

The Nāṣirean Ethics

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1. The biography and works of the author

Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, known as Khājeḥ Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, was born in 597 A.H in a family that was originally from 'Jahrūd' in Qum and had settled in Ṭūs. Owing to the fact that Naṣīr ad-Dīn was born and brought up in Ṭūs, he was named al-Ṭūsī. There is not much information about his childhood and youth: the only available information is that he studied the basics with his father who had been a student of Faḍlullah Rāwandī, and in his own era he became pre-eminent in all of the intellectual and traditional sciences. In Quhestan, he worked in the Ismā'īlī government for a time during which he wrote this book, *The Nāṣirean Ethics*, when he was about 36 years old. Al-Ṭūsī became the minister of the Mongol Prince Hulagu – after his invasion of Iran – and accompanied him to Baghdad. Some of the important measures taken by him were to prevent a valuable treasure of books from being destroyed in the course of the conquest of Baghdad, and also to construct the great observatory and library of Maragheh which contained 400,000 volumes of books.

He died in Baghdad in 672 A.H on 18th of Dhu al-Ḥijjah, which is the 'Eed of Ghadīr, and according to his own testament, was buried in Imam Mūsa al-Kāẓim's Shrine (Peace be upon him). There remains a precious heritage from al-Ṭūsī's works: 40 or 56 or 64 works are attributed to him respectively by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Ṣafawī in *al-Wāfi be al-Wafayāt*, Brookeman, and Gorge Saris.

¹ This is translation of an excerpt from the book *Kitāb Shenākht-e Isalmi*, by Mahdi Ahmadpoor, Mohammad Taqi Islami, Mohammad ALimzadeh Nuri and Mahdi Alizadeh (Pazhuheshgāh-e 'Ulum wa Farhang-e Islami, 1385 S.A.H)

His most important works are as follows: *Tajrīd al-Itiqād* in *kalām* on which outstanding figures like Allamah Ḥillī and Mullā ‘Ali Gūshchī have commented, *Tadbkirat al-Nāṣiriyyah* in astronomy, *Asās al-Iqtibās* in logic, *Tahrīr al-Uqlīdus* in geometry, *Tahrīr al-Majesty* in astronomy, and *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* in logic and philosophy. He left us some books in ethics as a remembrance of him: *Ādāb al-Muta‘alimīn*, *Awṣāf al-Ashrāf*, *Muḥtashamīyān ethics*, and *Nāṣirean Ethics [Akhlāq-i Nāṣiri]*.

Nāṣir ad-Din al-Ṭūsī first intended to translate *Tabzīb al-Akhlāq and Taṭhīr al-A‘rāq [Refinement of Morals]*, then he regarded it appropriate to rewrite it in Persian and to add two other chapters on practical philosophy, i.e., management of the home and politics. This decision was implemented in 633, but 20 years or so later after deliverance from the Ismā‘īlī government he reviewed the content of his book, adding to it some matters (such as observance of the rights of parents) and a new preface in which he was coerced to praise the Ismā‘īlī government.

Since this book was written by al-Ṭūsī at the suggestion of Nāṣir al-Din ‘Abd al-Raḥīm ibn Maṣṣūr who was an Ismā‘īlī ruler of Gulistān, it was named the *Nāṣirean Ethics*. There is however no doubt about the title of the book and its attribution to al-Ṭūsī.

2- Copies and editions

There are numerous manuscripts of *Nāṣirean Ethics* available at different libraries in Iran and the world. One of the oldest copies of this book was the manuscript written in 676 A.H, which Āghā buzurg Terhani has seen in Najaf at the library of Muhammad Ali Khansārī. In this copy the second introduction occurred beside the first one. Among other manuscripts are the manuscript of the Public Library of Ayatollah Mar‘ashī Najafī (8037, 7 A.H) and the manuscript of the National Library of Iran (360 , 7 A.H). The *Nāṣirean Ethics* has been frequently published such as the *Collection* of Jalāl al-Din Homā‘ī (Tehran, 1320 S.A.H.), *Exploratory Edition* of Muḥtabā Mīnawī and Ali Reza Heydarī (Tehran, 1356 A.H.S) and the *Edition* with the introduction of Buzurg ‘Alawī (Tehran, 1360 A.H.S).

