

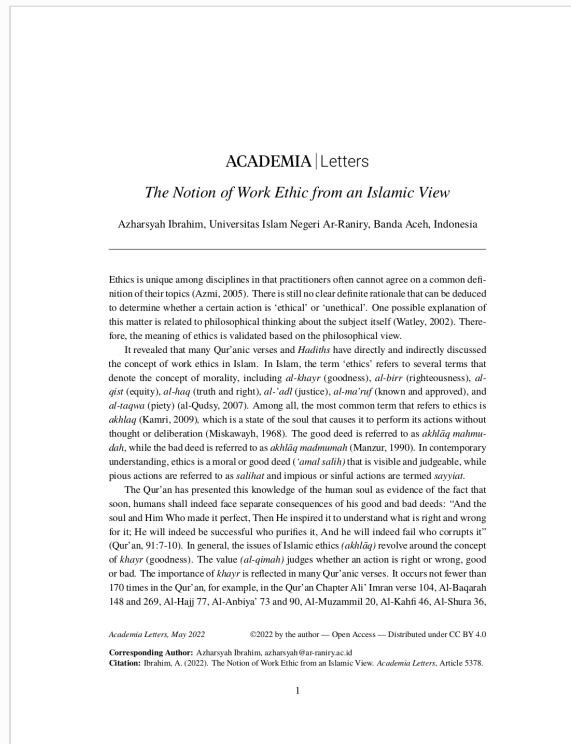


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The Notion of Work Ethic from an Islamic View

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The Notion of Work Ethic from an Islamic View

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Ethics is unique among disciplines in that practitioners often cannot agree on a common definition of their topics (Azmi, 2005). There is still no clear definite rationale that can be deduced to determine whether a certain action is 'ethical' or 'unethical'. One possible explanation of this matter is related to philosophical thinking about the subject itself (Watley, 2002). Therefore, the meaning of ethics is validated based on the philosophical view.

It revealed that many Qur'anic verses and *Hadiths* have directly and indirectly discussed the concept of work ethics in Islam. In Islam, the term 'ethics' refers to several terms that denote the concept of morality, including *al-khayr* (goodness), *al-birr* (righteousness), *al-qist* (equity), *al-haq* (truth and right), *al-'adl* (justice), *al-ma'ruf* (known and approved), and *al-taqwa* (piety) (al-Qudsy, 2007). Among all, the most common term that refers to ethics is *akhlāq* (Kamri, 2009), which is a state of the soul that causes it to perform its actions without thought or deliberation (Miskawayh, 1968). The good deed is referred to as *akhlāq mahmudah*, while the bad deed is referred to as *akhlāq madmumah* (Manzur, 1990). In contemporary understanding, ethics is a moral or good deed ('*amal salih*') that is visible and judgeable, while pious actions are referred to as *salihat* and impious or sinful actions are termed *sayyiat*.

The Qur'an has presented this knowledge of the human soul as evidence of the fact that soon, humans shall indeed face separate consequences of his good and bad deeds: "And the soul and Him Who made it perfect, Then He inspired it to understand what is right and wrong for it; He will indeed be successful who purifies it, And he will indeed fail who corrupts it" (Qur'an, 91:7-10). In general, the issues of Islamic ethics (*akhlāq*) revolve around the concept of *khayr* (goodness). The value (*al-qimah*) judges whether an action is right or wrong, good or bad. The importance of *khayr* is reflected in many Qur'anic verses. It occurs not fewer than 170 times in the Qur'an, for example, in the Qur'an Chapter Ali' Imran verse 104, Al-Baqarah 148 and 269, Al-Hajj 77, Al-Anbiya' 73 and 90, Al-Muzammil 20, Al-Kahfi 46, Al-Shura 36,

Al-Mukminun 55-61, Al-Zalzalah 7-8, Al-Mulk 2, Al-'Asr 1-3, and many others.

In addition, in Islam, people who attain felicity are those who invite to all that is good (*khayr*), enjoining what is right (*ma'rūf*) and forbidding what is wrong (*mūnkar*) (Qur'an, 33:72). Within that spirit, what constitutes ethical behavior in Islam is what is permissible for a person to act either according to his culture or personal values following the basic principles laid under the teaching of Islam.

