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## Religious Boundaries of Moral Responsibility and Its Impact on Pure Life

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### ABSTRACT

Human's moral responsibility can be depicted towards God, self, others and the environment. The desirable life of every human being in the various dimensions mentioned above will definitely be affected by the level of his awareness and adherence to his moral responsibility. This article tries to explain a part of this broad topic in the form of religious boundaries of moral responsibility and its impact on Pure Life. To explore the intricate relationship between moral responsibility and 'Pure Life' within Islamic teachings, this study employs a qualitative analysis of historical texts, contemporary scholarly interpretations, and theological discourses. The analysis is structured to identify core themes, delineate ethical boundaries, and elucidate the impact of these boundaries on personal and societal well-being. In this article, the most important boundaries of human moral responsibility and its impact on pure life have been explained through literature review of religious texts and scholarly articles. From the collection of documents and evidences, it has been concluded that the influencing factors in human moral responsibility are not outside the three factors related to the action, the effects of the action, and the moral agent. Among the factors mentioned, the factors related to the moral agent are more important in order to have a greater impact on Pure Life, and among the factors related to the moral agent, the factors related to maturity, power, knowledge, social status, and repetition of the bad act are more prominent in islamic teachings.

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## Introduction

The importance of ethics in religion and its effect on regulating a desirable life is something that has always been emphasized by theologians and religious scholars. Ethical teachings form a large part of religious texts and divine books. The extensive call of the Holy Qur'an to refine the soul and achieve high human values indicates the place of the category of ethics among the goals of religion. The famous hadith of the Prophet of Islam, peace be upon him, who said: "Indeed, my mission is to perfect and complete morality" (Majlisī, 1980: vol. 68, p. 373). According to ethics, moral responsibility and its influencing factors have always been a continuous concern of human society since long ago; Because pure life in the individual and social dimension is directly affected by it, and a person seeking a good life always needs it. This article tries to explain a part of this broad topic in the form of religious boundaries of moral responsibility and its impact on Pure Life, and while stating the theoretical foundations and background of the discussion, some of the most important factors influencing moral responsibility from the perspective of Islam will be discussed.

To explore the intricate relationship between moral responsibility and 'Pure Life' within Islamic teachings, this study employs a qualitative analysis of historical texts, contemporary scholarly interpretations, and theological discourses. Sources were meticulously selected for their relevance and authority in the field, ensuring a robust synthesis of perspectives. The analysis is structured to identify core themes, delineate ethical boundaries, and elucidate the impact of these boundaries on personal and societal well-being.

The main question here is: What are the Religious Boundaries of Moral Responsibility and Its Impact on Pure Life?

## Theoretical Foundations and Research Background

Religious perspectives assert the inherent value of 'existence,' which varies among creatures and influences their respective existential responsibilities. This value, endowed by divine decree, underscores the variable nature of moral accountability, influenced by human actions and their alignment with divine indications. Islamic teachings further differentiate responsibilities based on knowledge levels, distinguishing between the obligations of scholars and laypeople. This distinction extends to the treatment of animals, where moral responsibilities vary between domesticated and wild species, as well as between pests and non-pests.

The word "responsibility" in the dictionary means "duties, that a person is responsible for". (Dictionary of Elm-Alosol: 2011, vol. 1, p. 5•2) However, in the term, some have considered moral responsibility to mean the ability to be praised and condemned socially. (Strawson: 1962, p, 1-25) Some others define moral responsibility as the ability to explain and interpret a behavior or a trait (John Martin Fisher. 2002, v. 110, no 1, p, 95) and some have interpreted it as a person's responsibility, when he can freely choose his goals and act accordingly, and they have said that only in this case He will be responsible for his actions. (ibid: p.95)

Other meanings have also been stated for moral responsibility; Such as "being subject to punishment" or "responsibility before God, the result of which is punishment in the afterlife. (Sharīfī: 2006, p. 120. Deylamī: 2000, p. 74)

However, it can be said that the aforementioned definitions are a way of expressing the consequences of moral responsibility. It is possible to define moral responsibility and distinguish it from other human responsibilities, such as legal or religious responsibility, according to the origin and purpose of responsibility. The source of moral responsibility is moral rules or duties, and its purpose is to guide humans to perfection, therefore, moral responsibility is different from legal responsibility, which originates from laws and whose purpose is to establish social order. Also, Shari'a responsibility, whose source is Shari'a rulings is not the same as moral responsibility.

