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The Divine Laws of Charity: The Islamic Solution to Consumerism and Its Consequences

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Abstract

In contradiction with the divine laws of charity imposed by Allah (SWT) on the whole universe, money in the social flow of consumerism runs from the poor consumers to the rich companies and banks. The increase of intensity of the natural disasters linked to global warming, could just be a louder global warning from Allah (SWT) through nature in order to urge us to obey the divine laws of charity and change our lifestyle from consumerism to charity-based societies. The recent coronavirus pandemic could also be another global warning from The Merciful (SWT) to force humanity to change the life style based on consumerism. In order to reduce consumerism and its consequences on human health and nature, some people are already adopting “minimalist” lifestyles. The most important benefits of this way of life are reducing waste to help the environment, decreasing global carbon dioxide emissions and saving money and time used for excess consumption for charity-based activities.

Keywords: *islam, divine science, consumerism, global warming, coronavirus pandemic*

A. Introduction

To understand the universe, scientists around the planet have tried to find some universal laws such as statements that describe or predict a range of natural phenomena in the universe. In the perspective, Allah (SWT) exhorts Muslims to observe and study the universe in order to find some marks of His signs. For that reason, many verses of the Quran ask Muslims to study nature, and this has been interpreted to mean encouragement for scientific inquiry. In this perspective, my efforts (Ijtihad) in the first part of the investigation is to search for the Quranic verses that could lead me to the Divine Science.

1. The First Divine Law of Charity

Regarding the Quranic verse: *“And the heaven He has raised high, and has set up a Balance”* (Quran; 55: 7) (Al Hilali Muhammad Taqui-ud-Din and Muhsin Khan Muhammad 1996), Allah (SWT) created earth as a sphere and the sun heats equatorial regions more than polar regions. As a consequence, some regions in the planet are abundant in energy and other regions are deficient in energy. This uneven distribution of solar radiation is responsible for the imbalance of energy around the planet. According to this first Quranic verse, one can understand that Allah (SWT) has imposed some divine laws in order to set up a balance on earth. Because He is “The Impartial Judge” and “The Wise One” (SWT), this equilibrium is established by driving matter and energy to move from places on earth which have “concentrated” energy to regions on earth with “diluted” energy. This divine commandment is commonly known by physicists as the 2nd law of thermodynamics. Indeed, this law states that heat can be transferred only from higher temperatures to lower temperatures, fluids can flow only from higher pressures to lower pressures and rain falls from the sky to earth. Since this law is related to flows in nature, this aspect of thermodynamics is defined in this investigation as the 1st universal law of dynamic systems and can simply be written as:

$$E_{High} (\text{concentrated}) \xrightarrow{\text{displacement}} E_{low} (\text{diluted}) \quad (1)$$

Moreover, considering energy as a richness and based on the Quranic verse *“The seven heavens and the earth and all that is therein, glorify Him and there is not a thing but glorifies His Praise. But you understand not their glorification”* (Quran; 17:44) (Al Hilali Muhammad Taqui-ud-Din and Muhsin Khan Muhammad 1996), flows in the dynamic earth are therefore moving from a region rich (concentrated) in energy to a region poor (diluted) in energy. My spiritual vision of this physical phenomena tells me that “The Just One” (SWT) established a balance in the universe by imposing on places on earth rich in energy provided by Him using the sun, to share part of their richness with the regions of earth poor in energy. Consequently, every single space rich in energy is glorifying Allah (SWT) by sharing part of its richness (energy) in order to respect the balance imposed by Allah (SWT) on earth. From this spiritual interpretation of movements in nature, the 1st universal law of dynamic systems is defined in this paper as the 1st divine law of charity imposed by Allah (SWT) on the universe. As a result, equation (1) of dynamic systems becomes:

$$(2) \quad \text{Rich (in energy)} \xrightarrow{\text{Divine Flow of Charity}} \text{Poor (in energy)}$$

2. The Second Divine Law of Charity

Secondly, from this second Quranic verse: “And there is not a thing but that with Us are its depositories, and We do not send it down except according to a known measure.” (Quran, 15:21; *Al Hilali Muhammad Taqui-ud-Din and Muhsin Khan Muhammad 1996*), everything transported in the universe has also a fixed measure determined by “The All Authoritative One” (SWT). Therefore, natural flows obey Allah (SWT) by always moving from places of “rich energy” to places of “poorer in energy”, and additionally their quantity and timing are also predestined by a second divine commandment. For example, according to the Quranic verse “And we sent down from the sky water (rain) in (due) measure.” (Quran; 23:18; *Al Hilali Muhammad Taqui-ud-Din and Muhsin Khan Muhammad 1996*), a fixed amount of rain or snow (richness) that falls, and its timing are predetermined by Allah (SWT). This is described as 2nd divine law of charity of the Divine Science.

