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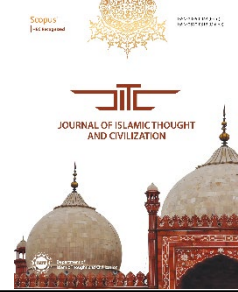
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Morality from Classical Civilizations to Post-Modern Era: A Historical Account Through Islamic Lens

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Abstract

The article provides a comprehensive exploration of the evolution of moral values across various civilizations. It begins by defining morality as a complex system of beliefs and ethical standards that shape human behavior and differentiate between right and wrong. The article then traces the historical perspectives on morality, starting from early classical civilizations like the Greeks and Hindus, to the influence of Semitic religions, particularly Islam, on the development of a coherent moral code. The central thesis revolves around how the perception of morality has shifted significantly over time, from a divine and transcendental pursuit in traditional civilizations to a secular, subjective notion in the modern Western world. The article highlights how traditional systems viewed morality as a pathway to achieving inner peace and cosmic harmony, while the Semitic religions, especially Islam, emphasize the divine command theory, where moral values are absolute, eternal, and rooted in the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). In contrast, modern Western thought, emerging after the Renaissance, places the individual at the center of morality, favoring subjective reasoning over divine guidance. The final sections argue that Islamic morality, unlike other systems, offers a balance between human instincts and divine will, portraying man as inherently good yet capable of moral failures. Islamic teachings provide a comprehensive and timeless framework for human conduct, ensuring both personal and societal harmony. The article concludes that the true understanding of morality lies in adhering to a divinely revealed code, as human nature is susceptible to corruption without the guiding principles set forth by Allah as mentioned in Quran and Hadith.

Keywords: morality, postmodern, classical civilization, Prophet Muhammad, Quran and Sunnah

Introduction

The quest to define and understand morality, a set of principles that govern human behavior, by distinguishing between right and wrong, has been a central endeavor across various civilizations and historical periods. This paper aims to explore the evolution of moral systems from the classical age through to the post-modern era, utilizing an Islamic perspective to offer a unique lens on this

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historical progression. By examining the philosophical underpinnings and theological doctrines that have shaped moral thought, this study seeks to illuminate how different societies have conceptualized ethical behavior, and the implications of these conceptions for contemporary moral challenges. The significance of such an exploration lies in its capacity to provide deeper insights into the roots of current ethical debates, and the moral dilemmas faced by globalized societies. Understanding the trajectory of moral thought can aid in navigating the complexities of modern ethics, where secular and religious perspectives often intersect and conflict. The methodology adopted in this study involves a comparative analysis of classical texts, philosophical doctrines, and theological teachings, with a focus on seminal works that have significantly influenced moral thought.

2. Morality and System of Values

Morality can be described as the human endeavor to discern right from wrong and good from evil, concerning one's actions and behaviors.¹ It refers to the adherence to established standards or criteria of right and wrong, aligning with behaviors generally accepted by society. Morality is a complex system of beliefs or principles derived from diverse social, cultural, religious, and philosophical contexts. Cultural and social groups significantly influence the shaping and enforcement of moral norms, rewarding conformity, and penalizing deviations from these accepted norms, thereby labeling non-conformists as deviant.² Another aspect related to morality is the theory of ethics, often referred to as the philosophical theory of ethics. In religious contexts, it is commonly believed that ethical systems derive from religious texts. However, in other traditions and particularly in modern discourse, ethics is predominantly a subject of philosophical debate. Numerous moral theories, based on philosophical ethics, lack religious foundations, indicating that they do not stem from religious sources.

In contemporary times, Western moral philosophers have noted the vast diversity and complexity of moral principles, asserting that no single theory has yet succeeded in fully explaining every aspect of moral life in a summarized, systemized, and absolute manner.³ Notably, Bernard Williams in his book "Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy"⁴ discusses the limitations of ethical theories. Critics of these theories, known as anti-theorists, argue that many ethical norms are inherently vague, complicating the development of a comprehensive theory. Additionally, ethical dilemmas, where choices may lead to mutually conflicting outcomes, further challenge the formulation of clear ethical rules. For example, ethical guidelines might dictate that one should not lie or offend others, yet certain situations may force a choice between telling a harmless lie to avoid offense, or being truthful and causing harm. In such scenarios, one must weigh which option bears greater moral significance. There is no definitive measure for the importance of various moral demands in specific contexts, nor a foolproof method for comparing ethical rules. Cultural psychologists have framed debates on morality within three ethical domains: autonomy, community, and divinity. Defining morality is inherently complex, leading societies to typically focus on just one ethical domain. The Western moral framework emphasizes autonomy, a value traceable to Judeo-Christian religious traditions where it is believed that God created man in His own image to embody divine qualities on Earth.

