

Common Thoughts of Socrates and Yusuf Khass Hajib on Wisdom and Virtue

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Summary

The concern for saving the State, science and politics, and laying the foundations of each one was expressed by both Socrates and Yusuf Khass Hajib; and the solution to this problem was found in universal and ethical values.

This study aims to put forward common thoughts of Socrates and Yusuf Khass Hajib on wisdom and virtue.

Key Words; Wisdom, Virtue, Ethical Values.

Introduction

Sociologist Zimmerman argues that the world witnessed four fundamental changes in the 20th century:

1. The reduction of distances and technological progress facilitated moral cultural imperialism.
2. Social classes and the change in the criteria for evaluating these classes led to attaching more importance to intellectuals and scientists.
3. The change in control and population regions.
4. The emergence of the psychology of admiration for past civilizations. This admiration was a radical change in mentalities (1,2). As the chef d'oeuvres presented to humanity by the West and the East were better known, the meta-culture identity of Turkish culture was better understood (1).

Kutadgu Bilig (Wisdom of Royal Glory) was written by Yusuf Khass Hajib (1018-1069) in the 11th century (This work was influenced by Turkish mythology, Turkish history and culture, ancient Turkish religion and Indian, Iranian and Chinese civilizations). There are four basic concepts in Kutadgu Bilig:

Yusuf informs us at the beginning of the work (lines 353-58) that it is based on four abstract princi-

ples, each of which is represented by one of the four major characters. These are as follows:

Name	Occupation	Principle
Rising Sun (Kün Toğdı, lit.“the sun has risen”)	King	Justice
Full Moon (Ay Toldı, lit.“the moon is full”)	vizier	Fortune
Highly Praised (Öğdülmiş. Lit.“praised”)	sage	Intellect (or Wisdom)
Wide Awake (Odgurmuş. Lit.“awakened”)	ascetic	Man’s Last End

Each concept is represented by a person and opinions on such issues as the State, politics, society, professions and ethics are expressed during the dialogues among these people (3,4).

Not the plot or form of the book but the content of dialogues determine the importance of Kutadgu Bilig.

This study aims to reveal common thoughts of Socrates and Yusuf Khass Hajib on wisdom and virtue.

Yusuf Khass Hajib (1018-1069) and Kutadgu Bilig

Yusuf Khass Hajib is the first author of Islamic Turkish Literature (whose work reached us). He was born in the early 11th century in Balasaghun, Turkistan.

This town was among a few civilized centers of the Karakhanid period. Yusuf Khass Hajib was a well-educated scientist, philosopher and artist who was aware of the importance of wisdom and who thought and wrote well. The center of the government of the Eastern Karakhanid State was Kashgar in 1069-1070. Yusuf started writing Kutadgu Bilig in Balasaghun and completed it in Kashgar after working for eighteen months on it and presented his work to Karakhanid Sultan, Tavghach Bughra Ebu Ali Hassan bin Soleman Arslan in 1070. Kutadgu Bilig is a didactic work written in Hakaniye Turkish. The intellectual Sultan of the period acclaimed this work and awarded Yusuf with the title of *Khass Hajib* (meaning 'top adviser'). Like the style of a classical Turkish poem, the work starts with words eulogizing *Allah* and *Mohammed*. It consists of 88 chapters and 6645 couplets (4).

Various opinions are expressed on the literal meaning of the title. According to some researchers, wisdom of happiness and according to some others, wisdom that brings happiness makes people reach happiness in both Earth and Heaven. This wisdom provides human beings with the mentality, knowledge and virtues required for ideally organizing the lives of the individual, community and State which are closely related to each other. "With this work Yusuf created a system of philosophy of life which analyzes the meaning of human life and determines the task of human beings within the community and within the State".

Today there are three known copies of Kutadgu Bilig:

1. The copy in Vienna: (in Uighur alphabet) It was found in Herat in 1439. It was taken to Tokat and then to Istanbul and was donated to National Library of Vienna by Hammer, who bought it from bouquinistes in Istanbul.
2. The copy in Cairo: (in Arabic alphabet) It was found out by the German Director of a library in Cairo, Dr Moritz, in 1896.
3. The copy in Fergana: (in Arabic alphabet) It was found by Zeki Velidi Togan in Nemengah, Fergana, Turkistan.