3- Relevant works

The Nāṣirean Ethics has been repeatedly summarized and given comments: *Awṣāf al-Ashrāf*, a synopsis of *Nāṣirean Ethics* written by al-Ṭūsī that has been

published many times in Iran and India. *Miftāḥ al-Akhlāq* is a commentary provided by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm Burhanpourī for the Indian King, Urang Zip. *Tawzīḥ al-Akhlāq* is a paraphrase by Amir ‘Alā al-Din Husain Āmulī ordered by King Ṣafī of the *Nāṣirean Ethics* in a clearer manner (1051 A.H). The same work has been carried out by Abu al-Ma‘ali ‘Āmilī for Sulṭān ‘Abdullah Quṭb, entitled *Tawzīḥ al-Akhlāq ‘Abdullah Shāhī*. Also *Ḥadīqat al-Lughab* by *Muḥammad Sa‘dullah*; *A Commentary on the Nāṣirean Ethics* of Sayyid ‘Alīmallah Jalandahrī: *A Commentary of Nāṣirean Ethics* of Sayyid Ali Muḥammad Lakahnawi, and there is a book named *Mubadhab al-Akhlāq* by an unknown author which just made some changes to the third section of *Nāṣirean Ethics* and reduced the number of parts from 8 to 4.

The *Nāṣirean Ethics* has been translated to English by Wickens and in 1964 published in London in the *Collection of Iranian Heritage*. Buzurg ‘Alawī made use of this translation for the publication of the book and on the basis of it he added to the book a Persian-English glossary and an English-Persian one. In 1964 an English translation of this book, entitled *Nāṣirean Ethics*, had been published in London and also a selection of this book was published, due to the efforts of Jalal Humā‘ī, by the Ministry of Culture of Tehran in 1320.

Jalal al-Din Dawānī preserves the same order of *Nāṣirean Ethics* of Ṭūsī in *Akhlāq Jalālī [Jalālīyan Ethics] (Lawāmi‘ al-Isbrāq)*, but the difference is that many sections have been omitted from al-Ṭūsī's book. Dawānī presents the sections on ethics, management of the home, and politics in three "*Lam‘ih*" [three shining section] (he divided his book into several *Lam‘ih* and every *Lam‘ih* into several *Lum‘ab*.) although he leaves out some parts in every section. In the section refinement of ethics, the first part of *Nāṣirean Ethics*, which pertains to principles, is omitted and the second is exactly repeated. There is slight difference between the first and second *Lum‘as* and first and second chapters of *Nāṣirean Ethics*. Although the sixth chapter of *Nāṣirean Ethics* differs from the sixth *Lum‘ab* of *Jalālīyan Ethics*, all other chapters correspond closely to other *Lum‘āt*. The section on refinement of ethics in *The Treatise of World-revealing Bowl (Maṣūriyān Ethics)* by Ghiyāth al-Din Maṣūr Dashtakī Shirāzī is a summary of *Nāṣirean Ethics. A Key to Happiness* (seventeenth section of *Persian Heritage of Literature*) is a selection of *Nāṣirean Ethics* which in 1374 A.H.S was published by Sukhan Publication owing to the efforts made by Ṣamad Muwaḥḥid.

In the preface provided by Muhammad Taqī Daneshpajhouh for *Muhtashamī Ethics* a valuable investigation is carried out and many translations, commentaries, annotations, and copied works of the *Nāṣirean Ethics* are presented. In this preface many manuscripts of the book are introduced. But we do not allude to them for the sake of brevity and unavailability of the majority of these works and refer the researcher to that preface.

The Nāṣirean Ethics is regarded as the last link in the chain of purely philosophical approaches to morality. After the *Nāṣirean Ethics* this approach is scarcely found among the works of Muslim intellectuals in ethics; especially the division of practical philosophy into ethics, management of the home, and politics, and the allocation of separate chapters to each one are specific to this book. No other sample with the same manner except *Rawḍat al-Anwār ‘Abbāsī* by Muḥaqqiq Sabziwārī and *Jalālīyan Ethics* by Muḥaqqiq Dawānī can be presented. A vast range of sources, along with *Refinement of Morals* of Miskawayh, have been used by al-Ṭūsī to write this book.

4- The variety of subjects

The topics of the characteristic traits of servitude are rarely found in this book. It offers a partially complete set of topics as to personal, social, and family morals and covers more subjects as contrasted with the *Refinement of Morals* of Miskawayh; for instance in *Nāṣirean Ethics* in the section as to the cure for illnesses of the soul, the diseases of the faculty of sight, concupiscence, and anger are separately mentioned, whereas the headings relevant to diseases of the faculty of sight do not appear in the *Refinement of Morals*.

The triple section on practical philosophy is encompassed by the *Nāṣirean Ethics* in 300 pages. Both the introduction and principles of ethics cover 50 pages, each of the ends of ethics and politics are 100 pages, the management of home 40 pages. The matters of the book are balanced in a reasonably appropriate way and tedious periphrasis or improper brevity is hardly seen in the subjects discussed.

