
Virtue Ethics and the Wisdom Tradition: Exploring the Inclusive Guidance of the Quran

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Abstract

The paper elaborates the meaning and measures of Virtue Ethics as a distinct form of moral discourse centered on cultivating an ethic of identity or character. In construing this ethic, Virtue Ethics engages in a moral discourse different from the prevalent discourses on ethics. While the discourse on Virtue Ethics remains grounded in the Aristotelian tradition of moral inquiry, the paper considers this to be a restrictive scope for advancing the meaning of the ethic of identity. The paper argues the need to enlarge the scope of inquiry by considering the wisdom traditions as sources from which virtues could be drawn. It identifies scriptures as a neglected source of wisdom, and relies on the Quran as an exemplary source for the understanding and cultivation of an inclusive ethic of identity. The paper explores the Quranic meaning of inclusion - both in terms of consciousness and conduct. Such a meaning is crucial for responding to the diversity that the emerging global consciousness and global context entails.

Introduction

Although never popular or dominant in the contemporary discourse on ethics, nevertheless, learning from the wisdom literature remains a valued approach in both academic inquiry and everyday social discourse. In the prevalent discourse, reflections are circumscribed either by the deontological, utilitarian or situational approaches to ethics, with the scope of ethics restricted to the secular conception of state and society. Virtue ethics offers a point of departure from the prevalent discourse by making the wisdom literature an integral part of ethical discourse, and in doing so, renders religious texts an inclusive part of reflection and deliberation.

For Virtue Ethics, the value of scriptures lie as sources of “wisdom.” This consideration does not affect nor judge the broader significance of scriptures in religious consciousness or devotional acts. Wisdom constitutes in how a person **uses** the knowledge he or she has. It is an attitude toward knowledge as well as toward belief, values, and skills (Meacham, 1990). Wisdom underlies the rules that are brought to bear on judgment formation or interpretation. In their review of the literature on wisdom, Birren and Fisher observe that, “the etymology of the words *wisdom* and *wise* suggests that they have always denoted or connoted high or elevated forms of behavior. Thus, being wise and displaying wisdom reflects forms of behavior that are admired, condoned, and encouraged” (Birren and Fisher, 1990: p. 318).

Scriptural wisdom aims to affect transformation in consciousness. Notwithstanding the common secular perception of such transformation as infantile servitude to presumed Divine commands, Scriptures do not dictate the transformation of consciousness as a logical or undeniable imperative. Rather, Scriptures invite its readers to a beneficial opportunity for human flourishing. To what opportunities and conception of flourishing does the Quran invites its readers to embrace? What sort of transformation in consciousness and conduct does Quran points to? What is the global wisdom of the Quran? To address these questions the interlocutor needs to extricate the wisdom of the Quran from its meaning frozen in historical particulars and from the social consciousness and customs of its traditional bearers.

The Quran (1) ascribes to itself the status of a wisdom literature (2:274, 3:80): a continuously available source of guidance to truth (39:41) and a wise reminder (3:58). The Quran also recognizes a variety of ways in which a person may conceive of his or her ethic, both as a function of history and of existential choice. Recognizing this freedom the Quran offers each individual, irrespective of his or her social affiliation, a path to embody a specific ethic: the ethic of being a “**muslim**.”* In the Quran, “sovereignty” belongs only to “God”(2). Therefore, every muslim remains accountable to God for his or her ethic as exemplified in conduct.

The Quran identifies the measures of conduct in terms of a consciousness and relationships that promise “peace”(3) and

“integration” in a person and a community, and offers itself as a guide (a “straight path”) to “peace” and “integrity” in conduct. The paper explores the Quran to convey what it means to have an ethic of identity and the relevance of such ethic for advancing an inclusive approach to moral conduct. The discussion proceeds in two sections: Virtue Ethics and the Discourse on Moral Identity, and the Context of Virtue Ethics and the Relevance of the Quran.

In the first section, I discuss Virtue-Ethics in the context of the general discourse on ethics. The discussion centers on the meaning of ‘ethic’ as character, in contrast to the conventional meaning of ‘ethics’ as normative reason. I draw upon Aristotle to show how this ethic of character varies in terms of the degree of inclusion and exclusion engendered by its specification. I end this section noting that the Aristotelian “virtues” reflect a restrictive scope of the meaning of character and conduct. Current deliberations on ethics rest on the global context of consciousness, and therefore, requires drawing from a broader source of wisdom beyond the Aristotelian corpus. In the second section, I follow up the question of broadening the scope of Virtue-Ethics by pointing to the emerging context of global consciousness and the relevance of the Quran as an available source of ethic. Here, the focus of the discussion is to recontextualize the inclusive meaning of the Quranic guidance on forming an ethic of character and conduct.

Virtue Ethics and the Discourse on Moral Identity

In this section, I shall discuss Virtue Ethics as a distinct form of ethical discourse and its relevance for addressing the emerging global context of human consciousness. In Virtue Ethics, moral inquiry is the study of the ‘ethic’ of a person or a community, which is different from the study of ethics in the social sciences or in philosophy. Ethic is a dimension of human conduct, which expresses the fundamental convictions of a person or a community. Ethic is different from ethics in that it rests on the response of a person more than on the observations of a spectator.

The social sciences frame ethical conduct as strategic acts that are either incumbent upon or advantageous to an agent (individual or group) in the process of adjusting to the changing social environment. Ethics thus becomes a special competence to attain given ends. This

is the sense in which the term ethics is used in administration. Depending on the role of an actor or institution, there are a variety of theories to capture and explain these coping strategies in action: Deontological ethics, Utilitarian/Teleological ethics, Situational ethics, and Professional ethics. These frameworks of ethical discourse forms the basis of analytical judgments (i.e., deductive systems of reasoning), that in turn, are used as normative guides (i.e., rational expectations) in role performance or institutional action.

In social discourse and in the experience of agents, these ethical theories (i.e., cognitive frameworks of expectations) compete with one another and leave their agents to rationally decide and sustain their ethical choice. On the other hand, rationality in moral choice remains elusive, because there is no neutral criterion or final experience to adjudicate among the competing theories (Thompson, 1998). Consequently, while one seeks to have convictions, one fails to arrive at or sustain his or her ethical choices as convictions. This subjective dilemma is amplified in considering reality as objectively ambiguous. What one considers as ethical reality may appear incoherent, not necessarily because it is so, but due to the reliance upon what one takes to be a valid ethical theory. Rational choice requires the consideration of all available theories, and the validation of the practical consequences that a chosen theory engenders. On this premise of rational choice, if a person chooses a single ethical theory to validate conduct, then that person becomes vulnerable to the charge of acting irrationally (i.e., making judgment on incomplete information) in not taking account of other ethical theories in construing his or her choice. If, on the other hand, a person considers more than one ethical theory to frame his or her conviction, then that person may experience incoherence in conduct between the competing demands of theories being considered, say between duty and self-interest or between self-interest and altruism. Either way, rational choice fails to affect moral convictions and their sustenance in conduct.

