

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Wisdom, Ethics, and the Nature of Man

A Translation of Dawānī's Opening Prelude to Akhlāq-i-Jalālī

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Translator's Introduction

To understand what it means for a human being to be good, we must first understand what it means for a human being to *be*. Dawānī's *Jalalean Ethics* (*Akhlāq-i-Jalālī*) opens with precisely this concern. The cosmos has not been created in vain; its existents possess ends (or, *teloi*), and the human being must likewise possess an end proper to himself. What is he for? What makes his excellence properly human? The answer is Divine Vicegerency (*khilāfat-i ilāhī*). Thus, the question of character already involves the question of our place in being.

Man's distinction, for Dawānī, lies in his 'comprehensiveness' (*jāmi'iyyah*). He gathers (*j-m-*) within himself degrees of existence which other beings possess only separately, and his contrary faculties make possible a range of perfection peculiar to him. The angel possesses the capacity to understand but not the capacity to fail in using it; the beast possesses *only* the capacity to act without understanding; and man possesses both the capacity to understand and the passions which oppose his understanding. The possibility of rising above the angel thus belongs to the same creature who may sink beneath the beast. His excellence must be achieved through the ordering of what he already *is*, and thus his *telos* is inseparable from his ontology.

As such, for Dawānī, ethical wisdom (*hikmah*) is an enterprise that is *existential* in nature, not merely a constrained branch of a contrived typology. Dawānī understands wisdom as certainty concerning realities as they are, and insists that wisdom must therefore also encompass right action, the sort of action that is in correspondence to the order of reality. To know the order of things while remaining disordered oneself is to fall short of the perfection which philosophy promises. It is precisely for this reason that the ancients defined philosophy as 'resemblance to God, insofar as human capacity permits', for the deiform existence of man bore directly upon the deific cultivation of his character. The intellect must apprehend truth, and the person who possesses that intellect must become capable of living accordingly.

It is because wisdom is an existential enterprise that we can, argues Dawānī, recognize the philosopher and the gnostic within the same pursuit. Demonstration and depuration both approach a reality which, at the summit of realization, is the same

reality. In Suhrawardī's visionary encounter, recalled hereunder by Dawānī, it is the masters of *direct witness*, and less so the scholars of logical inquiry, whom Aristotle (himself a master of demonstration) recognizes as the "philosophers in truth." Even so, his esteem for direct vision or personal gnosis is accompanied by his solemn awareness of self-deception. A traveller may mistake a mirage for attainment, or spend his life serving an impostor whom he supposes perfect. Given that only true sages may recognize true sages, it follows that even the path of purification requires learning and intellectual discernment. Otherwise, a discipline pursued without discernment may destroy the very capacity (that is, intellect) it was meant to perfect.

This same concern further explains Dawānī's insistence that practical refinement precede, at the very least practically, the acquisition of the theoretical sciences. Knowledge gives its possessor power, and that power may become an instrument of whatever dispositions already govern him. A vicious man may acquire more accomplished means of being vicious, and a virtuous man may acquire more accomplished means of being virtuous. Like a Hippocratic physician who argues that the body must be cleansed before it is nourished, the soul, too, must become cleansed before it receives its dosage of higher metaphysicals.

This appeal, however, gives rise to the question of whether the human being is even innately good or not, and whether he can or cannot change the preexisting vices or virtues within himself. In this regard, Dawānī examines the arguments inherited through Aristotle, Galen, Ibn Sīnā, and Ṭūsī, asking whether they can establish the virtue or vice of the natural human soul. Dawānī concludes that regardless of whether natural vice can be wholly cured, natural virtue wholly inherited, or some synthesis of the two acquirable, the fact remains that ethics applies all the same. Medicine retains its usefulness even when a disease cannot be wholly cured, and likewise ethical discipline retains its usefulness when a vice can at least be diminished. And where a person does not know that reform is impossible, he still remains obliged to strive for it. There is thus considerable sagacity in defending the work of moral cultivation without pretending to have demonstrated more than one has.

In the end, then, Dawānī asks the reader to take human possibility seriously. The being who can understand the order of things must also learn to order himself, and

the wisdom which discloses his place in creation must become a discipline of living. The true grandeur of this prelude thus lies in how closely the purpose of the cosmos comes to bear upon the purpose of one's own soul, and the government of that soul thereafter.

Method of Translation

Compared to some of his other works, Dawānī's language here is exceedingly prosaic, possessed of its own quasi-prolixity and hypotaxis. I have tried to preserve his prose and the fullness of his formulations, while still arranging the English so that the reader can follow the argument without losing Adriane's thread in the midst of Daedalus' Labyrinth. I have tried to keep the translation readable while still preserving the actual denotation of Dawānī's own exposition, leaving explanatory additions and/or interpretive glosses in brackets or in the footnotes.

I have also attempted to trace every quotation as far back toward its original source as possible. Where an attribution could not be established, or where the wording survives only through an intermediary, I have indicated this in the notes.

For each Arabic or Persian technical term, I have especially tried to identify its Greek and Avestan counterparts, with Middle Persian forms where appropriate. These annotations are intended to manifest Dawānī as an expositor of the synthesized "wisdom of the ancients," whose horizon includes the Mazdean Persians as much as the ancient Greeks (cf. Suhrawardī & Shahrāzūrī). The intention is to give the reader some sense of the wider inheritance which speaks through Dawānī's Arabic and Persian vocabulary.

It is with great happiness that we were able to write the letters we have written herein, in the sequences in which they have been written, to produce written words and sentences of worthwhile and valuable consideration.

May Allah make it of benefit.

Āmīn.

Dawānī's Prelude to *Jalalean Ethics*

God—Exalted is He—hath said, “We created not the heavens and the earth, and whatsoever is between them, in play.”¹ And God—Exalted is He—hath said, “Did ye then deem that We had created you in vain, and that unto Us ye should not be returned?”²

By the radiance of the rays cast forth from these two sacred luminaries, it becomes manifest and immediately beheld by those whose eyes are opened upon the prospect of truth-borne investigation (*taḥqīq*) that the particles of created being (*akwān*) and the realities of the realm of contingency (*ḥaqā'iq-i 'ālam-i imkān*)—brought forth from the hidden recess of the Unseen (*makman-i ghayb*) unto the bridal dais of manifestation and witnessing (*manṣṣa-yi shuhūd*), and which, adorned with the roseate tincture of “the coloring of God; and who is more excellent than God in coloring?”³ were displayed upon the field of vision—each possess, by the decree of “He gave unto everything its creation, then guided it,”⁴ an end (*ghāyah*; *telos*) and a wise benefit (*maṣlahah*), which stand to that thing in the relation of its fruit (*thamarah*).

