



**AL-ITQAN: Journal of Islamic Sciences and Comparative Studies**  
Vol. 10, Issue No. 1, (April 2025) 100-115  
Copyright © IIUM Press  
eISSN 2600-8432

## **ALASDAIR MACINTYRE'S EXPOSITION ON MORAL RELATIVISM: AN ANALYSIS FROM AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE**

*Muna Sidqy Binti Mohd Sidqy\* Amilah Awang Abd Rahman\*\**

**Abstract:** Moral relativism has seen a rise in popularity, especially during post-modern times. The heterogeneous nature of society due to various factors drives a compelling case for moral relativism to be studied from its historical context and theistic perspective. Therefore, this article aims to explore Alasdair MacIntyre's thoughts on moral relativism, analyzing it from Islamic perspectives. The subject of this research will be investigated through library research, with a particular reference to the third edition of MacIntyre's *After Virtue*. Selected journal articles written by MacIntyre and other scholars are used to supplement or reframe the arguments found in the book. This article specifically explores MacIntyre's thoughts on subjective nature, lack of standards, individualistic tendencies of moral relativism, and his concept of telos. The Islamic perspective is extracted from various opinions of selected contemporary scholars. The analysis demonstrates that MacIntyre's views are parallel with some ethical ideals held by the Islamic teachings, particularly in his concept of telos. Several aspects of his discourse can be more appreciated by refining it with the Islamic answers to the nature of morality. The concept of reality, the position of man, and the real nature of sources

---

\* Master's student, Department of Usul al-Din and Comparative Religion and Philosophy, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia. [moo.munasidqy@gmail.com](mailto:moo.munasidqy@gmail.com)

\*\* Associate Professor, Department of Usul al-Din and Comparative Religion and Philosophy, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia. [amilah@iium.edu.my](mailto:amilah@iium.edu.my)

of ethics, as exposed by the Muslim thinkers, can be supplementary to the issues highlighted by MacIntyre in sidelining moral relativism as the answer to contemporary times.

**Keywords:** MacIntyre, After Virtue, Moral Relativism, Islamic Perspective, Theistic Views.

## Introduction

Moral Relativism is fraught with controversies, following its popularity during the post-modern era and its claim to be in line with the current uncertain realities. Moral Relativism is a concept that denies the existence of one sole moral system capable of offering moral solutions, reflecting a change of thought among the people. It was found to have roots in the Western setting, thus, an overview of its development in Western history could prove to be significant in grasping its main ideas. This also justifies the importance of investigating it from a Western moral philosopher's framework, which may offer insights lost otherwise to a non-Western scholar.

Alasdair MacIntyre, renowned as a theist philosopher, was among those who offered a lengthy and elaborate view on relativist views, particularly in *After Virtue*. His stance on moral relativism had divided scholars, as his work was said to have arguments that could fall between defense and agreement with relativist thought. For example, Krishna Mani Pathak had offered concerns on the tradition-based morality as advocated by MacIntyre,<sup>1</sup> which would entail moral judgment being made only in accordance with one's own culture and traditions. Robert Wachbroit echoed these concerns, noting MacIntyre's emphasis on tradition allows for elements of traditional moral relativism.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, many works have also been dedicated to articulating MacIntyre's disagreement with moral relativism. That being said, little attention has been paid to analysing his thoughts on moral relativism from the Islamic perspective. This paper endeavors to do so, highlighting the contributions of Muslim scholars in the moral contemporary discourse while benefiting from MacIntyre's theistic thoughts, particularly regarding the subjective nature, lack of standards, individualistic inclinations of moral relativism, as well as his concept of telos. Therefore, this paper seeks to deepen the understanding of MacIntyre's views on moral relativism while gaining a more in-depth comprehension of the framework of Islamic Thought.

---

<sup>1</sup> Krishna Mani Pathak, "A Critique of MacIntyrean Morality from a Kantian Perspective," *SAGE Open* 4, no. 2 (April 15, 2014): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014531585>.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Wachbroit, "Relativism and Virtue," *The Yale Law Journal* 94, no. 6 (May 1985): 1–7, <https://doi.org/10.2307/796142>.

