



## Islamic Ethics: An Outline of its Concept and Essence (II)

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### Abstract

Since the early epochs of the Muslim history, the study of ethics, a field that is traditionally known among Muslim scholars as *tahdhib al-akhlaq* (character purification), has been an essential part of Muslim intellectual heritage. It is true that *the Qur'an* and *Sunnah* are the foundations of good morals, to which Muslims, including companions of the Prophet (s. a. w.), made constant reference to address moral issues. However, Muslim theologians and jurists (*fuqaha*) as well as the Sufis (*ahl al-tasawuf*), gave a considerable effort, time and again, to address, though in different approaches, the nature, the scope and the parameters of the Islamic ethics. This paper uses analytical method, and it aims to highlight the essence of the Islamic ethics. It provides an explanatory account of the basic components of the Islamic moral system, such as the inborn character (*fitrah*), the good motive (*niyyah hassanah*) of the moral agent and the role of the *shari'ah* principles in determining the moral property of given moral conducts. The related texts of *the Qur'an* and Prophetic narrations as well as the opinion of the scholars in this topic would be analysed.

**Keyword:** Ethical philosophy, essential components, Islamic morality, analysis

### Abstrak

Kajian etika sejak zaman awal sejarah Islam terhadap bidang yang secara tradisinya terkenal di kalangan ulama Islam sebagai *tahdhib al-akhlaq* (penulenan akhlak) telah menjadi bahagian yang penting dalam warisan intelektual Muslim. Memang benar bahawa *al-Qur'an* dan *sunnah* merupakan asas kepada akhlak yang baik kepada orang Islam, termasuk sahabat Rasulullah (SAW) yang merupakan rujukan tetap bagi menangani isu-isu moral. Walau bagaimanapun, ahli-ahli teologi Islam dan pakar undang-undang (*fuqaha*) dan juga para sufi (*ahl al-tasawuf*), telah memberikan satu usaha yang besar dan masa bagi menangani, walaupun dalam pendekatan yang berbeza, sifat, skop dan parameter dari segi etika Islam. Karya tulis ini menggunakan kaedah analisis, dan ia bertujuan untuk menyerlahkan inti pati bagi etika Islam. Ia menyediakan akaun penerangan bagi komponen asas sistem moral Islam, seperti watak semula jadi (*fitrah*), motif yang baik (*niyyah hassanah*) bagi ejen moral dan peranan prinsip *syari'ah* dalam menentukan ciri moral apabila diberikan kelakuan moral. Teks-teks yang berkaitan dengan *al-Qur'an* dan riwayat Nabi Muhammad (SAW) serta pendapat daripada para ulama dalam kajian ini akan dianalisis.

**Kata kunci:** Etika falsafah, komponen asas, kemoralan Islam, analisis

### Introduction

The essence of the Islamic ethical system is derived from the universal standards of right and wrong, which are inherently embodied in the inborn character of man, and guided by the Divine Commands of God (*al-wahy al-ilahiyyi*). Islamic ethical system is characterized by a number of attributes; *first*, the

value system of Islamic ethics transcends human desires and wants, in such a way that man's acquired desires and wants are not the source of judging the morality or immorality of given conducts; indeed from the perspective of Islam, man's acquired desires and wants are governed by norms of morality, and thus, it differs from conventional ethical systems such as egoism, altruism and utilitarianism, which are primarily founded on humanism. *Second*, Islamic moral values are marked by ideals of absolutism and reliability of ethical norms, with flexibility of application and practice, thus, moral systems of relativism and moral subjectivity run counter to the Islamic ethics. *Third*, for it promotes universal justice