For although the act of the Absolutely Munificent One (*Jawād-i Muṭlaq*) and the Agent in truth (*Fa‘āl bar ḥaqq*) is not caused or motivated by [discernible] purposes (*aghrād*), it [i.e., His act] is nevertheless never devoid of wisdoms (*ḥikam*), benefits (*maṣāliḥ*), ends (*ghāyāt*), and fruits (*thamarāt*). Both of these premises have been established in the Divine Science—that is, Metaphysics (*al-‘ilm al-ilāhī*; *prōtē philosophia*)—by decisive demonstrations and radiant proofs.

And the *telos* of Man—he who is the quintessence of created beings (*khulāṣa-yi akwān*), the essence of all essences (*‘ayn-i a’yān*), and the choicest extract of the cosmos (*nuqāwa-yi jahān*)—is Divine Vicegerency (*khilāfat-i ilāhī*; *Khvarenah*), as is declared by the purport of the Noble Text, “Verily, I am setting upon the earth a vicegerent,”⁵ and as the import of “He it is Who hath made you vicegerents upon the earth”⁶ likewise plainly proclaims.

¹ Qur’ān 44:38

² Qur’ān 23:115

³ Qur’ān 2:138

⁴ Qur’ān 20:50

⁵ Qur’ān 2:30

⁶ Qur’ān 35:39

And in the noble verse, “Verily, We offered the Trust unto the heavens and the earth and the mountains; but they refused to bear it and shrank from it, while Man bore it. Verily, he hath ever been greatly unjust, greatly ignorant,”⁷ if the Trust (*amānah*) be interpreted as the intellect (*al-‘aql*; *nous*; *xrad*) or as moral duty (*taklīf*; *déon*; *urvan*), as is recorded in the well-known commentaries, then against the first interpretation there arises the difficulty that jinn and angels share with Man in intellect; and against the second, that the jinn share with Man in being subject to moral duty. Its bearing [in those interpretations], therefore, would not be something peculiar to Man—whereas from the very context of the verse it is understood that Man is singled out for it, as is plain to any possessor of sound taste (*al-dhawq al-salīm*). Therefore, the Trust must be understood as the secret of Divine Vicegerency (*sirr-i khilāfat-i ilāhī*), for none save feeble Man was fitted to undertake the crushing burdens of that charge. A poet says:

*My feeble heart can scarce its own weight bear,
Yet Love’s great burden finds no weakness there.*

And another:

*The heavens could not bear the Trust’s great weight;
They cast the lot, and on my mad name fell its fate.*

Man’s worthiness for the rank of vicegerency rests upon the perfection of his receptivity (*kamāl-i qābiliyyat*): through the gathering of contrary attributes (*ṣifāt-i mutaqābilah*) he is capable of becoming a locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) for the mutually opposed Divine Names (*asmā’-i mutaqābila-yi ilāhī*), and is able to undertake the cultivation and ordering (*‘imārah*) of the world both in its form and in its meaning (*‘ālam-i ṣūrat wa ma’nā*).

For although the angels possess, by their very constitution, the aspect of spirituality (*rūḥāniyyah*; *pneumatikotēs*; *mēnōg*) and all that attends upon it—such as illuminations of knowledge (*ishrāqāt-i ‘ilmī*) and their consequences among the intellectual delights (*ladhdhāt-i ‘aqlī*)—they are altogether without share in the dimension of corporeality (*jismāniyyah*; *aisthetos*; *gētīg*) and the density of matter (*kathāfat-i māddah*; *hylē*; *astūmant*).

⁷ Qur’ān 33:72

And although the celestial bodies (*ajsām-i falakī*) possess, according to the principles of philosophy, rational souls (*nafs-i nāṭiqah*; *noētikē psychē*), their psychic perfections (*kamālāt-i naḥsāniyyah*) are innate and connatural, while their bodies are free of conflicting qualities (*kayfiyyāt-i mutakhālifaḥ*) and diverse natures (*ṭabāyī-i mukhtalifa*; *physis*). They therefore possess neither the journey through differing degrees and unequal ranks, nor the passage through the successive phases of deficiency and perfection, nor the transformation wrought by the vicissitudes of states, nor a comprehensive encompassing of all the higher and lower realities.

The human mode of existence (*nash'a-yi insānī*), by contrast, encompasses every one of these modes and journeys through every rank. At the beginning of his existence, Man first passes from the mineral degree (*martaba-yi jamādī*) to the degree of growth or vegetative life (*martaba-yi namā*; *psychē threptikē*); from growth he reaches the animal rank (*rutba-yi ḥaywānī*; *psyche aesthetike*); and from there he arrives at the human degree. Then, when he becomes adorned with the ornament of an equilibrated temperament (*ītidāl-i mizāj*; *sophrosyne*; *paymān*), and he duly balances his bodily and psychic faculties (*quwā-yi jismānī wa naḥsānī*; *dynameis*), he comes, in respect both of body and soul, to resemble the celestial bodies. For the state of mediation and equilibrium between opposites is tantamount to freedom from their extremes.

By means of this purification, his soul may then become imprinted, in a particularized manner, with the forms of events past and yet to come, as with the celestial souls (*nufūs-i falakiyyah*). This may occur either through an unveiling of the World of Images (*ālam-i mithāl*)—whose reality, in the judgment of the great pillars of philosophy, is established both through demonstration (*bayān*) and direct vision (*īyān*)—or through the reflection of sacred forms (*ṣuwar-i qudsiyyah*) from the lamp of the rational soul (*miṣbāḥ-i naḥs-i nāṭiqah*) into the niche of imagination (*mishkāt-i khayāl*; *phantasia*), there to assume representation in corporeal form, according to what is required by the reality of the thing beheld and by the nature of the mirror—such being the opinion of certain philosophers.

And when Man ascends beyond even this degree, effaces from his thought all that is other than God, and, upon the feet of high aspiration, climbs the towering summits of the sanctuaries of Holiness (*shawāḥiq-i ḥazā'ir-i quds*), he attains realization

in the station of beholding Pure Quintessential Unity (*mushāhada-yi waḥdat-i širf*), and takes his place among the Proximated Angels (*malā'ika-yi muqarrabīn*)—nay, among the highest ranks of the celestial beings who stand wholly absorbed beneath the Divine Majesty (*a'ālī-yi muhayminīn*).

And yet, for all this, he is neither imprisoned nor confined within any single station. Rather, whatever station he wills may become the place where he sets down the baggage of his journey, and whatever degree he chooses may become the dwelling toward which he directs his course.

*My heart has grown receptive unto every form:
A meadow for gazelles, a monk's secluded dorm.
The faith of Love is mine; where'er its camels wend,
Love is my creed and faith; on Love my paths depend.*

It is for this reason that the doyens of the Sunnah and the Community (*Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*)—they who hold in their hands the reins of the Sacred Law—agree that the elect of mankind (*khawāṣṣ al-bashar*) are superior to the elect of angels (*khawāṣṣ al-malak*).

*If Adam's quality be truly thine,
Thou'lt win the angels' wager, line for line;
For Adam's children, fashioned though of sod,
Are dust where angels bow themselves to God.*

As for the ordinary of mankind (*'awāmm al-bashar*) in comparison with the ordinary of angelkind (*'awāmm al-malak*), however, they have differed. Some have accorded superiority to ordinary human beings, as is recorded in the well-known books of dialectic theology; while others have maintained the contrary. Yet there can be no doubt that the elect of angelkind are superior to the ordinary of mankind.

