

An Islamic Worldview: Ethics in a Modern, Democratic and Secular State

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Introduction: Turkey is a modern, democratic and secular state that has had much of its focus directed to the Western world, with a laïcité dominating state policy and the public square. Yet, Turkey is also overwhelmingly Islamic; Islam continues to shape its culture and its traditions.

Concerns have surfaced that a growing traditional, politicized Islam is undermining Turkey's secular republican policies. But might this fear be misplaced – a misunderstanding or misconstrued notion of Islam? Might Islam be quite compatible with a modern, democratic and secular Turkish state?

Islam has ethical principles and values that arise from its sacred scripture and the teachings that flow from it; taught to younger and older alike in the home, mosque, or school. Might these ethical principles and values not only be discernable, but also quite compatible, and perhaps even beneficial, for a modern, democratic and secular Turkey?

This article will highlight a paradigm shift in thinking about Islam that also presents an ethical approach that is neither to be feared nor at odds with a modern, democratic and secular state.

Method: A group of professors and graduate students at Ankara University, using a transdisciplinary worldview framework unfolded through a series of workshops, developed a new understanding of Islam. That new understanding also assisted them in thinking about what it means to be human in light of controversial ethical issues that arise today.

Results: The worldview framework allowed participants to deepen their understanding of Islam through open discussion and by asking new questions. It revealed to them a dynamic Islam as a vision of life and a way of life, one that also explored what it means to be human in light of ethical issues pertaining to inclusion, disabilities, abortion and new medical technologies.

Conclusion: A transdisciplinary worldview framework approach to Islam can present a paradigm shift for many Muslims. With its Socratic pedagogical approach it allows participants to engage in a dynamic and ongoing exploration and discussion of their ideas with others and determine for themselves their thoughts, beliefs and notions. A transdisciplinary worldview approach to Islamic ethics, or that of any other religious or secular worldview, is a valuable resource for ethics teachers. It is not prescriptive but engaging. It admits no neutrality and challenges students to deepen their Islamic faith, discern their ethical beliefs and values, and explore the sources on which they are based.

Key words: Worldview, meaning of the human, ethics, Quran, abortion, religious education.

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Giriş: Modern ve demokratik Türkiye, yüzünü Batı dünyasına çevirmiş ve kuruluşundan itibaren din ve devlet ilişkilerini birbirinden ayırmıştır. Türkiye aynı zamanda halkının ezici çoğunluğu Müslüman olan bir ülkedir; İslam dini, kültürü şekillendiren önemli bir unsur olmaya devam etmektedir.

Son zamanlarda, geleneksel anlayışların artması ve politik İslam'ın yükselmesinin etkisiyle Türkiye'nin giderek seküler yapılarının sarsılacağı konusunda bazı çevrelerce çeşitli endişeler yaşanmaktadır. Fakat bu kaygılar, eksik bir İslam nosyonundan veya yanlış anlamalar ve yanlış yorumlardan kaynaklanıyor olamaz mı? İslam'ın değerleri ile modern, demokratik ve laik değerlerin uyum içinde olması mümkün değil midir?

İslam'ın kutsal kaynaklarında yer alan ahlâki prensipler ve değerler evde, okulda ve camiide genç insanlara ve yetişkinlere öğretim konusu yapılmaktadır. Bu prensipler ve değerler sadece öğretim konusu yapılan ve bilinen değerler olmakla kalmayıp aynı zamanda çağdaş değerlerle ahenk içinde olamazlar mı? Hatta daha da ötesine geçilerek modern ve demokratik değerlerin gelişmesine katkı sağlayamazlar mı?

Bu makale, İslam hakkında düşünmekle ilgili bir paradigma değişikliğinin ipuçlarına işaret etmekte ve modern, demokratik ve laik bir ülkede kaygı ve çatışmalardan uzak bir etik yaklaşım sunmaktadır.

Yöntem: Ankara Üniversitesi'nden bir grup öğretim üyesi ve doktora öğrencisi bir dizi çalıştay düzenleyerek, disiplinlerarası bir yaklaşım içeren dünya görüşü çerçeveleri kullanarak İslam hakkında yeni bir anlayış geliştirmiştir. Bu yeni anlayış, günümüzde ortaya çıkan tartışmalı bazı etik konuların ışığında insan olmak ne demektir, sorusu üzerinde de düşünmeye yardımcı olmuştur.

