



## **From Islamization to Ethicalization: Ethics, Knowledge, and the Reconstruction of Social Sciences**

**اسلامائزیشن سے اخلاقی تشکیل تک: اخلاقیات، علم اور سماجی علوم کی تشکیل جدید**

**Dr. Muhammad Rashid<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract**

The project of Islamization of Knowledge emerged in the late twentieth century as a critical response to the epistemic dominance of Western social sciences and their claim to value-neutrality. While this project successfully exposed the moral and metaphysical assumptions embedded within modern knowledge, it increasingly encountered conceptual resistance due to its perceived ideological framing. This article argues that the contemporary crisis of the social sciences marked by ethical fragmentation, normative ambiguity, and epistemic disorientation calls for a conceptual rearticulation of this project in the form of ethicalization. Rather than abandoning the foundational insights of Islamization, the article presents ethicalization as its epistemic maturation. Ethicalization reframes the reform of social knowledge around the inseparability of facts and values, foregrounding ethics as constitutive of inquiry rather than an external supplement. Drawing upon Islamic moral anthropology and the integrated roles of revelation, reason, and experience, the study demonstrates how ethical commitments shape social categories, methodologies, and interpretive frameworks. By situating ethicalization within broader debates in social theory, sociology of knowledge, and post-positivist methodology, the article positions it as a globally relevant framework capable of reconstructing the social sciences without recourse to ideological closure or civilizational imitation. The study concludes that ethicalization offers a coherent and intellectually responsible path toward restoring moral purpose to social knowledge in both Muslim and non-Muslim contexts.

<sup>1</sup> HOD, Department of Islamic Studies, Shifa Tameer-e-Millat University, Islamabad, Pakistan, [rashid.fssh@stmu.edu.pk](mailto:rashid.fssh@stmu.edu.pk)

**Keywords:** Ethicalization of Knowledge; Islamization of Knowledge; Normativity in Social Sciences; Sociology of Knowledge; Islamic Moral Thought; Value-Neutrality; Knowledge and Ethics

## **1. Introduction: The Crisis of Ethics in Modern Social Knowledge**

### **1.1 The Claim of Value-Neutrality and Its Discontents**

Enlightenment rationality and positivist epistemology both shaped the emergence of the modern social sciences. Both rationales posited that the social sciences should model themselves after the natural sciences. A central tenet of this is the notion of value-neutrality: the view that social inquiry can provide objective descriptions of social reality independent of commitment to moral, metaphysical, or theological positions. Max Weber's distinction between facts and values (Sein and Sollen) is central to this orientation and provides a foundation for disciplinary norms in fields of sociology, economics, and political science.<sup>2</sup>

Criticism of the claim of value-neutrality has come from within social theory. Researchers have demonstrated that social concepts—such as rationality, progress, autonomy, development, and rights are not neutral descriptions, but rather are normatively laden categories that arise out of particular historical and moral traditions.<sup>34</sup> Increasingly, researchers have recognized that the social sciences are normatively structured, whether they admit such structuring or not.

### **1.2 Ethical Fragmentation and the Limits of Positivist Social Science**

Excluding ethics from the core of social inquiry has contributed to the fragmentation of ethics. Social problems are increasingly being framed in technical, procedural, or statistical terms, leaving questions of moral purpose, responsibility, and the good life to the realm of private belief and policy debate, and not to the realm of scholarly analysis.<sup>5</sup>

Post-positivist and interpretive traditions have sought to address the deficit of ethics in social science inquiry through emphasis on meaning, power, discourse, and context. However,

---

<sup>2</sup>Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (New York: Free Press, 1949).

<sup>3</sup>Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

<sup>4</sup>Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

<sup>5</sup>Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985).

even these approaches are hesitant to frame substantial moral visions, instead relying on procedural or relativistic ethics that do not possess metaphysical grounding.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, social sciences swing back and forth between positivist reductionism and postmodern skepticism, each providing little, if any, coherent account of ethical responsibility in knowledge production.

### **1.3 Islamization of Knowledge as an Ethical Critique of Modern Social Sciences**

Within the broader crisis of modern knowledge, the project of Islamization of Knowledge (IoK), initiated by thinkers like Ismail Raji al-Faruqi and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, emerged in the late twentieth century. Al-Faruqi and al-Attas contended that modern disciplines were not simply empirically deficient, but also ethically and metaphysically limited. Specifically, they claimed that the exclusion of revelation and moral purpose resulted in forms of knowledge that lacked connection to ultimate meaning and human responsibility.<sup>78</sup>

Unlike some other critiques of modern knowledge, IoK did not reject empirical inquiry or rational analysis. Instead, it sought to reunify knowledge into a single moral and metaphysical vision based on *tawhīd* whereby truth, value, and purpose are indistinguishable. In this way, Islamization served fundamentally as an ethical critique of modern epistemology, even when expressed in civilizational or religious terms.

