

# AL-ITQĀN

JOURNAL OF ISLAMIC SCIENCES AND COMPARATIVE STUDIES

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**Volume: 6**

**Special Issue No. 4**

**December 2022**

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eISSN:26008432

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Published by:  
IIUM Press, International Islamic University Malaysia  
P.O. Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
Phone (+603) 6196-5014, Fax: (+603) 6196-6298  
Website: <http://iiumpress.iium.edu.my/bookshop>

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## Feasibility of the Goal of Sociology under Its Current Methodology

Hayatullah Laluddin\*  
Mohd. Abbas Abdul Razak\*\*

### Abstract

Sociology has attained a prominent status in the modern world, due to the role it played in the analysis of contemporary social issues and events. This has attracted an increasing interest in sociology not only in the Western societies, but also in the Muslim world due to their desire for modernization. Therefore, this article attempts to analyse whether sociology can attain its goal of reorganizing society, based on scientific methods. It also analyses ethics and morality as alternative means for the purpose, and as a source of derivation of universal rule of human social behaviour hence, reorganization of society. This research is theoretical and philosophical and uses a qualitative method as it relies on the analysis of the data gathered from textual sources. Using an analytical approach, the writers arrive at the conclusion that Sociology under its current scientific methodology, cannot achieve its goal of reorganizing society. This can be attributed to inadequacy of scientific method in the study of human society, due to the unpredictability of human behaviour and variety of its factors. The writers also suggest the adaptation of a dynamic multidimensional method that consider variety of factors such as spiritual, physical, mental, social, and moral which heavily influence human behaviour.

**Keywords:** Sociology, reorganization, reflective morality, scientific method.

### Introduction

From a survey of sociological themes, it can be revealed that the reorganization of society is the main goal of sociology. Therefore, its attempts are focused on the reorganization of society on a scientific basis. To achieve this goal, sociology uses scientific methods to identify universal rules of human conduct that are conducive to the harmonious life of humanity in general. Socrates first highlighted the significance of such universal rules, centuries before the Christian era. Thus, the notion of universal rules of human conduct seems to have provided the main stimulus

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for the rise of Greek thought. Consequently, the rationalism of the Greek philosophy has been at work right from the day of Plato down to eighteenth century to achieve this aim.

However, in nineteenth century, the utility of rationalism in discovery of universal rules of human conduct was seriously questioned. August Comte, a French philosopher of this era, proposed that a courageous move be made in the direction of scientific study of society to express current social theories in a systematic and comprehensive manner. This is clear from his argument that sociology was to be made the “queen science” that would stand at the top of a hierarchy of all sciences.<sup>1</sup> But his plan for a scientific study of society did not yield any significant results due to different approaches that sociologists adapted in treating their subject. It was also due to the infinite number of social conditions that have a strong bearing on human action, interaction and thinking. Every group of humans has a complex system of social relationships. As Hoselitz has rightly observed that strong attraction may develop between some members, whereas others do not particularly care for one another. Some members may be generally respected, and others looked down upon or ignored. In one group, cooperative spirit may prevail while in another competitiveness may prevail.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the lack of uniformity in sociologists’ approach, the unlimited variety of social conditions and the complex nature of a social relationship network, made the scientific study of society a difficult task.

In addition, physical forces, beliefs and tradition are said to have a paramount influence on individuals and group conduct and behaviour alike. They are also important factors in distinguishing one group from another. Social changes from within the society, as a result of the replacement of the old utilities by new ones, transform it into different one. It is for this reason that sociologists have defined society in many ways as there is no commonly agreed upon definition of society. Spencer, for example, defines society as a group of persons held together by cooperative bonds. On the other hand, Sumner and Keller define it as a group of human beings living in a cooperative effort to win sustenance and to perpetuate the species. To Lenin, the pioneer of Russian communism, society is any group of people who have lived and worked together long enough to get themselves organized or to think themselves as a social unit with well-defined limits.

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<sup>1</sup> The Emergence of Sociological Theories, [https://us.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/44173\\_3.pdf](https://us.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/44173_3.pdf), retrieved on 29/11/2022.

<sup>2</sup> B. F. Hoselitz, *A Reader's Guide to Social Sciences* (New York, 1967), p.158.

While, on the other hand, Kant viewed society as an ordered community of independent wills.<sup>1</sup>

Owing to the various definitions of society, and the complexity of the network of international human relations, society cannot be defined in a definite manner to be commonly agreed upon. This presents a serious impediment to the efforts of reorganizing society on a scientific basis. Even the definition of Sociology itself is not elaborated in a concrete way and there is no appropriate definition acceptable to all. In such a situation it would not be possible to study society scientifically while it is vaguely defined because science requires exactness in the object of its study. To answer this question, it is relevant here to dwell upon science and society.

