

## **The Islamic Concept, "Umma" In International Relations: A Contrast With The Western Conventional Idea Of "Universalism"**

Albashir Abubakar Imam,  
Department of Islamic Studies, Islamic University in Uganda

Ghazali Bello Abubakar,  
Department of Political Science, Sokoto State University, Sokoto, Nigeria

### **Abstract**

International Relations (IR) as a field of academic inquiry, although burgeoning, finds its origins and dominant theories steeped largely in Western traditions. This inherent bias significantly hampers its ability to fully grasp, elucidate, and anticipate the dynamics within the non-Western spheres. Amidst the burgeoning efforts to delve into non-Western IR perspectives and thereby enrich the discipline's knowledge base, the Islamic viewpoint, particularly the notion of "Ummah," offers a refreshingly different lens. This concept illuminates a form of global solidarity that starkly contrasts with the prevailing Western notion of "universalism." However, this is driven by the curiosity to understand the conspicuous absence of modern Islamic theories in IR, probing into factors attributable both to the Muslim community and to the prevailing global system underscored by Western dominance. This paper examines the role and interpretation of IR within the Islamic tradition, the influence and place of Islam within the contemporary IR landscape. It also tries to evaluate the potential of Islam to serve as either a comprehensive theory or a paradigm within IR scholarship. It concludes that a nascent model alongside two distinct trajectories—traditional and revolutionary remains valid. These proposed paths endeavours to overcome the current limitations and pave the way for a more inclusive and diverse interpretation of International Relations in the future.

**Keywords:** Islam, Westernization, International Relations, Umma, Universalism

## Introduction

International Relations is a captivating field that delves into the interactions between various global communities and societies. The intricate web of connections among diverse interest groups makes it a complex subject to fully comprehend, leaving room for continual exploration. The realm of International Relations (IR) primarily focuses on the dynamics between governments worldwide. Nevertheless, to grasp these dynamics effectively, one must consider the interplay with other key players, such as international organizations, multinational corporations, and individuals. Moreover, these relationships are intertwined with broader societal frameworks encompassing economics, culture, domestic politics, as well as geographical and historical influences. It is the amalgamation of these elements that propels the current pivotal developments in the realm of IR<sup>1</sup>.

Numerous scholars, such as Akbar Ahmed, Sandra Mackey, Alex Battler, and others delineate international relations by examining the diplomatic and strategic interactions among states. The central focus of IR typically revolves around matters of war and peace, conflict, and cooperation. On the contrary, some experts perceive international relations as encompassing various cross-border dealings, spanning political, economic, and social realms. In this broader view, IR may scrutinize trade discussions or the functioning of non-governmental organizations like Amnesty International, in addition to traditional peace negotiations<sup>2</sup>.

*Universalism*, the concept of universal salvation, which posits that the deliverance of all souls is the fundamental purpose of human existence, has been a prevalent theme in the annals of Christianity. Simultaneously, this notion forms the basis of Islamic teachings and underpins the practice of *Da'awah*. Universalists like Hosea Ballou, George T. Knight, and Thomas Whittemore maintained that a merciful God would not choose only a select few for salvation while condemning the rest to eternal damnation. According to their beliefs, the afterlife serves as a period of temporary punishment during which souls are purified and readied for an eternity in the presence of the Divine.

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<sup>1</sup> Pevehouse, Jon C. W and Goldstein, Joshua S. *International Relations* (New York: Pearson Education Inc., 2017)

<sup>2</sup> Levy, Jack S. “The causes of war and the conditions of peace,” *Annu. Rev. Polit. Sci.* no. 1 (March 1998): 139–165

Numerous influential scholars, including John Murray (1741–1815) and George de Benneville (1703–93) from Europe and America, who was not only a preacher but also a medical practitioner in Pennsylvania, dedicated themselves to promoting spiritual enlightenment among the people of their era.

