

UNDERSTANDING HUMAN NATURE: AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH FROM PHILOSOPHICAL AND RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

This study examines human nature from two complementary perspectives: philosophy and religion. Philosophy views humans as rational, moral, and existential beings capable of critical thinking and self-reflection. Religion, on the other hand, perceives humans as God's creation with spiritual dimensions and divine purposes. While these perspectives differ in their epistemological approaches philosophy relying on reason and religion on revelation they share common ground in recognizing human dignity, moral responsibility, and the search for meaning. This research explores the convergence and divergence between philosophical and religious understandings of humanity, demonstrating how both can be integrated to form a comprehensive view of human existence.

Keywords: *Philosophy of Human Religious Perspective, Human Nature, Rationality, Spirituality.*

INTRODUCTION

Human beings are unique and complex creatures. Beyond their physical aspects shared with other living beings, humans possess consciousness, rationality, and moral values that distinguish them from other creatures. Questions about human nature, origins, life purposes, and responsibilities in the world have been subjects of contemplation throughout civilization, from both philosophical and religious perspectives (Kattsoff, 2004).

Philosophy, as a discipline emphasizing rationality and critical thinking, attempts to answer questions about humanity through logical and analytical approaches. Philosophers since Ancient Greece have explored human existence, freedom, and morality through reason. Meanwhile, religion views humans as God's creation with spiritual duties and responsibilities in the world. From the religious viewpoint, human existence possesses meaning and purpose predetermined by the Creator.

These two perspectives philosophy and religion are often considered contradictory, yet they can complement each other in understanding human nature holistically. Philosophy provides space for critical thinking and moral value formulation based on reason, while religion offers spiritual foundations and transcendent purposes in human life.

Given the importance of humanity's position in life and the complexity of perspectives about it, it becomes compelling to examine how philosophy and religion interpret humanity, where their similarities and differences lie, and how they can be integrated to form a comprehensive view of human existence.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative approach with library research method, utilizing a comparative-integrative philosophical-theological analysis framework. The study is based on systematic literature review of primary and secondary sources related to philosophical and religious perspectives on human nature. Data were gathered through documentation study of classical philosophical texts (Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Sartre), religious scriptures (particularly the Quran), and scholarly works from both Western and Islamic traditions. The analysis proceeds through hermeneutical and comparative methods: (1) interpreting philosophical perspectives from Ancient Greek to contemporary thought; (2) examining religious viewpoints, particularly Islamic theology with references to other major religions; (3) identifying convergence and divergence patterns; and (4) synthesizing findings toward an integrative understanding that recognizes reason and revelation as complementary rather than contradictory sources of knowledge about human nature.

DISCUSSION

A. Philosophical Perspectives on Humanity

Philosophy views humans as beings with rational, moral, and existential dimensions. Humans are understood not merely as biological entities but as beings possessing self-awareness, capable of critical thinking, and reflecting on their existence. Therefore, in philosophy, humans become the center of attention in the search for life's meaning, values, and truth.

Since Ancient Greece, human thought has been a primary focus for philosophers. Socrates, for instance, emphasized the importance of self-knowledge (*know thyself*) as the beginning of wisdom. He believed humans must continuously examine life and scrutinize their values. This demonstrates that humans are self-aware beings responsible for their actions.

Plato, Socrates' student, viewed humans as a combination of body and soul. According to him, the soul is the most essential part of humanity, while the body is merely a temporary vessel. The soul has three parts: rational, emotional, and appetitive. For Plato, good humans are those whose rational soul controls the other two parts, indicating that human life should be guided by reason (Plato, 2002).

Unlike his teacher, Aristotle viewed humans as "*zoon politikon*" or social beings. He emphasized that humans can only achieve happiness (*eudaimonia*) by living ethically

within society. In other words, humans cannot live alone; they need others to develop morally and intellectually. This shows that human nature also lies in their relationships with others (Hadiwijono, 1999).

In modern philosophical tradition, René Descartes affirmed that thinking consciousness is the core of human existence. Through his famous statement, *cogito ergo sum* ("I think, therefore I am"), Descartes sharply separated body and mind, placing thought as the foundation of human existence. This shows that in modern philosophy, humans are seen as thinking subjects with individual consciousness.

