

Heritage of Islamic Ethics and Contemporary Issues A Call for Relevantization

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Abstract

This study addresses the subject of Islamic ethics from definitional and disciplinary perspectives. It highlights the need for relevantization of Islamic ethics to contemporary issues in a systematic manner which, in turn, calls for development of Islamic ethics as a complete discipline with ability to meet all types of challenges: conceptual, practical, normative, applicative, etc. Regarding the definitional issue, different from and more expansive than the traditional understanding of *al-ākhlaq*, the researcher argues that a proper definition of ethics should include ethically relevant habits, character, and behavior in its subject matter. As an academic discipline of paramount, practical significance, Islamic ethics should adequately address metaethical, normative, and applicative aspects of the subject. In terms of metaethics, Islamic ethics is derived from revealed knowledge; whereas, principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*usūl al-fiqh*) offers the best available methodology for the discipline in meeting demands of normativity and application. Regarding the nature of the subject of Islamic ethics, the researcher argues that understanding Islamic ethics as virtue ethics is unjustifiable reduction because a careful study of the subject from its sources would prove that Islamic ethics is rather an integrated field comprising of virtues ethics, divine command theory, duty-based ethics, etc. Therefore, Islamic ethics should be developed, taught, and learned as a whole composite of above-mentioned elements.

Keywords: Virtue ethics, personality ethics, Islamic ethics, *Uṣūl al-fiqh*

Abstrak

Kajian ini menumpukan perhatian kepada subjek etika Islam dari perspektif takrifan dan tata tertib. Ia menekankan keperluan untuk mengaitkan etika Islam kepada isu-isu semasa secara sistematik di mana ia akan menjadi panggilan untuk membangunkan etika Islam sebagai satu disiplin yang lengkap dengan keupayaan untuk menangani semua jenis cabaran: konseptual, praktikal, normatif, aplikatif dan lain-lain. Mengenai isu takrif, ia berbeza dan lebih luas daripada pemahaman tradisional *al-ākhlaq*, dan penyelidik berpendapat bahawa definisi etika harus merangkumi etika-etika yang berkaitan dengan tabiat, watak, dan tingkah laku dalam hal perkaranya. Sebagai disiplin akademik yang diutamakan dalam hal praktikal, etika Islam perlu menangani subjek etika dari aspek meta-etikal, normatif dan jugak aplikatif. Dari segi meta-etik, etika Islam berasal dari ilmu yang diwahyukan; manakala, prinsip-prinsip perundangan Islam (*Uṣul al-fiqh*) menawarkan kaedah terbaik bagi memenuhi permintaan normatif dan aplikatif. Mengenai sifat subjek etika Islam, penyelidik berpendapat bahawa memahami etika Islam sebagai etika yang menurut kuasa ialah pengurangan yang tidak

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wajar kerana kajian teliti tentang subjek ini daripada sumber-sumbernya akan membuktikan bahawa etika Islam adalah sebaliknya medan bersepadu yang terdiri daripada nilai-nilai etika, teori perintahan ilahi, duti berasaskan etika dan lain-lain. Oleh itu, etika Islam perlu maju, diajar dan dipelajari sebagai satu rencam yang menyeluruh berunsur elemen yang dinyatakan di atas.

Kata Kunci: Etika Kebaikan, Etika Keperibadian, Etika Islam, *Kaedah Fiqh*

Introduction

In this study, Islamic ethics is discoursed in relation to its tradition and potentiality of meeting the contemporary challenges. In the beginning, a brief explanation is given about how Islamic ethics has been as a subject throughout long Islamic intellectual history. Different from the populace perception of Islamic ethics as a “virtue ethic”, in the subsequent parts, it is shown that Islamic ethics is more than having “virtues” and “character”. To address the wider scope of ethics, Islamic ethics as a discipline should to be grounded in authentic sources of Islam; and regarding the subject of methodology, since no better methodology is available than the legalist methods as principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*Uṣūl al-fiqh*), this method could be used as the methodology for Islamic ethics. The researcher further argues that on metaethical level, Islamic ethics should be connected with Islamic worldview derived from the basic sources of Islam. Furthermore, Islamic ethics keeps both behavioral and psychological sides intact. Because Islamic ethics is comprehensive of habits, character, and ethical behavior, therefore there is no separation between virtue ethics and personality ethics. And intentionality is integral to ethics in Islam. The researcher argues that though habits and character could be outlined in line with virtues and thus internalized; however, it is the ethical behavior which becomes more important in making a successful, Islamic life. Therefore, redefining Islamic ethics and developing its subject components is the need of the hour in making it relevant to the contemporary world.

