

# Review and Critique on Herbert Spencer's theory of Ethical Evolutionism according to Islam

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## **Abstract**

Evolutionism thinkers in the discussion of the origin of creating humans believe that human societies in the context of time will be progressive and developed. Herbert Spencer, by the extension of evolutionary theory in biology to areas of society and ethics, believed in gradual progress of life from simple forms to complex forms. He has considered the distinction between developed and semi-developed behavior as the basis for the distinction between absolute ethic and relative ethic and accepted the benefit in describing the good and bad ethic, and considered joy and benefits the goal of ethic.

Quranic verses and hadiths do not accept the evolution of humans and their division from other creatures. In addition, the hypothesis of evolution even in biology has remained at the level of hypothesis and is not proven, and critics and opponents of thinkers of biology look at it with skepticism and challenges. As a result, according to the fact that this theory is not proven in the field of biology cannot validate its generalization in the field of ethics and community. In particular, such an extension requires relativity of ethic that is underlying numerous problems.

**Keywords:** ethical evolutionism, Herbert Spencer, originality of benefit, origin of creating human, Charles Darwin

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## Introduction

Evolution is a hypothesis that is raised in biology and has been taken into consideration. According to this theory, types or species of creatures along the time are not remained constant, but changed and evolved. It has an ancient history, but from eighteenth century is raised more serious in the field of natural sciences. And then some as the “Herbert Spencer” tried to extend it to the realm of ethic and society and raise evolutionary ethic.<sup>2</sup>

Spencer’s theory of social evolution in fact claims the society for evolution and development steps stages like the body evolution of a living creature.<sup>3</sup>

Another objection is that the law of evolution is deterministic law related to insensible and involuntarily nature. This law how can be the origin of ethical values that there is related to will and authenticity. Spencer “has never explicitly recognized that evolution that is a historical fact which in itself cannot prove the values that he loads of his own interpretation (of ethic and evolution). Even if we assume, for example, evolution advances toward the emergence of a kind of human social life and this type is the best type for survival not necessarily but ethically is the best type.”<sup>4</sup>

In the view of Motahari, the measure of the evolution of society is humanity. He considers evolution of human society in the humanity based on theory of nature and that its requiring is the acceptance of humanity.

Sometimes he considers evolutionary path of society as a result of the evolution of human and the world as guided path and says:

In the perspective of Qur’an, universe evolution path of human and social is a guided and targeted path and is on the line that is called the straight path and in terms of origin, path and end is clear. Man and society changes and evolves, but the way and the path is identified and unit and direct.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Tavssoly, 2001

<sup>3</sup> Saneiy, 1998

<sup>4</sup> Copleston, translation of Khoramshahi, 2001

<sup>5</sup> Motahari, 1987, p. 84

## History of evolutionism

Evolutionism is the oldest part of sociology that at the beginning, more than a century has dominated on sociology thinking. August Cont in the writings of the 1930s and 1940s established the term of sociology (Collins, 1989) and the rules that proposed for this new science of community were laws of the historical sequence of steps or evolution rules. Evolutionism in the nineteenth century was dominant in sociology. Spencer and Mine in the United Kingdom, Sumner and Ward in the United States, Lillienfeld in Germany and Novikov and Kropotkin in Russia were considered of great leaders. Evolutionism owed Faransuy and Toennies also German, Durkheim despite their criticism on speculations of four Muslim of evolution tradition in some aspects. However, in sociology in the first half of the twentieth century, a wave of opposition against evolutionism emerged. And with the appearance of serious opposition of evolutionism, like Weber, Simmel, Pareto and Parson, other ideas were proposed.

However, in the past two decades, evolutionary thought has been restored to some sort. Parsons himself presented an evolutionary pattern from world history. Germany's recent sociological theorists have tried to return Weber work on a project of evolutionary. Other patterns of evolutionary from biology and genetics as social biology are entered to sociology area. When the science of sociology is created all sociologists believed that social change among other social phenomena has the utmost importance, but only from nineteenth century and early half of twentieth-century, a serious debate among sociologists at this opportunity arose.

