

# Islamic Moral Ideas from Fazlur Rahman's Perspective

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## Abstrak

Pendidikan dan ajaran moral menjadi salah satu aspek penting untuk diperhatikan, terutama jika dikaitkan dengan maraknya penyakit sosial di lingkungan masyarakat. Sebagai salah satu tokoh muslim terkemuka, Fazlur Rahman melalui tulisannya mengajak masyarakat untuk melihat cita-cita moral yang terkandung dalam Qur'an. Tulisan ini akan membahas mengenai ide moral dalam Islam menurut Fazlur Rahman. Melalui kajian kepustakaan terhadap tulisan-tulisan Fazlur Rahman, ditemukan bahwa moralitas Islam menurut Fazlur Rahman merupakan konsepsi akhlak Islam yang bersumber dari Qur'an dan Sunnah. Hal ini sesuai dengan pandangan bahwa Islam adalah agama moral. Moralitas yang dimaksud tidak hanya memberikan nilai-nilai etika Islam yang unggul, tetapi juga mewujudkan masyarakat yang memiliki perilaku baik dan berahlak mulia.

**Keywords:** Moral Islam; Qur'an; Sunnah; Fazlur Rahman.

## Abstract

Education and moral teachings are important aspects to pay attention to, especially if they are related to the rise of social pathology in society. As one of the leading Muslim figures, Fazlur Rahman through his writings invites the public to see the moral ideals contained in the Qur'an. This article will discuss moral ideas in Islam according to Fazlur Rahman. Through a literature study of Fazlur Rahmad's writings, it was found that Islamic morality according to Fazlur Rahman is a conception of Islamic morals that originates from the Qur'an and Sunnah. This is in accordance with the view that Islam is a moral religion. The morality in question does not only provide superior Islamic ethical values, but also creates a society that has good behavior and noble morals.

**Keywords:** Islamic Moral Ideas; Quran; Sunnah; Fazlur Rahman.

## **Introduction**

All forms of behavior that are inappropriate and violate norms, customs, laws, and religion are social pathology. This will certainly disrupt the function of social structures in society (Kartono, 2011, p. 4). The existence of social pathology in society explains that there are social problems that are occurring in the life of a society. This problem causes unrest in society because it does not comply with existing norms and rules.

The practice of social pathology in society in general can be found in various forms such as gambling or games that involve risking something to gain multiple profits, corruption or abuse of authority for personal gain, crime or any act that violates norms and laws, as well as prostitution (Kartono, 2011, p. 214). For this reason, it can be seen that social pathology is a deviation from social and religious norms which has an impact on disrupting comfort and tranquility in social life.

The practice of this societal pathology cannot be separated from aspects of life such as religion, economics, education, social and culture. The results of research conducted by Resdati and Rizka Hasanah stated that the causal factors of social disease can come from the family environment, society and technology, then prevention can be done by means of moral and religious development (Resdati & Hasanah, 2021). For this reason, religious awareness and appreciation of religious values can foster self-evaluation to change behavior for the better.

Religion has a contribution in shaping a person's character (Muzakkir, 2016). This means that a person's basic religious values will influence that person's character. Islam is a religion that exists to teach goodness and morality to all humans. The aim of Islam is to provide benefits not only for humans but also for nature and the environment (Miskahuddin, 2022). Islam exists to equip humanity to become caliphs on this earth as God's representatives who are tasked with prospering, protecting and preserving nature, maintaining harmonious relationships with nature, creating a society with noble morals (Rohana, 2023).

The view regarding morality in religion as a guide to human life has been widely discussed by Islamic thinkers, one of which was discussed by Fazlur Rahman. Fazlur Rahman is an Islamic reformer who has views on the importance of morals in religious life. This can be seen through the methods of interpretation and *ijtihad* regarding the contents of the Qur'an and Sunnah (Amir, 2021). In this case, Fazlur Rahman is of the opinion that the Qur'an does not directly explain moral issues so *ijtihad* is needed to understand them. He said, only *qiyas* and *ijma'* can reveal the correct understanding of the Qur'an regarding moral issues (Fahmi, 2011). Likewise with the Sunnah, the Sunnah

is the behavior of the Prophet which is an example for Muslims (Zakiyah et al., 2020).

