

PURPOSE OF HUMAN EXISTENCE AND MORAL AGENCY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ISLAMIC TELEOLOGY AND SECULAR NATURALISM

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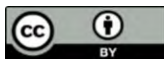
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ABSTRACT

The relationship between human existence and moral agency remains a central concern in both religious and philosophical thought, yet contemporary debates often treat purpose and ethics as analytically separable. This article addresses this gap by examining how underlying conceptions of human existence shape moral agency through a comparative analysis of Islamic teleology and secular naturalism. While Islamic thought grounds human existence in a divinely ordained purpose (ghāyah) structured by the principle of Tawhīd, secular naturalism explains human life through evolutionary processes and typically frames meaning and morality as contingent human constructions. Adopting a qualitative conceptual methodology, the study combines thematic analysis of contemporary philosophical literature with a semantic examination of key Qur'ānic concepts related to purpose, accountability, and human responsibility. It argues that these contrasting ontological frameworks generate fundamentally different models of moral agency: in the Islamic teleological perspective, moral responsibility is anchored in transcendence and accountability before God, whereas in secular naturalism, moral agency is grounded in autonomy and self-legislation. The analysis demonstrates that Islamic teleology provides an integrated framework linking purpose, accountability, and ethical conduct, thereby reinforcing internal moral regulation and existential coherence. In contrast, secular naturalism allows for pluralistic but potentially fragmented moral frameworks due to its rejection of intrinsic purpose. By foregrounding the connection between metaphysical assumptions and moral behavior, this study contributes to broader discussions on ethics, worldview formation, and the philosophical foundations of human flourishing in contemporary societies.

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INTRODUCTION

The question of the purpose of human existence has remained a central concern across philosophical, religious, and ethical traditions, shaping fundamental understandings of morality, responsibility, and the nature of human life. Contemporary scholarship increasingly emphasizes that inquiries into human purpose are not merely abstract metaphysical concerns but are closely linked to ethical orientation and patterns of human behavior (Langerak, 2022). In classical philosophical discourse, the notion of purpose (telos) has served as a foundational principle through which human existence is understood as directed toward meaningful ends, whether grounded in metaphysical, theological, or existential frameworks (Riecken, 2025). Within religious traditions, particularly in Islamic thought, human existence is understood as inherently purposeful and structured by divine intentionality, whereas in many modern secular frameworks, purpose is often treated as

contingent, emergent, or subjectively constructed (Agustono, 2024). In contemporary intellectual debates, the question of meaning has become deeply intertwined with discussions of morality and human flourishing. Recent work in moral philosophy suggests that differing conceptions of meaning significantly influence moral motivation, ethical reasoning, and the formation of value systems (Langerak, 2022). The rise of secular naturalism, particularly in modern Western thought, has contributed to a growing tendency to interpret human existence through evolutionary and material processes, thereby weakening the link between morality and metaphysical purpose (Dick, 2020). In contrast, religious ethical systems continue to assert that moral values are grounded in transcendent realities, offering a framework in which ethical norms are not merely socially negotiated but anchored in a broader metaphysical order (Malik, 2023). This divergence has generated ongoing debate regarding whether moral agency requires a teleological foundation or can be sustained within a purely naturalistic worldview.

Despite the extensive body of literature on both religious ethics and secular moral philosophy, there remains a notable gap in comparative analyses that explicitly examine how differing ontological assumptions about human existence shape moral agency and behavioral outcomes (Suhaib, 2025). Existing studies often focus either on normative ethical claims or on empirical relationships between religiosity and behavior, without adequately addressing the deeper metaphysical structures that inform ethical reasoning (Langerak, 2022). In particular, the comparative implications of Islamic teleology and secular naturalism for moral motivation, responsibility, and psychological orientation toward life remain insufficiently explored. This study seeks to address this gap by examining how these two frameworks conceptualize the purpose of human existence and how these conceptualizations shape moral agency. It asks: how does Islamic teleology ground moral responsibility in divine purpose, and how does secular naturalism account for moral agency in the absence of intrinsic teleology? What implications do these differing frameworks have for ethical behavior, psychological orientation, and human flourishing?