### **Science and Society**

Sociologists such as Comte and Spencer have perceived society as an object of sociological analysis and proposed a scientific study of it. This was aimed to gain objective empirical social knowledge of society. So, the question arises as to what is meant by science and whether it can or cannot be a source of genuine knowledge. Science is defined as the branch of study that is concerned either with a connected body or demonstrated truths or with observed facts systematically classified and brought under general laws; and which include trustworthy methods for the discovery of new truth within its own domain.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the construction of a scientific theory involves the abstraction of some characteristics (variables) from a complex reality and the attempt to establish laws about the possibility of the existence of regular relationship between these variables. The variables are expressed in the form of concepts, which are verbal symbol for characteristics. The characteristics are translated into a criterion that is perceivable by senses. Thus, the scientific investigations of a system that represent human relationships require formulation of concepts that symbolises the variables, which are to be examined. It is by means of these concepts that a model or paradigm which provide a systematic description of all variables is formed and can be used in investigation of a problem. This will facilitate hypothesis of some possible relations between the variables.<sup>3</sup> In brief, in building a scientific theory, one must take three things into consideration:

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<sup>1</sup> Gould, Julius, and William L. K. Kolb, *A Dictionary of the Social Sciences* (New York: Free Press, 1965), p. 674.

<sup>2</sup> Science, *The Oxford English Dictionary*. n. d.

<sup>3</sup> Cotgrove, Stephen *The Science of Society: An Introduction to Sociolog* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1967), p. 31.

- 1) Abstraction of some characteristics from a complex reality.
- 2) Formulation of concepts, which symbolises the variables which must be examined.
- 3) Drawing model or paradigm, which embodies a systematic description of all variables, involved.

Model or paradigm provides tentative descriptions of a system and suggest possible relations between variables for empirical research. They are considered as a half- way house in construction of theory. In other words, paradigm provides a model from which springs a coherent tradition of scientific research and a general way of looking at the world.<sup>1</sup>

In general, sociological theory can be divided into two types; A grand theory which deals with universal aspects of social life and is based on some assumptions about the nature of human society. Middle-range theory focuses on specific problem in the social world. It explains specific observable facts of one component of social life. Numerous middle range theories could be incorporated into some larger theoretical framework thus, leading to a grand theory. Theories are necessary because facts do not speak for themselves. It is by means of theory that the mass of data concerning a particular phenomenon is weaved together in order to form a coherent integrated explanation. Theory, therefore, is considered as the lifeblood of science. Without it, science would be nothing more than a mass of facts without an understanding of how and why they are related. The importance of theory also, as highlighted by Cohen, is due to its role in recording of experience of reality. His exact wordings go “we would have no experience of reality worth recording were it not for theories”<sup>2</sup> Thus, the role of theory in sociology is to organize and explain observable facts and their relationship and to guide the course of research.

In order to know whether society, with diversity of its patterns, can be subjected to a scientific study or not it is therefore required to know the methods that science uses in conducting experience. A scientific method consists of two elements: theory and empirical research.<sup>3</sup> A theory generally is a formal statement of the rules and ideas that are suggested to explain a

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<sup>1</sup> Paradigm, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/paradigms-and-models>, retrieved on 15/11/2022.

<sup>2</sup> Cohen S. Percy, *Modern Social Theory* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1969), p.2.

<sup>3</sup> Bryjak, George J., and Michael P. Soroka, *Sociology: Cultural Diversity in Changing World*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Allyn and Bacon. 1994), p.17.



fact or an event.<sup>1</sup> In other words, a theory is a set of logically coherent, interrelated concepts that attempts to explain some observable phenomena or group of facts. It uses reason, language and logic to suggest possible, or predict probable relationship among various data collected from the concrete word of experience. Empirical research, on the other hand, is the process of collecting data through careful and meticulous observation and their precise and detailed recording, so that other scientists can check the findings. Theory and empirical research are complementary to each other. None can stand on its own without the other. In other words, theory is sterile without experiment and vice versa. Hence, the theory which is not tested against fact is mere speculation and has no epistemological value. Similarly, facts gathered without relating them to theory are meaningless.<sup>2</sup> In such circumstances the feasibility of applying scientific method to the study of the society seems distant, for society is not defined precisely. Furthermore, human free will and freedom, in choosing from among different courses of action, is another stumbling block in subjecting human behaviours to scientific explanation.

The reason why human behaviour cannot be subjected to scientific explanation lay in the fact that humans have various impulses. These impulses arise from some state of mind or feeling. Hobbes holds human conduct to rest on impulses such as fear, the desire for honour and fame and the most important of all self-interest. Thus, the susceptibility of human behaviour to a variety of impulses makes it too capricious and erratic to have the regularities that science pursues. Furthermore, there is no absolute certainty in the domain of the scientific observation due to the absence of perfect predictability in the natural sciences. Propositions are used with qualifiers such as, 'under circumstances', 'so far as we know now', 'other things being equal', 'at sea level' or 'in our culture'. They are also stated in terms of probabilities; 'given A, the probability is from 90 to 95 percent that B will occur', even the world of atom is more a world of probability than of certainty.<sup>3</sup>

Bearing in mind the unpredictability of human behaviour and its irregularities, and the lack of absolute predictability in science itself, the application of scientific method in the study of human behaviours is not conducive to a proper understanding of social relations. Thus, the knowledge derived from science lack absolute certainty, for it is always

<sup>1</sup> Theory, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/theory>, retrieved on 15/11/2022

<sup>2</sup> Beisanz, J., *Introduction to Sociology*, (London. 1969), p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.13

based on postulate, i.e., something assumed or supposed as the basis of reasoning. In such a situation what could be the alternative sources of genuine knowledge? Here we may refer to reason as it is considered by rationalist as a source of genuine knowledge.

