The Definitions and Background of Ethics

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Abstract: *Islamic ethics refers to behaviors that are the outcome of acquired traits and are described as valuable acts in the religion of Islam. A vast volume of religious teachings and doctrines is dedicated to introducing these values and encouraging humans to adhere to them. The important point, and in fact the main distinction between the science of Ethics and other religious sciences, lies in this very criterion of value.This article aims at explaining the definition and background and principles of ethics.*

Keywords:*ethics*

Part One: Definitions, Background, and Principles

1-1. Definition of Ethics

The word "Ethics" (*Akhlaq*) is the plural of "Khulq" and refers to inner traits from which human behaviors originate. In other words, ethics consists of traits ingrained in the human essence that manifest

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in one's conduct, just as traits like race, color, height, and physique relate to the human creation (*Khalq*) and reveal one's physical form. (Note: By "ingrained traits," we mean psychological dispositions (*Malakah*); when an action is performed repeatedly, the state resulting from that action affects the human soul, and after a while, it penetrates the soul and becomes established in the self. In this case, it is said that the trait has become a "disposition" or *Malakah*. When a trait becomes a disposition, its removal is very difficult (See: Sadat, 8)). An ethical act is one that possesses spiritual value.

Various criteria have been proposed to determine whether an act is ethical. Professor Martyr Morteza Motahhari, explaining the difference between an ethical act and a non-ethical one, writes: "The difference between an ethical act and a natural act is that an ethical act holds value in the conscience of every human being; that is, it is a valuable and precious act, and humans place a price on this act for themselves. The price they place on it is not of the same type as the price or value placed on a worker's labor—which creates so-called material value and earns entitlement to a sum of money or goods—but rather a type of value beyond these values that cannot be evaluated with money and material goods". In this explanation, a key characteristic of an ethical act is highlighted: its value in the conscience of all humans.

1-2. Definition of Islamic Ethics

Islamic ethics refers to behaviors that are the outcome of acquired traits and are described as valuable acts in the religion of Islam. A vast volume of religious teachings and doctrines is dedicated to introducing these values and encouraging humans to adhere to them. The important point, and in fact the main distinction between the science of Ethics and other religious sciences, lies in this very

criterion of value. To put it more simply, the subject of the science of Ethics is behaviors that carry value.

Comparing the subjects of the science of Ethics with subjects of a science like Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) and its laws—which carry legal weight—helps clarify this discussion. For example, "Trust in God" (*Tawakkul*) is an ethical subject. This is because, in authentic Islamic texts—namely the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet and the Imams of Islam (Peace be upon him and his family)—it is introduced as a valuable matter. However, if someone does not have trust in God, legally speaking, no consequence applies to them. Similarly, if a person is not pleasant in their interactions with those around them or displays arrogant behavior, they have not broken a law that would entail a [legal] consequence for them. Whereas in the science of Ethics, good temper and humility are stated as valuable behaviors.

In contrast, acts such as theft, murder, and harming people's lives and property have a legal aspect and form the subjects of the science of "Jurisprudence" (*Fiqh*). Even in individual acts of worship, these two indicators—valuable (ethical) and legal—are observable. For instance, the science of Jurisprudence is responsible for stating the preliminaries, concurrent actions, and invalidators of prayer, the number and times of daily prayers, their units (*Rak'ats*), and recitations. Or it states the expiation for omitting fasting without a religious excuse.

However, the science of Ethics discusses how prayer and fasting should be in order to be elevating. In other words, the subject of the science of Ethics is: if the purpose of these acts of worship is not merely to discharge and lift the duty, but to be performed for the sake of nearness to the Truth (God), which qualifications must they

possess?. Such traits, which are introduced in Islamic culture as acquired values, form the "Science of Islamic Ethics".

