

ALI 441: Morality and Religion

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Outline

- Definition
- Importance of morality
- Do we need religion for morality?
- What is the basis for morality?
- Summary

English Terminology

Morals: a person's own principles regarding right and wrong.

Eg. he is morally upright, or he is immoral.

Morality is, at the very least, the effort to guide one's conduct by reason while giving equal weight to the interest of each individual affected by one's decision. (Rachels, Elements of Moral Philosophy)

Ethics: rules of conduct with respect to a particular set of behaviors.

Eg. work ethics and environmental ethics.

Arabic Terminology

Akhlaq:

- Plural of khulq
- Khulq meaning character, nature, natural disposition
- Khalq is used for external features and khulq for internal features

Akhlaq are the states of the self that propel a person to perform a task without the need for thought or contemplation. (Shaykh Abu Ali Miskawayh)

- Character and behaviour

Importance of Morality

- Prophets were sent to develop morality

*He it is Who raised among the illiterates a Messenger from among themselves, who recites to them His communications and purifies them
(al-Jumu'ah: 2)*

- The practices of Islam are designed to develop morality

*and keep up prayer Surely prayer keeps (one) away from indecency and
evil (29:45)*

- Believer is known by his morals.

Do we need religion for morality?

- Religion should be considered in two aspects:
 - Beliefs and practices
 - Scripture
- The questions can be divided into two questions:
 - Does a person have to believe in God for morality?
 - Do we need revealed scripture to teach us morality?

Belief in God and Morality

- Knowing morality versus acting morally.
- A person can know morals even if he does not believe in God.
 - Qur'an reprimands polytheists for immoral actions.
 - Many examples of non-Muslims or atheists acting morally
 - *It befits human beings.*

Belief in God and Morality

- Belief in God helps us to act morally.

Does he not know that Allah is watching?

- Belief in hereafter helps us to act morally.

On that day, mankind will issue forth in various groups to be shown their deeds.

*So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it,
and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it. (99:6-8)*

God and Morality

- Can we have morality without God?

If God does not exist, objective moral values do not exist

Objective moral values do exist.

Therefore God exists.

(William Lane Craig)

- What do you need to prove for the argument to be true?
- Objective morals have to be rooted in a reality.
- If God does not exist, then there is no basis for that reality.

Scripture and Morality

- Do we need scripture to teach us morality?
 - Religious teachings: beliefs, morals, practices (application of morals).
 - Ta'abbud: submission to authority.
 - Ta'aqqul: use of reasoning.
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- Beliefs are based in ta'aqqul or ta'abbud?
 - Practices and laws are based in ta'aqqul or ta'abbud?
 - Morals are based in ta'aqqul or ta'abbud?

Classical debate

- Morals have to do with our understanding of good (husn) and evil (qubh).
- There were two traditional positions:
 - Husn and qubh which is shar'iy (legislated)
 - Husn and qubh which is aqliyy (rationalized)
- The shia position has always been that husn and qubh is aqliyy.
 - Rational argument
 - Scriptural argument

Role of Scripture in Morality

- The Qur'an is a reminder.

Surely we have revealed the reminder

- The Qur'an encourages us to be morally upright.

Successful is the one who has purified it

- The Qur'an encourages higher standards of morality.

- Scripture encourages us to be moral agents.