### **Reason**

Reason is considered as the guiding principle of the human mind in the process of thinking. It is defined as “the intellectual power which function is to adopt thought or action to some ends.”<sup>1</sup> Plato considers reason as an instrument through which human being can have access to genuine knowledge. According to him, genuine knowledge is the apprehension of unchanging form or essences and not that of mere opinions, based on sense perception of the changing world of physical bodies. It is in this sense that reason is considered as a special intuitive faculty. Hence, human beings possessed this faculty as a distinguishing mark from animals. It enabled them to comprehend universal truths or principles that underlie the working of the universe considered rational.<sup>2</sup> This provides an epistemological basis for a belief in right reason, which dominated European political thought down to eighteenth century.

In this conjunction, we may mention Plato’s well-known theory of ideas or forms, which he held to be unchanging in its nature and conceived reality as its stereotype. He arrived at this belief through the process of thinking or reason. However, Aristotle, his own student did not agree with him on this point, for he conceived the reality not as consisting of transcendental ideas, but of individual, observable phenomenon with the application of human intellect upon it.

Aristotle, exposing the weakness of Plato theory of knowledge, combined rationalism with empiricism and therefore, is called the father of science. In his politics he introduced the inductive method of studying social phenomenon, while Plato used deductive method in studying the social phenomenon which is far less scientific. Nevertheless, Aristotle difference with Plato over certain points did not prevent him from being rationalist and lover of reason. Plato in his efforts to substantiate that reason can produce dependable knowledge, invented a system of logic known as syllogism. Syllogism consists of a major premise, a minor premise and a conclusion. For example, ‘All men are mortal’ constitutes

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<sup>1</sup> Reason, *Oxford English dictionary*. n.d.

<sup>2</sup> Gould, Julius, and William L. K. Kolb, *A Dictionary of the Social Sciences*( New York; Free Press, 1965), p. 517.

the major premise and it is followed by 'Plato is a man' as minor premise and consequently leading to 'Plato is mortal' as conclusion.<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that despite the time gap of one thousand and thirty-eight years, Imam al-Ghazālī was impressed by the theory of logic and later made it as a prerequisite to undertaking the study of jurisprudence.

Aristotle criticised this kind of logic and considered it as defective, for statements such as 'Men are alive', 'All Greeks are men', do not confirm that the Greek of antiquity exist. These all indicate that reasoning, in whatever form, has its own flows and defects. Due to this effect, it cannot be relied upon as absolute source of knowledge in isolation from other means of knowledge. It is for this reason that Ibn Tymiyyah in his *Kitāb al-'Aql wa al-Naql* (book on reason and revelation) launched a severe attack on philosophy and refuted Aristotle's system of logic in *Al-Radd 'Alā Mantiqīyyīn* (refutation of the logicians). Hume, as al-Ghazālī did centuries before him, refuted Aristotle theory of causation and held experience to be the only dependable source of knowledge. He remarked reason as only groping in the dark hence, seriously undermining its reliability as the ultimate source of knowledge. He also refuted the reliability of knowledge gained through causation, for according to him, it does not stand the test of experience. He observes; there is nothing in any object, considered, which can afford us a reason for drawing a conclusion beyond it. He furthers his argument saying that; even after the observation of the frequent or constant conjunction of objects, we have no reason to draw any inference concerning any object beyond those of which we had experience.<sup>2</sup>

Hume not only disputed the reliability of reason and causal knowledge of science, he went further to the extent of abolishing 'mind' entirely as an entity. He holds it to be a name for the flow of ideas, meanings, imaginations and feelings. By doing so he reduced mind into a conglomeration of ideas, imaginations and feeling hence, denying it any real entity. Perceiving mind in this way, to him even the scientific laws were in no sense the children of nature, but fictional construct in the mind of man.<sup>3</sup> Since Hume stresses on experience as the only reliable source of knowledge it is therefore imperative to discuss it briefly.

<sup>1</sup> Muhammad Muslehuddin, *Sociology and Islam* (Lahore: Islamic Publication Limited, 1977), p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> Hume, David, *Selections*, ed. Charles W. H., New York, 1927), p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> Chapline J. P. and T. S. Krawiec, *System and Theories of Psychology* (New York, 1968), p. 22.

## **Experience**

Hume's rejection of reason and causality as the real source of knowledge, led him to the conception of experience as a reliable source of real knowledge. However, his resort to experience drew strong criticism of rationalists, who rejected the adequacy of experience for the purpose. To them, the only genuine source of knowledge was reason and not experience or senses. This is because of their belief that the 'mind' possesses innate ideas of right and wrong. Based on this perception, they hold reason in high esteem as the sole criterion of judging right and wrong, hence, the only reliable source of the genuine knowledge of things. Their criticism of experience as the genuine source of knowledge, as Hume assumed, was based on the fact that it was the outcome of sense perception, which is deceitful. For example, Descartes criticised sense knowledge, as it is prone to variation. Thus, one cannot rely on the changing testimony of senses.<sup>1</sup>

Consequently, rationalists do not regard experience as a dependable source of knowledge for, it is derived from an external environment that is subject to change and differs from place to place. On the other hand, empiricists such as Hobbes and others rejected the theory of innate ideas of mind, as perceived by Plato, holding sensation to be the source of all knowledge. Hume by denying any real entity of mind abolished it all together. Under such circumstances neither science nor reason nor even experience and sense can be relied on as the source of genuine knowledge. These all indicate that sociology cannot accomplish its goal under any of the systems mentioned above, for the futility of studying society under scientific methods is due to its limitation and deficiency. And reason experience and sense are not exceptions to this. Since some Philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle in their efforts to find the universal rules of human conduct resorted to ethics as the source of real knowledge of human relations in the society, therefore it is of significant relevance to discuss ethics.

