


Volume 15, No. 3  2018

# *JOURNAL OF*

# *Islam in Asia*

A Refereed International Biannual Arabic – English Journal

**Special Issue: Integration of Islamic  
Revealed Knowledge into Humanities  
and Social Sciences**

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

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# ***Journal of Islam in Asia***

Special Issue: Integration of Islamic Revealed Knowledge  
into Humanities and Social Sciences 2018

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**Is Integration of Ethics in Islam with Social Sciences Viable? Exploring the Meaning and Nature of *al-Akhlaq* from the Qur'anic and Muslim Ethicists' Perspectives**

**Adakah Integrasi Ilmu Etika dalam Islam dengan Sains Kemasyarakatan Berdaya Maju? Eksplorasi Makna dan Ciri-ciri *al-Akhlaq* dari Perspektif al-Qur'an dan Pakar Ilmu Etika Muslim**

Amilah binti Awang Abd Rahman\*

**Abstract**

*Akhlaq* is not only a major dimension of Islam, but also the root of humanity in Islam. However, its relevance to the modern disciplines is yet to be extensively explored. This paper aims at looking into the relevance of *akhlaq* to the modern life, mainly through the Social Science disciplines. This paper analyzes the meaning of *akhlaq* with special connotation and expectation from the Qur'anic perspective, and its interpretation from Muslim ethicists. This paper seeks to answer the central problem related to typical perception on religious ethics that hinders its harmonious integration into the realm of human experience. The paper touches the issues on the real nature of *Akhlaq* and the place of human freedom and objectivity in *Akhlaq*. The role of *Akhlaq* in dealing with individual versus societal end is also explored. It is found that *Akhlaq* acts beyond the typical normative ethics and consistent in its standpoint of human agency with its concepts of motivation and sanction as addressed by the Qur'an. Instead of being abstract and dry, the generic nature of values in *Akhlaq* is adjustable to different experience, and harmonious to the life needs both at individual as well as societal level of man. Hence, *akhlaq* opens its door widely to work together with Social Science disciplines which can further enhance a better understanding of humanities in facing the social changes.

**Keywords:** *Akhlaq*, Social Sciences, Qur'anic Ethics, Normative, Motivation, Sanction.

**Abstrak**

*Akhlaq* bukan sahaja merupakan satu dimensi Islam yang utama, tetapi juga merupakan akar umbi kepada kemanusiaan dalam Islam. Walau bagaimanapun, hubungannya dengan disiplin-disiplin moden masih belum diteroka dengan mendalam. Ma-

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kalah ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji tentang hubungkait *akhlaq* dengan kehidupan moden terutamanya melalui disiplin Sains Kemasyarakatan. Ia menganalisa maksud *akhlaq* melalui konotasi khusus istilah dalam Bahasa Arab dan apa yang dibayangkan oleh al-Qur'an, berserta pentafsiran daripada ahli ilmu etika. Makalah ini ingin memberikan jawapan kepada permasalahan pokok tentang persepsi tipikal terhadap akhlak agama yang menghalang daripada mempunyai hubungan yang harmoni dengan ruang lingkup pengalaman manusia. Perbincangan menyentuh isu berkenaan sifat sebenar *Akhlaq* dan kedudukan kebebasan manusia dan ciri-ciri objektiviti *Akhlaq*. Peranan *Akhlaq* untuk memenuhi keperluan individu atau masyarakat juga dibincangkan. Dapatan kajian ialah *Akhlaq* bertindak melampaui persepsi tipikal etika normatif serta ia bergerak seiring dengan peranan manusia yang bertanggung jawab yang lengkap dengan konsep motivasi dan sanksi seperti yang dibawakan oleh al-Qur'an. Nilai-nilai *Akhlaq* adalah bersifat umum, dan bukannya tidak difahami (abstrak) dan statik, menjadikan ianya boleh dilentur mengikut pengalaman manusia yang berbeza dan harmoni dengan keperluan kehidupan manusia sama ada di peringkat individu mahupun masyarakat. Maka, *Akhlaq* membuka pintu yang luas kepada kerjasama dengan disiplin Sains Kemasyarakatan yang boleh membantu ke arah pembentukan pemahaman yang lebih baik tentang kemanusiaan ketika menghadapi segala perubahan dalam masyarakat.

