Journal of Philosophical Investigations
Print ISSN: 2251-7960 Online ISSN: 2423-4419
Homepage: https://philosophy.tabrizu.ac.ir

The *Dēnkard* VI: ‘Consequentialism’ and ‘Capitalism’ as Well as *Paymān* (The ancient Iranian ‘golden mean’)

Shirzad Peik Herfeh

Associate Professor of Philosophy Department, Imam Khomeini International University (IKIU), Iran. Email: shirzad.peik@hum.ikiu.ac.ir

Article Info

Article type:
Research Article

Article history:
Received 17 November 2023
Received in revised from 27 November 2023
Accepted 02 December 2023
Published online 29 January 2024

Keywords:
The *Dēnkard* VI, *Paymān*, consequentialism, the golden mean, capitalism.

ABSTRACT

Dēnkard (Acts of the religion), written in Pahlavi, is a summary of 10th-century knowledge of the Mazdean religion and is described by Jean de Menasce on the title page of his translation as a ‘Mazdean encyclopedia.’ The *Dēnkard* VI (Book VI of the *Dēnkard*) is representative of late antique and early medieval Zoroastrian ethical ideas. This article analyzes Book VI of the *Dēnkard* based on modern moral philosophy and introduces it as a candidate for early consequentialism and capitalism. The first generation of Iranian studies scholars in the late 19th and early 20th centuries such as Buch, Darmesteter, and Menant were aware of these concepts and even explained some of them, but the next generation did not take them seriously. This article also analyzes *paymān* (the ‘right measure’), that is the ancient Iranian ‘golden mean,’ in Book VI of the *Dēnkard* and shows the similarities and differences between *paymān* and the Aristotelian ‘golden mean.’ Probably, due to the biblical tradition in the interpretation of ancient religious texts or the anti-utilitarianism and anti-capitalism atmosphere in the second half of the 20th century, many scholars like Shaked inclined to the view that *paymān* is the main ethical principle of the *Dēnkard* VI and neglected its consequentialist and capitalist concepts.

Cite this article: Peik Herfeh, S. (2024). The *Dēnkard* VI: ‘Consequentialism’ and ‘Capitalism’ as Well as *Paymān* (The ancient Iranian ‘golden mean’). *Journal of Philosophical Investigations*, 17(45), 250-266. https://doi.org/10.22034/jpiut.2023.59245.3636

Publisher: University of Tabriz.
https://doi.org/10.22034/jpiut.2023.59245.3636

Introduction

In his *Utilitarianism*, Scarre (Scarre, 1996, 27) says the early Chinese philosopher Mo-Tzu succeeded "in presenting a subtle, well-rounded and humane philosophical position which it is not anachronistic to call 'utilitarian.'" He (Scarre, 1996, 28; 31) claims that Mo-Tzu has already answered two main modern objections against utilitarianism: that a. it is too demanding, and b. it is worthy only of swine. Following Scarre, Driver (Driver, 2012, 6) also introduces Mo-Tzu as a 'candidate for early consequentialist.' She says,

> Like the later utilitarians, Bentham and Mill, Mo-Tzu seemed motivated to promote social reform. His view that universal benevolence is what is needed to morally improve the world is echoed by Francis Hutcheson's views that virtue, at its root, is benevolence (Driver, 2012, 6-7).

Then, she (Driver, 2012, 7) laments that little work has been done on Mo-Tzu and his probable influence: "Unfortunately, little work has been done on this interesting figure and what his influence might have been in the history of ethical theory."

The main fact for their claim is the doctrine of 'universal love' (*chien ai*) in Mo-Tzu's ideas:

> If everyone in the world will love universally; states not attacking one another; houses not disturbing one another; thieves and robbers becoming extinct; emperors and ministers, fathers and sons, all being affectionate and filial-if all this comes to pass the world will be orderly (Motse, 1929, 80).

When nobody in the world loves any other, naturally the strong will overpower the weak, the many will oppress the few, the wealthy will mock the poor, those honored will disdain the humble, the cunning will deceive the simple. Therefore, all the calamities, strife, complaints, and hatred in the world have arisen out of want of universal love. Therefore, humanists disapprove of this want (Motse, 1929, 83).

Scarre and Driver project modern ideas onto older concepts and writings. If we do so we can show more textual and historical evidence to introduce the late antique and early medieval Zoroastrian ethical ideas reflected by the *Dēnkard* VI as another candidate for early consequentialism and capitalism. There is so much evidence in late antique and early medieval Zoroastrian texts, but only a few books, including *Zoroastrian ethics* (Buch, 1919), have been written on it and what its influence might have been in the history of ethical theory.

The change of language from Pahlavi to Farsi in Iran made a big chasm. Zoroastrian books were mostly written either in Avestan[1] or in Pahlavi. So, Iranian scholars could rarely read them after that change. However, Medieval and modern Zoroastrian scholars/theologians (*herbeds*) and

[1] In the Avestan language the only book is *Avesta*.

priests (*mobeds*) (magi) in Iran and India have been able to read Avestan and Pahlavi and continued to write commentaries even after the language in Iran developed from Middle Persian/Pahlavi into its recent forms of Classical and Modern Persian/Farsi. Pahlavi literature was written in the ninth-tenth century, and Zoroastrian priests were still able to read and use this language. Later, yet in the eleventh-twelfth century, Pahlavi script was not perfectly understood. Zoroastrians, mostly in India, started to transcribe Pahlavi texts in Avestan script (*pazand*) and later in Persian script (Parsi). The school of Neryosang Daval is one of the most known. In addition, in the first five centuries after Islam, some Iranian philosophers, such as Meskawayh (d. 1030) and Suhrawardi (1154–1191), still quoted to Avestan and Pahlavi texts and Zoroastrian ideas. Meskawayh, who was an Iranian Islamic moral philosopher, wrote a book entitled *Jāvidān k̲erad in which he translated some Pahlavi ethical texts including the andarz of* Ādurbād son of Mahraspand.