## **Ethics**

Etymologically, the term ethics is derived from a Greek word 'ethos' which originally means customs and usage, especially those relating to some groups as distinguished from another. Later it came to mean disposition or

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<sup>1</sup> Martindale, D. *The Nature and Types of Sociological Theories*, ed. Sprott, W.J. H. (London, n.p.1970,) p. 216.

character. While terminologically, it is defined as the science that deals with human conduct from the point of view of being considered right or wrong.<sup>1</sup>

It is imperative to note that Socrates takes a serious view of the construction of a system of ethics. He holds that the construction of an ethical system is possible only through devoting full attention to the special features of moral experience and the vagueness and contradictions of ordinary moral opinions. It means that in sifting through the mass of moral experiences and ordinary moral opinions a philosophical intellect of the first rank that focuses on the problems of conduct is required. The main problem concerning ethics is to find what things are good and how they are related to each other. This is because man by nature is inclined to pursue things which he assumed to be good but in reality they are inferior to other greater goods. Socrates, keeping this in view, entrusted the construction of ethical system to philosophical intellect of high calibre and not to the hodgepodge explanation given by those who claim to teach men how to live. Poets' orators and sophists were unable to defend their views by argument or even to define in a clear term what they were trying to explain. Thus, their opinions were dominated, according to Socrates, by inconsistency and ignorance.<sup>2</sup>

Some view ethics from a relative perspective and adopt an attitude of moral relativism. It means they do not see any particular system of morality to be permanent, for it keeps on changing from time to time. For example, Nietzsche's interpretation of morality or good is that of whatever leads to the enhancement of power. He holds that since different moral devices can achieve this goal, depending on time and place factors, therefore, there is no need for prescribing a universal code of morality. He insisted on the inversion of values to suit time and place. Thus, seeing nihilism and decadence in the prevailing Christian values, he emphasised on their inversion to suit the modern condition of society. Various systems can be adapted to suit to the various ends. Morality, to him, has been only a weapon in the hands of those who have the will to obtain power. Thus, to him strong and powerful is right and weak is wrong.<sup>3</sup>

The ideas of ethics or morality, as Dewey holds, originated from custom and tradition of society. Customs are not considered as merely habitual way of doing something, they are rather the ways of doing things that are approved by society or groups. Therefore, act or conduct that

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<sup>1</sup> Dewey, J. and James, H. T. *Ethics*, (New York, n.p. 1936), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ethics*, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol.10, (London, n.p. 1964), p. 762.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

contradicted the customs of the society or group was disapproved by society, for it caused its displeasure.<sup>1</sup> To avoid risking the displeasure of the society, customs were strictly observed. This strict observance of the customs gradually led to the birth of customary or normative morality.

### **Normative Morality**

Society consists of groups and a group basically refers to any number of individuals who interact on a regular basis to achieve certain goals of mutual benefits to them. Due to this large concept of group, sociologists in their attempts to distinguish between types of groups have divided groups in general to two main categories; primary groups and secondary groups. Primary groups are characterised by face to face interaction, intimacy and a sense of belonging.<sup>2</sup> It plays a crucial role in fulfilling individual's need for affection and belonging. The examples of this group are; family, peer or friendship. It influences to a great extent an individual's basic attitude and beliefs. Individual, constant and close exposure to the values and attitudes of primary group make him/her bound by its norms. Consequently, a member holds the norms of his/her group in a high esteem and tries his/her level best not to violate them, for the fear of alienation from whom he relies on for his emotional security and support.<sup>3</sup> Secondary groups are those groups that are larger in size and impersonal in their relations. It is in secondary groups that society takes its shape. Every group has its own system of controlling the behaviours of its members. This is called group morality which takes shape based on the prevailing customs of the group. Customs are the products of certain approved ways of conduct or 'mores' common to the group.<sup>4</sup>

As far the growth of customs, it can be said that men inherited from their savage ancestor's psychological trait, instinct or at least disposition which help them in solving the problems of food supply, sex, commerce, and other necessities of life. As a result of the persistence of these hereditary traits common to all men, folkways emerged and were adopted without knowing their originator. They gradually resumed the form of norms and customs.

The attempts of the earliest humans in fulfilling their needs were clumsy due to the lack of experience. They initially used trial and error

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> David, B. Truman, *The Government Process* (New York: Knopf, 1951), pp. 32-34.

<sup>3</sup> Abcarian, Gilbert and Monte Palmer, *Society in Conflict* (New York: Confied Press, 1974), p. 71-72.

<sup>4</sup> Sumner, W. G., *Folkways* (Boston, n. p. 1907), p. 30.

methods in searching for the basic needs of life. Need, as Sumner holds, was the impelling force; pleasure and pain were the rude constraint which defined the line on which efforts must proceed. Thus, ways of doing things were selected which were more advantageous than other ways. In the course of this process, humans developed skills and profited from others' experience. This finally led to the agreement on what proved to be most expedient. Hence, all adopting the same ways of interaction called norms or customs.<sup>1</sup>

Sumner has divided norms into two categories; folkways and mores. Folkways according to him are the customs and conventions that regulate the everyday interaction of members of a society. On the other hand, mores are the deeply established moral and emotional norms that are deemed essential to the survival of the individual as well as society.<sup>2</sup> Customs, due to their expediency, had the force of law and were considered good. Norms are also expressed in the form of laws. Laws for most part are the statement of mores and their violator is subject to punishment by society. The difference between the mores that take the form of laws and folkways is that the former is explicitly stated and codified whereas, the later takes the form of customs and tradition. Although, customs and tradition are commonly accepted and are considered as standard way of morality they are not immune from change. For there are certain periods of the history where the old customs are forsaken by a whole society or a group due to their failure in meeting the needs and challenges that face a society or group. This is where the need for a reflective or contemplative morality which can supplement customary morality arises.

