

Salvation and Damnation in Plato and Avicenna's View

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Abstract:

Salvation has always been one of the principal issues in the area of ethics. Influential thinkers like Plato and Avicenna have written about it, trying constantly and diligently to decode the meaning of salvation (happiness) and damnation (unhappiness). The present essay investigates the nature and grounds of salvation/damnation in the philosophical writings of Plato and Avicenna. In Plato's view, salvation means the idea of the great good. He confirms that achieving great good by human beings is possible. Accordingly, great good is considered absolute, eternal, unchanging, knowable and rational. Plato believes that great good is the salvation and sense of relief which is realized through satisfying the three dimensions of self and perfecting the non-rational faculties by submitting them to the rule of reason. To achieve such a salvation one needs to practice virtue at the first place. On the other hand, Avicenna contends that salvation means realizing the potential talents and capacities of human beings in a consistent and coordinated way. For Avicenna, it is impossible to separate salvation from perfection and for that matter perfection from reason. In other words, any form of perfection, especially rational perfection, is indeed a kind of salvation. Plato and Avicenna have discussed ethics along with their theories of salvation/damnation. This is because achieving salvation and avoiding damnation is deemed to be possible through ethics and ethical knowledge. Therefore, by using a descriptive-analytical method, the present essay delineates the nature of salvation/damnation and ways to achieve one and to avoid the other from the perspective of Plato and Avicenna.

Keywords: Salvation, Damnation, Self, Virtue, Reason, Truth

Introduction:

Achieving salvation (happiness) and leading a good life are two of the oldest wishes of human beings. Salvation is a key topic in different philosophical approaches to ethics including teleology and deontology. For some, “salvation” is *the* key concept in the philosophy of ethics. The importance of this concept goes back to Ancient Greece. For example, the focal point in the ethical writings of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle was salvation. Also, thinkers as different as Epicure, Xenon, Kant, and John Stuart Mill have dealt with the contours of salvation. Many Islamic philosophers including Avicenna, Farabi, al-Kindi, Khajeh Nasir al-Din Toosi, Molla Ahmad and Molla Mehdi Naraghi have discussed salvation/damnation in their writings. What we consider as salvation/damnation depends on our worldviews. However, it can be generally noted that actions which lead to salvation are those which are expected to also lead human beings to the desired perfection. The potential for such a state of perfection is inscribed in human beings by the Almighty God.

Salvation means achieving the state of perfection deeply rooted in one’s essence through taking self-conscious actions. This means realizing a state of perfection which is unique to human beings. The difference between the good/goodness and salvation lies in the fact that goodness is not relative to different individuals; rather, it is absolute. In other words, all people, knowledgeable or otherwise, have a similar conception of the good. They all agree that their ultimate goal is to become good. However, salvation is relative to different individuals because each person tries to achieve salvation in a particular way, ascribing salvation to something which might be deemed to bring damnation to another person (Naraghi, 2015). The opposite of salvation is damnation. Damnation means misery, unhappiness, condemnation and being unassisted or helped by God (Bostani, 2010).

Having shown the significance of salvation/damnation in ethics and philosophy of ethics it seems necessary to study rational salvation in contrast to damnation, the meaning of self and virtue, and the difference between rational salvation/damnation and sensory and corporeal pleasure. In doing so, the ideas of two influential philosophers, namely, Plato and Avicenna, are presented in the following.

Salvation/damnation in Plato’s view:

Plato was the first Greek philosopher who systematically discussed the meaning of self. To better understand the significance of salvation/damnation in Plato’s philosophy we need to first define “self” in his view. In fact, Plato criticized his predecessors for a superficial comparison of the self to air, fire or atoms. In his many works, he proposed different complementary definitions of the self (Plato, *Republic* 2001: 335).

In *Phaedo*, Plato considers the self as the origin of motion and therefore superior to the body. In *Timaeus*, the self is considered to possess rationality and to be invisible. Plato notes three dimensions for the self:

1. Rational dimension: this dimension differentiates human beings from animals. It is the most basic principal of the self. It is immortal, similar to the world of ideas.