### **Moral Relativism: Concept and Historical Development**

This part of the paper will explore the concept of moral relativism and how it evolves across human history. This would be essential to a better understanding of MacIntyre's position. Although moral relativism became more recognized during the twentieth century, its roots can be traced back as early as the Greek period.<sup>3</sup> The Greeks, while acknowledging non-objectivist views on morality, tend to fall on the skeptical side of the spectrum, that there was no actual moral knowledge, instead of being relativistic.<sup>4</sup> The closest historical account of relativist ideas, however, can be found in Herodotus' "The Histories", in which he narrates an event where Darius, a King of ancient Persia, calls forward some Greeks and asks them what it would take them to eat the corpses of their fathers.<sup>5</sup> Alternatively, he also summoned some Galatians, and asked them what would push them to burn their fathers' corpses.<sup>6</sup> Darius' social experiment revealed that cultural contexts play a role in putting diverse ideas of norms, practices, and moralities in the minds of the people. Notably, it is what guides them to interpret foreign ideas, as a person understands the worth of an idea by using their own pre-existing beliefs as a yardstick. Here, the Greeks and the Galatians may share the same intentions when they perform their respective death rites, but their ways of doing such practices were so different that it was antithetical.

Later, the Stoics, although widely seen to be proponents of universal moral codes, might not have been as committed to such a stance in their earlier generations. This can be observed in the writing of Epictetus' moral handbook, as he emphasizes the importance of aligning one's conduct in view of surrounding local factors.<sup>7</sup> This demonstrates the idea that practices and personal conduct, to a degree, are relative to the society where they were carried out because they yield the most preferable result. On the other hand, it was also said that the earlier Stoics did not find issues in the practices of incest and cannibalism; therefore, another point that suggests that they may not be as absolutist as one may assume.<sup>8</sup> It is important to understand that they do not directly promote or endorse such ideas, merely that they fit into some of the early Stoic philosophical debates in their efforts to find what

---

<sup>3</sup> Chris Gowans, "Moral Relativism (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)," *Stanford.edu*, 2015, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-relativism/#DesMorRel>.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories by Herodotus; Translated by George Rawlinson*, (Roman Roads Media, 2013), 193.

<sup>6</sup> James Rachels and Stuart Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 10th ed., 2022), 14.

<sup>7</sup> Scott Rubarth, "Relativism and Cosmopolitanism in Stoic Philosophy," *International Journal of Arts & Sciences*, Vol. 4, No. 13 (2011): 252.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

constitutes ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. This instance is a show of the early Stoics in the pursuit of understanding ethics beyond the confines of one’s own culture. Both scenarios contribute differently to the broader ideas of moral relativism, the first as further proof of empirical evidence, while the second one acknowledges its hold over the community and attempts to relate to cultures outside of it.

In the 16th century, Montaigne had critiqued those who labeled people “barbaric” simply because they lived and behaved differently.<sup>9</sup> He acknowledges that, indeed, certain people may pride themselves on discoveries and abundance of knowledge, and he finds them to describe their findings not as it is, but rather as what they appear to be to them.<sup>10</sup> In response, he purposefully presented his appreciation for the people unlike him, their daily practices, their rationale and significance, and contrasted with the practices and realities of ‘civilized’ people’s manner of living. His ideas distinguished him from his peers at that time, as he very clearly questioned the validity of Eurocentrism as a measure of civilization. Again, like its previous relativist incarnations, it was yet to be seen as a popular or relevant method of viewing morality. Nevertheless, they laid the grounds for the framework, which will be expanded or elaborated by later scholars in various capacities.

Moreover, David Hume put forward that the source of man’s merits can be owed to strong elements of sentimentality.<sup>11</sup> Virtues, he found, were qualities that benefit oneself and others; the opposite was true for vices.<sup>12</sup> Even though he did not completely discard the role of reason in moral decisions, the fact that virtues and vices ultimately were expressed in society through moral approval and blame proves that a strong element of sentimentality was at play.<sup>13</sup> In the subsequent century, Nietzsche put forward the two contrasting moralities he observed within a society, which is the master morality and slave morality.<sup>14</sup> Both of these morals are interestingly tied to the ‘who’, instead of only considering the actions acted upon.<sup>15</sup> For example, the oppressed would view selflessness as something ‘good’, while the nobles would find it undesirable and weak.<sup>16</sup> This brought up the notion that values are

---

<sup>9</sup> Michel De Montaigne, Charles Cotton, and William Carew Hazlitt, *Essays of Michel de Montaigne*, 2006, 228.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>11</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry into the Sources of Morals*, 2007, 75–76.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Keith Ansell-Pearson, and Carol Diethe, “*On the Genealogy of Morality*” and *Other Writings*, (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 154.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

intrinsic to the perspective and social dynamic, which implies that morals and values are relative to one's standing in the community.

