

Book Review

Islamic Ethics: Fundamental Aspects of Human Conduct by Abdulaziz Sachedina

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Islamic Ethics: Fundamental Aspects of Human Conduct by Abdulaziz Sachedina, Oxford University Press, 2022, ISBN: 9780197581810, 224 pages

Key words: ethics, jurisprudence, philosophy, interpretive jurisprudence

Abdulaziz Sachedina's book *Islamic Ethics: Fundamental Aspects of Human Conduct* (Oxford University Press, 2022) comes at the end of the author's six decades of scholarship and promises an in-depth analysis of the interaction between Islamic Jurisprudence, Ethics, and Philosophy. This seminal work has undoubtedly changed the field of Islamic ethics by shifting it away from Western philosophy and towards jurisprudence. It is a must-read for anyone interested in Islamic Ethics, Jurisprudence, and Philosophy.

Sachedina argues that Islamic ethics has been viewed through the lens of Western philosophy rather than as an innate part of Islamic discourse and is highly critical of the view which separates ethics and Islamic jurisprudence. Instead, Sachedina argues that Islamic ethics is contained within Islamic jurisprudence, stating that Islamic ethics is the "deontological ethics of the Sharia". Sachedina is a highly original scholar drawing their ideas from "Orientalist" writers and classical Islamic scholars. This synthesis of traditional Islamic thought with Western analysis of Islam promises a unique insight into ethics and Islamic jurisprudence.

The book is divided between 5 chapters which build upon each other, sometimes appearing repetitive: chapter one "In Search of a Comprehensive Definition of Ethics" seeks to establish universal Islamic ethical principles; chapter two "The Genesis of Moral Reasoning in Religious Ethics" explores and advocates for the use of human reason in judicial rulings; chapter three

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“Scriptural Sources of Ethical Methodology” argues that the use of human reasoning in jurisprudence is underpinned by a universal morality; chapter four “Natural Law and Ethical Necessity” sets out the Islamic notion of natural law and that human nature (*fitra*) establishes a universal good which facilitates the relationship between Muslim and other communities; chapter 5 “The Ethics of Interpretive Jurisprudence” argues more forcefully for the role of human nature in interpreting the Quran and brings up the possible ethical implications of this in light of modern ethical debates around topics such as IVF and Stem Cell research. In addition, there is an introduction that provides a succinct account of Sachedina’s argument and an epilogue that explains Sachedina’s motivations for writing the book.

To summarise, the main point of the work is to “steer Islamic ethics away from its traditional location in Greek philosophy” Sachedina does this by exploring the ethics found at the beginning of Islam. Sachedina deliberately does not utilise traditional interpretations of the *sunna* due to the influence of virtue ethics. Instead, Sachedina draws general universal principles out of the Quran. Following this Sachedina argues human reason should be used to apply these principles to ethical issues. This is evidenced by Sachedina’s statement “the thesis of this study is to reinstate the centrality of the Qur’anic moral epistemology that originates in human nature as a reliable primary source for ethical deliberations”.

A possible critique of the book is that Sachedina fails to move away from non-Islamic philosophical traditions. Demonstrated when he defines Islamic ethics as “deontological ethics” based on the Sharia. While Sachedina is not calling for Western conceptions of deontological ethics, such as Kantian ethics, by utilising such terminology it’s clear he is not free from the influence of non-Islamic philosophical traditions. This calls into question how feasible it is for Sachedina to “steer Islamic ethics away” from non-Islamic philosophy.

Importantly, Sachedina acknowledges the book does not prescribe ethical rulings. Rather it creates an alternative methodology to traditional jurisprudence. Consequently, this book is particularly relevant to those interested in jurisprudence as it creates significant scope for future work applying the methods proposed by the book to real-world case studies.

To conclude, *Islamic Ethics: Fundamental Aspects of Human Conduct* is an exciting addition to the discourse surrounding Islamic ethics, providing a new methodology for coming to ethical and juridical decisions. While the book will undoubtedly cause debate for its radical departure from traditional Islamic jurisprudence. Being the culmination of six decades of scholarship, the book warrants a read from anyone interested in ethics, jurisprudence, and philosophy in the Islamic context.