Turkish Language Association published all three copies in 1942-1943. It was translated in 1947 by

Reshit Rahmeti Arat with an annexed critical text and published in 1959, and its index was published in 1979. We used in this study the second edition of the translation of Arat and the English translation of Robert Dankoff published under the title of Wisdom of Royal Glory (Kutadgu Bilig) A Turco Islamic mirror for Princes. Our further studies will also be on these version (3,4).

Wisdom: In general wisdom is the product of the relationship between object and subject, resulting from the intentional tendency of the subject. It can be defined as being aware or conscious of something as well as a clear perception of something regarded as accuracy or a task (4).

Wisdom in Kutadgu Bilig

Kutadgu Bilig includes numerous concepts besides the four basic concepts we mentined at the beginning of this study.

Such concepts included in Kutadgu Bilig as *Biliglik* (being wise), *Kutululuk* (happiness), *Könilik* (rightness, justice), *Erdem* (virtue), *Edgü* (kindness, doing favor), *Asıglıg* (helpfulness), love, loyalty, generosity, bravery, patience and modesty are classified as ethically positive concepts whereas lying, hastiness, ignorance, meanness and greed are listed under the title of negative ethical concepts.

Yusuf Khass Hajib believes that our primary task for ourselves is seeking wisdom. Kutadgu Bilig includes the following statements on this consideration:

"Learn wisdom and earn the seat of honor." (K.B.line.6605)

"Wisdom is a mighty fortress. The heart and Tongue are fitting for notting without wisdom; with wisdom they fit everything, like water."(K.B.line.6606)

"However much wisdom you posses, still seek to gain more; for the wise man attains his desire by inquiry." (K. B. Line. 6607)

"Learn wisdom, and become a man by rising your soul aloft; otherwise be called "beast" and remove yourself from mankind." (K.B.Line.6611)

Yusuf Khass Hajib's abovementioned statements are of great importance since they reveal the significance of wisdom and wise men.

Since virtue is defined as the tendency to be always ethically good and engage in right actions, it is inevitable to regard virtue as a characteristic specific to human beings.

The statements in Kutadgu Bilig clearly express that wisdom makes individuals closer to perfection and guides the souls to make beneficial. This idea is parallel to Socrates expression: "Virtue is wisdom".

Socrates believes that each virtue is wisdom. An individual who is able to know what is good and right is virtuous, just and brave. The wisdom which makes an individual virtuous is the wisdom of the good (6,7). Socrates also employs good as synonymous with beautiful and useful. The acts that render life favorable and painless are beautiful, and every beautiful act is good and useful. Socrates believes that any act which does not serve for reaching a target is useless. Anything is beautiful and good because it is useful. People who are aware that there are better acts than the ones they do will never refrain from engaging in better acts. Philosophers have defined wisdom in various ways throughout the history of philosophy (8).

Wisdom is defined as follows in Kutadgu Bilig:

"Intellect is like a lamp in a dark night, while wisdom is light itself that has made you bright. (K.B. line. 288)

Wisdom is like alchemy: It Accumulates wealth which is stored in its place, the intellect. (K.B. line. 310)

Musk and Wisdom are of the same sort: Neither can be kept hidden (K.B. line. 311)

If you try to hide musk its scent gives it away, and if you conceal wisdom, it nevertheless continues to regulate your tongue (K.B. line. 312)

"Wisdom is a type of wealth that can not turn to poverty and can not fall prey to theft or fraud (K.B. line 313)

Besides these definitions, the following statements are also included in Kutadgu Bilig:

"There are numerous differences among men, but the main source of in quality is the degree of wisdom." (K.B. line. 201)

"Since the time that Adam descended to the world it has been men of intellect who instituted law, and in every age the highest position have always gone to the wise." (K.B. line. 220)

As a criterion, value always distinguishes between what is and what should be, and is always regarded as something positive or negative. In this expression from Kutadgu Bilig (KB. Line 201) wisdom is certainly regarded as a value.