This research aims to discuss moral ideas in Islam according to Fazlur Rahman. In this case, it is hoped that knowledge will be gained through a comprehensive discussion regarding Fazlur Rahman's views on the moral values of the Qur'an and Sunnah as a source of guidance for human behavior and actions in the world. The discussion will begin with an explanation of the biography of Fazlur Rahman's life journey, then continue with an explanation of the main points of Fazlur Rahman's thoughts and finally an analysis of these thoughts and their relationship to moral ideas in Islam.

### Research methods

This research was conducted using qualitative methods using library research. The data source for this research is writings by Fazlur Rahman such as *Tema-Tema Pokok al-Qur'an, Islam dan Modernitas, Gelombang Perubahan dalam Islam*, as well as journal articles that are appropriate to the discussion. Data analysis in this research uses Miles and Hubberman analysis where data analysis goes through three stages, they are the data reduction, displaying the data and then drawing conclusions (Sugiyono, 2010). The analysis in this research was carried out by data reduction, the data obtained was then recorded, presented in narrative text form and then conclusions were drawn from the existing problem formulation.

### Discussion

#### Biography of Fazlur Rahman

Fazlur Rahman was born in Hazara, Punjab in 1919 AD (Amal, 1993, p. 13). He grew up in a family with a strong tradition of the Hanafi school of thought. Therefore, from childhood he was accustomed to carrying out religious rituals such as prayer and fasting regularly and never left them. The foundation for understanding religion came from his father, Maulana Shihab ad-Din. Maulana Shihab al-Din is a cleric who graduated from Dar al-'Ulum Deoband, where even though he was educated with a traditionalist Islamic mindset, his mindset tends to be modern (Rahman, 1987, p. 35).

His father believed that Islam views modernity as a challenge and opportunity that must be faced. This belief then influenced Fazlur Rahman's life and thought (A'la, 2003, p. 33). At the age of 14, he moved with his parents from his hometown to Lahore. It was here that Rahman then began his formal education at a modern school, while his father also taught him traditional Islamic subjects at home (Nasution, 1992, p. 162).

The education provided by his father made Rahman a person who was quite

diligent in gaining knowledge from various sources, including from the West (Munir, 2020). He received his father's traditional Islamic education at home since he was a child. Rahman was able to read the Qur'an at the age of 10. Then, at the age of 14, he began studying philosophy, Arabic, theology, hadith and hermeneutics. Apart from that, he also mastered Persian, Urdu, English, French, German, Latin and Greek as well as other foreign languages. Since then, his intellectual quality has improved (Madjid, 1993).

The influence of his parents was very strong in shaping Rahman's intellectual framework and religious practices. Even though his father grew with a pattern of thinking about traditional Islam, however still open to modern values as reality daily (Munir, 2020). Marked from truth, love, patience and affection taught by her mother. Both parents played an important role in shaping Rahman's personality and wisdom. Another thing that influenced Rahman was the Hanafi tradition adhered to by his family, which then shaped his mindset in religious matters, namely the rationalist style (Rahman, 1987).

Rahman's religious thinking was also heavily influenced by the modernist mindset and early liberal figures of Pakistan, namely Shah Waliullah ad-Dihlawi, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Sayyid Amir Ali and Muhammad Iqbal. At that time, Muslims in India were in turmoil and tried to establish a separate country from India, namely a country based on Islamic teachings. In 1940, Rahman obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree and two years later a Master's degree in Arabic. He earned both degrees from Punjab University. However, according to him, this title is more of a formality than an intellectual aspect (Rahman, 1985, p. 117). In other words, according to him, the degree he received was not based on a good intellectual foundation. Rahman's criticism of the Islamic education system shows his commitment and concern for the state of science and knowledge of Muslims at that time.

In 1946, Rahman accepted a title Ph.D from University Oxford in the field English, In 1951 accepted title Ph.D in the field Philosophy. After earning his PhD, he taught at Durham University, the Institute of Islamic Studies and McGill University in Canada. Additionally, he served as a professor of philosophy. In the 1960s, Rahman returned to his native Pakistan at the invitation of President Ayub Khan. Apart from that, in 1962, Rahman was appointed Director of the Islamic Institute (Fauzi, 1995, p.3).

