

# ETHICAL VIEWPOINT OF ISLAM

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## **ETHICAL VIEWPOINT OF ISLAM**

Under normal circumstances when the stream of life runs calm and undisturbed, every individual enjoys a sense of mental peace and satisfaction; but the clear and shining surface of the stream fails to reveal the impurities which have settled at the bottom. They remain hidden and concealed. Deceived by the superficial calmness of the surface, people seldom feel the need to probe under the surface and get a feel of the currents and crosscurrents existing inside. But when the stream goes in spate, the impurities hidden at the bottom rise to the surface and become the gazing-stock. It is then that every one who has eyes under his brows can see very clearly that the life-stream has been carrying within its fold such a bewildering stock of filth and impurities. This precisely is the moment when people are likely to become conscious of the necessity of probing deeper into the realities of life, of finding out the causes of the rot that was, otherwise, hidden from the public view, and of devising ways and means to keep the stream of life pure and clean. If, however, the people do not wake up to this need even at such critical moments, this would betray a degree of moral insensibility which makes human beings totally indifferent to the very idea of social and moral well-being. Thank God, man has not stooped to that extent, and herein lies the real hope of the future.

## THE PREDICAMENT OF THE MODERN WORLD

The times through which we are passing are disturbed and distressing. They present an abnormal spectacle. The life-stream is in convulsion. Nations of the world are in conflict with each other and everyone is anxious to strike at the other only to serve his national interests. The tension has grown to such dimensions that it is no longer confined to governments and national leaderships only but has strained relations even on the personal level. Nations are arrayed against nations. Communal groups are at daggers drawn with each other. Individuals are behaving like sworn enemies of other individuals. Personal and social rivalries are rampant. Life is in a tumult. The result is that the moral vices, which people were nurturing within their bosoms now stand fully exposed. We are able to see in plain colours the moral depredations which had hitherto escaped the observation of the ordinary men and women. Only the unthinking can now harbour the delusion that nothing is wrong with the diseased humanity, that all is well in the state of Denmark. Only those individuals whose moral sense is perhaps altogether dead can remain unmindful towards the diagnosis and the treatment of the crisis that is threatening our existence. The contemporary situation is alarming and the danger is too pressing to be ignored.

The world has progressed in certain important directions. Nevertheless we are, today, witnessing the sorry spectacle of great nations indulging, on a large scale, in the moral vices which the conscience of humanity has always

condemned with one voice. Injustice and ruthlessness, cruelty and brutality, falsehood and fraud, treachery and hypocrisy, breach of trust, self-aggrandisement, exploitation and other crimes are no longer confined to individuals. They have become an integral part of the national policies of certain countries. The great nations of the world are committing in relation to their rival nations and groups acts which, if committed even by their own subjects, would evoke for them the severest punishments. Instances are not lacking where, in the name of "diplomacy" and "strategy", nations have chosen to select condemned criminals and placed them at the helm of their affairs. There is no form of villainy, however heinous, which under the direction of such leaders, these nations have not committed during the Second World War. Lies were fabricated and broadcast on a wide scale. The very air which we breathe has been poisoned by Radios spinning tissues of falsehood. Even today double-talk and double-act are the order of the day. Many a nation has taken upon itself the role of virtual robbers and bandits—what else is imperialism or colonialism, red or white or yellow!

What is more gruesome is the triumph of hypocrisy. Even in the face of naked aggrandizement, powerful nations have been trying to pose as angels and debunking their rivals while the fact is that the pot and the kettle are both equally black. Justice means justice only for their own people; rights, whatever they are, for them alone. Their ethical code not only legalises that other peoples can be deprived of their just rights, but on occasions even approves of such acts as highly meritorious. The nations of the world have one standard for taking things

in and another for giving them out. The criterion which a nation lays down for itself vanishes into thin air as soon as the question of other people's benefit comes in. Every nation infringes those very rules of morality which it insists upon others to observe. There are instances in which representatives of great powers, while putting their signatures on international agreements with solemn faces and cultured looks, have nurtured in their hearts the resolve to go back on their pledges at the first opportunity of furthering their national interests. And when all this is going on a vast scale there are very few who dare to raise the voice of truth and awaken the benumbed conscience of humanity. Sermons on morality are directed at others only and not at their own people and their own selves, however heinous their own crimes may be. It seems as if the conscience of humanity has been deadened.<sup>1</sup>

This is a horrifying and detestable situation indeed and it is extremely painful for me to delineate upon it. The glaring moral vices I have referred to above are sufficient to show the depths of the abyss of moral degradation to which we have stooped. In fact the entire humanity is suffering from the festering sores of moral depravity. The virus has spread all over the body-social, and governments and parliaments, courts and chambers of law, radio and the press, universities and educational

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1. *Editor's Note:* A friend who was kind enough to go through the draft (translation) objected that the above statement seems rather exaggerated. The indictment on the modern world is, in fact, so grave and the charges so revolting that the first reaction of every good human being would naturally be; it cannot be true! which perhaps would be another way of saying: it should not be true! But alas! it is true and only those who are unaware of the

institutions, banks and commercial combines have, in different degrees, become infected with its venom. The greatest tragedy of all is that even knowledge, learning and science, which are the most precious assets of mankind and its common heritage, have been poisoned and are being callously harnessed for the very annihilation of mankind.<sup>2</sup> Resources which Providence has bestowed

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(Continued from page 4)

gruesome facts of life or who are too enamoured of the exterior charm and glamour of the West can ignore or refuse to admit them. The record of the great powers is, unfortunately, not clean on this score. Both kinds of persecution, physical and moral, have been shamefacedly resorted to by the imperialist powers in their unfortunate colonies. Germany and Japan committed these crimes in the areas they conquered. Even the record of SCAP in Japan and at the personal level of the GIs in the society at large has been despicable. Russia's crimes under Stalin and particularly the Communist oppression in the Muslim states of Asia has been unparalleled in its heinousness. And what is being done in Viet-nam by the great leader of the democratic world at the time of the writing of this note is sufficient to put every conscientious human being to shame. (By the way Bertrand Russell had demanded that the U.S. President should be prosecuted for his crimes against humanity). The author has deliberately avoided giving specific instances in the text and has confined himself to making general statements, which nonetheless are based on *actual* behaviour of the so-called civilized world. Every point can be substantiated by an undergoing row of horrifying data, hair-raising statistics and harrowing statements and confessions. Those who want to read the story of this revolting depravity of modern man may see the following, to mention only a few; Lord Russell of Liverpool, *The Scourge of the Swastika*, London, 1959; Linyu Tang, *The Secret Name*, London, 1960; E. F. M. Durbin, *The Politics of Democratic Socialism* (particularly the Appendix), London, 1948; Father Trevor Huddleston, *Naught for Your Comfort*, Collins, London; Bertrand Russell, *How Near is War?* A Fleet Forum Publication, London; Henry S. Cammager, *Freedom, Loyalty, Dissent*, Oxford, 1944; David Dallin, *Forced Labour in Soviet Russia*. A concise documented statement will also be found in; Khurshid Ahmad, *Fanaticism, Intolerance and Islam*, Islamic Publications Ltd., Lahore, 1960.

2. How Biology was used by the Nazis and demography is being used by many for purposes of power-politics is a sordid story. "So much evil use has been made of knowledge that our imagination does not readily rise to the thought of the good uses that are possible." Russell, *Human Society in Ethics and Politics*, *ab. cit.*, p. 238.



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upon mankind are being frittered away in mutual wrangles and feuds and the noble qualities of courage, sacrifice, generosity, patience and resolution, have been yoked to the service of vicious ends.