The Middle and New Persian term *andarz* is most often applied to remarks made by a prominent person, such as a king or a high priest, to his son, his courtiers, 'people of the world,' etc., and commonly indicates a spiritual testament. It sometimes overlaps in usage with the Middle Persian term *frahang*, the proper meaning of which is 'education, upbringing,' but which also denotes, by extension, 'civilized behavior' and 'chastisement.' The term *andarz* also has an area of affinity with Middle Persian *ēwēn* 'protocol, accepted and binding custom,' especially as applied at the royal court. As a literary designation, the term *andarz* denotes the type of literature which contains advice and injunctions for proper behavior, whether in matters of state, everyday life, or religion. In a wider sense it may be applied to the whole range of wisdom literature, i.e., literature which presents instructive material in an attractive style making it accessible to those without specialized education (Shaked, 2012).

Later, thanks to the Iranian studies scholars in the recent centuries, many ethical and religious Pahlavi texts and *andarz* works such as *Dēnkard*, *The book of Arda Viraf* (that was an eschatological book), *Wāzagēčand ī Ādurbād ī Mahraspandān (The andarz of* Ādurbād son of Mahraspand), *Čīdagandarzī pōryōtkēšān* (that is also known by the title *Pand-nāmag ī Zardušt), Andarz ī Ošnarī dānāg*, The *andarz* of Wehzād [ī] Farroxpērōz, *Andarz ī Xusraw ī Kawādān ud rēdag-ē* (The a*ndarz* of K̲osrow son of Kavād and the page), and *Draxt asūrīg* (*The Babylonian tree*), have gradually been translated into Farsi, English, German, and French, but there is still much to be done.

1. The Dēnkard VI

Dēnkard (lit., 'Acts of the religion'), written in Pahlavi, is a summary of 10th-century knowledge of Zoroastrian or the Mazdean religion and is described by Jean de Menasce on the title page of his translation as a 'Mazdean [Zoroastrian] encyclopedia.' According to Menasce, the first author of *Dēnkard*, Ādurfarnbag ī Farroxzādān who transmitted it to his son Zardošt, may have been a contemporary of the caliph al-Maʾmūn (198-218/813-33), but the final redaction that was edited

by Ādurbād Ēmēdān dates from the 10th century (Gignoux, 2011).[1] However, in the beginning of many paragraphs, there are two sentences that show the author recites what he has heard from ancient Zoroastrian priests. These two sentences are "they considered this too" and "this too is thus." In addition, as Gignoux (Gignoux, 2011) says "the compiler, who is named in the last chapter of Book III, is said to have had information from the 'ancient sages,' the *pōryōtkēšān*, clearly of the Sasanian period." The *Dēnkard* was the product of a Persian milieu already largely islamicized and was thus intended both as a reply to Muslim attacks upon dualism and as a compendium of what could be saved of the scriptures. It is a compilation of preserved materials, no doubt carried out under the direction of an official master. The original *Dēnkard* must have consisted of basic texts specifically related to *Avesta*, along with glosses or commentaries on them (e.g., the *Zand*), the whole constituting what was called *dēn* 'religion.' The *Dēnkard* is primarily an apology for Mazdaism. More specifically, Books III-V are devoted to rational apologetics, Book VI to moral wisdom, and Books VII-IX to exegetical theology (Gignoux, 2011).

Book VI of the *Dēnkard* is a collection of *andarz*, a literary genre with antecedents in late Avestan literature, known through extracts from *Bariš nask*. It is a book of practical wisdom said to have been inherited from the ancient sages (Gignoux, 2011). Shaked (Shaked, 2012) distinguishes two groups of aphorisms, respectively religious and profane in character. Those of the *Dēnkard* VI are clearly of a more intellectual type than those in smaller, more popular collections, like the *andarz* attributed to Ādurbād ī Mahrspandān or the more clearly narrative texts that belong to the same literary genre (e.g., *Xusrō ī Kawādān ud rēdag-ē* and *Draxt (ī) āsūrīg*). Book VI is in fact a compilation, grouped into large sections distinguished from one another by their initial formulas (Gignoux, 2011). Shaked (Shaked, 1979, xvii) says within the fairly large group of *andarz* books of religious character, the *Dēnkard* VI forms quite clearly a category by itself. All other *andarz* compositions, whether religious or secular, can be said to possess popular character. They are all meant for instruction on a fairly elementary level, whether for young people or for adults. The *Dēnkard* VI, in contrast, is evidently addressed to an audience on a higher intellectual level. It contains many sayings of a sophisticated nature, based on allusions which contain literary associations or puns, sometimes hard for us to understand, and it also contains a small number of quite obscure hints which seem to possess some esoteric significance.