1-3. A Look at Authored Works in the Field of Islamic Ethics

There is a difference of opinion regarding who laid the foundation stone of Islamic ethical writings. Naturally, the longer the history of this science in Islamic culture, the more it indicates its importance. Some researchers believe that the Commander of the Faithful, Ali (Peace be upon him), should be considered the founder and compiler of ethical writings in Islam. It is stated in the book *Ta'sis al-Shi'ah li-'Ulum al-Islam*: "The first person to establish the science of Ethics was the Commander of the Faithful, Ali (Peace be upon him), who in his famous letter to his son Imam Hassan (Peace be upon him) after returning from Siffin, explained the foundation and roots of ethical issues, and virtues and vices were analyzed in the most excellent manner." It is worth noting that this letter is the same as Letter 31 in *Nahj al-Balagha*. After this letter, one can mention the *Risalat al-Huquq* (Treatise on Rights) by Imam Sajjad (Peace be upon him), in which he addressed the rights incumbent upon a human being in relation to God and others. However, it seems that the first book with the specific title of "Science of Ethics" belongs to Ismail bin Mehran Abi Nasr Sukuni, who lived in the second century.

However, if we wish to examine ethical works in terms of subject and method, we must point out that the writings produced in the science of Ethics can generally be classified into three branches: Narrative (*Naqli*), Philosophical, and Mystical.

The Narrative Method itself is divided into two types:

Some ethical works are, in fact, a collection and categorization of verses and traditions on ethical subjects; such as the book *Sifat al-Shia* by Sheikh Saduq, *Tanbih al-Khawatir* (known as *Majmu'ah Warram*) by Warram bin Abi Firas (died 605 AH), or *Hilyat al-Muttaqin* by Allamah Majlisi. (With the explanation that in parts of the books *Majmu'ah Warram* and *Hilyat al-Muttaqin*, explanations by the authors can be seen in addition to the verses and traditions, but the main approach is the collection and categorization of religious texts).

The other **Narrative Method** is where the author refers to verses and traditions to extract teachings provided in ethical fields in these sources; then, they cite verses and traditions on that subject and, using their expertise in sciences such as literature, exegesis, and jurisprudence of hadith, express its ethical points. Books such as *Akhlaq-i Mohtashami* by Khwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi, *Irshad al-Qulub* by Daylami, *Munyat al-Murid* (which the Second Martyr wrote on the religious and ethical manners of teaching and learning, and of the judge and issuing fatwas), and *Mahajjat al-Bayda* by Fayz Kashani are of this type.

Another approach observable in ethical works is the **Philosophical Approach**. Professor Motahhari writes about this method and its background: "In the science of Ethics, this idea has come from Aristotle that virtuous ethics is the mean (middle ground) between two extremes of excess and deficiency, and they have created a principle that all ethical traits are gathered under 'Justice'." This matter appears in our own older ethical books that express philosophical ethics, not in mystical or hadith-based ethical books. Examples of such books include *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq* by Abu Ali Ibn Miskawayh (died 431 AH), *Akhlaq-i Nasiri* by Khwaja Nasir al-Din

Tusi, and *Jami' al-Sa'adat* and *Mi'raj al-Sa'adah* by the Naraqis. (In some of these works, the statement of ethical means is accompanied by the citation of verses and traditions).

Another category of ethical works has a **Mystical Aspect**. In such works, the view of mystics regarding humans and the universe is the basis of the work; meaning that the premises and presuppositions of ethical discussions are taken from theoretical mysticism, and then it is shown through which stages and stations a human can reach their existential goal. Books such as *Kimiya-yi Sa'adat* by Abu Hamid Ghazali, and *Manazil al-Sa'irin* and *Sad Maydan* by Khwaja Abdullah Ansari are examples of this approach.

In addition to these, we must also mention works produced in the field of **Philosophy of Ethics**. The main approach of such works is to examine theories regarding the nature of ethics, the criteria for determining ethical values, and the relativity or absoluteness of ethical propositions. Examples include works by Professor Motahhari such as *Philosophy of Ethics*, *The Perfect Man*, and *Education in Islam* (Note: Collected Works of Martyr Motahhari, Vol. 22, p. 491).

1-4. Principles of the Science of Ethics

By "Principles (*Mabadi*) of the Science of Ethics," we mean the fundamentals upon which ethical teachings are based, and without accepting them, any effort towards ethical edification would be unjustifiable. We will examine these principles under the following headings.

1-4-1. Human Free Will

One of the principles that ethical education presupposes is the subject of human free will. It is obvious that teaching ethics only makes sense if we consider humans to have free will in performing their actions; for if we assume they are compelled, any movement towards purging vices and adorning with virtues is futile. In this case, praising or blaming a human for their actions would also have no basis, because the behavior originating from them is not truly attributed to them and they had no role in its occurrence.

