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Chapter 3: Comparative Study of Ibn Miskawayh and Aquinas's Shared Views on Philosophy

Introduction

According to Druart (2006, p. 116 –117), even though some presentation of philosophy had been made in Islam, there was much pioneering work yet to be done. Important texts still needed to be critically analysed, besides the analyses of arguments and works of interpretation.

It could be said that at least a deeper understanding of philosophy in medieval Islam, including a more nuanced awareness of the debate around the very existence of *falsafa* in Islamic culture. This could serve to improve our insight into the nature and role (and perhaps the limitations) of philosophy in general.

Among Muslims, this tradition continued with Ibn Miskawayh (d. 1030 AD). His teaching on the reformation of character reversed the traditional order. It began with a systematic presentation of ethics that was much influenced by the Nicomachean Ethics, and ended by prescribing medicine for the soul.

Ibn Miskawayh, in first part of his treatise, laid down a foundation involving a study of the faculties of the soul and reflections on the good, happiness, virtues and vices. He surveyed the good and happiness in greater detail after discussing human character, its perfection and its means. He focused the fourth part of his treatise on justice and dealt with love and friendship in the fifth. Finally, medicine for the soul was provided, with references to Galen and al–Kindi.

Miskawayh analysed different diseases of the soul, such as anger, fear of death, and sadness. He determined their causes and suggested appropriate treatment. His Treatise on Happiness relied heavily on al–Farabi's – Reminder and belonged entirely to the "medicine of the soul" genre (Druart 2006, p 116).

St Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–74 AD) was born in the castle of Roccasecca in the Kingdom of Naples in southern Italy, into a family of the Counts of Aquino. He was brought up in the Benedictine monastery of Monte Cassino. He was sent to complete his studies at the university of the time at the age of fourteen, where a full rang of Aristotelian doctrine was studied. This influenced him and he joined the Dominican order when he reached rang of twenty.

Aquinas studied in Paris, and then Cologne, under Albert the Great, and returned to Paris in 1251–52 AD He subsequently resided at Orvieto, Rome, Viterbo, Paris again, and Naples, constantly writing and engaging during the daytime. His work included numerous translations and commentaries on Aristotle, theological writing, and the two major texts for which he is best known, the Summa Contra Gentiles – "Against the errors of the infidels" – a textbook for missionaries, and the Summa Theologiae, which he began in 1266 AD. It was universally acknowledged to be the crowning achievement of medieval systematic theology (Blackburn 2005, p. 20).

For Aquinas the theological virtue of having God as one's ultimate end and objective was prior to all other virtues whether natural or acquired. Since the ultimate end must be present in the intellect before it was presented to the will. Since the ultimate end was presented to the will through hope and charity (the other lower theological virtues), in this respect faith was prior to hope and charity.

Hope was the theological virtue through which we trusted that with divine assistance we would attain the infinite good – the eternal enjoyment of God (ST II–IIae, qu. 17aa. 1–2). In the order of generation, hope was prior to charity; but in the order of perfection charity was prior both to hope and faith.

While neither faith nor hope would remain in those who attained the eternal vision of God to come to them in life itself, charity would endure in these blessed ones. This was a virtue or habitual form that was infused into one's soul by God and it inclined us to love Him for His own sake. If charity was more excellent than faith or hope (ST II–IIae, qu. 23, a. 6), it was so because through charity the acts of all other virtues were directed towards God – their ultimate end (qu.23, a.8; Audi, 2001, p. 40).

Building upon Aristotle's teaching, particularly the Nicomachean Ethics III and VI, Aquinas gave a detailed analysis of human actions, focusing upon their voluntary nature, intention, choice, and deliberation. He argued that these features had to be present if an act was out of human volition, and not merely like sneezing or twitching – acts, which might be truly said to happen to us rather than being something we did, and which could happen equally to an animal too.

Human acts were said to be out of volition when they were performed because of a reason, our reason being the value that we attached to something which was the desired end in relation to our act. Aquinas argued that beyond all the subsidiary ends that which we might aim at, there was an ultimate end – happiness, which we would not reject.

