

PHILOSOPHY OF ETHICS

MURTAZA MUHAMMADI

Translated by:
Mansoor Limba



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Publisher's Forward

To begin and execute a research is like walking in the path of development and evolvement. When the seeds of the "questions" are planted, in the soil of the mind of the researcher, this phase initiates, and its end is culminated when the result and the outcome of knowledge and wisdom is gained.

Evidently, this end is a new chapter in itself, for growth, and announces beforehand this good news to humans. For the result of all those mental efforts will not only bring the blooming and flowering of talent and all kinds of Blessings to humans, but it also makes the mind of the researcher to ponder and shape new, more questions.

This will produce a great collection of growing plants and flowers for the seeking mind... Those "questions" are in fact, the seeds, which according to the necessities of Time and the strength of the researchers will grow and bloom by themselves. They will make Culture and Civilization to move forward.

In like manner, the increasing rate of transferring oneself from one place to another place and the decrease of the distance will make those seeds travel miles and miles, to faraway places in order to install them inside the curious mind of other seekers. This will bring an amazing diversity and a novelty for another civilization...

It is true then, that the presence of knowledge and a good, capable management will help this project to develop itself and one has to admit indeed, that it has always played an important role...

Al-Mustafa International Publication and Translation Center, because of its global mission, and its special position among the Religious Schools and the colorful human diversity that it has developed inside itself, sees it as a moral duty to procure all the appropriate conditions for any research works, and takes its role in this matter, most seriously. To procure all kinds of necessary grounds, with an excellent management of all the existing possibilities and talents, and to care and protect all its researchers in religious fields; these are the most crucial responsibilities of the Department of Research in this International center.

We dearly hope that by being attentive to all these autonomous scientific movements, and by fortifying all the existing motives, we shall be able to witness the blooming of the Religious Culture in every part of this wide world!

**Al-Mustafa International
Publication and Translation Center**

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Foreword

Considering necessity of preparing appropriate Islamic texts in English for the modern world and aiming at satisfying that need, Al-Mustafa International Research Institute (M.I.R.I.) decided to establish “Islam and West Research Centre” in 2009. This centre has accomplished that duty in the best way by producing, translating, and reprinting tens of such appropriate texts.

The present book, *Philosophy of Ethics*, which is a translation of the Persian book *Falsafeh-ye Akhlāq* by the great Muslim thinker and reformer Āyatullāh Murtaḍā Muṭahharī (which was initially lectures delivered by him, published by Saḥā Publications, Tehran, 2006), is among such invaluable books prepared and published by Islam and West Research Centre.

As for some basic references, the translation of Qur’anic passages is adapted from Sayyid ‘Alī Qulī Qarā’ī’s *The Qur’an with a Phrase-by-Phrase English Translation* (London: Islamic College for Advanced Studies, 2004); the translation of quotations from *Nahj al-Balāghah* is based on that of Syed ‘Alī Raza (Qum: Foundation of Islamic Cultural Propagation in the World, 1995). For the poetic

quotations from Sa'dī's *Gulistān*, *Būstān*, Rūmī's *Mathnawī-ye Ma'nawī*, and the *Diwān* of Ḥāfiz, the translations of Edward Rehatsek [*Gulistan or Rose Garden of Sa'dī* (Tehran: Peyk-e Farhang, 1998)], Henry Wilberforce Clarke [*The Būstān of Sa'dī* (Tehran: Peyk-e Farhang, 2004)] and Reynold A. Nicholson, *The Mathnawī of Jalālu'ddīn Rūmī* (Tehran: Soad Publisher, 2002), and Henry Wilberforce Clarke [*The Divan of Hafiz* (Tehran: Aban Book, 2005)], respectively, are hereby adapted.

In a number of places, words or expressions marked by brackets were added to the text either to fill a gap or to render the meaning clearer.

Footnotes with the sign "[Trans.]" are not those of the author, and thus, not in the original Persian text, but provided by the translator to facilitate better understanding for the English readers. Footnotes in brackets are those of Āyatullah Murtaḍā Muṭahharī's Works Supervisory Council or the publisher.

In the end, I would like to acknowledge the contribution of a number of experts, consultants and colleagues without whose efforts this project would have not been set up. First and foremost we are all deeply indebted to the great master martyr Muṭahharī, who delivered such invaluable lectures owing to his deep knowledge of Islamic teachings, and I have to thank Ṣadrā Publications for publishing for the first time the book in which those lectures were gathered.

