

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF QUALITY OF LIFE AND HUMAN NEEDS THEORIES FROM AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE*

HAYAT KALİTESİ VE İNSAN İHTİYAÇLARI TEORİLERİNİN İSLAMİ BİR PERSPEKTİFTEN ELEŐTİREL ANALİZİ

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Abstract

*This article aims to contribute to the literature on human development and wellbeing theories from an Islamic critical perspective. In this article, the theory of human needs and quality of life theories will be evaluated and analyzed with a particular focus on Islamic resources and traditions. It has been argued that human development, quality of life and human needs theories analyzed in this paper are inevitably vague and have conflicting necessities. As Islamic teachings and traditions acknowledge, the discussions of primary needs, essential wants and lists are subject to change considering human values, beliefs, and other non-materialistic quantities. As a result, it is emphasized that universalization of human needs and quality of life requirements may mean little for those who need most if the relative and complex human phenomenon is not taken into account. **Keywords:** Wellbeing, Islam, Human Needs, Quality of Life*

Öz

Bu alıřma, insani kalkınma ve refah tartışmaları alanındaki alanyazına İslami bir eleőtirel perspektiften yaklaşarak katkıda bulunmak amacındadır. Bu kapsamda İnsan İhtiyaçları Teorisi ve Yaşam Kalitesi Teorileri deęerlendirilmiş ve İslam kaynaklarından beslenerek analiz edilmiştir. İnsani kalkınma, yaşam kalitesi ve insan ihtiyaçları teorilerinin kaçınılmaz olarak belirsiz ve çatışan gereksinimler ileri sürdüęü tartışılmıştır. İslami öğretiler ve kaynakların da gösterdięi gibi temel ihtiyaçlar ve gereksinim listeleri; deęerlere, inançlara ve maddi olmayan niteliklere sahip olan insanlar bakımından deęişime açıktır. Sonuç olarak, deęişken ve karmaşık insan fenomeni göz önüne alınmadığında, insan ihtiyaçlarının ve yaşam kalitesi gereksinimlerinin evrenselleştirilmesi, bunlara en çok ihtiyaç duyan insanlar için çok az bir anlam ifade edebileceęi vurgulanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Refah, İslam, İnsan İhtiyaçları, Yaşam Kalitesi.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social progress which is an umbrella term for wellbeing, happiness, quality of life has always been an important aspect of religious texts. The influences of religions are visible in many parts of the world such as in the Middle East in terms of social policies of states and in Europe (Jawad and Cakar, 2010; Rieger and Leibfried, 2003). In this respect, it is easy to see some scholarly work undertaken to investigate the relationship between religions and social progress.

For instance, Catholicism and social policy has been a particularly interesting subject for academia in this field. Fahey (1998) argues that social policy in Ireland is influenced by the Catholic Church's social services and teachings. Moreover, Belcher, Fandetti and Cole (2004) argue that Christian conservatism can enhance the utility of a liberal welfare state, noting that the driving force should remain with the state in social policy. Midgley (1990) also contributes to the discussions about the role of Catholicism in formulating the ideal welfare state. Smith and Lee (2012) spare one chapter of their work *Christian Ethics and Social Policy* to some social problems such as racism and discrimination and to the response of the Catholic Church to those problems. More importantly, a great deal of effort has been given to address social problems from a biblical perspective by numerous scholars (Hiers, 2002; Poe, 2008; Ridzi, Loveland and Glennon, 2008).

Similarly, many scholarly works investigated the relationship between Islam and social progress and social policies in the Middle East (Haddad and Esposito, 1997; Heyneman, 2004; Tiliouine and Estes, 2016). However, the extensive literature on religion and social policy has argued that conceptions of social policy do vary between religions. Rieger and Leibfried (2003) for example in the *Limits to Globalisation* argue that most of what passes for international secular social policy (e.g ILO Labour standards) is based upon a particular Protestant ethic of North West Europe. It has nothing in common with Confucianism for example.

