

Conferences/Seminars

Ethics In Islam Haryana, India

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The seminar on "Ethics in Islam" was held in Faridabad, Haryana, on July 30-31 1988, sponsored by the Institute of Objective Studies, New Delhi and the Department of Philosophy at Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India. Mr. Muqimuddin, the seminar organizer, opened the proceedings by remarking at the outset that the seminar's theme was of prime importance in the context of the present world. Justifying any aspect of Islamic Ethics is both tricky and difficult. According to him, ethics has developed in the West in the form of philosophical theories but classical philosophers did not give much attention to the theoretical aspects of Islamic Ethics and virtually no effort has been made toward the documentation of ethics in Islam.

The keynote address, delivered by Dr. Mohammed Abdul Haq Ansari entitled "Islamic Ethics: Concept and Prospect," (presently a professor at Imam Muhammad Islamic University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia), reviewed different streams of writing in the spheres of Islamic philosophy, Sufism, theology, jurisprudence, politics, and economy, and highlighted the contribution each has made to the subject. He asserted that in view of the material available in these writings, Islamic scholars of our time can develop a veritable chronicle of Islamic Ethics in a period shorter than the Islamic economists have taken to develop Islamic Economics. According to Prof. Ansari, there is a well-formulated system of morality in the Qur'an, but there is no such theorization in the field of ethics. He pointed out that there are several ethical problems which need our attention while proceeding towards theorization of Islamic Ethics, e.g., determinism, freedom of will, distinction between good and evil, etc.

The keynote address was followed by a lively discussion. Prof. Fazlur Rahman Ginnori was of the opinion that Islam has provided a complete code of morality obviating the need for theorizing about Islamic Ethics. Other participants were of the opinion that in order to convince the world of the feasibility of Islamic Ethics, especially because of its identification with most aspects of science, there is a need for an ethical theory of Islam.

Dr. Sanaullah Mir of Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India, read a paper on "Philosophical Justification of the Islamic Ethical Standard: the Ontological and Deontological Standards." While discussing the nature of

Islamic Ethics, Dr. Sanaullah observed that Islamic Ethics is both deontological and teleological. "While for teleologists the basic ethical concepts are "goodness" and "value," for deontologists the primary concepts are "right" and "ought." The teleologists hold that moral judgements are to be evaluated by reference to goodness of purpose and consequences achieved by actions." On the other hand, non-teleological or deontological theories advocate the priority of such concepts as "duty," "right conduct," or "moral obligation" to what is good or humanly desirable. The concept of "duty" does not have a logical relationship with the concept of "good." Therefore, moral duties cannot and need not be justified on the basis of their alleged good or bad consequences towards humanity, either on an individual or society. According to Dr. Sanaullah Mir, both these models can be employed within Islamic Ethics. The teleological concept, for example, sees the ultimate moral life as nearness to God or the fulfilled intention of pleasing God which becomes the good and the end of moral life, thus specifying as good those means that attain that end. Deontological Islamic Ethics justifies moral judgement in terms of the revealed words of God as the Law which Muslims ought to follow. God's Law determines what is right and what is wrong. The Qur'an adopts both the teleological and deontological models within its propositional gestalt while providing its own version of ethical teleology and deontology.

This paper also evoked a lively discussion. It was said that Shah Waliullah Dehlavi expounded the Islamic concept that human personality is ingrained in morality. Dr. Sanaullah objected, saying that he does not accept this proposition, as he subjectively feels that man is more inclined toward vice than virtue, immorality than morality. He produced in favor of his argument some of the new assumptions of modern psychology; however, he asserted that despite this fact, God wants us to be moral.

Prof. Shaida of the Indian Institute of Technology in Rampur responded to these views with his argument that it is difficult to be moral for God's ideal of man is the best of all models. He also stressed that human beings endowed with enormous powers may lean toward immorality but mankind can maintain its moral standard by means of *īmān bi Allāh* (faith in God) and *al 'amal al ṣāliḥ* (virtuous deeds). There are some principles which are to be accepted only on the demand of Shari'ah, although, reason also has its role to play in its justification. Prof. Abdul Haq said that God is the *absolute good*. It has been said by the Prophet (ṢAAS), "Cultivate divine attributes in you." It is also true that there are certain issues which are only determined by the Shari'ah, where reason has no supremacy. For example, in the case of prohibition of the consuming of wine, although we can give some rational arguments in its favor, it is not possible to present absolute arguments to justify this prohibition.