Although we might act in such a way as to put obstacles in the way of our achieving it through ignorance or incompetence, the fundamental practical principle – 'Eschew evil and do good' was in-built into all of

us in such a way that no person could be ignorant of it. This practical principle and others following from it form, a full and detailed system of natural law in the Summa Theologiae, which has had major impact on modern discussions in the philosophy of law (Honderich, 2005, p. 48).

Ibn Miskawayh's views on Ethics

Ethics was considered to be a technique and method which when applied to one's soul, some dispositions could be created in a way that only good deeds would be issued form that soul. Ethics was seen as the noblest of sciences. The nobility of each science was dependent upon its subject, and the subject of ethics was human spirit, that was the noblest of things and subjects that had been created.

Man could purify himself to perfection in the light of obstacles placed in his way through spiritual struggle with his carnal desires. He could thus save himself from real loss, i.e. loss of his own self. In the light of moral teachings a human being could refrain from evil and atrocity, and achieve virtue and happiness to an extent that he or she became the companion of the pure ones and angels, and could receive Divine bounty (Ibn Miskawayh, 1992, p. 27 & 166).

Natural and ordinary Ethics

A deep disposition was a soul-related state that caused a person to act without thinking and speculation (Ibn Miskawayh, 1370 AH, p. 119). Miskawayh divided this disposition into two kinds. Natural disposition sprung from a man's nature and temper. Some people could become naturally angry or excited over a minor event. These people were naturally coward, excitable and tough.

The second kind of disposition was ordinary. It was created in the soul because of the habit of repetition. This might in the beginning require effort by thinking consciously about it and one may encounter difficulty. However, it gradually became a deeply established disposition through repetition (Ibn Miskawayh 1992, p. 51).

Miskawayh believed that one's morality changed due to education and admonishment. This change was sometimes rapid and sometimes slow. To consider morality to be unchangeable was contrary to reason and nature of conscience. If we believed in such a thing, then we would have to deny our ability to educate our children and youth and regard all the strategies related to education in societies, as useless. And finally, in this situation we would need to know the faculty of discrimination in human being as useless and ineffective (ibid).

Man's original nature

Ibn Miskawayh (1992, p. 53) accepted Aristotle's theory that every disposition was changeable, and non-changeability was temperamental. Therefore, no disposition was temperamental. Even a temperamental bad person could appeal to virtue because of education. Admonishment and education

could transform and change all of human's dispositions. However, such a change and changeability was rapid in some people and slow in others.

Virtues and vices

Human soul had three different faculties. The faculty related to distinguishing and thinking about the truth of affairs, was called intellect (rational faculty), and its physical was the brain. The second faculty was related to anger, fear, fearlessness and hegemonism etc. It was called irascible faculty, and its instrument in one's body was the heart. The third faculty which was related to lust, and one's desire for food, shelter, marriage and other sensory pleasures was called appetite, and its instrument in the body was liver.

Each of these faculties could become powerful or weak in accordance with temper, habit and education. If the trend of the intellectual faculty was moderate and it was directed toward reaching correct sciences, the virtue of knowledge would emerge and as a result of it – wisdom – would be created.

If the trend of the basic appetites remained moderate and surrendered to the intellect, it would not be involved with its carnal desires. Thus, the virtue of chastity would be created. If the trend of irascible faculty was seemly and merited, and if it was accompanied with the following of intellect the virtue of – courage – would be created. The product and a result of having these three virtues was a fourth virtue called – justice. It was an outcome of perfection in having all the other virtues (Ibn Miskawayh, 1992, p. 37–38).

Pleasure and its kinds

Human beings experienced particular pleasure and pains to satisfy their physical needs. The pleasure resulted from a removal of pain. Man removed his thirst or hunger through drinking water and eating food and such a removal created a pleasure for him. Therefore, pleasure in human beings was like taking drugs for treatment of pain. So, one should pay attention to their merited quantity and quality; immoderation with them could lead man to other pains, diseases and finally death (Ibn Miskawayh 1992, p. 61–64).