### **Contemplative Morality**

Contemplative morality focuses on the nature of human act. The formula with regard to the question of moral act, as devised by Aristotle, contains three things. Firstly, the doer of an act must be conscious of what he is doing. Secondly, He must choose it, and choose it for itself. Thirdly, it must take the form of stable character. In his view, conduct and character are considered to be of the same nature and both should be the result of spontaneity and not that of pretensions. According to him, character can be built through the means of good education which a person can receive in a good family and city.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ethics, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 10 (London, 1964) p. 762.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Emmanuel Kant views morality from a different perspective. He asserts that good and evil must not be determined before moral law. But it can only be determined after the moral law and by means of it. Hence, he subordinates good to moral law and to illustrate this in a clear term he provides us with example of mother's care for her infant child. He says that natural impulse suggests to a mother to take care of her child, but her act of taking care of her child will be morally good when she does so out of respect for moral law. Therefore, in his view the way in which an act is inspired is the main factor in its morality. Consequently, according to him, an act is considered good when it is performed under moral law. In the same manner a person who is engaged in the service of a client is either motivated by his ambition for professional success or by his professional habits of doing the best for the affair of his client entrusted to his charge. His act can only be considered morally good when its motive comes from his reverence for moral law.<sup>1</sup>

From the preceding discussion it became clear that according to Kant the conception of reverence for moral law and duty is the only right way of doing things. Thus, the principle of good act to him is; to act in a way that one would like to be paid back in his own coin. This means to treat everyone as an end and not as a mean to one's own gain. Kant conceives a person who makes a lying promise to another to be using the later as a mean to his own advantage, thus considered immoral.

The question of human's character or disposition to do good to others is of paramount importance. This is because, without it no good can be expected due to the change that occurs to morality as a result of social conditions. Building such character in human requires a well specified moral system and a well-defined education. The definition of moral education, as given by Aristotle, is vague and inadequate. In Kant's writings there exists no well-defined educational system for character training as well. Even justice the arch virtue of universal recognition has not been defined in a concrete and definite manner. It has been defined in variety of ways. For example, Plato treats justice as the controlling or architectonic value from among the principle values of; wisdom, temperance and courage. Hence, a just man according to him is the self-disciplined person whose passions are controlled by reason. While, Nietzsche defines justice as the right of strong man which means might is right. On the other hand, Hobbes conceived it as performance of a covenant. When a covenant is made to break it is unjust. While, Hume sees justice as an artificial virtue

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<sup>1</sup> Dewey, J. and James, H. T. *Ethics*, (New York, n.p. 1936), p. 240.



and Stoics, those who show no feeling of worry or dislike, treat justice as an equal treatment of men.<sup>1</sup>

According to Dewey, J. and James, human understanding of real good is defective. For, they believe that a person might perceive some ends as good while under the influence of strong passion, but in actual experience they may not be so. In view of this fact we can conclude that it is not possible to have any fix standard of evaluation of human conduct based solely on reason. Considering this fact, Kant stresses an adherence to moral law, yet this may not produce any result unless it is backed by character. Kant, as Muslehuiddin observes<sup>2</sup>, seems to have affirmed what Islam has established centuries ago. But he fails to observe that morality has its roots in man character. His theory of morality seems to have been derived from Islamic teaching, particularly, the saying of the prophet SAW:

*“Wish for your brother what you wish for yourself”*<sup>3</sup>

There is another saying of the prophet to the same effect narrated by Bukhārī, in his al-Adab al-Mufrad, where the word good is added as follow;

*“He has no faith who wishes not for his brother what he wishes for himself”*

These sayings of the prophet provide us with the highest standards of morality which other moral systems lack. Because it stresses on being good to other and to avoid what may not be liked by others. In other words, no one should wish for the others except what is good. Referring to another of his statement, where he sees the motives as the only determining factor in human act can enhance further the claim that Kant’s theory of morality is derived from Islamic teaching. In fact, it is the true copy of another saying of the prophet where he assigns a crucial role to motives, as he sees them as decisive factor in evaluation of human act. He says, “Verily, the acts are determined by motives”<sup>4</sup>

All these narrations provide us with evidence to the fact that Kant’s theory of morality is not original. Furthermore, his failure to arrive at a

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<sup>1</sup> Gould, Julius, and William L. K. Kolb, *A Dictionary of the Social Sciences* (New York; Free Press, 1965)

<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Muslehuiddin, *Sociology, and Islam* (Lahore: Islamic Publication Limited, 1977), p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Bukhārī, Abi ‘Abdallah Muhammad bin Isma‘il, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 1, No. *hadith* 12, (Cairo: Lajnat Ihya’ Kutub al-Sunnah, 1990), p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

right conclusion is due to losing touch with the origin of the theory, which is another saying of the prophet SAW regarding character; *'the noblest of you are the best in character; certainly, God looks not at your faces or your wealth, but He looks at your heart and your deeds'*<sup>1</sup>

In addition to this in the Qurān great importance is attached to character as well like Allah said in al-Qur'ān;

*'Verily, the noblest of you, worthy of honour in the sight of God is he who is the most upright in character'*<sup>2</sup>

Islam does not suffice on provision of a theoretical framework for character building. It also provides us with practical illustration of noble character in the person of the prophet to be emulated.<sup>3</sup> Thus, Islam provides an effective system of morality which emphasises on character building and training. Through training and education Islam enable its adherents to develop in themselves a disposition to do good to others.