Islamic Ethics: Discipline and Trends

Islamic moral and ethical discourses are studied under many subject titles such as *‘Ilm al-Akhlāq*, *al-adab*, *al-tarbiyah al-islāmiyah*, etc. Books on the subject are of various types; however, the subject matter in most of the works which are circulated in a good number

because of their relevance to nurturing good habits and expounding few moral injunctions which are of use in everyday, ordinary life is related to a vast array of topics with textual evidence and quotations from the Quran and Sunnah, collections of Prophetic Traditions (*Al-Aḥādīth*). These moral guidelines are interpreted and explained under various chapter titles and sections; thus, it remains an open-ended subject. Like legal domain, ethical domain is not free from new issues and problems. In the legal domain, Muslim scholars developed a highly sophisticated methodology in coping with new issues (*nawāzil*); in ethical domain, the dominant thought has remained to reduce the discipline and the subject as whole to developing and internalizing a number of virtues (*fadā'il*). It is generally accepted that Islamic ethics is virtue ethics; the point of disagreement may be in counting those virtues or disagreeing on inclusion, exclusion or replacing some of them by some other more relevant virtues. Therefore, many works are available that tackle the moral and ethical issues on Islamic lines showing various styles and presentations. However, the subject of Islamic ethics in a form of systematic discipline has not emerged in full bloom as yet. Though there are many writings that are of great value in regards to the endeavor of systemization such as M.A. Draz's *The Moral World of the Qur'an* and scattered writings on Islamic applied ethics that are mostly connected with biomedical issues. This lack of systemization is very succinctly described by Abdul Haq Ansari as follows:

“Islamic ethics as a discipline or a subject does not exist at the present. We do not have works that define its concept, outline its issues, and discuss its problems. What we have, instead, is a discussion by various writers philosophers, theologians, jurists, sufis and political and economic theorists- in their particular fields of some issues that are either part of, or relevant to, Islamic ethics.”¹

In disagreement with the above claim, which Ansari makes, one can argue that there are many writings on Islamic ethics; in the same manner, one can well argue that the traditions and trends as briefed in Majid Fakhry's *Ethical Theories in Islam* are enormous and impressive. This is true; however, the need is of having a systematic ethics. Ethics as a systematic discipline should be able to define itself as a subject with its conceptual framework, research methodology and, at the same time, to make a complete ethics discipline, it should be able to meet the

¹ Abdul Haq Ansari, "Islamic Ethics: Concept and Prospect," *Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 6, no. 1 (1989): p, 81.

challenges in three main areas. These three areas are: *metaethics*, *normative ethics*, and *applied ethics*. To understand what all these terms mean, the following note explains it precisely.

Metaethics investigates where our ethical principles come from, and what they mean. Are they merely social inventions? Do they involve more than expressions of our individual emotions? Metaethical answers to these questions focus on the issues of universal truths, the will of God, the role of reason in ethical judgments, and the meaning of ethical terms themselves. *Normative ethics* takes on a more practical task, which is to arrive at moral standards that regulate right and wrong conduct. This may involve articulating the good habits that we should acquire, the duties that we should follow, or the consequences of our behavior on others. Finally, *applied ethics* involves examining specific controversial issues, such as abortion, infanticide, animal rights, environmental concerns...²

Definitions of *akhlāq* which have come to us from famous authorities like Al-Gazālī, Ibn Qayyim, Ibn Miskawayh, and others are reductive to mere “character”; when, in fact, character building is just a part of ethics and morality. In all their definitions, ethics is termed as a quality which is to be developed in *nafas* (self) by which a person should dispose in an involuntary way a right ethical action. In brief, according to these celebrated definitions, ethics is instilling few qualities among people and most observable of those qualities are having good habits. These qualities and their exemplification in the sources of Islam are reduced to developing virtues. And the best level of affairs in the matter is that a person by training and doing should reach a stage where he should act and behave in accordance to those virtues involuntarily, without any reflection; therefore, virtues should become part of his very nature.

On the other side, the ethical discourse in Islamic history has mainly remained confined to five groups: mystics (*Sufis*), rationalists (*Mutazilites*), Muslim philosophers, and theologians. The Sufi ethics has remained limited to Sufis with unworldly limited scope and mostly concerned with training and disciplining the self (*ta'dīb-u-nafas*). The rationalistic debate has remained historical without any significance; because, it leads ultimately to rationalism. Though it reemerged in some modern Western writings on Islamic ethics with high appreciation;

² James Fieser, "Ethics," <http://www.iep.utm.edu>.

however, it failed to make any visible impression on a host of works that came out in our time on Islamic ethics. It is because of its methodological limitations and failure to resolve unprecedented pressing issues that developed in ethical domain particularly in Islamic applied ethics. The philosophical debate is overshadowed by Greek philosophy; therefore, it loses appeal to Muslims and Islamic societies where philosophy is looked at with suspicion in matters connected ultimately with faith and metaphysics. The theological ethics has remained largely part of *fatwa* literature or collections of the Qur'anic verses and traditions of the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) without any systemization or development as a discipline with its own principles as principles of other Islamic sciences such as the principles of exegesis of the Qur'an (*usūl al- tafsīr*), principles of Prophetic Traditions (*usūl al- ḥadīth*), and the principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*usūl al- fiqh*). A good example of this sort on morality is Imam Bukhari's *Al-Adab al- mufrad* which records relevant Prophetic traditions under different topics.