This article proceeds in a structured manner to address these questions. Section 2 outlines the theoretical and conceptual framework, examining key concepts such as teleology, naturalism, and

moral agency within philosophical discourse. Section 3 analyzes the Islamic understanding of human existence as purposeful and grounded in the principle of *Tawḥīd*, highlighting its implications for moral responsibility and ethical conduct. Section 4 examines secular naturalism, focusing on its evolutionary foundations and its treatment of meaning and morality as humanly constructed. Section 5 presents a comparative analysis of the two frameworks, emphasizing their differing implications for moral motivation, psychological orientation, and social organization. Section 6 discusses the broader philosophical significance of these findings in relation to contemporary debates on meaning and the crisis of moral grounding, and Section 7 concludes with a summary of the article's contributions and suggestions for future research.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding the relationship between human existence and moral agency requires careful attention to the underlying conceptual frameworks that shape philosophical interpretations of purpose, action, and responsibility. Teleology, broadly understood as the orientation of beings toward ends or purposes, has historically played a central role in explaining human existence and agency within both classical and religious traditions. In teleological frameworks, human actions are not random or purely reactive but are directed toward meaningful goals that provide coherence to moral life (Riecken, 2025). In contrast, secular naturalism rejects intrinsic or externally imposed purposes, interpreting human existence through evolutionary processes and material causation. Within this framework, human agency is understood as emerging from biological and social conditions rather than from a predetermined metaphysical *telos* (Van Huyssteen, 2006). The tension between these perspectives reflects a deeper philosophical divergence regarding whether human beings are fundamentally purposive agents embedded in a meaningful order or contingent beings who construct meaning within an otherwise indifferent universe.

This divergence has significant implications for how moral agency is conceptualized. Moral agency refers to the capacity of individuals to make ethical judgments, act upon them, and be held accountable for their actions. Contemporary philosophical discussions emphasize that moral agency is closely

linked to the question of motivation: why individuals act morally and what grounds their sense of obligation. In teleological frameworks, moral motivation is often rooted in an objective order of meaning, where ethical conduct aligns with a higher purpose or ultimate good (Wall, 2025). This alignment provides a stable foundation for responsibility, as moral actions are understood in relation to a broader metaphysical structure. In contrast, within secular naturalism, moral agency is typically grounded in autonomy, rational deliberation, and social norms, with ethical obligations emerging from human agreements, evolutionary advantages, or pragmatic considerations rather than from transcendent authority (Flanagan, 2023). While such accounts can sustain systems of ethical reasoning, scholars have noted that they may also lead to pluralism and fragmentation, as moral values lack a single unifying metaphysical foundation (Street, 2023).

The relationship between worldview, metaphysics, and behavioral orientation further illuminates how these conceptual differences translate into lived experience. A worldview encompasses a set of fundamental beliefs about reality, knowledge, and value, shaping how individuals interpret their existence and guide their actions. Recent interdisciplinary scholarship highlights that metaphysical assumptions whether teleological or naturalistic, play a crucial role in shaping not only ethical reasoning but also psychological orientation and patterns of behavior (Smith, 2010). In teleological systems, where existence is understood as purposeful and morally structured, individuals are more likely to interpret their actions as meaningful contributions to a larger order, reinforcing internal moral regulation and long-term ethical commitment. By contrast, in naturalistic frameworks where meaning is constructed rather than given, individuals may rely more heavily on subjective interpretation and social context in determining ethical priorities (Nasr, 1981). This does not necessarily negate the possibility of moral coherence, but it shifts the basis of moral orientation from ontological grounding to human-centered construction.