2. Will and determination dimension: the other two principles, will and sensual (erotic), are mortal. Between the two, the dimension of will and determination is greater. This latter dimension is found in animals too, and can assist reason.
3. Sensual (erotic) dimension: this dimension is related to the corporeal needs and appetites of the body.

The rational element (dimension) is naturally attracted to the rational and invisible world. In this way, it is able to think and reflect. However, other elements of the self essentially depend on the body, that is, on the world of phenomena. These latter elements do not have a direct influence in the rational processes and are incapable of observing the world of forms.

Plato builds his philosophy of ethics on the grounds of knowing the self and epistemology. His ethical views derive from his philosophical views. Some of the principles of Plato's philosophy are:

Theory of ideas:

The concept of "idos" has been used in many ways throughout Plato's works. It means form, image, kind and adjective among others. The more germane meaning of the concept is "ideal" or "idea", that is, a concrete existence.

Plato believes that the general concepts that are formed in our minds such as the concept of "man", "tree" and "horse" have their complete instances in a world of ideas. In other words, these concepts refer to objects in a real world rather than being simple mental representations. The basic assumption of Plato's philosophy is that sense perception is only an appearance not the real thing. It is neither authentic nor lasting, thus, sense perception is not an object of knowledge. Rather, it is a space of speculation and conjecture. The object of knowledge is the world of rationality. This means that any phenomenon in the world, material or spiritual, has a real essence which is not perceived by the senses. It is only the rational mind (reason) which is capable of perceiving them. This is often referred to as the notion of forms or ideas in Greek philosophy; for example, the idea of man, the idea of courage (Plato, *Republic*, 2001: 25).

The truth behind the world of ideas is "goodness" itself. In *Republic*, Plato notes that great "good/goodness" is the summit of the mountain of rational world (Plato, *Republic*, 2001: 532). For Plato, human beings can perceive the idea of anything in this world. This may be facilitated by nurturing the rational faculty, that is, by being more rational. Rationality helps human beings to distinguish between truth and untruth and perceive the highest ideas which is the "idea of good".

Theory of recollection:

Plato's basic principle in the theory of recollection or reminiscence is that salvation as a form of truthful knowledge is nothing but recollection and remembrance. Knowledge in this sense should not be equated with the common sense of the word knowledge or science. Since the object of true knowledge and the achievement of salvation is inexpressible and unknowable, its acquisition and expression cannot be similar to other human forms of knowledge or science. According to Plato's theory of recollection, our encounter with truth is determined by an essentially familiar memory and recollection (Plato, *Phaedo*, 1983: 73).

Immortality of the soul:

Since for Plato human soul is eternal, it existed before coming to existence in this world. The soul in this view belonged to the world of ideas and abstracts. For this reason, human soul already had knowledge about what ever existed in the world of ideas and now that the soul has entered this world and has associated itself with the possessions and properties of it, its knowledge about the eternal ideal truths have been undermined, as if the soul does not know anything at all. Given this, Plato believes that human knowledge is in fact a kind of remembering because human soul used to know all the truth and through recollection and remembering it can revitalize those truths again.

Philosophy in Plato's view is moving from the world of sense perceptions to the world of ideas or invisibles and coming to knowledge of the rational (Plato, Republic, 2001: 532). In discussing the eternity of the soul Plato proposes the theory of recollection because for him salvation lies in truthful knowledge, itself dependent on recollection and remembering.

The idea of good:

The "idea of good/goodness" is the case of knowing the acquired knowledge. However, as sight and seeing are similar to the sun but not identical to it gaining knowledge of truth is similar to "good" but not identical to it. Rather, "good" is in essence superior to both.

The "idea of good" is in of primary importance in Plato's Republic, that is, it is primary and superior to anything else; it is even superior to essence and existence, thus in a primary position (Plato, Republic, 2001: 509-517).