It is obvious that social evils make their appearance on a vast scale only when moral degradation of the individuals is steep, when the grip of the moral values becomes lax and when fidelity to the standards of discipline is shattered. You cannot conceive of a society possessing a majority of morally robust individuals and collectively exhibiting signs of moral corruption. It is inconceivable that a community of virtuous people should entrust its leadership to a group of unscrupulous persons and remain passive spectators when their communal, national and international affairs are conducted in flagrant violation of moral principles. Therefore, if the peoples of the world are exhibiting on a large scale the seamy side of human nature through their collective institutions and policies, that can only lead us to the view that, in spite of all its intellectual and material progress, mankind is passing through a period of intense moral decadence which has gripped by far the greatest majority of human beings. It is better to frankly confess about this situation than hide our heads, ostrich-like, in the deceptive hey of polished phrases, varnished words and meaningless platitudes. No amount of prankish prattle or window-dressing can hide the rot. Nay, that will do positive harm. For, if this state of affairs persists, the time is not far off when humanity will meet with a colossal disaster and will plunge

headlong into an era of all-pervading darkness.<sup>3</sup>

Now, if we do not wish to make a blind rush for that evil day, we should look for the primary source from where the present evil is emanating with all the fury of a flood. And since it is a moral crisis it must obviously be traced in the contemporary moral systems, followed to by the people of the world. Attitude and behaviour have their roots in the ethical beliefs and moral concepts of the people. In the final analysis the ultimate forces responsible for the malaise will be found only there.

The question, therefore, arises: What are the contemporary moral systems which are fashioning the life-pattern of the individual and the society? When we analyse this question closely we find that all these systems broadly fall under two categories:

- (1) Systems which are based on belief in God and life-after-death; and
- (2) Systems which are devoid of any idea of God and arise from secular sources.

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3. "Are we to continue entrusting our affairs to men without sympathy, without knowledge, without imagination and having nothing to recommend them except methodical hatred and skill in vituperation? (I do not mean this as an indictment of all statesmen; but it applies to those who guide the destinies of Russia and to some who have influence in other countries). When Othello is about to kill Desdemona, he says, "But yet the pity of it, Iago. Oh Iago, the pity of it". I doubt whether Malenkov and his opposite number, as they prepare the extermination of mankind, have enough pity in their character to be capable of this exclamation, or even to realize the nature of what they are preparing. I suppose that never for a moment have they thought of man as a single species with possibilities that may be realized or thwarted. Never have their minds risen beyond the daily considerations of momentary expediency in a narrow contest for brief power.....The future of man is at stake." Bertrand Russell, *ibid.*, p. 238.

Let us now examine both these broad approaches to morality and find out the modes of their expression and their respective effects.

## (II)

### CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO MORALITY

#### (a) **Shades of Religious Morality**

Ethical conceptions based on belief in God and life-after-death are determined by the nature of man's ideas about God and life-hereafter. Our examination of the problem shall proceed as under:

##### (i) *Polytheistic Morality*

A great majority of human beings who believe in God are guilty of associating other deities with the One True God Who is the Creator of the universe and man. They have invested beings other than God, with certain powers concerning their own day-to-day life, although all such powers belong to God alone. They have drawn a wishful and imaginary picture of these godlings and have attributed to them some or all "divine" powers. They commit sins hoping that these godlings would secure them forgiveness. Like unbridled animals such individuals roam about and graze in the pastures of life as they please, indifferent to the rights of others and neglectful of their own duties and obligations, making no distinction between things lawful and unlawful. In exchange for a handful of offerings, these godlings, they assume, would guarantee them salvation. Even if they go out to commit burglary, the policemen fall asleep through the courtesy of these godlings! It appears as if an agreement has been entered

into between these people and their patron-gods to the effect that these people shall hold favourable nice belief about the godlings and shall propitiate them by occasional offerings and in lieu thereof the godlings have undertaken to look after the affairs of these individuals to their best advantage in this world, and to intercede with God on their behalf in the hereafter pleading that these persons had been under their protection and should not, therefore, be made to suffer in any way. In certain cases even the need of intercession may not arise, *for someone else has atoned their sins in advance.*<sup>4</sup>

These polytheistic beliefs have reduced to absurdity the doctrine of life-after-death with the result that the whole structure of morality built up by religion has crumbled to dust. Though many moral teachings of religions are still preserved in the pages of religious literature and are endowed with all outward show of respect, nevertheless, beliefs of the nature mentioned above have provided innumerable avenues of escape from the necessity of fulfilling the moral obligations, and that too in such a wonderful way that whichever avenue of escape they choose to take, they are always sure of reaching invariably the goal of salvation.

Leaving aside such perverted beliefs, we find that even where the doctrine of belief in God and life-after-death has retained its original purity of form, its demands and requirements have been restricted to a very narrow sphere of man's individual life and the entire gamut of

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4. For a more detailed evaluation of polytheism see: Abul A'la Maududi, *Islam aur Jahiliyyah* (Urdu). Islamic Publications Ltd., Lahore. An English Translation of the same is under preparation.—*Editor*.

socio-cultural life has been excluded from its active jurisdiction. A few acts, a few ceremonies, a few rites and rituals and a few restrictions in the sphere of individual and family life are all that God appears to demand of His believers and, in exchange for these offerings, He has prepared for them a soothing Paradise. If they fulfil these demands in relation to God, they are at liberty to pursue other affairs of this world as they wish. If they fail to carry out even these 'easy' religious duties, they can still hope for Divine forgiveness which will throw open to them the gates of Paradise and secure for them unrestricted entrance therein despite their heavy load of sins. This narrow and distorted concept of religion has greatly circumscribed the field of religious practices, as a result of which most of the important spheres of human life have become excluded from the guidance and control of religion. Moreover, even in this narrow domain of religious life, there is an escape from moral discipline and some people do not hesitate to take advantage of this leeway.

## *(ii) Morality of Asceticism*

There is another group of religious people who are free from the above mentioned perverted notions, who hold sincerely to the belief in God, and harbour no false illusion about life-after-death. Such people are blessed with undoubted moral purity and a high and noble character, but, generally speaking, their narrow conception about religion and spiritual life have made them ineffective. They adopt an attitude of indifference to the practical problems of life, and either confine their activities to a few specific acts which engross them in cleansing and purifying

their souls so that they may be able to hear voices from the Unseen and catch glimpses of the Divine Being in this world of matter. They think that the path of salvation lies not through the rough and tumble of life but somewhere on its outskirts, so that they may just touch it and escape without coming into full contact with it. According to them, the only way of attaining proximity to God is to mould a few outer aspects of life in the pattern furnished by religion, to purify the soul by using some useful methods, and to pass their lives in meditation and contemplation, in religious exercises and so-called spiritual practices, as if God wanted them to develop extra-sensory powers and to grow into something super-human, and as if He has sent to this earth human beings equipped with all the moral and material qualities to live here not as human beings made of flesh and bones and inspired by moral and social ideals but like jinn or angels renouncing the world in toto. This attitude is in radical violation of the entire scheme of nature and is a virtual revolt against the Will of God as *immanent* in His Creation. The greatest harm done to humanity by this wrong concept of religion is that it has removed from practical life some of those individuals whom God had endowed with high moral qualities, thus leaving the field or worldly affairs mostly for persons of inferior moral calibre.<sup>5</sup>

This, in brief, is the situation obtaining in the religious world. The greater part of humanity has been deprived of the moral force which comes from belief in God and life-after-death. As against this the minority which is in

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5. See: Henry Hazlitt, *The Foundations of Morality*, D. Van Nostrang Company, Inc., Princeton, 1964, Chap. 22.

possession of this force, has voluntarily withdrawn itself from the leadership and guidance of mankind, presenting the spectacle of a battery which has exhausted itself through misuse.

### **(b) Morality Without Religion**

The ethical code adhered to by most of those persons and nations which wield power and are directing the affairs of humanity today is devoid of any conception of God and life-after-death. This is not accidental, for the ethical values of humanity have been deliberately divested by these people of the idea of God and the life-hereafter. Indeed, they have openly refused to accept the guidance of God in ethical matters. Although the greater part of them do profess one religion or the other, they have reduced their religious faith to a few norms of individual and personal life, a sort of private belief which every individual should carefully keep to himself alone. They believe that religion should have no concern with the collective life of humanity. There is no need, therefore, for them to turn to any supernatural guidance for the direction of human affairs. This view began to influence the life and thought of the people and social movements emerged during the nineteenth century to organize life on a morality without religion. Dr. Flex Adler of Columbia University was one of the pioneers of the movement. The movement was initiated in America in 1876. The basic creed of the ethical movement was expressed in the following words in the statement of objectives of the American Ethical Union, a federation of six ethical societies of America:

**"To assert the supreme importance of the ethical factor in all relations of life, personal, social, national and international, apart from any theological or metaphysical considerations."**<sup>6</sup>

The movement also spread to England where a Union of Ethical Societies was formed. The society later merged itself in the Ethical Union in 1928. Its main object was stated to be:

**"To promote by all lawful means the study of ethical principles; to advocate a religion of human fellowship and service, based upon the principle that the supreme aim of religion is the love of goodness, and that moral ideas and the moral life are independent of beliefs as to the ultimate nature of things and a life-after-death; and, by purely human and material means, to help men to love, know, and do the right in all relations of life."**

These words fully represent the views of the upholders of secularism and also fairly reflect the mind of the people who wield power and control the destinies of the people in the modern world. Most of them have, in practice, deprived their ethics of the idea of God and of Life-here-after and freed themselves from every obligation to follow the guidance of religion in the sphere of social morality.<sup>7</sup>

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6. Vide *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 8, p. 757.

