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## THE ASPIRED WELL BEING: A CRITICAL EXPOSITION OF THE SCANLONIAN AND THE ISLAMIC DOCTRINES

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**Abstract:** The theme of this research paper is the explanation and critical evaluation of the concept *Well-Being* with especial reference to the aspects which Scanlon has skipped. He defined this term with particular reference of *Materialism* and specific socio-economic frame work. But for us, the Muslims who believe in religious metaphysics, this is not a sufficient explanation. Ours whole lives depend on the metaphysical and after life Well Being which is amid at even on the sacrifice of the material gains. *Well Being* may be a terrestrial matter for atheist people but for us it is life encompassing fact. Here such values will be presented which contribute to that concept and make life really *Well-Being*.

**Key Words:** Altruism, Experiential Living, Hedonism, Linguistic Analysis, Metaphysical Well Being, Morality, Religious Ethics, Values.

The concept of *Well Being* is not a simple concept which can be defined easily. Because this is not only relating to a *Status* in a society but also it is a hot debate in the field of ethics, sociology, philosophy of Linguistic Analysis and even in religious spheres. Moreover it is an abstract concept and a term which apparently is simple to understand but much challenging to define. As the Greek legend Socrates has pointed out when he started his venture of defining such concepts as, what is *Beauty*? What is *Truth*? What is *Whiteness*? In the same manner the task of defining the meaning and “*The Status*” and the concept of “*Well-being*” is much complicated one.<sup>1</sup> The problem of defining the term and the meaning of *Well Being* is not a modern one. In primitive societies even in savage one this matter existed. Those who possessed more cattle, more land, more fruit trees and more women, they were regarded as more well-being. But it is Islam which laid the foundation of well-being on the basis of morality and *Taqwa* but not on the material commodities. Though in the Greek period, the Hedonistic and the Stoic approaches were regarded as a source of a person’s well-being. This all means that there is no definite meaning of this term rather it is a relative one. There are many other writers who have written a lot on the topic of this term and exposed its multi-meanings and aspects. For example Derek Parfit, James Griffin, Hans Henrik Knoop, Antonella Delle Fave, Johnny H. Søraker, William J. Talbott, Beverley A. Searle, Roger Crisp, Brad Hooker and many more. Here, objective is not to present a bibliography or literature review on this topic instead my aim is to present Scanlon’s view and Islamic concept of Well-being. This Islamic approach, I found missing in all the relating western literature.

The question is what makes or contributes to make someone’s life better?<sup>2</sup>

For this, the first word which requires attention is the word “*better*”. The word ‘*better*’ is a comparative expression, and this expression can only be applied to material accumulations. So this is why, a well-being is supposed who has materially better position than the others. In this way, this is the first step of comparison of well-beings in ant society. Scanlon, besides this one has sketched out three aspects of Well-Being e.g. the first one, well-being as a rational individual; the second one, as a benefactor in relation to others as friend or as parent; and the last one as the role which a person plays in morality or in making moral judgments. (This last one sometimes assumes the Utilitarian approach).<sup>3</sup>

To be Well-Being<sup>4</sup> generally means the personal status which is related to the first category. In this reference this becomes a sociological phenomenon which includes morality also. Here a bifurcation arrives e.g., the *subjective well-being* and the *objectified sociological well-being*.<sup>5</sup> Well-Being as a self-centered focus is subjective approach but in relation to society and morality or as an agent and benefactor, this becomes objectified wellbeing. In both categories, this concept is a quantitative analysis and comparison of levels of different participants, so there no need for any demarcated theory about it Scanlon thought.<sup>6</sup> In contrast to him there are clear laws in religion for an individual's Well Being and vivid ordains regarding the status of well-being.

إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَنْقَرَكُمْ

Al- Quran, 49:13

.... Verily, the most honourable of you with Allah is that (believer) who has At-Taqwa.<sup>7</sup>

The theory of Well Being, according to Islamic theology is based on the piousness in this world and well-being in the here-after rather it is founded on the physical or material wellbeing. As the Holy Prophet declared in the Last Sermon at the eve of the Last Haj:

*No Arab has superiority over the Ajamee, and no Ajamee has priority over the Arab; No Red has priority over the Black, or no Black has priority over the Red; except due to Taqwa.*<sup>8</sup>

Therefore for us, the opinion of Scanlon is wrong that there is no clear theory or no need of any theory about the concept of wellbeing except as an intuitive idea.<sup>9</sup> In fact we have a demarcated theory of well-being in the theoretical form of the Holy Quran and practically in the form of the life of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). Ours whole life on the earth including socio-political and moral spheres and the life here-after depends on this concept of well-being.

