may be deficient in themselves, but when the law is silent or absent under some circumstances, self interest rules the roost. In many cases it may be too late for the individual and society to counteract

The neoclassical claim that neoclassical economic is (a) "Spiritually neutral" and (b) "compatible with variety of ultimate ends" (See El- Ansary 2005) implies that the starting drives of human behaviour are actually unimportant as if they are all the same, and that the ultimate ends are qualitatively the same. The differences are, if any, in degree, but not in substance. This is internally inconsistent, for if the starting motives are unimportant, then there should only be one ultimate end, not a variety of them. Furthermore, such alleged neutrality gives no guidance for policy. The implications of different social drives are usually more foreseeable at the macro [societal] level, than the micro [individual] level, and more so in the long run than in the short run. This is not to deny the commonality of some basic instincts that affect both individual and social behaviour. But these instincts do not operate

in a 'value vacuum' that refines and directs instincts. The only exception, of course is when instincts are driven by instincts. In this case, human beings relegate themselves down to animals.

From a moral point of view, there may be nothing wrong with the postulates of the utility theory (continuity, completeness, transitivity, etc.) What is wrong with Utility Theory is the absence of a general, outside guidance for preferences. In other words, there is no explanation as to why would some preferences be socially acceptable. Acceptability in the western utility theory is relative and a function of time and place. This is because the theory is based on the absoluteness of the individual. The Greek philosopher Protagoras is quoted to have said "Man is the measure of all things" [Ekelund & Hebert, P.18). Of course, we know that the Utility Theory has been subject to criticism. The neo-institutionalist school is one such critical school. It describes human behaviour as driven by limited rationality and opportunism (Williamson, 1985). This is a step forward, for it recognizes human weaknesses, but it is not optimistic, for it offers no remedy.

Utility as a theory and democracy as a practise are both based on the right of vote and the freedom of choice. There is nothing wrong with the method of democracy. There is nothing wrong with the people's right to vote and choose. As a matter of fact, such right is a meeting point of western democracy and Islamic Shura. The deficiency however, comes from the inspiring principle of western democracy- The absoluteness of man. This is the point of departure. Man in Islam is not absolutely rational but has the capacity to be so. In order for that to happen, man needs guidance from his Maker.

The freedom of choice in Islam is thus not an end by itself, but a means to reach to something else- The worshipping of THE LORD. However sacred it may be, freedom is not to be looked upon as absolutely sacred. Not every satisfaction, or pleasure is approved, and not every pain is disapproved. An example of the first is the prohibition of items and practises such as the prohibition of drinking alcohol, gambling, usury, etc. On the latter, the pain of work for a living is approved. Thus work per se is not something to be avoided, but it has to be organized and perfected. The definition and practise of pain and pleasure in Islam is guided by Sharī'ah which organizes both the private and public lives of both the individual and society. It directs both in spiritual and material affairs. Neither the individual, nor society is left for their un-refined instincts. This guarantees integration, alignment and cohesion, and public lives, and between the individual and society.

The individualist western philosophy is self-centred and inwardly-looking. It explains the behaviour of the Western Man not only in western societies, but also the way he dealt with other societies both in the past and in the present. By contrast, the worshipping philosophy of Islam explains the nature of relations in Muslim society and its relations to other nations at least in the past i.e. During the golden era of Islam. THE LORD says in Qura'n " We have created you nations and

tribes, so that you may know each other, the most valuable amongst you to THE LORD are the most (LORD) worshipping)". The Islamic philosophy is globally-oriented and thus outwardly-looking. This is the meaning of the above-mentioned verse.

An Islamic theory of value, be it a utility theory or otherwise must be firmly grounded in the principle of worshipping – **things and actions have value as long as they are in harmony with the principle of worshipping THE LORD**. Taking that guidance into consideration, Islam puts no limits whatsoever on the boundaries of scientific inquiry. The great achievements of the great Muslim scholars in all fields of knowledge are testimonies that they integrated, assimilated, modified, refined, streamlined, and further developed the contributions of earlier civilizations. There is an important implication of this historical background for the Islamization of today's fields of knowledge, but especially social sciences, namely that, Muslim scholars should follow the same approach of their ancestors in dealing with contributions from other civilizations. They have to critique it first, and absorb whatever may conform to Islamic values. If the Islamic value theory is going to be a utility one, it may require the development of an Islamic theory of human psychology. What is to be noted here is that reward and punishment for doing, or abstaining from purely spiritual deeds such as prayers, fasting, and charity are ordinally measured. Punishment for crime however, is both cardinally and ordinally measured.

Unlike Greek philosophers, the Islamic approach to social sciences emphasizes both ends and means. While the ends are determined by the absolute truth of the belief in God, the means are guided by the teachings revealed by the LORD through his apostles. The approach of great Muslim scholars for scientific inquiry has been always guided by the principle of worshipping the LORD. While this determines a course for thought and policy, it reduces human cost in terms of excessive speculation as to the scope and function of scientific inquiry. There is much less room for ethical controversy- Science, or any other activity, is not for the sake of its own (Uthman, 1998).

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