

# Realism and Virtues in Ottoman Political Thought\*

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**Abstract:** This article presents a novel perspective, arguing for a virtue-based weak version of political realism in Ottoman political thought (OPT). By recognizing realist elements in human nature and politics in OPT tradition, we can gain a deeper understanding of the place of morality in politics. Challenging the common sense understanding of morality that pervades all areas of politics, this paper provides compelling evidence to show how the understanding of the nature of politics in OPT was ever-changing, singular, and, to a certain extent, free of morality. This unique framing of politics and human nature in the OPT tradition makes it a realist one. Finally, I delve into the role of universals in explaining the intricate relationship between politics and morality through various analytical distinctions.

**Keywords:** Virtue ethics, political realism, Ottoman political thought, universals and particulars, ethics first principle, comparative political theory.

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## Introduction

This article aims to comparatively study two seemingly unrelated issues, morality and realism, concerning their interrelations within normative political philosophy.<sup>1</sup> In contemporary political theory scholarship, the discourse on realism, encompassing diverse issues such as the nature of politics, practices, norms, and the role of morality, has coincided with the resurgence of the Ottoman legacy on moral thought in Turkey. This convergence has opened significant opportunities for reevaluating the nexus between politics and morality. This article's primary objective is to explore how virtue ethics in Ottoman political thought (OPT) embodies a unique form of political realism, thereby contributing to the ongoing debates in the field.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the article, I will argue that within the OPT tradition there is a sui generis moderate political realism based on virtue. To this end, I will first discuss the thematic aspects of the political realism debates and the tradition of virtue ethics that are suitable for comparison. Second, I will examine the extent to which the principle of the primacy of morality, brought to the agenda by political realism debates, overlaps with the tradition of virtue ethics. In the third part, I will show that the claims about the nature of human beings in realism debates, and the virtue-based conception of human beings in the tradition of virtue ethics, are closely related. In the following section, I will discuss the relationship between the nature of politics and the process of acquiring virtues in the tradition regarding the problem of universals. This study posits that, at the most basic level, the current debate on realism and OPT tradition, although two distinct disciplinary traditions and seen as different from each other, bear resemblance in contents and branches and can mutually benefit from each other.

- 1 Realism as a philosophical school was translated as "hakikiyye" into Turkish in the early twentieth century. See, İsmail Fenni Ertuğrul, *Lügatçe-i Felsefe*, ed. Recep Alpyağlı (Konya: Çizgi Kitabevi, 2015), 355; Ma'ârif-i Umûmiyye Nezâreti İstîlâhât-ı İlmiyye Encümeni, *Kamus-ı Felsefe İstilahatı Mecmûası*, ed. Ali Utku and Nevzat H. Yanık (Konya: Çizgi Kitabevi, 2014), 209. The concept is translated as "vâk'îyye" in modern Arabic. Though both versions are used in Turkish, they have not become widespread in contemporary literature. Both translations correspond to political realism debates' discussions on the nature of politics. Therefore, they can be used interchangeably.
- 2 The literature I consider for discussing virtue ethics within the OPT tradition includes works on ethics by Ibn Miskawayh, Kindi, Farabi, al-Ghazali, Tusi, Ibn Arabi, al-Dawwani, Ijî, Kashîfî and Kınalızade and their influence on moral thought in general (either directly or through translations, commentaries, etc.) For two general evaluations of the literature in the Ottoman context, see Hüseyin Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined: The Mystical Turn in Ottoman Political Thought* (Princeton University Press, 2018), 69–75, 173–77; Marinos Sariyannis, "Political Philosophy' and the Moralistic Tradition," in *A History of Ottoman Political Thought up to the Early Nineteenth Century* (Leiden; Netherlands: Brill, 2018), 63–98, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004385245\\_004](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004385245_004).

## Political Realism and Virtue Ethics: A Convergence of Two Poles?

Realism debates in normative political theory intensified in the last fifteen years, especially against political liberalism's idealistic conception of man and society.<sup>3</sup> At the center of debates is the thesis that human weaknesses, desires, and wishes influence political behavior and that human behavior cannot be studied independently of its context. Both the ideas put forward by the proponents of this movement and the opponents' arguments are quite diverse. Instead of examining and classifying each view individually, I will concentrate on a particular theme and try to establish its relation to the virtues within the tradition. The position of the advocates of political realism can be briefly summarized as follows: politics has a normative value of its own, independent of morality, and this value cannot be reduced mortality. In this sense, politics is a sub-area area of ethics, or the practical application of ethical principles. Political realism emphasizes that disorder and conflict are a permanent element of political activity against the ideal state of order and stability.

Two interpretations of realism can be classified as radical and moderate; the first argues that normative political judgments can be derived from political values and that politics should be guided by these judgments, thus suggesting that moral values are not suitable for politics; the moderate version, on the other hand, accepts the autonomy of ethics while arguing that politics has greater autonomy and there are issues and boundaries that cannot be reduced to ethics.<sup>4</sup> The extent to which the normative value of politics determines the normative value of ethics is closely related to a discussion about the extent to which the normative value of morality is determinative. Accepting that the two normative domains are independent of each other, as some theorists suggest, may imply the existence of radical poles and the acknowledgment that they are irreconcilable.<sup>5</sup> Although the tension between politics and ethics

3 For a general flow of the debate in the literature, its areas of conflict and diverse groups, see, William A Galston, "Realism in Political Theory," *European Journal of Political Theory* 9, no. 4 (October 1, 2010): 385–411; Jonathan Maynard Leader and Alex Worsnip, "Is There a Distinctively Political Normativity?," *Ethics* 128, no. 4 (July 2018): 756–87; Enzo Rossi and Matt Sleat, "Realism in Normative Political Theory," *Philosophy Compass* 9, no. 10 (2014): 689–701; Matt Sleat, ed., *Politics Recovered: Realist Thought in Theory and Practice* (Columbia University Press, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.7312/slea17528>. 2018 The recovery of politics refers to the recirculation of many traditional concepts and perspective that have recently been purged by liberal theory.

4 Rossi and Sleat, "Realism in Normative Political Theory," 690.

5 Leader and Worsnip, "Is There a Distinctively Political Normativity?," 777.

is generally divided into modern and pre-modern, it should be emphasized that the radical version of realism is specific to the modern period. Finding an example of this idea in pre-modern Islamic history is quite difficult.