Bulgular: Dünya görüşü yaklaşımının , tartışma yöntemi ve yeni sorular sormak suretiyle katılımcıların İslam anlayışları üzerinde daha derin düşüncelerine ve anlayışlarını derinleştirmelerine destek olduğu görülmüştür. Bu yaklaşımın İslam'ı bir yaşam biçimi ve yaşam görüşü olarak ortaya koymaya imkân sağladığı belirlenmiştir. Yaklaşım, aynı zamanda yeni tıbbi teknolojiler, kürtaj ve özel eğitime muhtaç kişiler gibi hususlar karşısında insan olmak ne demektir, sorusunu araştırmaya kapı aralamıştır.

Sonuç: İslam dininin eğitimini disiplinlerarası dünya görüşü yaklaşımıyla yapmak bir paradigma dönüşümü sunabilir. Yaklaşımın ana yöntemi olan Sokratik yöntem (Buldurma yöntemi), katılımcıları canlı ve sürekli bir arayış içine sokabilir, fikirlerini başkaları ile tartışma ve bireyin kendi fikirlerini, inançlarını ve düşüncelerini oluşturma yolunu açabilir. İslam'ın dünya görüşüne veya diğer dini ve seküler dünya görüşlerine disiplinlerarası bir çerçevede yaklaşmak öğretmenler için etkin bir eğitim ortamı sağlayabilir . Bu yaklaşım, kalıp bilgiler sunmaz; aksine, öğrenciyi öğrenme sürecine dahil eder. Öğrencileri, inançlarını derinleştirmeye, inançlarının ve değerlerinin farkında olmaya ve dayandıkları kaynakların kökenini keşfetmeye davet eder.

Anahtar sözcükler: Dünya görüşü, insanın anlamı, etik, Kur'an, kürtaj, din eğitimi

Introduction

Turkey is a modern, democratic and secular state, established as a republic in 1923. Since that time it has had much of its focus directed to the Western world, with a *laïcité* dominating state policy and the public square. Turkey is guardedly secular, not unlike some other European countries.

Yet, Turkey is also overwhelmingly Islamic. Islam, as the dominant religion in the Republic of Turkey, continues to shape its culture and its traditions. Its architectural symbols dot the rural and urban landscape. Its beliefs and principles are taught in the schools. Turkey is manifestly if not reluctantly religious, not unlike some other European countries.

Certain recent political developments lead some to raise concerns that a growing traditional, politicized Islam

is beginning to undermine Turkey's secular republican policies. There is also a growing fear of "Islam rising"; in Turkey, in Europe and beyond. But might this fear be misplaced? Might it arise from a misunderstanding or misconstrued notion of Islam? Might Islam be quite compatible with a modern, democratic and secular Turkish state, much the same as Christianity is quite compatible with a modern, democratic and secular European state?

Islam, like Christianity, has ethical principles and values. These arise from its sacred scripture and the teachings that flow from it. These are taught to younger and older alike, whether in the home, the mosque, or the school. Might these ethical principles and values not only be discernable, but also quite compatible, and perhaps even beneficial, for a modern, democratic and secular Turkey, the same way that a Christian ethic might be quite compatible and even beneficial for a modern, democratic and secular European state? This article will highlight a paradigm shift in thinking about Islam that presents a new ethical approach that is neither to be feared nor at odds with a modern, democratic and secular state.

A Paradigm Shift

A paradigm shift in thinking about Islam that led to a new ethical approach had its genesis at a conference held in Ottawa in 2010. What began as a friendly early morning conversation between two people who were all but strangers, quickly developed into an exchange of similar interests, developing ideas and promising opportunities. Soon a challenge surfaced. Would it be possible to teach about Islam, and particularly ethics grounded in Islam, that would be both engaging and innovative, that would reach beyond an authoritative and prescriptive image of Islam, and that would be dynamic and vibrant? Would it be possible to map Islam as a worldview – a particular *vision of life* and a particular *way of life* – that is distinctive, renewed or reformed (*tejdid*) for a modern, secular and democratic state? Could this also lead to casting new light on certain ethical issues, such as what it means to be human? How would this be done, and what methodology would be required that would be sufficiently interdisciplinary if not transdisciplinary? The challenge was great, the possibility for failure even greater, yet the goal and objective immensely enticing and appealing.

