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Dear Assoc. Prof. Dr.,

**DECISION OF THE PUBLICATION TECHNICAL COMMITTEE ON THE
MANUSCRIPT ENTITLED: "ETHICS & FIQH OF CONTEMPORARY ISSUES"**

May this letter reach you while you are in the best of health.

2. Please be informed that the above-mentioned manuscript was deliberated during the Publication Technical Committee Meeting No. 8/2024, which concluded on 18th December 2024.

3. We are delighted to notify you that the Committee has approved the manuscript for acceptance and further processes, with the intent of publication by IIUM Press.

4. The details of the manuscript are attached as Appendix I.

Your attention and cooperation in this matter are highly appreciated.

Thank you. *Wassalam.*

"Leading the Way"

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CHAPTER 1: ETHICS FROM THE ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE	Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak Hayatullah Laluddin
CHAPTER 2: ISLAMIC ETHICS: PRINCIPLES, SOURCES, AND CHARACTERISTICS	Bachar Bakour
CHAPTER 3: THE INCULCATION OF MORAL VALUES	Abdul Latif Abdul Razak
CHAPTER 4: ENJOINING GOOD AND FORBIDDING EVIL	Mohammad Nazmus Sayadat
CHAPTER 5: JUSTICE IN THE ISLAMIC AND WESTERN TRADITIONS	Kabuye Uthman Sulaiman
CHAPTER 6: EXPLORING SHARĪ'AH, FIQH, AND THE LEGACY OF IJTIHĀD	Bachar Bakour
CHAPTER 7: MAQASID AL-SHARI'AH: TRADITION, EVOLUTION AND SCHOLARLY THOUGHT	Ahmad Akram Mahmad Robbi
CHAPTER 8: FAMILY: SOCIAL INTERACTION AND MARRIAGE	Mohamed Sheikh Alio
CHAPTER 9: INTERPERSONAL ETHICS	Abdul Latif Abdul Razak
CHAPTER 10: ISLAMIC ETHICS OF HEALTH, ILLNESS AND HEALING	Norbani Ismail
CHAPTER 11: HOMOSEXUALITY: AN ISLAMIC ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE	Norbani Ismail
CHAPTER 12: SURROGACY FROM AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE: ETHICAL-LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS	Az Zahara A. Jamal Hamim Azad
CHAPTER 13: BIRTH CONTROL AND EUTHANASIA	Maulana Akbar Shah @ U Tun Aung
CHAPTER 14: ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS	Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak Hayatullah Laluddin
CHAPTER 15: ISLAM AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	Maulana Akbar Shah @ U Tun Aung

CHAPTER 2

ISLAMIC ETHICS: PRINCIPLES, SOURCES, AND CHARACTERISTICS

Bachar Bakour

Introduction

This chapter delves into the multifaceted landscape of Islamic ethics, exploring its foundational principles. Islamic ethics, deeply rooted in the teachings of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, offers a unique perspective on morality, guiding individuals in their interactions with others and shaping their ethical conduct. The chapter begins by dissecting the division of ethics, which traditionally encompasses normative ethics, metaethics, and applied ethics. Through this lens, one gains insight into the theoretical frameworks and practical applications that underpin Islamic ethical discourse. Moreover, the chapter explores the sources of ethics in Islam, namely the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, as the primary repositories of divine guidance and moral injunctions.

A crucial aspect of Islamic ethics is its interrelationship with *fiqh* and Sufism. While *fiqh* provides the legal framework for ethical conduct, Sufism offers a spiritual dimension that emphasizes the inner transformation of the individual. This analysis explores how these two branches of Islamic thought complement each other, thereby enriching the ethical landscape with their distinct perspectives. Additionally, it outlines the characteristics of Islamic ethics, highlighting its universal principles, focus on intentionality, and commitment to justice and equality. Through the examination of these key elements, this discussion aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of Islamic ethics and its role in guiding individuals toward moral excellence and spiritual fulfillment.