The tension between politics and ethics arises from a competition regarding what will shape or regulate human institutions and behaviors. While politics represents power relations and the state as an institutional structure above human will, it is difficult to confine the modern debate on what ethics is in a certain institutional form, as we confine the discussion in politics. However, from the early period to the modern, moral philosophy has been more involved in politics through virtues than any other issue within the context of OPT.<sup>6</sup> Texts aimed at educating rulers based on virtues, which are numerous within the vast field of ethics, make critical contributions to modern normative realism debates. In the centrality of virtues, the classical understanding of ethics as a form of achieving happiness in this world and the hereafter highlights the necessity for individuals to acquire virtues through their own efforts. Politicians play a key role in how this necessity will spread throughout society. The underlying idea is that the morality of politicians will be reflected in society as they are one of the pioneering classes in society.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the moral excellence of a limited number of politicians is targeted for collective moral development.<sup>8</sup> There

6 As an example that reflects this trend, see the commentaries on İcî's *Ahlâk-ı Adudiyye* Taşköprizade Ahmed Efendi, *Şerhu'l-Ahlâk'il-Adudiyye*, trans. Mustakim Arıcı and Elzem İçöz (Istanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2014); Alâüddin el-Kazeruni, *Şerhu'l-Ahlâki'l-Adudiyye*, trans. Mehmet Demir, Güvenç Şensoy, and Mehmet Aktaş (Istanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2014); İsmail Müfid İstanbuli, *Şerhu'l-Ahlâk'il-Adudiyye*, trans. Selime Çınar (Istanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2014).

7 For instance, Lâmi'î Çelebi reads: "In the inhabited quarters of the world, the land of state and religion has become civilized and flourished by the Sultan's noble moral qualities." Lâmi'î Çelebi, *Şerefü'l İnsân*, ed. Sadettin Eğri, c. 2, *Doğu Dilleri ve Edebiyatlarının Kaynakları 102* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Üniversitesi Yakındoğu Dilleri ve Medeniyetleri Bölümü, 2011), 23.

8 One of the important problems of Islamic moral and political thought is to determine the audience of the texts. Do they aim at major social transformations or cultivate the moral subjecthood of certain elite groups? If the goal is general social transformation, then why certain texts have a quite difficult language embellished with high literary instruments? Again, if the goal is a major transformation, why do they only turn to elite groups rather than cover whole sections of society? It might be misleading to seek answers through "avam" and "havas" distinctions. A theological premise could be useful; everyone has the potential to cultivate high morals, but in practice, very few can achieve high moral competence. Pre-Ottoman or Ottoman-era texts aim to build a society based on virtues. So, searching for distinctive historical contexts to realize this goal may not be meaningful. Nir Shafir's *Moral Revolutions* argues that moral discourse aims at transforming individuals (in addition to Sultan) based on the concept of *nasihat*. See, Nir Shafir, "Moral Revo-

is no situation where the state, the politician, or political behavior produces norms or serves as a source of norms. In the texts on virtue ethics in the classical period, the source of tension between politics and ethics is the difficulty in obtaining virtues, the dominance of their opposites (i.e., vices) in character, and the resulting violence and oppression. The ruler cannot maintain virtues in his character,, described in detail with crucial examples from history, therefore justice does not prevail in society.<sup>9</sup> The point I want to emphasize here is that in the modern period, politics has become a practice that generates normative value not only for political life but also for controlling and ordering life. Therefore, this transformation in the modern context constructs ethics only as a practice of the individual/private sphere.

### Tradition of Virtue Ethics and Ethics First Principle in Political Realism

One of the critical debates in realism is whether morality encompasses everything or not. In virtue ethics, the question could be formulated as follows: to what extent is ethics an all-encompassing phenomenon in the virtue-based OPT? By the expression “all-encompassing ethics,” I refer to the idea, derived from the literature I examine, that ethics encompasses everything within the framework classified as the governance of the self, the household, and the city. As modern heirs of this tradition, it is inevitable to think that everything is based on ethics. Indeed, most modern literature reads the issue this way. This mode of reading is closely related to the modern secular nation-state’s potential to regulate social life more profoundly than ever before in human history. Therefore, considering ethics as an all-encompassing source of value

lutions: The Politics of Piety in the Ottoman Empire Reimagined,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 61, no. 3 (July 2019): 595–623. What he describes as a “pietistic turn” was explained through literature that prescribes various aspects of daily life based on Sharia law. What is remarkable here is not that the content of the literature is new; as the Shafir states, many Sufi texts were saying similar advises since the early period of Islam. What is new is that the actors spreading these discourses are representatives of Ottoman state mechanism, which has now turned to a massive bureaucratic structure. The question that needs to be answered (as well as the point of importance for political realism) is what kind of changes did this moral literature undergo within the bureaucratic structure as opposed to the classical period?

- 9 “Sevâlif-i eyyâmdan her hânedân-ı kâdim ve düdman-ı kerimden zevâl-i ni‘met ve intikâl-i devlete sebeb – ‘illet ahlâk-ı kerimelerini zemîmeye tebdil ve cevr ü zulmi ‘âdet itdikleri olmuştur.” [trans: The reason that past dynasties lost their affluence and prosperity is due to the fact that they turned their noble morality to the base morality and injustice was their way.] Azmî Pîr Mehmed, *Enîsü'l Ârifîn* [1566], ed. Fatih Koyuncu (Istanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2019), 331.

within the OPT tradition is, in many ways, a response to the modern situation. In the modern context, law, politics, and ethics have been institutionalized within their autonomous domains, separated from one another. This process has largely occurred within the context of Western hegemony and the history of colonization. Therefore, in response to these processes, the idea has arisen that there is a comprehensive, all-encompassing, and determinative understanding of ethics with a retrospective view. It is crucial to underline that the claim here is not to diminish the importance of ethics. On the contrary, ethics holds a significant place within the thoughts and practices of society, politics, and law. The specific aim of this article is to highlight the possibility of a distinct normative domain of politics apart from ethics and to provide explanations for how the relationship (between ethics and politics) could be intertwined.

In his critique of liberal theory, Bernard Williams describes political moralism as the notion that ethics should encompass everything, acting as a supreme principle and limit that normatively determines other domains.<sup>10</sup> This perspective, which acknowledges the priority of ethics in the relationship between ethics and politics, emphasizes that political justice and moral justice are the same. In his two models based on utilitarianism and political liberalism, Williams argues that ethics is established as a supreme principle before politics. This view initiates the debate on political realism against political moralism. Ethics does not refer to virtuous behavior and character traits in the conventional sense that comes to mind initially in Turkish, nor does it concern the steps one must take to achieve excellence. Instead, it is a branch of normative ethics philosophy that includes the conventional meaning of ethics. However, when discussing ethics within the OSD tradition, the school I will consider is virtue ethics, which is one of the three major currents in contemporary normative moral philosophy. While drawing connections between virtue ethics and political realism discussions, it should be kept in mind that virtue ethics was the most prevalent moral thought in pre-modern societies.