It is evident that the belief in human compulsion leads to the destruction of the foundation of ethics, and indeed the destruction of all laws of religion and Sharia, and anyone who has understood and accepted the justice and wisdom of God Almighty will not hold such a belief. As the Commander of the Faithful (Peace be upon him) gave this conscientious reminder to a person who imagined that his movement and jihad in the Battle of Siffin was due to compulsion: "Woe to you! Perhaps you thought of a necessary decree and an inevitable destiny? If it were so, reward and punishment would be void, and promises and threats would fall away. Indeed, God the Glorified ordered His servants by choice and forbade them by warning, tasked them easily and did not task them with difficulty, gave much in return for little, was not disobeyed by being overcome, was not obeyed by force, did not send prophets in jest, did not send down books for servants in vain, and did not create the heavens and the earth and what is between them aimlessly. That is the assumption of those who disbelieve, so woe to those who disbelieve from the Fire" (Note: *Nahj al-Balagha*, Wisdom 481).

In Ali's (Peace be upon him) statements, which are based on Quranic verses, human compulsion is explicitly negated, and accepting it is

considered equivalent to regarding the mission of prophets as futile. Aside from this, even by paying attention to our own inner states, such as regret and remorse over improper behaviors, we can realize our free will. For more information on this subject, one can refer to books on theology (*Kalam*).

1-4-2. Changeability of Ethical Traits in Humans

Another principle of ethical education is that we must accept the possibility of changing traits in humans; meaning we accept that humans can remove ethical vices from themselves and acquire ethical virtues. This subject is in one way similar to the previous subject (human free will), because in both, the discussion is about human power and ability. With the difference that the changeability of ethical traits in humans has a more limited scope than the discussion of free will and is more specific than it, as it includes ethical virtues and vices.

In fact, the main distinction between this discussion and the subject of free will is that in proving human free will, evidence is cited that cannot be relied upon in the current discussion. For example, in proving free will, one argues based on God's justice: that if the Truth (God) were to punish someone for actions over whose occurrence they had no choice, this punishment would be ugly, and God is free from doing ugly acts. What plays a key role in this argument is the existence of a system of punishment; whereas some ethical subjects are not subject to punishment, but are inherently ugly or beautiful, and thus it is good for a human to cleanse themselves of them or adorn themselves with them. For instance, being good-humored and joking is an ethical virtue; while if someone abandons it, God does not punish them. Therefore, the same argument we presented to prove free will cannot be stated in such cases. Hence, we must

independently examine whether it is fundamentally possible for humans to change their ethical traits or not.

By considering our own states, we find that abandoning and avoiding certain actions, or conversely performing deeds—even if sometimes accompanied by hardship and difficulty—is not impossible, and with serious determination, one can abstain from them or act upon them. We find this reality within ourselves; just as it is explicitly stated in religious teachings. The Commander of the Faithful, Ali (Peace be upon him), says: "If you are not forbearing (patient), then feign forbearance; for it is rare that someone makes themselves resemble a people and does not soon become one of them" (Note: *Nahj al-Balagha*, Wisdom 506). In this hadith, the possibility of acquiring ethical virtues is explicitly stated.

Similar to this phrase is a hadith that Ishaq bin Ammar narrated from Imam Sadiq (Peace be upon him), with this content: "Disposition (*Khulq*) is a gift that God Almighty grants to His creation; some of it is instinctual (*Sajiyyah*) and some of it is intention (*Niyyah*)." I said: "Which of the two is better?" He said: "The owner of instinct is naturally molded upon it and cannot do otherwise, but the owner of intention forces themselves to be patient in obedience with difficulty, so he (the latter) is the better of the two" (Note: *Al-Kafi*, Vol. 2, p. 101).

In this hadith, the cause of the manifestation of good traits is stated as two matters: instinct and acquisition. By instinct, it means those innate traits that are created in a human due to heredity or environmental influence, without them having a role in their emergence. The Imam considered both to be Divine gifts but emphasized that the acquired nature of these praiseworthy traits is a source of greater virtue. Basically, the very fact that in the teachings

of religious leaders, performing or avoiding certain acts is recommended, is itself a testament to the possibility of changing ethical traits in humans.