From their inception, Universalists have exhibited a broad spectrum of beliefs, setting them apart from more homogenized religious groups. Efforts to codify these beliefs into cohesive statements of faith, including a notable attempt in 1935, achieved only limited success. This is largely because the movement is underpinned by values that prioritize liberalism, the freedom for individual interpretation, and a deep-seated tolerance for diversity. These principles foster an environment where agreement is more readily found in the methods of exploring theological and church-related issues, rather than in rigid dogmas. The undercurrent of all these is a profound respect for the inherent dignity of every individual, which has been a unifying force within the movement.

A distinctive feature of Universalism is its embrace of reason as a pivotal component of religious belief, advocating for a faith that evolves in response to scientific discoveries. This progressive stance leads to a rejection of the miraculous narratives central to traditional Christianity, which are deemed incompatible with the lens of modern knowledge. Jesus is revered not as a divine entity but as an exemplary teacher whose life serves as a model of virtue worth emulating<sup>3</sup>.

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century unfolded, Universalism evolved to encompass a broader ideology. While still acknowledging their roots in the Christian tradition, Universalists began to probe into the universal aspects of various religions, striving for a deeper connection with faiths beyond the Christian sphere. This exploratory shift signifies an expanding worldview, aiming to bridge the gaps between diverse religious practices and beliefs, in pursuit of a more inclusive understanding of spirituality<sup>4</sup>.

To achieve this objective, it is important to recognize the numerous parallels between the universal principles of Islam and those of Christianity, particularly concerning the ideals of tolerance, freedom, and diversity. These core values illustrate how both

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<sup>3</sup> Twiss, Paul “Jesus, the Teacher.” Last modified 24 August 2024  
<https://tabletalkmagazine.com/posts/jesus-the-teacher/>

<sup>4</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, Universalism. Last modified 11 October 2024  
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Universalism>

religions, at their heart, seek to offer a roadmap to peace and understanding in a multifaceted world. However, there exist notable distinctions as well, especially in their teachings regarding salvation. A pivotal point of divergence lies in how each religion approaches the concept of redemption and the selection of individuals deemed worthy of salvation, while others are ostensibly left to face condemnation. This complex interplay between convergence and divergence in religious doctrines underscores the rich tapestry of beliefs that shape our world.

### **International relations from the Islamic perception**

In the spiritually charged atmosphere of the seventh-century Arabia, nestled in the heart of *Makkah*, a profound evolution was set to unfold. Prophet Muhammad, a man destined to alter the course of human history, commenced receiving divine revelations from God. These revelations, conveyed through the celestial messenger Jibril, marked the inception of what was to blossom into the Qur’an in the pivotal year of 610 AD. Initially, Prophet Muhammad chose a path of discretion, sharing the nascent teachings of Islam within the intimate circle of his close relatives and friends. This phase of quiet dissemination laid the groundwork for the subsequent public declaration of Islam’s universal message, as ordained by Allah.

Despite encountering vehement resistance from the numerous idol-worshipping Arab tribes, whose aggression stood in stark contrast to his message of peace, Prophet Muhammad’s steadfast resolve bore fruit. He galvanized a formidable assembly of devoted followers, among whom the *Sahabah* stood out for their unwavering loyalty and support. This loyal band of followers would not only embody the core of the emerging Muslim Ummah—a term encapsulating the notion of a nation unified by faith—but also spearhead an unparalleled chapter in the annals of history.

Following the demise of Prophet Muhammad, a mere 23 years after those initial revelations, the *Sahabah* emerged as the bedrock of the Muslim *Ummah*. Under their stewardship, Islam embarked on an era of extraordinary expansion that saw it challenging, and ultimately overcoming, the two reigning superpowers of the epoch: the Sasanian and Byzantine empires. This marked the first instance in recorded history where these formidable powers were subdued, heralding a new era of Islamic ascendance.

The aftermath of this seismic shift was the establishment of the *Khilafah*, an Islamic state whose influence would stretch far beyond its initial confines. From its roots in the Arabian Peninsula, the sway of the *Khilafah* expanded to encompass the Levant, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Persia, reaching into the heartlands of North Africa, the southern fringes of Europe—including what is today recognized as Spain and France—India, Southeast Asia, and extending to the far reaches of Central Asia and Western China.

