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Ethical views of Ibn miskawayh and Aquinas

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Ibn Miskawayh is one of the greatest Iranian Muslim philosophers in the eleventh century. His views particularly on ethics are very famous and important. On the other hand, Thomas Aquinas is the greatest Christian theologian and philosopher in the thirteenth century. He has also many famous and interesting ideas regarding ethics. The study of these tow scholars, as the representatives of Islamic and Christian philosophy respectively, will reveal their similarities concerning one of the most important sub – divisions of philosophy, that is, ethics. The goal of this article is to extract and explain their ethical views so that a common model of Islamic and Christian ethics might be identified which would be usable for all Muslim and Christian philosophers of the world.

Key words: Ibn Miskawayh, aquinas, ethics, happiness, pleasure, virtue, vice, evil

INTRODUCTION

According to Druart (2006), in spite of some presentation of philosophy in Islam, there is much pioneering work yet to be done. Critical editions of important texts are still needed, however, as well as analyses of arguments and works of interpretation. It can at least be said that a deeper understanding of philosophy in medieval Islam, including a more nuanced awareness of the issues deba-ted concerning the very existence of falsafa in Islamic culture, can only improve our insight into the nature and role (and perhaps the limitations) of philosophy in gene-ral.

Among Muslims, this tradition continues in Ibn Miska-wayh. His reformation of character reverses the tradi-tional order and begins with a systematic presentation of ethics, much influenced by the Nicomachean Ethics, but ends by prescribing medicine for the soul. Its first part lays down a foundation, with a study of the faculties of the soul and reflections on the good and happiness and on virtues and vices. After discussing character and human perfection and its means, Miskawayh surveys in more detail the good and happiness. He focuses the fourth part of his treaties on justice and in the fifth deals with love and friendship. Finally, medicine for the soul is provided, with references to Galen and al- Kindi. Miskawayh here analyses different diseases of the soul, such as anger, fear of death, and sadness; determines their causes; and suggests appropriate treatment. His Treatise on Happiness relies heavily on al-Farabi, s Reminder and belongs entirely to the "medicine of the soul" gener (Druart, 2006).

Aquinas, St Thomas (c.1225 - 74) Born in the castle of Roccasecca in the kingdom of Naples in southern Italy, into the family of the counts of Aquino, Aquinas was brought up in the Benedictine monastery of Monte Cassino. At the age of fourteen he was sent to complete his studies at the university of the time where a full rang of Aristotelian doctrine was studied. Here he became influenced by, and at the rang of twenty joined, the Dominican order. He studied in Paris, and then Cologne, under Albert the Great, and returned to Paris in 1251/2. He subsequently resided at Orvieto, Rome, Viterbo, Paris again, and Naples, constantly writing and engaging in the day. His works include numerous translations and comm-entaries on Aristotle, theological writing, and the two major texts for which he is best known, the Summacontra Gentiles ('Against the errors of the infidels'), a 'text-book' for missionaries, and the Summa Theologiae, begun in 1266, and universally acknowledged to be the crowning achievement of medieval systematic theology (Blackburn, 2005).

For Thomas the theological virtues, having God (the ultimate end) as their object, are prior to all other virtues whether natural or infused. Because the ultimate end must be present in the intellect before it is present to the will, and because the ultimate end is present in the will by reason of hope and charity (the other tow theological virtues), in this respect faith is prior to hope and charity. Hope is the theological virtue through which we trust that with divine assistance we will attain the infinite good-eternal enjoyment of God (ST II-IIae, qu.17aa.1 - 2).

In the other of generation, hope is prior to charity; but in the order of perfection charity is prior both to hope and faith. While neither faith nor hope will remain in those who reach the eternal vision of God in the life to come, charity will endure in the blessed. It is a virtue or habitual form that is infused into the soul by God and that inclines us to love him for his own sake. If charity is more excellent than faith or hope (ST II-IIae, qu.23, a.6), through charity the acts of all other virtues are ordered to God, their ultimate end (qu.23, a.8) (Audi, 2001).

