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SPECIAL ISSUE

APPLYING *WASAṬĪYAH* (MODERATION) IN CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM SOCITIES

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A double blind peer-reviewed
and interdisciplinary journal

SPECIAL ISSUE

Applying *Wasaṭīyah* (Moderation) in
Contemporary Muslim Societies

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Revisiting Fanaticism in the
Context of *Wasaṭīyyah*[1]

Fanaticism is derived from the Latin word *fanum*, which refers to sacred places of worship such as temples or other consecrated sites. The complete term *fanaticus* means "to be put into raging enthusiasm by a deity."[2] In the modern sense, a fanatic is simply an individual who goes to an extreme, is overly zealous or unreasonably enthusiastic regarding an issue, idea, opinion, or action. These ideations do not have to be of a strictly religious nature, but may also be in regard to a personal or private matter or a larger political, social, or economic issue. Despite the broadness of its contemporary application, it is most commonly used in its traditional sense of religious zealousness, intolerance, and violence.

In today's literature fanaticism stands not for the content of any particular religious position, but for a mentality and attitude that can attach an attitude of radicalism, rigor, and extremism to the content of any ideal or ideology. According to the *Cambridge Dictionary*, it refers to a person "holding extreme beliefs that may lead to unreasonable (actions) or violent behavior."[3] One feature of this mentality is the "religious assurance of the establishment of belief through dogmatic and moral legalism, often founded on a fundamentalist positivism in matters touching revelation."[4]

"Fundamentalism" (*uṣūlīyah*), on the other hand, is originally a Protestant term developed in the early part of the twentieth century to refer to Christian groups that believed in the Bible's inerrancy, as opposed to those who sought to make scriptural changes to accommodate the modern world.[5] It is somewhat redundant in the Islamic context; however, some scholars have been trying to understand the connection between Islam and fundamentalism.[6] Theoretically, the great majority of practicing Muslims are "fundamentalists" because they believe that the Qur'an remains unchanged from its initial revelation. Therefore, the following analysis will mainly focus on the concepts of fanaticism and *wasaṭīyah* from a comparative perspective that emphasizes their recent developments and connections to Islam.

One would be hard pressed to paint a picture of the typical fanatic, for fanaticism transcends all racial, geographical, linguistic, and religious boundaries. The objectives, goals, methodology, interests, and motivations of fanatics are as diverse as the means employed and the results achieved. A fanatic may operate in isolation or join a group of like-minded individuals. Even nation-states have been known to engage in fanatical behavior. Given this apparent diversity, do any similarities exist in the characteristics, behavior, and actions of fanatics? In his *Terrorist Myths* Peter Sederberg classifies terrorists according to their ideological commitments.[7] A similar classification can be made of fanatics who may or may not be involved in terroristic activities, which is defined as "the use of violence to achieve a political or social goal."[8]

Some fanatics are no more than criminals, for they seek not to change the established order so much as to penetrate it and then use it for deviant ends. Other fanatics are nihilists who desire to destroy the established order just for the sake of destruction; they do not seek to replace it with something better. Individuals with destructive pathologies, such as armed individuals who shoot others at random as well as many contemporary cultic movements, fall into this category. Others can be classified as single-issue social activists who are extremely committed to various issues (e.g., nuclear disarmament, the environment, abortion, and animal rights). Although mere membership in them does not make one a fanatic, many such groups have been known to use extreme measures to get their message across.

One example of an issue-oriented group is Christian Identity, which operates largely in the American Midwest and has no love for the federal government. During the 1980s its members set off bombs, robbed banks, and raided National Guard armouries[9] in attempts to show their dissatisfaction with Washington's policies. Another fundamentalist but not necessarily fanatical group that appears to be more involved in recent politics are "Born Again Christians." It has been confirmed that

> During the American presidential election in 2004, "Born Again" Christians played a decisive role in the re-election of former president George W. Bush. Polls revealed that thirty percent of those US voters regarded themselves as belonging to this movement.[10]

Other fanatics have a nationalistic bent that appeals to significant segments of disgruntled people among both the minority and majority populations. The Basque ETA (Spain), the IRA (Northern Ireland), and various Palestinian organizations fall into this category, for most cannot exist without the support of their respective populations.[11] Those fanatics who have a revolutionary agenda

advocate a program of social transformation that transcends the particular concerns of any state constituency in order to encompass the much larger "global" community. These are the most feared because they threaten the established order of the existing powers. One infamous ideology that falls into this category is communism, which has now become a spent force.

As mentioned above, states are not exempt from engaging in such behavior, the most extreme of which is genocide or the attempted elimination a certain ethno-religious group(s) that has been identified as undesirable for one reason or another. The most recent example of such an atrocity is the fanatical behavior of the Syrian government, which has been attempting to exterminate its Muslim co-citizens while the world watches helplessly.

The extent of the influence possessed by these fanatical groups or states is often subject to available financial resources, the group's organizational capacity, and the publicity and hence awareness generated about them. However, now that we have some idea as to their diversity, the next question is how to determine if an individual, group, or nation is fanatical or is engaging in such obsessive behavior? In other words, what are the criteria for establishing whether or not an individual or group has extreme opinions, ideas, and actions? It is quite difficult to answer this question, given that all moral action and behavior is relative as long as it does not harm or infringe upon another individual's personal freedom and liberty. Nevertheless, in spite of this general principle there is no broad application of the precept, particularly when it involves relations between and among nations. At this level, any action that harms or injures a state or group within a state may be justified as long as it serves the larger community's interest.

The problem with moral relativism is that it reduces fanaticism to a matter of personal perception and, as such, involves immense subjectivities. Not surprisingly, there has been appreciable use and abuse of the term based upon one's often ideological and political motivations. For example, the media frequently refer to Muslims struggling in a few "hot spots" as "fanatics," irrespective of the historical roots of these conflicts and motivations, as well as the rationales and purposes of the diverse activities undertaken by the indigenous groups. This label is habitually utilized because these groups are Muslims (mainly Arabs) fighting for causes that run contrary to the dominant international geopolitical interests. The content of the mass media, and nowadays of the social media, is therefore manufactured by "a scholarship of oversimplification that informs the West about Islam."[12]

Painting all Muslim activist groups with the same brush only undermines and belittles the causes of many of these groups and further impedes the pub-

lic's ability to comprehend all sides of the conflict. Consequently, "fanatic" perpetuates ignorance instead of encouraging an investigation that will lead to a more informed understanding of each side's perspectives. Regarding the recent "war on terror," John Esposito illustrates this position by citing a common question:

> Why do they (Muslims) hate us? The common answer from Washington is that Muslim radicals hate our (Western) way of life, our freedom and our democracy. Not so. Both moderates and radicals in the Muslim world admire the West, in particular its technology, democratic system and freedom of speech.[13]

The Causes of Fanaticism

The causes of fanatical behavior are quite diverse: private and personal, a larger socio-political goal, or no goal at all beyond the act itself. For some psychosocial analysts, fanaticism is a strictly psychological issue – someone with a personality disorder that makes him or her highly susceptible to fanatical behavior.[14] Consequently, fanatics need to be cured of this particular dementia or confined in such a way that they cannot harm others. Reducing fanaticism to a clinical issue has received its own share of criticism, for such an analysis fails to acknowledge that individual personalities do not develop in a vacuum. Rather, individuals are the products of their upbringing and the politico-socioeconomic environment in which they live. To focus on the personality disorder issue is to dismiss the problem, because the insane have no credibility and their actions and ideas gain no recognition in the political process.[15]

The role of the family in shaping the fanatic's personality, identity, and characteristics should not be underestimated. Individuals who are raised in healthy families with strong moral values and guidance, as well as with a great deal of love and affection, often develop a positive self-identity that may steer them away from fanatical paths. Conversely, families in which individuals receive scant care and attention, in which divorce, violence, abuse or extrajudicial death or manslaughter have occurred, may negatively impact individuals' growth and self-esteem. Such realities may also influence them toward a path of fanaticism and extremism.

The social environment in which one lives plays a strong role in developing an individual's identity. The socio-economic status of one's family, the religious and/or educational institutions attended, whether the individual lives as a part of a minority or majority group, and whether a person experiences racism or discrimination are all factors that may influence a fanatic's behavior.

Another very influential factor is the surrounding political environment. The extent to which an individual possesses basic political rights and freedoms, such as the right to influence and participate in the political process or to express an opinion and be heard, often affects one's behavior. The more one perceives one's society to be secure, fair, and just, and the more that the society in question accommodates one's interests and opinions, the less one may be inclined toward fanatical behavior. On the contrary, the perception that one's society is insecure, unjust and replete with inequality, corruption, and repression may create a widespread sense of frustration that, in turn, may lead those affected to engage in extremist behavior and actions in an effort to bring attention to their plight.

Adding these qualifiers to the contemporary global political scenario magnifies the possible causes of fanaticism. This attitude is further qualified by how one perceives the (mis)representation of the interests of his or her community or nation on the international stage, for this often affects one's identity and psychological development as well. A fanatic's behavior may also be influenced by other perceptions: Whether the person perceives his or her community and/or nation to be influential or powerless, the extent to which people can influence their own destiny and foreign policy, and whether or not they have to depend upon other nations for their own domestic economic development, political stability, and decision-making.

For example, the West's current political, economic, and cultural global domination often triggers potential fanatics in non-western countries who feel that their own identity, culture, and power are being threatened. Many of them resent the western powers' meddling in the internal affairs of some Muslim states via the media, technology, their military presence, economic and political sanctions, and so on.

The "Islamicity" of Fanaticism

Contemporary Muslim scholars frequently have difficulties defining fanaticism, for this concept did not exist in the early Islamic tradition, literature, and scholarship. But several terms did convey certain aspects of it as it is known today in western literature. One such example is *'aṣabīyah* or *ta'aṣṣub* (excessive love of one's tribe), which was very common during the pre-Islamic era and later developed into what Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) defined as "group feeling."[16] Even today, in the Iraqi dialect, a hot-tempered individual is often referred to as *'aṣabī*. Other Arabic terms linked with fanaticism are *ighāl* (beyond exaggeration),[17] *tashaddud* (exceedingly restrictive),[18] *gulūw* (excessiveness),[19]

and *taṭarruf* (moving to the farthest edge of a spectrum of opinions or attitudes); some scholars even include *taṣawwuf* (mystical experience).[20]

While social scientists have no well-defined criteria for determining at which point an individual's behavior or actions can be considered fanatical, Muslims have been given the "criterion" for determining appropriate moral action and behavior. Accordingly, when they wish to determine which source should be used for judging such things they first look to the Qur'an and then to the Sunnah (i.e., the Prophet's words and deeds as reported through the authentic traditions).

Like other major world religions, Islam is a religion of peace and moderation that encourages its followers to avoid extravagance and excess. The Qur'an addresses the global Muslim community as a "justly balanced" (Q. 2:143) *ummah*. The *tafsīr* (commentary) on this verse tells us that Islam came to moderate the ways of the previous nations, which had become either extremely legalistic (i.e., lacking in spirit) or far too "other-worldly."[21] It appears that Qur'an was revealed to bring humanity back to the straight path of monotheism and that of moderation in all spheres of life.

Muslims are advised to balance their spiritual and material concerns by focusing on religious duties and paying attention to worldly affairs. Even in the area of performing good deeds and religious duties, they are encouraged to pursue moderation. For example, Q. 2:267 encourages them to give charity and Q. 4:5 cautions them not to squander their money or give it to those who will waste it. For Muslims, the Sunnah is the living example of how the Prophet implemented the Qur'an. Most of them believe that his specific words, actions, and practices further endorse the fact that Islam frowns upon any extremism or fanaticism. On numerous occasions, Muhammad stressed that religion should be a matter of ease as opposed to one of hardship and extremism.[22] He applied this philosophy in his lifestyle.