What is gained at the end of the arduous and toilsome path of knowledge is accosting the "idea of good" itself. As soon as one reaches this state complete certainty is bestowed to one, from which all beauty and good in the world derives. It is from this principle that light is created in the world of senses and as in the world of knowledge it is the principle which has absolute rule, truth and reason being the byproduct of it.

Plato argues that the nature of salvation/damnation and how to achieve the first and avoid the second must be discovered through rationality and reason, similar to mathematical principles which are discovered. Thus, education is required in achieving salvation and avoiding damnation. This is why ignorant people are not capable of understanding the meaning of salvation.

Salvation in Plato's view lies in the immortality and eternity of the rational side of the self after the decomposition of the body. Axiologically speaking, for Plato salvation depends on acquiring knowledge. The highest form of salvation is approaching the "good" (God). According to Plato, human values are mostly ethical rather than religious. These values are assigned to a person through the process of education and learning.

The three parts of the soul:

Plato believed that human soul/psyche is made of three parts. The soul or the self is made of three parts: rational, spirited (*thymos*) and appetitive. Each of these parts has its corresponding virtue. The virtue of rational (mind) is wisdom, the virtue of spirit (will and determination) is courage and the virtue of appetitive part is temperance and abstinence. "He who rules his reason

is called wise; he who tames his anger is brave, and he who rules his passion is good-tempered” (Zarei, 2006).

When a person acquires all the above virtues he reaches justice. Having realized justice one achieves salvation. Therefore, for Plato, ethics means: knowing and keeping a balance and coordination between rational and non-rational elements of the soul. Such a balance, coordination, justice, ethics, virtue and sublimity of the soul guarantee salvation. Plato says that since such a balance and coordination is not acquired unless through knowledge, virtue is in fact knowledge and dependent upon it. Plato believes that virtue is not the same with salvation. Rather, salvation comes after virtue. According to him, 1) everyone desires and seeks to achieve salvation, 2) virtue is the necessary and sufficient precondition for salvation, and 3) salvation is the result of perfecting one’s own reason and deeds, which is possible to achieve by all. Plato explains that there are four major virtues that human beings can achieve: 1) wisdom, 2) courage, 3) courage, and 4) justice.

Wisdom is the rational component of the self, courage belongs to the will and determination part, and justice and temperance mean the unity of will and passion under the rule of reason.

Justice is a universal and general virtue. Each part of the self is expected to carry out its function in close coordination with other parts. In light of what Plato says, virtue should come under the rule of wisdom. This means that the primary and the origin of all virtues is wisdom. Wisdom is the instrument of gaining knowledge about the origin and root of anything, that is, the divine world of ideas.

Given what I have already mentioned it can be concluded that virtue is the same with salvation. In Plato’s view, a virtuous person is one who is perfectly aware of what is good and useful for him (Copleston, 1985).

The above theory leads us to the conclusion that goodness and salvation are not relative. Rather, they refer to something absolute and unchanging. Had it been otherwise, it could not mean salvation because according to Plato’s philosophy the true salvation belongs to general and absolute things.

Plato believes that ethics and ethical principles are not relative. He argues against the relativism of sophists by saying that ethical ideas like courage and justice are definitely absolutes the way mathematical, geometric and astronomy are. Accordingly, there is basically one way of having a good life because goodness is not contingent upon the attitudes, wishes, desires or beliefs of people. In fact, goodness is considered to have an existence independent of human beings. Goodness is discovered through education and learning (Robert L. Holmes, 1975).

Salvation/damnation in Avicenna’s view:

In the eighth chapter of *Points and Punishments (Esharat va Tanbihat)*, Avicenna discusses the topic of salvation/damnation. His main goal is to argue in favor of a special conception of salvation/damnation, namely, rational. Avicenna defines salvation is the realization of human potentials and capacities in a consistent and coordinated way which could lead to human perfection (Rasaei, 2011).