Cultural relativism is also another issue to be paid attention to. The notion of cultural relativism, -without going into arguments about what culture is and what it constitutes of -, can be explained in a way that culture is the principal source of any right or wrong (Donnelly, 1984). Although there are different sorts of relativism, they all share a common characteristic that any point of view cannot be uniquely true and generalizable (Howson, 2009). In this sense, cultural relativism asserts that cultural framework is crucial for one to understand people's choices and lives. Although, some assert that there are universal human needs but satisfiers may be varied across cultures as the idea of universal human needs is also highly controversial. This may overshadow the objectivity of the theory and the measures informed by the theories about human wellbeing and happiness.

This article aims to fill the gap in Islamic theories about human development and wellbeing by looking at the theories of human need and quality of life from an Islamic critical perspective. Although religions have a say on these issues, Islamic discussions seem to be limited in this area. In this article, the theory of human need by Doyal and Gough, quality of life theories by Phillips and others will be evaluated and analysed with a particular focus on Islamic resources and traditions.

2. A THEORY OF HUMAN NEED

In their work, Doyal and Gough (1991) discussed various approaches to the idea of human needs such as relativism and determinism. The aim of the theory is to place the concept of human need in the centre of human welfare and well-being discussions. The concept of human needs is an essential component of the discussion of any form of social welfare system or well-being. In the end, all ideas go back to the concept of human nature. Different approaches to human nature produce completely different conclusions about the quality of life and subjective well-being. It can be seen from Doyal and Gough's 1984 article that the socialist theory of social progress and its definition of human nature, are evaluated throughout. It says "... without a viable conception of human need, socialist theory and practice lose their moral and political coherence" (Doyal and Gough, 1984 p.1). In that regard, great emphasis is placed on Marxist theory in Doyal and Gough's theory.

There is a challenge in the theory against individualists, subjectivists and relativists. Individualist asserts that there are no social preconditions for individual needs to be met while Doyal and Gough (1991) state that humans are social beings and society and history have influence on them hence there are some social pre-conditions for individual needs to be met. Cultural relativists on the other hand believe that the only way to find out people's needs and wants is to comprehend the culture in which people live. Therefore, any idea that contains the terms like 'universal' or 'global' such as Doyal and Gough's theory, is rejected by relativists because cultures are deemed unique. Subjectivists' claim is that universal human needs can-not be determined since each human being is incomparable and has its own needs and wants. However, Doyal and Gough insist that there are two basic needs (health and autonomy) that a person requires in order to act successfully regardless of his/her goal or action, culture, shape, nationality, colour etc... Hence, personhood entails action and action requires two things for any 'homo sapiens': health and autonomy. Physical health to survive and mental ability to act on something is therefore essential for any human being to live as a person. For this reason, these two basic human needs are universal and essential for anyone on this earth regardless of his location and history.

The theory strongly opposes the idea that human needs are changeable, based on personal values, and therefore subjective. "...needs are the things that are required for a person basically to 'get by' as a person" (Doyal and Gough, 1984 p.12). There is also a dispute about whether needs exist naturally or not, e.g. intimacy. The following acts as a summary of the whole discussion about needs and wants: aims and goals are needs if applicable to all human beings. In that sense, universalizability plays a significant role in the discussion. The problem of subjectivism is tackled by defining "basic individual needs as those goals which must be achieved if an individual is to achieve any other goal - however idiosyncratic or culturally specific those other goals are" (Doyal and Gough, 1984 p. 10).

The theory also suggests that there are eleven intermediate needs alongside basic needs: survival/health and autonomy/learning. These eleven intermediate needs are: Adequate nutritional food and water, adequate protective housing, a non-hazardous work environment, a non-hazardous physical environment, appropriate health care, security in childhood, significant primary relationships, physical security, economic security, safe birth control and childbearing and basic education (Gough, 2003). These intermediate needs; contribute to the basic needs (health and autonomy). First six intermediate needs serve physical health and the last five advance autonomy. These conditions in which people satisfy their basic needs called 'universal satisfier characteristics. If a satisfier contributes to health and autonomy, then it is classified as an intermediate need or a universal satisfier (Gough, 2003).

It should be noted that there are some pre-conditions for having these needs fulfilled, such as having a 'creative consciousness' as a precondition for autonomy. The argument goes on to say that, in order for a person to meet these needs, four social preconditions must be achieved. These are production, reproduction, culture/communication, and political authority.

