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Jewish Ethics: Deontological or Teleological?

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Abstract

Every ethical system possesses at least six core elements: a theory of moral value, fundamental moral principles, rules of inference, incentives for adhering to ethical principles and rules, enforcement mechanisms for those principles and rules, and a justification for the necessity of being moral and for the validity of the said ethical system. This system is constructed and refined based on sources of moral knowledge and ethical foundations and is presented to its target society. Within this system, the theory of moral value is recognized as the principal element, upon which all other elements rely in some manner. Within Jewish ethical systems, two distinct theories are observed concerning the theory of moral value: "A deontological perspective and a teleological perspective. Some scholars currently argue that Jewish ethics is deontological and present reasoning for this position." This paper, with reference to the Tanakh (the Old Testament) and the foundations of ethics in Judaism, emphasizes the teleological viewpoint and critiques the arguments put forth by deontologists. The difference between these two perspectives has been notably evident in the conduct of the Zionist regime and its supporters over the past two years. From a deontological viewpoint, it is sufficient for a religious scholar to justify, based on their own interpretation, the massacre of the people of Gaza, Lebanon, Yemen, and Iran by

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Jewish Ethics: Deontological or Teleological?

citing a divine command; in this scenario, no rational, empirical or even emotional argument can prevent such crimes.

Keywords: Ethical System, Theory of Moral Value, Foundations of Ethics, Jewish Ethics, Moral Teleology, Moral Deontology.

Introduction

Judaism is a religion that traces its roots to two thousand years before the Common Era, to the time of the Prophet Abraham. Accordingly, Jews believe Judaism to be one of the world's living and advanced religions (Kertzer, 1993: xxiv). Throughout its history, this religion has experienced numerous and extensive vicissitudes, undergoing significant transformations across various spheres. Ethics, as one of the elements of the Jewish religion, is no exception and has undergone notable developments. Consequently, ethics within this faith has traversed at least four intellectual periods: the Biblical period, the Rabbinic period, the Medieval-Philosophical period, and the Contemporary period.

This article seeks to determine which theory of value—deontological, teleological, or virtue-based—has been adopted by the ethics based on the Holy Scriptures, which form the foundation of most Jewish ethical teachings, from the perspective of moral value theory.

Naturally, the adoption of any one of these viewpoints profoundly impacts their resulting ethical system. For instance, adopting a teleological perspective directs Jewish ethics toward achieving a specific end, which, primarily, is acting as God's surrogate on earth, with the loftier goal being the recognition of the divine manifestation and knowledge of God

Seyyed Akbar Hosseini Ghal'eh Bahman, Fatemeh Moradalizadeh

Almighty—an achievement attainable only by humans among earthly beings.

However, accepting a deontological approach, particularly one based on the Divine Command Theory, implies that a command from Yahweh must be executed merely by virtue of its divine origin, even at the cost of the slaughter of all people on earth. In other words, if a Jewish scholar, based on their interpretation of the Scriptures or other sources of Jewish knowledge, concludes that all Muslims worldwide must be massacred, this decree becomes a morally obligatory divine command for all Jews, and anyone who acts upon it is considered truly devout. Under this interpretation of moral value theory, an individual who drops a bomb on a building, killing all its inhabitants at once, is not a criminal and would instead receive favor and affection from Jewish religious leaders—a phenomenon manifest in the actions of the aforementioned regime.

The virtue-based perspective also has its own requirements, aiming for Jews to achieve perfection and prepare a virtuous life for themselves through actions and behaviors consistent with humanity and justice.

Arriving at the correct and accurate viewpoint in this matter depends on a proper understanding of the epistemological foundations of ethics and the ethical foundations within this faith. Adopting an erroneous viewpoint stems from disregarding these foundations and principles based on the Jewish religion.

This paper endeavors to demonstrate that the correct and accurate perspective within Jewish ethics, based on the foundations of the Jewish ethical system, is teleological. It argues that ethical deontology within this faith is erroneous and incorrect based on the foundations of Jewish ethics,

Jewish Ethics: Deontological or Teleological?

and it is upon this flawed interpretation that the aforementioned regime has relied, refraining from no criminal action and likely continuing to do so in the future, potentially to an even greater extent.

The conclusion of this analysis, through examining the arguments of both sides and the foundations of Jewish ethics, is to reveal the fact that, based on properly-founded Jewish ethics, the savage crimes of the Zionist regime in killing and displacing innocent Palestinian people, along with their other crimes, are erroneous even according to their own ethical teachings.

To obtain an answer, it is necessary first to attend to the definition of ethics, then to consider the sources of moral knowledge, subsequently extract the foundations of Jewish ethics from the Holy Scriptures, and finally, derive the theory of moral value within this faith.

It is important and significant to note that the era for the acceptance and authority of the Jewish religion has concluded; with the advent of Islam and the final religion, acceptance of Judaism no longer holds a position for belief.

1. What is Ethics?

Numerous and varied definitions have been provided for ethics. For example, *Abū Ali Miskawayh Rāzī* writes: "Indeed, ethics is a state of the soul that impels it to its actions without thought or deliberation...." (Miskawayh, 2001 AD/1422 AH: 85) *Fayḍ Kāshānī* defines the phenomenon of ethics thus: "*al-Khulq* is an expression for a firm disposition within the soul from which actions emanate with ease and facility without the need for thought and deliberation." (Fayḍ Kāshānī, 2002 AD/1423 AH: 5, 13) *Allamah Majlisī* also states: "*al-khulq* (with a *Ḍammah* on the *Lām*) is

Seyyed Akbar Hosseini Ghal'eh Bahman, Fatemeh Moradalizadeh

a stable property of the soul from which action emanates with ease."
(Majlisī, 1982 AD/1403 AH: 67, 372, Chapter 59, under Hadith 18)

Bustānī, quoting scholars of ethics, says: "*al-Khulq*, in the custom of scholars, is a stable property through which the soul [acts] without prior thought, deliberation, or affectation." (Bustānī, 1870: 251)

Bernard Rollin, in his book *Science and Ethics*, states: Ethics is a set of principles or beliefs that guide our vision of right and wrong, good and bad, fairness and unfairness, justice and injustice (Rollin, 2015: 35). Elsewhere, ethics has been defined as follows: An ethical system is a framework that governs its adherents and directs and organizes their behavior within four relationships (the relationship of humans with God, with themselves, with others, and with nature) in a specific direction (Hosseini Ghal'eh Bahman, 2015 AD/1394 SH: 115).

