

Hümeýra Özturan, *Reason and Morality: The Source of Morality in Aristotle and al-Fârâbî [Akıl ve Ahlâk: Aristoteles ve Fârâbî'de Ahlâkın Kaynağı]*, London: Classic Publications, 2014, 254 pages, ISBN: 6055245221

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Recent studies on the idea of morality in the classical period seem to carry at least two defects. One of these defects is that morality studies on that period are an analysis of definitions and classifications. Analyses in the classical texts on morality are portrayed in a largely depictive and repetitive way. This depiction-oriented, non-problematic kind of approach, as the second defect, impedes those who do such studies from determining their position, and therefore causes an atmosphere where issues related to moral philosophy can not be assessed critically.

The main feature of Hümeýra Özturan's work, *Reason and Morality: The Source of Morality in Aristotle and al-Fârâbî*, is that it addresses the issue not with a depiction-focus, but from a problem-focused position. This quality immediately saves her work from the two main problems indicated above, and presents a quite successful example of the problem-based critical approach to the moral problems of the classical period.

In order to clarify the problematic aspects of the study, several approaches should be pointed out in the context of relations between knowledge and morality in the modern and contemporary period. The first approach attributes any kind of explanation related to existence, knowledge and value only to the constructions and determinations by the subject solely through the intellect and consciousness. Another approach, which we can perceive as a criticism of it, criticizes the dominance of the *episteme* and *tekhne* on *praxis*, and the neglect of the field of practice, by attempting a reconstruction of the practical field in the context of the rehabilitation of practical philosophy. However, this second attitude of criticism of reason, science and theory goes to an opposite end similarly to the first one, and transforms into an approach for building the practical field independent of all kinds of metaphysical frameworks, as well as of the idea of essence and value by separating *praxis* from *episteme*. To sum up in this context, on one hand, there is the making absolute the intellect and consciousness, and the presumption that

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the intellect and theory can say the last word in the practical field, whereas on the other hand, there is a complete isolation of the practical realm from the functioning of the intellect, and setting the practical field against theory and science since it is considered unreasonable.

Within a historical context, as noted at this point, two possibilities to be kept in mind about the book should perhaps be clarified for the reader. First, the book can show us that classical philosophy, to which Islamic philosophy subjects itself within the context of Muslim Peripateticism, has a dimension that cannot be reduced to the intellect in knowledge that can resist the criticism of strict rationalism and intellectualism forwarded by Western thinking throughout different periods. The second possibility is that the book can show the ideal of classical rational philosophy that all forces should be controlled by the intellect. In this review, the author's position towards Aristotle and al-Fārābī will be revealed first. Then, provided that we consider this position as an analysis reflecting the general characteristics of the idea of morality during the classical period, which possibilities the classical philosophy of morality carries against those criticisms, through proof of the two possibilities mentioned above will be shown. Now let us try to trace both possibilities through the author's arguments.

The first part of the study analyzes the relationship between reason and morality within the context of the former being the source of the latter. The second chapter studies the aspect of the theoretical intellect being the ground for morality, and the third chapter focuses on the practical intellect's aspect of being the source of morality. Finally, the fourth chapter studies the role of political and religious authority as the sources of morality. The first, second and third chapters of the book constitute the backbone of the book within the context of the basic problems we expressed in the introduction, while the last one is more of a complementary element of the previous chapters. With the first chapter which is an introduction to the narrative of the functionality of the intellect in theory and practice, the author tries to lay the foundations of the central role of the intellect in cosmology and psychology of both the two philosophers. The reflection of supra-lunar universal cosmology where the system is based on reasoning upon the sub-lunar universe, together with the first mover or the first intellect, also takes place like that, and the intellect and the power of thinking are indicative of the properties that characterize human beings. However, as pointed out by the author, although Aristotle and al-Fārābī base the source of morality upon the intellect, experience and politics are complementary characteristics of it.

The second part of the book deals with issues such as the nature of the theoretical intellect (*episteme* / *science*, *sophia* / *wisdom*, *nous* / *intellect*), laying the founda-

tion for the claim that the theoretical intellect is the source of morality, the source and accuracy of moral propositions. The basic claim of this section is that the “theoretical intellect gives the final purpose of morality, the criteria for moderateness and general ethical propositions.” While basing her claim, the author essentially refutes four claims. These claims are as such: The theoretical intellect is not related to morality; the source of moral propositions is not the intellect but moral virtues; that the source of moral propositions is famous propositions: the sources of morality are only the practical intellect and experience. One of the basic questions of the study, if the theoretical intellect is the source of morality, what the source of universal moral propositions is, and what its practical contributions are, is also answered in this section.

