

# Is Islamic Ethos Based on Religious Mythos?

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## Abstract

An examination of the unique ethical framework of Islam, contrasting it with the mythos-driven moral systems prevalent in other religious traditions. We present the argument that Islamic ethics are fundamentally rooted in pragmatic, divinely revealed principles rather than symbolic or allegorical narratives often associated with mythology. Through a study of the Qur'an, Sunnah, and Islamic jurisprudence, the paper highlights how Islamic morality addresses universal human concerns with clarity, practicality, and adaptability. It refutes misconceptions about Islamic ethics, such as their alleged rigidity, exclusivity, or reliance on mythology, demonstrating their universality and relevance in contemporary contexts. By comparing Islamic ethics with mythological moral constructs, this study underscores the unparalleled ability of Islamic teachings to harmonize spiritual fulfillment with practical guidance for personal and societal well-being.

**Keywords –** Islamic Ethics, Mythology and Religion, Pragmatic Morality, Comparative Religion, Universal Ethics

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## Introduction

Human societies have long been shaped by systems of beliefs, often articulated through religious and cultural narratives. These narratives frequently draw upon mythological frameworks to provide moral guidance, cosmological understanding, and social coherence. Mythology, by its nature, thrives on allegorical and symbolic storytelling, providing lessons based on profundity rather than historical substantiation. Within this context, Islam is a unique tradition. That is because its ethical foundations are distinctively rooted in divine revelation and pragmatic principles, as opposed to the mythological constructs observed in other traditions.

The distinction between mythos-driven morality and Islamic ethos is deep and critical. Mythological narratives often rely on metaphorical or esoteric interpretations that cater to symbolic truths. Islamic ethics are derived from verifiable, divinely ordained principles enshrined in the Qur'an and Sunnah.

In this paper, we discuss how Islamic ethos transcends the mythological paradigms prevalent in other religions. By examining the philosophy, historical authenticity, and universal applicability of Islamic moral principles, we expound upon Islam's distinctive approach to ethics. Through a comparative analysis, this paper aims to underscore the pragmatic and divine nature of Islamic ethos, and its unparalleled ability to harmonize individual and communal well-being.

Further, we also address the challenges and misconceptions that may arise from conflating divine revelation with mythological tradition. By doing so, we aim to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the role of Islamic ethics in addressing the spiritual and moral needs of contemporary society.

## Religious Mythos

Mythology is a vehicle for societies to articulate their deepest values, explain natural phenomena, and establish ethical norms. It weaves together symbolic narratives often involving deities, heroes, and supernatural events to offer guidance on existential questions and societal ideals. These narratives are frequently allegorical, reflecting the cultural and historical contexts of their origins rather than verifiable truths.

### Definition

A myth, in essence, is a traditional story that seeks to explain the origins of the world, human existence, and societal structures. Mythos often incorporates elements of the supernatural to impart moral lessons or justify societal norms. While myths are not confined to the realm of fiction, their emphasis lies more on meaning than factual accuracy. In religious contexts, mythological narratives often function as tools to shape the worldview of a community, providing a framework for understanding life's mysteries.

The creation myths in various religious traditions, such as the cosmic egg or the world tree, symbolize philosophical ideas about life's origins and the relationship between humanity and the divine. These stories resonate with human emotions and cultural identities. They are not based on empirical validation or historical substantiation.

### Characteristics

1. Myths use *allegorical language* and *imagery* to convey deeper truths, often abstract in nature.
2. Myths commonly feature *imaginary divine beings* or *extraordinary events* that transcend human experience.
3. The themes and motifs of myths are deeply influenced by the *cultural milieu* in which they originate, reflecting localized moral and social ideals.
4. Many myths address *end-of-life* or *afterlife scenarios*, providing a framework for dealing with mortality and existential questions.

## Moral Framework

The moral codes embedded within mythological stories often stem from their symbolic narratives. Myths function pedagogically, imparting lessons about virtue, sacrifice, and justice through imaginative tales. For example, the ancient Greek story of Prometheus emphasizes the value of courage and innovation, albeit at great personal cost, while the Hindu epics, such as the Mahabharata, explore complex ethical dilemmas through their intricate narratives.