Here, the intended meaning of "Ethics" is the ethical system operative within a society, culture, religion, group, etc. An ethical system in this sense comprises elements that must be considered when describing the system.

These elements include:

- **Articulating the theory of moral value** (i.e., What is the criterion for good and bad, right and wrong, obligatory and impermissible, and moral duty? Is teleology the correct path, or virtue-centricity, or deontology, or rights-based ethics?).
- **Articulating foundational and primary moral principles** (i.e., principles that serve as the basis for moral judgments, upon which these judgments are built).
- **Articulating inferential and derivative rules** (i.e., secondary judgments derived and issued based on foundational principles).

Jewish Ethics: Deontological or Teleological?

- **Articulating motivational elements** that encourage adherence to moral precepts (i.e., incentives granted to individuals who observe moral precepts).
- **Articulating enforcement mechanisms for moral precepts** (i.e., penalties envisaged for violators of moral precepts).
- **Articulating the purpose of ethics**, or more precisely, the **moral justification** (i.e., Why should humans live morally at all? What is the goal of being moral? And why is adhering to a specific ethical system correct and justified?) (Hosseini Ghal'eh Bahman, 2015 AD/1394 SH: 117-118).

Scholars of ethics worldwide, across various religions and cultures including Judaism, have endeavored to prepare a complete and precise ethical system, coherent in its elements, for themselves and their societies.

In this article, the term "ethics" refers to the ethical system described in the last definition, and the effort is aimed at discovering the theory of moral value within the Jewish faith.

2. The Sources of Jewish Ethics

The primary question that arises in the ethical teachings of any religion or creed pertains to the foundations of its ethical doctrines and commandments. In other words, what are the religious sources within that faith? This question is equally pertinent to Judaism and the Jewish faith. The sources of Jewish teachings and ethics are divided into two categories: written and non-written sources. Although the Tanakh, Talmud, Baraita, and compilations of legal codes and commentaries are considered the titles of

Seyyed Akbar Hosseini Ghal'eh Bahman, Fatemeh Moradalizadeh

the written sources of Jewish teachings; however, according to Jewish belief,

"All definitions and interpretations concerning Judaism are inspired by a single, fixed, and fundamental source, which is the body of Jewish literature, laws, traditions, and customs referred to as "Torah." This term encompasses both the Written Torah (revealed to Moses at Mount Sinai) and the Oral Torah. The Oral Torah, in turn, includes the Mishnah, the Talmud and all its commentaries, the legal rulings of Halakha, the Shulchan Aruch, and all the customs and traditions that have been inherited generationally and form an integral part of Jewish life. No segment of the Jewish people, no movement in Jewish history (regardless of its religious, philosophical, or ideological basis) has any source or authority other than the Torah." (Amir, 1977: 31)

From this perspective, the principal and most significant source concerning Judaism and Jewish ethics is the Old Testament, which Jews refer to as the Covenant, the Tanakh, or the Hebrew Scriptures. The term Tanakh is an acronym formed from the initial letters of three words: *Torah* (the Law or the Pentateuch), *Nevi'im* (the Prophets), and *Ketuvim* (the Writings or Hagiographa), which together constitute the sacred scriptures of the Jewish people. According to Jewish tradition and belief, the books and scrolls compiled in the Tanakh originate from a source of divine sanctity and were assembled by the members of the *Knesset HaGedolah* (the Great Assembly)¹ (unlike other religious texts known

1. The Great Assembly (Knesset HaGedolah) was a Jewish legislative body that was active in Jerusalem from the early period of the Second Temple. The 120 members of this assembly were those who connected the era of the Prophets (Nevi'im) in Jewish history to the era of the Tannaim (the sages of the Mishnah, who lived from the 1st century CE to the

Jewish Ethics: Deontological or Teleological?

as *Sefarim Chitzonim* [external books], which lack divine sanctity) (Amir, 1977: 129). The Old Testament comprises 39 books compiled over many years. The original language of the Old Testament is Hebrew, with a small portion in Chaldean, both of which are Semitic languages. There also exists a version of the Old Testament in Greek, translated from the Hebrew text, known as the Septuagint. It is said that this translation was undertaken by 72 Jewish scholars around 258 BCE at the command of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, King of Egypt. The Greek version differs from the original Hebrew; most notably, it contains sections not found in the extant Hebrew version. These sections are called the Apocrypha (hidden writings), and their authenticity has been questioned since ancient times. Around 100 CE, the leaders of the Jewish council, the *Knesset HaGedolah*, canonized the 39 books of the Hebrew version and rejected the others (cf. Tofghi, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 97-100).

It is noteworthy that for obtaining Jewish religious and ethical teachings, in addition to the Tanakh, three other sources are considered significant: the Talmud, which is considered a continuation and commentary on the Tanakh (Amir, 1977: 126–128); the Baraita (Braitot), known as the external teachings for Jewish instruction (Cohen, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 21); and compilations of legal codes and commentaries formulated on prior texts, particularly the Talmud, such as the Mishneh Torah, the Shulchan Aruch, the Arba'ah Turim, and the Code of Asher for discerning ethical precepts in Judaism.

3rd century CE). This assembly established the customs and regulations concerning sacrifices and prayers, and also reorganized the Tanakh. (From: *Dictionary of Jewish Culture*, Translation Editor: Menashe Amir, Jerusalem, 1977: 203)

Seyyed Akbar Hosseini Ghal'eh Bahman, Fatemeh Moradalizadeh

Ethical scholars and jurists, utilizing these written sources as well as non-written sources such as Midrash (a method of interpreting texts and written sources), Takkanah and Gezerah (rulings derived based on current benefits and detriments in Jewish life), Ma'aseh (the precedent and conduct of scholars), Minhag (custom), and Chokmah (wisdom/reason), engage in the discovery and systematization of ethical principles, rules, and the ethical system within Judaism, placing the product of their efforts at the disposal of the Jewish community.