7. For a detailed study of this school of thought see: F. Adler, *An Ethical Philosophy of Life* (1918) and *The Reconstruction of the Spiritual Ideal* (1923); H. J. Bridges, *The Ethical Movement*, 1911; A. Martin, *The Distinctive Features of the Ethical Movement*, 1926; also: "The Ethical Movement", *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 8, pp. 756-57 and Gustave Spillies, "The Ethical Movement" in *Hastings' Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*.—Editor.



Now we shall try to review briefly the ethical philosophies and standards which the leading western philosophers have developed after freeing their thought from the grip of religion.

### (III)

## A RAPID LOOK AT THE SECULAR MORAL PHILOSOPHIES

### (a) The Highest Good or the Ultimate End of Human Conduct

The first basic question of ethical philosophy is: *What is the supreme good the attainment of which should be the life-purpose of man, the goal of all his endeavours, the summum bonum to which human conduct is to be directed and in the light of which it may be judged as to what is good or evil, right or wrong, virtue or vice?*

Man has not been able to find an agreed ethical standard. With some this standard is *happiness*,<sup>8</sup> with others *perfection*<sup>9</sup> and with yet others *duty for the sake of duty*.<sup>10</sup>

If we take "happiness" as the highest good, a number of questions arise. What kind of happiness is it that is sought? Is it the happiness that follows the gratification

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8. The school of thought which subscribes to this view is known as "Eudaemonism" its important shades being "Egoistic Eudaemonism", "universalistic Eudaemonism" or "Utilitarianism" and "Altruistic Eudaemonism" or "Altruism".—*Editor*.

9. "Perfection" is the name of this school which maintains that the highest good of human conduct is the fullest development of all the capacities of man in so far as these can co-exist in an harmonious whole.—*Editor*.

10. The founder of this school is Immanuel Kant.—*Editor*.

of bodily and sensual desires, or that which a man feels when he is engaged in self-adornment from the viewpoint of art, aesthetics or spiritualism? Whose happiness is to be sought: the happiness of the individual, or of the society of which the individual is a member, or of the entire mankind, or simply the happiness of others?

Similarly, several questions arise if we take "perfection" as the supreme end. For example, what is the conception and standard of perfection? Whose perfection is to be sought: of the class or group to which one belongs, of the individual, of the society, of the nation or of the whole of humanity?

Similarly those who adhere to the view that "*duty for the sake of duty*" constitutes the moral standard cannot avoid certain searching questions: What in fact is this imperative? Who has laid it down? What is the rationale for its obedience?

Different answers have been given to each one of these questions by different groups of thinkers, and the answers are different, conflicting and even contradictory, in theory as well as in practice. Those who are at the helm of affairs in the modern world—may they be rulers and administrators, generals of armies, judges of courts of law, legislatures, teachers engaged in training new generations, business magnates controlling the economic machinery, etc.—have no agreed standard of values. Instead, every individual or group has its own separate standard and although working within the framework of the same culture each is wedded to a different ideal. There is no uniform and accepted summum bonum. With some it is personal happiness and it is this which

determines their entire social conduct (Egoistic Eudae-monism and in its crude form simple Hedonism). In spite of this, we are deceived by their cultured appearance and fall into the delusion that they can suitably serve as administrators, judges, ministers, teachers, or as other similar public functionaries. Side by side with these people there are others who regard as their objective the happiness and well-being of the specific group with whom they are bound by ties of affection and interest (Utilitarianism). For them this is the supreme good and to strive for it constitutes real virtue. This viewpoint makes them dangerous for the rest of mankind. And yet their outward decency induces us to take them for gentlemen. Similar situations confront us when we consider the cases of those who regard 'perfection' as the ultimate good or those who believe in '*duty for duty's sake*.' Their dignified appearance hardly bears any affinity with their moral values and this misleads the people. The result is that despite loud protestations of morality, these conflicting notions and the dual-standards employed by the leaders of the modern civilization have wrought havoc in human life. And the root lies in the confusion of moral values and concepts and the lack of a universally accepted standard which is in keeping with the realities of human existence.

### **(b) Knowledge of Good and Evil**

The next important problem of moral philosophy is *to discover the means whereby we may distinguish the good from the evil*. What are the real means to obtain knowledge of good and evil, right and wrong? How to find out virtue and vice? What is the correct source of this

knowledge? Mankind has no agreed answer to this question either. Everybody plays a different tune. Some say that *human experience* is the only reliable source of our knowledge of good and evil,<sup>11</sup> that this source consists of the *knowledge of laws of life and conditions of existence*; others say that it is *intuition*,<sup>12</sup> and still others claim that it is *reason*.<sup>13</sup>

We are again confronted with a confused situation. If we hold that the above-mentioned criteria are the sources of our knowledge of moral values, it automatically becomes the first principle of ethics that there should be no absolute standard of morality and that, like a shapeless fluid, ethics should follow the line of least resistance and take all forms according to the shape of the vessel that contains it. This would lead us to pure relativism.

To arrive at true knowledge by means of human experience alone it is essential that full data and complete information should be available at one place and then some omniscient and perfectly balanced mind should deduce conclusions therefrom. But neither of these two pre-requisites can be fulfilled. First of all, human experience has not yet attained perfection. Data are inadequate; knowledge of experience is imperfect; and its flow being continuous we are not in a position to be clear about the exact fund of experience which would suffice to reveal the reality to our unwary eyes.

Secondly, whatever fund of human experience has

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11. This is the view-point of *Empiricism*.—*Editor*.

12. This school of thought is known as *Intuitionism*.—*Editor*.

13. Rationalism is the name of the school which presents this 'view'. It is represented by philosophers like, Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Hegel etc.—*Editor*.

accumulated so far, its different cross-sections have their own specialists and experts, who deduce conclusions in their narrow and limited field according to their vision and peculiar mental make-up, what to say of their prejudices and predilections. The question now arises; is it possible to regard such conclusions, based as they are on imperfect vision and partial experience, as correct? If not, how prudent and fair it would be to consider this source sufficient to yield a reliable knowledge of good and evil?<sup>14</sup>

The same is true of the laws of life and of the conditions of human existence. Either we should wait until such time when our knowledge of these laws and conditions becomes so perfect as to enable us to build up our code of good and evil. Or, in view of the present imperfection and incompleteness of our knowledge, different individuals should try to build up their own codes of good and evil according to their own limited fields, prejudices and intellectual levels. But this would perhaps necessitate a change, almost every morning, in their ethical norms. For, with the discovery of every fresh instalment of knowledge, values will change with the result that what is good today may become evil tomorrow and *vice versa*. Thus, we would be caught in the whirlpool of sheer moral relativism and utter confusion.

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14. For a fuller appreciation of this point see: John Lock, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Everyman's Library, E. P. Dutton & Co., New York, 1947; Bertrand Russell, *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits*, Simon and Schustee, New York, 1948. For a criticism of empiricism see: William Adams Brown, *Pathways to Certainty*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1931; Lecomte du Nuoy, *Human Destiny*, Mentor Book, 1963; Sir Muhammad Iqbal, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Lahore; Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi, *The Religion of Truth*, Lahore. —Editor.