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and equality of man, it also differs from religious ethical systems which are marked by Caste system and Ethnocentrism. The moral teachings of Caste system and Ethnocentrism are both driven by favouritism and exclusivism, whereby God favours some people over others, and thus run counter to the norms of universal brotherhood and equality. Thus, Islam ethics disagrees with the moral favouritism and exclusivism, and rather teaches universal brotherhood and equality of man, regardless of race or culture. In Islamic ethics, people are judged based on the content of their moral character, not based on the colour of their skin nor according to their gender. *Fourth*, in the Islamic ethical system, life is not *nihil* nor it is illusive, rather life is real and purposive, hence, Islam presents ethical system with a positive outlook. In this respect, moral positions of nihilism and the concept of suffering taught by some conventional philosophies and religious traditions have no place in the Islamic moral system. *Fifth*, in the Islamic ethical system, the norm is that of non-liability (*al-bara'ah al-asliyyah*), which implies that every man and woman are born with innocent character (*al-fitrah al-asliyyah*); a state which is not deprived or weighed by original sins, therefore requiring no salvation, mediator, or saviour, hence, the concept of Original Sin taught by certain religious faiths, runs counter to the Islamic concept of morality. In Islam, moral agents are born with original innocence (*fitrah asliyyah*), a state which is free from prior defectives. The moral agent is then required to maintain this original state of being good, by being personally accountable for his or her deeds. This paper aims to address the concept and the basic components of the Islamic ethical system.

### The Concept

The Arabic term: *khuluq* (plural, *akhlaq*), which more or less has the same connotations of the English word 'ethics' (Hornby, Cowie, & Lewis, 1974), comes in *the Qur'an*, two times; al-Shu'ara (*The Qur'an* 26:137), and al-Qalam (*The Qur'an* 68:4), in which it denotes character, custom, religion and ideology or doctrine. According to the Muslim exegete of *the Qur'an*, al-Qurtubi (d.1273 C. E), the word *khuluq al-awwalin* (خُلُقُ الْأَوَّلِينَ) as mentioned in chapter 26, verse 137, of *the Qur'an*, means: "their ancient customs and it includes religion, character, ideology, or doctrine." (Al-Qurtubi, 1993a). The term *akhlaq* is often used to refer to moral philosophy, the practice of virtues, natural disposition, etiquette and manners. Closely related to *akhlaq*, is the Arabic word *adab*, which is often used as an interchangeable term to *akhlaq* (Al-Kaysi, 1986). *Adab* basically denotes manner, attitude, behaviour, and the etiquette of putting things in their proper place. In relation to behaviour, *adab*

implies refinement, good manners, decency, humaneness, courtesy, respect, appropriateness, and fulfilment of prescribed codes of conduct. Though the terms *adab* and *akhlaq* address moral character in general, and often employed as a synonymous terms, but similar to the English words of morality and ethics, *akhlaq* and *adab* have some differences in terms of application and usage; *adab* denotes set of principles of right conducts, while *akhlaq* reflects the philosophy or the theory of moral conducts. In this case, *adab* reflects the conduct and the behaviour, while *akhlaq* implies the philosophy and the justifications of why the given conducts (behaviour) is morally right or otherwise. *Akhlaq* addresses the theoretical background of human conducts, while '*adab*' is more on the actions and manners, whereby the later talks about what is the proper (or improper) behaviour of man, while the focus of the former is more on the reasoning part of why such actions are proper or otherwise; hence *akhlaq* reflects the "moral philosophy". For instance, we often feel that there is something wrong or improper about conducts like cheating, bribery, lying and murder; these conducts show lack of *adab* or improper behavior. *Akhlaq* goes one step further and addresses the reason or the justification of why such conducts are improper; as such, these two terms address two levels of human character, however function as complementary terms which describe two dimensions of what man *ought to do*.