A team of university scholars with backgrounds in theology, worldview studies, education, feminist studies and sociology, together with graduate students in education and religious education, gathered to begin collaborations in May of 2011. Two challenges in particular stood out, and both were huge. The first was to gain an understanding of and become receptive to a whole new approach – a worldview framework. The second was to see if that worldview framework approach would be helpful in mapping an Islamic worldview, and perhaps even be beneficial in shedding light on ethical issues such as what it means to be human.

Over a five-year period, and in workshops of three to four days held twice a year at Ankara University, deep conversations unfolded. In the process, two observations could be made. One, the questions posed by the framework precluded easy prescriptive answers. Hard work was required and team members could resort to little previous or familiar experiences. Two, team members found themselves in intense but friendly discussion and dialogue with one another, learning from one another as they went along, and seeking clarification for profound theological, ethical, epistemological, ontological and philosophical questions. We were on the way to mapping an Islamic worldview, and one that would shed light on certain ethical issues arising in society.

That which emerged from the workshops represented an Islam from the inside out, from the hearts and minds of a group of younger and older scholars as they wrestled with a variety of sociological, theological, philosophical, ethical, cultural, and existential questions and issues. It is a view of Islam that has taken shape for them as they think anew about how to be Muslim in a secular society from the perspective of a comprehensive worldview framework. That view of Islam highlighted two central elements that emerge from the Qur'an: belief in God and live as a good person. All the rest of Islam flows from these two fundamental components,

and they give helpful direction and guidance on ethical issues.

Interpreting the Qur'an from these two essential beliefs sheds new light on Islam and what it means to be a Muslim. But it also presents huge challenges. First of all, what a belief in God entails and what it means to be a good person in the very context in which one lives requires interpretation. Islam is shaped by the context in which it is manifest as much as it shapes that context. Culture, tradition, and historical context have played a major role in shaping Islam through the ages. There are many faces of Islam, as there are many faces of Christianity, Judaism and even Humanism.

Second, while the Qur'an remains the most important source for Muslims for guidance, direction and understanding in life, it is not the only one. Insights gained from many other sources, including reason, science, history and experience are also highly valued. All of these assist in gaining knowledge and awareness of how to live in the situation in which one finds oneself and how to interpret and understand one's reality, and no less one's ethical reality.

Third, injunctions, and especially ethical injunctions, received from the Qur'an need to be understood in light of the context in which they were first received. Some were quite specific to that time and place and could be literally interpreted. Others contain principles and it is these principles, not literal interpretations of the injunctions, which are to give guidance and direction wherever Muslims find themselves. It is here that Islamic principles can shed light on ethical issues of today, even as Islam gives considerable freedom to Muslims to determine for themselves how to live by the Qur'an's two central tenets: belief in God and being a good person.

All of this implies that it is not politicized Islam that is important but to live by the Qur'anic principles of justice, fairness, equality, mercy and benevolence in all areas of life. These principles can guide and direct private lives but they are also to be extended to public lives, undergirding economic, ethical, political, communal and other engagements.

A Worldview Framework

The transdisciplinary worldview framework used to map an Islamic worldview as it emerged from the group gathered at Ankara University is grounded in the works of a number of scholars from a number of academic disciplines. The framework consists of five sub-frameworks, each with six further elements or components. Each presents itself as a building block to discerning a worldview that is greater than the sum of its parts.

The first framework – Personal/Group Identity – recognizes the insights from disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and psychology. Our context, upbringing, gender, education, community and socio-economic situation are very influential in shaping our identity. Humans are social creatures; we do not live in isolation. Our identity, and hence view of the world, is to a large extent socially constructed(1-4).

The second framework – Religious/Cultural Dimensions – is based on insights from disciplines such as religious studies, scriptural studies, theology, sociology, psychology and anthropology. Based largely on the pioneering work of Ninian Smart, this framework recognizes that a worldview is influenced and shaped by a number of cultural factors or dimensions (5). Our worldview is shaped by narratives or metanarratives, stories or scriptures, by teachings we have heard from these, by ethical or moral principles we embrace, by rituals and symbols that define us, the social or communal groups with which we gather, and the experiences that have left etchings on our hearts and minds (6).

