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AL-GHAZALI'S ETHICAL THEORY.

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ABSTRACT

The present paper deals with the salient features of Al-Ghazali's ethics via his major ethical works " The Criterion" and "The Revival". Al-Ghazali's rthics is an ethics of virtue. Virtue in Al-Ghazali's discussions represents the important feature of his ethics theory. His discussions of virtue, however, are identical with most of the classical ethics theories of the Creek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle. They also correspond to those of Muslim philosophers such as Avicenna, Ibn-Maskawayh, and Al-Farabi. Thus, to understand the ethical theory of Al-Ghazali, it is necessary to understant his theory of virtue first.

INTRODUCTION

Muslim thinkers have repeatedly dealt with the study of ethics. The study of ethics they have pursued, however, has always been considered in relation to the Koran. Thus, it can be said that ethics in Islam is nothing but the body of injunctions laid down in the Koran for practical conduct of life and fully exemplified in the practice of the Holy prophet throughout his life. But ethics as a science did not take shape till the influence of Greek philosophy on Muslim thought.
Perhaps the best known Muslim writer on ethical subjects is Abu-Hamid Muhammad Al-Ghazali. Al-Ghazali, surnamed Hujjat al-Islam (i.e., the proof of Islam) was born in 1058 A.D at Tus in the province of Khurasan in Eastern Persia. His studies cover an extensive range of subjects: theology, Islamic jurisprudence, philosophy, apologetics, logic and mysticism.

AL-GHAZALI'S ETHICS

Al-Ghazali has dealt with ethics in a number of books, particularly in the 'Revival of Religious sciences' (Ihya Ul-um al-Din), and the 'Criterion of Action' (Mizan Al-Amal). But the first Work in which Al-Ghazali speaks about ethics is 'The aim of the Philosophers" (Maqasid Al-Falasifa). In this book, A-Ghazali discusses briefly three of the sciences of the philosophers, namely logic, physics, and metaphysics. In his treatment of metaphysics, Al-Ghazali prfaces his discussion with the divisions of science. The science of wisdom is divided into two parts: a) the practical science which deals with man's actions and aims at finding out human activities which deals with man's actions and aims at finding out human activities which leads to man's happiness in both this life as well as in the next. b) the theoretical science which makes known the states of being as they are. Practical science is, in turn, divided into tree parts:

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a- The science which deals with how man ought to conduct himself with his wife, children, servants, andslaves. (scienceofthe governance of the household).
b- The science of the governance of man's relations with other man. (Political science).
c- The third practical science is ethics which deals with the way man ought to act to be goodand virtuous in his character and qualities.

Al-Ghazali considers ethics (i.e., the third practical science) as the highest of the tree and most important practical sciences.

In the Criterion Al-Ghazali presents a psychological analysis of the soul which he attributes to the philosophic tradition, then, on the basis of this analysis he discusses the virtues and explains how they can lead to ultimate happiness. But since happiness, according to Al-Ghazali, can only be achieved in the next world, he brings in mysticism further to support the aim of ethics. Al-Ghazali's view of ethics in the 'Criterion' starts as a philosophic view and then expands to include certain mystical and Islamic religious concepts.

AL-GHAZALI'S ETHICS CAN BE CHARACTERIZED AS FOLLOWS

1)- Ethics is an independent practical science ans is primarily concerned with the morai refinement of the individual.

2)- Ethics is a fundamental discipline which serves all other sciences and is also served by them.

This second characteristic is spelled out more in the 'Revival of the Religious science' which is considered to be Al-Ghazali's magnum opus.

The 'Revival' must have been writtenover a number of years. It had great influence on Islamic thought. In it, Al-Ghazali presents a comprehensive account of what we might call the popular moral philosophy of Islam in connection with his explanation of the ethics of mysticism. He treated of the whole domain of human life; he described prayer and love in their forms and religious depth, and also spoke about commerce and marriage, the daily meals and the education of the children etc..

The Revival is divided into four parts and each part consists of the books, making a total of forty books which are preceded by a preface. In the first part of the Revival (book one), and the third part (books one and two), Al-Ghazali presents the system of ethics that was adopted into Islam from the Greeks. The first book of the first part of the 'Revival' is a general introduction to the entire work. This is the 'Book of knowledge'.