### Conceptually

In the Islamic literature, *akhlaq* is generally understood as a character (*sifah/hay'ah*) or: "state of the soul which determines human actions (Omar, 2003). This state (*sifah*) is not the soul itself, but its (soul's) attribute or state (*halah* or *hay'ah*), which is manifested in conducts; though this character is a state of the soul and manifested in actions, however, is neither the soul nor the action. In his book on *Christian and Muslim Ethics*, Mohd Nasir offered a concise comparison between ethics and the human soul according to the Islamic perspective. He said: "the soul is innate, while character is a state of the soul that causes it (the soul) to perform its actions. The state is acquired by training and practice, while the soul is inborn and part of man's inborn nature. That is to say that, the soul represents an ontological structure-not indeed a thing but something as real (and real in the same way), whereas character is something that can be described as a human achievement" (Omar, 2003). The state (*sifah* or *hay'ah*) of the soul is divided into two forms; "inborn character (*fitriyyah*) and acquired character (*muktassabah*) (Al-Maydani, 1992), the former is

identical with the soul, in a sense that both the soul and the primordial character of the soul are innate and part of man's inborn nature. For God is good and He creates only good, both of the soul and the inborn character of the soul are good. The latter form of the human character, that is the acquired character, is not inborn but acquired (*muktasab*) right from infant age to adulthood. It is this form of the person's character in which personal attitudes, culture, education and social environment play an important role to shape the ethical character of given individuals.

Furthermore, both the inborn and the acquired character of the soul are different from the action; for character is the internal and the hidden state of the soul, while action is its outward manifestation. Character is the inward cause, while the action is outward consequence. A good character hence begets good action, whereas a bad character yields bad actions (Omar, 2003). As such, conducts are the outcome of the state of the soul, as argued by al-Farabi (d. 950 CE), the Muslim philosopher who is among early Muslim scholars who wrote a remarkable works in this field. According to al-Farabi, the "state of the soul by which a man does good deeds and fair actions are the virtues (*fadhā'il al-akhlaq*), and those by which he does wicked deeds and ugly actions, are vices (*raza'il al-akhlaq*) (Al-Farabi, 1987; Al-Farabi, 1984). In his book *Tahzib al-Akhlaq* (character purification), Ibn Miskawayhi (d. 1030 CE), presents a view, which resembles that of al-Farabi. He stated that *akhlaq* is: "a state of the soul which causes it (the soul) to perform its actions without thought or deliberation (Ibn Miskawayhi, 2006). Similar definition of ethics is given by Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d.505 A H), who described ethics as a character of the soul (*hay'atun rasikhah fi al-nafs*), based on which the individual makes his or her wilful behaviour; if the character of the soul produces desirable outcome, then such character is described as a good moral character. However, if the outcome is bad then such character would be described as a bad character. According to him, ethics means the "existing capabilities in the soul (of someone) that enables him to easily perform various actions without requiring deep thinking and contemplation (Al-Ghazali, n.d.). By associating ethics to the conducts that are habitually performed "without requiring deep thinking and contemplation", as stated in his definition, Al-Ghazali is not denying the importance of thoughtful considerations and deliberated decisions in given circumstances, rather he is emphasizing the role of consciences and innate motives in morality. He adds that the state of the soul is internal and thus hidden to us, however the goodness of the state of the soul, or otherwise, could be determined according to

the manifested actions of the moral agent. This means that desirable conducts of the moral agent reflect good state of the soul (*khuluqan hasan*), while moral agent's bad behaviour is a display of wicked state of the soul (*khuluqan sayi'an*). Furthermore, according to Al-Ghazali, the worthiness of a given moral conduct is measured based on the norms of human rationality (*'aqlan*) or on the bases of the divine norms (*'aqlan wa shar'an*). By doing so, he seems to acknowledge the fact that, good moral sense consists of two dimensions; internal and external.

