

# Who is Homo Islamicus? A Qur'ānic perspective on the economic agent in Islamic economics

The nature of  
economic man:  
a Qur'ānic view

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper aims to explain the nature of the economic agent in Islamic economics. He is commonly referred to as Homo Islamicus.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This is done by deriving the concept from the Qur'ān as the primary epistemological source in Islamic economics. The paper, thus, attempts to explore the message of the Qur'ān and internalize its concepts and values in their totality into the conception of the economic agent from an Islamic perspective.

**Findings** – The paper brings an insight regarding the nature of the economic agent in Islamic perspective. The concept of the economic agent that is developed from the Qur'ānic teachings will be useful in developing assumptions and theories in Islamic economics.

**Research limitations/implications** – This paper explores the normative behavioral framework of man from the Qur'ānic perspective (i.e. what is expected of man) in order to serve as the basis on which assumptions, concepts and theories could be produced and applied in real life. Further studies could extend the discussion by examining the application of the concepts in practice.

**Practical implications** – This paper promotes a normative behavioral framework that could be the basis in developing the body of knowledge of Islamic economics.

**Originality/value** – This paper promotes a concept of the economic agent in Islamic perspective, termed as Homo Islamicus, who is going to portray Islamic ethical teachings in economic actions. The paper brought insights from the Qur'ānic teachings and principles in developing the concept of Homo Islamicus who will be the representative agent in theorizing Islamic economics.

**Keywords** Economic agent, Homo Islamicus, Islamic economics, Qur'ān

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

## Introduction

Moral philosophy has always revolved around exploring the nature of the human being. Moral philosophers often begin their discourse with propositions about the nature of human beings, their purpose, destination, aims and other factors on the basis of which they base ethical premises. Philosophers have brought to light presuppositions about human nature in

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various dimensions including moral, practical, social and spiritual aspects (Fromm, 1990; Harré, 2000).

Economics is a discipline that adopts certain ethical positions in conceiving the nature of the economic agent who will demonstrate these conceptions in actual economic behavior. Economics is not a value-neutral discipline. It has been infused with certain ethical positions that are manifested in assumptions, theories and concepts. Mitchell (2002) recognizes that economic theory takes certain cultural background and is shaped by Western historical experiences. Pojman (2006, p. xi) also notes that morality is often “constructed to serve human needs and desires” rather than to provide guidance as to how the human being should be. Therefore, Hasan (2002) observed that the debate is not whether economics is value free, but which ethics have been infused into economics.

In this regard, a comprehensive ethical concept of the economic man that would convey proper ethics in accord with human nature is needed – not a concept that reduces the nature of man nor exaggerates him into other entities which do not represent him. Fromm (1990, p. 7) expects that the concept of human nature should be “based upon man’s inherent qualities, and . . . their violation results in mental and emotional disintegration”.

Endeavors to develop normative guidelines and conceptual foundations of Islamic economics will fall short of their goals if there is no sound conceptualization of the purpose of existence, the nature of human being and human behavior, and man’s objectives (Al-Najjar, 2000). Islamic economics as a social science is also expected to provide a comprehensive insight into human behavior at the personal and societal levels (Rafikov and Akhmetova, 2020).

The Qur’ān as the primary source of knowledge in Islamic epistemology encourages man to reflect upon himself, his creation, his essence and the purpose of his creation (Qur’ān, 30:8; 41:53; 51:20–21; 86:5–7). It is argued that no one knows more about the nature of man than God who created him (Qur’ān, 67:14). Articulating this could be conducive to realizing the objectives of developing Islamic economics as a discipline and practical system.

Finding the most plausible version of the theory of human nature is very important for Islamic economics as a value-based science. The objective is not only to gain validity of concepts and theories, but also to gain legitimacy from the scientific community (Mahyudi and Abdul Aziz, 2017).

So far, there has been an extensive discussion on the economic agent, referred to as Homo Islamicus, in Islamic economics. The discussion in the literature can be classified into two types: general discussion on the nature of human beings in the Islamic perspective and specific discussion clarifying the nature of human beings, and their tendencies and behavior in the economic realm from an Islamic perspective.

The first type of studies attempting to clarify the nature of human beings in the Islamic perspective include the work of Al-Faruqi (1963), Nasr (1968), Shariati (1981), Mutahhari (1983), Eaton (1991), Abd. Rauf (1991), Rahman (1999), Al-Najjar (2000) and Izutsu (2002). These studies discussed the conception and normative framework of a prototype of the human being either as an individual being or a social being in an Islamic perspective. They set the foundation for the second type of studies which try to investigate the nature of human beings in the realm of Islamic economics.

The second type of studies can be found in the work of contemporary Islamic economics scholars, classified into three categories, namely the critics of Homo Islamicus, the commodification of the economic man in an Islamic perspective and new approaches in discussing Homo Islamicus.