¹A. Rahnama, *An Introduction on Moral Education (Philosophical-Psychological Fundamentals and Moral Teaching Methods)* (Tehran: Ayizh, 2009).

²Jones Lawrence, "What Is Morality? - Definition, Principles & Examples Video with Lesson Transcript | Study.Com," accessed November 3, 2019, <https://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-morality-definition-principles-examples.html>.

³Peter L Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (New York: Anchor Press, 1979).

⁴Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1985).

3. Morality and its Connotations

The term “morality” is often rendered as “*Akhlāq*” in Arabic, deriving from “*Khulq*,” which denotes a person's character traits. “*Khulq*”⁵ is closely related to “*Akhlāq*,” signifying the molding and refining of a person's character, suggesting a comprehensive relationship between the two. “*Akhlāq*” encompasses not only the study of moral dictates, rules, values, and aims but also the virtues associated with them. It extends beyond theoretical examination to include detailed practical applications. However, it is sometimes narrowly used to refer to personal traits. Conversely, the English word “ethics” can be ambiguous due to its multiple interpretations. It is defined as a branch of philosophy concerned with values, principles, and virtues, both at the societal level and individually.⁶ In the context of this study, we primarily explore ethics as synonymous with morality and *Akhlāq*.

Morality and ethics are often used interchangeably, yet some distinctions are made in how different societies define these concepts. According to various articles in Britannica on ethics, both fall under the domain of moral philosophy.⁷ Morality is about discerning right from wrong, whereas ethics involves the standardized definitions of good and bad, as endorsed by a particular society. The relationship between moral thoughts, religion, and the concept of good and evil is intricate, contributing to the vague usage of ethics. Therefore, it is crucial to be mindful of the context in which ethics is used—whether it refers to principles and virtues arising from religious encounters, ideal ethics associated with a perfect man, or when discussing specific values, principles, and virtues pertinent to individual situations.

An individual's conception of morality may conflict with society's established ethical standards, potentially leading to deviance and corruption. In such cases, moral intuition or conscience can serve as a guide. This innate moral compass is inherent in all humans, though it can be overlooked or misinterpreted due to various external or internal influences. Moral conscience acts as the voice within, urging one to avoid disgraceful actions and aspire to nobility. Conscience, influenced by religious beliefs, cultural backgrounds, and personal experiences, plays a crucial role in daily decision-making by helping distinguish between right and wrong. Fulfilling one's conscience is essential for a fulfilling and content life. Awareness of one's connection to a Higher Power can alter perceptions of morality, affecting views on society and human relationships. This evolving recognition facilitates moral perfection, enabling individuals to understand and meet the requirements of the divine covenant. This pursuit of moral perfection is a continuous process that progressively refines its adherents.

4. Morality in Traditional Civilizations

The study of humankind including their social conduct has been one of the most important questions ever to come across with. Ever since humans began to think rationally, driven by a curious and inquisitive nature, they have pondered upon profound questions about the universe, the essence of humanity, and the ultimate reality.⁸ Religious traditions assert that when humans first appeared on Earth, they were privy to the answers to these existential questions through divine guidance, as such matters, being metaphysical, could only be truly understood through a metaphysical source. However, a broad overview of human history reveals that often, humans were

⁵Joseph W Meri, *Medieval Islamic Civilization: A-K, Index* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2006).

⁶Lawrence, “What Is Morality? - Definition, Principles & Examples Video with Lesson Transcript | Study.Com.”

⁷Grannan Cydney, “What's the Difference Between Morality and Ethics?,” Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed November 3, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/story/whats-the-difference-between-morality-and-ethics>.

⁸William, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*.

unaware of or disconnected from this divine revelation.⁹ This ignorance prevailed not only during periods without prophetic guidance but also during the times of many prophets,¹⁰ when a significant number of people chose to believe in doctrines contrary to those preached by the prophets.

The cosmos we inhabit is filled with mysteries. Throughout history, every reflective person has been drawn to these enigmas, and mankind has consistently endeavored to unravel them since time immemorial. Initially, religious explanations were the sole answers to these mysteries and were deemed both appropriate and correct. Over time, however, these religious beliefs and dogmas became tainted and corrupted. Consequently, they were supplanted by mythology. In many ancient civilizations, one finds the prevalence of gods and goddesses, supernatural forces, malevolent spirits, and their conflicts. For instance, the ancient religion of Hinduism in the subcontinent is fundamentally rooted in mythology. Similarly, in the West, Greek civilization, which stood as a beacon of prominence, initially based its metaphysical explanations on mythology. The Greek cosmos was governed by a multitude of timeless essences that underpinned concrete reality, imbuing it with form and meaning, and at times, these essences were personified as male and female deities.