The former stems from the inborn character of the soul, not from the acquired character of the soul, while the latter is shaped by the teachings of divine revelations. Hence, given conducts are morally worthy as long as such conducts are the manifestation of the good innate character of the soul (*hay'at al-nafs al-mahmudah*) and fulfils the dictums stipulated by the *shari'ah* norms. Closely related to Al-Ghazali's definition is presented by Abd Karim Zaydan. In his book *usul al-da'wah*, he relates ethics to the state or character of the soul (Zaydan, 1988). He defines ethics as the total sum of senses and attributes of the soul, based on which given conducts of the moral agents are manifested. In addition, in his book *min qadaya al-akhlaq fi al-fikr al-islamiyi*, Abd Qadir presents a definition of ethics that is closely related to that of Al-Ghazali, whereby the term *akhlaq* conceptually denotes both an inborn character and acquired attributes (Abd Qadir, 2003). In his book *al-Akhlaq*, modern Muslim writer, Ahmad Amin, equated ethics to "*'adatul-iradah*, i. e., habits of the will" (Amin, 1969), in such a way that wilful habits of the moral agent form the morality of the person. The equation of ethics to *adatul al-iradah* implies two things; *first*, conducts that are performed with the absence of the moral agent's will, perhaps due to external force or coercion, are often not counted as moral ones or otherwise. *Second*, ethical conducts are the ones, which the moral agents perform habitually. In this sense the *habitual will* of the moral agent determines the desirability of his or her conducts or otherwise. Similarly, contemporary Muslim writers like Abdirahman Habannakah Al-Maydani, mentioned that (Al-Maydani, 1992), in its generic usage the term *khuluq* denotes "the character" or "the state" of the soul, regardless of whether such character is wicked character (*khuluq madhmumah*) or good character (*khuluq mahmudah*). The state of the soul, as mentioned earlier, is classified into two; acquired and inborn. The latter forms innate nature of the soul, and it is identical with the soul. This type of the character is known as *fitrah* or inborn nature of the moral agent's persona. The second type of the human persona is the acquired character, which is not

inborn, but gained or developed out of personal desires, family background, education, cultural environment, and etc. The inborn character is a God given disposition, and it functions as the conscience or internal moral sense by which the moral agent realizes the moral property of given conducts. It is this form of the character that the moral agent possesses the moral sense that prescribes to refrain from immoral conducts such as cheating, corruption, discrimination, lying, stealing, murder, assault, slander, rape, fraud, and etc., and enjoins virtues of honesty, compassion, sincerity and loyalty (Haneef, 2005; Velasquez & Velazquez, 2002; Zaroug, 1999).

Hence, ethics refers to “the standards of right and wrong that prescribe what man ought to do.” The standards of right and wrong that dictate what ought to be are inherently integral part of the inborn character of the moral agent, however these standards are often established on the bases of rights, obligations, benefits to society, fairness, or specific virtues. For instance, there are cases in which the moral agents justifies his or her conduct on the bases of rights such as the right to life, the right to have freedom of speech, the right of being educated, the right to own property or the right to privacy. Similarly, sometimes the standards of what ought to be are justified on the bases of obligations such as the parents’ obligation to take care of their kids. There are also other instances in which the standards of right and wrong are established on the bases of benefits to the society, whereby the given policies and systems are introduced and defended by explaining their positive functions and usage for the public interest. Fairness is another basis of justifying the morality of given conduct in certain circumstance, while virtues of modesty, honesty, loyalty, kindness and integrity form other sources of justifying the morality of given conducts.

### The essence of the Islamic ethics

In chapter 95 verse 4, *the Qur’an* states that Almighty God “created man in the best of moulds” (*The Qur’an* 95:4). According to the exegetes of *Qur’an* like Al-Qurtubi and others (Al-Qurtubi, 1993b), the term ‘best mould’ mentioned in this verse includes both physical and internal character of man. Man is created with the good natural abilities that are set to alleviate man into higher positions than other creatures such as the natural character of acquiring knowledge, the ability to reason, the power to reflect, and etc., which are God’s “handiwork according to the pattern on which He has made mankind (*The Qur’an* 30:30).” Furthermore, in chapter 98, verse 5, (*The Qur’an* 95:5) and elsewhere in *the Qur’an*, man and woman are required to fulfil their duties with honest (*ikhlas*,

i.e., good motives), and thus be true in all matters of life. Similarly, in chapter 4, verse 59 (*The Qur’an* 4:59), and elsewhere in *the Qur’an*, we are told to use *the Qur’an* and the *sunnah* of the prophet (s. a. w.) as a reference, a standard, based on which the given disputes in life are assessed and judged. For God creates man with good character and best attributes, and guided with revelation, man’s conducts are morally worthy as long as his or her conducts stem from the innate character, articulated with good intention and in accordance with the Divine law.

