

# Islam's 'Philosophy' of History

## Criteria

In order to discover the viewpoint of any school of thought regarding the nature of history we may use certain criteria which help us to exactly determine its approach to different historic movements and events. For this purpose, here I offer some criteria which I consider proper for such a study. Of course, there may possibly be other criteria which I fail to perceive.

Before we take up these criteria and before we apply them for determining the viewpoint of Islam, it is essential to point out that, in our view, there are certain principles laid down in the Qur'an according to which the spiritual and intellectual foundation of society is considered prior to its material bases. The Qur'an has clearly stated the following as a principle:

.. إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ ..

**... God changes not the condition of a people until they change that which is in themselves ....**  
(13:11)

In other words, the destiny of a people is never changed unless they change their mental and spiritual attitudes. This verse clearly negates the theory of economic determinism of history.

Nevertheless, I shall give an account of the criteria I have determined and on their basis evaluate the viewpoint of Islam regarding the nature of history.

## 1. Strategy of the Call

Every school of thought that has a message for society and calls the people to accept it, has to adopt a specific method which is related on the one hand to its principal aims and objectives, and on the other to

its viewpoint about the nature of historical movements. The call of a school is meant, firstly, to awaken a particular consciousness in the people, and, secondly, to arouse and mobilize them by using certain specific means of motivation.

An example is the humanist school of Auguste Comte. Comte advocates a kind of "scientific religion," and considers the essence of human evolution to lie in the sphere of the human mind. He believes that the human mind has passed through two stages. The first stage is that of mythology and philosophy. The second is the stage of science. Naturally, he relates all the desirable forms of consciousness to science, and all the means of motivation required for attaining this objective are also related to the scientific spirit.

Another example is that of Marxism which is a revolutionary theory of the working class. The consciousness which it awakens is related to class antagonism. The means of mobilizing the working class lie in stirring its complexes and its feelings of deprivation and victimization.

In addition to their points of view regarding society and history, various schools of thought differ from one another with respect to different types of consciousness they wish to awaken and different types of means employed for bringing about the desired change. Various ideologies, in accordance with their interpretation of history and the course of its development and their outlook of man, also vary with regard to their target-audience, the reliance of their strategy on force and their view regarding its moral justifiability.

Some schools like Christianity approve only peaceful way of confrontation among human beings. Force or violence of all forms and under all conditions is disapproved of and considered immoral. Accordingly, one of its commandments is: "Offer the wicked man no resistance ... If anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well; if a man tries to take your tunic, lawfully or unlawfully, let him have your cloak as well."

On the contrary certain other schools of thought, such as the philosophy of Nietzsche, regard power as the sole moral value. To him human perfection lies in power, and his superman is the most powerful among men. According to Nietzsche, Christian morality is the morality of slaves, of the weak and the humiliated and is therefore to be blamed for the arrest of human progress.

Certain other schools of thought associate morality with power and violence, though do not consider every kind of force as moral. According to Marxism, the use of force by the exploiters against the exploited is immoral, because it is intended to preserve the status quo, and causes stagnation. But the application of force by the exploited is moral, for it is used for the purpose of transforming society, leading it to a higher stage.

In other words, there is a continuous conflict in society between two groups: one playing the role of 'thesis' and the other working as 'anti-thesis.' The force acting as 'thesis,' by virtue of its being reactionary, is immoral; the force acting as 'antithesis,' by virtue of being revolutionary and progressive,

is moral. It is quite natural that the same force which is now regarded as 'moral,' at a later stage, after coming into conflict with its counter force, would become 'immoral,' as it would then play a reactionary role, and the new rival force would become 'moral.' Hence morality is relative. What is moral at one stage, is immoral at a higher and advanced stage.

From the viewpoint of Christianity, its relation with the opposite group, judged by it to be opposed to progress and salvation, is that of softness and mildness. Only this kind of relation is morally right. According to Neitzsche, the only moral relation is the relation between the powerful and the weak. There is no moral value higher than power, and nothing more immoral than weakness. There is no sin greater than the sin of being weak.