He (Shaked, 1979, xx-xxii) has divided the *Dēnkard* VI into six parts. The first, from the beginning to A6d, is devoted to religious subjects, with emphasis on personal piety and devotion to the gods. In the second, from B1 to B47, the creations of *Ohrmazd* and *Ahriman*, the two wisdoms, and proportion (*paymān*) and excess (*frēhbūdīh*) are contrasted; the probable source was the ethical principles of Aristotle. The third, from B48 to C47, is related to the second, in that it is

[1] The only nearly complete manuscript, known as 'manuscript B,' is now in the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute in Bombay; it is dated 1659 (Gignoux, 2011).

devoted to the array of human qualities treated in a more practical manner. The fourth part, C48 to C83, deals with clusters of different qualities or activities, and the fifth, D1 to D12, includes the names of authors and morally edifying anecdotes. The last part, E1 to E45, is a conglomeration of aphorisms on various religious themes.

Shaked (Shaked, 2012) says that "the concept of 'right measure' (*paymān*) is central in *andarz* texts, as well as in a group of texts in the third book of the *Dēnkard* which deals systematically with questions of moral behavior." *Paymān*, that is very close to the Aristotelian 'golden mean,' "is the middle way, standing between the extremes of character, which are to be condemned" (Shaked, 2012). In the first part of the *Dēnkard* VI, "sin is defined as excess or deficiency, good works as keeping the right measure" (§38) and "religion is the (right) measure" (§39). Shaked (Shaked, 1979, xl) says that "the idea is repeated several times in this and in other books in Pahlavi." We can also find the same concept in B14 of the sixth book of the *Dēnkard*. Shaked (Shaked, 2012) believes that *paymān* is presented as a 'purely Iranian' concept, and "it has old Iranian roots, e.g., in the classification of qualities of character not only as good or bad, or as extreme or moderate, but also as forward-inclined (*frāz--āhangīg*) and backward-inclined (*abāz-āhangīg*)." Although Menasce and Zaehner would associate *paymān* with Greek thought, Shaked believes that "it is considered in the Sasanian texts to be a typically Iranian idea," and he quotes the following sentences from the *Dēnkard*:

> Iran has always praised the measure and criticized excess and deficiency. In Byzantium the philosophers have been mostly praised, in India the knowers, in other places the cognizant have been mostly praised those from whom skill of speech is manifest. The kingdom of Iran has approved of people with insight (Shaked, 1979, xl).

However, probably, due to the biblical tradition in the interpretation of ancient religious texts or the anti-utilitarianism and anti-capitalism atmosphere in the second half of the 20th century, many scholars of Iranian studies in this era inclined to the view that the 'right measure' (*paymān*), is the main ethical principle of the *Dēnkard* VI, and neglected its consequentialist, utilitarian, hedonistic, and capitalist concepts. The *Dēnkard* VI clearly uses 'golden mean' in ethical evaluation of actions and characters but:

1. Contrary to Aristotle, in the *Dēnkard* VI the 'Golden Mean' is not fixed, but flexible. It changes based on the agent's personality, the faculties of his character and soul, and state of affairs in society. This claim is not new and Shaked has already described it both in his entry entitled *andarz* in *Encyclopædia Iranica* (Shaked, 2012) and in the introduction of his translation of the *Dēnkard* VI (Shaked, 1979, xxi-xxii; xl).

2. The *Dēnkard* VI has consequentialist, utilitarian, hedonistic, and capitalist concepts that *paymān*-based interpretations do not explain. The first generation of Iranian studies scholars in the

late 19th and early 20th centuries were aware of these concepts and even explained some of them, but the next generation did not take them seriously.

2. Consequentialism

Consequentialism is the view that the moral quality of an action is determined by its effects. It used to be called utilitarianism but after the criticisms to utilitarianism and the answers of its defenders, they preferred to call it consequentialism. In this research, consequentialism in Zoroastrian ethics is an ethical view that holds that effects are morally relevant not the view that holds that effects are decisive and all that is morally relevant.

Concerned predominantly with the practical morality, Zoroastrianism is known to the first generation of Iranian studies, like Buch (Buch, 1919, 56), as an ethical religion. Contrary to the contemporary generation of Iranian studies, he categorized Zoroastrian ethics as a very early version of consequentialism or utilitarianism and he even used the same word for it:

> The utilitarian genius of the Iranians instinctively avoided all attempts to adumbrate pure abstractions and thus evolved a view which is essentially practical (Buch, 1919, 56).

Zoroastrian ethics is based on Zoroastrian 'dualistic' ontology, metaphysics, and theology in which Ahura Mazdā is the 'Principle or Spirit of the Good' and Ahriman is the 'Principle or Spirit of the Evil':

> He who is the best (of all) Ahura Mazdā, pronounced the Ahuna-vairya, and as He pronounced it as the best, so He caused it to have its effect, (He, ever) the same, (as He is). The evil one at once arose (to oppose Him), but He (Ahura) repelled that wicked one with His interdict, and with this repelling renunciation: Neither our minds are in harmony, nor our precepts, nor our comprehensions, nor our beliefs, nor our words, nor our actions, nor our consciences, nor our souls (*Yasna*, ch. 19, §17)!

These two Principles or Spirits have their own forces and there is fierce combat between the two sides. The triumph of the 'Good' over the 'Evil' in this opposition will result in *aša* in the world. "The word is attested in Old Persian as *ạrta*" (Schlerath & Skjærvø, 2011) and it is close to the Greek *arête* in meaning:

> Under the dominating influence of the idea, the whole world-order is to be kept in its purest state, all its better elements advanced towards their promised realization and its worst elements gradually made to disappear. This is then the broad meaning of *aša* (Buch, 1919, 63).