5- The structure of the book and a report of the content

The formulation and the themes of the section of refinement of morals in the *Nāṣirean Ethics* are mostly the same as those of the *Refinement of Morals* of Miskawayh, Although al-Ṭūsī changed the order of some matters. All things considered, al-Ṭūsī employed good taste in writing the book; he for instance put the discussion of good and salvation, which Miskawayh offered in the third part of his book, in the section on the principles of ethics after the perfection of the soul. With regard to the fact that many of the points discussed in the seventh chapter are related to social justice and rulers' behaviour, it is of course more appropriate for al-Ṭūsī to move this chapter to the third part (politics).

After a short introduction concerning the definition of philosophy and its divisions, the author introduces three categories of practical philosophy (ethics, management of the home, and politics) in three separate parts of his book. The first part of the book includes the principles (7 chapters) and the ends (10 chapters).

The definition of soul, its faculties, and human perfection, goodness, and felicity are presented in the first part which is mainly a translation and a compendium of the book of Miskawayh. In the discussion of ends, he speaks of character traits, the virtues of, and the vices of every human faculty, and justice, taking into consideration the degrees of felicity, the preservation of soul health, and the treatment of its diseases.

In the arrangement of the first part, the author has maintained approximately the main order of the book of Miskawayh, although in a few cases (as in the cure for soul diseases) he employed his own views. He also was not bound just to translate Miskawayh's text and in some cases he added some concise explanations, stories, and citations.

In the second part, consisting of five chapters, the author has dealt with the home and its bases, the administration of properties and nourishment, the husband's management of his wife, and the management of children and servants.

The fourth chapter of the second part, which is concerned with the management of children, is chiefly a liberal translation of Miskawayh's discussion regarding the training of children.

The third part of the book, consisting of eight chapters, is devoted to politics; the first chapter concerns the need of people for civilization and an explanation of the nature and the advantage of this sort of knowledge; the second chapter pertains to the virtue of love; the third chapter relates to different types of societies and an exposition of different sorts of cities (virtuous city [Utopia], unvirtuous city, ignorant city, dystopia, errant city and so on); the fourth chapter is relevant to the administration of a kingdom and the conduct of rulers; the fifth chapter is on the management of attendants and the etiquette of the followers of rulers; sixth the virtue of friendship and the manner of the interaction with friends; seventh the way of interaction with mankind; and eighth the laws of Plato.

It is worth mentioning that the second chapter (love) and the sixth chapter (friendship) of this part is mainly a translation of the fifth part of the *Refinement of Morals* of Miskawayh.

6- The method of the book

The *Nāṣirean Ethics* and the *Refinement of Morals* of Miskawayh are quite similar in method and what has been stated earlier about the work of Miskawayh is completely true of this book too.

7- The style of writing

The *Nāṣirean Ethics* is the last book of al-Ṭūsī in his corpus of writings handed down to us. He wrote this book in the style of *Kalileh and Dimneh* of Nasrullah Munshi before the composition of *Gulistān* of Sa'dī. In doing so, he managed to outstandingly apply this style and to overall offer a scientific and masterful text. Due to the fact that it is eloquent, and bizarre and obsolete words are scarcely found in it, it is engaging for Persian speakers – who are acquainted with scientific-philosophical terms and also with ancient Persian literature texts – to read this book.

In regard to its philosophical flavor there are a few citations from Qur'anic verses and hadiths in the book. Beside what Miskawayh provided in his *Refinement of Morals*, al-Ṭūsī added some verses and hadiths in certain cases. Nevertheless, all verses and hadiths do not amount to 50 cases in the book.

Refreshing the textual climate of the book, al-Ṭūsī in a few places has benefited from Persian and Arabic poems. There are not many stories in the

book on the grounds that the language employed for the discussions is scientific to a large extent.

8- Final evaluation

The book seems to be a translation of Miskawayh's book in which the intellectual ability of al-Ṭūsī, along with that of Miskawayh, intensified the validity of the book as a scholarly work.

The main criticism leveled at the content of the book is that the author surprisingly remarked on the manners of drinking wine, which is not consonant with his religious and scientific status. Thus, it is clearly obvious that he was influenced by Greek books.

G. M. Wickens holds that the Greek philosophical and scientific tradition is skillfully amalgamated with the Islamic view of the human being, society, and the world and the Greek ethics is surpassed by the amalgamation provided from this mixture.