Two important figures that in the sciences play a decisive role are: **Lamarck and Darwin.**

Lamarck was a Swedish naturalist who did extensive studies on natural organisms. During his studies concluded that animals that can consider them with simple structure and organism, such as invertebrates, over time have evolved to more and more advanced structures and complex organisms. Lamarck is considered two main reasons for this evolution: First, exist an inherent tendency, inherent and spontaneous to evolution in organisms and then the impact of external factors that are causing this evolution. Lamarck said that the need to adapt to the

environment causes changing needs of living organism and these changes since change the habits and behaviors of animals, changes the organism.

Charles Darwin between 1809 and 1882 lived in England; he was a naturalist scientist and studied flora and fauna. Darwin had two important effects of origin of types and human need. He following religious reformation and Protestant movement, creating profound changes in the religious field of people in Europe and following the Enlightenment era and emphasis and extreme focus on empiricism and rationalism and research of people like Lamarck intended a proper field for acceptance and develop his ideas. What was clear, concept of evolution in Darwin era was not new and especially since Spencer in 1857 in an essay spoke about the universal evolution that is due to balance of living creatures in natural environment.

### **Theory of evolution in the perspective of Spencer**

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### **Theory of evolution in the perspective of Spencer**

Spencer says that evolution “is the change from a relatively indefinite, incoherent and assimilation state into relatively clear, coherent and multi-species state”.<sup>6</sup>

According to Spencer, society is an organism. Communities and

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<sup>6</sup> Kuzaran, Lewis, former, p. 136.

living organisms follow the same rules of development. This is characteristic of the social organism that as living organisms when physically grow in terms of structure also become bigger. Like animals, human embryo has several identified part, but when the embryo gets older, his organisms increase and each one do something separately. The community is the same. The lack of similarity between the groups in terms of the number and the degree is subtle but when the population increases, dissimilar and separation will be more.<sup>7</sup>

Spencer considered evolution of society as a result of political and regional conflicts. In fact, he was one of the first sociologists that understood the importance of conflict in local patterns of social organization of a society. According to Spencer, evolution occurs due to lack of inherent instability of coherent mass and because forces lead elements to different directions, separating them in diverse environments will lead to differences between the elements that compromise them with different domains.<sup>8</sup>

From Spencer's writings understood that he believes in "linear evolution". Because it emphasizes on dynamic and move from the simple to the complex stages, and compares the path of communities to the path of growth from childhood to adulthood, but we witness parts of his thought that takes away from the idea of linear, when he says that social progress as well as other kinds of progress is not linear, but takes a variety of ways.<sup>9</sup>

Spencer inspired by biology and the theories of Darwin's thought raised "organism evolution" as a gradual progression of social life from simple shapes to complex shapes, from early consistency to the increased inconsistency plan and intended to adapt the rules of "evolution" on human societies. According to Spencer, the evolution is the integration of material that is associated with analysis of movement. During this process, material crosses from indeterminate and confused consistency or coherence state to the determined and disciplined multi-spices state, in the meantime, moving stopped passes the same transformation.<sup>10</sup> He

<sup>7</sup> Ozkia Gaffari, *Sociology of Development*, 2008, p. 143

<sup>8</sup> Turner, Jonathan and Beigly, Leonard; earlier, Page 67

<sup>9</sup> The same., P. 82.

<sup>10</sup> Ozkia Gaffari, *Sociology of Development*, 2008, p. 145

believed that societies based on natural laws evolves and this process is evolution that led to the survival of stronger element.<sup>11</sup>

### **Spencer's evolutionary ethic**

As the name implies, evolutionary ethic emerged due to effects of Darwin's views. Most believe the major founder of ethic is English philosopher Herbert Spencer. Previously he had raised this issue in a treatise called Darwin's theory of evolution in his book of Principles of Psychology.<sup>12</sup>

"Spencer" divides behaviors into two parts, behaviors that have ethical limit and behaviors that not have ethical limit. The common aspect of these two types is teleology of both. In general behavior is the applications that relates to limits. Teleological behaviors are a part of the evolution law that Spencer knows it as the law governing all spheres of life. So Teleological behavior and including ethical behavior is a part of the struggle law for survival. This is exactly the result that Darwin was achieved in his analysis of ethical behavior. The organism tries to protect itself in the expense of losing another, and this statement is true even in acts with ethical limit. Due to this fact living organisms are in a constant effort to preserve and protect them and do this practice by matching actions with limits continuously and the more the match is stronger with limit in a side, the other side will have less chance for survival. This is the law of survival. According to Spencer, the law that governs all aspects of life.<sup>13</sup>

"Good and evil" good and bad in behavior in his theory from this perspective should be meaningful. As good and evil in objects meant to fit the object with limit that has been created to meet. Good and evil of actions also means that the behavior to what extent meet the considered limit. In his vision:

"Good behavior refers to actions that evolved and passed from simply state and bad behavior is that less evolved and remained in simple mode".<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Tavassoly, theories of sociology, 2009, p. 79.

