



Explaining the desirable practical ethics of governance from the perspective of Abu Ali Miskawayh

Morteza Hasaninasab¹, Seyyed Morteza Mirtabar²

Received: 2023/11/15 ; Revised: 2024/02/18 ; Accepted: 2024/03/18 ; Published online: 2024/07/01

Abstract

In the contemporary world, ethical governance and the application of ethical principles in management processes have become an essential need. Despite the unprecedented growth of technology and social changes, political and social crises in many societies have created challenges for rulers that make it necessary to provide explanations of the desirable practical ethics of governance. In the meantime, classical ethical theories, especially the teachings of Abu Ali Miskawayh, can play a decisive role in governance strategies. Therefore, this article examines the principles of desirable practical ethics of governance from the perspective of Abu Ali Miskawayh, an Iranian philosopher and thinker of the fourth century AH. This research was conducted using a library method and a descriptive analysis of Miskawayh's texts, with an emphasis on his works in the field of governance and social ethics, and seeks to answer the question: What are the ethical principles governing governance from Miskawayh's perspective? And how can these principles be used to achieve desirable governance? The findings show that Miskawayh considers the importance of issues such as attention to public interests, moderation, continuous monitoring, equipping with knowledge, tolerance, foresight, and integrity and ethics to be among the most important characteristics of desirable governance ethics, and emphasizes interaction, tolerance, and decisiveness in dealing with agents, the public, and the military. He believes that applying these principles can help create just and efficient governance and ultimately lead to the country's social and political development.

Keywords: Miskawayh, Practical Ethics, Politics, Governance, Moral Virtues.

1. Assistant Professor, Faculty of Humanities, Arak University (**Corresponding Author**).

M-Hasaninasab@araku.ac.ir

2. Researcher, Institute for Cultural and Social Governance Studies; Institute for Security and Progress Studies; Tehran, Iran. smmb_110@yahoo.com

© The Authors
<https://www.jspt.ir/>

Publisher: Urwat al - Wuthqa International Academic Research Institute

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22034/jspt.2025.488958.1074>



1. Introduction

The question of ethics in politics and governance has always constituted one of the central challenges of human societies, drawing the attention of numerous thinkers and philosophers throughout history. This issue assumes particular significance in systems of monarchical or absolute rule, where the actions and decisions of a single ruler can exert profound and enduring influence over the fate of a nation and its people. Undoubtedly, one of the most effective methods for examining the moral foundations of political conduct lies in the careful study and reinterpretation of the works of early Muslim scholars. Yet, despite the richness of this intellectual heritage, it has often been employed in a fragmented and unsystematic manner. This underscores the necessity of revisiting such works with an eye to uncovering the fundamental and coherent elements of their ethical and intellectual frameworks. Among the prominent figures in this domain within the Islamic tradition is **Abū ‘Alī Miskawayh** (d. 1030 CE), whose scholarly eminence and prolific authorship earned him the epithet “**the Third Teacher**” (al-Mu‘allim al-Thālith) after Aristotle and al-Fārābī (Madras, 1969, Vol. 5, p. 345). His most celebrated work, *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq wa Tathīr al-A‘rāq* (*The Refinement of Character and the Purification of Dispositions*), represents a major contribution to Islamic ethical thought. Accordingly, this study seeks to examine the principles of **practical ethics** as they relate to rulers, with a particular focus on Miskawayh’s views—who may be regarded as one of the foremost theorists in the Islamic intellectual tradition on matters of politics and governance. Miskawayh, as a central figure in the development of Islamic and Iranian philosophy, frequently engages in critical reflection on the conduct and duties of rulers. He emphasizes two key points in this regard: first, that rulers must not become absorbed in the trappings of power to the point of neglecting their essential responsibilities; and second, that they should draw upon the wisdom and counsel of qualified advisors and administrators. He insists on the necessity of religious devotion and integrity, and maintains that a ruler must exercise precise and knowledgeable oversight over the affairs of the state in order to ensure the happiness and well-being of the populace (see: Miskawayh, 2002, pp. 53, 251). The aim of this article is, therefore, to present a critical analysis of Miskawayh’s reflections on the behavior of rulers through the lens of **applied ethics**, with the objective of gaining a deeper understanding of the fundamental principles of governance and the ethical obligations incumbent upon those in power. This analysis may also assist in promoting a model of ethical governance informed by classical Islamic thought. Furthermore, through engagement with historical examples and the documented consequences of ethical lapses in governance, the study endeavors to develop an **innovative and comprehensive framework for ethical leadership** in contemporary societies

and to elevate public awareness of the ethical dimensions of statecraft. This research aspires to provide a new paradigm in the field of **political and philosophical studies**, offering fertile ground for reflection on the nexus between ethics and politics. The **central research questions** explored in this study include:

