

Character Descriptions in the Qur'an: An Example of the Ostrich Paradox

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Abstract

The basic meaning of the word “paradox” is opposing thoughts; it consists of the Greek words "money" (counter) and "doxa" (thought-intention). However, this meaning has evolved over time; it is contradiction and contrast. One aspect of life is the illogical discrepancy between facts and what is done. To be more specific, it is the opposition between what a person should do and what he or she does. This situation is associated with the "three monkey syndrome," a social insensitivity problem in terms of behavior similarity. Paradoxes occupy humanity as a line, causing social and personal problems. They are reflected in life as serious problems in terms of both deceiving oneself and having wrong attitudes toward others. The solution to such paradoxes is to try to live without avoiding the facts, which is accomplished through knowledge and reason.

Keywords: ostrich, facts, interest, weaknesses, paradox.

1. Introduction

Concepts such as character, personality, and temperament psychologically define people. Although there are differences in meaning, these concepts generally describe the material, spiritual, and psychological characteristics of human beings. Temperament is an innate characteristic; conversely, personality is acquired (Katipoğlu, 2012). Character, which consists of a mixture of temperament and personality, expresses both innate and acquired characteristics (Karabulut, 2007).

Today, there are many theories that deal with human character. While some have lengthy histories, the majority were developed by scientists in the last one to two centuries. Methods of determining

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character according to physiognomy go back thousands of years (Demir, 2017b). The enneagram, which determines the character of a person according to aspects of his or her body, emotions, and mind, has also been taught for thousands of years (Karabulut, 2007). Today, there are many methods of personality analysis, such as NLP, characteristics organized according to colors, and identity defined according to the senses of sight, hearing, and touch. One method divides people into "A-type" and "B-type" personalities, according to a theory put forth by Freidman and Rosenman in the late 1960s that was based on the concept of stress (Altan, 2017). In the five-factor personality model, there are five characteristics: extroverted, harmonious, responsible, emotionally balanced, and open to development (Subaş, 2017).

The Quran is different from these theories. As divine word, it offers a direction and roadmap for all occasions. Allah Ta'ala, who created man from soil and carried him to a very different dimension by giving him characteristics such as spirit, mind, and emotion, has arranged the human character in an open way. This can cause positive and negative emotions to interfere with life. Many social and personal problems in today's world interfere with life, as a result causing distress and stress and various physical symptoms. Based on the divine truth that "We will certainly test you" (Al-Baqarah 2:155), human beings are destined to experience many challenging events throughout their lives. These tests, which manifest in forms such as fear and hunger and dualities such as profit/loss, sickness/health, and wealth/poverty can be considered preparatory stages for eternal life. Humans gain value from the will, belief, patience, and gratitude displayed in response to these tests. In fact, death consists of the rebirth of the person through the development of these values.

The highs and lows one experiences between birth and death demonstrate their stance in the face of adversity. Paradoxes emerge from events that push the limits of the mind. The basis of the ostrich paradox is that the human mind, which is created with the ability to make sense of life through techniques such as cause-and-effect and analysis/synthesis can act against its own interest in ways contrary to these abilities. Many philosophers, sociologists, and psychologists have produced various solutions to a wide array of human problems. Religion has also been a source of human physics, metaphysics, sociology, and psychology. Very clear conclusions about human behavior can be drawn from the hundreds of works written on this subject. However, each society and person's stance on reading about and understanding such events is different, and one's environment can radically change their evaluation of such topics. In the present work, two

important problems related to human behavior and the view of the Qur'an are discussed using historical and current data. Because the two problems are indicators of other hidden and open issues, in this study, within the scope of a qualitative method, documentary scanning and modeling methods are used, as well as verifiable scientific data.

2. Conceptual Framework – Character in Qur'an

In the Qur'an, people are described according to their sociological, psychological, and biological characteristics (Kahraman, 2015). In these narratives, many aspects of human beings that are not immediately recognizable are explained directly or through analogies. In some verses, a general image of people throughout history is offered through examples belonging to certain periods and given names. In this respect, it is appropriate to call the Qur'an a complete map of the human character (Özdemir, 2019). For example, the pharaoh is an arrogant type. Samiri is a cunning and utilitarian type. Both the pharaoh and Samiri are bad characters. In the Qur'an, different communities are also mentioned, such as believers and unbelievers, who are known for certain behaviors. When transitioning from communities to individuals, important prototypes emerge. Some are pharaohs, some are Samiri, some are Abu Bakr and Omar. People of all ages can easily find universal behavioral patterns described in the Qur'an. The line "everyone exhibits the necessity of their own character" underscores that the Quran gives hundreds of character examples. In the Qur'an's own words, "an example of everything" has been given to the people. These parables are to direct the mind and show how life should be lived.