Taking together, these conceptual distinctions provide the theoretical foundation for the comparative analysis undertaken in this study. By examining teleology and naturalism not merely as abstract philosophical positions but as frameworks that shape moral agency, ethical motivation, and

behavioral orientation, this section establishes the analytical lens through which Islamic and secular perspectives on human existence will be evaluated in the subsequent sections.

ISLAMIC TELEOLOGY AND HUMAN EXISTENCE

This section examines the teleological foundations of human existence within Islamic thought, focusing on how purpose is grounded in the principle of *Tawhīd*. It explores the relationship between divine unity, human creation, and moral responsibility as central elements of a purposeful life. By integrating metaphysical, ethical, and social dimensions, the section highlights how Islamic teleology provides a coherent framework for understanding human agency and accountability. Ultimately, it demonstrates how purpose in Islam extends beyond individual existence to encompass ethical character and social responsibility.

Tawhīd and the Metaphysical Foundation of Purpose

The Islamic understanding of human existence is fundamentally grounded in the principle of *Tawhīd*, the affirmation of divine unity, which provides the metaphysical foundation for purpose and meaning (Al-Attas, 1993). Within this framework, reality is understood as originating from and oriented toward a single, ultimate source God whose will and wisdom structure the order of existence. Human life, therefore, is not accidental or purposeless but is embedded within a divinely ordained system in which all beings are directed toward meaningful ends (Al-Aidaros et al., 2013). Contemporary scholarship in Islamic philosophy emphasizes that *Tawhīd* is not merely a theological doctrine but a comprehensive metaphysical principle that integrates ontology, epistemology, and ethics (Latifah, 2024). It establishes a unified vision of reality in which human existence is intrinsically connected to divine purpose, thereby grounding moral agency in a broader cosmological order. In this sense, purpose is not externally imposed upon human beings but is inherent in the very structure of creation, shaping how individuals understand their role, actions, and ultimate destiny.

Human Creation, Accountability, and Moral Responsibility

Within the teleological framework established by *Tawhīd*, the Qur'ānic conception of human creation presents human beings as morally accountable agents entrusted with responsibility (*amānah*). Human existence is understood as purposeful, with life functioning as a test in which individuals are evaluated based on their choices and actions (Al-Aidaros et al., 2013). This understanding introduces a strong link between purpose and accountability: human beings are not only created with intention but are also held responsible for fulfilling that purpose through ethical conduct. Recent studies in Islamic ethics highlight that accountability is not limited to legal or external judgment but operates as an internalized moral consciousness, shaping behavior through an awareness of divine presence and ultimate accountability (Miller, 2023). This internal dimension of responsibility reinforces ethical consistency, as moral actions are evaluated not only in relation to social norms but in light of a transcendent moral order. Consequently, moral agency in Islamic thought is deeply relational defined by the individual's relationship with God, society, and the moral law embedded within creation.

Ethical Character and Social Responsibility in Islamic Thought

The teleological structure of human existence in Islam extends beyond individual accountability to encompass the cultivation of ethical character and social responsibility. Islamic ethical thought emphasizes that moral behavior is not merely a set of external actions but a process of character formation (*tazkiyah*) in which individuals develop virtues such as justice, compassion, honesty, and humility. These virtues are understood as expressions of alignment with divine purpose, reflecting the integration of inner moral development and outward social conduct. Contemporary scholarship underscores that Islamic ethics situates individual morality within a broader social framework, where ethical responsibility includes obligations toward family, community, and the natural environment (Miller, 2023). This interconnected vision of ethics reinforces the idea that human flourishing is not achieved in isolation but through participation in a morally structured social order. In this sense, Islamic teleology provides a comprehensive model in which purpose, moral agency, and social responsibility are

integrated into a coherent framework that guides both individual behavior and collective life.