Irrespective of the ways Islamic ethics has developed, it remains at the core as virtue ethics. The vast Islamic teachings on ethics and morality have therefore boiled down to virtues in the works written by Muslim philosophers and thinkers. The way this ethics is mentioned in the works of Al-Kindī, al-Rāzī, al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīna , Ibn Rushd, and Ibn Miskawayh it remains Aristotelian. Therefore, it becomes virtue ethics and philosophic. However, even in the writings of those scholars who are treated as scholars of the traditional and conservative understanding of Islam; and, therefore they remain well respected by the Muslim masses, the influence of Greek ethical philosophy on their thought is visible in their understanding of Islamic ethics as largely virtue ethics. Majid Fakhry has briefed the case as follows:

“A specific blend of philosophical and religious ethics is characteristic of the writings of some late authors, including al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī (d. 502 A.H./ 1108 C.E.), Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and others. Al-Ghazālī is the foremost representative of this group, who in both his ethical treatise *Mīzān al- 'amal (The Balance of Action)* and his religious summa, *al-Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-dīn (The Revival of the Religious Sciences)*, has developed an ethical theory in which Platonic psychology serves as the groundwork of an essentially Islamic and mystical worldview. In this theory, the table of the four cardinal

virtues accords with the Platonic virtues but admits of a series of subdivisions or ramifications analogous to those of his predecessors".³

This virtue ethics remains contested because nothing about it could be said is particularly religious. It is rather a rationalistic virtue ethics which is justified on religious grounds or backed by religious traditions. Understanding this aspect of the virtue ethics, Shāh Walī Allah al-Dahlawī is the only person who discarded the Greek scheme of virtue and worked out a different scheme. "In place of wisdom (*ḥikmah*), courage (*shajā'ah*), temperance (*'iffah*) and justice (*'adālah*), he proposed the virtues of purity (*tahārah*), reverential submission (*ikhbāt*), and magnanimity (*shahāmah*). Shāh Walī Allah realized that justice would not be done to the religious dimension of Islamic life unless its independence was recognized and religious virtues were given a place equal to other virtues".⁴

Are virtues, whether rational or religious, sufficient to solve ethical problems? This question catches attention of ethicists when they deal with ethical problems, and sometimes clash of these virtues in decision making becomes perplexing. In short, while struggling with bioethical issues, Abdulaziz Sachedina states that "Aristotelian ethics as taught in the Muslim world deals with development of the virtuous life as part of one's spiritual and moral discipline. Consequently, what has been circulating as "Islamic bioethics" has very little to say about ethics as a discipline that endeavors to understand the moral reasoning behind ethical decisions".⁵ It is noteworthy to mention little about "moral reasoning behind ethical decisions" that Western scholarship on Islamic ethics has remained mostly in exploring *Mutazilite* ethics. Though critics have talked about Islamic ethics, and they have glorified the *Mutazilite* thinkers in contributing to ethical thought; however, this endorsement faces shortcomings when practicality of affairs and solution of ethical issues demand for ethically sound resolutions. At the level of practicality especially in problem solving, there is no way so far which could overstep legal methods. This is very apparent in many English works written on Islamic applied ethics that have almost given up *Mutazilite* stance; and authors of such works have realistically accepted that Islamic ethics could not be separated from Islamic law. On the other hand, the

³ Majid Fakhry, "Ethics in Islamic Philosophy," <http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ip/rep/H018>.

⁴ Ansari, "Islamic Ethics: Concept and Prospect," pp.85-6.

⁵ Abdulaziz Sachedina, "Defining the Pedagogical Parameters of Islamic Bioethics," *Quarterly Journal of Medical Ethics* 2, no. No 5, Fall 2008 (2008): pp.25 - 26.

ethical debate among academia regarding Islamic ethics has become divided into virtue ethics, divine command theory, and right and duty based ethics. In all these understandings of ethics, there is space for integration and complementariness, because in all these versions the sources of justification are the Qur'an, Sunnah and the remaining sources which are among the secondary sources of Islamic law.

In light of the above details, redefining Islamic ethics becomes necessary. There is a new emerging need to redefine Islamic ethics as a subject and discipline. Some scholars have felt this need, for example, Miqdād Yālġn in *'Ilm al-alkhlāq al-Islāmiyah* defines Islamic ethics in a manner which comes close to what ethics should be; he states: "knowledge of Islamic ethics is knowledge of good and bad and of beautiful and ugly. It is one of Islamic disciplines which is based on the understanding from the sources of knowledge among them are the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* and remaining sources of Islamic jurisprudence".⁶

Islamic Ethics Is grounded in Revealed Knowledge

At the level of metaethics, Islamic ethics is related to revelation or revealed knowledge; because, Islamic worldview derived from the revealed knowledge delineates the position of a believer in this universe and his relationship with the *creator* and the *creation*. The creator is Allah, and keeping a successful relationship with him is possible by satisfying *ḥuqūq Allah*; whereas, a person's relationship with the creation is widely mentioned as keeping *ḥuqūq al-'ibād* in many works, but in fact, it is wider than that, it is rather *ḥuqūq-ul- makhlūq*. Therefore, the discourse in Islamic ethics should be on the division of *ḥuqūq-ul- khāliq* and *ḥuqūq-ul- makhlūq*. Because, Islamic ethics beside its basis on relationship with God and human beings (*ibād*), should relate to all creation because there are ethical teachings in the Qur'an and Sunnah which include and go beyond humans and deal with animals, birds, environment, etc.