> Whenever Muhammad was given the choice of two matters, he would choose the easier of the two as long as it was not sinful to do so, but if it was sinful he would not approach it. (He) never took revenge over anybody for his own sake, but (he did) only when Allah's legal limits were transgressed...[23]

Muhammad encouraged his followers to do the same, to avoid going to the extreme and to beware of excessiveness in religion. Once when some Muslims tried desperately to follow him by performing *wisal*, a long continuous fast for more than one day as opposed to the traditional dawn-to-dusk fast, he strongly discouraged them by declaring that he received food and drink at night. He told them that they would only end up harming themselves.[24]

Some Companions were extremely zealous in their attempts to please him and thus engaged in many acts of religious devotion. One time, when he learned that Abdullah ibn Amr ibn al-As was fasting every day and then praying all night long, he mentioned his disapproved and informed this Companion that one's spouse and one's body have their own rights over a person. Instead of going to the extreme and enduring great hardship, he encouraged them to fast three days a month; however, those who had greater strength could fast like Prophet David, namely, every other day.[25] A good deed or act of *'ibādah* (worship) can become something unhealthy if taken to the extreme. Muslims were instructed to do those deeds that were within their capacity, since anyone will eventually tire of doing good deeds if such behavior is continuously taken to the maximum.

Wasaṭīyah in the Context of Fanaticism

If Islam is a religion of peace and moderation and the Prophet constantly advised his followers to take the middle path, why has the popular media so markedly identified it as a religion of fanatics? Moreover, if fanatics come in all shapes and colors, can be either religious or secular, and have varied motives and actions, then what explains the overwhelming linkage of anything related to Islam with fanaticism? Superficially, one perceives no clear rationale for the media to focus more on "Islamic fanatics" than any other type of fanatics. However, the answer becomes very clear when one examines this phenomenon in light of contemporary global, political, and economic conditions.

Common criminals, among then the Mafia, drug dealers, or armed maniacs firing at random targets, are only irritants to society. Neither they nor the nihilists are about to change the system. Despite fears of the growing numbers of cults, as well as skinheads in certain western countries, only a very small percentage of the population is actually involved with such groups. While public outcry is elicited by occasional tragedies – such as Reverend Jim Jones' ill-fated People's Temple cult that eventually led more than 900 individuals to commit mass suicide at Jonestown, Guyana, during November 1978 – for the most part they only harm themselves.[26] This is considered a small price to pay for the majority's continued enjoyment of "freedom and democracy." Furthermore, as the majority of participants in such activities are fairly young, many can be co-opted back into the system after passing through this "phase."

While fanatical acts done in the name of national liberation are by far the most prevalent, for the most part these groups pose no real threat to the state. Even in cases where they do pose a possible threat, the problem remains con-

tained within certain geographical regions and as such, does not threaten the global political-economic power structure. For example, while Sikh nationalists may be considered a nuisance to New Delhi, they are no threat to the western powers. Similarly, while the Basque separatist movement ETA in Spain claims to be the authentic representative of the Basque people, the 1984 autonomous elections showed that, in reality, only 10 percent of the Basque adult population supported it. By 1989, their amount of support had dropped even further.[27] The IRA of Northern Ireland has also performed dismally at the polls. Clearly, none of these groups is strong enough to cause any real problems. Paul Wilkinson argues that technically there is no justification for either group's extreme activities, for ample democratic channels are open to them: free elections, freedom of worship and expression, and enough freedom to organize and belong to political parties.[28]

Since the majority of fanatics are no threat to the established geo-political order, it is easy to understand why revolutionary fanatics are the most feared. With the demise of the Soviet empire, only one ideology now fits this bill: Islam. Islam, like Christianity, recognizes no political boundaries and transcends the particularistic claims of all ethnic groups and states. Moreover, it is a proselytizing religion.[29] As C. H. Dodd aptly points out, fanatical Muslim groups are

> a profound threat to the existing order, political, social and religious... It is for this reason that all the states in the (Middle East) region, from the most extreme to the most moderate seek to eliminate them altogether or to ensure that they are firmly and securely under their strict control.[30]

To add to the chagrin of global powers and interests, the goals of the contemporary Islamic resurgence are not confined to Muslim countries alone. Muslim "fanatics" are found even in the midst of their own polities. Yvonne Y. Haddad describes such "extremists" in America in the following manner:

> They tend to be isolationist and centered in the small group of like-minded Muslims. Often they hold meetings led by itinerant (migrant) missionaries from overseas who lecture on the necessity of faithfulness to Islam... They affirm the necessity of supervision of public life by Islam and Islamic principles. Thus their goal is to strive to alter society so that Islam may rule.[31]

In addition to being a threat to the contemporary global political and economic power, Islamic groups have frequently targeted westerners in general and Americans in particular, because doing so is one sure way to draw international attention to their particular cause. The fact that "Islamic fundamen-

talist terror has killed more Americans than any other type of terrorism"[32] certainly helps shed light on the reason for such strong anti-Islamic reporting in the global media, particularly during the last three decades. In fact, the media must take the lion's share of the blame for maligning Islam and linking it with fanaticism.[33]

While geo-political interests are largely responsible for such negative portrayals, Muslim fanatics are not totally blameless. With the recent "Arab Spring" and rapid regime changes in the Muslim world, we have seen the proliferation of Islamic groups and societies all over the globe. Unlike in some liberal democratic countries, where the IRA, the ETA, Christian Identity, and similar groups are free to express their views and their citizens are free to show their support through the electoral process, the majority of Muslim countries are characterized by non-freely elected governments and thus do not represent their inhabitants' true interests. In many cases, they are client states of foreign powers that, in order to maintain their illegitimate rule and privileges, oppress their own people. Even when elections are held, they are done more for show and only when the ruling government can guarantee its continued power. When Muslims groups try to play by the rules, their aspirations are curtailed.

Recent history is replete with examples of how democracy is permissible in Muslim countries as long as the "Islamists" do not come to power. For example, when it appeared that Algeria's FIS (the Islamic party) would assume power during the early 1990s, the military immediately intervened. In the Turkish elections of December 1995, Prime Minister Tansu Ciller's secularist government was legitimately defeated. When the victorious Islamic Welfare Party asked other parties to help it form a government, they were prevented from doing so because they party leaders wanted to put Islamic principles into law.[34] In addition, the current religious-political situations throughout the Arab world, but particularly in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, have created unstable and unsafe environments in which fanatical and extremist religious groups can – and are – flourishing.

Some Muslims, frustrated by what they perceive to be a lack of freedom to participate legitimately in the electoral process, as well as to practice their religion and establish Islamic institutions, believe that only way to change things for the better is to make their point known "by any means necessary." Sederberg argues that violent means can be justified only after all other avenues of redress have been exhausted, in other words as a last – but certainly not a first – resort.[35] Many Islamic groups believe that all other avenues of redress have been exhausted because, despite their members' support, the democratic process is closed to them. Consequently, they increasingly resort to

such drastic measures as suicide attacks and car bombs,[36] guerrilla warfare, hostage taking, hijacking airplanes, attacking educational institutions, abusing of women and children, encouraging sectarian violence, and other offensive means to destabilize the government.

It is these latter means that have led the global media to indiscriminately classify Muslims as "fanatics" and identify Islam as the cause of their fanaticism. Certainly, if one accepts this type of thinking, then all Islamic groups with a political or social agenda fall into the slot known as "fanaticism." According to their worldview, religion and politics are not suitable bedfellows and thus only non-threatening groups of a strictly spiritual nature can earn their stamp of approval. But even this approval is given with reservation, for frequently even the mere adherence to Islam causes one to be branded a "fanatic," especially in this age of uncontrolled secularism.

In light of the apparent diversity among contemporary Islamic groups, how does one distinguish fanatical elements from those with moderate ideologies? Clearly, Muslim intellectuals must be of concern to non-Muslim scholars when determining such definitions, unless the former explicitly agree with a checklist of beliefs held by the latter. By the same token, Muslims cannot turn a blind eye and pretend that no fanatical Muslim groups exist. Notwithstanding the potential conflict of interest, an objective approach based on well-established academic research should be pursued as closely as possible so that those groups being assessed are approached on a case-by-case basis.

The first question to be asked here is whether the group's philosophy and goals are in line with Islamic doctrine (*'aqīdah*). If they are not, then the group must be rejected and labelled "deviationist."[37] Second, are the means and methods used to achieve its goals consistent with Islamic teachings? If the group's intentions are noble but its means are ignoble, then it must either reform its methodology or be rejected as un-Islamic. Finally, does the group possess sincerity (*taqwā*), or does it undertake activities merely for the sake of self-aggrandizement and publicity? Ultimately, if the group's philosophy is acceptable from an Islamic point of view, then the means used to achieve its goals are within the Islamic framework. And if the group is sincere in its intention, then it cannot be labeled "fanatical." However, if the group is deficient in any of the above criteria, then it becomes vulnerable to being labeled as "fanatical" or "extremist."

A recent classification of contemporary Islamic movements in Southeast Asia (SEA) divided groups into "participatory" and "separatist" based on their religio-political affiliations. The former prefer to operate within the existing political framework, whereas the latter choose to work outside it and employ

fanatical means and techniques.[38] The majority of Islamic movements within the political-separatist category oppose the current political order and thus want to overthrow it and create their own "by any means necessary." As a result, most of them are not afraid to employ violent methods to resolve their grievances and gain public attention. A number of them receive theological support from a few Muslim scholars who call for a revolution against any leadership that "has rebelled against God and His guidance and is responsible for the suffering of mankind."[39]

In the view of such scholars, present-day secular governments must be replaced by the Islamic political order. Rizal Sukma, director of the Indonesian Center for Strategic and International Studies, argues that many of these groups in Indonesia are motivated by all or some of the following ideas: (1) moral frustration, (2) ideological fear of globalization and western domination, (3) the desire for a *Pax Islamica* in Indonesia, (4) simple political opportunism, and (5) economic and social resentment.[40]

An example of a recent regional Islamic movement with a separatist political agenda is the Indonesian-based Jamaah Islamiyah (JI). Kumar Ramakrishna asserts that this "radical terrorist Islamic organization has emerged as the biggest threat to SEA security," for

> [it is part of the global] "*Salafi Jihad*" ideology or "*al-Qaedaism*," which was brought to SEA by Arab migrants from Yemen. Moreover, the organization seeks to establish *Daulah Islamiyah Nusantara*, or an Islamic State incorporating Indonesia, Malaysia, the southern Philippines, Brunei and Singapore.[41]

The JI perceives "attacks on Western targets as part of a fully justified and legitimate defensive *jihad*,"[42] and its members have openly expressed their willingness to use force to achieve their goals. A statement issued by the organization immediately after the September 2004 bombing in Jakarta stated:

> We [in the JI] have sent many messages to the Christian government in Australia regarding its participation in the war against our brothers in Iraq. Therefore, we have decided to punish it as we considered it the fiercest enemy of Allah and the Islamic religion… the hands that attacked them in Bali are the same hands that carried out the attack in Jakarta…[43]

Other political separatist groups in the region include the Acehnese Independent Movement in Indonesia, al-Arqam and al-Ma'unah in Malaysia and Brunei, the Liberation Front of Pattani and Barisan Revolusi Nasional in Thailand, and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) of the Philippines. In 1991, a fanatical group in the Philippines with a revolutionary

agenda that disagreed with the ongoing peace process formed the Abu Sayyaf (Bearer of the Sword) Group. It proclaimed that its main goal was to establish an Islamic state in the southern Philippines based on the Sharʻiah.[44] From 2000 until the present day it has engaged in a series of kidnappings of both Filipinos and foreign nationals in order to obtain ransom money or execute them.