Now, with consideration of the sources of Jewish ethics, emphasizing the ethics derived from the Tanakh, we shall examine the ethical system of the Jewish faith and endeavor to demonstrate which theory of moral value is prevalent in Jewish ethics based on the Hebrew Bible.

3. The Foundations of Jewish Ethics

The ethical system of the Jewish faith, like other ethical systems, is constructed upon specific bases and foundations. Below, we will refer to the most important and relevant of these foundations.

3.1. Theological Foundations

The God of Israel is the most important reality and concept within the concepts and truths of the Bible, encountered throughout all parts and books of the Tanakh, except for the two books of Esther and the Song of Solomon. This concept is introduced with numerous and varied names; terms such as Yahweh, El, Elohim, etc.

3.1.1. Proof of God's Existence

The Torah and the Old Testament, which begin with the phrase, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," and in the first of the Ten

Jewish Ethics: Deontological or Teleological?

Commandments—the centerpiece of divine commandments in that book—state: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage," (Exodus 20:2) yet no direct argument for proving God's existence is observed therein. Even where it states, "The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God"..., " (Psalms 14:1) the fool, in reality, doubts God's moral authority, not His fundamental existence.

3.1.2. Attributes of God

- **Oneness of God:** Undoubtedly, the God of contemporary Judaism is One, and essential monotheism is ascribed to Him. In Deuteronomy 6:4–16 we read:

"Hear, O! Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength... then beware, lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. You shall fear the Lord your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you (for the Lord your God is a jealous God among you), lest the anger of the Lord your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth."

- **Self-Existence:** One of the attributes ascribed to God in the Old Testament is His self-existence. In the book of the prophet Isaiah, it is stated: "Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: "I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God." (Isaiah 44:6) This passage explicitly refers to the primacy and ultimacy of Yahweh, and that there is no God besides Him. Being first and last signifies that Yahweh has no need for another in His existence.

Seyyed Akbar Hosseini Ghal'eh Bahman, Fatemeh Moradalizadeh

- **Sustainer (*al-Qayyūm*):** The sustenance provided by God Almighty means that the subsistence of everything other than Him is dependent upon Him; meaning, besides the Divine Essence, everything that has taken form in the world has been realized by relying on that Essence, and in addition to coming into existence, it remains in need of that Essence for the continuation of its existence. Thus, sustenance implies the creation and perpetuation of contingent beings, or in other words, moment-by-moment creation. The attribute of sustenance can be observed in the opening passages of the Book of Genesis (Genesis 1:1-31).
- **Eternality:** According to the sacred texts, Yahweh has neither beginning nor end (Dan Cohn-Sherbok, 2003: 357). This concept is indicated by the expressions of primacy and ultimacy. The expression of primacy and ultimacy is interpreted in theological discussions as eternity (See also: Isaiah 9:6). It is narrated from the book of the prophet Isaiah that Yahweh says: "I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God." (Isaiah 44:6).
- **Omnipotence:** In the Book of Exodus, it is stated: "And God spoke to Moses and said to him: I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name Lord I was not known to them." (Exodus 6:2-3) In Jewish theology, God is the cause of all events in the world, and there is nothing beyond His power. This meaning also alludes to a form of unity in actions (*Tawḥīd al-Af'ālī*). This power, in the context of God's supervision and determination of behavior, is discussed under the term *Hashgacha* (Providence) (Amir, 1977: 243). In Psalms, Psalm

Jewish Ethics: Deontological or Teleological?

33, verses 14-15, it is stated: "From the place of His dwelling He looks. On all the inhabitants of the earth; He fashions their hearts individually."

- **Omniscience:** Omniscience means having complete knowledge of all things, even the existence of other gods (if they were to exist). In the first book of Samuel, it is stated: "Talk no more so very proudly; Let no arrogance come from your mouth, For the Lord is the God of knowledge; and by Him actions are weighed." (1 Samuel 2:3)
- **Omnipresence:** Another attribute of God in the Old Testament is His omnipresence. In other words, there is no place in the world where God is not present (Psalms 139: 5-11). Certainly, if God Almighty is aware of all matters of the world and, on the other hand, is capable of every possible action, He is pervasive throughout the entire universe; not a single particle of reality is separate from His existence, nor can it be absent from Him.
- **Perfect Goodness:** From this viewpoint, God Almighty is morally perfectly good. In the Psalms of David, God is described thus: "The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, Slow to anger and great in mercy. The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works." (Psalms 145: 8-9)

According to the Old Testament, He possesses all the characteristics and qualities that constitute the moral perfection of a being; for example, God is kind: "Teach me to do Your will, For You are my God; Your Spirit is good. Lead me in the land of uprightness" (Psalms 143:10). God is compassionate and gracious: "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy." (Psalms 103:8) God is just: "...And there is no other

Seyyed Akbar Hosseini Ghal'eh Bahman, Fatemeh Moradalizadeh

God besides Me, A just God and a Savior; There is none besides Me."

(Isaiah 45: 21)

- **Justice and Mercy:** God's justice necessitates that each person is responsible for their own deeds and accountable for their actions; however, God created the world based on His "Justice and mercy." Based on this belief, if God had created the world solely with His attribute of justice, nothing would have been saved from His wrath; but He placed His mercy alongside His justice so that a balance would be achieved in the world under the auspices of these two attributes.
- **Fatherhood:** God holds a paternal relationship with the people of Israel. He addresses the Israelites, saying: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son." (Book of the Prophet Hosea, 11: 1) However, the fact that the Israelites are called the sons of God signifies that they are so cherished that they are like a son to God, and because God breathed His spirit into humanity, they have become sons of God (Cohen, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 45).
- **Holiness and Perfection:** Every good attribute belongs to God, and every bad attribute is distant from Him. In other words, on one hand, attributes of perfection are ascribed to God, and on the other hand, attributes of imperfection are negated from Him. Attributes like wrath, etc., which are mentioned for God, are also interpreted (Cohen, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 44).