SECULAR NATURALISM AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING

This section explores the philosophical foundations of secular naturalism and its implications for understanding human existence and meaning. It examines how the rejection of transcendent purpose leads to the construction of meaning through natural, social, and evolutionary processes. By analyzing moral reasoning within naturalistic frameworks, the section highlights both the strengths and tensions of grounding ethics without metaphysical teleology. Ultimately, it contrasts constructed meaning with religiously grounded purpose, setting the stage for comparison with Islamic teleology.

Philosophical Foundations of Secular Naturalism

Secular naturalism begins with the view that reality is exhausted by the natural world and that human existence must therefore be explained without recourse to transcendent purpose or supernatural causation. In contemporary philosophy, however, "naturalism" is not a simple or uncontested category. Thomas Raleigh argues that the term often functions as a highly elastic philosophical label, sometimes so broad that its theoretical content becomes unstable (Raleigh, 2024). This is important because secular naturalism is often presented as a unified worldview, even though contemporary debates distinguish among scientific, methodological, liberal, and ethical forms of naturalism. What these forms generally share, however, is a rejection of divinely ordained purpose as a constitutive feature of reality. Human beings, on this view, are products of natural processes rather than creatures directed toward an intrinsic metaphysical end (Hutto, 2023). This rejection of metaphysical teleology has major implications for how meaning is understood. If human existence is not oriented toward a transcendent purpose, then meaning must be explained in immanent terms: through human projects, social practices, biological needs, or reflective self-interpretation. Recent philosophical work on ethical naturalism attempts to preserve some notion of objective flourishing by grounding ethical evaluation in human life-forms, historical practices, and the conditions of human development. Matthew Congdon, for instance, argues

that ethical naturalism can defend objectivity without appealing to ahistorical moral essences, locating value in the historically articulated conditions of human flourishing (Congdon, 2023). Even so, this remains a markedly different account from teleological religious frameworks, because the source of normativity is not divine intentionality but the interpreted structure of human life within nature.

Evolution, Constructed Meaning, and Human Existence

A central feature of secular naturalism is its reliance on evolutionary accounts of human existence. Human beings are understood as products of biological and cultural evolution rather than as beings created for a predetermined moral end. Recent work in moral philosophy and evolutionary theory suggests that moral cognition itself may be explained through gene culture coevolution, social selection, and the adaptive pressures associated with cooperation. Nathan Cofnas argues that our disposition to make moral judgments may plausibly be understood as the outcome of gene culture coevolution shaped by collectively enforced norms (Cofnas, 2023). Likewise, recent empirical work on moral foundations suggests that many core moral tendencies can emerge and persist under evolutionary pressures, supporting the naturalist claim that morality may have developed through adaptive social processes rather than through divine command or metaphysical teleology. Within such a framework, meaning is typically construed as constructed rather than discovered. Human life does not come with an intrinsic cosmic purpose; instead, significance emerges through subjective commitment, social recognition, or participation in shared practices. This gives secular naturalism a certain flexibility, since it allows individuals and communities to generate diverse forms of meaning without depending on a single sacred or metaphysical narrative. At the same time, critics argue that this flexibility can come at the cost of existential stability, because meaning becomes contingent upon human interpretation rather than grounded in an objective structure of reality. Recent philosophical discussions of semi-secular and naturalistic worldviews note that such outlooks often face not only epistemic but existential challenges, particularly when asked whether they can offer durable guidance for life, suffering, and moral commitment (Avataneo et al., 2025).

Moral Reasoning and Ethical Consequences in Secular Frameworks

In secular naturalist frameworks, moral reasoning is generally grounded in autonomy, rational deliberation, social cooperation, or the practical requirements of coexistence rather than in revelation or transcendent purpose. This does not mean that secular morality is necessarily arbitrary. On the contrary, contemporary defenders of ethical naturalism argue that objective moral evaluation may still be possible if human flourishing, social practices, and the conditions of life are taken seriously as normative grounds (Congdon, 2023). Yet the structure of obligation changes significantly once morality is detached from metaphysical teleology. Moral norms are no longer binding because they fulfill a divinely intended human purpose; they are binding insofar as they promote well-being, preserve cooperation, secure autonomy, or reflect justified human agreements.