There is a personality type exhibited by the behavior illustrated in the verse "Woe to those who pray," which appears in the chapter of Mahogany. This type is selfish and hypocritical. "The man who came running from one end of the city" in Surah Yasin is a believer who has faith in Allah and the Last Day and lives according to it, so much so that he does not hesitate to sacrifice his life for this cause. This person, called Habib Neccar, is actually a prototype for believers who exhibit similar behavior. Despite all the warnings, the pharaoh, who does not compromise on what he says, is arrogant and sets fire to his surroundings when things happen that he does not want; he is a prototype in the opposite direction. He is cruel, an infidel, and his kind has appeared throughout history. Karun is a rich but selfish and stingy man, an ungrateful type who prototypically attaches his wealth to himself. Conversely, the pharaoh's fatwaist, Haman, is a hypocritical type who

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supports the continuation of the pharaoh's reign and uses religious arguments to support persecution.

In the Qur'an, nine main characters are mentioned in terms of the ability to develop either balanced or extreme aspects of the body, emotion, and mind, the three basic characteristics of human beings. In Al-Fatihah, the following is written: "Guide us to the right path; the way of those whom you have blessed." This describes people who use features of their body, emotions, and mind in a balanced way. It represents avoidance of forbidden desires by eating and drinking halal foods as much as one needs, in order to retain balance in the body. Being in balance in terms of emotions is the ability to keep emotions such as love, hate, and jealousy away from extremes. Balance in terms of the mind means staying away from thoughts that destroy human existence. In the following verses, three main character types who go to extremes in terms of the body, emotions, and mind are described with the phrase "Not in the way of those who are angry at themselves." With the phrase "Not the way of the deviants," three main character types are described who go astray by not developing aspects of their bodies, emotions, and minds. The believer's character stands out in terms of being pious, patient, and steadfast. Ungrateful, cruel, polytheistic types are seen in the example of the disbeliever. The hypocrite has characteristics of both the infidel and those who are cruel and is more dangerous than either. Many inhuman behaviors such as lying, slander, injustice, violence, killing, betrayal of trust, breaking one's word, and excessive self-indulgence are seen in a complete hypocrite.

In Surat Al-Waqi'ah, the three groups of people described are the "muqarrabin," the people of the Right, and the people of the Left (Demir, 2017a). At the beginning of the surah, the words "ashab al-maymanati" are used instead of the people of the Right, and the words "ashab al-mashamati" are used instead of the people of the Left. Those who are in Paradise are called the people of the Right. Those with the highest degrees in Paradise are called "muqarrabin." Those who are in Hell are called the companions of the people of the Left (Al-Waqi'ah 56:1-10). These three groups of people are classified in terms of the blessings and food they will receive in the hereafter. The "muqarrabin" will receive the most beautiful blessings and rewards. They will be in the paradise of Naim, and sit on thrones adorned with jewels. Immortal youths will circulate among them. They will drink drinks that do not cause headaches and intoxication of mind. They will eat not just any fruit but the fruits they like and choose. They will be fed with flesh of fowls. Pure maidens with most beautiful eyes will be with them and they will hear only good words. These "muqarrabin"

are the chosen ones of blessing, the elite of the believers (Al-Waqi'ah 56:11-26). The people of the Right also consist of people who will enter Paradise. However, the blessings given to them are different from those given to the "muqarrab." The spiritual aspects of the blessings given to "muqarrabin" predominate. Thrones made of jewelry, the love of children, select fruits, flesh of fowls (which is the most delicious meat), and pure maidens with most beautiful eyes like hidden pearls are blessings that appeal not only to the material but also the soul. It is noteworthy that the blessings given to the people of the Right have material characteristics. Since they cannot develop their spiritual aspects as much as the "muqarrab," the blessings they will receive in Paradise are according to their level. These blessings are cherry blossoms, banana trees packed full of fruit, shaded water flowing continuously, and beautiful mattresses (Al-Waqi'ah 56:26-40). Conversely, the people of the Left are the people of Hell who are ungrateful for blessings and deny those who give them, even though they live in abundance in the world. They drink boiling water, their food is the oleander tree, and their place is in the shadow of black smoke. The reason they are tortured in this way is that they do not recognize the Almighty Creator, who created them and everything they own, and are not grateful for the various blessings bestowed upon them (Al-Waqi'ah 56:41-56).