The critics of Homo Islamicus describe the concept as an imaginary being who does not exist in reality and lacks any empirical support for its far-reaching theoretical claims (Kuran, 1983, 1995). Homo Islamicus is said to have been developed based on faulty presumptions by focusing on the positive aspect of the individual person’s innate being and ignoring the

interplay of social dynamics in influencing actual expressed preferences (Mahyudi, 2016). It is described as representing a mere utopian concept since it is not reflected in contemporary business settings, thus “creating a formidable gap between the rhetoric and reality” (Farooq, 2011, p. 58).

The second group can be found in the work of Mannan (1983), Arif (1985), Hosseini (1992), Chapra (2000) and Zarqa (2003). These studies attempt to clarify the nature of the economic agent in the Islamic perspective *vis-à-vis* Homo economicus, a prototype of the economic man in conventional economics. The discussion is very much influenced by the logic and flow of discussion in conventional economics and hence ends up by Islamizing the economic man's behavior, tendencies and characteristics. This is done through modification of the concept of self-interest, utility maximization goals and rationality to become Islamic self-interest, Islamic utility and Islamic rationality.

The third group can be found in the work of Asutay (2007), Furqani (2015a, b), Mahyudi (2015), Mahyudi and Abdul Aziz (2017), and Aydin and Khan (2021), who attempt to provide a new approach and perspective in discussing the nature of the economic agent in Islamic economics. Even though having successfully provided a new perspective in the discourse, their works still need to be followed up by further studies that put serious effort into developing the foundational concepts of the economic agent in Islamic economics. Such discussion will assist the development of Islamic economics as a scientific discipline. For Islamic economics, this becomes necessary since its conception of the nature of the economic agent, which stems from its worldview and epistemological sources, and will be the basis in constructing the microfoundations of Islamic economics (Arif, 1985; Mahomedy, 2013; Wahbalbari *et al.*, 2015; Furqani, 2021).

Therefore, this paper attempts to extend the discussion by clarifying the nature of the economic agent in an Islamic perspective based on the Qur'an as the primary source of knowledge in Islamic epistemological tradition. It argues that an Islamic ethical position is very much prevalent in its conception of the economic agent (Homo Islamicus) who is going to portray Islamic ethical teachings in economic actions. By using the Qur'anic approach, this paper will explore a comprehensive concept that would properly capture all dimensions of the human self, his nature, wellbeing and his relationship with other beings in the economic realm.

To do so, this paper first starts by exploring the nature of human beings in the Qur'an by compiling various related verses on the topics discussed. Then, it investigates the process of how human beings are created and for what purpose; i.e. what is the *raison d'être* of man's creation, how human beings should interact with other beings, man's true self and what constitutes his wellbeing.

### Human nature in the Qur'an

The Qur'an constantly addresses human beings (*al-insān*), the people (*al-nās*) or the descendants of Adam (*banū Ādam*) in various verses. This shows that the human being is a permanent object of God's attention, more so than any other creation, notably angels, *jinn*, the universe or Satan (Arkoun and Lee, 1994).

The Qur'an addresses human nature, how they have been created and what is the purpose of their creation (Izutsu, 2002). Those Qur'anic teachings are the sources of ethics that are the basis for freeing human nature of the cardinal deficiencies discussed in modern ethical discourses (Rahman, 1999). Philosophers discuss human nature in different perspectives depending on the philosophical foundation and worldview they hold. Different conceptions of human nature create confusion regarding proper ethics to be attached to humans. An explanation is required that not only explains it correctly but can also guide to achieve the perfection of life as individuals and social beings. An explanation from the Qur'anic

perspective is, thus, deemed important. The explanation of human nature from the perspective of the Qur'an will comprehensively reveal various dimensions of the human being and also determine the ethics that must be adhered to in order to reach perfection. This is possible since, according to Al-Faruqi (1963, p. 196), "the infinity or divine character of the Qur'an was assigned the meaning of giving us values rather than real-existents, the ethico-religious rather than the other realms of values, and the principles of the hierarchization of the ethico-religious values rather than a complete listing of them". The Qur'an describes human nature in a comprehensive perspective as follows:

- (1) The process of creation of human beings and elements of his creation (Qur'an, 6:2, 15:26, 17:61, 23:12, 55:14, 76:2);
- (2) The reason of his creation, duties and responsibilities and the ways he should follow in order to achieve success (Qur'an, 23:115, 51:56);
- (3) The relationship of human beings with their Creator (Allah *Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala* (SWT)) and other beings (Qur'an, 2:30, 61:10–14);
- (4) The nature, characteristics, tendencies and potentials of human beings (Qur'an, 3:152, 7:179, 17:19, 78:39); and
- (5) The values and qualities to be achieved to attain a higher self-realization (Qur'an, 5:15–16).

Islamic economists, in attempting to develop assumptions and appraise theories on the behavior of individuals are guided by these Qur'anic foundations. This paper attempts to grasp the message of the Qur'an and internalize its concepts and values in their totality into the conception of an economic agent in the Islamic perspective.