The literature of these significant civilizations also drew heavily from myths. The Mahabharata and the Ramayana from India, and the Iliad and the Odyssey from the West stand as testament to this. B.R. Herganan¹¹ elucidates that the initial efforts of humans to understand natural phenomena often involved attributing human characteristics to nature. For instance, phenomena like the sky or earth were described as having human emotions—being angry or calm. This tendency to perceive all of nature as living is referred to as animism, and the attribution of human traits to natural elements is known as anthropomorphism. These approaches were part of early endeavors to comprehend the complexities of life, since initially, humans did not differentiate between objects that were alive or inanimate, nor between tangible and intangible entities.

4.1. Non-Semitic Races

Morality in the traditional civilizations that were not under the direct revelation, was mainly a set of principles that was forwarded by some thinker, monk or a saint that was prominent in that civilization. Mostly these contained a set of individual-centered teachings that could enable a person to achieve inner satisfaction. Moral systems in the Eastern side of world derived its principles from a set of religions mainly including Hinduism, Confucianism, Buddhism etc. which described moral codes as an important duty that must be followed by its believers.¹² Eastern philosophers propagated a monistic viewpoint, rather than a dualistic viewpoint. They construed man as a vital part of the society, presenting them as an inseparable part of the world.¹³ For instance, Chinese philosophers believed that all things or objects present in this world were a byproduct of the dynamics that took place between two contradictory forces including yin and yang.¹⁴ Confucianism defined family as human body, where each member represented a vital body organ. For example, the relationship shared between a child and parent is considered synonymous

⁹Al Baqara,2: 39.

¹⁰Al A'araaf, 7: 88.

¹¹Ibid., 29.

¹²Rahnama, *An Introduction on Moral Education (Philosophical-Psychological Fundamentals and Moral Teaching Methods)*.

¹³William, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*.

¹⁴Hwang, "Morality (East and West)."

to the relationship between bones and flesh i.e., inseparable.¹⁵ Hindus also proposed functional interrelatedness among living beings and the universe. They believe that the human society is a large cosmic organism in which each part performs a specific function. They believe this organism has four parts including head, arms, trunk and feet, each part representing the four prevalent caste systems in the Hindu society. Buddhists believe that a follower or believer must adhere to five principles or values including do not lie, do not be lustful, do not steal, don't kill, never taste meat or consume intoxicants. They believe that violation of these five principles can lead to an automatic payback by karma in the latter stages of life.¹⁶

The ethical discourse in ancient Greece set foundational pillars for Western philosophical thought, heavily influenced by the dialogues of Socrates, and the subsequent works of his student Plato, followed by Aristotle. These philosophers fostered an exploration of virtue and ethics that has persisted through the ages, each contributing uniquely to the development of moral philosophy.¹⁷

Before the philosophical rigor introduced by Socrates, the Sophists, a group of itinerant teachers in ancient Greece, offered a relativistic approach to morality and knowledge. They argued that truth and morality were subjective, varying from one person or society to another. This perspective challenged the notion of absolute moral standards, suggesting instead that what is considered "right" or "moral" is dependent on individual perceptions or societal conventions. The Sophists' emphasis on persuasive argumentation, and the success of rhetoric in public and political arenas highlighted the practical implications of their relativistic moral views.

Against this backdrop, Socrates emerged with a contrasting philosophy that sought universal truths in ethical matters. His method of dialectical questioning aimed to uncover immutable truths about virtues, arguing against the Sophists' notion that morality was merely a construct of convention or persuasion. Socrates believed in absolute values, which he pursued through relentless questioning, aiming to establish a firm foundation for ethics that transcended personal or cultural biases.

Plato, building on his teacher's quest for absolute truths, formulated the theory of forms, which posited that true knowledge of virtue comes from understanding its perfect, unchangeable form existing in a transcendent realm. In *The Republic*, he describes a society governed by those who have knowledge of these forms, thus ensuring just and moral governance. Plato's allegory of the cave further illustrates the journey from the illusion of sensory perception to the enlightenment of true knowledge, emphasizing the philosopher's role in achieving and disseminating this knowledge.

Aristotle diverged to some extent from Plato's idealistic forms by focusing more on practical ethics in his "Nicomachean Ethics." He introduced the concept of the Golden Mean, suggesting that virtue lies in moderation between two extremes, and is attainable through rational practice. This approach framed morality in more individualistic and practical terms, though Aristotle maintained that rationality guided these virtues, suggesting a form of objective standard based on natural law.

The dialogue between these philosophies reflects a dynamic tension in Greek thought between the transcendence of objective moral standards, and the subjectivity of individual moral practice. While Socrates and Plato looked toward an absolute, unchanging truth in morality, Aristotle

¹⁵Gordon W. Allport, *Becoming: Basic Considerations for a Psychology of Personality*, *Becoming: Basic Considerations for a Psychology of Personality* (New Haven, CT, US: Yale University Press, 1955).