According to Marxism the relation between two economically opposite classes is nothing but a relationship of antagonism translated into acts of violence. In this relationship, the acts of violence committed by the exploiting class are immoral for being antiprogressive, and the acts of violence committed by the exploited are morally justified. The relationship between newly emerging forces and old forces is that of continuous conflict. and in this conflict morality is invariably on the side of new forces.

All the above-mentioned ideas are rejected by Islam. Islam does not confine morality to pacifism, persuasion through mild and peaceful manners, cordiality and love, as preached by Christianity. It holds that occasionally force and power are also moral. For the same reason Islam regards struggle against tyranny and injustice as a sacred duty and under certain conditions makes jihad, which means armed struggle, an obligation.

It is evident that Neitzsche's view is absurd, anti-human, and decadent.

The viewpoint of Marxism is based on the supposed mechanism operative in the development of history. Contrary to it, Islam regards violent confrontation with the opposing retrogressive group as a second alternative not the first. The first alternative consists of communication through rational persuasion (*al-hikmah*) and moral preaching (*al-maw'idah*):

ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ ..

*Invite them to the path of God by appealing to reason and moral sense ....*

Confrontation with the retrogressive forces through acts of violence is morally approved only when the methods of intellectual, moral, and spiritual persuasion have been unsuccessful. That is why the prophets who waged war against their adversaries had tried initially to convey their message through persuasion and preaching and occasionally through theological debating. Only when they failed in these attempts, or could attain only partial success, they considered the path of violent confrontation, Jihad,

and acts of force as morally justifiable. The main reason of this attitude is that Islam, since its approach is spiritual not materialistic, believes in the wonderful power of rational argument, logical demonstration, and moral persuasion. Just as it believes—to use an expression of Marx—in the power of weapons for the purpose of criticism, it also believes in the power of the weapon of criticism, and makes use of it. However, Islam does not consider it the sole weapon that should be used everywhere. The fact that armed struggle against the forces of reaction is permissible in Islam only as a second alternative not the first, and the fact that Islam has a strong faith in the power of reasoning, persuasion, and moral teaching, both point towards the characteristic spiritual outlook of Islam regarding man, and, consequently, society and history.

Thus, we come to know that the relation of a school of thought with its adversaries—whether it is one of sheer persuasion or of sheer conflict, or a two-stage relation consisting firstly of persuasion and secondly of conflict—clearly reveals the faith of any school of thought in the power of logical persuasion, and moral preaching, their effectiveness and their limits, and also reveals its outlook regarding history and the role of conflict in the course of history.

Now we shall discuss the other aspect. Let us see what kind of consciousness Islam strives to awaken and what means it employs to invite people for embracing its message.

Islamic consciousness attaches foremost importance to the belief in the Divine origin and resurrection (*al-mabda' wa al-ma'ad*), This method of cultivating this consciousness has been used by the Qur'an and, according to it, also by the prophets of the past. The prophets awakened among the people the awareness of their origin and goal:

Wherefrom have you come; where have you come; to where are you bound? From where has the world emerged, which course does it pursue, and in which direction is it moving? The primary concern instilled by the prophets into people's consciousness is the concern and responsibility towards the whole creation and existence. The concern for social responsibility is only a part of the concern for responsibility towards the whole universe and being. It has been pointed out earlier that the Meccan surahs, revealed to the Prophet (S) during the first thirteen years of this mission, bring into focus little except the issues of creation and resurrection.<sup>1</sup>

The Holy Prophet (S) started his mission with the declaration:

قولوا لا إله إلا الله تفلحوا

*Say, there is no god except God, that you may be delivered.*

This was a religious movement which aimed at purifying human belief and thought. It is true that the principle of *tawhid* (Divine Unity) has many dimensions—if all teachings of Islam are analysed, they are

found to be reducible to the principle of *tawhid*; in the same way, the whole system of Islamic ideas can be constructed on this principle<sup>2</sup> but it should be noted that in the beginning this declaration was meant for no purpose except changing the current polytheistic modes of thinking and worship into monotheistic belief and worship; nor if such a comprehensive objective was upheld would it have been comprehensible for the people.

