

A Comparative Study of the Ethical Principles and Ideas of ‘Allāma Majlisī and Abū ‘Alī Miskawayh

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Abstract

Although ‘Allāma Majlisī did not intend to write an exclusive ethical book or propose a coherent ethical system in the various volumes of his book *Biḥār al-Anwār*, the analysis of the discussions he has made about the qur’ānic verses and traditions provides a comprehensive ethical doctrine. In addition to emphasizing on the role of rationality in the explanation of theoretical and practical teachings of ethics, this doctrine pays special attention to the basic role of religion in the interpretation of spiritual foundations of conducts as well as the ethical and pedagogical aspects such that it gives in a complete and in-depth overview of the virtues and principles of Islamic ethics. On the other hand, the philosophical and ethical ideas of Miskawayh are also so wise and sagacious of its kind. His attempts in shedding light on imaginative and confirmatory principles of ethics, creating coherence between philosophical teachings of Greek and Islamic ethics, and explicating the four classes of ethical virtues as well as their subcategories based on religious tenets are considered scholarly, valid, and thorough. This study focuses on a comparative survey of the ethical principles and ideas of ‘Allāma Majlisī in *Biḥār al-Anwār* and Abū ‘Alī Miskawayh in *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq*. Then, by the analysis of these two ethical approaches, it is attempted to analyze their similarities and differences as well as their pros and cons in the clarification of Islamic ethics.

Keywords: Ethics, Blissfulness, Virtue, Majlisī, Miskawayh.

Introduction

Morality and ethical issues have always been of special importance within different human societies during history. One of the most basic concerns of thinkers and philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Galenus, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Saint Augustine, Kant, and also many Muslim scholars including Fārābī, Avicenna, Ghazālī, Fayḍ, Mullā Ṣadrā, and so on has been arguments about blissfulness, goodness, ethical virtues and their subcategories as well as other discussions in Ethics. Reflecting upon the scientific legacy from Islamic philosophers and thinkers and studying their weaknesses and strengths with respect to authentic religious resources is a way to achieve accurate explanation and extraction of Islamic ethical principles and ultimately specify the scientific and rational ethics in Islam. Abū ‘Alī Miskawayh is a scholar and philosopher who has paid special attention to ethics and practical wisdom and has given in some unprecedented works in this field including *Ādāb al-dunyā wa al-dīn*, *Tartīb al-sa’ādāt wa manāzil al-’ulūm*, *Al-Risāla al-mas’ada*, *Fawz al-sa’āda*, *Fawz al-najāt*, and finally his most significant and well-known ethical work, i.e., *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*. Although

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Miskawayh in his book has been under the influence of Greek thinkers and philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato, he has attempted to present philosophical ethics in a new framework compatible with religious ethics and Islamic beliefs so in this regard he has had an immense impact on the scientific and rational clarification and expansion of Islamic ethics that has enormously influenced the ethical works after him. On the other hand, ‘Allāma Majlisī is one of the great Islamic jurists and narration transmitters who is considered as an eminent and meditative researcher in narrative and intellectual sciences. This fact is quite evident for anyone who has referred to his analyses and commentaries about the traditions in his noble book *Biḥār al-anwār*. Although ‘Allāma Majlisī in the various volumes of *Biḥār al-anwār*, especially volumes 64 to 76, was not about to write a cohesive book on ethics, an accurate overview of his approaches and minute analyses according to the qur’ānic verses and traditions and instructions of Ahl al-Bayt displays the fundamental tenets as well as the moral virtues and vices at issue in Islamic ethics. Therefore, due to the important influence of the moral ideas and works of these two Muslim thinkers on rational exegeses and expansion of Islamic ethics and also their unique approach to moral issues, this study deals with the comparative analysis of their ethical doctrines and opinions. The comparative study of different approaches in the ethical works of Muslim philosophers and thinkers displays their pros and cons and also serves as a scientific and logical guideline for a comprehensive and cohesive ethical system. This article explores the following questions: What are the axioms of the ethical ideas of ‘Allāma Majlisī and Abū ‘Alī Miskawayh? What is the relationship between blissfulness and faculties of the soul? How are ethical virtues explained from the view of ‘Allāma Majlisī and Abū ‘Alī Miskawayh? By the analytical survey of the approaches of these two Muslim scholars, the similarities and differences in their views, plus their weakness and strength points, the present research seeks to represent a comprehensive model for Islamic ethical virtues and principles ensuring human blissfulness in all physical and spiritual aspects.