According to the OPT tradition that I am focusing on throughout the article, there is a disagreement between a virtue-based realist trend and the nature of politics as politics, which, as Williams expresses, does not have any inherent connection to the

10 Bernard Arthur Owen Williams, *In the Beginning Was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument* (Princeton University Press, 2005), 1–17. This book, published after Williams' death, is a compilation of essays released at various times. The first essay, "Realism and Moralism in Political Theory," which I focus on, is crucial because it serves as a reference for many sources in post-2000 discussions on political realism and shapes the course of the debate.

moral. The pre-political order, defined by Williams as the first political question, necessitates a compromise, cooperation, and negotiation aimed at establishing order, trust, and security before politics can be discussed. Therefore, politics emerges only after a response is given to the basic legitimation demand. Politics comes into play only at this stage. The state of nature, probably a legal fiction commonly used for all traditional social orders, is closely linked to a virtue-based moral understanding within the OPT tradition.<sup>11</sup> The realist movement does not present an objection to such a connection even in modern conditions. At this point, what kind of realist movement can be discussed within the OSD? The existence of authority is based on the idea that people coming together is not enough to form a society when there is no punitive sultan within the legal fiction framework.<sup>12</sup> The emergence of political authority and society stems from the inherent weakness and vulnerability in human nature, hence the inability to meet basic needs when left alone, and consequently, the necessity of living together.<sup>13</sup> The exit from the state of nature, as described by Williams as the basic legitimation demand, is articulated within the OPT as the adoption and implementation by political authority of what is termed “hayrât-ı âmme,” [common goods] encompassing “emn ve sükûn ve âfiyet ve re‘âyâ arasında mahabbet ve ülfet ve adl ve iffet ve vefâ ve ruhsat (hisset) ve rehâ...” [security, tranquility, well-being, mutual love and companionship among commoners, justice, modesty, loyalty, authorization (ruhsat), ease and comfort...] (“halife ve padişah nice siret üzere olmak gerek” [The caliph and the sultan should conduct themselves according to noble conduct]). Conversely, what is described as “şürûr-i âmme,” [common evils] encompassing “havf ve ızdırıp ve re‘âyâ arasında bugz ve adâvet ve tenâzu‘ ve husûmet ve gasp ve sirkat ve hiyânet ve kaht ve galâ” [fear, distress, animosity and hostility among commoners, exploitation, theft, deceit, oppression, and tyranny] should be avoided by political

11 The concept of the state of nature, which has existed as an idea in the history of political thought for two thousand years, refers to theories that negotiate normative elements governing social contracts (such as the natural sources of societal morality and justice). In the case of the Ottoman Empire, as exemplified by Kınalızâde, the state of nature (a condition dominated by vices, negative emotions, and desires) is in constant conflict with the civil state (dominated by virtues). For a brief evaluation of state of nature in the history of political thought, see: David Boucher, “State of Nature,” in *The Encyclopedia of Political Thought* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2014), 3582–88; Mark Somos and Anne Peters, eds., *The State of Nature: Histories of an Idea*, vol. 6, History of European Political and Constitutional Thought (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2021).

12 Kınalızade Ali Çelebi, *Ahlâk-ı Alâî*, ed. Mustafa Koç (İstanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2015), 399–412.

13 For descriptions of state of nature, political authority and society in OPT, see: Vasileios Syros, “Shadows in Heaven and Clouds on Earth: The Emergence of Social Life and Political Authority in the Early Modern Islamic Empires,” *Viator* 43, no. 2 (July 1, 2012): 377–406.

authority as moral/legal qualities.<sup>14</sup> The noteworthy point here is that, in addition to what Williams listed, virtues such as companionship, love, and loyalty have been added to the basic legitimacy demand. In a sense, within the OPT tradition, alongside the security and trust that enable politics, a morality that regulates interpersonal relationships has been identified as a prerequisite for politics and sociability. Therefore, merely ensuring the existence of a superior political power does not suffice to transcend the state of necessity in the OPT context. An independent normative political domain apart from virtues does not seem possible within the OPT tradition. In the OPT context, politics is always connected to a moral domain. The famous connection of practical wisdom with individual, family, and city cannot be separated. Another important point to emphasize is the consideration of “common goods” and “common evils” together in politics, law, and ethics. The idea that humans must live together to sustain their lives, used to justify the departure from the state of nature, does not merely propose a categorical and hierarchical power-oriented understanding of politics. Its close connection with morality, law, and economy enables and sustains politics. In this respect, political realism debates also point to the holistic perspective that encompasses “common goods” and “common evils” while opposing the separation of politics from its economic, historical, and legal context. The dual duty assigned to political authority is closely related to the moral principle commonly expressed in the tradition as “enjoining the good and forbidding the evil.” In one aspect, the formal construction of politics is a process of institutionalizing this principle.<sup>15</sup> Simply put, institutional politics and state understood to consist not only of tasks like military power and tax collection but also of a duty of fostering the moral excellence of society.

14 Ali Çelebi, *Ahlâk-ı Alâî*, 2015, 456. The word “hisset” mentioned in the sentence I quoted from Kınalızade appears as “hisb» in Fahri Unan’s transliteration of *Ahlâk-ı Alâî*, see. Kınalızade Ali Çelebi, *Ahlâk-ı Alâî: Çeviri yazı Metin.*, ed. Fahri Unan, vol. LXVIII (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2014), 542. In a manuscript copied eight years after Kınalızade’s death, the same expression appears as “ruhsat.”, see. Alaeddin Ali b. Emrullah el-Hinnavizade “Ahlâk-ı Alai” İstanbul Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Kütüphanesi, 447 varak, [https://katalog.iae.org.tr/yazma/Yz\\_000008.pdf](https://katalog.iae.org.tr/yazma/Yz_000008.pdf). In another manuscript of unknown date, the expression also appears as “ruhsat.”, see. Kınalızade Ali Çelebi, “Ahlâk-ı Alâî”; (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Houghton Library, MS Turk 28) vrk. 239, erişim 12 Ocak 2022, <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL.HOUGH:2256427>. The term “ruhsat” seems more appropriate in the context of the sentence as it signifies the execution of affairs within the framework of authority and legality, instead of “hisset” meaning stinginess or miserliness and “hisb” implying growth, productivity, and development.

15 Ovamir Anjum, *Politics, Law, and Community in Islamic Thought: The Taymiyyan Moment* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 244.



## The Virtues in the OPT Tradition and the Weakness of Human Nature in Realism

One of the issues brought up by realism debates in political theory is that human nature is inherently weak. This includes the influence of desires and passions on behavior, the gap between words and actions, and human frailty. These aspects should be central to any consideration of the nature of politics.<sup>16</sup> The phenomenon which I here refer to as frailty is that people's moral characters are not always fixed, immutable, and perfectly acting from the beginning. Instead, their motivations are variable, their ideas about moral values are changeable, and they possess contradictory characteristics.<sup>17</sup> The relationship I'm trying to establish with frailty is actually the advice given in many verses of the Quran regarding human ignorance, indecision, variability, and weaknesses. Human beings must recognize these characteristics as part of their test in the journey of life and strive to reach perfection in terms of morality and deeds by being aware of them.<sup>18</sup> The connection of frailty to the weakness emphasized in political realism is related to constructing virtues. The rooting of virtues as expected capabilities within human behavior is lengthy. During this process, it is not uncommon for any given virtue to transform into its opposite moral character. This is precisely related to the criticism leveled by realism regarding the ethics first principle. The idea of political actors adopting and implementing a set of moral values is problematic. Such an idea disregards the fact that the capacity of individuals to adopt and implement these moral values, and thus their frailties, are subject to many tests and doubts. Often, there is a significant gap between what is enacted and what is expressed at the discursive level. So, has virtue ethics developed a response to such a gap?