¹⁶Harold Cowar, *The Perfectibility of Human Nature in Eastern and Western Thought* (New York: State university of New York press, 2008).

¹⁷Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of Western Mind* (London: Random House, 1991).

recognized the variability in how these truths were practiced, suggesting a nuanced understanding that bridged absolute ethics with practical application. This interplay highlights a sophisticated evolution in Greek moral philosophy, which acknowledged both the superiority of human reason in discerning moral truths and the subjective experiences that influence ethical behavior.

4.2. Semitic Religions

The medieval period in history was heavily influenced by Christian thought, which offered rich insights into human nature through its religious texts, particularly the Bible. As William James noted in his exploration of human nature from a religious standpoint, religion serves as a framework for understanding various aspects of human nature. Within Christian theology, two primary schools of thought emerged concerning human nature. One viewed humans as theistic and spiritual beings, while the other considered them natural and cosmological entities. This led to diverse interpretations by Christian theologians about human nature, which became part of the prominent and influential explanations during the medieval era.

The moral doctrines of this period elevated humanity to a lofty status within the universe, portraying human life's sole purpose as achieving spiritual purity and transcendence. The New Testament discusses human attributes such as intelligence, emotions, free will, moral responsibility, and the potential for eternal life. The Gospels reflect that Jesus' perspectives on human nature align with those found in the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament.

For instance, Jesus' statement in Mark 14:38, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak," may appear to endorse a dualistic view of human nature. However, this interpretation is misleading. Jesus adhered to the Hebrew tradition of viewing the entire personality—mind, body, and spirit—as a unified whole. He often used the terms "flesh" and "body" not to signify separate entities but as representations of the entire human personality, as shown in Matthew 5:29 where he says, "that your whole body be thrown into hell."

Similarly, when Jesus speaks of "life" in Mark 8:35, "Whoever would save his life will lose it," or "soul" in Mark 14:34, "My soul is sorrowful," he refers to the Hebrew term *nephesh*, which encompasses life or self, including the body and its physical components. In his teachings, Jesus underscores the essential human characteristics of intelligence, free will, and emotions, emphasizing the need for discipline. The Biblical narrative, therefore, presents a multifaceted and diverse portrayal of human nature, reflecting the complexity and depth of Christian theological thought. In a nutshell following points can be seen in all *biblical ethics*.¹⁸

- God; the creator is the origin of Mankind.
- Man is the expression of God.
- Man is the supreme creation, and is the master of all other creations.
- Humans are composed of two parts i.e., the Body and the Soul.
- Humans have the ability to transcend themselves.

Islam, like the other Semitic religions i.e., Christianity and Judaism, propagates the fundamental belief that Allah Almighty created this universe, and created man as his vice-regent on Earth. Allah is the Omnipotent and Omnipresent Lord and his commands are to be followed. It is He, who for the guidance of Man, sent Prophets and revealed Books upon them. These books, containing divine guidance from Allah, are the only source of moral standards, setting the criteria for judging good and evil. Prophets during their lives set a practical example by acting upon those divine commands and guidance. Hence upon this objective and absolute criterion, man is responsible to perform his religious obligations, and will be held accountable for not performing his

¹⁸Justo L. González, *Essential Theological Terms* (Westminster: John Knox, 2005), 8.

social obligations and duties. There is another prime element which appeared to be similar, that is the concept of life after death, which is termed as resurrection. In all world's religions, especially in those that are named as Semitic religions, this feature is more or less similar. Even before the advent of proper religion, among those who were supposed to worship the moon, and the sun as deities, people also pondered over the questions about the tragedies of life. This critical and worth examining question led them to believe in next world. Ezzati however, finds a sharp contrast between Christian and Muslim concepts regarding human nature. He says that "According to Christianity, Adam's disobedience plunged the entire human race into ruin, and the fallen man could not of himself do good, please God or gain salvation. The Christian, is thus born in sin, and in an impure state and cannot redeem himself by his inner resource. By contrast, Islam recognizes both the innate goodness of human nature, and the innate potential of man to earn his own salvation..."¹⁹ According to the Islamic outlook, the definition of transgression is different as compare to Christianity. They (Christians) lack hope for survival because of their stubborn beliefs regarding predetermined sin, which is so affirmative that it imparts dullness in their lives. It leads them to believe that absolute perfection or utterly virtuous life is not possible.

5. Common Points Amongst Ancient and Medieval Concepts of Morality

From the discussion so far, we can draw a conclusion that ancient traditions universally recognized that human beings transcend mere material existence, and their true nobility is derived from their spiritual and moral essence. Knowledge and morality form the foundation of man's true supremacy, leading to the belief that civilizations with elevated moral standards and intellectual achievements were superior examples of humanity. Traditionally, man was seen as the focal point of all creation. However, as knowledge progressed, these conventional views of human nature began to be questioned and reevaluated.