### **The creation of human beings**

To understand the nature of Homo Islamicus, it is important to look at the Qur'anic description of how human beings were created, why they were created and what are the elements of their creation. Human beings are described in the Qur'an as having a unique status – they were created in a perfect state (Qur'an, 95:4). Human beings have been created with the combination of two different elements, namely the material/body (*jasad*) and the immaterial/soul (*ruh*). The Qur'an describes the material dimensions, stating that man was made of sounding clay like the clay of pottery, from mud and from a drop of mingled sperm (Qur'an, 6:2, 15:26, 17:61, 23:12, 55:14, 76:2). God has fashioned him in due proportion and subsequently has perfected human creation by endowing him with an immaterial element, which is a "soul" from the "breath of God" (Qur'an, 15:29, 32:9, 38:72).

Human beings are, therefore, two dimensional beings, which differentiates them from all other beings, who are one-dimensional. Man in this regard is "a synthesis from which no element, from the highest to the lowest, is excluded, and it is a mirror in which are reflected the Names and Attributes of God before Whom he stands upright, now and forever" (Eaton, 1991, p. 358).

This implicates that human tendencies and needs are also complex and consist of physical, psychological, moral and spiritual needs. A balanced approach is, thus, required to fulfill each of the self's respective needs.

It should be noted that contradictory desires and tendencies in human beings can disturb the balance. The biological base of human beings makes them share with other animals many common material aspects of the physical senses that give humans awareness of the world. The spirit of God (*ruh*), which is the most sacred, exalting and noblest "part" of his being, however brings him into a higher place.

The earthly pole (body and matter) tends to lower him to the group of animals, showing love for the material and love for himself (selfishness), and makes him forget others, society or even God. Once dominated by this earthly/material perspective, human morality as well as spirituality suffer and decline. Individuals in this regard get caught up with consumerism and hedonism and tend toward selfishness, corruption and injustice. The heavenly pole, on the other hand, leads human beings to a higher level, to goodness, ideals and the realm of the spirit where human beings prefer justice, sympathy, love, sacrifice and altruism (Mutahhari, 1983).

In this respect, human beings have inclinations and are free to choose between good or evil (Qur'an, 3:152, 7:179, 17:19, 78:39). Individuals have to struggle to avoid a descent to their lower potentiality and achieve instead a higher level of being. The struggle will perpetually rage within them, and their lives will be valued based on their choices and conscious actions made (Shariati, 1981).

In this struggle, he has been endowed with the internal capacity of intellect (*ʿaql*), free will (*ikhtiyār*), capabilities (*qudrah*) and desires (*ahwāʾ*). However, these facilities are not sufficient to win the battle. Therefore, God has also revealed religion (*dīn*) in order to foster consciousness (*īmān*) in the human self so that one is able to manage those facilities for self-realization and transformation to achieve success and happiness. Religion is functionally regarded to induce the believer to transcend his animal nature to a higher spiritual aspect in a balanced way that will separate him from the animal species unto what the Qur'an calls *khayr wa abqā* (better and eternal).

### The self of Homo Islamicus

As mentioned above, the human being has dual dimensions: body and soul, and matter and spirit (Qur'an, 15:28–29). This implies that the human self is complex, with potentials and tendencies to realize values in a positive or negative way. The self is described as capable of moving to the lowest level of wickedness (*fujūr*) (Qur'an, 12:53) or toward virtue (*taqwā*), which is the pull of the higher self (Qur'an, 75:2).

Therefore, the Qur'an employs duality of values that human beings have the potential to choose and realize; for example

- (1) good (*sālihāt*) and bad (*sayyiʾāt*) (Qur'an, 45:21)
- (2) right (*khayr*) and wrong (*sharr*) (Qur'an, 99:7,8)
- (3) righteousness (*birr*) and sin (*ithm*) (Qur'an, 5:3)
- (4) good deed (*ḥasanah*) and evil deed (*sayyiʾah*) (Qur'an, 27:89–90)
- (5) righteous (*maʾrūf*) and evil (*munkar*) (Qur'an, 3:104)
- (6) lawful (*ḥalāl*) and unlawful (*ḥarām*) (Qur'an, 10: 59)
- (7) wholesome (*ṭayyib*) and malicious (*khabīth*) (Qur'an, 2:172).

Homo Islamicus is able to manifest the values when he makes choices since he is endowed with free will, intelligence, understanding, as well as potency and capability that enable him to act and choose either good or evil (Qur'an, 53:39–40; 76:3; 90:10).

However, unlike Homo economicus, Homo Islamicus has clear objectives in all his actions, namely “to maximize moral energy, to control and harness his desire and to make it obedient to his intellect and thus arrive at spiritual freedom” (Mutahhari, 1983, p. 33). The choice of good is in fact the true growth or self-realization to protect the self from degradation and to attain the higher levels of spiritual attainment. In fact, humans have more potencies to choose good values since the basic premise of human nature in the Qur'an is originally good and pure

(Qur'ān, 95:4–5). Man's inherent nature (*fitrah*) is good and free from any spiritual and morality flaws as long as it is not corrupted during one's life (Qur'ān, 30:30).

