

Being a “Good Person” Is Not Enough: Why Ethics Need Islam	
Author	Ovamir Anjum - Bachelors in Nuclear Engineering and Physics, Masters in Computer Science and Ph.D. in Islamic Intellectual history (University of Wisconsin-Madison), Masters in Social Sciences (University of Chicago)
Epistemic imperialism	<p>The colonization of knowledge-production, meaning, and values by certain key global institutions</p> <p>Greed had always been recognized as the greatest of evils, and its particular form, usury or interest, the most hated crime, in all cultures and all history, until modern capitalism began to consider it both a virtue and a necessity. This points to a deeper problem than economic exploitation and increasing inequality: it is our very sense of right and wrong that is mass manipulated by the elite</p>
Sign of moral bankruptcy	<p>It is not without irony that the greatest sign of the moral bankruptcy of the modern secular lifestyle is offered by modern empirical science itself: climate change</p>
Climate change and its moral implications	<p>Imagine if parents sell off and consume the only house where their children could live, every brick and piece of furniture, deliberately and out of reckless greed, leaving their young children to starve, beg, and freeze on the streets as they voraciously consume everything.</p> <p>Science tells us that the modern, secular, capitalist lifestyle has been precisely that kind of parent to the world</p>
Evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Since the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century, within 200 years, humans have consumed nearly all of the fossil fuels that it took natural processes 200 million years to deposit into the earth - Nearly 5% of the world's population consumes 35% of the world's resource - A child born in the United States will create thirteen times as much ecological damage over the course of his or her lifetime than a child born in Brazil
Metaethical questions	<p>Are ethical norms, such as ‘killing an innocent person is bad’ and ‘helping someone in need is good,’ simply conventional norms that make our lives easier (and hence, have no objective foundation), or based on the nature of things themselves (such that they can be known by reason alone), or assigned and revealed arbitrarily by God (and hence, known only through revelation)?</p>
Priorities	<p>Which of the many desired behaviors and virtues are more important than others, and what do we do when they conflict with each other?</p>
Question of purpose/teleology	<p>Is the purpose of life to maximize pleasure and individual liberty, group power for the sake of domination, or to please God?</p>

<p>Hadith Possible interpretations</p>	<p>The Messenger of Allah ﷺ summed up his entire mission saying: "I have been sent only to perfect noble traits of character"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "I have come not to invent but only to perfect good character." - "I have come for no other purpose but to complete noble character traits." <p>This hadith affirms that people already do recognize and possess noble traits; the revelation has come only to complete and perfect these traits</p> <p>One implication of the hadith is that human beings are often in possession of knowledge and appreciation of good character even before access to direct revelation</p>
<p>How does Islam perfect moral traits</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) By giving these virtues the right purpose or teleology: Allah ﷺ 2) By providing a higher and lasting level of motivation 3) By providing the right meaning and balance among competing values through the revealed Law, the Sharī'ah
<p>Socrates Quote Idea Question Answer</p>	<p>The first ethical philosopher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "An unexamined life is not worth living." - Suggested that all must be governed by one all-wise philosopher, and that women and children are to be communal property rather than individuals within their families, and that children should be separated from their parents at birth and placed according to their natural capacities so as not to receive undeserved love - How could the man known to be the first and greatest philosopher of ethics come to a conclusion that, by all accounts, appears the most deplorable and unethical? - The human mind, even at its best, cannot be trusted to play god; only God is above blind spots and errors
<p>Divine guidance</p>	<p>Humanity has never existed without divine guidance and hence ethics</p> <p>Allah created the first human being with the ability to know right from wrong and the imperative to follow divine guidance when it is sent through divine messengers</p> <p>Guidance has always involved recognizing the truth of one God, worshiping Him alone, and being good to one another</p>
<p>Need for divine guidance Absence of guidance</p>	<p>Humans can naturally come to believe in one Ultimate Reality, but often cannot advance beyond this point without the benefit of divine revelation to arrive at the attributes of the One True God and the right way to live that is pleasing to God</p> <p>Results in endless disagreement and confusion</p>