One identifiable trait across this collective evidence is how descriptive they are of the practices and norms of the communities. This suggests that, at the earlier stages, relativist views were mostly the result of observing and documenting the diverse nature of cultures and accepting them as they were. It naturally progresses to the stage where responses resembling any form of antagonism towards different cultures are interpreted as uneducated or unsophisticated. Then, new ideas that relate moral deeds with perspective and sentimentality detected in the same community of people further add a new dimension to this concept. Eventually, moral relativism took a step further from these elements of cultural relativism, perspectivism, and subjectivism, and was later refined to become a normative framework that denies the existence of universal moral truths. In other words, moral relativism posits that all moral values are contingent upon one's own culture and context. Given this, universal and objective morality would be rendered meaningless and impractical.

### **Alasdair MacIntyre's Views on Moral Relativism**

Moral relativism is truly revolutionary in the sense that it combines and accepts every moral argument without rebuking its opposites, being almost eclectic in its concept. It is believed that one should approach it by investigating the feasibility of accepting all moral arguments and the standard by which moral relativism operates to deal with this phenomenon. Though Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* mainly responds to and expounds on emotivism, some of his arguments are in line with addressing the issues of moral relativism. As he reviews emotivism purporting moral judgment to be mere expressions of preference, attitude, or feeling, MacIntyre's characterization of emotivism parallels some of the mentioned qualities and ideas of moral relativism.<sup>17</sup> To him, emotivism is the culmination of decades of moral philosophical discourse based on reason alone, failing to offer a solution to the practical and theoretical problems in their societies, thus leading to the breakdown of their long-standing culture.<sup>18</sup> When the Enlightenment project, as advanced by its leading scholars, is unable to deliver a sufficiently comprehensive ethical system that is both true to life and applicable to man, the idea of a subjective ethical and moral perspective gains root. It is this element of subjectivism and the relativist nature of emotivism that made MacIntyre's views on it particularly compelling for moral relativism as well.

---

<sup>17</sup> Alasdair C MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 12.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

His most pressing concern would be the subjective quality of emotivism, which also closely aligns well with claims made in moral relativism. Moral judgments, although they can be quite emotionally and aesthetically driven, cannot be the basis of a moral philosophy. This was postulated in his book using the argument of the interminability of modern moral debates.<sup>19</sup> He asserts that one quality found within the modern moral debates is their inability to produce a consensus. According to him, there could be two possibilities or cases for this. The first case is that moral judgments truly are a reflection of their personal preference, which is a direct reference to emotivism and some branch of moral relativism.<sup>20</sup> If this is true, moral debates can devolve into a battle of wills, without a clear, shared, and meaningful foundation between the speakers.<sup>21</sup> It can be perceived that this moral debate may 'win' when they can successfully appeal to their audience via emotions, whether it is relevant or significant to the issue at hand or not.<sup>22</sup> In consequence, the actions taken resultant of this type of discussion could be short-sighted, impractical, unjust, and exacerbate the problem at worst. Without considering the related variables of the moral question, the proposed solution would likely be inapplicable and incongruent to the issue. The second case is when moral concerns are argued based on reason. However, this too is not free from its vulnerability, as MacIntyre raises the concern of why exactly one chooses a line of thought over others.<sup>23</sup> What is most important here is that this highlights moral relativism's impotence in resolving real-world issues in a way that can be agreed upon by the people. This promotes a fragmented approach to morality, therefore risking disunity and unrest in the community. Additionally, this takes away the element of cohesion and solidarity in tackling societal issues, which could be a game-changing factor by itself.

Next, related to the above argument, is the lack of a standard for moral relativism.<sup>24</sup> Besides leading to interminability in moral discourse, it also brings to light the fact that it does not lay a suitable, shared framework for people to have meaningful disagreements. This implies that one cannot, on good grounds, criticize, analyze, and evaluate the worth of a moral and ethical system against another. Following that logic, then no cultural or individual moral framework can be superior or inferior to another, which is, realistically speaking, improbable. On the flip side, one may not substantially benefit from other frameworks, as

---

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

there is supposedly no better way to be the best in one's own cultural or individual morality. To put it simply, if one is a Nazi, then the finest and best method to improve oneself is to be more in tune with one's Nazi self. Morality becomes somewhat static, without a clear way for one to evaluate oneself or others, therefore, moral choices and options only revolve around what is available to them, even when it proves to be inadequate. It undermines how morality can indeed improve from bad to good, or conversely, experience a decline. It is clear to us that accepting all morality to be of equal standing invites the notion of praising what is considered harmful and dishonoring the praiseworthy.