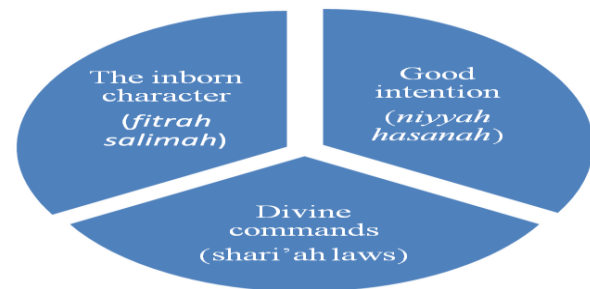


Figure 1: Essential components of Islamic ethics

This is to say that, the essence of the Islamic ethics is formed by combination of three dimensions; the good character (*al-fitrah al-salimah*), the good motive (*niyyah hasanah*) and the principles of the Islamic Divine law (*the shari'ah*). In Islam, the property of a given moral conduct is sought through and within the intersection among these three dimensions, the details of which are exposed in the following paragraphs.

First, with regards to man’s character, Muslim scholars often speak about two forms of moral agent’s character; the inborn character and the acquired one. The former constitutes the innate nature (*fitrah*) of man, which is the inborn state of the soul. This form of the character is identical with the soul, and thus it is a God given character, not acquired. As illustrated in various chapters of *the Qur’an*, this type of man’s character consists of the positive attributes of man, such as *al-bayan* (intellectual discourse) (*The Qur’an* 55:4), *al-ilm* (knowledge and understanding) (*The Qur’an* 96:5), *al-taqwim al-hasan* (natural disposition) (*The Qur’an* 95:4) and *al-nazar and al-itibar* (reflective power) (*The Qur’an* 24:44). These attributes and qualities, i.e., intellectual discourse, the faculty of reasoning, understanding and the reflective power, are inherently part and parcel of man’s nature. *The Qur’an* describes these natural qualities as inborn traits, or God given attributes. As these natural qualities are God given, the inborn character forms the primary source of righteous conducts. As reported by Imam Muslim, a man approached Prophet Muhammad (s. a. w.) and asked him on how to determine the moral property of given conducts,

particularly, how to know which conduct is good and which one is vice. The Prophet (s. a. w.) replied: “righteousness (*al-birr*) is a kind of human disposition (*husnul khuluq*) and vice (*ithm*) is what rankles in your heart and you disapprove that people should come to know of it. This is to say that the right moral sense stems primarily from the inborn disposition. The second form of man’s character is the acquired character, which consists of the traits and attitudes that are learned or gained through times from the social environment in which the moral agent grew and mature. This is where personal attitude, family, friendship, schooling, culture and legal regulations play their roles to shape the persona of the moral agent. The acquired attributes might however be gained in accordance with the inborn character (*fitrah*) by having good personal attitude, or growing up in a decent family or in a social environment that is morally sane and sound. If there are instance in which the acquired character of the moral agent is shaped according to the inborn character, then the acquired character is presumed to be morally good. In the instances in which the acquired character is not nurtured in accordance of the inborn character, whereby the moral agent’s behaviour is shaped by his or her personal desires, or by indecent family life or by immoral social environment, then the acquired character will presumably not be in line with the original state of being good, and thus cannot function as the source of good moral conducts. For instance, though man is inherently born with innate positive attributes, such as the power of intellect, the will to make a better choice in life, intellectual discourse, and etc., that are set to assist the moral agent to make morally worthy choices. However due to acquired tendencies, man exhibits negative behaviours such as being *dha’if* and *al-ya’us* (weak and easy give up) (*The Qur’an* 4:28), *halu’* and *manu’* (selfish and egoist) (*The Qur’an* 70:19-21) ‘*ajul* and *qatur* (haste and niggard) (*The Qur’an* 17:100, 21:37), *zulum* and *jahul* (forgetful and unjust) (*The Qur’an* 33:72) and *jadal* and *halu’a* (argumentative and impatient) (*The Qur’an* 18:54, 70:19). According to *the Qur’an*, positive attributes of human persona such as having natural disposition, intellectual discourse, the faculty of understanding, reflective mind, and etc., are the outcome of man’s inborn character, which is given to man by Allah (s. w. t.). However, the above-mentioned negative attributes such as being selfish, haste, niggard, forgetful, unjust, and etc., are attributed to man’s acquired desires and attitudes. Moral conducts are therefore the ones that stem from the inborn character of the moral agent, while the immoral traits of man’s persona are attributed to the acquired tendencies. In the process of determining the