- 1) What characteristics, according to Miskawayh, constitute the core principles of practical ethics for rulers?
- 2) What factors contribute to the moral and political failures of rulers in their decision-making processes?
- 3) Can the historical insights and critiques of Miskawayh be employed to enhance the quality of governance in the modern world?

It is posited that addressing these questions will facilitate a deeper critique of contemporary political thought and leadership practices, while simultaneously affirming the centrality of ethics and moral decorum in political life. The ultimate goal of this research is to advance a **comprehensive and profound understanding of the role of ethics in governance** and its contribution to the establishment of a just, sustainable, and progressive society. By analyzing the principles of practical ethics from the perspective of Abū 'Alī Miskawayh, this study aims to enrich theoretical developments in political thought and governance, and to improve the quality of life in diverse socio-political contexts. The **methodology** employed in this article is based on **qualitative library-based and document-oriented research**. It involves a descriptive analysis of Miskawayh's views as presented in his major works and related scholarly literature. The study begins with a comprehensive review of authoritative sources on Miskawayh's political and ethical philosophy, followed by a detailed interpretive analysis of his key concepts. This approach enables the identification of essential themes, patterns, and conceptual frameworks pertaining to practical ethics in governance. The **novelty** of the present study lies in its attempt to **extract a theoretical model** for understanding the ethical dimensions of governance, which can be employed to promote *virtuous leadership* in the context of the Islamic state and contribute to the realization of the **new Islamic civilization** envisioned by the Islamic Republic of Iran. In this manner, the research offers a modest step toward the **revival of Islamic civilizational heritage** in the domain of practical ethics by engaging rigorously with the thought of classical Islamic philosophers such as Abū 'Alī Miskawayh.

1-1. Research Background

Through an extensive review of academic libraries and online scholarly databases, several categories of research related to the present study have been identified. A critical examination of these works is essential for clarifying the

boundaries of new contributions this research seeks to make. The **first category** includes articles that focus on the *political thought of Abū 'Alī Miskawayh*. For instance, Ranjbar and Gholami (2019) explore the points of convergence and intersection between ethics and politics in Miskawayh's political philosophy. Montaqemi (2012) analyzes Miskawayh's theory of *love and friendship*, presenting it as one of the most foundational ethical and philosophical concepts in his moral system. The article argues that "love" in Miskawayh's ethical theory serves as a general concept denoting the innate human capacity for social connection and cohesion. Mohajernia (2000) addresses a central question: whether, in the view of the "Third Teacher" (al-Mu'allim al-Thālith), politics and the organization of society are anything other than a means for moral cultivation, ethical education, and the attainment of political virtue among the rulers of the polity. His inquiry further examines the rationale behind Miskawayh's compilation of works such as *Tajārib al-Umam*, *Jāwidan Khirad*, and *Uns al-Farīd*, and the broader intellectual framework these texts attempt to construct. In general, this study presents an overview of Miskawayh's political thought, yet it adopts a conceptual approach significantly different from that of the present research. Lotfabadi (2012) investigates the relationship between *religion and the state* in Miskawayh's philosophy, offering a politically-oriented perspective. A similar approach can be found in the work of Ayazi et al. (2018), although they extend their analysis to include the intersection of *ethics and politics*, ultimately concluding that from an Islamic perspective, these two realms are inseparable and that Islamic politics is grounded in ethical philosophy. Sadeqi (2000) analyzes Miskawayh's political thought with a focus on *his historiographical method*, concluding that Miskawayh's objective in historical writing was not merely to recount events, but rather to illustrate the political and military strategies employed by past rulers—strategies he considered still applicable and valuable for contemporary governance. Accordingly, he compiled these insights as practical guidance for rulers. Mohammad Yasin (2010) addresses the concept of *justice* in Miskawayh's thought and compares it with the views of ancient Greek philosophers. While valuable, all of these studies approach the subject from a predominantly political or theoretical angle that diverges from the ethical emphasis of the present article. A few studies have employed a *comparative framework*—for example, Sajjadi and Daraa'i-Tabar (2019) examine the relationship between *politics and happiness* in the philosophies of Aristotle and Miskawayh, analyzing both the points of convergence and divergence in their respective theories. Both philosophers view the ultimate purpose of politics and the political community as the attainment of happiness, and consider the constituents of the ideal political society to be the same elements necessary for achieving individual and