By relying on ethical theories, we debate and analyze situations more to ascertain the efficacy of our rational cognition, than to gain confidence on our responses or to sustain the integrity of our convictions. Our response constitutes our actions, and in existential terms, expresses the integrity of our character or identity. To respond to a situation in a particular way is to claim an identity and express an ethic. Thus, ethic inheres in one's identity (i.e., in

ones relationship with the world and with others). Ethic is not the description of the other, as is the case in ethical theories. One learns about a person's ethic from that person's particular human characteristics that we observe in inter-relationships. We do not learn about this ethic from mastering the deductive rules operative in an ethical theory.

Descriptive knowledge, discernment of the factual referent of a disposition or concept, and rules of inference or judgments are instrumental skills. They aid but are not constitutive of the ethic of identity or character. An ethic of identity constitutes virtues that find expression in conduct. An ethic of virtue is different from an ethics of principles (one based on rules, laws, or right-reason). For example, in utilitarian ethics, outcomes define what is good, independent of the agent's intent. Virtues on the other hand are prior to the application of rules or rational cognition. Trust, Forgiveness, Empathy, Honesty, and Caring are all virtues. They constitute virtues not because they are instrumental for some given ends or because they constitute the expectations of rational persons. Rather they are identified as virtues, because, as conducts, they generate appreciative responses in human interactions and find validation in the internal goods of practices (Statman, 1997; MacIntyre, 1985). Hence humankind values them across cultures and history.

Virtues are anchored in a relational identity, and thus cannot be idealistic or idiosyncratic forms of action. This is because idealism and subjectivism can both be cultivated in a self-referential mode of discourse. Virtues, being constitutive of conduct, are necessarily relational or dialogical in their expression. Virtues, therefore, are necessarily other directed, where the "other" can be the human conception of the sacred, the revealed will of God, a Nation, an ideology, or something else. This relational direction means that admiration (and not prior rules) forms the basis of identifying what constitutes a virtue. In everyday discourse, this Virtue Ethics or the ethic of character provides the operative or embodied meaning of ethics. A contemporary student of virtue ethics conveys the 'ethic of character' in the following terms, "[t]he moral goodness of persons is determined by the virtues they possess: some people are admirable because they have some desirable traits of character, and not the other way round, that some traits of character are desirable and admirable because they are possessed by certain people" (Statman,

1997: p. 10). The invariance of this meaning of Virtue Ethics continues, despite the attempts of philosophical, theological, and political theories of ethics to supplant it. Given the wide variation of discourse on Virtue Ethics, the following positions typify the virtue approach to moral inquiry:

- Virtues signify moral identity in terms of character, which is demonstrated in our actions.
- Virtues are drawn from cultural traditions. Thus virtues exist as moral choices to be affirmed in conduct. Individuals exhibit and transmit virtues when they excel in practicing what they profess and become the exemplar of particular virtues.
- Virtues vary in the nature and range of relationships within which a person find oneself. This range varies depending on the socialization of exemplary practice and their institutionalization in the civic culture.

Focus on Actions

In Virtue Ethics, actions determine the character or virtue that one develops in oneself. Character (i.e., structured patterns of action) defines a person's identity, not only among his or her contemporaries, but in history as well. Thus, the ethic of virtue, as a contemporary student of the subject writes, "[is] to become a person of a certain sort where becoming a person of that sort is to become a person who has certain dispositions to respond to situations in a characteristic way.... (Therefore, in Virtue Ethics,) the assessment of human character is more fundamental than either the assessment of the rightness of action or the assessment of the value of the consequences of action (D. Solomon, 1997: p. 166).

Aristotle, who was the first systematic exponent of Virtue Ethics, offers the following meaning of the term: "By human virtue we do not mean the excellence of the body, but that of the soul, and we define happiness as an activity of the soul. Virtues (therefore) are the activities of the soul in conformity with practical wisdom" (Ostwald, 1962: pp. 29, 17). By soul, Aristotle refers to the two qualities of human psyche: the rational (meaning the ability to reason) and the irrational (meaning the biosocial and psychological dispositions). He writes, "in speaking of 'soul,' we refer to our soul's actions and activities" (Ostwald, 1962: p. 19). We cultivate virtues in the exercise of practical wisdom while responding to the dispositions

that underlie conduct. In recognizing the 'soul,' we do not need a determinate meaning of the term 'soul.' What is crucial for Virtue Ethics, as Aristotle points out, is that in our very conduct we exhibit our soul or character, irrespective of the question of whether the 'soul' is an independent entity or not.

Similarly, practical wisdom is intelligence nourished by experience, reflection, and social learning. We should not equate practical wisdom with rational analysis (or theoretical reason), as many have misread Aristotle in this matter. To avoid this unfortunate attribution, early in his treatise on ethics, Aristotle drew clear distinctions among different kinds of reason: Theoretical reason (which includes Science, Metaphysics and Logic), Productive reason (which includes Expertise and Aesthetics) and Practical reason (which includes Politics and Ethics).

Focus on Exemplary Conduct

In Virtue Ethics, the moral values that signify an identity, do not come from discovering the principles of action through reason. Instead, they derive from exemplary conduct that we acknowledge in our historical and cultural traditions. The historical status of virtues as antecedent to the agents possessing them is central to Virtue Ethics. The ontological status of virtues thus renders reason (i.e., practical reflection) continuous with history, rather than becoming an independent source of values.

Aristotle refers to this ontological status as "studying from the known." Aristotle identifies practical reason as the ability to discern virtues from their presence in the culture. Only then do we advance them as rational action. For Aristotle, virtues stay preserved in a community tradition whose sources lay obscured in history (4). These virtues are either divinely inspired or socially preserved measures of human excellence, and therefore, are not derivable from the autonomous acts of rational cognition. Aristotle writes, "[i]f there is anything at all which comes to men as a gift from the gods, it is reasonable to suppose that happiness above all else is god given; and of all things human it is the most likely to be god-given, in as much as it is the best. But although this subject is perhaps more appropriate to a different field of study, it is clear that happiness is one of the most divine things, even if it is not god-sent but attained through virtue and some kind of learning or training. For the prize and the

end of excellence and virtue is the best thing of all, and it is something divine and blessed” (Ostwald, 1962: p. 22).

