

Methodological Approach of Studying Religious Ethics of other Faiths between Ismail al-Faruqi and Toshihiko Izutsu: A Comparative Study

Abdul Razak Abdulahi Hashi*

Abstract

Both Toshihiko Izutsu and Ismail al-Fārūqī have studied religious ethics, but according to their respective religious faiths. In his *Christian Ethics* al-Fārūqī analyzed Christian ethics and moral values and presented a twofold methodology on which, according to him, religious principles including 'religious ethics' could be objectively analyzed and understood. Likewise, in his monumental work: *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*, Toshihiko provides a semantic analysis of the Qur'anic ethico-religious terms, and presents an exposition of 'methodological principles' of studying objectively the ethical terms of other religions. Both al-Fārūqī and Toshihiko stress that the polemical and argumentative approaches of religious terms of other faiths including ethics are counterproductive and generate only mistrust between the believers and the researcher. Thus, an objective and meaningful study of religious ethics of other faiths, according to them, is achievable only through analyzing ethical terms from and within the religious structure that they belong to. In the introductory remarks of his book, Toshihiko states that the methodological approach of his presentation of the Qur'anic ethico-religious concepts lies in the analytic method that he applies to the Qur'anic data, which is to make the Qur'an interpret its own concepts and speak for itself. Similarly, al-Fārūqī states that his aim in studying Christian ethics is not to present an Islamic critique of Christian ethical values but pure and simple presentation of Christian ethics drawn from the Christian tradition, so that a Christian reader will not offer to brush aside this work as the opinion of a non-Christian. However, though these two approaches of studying religious ethics seem to be indistinguishable in terms of objectivity and neutrality, nonetheless, there are some fundamental divergences between them in terms of style and aim. This paper is an attempt to offer comparative analysis on the methodological approaches of the two scholars' study of religious ethics.

Introduction

Both al-Fārūqī and Toshihiko have endeavored to study and understand the theological and ethical principles of other faiths, and as a result accumulated a huge data on religious ethics. Both al-Fārūqī and Toshihiko are with the belief that religious teachings including ethics should be perceived through their own traditions and literature as interpreted and manifested by their own adherents. This is to say that religious communities should be allowed to speak for themselves, and close references should be made to authentic traditions and texts of the respective religions and the authoritative writings of their scholars, before offering any propositions of evaluation. Al-Fārūqī's works on religious ethics are found in his books *Islam and Other Faiths*,¹ *Trilogue of Abrahamic Faiths*,² *al-Tawḥīd: Its Implication for Thought and Life*³ and *Christian Ethics*.⁴ Although al-Fārūqī made many comparative analyses on theological and ethical divergences and convergences between Islam and other faiths, particularly, the Abrahamic faiths, in other books the methodology of evaluation of the ethical systems of other faiths has extensively and deeply been presented in his book of *Christian Ethics*.

On the other hand, Toshihiko's works on the moral systems of other faiths are found in, *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology: A Semantic Analysis of Imān and Islam*,⁵ "Sufism and Taoism: A

*Assistant Professor, Department of Biomedical Science, Faculty of Science, IIUM E-mail: hashi@iiu.edu.my

¹ Ismā'īl Rājī al-Fārūqī, Edited by Atāullah Siddiqui, (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1998).

² Ismā'īl Rājī al-Fārūqī, (Herndon, VA.: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1991).

³ Ismā'īl Rājī al-Fārūqī, (Herndon: the International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2nd Edition, 1992).

⁴ Ismā'īl Rājī A. al Fārūqī, (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1967).

⁵ Salem N.H: Ayer. 1988.

comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts”,⁶ *God and Man in the Qur’an: Semantics of the Qur’ānic Weltanschauung*,⁷ *A Comparative study of the Key Philosophical Concepts in Sufism and Taoism*”⁸ and *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur’an*.⁹ In the later work, Toshihiko provides an imperious and lucid exposition of the Qur’ānic teachings, and it was viewed by many as a major scientific contribution to the study of theology and moral system of religion in our contemporary times.