The general presuppositions of duty, i.e. maturity, reason, power, and authority, are also the condition of moral responsibility, but there is a difference in whether knowledge and awareness are among the presuppositions of duty or not.

According to the Ash'arite belief, knowledge is one of the general conditions of obligation (Taklif), and one who is not knowledgeable is not actually obligated, and on this basis, they consider God's decrees to be exclusive to knowledgeable. (Mutahharī, 2021: Volume 1, p 91).

However, the Imamiyyah do not consider knowledge as one of the primary and general conditions of obligation (Taklif), but they believe that the real rules are common between the scholar and the ignorant, and ignorance and knowledge are only involved in the actuality of obligation (Taklif). (ibid: p.92)

Therefore, if someone is aware of the obligation, the obligation will be fulfilled for him, and opposing it will bring punishment for him. Also, the ignorant person is guilty as well as the knowledgeable. (Dictionary of Elm-Alosol: vol. 1, p. 512)

Of course, according to some, moral responsibility is realized with the two conditions of awareness and intention, and some Western researchers have considered belief as one of the conditions of moral responsibility. Considering the forms of philosophical determinism, these researchers wanted to make moral responsibility conditional on conditions that would stand even if determinism is proven. (Lawrence Becker: p. 110-97)

Certainly, the meaning of some general conditions of duty such as maturity can be different in moral responsibility; This means that in moral responsibility, maturity has its meaning. That is, it can be assumed that it is a moral responsibility while physical maturity in the legal sense has not been achieved, so it is possible to carry the moral duty even for children and teenagers, to the extent that they have the necessary awareness and motivation.

As a result, and based on the said content, moral responsibility is based on moral duties. Because responsibility is always equal to duty. The origin of moral duties or obligations comes from the real relationship between human action and the goal that is achieved by performing that action.

Indeed, responsibility is reasonable where the responsible person has a duty and responsibility in the matter in question. Moral responsibility from a religious perspective is based on presuppositions; Such as moral realism, divine worldview, discretion, maturity, science, power, and human intention. The presence or absence of some of these conditions or their severity and weakness can affect the presence or absence or at least the level of moral responsibility of a person.

- Moral Responsibility: The obligation to act righteously based on moral standards, often influenced by religious teachings.
- Pure Life: A concept within Islamic philosophy referring to a life led in accordance with divine commands and ethical purity.
- Moral Action: A moral action is a behavior or decision that aligns with ethical principles and values, reflecting a sense of right and wrong. It involves acting with integrity, compassion, and consideration for the well-being of others.
- Moral Agent: A moral agent is an individual capable of making ethical decisions and being held accountable for their actions. They possess the ability to discern right from wrong and act accordingly, guided by moral principles.
- Religious Boundaries: Religious boundaries are the distinctions that define the beliefs, practices, and identities of different faiths. They delineate the cultural and doctrinal limits that separate one religion from another, influencing social and spiritual interactions

The discussion of moral responsibility can be seen in the very old discussions of "duty and obligation".

Socrates (about 399-470 BC), the father of moral philosophy, at the beginning of Crito's treatise, while presenting a mysterious story, portrays the duty and responsibility of a person before the laws (The Course of Plato's Works: Vol. 1, p. 61).

Cicero (106-43 BC), the famous Greek philosopher, in his last book called "On Duties" wants to provide a conceptual framework so that everyone can analyze who they are and what action is required of them. (Roman moral philosophy: p. 107-117)

Some medieval philosophers, including Augustine (354-430 AD) in the book "Ethics of the Catholic Church" and Aquinas (1274-1225 AD) in the book "Collection of Theology" advocated a kind of duty-based approach to responsibility while discussing duties.