The antecedent status of virtues inheres in a cultural tradition. This helps us understand that we do not create, confer or take away virtues, but only reject or receive them. Wealth, Honor and Status are not virtues because someone can give or take them away; while Justice, Wisdom, Courage, Temperance, Modesty, Humility, and Benevolence are virtues because they exist only in the context of their practice. Virtues, thus, are inherent in the life one leads and the conduct one engages in, and therefore, do not inhere in the natural constitution of persons. Aristotle writes, “Nobody would call a man just who does not enjoy acting justly, nor generous who does not enjoy generous actions.... We become just by the practice of just actions” (Ostwald, 1962: pp.21, 34). Because, virtues are not innate in character, they can only be affirmed and cultivated. We sustain them only by habit and training. Pointing to the importance of this pedagogic requirement, Aristotle writes, “[n]one of the moral virtues is implanted in us by nature, for nothing which exists by nature can be changed by habit, ... nor can the direction of any nature-given tendency be changed by habituation. Thus, the virtues are implanted in us neither by nature nor contrary to nature: we are nature equipped with the ability to receive them and habit brings this ability to completion and fulfillment” (Ostwald, 1962: p. 33).

We can see the significance of this observation for Virtue Ethics in the ontological status of virtue – that is, we learn virtues in our socialization, training, habituation, and the cultivation of practical wisdom. In order for us to share practical wisdom, there must exist agents who demonstrate the excellence of particular virtues. The function of a guide, mentor, role model, leader, or supervisor (depending on the context of relational conduct) is a constitutive condition in Virtue Ethics. The very concept of authority rests on the demonstrated capacity of a person to guide and the acceptance of his or her guidance by another person or a community (5). Thus, Statman writes, “Appealing to some paradigmatic personality who exemplifies the virtues in an extraordinary way appears to be the only available way to understand and apply the virtues. To find out what is required by friendship, for example, in some specific situation, would be to imagine an ideal friend and try to figure out how this friend would behave.... [Therefore] becoming a

good person is not [only] a matter of learning or applying principles, but of imitating some models." (Statman, 1997: pp. 10, 13).

The indispensability of exemplars (e.g., Abraham, Socrates, Krishna, Moses, Gautama, Jesus, and Muhammad) render virtues to be both existential and historical. Our understanding of the traditions embedded in a community, organization, role, or relationship provides the historical context for identifying virtues. On the other hand, the development and utilization of instrumental means in the exercise of practical reason (such as resources, techniques and processes) provide the existential basis of identifying the contemporary exemplars of virtues. Neither the historical nor the contemporary exemplars can be demagogues or taskmasters. This is because, as exemplars, they exhibit creativity and flexibility in their conduct to accommodate human fallibility, and thus, they make it possible for others to exercise their own practical wisdom to act flexibly and creatively in their own situations (Alderman, 1997; MacIntyre, 1985). This is why we admire them as teachers and not as rulers.

Variation in Virtues

Aristotle conveys that the cultivation and expansion of practical wisdom are instrumental to the happiness of the soul. He writes, "it is impossible or at least not easy to perform noble actions if one lacks the wherewithal. Many actions can only be performed with the help of instruments [i.e., processes], as it were: friends, wealth, and political power. And there are some external goods [i.e., socio-economic conditions of action], the absence of which spoils supreme happiness " (Ostwald, 1962: p. 21). The reliance on instrumental practices, which have their own virtues, being one thing in medicine and another in military strategy, is a necessary condition of exercising practical reason. Aristotle writes, "there are many people who can make use of their virtue in their own affair, but who are incapable of using it in their relations with others" (Ostwald, 1962: p. 114).

Therefore, for the public good (i.e., the happiness of the political community, which forms the enabling context of all human virtues), Aristotle finds political action as integral to virtue. He writes, "the main concern of politics is to engender a certain character in the citizens and to make them good and disposed to perform noble actions" (Ostwald, 1962: p. 23). Politics (and by

extension, administration), then, is an instrument of gaining influence over others in order to nurture an environment (i.e., a political culture or an organizational culture) where people can cultivate virtues in themselves and encourage them in others. Aristotle writes, "We define something as self-sufficient not by reference to the 'self' alone. We do not mean a man who lives his life in isolation, but a man who also lives with parents, children, a wife, and friends, and fellow citizens generally (i.e., within a network of interdependent social relationships), since man is by nature a social and political being" (Ostwald, 1962: p. 15).

Aristotle and the virtue tradition to this day consider as exemplary conduct or virtues to be those acts that promote the well-being or 'happiness' of persons in a polis (i.e., a political community). The meaning of person, community, and exemplar vary. So does the meaning of identities that we form in relation to these concepts. They remain contingent, both in terms of history and consciousness. Therefore, the Aristotelian condition of attaining the virtues of the polis remains only a historically contingent context (6), and does not preclude the identification of virtues and their exemplars in other contexts.

Virtues carry different significance depending on their context and valuation (i.e., their source and scope of exemplary embodiment). Different contexts of human conduct draw upon different virtues for human beings to receive and respond. Therefore, identities not only differ, but their differences hold consequences for the scope of relationship one recognizes to be embedded in them. Given the enormous but historically contingent range of identities, having an identity becomes a continuous act of striving. The striving lies in recognizing and responding to the expansion or contraction of ones relatedness to the world and to others. In affirming this relational identity, the integrity of conduct does not issue from prior socialization, but emerges from the quality of ones responses to the relations that one recognizes as constitutive of his or her being. To lose integrity means acting out of or to have acted out of ones character (R. Solomon, 1997).

The integrity of virtues and character are not restricted to a specific context, such as the self, family, local community, nation, race, class, or occupation. In fact, considering these restrictive contexts as the source and terminus of virtues cause and continues to

cause unmitigated harm to human life throughout history. The bias of ethnocentrism and claims of autonomous reason as the source and adjudicator of virtues still distort our consciousness of the historical and cultural variations of virtues. There is nothing in the tradition of Virtue Ethics to keep it restricted within the bounds of a particular ethnocentric, political, theological or epistemological claim. For Virtue Ethics to continue with its focus on the ethic of character and respond to human diversity, it must both remain open to and recognize the boundaries of the variations in human identity (Stole, 1995; MacIntyre, 1985).

Stripping off the Aristotelian teleology (i.e., the well being of the polis as the end of virtue) as a historically contingent context allows us to recontextualize the contemporary context of Virtue Ethics. The recontextualization involves not only attending to the different modes of consciousness on human identity but also recognizing the different exemplars of such identity. The current global context not only makes it possible to take this inclusive approach to Virtue Ethics but also offers the opportunity for its recontextualization. I turn to the next section to draw attention to this changed context and the implication it holds for advancing the discourse on Virtue Ethics.

Virtue Ethics and the Relevance of the Quran

In this section, I discuss the significance of the emerging context of global consciousness and the relevance of the Quran in addressing it. Central to my discussion is the position of considering the Quran as a source of wisdom that everyone can consider and learn from (3:58, 32:3, 39:41, and 42:52). I hold the value of Quranic guidance to be neither subordinate to nor the exclusive claimant of Virtue Ethics. I address this stance in terms of two converging positions. The first rests on the emergent global milieu that necessitates an inclusive discourse on Virtue Ethics. The second uses the Quran as one source for advancing our understanding of Virtue Ethics.