While these stories carry significant moral and educational value, they are shaped by the societal and temporal conditions of their origin. As a result, the lessons they impart, though meaningful, often remain subject to interpretation and contextual adaptation.

## Problem

While mythos offers rich cultural and moral insights, it often operates in a realm detached from historical accuracy or universal applicability. The reliance on symbolic meaning and esoteric interpretations can lead to ambiguity, allowing for varying and sometimes contradictory understandings of moral principles. The absence of a verifiable historical foundation makes it challenging to establish these narratives as a consistent basis for ethical and societal norms.

# Foundations of Islamic Ethics

Islamic ethics are unique in their grounding in divine revelation and their emphasis on actionable guidance for personal and societal conduct. Unlike mythological frameworks that often rely on symbolic or allegorical narratives, Islamic ethics draw directly from the Qur'an and Sunnah, offering a universally applicable and historically verifiable moral framework.

## Sources

1. The *Qur'an* serves as the foundational source of Islamic ethics, offering comprehensive guidance on every aspect of human life. Its moral directives are both universal and timeless, addressing issues such as justice, equity, compassion, and humility.
2. The *Sunnah*, comprising the sayings, actions, and approvals of the Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم), complements the Qur'an by illustrating its principles in practical scenarios.
3. After the Qur'an and Sunnah, the teachings of the *Awliya Allah* play a vital role in guiding the Ummah toward spiritual and ethical fulfilment. Awliya Allah are individuals distinguished by their profound piety, unwavering commitment to Allah, and exemplary adherence to Islamic principles. Their lives serve as practical demonstrations of how the divine teachings of Islam can be implemented across diverse contexts, transcending cultural and temporal barriers.

## Principles

1. *Tawheed* establishes the foundation for Islamic morality by affirming the sovereignty of Allah. This principle ensures that all ethical behaviour is ultimately accountable to Allah, who is the source of all moral authority. Tawheed also emphasizes unity and interconnectedness, promoting harmonious relations among individuals and between humanity and nature.
2. *Adl* or *Justice* is a divine mandate in Islam. The Qur'an explicitly commands Muslims to uphold justice at all costs. Justice extends beyond judicial matters to encompass economic fairness, environmental stewardship, and social equity.
3. *Compassion*, or *Rahma*, is a recurring theme in Islamic ethics. Acts of charity, such as Zakat (obligatory almsgiving) and Sadaqah (voluntary charity), are encouraged as expressions of compassion.
4. *Amanah* encompasses both personal integrity and societal responsibility. It requires individuals to honour their commitments, safeguard entrusted possessions, and act with transparency.
5. Ethical actions in Islam must be performed with sincerity (*Ikhlas*), seeking only Allah's pleasure. The Qur'an warns against hypocrisy, emphasizing that good deeds are invalidated if performed for public recognition. Sincerity ensures the purity of intentions, aligning individual actions with divine expectations.

## Dimensions

Islam places a profound emphasis on ethical practices that ensure justice, equity, and the overall welfare of society. Its moral framework extends seamlessly into economic transactions, social conduct, environmental stewardship, and governance, offering comprehensive guidance that aligns spiritual principles with practical living.

1. *Economic fairness* is a critical part dimension of Islamic ethics, with clear directives to ensure transparency, honesty, and social equity. The prohibition of *Riba* (usury) is central to this framework, designed to prevent exploitation in financial dealings and foster equitable wealth distribution. By eliminating interest-based systems, Islam encourages mutual benefit and reduces the economic disparities that often lead to societal discord. The emphasis on Halal trade highlights the importance of lawful and ethical commerce. Muslims are enjoined to avoid fraud, hoarding, and deceptive practices.
2. Islamic teachings prioritize *harmonious relationships within families and communities*, emphasizing respect and care for all. The Qur'an commands kindness to parents, compassion toward the elderly, and generosity to neighbours, fostering a cohesive social fabric rooted in mutual respect. Inclusivity is a defining feature of Islamic ethics. The Qur'an stresses the importance of treating individuals with kindness and fairness, regardless of their faith or background.