One of the possible answers that virtue ethics provides to this question is the claim of comprehensiveness, which also constitutes the greatest contribution to political thought directly. Therefore, moral excellence is expected to manifest itself

16 “...that most human agents most of the time are weak, easily distracted, deeply conflicted, and confused, and that they therefore do not always do only things they take to be permissible”. Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton University Press, 2008), 2. It would be stating the obvious to note that Geuss's contribution to the realism debate is more comprehensive than what I will express in this section. I am focusing on the part of his extensive argument that deals primarily with human weaknesses, complexities, and contradictions. The way I use the quoted sections in the article does not contradict his overall argument.

17 Geuss, 3,9,21-22.

18 Ali Çelebi, *Ahlâk-ı Alâî*, 2015, 79–88.

at each level due to the tight relationship established between the individual, the family, and the city.<sup>19</sup> Someone who does not adhere to virtues in their individual relationships cannot uphold ethics within a macro-level institutional framework because excellence can be achieved at both micro and macro levels. Another possible answer could be situations arising from not preserving the soul's health, expressed as diseases of the soul. In this illness, emphasis has been placed on the disasters of speech in the section on the afflictions of the tongue. The consequences of not knowing where, how, and what to speak or deviating from moderation in these three points are highlighted as the source of many problems.<sup>20</sup> "Samt ve sükût" [silence and restraint] are praised as virtues. The practice of silence and restraint is praised here as a virtue, which constructs both the individual and society. Silence is not meant as passive indifference but rather a conscious choice and state of tranquility.<sup>21</sup> Silence and restraint are recommended as a way to avoid speech related diseases such as "fuzûl- ı kelâm, mirâ ve cidâl, husümet, tasannu'-ı kelâm, fuḥş u sebb ve ŧetm ü kazf, la'n-nı insan yâ hayvan yâ cemâd, temashur u istihzâ, ifşa-yı sırr-â âher, kizb" [trans: excessive speech, contention and quarreling, animosity, verbosity, obscenity and abuse, slander, defamation of humans, animals, or inanimate objects, backbiting and ridicule, disclosing others' secrets, lying.] Demonstrating calmness against the domination of speech is one element that makes virtue ethics realistic. Contrary to the view that views speech as active and silence as passivity and deficiency, from the perspective of virtue ethics, silence endows individuals with emotional and mental clarity and dignity, protecting them from humiliation.<sup>22</sup> The inclusion of speech

- 19 The classical relationship between the individual, the family, and the city constitutes the three fundamental pillars in constructing ethics in texts. The phrase "the unity of human life," indicating their close connection, is borrowed from MacIntyre, see. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Erdem Peşinde: Bir Ahlak Teorisi Çalışması*, trans. Muttalip Özcan (İstanbul: Vakıfbank Kültür Yayınları), 415–58.
- 20 Ali Çelebi, *Ahlâk-ı Alâî*, 2015, 239–87. The issue of "disasters of speech" refers to the twenty types of speeches mentioned by Kınalızâde, which he states are derived from Gazali's *Ihya* and indicates situations of moral degradation caused by speech.
- 21 The reason why silence and restraint are considered qualities to be acquired as part of moral excellence is rooted in the ease with which speech occurs without effort, leading many people to fall into speech-related disasters. I couldn't find a study on "silence" in the OPT. For examples of study on silence and restraint, see. Sean WD Gray, "Towards a Democratic Theory of Silence," *Political Studies*, September 6, 2021; Kennan Ferguson, "Silence: A Politics," *Contemporary Political Theory* 2, no. 1 (March 1, 2003): 49–65.
- 22 "Bâ-ân ki sükût sebep-i ferâğ-ı hâtr u fikr ve mücib-i ibâdet ü zikr ve müris-i rezânet ü vakar ve dâfî-i tezelliül ü ihtikârdır." [trans: Silence is the cause of intellectual tranquility, leads to worship and remembrance of God, brings about dignity and respect, and prevents humiliation and contempt] Ali Çelebi, *Ahlâk-ı Alâî*, 2015, 242.

and debate etiquette and tranquility into the ethics of virtue is an alternative way to prevent destructive political debates. This involves practicing restrained speech, thoughtful debate, and calmness.

The exclusion of discussions on human nature from any theoretical attempt regarding politics cannot be confined to political theory as a discipline. This phenomenon emerged alongside many other processes I mentioned in the introduction of the article, particularly with the rise of liberal political thought in normative political philosophy. Considering the issue of human frailty highlighted in realism debates along with numerous virtue categories transferred from virtue ethics within the OPT tradition offers new insights into modern politics. In the history of Islamic political thought, there have been many classifications, but broadly speaking, there are two main currents: one based on jurisprudence (fiqh) and the other on philosophy/wisdom (hikma). In the history of Islamic political thought, there have been many classifications, but broadly speaking, there are two main currents: one based on jurisprudence (fiqh) and the other on philosophy/wisdom (hikma).<sup>23</sup> These two currents diverge within themselves and often coexist within the same work or across different works by the same author. One of the most notable developments in virtue ethics is the rapid increase in texts on virtue-based moral and political thought, particularly centered on the Ottoman period after the classical era, and this increase continued into the modern period. The practical significance of centering virtue ethics in political and moral texts lies in the belief that political and social transformation is possible primarily through “exemplary individuals,” particularly those with political

23 Hızır Murat Köse, in addition to these two, adds the categories of Kalam, Siyasetname, edeb, and ıslahatname. Throughout this study, in which I discuss a virtue-based understanding of politics within the OSD tradition, the aforementioned literature has used many classifications together. See, Hızır Murat Köse, “İslam Siyaset Düşüncesinin Temelleri,” in *İslam Siyaset Düşüncesi Adil Devlet, Erdemli Şehir, Mükellef İnsan*, ed. Lütfi Sunar and Özgür Kavak (Ankara: Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık, 2018), 27–50; Ahmet Okumuş, “İslam Siyaset Düşüncesinde Siyasal Nerede Aranmalı?,” in *İslam Siyaset Düşüncesi Adil Devlet, Erdemli Şehir, Mükellef İnsan*, ed. Lütfi Sunar and Özgür Kavak (Ankara: Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık, 2018), 361–84; Müstakim Arıcı, “Osmanlı Ulemasının Siyasal Bilimler Tasavvuru: Taşköprülüzade ve Kaynakları Bağlamında Bir İnceleme,” in *Taşköprülüzade’de Dil, Ahlak ve Siyaset*, ed. İhsan Fazlıoğlu and İbrahim Halil Üçer, 36 (İstanbul: İlem Yayınları, 2020), 1–26; Ömer Türker and Kübra Bilgin Tiryaki, eds., *İslam Ahlak Literatürü: Ekoller ve Problemler* (Ankara: Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık, 2016); İlker Kömbe, “İslam Siyaset Düşüncesinde Siyaset Tasnifleri Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme,” *Dîvan: Disiplinlerarası Çalışmalar Dergisi* 23, no. 44 (2018): 35–60.

and military power.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, it is assumed that their moral maturity and level of perfection directly affect society. For this reason, it is no coincidence that virtues are emphasized within this thought, which was prevalent in all pre-modern societies.