The realization of *aša* in the world is subject to the enjoyment of *aša* and 'good thoughts, good words, and good deeds' by humans. Humans should help Ahura Mazdā to come over Ahriman and this is where Zoroastrian ethics begins. The contrast between 'Good' and 'Evil' in the world exists in the human too and he should act based on *aša* to help Ahura Mazdā to realize *aša* in the world. Three things in the human should have the best *aša*: thoughts, words, and deeds.

> I praise good thoughts, good words, and good deeds and those that are to be thought, spoken, and done. I do accept all good thoughts, good words, and good deeds. I do renounce all evil thoughts, evil words, and evil deeds (*Yasna*, Intro., §4).

Analyzing the criterion of the 'good' in Zoroastrian ethics, we can find its 'consequentialist' and 'utilitarian' characteristics. 'Good' is related to the 'vital forces,' and 'evil' is related to the 'forces of death,' and "the duty of man consists in enlisting himself on the side of the good, by furthering to the best of his ability all the vital forces and retarding all the forces of death" (Buch, 1919, 60). This is the very interpretation of Zoroastrian ethics by the first generation of Iranian studies scholars such as Darmesteter and Menant. On February 2, 1857, in his lecture in Mumbai entitled 'Parsi religion and Parsis in history,' Darmesteter put forward this interpretation of Zoroastrian ethics. Parsis are Zoroastrians who immigrated to India and their descendants. Menant (Menant, 1917, 647-648) has quoted parts of this lecture in his entry entitled 'Parsis':

> The Zoroastrian religion was a religion of life in the noblest sense of the word; it brought two things of which the old Aryan religions in the midst of which it arose had no idea or only a dim perception; those two things were morality and hope; so that the Zoroastrian faith not only gives its follower a moral rule through life; not only directs his heart, his tongue, his hand, teaching him *good thought, good word, good deed*; but it tells him that the good will prevail at last if he does his duty; that a son of the prophet, Saoshyant, will come and open the eternal reign of Ormazd and exterminate the evil from the world. The poorest, the meanest Zoroastrian in the world knows that he is born a soldier of Saoshyant and that Ormazd will conquer through him (*Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. 9).

The *Dēnkard* VI reflects late antique and early medieval Zoroastrian ideas, not those of the Parsis (or Zoroastrians who immigrated to India and their descendants). However, Darmesteter's interpretation of Zoroastrian religion as 'a religion of life' helps us understand this unknown or forgotten feature of it. Buch (Buch, 1919, 63-64) also insists in this feature of Zoroastrian ethics among Parsis: "The main idea of the Parsi ethics is the fullest realization of the vital forces and the consequent disappearance of the opposite tendencies." We can see this kind of consequentialism in the final answer of a Zoroastrian priest to a series of questions. He says humans can evaluate

their actions based on their 'consequences and 'utility' and every action, but polluting water and fire, that leads to the 'greatest good' is 'permissible.' In definition of 'truth,' that is one of the best acts in Zoroastrianism, the *Dēnkard* VI says "Truth is best which if one among the creatures of God should perform, then that one who acts up to it should be so much the more benefited according as one follows it out" (§23). According to the *Dēnkard* VI, "in (any) work that might present itself, one should view one's highest employment. And whoever would not recognize this to be the highest employment should (at least) so regard (all) work of lovingness" (§46).

The ethical advice of the third part of the *Dēnkard* VI (B48-B53 & C1-C47) is clearly consequentialist too. In this part, we see the word 'for' immediately after each advice explaining its good consequences:

1. This too is thus: One should not gain property by means of sin and carry it home, for even that which is done and which is at home will be destroyed to a man who makes property out of sin and who takes it home (C1).
2. This too is thus: One should say as much as one knows, for he who says more than he knows gains less faith from people even in matters he knows (C2).
3. This too is thus: Having drunk wine, one should not engage in destructions and strife (?), for anger and conflict always issue from a man who, having drunk wine, engages in destructions and strife (?) (C3).
4. This too is thus: One should not keep a scoffer close to oneself and accepts words from him, for he always casts doubt on people for a virtue which they lack, and his power is reduced, who keeps a scoffer close to himself and who accepts words from him (C4).
5. This too thus: One ought not to consider oneself as (having) more goodness and virtue than one possesses, for that man is himself afflicted with pain, and is cantankerous with good people, who considers himself as (having) more goodness and virtue than he has (C5).
6. This too is thus: One should regard the good things of the good as one's own and rejoice in them, for people always suspect him of envy and of hostility to the good who does not regard the good things of the good as his own and who does not reject in them (C6).
7. This too is thus: One should not be intoxicated by authority and power, for the good always turn against him, and more harm and misfortune come to him who is intoxicated by authority and power (C7).
8. This too is thus: One should not be disobedient and confident with regard to a lord and a man of authority, for he always comes to chastisement and punishment who is disobedient and confident with regard to a lord and a man of authority (C8).

9. This too is thus: One should not have evil sorrow (?) and upset mind (?) in deception (?) and distress (?), for he is less aware of a remedy for that which has come, and more misfortune come to him over afresh, who entertains evil sorrow (?) and upset mind (?) in deception (?) and distress (?) (C9).
10. This too is thus: One should not experience pain and grief over a thing has not come, for he lives constantly in pain and apprehension who experiences pain and grief over a thing which has not come (C10).