The ethical consequences of this shift are mixed. On the one hand, secular naturalism can support pluralism, critical reflection, and moral revision, since values are open to reassessment in light of human experience and social change. On the other hand, several recent debates suggest that secular naturalism may struggle to explain why moral beliefs should be regarded as more than pragmatically useful products of biological and social history. A recent discussion notes that, under naturalistic assumptions, moral beliefs are often explained in terms of social and biological grounds, which can make it harder to claim that they possess more than pragmatic value (Noaparast, 2025). This does not invalidate secular ethics, but it does indicate a possible tension between naturalistic accounts of moral origins and stronger claims about moral obligation, normativity, and existential seriousness. For the purposes of this study, that tension is central: it marks one of the most important points of contrast with Islamic teleology, where morality is anchored not merely in human interests or social construction but in a divinely ordered purpose of existence.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: PURPOSE AND MORAL AGENCY

This section offers a comparative analysis of Islamic teleology and secular naturalism, focusing on their differing conceptions of purpose and moral agency. It examines how each framework understands the

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source of meaning, the grounding of moral responsibility, and the nature of human flourishing. By highlighting both philosophical and practical implications, the section reveals key contrasts in how individuals orient their lives and ethical commitments. Ultimately, it demonstrates that these differences extend beyond theory to shape broader psychological and social realities.

Teleological Purpose versus Constructed Meaning

The contrast between Islamic teleology and secular naturalism is most evident in how each framework understands the source and status of meaning. In Islamic teleology, meaning is discovered rather than invented: human existence is oriented toward a divinely intended end, and moral life consists in aligning one's actions with that purpose. By contrast, secular naturalism typically treats meaning as constructed within the bounds of a naturalistic ontology. Contemporary philosophy of meaning argues that, absent a transcendent telos, significance arises through subjective commitment, social practices, and participation in shared projects rather than through reference to an objective cosmic end (Langerak, 2022). This difference is not merely semantic. When meaning is grounded in a transcendent order, it carries a claim to objectivity that stabilizes ethical orientation; when meaning is constructed, it remains contingent upon human interpretation and is therefore open to revision, plurality, and, at times, contestation. The result is a fundamental divergence in how individuals situate themselves within the world: as participants in a pre-given moral order or as agents responsible for generating their own frameworks of significance (Flanagan, 2023).

Moral Motivation, Responsibility, and Internal Regulation

These differing accounts of purpose generate distinct models of moral motivation and responsibility. In Islamic teleology, moral agency is anchored in accountability before God, which functions both as an external standard and an internalized source of ethical discipline. Recent work on Islamic ethics emphasizes that this form of accountability produces a mode of internal regulation in which moral behavior is guided by a cultivated awareness of divine presence, rather than by external enforcement alone (Street, 2023). Such an orientation integrates

intention, action, and consequence within a unified moral framework, strengthening the coherence of ethical life. In contrast, secular naturalist accounts ground moral motivation in autonomy, rational justification, and social cooperation. Contemporary metaethical debates particularly within constructivism argue that moral obligations can be justified through procedures of rational endorsement or social agreement without recourse to transcendence (Nagel, 2023). While this allows for flexibility and adaptability, it also raises questions about the depth and stability of moral obligation, especially when competing values lack a shared metaphysical foundation (Ecklund et al., 2019). The contrast, therefore, is not between morality and immorality, but between two distinct structures of moral grounding: one rooted in transcendence and accountability, the other in autonomy and human-centered justification.