Another factor that makes virtue-centered political thought realistic is its action-oriented nature. By action, virtues can only be spoken of when they are manifested in actual deeds. When a virtue becomes a habit, it is implemented without being part of a thought process or deliberation. An ethics discourse based on an ideal is unrealistic, as it does not correspond to empirical reality. In other words, politically-driven movements based on the implementation of a vast array of virtues are the focus of realism. The transformation of virtue into action is closely related to the motivation to achieve righteousness and honesty within a broad, complex context filled with relationships. Virtue is to do what is right with moderation within relationships that are constantly changing, deteriorating, being rebuilt, and prone to disintegration. Virtue ethics attempts to define the worst limits where there can be two extreme states regarding human nature: virtuous and base behavior. The increasing proliferation of different virtue categories (the refinement, intensification, and differentiation of meanings) is largely a result of the necessity imposed by the changing context of social and political life (such as its instability and susceptibility to disintegration). The necessity of action remains valid in every situation. The “Asr-ı Saadet” [Golden Age] in the tradition of virtue ethics is not an ideal time that can never be reached; rather, it is possible within the constantly lived time. Modernity is not a distinctive period in this regard. This is because there is an aspect of virtue independent of space and time, where a person can reach virtue or fall into disgrace. Excessive optimism or pessimism due to current circumstances (context-related) does not represent anything as a moral motivation.

24 In the tradition of virtue ethics, the idea that the life stories, actions, and words of pioneering, role model, and exemplary individuals inspire amazement, astonishment, and admiration in listeners or readers, thereby motivating them to perform similar behaviors and imitate, is quite common. The term ‘role model’ and ‘exemplary individuals’ referred to here differ from the elite theories developed by sociologists like Veblen, Pareto, Mills, Bottomore, and Bourdieu, among the classics of social theory. I borrowed the term ‘exemplary individuals’ from Zagzebski’s book, where she constructs a virtue ethics theory based on pioneering individuals as role models. See, Linda Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). In the OSD tradition, the life stories of political leaders, Sufis, and literati, including those of the Prophet, the Companions, and pre-Islamic figures, play a key role in exemplifying and explaining various virtues. In this regard, texts on virtue ethics or political thought and many other literary genres and collections of legends serve this function.

In many texts representing virtue-centered political thought, there is a critical stance that limits the political idea based on the absolute power of the political actor, such as the sultanate, and argues that the authority and power of the actor cannot have permanence. At the core of this stance lies the belief in a close connection between social order and good morals. The sustainability of political power is considered together with the good morals of the political actor. Therefore, the acceptance of human weakness by virtue ethics constitutes an important part of the picture regarding human nature. From another perspective, the effort to limit, discipline, and moderate absolute power with good morals can only be possible by emphasizing human nature's inherent weakness. By weakness, all problems referred to are meant are expressed as the diseases of the soul and stem from not properly utilizing the faculties of the soul.<sup>25</sup> In philosophical ethics, whether desires and passions have unintended benefits beyond their own purposes is not a matter of debate.<sup>26</sup> The main goal is to become proficient in acquiring virtues through the proper use of the faculties of the soul.

## The Normative Nature of Politics, Universals, and the Process of Acquiring Virtues

Writing any text on the nature of politics for a tradition spanning centuries and covering dozens of different disciplines would be far from comprehensive and representative. It would also entail advancing a challenging series of claims to defend academically. However, in this section of the article, I will attempt to discuss the nature of politics within a narrative where I can delineate its boundaries in terms of points of connection with the tradition of virtue ethics. One can argue that the rationale for such an effort lies in the potential impacts regarding the nature of politics to influence the overall discussion. This is because a discussion on the nature of politics contains clues as to how ethics determines a political argument, how much they influence each other, and the boundaries between independent domains.

25 Mustakim Ancı, "Adudüddin El-İcî'de Huy ve Erdem Problemi," *Nazarîyat İslam Felsefe ve Bilim Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi* (Journal for the History of Islamic Philosophy and Sciences) 2, no. 4 (April 15, 2016): 31–56.

26 What I want to emphasize here is that the moral literature I am discussing does not address the redirection of specific passions by governmental instruments towards a particular project. See, Albert O. Hirschman, *Tutkular ve Çıkarlar Kapitalizm Zaferini İlan Etmeden Önce Nasıl Savunuluyordu?*, trans. Barış Cezar (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2022). However, there is often emphasis on presenting vice as virtue in the discourse of political actors or on confusing virtues with vices.

I will examine the section in Ibn Khaldun's "Muqaddimah" that discusses why scholars are distant from politics. This text reveals key insights and has the potential to represent best the overall aim of the article in many respects.<sup>27</sup> Both the original Arabic text and the comments by Ahmet Cevdet Pasha in Ottoman Turkish provide fundamental conceptual distinctions regarding the nature of politics. By stating that scholars are distant from politics, Ibn Khaldun means that they fail to understand it. This is related to their methods of engaging with knowledge; they think in terms of universals and thus cannot penetrate a discipline like politics, which involves particularities. When we view all external reality as a branch or part of these universals, a fundamental problem arises: the inevitable failure of trying to fit external reality into these mental constructs of universals. As an activity, politics requires its practitioner to pay attention to external reality, particularities, and their natures.<sup>28</sup> An

27 'Abd al-Rahmân ibn Muḥammad İbn Haldûn, "Sunuf-ı Beşer İçinde Ulemanın Emr-i Siyasetten Eb'ad Oldukları Beyanındadır," in *Mukaddime: Osmanlı Tercümesi*, ed. Yavuz Yıldırım et al., trans. Pîrîzâde Mehmed Sâhib and Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, Birinci Basım, vol. 3, 3 vols., Klasik Kitaplar-1 (Istanbul: Klasik, 2008), 217–18. For an article examining Ibn Khaldun's theory of civilization (umran) in light of the realism debates in normative political theory, which I consider throughout the article, see Navid Hassanzadeh, "Realism and Its Limitations for Ibn Khaldûn," *The Journal of North African Studies* 25, no. 4 (July 3, 2020): 523–44. Hassanzadeh examines the "Muqaddimah" in terms of a nature-based conceptualization of politics, sensitivity to the necessity of politics (ıztıranıyyat), and the problem of idealism versus realism. This study appears to be the only one that considers a Muslim scholar within the framework of normative realism debates. Scholars are considered within the realism debates found in international relations theories. The debates on political realism, which have gained importance in the last 15 years, are largely overlooked. However, these two trends are not independent of each other. Throughout political thought, realism has existed as a school of thought, even if not explicitly named as such. For a study that attributes the recent divergence between political realism and classical realism to the portrayal of classical realism as amoral realpolitik and argues that, contrary to this simplified common picture, there is a close conceptual and analytical kinship between the two trends: Alison McQueen, "The Case for Kinship: Classical Realism and Political Realism," in *Politics Recovered: Realist Thought in Theory and Practice*, ed. Matt Sleat (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 243–69. ed. Matt Sleat (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018)