3.2. Anthropological Foundations

Humanity and the beliefs of various religions and creeds concerning it contain a multitude of subjects and teachings whose examination requires

Jewish Ethics: Deontological or Teleological?

substantial and independent opportunity. In this context, we will briefly study the anthropological teachings of Judaism to the extent that they directly influence Jewish ethics.

3.2.1. The Status of Humanity Among Other Creatures

In the view of the Tanakh, humanity is placed slightly lower than the angels and is crowned with glory and honor.

"What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him with glory and honor." (Psalms 8: 4-5)

In this interpretation of humanity's place among the creatures of the world, humanity is neither so high as to be above the divine angels, nor so worthless as to be considered subordinate to other creatures. They are slightly lower than the angels and are the ruler and governor of other creatures in the world.

3.2.2. The Choosiness of the Jewish People

However, it is necessary to mention this very important point in the anthropological foundations of Judaism: traditional Judaism, based on the Tanakh, maintains that God chose Abraham, Sarah, and their descendants for a specific service in the world. According to this interpretation, the Children of Israel were chosen to uphold and respect God's law and to spread the divine heritage throughout the world. In Deuteronomy, chapter 14, verses 1-2, it is stated:

"You are the children of the Lord your God... For you are a holy people to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for Him, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth."

Based on this text, firstly, the Children of Israel are of such esteem and proximity to Yahweh that they are titled the children of God; secondly, this people is holy; and thirdly, God has chosen this people from among all the nations on earth as His own special and particular people. Yahweh God has also given this chosen people of His the guarantee that He will not replace them with another people.¹

3.2.3. The Existential Dimensions of Humanity

In Judaism, as in other Abrahamic faiths, it is believed that humans possess two existential dimensions: a body fashioned from the dust of the earth, and a spirit, which is the divine breath blown into his frame. In the Book of Genesis, it is stated:

"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." (Genesis 2:7)

3.2.4. The Relationship Between Soul and Body

In Judaism, since humanity is the valuable and "Very good" pinnacle of God's creation, there exists a positive view of the body as the instrument of the soul. From this perspective, a physical body is necessary for the soul to master the physical world; it is through the instrumentality of this very body that the soul interacts with the world and brings it under its dominion. Nevertheless, it is imperative to prevent the body from rebelling and to obstruct its inclination toward transgression and impiety.

1. It is good to know that preferring one people over others, without regard to their conduct in the past, present, or future, is far from the wisdom and rationality of a wise and thoughtful being—even if this act were to be carried out by God Almighty. Furthermore, according to Quranic teachings, God Almighty has not favored any people over another and has deemed the most noble among them to be the most righteous. Accordingly, the doctrine of the chosenness of the Jewish people is incompatible with divine wisdom, and the verses of the Holy Quran refute it.

Jewish Ethics: Deontological or Teleological?

But what relationship is considered to exist between the soul and the body in Judaism? Jewish theology has not provided clear-cut views on the connection between the soul and body, or even on the nature and essence of the soul itself. Apart from the philosophical and Kabbalistic literature on the soul, the primary sources for delineating Jewish religious teachings are Midrashic texts (i.e., texts compiled by Jewish religious scholars interpreting the Tanakh and the Old Testament) and the Talmud. According to the Rabbis and Talmudic authors, the soul, in some of its meanings, is clearly distinguishable from the body; for God blew the soul into Adam's body (Genesis 2: 7) (Talmud, Ta'anit, 22b).

During sleep, the soul separates from the body and receives spiritual vitality and refreshment from the upper world. The soul separates from the body at death and is only reunited with the body upon resurrection (Talmud, Sanhedrin, 90b–91a). Midrashic interpretations of Scripture have ambiguously addressed the life of the soul without a body, stating that the body does not endure without the soul, nor does the soul endure without the body (Tanh. Va-Yikra 11). Although one view presented here is that the soul enters a quiescent state after death (Talmud, Shabbath, 152b), the predominant view appears to be that the soul can lead a fully conscious existence when it is disembodied (cf. Ket. 77b; Ber. 18b–19a). It has even been suggested that the soul existed prior to its attachment to the body; however, the interpretation of this view is often fraught with difficulty because many stories and descriptions of the soul in a disembodied state are presented in terms of a corporealized soul, attributing to it a physical manifestation. In these interpretations, one might assume that a celestial and ethereal body is associated with the soul, enabling it to perform its most

crucial functions of an embodied state in parallel while in a disembodied, non-material state (Ivry, 1972: 4, 30). In this manner, the soul would essentially be meaningless without a body, an unjustifiable assumption; for the Rabbis were not primarily concerned with creating conceptual coherence and consistency in their theological thought. In their view, the anthropomorphism of the human being served a homiletic function rather than a philosophical or intellectual one. In other words, from a functional perspective of Rabbinic teachings, the soul is a guest in the body on earth (Lev. R. 34:3), and for this reason, the body must be respected and honored for its hospitality (Ivry, 1972: 4, 30).

3.2.5. The Nature of Humanity

In Judaism, firstly, humanity is not conceived as lacking an inherent nature. Human beings enter and live in the world endowed with a specific nature. Furthermore, according to this faith, particularly Judaism influenced by Rabbinic literature, a human is created morally neutral at birth, while possessing an inclination toward both good and evil (Karesh and Mitchell, 2009: 563). Humanity possesses an internal conflict. On one hand, it has an attraction and tendency toward good, and on the other, it inclines toward evil and wickedness. In other words, Judaism holds that human existence is composed of two natures, referred to as the *yetser hara* [YAY-tser hah-RAH] and the *yetser hatov* [YAY-tser hah-Tove]. Literally translated, these two natures mean the "Evil Inclination" and the "Good Inclination." From the perspective of this faith, humans are granted free will to follow and submit to the effects and endowments of one of these two opposing characteristics. In an ancient Midrashic depiction, when Cain killed his brother and was brought before God for this matter, he said, "O God, do not

Jewish Ethics: Deontological or Teleological?

punish me for killing my brother; if I have committed an error, this error is from You; for it was You who created me thus." However, God rejected Cain's argument. Cain possessed free will and was autonomous; he should have moved toward and chosen his positive inclinations based on his own volition (Kertzer, 1993: 115).