Some of man's pleasures were sensory which sprang from appetites and irascible faculties and man shared them with animals. Such pleasures were accidental and transitory. Excessive engagement with them could sometimes lead to pain. Since these kinds of pleasures were consistent with man's nature, they were more desirable for people. Pleasures such as eating, sleeping, marriage, vengefulness, chairmanship, etc. were among such sensory pleasures (ibid, p. 96).

Another kind of pleasure peculiar to mankind was intellectual (rational). These kinds of pleasures were innate, durable, and their repetition did not annoy man, rather the pleasure experienced was deeper. Such pleasures were contrary to man's natural desires. Being attentive to them and wanting them required patience, practice, obeying religious commandments, and following the guidance of good

people including parents.

In spite of such high requirements, the intellectual (rational) pleasures were the highest and noblest of pleasures. Many men welcomed pain, and showed forbearance against sensory pleasures on their way to attain such pleasures (ibid, p. 96 & 100–102).

Happiness and its kinds

In general, it could be said that the happiness of each creature was in achieving the particular goal for which it has been created. Ibn Miskawayh, in reply to the question – what brings happiness to man, put forward three different theories.

First was theory of sensory pleasure, which had been attributed to Epicureans. It stated that the ultimate aim of human being was to reach sensory pleasures. According to this theory, the desirable virtue and the great happiness were sensory pleasures, and all faculties of man had been created for such pleasures, even intellect, memory and imagination, had been created for comprehension and identification of these pleasures, and their better attainment.

Ibn Miskawayh had attributed this theory to ignorant people and considered it invalid. He said that this opinion was adjusted to man's nature, most of people followed it, and its followers considered even worships, prayers and paradise as a useful transaction which was necessary for further pleasures.

Miskawayh asserted that sensory pleasures were usually mixed with pains, and they were nothing else save temporary removal of pains. Achieving them was neither considered as happiness nor as a virtue for mankind because the angels and other beings nearest to God kept clear of such pleasures. Such base human pleasures were shared with animals and many animals enjoyed such pleasures in the same way as human beings (Ibn Miskawayh, 1992, p. 60–61).

The second theory of happiness of spirit had several advocates like the wise before Aristotle such as Pythagoras, Hippocrates and Plato. They deemed man's happiness in the perfection of his soul (spirit), and considered the accomplishment of the virtues such as wisdom, courage, chastity and justice in the soul as a harbinger of happiness even though the body was imperfect and afflicted with disease. These scholars did not consider poverty, impotence, weakness and other similar issues that were harmful to the human soul for achieving happiness (ibid, p. 86–87).

Miskawayh denied this theory for it only paid attention to one aspect of man's personality, i.e. his soul, and neglected its other aspect, i.e. the body.

The third theory of happiness of spirit and body had Aristotle as one of its advocates. This theory believed that man's happiness lay in the perfection of his spirit and body. They, contrary to the second group, maintained that the attainment of happiness was also possible in this world.

The followers of this theory considered things such as health of body, moderation of temper and senses, wealth, good reputation, success in affairs, correctness of beliefs, moral virtues, and behavior of merit as part of happiness. They believed that the ultimate happiness was obtained through the accomplishment of all of perfections related to spirit and body (ibid, p. 85–86).

Ibn Miskawayh confirmed this third theory and considered it on the basis of a comprehensive view of human being and his existential dimensions (Beheshti, Abujaafari & Faqihi, 2000, p. 57–59).

Thomas Aquinas's Views on Ethics

Increasingly it had been recognized that ethics of virtue was central to Aquinas' moral thought and his consideration of the characteristic capacities and achievements of human nature (McEvoy 2006, p. 262). Aquinas saw ethics as having two principal topics – first, the ultimate goal of human existence, and second, how that goal was to be won or lost (Kretzmann & Stump, 1998).