Lastly, moral relativism is quite individualistic in its philosophy and application. In many examples put forward to further explain it as a viable moral framework, it can be inferred that it does not have social integration as its interest. This is against MacIntyre's position on the role of morality as an indispensable aspect that holds the community — and subsequently, culture — together.<sup>25</sup> His explanation of the divorce of philosophy of mind from an action may shed more light on this matter. He believed that the philosophical legacy left by Rene Descartes had influenced the later thinkers to divide the philosophy of mind and action into isolated discussions.<sup>26</sup> His ideas of dualism, rationalism, and methodical skepticism had given rise to philosophers like Kant and Reid, who introduced the concept of choice as central to moral philosophy. This had, to some degree, the unfortunate effect of diminishing the previously consolidated form of moral philosophy.<sup>27</sup> For instance, Kant's idea of duty and the categorical imperatives framed morality to be one's choice to adhere to this universal moral rule, and accordingly, resist all temptations to do otherwise, or to violate it. However, to say that one's act is moral, one must be free from causal antecedents, e.g., desires, religious teachings, habits, social pressure, and cultural norms. To illustrate, if a person were to steal under duress, then that person is not fully responsible for his actions. Despite stealing being categorically wrong and immoral, he is not truly autonomous and free from antecedents that may have forced him to perform such an act. The absence of antecedents in moral discussion has led scholars to gradually shift away from the philosophy of mind as a focus.<sup>28</sup> Later philosophies had more or less emulated the trend, and as a result,

---

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>26</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, "How Moral Agents Became Ghosts or Why the History of Ethics Diverged from that of the Philosophy of Mind," *Synthese*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (November 1982): 295, <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00484905>.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

emerged as ethical systems that are rational but neglected the complexities of the different facets that constitute man's morality.

In light of these deliberations, the task undertaken by moral relativism to ensure these moral philosophies may be equally valid under one large umbrella can be considered faulty because of this. In its attempt to bring harmony to the contradicting ideas, it may have overlooked the actual reason why these differences happen in the first place, and therefore, be susceptible to the same vulnerabilities. Notice how it repeatedly champions the salience of independent moral systems — whether from a culture or an individual — without providing a conducive foundation where these moralities could positively interact and grow.

Having established these points, one may wonder, does MacIntyre completely reject all insights from moral relativism? The discussion explores what he believes to be the best solution to the vulnerabilities of moral relativism, while also acknowledging that some of his views may mirror its principles. Both emotivism and moral relativism respond to the shortcomings of reason-based ethics and morality, which were affirmed several times in this paper. MacIntyre holds similar thoughts to the relativists regarding this matter. He asserted that if the only obstacle to achieving some sort of terminability in moral concerns is the absence of reason, then one may observe how reason alone fares. One's moral choices or judgments can be said to be reasonable when one tries to appeal using values that are separate from their individual preferences, desires, and contexts to some universal standard that may be understood and accepted by others, e.g., duty, pleasure, and consequences. An additional point to note is that their judgments must be logically sound and valid, as the conclusions derived from their respective premises are correct. Unfortunately, it happens that these universal ethical systems ironically present conflicting ideas and schools of thought that contradict each other, while simultaneously maintaining their soundness. Anyone with reason could understand from their perspective(s), even when the result or produced judgment is wildly distinct.

MacIntyre had proposed to approach this incommensurability of moral arguments historically, as he outlined values that are inherited by the modern moral philosophies from its predecessors — justice in Aristotle's virtues, power and strategy from Machiavelli, Clausewitz, and Bismarck, liberation from Fichte and Marx, moral laws that has its roots in Thomism, among others.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, it is pertinent to understand that such older moral philosophies and ideas are as much a product of their culture and societal context. He claimed

---

<sup>29</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 10.



that moral concepts are embedded in specific traditions' frameworks, which were omitted by modern interpretations of it, thus misrepresenting it. This could be seen in the development of the words used to express morality, e.g., piety, ought, immoral, etc. They once carried specific meanings, but modern usage has reduced them, now encompassing only a fraction of their original intent.<sup>30</sup> With these considerations, modern debates that seem interminable may happen due to the distortion of moral language.