The first condition is production. It refers to the idea of producing materials in a society and when doing this, people have to cooperate and communicate with each other. Sharing responsibilities and duties is unavoidable in society. People have to produce goods and different services in order to survive.

The second condition is reproduction; it is divided into two subgroups: biological reproduction and infant care and socialisation. Biological reproduction means that society must multiply in order to survive and mothers have to give birth. After having a baby, the infant has to be taken care of, due to its incapable nature. Then, the baby must socialise to learn basic communication skills such as language to join a society and to have an identity.

The third condition is communication; it is an unavoidable task for society to teach its members the culture and way of life, which they inherited from their ancestors. Without an inheritance from the past, any society would have significant problems in progressing. Two types of communication are to be met. The first one is the technique. This is the way that people tackle the problems they face. This

technique is learned through the experiences of ancestors. The second type of communication is rules; there must be some sort of rules, which people agree to abide by in society.

The fourth condition is a political authority: the central authority will allow people to implement rules and distribute resources. Without an agreement in the way that political authority runs, this would be impossible. For instance, Doyal and Gough (1984) argue that without an agreement of masses in a free market system, capitalism would find it difficult to survive.

It should also be noted here that the idea that humans are not just individuals who can meet these "needs" by themselves, but rather that they are part of a bigger picture, which is society. It would be impossible for a person to satisfy these needs without a society. Therefore, there is a reciprocal dependency here: "Everyone needs people to be anyone" (Doyal and Gough, 1984 p.17). 'Needs' can be met by different satisfiers, although this does not mean that basic needs will vary in different circumstances. So long as the centre of the argument is human, it will be the same needs that human beings will strive to meet in order to achieve any goal.

Human liberation is another concept, which should be taken into consideration. According to Marxist theory, human liberation is the ability to select options that satisfy individual and societal needs. Without this ability, human liberation would not exist; hence, the need for autonomy would not be satisfied. If your options are limited and you are not given a chance to choose the way you want to satisfy your needs and seek your goals, how would you be able to have autonomy and identity?

The concept of absolute freedom and unlimited options is utopian. However, providing as many options as possible to people must be of significance to political authority. This opens another discussion about what possible options can be provided to people without excluding anyone's options. This is not clarified in the theory.

Finally, attention was given to the ecological side of the argument. The side effects of the production process must be taken into account when considering the theory. World resources must be evenly distributed. The process of production should not pollute the environment, which can have negative impacts on society. The theory does not deal with the problem of how we should do this in practice. These issues are too much to cover in the theory. This raises questions about the practicality of the theory as the authors acknowledge. Phillips (2011) points out that Gough and Wood (2004) adds new need as the participation in one's life considering the environment that should be secure enough to do so. However, the question "what is the ideal type of secure environment" requires another ideological point of view.

Working on human wellbeing and measuring how populations perform are complicated tasks. King, Reno and Novo (2014) argue that the theories developed in this area should be supported by mixed methods that take local stakeholders and participatory approaches into account. "Mixed methods and participatory approaches are necessary to adequately investigate the complex dynamics, cultural specificity and context-dependent nature of well-being, and identify local conceptions, criteria, and indicators of living well." As can be seen from the human needs theory, many approaches can be argued in terms of human needs and wants, although these discussions differ mainly being social, local, specific ideology oriented, individual and international by their nature.

3. QUALITY OF LIFE

Phillips (2006) draws attention to the issue of quality of life. Similar to those of Happiness Index and "A Theory of Human Needs", he argues that different elements contribute to the quality of life. There are mainly as follows: individual well-being and health-related quality of life, human needs – living fulfilling and flourishing lives, poverty and social exclusion, social solidarity, altruism and trust within communities.

It focuses on not only individual quality of life but also collective quality. In this respect, it is one of the main contributions to the field, since the social policy is dealing with people's welfare and

their life quality. Phillips (2006) acknowledges the fact that these arguments are as old as human beings on earth since it is one of the most significant components of human life.