And from the Illustrious 'Alī عليه السلام—he who is the Gate unto the City of Knowledge, and whose gate is itself the refuge of all seekers after certainty; may God be pleased with him and ennoble his countenance—there is transmitted the following teaching:

“God—Exalted is He—gave unto the angel intellect (*al-‘aql*; *nous*; *xrad*) without concupiscence (*shahwah*; *epithymia*; *āz*) or irascibility (*ghaḍab*; *thymos*; *xēsm*); and unto the animal He gave concupiscence and irascibility without intellect; while unto Man He gave both.”⁸

Thus, if Man makes concupiscence and irascibility obedient and submissive to intellect, and thereby attains intellectual perfection (*kamāl ‘aqlī*; *teleiōsis tou nou*; *vohu manah*), his rank rises higher than that of the angel. For the angel encounters no adversary or impediment in the attainment of perfection—indeed, in this respect there is no such contest of choice for him—whereas Man wins his way to that degree through striving and diligence, even despite the presence of an opposing natural disposition. But if he allows the intellect to be vanquished by concupiscence and irascibility, he casts himself beneath the very rank of beasts. For beasts, through their lack of intellect—the faculty that might restrain concupiscence and irascibility—are excused in their deficiency; Man is not.

*How strange a compound Adam’s child is made—
Of angel substance and of beastly grade;
Bend beastward: lower than the beast he lies;
Aspire angelhood: beyond the angel flies.*

As for the debate reported from the philosophers concerning the preference of Man over the angel, the author of *Nomenclature of the Ṣūfīs (Iṣṭilāḥāt al-Ṣūfiyyah)* has offered an indication whereby that disagreement may be removed, and has shown a path by which the two parties may be reconciled. It is this:

Nobility (*sharaf*) is something other than perfection (*kamāl*).

⁸ Quoted in *Biḥār al-Anwār*, a Shī‘ī compendium of *aḥādīth* (see: *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 60, pg. 299). In Sunnī historical sources, the statement is reported not from ‘Alī عليه السلام, but Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, a Tābi‘ī, a counselor to the caliph ‘Umar عليه السلام, and arcanist of Biblical literature (See, for instance: al-Muṭaḥhar b. Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī’s *al-Baḍ’ wa al-Tārikh*, vol. 1, pg. 180-181). In both sources, the statement finishes, “So, if a person’s intellect overpowers his concupiscence, he is better than the angels; but if his concupiscence overpowers his intellect, he is eviler than beasts.” It should be noted that neither *Biḥār al-Anwār* nor *al-Baḍ’* include mention of irascibility, unless further variants exist which I have not observed. If such variants do not exist, we can assume Dawānī interpolated the mention of irascibility to complete the formalized trichotomy of the soul, whereas the original expressor might have included irascibility within concupiscence, anger being, from a certain respect, one form of concupiscent expression. It should also be noted that the Sunnī epistemic framework of historiography leaves no consideration for the Shī‘ī epistemic framework of historiography, for it deems the latter utterly unfounded. As such, the statement should be assumed to be that of Ka‘b عليه السلام until further corroboration may be found for its attribution to ‘Alī عليه السلام.

Nobility is measured by the nearness of a thing within the chain of existention (*silsilat al-ījād*) to the First Principle (*al-mabda'*; *archē*; *bun*), by the predominance of spirituality [read: immateriality], and by the purity and transcendence necessarily attendant upon it. Perfection, by contrast, arises through comprehensiveness (*jāmi'iyyah*): the gathering of many degrees and modes of existence within a single being.

Thus, although the angel—by reason of the paucity of intermediaries between himself and the First Principle, and by reason of the predominance within him of the conditions of divestiture (*tajarrud*; *asomatos*)—may be **nobler** (*ashraf*) than Man, Man, by virtue of his comprehensiveness and all-encompassing capacity, is more virtuous and **more perfect** (*afḍal wa akmal*).⁹

If, therefore, the words of each party be understood as referring to one of these two distinct considerations, disagreement is transformed into concord, contention passes away, and all reconciliation is from God Most High.

Illumination

The realization of Man's Divine Vicegerency depends upon two things.

1. The first is consummate wisdom (*al-ḥikmah al-bālighah*; *sophia*; *xrad*), by which is meant perfection in knowledge (*al-kamāl al-'ilmī*; *epignosis*; *dānāgīh*).
2. The second is excellent power (*al-qudrah al-fāḍilah*), by which is meant perfection in action (*al-kamāl al-'amalī*; *aretē*; *kirdār*).

This formulation, however, proceeds upon the supposition that wisdom (*ḥikmah*) is interpreted as knowledge of the states and conditions of existent things only, and praxis as lying outside wisdom.¹⁰ But if wisdom be defined instead as the actual attainment of whatever perfection is possible for a being, in respect to both

⁹ For the entire exposition, see: Nabil Safwat & 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī, *A Glossary of Sufi Technical Terms (Iṣṭilāḥāt al-Ṣūfiyyah)*, pg. 91.

¹⁰ In logic, any valid typology must be fully discrete between its parts: no two categories in a proper disjunctive typology may be inclusive of each other's referents to any respect. As such, to separate 'wisdom' from 'praxis', as the popular disjunction does, is, in effect, to exclude praxis from the gamut of wisdom.

knowledge and action, then there is no need for this latter qualification: Divine Vicegerency is attained through ‘wisdom’ alone, since action is already contained within it.

The latter interpretation is preferable, for it accords more closely with the original signification of the word. ‘Wisdom’, in its primary linguistic sense, denotes truthful speech and right conduct (cf. *Humata, Hūxta, Huvaršta* in Mazdean philosophy). Moreover, the explicit Divine Word, “Whosoever is granted Wisdom hath indeed been granted abundant good,”¹¹ is more fitting and becoming upon this interpretation.

Upon the former interpretation, an expression such as “Verily, Thou art the All-Knowing, the All-Wise (*al-Ḥakīm*),”¹² would amount to little more than the conjunction of two synonymous expressions. Yet there can be no doubt that to construe two expressions as establishing distinct meanings (*ta’sīs*) is preferable to construing the second as mere repetitive emphasis (*ta’kīd*).