1-4-3. Human Inclination towards the Source of Absolute Perfections and Innate Familiarity with Good and Evil

One of the innate characteristics of all humans is their pursuit of perfection. Understanding this innate trait is possible by considering human motivations and inner desires. What is observed among all humans is a desire and inclination towards things that lack limits or boundaries. Humans are inclined towards endless life; they desire limitless power and knowledge; they want infinite beauty and kindness. The reflection of these desires is observable in different human societies.

The religious explanation of these desires indicates that since the human soul has encountered a Being who is the Life-Giver and Creator of life, whose knowledge, power, and existence have no limit, and who is entirely kindness and beauty, it inwardly yearns for that old acquaintance who possesses all these perfections infinitely. In truth, the human being has had a meeting with the source of all these boundless perfections, and innate knowledge is the encounter with One who possesses all these infinite perfections, and those desires are the effects of this soul-meeting. (Note: Apparently, the meaning of Imam Baqir's (Peace be upon him) statement to Zurarah, "Hanifiyyah (upright religion) is of the Fitrah (nature)," is this very meaning: that human inner inclinations towards limitless perfections stem from their innate knowledge of God. See: *Al-Kafi*, Vol. 2, p. 12).

Furthermore, examining the verses and traditions that form the main sources of Islam reveals the truth that ethical values also stem from human innate knowledge; meaning all humans are innately familiar with these values. The Holy Quran has stated in this regard: "By the soul and He who proportioned it. And inspired it [with discernment of] its wickedness and its righteousness. He has succeeded who purifies it. And he has failed who instills it [with corruption]" (Note: Verses 7-10 of Surah Ash-Shams).

Before interpreting the verse, we must explain that the word "Ma" in the phrase "Ma Sawwaha" can mean "He who" (*Alladhī*), as Tabarsi has presented evidence for it in *Majma' al-Bayan*. Also, the verb "Sawwa" comes from the root "Sawwa," meaning moderation and balance (Note: *Majma' al-Bayan*, Vol. 10, p. 754). The original meaning of the word "Ilham" (inspiration) is to swallow and to place inside the soul, and here it means to teach or cause to understand (Note: *Al-Mufradat fi Gharib al-Quran*, p. 439). The word "Fujur" (wickedness) is from "Fajr," meaning to tear or split. In *Tafsir al-Mizan*, it is stated: "Since the dawn splits the curtain of the night, it is called 'Fajr,' and since committing sins splits the curtain of religiosity, it is called 'Fujur'. Of course, 'Fujur' in the verse under discussion refers to its causes, factors, and paths" (Note: *Al-Mizan*, Vol. 20, p. 297). "Taqwa" (righteousness) also means preserving and protecting (Note: *Lisan al-Arab*, Vol. 15, p. 401).

In this noble verse, it is explicitly stated that the factors of wickedness and righteousness, or bad and good, are ingrained in the human soul, and man is innately and naturally familiar with them. As stated in a hadith from Imam Sadiq (Peace be upon him) explaining this subject: "Then He inspired it with its wickedness and its righteousness," meaning He explained to it what it should do and

what act it should avoid (Note: *Al-Kafi*, Vol. 1, p. 163). According to Allamah Tabatabai, the fact that the letter "Fa" comes before the verb "Alhama" (inspired) in the noble verse indicates that inspiration is the result of the proportioning (*Taswiyah*), and this very fact shows that the inspiration of wickedness and righteousness is a characteristic of human creation and an innate matter (Note: *Al-Mizan*, Vol. 20, p. 298). Another interpretative point seen in this verse is the precedence of wickedness over righteousness, which some commentators have considered as indicating the priority of cleansing vices (*Takhliyah*) over adorning with virtues (*Tahliyah*) (Note: *Tafsir-e Novin*, p. 208).

