THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR REPRESENTED AS 'WORLDVIEW'

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ABSTRACT

Moral behavior is one phenomenon among others that is manifested by man as a comprehensive part of his humanity. This is because moral behavior brings a responsibility that is meaningful only within a context of rational reflection; for, a moral behavior is intrinsically distinguished from other forms of animal behavior in that these animal behaviors would be naturally punished if natural laws are not obeyed. But there is no such mechanism in the moral law and in fact it may go unpunished if not controlled by a legal system. Moral system and the legal system are, therefore, intimately related. Of course, many moral principles cannot be controlled by the law either; they are as such based necessarily within the conscience of the individual, such as one ought to help others, one ought to be sincere in his doings, selfishness is to be avoided, one ought to be courageous and generosity is a virtue. Due to this nature of morality, the moral behavior is uniquely a human phenomenon. Since the most outstanding human characteristic that distinguishes man from the rest of the animals is rational reflection, it is consequently the case that moral behavior is exclusively human, and hence it is based upon some *mental activity*. Since at the outset we are not yet clear about the ground of moral behavior, we shall, as we have just done, designate it by a general phrase '*mental activity*'. It is because of this ambiguity that we shall first try to demonstrate the ground of a moral act and then attempt to compare the Aristotelian ethics with the Islamic ethics from this perspective.

Keywords: Moral behavior, mental activity, worldview, framework, foundation of human actions

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All human actions with regard to their origin can be broadly divided into two classes: 1. natural; 2. deliberative. If an act is performed as a result of the bodily requirement, that act is natural, such as eating, sleeping, the reaction to a sudden pain and the similar acts. A deliberative act is, on the other hand, a behavior that is performed consciously as a result of certain mental activity. As it is seen in our definitions of these human acts, the origin of a natural act is some natural instinct or requirement, whereas the origin of a deliberative act is in one way or another a mental phenomenon. But since the mental phenomenon itself is somehow related to the body, in many cases it is very hard to analyze a human act into its natural and deliberative origins. For example, eating is a natural act, but one may prefer to eat only two times a day and develop a certain habit of eating which will eventually lead us to analyze a particular act of eating as a deliberative act. This will also lead us to conclude that even all natural acts, if they are not performed spontaneously, are performed deliberately. In other words, even the natural acts are performed by humans as a result of certain mental activity. This general conclusion also justifies us to formulate that with the exception of only certain spontaneous acts all human behavior is ultimately deliberative. Spontaneity is a basic feature of natural acts; therefore, if an act is not performed spontaneously it must be regarded as a deliberative act, even if it originates out of natural instincts because it follows as such from some mental planning and reflection which changes its natural character. That is why human action can be characterized by certain ethical values.

All moral behavior is, thus, grounded upon some mental reflection; but that mental reflection itself in turn is grounded upon a metaphysical foundation which is essentially rooted in the mind. Therefore, a moral act may either directly or indirectly follow from a fundamental ground that is already formed in the mind. Let us try to explain this with an example; suppose a person is trying to help someone in distress, this act of help is either the result of a certain planning in his mind, or it is spontaneous in which case obviously no mental planning and hence, reflection is involved. In the former case, there is a mental reflection but this mental reflection is definitely the result of certain ideas in the mind of the person, such as "helping others is a morally good deed", "if one does a morally good deed he becomes a virtuous person", and depending on the background of the person, he may also have religious ideas that support these moral principles, such as "every person is required to be morally virtuous by God"; just consider the verse in the Qur'an, in case of a Muslim: "In the sight of God, the most honorable of you is the one who is the most virtuous" (49/Al-Hujurat, 13). It is clear that in this case the moral act does not follow directly from this ultimate metaphysical