### **1.4 From Islamization to Ethicalization: Framing the Central Argument**

Although intellectually productive, the term Islamization has, however, most often been interpreted in contemporary academia as ideologically or confessionally charged, thereby concealing its deeper epistemological concerns. This article argues that the main contribution of Islamization is not its civilizational label, but rather its contention that knowledge is ethically constructed. Reformulating the project as ethicalization allows its insights to be articulated in a more conceptually broad and accessible global context.

Ethicalization, as defined in this research, represents the transformation of social sciences through the acknowledgment of ethics as a constitutive part of inquiry. Ethicalization does not advocate the application of a singular moral code, nor does it dismiss scholarly rigor. Instead,

---

<sup>6</sup>Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

<sup>7</sup>Isma‘il Raji al-Faruqi, *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan* (Herndon, VA: IIIT, 1982).

<sup>8</sup>Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993).

it advocates for epistemic honesty regarding the moral commitments implicit in social knowledge and their critical reconstruction through coherent ethical frameworks — among which, Islamic moral reasoning presents a particularly rich and systemic source of ethical frameworks.

This reframing serves as the foundation for the methodological framework outlined in the next section, which demonstrates how ethicalization may serve as a legitimate form of social scientific inquiry, rather than an outside moral critique.

## 1.5 Literature Review

The literature relevant to this article's argument converges from several distinct directions. The first is the Islamization of Knowledge movement itself. Al-Faruqi's foundational statement identified the separation of knowledge from moral purpose as the central problem confronting the modern disciplines.<sup>9</sup> Al-Attas, writing in the same period, located this problem more precisely in the conceptual confusion introduced by the uncritical adoption of secular categories into Islamic thought.<sup>10</sup> Together, their statements established the terms of the critique this article builds upon, even as the movement's subsequent institutional reception was often reduced to curricular additions of Islamic content rather than the deeper epistemic reconstruction its founders intended.

A second body of literature is the sociology of knowledge, which supplies the theoretical warrant for treating knowledge claims as socially and morally situated rather than neutral. Mannheim's early formulation of the relationship between social position and epistemic perspective demonstrated that no vantage point in the study of society is free of social conditioning.<sup>11</sup> Berger and Luckmann extended this insight by showing how social reality itself is continuously produced through processes of institutionalization and legitimation.<sup>12</sup> Together, these works establish that no knowledge system including the social sciences stands outside the historical and moral conditions of its production.

---

<sup>9</sup>Isma‘il Raji al-Faruqi, *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan* (Herndon, VA: IIIT, 1982).

<sup>10</sup>Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993).

<sup>11</sup>Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (London: Routledge, 1936).

<sup>12</sup>Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966).

A third and closely related body of work is the post-positivist critique of value-neutrality within Western philosophy of social science itself. Bernstein's diagnosis of the objectivism/relativism impasse showed that the aspiration to a standpoint entirely free of tradition is untenable.<sup>13</sup> Putnam went further, arguing against the coherence of the strict fact/value dichotomy on which claims to neutrality depend.<sup>14</sup> Taken together, these works demonstrate that the case against value-neutral inquiry does not depend on any single cultural or religious standpoint, but has been made forcefully from within the Western tradition itself.

A fourth relevant literature comprises reflexive and standpoint-based critiques of knowledge production that have emerged from feminist and decolonial scholarship. Harding's work on feminist standpoint epistemology argues that acknowledging the social location of the knower is a condition of, rather than an obstacle to, rigorous inquiry.<sup>15</sup> Mignolo's account of the coloniality of knowledge extends this reflexive turn geopolitically, showing that categories long presented as universal within Western social science in fact encode particular civilizational assumptions.<sup>16</sup>

Taken together, this literature establishes both the necessity and the available intellectual resources for a reconstructive project of the kind this article proposes: the Islamization of Knowledge tradition supplies the substantive moral anthropology, the sociology of knowledge and post-positivist philosophy supply the theoretical warrant for treating normativity as constitutive rather than incidental, and feminist and decolonial epistemology supply comparative cases of reflexive critique against which ethicalization's own distinctiveness can be clarified. The remainder of this article develops ethicalization as a response that draws upon, and moves beyond, each of these bodies of literature in turn.