### Three aspects of Well Being

In western thinking well-being is considered with reference to *Material welfare*<sup>10</sup> i.e. the quality of life in certain circumstance in which there is freedom from danger, availability of nutrition, security of health, education. We may conclude it in the sense that the lives of European

are better than those of the eastern people. Here is only material comparison of material benefits. Anyone can analyze that there is no emotional, spiritual aspect. So this view of well-being based on materialism, if not acceptable yet it is insufficient.

The other aspect might be called as the *Experiential Well Being*. This is concerned with the person who is experiencing the life and feeling one-self well. He or she cannot recognize that their relatives are deceiving them .the concerned person thinks that he is lucky in having good friends but in fact they are disguised enemies and deceivers. This is experiential well-being. But in Islam there is no space for such type of experiential beings. Islam clearly abhors it and says:

*Those who deceive their fellow brethren, they nor not from us.*

The next characteristic is *value or worthiness* of life. This is two faced coin. Front side is one's own worth and for the value of one's own-life. The other is side is the worthiness of others' lives and value. I used the word two sided coin. This is due to the fact that a coin which has only one side has no worth to buy anything. Same way a person is associated with the rest of community so his worthies linked with the others. In this respect a person has to contribute to others' live even at the cost of self-interest sacrifice. This is the very characteristic which Islam called *Altruism* and emphasized very often.

وَابْتَغِ فِيمَا آتَاكَ اللَّهُ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ  
وَلَا تَنْسَ نَصِيبَكَ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا وَأَحْسِن  
كَمَا أَحْسَنَ اللَّهُ إِلَيْكَ وَلَا تَبْغِ الْفَسَادَ  
فِي الْأَرْضِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٧٧﴾

Al- Quran, 28:77

*But seek , with that (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on you, the home of Hereafter, and forget not your portion of lawful enjoyment in this world; and do good as Allah has been good to you, and seek not the Mufsidun (those who commit great crimes and sins, oppressors, tyrants, mischief- makers, corrupters).<sup>11</sup>*

Such a great example of *altruism* cannot be found in all the western theories as Islam has ordained that even one's own life can be sacrificed for others.

وَيُؤْتِرُونَ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ  
وَلَوْ كَانَ بِهِمْ خَصَاصَةٌ وَمَنْ يُوقِ شَحَنَفٍ  
فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٩﴾

Al- Quran, 59:09

Scanlon's concept of well-being is not new one. The three aspects *i.e. Material welfare, Experiential Well Being and value or worthiness of life* all have been expounded in Islamic concept of well-being and each one is in proper proportion and appropriate in all circumstances for all people. The material aspect has been given importance to the extent to which a person's needs are satisfied. Even those who do not have any material commodities, they are to be provided by the well-to-do fellows. They are not to be left alone. For the *experiential* phase every member of a society is supposed to be a participant of the experience of social life.

وَلَا تَنْسَ نَصِيبَكَ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا

Al- Quran, 28:77

*And forget not your portion of lawful enjoyment in this world,*<sup>12</sup>

Everyone is demanded to care for others to enjoy one-self the experience of life. Even the killing of new borne child or suicide has been illegitimatized and prohibited. The worthiness of has been sanctified. Even the murder of one person has been declared as the murder of the whole humanity.

### **Theories of Substantive Good**

*Substantive Good* theories are related to the question that what are those things those contribute to make someone's life better. They are at least three, e.g. *Experiential Theories, Desire Theories and Objective List*.

#### **1. Experiential Theories**

"The person who lives it", "What it would be like to live it" are the question those are related to experiential theories.<sup>13</sup> This means the

possible circumstance which a person experiences and wants to make life better. Generally everyone wants ease in life and to aspire to have happiness and enjoyment. This is why this experiential theory is named “Hedonism”<sup>14</sup>. Jeremy Bentham says that “*Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure.*”<sup>15</sup> Everyone wants to have and experience pleasure and wish to get rid of pain. This pleasure principle enhances to a person’s well-being.