According to al-Qudsy (2007), the concept of ethics in Islam is unique in terms of 1) Scopes. Ethics is not limited to workplaces or places of worship but everywhere; 2) Judgment. Judgment on ethics is not only in situations that can be measured or seen by people but also in any situation and condition; 3) Source. The source of ethics comes from the Sovereignty of God, while humans get the idea of how to develop and implement ethics in their living from their studies and experience after God gives His complete guidance and motivation; 4) Rewards. The rewards will be given for ethical behavior in this world and the hereafter; 5) Punishments. One can escape from being punished in this world, but not from Allah's punishment in the hereafter.

The work ethics concept in Islam has universal values that might be applied to all people regardless of culture, religion, nation, and local values. The conception of good and bad, for instance, has the universal value that most people tend to agree with, such as being honest is good and being dishonest is bad; cleanliness is good, dirtiness is bad; and so forth. Thus, in general, it is understandable that work ethics in Islam shares some similarities with the work ethics in other religions, especially when emphasized on hard work, commitment and dedication to work, avoidance (intolerance) of unethical methods of wealth accumulation, and competitiveness at the workplace (Yousef, 2000).

Although shares common characteristics with other religions, work in Islam has an inimitable system. In Islam, work is viewed as an integral part of the act of worship. Within this view, every Muslim will envision his work in a twofold manner; as a source of financial support and achieving good worldly life (*al-falah fi al-dunya*) and as a means of serving Allah SWT and preparing for the success of the afterlife (*al-falah fi al-akhirah*). More comprehensively, work in Islam is not only to achieve material and human physical pleasure but it is also a form of human engagement and cooperation (*al-ta'awun*), an act of worship (*al-'ibadah*), an act of kindness towards others (*al-ihsan*), execution of responsibilities and accountabilities (*al-amanah*), security of self-dignity (*hifz al-muru'ah*) and as a part of reliance toward God (*al-tawakkal*) (Possumah, Ismail, & Shahimi, 2013). For these reasons, Islam recognizes work in the highest regard, considering it as an articulation of one's faith, thus accentuating its vital role in life.

In the context of an organization's work culture, every individual must be aware that the

position he holds is determined by him. He must remember that once he accepts the responsibility, he has accepted a religious obligation. As a result, any employee must perform their job honestly, sincerely, truthfully, and gratefully. In fact, the individual must perform his job in a manner commensurate with his pay and refrain from engaging in any immoral behavior, such as failing to be grateful, causing squabbles among coworkers, or spreading lies among coworkers. This is consistent with the Prophet's (s.a.w.) statement that "the best people are those who benefit the most fellow human beings" (Narrated by al-Tabrani).

The importance of work in Islam is addressed succinctly in many verses of the Qur'an. Allah commands humans to work in order to live a better life. Human beings can positively impact other beings through their work. As a result, work and commitment enable people to achieve their intended goal, as stated in the Qur'an: "And that man can have nothing but what he strives for; that (the fruit of) his striving will soon come in sight; then will he be rewarded with a reward complete" (Qur'an, 53:39-41).

Work is given special importance in Islam to the extent that it is used to meet religious demands and is classified as fulfilling religious obligations, which is considered an act of worship ('*ibadah*) (Rahman & Upawi, 1993). It emphasizes religious values as the foundation for carrying out occupational responsibilities. Making a job as a form of worshipping Allah SWT will foster a strong devotion to the Creator and increase the love for life in the eternal hereafter, far outweighing the importance of material and worldly affairs (Ahmad & Owoyemi, 2012).

Therefore, the primary purpose of working in Islam is not to merely meet daily needs, but also to obtain the blessings of Allah. Islam rewards and acknowledges working which should be performed to praise Allah and to benefit others and society, as it is stated in the Qur'an: "Work (righteousness): soon will Allah observe your work, His messenger, the believers: soon will ye be brought back to the knower of what is hidden and what is open: then will He show you the truth of all that ye did" (Qur'an, 9:105). The Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. has asserted four work issues as a complete departure from the thinking at that time (Zainol, 2009): (1) work is the highest form of worshipping Allah, (2) work is not sanctioned if it is not performed to the best ability, (3) work has social dimension and meaning and can provide benefit to people, and (4) work—such as trade and active involvement in business—enables an individual to reach prosperity and a reasonable living standard. Therefore, from the aforementioned facts, it can be concluded that work ethic in Islam is performing the positive things that contribute positively to society and oneself with the intention to please Allah SWT.

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