Global Milieu Influence

The expansion of the scope of Virtue Ethics raises the question of which wisdom literature is relevant for what context? Is it the one that is widely available in a culture (for example, the Judeo-Christian

and philosophical literatures found in the West)? Or should one also consider literatures beyond the dominant cultural consciousness? There is no neutral basis to choose among the wisdom literature or for that matter among ethical theories on strictly epistemological or political grounds.

The present global milieu fundamentally alters the nature and scope of moral choice (Kung, 1996; Smith, 1998; Lynch & Lynch, 1998). The opportunity is now emerging to make the choice on ontological grounds. For example, Smith writes, "Our modern situation enables man, for the first time, to be significantly aware of the whole sweep thus far of his or her history on the planet" (Smith, 1998: p. 129). This is an opportunity that was unavailable to this extent in any previous times (7).

Everyday, the context of social reality is becoming global due to the advancements in communication that increases our interaction and interrelationship. In this emerging context, we not only cannot deny the existence of different convictions of others, but more crucially, we are able to know and consider all of the distinctive forms of thinking and living within our own consciousness. The very ability to have a non-coerced global consciousness presents a unique opportunity to expand our consciousness in forging an ethic of identity.

The availability of such global consciousness makes it possible to have, in Smith's words, a "world-wide and centuries long awareness" of human condition and identity. This global awareness is possible not only through the mass media, but also through the wisdom literature, which is a continuing source of learning about human identity in all of its diversity. This unique historical context, and its recognition in Virtue Ethics, makes the broader wisdom literature valuable to our contemporary discourse on ethics.

In recent times, there are voices pointing to the relevance of the scriptures in advancing an inclusive global consciousness of ethics. For example, in the context of Public Administration, Lynch, Omdal, and Cruise note that, "Public Administration should not narrow its choice of values to only secularization but should use the full range of human inquiry available to us, including the various Holy Scriptures from not only the Jewish and Christian traditions

but other traditions as well, such as the Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic” (Lynch, Omdal, and Cruise, 1997: p. 473).

Except for religious studies and in studies on religion, the Quran receives the least amount of critical reflection and reference in contemporary discourse (even in Islamic cultures) (8). Therefore, understanding virtues from the Quran's point of view remains outside the normal purview of cultural discourse. To address this oversight, this article draws upon the Quran for its message on the ethic of identity. The approach taken here is not one of learning about the Quran, but learning from it.

What does it mean to learn from the Quran, and why is the effort important? Frederick Denny provides an answer. He writes, “[the] Quran is neither a work of systematic Theology nor an essay in the science of moral discourse. Like the Bible of the Jews and Christians, the Quran is a sourcebook for faith and order and not a textbook of definition and regulation. Because of this, the Quran is not to be equated with the subsequent developments of Islamic thought and practice connected with theology, law, or ethics...(Denny continues) [B]ut often the Quran has been the prisoner of the interpreters rather than their source and guide. Perhaps it is because of this that the Quran has not been as prominent a source for Islamic ethics as might be expected...” (Denny, 1985: p. 103).

Beginning in the 10th century and continuing to this day, Muslim scholars noted the imprisonment of the Quran in a variety of contingent contexts. Among the recent scholars, Fazlur Rahman elaborates the most sustained articulation of this position. He holds that the early interpretation of the Quran as, “a doctrine situationally developed in order to meet certain particular historical exigencies has been erected into a permanent orthodox dogma” (1966: 243). He points that the Quran in the hand of its orthodox and parochial interpreters fails to inspire and guide us. Therefore, in this paper, I approach the Quran as a source of guidance, and as such, I cite and discuss it as a valued source of learning.*

Advancing Our Understanding

An inclusive approach to learning from the wisdom literature must take into account the receptivity of a specific literature to that end. It is an insufficient condition of inclusiveness, if a particular

literature yields to an inclusive understanding only by way of a specific interpretation. The claim of inclusion, therefore, must be an integral element of a wisdom literature for it to advance a global consciousness. If a literature rests on an exclusionary claim, then it remains meaningful only within a given cultural tradition, and hence, it cannot contribute beyond the cultural context in which the tradition is nurtured. Given this criterion, does the value of Quran's message rest on an inclusive or exclusive claim? Unless we address this issue, inclusion of the Quran as a wisdom literature not only will fail to contribute to advance discourse, but may trigger valid objections from those who consider the Quran as unique and hence relevant only within their own interpretive traditions.

The Inclusive Approach of the Quran

In repeated verses** the Quran emphatically points out that, despite the shared human propensities and capabilities, the social expression of human experience is one of diversity. In the Quranic language, the consciousness of social reality is a matter of continuous advancement of understanding by knowing the diversity of human experience and expressions over time. In a wide variety of ways and in addressing different contexts, the Quran conveys its message of inclusion based on its recognition of the differences in human identity. Like the material world, which in the Quran stands for the sign of God, so too is human diversity, including gender identity stand for the signs of God. The Quran states, *“And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and colors. Indeed there are in these signs for a people who reflect (30:22). O Mankind, We have created you male and female and made you nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Surely the noblest of you in God’s sight is the most pious. God indeed is All-Knowing, All-Informed (49:13).*

The Quran states that, God, if He so willed, could have made the social reality an undifferentiated whole or make this uniformity the purpose of social change (i.e., all people as a *single nation* or for different people to gradually become one (16:93, 42:8). But that was not the will of God as stated in the Quran. Rather, what was willed or created is that people experience and know each other in terms of their different ways of life, including their different ways of relating to God. These different ways of life and faith in God (or “submission” to the sacred) is what the Quran names as religion.

These ways of life throughout history, as the Quran narrates, institute moral cultures by means of the guidance provided by the messengers of God (10:47, 25:20). The Quran states that some of these messengers (spiritual teachers) are mentioned in the Quran (especially those who lived in Semitic cultures), but others remain unmentioned (40:78). The Quran then points that God does not, and hence humankind should not, differentiate among any of the messengers (2:136). The reason for non-discrimination is that, all of the messengers delivered the same inspiration and guidance. However, they conveyed the message differently (for example, in different languages, texts, and modes of God consciousness) due to their historical contexts (i.e., messengers being *witness to their own people*) (16:36, 89, and 22:34). Therefore, while the expressive form of the message vary by historical context, its guidance on conduct remains invariant.

The Quran states that the “Book” (i.e., the word or message) calls *every nation* (45:28), in terms of their *conduct* (i.e., *what they did*) (45:29). The Quran states, “*Every nation has its messenger; and when their messenger comes, they will be judged (in terms of the message received), and they will not be wronged*” (10:47), “*for each people there is a guide*” (13:7). The Quran sums up its position saying, “*And We have revealed to you the Book (inspiration) in truth (guidance), confirming the scriptures that preceded it and supercede it. Judge between them, then, according to what God has revealed, and do not follow their illusory desires, diverging from what came to you of the Truth. To each of you, We have laid down an ordinance and a clear path; and had God pleased, He would have made you one nation, but [He wanted] to test you concerning what He gave to you. Strive forward then in good deeds. To God is the ultimate return of all of you, that He may instruct you regarding that on which you differed*” (5:48).