3.2.6. Humanity as a Free Agent

In Judaism, humanity possesses an internal conflict. On one hand, it has an attraction and tendency toward good, and on the other, it inclines toward evil and wickedness. In other words, Judaism holds that human existence is composed of two natures, the "Evil Inclination" and the "Good Inclination." From the perspective of this faith, humans are granted free will to follow and submit to the effects and endowments of one of these two opposing characteristics. In an ancient Midrashic depiction, when Cain killed his brother and was brought before God, he said that God should not punish him for the murder of his brother, arguing that if he had sinned, the fault lay with God for creating him with such an inclination. However, God deemed Cain's argument insufficient because Cain possessed free will and was autonomous; he should have moved toward and chosen his positive inclinations based on his own volition (Kertzer, 1993: 115).

3.2.7. The Purpose of Human Creation

At first glance, based on the Old Testament, the creation of humanity is for humans to be God's vicegerent and deputy on earth. According to the Old Testament, humanity was created to manage and administer the creatures on earth. Humans were created to rule over earthly creatures and govern them. Psalm 8 states:

Seyyed Akbar Hosseini Ghal'eh Bahman, Fatemeh Moradalizadeh

"4 what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? 5 You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. 6 You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet; 7 all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, 8 the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas." (Psalms 8: 4–8)

A similar theme is seen in the first chapter of Genesis:

"27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. 28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (Genesis 1: 27–28)

This passage refers both to the purpose of human creation and to the means and prerequisites for achieving that purpose. The goal is dominion over the earth and rule over its creatures, and its prerequisite is the power and ability to exercise this dominion and rule. These prerequisites are realized through being created in the image of God and receiving His blessing.

It is noteworthy that being created in the image of God (Hebrew: *צֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים*, romanized: *tzelem Elohim*; Latin: *Imago Dei*) means bearing a resemblance to God; a resemblance in the sense of being able, like God, to exert dominion over other creatures and rule them. Thus, being like God entails possessing sufficient knowledge, power, perception, and intellect to administer the world. Undoubtedly, this phrase employs symbolic language and does not intend to suggest that God has a physical body like humans;

Jewish Ethics: Deontological or Teleological?

rather, the meaning and intent is that God created humans to be similar to Him in terms of certain attributes.

In any case, regarding the purpose of human creation, the first point derived from the Tanakh is that humanity was created to be God's deputy on earth and to rule over its creatures. Being God's vicegerent and having sovereignty over earthly creatures, of course, necessitates human responsibility before God (Bradshaw, 2010: 114)

In a general understanding of the purpose of human creation, it can be said that the primary purpose is for humanity to be God's deputy on earth, and the higher purpose is the recognition of the divine manifestation and the knowledge of God Almighty, which, among earthly beings, can only be realized by humans.

3.2.8. Humanity and Life in the World (Responsibilities and Duties)

As mentioned earlier, regarding the purpose of human creation, the first point derived from the Tanakh is that humanity was created to be God's deputy on earth and to rule over its creatures. Being God's vicegerent and having sovereignty over earthly creatures requires, at the very least, human responsibility before God (Bradshaw, 2010: 114)

In light of the above, within Judaism, humanity is placed on a specific path, and all its responsibilities and duties are shaped within this path. From this perspective, the most significant events in the life cycle of a Jew are: birth, circumcision, naming, coming of age (Bar/Bat Mitzvah), marriage, and death. In Judaism, a ceremony and celebration are held for each of these events, thereby depicting the individual's entry into these responsibilities.

Certainly, when duty and responsibility are discussed, reward and punishment also gain heightened value and importance. But what is the

Seyyed Akbar Hosseini Ghal'eh Bahman, Fatemeh Moradalizadeh

narrative of reward and punishment for human actions and behaviors consequent upon their being obligated?

There are various views concerning the reward and punishment of human actions. The Old Testament states that God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2: 15). This garden was a geographical region located in this earthly world. The Garden of Eden is equivalent to the Hebrew term *Gan Eden*. The concept of the Garden of Eden, along with other concepts of Jewish eschatology, evolved. With the emergence of the themes of resurrection and individual reward and punishment, the Garden of Eden was also transformed into a garden in the hereafter. (Peters, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 3, 477–479).

The Old Testament mentions a place called Sheol (*Sheol*) and Hades (*Havveh*). The Hebrew word Sheol is used as a proper noun. This word refers to a place where the dead reside. Sheol is considered a neutral place and is not a site of reward or punishment. In Sheol, slaves and masters, the righteous and the wicked, the poor and the rich are equal and Sheol is merely a place of interment. Sheol has also been referred to by the names "Dust" and "Grave." Phrases such as "Abode," "Nether regions" and "Dark land" also refer to the land of the dead. Sheol is situated underground, under the sea, or at the base of mountains. Sometimes Sheol is depicted as a fearsome dragon (Rasulzadeh, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 67–96).

To provide further explanation regarding Sheol, it must be said that Sheol is the closest equivalent in the Bible to the concept of hell. The Book of Numbers in the Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible, states that Sheol is a "Dark and Deep" region, a place to which humans descend after their death. The Books of Ecclesiastes and Job both state that Sheol is a land to which all the dead

Jewish Ethics: Deontological or Teleological?

are sent. In fact, some have interpreted Sheol as oblivion itself; a place where all the dead face a similar fate of non-existence and nothingness. However, Sheol may simply be the place that ancient Israelites imagined—a place where all spirits reside together. What later Rabbinic interpretation depicts of Sheol is the netherworld; a place where souls separated from God live together eternally in Limbo (Karesh and Mitchell, 2009: 472)

3.2.9. Afterlife

The Hebrew Bible, the Tanakh, does not in itself contain direct teachings about the afterlife or the concepts of heaven and hell. However, Rabbinic doctrine posits the existence of an *Olam Ha-Ba* (the World to Come); while *Olam Ha-Ba* is often described as akin to the heavenly Garden of Eden, the Jewish tradition views Gehenna (Hell) as a place where a person is judged before being permitted entry into *Olam Ha-Ba*. The spirits of the truly wicked, who have not manifested the divine will, will remain eternally in Sheol, in a state of Limbo (Karesh and Mitchell M. 2009: 472)

3.2.10. The Resurrection of the Dead

The belief in resurrection is one of the foundational principles of the Jewish faith, and its denial is considered a grave sin (Ghasemi Qomi, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 158).

