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THE INTERPRETATION OF EASTERN MORAL VALUES IN “RABI’ AL-ABROR”

Abstract. *This article analyzes the issues of Eastern morality reflected in Mahmud Zamakhshari’s “Rabi’ al-abror wa nusus al-akhyor.” The work describes noble ideas such as human virtues, etiquette, morality, knowledge and enlightenment, honesty, generosity, modesty, patience, and contentment through the wisdom and narrations of Eastern thinkers. The analysis draws on selected passages from the work to examine its philosophical methodology, its integration of Islamic and pre-Islamic sources, and its treatment of knowledge, truth, and moral responsibility as the foundations of human perfection.*

Keywords: *Zamakhshari; Eastern morality; virtue; knowledge; honesty; deontological ethics; Islamic philosophy; wisdom literature; moral education.*

INTRODUCTION

Mahmud Zamakhshari’s “Rabi’ al-abror wa nusus al-akhyor” serves to cultivate high enlightenment and strong willpower while encompassing all aspects of human life. In this work, not only are instructions given on being well-mannered, generous, and performing righteous deeds, but recommendations are also provided on eliminating bad habits. A person who positively accepts and practices these requirements and instructions is regarded as a perfect human being.

Zamakhshari follows a very precise, scholarly, and systematic order in arranging his quotations. The author’s purpose is not merely to express an idea but to substantiate and strengthen it through sources of different levels. Topics begin with verses from the

Holy Qur'an, representing the highest level of evidence. Through Qur'anic passages, the author provides a religious foundation and clear direction for the subject. The next stage includes hadiths, through which the meanings of Qur'anic verses are further clarified through practical examples from life. After hadiths, the sayings of the Companions and the *tabi'un* are presented a layer of particular scholarly importance because it demonstrates the historical continuity of Islamic knowledge and its chain of transmission.

Another important aspect of Zamakhshari's method is that he does not limit himself to Islamic sources alone but also includes the wisdom of representatives of pre-Islamic and other cultures. The ideas of ancient Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle are cited. Through this, the author demonstrates that wisdom and sound thought are not confined solely to the religious sphere. The aim of this article is to analyze the principal categories of moral value treated in "Rabi' al-abror" on the basis of selected quotations, and to assess their philosophical implications within the broader framework of Eastern moral thought.

METHODS

The article employs philosophical-analytical and comparative methods. The primary source is Zamakhshari's "Rabi' al-abror wa nusus al-akhyor" (Zamakhshari, 1992), from which selected passages on knowledge, truth, moral responsibility, and the sciences are drawn and subjected to close philosophical analysis. These passages are read against the background of ancient Greek philosophical parallels principally Plato's "Apology of Socrates" (Plato, 1990, 1997) and Aristotle's "Metaphysics" (Aristotle, 1976) to illuminate the universal dimensions of the moral values articulated in the work. The analysis proceeds thematically, examining in succession the status of knowledge, the classification of the sciences, the moral weight of truth, and the ethical significance of honesty.

RESULTS

1. The status of knowledge: ink and blood. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is reported to have said: "On the Day of Judgment, the ink of scholars and the blood of martyrs will be weighed, and neither will outweigh the other. A single morning spent in pursuit of knowledge is more beloved to Allah than one hundred battles. Whoever

goes out seeking knowledge will have an angel appointed to give him glad tidings of Paradise. And whoever dies leaving behind inkpots and pens as inheritance shall enter Paradise” (Zamakhshari, 1992:16).

This collection of hadiths interprets the status of knowledge at an exceptionally high level, equating it with martyrdom: “The ink of scholars and the blood of martyrs will be weighed, and neither will outweigh the other.” Although the hadith outwardly expresses equality, in essence it indicates that two different paths the path of knowledge and the path of sacrifice ultimately serve the same purpose. The blood of the martyr symbolizes sacrificing one’s life for the sake of truth, whereas the ink of the scholar symbolizes understanding, preserving, and conveying the truth to others. From a philosophical perspective, this reflects the unity between knowledge and action: one protects the truth, while the other creates and explains it.