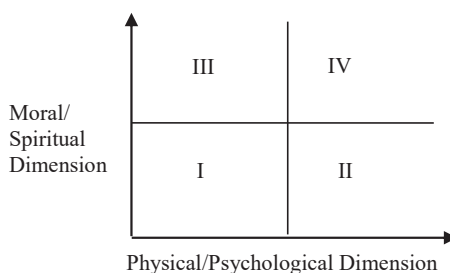
Therefore, the actions of Homo Islamicus, and his motives and decisions, should be made within the matrix of a consciousness oriented to choose the higher level of spirituality and the straight path (*al-sirāt al-mustaqīm*) (Qur'ān, 90:5–20). However, his striving to realize values is inseparable from the inner struggle (*jihād al-naḥs*). There is a real possibility of moral evil, which comes internally from his selfish desires (*hawā'* and *shahwah*) and his inclination to the earthly dimension of his self, or externally from others and from his everlasting enemy – *Shayṭān* (the Devil) – who is perpetually trying to seduce him away from his natural straight path into deviant behavior (Qur'ān, 17:61–65).

For this reason, the human being is also provided divine guidance (the Qur'ān and Sunnah) to the right path that would assist him in making the “right” decision and not violating the balance, and that would inspire him to act in a rightful manner. In this regard, [Abd. Rauf \(1991, p. 92\)](#) insightfully elaborates that “Islam does not confine man to a single course with no choice, nor does it leave him a victim of uncontrolled greed, human vagaries and stubbornness. It grants man a wide range of choices and creativity, motivates him to satisfy his physical and psychological needs in progressive processes, but seeks to protect him from evil.”

In addition, Allah (SWT) declares that He is always with human beings in this struggle provided they make the necessary effort (Qur'ān, 15:42, 16:99, 17:65). Such effort requires human beings to direct themselves, using all their positive potential, to eliminate the negative aspects in themselves, control the earthly desires, commit themselves to higher ideals, bring the positive aspects of their selves to the stage of action and develop themselves into a perfect ethical being. Most importantly, man's conscious self-alignment with God (*īmān*) seeks to strengthen and develop the good tendencies that he carries in himself by nature (Qur'ān, 8:29).

Homo Islamicus' actions should be directed to achieving unity in all dimensions of his personality – the physical, the moral, the rational, the esthetic and the spiritual ([Ansari, 2001](#)). This could be achieved by realizing moral values, which is actually an ontological reason of his existence (Qur'ān, 11:7, 67:2). This commitment to the moral ideals as envisaged in the Qur'ān is actually a primordial covenant that man agreed to before entering the realm of earthly existence.

Homo Islamicus will strive not to gravitate toward the earth but, rather, to transcend to a higher order of being, to the heights of purity, to the spiritual and to the divine where his origin is ([Rahman, 1999](#)). This is reflected in Quadrant IV of [Figure 1](#) whereby the material/psychological dimension is pursued in line with the moral/spiritual achievement. In Quadrants I and II, a Homo Islamicus is unable to gain moral/spiritual achievement as desired. His behavior, as a result, will become erratic and undesirable as it is not based on ethics or spiritual foundations.



**Figure 1.**  
The moral tension of  
Homo Islamicus

**Source(s):** Authors' own

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Islamic economics as an ethics-based economics attempts to envisage this ethical position in its conception of the nature of the economic agent. This is done by introducing moral values as part of one's preference functions, internalizing moral norms or rules as motives as well as constraints in actions, and incorporating those values and moral positions in policy prescriptions (Furqani, 2017).

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### The human being and his *raison d'être*

Understanding the *raison d'être* of human creation would give us the basis in understanding the tasks and roles that will be performed by human beings. It will also explicate the concept of ethics that will support a human's existence on earth as well as to complete the purpose of human creation.

The Qur'an asserts that human being is created not by coincidence or for baseless reasons. The human being is a chosen creature for a serious task (Qur'an, 23:115). To support this task, the Qur'an (95:4) says that "We have indeed created man in the best mold".

In the first place, the Qur'an clarifies that the purpose of human creation is to serve God (*ibādah*): "I (Allah) have not created jinns and humans but that they should worship (serve) me (alone)" (Qur'an, 51:56). This is done by consciously acknowledging God's magnificence and supremacy, and obeying His call for human progress and righteousness by complying to God's patterns pertaining to ritual and nonritual activities (Abd. Rauf, 1991). It is through *ibādah* that human integrity and perfection can be achieved (Al-Najjar, 2000).

Proper human action arises from this complete commitment to God by obeying the prescribed frameworks (Qur'an, 61:10–14). Human prosperity in this earthly life and in the hereafter is also valued based on the level of commitment to God (Qur'an, 30:38–9, 63:9, 87:14).

Secondly, the Qur'an clarifies that humans, unlike other creations, also have another special purpose, namely, to be God's vicegerent on earth (*khalīfah fī al-ard*). The Qur'an says, "He it is who created for you all that is on earth . . ." (Qur'an, 2:30). The vicegerent has a mission to make earthly life flourish by fulfilling the divine patterns on earth, implementing Allah's intent for life here, abiding by His rules (Qur'an, 11:61) and maximizing moral energy as much as possible during his life in the world (Qur'an, 6:165, 7:129).

