ETHICAL PERCEPTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS IN ISLAM: A TEXTUAL ABRIDGED SUMMARY OF AL-GHAZALI'S VIEW

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ABSTRACT

Islam contains a general code of conduct; there is neither much doubt nor disagreement on this. That Islam as both a religion and way of life encompasses all religious issues and affairs affecting human's life is also a fact unchallenged by those of consummate mind. One important aspect of all facets of Islamic discussions is akhlaq (Ethics). Ethic cum conduct is pertinent in Islamic religion. It could be interpreted in many ways and forms; its perception differs from one person to the other, and sometimes within an individual, but seldom from one religion to the other. This paper thus seeks to explore the meaning of ethics and the perceptions it has in Islam, together with the types of relationship it denotes, through the major writings of some Muslim notable scholars, with major concentration on al-Ghazali. It is also the aim of the study to expatiate the importance of ethic in jurisdictions. The study commonly employs qualitative library approach in collecting and analyzing the data. The study maintains that Islam's concept of ethics, if carefully applied on most contemporary issues, suffice and proffer long-lasting solutions to various problems.

Keywords: *Al-Akhlaq*, Ethic, Islam, Perceptions, Relationships.

INTRODUCTION

Al-Akhlaq, the plural form of *al-Khuluq* in Arabic, is literally synonymous to "*al-Sajaayaa*" (habits), "*al-Tabaai*" (natures), "*al-Muruaat*" (behaviours), "*al-Aadaat*" (customs), and "*al-Adyaan*" (religions and/or ways of life). There are various opinions to the rightful interpretation of Khuluq in English language, while some refer to it as conduct, others call it morality, and some others ethics, behaviours, disciplines, practices, and so on, but the scope of this paper falls outside the realm of disagreements and approval of the meanings. The most appropriate and equivalent interpretation this paper adopts is Ethic. And as we adopt khuluq as ethic so we approve Akhlaq undoubtedly as Ethics. Ethic, as known today, was derived from Latin word "*ethicus*" and Greek word "*ēthikós*", indicating moral character in relation to "*êthos*" (custom, habit). It is by definition a moral principle that governs one's behavior or the

conducting of an activity, moral principles by which one is guided; it is the branch of science that deals with moral principles.

It is found employed synonymously to moral code, morals, morality, values, rights and wrongs, principles, ideals, standards (of behavior), value system, virtues, and/or dictates of conscience, among others. It is the study of standards of right and wrong; that part of science and philosophy dealing with moral conduct, duty, and judgment. It is formal and professional rules of right and wrong, a system of conduct or behavior, the seat of which is the hearts, and not the minds. It is thus not accidental, but rather coincidental; to see Hans referring to it as "*the innate peculiarity*" (Barnhart, 1966; Qafisheh, 1997; Rosmizi, 2010; Habib, 1978; Catafago, 2017; Hans, 1976; Pearson, 2008; and Olodo & Safri, 2017).This paper is thus structured on a centralized introduction of the study, the method and significance, discussion, and conclusion. It should be clarified here that although some recent material are required of this study, the most prevalent primary sources are traditional, considering the figure and focus of the study (Al-Ghazali, 1994). The study is based on popular qualitative library approach in collecting and analyzing the data. The study advises that the Islam's concept of ethics, and it relations, be carefully applied to suffice and proffer long-lasting solutions to various contemporary problems man faces on daily basis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Islam as both a *dÊn* and a perfect way of life encompasses all facets of all creatures, living or non-living. Islam institutes a living order, *al-Akhlaq*, built on a solid foundation, *al-Aql*, with four basic importance closely related to maintainance (*taÍÎÊn*) and maintenance (*ÎiyÉnah*), meaning "*safeguarding and protecting*".

The first of the four basic importance of *al-Akhlaq* is the maintainance (protecting and safeguarding) of one's cordiality to Allah SWT (*siyanah wa tahsin al-Alaqah bayn al-Abd wa Rabih*). This is to make true the primordial consciencual agreement between one's consciencual existence and Allah SWT as stipulated in "*alastu bi Rabikum* (Am I not thy Lord?) and further in the Divine decree "*wa qada Rabbuk alla ta'budu illa iyyah*" (Thy Lord hath decreed that thou shall adore in worship none but Him).