This sprawling empire, unified under the banner of Islam, bore testimony to the enduring legacy of Prophet Muhammad and the unshakeable faith of his followers, as they wove the rich tapestry of Islamic civilization across three continents. During the *al-Khulafa' ar-Rashidun* (Rightly Guided Caliphs) era followed by the *Umayyad* era, a significant advancement took place within less than 120 years. The subsequent *Abbasid* era marked the golden age of Islam, characterized by remarkable cultural, economic, and scientific developments from the eighth to the fourteenth century. This era showcased a pivotal period in the history of Islam. Subsequently, the Ottomans extended Islam's influence in Europe, notably advancing as far as the gates of Vienna from the fourteenth through the seventeenth centuries.

Subsequently, the vast dominion of the Ottoman Empire entered a phase of gradual decline that persisted until 1914. During this era, it was colloquially referred to as 'Europe's sick man'—a moniker that symbolized the empire's dwindling might and foreshadowed its eventual disintegration following substantial losses in the World War I. This period culminated in the cessation of its sovereignty. The Ottoman Caliphate, which was the last caliphate globally to be recognized by Muslims, was officially dissolved on March 3, 1924, through a decree issued by the then Grand National Assembly of Turkey. This action was part of a series of reforms undertaken by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, aimed at transitioning the remnants of the Ottoman Empire into what is today known as the Republic of Turkey.

Throughout the extensive chronicles of this historical epoch, the Muslim community nurtured a distinct interpretation of International Relations (IR), primarily influenced by the teachings of Islam and its perspective on interactions with other societies. The Islamic viewpoint on IR predominantly centres around the tenets of *Shari'a* (Islamic law) and *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence). The foundational sources of *Shari'a* encompass the Holy Qur'an, the Hadith—which includes an extensive collection involving the

teachings, actions, statements, and historical encounters related to Prophet Muhammad—and, to a minor extent, the *Ijma'* (the consensus among Islamic jurists regarding specific legal matters).

On the other hand, *Fiqh* represents the human endeavour to interpret and expand upon these divine instructions, facilitated by the *Ulama* (Muslim legal scholars). Through the process of *Ijtihad* (jurisprudence), which involves the intricacies of interpreting the Quran and Sunnah, *Fiqh* endeavours to elaborate on and adapt *Shari'a* to address the particulars of diverse circumstances and environments. Essentially, *Fiqh* serves as the conduit for the application of *Shari'a*, offering a dynamic framework that affords the Muslim community the necessary adaptability to navigate the complexities of varying temporal, spatial, and contextual challenges.

### ***Intersection of Islam in modern International Relations***

In the past century, there has been a prevailing belief among Western scholars of International Relations (IR) that religion is inconsequential in the realm of global politics. This perspective can be attributed to a deliberate marginalization and exclusion of religion in the Western approach to understanding IR. This exclusion was based on the notion that, in the post-Westphalian IR system, religion had been relegated to a state of isolation and no longer held any significant role or place. Scholars like Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sandler took this argument a step further, contending that the neglect of religion was not unique to IR scholars, but rather a prevalent trend across all Western social sciences, with IR scholarship being a particularly striking example. They asserted that "the discipline of IR is a microcosm of Western social sciences, which for most of the twentieth century had ignored religion."

For many Western social scientists, the prevailing belief was that religion would gradually lose its relevance in society and politics, especially those who associated modernization with the decline of religion as a significant social and political force. However, in recent decades, there has been an unexpected shift, challenging these assumptions. More and more scholars have observed a phenomenon they refer to as the

"resurgence of religion" or "the return of religion" in the international arena, which has subsequently captured the attention of the IR field<sup>5</sup>.

***Islamic views on internationalization***

There are conflicting perspectives when it comes to how Muslims and Europeans view the concepts of polity (such as nation-states) and the tools/frameworks (like constitutional cases) that shape societies in the international system. By studying Islam, we can explore new ways of understanding international relations theory and its relevance to contemporary global issues such as power, legitimacy, conflict, peace, and human rights. These topics in aligning with Islam and its practices, allowing for a connection and integration of Islam within the realm of international relations theory.