Ethical principles and ideas of ‘Allāma Majlisī

Soul (Nafs) and its incorporeality

‘Allāma Majlisī believes that a human is composed of soul and body as dual and autonomous entities; he attributes human genuineness to his rational soul that is recognized with the word “I” by everyone (Majlisī, 1983, vol. 57:271; vol. 56: 290). From the viewpoint of ‘Allāma, rational soul is a delicate, illuminous, and divine substance that belongs to the body and is interrelated with it; and the angels take it at the moment of death (Majlisī, 1983, vol. 58: 26). From his view, the arguments of philosophers for the incorporeality of the soul are questionable, as they do not prove it explicitly and vividly (ibid: 104).

Faculties of the soul

‘Allāma Majlisī in the interpretation of “fresh water” and “salty and bitter water” in the narration “... Be fresh water so to create from thee my heaven and my Servants, and be salty and bitter...” states that “fresh water” is an allusion to the faculties of the soul inviting a human to goodness and righteousness, e.g., the rational faculty. In his view, “salty and bitter water” denote some faculties that incite human to lust and physical pleasures; thus, the metaphor of fresh and salty water implies that every human has different faculties, some obey the good faculties while some others obey the evil faculties that exist in their existence (ibid, vol. 64: 93-95).

A human's predominant temper

It is concluded from the commentaries of ‘Allāma Majlisī regarding the traditions that a human’s temper is more inclined to vice and evil as he innately wants to be free without any obstacles on his way to bestial desires and carnal pleasures. If God leaves a human to herself and appoints no divine prophet to guide him to goodness and righteousness, he just satisfies his (worldly) desires, even if it leads to corruption and bloodshed. Therefore, evil dominates good in a human’s temper (ibid, vol. 11: 126). On the other hand, ‘Allāma Majlisī holds that human is created in a way that he has tendency to God and has an innate inclination to gain insight into and relate to Him. Man’s God seeking nature, from the view of Majlisī, is a covenant-driven insight that paves the way for accepting religion, and if it was not covenant-driven, it would not be possible to accept religion and give one’s life for it, because if there is no zeal and eagerness inside a human’s soul for God, persistence in religion would be meaningless (ibid, vol. 65: 318).

Superior virtues

Virtue literally means excellence, priority, superiority, privilege, and good attribute versus vice (Dihkhudā, 1963, vol. 36: 277). ‘Allāma Majlisī has discussed human virtues with respect to the Qur’ānic verses and different narrations. In his view and with regard to traditions, the perfection of religion is in seeking knowledge, and knowledge paves the way for acquiring good behaviors. “Knowledge is of numerous virtues: its head is humbleness, its eyes are restraint from jealousy, its ears are understanding, its tongue is honesty, its memory is inquiry, its heart is optimism, its ration is discovering the reason of issues, its hands are kindness, its endeavor is health, its feet are visiting the scholars, and its weapon is sweet and pleasant words...” (Majlisī, 1983: vol. 1: 175). Other virtues are like the inner and outer limbs and faculties of science. In another words, it can be said that science and knowledge are the root of all human virtues (ibid: 117). Inspired by traditions, ‘Allāma Majlisī regards patience or equanimity as one of the best human virtues, and writes, “In order to do his responsibilities and commitments, and to resist difficulties and hardships, a human is in need of patience and persistence. If he has no spiritual power and if the unfailing faculty of patience and resistance is missing in his soul, he cannot win in the battle of fighting against difficulties and trouble and also in the realm of doing commitments.” (ibid, vol. 68: 68-69).

In the opinion of ‘Allāma, patience is a high ideal that has an influence on all of the behaviors and qualities in a human and takes a special name in every field. It is named bravery in the realm of battle, and in the realm of obedience and adherence to God, it is named patience in obedience, and when it comes to keeping secrets, it is called confidentiality. Patience against someone who gets furious at us is called swallowing anger, and in the realm of politics and social issues it is named expansion of mind (ibid). Furthermore, ‘Allāma has explained about the virtue of faith and Islam as well as other ethical virtues such as love to God, monotheism, sincerity, gratefulness, remembrance, etc. However, it is not possible to mention that here due to its lengthy account.

Moderation and pleasure from the view of ‘Allāma Majlisī

From the viewpoint of ‘Allāma Majlisī, the criterion for measuring virtue in human behavior is moderation and restraint from extremism. In his interpretation of the narration “There is no believer who believes in God but is harsh,” he writes, “The Believer always observes the boundaries of moderation and avoids extremism” (ibid, vol. 65: 386-387; vol. 58: 291).