---

<sup>13</sup>Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

<sup>14</sup>Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

<sup>15</sup>Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

<sup>16</sup>Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

## **2. Methodological Framework: Normative Reconstruction in Social Knowledge**

### **2.1 The Sociology of Knowledge as a Critical Method**

The sociology of knowledge argues against the idea that knowledge is developed independently of social, historical, and moral contexts. Sociology of knowledge has shown how each sociologist's epistemological framework reflects the sociologist's position in relation to power, morality, and culture.<sup>1718</sup>

As such, the paper will treat social scientific concepts as not being neutral analytical tools but as historically developed categories that were created based on specific ethical and metaphysical assumptions. In doing so, the paper can provide a critical evaluation of liberal social science based on its normative structure rather than rejecting its empirical contributions.

### **2.2 Normative Reconstruction as a way of developing epistemologies**

The paper uses normative reconstruction as the main methodology for providing a critical evaluation of liberal social science.

Normative reconstruction involves articulating the implicit moral assumptions of social theories within new ethical frameworks. Normative reconstruction was first used by critical theorists to show the normativity of social theories while avoiding relativism and ideological reductions.<sup>1920</sup>

In the context of this paper, the use of normative reconstruction provides two main benefits. Firstly, it shows how liberal social science is based on ethical premises (autonomy, individualism, instrumental rationality) yet denies they have a normative character. Secondly, it enables the formation of new social knowledge based on principles that are developed from Islamic moral thought without replacing theological inquiry with academic inquiry.

### **2.3 Ethical Hermeneutics and Conceptual Analysis**

---

<sup>17</sup>Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (London: Routledge, 1936).

<sup>18</sup>Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966).

<sup>19</sup>Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).

<sup>20</sup>Axel Honneth, *Freedom's Right* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

Ethical Hermeneutics is also part of the methodological framework for this paper. Ethical Hermeneutics is concerned with the moral implications of the concepts that are used by social scientists. Social scientific concepts, i.e., “rights,” “freedom,” “rationality” and “development,” are analyzed not simply as useful labels but as bearers of moral visions of human nature, social order and purpose.<sup>2122</sup>

Therefore, in this paper, conceptual analysis is also an ethical endeavor; it highlights how language structures our perceptions and legitimates particular types of social organization. For many Muslim societies, the introduction of social scientific vocabulary may replace local moral categories with foreign ones rather than translate them accurately.

## **2.4 Comparative Epistemic Analysis**

Another important aspect of the methodology of this study is comparative epistemic analysis, comparing liberal social science frameworks with those of Islamic moral reasoning to examine their assumptions regarding knowledge, normativity and social order. The comparison is made not to provide evidence for one over the other using apologetic methods, but to identify, in a systematic and analytical rather than polemical manner, the differences between the moral anthropologies, the sources of normativity, and the epistemic authorities of both sets of frameworks.<sup>2324</sup>

## **2.5 Justifying the Normative in Social Scientific Research**

A major issue addressed by this methodological framework is the justification of the normative in social science. Contrary to the views of positivists, the normative is not an extraneous influence on research but a fundamental aspect of research. All decisions regarding what constitutes a social problem, which variables are relevant, and which outcomes are preferable involve normative judgments.<sup>25</sup>

Making the normative explicit, therefore, increases the rigour of scholarship rather than diminishing it. Rather than hiding behind the fiction of neutrality, ethicalization provides a form of epistemic responsibility for researchers by requiring them to justify their moral

---

<sup>21</sup>Charles Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>22</sup>Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

<sup>23</sup>Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993).

<sup>24</sup>Wael B. Hallaq, *The Impossible State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

<sup>25</sup>Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

premises rather than hide them. In addition to the critique of objectivism that is currently underway, this approach provides a constructive way forward based on coherent ethical systems.

## **2.6 Methodological Limitations and Scope**

Finally, this paper recognizes its limitations as a methodology. It does not propose a fully operationalized ethics-based social science nor claims to supplant current empirical methodologies. Rather, it proposes a conceptual and normative framework designed to direct future research, course design and theoretical developments. Ethicalization is presented as an approach towards the production of knowledge rather than a complete methodological system.

## **3. Islamization of Knowledge Revisited: Historical and Epistemic Assessment**

### **3.1 Colonial Knowledge Disruption and the Rise of Epistemic Reform**

Modern colonialism, introduced western secular paradigms into education, law and social inquiry through the displacement of indigenous intellectual traditions, thus limiting Islamic ways of knowing to the domain of rituals and theology, and placing modern disciplines as having epistemic authority over the social world.<sup>2627</sup>

Therefore, Muslim intellectuals at the end of the 20th century began formulating the need for epistemic reform in the face of this state of affairs, and Islamization of Knowledge was formulated as a critical response to the underlying moral and metaphysical assumptions of dominant knowledge systems, and not as a reaction against modernity per se.