The key points of this traditional view of man can be summarized as follows:

- Man is fundamentally a spiritual entity.
- He is considered the center of the universe.
- Man possesses an inherently flawed nature that requires refinement.
- The moral aspect of man is of paramount importance.
- Moral perfection is attainable through adherence to the teachings of prophets.
- Certain absolute moral ideals exist that define a virtuous individual.
- Man has the capacity to fully align his will with that of God.
- Through specific acts of purification, man can cleanse his inner self of moral blemishes.
- He is capable of achieving a state of metaphysical perfection.
- Man can embody the characteristics of an ideally perfect human being.
- He possesses divine attributes that enable him to attain a godlike stature.

These points reflect the depth and complexity of the traditional understanding of human nature, emphasizing the blend of spiritual and moral dimensions that define humanity's unique position in the cosmos. In summary, despite varying in form and substance, all religious traditions

¹⁹Cowar, *The Perfectibility of Human Nature in Eastern and Western Thought*.

concur that man embodies a moral and spiritual essence. Both Semitic and non-Semitic religions recognize that transcendence extends beyond the physical realm and is attainable through adherence to absolute standards prescribed by authoritative scriptures. The ultimate aim of human life, according to these traditions, is to achieve such transcendence. Consequently, each religion prescribes a system of values and rituals designed to facilitate self-purification and spiritual ascent.

Even in ancient Greek civilization, concepts of good and evil were acknowledged from the pre-Socratic era. Although the Sophists promoted a relative notion of values, philosophers like Socrates and Plato later refuted this relativism, establishing standardized definitions of values and morality. Similarly, in the religious teachings of Judaism and Christianity, a primary focus is placed on the purification of man's moral self, enabling individuals to attain ultimate success in the hereafter.

There are numerous common elements across different religions which at times delineate distinct boundaries, and at other times show parallel paths. Thus, it can be observed that morality in classical civilization was more focused on transcendent spirituality, rather than worldly morality and empiricism. In Eastern traditions, the core of moral code revolved around religion, community, social obligations, and duties. This period highlighted both similarities and differences between religious and traditional schools of thought, with religious doctrines emphasizing divine guidance, while traditional Greek thought championed human intellect and rationality. However, they agreed that man held high morals and knowledge, and was more than material self.²⁰

6. Morality in the West after Renaissance to Post Modern World

Following the Renaissance, Western morality increasingly emphasized individual choices and rights, fostering an egalitarian societal structure that championed personal autonomy. In contemporary Western societies, individuals are largely freed from societal pressures about how their life choices are perceived, moving away from concerns about public judgment or community backlash.

The West faces an existential challenge as it grapples with a shift away from religious adherence, witnessing a rise in atheism and secularism. This shift includes questioning the existence of a divine entity and challenging the notion of a supreme power overseeing human affairs. Despite remarkable achievements in science, technology, artificial intelligence, and robotics, Western thought has yet to provide definitive answers regarding human origins. The Renaissance marked a significant transformation in the traditional concepts of humanity and divinity, introducing a philosophy of dualism that encouraged individuals to disengage from external influences and focus on personal autonomy and free will. This period heralded an era where rationality and subjective reasoning became valorized.

The Enlightenment, a pivotal era in the history of Western thought, brought forth a reevaluation of traditional values and introduced new perspectives on morality and ethics. Key philosophers such as Immanuel Kant, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau profoundly influenced this shift. Kant, with his categorical imperative, argued that morality is grounded in rationality, and that ethical actions are those that can be universally applied. John Locke emphasized natural rights and the social contract, suggesting that moral principles are inherent, and can be discerned through reason. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, meanwhile, focused on the innate goodness of man, and believed that society corrupts this natural virtue, a concept that deeply influenced the Romantic critique of Enlightenment rationalism.

These philosophers laid the groundwork for a moral framework that emphasized individual rights, autonomy, and the capacity of reason to determine ethical conduct. Their ideas have

²⁰Cowar, *The Perfectibility of Human Nature in Eastern and Western Thought*, 50–91.

significantly shaped modern Western approaches to morality, which prioritize individual choice and egalitarian societal structures.

The advancement of capitalism further reinforced individualism within Western societies. This cultural shift placed the individual at the core of societal concerns, where personal freedom and autonomy are paramount, often at the expense of communal obligations. In this context, individuals operate based on personal choice, with minimal regard for the communal ramifications of their actions.

In the modern Western world, individuals are seen as sovereign entities, not easily held accountable for actions that may be deemed immoral by traditional standards. The primary role of an individual is perceived as fulfilling personal desires and aspirations. Furthermore, when the social structure fails to meet the needs and desires of its individuals, it is often subject to restructuring through revolutionary changes or cultural transformations. This reflects a societal focus that prioritizes individual rights over traditional religious values and principles.