The continuation of the hadith states that “a single morning spent seeking knowledge is more beloved than one hundred battles.” The pursuit of knowledge is placed above physical struggle. Warfare is directed against an external enemy, whereas knowledge represents a struggle against humanity’s inner ignorance. Philosophically, the transformation of consciousness through inner struggle produces deeper and more lasting results than external conflict. The phrase “an angel is appointed” signifies that seeking knowledge is not an ordinary activity but a process supported by divine guidance, elevating knowledge to a metaphysical level. The wisdom concerning “leaving behind inkpots and pens as inheritance” demonstrates the continuity and social significance of knowledge: a person may die, yet his knowledge remains alive and continues to influence society. Knowledge is not merely learning; it is the path toward understanding truth, conveying it to others, and elevating humanity.

2. The boundlessness of knowledge: Moses and the scholar who seeks. The following saying is attributed to Moses (peace be upon him): “O my Lord, who is the most beloved person to You?” He replied: “A scholar who seeks knowledge” (Zamakhshari, 1992:19). In this wisdom, expressed through a dialogue involving Moses, the highest form of knowledge is revealed: “a scholar who seeks knowledge” a person who, despite already possessing knowledge, never ceases to pursue further learning. A true scholar is not one who assumes he has reached the limit of knowledge, but one who realizes the boundlessness of knowledge and remains in constant search of it. Knowledge is therefore not a final destination but an endless process of inquiry.

The famous statement of Socrates, “I know that I know nothing,” closely relates to this idea: acknowledging one’s ignorance is regarded as the beginning of wisdom (Plato, 1990:56). Furthermore, this saying introduces a divine criterion: the most beloved person to Allah is not merely one who worships or one who possesses knowledge, but one who continuously works on self-improvement and never ceases to grow.

3. *The classification of the sciences.* Some of the early scholars said: “There are four sciences: jurisprudence for religion, medicine for the body, astronomy for time, and grammar for language” (Zamakhshari, 1992:17). The enumeration of these four sciences is not accidental; they constitute a model for governing human life in a complete and balanced manner, each representing an essential dimension of human existence. Jurisprudence (fiqh) regulates a person’s religious life, establishing criteria such as lawful and unlawful, right and wrong, and justice and oppression; philosophically, it shapes the moral and normative consciousness of the individual. Medicine preserves the physical health of the human being reflecting the philosophical idea of the unity of body and soul. Astronomy connects the individual to a system greater than oneself, developing what may be called cosmic consciousness. Grammar regulates language and enables the clear expression of thought, ensuring harmony between thought and speech.

In the philosophy of Aristotle, knowledge is also divided into different branches for the perfection of human beings, and each branch serves overall human excellence (Aristotle, 1976:76). This wisdom likewise presents knowledge not as fragmented but as an interconnected system: a human being cannot achieve perfection by developing in only one direction but must mature simultaneously in spiritual, physical, intellectual, and cosmic dimensions. When these four sciences are harmonized, a person becomes truly complete.

4. *The moral weight of knowledge.* The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is reported to have said: “A person’s betrayal of knowledge is worse than betrayal of wealth” (Zamakhshari, 1992:17). In this hadith, betraying knowledge is considered even more serious than betraying material property. Betrayal of property causes material harm and usually affects only a particular individual or group. However, betrayal of knowledge means distorting the truth, spreading false information, or concealing knowledge, thereby damaging the consciousness of society itself; its consequences are far broader and more destructive. In the philosophy of Socrates, knowledge and truth are regarded as

inseparable concepts: true knowledge guides a person toward the right path, so corrupting knowledge means corrupting the truth itself (Aristotle, 1976:81).

