

# A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF KANTIAN AND ISLAMIC VIEW OF HUMAN FREEDOM

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Islam is a religion which speaks to man as a being having full liberty and adequate intelligence to select his own way of life. Islam has presupposed freedom and intelligence for the human species; and by giving this freedom and intelligence Islam makes man the crown of creation, and a viceroy of God in this world. The purpose of man is to act as a vicegerent of God. That is why Allah is going to hold man accountable in the life hereafter. Being a vicegerent man has a responsibility to implement the laws of Allah in this world with complete authority given to him. This given authority is the actual freedom which makes man a superior being than the rest of the creation. Man is not only a creation but also a trustee of God. His immortality makes him alert and conscious and also responsible for his doings. Actually man once created will not be demolished, because being a crown-creation, he has to give account of the fulfilment of his responsibility for which he enjoys complete freedom.

Further, life of man is composed of many factors. Some of these are metaphysical, others moral, and some of them are biological. All these factors combine to give one unit Islam treats man as a unified being. All these aspects are simultaneous in human life. Freedom seems to give a harmonious and rhythmic synthesis to human life. As Islam is revealed to us through the prophet we can understand its concepts through thinking upon the prophetic teachings.

In the Islamic view human reason with all its capabilities is unable to reach where the prophetic reason soars. The prophetic reason leads to perfect and concrete principles, which are complete and practicle. There can be no system except the prophetic revelation, which can present such a harmonious and rhythmic sequence of human perfection.

In what follows we will show that Kantian analysis of freedom and Islamic analysis of freedom are not contradictory to each other. Prophet of Islam has clearly stressed the liberty or freedom of man and the Kantian analysis in 18<sup>th</sup> century has presented the same teaching. Particularly in the following points:

1. Both of the systems regard action as translation of the motive behind it.
2. Both the systems are desirous to preserve the dignity of man.
3. Both the systems are opposed to the predetermination of human acts.
4. Both the systems reject the utilitarian and egoistic view of morality.
5. Both the systems deny the idea of the original sin of man.
1. It is a fundamental principle of law in all ages and climes that motives and intentions are the criterion by which action of men ought to be judged. In other words, actions are held to be good or bad, just or unjust, criminal or innocent if the motives are good or bad, Just or unjust. If a man shoots a tiger but hits another man lying concealed in ambush, his action cannot be held to be criminate. Similarly if a man gives away something in charity with certainly be rewarded by Allah, but if he does it to become prominent in the public eye, he may attain that object but with no benefit in the next world which is the goal of our life. A tradition of the Holy Prophet goes:

“Actions are judged by the motives (behind them)”.

Since motives are closely connected with our will to do certain things, one cannot ignore the fact that this prophetic tradition points out a relationship between our will and the quality of the action resulting from it. A man having no will or interaction what-so-ever for anything is not expected to do anything, small or great. All actions are done with the help of will. Will is the chief element which leads men to act. If will is strong and firmly rooted, action will not be weak and ineffective. If the will is weak, it will have weak effect on the outside world. If the action/character is honest, the will behind it would be honest; If dishonest, it will be dishonest. The quality of an action is judged by the intercity and the quality of the will-force behind it. A tradition of the Prophet goes as follows:-

Umar-al-Khattab reported that the Messenger of Allah said. Actions are judged by motives. There is surely for man what he intends. So who so ever makes *hijrah* towards Allah and His Apostle, his *hijrah* is for Allah and His Apostle; and whose ever hijrat is towards the world which he seeks or

towards a women whom he intends to marry, his *hijrah* is that for which he makes *hijrah* (emigration)”.

Analysis of this tradition shows that act which are done for the sake of Allah without any regard to personal gain or loss are truly moral in their nature. They are generally praise-worthy. They are suggestive of deontological approach to morals. Same goes for Kantian insistence on categorical imperative where in he recommends that moral life is an end in itself. We should do good/duty irrespective of its consequences.

After explaining the Islamic view of motive and intention, now we will discuss the Kantian notion of intention and will. In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant discusses first, what he calls the morality of common sense. He points out that nothing can be called absolutely good, except a good will.<sup>14</sup> Unless the motive behind our action is pure, our behaviour cannot be called meritorious and deserving of the reward of happiness. Furthermore, the good will is the only thing whose goodness is not the goodness of a means to some further end, but it is an end in itself.