### **3.2 Foundational Thinkers and Epistemic Intentions**

Two key thinkers, Ismail Raji al-Faruqi and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, have been central to the development of the concept of Islamization of Knowledge. Both thinkers held

---

<sup>26</sup>Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

<sup>27</sup>Syed Hussein Alatas, "The Captive Mind in Development Studies," *International Social Science Journal* 26, no. 4 (1974): 691–699.

that modern knowledge has lost its ethical bearings because of the separation of knowledge from the Islamic worldview and the fragmentation of meaning.<sup>2829</sup>

Al-Faruqi conceptualized Islamization as the integration of modern disciplines into an Islamic worldview based on the unity of God, and argued that knowledge that is separated from moral ends ultimately produces human suffering.<sup>30</sup> By contrast, al-Attas saw the main issue as conceptual confusion (taḥrīf al-maʿnā) and argued that unless secular concepts are critically examined they will misrepresent Islamic knowledge and create a rupture in the intellectual field.<sup>31</sup>

Both thinkers accepted reason and empirical inquiry, but rejected the epistemic hierarchy that placed secular rationality above revelation, thereby relegating the latter to the private realm.

### **3.3 Islamization as an Ethical, Rather Than Cultural/ Civilizational, Project**

While the concept of Islamization of Knowledge has often been framed in civilizational terms, its central concerns are actually ethical rather than cultural. Its major preoccupation has not been the identification of disciplines as being Islamic but the ethical orientation of knowledge as such. Therefore, by demanding that knowledge should serve truth, justice, and human purposes, the concept of Islamization of Knowledge contests the prevailing view that the social sciences can remain morally neutral and shape the social world accordingly.

In this sense, the ethical concerns of Islamization of Knowledge are also part of a larger critique of modern epistemology that emerges in the literature of Western philosophy itself. The emphasis in the concept of Islamization of Knowledge on normativity, responsibility, and purpose therefore corresponds to post-positivist and communitarian critiques of liberal individualism, although these critiques are expressed in Islamic terms.

---

<sup>28</sup>Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993).

<sup>29</sup>Ismaʿil Raji al-Faruqi, *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan* (Herndon, VA: IIIT, 1982).

<sup>30</sup>Ismaʿil Raji al-Faruqi, *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan* (Herndon, VA: IIIT, 1982).

<sup>31</sup>Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993).

### **3.4 Conceptual Resistance and Misinterpretations of Islamization**

However, despite its intellectual ambition, the concept of Islamization of Knowledge met with considerable resistance in academic circles around the world. This resistance was largely due to the term “Islamization” itself, which was most commonly understood as an attempt to make Islamic dogma prevail in scholarly research. These interpretations obfuscated the epistemological intentions of the project and further strengthened the idea of ideological closure.

Furthermore, the institutional attempts to implement the concept of Islamization of Knowledge in many cases focused on curricular changes without adequate theoretical reconstruction, and thus supported misconceptions that Islamization is merely about adding Islamic content superficially, and not about fundamental transformation. Therefore, the ethical dimensions of the project were very often overshadowed by controversies regarding identity, authenticity, and political Islam.

### **3.5 From Islamization to Ethicalization: An Epistemic Transformation**

This paper maintains that ethicalization represents not a rejection but a conceptual refinement of the epistemological insights of Islamization of Knowledge. Ethicalization presents the same critique of value-neutral knowledge in terms that are more analytically transparent and globally accessible by concentrating on the structural ethics of knowledge instead of labeling knowledge systems.

Ethicalization thus keeps intact the central argument of Islamization of Knowledge that knowledge cannot be separated from the moral purpose of knowledge while eliminating the discursive constraints of confessional language. In this way, it places Islamic moral reasoning as a participant in international debates on social knowledge rather than as an alternative.

## **4. The Ethical Turn in Contemporary Social Theory**

### **4.1 The Exhaustion of Positivist and Technocratic Models**

At the end of the twentieth century, social science's positivistic optimism, that was the hallmark of the social sciences, had begun to disintegrate due to an onslaught of philosophical and empirical critiques.

The belief that social reality could be studied in the same way as natural phenomena — through causal explanation separate from moral assessment — continued to become less able to explain the complex ways humans develop meaning in their activities.

Technocratic models of social problems, that viewed social problems simply as issues of efficiency, governance, and/or management, were criticized for excluding questions of values, responsibilities and purposes.<sup>32</sup>

This disintegration left an intellectual void where the ethical dimensions of social life could no longer be denied. A growing recognition that all social inquiry involved making judgments regarding what mattered; what counted as harm; and what counted as flourishing revealed the limits of value-free methodologies.