The third framework – Ultimate/Existential Questions – derives insights largely from philosophy and responds to those larger than life questions that have challenged humankind since the dawn of human history. While we may individually or collectively have greater or lesser responses to them, or even none at all, they are present in

the contexts and cultures in which we live, largely through the works of those who have philosophized about them. They have shaped cultures and political systems, at times causing upheavals of huge proportions when transitions are made from one philosophical orientation to another, as the history of philosophy and political theory has shown (7-9). Questions such as the meaning of life, the purpose of the human, responsibilities and obligations, discerning right from wrong, the notion of a higher power, force or being beyond the human, and life after this life all elicit responses that give shape to our thoughts and actions – our *vision of life* and our *way of life* – either individually or collectively.

The fourth framework – Ontological/Epistemological Beliefs – also takes insights from philosophy and particularly its two distinct fields. These two areas of philosophical inquiry have a long history and can become quite complex. Few people individually or collectively probe their depths. Yet, questions addressing the notion of the physical or the metaphysical, or a combination of the two, as the essence of the human or reality in general continue to provide if not provoke intensive discussion and serve to point to worldview differences, as evidenced in terms such as physicalism, scientism, evolutionism, atheism, spiritualism, and monotheism. None of these worldview orientations can be embraced with ultimate certainty but are necessarily embedded in some leap of faith, since ultimate knowledge escapes the human. Even rational and scientific knowledge, while powerful sources of human understanding, have limitations, as some are beginning to recognize, which opens the door again to respectability for religious faith and belief (10-15).

A fifth and final framework – Ultimate/Particular Beliefs, Values and Principles – focuses as much on beliefs as it does on actions, or better stated, how beliefs correlate with actions. Incongruities can develop between beliefs espoused and actions taken, and sometimes actions speak louder than words (16,17). Nonetheless we all have or espouse some ethical notions, convictions or beliefs regarding justice, equality, openness and sacredness of the human. Herschel reminded us that “Man’s understanding of what is right and wrong has often varied throughout the ages; yet the consciousness that there is a distinction between right and wrong is permanent and universal” (18). There are universal beliefs and values but how they play out, or should play out, in particular situations or in particular historical contexts creates disagreements and disputes. For example, monotheistic worldviews (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) affirm that God is just but the justice often carried out by some in God’s name is rather appalling. But no less is the justice carried out by people such as Hitler, Stalin and Mao, whose embrace of secular worldviews such Marxism and Communism led to history’s most brutal massacres in the 20th Century. Our ethics is embedded in the worldview we embrace, which in turn leads to particular actions influenced by or dependent on the context in which we live.

Personal	Gender, Family Relationships
	Abilities/disabilities, interests, characteristics, desires
	Learning and educational levels
Social	Communities to which we belong
	Socio-economic status
Cultural	Ethnicity, nationality, language

Framework I: Personal / Group Identity

Texts, Scriptures, Metanarratives, Stories
Teachings, doctrines
Ethical principles
Rituals; symbols
Communal, social gatherings of the devotees
Ecstatic experiences which strengthen this worldview

Framework II: Religious / Cultural Dimensions

Meaning/purpose of life, the universe
Nature, purpose of humans
Responsibilities/obligations
Values, discerning good/bad, right /wrong
Greater force, power, being in the universe
<i>Eschatology</i> : Life after this life

Framework III: Ultimate or Existential Questions

Nature of being, reality	<i>Physics</i> : Ultimate nature of reality
	Metaphysics: beyond the physical; spiritual nature
	<i>Cosmos</i> : Origin/future of the universe
Nature of our knowing: certainty of knowledge.	Subjective knowledge
	Objective knowledge
	Source, basis of knowledge

Framework IV: Ontological / Epistemological

Pursuit of justice
Dignity of all people
Sacredness of life
Equality/diversity
Openness/tolerance
Environmental concern

Framework V: Universal / Particular Beliefs, Values and Principles

Shedding Light on Ethical Dilemmas: The Nature of the Human

Discussions regarding the last of the five frameworks easily result in a number of controversial societal issues coming to the fore. One of the most important issues for the 21st Century may indeed prove to be what it means to be human (19). Such an issue can be given greater clarity when seen within the context of larger worldview positions.

