

UNDERSTANDING ISLAMIC ETHICS AND ITS
SIGNIFICANCE ON THE CHARACTER
BUILDING

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Definitions of Islamic ethics

- Islamic ethics is defined as *akhlaq* (plural *khuluq*) which means character.
- The word *akhlaq* has a very close relationship with the word *khaliq* (Creator) and *makhlūq* (creature).
- *Akhlaq* or character has been referred as the state of the soul that determines human actions.
- Al Farabi (d 950) was to be known as the earliest great Muslim philosopher who acknowledged the interrelation of *akhlaq* or character with human action.
- Indeed, he defined Islamic ethic or *ilm al akhlaq* as “ a science that studies the state of human soul”.

- Besides al-Farabi, Ibn Miskawayh (d 1030) in his work *tahzib al-Akhlaq* defined Islamic ethics or *ilm al-akhlaq* as
“a state of the soul which causes it to perform its action without thought or deliberation”.
- The definition of *akhlaq* as the science of the human soul was further elaborated by successive writers and philosophers on Islamic ethics, such as, al-Ghazali (d 1111), Fakhruddin al Razi (d 1209), al Tusi (d 1274), al Dawani (d 1502) and others.

- Al-Ghazali stated that man consists of 2 forms;
 - i) *khalq*- refers to the physical form of mankind
 - ii) *Akhlaq*- refers to the spiritual form of mankind
- Thus, *akhlaq* from al Ghazali's point of view is rooted in the soul and manifested through man's actions.
- Al Ghazali defined Islamic ethics or *ilm al akhlaq* as
 - “The way to acquire the well being of the soul and to guard it against the vices”.
 - “A study of certain religious beliefs and of rightness or wrongness of actions for the purpose of practice, and not for the sake of mere knowledge”.
 - “Includes the study of right actions towards God, family members and society”.

- According to Ibn Taymiyyah, Islamic ethics or *ilm al akhlaq* is “a science that seeks to know which actions should be done and which actions should be avoided. It is a practical science meant to be applied”.
- Accordingly, Islamic ethics or *ilm al akhlaq* can be defined as “ a science which deals with the ways to maintain virtues at their optimum level; i.e to avoid wrongdoing and to do what is right and desirable”.
- The scope of Islamic ethics is numerous, far reaching and comprehensive.

Sources of Islamic ethics

- Two primary sources of Islamic ethics; *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* of the Prophet. Both *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* are called the Scriptural morality.
- Other sources;
 - Islamic theology
 - Islamic philosophy
 - Islamic jurisprudence
 - Islamic mysticism

The Relationship between Islamic Ethics and Islamic Law (Shariah)

- The objective of Islamic law or *shariah* is seen to be similar with Islamic ethics, that is, to construct human life on the basis of virtues (*ma'rufat*), and to cleanse it from vices (*munkarat*).
- Like Islamic ethics, *shariah* aims at regulating the relationship of man with God, and man with man. Therefore, both Islamic ethics and *shariah* cannot be separated from each other.

- In shariah, there are limits (*hudud*) which every Muslim must respect and obey, and if he transgressed any of these limits, he is doing wrong or committing a crime.
- These limits (*hudud*) are to be the sanctions of Islamic law or *shariah*, and that is why it is called *hudud* law.
- Apart from giving man a sense of responsibility to Allah as well as to entire mankind, these limits (*hudud*) will safeguard the rights and the well being of man in all aspects of life.
-i.e to safeguard the lineage of people, Islamic law provides clearly the punishment of adultery (*zina*).

- There are 3 kinds of punishments in Islamic law:
 - i) *Hudud*
 - ii) *Qisas*
 - iii) *Ta'zir*
- These categories of punishment reflect Islamic law as the law of equality which is consistent with the basic ethical values.

The Significance of Islamic Ethics

- Islam gives very much emphasis on the importance of ethics and its significance for the development of individual and society.
- Ethics can be considered as the basic pillar for a healthy and firm nation.
- According to Muslim scholars, the first step in promoting an ideal human society is to advocate refined morality.

- Ethics must be counter part of other sciences, such as, law, politics, science, economics, and others for such sciences become soulless or insignificant if detached from ethics.

a) **Economic**

*The relationship between ethics and economic has been expounded clearly by Muslim jurists like Qadi Abu Yusof (d 799) and Abu Ubayd (d 834) in their discussion about the concept of justice in economic.

***In modern term business ethics can be defined as;**

- written and unwritten codes of principles and values that govern decisions and actions within the company
- ethics between employers, employees, businessmen and consumers as well as to all aspects of business conduct
- The conduct of individuals and business organization as a whole
- should not involve any negative elements, such as, cheating or bribery
- Justice in distribution

***There are some socio-economic ethics in the *Quranic* verses and *hadith*, such as;**

- Condemn of the use of false weights and measures and other fraud dealings (83:1-3, 6:152, 55:8-9)
- The prohibition of *riba* and usury (30:39, 2:278-279)
- The prohibition of gambling (5:90, 2:219)
- The prohibition of bribery (2:188)
- Consuming others' property unlawfully (4:29)
- Trading during congregational prayers on Friday (62:9-11)

b) Politics

* Political ethics refer to a code of conducts which regulates and guides the behavior of the ruler and the ruled as well as the government and citizens.

-i.e the implementation of justice

c) Science and Technology

* The advancement of technology makes abundant of new inventions that somehow contradict to the human nature. For instance, the issue of cloning.

d) Medicine

- * Medical ethics refers to codes of conduct which regulates and guides the behavior of doctors in dealing with each other and patients.
- * In the 9th century, the physician Ishaq bin Ali Rahawi wrote the first treatise on *Adab al Tabib* (medical ethics). In this treatise, Rahawi labels physicians as guardians of souls and bodies. He also highlighted all the deeds and acts that must be observed by a Muslim physician.

Muslim Contributions to Islamic Ethics

- Among the remarkable works on ethics was done by Ibn Miskawayh.
- He authored quite systematic treatment of ethics like *tahzib al akhlaq*, *al fauz al asghar*, *kitab al saa'dah*.
- According to Ibn Miskawayh, the task of ethics is not only to justify and analyze basic concepts but also to discuss the methods of attaining a virtuous life.

- The whole of Ibn Miskawayh's ethics can be divided into 3 parts:
 - i) how to cultivate virtue
 - ii) how to preserve virtue or maintain of the health of the soul
 - iii) how to get rid of the of vice

- Besides Ibn Miskawayh, al Ghazali also gives much emphasis on Islamic ethics in which he focused on the importance of fulfilling duties as human being.
- According to him, performing duties has 2 divisions;
 - i) Duties which are directed to God
 - ii) Duties which are directed towards one's fellow men.
- Performing both duties requires the implementation of ethics because ethics guides Muslims to keep them onto the right path, and without ethics, people would not bother their duties.

Conclusion

- In order to ensure the happiness and goodness of life, man needs to refer to the code of ethics to monitor his relationship with God, with his family, with other fellow men in society, with other creature of the universe, and even with his innermost self.
- If every individual abide by the prescribed codes of ethics, people can live peacefully and there would be no cases of crimes.
- Therefore, Islamic ethics is vividly vital because it is a basic pillar for a healthy society. It aims at establishing life's order and giving it reputation, dignity and serenity as desired by the teachings of Islam.

THANK YOU