28 "Emri siyâset ve idâre-i umûr u memleket maslahatı ise sahibinin mevadd-ı hâriciyye ve cüzîyyeye, ve ol mevaddın ahvâl-i lâhika vü tâbî'asına mürâ'ât eylemesine muhtacdır. Zira umûr u mezkûrede teşbîh ü tanzîr ile ilhâka mâni', ve kendilerine tatbîk i matlûb olan emr-i külliye muhâlif ü mümâni' ba'zı husûsiyyet olmak ihtimali vardır. Ve halbuki ahvâl-i umrândan hiçbir şey diğere kıyâs olunamaz. Zira emr-i vâhidde mütesabih oldukları gibi, umûr-u adidede ihtimal ki muhtelif olurlar. Ulema ve fukaha dahi ber-minvâl-i sâbık ahkâmı ta'mim, ve umûrun bazisini bazısına kıyas etmeye meluf olduklarından, siyasete nazar ettiklerinde onu dahi ekser-i enzarları kabilinden ve kendi istidlalleri nevinden bir kalıba ifrag etmeleriyle ekseriya galat u hatada vâki' olup bu bâbda re'ylerine emniyet ü itimat olunmaz." İbn Haldûn, "Sunuf-ı Beşer İçinde Ulemanın Emr-i Siyasetten Eb'ad Oldukları Beyanındadır," 217. [trans: political conduct and administration

uneducated, ordinary peasant, through the experience of daily life, would be more protected from mistakes in politics and have more accurate judgment in social relations (“nazarı müstakim olur” [trans: his view would be more straightforward]). At this point, Ahmet Cevdet Pasha would object to Ibn Khaldun’s views, finding authors like Ibn Sina, Ibn Bajjah, Kemal Pashazade, and Idris-i Bitlisi skilled in both theoretical and practical sciences. However, he would acknowledge that the prevalent view aligns with Ibn Khaldun’s observation.

What does this section summarized from Ibn Khaldun say regarding the debates on political realism? The most crucial point for this article is that the term “mevadd-ı hāriciyye ve cūziyye,” which I have tried to express in modern Turkish as external reality [harici gerçeklik], aligns with political realism’s emphasis on concrete facts as the basis for political practice and analysis. The primary questions arising from the excerpt include what the terms “külli” (universal) and “cüz’î” (particular) refer to, and the idea that universals hinder the explanation and interpretation of singularities occurring within the realm of politics. The core objection in the excerpt is the claim that universals, as a methodological necessity, cannot penetrate into particularities.<sup>29</sup> The crucial point in Ibn Khaldun’s analytical method distinction, taken from Ibn Sina, is determining how structurally challenging each particularity is within the

of governmental affairs requires its practitioner to heed external reality and particularities and consequences and states of those matters. Because in the matters in question, there may be some particularities that prevent analogy and generalization, and there may be some specific qualities that oppose or hinder the application of the universal conduct to themselves. Moreover, nothing can be compared with each other in the realm of umran. For while they may be similar in a single conduct, in numerous matters, it is possible that they are diverse. Also, the scholars and jurists, by comparing the current judgments with the previous ones, and being accustomed to comparing the bases of matters with each other, when they look at politics, they usually fall into error and mistake by trying to fit it into a mold based on their speculations and their kind of reasoning, and their opinions cannot be trusted in this matter.]

29 This claim has an aspect related to Sharia sciences. Arguing that universals cannot penetrate external reality necessitates accepting that Sharia sciences, which do not seek alignment with external reality, are also independent of these external particularities. This leads to the assertion that Sharia, which constitutes the source of morality (at least in certain aspects), exists in a realm devoid of experience and everyday reality. The point I want to address here is the problem that stems from Ibn Khaldun’s emphasis on the particularity of politics and the general judgment made by scholars who think in terms of universals. It is evident from the perspective of Islamic law that especially furu’ al-fiqh explain particular situations with the universal principles derived from the usul al-fiqh and adapt them accordingly, see. Frank Griffel, “The Place of Virtue Ethics within the Post-Classical Discourse on Hikma: Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī’s al-Nafs Wa-l-Rūḥ Wa-Sharḥ Quwāhumā,” *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 21 (2021): 70–71.

political realm. Answering this question is difficult without delving into his general theory of civilization (umran). In short, the methodological distinction based on universality and particularity tells us this: if one wants to think about and act in politics, it is only possible through a method based on facts and experience. This distinction is closely related to the broader ethical debate about whether judgments on justice and virtues are universal or specific to particular contexts.<sup>30</sup> In the modern period, justice theories claiming universality and virtue theories confined to particularities have traditionally separated justice and virtue, which were once closely linked. In the context of Islamic intellectual history, within the philosophical ethics tradition, practical wisdom is not concerned with acquiring virtues independent of time and place. Rather, it focuses on the ability of practical wisdom to consistently make the right decisions and actions within a specific time and place. The prioritization of context-specific conditions with particularist characteristics brings forth the political realism debate addressed in this article. If certain conditions single out specific virtues, this necessarily implies an interaction between these virtues and external reality, activating them in response to the circumstances.

This interaction leads to another problem that needs to be addressed: What is the place of moral propositions and practices, considered universals, in politics based on experience and practice? Does such a distinction lead to an inextricable chain of contradictions? One answer to this question comes from the tradition of virtue ethics within the OPT. Kınalızâde, when answering how virtues are acquired, subjects this process to a certain ordering. Virtues only settle into human behavior as faculty due to a specific natural flow and disposition.<sup>31</sup> Virtue ethics defines the fundamental faculties in achieving moral excellence as the innate powers that emerge from birth and grow until one attains the capability of ensuring the continuation of the species, such as anger, lust, and judgment. The primary concept used in acquiring moral characters is the “sinâ’îlik [acquiredness] which indicates that moral qualities can be acquired through one’s own actions. In their simplest form, these three faculties are placed in human nature independently of human will from birth. The faculties acquired later by human will and effort are then superimposed upon this

30 For the universalist and particularist conceptualizations of ethics in the classical and modern periods, see. Onora O’Neill, *Towards Justice and Virtue: A Constructive Account of Practical Reasoning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 9–37.

31 Ali Çelebi, *Ahlâk-ı Alâî*, 2015, 143–48.



nature and develop dependent upon it.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, there is an inseparable connection between the particular and universal in terms of obtaining virtues. Examining the nature of politics and its relationship with virtue ethics from the perspectives of universals and particulars plays an important role in determining what political realism corresponds to within the tradition of the OPT.<sup>33</sup> Because these two analytical distinctions methodologically lead to the examination of politics and virtue ethics in different camps by different thinkers.<sup>34</sup> In Ibn Khaldun, it was stated that politics is part of the particulars, and therefore, someone who thinks in terms of universals has limitations in understanding political activity. That is, knowledge obtained about a practice that is singular, prone to change and corruption, and has qualities that are not repeatable is different from knowledge obtained about a phenomenon that develops in its natural process, independent of time and place. In *Ahlâk-ı Alâî*, when the perfection achieved by nature and human will is explained, particulars and universals are highlighted as follows.