With advances in medical technology what it means to be human takes on particular poignancy, for what we today can *do* with the human is far in advance of ethical discussions about what we *should* or *should not* do with the human. It raises ethical questions about the sacredness of the human and what is or is not valued in the human. Issues such as abortion, euthanasia, and designer babies bring clear differences to the fore regarding what are valued in terms of the human. Different worldview perspectives take different positions and all of this is quite telling. Islam has some clear positions to offer to society at large to assist in sorting through some of the ethical dilemmas. These become clear when seen in comparison to others.

Jean Vanier, Catholic theologian, philosopher and founder of L'Arche communities worldwide, argues that all humans are persons regardless of their abilities or disabilities, and all are valued because they are creatures of God. Further, humans are communal beings; they form communities and everyone belongs to the community, even the physically and intellectually disabled. They are often among the most vulnerable in our society, yet they belong and are to be valued for who they are – children of God. Vanier argues from a Christian worldview perspective (20).

Peter Singer, on the other hand, an ethicist and utilitarian philosopher, argues that not all humans are persons. He scoffs at the notion of the sacredness of human life, regarding it as a medieval through back. Persons are those who are rational, self-conscious and have the ability to self-reflect. Those with severe intellectual disabilities, who are unable to reason, lack self-awareness and are unable to self-reflect, may be human but

are not necessarily persons. Singer argues that those with severe intellectual deficiency can be euthanized in their first years of existence if parents do not value them nor wish to keep them; that is, if they have no utility to them. Singer argues from an atheist utilitarian worldview perspective (21).

A number of European countries, most notably Denmark, have taken steps to decrease from among their population those with Down syndrome by 2030. Through advanced prenatal screening Down syndrome can be detected in the early stages of pregnancy, and options for abortion are presented to the mother. A high degree of women in Europe and North America who discover their unborn child has Down syndrome opt for abortion. While raising a child with Down syndrome can be challenging and overwhelming for parents, it also sends a signal as to what kinds of persons are valued in society. Might countries such as Denmark and others argue from a consumerist or capitalist worldview perspective, where value is accorded to those who can contribute to consumer and capitalist ideologies and endeavours?

These matters are highly charged. They are also telling in terms of what is valued and here worldview differences surface. While there is agreement that humans are to be treated with dignity and respect as a universal principle, in particular contexts and situations that dignity and respect is not applied evenly or applied at all: not all humans are equally valued. Global awareness has brought us knowledge and information of how humans define, treat and regard human life in various parts of the world. How then do those embracing an Islamic worldview and who live in a modern, democratic and secular state understand and particularize the universal notion of the sacredness of human life? What does Islam bring to the ethical debate that is insightful and helpful?

Muslims believe that God created all things, including human life. All living entities are a consequence of an ontological relationship with God. The concept of sacredness can be found in the Qur'an: "There is no existence on earth that does not glorify God" (13:2) In this sense, all living things in the universe are sacred, or special – all are valued. Humans are a special creation.

According to Islam, the sacredness of life is extended to all humans, from conception to natural death. The value of persons is not determined by their abilities or disabilities, whether these are intellectual or physical – life is a creation of God and hence must be preserved (22).

While the value of human life is a general principle it is not, however, an absolute one, even in Islam. People get killed, and especially in war. Solders threatened with death in wartime have the duty to eliminate their enemy. Yet, protecting human life is still evident. The principle "an eye for an eye", while implemented throughout much of human history and often used to support capital punishment, was only intended as a maximum not minimum punishment, or necessarily the only punishment, to be inflicted or enacted, for, as Gandhi reminds us, "an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind".

According to Islam, punishment is ethical and legal by its very nature, yet here too the human must be respected. Some Muslims feel that criminals should not be executed nor should they remain imprisoned for life, arguing that reintegration into society honours the sacredness of life principle. Yet, others argue that ensuring a safer society requires deterrents and that punishment should fit the crime. It is also argued that the merits of capital punishment is not directly part of theological study and that governments and their legal systems are best suited to deal with these issues. Nonetheless, capital punishment has been eliminated in Turkey.

In terms of abortion, the "life is sacred principle" is also not absolute. Islamic teachings indicate that the soul does not enter into fetal life until the fourth month and hence abortion is permitted during the first four months of pregnancy. After this the fetus becomes a living soul and abortion is restricted. After the initial four month period, the option of abortion applies only where the life of the mother is in danger; her right to life takes primacy over that of her unborn, for the mother is considered the "source of life" while a fetus

is a “potential life”. Some Muslim scholars consent to abortion after the fourth month in the case of fetal deformity where care would become exceptionally difficult for the parents. Some feel that children conceived through rape may not be aborted after the fourth month; others make exceptions and permit it, especially if it occurs during wartime (22,23).