Pleasure is one of the main concepts related to perfection and blissfulness, and it literally means delight, favorite, delightful, taste, and good taste (Fayyūmī, 2004: 552). If a human acquires something that is compatible with his true perfection and blissfulness, he enjoys it and if he/she gets something that is not consistent with his existence, he suffers from it (Misbāh, 2009: 161). ‘Allāma also writes that rational pleasures are superior to and more perfect than sensual pleasures, “It is commonly held by the laymen that the most powerful pleasures are sensual and physical, so most of people do not worship God unless to get delicious food and heavenly maidens in the hereafter, but this idea is refuted by those who have wisdom due to several reasons”. Then, he points to the causes of this argument (Majlisī, 1983, vol. 58: 127).

A Human’s ultimate perfection and blissfulness

‘Allāma Majlisī discusses the concept of blissfulness and wretchedness based on the Qur’ān and various traditions. In his literal definition of blissfulness and wretchedness, he quotes from *Mufradāt* Rāghib and writes, “Al-sa’d wa al-sa’āda: it is assistance in Godly and divine works to achieve goodness and merit; it is against wretchedness; and it is said: sa’ida wa ‘as’adahullāh: God made him achieve goodness and assisted him. As the term blissfulness (sa’ādat) is mainly in two kinds: worldly and otherworldly; and worldly blissfulness is in three kinds: spiritual, physical, and external; wretchedness (shaqāwat) has the same divisions, too (ibid, vol. 70: 42). Moreover, ‘Allāma takes blissfulness as selecting and adopting what will bring the good ending (ibid: vol. 1: 115).

In another case, ‘Allāma considers rationality to be the heart of duties and perfections, and as a means for achieving worldly and otherworldly blissfulness, recognizing the truth of the phenomena, and reflecting upon complicated, intricate, and elusive tasks (ibid: 102). Likewise, he regards faith as a means to reach blissfulness in this world and the hereafter, and regards disbelief as the cause of wretchedness in both worlds (Majlisī, 1983: vol. 5: 299). The extensions of blissfulness are different in various ethical doctrines in terms of different ideologies that constitute the foundation of human blissfulness. The Noble *Qur’ān* maintains that a human’s ultimate blissfulness and wretchedness lie in approaching God (Misbāh, 2010, vol. 1: 92-93; ibid, 2009: 343).

From the perspective of ‘Allāma Majlisī, the manifestation of true blissfulness is approaching God. Approaching God should be interpreted as the degrees of perfection. Human being is contingent, and possible beings have nothing of themselves and are in the highest level of fault, shortage, and imperfection. However, the Necessary Being has all properties of perfection. Thus, there is an incredible and enormous discrepancy and distinction between absolute deficiency and absolute richness. When a human steps in the spiritual way, the more he takes the moral high ground and distances from ethical faults by worshipping and doing duties, the better he attains perfection, approaches the source of excellence, and takes Godly moral attributes (Majlisī, 1983, vol. 67:197).

Ethical principles and ideas of Miskawayh

Soul and body

In the opinion of Miskawayh, there is a reality in humans that is not totally or partially physical, but rather it is, in essence and properties, in contrast with physical objects and their components (Ibn Miskawayh, 1951: 4-5). Human beings are creatures composed of body and soul. A human’s body consists of physical elements that are in constant change and transformation while his soul is incorporeal and independent from matter and its effects; accordingly, a human’s virtuosity lies in his soul. A human’s physical aspect is compatible

with that of animals and his spiritual aspect corresponds the qualities of angels (Ibn Miskawayh, 1981: 69). In his view, soul is a living and immortal essence that is not susceptible to either death or destruction because it is neither physical nor accidental; it rather is considered a simple essence with no nullifying opposite; it is not a composite essence to be destructed either.

Faculties of the soul

The recognition of the soul and its faculties is among important discussions taken into account by some philosophers in their works and they have presented different ideas in this regard (Aristotle, n.d.: 35; Suhriwardī, 1997, vol. 3: 26; Avicenna, 1985, vol. 2: 32; Ṣadr al-Muta'allihīn, 1981, vol. 8: 53). From the view of Miskawayh, the faculties of the soul are divided into three types: faculty in charge of thinking and reflecting on the essence of the phenomena, faculty dealing with wrath, bravery, performance of important and risky tasks, and tendency to domination, and the faculty of desire, interest in food, and a variety of sensual pleasures. These three types are distinct and incompatible such that the fortification of one would lead to the weakness of another. Rational faculty is the incorporeal truth or the angel-like aspect of a human (Ibn Miskawayh, 1981: 14).

In Miskawayh's idea, the faculty of desire is not nurtured and not capable of being nurtured; the faculty of anger, although impolite, is capable of becoming polite; and finally, the faculty of rationality certainly has politeness and dignity. Becoming predominant in a human's soul, each of the faculties makes the others subordinate to itself. By the power of will and wisdom, a human can subdue his anger and desire to his ration, achieve theoretical and practical excellence, and improve his dignity and merits to the angelic level. However, if his rationality is at the service of desires and anger, he will accept the worst kind of slavery and will deteriorate to the stage of being like animals (ibid: 44).