Furthermore, the ancient philosophers’ definition of philosophy— “To become resembling of God, insofar as lies within man’s power” (*al-tashabbuh bi al-ilāh bi qadr al-imkān; homoiōsis theōi*)—likewise bears this second meaning. For resemblance with the Divine is not perfected through knowledge alone, without the imitation of Divine qualities in one’s character (*al-takhalluq bi akhlāq Allāh; imitatio Dei*); and it is established beyond doubt that Man does not reach the summit of perfection through knowledge bereft of action. Thus, it is related in a Prophetic tradition—upon its Speaker be the choicest blessings of all who invoke blessing, and the most perfect benedictions of the Lord of all worlds—“Knowledge without action is a burden of woe, and action without knowledge is error.”¹³ Likewise, the Refuge of Messengership—the choicest blessings and peace of God be upon him—sought refuge in God from knowledge divorced from action when he said, “O God, I seek refuge in Thee from knowledge that bringeth no benefit.”¹⁴

¹¹ Qur’ān 2:269

¹² Qur’ān 2:32

¹³ I could not find this *ḥadīth* in any primary or secondary source, whether as quotation of the Prophet ﷺ or some other historical figure.

¹⁴ *Sunan al-Nasā’ī, Musnad Aḥmad, & Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān*

Now, the knowledge (*al-‘ilm*; *epistēmē*; *dānāgīh*) spoken of in the definition of wisdom is not the mere memorization of currently circulated or celebrated aphorisms. Rather, what is intended is certitude in realities as they truly are (*al-tayaqqun bi al-maṭālib al-ḥaqīqiyyah*). Such certainty may be acquired:

1. Through rational inquiry and demonstration (*al-naẓar wa al-istidlāl*; *theōria* and *apodeixis*), according to the method of the people of rational inquiry (*ahl al-naẓar*), who are called the learned (*‘ulamā’*).
2. Or it may be attained by the path of purification and self-perfection (*taṣfiyah wa istikmāl*; *katharsis* and *teleiōsis*; *yaoḏdā* and *haurvatar*), according to the practice of the people of [spiritual] poverty (*ahl al-faqr*), who are called the gnostics (*‘urafā’*; *gnōstikos*) and the Boon Companions of God (*awliyā’*).

In truth, both parties are philosophers—both are possessors of wisdom (*ḥukamā’*). However, the second company indeed is the nobler and more exalted of the two, for they have attained the degree of perfection through pure Lordly bestowal (*mawhibah rabbāniyyah*), and thus they have taken precedence in the schoolhouse of “We taught him knowledge from Our Own Presence.”¹⁵ In their road the thorns of doubt (*ashwāk al-shukūk*) and the ravages of delusive imaginings (*ghawā’il al-awhām*) are fewer, and in this way they are nearer to the inheritance of the Prophets, who are the very elect of creation.

Even so, the furthest end of attainment the two roads return and meet at one head—“Unto Him returneth the affair, all of it”¹⁶—and between the true lords of realization of the two paths there is no disagreement whatsoever. Thus it is related that the Shaykh, the gnostic, the verifier, the subtle investigator, exemplar of the possessors of direct vision, the choicest among the eminent of mankind, Shaykh Abū Sa‘īd ibn Abī al-Khayr, once chanced to enjoy a period of companionship with the exemplar of the later philosophers, Shaykh Abū ‘Alī Ibn Sīnā—may God sanctify both their spirits.

When their meeting had ended, one of them said, “What he knows, we behold.”

¹⁵ Qur’ān 18:65

¹⁶ Qur’ān 11:123

And the other said, “What he beholds, we know.”

No true philosopher has ever denied this path. Rather, all of them have affirmed it. Thus, Aristotle says:

“These commonly circulated doctrines are like a ladder to the actual degree that is sought. Whosoever would attain that degree must acquire for himself another mode of vision.”¹⁷

And the Divine Plato is reported to have said:

“Thousands of questions have become realized for me concerning which I possess no demonstration.”¹⁸

And Shaykh Abū ‘Alī [Ibn Sīnā], in the *Stations of the Gnostics* (*Maqāmāt al-‘Ārifīn*), says:

“He who would love to know these things must advance gradually until he becomes one of the people of direct witness, not those who merely hear words face to face; one of those who have reached the very Quintessence of Truth, not who merely hear report of its trace.”¹⁹

Likewise, the Divine Sage, Shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn the Slain—the reviver of the traditions of the ancient philosophers—relates in his *Tabular Inscriptions* (*Talwīḥāt*):

“During a subtle rapture—that state which, in the terminology of this company, they call ‘absence’—I beheld Aristotle. I questioned him concerning several subtleties in the investigation of perception (*idrāk*), which is among the most abstruse problems of philosophy.

¹⁷ Likely a statement of Pseudo-Aristotle in *Aristotle’s Study of God* (*Uthūlūjiyā Aristātīs*), being really a combination of Plotinus’ *Enneads* and its Porphyran commentary. The closest equivalent to the abovementioned quotation I found in *Kitāb Uthūlūjiyā Aristātīs*, pgs. 5-6 (first Berlin edition). Similar sentiments may be found in *The Enneads* directly, for those who wish to go to *The Uthūlūjiyā*’s original source. For instance, Plotinus writes: “What is our course and what is our means of flight? We should not rely on our feet to get us there, for our feet just take us everywhere on earth, one place after another. Nor should you saddle up a horse or prepare some sea-going vessel. **You should put aside all such things and stop looking; just shut your eyes, and change your way of looking, and wake up. Everyone has this ability, but few use it.**” (See: Plotinus, *The Enneads*, Cambridge University Press, 2018; 101 (1.6.8))

¹⁸ I could not find an older primary or quotational source for this statement.

¹⁹ I have translated Dawānī’s quotation directly, but a parallel translation may be found in Shams Inati’s translation of the same work (technically a section of Ibn Sīnā’s larger *Pointers and Injunctions* (*al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbīhāt*)). See: Shams Inati & Ibn Sīnā, *Ibn Sīnā and Mysticism - Remarks and Admonitions: Part Four*, pg. 89.

Thereafter Aristotle began to praise his own master, Plato, and spoke with the greatest extravagance in his adulation.

I asked him, ‘Has anyone among the later philosophers attained his rank?’

He replied, ‘No, not by even one part in seventy thousand of his perfection.’

In response, I began to recount to him certain philosophers of Islam, but he paid regard to none of them, until I came to the mention of certain masters of epiphany and direct witness (*kashf wa shuhūd*)—such men as Shaykh Junayd al-Baghdādī, Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī, and Sahl ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Tustarī. There, he said, ‘Those! Those are the philosophers in truth!’²⁰

Yet upon this path there are many dangers and perils beyond numbering, for the promptings of obsession (*khaṭarāt-i wasāwis*), the precipices of passing fancies (*waraṭāt-i hawājis*), false insinuations (*taswīlāt-i bāṭilah*), and corrupt imaginings (*takhayyulāt-i fāsidad*) leave the traveller bewildered and wandering in the wilderness of the Quest. And the most ruinous corruption of all is that, at the first slight appearance of something—“*like a mirage upon a plain, which the thirsty man supposeth to be water*”—he ceases travelling and abandons the Quest altogether; “*until, when he cometh unto it, he findeth it to be naught.*”²¹ Then, when at last the true appearance of his condition is disclosed to him, nothing remains as the fruit of his journey save regret and ruin.

