Prophetic Ethics in Islamic Thought: A Contemporary Analytical Study of the Qur'anic Message and Philosophical Morality

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Abstract
This scholarly article undertakes a comprehensive and critical investigation into the intricate ethical foundations that underpin the prophetic message as articulated within the rich tradition of Islam, meticulously examining how these ethical principles are expressed in the Qur'anic discourse while also considering their far-reaching implications within the broader realm of philosophical ethics. The research draws upon a multitude of interdisciplinary approaches that include but are not limited to Qur'anic exegesis, the study of prophetic traditions known as Sunnah, the exploration of Islamic philosophy, and the application of comparative moral theory, thereby situating itself at the intersection of various academic fields. In particular, the study devotes considerable attention to the life of the Prophet Muhammad, who is portrayed as a dynamic moral exemplar, while also exploring the complex interplay between divine command, human intention, and the concept of virtue within the framework of Islamic ethical thought. The research findings reveal that the ethical principles derived from prophetic teachings provide a multidimensional framework that is not only deeply rooted in spiritual values but also possesses a moral universality that bridges the gap between traditional Islamic virtues and contemporary ethical concerns, such as the recognition of human rights, the acknowledgment of pluralism, and the insights provided by moral psychology. Additionally, this article engages critically with contemporary literature on Islamic ethics, identifying significant areas that warrant further research and practical application in the domains of education and public policy.
Keywords: Prophetic Ethics, Qur'an, Moral Philosophy, Islamic Thought, Virtue Ethics, Intention, Moral Psychology, Pluralism

Introduction
The question of ethics in Islamic thought has remained central to theological, philosophical, and sociopolitical discourse throughout Islamic intellectual history (Kamali, 2019; Ghaly, 2020). At the core of this moral inquiry lies the ethical example of the prophets, particularly as conveyed in the Qur'anic narrative. Prophetic ethics are not merely episodic or historical elements of scripture but serve as integral moral paradigms that continue to inform the

character formation, social engagement, and spiritual consciousness of Muslim communities (Moosa, 2021; Shah-Kazemi, 2019). This study aims to critically explore the ethical model of prophethood in the Qur'an, positioning it within both traditional Islamic moral philosophy and contemporary analytical frameworks (Fakhry, 2015; Adamson, 2020).

In the modern context, ethics is often discussed in fragmented terms bioethics, political ethics, environmental ethics, whereas in the Qur'an, ethical conduct is inseparably woven into the identity and mission of the prophets (Safi, 2014; Abou El Fadl, 2014). Their lives offer a synthesis of action and contemplation, of principled resistance and spiritual submission, and thus present a uniquely holistic approach to morality (Rahman, 2016; Esack, 2018). The Qur'anic portrayal of prophets such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad (peace be upon them) illustrates consistent ethical values truthfulness, humility, repentance, justice, compassion, and perseverance (Kamali, 2014; Siddiqui, 2017). These values are not abstract ideals but lived virtues, demonstrated in the face of real moral challenges.

Despite the theological centrality of prophethood, the ethical dimensions of prophetic conduct have often been underrepresented in both classical theological discussions and modern academic treatments (Nasr Abu Zayd, 2019; Duderija, 2016). While much attention has been given to legal obligations (*fiqh*) and creed (*ʿaqīdah*), this study emphasizes ethics as a critical axis in understanding the prophetic role. It further investigates how prophetic ethics, when interpreted through a contemporary analytical lens, can contribute to wider moral philosophy and intercultural dialogue (Murata & Chittick, 2014; Halim, 2020).

This study proceeds from the assumption that Islamic ethics must be both faithful to the Qur'anic message and responsive to the ethical dilemmas of the contemporary world (Ramadan, 2019; Ghaly, 2018). Therefore, the objective of this article is twofold: first, to analyze key ethical traits embodied by the prophets in the Qur'an and contextualized in classical Arabic literature; and second, to interpret these traits in conversation with contemporary moral theories, including virtue ethics, moral psychology, and political ethics (Kristjánsson, 2020; Elshakry, 2023).