When this consciousness, whose roots go down deep into the human nature, created a feeling of enthusiasm for defending and spreading this faith in a follower, he would not hesitate to sacrifice his life, property, social position, and children for its sake. The prophets started with what in our days is called "the superstructure," working towards what is called 'the base' or 'infrastructure.' According to prophetic teachings, man is more committed to faith and ideology than to material interests. In fact, it is this faith and ideology which is the base, and labour, which is a relation with nature, natural resources or society, constitutes the superstructure.

Every religious call, in order to be effective, must be 'prophetic,' that is, it should be accompanied by persistent reminding of origin and resurrection. The prophets mobilized the society by awakening this awareness, and by cultivating this consciousness, by removing all dust from the face of human conscience and by relying on the notions of God's good pleasure, His sovereignty, His reward and retribution. In thirteen places the Qur'an makes mention of the *ridwan* (good pleasure) of God. This shows the kind of spiritual motivation employed by Islam for mobilization of the society of believers. This awareness may be called Divine or cosmic consciousness.

Of significance at the second level in Islamic teachings is man's consciousness of his humanity, and realization of the nobility and honour of man's station. In the view of Islam man is not the animal who in the beginning was like all other primates for hundreds of millions of years, who survives and has attained this stage of evolution by treacherously eliminating others in the struggle for existence.

On the contrary, he is a being who carries within him the light of Divine Spirit, before whom the angels prostrated, a being to whom are addressed calls from the Divine Throne. Despite all animal propensities toward lust, sensuality, corruption and evil, his being is endowed with a sacred spark which is essentially averse to wickedness, bloodshed, falsehood, corruption, meanness, degradation, and humiliation and which resists repression and tyranny. That spark is a manifestation of Divine honour and majesty:

.. وَلِلَّهِ الْعِزَّةُ وَلِرَسُولِهِ وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ..

**...Honor belongs to Allah and to His messengers and the believers... (63:8)**

The Prophet (S) has said:

شرف المرء قيامه بالليل و عزه استغناؤه عن الناس

*Man's nobility is in his nightlong vigils, and his honour lies in his being in no need of people.*

'Ali (A) said to his fellowmen during the Battle of Siffin:

الحياة في موتكم قاهرين و الموت في حياتكم مقهورين

*Life is to die victorious, and death is to survive in subjugation.*

Al-Husayn ib 'Ali (A) said:

لا أرى الموت إلا سعادة و الحياة مع الظالمين إلا برماً

*I can see happiness only in death, and find nothing but agony and disgust in life in the company of tyrants and oppressors.*

He also said:

هيهات منّا الذلة

*We and disgrace? How preposterous!*

All these saying rely on man's sense of honor and nobility which are inherent in human nature.

Of significance at the third level in Islamic teachings is awareness of one's social rights and responsibilities. There are several instances in the Qur'an which, by relying on the necessity of fighting for restoration for one's rights or the rights of others, use this obligation as a means of motivation and mobilization. For an example, we may refer to the following verse of *Surat al-Nisa*:

وَمَا لَكُمْ لَا تُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَالْمُسْتَضْعَفِينَ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ وَالنِّسَاءِ وَالْوِلْدَانِ  
الَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا أَخْرِجْنَا مِنْ هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةِ الظَّالِمِ أَهْلُهَا وَاجْعَل لَّنَا مِن لَّدُنكَ وَلِيًّا  
وَاجْعَل لَّنَا مِن لَّدُنكَ نَصِيرًا

***How should you not fight for the cause of Allah and of the oppressed among the men, women, and children, who say, 'Our Lord, bring us forth from this city whose people are oppressors, and appoint to us a protector from Thee, and appoint to us from Thee a helper'? (4:75)***

This verse relies on two spiritual values for motivating towards jihad. The first value is necessity of struggling in the way of God; the second, human responsibility to rescue helpless and defenceless human beings out of the clutches of oppressors. In *Surat at-Hajj*; God says:

أَذِنَ لِلَّذِينَ يُقَاتَلُونَ بِأَنَّهُمْ ظَلَمُوا وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ نَصْرِهِمْ لَقَدِيرٌ {39} الَّذِينَ أُخْرِجُوا  
مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ إِلَّا أَنْ يَقُولُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ وَلَوْلَا دَفْعُ اللَّهِ النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُمْ  
بِبَعْضٍ لَهَدَمَتْ صَوَامِعُ وَبِيَعٌ وَصَلَوَاتٌ وَمَسَاجِدُ يُذْكَرُ فِيهَا اسْمُ اللَّهِ كَثِيرًا وَلَيَنْصُرَنَّ  
اللَّهُ مَنْ يَنْصُرُهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَقَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ {40} الَّذِينَ إِنْ مَكَّنَّاهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ أَقَامُوا  
الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوُا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَمَرُوا بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَنَهَوْا عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَلِلَّهِ عَاقِبَةُ الْأُمُورِ {41}

***Sanction is given unto those who fight because they have been wronged –and surely God is able to give them victory—who were driven from their homes unjustly only because they said: 'Our Lord is Allah. ' Had it not been for Allah's repelling some men by means of others, cloisters and churches, oratories and mosques, wherein the Name of Allah is oft mentioned, would assuredly have been pulled down. Assuredly Allah helps one who helps Him—surely Allah is All-strong, Almighty—who, if We establish them in the land, establish prayers, pay the poor-due, and bid to honour and forbid dishonour. And to Allah belongs the issue of all affairs. (22:39-41)***

We notice in this verse that the sanction of jihad and defence begins with reference to the rights of those who are permitted to fight. But, at the same time, the underlying philosophy of defence is regarded as a matter over and above and more fundamental than the injustice done to certain people. This philosophy of defence is that if the believers and the faithful do not act and do not rise to wage war against unbelievers, the mosques and other places of worship, which form the heart of the spiritual life of a society, would be demolished, ruined and deserted. In *Surat al-Nisa*, the Qur'an says:

لَا يُحِبُّ اللَّهُ الْجَهْرَ بِالسُّوَاءِ مِنَ الْقَوْلِ إِلَّا مَنْ ظَلِمَ

***God likes not the utterance of harsh speech unless one has been wronged .. (4: 148)***

Evidently this is a sort of encouragement of the uprising by the oppressed. In the Qur'an after censuring the poets for their extravagantly fanciful ideas, adds:

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَذَكَرُوا اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَانْتَصَرُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا ظَلَمُوا

***"Except those who believe, do good deeds, remember Allah much and vindicate (by means of poetry) themselves after they have been wronged." ( 26:227)***

Although according to the Qur'an and the Sunnah (the conduct of the Holy Prophet) it is a grave sin to submit to tyranny and it is the duty of everyone to realize one's rights, these things have been mentioned as values having human aspect. The Qur'an does not rely on any psychic obsession nor does it excite jealousy or a carnal desire. For example it never says that such and such group is enjoying a lavish style of life, eating, drinking and making merry; why don't you take its place?

If an attempt is made to seize the property of someone, Islam does not allow the owner to keep quiet on the plea that material goods have no value. Similarly if an attempt is made to violate the honour of a person, it is the duty of that person not to take the matter lightly or keep quiet. According to a tradition, a person who is killed defending his honour or his property is to be regarded as a martyr who has laid down his life for the cause of Allah.

If Islam urges people to defend their property, that does not mean that Islam asks them to amass wealth or to be greedy. It only asks them to defend their rights. Similarly when it considers it a duty to defend one's honour, it does so because it regards chastity as the highest social value and considers man to be the custodian of it.

## **2. An Ideology's Nomenclature**

Every school of thought identifies its followers with a specific name. For example the racial theory is the distinctive mark of the adherents of that theory. When they say " We", they mean the whites. The Marxist theory is the theory of the workers. The followers of this school call themselves workers and identify themselves by this name. When they say "We", they mean workers. The Christians simply ascribe themselves to the person of Christ as if they have no doctrine nor any ideology. Their mark of identification is that they look for Christ and want to join him.