Contrary to Kant theory of morality is that of Bentham who lays stress on the consequences of an act to decide its moral status. While, the former stress motive the latter sees the consequences as the main factor in determining goodness of an act or its moral status. Therefore, if the act could produce such consequences that contribute to human happiness<sup>4</sup> it is considered a moral act and the converse will be considered as immoral. Thus, Bentham adopts teleological approach, judging the value of an act based on its consequences, in his analysis of morality.

From the forgoing discussion of the moral theories it becomes clear that there are differences of opinions as regards to the definition of morality. The difference seems to be due to the varying focus of moral theorists in their theory of morality. Some focus in their theory of morality on the way in which an act is inspired. According to this view, the consequences are often out of control thus, of no significance in determining the goodness of an act. On the other hand, others stress on the purpose and end of an act as the leading factor in the conception of ultimate good. Still there are those who see approval and disapproval, praise and blame as the criterion for

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Muslim, Abi Hasan Muslim bin al-Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim* Vol. 5, ed. 1 (Beirut: Mu'assasat 'Izz al-Dīn, 1987), p. 148.

<sup>2</sup> Qur'ān, 40:13 English translations by: Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Durban, South Africa: Islamic Propagation Centre International, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Muslehuddin, *Sociology, and Islam* (Lahore: Islamic Publication Limited, 1977), p. 63.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

judging the goodness of an act. Islam as ultimate source of truth provides us with the fundamental principle that human sole reliance on reason in the perception of good is not the right way of discovering what is good. For, we cannot differentiate between what appear to be good and that which is really good. It is stated in the Qur'ān;

*“May be that you dislike a thing which is good for you and like a thing which is bad for you.”<sup>1</sup>*

In these circumstances the conception of real good is beyond our knowledge and God alone know what is really good. It is, therefore, necessary to search for the definition of what is really good and moral in the divine revelation rather than searching it in the blind alley of human thought and reason. However, an adequate methodology is required for such a purpose.

It is important to know how change occurs in social conditions and shakes the foundations of morality. So far, we have dealt with changes in social thought in a general way. In order to have an insight to the changing characteristics of morality here we may dwell on the theme of change or alteration in morality.

### **Alteration in Morality**

As mentioned already, the Greek conception of city –states, even though small in size and Athens as their cultural capital, constituted the basis of reflection in western social philosophy. The modern ideas of justice, liberty, constitutional government and the respect for law had sprung from the conception of the city –state. As Sabine and George has noted; ‘the great age of Athenian public life fell in the third quarter of the fifth century B.C. while, the great age of political philosophy came only after the downfall of Athens in her struggle with Sparta. Greek history had a wide scope and played a key role in uniting East and West providing the basis for the continuous development in Europe. It is essentially considered as universal in interest and not parochial. This is made clear from their interest in the study of other culture and customs.<sup>2</sup>

Herodotus’ recording of strange customs and manners of foreign people shows that every society needs standards of life to follow. For, humans naturally prefer the custom of their own country regardless of whether it is being superior to other country’s custom or not. Thus, society

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<sup>1</sup> Qur’an, 2:2616

<sup>2</sup> Sabine, George H. *A History of Political Theory* (Illinois: Dryden Press, 1973), p. 21.

in its early stage holds its custom in great reverence. But as it advances further due to increased intellectual activities, old customs lose their societal sway over it. This was the case with Greek society. This is clear from Sabine observation; 'With the advance of civilization the city –states became vigorous in action and fertile in ideas. As a result of this fertility, devotion to the state reached its highest level in Athens. The principles of democracy were expressed in ideal form by Pericles, the leader of democracy. This development culminated in the belief of harmony of life as a fundamental element of Greek thought in a conception of state.'<sup>1</sup>

The idea of harmony replaced the old idea of convention or 'use and wont' as lord of all. It was derived from nature where celestial bodies strictly observe the measures set for them. As Heraclitus says 'The sun' will not overstep its measure. In Athens the fundamental ideas of harmony and proportionality were conceived as property of nature as well as of human nature. Although they were initially developed in natural philosophy, later they were used in ethical and political thought. The Sophists who came from the other part of the Greek world took on this idea and gave it a new turn. They perceived natural law as the 'rule of the might is right'. Under the influence of their conception of the natural law as the rule of might is right' they viewed traditional religion as the product of convention, and the nature of man as selfish. This transformed the natural philosophy to humanistic studies, in which individual takes centre stage rather than group or society. The new movement gradually led to the disintegration of state and the weakening of affection for it and the rise of individualism.<sup>2</sup>

From the above discussion it became clear that the idea of harmony which replaced the idea of convention and which corresponds to justice was changed to that of might is right. In addition to this, its initial conception as a property of nature, as well as a reasonable property of human nature, was transformed to that of selfishness or self-interest. Hence, the perception of society as a harmonious life shared by all its members was transformed to that of individualism where priority is given to individual interest.