Among many esoteric questions, three are very important in connection with the ethical domain. They are: where have we come from? Why are we here? And where are we going? To these questions, Islamic sources, contrary to philosophical systems, have clear answers.

⁶ Miqdād Yālġn, *Ilm Al-Khlāq Al-Islāmiyah* (Riyadh: Dār Ālm Al-Ktb Lltabā Wā Nashar 2003), p.47.

Islamic teachings clearly state that the purpose of our life is 'ibādah. The Qur'an states: "And I (Allah) created not the jinns and humans except they should worship Me (Alone)" (51:56) and 'ibādah means more than ritual worshipping. And the role a believer is of *khilāfah* as it is mentioned in the Qur'an:

Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: "I will create a vicegerent on earth." They said: "Wilt Thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? - whilst we do celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy (name)?" He said: "I know what ye know not.(2:30).

For a believer, his existence does not end in this world when his death arrives, but he continues to exist by exiting the *dunyā* and entering the *ākhirah*. Islamic world view is based on this continuity of existence. That is why a Muslim should think of both the worlds and should ask Allah for their betterment. It is possible that one may make the *dunyā* better in worldly sense and ignore the *ākhirah*, but such a person will lose his share in the other world. The Qur'an states:

But of mankind is he who said: "Our Lord! Give unto us in the world," and he hath no portion in the Hereafter" (2:200).

Therefore, the Quran teaches that believers should ask for the betterment of both the worlds: *dunyā* and *ākhirah*. However, there is no such verse in the Qur'an which may say that we should only ask for the afterlife, because on the basis of Islamic worldview, it seems impossible to imagine a good *ākhirah* without a good *dunyā*; therefore, it is this life in which a successful realization of existence of both is possible. It is so, because in Islam life is a sacrament; and worldly affairs are not detached from the religious part, and an ideal life that a person should follow is not renouncing the world, there is no distinction between clergy and laymen, people are not divided between elites and commoners; therefore, an ideal life is the ordinary life lived in accordance to the teachings of Islam. This can be understood from the Prophetic traditions such as the tradition of the prophet that states: Abdullah ibn Umar narrated that the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said: "A believer who mixes with people and stands for their evil, is better than

he who does not mix with people or stand for their evil”⁷ (Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal). Therefore, an idealistic Muslim life requires a believer to live an ordinary life which is social, political, economical, etc. The Qur’an encourages it in very clear terms: “*But seek, with that (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on you, the home of the Hereafter, and forget not your portion of legal enjoyment in this world, and do good as Allah has been good to you, and seek not mischief in the land. Verily, Allah likes not the Mufsidūn (those who commit great crimes and sins, oppressors, tyrants, mischief-makers, corrupts)*” (28:77). Focusing only on the ritualistic part of religion such as praying, keeping fast, and charity and, at the same time, violating the ethical teachings of Islam and breaking ethical principles would lead to “*bankruptcy*” in *ākhirah*. The following tradition includes the message in the clear terms.

Abū Huraira reported Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) as saying: Do you know who is poor? They (the Companions of the Holy Prophet) said: A poor man amongst us is one who has neither *dirham* with him nor wealth. He (the Holy Prophet) said: The poor of my Ummah would be he who would come on the Day of Resurrection with prayers and fasts and *zakāh* but (he would find himself bankrupt on that day as he would have exhausted his funds of virtues) since he hurled abuses upon others, brought calumny against others and unlawfully consumed the wealth of others and shed the blood of others and beat others, and his virtues would be credited to the account of one (who suffered at his hand). And if his good deeds fall short to clear the account, then his sins would be entered in (his account) and he would be thrown in the Hell-Fire.⁸

Furthermore, breaching ethical responsibility is related to hypocrisy (*nifāq*) as it is narrated by Abū Huraira that Allah's Apostle said, “The signs of a hypocrite are three: (1) whenever he speaks, he tells a lie, (2) whenever he is entrusted, he proves to be dishonest, (3) whenever he promises, he breaks his promise.”⁹

In light of the above details, it appears that Islam maintains a close connection between the *ritualistic* and *practical aspects* of religiosity. The ritualistic aspect of Islam is closely connected with its objectives that enhance the practical aspect of a believer; and this practical part is

⁷ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Munad* (Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, Beirut, 1994), vol. Hadīth No.....

⁸ Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ* (Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, Beirut, 2000), kitāb al-birr, Ḥadīth No. 2581.