Being a *khalīfah*, he is the only creature capable of pursuing the totality of values by establishing justice, prosperity and solving all economic problems as he has the *ʿaql* (intelligence) and vision requisite for such pursuits. Al-Faruqi (1992, p. 66), in this regard, asserts that *khalīfah* is "a sort of cosmic bridge through which the divine will, in its totality, can enter space-time and become actual." Eaton (1991, p. 69, 359) also articulates that the human being alone of all created beings is "situated directly beneath the divine axis where the divine Will may operate through him without impediment." Al-Attas (1993, p. 68) likewise describes that "while Islam is the epitome of the divine cosmic order, the man of Islam who is conscious of his destiny realizes that he is himself, as physical being, also an epitome of the cosmos, a microcosmic representation (*ʿālam ṣaghīr*) of the macro-cosmos (*ʿālam kabīr*). Hence in the manner that Islam is like a kingdom, a social order, so the man of Islam knows that he is a kingdom in miniature, for in him, as in all mankind, is manifested the Attributes of the Creator." Every action of individuals is, therefore, capable of adding, however little, to the total value of the cosmos, as an act of worship, of service to God.

To support this mission as *khalīfah*, human beings are endowed with the spiritual capacity to receive divine injunctions and with the intellectual capacity to be able to implement those injunctions on earth. The Qur'an (2:31–33) informs that once Adam was created, God taught him the names (*al-asmāʾ*) which represent knowledge. By knowledge, intellectual ability to think and physical capacity, human beings are able to discover natural laws and utilize natural resources for their purposes (Qur'an, 45:13).

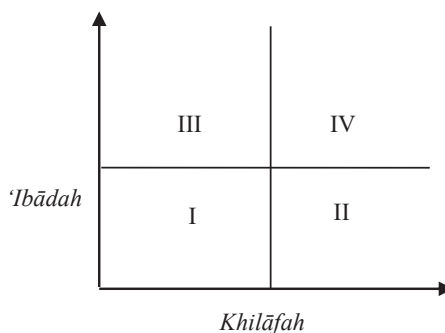
The role of *khalīfah* is essentially a task (*taklīf*) and a trust (*amānah*) that establish responsibility to manage the earth and make it flourish by means of bounties endowed by

God, human initiative, effort and creativity (Qur'ān, 33:72). A Homo Islamicus is expected to play the role of *khalīfah* by creating a moral social order on earth. However, this action is voluntarily applied as he is free to choose either to fulfill it or not (Qur'ān, 76:2–3).

The task of *khalīfah* (vicegerency) entails fulfillment of a trust, which implies responsibility – responsibility for his own wellbeing, responsibility for the wellbeing of his society and environment and responsibility before His Lord, the Creator of all things. The Homo Islamicus' action is his attempt to fulfill all responsibilities. This action is expected not to be mechanically, blindly or instinctively done, but consciously, deliberately and voluntarily emerging from one's inner moral consciousness (Abd. Rauf, 1991). Without being moral, this responsibility could not be achieved successfully. In fact, fulfillment of God's command, the divine trust, is identical with moral felicity (Al-Faruqi, 1963). Life on earth is about implementing the ethical ideals outlined by God through His revelation into real practices. In this perspective, "the human being's will is perfected only when he reflects the Divine Will" (Eaton, 1991, p. 362). The Divine pattern is required to be fulfilled by man by his conscious ethical actions as a *khalīfah*.

The nature of Homo Islamicus in this regard has been perfectly designed to be able to complete the mission (*raison d'être* of human creation) for which no other creature has the requisite ability. In fact, human beings have a natural inclination to carry out these moral duties of *ibādah* (worship of God) and *khalīfah* (vicegerency of God to make the earth prosper) (Al-Attas, 1993). This is because a human being is both a physical and spiritual being, a perfect combination of body and soul which makes him qualified to be a cosmic bridge between the micro- and macro-cosmos. The virtues with which he is endowed in order to be able to properly accomplish the mission of servitude and vicegerency of God are the positive aspects of the human being that also mark his superiority compared to other creations.

The quadrant in Figure 2 explains four possibilities of the Homo Islamicus in performing the role of servitude and vicegerency and hence the moral duties of *ibādah* and *khalīfah*. In Quadrant I, Homo Islamicus does not carry out the role of *'abd* or *khalīfah*' or performs a very minimal role. In Quadrant II, Homo Islamicus plays the role of *khalīfah* more but is less involved in his role of *ibādah*. On the other hand, in Quadrant III, Homo Islamicus performs more *ibādah* duties and less duties of *khalīfah*. What is desired is Quadrant IV, where Homo Islamicus balances action and perfectly carries out the duties of *ibādah* and *khalīfah*. He fully understands that the task of *khalīfah* is essentially a form of *ibādah*, and vice versa. *Ibādah* means serving God by implementing what God enjoins and refraining from what He forbids, and *khalīfah* means implementing God's intent on earth and His patterns and injunctions in economic activities (Al-Najjar, 2000).



**Figure 2.**  
The moral duties of  
Homo Islamicus

Source(s): Authors' own



### Homo Islamicus and other beings

Homo Islamicus in the Islamic worldview is not viewed in isolation from other beings. In fact, the Qur'an has also explained the *expected* relationship and attitude of man to himself, his fellow man, nature and God, and the *huquq* (rights and obligations) that emerge in these relationships (Furqani, 2015a).

