

The Relationship Between Psychology and Ethics in *Tıbb al-Nafs/al-Rūhānī* Through Birgivi's Treatise on “The Path of Muhammad (ﷺ)”

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of ethics in the discipline of *Tıbb al-Nafs/al-Rūhānī* (Traditional Islamic Psychology) and its relationship with psychology through Birgivi's book *The Path of Muhammad* (ﷺ). First, Birgivi's writings on theoretical morality were explored. This chapter includes the definition of morality and the source of morality. Afterward, Birgivi's evaluations on the practical dimension of morality were examined. In this section, some virtues, and vices in Birgivi's work are discussed with their causes and solutions. In the continuation of the study, the relationship between morality and psychology was examined. The analysis of the section of the text reveals that Birgivi shows regard that to be moral, one must overcome unfavorable psychic states and develop a psychologically healthy mood. Based on Birgivi's view that psychology is necessary for morality and that morality also contributes to psychological well-being, inseparability of the two was emphasized in this section. Then, starting from Birgivi's shaping his understanding of morality within the framework of the religious term *taqwa*, which means to love God and to tremble at Him, it was concluded that adding religion-based ethical therapy methods to modern psychology would make an important contribution to the discipline of psychology.

Keywords: Psychology, ethics, *tıbb al-nafs/al-rūhānī*, Birgivi, the path of Muhammad (ﷺ)

Birgivi'nin Tarikat'ul-Muhammediye eseri üzerinden Tıbbu'n-Nefs'te Psikoloji-Ahlak ilişkisi

Öz

Bu makale, Birgivi'nin “Muhammed'in (ﷺ) Yolu” adlı kitabı üzerinden Tıbbü'n-Nefs/er-Rūhānī (Geleneksel İslam Psikolojisi) disiplindeki ahlakın rolünü ve psikoloji ile ilişkisini incelemektedir. Arařtırmada öncelikle Birgivi'nin teorik ahlak konusundaki yazıları incelenmiştir. Bu bölümde ahlakın tanımı ve ahlakın kaynağı yer almaktadır. Ardından Birgivi'nin ahlakın pratik boyutuna ilişkin deęerlendirmeleri incelenmiştir. Bu bölümde Birgivi'nin eserindeki bazı erdemler ve reziletler nedenleri ve çözümleri ile birlikte ele alınmıştır. Çalışmanın devamında ahlak ve psikoloji arasındaki ilişki incelenmiştir. Metnin ilgili kesiti incelendiğinde, Birgivi'nin ahlaklı olabilmek için kişinin olumsuz ruh hallerini aşması ve psikolojik olarak sağlıklı bir ruh haline ulaşmasının gerekliliğine dikkat çektiği görülmektedir. Birgivi'nin ahlak için psikolojinin gerekli olduğu görüşünden ve ahlakın psikolojik iyi oluşa da katkı sağlamasından hareketle; bu bölümde ikisinin ayrılmazlığı vurgulanmıştır. Çalışmanın devamında Birgivi'nin ahlak anlayışını Allah'ı sevmek ve O'ndan ürpermek anlamına gelen takva kavramı çerçevesinde şekillendirmesinden yola çıkarak, modern psikolojiye dine dayalı etik terapi yöntemlerinin eklenmesinin psikoloji disiplinine önemli katkılar sağlayacağı sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Psikoloji, etik, Tıbbu'n-nefs er-ruhani, Birgivi, Muhammed'in (ﷺ) yolu

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INTRODUCTION

Birgivi (d. 981/1573), one of the great Islamic scholars who had many studies in the field of grammar, *hadith*, *tafsir* and *akaid*, especially religious morality, divided his work, The Path of Muhammad (ﷺ) into three parts. In the first chapter, reprehensible innovations (*bidats*) introduced into the religion are mentioned, and it is emphasized that they should be avoided. In the second part, morality is emphasized around the theme of *taqwa* which means love and fear of human beings towards God. In this research, Birgivi's understanding of morality and psychology is evaluated. The third part of the study is about the issues mistakenly associated with *taqwa* even though they are not suitable for *taqwa*. The part of the book that will be examined in this study will be discussed in three parts the definition of morality, the source of morality and the virtues that are the subject of practical morality. The next section includes the relationship between morality and psychology. At the end of the study, modern psychology and *Ṭibb al-Nafs/al-Rūḥānī*, which are two different disciplines of psychology, will be evaluated within the context of their relationships to ethics.