Human perfection and blissfulness

From the perspective of Miskawayh, human perfection is divided into two kinds, as there are two faculties in a person: One is theoretical wisdom and the other is practical wisdom. By one of them, he shows interest in science and knowledge and by the other is inclined to the order of tasks. His first perfection that is related to the theoretical faculty is to be encouraged into knowledge and awareness, achieve appropriate orientation to the truth, avoid fallacy in beliefs, and not get into doubt and uncertainty. Moreover, in gaining awareness about the truth of creatures and their hierarchy, it is essential for him to reach the highest stage of knowledge (that is Godly knowledge) and by which attain tranquility and certainty in his heart. However, the second perfection belonging to the practical wisdom is ethical perfection, which begins with the moderation of faculties and certain acts so that they become consistent and compatible, and hence the acts follow the faculty of thought. When a human becomes aware of the general truth behind the creatures, he somehow gets information about the details, too, because the details come from the underlying general truth of objects, and when a human reaches that level of theoretical and practical wisdom, in the light of those acts, he will become the successor of God – the creator of all the universe – and thus will not make mistakes in his conducts any more. In Miskawayh's view, the perfect creatures who attain this stage will have an eternal and immortal existence and will not miss any everlasting blessing, because by this state of perfection they will get the talent of receiving grace from God for ever and approach God such that there will not be any veil between them and God. It is truly the ultimate stage of human blissfulness (ibid: 33-35).

Natural and typical temper

Philosophers usually do not regard a person's actions and behaviors as his/her temper or ethics; but rather they regard temper as a disposition or firm tendency in the soul leading to certain actions without thinking and consideration (Fārābī, 1985: 24-34; Fayḍ Kāshānī, 1996, vol. 5: 95; Narāqī, n.d: 55; Ṣadr al-Muta'allihīn, 1981, vol. 4: 114). Miskawayh also holds that ethics is an approach by which some behaviors and merits are created in the soul that perform only beautiful actions. He considers ethics that has the objective of the betterment of human actions as one of the best and most noble branches of science, because it focuses on human being who is the most perfect creature in this world ('Ibn Miskawayh, 1981: 30). Miskawayh discusses whether a human's predominant and first temper is based on good or evil, reviews and analyzes different approaches in this regard such as the ideas of the Stoics and Galenus (ibid: 26-27), and finally quotes and confirms the theory of Aristotle. In his view, even unscrupulous people can become righteous as a result of education and correction; therefore, every behavior is capable of being changed so no changeable matter is innate and natural; as a result, no behavior is natural and instinctive. Though, people are said to be different in accepting the disciplines called behavior and are in various levels in terms of adjustment and disposition to different ethical issues (ibid: 24-28). Accordingly, in another approach, he divides temper into natural and typical. Natural temper originates from a human's essence and nature; for instance, some people get furious, excited, or frightened easily; however, typical temper is formed as a result of habit and repetition. Although some behaviors might begin with thinking and contemplation at first, they gradually turn into habit by repetition (ibid: 25). Miskawayh thus assumes that behavior is capable of being changed as a result of nurture and advice, although this change might occur slowly.

Ethical virtues and vices

From the view of Miskawayh, each of the three faculties in a human gets strong or weak according to nature, habit, and nurture. Therefore, when the faculty of rationality moves on moderately and pays attention to its truth, the soul gets interested in true sciences and will be in the way of appropriate, undoubted knowledge so the moderation of rational soul brings about the virtue of knowledge and consequently wisdom. Likewise, when the faculty of desire and the *animalis* soul moves on moderately under the control of rationality and does not sink into desires and lusts, the virtue of chastity and consequently generosity will appear. Furthermore, when the faculty of anger becomes moderate and appropriate and follows the faculty of rationality such that it gets excited at the right time and does not excessively get furious, the virtue of patience and consequently bravery will emerge. The combination and moderation of all these virtues will constitute justice in the soul that will bring perfection and excellence of all virtues. Accordingly, there is a consensus among scholars that the virtues are four: wisdom, chastity, bravery, and justice (ibid: 14-15). In the following, Miskawayh mentions subcategories of the four virtues: The virtue of wisdom involves intelligence, memory, rationality, purity, sharpness of the mind, and easy learning; the virtue of chastity includes self-restraint, perseverance, beneficence, freedom, contentment, good temper, order, toleration, dignity, and beauty. Self-esteem, courage, patience, sobriety, fearlessness, and tolerance of suffering and hardship are among virtues that are considered as the subcategories of bravery. And finally, the virtue of justice involves merits such as honesty, uniqueness, meeting relatives, equality, decent judgment, friendship, and worship (ibid: 17-19). Many merits mentioned as the branches of ethical virtues by Miskawayh are those that are maintained in Islamic ethics, according to the verses and traditions, among which we refer to meeting relatives, praying, and so on. This concept is quite evident from his definition of

