

# Theory of Human Development: Al-Muhasibi Vs Maslow a Preliminary Exploration

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## Abstract

Human growth is a topic that is frequently discussed at all levels of society. Human development in Islam and the West have frequently been contrasted, but psychological comparisons of human development between Sufi luminaries al-Muhasibi and Maslow remain rare. This article will seek to assess the contributions made by these two persons to human development, both in terms of differences and similarities. This study is qualitative since it applies a content analysis methodology, which entails reading the writings of relevant personalities and publications by other academics who are related to them. The findings reveal that there is a difference in the goal of human development between these two personalities; yet, both approaches should be copied by all members of society. This essay has consequences for human development in terms of achieving the best possible self-development.

**Keywords:** Human Development, Early Exploration, Sufism, Psychology

## Introduction

According to al-Muhasibi, humans are classified as living entities alongside angels and animals. Every living being must have its own habits (Rahman, N. B. A., & Badaruddin, F., 2019). In comparison to other creatures, humans are the most unique creatures created by Allah Ta'ala in this world (Kasimin, 1993). Humans will go through several stages of life and experience varied social lives as they grow and mature. People must develop knowledge and mental stamina as they mature in order to decide the best life pattern for themselves. That knowledge is also essential for the development of an ideal human society of noble character, which is consistent with the aim of man's creation as Allah S.W.T.'s caliph in this world.

Every individual has unique thoughts and opinions about how to live the best life possible for themselves and their families. However, it is questionable whether the selected self-formation and human growth procedures are optimal. Human growth is a commonly contested topic among people at all levels of society. We will always hear and observe the problem of moral degeneration, regardless of age. Drug addiction symptoms, hanging out,

involvement in major criminal cases including murder, rape, robbery, and kidnapping, baby dumping, and vandalism are all regularly reported in print and electronic media.

This paper will cover two techniques based on distinct sources of information as an alternative to establishing continuous and right spiritual education in order to aid in human self-development so that people can act on good ideals in life. The value of spiritual education for human development will be examined from two major perspectives: Islamic and Western. In discussing human growth from an Islamic perspective, the writer has chosen Sufism as the primary source of discussion, and the Sufi figure chosen to discuss his approach is Abu ʿAbd Harith bin Asad Al-Muhasibi, also known as Al-Muhasibi (d. 243H/857AD). While from a Western perspective, the writer is more interested in humanistic psychology and Abraham H. Maslow (d. 1970) as a figure to be examined later.

### Literature Review

The book *Al-Riʿayah li Huquq Allah*, which has been authenticated by Abd al-Qadir Ahmad Ata' (1990), is the main book written by al-Muhasibi and discusses the protection of slaves against the rights of Allah S.W.T. (The Creator) is either overt or hidden (outward and inner). The main discussion in al-Muhasibi's writing revolves around the questions of sincerity, purification of the soul, and a perfect moral life (Stapa, 1994). Al-Muhasibi talks a lot about praiseworthy morals such as patience as well as despicable qualities such as *riya'*, and how these qualities can bring people to the desired paradise or send them to hell (Mahmud 1973; Rahman, & Badaruddin, 2019).

Discussions about psychological issues can be classified using al-Muhasibi's psychological theory. In this theory, he also explored in detail psychological issues such as the role of the heart, which Allah S.W.T. bestows in the good and bad qualities that will be emitted by the reaction of human behaviour (aʿmal al-jawarih). He also examined the soul and its levels, as well as the spirit and intellect, and how they influence human conduct on a daily basis (Smith, 1970). In al-Muhasibi's debate, the idea of *tazkiyah al-nafs* is separated into three parts: prevention (*wiqayah*), development (*tanmiyah*), and treatment (*ilaj*). (Mohamad, Hamjah, & Mokhtar, 2017).

Basically, the main theme that is often discussed by al-Muhasibi in his writings is about morality and its importance in maintaining the relationship of humans as servants with Allah S.W.T. as Al-Khaliq (Creator). The existence of praiseworthy qualities (*mahmudah*) in every human being is very important, not to mention as a Muslim. This is to ensure that every act done will receive a reward and a commensurate response from Allah S.W.T. for the continuation of life in the afterlife.