The question arises after reading the introduction which summarizes the main points that, in an imperfect world where our lives and our circumstances are vulnerable and uncontrollable at most times if not all the time, how can we aim to establish "the perfect society" knowing that many factors are out of our control such as weather, earthquakes, people's personality, our needs and wants, changing circumstances of time, technology, collective subconscious of a society and unpredictable reactions of people to unpredictable events. Can these factors be controllable and manageable? Can science solve the mystery of human nature and provide people with his basic needs and wants all the time? These are the challenges and goals of the modern scientific world, which seeks to control nature by science and understand the human being totally by various social sciences. It is hard to believe that someday science will be able to control and understand human nature and the universe, therefore, control and manage both circumstances around us and ourselves rather than caged by them.

Briefly, what Phillips (2006) is saying is that for individual quality of life there are five core attributes which people or society are supposed to be equipped with. These are as follows: first, basic needs (note that the author does not frame what or not basic needs are except avoiding pain and harm) and the second one is autonomy of agency which gives options to people to pursue their lives in whatever way they want. Third, is subjective well-being. It encompasses satisfaction, positive emotion, the presence of purpose in life and personal growth. Fourth, is 'flourishing' in the author's words. Flourishing comprises different elements such as values, capabilities, and accomplishment. The last one is about society. It is social inclusion. It is a societal need and requires community action. Active citizenship is used as a key reference word here.

As for the collective quality of life, there are also five core attributes listed by Phillips (2006). The first and the most important one is what he calls civic integration. It includes the idea of the World Bank and in the Bank's words 'civic responsibility and common identification with forms of government, cultural norms and social rules' (World Bank, 1998). In simple words perhaps, it is the compatibility of a government system with local culture and people's values. Second and third ones are eclectic according to the author. Social integration, tolerance, and respect for difference are the main characteristics of these two attributes.

The fourth attribute is sustainability and it ensures that the theory and practical model will last long. Lastly and most controversially as Phillips (2006) mentions, social cohesion is the last core attribute of collective quality of life.

In conclusion, he aims to define what quality of life is as follows; " Quality of life requires that people's basic and social needs are met and that they have the autonomy to choose to enjoy life, to flourish and to participate as citizens in a society with high levels of civic integration, social connectivity, trust and other integrative norms including at least fairness and equity, all within a physically and socially sustainable global environment" (Phillips, 2006 p. 245). Phillips' subsequent work compares social and local approaches to the issue of human needs and quality of life by pointing out the problems of individualistic and material oriented theories which supposedly overlook "the social" collective identity of human beings (Phillips, 2011).

4. HUMAN WELLBEING AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES RELATING THE UNIVERSAL AND THE LOCAL

The wellbeing approach was initiated by Gough, the author of Theory of Human Need. Even though he wrote the challenging and enlightening work about human needs with Doyal, he did not remain satisfied by that and he decided to move further on this topic. What Gough is saying in his work (Gough, 2004) is that the global dominant worldview that -needs are local- and -policies should be global- must be challenged on the ground that, as mentioned in the human needs theory, human needs are universal but the means may vary and differ from time to time and place to place. He is arguing that global politics and big actors of global social policy are unaware of the fact that what they do is

disconnected from the reality on the ground. In the developing world especially, this fact worsens the situation of local people for two reasons. First, the people who are subject to the issue have no say about universal needs or their wants. Second, local people are unable to raise their questions about the practices of big policy actors in their own place.

Gough starts with a summary of the original theory's main points about human needs and describes how it distinguishes needs from wants. At this point, another important issue should be taken into account. Critical autonomy is stated and emphasised as a basic need; however, even though Gough states that without a measure of critical autonomy local understandings of wellbeing cannot be comprehended (Gough, 2004 p. 302), he does not explain how one can measure someone's ability to think critically and question the world around him/her (Gough, 2004 p. 291).

The main argument is to criticise the policy that stems from the idea of 'one size fits all' (OSFA). It dismisses the realities on the ground and cannot hear the voices of the poor. "In this topsy-turvy world, core values and needs are relative and local and means and policies are global and universal" (Gough, 2004 p. 291). Gough decided to challenge this hegemony.