Avicenna begins his discussion of salvation by referring to pleasure and happiness. For him, pleasure is achieving or perceiving something which works as a prerequisite for reaching perfection and gaining goodness. In this view, pleasure is divided into rational and sensory. Avicenna proves the superiority of essential and rotational pleasures over sensory pleasures. By proving the immortality of the self he notes that the self, if it becomes perfect, is able to achieve happiness and salvation which surpasses the mortality of the body.

The true salvation and pleasure for human means the arrival of the self to a perfect state. This can be achieved self-conscious will and determination of human beings. The seed of desired state of perfection is planted in the essence of human beings by the Almighty God. One needs to take into account all human faculties in seeking perfection.

Human salvation which is a combination of soul and body is a form of goodness proportionate to the faculties of the soul and body. We call a human being perfect when his heart is enlightened by the divine light. Determining the parameters of human salvation is dependent on the centrality of God (Shirazi, 1981).

Now the main question is whether salvation and pleasure are the same.

The truth of the matter is that not all kinds of pleasure is salvation, neither is all kinds of suffering, damnation because there are kinds of pleasure which result in more suffering or in depriving one from experiencing greater kinds of pleasure. Similarly, there are sufferings and pains which immune a person from other sufferings or lead him to greater kinds of pleasure. Therefore, salvation should be understood as a kind of pleasure which does not hinder experiencing a greater and more important kind of pleasure or does not cause more suffering. In the same vein, damnation should be understood as a kind of suffering which prevents more suffering or prepares the ground for experiencing higher forms of pleasure.

Pleasure and pain (suffering) depend on the feeling of pleasantness or unpleasantness of a thing. Similarly, salvation/damnation depends on wisdom or lack of it. That something is pleasurable or not is related to a special faculty and talent or a special member in a human being. However, that something is wise to do or not is related to a set of faculties and talents, all the physical and spiritual aspects of a human being. That something is pleasant or not belongs only to the present moment while whether something is wise to do or not depends equally on the present and the past. Human beings choose pleasure instinctively while they decide whether something is wise or not by relying on reason. This means that pleasure is instinctive while salvation is rational. In other words, recognizing pleasure is a function of instinct and recognizing salvation is a function of reason (rationality).

According to the above definition, the essence of pleasure is perception. However, a kind of intuitive perception which is the result of the perceiver's vision of goodness and perfection. This is related to the relativity of pleasures and pains. Since the essence of pleasure is perception and perception as in all faculties is dividable Avicenna divides perceptive faculties into external and internal. He also divides internal faculties into imagination, illusion and reason.

Avicenna believes that there are three kinds of pleasure:

1. External sensory pleasure which is gained through external senses.
2. Internal sensory pleasure which is gained through imaginary and illusory perceptions.
3. Rational pleasure which is gained through rational perceptions.

In comparing rational pleasures to other kinds of pleasures, Avicenna notes that the former is stronger in quantity and quality. In other words, rational pleasure is superior to other ones (ibid).

Avicenna does not equate perceptions and pleasures/pains. In this way, he argues that the main criterion for measuring a form of pleasure or pain is that any faculty whose function is more important, whose perfection higher and goal more lasting, brings a kind of pleasure/pain that is felt stronger (Shirazi, 1981).

Levels of salvation/damnation:

In Avicenna's view, the fact that pleasure/pain has many levels leads naturally to skepticism about salvation/damnation. It necessitates the notion of finding different levels of salvation/damnation. This is agreed upon by all Islamic thinkers (Avicenna, 1984). For Avicenna, salvation does not lie in isolating one to a hermetic corner, rather, salvation is a form of seeking pleasure (Yasrebi, 2004).