*The mirage lies afar—beware this waste,
Lest desert demons lure thee on in haste;
And with a phantom draught thy thirst beguile,
Till sand alone rewards the weary mile.*

And again:

²⁰ Summarized rendition (with a few alterations) of a longer narrative. See: Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī, *al-Talwīḥāt* in *Mawsū‘at Muṣannaḥāt al-Suhrawardī*, pgs. 84-88.

²¹ This passage and the previous one from Qur’ān 24:39

*My friends, the desert-crossers toward the Fold are rife;
But few indeed are masters who arrive.*

Moreover, the master of this path—namely, the perfect spiritual guide (*murshid kāmīl*)—is exceedingly rare. Even supposing that such a one exists, recognizing him is either impossible or desperately difficult, for none knows human perfection save one who himself possesses perfection, and none knows the price of a jewel save a jeweller.

*The Simurgh's secret and the Hoopoe's pain
Are known to only him who knows the birds' refrain.*

Most men, however, are turned from the road by gilded forms and outward appearances empty of reality.

*They rank the ruby with a worthless bead,
And pay red gold for blackened stone instead.*

Thus it may suddenly befall that a beginner, deceived by imposture and fraudulent display (*talbīs wa tadbīs*), spends the very coinage of his life in the service of an imperfect man, supposing him perfect. In turn, that impostor becomes the cause for the ruin of both his spiritual state and his worldly substance. We seek refuge in God from stupidity and misguidance. It is for this reason that most of the learned urge people toward the [first] path of rational inquiry (*ṭarīqat al-naẓar*).

And yet, even upon the path of purification (*ṭarīqat al-taṣfiyah*), there is an established need for this rational and learned discipline. For if the traveller is altogether devoid of formal learning (*al-ʿilm al-rasmī*), he cannot remain secure from the abyss of excess and deficiency, nor can he be assured of avoiding contradiction of the Sacred Law (*Sharīʿah*) and of wisdom (*Ḥikmah*). It may even happen that, through ignorance of the mean of equilibrium (*ḥadd al-iʿtidāl; mesotēs*), he subjects himself to excessive disciplines (*riyādāt mufriṭah*), which then bring about the corruption of his temperament (*fasād al-mizāj*) and the destruction of his very capacity for perfection (*buṭlān al-istiḍād*).

It is for this reason the Guide to the Straight Path for the Two Burdened Kinds—mankind and jinn—upon him and his House be the choicest greeting and

peace, declared, “Never hath God taken an ignorant man as one of His Boon Companions.”²² And, in another report, “Two men have broken my back (*qaṣama ṣahrī rajulān*):²³ an ignorant devotee and a learned libertine.”²⁴

An Insight

Since it has now become known that the realization of Divine Vicegerency—which is the very end for which Man was brought into existence—depends upon, and is bound to, knowledge and action (*al-‘ilm wa al-‘amal*), it follows that **the science which undertakes to establish the manner and prescribe the disciplines whereby these supreme forms of knowledge may be acquired must be the most important and the most beneficial of all sciences.**

That science is Practical Philosophy (*al-ḥikmah al-‘amaliyyah; praktikē philosophia; Huvarshṭa*), which the philosophers have called ‘therapeutics of the soul’ (*al-ṭibb al-rūḥānī; iatrikē psychēs*). For through knowledge of this science one may preserve in a perfected soul the equilibrium of character, just as medicine preserves health in the body; and by that same knowledge one may restore imperfect souls to equilibrium, just as bodily medicine repels disease from the body. Indeed, vicious dispositions (*malakāt radiyyah; kakia; akām manah*) are diseases of the soul.

To set forth the matter more fully: the nobility of every science derives:

1. Either from the eminence of its subject matter (*mawḍū‘; hypokeimenon*),
2. Or from the majesty of its end and benefit (*al-ghāyah wa al-manfa‘ah; telos and ōpheleia*),
3. Or from the certainty of its demonstration and proof (*al-burhān wa al-ḥujjah; apodeixis*).

²² A fabricated *ḥadīth* according to Sakhāwī (*al-Maqāṣid al-Ḥasanah*, vol. 4, pg. 393), Mullā ‘Alī al-Qārī (*al-Maṣnū‘*, pg. 156), and ‘Ajālūnī (*Kashf al-Khafā‘*, vol. 2, pg. 212). Nonetheless, Sakhāwī writes that its meaning is accurate to the spirit of the Sharī‘ah, even if not an exact prophetic statement. The full rendition of the statement reads, “Never hath God taken an ignorant man as one of His Boon Companions (*mā ittakhadha Allāh waliyyan jāhīlan*). And even if He took him unto Himself [as a friend], He would instruct him (*wa law ittakhadhū, la‘allamahū*).” A literary explanation for the statement may be found in Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī al-Makkī’s *al-Fatāwā al-Ḥadīthiyyah*, pg. 93.

²³ A rhetorical expression meaning, ‘to cause severe distress or pain, usually on account of some possessed quality.’

²⁴ More accurately a statement of ‘Alī عليه السلام. (See: Iṣfahānī, *al-Dharī‘ah*, 184; Ghazālī, *Mizān al-‘Amal*, 371-372)

This science (practical philosophy) enjoys an especial distinction in all three respects.

1. Its subject is the human rational soul (*al-naḥs al-nāṭiqah al-insāniyyah*; *psyche logike*; *xrad-gyān*), considered insofar as beautiful and praiseworthy actions, or vile and culpable ones, may issue from it through deliberation and will (*al-rawiyyah wa al-irādah*; *bouleusis* and *prohairesis*).

2. The nobility of the human soul has already become apparent from what preceded; the end of this science is nothing less than the perfection of so noble a substance. And what benefit could be greater than this: that by means of it the human soul, though it stand at the level of the beast (*bahīmī*) or the predatory brute (*sabuʿī*)—nay, even beneath them—may be raised unto a station higher than that of the angel? For this reason certain great masters have called this science the **Supreme Elixir** (*al-iksīr al-aʿẓam*; *xērion*; *spenta haoma*), for through it the basest among beings—namely, imperfect Man—may attain a rank wherein he becomes the noblest of all contingent beings. It was upon this principle that the ancient philosophers—they who had kindled the lamp of wisdom from the niche of the lights of Prophethood—first directed the seeker of virtue toward the science of the refinement of character (*tahdhīb al-akhlāq*; *paideia*). Only afterward did they direct him toward logic (*manṭiq*; *logikē*) or the mathematical sciences (*riyāḍiyyāt*; *mathēmatikē*); then toward natural philosophy (*ṭabīʿiyyāt*; *physikē*); and thereafter toward the Divine Science, metaphysics (*ilāhiyyāt*; *prōtē philosophia* or *theologia*).