The fact that a wise man will always have a special position in the society where he lives highlights the importance attached to a wise person.

The ethical values stated by Socrates are concepts which are universally good, acceptable, permanent, valid for all conditions and times, and which do not change according to particular events. Values such as modesty, helpfulness, rightness and justice, obedience to law are among the examples of universal values which are believed to be existing by Socrates (9-11). These values are also mentioned in Kutadgu Bilig and Yusuf Khass Hajib believes that they exist potentially in the inner world of human beings. The problem is to get them out to the real world. Thus, one will reach the right, the beautiful and the good. Socrates and Yusuf Khass Hajib expressed common thoughts on the ethical values mentioned above and how to reach them.

The following statements on wisdom quoted from Kutadgu Bilig reflect ancient Turkish tradition and the value attached to wisdom:

"Man's heart is like a bottomless sea and wisdom is the pearl that lies at the bottom." (K.B. line. 211)

"If fails to bring the pearl up out of the sea it could just as well be a pebble as a pearl." (K.B. line. 212)

Turkish people used to compare the mind of wise people with huge seas. It was a custom to say "his mind is like an ocean" while talking about a wise and well-educated person (12).

“As long as the wise man does not bring out wisdom upon his tongue, his wisdom may lie hidden for years and shed light.”(K.B.line.214)

A wise person is expected to use his wisdom for the benefit of the society. The formation of a healthy society is also important in the human model and concepts presented in Kutadgu Bilig. This is merely one of the universal values presented to all humanity by Kutadgu Bilig.

The below-mentioned statements are an evidence of the relationship between wisdom and the benefit provided by wisdom:

“The profit of wisdom is all good things with wisdom, as the proverb goes “he found the road to heaven”. (K.B. line. 208)

“Then speak all your words wisely, and know that wisdom alone makes men great.” (K.B.line.209)

Nobody would intentionally do something which is evil or which he knows to be evil. In fact it is against the nature of human beings to consider the evil superior to good.

Socrates is solely concerned with the following question: “How is the right life style?” he seeks for the conceptual truth only because of ethical concerns. Ethical self-development and science are the same. The universal truth to be found after researches will provide clarity and confidence on consciousness of ethics.

Ignorance categorized among negative ethical concepts in Kutadgu Bilig defined in various ways. Ignorance can be defined as not knowing or being totally or partially deprived of knowledge.

As the following statement suggests, ignorance is described as an illness:

“Wisdom proclaims its own meaning this: When a man knows wisdom, the illness is not treated the patient dies.”(K.B.line.156)

“An ignorant person is always ill. If the illness is not cured, the patient will die soon.”K.B.line.157)

This statement also reveals the concern stemming from ignorance.

“Go then, fool, seek remedy for your ills, and you, glorious sage, prescribe the foll’s remedy!”(K.B.line.158)

Socrates suggests that wisdom orientates people to right actions whereas ignorance orientates them to the wrong. Thus a person who knows himself will engage in acts which are beneficial for him while a person who does not know himself will engage in harmful acts (13,14). Wisdom is the source of our ethical actions and ignorance is at the basis of all wrong actions (15). Wisdom is considered the source of ethical actions in Kutadgu Bilig, as well.

The following selection from Kutadgu Bilig shows the similarity between the thought of Socrates and Yusuf Khass Hajib on wisdom:

“Know that wisdom and intellect are noble things and they ennoble the chosen servant (i.e.) man.”(K.B.line .152)

“Intellect is leading rein : If a man leads by it, he achieves his goal and enjoys countless desires.” (K.B.line.160)

“Through intellect a man rises in esteem and “wisdom he grows great”. (K.B. line. 289)

Socrates and Yusuf Khass Hajib

Having placed himself at the centre of philosophy, man who seeks how is and how should be his relationship with himself, universe and society, and who highlight the personal, social and ethical dimension of human life is involved in a world where many other people lead a life and social values prevail.