There is a tendency to view Islam within the confines of international relations theory, often overlooking its potential as a theory. Much of the literature, particularly since 9/11, only considers Islam as a factor that relates to existing paradigms of international relations, failing to recognize its comprehensive nature as a knowledge system<sup>6</sup>. However, scholars like AbuSulayman<sup>7</sup> have attempted to study "international" issues solely through an Islamic lens, drawing upon theological principles from the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.

Despite numerous efforts to develop an International Relations (IR) theory through an exclusivist Islamic perspective, these efforts have largely not succeeded in forming a cohesive and systematic Islamic IR theory. This failure can be attributed to the tendency of these perspectives to delve deeply into discussions centered on political philosophy and Islamic theology (*kalam*). Such discussions predominantly focus on the dynamics of relationships (*Mu'amalat*) between Muslims and non-Muslims, as well as on the jurisprudential delineations separating Islamic and non-Islamic territories. These

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas, Scott. *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005

<sup>6</sup> Turner, J. "Uncovering an Islamic Paradigm of International Relations." In *Political and Cultural Representations of Muslims* edited by C. Flood, H. Nickels, S. Hutchings and G. Miazhevich, Amsterdam: Brill, 2012

<sup>7</sup> AbuSulayman, Abdul Hamid. *Towards an Islamic Theory of International Relations: New Directions for Islamic Methodology and Thought*. Herndon: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1993

delineations include determining what is permissible (*halal*) and what is forbidden (*haram*).

Again, to bridge this gap, in 1981, a collective of Muslim scholars like Abdul-Baqi Miftah, Abd al-Hamid Kishk, Muhammad Mitwelli al-Sha’awari, etc. came together to establish the International Institute of Islamic Thought. This significant move heralded the inception of the “Islamization of Knowledge” movement. This movement underscored Islam as fundamentally oppositional to the prevailing frameworks of IR at the time, thereby marking a pivotal moment in the discourse on Islamic contributions to the field of International Relations.

The proliferation of normative interpretations of the *international* in Islam has heightened its universal claims. Religious ideals and values intended for the social sphere often fall short in systematically analysing the complexities of International Relations (IR). These normative explanations can be applied to validate the theological legitimacy of the international arena and explore how the West is perceived in the context of sectarian or cultural conflicts, as well as ethnic or national disparities. Despite their diversity, these approaches remain distinctly Islamic as they draw from the foundational sources of Islam (the Qur’an and Sunnah).

This line of reasoning presents an intellectual unease, as it posits that Muslims adhere to their own distinct world order, one that primarily revolves around their relations with "the Other." In essence, it mirrors a derogatory Orientalist perspective. If the international system is built solely upon the interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims, it inherently assumes that Islam holds a universally applicable message and values, consequently marginalizing those who do not identify as Muslims.

The discussions that continue to unfold around the possibility of delineating the boundaries of the Ummah, traditionally understood as the collective Muslim community, inject a notable degree of ambiguity into the task of crafting a cohesive framework for Islamic International Relations (IR). This realm of discourse, fraught with varying perspectives and interpretations, highlights the complexities inherent in integrating Islamic principles into the broader discourse of global diplomacy and relations.

On the other side of the discourse, Turner presents a compelling counterargument, asserting with conviction that Islam should transcend its status as merely a subject of

academic and political debate. He posits that Islam offers a unique and profound paradigm for understanding and navigating the intricacies of International Relations. Turner's perspective challenges us to reconsider the role of Islam beyond conventional discussions, advocating for its recognition as a pivotal and transformative force within the international realm.

There are three fundamental principles in Islamic International Relations. Firstly, the concept of state and sovereignty is represented by the Ummah, which signifies the unity of the community connected by *asabiyyah*, commonly referred to as "solidarity". Secondly, there are distinct domains within Islamic territories known as *dar al-Islam* (the abode of Islam), *dar al-harb* (the abode of war), and the intermediate domain known as *dar al-sulh* or *dar al-ahd* (the abode of covenant or agreement). Lastly, the core belief system includes faith in God, the teachings of the revealed message (Qur'an), and the traditions of the Prophet as documented in his sayings and actions. (Sunnah).