collective felicity. However, despite the merits of such comparative studies, they do not address the specific concerns of the present inquiry and remain within the scope of general political theory. The **second category** comprises studies on *principles of governance in Islamic thought*. A number of works have explored this theme. For example, Elham Ramazan et al. (2024) concentrate on *ethics in the Islamic state*, emphasizing values such as honesty, integrity, and consultation as fundamental principles for effective governance. Motilal et al. (2022), in their book, outline *ethical frameworks for good governance*, though they make no reference to Miskawayh's views. Ghaffran and Yasmin (2022) also examine *Islamic ethical principles of governance*, particularly the concepts of *shūrā* (consultation) and *hisbah* (moral accountability). Although many of their conclusions echo principles found in Miskawayh's writings, their studies do not specifically address *practical ethics in governance* from Miskawayh's perspective. Mohammadi and Khazaeli (2019) explore *Miskawayh's civilizational theory*, which they argue is founded upon *civic ethics*. Their paper proposes a model for the realization of the "New Islamic Civilization" through the application of civic moral principles in society, but it does not explicitly address the role of practical ethics in rulership. In sum, no comprehensive research has thus far been conducted from the particular vantage point adopted in the present study. Existing works generally focus on questions such as the nature of Miskawayh's political theory, criteria for evaluating philosophical models of governance, or broader explorations of Islamic political thought—with ethics treated only peripherally or instrumentally. Therefore, this article represents a novel contribution to the field by **placing ethics—particularly practical ethics for rulers—at the center of analysis**.

2. Review of Existing Approaches

Before delving into Abū 'Alī Miskawayh's perspective on the role of practical ethics in achieving optimal governance, it is imperative to first define key foundational concepts—such as the relationship between optimal governance and ethics, and the importance of ethical orientation in governance. Once the necessity of these elements is established, the theoretical foundations and Miskawayh's views on identifying principal indicators of practical ethics in governance can be examined.

2-1. Achieving Optimal Governance Through an Ethical Lens

Governance, understood as the administration and regulation of public affairs, involves both authority agents and citizens; it has been defined as “the exercise of economic, political, and administrative power according to law, accountability, and effectiveness” (Midari, 2009, p. 27; Johnson, 1997, p. 9). It

is also conceptualized as the processes by which countries are governed and with the implementation of defined rules affecting all members of society (Bevir, 2013). In its most practical sense, “governance” denotes a shift away from the traditional, top-down legislative model—characterized by tightly controlled regulation—to a framework in which systems are structured so that individuals and institutions self-regulate in pursuit of desired outcomes (Khājeh Nā’yini, 2014, p. 131). **Ethics in governance** forms a fundamental and indispensable element of any successful administration (Wieland, 2001, p. 74). In recent decades, the governance paradigm has gained primacy for several reasons: the failure of previous development programs, growing attention to institutional dynamics in economic and social analyses, recognition of political factors in development, the reevaluation of certain neoclassical assumptions by economists, and the collapse of communism (see Nikonasbti, 2012, p. 150; Tarābi, 2020, p. 85). In Islam, **ideal governance** is also a moral imperative anchored in divine instruction intended to serve humanity. Islamic sources—from the Qur’an to the Sunna—emphasize the role of government as a mission akin to that of prophecy and judgment (Mutahhari, 1986, p. 171). Throughout Islamic tradition, moral characteristics of good governance are consistently stressed. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his household), for instance, asserted that a ruler must be the most qualified person for leadership (Baghlāni, 1957, p. 190; Amini, n.d., Vol. 8, p. 411). Imam Ali (peace be upon him) emphasized the importance of competent administration, forgiveness during times of power, and benevolence while in authority (Laithī al-Wāsiṭī, 1997, p. 439; Amedi, 2002, p. 320). Imam Sajjad (peace be upon him), in *Risāla al-Huqūq*, advised rulers to exercise kindness toward their subjects, remain attentive to public welfare, and govern with patience and composure (Imam Sajjad, 2001, p. 44; Ibn Shubba, 2003, p. 266). In societies led by a monarch or single authority, the ruler’s personal conduct, decisions, and moral values not only influence governance but also directly shape the destiny of each individual (Hosmer, 1927). Today, as citizens across political spectrums strive for optimal governance and as institutional corruption arises due to diverse frameworks and interpretations, there is pressing concern over the erosion of ethical norms within state apparatuses (Hag, 2016). Therefore, effective leaders are deeply invested in cultivating environments in which citizens, guided by responsibility and full commitment to social issues, feel aligned with the objectives of governance (Menzel, 2009, p. 214).