It is a characteristic of Islam that it has not chosen any racial, class, professional, local, regional or individual label to introduce its school and its followers. The adherents of this school are not known by any such designation as the Arabs, the Semites, the poor, the rich, the oppressed, the whites, the blacks, the Asians, the Easterns, the Westerns, the Muhammadans, the Qur'anians, the Qiblitites etc. None of the above names represents the real identity of the adherents of Islam.

When the question of the identity of this school and its followers arises, all these names vanish. Only one thing remains, that is the relation between man and Allah. Islam means submission to Allah. The

Muslims are an ummah that submits to Allah, to truth and to the revelation and the inspiration rising from the horizon of truth and communicated to the heart of the most worthy persons. Then what is the nature of the identity of the Muslims? What label does their religion attach to them and under what banner does it want them to assemble? The answer is Islamic submission to truth.

The criterion of unity that every school approves for its followers is a reliable means of judging its aims and objectives.

It also helps us to understand the outlook of school regarding man, society, and history.

### **3. Favourable and Unfavourable Conditions for Acceptability**

We have said earlier that different schools have different view about the mechanism of the movement of history. One school is of the opinion that the natural mechanism of this movement is the pressure of one class against another class. Another school holds that it is the friction between a reactionary class. Still another school maintains that the real mechanism should be looked for in the pure state of human nature, which is evolutionary and progressive.

Some other schools have some other opinions. Every school in its teachings enumerates such causes, conditions, obstacles and impediments of the movement of history. as are appropriate to its conception of its mechanism The school which believes that the mechanism of the movement of history is the pressure of a class against another, in order to mobilize society and bring it into motion tries to create such pressure if it does not already exist. Marx in some of his works has pointed out that the existence of a subjugated and oppressed class is absolutely necessary for the emergence of a class of free people.

At the end of his study he says: " Where does the possibility of liberation for the German nation lie? Our answer is that: We must form a class which is decisively in chains.'<sup>3</sup> Such an ideology regards reforms as an obstacle in the way of a revolution, because reforms reduce pressure and a reduction in pressure prevents the explosion or at least delays the revolution. In contrast, a school that believes that movement is an intrinsic and essential quality of society never suggests the creation of shackles for any class, for it does not regard pressure as a necessary condition of evolution, nor does it consider reforms as an obstacle in the way of progress.

What are the favourable and unfavourable conditions from the viewpoint of Islam? The Islamic interpretation of these conditions revolves around the nature of the human being. Sometimes the Qur'an stresses the condition of adherence to primordial piety (هدى للمتقين) "...guidance for the God-fearing" [2:2]). Sometimes it mentions anxiety and apprehension arising from awareness of responsibility vis-à-vis the whole system of existence as a condition (الَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُم بِالْغَيْبِ) "who fear God in the Unseen," [21:49]; or (وَحَشِيَ الرَّحْمَنَ بِالْغَيْبِ) "who fears the All-merciful in the Unseen," [36: 11]). Sometimes it mentions the condition that the God-given nature within one should have remained intact and alive: لِيُنذِرَ

مَنْ كَانَ حَيًّا “to warn him who is alive” (36:70). Thus the essential conditions according to Islam for acceptance of its call are piety, anxiety and apprehension arising out of a sense of responsibility towards the system of creation, and intact survival of one's God-given nature.

In opposition to these conditions are such spiritual and moral vices as **إِثْمُ الْقَلْبِ** “sinfulness of the heart,” (2:283); **رَيْنُ الْقَلْبِ** “rusting of the heart,” (83:14); sealing of the heart (2:7), inner blindness or loss of sight (22:46); deafness of the heart (41:44); corruption of the book of the soul (91:10); blind adherence to the practices of ancestors (43:23); personality cult or hero worship (33:63); reliance on surmise and conjecture (6:116), and so on. Extravagance, affluence, and habitual luxury are also regarded as deterrents, because they strengthen the animal qualities in man and transform him into a beast and even a predator. According to the Qur'an, these factors impede advancement towards the welfare of the society and are injurious to its development.