Fazlur Rahman was critical of the religious thinking of his predecessors, especially traditionalists and fundamentalists. His views attracted the attention of the Pakistani mass media for a year. The clerics accused him of denying the Qur'an. Because he didn't get support and received big protests, he finally gave up all his work

in Pakistan and moved to Chicago, USA. Since 1970, he has been Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Chicago (Rahman, 1995, p.ix).

In the mid-1980s, Fazlur Rahman's health began to deteriorate due to diabetes and heart disease. Even when his family doctor advised him to limit his activities, he accepted an invitation from the Government of the Republic of Indonesia in the summer of 1985. Fazlur Rahman spent two months in Indonesia and observed the Islamic situation in the country through audiences, debates and lectures in several locations. Finally, he died in the United States on July 26, 1988 at the age of 69 after spending some time in a Chicago hospital (A'la, 2003, p. 44).

### **Fazlur Rahman's Main Thoughts**

Fazlur Rahman stated that the main goal of Islamic morality is to maximize moral energy. This is very important so that humanity does not fall into Satan's trap which often leads to crime. Kufr is a term used to describe someone who has completely lost moral energy because they cannot control their actions and subdue his own desires (Jalil, 2018). Furthermore, he argued that Muslims must find moral and legal goals in the interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an. In this case, understanding the contents of the Qur'an requires a historical approach in order to understand the reality of Arab society at the time of the revelation in order to understand its moral purpose (Rahman, 1984, p.x).

An important part of understanding the Qur'an is its emphasis on moral ideals. The moral ideals contained in scripture must take precedence over specific legal provisions. In addition, goals must be understood and identified in a sociological context that is relevant to the environmental conditions in which the prophet lives. For this approach, said Fazlur Rahman, a serious and honest historical approach must be used to find the meaning of the text (Mas'adi, 1997, p. 150). Historical research seeks to find the differences between historical Islam and normative Islam. Since it was first revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, Islam emerged as a solution to the gaps and contradictions in pre-Islamic human lifestyles, namely teachings designed to instill moral attitudes (Mas'adi, 1997, pp. 73-74).

Apart from historical studies, Fazlur Rahman also has normative studies. Fazlur Rahman's normative or hermeneutical studies are part of his broader ethical project to avoid complacency. Fazlur Rahman's hermeneutics or what is commonly known as double movement hermeneutics consists of two steps, first, the interpreter must understand the meaning of a verse by studying the historical situation in which the verse was revealed. Second, the historical situation must be seen from general moral

objectives and implemented in the current socio-historical context (Ulya, 2011). This means that the study seeks to find moral values that meet the needs of Muslim society.

In his study, Fazlur Rahman discusses crucial issues such as the status of women in Islam, ethics, politics, reinterpretation of Islamic law and the development of modern ethics (Rahman, 2001, p.33). Fazlur Rahman's normative research aims to understand and interpret verses according to the wishes of their creators. Fazlur Rahman found two ways to revitalize his normative work, namely adhering to the general principles contained in the text and focusing on the context or situation of the object of his reduction (Mas'adi, 1997, pp. 70-73).

Therefore, Fazlur Rahman invites us to truly understand the historical and normative aspects of Islam so that we are not easily trapped in this modern world. Fazlur Rahman offers two major steps to find its normative value, which is known as the double movement theory. The following are the main points of Fazlur Rahman's thoughts:

a. The Qur'an as the Primary Authority and Representation of God

Fazlur Rahman stated that the Qur'an is the main source of authority and representation of God in the universe which is always up to date and contextual in every situation faced by humans. It is not an exaggeration if this thinker is often referred to as someone who focuses on the Qur'an, because Rahman's fundamental basis is the Qur'an. Therefore, Rahman's attitudes and thoughts are said to be very Qur'anic (Rahman, 1984, p. 86).

According to Rahman, all mentions of nature and God in the Qur'an also basically refer to humans. This is demonstrated by the Qur'an which expressly refuses to mention the issue of God's power. It is stated in the Qur'an that humans are given choices and responsibilities in life (Shaleh, 2019). One of the functions of the concept of divinity is to explain the order of the universe. The concept of divinity is part of the inner logic of necessary existence. God is not only transcendent, but also immanent. This is known from the verses of the Qur'an which mention God in all natural processes and events (Rahman, 1987, p. 87).