2-2. The Importance of Ethical Governance

Governance is not merely the enforcement of policy and statute; it is deeply intertwined with moral principles. **Ethics of governance** refers to the set

of moral standards and codes that guide the behavior of rulers and public institutions. The contemporary significance of this subject is clear—it serves as a cornerstone of sustainable social development. Governance devoid of ethical norms often breeds corruption, injustice, and public dissatisfaction, whereas ethical governance strengthens public trust, bolsters institutional integrity, and enhances social cohesion. In the following sub-sections, we outline the major dimensions of ethical governance:

2-2-1. Promotion of Personal Virtue

Virtue ethics emphasizes moral excellence, temperance, and upright character. Virtue—a deliberate inclination to choose rightly in given circumstances—is a matter of habit, not mere automatism (Annas, 2003, p. 20). Aristotle describes it as a disposition fostered by reason and habit, encompassing both emotional resonance (“doing the right thing and feeling good about it”) and rational deliberation (“acting virtuously for the right reason”). Ethics can shape virtues, for Aristotle, in the manner that craft shapes the artisan (Crane & Matten, 2007). Governance rooted in virtue fosters morally capable leadership that exemplifies ethical conduct.

2-2-2. Impact on Public Trust

Ethical decisions by rulers can either reinforce or undermine trust in government. Leaders who act on moral principles can foster strong, positive relationships with the populace, enhancing the sense of security and satisfaction. Governance defined as “transparent and accountable management of human, natural, economic, and financial resources, oriented toward just and sustainable development, within an institutional-political climate that respects human rights, democratic principles, and the rule of law” directly contributes to this trust (Rieseneder, 2008, p. 32; Sing, 2023, p. 44).

2-2-3. Distinguishing Good from Bad Governance

Ethical frameworks serve to clarify the positive functions of government and distinguish them from harmful practices. When governance is grounded in ethics, citizens can expect transparency, accountability, and alignment with justice and public interest. Mosavi et al. (2018, p. 204) argue that through ethical governance, virtues such as responsibility, honesty, and public service are foregrounded, while corruption, discrimination, and abuse of power are clearly identified and condemned. Ultimately, ethical governance consolidates democratic integrity, increases public confidence, and guides societal progress.

2-2-4. Promotion of Just Governance

Ethics underpin equitable and fair governance. An ethically-guided ruler promotes equal treatment and prevents injustice. This forms the foundation for

legitimacy and stability within society (Sing, 2023, p. 46).

2-2-5. Contribution to Socioeconomic Development

Ethical considerations shape economic and social policies. Leaders who adhere to moral principles prioritize community welfare, leading to social prosperity and economic progress. Indeed, some scholars identify social and economic development as central indicators of good governance (Hirst, 2000, p. 15).

2-2-6. Effective Intergovernmental Relations

Ethical governance also enhances a country's diplomatic and international standing. Paul Hoebink suggests that donor nations prefer to support countries with strong ethical governance, contrasting diverting aid away from those with poor governance (Hoebink, 2006, p. 138). Thus, ethics play a strategic role in intergovernmental relations and global diplomacy.

Conclusion of Section 2: Given these considerations, this article specifically examines the influence of ethics on governance from Abū 'Alī Miskawayh's perspective. Miskawayh draws upon moral principles as essential guarantees for just and effective rulership, offering solutions to strengthen governance. The aim of this research is to elucidate how ethics can act as a driving force in achieving public and state objectives, thereby mitigating the perennial tension between morality and power.