Reliance on reason and intuition presents similar difficulties. No doubt, human reason is capable, within certain limits, of *distinguishing* good from evil, and every individual has been endowed with it in some measure. Similarly the knowledge of good and evil is, to some extent, intuitive, because human conscience instinctively feels uneasy in the presence of evil. But neither of them is sufficient by itself to be taken as an authoritative and reliable source of our knowledge of moral values. Indeed, whichever is uncritically accepted as self-sufficient, it will fail us before we reach the journey's end. It may give us knowledge but not wisdom. Our information will remain imperfect, biased, limited to certain fields, distorted and disbalanced and even contradictory. The variety of interpretations would be bewildering. A commonly agreed and universally accepted standard will continue to elude our grip.<sup>15</sup>

This chaos, to which I have been referring, is not confined to learned treatises and philosophic discourses only, but is fully reflected in practical life, in the civilizations and cultures of the world.<sup>16</sup> People who are actively engaged in building up human civilization, whether as leader or as followers, are all turning to these diverse sources to know what is good or evil, and which is right or

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15. Those who want to pursue a study of these aspects of normal philosophy may see: C. D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., London, 1951; William E. Hocking, *Types of Philosophy*, Revised Edition, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1939 (for relativism see pp. 121-138 & for Utilitarianism see pp. 175-212); Iqbal, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*; Al-Ghazzali, *Tahafatul Falasafa*, English Translation by Kamali, Pakistan Philosophical Congress, Lahore.—Editor.

16. See Pitirim A. Sorokin, *The Crisis of Our Age*, E. P. Dutton & Co., New York, 1951, Chapters I, III and IV.—Editor.

wrong, with the result that the good of one individual or group is in conflict with the good of other individuals or groups. This chaos has left human morality without any solid basis. Things which the world had always held to be morally reprehensible and those which were, for ages, regarded as crimes and sins have now become either absolute or relative virtues, at least with some groups of human beings. Similarly, what mankind once considered to be meritorious acts of virtue are laughed at today as crass stupidity. Several groups are going against these, not only without any sense of guilt or shame but rather with boastfulness. In days gone by, if anyone told a lie, he still believed that truth and no falsehood was the standard of morality.<sup>17</sup> But certain modern ideologies have turned lying into a virtue and have given it the august name of propaganda. A whole science of broadcasting falsehood has been developed and many a nation is practising it on a large scale in the sacred name of diplomacy. Similar is the case with other evils, which have all along been recognized as evils but have now, thanks to new fangled philosophies, been raised to the dignity of virtues, either in an absolute or a relative sense.

### (c) Sanction Behind Moral Law

The third fundamental question of ethics is: *What is the sanction behind the moral law?* In response to this problem the advocates of the theories of happiness and

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17. This is what Lenin says: "We must be ready to employ trickery, deceit, law breaking, withholding and concealing truth. We can and must write in a language which sows among the masses hate, revulsion, scorn, and the like, towards those who disagree with us." Quoted by Henry Hazlitt, *The Foundation of Morality*, op. cit., p. 340.—Editor.

perfection state that the virtues leading to happiness or perfection are self-enforcing and the vices making for sorrow or imperfection are repugnant to human nature, and that, therefore, the ethical law does not stand in need of any external authority. Another group also arrives at the same conclusion but through a different line of reasoning. It says that the law of duty is the self-imposed law of "practical reason", and hence it does not need any force external to itself. A third group holds that political power is the real sanction behind moral law and vests all those powers and functions to the state, which originally belonged to Almighty. A fourth school assigns this status to society. All these replies have created and are still creating disorder and confusion in the life of humanity. The first two carried individual liberty to such irresponsible extremes that the very fabric of corporate and social life was threatened with subversion. The reaction came with the appearance of new social theories which either elevated the state to the status of an absolute divinity and reduced the individual to the position of an abject slave or a cog in the lifeless machine of social organization, or left to society as a whole the decision of what is morally good and bad for an individual. In reality, however, neither the state nor the society as a whole is free from imperfections and susceptibility to error.

#### **(d) Motive of Moral Conduct**

We are confronted with a similar situation when we come to the question of *the motive which induces man to obey moral law even against his natural inclinations or per-*



*sonal interests?* One school of thought says that *desire* for pleasure or *fear* of pain are sufficient to act as motives for this purpose; another group thinks that longing for perfection and a natural distaste for imperfections form the motive force. A third group relies on man's in-born respect for law; while a fourth group gives expression to the hope that the state constitutes the proper agency to reward acts virtuous and to punish acts contravening moral law. A fifth school lays emphasis on the rewards and punishments awarded by the society in the form of esteem or denunciation. Each of these answers to the basic question of motives finds a prominent place in one or the other contemporary ethical system. But even a cursory examination shows that all these motives can serve equally well as inducements to moral vice or moral good. In fact they may be more effective for evil than for good. In any case, they are wholly inadequate as basis for higher morality.

The foregoing brief and rapid survey<sup>18</sup> of the contemporary moral scene makes it evident that the world is faced with widespread moral confusion. Having made himself independent of God, man has not been able to discover any alternative basis for building up his moral life with any degree of satisfaction. All the basic ethical questions have become insoluble for him. He has neither been able

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18. Those interested in a thorough discussion over these problems of moral philosophy may read the following with profit: H. Sidgwick, *Method of Ethics* and *History of Ethics*; J. Martineau; *Types of Ethical Theory*; H. Rashdall, *Theory of Good and Evil* (2 Vols.); C. D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory*; Henry Hazlitt; *The Foundations of Morality*; Jacques Maritain, *Moral Philosophy: An Historical and Critical Survey of the Great Systems*, New York, 1964.—Editor.

to discover that supreme good which could serve as the object of all his endeavours and enable him to judge the right from the wrong, the virtue from the vice; nor he has discovered a satisfactory source for his knowledge of moral values. He has not even succeeded in securing for himself that sanction on the basis of which some noble, comprehensive and universal code of morality could be enforced; nor has he put his finger on that motive which could induce human beings to follow the path of truth and virtue and abstain from falsehood even in the face of adversity. Having rebelled against God, man tried arrogantly to solve these questions without His guidance, and he thought he had solved them. But it is precisely a result of this escape from the Lord that he is faced with a crisis which is threatening the very existence of human civilization.

This is the situation with which humanity is beset to-day. Has the time really not yet come when we should search for that true basis on which moral life might be happily built? This kind of search is not merely an academic one but is also a practical necessity and one of the most pressing needs of our times. The critical times through which we are passing have added infinitely to its importance. It is in view of this consideration that I am making my own submissions on the problem and I hope that those who are conscious of this need will give some deep thought to them.

## (IV)

**ISLAMIC VIEWPOINT**

After years of thought and reflection I have reached the conclusion that there is only one correct basis for morality and that is presented by Islam. Here we get an answer to all the basic ethical questions; an answer free from the weaknesses and fallacies from which the viewpoints expressed by secular and other religious philosophies alike suffer. The fundamental weakness of all these systems of ethics——religious or secular——is that they fail to build up simultaneously a firm and integrated moral personality of the individual and a sound and healthy organization of the body-social. The situation is altogether different in respect of Islam. Here we find such comprehensive moral guidance as can ensure our progress to the highest pinnacle in every sphere of human life and activity. Islam gives us basic moral norms and values to guide and control the entire gamut of man's life. It gives a comprehensive code of behaviour for the individual and shows him the way to the highest possible moral excellence and also gives ethical principles on which the edifice of a truly righteous society can be raised and which, if accepted as the basis of individual and collective conduct, can save human life from the chaos and anarchy that have overtaken it today. Let us now make an effort to appreciate the Islamic viewpoint.

**(a) First Questions**

The first grave mistake which secular philosophers have committed in connection with ethics and moral values

lies in starting their enquiry from the wrong place. Instead of beginning with first questions, they have jumped into the middle and lodged themselves into a muddle. They have disturbed the sequence in which the question of the basis of morality should have been discussed. And once the order is disturbed nothing but confusion results. The question, what is the criterion of right and wrong for purposes of human conduct and what is the ultimate good for the realization of which man should direct his efforts is, in reality, a question which arises much later. The first problem to be settled is that of man's place and status in the universe. This problem enjoys priority over all others, because it would be meaningless to build up any ethical system without first deciding as to the real position of man in the universe. The question about standards of conduct will defy all solutions unless the status and the position of man are correctly determined. For example, if you have to determine your conduct in relation to a commodity and to decide how far and in what way it is rightful for you to utilise it for your benefit, you must, in the first instance, ascertain your legal status, *vis-a-vis*, the said commodity. If it belongs to another person and your position is merely that of a trustee, your conduct must, of necessity, be different from what it would be if you were the owner of it and had full proprietary rights over it. And that is not all. Not only the question of status is decisive in determining the nature of your conduct *vis-a-vis* the commodity in question but on this very point will rest another very fundamental question; who would be the proper authority to determine your conduct in relation to it, *i.e.*, whether you yourself enjoy this authority, or it would be enjoyed

by the person whose agent you are.