Building upon Aristotle's teaching, particularly the Nicomachean Ethics III and VI, Aquinas gives a detailed analysis of human acts, focusing upon voluntariness, intention, choice, and deliberation, and argues that these features have to be present if an act is to be human, and not merely, like sneezing or twitching, an act which might as truly be said to happen to us as to be something we do, and which could equally happened to a non-human animal. Human acts are those that we see ourselves as having a reason for performing, our reason being the value that we attach to something which is therefore the end in relation to our act. Aquinas argues that beyond all the subsidiary ends at which we might aim, there is an ultimate end, happiness, which we cannot reject, though through ignorance or incompetence we may in fact act in such a way as to put obstacles in the way of our achieving it. However, the fundamental practical principle 'Eschew evil and do good' is built into all of us in such a way that no person can be ignorant of it. This practical principle and others following from it form, in the Summa Theologiae, a full and detailed system of natural law which has had major impact on modern discussions in the philosophy of law (Honderich, 2005).

The explanation of the ethical views of Ibn Miskawayh and Aquinas as the two representatives of Islamic and Christian philosophy respectively will help to a better understanding of their shared ethical views and the formation of a common ethical model which is usable for both Muslims and Christians all over the world.

This article is a library research, and the main topics studied are: natural and ordinary ethics, man's original nature, virtues and vices, pleasure and its kinds, happiness and its kinds, "God" and "happiness", "moderation" and "four cardinal virtues" and the problem of evil.

Ibn miskawayh's views on ethics

Ethics is a technique and method through applying which in one's soul, some dispositions are created that only good deeds are issued form such a soul. Ethics is of the noblest sciences; for the nobility of each science is dependent upon its subject, and the subject of ethics is human's spirit, that is the noblest of creatures and subjects. Man can purify himself in the light of the obstacles of perfection by spiritual struggle with one's carnal desires and save himself from real loss, that is, his own loss. In the light of moral teachings a human being refrains from badness and atrocity, and achieves virtue and happiness to the extent that he or she becomes the companion of the pure and angels, and accept divine bounty (Ibn Miskawayh, 1992).

Natural and ordinary ethics

A deep disposition is a soul related state that causes the issuance of an action from a person without thinking and speculation. Miskawayh divides this disposition into two kinds; natural disposition springs from man's nature and temper, as some people are naturally such that become angry or excited because a minor event. These people are naturally coward, excitant, and tough. Ordinary disposition is created in the soul because of habit repetition. This might in the beginning be with thinking and difficulty, but it gradually becomes a deep disposition through repetition (Ibn Miskawayh, 1992).

Miskawayh believes that one's morality changes because of education and admonishment. This change is sometimes rapid and sometimes slow.

Unchangeability of morality is contrary to reason and conscience; for if we believe in such a thing, then we should deny our ability to educate children and youth and regard as useless all of the strategies related to education in societies, and finally know effectless and useless the faculty of distinction in human being (Ibn Miskawayh, 1992).

Man's original nature

Ibn Miskawayh (1992) accepts the Aristotle's theory that every disposition is changeable, and no change-ability is temperamentally, thus no disposition is temp-eramental. Even the temperamental bad persons can appeal to virtue because of education; admonishment and education can transform and change all of human's dispositions. But, such a change and change-ability is carried out fast is some persons and slowly in some other persons.

Virtues and vices

Human soul has three different faculties: a faculty related to distinguishing and thinking in the truth of the affaires, which is called intellectual (rational faculty), and its instrument in body is the brain. The second faculty is related to anger, fear, fearlessness and hegemonism, etc. Which is called irascible faculty, and its instrument in one's body is the heart. The third faculty which is related to lust and one's desire to food, residence, marriage and other sensory pleasures are called appetitive, and its instrument in the body is liver. Each of these faculties becomes powerful or weak in accord with temper, habit and education. If the trend of the intellectual faculty is moderate, and it is toward reaching correct sciences, the virtue of knowledge and as a result of it "wisdom" will be

created. If the trend of the appetitive is moderate and it is surrender to the intellectual faculty, and it does not involve in its carnal desires, the virtue of chastity will be created from it. If the trend of irascible faculty is seemly and merited, and if it is accompanied with the following of the intellectual faculty, the virtue of "courage" will be created. The product and resultant of these three virtues is a fourth virtue called "justice" that is the perfection of virtues (Ibn Miskawayh, 1992).