worship because in his view, it is the appreciation and admiration of God, obedience to Him, doing the requirements of religion and piety, showing respect for divine prophets and Imāms, and adherence to their divine instructions (ibid). Therefore, although Miskawayh owes to Greek moral philosophy in the explanation of ethical virtues, it should be noted that by using religious instructions, he has attempted to present Islamic ethics consistent and compatible with Greek moral philosophy.

Temperance and moderation

One of the most significant discussions raised by the Islamic scholars in their ethical works under the influence of Aristotle is the golden rule of justice (Aristotle, 2007: 66; Fārābī, 1995: 37; Fayḍ Kāshānī, 2002: 60; Ghazālī, n.d, vol. 8: 98-99; Khumaynī, 2009: 147; Narāqī, 1999: 78).

After explaining the four virtues and their classifications, Miskawayh writes, So when you recognize these virtues and their types, you should also know their opposite vices. The virtues are the balance between two extremes and that is why when a virtue goes astray a bit, it approaches another vice. Achieving this moderation is hard, yet maintaining it is even harder (Ibn Miskawayh, 1981: 21).

Therefore, wisdom is the balance between stupidity and idiocy. Stupidity here refers to using the faculty of ration for unimportant issues not deserving contemplation and on the other hand, idiocy means the absence of contemplation and consideration. Chastity is the balance between two vices named the voracity and laxity of desire. The voracity here means going overboard in pleasures and laxity denotes restraining the soul from appropriate necessary pleasures for the body while they are permissible by ration and religion. Furthermore, courage is the middle point between two vices named fearfulness of the things that are not allowed to be afraid of and fearlessness in committing indecent actions. Finally, justice is the balance between two extremes; one is oppression and tyranny to gain excessive property and wealth by inappropriate and unwarranted means, and the other is being oppressed and depriving oneself from any property or asset while the person deserves it (ibid, 22-23).

Pleasure and its different types

The concept of pleasure has always been considered for analysis by philosophers and thinkers due to its close relation to blissfulness and ethical virtues (Aristotle, 1925, vol. 2: 325; Fayḍ Kāshānī, 1997: 169; Ikhāwn as-Şafā, 1991, vol. 3: 59; Şadr al-Muta'allihīn, 1981, vol. 4: 117; Shahrzūrī, 2005: 597). Miskawayh maintains that pleasures are divided into sensual and rational; some people assume that sensual pleasures are optimal good and super blissfulness insomuch that they suppose all human faculties are created to achieve these enjoyments. Because of this assumption, their noble soul – like an inferior slave – is at the service of their appetitive soul. Such pleasures originate from the faculties of desire and anger and are common between humans and animals (Ibn Miskawayh, 1981: 35-36). Sensual pleasures are accidental, that is, they lose their attraction soon and their repetition will bring boredom and suffering; however, rational pleasures are innate, stable, and exclusively for humans (ibid: 79). Besides, Miskawayh in another approach regards blissfulness as the most enjoyable and righteous pleasure. In his view, pleasures are in two kinds: passive pleasures common between humans and animals, and active pleasures that are exclusively assigned to humans only. Sensual pleasures are accompanied with lust, disappear soon, and become repetitive, even painful, disagreeable, and ugly; these are contrary to the innate rational pleasures that are stable and long lasting. Therefore, blissful pleasure is essential, not accidental; it is rational, not sensual; it is active, not passive; and finally, it is Godly, not mundane. It is an enjoyment

that is created only as a result of achieving virtues and wisdom (Avicenna, 1984: 417; Fārābī, 1992: 248-250; Ibn Miskawayh, 1981: 84-85; Ṣadr al-Muta'allihīn, 1981, vol. 4: 142).