If that is the case, the question arises as to what the uniting factor or shared moral framework of older moral philosophies was. To him, it is the telos, for without it, it would be nigh impossible to evaluate competing claims in various contexts. Telos offers man a sense of purpose and goals that would guide traditions, and consequently his everyday practices and actions. It is telos that are expressed by ever-evolving traditions or practices within a community or culture. The teleological scheme included three factors: man-as-he-happens-to-be and man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature, which were then linked with the rational precepts of ethics.<sup>31</sup> This means that by practicing following one's traditions, one can embody the values that will carry one forward to achieve one's telos. In this sense, MacIntyre again has the same opinion regarding the importance of culture in shaping and influencing the moral framework, though it is equally paramount to note that he did not hold all traditions to be of the same standing.

Moral relativism, like emotivism, is far too flexible, able to see from the viewpoints of all other cultures equally, even if it ends up with critiquing one's own stance.<sup>32</sup> This makes the task of having proper criteria for evaluation null, which affects the ability to hold oneself and others accountable from this perspective. MacIntyre had avoided this deficiency in his arguments through his advocacy of practices, which he defined to be:

Any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.<sup>33</sup>

These practices necessitate a reference specific to one's society, which would mean a standard against which they may be evaluated. The desired result from consistently

---

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 52-53.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-32.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

adhering to these standards will bring about internal good — which are goods that one receives only internally to the practice, and it can be recognized only by experience in participating in that practice.<sup>34</sup> Its counterpart, the external goods, can be attained even through other means, or without fully submitting oneself to the standard or authority of the practices, such as wealth, fame, and connections.<sup>35</sup> In this framework, subjectivism is not accepted, which is another discrepancy between MacIntyre's morality and moral relativism. MacIntyre's conception of practices facilitated moral progress, not just within individuals and their societies, but also across different cultures. Different cultures may engage in meaningful dialectics with each other, overcoming challenges existing in their society by learning from a more enriched tradition.<sup>36</sup>

### **Analysis of MacIntyre's Views from the Islamic Perspective**

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that while MacIntyre has some relativist elements in his conception of morality, it does not fully comply with moral relativism. His concept of tradition, practices, and internal goods is conducive to promoting a cohesive and flourishing society, though due to his disagreement with universal values, it may be revealed to be insufficient in offering a truly comprehensive evaluative tool in judging morality. His idea of tradition would presuppose that there is indeed the best standard a man, society, and civilization can achieve, and others from different cultures may interact with it and each other in an attempt to reach its telos more completely.

However, the centrality of tradition in MacIntyre's view will come to a very pertinent question: How to determine a particular tradition to be 'superior' and capable of improving itself through such engagement requires careful consideration? Another consideration is whether the so-called best tradition, having already reached its peak performance, would have nothing more to work towards once it has attained the best version of itself according to its own culture. Even with the idea of telos as a benchmark to measure the excellence of traditions, it does not mean it will be all that helpful if these traditions find the other telos to be contradicting to their own, again leaving them without guidance to systematically better of themselves. Moreover, other than telos' being the central role in shaping morality, not much is offered in the ways of how to determine the quality of telos other than it being deeply

---

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 188-189.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>36</sup> John Flett, "Alasdair MacIntyre's Tradition-Constituted Enquiry in Polanyian Perspective," *Tradition and Discovery the Polanyi Society Periodical*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (January 1, 1999): 11, <https://doi.org/10.5840/traddisc1999/200026219>.

embedded culture of man. These questions and commentary are not meant to disagree with the function of culture or '*ādat*' of a people, but this suggests that there is more to moral self-improvement than conforming to well-established human ideas of civilization and sophistication.

The particular focus MacIntyre had on communal practices is timely, seeing the increasingly materialistic and individualistic nature of modern values, though it raises the question of how his version of virtue ethics would balance between individual good and common good. It seems that his morality largely depends on the community itself, as even individual good is interpreted in relation to one's role in society, and how it must align with it. This has the potential to be a sustainable method in promoting virtues in a community, though it necessitates the society and its supporting tradition to be 'good' for it to work. The fate of those who are unfortunate enough to be born and raised in a community that has always been fragmented remains a critical concern.