Thus the Quran rests on an inclusive consciousness that is respectful of differences, but with an underlying common purpose. The purpose being, as the Quran puts it, first to know each other on the basis of mutual understanding, and second, to help and encourage each other to do good and to caution and prohibit each other from causing harm. The Quran also points to the need to avoid disputes on matters of faith or to rejoice in being different (23:53, 29:46, 30:32). It also instructs us to stay focused on conduct (doing good work and

guard ourselves from harm), because, only God is the final adjudicator of all differences (42:10).

The Quran is emphatic on the need to stay focused on conduct. The crucial importance of conduct lay on the ground that only in terms of conduct we are able to understand and exemplify the invariant messages of guidance. All forms of expressed guidance being historically contingent, they illustrate but are not universal rulings on virtuous conduct. This emphasis becomes clear when the Quran points to speech-acts as the deceptive signifier of the muslim identity. Therefore, the identity of muslim retains its sure footing only in terms of virtuous conduct.

Misconstruing the Quran with Exclusionary Claims

Despite the inclusive approach, there are other “signs” (passages) in the Quran, where one **may** interpret its messages as exclusionary claims. In particular, Quran announces itself as an Arabic Revelation (12:2, 43:3), specifically addressed to the Arabs in the 7th century Arabia, and conveyed by an Arab messenger, so that its messages are acceptable and understandable to them (19:97). The Quran states, “*We sent forth to you an apostle from among you reciting Our revelations to you, purifying you, instructing you in the Book and the wisdom, and teaching you what you did not know. Remember Me then and I will remember you. Give thanks to Me and do not be ungrateful*” (2:151). Furthermore, the Quran designates the Arab Muslims or the Muslim community as “*the best of nations*” (3:110).

The Arab context, both in terms of a specific language (Arabic) and a particular context (the sedentary culture of Hijaz in 7th century Arabia) are claimed to confer a special or privileged status to the Arabic language and to the 7th century Arab culture. On this basis, many Muslims and non-Muslims lay the following exclusionary claims on the Quran. The first claim is that the Quran confers a sacred status to the 7th century Muslim Arab culture, and hence it serves as the temporal ideal for all later cultures to emulate. The second claim is that the Quran can **only** be understood in the Arabic dialect (i.e., the Quran is untranslatable, which is different from the question of its inimitability). The basis of these exclusionary claims is that, the divine choice of culture and language confers a unique superiority to the Arab Muslim culture, both for the authoritative interpretation of the Quran and following the prophetic exemplar (Nasr, 1975).

Such exclusionary claims are possible only by relying on a nominal or an ideological reading of the messages and purpose of the Quran. Such readings deny what the Quranic signs point to -- which the Quran instructs its readers to cultivate, thereby, contradicting 1420 plus years of history. Even without seeking their referential meaning, the words that precede or follow the specific references to the Arabic language or the Arab culture offer a contextual understanding of the passages. For example, when pointing to itself as an Arabic Quran, the Quran emphatically and repeatedly mentions the purpose for it to be in Arabic. The Quran states, "*We have made it an Arabic Quran that perchance you may understand. And indeed, it is in the Mother of the Book, with Us, lofty and wise*" (43:3). Here, 'you' refers to the 7th century pagan believers of Arabia and the early Muslims, and the key point for which the reference to the Arab context is made, is to cultivate understanding. In other words, **the Arabic language and the social context of Hijaz is referenced in order for human beings to clarify the general and symbolic meaning of the Quran in culture-specific understanding.***

The Quran's claim to advance understanding rests on its observation that the Arab culture not only did not receive any previous message, but that as a culture, the Arabs remain uninformed of any reflective understanding of reality (Quran uses other terms to characterize the Arab culture: *ignorant/ extravagant/ contentious/ haughty*). The emphasis on understanding is also backed by the inclusive approach that the Quran claims for itself. For example, in forwarding the reason for the messenger to be an Arab (i.e., Muhammad), the Quran points to the invariant condition of conveying revelations (or inspirations). The Quran states, "*We did not send any Messenger but with the language of his people, so that he might explain to them clearly*" (16:4).

On the question of the Arabic language, the Quran points that it is of no hindrance for others (i.e., non-Arabs) to learn about the Quran. The Quran states, "*A Book in which the verses are made plain, an Arabic Quran for a people who know*" (41:3). Here the Quran is not addressing the Arabs of 7th century, who the Quran identifies as those who do not know (12:13, 43:5), but the learning community of human beings. Finally, being contextually grounded (as the Quran mentions all revelations to be), the designation of "the best of nation" is predicated on a performance criterion based on conduct. The

Quranic lines that follow the designation are as follows: “*You were the best of nations brought forth to mankind, **bidding the right and forbidding the wrong**, and believing in God*” (3:109).

Thus, we find the Arab context of the Quran draws upon the same inclusive criteria as we find in the context of Diversity. For example, providing service to the world (i.e., making the message of the Quran available to all), having faith (i.e., responsiveness to ones convictions about God), and engaging in committed action (i.e., living a moral life both in a community and in person). In the embodiment of these criteria lie the meaning of the Quran’s message. Any community exemplifying them can claim the distinction of “the best.” The Quran tells us what a community does, defines its excellence, as “best” is not an honor conferred for nothing, nor a privilege granted for an innate superiority of a people over others. The Quran’s reference to the purpose of revelations is “*to offer guidance to judge matters under dispute among people (2:213)*,” reinforces the point of making the message available to the world and not making it the exclusionary claim of the receiving community.

Another possible basis of exclusivity rests on the claim that the Quran is only for the Muslims and only Muslims can understand it. In other words, without becoming a Muslim, one will fail to understand the meaning of the Quran no matter how hard one may try. In other words, the Quran cannot contribute to their learning. The Quran certainly addresses the “Muslims” and considers itself as a guide to their efforts, but the Quran also addresses humankind as well as muslims in offering its guidance to all. In its own terms, the Quran refers to itself as a Book of Wisdom (10:1) conveyed to inspire (42:52) and guide people (39:41) who are sincere in their inquiry (47:24) and who follows through with good work (31:3).

The Quran also addresses non-Muslims (i.e. people of the Book, including Jews, Christians and Sabians), polytheists as well as the hypocrites. Since, Muslims and non-Muslims are addressed together, the audience of the Quran is therefore humanity in all of its diversity. The Quran acknowledges that language and cultures vary (22:34), but it is emphatic about the universal availability and applicability of its messages (23:52).