Gough seems interested in views that can challenge the OSFA approach of world powers like USA. He gives copious space to the consideration of Mary Douglas' theory about 'four world' views. The main reason for this, as Gough explains in the previous chapter, is to challenge the hegemony of big structures and to establish an alternative middle range theory. Mary Douglas explains that there are four general ways of living and these are as follows: individualism, hierarchy, egalitarianism, and fatalism. Gough concludes by saying that different ways of life can coexist but they nonetheless adhere to these four basic ways of living. Ways of living, furthermore, are dynamic, and always subject to change: "Change comes when a way of life cannot deliver on the expectations it has generated" (Gough, 2004 p. 300).

His alternative neo-institutional approach presents very good reasons to study social policy in development contexts as he claims. First, this new approach offers a welfare mix where public and private sector interacts. Second, it is not only concerned with institutions but also with outcomes. Third, it enables researchers to analyse social policy in 'power terms'. Finally, it facilitates the classification and grouping of countries according to their welfare characteristics (Gough, 2004 p. 301).

He then goes on to redefine welfare regimes and to identify three types. First, in a welfare state, people meet their security needs without any problem. Second, in informal security regimes, people rely on persons or groups other than the state to meet their security needs at different levels. Lastly, in an insecurity regime, international powers intervene and create disorder and instability. By classifying welfare regimes, he believes that we can reconcile the universal and local social structures of social policy (Gough, 2004 p. 301).

He states that hopefully, international powers in the area of social policy will begin to take on the challenge of an anti-one-size-fits-all policy and develop new policies like 'eight size do'. Moreover, regional and regime-specific actors can consider and analyse local people better than global powers sitting in million dollar high-tech skyscrapers in Washington. In his own words: "Together, they (regional and regime specific actors) can begin to challenge postmodern relativism about goals and OSFA (one size fits all) global norms concerning means. It may reinvigorate the vision of common human needs coupled with local contestation over need satisfiers" (Gough, 2004 p. 306).

The subsequent work about wellbeing undertaken by ESRC Research Group at the University of Bath indicates that such universal needs listed by Doyal and Gough's theory are not always welcomed by local people who do not see education (as an intermediate need), for example, as a need at all (Lavers, 2007). Moreover, the study that Lavers undertook in Ethiopia, reveals that residents in some of the areas in Ethiopia, values 'beautiful surroundings' more than daily food, even though food availability is limited at times. It shows that local goals and perceived basic needs may vary from time to time and place to another. Guillen Royo, Camfield and Velazco (2013) on the other hand exhibit that local and universal goals can be overlapped and serve towards the goal satisfaction without

interfering each other. However, it is still the case that local goals differ in different contexts resulting in the different understanding of life satisfaction.

5. DISCUSSION and an ISLAMIC CRITICISM OF UNIVERSAL NEEDS

The Human needs theory suggests that human beings must have two basic needs met in order to be 'a person'. One of them is critical autonomy, which is heavily criticised by others on the ground that it is very individualistic and western (Diener and Suh, 2000). The future works by Gough and his colleagues at the University of Bath acknowledge the critiques and insist that, "Autonomy is a universal psychological need but its expression is always contextual" (Devine, Camfield and Gough, 2006 p. 2). It still does not satisfy someone who asks if an absolute truth and a way of happiness cannot be put forward, what is the point people questioning the lifestyle around them.

There is a possibility, however, that people can also be happy by questioning their lives and reflecting upon themselves. Nevertheless, it does not mean that critical autonomy must exist in a happy person's life. Devine and his colleagues (2006) assert that individual autonomy and dependence on others can coexist and lead to a happy life. Even if it is true, the objection here is not to the idea of the impossibility of coexistence of these two psychological forms, it is to the idea that in the absence of critical autonomy, a person cannot be a person, therefore, happy since his/her one of the basic needs is unmet.

Islamic resources, for example, encourages and recommends thinking about life and questioning about 'ancestors' wrong practices' before embracing Islam (Abdel Haleem, 2004 p. 234). However, someone who is born into a Muslim family and raised as a Muslim does not have to be a thinker at all or question anything since he already has 'the wisdom' and 'truth' in the eyes of Islam. Therefore, it is not really questioning and forming your life on your own, but rather accommodating to factors such as personality, IQ level, family, religion, society pressure, hardships, circumstances... Although Gough acknowledges the critiques and answers the critiques in his way, Gough's argument about having a form of life and participating in it, is rather abstract, theoretical and ambiguous.