3. Hedonism

Pahlavi ethical texts, like the *Dēnkard* VI, emphasize that human should keep his body in joy and withhold from bodily disorder, pain, and suffering and believe those who allow them in their bodies can hardly perform good acts:

> They considered this, too, thus: namely one should keep the body in joy, and hold back the hands from sin; since when the body (is) in joy, Vohuman then lodges (*mâhmân*, lit. "is a guest") in the body. When Vohuman (is) a guest in the body, (it is) then difficult to commit a sin, and (there is) much witholdment from (bodily) disorder. Because whoso allows disorder in the body, then Akoman enters into (his) body; and into whosoever's body Akoman enters, then it is difficult to perform the acts of integrity (§193).

Similar to Zoroastrian dualistic ontology, Zoroastrian ethics is a dualistic moral theory on one side of that there are the Good, pleasure, and happiness, and on the other side there are the Evil, pain, and suffering. This is what Lehmann calls the 'Persian genius for utilitarianism:'

> The Persian genius for utilitarianism and things practical always enters into the scheme of righteousness and justice. In the individual life, this ethic appreciated industry, self-control, and veracity; in social life, righteousness, regularity, and social accord. The reverse of this ethic is an abstract stiffness that will not accommodate itself to life and whose irrational consequences are often inimical to life (Lehmann, 1912, 515).

We can clearly see this 'hedonistic utilitarian consequentialism' in 'Pahlavi texts' and 'ancient Iranian *andarz*;' esp. in the *Dēnkard* VI in which the 'utility of the consequences' is prima facie, if not decisive, criterion for evaluating the actions.

The *Dēnkard* VI recognizes 'happiness' as the main element of 'religion:' "religion is that which creates happiness unto every creature" (§36). Contrary to many ancient texts, the *Dēnkard* VI (§191, §193, §208) does not neglect the 'pleasure.' It evaluates actions based on the pleasure they bring about. So, similar to Jeremy Bentham's moral theory, its utilitarianism or consequentialism

is 'hedonistic.' Bentham introduces seven 'quantitative parameters' to evaluate actions, including, but not limited to, 'fecundity' and 'purity.' 'Fecundity' means how likely one pleasure is to lead to further pleasures or pains and 'purity' means how much intermixture there is with the other sensation. The *Dēnkard* VI also evaluates pleasure based on these two parameters: "They considered this, too, thus: namely, the propitiation of the good spirits (is) the delight of him for whom there is no harm in the end" (§191). Like pleasure, happiness is also a criterion for evaluating the consequences of actions in the *Dēnkard* VI:

> They considered this, too, thus namely, one should make this body a (barren) plain, and not a peak. The water which rains on a plain entirely remains in (it), and that which rains on a peak and on other (altitudes) which are higher, entirely passes down from them; what does not rain on (the top) does not then reach it (viz., the plain) first. They said this regarding *gaôbar*: (it implies) much friendliness, (that is) to keep to oneself the surplus of wealth which is necessary for others (in their need, and) to be satisfied thereby. They said this regarding *chikât*: (it implies) much hostility, (that is) to keep the surplus (of wealth) to oneself (for personal use, as being) not needed by others, (and) to be distressed thereby (§208).

Body, as all the material creation, can be created only by Ohrmazd, and Material is positive. In addition, joy and health of the body is absolutely important in the Zoroastrian daily battle against Evil. To stress the idea that pleasure is an important feeling in Zoroastrian religion we can also quote some passages in *Bundahišn* 14 and 34. However, is it enough some passages in the *Dēnkard* VI, *Bundahišn* 14 and 34, etc. to claim that 'happiness' is the main element of Zoroastrian religion, let alone to define it as hedonism? I know bringing scant evidence taken from an entire book to claim such a concept for a very complex and articulated religion is difficult. However, there is at least scant evidence indicating that there were hedonistic concepts that we cannot neglect in an ancient religion like Zoroastrianism.

4. Global Consequentialism

The theories of 'normative ethics were 'character-based' in ancient Greece, but they gradually became 'action-based' after Hume. At this time, 'moral philosophy' came closer to 'law' because many moral philosophers wanted to use it for social reforms. They had to issue new rules that led to social reform. Those rules had to be based on the agent's action (not character) because some parts of an individual's character are hidden to him, let alone to the judge and the court. Utilitarianism was the first action-based moral theory in this transition era.

In 1973, Bernard Williams (Williams, 1973, 150), wrote a book against utilitarianism in which he criticized its 'simple-mindedness:' "The demands of political reality and the complexities of political thought are obstinately what they are, and in face of them the simple-mindedness of

utilitarianism disqualifies it totally." Williams predicted "the day cannot be too far off in which we hear no more of it." Moral philosophers took his critique seriously and that may be why his prediction did not come true:

> Bernard Williams echoed a view popular to many in the 1980s when he wrote in his famous exchange with J. J. C. Smart that "the simple-mindedness of utilitarianism disqualifies it totally." What did Williams mean by simple-minded? This criticism is actually multi-faceted. Williams was making a point, often echoed by later virtue ethicists, that insofar as the theory focuses on right action, it is ignoring a great deal of the nuance of moral evaluation (Driver, 2012, 145).