**Kata Kunci:** *Akhlaq*, Sains Kemasyarakatan, Etika al-Qur'an, Normatif, Motivasi, Sanksi

### **Introduction**

*Akhlaq* is the third dimension of Islam which is responsible for morality and spirituality aspect of man. Being the third in the list<sup>1</sup> does not mean the third in importance. The core importance of spiritual dimension of man to boost high quality of life of the Muslims and their achievements which reflects the real spirit of the religion had been an area of concern by many renowned scholars such as Al-Ghazali, Shah Wali Allah al-Dahlawi, Muhammad Iqbal who considered it as vital and indispensable for renewal of the spirit of Islam in facing different challenges of the *ummah*.

However, up until the modern days, *akhlaq* has been an area without much exploration, especially in term of treating it as a discipline of study; or a discourse that analyzes its theoretical foundation to cater the needs of a modern man. The shortage is serious, to the extent that

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<sup>1</sup> *Akhlaq* is normally mentioned as the third aspect of Islam in referring to a *hadith* known as *hadith Jibril* where it is reported that Archangel Jibril came to ask the Prophet on important aspects of Islam, namely Iman, Islam and *Ihsan*. The *hadith* is reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

Abdul Haq Ansari claimed that its fundamental framework and nature of study is still not defined. He wrote, “Islamic ethics as a discipline or a subject does not exist at the present. We do not have works that define its concept, outline its issues and discuss its problem.”<sup>2</sup> Several other scholars including Abdullah Draz and Toshihiko Izutsu, voiced out that real interpretation of *akhlaq* from the most primary source of reference that is the Qur’an is yet to be explored in order to capture its original and comprehensive contribution.<sup>3</sup> Other than Draz and Izutsu, the latest figure who contributed to the new interpretation of *Akhlaq* is Taha Abd al-Rahman in his book *Su’al al-Akhlaq (The Akhlaq Matters)*.<sup>4</sup> They believe that *Akhlaq* does not only contain very rich principles of good and bad, but also rich with theoretical foundation that is capable of contributing important solutions to the Muslim life as well as general modern philosophy of ethics.

The discussion of this paper is mainly focused on exploring the relevance of *Akhlaq* to the field of Social Sciences. It attempts to provide a platform where both disciplines can together contribute majorly to the modern humanities. The advantage of *akhlaq* is the connection on the basis of values with Social Sciences. The nature of social sciences which generally focuses on man and society, which covers a wide array of approaches to the analysis of the social world delineated from theories of man as individuals and members in society involving the relationship between individuals and society, definitely touches the value system of man.

There are two challenges suffered by the ethics discussion in providing bases for Social Sciences. Both of the problems are highlighted by Flanagan in his introduction to his book *Virtue Ethics and Sociology: Issues of Modernity and Religion*. The first challenge is the missing of smooth relationship among modern theories of ethics which is phrased as:

*“The issues raised in virtue ethics belong to philosophy; they offset the narrowness of an ethics based on Kantian assumptions of reason and consequence; the spirit of cal-*

<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Abdul Haq Ansari, “Islamic Ethics: Concept and Prospect,” *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 6, no. 1 (1989): 81.

<sup>3</sup> See Abdullah Draz, *The Moral World of the Qur’an*. tr. Danielle Robinson and Rebecca Masterton, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), p. 2; also Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur’an* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2004), p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Taha Abd al-Rahman, *Su’al al-Akhlaq: Musahamat fi al-Naqd al-Akhlaqi li al-Hadathah al-Gharbiyyah* (Beyrut, Lubnan: al-Markaz al-‘Arabi al-Thaqafi, 2000).

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*culatation of utilitarianism; and the calibration of judgement to outcome, that speak of process, but of no moral substance and of no character or trait of goodness or evil.*"<sup>5</sup>

The situation is illustrated by some as an analogy of a group of blind men who attempted to describe an elephant. The men failed in their endeavour since everyone was describing what he touched which was only a part of the body, without visualizing the whole picture of what an elephant was all about. Indeed, the discipline of ethics is a very difficult subject, involving subtle topics. Instead of having new theories that incorporate the older ones, the conversations in ethics produce contradicting answers, circulating around the same problems again and again until today. To the extent Hauerwas and MacIntyre consider the philosophy of ethics to be problematic.<sup>6</sup>

The second challenge is the break-up between Ethics and Social Sciences. Ethics is immersed very deeply in philosophical debates neglecting the touch of real experience, whereas Social Sciences take the realm of human life as its whole concern. The final product is ethics work on its own in dealing with the issues concerned, and Social Sciences move to another direction to fulfil its expectation. In illustrating this situation, Flanagan wrote:

