

Why Is Shirk the Greatest Sin of All?	
Author	Zohair Abdul-Rahman - B.Sc. in Life Sciences with a minor in Psychology, an M.Sc. in the Scientific Method, Ijāzah in Islamic theology and Hadith, M.D. (University of Queensland)
Can one independently come to the Truth?	<p>Theologians have debated whether an individual can independently come to the Truth without guidance in the form of revelation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Qur'an is clear that regardless of whether one is capable of reaching the Truth or not, out of His Mercy, the responsibility to believe in the Truth only comes if a messenger is sent</li> </ul> <p>وَمَا كُنَّا مُعَذِّبِينَ حَتَّىٰ نَبَعَثَ رَسُولًا</p>
“Just be a good person, it doesn’t matter what you believe”	Response: The conception of a ‘good person’ is based on a person’s belief in what constitutes the Ultimate Good. Therefore, religious belief is the most important part of being a good person
Harm of bad beliefs	<p>Nazi Germany’s belief in Social Darwinism and the Soviet Union’s militant atheistic communism was catastrophic yet based on their conception of the Ultimate Good</p> <p>Sometimes the harm of false beliefs may not be as obvious yet are spiritually, psychologically, and morally destructive</p>
Tawhīd	Reflects the absolute oneness of the Divine Reality who governs this world
Shirk	Divinity is shared across multiple entities
Hadith regarding the greatest sin	<p>The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was asked, “Which is the greatest sin?” He replied, “That you set up with Allah a rival and He is the One who created you”</p> <p>أَئُذْنَبْ أَعْظَمُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ قَالَ أَنْ تَجْعَلَ اللَّهَ نَذِرًا وَهُوَ خَلَقَكَ</p>
Question	If shirk is the greatest evil, why does one feel more outraged by a serial killer’s crime of murder than his personal religious beliefs and practices?
Moral outrage versus moral magnitude	Moral outrage is a person’s emotional response to a moral crime, which is relative to a range of contextual factors and not an objective evaluation of the magnitude of the crime
Factors contributing to stronger reactions to a crime	<p>Feelings of personal vulnerability - A serial killer generally evokes a stronger emotional response than a politician commissioning drone strikes that kill thousands</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It’s harder to identify with nameless drone strike victims in a foreign country than with serial killer victims who could be your neighbors</li> </ul>

<p>Outrage against disrespecting the flag</p> <p>Outrage against shirk</p> <p>Qur'an</p>	<p>Personal values - a person's worldview will majorly determine their reaction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- American patriots who have lost their children in military service will be more outraged at someone disrespecting the American flag</li> <li>- In disrespecting a flag, no harm is directly perpetrated against another individual, yet moral outrage is high. This informs us that emotional reactions to immoralities are not only based on harm committed against others, but on how strongly a person believes in their values</li> </ul> <p>A person who does not have a sense of moral outrage against shirk has betrayed their own lack of connection with the value of <i>tawhīd</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The stronger a person's love for Allah, the angrier they will feel when people associate partners with Him</li> <li>- "They say, 'The Most Compassionate has offspring.' Indeed you have come up with such an abominable statement. It almost causes the heavens to be torn apart, the earth to split asunder, and the mountains to crumble to pieces"</li> </ul>
<p>Perspectives when judging acts</p>	<p>Crimes with immediate consequences are seen as worse than those with long-term effects</p> <p>People focus on physical harm to the exclusion of spiritual or psychological damage</p> <p>*Consequences in the afterlife are what truly determine the magnitude of evil</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The afterlife is the place where deeds are recompensed according to their true worth</li> <li>- "Every soul will taste death, and you will only be given your [full] compensation on the Day of Resurrection"</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;">كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَاقَةُ الْمَوْتِ</p>
<p>Punishments in Islam</p> <p>Comparing ribā and public intoxication</p> <p>Shirk and Islamic law</p>	<p>In Islamic law, there are many immoralities that are grave but carry no legal punishments in this world at all</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lying, backbiting, and mistreatment of parents are all major sins but no worldly punishments are legislated for them</li> </ul> <p>The sin of ribā (interest) is described as 'waging war against Allah and His messenger,' yet has no associated worldly punishment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Public drunkenness, on the other hand, has a prescribed punishment even though ribā is worse from a moral perspective</li> </ul> <p>Shirk, which is considered the ultimate evil, does not have a worldly punishment prescribed for it in Islamic law</p>
<p>Islamic law and</p>	<p>It is not designed to punish every single immorality in this world</p>