God and Happiness

Aquinas maintained that happiness did not lie in riches, honors, fame, glory, power, bodily endowment, pleasures, any endowment of soul, or any created good. For Aquinas, however, the essential respect in which God constituted our blessedness was in direct vision of the Divine nature. Happy was he who had whatever he desired, and desired nothing amiss. Happiness was the attainment of the last end. The essence of happiness consisted in an act of the intellect; happiness is joy in truth (McEvoy 2006, p. 263–264).

Aquinas argued that often the unrecognized, genuine and ultimate end for which human beings existed (their 'object') was God – perfect goodness personified and perfect happiness. The ultimate end for which they existed (their 'use' of that object) was the enjoyment of the end for which they existed. That enjoyment could be fully achieved only in the beatific vision, which Aquinas conceived of as an activity. Since the beatific vision involved the contemplation of the ultimate (first) cause of everything, it was, whatever else it might be, also the – perfection of all knowledge and understanding (Kretzmann & Stump, 1998).

Aquinas argued that a human being necessarily (though not always consciously) sought everything it sought for its own ultimate end – happiness (Kretzmann & Stump, 1998). The happiness, which was the final end, was of course not just a matter of an exercise of the virtues. It could be attained only through a development of all powers. So far as the attainment of happiness in worldly term was concerned, the actualization of our highest powers depended on and presupposed the actualization of our lower powers (MacIntyre 1998, p. 100).

Aquinas maintained that the ultimate end of human beings, their perfected happiness, could not 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 became known through philosophical inquiry (MacIntyre 1998, p. 101).

Aquinas maintained that for the conditional sort of happiness that one could hope for during earthly life (where health of body and soul, and some degree of possessions were relevant conditions) friends were indeed necessary, since we needed to love (McEvoy 2006, p. 264).

Aquinas also emphasized the misery and unhappiness of earthly life, as many before him had done. However, he chose to value and recommend those experiences and achievements through these, which were related in a positive way to perfect happiness. He wisely regarded the happiness as attainable in this life as being imperfect at best, but clearly held that this was happiness in an analogical and not merely an equivocal sense (McEvoy 2006, p. 264).

According to Aquinas, beatitude, or the final end was to hold the beatific vision of God. Thomas, Aquinas endeavored to relate happiness to moral and speculative virtues. He argued that beatitude did not lay in bodily or material goods such as pleasure or wealth, but rather that the highest happiness, attainable by human beings lay in the contemplation of truth (McEvoy, 2006, p. 262).

Aquinas recognized intellectual virtues that, like the moral virtues, could be acquired with human effort. On the other hand, the supreme theological virtues of faith, hope and charity could not be acquired, rather these had to be directly 'infused' by God (Kretzmann & Stump, 1998).

Aquinas believed that God indeed was good and that this conclusion could be argued for (Davies 2003, p. 139). For Aquinas, 'God is good' could mean nothing more than that God was desirable. Goodness was visible in its many forms in what God had creatively brought forth. He also thought that the Cause was reflected in its effect. He thought that the Cause expressed itself in them. The effect visible in the Creation was a reflection of what their Causes would look like in action. On this basis, he concluded that God was good, as the source of things, which are good in their various ways, and desirable, since 'good' implied them being 'desirable'.

Thus Aquinas meant that God was good since the goodness of creatures preexisted in Him as their cause (ibid, P. 145). For Aquinas, nothing could exist without somehow being good. In this sense, he thought that everything real was good, even though it might not be as good as it could be (ibid, p. 148).

According to Aquinas, faith was a virtue infused through reason that made us accept God's authority on what He had revealed to us (Audi 2001, p. 40). He held that there was one final end for human beings towards which they were directed through their innate nature as rational animals. It was for the sake of this travel that all was done and by itself, it was a means for reaching a state with no further end.

Good acts were those that directed us towards the achievement of that end. They were a movement towards perfection, so that by performing them we became the kind of human beings who were able to achieve that end (MacIntyre 1998, p. 99).