While preparing this editorial (April 2015), a Malaysian news report confirmed that the police had launched a special operation against local cells linked to the Islamic State (IS).[45] The Special Branch's Counter-Terrorism Division began this effort around Kuala Lumpur and the northwestern state of Kedah against cell members affiliated with IS who were planning to launch violent activities in the country. Malaysian Inspector-General of Police Khalid Abu Bakar confirmed that the police arrested 17 suspected militants aged between 14 and 49 and affirmed that "[w]ith the latest arrest, the number of Malaysians nabbed by the Special Branch's Counter-Terrorism Division for suspected involvement in militant activities in Syria was 92 suspects since the operation was launched in February 2013."[46]

Treatments for Fanaticism

The solution for any problem depends upon the nature of the problem. As we have seen, fanatics are a diverse lot. Accordingly, a diverse set of "treatments" should be administered.

- The fanaticism of criminals or activists who want to overthrow their governments can be discouraged via the judicial-legal system's imposition of harsher penalties.
- Pathologically destructive fanatics can be helped by mental health professionals. For example, members of fanatical cult groups have been "cured" through controversial deprogramming techniques and counselling.[47]
- Nationalist fanaticism can be reduced by granting greater political rights and freedoms to those concerned, including greater autonomy and decision-making power.

Nevertheless, the more serious question is can revolutionary fanatics be "cured"? The answer depends on how one perceives the "problem." If the problem of "Islamic fanaticism" is perceived as a threat to contemporary geopolitical hegemonic interests, then a variety of techniques can and are being employed. Some of the means used to contain, restrict, and control the ac-

tivities and growth of Islamic groups, particularly those of the more "militant" or "fanatical" type, are economic sanctions, air embargoes, and arms control for states deemed friendly to such fanatics or those that harbor or sponsor them. For the most part, such countries are now considered guilty unless proven innocent by their actions – a clear violation of international law. Presently, the "media machine" is set in motion to rally people in the "free-thinking liberal democracies" against the "unfriendly" country or "renegade" state so that no one will question the legitimacy of the ensuing punitive actions.

If the perceived threat is posed by non-state actors, efforts can be made to prop up the nation's military abiltiy to crack down on these anti-state insurgents. Multilateral cooperation between western nations and "friendly" Muslim states has been encouraged in an all-out effort to deter such "Muslim fanatics" from toppling many of these regimes. The West's current engagement in Afghanistan to defeat the Taliban is a good example of such cooperation.

Muslim states with weak popular support can further erode what little political rights and freedoms their citizens have by (1) restricting public assembly and movement, (2) controlling *madrasah*s, (3) censoring and thus restricting both the media and the weekly religious sermons to "safe subjects," and (4) imprisoning the leaders of "fanatical" groups in an effort to "cure" or at least "contain" the problem.

But have these means proved effective in discouraging "Muslim fanatics," or have they merely added fuel to the fire? Often this depends on a group's organizational capacity and links to popular support within a particular society. There should be little doubt, however, that when Islamic groups and movements are denied political expression on a level playing field, and when their members' freedoms of worship, movement, and livelihood are curtailed even further, the greater will be their propensity to engage in extremist and fanatical behavior. Some would argue that such individuals have nothing left to lose in terms of worldly affairs and only "paradise" to be attained for their efforts.

However, such logic does not legitimize all of their actions. As stated earlier, every Islamic group and movement must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. While jihad (struggle in the way of God) is permissible and obligatory for Muslims, it is still subject to limits (Q. 2:190-93). According to Syed Hussein Alatas, a prominent Malaysian thinker, jihad is "legitimate only when you (Muslims) are attacked or when you are driven out of your home, and you have to defend yourself."[48] Its classical spirit is reflected in the following advice given by Caliph Abu Bakr al-Siddiq on the occasion of the Syrian expedition:

Remember that you are always in the presence of God....Avoid injustice and oppression...let not your victory be stained with the blood of women and children. Destroy not palm trees, nor burn any field of corn. Cut down no fruit trees, nor do any mischief to cattle or such as you kill to eat. When you make any covenant or article, stand to it and be as good as your word. As you go on, you will find some religious persons who live retired in monasteries and propose themselves to serve God that way, let them alone, neither kill them, nor destroy their monasteries.[49]

As such, it is incumbent upon all sincere Islamic groups, organizations, and states to undertake self-evaluations in order to ensure that their philosophy complies with Islamic principles and that their methods do not violate the Shari'ah. In addition, all Muslim leaders must ensure that members do not overstep Islam's limits. Moreover, the "Islamicity" of some of the means used by various groups needs to be reviewed, discussed, and debated by contemporary qualified Islamic scholars. Muhammad Uthman El-Muhammady, a prominent Malaysian scholar, recommends that

Muslims and their leaders should be exposed to the liberating influences of the various schools and the guidance from them to prevent the generation of fanaticism among Muslims and the various ways to combat fanaticism when they emerge among Muslims.[50]

Unfortunately, the answers are not all clear-cut because the jurists have reached no unified opinion regarding fanatical activities and techniques.[51] Nevertheless, if Islamic groups and movements do their best to follow what is permissible and avoid what is prohibited, then perhaps they will achieve their goals without succumbing to fanatical behavior.

One of the key Islamic concepts most challenged by contemporary fanatics is that of *wasaṭīyah*. This Arabic term, which is perhaps best translated as "justly balanced," is derived from "We made you a justly balanced community (*ummatan wasaṭan*) so that you may bear witness [to the truth] before others and so that the Messenger may bear witness [to it] before you" (Q. 2:143). This translation reflects the interpretation of both classical and modern Muslim intellectuals that *ummatan wasaṭan* means "a justly balanced community" and that its citizens therefore enjoy social justice, freedom, and equality. In fact, this concept is relevant to the political, economic, social, and religious facets of life. The historical record provided by Islamic tradition as to its concept and implications gives even more evidence of its importance.

An increasingly important imperative of *wasaṭīyah* is the need to oppose and control unhealthy elements, such as extreme ideologies and interpreta-

tions. One initiative in that regard is the 2013 establishment of the International Institute of Wasatiyah (IIW) that, under the auspices of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), has been entrusted with systematically studying and promoting this concept in society. In particular, IIW has been conducting research on the challenges facing modern societies in terms of ethnic, religious, cultural, and linguistic diversity. It is responding to questions such as: How can the modern state effectively accommodate multiple and sometimes competing worldviews within society while at the same time maintaining societal cohesion and harmony? Is it possible to allow religious groups the freedom to reaffirm their identity and faith, as well as to practice their diverse rituals and traditions, without leading to the society's destruction? To what extent is religious moderation maintained and protected in a multi-religious state?

In responding to these questions, the IIW has recently published two books: *Wasaṭīyah (Moderation): A Multidisciplinary Study* (New York: LEGAS, 2014) and *Application of Wasaṭīyah in the Contemporary Muslim World* (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 2015). The two titles can be utilized as additional academic sources for both students and scholars of Islamic studies.

This Issue

This special issue on "Applying Moderation in Contemporary Muslim Societies" began with an invitation to social scientists to reflect upon and respond to this topic while providing a "stepping stone" for further research on applying it. Since this concept has its roots in history and civilizations, we start with M. Ashraf Adeel's "Moderation in Greek and Islamic Traditions, and a Virtue Ethics of the Qur'an." He claims that this Qur'anic concept needs to be explored carefully at a comprehensive philosophic level if it is to meet the need for balance in society. His analysis of both the classical Greek and Islamic traditions in this regard highlights the ethical views of Platonic-Aristotelian and classical Muslim thinkers (e.g., Ibn Miskawayh and al-Ghazali) on moderation.

In her "Moderation and al-Ghazali in Turkey: Responses to Skepticism, Modernity, and Pluralism," Taraneh Wilkinson explores the country's theology faculties and their contributions to the challenges of modernity. She posits that modernity is strongly associated with such questions as tolerance and freedom of thought, but that it is also linked to issues of skepticism, atheism, and pluralism. Her article examines how such a position reflects modernity's positive values and responds to its challenges. She highlights those resources that deal

with religious moderation in al-Ghazali's writings and how they are utilized and analyzed in these particular faculties. Wilkinson focuses on two recent works by the contemporary Turkish theologians Mehmet Bayrakdar and Adnan Aslan and argues that not only are both thinkers suitable for the label of *moderate*, but that they also engage their own theological interests and interpretations with those of al-Ghazali.

While the application of *wasaṭīyah* can be associated with most fields of knowledge, Joseph Alagha's contribution is specifically on "Moderation and the Performing Arts in Contemporary Muslim Societies." For him, Islamic arts are referred to as "purposeful art" – "clean art" that portrays good deeds, as distinguished from bad deeds that characterize indecent or "lowbrow art." In his paper, moderation provides a novel reading of the maxims of Islamic jurisprudence (*qawā'id al-fiqh*), whereby performing art promotes benefits (*maṣāliḥ*) and avoids harm (*mafāsid*).

The final contribution is Zakiyuddin Baidhawy's "The Muhammadiyah's Promotion of Moderation." He examines the role of Indonesia's largest Islamic civil organization in promoting moderation within the Muslim community. This sociological study, which focuses on the organizational efforts to establish social ideals within the framework of civil society, shows that the movement's social ideal has been deliberately based upon three Indonesian domains, namely, the political, economic, and cultural.

In addition to these four papers, Ahmad El-Muhammady's short forum paper deals with "Applying *Wasaṭīyah* within the Malaysian Religio-Political Context." He argues that given the present-day context, *wasaṭīyah* needs to respond to the extremism now manifesting itself in politics, economics, culture, and religion.

We hope that our readers will find these papers thought-provoking for their understanding of *wasaṭīyah* as well as stimulating for its application. We also feel confident that these papers will serve as sources of inspiration and motivation for their own research.

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Moderation in Greek and Islamic Traditions, and a Virtue Ethics of the Qur'an

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Abstract

This article looks at some of the salient analyses of the concept of *wasaṭīyah* (moderation) in the ancient Greek and the Islamic traditions and uses them to develop a contemporary view of the matter. Greek ethics played a huge role in shaping the ethical views of Muslim philosophers and theologians, and thus the article starts with an overview of the revival of contemporary western virtue ethics, in many ways an extension of Platonic-Aristotelian ethics, and then looks briefly at the place of moderation or temperance in Platonic-Aristotelian ethics. This sets the stage for an exposition of the position taken by Ibn Miskawayh and al-Ghazali, which is then used as a backdrop for suggesting a revival of the Qur'an's virtue ethics. After outlining a basis for its virtue ethics, the Qur'anic view of the virtue of *wasaṭīyah* is discussed briefly and its position on this virtue's nature in terms of the individual and the community is presented.

Introduction

We are living in difficult times. The world in general and the Muslim world in particular need to ground themselves in the ethical wisdom of the ages in order to steer themselves through the contemporary political upheavals. Given

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that humanity is afflicted by various extremist ideas and ideologies, it is very important that we search our ethical documents to get a sense of balance for living our lives. Thus the Qur'anic concept of *wasaṭīyah* needs to be explored carefully from a variety of angles and disciplinary perspectives at a comprehensive philosophic level. This paper seeks to contribute to the work being done in this area by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars by looking at some of the salient analyses of this particular concept in the ancient Greek and the Islamic traditions and then using them to develop a contemporary view of this matter.