Prof. Shaida pointed out that wisdom (*hikmah*) and education (*ta'lim*)

can be attributed to God, but nature (*fiṭrah*) requires some thought. If we accept the dictum that we have to cultivate divine qualities in ourselves, the question arises as to the limit of this cultivation. While some of the qualities advised by Allah (SWT) should be followed and attempts should be made to inculcate them in ourselves, being humble creatures, we cannot hope to cultivate in ourselves all the qualities of the Creator. Mr. Muqīmuddīn said that to imitate Allah's attributes seems ambiguous as it defies any theory.

Prof. Shaida opined that when such sayings are presented by Islam they probably mean that man should follow moral duties as ordained by God, not that he should assume the form of a divine being, because, in the latter case, there is every apprehension of going astray from *tawhīd*. Dr. Jalalul Haq said that the divine attributes or qualities in man are only at the microscopic level, not at the macroscopic level. Dr. Abdul Haq stated that we are not capable of cultivating some of the divine qualities in ourselves, for example, the powers of granting death or life to any object in the world. At the same time, we cannot be endowed with divine personalities.

Prof. Fazlur Rahman Ginnori presented a paper on "*Taqwa* as a Moral Principle." He asserted that *taqwa* is a positive value, not a negative one. In the Qur'an, the term *taqwa* appears in more than 258 places. The gist of all Islamic teachings is *taqwa*. The basic theme of all the Prophets was *taqwa*. *Taqwa* indicates that man has to proportionately avoid bad and vicious deeds and has to be inclined toward good and virtuous deeds. The center of *taqwa* is man's heart and mind. But according to Prof. Fazlur Rahman, *taqwa* has not been taken as a moral value by Muslim moral thinkers. It seems that these people have been more inclined toward *zuhd* which has led them to neglect the ethical significance of *taqwa*. In the discussion, Prof. Abdul Haq said that Islam has provided the processes of completion and culmination of morality of which *taqwa* is one of the processes, *ahsān* another. According to him, although *taqwa* has been presented in the Qur'an as an ingredient of human nature, to call it the principle of Islamic morality is debatable and at most one can call it the compendium of all goodness. Dr. Abdul Haq said that *taqwa* is not only a moral value, but a spiritual and ascetic value as well.

Prof. Shaida presented a paper entitled "Islamic Ethics: Some Theoretical Questions." He observed that Islamic Ethics is both deontological and teleological. Islamic ethical values do not limit themselves to regional or racial bias. Since religion or Shari'ah has enjoined on us certain ethical codes, we can derive a theoretical structure from it. To say that we have certain problems to be discussed in modern idiom is not an apology. The idiomatic approach, according to Prof. Shaida, may be different, but we should see whether there is any philosophical structure in Islamic Ethics. If there are some philosophical discussions in Islam, how can we discuss them in modern,

universal, philosophical language?

Some participants of the seminar were of the view that Islam does not need any help from the Western medium as it is not an adequate method of acquiring the exact comprehension of things which are religious, being based on fallible reason or experiment. Prof. Abdul Haq said that man can adopt some moral values by reasoning despite the fact that we accept these belief systems as they are. Maulana Abul Irfan Nadvi of Nadvatul Ulama, Lucknow, said that moral dictates should be justified on the basis of reason. (The Shari'ah also describes the relevances of different moral dictums). According to him, in Muslim philosophy the Mu'tazilites believed that reason should be the criterion of good and bad. He went on to say that the basic moral values ordained by Shari'ah are also supported by reason. For example, truth, honesty, helping the poor and other qualities can be proved to be worthy in the goodness or badness of morality. Ibn Taymīyah has provided one hundred and four points to prove this point. Shari'ah is not necessary to determine them on a rational basis. It is quite feasible to say that *ma'rifah* (realization) is a supreme good. Basic virtues are universal, as reason testifies.

Prof. Abdul Haq said: What is the criterion of moral principles? *Ḥasanāt* or *Ma'rifah* can also be provided as a proof. According to Ibn Taymīyah and Ibn Qayyim there are various aspects of things which throw light on the motive of ethical values. He also said that in Islam the concept of *Ma'rifah* encompasses all aspects of human morality. But we have to determine its real meaning. Although Islamic ethical theory is not in an organized form, we can understand something from the Islamic moral system. Hamid Naseem Rafiabadi of the Indian Institute of Islamic Studies, New Delhi, said that although *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) was not determined by the Qur'an, it was developed by the 'ulama from the Qur'an and the prophetic teachings. There are several moral values which can only be understood by revelation. Revelation is as final and authoritative as reason is not. We need to understand Islamic teachings in light of modern Western philosophy. It is not necessary to use Western terminology, but wherever we need it we should use it and formulate this science. Mr. Muqimuddin said that it is immaterial where the idea comes from, the East or the West, we should take advantage of it." There is no difference in the basic laws of the universe so there should be no difference in logical laws either. It is in our time that questions concerning ethical issues have been raised. Islamic Ethics exist in perspective. Islam provides a set of values which are capable of bestowing upon man a life ever evolving and progressing. For example, these values indicate the positive dimensions of the dynamics of Islamic morality: *ḥaya'* (chastity) *'adal* (justice) *ukhūwah* (fraternity) *waḥdah* (unity), etc.