Islam takes up this very question before anything else and tells us clearly that the status of man in this world is that of an *'abd* (God's servant and slave) who is also *Khalifat-ul-Allah* (Allah's deputy and vicegerent). All things in the world with which he comes in contact belong to God. Even his own body and the capacities with which he is endowed are not in fact his own,<sup>19</sup> but are a trust from the Lord.

God has appointed him as his vicegerent giving him the power to use these objects for his benefit. And in this lies his test and trial. The final results of this test will not be declared in this world but only at the time when individuals and nations and, indeed, the whole of mankind shall have finished their career on the earth and the consequences and effects of their actions and strivings shall have become fully manifest. It is then that God will examine the account of each human being and will decide as to who has duly carried out the duties of His stewardship and who has not. And this examination will not be confined to any one thing or one department of life, but will cover the entire range of a person's individual and social conduct. It will be an examination of all the faculties of his mind and body with which he has been endowed and also of every kind of authority and power over external objects which has been delegated to him.<sup>20</sup>

This being man's real position in the world, it logically follows that he is not the master—but the agent and the

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19. That is why suicide is a moral crime in Islam.—*Editor*.

20. For a detailed study of this point see Maududi, *Foundations of Islamic Faith and Culture*, Islamic Publications Ltd., Lahore.

deputy. His power and authority are bound to be limited. Sovereignty belongs to God alone; man is His vicegerent and the only moral course open to him is to fulfil the task which the Sovereign has assigned to him. He is not totally free to determine his own behaviour, the standards of right and wrong must be taken from the Sovereign. Man has no absolute right to determine the course of his own conduct—the course of conduct has been laid down by the Lord. Man's job is to faithfully and scrupulously pursue the mission assigned to him. The code of conduct is not to be formulated by man, he has to take it from God and follow it. Creator is the law-giver; man has to act within that framework which the Sovereign has laid for him. Once this position is accepted and the nature of God-man relationship is clearly understood all ethical questions which have been agitating the minds of philosophers from time immemorial find appropriate solutions. These solutions are clear, precise and definite. And they are based on reality. They are universal and eternal.

### **(b) Foundations of Morality**

If the position assigned to man by Islam is accepted by him, then it becomes automatically settled, that:

- (i) to emerge successfully from the test prescribed by God and to attain His pleasure constitute the supreme good and the ultimate objective of human life;
- (ii) the criterion of right or wrong for human conduct lies in determining how far it helps or hinders man in the attainment of this supreme good;

- (iii) the real source of man's knowledge of good and evil is found in the guidance furnished by God through His prophets—other sources of knowledge can be employed only as auxiliaries and aids to it, but none of them deserves to be treated as its substitute; and,
- (iv) the real sanction for morality lies in the love for and the fear of God—the real motive-force which would impel us to observe the canons of morality and to abstain from immoral conduct would be the love of God, the desire to seek His Pleasure, the fear of His Displeasure and the consequences—good or otherwise—which are to follow in the Hereafter.

In this way not only all the basic moral problems are solved satisfactorily, but the system of morality reared on this foundation also duly incorporates within itself all the best from the moral ideas presented by philosophers and moral theorists from time to time, assigning to them their due place within its framework. *The weakness of the ethical systems expounded by philosophers and the sages is not that they are totally devoid of truth and reality but that they regard some particular aspect of truth as the whole truth.* They have fallen a prey to the fallacy of regarding the part as *the whole*, and as this apparently left many gaps and loopholes which they had to fill by drawing upon imagination and falling on materials of doubtful validity, thus introducing a large slice of unreality in their systems and making the over-all picture distorted and disproportionate. On the other hand, Islam presents the whole truth and in this whole truth all partial truths, which

remain imperfect in isolation from one another, are assimilated and synthesized into a perfect unity, nothing superfluous, nothing lacking.

*Happiness* has a place in Islam, but it is the happiness which follows the observance of the law laid down by God. It is physical as well as mental, artistic as well as spiritual; it relates to the individual as much as to the group, the nation and, indeed, to humanity as a whole. All these different kinds of happiness are not conceived by Islam as antagonistic to one another but mutually coherent and harmonious.

In Islam, there is a place for *perfection* also. It consists in emerging successful from the test prescribed by God in the trial of existence; and it relates to the individual, the nation and, indeed, to the whole of mankind. The correct ethical conduct for an individual, therefore, is to advance himself towards perfection and to assist and help others in the same direction.

Kant's standpoint also finds a place of honour in Islam and here the concept of Duty also gets the sheet-anchor which it lacks in Kant's own system of thought.

The '*categorical imperative*' of which Kant wrote, but which he could not elucidate, is in reality God's Law. God has determined its form and it is entitled to obedience solely in virtue of being His law. Indeed, moral goodness is nothing other than absolute and willing submission to the Law of God.

### (c) Source of Moral Values

Similarly, as regards the source of the knowledge of moral good and evil, Islam does not reject altogether



those sources to which the philosophers turn, but merely incorporates them at their proper place in its comprehensive system. What it really rejects is that any one or all of them put together (devoid of Divine Guidance) can be taken as the final and absolute source of knowledge. The knowledge of good and evil provided to us by Divine Guidance constitutes the real knowledge; while empirical knowledge derived from the observation of laws of life and conditions of existence, rational knowledge, and intuitive knowledge, all are its collaborators and aids. What Divine Guidance states to be good receives confirmation from the experience of humanity. The laws of life bear equal testimony to its being good and man's reason as well as intuition lead him to the same conclusion. It is thus the Divine Guidance, and not these sources of knowledge, which forms the criterion of truth. In case any inference drawn from the historical experience of mankind or from the laws of life, or any opinion formed on the basis of reason or intuition, runs counter to Divine Guidance, credence will definitely be given to Divine Guidance, and not to that inference or opinion. The chief merit of having an authentic and reliable criterion is precisely this; our knowledge becomes disciplined and we are saved from the chaos and anarchy which result from the absence of an agreed criterion as well as from giving license to every individual to fashion and follow his own opinions.

#### **(d) Sanction and Motives**

The question of the sanction of moral imperatives and that of the proper motive-force behind them is also solved on the same lines. None of the solutions suggested

by the philosophers is rejected altogether. They are corrected, modified and assigned their due place, after being lifted out of the fields to which they had been wrongly extended. They are, thus, fitted into the framework of a wider system and thus are assigned a proper place. God's Law, because of its Divine origin, is self-enforcing. Sanction for it exists in the mind of the believer who finds happiness in seeking God's Pleasure and is desirous to attain the standard of perfection which is to be attained by proximity to Him. Similarly, this sanction is inherent in the community of the faithful and in the State which is based on Divine Law. The motive that leads the believer to obey the moral law is his sense of duty as well as his love of truth and hatred of falsehood; he is fully conscious of both of these: and this constitutes the essence of belief. Fear of God's punishment and hope of His Pleasure and reward also act as equally powerful motives in inducing obedience to moral law.

Thus, Islam sets at rest the anarchy of thought and conduct which results from the assumption that there is no power above man and from the attempt to build up a whole ethical system on the basis of this unreal assumption. Islam exposes the fallacy of this approach and states, at the very outset, that morality can have its basis only in God's Will. This being the starting point, Islam very clearly states its concept of God, which, in fact, constitutes the real source of all its moral thinking.