In the middle of the first century of Hijri, Muslims discussed this issue in the topics of predestination and free will. (Mutahharī, 2021: Vol. 1, p. 41)

With a quick look at the academic database such a Google scholar, it is clear that the collection of books and articles written on the subject of moral responsibility is wide in general. Civil, legal, and moral responsibility towards individuals, trades, and even organizations has been considered in these works. For example, "Human Responsibilities in Ayatollah Meṣbāḥ-Yazdī and Søren Kierkegaard

Ethical Thought: A Comparative Study” and “the etical responsibility in the Quran and Hadith” are among these books that have tried to explain the moral responsibility by using Quran and Hadith or by matching between Islamic and Western viewpoints.

In most of these works, the factors affecting moral responsibility have also been considered, but what seems to have received less attention is human responsibility, focusing on the moral agent. For this reason, this article intends to deal with the important factors affecting moral responsibility, including the states of the moral agent, by using religious teachings, especially Islamic texts.

The importance of this article is that an important part of ethics, which is individual ethics, and its purpose is self-improvement and spiritual excellence of the moral agent, can be affected by these topics and, in turn, be effective in reforming social ethics and pure life.

### Conditions of Moral Responsibility

If you throw a stone at a dangerous animal with the intention of defending yourself and the stone accidentally hits a person's head and injures him, although you are legally responsible and must pay damages to that person, but morally You are not responsible; Because when you threw the stone, you did not intend to hit that person.

So, as mentioned in the introduction of the discussion, intention" is a condition of moral responsibility; Because without intention, there is no possibility of moral evaluation of the act.

A person has moral responsibility when, in addition to moral maturity, he is aware of his responsibility for his behavior and its consequences, or at least the possibility of acquiring awareness is available for him.

The adverb of "possibility of learning", on the one hand, excludes those who do not have mental and intellectual health from the scope of moral responsibility, and on the other hand, individuals or groups who have deprived themselves of knowledge through neglect enter this circle and are considered responsible. (Aristotle, 1988 p. 63)

Also, a person is responsible for his duties if he is capable of it. No one blames a person who does not have financial means for not spending, and no sane person expects education from an illiterate person. Because everyone believes that duties should be defined according to power. Philosophers and theologians have considered this condition as one of the self-evident matters, as well as the assignment of the impossible as examples of injustice and injustice. (Subhānī, 2014, Vol. 1: 301)

The Qur'an also says: "God does not charge anyone except according to his ability." (Qur'ān, 2:286)

However, the possibility of acquiring power as an optional act, during the act or before it, is also sufficient for the realization of human moral responsibility. For example, man not only has the duty to defend his land and honor, but preparing everything necessary for this defense is one of his duties and he is responsible for all those things. According to this point, the Qur'an says: Mobilize as much as you can from the ready forces and horses. (Qur'ān, 8:60)

Authority or freedom (Ekhtiar) is another condition of moral responsibility. Ekhtiar in the word means to choose, to like, to have freedom and control in a work or matter, and in the term, it is a state or attribute in a human being, due to which he gives priority to some work over others. (Amid) When a person's freedom and choice are taken away, he will not be responsible for his actions or omissions and the consequences of his actions or omissions.

According to the opinion of the majority of Muslim thinkers, the power to make decisions and choose is one of the most certain things that can be recognized by a human being, and every human being with an infallible present knowledge finds that he has authority. (Subhānī, 2014, Vol. 1: 303)

Of course, there are doubts about human freedom, in which the influence of factors such as "society, environment and heredity" on human behavior, by adhering to some philosophical rules, has caused some thinkers to consider man as forced in his actions, and as a result, not responsible, which others denied these claims (Rajabī, 2000: p. 145). Of course, this article deals with moral responsibility and its factors with the assumption of the free will of man.

According to Martin Fisher in the book “Responsibility and Control”, moral responsibility is not from the category of "all" or "nothing", but different levels of moral responsibility can be considered for people according to the availability of backgrounds, talents, and individual and social conditions.