2.1 General Human Character in the Qur'an

In the divine book, we see that people are generally categorized as believers, unbelievers, polytheists, or hypocrites. In addition, other special titles emerge for believers and unbelievers exhibiting different behaviors, such as cruel, hypocritical, patient, and "muttaki" (Kaya, 2002). There are also verses that give information about the common temperament of all people, such as those who are hasty, ambitious, or stingy. These characteristics do not represent desirable behaviors. In terms of the freedom of a person who can exhibit both sides of such behavior, these features are a test element (Sert, 2003). "God wants to lighten from you [your heavy burdens]: [because] man was created weak" (An-Nisa 4:28). "[Despite this,] they ascribed a piece of their servants to Him. Indeed, man is clearly ungrateful" (Az-Zukhruf 43:15). "Truly man is ungrateful to his Lord" (Al-'Aadiyaat 100:6). "He gave you everything you wanted. If you try to count the blessing of Allah, you will not be able to count [them]. The truth is that man is very cruel, very ungrateful" (Ibrahim 14:34). "No; truly human, rebuke" (Al-'Alaq 96:6). Indeed, man was created

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“selfish and ambitious” (Al-Ma’arij 70:19). “If you had the treasures of my Lord's mercy, you would be stingy for fear that they will be consumed by spending. Humans are very stingy” (Al-Isra’ 17:100). “When you are afflicted in the sea, all the idols you invoke besides Allah are invisible. But when He saves you and brings you to the land safely” (Al-Isra’ 17:67), “sometimes people want evil as if they want good, and people are too hasty” (Al-Isra’ 17:11).

Being hasty, ungrateful, cruel, or stingy, like many features of human beings, are states and attitudes that manifest themselves in life that can become distinctive features of one’s personality. These features, which give people negative experiences, can become very useful when people use their will positively. Then, ungratefulness turns into gratitude, stinginess into generosity, and cruelty into justice (İşliyen, 2018).

2.2 Animal-Human Comparisons in the Qur'an

2.2.1 Book Loaded Donkey

“The situation of those who are held responsible for the Torah but do not give it its due is similar to the situation of a donkey carrying huge books. How bad is the example of the people who deny the signs of Allah! Allah does not guide the wrongdoers.” “O Jews! If you claim that you are the friends of Allah, not other people, and if you are true to your word, then wish for death!” However, they will never want death because of what they have done before. Allah knows the wrongdoers very well. “Know that death, from which you keep running away, will surely come and strike you. Then you will be returned to God, who knows the intelligible and the [un]intelligible, and He will inform you of what you used to do” (Al-Jumu’ah 62:5-8).

It is in the Torah, which is the divine book that is told, in which the analogy of a donkey loaded with books appears (Sayar, 2000). However, the Torah points out the dangers faced by those who read the Qur'an, and like the Torah, fall into the same situation. The metaphor reveals a valid provision for every person of the time. In this analogy, explained in particular detail are those who are institutionalized as clergy and design a higher life based on their faith, and those who underestimate the basic rules of religion because they do not want to give up.

2.2.2 Wild Donkeys.

“While this is the case, what is the matter with them that they turn away from the advice like wild donkeys running away from a lion! Instead of taking advice [from those warning them], each one of them wants to be given opened pages [divine revelation]. No! In fact, they do not fear the Hereafter” (Al-Muddathir 74:49-53). As a metaphor, this verse shows the escape from oneself, from reality and faith. This escape is another example of turning off one's mind and emotions and acting purely on instinct.

2.2.3 Mindless Animals.

“Or do you think that most of them will listen or use their reason? They are like animals, perhaps even more confused, by the way” (Al-Furqan 25:44). This verse describes those who do not use their minds and think of nothing but pursuing their bodily pleasures.

2.2.4 Eating Like an Animal.

“Verily, Allah will admit those who believe and do good works in religion and the world, into Gardens under which rivers flow. The unbelievers, on the other hand, take advantage of the blessings and eat and drink like animals; their eternal abode is Hell” (Muhammad 47:12). This analogy describes a character who lives by eating and drinking just like animals do, without using his mind and emotions in a balanced way. It is unthinkable that people living in such a state exist mentally, logically, and conscientiously.