Greek ethics played a huge role in shaping the ethical views of Muslim philosophers and theologians, and therefore the article begins by overviewing the revival of contemporary western virtue ethics, in many ways an extension of Platonic-Aristotelian ethics. It then looks at the place of moderation or temperance in this stream of Greek ethics briefly to set the stage for explaining the positions taken by Ibn Miskawayh and al-Ghazali. This discussion is then used as backdrop for suggesting a revival of the Qur'an's virtue ethics. After outlining the basis for this, the virtue of *wasaṭīyah*, or moderation as it appears in the Qur'an's verses, is discussed briefly. A view of the Qur'anic position on the nature of this virtue as regards the individual and the community is also presented.

The Recent Revival of Virtue Ethics in the West

There are currently three major approaches in ethical philosophy: Kantianism, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics. The first two have remained the dominant trends in western ethical philosophy ever since the Enlightenment.[1] Both approaches seek to understand ethical matters in terms of understanding the characteristics of people's actions. Thus they are, so to speak, action-centered approaches. Kantians look at the action's moral quality through the lens of the rule or duty upon which it might be based. This approach is called *deontological*, from the Greek word *deont* (that which is binding).[2] Thus it is a duty-based approach to understanding ethics. As opposed to this, the various utilitarian approaches seek to evaluate actions in terms of their consequences for all concerned. As a result, these approaches are known as *consequentialism*.

These two dominant approaches have recently been challenged by the revival of an historical tradition of ethics known as virtue ethics, which can be traced back to Homer, Plato, and Aristotle. It was also the dominant ethical approach in Islam and Christianity during the Middle Ages.[3] In fact, Confucian ethics is also a virtue ethics.[4] In essence, this approach focuses on the moral

agent's characteristics instead of the action, for it regards the agent's character as basic for understanding the action's morality .

There is an ongoing debate among adherents of these three ethical approaches in contemporary ethical literature.[5] Here, however, we are concerned with the virtue ethics approach because it is the dominant ethical perspective in the Islamic religious and philosophical traditions. This section, therefore, gives a brief overview of contemporary western virtue ethics to set the stage for further discussion.

The contemporary revival of virtue ethics is normally traced to the publication of E. Anscombe's well-known paper "Modern Moral Philosophy,"[6] in which she expressed her despair with modern moral philosophy and argued that the ethical terms of modern philosophy contained no real content. Expressions like "morally wrong" action fail to rule out the possibility that the same action may turn out not to be morally wrong in other circumstances. She also argued that notions like *right* and *wrong* or *obligation* are primarily *legal* notions that presuppose the existence of a *legal* authority. But modern philosophers do not have a plausible notion of such an authority, insofar as they do not attribute this status to God and insofar as their other purported sources of such legal authority (e.g., society, conscience, social contract, or nature) all suffer from various defects.[7] Therefore, she asserted, if we do not take God to be the source of our ethical "norms," we need to look somewhere else for those norms. She proposed looking for them in human *virtues*.

> [J]ust as *man* has so many teeth, which is certainly not the average number of teeth men have, but is the number of teeth for the species, so perhaps the species *man*, regarded not just biologically, but from the point of view of the activity of thought and choice in regard to the various departments of life – powers and faculties and use of things needed – "has" such-and-such virtues: and this "man" with the complete set of virtues is the "norm," as "man" with, e.g., a complete set of teeth is a norm."[8]

Anscombe wanted contemporary ethics to revert to an Aristotelian approach in its search for ethical norms, defined as what is "normal" for human beings in terms of functioning properly in different departments of life. She believes that if one wants to retain the notions of obligation and right and wrong in our ethics, one needs to retain God as the legal authority or source of our obligations. Norms legislated by God need not be in conflict with the requirements emerging out of human nature. Otherwise, one needs to do away with these notions.

This was the first drop of rain for the contemporary revival of virtue ethics. The next major development was the appearance of Alasdair Mac-Intyre's *After Virtue* (University of Notre Dame Press: 1981), a complex historical argument that placed the resurgence of virtue ethics on a strong footing. MacIntyre, like Anscombe before him, regards modern ethical philosophy as quite hopeless as far as resolving contemporary moral issues through rational argument is concerned. The mind-set generated by what he calls "modern liberal individualism" lacks the resources to produce any agreement on the *premises* of the arguments constituting contemporary moral debates. In his view, one needs to belong to a moral tradition in order to produce such agreement on moral premises. Contemporary liberal individualism belongs to no such tradition and draws its concepts and rules from fragments of traditions.

> The surface rhetoric of our culture is apt to speak complacently of moral pluralism in this connection, but the notion of pluralism is too imprecise. For it may equally well apply to an ordered dialogue of intersecting viewpoints and to an unharmonious melange of ill-assorted fragments. The suspicion – and for the moment it can only be a suspicion – that it is the latter with which we have to deal is heightened when we recognize that all those various concepts which inform our moral discourse were originally at home in larger totalities of theory and practice in which they enjoyed a role and function supplied by contexts of which they have now been deprived. Moreover the concepts we employ have in at least some cases changed their character in the past three hundred years; the evaluative expressions we use have changed their meaning. In the transition from the variety of contexts in which they were originally at home to our own contemporary culture "virtue" and "justice" and "piety" and "duty" and even "ought" have become other than they once were. How ought we to write the history of such changes?[9]

Thus modern culture is isolated from the systems of rules and concepts that constituted various traditions. As a result, modernists construct their arguments with fragments that are isolated from a total system of moral concepts. Due to this absence of a total system in which they can house their arguments, they start from different beginnings/premises and fail to find points of agreement for resolving moral differences.

Through a complex historical analysis, MacIntyre develops the argument that from the Homeric/Heroic age through Plato and Aristotle up to the Stoics and then continuing through the Middle Ages and the Enlightenment until the emergence of modernity, there is a sequence of moral traditions, each of which integrates its moral concepts with its own specific social/historical context. In the Homeric/Heroic age, virtues are traits or excellences that required a person

to perform his/her role appropriately according to his/her status in the context of his/her family. In the case of Plato and Aristotle, virtues are traits required to perform one's role appropriately according to one's station as a citizen of a city-state. In both Homeric/Heroic age and Platonic/Aristotelian traditions, virtues are meant to help improve the social order, family, or city-state.[10]

For Stoics, however, virtues are neither diverse nor embedded in a social order. They talk of only one virtue, namely, submitting to nature and that too in an individualistic sense. The emergence of the Hellenistic and subsequently the Roman empires diluted the sense of community. Citizens had to act not on behalf of a community, but rather on their own behalf to prove their worth to the empire. According to MacIntyre, this Stoic individualism has emerged time and again throughout history during periods of a weakened sense of virtues.[11] This individualism is a precursor of the modern individualistic mind-set that Enlightenment thinking brought to a head.

In fact, MacIntyre believes that our very conception of reason underwent a revolution from teleological to "calculative" with the advent of Enlightenment science. As a result, the Platonic-Aristotelian scheme for understanding morality that was adopted without difficulty by the Jews, Christians, and Muslims of the Middle Ages became fragmented at the hands of Enlightenment modernity.

> This scheme is complicated and added to, but not essentially altered, when it is placed within a framework of theistic beliefs, whether Christian, as with Aquinas, or Jewish with Maimonides, or Islamic with Ibn Roschd. The precepts of ethics now have to be understood not only as teleological injunctions, but also as expressions of a divinely ordained law. The table of virtues and vices has to be amended and added to and a concept of sin is added to the Aristotelian concept of error. The law of God requires a new kind of respect and awe. The true end of man can no longer be completely achieved in this world, but only in another. Yet the threefold structure of untutored human-nature-as-it-happens-to-be, human-nature-as-it-could-be-if-it-realized-its-*telos* and the precepts of rational ethics as the means for the transition from one to the other remains central to the theistic understanding of evaluative thought and judgment. Thus moral utterance has throughout the period in which the theistic version of classical morality predominates both a twofold point and purpose and a double standard. To say what someone ought to do is at one and the same time to say what course of action will in these circumstances as a matter of fact lead toward a man's true end and to say what the law, ordained by God and comprehended by reason, enjoins. Moral sentences are thus used within this framework to make claims which are true or false. Most medieval proponents of this scheme did of course be-

lieve that it was itself part of God's revelation, but also a discovery of reason and rationally defensible. This large area of agreement does not however survive when Protestantism and Jansenist Catholicism – and their immediate late medieval predecessors – appear on the scene. For they embody a new conception of reason.[12]

This is a key passage in MacIntyre's analysis of why contemporary societies need to revert to a traditional virtue ethics scheme. He also notes the continuity of his argument with that of Anscombe. Without allowing ethical concepts to breathe in their traditional context, we cannot agree on the fundamental premises of our moral arguments and, hence, end up failing to understand or resolve our ethical differences. In Anscombe's characterization, our ethical expressions fail to have "content." MacIntyre's point in this passage is that medieval Jewish, Christian, and Islamic thought blended nicely with the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition to give it a theistic dimension. Virtues and vices became justified by divine law simultaneously with teleological reason, which sought to realize humanity's essence or essential function. Enlightened modernity disrupted this blend by destroying the teleological conception of human reason/nature.

According to MacIntyre, modern moral thinking continues to be emotivist even after emotivism's philosophical retreat as a philosophical theory. It not only lacks the capacity to settle moral debates rationally because of its fragmented nature, but also because it does not have the right kind of moral self in view. Since the emotivist approach obliterates the distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations, our model characters in modern times are all manipulators of persons and pursue goods that he characterizes as "external" to their practices. His gives examples of such characters.

> Two of these we have already noticed: the Rich Aesthete and the Manager. To these we must now add a third: the Therapist. The manager represents in his *character* the obliteration of the distinction between manipulative and nonmanipulative social relations; the therapist represents the same obliteration in the sphere of personal life.[13]

Characters like the bureaucratic manager and the therapist want to make wealth or gain power (psychological effectiveness), both goods that are external to their practices, rather than to help people or cure the patient (i.e., goods internal to their practices). Similarly an aesthete, who is rich personally or parasitic on someone who is rich, works incessantly for enjoyment in order to avoid boredom, rather than basing his/her life on anything substantive in terms of work and values.

MacIntyre argues that in order to come out of the current crisis in moral thinking, we need to revert to the tradition of virtue ethics of which Aristotle, according to him, is the greatest representative. Fragmented Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment morality needs to be replaced by a virtuous pursuit of goods internal to various social practices. In fact, he defines virtue with reference to social practices.

> A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.[14]

According to him, standards of excellence, rules, and goods are the three basic components of such practices. Anybody who enters a practice must accept its standards in order to achieve its internal goods. One can acquire and then exercise the relevant qualities (virtues) to achieve the related goods. The failure to exercise such virtues clearly results in the failure to achieve the relevant internal goods and, hence, is morally blameworthy. As far as the standards of such practices are concerned, they are subject to critical evaluation over time. However, the practices can still have a historical continuity and stability. Entering into such practices to achieve their internal goods provides a narrative structure to our lives, unifies them, and makes them intelligible to us.

For MacIntyre, communities give life and context to these practices, be they in the arts, the sciences, or any other area. Therefore virtues, given that they are related to practices, can be understood only through their relations with the communities in which those practices breathe. Like Plato and Aristotle, he considers the pursuit of virtues a communal activity.