Central in this relationship is the difference between the real, absolute and ultimate reality, on the one hand, and the relative reality on the other. God, in the Islamic worldview, is the *Khaliq* (creator). He is the Real the Absolute and the Ultimate while human beings and the universe are the creation (*makhluq*); they are manifestations of reality and thereby relative and not ultimate. Therefore, in explaining being and realities, the Qur'anic *weltanschauung* is most evidently theocentric, whereby God stands in the very center of the world of being. All other things are His creatures; they are inferior to Him in the hierarchy of being and submit (willingly or unwillingly, in the case of humans) to Him (Izutsu, 2002). Ansari (2001, p. 102) insightfully puts God as "the fountain-head of the highest values and ideals that reveals itself in the Cosmic Order, He is the basis of all Existence, the Source of all Excellence".

The task of *khalfah* to be performed by Homo Islamicus is addressed by the Qur'an as an individual as well as collective task (Qur'an, 6:165). This means that it can only be done perfectly through the synergy of individuals and society. Islamic economics in this perspective has both an individual as well as a social agenda and attempts to harmoniously blend individuals as well as the society in the spirit of brotherhood (*ukhuwwah*) in its concepts as well as theories.

Therefore, the perspectives of individual self-interest and public interest and ideas such as "sacrifice for others/society" are not viewed as conflicting goals. Likewise, the concept of altruism in Islamic economics is not built on individual sacrifice for the sake of collective interest. Hence, individuals do not have to suffer loss of individuality and personality, nor the society has to suffer loss of its polity and authority.

How is it possible? According to Al-Attas (1993), this is possible since in the Islamic system of life, the individual and society are bonded with morality. The Islamic man and Islamic society are characterized by their commitment to Islamic ethics which means the "individual is at once himself and his community, and his community is also he, since every other single member strives like him to realize the same purpose in life and to achieve the same goal" (Al-Attas, 1993, p. 66).

In other words, the individual and society are both bound in a firm spiritual foundation of being God's servant. This unity comes from the primordial covenant to God that should be fulfilled by human beings collectively as a society (*ummah*) as well as individually. The principle of *tawhid* conveys the message that all mankind are the creations of God. Furthermore, the concept of *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood of mankind) would further strengthen the individual consciousness of others (Azzam, 1993).

Obedience to His commands and His favors is the primary principle that constitutes the foundation of morality in Islam. The objective would be to achieve greater spiritual refinement and moral goodness (Al-Attas, 1993).

Therefore, self-interest and self-sacrifice (to the society) are never in conflict. Both, in fact, could be linked directly with spiritual ascension. The society is in fact the place where the individual could gain self-realization and spiritual achievement. An individual's self-sacrifice in a social action is highly appreciated by God. Such actions will purify an individual's soul, earning rewards from God, and at the same time, contribute to social harmony (Qur'an, 2:263, 267, 274, 277).

It should be noted that human earthly life has been designed by God in such a way that recognizes differences whereby human beings consist of the rich and the poor, the light-skinned and the dark, the strong and the sickly, the haves and the have-nots. The Qur'an reveals that the purpose of this inequality is to set the ground of moral struggle by

individuals, in whatever degree they may have received the different divine gifts. This inequality embeds humans in circumstances of mutual dependency among individuals (Qur'ān, 4:37; 8:74). People are expected to cooperate among themselves to help the needy and the poor (Qur'ān, 9:71, 24:22) rather than take opportunities to exploit others (Qur'ān, 107:2-7). While competition among society members is appreciated, cooperation that results from the spirit of brotherhood is more appreciated (Qur'ān, 2:277; 6:165; 16:71). Such social commitment is praised in the Qur'ān as such actions remind human beings that they have come from God (Qur'ān, 4:80-81). The individual success which is marked by spiritual ascent and God's love is found in this spirit of sacrifice to benefit others and to create a just society. In this perspective, it is out of individual self-interest that man sacrifices for society (Qur'ān, 4:114, 12:88); he does it to purify himself (Qur'ān, 9:103), as God will bless him (Qur'ān, 9:71), and for wellbeing in the eternal life of the hereafter (Qur'ān, 30:38).

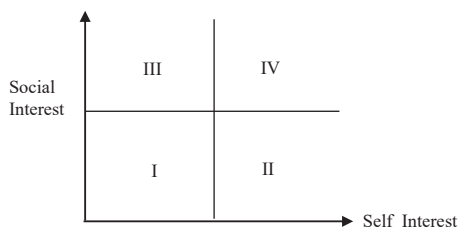
Likewise, Homo Islamicus' relationship with nature is viewed in an integrated perspective of mutual coexistence. It is recognized that nature is one of the facilities endowed to human beings to support the role of *khilāfah*. Nature has been created subservient to humans' needs (*taskhīr*). Nature, with its beauty, well-planned, well-structured, sufficient resources and its discovered and undiscovered mysteries, is for man's service, and he can utilize it for his wellbeing (Qur'ān, 2:29, 14:32, 16:12, 22:65, 29:61, 31:20, 35:13, 39:5, 43:12, 45:12).

