

**His Excellency, Āyatullāh Jawādī Āmulī's Message
to the Second International Congress on Bioethics**

February 5-7, 2011

*I seek refuge from the accursed Shayṭān.
In the Name of Allah, the All-beneficent, the All-merciful.*

Perpetual praises are due to God Who originated His vicegerent (*khalīfah*) for creating ethos (*khulq*);¹ endless salutations are in order upon God's holy prophets, especially the Seal of Prophethood whose ethos was the Holy Qur'ān; boundless benedictions are owing upon the Immaculate Family who took upon the heavenly mantle of a noble ethos and called humanity to be vested by it; we wish to near ourselves in friendship to these sacred souls and distance ourselves from their nefarious foes.

We wish to extend a warm welcome to all noble guests, seminary scholars, university professors, and intellectuals partial to ethical upliftment. With the conviction that the untiring efforts of the honourable conveners of the Second International Congress on Bioethics will be met with divine favour, we would like to duly acknowledge here the speakers and writers who, with their sagacious orations and scholarly compositions, have added to the spiritual elevation of the Congress.

It is appropriate that we present a few short points in this message.

First: While the purpose of the creation of man is his worship and the intent behind the origination of the cosmos is man's unitive (*tawḥīdī*) knowledge—the former having been put forth in sūra Dhāriyyāt² and the latter alluded to in sūra Ṭalāq³—nonetheless, the purpose of the creation of the vicegerent (*khalīfah*) [of God] is his creation of ethos. That is, God appoints some human beings to be His vicegerents so that: firstly, they are a manifestation of God in creativity; secondly, their realm of creativity is the spiritual and inner aspect of man, and not his material and outer (even though men like Jesus were mandated with the latter); thirdly, the instrumental means for such inner creativity is precisely the teaching of the Book and wisdom intellectually speaking, and the purifying of souls on the volitional level; fourthly, the certain result of this instruction and such purification is the acumination of the intellect and the immolation of the carnal soul—this is because ethos, which is a psychic disposition and habit of the soul, keeps both cognition and volition in check, so that the former does not err by means of dubiety, nor does the latter deviate by way of excessive concupiscence or irascibility. Such a powerful disposition, properly known as 'ethos,' is the creation of a man that is vested with the majestic mantle of God's viceroyalty. From such a man comes forth the effusion and grace of divine creativity to instil the ethos of nobility in the very crux of man, thereby giving him entry to the truly Good Life.

Second: The confinement of knowledge to the straight-jacket of the sensorial and empirical is an incurable malady that has affected epistemology and has led to the decline of many sciences from the level of the human to the level of the animal. This is because sensorial cognition does not have the ability to comprehend the immaterial human spirit and is averse to it and ultimately rejects it. Moreover, it sees the reality of man to be, much

¹ The Arabic word *khulq* is usually translated as 'character.' We have chosen to use 'ethos' instead for its richer and more comprehensive connotation as well as its immediate connection with ethics. The word *ethos*, in its classical sense, means moral character, natural disposition, or habit arising from the very heart of man. Hence its etymological and literal meaning of 'dwelling place' becomes correct when the heart of man is seen to be the repository of the divine Spirit, and hence the saying of Heraclitus, "*ethos anthropoi daimon.*" [Tr.]

² Verse 56.

³ Verse 12.

like livestock, composed of purely material parts that can be duly dissected in a laboratory. Anything that is not observable with the aided or unaided eye is denied existence and in this way the important and profound line that separates the noble medical profession from veterinary science is blurred. This is because according to the sensorial epistemological perspective: man is just an animal that happens to speak; all human knowledge is purely material; in dying man deteriorates into dust; after death man bears no responsibility whatsoever for his beliefs, character/ethos, behaviour, and speech—all of this implies that upon death an oppressive person, just like a bloodthirsty wolf, is annihilated completely; and that because there is no aversion to the reduction of knowledge, there is no aversion to the subject of knowledge becoming earthbound and degraded. A person who is afflicted with this type of closed-circuit and spiritless epistemology might still speak of “spirituality” but will formulate his speech in materialistic thought—being unaware that sacred speech from a profane speaker is without spiritual effect altogether. Hence in expounding the important field of bioethics it is essential to avoid a reduction to an empirical and sensorial epistemology and—while assenting to the validity of the latter [on its own level]—it is imperative to move on up to an immaterial or metaphysical epistemological perspective. This will make possible the proper formulation of the philosophical principles and bases of bioethics and will thereby prepare the ground for the correct apprehension of the guidance that the Abrahamic religions, especially the last of them—Islam, have to offer with regards to it.