Psychological and Social Implications

The divergence between teleological and naturalistic frameworks also extends to psychological orientation and social life. Teleological systems, by linking existence to a higher purpose, tend to provide a stable sense of meaning that can reinforce resilience, especially in the face of suffering or uncertainty. Empirical and philosophical studies alike suggest that belief in a purposeful structure of existence is associated with stronger existential coherence and long-term ethical commitment. In contrast, naturalistic frameworks, while capable of supporting meaningful lives, often require individuals to actively construct and sustain their own sense of purpose. This can lead to greater pluralism in life projects but may also introduce existential tension when individuals confront the contingency of their chosen values. On the social level, teleological frameworks often support a more integrated ethical order, as shared beliefs about purpose can unify moral norms and expectations. Naturalistic frameworks, by contrast, tend to produce more diverse moral landscapes, reflecting the multiplicity of perspectives within modern societies (Flanagan, 2016). This diversity can be a source of creativity and tolerance, but it can also complicate efforts to establish widely shared ethical standards.

Divergent Understandings of Human Flourishing

These differences culminate in contrasting conceptions of human flourishing. In Islamic teleology, flourishing (*falāh*) is understood as the realization of human potential in alignment with divine purpose, integrating spiritual, moral, and social dimensions of life (Kasapovic, 2022). Flourishing is therefore not reducible to material well-being or subjective satisfaction; it is measured in terms of ethical excellence, spiritual fulfillment, and accountability in both this life and the hereafter. In secular naturalism, by contrast, flourishing is typically defined in immanent terms such as well-being, autonomy, happiness, or the successful pursuit of individual and collective goals. Contemporary philosophical accounts of flourishing within naturalism attempt to ground these ideals in human capacities and social conditions, offering a framework that is empirically informed but not metaphysically anchored (Congdon, 2023). While such accounts can be robust and practically effective, they differ from teleological models in that they lack reference to an ultimate, transcendent end. The comparative analysis thus reveals that the divergence between Islamic teleology and secular naturalism is not limited to abstract metaphysics but extends to the very definition of what it means to live a good and meaningful human life.

DISCUSSION

The comparative analysis undertaken in this study highlights a fundamental philosophical divergence that lies at the heart of contemporary debates on meaning and morality: whether human existence is intrinsically purposive or contingently structured through natural processes. This divergence is not merely theoretical but reflects what many scholars have described as a broader “crisis of meaning” in modern societies. Contemporary philosophical discussions increasingly recognize that the weakening of teleological frameworks particularly in secular contexts has contributed to a growing sense of existential uncertainty, in which individuals are required to construct meaning in the absence of an objective moral order (Hyde, 2024). While secular naturalism offers intellectually coherent accounts of human existence grounded in scientific explanation, it often leaves unresolved the question of why moral

commitments should carry binding force beyond pragmatic or social considerations (Congdon, 2023). In contrast, the Islamic teleological framework examined in this study presents a model in which purpose, morality, and accountability are structurally integrated. By grounding human existence in divine intentionality and linking ethical conduct to ultimate accountability, Islamic thought provides a stable ontological foundation for moral agency. This does not eliminate moral complexity or ethical disagreement, but it situates such challenges within a broader framework of meaning that reinforces responsibility and ethical coherence. The contrast, therefore, is not between meaningful and meaningless systems, but between differing sources of meaning: one grounded in transcendence and the other in immanence. Importantly, the contemporary crisis of meaning should not be interpreted as a simple failure of secular thought. Rather, it reflects the philosophical and existential consequences of a shift from teleological to naturalistic accounts of human existence. Scholars such as Thomas Nagel have argued that purely naturalistic explanations may struggle to fully account for the normative force of moral judgments, particularly when those judgments are explained in terms of biological or social origins (Kopfensteiner, 1992). This tension suggests that the question of meaning cannot be entirely separated from questions of metaphysical grounding. The findings of this study reinforce this point by demonstrating that conceptions of purpose play a decisive role in shaping not only ethical reasoning but also the lived experience of moral responsibility.