Also, regarding the noble verse "Cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression" (Note: Surah Al-Ma'idah, Verse 2), a hadith is narrated that after the revelation of this verse, a man named Wabisah came to the Prophet (Peace be upon him and his family) and said: "O Messenger of God, I have a question." Before he could state his question, the Prophet said: "Do you want to ask about sin (*Ithm*) and what sin is?" He said: "Yes, O Messenger of God." The Prophet said: "A bad deed is that which your heart does not accept. God has given man a heart that has a connection with good deeds and an alienation from bad deeds." And then, tapping his chest with two fingers, he said: "Consult your heart, O Wabisah!" This hadith also indicates that ethical values are rooted in human conscience (Note: *Al-Musnad*, Vol. 4, p. 228 and *Sunan al-Darimi*, Vol. 2, p. 246).

It can be said that the subject of "Conscience" (*Wajdaniyyat*) is one of the most important epistemological discussions, which, in addition to religious texts, is evidenced by the states that befall a human after performing actions. For example, we can mention the

pangs of conscience that afflict criminals after committing a crime, which is one of the most obvious evidences of this subject. The Holy Quran refers to this truth as "An-Nafs Al-Lawwamah," meaning the Self-Reproaching Soul (Note: Verse 2 of Surah Al-Qiyamah).

In *Tafsir-e Namuneh*, a subtle point is mentioned: from placing the Resurrection alongside the Self-Reproaching Soul, one can understand the similarity between these two truths; because just as human actions and behavior are judged on the Day of Resurrection, the human conscience is also a court where one's actions are judged, leading even to the issuance and execution of a verdict: "The truth is that one of the proofs for the existence of the Afterlife is the existence of the court of conscience inside the human soul, which, upon performing a good deed, fills the human soul with joy and vitality and thus rewards him, and upon performing an ugly deed or committing a crime, puts his soul under severe pressure, punishing and torturing him to the extent that sometimes he commits suicide to escape the torment of conscience" (Note: *Tafsir-e Namuneh*, Vol. 25, p. 275).

Professor Motahhari says in this regard: "We find things in Islam indicating that Islam grants authenticity to human conscience. There is a hadith from the Prophet (Peace be upon him and his family) who said: 'Truthfulness is tranquility and lying is doubt/anxiety.' Truthfulness gives a kind of peace to the heart, and lying creates doubt in the heart. There is an affinity and relationship such that the human heart accepts a truthful word quickly, but accepts a lie (without having evidence of it being a lie) with hesitation" (Note: *Islam and the Needs of Time*, Collected Works, Vol. 21, p. 260).

In the first sermon of *Nahj al-Balagha*, a phrase is narrated from the Commander of the Faithful, Ali (Peace be upon him), which can

refer to this same subject; in explaining the creation of man, he said: "Then He blew into it from His Spirit, and it represented a human being with minds that he puts to use, thoughts that he disposes of, limbs that he employs, instruments that he turns about, and knowledge by which he distinguishes between truth and falsehood" (Note: *Nahj al-Balagha*, p. 42). In these phrases, the granting of knowledge to humans is mentioned together with their creation, which indicates its innate nature.

By reflecting briefly on the implications of the mentioned verses and traditions, one can conclude that human actions possess rational goodness and badness (*Hasan and Qubh*), and humans, by understanding this goodness and badness, are free to choose their path: "Indeed, We guided him to the way, be he grateful or be he ungrateful" (Note: Surah Al-Insan, Verse 3). "And We have shown him the two ways" (Note: Surah Al-Balad, Verse 10). Every human is more insightful about their own actions than anyone else; this is why the Holy Quran says: "Rather, man, against himself, will be a witness, even if he presents his excuses" (Note: Surah Al-Qiyamah, Verses 14-15). In this verse, God draws attention to man's inner insight and emphasizes that his making of excuses does not obscure this vision.

In this way, one can understand the relationship between voluntary actions and the ultimate goal of Islamic ethics, which is nearness to the Truth (God). Based on this principle, scholars of the philosophy of ethics do not consider ethical propositions to be merely conventional (*I'tibari*), but believe in a real connection between them and the ultimate goal of ethics; because humans naturally seek perfection, and the path to perfection has been shown to them (Note: Surah Al-Kahf, Verse 110). Therefore, every action that emanates

from a human has a real connection with their ultimate goal, depending on whether it is in the direction of their perfection or not (Note: *Philosophy of Ethics*, pp. 58-61).

Here, a question may arise: If humans are innately familiar with good and bad, then what is the need for sending prophets and introducing successors (*Awliya*), and what is the role of religion in ethical education?