## 2. Desire Theories (the Satisfaction of Desires as well-being)

According to Scanlon, the well-being of a person can be measured by the fact that to what extent his desires have been satisfied.<sup>16</sup> But in fact human desires cannot fully be satisfied. There must be a limit to the desires and in their fulfillment. In the rat race of achieving benefit and satisfaction of one’s own desires one should not usurp others’ rights. Islam rejects this type of satisfaction of desires and the concept of well-being at the cost of others’ interests and ordains:

وَلَا تَأْكُلُوا أَمْوَالَكُمْ بَيْنَكُمْ بِالْبَاطِلِ

Al- Quran, 02:188

*And eat up not one another’s property unjustly.*<sup>17</sup>

### i. Desires and Reasons

Do the desires have any reasons? Surely there is a relation between desires and reasons. Sometimes desires are based on fancy and sometime due to jealousy. But the genuine desires are those for a person strives for. If they are contributing to one’s well-being than that must be followed otherwise must be rectified or left. One must be conscious regarding the desire based well-being theories.

### ii. Variation in Desires

Human nature is not a static machine. It is subject to change. Human desires also change due to circumstances. So a desire which is at one moment *sumumbonum*, at other moment it is replaced by another desire. So the question arise which desire either the former or the latter is to be given value and worth. Scanlon votes in favour of the latter one.

### iii. Informed Desires

The standard of life of the experiencing person can be measured by the satisfaction of the informed desires<sup>18</sup> which have been built up due to the

full understanding of the objects and error free from reasoned judgments. When a person has reason and based upon it has an informed desire then he strives for achieving it. For example: Any person wants to appear any competitive exam then he will try to formulate and manage his all sources, time period and routine schedule to get the desired results. This all is because he has informed desire without any reasoned errors.

To desire for something means the value, worthiness, preference and desirability of an object that can contribute to a well-being. So everyone can change one's well-being. In the same manner, human aims if rational play vital role in his wellbeing, though they can be changed in due course and they affect the well-being.

The sum of the fulfillment of the informed desires, rational aims and preferences those contributed to a person's well-being are called the summative theory of desires. But after this sum there appear new desires and new aims. To this extent there is a relative conception of well being but there exists a society. So there appear the social choice theories.

#### **iv. Hierarchy of Desires**

Human beings' desires have a hierarchical character. Aims preferences, comprehensive goals, planes for life, revision of them, priority of choice or the act of abandoning, their larger or narrower explanation, all contribute in a person's well-being. And "a life is made better by succeeding in one's projects".<sup>19</sup>

#### **v. Social choice theories<sup>20</sup>**

Single person cannot form a society. Two persons make a family and families form tribes and societies. In a society a person has to make choices and he has to make changes in the relative choices. After choices and preferences he has to act upon any one among the alternatives and preferences. Morality and ethical questions arise at this point. The matter that, *what is good for me?* takes the shape *what is good for the whole society?*

That is the point that Islam ordains at the outset. The *Sociological Well Being* is the main theme of Islamic concept of the human welfare and salvation of the hereafter life. For achieving this aim of sociological well-being Islam gives a whole system of *Rights and Duties*. Subjective

well-being is focused but it is counterpart of objective welfare or the welfare of whole society. In it the experiential phenomenon, the desire theories and the objective list, all have been taken for granted.

This is what Allama Iqbal has versified.

فرد تمام ربطِ ملت سے ہے تنہا کچھ نہیں  
موج ہے دریا میں اور بیرون دریا کچھ نہیں

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### 3. Objective List

The *Objective List* consists of the items, things or persons which are more than the Pleasure Principles and the desired lists regarding the *Well Being*. They might be friendship or knowledge. Friendship and knowledge are regarded as constituents of well-being. Though they may contribute to well-being but it is not necessary principle that they can be enjoyed, they might be only on the list of acquisitions.

In short these theories present the following notions:

- a. The first one expounds that the standard of life of a fellow can be determined by the living experience of the concerned person.
- b. The second depicts that the standard of a life of a concerned person can be measured due to the criterion of the satisfaction of the desires of the related person.
- c. The third, the *objective list* may be regarded as the other version of the desire theories. This means every person makes a list of objectives which the one wants to achieve. The fulfillment of the list makes the concerned person's life better.

An analysis of theses, reveal that all the three are relative approaches towards life. Being a part of sociological entity and as a member of society no one can fulfill one's own objectives solely without being affiliated to other members of a society. Well-Being so far as it is personal psychological satisfaction can be one among the above. But as a comparative concept and as a comparison with others it will be an objective Well-Being.



Subjective Well –Being is self-centered and relative approach of life. Consider the Objective and sociological point of view and the well-being-ness of Abdul SattarEdhi.<sup>22</sup> He spent all his life in the service of humanity he is so much simple but have an object well-being, experiential life, desired goal and objective list. He has a lot of money but nothing for his own-self but he is a standard of ‘Objective Well-Being’.