Therefore, the Arab context is too restrictive for understanding the Quranic guidance, as are the exclusionary claims

in Muslim traditions. In its own terms, the Quran not only remains inclusive but also instructs its readers to further the scope of inclusion in terms of cultivating reflective understanding and incorporating them in their moral practice. The Quran states, “*Do not be like those who say: ‘We hear’, while they hear not. The worst beasts (i.e., persons) in God’s sight are the deaf and dumb (i.e., unreflective) who do not understand.*” (8:21).

The Meaning of Inclusion in the muslim Identity

The crucial distinction between inclusion and exclusion lies in what the Quran means as the identity of a “muslim.” If the identity is inclusive and open, which I claim it is, then becoming a muslim is a universally available identity that entails an inclusive approach to living and relating to others. On the other hand, if the identity of a muslim is exclusive and closed, then one can only be a muslim by separation and segregation from others. The judgment of whether one is a muslim rests only with God. However, according to the Quran, anyone can become a muslim in his or her acts of affirming (i.e. submission to) the guidance of God. It entails the exercise of free choice and reflection.

The Quran addresses a universal audience (i.e., humanity itself) in order for *any individual person* (living in diverse cultures and having different languages and religion) to *receive* and *respond* to its messages. The act of receiving and responding to its messages is what the Quran refers to as establishing and sustaining faith, which is fundamentally different from the act of believing (9). The Quran thus states, “*Say: You do not believe, but say: ‘We submit’; for faith has not yet entered your hearts*” (9:14). The Quran denies the authenticity of a speech-act unless it is affirmed by the soul, that is, the expression of character in conduct (5:41, 5:61). The criteria that the Quran establishes for the character of muslims are “*acting justly*” [30:29], “*being upright,*” “*understanding the signs of God,*” and “*cultivating piety in the heart,*” (22:31-32). Therefore, the Quran rejects the nominal claim of faith (i.e., as a speech-act without conviction) as the criterion of muslim identity. This is emphatically put in the following terms, “*Say: ‘Will you inform God about your religion, while God knows what is in the heavens and in the earth?’ They regard it a favor to you (i.e., Muhammad the Messenger) that they have submitted. Say: ‘Do not regard your submission a favor to me (i.e., an obligation); rather God has favored you when He guided you to*

belief; if you are really truthful'. God knows the secrets of the heavens and the earth, and God sees well the things that you do" (49:17).

Another critical condition that the Quran preserves and promotes for its inclusive approach to faith is freedom of choice. This freedom rests on the condition that there should be no "coercion" (compulsion) in responding to the Quran (2:256). Addressing the Prophet (and therefore all Muslims), the Quran states, "*your duty is simply to deliver (i.e., convey and explain) the message, God perceives His servants well (i.e., calling to account is God's prerogative)*" (3:20, 13:40, 16:82). The Quran offers the reason for this freedom: "*Had your Lord willed, everybody on earth would have believed. Will you then compel people to become believers?*" (10:99). The Quran, therefore, instructs Muslims to only proclaim and follow: "*Say, the truth is from your Lord. Whoever wishes, let him believe; and whoever wishes, let him disbelieve*" (18:29).

The criterion that the Quran points to in exercising free choice is: "for the good of ones soul (or character)." The Quran instructs Muhammad to say, "*O people, the truth has come to you from your Lord; whoever is well-guided is well-guided only to his own advantage, and whoever goes astray goes astray only to his disadvantage, and I am not a guardian over you. And **follow** what is revealed to you and be patient and steadfast, **until God judges**; for He is the best of judges*" (10:108-109). In allegorical terms the Quran points to the consequences to the soul in exercising the freedom of choice -- where affirmation leads a person to live in "peace" and "integrity" and rejection in the loss of conviction behind actions, both in this life and the hereafter (2:169, 18:29).

The Quran's choice of Islam (21:92) also conveys an inclusive approach in terms of a way of life that is clear and easy for all to understand and follow. The absence of hardship is rooted in the discretion Quran grants to conduct and the exemptions it grants to obligatory practices (i.e., the habits to cultivate virtues). The exercise of discretion and the performance of obligatory practices constitute a way of life that is Islam. The Quran states, "*Strive for God as you ought to strive. He elected you, and did not impose on you any hardship in religion - the faith of your father Abraham, he called you muslims before and in this Quran, that the Apostle (i.e., Muhammad) may bear witness against you, and you (as muslims) may bear witness against mankind*" (22:78). "*We do not charge any soul beyond its capacity; and*

We have a Book which utters the truth, and they (i.e., whoever follows) shall not be wronged (23:62). In other words, the Quran claims that since the guided path (i.e., Islam) is not hard, and that provisions for discretion and exemptions are made, Islam remains open to anyone to follow.

The Meaning of Inclusion in the Ethic of Character

The inclusive scope of the Quran rests on the claim that its guidance is open to anyone with sincere understanding to follow. Thus, following the guidance has been made conditional on exercising understanding and being sincere in conduct, but not on becoming a Muslim. The Quran states, *“To everyone there is a direction towards which he turns. **So hasten to do the good works.** Wherever you are, God will bring you together. Surely God has power over all things”* (2:148). The Quran follows by saying, *“Do not make God in your oaths a hindrance to **doing good**, to fearing God and to **making peace** between people. God is All-Hearing, All-Knowing”* (2:224). The Quran emphatically states, *“We will give help to both groups, those who worship the world and those who seek the hereafter, so that **none should remain deprived of the favor and generosity of their Lord.** Behold how We have made some of them surpass the others, although the Hereafter is far higher in rank and more preferable”* (7:18). The Quran thus makes choice and conduct the reliable medium of faith, with the authentication of speech-acts of faith resting only with God.

In contextual reference to the Jews and Christians, the Quran addresses the followers of other religion as those whose **faith is exemplified in their conduct**. The Quran refers to them as, *“an upright group who recite God’s revelations... bid the right and forbid the wrong and hasten to do the good deeds. These are among the righteous people! And whatever good they do, they will not be denied it.”*(3:113-115). This inclusive scope is further specified, when the Quran addresses the faithful, *“Did you suppose that you will enter Paradise (i.e., find peace), before God knowing who among you have struggled, and remained steadfast”* (3:142). The Quran follows up stating, *“O believers, whoever of you renounces his religion, God will certainly bring forth a people whom He loves and they love Him, humble towards the faithful, but mighty towards the unbelievers. They fight in the way of God and do not fear anybody’s reproach.”* The Quran reminds that, *“This is a favor from God which He confers on whomever He pleases. God is Munificent, All-Knowing”*(5:54), and *“God never changes a favor He confers on a people or changes the condition of a people unless they change what is in their hearts (i.e., their intentional conduct)”* (8:54, and 13:11).