It is well known that a flow is mathematically proportional to its driving force and inversely proportional to its resistance and the following qualitative general equation of dynamic systems could be utilized:

$$(3) \quad \text{Flow} \propto \frac{\text{Driving Force}}{\text{Resistance}}$$

In order to relate this general equation to the Quranic verse (15:21), the difference in energy between a region in earth having high energy (E_{High}) and a region having low energy (E_{Low}) is considered as the “driving force” of any natural process and, the fluid or solid between these two regions presents a resistance “R” to the flow under consideration. Based on Equation (2), the predetermined flow of energy transported could be qualitatively represented by:

$$(4) \quad \text{Flow} \left(\frac{\text{Amount of mater or energy}}{\text{time}} \right) \propto \frac{(E_{\text{High}} - E_{\text{Low}})}{R}$$

Equation (4) is defined in this paper as the qualitative approach of the 2nd universal law of dynamic systems that deals with the amount of matter or energy to be transferred. In concordance with the 1st divine law of charity, Equation (4) is therefore the 2nd Divine Law of Charity.

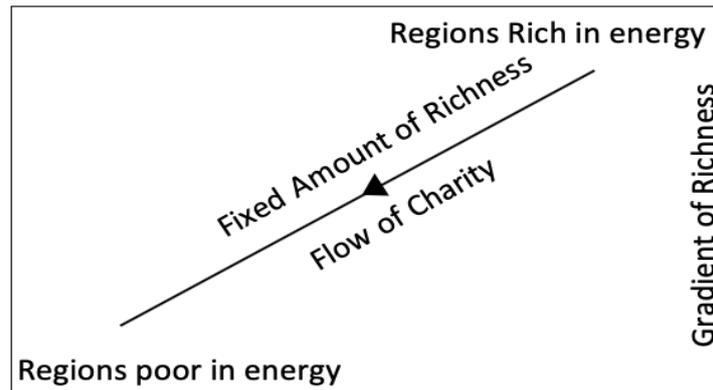


Figure 1: The Laws of the Divine Science (Author’s Figure).

In conclusion, the first Quranic verse (55:7) taught me that in order to create a balance and harmony in nature, Allah (SWT) urges the regions rich in energy to give part of richness to the regions poor in energy. This is described in this book as 1st divine law of charity of the Divine Science. From the second Quranic verse (15:21), which is described as 2nd divine law of charity of the Divine Science, Allah (SWT) fixes the amount of the matter or energy to be flowing from a rich region to a poor region (Figure 1). Similar to nature, divine laws of charity for Muslims are also indicated in the Quran. There is therefore a complete harmony between the signs of Allah (SWT) in nature, scientifically described by universal laws and His words in the Holy Quran. However, while nature is created to obey the divine laws of charity, human beings are born with the ability to think and the freedom to obey or not the Divine commandments. Since consumption is closely related to selfishness and opposite concept to charity, this social activity and its consequences are investigated in this paper.

B. Marketing, Loans and Consumerism

“And man has been created weak (lacking firmness to control his vain desires and passions)”

(Quran; 4:28) (Al Hilali Muhammad Taqui-ud-Din and Muhsin Khan Muhammad 1996)

Based on this Quranic verse, striving to satisfy physiological needs, security, connection to other human beings, esteem and reaching one’s full potential are the driving forces behind corresponding social and professional activities. For example, as shown in Figure 2, in terms of esteem, students transition through a social flow of education to prepare for their career. In their quest to achieve security in life, people follow the social flow for professional activities. To meet their physiological needs, people engage in the “flow of consumption” that leads them to shopping and buying, and they spend time with family members, friends and neighbors for the

flow of love and belonging. Finally, according to self-actualization, individuals who are highly creative demonstrate the desire to resolve dichotomies inherent in ultimate contradictions, such as life versus death and freedom versus determinism (McLeod, S. A. 2018)



Figure 2: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (McLeod, S. A. 2018)

The application of the universal law of dynamic systems for social flows of any social or professional activity could be represented as:

$$(5) \quad \text{Social flow} \propto \frac{(\text{motivation "Driving Force"})}{(\text{Obstacle "Resistance"})}$$