Al-Fārūqī’s Methodology

Al-Fārūqī stresses the need for an objective approach that should transcend polemical apologetics in the study of other religious teachings such as ethics. He complains that most of the books written on religious teachings by non-believers of those religions are filled with imposed standards from the author’s religion and culture onto the religious teachings being studied. Al-Fārūqī raises the issue of the possibility of presenting a worthwhile study of other religious faiths and moral systems, and he is with the view that it is possible. However, to study other religious cultures in a fair and truthful manner, says al-Fārūqī, one needs to disengage his presupposed feelings and prior beliefs. He states that: “to really know another religious culture, we must first ‘disengage’ from our own beliefs. We must step out of our own presuppositions and values in order to step into those of the religion we wish to study.”¹⁰

Al-Fārūqī likens the study of religious teachings of others, including religious moral system, to stepping out of one’s shoes at the doorway of a sacred place into which we wish to enter. This is because, according to him, “unless and until we are willing to be with and inside the ‘life-facts’ we are studying, they will not yield their meaning to us.”¹¹ Al-Fārūqī holds that religious teachings are not a “scientific” fact which could be coldly examined in the manner of geological or biological samples. This is because, to a limited extent, the rites, ritual and organized institutions of religion, as well as their development and history can be studied in this way. Al-Fārūqī believes that, before one can bring himself to criticize either for or against different religious teachings, one must understand the religio-cultural systems that are common to the religious experience of mankind.

Unlike scientific facts in which the researcher could remain to be an outsider and keep a ‘cold’ distance from the phenomenon under study, to gain an insight into the ‘life-fact’ of a religion, we must imagine and allow our understanding to be touched and informed by them. The longer we can sustain this effort of imagination, the deeper will be our experience of the other religious teachings, and the deeper (and more reliable) our insights are into it.

According to al-Fārūqī, a fair and agreeable approach of studying objectively religious ethics of others begins with what he calls ‘disengagement’ from the values of the researcher’s own religious beliefs. This disengagement allows the researcher to become an insider and to see such religious teachings from and within the perspective of their adherents. It enables the researcher to be sympathetic, to learn and understand. Nonetheless, this disengagement is not static or total. Rather the researchers would remain free to adjust their position duly, so that the insights gained could be directed into a reasoned argument, then criticized and evaluated. Besides, disengagement and suspension of prior beliefs, al-Fārūqī, argues that to study other religious ethics, one must possess the proper attitude, and be conscious of the complexity involved in interpreting and evaluating foreign religious moral values.¹²

⁶ Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1984.

⁷ North Stratford, NH: Ayer Co. Pub., 2002.

⁸ Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1966.

⁹ Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966.

¹⁰ Christian Ethics, p.1

¹¹ Ibid.,

¹² In his case, al-Fārūqī acknowledges the complexity of the subject that he is presenting objectively to the reader, “the Christian ethics”. This is because, the religious experience from which Christianity began is not wholly or securely identified with the texts which were eventually authorized and accepted as canonical, as Scripture, and its doctrines are not very securely connected with that Scripture.

To establish a common ground which is shared by both the researcher and the religious community under study, al-Fārūqī argues that the study of ethical systems of other religious must be “governed by standards of reasoning and ‘higher principles’ which have authority independent both of the religion and culture we are studying and of our own.”¹³ Though many scholars are on the view that no independently authoritative ‘higher principles’ exist to which we can refer when seeking critical judgment about the ethical values and beliefs of others, according to al-Fārūqī, everyday experiences of religious life repudiate such a view. This is due to the fact that different religions, while being different, have some values in common, thus according to him, “it is possible to set out, at least provisionally, a body of ‘higher principles’ which, in practice, we do all acknowledge.”¹⁴

In his account of ethics of other faiths, especially that of his book *Christian ethics*, al-Fārūqī frequently compares Islamic ethics with Judaism and Christianity, endeavoring to explain the fundamental principles of ethical values and moral judgments.¹⁵ In this work, al-Fārūqī provided a guideline in how to study and understand a religious moral system different from one’s own religious ethics. He concludes that one must understand first the religio-cultural systems that are common in the religious experiences of man in general. This, according to him, should be done through the process of what he calls “meta-religion” and which he creatively analyses and proposes as the methodological principles that should govern the study of comparative religion.

