

## Difference between *Fitrah* and Material Nature: Which One Governs Us?

### The Opposition between *Fitrah* and Material Nature and Their Proponents

At the beginning of creation, God breathed His **spirit** into the **physical body** of the human being.<sup>1</sup> He taught him all His names and attributes<sup>2</sup> and made him worthy enough to become His perfect deputy on earth.<sup>3</sup> In this way, the desire and ability to achieve the best perfections became inherent in the essence of human existence. This innate essence is *fitrah* (pure primordial nature) or the true self of human beings and is different from their material nature or false self.

The qualities of *fitrah* are specific to human beings and are different from those of his material nature which are inherently and instinctively shared between humans, inanimate objects, plants, and animals.<sup>4</sup> In fact, *fitrah* and material nature constantly struggle with each other to take control of the human being. Human beings are divided into two groups of naturalists and those who believe in *fitrah* based on their inclinations to any of these two groups. Each defines the human being from its own point of view and addresses human life, goals, desires, and needs from his own particular worldview. In this article, we are going to discuss various aspects of these two viewpoints.

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<sup>1</sup>. Quran, 32:7-9

<sup>2</sup>. Quran, 2:31

<sup>3</sup>. Quran, 2:30

<sup>4</sup>. Such as eating, reproduction, love for leadership, helping others, etc.

## Human Immortality or Mortality

Those who believe in *fitrah* consider humans as eternal beings. They believe that our true self never dies and only moves from one carrier to another in different periods of our lives. At one point, we continue our life in the form of the material body and, at another, in the form of the *Barzakh* body in *Barzakh* (Purgatory).<sup>5</sup> But naturalists do not share the same view and consider the human a mortal being. They believe that with death, we will become **non-existent** and end in nothingness. Certainly, a person who believes that he is an eternal being and has an eternal life is very different from the one who thinks that, after a lifetime of effort and hard work, all his achievements will come to nothing and perish. This difference will have a direct impact on the thoughts, behaviors, decisions, and relationships of both individuals.

## The Truth of Human Essence

Naturalists believe that the whole truth of humans is this physical body or material nature, which is either a woman or a man and has needs such as food, clothing, shelter, job, and leisure activities. It also needs to acquire knowledge, achieve fame, get married, find accommodation, etc. All these needs must be satisfied so

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<sup>5</sup>. Barzakh is called Facsimile World also, because it is just like this world. But is so in shape and form yet different and distinct from the viewpoint of its substance and speciality. After our death, we enter a realm, which, in comparison, is like this world vis-à-vis a mother's womb.

Similarly, our bodies also will be facsimile bodies in Barzakh. This is to say that they will appear quite like our worldly material bodies but, factually, they will not be this body (containing skin and flesh). It will be an elegant, fine and exquisite body. It will be finer than air. There will be no barriers for it, which our bodies face in this material world. It (the Barzakh body) can see anything and everything from everywhere every time. There will be no difference for observation whether some thing is on this side of a wall or on the other.

(For more on this, see <https://www.al-islam.org/hereafter-maad-sayyid-abdul-husayn-dastghaib-shirazi/barzakh-purgatory-stage-between-world-and>)

that he can find happiness and inner peace in life. However, from the perspective of *fitrah*-oriented people, in his genuine essence, a human being is neither a woman nor a man, neither a mother nor a father, neither a teacher nor a student, and so on. They believe that the human being has a material and earthly form just to use it as an instrument which serves his 'true self.' He fulfills the true requirements of his eternal and everlasting life and finally returns to his original abode.

### **The Purpose of Human Life**

From the perspective of naturalists, the starting and ending point of life is limited to this earthly life. They believe only the physical body and its needs are real and respectable. All their wishes and goals are confined to satisfying the desires of the animal dimension of their existence. As we stated before, even goals such as serving fellow-human beings, achieving status and fame, acquiring knowledge, discovery, invention, expansion of knowledge, and scientific advancement can be classified as the goals of the animal dimension.

However, *fitrah*-oriented individuals consider the human being to be eternal because he has a soul and the divine breath exists within him. So they define their goals within this framework. In fact, from their point of view, the important goals of the human being are satisfying the needs of the 'true self,' being born healthy into the hereafter, and reaching the ultimate goal of human existence.

## Human Freedom and Limitation

All of us have experienced what it means to be infinite before coming into this world, and we want to return to our origin. Therefore, the desire for the infinite and the rejection of limitations are inherent in all of us. However, naturalists and *fitrah*-oriented individuals have different views on the subject of infinity.

Naturalists see the desire for the infinite as **limited** to their own **material** and **worldly** needs. In their pursuit of worldly desires and achieving higher ranks, they try different things. Moreover, since they try to fulfill this **unlimited** and **immaterial** desire with the limited and material tools of this world, they feel bored and anxious.

On the other hand, since *fitrah*-oriented people consider the source of their desire for the infinite to be something immaterial and innate (*fitri*), they know that this desire can only be satisfied through the supra-rational faculty. And when they respond to this desire in the proper way, they feel calm and happy instead of being anxious and depressed.

## Human Happiness and Misery

According to naturalists, all human happiness, dignity, joy, and inner peace lie in fulfilling material needs, indulgence in various pleasures, obeying instincts, and access to the best possible facilities at any cost. From their point of view, a person is happy as long as he has more physical beauty, money, power, fame, and ultimately greater knowledge than others. In short, a person who satisfies the needs of his material nature and enjoys more worldly blessings is happier.

However, those who believe in *fitrah* seek true happiness, joy, and peace in connection with the Absolute Perfect and in eternal, everlasting pleasures. Although they believe that all human beings have the right to enjoy a reasonable amount of earthly pleasures, they define these pleasures within the framework of a set of laws so that their eternal bliss and happiness will not be destroyed.

Overall, the perspectives of *fitrah*-oriented individuals and naturalists about human beings can be summarized as follows:

	<b>Views of <i>fitrah</i>-Oriented Individuals</b>	<b>Views of Naturalists</b>
<b>Human life</b>	Eternal and everlasting	Limited to the material world
<b>The truth of human essence</b>	Neither a woman nor a man	A man or woman with their specific needs
<b>The purpose of human life</b>	The manifestation of the names and attributes of God, the Absolute Perfect	Meeting physical needs
<b>Human freedom or limitation</b>	Subordination and obedience to divine laws	Subordination and obedience to carnal desires
<b>Human happiness and misery</b>	Connection with the Absolute Perfect and satisfying the needs of the 'true self'	Indulging in animalistic pleasures

For more information about the necessity of humanology, see "**Why Should We Define Ourselves as a Human Being?**"

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