Pleasure and its kinds

Human beings have particular pleasure and pains to satisfy their physical needs; and pleasures in humans are in fact for removing of pains. Man removes his thirst or hunger through drinking water and eating food, and such a removal creates a pleasure for him. Therefore, pleasures in humans are like drugs for treatment of pains and then, one should pay attention to their merited quantity and quality; immoderation in them leads man to other pains, diseases and finally death (Ibn Miskawayh, 1992).

Some of man's pleasures are sensory which spring from appetitive and irascible faculties and man is shared in them with animals. Such pleasures are accidental and transitory, and excess in them can sometimes lead to pains. These kinds of pleasures, since are consisted with man's nature, are more desirable for people. Such pleasures as eating, sleeping, marriage, vengefulness, chairmanship, etc. are among sensory pleasures (Ibn Miskawayh, 1992).

Another part of pleasures, which are peculiar to mankind, are intellectual (rational) pleasures. These kinds of pleasures are innate, durable, and their repetition not only doesn't make man annoyed, but also the pleasure more and deeper. Such pleasures, since are contrary to natural man's desires, paying attention to them and wanting them require patience, practice and using religious commandments, the good people and parents' guidance. In spite of this, the intellectual (rational) pleasures are the highest and noblest pleasures; and many a man welcomes many pains, and forbears sensory pleasures in the way to reach pleasures (Ibn Miskawayh, 1992).

Happiness and its kinds

In general, it can be said that the happiness of each creature is to achieve the particular goal for which it has been created. Ibn Miskawayh, in reply to this questions what causes man's happiness has put forward three different theories:

1.) Theory of sensory pleasure: On the basis of this theory which has been attributed to Epicureans, the ultimate aim of human being is to reach sensory pleasures. According to this theory, the desirable virtue and the great happiness are sensory pleasures, and all man's faculties have been created for such pleasures, even

intellectual faculties, memory and imagination, have been created for the comprehension and identification of these pleasures and better attainment to them.

Ibn Miskawayh has attributed this theory to the ignorant people and considers it as an invalid theory, and says that since this opinion is adjusted with man's nature, most of people follow it, and its followers consider even worships, prayers and paradise as a useful transact which is necessary for more pleasures. While Miskawayh asserts that sensory pleasures are usually mixed with pains, and they are nothing else save removal of pains, and achieving them is neither considered as happiness nor considered as a virtue for mankind; for the angels and other nearest to God are cleared from such pleasures; and human being is shared with animals in these pleasures and many an animal more enjoys such pleasures as compared with human (Ibn Miskawayh, 1992).

2.) Theory of happiness of spirit: The advocates of this theory, that is, the wise before Aristotle such as Pythagoras Hippocrates and Plato, deem man's happiness in the perfection of his soul (spirit), and consider the accomplishment of the virtues such as wisdom, courage, chastity and justice in the soul as its happiness even though the body is imperfect and attacked with diseases. These scholars do not consider poorness, impotence, weakness and other similar issues which are out of the soul harmful for man's happiness (Ibn Miskawayh, 1992).

Miskawayh denies this theory for it only pays attention to one aspect of man's personality, that is, his soul, and has neglected its other aspect, that is, the body.

3.) Theory of the happiness of spirit and body: The advocates of this theory, one of them Aristotle, believe that man's happiness is in his perfection of spirit and body. They, contrary to the second group, maintain that the attainment of happiness is also possible in this world. The followers of this theory consider such things as health of body, moderation of temper and senses, wealth, good reputation, success in affaires, correctness of beliefs, moral virtues, and merited behavior as a part of happiness and believe that the ultimate happiness is obtained through the accomplishment of all of the perfections related to spirit and body (Ibn Miskawayh, 1992).

Ibn Miskawayh confirms this third theory and considers it based on a comprehensive view to human being and his existential dimensions (Beheshti et al., 2000).