This principle embarks from the perspective that nature belongs to God alone (Qur'ān, 25:2), and it is bestowed to mankind as a trust with the condition of responsibility to preserve and not to corrupt (*fasād fi al-ard*, Qur'ān, 11:85). Moreover, humanity must ensure that its utilization brings benefit (*maṣlahah*) to all creatures and realizes the mission of *khilāfah* (Qur'ān, 23:115).

Central to this task is the individual awareness and relationship with God (*tawhīd*) through the attitude of *taqwā* (God-consciousness) in all economic activities. The disequilibrium or disharmony between man and nature is due to the destruction of the harmony between man and God (Nasr, 1968). Nature in this regard is not viewed as an *amānah* from God. Instead, individuals think of themselves as the "master" of nature who can do anything they like (Furqani, 2015b).

Therefore, the Qur'ān repeatedly reminds man that nature is not created only to satisfy man's need (or greed) (Qur'ān, 30:34) but also to attain spiritual goals (Qur'ān, 23:51-52). In their role as *khilāfah* (Qur'ān, 2:30), individuals are endowed with capabilities and facilities to perfectly implement God's authority in managing the earth and allocating resources (Qur'ān, 7:32, 18:7) to realize all potentials and moral energy to achieve spiritual attainment of higher levels of being (Qur'ān, 51:56).

In Figure 3, Homo Islamicus is expected to be in Quadrant IV where he has consciousness of pursuing a balanced orientation of social goals and self-interest by understanding respective *huqūq* (rights and obligations), synergy of individuals and society in the spirit of brotherhood (*ukhuwwah*) and cooperation (*ta'āwun*) (Furqani, 2015a). This state of affairs is called by Al-Attas (1993) a state of justice (*'adl*), which means a harmonious condition whereby everything is in the right and proper place.



Source(s): Authors' own

Figure 3.  
Homo Islamicus and  
harmonious interest

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This is possible through spiritual consciousness (*taqwā*). Internalizing Islamic ethics in economics aims at establishing this kind of behavior where Homo Islamicus will have consciousness of the central role of God in his relationship with other beings and in all of his affairs (Qur'ān, 9:67, 59:19, 89:20–28). Morality is actually the effort to comply with the patterns of behavior within the divine guidance. Vice versa, it is immoral if individuals act contrarily by pursuing only self-interest and neglecting social goals as in Quadrant II, or pursuing only social interest while neglecting self-interest as in Quadrant III, or even worse by neglecting both self-interest and social orientation as in Quadrant I.

The nature of economic man: a Qur'ānic view

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### Homo Islamicus' wellbeing

The dual dimension of the human self in terms of body and soul, material and spirit, and mundane and profane, reflects that Homo Islamicus is a complex creature and consequently his needs are also complex. His wellbeing depends on the fulfillment of all his needs and therefore, should be viewed in a comprehensive manner. The nature of Homo Islamicus, as Eaton (1991, p. 358) puts it, is “a synthesis that reflects totality and can be satisfied with nothing less than the total”. His bodily aspect has its particular needs and requirements to be fulfilled so that man can live happily. His spiritual side also has particular needs and requirements to be taken care of so that his life will be good.

Human beings are endowed with motives which is the driving force that evokes activity. Motives trigger behavior and lead human beings to certain goals. Human beings are endowed with an inner motive by God that drives them to work and struggle to fulfill their physical, psychological, social, intellectual, recreational and spiritual needs. Self-preservation, therefore, is not only to preserve one's natural urge of having more wealth, profit or utility, but also to gain comprehensive wellbeing of mental, spiritual and moral gain that will encompass this life and the hereafter (Roy, 1994). Chapra (2008) also argues that *real* wellbeing cannot be realized and sustained by merely increasing income, wealth and satisfying material needs at the cost of the spiritual.

The Qur'ān, however, teaches Homo Islamicus to have a proper orientation; although physical satisfaction is necessary for his wellbeing, it is not the ultimate end that would provide ultimate wellbeing (Qur'ān, 53:30). It is not an end in itself because the body and this physical world are not eternal and will be diminished (Qur'ān, 27:36); they are in fact intermediate ends that should be pursued to achieve the ultimate end, which is spiritual wellbeing. In this perspective, the pleasures of earthly life are not themselves condemned as they are natural and necessary. However, they should be put in a holistic perspective by not separating worldly satisfaction from spiritual pleasure. Asad (2010, p. 13) in this regard rightly asserts that “of all religions, Islam alone makes it possible for man to enjoy the full range of his earthly life without for a moment losing its spiritual orientation”.

Therefore, the Qur'ān repeatedly warns of the negative tendency of human beings to focus more on intermediate wellbeing and, hence, forget the ultimate goal. For example, the Qur'ān describes human beings as having a natural inclination to selfishness, although it can be detrimental to their interests (Qur'ān, 17:102, 89:15–25, 100:8). The Qur'ān advises that cupidity destroys the human self (Qur'ān, 100:9–11); it makes one neglect others (Qur'ān, 92:8–10), and therefore should be overcome by giving charity (*zakat*) that would purify one's soul from excess love of material gain and selfishness.