<sup>12</sup> Theories of sociology, Adibi and Ansari, former; Page 47

<sup>13</sup> Durant, Will. The history of philosophy. Translation of Zaryab Khoi, 1992, p. 315.

<sup>14</sup> Copleston, translation of Khoramshahi, 2001

Here limit is the same preservation of nature. Preservation of nature means in two levels of individual and personnel and type. Good behavior in the first level is a behavior that leads to the preservation of nature. And at the higher level, the individual behavior is a good when helps to evolution of archetypical form and to be developed in this direction.<sup>15</sup>

He interpreted the ethical man as:

"The ethical man is someone whose critical performance with all diversity is implemented and applied in accordance with the conditions of his existence .... Run each of the vital functions is an ethical obligation. Thus, man is the product of evolutionary, society is the product of evolutionary and moral values as well as is the product of evolutionary. Behavior in overall law of evolution is an evolutionary phenomenon and ethical behavior in this case is not separate from evolution law."

### **The theory of evolution and Western scholars**

Very controversial and problematic and influential theories on anthropology are evolutionary theory of Darwin (1882-1809). This theory in the West created radical changes in religious and non-religious education and created different schools that each in a way affects the ideology of the people, have transformed their anthropology. This theory put down the human from the position of succession of God, and introduced him a monkey evolved and limited anthropological studies to biological studies about human as a more complex human. Ethics and human values derived from the teachings of revelation were shaken and practical ethical based on evolution theory and by mimicking the current rules in nature was replaced.<sup>16</sup> About domination of this theory, Dr. Nasr said: "Today, in the modern world anyone thinks and speaks about everything with evolution criteria."<sup>17</sup>

Darwin by studying Malthus paper (1834-1766) priest and English economist about balance of population discovered the theory of natural selection as the basis of hypothesis of evolution.

<sup>15</sup> Sanei Darreh Bidi, former Page 327.

<sup>16</sup> Pirmoradi 1995:18.

<sup>17</sup> Nasr 1994:268-269

According to Malthus, world population with a geometric progression (ie 1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, etc.) will increase and so much that if everyone wants to stand on feet, no longer can find a foothold. Malthus states this theory that “the balance between human beings and food available all are created by wars, epidemics and floods, earthquakes and the like them otherwise human would die of hunger.”<sup>18</sup> (The struggle for survival) this struggle has existed always between them and after centuries, emission of characteristics will be created and a trait that is seen in the last type is different altogether from their original ancestor, so that it can be called a new kind.<sup>19</sup>

### **The theory of evolution and Islam**

What it seems is that gradual human evolution is not correct according to the Quran. Verse 30 of Sureh Baqarah in the Holy Quran says: When your Lord said to the angels: I placed a successor on earth, the angels said: Do you place anyone on earth that do corruption and bleed? We praise you. He said: I know facts that you do not know.<sup>20</sup>

In this verse, the angels after informing from Adam creating asked God whether you create a creature that corrupt and bleed. It is as if the angels before Adam have observed creatures that were as Adam and had acted to corruption and bloodshed that in most interpretations, one of the possibilities that state to the type of organisms is that they were human.<sup>21</sup> From this verse as understood that God, while created Adam (AS) who is ancestor of modern man that before him had also created other human beings and they were destroyed and modern human has been replaced by them of course, apart from their creation because apparently angels had no previous knowledge to Adam.

In other words, this verse not confirms the gradual evolution and human is derived from other creatures. In a hadith asked from Imam Ali (AS) that what has been before Adam, the Prophet (PBUH) says: Adam and if ask several times, we say, Adam (ie there were other people

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<sup>18</sup> Darwin, earlier, 97: 1984

<sup>19</sup> Darwin, 98: 2008

<sup>20</sup> Verse 30, Sureh Baqara

<sup>21</sup> Interpretation of sample- Makarem Shirazi and others- first vol-p 172- published thirty-eighth and interpretation of Tasnim- Abdollah Javadi Amoli- third vol Page 64

like Adam before him) that apparently this tradition rejects gradual evolution.