3. Abū 'Alī Miskawayh and His Ethical Foundations of Governance

Abū 'Alī Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb Miskawayh (d. 421 AH/1030 CE), commonly known as Abū 'Alī Miskawayh, was one of the most prominent intellectual figures of the 4th and 5th centuries AH. Born in Rayy, he emerged as a distinguished philosopher and thinker, playing a pivotal role in the evolution of Islamic intellectual history and moral philosophy. In addition to his philosophical and scholarly contributions, Miskawayh was also actively involved in the political affairs of his time. He served under the Buyid dynasty and held administrative and scholarly positions in major cities such as Rayy, Isfahan, and Baghdad (Nasr & Leaman, 2004, p. 441). Despite his significance in Islamic thought, Miskawayh's originality in the field of moral philosophy is considered limited. He is generally seen as more of a philosopher than an independent ethical innovator, and unlike thinkers such as Muḥammad ibn Zakariyyā al-Rāzī, he did not adopt a radically critical approach (Walzer, 1970, p. 649). Miskawayh left behind numerous works that reflect his profound engagement with philosophy, ethics, and social thought. Among his most influential writings is *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq* (The Refinement of Character), a treatise with a socio-ethical orientation examining the moral standards

and ethical atmosphere of society. This text served as a primary source for subsequent ethical works by scholars such as Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, Ṭabarsī, and Mullā Ṣadrā, significantly shaping the post-classical Islamic moral discourse (Mohajernia, 2001, p. 50). Another highly regarded work is *al-Ḥikma al-Khālida* (The Eternal Wisdom), in which Miskawayh compiles practical wisdoms and moral aphorisms from various cultures—including Iranian, Indian, Arab, and Greco-Roman traditions—to develop a comprehensive philosophical-ethical framework (Fazā'elī, 1987, p. 10). In addition, *Tajārib al-Umam* (Experiences of Nations) is a seminal historical work where Miskawayh approaches historical events with analytical and scientific rigor, offering insights into historiography, social analysis, and power structures of his era (Mohajernia, 2001, p. 2). Through his corpus, Miskawayh underscores not only the precision of philosophical reasoning but also the psychological and social dimensions of human conduct. His analyses reveal how habits and character traits influence behavior, underscoring the moral impact of human interactions. Thus, he remains a towering figure in the history of Islamic philosophical and ethical thought, with enduring relevance in contemporary scholarship.

3-1. Miskawayh's Criteria for Ideal Morality

Miskawayh, one of the leading Muslim philosophers of Iranian origin during the Islamic Golden Age, made substantial contributions to the development of ethical and philosophical doctrines. His works—especially *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq* and *Tarīb al-Sa'āda*—are not only philosophical treatises but also essential sources for understanding Islamic social and moral thought. In these texts, Miskawayh investigates the complexity of human behavior and its moral foundations within a social context. He organizes moral virtues into four cardinal categories: **wisdom (ḥikma)**, **courage (shajā'a)**, **temperance ('iffa)**, and **justice ('adl)**—each aimed at reinforcing reason and achieving human perfection. Notably, Miskawayh holds that these virtues are not innate or natural but are instead cultivated through learning and acquisition, prior to the development of rational faculties (Miskawayh, 2002, p. 59). The intellectual virtues—such as skill (ṣinā'a), knowledge ('ilm), comprehension (fahm), and both practical and theoretical wisdom—require education, volition, and habitual practice for their realization (Miskawayh, 1937, p. 21; Miskawayh, 2002, p. 53). Miskawayh maintains that Iranian ethical behavior is deeply shaped by social interactions. For instance, when an artist bases their creativity on Iranian social conventions, their work becomes more authentically national. While such constraints may impose limits, they also foster creativity within a morally grounded framework. In the context of Iranian social norms, writers are expected to remain within the bounds of virtue rather than pursuing dramatic

effect at the expense of moral integrity. Creativity must operate within these ethical confines, thereby producing works of greater structural integrity. He further explains that when a person perceives objects whose forms harmonize with nature and are proportionate in terms of color, size, and composition, this arouses an inclination toward unity. In such moments, the individual transcends the material domain and moves toward spiritual unity. Though this process is initially mediated through the senses, it is ultimately reason—not sensation—that elevates the experience to a higher metaphysical level (Turan, 2017, p. 14). From Miskawayh's perspective, a healthy society emerges from acts of compassion, whether active or passive. Actions grounded in justice lead to the perpetual survival of society, as virtue becomes the dominant mode of interaction. Compassion, in particular, is considered the highest moral state, and Miskawayh provides a detailed account of its types and origins. He contends that every act of kindness is shaped by the needs and motivations of the actors involved, forming the basis for distinct forms of social behavior (Miskawayh, 2002, p. 77).