The sage Abū ʿAlī Miskawayh, however, placed mathematics before logic—and this path is the nearer to the mark, for through continual exercise in mathematics the soul becomes habituated to certainty; a settled disposition of rectitude and intellectual firmness takes root within it; and it becomes its very habit to distinguish affectation from verification, and forced subtlety from true precision. *Au contraire*, most of those who busy themselves with logic while paying no heed to any branch of mathematics are characterized by precisely the opposite traits. They imagine perfection to consist in wrangling and disputation, and regard the utmost achievement of rigorous inquiry as nothing more than the production of some sophism or the invention of some doubt. Hence it was that Plato had written above the entrance of his house:

“Let no one ignorant of geometry enter our house.”²⁵

In sum, the precedence of ethical refinement over all other sciences is an established matter upon which there is agreement. The sage Hippocrates said:

“An unpurified body, whenever you nourish it, you increase only in evil.”²⁶

That is to say: a body which has not first been cleansed of corrupt humors (*akhlāt fāsīdah*; *chymoi*)—however much nourishment you it—increases thereby only in evil, and the morbid matter within it is multiplied. And herein lies a symbol: when the soul has not first been purified of culpable character traits (*al-akhlāq al-dhamīmah*; *kakiai*; *duš-huvaršt*), the acquisition of the philosophical sciences becomes for it only a cause of increasing corruption, for by means of them it acquires fresh material for arrogance and conceit, together with greater power to injure free and noble men and to engage in contentious disputation with the great scholars.

The truth is that most seekers of knowledge who straggle behind in the degrees of backwardness, error, iniquity, and moral dissolution do so only because they fail to act in accordance with the Divine command: “Enter ye the houses by their doors.”²⁷ They do not begin, at the beginning, by laboring to refine their character. So, when they hear it said that philosophy delivers a man from the bonds of imitation (*taqlīd*) and raises him to the degree of truth-borne verification (*taḥqīq*), yet do not understand the meaning of these words, they form the false notion that philosophy means the loosening of the bonds of the Sacred Law and emancipation from the ordinances of the religious dispensation (*nawāmīs al-millāh*; *hieros nomos*). Then, following the summons of caprice and the appetites of nature (*raghabāt al-ṭabīʿah*), before they have attained so much as the mere threshold of true realization, they strip themselves of

²⁵ *Ἀγεωμέτρητος μηδεὶς εἰσίστω* (Let no one ignorant of geometry enter): a motto said to hang over the door to Plato's Academy, first recorded (or, more accurately, alleged) by a fourth-century Sopatريان scholiast on Aelius Aristides' *In Defence of the Four Against Plato* (*Πρὸς Πλάτωνα ὑπὲρ τῶν τεττάρων*). See: Saffrey, H.D. (1968), ‘Agometrétos médeis eisitó. Une inscription légendaire’, *Revue des études grecques* 81, 67-87 (repr. in Saffrey [1990], 251-71).

²⁶ *Τὰ μὴ καθαρὰ τῶν σωμάτων, ὅκόσον ἂν θρέψῃς μᾶλλον, βλάπτεις*: Bodies that are not cleansed [of impurities], the more you nourish the more you harm. See: Hippocrates in Vol. IV: *Heraclitus on the Universe*; The Loeb Classical Library, pgs. 110 (Greek), 111 (English).

²⁷ Qurʿān 2:189

conformity to the disciplines of the Sacred Law—those very disciplines which are the adornment of the men who tread the road of seeking.

Casting away the bridle, shameless and unrestrained, they fall upon food and drink like cattle. And like beasts of prey they bare the fangs of their tongues, tearing at the honor of their peers and behaving insolently toward the predecessors and eminent masters—their spiritual fathers for whose labors gratitude is a debt incumbent upon the very aspiration of every seeker after perfection. As a result, they abandon even the simple faith of old women—that faith in whose accordance the apothegm “Simple-mindedness lies nearer to deliverance than cleverness maimed and incomplete,” may yet become the cause of a kind of salvation—and, without ever arriving at the reality of the affair, are left bewildered—“*like one whom demons have enticed into wandering upon the earth,*”²⁸—and wavering in confusion—“*fluctuating in the midst of it all, belonging neither to these nor those.*”²⁹

Among the bitterest consequences of this is that Wisdom itself—that sacred, Lordly leaven, that very fountainhead of the Water of Life, praised and extolled in so many places throughout the Scripture and the Sunnah—has, through the vileness of conduct displayed by these deficient pretenders, been exposed to the reproach of all. Of such men the hemistich speaks truly:

“A fair and noble name a handful stain.”

May God preserve us, and all the Muslims, from rebellion and from stumbling in intellect, in speech, and in action. *There is neither power nor strength save through God; and victory cometh from God alone.*

Lifting a Veil

It may be that a certain veil of doubt [read: objection] overspreads the sight of the seekers, thence withholding them from beholding the beauties of this celestial-born Ḥūrī, this bride of the bridal-chamber of rectitude. It therefore seemed incumbent to confront that doubt, and to strive to unveil and dispel it.

²⁸ Qur’ān 6:71

²⁹ Qur’ān 4:143

The statement of doubt is this: The benefit of this art can be realized only if one's moral character is capable of alteration and transformation [in the first place]; yet this premise is by no means self-evident. Indeed, the contrary is actually more forthcomingly presential to the mind and what comes rushing foremost to it. Furthermore, from the purport of some of his truth-borne expressions, God bless him and grant him peace—concerning whom it was revealed, “*Nor doth he speak from caprice,*”³⁰—one such [expression] being, “If ye hear that a mountain hath moved from its place, believe it; but if ye hear that a man hath departed from his character, believe it not, for surely he shall return unto that upon which he was fashioned,”³¹ it would seem, by way of hyperbolic exaggeration, that the removal of [one's present/original] character is altogether impossible.

According likewise to the principles of philosophy, moral character follows upon bodily temperament; and temperament itself admits of no transformation. Should someone deny that temperament cannot change, on the ground that the temperament of one and the same person differs at every age—nay, in every state and instance—we answer that every individual possesses a certain latitude of temperament (*‘ard al-mizāj*), extending between a determinate limit of deficiency and a determinate limit of excess in each of the four primary qualities (*al-kayfiyyāt al-arba‘*; *thermon, psychron, xēron, hygron*; *garm, sard, hušk, nam*). It is therefore possible that some particular character trait should remain inseparable from every degree within that whole latitude of temperament, so that the removal of that trait would entail the destruction of that person's individual temperament itself—and his continued existence without that temperament would be impossible. In such a case, striving to eradicate the trait would be sheer futility.

No washing can whiten the Æthiop's skin.

Hence it is related in the Prophetic tradition—upon him be the choicest blessings and salutations: “People are mines, as of mines of gold and silver: the best of you in the Age of Ignorance are the best of you in Islam, if they attain sapiential

³⁰ Qur’ān 53:03

³¹ *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 27539. Although the chain experiences a severance (*inqiṭā’*) between Zuhri and Abū al-Dardā’ عليه السلام, Sakhāwī says the *ḥadīth* retains enough corroborations so as to remain likely prophetic.