Three: The immaterial human spirit is not without body; while it is in this terrestrial realm, its natural life is accomplished by this very same body. This said, it is imperative to note that its human life is acquired by a number of things: in addition to nutrition, growth, and reproduction—things that are common to human beings and vegetables, and over and beyond some feelings, sensations, and acts of procreation—things that are shared between human beings and animals, it is acquired by intellectual certainty of the world and the existents particular to it on the one hand, and by volitional strength with respect to the correct way of interacting with itself, the outside world, and others, on the other hand. The responsibility of ascertaining such types of interaction and securing such a spiritual life for both the individual and society lies with ethics—a comprehensive and important branch of knowledge that includes within its scope a number of other sub-fields, some of which will now be alluded to:

1. **Spiritual Medicine:** The mandate of this metaphysical field, one that is responsible for man’s divine vicegerency, is the vivification of the imaginal body whose limbs and organs are informed by true knowledge and good action, not formed by flesh and bones. It is also responsible for the therapy of the imaginal body, by way of a hygiene that includes the prevention as well as the treatment of diseases [of the soul].
2. **Spiritual Architecture:** The responsibility of this supranatural field is the soundness of formation and the firmness of the compact structure of the imaginal body, such as are secured by the vigour and health of the ethos (and not the physical body). This is of significance because the phenomenon of death is so exacting and draining that if the imaginal body is not firm and sound, it is possible that just like the physical body it too would fall apart. In such case, the “tongue” would be incapable of speech and would be unable to answer the crucial questions put to it in the purgatory and imaginal world. This remains true irrespective of the fact that in the resurrection and rebirth man is raised with the same body that he had in this world.
3. **Spiritual Art:** The mission of this supranormal branch is the beautification of the [imaginal] face and limbs; in particular the “whitening” of the face and being resurrected with a shining countenance.⁴ [The “whiteness” of imaginal faces has

⁴ Cf. Qur’ān 3:106.

nothing to do with race, as] the fact is that in this world and terrestrial life, if a man were to possess the quality of nobility and piety, there would not be any difference between black and white. As Sa'dī has put in verse:

The piety seeker is a godly man, Whether he be white or black.⁵

[The "whiteness" or any other feature] that is in the otherworld after death, is nothing but the symbol and representation of qualities such as justice or oppression, truth or falsehood, and goodness or evil [acquired hereunder]. This type of heavenly art [and symbolic representation] is capable of taking a poem, such as that of Ḥakīm Sanā'ī, "Enchanting eyes, an Indian's mole, a heathen's ringlet, an outlander's countenance; O Muslim, why have you made yourself a pantheon,"⁶ that on the material plane is considered to be enchanting fiction and turn it into a wise and intelligible expression vis-à-vis the realm of ethos. Of course, such ornamentation and representation is the forte of the holder of virtues who has an unbreakable bond with his Creator and whose manner of forbearance is as such:

The pain that I always heard people talk of as fiction;
Went from mentality to objectivity and from ear to here.

And whose inner and outer self is as so:

In matters of love, where his foot[steps] are, there is my head;
In matters of devotion, where his ring is, there I give my ear.

If a creative artist, by way of a novel and exquisite design, is able to strike harmony between heaven and earth, and with this admixture of beauty and majesty, manifest himself on Resurrection day, he would be the external embodiment of Sanā'ī's verse:

Perplexity came upon the eye, saying O eye don't look;
Jealousy came upon the ear, saying O ear don't hear.

Fourth: The science of ethics has precepts, bases, and sources (*archai*). The ethical precepts are a set of prescriptions and proscriptions, either obligatory or recommended. The ethical bases are those universal laws upon which the ethical precepts are based. The ethical sources are those fixed and trustworthy principles that are the proof of God; it is from these sources that the ethical bases are derived. In the "*islām*" that is manifested in the form of the Abrahamic religions, as per the verse:

إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ

Indeed, with Allah religion is Islam, (3:19)

all of the aforementioned elements are present and hence it is possible to form the branch of knowledge called ethics. For example, justice and oppression, two of the most central ethical and legal principles, are conceptually clear but are extremely vague and unknown when it comes to their reality. To explain, the semantic meaning of justice is to place everything in its own place; hence its correlate, injustice, comes to mean to go beyond the limit and intrude in some other thing's place. These clear and evident concepts have extensions and concrete referents that are clouded and unobvious. This is because the place of all things and people is only known to their Creator. Anyone else, who neither created them nor was witness to their creation, can never know their place; and when the place of

⁵ *Diwān-e Sa'dī*.