A note of thanks goes to the translator, Dr. Mansoor L. Limba, who worked diligently to render the entry into English.

I would like to express my gratitude in particular to Professor Hamidreza Ayatollahy for his cooperation in starting this project and in general to Mohammad Meftah of the Qum-based International Institute of Islamic Studies for his most helpful translation consultancy, to Salahaddin Limba for proofreading the initial manuscript, and to the editor Amir Dastmalchian who went through the manuscript most meticulously.

I would also like to greatly appreciate the efforts of Ali Aranj and Leyla Majdani for supervising and facilitating the workflow of the present work.

I hope that this book would be an invaluable contribution to the Islamic thought and of great benefit for all readers in general and people of research in particular.

I take this opportunity to express our gratitude to "Islam and West Research Centre Ltd" for publishing this book and hope that the latter should form a link showing the way for those who seek advancement.

Seyyed Mohsen Miri

About the Author

Professor Āyatullāh Murtadā Muṭahharī (1298-1358 S.A.H) was born to a family of clergymen on Bahmān 13, 1298 S.A.H.[February 3, 1920] in the village of Farīmān near Mashhad. At the age of 12, he went to Mashhad where he learned the basics of Islamic science and then moved to Qum where he attended the sessions of the great authorities of the theological center.

From 1319 S.A.H. [1940] Muṭahharī attended the sessions held by Imām Khomeinī and other famous teachers of the time. Moreover, he himself gave lectures in subjects like Arabic literature, logic, *kalām* (scholasticism), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and philosophy.

In 1331 S.A.H. (1952) Muṭahharī moved to Tehran and in 1341 S.A.H.(1955) he was invited to teach Islamic sciences at the Faculty of Islamic Sciences, Tehran University. He was arrested at midnight on Khordād 15, 1342 S.A.H. (1963) and remained in prison for 43 days. After Imām Khomeinī's migration to Paris in France, Muṭahharī went to meet him, and the Imām assigned him the

responsibility of organizing the Revolutionary Council.

On the night of Ordibehesht 11, 1358 S.A.H. (May 1, 1979) Muṭahharī was martyred by one of the agents of the terrorist Furqān group. He wrote more than 50 books and tens of articles, and delivered scores of speeches.

A cursory examination of the 22-volume *Ṣaḥīfeh-ye Imām*¹—the largest ever compiled anthology of Imām Khomeinī's speeches, messages, interviews, religious decrees, permissions, and letters—reveals that the martyred Professor Muṭahharī undoubtedly occupied a distinct station in the sight of the Great Leader of the Islamic Revolution and the Idol-Breaker of the 20th century.

Imām Khomeinī's communications with Āyatullāh Muṭahharī in the form of religious permissions (*ijāzāt*) and personal letters as well as descriptions of him in the Imām's letters, speeches, messages, statements, interviews, autobiography, and memorial note during and after Muṭahharī's lifetime—as indicated in the encyclopedic authentic reference source suggest that the former considered the latter a trustworthy representative, compassionate teacher, erudite scholar, competent jurist, eloquent speaker, combatant *'ālim*, and an epitome of martyrdom in the way of truth and freedom of thought.

1. *Ṣaḥīfeh-ye Imām: An Anthology of Imām Khomeinī's Speeches, Messages, Interviews, Religious Decrees, Permissions, and Letters*, volumes 1-22 (Tehran: The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imām Khomeinī's Works, 2007). [Trans.]

These benevolent views regarding him are consistent in an encyclopedic reference source of Imām Khomeinī's works—from the first volume of the anthology in which Professor Muṭahharī is indicated having been granted authority (*ijāzah*) on Dhu'l-Hijjah 24, 1388 S.A.H.(March 13, 1969) by the Imām in the financial and religious law affairs, up to the 21st volume (volume 22 being the indexes of the whole voluminous treatise) wherein he—in the Imām's message dated Shahrīvar 14, 1367 S.A.H.(September 5, 1988) addressed to the Muslim nation of Pakistan and the 'ulamā' of Islam on the occasion of the martyrdom of Sayyid 'Ārif Ḥusayn Ḥusaynī—is mentioned as having been among "the freedom-loving 'ulamā' of the Islamic world subjected to conspiracy and terrorism".

To the Imām, Shaḥīd Muṭahharī was more than a student, representative, associate, confidant, friend, or son. Indeed, it can be said that to him, Muṭahharī could not be confined to a single dimension as he embodied a totality of aspects. Muṭahharī is Muṭahharī.