Terms Defined

Given the depth and breadth of the discussion on Islamic ethics, the discussion broadly outlines the main features of the terminology. Etymologically, the term ‘ethics’¹ goes back to the ancient Greek ‘ethos’ meaning character,² and is defined as 1. discipline dealing with good and evil and with moral duty. 2. Moral principles or practice.³

Generally, the terms ‘ethics’ and ‘morality’ are used interchangeably, although some ethicists make a distinction between the two terms.⁴ ‘Ethics’ commonly refers to the conduct of organizations and is associated with professional codes of conduct, such as medical and business ethics. On the other hand, ‘morality’ typically pertains to individuals' behavior in their personal lives. In Arabic, *Khuluq* (pl. *akhlāq*) is identical with ‘ethics’, meaning ‘innate disposition.’⁵ Other terms also denote hereditary moral characteristics or the temperament with which one is born, such as *sajjiyah*,⁶ *fitrah*⁷ and *al-ṭab‘* or *al-tabī‘ah*.⁸ Particular attention goes to the term *fitrah*.

Fitrah

Man is born with the natural predisposition to believe in God. All mankind, before they were placed in the terrestrial world, were gathered and required, according to the Qur’an (7: 172), to bear witness to God’s lordship.⁹ Contemporary studies on the cognitive science of religion demonstrate that children have a natural propensity to believe in God.¹⁰ A key Hadīth, narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim, lays stress on the fact that every infant is born according to the original

¹ The term ‘ethics’ can be used as both a singular and plural noun. *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974, 247.

² Balckburn, Simon. *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, 126.

³ *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, 247. For further definitions and concepts see Balckburn, *The Oxford Dictionary*, 251; Flew, Antony. *A Dictionary of Philosophy*. London: Pan Books Ltd, 1979, 105-106.

⁴ Balckburn, *The Oxford Dictionary*, 251; Proudfoot, Michael and Lacey, A.R. *The Routledge Dictionary of Philosophy*. Routledge, 4th ed., 2010, 125-128; 265-266. For an assessment of the differentiation and contradictory positions regarding the two terms see Taha ‘Abd al-Rahmān, *Su’āl al-akhlāq: musāhamah fī al-naqd al-akhlāqī li al-hadāthah al-gharbiyyah*. Casablanca and Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-‘Arabī, 2000, 17-20.

⁵ Lane, Edward William. *An Arabic-English Lexicon*. Beirut: Librairie du Liban, reprint, 1968, 2: 101

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4: 1313.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 6: 2416.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 5: 1823. For a linguistic differentiation between these terms, see al-Asfahānī, al-Rāghib *Al-Dharī‘ah ilā makārim al-sharī‘ah*, translated and annotated by Yasien Mohamed under the title *The Path to Virtue: The Ethical Philosophy of Al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī*. Kuala Lumpur: The International Institute of Thought and Civilization (IIUM), 2006, 492-495.

⁹ Mawdūdī, Sayyid. *Towards Understanding the Qur’ān*, Abridged version of *Tafhīm al-Qur’ān*. Translated and edited by Zafar Ishaq Ansari; Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 2004, 3: 97.

¹⁰ See Barrett, Justin. *Born believers: the science of children’s religious belief*. New York: Free Press, 2012; Bering, Jesse. *The Belief Instinct: The Psychology of Souls, Destiny, and the Meaning of Life*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2011.

state of creation (*fiṭrah*), but gets perverted by his parents (and surrounding milieu).¹¹ However, the nature of this *fiṭrah* is interpreted differently by Muslim scholars. It denotes a dualistic state of inclination to goodness and evil; a neutral state of neither good nor bad; or a positive state of intrinsic goodness.¹² The third interpretation is the most predominant view by classical scholars.

13

Al-‘Aql (Reason)

Humanity has been granted by God the capacity to use reason in distinguishing between right and wrong, and to discern the appropriate course of action. Al-Raghib Al-Asfahani asserts that through reason, man earns the right to be God’s vicegerent, suggesting that if it were to be removed, virtues would be removed from the world, let alone humanity.¹⁴ Those who neglect reason and instead indulge in selfish desires, blinding themselves with self-importance, stray from the correct path and lose the ability to differentiate between right and wrong. Even if they possess knowledge of the truth, they are inclined to follow their carnal desires and pursue materialistic gains, disregarding their conscience. The Qur’an (38:26) urges humanity to restrain egotistical and hedonistic desires, condemning those who display arrogance, mischief, and an insatiable thirst for wealth and power.