What made an action morally bad was that it moved the agent not toward, but away from, the agent's ultimate goal. Such a deviation was patently irrational. Aquinas' analysis of moral evil of human action identified it as fundamentally irrational, since irrationality was an obstacle to the actualization of human being's specific potentialities – the one's that made distinction of the human species rational.

In this, as in every other respect, Aquinas ethics was reason–centered (Kretzmann & Stump, 1998). According to Aquinas, the good of the human being as individuals acting in isolation could not be achieved overall for two reasons. First, we needed the aid and friendship of others at each stage in our lives, if we were to become able to perform the tasks for that stage. And second, the achievement of the good of each individual was inseparable from the achievement of the common good that was shared with those other individuals with whom he or she cooperated in making and sustaining a common life (MacIntyre 1998, p. 100).

Moderation and four cardinal virtues

According to Aquinas, the four 'Cardinal Virtues' could be understood as habits, and were as follows: habit of good governance generally was prudence; reason's restraint of self- serving concupiscence was temperance; reason's preserving despite self-serving 'irascible' passions such as fear was courage; reason's governance of one's relations with other despite one's tendencies toward selfishness was justice.

Aquinas normative ethics was based not on rules but on virtues; it was concerned with dispositions first and only then with actions (Kretzmann & Stump,1998). He demonstrated that of the four cardinal virtues, prudence was the one that must govern the others. Without prudence, he said that temperance, courage, and justice could tell us neither what should be done nor how it should be done – thus, they would be blind or indeterminate virtues (Comte–Sponville, 2003).

Aquinas kept an important place for the Aristotelian virtues, such as fortitude and temperance (Mautner 2005, p. 39). Whether a particular individual judged and acted so as to achieve his or her good was whether and how far that individual had acquired the virtues of character. Temperance disciplined and educated the bodily appetites, courage ordered our passions in response to threats of harm or danger, and justice disposed the will rightly in relation to others by giving to each their due.

Prudence was the exercise of practical intelligence in relationship to the particulars of any given situation. Aquinas understood a range of other virtues as parts or aspects of these four cardinal virtues. The endurance involved in the exercise of patience was an aspect of courage. Untruthfulness was a failure in justice, since we owde truth to each other in our utterances (MacIntyre 1998, p. 99).

What was indispensable to the acquisition of these virtues was performance of right kinds of habit. It was only through practice that the virtues could be acquired and changed into stable and fixed dispositions (MacIntyre 1998, p. 100).

The problem of evil

For Aquinas, the evil that was suffered was no illusion. It was perfectly real in the sense that we could truly say things like this person was blind. Yet Aquinas also thought that to say such things was not to refer to something that existed in its own right. There were, he held, no such things as blindness – there were only people who could not see.

Something was bad because what we expected or wanted to be there was not there. Aquinas said that evil could not signify a certain way of existing or a certain from of a nature. Therefore, we signified a certain absence of good by the term 'evil'. And he took this to imply that God could not have created evil for suffering. God could not have produced evil because when He made something to be there, it was good rather than nothing (Davies 2003, p.155–156).

Conclusion

It could thus be concluded from this article that Ibn Miskawayh and Aquinas had many similar and shared views on ethics. Human dispositions were changeable, and they could change through some environmental influence, particularly with repetition and habit formation.

The ultimate goal of ethics was consistent with the ultimate goal of human being's creation, i.e. reaching God who was the perfect goodness. Man's real happiness was ensured when he reached this goal. Those attributes which led human beings to achieve God for human happiness to become manifest were considered to be virtues. Likewise, those attributes that kept humans from achieving this goal were considered to be vices. Thus, only virtues could bring happiness to human beings.

Although worldly things created some sensory and superficial pleasures, these could never lead human beings to happiness. Man's happiness resulted from actualization of all of his powers or faculties.

Happiness being a comprehensive state included human body and spirit, this world and the hereafter. In spite of this fact that the highest rank of happiness remained possible only in the hereafter, a high level of happiness could be possible in this world itself.

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