Maslow (1970), discussed in his book *Motivation and Personality* about humanistic psychology and its significance in the development of an ideal human being. He has talked about motivational theories and how they can help people achieve self-perfection (self-actualization). He also discussed things that can assist in attaining that level, as well as challenges and obstacles that prevent people from reaching that level of perfection. He thought that people could not focus on higher-level demands until they had met the majority of their lower-level requirements (West, 2022). Maslow also believed that meeting the requirements on all five levels leads to personal fulfilment. Maslow's view of humans is that

they can be loved, noble, and creative and can achieve high aspirations and life values (Schultz & Schultz, 2016; Goble, 1992).

The theory of human personality emphasizes the importance of each individual being truly aware of the uniqueness of his own life experience. They focus on who a person is (what the person is) and what can be achieved (what he can become). The focus of the humanitarian group is to imagine attention to humans as an object of concentration and understanding to control all their behaviours (Khouj, 1980). The basic term of the humanistic approach to self-growth is what humanistic psychologists call "the humanist model of man." In order to understand humans, humanistic psychologists pay attention to completing and defending the human model by saying that is the most appropriate human model. Psychologists should study human nature directly and not animal species (Khouj, 1980).

### Research Methods/Methodology

This writing is qualitative in nature, using content analysis methods from various relevant scientific sources. In this writing, secondary data serves as the main source of information. This material was collected by reading relevant sources, including the writings of selected figures such as al-Muhasibi and Maslow. All the data obtained is evaluated descriptively, which is narrative and description and comparison regarding human growth based on the opinions of the two figures involved. Bibliography is considered important and primary in examining all relevant references.

### Result and Discussion

Al-Muhasibi's theory of human development has drawn little attention and discussion. His theories had a significant impact on al-Ghazali's thought, which was fully documented and expounded in his book *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*. Al-Muhasibi's methodology for producing human beings who develop in a balanced and praiseworthy manner from both physical and spiritual aspects is centered on cultivating and caring for internal manners as well as rejuvenating spiritual parts. He highlights the significance of internal components like spirit, heart, *nafs*, and intellect. According to al-Muhasibi, the concept of spiritual strengthening, such as educating the nature of *mahmudah* and avoiding all *madhmumah* traits, is highly important to appreciate and practise in order to contribute to a civilised society (Zainudin, 2023).

A full understanding and conviction of the good and evil promises (al-w<sup>c</sup>ad wa al-wa<sup>c</sup>id) based on the pillars of Islam, including belief in the Last Day, will promote the rise of fear (al-khawf) and hope (al-rajā') in humanity. All of these characteristics in a person will prevent them from committing evil and disobeying Allah's command. People will strive to be attentive of their actions at all times, in accordance with His instructions and warnings. This phenomenon will undoubtedly occur if humans truly understand the concepts of good promises (al-w<sup>c</sup>ad) and bad/evil promises (al-wa<sup>c</sup>id).

The presence of such things within oneself will urge people to engage in continuous self-reflection (muhasabah nafs) in the hope that the load of reckoning in the Hereafter will be alleviated. Self-reflection will also assist people in always practicing repentance and deep examination, which will serve as a warning and reminder to themselves to always take care of their everyday lives and actions as genuinely devoted servants of God. Continuous good

practices will generate a pious and obedient attitude toward Allah S.W.T., and all He orders will be carried out properly. Continuous self-reflection will also help to improve human piety.

Self-reflection will also help people practise repentance and serious investigation on a regular basis, serving as a caution and reminder to themselves to always take care of their daily lives and activities as really devoted servants of God. Continuous good practices will result in a pious and submissive attitude towards Allah SWT, and all of His orders will be followed out correctly. Continuous reflection will also benefit human piety. When the character of piety is instilled in people, they will always be vigilant in all parts of daily life, putting everything in their correct position and avoiding all of His prohibitions, whether overt or hidden.

Al-Muhasibi emphasized that the righteous will always ensure that he is on the right track and conforms to the will of the *Sharia*. Promises and threats of Allah S.W.T. are true, and success will belong to people who are healthy and obedient to all His commands and warnings. A person who truly understands and repents about all that will make him obedient and obedient to Allah S.W.T. When all of the types of understanding regarding *al-w<sup>u</sup>ad* and *al-w<sup>u</sup>aid*, *khawf* and *raja'* that lead to rise of the attitude of *al-nafs*, piety, and obedience exist in human beings, the attitude of *zuhud* and *warak* will emerge. Al Muhasibi claimed that in order to be *zuhud*, people must: a) have simple aims or wishes (*qasrul amal*); and b) be serious about their work (*al jiddu fil 'amal*) (Zaenudin, & Tantowi, 2022).