*"Kant did write on virtue, but the form it takes in virtue ethics is different. In reaction to the supposed narrowness of ethics and its apparent disconnection from the world as lived, the rise of virtue ethics, with its stress on character traits, on community and formation, and on moral excellence, might have uses in ameliorating the distance of philosophy from the world, but that is not the sociologist's weak flank. Whatever else his weakness, the sociologist lives in the world, and reflexivity enjoins that he speaks from it, to articulate its worries."*<sup>7</sup>

Another issue of concern is the expectation of coverage of the subject matter. It is indeed a challenging task for an ethics system to cater the needs of the whole discipline under the umbrella of Social Sciences with different aims. Social Sciences comprise different fields with differ-

<sup>5</sup> Kieran Flanagan, *Virtue Ethics and Sociology: Issues of Modernity and Religion* (New York: Palgrave Publishers, 2001) p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre, *Changing Perspectives in Moral Philosophy* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983)

<sup>7</sup> Kieran Flanagan, *Virtue Ethics and Sociology: Issues of Modernity and Religion*.

ent nature of dealings, as well as different subject matter. It ranges from Psychology which gives emphasis on the individual and inner self, to Sociology and Political Sciences which deal with social behaviour of a society. Economics is another branch that deals with human behaviour in dealing with material. The question at hand is that, whose end benefit the discipline strives for, which has been a question in the discipline of ethics which raised the issue of individualism versus altruism.

The above problems form the framework of this paper in exploring the potential relationship between Social Sciences and *Akhlaq*. It will look first at the meaning of *Akhlaq* in understanding what it really offers. Second is to understand the nature of *Akhlaq* in dealing with the question of human autonomous power, and the place of human experience in order to understand its attitude towards empirical and scientific studies. Third, to understand the scope of *Akhlaq* in dealing with the issue of individual well-being or societal interest. All in all, this discussion aims to furnish the area of interdisciplinary studies, especially between *Akhlaq* in specific and religious ethics in general, and modern disciplines.

To date, the bulk of works on the Islamic endeavour to relate its teachings with the modern context including modern humanities is mainly on the concept of Islamic worldview championed by Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, Abd al-Hamid Abu Sulayman and Mohd Kamal Hassan among others. The ethical aspect of Islam is generally incorporated under the worldview, but it needs to be discussed independently in order to have comprehensive and thorough impact. Hence, this writing is a preliminary step providing a platform for a joined program between Social Sciences and *Akhlaq* to provide a more complete system of reference for human life.

### **Definition of *Akhlaq***

The literal meaning *Akhlaq* is traced from its root alphabets. The word *akhlaq* is a plural noun of *khulq* from the root alphabet of 'khā', 'lām', and 'qāf' which is pronounced as *khuluq* instead of *khalq*. It is interesting that the difference between *khuluq* (innate peculiarity; natural disposition, character, temper, nature)<sup>8</sup> and *khalq* (creation, making, origination, physical constitution)<sup>9</sup> is basically complementing each other. At

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<sup>8</sup> Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (New York: Spoken Language Services, Inc., 1994).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.,

the same time, both words represent two important aspects of man; namely, the physical and moral strength of man.

There are two verses of the Qur'an that contain the word *khuluq*. The first one is "This is no other than *khuluq* (customary device) of the ancients."<sup>10</sup> Ibn 'Abbas defines the word *khuluq* in this verse as custom, character and *din* (religion). Similar interpretation made by al-Qurtubi interprets it as ancient customs, religion, character, ideology, or doctrine. In explaining religion as associated with *Akhlaq*, Hamdy 'Abd al-'Al contends that it is because both *din* and *akhlaq* share the same task of guiding human action and therefore *akhlaq* is the very spirit and substance of Islam; and not only one of its aspects.<sup>11</sup> Zaroug on the other hand, reflected on *akhlaq* as reflecting the worldview of Islam. *Akhlaq* is then, as comprehensive as religion in guiding man in his life. These mentioned discussions highlighted the central role of *akhlaq* in man's life.

Another verse that mentions the word *khuluq* in the Qur'an is "And you (Muhammad) have a sublime character."<sup>12</sup> The saying shows that *akhlaq* is a major aspect and about over-all performance of man. The model and best example of good *akhlaq* is the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Prophetic tradition related to *akhlaq*: "I was sent to sanctify the noble characteristic."<sup>13</sup> This shows that the purpose of sending down the Prophet is to sanctify good conduct and groom good *akhlaq*. This is the most important objective of Islam.