Division of ethics

Ethics is traditionally subdivided into normative ethics, metaethics, and applied ethics. Meta-ethics, which delves into the essence of ethical terms themselves (such as 'what is goodness?'), and questions how ethical knowledge is acquired (for example, 'how can I differentiate between what is good and what is bad?'), focuses primarily on the theoretical aspects rather than practical applications like 'what should I do in a particular situation?'. Meta-ethics thus explores the nature of ethical properties, statements, attitudes, and judgments. It scrutinizes topics such as the meaning of moral questions and the basis for determining what is 'true' or 'false'.

In contrast, normative ethics delves into ethical actions, explicitly addressing the question of 'what is the right thing to do?' in a general sense. It revolves around inquiries into what individuals should

¹¹ Ibn al-Athīr, *Jāmi‘ al-Usūl fī AHādīth al-Rasūl*. Damascus: Maktabat al-Halwānī, 1969, 1: 268.

¹² Mohamed, Yasien. *The Islamic Conception of Human Nature with Special Reference to the Development of an Islamic Psychology*. MA Dissertation. The University of Cape Town, 1986, 2-31.

¹³ Ibid., 12-13.

¹⁴ Al-Asfahani, *Al-Dhari‘ah ila Makarim al-Shari‘ah*, edited by Abu al-Yazid Abi Zayd al-‘Ajami, Cairo: Dar al-Salam, 1st ed., 2007, 133.

do morally and how they can determine the 'correct' course of moral action. Applied ethics deals with the pursuit of moral outcomes in specific scenarios, involving a philosophical analysis of intricate issues requiring moral judgment. Fields like bioethics, environmental ethics, development ethics, and business/corporate ethics fall under applied ethics.¹⁵

Islamic ethics: Source

In Islam, the Qur'an establishes ethical concepts and standards, while the *sunnah* embodies these concepts through practical examples.¹⁶ For instance, Allah says: "*You (Prophet Muhammad) are on an exalted standard of character.*" (Qur'an, 68:4) When 'Āishah, was questioned about his character, she responded by saying that it mirrored the noble teachings of the Qur'an.¹⁷ The Qur'an contains abundant ethical references. As a whole, its revelation outlines a vision of humanity, emphasizing values and ultimate goals rooted deeply in morality. Through the recognition of God and His uniqueness (*Tawhid*), believers are encouraged to navigate their life's journey by answering the call to engage in virtuous deeds, to undergo self-transformation through reform and purification, and to break free from the captivity of material possessions and dependencies.

The Muslim jurist, al-'Izz ibn 'Abd al-Salām (d. 1262 CE), emphasizes that knowledge of God and His attributes is the source of human happiness and the catalyst for all acts of goodness in both worldly life and the hereafter.¹⁸ Al-'Izz employs the metaphor of a tree, drawing inspiration from the Qur'an's reference to the "good tree" (*al-shajarah al-taiyybah*).¹⁹ In this analogy, the trunk symbolizes *ma'rifat al-dhāt* (the knowledge of God's essence), while its three main branches represent *ma'rifat al-sifāt* (the knowledge of God's attributes). These attributes encompass: i. those that negate improper concepts or actions attributed to God, such as slumber, injustice, and aggression; ii. attributes that add conceptual depth to God's essence, including will, sight, life,

¹⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/summary/ethics-philosophy>

¹⁶ Muslim scholars such as al-Fārābī, al-Ghazālī, and Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, who have written on Islamic ethics, have, to varying extents and through various approaches, extracted ethical principles from diverse religious and cultural traditions, including Greek, Persian, and Indian, and integrated them into Islamic ethical discourse. However, it's important to note that these Islamic philosophers never ignored the Qur'an as a source of inspiration in shaping the overall Islamic ethical perspective

¹⁷ Ibn Hanbal, Ahmad. *Al-Musnad*, edited by Shu'ayb al-Arna'ūt, et. al. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1993-2001, 14: 149.

¹⁸ Al-'Izz ibn 'Abd al-Salām, *Shajarat al-ma'ārif wa al-ahwāl*, edited by Iyād al-Tabbā', Damascus: Dar al-Tabbā', 1989, 14.