3. Islam regards *humanity as the steward (Khalifah)* of the Earth, entrusted with its care and preservation. This exemplifies the intersection of ecological preservation and ethical living, encouraging Muslims to engage in sustainable practices that benefit all of creation. By promoting the conservation of resources and the protection of biodiversity, Islamic ethics align closely with modern environmental concerns.
4. Islamic governance is anchored in the principles of *justice and accountability*, demanding that leaders prioritize the welfare of their people over personal gain. Community leaders are required to act with integrity, ensure equitable treatment, and address the needs of their communities. Ethical leadership in Islam is not just a position of authority but a sacred trust, emphasizing service, transparency, and the pursuit of justice.

## Features

Islamic ethics are uniquely positioned as a universal and pragmatic framework for addressing the complexities of human life. Their principles transcend cultural, temporal, and societal boundaries, providing a balanced and actionable approach to personal and communal well-being. Central to their effectiveness is their focus on accountability to Allah, ensuring clarity and consistency in moral decision-making.

1. One of the defining features of Islamic ethics is their *applicability across cultures and epochs*. Rooted in divine revelation, Islamic teachings provide principles that resonate universally, unbound by specific cultural or temporal contexts. For instance, the prohibition of exploitation applies equally to all societies, whether addressing medieval trade practices or modern corporate ethics. The Qur'an's directives on justice, equity, and compassion uphold values that are inherently relevant, ensuring that Islamic morality remains timeless and inclusive. This *universality* enables Islamic ethics to act as a bridge between diverse societies, fostering mutual respect and shared values.
2. Islamic ethics stand out for their *practicality*, offering clear and actionable solutions to real-world challenges. They address pressing issues such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation through pragmatic mechanisms. The institution of *Zakat* (mandatory almsgiving) directly alleviates poverty by redistributing wealth to the needy, fostering social equity. Similarly, the prohibition of *Riba* (usury) eliminates exploitative financial practices, promoting economic justice. Environmental sustainability is another example of this *pragmatism*, as Islamic teachings emphasize the conservation of natural resources and responsible stewardship of the Earth. These actionable solutions demonstrate how Islamic ethics harmonize spiritual principles with tangible societal improvements.
3. Islamic morality is remarkable for its holistic approach, which seeks to *balance spiritual aspirations with material responsibilities*. Islam recognizes that personal well-being is intricately tied to communal harmony and strives to align individual and collective goals. For example, fasting during

*Ramadan* serves not only as a spiritual act of devotion but also cultivates empathy for the underprivileged, encouraging acts of charity and social solidarity. This balance ensures that neither spiritual nor material pursuits overshadow the other, fostering a comprehensive framework for ethical living that is rooted in moderation and harmony.

4. Unlike mythological frameworks that rely on symbolic interpretations, Islamic teachings emphasize a direct relationship between human actions and divine expectations. This accountability ensures consistency in ethical behaviour, as actions are evaluated based on their alignment with Allah's commands.

## Mythos Driven Frameworks vs Islamic Pragmatism

While many religious traditions rely on mythological narratives to establish moral codes, Islamic ethics emerge as a divinely rooted system that transcends the allegorical and cultural confines of mythos. This section examines the philosophical and functional differences between Islamic ethics and mythos-driven frameworks, highlighting the universality, practicality, and divine legitimacy of Islamic teachings.

### Characteristics of Mythos Driven Frameworks

Mythos-driven moral frameworks rely heavily on symbolic narratives, cultural specificity, and allegorical tales to convey ethical principles. While these frameworks offer profound philosophical insights, they often lack the clarity, universality, and historical grounding necessary for consistent and practical moral guidance.