## **4.2 The Revival of Moral Reasoning in Social Inquiry**

In reaction to this collapse, many scholars across disciplines began to reintroduce moral reasoning back into social theory. Alasdair MacIntyre critiqued modern moral fragmentation arguing that social practices can never be understood apart from the traditions that provide them with ethical unity.<sup>33</sup>

Similarly, Charles Taylor also emphasized that human agency is always directed toward goods that are socially and morally constructed, thus challenging the atomized model of the self that liberal theory assumes.<sup>34</sup> Within sociology and anthropology, this turn to ethics has included new attention to moral worlds, to the development of the self ethically and to lived normativity.

These developments indicate a movement away from procedural ethics toward a more substantive form of moral inquiry, though scholars continue to be reluctant to provide a comprehensive moral vision.

## **4.3 Ethics, Power, and the Challenge to Secular Normativity**

A second aspect of the ethical turn has been to expose the power relationships in secular moral frameworks. Talal Asad's genealogical analyses illustrated that secularism itself serves

---

<sup>32</sup>Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

<sup>33</sup>Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

<sup>34</sup>Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

as a normative project that shapes the concepts of religion, freedom and agency along specific historical paths.<sup>35</sup>

This realization undermined the notion that secular ethics provides a neutral or universal ground for social inquiry. Critical theorists have similarly argued that liberal moral vocabularies frequently obscure power inequalities while presenting themselves as liberatory. Concepts like autonomy and rights may be useful in some contexts, however they are shown to privilege certain moral imaginations and forms of life and raise questions concerning their universality.

#### **4.4 The Limitations of Secular Ethical Frameworks**

Although the ethical turn has produced critique, it has yet to produce substantial reconstruction. While social theory now increasingly recognizes the normative aspects of knowledge, there is a lack of substantial moral foundations. Thus, there exists an opportunity for alternative ethical traditions (e.g., Islamic moral thought) to make a meaningful contribution to the reconstruction of social knowledge.

#### **4.5 Ethicalization in Conversation with Contemporary Theory**

Ethicalization as proposed in this paper enters into this intellectual context not as a disruption, but as an extension and intensification of the ethical turn. It shares with contemporary social theory both the rejection of value-neutrality and the assertion that moral commitment influences inquiry. However, it extends the discussion by providing an integrative framework that relates moral reasoning to metaphysics, anthropology and purpose.

Therefore, ethicalization does not simply challenge secular normativity, but provides an alternative constructable framework to address the moral shortcomings of modern social theory. Through locating Islamic ethical reasoning within the broader context of these conversations, ethicalization presents itself as a participant in global theoretical debates, rather than a separate or counterproject.

This positioning invites a clarifying comparison with other reflexive traditions that have similarly challenged the fiction of value-neutral knowledge. Feminist standpoint theory has long argued that the social location of the knower — particularly with respect to gender — shapes what can be known, and that making this location explicit enhances rather than

---

<sup>35</sup>Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

undermines the rigour of inquiry.<sup>36</sup> Decolonial critiques of knowledge have advanced a parallel argument from a different vantage point, showing that categories long presented as universal within Western social science in fact encode particular geopolitical and civilizational assumptions, and that genuine pluralism in knowledge production requires recognizing epistemic traditions marginalized by that history.<sup>37</sup>

Ethicalization shares with both traditions the conviction that reflexivity about one's normative starting point is a condition of rigorous inquiry rather than a threat to it. It differs from them, however, in the source and structure of the normativity it makes explicit. Where standpoint theory grounds its critique primarily in social positionality and decolonial theory grounds its critique primarily in the geopolitics of knowledge production, ethicalization grounds its critique in a substantive moral anthropology derived from revelation, reason, and experience. This grounding allows ethicalization to move beyond diagnosing whose knowledge has been excluded, toward articulating a positive account of justice, accountability, and the common good against which social knowledge can be constructively reformulated — a difference of orientation rather than of rigour, and one that positions ethicalization as a complement to these traditions rather than a rival to them.

## **5. Ethicalization of Knowledge: Conceptual Foundations**

### **5.1 Ethics as Constitutive of Knowledge**

The most important aspect of ethicalizing is that the distinction between facts and values will no longer be valid. Ethicalizing will begin with the idea that knowledge is not a reflection of society's reality through a neutral lens but through a lens shaped by one's moral judgment of what is significant, desirable, and worth explaining. All decisions on issues of research questions, conceptual frameworks and how we choose to categorize our interpretations are considered to be an ethical issue even if they are not made explicit.

Critiques of philosophical positivism have illustrated that the distinctions between facts and values are neither descriptive of how things actually are nor methodologically correct.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup>Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

<sup>37</sup>Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>38</sup>Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

Ethicalizing builds on this observation by illustrating that ethics is not something that is imposed as an outside constraint on knowledge after the fact, but is a part of the inquiry process itself.