2.2.5 Breathing Like a Dog.

“Recite to them the news of that person, to whom We gave our signs, but he left them. Satan made him subject to himself. Thus, he became one of the wicked. If We had willed, we would have raised him with it. But he stuck to the ground, followed his whim. His situation is like the situation of a dog that droops its tongue out and breathes even if you step on it, or a dog that droops and breathes even if you do not. Such is the situation of the people who denied Our verses. Tell this

story, and perhaps they will take heed” (Al-A’raf 7:176). Here too is seen a type of teasing, cursing, and slandering. These types consider it their duty to attack people of faith at every opportunity, both with their own language and with written and visual arguments. In addition, from the analogy, it can be seen that they work at the request of someone.

3. The Ostrich Paradox

The animal known as the ostrich does not defend itself in dangerous situations; instead, it sticks its head in the sand. However, ostriches are fast runners and have strong feet, and can be a danger to their environment. In representations, this meaning is taken into account. Like an ostrich, a person cannot define where they stand and change their position as it suits them. In this sense, in the Qur'an, the ostrich also represents human character.

3.1 Don't Bury Your Head in the Sand

The foundation of the ostrich paradox is the following event, which serves as a metaphor: The ostrich sees a hunter and is afraid. He wants to escape, but he can neither run nor fly. Then, he sticks his head in the sand so that the hunter cannot see him. He thinks he is hiding in the sand with his eyes closed. In other words, he thinks that he is made invisible by closing his eyes (as is the logic of a bird) and hopes that he will escape danger. However, his huge body stands out as a target. “They prefer the life of this world to the life of the Hereafter [lovingly, willingly]. They hinder from the way of Allah and seek crookedness in it. Here they are in a deep perversion” (Ibrahim 14:3). The traces of the behavior of the ostrich can be seen in the verse. The fact that a person turns away from the truth voluntarily, pretends to be dead in the face of death and the existence of eternal life, and in the end suffers damage can be explained by the representation of the ostrich. The hunter is Azrael (a.s.). Sand is heedlessness and the life of the world. An ostrich is a person who cannot decide between being a bird and a camel. They do not properly appreciate God. "God has not sent down anything to man," they said. "Who has sent down the Book that Moses brought as a light and guidance for mankind, which you have been taught by it, which you have made into written pages, some of which you have disclosed but some of which you have concealed, which neither you nor your forefathers knew? You say, ‘God.’ And then let them play

in the swamp they plunged into” (Al-An’am 6:91). This verse explains how some people struggle with the truth, even though they know it. Afterwards, it is stated that they are given a respite to live a worldly life, pomp and pleasure, so they do as they wish. “Know that death, from which you keep running away, will surely come and strike you. Then you will be returned to God, who knows the intelligible and the [un]intelligible, and He will inform you of what you used to do” (Al-Jumu’ah 62:8).

This life is the sand in which the head is buried. In fact, the word “head” is a metaphor, and in reality means the mind. It is a unit of measurement that directly indicates the wrongness of the mind. Humans organize their lives after measuring with their minds. However, the characters mentioned here are not as they should be; they damage the measurement system of the mind. It is a well-known fact in social life that such characters, with the cancellation of their minds, close their eyes to the truth, keep their ears from listening to the right voices, and their tongues avoid saying the right things. This is the same as the three monkeys covering their eyes, ears, and mouths and the ostrich burying his head in the sand. In fact, death is a subtle meaning of the verb “to bury.” The dysfunction of reason and the statements that make humans human also destroy the meaning of life. The fact that the ostrich’s body is above the sand represents people, the judgment of the dead through the annulment of reason.

Humans’ heedlessness about aging and death prevents them from thinking about the eternal realm. Although there is a thin line between, this line thickens over time and people become completely blind to the hereafter. Even so, they cannot shed the fear of death that is constantly repeated throughout life. However, the human soul finds a remedy for this situation and temporarily relaxes in the world. Humans may say they do not believe in death and the hereafter, ignore the hereafter, and live like that, shielding themselves from different currents of ideas and setting only worldly goals for themselves in the short and long term. All of this does not change the truth, that old age and death are always approaching. Then, as the Qur'an puts it, it is inevitable for people to wake up to the day when they rise from their graves, just as plants come to life after rain. People in this situation will harm themselves because the cancellation of the mind through negligence can cause incalculable damage.

