

13. *Majmu'a Tafasir-e-Farahi* (author's translation from Urdu), Lahore, 1969, p. 350.
14. *Grundlegung*, 2: E.T. Abbot, p.46.
15. MacIntyre, A., *After Virtue*, Oxford University Press 1993.
16. Kierkegaard, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Princeton University Press, 1960.
17. Kierkegaard, S. *The Sickness Unto Death*, Harper Torch Books, New York, 1959.
18. For a detailed discussion of the ethical thought of Kierkegaard see my book 'Kant and Keirkegaard—A Comparative Study', Caravan Press Lahore, 1983.
19. *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, Translated by R. Ashley Audra and Cloudesely Brereton, Garden City, Doubleday, 1956.
20. Ibid, p.89.
21. A MacIntyre: *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* University of Notre Dame Press. 1987.
22. Ibid, p.97.
23. His two book length studies on the moral philosophy of al-Farabi and Miskawaih have also been published from Aligarh (India).



دعوت رجوع الی القرآن کی اساسی دستاویز
ڈاکٹر اسرار احمد رحمۃ اللہ علیہ کی مقبول عام تالیف

مسلمانوں پر قرآن مجید کے حقوق

اشاعت خاص: 30 روپے اشاعت عام: 20 روپے

REFERENCES & ENDNOTES

1. This fact is amply borne out by a study of contemporary Anglo-American analytical and linguistic moral writers e.g., Ayer, Hare, Toulmin, Stevenson, and others.
2. Emil Durkheim, the eminent sociologist, introduced the term 'anomie' which looms large among his many contributions. 'Anomie' means a condition of normlessness, a moral vacuum, the suspension of normative ethical rules, a state sometimes referred to as de-regulation.
3. Cf. Quranic verses 57:27, 3:105, 4:76.
4. Iqbal: *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Sheikh Ashraf Publisher, Lahore, p. 81.
5. Buber, Berdyaev, Paul Tillich and H.D. Lewis are some of the eminent contemporary philosophers who have written in this vein.
6. See Surah Al-Furqan verses 47-54.
7. Numerous excellent works of Jung, Erich Fromm and others amply prove this claim.
8. The parallelism between the Arabic words 'Birr' and 'Bahar' as used in Urdu also and the consequent sense of insecurity and discomfort experienced while indulging in immoral acts is supported by a great Quranic scholar, Imam Raghib. Cf. his Mufridats, p.39.
9. The *nature* conceived by the Holy Quran is governed by a primordial, universal law which is fundamentally rational.
10. Here the Quran refers to ideal human nature, i.e., the nature bestowed on humanity by God at the dawn of creation. It is not the same thing as Rousseau and some other moralists speak of in terms of 'primitive' or 'original' nature, because their view does not go beyond the spatiotemporal dimensions.
11. Cf. Cicero: "True law is right reason in agreement with nature; it is of universal application, unchanging and everlasting; it summons to duty by its demands and averts from wrong doing by its prohibitions." (*Republic*, 3:22)
12. It would be too lengthy to cite here all the Quranic exhortations. However, we may recall a passage (4:36-8) in which it speaks of the social behaviour of the devoutly God-conscious man: "And serve God; ascribe no thing as partner unto Him: (show) kindness unto parents, and unto near kindred, and orphans, and the needy, and unto the neighbour and the fellow-traveller and the wayfarer and the slaves whom your right hands possess."

"One of the glaring defects of this (i.e. Greek) scheme was that religious virtues of Islam such as faith, trust, love and worship could not be accommodated in it. So they were either ignored or were placed where they did not belong... The real reasons why the Greek scheme of virtue could not express the entire gamut of Islamic virtues lay deeper in its concept of man. According to it, man was only a rational and a moral being. Religion was not a part of his essence, and hence religious virtues could not be treated as a separate class. Muslim philosophers were not able to discern that fact. The only person who realized it was Shah Wali Allah (d.1176/1762). Consequently he discarded the Greek scheme of virtue and worked out a different scheme. In place of wisdom (*hikmah*), courage (*Shuja'ah*), temperance (*'iffah*) and justice (*Adalah*), he proposed the virtues of purity (*taharah*), reverential submission (*ikhbat*), magnanimity (*samahah*) and justice (*adalah*).... What I want to underline is the fact that Shah Wali Allah realized that justice would not be done to the religious dimension of Islamic life unless its independence was recognized and religious virtues were given a place equal to other virtues."²³

Endorsing Dr. Ansari's main contention, however, my considered view is that there are many notions in Greek and medieval European (especially Thomistic) philosophy which can be used by Muslim thinkers to make their own moral concepts meaningful and appealing to modern minds, e.g., *bonum honestum* of Aristotle's ethical theory which stands for the unity of the good, the right, the beautiful and the noble, and the concept of natural law in ethics developed particularly by the medieval theologians.