Immanuel Kant expanded this view by emphasizing the importance of practical reason in human moral life. According to him, humans are autonomous beings who can determine moral laws for themselves through reason. He called humans "ends in themselves," not means to other ends. This view affirms humanity's high dignity in philosophical ethics.

Meanwhile, in existentialist philosophy, humans are viewed as free beings who must determine their own life's meaning. Jean-Paul Sartre stated that "existence precedes essence," meaning humans have no fixed meaning from the beginning but must create that meaning through choices and actions. This places freedom at the core of human existence (Aristoteles, 2001).

However, freedom also brings anxiety. Martin Heidegger, another existentialist, viewed humans as *Dasein*, beings who "exist in the world" and are conscious of their mortality. Consciousness of death makes humans unique compared to other creatures, and from this consciousness humans are required to live authentically, not merely following social currents.

Philosophy also discusses humans as historical beings, living in particular space and time. Hegel, for instance, saw humans as part of a historical process toward higher consciousness and freedom. In this framework, humans serve as agents of historical change and contribute to the development of collective consciousness.

In humanist philosophy, humans are considered the center of value and purpose in life. Humanism emphasizes human potential and ability to develop, think, and create culture. Humanism is not always anti-religious, but rejects views that demean human dignity or freedom for the sake of external authority.

Philosophy also examines humanity's relationship with the universe. Stoicism, an ancient philosophical school from Greco-Roman times, taught that humans must live in harmony with nature and accept fate wisely. In this teaching, humans are not masters of nature but part of a harmonious cosmic order. From this emerged views about a life full of virtue and self-control.

In the contemporary era, views about humanity have become increasingly complex. Postmodern philosophy challenges universal notions about humans, demonstrating that human identity is formed through language, culture, and power. Figures like Michel

Foucault see humans as historical constructions that continuously change according to social and political contexts (Sugiharto, 1996).

Despite many different views, all philosophical schools agree that humans are unique beings—possessing consciousness, freedom, and responsibility. Philosophy not only attempts to describe what humans are but also encourages humans to live reflectively and take responsibility for their choices.

Thus, philosophy provides space for humans to explore themselves deeply. It does not provide definitive answers but opens possibilities for sharper new questions. In this process, humans are required to continuously question and seek their own life's meaning.

Finally, the philosophical view of humanity is not something singular and final, but continues to develop with changing times and cultures. From Socrates to Foucault, from reason to existence, philosophy continues to interpret humans as seeking beings—seekers of truth, meaning, and identity in a constantly changing world.

B. Religious Perspectives on Humanity

From a religious perspective, humans are viewed as God's creation with a special position compared to other creatures. In Islam, for instance, humans are called *khalifah* (vicegerent) on earth (QS. Al-Baqarah: 30), meaning they have leadership duties and moral responsibility in maintaining and prospering the earth. Humans are created with two main elements: physical and spiritual. The body originates from clay, while the spirit is God's breath, as mentioned in the Quran (QS. As-Sajdah: 9). This view affirms that humans are not merely material beings but also spiritual beings with a direct relationship to the Creator (Cragg, 2000 in Abdullah, 1996).

Moreover, humans are given reason and heart as means to distinguish between right and wrong. In many religious traditions, such as Christianity and Judaism, humans are created in "the image and likeness of God," indicating the dignity and noble value inherent in humans. This concept shows that humans have the capacity to love, think, and make moral decisions, just as God is also loving and wise. In Eastern religions like Hinduism and Buddhism, humans are also viewed as beings on a spiritual journey toward highest consciousness or enlightenment. Reincarnation and karma are parts of an ethical and spiritual system showing that human life has purposes beyond worldly existence.

Religion emphasizes that human life is not coincidental but has purposes predetermined by God. In Islam, the purpose of human life is to worship Allah (QS. Adz-Dzariyat: 56), encompassing all aspects of life, not just ritual worship. Religion also teaches that humans have free will, but that freedom must be used within the bounds of goodness and moral responsibility. In religious view, humans are beings with both good potential and inclinations toward evil, and life is a test to determine who has the best deeds.

Thus, religion views humans holistically as physical and spiritual beings, possessing will, reason, conscience, and responsibility toward God, fellow humans, and nature.