Thus, an inclusive approach to a global consciousness finds ready resonance in the very spirit, language, and message of the Quran. From this perspective, a muslim, then, is any person, who consciously cultivates the inclusive spirit of the Quran in his or her conduct.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have sought to discern the Quranic terms of discourse for an inquiry on ethic. I have sought this end in terms of the inclusive scope of the Quran and its conveyance of an ethic of identity. For the Quran, this ethic signifies the identity of a person based of his or her consciousness and conduct: an identity that the Quran designates with the term "muslim." This identity is distinct from the sociological meaning of "Muslim" or what the law in Islamic ethics has canonized (10). In Quran's terms, the life of a muslim is the scope of his or her ethic. Therefore, muslim ethic is not a set of special reasoning skills or legal codes to master, as is the case with Islamic ethics.

With this focus, we need to approach the Quran not as a treatise on metaphysics, but as a guide to effective living -- what the Quran depicts is a social life of "peace" and "integrity." The Quran provides us the guidance with which we can pattern our lives to exemplify piety in character and peace in conduct. Since any pattern of living involves cultural modes of its dissemination, the Quran designates the exemplary practitioners of its virtues as teachers and guides to humanity (i.e., prophets or messengers). The Quran also maintains that these exemplary guides are available in all cultural traditions and hence its message on human conduct remains available to all to follow.

Because of this inclusive scope, the Quran does not make the act of submission a prerequisite for appreciating the virtues it conveys or to embody them in conduct. The claim of the Quran as a guide to living thus falls outside the conventional meaning of "religion," because, conventionally, we identify religions primarily as doctrinaire beliefs espoused in devotional texts and invoked in ritual practices by particular group of believers. This unfortunate understanding of religion promoted centuries of exclusion of others from the assertive claims of "believers," even to the point of exterminating the different other.

As a functional counterpoint, the modern separation of the secular and the religious served humanity well by safeguarding the value of human freedom -- both as an ideal and in conduct. But, as our experience with modernity shows, this safeguard itself institutes new and more powerful forms of exclusion including national interest, economic necessity, and cultural superiority. In an emerging consciousness of a global world, any exclusionary approach (whether in ethics or politics, and, whether pursued with 'religious' or 'secular' forms of justification) denies and defeats the cultivation of identity that is inclusive.

Cultivating an inclusive identity necessitates an ethic of character or virtues. Only in conduct can we universally identify with each other, because, in all other modes of identity, we differ in our intents, convictions and cultural expression. Cultivating an ethic of character, as Virtue-Ethics informs, does not have any teleological end other than the satisfaction and respect it generates from one another. Therefore, neither politics nor administration stands as the end of virtuous conduct. They serve as the contexts for the cultivation and practice of virtues. The Quran conveys such virtues in terms of an ethic of identity. The Quran holds that the meaning of its messages cannot be discerned by holding them as dogmas or by deductive reason. Rather, we can only understand the messages in terms of our individual response to them, that is, in terms of our reflective practice or conduct.

Recognizing the cultural diversity of human consciousness and expression, the Quran invites all thinking persons to make that response, which they can only do by making human differences the basis of learning and conduct. This recognition of others thus forms the very basis of grasping and relating to the "Unity of Reality" which underlies all differences and distinctions. Quran thus remains a continuous source of learning available to all for inquiry and response.

Notes

1. Quran refers to itself as divine guidance conveyed in clear 'signs'. Quran expresses this by designating its mode of transmission as a public announcement (Revelation), a discourse (Recital), and insights (Inspiration). Quran,

therefore, identifies itself as pedagogy rather than a text of propositions or dogmas. This is one reason why the reading of Quran frustrates those who approach it with either a deductive, inductive, or dialectical reasoning. The Quranic meanings are person and context centered, and hence, they are narratives spanning historical and existential referents. Therefore, the coherence of Quranic meaning does not reside in the chronology of its chapters or themes, but reside in its direct address to the person reading it. Quranic meaning depends on its response in human understanding, which the Quran refers to as reflective knowledge. As revelation, one need not succumb to some esoteric process that the Quran communicates. It is sufficient to consider revelations to constitute as what inspired persons revealed as the expression of the sacred reality symbolized in the word: God.

2. The Quran refers to "God" in symbols expressed in terms of both the material and the spiritual consciousness of reality. For example, the Quran states, "*We shall show them Our signs in the horizon (i.e., in nature or universe) and in themselves (i.e., soul or psyche) (41:43). Most surely, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of the night and day, there are signs for men who understand*" (3:190). Therefore, in the Quran, God is never a deity, an entity, or a concept. The Quran also refers to the symbolic expression of God as names, some of which are self-referential (e.g., Omnipotent, Omnipresent, Unity) while others are relational (e.g., Mercy, Lord, Light). For example, The Quran states, "*His are the most exalted attributes in the heavens and the earth*" (30:27). The Quran frequently refers to "God" by the name of "Allah," which is the Arabic word for "God." But Allah also was the name of the principle stone idol in pagan Arabia. The Quran simply takes over the name as another designation of God by stripping the human relation with the sublime from its material referents (i.e., a stone, or the forces of nature, or a historical myth). This sublimation of meaning removes any human pretension of knowing God as an object, and maintains the status of God as the intimate and encompassing 'Other.' In the Quran, God is also referred to as Time and Reality, a Reality to which all that exists submits. Finally, what is crucial for its readers is that, the Quran itself points to the incomprehensibility of God in human consciousness [*no vision*

can grasp Him (6:103)], despite the intimate and all encompassing presence of God. For example, the Quran states, "To God belongs the East and the West. Therefore, whatever way you turn, there is God's purpose" (2:115).

3. Given this premise of peace, Islam cannot be considered as aggressively violent. The Quran points to three conditions under which a Muslim is expected to fight (i.e., strive through military means):
 - a. To make Islam available to others in order for them to choose voluntarily and live a secure and peaceful life.
 - b. To ward off attacks and threats to the Muslims and non-Muslims who resolve to live peacefully.
 - c. To establish and secure justice for all in terms of the peaceful measures by which communities resolve justice.

Many (or even a majority) of those who claim to be Muslims did not exemplify the Quranic conditions. Most fought either out of loyalty to persons, in pursuit of wealth, or for political ambition. Mostly they fought and continue to fight against each other. Therefore, the Quranic provision of exercising restrained force should not be read to obscure the crucial distinction between the nominal Muslim and muslim by affirmative conduct. If we fail to make this distinction, then all efforts to affirm the muslim identity fails. For then, how in any polity can we know the difference between the concept of citizenship by birth or law, and the concept of citizenship exemplifying the political values of a polity.