In conclusion I wish to express my hope that the present paper will play at least some role in awakening the interest and directing the attention of Muslim philosophers to re-understand their ethical theory in its pristine purity and reconstruct it in modern terminology. For this they have to reject the dominant Western *episteme*. Moreover, being at a vast distance away from the times of the Holy Prophet (SAWS) they have to do, to use Foucault's term, a lot of archaeological work in order to unravel and dig out moral ideas that were silenced from accumulated and limiting patterns of knowledge or from constrictions placed by modern culture and society. In short, Islamic moral philosophy needs a reorientation through which it could rediscover itself by rediscovering its realist and cosmic character and the primary truths on which it rests in the human spiritual core.

from pressure and that which proceeds from aspiration. Pressure comes from social formations and from the law of fear to which the individual is subject with regard to the rules of life imposed by the group and intended to assure its preservation, and which seeks only to turn to the routine and ferocious automatism of matter. Aspiration comes from the call of superior souls who commune with the *elan* of the spirit and who penetrate into the infinitely open world of liberty and love, which transcends psychological and social mechanisms. To this law of pressure and 'his law of aspiration are linked two quite distinct forms of morality: closed morality, which, to put it briefly, is that of social conformism and open morality, which is that of saintliness. Without necessarily affirming Bergson's extravagant claims like 'there can be no question of founding morality on the cult of reason'²⁰ we owe him a special debt of gratitude as one can get a lot of inspiration from him. Islamic morality, being an open morality in the Bergsonian sense, is not one of constraint or coercion but one of aspiration and attraction towards a transcendent goal. It is thoroughly permeated by the highest aspirations and ideals: love (and not just fear) of God and the highest social objective of establishing a world-wide order of social and economic justice and equity—*nizam-e-adal-o-qist*—in the terminology of the Quran. In short, individual piety and rectitude on the one hand, and social laws and dynamism on the other, are rolled into one harmonious whole in the Islamic ethical perspective. And there is no need to feel embarrassed about state laws and punishments either, as the reassurance comes from the West from no less an academic philosopher than Alasdair MacIntyre. In his latest book *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*²¹ he announces that he is now an Augustinian Christian. For him, a good tradition is "more than a coherent movement of thought"; it must display self-awareness in its confrontation with challenges both from adherents and opponents. But Catholic norms, as MacIntyre's account unfolds, also derive their status from the political authority of the Church, which imposes agreement concerning basic principles, subduing the disobedient human will. "Men need control and restraint", he writes, "if any measure of justice or peace is to be attained and preserved".²² And he also clearly approves of the inculcation of such agreements through a system of education controlled by religious authority.

From amongst the few contemporary Muslim thinkers writing on Islamic ethics Prof. Dr. Abdul Haq Ansari is a scholar who fully realized the limitations of Greako-European thought in appreciating the Islamic vision of morality and virtue. He writes:

notion of "the individual before God" for Kierkegaard as he says: "Only when the self as the definite individual is conscious of existing before God, only then is it infinite self" (*The Sickness Unto Death*¹⁷ p.211). Yet by virtue of the very fact that his introverted thought was wholly centered in his own subjectivity and his own unique and quite eccentric singularity, he entirely missed the importance of the so-called concrete universal.¹⁸ On the other hand, even though Islam emphasizes the category of the individual, this is not to say that it denies the world of social ethics and the value of the general law; it tells us that the law is good and that what is asked of man is to interiorize it through conscience and thus to make his singularity coincide with the general. Obligation-in-conscience, according to Islam, is an absolutely primary and absolutely irreducible datum of moral experience; yet it is often missed completely by modern philosophical reflection. The authentic absolute value of acts in Islam consists in purity of heart (to use Kierkegaard's words) and sincerity of purpose which can be none other than salvation and eternal bliss in the hereafter. What we are made to understand is that the fact of being face to face with God—the belief in accountability—is the heart of all moral life and every authentically moral decision; that the more the moral life and moral experience deepens and becomes genuine, the more they are interiorized and spiritualized, and by the same token liberated from servile conformity to the socially customary. In its societal and collective dimension, the ethical basis of Islam can be extended beyond law and turned into a dynamic problem-solving methodology: indeed it can be turned into a pragmatic concern. The supplementary sources of the Islamic Shariah as *istihsan*, that is prohibiting or permitting a thing because it serves a useful purpose, *istislah* or public interest, and *urf* or custom and practice of a society need to be explored in greater detail in order to resolve further the tensions of internalized ethics and externalized law and to give the Muslim state and polity a more egalitarian stance.

Some Muslim philosophers evince clear symptoms of inferiority complex with regard to their faith and moral norms and consequently adopt a rather apologetic approach in defending them. They quite wrongly think that Islamic morality is a strictly rigid and closed morality. Here I only wish that they realize as to how radically different is the use of 'open' and 'closed' in the treatments of Bergson and Karl Popper and that they need not be swayed by the Popperian sense of these terms. I shall here briefly pause to elaborate my submission. The fundamental theme of Henry Bergson's *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*¹⁹ is the distinction and opposition between that which in moral life proceeds