“Indeed, as these commonalities and differences are being known, the nature of the disposition of man and the disposition of animal and growing body inspired in the human mind, the knowledge of the particulars and the nature of things are perceived and distinguished as far as the ability of a person allows. And this disposition (tabâyi‘) is called “ma’kulâtı evvel”, because this is the first level of intellection. What comes before this is perception, not intellection, for the perception of particulars is not the perception of universals. Therefore, they call it the perception of senses, not intellection and knowledge. When one reaches this stage, the realm of intellection is reached, and it is called intellect, and it is at this stage that one is called human. And the perfections resulting from this disposition (nature) ultimately find their culmination. After this, perfection is attained through human discretion and accomplishment [tedbir]. If these perfections

32 “Pes tabî‘at sinâ‘atın üstadı vü muallimi mesabesinde ve sinâ‘at tabî‘atın müteallimi ve şakirdi menzilesindedir.” Ali Çelebi, 143.

33 There is little research on the problems or insights generated by this dual distinction in Islamic societies. This issue is extensive enough to warrant a comprehensive study. The dual distinction is a logical and metaphysical dimensions and has passed from Ancient Greece to Islamic philosophy. As indicated by Ahmet Cevdet Pasha’s note on Ibn Khaldun’s commentary above, the advancement of the West in science and engineering in the modern era corresponds to their emphasis on empirical experience. At the same time, Muslims’ engagement with theoretical knowledge has been attributed to their lagging behind in natural sciences due to their detachment from experiential reality. The significant point of this article is that the distinction between universals and particulars has been used to identify the progress or regression of various disciplines.”

34 Şenol Korkut, “Siyaset: Felsefe, Din ve Şehir,” in *İslam Felsefesi: Tarih ve Problemler*, ed. M. Cüneyt Kaya, İlmî Araştırmalar Dizisi 63 (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 2018), 690.

are also achieved, humanity, which was acquired through nature, finds true survival and eternal existence. Therefore, it is necessary for the seeker of virtue, who desires to attain the perfection to which he aspires through accomplishment, to make use of nature, to take nature as an example and to use order and arrangement learned from nature in the betterment of the faculties.”<sup>35</sup>

“ta’akkul” as intellection is a term specifically used for universals, and its usage here does not contradict the general usage.<sup>36</sup> The term “cüz’iyyat” (particulars) refers to the stage where sensations are perceived through the senses and the development of faculties is contingent upon nature. When will, choice, and human effort come into play in the development of faculties, it indicates the involvement of “külliyyat” (ethical propositions and principles). “Külliyyat” (universals) are solely the “principled and conceptual meanings” that exist in the mind.<sup>37</sup> The relationship between the natural and the voluntary can be understood through the distinction between sensory perceptions (ihsas) corresponding to particulars (cüz’iler) and the voluntary corresponding to universals (külliler). The establishment of the form of humanity (similarly the form of animality) in the mind occurs through distinguishing individual persons (or animals) from the universal form of humanity. Being aware of particular experiences is not equivalent to being aware of universals. The awareness of particulars is initially sensory perception, not rational comprehension (ta’akkul; intellection). Rational comprehension is possible through understanding universals, and virtues can be acquired only after this. The problem concerning the comprehension of particulars and the acquisition of virtues must be understood as a step

35 “Pes bu müşârekeler ve muhâlefetler ma’lûmu olmakla zihnine suret-i tabî’at-i insan ve tabî’at-ı hayvan ve cism-i nâmî feyz olup tabâyi’i cüz’iyyâtın ve cüziyyatı vü tabâyi’i birbirinden mümkin oldukça ve isti’âdâi yetiştikçe idrak ü temyiz eder. Ve bu tabâyi’e ma’kûlâtı evvel derler, zira evvel mertebe ta’akkul budur. Bundan evvel olan ihsastır, ta’akkul değildir, zira idrak-i cüz’iyyât idrak-i külliyyât değildir. Annın için onların idrakine ihsas derler, ta’akkul ve ilim demezler. Çün bu mertebeye, ta’akkul dâiresine gelip akl ıtlak olunur ve insaniyyet bi’l-fi’l ismi bu halde ana vâki’ olur. Ve bu mertebeye gelince tabî’attan sâdır olan kemâlât nihayetin bulur. Bundan sonra nevbet tedbir ü snâ’at sebebi ile olan kemâlâta erişir. Eger bu kemâlât dahi hâsil olursa ol insaniyyet -ki tabî’at sebebi ile hâsil olmuştu-snâ’at sebebi beka-yı hakiki ve devam-ı ebedi bulur. Pes tâlib-i fazilet olana lâzımdır ki müteveccih olduğu kemâli snâ’at sebebi ile tahsil ü tekmil etmek istedikte tabî’ata iktidâ eyleye; tabî’attan istifade olunan siyakat u tertibi tehzib-i kuvâda isti’mâl ü ri’ayet eyleye.” Ali Çelebi, *Ahlâk-ı Alâî*, 2015, 145–46.

36 Abuzer Dışkaya, “İkinci Makuller Teorisi,” in *Varlık Düşüncesi ve Sıfatlar*, ed. Ömer Türker, vol. 2, *İslam Düşüncesinde Teoriler -1- Metafizik* (İstanbul: Ketebe Yayınları, 2021), 739.

37 Hasan Akkanat, “Tümeller Teorisi,” in *Varlık Düşüncesi ve Sıfatlar*, ed. Ömer Türker, vol. 2, 3 vols., *İslam Düşüncesinde Teoriler -1- Metafizik* (İstanbul: Ketebe Yayınları, 2021), 718–35.

where particulars, at the sensory level, need to be worked on for human perfection. Thus, an interesting relationship emerges between politics and the senses. The nature of particularity and uncertainty in politics, highlighted by normative realism, is closely related to the process by which sensory perceptions settle ethical principles and rules into human behavior as habitual dispositions or faculties. In their unrefined and untested state, sensory perceptions have not yet encountered human will and rational faculties. When these unrefined sensory perceptions influence political practice (or any behavior playing a role in societal order), their disruptive nature becomes apparent. One of the most common examples of this in everyday language is the justification of abandoning any ethical principle due to “current conditions” or the assertion of the “impossibility of applying the principle today.” Emphasizing the present, the immediate, and the current moment stems from the dominance of the sense of uncertainty, chaos, and unpredictability—essentially the particulars—in decision-making processes and behaviors. While the assumption that particulars are inherently chaotic may be open to debate, there is no doubt that, in the absence of order and organization, they are indeed destructive.