In this social flow of consumption, people are motivated to spend their money in order to buy required goods, defined as “utilities”. On the other hand, the amount of funds spent depends on personal income. In general, when income is lower, less spending occurs. Therefore, the personal income could be seen as a “conductor” for shopping and, by consequence, the inverse of income could be interpreted as the resistance to shopping. Finally, for any shopping activity, the flow of consumption (FC_1) could be qualitatively described by Equation (6) (Dadach Zin Eddine, 2019):

$$(6) \quad \text{Flow of Consumption } (FC_1) \propto \frac{\text{Utility}}{\left(\frac{1}{\text{income}}\right)}$$

“O children of Adam, take your adornment while praying, and eat and drink, but waste not by extravagance. Certainly, He likes not those who commit extravagance.”(Quran; 7:31) (Al Hilali Muhammad Taqui-ud-Din and Muhsin Khan Muhammad 1996)

In order to compete in this consumption-based economy, companies started to focus on using advertisements for their products as a tactic to influence the mind of the public, and to encourage them to spend more money. By influencing the

consumers' preferences and behavior to become impulse buyers instead of only buying necessities (utility). As a result, marketing increases the driving force for buying and by consequence the flow of consumption will become the flow of overconsumption as described by Equation (7) (Dadach Zin Eddine, 2019):

$$(7) \quad \text{Flow of overconsumption}(FC_2) \propto \frac{(\text{Utility} + \text{Marketing})}{\left(\frac{1}{\text{income}}\right)}$$

“Then on that Day you shall be asked about the delights” (Quran; 102: 8) (Al Hilali Muhammad Taqui-ud-Din and Muhsin Khan Muhammad 1996).

Moreover, loans were introduced by banks and companies as an “artificial income”, thereby falsely boosting disposable income of consumers. As a result, some statistics show that we wear 20% of our clothes 80% of the time. That means that many of us have closets full of clothes that we no longer like or no longer fit us properly (Becker Joshua, 2020). The corresponding flow of consumerism could be qualitatively described by Equation (8) (Dadach Zin Eddine, 2019):

$$(8) \quad \text{Flow of consumerism } (FC_3) \propto \frac{\text{Utility} + \text{Marketing}}{\left(\frac{1}{\text{income} + \text{Loan}}\right)}$$

C. Consequences of Consumerism

The fundamental reason for consumerism is the common belief that we are buying comfort and pleasure and ultimately happiness. The sad reality is that the search for comfort and pleasure in this way has serious consequences for humanity such as anxiety, depression and loneliness of the soul. For example, the research paper "The High Price of Materialism" (Domagalski Theresa and Kasser Tim 2002) shows that people who manage their lives around extrinsic goals such as product acquisition are likely to experience greater unhappiness in relationships, poorer moods and more psychological problems. Closer to us, Prophet Mohamed (PBUH) voices warnings about the consequences of being attached to material possessions: “Be happy, and hope for what will please you. By God, I am not afraid that you will be poor, but I fear that worldly wealth will be bestowed upon you as it was bestowed upon those who lived before you. So you will compete amongst yourselves for it, as they competed for it and it will destroy you as it did them”(Quranic Definitions and Hadith Al-muflihûn, ridwân).

Consumerism, enhanced by marketing and loans, could be explained by the fact that the goal of companies and banks is always to maximize their profits in order to stay competitive. However, in contradiction with the Divine Science imposed by

Allah (SWT) on the whole universe (figure 1), money in the flow of consumerism runs from the poor consumers to the rich companies and banks (Figure 3). Indeed, after being influenced by marketing to buy more than is needed, it's common to become trapped in a debt cycle of repaying companies credit debt for goods which may even have become worn or worthless. The other results of this self-centered human tendency are extensive: the increasing gap between poor and rich, the rise of poverty worldwide, the human emigration flows to rich countries, crimes and wars. Moreover, every day, new indication of our increasing effect on the environment is developing.

“And do not do mischief on the earth after it has been set in order.”
 (Quran; 7:56) (Al Hilali Muhammad Taqui-ud-Din and Muhsin Khan
 Muhammad 1996)

Based on this Quranic verse, the increasing amount of carbon dioxide emissions caused mainly by consumerism is also disrupting the chemical order imposed by Allah (SWT) on the atmosphere. This chemical disturbance is causing natural disasters because it is becoming more difficult for nature to reach a new balanced state (Figure 3).