the good life (*al hayat al tayyiba*). Islamic ethics is deeply rooted and firmly anchored in the ethos of Islam as conceived in the Quran and elaborated in the Sunnah of the Prophet. It is not just a simple system of moral philosophy; we understand nothing of its true significance if we take it for philosophical theory in the ordinary sense. In the Islamic perspective moral philosophy is not just an ethics, but a super-ethics and the aim is not merely to chart out the guiding principles of an upright human life, but in a single leap to reach the supreme end and supreme happiness, the *ihsan* state of perfect virtue. It is both a practical guidance for life and an itinerary of spiritual direction. The authentic Islamic moral philosophy does not remain pure moral philosophy and must enter into communication with a world of human data and aspirations more existential than that of empty and sterile philosophy isolated within itself. Moreover it lays full emphasis on the spiritual means of contact between God and man, between Higher Reality and normal day-to-day existence. In Islam faith has thus a different form of rational and different *modus operandi*. Moral behaviour and ethical virtue is assigned the pivotal role in the epistemology or noetic structure of Islam. Many verses of the Holy Quran, particularly of Meccan Surahs emphatically state that a morally wicked person cannot attain true knowledge. Good deeds and virtuous life have been declared the veridical signs of true and genuine religious belief and faith. An oft-quoted saying of the Holy Prophet (SAWS) totally negates *iman* i.e. true Islamic belief and faith, in a man who tells lies, does not keep promises, commits embezzlement, and becomes quarrelsome while in rage. These points clearly show that Islamic ethics can be appreciated in an intellectual context and atmosphere quite different from the one prevalent in contemporary Western academic world. West's intellectual and cultural imperialism in the recent past have clearly overtaken many Muslim scholars and intellectuals and it is time that they develop a critical attitude towards it. They should have a greater and clearer perception of the truth that in the Islamic tradition ethical behaviour both cures the human soul and opens it up for metaphysical knowledge: gnosis or *ma'rifa*.

As is generally known by the academia, the question of the distinction between, and relative importance of, the individual and the society has been a thorny issue in ethics and social philosophy. In the European thought of the recent past Soren Kierkegaard has usually been taken as the champion of the singular. Quite in conformity with the Quranic teachings, he asserts in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*¹⁶ (p.280): "The only reality that exists for an existing individual is his own ethical reality". Again there is good reason to insist on the importance of the

the direct commands of God revealed in the Quran. The moral precepts of the Quran and scientific/psychological knowledge of the universal needs and tendencies of man, provide complementary rather than competing standards of ethical judgement. Good as fulfilment of genuine natural tendencies is subordinated to attaining God's pleasure, or to use a philosophical expression—eternal beatitude—the fulfilment of the aspirations of the virtuous soul. The notion of righteousness that is the pride possession of a Muslim is the ever-present sense of moral responsibility, an inner calling that is both intimately personal and ineluctably trans-institutional.

Epilogue: Contemporary Scene

Barring a few exceptions, almost all writers and scholars seem to present Islamic ethics mainly in Greek or in Western-Christian categories and therefore fail miserably to lay bare the essential nature and elan of Islamic ethics. It is now widely acknowledged that traditions are embodied in languages and conceptual schemes that cannot be neatly translated into another, that traditions carve up the world of experiences in somewhat different ways. Not to speak of inter-traditional perspectives, philosophers are sometimes at cross purposes even at intercultural level. For example, in his influential book *After Virtue*¹⁵ (1981) Alasdair MacIntyre has argued that the language of contemporary ethical debate is in hopeless disorder. Lacking the firm guidance of shared agreements about moral standards, lacking even a common moral language, we argue past one another, MacIntyre claimed, hurling at our opponents uprooted fragments of once vital ethical traditions. We do not realize that our arguments and the terms we use to make them are rootless, lacking connection to traditional beliefs and stories that alone give the moral terms a life of meaning. To my mind, the conception of morality which one finds discussed in contemporary Anglo-American treatises is the most superficial and the most inexistential one. Concepts and ideas are discussed and analysed at the most exteriorized level of ordinary moral life and the same cavalier approach is reflected in the majority of studies dealing with the Islamic moral philosophy. As is borne out by naive and superficial examples of hockey game and chess playing, Modern European moral philosophy, I regret to say, concerns itself with infra-morality of the social order and totally rejects the foundational morality of the inner conscience as well as the supra-morality of mystical order and creative love. Islam indeed, on the contrary, firmly stands for their mixture and inter-penetration.

Based on the twin sources of the Holy Quran and the Prophet's Sunnah, Islam presents a doctrinally articulated philosophy of moral virtue and

discrimination between good and evil. Quranic theology has dealt with the problem of the concrete moral decision in terms of the doctrine of the divine presence. The sense of "Divine Presence every-where" opens man's eyes and ears to the moral demand implicit in the concrete situation. Tables of laws can never wholly apply to the unique situation. Belief in God, on the contrary, opens the mind to these potentialities and guides decision in a particular situation.

The plural nominative of '*saleh*' used in the Quran is '*salehat*'. it means good deeds. Its semantic constitution contains emphatic reference to belief in God, prayer, and good will and love for humanity. However, the practice of *salihat* is repeatedly joined to Faith. Thus this term connotes 'faith expressed in outward conduct'. If we take into consideration the facts of human psychology in reference to the proper realization of the moral ideal, we are bound to hold to the Quranic view that some desires deserve to be suppressed, some to be moderated, and some to be encouraged and enhanced, ultimately subordinating all to the spiritual yearning of obtaining Divine Pleasure—keeping the sense of duty always dynamically alive and the action entrenched in the purest motivation. In this sense, the soundness of the Quranic view is self-evident even though certain religions like Budhism, and certain great moral philosophers like Kant are opposed to it. For instance, maintaining that all desire is bad, Kant says: "The inclinations themselves being sources of want, are so far from having an absolute worth for which they should be desired, that on the contrary it must be the universal wish of every rational being to be wholly free from them".¹⁴ Schopenhauer rightly terms Kant's view as the 'apotheosis of lovelessness', because in Kant's estimation even the most unselfish acts of benevolence towards, and love for, other human beings lose all their moral worth unless inspired by pure sense of duty and unless emptied of all desire to be benevolent towards fellow-beings. According to the Quranic view, on the other hand, neither desire as such, nor the higher desires that relate to high and noble ends, are condemned. Only the desires relating to the unregulated instinctive urges, called *hawa* in Quranic terminology, are subjected to moral disapproval.