To be truly praiseworthy, Kant says, we must act not from inclination but from duty, that is, one can say at once that a dutiful action derives its worth, not from its consequences, but from some general law or principle. It is done because it is right in itself and not because it leads to something beyond itself. He further says that the rule of right behaviour is to act in a manner in which we should wish that all other people may also do the same. In brief, true moral behaviour is always founded on a universally applicable maxim: it allows no exception.

The maxim, Kant feels, is not empirical. As a matter of experience, we find that we are always falling short of our duty. The presence of the ideal, and the sense of ought and duty are therefore, not empirical. We have a sense of right and wrong, which we apply to events, as it were, from above, when they occur.

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<sup>14</sup>. Stump, Samuel Enoch, *Socrates to Sartre, A History of Philosophy*, McGraw Hill Inc Edition 1993, P.316.

The seat of this sense must not be in the empirical content of will, but reason inaction, or, as we might call it a practical reason. However, since right and rational behaviour is hindered by immediate desires and interests in such a manner that human conduct is never wholly reasonable and praiseworthy, the good will is never a realized fact but appears in experience as an unrealized ideal, accompanied by the sense of necessity or obligation of realizing it, which commands the will as imperatively as the ideas of pure reason coerce our thinking. It is to be incumbent on everyone to do what is right, simply because it is right, as Kant says in his formulation.

“Act according to the maxim which can at the same time makes itself a universal law”.<sup>15</sup>

2. Man, in Islam has to act as the vicegerent of Allah in this world. The dignified position of man in Islam is as follows.

“We have honoured the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on the land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure, and conferred on them special favours, above a great part of Our Creation”<sup>16</sup>.

Also the Qur’an says:

“He it is who hath placed you as viceroys of the earth and hath exalted some of you in rank above others, that he may try you by (the test of) that which he hath given you”<sup>17</sup>.

In these verses the distinctions conferred by God on man are recounted in order to enforce the corresponding duties and responsibilities of man. He is raised to a position of honour above the brute creation: he has been granted talents by which he can transport himself from place to place.

It is a great trust of Allah on man to have been appointed as viceroy. It presupposes that man is a free being. Because an object which is absolutely ignorant of his will power and is unable to choose is either dead matter of just a plant. Nature is absolutely determined by the causal laws. It does not

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<sup>15</sup>. Ibid. P. 317.

<sup>16</sup>. Al-Qur’an, 17:70.

<sup>17</sup>. Ibid, 18:

have any choice to act differently than what it does. It is determined and absolutely dependent; while, on the other hand, man, being a trustee of God, has absolute freedom of choice, action, and decision. He has been given an intuitive ability to select straight forward and clear cut way from the given choices of good and bad. The right and wrong is clearly show by the prophet and he also informed the people that if they choose the right path they will get reward. If they opt for the wrong path they will punishment. They have a free will and choice. For instance, the Qur'an maintains:

“If ye did well, ye did well for yourselves; if ye did evil, (ye did it) against yourselves”<sup>18</sup>.

This verse clearly indicates that man defines his own being by virtue of his own action. Further, reward and punishment is meted out to him because of his own actions. The purpose of creation of man is submission to the will of God and to acquire self-perfection. Actions are the means for the realization of this goal. The best man is he who is best action. There is nothing for men but what he strives for”<sup>19</sup>. The divine service can only be done by action and not by sitting idle. It is the secret of success and this world is world of action for reaping fruit in the next”<sup>20</sup>.

Kant also strives for the dignity of man. The dignity and sanctity of man is to be respected at all costs. All socio-political institutions must see to it that the dignity of man is protected and preserved in the establishment of social order. Kant insists that: “Respect yourself & respect other impartially, & exploit no one”<sup>21</sup>.

Men according to this principle must respect each person and attribute dignity, because this is the only practical way to pursue their own ends in comparative safety and security.

In Kant's second formulation of the categorical imperative, we see it should respect all human beings impartially and avoid exploiting anyone. This formula applies to the agent's treatment of himself as well as of others.

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<sup>18</sup>. Ibid, 17:7 .

<sup>19</sup>. Ibid, 55:38.

<sup>20</sup>. Ibid, 51:56.

<sup>21</sup>. Wright, W. T. *A History of Modern Philosophy*.