This overall argument for the revival of virtue ethics in the context of community life seems to have tremendous relevance for the revival of virtue ethics in the Muslim community on both the local and global level. Several considerations make it imperative that Muslim thinkers, leaders, and communities revive their traditional virtue ethics approach.

First of all, the fragmentation of ethical thinking that he speaks about in relation to the modern West exists at a far deeper and more comprehensive level in the Muslim community.[15] Due to the colonial interregnum to which the West subjected most Muslim societies, their collective and historical psyches have been disrupted. A great many traditional institutions and social practices were demolished and supplanted with western institutions and practices that did not function effectively, particularly after the colonial powers' departure. As a result, there is a widespread dissatisfaction and political unrest throughout the Muslim world.[16]

Second, this disruption has caused widespread confusion, indeed ignorance, about the intellectual heritage of Islamic civilization. The contribution of Islam toward the modern intellectual tradition, science, and technology remains largely unknown even among Muslims. Third, the community's moral fiber has been severely damaged due to the political and economic mismanagement of its affairs by an inept and often corrupt leadership. As a result, the intellectual traditions of the Islamic "golden age," of which virtue ethics was an integral and critically important part, must be revived.

The Virtue of Moderation among Greek and Medieval Muslim Thinkers

Moderation or temperance is one of the four principal virtues in Plato's ethics, the other three being wisdom, courage, and justice. The Greek word *sophrosune*,[17] normally translated as moderation or temperance, does not have an exact equivalent in other languages. It is a virtue or excellence of character that leads its possessors to exercise an all-round moderation, self-control, and prudence in their actions – self-knowing moderation or orderly disposition. Muslim ethicists have adopted the Arabic term *'iffah*[18] for this particular virtue, which connotes, among other things, an all-round self-restraint and purity.

The Virtue of Moderation in Plato

Plato divided the four principal virtues into two groups: wisdom (based in the human soul's rational part, which regulates or harmonizes all other parts) and courage, temperance, and justice (all of which are subordinate to wisdom). Of these, courage corresponds to the spirited part of the human soul. There is no virtue that corresponds specifically to the appetitive part of the soul. Temperance is an excellence or virtue that gives the soul an orderly disposition as regards satisfying its appetites and desires; however, it also ensures which part rules and which ones are ruled over. Justice, finally, is the virtue by which the human soul lets all of its different parts function in harmony and without interfering with each other. There seems to be a close affinity between justice and temperance, insofar as these virtues contribute to the soul's orderly functioning.

This division of the soul into rational, appetitive, and spirited parts is based on the tripartite division of the social order in Plato's *Republic*. The virtues of the ideal city-state are the same as virtues of the soul. The three classes of the ideal social order, namely, the farmers/craftsmen, soldiers, and rulers corre-

spond to the soul's appetitive, spirited, and rational parts, respectively, and need to be governed by the same virtues as the parts of the soul. Plato describes the role of temperance or moderation in the social order as (summarized by James Adam):

> This virtue [Temperance] resembles a kind of "harmony"or mutual accord. It is often explained as self-control. Self-control means that the better self rules the worse; and this is surely true of our city, for in it the higher controls the lower, and the irrational desires of the inferior many are subject to the rational desires of the virtuous few. Further, our citizens are in accord with one another as to who shall rule and who shall be ruled, so that Temperance is present in both ruled and rulers, pervading the whole city through and through and rendering it accordant with itself. We may define Temperance as accord between the naturally better and the naturally worse, on the question which of them should rule. 430D - 432A[19]

James Adam points out that Aristotle and others seem to have made the mistake that temperance is "the special virtue of the lowest class in the State and the lowest element in the soul."[20] This error, he contends, partly arose from a desire to bring a superficial symmetry to Plato's theory by attaching a virtue to each social class. However, in Plato's theory temperance is not unique to the lowest social class or lowest part of human soul. In fact, all parts of the social order and human soul need temperance insofar as it is a concord between the "naturally better and naturally worse."

In Adam's tabulation all three virtues (i.e., wisdom, courage, and temperance) belong to the rulers or philosopher kings/queens, whereas courage and temperance belong to the soldiers and temperance belongs only to the farmers and craftsmen. Justice, which makes all of the other virtues possible, unifies them all by making them carry out their own specific part (i.e., mind their own business) in the state as well as in the human soul. It makes them possible insofar as "the division of duty according to natural capacity"[21] is the source of each virtue in the state as well as in the soul. Justice is exactly such a division of duty according to natural capacity. Therefore, without justice the other virtues will not even arise. Justice also unifies all other virtues insofar as it has to run through them all to keep them in their own respective spheres.

Although temperance is a disposition for orderly and harmonious conduct of all the parts of the soul or the state, it is different from justice. For instance, it does not make other virtues possible, despite the fact that it must be present in all parts to ensure concord among them. Indeed, temperance must regulate itself to stay temperate for, as Adam notes, "it is a virtue both of the whole

and of each of the parts."[22] But unlike justice, it does not create the division of duties according to natural capacities. All it does is enable concord among the parts so that the better should rule the worse. At the appetitive level of the soul and at the lowest level of the social order, it moderates and properly restrains the appetites of the individual and the relevant social group.

Aristotle on Moderation

Aristotle's ethics also accepts wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice as virtues. However, unlike Plato, he considers them, along with many others, to be individual virtues, although the social order or city-state helps the citizens realize them. Therefore, temperance is not seen as an excellence or virtue of the social order, but rather as an excellence of individual character like the virtues of wisdom, courage, and so on. His ethics is based on the so-called function argument. After establishing that *eudaimonia* (i.e., happiness or human flourishing) is the supreme good toward which all human actions aim, either directly or indirectly through such instrumental goods as health, wealth, and other things, he presents the following argument.

> [W]e still require a more explicit account of what constitutes happiness. Perhaps then we may arrive at this by ascertaining what is man's function. For the goodness or efficiency of a flute-player or sculptor or craftsman of any sort, and in general of anybody who has some function or business to perform, is thought to reside in that function; and similarly it may be held that the good of man resides in the function of man, if he has a function.[23]

The function that humanity does not share with animals and plants, according to Aristotle, is rational thought. It is rationality, therefore, which is a specifically human function. Through the exercise of rationality, man fulfills the basic function of his nature. This intellectual capacity, according to him, has a theoretical and a practical side to it and intellectual virtues of theoretical and practical wisdom are based on it.

Aristotle defines virtues as dispositions or states of the human soul that have been inculcated by habits and thus can provide the proper emotional and rational response in different situations. Inculcated in us since childhood through feeling and acting in certain ways, these dispositions slowly become habits, the totality of which makes up a person's character. Acting in accord with these habits, however, cannot be considered fully virtuous until they are regulated by *phronesis* (practical wisdom), which helps us discern the most appropriate course of action in a given situation. Aristotle argues that virtue is

a mean between the two extremes of excess and deficiency. For example, generosity is the mean between the excess of prodigality and the deficiency of stinginess. Similarly, courage is the mean between the excess of rashness and the deficiency of cowardice.

As noted by Nussbaum, Aristotle identifies spheres of human experience and then mentions the virtues that correspond to them.[24] As a virtue, temperance or moderation corresponds to the sphere of bodily appetites and their pleasures and pains. Bodily appetites like hunger, thirst, and sexual drive need to be satisfied in a temperate way without either excessive indulgence or deficient satisfaction. To discover the mean of satisfying one's appetite one has to inculcate the right habits from the beginning and use his/her practical wisdom, *phronesis*, to act with temperance. In his close study of the Aristotelian virtue of temperance, Charles Young sums the matter as follows:

> Aristotle makes moral temperance the product of a different [different from Plato] kind of intellectual temperance. For him, people properly control their appetites when they are properly inflected towards their animality – when they acknowledge it without submitting to it. To have Aristotelian temperance, then, is to embody the recognition that one is animal in genus and rational in species. It is to know one's place in the community of souls.[25]

It appears that Aristotle gives a kind of a universal role to *phronesis* in the realm of virtues. The exercise of all virtues involves the use of practical wisdom (reasoning), which is itself a virtue, albeit an intellectual one. This universal role of practical wisdom appears to be quite similar to the role of temperance in Plato's scheme, in which the latter is the virtue that ensures that the ruling (reason) and the ruled elements (spirit and appetite) of the soul or the state agree to rule or being ruled. In other words, temperance has a kind of a universal role as far as the exercise of other virtues is concerned.

However, there are three crucial facts one has to keep in mind when comparing Plato and Aristotle in this regard. First, Aristotle does not isolate wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice as principal or what later came to be called cardinal virtues.[26] Rather, they are part of a larger group of virtues. Second, he does not extend these four virtues to the social order. Third, his understanding of them is narrower than that of Plato in terms of their conceptual content. For example, Aristotle does not consider temperance as a virtue of the state and, at the individual level, restricts it to the control of appetites involving our sense of touch. Thus it has no role in relation to the soul's spirited and rational parts.

Muslim Thinkers on Moderation

Starting with the early Qur'anic commentators and the jurists, Muslim scholars have been engaged with considerations of virtue all along. During the eighth and ninth centuries, Mu'tazilah and Ash'ariyyah theologians developed elaborate ethical systems. The chief representative ethicists of these schools are Qadi Abd al-Jabbar (d. 1025), a Mu'tazili of the Basra school, and al-Ghazali (d. 1111), one of the most influential Ash'ari theologians of all times. Philosophers from al-Kindi (d. 866) onward addressed ethical issues in their systems, and one finds elaborate ethical doctrines in the works of al-Farabi (d. 950), Ibn Sina (d. 1037), and many others. The greatest ethicist in the tradition, however, is Ibn Miskawayh (d. 1030).

Mu'tazili ethics is deontological in its spirit, whereas Ash'ari ethics is engaged with the issue of divine omnipotence and hence tends to be a voluntaristic ethics. Philosophers like al-Farabi and Ibn Sina are under the Platonic influence in their approach to virtues. Ibn Miskawayh is also influenced by Plato as regards his approach to principal virtues, although his view of happiness is Aristotelian. Elements of neo-Platonism and Stoic ethics are also present in Ibn Miskawayh. Here we briefly note the views of Ibn Miskawayh and al-Ghazali.

Ibn Miskawayh, considered to be the greatest Muslim ethicist of the Middle Ages, accepts Plato's four principal virtues as basic and organizes all of the other virtues around them. Hamid Alavi sums up his position in this regard as follows:

> [The] human soul has three different faculties: a faculty related to distinguishing and thinking in the truth of the affaires, which is called intellectual (rational faculty), and its instrument in body is the brain. The second faculty is related to anger, fear, fearlessness and hegemonism, etc. Which is called irascible faculty, and its instrument in one's body is the heart. The third faculty which is related to lust and one's desire to food, residence, marriage and other sensory pleasures are called appetitive, and its instrument in the body is liver. Each of these faculties becomes powerful or weak in accord with temper, habit and education. If the trend of the intellectual faculty is moderate, and it is toward reaching correct sciences, the virtue of knowledge and as a result of it "wisdom" will be created. If the trend of the appetitive is moderate and it surrenders to the intellectual faculty, and it does not involve in its carnal desires, the virtue of chastity will be created from it. If the trend of irascible faculty is seemly and merited, and if it is accompanied with the following of the intellectual faculty, the virtue of "courage" will be created. The product and resultant of these three virtues is a fourth virtue called "justice" that is the perfection of virtues (Ibn Miskawayh, 1992).[27]

It is plain that his view of the human soul is similar to that of Plato in that he associates the four principal virtues with three aspects of human soul (viz., wisdom, courage, chastity – the translation of Arabic term *'iffah*, used by Muslim philosophers for moderation) and that each one of them plays its specific part (justice). It needs to be noted, however, that his view here is not Platonic for he does not associate these virtues with the social order.