moral property of conducts, the role of the inborn character, not the acquired one, is very much emphasized. The sense of grasping what is morally right or wrong is then equated with the inborn character of man.

It is worth mentioning that, in the Islamic ethical system, the role of the inborn character in the formation of the moral sense is very much emphasized. The reason is because, unlike the teachings of some religious traditions and conventional philosophies, in which man is seen as inherently sinful or evil, in Islam the primordial nature of man is not evil nor is he weighed down by the original sin; rather at birth, man is free from sin, whereby every man and woman are born with a natural state of being sinless (*fitrah*); a character which is neutral or good (above zero). However, as we grow up and mature in life, our inborn character is influenced by desires, temptations and cultural influences, which might eventually lead our inherent character to shift from the natural condition of being good or neutral, into a state, the formation of which is very much influenced by the acquired traits that are not necessarily moral. Therefore, in the Islamic tradition, moral agent whose conscience did not deviate from the inborn (natural) state is known as good servant (*‘abdan salihan*), while the moral agent whose conscience deviated from the inborn (natural) state as a result of the acquired social and personal attitudes is known as *mufsid* (mischievous), *fasiq* (defiant) or *fajir* (filthy and sinner). While *salih* signifies natural, good, approved character, or moral decency, traits like *fajir*, *fasiq*, *fasid* imply deviant, atypical, disapproved character, or indecent. In this respect, *abdan salihan* is the person who is with upright character, which allows him or her to act with correct conscience, and henceforth act with honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, just, and etc. However, for their behaviour has deviated from the inherent character, moral agents whose character is marked by the moral indecencies of *fujur*, *fusuq*, *fasad*, and etc., tend to act with dishonesty, transgression, and etc. To avoid deviations from the inborn character, man is then required to engage with continues self-assessment and character purification (*tazkiyyah al-nafs*). The process of character purification takes in the form of spiritual enhancement such as engaging prayers (*salah*), or in the form intellectual contemplations such as meditation (*tadabur*), self-control (*sabr*), to be mindful of the presence of Almighty Allah (*zikr Allah*), God-consciousness (*taqwa Allah*), and etc. These spiritual practices and intellectual contemplations are designed to enhance the moral agent’s self-control and self-discipline, so that the perceived and real deviations as well as

character delusions are constantly resisted or healed duly.

Second, another building block of morality is having good motives/intention (*niyyah hassanah*). In this regard, conducts that are performed with good motives are morally desirable, whereas ill motivated ones are not morally worthy. This is so because, among well-established principles of the Islamic teachings is: "actions are (judged) by motives (*niyyah*), so each man and woman will have what he or she intends." Another narration of the Prophet (s. a. w.) mentions the connection between the motive and the moral property of the actions, and states that if a moral agent intends to do good deed but fails to do so, such motive is counted as a moral conduct though the moral agent did not perform it. According to these Prophetic narrations, the moral property (bad or good) of given acts is determined according to the intention that is behind the action.