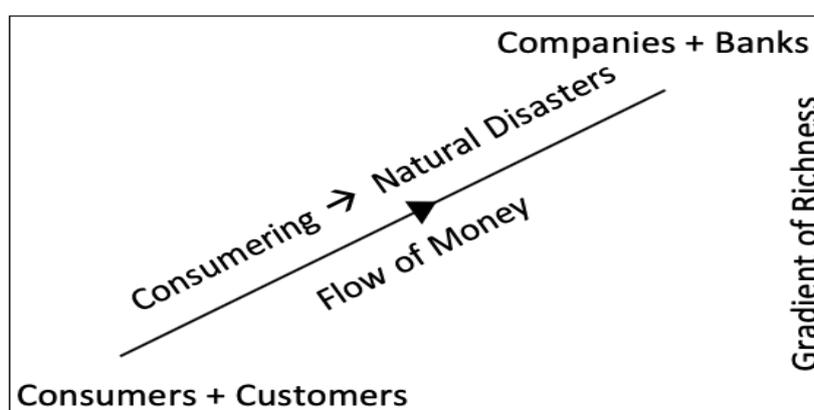


Figure 3: Consumerism and natural disasters (Authors' figure).

In this topic, scientists at the COP 21 have warned us that the outcomes of global warming include increased risk of drought and increased intensity of storms, including tropical cyclones with higher wind speeds, a wetter Asian monsoon, and, possibly, more intense mid-latitude storms (Thompson Andrea, 2014).

D. From Consumerism to Charity-based Societies

“Evil (sins and disobedience of Allah, etc.) has appeared on land and sea because of what the hands of men have earned (by oppression and evil deeds, etc.), that Allah may make them taste a part of that which

they have done, in order that they may return (by repenting to Allah, and begging His Pardon)”(Quran; 30:41) (Al Hilali Muhammad Taqui-ud-Din and Muhsin Khan Muhammad 1996)

In reality, this increasing intensity of natural disasters could just be a global warning as a bitter medicine from The Merciful (SWT) through nature in order to cure our plague called “consumerism”. Indeed, looking for solutions to global warming, the IPCC’s report indicates that behavioral changes could reduce energy demand by up to 20% in the short term and by up to 50% of present levels by mid-century (Thompson Andrea, 2014). The significance of these statistics suggests that future events on the planet depend more on our daily attitudes than on the advancement of technologies. Therefore, finding only technical solutions to carbon dioxide emissions will never be the answer to consumerism.

“And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me”(Quran; 2:143)(Al Hilali Muhammad Taqui-ud-Din and Muhsin Khan Muhammad 1996).

According to this Quranic verse, the wisdom that will save humanity is to obey the Divine Laws of Charity of the Merciful (SWT) who created us and certainly knows what is best for us. It is time to shift from consumerism to charity-based societies. This is now supported by the recent coronavirus pandemic that could be another global warning from The Merciful (SWT) to force humanity to change the life style based on consumerism. Indeed, the coronavirus pandemic has obliged countries around the world to scale down economic activities. As a positive result, the global carbon dioxide emissions have significantly decreased (Tollefson Jeff 2020). In order to reduce consumerism and its consequences on human health and nature, some people are already adopting “minimalist” lifestyles (Becker Joshua, 2020). The most important benefits of this way of life are reducing waste to help the environment, decreasing global carbon dioxide emissions and saving money and time used for excess consumption for charity-based activities.

E. Conclusion

The most important lesson to learn is that Allah (SWT) used nature as a universal school in order to show us that His science is based on charity with the goal to create balance and harmony. For the same purpose, the same divine laws of charity for Muslims are indicated in the Quran and The Prophet (PBUH)’s sayings. There is therefore a complete harmony between the signs of Allah (SWT) in nature, scientifically described by universal laws and His words in the Holy Quran. On the other hand, consumerism, enhanced by marketing and loans, is explained by the fact

that the goal of companies and banks is always to maximize their profits in order to stay competitive. However, in contradiction with the divine laws of charity imposed by Allah (SWT) on the whole universe, money in the social flow of consumerism runs from the poor consumers to the rich companies and banks. The increase of intensity of the natural disasters linked to global warming, could just be a louder global warning from Allah (SWT) through nature in order to urge us to obey the divine laws of charity and change our lifestyle from consumerism to charity-based societies. The recent coronavirus pandemic could be another global warning from The Merciful (SWT) to force humanity to change the life style based on consumerism. In order to reduce consumerism and its consequences on human health and nature, some people are already adopting “minimalist” lifestyles. The most important benefits of this way of life are reducing waste to help the environment, decreasing global carbon dioxide emissions and saving money and time used for excess consumption for charity-based activities.

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