He presents a twofold contention on which, says al-Fārūqī, religious principles of faith and ethics could be objectively analyzed and understood. In this method, al-Fārūqī contends that understanding religious ethics should involve what he calls “meta-religion”. The study of meta-religion is done through principles like, “internal and external coherence,” “the principle of unity,” “coherence with reality,” and “right purpose,”¹⁶ which are related to the study of religious scriptures and the foundation of religious ethics, and are also very important for the authentication and validity of moral judgments of religious scriptures. This is because if the textual statements of religious scripture have no internal coherence, then such scripture would only be teaching shaky moral principles.

Thus, al-Fārūqī suggests that studying religious moral systems must be done through two interrelated stages which are “understanding” and “evaluation”; each of these stages has its methodological principles. Understanding principles, say al-Fārūqī, are the theoretical principles which regulates the ways which we grasp, make sense of and put into order, the meaning that we discover in the other religious teachings of morality. On the other hand, the principles of value specialize in matters of religion and thus constitute the foundation of all religious teachings and cultures.¹⁷

In order to judge other religious moral values, we must agree theoretically that all religious teachings have internal coherence, which means that the divinely revealed truth should be free from any contradiction. This is because no system of any kind makes any sense unless its elements are free from all types of contradictions. Besides the internal coherence of religious moral values, they should also have external coherence, which means the statement of belief or doctrine in the case of religion must make sense in the light of what we already know. Furthermore, the principle of unity is similarly important for our understanding of religious values, which means that revealed truths must cohere with the religious experience of mankind, if they are revealed truths. In other words, if God is the source of revelation, His commands cannot contradict each other. Another principle is that religious moral codes must be coherence with reality, which means that the particular ‘truth’ which any religion claims must correspond

¹³ *Christian ethics*, 3

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.3

¹⁵ A good example is al-Fārūqī’s work on “*Islam and Other Faiths*,” which contains a collection of articles written in a span of about two decades, al-Fārūqī deals with Islam and other faiths, in particular, Christianity and Judaism.

¹⁶ Ismā‘il Rājī al Fārūqī, *Christian ethics: A historical and systemic analysis of its dominant ideas*, 4-7.

¹⁷ Al-Fārūqī, adds that these principles are not, however, special to the study of religion. On the contrary, they regulate our ways of understanding data of any and every kind. They are the foundation of the way we come to know, the foundation of human knowledge in general. (*Christian ethics*, pp.3-4).

with the reality we all experience or know outside of those ‘truths’. The final one is, the principle of right purpose, which means that the proper use of language, for example, is to enable expression and communication, hence if, within the religious language, there are signs and sounds that neither express nor communicate, it would be right to point them out as unacceptable.

With regard to the principles of value, there are six principles of evaluation according to al-Fārūqī, which, if we apply them conscientiously, enables us to describe and understand the beliefs and values of the religion we are studying and their degrees of internal and external coherence. First, being is of two realms, ideal and actual, where the ideal and the actual are different kinds of being, they are two in religious term. This principle means that God is, since the ‘realm ideal being’ which is totally other than the realm of actual being is, the one and only transcendent being.

Furthermore, the ideal being is relevant to the actual being, which means that, God concerns for this world, He does not merely co-exist with it. In addition, the relevance of the ideal to the actual is a command, where the ideal is a command demonstrated by two polarities. One is the realization of the ideal in the actual and the other is not being able to recognize the ideal in the actual. Therefore, the ideal being (God) commands humanity to strive to uphold its values. This principle means that, in the realm of nature, God’s commands are as necessary as and inevitable as natural laws. The actual being is as such good, which means that this world is good; to enter it and to be in it, is valuable.