Allah's promises and threats are true, and victory will come to those who are healthy and follow all of His commands and cautions. A person who sincerely understands and repents for everything would become obedient to Allah S.W.T. The attitude of *warak* will emerge when all of the types of understanding regarding *al-w<sup>u</sup>ad* and *al-w<sup>u</sup>aid*, *khawf* and *raja'* that give rise to the attitude of *al-nafs*, piety, and obedience exist in humans. This phenomenon has become natural since, with the availability of these good attitudes, people will conduct properly in their daily actions, whether in the light or the dark, open or concealed.

What is most important is an accurate and deep understanding and belief about the concept that *al-w<sup>u</sup>ad* and *al-w<sup>u</sup>aid* can form a perfect human personality. A sense of fear, or *al-khawf*, and a sense of hope, or *al-raja*, will appear on their own when the concept has been understood and believed. The presence of fear and hope in human beings will surely guarantee the birth of all good and noble traits and behaviours. The feeling to do and practice *al-nafs* meditation will then take place in the human body and soul. When self-reflection is done continuously and earnestly, then the nature of piety will be born, which in turn will lead people to become servants of Allah S.W.T. who are obedient and righteous in their daily behaviour.

Humans who understand and believe in God's promises will definitely produce other positive behaviours and attributes. This is because in fact all of the *mahmudah* qualities have a reciprocal role, where the existence of one of these qualities in a human being will cause the appearance of the subsequent *mahmudah* qualities. Because of that, all human beings should strive hard to improve themselves and their morals in order to be in line with the Islamic *Shari'a* and to ensure all the promises of Allah S.W.T. that really became a reality.

Maslow hypothesis was motivated by Gestalt psychology's concept that individuals are more than their components and that spiritual aspirations are necessary for their well-being (Celestine, 2017). Human needs were arranged in a hierarchy, with physiological (survival) needs at the bottom, and the more creative and intellectually oriented 'self-actualization' needs at the top (Maslow, 1954). The physical aspect that is emphasised in Maslow's hierarchy of needs is the need that is at the bottom, which is the physiological need, where the need to eat, drink, sleep, rest, and sex, according to him, is very important to form a positive human development. According to Maslow, the lower the need in the hierarchy of needs, the more urgent the need for further human development. If these needs are not met, then it will have a negative impact on the next needs, so that human development as a whole will also be affected.

According to Maslow, the highest level of need will emerge only after all lower-level needs have been met. As a result, when physiological demands are met, second-level needs such as safety and order emerge. The demands at this level must also be satisfied because they can impact the creation of the self and the circumstances of the next human life. Humans living in a society with disorganised social and political structures would feel uneasy and disturbed, making it impossible for them to think and behave in ways that will allow them to fulfil their potential. Maslow argued that survival needs must be satisfied before the individual can satisfy the higher needs. The higher up the hierarchy we go, the more difficult it is to meet the needs of that stage due to interpersonal and environmental restrictions that eventually upset us (McLeod, 2024).

Satisfaction at varying degrees of need can aid in the pursuit of self-perfection. Humans whose requirements are not met at specific levels will experience disruptions and pressures that prevent them from being born as fully developed and exceptional self-formers. Maslow previously claimed that the proportion of people who reach self-perfection is insufficient in contrast to the world's total population.

However, Maslow believes that every human being has the ability to evolve and attain the maximum level. In order to achieve the level they desire, people must work hard and meet specific demands. External variables, such as community support, are also vital in ensuring the existence of optimal self-development.

In Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the need for love and belonging is considered the most crucial. At this point, people will seek to fulfil it since not having a buddy, for example, when they are in desperate need, will have a profoundly detrimental impact on them. This failure will cause people to become lethargic, reclusive, and hostile, resulting in a sense of isolation from their surroundings to the point where they lose interest in living.