Conclusion

In the foregoing pages I have discussed in detail the Islamic notion of ethical virtue as depicted in the two Quranic locutions—*Birr* and *Saleh*. Islam identifies virtue with good works based on religious beliefs. As such, morality is an inner quality, a property of motive or intention rather of mere consequences or outward form of one's actions. On this view, the promptings of informed reason and moral conscience represent an inherent tendency in the truly authentic nature of man, and the conformity to this nature fulfils both the cosmic plan of the Creator and

Quranic moral imperative, in this sense, is the demand to realize one's true nature actually which he has potentially. Every act is a morally good action in which an individual self establishes itself as a true person. In this way, a moral act is not an act in obedience to an externally imposed law; it is the inner law of our true being, of our essential nature. Conversely, an antimoral act is not the transgression of one or several prescribed commands, but an act that contradicts the self-realization of the person as a person and drives towards disintegration—'*fasad*' in Quranic usage. It disrupts and corrupts the centredness of the person by giving predominance to degenerate passions, desires and cravings. And when this happens, the self as an active being is split and the conflicting trends make it their battlefield. The 'will', in the sense of a self that acts from the centered totality of its being, is enslaved. Freedom is replaced by compulsion. The voice of man's essential and true being is gradually silenced until it reaches a state of total depersonalization, described by the Quran as the state in which:

"God hath set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing, and on their eyes is a veil; great is the penalty they incur." (2: 7)

One cannot discard the moral imperative itself without the self-destruction of one's essential nature and one's manifold relationships. Moreover, the Quranic word '*amal*' too is very significant. The two locutions 'action' and 'activity' are both generally taken to convey the sense of the Arabic word '*amal*'. But there is a subtle difference in their connotation. Any kind of movement or work can be called activity, but the word action usually implies some strenuous or arduous task and it, as such, better expresses the meaning of '*amal*'. By combining the connotations of '*saleh*' as explained above and that of '*amal*', we would realize that the real significance of this term is: it is necessary for man to put up a hard struggle to achieve that real goal for which he was potentially created, and he has to ascend certain heights to attain that goal. All this is conveyed by the comprehensive word '*Amal Saleh*'.

The basic and poignant concern of the Islamic faith is to point to, and overcome, the crisis of our age—the crisis of man's separation from man and of man's separation from God. Islam recognizes that human morality and human ideals thrive only when set in a context of a transcendent attitude. A religious person commands a depth of consciousness inaccessible to the profane man. The Quran emphasizes the moral dynamic of man. Its image of man as the vicegerent of God on earth, *Homo cum Deo*, implies the highest conceivable freedom, the freedom to collaborate with the very creative process. This image implies further that the intellect and conscience are capable of making genuine

the moral tone underlies all the passages of the Quran and the moral teachings are repeatedly stressed in various contexts throughout the Holy Book. Every Quranic moral principle is mentioned either as a single significant principle or as an element of a total system of morality, which itself is an element of a complete religious supersystem. The basic morals of the Quran are meant to help the individual to develop his personality and cultivate his character in the most wholesome manner, to strengthen his bonds and consolidate his association both with the Creator and the creatures. The Quranic ethic is not simply an abstract ideal conceived just for nominal adoration or a stagnant idol to be frequented by admirers every now and then. It represents a code of life, a living force manifest in every aspect of human life.

'Amal Saleh'

Understanding the Quranic term '*Amal Saleh*'—righteous or good deeds—requires deep thought and reflection. The Quran includes under this blanket term all its moral and spiritual teachings including the laws of individual and social conduct. It also makes an allusion to the fact that the secret of man's real development and progress lies in performing these very acts. Righteous deeds alone can guarantee the growth of man's natural capacities and potentialities on the right lines. To quote Maulana Farahi, an eminent scholar, on this point:

"Almighty Allah has designated good and righteous deeds with the word '*Salehat*'. This term itself guides us to the great truth that the whole of man's development and rectitude—be it outward or inner, wordly or spiritual, personal or collective, bodily or intellectual—depends upon good and righteous deeds. Righteous action is life-giving and a source of maturity and enhancement. By means of good deeds alone man can attain those highest stages of development to which he aspires while sticking to his true and ideal nature This point can be put alternatively thus: Since man is an integral part of the total scheme of universe, only those of his deeds will be righteous which accord with the grand design on which the universe has been fashioned by its Creator."¹³