As reflected in these particular narrations of the Prophet (s. a. w.), as well as in other founding texts of the Islamic tradition, the motive or the intention constitutes an essential part of the moral property of conducts in such a way that, unintended conducts are not counted as moral actions. Similarly, conducts which are done with bad motives are immoral. With regards to the role of motives in morality, there are three areas, which are matters of concern for Muslim scholars; unintentional conducts, and the conducts which are intentional but their outcome differs from the intended outcome, as well as the conducts which are done with bad intention. (a) The first dimension constitutes the conduct which took place without intention, such as actions made while in sleep and etc. In this case, as long as the moral agent did not intend to make it, then given conduct cannot be categorized as moral or otherwise; the reason is because such action lacks an essential factor, namely the intention, to qualify its moral status. However, if such action causes negative outcome such as loss of life or property of others, then the moral agent is required to pay compensation. (b) Unintended outcome could also refer to the cases in which we actually intend to do something good, but the outcome becomes something different, probably the opposite. For instance, a surgical doctor might decide to operate a patient, with the intention that after the operation the patient gets better, but due to unforeseen circumstances the outcome of such operation might become bad, whereby it leads to the death of the patient. In this case, this unintended outcome (death of the patient) of this operation would not make the whole surgical operation as an immoral conduct, unless there is negligence or carelessness from the side of the operating doctor. (c) Another area of our

moral behaviour in which the motive of the moral agent plays an essential role in determining the morality of given conducts is in the instance in which the given conducts are done with bad motives, such as giving donations to the needy people with the motive of showing-off or becoming popular in the eyes of the public (*riya'*). Though charity is good in itself, whereby the needy people get assisted through donations and charity, yet in this case, giving charity with the motive of show-off is immoral. Thus, in the Islamic ethical system, motive constitutes an essential ingredient, whereby voluntary conducts are judged based on the motive behind it, for good or bad. In this understanding, involuntary actions are neither categorized as moral nor are they judged as immoral, whereas voluntary actions are either described as moral or immoral depending on the motive behind it. Voluntary acts which are done with bad intention are immoral, while voluntary conducts which are done with good intentions are moral, as long as such acts stem from the inborn conscience, and are in accordance with the universal norms of what ought to be. As such, character purification by means of practicing virtues (*fadh'il al-akhlaq*), as well as having good motive are counted in the process of determining the morality of given conducts. In doing so, Islamic ethics differ from those ethical systems that do not give weight to character purification (*tazkiyyah al-nafs*), as well as consequential ethical systems that neglect the motive of conducts and focus on the outcome in deciding the moral property of conducts.

Third, Islamic ethics requires given conducts to be in line with the principles of the Islamic Divine laws (*the shari'ah*). It is true that the inborn character (*fitrah*) and good intention (*niyyah hassanah*) form the internal property of the good moral conduct, however the external (measurable) criterion of judging the moral property of conducts are established through and within the norms of the *shari'ah*, whereby the legislation of what is morally permissible and what is not, is assigned to the *shari'ah* laws. In the instance of deciding the permissibility of given conducts, the authority of the divine revelation (*alwahy*) prevails, wherein the authority to legislate, i.e., to make something lawful or prohibited, is the right of Allah (s. w. t.) alone. For God is the ultimate authority of legislating what is permissible or otherwise, the *shari'ah* laws function as a Divine reference based on which permissibility or impermissibility of given conducts are judged. Saying the *shari'a* laws function as reference point of judging the morality of given conduct, does not however mean to deny the role of the inborn character and good motives in morality. These two dimensions of