ground because there is a planning as a mental reflection from which the act follows directly. But if the distressed person is in urgent help, the helping person does not have time for mental reflection and hence, spontaneously acts to help. Obviously in this case the act of helping does not follow upon a mental reflection but it directly follows from the ultimate metaphysical ground. For if the person does not have some of those mental ideas he cannot act towards helping. It will be helpful to show our results on a chart:
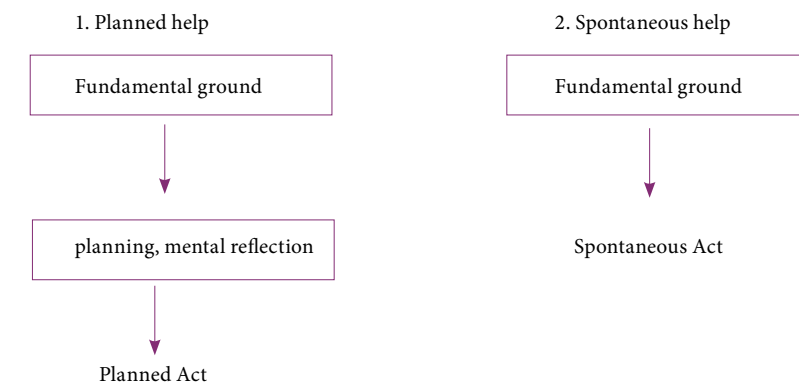
Although we have just set spontaneity as a basic feature of natural acts, yet we must see that both the planned and spontaneous acts can also be deliberative acts, as in the above case, and hence inherently liable for moral evaluation. The only difference is that the deliberative act, which is spontaneous, directly springs from the ultimate metaphysical ground, shown on the above chart as the 'fundamental ground'; whereas the planned act follows from this fundamental ground through the intermediary of a mental reflection. What we call mental reflection is the planning and all other mental activities involved prior to the performance of an act; our terminology concerning this is clear. But what is meant by the fundamental ground has not been explained sufficiently, and therefore, we need to clarify it further.

All human conduct, as we have pointed out, is ultimately traceable to a fundamental mental unity which we call 'fundamental ground of human behavior'. Since this fundamental ground, as a metaphysical basis, arises in the mind we refer to it by a simple term; 'worldview'. Our conclusion, therefore, amounts to saying that every human action is, in one way or another, ultimately traceable to a worldview. As soon as a human being is born, his mind begins to acquire knowledge and thus gradually begins to form a framework for itself. It is this framework that we call 'worldview'. From the very first inception of a piece of knowledge, the mind begins to work within that framework as it enlarges it through various combinations

of knowledge acquired later. The worldview thus becomes the *environment* within which the mind operates, and without which it cannot function at all. If the human mind cannot function without such a mental framework it is clear that without a worldview no deliberative action can take place and without a worldview no moral evaluation will ever be possible. In order to demonstrate this we need to clarify further the nature and structure of worldviews.

A worldview is a perspective from which the individual views everything. Therefore, no one can evaluate any question or a problem without first assuming a worldview of a sort. In fact, the human mind works only within the context of such a mental totality. It is clear that our concept of worldview refers to the conceptual totality as an attempt to grasp the universe, and as such a worldview is a mental totality, in which notions, ideas and beliefs are so interconnected that together they form a network of organized concepts. This network forms a coherent mental structure *naturally*, thanks to the constitution of our mind. The mind uses its inherent principles, such as the principle of contradiction, argumentation, and association and so on, to form the impressions that it receives from the outside world into a coherent unity, as a result of which arises a worldview. It is clear, therefore, that a worldview is not *necessarily constructed* by the individual, but rather it *arises* in the mind of the individual *necessarily*, a necessity which is required by our human nature. It is in this sense that we shall claim its disclosure to be a natural process, rather than a conscious effort to build an architectonically whole perspective.[1] For, a worldview is in fact a perspective from which the individual views everything.

A worldview is, therefore, a network of ideas, conceptions, beliefs and aspirations in which all that make it up are organized in a coherent manner, but not necessarily in a *systematically* interconnected network (which is called 'system' in the philosophical sense).[2] Therefore, by calling the process out of which a worldview comes to arise in the mind of an individual 'natural', we do not mean that this process is governed by *natural* means; on the contrary, it is for the most part regulated by education and society, and in the case of the Islamic worldview primarily by religion. Hence, by the *natural process* we mean the natural operations of our mind that begin to take place right after we are born, and as we grow, through this process

we begin to acquire the knowledge that makes up the constitution of our worldview. By the natural operations of the mind, on the other hand, we mean the logical principles, such as the law of contradiction, the principle of identity, association, deductive, inductive and similar ways of argumentation discussed in logic. The mind uses these ways naturally to acquire knowledge, and as we acquire any kind of knowledge, our worldview is formed *simultaneously* from the kinds of knowledge which we accept. Then, we organize our life on the basis of such accepted knowledge, which we call 'worldview'.[3]

Although a worldview, as we have seen, is a mental totality, it is possible to analyze it logically into certain doctrinal elements, which we call 'structures'. As a fundamental element, a structure is the largest *unity* within a worldview. As these *unities* emerge in a coherent relationship with each other, they altogether form a total mental unity, which is the worldview itself. Hence, each structure within a worldview is also a unity just like the worldview to which they belong.