Human position is very high but also full of trust. This view not only provides identity and life meaning but also guides humans to live morally, purposefully, and rely on eternal divine values (Nasution, 1985).

Beyond being viewed as noble creatures, religion also emphasizes that humans have potential to err and must be responsible for their choices. In Islam, the concept of sin and repentance is very important. Humans are given freedom to choose between good and evil, but each choice has moral and spiritual consequences. God is Most Forgiving, but repentance must come from sincere awareness and regret (QS. Az-Zumar: 53). This view places humans in a dynamic position—not perfect beings but beings who continuously learn and improve themselves.

Therefore, religious perspectives on humanity are very rich and multidimensional. It encompasses aspects of human origins, life purposes, moral responsibilities, social relations, even the meaning of suffering and death. Through revelation and teachings of prophets or spiritual teachers, religion guides humans to recognize their true selves, live life with values, and ultimately return to God in a pure and complete state. In religious light, humans are not merely living beings on earth but also pilgrims journeying toward the hereafter.

C. Convergence and Divergence

Discussion about humanity is a central theme in both philosophy and religion. Both attempt to understand human nature, purpose, and position in the universe. Despite having different approaches and epistemological frameworks, philosophy and religion both recognize that humans are not merely biological beings but unique rational, moral, and spiritual beings. Their starting points differ: philosophy uses reason as the main tool for seeking truth, while religion is grounded in revelation and faith. However, they are not in absolute opposition, as there are many areas of human understanding that become meeting grounds between philosophy and religion.

From philosophical perspective, humans are seen as subjects who think, are conscious, and capable of making autonomous decisions. Philosophy emphasizes freedom of thought and use of reason to understand oneself and the world. This view is strongly rooted since Ancient Greece, especially in the thoughts of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. They viewed humans as rational animals with the duty to know themselves and live life based on virtue.

Meanwhile, from religious perspective, humans are God's creation given responsibility as *khalifah* on earth. They have spiritual souls originating from God and their lives aim to serve and return to the Creator. Religion emphasizes that human life is not solely for worldly interests but also to achieve salvation in the hereafter. This view is clearly seen in Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and other religious traditions.

One convergence point between philosophy and religion is the view about noble potential possessed by humans. Philosophy acknowledges that humans have rational

capacity to distinguish between good and evil, while religion affirms that humans are endowed with conscience and revelatory guidance to choose goodness. In this regard, both agree that humans are ethical beings responsible for their actions.

Both philosophy and religion also agree that humans are social beings. Aristotle called humans *zoon politikon*, beings who can only develop in social life. Similarly, religion emphasizes the importance of human relationships, such as in Islamic teaching about *habl min an-nas* and Christian teaching about love for neighbors. Values such as justice, compassion, and social responsibility are common foundations upheld by both.

However, there are fundamental differences in knowledge sources used. Philosophy relies on reason and experience to understand humans and reality, while religion sources from revelation and divine authority. This difference causes divergent approaches in answering big questions about human existence, origins, and purposes. For philosophy, answers to such questions must be achieved through critical dialogue and rational reflection, while religion provides them through sacred texts and spiritual traditions (Hick, 2001).

Regarding human origins, for instance, philosophy tends to be open to various theories, from materialism, idealism, to existentialism. Philosophers like Sartre even reject fixed human essence, stating that humans create themselves through actions. Conversely, religion states that humans are created by God with specific intentions and purposes, such as in Islam which states humans are created to worship (QS. Adz-Dzariyat: 56).

Modern philosophy also emphasizes human freedom in determining life's meaning. Sartre and other existentialists state that life is absurd if we don't fill it with meaning we construct ourselves. Religion, while acknowledging human free will, still provides value frameworks and purposes sourced from divine will. Human freedom in religion is bounded by *shariah* or absolute moral law.

Another convergence point is in understanding human dignity. Both acknowledge that humans have special positions in natural order. Humanist philosophy elevates humans as centers of value and freedom, while religion states that humans are the noblest creatures because given reason, trust, and spirit from God. This view equally rejects dehumanization and human exploitation for power or economic interests.