Turkey legalized abortion for medical reasons in 1965 and in 1983 broadened the right to abortion in the first ten weeks of pregnancy. Government initiatives to further restrict abortions have met with huge public outcry. Some, in tune with much Western liberal thinking, argue for the right of women to choose for themselves. Others feel Islam forbids all abortions, applauding the general principle of the sacredness of human life, even in its earliest stages and especially when it concerns disability.

Yet here too the general principle of the value of all human life is applied in particular ways. But what about the sacredness or value accorded to the disabled, especially the intellectually disabled? How is this general principle particularized or manifested? Opinion is divided as to whether Islam, both in terms of the Qur’an and its Sunna, values those with severe disabilities, especially intellectual mental disabilities. Turmusani argues strongly that the disabled, especially intellectually disabled women, have traditionally been cast in a negative light. Many have been hidden away, often because they have brought shame on their families. They have suffered centuries of abuse that is now only being addressed, according to Turmusani, thanks largely to feminist movements (24). Morad argues, in opposition to Turmusani, that the Qur’an strongly supports the rights of people with disabilities, and highlights a continuity of the past with the present in extending value and care for them (25). The notion of community and concern is deeply embedded within Muslim tradition, and Muslims feel obligated to care for disabled children because it is understood to be a special task given to them by God. Sending them to institutions, as has often been done in other European and North American contexts, would be seen as shirking this responsibility. Onus is placed on families to be the prime caregivers (25). Yet Morad affirms that Islam does not forbid residential care institutions for the disabled and because abuse is known to occur steps are being taken to give greater assistance and support to families burdened with caring for disabled children. Turkey signed the UN Convention for the Rights of People with Disabilities and is now taking initiatives to create residential care facilities to assist parents. It is also mandated to have them proportionally represented in all aspects of the larger society, including as members of the national parliament (26).

While issues such as abortion and the treatment of those with disabilities remain controversial and complex, the general Islamic principle is quite straightforward: all human life is sacred and valued. Hence the two primary Islamic beliefs – believe in God and be a good person – places onus on treating all human life with respect and value, and seeing the community as the context in which this is to be enacted: Islam values community. As such it rejects individualism, a worldview that places the individual at the centre. It rejects utilitarianism, a worldview that links human value to their utility whether to others or society at large. It rejects consumerism, a worldview that accords greater value to those humans with greater capacities to consume.

Muslims acknowledge that life is complex and that hard and fast rules cannot be rigidly applied everywhere and in every situation. Guiding principles, on the other hand, can give direction, and Muslims recognize that to believe in God and be a good person cannot be done without treating all human life with respect and value, especially those who are most vulnerable. This must be the overriding ethical principle.

A Worldview Framework Approach: Personal Reflections

A worldview framework approach, whether pertaining directly to ethical issues or beyond, can result in a richer and deeper understanding of Islam. It can transform the understanding of Islam in a number of ways. One, it can transform the understanding from what is often perceived as a prescriptive, ritually oriented

religion to one that is intended to give individuals freedom to explore for themselves how to live under the guidance and direction of the principles revealed in the Qur'an. Two, it can transform the understanding from what is often seen as a politicized religion vying for dominance to one that allows each individual Muslim to seek its wisdom, guidance and direction as one seeks to address and confront all of the issues of a modern, democratic and secular society. Three, it can transform the understanding from a rigidly imposed belief system that determines one's private life to one that presents a vision *for* life and a way *of* life for all areas of one's existence. Four, it can transform individuals in that it allows them to explore Islam anew for themselves. What follows is a paraphrasing of comments from individuals involved in the workshops, and how the method used, the pedagogical approach taken and the trust that developed assisted them in a new look at themselves and at Islam.

One faculty member stated that the framework approach allowed project members to present their thoughts in a systematic way. The workshops allowed everyone to think about numerous dimensions of the world in which they live. At times it created areas of thought not previously considered, which is crucial for intellectual development.