In principle, it is difficult to establish the perfect human self-using Maslow's hierarchy because humans have a wide range of experiences and situations. Humans born into impoverished households will surely emphasise addressing their physiological and familial needs over achieving the life satisfaction that Maslow proposed. Such an atmosphere is essential because humans cannot resist their instinctive and physiological desires, which are inherent in human nature. Maslow's method is tough and ineffective; as a result, such a

human form is difficult to find in today's socioeconomic situations, particularly in emerging countries that are generally disadvantaged and behind in terms of material development.

The notion of human development promoted by both systems covered in this work appears to share parallels, namely the requirement for positive spiritual formation in order to produce a perfect and superior human being. Al-Muhasibi promotes the concept of *al-nafs* as a means of ensuring the existence of positive human beings, whereas Maslow emphasises the importance of feelings in achieving the level of self-perfection that can lift people to the desired level of self-actualization.

While there are significant distinctions between the two methodologies presented. Maslow prioritises outward issues above internal aspects, whilst al-Muhasibi does the opposite. According to Maslow, the unsettling component is played by external sources, however Muhasibi underlines that it is entirely inside the human being. For example, reprehensible nature (*madhmumah*), despite receiving an external threat (the devil as a disturbing factor), requires an inside ingredient to reactivate the threat, such as *lust*.

According to Maslow's theory of human development, the need for belonging and self-esteem demonstrates the human need for external forces to affect individuals in developing a good and complete sense of self-worth. Meanwhile, al-Muhasibi stated that all positive factors for human development are based on internal human factors, such as the need for a deep and correct understanding and belief in *al-wa<sup>c</sup>d* (good promises) and *al-wa<sup>i</sup>d* (bad promises) or faith in the Hereafter to ensure that people take care of their daily behaviour and always do self-reflection.

Although al-Muhasibi's method appears to have completely ignored environmental and social factors, it is possible that al-Muhasibi believed that by instilling the nature of *mahmudah* in each individual, he could create a human being who truly understands and is confident in the will of religion, which commands humans to be virtuous. Maslow's hierarchy of needs highlights the external aspect as a factor that leads to the existence of a perfect and superior self, and his system appears to rely significantly on other people in order to achieve that level.

Al-Muhasibi does not place a high value on external factors, possibly because he believes that a human being endowed with all kinds of good qualities such as *khawf* and *raja'*, *muhasabah al-nafs*, piety, obedience, and *warak* will undoubtedly promise a human being with a true personality - truly perfect. Metaphysical control is definitely involved in al-Muhasibi's proposed theory and practice.

However, Maslow argues that this is not the case. In reality, he stated that recognition from society and the environment, as well as other external elements, is extremely beneficial in the development of a truly skilled human person. In theory, the distinction between the two ways under consideration is directly related to the cultural and civilisational differences that gave rise to the two figures. Al-Muhasibi's views and practices obviously reflect a culture founded on spiritual principles, whereas Maslow is plainly a product of modern Western material civilisation.

When every element of the human being to be developed are considered, it is apparent that al-Muhasibi's method is the most appropriate and ideal way. This is because Muhasibi has offered a technique for implementing the approach beginning with the basis, which is a thorough grasp and confidence in the principles of *al-wa<sup>c</sup>d* and *al-wa<sup>c</sup>id*. This awareness and confidence lay the foundation for the emergence and development of other good attitudes.

Al-Muhasibi definitely does not emphasise physical self-development. A good and ongoing spiritual formation would undoubtedly result in the development of a decent and commendable physique. Positive internal development will undoubtedly effect exterior human development. He also ignored the importance of the environment, which might impact attitude and posture in forming the development of a positive-valued human spirit. This is due to the strong conviction in metaphysical control supplied by notions like *al-wa<sup>c</sup>d* and *al-wa<sup>c</sup>id*, which is potent enough to shape a positive and active human personality.

Al-Muhasibi's method is simple to grasp but difficult to apply because it involves a high level of seriousness on the part of the individual. To really believe in the concept of *al-wa<sup>c</sup>d* and *al-wa<sup>c</sup>id*, the human being must cultivate a profound and earnest attitude and desire to grasp it. This is because these two features cannot be seen or detected with the naked eye or outward senses, but they are metaphysical in nature and require a pure and true vision of the heart before conviction about them can be formed.

