ERPA 2014

# The making of the city of virtues-a traditional perspective on restoring values among people

Nurullah Koltas[a]*

*[a]Trakya University aFaculty of Theology, Meydan Mahallesi Kadirpasa Mektep Sokagi No:5, Edirne 22030, Turkey*

**Abstract**

According to the traditional classification, the source of mind is the brain and that of the inner self is the heart. These sources should be operated in a certain balance so as to decide and behave properly as it was the case in our primordial state. For, the will that decides on something would not function operatively unless it is strengthened by the power of brain and the heart.The traditional values education aims to operate these two active centres intertwined rather than separately. In order to execute this task, human beings must be known/understood together with all their dimension, capabilities and capacities as well.The motto of traditional education is expressed perfectly in the following phrase: "Know Thyself." Once the microcosm is known, then the macrocosm would be easily comprehended.The human self has specific capacities such as intellect (aql), anger (ghadab) and desire. When these capacities are balanced, we may attain the virtues of wisdom (hikmah), courage (shajaah), honour (iffah) and justice (adalah), and their sub-virtues as well. Thus it is of great importance not to operate them individually. Whence the balance is neglected, we witness some extreme inclinations inevitably. That is to say, if one is continuously encouraged to be courageous without any balance, one may either show dishonesty and cunningness (ifrat) on one hand, or faintheartedness and lack of courage (tafrit) on the other. And even in some cases, we may face deviations such as pretentiousness, arrogance and behaving like a wiseacre (radaah). This example is only related to the balance or imbalance of courage. This can be applied to all virtues. Philosophers (in the exact meaning of the term philo-sophia) and sages convey noble virtues to the community in which they lived as the stations to become Universal Man (al-Insan al-Kâmil).

\* Corresponding author.
*E-mail address:* nurullahkoltas@trakya.edu.tr

## 1. Introduction

One of the greatest dreams (yet to some, it is mere utopia) of mankind is to establish a state in which virtues dominate vices. A great many philosophers or lovers of Sophia (hikmah) including al-Farabî, expressed their views on the basis of an idea as such. They laid down their own classifications and theoretical aspirations as the implications of a longing for "virtuous city" or virtuous societies (Parens, 2006). Though it may seem imaginary to our modern perceptions, a few instances throughout the history proved the possibility of transforming states or societies of virtuous conduct as in the case of great Andalusian civilisation, the cultural heritage of which paved the way for Renaissance.

The history of thought witnessed many achievements those began out of sparkling of ideas that were not taken into consideration seriously at the beginning. In case of a need– as is the case in this era- these creative ideas may transform not only a nation but also the world as a whole. For some ancient philosophers, the raison d'etre of humanity is to attain happiness that represents the supreme good and perfectness (Kaya, 1983). Despite the fact that Muslim philosophers benefited from their predecessors in the West, especially from Plato and Aristotle, they evolved their ideas to a great extent rather than mere imitation. The difference in their points of view is the fact that happiness is the main goal for western philosophers whereas it is the result after attaining the virtues for the Muslim ones (Açıkgenç, 2001). Many Muslim philosophers such as ibn Miskawayh, ibn al-Arabî, Ghazâli, al-Tûsî, Gulshanî, Qinâlizâdeh Ali Efendi wrote magnificent treatises in which they dealt with the classification of human faculties, virtues and vices under the light of Revelation.

Almost all religions envisage the end of the world at hand. According to Hindu tradition, the world experienced seven consecutive cycles, the end of which signifies darkness but also implies the beginning of a radiant age. The last cycle is called "Kali Yuga", and for René Guénon, a contemporary Muslim philosopher, Kali Yuga is more complicated than the previous ages. The spirituality and truth was obscured so that they "have become more and more hidden and inaccessible" (Guénon, 2001). As a result, scientism rather than science have encompassed the mind of so-called intellectuals, and following the "Enlightenment", secular societies began experiencing a crisis that engulfs individuals with a poor sense of tradition. However, it is tradition that links the created to the Creator by a chain of divine scriptures. Those who adhere to tradition will have certain means of salvation through virtues. As a matter of fact, a certain secularist bias blurs the access to traditional perspective in that the former "deracinates" the proper place of the latter (Lakhani, 2011). From this respect, it is of utmost importance to prepare curriculums under the light of tradition or perennial wisdom. However, the theory takes precedence over practice and thus we decided to determine the common features of opinions introduced by luminous philosophers and sages. Our main aim here is to review the previous classifications and present an applicable or adaptable classification to be actualised for a virtuous generation.