### **Individualism**

Individualism is rooted in the rationalistic belief that the fundamental rights of human beings are self-evident. It is a social theory, which lays stress upon the freedom of individual in human action. Thomas Hobbes seeing individual self-interest as the motive for all human behaviours, gave priority

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid. p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 42.

to the individual and regarded society as a means to the actualisation of individual interest. To him, society was a means of achieving individual interest. Its failure to materialize this end will undermine its relevance as a useful mechanism and renders it of no substantial importance to human beings. Conceiving individual interest as the essential goal of the society and society as a means of obtaining individual interest made him both a complete utilitarian and complete individualist. Therefore, in his view individual interest and security constitute the only ground for justification of the authority of law and the power of the state. The rational basis for the obedience of individual to the state and the authority of law lay in his anticipation of the larger benefits that they may yield.<sup>1</sup>

Individualism is the thoroughly modern element of Hobbes' social theory. As thinkers two centuries after him considered his theory of individual interest as a more obvious motive and enlightened self-interest as a more applicable remedy for social ills than any form of collective action. This provided a guiding principle in the justification of political institutions. They were justified only because of their protection of individual interest and maintenance of individual rights.<sup>2</sup> The recognition of individual fundamental rights was further enhanced by constitutional means. As they were expressed in a written constitution with its bill of fundamental rights, in which it was stated that there are certain rights of citizen which even parliament must not repudiate or take away or modify.

John Locke, another social philosopher of the eighteenth century, was also a strong supporter of individualism. As he set up a body of innate individual rights by means of which competence of the community was curbed and its interference with the liberty and property of individuals was prevented. The social theory of individualism was brought to such a prominence that it was considered as the criterion, based on which the value of a social group was gauged. As it is clear from Sabine comment that 'individualism presume that the value of any social group consists in the happiness or self-satisfaction, which it produces for its members, especially in the protection of their inherent right to own and enjoy property. Thus, individual cooperation can be attributed to enlightened self-interest and the presumed advantages in such cooperation.

It is important to know that Plato attributed the collapse of Athens' political power and her imperial ambitions, in her war with Sparta in Peloponnesian war, to individual liberty and freedom and denied him any

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid. p. 432.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. pp.441- 448.

value. He viewed individuals to have no significance on their own and stressed that their value lays in the duties performed for the state. On the other hand, Aristotle thought of the individual as a fraction of the polity and denied him/her any separate significant role in isolation from society. However, this assumption of him was belittled by no less a personality than Alexander, his own pupil who emerged as an individual of profound capacity. Alexander later established the Macedonian Empire, thus, restoring to man his individuality.<sup>1</sup>

This achievement of individualism in the hands of Alexander did come to an end with the collapse of his empire and the consequent anarchy hence, giving rise to Feudalism and formation of upper class in society. Feudalism by all available means tried to curb the rise of individualism which met a strong resistance. Even though the struggle continued for a long period of history it finally came out victorious with the approach of French Revolution in 1737. As a result of this triumph individuality was restored, and individual freedom was considered as a birth right. This was enshrined in the constitution where civil rights and liberties were safeguarded by imposition of constitutional limitation on the government. It demarked the dawn of individualism in the history of western political history and found expression in the *laissez-fair* policy of the government.

With the start of eighteenth century universities became the centre of intellectual discussion by scholars who challenged the received established, mainstream opinions and subjected them to scrutiny and criticism. This enhanced further the emancipation of thought and extended its boundaries to new horizons. Added to this was the change that was brought about by Industrial Revolution. This all led to change in the life and moral of society.<sup>2</sup>

Consequently, due to the growth of political democracy, in the eighteenth century and with its wide spread educational opportunities, moral consciousness was broadened and revitalised. However, with the rise of natural and social science the scientific method of inquiry assumed a prominent role which affected the standards and values of morality. As a result, reasoning with observation provided a new test of truth and the conception of objective good was given a sensualistic turn hence, the birth of utilitarianism.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid. p. 533.

<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Muslehuddin, *Sociology and Islam* (Lahore: Islamic Publication Limited, 1977), p. 68.

## Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism is a doctrine that considers the greatest happiness of the greatest number as the guiding principle of human conduct. According to this theory, there are two native forces of motivation, which affect human's behaviours. They are the desire for pleasure and the dislike of pain. All other complicated motives are the outcome of the association of these two forces. The theory implies that the end of human conduct is to enjoy as much pleasure and to suffer as little pain as possible.<sup>1</sup> Utilitarianism as an ethical social theory was first developed in England in 1730's and 1740's. It was elaborated and refined in France in 1758 by Helvetius. However, the tone in which the theory was presented in England differed from the one in France. In England it initially took the form of theological theory preferred by orthodox due to the importance they attached to pleasure and pain in the future life. Whereas, in France it took quite a different direction as Helvetius turned it into an instrument for legal reform. The mechanism of human motives was utilized to enhance private happiness and public welfare to its highest level. In other words, he made the principle of greatest happiness as a criterion of reform and passed it to his two followers: Beccaria and Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832). It was the latter who brought the greatest happiness principle back to England and utilized it as an agent for radical reforms.<sup>2</sup> The essence of the theory is that all, ethic, thought, and psychology are based on the fundamental principle that pleasure is preferable to pain.