¹⁹ The verses go, 'Hast thou not seen how God has struck a similitude? A good word is as a good tree -- its roots are firm, and its branches are in heaven; it gives its produce every season by the leave of its Lord.' Arberry, Arthur. *The Koran Interpreted*. New York: Touchstone, 1955.

hearing, knowledge, power, and speech; iii. attributes related to divine actions, such as causing harm or benefit, forgiveness or punishment, honor or degradation, and so forth. Under these branches, particularly the third which is the most expansive, a wide array of values and virtuous deeds are encompassed.²⁰

Many verses in the Qur'an emphasize the fundamental reality that everyone faces a choice: "The one who purifies his soul succeeds, and the one who corrupts it fails" (Qur'an, 91 :9–10). Thus, inherent within every person are two inclinations, one toward goodness and the other toward evil (as part of their creation). In alignment with their conscience and faith, individuals must make a conscientious choice between good and evil. The distinction of a "believer" is marked by their engagement in "good deeds," as revealed in the Qur'an: "*those who believe and work righteous deeds*" (Qur'an, 29:7).

It is of prime importance to refer here to a great book on the ethics of the Qur'an by the late Egyptian Shekih Muhammad Abdullah Draz.²¹ Through a thematic analysis of the Qur'an, the Sheikh presents five key moral components: obligation, responsibility, sanction, intent, and effort. Each component is vital in shaping the conscience of a believer, demanding awareness and consideration. The Sheikh illustrates that every individual, regardless of faith, possesses an innate "light" enabling them to discern between good and evil, leading them towards duty, kindness, and charity. However, believers have a "double light," a profound understanding that integrates divine law into their being, aligning their will with that of their Creator.

In the second part of the book, the author divides practical ethics into the following: Personal Ethics: This section encompasses various duties such as the pursuit of knowledge, temperance of anger, humility, and control of desires. It also outlines prohibited actions including lying, suicide, cruelty, hypocrisy, greed, wastefulness, ostentation, pride, attachment to worldly life, deviation, and consumption of intoxicants. Additionally, it discusses permissible actions such as the moderate use of blessings and exceptions during times of necessity, supported by relevant Qur'anic verses. Family Ethics: A. Responsibilities towards ancestors and descendants include kindness, humility, obedience to parents, and safeguarding the well-being of children. B. Responsibilities towards spouses involve delineating prohibited marriages, desirable qualities in choosing partners,

²⁰ Al-'Izz, *Shajarat al-ma'arif*, 14-45.

²¹ Draz, *Morality in the Qur'an: The Greater Good of Humanity*, translated and edited by Basma I. Abdelgafar. Islamic Book Trust, 2018.

conditions for polygamy, and aspects of married life such as affection, propagation of lineage, equitable rights and responsibilities, divorce regulations, and inheritance laws. Qur'anic verses are referenced to provide insight and understanding.

Social Ethics: This segment addresses prohibitions such as homicide, theft, injustice, betrayal, and spying, along with commands like returning deposits, honoring debts, fulfilling promises, offering fair testimony, fostering peace, liberating slaves, managing orphaned estates, promoting knowledge, countering evil with goodness, cultivating spiritual excellence, upholding justice, and practicing charity. Additionally, it discusses etiquettes including seeking permission before entering homes, responding to greetings, speaking softly, selecting appropriate conversation topics, using kind language, and seeking permission before leaving gatherings.

Political Ethics:

The head of state is tasked with consulting citizens, ensuring justice, upholding order, safeguarding public property, and guaranteeing religious freedom. Citizens, in turn, are expected to maintain discipline, unity, engage in public discourse, obey the Prophet, combat corruption, prepare for defense, avoid collaboration with enemies, and promote peace. During conflicts, they must adhere to principles such as avoiding aggression, targeting only combatants, demonstrating steadfastness, honoring treaties, and upholding ethical standards.

Religious Ethics: This section outlines duties towards God, including belief in Him and His revelations, unconditional obedience, contemplation of His words and creation, gratitude for His blessings, patience during trials, trust in His mercy, fulfillment of vows, maintenance of faith, constant remembrance of Him, performance of worship rituals, pilgrimage (Hajj).