According to the Islamic teachings, young people as compared to the aged, and the poor as compared to the affluent, are more receptive to the teachings of Islam; since the youth due to their young age escape psychological pollution and their nature is purer; and the poor also are purer because their souls are not distorted by luxury and wealth.

These positive and negative conditions for the acceptability of Islam affirm that the mechanism of social and historical change suggested by the Qur'an is more spiritual-psychological in nature than materialistic and economic.

## 4. Rise and Fall of Societies

Every sociological school usually deals with the causes of the rise and progress of societies and reasons of their degeneration and decline. The viewpoint of a school regarding the main factors of progress or decline, indicates its approach to society and history and their movement towards development and decline.

The Holy Qur'an, especially with reference to the stories and anecdotes related to these matters, explains its view. We have to see whether the Qur'an interprets the causes of change in terms of the so-called infrastructure or in terms of the superstructure. To be more precise, we have to know what things are considered by the Qur'an as the basis and what matters are regarded as constituting the superstructure. Does the Qur'an emphasize the material and economic factors as being basic, or does it attach basic importance to matters pertaining to faith and morality? Or does it consider all the factors combined together responsible for the rise and fall of a society without giving priority to anyone of them?

The Qur'an, on the whole, enumerates four factors influencing the rise and fall of a society. In passing, I will give a brief account of these factors.

## A. Justice and Injustice

This notion finds reflection in many verses of the Qur'an. One of them is the fourth verse of *Surat al-Qasas*, which I have already quoted in the context of the 'verse of oppression':

إِنَّ فِرْعَوْنَ عَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَجَعَلَ أَهْلَهَا شِيَعًا يَسْتَضِعُّ طَائِفَةً مِنْهُمْ يَذِبحُ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ  
وَيَسْتَحْيِي نِسَاءَهُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ مِنَ الْمُفْسِدِينَ

***Verily Pharaoh exalted himself in the land and divided its inhabitants into castes, oppressing one party of them, slaughtering their sons, and sparing their women. Verily, he was of those who work corruption. (28:4)***

This holy verse first describes Pharaoh's lust for power and superiority and his claim to divinity, which led him to treat others as slaves. His policy of discrimination had divided them into mutually conflicting groups. He had humiliated a particular group of his people, killing their sons and sparing their women (for serving Pharaoh and his clique). The Qur'an mentions him as a 'mufsid' (one who corrupts). Evidently the sentence 'Verily, he was of those who corrupt,' is intended to condemn such offences against society which demolish its very foundations.

## B. Unity and Disunity

In the *Surat Al 'Imran*, the verse 103 lays down a clear command to unite on the basis of faith and to hold on to the bond of God, and prohibits disunity and division. In a following verse (3: 105) the believers are asked again not to behave like their predecessors [Jews and Christians] who quarrelled with one another and divided. Quite similar to it is the verse 153 in *Surat al-'An 'am*. In the same surah, verse 65 states:

قُلْ هُوَ الْقَادِرُ عَلَى أَنْ يَبْعَثَ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابًا مِّنْ فَوْقِكُمْ أَوْ مِنْ تَحْتِ أَرْجُلِكُمْ أَوْ  
يَلْبِسَكُمْ شِيَعًا وَيُذِيقَ بَعْضَكُمْ بَأْسَ بَعْضٍ..

***Say, He is able to send forth upon you chastisement, from above you or from under your feet, or to confuse you in sects and make you taste the violence of one another...(6:65)***

In the *Surat al-'Anfal*, the verse 46 declares:

.. وَلَا تَنَازَعُوا فَتَفْشَلُوا وَتَذْهَبَ رِيحُكُمْ..