The first and the second books of the third part of the 'Revival' are the 'Book of the Explanation of the Wonders of the Heart' and the'Book of training the soul, refining the character, and treating the diseases of the heart'. In the 'Revival' Al-Ghazali gives a fuller and more elaborate discussions of such problems of moral philosophy as knowledge,the freedom of the will, the functions of reason, and the attainment of moral integrity.

KNOWLEDGE AND MORALITY

Knowledge results from the functioning of intellect which is the innate rational faculty of man. According to Al-Ghazali, morality and good conduct are not possible without knowledge. Hence, knowledge is one of the corner-stones in Al-Ghazali's ethical system. Al-Ghazali maintain that intellect or reason is a potentiality for the development of knowledge. But this potentiality, he explains, can only be converted into reality under two conditions; Firstly, the development of intellect depends upon physical development, and secondly, there must be some external cause to excite it to action (stimulus), just as there must be something to be seen if the eye is to see.

AL-GHAZALI DIVIDES KNOWLEDGE INTO TWO PARTS

I)- Formal knowledge: It is an innate, apriori, and self-evident knowledge. According to Al-Ghazali such knowledge though it begins with experience, is more than what is actually contained in experience, and as such is not based on experience.

2)- Existential knowledge: It is the knowledge of objectits and events attained through experience and intuition. It is of two:

a- Phenomenal knowledge:It is the knowledge of the material world.

b- Spiritual knowledge: It is the knowledge of the spititual realities, e.g God, soul.. Al-Ghazali considers spiritual knowledge as the highest form of knowledge. It depends on intuition, but comes fifferently to different people. To some, it comes slowly through a good deal of self-cultivation, while to a few it is revealed directly.

So, according to Al-Ghazali, knowledge commes to the soul in two ways: Firstly, it comes through study and education. It can be acquired by everybody and is called refletion and meditation. Secondly, knowledge comes through intuition and revelation. This knowledge, Al-Ghazali remarks, is certain. It is the knowledge of the supersensous world. It comes from the sixth sense which apprehends spiritual realities. Al-Ghazali establishes the sixth sense on the basis of the phenomenon of dreams. In sleep, when external senses cease to function this senses begins functioning.

THE FREEDOM OF THE WILL

Al-Ghazali explains in the 'Revival', that the fact that human character can be changed and improved implies that man possesses some degree of free will. He maintains that man is free to choose and therefore he can make or mar himself. But, on the other hand he believes that God determines what shall happen. Nothing happens without his will. 'whom He wills He guides aright and whom He will He leads astray'.

AL-GHAZALI'S THEORY OF VIRTUE

a) Philosophical virtues

In his two major ethical works, the 'Criterion' and 'The Revival', Al-Ghazali begins the discussion of virtue with what he calls the 'mothers' or principal virtues. These are listed as follows: wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. His representation of virtues are identical with that of the Muslim philosophers, such as Avicenna, Ibn-Maskawayh, and Al-Farabi; and they also correspond to the greek philosophic tradition especially in Plato and AristotleAl-Ghazali discusses virtues which are common to philosophic ethics the basis of an analysis of the soul which belonge to the philosophic tradition. To explain the activities of the soul, Al-Ghazali gives an account of tree powers or faculties: I) The animal, and 3) the human.
Al-Ghazali's view, virtue can be acquired in tree ways: Habituation, learning, and divine generosity. For Al-Ghazali habituation implies a positive attitude on the part of the agent in seeking to acquire virtue; learning on the other hand depends on an authority outside the agent that teaches him how to act virtuously even if he is not whole-heartedly seeking to attain such a state. The third way of acquiring virtue i.e.,divine generosity is realized when God bestows a gift of virtue on a man at birth, as in the case of Jesus, John the Baptist, and other prophets. Thus, a man may be endowed with special ability through divine bounty to acquire virtue without habituation or training.

THE FOUR PRINCIPAL VIRTUES

According to Al-Ghazali, there are only four principal virtues. The three principal virtues, namely wisdom, courage, and temperance correspond to the ratinal, irascible and concupiscent faculties ofthesoul respectively. The fourth principal virtue, i.e., justice, has the task of properly ordering these faculties in relation to one another. All other virtuesenumerated by Al-Ghazali are subordinated to these principal ones.
The following table (I) gives Al-Ghazali's divisions and subdivisions of the principal virtues.