5. Truthfulness as an absolute moral principle. Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) is reported to have said: “Adhere to truthfulness, even if it leads you to destruction” (Zamakhshari, 1992:62). Adhering to truthfulness signifies a person’s loyalty to moral principles even in situations where honesty may outwardly lead to harm. The underlying idea is that moral principles stand above outcomes.

From a philosophical perspective, this statement reflects a meaning close to the principles of deontological ethics namely, that the correctness of an action depends not on its consequences but on its conformity to truth and justice. Truthfulness here is interpreted not as an instrumental means but as an absolute moral principle possessing intrinsic value. This wisdom also demonstrates the inner independence and spiritual stability of the individual: preserving truthfulness under all circumstances means rising above social pressure, personal interest, and fear a manifestation of inner freedom. Furthermore, the expression that truthfulness may “lead to destruction” indicates that honesty is truly tested in difficult situations: genuine moral maturity is manifested not in comfortable circumstances but in challenging and dangerous conditions.

DISCUSSION

The five passages analyzed above illuminate the central moral philosophy of “Rabi’ al-abror” as a coherent and integrated vision of human perfection grounded in three interconnected values: the dignity of knowledge, the moral weight of truth, and the unconditional demand for honesty. What distinguishes Zamakhshari’s methodology from simple anthologizing is his deliberate construction of an argument through multiple levels of authority Qur’an, hadith, Companion sayings, and Greek philosophical parallels each level adding a distinct dimension to the idea under discussion.

The comparison between scholars’ ink and martyrs’ blood (Zamakhshari, 1992:16) is particularly significant as a philosophical proposition: it implicitly argues that intellectual labor and physical sacrifice are not hierarchically ranked but structurally complementary both are forms of devotion to truth. This is a remarkably sophisticated claim, anticipating the later philosophical distinction between praxis and theoria by presenting them as equally sacred paths. The fourfold classification of the sciences

(Zamakhshari, 1992:17) similarly anticipates what we would today describe as a holistic or integrated curriculum: it recognizes that the human being is simultaneously a moral, physical, temporal, and linguistic creature, and that true education must address all four dimensions simultaneously (Aristotle, 1976:76; Plato, 1997:1080).

The saying of Umar ibn al-Khattab on truthfulness (Zamakhshari, 1992:62) represents “Rabi’ al-abror” at its most philosophically ambitious: it articulates a deontological ethic of truth-telling that is functionally equivalent to Kant’s categorical imperative, centuries before the formulation of deontological ethics as a philosophical tradition. This convergence between Islamic moral wisdom and Western philosophical categories confirms the universal reach of Zamakhshari’s work and its relevance for contemporary comparative ethics.

CONCLUSION

Mahmud Zamakhshari’s “Rabi’ al-abror wa nusūs al-akhyor” is one of the important sources of Eastern spirituality and moral thought. In the work, virtues such as etiquette, attitudes toward knowledge, truthfulness, honesty, patience, contentment, generosity, modesty, and justice are illuminated through hadiths, wise sayings, and the views of scholars and thinkers from both the Islamic and pre-Islamic traditions. The author emphasizes that human perfection is the principal factor in the development of society and pays particular attention to the issue of moral education (Zamakhshari, 1992).

The analysis has demonstrated that “Rabi’ al-abror” presents a coherent philosophy of moral development organized around three principal values: the sacred dignity of knowledge, the social responsibility entailed by the possession of truth, and the absolute moral primacy of honesty over consequences. These values are articulated through a methodologically sophisticated source hierarchy that integrates revelation, prophetic tradition, scholarly transmission, and cross-cultural philosophical wisdom into a unified moral framework. The work’s relevance extends beyond its medieval context: its core insights that knowledge obligates, that truth is unconditional, and that human perfection requires the integration of spiritual, physical, intellectual, and linguistic development remain foundational concerns of contemporary moral philosophy and education (Plato, 1997; Aristotle, 1976).

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