The second source of ethics in Islam is the Prophetic *Sunnah*. The Prophet (p.b.u.h) encapsulated his entire message in his saying, "Verily, I was sent to perfect the moral character."²² The Prophet (p.b.u.h) was once asked about those whom Allah loves the most. His response was: 'Those who possess good morals.' Additionally, he instructed his companions to refrain from indecency and immoral behavior, affirming that 'the best among you are those with the best character.'²³ On another occasion, he delineated the defining attributes of a Muslim's character, stating: 'A Muslim is one who refrains from harming other Muslims with their words and actions.'²⁴ Also, the Prophet

²² Ibn Hanbal *Al-Musnad*, 14: 513. For prophetic traditions on the centrality of good character, see Ali, Syed Ameer. *The Ethics of Islam*. Calcutta: Thacker Spink Co, 1893, 1-51.

²³ Ibn al-Athīr, *Jāmi' al-Usūl*, 4: 6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1: 240.

(p.b.u.h) declared, 'You cannot win people's hearts with wealth, but you can win them over with a smiling face and good morals.'²⁵

Islamic ethics and other sciences

Islamic ethics is deeply rooted in the Islamic tradition, spanning from Qur'anic and Hadith studies to theology and philosophy, and from exegesis and *fiqh* to Sufism and literary works. I will focus here on ethics in relation to *fiqh*²⁶ and Sufism.

1. *Fiqh*

Fiqh, in its early usage, signifies an ethical journey to reach the quality of moral integrity.²⁷ The term *maslahah* is taken from the verb *salaha/aslaha*, which means to fix, rectify and improve something or someone whether physically, morally, or spiritually.²⁸ 'Strictly speaking, *maslaha*, like *manfa'a*, means "utility" and its antonyms are *madarra* and *mafsada* ("injury"); but generally speaking, *maslaha* denotes "welfare" and is used by jurists to mean "general good" or "public interest". Anything which helps to avert *mafsada* or *darar* and furthers human welfare is equated with *maslaha*.'²⁹

In his interpretation of the prophetic tradition, "*Verily, I was sent to perfect the moral character,*" al-Shatibi posits that the entirety of *Sharī'ah* is infused with moral principles. He explains that during the Meccan period, God revealed the fundamental principles and overarching regulations of Islam. These included beliefs in God, His messengers, and the Last Day, as well as prohibitions against disbelief and polytheism. Additionally, they encompassed directives promoting virtuous conduct such as justice, benevolence, forbearance, and honoring commitments, while discouraging vices like indecency, aggression, and homicide. As time progressed into the Medinan era, these foundational principles and regulations were gradually expanded upon. This evolution included the prohibition of intoxicants and the establishment of legal sanctions, among other developments.³⁰

²⁵ Al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, *Kanz al-'Ummāl*. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1978, 3: 6.

²⁶ In a broad sense, *Fiqh* refers to the comprehensive legal dimension of Islam, encompassing *Usul al-fiqh*.

²⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*. Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 2005, 41-42.

²⁸ See Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, iv. 1714; Mas'ūd, Muhammad Khālid. *Al-Shāṭibī's Philosophy of Islamic Law* (Kuala Lumpur, Islamic Book Trust, reprint, 2005), 135.

²⁹ Khaḍḍūrī, Majid. 'MASLAHA', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, edited by C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, G. Lecomte, Leiden: Brill, new ed., 1986-2004, 6: 738.

³⁰ Al-Shatibi, *Al-Muwafaqat*, edited by Abu 'Ubaydah Mashur ibn Hasan al Salman, KSA: Dar Ibn 'Affan, 1997, 3: 336.

As the prophetic mission endeavors to nurture the inherent moral compass within humanity, all Islamic laws, covering rituals, transactions, and criminal acts, were instituted as means to achieve the ethical elevation of the soul.³¹

In addition, *Sharī'ah*, as a whole, was primarily instituted for the promotion of the best interests of human beings (*Masālih al-'Ibād*).