He continued, the question of whether God is far or near does not only present theological evidence for God's existence. However, the existence of God can be known by paying attention to various facts that occur in the universe and using these facts as a reminder of God's existence. God is the dimension that gives meaning and life to everything without limits and only He is unlimited (Rahman, 1984, p. 88).

#### b. Revelation and Prophethood

According to Rahman, the Qur'an is something holy and eternal (Qadim). Prophets are human because of their steadfastness and sensitivity to God's revelations that they receive and communicate with other people. It is not surprising that prophets as humans have made mistakes. As an example for his people, the Prophet Muhammad never considered himself superior to other humans. In fact, at first he didn't know and didn't prepare himself to become a prophet. However, in a naturalistic sense, the Prophet Muhammad prepared himself to become a prophet (even though he did not realize it) because of his strong sensitivity to human morals since he was a child (Rahman, 1984, pp. 132-133).

Rahman firmly rejects the view of delivering revelation mechanically and externally, which is an orthodox view which assumes that delivery is carried out like a postman delivering a letter, namely when Gabriel comes and faces God to deliver the message to the Prophet Muhammad. In fact, the process of conveying revelation is by combining the transcendent (Divine) and the immanent. This view is based on the Qur'an, surah an-Nahal verse 102 which states that the Holy Spirit conveyed the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad (Rahman, 1984, p. 139).

#### c. Sunnah and Hadith

The Sunnah of the Prophet is an ideal that someone wants to emulate (Taib, 2014). This is done by interpreting the Prophet's example based on new needs and being interpreted continuously. As explained by Fazlur Rahman, sunnah is the law of actions, whether they occur once or repeatedly. Furthermore, according to him, the sunnah is not just a law of behavior, but is also a normative moral imperative. Sunnah is a behavioral concept that views what has been traditionally practiced in a society not only as an actual practice but as the "normative practice" of society. Fazlur Rahman explained that exemplary (normative behavior) is the concept of standard or correct behavior (Rahman, 1995).

Theoretically, Sunnah is a concept of action according to circumstances, so the Prophet's Sunnah must be able to be developed, interpreted, and adapted according to conditions with *ijtihad* and *ijma'*. Fazlur Rahman then stated that the history of hadith has existed since the beginning of the development of Islam. During the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad, it was natural for Muslims to discuss the words and deeds of the Prophet. This is based on the characteristic memorization and poetry of the Arab people which allows them to retell the deeds and sayings of someone who is recognized as the messenger of God (Rahman, 1995).

d. Human Will

According to Rahman, humans are creatures that have advantages compared to other creatures. This is based on the Qur'an, surah al-Baqarah verses 30-33, and surah al-Ahzaab verse 72 which discusses God's belief in humans, that humans have the potential to create life and build the world. Regarding human freedom, Rahman believes that humans themselves are the ones who cause themselves to go astray. The Qur'an also emphasizes that God would not close his heart and lead humans astray if it were not for the actions of humans themselves (Rahman, 1985, p. 87).

Still referring to human freedom, Rahman stated that although this freedom is from God, humans are aware of their own decisions. Because from an Islamic perspective, Qadar does not determine the occurrence of something or human behavior. What God determines is not the occurrence of something, but rather its possibility. Through the possibilities that God has determined, humans are free to process and develop creatively (Amal, 1994, p. 150). Furthermore, according to Rahman, human strength will never exceed God's strength. Because of these limitations, humans must ask God for help through prayer and earnest effort (Amal, 1994, p. 145).

e. Hereafter

According to Rahman, the afterlife is an important moment for the disclosure of objective moral reality, when everyone realizes their actions in the past. Life after death is important for several reasons. First, the quality of human behavior is assessed based on morality and justice. Second, humans need to articulate their life goals in order to understand what they have fought for in this life. The third reason, disputes, contradictions and clashes of human interests must be resolved. According to Rahman, human happiness and suffering in the afterlife are not only spiritual, but also physical. This is what must then be explained more in the Qur'an and rationally so that it can influence human efforts to act in accordance with religious morals (Rahman, 1984, p. 97).