## **5.2 Islamic Moral Anthropology and the purpose of knowledge**

Ethicalizing is based on Islamic moral anthropology which views humans not as independent individuals who make their own rules, but as responsible agents (*mukallaf*) in a world governed by divine order. As such, all of human actions are determined by purpose (*maqṣad*), accountability (*taḳlīf*), and trust (*amānah*) and establish social life through moral responsibility instead of personal preference.

Knowledge is intrinsically connected to the development of moral character and social order, and is not merely a means to acquire knowledge but is teleological, directed toward justice (*‘adl*), public good (*maṣlaḥah*), and the development of virtues. This perspective is contrary to the view of liberalism which assumes that it can separate the moral end from the procedures used to achieve that end.<sup>3940</sup>

## **5.3 Revelation, Reason, and Experience as Complementary Sources of Knowledge**

An essential aspect of ethicalizing is its rejection of epistemological reductionism. The Islamic intellectual tradition holds that revelation (*waḥy*), reason (*‘aql*), and experience (*tajriba*) are complementary sources of knowledge which operate in their respective domains. Revelation provides the ultimate moral direction, reason allows for the interpretation and application of revelation, and experience gives substance to ethical thinking through lived experiences.

This integrated epistemology differs from both rationalist independence and fideistic disengagement. In contrast to secular ethical models that either neglect metaphysical claims or treat them as subjective preferences, ethicalizing maintains the possibility of critical inquiry while linking it to a coherent moral and metaphysical system.

## **5.4 Ethicalization vs. Moralism and Ideological Closure**

One major focus of ethicalization is the danger of moralism, the treatment of ethics as mere prescriptive assertions devoid of analytical rigor. Ethicalization clearly rejects moralism by

---

<sup>39</sup>Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993).

<sup>40</sup>Wael B. Hallaq, *The Impossible State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

establishing a clear distinction between ethical foundations and ideological impositions. Ethicalization seeks to clarify the ethical presuppositions of social knowledge and does not seek to impose moral conclusions.

By making moral commitments explicit and open to critique, ethicalization promotes reflexivity as opposed to stifling discussion. Ethicalization is consistent with Islamic traditions of scholarly disagreements (ikhtilāf) and ethical discussions, showing that normative foundations do not require intellectual closure.

## **5.5 Ethicalization as an Epistemic Maturity**

Ethicalization represents a greater degree of epistemic maturity than previous reform initiatives. Rather than a complete break, ethicalization is an extension of the previous reform initiatives. Where the Islamization of Knowledge identified the moral shortcomings of the modern social sciences, ethicalization develops a more analytic, and communicable at a global level, framework to address those shortcomings. Ethicalization reframes the reform of knowledge as a matter of ethical responsibility rather than as a question of cultural conflict.

Therefore, ethicalization establishes Islamic moral reasoning as a resource for developing social sciences in ways that are both normatively coherent and intellectually rigorous, thereby creating a pathway beyond the confines of critique to the creation of socially relevant, ethically informed knowledge.

## **6. Ethicalization versus Value-Neutrality in the Social Sciences**

### **6.1 The Ideal of Value-Neutrality and Its Intellectual Origins**

The concept of “value-neutrality” represents a core element in the self-conceptualization of modern social sciences. Developed out of Enlightenment rationality and positivistic philosophical ideas, “value-neutrality” was developed as a protective barrier against ideological bias and moral dogmatism. Max Weber's insistence that empiricists separate descriptive analysis of social processes from value judgments had a significant impact on developing methodological guidelines aimed at distinguishing scientific description from ethical evaluation.<sup>41</sup> Value-neutrality thereby emerged as a means of achieving objectivity and scholarly legitimacy.

---

<sup>41</sup>Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (New York: Free Press, 1949).

## 6.2 The Concealed Normativity of Social Scientific Constructs

In spite of its proclaimed status, however, “value-neutrality” has been unworkable in practice. Social science constructs inevitably contain elements of normativity, i.e., they include judgments regarding what constitutes desirable ways of living, organizational forms, and agents of action. In addition to “development,” “rational choice,” “modernization,” “empowerment,” and “progress,” social scientists utilize many other terms which presuppose specific moral visions that favor some goals and values over others.

Across disciplines, scholars have documented how social science constructs serve as covert ethical frameworks that claim to be mere neutral descriptions.<sup>4243</sup> As a result of the refusal to recognize normativity, ethical commitments do not disappear, but rather become implicit and therefore incapable of being subjected to scrutiny.

## 6.3 Value-Neutrality as an Epistemological Strategy of Power

From the vantage point of the sociology of knowledge, value-neutrality may be conceived as an epistemological strategy that legitimates certain moral systems, while delegitimizing others. In so far as social sciences present liberal moral assumptions as neutral, social sciences create epistemological hierarchies which privilege secular individualistic frameworks and delegitimate competing moral traditions — especially religious ones.<sup>44</sup>

This is particularly evident in studies of Muslim societies, where Islamic norms are often viewed as cultural variables to be explained, rather than as ethical resources which are able to shape theoretical constructs. Therefore, value-neutrality serves less as a methodological principle, than as a means of exercising conceptual control.