According to him, the moral responsibility of man is of several types; Moral responsibility for the action, for neglecting or abandoning the action, and moral responsibility for the consequences and results of the action or abandoning it. (Habībī, 2014: 46)

According to Islamic teachings, moral responsibility includes human beliefs in addition to actions, omissions, and firm and stable mental states (properties). Many verses in the Qur'an support this claim; Verse 36 of Surah Al-Isra, 283 of Baqarah, 12 of Hujrat, 4 of Tahrim, 9 of Hashar, 66 of Yunus, 14 of Naml, 19 of Noor, 154 of Aal-i-Imran and 5 of Ahzab are examples of these verses.

Verse 284 of Surah Al-Baqarah says: "Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth belongs to God. And if you reveal or hide what is in your hearts, God will judge you accordingly; Then He forgives whom He wills, and punishes whom He wills, and God has power over all things. Due to the use of the phrase " what is in your hearts " it is considered to be related to esoteric deeds and due to the word "God will judge you accordingly " the calculation or non-calculation of these deeds has been accepted.

Therefore, from a moral point of view, just as a person is obliged to perform a good external (Zaheri) action or to leave an unpleasant external act, he also has a duty to cultivate a pleasant state in his soul or free his soul from the clutches of an ugly state such as jealousy. Also, he is morally obliged to observe certain moral norms in the process of forming his beliefs.

Therefore, from a religious point of view, for example, he has no right to believe about someone through the news of a wicked person. (Qur'ān, 49:6) Because the goal of Islam is to ensure a pure human life by drawing boundaries of moral responsibility for humanity. These boundaries, which are set based on the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH) and the Ahlul Bayt (AS), act as a guide for individual and social behavior and enhance human life in various dimensions.

With this statement, it became clear that according to Islamic texts, human moral responsibility is quantitatively and qualitatively affected by factors that can be divided into the following three parts in a general category:

- The factor related to the characteristics of the deed.
- The factor resulting from the consequences of the deed.
- The factor responsible for the moral agent.

### **Factors of Moral Responsibility**

As mentioned, the factors of responsibility can be divided into three parts: the factors related to the action, the consequence of the action, and the moral agent. By looking at the transition from the first two factors, this article tries to focus on the third factor.

#### **1. Moral Responsibility and Characteristics of Action**

Based on the theory of "Inherent beauty and ugliness of actions", the responsibility of the person who commits a minor sin is definitely not the same as the one who commits a major sin. The Qur'an says in Surah Nisa: "If you avoid the big sins that you are forbidden from, we will cover your small sins" (Qur'ān, 4:31). It has been repeatedly stated in religious traditions that there is no sin higher than polytheism. "The injustice that cannot be forgiven is associating partners with God. (Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 176)

#### **2. Moral Responsibility and the Consequences of Action**

It can be said that based on religious evidence and the themes of hadiths, the one who creates a tradition of justice will be rewarded the same as the reward of those who follow that tradition. Also, if someone sets an oppressive tradition, as long as the following of that oppressive tradition continues, he will be guilty of the sin of those who practice it and will be punished. (Hurr Āmilī, 1990: vol. 11 p. 437, vol. 16 p. 174);

Therefore, the moral responsibility of a person whose actions cause one person to go astray is not the same as the one who misleads a nation. Man is not only responsible for the direct results of his actions, but also for the results through his actions. Therefore, the results of a human's voluntary actions, even though they are created through several intermediaries, affect the amount of his moral responsibility.

### 3. Factors Related to the Moral Agent

The factors related to the moral agent, especially the emotional states of the agent, if they are considered along with other factors, i.e., the factor that observes the characteristics of the action and the factor arising from the results and consequences of the action, they can give a double factor to the moral responsibility of a person or reduce the burden of a person's responsibility.

The most important factors related to the moral agent can be drawn as follows:

#### 1. Puberty

Duty and then moral responsibility belong to someone who has reached the age of maturity. But moral maturity is different from religious maturity.

From a moral point of view, if the moral agent is able to distinguish between good and bad, he is obligated to it and has a moral responsibility towards it, even if he has not reached the age of religious maturity.

The narrations that allow the punishment of a child before puberty for the purpose of education are proof of this claim. For example, it has been narrated from the Messenger of God that he said:

Make your young children familiar with prayer and ablution, and when they reach the age of ten, spank them for laziness and negligence in prayer, but do not exceed three strokes. (Warrām, 1990: p. 358)

#### 2. The Power

The moral responsibility of every human being should be measured according to his ability because God does not hold anyone accountable except to the extent of his ability.