These ideas can be explained philosophically thus. Man, like any other being, has environment; but in contrast to brute animals, he is not bound to it. He can transcend it, in imagination, thought and action. His encounter with any of the objects and situations surrounding him is always active and creative. Such an encounter presupposes ability to transcend and overcome both psychological inclination and outer compulsion, the ability to see the universal within the particular. The

negated in respect of a particular type of action performed ritualistically. Whereas the positive declaration starts with the words 'righteous is he' or 'righteousness is of that person'

Matter (or desire) is not an antidivine principle from which the soul has to be liberated. Islam leads man towards a consciousness of moral responsibility in everything he does, whether great or small. The well-known injunction of the Gospel: 'Give Caesar that what belongs to Caesar, and give God that what belongs to God' has no room in the ethical structure of Islam, because Islam does not allow a differentiation between the 'moral' and 'practical' requirements of our existence. Hence the intense insistence on action as an indispensable element of morality. Moral knowledge, according to the teachings of the Quran, automatically forces a moral responsibility upon a man. A mere Platonic discernment between right and wrong, without the urge to promote the right and to destroy the wrong, is a gross immorality in itself.

Moral righteousness, according to the Quran and the teachings of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him), is an organic whole. Every single element of it appears living and meaningful when intact with the basic underlying grid, the life impulse of '*iman*'. When we take out a part, we negate and nullify the entire edifice of righteousness. To pass a moral judgment on a man, we shall have to take into account his total behaviour, character and beliefs, not just a few discrete actions.

The Quran places equal emphasis on the sensate and the transcendental yearnings of man, and harmonises them; and thus it lays down for humanity a comprehensive ideal which consists in the cultivation of: (i) Piety based on a dynamic, vibrant and living faith in God, an earnest and courageous pursuit of Truth, and an ever-present consciousness of Final Accountability; (ii) sound and comprehensive Morality; (iii) social, economic and political Justice; and, finally, Knowledge in all its dimensions,—all of these resulting in the conquest of harmful and vicious propensities within the individual, the conquest of evil within the society, and the conquest of the treasures of physical environment or Nature. In the pursuit of this Ideal, moral virtue, love for humanity, truth, justice, beauty, discipline and progress are the watchwords, while the concept of Unity permeates the entire movement towards the Ideal.

The range of morality in Islam is so inclusive and integrative that it combines at once faith in God, religious rites, spiritual observances, social conduct, decision making, intellectual pursuits, business-transactions, habits of consumption, manners of speech, and all other aspects of human life. Because morality is such an integral part of Islam,

members of the society and one's relations have a natural right of protection and support, so that mere lack of opportunity may not ruin their general welfare. In order to emphasise the importance of benevolence and kindness in the moral life, Quran projects them into the very being of God. "Be good to others as God is good to you" (28:77). God, according to the Quran, is just, merciful and kind. It is this benevolence or '*ihsan*' which helps to bring about greater cohesion, greater harmony, and greater cooperation among members of a society.

Practical deeds of charity are of value when they proceed from the love of God and from no other motive. In this respect also we must stick to the logical order mentioned very elaborately in the above quoted ayah '*Birr*': our kith and kin; orphans (including any persons who are without support or help); people who are in real need but who never ask (it is our duty to find them out, and they come before those who ask); the stranger, who is entitled by laws of hospitality; the people who ask and are entitled to ask, i.e., not merely lazy beggars, but those who seek our assistance in dire necessity in some form or another, (it is our duty to respond to them); and the slaves, (we must do all we can to give or buy their freedom). Moreover, charity and piety in individual capacity do not complete the moral obligation. Both in prayer and charity, we must look to our organised efforts as well. Where there is a Muslim state, these are made through the state, facilities for public assistance, and for the maintenance of contracts and fair dealings in all matters. Indeed, according to the Quran, actual generosity and compassion is a 'duty to others. But the cultivation and maintenance of the spirit and the attitude of generosity is a duty towards self because of the purity and enrichment that it acquires thereby. It is this spirit and this attitude that have been emphasized together with actual benevolence in the above quoted verse.

A Whole Life-Pattern

A very important truth that one gets from a perusal of the above 'Ayah *Birr*' is that the Quranic definition of moral righteousness and virtue depicts a whole life-pattern that may not be reduced or adulterated. According to the Quran, moral behaviour is essentially a function of the total human person or spirit. And by 'spirit' the reference is here to the dynamic unity of body and mind, of vitality and rationality, of the emotional and the intellectual. In every function of the human spirit the whole person is involved, and not merely one part or one element. All elements of man's being participate in every moral decision and action. In this sense righteousness admits of no division: it is an expression of the total personality of a man. This becomes clear when we concentrate on the first part of the verse in which moral worth or value has been

authority can only be the authority of God. For the Muslim, the intermediary between man and God is righteousness. And Islamic *Sharia* is the supreme expression of that righteousness. Being of divine origin should not be taken to mean, according to the Quranic teaching, that the Divine Law is foreign to the nature of man and is merely thrust from outside on him by God to be obeyed. Rather, it is simultaneously the 'Divine Law' as well as the 'Law of ideal Human Nature' and constitutes therefore the very behest of the higher human self.