Blissfulness and its different stages from the perspective of Miskawayh

After proving the spiritual aspect of human being, this question is raised that whether human blissfulness and perfection is related to only the soul or both body and soul. In his answer to this question, Miskawayh critically analyzes different theories such as the theory of physical pleasure by the sensualists and spiritual pleasure by philosophers such as Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato (Ibn Miskawayh, 1981: 69). Miskawayh then explains his idea on the truth of blissfulness that is a combination of these two theories. In his view, a human is of spiritual virtue by which he can reach the level of angels; he also is of physical virtue like that of the animals; therefore, a blissful human is either at the stage of physical issues and at the same time has an eye on charity, or is at the stage of spiritual issues and at the same time pays attention to physical affairs and reflects upon and follows the signs of God's power and wisdom. In his idea, blissfulness lies in either of the above stages although one of them is more limited and deficient than the other due to its worldly deceits and physical luxuries. A human might become obsessed with these aspects that are replete with sorrow and regret and restrain him from good and improvement in doing moral acts. However, a truly happy person is the one who has immense wisdom, is at the highest level of spirituality, is enlightened with the divine light, and is always content and satisfied with the blessings he receives from God. He does nothing but what is the will of God and chooses nothing but what makes him close to God. Of course, the levels of humans is various in this regard; therefore, Miskawayh holds that issues such as success, accurate beliefs, ethical virtues, decent behavior, health, wealth, and good reputation bring just partial blissfulness whereas ultimate blissfulness lies in the substantiation of all spiritual and physical perfections altogether (ibid, 69-72).

Analysis

Philosophical and religious approaches

Philosophical ethics discussed by some Muslim thinkers and philosophers such as Kindī, Fārābī, Miskawayh, Khāja Nasīr, Fayḍ Kāshānī, and so on is based on virtue ethics. The emergence of virtue ethics in philosophy dates back to ancient Greek. Later, Muslim philosophers started to represent a religious interpretation of the ancient Greek ethical ideas, as they did not find them against religious instructions of Islam. Ibn Miskawayh who is a Platonic-Aristotelian philosopher has made use of religious instructions more than other philosophers before him in his books *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* and *Taḥhīr al-a'arāq*. He has extracted many important ethical points from the *Qur'ān* and traditions; however, his principle moral system relies on Aristotle's theory of balance. All in all, what was summarized about the ethical ideas of 'Allāma Majlisī in this article is based on the themes in the *Qur'ān* and traditions and has a quite religious and theological structure.

Principles of Islamic ethics

In different branches of knowledge, there always exist a preset purpose, subject, definition, problems, and principles. Ethics or moral philosophy is not exempt from this rule either, and the scholars in this field have attempted to explain the imagination principles and foundations before getting into the main subjects because the imagination and confirmation principles of every branch of science are in fact its bases. Therefore, what is stated as the foundation of

ethics by philosophers is definitely of importance and making a comparison between two ethical approaches can reveal their similarities and differences in terms of principles.

Principles of Miskawayh's ethics

In his definition of morality and its principles, Miskawayh believes that ethics is a branch of knowledge that has some foundations and objectives. Of course, as mentioned before, Miskawayh has not discussed all details about ethics, but rather he has just dealt with proving the soul (nafs), the classification of its faculties, goodness and blissfulness, and the definition of ethics; however, in his discussion of different ethical issues, he has also stated some subjects about the philosophy of ethics and its principles. What is significant here is the extent to which he has been under the influence of ancient Greek philosophers. Undoubtedly, Miskawayh has been influenced by the ideas of Aristotle and Plato in his book *Biḥār al-anwār*. Like Aristotle, he believes that the soul is not compatible with the substance of body because it neither changes nor transforms. Besides, he defines the triplet virtues with respect to faculties of the soul and also adds a fourth one named justice to them. There is a consensus among philosophers that Socrates and his pupils have been the first ones who mentioned these four virtues (Aḥmadpūr, 2011: 112). Although the basic principles in the ethical doctrine of Miskawayh are based on Aristotle's theory of balance as well as other moral instructions of Socrates and his pupil Plato, he has been inspired by religious theology, too, and has attempted to interpret virtue ethics in a religious philosophical framework.

Ethical principles from the view of 'Allāma Majlisī

In his noble book *Biḥār al-anwār*, 'Allāma Majlisī has not emphasized the principles and definition of ethics; in another words, it is better to say he has not assigned an independent chapter to ethics or moral philosophy like other philosophers because he does not mainly intend to write an ethical book or establish a special moral doctrine. However, in all volumes of *Biḥār*, inspired by the verses and traditions, he has mentioned some human moral characteristics among which we can accurately infer the basics of Islamic ethics from his view. The arguments of 'Allāma about anthropology, study of the soul, ontology, theology, and monotheism in his noble book convey the confirmation principles of Islamic ethics based on the *Qur'ān* and traditions. Through the overall structure of *Biḥār al-anwār*, it seems that Majlisī – like many other narration transmitters – acknowledges ethics as subsidiary to faith, regards ethical virtues and vices as the soldiers of faith and disbelief, and thus he raises ethical traditions after the discussion of faith and disbelief. First, he addresses ethics of servitude and individual ethics, then he discusses social relations and the believer's rights, and finally he mentions Islamic rituals and traditions in different individual and social fields (ibid: 271).