And Imam Sadiq (a.s.) says: "Servants have not been commanded except for less than their ability. Therefore, whatever people are assigned to do, they have the ability to do it, and what is not within their ability, has been taken from them." (Subḥānī, 2014, Vol. 1: 303)

But sometimes, due to internal or external conditions, a person cannot use all his strength to do something; that is, his freedom and choice are limited in certain conditions. or he does not act according to the requirements of his knowledge or power in certain circumstances, in such circumstances his moral responsibility is also determined in the same scope and according to the same special circumstances. (Ḥabībī, 2014: 46)

#### 3. The Knowledge

The greater the knowledge of the moral agent, the greater his moral responsibility. Imam Sadiq (a.s.) said: "Before one sin is forgiven of a scholar, seventy sins of the ignorant are forgiven". (Muḥammadī Riyshahrī, 2002: Vol. 2, p. 1078)

Knowledge does not have to be actual, but if a person can acquire the necessary knowledge to doing a duty, he will be responsible for performing that task.

#### 4. The Social Status of the Moral Agent.

In the Quran, chapter Surah Al-Ahzab, we read that: "O wives of the Prophet! Whoever among you commits an open deed (and sin), her punishment will be doubled and this is easy for God.

And it's been narrated: "Before one sin is forgiven of a scholar, seventy sins of the ignorant are forgiven". (Hurr Āmilī, 1990: vol. 11 p. 437, vol. 16 p. 174);

Also in the narrations: "A scholar's repentance will not be accepted in some stages, then he referred to this verse; ": Repentance is only for those who do bad things out of ignorance." (ibid)

In a hadith from Imam Sajjad (peace be upon him), we read that: "Someone said to the Imam: You are a family that God has included in His forgiveness." (Muḥammadī Riyshahrī, 2002: p. 944, h. 6618)

The Imam became angry and said: We deserve what God has done for the wives of the Prophet (peace and blessings of God be upon him), not as you say, we have two rewards for our good deeds and two punishments for our evildoers. And we believe in punishment, then he recited two verses 30 and 31 of Surah Al-Ahzab as a witness." (Ṭabrisī, 1991: vol. 8, p. 354)

### 5. Repetition of the Indecent Act and Insistence on it.

It is mentioned in our narrations that during the time of the Messenger of God (peace and blessings of God be upon him), a person used to steal shrouds from the graves of the dead. In one of these robberies, he tore open the grave of an Ansari girl who had just passed away. When he removed the shroud from her body, with the temptation of the devil, he committed adultery, in addition to the grave desecration and theft. Then he repented and came to the Messenger of God (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and told the story again. The Messenger of God (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) drove him away. He also left the people and worshiped in the mountains of Medina. until God Almighty accepted his repentance and this verse was revealed:

"And those who remember God and seek forgiveness for their sins when they commit an abominable act or wrong themselves, God forgives them, and who forgives sins but God? And they do not insist on what they have committed even though they know it is a sin. » (Qur'ān, 3:135)

The phrase ". . . They don't insist" is used in this verse that consciously insisting on sin increases the responsibility of a person and is more dangerous for his destiny. (Ṭabāṭabāyī, 1981: Vol. 4, p. 24; Qarā'atī, 1995: Vol. 2, p. 182)

In another narration from Imam Ali, peace be upon him, it is stated that a sinner's insistence on his sin is the highest sin in the eyes of God. (Muḥammadī Riyshahrī, 2002: p. 944, h. 6618)

### 6. Underestimating the Detestable Act

The moral actor's belief, which is one of his inner actions, can affect his moral responsibility.

It has been narrated from Amir al-Mu'minan Ali (peace be upon him): "The worst sin is the sin that the sinner considers light. (Nahj al-Balagha: Hikmat 477 and 348)

It is well understood from the content of this narrative that this subjective characteristic of the agent directly affects his moral responsibility.