Another faculty member acknowledged the friendly atmosphere of the workshops. No one was afraid of being judged. Everyone felt completely safe, free to express themselves, make comments and ask questions in a very pleasant atmosphere. It was very important that trust was established very early so that hard questions could be asked. Being confronted with one's traditions and how to position oneself in religious, ethical, social and traditional areas led members of the group to rethink many of their previous notions and assumptions.

One PhD student found the opportunity to freely express herself and discuss with other participants very helpful. She learned a lot from the workshop discussions and felt that they contributed considerable to her personal development. Before these workshops she did not feel a strong connection to her Islamic tradition and faith, and had lots of unanswered questions. Many of these were answered. She also discovered that asking the right questions leads to new insights.

Another PhD student indicated that the most important aspect of the workshops was the method employed. Use of a worldview framework combined with a Socratic style of questioning was crucial in gaining new insights. The pedagogical approach led to discussing far-reaching topics related to Islam, especially ethical ones. Not only was this process fruitful, it was also a good model for working collaboratively.

A young instructor learned that theory begins with good questions. She felt that the workshops allowed her to see the larger picture and this was important for her. She also felt that because an environment of trust and openness was established early, it assisted everyone in better knowing and appreciating other members of the group and their points of view, and willing to engage larger issues, especially ethical ones.

Another instructor felt the workshops gave her an opportunity to look anew at her tradition as well as ask questions about herself. She found the worldview framework approach and Socratic style of questioning very helpful.

Another PhD student felt the workshops taught her questions she should ask to gain a better understanding of herself and the larger universe. Encountering new questions can be exciting. Learning which questions to ask became most important for they can lead to new insights.

A Worldview Approach: A Valuable Resource for Ethics Teachers

Is such a worldview approach a valuable resource for those who teach ethics? Ethics are embedded in worldviews. What is considered ethical depends greatly on the worldview perspective one embraces, which can be seen from the different worldview perspectives taken by peoples such as Vanier and Singer when it comes to how

people with intellectual abilities should be treated. As such, might a worldview approach to teaching and studying ethics be helpful not only for a better understanding of Islam but also for a better understanding of religious and secular worldviews in general. Teaching about worldviews provides a refreshing approach to understanding ethics and ethical issues, with the following benefits:

One, a worldview framework approach is transdisciplinary and comprehensive. It assists students in viewing the world as a meaningful whole rather than as isolated and unrelated pieces of information. It takes insights from numerous disciplines recognizing that views of life and ways of life are shaped and influenced by many factors.

Two, a worldview framework approach is inclusive and engages students of all worldviews in exploring and internalizing their own *vision of life* and *way of life*. It is not exhaustive, definitive, or prescriptive but increases critical thinking and articulation of one's own beliefs and values, and those of others. It enhances true dialogue: ethical questions asked of others become ethical questions asked of themselves.

Three, a worldview framework approach invites individuals and groups of individuals to take an active role in determining for themselves their particular ethical beliefs and values. It assists them in understanding the source of their own ethical beliefs and values, reflecting on and articulating the theological, philosophical, and historical traditions in which they may be grounded, yet is dynamic in assisting them rethink their beliefs and values in light of constantly changing contexts and circumstances.

Fourth, and finally, this dynamic process challenges all persons to a continuous process of understanding, reflection and articulation. It resists ossifying beliefs and values. It opens up possibilities for dialogue and discussion, validates the importance of asking basic questions, and increases understanding of what it means to be Muslim, Christian, or atheist.

Conclusions

One, a worldview approach has highlighted what is felt to be a dynamic Islam as a *vision of life* and a *way of life* that will entail a paradigm shift for many Muslims. It is compatible with a modern, democratic and secular nation and may serve as a model for other nations with a majority or large minority Muslim population.

Two, the transdisciplinary worldview framework with a Socratic pedagogical approach results in considerable growth among younger students and seasoned academics. Individuals are free to discuss their ideas with others and determine for themselves their thoughts, beliefs and notions on wide-ranging ethical issues related to an Islamic worldview. The process is ongoing, extensive, and dynamic.

Three, a transdisciplinary worldview approach to Islamic ethics, or that of any other religious or secular worldview, is a valuable resource for ethics teachers. It is not prescriptive but engaging. It admits no neutrality and challenges students to deepen their Islamic faith, discern their ethical beliefs and values, and explore the sources on which they are based.

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