A tradition that reflects this verse is the saying of Aisha in answering a question about the *Akhlaq* of the Prophet. She said, "His *akhlaq* is the Qur'an."<sup>14</sup> Another inference that can be deduced from the saying other than that the Prophet being the best example is, the Qur'an contains very important principles of *akhlaq* that should be emulated by Muslims.

The meaning of *akhlaq* is also represented by other words such as *'amal ṣaliḥ* which is associated with good faith in more than 45 verses. Izutsu considers this relationship to be "the strongest tie of semantic relationship into an almost inseparable unit."<sup>15</sup> 'Good' in the Qur'an is rep-

<sup>10</sup> Al-Shu'ara': 137

<sup>11</sup> Hamdy 'Abd al-'Al, *Al-Akhlaq wa Mi'yaruha bayna al-Wad'iyyat wa al-Din* (Kuwait: Dar al-Qalam, 2002), 13.

<sup>12</sup> Al-Qalam: 4.

<sup>13</sup> Muhammad ibn Ismail Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari* (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risalah, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad.

<sup>15</sup> Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*, p. 237.



resented by various terms such as *ṣāliḥ*, *birr*, *ma'rūf*, *khayr*, *ṭayyib*, *ḥusn*, *ḥalāl*; 'bad' by *fasād*, *munkar*, *sharr*, *khabiṭh*, *ḥarām*, and *dhunūb*.<sup>16</sup> Many characteristics of man are associated with moral conduct including the *kafir* or *kufir* (unbeliever) as a symbol of ingratitude and injustice, believer as a symbol of high commitments to duties given. The main reason for rejecting the truth is also related to morality that is *istikbara* which means arrogant.<sup>17</sup>

Good characteristics are repeatedly mentioned as ends of moral life. The believers are exhorted to be *muḥsinūn*, *muttaqūn*, *muslimūn*, *muflīḥūn*; they are also warned of the bad characters such as *ẓulm*, *mujrim*, and others. Verses on the pillars of faith are also motivations for man to be good in life. Important principles of ethics are mentioned consistently, such as that all deeds will be presented in the real Judgment Day, the deeds will be rewarded and punished accordingly, the good will be rewarded with good<sup>18</sup> and even better than the deeds,<sup>19</sup> whereas the bad will be punished bad and even worse.

The understanding of the concept of God in the Qur'an is also God as the best Judge, since He is the most knowing, hearing and seeing, beyond any boundaries which include what is in the heart or hidden by man. In fact, the stories of the Prophets of Allah and their communities are meant to give moral lessons to the human beings. Therefore, it is clear that the Qur'an has made good conduct and good personality to be its major aim.

The concept of *ihsan* and *taqwa* are associated with *Akhlaq*. *Ihsan* literally means better. Based on a narration by 'Umar, Jibril came and sat closely in front of the Prophet asking several important questions about *iman* (faith), Islam and *Ihsan*.

"He said, 'Tell me about al-Ihsan (goodness).' He [the Prophet (p.b.u.h.)] answered, 'It is that you worship Allah

<sup>16</sup> See Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*, pp. 236-282.

<sup>17</sup> See for example, *al-Zumar*: 59; *Sad*: 75; *al-Baqarah*: 87; *al-Jathiah*: 31

<sup>18</sup> There are many verses that mention that the reward for those who do good is the Heaven, and they will be permanently there with all sorts of pleasure and sources of happiness. Among others, *al-Baqarah*: 25; 82; *al-Nisa'*: 57; 122; 173; *Hud*: 23 and many others.

<sup>19</sup> There are several verses mentioning that Allah will reward the best of what the servant do. For example *al-Kahfi*: 30 and *al-Ahqaf*: 16.

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*as if you see Him. And even though you do not see Him,  
[you know] He sees you.* '20

The Arabic word *taqwa* literally means "forbearance, fear and abstinence." It is also known to mean 'God's consciousness' with the general meaning of being conscious and cognizant of Allah. This means that *taqwa* of Allah is about a man who will try his best to avoid from what is not favoured by Allah. In a famous interpretation of *taqwa* by Ubay ibn Ka'ab who responded to Umar's question of what is *taqwa*. Ubay said said, "Have you ever walked on a path that has thorns on it?" Umar said, "Yes." Ubay asked, "What did you do then?" to which Umar replied, "I rolled up my sleeves and struggled." Ubay said, "That is *taqwa*, to protect oneself from sin through life's dangerous journey so that one can successfully complete the journey unscathed by sin."<sup>9</sup>

*Ihsan* and *taqwa* are a good combination where *Ihsan* is about improving self on the good side, whereas *taqwa* originally means fearing God from doing bad. Both carry the meaning of highest respect to Allah out of love and fear, and therefore encourage Muslims to avoid any sin as much as they could and produce the best action that they could. It is interesting that these two states are actually in the form of dispositions and not action. It is the state of potentials of the self of performing the good, as much that it could, and avoiding the bad, the best that it could. These two qualities have been made to be the real sanctions of *akhlaq* which makes every man to be responsible to nurture the character of his self.