⁹ *Ibid.*, kitāb al-Īmān, Ḥadīth No. 59.

in its essence ethical. It is ethical in the sense to encourage and enjoin good / right actions and to discourage and prohibit bad /wrong actions. The major rituals in Islam are *ṣalāh* (Prayers), *ṣiyām* (Fasting), *zakāh* (Alms-giving), and *ḥajj* (Pilgrimage), and they are, beside *shahādah*, among the five pillars of Islam. These rituals, as they are mentioned in the Quran, aim at enhancing practical qualities among their observers. Therefore, *ṣalāh* is not just prostrating before Allah, but it has consequences which lead to good action. Allah says in the Qur'an:

Recite (O Muhammad) what has been revealed to you of the Book (the Qur'an), and perform ṣalāh. Verily, ṣalāh (the prayer) prevents from al-faḥshā' (i.e. great sins of every kind, unlawful sexual intercourse, etc.) and al-munkar (i.e. disbelief, polytheism, and every kind of evil wicked deed, etc.) (29:45).

In the same manner, Allah speaks about *ṣiyām*:

O you who believe! Observing the fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become the pious. (2:183)

Regarding *zakāh* Allah says:

Take ṣadaqah (alms) from their wealth in order to purify them and sanctify them with it, and invoke Allah for them. Verily! Your invocations are a source of security for them, and Allah is All-Hearer, All-Knower. (9:103)

And regarding *ḥajj* the Qur'an states:

The ḥajj (pilgrimage) is (in) the well-known (lunar year) months. So whosoever intends to perform ḥajj therein by assuming iḥrām, then he should not have sexual relations (with his wife), nor commit sin, nor dispute unjustly during the ḥajj. And whatever good you do, (be sure) Allah knows it. And take a provision (with you) for the journey, but the best provision is taqwā (piety, righteousness, etc.). So fear Me, O men of understanding! (2:197)

Moreover, similar aims are elaborated in the traditions of the Prophet which state that these rituals are not disconnected exercises in gym, but are closely connected with pleasing Allah (*marḍāt Allah*) and enhancing good behavior, developing good habits, and improving virtuous character. For example, regarding *ṣiyām* (fasting) the prophet says as narrated by Abū Huraira “Whoever does not give up forged speech and evil actions, Allah is not in need of his leaving his food and drink (i.e. Allah will not accept his fasting.)”¹⁰

In a more emphasized manner, the higher intentions of Islamic *sharī‘ah* (*al-Maqāṣid al-Sharī‘ah*) also lead to the same conclusion. There are specific objectives and aims which Islamic *sharī‘ah* wants to safeguard. Al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) in *al Mustafīd*, Ibn ‘Abd al Salām (d. 660/1262) in *Qawā‘id al Aḥkām*, Al-Shāṭibī (d. 790/1388) in *al-Muwāfiqāt*, to mention a few leading scholars, have raised the question: what is the end or the object of the *sharī‘ah*? The essential *maṣāliḥ* are enumerated as five, namely life, intellect, faith, lineage and property.¹¹ In these higher intentions of Islamic Shariah, we see that they are related to very worldly matters, matters that are social, economical, human, etc. Furthermore, all these areas covered by the higher intentions of the Islamic Law are the areas closely connected to ethics and morality. Therefore, Islam, by its teachings, provides its framework to guide believers how these objectives can be realized and safeguarded, and it is the domain where ethical questions mostly arise.

Reforming Ethics as a Subject and Discipline

The aforementioned details which make a plausible argument for extending frontiers of Islamic ethics leads to the necessary implication that Islamic ethics as a subject should include normative and applied ethics that can be applied to different domains of activities and professions. By doing so, ethical character will develop among the individuals of an Islamic community, the professional and working class people will live ethically, and the institutions and social structure will stand firm on strong, ethical infrastructure which, in effect, will lead to overall development of Islamic nations in a holistic and comprehensive manner. Therefore, Islamic ethics proper should include ethically

¹⁰ Al-Bukhārī, Muhammad ibn Ismā‘īl, *Ṣaḥīḥ* (Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, Beirut, 1400 A.H.), Vol. 2, kitāb al-ṣawm, Ḥadīth No. 1903.

¹¹ See: Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Maqasid Al Shariah Made Simple* (The International Institute of Islamic Thought, Herndon 2009).

relevant habits, character, and behavior. Behavior includes both attitude and making ethical judgments. This would be an inclusive way which will include both the traditional and contemporary understanding of *akhlāq*. In brief, virtues as debated in widely literature should be part of character; habits should be directly connected with the Qur'an and Sunnah and the door should be open for taking best habits from *'urf* (good customs) which do not go against the Qur'an and Sunnah. The final part is ethical behavior; it is in the sense how to make ethical choices in matters which go beyond habits and character in real practice. Very simply, if we restrict ethics to virtues and developing virtuous persons, it is not going to solve ethical paradoxes and dilemmas. Being person of virtues is not going to help solving complexity of matters which call for well spent intellectual effort. And with this extension of going farther than mere character, ethics becomes guiding framework for sociology, politics, economics, and business, and in a wider way it includes everything which comes under *action*, *praxis*, and *doing*. Therefore, virtue ethics has its limitations. However, it could be defended against sorts of criticism made against it. Its defense remains unsatisfactory. In short, popular defense of virtue ethics as follows explicitly shows underlying problems of virtue ethics.