This study contributes to ongoing debates in philosophy of religion and ethics by foregrounding the relationship between metaphysical assumptions and moral agency. While much of contemporary ethical discourse focuses on normative frameworks such as utilitarianism, deontology, or virtue ethics - this article shifts attention to the ontological conditions that make such frameworks intelligible and motivationally effective (Street, 2023). By comparing Islamic teleology with secular naturalism, the study shows that differences in moral systems cannot be fully understood without examining the underlying conceptions of human existence from which they emerge.

One key contribution lies in demonstrating that moral motivation is not solely a function of rational deliberation or social conditioning but is deeply influenced by the perceived purpose of human life. In teleological frameworks, where human existence is

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understood as directed toward a meaningful end, moral obligations are reinforced by a sense of ultimate accountability and existential coherence. In contrast, secular naturalist frameworks often rely on internal consistency, social agreement, or pragmatic reasoning to sustain ethical commitments (Peels & Nagasawa, 2025). While these approaches can produce robust moral systems, they operate within a different motivational structure, one that is not anchored in a transcendent source of meaning.

Furthermore, this study contributes to contemporary discussions on human flourishing by highlighting the role of purpose in shaping psychological and social well-being. Philosophical accounts of flourishing increasingly recognize that well-being cannot be reduced to material satisfaction or subjective happiness alone but must also include a sense of meaning and moral orientation. The Islamic teleological model offers a comprehensive framework in which flourishing is understood as the integration of ethical conduct, spiritual fulfillment, and social responsibility. By contrast, secular naturalism provides a more pluralistic account of flourishing, allowing for diverse interpretations but potentially lacking a unified standard by which flourishing can be evaluated (Peels & Nagasawa, 2025).

Finally, the study opens a pathway for further interdisciplinary engagement between philosophy, theology, and social theory. By demonstrating that metaphysical conceptions of purpose have tangible implications for moral behavior and social organization, it suggests that future research should move beyond purely normative debates and engage more directly with the ontological foundations of ethics. In doing so, this article contributes to a growing body of scholarship that seeks to reconnect questions of meaning, morality, and human flourishing within a unified philosophical framework.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the relationship between conceptions of human existence and the structure of moral agency through a comparative analysis of Islamic teleology and secular naturalism. By situating moral reasoning within its underlying metaphysical framework, the article has demonstrated that ethical systems cannot be fully

understood in isolation from the ontological assumptions that give rise to them. The findings show that Islamic teleology offers an integrated model in which purpose, accountability, and moral conduct are internally connected through a transcendent framework grounded in *Tawḥīd*. In contrast, secular naturalism provides an account of human existence rooted in evolutionary and material processes, in which meaning and morality are constructed within human experience rather than derived from an intrinsic cosmic purpose. The comparative analysis reveals that these differing foundations generate distinct models of moral agency. In the Islamic framework, moral responsibility is reinforced by a coherent linkage between purpose and accountability, fostering internal moral regulation and a stable ethical orientation. In secular naturalism, moral agency is grounded in autonomy, rational deliberation, and social negotiation, allowing for pluralism and adaptability but also introducing the possibility of fragmentation in moral frameworks. This divergence extends beyond abstract philosophy to shape psychological orientation, ethical motivation, and conceptions of human flourishing. The central contribution of this article lies in foregrounding the role of metaphysical purpose in structuring ethical life. It argues that the contemporary “crisis of meaning” cannot be adequately addressed without engaging the ontological foundations that underlie moral systems. Rather than framing the debate as a binary opposition between religious and secular ethics, the study highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of how different worldviews generate distinct forms of moral coherence, responsibility, and human fulfillment. In doing so, this research contributes to broader discussions in philosophy of religion, ethics, and social thought by demonstrating that moral agency is not merely a function of normative reasoning but is deeply shaped by conceptions of existence itself. Future research may build on this work by exploring empirical dimensions of these frameworks, examining how teleological and naturalistic orientations manifest in lived ethical practices across different cultural and social contexts. Such inquiry would further illuminate the relationship between worldview, moral behavior, and the ongoing search for meaning in contemporary societies.

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