Western societies are governed by principles derived from science and technology, emphasizing the goals, rights and duties of individuals. The prevailing system mandates respect for the rights of others and considers the violation of moral codes as fundamentally wrong.

Thus, a central moral dilemma in the West today is balancing the liberty of the individual with the demands of society. This tension underscores how the pursuit of individual freedom can sometimes encroach upon basic human rights and adversely affect the fulfillment of other societal obligations. The challenge lies in harmonizing personal freedoms with a collective ethical framework that ensures the well-being of the broader community.

Postmodernism emerged within the Western episteme, fundamentally as a reaction against the narratives promulgated by modernity. A primary characteristic of postmodernism is its thorough rejection of absolutism, including the notion of absolute truth, and its advocacy for relativism across various domains as the sole viable approach. Additionally, postmodernism does not support absolute values or fixed beliefs, and views human identity as a construct shaped by societal influences, challenging the principles of essentialism. McGrath succinctly defines postmodernism as a cultural sensibility that eschews absolutes, fixed certainties, and foundations, embraces pluralism and divergence, and seeks to address the radical situatedness of all human thought. This definition underscores a preference for subjectivity and the denial of timeless truths and absolute standards.²¹ It does not adopt the idea that values are the source of development and rejects the idea that human actions are influenced by predetermined ideals. The texts that have been the source of change and guidance for millions of people throughout the history have been devoid of all the sacredness and authenticity by the theory of deconstruction. This theory gives every reader the right to interpret every text according to their own will and liking. With all these debates present in postmodernism, it has influenced all the fields of knowledge. Even the morality and value system endorsed by Postmodernism is relative and subjective instead of absolute and objective.

One concept or idea that is acceptable according to someone can be unacceptable for some other person at the same time. It means that it is more concerned with individual likes, dislikes and circumstances. So, a single thing may be true in particular circumstances on a particular point, and may be false in other circumstances. Nothing in the world can be claimed as the ultimate truth consistently, and across various perspectives. The believers of postmodernism are also not ready to accept even science as an absolute truth. According to postmodernism, democracy, freedom,

²¹Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 190.

progress, God, communism and other assertions like these often called as “Meta-narratives” have same status as mythologies in the past had.

The focus of Modernism was the quest for truth, and for progress while, postmodernism emphasizes on relativity, creation of realities, and instability of everything. Modernism considers certainty of things and meta-narratives, on the other side, postmodernism does not believe in meta-narratives, the certainty of politics, values, moralities, and education.

In the latter half of the 20th century, Postmodern ideology penetrated in all aspects of society in the west, and it moved the position of Church’s ethics in a complex direction, shattering the timelessness of truths. For example, a good citizen is necessary for a good society rather than a good human being. There is not any objection on a drunkard if he does not create any harm for society. So, there is a great need to recognize this new transformation. Postmodernism is a complex intellectual thought because there are many intellectual movements which are responsible to shape this transformational intellectual climate. Pragmatism, existentialism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, feminism, deconstructionism, and post empiricism are the most prominent shapers of postmodernism. The whirlpool of these divergent tendencies has developed an ambiguous and undetermined postmodernist mind. The new transformation has changed the spirit of man, making him think of himself as the greatest entity of the universe, free from any external authority.

7. Place of Religious Truth and Morality in Postmodernism

The most prominent effect of postmodernism is that it diminished the interest of people from views, doctrines, and ideologies. The modern man had adherence to particular views and doctrines, and was enthusiastic and motivated to preach and promulgate them. Postmodern man has no particular goals and or any consistent principles set for building a discourse. Postmodernists are against ontology, and do not give any importance to religious or metaphysical topics and debates. This is one of the fundamental principles of postmodernists. According to postmodernists, humans are the source of all values, realities and knowledge, and they forcefully reject all such branches of knowledge related to metaphysical and paranormal truths. Postmodern school of thought strongly rejects any external power or concept of God, and theological beliefs and concept of religion. They believe that whatever exists in this universe has material, concrete and tangible shape with constructed local realities. Thus, postmodernists do not endorse any religious tradition, concept of God and metaphysical phenomenon. Postmodernists believe in an empirical world, and consider that there is no trace of material dualism or spiritual world.²²

Postmodern ideology has significantly undermined the influence of religion, characterizing the current era as “the age of no ideology,”²³ which inherently dismisses any religious meta-narrative. Globally, there is a growing readiness to reject all religions, viewing them as fundamentally equivalent. Postmodernists categorically dismiss any claims of exclusivity by any religion, positing that such assertions are incompatible with contemporary ideological standards. While postmodern thought hypothetically allows individuals the freedom to follow any religion, it firmly rejects recognizing any religious framework as an authoritative force. Furthermore, traditional religions have relied on sacred texts, the interpretations of which have historically been controlled by individuals sanctioned by religious authorities. These interpretations are context-bound, and are often contingent on past understandings. However, postmodernism champions the individual’s right to interpret texts independently, leading to a diversity of interpretations. This shift ensures that a uniform interpretation, which could underpin a cohesive value system, is now virtually unattainable.