[An Excerpt from AKHLĀQ-E NĀṢIRĪ]

Justice and worship

A comprehensive discussion of human justice in relation to God is held with a reference to the tree types of justice by Nāṣir al-Din Ṭūsī in the following text. In his view, the principle of justice and equity necessitates that man should appreciate any kind of beneficent and good act. God, who grants the soul, wealth, and every good that a human can have, deserves worship more than anyone else. He then deals with how man should thank God, considering commitment to Islamic law and reflection upon divine signs and the Deity as the best way to express gratitude to God.

The relation between justice and worship is an appropriate and important debate in which Ṭūsī engages here.

As to the types of justice in acts and deeds, we say: justice has been divided by the First Philosopher [Aristotle] into three types: the first type is what people must perform in relation to God, Truth Most High, who is the

bestower of goods and the effector of favours, or rather He is the cause of existence and every blessing that is dependent on that existence. The principle of justice requires that God's servant should follow, as much as he can, the best path with respect to the matters present between him and the One he serves and make serious attempt to observe the conditions of the obligation; the second type pertains to that man must do in relation to the rights of his fellow creature, the honouring of the masters, the deliverance of trusts, and fairness in transaction; the third type is what they must do in relation to the discharge of the claims of ancestors like the repayment of their debts and the execution of their will and the like.

What the Philosopher meant is, hitherto, stated. This statement concerning the obligation of the discharge of God's claim, Glory be His Majesty, can be studied in the way that since the condition of justice has to be apparent in the taking and giving of the possessions and favours and the like, it is necessary that God has an undeniable right in lieu of His gifts and unlimited blessing given to us and we have to observe this right in one way or another, because if one is allocated a little favour and he does not return the favour in some way, he then will be accused of the ignominy of injustice. If God allocates infinite gifts and countless blessing to the one and thereafter, he subsequently and continuously, from moment to moment, aimed by some following bounty, how is it possible that he, in return, does not think of thanking God for His bounty, or he does not observe His right, or he does not do something good to Him? Indeed, the course of justice requires that he should restrict his efforts to requital and compensation, and considers himself as unexcused for negligence (oversight) and shortcoming. Since if a king, for instance, is so just and learned that as a result of his policy, roads and realms are safe and improved, his justice among the people around the world is apparent and renowned, and even for a moment he does not neglect that he should protect and keep safe his kingdom, preventing his people from oppressing each other, preparing the ground for the common interests of people's life in this world and the next, then his good will include everyone of his citizens and inferiors, his beneficence will embrace everyone, in particular, whether weak or strong, and he is entitled to be in some way rewarded and requited by every particular person of his citizens, for shortcoming in doing this [duty] involves characterization by the stigma of injustice. Due to the fact that the king is not in need of what his subjects craft, they can, as a compensation, sincerely pray for him, wildly praise him, mention his virtues and glories, describe the endeavor he made and the exploits he had, greatly thank him, genuinely love him, obey and give him

advice, covertly or overtly repudiate the disobedience, make endeavor to complete his course as much as possible, take example from him in the organization of home and in the regulation of household and kindred – towards which they stand as a king towards his kingdom. If they, free and powerful, ignore doing so and fulfilling such condition, it will be a true injustice and unfairness and a deviation from the practices of justice. For it is principally unfair to take without giving back. The greater the provision of blessings and the emanation of honourable, the more heinous the injustice in return. For, although injustice is repellent in itself, some sorts of injustice are more repellent than others, just as one elimination of a blessing and one denial of a right may be more repugnant than another.

As it is to this extent clear that failure in obeying, thanking, loving, and making attempt as a requital for kings and princes is repellent, you can see how much it would be reprehensible and blameworthy to overlook the fact that you should observe the rights of the Real Master of the Kingdom who every hour, or rather every moment gives us, our bodies and souls, so much of unlimited bounty and gifts that cannot be neither enumerated nor put in boundaries.

If we speak of the first gift which is existence, no substitute can be conceived therefore. If we speak of the composition of the structure and of the refinement of the form, the author of the *Book Tashrih (Anatomy)* and the compiler of the *Book Manafi' al-A'zā' (The Benefits of Organs)* have written more than two thousand pages about these issues in reckoning what weak human imagination can reach. Nevertheless, they did not explain things even as much as one drop from an ocean. They did not adequately succeed in understanding one point, nor did they get to the heart of a minute detail. If we talk about souls, faculties, moral dispositions, and spirits, desiring to spell out the help with which the soul is provided by the emanation of God's intelligence, light, majesty, glory, exaltedness, benefits, and gifts, then we do not have the opportunity to indicate our views about these matters, regarding language, expression, understanding, and imagination as unable to make access to its truths and subtle points. If we discuss the grace of our everlasting life, ever-existing kingdom, and proximity to the presence of Absolute Unity - who created us in a way that we can acquire potentials and actualize them - , then we just can see our inability, perplexity, shortcoming, and bewilderment. Verily, by my life, only cattle do not recognize these blessings. If the Creator, the Glorified and the Exalted, is not in need of our strivings, it would be shameful and outrageous that we do not commit

ourselves to discharge a due and to put forth an effort by means of which we can avoid the ignominy of inequity and the stigma of deviation from the conditions of justice.