"Whoever does not believe in the resurrection of the dead and denies it will have no share in the resurrection and will not be revived." (Sanhedrin, 95 a)

Jewish sages made the belief in resurrection the subject of one of the eighteen benedictions (*Shemoneh Esreh*), which constitutes a crucial part of the daily prayers (*Tefillah* in Hebrew, תפילה). This prayer states:

Seyyed Akbar Hosseini Ghal'eh Bahman, Fatemeh Moradalizadeh

"You are mighty forever, my Lord; You are the One Who revives the dead... Who is like You, O! King, Who causes death and restores life, and causes salvation to flourish? And You are faithful to revive the dead. Blessed are You, O Lord, Who revives the dead."

In response to the deniers of the afterlife, it was established that at the conclusion of the prayers in the *Beit HaMikdash* (Temple), one should say: "From this world to the World to Come." (Mishnah Berakhot, 5: 9)

4. The Jewish Ethical System

Thus far, we have examined the most important foundations of the Jewish ethical system. In this section, we will, within the available scope, investigate the ethical system of this religion and note its primary pillars. It is important to mention that our examination focuses on the stronger and more prevalent views, leaving divergent opinions to more specialized forums. As in previous chapters, the discussions on the Jewish ethical system will be examined within the framework of the elements and pillars of an ethical system; consequently, we will commence with the theory of moral value.

4.1. Theory of Moral Value

As stated, for any issue to be deemed right or wrong, there must be a criterion and standard by which to judge its correctness or error. The theory of value is, in fact, the scale and criterion for determining moral right and wrong within various ethical systems.

It was also noted that the theory of value is the most fundamental element in any ethical system. Ethical principles and rules are constructed based on a theory of value, and ethical challenges and conflicts are resolved using it.

Jewish Ethics: Deontological or Teleological?

Normative theories are commonly divided into three categories: "Consequentialist, Deontological, and Virtue-Based" theories (cf. Williams, 2003 AD/1382 SH: 13). Some ethicists have added a "Rights-Based" theory to these three (cf. Omid, 2002 AD/1381 SH: 313).

To elaborate, a Consequentialist is one who sets a specific goal for life and measures human voluntary actions and traits against that goal. If they fulfill that goal, they are deemed morally obligatory and good; if not, they are considered morally bad and vicious. Accordingly, an action is morally right if it produces good results; hence, in Consequentialism, attention to the result and consequence of an action takes precedence over the action itself. Consequentialism includes perfectionism and utilitarianism. Perfectionists define that goal in terms of the actualization of human potential, while utilitarian place the goal in the benefit, utility, or pleasure that accrues to humans. In Jeremy Bentham's hedonistic utilitarianism—the most famous form of consequentialism—the only intrinsic good in the world is pleasure, and an action is right if it creates the greatest amount of pleasure compared to any other action (cf. Atrak, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 28).

In ethical hedonism, a subset of consequentialism, happiness and pleasure are intrinsically good; the goodness of happiness and pleasure is not from a moral perspective per se, but from the viewpoint of hedonism, and the pursuit of pleasure may occur without regard for moral considerations.

Virtue ethics is a theory and branch of normative ethics. Its emergence dates back to ancient Greece. History considers Socrates the primary initiator of this arduous path because, by engaging with groups of young people and questioning them on how to live, he attempted to clarify ethical

Seyyed Akbar Hosseini Ghal'eh Bahman, Fatemeh Moradalizadeh

concepts for them in his own manner. He also sought to influence them by displaying his own virtues and spoke of a life centered on virtue, aiming to establish ethics among the people (Khazaei, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 20–21).

In Deontological Ethics, the criterion for the rightness or wrongness of a voluntary trait or action is neither its conformity with the purpose of life nor its human or animal origin; rather, the criterion lies within the trait or action itself. In other words, by considering human voluntary traits and actions themselves, one can perceive goodness and badness, rightness and wrongness in them, independent of their product or their source. By looking at truth-telling itself, its goodness is observable, and by looking at lying, its badness is visible. Deontologists can be divided into two groups: followers of the Divine Command Theory and adherents of Kantian Ethical Deontology. Followers of the Kantian theory maintain that the goodness and badness, rightness and wrongness, and obligatoriness and impermissibility of a voluntary trait or action are ontologically inherent in those ethical actions and traits themselves, and a rational being can, by considering that trait or action, at least in its very manifest instances, observe and comprehend that goodness or badness and rightness or wrongness.

However, proponents of the Divine Command Theory believe that voluntary actions and traits are, in themselves, neutral with respect to goodness and badness, rightness and wrongness. It is the divine will and, subsequently, divine command and prohibition—or better stated, divine legislation—that imparts the color and character of goodness or badness, rightness or wrongness, and obligatoriness or impermissibility to that behavior or trait. In this case, humans must seek to discover God's command or prohibition through various means to become aware of the moral ruling

Jewish Ethics: Deontological or Teleological?

of a trait or behavior. Once this divine ruling and view is ascertained, no consequence can change it.

Finally, Rights-Based theory interprets the criterion of right and wrong as the observance of the rights of humans and beings possessing moral status. In this view, one must first identify beings with moral standing; then, extract the rights we hold towards these beings with moral status; and finally, acknowledge that any voluntary action or trait that safeguards the rights of beings with moral status is morally good, and any behavior that disregards their rights is morally bad.

The primary question in this section is: Which of these theories of moral value does Jewish ethics, particularly ethics based on the Hebrew Bible, follow? Consequentialism? Virtue ethics? Deontology? Or Rights-Based theory?

Considering the Hebrew sacred texts and the foundations of the Jewish ethical system, Jewish ethics can be interpreted both as a perfectionist Consequentialist ethics and as a Deontological ethics.