The most established definition of *Akhlaq* in the interpretations of the philosophers is generally as what al-Ghazali presented: "*Akhlaq* (character) means established states (of the soul) from which actions proceed easily, without any need for reflection and deliberation. If this state is such that good actions-i.e. those which are praised by reason and *Shari'ah*- proceed from it, it is called good character. If the actions proceed from the evil state, it is called bad character (*akhlaq*)."<sup>21</sup>

The established state of the soul is characterized by stability, easy and spontaneous in producing certain nature of action.<sup>22</sup> The ideal state is a balanced or mean state, as a result of perfect balanced between excessive and deficiency in the faculties of intellect, anger and temperance which will lead to justice. Inner side of man has immediate relation with

<sup>20</sup> Narrated by al-Bukhary in his *Sahih al-Bukhary* 1/19; Muslim in *Sahih Muslim*, 1/36.

<sup>21</sup> Muhammad Abul Quasem, *The Ethics of Al-Ghazali: A Composite Ethics in Islam* (New York: Caravan Books, 1978), p. 80.

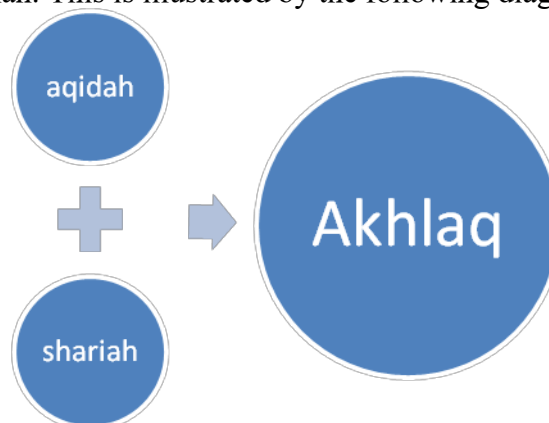
<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

human actions which are manifestations of the quality of the inner self. These both sides of man are interpenetrating in the Islamic ideal.<sup>23</sup>

It is interesting that this theory also deals directly with the concept of inner self. The character as the product of the process of grooming the self is also in the state of disposition and the state of self in responding to different experience in life. Hence, *akhlaq* is beyond the expectation of normative ethics. In fact, it is grooming high quality skills of controlling the self in dealing with various experiences in life. *Akhlaq* is truly carrying the whole spirit of religion; of pushing man to carry out his duties as vicegerent of Allah. It is indeed about the real ‘applied ethics’ but not limited to normal term of ‘applied ethics’ where the main concern is to answer specific problems faced by human beings.

*Akhlaq* is also beyond the deontological or teleological ethics. Draz managed to prove that the Qur’an has brought a complete moral system in terms of concept of obligation, responsibility and sanction. In responding to the conflict of realism versus idealism, absolute versus practical system he came with the conclusion that that the Qur’an is able to produce a perfect prodigious effect by positioning human action between fixed and flexible. Its message is again unique with threefold perfection: softness within firmness, progress within stability, and nuance within unity.<sup>24</sup>

Being the third dimension of Islam, *akhlaq* is really the active side of religion. Compared to faith and *shari‘ah* law or *Fiqh* which are generally about imposing certain belief and rules to human, *akhlaq* is the realm of ‘action’ to man. This is illustrated by the following diagram.



<sup>23</sup> Abdul Haq Ansari, *The Ethical Philosophy of Ibn Miskawaih*, p. 27

<sup>24</sup> M. A Draz, *The Moral World of the Quran*, p. 5

### **The place of Human Agency and Human Experience in *Akhlaq***

Human realities in life experience has been the core business of different areas of the Social Sciences, from Psychology to Sociology, Political Sciences as well as Economics. This is coming from the confidence of human agency in their actions. The subject matter and methodology of Social Sciences are to focus on the concern of human beings in dealing with various changes and challenges of life. Therefore, there is a need of new methodology to assess what really happens in human life.