The main response to this criticism is to stress the role of the *virtuous agent as an exemplar*. Virtue ethics reflects the imprecise nature of ethics by being flexible and situation-sensitive, but it can also be action-guiding by observing the example of the virtuous agent. The virtuous agent is the agent who has a fully developed moral character, who possesses the virtues and acts in accordance with them, and who knows what to do by example. Further, virtue ethics places considerable of emphasis on the development of moral judgment. Knowing what to do is not a matter of internalizing a principle, but *a life-long process of moral learning* that will only provide clear answers when *one reaches moral maturity*. *Virtue ethics cannot give us an easy, instant answer. This is because these answers do not exist*. Nonetheless, it can be action-guiding if we understand the role of the virtuous agent and the importance of moral education and development. If virtue consists of the *right reason and the right desire*, virtue ethics will be action-guiding when we can perceive *the right*

*reason and have successfully habituated our desires to affirm its commands.*¹²

The above defense of virtue ethics includes the most favorable points that can be made in defense of it. However, the parts italicized show some problems in this defense. Without deliberating on every problem, the above defense ultimately ends with upholding the position that “virtue ethics will be action-guiding when we can perceive the right reason and have successfully habituated our desires to affirm its commands”. This concluding remark itself shows that mere virtues are not helpful unless coupled with right reasoning.

The preceding details demonstrated that Islamic ethics has been dominantly virtue ethics. The only subject beside ethics that is concerned with right and wrong in the legal sense is Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). *Fiqh* has been one of the most engaging disciplines in Islamic sciences; however, the works on *fiqh* are restricted to a number of topics that fall short of replacing need of ethics. In other words, *fiqh* is not inclusive of ethics, though there is overlap between these two subjects. Outside restricted *fiqh* curriculum, grew another ancillary offshoot of *fiqh* called as *fatwā*. *fatwās* are opinions of jurist consultants which make compilations and collections that are types, some are confined and some are unrestricted to *fiqh* curriculum. Many queries and answers in the works of *fatwā* show responses to ethical questions, not from the principle oriented and codified approach, but responses to various questions which fatwa institutions receive time to time, by invoking variety of injunctions mentioned in the Qur’an, Ḥadīth, or Fiqh canons. This contribution of *fatwā* literature has, to some extent, served needs of ethics in non-disciplinary manner, leaving a huge amount of material in the form which is similar to question answering, problem-solving, and case studies.

However, in teaching and learning when considering principles, the emphasis has been on virtues without demonstrating, contesting, and understanding their clear implementation, application, and implications. Relying only on expounding values and virtues in teaching without their application has its own benefits with limitations. The benefits are at least that students know values that they should cultivate in themselves, and these values come with two main components *fear* and *pleasure*: fear of Allah (swt) which is called *taqwā*, and pleasure is seeking pleasure of Allah (swt) which is called *marḍāt Allah*. The positive part of Islamic

¹² Nafsika Athanassoulis, "Virtue Ethics," <http://www.iep.utm.edu/virtue/>.

virtue ethics is that it gives justification for virtues from revelation; makes compliance to virtues obligatory by quality of *taqwā*; and sets objective of objectives (*ghāyat al-ghāyāt*) as *maṣḥab Allah*. The limitation which besets this ethics is lack of training students in understanding how these virtues could become operational and executable in various life settings, situations, and cases.

Virtue ethics in general focuses on the role of character without setting clear guidelines, rights and duties, and any examination of the consequences. Aristotle and most Muslim thinkers agreed that a virtuous person is the one who has ideal character traits. "These traits derive from natural internal tendencies, but need to be nurtured; however, once established, they will become stable."¹³ This means that to become virtuous person, long time training and development is required. This training and development may not be even sometimes available to most of the people. The question arises when a person can grow real virtuous? The problem with virtuous ethics is that "theories of virtue ethics do not aim primarily to identify universal principles that can be applied in any moral situation. And virtue ethics theories deal with wider questions—"How should I live?" and "What is the good life?" and "What are proper family and social values?"¹⁴ The question how these virtues and values can be applied in real life situations is compelling. Therefore, "... the complaint that virtue ethics does not produce codifiable principles is still the most commonly voiced criticism of the approach, expressed as the objection that it is, in principle, unable to provide action-guidance".¹⁵ Furthermore, virtue ethics limits scope of ethics and makes it relevant to agent or person. It makes ethics a discipline whose subjects are human beings. This is very reductive approach. Ethics should be a subject by which life in its totality could be examined by it. It should be able to set social structures, science and technology, institutions, and historical development on ethical lines.