²²M Farmahini, *Postmodernism and education* (2nd ed.). (Tehran: Ayizh, 2010).

²³J. F Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington, 1st edition (June 21, 1984) (Minnesota,: University Of Minnesota Press, 1984).

Postmodernist theorists apply this relativism to ethical and moral domain as well without providing any proven theory regarding them. Due to their particular system of beliefs, they just attack on absolute values especially given by religion. To talk about an absolute and objective value system in postmodernism is quite contradictory because this school is fundamentally against foundationalism. The identity of postmodernism is determined by the destruction of meta-narrative which is opposite to any objective criterion-based value system. Postmodernists are fully against the principle of totality in morality, and are at a total disagreement with any universal values. Postmodernists have a concrete belief that no single and constant reality exists in this world due to post-constructive background.²⁴ Postmodernists reject the objectivism and focus on mutual mentality. According to postmodernists, being a social creature, human being grows up in a particular environment with special values, cultures and goals. This is the reason that they need special presumptions and particular goals at any work, which affects the research and study of researchers.²⁵ If all truths are relative, and have changing nature then all moral and ethical values are relative. Therefore, the rejection of truth leads to the rejection of morality.

Postmodernists, therefore, do not believe in the concept of universal morality, universal truth and spiritual values. Instead, they believe in the relativity in all areas of life. In this way, according to them, there is no specific value in this world. Thus, everyone has their own values, approaches and preferences.²⁶ Value and education have no objective and absolute criteria, according to them. Richard Rorty preferred contingent moral nature over activism, and rejected the concept of fundamentalism in replacement of activism. In activism, as similar to the school of Dewey, the main concept of morality is experience. Relativity of morality, importance of experience, and the rejection of absolute values – these are the things which are similar to the school of John Dewey activism concerning moral and educational matters.²⁷ We are living, they claim, in a universe with numerous values and multiple sources of values, and there is no concept of one value, or source for value. Humans can accept any values concerning and matching to their subjective social selves.²⁸

8. Islamic Absolute Morality vs Relativistic Morality

Traditional Islam is definitive and absolute, grounding its concepts and doctrines firmly in revelation. According to Islamic literature, the ideal exemplar is the Prophet Muhammad, followed by his companions. Thus, within this framework, there is minimal scope for relativism; the notion of personal truth is considered fundamentally erroneous. Islam maintains that the truths derived solely from human reason are inherently limited, and susceptible to doubt and error. The idea of universal values and principles based on divine revelation is not unique to religious traditions; however, Islam's contribution is its fully developed value system founded on texts regarded as unequivocally authentic in the modern world.

In Islamic tradition, revelation is consistently prioritized over reason. When divine revelation presents a proposition, reason is not typically invoked to challenge or reinterpret it. The understanding that human intellect is fallible, and not the ultimate source of truth, is not novel to those familiar with Islamic teachings. Modernism, in contrast, has elevated human intellect, endorsing rationality as the ultimate truth. Islamic scholars, such as Imam Ghazali and Imam Ibn

²⁴H. A. Ozmen, and M. S. Cramer, *Philosophical Fundamentals of Education*, trans., G. Motaghifar et al. (Qom: Imam Khomeini Educational Institute, 2000).

²⁵S. Beheshti. *Philosophical Contemplations in Education* (Tehran: Beynolmelal, 2009); M. Farmahini, *Postmodernism and Education* (2nd ed.). (Tehran: Ayizh, 2010) 282.

²⁶A Rahnama, *An Introduction on Moral Education*. (Tehran: Ayizh, 2009).

²⁷Ibid

²⁸H. Poorshafei, and N. Arian. *Postmodernism and its Implications in Religious Education* (:IstambulIslam and Educational Researches, 2009).

Taymiyyah, have critically engaged with this perspective. Imam Ghazali, in particular, challenged Aristotelian logic using Aristotle's own methodologies, demonstrating that facts derived from intellectual reasoning could be illusory and unreliable for discerning metaphysical realities. He argued that the universe and time are boundless concepts that human intellect cannot fully comprehend; thus, any observations or conclusions based on these limited perceptions are fundamentally flawed. This critique by Imam Ghazali highlights a critical perspective within Islamic thought—that the capabilities of human reason are not only limited, but also inadequate for understanding the vastness of metaphysical truths, distinguishing Islamic views from both modernist and postmodernist ideologies.