In this study, the problem of the nature of moral propositions based on the theoretical intellect is discussed as to whether or not the theoretical intellect gives reason to the first moral. It is not clear whether such primary principles existed for Aristotle or al-Fārābī. This notwithstanding, the author argues the possibility of the presence of first moral reasonables in al-Fārābī. Starting from this basic idea and the examples mentioned in the secondary literature, she attempts to put “the good” and freedom of will as the first moral reasonables. But as the author also stated, determination of the good as the first moral reasonable can only be in the form of “good is good.” Indeed, if it was determined, at the level of the first principle, what is good, people would not fall into dispute on this issue, and would not be mistaken about what is good. In this regard, we do not in fact come across a moral principle with certainty like “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” Another point to be considered here is that principles that could be considered as the first moral principles cannot be many in number, and those first principles are also largely unsophisticated. Thus, increasing the number of the first moral principles and the reasonables of this kind within the context of efforts to base the intellect as the source of morality would appear unlikely, as the intellect mostly yields to general and unsophisticated concepts, and even if increased, it would be seen as a problematic situation from the aspect of the general characteristics dynamic moral thinking should have.

The claim that the theoretical intellect yields to the ultimate moral goal and the issue of the intellect being the source of other moral propositions can be analyzed as two interrelated problems. Indeed, those who become subject to the author’s criticism with their claim that the source of moral propositions are well-known ones, claim that Aristotle’s identification of happiness as the ultimate goal is not based on evidence but from famous propositions, and they also base that on Aristotle’s reference to the majority when identifying happiness as the ultimate goal. As a result, the basic claim of the study is that for Aristotle and al-Fārābī, happiness

is the ultimate goal and thus the first principle, and by theoretical reasoning it is understood that this goal can only be achieved through a reasonable life.

Related to these issues, several points should be noted. First, over the course of the discussion about happiness is that the ultimate goal does not stem from famous propositions but from the intellect, the subject of the essence of happiness is considered. The focus here is the idea that happiness as the ultimate goal is derived both from the views of the majority and of wise people. In general, it is observed that people adhere to the idea of happiness as the ultimate goal, but they differ in its nature. In the subject of happiness being the ultimate goal, the function of the intellect puts the basis of something given to it, something taken from renowned sources and based on means of reasoning as is the case in many general moral reasoning situations, rather than functioning as rule maker and originator. The concern in the comments here is about the attribution of grounding the ideas of goals to the intellect, based on what intellect grounds on a given principle. Comments about happiness being derived from what is given can be the case only when it is argued that famous propositions are the basis of morality independent of the intellect, verifying the author's concern.

Another problem that should be pointed out in the context of happiness being the ultimate goal is the fact that happiness can be grounded not as the first and indisputable proposition of the intellect but only inferentially, and that is why it has a verifiable and falsifiable nature. Indeed, critics of the idea of happiness as the ultimate goal of morality in both the modern and classical periods also verify that. In addition to this, the first basic principle that can be derived at the level of fundamental principles can be the principle that everything has an aim. In this case, Aristotle's claim that happiness is the ultimate good seems to be unsophisticated because the happiness mentioned here is not meaningful, in the sense that a consensus cannot be reached as to who, where, when and how would decide on what happiness is.

Regarding the issue of the theoretical intellect as the source of other moral propositions, it is stated that the theoretical intellect gives general moral propositions. It was mentioned above that for Aristotle, the first moral reasoning is the good, while for al-Fārābī it is freedom of expression. But moral propositions are not limited to these. In this context, the author argues that the issue of whether the source of general moral judgments like "lying is bad" and "it is good to be fair," as well as the criterion of the moderate way, "one should be between exaggeration and oversimplification" as theoretical reasonables is still controversial.