## 2. The study of ethics

Ethics has been one of the most discussed and elaborated topics within the history of philosophy, and by the same token, philosophy –in the proper sense of the word- has acted as the R&D for all civilisations. In this era in which modern societies suffer a lot from vices, it is high time we had recourse to the precious ideas of philosophers and sages. According to a number of philosophers including the Second Master (Muallim al-Thāni) al-Fārābī, the perfection is attained by nature and the will jointly, and the process towards this perfectness constitutes human beings and leads to the acquisition of virtues and good deeds. On the other hand, the acts those "deflect" human beings from this perfection will make them inhuman and these deflecting acts in turn will cause vices and ugly things in life (Alfarabi, 1962) For Farabî, the goal of education is related to the human "self", and perfectness (kamâl) can only be achieved by virtue of educating it. Thus, education is said to be the vital process of perfecting human beings. (Farabi, 1980). As you know, the term educate is derived from the Latin root of "ex" (out of) and "ducere" (to guide or lead) which means, "to lead out of". As this leading out requires a source, we can confer that it is the Absolute Reality into which we participate existentially (Lakhani, 2011).

It can also be said that no learning would be possible unless we appeal to the innate Truth that resides within our inward being and that is placed there when The Almighty taught Adam the "names", the knowledge that functions as a guide leading His consent.

Muslim philosophers devoted much of their writings on ethics from the beginning. Thus, it is quite natural that there might be resemblances concerning their views on classification of virtues. Most of them agree that human beings consist of not only the body (Lat. *corpus*; Ar. *cism*) but also the spirit (Lat. *spiritus*; Ar. *rûh*) and the soul (Lat. *anima*; Ar. *nafs*) as well (Stoddart, 2011). Their complex attitudes and behaviours should be evaluated by taking these complex faculties into consideration.

## 3. Values

Human beings have certain needs and desires as well as goals to achieve. They have to make decisions as they face alternatives throughout the course of life. The principles, beliefs or phenomenon that lead them towards these selections are called "values", which is derived from Latin valere that means "to be well, strong". Human beings utilize their intellect for the selection and will in accordance with the selective systems. The interests, tastes and characteristics constitute these selective systems that accept the beneficial and the good, and reject the wrong, the bad and the ugly.

We can also say that anything that is the object of interest becomes a value. We can classify the values under two categories: Terminal Values and Instrumental Values (Rokeach, 1973).

As we have seen before, human beings are in search of the happiness and it is the Terminal Values that enable them to attain the happiness they sought. On the other hand, Instrumental Values function as instruments for the acquisition of Terminal Values.

After examining numerous classifications concerning the terminal values, it is possible to say that the classification below seems to be an appropriate one for values education from the point of content:

- Objective Values (that determine what is nice, useful, beneficial or not)
- Logical Values (that determine what is right or not)
- Ethical Values (that determine what is good or not)
- Aesthetical Values (that determine what is beautiful or not)

These values help human beings to find out the appropriate way of life, and enable them to conceive what ways they ought to follow to attain their goals. The values are related to the individual; that's to say, they're up to the individual. Each period of time or culture has its own values and understandings. If the values are not acquired in accordance with the ethical principles, they degrade the ones who possess them even if they are respected among the people. For instance knowledge, money, technology are all values. However, they degrade their owners if they are not acquired by means of ethical principles. Values are relative. That's to say, they are related to one's own choices and can make one better or worse.

On the other hand, virtues are behaviours that make people feel better and happy. Everybody has a tendency towards the virtues by birth. Virtues are certain and stable. They do not change according to the individual, place or time. In other words, they are not relative. What makes people happy, peaceful and perfect is to lead a life in accordance with them.

## 4. The instrumental values or "virtues"

As soon as the "self" finds itself in a fully realized equilibrium, the instrumental values or virtues come into existence (Gülşenî, 2004).

Despite the differences in expressions, Muslim philosophers and sages agree that there are four main virtues (ibn Miskeveyh, 2013):
- Wisdom (Hikmah) that appears as a result of the equilibrium in the faculty of Intellect (Fakhry, 2002);
- Courage (Shaja'ah) that appears as a result of the equilibrium in the faculty of Anger (ghadab) (Kınalızâde Ali Efendi, n.d.);
- Chastity (Iffah) that appears as a result of the equilibrium in the faculty of appetite lowly desires (shahwah), and finally

- Justice (Adalah) that appears as a result of the equilibrium in the faculty of hikmah, shaja'ah and iffah both in themselves and as a whole (Naṣīr ad-Dīn Ṭūsī, 1964).

After attaining these virtues, their sub-virtues are also realized and the Terminal Values are attained as a result.

Human being is the microcosm that consists of some certain potentialities reflecting his character as *khalifatullah fî al-ard*, that is, the vicegerent of God on earth. This primordial or Adamic nature can be tainted by means of satanic vices. In order to prevent the inclusion of satanic forces and gain an angelic character, one should internalize the ancient saying, "*Know Thy Self*", "*Nosce Te Ipsum*" or the famous saying of Prophet (P.B.U.H.), "*Man arafa nafsahû faqad arafa Rabbahû*" that is One who knows his self, knows his Lord.