The second of the four basic importance of *al-Akhlaq* is the maintainance of cordiality with oneself (*siyanah wa tahsin al-Alaqah bayn al-Abd wa nafsih*).*Nasihah* is best given and taken by and from the one who practically possesses such, *faqid shay'in la yu'tih*, so says the adage. This is in the context of "*…qu anfusakum wa ahlikum al-Nar*" (save thou thyself and thy loved ones from the tormenting fire).

The third of the four is the maintainance of cordiality with one's fellow beings (*siyanah wa tahsin al-Alaqah bayn al-Abd wa ghayrih min al-Bashar*). It starts from one's parent as depicted in "*…wa bi al-Walidayn ihsanan*" (and be thou good to thy parents), then to one's close relatives, such as siblings, and extended relatives such as uncles, sisters, aunties, in-laws. Ones neighbours are not excluded in this circle, because they are one's "*mujawir*".

The fouth, and the last, is the maintainance of cordiality to non-human beings (*siyanah wa tahsin al-Alaqah bayn al-Abd wa ghayrih min ghayr al-Bashar*). This includes all domestic animals and other non-living organisms in the environment in which one inhabits. Stoning and killing animals unjustifiably are outside the ethical realm, and vandalizing government cum public properties is unethical.

The most important of the four is *siyanah wa tahsin al-Alaqah bayn al-Abd wa Rabih*, while the other three lead to it in relevance. All ethical values should be for the purpose of attaining the everlasting and eternal bliss, as maintained by al-Farabi that the ultimate goal of human existence and deeds is to attain supreme happiness (*al-Saadah al-Qaswa*), which he relates with the absolute good (*al-Khayr al-Mutlaq*), "*…that which is chosen and desired for itself and is not chosen, at any time whatsoever, for the sake of anything else. All else (other things) is chosen for its use in the attainment of happiness.*" It should be noted here that the happiness referred to is the Ultimate Good, which in turn is God. Thus, all ethical values and relationships should lead and direct towards the everlasting bliss' attainment in God (Murtada, 1989; Osman, 2006; Shihadeh, 2006; Al-Attas, 2001; Abduh, 1999; Olodo et al., 2018). The instructions cum ethical injunctions should start and end with "*Thou shall not set up any other god with Allah in worship, for if ye do, then thou shall forever remain condemned as ungodly, and be forsaken by Him utterly*" and "*Thou shall not set up in worship any other god with God. If ye do, then thou shall be cast into Hell, deservedly blameworthy, forever banished*" respectively, indicating that all starts and ends for the sake of Allah SWT to be accorded a reward.

Significance of the Paper

The importance and significance of *al-Akhlaq* in mortals' affair has been an age-long discussion among scholars, and its perceptions and relationship in Islam is not less in importance. The paper objectively defines *al-Akhlaq*, explains its perceptions, and clarifies its relationships. It qualitatively summarizes abridgedly the scholars' views and various contributions on *al-Akhlaq* and its inclusions, and it is basically a self-descriptive library study.

Al-Ghazali on Ethics

It is important to note that al-Ghazali uses two synonymous words almost simultaneously to mean the same thing; he uses the word "*al-Adab*" to mean "*al-Khuluq*" and vice-versa (Al-Ghazali, 1998). In his discussion about the virtue of companionship and brotherhood, its conditions, stages, and benefits, he says that "*companionship (al-Ulfah) is a proceeds of good ethics (husn al-khuluq) while dividence (al-Tafriqah) is a proceeds of bad ethics (su al-Khuluq)*". This is so because *husn al-Khuluq* necessitates affection, companionship and understanding, and "*su al-Khuluq*" breed's enmity, envy, and disparity. The more praiseworthy the source is the more the proceeds is praiseworthy; the virtue of good ethics is not hidden in religious discussions for with it Allah SWT has praised His noble prophet SAW when He SWT says: "*For, indeed, you are, most surely, a man of outstanding character*" (*surah al-Qalam:* 4), to which the Prophet SAW corresponded by saying: "*the most of through which people would be granted into Jannah is the consciousness of Allah and good ethics*". Usamah bin Sharik reports that he and some other companion inquired from the Prophet SAW as to "*what is the best gift given to people*" to which the Prophet SAW responded "*a good ethics*". The prophet SAW complimentarily says that he was raised to perfect good ethics, and says: "*the weightiest of which would be measured on the day of judgement is husn al-Khuluq*" to the extent that "*Allah SWT would not perfect the creation and ethics of a person and then taste him the hell*". In a friendly conversation between the Prophet SAW and Abu Hurayrah, the Prophet SAW enjoined Abu Hurayrah with *husn al-Khuluq*, to which Abu Hurayrah inquired "*what is husn al-Khuluq*

