

Imam Khomeini's Code of Ethics

In the heart of Imam Khomeini's [1] way of thinking, ethics has a [special] place, and in fact, all areas of knowledge revolve around this pivot. According to his view, by citing a *hadith* (Prophetic tradition) from the Messenger of God (s) ([2]), all kinds of knowledge can be placed in three general categories. It is because the human being possesses three existential presences and three types of world: one, external and sensory; another, the allegorical world; the third, the intellectual one.

Social science, juristic precepts and transactions are examples of the first category while rational sciences are instances of the third type. Yet, what is related and complementary to the second type is called *ethics*. If man wants to go beyond logic and the law of instincts, then he needs ethics in its broad sense. Ethics in this context cannot be confined to merely a number of ethical rules; instead, it is in fact a knowledge which searches for the deepest recesses of man's existence, and which cures him.

This ethics is, indeed, a sort of theoretical and practical anthropology. It is awareness of fixed principles and their application. It is owing to this that this knowledge can be considered as the noblest one and the *raison d'être* of the prophets' (s) ([3]) summons.

The Messenger of God's (s) sayings were a manifestation of such kind of ethics which he made known as the purpose of his mission. In this sense, man can be needless of many types of knowledge; yet, he cannot consider himself needless of ethics since this knowledge is the capital asset of felicities in both worlds:

The purpose and result of the summons of the Seal of the Prophets (s) is the perfection of morality. In the noble traditions, both that are brief and those which are elaborate, moral excellences have been given more importance than anything else after doctrinal teachings [*ma'arif*]... And their importance is greater than what we are capable of explaining adequately, but that which we know for certain is that the asset of the everlasting life of the hereafter and the capital asset of the life of that abode is the acquisition of noble dispositions and the possession of moral excellences.

The paradise which is given to man for the sake of moral excellence is the paradise of Attributes, incomparable to the physical paradise of Act.[4]

Ethics, with this peculiar status, has always had Imām Khomeinī's attention. From the very beginning when he was a regular teacher up to the time when he was in the midst of the political arena, led the people's uprising, and established the Islamic Republic, he always paid particular attention to morality, and viewed almost all socio-political issues from the moral perspective. His recommendations and political messages to the officials and the people speak for this, and these [recommendations] can be treated, apart from the occasion of their issuance, as profound moral lessons from which we can learn.

However, from his point of view morality cannot be restricted to some recommendations and decrees. Rather, it is anchored in profound philosophical, theosophical and anthropological principles and precepts. His view on morality is a philosophical one. It is in this sense that he keenly scrutinizes moral vices and virtues, discusses them wisely, and enumerates the benefits and harms of this and that item. In fact, he has a remarkably profound belief in religious morality and uncovers vices and virtues from the heart of the narrations [*ahādīth*] from the Infallibles [*ma'sūmīn*][5] ('a); nevertheless, he does not content himself with the tradition of quoting, but perfectly utilizes intellect in analyzing these narrations [*ahādīth*] and in elucidating moral concepts.

This mode of striking a balance between the intellect [*'aql*] and narration [*naql*], which has been acceptable to the great Shī'ah scholars, is very manifest and conspicuous in the moral discourses of the Imām. Anyone who assiduously scrutinizes the ethical and gnostic works of the Imām can deduce his system of ethics.

The truth of the matter is that he has based his code of ethics and mystical-moral understandings on theoretical principles, which he does not specify so much. In the same manner that he juxtaposes the fragments of a riddle with one another, so also the researcher must carefully find these principles and place them together. In doing so, he could present the Imām's code of ethics, which is rooted in a long-standing tradition and founded on the great gnostic and ethical heritage of the Muslim mystics and teachers of ethics.

The writer of these lines has tried his best to accomplish this task to the best of his ability. Thus, by pondering on the ethical writings of the Imām, particularly the *Sharh-e Chehel Hadīth* [Exposition of Forty *Hadīths*], [6] which is replete with philosophical, ethical and psychological intricacies and subtleties, he has attempted to infer and expound on the principles that he considers as being the underpinning of the Imām's system of ethics.

The outcome of this study is the presentation and explanation of the Imām's eight fundamental tenets and the results that emanate from them. Undoubtedly, the comprehensiveness of such kinds of studies cannot be claimed and the first person who perceives its flaws is the researcher himself. The reason for

this is that if, after a few days, he reads what he has written, he feels there is something to be added and omitted from it. This, in itself, indicates that such handiworks of man are, like him, is an unfinished matter and an open question.

What must be said is that these tenets and principles are theoretical teachings on the basis of which the system of practical ethics takes form, and so one can talk about practical ethics. These discussions are mainly theoretical in form. The framework of practical discourses and the manner of ethical behaviour must be dealt with elsewhere. The teachings which will be discussed in this section and can be considered as the bedrock of the Imām's code of ethics are as follows:

1. Indescribability of the human being;
2. Man in the state of nature;
3. Man as the arena of conflict between good and evil;
4. Regulation of instincts;
5. This world and the hereafter;
6. The philosophy behind suffering;
7. Knowledge as a mental aid, or burden; and
8. Behaviour as emanating from ethical principles.

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