Definition of Morality

Birgivi defines morality as actions that emerge from the soul before the act of thinking takes place, and that has become a faculty (Birgivi, 2011). Most of the Islamic philosophers describe morality as “a faculty from which actions come easily without thinking” (Galen, 1937) The point that draws attention to Birgivi's definition is that for an act to become moral, that such actions must

turn into stable automated traits within human beings. Birgivi also emphasizes that morality can change in the sentences after the definition. However, he indicates the importance of temperament in terms of how much morality can change. Therefore, Birgivi is not deterministic to morality but does not ignore the influence of innate human dispositions and temperaments. Modern studies accept the existence of heritable variation in behavior and mood that emerge in early development (Fowles & Kochanska, 2000), which is called temperament (*mizaç*), and the existence of some characteristics that children are genetically predisposed to. Children differ in behavioral characteristics, distress management, irritability, smiling, and fear response (Kagan, 2005). However, this does not ignore the influence of many factors such as upbringing, environmental conditions, living space, etc. Although temperament remains relatively stable and consistent across the lifespan, morality can change as Birgivi underlines. Many studies, especially Bandura's Bobo Doll experiment, reveal the effect of learning on the moral development of the individual, that is; unlike temperament, it can change over time.

Source of Morality

The source of one's character is influenced by the three underlying basic drives of human beings according to Birgivi. These are faculty of intellect (*nutq/النطق*), survival instinct (*g'azab/الغضب*) and appetitive drives (*shahwat/الشهوة*) (Birgivi 2011). Of these, faculty of intellect (*nutq/النطق*) means comprehension and understanding. The moderation of the comprehension and the

excessive wisdom is called loopie (*cerbeze* / جَزِيرَة). He does not find the excess of understanding correct because of the futility of trying to understand the issues that the human mind cannot know. He shows this as an example of trying to understand the verses called *mutashabihat* (a word or expression that is difficult to understand) and the issue of destiny. He calls the low level of comprehension as foolishness (*belade* / بلاده). Moderated speech is wisdom (*hikmah* / الحكمة) and it is the virtue of distinguishing between right and wrong (Birgivi, 2011).

Survival instinct (*g'azab* / الغضب), on the other hand, is the power that prevents the situations in the individual that he does not find pleasant and appropriate. Moderation is called valor (*shecâat* / الشجاعة), excess is called recklessness (*tahevur* / تهور) and less is called cowardice (*cübn* / الجبن) (Birgivi, 2011).

As for appetitive drives (*shahwat* / الشهوة), it is the instinct of an individual to desire and seek the things that are pleasing to him. Its excess is shamelessness (*shirre* / الشرة), while its understatement is reluctance (*hamud* / خمود). Moderation is temperance (*iffah* / العفة) (Birgivi, 2011). Temperance is the virtue of keeping one's soul away from bad things and forbidden things, being moderate in things such as food and drink, and in sexual intercourse to be legitimate (Birgivi, 2011). In other words, according to Birgivi, good morality consists of wisdom, bravery, and temperance.

This understanding of Birgivi shows a resemblance with Aristotelian ethics. Aristotle regards virtue as being able to find the "right middle" between two extremes. Virtue for him is the one who is far from excess and deficiency (Aristoteles, 1998).

In Aristotle, the concept that expresses the state of being medium for character virtues is the concept of "*mesos*" (Güven, 2014). Besides this, the teaching of being a middle way is also found in other cultures. To attain Nirvana, it is necessary to be moderate in Buddhism (Sarkaçoğlu, 1999). Lao Zi, one of the famous names of the Far East, also said that the purpose of life is to reach a state of balance, the middle path. The encouragement of the *hadiths* of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) to be middle way such as "Keep the middle way, try to do the best, then good news for you"¹ and the encouragement of the verse "We have made you a middle way (away from extremes) nation"² has also affected many Islamic thinkers like Birgivi to build moral theory on the understanding of middle way. Although the understanding of placing the 3 basic virtues of temperance, courage and wisdom at the center of the moral system was taken from the Greek culture, these virtues were sometimes expressed with different concepts by other Islamic thinkers or new ones were added to these virtues. (Çağrı, 2022).