Some scholars like Yusuf Azzam, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyah consider *ijtihad* (independent qualified interpretation of Islamic law) as a credible source of knowledge, a practice carried out by learned scholars deeply knowledgeable about the primary texts (the Qur'an and Sunnah)<sup>8</sup>. Modern Islamic philosophical thinking largely emphasizes the central importance of the Ummah.

### ***Islam versus the Universalistic nature of International Relations***

The prevailing argument suggests that contemporary International Relations (IR) can be traced back to the profound experiences of the European Reformation era, which directly influenced the creation of the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. The individuals who played key roles in the reformation were also instrumental in establishing the Westphalian system, highlighting a deep-rooted connection between these two historical events<sup>9</sup>.

This argument has two main points: first, it proposes that the Reformation laid the foundation for Westphalia by establishing a similar authoritative structure inherent in the sovereign state system. Second, it emphasizes the reformation as a historical catalyst

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid*

<sup>9</sup> Hourani, Albert. *Islam and Foreign Policy*. Cambridge: University Press, 1983

that deserves greater attention in the discourse of international relations literature. This perspective not only enhances our understanding of the fundamental elements of modern IR, but also prompts a reassessment of historical events and their lasting impact on the structure of international relations<sup>10</sup>.

Similarly, Islamic interrelations revolve around the concept of *Ummah*, which encompasses a universal membership. The experiences of Muslims and Europeans differ when it comes to governance, specifically in relation to nation-states and mechanisms like constitutional frameworks in the global society<sup>11</sup>. By examining Islam, we can gain valuable insights into approaches within International Relations theory that tackles pressing global issues such as the legitimacy of power, conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and the protection of human rights. These themes naturally align with Islam's principles and effectively intertwine with the realm of IR theory<sup>12</sup>.

There is a growing trend in contemplating, or even reconsidering Islam within the framework of IR theory, rather than just as a theory. Most of the literature, particularly post 9/11, tends to view Islam solely as a variable to be analysed within the context of established IR paradigms, disregarding its richness as a comprehensive system of knowledge. On the other hand, scholars such as Abu Sulayman (1993) attempted to make the study of “international” purely Islamic through reference to theological prescriptions from the Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Prophet. However, so far IR theorizing efforts for using an exclusivist Islamic lens has arguably failed to build a cohesive and systemic Islamic theory of IR.

The proliferation of normative interpretations of the international in Islam exacerbated its universal claims<sup>13</sup>. Religious ideals and values that would apply to the social world do not systematically analyse the complexity of IR. The applicability of these normative explanations may refer to the theological legitimacy of the international and the appropriation of the West in terms of sectarian or cultural conflicts and ethnic or

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<sup>10</sup> Philpott, Daniel. “The Religious Roots of Modern International Relations”, *World Politics* no. 52 (2000): 206-245

<sup>11</sup> Vatikiotis, P.J. *Islam and the State*, New York: Routledge, 1987

<sup>12</sup> Adiong Nassef M. and Cenap Cakmak, ed. *Islam: A Worldwide Encyclopaedia*, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2017

<sup>13</sup> Roy, Olivier. *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004

national differences<sup>14</sup>. Regardless of varying differences, these approaches are Islamic in that they engage with the sources of Islam (the Qur’an and Sunnah).

Turner (2012) claims that as per Islam, the cross-border Relations is far beyond a concept of how states deal and or interact with each other but, rather, is a concept of world order that focuses on the relations between the Muslims and the non-Muslims spheres. On this ground of thought it is noted that Muslims have their own version of world order which primarily focuses only on relations between Muslims and the others.

Some scholars, like J. Proctor, Roy and Qutb say that *ijtihad* (independent qualified judgement in matters of Islamic law), which is practised by a well-trained scholar with knowledge of the primary texts (the Qur’an and Sunnah), can also be a source of knowledge<sup>15</sup>.

### **Humanity in the account of David Hume**

In David Hume work, the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (EPM), a rich account of humanity as a moral principle is being developed, rather than simply a virtue, commentators have tended to regard Hume as reverting in this work, and to the detriment of his ethics, to a more Hutchesonian moral sense theory.