In other words humanity should not view its actual being as inherently evil; rather, humanity was created good. In religious terms this means that God has created the actual for a purpose, namely for its perfectibility by man. Furthermore, the actual being is malleable; for the realm of the actual to actualize the value and content of the ideal, value realization must be possible. This means that man can only reach the paradise and not beyond salvation. Finally, perfection of the cosmos is only a human burden, the importance of man is that he is the Only creature who holds the key to the entrance of the evolutionary ideal into the actual. In other words man is only a moral being insofar as he subjects himself to God’s Command, being able to refuse, and only man is a moral agent insofar as only he can contribute to the value, commanded by the ideal being, of real existence.

Thus, through this twofold approach, al-Fārūqī attempts to present systematically and historically the dominant ideas of Christian ethics. Texts, traditions and events were analyzed and compared to make sure that only the authentic and valid documents be relied upon. To ensure accurate comprehension and presentation, the researcher consulted the genuine scriptures and traditions which were accepted mainly by various Christian denominations. This is to ensure the approach of being inclusive and comprehensive, and to avoid the shortcomings of being selective and partial.

Toshihiko Izutsu’s methodology

Toshihiko begins his discussion about the methodology of religious ethics that one needs to maintain the basic attitude of being objective in dealing with observed facts, and to decline being influenced by one’s own cultural values. According to him preconceived cultural conceptions will interfere with the objective understanding of ethical-value of others.

Toshihiko states that the proper methodological approach to religious ethics is through the analytic method of semantic patterns of moral codes of religious faith, which is to make religious ethics interpret its own concepts and speak for itself. The centre of this method, says Toshihiko, is not so much the material or the collected data about the subject, but the method of linguistic analysis applied to the material and the specific point of view from which it attempts to analyze scientifically the semantic structure of the value words of the religious scripture in the field of conduct and character. Toshihiko argues that proper understanding of religious ethics is through semantic analysis of religious cultures, which is the process of relating syntactic structures, from the levels of phrases, clauses, linguistic sentences and paragraphs to the level of writing as a whole.

Therefore, a scientific and rigorous analysis of religious ethics is possible if religious cultures are allowed to speak for themselves by making close references to authentic scriptures and texts of religions and the authoritative writings of their scholars. Texts, traditions and reports, should be analyzed and compared, so that only the authentic and valid meaning of ethical terms can be relied upon. Thus, by the

scientific method of studying religious ethics, Toshihiko understands primarily that the empirical or inductive analytic study of ethical terms should not be prejudiced by any theoretical position of moral philosophy.

Analyzing the semantic structure of given scriptural value words is necessary in order to avoid the mistakes made by some scholars who depend on mere linguistic translations of other languages into their own language, and tend to form their views on ethical ideas of others through and within their own ethical terms. Such scholars have indeed committed a grave danger of being led unconsciously into erroneous theories about the nature of morality by manipulating translated concepts and not trying to analyze scientifically and rigorously the original concepts themselves. This does not necessarily mean to incline to extreme historical relativism, according to Toshihiko. He is of the opinion that though the more we study moral codes the more we find no divergence among them in the major issues, ethical values should be understood not through imposed conceptions but through their cultural roots. This is because each one of our moral words represents a particular perspective in which we see the word, and what is called a 'concept' is nothing but the crystallization of such a subjective perspective; that is to say, it is a more or less stable form assumed by the perspective.

Based on this contention, Toshihiko suggests a number of interrelated methodological approaches which enables the researcher to present fair and objective study of religious ethical systems of religions. First, ethical systems of religions could be understood through elaborating the legal systems of the concerned society. This is due to Toshihiko conception that the social laws of religious societies, normally regulates, more or less, the details of individual and collective behaviors, which is very much related to the moral ethics of commands and prohibitions. Thus, to understand the ethical terms of certain society, we must pay a considerable attention to the social laws which regulate their practical daily life.