Birgivi and Practical Ethics

Morality is generally seen as the sub-discipline of practical sciences in the classification of sciences in Islamic tradition. Râzî (d. 606/1210) considers morality a part of practical philosophy in various works, especially *Şerhu Uyûni'l-Hikmah* (Arıcı,

¹ Bukhari, Iman, 29

² Bakara, 2/143

2016). This approach of Râzî influenced the classification of the subsequent scholars. Another philosopher of the 13th century Nasiruddin et-Tûsî (d. 672/1274) continued this approach in the field of classification of sciences and considered morality as one of the sub-branches of practical philosophy (Arıcı, 2016). In the 16th century, it was seen that Tařköprîzâde Ahmed Efendi (d. 968/1561) also considers a sub-discipline of the morality of practical philosophy. (Arıcı, 2016) In addition, it is seen that in Avicenna (d. 428/1037), he classifies morality under practical philosophical sciences (Arıcı, 2016). As a product of this idea, it can be said that Birgivi deals with practical moral themes that can be directly equivalent in practical life instead of focusing on the theoretical philosophy in the theoretical sense. (Koç, 2020) Some virtues in the work, which is called as praiseworthy characteristics (*ahlak-ı hamide*) are to be humble, be patient, not to waste, to be tolerant. Birgivi gives the following advice under the title of patience: "Overcome troubles, diseases, and disasters with patience. Do not complain to anyone" (Birgivi, 2011). He says hastiness is the opposite of patience and considers being hasty as thirty-third of the sickness of the heart. Humbleness is considered as the equivalent of arrogance. The humility, which means not to be arrogant in Islamic Sufism, to bend in the face of the greatness of Allah, is of great importance as a responsibility for Allah, as a therapeutic function in private life and social relations and is seen as a moral virtue. (Koç, 2020) As for wastefulness, it is seen as excessive (*ifrad*), while stingy is seen as insufficiency (*tafrid*). The recommended middle road is generosity. According to Birgivi, Tolerance

means "not to get excited directly, to dominate the nervous system (Birgivi, 2011). He points to the control of the anger force and the maturity of the mind. Birgivi also considers some benefits to promote these moral virtues. Some of those are that "*Hilm* (Tolerance) owner is forbidden to go to hell", "*The Hilm* owner is not deprived of charity", "*Hilm* owner is the love of Allah" (Birgivi, 2011).

Some of the attitudes and behaviors that he defines as graceless characteristic (*ahlak-ı zemîme*) are to be arrogant, to be jealous of, to think badly about someone, to show off. It is seen that arrogance, which means that one sees himself superior and makes people humiliating with this feeling, is the opposite of humility. Birgivi counts arrogance as the twelfth sickness of the heart. Birgivi warns people by talking about factors that can cause arrogance such as science, worship, generation, beauty, strength, and property. As for jealousy, he defines it as asking for blessing to go away from anybody he does not like or ask him not to reach blessing. As for suspicion (*sû-i zan*), it is the twenty fourth sickness of the heart. It is to have bad thoughts about Allah and the believers. Birgivi also mentions the evil of hypocrisy (*riya*) and advises people to do good deeds secretly. He emphasizes that the reason for the way to get rid of the hypocrisy is necessary to know the cause of the hypocrisy, and the reasons for the hypocrisy are the desire to have superior honour in the position and order in the public, the desire to obtain something from the blessings in the hands of the people, and the desire to get rid of the humiliation. (Birgivi, 2011)

As can be seen from the examples, Birgivi is more interested in the practical equivalent of morality than the theoretical moral debates, classifying good and bad moral features, finding the reasons for bad moral features, and giving advice to the readers. Thus, he does a work that has functionality in real life, and he focuses on "thinking to act."