## 6.4 Ethicalization as Epistemological Transparency

Ethicalization is a response to these challenges by substituting epistemological transparency for the fiction of neutrality. Instead of refusing to acknowledge normativity, ethicalization obliges scholars to identify and justify the moral precepts that underlie their

---

<sup>42</sup>Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

<sup>43</sup>Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

<sup>44</sup>Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

research. In no way does ethicalization diminish the rigor of research; on the contrary, it increases it by rendering ethical assumptions available for critique, discussion, and refinement.

Therefore, from this viewpoint, objectivity is not attained through the suppression of values; it is achieved by submitting them to reflective criticism based on a coherent ethical framework. Ethicalization consequently redefines the responsibilities of scholars to include accountability not only to empirical standards, but also to a coherent set of moral principles.

## **6.5 Beyond Relativism and Moral Absolutism**

One of the most common objections to research based upon ethicalization is that it will collapse into relativism or dogmatism. Ethicalization avoids both by establishing normativity in systematic moral argumentation instead of in arbitrary preference or authoritarian declarations. The fact that Islamic moral thought emphasizes reasoned argumentation, the public interest (*maṣlaḥah*) and respectful disagreement (*ikhtilāf*) illustrates how ethical commitments can exist together with pluralism and debate.

Thus, ethicalization represents a middle course which acknowledges the inevitability of ethics in social knowledge, but insists upon intellectual humility and methodological discipline.

## **7. Reconstructing the Social Sciences through Ethicalization**

### **7.1 From Critique to Constructive Reconstruction**

While the previous chapters illustrated the conceptual limitations of Islamization and the incoherence of value-neutrality, a critique alone is insufficient. An alternative is needed — a positive framework to reorder social scientific inquiry around specific ethical bases. Ethicalization provides such an alternative framework — it does not merely add moral considerations to social science disciplines, but transforms the fundamental premises regarding knowledge, agency and social structure of those disciplines.

The reconstruction here does not reject empirical techniques or analytic rigor. The construction entails the relocation of empirical investigation within a broader ethical architecture that establishes what will constitute a legitimate social issue, and why that issue is important.

### **7.2 Ethical Bases for Social Knowledge**

Social science based on ethicalization begins with the premise that social reality is fundamentally normative. All actions of humans are directed towards value(s), purpose(s), and conceptions of the “good life,” and all social institutions embody moral judgments — either explicitly or implicitly. Therefore, ethical reasoning is integral to social analysis — not external to it.

The Islamic intellectual tradition has provided a rich ethical vocabulary including ‘adl (justice), amānah (moral accountability), maṣlaḥah (common good), and khilāfah (moral stewardship). These concepts provide both the basis for moral doctrine and serve as analytical tools through which social structures may be assessed and theoretically formulated.<sup>4546</sup>

### 7.3 Redefining Central Categories in Social Science

Ethicalization necessitates a reassessment of central social science categories that have been defined by liberal moral perspectives. For example:

- Agency is no longer understood primarily as autonomous preference maximization, but as morally responsible action that is bound in social and divine obligations.
- Power is studied not only in terms of domination and resistance, but in terms of justice, legitimacy and moral authority.
- Development is redirected away from economic development and individual freedom toward human flourishing (falāḥ) and ethical well-being.

To illustrate the last of these redefinitions concretely: a conventional development indicator such as GDP growth, read through the lens of falāḥ, can no longer be treated as a self-sufficient marker of progress. Rising aggregate output accompanied by deteriorating family stability, environmental degradation, or communal trust would, on an ethicalized reading, count as partial or even illusory development, since falāḥ requires flourishing across material, moral, and communal dimensions at once, not merely growth in a single quantitative measure.

This redefinition does not import religious doctrine into empirical data. Rather, it shifts the focus of empirical investigations in the direction of ethically-oriented analysis that is transparently articulated and critically examined.

---

<sup>45</sup>Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Shari‘ah Law: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008).

<sup>46</sup>M. Umer Chapra, *The Future of Economics: An Islamic Perspective* (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 2000).

## 7.4 Methodological Implications of Ethicalized Inquiry

An ethicalized social science uses a multi-methodology combining empirical observation, historical examination, and normative analysis. Empirical and qualitative research methods continue to have utility but are focused on ethically-informed research questions and interpretive frameworks.