Furthermore, another imperative approach of studying religious ethical terms is to understand the theological system of the concerned ethical system. Theological system, normally constitutes the theoretic treatment of the basic problem of what a 'true believer' should believe in, what kind of attitude he should have towards God, and how he should act according to the dictates of his belief. Similarly, one may pick up more or less systematically various teachings and opinions on morality contained in the religious scripture, put them in order and then offer some analytical study of a religious ethical system.

Another approach is to understand the tradition of the society and patterns of their language. Toshihiko believes that every culture has a number of traditional patterns of moral evaluation which have become crystallized historically in the body of its ethical terms, and these conversely furnish the speakers of the language with a complete set of channels through which to categorize all moral phenomena. He stresses that by using the semantic patterns of their native language, researchers can easily analyze, report, and evaluate any human actions or characters. Then Toshihiko raises the question of how to devise a scientifically reliable method of analyzing the fundamental structure of such a semantic field? He agrees that the best way to proceed is to try to describe the semantic category of a word in terms of the conditions in which it is used. He believes that "language, in its connotative aspects, is first and foremost an important manifestation of that tendency to categorize the characteristic of the human mind."¹⁸

This is because, the ethico-religious terms of a given language form a particular system of categories which is comprised within the larger connotative system of the language in question. Therefore, the central problem for the investigator is to seek the defining attributes for each term, by virtue of which an unlimited number of discriminably different persons or acts are categorized into a class and thus receive a common name. By examining analytically the key ethico-religious terms in a language, the investigator may gradually come to know the basic structure of the system through which all events involving moral judgment are filtered before appearing in an accessible form to the members of that language community.

¹⁸ Ibid, p.13

In the second chapter of his book “*ethico-religious concepts of the Qur’an*”, Toshihiko initially explains the semantic divergences of ethical expressions among different religious cultures, and warns the danger of drawing hasty conclusions from literal translations of ethical terms from one culture to another. He argues that, with regards to ethical values, translation turns out to be far more frequently misleading than enlightening. This is because, “the semantic discrepancies between words and their foreign ‘equivalents’ naturally increase as we turn to those regions of existence where unique modes of vision tend to dominate and where language is charged with the task of reflecting and expressing the truly ethnic features of a people’s life”.¹⁹

Therefore, Toshihiko suggests an integrative framework through which religious ethical concepts of foreign religion could be objectively understood and analyzed. The first step of understanding ethical conceptions of other religions is to provide ‘contextual definitions’ of ethical terms. This, according to Toshihiko, means to identify the precise meaning of a word and elucidate it concretely in its context by means of verbal description. Toshihiko applies this approach to analyze the Qur’ānic ethical concepts like *birr* (piety), *ṣidīq* (sincerity) and *taqwā* (pious fear of God) which form the foundation of Islamic ethics. He argues that though he has applied this approach to analyze the Islamic moral codes, this type of analysis is also applicable to other religious ethics such as Jewish, Christianity and Buddhism.

Furthermore, besides the ‘contextual definition’, Toshihiko suggests the idea of ‘value of synonyms’ which holds that synonymous words of ethical concepts can substitute for each other in the same passage or in exactly the same kind of verbal context. According to Toshihiko, this substitution is helpful for the researcher in investigating the semantic category of ethical terms. He applied this methodology to Qur’ānic ethical terms like *sayyi’ah*, *khafi’ah* and *dhanb*, which according to him are used exchangeably by the Qur’an to describe the immoral practices committed by man willfully and deliberately.

In addition, Toshihiko also adopted another approach in which the semantic structure of a given term is elucidated by contrast. For instance the ethical ramifications of the term *khayr* were examined in comparison with other moral terms of the Qur’an like *hasanah*, while both *khayr* and *hasanah* were contrasted to *sharr* and *sayyi’ah*. In order to ascertain the precise ethical connotation of these terms, Toshihiko examines the ethical contents of these terms both in cultural and religious contexts.