A Ph.D. holder in International Relations (University of Tehran) who also earned units in MA Islamic Studies, Mansoor L. Limba, the translator, has tens of written and translation works to his credit on such subjects as international politics, history, political philosophy, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), scholastic theology ('*ilm al-kalām*), Qur'anic sciences, ḥadīth, ethics, and mysticism.

Limba's English rendition of the Persian book *Shī'eh Pāsukh Mīdahad* (*The Shī'ah Rebuts*) by Dr. Sayyid Riḍā Ḥusaynī Nasab (Tehran: Ahl al-Bayt (A.S.)¹ World Assembly, 2007) was recognized as best translation of the year in the Shaykh al-Ṭūsī International Festival (Qum, 2008) while his paper "Mahdawīyyah as Final Vocabulary: A Postmodernist Reading of Islamic Iran's Foreign Policy Principles" was awarded "best paper" at the 5th International Conference on the Doctrine of Mahdawīyyah (Tehran, 2009).

The present volume is the fifth work by Āyatullah Muṭahharī that the translator has translated into English, the others being the books *Ihyā-ye Tafakkur-e Islām* (*The Revival of Islamic Thought*) (Tehran: Ahl al-Bayt (A.S.) World Assembly, forthcoming), *Nazariyyeh-ye Shī'ah* (*The Theory of Knowledge: An Islamic Perspective*) (Tehran: Institute of Humanities and Cultural Studies and Ahl al-Bayt (A.S.) University, 2012), *Ta'lim wa Tarbiyat dar Islām* (*Training and Education in Islam*) (Tehran: Institute of Humanities and Cultural Studies and Ahl al-Bayt (A.S.) University, 2012), and *Fiṭrat* (*Fiṭrah: Man's Natural Disposition*) (London: MIU Press, forthcoming). He is currently translating a booklet entitled *Akhḡā wa Farā-akhlāq* about the author's ideas on ethics and meta-ethics (Cotabato City, Philippines: SMERI Press, forthcoming).

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1. The abbreviation, "a" stands for the Arabic invocative phrase, 'alayhi's-salām, 'alayhim'us-salām, or 'alayhā's-salām (may peace be upon him/them/her), which is mentioned after the names of the prophets, angels, Imāms from the Prophet's progeny, and saints (A.S.). [Trans.]

Preface

The present book consists of 13-session lectures by the martyred Professor Āyatullāh Murtaḍā Muṭahharī about the philosophy of ethics and it has two parts. The first part which constitutes the greater portion of the book consists of his 10-session lectures in the month of Muḥarram in 1351 S.A.H. (circa 1972) at Arak Mosque, Tehran. In this part, apart from the philosophy of ethics, Islamic ethics has also been discussed.

The second part consists of the professor's three lectures on the same subject on different occasions and venues.

The first lecture is entitled "The Criterion for Moral Action" delivered at the later part of his life before a group of Islamic seminarians in Qum.

The exact date of the second lecture in this part entitled "Communist Morality – Russell's School of Morality" is not determined, but it is obvious that it was delivered during the later part of the blessed life of this martyred thinker.

The third lecture entitled "The Issue of 'Self' in Ethics" was delivered in around 1339 S.A.H. (circa 1960) in the

PREFACE

Higher Training College of Tehran, and of course, its audio cassette recording is not available and its compilation is done through its transcript of the cassette recording at the time which was the disposal of the professor.

With the exception of the book's title (*Philosophy of Ethics*) and titles of two lectures – "Communist Morality – Russell's School of Morality" and "The Issue of 'Self' in Ethics," the rest of the lectures' titles are those of the compiler.

The martyred professor has relatively many notes related to the philosophy of ethics and Islamic ethics, which will be published in the thematic notes of the erudite scholar, God willing.

This book was first published in 1377 S.A.H. (circa 1998) and since then it has been much welcomed by the readers.

The earlier editions did not have the first lecture since its transcript became available afterward. Also, in this edition, subtitles are supplied in the text while meticulous editing and proofreading have been done after the typesetting, and since the book becomes thicker, it is hereby published in foolscap size. As a whole, this edition is presented in a thicker form and better quality. It is hoped that it is acceptable and approvable to those who are interested with the writings of this Islamic scholar and martyred combatant.

We beseech God, the Exalted, for more success.

Supervisory Council of Āyatullāh Murtaḍā Muṭahharī's Works

Bahman 1380 S.A.H. (February 11, 2000)