oh Messenger of Allah? ", and the Prophet SAW replied: *"relate with those who have severed their relationship from you, pardon those who have oppressed you, and give those who deprive you"*. It is good to know that some of the proceeds *husn al-khuluq* is companionship and lack of loneliness (Reichmuth, 2009). Thus, ethics is an expression of an act situated in the soul (mind), from which deeds sprout easily and simply and without necessitating a pre-thought and plan. If the proceed of the act that sprout therefrom is "*good*", then the act is referred to as "*good ethics*", but, on the other hand, if the proceed of the act that sprout therefrom is "*bad*", and then the act is referred to as "*bad ethics*". Ibn ManÐËr, in his "*LisÉn al-ÑArab"*, while referring to the *surah al-Qalam*: 4 (For, indeed, you are, most surely, a man of outstanding character), says that *al-Khuluq* or *al-Khulq is al-Din, wa al-Tab'u wa al-Sajiyyah* (the character mentioned in the Qur'anic verse means the religion as a way of life, the primordial nature upon which man was created, and the habit of man. It signifies from the above that ethics is an integral part of *al-Din* and anyone who lacks ethics also resultantly lacks the *din*.

In *huquq al-Ukhuwwah wa al-Suhbah* i.e the rights to companionship and friendship (Reichmuth, 2009), al-ghazali says that the tie of brotherhood is a bi-relationship such as that of marriage (*Nikah*), and as there are necessitating rights and rules in *nikah*, so there are in brotherhood (Zahra, 2015). He mentions eight distinguishing, but closely related, ethical relations in brotherhood, companionship and friendship (Moore, 2015).

First is the wealth cum property (Reichmuth, 2009), second is self-willing assistance rendered to solving one's partner problem without been asked, and placing it over individual preferences (Reichmuth, 2009), third is maintaining a silent-tongue (Reichmuth, 2009), fourth is maintaining a spoken-tongue (Reichmuth, 2009), fifth is overlooking of mistakes and misconducts (Reichmuth, 2009), sixth is the act of praying for one's partner, dead or alive (Reichmuth, 2009), seventh is the fulfillment of promise and sincerity (Reichmuth, 2009), and the eighth, and last, of the ethical relations is leniency, and lack of affectation and compulsion (Reichmuth, 2009). These are the eight ethical relations projected by al-Ghazali in one-on-one relationship, and they should by large be extended to moral institutions of learning and the societies. Thus, ethics could be divided into two broad categories, namely, good, praiseworthy, virtuous ethics and bad, blameworthy, reprehensive ethics. Every human has the tendency and freedom of choosing whether to be good or to be otherwise, but instinctively, man is made to know whether he is right or wrong because of the gift of the intellect he was primordially endowed with, as ascertained in *surah al-Insan*: 3 that *"indeed, it is We alone who have shown him (man) the way to be either grateful (right) or ungrateful (wrong)"* (Hammad, 2009).

CONCLUSION

This paper has been able to address the stipulated research objective, namely, *"explain the concept of al-Akhlaq"*, examine al-Ghazali's scholastic views and religious perceptions on *al-Akhlaq*, and clarify al-Ghazali's saying with regards to *al-Akhlaq* and religious injunctions. In conclusion, al-Ghazali's concept, views, and interpretation of ethics is mostly unanimous with that of notable scholars like him, and his views are not antagonizing to that maintained in the Qur'an and hadith. It is highly important to note that al-Ghazali's reliance on the Qur'an and hadith is clearly unavoidable, all his interpretations circumambulate around that which is divinely maintained. In al-Ghazali's general interpretation, it could be deduced that *al-Akhlaq* is the third in rank in Islam; it is third to *al-Aql* and *al-Iman*. If this depicts something, it is that

faith in Allah SWT comes first, next comes the intellect upon which *al-Akhlaq* is based. And finally, the scope of ethics in Islam encompasses all facets of life, religious and non-religious, democratic, economic, social, and others. Thus, practicing it as required is a task on those in various categories of authority, for its applicability suffices the quest for long-lasting and feasible solutions to various contemporary problems man faces.

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