In other verses, the Qur'ān illuminates the real wellbeing: when individuals are willing to share their wealth through charity or good works (Qur'ān, 9:88–89) instead of accumulating material goods for personal interest or for the future, thinking that their treasures will give them eternal life (Qur'ān, 104:1–3). Such misperception of the ultimate goal is actually the source of all social evils (Qur'ān, 100:8–11) because an individual loses his God-consciousness and unconsciously makes his lust his god (Qur'ān, 28:63, 45:22, 54:3, 89:17–20).

This dimension, according to Zaman (2012), impels another goal of Islamic economics, namely transforming human beings. Islamic economics at the theoretical level as well as its practical system attempts to realize economic justice, to urge the feeding of the poor, and to implement the orders of Allah (SWT) which are relevant to the economic realm. Islamic economics is, therefore, neither positive (seeking to merely study the world as it is), nor normative (seeking to merely describe an ideal state of affairs), but it is transformative (attempting to transform realities into desirable objectives). In other words, Islamic economics contains both normative and positive dimensions with the purpose of transforming the phenomena, behavior and activities into Islamic goals.

The above characteristics and guidelines of Homo Islamicus as derived from the Qurʾān, which is the primary source of knowledge in Islamic epistemology, will be the guidelines in developing the assumptions and hypothesis of analysis. Abalkhail (2020) in this regard has provided evidence that religion plays an important role in shaping beliefs, knowledge, attitude, decisions and behavior at both the individual and societal levels.

### Conclusion

The Qurʾān not only provides insights into the nature of man but also offers a systematic and penetrating analysis of human beings in the bigger picture of their relationship with other realities including the ultimate reality. This paper has elaborated the concept of Homo Islamicus, his nature, characteristics, tendencies, goals and wellbeing developed in accordance with the Qurʾānic insights of how man should deal with himself, society, nature and God. This conception can be the foundation in developing theories of Islamic economics and the basis for analyzing the behavior of the economic agent in Islamic economics.

Based on the above explanation, the nature of the economic agent in Islamic economics (Homo Islamicus) can be characterized as follows:

- (1) Homo Islamicus has been created in a perfect state synthesizing two elements, namely the material/body (*jasad*) and immaterial/soul (*rūh*). As a result, his tendencies, potentials and needs consist of physical, psychological, moral and spiritual needs. Endowed with guidance from the Qurʾān and Sunnah and internal capacity of intellect (*ʿaql*), free-will (*ikhtiyār*), capabilities (*qudrah*) and desires (*ahwāʾ*), Homo Islamicus is expected to pursue a balanced attitude in satisfying these various tendencies and needs.
- (2) Homo Islamicus plays an important role and undertakes the task of *ʿibādah* by serving God by carrying out all that he is charged with (*taklīf*) in the form of orders and prohibitions as well as that of *khalīfah* (God's vicegerent on earth) by implementing God's intents, patterns and injunctions in economic activities (*ʿimārat al-ard*).
- (3) Homo Islamicus is an individual and social being as well as a spiritual and material being. He attempts to maintain the relationship by preserving the *ḥuqūq* (rights and obligations) of respective realities (God, nature, individual and society) and to gain harmony through the attitude of *taqwā* (God-consciousness in all actions).
- (4) Homo Islamicus' wellbeing (*maṣlahah*) lies in satisfying the material, psychological, moral, social and spiritual needs in a balanced and holistic perspective. This is possible if he is aware of his own nature (*maʿrifat al-nafs*), his role as an *ʿabd* and *khalīfah* who has been assigned a task (*taklīf*) and is endowed with a trust (*amānah*) to make the earth prosper (*taʾmīr*), establish justice (*ʿadl*), and have God-consciousness (*taqwā*) in preserving the rights and obligations (*ḥuqūq*) of others.

Homo Islamicus' actions, as illustrated in the above quadrants, will have various possibilities with low and high commitment. In other words, this paper is keenly aware of the criticism by Mahyudi (2016), who says that the discussion of Homo Islamicus focuses on one type of behavior, namely the positive dimension. This study recognizes that the various types of Homo Islamicus' tendencies and behavior depend on his level of commitment toward ethics and spirituality. However, the paper explicates the desired output as envisaged in the Qur'an, which can be achieved if Homo Islamicus has conscious and clear spiritual orientation. Islamic economics as a discipline will explicitly set a guide of proper ethics for individual choices and actions, and hence harmony and equilibrium could be achieved as propagated by Choudhury (2018, p. 265):

Islamic economics in its present state does not have a theory and foundation that can be called truly Islamic in terms of systematizing economic and social learning in a holistic way. The methods and models of Islamic economics today ignore the need to model Islamic morals and ethics in an endogenous way with materiality.

Therefore, this study is an initiative to clarify the nature of the economic agent in Islamic economics. Further research to examine the reliability of the proposed concepts as well as their practical implementation is, therefore, needed.

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