punishments	<p>Some immoralities are too grave to be handled by human beings and must be escalated to the Supreme Court of the Most High</p>
What is 'good' and 'bad'?	<p>Good and bad are categorizations of reality that necessarily assume an ultimate cosmic purpose</p>
Sports comparison	<p>In sports, a 'good' move is what facilitates the individual or the team fulfilling the purpose of the game, while a 'bad' move hinders them from it</p>
Life has purpose	<p>Similarly, we can only apply the terms good and bad to life as a whole if it possesses some inherent purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It would be nonsensical to describe an action as good if there was no point to the game</li> </ul>
Betrayal/treason	<p>The major sins and crimes people recognize can be reduced to a common theme: betrayal</p>
	<p>The worst crime in the eyes of the state is treason, betrayal of the nation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The harshest punishments are reserved for the crime of treason</li> <li>- The reason being that the state had provided the citizen with protection, public resources, and dwelling in exchange for loyalty</li> <li>- The more benevolence granted to a person, the greater level of loyalty expected</li> </ul>
Adultery	<p>The worst crime in a romantic relationship, is a betrayal of marital trust</p>
Shirk a form of betrayal	<p>The most destructive action that a spouse can commit is acquiring a secret lover</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To Allah belongs the highest example, but similarly when one betrays their tawhīd and elevates an idol to the position of God, Lord, or Divine, they have committed the greatest act of betrayal in the most important relationship of their lives</li> </ul>
Hadith	<p>I asked Prophet Muhammad ﷺ which crime is the greatest according to Allah ﷺ. He ﷺ replied, 'That you make a rival alongside Allah ﷺ while He created you.' What is next? He ﷺ said, 'That you kill your own child fearing that he will share your food with you.' I said what is next? He ﷺ said, 'That you commit adultery with your neighbor's wife.'"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Shirk is a betrayal of the One who created you, infanticide is</li> </ul>

	<p>the ultimate betrayal of the parental duty of providing, and the worst form of adultery is betraying the trust of one's own neighbor</p>
Idolatry in today's time	<p>The worshiping of idols is in reality the worshiping of one's ego</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "They are only names you have invented yourselves... They are only following their whims and what their self desires"</li> </ul>
Modern form of idolatry	<p>The average Westerner in the 21st century cherry-picks the virtues found in other religions that make them happy and shows the same audacity of the idol-carvers in creating their own way of life based on their own desires</p>
The harm principle Shortcoming	<p>In most liberal societies, the harm principle is the only legitimate standard for right or wrong</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In the absence of any clear harm perpetrated against a victim, an act is often exonerated of any immorality</li> <li>- Many immoralities without obvious harms are not recognized as evil</li> </ul>
Harms of idolatry	<p>Idolatry is an example of an individual oppressing themselves</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When a person commits shirk, he deprives himself of paradise, the mercy, love, and care of Allah</li> </ul>
Psychological harm	<p>Having a coherent purpose in life is essential to psychological well-being</p>
Burhān al-tamānu'	<p>It is impossible to maintain a meaningful belief about the world through idolatry</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Competing divine wills would inevitably result in constant struggle and resistance, compromising the very fabric of reality</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;">لَوْ كَانَ فِيهِمَا إِلَهٌ إِلَّا اللَّهُ لَفَسَدَتَا</p>
Al-Rāzī	<p>The Qur'an compares idolatry to being co-owned by two quarreling partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- He is left confused, not knowing which of them is most deserving of being pleased and which of them he should seek for his needs. One god may be happy with an offering but another one may be spiteful</li> <li>- Believing in multiple idols entails divergent and contradictory aims in life</li> </ul>
Atheism	<p>Modern form of shirk that endows natural entities or concepts with Divine attributes</p>