The Relationship Between Morality and Psychology

In Birgivi's psychology, to be moral, the individual must realize the sickness-immorality- in his soul and treat them appropriately. (Yüksel, 2011). Here we see that the ultimate goal is to be moral and psychology also serves this purpose. However, in addition to this interpretation, it is also possible to say that morality is necessary for mental health because it helps the individual to cope with his/her problems and feels peaceful and whole.

According to a classification, moral teachings are divided into two as teleological (goal driven) and deontological (non-goal driven) moral understanding (Aydın, 2014). The teleological moral understanding argues that the ultimate element that determines the moral value and correctness of human behavior is the results and purpose of that behavior, and Aristotelian moral philosophers define this ultimate goal as happiness. Happiness is the state that is the ultimate and highest goal of human behavior, the state of attaining the highest value or goal in life, the absence of pain or the state of pleasure, the state of harmony of the whole human being, the state of competence that is the result of virtuous fulfillment of one's own potential powers, doing one's duties (Cevizci, 2000). The understanding of

happiness in this definition is seen as a state of being metaphysical well-being. Since the purpose of morality is to ensure that people reach an ideal mental state by providing their balance, the focus of psychology studies on serving people's well-being in this context will contribute to the well-being process of people in every respect.

Modern psychology and *Tibb al-Nafs/al-Rūḥānī*

Birgivi made some considerations on morality in his work on psychology and found the moral development of the individual necessary for mental health. As for the modern discipline of psychology, it does not acknowledge moral weakness as subject in field of study.

The concept that modern psychology sees as a problem for the mental health of the individual and focuses on it is disorder. A disorder is disturbance and functional abnormality (Sefton, 2011). It is generally categorized as mental, physical, genetic etc. But such a category as moral disorder does not appear in the discipline of psychology. Disorders are abnormal conditions seen in a limited part of the population, and these efforts to restore the health of people with the disorder are certainly invaluable. However, if the aim of psychology is to lead a balanced life by protecting the mental health of the individual, it is surprising that it does not consider so much the moral problems faced by all individuals as a problem. It seems that this difference underlies the distinction between modern psychology and *Tibb al-Nafs/al-Rūḥānī*. *Tibb al-Nafs/al-Rūḥānī* has 3 categories as virtue development, mental processes, and disorders (The last two fields show some parallels with the cognitive neuroscience, and clinical psychology

fields of modern psychology). Sufis classify bad morals under the titles of sicknesses of the heart (*emrazu l-kulub, afad 'ul-kulub*) and consider them as a spiritual disease and offer solutions. Thus, traditional Islamic psychology appears before not only as a discipline that offers solutions to clinical cases, but also as a discipline that aims to produce solutions to the problems of all individuals and to bring them to a morally perfect level. However, modern psychology does not include morality like this triple classification of *Tıbb al-Nafs/al-Rūhānī*, and this situation narrows the scope of modern psychology and limits psychology. Although modern psychology does not have such a direct sub-discipline; the positive psychology studies of modern psychology make valuable contributions to the field of morality with the importance it gives to character development. Increasing these efforts and making the subject of virtual development a sub-discipline of modern psychology and developing ethical therapies applicable to psychotherapy will provide ideal solutions for this problem.

However, the inclusion of morality in the discipline of psychology will bring along the question of what will be the source of the ideal morality to which the client will be guided in therapies. Birgivi's definition of morality can be considered independent of religious and cultural values. Universally accepted approaches to morality can be developed, but the question of "good morals" to be used in therapy is not a question independent of values. As a matter of fact, it is seen that Birgivi gathers good morality around the concept of "*taqwa*", which is an Islamic concept.

According to Birgivi, being *taqwa* also means being moral (Koç, 2020). The integration of universal moral values accepted by everyone into psychotherapy will not pose a problem like Birgivi's emphasis on universal ethical values emphasizing good morals such as patience, being humble, not wasting and being tolerant, and universal ethical problems emphasizing bad morals such as 'being arrogant, envious, making bad assumptions, showing off and being stingy (Koç, 2020). However, it is certain that many virtues and motivation to encourage these virtues are shaped by religious values. At this point, it can be predicted that the development of theoretical studies and therapy methods that include religion-based moral development models will contribute to the modern psychological studies.

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