Some thinkers hold that all duties are social, and even our duties to ourselves are duties to society of which we are members. While others hold that all duties are personal, and that if we respect our own personality, our duty to others will immediately follow. Kant takes the middle path between these one-sided views and holds that we shall have no duty to others unless we had a duty to ourselves. Moral behaviour is behaviour towards other men, each one of which is rational, and finds his good in the conscious realization of his nature as a rational being. Rational beings have a value for themselves, which cannot be measured in terms of the relative value they may have for other people, recognition in the others of the same absolute worth as each one of us finds in himself is the basis of moral behaviour and expresses itself in the following general rule, or “practical imperative”: “Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or that of another always as an end and never as a means only”.<sup>22</sup> This is the concrete content of ethical action. This is what we should do, and how we should act in dealing with our “fellowmen”. If our behaviour is to have a universal and absolute moral value & to be truly good.

The rule of action is not prescribed by our particular preferences, desires, and ends. It is derived, like the categories, from the nature of reason, and is, therefore, a priori. To put this idea in term of volition, the truly moral rational will prescribes its own law and its own imperative. With no other end in the view than to express its own nature. Its obligation is self-imposed. Hence the moral will is self-determined and self-legislating or as Kant calls it autonomous. So when we act morally, we are not only citizens of the world, to which incidentally, considerations of prudence and expediency might better adopt us, but we are also citizens of an ideal order, or a “Kingdom of ends”, of which we are both the subjects and monarchs, obedient in our actions to the laws laid down by our own will.

There is no compromising of these ends, nor is there any equivalent for them. The ends that have only an intrinsic value and dignity cannot be traded for anything without depriving us of self-respect. Since the autonomous will is self-legislating and exercises its causality uninfluenced by anything except itself, it is free. Its acts occur independently of causation we find in the

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<sup>22</sup>. Kant, Immanuel *Foundations of Metaphysics of Morals*, Tr. by L. W. Beck, the Bobbs-Merill Inc, New York, 1959, P.47.

phenomenal world. Its laws of action, the categorical imperative and moral behaviour inspired by that law, originate in the transcendental self in the world of things-in-themselves.

3. In Islam the short span of life is a kind of sacred trust of God given to the individual, or groups of people, to prove that are honest in the use of the trust. If this trust confers on the individual the highest status amongst all created beings, he is also saddled with the gravest and the most challenging risks, which are associated with it. It is obvious, therefore, that this life is a test and trial for man to show his worth. He is free to choose and act, according to his will whatever he likes. Further, if God has desired. He would have made all people virtuous and pious, but than the purpose of creation would not be fulfilled. The evil doers could never be distinguished from virtuous persons. The test is meant to separate the chaff form the grain. It is indeed a touchstone to differentiate between the pure gold and base metal.

In the Islamic view angels, though holy and pure endowed with power from God, yet represent only one side of creation. We may imagine them without passion or emotion, of which the highest flower is love. If man was to be endowed with emotions, those emotions could lead him to the highest as well as drag him to the lowest. The power of will (when used rightly) can give him, to some extent, mastery over his fortunes and God-like nature, which has supreme mastery and will. The perfect vicegerent is he who has the power of initiative. God, the Almighty has given mind the needed guidance: the right and wrong ways of life are made clear to him. Besides, he is blessed with the ability to choose which-ever way of life he likes. In fact, the Qur'an is addressed to man who is supposed to have both freedom and intelligence; otherwise the purpose of revelation will be nullified.

Human will is heteronomous, as Kant calls it, or subject to motivation by an object other than the expression of its nature. Self expression can command the will and put it under an imperative obligation. It is not our duty to be happy, but it is our duty to be good, though it is not always within our power to be happy.

My acts, Kant says, may be as completely determined by antecedent causes as any other natural events. But it must remember that the natural order as a whole, and the nature of the entire succession of events appearing

in the relation of cause and effect, rest upon a world of things-in-themselves, which condition the sensible world to be the kind of world it is.

Suppose, however, we object that if we are created by God our freedom and moral responsibility are thereby destroyed, since God has made us what we are. To this Kant replies that the question of who made us has no bearing on freedom. Although God may be responsible for my existence, it is I who am responsible for how I behave, and it is the latter responsibility alone that has moral significance.

So Kant argues that if God is the cause of man's actions through original creation of man's substance, than only determinism exists and morality is impossible. Hence it can be said that morality depends upon freedom of will. Kant rejects the view that morality is based on religion. But he is far from rejection the view that there is a logical connation between the two things, though he thinks that religion is based on morality.

4. In the Islamic view a person is free to choose for himself, and is responsible for the consequence of his actions. No other person is responsible for his deeds. No one can get the reward or punishment on behalf of others. Man cannot transfer his responsibility to some also.