Ibn Miskawayh's view of happiness is at least partly Aristotelian. He argues that Aristotle distinguishes three kinds of happiness: happiness located in the human soul (e.g., goods like knowledge and gnosis), in the human body (e.g., goods such as beauty and health), and in goods external to the human soul and body (e.g., intelligent children, friends, and other resources).[28] As far as temperance is concerned, he subordinates a number of virtues to it, among them self-discipline and correct evaluation of the self.[29] This ordering goes to show that he is following the original sense of *sophrosune*, which includes self-knowledge and avoiding all forms of excess.

Turning now to al-Ghazali, he, despite his criticism of philosophers, generally follows them in his virtue ethics. Sherif puts the matter in these words:

> Ghazali begins the discussion of virtue with what he calls "mothers" (*ummahat*) or principal virtues, the "mothers of character" (*ummahat al-akhlaq*) refer to the same principal virtues. These are listed as four: wisdom (*hikmah*), courage (*shaja'ah*), temperance (*'iffah*), and justice (*'adl*). He derives them from an analysis of the soul and distinguishes them according to its faculties. These virtues and their psychological basis are identical with their counterparts in the Greek philosophic tradition especially in Plato and Aristotle.[30]

However, al-Ghazali's analysis of the human soul has its own uniqueness despite its roots in the philosophic tradition. According to Sherif's summary, he divides the soul into three parts or faculties: the vegetative (*al-nabaṭīyah*), the animal (*al-ḥayawānīyah*), and the human (*al-insānīyah*). From an ethical point of view, the latter two faculties are crucial. The animal soul is further divided into the motive (*muḥarrikah*) and the perceptive (*mudrikah*).[31] It is the motive faculty that gives us impulse and is appetitive; desires and anger are based in the appetitive part. The perceptive part has an external and an internal sense. The external sense is comprised of the usual five senses, whereas the internal sense has representative (*khayālīyah*), retentive (*ḥāfiẓah*), estimative (*wahmīyah*), recollective (*dhākirah*), and sensitive imagination (*mutakhayyilah*). Lastly, the human part has two parts: theoretical reasoning (*'ālimah*) and practical reasoning (*'āmilah*).[32]

The disposition toward virtue is habituated in humanity by practical reasoning through governing all parts of the animal soul. If passively accepted, bodily desires produce a disposition toward vice. The disposition for the virtue of temperance develops when the faculty of desire (*shahwānīyah*) is governed by practical reason. Desires need to be satisfied, and the extremes of excessive indulgence or total insensibility to them need to be avoided. The practical reason strikes the proper mean in this regard, and as long as one submits to the limits imposed by reason one is being temperate or moderate. But Sherif points out that temperance is not limited to desires for al-Ghazali, who also has an extended conception of this virtue:

> Influenced by these [i.e., Qur'anic, prophetic, and lexicographic] usages of the term *'iffah*, Ghazali's concept of temperance is enlarged, an abstinence and restraint not limited to the objects of the concupiscent faculty alone. In applying temperance to all faculties of the soul and all organs of the body, Ghazali extends its meaning beyond that accepted by the philosophic tradition.[33]

Sherif continues to inform us that al-Ghazali extends temperance as a virtue in the direction of restraint from things forbidden by religious law and, ultimately, restraint from all that does not aim at "ultimate happiness" or "religious salvation." This extended conception, though, seems to bear some resemblance to Plato's view of this virtue (noted above) as regulating all parts of the human soul and the social order portrayed in the *Republic*. Hence, contrary to what Sherif says, al-Ghazali does not go beyond the philosophic tradition in this matter, although the goal of practicing virtues is, according to Plato, to reach the form of the Good. This does not look like an explicitly religious goal.

Toward A Virtue Ethics of the Qur'an

The Qur'an describes itself as the book of guidance for the *mutaqqīn* (Q. 2:2), those who have the all-embracing virtue of *taqwā*. Translators normally translate this term as "fear of God." However, such a translation can be misleading because the root word *w-q-y* means "to guard or protect against something."[34] As Caliph Umar is reported to have remarked to Ubayy ibn K'ab, possessing *taqwā* is like walking on a thorny path and succeeding in avoiding all thorns.[35] The point of this simile is that *taqwā* is the quality or ability or disposition of being able to remain virtuous at all times and to guard oneself from all vices and evil even in the most difficult of circumstances. Thinkers

like Fazlur Rahman define it as the ability to distinguish right from wrong (conscience) and then actually being able to do what is right without feeling self-righteous.[36]

From these preliminaries, it can be seen that *taqwā* is not a specific disposition to perform this or that particular virtuous act, but rather a general disposition or a complex of dispositions that one might have to succeed, generally, in choosing and performing virtuous acts in various situations. One can also say that it is a general disposition that gives birth to other specific dispositions for virtuous actions. But if that is so, then *taqwā* is a certain form of character that enables a person to make virtuous choices. A *mutaqqī*, therefore, is a person who possesses a special character that generally inclines him/her toward correct choices and correct action.

It appears, therefore, that the Qur'an describes itself as a book of guidance for those who have the general disposition or character to protect themselves against all vices. This literally boils down to a character disposition for virtue. If this interpretation of *taqwā* is correct, then the Qur'an by its own description is a book of guidance for those who pursue a virtuous life. It follows, therefore, that its ethics would be appropriately interpreted as virtue ethics. This position is also corroborated by the fact that Muslim philosophers and ethicists who were active during the Middle Ages by and large took a similar stance toward Islamic ethics.

One may differ with the above characterization of the matter and say that the Qur'an also describes itself as guidance for humanity as a whole (Q. 2:185, 17:9), which of course includes people who do not possess *taqwā*. This guidance is for everyone and therefore should not be relegated only to those with *taqwā*. This is true; however, it needs to be understood that the Qur'an also says that the ability to distinguish right from wrong (the most fundamental ingredient of *taqwā*) has been granted to all of humanity: "By the soul (*nafs*) and the proportion and the order given to it, and its enlightenment as to its right and its wrong" (Q. 91:7-8). Now if all souls have been given this enlightenment, then all humans have the capacity to receive guidance from the Qur'an. Nobody is barred from this guidance automatically. However, one's consistent failure to exercise this capacity to distinguish right from wrong blocks the emergence of the disposition required for virtuous actions (another ingredient of *taqwā*) and can *result* in what the Qur'an calls the hardening or sealing of hearts (Q. 2:7). In such a situation, one ends up failing to receive and benefit from this guidance. Perhaps it is in a similar vein that the Qur'an proclaims: "God does not guide the unbelievers" (Q. 5:67).

It is with this background in mind that a virtue ethics of the Qur'an in outline is being proposed here. However, instead of taking Platonic-Aristotelian ethics as a guidepost, it is best simply to allow the Qur'an to speak for itself. The basic contention here is that the Qur'an contains at least five fundamentals of virtue ethics[37]: (1) sound moral character as the only basis for judging the moral worth of a human being, (2) freedom of choice, (3) conscience, (4) intention plus principle as the criterion of the moral worth of an action, and (5) rejection of self-righteousness.

Why these five elements have been selected as fundamentals of the Qur'anic virtue ethics needs to be explained. A virtue ethics is basically a character-based ethics. It understands the virtuous nature of an action in terms of the characteristics of the person performing the action, rather than the characteristics of the action itself.[38] The Qur'anic principle of sound moral character as the only basis for a person's moral worth is, therefore, a fundamental prerequisite for constructing a virtue ethics. It points in the right direction for judging a person's worth and actions from the perspective of a virtue ethics. The other four fundamentals noted here are similarly characteristics of the moral agent, rather than that of an action. Even the fourth one is not purely about the principle behind an action, for it links the principle with the intention of the person performing the action.

The question as to why are these five fundamental elements necessary and sufficient for constructing a virtue ethics of the Qur'an can be answered by noting that they are necessary because they are related to the moral agent's character and that they are sufficient because their generality allows them to answer all of the basic questions about morality. If one has a conscience and can exercise free choice in moral matters with the appropriate degree of humility (rejection of self-righteousness) combined with proper intention and principle, then one can be held responsible for his/her character. And this is what any view of ethics is primarily supposed to achieve. Answers to any other questions of ethics, as well as characterizations of other ethical concepts, can be explained on the basis of these basics.

That is why it is in the framework of these five fundamentals that one can take the Qur'an as proposing all of its ethical and religious virtues. The idea behind these five fundamentals seems to be that one achieves *falāḥ*,[39] the Qur'anic term for comprehensive happiness and success, only on the basis of one's character. Therefore, one's character determines one's ultimate moral worth. But to shape this character or develop *taqwā*, a person needs the ability to distinguish right from wrong (conscience) as well as the freedom of choice

to select the course of action that leads to *falāḥ*. A human criterion for deciding an action's moral worth is also required to distinguish virtue from vice so that one can exercise one's conscience effectively in specific situations. Of course, when making these choices a person needs to steadfastly guard against self-righteousness in order to not destroy the moral value of his/her actions. Provided we have these fundamentals, we can pursue specific ethical and religious virtues successfully and achieve *falāḥ*, comprehensive happiness and success in this world and in the hereafter.

I first point out the Qur'anic bases for these five fundamentals and then knit them together to form a basis for a virtue ethics. As for a sound moral character (*taqwā*) being the only basis for judging one's moral worth, we read:

> O humanity! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise (each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things). (Q. 49:13)

The term translated as "the most righteous of you" is a derivative of the same root as *taqwā*.[40] Therefore, *taqwā* is the sole basis of judgment for determining a person's worth. This *taqwā*-based character is the foundation of each person's moral worth or the moral worth of his/her individual actions. Human beings have been entrusted with freedom of choice to make them responsible for the inculcation of such character. The Qur'an says: "We did indeed offer the Trust to the Heavens and the Earth and the Mountains; but they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof: but man undertook it; – He was indeed unjust and foolish" (Q. 33:72).

Commentators of the Qur'an take this "trust" to be that of free will or freedom of choice.[41] The idea here is that all other creations in the universe lack this ability. They are subject to the laws of Nature, as created by God, and thus there is nothing more to them. Only humanity undertook this tremendous burden of freedom and the huge risks involved therein. Still, it is this freedom of choice that elevates humanity over everything else in creation. When this free will is exercised responsibly, meaning in combination with one's *taqwā*-based character or propensity to guard against all vices or evils, one chooses the virtuous course for the given situation. It must be added that such a *taqwā*-based free choice propels a person toward doing what is virtuous in a given situation rather than doing what is vicious.

It is obvious that the conscience, a central feature of *taqwā*, helps in this regard. According to the Qur'an, this ability to distinguish right from wrong

is inherent in human nature: "By the soul (*nafs*), and the proportion and order given to it, and its enlightenment as to its wrong and its right" (Q. 91:7-8). So a proportion and an order has been given to the human soul, as well as the ability to know right from wrong. This proportion and order are the soul's internal harmony in its healthy state, whereas the ability to know right from wrong is the conscience itself. This ability helps the soul or the self to know which alternative is the right one and then to choose it freely because of its propensity for virtue (*taqwā*).