Indeed, society as a whole is partially responsible for shaping a person as is, since it cannot be denied that the most virtuous or depraved acts performed by individuals can be bolstered by surrounding conditions. A modern example would be Lily Phillips, an adult entertainer who had been bedded by 101 men.<sup>37</sup> She planned to take it up a notch to 1000 men not long after that, but no updates on that particular escapade as of yet. One may blame her for immoral behavior but let us also ponder upon the extenuating factors that made her idea come to fruition in the first place. The culture she lived in found intimate acts to be personal affairs; thus, while some may find her activities repulsive, one would have no 'justifiable' reason to stop her. Additionally, more women preceded her, and some were even her contemporaries. These are empirical evidences that prove societal factors create extreme acts. Hence, it can be seen that MacIntyre's concept of tradition and practice has put forward the importance of community and communal norms in facilitating an environment encouraging habits, deeds, or '*amal*'.

The change in society, logically, would begin with the individuals in it aspiring for change or *işlah*. More attention should be given to how to cultivate virtues that are beneficial for oneself and others, despite external antecedents like the practices of one's tradition. For example, the practice of sati in pre-colonial India. If India had continued as it was, without British interference, the question arises of whether such a practice would be morally

---

<sup>37</sup> Sarah Bull, "Lily Phillips' Followers Fear She's Gone Too Far & Needs 'Sectioning' over Disturbing New Event to One-up B...", *The Sun*, January 27, 2025, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/fabulous/33021441/lily-phillips-fears-mental-health-new-event-bonnie-blue/>.

acceptable today, even if self-sacrificing widows were completely sincere and voluntary. One may think that it would be impossible, as in this day, cultures have never been more than free to interact with each other with the coming of the digital age, thus one can reasonably assume its people would eventually know of better alternatives and try to re-establish new norms. This has also been the stance of MacIntyre in regard to inter-tradition engagement, highlighting his subtle endorsements of historicism. But, consider the extremely isolated communities of people that have minimum access or desire to connect with people from other cultures. This proves that being estranged from other people is entirely possible, even in recent times. Perchance that they have somehow collectively realized how detrimental the practice is, replacing it with a new one is not so simple. Since the practice is so embedded within the culture, then, it would have ties to the relationships of the widow, e.g., the religious authorities, her parents, her children, her larger family, and neighbors. If they truly want to do away with the practice, the factors surrounding the non-practice should also be scrutinized properly to offer an alternative that would reflect the quality of ‘betterment’, or it would persist among the people and continue to be practiced. Additionally, assuming one was to limit oneself to think in the framework of one’s tradition — whether to conform better or against it — then it rests its fate in the hands of the majority or the more powerful, which is not necessarily favorable for good qualities or virtues that do not benefit them, e.g., difference of thought, creativity, and individual freedom. To demonstrate, should MacIntyre’s proposition of shared telos be all there is in the foundation of morality, then it has given little attention to the significant element of man’s creativity to go beyond established traditions and culture to achieve moral perfection. Furthermore, despite MacIntyre’s telos having tried to connect man’s existence to a higher purpose that would guide his actions, the characteristics of what constitutes the best telos are quite vague and leave many options to be viable, even potentially clashing ones.

In responding to this issue, Islam has, from the very beginning, highlighted how wide the human world is for them to act upon. Naquib Al-Attas defined the Islamic worldview as not merely encompassing “the mind’s view of the physical world and man’s historical, social, political, and cultural involvement”.<sup>38</sup> He argues that this understanding separates man’s understanding of profane and sacred,<sup>39</sup> and it is against the Islamic concept of reality. The worldly life as experienced by man is integrated with the *al-ākhirah*, where the former