Maulana Sultan Ahmad Islahi read a paper entitled "The Salient Features of Islamic Morality." According to Maulana Islahi, the concept of morality

is ingrained in human nature as man distinguishes between good and bad. The need for morality and ethical values is accepted by all philosophers and religions. But philosophy cannot provide a comprehensive code of conduct. Islam has not only completed the chain of prophethood but has also completed the system of morality and developed it to its completion. Islam not only provides us with moral descriptions but also provides motives for morality. For example, belief in God and life after death are two motives for making a man moral.

In the discussion that followed, Prof. Abdul Haq said that Islam also considers the motivation aspect of an action. For example, the Qur'an describes adultery as a wicked act, and says that if the motivation is bad, the consequences will also be bad. God has ordered us to perform such acts which He Himself likes. "God is beautiful and loves beauty" (Hadith). But in our Islamic society, degeneration owes its roots to the negligence of the prescriptions of a real Islamic nature. For example, in the West, some values do not need any emphasis for their confirmation, but in our society these things need much more emphasis. It means, in other words, that if nature is not suppressed, moral values will spontaneously ensue. Islam has not only laid emphasis on individual responsibilities but also on social responsibilities while other religions have only emphasized individual morality.

Maulana Farooq Khan presented a paper on the theme, "The Ethical Thought of Islam." According to Maulana Farooq, morality is an abstract thing, which requires freedom for its practice. A particular person or nation possessing a set of moral principles indicates the symptoms of his and his nation's progress or failure. The belief system, he said, also affects morality with belief in God forming the locus from which morality emanates and man is endowed with lofty moral dimensions. The apparent beauty of man is the manifestation of his inner beauty and seeking the pleasure of God is the intrinsic goal of man's life. God is the *somum bonum* for man. There is no contradiction in the "Fitrah of God" and human nature. Prof. Abdul Haq Ansari, quoted the Qur'anic verse: *God has shaped man on the divine design*. He said that human beings have the faculty of inner voice, which is responsible for discouraging people from going astray from the *hudud Allah* (limits prescribed by Allah [SWT]). Added to this is the Qur'an as a true guide for man to rescue him from falling into the abyss of immorality. Man has strong impulses to be moral and is not immoral by nature. Modern researchers in psychology are sometimes misleading as they ignore the actual status of man as a moral agent. *Fitrah*, he said, means to restrain human desires. Mr. Ishrat Husain said that the idea of law governs man. "Categorical imperative" (i.e., duty for duty's sake) has been focused upon in the Qur'an, according to Mr. Ishrat Husain. Dr. Jalalul Haq said that philosophy cannot be the supervisor of religion. At the most we can say that there are various models of ethics:

a secular model, religious model and an Islamic model. All these are paradigms of morality, but the Western model is not the superior model. These are rather alternatives to each other. His point was that we should be on our guard not to intermix Islamic Ethics with so-called philosophical ethical models. Independently it is possible to mix all ethical theories without worrying about Western moral standards. Mr. Sanaullah rejoined by saying: Both models of the West, i.e., teleological and deontological have failed to justify moral actions and only actions. Islam can justify moral action, he said. Islam justified its claims by means of its belief system. By genuine faith we develop our morals. Hence, religion becomes a criterion for our moral actions.

Maulana Abul Irfan read a paper on "The Principles and Basis of Islamic Morality." He said that *ikhlaq* (morality) includes both Good and Bad and observes the capacity of man, while enabling man to perform an activity without any hesitation. The categories of *bīr* (virtuous activity) and *īthm* (vicious activity) are dealt with in Islamic Ethics. In Islam, the authority of our belief and practice is derived from revelation as in the case of morality. Reward or punishment is also determined on the basis of revelation. The Maulana categorized Islamic morality under four headings. They are *ṭahārah*, *ikhbāt*, *samāḥah*, and *ʿadālah* (this categorization had been provided initially by a great Islamic scholar-Shah Waliullah Dehlavi). The Islamic ethical system, according to the Maulana, is neither limited nor incomplete since Islam has made morality an integral part of a believer's life. According to him there are two bases of morality: 1. revelation and prophethood, and 2. reason. But there is a great difference between the morality of prophets and the morality of philosophers. Prophets live for moral values and make sacrifices for the establishment of a moral order in society. But philosophers describe moral dictums for the sake of description without working for their observance and they themselves need not necessarily abide by the dictums they have created.