#### **(e) Islamic Concept of God and its Consequences for Morality**

The concept of God which Islam expounds implies that He is the Absolute Sovereign, Master, and Creator of

man and of the entire universe and there is no one who shares with Him in any of the prerogatives and attributes of Divinity. There is no one to exercise over Him the least iota of influence and to get his recommendation accepted, except as a matter of absolute Grace from Him and that too if one comes to Him purely as a suppliant. The success or failure of every man depends upon his own conduct. No person can atone for another person; neither can the burden of anyone be placed upon another's shoulders; nor can anyone receive the reward for another person's good deeds. There is no favouritism or partiality with God so that He may have greater interest in any individual, family, clan, race or nation. All human beings are equal in His eyes. There is one moral code for all and the only excellence that matters with Him is moral excellence. He is Merciful and likes mercy; He is Generous and likes generosity; He is Forgiving and likes forgiveness; He is Just and likes justice. He is absolutely free from all injustice, narrow-mindedness, cruelty, wickedness, callousness, bigotry and partiality, and therefore likes only those who are free from these vices. All greatness is His exclusive right and, therefore, arrogance in any human being, however great, causes His displeasure. All godly qualities and divine attributes belong to Him alone. He, therefore, dislikes any one behaving in an absolute manner towards another person or group of persons. He is the Sole Owner of whatever there is in the heavens or the earth, and what appears to us as belonging to anyone among us is really in the nature of a *trust* from Him. Therefore, any creature who sets himself up as an independent authority, or is presumptuous enough to lay the basic law for others,

or claims obedience in his own right from other persons or groups of persons, automatically puts himself in the wrong position, for God alone is the Lord of all and the good of all lies in explicitly obeying Him. Again, He is the Benefactor and is entitled to the gratitude and love of the beneficiaries. He is the Bestower of all gifts and it is, therefore, His right that His gifts should be utilised in accordance with His Will. He is Just and this makes it incumbent upon His creatures to hope for rewards and to fear punishments. He is Omniscient and knows also the hidden intentions of human hearts, therefore, no one can deceive Him by an outward show of virtue or by a mere affectation of piety. He is All-Encompassing and hence nobody can harbour the delusion that he can commit crimes with impunity.

#### **(f) A Perfect Ethical System**

Reflect deeply over this concept of God. From this conception there naturally emerges into shape a perfect ethical system for man, and this system is free from all those defects which are to be found in the ethics of idolatrous religions and of secular creeds. Here there are no backdoors of escape from moral responsibility, nor is there any room for those cruel philosophies whose protagonists divide humanity into warring sections on the basis of the class,<sup>21</sup> clan, country or vested interests, behaving as the very embodiments of goodness and nobility in relation to one and as devils personified in respect of the other. Indeed, you will not find in this concept of God

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21. *Editor's Note:* Lenin, while addressing an All-Russian Congress of Youth, declared: "For us morality is subordinated completely to the interests of the class struggle of proletariat." See: Hazlitt, *op. cit.* p. 341.

any basis for that double-faced morality under which no strength of character can be built up. Side by side with these merits of negative nature this concept of God has the positive merit of setting up the most sublime and the most comprehensive ideal of moral excellence and of providing the noblest and most effective incentives for the moral effort of man.

In addition to the above merits, the idea that the test set by God is not confined to any one aspect of life or to any particular branch of human activity but extends to *all aspects of life* and *all spheres of action* enlarges the field of morality and makes it co-extensive with life. Man's reason, his powers of perception, his physical faculties, his ambitions and desires, indeed, the entire human personality, is covered by this test. Beyond that, it extends to man's relations with the external world,—to his attitude towards everything that is to be found in it and to his behaviour towards every person with whom he comes into contact. And above all, his supreme test lies in the *spirit* in which he performs his duty, namely, whether he does everything with a feeling of responsibility to God—with the consciousness that he is a dutiful servant of his Creator or accepts someone else as his master, or acts independently, following his own desires. This all-embracing conception of morality is free from the distortions which are the natural result of a narrow and limited concept of religion. It carries a man forward in every sphere of life, indicates to him his moral responsibilities in every field and gives him those principles of morality the observance of which can lead to success in that test which God has prescribed for life's march towards destiny.

### (g) Horizon Enlarged

The idea that the ultimate results of this test and the final outcome of our moral efforts shall not be known in this life but in life-after-death and that true success or failure shall be that which pertains to the next world and not merely to this one, radically alters our outlook about our life in this world and its affairs. With this belief man does not regard the results that manifest themselves in this world as the true and *final* criterion of good and evil, right and wrong, truth and falsehood, success and failure, and, consequently, the question of obeying or disobeying the moral law does not depend on his estimation of them. A man who adheres to this concept will always be steadfast in observing the laws of morality, whether its consequences bring him happiness or misery, and whether they lead to worldly gain or loss. This does not mean that the material consequences of his actions shall be wholly irrelevant to him. No. Rather, their role shall be subservient to the success in the life-hereafter, which alone shall form the decisive factor. His decision to choose a certain way in preference to another will not rest on the calculation whether it is productive of pleasure, happiness or gain in the present preliminary stage of life but on the expectation of what it will lead to in life's final stage. Hence, his moral principles shall remain unchanged under all circumstances and his character shall remain immune from hasty and unfounded shifts and alterations.

Of course, his moral outlook shall be dynamic and progressive; that is to say, his moral conceptions shall

expand in their scope with the development of civilization and the advancement of society. His moral principles, however, shall remain unaffected by changes in external conditions and circumstances of life. In other words, though progressive, he will not be a moral weathercock, having no set of uniform ethical norms. His principles would not be like shifting sands, nor would he be like a vessel without a rudder. Instead, he will have firm grounds to stand upon, and firm standards to act as a measure of progress he attains.

Thus, in the moral domain of human life, the Islamic concept of the life-hereafter produces two important effects which are not obtainable from any other source:

First, it lends to morality a basis which is strong and unshakable;

Secondly, it imparts stability and firmness to human character and firm foundations for human society.

Truth can have, say, ten different results in this world, and an opportunist with his eyes on these results can adopt ten different courses, varying his strategy to suit the expected results; while in the life-hereafter truth must, of necessity, have only one consequence and a believer, with his attention centred on it, will invariably adopt only one course without the least anxiety for immediate gain or loss. If we go only by the material consequences and results which reveal themselves in this world, good and evil cease to have any definite meaning and permanent significance. For, consequences make the same thing appear sometimes good and sometimes evil, and in the pursuit of such a will-o'-the-wisp the character of the

pursuant also goes on changing its pattern. But if the outlook is focussed on the consequences of the life-here-after, good and evil stand clearly defined and it becomes impossible for the believer in that life to change his character if good temporarily happens to produce unpleasant results or evil appears to produce desirable consequences.

#### **(h) The Mission of Man**

Besides the above, the Islamic concept that man is God's vicegerent on earth and that all the powers that he possesses are held by him in that capacity, sets for him the end of life as well as the means for realization of that end. It follows logically from this tenet that all conduct based on the assumption that man is an independent being, free to regulate his own affairs in accordance with his uncontrolled desires and unbridled interests, is incorrect and that the right conduct consists in subjecting oneself to God's Will and in accepting the limit laid down by Him. On the one hand, this conception makes it incumbent upon man to abstain rigorously from that behaviour which smacks even remotely of rebellion against God or of allegiance to any one besides Him or of haughtiness, since such behaviour amounts to a direct negation of his status as the vicegerent of God. On the other hand, this conception ensures that man's utilisation of the material possessions bestowed by God and of his own God-given powers, as well as his leadership and authority over other human beings, shall be wholly in accordance with that conduct which God, the real Master and Sovereign of the world, has been pleased to prescribe in relation to His kingdom



and His subjects. This is the logical demand of his status as vicegerent, for no viceroy can truly be considered a viceroy unless he adheres strictly to the commands and the policy of the Sovereign. It also follows from this principle that man has been charged to utilise, in accordance with the Divine Will and Pleasure, all the powers and faculties which have been given to him and all the resources that have been placed at his disposal. In other words, man falsifies his position as the vicegerent of God not merely by acting contrary to God's Will in the use of his powers and the material resources of the world, but also if he fails to utilise those powers and resources or wastes them or ignores the duties assigned to him by the Sovereign in relation to them. Furthermore, it also follows from this concept that the collective life of mankind should be organized in such a manner that all human beings, *i.e.*, all the vicegerents of God, should co-operate with one another in the execution and fulfilment of the responsibilities laid upon them, and that in the *social organization* of mankind there should be no such flaw which might render it possible for one individual or group to usurp the vicegerency of the other or to hinder its proper functioning except in the case of those individuals or groups who set themselves up against God and thus falsify their position as vicegerents.<sup>22</sup> It goes without saying that this attitude is bound to produce sense of

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22. The socio-political implications of this concept have been developed by the author in his other articles, viz., "Political Theory of Islam" and "First Principles of Islamic State," see: Maududi, *Islamic Law and Constitution*; Islamic Publications Ltd., Lahore, 1960.—Editor.

responsibility and moral consciousness in the followers of this ideology.