Thomas Aquinas's views on ethics

It is being increasingly recognized that virtue ethics is central to Aquinas's moral thought and to his consideration of the characteristic capacities and achievements of human nature (MCEvoy, 2006).

Aquinas sees ethics as having two principal topics: first, the ultimate goal of human existence, and second, how

that goal is to be won, or lost (Kretzmann and Stump, 1998).

"God" and "happiness"

Aquinas maintains that happiness doesn't lie in riches, honors, fame and glory, power, bodily endowment, pleasures any endowment of soul, and any created good. For Aquinas, however, the essential respect in which God constitutes our blessedness is in direct vision of the divine nature. Happy is he who has whatever he desires, and desires nothing amiss. Happiness is the attainment of the last end. The essence of happiness consists in an act of the intellect; happiness is joy in truth (McEvoy, 2006).

Aquinas argues that the often unrecognized genuine ultimate end for which human beings exist (their 'object') is God, perfect goodness personified; and perfect happiness, the ultimate end with which they may exist (their 'use' of that object), is the enjoyment of the end for which they exist. That enjoyment is fully achieved only in the beatific vision, which Aquinas conceives of as an activity. Since the beatific vision involves the contemplation of the ultimate (first) cause of everything, it is, whatever else it may be, also the perfection of all knowledge and understanding (Kretzmann and Stump, 1998).

Aquinas argues that a human being necessarily (though not always consciously) seeks everything it seeks for its own ultimate end, happiness (Kretzmann and Stump, 1998).

The happiness which is our final end is of course not just a matter of the exercise of the virtues. It can be attained only through a development of all our powers and, so far as the attainment of happiness in this-worldly terms is concerned, the actualization of our highest powers depends on and presupposes the actualization of our lower powers (MacIntyre, 1998).

Aquinas maintains that the ultimate end of human beings, their perfected happiness, cannot be any finite or created good, since no finite or created good could finally and completely satisfy human desire. Only God could be that good, the God whose existence and goodness can be known through philosophical inquiry (MacIntyre, 1998).

Aquinas maintains that for the conditional sort of happiness one can hope for during earthly life (where health of body and soul and some degree of possessions are relevant conditions) friends are indeed necessary, since we need to love (McEvoy, 2006).

Meanwhile Aquinas has emphasized the misery and unhappiness of earthly life, as many had done before him, but he chose to value and recommends those experiences and achievements in it which are related in a positive way to perfect happiness. He wisely regarded the happiness attainable in this life as being imperfect at best, but clearly held that it is happiness in an ana-logical, not merely an equivocal, sense (McEvoy, 2006).

According to Aquinas, Beatitude, or the last end is held to be the beatific vision of God. Thomas, Aquinas endeavors to relate happiness to the moral and speculative virtues, arguing that beatitude does not lie in bodily or material goods such as pleasure or wealth, but rather that the highest happiness, attainable by human beings lies in the contemplation of truth (McEvoy, 2006).

Aquinas recognizes intellectual virtues that, like the moral virtues, can be acquired by human effort. On the other hand, the supreme theological virtues of faith, hope and charity cannot be acquired but must be directly 'infused' by God (Kretzmann and Stump, 1998).

Aquinas believes that God is indeed good and that this conclusion can be argued for (Davies, 2003) .For Aquinas, 'God is good' can mean nothing more than that God is desirable. Goodness in its many forms in what God has creatively brought about. And, since he also thinks that the effects of efficient causes reflect their causes, since he thinks that their causes express themselves in them (that they are what their causes look like in action), he concludes that God is good, as the source of things which are good in their various ways, and desirable, since 'good' means 'desirable'. He means that God is good since the goodness of creatures preexists in him as their cause (Davies, 2003). For Aquinas, nothing can exist without somehow being good. In this sense, he thinks, everything real is good, even though it might not be as good as it could be (Davies, 2003).

According to Aquinas, faith is an infused virtue by reason of which we accept on God's authority what he has revealed to us (Audi, 2001).

Aquinas holds that there is one final end for human beings towards which they are directed by their nature as rational animals, that for the sake of which all else is done and which is itself a means to no further end. Good actions are those which direct us towards the achievement of that end. They are perfective, so that in performing them we become the kind of human beings able to achieve that end (MacIntyre, 1998).