To him, it is universally acknowledged, that there is a great uniformity among the actions of men, in all nations and ages, and that human nature remains still the same, in its principles and operations. This is Hume’s most famous line in the Study of Human Understanding. Spatially, the actions of people in each country are alike; In terms of time, the actions of each generation are similar. Moreover, the principles of human nature play the same role in the actions of people in all countries and all ages, and the usefulness achieved by the principles of human nature are the same in the actions for everyone (including not only people of the contemporary, but also people of the past and future eras.

In addition to great uniformity in actions, human beings share great similarities in physical structure, nature, character and language. It is this great similarity between people that ensures the identity of the principles of human nature, and all sciences based

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<sup>14</sup> *ibid*

<sup>15</sup> Proctor, J. Harris. *Islam and International Relations*, New York: Praeger, 1965

on the principles of human nature have the universality of principles. Human nature, therefore, is universal in principle to science. Therefore, the universality in principle, not the universality of everyone, but the universality based on the uniformity of action between people and the similarity between individuals.

**David Hume** (1711–1776) was generally regarded as one of the most important philosophers to write in English, was also well known in his own time as an historian and essayist. A master stylist in any genre, his major philosophical works *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–1740), the *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding* (1748) and *concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), as well as his posthumously published *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (1779) remain widely and deeply influential until today. Born in Edinburgh, Hume spent his childhood at Ninewells, his family’s modest estate in the border lowlands. He came from a “reputable family which was socially well connected but not wealthy. His father died just after David’s second birthday.

#### ***Universalism in the account of Immanuel Kant***

The notion that the moral judgments universalistic owed something to the ancient Golden Rule even more to Kant’s first formulation of the categorical imperative. That a rule of conduct is unconditional or absolute for all agents, the validity or claim of which does not depend on any desire or end. “Thou shalt not steal,” for example, is categorical, as distinct from the hypothetical imperative associated with desire, such as “do not steal if you want to be popular.” For Kant there was only one categorical imperative in the moral realm, which he formulated in two ways.

Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law is a purely formal or logical statement and expresses the condition of the rationality of conduct rather than that of its morality, which is expressed in another Kantian formula: *so act as to treat humanity, whether in your own person or in another, always as an end and never as only a means*. These ideas were refined to eliminate their obvious defects. Moreover, for some thinkers like Hare the universalizability was not as substantive moral principle but a logical feature of moral terms. This means that anyone who uses words such as ‘right’ and ‘ought’ is logically committed to universalizability.

**Immanuel Kant** was born on April 22, 1724, in Königsberg, near the south-eastern shore of the Baltic Sea. Königsberg has been renamed Kaliningrad and is part of Russia. But during Kant’s lifetime Königsberg was the capital of East Prussia, and its dominant language was German. Though geographically remote from the rest of Prussia and other German cities, Königsberg was then a major commercial centre, an important military port, and a relatively cosmopolitan university town. Kant was from an artisan and modest means family.. His father was a master harness maker, and his mother was the daughter of a harness maker, though she was better educated than most women of her social class. Kant’s family was never destitute, but his father’s trade was in decline during Kant’s youth and his parents at times had to rely on extended family for financial support (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2020).

In Kantian philosophy, a truly good act is one that can become a universal law; a merely self-serving act is by nature not generalizable and thus, non-existent. This principle has its merits from an ethical standpoint, and Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewers continually weigh the proposed activities in research studies and their risk to human participants against precedents set by previous studies. Additionally, the IRB seeks to uphold its researchers to the same standards, leading to the creation of institutional and federal policies. However, there are some cases in which the universalizability principle does not always apply<sup>16</sup>.

The idea of categorical imperatives was first introduced by Immanuel Kant, a philosopher from the 1700s. He is best known for his philosophical works, *Critique of Pure Reason* and *The Metaphysics of Morals*, among others. As outlined in the video above, Kant is most famous for his ideas on a person's unconditional moral obligation, known as the ***categorical imperative***, which is defined as commands or moral laws all persons must follow, regardless of their desires or extenuating circumstances. As morals, these imperatives are binding on everyone.