In the Islamic view we must act rightly without regard to consequences what ever these might be. For example, if we know any truth of any kind whatever, to that we must bear witness, protecting the lives or interests of our fellow-being firmly, not half-he-artily, without fear or even if we lose friends or associates in the process.

In the Islamic view justice is something higher than the formal justice of the Roman law. It is even more penetrative than subtler justice in the speculation of Greek Philosophers. It searches out the innermost motives, because we are to act as if we are in the presence of God, to whom all things, acts, and motives are known. Some people may be inclined to favour the rich, other the poor. Both these approaches are wrong, because, Islam recommends that, be just, without fear or favour as: "Witnesses for Allah even thought it be against yourselves or (your) parents or (your) kindred".<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>. Al-Qur'an (4:135)



Turning again to Kant, he preserves the dignity and sanctity of man in his second formulation of the categorical imperative. His ethical system is a revolt against utilitarianism and egoism, because both these systems are one-sided.

Egoism damages the altruistic nature of man; for the egoist every action is based rigidly on self-love or self-interest. They neglect the altruistic side of human nature. Such as a person who supports the view that we ought to seek our own pleasure rests his case on the fact that we do actually seek pleasure. To argue in this way is to confuse pleasure as our only motive with pleasure as a moral ideal or objective standard for judgment. If pleasure is our only motive, there is no point in arguing for it as an ethical standard, because we cannot help seeking it. If pleasure is not our only motive the fact that it is very common one does not prove that it ought to be the basis of our moral judgment.

In utilitarianism the ideal is the benefit of the majority i.e. utilitarianism is a philosophy of expediency. Yet we all recognize that there is a distinction between what is right and what is expedient. Even slavery and killing of an innocent person for instance, can be justified on utilitarian grounds. Obviously this approach has no commitment to the sanctity and dignity of man.

So in the Kantian analysis the dignity of man is exploited which is against the universal moral law. So both these systems are violating the human dignity, while Kant insists to preserve human dignity as an end in itself. He stresses the respect for the dignity of man at all const. In all his system the dignity of man is protected and preserved in the establishment of the social order.

The principle of humanity and of every rational creature as an end in itself is the supreme limiting condition on freedom of actions of each man. It is borrowed from experience, first, because of its universality, since it applies to all rational beings generally and experience does not suffice to determine any thing about them; and secondly, because in experience humanity is not thought of as the end of men, i.e. as an objective end which should constitute the supreme limiting condition of all subjective end, whatever they may be.

5. As against the Christian notion of the “Original Sin”. Islam holds that, the individual person is responsible for his own actions. It is quite unreasonable to hold that one can at one the sins of others as Christians believe, or that man is born as sinful. This theory of the original sin, the greatest black mark that could be attached to God and man who was created “in his own image”, is said to be based on the disobedience of Adam. It was thought that this act of transgression was the manifestation of the sin inherent in man’s nature which neither he nor anyone else could escape. Faith in the power of Christ, who did on the cross in order to redeem the whole of mankind of its natural depravity alone can save us. But if this original sin is an inherited corruption than it destroys the freedom of man and his responsibility which are basic to the very existence of morality and religion.

According to the Qur’an, man inherits no sinful nature, but simply a weak and forgetful nature. The conflict of Adam and Santa does not show that Adam disobeyed God because he was by nature sinful. He was created after the nature”<sup>24</sup> and of goodliest fabric”<sup>25</sup>. It is man’s weak nature, the lack of proper balance and harmony between his natural impulses and reason that something leads him to the path of unrighteousness. There is no need of any elaborate process of atonement for the sins committed; repentance with a resolve not to commit them again is sufficient. “They who after they have done a base deed or committed wrong against their own selves, remember God and implore forgiveness of their sins-and who will forgive sins but God only-and persist not in what they have willingly done amiss: as for those, pardon from their Lord shall be their recompense”<sup>26</sup>.

According to Christianity man is looked upon, not as a social unit, but as a single soul, responsible to God. Besides this, he has no social duties to perform. The moral precepts of Christianity-neighbourly love forgiveness, mercy are viewed not in social context, but as isolated actions of individuals to others as individuals and not as members of a reformed social order, which may set an ideal pattern for others to follow. There was, in short, no dynamism in Christian ethics at all. It was sordidly individualistic, other worldly, pessimist, fatalistic, negative, dogmatic, non progressive, static. It

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<sup>24</sup>. *Ibid* 30:30

<sup>25</sup>. *Ibid*, 95:4.