---

<sup>38</sup> Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam*, (Johor Bahru, Johor Darul Ta’zim: Penerbit UTM Press, 2014), 1.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

is the platform and opportunity to prepare for the latter. According to Al-Attas, it is the “metaphysical survey of the visible as well as the invisible worlds, including the perspective of life as a whole”,<sup>40</sup> coherently interpreted and founded upon the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah*. Like MacIntyre, they believed that the human purpose is inherent to the nature of man, therefore, the knowledge of man’s nature is indispensable in forming a consistent, comprehensive, and non-speculative idea of the best morality that would apply to all men. More importantly, it would give man a higher purpose beyond material and physical needs, thus acting as a motivating or push factor that drives man to embody praiseworthy values. However, this is where the similarities end. In lieu of human traditions and practices, the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah* were taken to be the solid foundation of morality. According to Mumtaz Ali, the Qur’ānic and Prophetic texts are not mere religious texts that are only relevant to their adherents or believers; rather, it is to be understood to be the source of True, Authentic, and Universal Knowledge that would correctly guide man to achieve his true purpose.<sup>41</sup> This means Mumtaz Ali posits that the Islamic worldview and knowledge should not be perceived reductionally as only appropriate for Muslims, but for all of mankind, as it describes and articulates the nature of man, world, and reality as it is, and how man may navigate through life.

The tension between reason and revelation is particularly significant in providing ethical guidelines and motivations. Does man only follow through with what is told to be good and avoid what is bad, as mentioned explicitly by God? Muhammad Abdullah Draz has explained that God’s order is not necessarily specific and definite, and many of the concepts of good are generic, creative, and constructive; thus, they can resonate well with various facets of man’s life, which makes up innumerable social relationships and contexts.<sup>42</sup> Rather than providing a long list of dos and don’ts, the *Qur’ān* has approached the matter by balancing between explaining what is its basis. Instead of making everything as straightforward answers and not leaving man with different routes of actions in life, this combination of generic and specific good or bad, in addition to different levels of man’s capabilities, is meant to offer many opportunities to exercise reason and creativity to suit the time, place, and issue. This also implies that the Islamic framework could still be relevant for today’s use despite being initially established in a vastly different context. In Draz’s

---

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>41</sup> Mumtaz Ali, *Issues in Islamization of Human Knowledge: Civilization Building Discourse of Contemporary Muslim Thinkers*, (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 2019), 26.

<sup>42</sup> Muhammad Abdullah Draz, *The Moral World of the Qur'an*, trans. Danielle Robinson and Rebecca Masterton, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), 6, 44.

words, the special features of *Qur'ānic* ethics are: "It (The Qur'an) chose a particular stamp to enunciate the formulation of its rules, being halfway between the abstract, vague, and indistinct and the concrete, which is too formalistic."<sup>43</sup>

The argument for culture in the case of moral relativism and tradition in the case of MacIntyre seems appealing because it is descriptive of the people and time and is practical in a way that Enlightenment-issued universal frameworks are not. The Islamic framework could present a foundation that is flexible but universal as well as permanent in its values, therefore incorporating the best parts of both moral systems. On the other hand, human traditions could be the vehicle to support one's — and the entire community by relation — moral values, though, as mentioned before, one may question the characteristics or standards by which these traditions are evaluated. Historicism would only employ the use of human reason within context and move towards an end that is unclear and subjective. Positively looking through its lenses would lead us to perceive human history evolving into an improved state, but that is not quite accurate. Therefore, the presence of the standards set in the True, Authentic, and Universal knowledge would be a stable foundation with which we may hold our tradition accountable.

Then, regarding man's position or relationship with the world and living from the Islamic perspective, al-Faruqi had put forward an interesting answer to this, which he had elaborated in his conception of the *Tawhīdic* paradigm. In his view, man is duty-bound by the relationship of man and God, which is defined by man's role as '*abd*'<sup>44</sup> and *khalīfah*.<sup>45</sup> The '*abd*' part of man is interrelated with the *khalīfah*, the first to the means of preparation for the second. It is the *khalīfah* within man that is depicted to have the Divine duty to participate and become a leading figure in one's society. Furthermore, the *Tawhīdic* paradigm did not halt within the boundaries of one's own culture, as it presented the basis that united all of mankind in the name of human dignity and brotherhood. There is no such thing as one person being superior to the other, except their *taqwā*,<sup>46</sup> which is a quality only known and understood by Allah SWT. All things considered, these are all only known to man through education, which calls the issue of isolated peoples' fates into question. In the *Tawhīdic* principles, al-Faruqi had clarified that God's wisdom was given to man not only

---

<sup>43</sup> Draz, *The Moral World of the Qur'an*, 5.