In order to work hand in hand with the Social Sciences, *akhlaq* must look at the linking point with the discipline in relation to the human agency and their experience. Making choice is central in the concept of human action in Islam. The first evidence that the Qur'an is serious in human freedom is that the whole message of the Qur'an is to address the human self. The Qur'an is full of verses that make use of direct dialog between the Qur'an and human beings. The Qur'an also is lucid in addressing human mind, each piece of verses is to make human enlightened and later, to react accordingly. The highlights in the Qur'an related to matters of faith, together with sufficient and ready evidences to man, is meant to instill in human real understanding. The Qur'an directly mentions about "*afalā ta'qilūn*" (... don't you think or comprehend?) and "*la'allakum ta'qilūn*" (so that you can comprehend).<sup>25</sup>

The main message of the Qur'an is basically to motivate man to make good choice, and the most important choice is to opt for the sound faith. This is the message behind the declaration and explanation of the sound faith which is the most primary message of the Book. It is full of encouragement to choose for the sound faith and warning as well stern exhortations against the false one, including the narrations of the past people who did not accept the teachings of the Prophets such as the people of Nuh, Lut, Salih, Musa and others.

The next choice expected is to follow the 'straight path' of observing good way of life through the *shari'ah* such as leaving bad actions such as killing, stealing, adultery, cheating, as well as recommendations to do good such as being truthful, helping others, donate, and many other good practices.

In order to enhance good choices of man, Islam provides relevant answers to the foundation of human action. Among others, Islam has

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<sup>25</sup> The exact phrase of "... don't you think", and "so that you will comprehend" appear in more than 20 verses, such as *al-Baqarah*: 44; 73;76 and 242; *Al 'Imran*: 62 and 118.

made it very clear that this life is a realm of tests to man to test who is the best among all human beings. Allah said:

*“He Who created Death and Life, that He may try which of you is best in deed: and He is the Exalted in Might, Oft-Forgiving”*<sup>26</sup>

Human beings are responsible to carry their tasks and duties in this life as part of their promise to God and bear serious consequences in case of failure from fulfilling the trust. The Qur'an presents choices that human can take either good or bad. It is human who should be responsible in his or her choices; and also the state of self that he or she has finally.

The first thing to enhance the spirit of accountability is through the concept of God that makes man cannot escape by any means. God who is All-knowing, All-hearing and All-seeing is the only Judge for human action. The Qur'an also mentions many times about God who really knows “what you make it clear and what you hide”<sup>27</sup> and confirmed by phrases like

*“and of all things He hath perfect knowledge.”, “He is aware of everything that you do” and “Allah will not be negligence in what you do”.*<sup>28</sup>

The promise and affirmation of reward and punishment is repeatedly mentioned to ensure man to make good decisions in life. Belief in the Hereafter is not the second pillar of faith, but has been associated with belief in Allah in many verses to show its importance and big impact in human action.

Another hindrance of the system of ethics to work together with human experience is the general understanding that it is about a set of rules and values that are abstract, dry and not flexible in relation to different experiences of man. However, *Akhlaq*, in a holistic understanding, goes beyond the normative set of rules. Draz in defining the scope of ethics in Islam said that it is about “a hierarchy of values, both positive and negative, cleverly arranged and richly detailed.”<sup>29</sup> The hierarchy of values consists of not only the elementary and definitive duties, but also creative, constructive virtue, a field of activity which is so vast that it comprises endless degrees, all possible and practicable. The latter category

<sup>26</sup> *Al-Mulk*: 2

<sup>27</sup> For example, *al-Nahlu*: 19; *al-Taghabun*: 4; *al-Baqarah*: 77.

<sup>28</sup> The strong effect of the last phrase alone is used in more than 10 verses. Among others, *al-Baqarah*: 74; 85; 140; 144; 149; *Ali Imran*: 99 and others.

<sup>29</sup> Draz, *The Moral World of the Qur'an*, p. 44.