4.2. Deontology in Jewish Ethics

Some, like Michael J. Harris, believe that Jewish ethics is a deontological ethics, specifically interpreted through the Divine Command Theory. According to this group, the rightness and wrongness of human voluntary actions and traits are subject to divine command and prohibition, and even divine will. Without this will, desire, and command/prohibition, no moral ruling is obtained (Harris, 2003: 5).

If the killing of an innocent human is to be wrong and erroneous in Jewish ethics, this must necessarily be subject to divine will and desire. If divine will and desire have not been directed against the wrongness of

Seyyed Akbar Hosseini Ghal'eh Bahman, Fatemeh Moradalizadeh

killing an innocent human, this act is considered neutral in itself. (Something we witness today in the occupied territories and other countries of West Asia).

However, a very important question exists in this realm: How is the divine will and desire revealed to humans?

Michael J. Harris states on this matter:

"It is therefore useful to distinguish between three different types of [awareness of] divine will or desire concerning human ethical behavior. These three types are: 1. Desires and wills that God has explicitly revealed in the Torah; 2. Desires and wills that are not explicitly commanded in the Torah, but which God communicates to us through other means; and 3. Desires and wills related to human ethical behavior that God does not make known to us at all, neither through revelation in the Torah nor through other means." (Harris, 2003: 5)

He applies the term "God's revealed Torah command" to the first type and calls the second and third types "God's unrevealed will." (Harris, 2003: 7)

Those who believe in deontology in Jewish ethics often rely on three reasons: First, the abundance of ethical and non-ethical (e.g., ritual) commandments and obligations in Jewish sacred texts; Second, the prevalence of an imperative tone, whether as command or prohibition, in Jewish sacred texts; and Third, the existence of very strange commandments addressed to Jews that are utterly irreconcilable with Consequentialist, Virtue-Based, or Rights-Based understandings.

To elaborate, the Tanakh, considered the primary sacred text of Jews, contains 613 commandments (*mitzvot*), encompassing ethical, creedal, and

Jewish Ethics: Deontological or Teleological?

legal (halakhic) injunctions, with the Ten Commandments being the most prominent among them. The multitude of ethical commandments, both positive and negative, suggests one thing: that the criterion of moral value is these very divine commands, prohibitions, and injunctions, and nothing beyond them.

Of course, it is evident that the articulation of this number of commands and prohibitions, at least in the realm of ethics, can have a revelatory function regarding ethical values. In other words, moral rulings and values, based on any ethical theory—be it Consequentialism or Deontology—are expressed in two forms and modalities: in the form of value judgments, such as the statement “truth-telling is good,” and in the form of obligatory rulings, such as the injunction “one must tell the truth” or “tell the truth!” The crucial point about these two forms is their unified content, which strives to direct humans toward performing good deeds and refraining from ethically ugly actions. Therefore, both modalities and forms are two sides of the same coin. Accordingly, in any sacred text or ethical source, the prevalence of one form does not necessarily indicate the theory of value endorsed by that text and source. Thus, the abundance of obligations in the Hebrew Bible does not necessarily signify the primacy of deontology. The presence of commands and prohibitions in sacred texts is sometimes to aid other human faculties in identifying values and does not point to the creation or establishment of moral values in the manner proposed by the Divine Command Theory.

The second point is that a strongly imperative and obligatory tone is highly prominent in Jewish sacred texts, including the Tanakh, with few sections devoid of it. This tone could indicate the dominance of deontology

Seyyed Akbar Hosseini Ghal'eh Bahman, Fatemeh Moradalizadeh

over rival approaches in ethical theory, imposing the dismissal of those theories.

In response to this perception, it suffices to say, as mentioned, that ethical rulings are referred to in two forms—value and obligation—both of which essentially indicate the same reality and are two sides of the same coin. For example, to express the ethical desirability of truth-telling, one can state: "Truth-telling is good" or say: "One must tell the truth." But in reality, both refer to the desirability of truth-telling and seek the same reality. The imperative and commanding tone should not be taken as a sign of deontology.

Furthermore, the existence of some very strange and unbelievable commandments in the Tanakh or other Hebrew sacred texts could be seen as evidence that these commands and prohibitions themselves constitute the criterion of value, steering us toward the Divine Command Theory and narrowing the space for rival ethical perspectives like Consequentialism, Virtue Ethics, or Rights-Based theories. For instance, in 1 Samuel, chapter 15, it is stated:

"Samuel said to Saul, 'The Lord sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore listen to the words of the Lord. 2 Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'I will punish what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. 3 Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'"

In this passage, Yahweh commands the slaughter and destruction of the Amalekites and forbids any mercy. This action, which is ostensibly highly unethical, becomes ethical through this command. In this analysis, Saul is

Jewish Ethics: Deontological or Teleological?

considered a servant and slave of Yahweh and must therefore carry out all His commands, regardless of their nature.

In analyzing the aforementioned biblical passage, it can be pointed out that this command and similar injunctions could represent the resolution of a specific challenge or dilemma, not the expression of a general view on the theory of moral value. In other words, when dealing with rebellious and disobedient peoples, severe measures are sometimes deemed necessary, and these measures do not signify the disregard for criteria of moral value such as Consequentialism or Virtue Ethics.

Moreover, this command falls within the realm of Jewish law (*Halakha*), and adherents of that religion must address the apparent conflict between this legal ruling and ethical values and somehow justify this contradiction.

In any case, it seems that deontology, especially with a Divine Command reading, lacks sufficient evidence, and Jewish theorists who advocate this view need to provide stronger evidence and arguments for their position.

Of course, it is clear that deontology, irrespective of the evidence for its confirmation, carries with it difficult consequences and results, which are worth noting:

1. The Primacy of Duty over Consequence. In deontology, a moral action does not necessarily have to have desirable consequences; it must merely conform to the divine command or moral rule. For example: "Truth-telling is obligatory even if it harms the individual, because it is a moral duty." Conversely, killing an innocent person could be deemed good if it is determined to be commanded based on certain criteria.