For example, statistics measuring poverty or inequality take on new significance when they are viewed in the context of ethically-based commitments to justice and social responsibility as opposed to abstract efficiency. Ethicalization thus changes not only the conclusions that social scientists reach, but the way in which social scientists design research itself.<sup>47</sup>

Concretely, a national poverty headcount ratio is conventionally read through an efficiency lens, as an indicator of economic underperformance calling for market-based correction. Read instead through 'adl, the same statistic raises the question of whether existing mechanisms of redistribution — zakāh, waqf, and public welfare provision among them — are in fact distributing resources justly; read through maṣlaḥah, it invites an assessment of whether prevailing fiscal or social policy genuinely serves the common good rather than narrow sectional interests. The same numerical finding, in other words, generates different research questions, different policy recommendations, and different criteria of success, depending on the ethical framework brought to bear upon it — a demonstration, in miniature, of how ethicalization changes social-scientific practice rather than merely its vocabulary.

## 7.5 Ethical Pluralism Without Erasing Moral Difference

One advantage of ethicalization is its potential to promote pluralism without degenerating into relativism. Ethicalized approaches recognize the existence of various moral traditions while eliminating the neutralization of differences in norms.

Dialogue among ethical systems is made possible by the fact that each system articulates its own moral commitments rather than hiding them. This enables Islamic ethical reasoning to participate in the global conversation of scholars not as a cultural artifact but as a living, intellectually-moral tradition capable of contributing to theory and of self-reflection.

## 7.6 Toward a Post-Islamization Paradigm

---

<sup>47</sup>Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Knopf, 1999).

Ethicalization represents a movement from defensive knowledge reform to a confident, dialogue-oriented relationship with global social sciences. Rather than ask how Islam can be incorporated into existing disciplines, ethicalization asks how social knowledge needs to be reconstructed once ethics is recognized as a foundation for social knowledge.

Therefore, ethicalization constitutes a post-Islamization paradigm: while preserving the primary goal of maintaining epistemological integrity, ethicalization avoids the essentialism and methodological ambiguities that were a part of earlier efforts. Ethicalization presents a framework within which Islamic moral thought is able to contribute to the reconstruction of social sciences as ethically accountable forms of knowledge.

## **8. Conclusion: Ethicalization and the Future of Social Knowledge**

This article has claimed that the long-standing Islamization of Knowledge project, although intellectually and historically important, needs to be conceptually redefined in terms of current problems facing the world in terms of epistemology and ethics. Today's social sciences have an extreme problem with being fragmented on morals; being too instrumentally focused on methodology; and continuing to believe in the myth of value neutrality. In this way, ethicalization is not a step away from Islamization of Knowledge, but rather a maturity of the epistemology of Islamization of Knowledge and a redefinition of its theory.

As a social science, ethicalization foregrounds ethics as part of all social scientific inquiry, thereby revealing the moral structures that underlie both the creation of knowledge and the analysis of society. Rather than hiding the moral commitment under the guise of neutrality, ethicalized social science brings the moral basis of social science into the public arena, subject to public criticism. In this way, there is more accountability, reflection, and honesty in social science research.

The article shows that Islamic moral thought (which is based on an integrated view of revelation, reason, and experience), is an integrated set of moral principles that could be used as a foundation to build back social knowledge. Principles like justice, responsibility, and human flourishing are not only moral or theological concepts, but also conceptual tools that can help guide research questions, analytic categories, and methodological approaches. Ethicalization thus allows Islamic scholarly tradition to enter into the world-wide community of social scientists, and provide alternative ways of thinking about social science issues, as opposed to being seen as cultural alternatives or ideological criticisms.

It is essential to point out that ethicalization does not attempt to be the sole voice of morality nor attempt to impose one particular moral perspective on diverse cultures. Rather, ethicalization models a form of moral pluralism without loss of norms, where different moral perspectives can interact with each other through open communication and principle-based disagreement. In this manner, ethicalization is positioned as a universally applicable approach to address ethical crises in the social sciences across non-Muslim contexts.

Beyond its theoretical contribution, ethicalization carries direct implications for practice. In curriculum design, it suggests that courses in research methods and social theory should require students to identify and justify the ethical assumptions embedded in the concepts and measures they use, rather than treating such reflection as optional to technical training. For future empirical research, ethicalization opens a concrete agenda: comparative studies could examine how differently framed ethical starting points — for instance, efficiency-based versus *maṣlaḥah*-based framings of the same policy question — produce divergent research questions, methodological choices, and policy conclusions, thereby testing empirically the claims this article has advanced conceptually.

In summary, ethicalization represents a viable post-Islamization of Knowledge paradigm to reformulate the social sciences as ethically accountable methods of knowledge. By reconnecting ethics to the core of social scientific inquiry, ethicalization presents new opportunities for developing social science scholarship that is meaningful at both the level of how societies operate and how societies should be understood and changed.