### 7. Public Wrongdoing (public sin)

Public wrongdoing is to sin openly and in front of others. (Ibn Manzūr, 1995: Vol. 4, p. 150) for which the Holy Qur'an has promised punishment in Surah Noor: "Those who like to spread ugliness among people with faith, for them is a painful punishment in this world and the hereafter, and God knows. And you do not know" (Qur'ān, 24:19)

One of the effects of this work is the loss of some of the rights of the sinner, which reduces the moral responsibility of others in the same proportion. For this reason, it has been said that Sadat's share of Khums should not be given to a Sayyid who openly sins. (Imām Khumeynī, 1995: Vol. 1, p. 365)

They asked Luqman Hakim: Who is the worst person? He replied: The one who does not fear that people will see him doing bad things (committing sins). (Majlisī, 1980: Vol. 13, p. 421, h. 16)

### 8. Pleasure from Sin

Commander of the Faithful Ali (peace be upon him) says:

" You have done ugly things! Don't laugh laod and whoever has sinned should not consider himself safe from God's punishment." (Kulaynī, 2009: Vol. 2, p. 269, h. 5).

In another hadith, he says: Being happy about sins is uglier than committing them. (Āmidī, 2015: H. 10762, 10705 and 8823.)

Perhaps it can be said that having good feelings after committing evil deeds and being happy with them, for the reason that it keeps the sinner away from repentance, causes aggravation of moral responsibility.

### 9. Doing Bad Things and Pretending to be Good

Ali (peace be upon him) said in a warning to one of his companions:

"Be careful not to present yourself in the eyes of people and appear in the presence of God with a sin, because God will disgrace you on the day you meet him." (Sadūq, 2009, p. 278, H. 308)

All these religious boundaries and moral responsibilities in Islamic traditions can be introduced as a divine framework for a healthy and balanced life. Adhering to these principles not only enhances individual life but also drives Islamic society toward justice, ethics, and closeness to God.

Although all boundaries of moral responsibility—whether pertaining to outward actions or inward states—play a role in improving human life, Islam’s strong emphasis on nurturing a sound soul for cultivating virtuous morals, self-purification, self-discipline, and inner cleansing from moral vices—along with its exhortation to worship and connect with God to attain tranquility (Qur’ān, Surah Ar-Ra’d, 13:28)—demonstrates the greater effectiveness of religious moral boundaries in enhancing human life. This is further supported by the words of Imam Ali (AS), who said: "Discipline your soul by abandoning sins, for the discipline of the soul is the foundation of wisdom." (Āmidī, 2015: H. 1072).

In this table, we will examine and summerise factors affecting human moral responsibility and the their ramifications.

**Table 1. Factors Affecting Human Moral Responsibility**

Table 1: Factors Affecting Human Moral Responsibility			
Leaving it despite the necessity of the action		The verb is inherently good	Factors related to moral action
Doing it without an excuse		Inherently bad verb	
To do or leave it		neutral verb	
It has a direct effect on the level of moral responsibility		Negative consequences Direct and indirect	Factors relatedto the consequences of the verb
The social status of the moral agent		social	Factors related to the moral agent
Repetition of the abominable action and insistence on it by the moral agent	external	Individual	
Underestimating the unseemly action on the part of the moral agent			
guilty pleasure			
Doing evil and pretending to be good			
maturity (which is different from religious maturity)	internal		
The power or ability to acquire the necessary power to perform the action			
Knowledge or the possibility of acquiring knowledge on the part of the moral agent			
to do evil openly (Public sin of the moral agent) if it is not for the sake of practice			

## Conclusion

From all the religious propositions used in this article, it can be concluded that the factors related to the moral attributes or actions resulting from the moral attributes of the moral agent have a double role in his moral responsibility.

Although, the factors related to the act or the consequences of the act, are effective as a kind of boundary in the moral responsibility of man, definitely the factors related to the moral agent, especially the factors that are related to the inner affairs of man, have a greater effect on the quality and quantity of the moral responsibility of man; Therefore, the importance of morality and self-improvement, which has been emphasized by all religions, will be better clarified.

The influence of each of the mentioned factors on moral responsibility independently or in combination, the different explanations of moral maturity from jurisprudential maturity, and the influence of “the degree of adherence of the moral agent” on the meaningfulness of his life can be other results of this article.



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