The most fundamental doctrinal element in a worldview can be termed 'life-structure'. We can distinguish this structure from all others easily, because it develops first out of the human biology, and as such it is prior to all other structures both temporally and logically. In its later phases, however, it emerges conceptually as well and thus acquires an abstract sophistication. It is because of its biological origin that we may also identify it as 'natural'. The life-structure regulates not only the development of related concepts in this structure, but also our behavior in our daily life. Out of the life-structure grows our culture within a social context. Therefore, most of our cultural dealings are regulated by this structure, such as our ways of eating, drinking, talking, everyday actions and even professional dealings. But

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1   In fact if there is such an effort to build a framework systematically, that will be a scientific activity which already exists in philosophy. Therefore, the counterpart of the term 'worldview' in philosophy is the concept of 'system'. We thus distinguish these two terms only in this sense. See the following footnote.

2   For an elaboration and comparison of the concept of 'system' in relation to worldview, see the present author's "A Concept of Philosophy in the Qur'anic Context", *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*", 11: 2 (1994), 170-4.

3   The major factors leading to the rise of a worldview in the mind of an individual are mainly religion, cultural environment and education. Other factors that are also dominant in the disclosing process of a worldview are the psychology of the person, language, natural environment and other social conditions. Since these are precisely the major factors that form a worldview, through the natural operations of the mind, the individual does not have to make a conscious effort to construct a systematically organized worldview. The individual's effort is only to find answers for certain questions that either arises in his mind or he simply comes across them in an accidental manner in his daily life. But we do not mean that the individual has absolutely no conceptual effort in the process of the emergence of his worldview. On the contrary, he contributes to this process in his effort of obtaining knowledge. What he is not conscious of is the actual formation of the worldview itself, an act of reaching a mental totality in the epistemological sense, which primarily and naturally belongs to the mind. Hence, a worldview is formed by our mind as a matter of habit that is dominant in our daily life, either: 1. through culture, technology, scientific, religious and speculative ideas that we acquire through education and other means, or;
2. through a conscious effort to acquire knowledge, or;
3. in both of the above.

at the same time, as we grow up, our social environment shapes the life-structure; hence, just as there is a reciprocal influence between a worldview and its social environment, there is the same kind of relationship between the life-structure, and indeed between all other structures, and their physico-social environment.

Out of the life-structure from infancy to adulthood gradually develops certain conceptions concerning the world we live in; first, certain fundamental questions arise in the mind, such as the meaning of life, from where we have come and to where we are going. As we try to answer, or find answers to these fundamental questions, a conception concerning the world and things around us is formed. As this conception begins to be more sophisticated, it gradually forms a clearly discernible structure in the mind, which can be distinguished from the life-structure, and thus can be termed 'world-structure'. As soon as this new structure is established within the worldview, it begins to function in conjunction with the life-structure and vice versa. In fact, all the structures of a worldview operate in relation to each other. None of them can operate independently; hence, our treatment of them independently is only a logical analysis of a worldview. Otherwise, we do not intend to establish each structure as an independent unity.

The emergence of other structures as logically discernible manifestations of a worldview has no fixed order. It may even be possible for certain worldviews to have the rest of the structures as potential mental conceptions within the world and life-structures. Hence, they may remain within them as mere sub-structures. But if the worldview is sufficiently sophisticated, it will be possible to analyze within it, first, a 'knowledge-structure', which is a direct extension of the world-structure. Then, either the world-structure or the knowledge-structure, or the combination of the two plus the life-structure will eventually lead to a sophisticated concept of morality, which can be discernible as the 'value-structure'. From the composition of such a worldview, it is possible to infer a fifth structure as well, to which we shall refer as the 'man-structure'. Hence, in a worldview we distinguish five fundamental structures: 1. life; 2. world; 3. knowledge; 4. value; 5. man structures. Among these structures, it is the value structure that concerns us here.