3-2. Foundations of Miskawayh's Vision of Ideal Governance

As a major figure in Islamic political philosophy, Miskawayh dedicated considerable attention to analyzing rulers' conduct and its broader societal implications. To understand his vision of ideal leadership, the foundational principles of his political philosophy must be considered:

3-2-1. Character as the Source of Human Conduct

Miskawayh asserts that human behavior, particularly that of rulers, originates from character (*khuluq*), which he defines as a stable psychological disposition prompting action without deliberation. He distinguishes two key sources of character: innate temperament and habituated behavior. Over time, habitual practices allow individuals to internalize social norms to the point where their actions become instinctive. This underscores the formative role of upbringing and environment in shaping behavior (Miskawayh, 1999, p. 25).

3-2-2. The Role of Religion in Political Virtue

Miskawayh, as an Islamic philosopher, ascribes substantial significance to religion in the domain of politics. He views politics as a craft (*ṣinā'a*) that, in addition to organizing civic life, guides people toward their true interests (Towhīdī & Miskawayh, 1991, p. 333). For him, ideal governance is divine in nature, rooted in divine law (*sharī'a*), and every prophet, following the call to monotheism, was also tasked with promoting and implementing divine governance (Anonymous, 2000, p. 126). He considers religion and politics to be inseparable; the *sharī'a* provides the foundation for governance, and governance

ensures the preservation of the sharīʿa (Loṭfābādī, 2012, p. 106). Furthermore, he asserts that rulers must be appointed by divine authority. Only such individuals are capable of actualizing religious teachings in society (Amīn, 1981, p. 213). Quoting Ardashir Bābakān, Miskawayh emphasizes that kings must not allow religious leaders to act autonomously in matters of doctrine, as this could lead to political fragmentation (Miskawayh, 1990, Vol. 1, p. 118). From his standpoint, politics achieves legitimacy only when the ruler is a divinely sanctioned leader—an idea that resonates with the modern Shiʿi theory of *Wilāyat al-Faqīh*.

3-2-3. Social Norms and the Formation of Behavior

Miskawayh affirms that humans are naturally social beings (*madaniyyūn bi-l-ṭabʿ*), and failure to recognize this leads to fundamental errors in judgment: “*This is the opinion of one who is ignorant of the structure of the world and does not know that man is by nature a civic creature.*” (Miskawayh, 1940, p. 62). He explains that social norms arise from various sources such as religion, law, and cultural customs (Miskawayh, 2002, p. 251). These norms begin as conscious practices but eventually become internalized, transforming into automated behaviors (Miskawayh, 2002, p. 84). He categorizes human behavior into three types: (1) behaviors stemming from innate nature, (2) those formed through habituation, and (3) behaviors elevated to the level of moral disposition (*malaka*). Furthermore, he classifies people into three groups: the naturally virtuous (a minority), the innately wicked (a majority), and a third group whose behavior fluctuates between virtue and vice (Miskawayh, 2002, p. 53). This tripartite division reveals the complexity and variability of human behavior, emphasizing the influence of both individual and collective factors.

4. Ethical Characteristics of Good Governance

Throughout the history of political thought, the question of responsibility and morality in governance has remained a central concern. Abu 'Ali Miskawayh, as one of the prominent figures in Islamic political ethics, offered a critical evaluation of the conduct and behavior of rulers and delineated the essential attributes of ethical leadership. An analysis of Miskawayh's surviving texts reveals a set of moral indicators that, if implemented by rulers and statesmen, would serve to establish an ideal and virtuous model of governance. The following outlines these ethical markers in detail:

4-1. Avoidance of Self-Indulgence and Commitment to Public Welfare

According to Miskawayh, rulers must refrain from pursuing personal pleasures and sensual desires, and instead prioritize the needs and aspirations of the populace. He underscores that many kings historically have been engrossed

in their own indulgences, neglecting the real problems facing their societies—a negligence that undermines governmental responsibility and leads to the disintegration of political structures and public hardship (Miskawayh, 2001, Vol. 6, p. 68).