1. Mythological narratives frequently use *symbolism* and *allegory* to impart ethical lessons, often embedding moral principles within tales of gods, supernatural beings, and heroic figures. The story of Prometheus stealing fire from the gods to aid humanity illustrates themes of sacrifice and defiance against oppressive authority. While the tale inspires courage and innovation, its allegorical nature leaves it open to varied interpretations, reducing its applicability to concrete ethical dilemmas. The Mahabharata employs complex allegorical battles to delve into the concept of dharma (duty) and moral conflict. While the epic offers rich ethical insights, its reliance on symbolic representation often leads to subjective and culturally specific interpretations.
2. The moral systems embedded in mythological frameworks are often deeply rooted in the *cultural and temporal contexts* of their origins. While they reflect the values and challenges of specific societies, their relevance diminishes when applied to different eras or global contexts. The themes of fate and heroic destiny prevalent in Norse mythology reflect the harsh realities of Viking life. However, these narratives offer limited guidance for contemporary global challenges such as environmental conservation or social justice. Stories centred around Osiris and the preparation for the afterlife emphasize ritualistic practices over practical ethical concerns. While meaningful within

the ancient Egyptian worldview, these narratives often conflict with modern ethical priorities, such as justice and life preservation.

3. A defining limitation of mythological frameworks is their *lack of historical substantiation*. The moral authority of these systems is often undermined by the imaginative and fantastical nature of their narratives. For instance, the pantheons of gods in Greek and Roman mythology, while serving as tools for moral exploration, are widely regarded as products of human imagination rather than reflections of divine truth. This absence of factual grounding diminishes their capacity to function as definitive ethical guides.
4. Many mythological narratives were *designed to explain natural phenomena or reinforce social hierarchies*, rather than provide enduring moral frameworks. This utilitarian origin often limits their relevance in modern contexts where historical accuracy and universality are paramount.

### Contrasting with Islamic Pragmatism

Islamic ethics present a pragmatic and universally applicable framework, distinctly rooted in divine revelation. Unlike mythological moral systems, which often rely on culturally specific allegories and subjective interpretations, Islamic teachings offer clear, actionable directives that address human needs across cultures and eras.

1. The *universality* of Islamic ethics lies in their foundation upon divine revelation, intended for all of humanity without distinction of culture, race, or era. This universality establishes a framework of equality and mutual respect, where the inherent dignity of every individual is recognized. By transcending cultural boundaries, Islamic ethics resonate with a wide array of societal contexts, making them particularly relevant in diverse and pluralistic societies. This inclusivity ensures that principles such as justice, compassion, and equity are applicable across epochs, fostering harmony and understanding among people.
2. Islamic morality is distinguished by its *emphasis on concrete and implementable principles*. It is not limited to philosophical ideals but extends to actionable guidelines for personal and societal well-being.
3. The institution of Zakat (mandatory almsgiving) exemplifies how Islamic ethics *translate moral values into systemic social support*. By mandating a fixed percentage of wealth to be distributed to those in need, Zakat addresses poverty and inequality in tangible and measurable ways, fostering economic balance and social cohesion.
4. Islamic teachings also emphasize humanity's role as *stewards of the Earth*. Ethical responsibility for preserving the environment is a recurring theme, encouraging sustainable practices and the careful management of natural resources. These directives align closely with modern global efforts to combat environmental degradation, showcasing the foresight and relevance of Islamic morality.

5. The legitimacy and consistency of Islamic ethics stem from their *foundation in divine authority*. Unlike moral systems that are subject to cultural or personal reinterpretations, Islamic directives remain absolute and immutable. This accountability to Allah ensures that ethical guidelines are applied consistently, fostering a sense of moral clarity and purpose. The intrinsic connection between divine authority and moral directives discourages exploitation or manipulation of ethical principles for personal or societal gain. By grounding morality in the sovereignty of Allah, Islamic ethics maintain a high degree of coherence and objectivity, offering an enduring and trustworthy framework for guidance.

### Contrasting Philosophies on Truth and Morality

*In mythological morality, truth is often symbolic and subject to varied interpretations.* Myths are crafted to inspire and provoke thought, offering lessons through allegory rather than definitive prescriptions. This approach lends itself to flexibility but also results in inconsistencies, as the symbolic nature of these narratives leaves ethical conclusions open to interpretation and cultural adaptation. Mythological systems often lack the clarity required to establish a universally applicable moral framework, relying instead on their ability to evoke philosophical and emotional resonance.