⁶ This and all the following verses are from *Diwān-e Sanā'ī*, pp. 335-336. Please see the References for the original Farsi text. [Tr.]

something is unknown, to keep that thing in it or to keep it from going out of its bounds remains an ambiguous enterprise. In such case, how can a law be seen to be just and its opposite to be unjust?! Admittedly, in some cases the referent of these two concepts is clear, but the fact remains that the systematic promulgation of general laws for the existential order without the prior knowledge of the delimitation and demarcation of every entity is not possible. This means that when the otherwise compelling and magisterial science of ethics is taken outside of the religious paradigm, it becomes devoid of doctrinal sources and is instead derived from factors and accretions pertaining to local culture, indigenous rituals and habits, racial predilections, geographical conditions and nationalistic biases. It thereby loses its logically demonstrable decisiveness as well as its generality and contiguity. That is, it can no longer be logically or philosophically defended and is not for all people in all times; rather it becomes temporally and spatially limited and ultimately relative. That which has led some individuals to hold that the science of ethics is not rationally demonstrable is their obliviousness of the principal necessity for a source (*arche*) in the first place, and their ignorance of the dependency of any ethical basis on this source in the second. It is precisely because ethical bases and foundations rest upon actual and ontological factors, and because their consequences in the hereafter—in the forms of purgatory and heaven—are ontological realities, they are applicable of rational argumentation and logical and philosophical demonstration.

Fifth: God created the world in the most beautiful of makes, such that anything better could not be possible. If this were not the case, then it would have to be said that either God did not have the sufficient knowledge or ability or that He was niggardly. All three of the above suppositions, as the consequents of hypothetical proposition (*modus ponens*) are impossible, hence it can be concluded that the world could not have been better than it is. (Of course, in the immaterial realm of the purely abstract intellects that are free of motion and mutability, the matter is quite different.) Man, who is the vicegerent of God, has a three-fold mandate: 1) world viewing, 2) world custodianship, and 3) world beautification. The first responsibility is based on thought—the theoretical intellect being its appropriate faculty; the second and the third are based on motivation—the practical intellect being the faculty in charge. On one hand the noble science of ethics is effective in maintaining the natural order of the world, and helps to prevent its devastation as per the verse:

إِذَا دَخَلُوا قَرْيَةً أَفْسَدُوهَا

When they enter a town, they devastate it. (27:34)

On the other hand, it also has a great role to play in the beautification of the world. All this so that economic poverty as well as cultural impoverishment may come to an end and so that relative wealth and intellectuality can awaken the dormant prosperity of weak nations.

That which is presently taking place in the modern world, especially the Middle East, is nothing more than bloodshed, plundering, and destruction. The only cure for such a state of affairs is the correct understanding of, and conviction with respect to ethics, as well as carrying out of good deeds in accordance with it. Such ethical excellence is outside of time and space, not being limited to any particular land, or fixed to a certain period. Similarly, such nobility of ethos is free from the defect of selfishness and caprice, as the reality that is common between the East and the West is the unitive human nature, which is neither eastern nor western. The preservation of this divine gift is only by way of religion, as can be seen by the counsels and statements of God's prophets: Abraham (*'a*) is quoted in the Qur'an as saying,

لَا أُحِبُّ الْآفِلِينَ

I do not like those who set. (6:76)

Prophet Moses (*'a*) is made to pray as such:

رَبُّنَا الَّذِي أَعْطَى كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلْقَهُ ثُمَّ هَدَى

Our Lord is He who gave everything its creation and then guided it. (20:50)

In his turn, Jesus (*'a*) is quoted as saying:

إِنِّي عَبْدُ اللَّهِ ءَاتَنِي الْكِتَابَ وَجَعَلَنِي نَبِيًّا

Indeed I am a servant of Allah! He has given me the Book and made me a prophet. (19:30)

Ultimately and in its most complete and perfect form in line with God's pleasure, prophet Muḥammad (*ṣ*) is made to express the doctrinal formula of:

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ

There is no god except Allah. (37:35)

At the conclusion of this message, given the fact that it is close to the thirty-second anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution at the hands of the great Muslim nation of Iran and under the leadership of the founder of the Islamic Republic, his eminence Imam Khumaynī (*r*), we would like to offer our congratulations and once again acknowledge and honour all the thinkers, academics, and scholars present here, in particular the conveners of this important congress. We pray to the Creator of the world that He grants human society success in arriving at the above mentioned principles and true bioethics.

Jawādī Āmulī

Safar 1432 AH / Bahman 1389 AHS / February 2011 CE

References:

Poems quoted from the Diwān of Sanā'ī in their Farsi original:

ای مسلمان زاده خود را کافرستان کرده‌ای	چشم جادو، خال هندو، زلف کافر، رُخ فرننگ
از علم به عین آمد و از گوش به آغوش	دردی که با فسانه شنیدم همی از خلق
در بندگی آنجا که ورا حلقه، مرا گوش	در عاشقی آنجا که ورا پای، مرا سر
غیرت سوی گوش آمده کای گوش، تو مَنیوش	حیرت سوی چشم آمده کای چشم، تو منگر

Translated by: Shuja Ali Mirza