Some contemporary consequentialists like Pettit and Smith (Pettit & Smith, 2000, 121-133) and Driver (Driver, 2012, 145-153) tried to modify utilitarianism in a way that it can resist William's critique. They called this new utilitarianism 'global consequentialism:'

> Global consequentialism does not privilege any evaluand. The right rule to use is the rule that itself produces more value, and so forth with actions, motives, desires. Note that global consequentialism is quite distinct from indirect forms of consequentialism that focus on, for example, rules, and then define right action or right motive relative to the right rules. The standard version of rule-utilitarianism, for example, is incompatible with global consequentialism since it privileges, still, act evaluation though the act evaluation is understood relative to rules. For global consequentialism, rather, the right motive, or motive set; the right desire; the right intention; the right rule; the right action is all on an evaluative par. This allows for a very rich evaluative landscape. The form I would like to argue for is the more general form: (GG) The *moral quality* of *x* is determined solely by the consequences of *x*, where *x* is understood as a feature of agency or relevant to agency (Driver, 2012, 147).

As Driver says, global consequentialism is the view that:

> We apply consequentialist evaluative criteria to more than actions. We do, in actual practice, evaluate more than the rightness or wrongness of actions. We also evaluate persons themselves as praiseworthy or blameworthy. We evaluate the mental states of agents. A person may act rightly in such a way as to reflect badly on her character; or she may act wrongly in such a way as to reflect well on her character (Driver, 2012, 127).

The consequentialism in Zoroastrian ethics is 'global' too. It evaluates all features of agency including, but not limited to, thoughts, actions, and behavior. Years before the modern 'global

consequentialism,' the first generation of Iranian studies scholars in the 19th and early 20th centuries insisted that Zoroastrian ethics is 'comprehensive' and 'global:'

> The oft-repeated reference to thoughts, words and deeds, suggests at once the comprehensiveness and depth of the ethical position of these writings. For the root of good or bad words or deeds is to be found in good or bad thoughts. The basis of the ethics may therefore be said to be fundamentally spiritual. But though the inner motive is of primary importance, the outer act or consequence is also recognized as possessing a value which ethics must consider (Buch, 1919, 62).

In addition, the 'golden rule' that comes in the second paragraph of the first part of the *Dēnkard* VI is 'global' and evaluates agent's 'character:' "They held this too: that character [and not only action] is best, one who does not do to another that which is not good for himself" (§2). In addition, similar to global consequentialism, in C49, we also find the emphasis on all features of agency:

This too is thus: From good education there comes about good wisdom, from good wisdom there comes about good habit, from good habit there comes about good character, from good character there comes about righteous action, and through righteous action the demons are expelled from the world (C49).

5. Capitalism

As the capitalist Economist Todd Buchholz (Buchholz, 2007, 313) says "For most of man's life on earth, he has lived no better on two legs than he had on four." This sentence shows Buchholz's interpretation of the average income from the beginning of history up to two centuries ago. It was around 3 USD during this period. However, suddenly everything changed fast; starting about 200 years ago in northwestern Europe. Deirdre McCloskey calls this humongous increase in humans' standards of living that began about 200 years ago the 'Great Fact.' In her book, *Bourgeois dignity: Why economics can't explain the modern world*, McCloskey examines many explanations in detail, but she finds all of them inadequate to explain the 'Great Fact.' The main reason was 'rhetoric,' she says. McCloskey uses 'rhetoric' in its ancient sense, 'the means of unforced persuasion' that includes logic and metaphor. In other words, she explains the 'Great Fact' based on 'language:'

> A change in rhetoric about prudence, and about the other and peculiarly human virtues, exercised in a commercial society, started the material and spiritual progress. Since then the bourgeois rhetoric has been alleviating poverty worldwide and enlarging the spiritual scope of human life (McCloskey, 2010).

'The Bourgeois Revaluation' that we call 'capitalism' happened only when wealth, property, merchants, tinkerers, and practical seekers of profit in markets came to be not only respected but also admired. McCloskey calls it the 'big change' in the common opinion:

> A big change in the common opinion about markets and innovation, I claim, caused the Industrial Revolution, and then the modern world. The change occurred during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in northwestern Europe. More or less suddenly the Dutch and British and then the Americans and the French began talking about the middle class, high or low — the 'bourgeoisie' - as though it were dignified and free. The result was modern economic growth (McCloskey, 2010, xi).

So many years before such a 'linguistic turn' in Western languages and societies which happened under the influence of philosophers like Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), François de La Rochefoucauld (1613-1680), Claude Adrien Helvétius (1715-1771), Bernard Mandeville (1670-1733), Voltaire (1694-1778), and Adam Smith (1723-1790), the *Dēnkard* VI respected and admired the main elements of 'capitalism' including 'the rich,' 'wealth,' 'property,' and another 'bourgeois virtues:'

> In the earliest stages of civilization, when animistic tendencies largely prevail, and abstract ideas are understood only under the guise of something concrete, morality consisted very largely in a struggle against evil spirits. Everything which has a pernicious tendency is supposed to be due to the action of some evil spirit. All such evil spirits must be exorcised. Hence the very great insistence shown on the elaborate rituals calculated to root out all impurity, under the shelter of which an evil spirit generally lurks. The idea gradually receives a more liberal interpretation. As Lehmann remarks, the religious duties go hand in hand with the work of civilization. We must remember that in the time of the Gathas, the people were mainly pastoral and agricultural. The work of promoting life took special forms suited to the age. The work of breeding cattle well and the art of cultivation receive special attention. Many important works such as building of bridges, houses, canals, and the destruction of noxious creatures became highly moral when looked at from this point of view (Buch, 1919, 64-65).