The identity of the 'Divine Law' and the 'Law of the ideal Human Nature' has been explicitly proclaimed thus in the Quran:

"So set thy purpose for religion as by nature⁹ upright—the nature (framed) of Allah in which He hath created the human beings.¹⁰ There is no altering the laws of Allah's creation. That is the right religion, but most men know not".¹¹ (30: 30)

Here it should be noted that the 'ideal nature' is the same, and has been always the same, in all human beings, of whatever race or tribe or country. This is implied in the fact that Divine Law relating to the 'ideal nature' has been revealed to all the communities of the world at one or the other period of human history. As a matter of historical fact, it is confirmed by the observation that basic moral concepts have been the same in different civilizations and different ages—their apparent differences consisting basically in the imperfect understanding of those concepts, or in their application to concrete problems of life.

Benevolence—The Foremost Moral Virtue

We must clearly appreciate the true connotation of the word *birr* or righteousness in the light of the above quoted Quranic verse. A righteous or moral person, accordingly, is not one who offers suprarogatory prayers or engages in sufi practices or meditation. Rather, a righteous person is one who is benevolent and compassionate to others. An inconsiderate, cruel and miser person thus cannot be a morally virtuous man. The natural outcome of faith and belief in the unity of God is the love of creation.¹² The essence of Islam is to serve Allah and do good to one's fellow creatures. This is wider and more comprehensive than 'Love God and love your neighbour'. For it includes duties even to animals as our fellow creatures, and emphasizes practical service rather than mere sentiment. Kindness and humane treatment of those who are dependent on us, love to our neighbours and children are essential according to the Quranic moral law. It is this element of loving-kindness which helps sustain the poor and unfortunate sections of society at par with the rich. It is this moral provision which cuts at the root of class struggle. The poor

shore after a long sailing in rough seas, he feels a great relief. He is never sure of his safety in the ocean, but he feels sure-footed and comfortable when he has landed on the ground. This very sense of righteousness (or charity) has been beautifully conveyed thus by the Prophet's saying:

"Give up whatever pricks your heart." (al-Bukhari)

The moral act as the self-actualization of the centred self or the constitution of a person as a person, has analogies in the living beings. The analogy to the diminution or loss of centredness is the psychosomatic phenomena of disease. The analogy between the antimoral act and bodily disease is in many cases more than analogy. The Quran also employs this and calls an immoral act the symptom of a diseased and morbid heart. In other words, the process of self-integration is continuously combated by movements towards disintegration. This means that the moral act is always a victory over disintegrating forces and that its aim is the actualization of man as a centered, composed and healthy person.

In Islam, man by nature (i.e. *fitrah*) has an awareness of the universally valid moral norms. To every man this awareness is potentially given, even though actually distorted by culture, education, and his existential estrangement from his true being. The Divine Law is creatively present both in the laws of nature and in the natural moral laws of the human mind. A man, who performs morally vicious actions, feels a consciousness of estrangement from, and contradiction of, his essential being. According to the Quran, the original nature of man is essentially good. Contrary to the Christian idea that man is born sinful, or the teachings of Hinduism that he is originally low and impure, the Islamic teachings contend that man is born pure and in the best of mould. The Quran says:

"Surely We created man in the best structure." (106:4)

but in the same breath the verse continues:

"...and afterwards We reduced him to the lowest of low; with the exception of those who have faith and do good works..." (106:5-6)

Thus, according to the Quran, evil never is essential or even original; it is a later acquisition and is due to a misuse of the innate, positive qualities with which God has endowed every human being. The moral law, as distinguished from the political law, is surely a law that our own moral consciousness—our own conscience, and not any other factor, should make us incline to obey. It should form the behest of our higher self. Yet moral law should not be accepted as merely self-imposed, because the self can also dispense with it even as it can impose. Consequently it should be combined with the element of absolute authority, and such an

inside and outside life, to his individual and social affairs. When the Islamic principle of righteousness is established, it provides the individual with peace in all circumstances, the society with security on all levels, the nation with solidarity, and the international community with hope and harmony. How peaceful and enjoyable life can be when people implement the Islamic concept of righteousness!

According to the latest researches of psychologists, human moral character is a system of such beliefs and convictions that guide the actions of an individual and distinguish him from other.⁷ Actions are caused by motives. The sources of motives are thoughts and beliefs which a man acquires from the experiences of his life, his education and other sources as well. The knowledge provided by the Quran or "*scientia intuitiva*" is the certain knowledge that there is no object worthy of adoration or ideal to be pursued save God. The believer turns to God as his only point of reference and approaches Him in joy or sorrow, hope or fear. A true Muslim's faith in God is not merely a matter of verbal profession, he must realise the Presence and Goodness of God. When he does so the scale fall from his eyes; all the falsities and glittering nature of the material existence cease to enslave him: he sees God's working in His world and in himself. Once a man is emancipated from everything but God, he arrives at a stage of development where he feels perfect repose. He finds his Lord as all loving and all merciful. He sees God's wisdom at work everywhere and becomes his instrument of action in every sphere of life. Inspired by the idea that God is sufficient unto him, he moves to action. Freed as he is from fear, he ventures on every virtuous action and meets with success. The energizing words of the Quran which declare that the entire heavens and earth are made subservient to him ring in his ears and encourage him. Egotism, lust and greed touch him not, and he moves forward by the dynamic force of the Quranic message of peace, equality and fraternity.