With regard to the levels of damnation, Avicenna says,

1. Suffering and pain is a form of perception rooted in reception, a condition which is ineffectual and undesirable for the perceiver. It is clear that the realization of such a condition requires first the perceiver to be aware of his imperfection and perfection, and second to let flourish his talents and capacities in seeking perfection. Moreover, since the imperfection or perfection of the faculties, especially the faculty of reason, are not axiomatic issues, they must be understood through reasons and arguments. Imperfection and shortfalls produce a feeling of suffering in only those who have become enthusiastic to seek knowledge and achieve perfection by all their heart. As Avicenna aptly puts it, "and those who have knowledge about their imperfection must become eager to gain perfection and they must show enthusiasm in achieving it" (Avicenna, 2004 a). (*Jahed* or an ignorant person refers to those who have contended themselves with imperfection which is in opposition to the nature of the perfection of the self).
2. The cause for imperfection or loss of perfection is either because of lack of something (e.g. lack of perfect rationality in insane and children) or because of the existence of something (e.g. existence of contradictions with the self's perfection). Moreover, these can be either firmly grounded in the self or weakly constituted. Therefore, there are three kinds of causes for the imperfection and loss of perfect state of things depending on either the faculty of thought or the faculty of action. As a result, the rational assumptions of the issue will have six forms. (*Morezan* refers to those who have occupied themselves with something which has distracted them from achieving perfection while the thing they were initially after was not in opposition to perfection (Arafi, 1998).
3. In terms of the faculty of thought, the human self can be interpreted in this way: either they become aware that certain virtues and pleasures are achievable by them, or they do not become aware at all. The second group of selves is called the simple self, for example, the insane, children and ignorant people. However, the first group who have had a sense of perception and desire about achieving perfect virtues and pleasures (especially rational perfection) either succeed in realizing these virtues and pleasures – then they are called "mystics" – or they fail in doing so. The latter group in whom a

desire to achieve perfection has begun to appear yet they have not accomplished their goal, have let themselves to create imperfect state of affairs – these are called “*jahed*” – otherwise they have totally conceded to an imperfect state of affairs. In this group too (whilst they are eager to achieve perfection they have not yet achieved either perfection or conceded to imperfection) the failure in realizing perfection is due to worldly occupations and obsessions – these are called “*morez*”, that is, they turned away from something – or due to their own “loth” and “laziness” (*mohmel*) rather than any obstacles. These are people who have neglected both this world and the life after death because of their loth. Among the five groups these latter three groups (*jahed*, *morez*, and *mohmel*) will be in pain and will suffer after death and the unveiling of truth because on one hand they lacked perfection and on the other hand they did not have any desire to achieve perfection. Nevertheless, the punishment of the people belonging to the group of “*jahed*” who have turned to ideas in opposition to truth and in whom there is an essentially firm obstacle for achieving perfection in thought is severe and eternal. The other two groups, “*morez*” and “*mohmel*”, whose shortcoming does not lie in their essence will not suffer eternally. Avicenna calls these three groups “the eternal insidious”. However, the first two groups, “the simple self and the mystic”, who are free from the vices in their deeds and thoughts, are immune from pain and suffering, and are granted salvation. It is worth mentioning that perfect mystics have acquired rational salvation while simple selves have achieved sensory salvation. That is reason why Avicenna considers ignorance and simplicity free from the vices and closer to salvation and bliss (Avicenna, 2004 b).

According to this view, there are two levels of salvation: perfect mystic and simple pure self.

In “Salvation and Arguments on the Essence of Self” notes that some imagine that salvation means reaching a state of sensory pleasures and worldly positions. However, a wise person knows that none of the worldly pleasures is the same with salvation because all are imperfect and defect in one way or another.

In Avicenna’s view, the true salvation means something which is essentially good and is chosen for its own sake. It is obvious that what is considered good in its self not as a means to achieve something else is superior to the latter.

For Avicenna achieving salvation depends in “reaching perfection in the two faculties of thought and action”. Avicenna reminds everyone to do their best in achieving true salvation (Avicenna, 2000).

Ethical education:

The distinctive feature of Avicenna’s theory with regard to achieving salvation and avoiding damnation is his emphasis on ethical education and learning. He has explicitly addressed this issue in his works. The essence of education according to Avicenna is “calculated programming and planning for the education of the child, welfare of the family and managing social dimensions of life to achieve perfection in this world and eternal divine salvation” (Kardan, 1995).