As the study claims that the source of moral virtues, general moral judgments, and the criterion of the moderate way that form the basis of morality for Aristotle

and al-Fārābī is theoretical reasoning, it forms the opinion that their value of certainty is *yaqīni-burhāni* (evidential). Yet the claim of accuracy here should be balanced with emphasis on the third section regarding the accuracy of the practice area as being different from that of the theoretical field.

As a justification of problems put forth with regard to relating happiness and general moral propositions not to renowned propositions but to the theoretical intellect in the context of the first moral principles/reasonables being the ultimate goal, we can draw the following conclusion: the main concern should be avoiding any kind of implication that would yield to the image that morality is reduced to reasoning. This matter can also be seen on the nature of reasoning at the time of action, which will be handled in the third section. When it comes to wisdom and knowledge and their participation in action, it does not take place in the form of dumping a ready, fixed and unchanging form of knowledge during action; the reasoning itself is carried out during the execution of an action. Another issue to be considered here is that rational moral justification can also be interpreted as a process of identification working backwards, not forward and then backwards. Though it is possible after an action to see how that action is reasonable/evidential, the morality that is realized or not during the action is a process that cannot be reduced to theoretical reasoning. Therefore, it is worth evaluating whether rational inference, moral propositions, practical syllogism and other similar acts of thinking do necessarily precede the action, or are these retroactive determinations after that action is already realized at least once. Considering these elements as preceding the action by necessity is rejected even by the definition of habit/morality itself because in the classical approach, temperament (*khulq*/morality) is seen as a faculty from which righteous and unrighteous acts come from without thought. Indeed, despite the emphasis on practical syllogism with Aristotle, even he regarded morality as far from being a syllogistic discipline.

The third part of the study evaluates the issue of the application of general moral propositions and principles as determined by theoretical reasoning to particular matters. In other words, the issue of the source of the intellect based on practical reasoning. In this section, the author tries to identify the nature of the intellect and builds this on two of the five basic concepts common with Aristotle and al-Fārābī, namely *tekhne/art* and *phronesis/intellectual power-process of reasoning (ta'aqqul)* together with issues like *appreciation according to the principle of being moderate, experience, direct reasoning, and practical syllogism*. Essentially, the most important emphasis in this part with regard to the practice is that both philosophers indicate that knowledge produced by *sophia/wisdom* is general and it is not enough for action, *sophia/wisdom* provides information on the final goal, i.e., what is happiness, but

does not give information on the particulars. In this case, the determination of the singular action which would lead to happiness is possible by means of *direct reasoning*, which operates the virtue of *phronesis*, and with *prudence*, which stipulates *intellectual strength*. In other words, even if the determination of man's ultimate goal, his basic moral virtues and propositions, is attributed to the theoretical intellect, the practical intellect that provides the application of these goals and general principles to particular situations should be nurtured from environmental conditions like experience and society. This can be performed through a series of processes mentioned in this part of the study.

*Phronesis*, whose object is said to not be nature or metaphysics but human, plays quite a key role in this context. There are quite a few important points, such as a virtue associated with action, *phronesis* is related to particulars, like actions can be infinite according to the perpetrator and his preferences because the particulars are endless. That is why action cannot be identified by general principles or subjected to certain rules, every action should be individually studied. The perpetrator gains existence within the unity of particular situations and under the special circumstances of each action. *Phronesis* is different from the science of the general and indispensable ones; *phronesis* is about what is able to exist in a different form than their current situation. While in science there is only one general truth, there are results as numerous as there are human beings in *phronesis*. It is based more on perception than knowledge. It works on perceptual data by means of contemplation, and that is why *phronesis* is demonstrative. Similarly, with al-Fārābī, it is seen that *the power of idea* is related to the particular and practical rather than the general and theoretical. The word "idea" does not imply a theoretical use of the intellect but a relationship of the intellect with individual and particular beings and events in the outside world. The power of the *idea* refers to the second part in al-Fārābī's classification of *natural reasonings-voluntary reasonings*. Forms connected to voluntary reasonings and factors making situations different are points like *time*, *space*, *social conditions*, and the *particular circumstances of the individual*. Thanks to *prudence* (*ta'aqqul*) which enables the working of the *power of thinking*, evaluation of events and *conditions surrounding behavior* can be made. Assessment can be made from the conditions of *community*, *time*, and *space* under which that event happened. The *actions needed* are fulfilled, *as required, when and where it should be*. What *phronesis* and *prudence* (*ta'aqqul*) reveal is that even if it is dependent on reason in terms of the general principles of morality, it can be demonstrated how it is connected to the discretion of the individual. At this point however, emphasis on the virtue of *phronesis* should not be diminished by increasing the emphasis towards its mental aspect. Indeed, Aristotle's high stringency is known for grounding the alteration of *phronesis* from *episteme* as well as *nous*.