What makes an action morally bad is its moving the agent not toward, but away from, the agent's ultimate goal. Such a deviation is patently irrational, and Aquinas analysis of moral badness of human action identifies it as fundamentally irrationally, since irrationally is an obstacle to the actualization of human being's specifying potentialities, those that make rational the differentia of the human species. In this as in every other respect, Aquinas ethics is reason centered (Kretzmann and Stump, 1998).

According to Aquinas, the good of the whole human being cannot be achieved by individuals in isolation and this is for two reasons. First, we need the aid and friendship of others at each stage in our lives, if we are to become able to perform the tasks of that stage. And second, the achievement of the good of each individual in inseparable from the achievement of the common good that is shared with those other individuals with whom she or he cooperates in making and sustaining a common life

(MacIntyre, 1998).

"Moderation" and "four cardinal virtues"

According to Aquinas, the four 'Cardinal Virtues' can be understood as habits, and are as follows: Reason's habit of good governance generally is prudence; reason's restraint of self-serving concupiscence is temperance; reason's preserving despite self-serving 'irascible' passions such as fear is courage; reason's governance of one's relations with other despite one's tendencies toward selfishness is justice. Aquinas normative ethics is based not on rules but on virtues; it is concerned with dispositions first and only then with actions (Kretzmann and Stump, 1998).

Aquinas demonstrates that of the four cardinal vir-tues prudence is the one that must govern the others. Without prudence, he says, temperance, courage, and justice could tell us neither what should be done nor how to do it; they would be blind or indeterminate virtues (Comte - Sponville, 2003). Aquinas keeps an important place for the Aristotelian virtues, such as fortitude and temperance (Mautner, 2005).

Whether a particular individual judges and acts so as to achieve her or his good is a whether and how far that individual has acquired the virtues of character, that temperateness which disciplines and educates the bodily appetites, that courage which orders our passions in their responses to threats of harm and danger, that justice which disposes the will rightly in relation to others by giving to each her or his due, and that prudence which is the exercise of practical intelligence in relationship to the particulars of any given situation. Aquinas understands a range of other virtues as parts or aspects of these four cardinal virtues. The endurance involved in the exercise of patience is an aspect of courage. Untruthfulness is a failure in justice, since we own to each other truth in our utterances (MacIntyre, 1998).

What is indispensable to the acquisition of the virtues is the right kind of habituation. It is only in and through practice that the virtues can be acquired and changed into stable and fixed disposions (MacIntyre, 1998).

The problem of evil

For Aquinas evil suffered is no illusion. It is perfectly real in the sense that we can truly say things like this person is blind. Yet Aquinas also thinks that to say such things is not to refer to something which exists in its own right. There are, he holds, no such things as blindnesses: there are only people who cannot see.

Something is bad since what we expect or want to be there, is not there. Aquinas says that evil cannot signify a certain way of existing or certain form of a nature. Therefore, we signify a certain absence of good by the term "evil". And he takes this to imply that evil suffered

cannot be created by God, that it cannot be produced by God when he makes it to be that there is something rather than nothing (Davies, 2003).

Conclusion

It can be concluded from this article that Ibn Miskawayh and Aquinas have many similar and shared views on ethics. Human's dispositions are changeable, and they can be changed through some environmental factors, particularly habits and repetition. The ultimate goal of ethics is consistent with the ultimate goal of human being's creation, that is reaching God which is the perfect goodness. Man's real happiness is ensured when he reaches this goal. Those properties which lead humans to achieving God which is the manifestation of man's happiness are considered as virtues, and those properties which forbear humans from achieving this goal are considered as vices. Thus it is only virtues that can bring human to happiness.

Although worldly things create some sensory and superficial pleasures, but they can never lead human beings to happiness. Man's happiness is when actualization of all of his powers or faculties. Happiness is a comprehensive state that includes human body and spirit, this world and hereafter. In spite of this fact that the highest rank of happiness is possible in the hereafter, a high rank of it, is possible in this world.

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