But what seems more important is the place of conflict in the development of human kind and not in other animals. Because essentially the religion of Islam not speaks from the emergence of other creatures plainly and clearly although introduces exist of other creatures without giving rise to excess or their gradual (evolution) from God and even though the Koran also agrees gradual and evolutionary theory on other creatures except human beings. For example, in verse 30 of Sureh Naba Holy Quran say: "we alive everything from water".<sup>22</sup> Verse 45 of Sureh Noor: "Allah created all from water".<sup>23</sup> From verses like these verses that refer to the creation of life from water can be understood the evolutionary life that according to the theory of evolution has been the primary source of life from unicellular organisms that had arisen in sea water. And this theory is more consistent with the tradition of God which is the order and law in the universe and creation. Also Tabatabai (ra) was asked: Is there a verse in the Holy Quran in this regard that before mankind has been another mankind?

Allame responded: No, Quran has not protested the meaning that before this man has been universe of another human, as it is about the jinn.<sup>24</sup>

In the unity book of Imam Sadiq (AS) quoted in a tradition that said: Perhaps you think that God did not create human except you, yes I swear to God that God has created thousands of people that you're in the last series.

Ibn Meisam in the description of Nahj al-Balagha from Imam Baqir (AS) has narrated a narration that is as the same theme, and Saduq in Khasal book also has narrated it. In the book of Khasal of Imam Muhammad Baqir (as) that he said: Allah from the day when created earth has created Seven universes in it and humans in the worlds not been Adam's descendants and their creation is from earth and God placed them one after another on earth with the world related to themselves and then created Adam Abolbashar and his children were emerged of him.

<sup>22</sup> Verse 30 of Surah Naba

<sup>23</sup> Verse 45 of Sureh Noor

<sup>24</sup> Hajar: 27, r, ck: Al-Mizan, vol. 2, p. 39, vol 12, Page 153

**Critiques:**

- If we not say the theory of transfer of kinds and evolution is canceled, at least yet in the field of biology is at the level of hypothesis and not turned into law. So Spencer's ethical approach that is based on the theory is shaken and challenged.

- Spencer's view in the field of human perfection and his limit of life not meet the basic and deep questions about anthropology, cosmology and eternal life.

- Spencer's approach is focused solely on external and material operations of human and not pays attention to spiritual and esoteric matters. While the internal actions and the actions of human are raised in ethic and primarily made the basis of ethics. External actions are internal and external actions emerging. The lack of referring and basic attention to this kind of human action is indicative of the failure and aborting of this theory.

- Spencer view is in contrast with religious doctrines. This approach by lack of attention to religious teachings and the separation of ethic teachings with religious principles has become a superficial and mono-centric approach.

- Spencer's statement that humans gradually led from selfishness to altruism so that benefit except for them follows joy is untrue. Because in cases of conflict, between desires often egoism and selfishness prevails and dominates and humans path has not been constantly toward ethic evolution. Of course, understanding and public perception of people has been towards understanding social and collective relationships. But this concept that understanding always causes action needs for ethical education, and naturally, especially with educational barriers will not be realized. Ethical education is based on the acceptance of comprehensive and complete ethic principles.

- The critiques on Spencer's theory are that the theory is based on the theory of evolution, originality of benefit and ethical sense that the accuracy of theory of evolution is questioned. - Basically, what triggers all actions of man is selfishness. In this regard, it's been art of religions which introduced real self to human being and not vilified and altered the self-love. When the real man was absolute perfection, all

ethical principles, including emotion to others finds logical justification. Spencer in his approach has paid less attention to this point.

- Spencer's view has been lack of logic principles and reasoning and does not have a coherent and deep structure. The view in explaining its principles have been excessive superficiality and has become single-centered approach and unreliable.

- The theory not provides practical application on how we can achieve a sense of ethical and ethical sympathy and lead selfishness in order to non-selfishness.

- Criticism that is for sense of ethical theory and theory of originality of ethical on this approach could also be taken into account.

- Ethical evaluation of this view based on relative ethical and relative distinction to ethics, ethical principles are faced with fundamental challenges. So from Spencer approach cannot deduce human ethic and proportional to the excellent nature of human beings.