The Philosopher, Aristotle, in his exposition of the service people should perform, states that people disagree as to what they should perform for the Creator. Some have said one has to practice fasting, to recite prayer, to serve the house of worship or shrines, to get nearer to God by sacrifice. A group has held that one should confine himself to acknowledging His lordship, to admitting His beneficence and to glorifying Him to the extent that they can. Another group has said that we should get proximity to God by practicing beneficence for ourselves through the purification of our souls and discretion and for others through generous help, wisdom, and advice. Some contended that we should greedily think about and reflect on theology and make effort to do what increases our knowledge of the Creator, the Glorified, so that this culminates in perfect knowledge of Him and His unity will be carefully studied. Some asserted what is obligatory for people to do in relation to God, the Exalted, is not one determinate thing to which they commit themselves, nor is it a definite sort, but rather according to classes and levels of people in respect of different sciences it varies. What has been suggested up to this point is transmitted from Aristotle, but there is no quotation that he preferred some of these views to the others.

A late class of the philosophers said: worshiping God, the Sublime, can be restricted to three sorts. One is what relates to the bodies such as prayer, fasting, staying in holy places for offering a prayer to God and intimate conversation with Him. The second sort is what pertains to the souls like sound beliefs concerning the unity of God, the glorification of the Almighty Truth, and reflection upon how He emanates being and wisdom in the universe and the like. The third sort is that which we are obligated to do in interaction with people such as fairness in transactions, in the contract of crop-sharing, nuptial contract, and the discharge of trusts, the counseling of one's fellow creature, the combat with the enemies of Islam, and the defense of womenfolk. Of these philosophers a group more akin to men of discernment said worshiping God, the Sublime, consists of three elements: true belief, correct utterance, and righteous deed: in some regards prophets and religious knowledgeable jurists – who are the inheritors of prophets - at any time give accounts of each of them in some form. It is compulsory for everyone to obey and to submit to the prophets and such jurists in order to abide by God's commands.

It ought to be known that there are stages and stations for mankind to get closer to the Divine Presence. First comes the station in which people are called people of certitude, having sure faith. This is the rank of great philosophers and leading scholars. The second is the station of the men of spiritual virtue who are called virtuous: this is the rank of those who – along with perfect knowledge – are adorned with righteous deeds and characterized by the virtues enumerated above. The third pertains to the station of the righteous, a group engaged in reforming the cities and the affairs of the people, whose endeavor is confined to perfecting the created being. The fourth station is the stage of the people of success who are called successful as well as dedicated to God, the culmination of this rank is the stage of union.

Beyond this there is no conceivable station or stage for mankind. Four features form the capacity to move to these stages: first, eagerness and vitality in seeking, secondly; acquisition of true knowledge and certain doctrines; thirdly, shame at ignorance and lack of the talent which results from negligence; fourthly; sticking to the journey on the path of virtues as much as possible. These are called the means of union with the Mighty Presence [God].

There are, however, four causes of detachment from God – which consist in God's curse – first comes the descent that will give rise to turning away from God and lead to disdain. Second is the descent that will lead to suffering veil and consequently to depreciation. Third is a descent that causes driving away and therefore involves outrage. Fourthly, there is a fall that brings about banishment, namely distance from God and so entails hatred.

There are four causes of the eternal wretch which will result in these detachments. First pertains to laziness and sloth, a consequence of which is waste of life. Second is the ignorance and silliness that will proceed from the fact that theoretical thought and mortification of the self by education are abandoned. Third comes an effrontery which is born out of his inattention to the self and his arbitrary decision in following vain desires. Fourth is complacency about the vices, following from persistence in repulsive actions and the abandonment of repentance. The terms deviance or swerving (*zaygh*), rust (*rayn*), blindfold or covering (*ghasawah*) [on the eyes], and seal (*khatm*) are literally mentioned in the Holy Quran. The meaning of these terms is similar to those four causes and each of these wretched states has a cure that later on will be briefly indicated if God wills.

This is what the philosophers say about the worship of God, the Sublime. Plato the Metaphysician states: when the soul acquires justice, the light of the faculties and parts of the soul would shine upon each other, since justice entails all of virtues. Therefore, the soul will be able to perform its particular action in the most virtuous way possible and this is the ultimate proximity of mankind to the Deity, the Sublime.