<sup>26</sup>. *Ibid*, 3:134.

cuts the roots of all family life, it destroyed the motive for social betterment, is preached a slavish subordination of man to political and economic status quo, it turned the attention of man from rightful participation in the affairs of the present life to a miraculous and supernatural appearance of a kingdom of God in some distant future-and all this due to a misinterpretation of the nature of man and his relation to god and to the hereafter. Naturally, the highest moral ideal in Christianity, was personal salvation and escape from this world in contrast to the Islamic ideal of flash (well-being), material and spiritual betterment.

Being a vicegerent of Lord, every man is responsible for his own actions. The Qur'an says: And no soul earns but as against itself, and no bearer of the burden shall bear the burden of another<sup>27</sup>.

On the other side, Kant consciously or unconsciously appreciates the same notion of Islam, in preserving the dignity of man in his second and third formulation of the categorical imperative. Man cannot be originally sinful because it is against his nature. In the second formulation, Kant denied that man is an instrument. . In the interpretation of this formulation we can see that the sin of Adam has been forgiven by God after he was adequately repentant for his aggression. And the rest of the generation free from his sin, because if the rest of the generation is supposed to be guilty of the wrong deed committed by Adam it means the rest of the generation is being used as means for its predecessor. Every man has his own purpose of creation independent of influence of his predecessors. Therefore he is responsible for his own conduct. It is unjust to punish a man who is not guilty. This is what Kant's second formulation leads to.

In his third formulation he underlines the point of man being the crown of creation. A man who is free and conscious and has an authority of his own, acts to legislate a law. Being the crown of creation man must think himself as a universal being who is to be followed by the rest of the creation. Therefore every action or principle which he is to legislate must be universally acceptable.

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<sup>27</sup>. *Ibid*, 6:165; 53:30.

Islam appreciated this sort of thesis, that one should like the same for others as he likes for himself. As for as morality and good conduct is concerned. Islam defines it very simply. Islam gives the idea of morality and treatment of other people in such a way that a person must have good conduct. Conduct as meant here is a bundle of virtues and vices. If a bundle of virtues as defined in Islam is found in a person he is called a man of good conduct and if on the person he is called a man of good conduct and if on the other hand, a bundle of vices is found in him, he is called a man of bad conduct. The Holy Qur'an and Hadith are replete with instances of practical good conduct of the Holy Prophet, which captured, the entire heart of the Arab world like a magnetic force and which won for him adherents. In short he was a model and an ideal of good conduct.

Islam is an organic unit in which nature of man and personal dignity is required to be preserved at any cost. It can be easily understood from the last address of Holy Prophet in which he spoke the unforgettable words on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Zil Hijja, to the assembled people.

In conclusion I would say that both the systems underscore the following points:-

#### Similarities between Kant and Islam.

1. Both the systems regard action as translation of the motive behind it.
2. Both the systems strive for the preservation of the dignity of man.
3. Both the systems are opposed to the predetermination of human acts.
4. Both the systems reject the utilitarian and egoistic view of morality and are inclined towards deontological approach.
5. Both the systems reject the idea of the Original sin of man and hold that man is born innocent and is a bundle of possibilities. He is endowed with basic intelligence and freedom and is called upon to define his own being. His actions in the long run will be hung to his own neck and he will be rewarded or punished by his own deeds.

#### POINTS OF DISSIMILARITIES

There are some differences between Kant's position and that of Islam. The Kantian analysis of human freedom leads to the following points.

Kant's first formulation emphasizes to act in such a way that an action can be universalized. This is an implicative treatment for a law that when a man or a legislator is giving a law, this law must be a universal law. But he does not talk about the law itself that what sort of law can be universalized. There is an assumption that there exists a law, and his argument takes the form of asking what character a universal moral law must have.

The Kantian analysis leads to the universality of law, which implies ensures consistent application of law are two different steps. Even a bad law such as kill everybody who is over 40 years old can be consistently applied even though the law itself is against all sense of morals. We need impartiality rather than consistency for the formation of law. And when once the law is formed we need consistent application of law. These two distinct elements are not properly recognized in the Kantian system. Islam on the other hand, not only gives us the law but also demands (from us) that justice must be done according to the law irrespective of the fact whether its rigid application is in line with your own interest or is against your own interest.