From this explanation, it can be seen that according to Rahman, belief in the existence of heaven and hell has an important meaning for human life in the world. Rahman believes that the afterlife according to the Qur'an is a real construction of justice and morality of human behavior. Through such a theoretical framework, Islamic theology according to Rahman can be applied as a world view. The Qur'an functions as a fundamental criterion in the formation of moral and ethical values (Rahman, 1987, p. 89).

f. Satan and Evil



The discussion of Satan has implications for evil as a reality that humans must face. Humans who are able to resist Satan's temptations have the right to become his caliph on earth (Rahman, 1984, pp. 178–193). Satan comes from jinn, but Rahman differentiates between jinn and devils. To illustrate this difference, he quoted several verses from the Qur'an, namely Surah Saba' verse 12 about the existence of jinn who served Solomon and Surah al-An'am verse 130 that God sent messengers to jinn and humans. Based on this verse, it can be seen that jinn are creatures that are basically no different from humans, but devils have a greater tendency to do evil and stupid things. Apart from that, unlike humans, devils are included in a group of supernatural beings that originate from the essence of fire, jinn are creatures that really have personalities, not just metaphors or symbols (Rahman, 1984, p. 110).

Based on his analysis, in the case of the descendants of Adam and Eve, Satan not only violated God's command by refusing to honor Adam, but also vowed to fight God and deceive humanity. Satan no longer appears as a specific person, but as the objective embodiment of evil and ugliness. Satan is an anti-human principle that always tries to divert people's attention from the truth and lead them down the wrong path. According to Rahman, the most important idea that can be learned from the Qur'an is that satanic activity attacks all areas of human life and humans must always be alert. If humans are careless, humans will be easily deceived by Satan's temptations (Ramadan, 2014).

### **Analysis of Fazlur Rahman's Thoughts on Islamic Moral Ideas**

Humans in Raman's view are free creatures, but this freedom is a manifestation of God's love. Along with freedom, humans have an obligation to create a moral social order as God's vicegerents on earth. For this reason, it can be seen that there is a relationship between human freedom and the moral obligations that humans must fulfill. According to Rahman, the central issue raised in every discourse on human freedom is not the nature of freedom or determinism itself, but rather the responsibility of morality to live up to the principles outlined in religion (Ramadan, 2014).

Apart from being based on verses of Surah al-Baqarah 233 and 286 concerning individual responsibility according to his abilities and about the futility of friendship and helping each other on the Day of Judgment in verse 254. Rahman's rejection of the concept of intercession is also based on the Islamic view which pays great attention to struggle, effort and personal responsibility (Amal, 1993, p. 150). Meanwhile, regarding the possibility that intercession is given with God's permission and is mentioned as an algorithmic statement to explain the greatness of God and that humans can be empowered only because of God's grace. Therefore, the verse cannot be interpreted

literally as intercession from one person to another (Hakim & Ramdani, 20109).

According to Fazlur Rahman, Qur'an and all base law are instruction For Muslim (Rahman, 1987, p. 315). The Qur'an is a book that contains religious principles, morals and advice to humans. The moral dimension is necessary for human creative activity regarding how humans can live in this world and the afterlife (Rahman, 1984, p. 15). Therefore, to fulfill human knowledge about the morals of an action, it is necessary to review the Prophet's way of life or what is called the Sunnah.

According to Fazlur Rahman, the sunnah is not just a guide to behavior, but also normative moral rules and moral commands. Sunnah is a behavioral concept, so that what has long been practiced by society is not only a real practice, but also a normative practice of society (Rahman, 1995, pp. 2-3). Thus, Fazlur Rahman describes the Sunnah as a moral ideal that generations of Muslims must follow by interpreting the Prophet's example based on the new needs they experience (Rahman, 1995, p.38).

Morality is closely related to a person's way of thinking, attitude to life and behavior. If many people in society are morally corrupt then the consequences can be detrimental to other people. Fazlur Rahman is a figure who introduced the double movement theory in understanding and interpreting the relationship between revelation and human history. The relevance of the norms and values of this divine revelation allows humans to survive as religious communities without being limited by time and space (Rahman, 1987, p. 36).