The abovementioned criticism can be leveled against what has come to be known as Islamic virtue ethics. It is good to develop virtues as habits and character; however, when behavior action-guidance is needed, virtue ethics falls short of meeting many challenges. Having virtues is like capacity building, self-controlling mechanism, and

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Rosalind Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics,"

<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2010/entries/ethics-virtue>.

keeping a pure personal approach that is free from extremes ; in this sense a person does not become mechanical living by rules of action-reaction or stimulus –response, but remains firm on stable ground. This all contributes in building a moral self which is ready to dispose, not in subordination to instincts, but in line with very excellent human nature and enhanced qualities. However, at the same time, the virtuous person needs to have knowledge or capacity of making moral judgments; therefore, a truly consistent behavior requires having more than a set of virtues. In presence of this challenge; therefore, in terms of behavior, a broader guidance is required which should be based on the Islamic sources. On this point, therefore, the question in morality goes back to what is good and bad, or what actions could be classified as good and what could be classified as bad. Therefore, a basic principle is needed under which bad and good could be categorized. In Islamic thought, this comes to fore in *mutazilite* thought that good action is *ma'rūf* and bad action is *munkar*. The Qur'an clearly states: “*And believing men and women are friends to each other. They enjoin what is ma'rūf and forbid what is munkar*” (9:71). And to know what is *ma'rūf* and *munkar* and how these categories could be ascribed to actions seems dependent on principles of Islamic jurisprudence for adequate justification.

Therefore, Islamic ethics ought to be an integrated field comprising of virtue ethics, divine command theory, and duty-based ethics. And this could be realized if this ethics is developed on the principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*usūl al-fiqh*) with inclusion of maxims of Islamic jurisprudence (*al-qawā'id al-fiqhīyyah*). Though there are many ways of looking at Islamic ethics; however, in terms of theory and application, when questions regarding epistemology and application arise, it seems inconceivable to divorce this discipline from the juristic epistemology (*usūl al-fiqh*). The overlap between morality and law is unavoidable. However, there are ways in which a distinction between Islamic ethics and *fiqh* can be made. Ethical domain is wider than legal domain, yet *usūl al-fiqh* has principles which are suitable to address ethical problems because they include both primary and secondary sources of Islam which are able to meet challenges of ethical dilemmas. These sources are: the Qur'an, Sunnah, Consensus (*ijmā'*), analogical deduction (*qiyās*), juristic preference (*istihsān*), public good (*al-maṣlaḥah al-mursalah*), textual indication (*istidlāl*), common practice (*'urf*), etc. Though they are legalistic principles, yet they are very relevant to development of Islamic ethics. Because, Islamic law and ethics go hand in hand ; however, legal -illegal distinction would not be

applied to ethical-unethical distinction in terms of duties and punishments in the strict sense; however, unethical category would include categories such as *ḥarām* and *mukrūh*; whereas, ethical would include *mubāḥ*, *mandūb*, and *mustahab*. The category of *mubāḥ* would remain open – ended and would be merit making if connected with *right intentionality* and *pleasure of God*.

Blend of Character Ethics and Personality Ethics

In Western ethics, there is a distinction between character ethics and personality ethics, and very huge literature is written on both sides because interpersonal relationship is ultimately thought to have basis that are by their nature ethical. The explosion of literature on both sides is due to development of businesses, corporations, and increasing need for living with people and managing them effectively. I think one of the popular works is *How to Make Friends and Influence People* among many other works on the similar themes; on the contrary, there are books such as *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* which advocates virtue ethics. These books teach ethics mainly for interpersonal relations, but from non-technical and non-academic point of view. However, their public reception has been amazing. According to the character ethics, it is most important to focus on integrating the principles of effective living into one's character. Therefore, character ethics is actually virtue ethics. To build character is long-term process, but a strong foundation from which behavior follows. On the other hand, personality ethics focuses on learning skills and techniques which will result in developing personality and attitude that will lead to success; however, "These ideas may be helpful when they flow naturally from a good character and the right motives, but they are secondary".¹⁶ The difference between two trends is that while one emphasizes on developing virtues, the other one emphasizes on developing techniques.

Any formulation of Islamic ethics should overcome the above distinction. Both of them should go together while on one hand developing virtues and at the same time learning how to live an effective life by having good characteristics. True self should show in its true expression. Justification for this position can be made by turning to the sunnah where there are many *ḥadīth* which clearly support that expressing manners are not just affairs of heart, but should be translated

¹⁶ John Aurther, *Personality Development* (New Delhi: Lotus Press, 2006), p.112.