In contrast, *Islamic ethics ground truth in divine revelation, establishing it as objective and unambiguous.* The Qur'an provides explicit guidance on moral behaviour, leaving little room for subjective reinterpretation. This clarity ensures consistency in ethical application, fostering a coherent framework that aligns spiritual obligations with practical human responsibilities. Truth, in Islam, is an actionable directive that cater to the diverse needs of humanity.

*Mythological frameworks often attribute moral outcomes to the whims of deities or cosmic forces, thereby reducing human accountability.* The moral consequences in such systems are frequently portrayed as dependent on supernatural interventions rather than individual agency. This perspective diminishes the role of personal responsibility, creating an ethical landscape where human actions are secondary to the unpredictable will of gods or fate.

*Islamic ethics, however, place human free will and accountability at the centre of moral conduct.* Individuals are directly responsible for their actions and are judged accordingly. This principle reinforces a clear sense of moral agency, where each person's deeds contribute to their ultimate reward or punishment. The emphasis on justice and accountability creates a moral framework where ethical conduct is tied to individual choices, fostering personal responsibility and societal harmony.

The role of rituals also differs significantly between these frameworks. *Mythological systems often prioritize ritualistic practices over moral behaviour,* with offerings, ceremonies, and rites aimed at appeasing deities or securing divine favour. While these rituals hold cultural and symbolic significance, they often overshadow the importance of ethical conduct, reducing morality to a secondary concern.



*Islamic ethics integrate rituals with moral responsibility, ensuring that acts of worship are not isolated from ethical behaviour.* Rituals such as prayer and fasting are deeply connected to moral discipline, fostering virtues like honesty, patience, and empathy. For example, fasting during Ramadan is not solely a physical act of abstention but also a moral exercise in refraining from falsehood and harmful deeds. This intrinsic connection between ritual and ethics ensures that worship in Islam transcends symbolic acts, becoming a comprehensive system for cultivating personal and societal virtue.

## Functional Superiority of Islamic Ethics

Islamic ethics demonstrate remarkable adaptability, addressing contemporary issues such as environmental degradation, economic inequality, and social justice with principles that are timeless in their applicability. For instance, the prohibition of wasteful consumption reflects a commitment to sustainability, aligning with modern efforts to combat environmental challenges. Similarly, the emphasis on justice ensures fairness in governance and economic practices, effectively combating corruption and exploitation. These principles, grounded in practical application, offer solutions that transcend historical contexts and remain relevant in the face of evolving societal challenges.

A defining feature of Islamic teachings is their inherent balance between spiritual and material needs. Unlike mythos-driven systems, which often prioritize one dimension at the expense of the other, Islamic ethics harmonize both aspects, creating a holistic framework for living. This balance ensures that personal well-being aligns with communal harmony, fostering a system that promotes both individual fulfilment and societal welfare.

Moreover, the divine origin of Islamic ethics provides a sense of moral clarity and certainty. This consistency offers believers a definitive guide to righteous living, free from the ambiguities and subjective interpretations that often characterize mythological narratives. The unchanging nature of these ethical directives ensures their reliability as a foundation for personal and societal conduct, highlighting their universal relevance and enduring applicability.

## Conclusion

Islamic ethics represent a unique moral framework, distinct from the mythological narratives that underpin many other religious traditions. Rooted in divine revelation and supported by historical authenticity, Islamic morality offers pragmatic guidance for individuals and societies, transcending cultural and temporal boundaries. This analysis has highlighted the foundational principles of Islamic ethics, i.e., justice, compassion, sincerity, and universal accountability, and demonstrated how they address the complexities of human existence in a clear, actionable, and universally relevant manner.

Unlike mythos-driven moral systems, which rely on symbolic interpretations and cultural specificity, Islamic ethos provides a cohesive framework that integrates spiritual enrichment with practical solutions for

personal and societal challenges. Its emphasis on balance between individual and communal needs, spiritual and material concerns, and timeless principles with modern applicability, underscores its adaptability and enduring relevance.

The misconceptions surrounding Islamic ethics, such as their alleged rigidity, exclusivity, or mythological roots, stem largely from a lack of understanding or conflation with cultural practices. By refuting these misconceptions, it becomes evident that Islamic teachings are not only practical and universal but also profoundly inclusive, promoting coexistence and mutual respect across diverse communities.

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