In understanding suffering, differences reemerge. Philosophy tends to see suffering as consequence of human existential condition or individual and societal moral errors. Nietzsche, for instance, rejected meaningless suffering and called for humans to create their own values. Religion, on the other hand, sees suffering as tests, means of sin purification, or paths toward closeness with God. In this case, suffering is not always bad but can bring spiritual growth (Al-Farabi, 2008).

However, both philosophy and religion teach the importance of self-reflection as path toward more meaningful life. Socrates stated that "the unexamined life is not worth

living," while religion recommends *muhاسبah* (self-introspection) as way to improve life quality and relationship with God. Both encourage humans not to live carelessly but with awareness, responsibility, and noble purposes.

Another difference lies in views about life's end. Philosophy is often speculative or even agnostic regarding afterlife. Some schools consider death as end of consciousness, while religion firmly states the existence of afterlife, heaven, hell, and judgment day. This belief provides additional meaning to human moral actions during life.

Despite conceptual differences, philosophy and religion need not negate each other. Many great thinkers throughout history like Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Thomas Aquinas, and Al-Ghazali attempted to harmonize reason and revelation. They believed philosophy can help understand religious teachings more deeply, and that faith does not contradict reason but complements each other.

In modern times, dialogue between philosophy and religion becomes increasingly important to answer existential crises, moral degradation, and spiritual emptiness. Both have potential to jointly guide humans in understanding themselves and constructing dignified life order. Philosophy offers freedom of thought and deep reflection, while religion provides direction, meaning, and inner strength.

Criticism of religion often emerges from modern philosophy circles for being considered dogmatic, but conversely, philosophy is also criticized for being too speculative and nihilistic. Therefore, convergence between them lies in acknowledgment of human needs for meaning, values, and truth. Both religion and philosophy, in their pure forms, attempt to answer humanity's deepest longing for goodness and wisdom.

Philosophy teaches us to question, while religion teaches us to believe and submit. However, both can unite in efforts to deepen human meaning. Questioning need not eliminate faith, and believing does not mean rejecting thinking. In this context, truth seekers are those who can make reason and revelation two lights that illuminate each other.

In education, combination of philosophy and religion also becomes important foundation for forming whole humans. Philosophy forms critical and logical thinking, while religion forms character and moral orientation. If both are separated, education can become shallow or spiritually dry. However, if united, intelligent humans are born who are not only smart but also wise and moral.

Ultimately, both philosophy and religion are human efforts to understand and live life meaningfully. Philosophy offers critical questions and reflection about reality, while religion offers transcendent answers and direction. Both can meet in intellectual honesty and spiritual humility.

Their differences should not become sources of conflict but spaces for enriching dialogue. Humans as meaning seekers need philosophical depth and religious tranquility.

In increasingly complex and rapidly changing life, dialogue between faith and reason becomes more important than ever before.

The convergence point between philosophy and religion lies in their shared desire: understanding humans as beings with purpose, dignity, and responsibility. Their differences are not to be opposed but to be explored and studied, to create more complete understanding of human existence itself.

CONCLUSION

Understanding humanity is a central topic discussed in both philosophy and religion. From philosophical perspective, humans are viewed as beings possessing reason, self-awareness, and capacity for critical thinking. Philosophy attempts to explore human nature with rational and logical approaches, seeking universal meaning of existence and human life purposes.

Meanwhile, religion provides more spiritual views emphasizing that humans are God's creation with divine purposes. In religion, humans are not only viewed as physical and rational beings but also spiritual beings given responsibility as khalifah on earth and obliged to worship the Creator.

The convergence point between philosophy and religion in understanding humanity lies in recognition that humans are unique beings with great potential. Both agree that humans possess consciousness and moral capacity distinguishing them from other creatures. However, their methods and focuses differ; philosophy uses reason and reflection, while religion uses revelation and faith.

Fundamental differences emerge in how both perspectives explain human origins and purposes. Philosophy tends to open space for free reasoning and criticism, while religion places divine revelation as main source of truth. This makes religious views more dogmatic, while philosophy is more open to debate and view revision.

Thus, complete understanding of humanity requires dialogue and synergy between philosophy and religion. Both complement each other, where philosophy provides critical and reflective thinking framework, while religion provides higher meaning and purpose.

In conclusion, philosophical and religious perspectives together provide pictures of humans as complex beings, consisting not only of physical and rational aspects but also spiritual and moral dimensions.

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