(See: Ali, Bilal. “Research on the Hadith on Moving Mountains and Changing Habits.” Bilal Ali, July 17, 2012. <https://bilalaliansari.com/2012/07/27/research-on-the-hadith-on-moving-mountains-and-changing-habits/>.)

understanding.”³² From this [canon] it would appear that the root of excellence lies in the purity of one’s native clay and the lucidity of the substance of one’s primordial constitution; and that where there is an intrinsic density and an original baseness, the attempt to perfect it would be like one who seeks, by [nothing but] polishing, to raise a piece of glass unto the rank of ruby and corundum, or by [nothing but] burnishing to bring iron unto the degree of silver and gold. Yet such a fancy is impossible.

*The jewel in Jamshīd’s cup is mined elsewhere;
Why seek from potters’ clay a gem so rare?*

Such, then, is the objection, set forth with some measure of detail.

To resolve it, we must first establish a fitting preliminary. Character is a settled quality of the soul by virtue of which an action proceeds from it with ease, without need of reflection or deliberation. A settled disposition is a quality firmly rooted in the soul; and it has been established in theoretical philosophy that when a psychic quality is swiftly passing, it is called a “state” (*ḥāl*; *diathesis*), whereas when it is slow to pass away, it is called a “propensity” (*malakah*; *hexis*). Now the cause whereby a character trait comes to exist in the soul may be one of two things:

1. The first is nature. Thus an individual’s temperament may, in his original constitution, be so disposed that he possesses a greater receptivity toward some particular quality, and as a result he assumes that quality upon the slightest occasion. A hot and dry temperament (*thermon kai xēron*; *garm ud hušk*) tends toward irascibility; a hot and moist temperament (*thermon kai hygron*; *garm ud nam*) toward concupiscence; a cold and moist temperament (*psychron kai hygron*; *sard ud nam*) toward forgetfulness; and a cold and dry temperament (*psychron kai xēron*; *sard ud hušk*) toward idiocy, as has been explained in detail in the books of philosophy and medicine.
2. The second cause is habit (*‘ādah*; *ethos*). This occurs when, at first, a man deliberately undertakes an action by choice; then, through repetition, continual practice, and exercise, he becomes so trained and accustomed to it that the action thereafter proceeds from him with ease and without deliberation. At that point it has become a natural ethic (*khuluq ṭabī‘ī*) for himself.

³² *Bukhārī & Muslim*

Some maintain that all character traits are natural—that is to say, they are necessitated by one's nature—and therefore cannot be removed, precisely as was expounded in the formulation of the objection above. Others maintain that some character traits arise from nature and cannot be removed, while others arise through habit and are capable of removal. A third group maintains that no character trait is either natural or contrary to nature. Rather, the soul in its primordial constitution is pure receptivity toward either of two contrary extremes: it may receive one with ease when that quality agrees with the temperament, or only with difficulty when it opposes the temperament.

Yet another group holds that mankind, in its original constitution, is fashioned upon goodness, but that through continual indulgence in concupiscence, continued exercise in base things (*mumārasat al-khasā'is*), and the neglect of one's nature, men acquire vicious propensities and thereby become evil. Certain among the ancient philosophers, however, have taken precisely the opposite view. They say that Man is created, in his original constitution, from the dross of nature; that the soul, though luminous in its own substance, is a light mingled with darkness; and that evil is therefore implanted in the very root of his native clay. He becomes receptive to good only through instruction and discipline, whereby the evil within him does not reach its utmost degree, and the dusky substance (*jawhar ḡulmānī*) [that is part and parcel of him] does not gain mastery over the luminous substance (*jawhar nūrānī*).

Galen, however, holds that some men are by nature disposed toward good, others toward evil, and still others receptive to either extreme.

In proof of his doctrine he argues thus: if every individual human being were good in his primordial constitution, and wickedness were something merely accidental, then the acquisition of evil would necessarily come either from oneself or from another. If from oneself, there must already exist within such a person some faculty productive of evil; and in that case he would not be [entirely] good by nature—which contradicts the hypothesis. And if both a faculty of good and a faculty of evil existed within him, while the evil faculty predominated, the same absurdity would follow. But if, on the second supposition, he acquired evil from another, the very same difficulty would arise concerning that other person; for that other would

have to be wicked by nature, and thus it could not be maintained that all men are naturally good.

The selfsame argument he applies, point for point, to refute the assertion that all men are wicked by nature. Thus, having rejected both these alternatives, he says:

“By plain sight and immediate observation I perceive that the nature of some men requires good, and they can in no wise be turned away from it; but these are few. The nature of others requires evil, and they will in no wise receive good; and these are many. The remainder stand midway between the two: through companionship with the good they become good, and through association with the wicked they become wicked.”³³

Such is Galen’s proof, in the form in which it is transmitted in the *Nasirean Ethics* (*Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*).³⁴

Yet to a discerning intelligence the weakness of this argument is not concealed. For according to the principles of the philosophers, individual human beings have no temporal beginning; and on that supposition it is perfectly possible that the occurrence of wickedness in every individual should derive from another, and so that onward without end, without ever terminating in an individual wicked in himself. For an infinite regress in matters of this kind is analogous to an infinite regress among preparatory causes (*mu’iddāt; proparaskeuē*), which in their view is neither impossible nor invalid, but actually occurs. And the same may be said of the second alternative: the occurrence of good in each individual may likewise derive from another, and so proceed indefinitely in the same manner.

Shaykh Abū ‘Alī [Ibn Sīnā], however, states in *The Cure* (*al-Shifā’*) that what is most plausible is this: the great deluges which occur at the times of the Great Conjunctions (*al-qirānāt al-‘uẓmā*) arise either through the coincidence of the two great celestial circles, or through their approaching coincidence—if such a thing does indeed occur—or through the displacement of apogee and perigee, or through other

³³ Likely from Galen’s now-lost *De Moribus* (*On Character*), a monograph on the nature of human disposition. Its contents survive, however, in summary within Ibn Miskawayh’s *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq*, which preserves quotations drawn from Ibn Miskawayh’s own reading of an authentic Arabic translation of Galen’s originally-Greek work. See: Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq* (Maṭba‘at al-Taraqqī bi Shāri‘ ‘Abd al-‘Azīz), pg. 26-27.

³⁴ See: Joep Lameer & Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *The Arabic Version of Ṭūsī’s Nasirean Ethics*, pg. 201-202.

causes of this kind. At such times, those regions of the earth which are fit for habitation and capable of serving as the dwelling places of breathing animals—namely, the tracts lying near the celestial equator (*mu‘addal al-nahār*) up to a certain latitude—become submerged beneath the waters. The earth is then divided into two portions: one drowned beneath the sea, and another exposed but unfit for habitation because of the extremity of its latitude. Upon this supposition animals and plants perish; and thereafter they come newly into existence by spontaneous generation (*tawallud*), not by sexual reproduction (*tawālud*).

There is no demonstration proving that the origination of those species through spontaneous generation is impossible. For in many species it is observed that they arise both through spontaneous generation and through reproduction: as, for example, serpents that are said to arise from human hair, scorpions from figs and basil, mice from earth or clay, and frogs from rain.