If we follow the traditional definition that universals have principled and conceptual meanings in the mind, many political phenomena fall into this category. Concepts such as nation, ethnicity, state, parties, etc., are universal. In this sense, what grants a political phenomenon the quality of universality is its sameness everywhere. The uncertainty found in particulars leads to certainty and unity in universals. The most problematic aspect of this analytical framework in politics is how particularity can exist within the collectivity.<sup>38</sup> This problem is also significant in discussions about whether universals exist externally. As conceptual tools of the mind, universals are highly influential on behaviors in the external world, depending on the nature of the concept. For instance, the abstract idea of the state is reflected in a highly organized bureaucracy. Continuing with the concept of the state, a universal category, one would expect the state to exhibit the same level of organization universally, as required by its universality. In practice, the invalidity of organization in certain areas of life or within specific units does not undermine the existence of the universal category. The relationship between the state’s bureaucratic organization, which exists externally, and its existence as a universal category in the mind is one

38 Eric Goodfield, “The One and the Many,” in *The Encyclopedia of Political Thought*, ed. M. T. Gibbons (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, September 15, 2014).

of reciprocity.<sup>39</sup> The relationship between an abstract concept and its profound influence on human behavior enables this impact. Although we may consider politics and moral principles within the domain of universals, this does not mean that they exist as independent spheres with their own distinct realms of existence. Certainly, they have their own unique domains. However, they are constantly interacting with other universals and particulars. Practices such as “siyaset-i şer’iyye” and customary law (örfî hukuk) indicate the inevitability of such relationality. These practices remind us that the boundaries of two ideal normative realms are not as pure and distinct as presupposed, highlighting the interconnected nature of these domains.

The passage I quoted from Kınalızâde emphasizes a distinction between nature and acquisition. It advises that to obtain virtues, one must mimic similar processes in nature. Here, “nature” refers more to individuals’ physiological growth and maturation processes, which occur regardless of their will. This biological process constitutes the essence of humanity, and when individuals seek to imbue their behaviors with virtue in the future, morality will be built upon this biological foundation. Kınalızâde’s idea of mimicking and imitating nature to attain virtues is based on the notion that the stages passed during natural maturity should also be followed in acquiring moral virtues. The natural maturation process, starting with the most basic level of obtaining food, continues with individuals strengthening themselves materially, avoiding harmful things as they gain power, and removing obstacles that cause them trouble (such as refraining from touching fire again after being burned). In the final stage, individuals can observe and categorize living and inanimate entities around them. At this point, reason reaches the level of transitioning from particulars to universals. At the ultimate stage, natural development reaches perfection, and only after this stage does the process of moral maturation, which can only be achieved through willpower and effort, begin. Based on the relationship established by Kınalızâde between natural maturation and moral development, the following deduction can be made in terms of political realism: When politics is conducted on a ground devoid of certain moral principles and sensitivities, it turns into a realm dominated by the very biological faculties mentioned above. Because moral faculties do not develop spontaneously within human behaviors; rather, they influence

39 Wahid Amin, “Qutb Al-Din al-Razi and the Problem of Universals: A Fourteenth-Century Critique of Avicenna’s Theory of Natural Universals,” *Nazariyat İslam Felsefe ve Bilim Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi (Journal for the History of Islamic Philosophy and Sciences)* 5 (November 15, 2019): 41.

behaviors through deliberate effort. The absence of space for ethics in politics means being defenseless against particular circumstances' destructive and disruptive qualities. Chaos and destruction become defining elements of politics. Advocating unity among diversity becomes impossible due to the absence of predictability. In such a context, coexistence does not imply socialization; instead, it results in an order based on brute force, where the state of nature fully prevails.

The attempt to establish a connection between the debate on universals, which crosscuts multiple disciplines, and political realism stems from an effort to understand the normative domain of politics. Making decisions, making choices, and determining priorities within a given situation are fundamental to political activity. I highlighted the impact of context on this process above. The acquisition of virtues also occurs within the interaction with external reality. From a normative perspective, the critical question is how politics and ethics will reconcile or relate to each other in the domains where they encounter each other. Especially in the tradition of virtue ethics, tensions become evident in the definitions of political and moral virtues categories.<sup>40</sup> I wanted to emphasize in this section the role played by universals in these tensions. We don't have a comprehensive picture of how the problem of universals corresponds to social and political theories.<sup>41</sup> The questions and diversity contained within normative political realism discussions over the past twenty years (such as whether the normativity of politics should be discussed, what the normative domain of politics is, and what the sources of this normativity are)<sup>42</sup> bring up questions about the ontological position of universals in virtue ethics. The primary reason for this is universals' role in conceptualizing virtues and expressing new layers of meaning.

## In Place of a Conclusion

This study has addressed the debates around political realism, the comprehensiveness of ethics, the inherent weakness of human nature, and the problem of universals in politics. It has examined the points of convergence and divergence between two different literatures as much as possible. It can be argued that considering the

40 I plan to address the problems arising from these definitions in another study.

41 Hasan Akkanat, *Klasik Dönem İslam Felsefesinde Tümmeller: İbn Sina Eksensli Bir Çözümleme* (Adana: Karahan Kitabevi, 2016), 19.

42 Manon Westphal and Ulrich Willems, "Doing Realist Political Theory: Introduction," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 26, no. 3 (April 16, 2023): 319–34.

Ottoman tradition of virtue ethics from the perspective of political realism has several important benefits. Firstly, virtue ethics explains the complexity of human behavior that is both nature-based and shaped by human agency. This feature highlights the extent to which there is a necessity and an ideal discourse relationship in understanding political practices. Secondly, the importance of virtue ethics in the examination of Ottoman political thought is also evident in contemporary realism debates. Any political theory harbors assumptions and understandings about human nature within it. It builds its arguments based on this understanding. Debates in contemporary political philosophy have excluded the views of many of the founding names of modern political philosophy on the nature of human beings and politics from modern readings and interpretations because they considered them traditional or outside of a certain liberal tradition. However, discussions on political realism seek to reintegrate these overlooked aspects of foundational texts into political philosophy.

During this process, the recent publications on Ottoman virtue ethics literature in Türkiye, whether in translation or original works on tradition, have played a significant role in understanding the scope of this heritage. It has emerged that virtues have a fundamental function in thinking about politics and ethics and that a unique conception of human nature is a foundational element in understanding these two domains at a basic level. These developments indicate that meaningful comparisons can be made between two different traditions regarding intellectual history and political theory. From the political theory perspective, the Ottoman virtue ethics tradition remains relevant. The emphasis on human weakness highlighted by political realism partially explains why the Ottoman scholarly tradition is not systemic or predominantly legalistic but aimed to educate and reform rulers and the populace through virtue and vice categories. The legacy remaining from the Ottoman political thought tradition as a school of virtue ethics shows us that representatives of the Ottoman scholarly tradition wrote works in this field until the late 19th century. We expect that focusing on the transformations of various virtue categories in future studies will contribute greatly to understanding the normative field of politics. This will also provide clues to delineate the boundaries of realism in political thought.

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