While choosing the right alternative, one needs to evaluate the principle on which such an alternative is based. That judgment involves the use of reason, of course, and so the conscience is assisted by reason or intelligence. Once the conscience judges the principle behind the alternative to be correct or virtue-based, a person can intend to either act upon it or to avoid/oppose it against the dictates of his/her conscience. Thus the correct principle identified by the conscience becomes combined with an intention that will eventually result in some action. The criterion of a good/virtuous action is that the action must be based on a correct principle combined with the correct intention.

> Allah will not call you to account for thoughtlessness in your oaths, but for the intention in your hearts; and He is Oft-forgiving, Most Forbearing. (Q. 2:225)

> Call them by (the names of) their fathers: that is more just in the sight of Allah. But if you know not their father's (names, call them) your brothers in faith, or your *mawla*s. But there is no blame on you if you make a mistake therein: (what counts is) the intention of your hearts: and Allah is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful. (Q. 33:5)

Only an intentionally performed action can be evaluated as virtuous or otherwise. An intention to act upon the principled alternative is necessary for the virtuosity of the resulting action. However, one can fall prey to self-righteousness and moral arrogance even when one's conscience has led him/her to identify the principled alternative and one has formed the intention to act upon it. This can happen if one comes to believe that one possesses the final truth regarding the concerned alternative's correctness. Obviously such an attitude ignores the possibility of error in the human conscience.

Ignoring this possibility arrogates the human conscience to the position of God, the Knower of the Unseen, and the ensuing arrogance blunts it and destroys one's propensity for virtue. Therefore, the Qur'an considers arrogance

to be a cardinal sin. In fact, Satan (or Iblis) is arrogance personified as far as the Qur'an is concerned. Hence, the action needs to be chosen by one's conscience with the understanding that its total moral worth is known only to God, the Knower of the Unseen.

A sense of fallibility must always accompany such judgments. This comes out clearly in the Qur'an's description of the conditions of *taqwā* in Q. 2:2-4. One of these conditions is belief in the Unseen. This Unseen is obviously God. But God, being the ultimate embodiment of all values, always transcends human understanding. In other words, the ultimate nature of values cannot be fully comprehended by human beings and thus they can never judge the ultimate worth of their own actions. That is why the conscience of a *mutaqqī* must always take itself to be fallible.

The foregoing remarks give us a basic conceptual structure in which to understand the Qur'anic virtue ethics. The primary thing is to inculcate virtuous character (*taqwā*), defined as the general disposition or propensity to act virtuously in the light of free and conscientious judgment between multiple alternatives in a given situation. This conscientious judgment provides a human being with the occasion to form an intention to act or not to act accordingly. As a general propensity, *taqwā* propels one to act accordingly but without self-righteouness sothat the resulting action will be virtuous in that particular situation.

Given this scenario, we need not define virtue as the mean between extremes only. Human conscience can choose the correct alternative in a given situation on several different bases, including the criterion of the mean between the extremes. Other criteria may consist in principles and values rooted in and motivated by the concept of *falāḥ* (comprehensive well-being and success), which is central to the relevant social or religious practice of the relevant community/tradition. Human conscience works in the context of a tradition/ society, not in a vacuum.

At this juncture, one might ask what the Qur'an considers to be the salient virtues. This is obviously a large question and far beyond the scope of a small paper like this one. However, one must point out that it explicitly mentions the virtues of wisdom, courage, moderation (or temperance), as well as justice. The Arabic word *ḥikmah* (wisdom) is mentioned twenty times, even if we do not count other variants of its root word *ḥ-k-m*. The Qur'an has this to say about its significance, as per Pickthall's translation: "He gives wisdom unto whom He will, and he unto whom wisdom is given, he truly has received abundant good. But none remember except men [and women] of understanding" (Q. 2:269).

Courage is exhorted upon the Prophet in Q. 46:35, for example, and is mentioned in several other places. Justice as a virtue is a constant theme, as the roots *q-s-ṭ* and *'-d-l*, for *qisṭ* and *'adl*, respectively, occur therein over fifty times in various forms. The Qur'an describes justice as being nearer to *taqwā* (the propensity for virtue):

> O you who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and fear Allah. For Allah is well-acquainted with all that you do. (Q. 5:8)

 The word *piety* is used for *taqwā* in this translation by Abdullah Yousaf Ali.

Before I deal with moderation/temperance in the Qur'an, however, it needs to be added that the Qur'an emphasizes a number of other religious and social virtues. The following verse is a good example:

> It is not righteousness that you turn your faces Towards east or West; but it is righteousness to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and practice regular charity; to fulfill the contracts which you have made; and to be firm and patient, in pain (or suffering) and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the Allah-fearing. (Q. 2:177)

This verse underscores the virtues of faith, benevolence, prayer, justice, and patience. The overall point here is that a system of virtues exists in the Qur'an and needs to be systemized in the light of the Qur'anic worldview.

The Qur'an on Moderation

The trilateral root of *wasaṭīyah*, the Arabic equivalent of temperance or moderation, is *w-s-ṭ*. It occurs five times in the Qur'an. The most important thing for our concerns here is that the Qur'an uses it both for the *ummah* (social order) and for an individual, thereby revealing that temperance is both a communal/social and an individual virtue. From this point of view, the Qur'anic position is closer to that of Plato and the Platonists than that of Aristotle and the Aristotelians. The Qur'an proclaims:

> Thus, have We made of you an *ummah* justly balanced, that you might be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves; and We appointed the *qiblah* to which you were used, only to test those who

followed the Messenger from those who would turn on their heels (from the faith). Indeed it was (a change) momentous, except to those guided by Allah. And never would Allah make your faith of no effect. For Allah is to all people most surely full of kindness, Most Merciful. (Q. 2:143)

Abdullah Yousaf Ali translated *ummatan wasaṭan* as "*Ummat justly balanced*." It basically means a middle or moderate community, which is the idea behind the phrase "justly balanced *Ummat*." The Qur'an, therefore, characterizes the Muslim community as the middle or moderate or temperate community. The same excellence is also attributed to individuals in the following verse, as per Arberry's translation: "Said the most moderate of them, 'Did I not say to you, "Why do you not give glory?"'" (Q. 68:28). Here, the Qur'an is talking about people who owned a garden but were stingy and arrogant. When God's punishment was visited upon them, the most moderate[42] one reminded them of their failure to glorify God. This, in this particular the virtue of moderation or temperance, refers to an individual.

From these two verses, the Qur'an clearly views moderation as an excellence that can be present both in individuals and communities or the social order. The more fundamental thing, however, is to uncover the nature of this virtue when it is possessed by communities. Why does it describe the Muslim community as the middle or moderate or "justly balanced" community? In what sense can a community possesses the virtue or excellence of moderation or temperance? Commenting on Q. 2:143, Fazlur Rahman says:

> Most probably what the Qur'an has immediately in mind is the middle position or balancing effect of the Muslim community as between the immobility or rigidity of Jewish particularism on the one hand and the excessively "accommodating" nature of Christianity on the other. But, of course, this immediate objective of the Qur'an can and must be extended by the principle of *qiyās* to other extremes, for example, that between Communism and Capitalism. The term "witness" here, as the Qur'an commentators remind us, has reference to the balance of the two sides of a scale. The idea, then, is that Muslims are the scale or the judge whereby extremes are to be determined and they are also the modifiers whereby those extremes are to be smoothed out. The former is an intellectual or diagnostic function, while the latter is an operational one.[43]

So the community is expected to perform the dual function of discovering the extremes on the one hand and smoothing them out on the other. Both the functions of the "middle" community can be/need to be performed in history in relation both to the internal life of the community and also its external re-

lations. That is to say, in the external dimension of its role in history a community needs to act moderately in relation to other communities or states. In the internal dimension the community needs to exercise the virtue of moderation in all aspects of its ethical, socio-political as well as religious and spiritual life. In Platonic terms the virtue of moderation regulates all other virtues as well as all pursuits of the community in history. Rahman sums up the Qur'anic view of the role of society in the following words:

> To resume our account of the general social philosophy of the Qur'an, human history basically consists of a constant process of the making and unmaking of societies and civilizations according to certain norms which are essentially moral; their source is transcendental but their application is entirely within collective human existence. These norms are called "God's Sunna" (practice or law for mankind which is unalterable):

> [Look at] the example of those [Messengers] we sent before you [O Muḥammad!], and you will find no change in Our law. (17.al-Isrā':77) This has been God's practice with regard to bygone peoples, and God's Command [law] is irrevocably determined. (33.al-Aḥzāb:38)

> This has been God's practice with the peoples of yore, and you shall certainly not find any change in God's practice. (33.al-Aḥzāb:62)

> Are these people [Muḥammad's opponents], then, awaiting only the fate of earlier communities? For they shall surely find no deviation, no change whatever in God's law [or practice]. (35.Fāṭir:43; see also 8.al-Anfāl:38; 15.al-Ḥijr:13; 18.al-Kahf:55; 40.Ghāfir:85; 48.al-Fatḥ:23)

> This is the Qur'an's concept of "judgment in history," which descends upon peoples and nations rather than individuals (who will primarily be judged on the Last Day).[44]

Thus communities, societies, and civilizations are subject to moral norms, the persistent violation of which can lead to their destruction and replacement in history. It appears, therefore, that a "middle" community is the one that follows the transcendental ethical norms while staying persistently within the bounds of temperance. Its laws and values do not transgress the limits of moderation either internally or in its external relations with other communities. Such a community is a "witness" to other communities in the sense of being the standard bearer of temperance. In other words, it provides them with the standard by which they can measure their own conduct in terms of temperance and thereafter smooth out the existing extremes.

On the internal front, following the virtue of moderation would mean, among other things, that the Muslim community is expected to measure all of its laws against the best standards of temperance, thereby ensuring that they handle the relevant situation in a balanced manner. But no law can guarantee such a balanced handling once and for all. With the passage of time, the human understanding of relevant situations and/or the structure of those relevant situations can undergo change. The related laws, therefore, need to be reviewed in the light of those intellectual and social changes. In other words, a community has to appropriately review its own laws in order to ensure that they are balanced and moderate in the light of the current intellectual and social conditions. This seems to be the only way in which the virtue of being a "middle" or temperate community can be practiced by a society in terms of its laws.

However, the contemporary Muslim community is far from being a temperate one. The excessive conservatism of the traditionalist approaches to Islamic law is a far cry from being moderate. The other extreme, that of abandoning the Islamic roots of the law, also violates the communal virtue of temperance. All societies in history have to strike a balance between tradition and change, for none of them can afford to live in the past or abandon it altogether. As the times and climes change, a society's laws have to be reviewed in a balanced and temperate fashion to make sure that they reflect the current wisdom of humanity and meet the challenges of changed social circumstances.

The idea that the earliest generations of Muslim jurists have legislated on the basis of the Qur'an and the Sunnah for all times to come is simply inconsistent with the Qur'anic and prophetic view of a "middle" or temperate community. Sucn an assertion denotes excess on the side of conservatism and locks the Muslims' capability to perform *ijtihād* (creative and critical thinking) in the prison of the past. Although a great deal can be learned from past legislation, a number of contemporary reform-minded Muslim thinkers have argued[45] that it has to be appropriately adjusted and revised to make it relevant to new times and climes. Otherwise, the community violates the Qur'anic demand that it be a moderate or "middle" community.