Qur'an links inner purification of the self to the attainment of salvation, "*Consider the human self, and how it is formed in accordance with what it is meant to be, and how it is imbued with moral failings as well as with consciousness of God! To a happy state shall indeed attain he who causes this [self] to grow in purity*," (Qur'an, 91/7-9). In Sufism, the seekers are advised to lead the true path at the end of which stands the image of "Perfect Man" (*al-Insan al-Kamil*). The Perfect Man or Pontifical Man acts in accordance with the divine norms whereas the Promethean Man loses the sense of the sacred and becomes a slave of his lower self (*nafs*) (Chittick, 2007). In traditional Islamic doctrines, "self" is believed to be consisting of two capacity centres: the mind (*al-dhihin*) and the heart (*qalb*, *wijdan*). Human "self" is a kind of representation for the capacities of the heart, mind, intellect, sense, intuition etc. in human beings. In order to train the "self", appropriate programmes should be developed accordingly. In modern societies, these faculties are often omitted or at least neglected. As a result, societies began to experience a profound unhappiness and discontentedness. Each human being is unique in character and thus the programmers ought to pay much attention for the risk of overgeneralizations.

## 5. The capacities of the self

In traditional ethics, three faculties are of great importance for the emergence of virtues (*fadhilah*) and vices (*radhilah*) (Gülşenî, 2004):

Intellect (*tamyîz*) is the capacity of discernment,

Anger (*ghaḍab*) is the capacity of prevention,

Appetite (*shahwah*) is the capacity of attraction.

Concerning the imbalances, three sorts of diseases may occur: excess (*ifrat*), defect (*tafrit*), and deviation or perversity (*radaah*).

In the case of Intellect;

The excess causes cunningness.

The defect causes foolishness, narrow-mindedness.

The perversity causes unnecessary opposition and know-it-all behaviour.

In the case of Anger;

The excess causes rancour, grudge, jealousy and behaviours akin to those of animals.

The defect causes lack of devotion, laxity in nature and inclination towards adultery.

The perversity causes torture, cruelty to animals and other creatures.

In the case of Appetite;

The excess causes addiction to drinking, eating and sexual acts.

The defect causes laxity in search of livelihood, unwillingness for sexual acts required for continuation of the human race.

The perversity causes abnormal sexuality and other acts as such.

## 6. Conclusion

Nowadays, we frequently watch news about a young person shooting at students, a husband treating his wife abnormally or someone killing animals wildly. Of course, sociological, psychological analysis would reveal the causes. However, more serious problems may occur unless we find solutions for the mentioned problems

immediately. Thus, the best way to solve the problems seems to be the actualisation of the remedies we inherited from previous philosophers (*hukemâ*), scholars (*ulamâ*) and sages (*urafâ*).

While trying to prepare programs for values education, we must consider these subtle classifications and pay attention to the unique characteristics of individuals. By doing so, it would be possible to convey the "utopic" ideal of a virtuous state into practice.

## References

Açıkgenç, A. (2001). Karşılaştırmalı Ahlâk: Aristotales'in Ahlâk Felsefesi ve İslâm Ahlâk Anlayışı. In Dursun, A. (Ed.), Köprü, 75. (pp. 87-98). İstanbul: Sentez.

Alfarabi. (1962). Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. Mahdi, M. (Trans.). NY: The Free Press of Glencoe.

Farabi. (1980). Es-Siyasetü'l-Medeniyye. Aydın M. & Şener, A. & Ayas, M. R (Trans.) Istanbul: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları.

Chittick, W. (2007). The Essential Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Indiana, Bloomington: World Wisdom, Inc.

Fakhry, M. (2002). Al-Fārābi-Founder of Islamic Neoplatonism. Oxford: Oneworld Publications.

Guénon, R. (2001). The Crisis of the Modern World. Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis.

Gülşenî, M. (2004). Ahlâk-ı Kirâm. Tümsek, A (Ed). Istanbul: Insan Yayınları.

ibn Miskeveyh. (2013). Tehzibü'l Ahlak. Şener, A. & Tunç, C. & Kayaoğlu, I. (Eds). Istanbul: Büyüyen Ay.

Kaya, M. (1983). İslâm Kaynakları Işığında Aristoteles ve Felsefesi. Istanbul: Ekin Yayınları.

Kınalızâde Ali Efendi. (n.d.). Ahlâk-ı Alâî. Hüseyin Algül (Ed.). Istanbul: Tercüman 1001 Temel Eser no 30.

Lakhani, M.A. (2011). A Metaphysical Perspective. In Casewitt, J (Ed.) Education in the Light of Tradition. Indiana, Bloomington: World Wisdom, Inc.

Wickens, G. M. (1964). The Nasirean Ethics. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.

Parens, J. (2006). An Islamic Philosophy of Virtuous Religions. Albany:State University of New York Press

Rokeach, M. (1973). The Nature of Human Values. New York: Free Press.

Stoddart, W. (2011). The Role of Intellect in Education, In Casewitt, J (Ed.). Education in the Light of Tradition. Indiana, Bloomington: World Wisdom, Inc.