1-5. The Role of Religion in Ethical Education

To find the answer to the question raised, it is necessary to pay attention to the position of prophets and successors, and generally the role that religious teachings play in the education of humans. This subject is explained under the following headings.

1-5-1. Awakening of Intellects

In the Holy Quran, God Almighty has said to the Prophet (Peace be upon him and his family): "So remind, you are only a reminder. You are not over them a controller" (Note: Surah Al-Ghashiyah, Verses 21-22). In *Tafsir al-Mizan*, regarding these verses, it is stated: "The phrase 'You are only a reminder' explains that his duty—as a Messenger—is only to remind, in the hope that they may respond and believe without coercion and compulsion" (Note: *Al-Mizan*, Vol. 20, p. 275). The word "Dhikr" (remembrance) lexically means to recall and is opposed to "Nisyan" meaning forgetfulness (Note: *Lisan al-Arab*, Vol. 4, p. 308).

In the first sermon of *Nahj al-Balagha*, the Commander of the Faithful, Ali (Peace be upon him), explaining the reason for the mission of prophets, says: "Then God chose prophets from among the children of Adam, took their pledge for the revelation and their trust for the conveyance of the message, when most of His creatures

changed God's covenant to them, ignored His right, took equals along with Him, and devils turned them away from knowing Him and cut them off from worshiping Him. So He raised among them His messengers and sent His prophets to them in succession, to demand from them the fulfillment of the covenant of their creation (*Fitrah*), to remind them of His forgotten favors, to argue against them by conveyance [of the message], and to unearth for them the buried treasures of intellects" (Note: *Nahj al-Balagha*, p. 43).

In this sermon, very important and fundamental points are raised; among them is that the Imam introduced the prophets as reminders of covenants and innate cognitions upon which the dust of forgetfulness has settled. In a subtle metaphor, he described these cognitions as treasures buried and hidden in human intellects and considered the role of prophets to be the extraction of these buried treasures.

Allamah Mohammad Taqi Jafari, in his commentary on these phrases of the first sermon, writes: "Let us consider this very interesting point that if authoritative Islamic sources do not introduce the goal of the prophets' mission as the awakening, strengthening, and activation of the intellect, at the very least they have made it the most fundamental goal of the mission. We have seen in this very sermon, a few sentences before the interpreted sentences, the phrase 'and to unearth for them the buried treasures of intellects'... A significant number of traditions are seen with this content, introducing the intellect as the inner proof and inner prophet, and the prophets as the outer proof of the outer intellect. Such as: 'O Hisham, indeed God has two proofs (*Hujjah*) over people: an outward proof and an inward proof. As for the outward one, it is the Messengers, Prophets, and Imams (Peace be upon

them), and as for the inward one, it is the intellects.' Imam Musa bin Ja'far (Peace be upon him) said: 'O Hisham, indeed God Almighty completed the proofs for people through intellects, supported the Prophets with explanation, and guided them to His Lordship through proofs'" (Note: *Translation and Interpretation of Nahj al-Balagha*, Vol. 2, p. 197).

The tradition that the late Allamah Jafari referred to is a detailed hadith that Sheikh Kulayni narrated in the book *Al-Aql wa al-Jahl* in *Al-Kafi*, covering important dimensions of the subject under discussion (Note: *Al-Kafi*, Vol. 1, p. 13). Among them is that the intellect is the inner proof and the prophets are the outer proof, and with the existence of these two, the proof is complete upon humans; because the prophets reveal what humans have inside themselves and call them to perform actions consistent with this inner knowledge. Therefore, it can be said that although the roots of many truths lie in human nature (*Fitrah*), these cognitions are exposed to forgetfulness; that is why prophets come and brush aside the dust of forgetfulness from the face of human nature so that man may find what he already possessed.

1-5-2. Dependence of Some Ethical Rulings on Interests and Corruptions

Another important point that must be considered regarding the role of religion in ethical education is that although humans are innately familiar with ethical values and disvalues, one should not overlook the fact that some of these values and disvalues depend on interests (*Maslahat*) and corruptions (*Mafsadah*).