Fazlur Rahman tries to explain that theology or doing theology must be able to develop, guide and instill a system of moral or ethical values so that humans are morally responsible (with piety). So that by practicing theology a person is able to bring intellectual and spiritual peace to human life (Romas, 2000, p. 82). According to him, rules can be changed as long as the changes do not conflict with moral principles and are based on considerations of justice (Mas'adi, 1997, p. 178). Through his interpretation method or what is called double movement, Fazlur Rahman can interpret the moral value of the laws contained in the Qur'an and its recommendations (Rahman, 1987, p. 58).

Understanding how Fazlur Rahman's work in interpretation gives the impression that attributes such as power, justice and wisdom are the attributes of God who are mentioned as closing the order of creation of the universe. In the past, various kinds of questions and problems that arose could always be answered according to the Sunnah and confirmed directly to the Prophet, but because the Prophet had died and could no longer ask him about current problems, one way is to use Fazlur Rahman's Ijtihad method (Sutrisno, 2006, p. 164).

According to Fazlur Rahman, this moral issue should be of concern to people everywhere, both in developed societies and those that are still developing. Because moral damage is closely related to human thought patterns, attitudes towards life and behavior. If in a society many people are morally corrupt, then the impact can be detrimental to other people. In this context, the decline of a nation could be caused by the moral decline of the individuals within it so that to heal it, one must always guard against immoral behavior.

Understanding Islamic moral ethics can be a comprehensive source for building human character in a better direction. One way to do this is by implementing the spirit of Islamic morality in everyday life. Implementing Islamic teachings in everyday life will foster a religious character. Understanding Islamic moral ideas is necessary to make someone always strive to perfect their faith, piety and noble character.

As sources of Islamic law, the Qur'an and Sunnah are not only writings that must be memorized, but the Islamic moral ideas contained therein are sources of learning that must be applied in everyday life in the community through a process of habituation, example, and practice continuously. Therefore, instilling Islamic morality is the responsibility of all Muslims. For its implementation, it is necessary to have a comprehensive interpretation of the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah and provide knowledge to avoid things that could hamper the spirit of moral development (ahlakul karimah) which is the goal of Islam.

Understanding Islamic teachings through Fazlur Rahman's double movement theory is important in understanding Islamic teachings more broadly and comprehensively. Understanding related to Islamic moral ideas aims to strengthen faith, increase understanding, appreciation and practice of Islamic teachings. Character formation through understanding Islamic moral ideas can be realized through formal or non-formal education. The non-formal route can be in the community and family environment, while the formal route occurs in the school environment.

In an effort to strengthen Islamic morality and minimize social pathology, it is necessary to understand Islamic moral ideas to fortify and direct a person to create better behavior and personality in society. In essence, Islamic teachings aim to foster morals and instill good behavior and commendable actions or morals. Through understanding moral ideas in Islam, virtue can emerge from within a person and give rise to behavior, values and morals, for example behavior in accordance with norms, customs and good morality. Then this behavior will be visible and there will be concrete actions, namely good behavior, trustworthiness, responsibility, respect for other

people's rights, hard work and so on.

Understanding Islamic moral ideas is an important foundation in cultivating and forming a person's character, therefore it is necessary to implement character and moral formation strategies. In this case, the application of the double movement theory in the interpretation of the Qur'an can be carried out as a strategy to achieve the goal of understanding the spirit of morality in Islam. Living life by paying attention to ethics and morals is something that is important to do in the midst of moral degradation or social pathology that arise among society. Thus, understanding the moral values in Islam which originate from the Qur'an and Sunnah is one way that can be done to make oneself aware so that one is not easily influenced by negative things in order to maintain the stability of social life.

## Conclusion

Morality is an integral part of being human. Humans may be able to determine their own morality without religion, but morals come from God, will definitely be in accordance with common sense, conscience and belief in God. Fazlur Rahman is a neo-modernist Islamic thinker who pays attention to developments over time both in terms of human behavior and moral values. From his work it is clear that most of his thinking was based on his views on the Qur'an. Understanding moral values in Islam such as good behavior, trustworthiness, responsibility and respect for the rights of others which come from the Qur'an and Sunnah is one way that can be done to make yourself aware so that you are not easily influenced by negative things. For this reason, the implementation of Islamic moral ideas should begin and become a guideline for behavior.

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