On this ground or so Kant would argue, that under the universalizability principle, you cannot lie to your friend’s ex, as this action is inherently self-serving and thus not generalizable. Instead, Kant would suggest two options: refuse to answer the question

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<sup>16</sup> Kleingeld, Pauline, “Contradiction and Kant’s Formula of Universal Law,” *Kant-Studien* no. 108 (2017): 89–115

or tell the truth. Under Kantian law, you would not be responsible if the ex-partner sought to ruin your friend’s relationship, because the ex was acting outside of the universalizability principle.

### *Comparative Similarities*

This is a function largely of the ethical universalism of the Quran, and its call to enjoin what is good and praised (*Ma`ruf*) and forbid what is morally evil and disliked (*munkar*). This is evidently not a culture-specific injunction, just as it is also addressed to all peoples, regardless of their religious affiliations. The notion of the middle community (*Ummah Wasatah*) supports the same outlook: “*And, thus, We willed you to be a community of the middle way, so that you might bear witness (to the truth) before all mankind, and that the Apostle might bear witness to it before you*” (Q 2:143). This ethical-spiritual universalism aims to create an open society based on moral values, not the received traditions of one tribe, city or nation. The Quran also positions itself against the cultural localism of pre-Islamic Arabia.

Once established as major cultural units, Muslim societies articulated their ethical inclusivity into various societal mechanisms, by which the ideal of creating a virtuous human society could be realised. Gaining status and social ascendancy in that environment depended on acquiring two universal qualities: knowledge (*‘ilm*) and virtue (*Fadilah* and *Ihsan*), both being implicit in the Quranic notion of God-consciousness (*Taqwa*) (Q 49:13).

In a broad sense, this forms the basis of an Islamic meritocracy, whereby every member of society is urged to contribute to creating a moral and just social order. Despite occasional sectarian conflicts, such as the Inquisition (*Mihnah*) incident in the ninth century, traditional Muslim societies succeeded in creating a stable and peaceful habitat in which Muslim and non-Muslim members of the *Ummah* contributed to cultivating a world civilisation<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Kamali, Muhammad Hashim. Universalism of the Ummah, last modified 11 October 2024 <https://www.nst.com.my/news/2016/09/172567/universalism-ummah>

**Conclusion**

The complex relationship between Islam and IR has not deterred scholars from delving into it. In the past decade, there has been a growing emphasis on exploring various facets of this connection. This emphasis has been driven by the rising demand for a global perspective in IR, moving away from a Western-centric approach that struggles to adequately address phenomena outside of the Western world.

The traditional Islamic perspective of International Relations (IR) may appear outdated or insufficient, considering some traditional approaches being disproven in today's world of IR. However, it is inaccurate to claim that Islam holds no relevance in the international sphere or that it is entirely inconsequential to IR. It is essential not only to comprehend Islam to grasp the Muslim world comprehensively but also refusing to acknowledge its significance will hinder IR's ability to comprehend, assess, and interpret the events in the Muslim world that influence IR to varying extents.

In the realm of academic research, scholars have tirelessly endeavoured to investigate the potential of Islam as a foundational pillar for International Relations (IR) theory or as a distinctive paradigm on its own. Despite the absence of any substantial breakthroughs in crafting overarching Islamic theories - often referred to as mega theories - the dedication and effort invested into this scholarly pursuit have been nothing short of invaluable. This assertion holds particularly true when one considers the myriads of obstacles and challenges that researchers have had to navigate within this specific domain.

These challenges, rather than acting as deterrents, should serve as compelling incentives for scholars to persist in their efforts. The aim of this scholarly endeavours is not merely academic; it is profoundly practical and ambitious. By striving to formalize Islamic theories of International Relations, researchers aspire not only to enrich the existing corpus of IR theories but also to play a pivotal role in globalizing the current IR discourse. This effort is seen not just as an expansion of theoretical boundaries, but as a crucial step towards fostering a more inclusive, diverse, and representative global IR narrative that acknowledges and incorporates the richness of Islamic perspectives.

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