

Chapter 16

Contrast in Ethics, Morality, Justice, and Behavior: Some Reflections on Business and Islamic Ethics

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ABSTRACT

The ethical dilemma begins due to greed, jealousy, and discontentment, and these have solutions in life. This chapter aims to analyze and apply the understanding of dichotomy of contrast in ethics, morality, justice, and behavior. Since ethics matters a lot in discharging corporate social responsibility in business and trade, the chapter will also examine the application of these ethics, morality, and behaviour from an Islamic perspective. The authors derive that “one must strengthen contentment, remembrance of death, the firm belief in Allah’s mercy, generosity” while refraining from common contemporary business problems such as window dressing of financial results, fraud, deception, bribery to get contracts, and among others.

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INTRODUCTION

This is an era of departure from 20th century laden with secularism, capitalism and so called market dynamism as a self-centered approach. However, concern for others, care, love and service to the humanity has been stressed in different ways in all faiths and religions. But do people follow what is taught to them? Also, to what extent people practice what they themselves preach? Islam is a faith based religion that also has prescription for values based on ethics, morality, justice and peace. An anecdote from personal experience of a friend and our daily life is for illustration as follows.

During a Friday prayer in a mosque inside a University campus in a predominantly Muslim nation the Imam gave a sermon on Islamic ethics and values. In that context, he referred to the unethical behavior of those (mostly students) who drove their motor cycles on the pavement as a short-cut to reach to their destination, that included the mosque. He stressed upon the Islamic values of empathy and care for others and warned that such action could also lead to accidents and injuries to those walking on and using the pavement especially handicapped ones. I was quite impressed with this timely sermon and so as soon as the prayer was over, I rushed out of the mosque to check the result. Regretfully, there was no change and it never happened even after months of prayers and sermons. This brings me to this assertion that moral values can't be taught it is rather caught?

This is not applicable to the act of worshipers alone. This is quite rampant in *Fiqh Muamalat* (Islamic transactions) by business owners and their agents' (managers) managing on their behalf. Despite listening sermons for fair deal (based on social justice) in conducting our trade and businesses and related services including Islamic banking and financing services, they are involved in too much profiteering. This affects the spirit perhaps not the letter due to being a *Shariah* compliant transactions. And therefore criticisms are quite often raised by the experts in terms of failing in their pursuits of poverty eradication due to failings in Islamic social financing.

Why people did not follow what was preached to them during the prayer especially during Friday's sermon or elsewhere in other religious preaching and gatherings? The possible explanation comes from social psychological studies on group norms and conformity behavior. Social norms play an important role in how people behave in social situations such as following or not following the traffic rules and shared values. Social psychologist Solomon Asch (1951) conducted a series of experiments on group norms and conformity and revealed that people were willing to ignore reality to conform to the rest of the group. Group or social norms, even if they are wrong, immoral and unethical, become the standard that guides people behavior. Simply put if most of the people are driving their motor cycles on the pavement then it becomes the norm to follow. Norms define the culture of the social unit, be it family, community, business and trade or nation.

Deutsch and Gerrard (1955) found that there are reasons due to which this happens. They termed it as two factors- normative conformity and informational conformity. The first requires compliance to remain in the group failing which he/she feel rejected whereby the second one happens due to ignorance and needed help from fellow members to guide him/her to be part of the chosen group. Businesses and corporate sectors are not exception to this. These establishments see and follow the trends and rampant trade practices in a society and at the market place.

On another note, there is no dearth of examples from the history where human beings have been subjected to extreme forms of brutalities in religious and faith based societies such as Buddhists that preaches non-violence, either at the individual or at the mass levels, such as the recent Rohingya crisis in Myanmar, Uighurs in East Turkistan. According to the media reports regarding mass deportation,

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