It is inevitable for people to experience this paradox more or less throughout the course of life. Some experience these contrasts in their daily work, some in their decisions that affect their lives, and some in the balance of the world and the hereafter. Lazing in the shadow of excuses like a

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student who knows that they will not pass the exam if they do not prepare, such people believe in the need to be changed but postpone it, despite knowing that it will cause harm in the end. The expectation is that "he continues anyway, [and] there is no situation that will disturb his comfort." Others believe in the hereafter but stay away from living lives according to what is required. These are examples of this paradox. People who want to escape from the truth wrap themselves in various excuses, but the truth is always apparent. Many behaviors exhibit such a paradoxical character, such as smoking voluntarily despite knowing that smoking is harmful to health. It seems clear that a life that progresses with disorder is destined to be broken and spilled. Some scientifically determined and proven social realities and truths in the divine book are for some reason relegated to the background, ignored. People prefer to think and act as they see fit. In this way, this is not a burying of one's head in the sand. This sand becomes the love of the world and the truth that "They knowingly and willingly prefer the world to the hereafter" (Ibrahim 14:3). Sometimes it is denial, and sometimes it is glory, but in the end, choosing the wrong path is an invitation to harm.

There is a direct relationship between the behavior of sticking one's head in the sand and ignoring the fact of danger in exchange for feeling comfortable. This strategy of closing one's eyes to the truth is like a movie that ends in an undesirable way. The important thing is not to escape, but rather to be intertwined with life and reality. Every deliberate wrong behavior is a paradox, because there is an escape. Like a compass, the human conscience always shows the truth, at least until it loses its properties and turns into stone.

3.2 Making a Decision and Changing Direction according to the Situation

The second part of the ostrich paradox is the behavior of making a decision and changing direction according to the situation. Here, the mind disposes of the soul and ego and prefers to act as it pleases. At the axis of this paradox is the following metaphor. The ostrich is asked to carry a load, and he responds with "I am a bird." They ask him to fly, and he says "I am a camel." Not taking responsibility for the hereafter is one of the most detrimental weaknesses of the soul. Carrying a load represents accepting one's duty. Both being human and escaping from the duty of humanity can be seen in the ostrich paradox. Sometimes large masses of people can fall into this paradox. When a situation occurs that is contrary to the knowledge they acquired thanks to their minds and hearts, they give up on what is religious and human and incline towards the spiritual. They don't

want to hear and see the truth. They can't escape what they intend to do, and they don't want to, either, because there is a temporary relief in situations only experienced by the senses.

The Quran says that some Jews say "We are the friends of Allah." In response to such claims, "If you are sincere when you say it, wish for death." (Al-Jumu'ah 62:6). That is to say, a friend wants to be reunited with a loved one. "If I am your friend, come to me by way of death." But they never want that, so they experience a contradiction and are just staring at a worldly life. This example, of course, is also valid for those who are engaged in similar discourses today. Such are the people who do not speak sacred/religious words, who construct their lives on a worldly basis and exchange immortality for living in pomp. When they give speeches, they arouse admiration. However, there is no trace of beauty in them. The ways of acting according to the situation and the variability according to their interests are not desirable in terms of general ethics. Because of this behavior, they say "they vacillate between believers and unbelievers: they neither cling to them nor [not] to them. Whoever Allah misleads, you will not find any way for him" (An-Nisa 4:143). They are included in the group expressed in verse as "inferior to the mastermind" and they cannot find the right way for themselves. Those who were with the people of knowledge and wisdom yesterday and who appear and declare them enemies today are like this. Although burying one's head in the sand is sometimes an act of desperation, it is one of the most commonly used methods in today's world, especially in terms of ignoring facts. In many societies where capital and egoism are everything, material power, which is indispensable for states, the environment, the atmosphere, all living things, and finally people and humanity, can be overlooked by allowing them to perish. Playing the three monkeys in the face of destroyed human, religious, and natural values is now accepted as a habitual and normal behavior in this world.

5. Conclusion

In short, whether a person or society closes their eyes to facts or changes their position according to their interests, and whether they are to be crushed beneath the wheels of time by playing at being three monkeys in response to the suffering and injustice experienced, the ostrich paradox will always be a subject that closely concerns human life. In the end, those who will be happy are those who do what they need to in the face of the realities of life, and those who live their lives without deviating from the right path at all costs.

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