## Conclusion

- "Herbert Spencer" was the nineteenth-century thinkers who advocate the theory of evolution or the theory of the transfer. Spencer was seeking to find a scientific basis for the ethical implications and obligations, and not found any belief to unseen and metaphysical reference for ethic philosophy in his view. Theory of evolution that was extended by "Lamarck" and by "Darwin" was accepted and considered for Spencer.

Spencer by follow the approach of Lamarck and Darwin based his ethical philosophy on evolution theory and for explaining ethical principles of his philosophy used principles, rules and principles governing the theory. Thus, he considers behavior a set of actions that are related to the derivative. Actualized and human perfection in the view of Spencer is considered limit of human behavior.

He believed that more clear evidence from targeted actions that is for the good of the person or type can be found. But it can also be argued that such purposive activity form a part of struggle for survival between different people of a type and between different types, stating that an organism seeks to protect itself at the expense of the other.

With this interpretation, Spencer is accepted the theory of originality of benefit in describing the ethics of good and evil. He considers pleasures and benefits as the limit of ethic and he measures verification with the criterion of utilitarianism. Spencer believes that in past societies, ethical orders have been familiar by imagining divine authority and sacred and divine approval and therefore with a kind of authority. However, over time, gradually ethic is released of conjunction with non-ethical and religious attitudes and considered an ethical approach that is based solely on the natural and detected consequences of human. Spencer in his ethic philosophy believes in separation of ethic and ethic philosophy of religion and religious principles and thus considered independence for the ethic philosophy.

It should be said that he believes in the field of ethical philosophy and domain of ethic, evolution process of theories and ethics has been considered of extending approach of originality of benefit. With this description, Spencer explains his belief in the theory of utilitarianism. He believes that the evolution notice the appearance of the highest human faculty, so originality of benefit of Spencer can accept perfection of self in its inside.

Spencer also somewhat committed and believed to the theory of ethical sense. He considered retractable the benevolence with selfish. He was going to gather his theory and the facts that were in his ideas. For example, he not considered the originality of benefit negating the theory of ethical authenticity and ethical sense. Rather he said this kindness to others, after a period of time will be inner and natural.

- The truth is that the theory of evolution and the origin of species is still at the level of hypotheses and theories and there is no definite and certain reason for its proving. So many questions and ambiguities cases arise on the assumption that each have special place and questionable for their own. As Spencer says that evolution is "the change from a relatively indefinite, incoherent and assimilation state into relatively clear, coherent and multi-species state" and the evolution is in fact the universal process that explains "the first development that the whole world should be seen to itself" and the "last developments that we find in community and products of social life".

In short, Quranic verses and hadiths not consider accurate the Human Evolution and split it of the other creature. In addition theory of evolution in biology is still hypothesis and not proved and many

critics and opponents look at it with great challenge and doubt. When the theory in the field of biology is unproven how can validate its extension in the field of ethic and society, especially such an extension requires relativeness of ethic that follows numerous problems on relative-oriented in ethic.

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## PREGLED I KRITIKA HERBERT SPENCEROVE TEORIJE ETIČKOG EVOLUCIONIZMA PO ISLAMU

### Sažetak:

Evolucionistički mislioci u raspravi o porijeklu stvaranja čovjeka vjeruju da će ljudska društva u kontekstu vremena biti napredna i razvijena. Herbert Spencer je po proširenju evolucijske teorije u biologiji na područja društva i etike vjerovao u postepeni razvoj života od jednostavnih do složenih oblika. Razmatrao je razliku između razvijenog i polurazvijenog ponašanja kao osnovu za razlikovanje između apsolutne etike i relativne etike, i prihvatio je prednost u opisu dobre i loše etike te je radost i koristi smatrao ciljem etike. Kur'anski ajeti i hadisi ne prihvaćaju evoluciju ljudi i njihov nastanak od drugih stvorenja. Osim toga, hipoteza evolucije čak i u biologiji ostaje na razini hipoteze i nije dokazana, a kritičari i protivnici mislilaca biologije gledaju ga skeptično i sa izazovom. Kao rezultat toga, zbog nedokazivanja ove teorije u području biologije, ne može se potvrditi njegova generalizacija u području etike i zajednice. Konkretno, takva analogija zahtijeva relativnost etike koja je temelj brojnih problema.

**Ključne riječi:** etički evolucionizam, Herbert Spencer, originalnost koristi, porijeklo stvaranja čovjeka, Charles Darwin

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