Once we have thus outlined the constitution of worldviews, we may try to show first where ethics is located within the Islamic worldview, and then the same attempt will be made concerning the Aristotelian philosophical system.[4]

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4   Although in case of Islam we use the term 'worldview', the same term cannot be used for the Aristotelian philosophy. See footnote 2.

Since the life-structure is grounded in human biology, it will have the most common elements with all other worldviews, and as such the life-structure of the Islamic worldview is its aspect that is most dominant in the Islamic cultural activities. The world-structure, on the other hand, is that aspect of the Islamic worldview which includes the most fundamental elements, such as the idea of God, prophethood, resurrection and the ideas of religion and the hereafter, *akhirah*. We do not, however, mean that these are the only fundamental concepts of the Islamic worldview because each structure by itself represents a doctrinal element which includes within itself much other fundamental Islamic key terminology. But the extensions of these key concepts and terminology constitute substructures; hence, there lie many substructures within the basic structures of the Islamic worldview which are not so fundamental.

As an extension of the world-structure, knowledge-structure is also a fundamental doctrinal element, which is represented by the umbrella term *'ilm* in the Islamic worldview. This structure includes within itself the key scientific terminology of Islamic science and as such it is extremely important in this context because the elaboration of the rest of the structures depend on the sophistication of this structure. Therefore, the sophisticated ethical system of Islam also largely derives from this structure, although as a doctrinal content it is primarily based on the fundamental concepts of God and religion which are included in the world structure of the Islamic worldview.

The value-structure in the Islamic worldview thus includes religious, ethical and legal practices. Since the concept of law in the early Islamic worldview is closely linked with the world-structure, it naturally included religious law, which cannot be devoid of moral content. Hence, law, religion and morality are manifested as an integral part of one structure. This conceptual understanding of law, religion and morality never brought about a sharp distinction between the three. As a result, there has never been a thinker who developed an ethical philosophy independently of Islam as a religion. In fact there can be no ethical philosophy within the Islamic worldview, since ethics is integrally combined with religion. If there is a book on ethical philosophy by a Muslim philosopher, we can very safely identify its alien origin, such as Miskawayh's *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq*. The same is true of law and legal philosophy. The corollary to this fact is that *fiqh* cannot be translated into English simply as 'law', for *fiqh* includes religion, law and morality so integrally that the one cannot be without the others. Of course, usually many concepts of a worldview cannot be translated into the concepts of another worldview. But there may be concepts in each worldview that can correspond to their

related concepts. In this case the concept of law in English as represented within the Western worldview corresponds, not wholly, but partially, the concept of *fiqh* within the Islamic worldview.

Finally, the man-structure is represented within the Islamic worldview by the concepts of *khalifah* and *ummah*. As such this structure manifests the Islamic understanding of man and society, which is totally grounded in the world-structure because, again, even these conceptions themselves are derived from the concepts of *tawhid*, prophethood, religion and *akhirah*. Since it is not our aim here to expound these conceptions of Islam, we do not concentrate on their exposition. Only their nature so far as it is related to the concept of worldview as we explained here is sufficient.[5]

Each structure in a worldview, therefore, has a specific function in life and in human activities. The function of the value structure within the Islamic worldview is to regulate the religious, moral and legal activities. All these phenomena are studied in Islam in a specific science called *fiqh*. Therefore, *fiqh* in Islam means the science of religion, ethics and law. What determines this understanding of law and ethics is the Islamic worldview which is based on the concept of *tawhîd* as outlined in the Qur'an. This understanding leads the idea of an absolutely one God, unique and also the only authority in religion (*mâlik yawm al-dîn*). As a result no one else can say anything on religion and He can command what is right and thus what is also good, hence ethical and moral; and prohibit what is wrong, and thus what is also evil, hence unethical and immoral. But a worldview in which these ideas are not set in this way will obviously lead to some other understanding of law and ethics that is coherent with that worldview.

What I have tried to show has been so far only one aspect of worldview which is to function as a framework for our mind. In this way a worldview will be manifested in our actions. It also functions in this way as an ultimate mental ground of our actions.

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5   For an excellent exposition of these concepts and their place in the Islamic worldview one must consult Professor al-Attas' *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Islamic Worldview* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1996).