Seyyed Akbar Hosseini Ghal'eh Bahman, Fatemeh Moradalizadeh

2. Inability to Justify Behaviors, Traits, and Voluntary States Based on Results. By accepting deontology, one can no longer justify an action merely based on its utility or good outcomes (e.g., arguing that a white lie told to save a human life is justified and right becomes unacceptable).
3. Lack of a Clear Perspective in Cases of Conflicting Duties. If two moral duties conflict—for instance, saving a person's life requires lying—deontology does not provide a clear answer for resolving the conflict.
4. Accepting deontology necessitates moral rigorism, inflexibility, and adherence to duties that can sometimes have very dire consequences, such as the killing of innocent people, children, and the elderly based solely on the perception of a moral duty, even though an unreliable means—as has been seen in recent years with the Zionist regime.

4.3. Moral Teleology in Jewish Ethics

In the definition of moral teleology, it was stated that a teleologist is one who establishes a purpose for life and measures human voluntary behaviors and traits against that purpose. If they fulfill that purpose, they are deemed morally obligatory and virtuous; if not, they are deemed morally wrong and vicious. Accordingly, an action is morally right if it yields good results; hence, in teleology, consideration of the outcome and consequence of an action takes precedence over the action itself.

5. Explication of Moral Teleology Based on the Foundations of the Jewish Ethical System

Jewish Ethics: Deontological or Teleological?

1. Based on the theological foundations of Judaism, God Almighty possesses all attributes of perfection, and His existence is complete in every respect. Among these attributes, His state of pure goodness, in its lordship over humanity, delineates a path for human perfection and the attainment of a specific ultimate purpose (*telos*), which is realizable through the performance of duties and human accountability in this capacity.
2. Based on the anthropological foundations of Jewish ethics, humanity and its life, from a Jewish perspective, have a definite and specific purpose. Within the anthropological foundations of this religion, it was indicated that, in a general understanding of the purpose of human creation, it can be said that the primary purpose of human creation is to be God's deputy on earth, and the higher purpose is the cognition of the divine manifestation and the knowledge of God Almighty, which, among earthly beings, is achievable only by humans. These objectives precisely guide humanity toward teleology in ethics.
3. The existence of inclinations toward good and evil lacks specific justification for Jewish thinkers and scholars without considering a *telos* for human life. Fundamentally, good and evil derive their meaning from the positive or negative relationship of human behaviors, voluntary traits, and conditions with the aim and *telos* of human life. Without considering one or several ultimate purposes, positive and negative inclination has no locus; this constitutes moral teleology.

Seyyed Akbar Hosseini Ghal'eh Bahman, Fatemeh Moradalizadeh

4. Considering the resurrection of the dead, neglecting a *telos* for life and ethics seems hardly justifiable. If the purpose of life is to attain a meaningful resurrection, then one must strive to achieve it, which is itself a form of teleology.

In light of the above, moral teleology appears to be the more precise and serious value theory within the Jewish tradition.

It should be clarified that all ethical commandments in Judaism are oriented toward a clear horizon in the moral development of the individual adhering to them. The *telos* of the commandments and tenets of Jewish ethics is encapsulated in this Torah verse: "And God created man in His own image." (Genesis 1: 27) This indicates that the highest possible degree of perfection and self-knowledge for a human being consists of making oneself resemble God to the greatest extent possible. Considering this teleological value theory, this statement can be regarded as the basis and foundation of the most important and unique ethical principle of the Torah: the imitation of God (*Imitatio Dei*) (Menachem Kellner, 2003 AD/1382 SH: 241).

Based on this analysis, the ethical imperative from a Jewish perspective comprises an individual's behaviors aimed at achieving the ultimate purpose of perfection, which is resemblance to God. The nature of ethics is interpreted precisely along these lines. That is, the ethical commandments, derived from religious texts, instruct us on how and by what path the creation may draw closer to its Creator and attain the supreme model, which is the manifestation of God (for further study, cf. Khavas and Saleh, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 67). In other words, in Jewish ethics, life has a specific and definite purpose toward which humans must progress through their voluntary behaviors and attributes. The criterion of value, rightness, and

Jewish Ethics: Deontological or Teleological?

wrongness is established precisely in this point, and this statement is itself moral teleology, specifically of a perfectionist type.

Summary and Conclusion

1. The primary question of this treatise was to determine the value theory within Jewish ethics. That is, is the Jewish ethical system a teleological or a deontological system?
2. The selection of either of these two perspectives entails specific implications and consequences that cannot be overlooked.
3. The teleological perspective seeks to achieve a perfect human who is God's deputy on earth and exerts all effort toward building a prosperous world for humanity, irrespective of any ethnicity or race.
4. The theory of moral deontology, by stipulating that whatever Yahweh commands must be carried out without any rational, emotional, or empirical evaluation, and by finding the divine command through the interpretation of Jewish scholars, paves the way for any crime against humanity.
5. To arrive at the correct perspective, it is necessary to examine the arguments of both sides, as well as the foundations of Jewish ethics.
6. Accordingly, in this treatise, ethics was first considered as a system governing humanity, and it was stated that an ethical system is a framework that governs its adherents and directs and organizes their behavior within four relationships (the relationship of humans with God, with themselves, with others, and with nature) in a specific direction. Subsequently, the sources of ethical knowledge in the Jewish tradition were briefly examined, and it was noted that the

sources of Jewish teachings and ethics are divided into two categories: written and unwritten sources. Although the Tanakh, Talmud, Baraita, and collections of legal codes and commentaries are titles of the written sources of Jewish teachings, the Tanakh is recognized as the most important source of Jewish ethical knowledge. Following this, the theological and anthropological foundations of the Jewish ethical system were mentioned, and then special attention was paid to the value theory within this system. Concerning the value theory in Jewish ethics, two perspectives were proposable: "The deontological view and the teleological view. The arguments for the deontological view were examined, and the teleological perspective was emphasized."

7. In this treatise, the implications of deontology were also analyzed to the extent the opportunity allowed.
8. Finally, we emphasize that fundamentally, the period of validity of the Jewish tradition has concluded, and with the advent of the final religion (*Din-e Khatam*), there remains no grounds for its acceptance.

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