*...Do not quarrel with one another for then you will be weak and your power will depart from you... (8:46)*

### **C. Practice or Neglect of the Principle of al-‘Amr bi al-Ma’ruf wa al-Nahy ‘an al-Munkar**

The Qur’an puts great emphasis on the duty of *al-‘Amr bi al-Ma’ruf wa al-Nahy ‘an al-Munkar* (enjoining right conduct and forbidding indecency). An evident inference that may be drawn from one of its verses is that negligence of this great duty on the part of a nation ultimately results in its destruction and doom. This is verse 79 in *Surat al-Ma’idah* which explains that one of the reasons for the denial of Divine mercy and compassion to the infidels of Bani Israel was their nonobservance of the duty to prohibit others from vices:

كَانُوا لَا يَتَنَاهَوْنَ عَنِ مُنْكَرٍ فَعَلُوهُ لَبِئْسَ مَا كَانُوا يَفْعَلُونَ

*They forbade not one another any dishonor they committed; surely evil were the things they did. (5:79).*

In reliable Islamic traditions there are ample references to the advantages of observance and perils of abandonment of the duty of enjoining right conduct and forbidding indecency. However, we abstain from quoting them here for the sake of brevity.

### **D. Moral Corruption and Degeneration**

There are various verses in the Qur’an in this context also. In a series of verses luxury and opulence are regarded to be the cause of destruction and ruin.<sup>4</sup> There are also a number of verses in which the word "zulm" (cruelty, injustice, oppression, tyranny) occurs. In Qur’anic terminology this word does not specifically mean violation of the rights of an individual or group by other individual or group. It also includes injustice to one’s own self<sup>5</sup>, as well as injustice of a nation to itself. Actually the word *zulm* is used in the Qur’an in a general sense.

Any kind of deviation from the right path of humanness is injustice, and includes all acts of injustice to others as well as all acts of impropriety, corruption, perversion and immorality. This word is more often used in the Qur’an in the second sense (i.e., moral deviation). Such verses which consider *zulm* in its general sense as the main cause of destruction and ruin of nations are very numerous. It is beyond the scope of the present work to discuss them here.

Taking in view all these criteria as a whole, we can grasp the view of the Qur’an regarding the basis of society and that of history. The Qur’an allots a decisive and determining role to most of the factors which

some consider as superstructural.

- 
1. Translator's Note: Martyr Mutahhari could not complete this book as he had originally planned. There is no such heading in the present edition of the book. See note No. 21 below.
  2. Certain so-called Muslim intellectuals, in a number of commentaries they have written on various Surahs in the Qur'an, totally deny the presence of even a single verse in the Qur'an dealing with resurrection. They say that wherever the word "dunya" (the present world) occurs in the Qur'an it always refers to the lower level of social existence, i.e. the system of discrimination, inequality, and exploitation, and wherever the word "akhirah" (the Hereafter) occurs, it means a "superior system of social existence," a system which permits no exploitation and discrimination, and which abolishes the institution of private property. If this meaning of "akhirah" is to be accepted, it means that the Qur'an, a thousand years before the emergence of Marx's materialist philosophy, announce the death of religion and closed its file.
  3. 'Allamah Tabatabai, al-Mizan, see the commentary on the last verse of Surat Al-Imran.
  4. Andre Peter, op. cit., p. 35 (the text and the footnote). Here we come to know that the viewpoint of Marxism which holds that only the acts of violence of the oppressed class are moral, because they accelerate the course of social evolution, while the same kind of acts by the oppressing class are immoral, because they cause stagnation, is not defensible. It means that, in accordance with the views of this school, the exercise of pressure by the oppressors is as moral and effective in the course of social evolution as violence by the oppressed. The only difference between them being with regard to their orientation: one is directed towards the past and the other towards the future – not with regard to their effective role in social development. Evidently the retrogressive or progressive orientation cannot solely determine the morality or immorality of an act, without considering the motivate behind the act, for judging its morality, and such a position, in the view of Marxism, amounts to a kind of idealism.

---

**Source URL:**

<https://www.al-islam.org/society-and-history-ayatullah-murtadha-mutahhari/islams-philosophy-history>