<sup>44</sup> Al-Fārūqī, *Tawhid: Its Implications for Thought and Life*, (Herndon, Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1992), 66.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

in the forms of Islamic revealed knowledge, but also the innate *fiṭrah* and reason.<sup>47</sup> This was illustrated in great detail by Ibn Tufayl in “The Tale of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan”, where Hayy, the main character of the novel, methodically utilized his reason to conclude the existence of God. However, such a line of thinking requires a pure heart, resilience, and high intellect,<sup>48</sup> which are not readily available and present in all men. Additionally, Hayy is completely isolated from any elements of human culture and civilization, notably taking literal decades to reach the truth. For that reason, one of the tasks essential to man is to spread the word of knowledge for others to live life with clear guidance.

## Conclusion

This paper has explored existing strands of relativist ideas in Western culture before delving into the response from Alasdair MacIntyre. His principal views on moral relativism were mainly extracted from his discussion on emotivism and inferred from his arguments. An analysis from the Islamic perspective reveals significant parallels with his concept of telos and its importance to developing the ideal ethical life. This similarity underlines the importance of ideals that offer a basis for living the good life beyond material gains consistently, a premise which may be found lacking in non-theistic or modern philosophies. By rearticulating the ethics in a theistic context, this may further encourage and offer a stronger basis for contemporary and practical solutions derived from Islamic in dealing with modern moral issues.

## References

- Al-Attas, Muhammad Naquib. (2014). *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam*. Johor Bahru, Johor Darul Ta'zim: Penerbit UTM Press.
- Al-Fārūqī. (1992). *Tawhid: Its Implications for Thought and Life*. Herndon, Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought.
- Ali, Mumtaz. (2019). *Issues in Islamization of Human Knowledge: Civilization Building Discourse of Contemporary Muslim Thinkers*. Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press.
- Bull, Sarah. (2025). Lily Phillips' Followers Fear She's Gone Too Far & Needs 'Sectioning' over Disturbing New Event to One-up B. *The Sun*, January 27. <https://www.thesun.co.uk/fabulous/33021441/lily-phillips-fears-mental-health-new-event-bonnie-blue/>.
- Draz, Muhammad Abdullah. (2008). *The Moral World of the Qur'an*. Translated by Danielle Robinson and Rebecca Masterton. London: I. B. Tauris.

---

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-71.

<sup>48</sup> Lenn E. Goodman, *Ibn Tufayl's Hayy Ibn Yaqzan: A Philosophical Tale*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 98-99.

- Flett, John. (1999). Alasdair MacIntyre's Tradition-Constituted Enquiry in Polanyian Perspective. *Tradition and Discovery the Polanyi Society Periodical*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (January 1): 11. <https://doi.org/10.5840/traddisc1999/200026219>.
- Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Keith Ansell-Pearson, and Carol Diethe. (2016). *On the Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Goodman, Lenn E. (2009). *Ibn Tufayl's Hayy Ibn Yaqzan: A Philosophical Tale*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gowans, Chris. (2015). *Moral Relativism* (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). Stanford.edu. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-relativism/#DesMorRel>.
- Hahn, Hans. (2023). On the Changeful History of Franz Boas's Concept of Cultural Relativism. *Ethnographisch-Archaeologische Zeitschrift*, Vol. 57, No. 1-12 (April 24): 1. <https://doi.org/10.54799/isbf2790>.
- Herodotus. (2023). *The Histories by Herodotus*; Translated by George Rawlinson. Roman Roads Media.
- Hume, David. (2007). *An Enquiry into the Sources of Morals*.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair C. (2014). *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. London: Bloomsbury.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. (1982). How Moral Agents Became Ghosts or Why the History of Ethics Diverged from that of the Philosophy of Mind. *Synthese*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (November): 295–312. <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00484905>.
- Michel De Montaigne, Charles Cotton, and William Carew Hazlitt. (2006). *Essays of Michel de Montaigne*.
- Pathak, Krishna Mani. (2014). A Critique of MacIntyrean Morality from a Kantian Perspective. *SAGE Open*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (April 15): 8. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014531585>.
- Rachels, James, and Stuart Rachels. (2022). *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. New York, Ny: McGraw-Hill Education, 10th ed.
- Rubarth, Scott. (2011). Relativism and Cosmopolitanism in Stoic Philosophy. *International Journal of Arts & Sciences*, Vol. 4, No. 13: 249–55.
- Wachbroit, Robert. (1985). Relativism and Virtue. *The Yale Law Journal*, Vol. 94, No. 6, (May): 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.2307/796142>.