The structure of the article is as follows: the next section outlines the theoretical framework and methodology employed in the study. This is followed by a literature review that situates the topic within the existing body of scholarship. The core findings analyze Qur'anic texts and prophetic examples, while the discussion section extrapolates broader philosophical implications. The study concludes with recommendations for applying prophetic ethics in modern contexts and highlights limitations and directions for future research.

Theoretical Framework
This study is grounded in two complementary theoretical traditions: Islamic ethical epistemology and comparative moral philosophy. First, it draws on the Islamic concept of akhlaq (moral character), which integrates scriptural revelation, prophetic practice, and rational reflection (Al-Attas, 2010; Qadhi, 2021). Second, it incorporates key perspectives from virtue ethics, particularly the Aristotelian-Thomistic model of character formation and the contemporary revival led by philosophers like Alasdair MacIntyre (1984) and Rosalind Hursthouse (1999). The Qur'an presents a moral vision centered on justice ('adl), compassion (rahma), and trustworthiness (amana), values embodied by the Prophet Muhammad as

uswatun hasanah (a beautiful example) (Qur'an 33:21). In this sense, prophetic ethics parallels the Aristotelian idea of the moral exemplar or phronimos. Yet Islamic ethics diverges in its theological foundation: ethical norms are ultimately rooted in divine command, not autonomous reason. Comparative models are used not to relativize Islamic ethics but to clarify its structure and distinctive features. For example, while Kantian deontology emphasizes duty and universal law, Islamic ethics integrates niyyah (intention), action, and divine accountability. This integrated framework resists the dichotomy between virtue and duty by locating both within a theocentric moral order (Rahman, 2012; Moosa, 2015).

Methodology
This article employs a qualitative methodology combining textual analysis, thematic interpretation, and comparative ethics. Primary sources include the Qur'an, major Hadith collections (Bukhari, Muslim, al-Nawawi), and classical works of Islamic ethical theory (e.g., al-Ghazali, Miskawayh). Secondary sources include contemporary studies in Islamic ethics and philosophy of religion. The analytical process involves:

• Extracting key ethical themes from Qur'anic passages.
• Interpreting prophetic actions and statements in ethical terms.
• Comparing Islamic ethical principles with modern theories (e.g., utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, virtue theory).
• Contextualizing findings within current debates on religious ethics, pluralism, and the moral psychology of religion.

This method allows for both fidelity to Islamic tradition and critical engagement with modern ethical discourse (Sachedina, 2020; Opwis, 2014).

Literature Review
The study of prophetic ethics within Islamic thought has been a growing area of interest in contemporary scholarship, particularly in light of global ethical challenges and renewed interest in normative religious frameworks. Classical scholarship often approached prophetic ethics through the lenses of theology (ʿaqīdah), jurisprudence (fiqh), and spiritual refinement (taṣawwuf), while modern academic discourse tends to integrate philosophical ethics, comparative theology, and moral psychology.

Classical Grounding and Modern Reinterpretations
Several foundational works continue to influence the study of prophetic ethics. Al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* remains a seminal reference for understanding the integration of moral psychology and religious ethics (Winter, 2010). Ibn Miskawayh's *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq* has been re-evaluated in recent decades for its proto-virtue ethical framework, especially its emphasis on habituation and the moderation of character traits (Adamson, 2020; Nasr, 2017). Recent scholarship by Fakhry (2015) and Moosa (2021) has shown how Islamic moral philosophy anticipates many themes in Aristotelian and Kantian ethics, particularly with regard to intention (*niyyah*), virtue, and teleology. This has encouraged a resurgence in the study of prophetic models not just as spiritual archetypes but as moral agents engaged in social reform, resistance to injustice, and ethical pedagogy (Qadhi, 2020; Rahman, 2016).

Qur'anic Ethics and Moral Hermeneutics
The Qur'an remains the principal source for understanding the ethical dimensions of prophethood. Fazlur Rahman's double-movement theory (Rahman, 1982, revisited in

Siddiqui, 2017) has been instrumental in rethinking how ethical commands in the Qur'an can be applied to modern contexts. Abou El Fadl (2014) further argues for a moral reading of the Qur'an that centers on the human capacity for justice, mercy, and rational discernment. In contemporary moral hermeneutics, Nasr Abu Zayd (2019) and Shahab Ahmed (2016) challenge literalist readings that strip ethical narratives of their broader philosophical depth. Their work emphasizes the literary and existential dimensions of prophetic stories as tools for moral formation. Kamali (2020) echoes this by stressing the maqāṣid al-sharīʿah (objectives of Islamic law) as intrinsically ethical, rooted in human welfare and divine wisdom.