These *masālih*, or interests, are traditionally understood within the framework of *maqāsid al-Sharī'ah* (the higher objectives and intents of Islamic law), categorized as follows:

- i. *darūriyyāt* (necessary interests): These encompass five universal principles: the preservation and protection of religion, life, intellect, property, and lineage. The existential purpose of *Sharī'ah* is to safeguard and promote these five areas of human life. Its legal rulings cannot contradict these principles or any of their implications, as they are essential for the proper functioning of life.
- ii. *hājiyyāt* (supporting needs): These supporting interests are necessary for the smooth operation and implementation of *darūriyyāt*. Without legal protection, there would be hardship and loss in the execution of social functions. While *darūriyyāt* may not be lost, their protection would involve considerable hardship and difficulty.
- iii. *tahsīniyyāt* (complementary interests): These interests aim to enhance the fulfillment of *darūriyyāt* and *hājiyyāt* by providing additional rules that contribute to the moral and spiritual advancement of society.³²

Considering that the Prophet's core mission is fundamentally ethical, and that the principle of *maslahah* embodies the ultimate purpose of *maqāsid al-Sharī'ah*, it can be inferred that the advancement of people's morality and the promotion of their best interests are interconnected concepts serving a common objective, akin to two sides of a coin. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah astutely observes, “The fundamentals of *Sharī'ah* are founded on preserving the welfare of people in this life and the hereafter. These objectives are based on justice, mercy, wisdom, and the benefit

³¹ Ibid., vol. 3: 121.

³² Hallaq, Wael. *A History of Islamic Legal Theories*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 168-170; Al-Raysuni, Ahmad. *Imam Al Shatibi's Theory of the Higher Objectives and Intents of Islamic Law*. Translated from Arabic by Nancy Roberts; London, Washington: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2005, 108-109; 136-144; Kamali, Hashim. *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*. Islamic Texts Society, 3rd ed., 2003, 351-368.

of creation. Therefore, any situation that deviates from justice to injustice, from mercy to cruelty, from wisdom and utility to chaos and futility, falls outside the scope of *Sharī'ah*.”³³

2. Sufism

Sufism, often referred to as the mystical dimension of Islam, embarks on a journey of spiritual awakening and divine intimacy. Rooted in the Qur'anic injunctions to seek closeness to Allah and the Prophetic teachings on spiritual excellence (*ihsan*),³⁴ Sufism delves into the inner dimensions of faith, seeking to transcend the material realm and attain spiritual union with the Divine. Through practices such as *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah), meditation, and spiritual purification, Sufism cultivates a profound sense of spiritual awareness and inner transformation. Abu Talib al-Makki attributed the establishment of the "science of the heart" (*'ilm al-qulūb*) to al-Hasan al-Basri, a designation that many associate with Sufism.³⁵ Abū Muhammad al-Jurayri defines Sufism as 'assuming every sublime moral character trait and giving up every lowly one.'³⁶ Sufism, according to another one, is nothing but good morals; whoever surpasses you in good morals surpasses you in purity (*saḡā*).³⁷

The communities from which the early tradition emerged consisted of various groups such as preachers, weepers, worshippers, and ascetics. Even if one doubts the historical accuracy of the numerous legends surrounding the renowned female mystic Rābi'ah al-'Adawiyya, which portray her as the epitome of the devoted lover of God, the significance of the role of divine love in the spiritual journey within this environment cannot be overlooked.³⁸

³³ Ibn Qayyim's statement is translated in Al-Bar, Muhammad 'Ali and Shamsi, Pasha Hassan, *Contemporary Bioethics: Islamic Perspective*. Springer, 2015, 50.

³⁴ A renowned Hadith recounts an encounter between Prophet Muhammad and his Companions, during which the Angel Gabriel appeared in human form and asked the Prophet to define Islam. The Prophet responded by outlining the five pillars of practice: the *shahhdah*, prayer, fasting, alms-giving, and pilgrimage. When questioned about *iman*, the Prophet enumerated the six pillars of faith, including belief in God, prophecy, angels, scriptures, the Final Day, and divine decree. Regarding *ihsan*, the Prophet articulated, "It is that you worship God as if you see Him; but if you do not see Him, He nevertheless sees you." Some scholars interpret these responses as delineating the three spheres that encompass Muslim life: "right action," "right belief," and "spiritual excellence." Orfali, Bilal, Khalil, 'Atif, Rustom, Muhammad, eds. *Mysticism and Ethics in Islam*. American University of Beirut Press, 2022, the intro. 11.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁶ Al-Qushayri, *Al-Qushayrī Epistle of Sūfism*, Translated by Alexander D. Knysh; UK: Garnet Publishing Limited, 2007, 289.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 290.