Bentham's writings especially, the principle of moral and legislation, which was printed in (1789), marked the transition from rationalism to utilitarianism. Viewing desire for pleasure and the dislike of pain as eternal and irresistible sentiments he holds them as the necessary elements of any legal and moral study. He attacked the concept of natural law and asserted that all men thought and action are subject to the phenomenon of pleasure and pain. He holds that nature has put man under the empire of pleasure and pain and all his ideas, judgement and determination spring from them. Humans cannot withdraw themselves from such subjection and any claim to the contrary is unrealistic and a mere pretext. For man's only object, according to him, is to seek pleasure and to avoid pain. Bentham considers desire for pleasure and dislike of pain as the 'safeguards' that nature has provided for man. All other motives are peripheral to these two and are the outcome of the association of pleasure and pain with the act that are their

<sup>1</sup> Sabine, George H. *A History of Political Theory* (Illinois: Dryden Press, 1973), p. 518.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 520.

remote causes. Thus, good, and evil, according to him, were understood in terms of pleasure and pain and not in terms of innate ideas of moral faculty. Moral development was understood to be possible through the creation of incentives in term of increment of pleasure or pain. Utilitarian hold these two elements of pleasure and pain, to be the driving force of human motivation. In sum, utilitarian does not rely on reason in determining wrong and right. In deciding the issue, they refer to human observation and experience in order to know what human actually value. Instead of judging the value of an act by its feeling and motive they judge it by consequence to which it leads.<sup>1</sup>

However, Bentham's perception of utilitarianism in which personal pleasure is depicted as the whole object of all actions is disputable. This is because it is far below the standard of morality, which he himself believed to lay in universal benevolence as the principle of approval. Muslehuddin in diagnosing the discrepancy of personal pleasure as the sole motive of human action quoting George Eliot rightly observes 'It would be only a poor sort of happiness that could ever come by caring very much for our narrow pleasure. Personal pleasure is, indeed, a low set of pleasure and it is better to be human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied'.<sup>2</sup> Thus, personal pleasure is the lower type of pleasure, and it is inferior to that of others. Therefore, it cannot provide a proper ground for evaluating the morality of an act.

Besides the inadequacy of personal pleasure as the standard of morality, the impossibility of defining pleasure in a concrete manner is another factor that invalidates Bentham's theory. For pleasure or pain depend on the existing state of person. Something may be agreeable at one time but disagreeable at other time; what pleases one in health may not be so when one is sick; what is disgusting in repletion may be gratifying in hunger. Similarly, what a person of generous character likes may arouse aversion in a stingy person.<sup>3</sup> These all indicate the inadequacy of pleasure as the means of evaluation of an act, for it has no sound basis and no clear definition. Furthermore, from moral perspective consideration of pleasure or pain as end of human act is not good. This is because; a vicious person takes pleasure in his wickedness. Thus, to consider pleasure as the only end of human being action is baseless and immoral.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Muslehuddin, *Sociology and Islam* (Lahore: Islamic Publication Limited, 1977), p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> Dewey, J. and James, H. T. *Ethics*, (New York, n.p. 1936), p. 240.



## Conclusion

The goal of sociology to reorganize society based on scientific method seems a distant possibility, due to the unpredictability of human behaviour and its irregularities. Similarly, reason, experience and sense perception cannot be relied on for such purposes, due to their incapability in the derivation of the universal rules of human conduct. This becomes clear from the difference of opinion over their capacity as the means of acquisitions of genuine knowledge. Philosophers realizing the deficiency of these systems of knowledge resorted to ethics, the science of human conduct, for discovering the universal rules of conduct of human behaviour. This too proved fruitless due to the varying approach with regard to the determination of the rightness or wrongness of conduct or morality of an action. Thus, morality whether normative or contemplative could not provide a permanent criterion for the rules of human behaviour, due to their origination in the custom and tradition of society which changes. Furthermore, human understanding of good is defective due to the influence of strong passion, therefore it is not possible to have any fix standard of evaluation of human conduct solely based on reason.

Islam as an ultimate source of truth, has provided the fundamental principle that human being's sole reliance on reason in the perception of good is not sufficient. Because human beings are incapable of differentiating between what appears to be good and that which is really good. The conception of real good is beyond our knowledge and God alone knows what is really good. Therefore, it becomes imperative to search for the definition of the real good and morality in the divine revelation rather than searching for it in the blind alleys of human thought and reason.

Here comes the relevance of Al-Ghazālī's concept of *maṣlaḥah* as the preservation of the five principle values of religion, life, reason, property and descendent. This is because he defines good in terms of preservation of these principle values, and not as utility in the strict sense of its literal meaning. Since these values are of universal character and constitute the intrinsic concern of every human society, the system of morality which is drawn with clear insight to these values has the potential for discovery of universal rules of human conduct hence, the effective organization of the society. For, these values are comprehensive in nature and cover every aspect of human existence and needs, spiritual, physical, mental, social and moral. In this sense the concept of *maṣlaḥah* provides a proper source for the derivation of universal rules for the organization of society, hence, can play potential role in formation of Islamic perspective on sociology or its Islamization.

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# AL-ITQĀN

JOURNAL OF ISLAMIC SCIENCES AND COMPARATIVE STUDIES

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**Volume: 6**

**Special Issue No. 4**

**December 2022**

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