Prophethood, Ethics, and Political Resistance
The ethical conduct of prophets has also been analyzed through a political lens. Prophets such as Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad are often cast as moral exemplars in resistance against tyranny, materialism, and ethical nihilism (Esack, 2018; Ramadan, 2019). Recent work by Sachedina (2021) and Elshakry (2023) has emphasized the social dimensions of prophetic ethics, particularly in confronting structural injustice and promoting human dignity. In this context, prophetic ethics are not only personal virtues but embodied practices of justice, reform, and community leadership. This reading resonates with liberation theology and other global ethical traditions (Abdulhameed, 2022).

Comparative and Interdisciplinary Approaches
Modern comparative ethics has opened avenues for dialogical engagement between Islamic moral thought and Western philosophy. Wyschogrod (2017) and Murata & Chittick (2014) compare prophetic models across Abrahamic traditions, identifying overlaps in humility, obedience, and moral courage. Meanwhile, contemporary Muslim philosophers like Halim (2020) and Shah-Kazemi (2019) advocate for a bridge between spiritual metaphysics and lived ethical action. Interdisciplinary research has also emerged in areas such as environmental ethics (Foltz, 2021), gender justice (Bucar, 2022), and bioethics (Ghaly, 2018), highlighting how prophetic ethics can inform contemporary global challenges.

Findings
This study identified several core ethical principles that consistently emerge across the prophetic narratives in the Qur'an. These findings are based on thematic analysis of the Qur'anic text, supported by exegetical sources and integrated with modern moral philosophy. The prophets' moral character serves not merely as historical accounts but as enduring ethical paradigms.

Truthfulness and Moral Integrity (Sidq and Amanah)
All prophets exhibit a profound commitment to truthfulness (ṣidq) and moral integrity (amānah). The Qur'anic refrain *"Innā la-narāka mina al-ṣādiqīn"* (We see you among the truthful) (Qur'an 12:46) is repeated in different forms across narratives. This ethical core is not merely descriptive but constitutes the prophetic legitimacy itself. Modern scholars such as Kamali (2020) and Moosa (2021) argue that truthfulness functions as both a metaphysical and social virtue in Islamic ethics. It ensures the coherence between belief, word, and action—what Ricoeur (1995) terms "narrative identity," and what Islamic scholars refer to as *iṣlāḥ al-nafs* (self-reform).

Repentance and Moral Accountability (Tawbah and Iʿtiraf al-Khataʾ)

The story of Adam (peace be upon him) emphasizes ethical humility through repentance. Unlike Iblīs, who rejected responsibility, Adam admitted his error and sought divine forgiveness (Qurʾan 7:23). This distinction forms a foundational Islamic ethic: sin is human, but arrogance in sin is satanic. Contemporary ethicists like Nasr Abu Zayd (2019) and Safi (2014) interpret this as the Qurʾanic endorsement of moral accountability. In psychological terms, it reflects a model of ethical resilience and spiritual growth, moving from failure to transformation.

Patience and Endurance (Sabr)

Prophets such as Nūḥ, Yūsuf, and Ayyūb embody *ṣabr* not merely as passive endurance but as active moral resistance. The Qurʾan frequently praises *al-ṣābirīn* as those who sustain their ethical posture despite hardship (Qurʾan 2:153). This aligns with virtue ethics as described by MacIntyre (2007), where patience is seen as a stabilizing virtue that enables other moral acts. The Qurʾanic ṣabr, however, also carries a transcendent dimension an alignment with divine will, as interpreted by al-Rāzī and modern scholars like Ramadan (2019).