³⁸ Orfali, Bilal, Khalil, 'Atif, Rustom, Muhammad, eds. *Mysticism and Ethics in Islam*, 12.

In early Sufi literature, the emphasis was primarily on guiding the inward transformation necessary for the fallen soul's journey back to its spiritual home, rather than expounding metaphysical doctrines, though these were not entirely absent. This approach encompassed various domains such as virtue ethics, moral psychology, moral theology, and mystical theology, which together formed the distinctive character of Sufi ethics. Central to this convergence was the belief in humanity's exile from its true homeland, with the conviction that the inner life is the path of return. Just as the exile of Adam and Eve marked the beginning of human existence on earth, it also symbolized a descent and an outward displacement from one's spiritual center. While prophetic teachings offered a method for returning to God's Paradise after death, the inward message of the Sufis, inheriting the prophetic tradition, provided a method for returning to the Divine Presence within, in the eternal present.³⁹

At their core, both ethics and Sufism share a common objective: the cultivation of virtuous qualities and the realization of spiritual perfection. Ethics provides the moral framework within which Sufism operates, guiding practitioners to embody principles of righteousness, compassion, and humility in their spiritual journey. Similarly, Sufism infuses ethical considerations into its practices, emphasizing the importance of sincerity, integrity, and selflessness in the pursuit of spiritual realization. Ethics serves as the moral compass that guides Sufis in their quest for spiritual enlightenment, ensuring that their spiritual aspirations are grounded in principles of ethical conduct and moral integrity. Conversely, Sufism enriches ethical principles with a deeper spiritual dimension, infusing moral conduct with a sense of divine purpose and spiritual significance.⁴⁰

Characteristics of Islamic Ethics

Islamic ethics are built upon the principle that humanity is entrusted with the role of vicegerent on Earth. According to this worldview, humans are created as part of Allah's divine plan and are tasked with the responsibility of managing and enhancing life on Earth in accordance with revelation. The Qur'an emphasizes that humans have been endowed with intellect, knowledge, freewill, and guidance, elevating them to a unique position among Allah's creations. As vicegerents

³⁹ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁰ See Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. 'The Rise and Development of Persian Sūfism' in *The Heritage of Sufism*, edited by Leonard Lewisohn, Oxford: Oneworld, 1999, 1: 5; Orfali, Bilal, Khalil, 'Atif, Rustom, Muhammad, eds. *Mysticism and Ethics in Islam*; Awn, Peter J. "The Ethical Concerns of Classical Sufism," *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 11, no. 2 (Fall, 1983), 240-263; Chiabotti, Francesco, et al. eds. *Ethics and Spirituality in Islam*, Leiden: Brill, 2017.

entrusted with the duty of improving life, humans are appointed as stewards and guardians, responsible for managing human and natural resources to enhance life and ensure the habitability of Earth.

1-Islamic ethics transcends human limitations because its determination of ethicality and propriety originates from Allah. In Islam, morality is derived from a divine source beyond human desires and cultural norms. The moral code is revealed through the revelation, which remains unchanged by time or culture.

2-Adult Muslims are morally responsible persons. Moral responsibility is deeply ingrained in the concept of accountability before Allah for one's actions and intentions. Individuals will be answerable for their deeds on the Day of Judgment, where their actions will be weighed and judged according to divine standards of morality. Moral responsibility in Islam is contingent upon several conditions: **intention** (*niyyah*), which holds paramount importance in determining the moral value of actions. The Prophet (p.b.u.h) highlighted the significance of intention in numerous hadiths, highlighting that actions are judged by their underlying intentions. This concept underscores the idea that the inner motives behind an action are as crucial as the action itself. It serves as a guiding principle that shapes the ethical conduct of individuals in their daily lives. The emphasis on intention in Islamic ethics reflects the belief that sincerity and purity of heart are essential components of righteous deeds. A sincere intention aligns an individual's actions with their faith and values, ensuring that they are performed for the sake of pleasing Allah alone. This notion instills a sense of mindfulness and accountability, encouraging Muslims to introspectively evaluate their motives before engaging in any action. Furthermore, intention in Islamic ethics serves to elevate the mundane into acts of worship. Everyday activities, such as eating, working, or interacting with others, can attain spiritual significance when accompanied by a pure intention.