The foundational moral choice	The choice to respond to the truth, neglect it, or deny it
Emotivism	An ethical theory which bases values on what feels good or bad In an emotivist culture, ethical beliefs are merely based on manipulation of individuals by each other
The dominant ethical philosophy of our times	Liberalism upholds the idea that individual freedoms and rights take precedence over any truth-claims - Secularism is the idea that religion should be removed from public life - Liberalism requires secularism but not the other way around, as there exist a number of nonliberal secularist societies like Russia and China
Justification for moral principles	Some scholars have accused post-Enlightenment, liberal, Western society of smuggling ethical values from major religions because they do not have a valid justification for their own
Modern secularism https://www.islam21c.com/islamic-thought/why-modern-atheists-are-mushriks/	While ostensibly atheistic or agnostic, it is indeed a kind of polytheism in numerous palpable ways Human beings have been created to worship, and when they fail to acknowledge and worship God, they invariably fall into worshiping many gods
Pre-Islamic Arabs and modern liberal societies	Burying baby girls alive was a normal practice to pre-Islamic Arabs In modern liberal societies, where human rights are worshiped, many advocate similar rights to kill unborn babies in the name of sexual freedom and choice - The pre-Islamic Arabs were only different insofar as they were technologically behind and had to wait for the children to be born before killing them - The poor among them would bury their daughters alive for "fear of starvation". They may have individually felt this to be wrong, but they lacked belief in the God-given inviolability of life
Why ethics need revelation	Contrary to popular belief, most horrific acts occur not due to a lack of morality, but rather in the name of some supposedly moral goal - It is estimated that millions were killed by modern states, for the sake of modern ideologies such as progress, Marxism, and colonialism
Examples	Hitler, considered the epitome of evil in modernity, was driven to commit genocide by virtue of his strong commitment to his particular moral beliefs which was inspired by the ideology of Darwinism - Sixty-two million people were killed

Do the ends justify the means?	<p>The pursuit of a greater ethical good was also the justification behind Mao's communist transformation in China during which tens of millions of people starved to death in the man-made famine of the Great Leap Forward, but such a tragedy was considered necessary to achieve a more economically equal society</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Between twenty and thirty million people were killed <p>In 1996, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was asked about the death of half a million children as a direct result of the US war and sanctions against Iraq and responded: "We think the price is worth it." The world's oldest democracy and champion of human rights, in other words, believes that half a million innocent children could be legitimately killed to protect its strategic interests</p>
Can unbelievers be moral?	<p>The preceding discussion does not entail that such people cannot have moral conduct. Rather, the moral sense, <i>fitrah</i>, is God-given. But the exclusion of God confounds it and misleads it. Without being guided by the truth of God and disciplined by God's commands, it has often led humans to commit greater atrocities than any beasts have ever committed</p>
Shari'ah commands goodness and justice	<p>"He [Prophet] will enjoin on them that which is right and forbid them from that which is wrong, making lawful for them all good things and prohibiting for them only the foul; relieving them of their burden and the fetters that they used to wear"</p>
Laws of Allah are beneficial	<p>Allah has commanded us to do what is known to human nature to be right and beneficial</p> <p>All scholars agree about the reasonable and beneficial nature of the divine command</p> <p>Of the four theological schools, three, the traditionalists, <i>Māturīdiyyah</i>, and <i>Mu'tazilah</i>, argued that ethical truths are indeed known to human reason, whereas one, the <i>Ashā'irah</i>, disagreed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The <i>Ashā'irah</i> did not deny that human reason can know what is beneficial or harmful, but they differentiate that from the knowledge of what incurs reward or punishment by Allah in the Afterlife
Ibn al-Qayyim	<p>"Verily, the Shariah is founded upon wisdom and welfare for the servants in this life and the afterlife. In its entirety it is justice, mercy, benefit, and wisdom"</p>
The first ethical imperative	<p>The foundation without which the concept of good becomes incoherent is the acknowledgment of and submission to the ultimate Truth, Allah</p> <p>We are taught to devote our worship to Him exclusively, and to turn to none but Him for help for He alone <i>deserves</i> to be worshiped and</p>

	<p>begged. The idea of right or desert (haqq) is a fundamentally moral idea</p> <p>The Creator created life with a purpose and fulfilling that purpose is the foundation of all ethics and truths</p>
<p>Why does God let those who deny Him thrive and dominate the earth?</p>	<p>God's patience is incomparably greater than ours, and hence, God is far more patient with those who are unjust toward Him than with those who are unjust toward each other, even though the former is a greater sin than the latter. This is the meaning of the famous saying of the scholars that "God gives respite to the unbelievers who possess the virtue of justice but not to those who are believers but who are mutually unjust." For it is fitting that those who possess God's guidance be taken to account in this world to remind them to wake up to their duty to God and to humankind, and that those who do not have access to God's message be given time until the message is brought to them.</p>

AK