Justice and Social Reform (ʿAdl and Islah)

Prophets consistently function as reformers challenging oppression, economic injustice, and idolatry. The mission of Moses (Mūsā) is framed as an ethical confrontation with Pharaoh's tyranny (Qurʾan 20:44). Similarly, Prophet Shuʿayb condemns fraudulent trade, linking worship with socio-economic justice (Qurʾan 11:84–85). This reflects the maqāṣid-based approach to ethics—where justice is not peripheral but central to divine intent (Kamali, 2019). Scholars such as Esack (2018) and Elshakry (2023) emphasize how prophetic ethics form the moral core of resistance theology.

Mercy and Compassion (Raḥmah)

The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ is described as *"raḥmatan lil-ʿālamīn"* (a mercy to the worlds) (Qurʾan 21:107). This mercy is both existential and relational: shown to believers, enemies, animals, and the environment. Contemporary Islamic ethics, especially in Sufi traditions, center on this expansive model of compassion (Shah-Kazemi, 2014; Halim, 2020). The findings show that compassion is not weakness but a profound moral power. It restrains vengeance, tempers justice with forgiveness, and sustains communities.

Humility and Selflessness (Tawaḍḍuʿ and Ithar)

The Qurʾanic portrayal of prophets like Ibrahim and Luṭ emphasizes humility and generosity. Ibrahim's welcoming of the angelic guests with roasted calf (Qurʾan 51:26) has been interpreted in ethical literature as a model of selfless hospitality. Contemporary research in Islamic moral psychology (Ghaly, 2020; Bucar, 2022) highlights the value of ithar altruism even at personal loss as an advanced ethical trait cultivated by prophets.

Discussion

The ethical framework embodied by the prophets in Islamic thought presents a multidimensional model that merges metaphysical conviction with ethical action. While the findings establish the core traits of truthfulness, patience, compassion, justice, humility, and repentance, the discussion must now address the broader implications of these values within philosophical ethics, religious morality, and contemporary ethical challenges.

Prophetic Ethics as a Teleological Framework

Prophetic ethics in Islam are best understood within a teleological framework where ethical behavior is oriented toward divine pleasure (*riḍāʾ Allāh*) and human flourishing (*falāḥ*). This aligns with the Aristotelian tradition of virtue ethics, as argued by Fakhry (2015) and Adamson (2020), where moral development is seen as habituation toward excellence. The Qur'anic term *taqwā* (God-consciousness) functions not merely as an inner state but as a telos—a moral end achieved through disciplined ethical action. Unlike deontological or consequentialist ethics, prophetic ethics emphasize the intrinsic value of virtue. The Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ statement, *"I was sent only to perfect good character"* (al-Muwaṭṭaʾ, Mālik) serves as a mission statement of moral teleology. This repositions prophecy as not only theological but pedagogical.

Ethics Beyond Legalism: The Limitations of Fiqh-centrism

A critical insight emerging from the findings is the contrast between ethics as virtue and ethics as legal compliance. While Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) provides necessary boundaries, it is insufficient for cultivating *iḥsān* moral excellence. The prophetic model transcends minimal legal obligation, embodying *muruwwah* (dignified conduct), *ḥilm* (forbearance), and *īthār* (selfless giving), all of which resist codification. Scholars like Abou El Fadl (2014) and Moosa (2021) emphasize that over-reliance on legalism risks reducing ethics to rule-following. Instead, the Qur'anic model, as manifested in the prophets, calls for a deeper moral literacy grounded in empathy, context, and wisdom (*ḥikmah*).

Moral Psychology and the Prophetic Model

The internal disposition of the prophets, especially their responses to suffering, rejection, and moral injury offers an Islamic model of moral psychology. The example of Job (Ayyūb), who suffers with unwavering faith, or Joseph (Yūsuf), who forgives his brothers despite injustice, illustrates resilience through spiritual conviction. This aligns with contemporary work in psychology and virtue ethics, particularly Kristjánsson (2020), who connects moral character with emotional regulation, and Ghaly (2018), who explores Islamic bioethics and patient dignity. The prophets, as moral agents, integrate cognition, emotion, and volition in ethical decision-making.