Avicenna is the first Moslem philosopher who regards education as significant for achieving salvation and avoiding damnation. He describes different kinds of education but

considers rational education as the most important one. Rational education in this view means the education of mind (Zibakalam Mofrad, 2005).

At the beginning of *The Measurements of Destinations (Tadabir al-Manazel)*, Avicenna refers to the superiority of human beings over other creatures because of the former's faculty of perception and rationality: "God has given human beings the faculty of perception by which it is possible to make a distinction between salvation and damnation as well as between maturation and negligence. The same faculty helps human beings to distinguish between the creature and the creator, ruler and the ruled, politicians and those who are really concerned with human affairs. This faculty has enabled human beings to gain knowledge about what exists between the creator and the created, and to prove the existence of the eternal creator to the world" (Avicenna, 2004 b).

Reforming the self:

For Avicenna, the first step in achieving salvation is reforming the self. Emphasizing this, he notes that, "the primary policy that one needs to adopt is the policy of his self, that is, one needs to do his best in reforming himself. All policies and ideas must be marshalled for making oneself virtuous and good. This is because the self is the most important and intimate of things and needs the utmost attention and care (Avicenna, 1991). Having done so the self is able to walk on the path of salvation and avoid damnation.

The self in Avicenna's view:

1. The faculty of thought (knowledge/perception)
2. The faculty of action

The above faculties can be referred to as the faculties of rationality: theoretical rationality and instrumental rationality. Each of these has its own special form of perfection. The special form of perfection that the faculty of rationality can acquire occurs when the perceived rational world represents the whole world and manifests the system of rationality itself as to prove the existence of the whole and to show the rational world as parallel to the existing external world.

In light of the above idea the subject of knowledge needs to gain knowledge about the whole world and its levels, whether rising or falling in their levels, as it befits them. The formation of the whole world, its components and their relations, is expected to incarnate itself in the subject of knowledge. The subject of knowledge is required to become aware of the ever-present good and the eternal system which is the source of absolute good and beauty and is ubiquitous. In this view, the subject of knowledge is required also to become conscious about the contours of the world and comprehend the kind of the existence of an essence which is prior to the existence of all creatures, its unity and the way to know it, as not to lead to an idea of plurality. Next he is expected to delineate the relation of creatures to the original source and become aware of the eternal cause of all motion (Avicenna, 1991).

In Avicenna's view, true salvation refers to something which is essentially good and is chosen for its own sake. It is clear that what is essentially good, encompassing all other things in its light, is superior to things which are desired as means rather than as ends in themselves. Salvation is the highest thing that a human being is after. Thus, guidance to the path of salvation

is the highest guidance because the significance of any guidance depends on the path they lead a person. The great salvation is in fact “approaching the first good” before which all other good is infinitesimal. Mystics and philosophers desire to achieve this kind of salvation rather than the salvation of body. In Avicenna’s view, the way of achieving salvation lies on “approaching perfection in the two faculties of thought and action”. He advises everyone to do their best in achieving true salvation and says, “My intimate brother, use this accepted method and avoid its opposite. Achieve true salvation and avoid true damnation. It is practical to fear eternal pain and be hopeful about eternal salvation and bliss (Avicenna, 1997).

Plato and Avicenna’s views on salvation/damnation: a comparison

Having explained Plato and Avicenna’s views about salvation/damnation in different sections, let us now turn to a comparison of the two.

Plato believes that salvation is great good. He approves of great good and its possibility for human beings and considers it absolute, eternal, unchanging, knowable and rational. In his view, great good for human beings is a form of salvation or bliss which is realized by satisfying the three parts of the self and perfecting the non-rational faculties of the self by committing them to the rule of reason/rationality. To achieve such a salvation, one needs to be virtuous at the first place.

Avicenna notes that salvation is realizing the potentials and capacities of a self in a consistent and coordinated way which can bring one’s perfection. He believes that it is impossible to separate salvation from perfection and by that matter perfection from reason. Any form of perfection especially rational perfection is itself a kind of salvation. In sum, both philosophers believe that achieving salvation is a rational process.