into behavior by properly demonstrating them. For example, according to many Prophetic traditions, loving a Muslim brother is an act, not only intent. It is a praiseworthy matter as Abū Huraira reported that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "Allah Almighty will say on the Day of Rising, 'Where are those who loved one another for the sake of My majesty? Today, on the day when there is no shade but My shade, I will shade them.'"¹⁷ Love in this narration refers to an attitude and will; however, the other prophetic traditions on this subject encourage that this attitude has to be translated by proper habits and behavior as Abū Huraira reported that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "By the one who has my soul in His hand, you will not enter the Garden until you believe, and you will not believe until you love one another. Shall I point out to you something which will make you love one another if you do it? Make the greeting widespread among you."¹⁸ And it is not just matter of having an attitude and following suitable habits to convey it, it is a will and attitude which should be expressly conveyed as Abū Karīma al-Miqdād ibn Ma'dīkarib reported that the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said: "If a man loves his brother, he should tell him that he loves him."¹⁹ The traditions are rich with record to provide many examples; however, I would like to link the whole matter with the concept of *tahārah* (purity) and *nazāfah* (cleanliness). Abū Mālik al-Ḥārith bin al-Ḥārith al-Ash'arī said: The Messenger of Allah said: Purity (*tahārah*) is half of *īmān* (faith)²⁰ ... and another ḥadīth says "Cleanliness (*nazāfah*) calls to *al-īmān*".²¹ These two traditions show that *tahārah* is an intrinsic quality and *nazāfah* is an outward demonstration, linking this to ethics, the good virtues should properly demonstrate themselves through the corresponding behavior and action. Virtues should be coupled with right and lively expression. Because acting out of virtues needs long time practice and virtues actually tell less about how to act out than how can actor should be as a person; therefore, a true demonstration of character ethics is in need of

¹⁷ Muslim, kitāb al-Kusūf, Ḥadīth No: 2248.

¹⁸ Ibid., kitāb al-Īmān, Ḥadīth No 54

¹⁹ Abū Dā'ūd, Sulaymān ibn al-Ash'ath, *Sunan*, kitāb al-adab, Ḥadīth No: 5124.

²⁰ Muslim, kitāb al-ṭāhārah, Ḥadīth No 0432.

²¹ Al-Ṭabarānī, Sulaymān ibn Ḥammād, Al-Amu'jam Al-Awsaṭ, , Ḥadīth No: 7311.

proper modes of demonstration, techniques, and expression, and this outward expression is, in fact, the subject of personality ethics. *Intentionality* is the only difference that makes virtue ethics different from personality ethics. However, this difference does not create any problem to Islamic ethics, because Islamic ethics is essentially based on right intentionality; therefore, the distinction between character ethics and personality ethics collapses. The famous legal maxim, *al-umūr bi-maqāsidihā*, refers to this important element, which means matters shall be judged by their objectives or acts are judged by the intentions underlying them. This principle is without any dispute applicable to all moral actions. It is founded on the sound tradition of the Prophet in which he states: “Actions are but by intention and each person will have but that which he intended”²². Since, in legal matters, intentionality does not play a deciding factor, it could only be of any benefit if ignorance of fact is proved which could show the actual intentionality behind acts. However, in Islam, intentionality has a major role in judging action in terms of *sin* and *non-sin* or *good* and *bad*.

Developing good moral character and maintaining an ethical lifestyle requires being members of a community which is based on proper ethics; therefore, educational, economic, political, and social institutions should be founded on proper ethics to make it possible for an individual to live an ethical life. Some contemporary philosophers are now addressing these issues. For example, Andrew Mason in “*MacIntyre on Modernity and How It Has Marginalized the Virtues*” explores how capitalist market forces make it difficult for virtues to flourish. In the similar way, Marcia Homiak in “*Aristotle on the Soul's Conflicts: Toward an Understanding of Virtue Ethics*” develops Aristotle's and Mill's views on the transformative power of institutions to explore the possibilities for living virtuously in an imperfect world.²³ Therefore, ethics as normative and applied ethics should to be further implemented in policies which govern institution and professions. And this is only possible if we have ethics based on more than virtues. Educational, economic, political, and social institutions should be structured by proper ethics so it would be a living and encouraging space for those individuals who are engaged in these institutions. And equally, those professionals and players who work in

²² Al-Bukhārī, op. cit., kitāb bad’ al-wahy, Ḥadīth No. 1.

²³ Marcia Homiak, "Moral Character,"

<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/moral-character>.

these domains must have proper training in conducting their duties in an ethical manner. Therefore, individuals and institutions both are in need of ethics. Thus, any ethics without branches of applied and professional ethics would practically become meaningless and failure. In response to this need, Islamic ethics must be applied to professions and social structures; otherwise, there is no good reason to believe that we can live effectively and truly an ethical life.

Conclusion

Islamic ethics is very significant subject and discipline which ought to be developed on firm grounds to serve a clear guideline for ethical decision making. The domain of ethics is wider than Islamic law (*fiqh*). Principles of Islamic law (*usūl al-fiqh*) has to be applied in the ethical domain. The traditional definition of Islamic ethics, therefore, should be expanded in a manner to include habits, character, and ethical decision making. With the development of ethics as a subject and discipline as described throughout the said details, equally important is introduction of Islamic ethics as a standalone subject and as a core subject in any higher academic programs in which the subject will meet the specific challenges and program related issues.