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ry is really opening the door for individuals to play his or her role in selecting his or her role since individual conscience will have different responses and tendencies in accordance to moral capacity and end.<sup>30</sup> Draz further related that man is left with his autonomous role to use his reason to opt for actions. He said: "between the undetermined and the determined there lies the whole gamut of options, not only for the free choice of a psychological conscience, but also for the intelligent evaluation of the moral conscience, since the distinctive features of any singular act are neither all to be ignored nor all to be considered; most of the time they have both characteristics, either in succession according to the case, or simultaneously, according to the point of view at which one is placed. It therefore requires an individual effort and a special tact to appreciate them for their proper value and to choose those which are the most essential."<sup>31</sup>

In addition, *Akhlaq* is appreciated more for its values and not rules. Among others is patience, responsible, accountable, and truthful. These by nature are generic and fit with the rule of thumb, instead of being dry rules. Abdul Haq Ansari in highlighting this nature of values said:

*"The determination of a particular course of action in a situation is often not a process of strict logical deduction from certain principles. One has to study the situation before him, balance the demands of various principles and assess the consequences of different alternatives before deciding upon any action."*<sup>32</sup>

Hence, the ethical judgement, in its deepest analysis, changes in accordance to situation.

To illustrate into real life example, a person who is capable to donate a thousand dollar per month but chooses to donate only ten dollars is not making a wise decision. Another example is mercy; a virtue that can turn to bad if it is done excessively especially in disciplining a child, where too much leniency will take place and makes the whole process of disciplining as not successful.

Moral decision is also not unilateral. Decisions are made out of different expectations from different aspects of life. It also involves various relationships which go beyond the personal to familial and social

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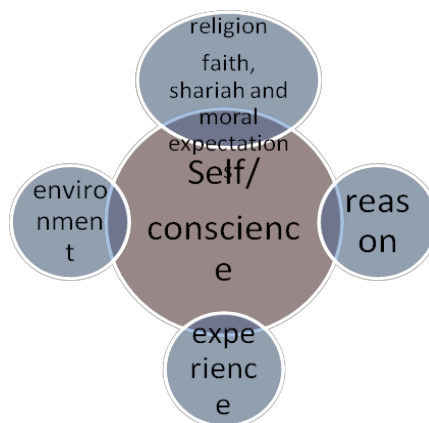
<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Draz, *The Moral World of the Qur'an*, p. 63.

<sup>32</sup> Abdul Haq Ansari, *The Ethical Philosophy of Ibn Miskawaih*, p. 29.

ones which are captured by the phrase “No man is an island” in Sociology. The whole spectrum of human effort is about the amalgamation of relationships of human: the personal, familial, social, human and divine which requires man to balance them up. This is the gist of the Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC) theory popularized by Alan Gewirth.<sup>33</sup>

All in all, *Akhlaq* really suits the meaning of applied ethics in a comprehensive understanding in the sense that it gives way for man to decide, choose relevant choices of actions. This is illustrated with the following image:



### The Place Objectivity in Empirical Studies

The question of objectivity is primary in Social Sciences. The general perception is that the religious ethics do not fulfil the criteria of objectivity, hence do not fit with empirical study.

The first point to highlight on the extent of *Akhlaq*'s openness to the objectivity and empirical studies is about the freedom and autonomous power of man in decision making. The major part of the discussion on this freedom was discussed under the previous point, on the role of human in the ethical choices. For this, Draz wrote:

*“A rule is never made in order to shackle our freedom, but somehow to increase it. Instead of allowing our thoughts to be scattered across all the possible meanings in the search for wise rulings, the advantage of having an established rule is firstly to spare us from stumbling and thus diminishing the chance of making an error. It also provides a framework for our activity so that it increases in power*

<sup>33</sup> Alan Gewirth, *Reason and Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

*and effectiveness. Our freedom may lose in extension but it gains in depth, in the search for the best ways of performing a duty.*"<sup>34</sup>

Another point to prove its objectivity is to look at the extent to which *Akhlaq*'s injunctions are consistent with human experiences. The behaviours that are condemned by all religions are: murder, killing, Adultery, fornication, immorality, stealing, theft, robbery, Lying, cheating, deceit, bearing false witness, Slandering, backbiting.<sup>35</sup> These vices are proven to be harmful to the society. On the other hand, the good includes love, compassion, forgiveness, generosity, helpfulness, forgiveness, sympathy, empathy. Religions also look high at discipline, integrity, patience, resilience. These values or virtues are proven to be important in human life.

Furthermore, *Akhlaq* has made the *shari'ah* law as its axis which is to follow certain objectives (*maqasid shari'ah*) for the sake of well-being of man. *Maqasid al-shari'ah* are deliberated into several layers: necessities (*daruriyyat*), complementary (*hajiyyat*) and embellishment (*tahsiniyyat*). The necessities are the most crucial ones which stemmed into five crucial needs of man, namely faith, soul (life), wealth, mind and lineage.