"Birr" or Personal Centredness of a Person

The term '*Birr*' (بِرّ) is derived from the root (ب ر ر) which means godliness, righteousness, probity, kindness, charitable gift. The semantic constitution of this term seems to be similar to that of '*salih*' which I shall discuss in the later part of this study. A very important clue to the subtle meaning of this word is provided by concentrating on another meaning of this word and contrasting it with its opposite, viz., land or ground and ocean. In this sense these locutions are also used in Urdu: '*barr*' and '*bahar*'⁸ it is common knowledge that when a person sets his feet on

observances to the total neglect of their inner spirit and meaning. Quite understandably many people, as a reaction to the ritualistic soulless moralism of religious people, turn to secular ethics. Islam, on the other hand, always warns against superficial concepts and rituals, against lifeless formalities and non-effective beliefs.

The concept of morality in Islam centres around certain basic metaphysical beliefs and principles. Among these are the following:

1. God is the Creator and Source of all goodness, truth and beauty.
2. Man is a responsible, dignified, and honorable agent of his Creator.
3. By His Mercy and Wisdom, God does not expect the impossible from man or hold him accountable for anything beyond his power. Nor does God forbid man to enjoy the good things of life.
4. Moderation, practicality, and balance are the guarantees of high integrity and sound morality.
5. Man's ultimate responsibility is to God and his highest goal is the pleasure of his Creator.

The dimensions of moral righteousness in Islam are numerous, far reaching and comprehensive. The Islamic morals deal with the relationship between man and God, man and his fellow-men, man and other elements and creatures of the universe, man and his innermost self. A Muslim has to guard his external behaviour and his manifest deeds, his words and his thoughts, his feelings and intentions. In a general sense, his role is to champion what is right and fight what is wrong, seek what is true and abandon what is false, cherish what is beautiful and wholesome and avoid what is indecent. Truth and moral virtue are his goal. Humility and simplicity, courtesy and compassion, are his second nature. To him, arrogance and vanity, harshness and indifference, are distasteful, offensive, and displeasing to God.⁶

In the verse quoted above there is a comprehensive and clear description of the righteous man. He should obey all the salutary regulations, and should make his sincere motive the love of God and the love of his fellow-men for the sake of God. Here we have four elements of righteousness: (a) One's faith should be true and sincere, (b) one should be prepared to show it in deeds of charity and kindness to fellow men, (c) one must be a good citizen by supporting charitable institutions and social organizations, and (d) one must be steadfast and unshakeable in all circumstances. It is clear, therefore, that righteousness is not merely a matter of void utterances, it must be found on strong Faith and constant practice. It must cover the person's thinking and action and extend to his

attracting rewards and the pleasure of God. Good morals in Islam are divine attributes and it is demanded of us to recreate them in ourselves as far as our humanity allows. A tradition of the Prophet (peace be upon him) says:

"Let the virtues of God be your virtues." (al-Bukhari)

- (j) From the concept of normative or exemplary conduct there follows the concept of standard or correct conduct as a necessary complement. Righteous behaviour, in Islam, is formalized by the Prophet's example, his '*Sunnah*'.

In the behavioural pattern of the Prophet (peace be upon him) righteousness and virtue appear in an embodied form. An abstract passion for piety and righteousness may assume devilish form and proportion and eventually end up in something vicious and degenerate. The sense in which *sunnah* is a straight path without any deviation to the right or to the left also gives the meaning of a 'mean between extremes' or the 'middle way'. The Prophet's life provides perfect answers to the questions: 'What are the undesirable extremes in human dispositions?' and 'What is the golden mean that secures the highest good attainable?'

'*Birr*' or Righteousness

Among all the ethical terms used in the Quran such as '*Ihsan*', '*Sidq*', '*Adl*', '*Khair*', '*Ma'ruf*' the most comprehensive and perhaps the most representative of an ideal moral action is the term *Birr*, which will be discussed here not so much in its semantic meaning but in its broader sense in which it is used in the Quran as the definition of ethical virtue and moral righteousness. Let me quote the English translation of the verse 177 of Surah al-Baqarah in which this is explicated at length:

"It is not righteousness (*Birr*) that you turn your faces towards the East and the West, but righteous is he who believes in Allah, and the Last Day, and the angels and the Book and the Prophets, and gives away wealth out of love for Him, to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask, and sets slaves free and keeps up prayer and pays the alms (Zakat); and those who honour or fulfil their contracts when they make a contract, and remain patient in distress and affliction and in the time of panic and conflict. These are they who are truthful and these are they who are God-fearing."

In the first part of this verse a particular view of moral rectitude and righteousness has been negated, that of pure formalism and ritualism. Some devoutly religious persons exhibit this attitude when they assign utmost importance to outward appearance of moral and religious

The teaching of the Quran, which stands for the possibility of improvement in the behavior of man and his control over natural forces, is neither pessimism nor optimism and is animated by the hope of man's eventual victory over evil."⁴ Earthly life is of tremendous value; but it is of a purely instrumental value. In Islam there is no room for the materialistic optimism of the modern west which says:

"My Kingdom is of this world alone."