The foundational truths in Islam, derived from divine revelation and the unequivocal Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad, stand as absolute truths. These form the essential benchmark against which all claims of truth in the world are evaluated. If they conflict with the Divine revelation, they are deemed unequivocally false; if they do not, their veracity and moral alignment are assessed based on established criteria. Thus, only the commands and edicts of Allah Almighty and the Sunnah of His Prophet are inherently right and true, and all other judgments must be measured against this standard. In the realm of practical application, particularly in legislative and codification matters, Islam adopts this perspective uniquely. Unlike modernism, which applies a universal scope to every issue, or postmodernism, which often rejects universal norms altogether, Islam maintains a balanced approach. It upholds universal principles for foundational rules while simultaneously allowing for *Ijtihad*—the process of legal reasoning and interpretation. Through *Ijtihad*, Islamic jurists (*mujtahids*) derive laws suitable for specific times, places, and situations, based on the Quran and the Sunnah.

Islam also teaches the omnipresence of God, underscoring that the primary motivation to abstain from sin or wrongdoing stems from the awareness that Allah is omnipresent and will hold each individual accountable for their actions. The Quran emphasizes that nothing can escape His observation, challenging the notion that only actions harming others are wrong. Furthermore, the doctrine of *Khatam-e-Nabuwat* (the Finality of Prophethood) is pivotal in Islamic philosophy, asserting that divine guidance was completed through the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.), and remains relevant and binding for all peoples and nations until the Day of Judgment. This doctrine precludes any alterations to the fundamental tenets of Islam as initially established. Consequently, the definitions of *Halāl* (permissible) and *Harām* (forbidden) as delineated in the Quran and the Sunnah are also definitive and final.

9. Conclusion

After centuries of intellectual progress, humanity, once revered as the spiritual and moral center of the universe, has been reduced to a mere biological entity driven by instinctual impulses. The special purpose and transcendent goals that once defined human existence, have faded into obscurity. The realms of religion and metaphysics have become increasingly marginalized—seen as personal, subjective, and speculative, distinctly separate from the objective knowledge of the empirical world. This division has led to a definitive severance of faith and reason, with transcendental conceptions deemed beyond human comprehension. These notions are now variously viewed as emotional palliatives, imaginative creations, valuable heuristic assumptions, supports for morality or social cohesion, political-economic propaganda, psychological projections, life-impoverishing illusions, or mere superstitions.²⁹

Equipped with the tools of science, modern man now claims to understand, and explain the cosmos and human nature solely through empirical means. As a result, humans are viewed as biological machines, composed merely of chemical elements. This perspective not only strips

²⁹Richard Tarns, *The Passion of Western Mind*, 270.

humanity of its dignity but also neglects the ethical, moral, aesthetic, emotional, and imaginative dimensions of human personality. The philosophies that emerged from the Renaissance and flourished through the Enlightenment have now reached the boundaries of existence. Existentialism, the last theory of modernity, nearly liberated man from all external authorities. Nietzsche's late 19th-century proclamation that "God is dead"³⁰ was not just a reflection of his era, but also a foreshadowing of future intellectual trends, interpreted by many as signaling the death of a humanity in need of divine guidance. Now, man has elevated himself to a divine status, devoid of any allegiance to higher authority.

Despite these developments, all classical traditions concur that man is not merely a material being; true dignity lies in his spiritual and moral essence. Civilizations rich in moral values and intellectual prowess were once regarded as superior. This traditional view placed man at the center of creation, but modern advancements have shattered this perspective. Classical civilizations had external, objective criteria for morality and values, whether in the form of revealed scriptures or mythological systems. These were the foundations for developing value systems, characterized by absolute standards. Modernity, with its new ideals, has challenged these classical value systems and questioned the authority of sacred texts. The adage "nothing is good or bad; only thinking makes it so"³¹ encapsulates this shift, emphasizing rationality and empirical knowledge as the sole criteria for discourse, including morality. Consequently, the influence of religion in moral determinations has waned, and practices once deemed immoral by religious standards, like drinking alcohol or cohabiting without marriage—both prohibited in the Bible—are now commonplace in Western societies. Additionally, the concept of sin as actions forbidden by God has been replaced by the notion of unlawful acts, further secularizing moral judgments.

In sum, while the essence of humanity has historically been recognized as a blend of spiritual and moral attributes, modernity's shifts towards rational and empirical validation have fundamentally altered how values and ethics are perceived and practiced.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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³⁰Frederic Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans., Walter Kaufmann (London: Dover Publications, 1999).

³¹"No Fear Shakespeare: Hamlet: Act 2 Scene 2 Page 11," accessed June 27, 2019, https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/hamlet/page_106/.

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