4. Aristotle does not provide us with a consistent understanding of the source of virtues. While he admits we receive them from the past, nevertheless, he makes virtues subordinate, to the demands of practical reason (i.e., the working of rational intelligence in experiential practice). In this subordination, virtues become instruments of what practical reason decides. Laws then supercede ethics. Aristotle's aristocratic bias and rational temperament denied him the ability to respond to and value ordinary experience where virtues inhere and find their significance. He simply failed to defer to the faith (piety) of ordinary persons (who do not possess the rigors of logical reasoning), but, nevertheless, manage to act virtuously, and in

doing so, keep the virtues alive and available in his and subsequent cultures.

5. In the social sciences, the concept of charismatic authority or inspirational leadership embodied in a person forms a crucial condition for the formation and continuation of a tradition. Charismatic leaders, in so far as their leadership tasks were self-consciously moral, always exemplified the virtues that they invited others to affirm and follow. For example, the charismatic authority Solon and Socrates exercised in the formation of the Greek philosophical culture.
6. The consistent criticism raised against Aristotle are precisely the Ethnocentric, gender and class centered restrictions he maintained in his exposition of the ethnic of character. To Aristotle, the scope of the polity was only the Greek city states, with the rest of the world considered as barbaric and hence in need of civilization. This he maintained (i.e., his exclusiveness), despite his travels and intellectual position on the universal meaning of justice (as a virtue). Aristotle held that there is a natural constitution of virtues, and hence, they are not historically contingent. They remain as universal potentials for reason to grasp. He writes, "What is by nature just has the same force everywhere and does not depend on what we regard or do not regard as just (p. 131)." This intellectual position runs contrary to his more humane admission of limits, when he held that virtues are socially induced and not discoverable by reason. While Aristotle's intellect (reason) allowed him to consider virtues as universal, his character (soul) did not. His soul, being rooted and nourished by the allegiances he maintained with the aristocracy, sustained his ethnocentric position on the source and scope of virtues. This is why Aristotle, despite his reputation, is admired only as an exemplary intellectual and not as a guide to moral conduct. That he did not serve as a moral exemplar of conduct (other than embodying the virtue of intellectual wisdom) is borne by him having very little moral influence on his famous pupil Alexander (who only adored him as a teacher). When Alexander went on to conquer the world, he did so not to transmit the virtues of Greek culture to the barbarians (which Aristotle would have approved), but to claim for himself an absolute sovereignty (magnanimity) to

remain unaccountable to anyone, and thereby becoming free. This unaccountable freedom animates both Aristotle and Alexander but sought in different ways by each. While Aristotle sought it through the cultivation of intellectual powers, Alexander sought it through his cultivation of military prowess. But under Aristotle's own terms neither position stands for moral virtue. Therefore, Aristotle relied on Socrates more in his reference to moral virtues than on his own conduct. Because of this disconnection between thought and conduct (in Aristotle as well as in Greek philosophy in general), it is crucial to advance an inclusive and alternative understanding of Virtue Ethics. To highlight this point, I have gone into some details in assessing Aristotelian position on Virtue Ethics.

7. In previous times, the knowledge of consciousness other than one's own was made available by way of conquest, mass migration, or cultural association. Given these modes of knowing the different other, the consciousness of other traditions that were subsequently formed became unavoidably political, prejudiced, partial, and restricted only to a very limited range of conduct. In different periods of history, only the rare global traveler, the mystic, or pilgrim were able to know the other traditions on their own terms. Therefore, these rare individuals gave us a consciousness of humanity in all its diversity (expresses either in poetry, travelogue, or spiritual symbols), thereby, forging ethical understandings based upon cross-cultural consciousness. During the enlightenment, there was also the recognition that ethics necessitates a cosmopolitan consciousness. But the idea of the cosmopolitan was shaped not only along racial, gender, and class lines but also mediated by the experience of colonial and imperial contacts with the other. Such constrained cosmopolitan attitude is characteristic not only of the example, in the cosmopolitan of the Greek, Roman, Umayyid, Abbassid, Ottoman, and Mogul empires.
8. In academic discourse, the exclusion of the Quran or for the matter any scripture, rests on the claim that they are irrelevant to address modern experience and concerns. This secular view contrasts religion with reality. Reality is the realm of objective facts, mediated by human sense perception

and their valid articulation in scientific disciplines. In contrast, religion rests on subjective beliefs mediated by psychological illusions and sustained in cultural traditions. In the current secular use of the term, religion constitutes only a distinct sphere of cultural life (the private sphere of belief and rituals), and hence remains (properly) separated from public life and discourse. This conception of human life is segregated and partitioned into distinct spheres is a product of modern consciousness. It has no precedent in human history. A historical understanding of religion informs us that human cultures have always been religious – where religion constitutes a symbolic expression of signifying the relationship between human beings and their sense of the sacred. Faith in a religion constitutes the affirmative response to the consciousness of sacred reality. Seen from this historical perspective, the secular position simply constitutes the negating response, and not the denial of religion or its opposition to reality. Therefore, we are not warranted in the contemporary culture to exclude scriptures from public discourse, because such exclusion rests upon a meaning of religion that fails to find support in the historical and existential meaning that the term evokes and conveys.

9. Believing is a speech-act that occurs when one does not have a clear awareness of reality. Beliefs (i.e., ideas, options, and guess) serve as temporary cognitive devices or means of coping with uncertainties, and are useless once clarity is gained by reason or in factual experience. The Quran points to this instrumental status of beliefs, stating, *“What is with you passes away and what is with God is enduring. Therefore, We will most certainly guide those who are patient in their conviction, and reward them with peace and success for the excellence of their conduct (the best of what they did)”* (16:96). On the other hand, in contrast to beliefs, awareness, (insights and pragmatic understanding) comes by way of reflective response to the intuitive sense of affirmation and learned experience. To receive and respond, one must first become aware of the message (which in the Quran is interchangeably referred to as inspiration and Reality) and its implications for living. Such awareness, which the Quran holds everyone to have, commits a person to what he or she accents to. The commitment and the scope of response increase as awareness

increases. Thus, the Quran refers to faith, not something that is fixed. Rather, it is a responsive mode of consciousness, which is possible only by way of sustained cultivation. It is a consciousness, which grows or diminishes in proportion to the actions through which one seeks to sustain the consciousness in conduct, and correct mistakes of perception through continuous learning. Therefore, repentance is a constitutive virtue of muslim consciousness.

10. Law and Morality hold a broader meaning in the Quran than given by later Muslims. The early emphasis on discourse and conduct became displaced by the canonization of forms and details of definition in the law books (particularly, in the wake of the Mongol invasion). Jurists came to regard the Quran as a legal document with specific rules and regulations. Legal formulas overshadowed the ethical aspects of the Quran. The Quran became the prisoner of its interpreters rather than their source and guide. Consequently, Fazlur Rahman notes, “a Quranic ethics was never worked out by Muslims” (1985:12). Al Ghazzali also regarded the legal codes as “a mere science of this world” (i.e., rulings based on opinion), if they were not practiced with a religious attitude (i.e., a deep spiritual disposition and obligation).

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