WISDOM	COURAGE	TEMPERANCE	JUSTICE
Discretion	Magnificence	Modesty	
Excellence of discernment	Intrepidity	Shame	
Penetration of thought	Greatness of soul	Remission	
Correctness of opinion	Endurance	Patience	
Awareness of subtle actions and of the hidden evil of the soul	Gentleness	Liberality	
	Fortitude	Good calculation	
	Suppression of anger	Contentment	
	Correct evaluation	Abstinence	
	Amiability	Cheerfulness	
	Nobility	Joy	
	Manliness	Tenderness of character	
		Self discipline	
		Good appearance	
		Tranquility	
		Honest dealing	
		Righteousness	
		Indignation	
		Wit	

(This table is given in both the Revival (R,III,2,1443) and the CRITERION)

Justice.

The fourth principal virtue. It is a state in which the concupiscent and the irascible faculties are subordinated to the rational faculty. By equating justice with the order and harmony of these three faculties, Al Ghazali considers it not only a 'virtue' but also the 'whole of virtues'. For Al-Ghazali, justice is important because it is the virtue of the soul which is a sign of individual perfection, not because it has a social function. Justice brings about a harmony among the faculties of the soul, preparing the individual for superior virtue. Because of this view Al-Ghazali does not list any virtue under justice as it is shown in table (I) above. Al-Ghazali maintains that all these three virtues have been dealt with in detail by the Islamic religious teachings and that they can be sought in the prophet Muhammad's conduct and way of life.

b) Religious-legal virtues

The religious-legal virtues consist in the fulfillment of the divine commandments. They consist of worchip directed towards God, and of those practices directed towards fellow men which are necessary for men to live in a particular religious community which makes possible devotional life.

Thus, according to Al-Ghazali, the religious community must live up to the acts of worship and customs and apply them properly so that its members may receive what he calls guidance nessessary for the attainnment of the happiness of paradise and the hereafter.

Al-Ghazali maintains that living according to the commandments in their external sense may elicit the gift of divine guidance, and thus that living according to the commandments in their external sense is the necessary, but not the sufficient condition for the attainment of happiness. For Al-Ghazali, then, it is divine guidance, and not the religious-legal virtues themselves, which make happiness possible.

In their external aspects of the religious-legal virtues, whether they are acts of worship or customs, provide the religious community in general with the opportunity of attaining happiness through obedience to God's divine commandments.

However, in order to attain ultimate happiness, Al-Ghazali maintains that the members of the religious community must discover the internal meanings of these divine commandments and live according to them.

c) Mystical virtues

Al-Ghazali considers these virtues to be higher than the religious-legal virtues. Al-Ghazali accepts mysticism as a superior way ti true happiness, but maintains that it must always be rooted in and remain under the control of trained reason. He points outcontinuously that the mystic must always observe religious law and practice, making this the sigh of the first resting place of those who are travelling the roed to God.

AL-GHAZALI'S LIST OF MYSTICAL VIRTUES

Repentance, patience, gratitude, hope, fear, poverty, asceticism, divine unity, trust, love, yearning, intimacy, satisfaction, resolve, sincerity, truthfulness, vigilance, self-examination, meditation. Al-Ghazali's analysis of the mystical virtues occupies a large space in the Revival. In his analysis he asserts emphatically that mystical virtues are the highest kinds of virtues, not because they describe man's relation to God, but because they are primarily the virtues of the few.

In summary, Al-Ghazali's ethics, like most of the classical ethics theories, (e.g., Aristotle, Plato, Al-Farabi, Avicenna) is an rthics of virtue. In his major ethical works, the 'Criterion' and the 'Rival', Al(Ghazali devotes a great deal of attention to the definition and analysis of virtues. This aspect (i.e., virtue) in Al-Ghazali's work

represents all the important features of his ethics theory hus, in that sense, Al-Ghazali's theory of virtue vecomes the key to understanding his ethics.
In his treatment of virtues, first Al-Ghazali discusses virtues which are common to philosophic tradition, then he mentions some virtues which are particulary religious and finally points out to some mystical virtues.

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