4-2. Cultivation of Knowledge and Information Literacy

Miskawayh emphasizes that rulers should value the expertise and experiences of their ministers and advisors. Ignoring the insights of knowledgeable statesmen and failing to heed their counsel impedes sound decision-making. Furthermore, rulers should actively study the histories of past monarchs, drawing lessons from their triumphs and failures (cf. Miskawayh, 1997, Vol. 6, p. 65).

4-3. Pursuit of Human and Collective Happiness (Sa'āda)

For Miskawayh, the construction of human life and the attainment of both individual and collective felicity (*sa'āda*) represent the ultimate aim of political endeavor. He views politics and happiness as intrinsically interconnected, asserting that the true end of politics is the realization of communal well-being (Sajjadi & Dāra'ītabār, 2016, p. 106).

4-4. Relationship with Administrators and the Military Class

One of the fundamental responsibilities of rulers, in Miskawayh's perspective, is the effective supervision of military commanders and bureaucratic agents. This can be achieved through the appointment of upright and informed officials. The ruler must foster strong relationships with their civil servants and demand of them a sincere commitment to national development (Miskawayh, 2001, Vol. 6, p. 68). In contemporary governance, this approach may be equated with civic participation or religious democracy.

4-5. Moderation as the Axis of Political Action

A key principle in Miskawayh's political ethics is the observance of moderation (*i'tidāl*). He posits that governance cannot be achieved without prudent political conduct—namely, acting with proportionality, avoiding excess or deficiency, and responding to matters at the proper time. He warns that the absence of justice and persistence in injustice will inevitably invite calamities. According to him, “nothing brings about the ruin of a state and its blessings more than continued oppression” (Miskawayh, 1999, pp. 21, 30).

4-6. Continuous Monitoring and Oversight

Rather than relying on unreliable treaties with foreign powers, Miskawayh argues that rulers should prioritize the ongoing monitoring of internal affairs. They should employ trustworthy and skilled informants to ensure a constant

flow of accurate information. This surveillance should be immediate and routine to mitigate any potential harm or disruption (Miskawayh, 2001, Vol. 6, p. 69).

4-7. Balance of Forbearance and Decisiveness

Effective rulers, in Miskawayh's view, must differentiate between reformable and irredeemable individuals. Those who are capable of moral improvement should be met with patience and provided opportunities for correction. However, with those who are incorrigible and pose persistent obstacles to justice, a firm and decisive approach is warranted (cf. Miskawayh, 1997, Vol. 6, p. 66).

4-8. Prudence and Strategic Foresight

The ideal ruler must embody prudence (*hazm*), which includes sound judgment, strategic foresight, valuing opportunities, and taking swift action when necessary. Miskawayh stresses that when a critical moment is at risk of being lost, hesitation is no longer acceptable—the matter must be addressed immediately and resolutely (Miskawayh, 1999, pp. 21, 23).

4-9. Investment in Human and Financial Capital

Rulers should regard investment in qualified personnel and monitoring mechanisms as a form of capital accumulation. Resources must be allocated to recruit and retain competent individuals, as the returns of such investment—namely the enhancement of public trust and governance quality—are invaluable (Miskawayh, 2001, Vol. 6, p. 69).

4-10. Ethical and Religious Foundations of Governance

According to Miskawayh, rulers must cultivate their staff and administrators based on ethical and religious principles. Religion, in this context, serves not merely as a safeguard for the regime, but also as a means of winning the hearts of the people. This demonstrates the significance of founding governance upon moral and theological grounds, as such a basis fosters societal cohesion and public trust (cf. Miskawayh, 1997, Vol. 6, p. 66). These ten ethical principles are not only essential for establishing just governance but also contribute to the development of a stable and flourishing society. Rulers must endeavor to implement these principles while drawing lessons from historical experiences to construct a moral polity. In summary, from Miskawayh's viewpoint, the realization of virtuous governance necessitates two fundamental elements:

- 1) the ethical behavior and personal conduct of the ruler, and
- 2) the institutionalization of ethical governance indicators—both of which are achievable within the framework of practical ethics (*al-akhlāq al-'amaliyya*).