There are also similarities between Plato and Avicenna with regard to their ideas of the self’s achieving salvation and avoiding damnation:

Since for Plato human soul is eternal, that is, its existence before birth and was in contact to the world of abstracts and ideas he proposes a theory of recollection with regard to the eternity of the soul. He believes that salvation is possible only through true knowledge. True knowledge on the other hand is nothing but “recollection” and remembering.

However, Avicenna emphasizes the survival of the self after the decomposition of the body in an immaterial way. This will inevitably lead to the question that if the self exists in another world, without the body, there should not be any form of pleasure or pain, neither salvation nor damnation because pleasure/pain and salvation/damnation fully depend on the body and its sensory members. According to Avicenna, there is only one kind of pleasure/pain and salvation/damnation which is dependent upon the body and sensory members while other kinds are not dependent on the body and bodily functions.

Plato adds the notion of good to the notion of salvation while for Avicenna salvation and pleasure come together. Their views with regard to the relationship between salvation and other factors are different.

In Plato’s view, “the idea of good” is something which shed the light of truth to other objects of knowledge and enables the subject of the knowledge with its cognitive powers. In other words, the idea of good should be understood as both the cause of knowledge and the cause

of the truth about which one gains knowledge. Plato notes that what a human being perceives in the world of knowledge after tolerating various pains and suffering is the idea of good, which is in fact hardly visible. As soon as one becomes aware of the idea of good complete certainty that all beauty and good originates in Him is achieved. In other words, he is expected to think about the world and its creatures, gain knowledge about rational world of ideas and the origin of things, and adapt his actions and deed to those rational ideas (wisdom/philosophy). On the other hand, Plato believes that the salvation and bliss of a human being depends on following the principles of virtues. Virtue in this view is understood as becoming similar to God as possible as it is. Plato says that “we should become like God as much as we can. This means becoming just and good with the help of wisdom (philosophy).” For Plato, philosophy or wisdom means gaining knowledge about the general and the rational ideas. In such a condition, a human being has reached the source of truth and goodness and will not commit evil or be damned anymore.

In his view, such people are favored by God. The main traits of these people are moderation and temperance. He notes that worshipping God and sacrificing in his name though good and helpful in guiding a person to the path of righteousness are accepted only when they are done by good people; evil people will not gain anything from doing these things.

For Avicenna, “salvation” is a description in relation to pleasure and joy which is realized by perfecting one’s self and doing good. Therefore, instead of explaining what salvation is, Avicenna tries to elucidate the meaning of pleasure. In his view, salvation is a kind of seeking pleasure. Another point worth mentioning is that when Avicenna talks about salvation and redemption he basically means a mystic kind of salvation which is realized in connection to God. For Plato, on the other hand, this lies in the idea of the good.

Both Plato and Avicenna believe that there is a form of rationality which is beyond the limits of the sensory world. Such a world is outside the realm of natural world. For both reaching to that world is possible through the use of reason/rationality.

Another similarity between Plato and Avicenna concerns the issue of the role of ethical education as a way of realizing ethical virtues. There are nevertheless some differences between them.

Like all Greeks, Plato thinks that it is not possible to imagine a life without the necessities of the polis (city). In other words, good life and salvation are impossible without the society. Plato emphasizes individual education as a way of guiding the society to salvation while Avicenna emphasizes the salvation of the society itself.

Both Plato and Avicenna consider the main aim of education as guiding the individual and the society to salvation.

Plato notes that “our soul intimates itself with truth and regains its peace in light of this intimacy, thus, bestowing salvation to our lives” (Plato, *Protagoras*, 2001: 356).

One of the similarities between Plato and Avicenna with regard to their theories of ethical education is that both believe in salvation after death in addition to worldly salvation.

Among the differences in relation to their theories of ethical education one can mention the fact that Avicenna’s method is directed to moderation, balance and gaining ethical virtues while Plato’s method is dialectic. Dialectic means freeing oneself from vice and moving toward the good and salvation which is difficult and gradual process.