Nor does it follow that, merely because the origination of certain species through spontaneous generation has not occurred for exceedingly long periods, it must therefore never occur at all. For perhaps such generation depends upon some determinate celestial configuration which recurs only after vast stretches of years. Indeed, it is most plausible that universal events of this sort have repeatedly occurred in the world at immense intervals of time; and this would constitute a Great Resurrection (*al-qiyāmah al-‘uzmā*).

Nay more: since propagation and sexual reproduction depend upon voluntary motions, such as copulation, and voluntary acts are not necessary in themselves, it is unavoidable that one admit some form of spontaneous generation for mankind as well, lest the extinction of the species become necessary. For it is not necessary that offspring remain after every individual, nor even after any particular individual among us.

He then says that if one reflects upon the origins of crafts and technical arts, one will know that all of them are originated and that each arose through the insight of some determinate individual. The proof of their origination is that, day after day, they continue to increase. And their having originated indicates that, after interruptions and extinctions in the chain of reproduction, mankind must possess

some renewed beginning. For many of these arts are of such a kind that ordinary man could not subsist without them, unless he possessed some special celestial property or some Lordly inspiration lying outside the customary course of things. It follows, therefore, that the person who first invented any such art must himself have been independent of it for the preservation and ordering of his own life, and must have devised and originated it for the benefit of the other members of his species.

Thus far are the words of the Shaykh. And upon this account the position of Galen does indeed possess a certain plausibility. Yet even in this discourse the marks of merely persuasive reasoning are manifest, and ample room remains for disputation.

The later philosophers have adopted the position that no moral disposition is natural, nor is any contrary to nature. As for the first of these claims, their argument is that every moral disposition is capable of change, while nothing capable of change is natural; whence it follows that no moral disposition is natural.

The minor premise is established thus: by direct observation and manifest experience we see that men, through companionship and association with the wicked or the good, acquire vices and virtues. This becomes especially evident through attentive observation of the states of children—above all those who, having been taken into slavery, are carried from one land to another—for discipline and education exercise upon them an immense effect, and according to the measure of their receptivity they acquire moral dispositions either easily or with difficulty. Moreover, were moral dispositions incapable of removal, the faculty of discernment and deliberation would be without benefit; discipline and governance would be vain; and the nullity of revealed laws and religions would necessarily follow. As the sage Aristotle has said:

“The wicked become good through discipline and instruction.”³⁵

³⁵ Likely a summarized reference to Aristotle’s tangent in *Categories*, wherein he says, “For it is possible for the healthy to fall sick and for the white to become black and the hot cold; and it is possible to become bad instead of good or good instead of bad. For the bad man, if led into better ways of living and talking, would progress, if only a little, towards being better. And if he once made even a little progress it is clear that he might either change completely or make really great progress. For however slight the progress he made to begin with, he becomes ever more easily changed towards virtue, so that he is likely to make still more progress...” (See: Aristotle, “*Categories*” in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, 13a23–31.)

As for the proposition that nothing which is capable of removal can be natural, that is manifest. It is known of necessity that the nature of water cannot be altered in such wise that, once the impediments are removed, it should cease to incline downward; nor can the nature of fire be transformed into the contrary. And since this premise is self-evident, the examples are cited only by way of alerting attention [to it].³⁶

The above argument, in this form, is adduced in the *Nasirean Ethics*.³⁷ Yet a person practiced in the art of rational inquiry will know that this proof too is merely persuasive (*ilzāmī*) rather than demonstrative (*burhānī*). For an opponent may say: just as observation has established that certain moral dispositions undergo transformation, observation likewise establishes that certain dispositions, in certain persons, undergo no transformation whatsoever—especially the perfections of the theoretical faculty, such as intuitive apprehension, retentiveness, excellence of intellection, and the like. For we observe that some men, however greatly they strive to acquire these qualities, meet with no success. Indeed, such a condition may be witnessed among most of the students of our own age. How then, upon the strength of this argument alone, can it be judged that no moral disposition is natural and that all moral dispositions are capable of removal?

In sum, complete induction (*al-istiqrāʾ al-tāmm*; *epagōgē*) here is impossible, while incomplete induction yields no certainty. To claim that the premise is self-evident is to forge an unsubstantiated assertion (*taḥakkum*); and the claim that these examples have been mentioned only by way of alert is itself open to objection. Nor would the faculty of discernment be rendered useless, nor discipline and systems of governance cast aside, nor revealed laws rendered void, unless no moral disposition whatsoever were capable of removal. An analogous claim would be to say, “Were every disease not susceptible to treatment, the science of medicine would be invalid,” yet there can be no doubt of the falsity of such a statement.

The upshot, then, is this: the wicked, in some measure, become good through discipline and governance, just as Aristotle has said. And although this proposition does not hold absolutely and without exception, repeated discipline and governance

³⁶ See: Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifāʾ: al-Ṭabīʿiyyāt: al-Maʿādin wa al-Āthār al-ʿUlwiyyah*, (Cairo, 1965), pgs. 75–79.

³⁷ See: Joep Lameer & Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *The Arabic Version of Ṭūsī's Nasirean Ethics*, pgs. 201–202.

nevertheless produce some effect upon them. Even if evil is not altogether eradicated from them, its diminution at least is attained.

From this fact it becomes clear that, in establishing the benefit of this science, there is no need whatsoever to assert that all moral dispositions are capable of removal. It suffices that human beings possess, in some measure, a receptivity to the acquisition and alteration of moral qualities—just as the science of medicine retains its benefit notwithstanding that certain diseases, or certain persons, may fail to respond to treatment. Such failure, if it occurs, can belong only to rare dispositions in rare individuals, and even in these persons the benefit of this science remains manifest insofar as evil may at least be diminished. Thus, the invalidity of governance and/or of the moral duties imposed by the Sacred Law (*al-takālīf al-sharʿiyyah*) follows in no respect whatsoever. For if a particular treatment should prove ineffective against some disease, or in some individual patient, this does not constitute an objection against the science of medicine.

And if it be said: “Upon this supposition, the obligation imposed upon every individual to transform every blameworthy disposition cannot be consistently maintained; for perhaps some particular disposition, in the case of some particular person, is incapable of removal,”

We answer: Since its incapacity for removal is not known with certainty, both reason and revelation require that one strive to eradicate it. Furthermore, it would seem that there is an allusion to precisely this meaning in the truth-proclaiming words of the Master of mankind—upon him and upon his House be blessing, peace, salutation, and honor—where he صلى الله عليه وسلم said: “Act ye; for unto each is made easy that for which he was created.”³⁸

From these discussions it becomes apparent that the discourse of the philosophers in this discipline rests, in certain places, upon a degree of latitude and liberties taken (*musāmaḥah*).

³⁸ *Bukhārī & Muslim*

This matter shall later be inscribed by the pen of exposition in a manner more detailed than the present, together with an apology excusing the employment of such approximations.

All this is only if Allah hath willed, for with Him lies protection and providence.