morality, which together form the internal factors of good moral conduct, are indeed very important in ethics, however as an external criterion and point of reference of settling down moral disputes in real life, the *shari'ah* functions as the legislative body of good moral conducts. In this respect, the moral agent is required to act according to his or her inborn character and fulfil moral duties with good intention, yet intended goals (*ghayat*) and means (*wassa'il*) of achieving intended aims are weighed and governed through and within the *shari'ah* jurisdictions. If let us say the intended aims or means are not in line with the *shari'ah* laws, such aims or means are then not morally worthy, and thus impermissible. For instance, a given moral agent might act according to the inborn character of being kind to others, for instance helping a needy person by giving food or money; however if it happens that the moral agent helped the intended needy person by stealing or robbing someone's property or by means of bribery, then his kindness as well as his good will of helping the needy are not sufficient to qualify his conduct as a morally desirable conduct. The reason is because, though the conduct of given charity and the motive of helping the needy people are morally desirable ones, however in this case the means of helping the needy, namely stealing and bribery, are not permissible ways of achieving goals in the *shari'ah* laws, thus his conduct is immoral. Similarly, a moral agent might want to perform a cosmetic surgery with the intention of looking young or beautiful, however as cosmetic surgery involves deception and cheating, which are not permissible in the *shari'ah* laws, the conduct is deemed immoral and thus not permissible. This is to say that though good character and good intention play an important role in determining the moral property of given conducts, the external rules based on which the permissibility of given conducts are assessed and decided are the principles of the *shari'ah* law. Hence, as mentioned earlier, the teachings of the Divine laws function as a guide and point of reference to resolve problematic moral issues in business dealings, management, family matters (such as marriage contract and divorce), politics and public administration, healthcare and biomedical practices, and etc. Unlike the ethical systems in which moral decisions are justified on the bases of humanism, *i. e.*, on manmade desires and regulations, in the Islamic ethical system, norms of social order (*halal and haram*) are all derived from the Divine law (*shari'ah*). This does not however mean to deny the role of the intellect in making moral decisions in given circumstances. In fact, Islamic ethics allows deliberation and discussion on given moral issues, so that the benefit and the harms of given conducts are

exposed and judged; however, eventually the authority of the divine revelation (*al-wahy*) prevails, whereby as mentioned earlier, the authority to legislate (to make lawful or prohibit) is the right of Allah (*s. w. t.*) alone. Allah (*s. w. t.*) is the lawgiver (*al-mushari'*), whose commands are presented in the *Qur'an*. Indeed "Islam has restricted the authority to legislate the *haram* and the *halal*, taking out of the hands of human beings (Al-Qaradhawi, 1997), regardless of their social status. Neither kings nor parliamentarians have the right to prohibit something in which Allah (*s. w. t.*) has permitted. Scholarly views and professional opinions are welcome, nevertheless these views are respected as long as such opinions are in line with the Divine Revelations. Islam encourages *ijtihad* or the process of giving effort to issue a formal judgment being established on given issues; however, this process has to be guided by the established norms of the *sharia*, in such a way that *ijtihad* cannot overrule the established principles of the Divine Laws. For instance, prohibition of drinking wine, or prohibition of giving or taking bribery, as well as the prohibition of same-sex marriage, and etc., which the *shari'ah* prohibited, cannot be permitted through *ijtihad* of the scholars, nor can these prohibitions be abrogated by the majority vote of the parliament or legislators of a given country. In Islam, scholars and parliamentarians are entitled to their thoughts; however such thoughts are respected as long as these opinions are in line with the Divine guidance of God. Therefore, in Islam, as shown in Figure 1, ethics is constructed through and within these building blocks; character purification, good intention and in accordance with the Divine Laws.

## Conclusion

Islam presents a universal code of conduct that with unique characteristics. It appreciates the inborn character of man and recognizes it as the primary source of the moral sense. It also requires the given aims to be achieved with good motive, as well as to use the Divine Laws as the criterion based on which disputes matters are settled down. For it beliefs that every man is born with original innocence, sinless state, therefore Islamic ethics differ from philosophies and religious teachings that associated man's nature with original sins or evils. Similarly, for it acknowledges the role of motives in determining the moral property of conducts, it varies from consequential ethical systems, the focus of which is the outcome or the consequence of given conducts. It also requires the conduct to be judged or measured according to the Divine Laws, therefore it presents a moral system which primarily different from

conventional ethical systems, which founded on humanism.

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