

ARISTOTELIAN AND ISLAMIC MORAL PHILOSOPHY A COMPARATIVE ETHICS

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Moral behaviour is one phenomenon among others that is manifested by man as a comprehensive part of his humanity. This is because moral behaviour brings a responsibility that is meaningful only within a context of rational reflection; for, a moral behaviour is intrinsically distinguished from other forms of animal behaviour in that these animal behaviours would be naturally punished if natural laws are not obeyed. But there is no such mechanism in the moral law and in fact it may go unpunished if not controlled by a legal system. Moral system and the legal system are, therefore, intimately related. Of course, many moral principles cannot be controlled by the law either; they are as such based necessarily within the conscience of the individual, such as one ought to help others, one ought to be sincere in his doings, selfishness is to be avoided, one ought to be courageous and generosity is a virtue. Due to this nature of morality, the moral behaviour is uniquely a human phenomenon. Since the most outstanding human characteristic that distinguishes man from the rest of the animals is rational reflection, it is consequently the case that moral behaviour is exclusively human, and hence it is based upon some *mental activity*. Since at the outset we are not yet clear about the ground of moral behaviour, we shall, as we have just done, designate it by a general phrase '*mental activity*'. It is because of this ambiguity that we shall first try to demonstrate the ground of a moral act and then attempt to compare the Aristotelian ethics with the Islamic ethics from this perspective.

All human actions with regard to their origin can be broadly divided into two classes: 1. natural; 2. deliberative. If an act is performed as a result of the bodily requirement, that act is natural, such as eating, sleeping, the reaction to a sudden pain and the similar acts. A deliberative act is, on the other hand, a behaviour that is performed consciously as a result of certain mental activity. As it is seen in our definitions of these human acts, the origin of a natural act is some

natural instinct or requirement, whereas the origin of a deliberative act is in one way or another a mental phenomenon. But since the mental phenomenon itself is somehow related to the body, in many cases it is very hard to analyze a human act into its natural and deliberative origins. For example, eating is a natural act, but one may prefer to eat only two times a day and develop a certain habit of eating which will eventually lead us to analyze a particular act of eating as a deliberative act. This will also lead us to conclude that even all natural acts, if they are not performed spontaneously, are performed deliberately. In other words, even the natural acts are performed by humans as a result of certain mental activity. This general conclusion also justifies us to formulate that with the exception of only certain spontaneous acts all human behaviour is ultimately deliberative. Spontaneity is a basic feature of natural acts; therefore, if an act is not performed spontaneously it must be regarded as a deliberative act, even if it originates out of natural instincts because it follows as such from some mental planning and reflection which changes its natural character. That is why human action can be characterized by certain ethical values.

All moral behaviour is, thus, grounded upon some mental reflection; but that mental reflection itself in turn is grounded upon a metaphysical foundation which is essentially rooted in the mind. Therefore, a moral act may either directly or indirectly follow from a fundamental ground that is already formed in the mind. Let us try to explain this with an example; suppose a person is trying to help someone in distress, this act of help is either the result of a certain planning in his mind, or it is spontaneous in which case obviously no mental planning and hence, reflection is involved. In the former case, there is a mental reflection but this mental reflection is definitely the result of certain ideas in the mind of the person, such as "helping others is a morally good deed," "if one does a morally good deed he becomes a virtuous person," and depending on the background of the person, he may also have religious ideas that support these moral principles, such as "every person is required to be morally virtuous by God"; just consider the verse in the Qur'ān, in case of a Muslim: "In the sight of God, the most honorable of you is the one who is the most virtuous" (49/Al-Hujurāt, 13). It is clear that in