### **‘The First Person’ and ‘the second Person’ Accounts of Well Being**

The three theories of substantive good along-with their associated features and the Subjective and the Objective aspects of human personality reveal two dimensional insights about things. First about the particular things for understanding their own values and the second is that to what extent they are helpful in the concept of well-being.

#### **i. The First Person Account**

These ways are concerned to the third person account of a person that means the role of a person as a benefactor or the moral aspect of a person. In this perspective two questions emerged *e.g.* what things are to be done and what are the objectives to be achieved by him.

Regarding the former question, in daily life we have to make decisions that how can we avoid injury or how can we enjoy ourselves a life or what things can amuse us. The choice between the two options and sacrifice any one leads to the sphere of compensation. For example a student sacrifices his daily enjoyments and does extra work for the sake of good grades. In the case that he could not achieve desired success after utilizing all his capabilities yet he is not a failure. In this sacrifice there is no real loss because it falls into the category of the compensation.<sup>23</sup> This is the point where Kant gives his moral argument for the possibility of metaphysics.<sup>24</sup> He said that there should be a world where the aggrieved must be compensated.

According to Islamic concept, a person cannot be considered a loyal until he has no regards for other people or others’ interests. A person is not loyal until he regards the loss of other relatives as his own loss and until he does not sacrifice his own interests in favour of his own family or institution. Thus Islamic concept of others’ care and sacrifices for others contributes to his own-self and well-being.

Regarding the second question, the success in the goals or in gaining objectives is the main element of a well-being. But for this purpose no person is allowed to deceive or harm others for his self-interests.

فَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَرَهُ ﴿٧﴾  
وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ ﴿٨﴾

Al-Quran, 99: 7-8

7. *So whosoever does good equal to the weight of an atom shall see it.*

8. *And whosoever does evil equal to the weight of an atom shall see it.*<sup>25</sup>

Only a well-balanced life is admissible and better.<sup>26</sup> Since the well-being mean the traits that benefit the person whose is this well-being along-with others.

## ii. The Third Person Account of Well Being

This perspective explains a person's role as a benefactor for others, it may be in the form of a friend or a parent and this is not self-centered type. This is to be materialized on the grounds; firstly, that what will give me pleasure, extend my life or relieves my pain; secondly, what will enhance the benefits and security to my relatives and; lastly, the role of a benefactor which does not directly belonged to me.

All the above discussion concludes that there is a gradual up-gradation from personal well-being to the altruism and to the level of being as benefactor of the relatives. Moreover to the things those are not directly concerned to one's own-self. That is what Islamic doctrine teaches us. Start from your own self then give to nearest ones then the others. Here Scanlon's concept is in harmony with Islamic doctrine.

So it is neither important that how much the limit of well-being is nor it is important that there are any boundaries or clear-cut demarcation of that what well-being is.

## Morality Based conception of well being

Here two questions arise, what is morality?, and why one should be moral? Regarding the first question e.g. the theory of right and wrong as

well as the theory of duties and obligations is called morality. And with reference to the concept of well-being morality plays three different roles.<sup>27</sup> Firstly, it is related to moral requirements. This means that in particular circumstances what is required to boost or up-gradation of others. Secondly, justification of the moral principles is done by the concept of well-being. This provides us the method and ground for assessing any principle and gives the basis of acceptance or rejection of it. Thirdly, the morality of well-being is related to the second question that Why should be Moral? The simple answer to this is that morality contributes to any person's status of well-being in the society.

The second question that why should be moral? Morality necessitates a notion of well-being and being moral means *"to come up with a systematic account of well-being"*.<sup>28</sup>

### **Altruism and Islamic Concept of Well-Being**

We, the Muslims are generally very much influenced by the western teachings. Under the influence of media and technology, usually we pay no heed and ignore the Islamic concepts while reading the western theories propagated by orators or paid journalist or media scholars. Regarding the well-being Islam has already presented the concept of well-being based on Altruism.

Life is a phenomenon which takes place when two persons meet. This is the evidence that no one can be borne or live alone. The birth of a child is the proof that everyone is dependent on others. So it is unnatural to have a subjective view about life and to have an alone existence in a social set up while being a member of a society. As Aristotle said that only a god or a devil can live alone. Human beings cannot because Man is a social animal.

Islamic concept of well-being starts from the birth of Adam who was exalted<sup>29</sup> due to the knowledge for which Adam was exalted and the then others i.e. the Jenes and the Angels were ordained to face down and 'Prostrate' before him.