The Quran teaches us to pray:

رَبَّنَا آتِنَا فِي الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ حَسَنَةً

"Our Lord! give us the good in this world and the good in the Hereafter." (2: 201)

Thus the full appreciation of this world and its goods is in no way a handicap for our religio-moral endeavours. Material prosperity is desirable, though it is not a good in itself.

- (h) *Morality*, culture and religion, according to some influential theological ethical philosophers who agree with the Quranic approach, are the three functions of the human spirit.⁵ None of these functions of the spirit ever appears in isolation from the other two. The moral imperative, in so far as it has an unconditional and self-transcending character, assumes a religious dimension. A decision or action is moral only when it spring from the 'pure ought to be' of the moral imperative. In this way not only the content but also the unconditional character of the moral imperative would have to be sanctioned by a divine command.
- (i) Islam is not only a spiritual attitude of mind or a code of sublime precepts but a self-sufficing orbit of culture and a social system of well-defined features. In fact, it is an all embracing code of life establishing, on a systematic and positive base, the fundamental principles of morality and precisely formulating the duties of man not only towards his Creator but towards himself and towards his fellowbeings. It offers a complete coordination of the spiritual and material aspects of human life, lays down a practical code and demands a righteousness well within the realm of practicability. It does not subscribe to materialistic trends but rouses in man a consciousness of moral responsibility in everything he does. There is no sphere of life, no conscious activity of man, which may be outside the pale of Islamic morality. If it falls in line with the divine prescriptions and the ethical code, almost every temporal act is given a spiritual touch and raised to the status of worship (*Ibadat*),

- d) In Islam, the first and foremost goal is the inner, moral progress of man, and therefore the ethical considerations overrule the purely utilitarian. In the contemporary world the situation is unfortunately just the opposite. The consideration of material utility and physical comfort dominates all manifestations of human activity, and ethics are being relegated to an obscure background of life and condemned to merely a theoretical position without the slightest power of influencing the human community.¹
- e) Ethics constitutes an essential aspect of man's intrinsic nature: it is part of his ontological substance. The sense of right and wrong fulfils a psychical demand emanating from a man's inner being, just as water and air fulfil our basic needs for physical existence. The inner non-corporeal component of man—the spiritual core or soul—requires nourishment through gratification of its moral demands. In this sense, some conception of moral righteousness or piety is inalienable from human life. On deeper analysis it would become clear that even socially undesirable elements have a sense of righteousness and observe a code of ethics to gratify it. *Pace* Durkheim, a minimal sense of ethics (good, virtue) is unavoidable, and hence his notion of 'anomie' or a state of normlessness is a pure fiction.²
- f) The ultimate justification of morals depends on the idea of man's intrinsic aim, the *telos* for which he is created. If the aim implies something above finitude and transitoriness, the fulfilment of this aim is infinitely significant. When Plato said that the *telos* of man is 'to become as much as possible similar to the God', such a *telos* gives utmost depth to the moral imperative. Again, if the object of our life as a whole is the worship of God, then we necessarily must regard this life, in the totality of all its aspects, as one complex moral responsibility. Thus all our actions, even the seemingly trivial ones, must be performed as acts of worship.
- g) Disgusted with the Buddhist or 'Tayag' doctrine of pessimism that this world is full of evil and consequently no good can come out of it, some thinkers have taken refuge in the opposite extreme of optimism. The Quran, on the other hand, advocates neither the one nor the other.³

"To the optimist Browning", writes Allama Iqbal in his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, "all is well with the world; to the pessimist Schopenhauer the world is one perpetual winter wherein a blind will expresses itself in an infinite variety of living things which bemoan their emergence for a moment and then disappear for ever..."

ETHICAL VIRTUE IN THE QURANIC PERSPECTIVE

Dr. Absar Ahmad

In this paper I intend to discuss briefly and schematically the question of moral virtue or righteousness with special reference to the words *Birr* and *Saleh* as the key ethical terms used in the Quran. It would, however, be helpful first to make a few general observations regarding the Quranic approach to human life and the importance of his moral endeavour.

- a) Islam, as every unbiased student of history knows, wrought an epoch-making and the most wonderful transformation in the laws of thought, principles of life and criterion of values of mankind. This much needed and most welcome revolution was based upon those fundamental principles which are, in reality, the *raison d'etre* of Islam itself, viz., God-consciousness, sense of human dignity and the moral principle of human equality.
- b) Atheistic ideologies and humanistic ethics believe in the possibility of a progressive moral improvement of mankind, in the collective sense, by means of their practical achievements and the development of scientific thought. The Islamic viewpoint is, however, diametrically opposed to this conception of human evolution. Islam has never accepted, as the secular utilitarian/pragmatic philosophies do, that the human nature—in its general supersensible sense—is undergoing process of progressive change in a similar way as a tree grows; because the basis of that nature, the human soul, is not a biological entity. Ethical matters, accordingly, are part of an ontology and not part of a sociology or 'social engineering'.
- c) Islam, being based on transcendental conceptions, regards the existence of a soul as a reality beyond any discussion. Though certainly not opposed to each other, material and spiritual progress are, according to the Quran, two distinctly different aspects of human life. They may exist side by side, and again they may not. While clearly admitting the possibility, and even desirability of material progress of believers, Islam clearly denies the possibility of moral and spiritual improvement of humanity by means of its collective material achievements.