This mission of man naturally follows from the principle of human vicegerency and sets the moral goal for man. The natural demand of man's status as God's vicegerent is that the purpose of his life should be to fulfil the Will of God on earth and that the goal of his moral endeavours should be: *to enforce the Divine Law in that cross-section of world affairs the management of which has been entrusted to him by God ; to create and maintain conditions in which peace, justice and virtue may flourish : to suppress and eradicate evil and disorder in all their forms: and to foster those virtues which are liked by God and which He desires should prevail over this world and its inhabitants.*

This ethical outlook stands in sharp contrast with not only the purposes set forth for human life by Hedonism, Utilitarianism, Empiricism, Materialism, Nationalism, and other secular creeds but also against those goals which men of religion generally prescribe under the influence of mistaken and narrow views of spirituality. Between these two exaggerated extremes, the concept of the vicegerency of man places before mankind the truest and the best purpose bringing into full play human faculties and capacities and utilizing them for creating and developing the healthiest society and civilization. In it there is freedom as well as restraint, life-fulfilment as well as spiritual perfection.

These are the first principles given by Islam for raising a healthy structure of human morality. *Islam is not a national religion. It is not wedded to any particular race or*

*region. Nor is it the sole monopoly of any particular group of people. It is the common legacy of the whole of mankind.* Everyone who is mindful of his own good and interest as also of mankind should reflect whether the basis furnished by Islam for human morality is better than those provided by mystic religions and secular philosophical systems. If he is satisfied that the basis furnished by Islam is more sound than that provided by any other moral system, then no false prejudices should stand in the way of its acceptance by him. He should be the ally of none but truth.

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## MORAL SYSTEM OF ISLAM<sup>1</sup>

Moral sense is inborn in man and through the ages it has served as the common man's standard of moral behaviour, approving certain qualities and disapproving others. While this instinctive faculty may vary from person to person, human conscience<sup>2</sup> has given a more or less uniform verdict in favour of certain moral qualities as being good and declared certain others as bad.

### Universally Accepted Values

On the side of moral virtues, justice, courage, bravery and truthfulness have always elicited praise and history does not record any period worth the name in which falsehood, injustice, dishonesty and breach of trust may have been upheld; fellow-feeling, compassion, fidelity, and magnanimity have always been valued while selfishness, cruelty, miserliness and bigotry have never received the approbation of the human society; men have always appreciated perseverance, determination and courage and have never approved of impatience, fickle-mindedness, cowardice and imbecility. Dignity, restraint, politeness and amiability have throughout the ages been counted among virtues, whereas haughtiness, misbehaviour and

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1. This is a new and revised translation of a talk given by the author from Radio Pakistan, Lahore, on 6th Jan. 1948.—*Editor*.

2. This word is used in its wide sense, meaning the moral consciousness of man. It should not be taken in the limited sense in which it is used by writers undertaking an anthropological study of the so-called evolution of morals.—*Editor*.

rudeness have never found recognition as good moral qualities. Persons having a sense of responsibility and devotion to duty have always won the highest regard of men; never have people who are incompetent, slothful and lacking in sense of duty been looked upon with approval. Similarly in respect of the standard of good and bad in the collective behaviour of society as a whole, the verdict has always been almost unanimous. Only that society has been looked upon as worthy of honour and respect which possesses the virtues of organization, discipline, mutual affection and fellow-feeling and has established a social order based on justice, freedom and equality of men. As opposed to this, disorganization, indiscipline, anarchy, disunity, injustice and social imbalance have always been considered manifestations of decay and disintegration. Robbery, murder, larceny, adultery, fraud and graft have always been condemned. Slandering, scandal-mongering and black-mailing have never been considered wholesome social activities. Contrary to this, service and care of the aged, help of one's kith and kin, regard for neighbours, loyalty to friends, assistance to the weak, the destitute and the orphans, and nursing the sick are qualities which have always been highly valued ever since the dawn of civilization. Virtuous, polite, mild and sincere persons have always been welcomed. Individuals who are upright, honest, sincere, outspoken and dependable, whose deeds conform to their words, who are content with their own rightful possessions, who are prompt in the discharge of their obligations to others, who live in peace and let others live in peace and from whom nothing but good can be

expected, have always formed the core of every healthy human society.

This shows that human moral standards are in fact universal and have been well-known to mankind throughout the ages.<sup>3</sup> Good and evil are not myths to be hunted out. They are well-known realities and are equally understood by all. The sense of good and evil is inherent in the very nature of man. Hence, in the terminology of the Qur'an, virtue is called "*Ma'ruf*" (a well-known thing) and evil is designated as "*Munkar*" (an unknown thing); that is to say virtue is known to be desirable for every one and evil is not known to commend itself in any way. This fact is mentioned by the Qur'an when it says:

"God has revealed to human nature the consciousness and cognition of good and evil."

(Al-Qur'an, 91: 8)

### **Why Differences?**

The question that now arises is: if the basic values of good and evil have been so well-known and there has virtually been a universal agreement about them, then why do varying patterns of moral behaviour exist in the world? Why are there so many and so conflicting moral philosophies? Why do certain moral standards contradict one another? What lies at the root of their differences? What is the unique position of Islam in the context of the

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3. Some anthropologists and sociologists may not fully subscribe to this view but on deeper reflection it is found that despite superficial differences in mores and morals there is an essential element which is rather universal, particularly in the civilized phases of human existence. And it is this period which the author has in view. The nature and causes of differences are discussed in the following paragraphs.—*Editor*.

prevailing ethical systems? On what grounds can we claim that Islam has a perfect moral system? And what exactly is the distinctive contribution of Islam in the realm of ethics? These questions are important and must be squarely faced; but justice cannot be done to them in the brief span of this talk. To cut a long story short, I shall briefly sum up some of those important points which strike us at the very outset when we undertake a critical examination of the contemporary ethical systems and the conflicting pattern of moral behaviour.

(a) The present moral systems fail to integrate various moral virtues and norms by prescribing their specific limits and utility and assigning to them their proper place. That is why they fail to provide a balanced and coherent plan of social conduct.

(b) The real cause of their differences seem to lie in the moral system offering different standards for good and bad actions and enunciating different means of distinguishing good from evil. Differences also exist in respect of the sanction behind the moral law and in regard to the motives which impel a person to follow it.

(c) On deeper reflection we find that the grounds for these differences emerge from the conflicting views and concepts about the universe, the place of man in the universe, and the purpose of man's life. Various theories of ethics, philosophy and religion are but a record of the vast divergence of views of mankind on these vital questions: Is there a God of the Universe and if there is, is He One or are there many gods? What are Divine attributes? What is the nature of relationship between God and the human beings? Has He made any

arrangements for guiding humanity through the rough and tumble of life or not? Is man answerable to Him or not? If he is, then what are the matters for which he is answerable? What is the ultimate aim of man's creation which he should keep in view throughout his life? Answers to these questions will determine the way of life, the ethical philosophy and the pattern of moral behaviour of the individual and the society.

It is difficult for me to take, in this brief talk, a stock of the various ethical systems prevalent in the world and indicate what solutions each one of them has proposed to these questions and what has been the impact of these answers on the moral evolution of the society believing in these concepts. Here I can confine myself to the Islam only and explain what answer it offers to these questions and what kind of moral system takes shape on the basis of this answer.

### **Islamic Concept of Life and Morality**

The viewpoint of Islam, however, is that this universe is the creation of God Who is One. He created it and He alone is its unrivalled Master, Sovereign and Sustainer. The whole universe is functioning at His Divine Command. He is All-Wise, All-Powerful and Omniscient. He is the Knower of the manifest and the hidden. He is *Subbuh* and *Quddus* (that is, free from all defects, weaknesses and faults and is pure in every respect). His Godhood is free from partiality and injustice. Man is His creature, subject and servant and is born to serve and obey Him.