The fourth step is what Toshihiko terms as ‘semantic field’ which is any set of patterned semantic relations between certain words of a language. This is because in every language we encounter such semantic ‘clusters’ of words, where a word rarely stands aloof from others and maintains its existence all alone; on the contrary words manifest everywhere a very marked tendency to combine with certain others in the context of occurrence. In this perspective, Toshihiko insists that every ethical passage is semantically significant and contributes, in one way or another, to provide better understanding about the subject under study. With this in mind, Toshihiko analyzes the Qur’ānic terms like *iftrā* (to invent or forge), *kadhib* (a lie) and *zālim* (unjust), which forms in the Qur’ānic ethics, a peculiar group or combination of semantic field.

Finally, Toshihiko’s analytical approach to the study of religious ethics of others is, indeed, presented through and within the semantics of the theory of meaning.²⁰ The proponents of this theory, including Toshihiko, believe that objects are there in the first place, and then different names are attached

¹⁹ Ibid, p.39

²⁰ This theory is also known as ‘Ethnolinguistics’ and it is a field of anthropological linguistics which studies the language of a particular ethnic group. Ethnolinguists study the relationship between language and culture, and the way different ethnic groups perceive the world, and how perception and conceptualization influences language. This theory questions the direct relationship between language and culture, and thus rejects the assumption of simple common-sense that the existence of a direct relationship between words and reality. See *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur’an*, pp.6-8

to them as labels.²¹ Our minds not only passively reflect the structure of reality, but more positively look at reality from a particular point of view and angle. This particular angle from which man approaches reality is culturally and historically conditioned.

Because of this background, Toshihiko's approach to the religious ethical system is inclined to the pluralistic theory which holds that people's view of what is good and bad, or right and wrong, differs from one place to another and from time to time, and differ fundamentally, not as trivial details to be explained away as degrees in the scale of a unitary cultural development, but as more basic cultural divergences having their roots deep down in the language habits of each individual community. Meantime, Toshihiko argues that the pluralistic approach towards religious ethics do not necessarily mean to accept extreme historical relativism where humanity shares no ethical values. Indeed, says Toshihiko, "the more we study moral codes the more we find that they do not differ on major points of principles."²²

Conclusion: Comparative analysis

Both al-Fārūqī and Toshihiko are in agreement that the task of presenting an objective and fair study of religious ethics will only be accomplished by understanding the concerned society through having direct contact to their culture. However, besides their endeavor to be objective, both Toshihiko and al-Fārūqī do not stand detached themselves from their works, or from their readers. Both of them maintained their religious and academic identities and loyalty to the intellectual atmosphere they belong to.

Furthermore, Toshihiko and al-Fārūqī believe that religions and religious ethics should be perceived within their own traditions and literature as interpreted and manifested by their own adherents, and thus rule out theorization based on preconceived notions or cultural terms other than that of the culture under study. For them to carry out an objective study one should allow religions to speak for themselves by making close references to authentic scriptures and texts of the concerned religions and the authoritative writings of their scholars. Both textual and empirical studies are necessary; the former will let the researcher to understand the theoretical aspects, while the latter helps the reader to know the practical side of religious ethics. Both of these scholars agree with the objective approach in the study of comparative ethics, where al-Fārūqī calls for the need of 'disengagement' of one's own presuppositions, while Toshihiko stresses the need to avoid 'transmutation' in contemporary comparative ethical studies of different systems of moral ideas.

Though different in approach and style, al-Fārūqī and Toshihiko have employed the modern methodologies of comparative religion to study religious ethics. Using the scientific methodology of religious phenomenology to understand religious ethics of other faiths, al-Fārūqī developed his own sophisticated phenomenology which has its own originality and roots in human rationality. On the other hand, Toshihiko applies the contemporary theory of meaning generally known today as 'ethnolinguistics' a theory of interrelations between linguistic patterns and cultural patterns in which he analyzed the semantic structure of ethical terms.