Moreover, it might be better for someone to take no responsibility for his actions, instead of giving all the responsibility to other people, such as parents or authorities, in the name of happiness. In Islamic teachings, there is a concept, Qadar (fate, fortune), which allows people to give up their burdens of questioning or formulating a life, and think that God determines everything. Hence, there is no reason to strive for better at some point. Although Gough's counter-argument to the critiques about critical autonomy clearly states "...this refers not to independence or non-reliance on others, but to self-regulation and volition... (Gough, 2004 p. 303), it does not explain or mention how much self-regulation someone can have and in which circumstances it is better to have more or less volition. As I mentioned above, it could be better for someone for his happiness to think that we have no or limited self-regulation or free will at times. For example, unexpected events or illnesses may hurt less and make people less miserable if they think that, they have limited choice in that matter and someone who is superior knows better than they do.

According to Islamic teachings, whatever you do, God is aware and therefore he has the right to intervene and interrupt in people's life anytime he wants. Concepts such as absolute freedom, the dignity of human being and sovereignty only belong to people are at least controversial in Islamic theory if not rejected.

I would argue that critical autonomy counted as a human need, is a vague and very secular concept. It is rather unfamiliar to the reality of many people and religions, especially to Islamic teachings. Critical autonomy puts all the burden and responsibility on the shoulders of human beings, whereas life, according to Islamic teachings, is full of unexpected and unexplainable events. Furthermore, as the Quran makes clear, everything -bad and good- comes from God (Abdel Haleem, 2004 p. 58). In this regard, it is inconceivable that we need to have critical autonomy or at least that someone could know how much we can have.

Gough argues that participation in some form of life is a goal of all people. Yet as we can see in the Muslim world, some women who prefer to stay at home and not attend any other form of life can nonetheless be happy. This raises an important question: Does staying at home count as a form of life? Or, does the form of life imply working or being active outside the house, similar to the idea of the western ideal for women?

As for Laver's (2007) work in Ethiopia, linking his findings to an Islamic approach to the subject, it could be argued that some Muslims believe that provision comes from God. Making someone's living never relies on a person's effort but God's will according to Islamic teachings; therefore, a Muslim may not see daily food as his basic need; rather being a good servant to his God and observing his daily prayers can be more important in the believer's eyes. This idea may stem from different verses from the Quran, which may implicitly indicate that regardless of the effort a person can make, Allah provides whatever he wishes to his servant in terms of income (Abdel Haleem, 2004 p. 37, 136). "God gives abundantly to whoever He will" (Abdel Haleem, 2004 p. 155). Taking account of what local people say their needs and goals are might be more legitimate in the eyes of Islamic understanding than forming a universal theory, which imposes on others.

A specifically framed list of needs or goals as made by different scholars such as Gough (1991) and Sen (1999), cannot be easily found in the Quran and even in Islamic tradition. In terms of the intermediate needs listed by Gough, Islamic teachings may not object to those characteristics in the list. However, what is understood by basic education and significant primary relationships, for example, might differ in an Islamic understanding. As long as the needs and goals of local people are not against Islamic principles such as having intimacy outside of marriage, Islamic tradition recognises these needs. Islamic principles, the things that allowed and not, are clearly set out in the Quran, thus, a person can neglect his basic need, let's say, daily food to fast and think that he is happy. However, the Islamic theory does not allow someone who is death-fasting. Similarly, any of the eleven intermediate needs listed by Gough can also be left unfulfilled in order to gain Allah's content if a person is fine with it.

As a result, human development, quality of life and human needs theories are inevitably vague and have conflicting necessities. As Islamic teachings and traditions acknowledge, the discussions of primary needs, essential wants and lists are subject to change considering values, beliefs and other non-materialistic quantities that we have as humans. Therefore, it is inevitable that people's subjective choices informed by their locations, cultures, beliefs and other non-material belongings have and will have an impact on their goals, needs and wants considering complex and variegated human phenomenon.

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