Professor Motahhari has explained this subject by citing examples: "It is possible that an act may be ethical from one perspective and

unethical from another... We may have no action in Islam except that, in the terminology of seminary students, its ruling changes with 'secondary titles'. For example, if they ask us whether sheep meat is Halal (permissible) or Haram (forbidden)? We say it is Halal. Then they ask is pig meat Halal or Haram? We say it is Haram. The primary title of a sheep is Halal-meated, and the primary title of a pig is Haram-meated. But this same Halal meat becomes Haram under a secondary title. Suppose it belongs to someone else; by virtue of being the property of another, eating its meat becomes Haram because it is theft. So this sheep is Halal from the aspect of being Halal-meated, but from the aspect of being another's property, eating its meat is Haram. And pig meat, which is Haram, becomes Halal in another place; for example, when a person is trapped in a predicament where their life depends on it. Not only does it become Halal, but eating it also becomes obligatory; meaning if they do not eat and perish, they have committed a Haram act. We have many such examples" (Note: *Education in Islam*, Collected Works, Vol. 22, p. 614).

Another example that can be stated for this subject is the issue of honesty and truthfulness. Suppose a cruel criminal is looking for someone with a weapon to kill them and asks you for their location. In this situation, what is your duty? Since honesty and truthfulness are good, should we tell the location of that person to that criminal and oppressor? Or no; because of another interest, which is saving the life of an innocent human, we must avoid stating their location?

Also, someone might say that my conscience dictates mercy towards fellow humans, so criminals should not be punished; whereas in this view, the corruptions of such an approach have not been considered; because in this case, the way is opened for the aggression and

assault of criminals and looters, and this itself is oppression against innocent people. We encounter many such examples in our lives.

The important point is that due to the limited scope of human knowledge, humans do not have comprehensive command over the interests and corruptions of affairs; therefore, it is necessary that a guideline defining the do's and don'ts of correct behavior be provided by Someone who is knowledgeable about all interests and corruptions of affairs, namely God Almighty. It is worth noting that these guidelines are also in harmony with nature (*Fitrah*); but the aspect of this conformity must be discovered by considering the interests and corruptions of actions. For example, in the conflict between two conscientious rulings—mercy towards a criminal as a human being and preserving the life and property of innocent humans—the Holy Sharia prefers the interests of the second ruling over the first and therefore orders the punishment of the criminal. These rulings, which also include ethical subjects, look at interests and corruptions that are often hidden from our view.

1-5-3. Religious Motivation: The Only Guarantor of Ethical Execution

A famous saying is narrated from Fyodor Dostoevsky, which Martyr Motahhari has cited in multiple places in his works. Dostoevsky's phrase is this: "If there is no God, everything is permitted." Professor Motahhari believes that his meaning by this phrase is that if there is no religion, none of the ethical values have a guarantee of execution. He says in this regard: "Dostoevsky's meaning is that there is nothing else that can truly prevent man from performing anti-ethical acts... Experience has shown that wherever religion has been separated from ethics, ethics has lagged far behind. None of the non-religious ethical schools have succeeded in their work. The

certain fact is that religion is necessary at least as a support for human ethics. This is why their outcry is loud in this regard—with various expressions—that however much humanity has advanced in terms of industry and civilization, it has lagged behind in terms of ethics. Why? Because ethical schools did not exist; the ethical schools that existed from old times were mostly religious and that's it; and to whatever proportion religion and faith have weakened, it has been practically seen that human ethics have lowered. This is why we must attach extraordinary value to faith at least as a support for ethics—if we do not say the only guarantor of its execution" (Note: *Education in Islam* [Collected Works], Vol. 22, p. 592 and *Philosophy of Ethics* [Collected Works], Vol. 22, p. 471).

The subject raised in these phrases is very important. If we want to state this subject in answer to the question raised about the role of religion in ethical education, we say: although man is innately familiar with ethical values and disvalues, this knowledge is fruitful when it can manifest in human behavior. This important matter will not be realized except with belief in the Origin (God) and the Resurrection; because assuming the denial of these principles, there is no powerful motivation to listen to the call of nature (*Fitrah*). This is why the great Prophets and Successors (Peace be upon them), along with awakening human intellects, remind them of the Creator of the world and the Day of Judgment and build ethics upon the foundation of beliefs (Note: *Man and Faith* [Collected Works], Vol. 2, p. 65).