This paper was followed by a good discussion. Prof. Ginnori said: "Shah Waliullah Dehlavi has produced a new theory of morality which is different from Greek ethics, where attention is also paid to the physical needs of the human body and to helping a man transcend the negative effects of these needs."

Maulana Ansar Umari of Idarah-e-Tehzeeqat-e-Islami, Aligarh, said that Maulana Abul Irfan Nadvi has already mentioned the categorization made by Shah Waliullah Dehlavi, which encompasses the whole of human life and not only the moral aspect of it. Islam has given us moral values, not an organized ethical system. Morality is a part of our whole human life. It does not imply that we can understand all aspects of morality on the basis of reason. In Islam, *Shari'ah* becomes the criterion, not reason.

According to Prof. Abdul Haq, these few categories are only heads, not principles. Concerning reward or punishment in the life hereafter, we have

to view actions from logical or natural grounds in order to evaluate their good or bad aspects. As we know, although truthfulness (*ṣidq*) is valuable on a rational basis, it also involves the dictates of *Shari'ah*. Morality has a very broad range which cannot be confined to theory alone.

Prof. Sanghasena Singh, University of Delhi, Delhi, presented his views on the theme "Ethics in Buddhism and Jainism." He said that there are some ethical principles provided by Buddhism and Jainism for leading a moral life. But these principles are incomplete and lack the capacity of being implemented for higher moral values. The ethical dictions are very hard and it is sometimes difficult to abide by them.

The concluding session of the seminar on "Islamic Ethics" was chaired by Prof. Abdul Haq Ansari. Mr. Muqimuddin pointed out that the purpose of the Seminar was to emphasize the role and importance of Islamic Ethics so that it can be developed as an integral part of the Islamic system of thought. The Institute of Objective Studies (IOS) will continue to work in this direction by organizing a series of such seminars in other Islamic fields.

Mr. Manzoor Ahmed presented a brief report of the proceedings and outlined the issues raised by various presentations. He pointed out that more or less all participants accepted that there is a need to develop the discipline of Islamic Ethics. Although some participants expressed doubt about an Islamic theory of ethics, the majority endorsed the view that it is greatly needed to present a balanced and integrated philosophy of life.

The Seminar called upon the IOS to do what it can to develop Islamic Ethics. In this direction a proposal to compile a directory of competent scholars was proposed. It was also emphasized that a comprehensive bibliography on the discipline is urgently needed. The particulars were entrusted to the IOS to work on these two vital areas.

Some essential questions were posed by Professor Ansari at the end of the seminar, such as: What is the relation between revelation, reason and experience? What is the role of religious experience? What place is occupied by ethics in Islam? It is well-known, he said, that ethics is intimately related to metaphysics, therefore, Islamic Ethics should also be seen in the perspective of Islamic injunctions and teachings. Whatever we are going to do in this direction will have limitations, but no matter how insignificant our attempt may appear it will be at least one step in this pious direction. It was felt that many issues failed to get proper attention and there are numerous areas where detailed debate and argument is still required. In this context the role of God in ethics and the relation between divine attributes and ethics came under discussion. It was noted that early writers had done much work on the problem of ethics but this needs attention in present times, and therefore an analysis of this problem will be extremely fruitful.

A fundamental question in ethics is: Why should we be moral? Many

Islamic thinkers have contributed substantially to this debate. This demands separate research. For example, one research paper can be written on the problem of moral obligation as undertaken by Ghazālī. We should initially evaluate and analyze his views in light of present day philosophy.

Apart from these, there are certain other issues which demand attention from scholars, e.g., equality, whose meaning and applicability should be traced. To what extent has equality been operative in Islamic society? Is there any limitation attached to the concept of equality?

How do we establish the limits and hierarchy of values? This needs further study. Similarly the meaning and scope of justice is not very clear. As compared to truth, the problem of justice is slightly obscure. What are the principles to determine priority? Very few classical scholars focussed on these areas. The levels of evil are well established but what are the principles that determine these levels? Similarly, when there is any conflict of values, how can we resolve such a conflict? These issues need further reflection. But such issues necessitate a thorough background of the Qur'an and Sunnah, therefore, 'ulama can help in this direction. If we focus our attention on such issues then Islamic ethics can be revived.

With these remarks and subsequent *du'ā'* the seminar came to an end.

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