Conclusion:

The above discussion indicates that human beings are too imperfect in their cognitive and perceptual faculties to be able to gain certainty through cognition. Therefore it must be noted that to understand what true salvation is and how it is possible to achieve it one needs guidance from an absolute source of knowledge, namely, the creator of the world. It is only He who knows the true and eternal salvation and the way for achieving it.

In discussing Plato and Avicenna's views, it should have become clear that each has focused on one aspect of the existence of human beings. Their interpretation of being a human and human salvation depends on their worldviews. However, a human being has many aspects and complex dimensions and unless all of these complexities are taken into account his salvation/damnation will not be clearly determined. Therefore, human mind/rationality must be assisted with his heart and divine inspiration. Through this we can determine what true salvation is and how it is possible to achieve it so that we can finally realize this goal.

Schools of human ethics which are the product of the power of human mind and experience are not perfect yet because all human schools are based on limits of human science and experience. Human rationality is in itself imperfect and limited. Therefore, its product will be imperfect and limited too.

One is able to reach new findings in ethics. Though such findings have had a rising trend it is impossible to achieve salvation and avoid damnation without relying on God's word and divine ethical guidance. Human rationality and experience must be assisted by God's ethical commandments and the teachings of prophets to achieve eternal salvation and virtue. Achieving a comprehensive, unchanging and perfect ethical program needs comprehensive, unchanging and perfect knowledge about human as well as other worlds. Since this form of special knowledge is infinite while human existence is finite all human programs of ethical education are imperfect and limited.

Studying Plato and Avicenna's views indicate that they have tried to find and introduce a way for salvation to all human beings. It might seem that their views about virtue and salvation are similar with some minor difference about what salvation and virtue are. However, further investigation shows that though both have written about salvation/damnation their understanding and interpretation of the concept of "salvation" are different.

In Plato's view, the essence and nature of achieving salvation and avoiding damnation is decided by reason/rationality. For Plato, salvation is the eternity and deathlessness of the rational part of the self after the decomposition of the body. The highest level of salvation is approaching the "good" (God). If one becomes aware of the good, he will not commit evil anymore. Therefore, if human beings gain knowledge about the nature of salvation/damnation, that is, if they become knowledgeable about the general and rational ideas, they have already chosen the path of salvation and have avoided damnation.

Avicenna believes that salvation is the realization of human potential and capacity in a consistent and coordinated in order to achieve perfection. This discussion has a significant social implication. If salvation totally depends on a person's self-satisfaction not on the essence of satisfaction itself the bourgeoisie might create an atmosphere in which the lower class are

deceived into being satisfied with the minimal requirements of life and out of their ignorance thank God for what they have.

The beginning step in salvation according to Avicenna is pleasure and joy. Thus, he believes that pleasure is in fact achieving something for its own sake and by that matter pleasure is perfection and good. This conception of pleasure equates it with salvation which does not prevent one from experiencing a greater kind of pleasure and immunizes him from experiencing a greater kind of pain. Thus, pleasure and pain depend on the pleasantness or unpleasantness of something. Salvation/damnation depend on whether it is wise to do something or not.

In Avicenna's view everyone is eager to achieve salvation. Virtue is the necessary and sufficient condition for salvation. Salvation is the result of perfecting one's thought and action which is generally achievable by everyone.

Avicenna believes that salvation is the greatest thing that everyone desires. Similarly, guidance to the path of salvation is the greatest form of guidance because the significance of any guidance depends on the path it leads a person. The greatest salvation is "approaching the primary good" before which any other good is nothing. Godly philosophers desire this kind of salvation more than anything else, that is, more than physical salvation. In Avicenna's view, the way to achieve salvation is through "approaching perfection in the two faculties of thought and action." Avicenna advises everyone to do their best in achieving true salvation.

Avicenna's philosophical system comes under the category of theology and *sharia*. Studying Plato's works and their different interpretations show that his notion of dialectic is nothing but mystic quest and journey. Both Plato and Avicenna base their philosophy on the grounds of *sharia*.

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