Buch (Buch, 1919, 65) called it 'the idea of utility:' "the idea of utility underlying the above agricultural ethics received a further extension when man's health and vigor become objects of particular attention." He believed that "Brahmans and medieval Christians did not find favor amongst the followers of Zoroaster" (Buch, 1919, 66) because in Zoroastrian ethics "all negative virtues, which if divorced from more positive and fruitful activities lead to the diminution of life-forces, were either relegated to the background or ignored" (Buch, 1919, 66). Neglecting the difference between the late antique and early medieval Zoroastrian and Parsi ideas, he vividly called Zoroastrian or Parsi ethics 'the ethics of utility:'

> From this general standpoint, it is not strange to find that all practical virtues which lead to success in life receive marked recognition. The qualities of thrift, temperance, industry, moderation are deemed essential for a true Zoroastrian. So far Parsi ethics appear as ethics of utility (Buch, 1919, 66).

After calculations of worldly profit and loss, a vivid appreciation of the higher and finer possibilities of the human soul grew up and a conspicuous place was assigned to altruistic virtues. In Zoroastrian ethics, individuals learned well to identify self with the larger self of the community and to work in a spirit of disinterestedness for the larger brotherhood (Buch, 1919, 66-67). Buch concluded with Lehmann's (Lehmann, 1912, 515) above-mentioned words in which he used the phrase "the Persian genius for utilitarianism and practical things."

In §71, the *Dēnkard* VI orders people not to despise the rich for their wealth and not to praise the poor for their poverty:

> They held this too: Unless a man be examined and known in the best important things, one should not deny him goodness solely because of his wealth and opulence, and one should not thus praise a man for goodness because of his paucity of wealth and indigence. For when, principally, not the goodness and wickedness of the man are perceived but his paucity or abundance of wealth, it may come about in the world that a man of great virtue seems (falsely like) one of evil nature; and that one praises a trespasser who is sinful fame-seeker, and who possesses little wealth on account of his desire for fame; or a wasteful person, who destroys that which he possesses; or a lazy person who does not produce wealth, and other evil people of many sorts; and that one despise a generous man of abundant wealth. The poor man manifests himself as disciplined as compared to the wealthy, and disciplines his faults less. For that reason, the generous man who is wealthy is sometimes regretful of what he does, and the man who bestows that praise causes, for his own part, generosity to diminish from the world and that much evil which he praises in the world he causes to reside [in it] (§71).

The same idea comes in §147: "They considered this, too, thus: namely, if among (themselves) the dervishes prune off this one thing, (namely), arrogance which (is prevalent) amongst the powerful great, then for hundred years they do not come to Hell" (§147). In §282, it insists that being wealthy is not a vice at all, and all that matters is to know how to use and keep the wealth:

> They held this too: Sin does not accrue to a man of most abundant wealth when he knows how to use and keep it, (merely) on account of his abundance of wealth. The poorest man, (however), when he does not know how to use and keep (his

> property), may come to mortal sin through (the possession of) one *drahm*'s worth of property (§282).

In §283, we find a direct relationship between not only 'righteousness' and 'wealth' but also 'wickedness' and 'poverty:' "They held this too: Many are the people whose state of righteousness is from abundance of wealth; and many are the people whose state of wickedness is due to poverty (§283)." In C32, it orders to enjoy life with the wealth one possesses:

> This too is thus: One should not lead a miserable life with the wealth that one possesses, for people in the world regard that man as stingy, and he himself obtains less when he is in needs who leads a miserable life with the wealth that he possesses (C32).

It also talks about a kind of positive poverty that has two main characteristics. The first is satisfaction and the second is admiration of the rich:

> They held this too: Poverty is this: One whose self is prosperous and satisfied as regards the powerful wealth of the material world, whose mind turns away from it (?), whose thought is content in it, who is not angry concerning it, and who is not contemptuous of a man who is wealthy and opulent, but acts in this manner (thinking): "My poverty is together with the wealth and riches of that man. After all, we are the same, he and I." (§143).

The *Dēnkard* VI, is a unique ancient book in moral philosophy that respects and admires 'material wealth' and its 'proper employment' based on 'right measure' (*paymān*). *Paymān* is a 'golden mean' that stands between two extreme vices of excess and deficiency. The 'wealth' is almost necessary for the agent to live morally but it should be based on *paymān*. Using and keeping the wealth based on *paymān* is important. The agent should always be careful about the two extreme vices of excess and deficiency.

Adding *paymān* as a 'safety valve' to the 'wealth' is similar to adding 'sympathy' to the 'wealth' in Adam Smith's thought. Smith respects and admires the 'wealth,' but he tries to 'moderate' his view based on 'sympathy:'

> This disposition to admire, and almost to worship, the rich and the powerful, and to despise, or, at least, to neglect persons of poor and mean condition, though necessary both to establish and to maintain the distinction of ranks and the order of society, is, at the same time, the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments. That wealth and greatness are often regarded with the respect and admiration which are due only to wisdom and virtue; and that the contempt, of which vice and folly are the only proper objects, is often most

> unjustly bestowed upon poverty and weakness, has been the complaint of moralists in all ages (Smith, 1984, 61-62).