Awareness. Moral responsibility is linked to the level of knowledge possessed by an individual. Those who are unaware of the ethical implications of their actions may be excused to some extent, whereas those who possess knowledge of right and wrong are held accountable for their choices.

Freedom: Islam recognizes the autonomy of human beings to make choices. Moral responsibility arises from the ability to exercise free will in accordance with divine guidance. Individuals are expected to use their agency to choose righteousness over sinfulness.

Capacity: Moral responsibility is contingent upon one's capacity to discern right from wrong and act accordingly. Those who are mentally incapacitated or lack the faculties to make moral judgments are exempt

from full accountability. **Consequences:** Islam emphasizes the importance of considering the consequences of one's actions. Individuals are responsible not only for the actions themselves but also for the foreseeable outcomes of those actions. This includes both the immediate consequences and the broader impact on society and the environment.

3- Islamic moral standards advocate for universal justice and human equality. Firstly, ethical principles reflect universal moral truths that transcend cultural, racial, religious, and national boundaries, thereby rejecting moral relativism within Islam. Secondly, Islam asserts the equality of all human beings, without favoritism towards any ethnic group. Proximity to Allah is determined solely by one's deeds. Therefore, discrimination and the categorization of individuals based on ethnicity, lineage, intelligence, or privilege are incompatible with the Islamic ethical framework. Allah says, "*O people, We created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, so that you may come to know each other.*" (the Qur'an, 49:13). The Prophet (p.b.u.h) emphasizes this equality in this following tradition, "O people! Verily, your Lord is One, and your father (Adam) is one. There is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab, neither a black over a white, or a white over a black except in piety and righteousness." ⁴¹

4-Islam upholds the rights of individuals to enjoy their natural freedoms and liberties, yet within the framework of accountability and justice. While individuals are afforded the freedom to express themselves and act according to their will, this freedom is constrained by the rights of others and the principles of accountability. For example, while nudists may advocate for their freedom to practice nudism, Islamic ethics deem it unethical and immoral due to its contradiction with principles of public decency.

5- In Islamic ethics, the morality of decisions is not determined solely by their impact on the majority or minority. Unlike utilitarian perspectives, which prioritize the greatest happiness for the greatest number, Islam emphasizes ethical principles over numerical considerations. For instance, regardless of the level of societal acceptance, practices like corruption and bribery are deemed immoral in Islam. Similarly, behaviors such as same-sex marriage, lesbianism, and homosexuality remain unacceptable and unethical within Islamic teachings, irrespective of popular support. Islamic ethics are guided by principles and norms rather than numerical calculations or hedonistic ideals.

Conclusion

⁴¹ Ibn Hanbal, *Al-Musnad*, 38: 474.

Islamic ethics presents a rich and holistic framework for moral and spiritual development, drawing from the Qur'an and Sunnah as primary sources of guidance. This exploration highlights how Islamic ethical principles permeate both personal and societal dimensions, emphasizing intentionality, justice, and integrity in human conduct. The integration of *fiqh* and Sufism within this ethical system offers both a legal structure for outward actions and a spiritual focus on inner transformation, underscoring the balance between external obligations and internal growth. Through synthesizing these elements, Islamic ethics not only guides individuals toward moral excellence but also promotes spiritual fulfillment and social harmony. More, Islamic ethics is characterized by its divine origin, grounding morality in revelation rather than human desires or cultural norms. It holds adult Muslims as morally responsible individuals, accountable before Allah based on their intentions, knowledge, freedom, and capacity. Islamic ethics emphasizes universal justice and equality, transcending cultural and racial divisions, and upholds individual rights within a framework of accountability. Unlike utilitarianism, Islamic ethics prioritizes adherence to ethical principles over majority benefit, ensuring that moral actions align with divine standards rather than societal trends.