In the context where *phronesis* is attempted to be separated from the more general and necessity-driven *episteme*, the author evaluates *phronesis* as a kind of self-command. From there her reaching the opinion that Aristotle's moral philosophy is among the normative moral approaches also deserves a re-evaluation. Because apparently the reasoning arising as a result of *phronesis* bears a nature that cannot be generalized or run anew each time. Commandments and the normativeness that would be attributed to *phronesis* seem troubling because the practice area and morality should be considered as separately as possible from generally accepted laws, from a structure that resembles automatic obedience to one that obeys the law and rules. A moral perpetrator does not act with data ready to be implemented even in the form of its own command, but in every new situation it puts a new preference for that specific action by using new reasoning.

One of the major tools of the practical intellect being a source of morality is the need of the criterion of moderateness for re-appreciation according to the changeable conditions in a character. Indeed, this principle is unsophisticated and empty because it can be theoretically determined. Therefore, for each individual action the determination has to be made from what is moderate. It seems that one of the properties which saves the classical philosophy of morality from being a pure objective, universal, mental, constants-focused and unchangeable mechanical structure is the difference made by Aristotle between the *middle that is the same for everyone* and *the middle for us* or in the words of al-Fārābī *the middle itself* al-Fārābī and *the relative middle*. As a result, this also seems to be a place where the final and absolute determination of the intellect is dysfunctional and offers a clue for the approach of keeping moral ones away from an evidential-level exaction and search for it. At this point, it is not the deterministic and unchangeable laws of the intellect which are decisive, rather it is the external conditions as expressed by al-Fārābī such as (i) the *time*, (ii) the *place*, (iii) the *perpetrator*, (iv) the *target*, (v) the *tool* with which the action is done, and (vi) the *purpose* for which the action is done.

The philosophical tradition of classical morality, as long as its intellectual image is not focused on theory, will gain the power to face and overcome criticisms directed toward classical philosophy through the attitudes mentioned in the introduction. On the other hand, as long as it is considered as theory-based thinking through the intellect, it will lose its power in the face of criticism from this vantage. If the rational aspect of morality specific to Aristotle and al-Fārābī in this study allows us to reflect on the whole picture, then this sense of morality needs to face criticism towards this sharp rationalism and put forward that it does not have a purely rational position. Because as we have seen through this text, we are dealing with a structure where action/practice is at least as important as thought and that

both even feed each other. But if this same sense of morality contains so much certainty and necessity for justifying the criticism of evidence directed toward the metaphysical and epistemological branches of the main body by different successive systems, then the claims of universality and the evidential method of the said tradition is required to be similarly criticized in morality and discussed in terms of the relationship of morality with the evidential method. Indeed, the field of morality, even if it is not an absolute field of autonomy, should be separated as far as possible from *science* and *law* where constants, unchangeability, necessity, determination, law and order prevail. In other words, although morality is related to the *theoretical intellect* it should be viewed distinctly apart from *evidence-based philosophy* and all kinds of sharp *theoretical emphasis* when it comes to classical philosophy. While it is associated with *practical reasoning*, it should be viewed separately from the legal and sanction-based aspects of *religion* and *politics* because the non-absolute partial autonomy of morality can only be achieved in that way.

As a result, it works only through a holistic approach which does not allow for either the pure knowing ideal of the intellect to consider the practical sphere as secondary and dominate it, or for the latter turning out to be a rambling realm in absolute isolation from reason with metaphysics destroying all kinds of ideas of essence and value. Examining the relationship between intellect and morality in the context of Aristotle and al-Fārābī, this study offers a very convenient opportunity to start thinking on these issues which are expressed only partially here. Indeed, the study's section on *theoretical intellect* has the nature to impede the second of the problems pointed out here, while the section on *practical intellect* does this for the first question indicated. With this understanding, it offers an important picture regarding the holistic structure of classical philosophy.