The correct course of life for man is to live in complete obedience to Him. It is not for man to determine the mode of worship and obedience; it is for God to decide this. God, being his Master, has raised from time to time Prophets for the guidance of humanity and has revealed His Books through them. It is the duty of man to take the code of his life from these sources of Divine Guidance. Man is answerable to God for all his actions in life. The time for rendering an account will be in the life-hereafter and not in this world. The short span of worldly life is really an opportunity to prepare for that great test. In this life all efforts of man should be centred on the object of soliciting the Pleasure and Blessings of God in the Hereafter. During this test every person is responsible for all his beliefs and actions. He, with all his faculties and potentialities, is on trial. There will be an impartial assessment of his conduct in life by a Being Who keeps a complete and accurate record not merely of his movements and actions and their influence on all that is in the world—from the tiniest speck of dust to the loftiest mountains—but also a record of his innermost ideas and feelings and intentions.

### **Goal of Moral Striving**

This is Islam's fundamental attitude towards life. This concept of the universe and of man's place therein determines the real and ultimate good which should be the object of all the endeavours of mankind and which may be termed briefly as "seeking the Pleasure of God". This is the standard by which a particular mode of conduct is judged and classified as good or bad. This

standard of judgement provides the nucleus around which the whole moral conduct should revolve. Man is not left like a ship without moorings, to be tossed about by the blows of wind and tides. This dispensation places a central object before mankind and lays down values and norms for all moral actions. It provides us with a stable and flawless set of values which remains unaltered under all circumstances. Moreover, with making the "pleasure of God" as the object of man's life, the highest and noblest objective is set before humanity and thus unlimited possibilities are opened for man's moral evolution, untainted at any stage by any shadow of narrow selfishness or bigoted race or nation-worship.

While providing a moral standard, Islam also furnishes us with means of determining good and evil conduct. It does not base our knowledge of vice and virtue on mere intellect, desire, intuition, or experience derived through the sense organs, which constantly undergo shifts and modifications and alterations and do not provide definite, categorical and unchanging standards of morality. It provides us with a definite source, the Divine Revelation, as embodied in the Book of God and the Sunnah (way of life) of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him). This source prescribes a standard of moral conduct that is permanent and universal and holds good in every age and under all circumstances. The moral code of Islam covers a wide field, including the details of domestic life as well as broad aspects of national and international behaviour. It guides us at every stage in life. These regulations imply the widest application of moral principles in the affairs of our life and make us free

from exclusive dependence on any other source of knowledge, except as an aid to this primary source.

### **Sanction Behind Morality**

This concept of the universe and of man's place therein also furnishes the sanction that must lie at the back of every moral law, viz., the love and fear of God, the consciousness of accountability on the Day of Judgement, and the promise of eternal bliss and reward in the life-hereafter. Although Islam wants to cultivate a powerful and strong mass opinion which may induce individuals and groups to abide by the principles of morality laid down by it and also aims at the evolution of a political system which would enforce the moral law, as far as possible, through its legislative and executive power, the moral law of Islam does not really *depend* on these external pressures alone. It relies upon the inherent urge for good in every man which is derived from belief in God and the Day of Judgement. Before laying down any moral injunctions Islam seeks to firmly implant in man's heart the conviction that his dealings are with God, Who sees him at all times and in all places; that he may hide himself from the whole world but not from Him; that he may deceive everyone under the sun but cannot deceive God; that he can flee from the grip of any one else but not from God's ; that while the world can see man's outward life only, God probes into his innermost intentions and desires, that while he may, in his short sojourn on this earth, do whatever he likes but in any event he has to die one day and present himself before the Divine court of justice where no ingenious

pleading, recommendation, misrepresentation, deception or fraud will be of any avail and where his future will be decided with complete impartiality and justice. There may or may not be any police, law court or jail in this world to enforce the observance of these moral injunctions and regulations, but this belief, firmly rooted in the heart, is the real force at the back of the moral law of Islam which helps in getting it enforced. If popular opinion and the coercive powers of the state exist to give it support so much the better; otherwise, this faith alone can keep a Muslim individual and a Muslim community on the straight path of virtue provided the spark of genuine faith dwells in his heart.

### **Motives and Incentives**

This concept of Islam about man and his place in the universe also provides those motivating forces which can inspire a person to act in conformity with the moral law. The fact that a man voluntarily and willingly accepts God as his Creator and the obedience of God as the mode of his life and strives to seek His Pleasure in all his actions provides sufficient incentive to enable him to obey the commandments which he believes to be from God. Along with this, the belief in the Day of Judgement and the belief that whosoever obeys Divine commands is sure to have a good life in the hereafter, the eternal life, whatever difficulties and handicaps he may have to face in this transitory phase of his existence, provides a strong incentive for virtuous life. On the other hand, the belief that whoever violates the commandments of God in this world, shall have to bear

eternal punishment, however superficially nice a life he may have led in this temporary abode, is an effective deterrent against violation of moral law. If this hope and fear are deeply rooted in one's heart they will provide a strong motive force to inspire one to virtuous deeds even on occasions when worldly consequences may appear to be very damaging and harmful, and it will keep one away from evil even on occasions when it looks extremely attractive and profitable.

This clearly indicates that Islam possesses a distinctive criterion of good and evil, its own source of moral law, and its own sanctions and motive force, and through them it enforces the well-known and generally recognized moral virtues in all spheres of life after knitting them into a balanced and comprehensive scheme. Thus, it can be justifiably claimed that Islam possesses a perfect moral system of its own. This system has many distinguishing features and I shall refer to the three most significant of them, which, in my opinion, can be termed its special contribution to ethics.

### **Distinctive Features of Islamic Moral Order**

(1) By setting Divine Pleasure as the objective of man's life, it has furnished the highest possible standard of morality. This is bound to provide innumerable avenues for the moral evolution of humanity. By making Divine Revelation the primary source of knowledge it gives permanence and stability to the moral standards which afford a reasonable scope for genuine adjustments, adaptations and innovations though not for perversions, wild variations, atomistic relativism or moral fluidity. It pro-

vides a sanction for morality in the love and fear of God which will impel man to obey the moral law even without any external pressure. Through belief in God and the Day of Judgement, it furnishes a motive force which enables a person to adopt moral conduct with earnestness and sincerity, with all the devotion of his heart and soul.

(2) It does not, through a false sense of originality and innovation, provide any novel moral virtues nor does it seek to minimise the importance of the well-known moral norms nor does it give exaggerated importance to some and neglect others without cause. It takes up all the commonly known moral virtues and with a sense of balance and proportion it assigns a suitable place and function to each one of them in the total scheme of life. It widens the scope of their application to cover every aspect of man's individual and collective life—his domestic associations, his civic conduct, legal, educational and social realms. It covers his life from home to society, from the dining-table to the battlefield and peace conferences, literally from the cradle to the grave. In short, no sphere of life is exempt from the universal and comprehensive application of the moral principles of Islam. It makes morality reign supreme and ensures that the affairs of life, instead of being dominated by selfish desires and petty interests, should be regulated by the norms of morality.

(3) It stipulates for man a system of life which is based on all good and is free from all evil. It invokes the people not only to practise virtue but also to establish virtue and eradicate vice, to bid good and to forbid wrong. It wants that the verdict of conscience should prevail and virtue should not be subdued to play second fiddle to evil.

Those who respond to this call are gathered together into a community (Ummah) and given the name "Muslims". And the only object underlying the formation of this community (Ummah) is that it should make an organized effort to establish and enforce goodness and suppress and eradicate evil.<sup>4</sup> It will be a day of mourning for this community and a bad day for the entire world if the efforts of this very community were at any time directed towards establishing evil and suppressing good.

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4. The Qur'an lays down this objective in the following verses :

"Verily, you are the best people raised unto mankind, you bid virtue, forbid vice and are believers in Allah."

(Al-Qur'an, III: 110)

"If we establish them (the Muslims) in the land (i.e., give them power), they will establish regular prayers and give regular charity, enjoin right and forbid wrong—with God rests in the end of all affairs."

(Al-Qur'an, XXII : 41)—*Editor.*