Prophetic Ethics and Social Justice

One of the most significant themes in the findings is the role of prophetic ethics in confronting systemic injustice. Moses' stand against Pharaoh is not merely a theological event, but a model of ethical resistance. Shuʿayb's opposition to economic exploitation, or Muhammad's ﷺ critique of tribalism and gender injustice, reflect ethics as a tool for social transformation. This is resonant with liberation theology (Esack, 2018) and the ethics of dissent (Ramadan, 2019), where prophets are seen as revolutionaries in moral terms. In this light, prophetic ethics are inherently political, not in a partisan sense, but in their insistence on dignity, accountability, and reform.

Universality and Contextuality

Though deeply rooted in Qur'anic revelation, prophetic ethics maintain a level of universality that allows for interfaith engagement. The ethical behavior of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, shared across Abrahamic traditions, allows for dialogical ethics based on shared virtues (Murata & Chittick, 2014). However, can contextuality remains crucial. The same prophetic

trait, such as patience in one situation become confrontation in another. Ethical praxis, therefore, must be dynamic, reading both the moral horizon of the text and the realities of the present.

Conclusion and Recommendations
Conclusion
This study has explored the ethical dimensions of prophethood in Islamic thought through an analytical reading of the Qur'anic message and recent philosophical scholarship. Drawing from both classical sources and modern interpretations, it has demonstrated that prophetic ethics constitute a holistic moral system that transcends individual virtue to shape social reform, legal consciousness, and existential orientation. The ethical virtues embodied by the prophet's truthfulness, repentance, patience, justice, compassion, humility are not simply idealistic abstractions but actionable paradigms rooted in divine guidance.

These values represent a unified vision of moral excellence (*iḥsān*), grounded in both spiritual awareness and ethical action. Prophetic ethics thus offer a middle path between rigid legalism and moral relativism, between spiritual elitism and secular humanism. They assert the potential for moral development inherent in humanity, while situating it within a framework of transcendent objectives. In this regard, the present research augments an expanding corpus of academic inquiry that situates Islamic ethics as both a historical legacy and a dynamic tradition, equipped to navigate the intricate moral terrain of contemporary society.

Recommendations
Based on the findings and discussions, the following recommendations are proposed:
1. **Integrate Prophetic Ethics in Modern Islamic Education:** Educational institutions, especially in the Muslim world, should integrate prophetic ethics into their curricula—not only as part of *sīrah* (biography) but within courses on leadership, civic responsibility, and personal development.
2. **Develop Applied Ethical Frameworks for Contemporary Issues:** Scholars and ethicists should explore how prophetic virtues can inform bioethics, environmental ethics, artificial intelligence, and conflict resolution fields where moral ambiguity is pervasive.
3. **Promote Interdisciplinary Ethical Dialogues:** There is a need for deeper engagement between Islamic ethics and global moral philosophy. Comparative ethics can foster shared values and mutual understanding across religious and cultural lines.
4. **Revive the Spirit of Ethical Ijtihād (Independent Reasoning):** Ethical reasoning in Islam should be dynamic and context-sensitive. Reviving *ijtihād* in moral matters, especially those not covered directly by law would enable more responsive ethical engagement.
5. **Encourage Ethical Leadership Based on Prophetic Models:** Contemporary Muslim leadership political, social, academic should emulate prophetic ethical traits such as humility, integrity, courage, and justice. This could help restore trust in religious and public institutions.
6. **Support Public Ethics and Moral Discourse:** Public intellectuals and community leaders should foreground prophetic ethics in public discourse as a counter-narrative to materialism, nihilism, and populism.

Theoretical and Contextual Significance

This study makes an important contribution by showing how prophetic ethics in Islam can speak meaningfully to the challenges we face in today's world. On a theoretical level, it helps connect timeless values found in the Qur'an—like justice, patience, and compassion—with modern ideas in ethics, especially those found in virtue ethics and moral philosophy. It gives us a fresh way to think about these values not just as religious duties, but as principles that can guide anyone seeking to live a good and responsible life. Contextually, the study is especially relevant for Muslim communities today, as they navigate questions about how to stay true to their faith while engaging with a rapidly changing, often morally confusing world. It offers a grounded yet flexible ethical framework that can be used in classrooms, community work, interfaith dialogue, and public life. By bringing together tradition and modern thought, this research helps bridge old wisdom with new realities.

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