Therefore, in the view of Allāma Majlisī, there is a deep relationship between the purity of the soul, ethical virtues, faith, and monotheistic theology because a human's true blissfulness lies in divine ethics and it is obtained only in the light of monotheism). Furthermore, according to genuine Islamic ideology, the accurate recognition of this world, its attractions, and its role in blissfulness and wretchedness in addition to the recognition of the otherworld as the ultimate destination for a human and the place for receiving rewards and punishments have an undeniable effect on moral guidance, acquiring ethical virtues, and freedom from moral vices.

Comparison between the ideas of Allāma Majlisī and Miskawayh

Similarities

With respect to what was explained above on the ethical system of Allāma Majlisī and Miskawayh, we can refer to the following similarities between their views about morality:

- A. As mentioned above, the principles of ethics include discussions about the soul or the science of soul that is of special importance in ethics. With regard to different Qur'ānic verses and traditions, Allāma Majlisī interprets discussions about the soul and its faculties. He regards a human consisting of body and soul and believes that they are independent from each other. He also maintains that a human's nobility and dignity depend on his rationality. Miskawayh also holds that a human has a truth that is neither physical nor semi-physical, but rather it is contrary to objects and their parts in terms of essence and qualities; therefore, in his view, a human is a combination of body and soul. He maintains that a human's value relies on his soul because his bodily aspect is comparable with animals while his spiritual dimension is like angels.
- B. As mentioned through various volumes of *Biḥār al-anwār*, in the ethical doctrine of Miskawayh and 'Allāma Majlisī, blissfulness is voluntarily acquired by means of virtues.
- C. Like 'Allāma who discusses blissfulness in this world and the hereafter based on the verses and different traditions, Miskawayh first mentions different theories on blissfulness and then raises the theory of comprehensive blissfulness including happiness in both worlds.
- D. Although in Allāma's view, evil dominates good in human nature and people are different in terms of temper and qualities, it should be noted that according to him, even natural and innate tendencies in a human are changeable by practice and people can create moral virtues in themselves through endeavor, persistence, and repetition. Miskawayh also divides temper into natural and typical and then explains about them. He refers to the transformation of human behavior as result of nurture and advice, although he assumes that this transformation may take some time.
- E. 'Allāma Majlisī and Miskawayh have both paid attention to the theoretical and practical guidelines of ethical pedagogy, and based on their own approach to morality, have attempted to delve deep into both theoretical and practical methods of acquiring ethical virtues and restraining from vices.

Differences

A) 'Allāma Majlisī considers rational soul as a delicate, luminous, and divine substance from the World of Sanctity that belongs to the body. From his view, the arguments of philosophers for incorporeality of the soul are against the *Qur'ān* and tradition and thus are questionable. However, rejecting the incorporeality of the soul and belief in its corporeality are not free from fallacy unless we accept that 'Allāma believes in a level of incorporeality of the soul, as he sometimes regards it coming from a sacred and luminous world. However, Miskawayh definitely argues for the idea of incorporeality of the soul.

B) What Miskawayh writes about the three faculties of the soul as well as its talents, potentials, developmental stages, and perfection is inspired by the ethical doctrine of ancient Greek philosophers, whereas 'Allāma Majlisī discusses the soul and its faculties from the perspective of the *Qur'ān* and traditions. He states that the soul has five spiritual and inherent rational faculties as well as some stimulative and active faculties. It seems that the triplet classification of the faculties of soul by Miskawayh and his division of ethical tendencies and

behaviors according to that is faulty and questionable. More contemplation and inquiry reveal that ‘Allāma Majlisī’s classification of the faculties of soul with regard to the qur’ānic verses and traditions is more accurate, as he has attempted to take all human epistemological and spiritual aspects into consideration.