While Maslow's hypothesis has numerous obvious flaws, each individual's demands are unique. People who are not highly educated typically focus all of their activities on addressing basic requirements, such as earning a living. Those that live comfortably will only seek to improve their talents and abilities. Maslow's idea of human nature is overly optimistic, relying on positive human drive, which is difficult to believe given that many people exhibit negative behaviour. Maslow's idea of human nature is overly optimistic, relying on positive human drive, which is difficult to believe given that many people exhibit negative behaviour. Maslow's research is not very accurate because the theory he highlighted requires observation and long-term research, such as human development from infancy to attaining the degree of self-perfection and satisfaction of all the Hierarchy of Needs.

This idea lacks adequate empirical support (observation or research), and there are several exceptions due to individual differences (Siti Hawa & Ma'rof, 1990). This hypothesis is also more philosophical than scientific, as empirical research into the concept of self-perfection is challenging. This point of view is significant because it successfully depicts characteristics of the human being that other views, in particular (Mohamed, 1990).

Two criticisms of Maslow's interpretation of motivation theory highlight its difficulty in defining the core motive. In other words, how do we accept the concept of a hierarchy of needs? First and foremost, we know that successful adults emerge from various childhood experiences. The lives of James Baldwin, Viktor Frankl, and Sarah Bernhardt (Newman, 1980) demonstrate how the denial of psychological rights, stability, or a sense of belonging can inhibit the growth of genius or self-actualisation.

Conversely, there are those people who deny the underlying desire to accomplish what they consider to be the highest level of consciousness or achievement. Thoreau's retreat into the forest, Mahatma Gandhi's fast, and the sacrifice of a fireman all demonstrate a willingness to forego more fundamental requirements in order to achieve something greater. As a result, while Maslow's model states the necessity for optimism about self-development, which is not represented in Freud's theory, it fails to describe a satisfactory description of the major achievement incentive for the establishment of human attitudes (Newman, 1980).

Although there are no obvious parallels between the two theories addressed in this paper, in practice, both systems accept internal variables as contributors to human growth. Maslow's emphasis on interior nature was limited to comparatively tangible things such as eating, drinking, lodging, and sex (as in physiological needs). All of these elements tend to have a greater impact on physical development than on interior (spiritual) development. While the accounting approach places a high value on internal (spiritual) progress, paying close attention to internal factors will significantly help human development. This is because prioritising spiritual development allows physical development to flourish. All sorts of morality and positive behaviour exist because every human being possesses *mahmudah* qualities.

Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs" hypothesis cannot be completely ignored because internal forces (spiritual) also play a role in helping to build humans who achieve a level of self-perfection, which eventually helps to produce humans who actually evolve. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, reaching the level of perfection is often reserved for persons who have achieved adulthood. Children and teenagers cannot achieve self-perfection. It is considerably different from al-Muhasibi's notion of human development, in which he claims that if every human being, without exception, possesses all of the praiseworthy traits, he will undoubtedly become a human being who develops perfectly, with no defects.

The teaching of al-Muhasibi emphasises the observation and meticulous care of spiritual components. Man's position as an individual is critical since it serves as the foundation for the establishment of excellent and commendable morals, as well as the most significant aspect in the production of faultless and superior human growth. Environmental or external variables play just a little impact in shaping human development. Al-Muhasibi believes that spiritual power is the most important aspect of full self-development.

Although Maslow did not go into as much detail as Muhasibi, he did mention the internal forces indirectly. However, it is apparent that he emphasises the importance of external variables and the environment. Maslow's emphasis on external circumstances suggests that internal factors have little part in the building of healthy self-development. Maslow's theory emphasises the importance of human dependence on others and their surroundings in achieving positive and fully successful self-development.

## **Conclusions**

Maslow's human development hierarchy is simple, direct, and less persuasive. This is because the reality in today's society differs from Maslow's theory, which states that people who have completed all of their requirements will become perfect individuals with all good and commendable qualities. In contrast to al-Muhasibi's method, which emphasises spiritual



development from all perspectives. This factor is regarded to be the basic core or foundation that humans require in order to create a truly exceptional and perfect human. In truth, not all human beings who have met all of their material goals will be flawless and possess all praiseworthy characteristics, but they will make genuine efforts to apply pure principles in their spiritual aspects. In reality, we must focus on both the spiritual and physical sides of human beings because they influence each other's growing efforts.

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