1-6. The Position of the Science of Ethics in Islamic Teachings

In a common classification, the collection of Islamic teachings is categorized into three general sections: "Beliefs," "Ethics," and

"Jurisprudential Rulings" (*Ahkam*). Each of these sections is distinguished from other fields of Islamic sciences by their specific characteristics. Among these, the religion of Islam has paid special attention to the category of ethics, such that numerous verses of the Holy Quran and countless traditions from the Prophet (Peace be upon him and his family) and the Imams (Peace be upon them) are dedicated to this subject. In addition, their entire lives are full of ethical lessons. By reflecting on Quranic verses and hadiths, it can be stated that "Ethics" in the religion of Islam has both "objectivity" (*Mawdu'iyyah*) and "methodicality" (*Tariqiyyah*); in other words, "Ethics" is both a goal and a way to reach other goals.

The evidence for this statement is that the Prophet (Peace be upon him and his family) stated the purpose of his mission as perfecting ethical noble traits, which indicates that "Ethics" has objectivity (is a goal in itself) in Islam (Note: *Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 68, p. 382). Because, apart from that category of ethics which has a heartfelt and inner aspect, other "ethical attributes" are also the external manifestation of human beliefs. Just as in the teachings of the Imams (Peace be upon them), the root of many ethical virtues is stated to be in the certainty and belief of individuals. For example, virtues such as "Asceticism" (*Zuhd*), "Patience," and "Trust in God" (*Tawakkul*) are introduced as the fruit of the tree of certainty (Note: *Ghurar al-Hikam*, p. 275 and 280, and *Majmu'ah Warram*, Vol. 2, p. 233). Or on the opposite point, a jealous person is sometimes objecting to God's decree. This means, in truth, adorning oneself with ethical virtues and avoiding ethical vices is an expression of humans' faith and certainty in the Origin and the Resurrection.

On the other hand, Islamic teachings indicate that ethics has a methodical aspect in achieving other religious goals; meaning it

smooths the way to reach them. As it is explicitly stated in the Holy Quran that if the Prophet had a harsh and rough character, those around him would have dispersed from him (Note: Verse 159 of Surah Al Imran). In this verse, "Good Ethics" is introduced as an aid to the Prophet (Peace be upon him and his family) in the path of propagating God's religion. Just as in God's mission to Moses and Aaron, treating Pharaoh with good behavior and gentleness is emphasized to increase the possibility of his being influenced (Note: *Amali al-Tusi*, p. 531).

In addition to this, the traditions of the Prophet and the Imams (Peace be upon them) have stated some ethical virtues as a source of achieving transcendent goals. For example, asceticism towards the world is introduced as a source of benefiting from Divine wisdom (Note: *Nahj al-Balagha*, p. 341), trust in God as a cause for His sufficiency (Note: *Al-Kafi*, Vol. 2, p. 94), and gratitude as a cause for the continuation of blessings (Note: *Ilal al-Sharai'*, Vol. 1, p. 9). Similarly, other ethical attributes play an important role in achieving religious and denominational goals. By paying attention to them, one can realize the special position of the science of Ethics in the religion of Islam.

Now, after presenting these discussions, it is time to state ethical subjects. To open this section, three important and necessary discussions will be presented as foundational discussions in the science of Ethics. These discussions include "Knowledge and Learning," "Self-Discipline" (*Tarbiyat-e Nafs*), and "Intention." Since knowledge and cognition are the foundation stone of servitude, and servitude is the etiquette of the people of faith in the presence of the Truth (God), which places man under God's eternal mercy—which is the supreme goal of creation (Note: Verse 56 of

Surah Adh-Dhariyat and Verse 119 of Surah Hud)—in the section related to knowledge, the position of knowledge and learning in Islamic teachings is examined (Note: *Al-Kafi*, Vol. 1, p. 44). Since the step after knowledge and cognition is action, in the second section of the introductory subjects, the teachings of the Quran and hadiths regarding "Self-Discipline" are stated. Also, the comprehensiveness of the discussion of "Intention" necessitated that it be referred to independently and as a foundational discussion; because the subject of "Intention" encompasses all ethical dimensions. For this purpose, we dedicated the third section of these discussions to the subject of "Intention."