While both Toshihiko and al-Faruqi, strive to maintain objectivity and neutrality throughout their methodology of studying religious ethics of other faiths, there are some fundamental divergences between them in terms of style and aim. A divergent point between these two scholars is that al-Fārūqī contends for the use of the phenomenological method in studying ethics, while Toshihiko argues for the use of the theory of meaning or 'ethnolinguistics'. Through the phenomenology of religion, though on his own style, al-Fārūqī argues that objective inquiry of religious ethics must be based on the premise that ethical reality consists of real facts as they are perceived or understood by their society. However, through the theory of 'ethnolinguistics' which is a study of the relationship between language and culture, Toshihiko attempts to understand religious ethics, by

²¹ In this view, the word 'table' for instance means directly this concrete thing which exists before our eyes. But the example of the word 'weed' clearly shows that this is not the case; it shows that between the word and the thing there intervenes a peculiar process of subjective elaboration of reality. *Ibid.*, p.8

²² *Ibid.*, p.5

analyzing the way perception and conceptualization influences language, and show how this is linked to different cultures and societies.

Thus, the theory of meaning which is the bedrock of the whole structure of Toshihiko's study of religious ethics, is somewhat diametrically opposite to al-Fārūqī's phenomenological approach to the subject. This is because while the theory of meaning to some extent indicates ethical relativism where ethical values means many things to many people, al-Fārūqī's meta-religious approach to religious ethics is based on a set of self-evident principles, the validity of which is human reason or rationality. Thus, whilst Toshihiko's approach to religious ethics is inclined to ethical relativism where, according to him, people's views of what is good and bad, or right and wrong, differ from place to place and from time to time, on the other hand, al-Fārūqī's rational phenomenology attempts to establish positively the great essentials and fundamentals of our common humanity. Therefore, the linguistic approach and semantic understanding of each moral term within the cultural environment, without building common principles upon which all moral values are evaluated, is tantamount to relativism.

Another noticeable divergent point is that, Toshihiko Izutsu, promotes linguistic thought through which he presents his analysis of Ethico-Religious concepts of the Qur'an. Izutsu argues that there is no direct relationship between words and reality, where language remains an artificial sign system invented to segment, categorize and articulate non-linguistic reality and thus make it meaningful and recognizable. Hence, according to him, human understanding of reality differs from culture to culture, depending on their language system. As such, the best way of understanding the moral system of a specific society, such as Islam, says Toshihiko, is possible through the semantic analysis of ethical terms, where each term is used together with its synonym and antonyms, and thereby clarify its linguistic structure. Toshihiko believes such process to be the most effective way of understanding the moral system of other faiths.

However, according to al-Faruqī's contention of studying religious ethics, linguistic thought and semantic analysis of the moral terms are not the way forward to study the ethical system of other faiths. Al-Faruqī promotes a methodology coloured by elements of phenomenology and absolutism, in which religious moral systems are studied, not only through a semantic analysis of the moral terms, but through understanding the whole system and the worldview in which such moral ethics is applied. The material, to which the theoretical and values principles are applied in the course of the analysis should be drawn from the religious tradition they belong to. But judgement and evaluation are neither based on linguistic analyses of semantic meanings, nor to dogmatic interpretations of other moral systems from one's own religious perspective. Rather, al-Faruqī appeals to common sense and human rational thinking, for evaluation and understanding. Understanding religious ethics through linguistic and semantic analyses might somewhat lead to ethical relativism, which al-Faruqī rejects. Al-Faruqī believes in the universality of ethical values, as such, the aim of studying of the moral systems of other faiths is to evaluate the 'truth value' of such system.

Furthermore, another manner in which the methodology of these scholars varies is the issue value and the truth of ethical value. Toshihiko Izutsu is more interested in exploring and understanding the meaning of the Qur'anic terms of ethics, and how such terms are linked to the pre-Islamic tribal moral code, for the sake of comprehensively visualizing the Qur'anic conception of morality. However, while al-Faruqī possesses similar intentions of understanding Christian ethics, his interest is not only limited up to the level of understanding; rather, his interest is shaped according to the concern of understanding the truth-value of the Christian moral system, particularly whether it contradicts with the common sense of human rationality or otherwise. For him the main contribution of religious historians is not confined to feel and understand, but goes beyond that, to produce evaluative judgements on the events where contradictions in the moral system becomes obvious.

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