People adopt the ideals and values of society in which they live. During this social conditioning and socialization process nearly all people are voluntarily involved in the ideals of society and lead a life striving to meet the expectations of the society. This life is qualified as “an unquestioned life” by Socrates and “an unreal life” by existentialists in the 20th century (16).

While people are leading such a life, the life is not under their own control. It is led by an external control, which makes them unhappy. Providing the soul

with the necessary care means knowing or being aware of what makes us a human being, the spirit itself and what completes and realizes the nature of a human being.

At this point we have to remember another well-known aphorism of Socrates philosophy: "Know yourself". When a person is aware of his own nature, the motifs that motivate him, his capacity and abilities and the real objective of life, he will be able to reach the final objective - which is happiness - acting wisely and reasonably in accordance with this awareness (17,18).

Socrates draws an analogy between leading an ethical and happy life and various arts and crafts in order to express more clearly the relationship between happiness and wisdom. As mentioned in many resources, Socrates believes that living is also an art. If we want to lead a good and right life, we have to regard life as an art whose final objective is happiness. The ways suggested for reaching happiness -which is the objective of life- are virtues defined as perfection which makes up the personality of human beings.

Virtue is a value or a qualification which guides human beings to reach eudemonia where they fully realize their own nature, apply all their potentials to life and reach their perfection. Socrates believes that virtue - with its abovementioned definition - is equal to wisdom. "Virtue is wisdom" is an expression which he never gave up repeating.

If virtue is wisdom, what kind of wisdom is it?

It is clear that Socrates does not regard all wisdom as virtue. The wisdom which is a virtue leads people to self-realization and happiness. Wisdom which is virtue should be good, render us good and change our life into a good one.

According to Socrates, wisdom which makes people realize their own nature and help them reach happiness is the wisdom related to the good and the evil, and what is good and what is evil.

Wisdom which is virtue belongs to a person himself. The second way of defining virtue is equalizing it to knowledge or knowing.

People cannot know what is good and bad for them unless they know who they are, what they need, which capabilities they have and do not have.

The fundamental feature of Socratic ethical philosophy is to find out method or knowledge of how to achieve universal values. Socrates does not suggest universal ethical values as a task. He wants people to find out the good and the right applying this method to their life (19,20).

Sorokin's classification of cultures as materialist, ideational and idealistic (integral) is important. Sorokin states that materialist and ideational cultures are incomplete. Idealistic cultures provide the harmony between material and ideational values. Points of view and insufficiencies of cultures which are either materialist or ideational are not reflected in Kutadgu Bilig (5).

Since mythological ages, Turkish thought has been observed to embrace the reality of life and universe with an "integrating" approach. Matters such as God/sky/earth/humanity/State laid the foundations of our culture in a society without social classes composed of people of great character who were donated with strong ethical virtues. Thus the reality of "human" and "society" which is of great importance in Turkish culture displayed the need for the existence of a fair social order. The position of the State and people, their relationship and ethical concepts must be clarified in this social order. Kutadgu Bilig includes all these functions.

The thoughts of Maturidi (A.D. 862-944), Turkish religious scholar from Semerkant, had great influences on religious and ethical life of Turkish people. The value attached to customs and Imam Maturidi's thoughts on monotheism and ethics influenced Sufists and Turks. Yusuf Khass Hajib was affected by the system of Maturidi which explained and arranged principles of Islamic religion in a reasonable and scientific way. According to the theory of ethics, the good, the evil and the beautiful are comprehended by reason.

Ethical values of Maturidi are divided into two as the ones that do not change under any circumstance and the ones that change in accordance with conditions and situations. The way he explains ethical values leads us to think that he distinguishes between absolute and relative ethical values (19).

The absoluteness and relativity of ethical values is balanced in Kutadgu Bilig.

The Socratic understanding of ethics adopted by Maturidites is observed in Kutadgu Bilig as well (20).

Human beings owe much to philosophers; however, the humanity will reach happiness when everybody adopts universally accepted thoughts rather than personal ideas.

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