The awareness to have fundamental consensus on binding values, irrevocable standards and personal attitudes among world religions in facing various challenges of modernity brought to a declaration called as "The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions or known as Global Ethic" which was attended by representatives of major religions of the world.<sup>36</sup> It was such a successful declaration since all religions agree to have such declarations which include:

1. No new global order without a new global ethic
2. A fundamental demand: Every human being must be treated humanely
3. Four irrevocable directives
  - a. Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life
  - b. Commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order
  - c. Commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness

<sup>34</sup> Draz, *The Moral World of the Qur'an*, p. 64.

<sup>35</sup> Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman, *Religion and Pluralistic Co-Existence: The Muhibah Perspective* (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 2010), pp. 67, 85-88.

<sup>36</sup> Hans Kung and Karl-Josef Kuschel (eds), *A Global Ethics: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions* (New York: Continuum, 1995).



- d. Commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women

This declaration shows that the concerns of religions are common, and fundamental to the peaceful living of people either for their own self or society.

When it comes to specific decisions at a particular time and situation, as had been proven before, it is mainly made by the person. *Akhlaq* wishes to organize certain guidance in decision making. Decision is not on one hand random, capricious, uncontrolled and irrational. On the other, it is not static, forced and determined as what human can perceive. What a person needs to know is that, he is free across various choices recommended by religion.

And since decision of an action is indeed complicated, especially for those who are serious in his decision, it opens widely to human thinking and considerations. Therefore, daily decision making in *Akhlaq* are open to studies based on human reasons and experience, and in line with the spirit of objectivity in Social Sciences.

### ***Akhlaq* as the Key to Link between Individuals and Society**

*Akhlaq* ranges from the most inner training of individual man, as the most core content of human behavioural development, to the societal arrangement. The value system as the subject matter of *Akhlaq* unites individuals and society into the same arrangements.

It begins with the most inner side of man. The established classical interpretation of *akhlaq* including al-Ghazali focuses on the concept of soul as the source of good action. In fact, the whole process of educating self is to achieve established good state of soul which requires the whole life span of man. It is the good state which continuously produces good actions, both for the goodness of self and also for others. Therefore, the good self is the key of producing good actions, not only for himself but also for all.

It is also interesting that *Akhlaq* has made the societal concerns as its priority. The rigorous definition and conditions relating to conscience found in the Qur'an loses its power when it comes to negative effects on others.<sup>37</sup> *Akhlaq* has made the crimes and wrongdoings affecting others as its prime vices including killing, stealing and even slandering and backbiting. Even though there are different degrees of punishment in the case of negligence or absence of intention, it is still imposed mainly be-

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<sup>37</sup> Draz, *The Moral World of the Qur'an*, p. 108

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cause of the effect on others. To the extent that asking forgiveness from God is not valid when one has violated others’ rights. This is to justify that an action with negative effect on others or bad consequence to members of society whose rights are violated is a sensitive concern of Islam.

Punishment towards crimes has been without compromise, and it is for sure because of societal interest. It is really a lesson for a person after committing any crime, and to give lesson to others not to follow or try to commit such crime. There is a famous prophetic tradition that shows the one who sets the precedent of bad practices, as well as good, is carrying the same sin and reward as the actors.

*“He who inaugurates a good sunnah (practice) in Islam earns the reward of it and of all who perform it after him without diminishing their own rewards in the slightest. And he who inaugurates an evil sunnah (practice) is guilty of the sin of it and of all who perform it after him without diminishing their own sins in the slightest.”<sup>38</sup>*

### **Conclusion**

*Akhlaq*, a religious value system is proven to be unique. It should not be trapped into any label introduced by the modern concepts which include teleological, deontological, virtue, as well as any specific characteristics such as realism, idealism, absolute and subjective. In fact, it is a system that combines all the strength of a value system needed by man.

Other than being in line with the objectivity and common sense, *Akhlaq* is surprisingly very friendly to the changes taking place in human life. The generic nature of values in *Akhlaq* makes it adjustable to human experience. Hence, the room for working together with the Social Sciences is widely open. On the one hand, *Akhlaq* is rich with the philosophical foundation, and on the other hand it is open for the empirical methods specialized by the Social Sciences.

The applied aspect of *Akhlaq*, should be strengthened in order to revitalize its role in the modern life. Indeed, relating *Akhlaq* to Social Science whose niche is dealing with the real experience of man is vital.

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<sup>38</sup> Narrated by Imam Muslim.

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