C) Although Miskawayh has tried to make a comparison between Aristotelian virtue ethics and religious ethics to establish a theological moral doctrine and interpret ethical virtues and their types according to the principles of religion and has pointed to the role of Sharia in human blissfulness, it can be said that despite his endeavor for the interpretation of rational and theological instructions of the verses in the Noble *Qur’ān* and traditions of the Infallibles (a), he has neglected or underestimated many ethical virtues important in Islamic ethics such as faith, monotheism, piety, and their role in human blissfulness (Jawādī Āmulī, 2011, vol. 21: 88; Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1996, vol. 10: 124; vol. 11: 155-157). Despite the strengths of Miskawayh’s approach to blissfulness – which is under the influence of ancient Greek philosophers – , the subject of faith and its role in achieving blissfulness is not adequately and appropriately considered as in his view, blissfulness is said to be acquired through virtues that are irrelevant to faith and monotheism. Besides, in his exegeses and explanations about ethical ideas and principles, Miskawayh has mostly referred to ancient Greek philosophers such as Aristotle, Plato, and Galenus while he has rarely made use of the qur’ānic and traditional references. From this aspect, his morality cannot be considered as a comprehensive reflection of religious-philosophical ethics. However, ‘Allāma Majlisī, in volumes 3 and 4 of his Noble book *Biḥār al-anwār*, has explained about monotheism in detail and assigned volumes 62 to 70 of his book to discussions about faith and disbelief. He has also reviewed other ethical virtues in different volumes of *Biḥār* so that by an accurate reflection upon the overall structure of the book, its title, and chapters based on the qur’ānic verses and traditions, we can understand his ethics in which the importance of monotheism, faith, piety, and other religious virtues are displayed in the best way.

D) In Miskawayh’s view to ethics, the individual aspects have been considered more. Although some arguments about the ethics of servitude, social ethics, and family ethics have been raised, it seems that social aspects have not received sufficient attention. On the other hand, in various volumes of *Biḥār al-anwār*, in addition to personal ethics in terms of virtues and vices, some social aspects like the ethics of servitude, society, and family have thoroughly been discussed.

E) The discussion of Imāmat and Wilāyat have not been highlighted in the pedagogical ethics of Miskawayh such that it can be said he has not paid enough attention to the key role of obeying an Imām as a perfect human for the leadership and guidance of people in achieving blissfulness both in this world and the hereafter. However, ‘Allāma Majlisī, in volumes 23 to 27 of *Biḥār*, has discussed this discussion in detail; this conveys the significant place of these concepts for him.

F) In Islam, the emphasis on the imitation of religious models (that are ethical as well) is very noticeable. Obedience to the Prophet (s), Imāms (a), and other religious figures who guide us to morality and are in the role of instructors whose behavior and speech display ethical codes and perfection is highly emphasized. These role models are called “moral saints” in Christianity and are introduced by the church. In Islam, they are called “Uswa” who are either introduced by God or are gradually recognized by people themselves (q.v. Khazā’ī, 2009: 144-164). Inspired by the *Qur’ān* and traditions, ‘Allāma Majlisī in numerous volumes of *Biḥār* has emphasized the role of models and moral imitation in ethical pedagogy (Majlisī, 1983, vol. 67: 358; vol. 65: 152), but in Miskawayh’s ethics, scant attention has been paid to this discussion.

Conclusion

The philosophical and ethical ideas of Miskawayh are so wise and sagacious of its kind. His attempts to shed light on imagination and confirmation principles in ethics and create coherence between the philosophical instructions of Greek and Islamic ethics are of scientific strength, validity, and comprehensiveness. Some researchers assume that Miskawayh has been under the influence of Aristotle in raising the subject of relationship between blissfulness and virtue and theory of balance (q.v. Tawāzīyānī, 2010: 89-106). It should be noted that the attempt to derive scientific and rational principles of Islamic ethics from the heart of qur'ānic verses and traditions is an issue neglected by Islamic thinkers during history. However, the significant place of ethics in Islam is evident to everyone and the Prophet (s) says in this regard: "Verily, I have been sent to uphold and complement the noble morals and human virtues." However, many Islamic philosophers such as Miskawayh have only attempted to represent Islamic ethics compatible and consistent with ancient Greek philosophical and ethical doctrines and thus have made less reference to the *Qur'ān* and traditions in their discussions. On the other hand, although 'Allāma Majlisī was not about to write a book exclusively on ethics, he has stated scholarly and logical themes in ethics based on the *Qur'ān* and Islamic traditions with an analytic and scientific approach within different volumes of *Biḥār*. In the ethics perceived from *Biḥār al-anwār*, in addition to the emphasis on the role of reason in the interpretation of theoretical and practical instructions and specification of moral virtues according to the verses in the Noble *Qur'ān* and traditions of Ahl al-Bayt, special attention has been paid to the basic role of religion in the explanation of spiritual principles of ethics as well as moral and educative aspects. *Biḥār al-anwār* displays a perfect and comprehensive manifestation of Islamic virtues and principles that guarantee human blissfulness in all physical and spiritual dimensions and make up for the likely rational deficiencies or insufficiencies in the recognition of human blissfulness and perfection. Overall, it seems that a comprehensive ethical system is needed to involve personal, social, and political ethics as well as branches such as moral philosophy, professional ethics, and so on.

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