As J. R. Weinstein (Weinstein, 2000, 68) says, "In this paragraph, Smith is as explicit as he gets. Poverty and its consequent subordination are the major cause of the corruption of the sentiments. This in turn interferes with sympathy. By definition, anything that interferes with sympathy is immoral." Weinstein says that Smith himself was aware of the disadvantages of pure emphasis on the 'wealth' and suggested 'sympathy; as a 'safety valve' for its 'proper employment.' He criticizes the "steadfast adherence to the greedy and selfish caricature of Smith's free market," and neglecting what Smith insists on in his beloved book, *The theory of moral sentiments.*

Last, but not least, using the word 'capitalism' we should not fail to understand the social and political context where the *Dēnkard* VI was written, that is, a Zoroastrian priestly milieu settled in Baghdad and gravitating around the Abbasid court.

Conclusion

Contrary to many ancient moral theories that do not accommodate themselves to life and their consequences are inimical to life, pleasure, and happiness, both the *Dēnkard* VI (as representative of the late antique and early medieval Zoroastrian moral ideas) and Parsi ethics (the ethics of the Zoroastrians who immigrated to India and their descendants) put forward an early hedonistic, utilitarian, and consequentialist moral theory that admires pleasure and happiness. Similar to Zoroastrian dualistic ontology, metaphysics, and theology, Zoroastrian ethics is a dualistic moral theory on one side of that there are the Good, pleasure, and happiness, and on the other side, there are the Evil, pain, and suffering. This ethics respects and admires bourgeois or capitalist concepts like the wealth and property, and appreciates industry, self-control, and veracity in the individual life and righteousness, regularity, and social accord in the social life. So, centuries before the rhetoric turn and the big change in the common opinion about life, industry, and innovation that occurred during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in northwestern Europe and America and caused the industrial revolution and modern economic growth, the main features of capitalism existed in Zoroastrian ethics. In addition, centuries before global consequentialists like Pettit, Smith, and Driver in 21st century, Zoroastrian ethics put forward the earliest version of global consequentialism that applied consequentialist evaluative criteria to more than actions and evaluated all features of agency including the mental states of agents and his character as well as his actions.

Last, but not least, I know to reach such a clear-cut conclusion using few passages of a book belonging to such a complex religion is difficult (if not impossible). The *Dēnkard* VI is an important book which reflects and summarizes some relevant aspects of the ninth-tenth-century Zoroastrianism. So, the reader may think I have not enough textual and historical evidence to claim

it. In addition, I do not think it is easy to apply Western categories of definition to religious phenomena sometimes so far in time and space. However, this article shows that we cannot neglect these concepts in Zoroastrianism. We are still in need of further studies and researches to find more textual and historical evidence.

References

Buch, M. A. (1919). *Zoroastrian ethics*. Mission Press.

Buchholz, T. (2007). *New ideas from dead economists: An introduction to modern economic thought*. Plume.

Driver, J. (2012). *Consequentialism*. Routledge.

Farroxzādān, Ā. & Ēmēdān, Ā. (1907). *The Dēnkard VI*, Edited & translated by D. D. P. Sanjana, D. Ardeshir & Co. http://www.avesta.org/denkard/dk6s.htm

Farroxzādān, Ā. & Ēmēdān, Ā. (1979). *The Dēnkard VI*, Edited & translated by S. Shaked, Westview Press.

Farroxzādān, Ā. & Ēmēdān, Ā. (2014). *The Dēnkard, VI* Edited & translated by M. Mirfakhraie, IHCS. [In Persian].

Gignoux, P. (2011). Dēnkard. In *Encyclopædia Iranica*. https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/denkard

Lehmann, D. (1912). Ethics and morality (Parsi). In J, Hastings & J. Selbie (Eds.), *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. V. (pp.513-516). Charles Scribner's Sons.

McCloskey, D. (2010, October 4). *Bourgeois Dignity: A Revolution in Rhetoric*. Cato. https://www.cato-unbound.org/2010/10/04/deirdre-mccloskey/bourgeois-dignity-revolution-rhetoric

Menant, D. (1917). Parsis. In J, Hastings, Edited by J, Selbie & L. Gray, *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics* (vol. IX.) (pp. 640-650). Morrison & Gibb Ltd.

Mills, L. L. (Trans. & Ed.). (1995). *Yasna*. http://avesta.org/yasna/yasna.htm

Motse. (1929). *The ethical and political works of Motse*, translated by Y. P. Mei, Arthur Probsthain. (Original work published around 420 BCE)

Pettit, P. & Smith, M. (2000). Global consequentialism. In B. Hooker, Edited by E. Mason & D. Miller, *Morality, rules, and consequences*, pp. 121-133. Rowman & Littlefield.

Pourdavoud, E. (Trans. & Ed.). (1962). *Avesta*. University of Tehran. [In Persian].

Scarre, G. (1996). *Utilitarianism*. Routledge.

Schlerath, B. & Skjærvø, P. O. (2011). Aša. In *Encyclopædia Iranica*. https://iranicaonline.org/articles/asa-means-truth-in-avestan

Shaked, S. (Ed.) (1979). *The Dēnkard VI*. Westview Press.

Shaked, S. (1979). *The wisdom of the Sasanian sages*. Westview Press.

Shaked, S. (2012). Andarz and andarz literature in pre-Islamic Iran. In *Encyclopædia Iranica*. https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/andarz-precept-instruction-advice

Smith, A. (1984). *The theory of moral sentiments*, Edited by A. Macfie & D. Raphael, (Original work published 1759), Liberty Fund.

Weinstein, J. (2000). *On Adam* Smith. Wadsworth.