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ

Al- Quran, 02:34

*And (remember) when We said to the angels: "Prostrate yourselves before Adam." And they prostrated except Iblees (Satan).*

And He exalted the progeny of Adam<sup>30</sup> and regarded them as the Khalifa Vicegerent of Allah on Earth

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ

Al- Quran, 17:70

*And indeed We have honoured the Children of Adam*

Islam presents such a concept that takes for granted human beings as *exalted* creature. Every member of this society enjoys oneself the equal status. So, Islamic concept of well-being starts from the exaltation of all human beings and the criterion of differentiation is knowledge and 'Taqwa' and usefulness to other human beings. Otherwise all are equal to God and possess equal status of well-being.

### **Conclusion**

In short, according to Scanlon any theory of well-being has to encircle these three aspects of life. The first, the *Experiential States* which includes certain forms of enjoyment and satisfaction. But this is not the sole element. The second, *The Pursuit of Success* is the next element which any theory of well-being must fulfill. The level or degree of success that a person achieves in the struggle for achieving in his goals and aims, this success contributes to a person's well-being. The third is *The Relation and Excellence*, this may be gained besides other good things e.g. friendship or relations of personal kind along-with the excellence in other fields. These intuitively fixed<sup>31</sup> measurements can contribute to a theory of well-being.

Generally we observe the world within the outline of reasons formed due to our concept of values and aims. We take decisions on those grounds. So the perfect definition of well-being is not possible until we know the main aims and concept of values of the concerned fellow.

From the first-person point of view the well-being theory has little importance but the things those participate in well-being are important. With respect to the third-person account e.g. persons as benefactor and right or wrongs acts, it has great importance.

We can assume well-being as “*master value*”<sup>32</sup> but in fact it is not a segregated portion of *good*. On the other hand it is an “*inclusive good*”. Moreover it is one among others those can make life successful and all other values cannot be reduced to this one value of Well-Being.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, if we analyses Islamic concept of well-being which is based on Altruism and takes man not as a segregated part of a society but focuses on all humanity as an organic whole, Islam conditioned the well-being of a person with the betterment of other people as well as society. So there are no subjective or objective distinctions but there is an organic whole and the objective is the well-being of the whole society not only in the world but hereafter.

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For full description, see The lecture *The Status of Well-Being* in the series of *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* delivered by Thomas M. Scanlon Jr. delivered at the University of Michigan on October 25, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas M. Scanlon, “*The Status of Well-Being*” (Lecture, University of Michigan on October 25, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Utilitarianism is a political theory but in fact it plays a vital role in ethics and philosophy. This aims at, the maximum good for the maximum people.

<sup>4</sup> He clarified that *to be well-being* does not mean that there is a single definition or notion of it that there is something that is the criterion of well-being. But in fact this is a *rough intuitive idea*. This is only a mode of assessment that what can make someone’s life better or worse. See. Scanlon, 94.

<sup>5</sup> These two terms has not been used by Scanlon. I have coined for the content which he has presented in the lecture.

<sup>6</sup> Scanlon, 95

<sup>7</sup> *Translation of the meaning of The Noble Qur’an* Translated by Muhammad Taqi-ud-din Al-Hilali, Muhammad Muhsin Khan. Madina: King Fahad Complex. Al- Quran, 49:13

<sup>8</sup> The Last Sermon of The Prophet Muhammad (BUPH) at the Last Hajj.

<sup>9</sup> Scanlon, 95,96

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 97

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 28:77

<sup>12</sup> Al- Quran, 28:77

<sup>13</sup> Scanlon, 97.

<sup>14</sup> Hedonism is philosophy which aims at the pleasure principle. It insists on gaining pleasure in any form. Later in modern philosophy it occupies a great place in ethical debates.

<sup>15</sup> Jeremy Bentham, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*

<sup>16</sup> Scanlon, 100.

<sup>17</sup> Al- Quran, 02:188

<sup>18</sup> Scanlon, 102.

<sup>19</sup> Scanlon, 116.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.,104,5.

<sup>21</sup> Allama Muhammad Iqbal. *Kulyat-e-Iqbal* (Urdu), 17.

<sup>22</sup> <http://storyofpakistan.com/abdul-sattar-edhi> (This article has been

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written a couple of years before the death of this great server of humanity).

<sup>23</sup> Scanlon, 121.

<sup>24</sup> Kant

<sup>25</sup> Al-Quran, 99:7-8.

<sup>26</sup> Scanlon, 127.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.,133.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.,134.

<sup>29</sup> Al-Quran, 02:34

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 17:70

<sup>31</sup> Scanlon, 117.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.,140.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.,142.

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