What is true of the laws is also true of education. Muslim communities today are caught between the two extremes of traditional *madrasah* education on the one hand and modern education on the other. They are extremes because, in most cases, these two streams of education fail to understand and, where rationally justified, accommodate each other. Education, like law, cannot be divorced from tradition or locked in tradition for good. In the first case it finds itself hanging in an intellectual and moral void; in the latter it becomes stultified and irrelevant. *Madrasah* education has made itself mostly irrelevant

to contemporary times, and its excessive conservatism prevents it from benefitting from contemporary knowledge even in the areas of the social sciences and humanities. It has locked itself away from modern hermeneutical, linguistic, and philosophical methods and ideas to the detriment of the rich intellectual tradition of Islamic civilization. Obviously, such an intemperate approach violates the idea of being a "middle" community.

On the other hand, modern universities in the Muslim world have by and large failed to develop a viable program of general education based on the historical intellectual heritage of Islam as well as of humanity at large.[46] Without such a comprehensive program, they cannot hope to produce appropriately educated graduates in either the natural sciences or the social sciences and humanities. Given the absence of balance and temperance in their curricula, the education provided by the community's traditional and modern institutions need to be overhauled to meet the dictates of the virtue of temperance.[47]

We now turn to the political situation. By and large, contemporary Muslim nations find themselves in a political mess. Monarchies, dictatorships, rigged and manipulated "democracies," and militant radical movements are the order of the day. However, the Qur'an characterizes Muslims as a community that conducts its affairs through *shūrā* (mutual consultation; *amruhum shūrā baynahum* [Q. 42:38]). It should go without saying that this general principle does not discriminate between different sections of society, for all of them have the right to be consulted. The best interpretation of this principle seems to be a genuinely democratic dispensation.[48] No section or group is given an elitist role in this general principle of governance.

There is, therefore, an obvious clash between the Muslim world's contemporary political state of affairs and the Qur'anic principle of governance. Governance by *shūrā*, it seems, is the middle course between dictatorships and tyrannies of various hues on the one hand and anarchy on the other. Dictatorships and tyrannies are examples of excessive control and touch the opposite extreme in various ways; anarchy is a lack or deficiency insofar as it recognizes no controlling authority. The Islamic tradition endorses neither of these extremes. This point can be fully appreciated only if one realizes that the Islamic tradition has generally insisted upon avoiding tyranny, dictatorship, and anarchy. As Abdul'aleem Islahi puts it:

> Al-Mawardi (991-1058), Abu Ya'la al-Farra' (990-1065), al-Ghazali (1031-1111), Ibn Jama'ah (1241-1333) and Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) have all emphasized the need for the state and its religious character….To Ibn Taimiyah

authority is preferable to anarchy. Although he asks Muslims not to obey orders contrary to the commandments of Allah and forbids them to cooperate with an unjust ruler.[49]

Similarly, the Islamic tradition also rejects tyranny and dictatorship insofar as it predominantly recommends electing the ruler in order to promote justice in society. As detailed by Abdi Shuriye, a majority of Muslim political thinkers (e.g., Ibn Khaldun, al-Mawardi, Ibn Taymiyyah, and al-Ghazali) argued for election when it came to choosing the caliph during the Middle Ages: "[The] majority of these thinkers have agreed that election, or the process of choosing the right leader, becomes a necessity (*Darurah*), as people have varied intellectual capacity."[50]

It appears, therefore, that governing by a process of society-wide *shūrā* in a fair and just fashion is a course that avoids these above-mentioned extremes. In such a situation, the virtue of moderation at the communal level would seem to lie in that form of governance which is fundamentally democratic and thus capable of meeting contemporary societal and international requirements.

Hence, most contemporary dispensations in the Muslim world are violating the virtue of moderation and destroying the community's median character insofar as they violate the spirit of governance by *shūrā*. Any and all forms of oppression and exploitation carried out by the political establishments, as well as all forms of chaos and disruption perpetrated by radical militancy that one finds throughout Muslim lands today, are therefore a vicious violation of the Qur'anic principles and render Muslims open to God's judgment in history.

Conclusion

Beginning with a brief look at the revival of virtue ethics in contemporary times, this article traced the virtue of *wasaṭīyah* (moderation or temperance) through some ancient and medieval ethicists and finally suggested elements of a virtue ethics in the Qur'an. A brief look was also cast at the Qur'anic characterization of moderation as both individual and social virtue. At the social level, Muslims seem to be in gross violation of this virtue today. In such central areas of life as law, education, and political dispensation, Muslim communities can be found at one extreme or the other. The genuine balance of the "middle" community needs to be restored through proper ethical education and the establishment of temperate institutions in all walks of life. Many vices are located at one extreme or the other, and many virtues are rooted in a moderation determined by practical wisdom. The Qur'an exhorts us to "strive as in a race in all virtues" (Q. 5:48).[51]

Endnotes

1. See, for example, A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3d ed. (University of Notre Dame, 2007), x, chaps. 4-5; Jennifer Welchman, ed., *The Practice of Virtue: Classic and Contemporary Readings in Virtue Ethics* (Indianapolis and Cambrdige: Hackett, 2006), ix-xvi. For an overview of the two approaches, see Larry Alexander and Michael Moore, "Deontological Ethics," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (spring 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), http://plato.stanford. edu/archives/spr2015/entries/ethics-deontological.

2. See http://www.thefreedictionary.com/deontology.

3. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, chaps. 10-13. Also see Robert B. Kruschwitz and Robert C. Roberts, *The Virtues: Contemporary Essays on Moral Character* (Wadsworth: 1987), 6-16.

4. See, for example, various chapters in *Virtue Ethics and Confucianism*, ed. Stephan Angle and Michael Slote (Routledge, 2013) and Justin Tiwald, "Confucianism and Virtue Ethics: Still a Fledgling in Chinese and Comparative Philosophy," *Comparative Philosophy* 1, no. 2 (2010): 55-63.

5. See, for example, James Dreier, ed., *Contemporary Debates in Moral Theory* (Wiley Blackwell, 2006); Kruschwitz and Roberts, *The Virtues*, 16-17; Timothy Chappell, *Values and Virtues: Aristotelianism and Contemporary Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006).

6. E. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33 (1958).

7. Ibid., 13-14

8. Ibid., 14.

9. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 10.

10. Ibid., 133.

11. MacIntyre writes: "Indeed whenever the virtues begin to lose their central place, Stoic patterns of thought and action at once reappear." Ibid., 170.

12. Ibid., 53.

13. Ibid., 30.

14. Ibid., 191.

15. For a good overview of the situation in the Muslim world, see W. W. Cooper and P. Yue, *Challenges of the Muslim World* (Emerald Group Publishing, 2008), particularly chaps. 5-7 and 9-10.

16. See, for example, "The Tragedy of the Arabs," *The Economist*, 5 July 2014 at http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21606284-civilisation-used-lead-world-ruinsand-only-locals-can-rebuild-it; Toby Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Aabia, and the Arab Spring That Wasn't* (Stanford University Press, 2013) and Hamid Dabashi, *The Arab Spring: The End of Post-colonialism* (Zed Books, 2012) for an analysis.

17. A. MacIntyre, "Sophrosune: How a Virtue Can Become Socially Disruptive," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 13 (1988): 1-3.

18. Mohamed Ahmed Sherif, *Ghazali's Theory of Virtue* (State University of New York Press, 1975), 24.

19. *The Republic of Plato*, trans. James Adam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902), 232.
20. Ibid., 235.
21. Ibid., 237.
22. Ibid., 236.
23. Aristotle in 23 volumes, vol. 19, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd., 1934).
24. Martha C. Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 13, 35-36.
25. Charles M. Young, "Aristotle on Temperance," *The Philosophical Review* 97, no. 4 (1988): 542.
26. Istvan P. Bejczy, "The Cardinal Virtues in Medieval Commentaries on the Nicomachean Ethics," in *Virtue Ethics in the Middle Ages: Commentaries on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, 1200-1500, ed. Istvan P. Bejczy (Brill, 2007), 199.
27. Hamid R. Alavi, "Ethical Views of Miskawayh and Aquinas," http://www.academicjournals.org/article/article1379169273_Alavi.pdf, accessed December 2014, based on Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahzib al-Akhlaq va Tahrir al-A'raq* (*Purification of Morality and Refinement of Souls*) (Qom: Bidar, 1992). Also cf. Y. Mohamed, "Greek Thought in Arab Ethics: Miskawayh's Theory of Justice," *Phronimon* 2 (2000): 242.
28. Cf. Ibrahim Abu Bakr, "Some Aspects of Ibn Miskawayh's Thought," *Islamiyyat* 10 (1989): 121, at http://journalarticle.ukm.my/7607/1/2507-5133-1-SM.pdf, accessed December 2014.
29. A. Sherif Mohamed, *Ghazali's Theory of Virtue* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), 179.
30. Ibid., 24.
31. Ibid., 25.
32. Ibid., 25-26.
33. Ibid., 64.
34. Rahman, Fazlur, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, at http://ebooks.rahnuma.org/religion/Fazlur_Rehman/Fazlur_Rehman-Major-Themes-of-the-Qur-an.pdf, 20.
35. *Tafsīr ibn Kathīr*, at http://www.qtafsir.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=451&Itemid=36, accessed on April 9, 2015.
36. Rahman, *Major Themes*, 28-29.
37. Cf. M. Ashraf Adeel, "Islamic Ethics in Dialogue with Socrates, Jesus, and Confucius," unpublished.
38. See Welchman, *The Practice of Virtue*, x.
39. *Taqwā* is explicity linked with *falāḥ* (success) in such verses as Q. 2:189, 3:130, and 3:200.
40. See *afsīr ibn Kathīr*, at http://www.qtafsir.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1750&Itemid=105.
41. See *Tafsīr ibn Kathīr*, which takes trust to mean obedience, at http://www.qtafsir.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1810&Itemid=http://Abul

Ala Maududi clarifies in his Tafsir that Trust is the freedom to choose between obedience and disobedience. See www.alim.org/library/Qur'an/AlQur'an-tafsir/MDD/33/72.

42. See *Tafsīr ibn Kathīr*, http://www.qtafsir.com/index.php?option=com_content& task=view&id=1281&Itemid=124#1.

43. Fazlur Rahman, "The Principle of Shura and the Role of the Umma in Islam," at http://i-epistemology.net/politics-a-government/330-the-principle-of-shura-and-the-role-of-the-umma-in-islam.html, accessed December 2014.

44. Rahman, *Major Themes*, 35.

45. There is a long tradition of reform-minded Muslim thinkers from Muhammad Abduh and Jamal al-Din Afghani through Muhammad Iqbal to contemporary times who have argued for such an adjustment. For a masterly philosophical statement of this reform-minded approach, see Muhammad Iqbal, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Oxford, 1934).

46. For example, contemporary American universities require general education courses for all degrees. This general education may vary from one institution to another, but its overall purpose is to expose students to humanity's general intellectual heritage, including its cultural and religious diversity. This kind of structured general education is generally missing in many modern universities of the Muslim world.

47. For an overview of some educational reform efforts in the Muslim world, see Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982), particularly chap. 2.

48. Rahman, "The Principle of Shura and the Role of the Umma in Islam."

49. See Abdul'aleem Islahi, "Economic Thought of Ibn Taymiyyah," Islamic Book Foundation, http://www.al-adala.de/attachments/article/2699/Islahi%20-%20-Ibn%20Taymiyyah%20-%20Need%20for%20a%20State.pdf [accessed on April 11, 2015].

50. Abdi O. Shuriye, "The Culture of Election and Democracy in the Taxonomy of Islamic Political Literature in Relation to the Democratic Revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa," *Asian Social Science* 8, no. 1 (2012): 195.

51. All translations are from Abdullah Yousaf Ali, *The Meaning of the Qur'an* (Beltsville, MD: amana publications, 1999) unless otherwise noted.

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