Indeed, worthy governance materializes only when it is embedded in the moral fabric of the governing structure and disseminated throughout the political system.

5. Conclusion

This article has examined various dimensions of *practical ethics* in ideal governance from the perspective of Abū 'Alī Miskawayh. It is no exaggeration to assert that his teachings provide a foundational model for ethical and just governance in contemporary political systems. Miskawayh's emphasis on the role of religious commitment and moral integrity in governance highlights the insufficiency of mere reliance on formal laws and regulations. For governance to be truly effective and just, rulers must conduct themselves in accordance with moral and human principles. A central theme explored in this study is the importance of historical reflection. Learning from past experiences—both positive and negative—is posited as essential for informed decision-making and for ensuring a sound basis for political leadership. This principle implies the need for policy alignment with the historical and cultural context of a society, as well as responsiveness to the needs and expectations of the populace. Moreover, religious and moral commitment—particularly within Islamic societies—is presented as a strategic pillar of ideal governance. When rulers adhere to ethical and spiritual principles, they are more likely to uphold human dignity and avoid self-serving behaviors, even under challenging conditions. Miskawayh also underscores the necessity of continuous supervision and monitoring of state officials. The establishment of transparent and accountable mechanisms within the political system serves to minimize corruption, abuse of power, and neglect of citizens' rights. Such mechanisms not only increase institutional accountability but also foster public trust in governance. Miskawayh's insistence on the appointment of qualified and morally upright advisors and officials reminds policymakers of the critical role that competent and ethical personnel play in advancing the objectives of a just political order. Appointments based on merit and moral integrity not only enhance the efficacy of governance but also strengthen team cohesion and solidarity toward collective goals. Additionally, Miskawayh warns against hasty and irrational decision-making. He advocates for evidence-based and reasoned approaches, grounded in deep analysis and foresight. This orientation enables rulers to make decisions that genuinely serve the public interest, particularly the most vulnerable sectors of society. Furthermore, tolerance and constructive interaction in political relations are among the ethical principles that can help reduce social tensions and cultivate a more cooperative political atmosphere. Encouraging inclusive civic participation and fostering positive relationships between state and society can enhance citizens' sense of responsibility and belonging. Considering all these dimensions can lead to more just and humane governance. In an era marked by social, political, and economic tensions, the ethical principles proposed by Miskawayh can offer valuable guidance for addressing contemporary challenges. It is

therefore recommended that policymakers revisit these teachings with renewed attention to the ethical foundations of governance and employ them in designing transparent, responsive, and efficient political systems. This, in turn, not only improves state–society relations but also contributes to a healthier political and social environment, promoting sustainable development and broader societal well-being. In sum, adopting the findings of this research may open new horizons in Islamic and contemporary governance and foster greater hope for a better future among citizens. Although the methodology and analytical framework employed in this study differ from those of earlier works, its findings align—particularly in their emphasis on *practical ethics as a foundation for virtuous governance*—with studies conducted by Ayazi et al. (2018), Sajjadi & Daraeetabar (2019), and Motil et al. (2022).

6. Research Recommendations

Undoubtedly, the views of Abū ‘Alī Miskawayh offer a comprehensive ethical model for governance. In light of this, the following recommendations are proposed for future research and academic development:

1) Comparative Analysis: A comparative study of Miskawayh’s views with those of contemporary political philosophers and theorists concerning the impact of practical ethics on governance.

2) Critical Assessment of Ethical Components: A critical analysis of each of Miskawayh’s ethical components and their applicability to modern Islamic and global governance frameworks.

3) Systematization of Miskawayh’s Ethical Doctrine: Developing a comprehensive ethical system based on Miskawayh’s views that includes dimensions of governance, family, citizenship, and beyond.

4) Theoretical Wisdom and Governance: An in-depth study on the role of *theoretical wisdom (ḥikmah naẓariyyah)* in the realization of ideal governance from Miskawayh’s perspective.

References

- Ibn Shu‘ba, H. b. ‘A. (2003). *Tuhaf al-‘Uqul ‘an Āl al-Rasūl* (A. Jannati, Ed.). Tehran: Amir Kabir Publishing.
- Imam al-Sajjad, ‘A. b. al-Husayn. (2000/1421 AH). *Risālat al-Huqūq li-Imām Zayn al-‘Ābidīn*. Tehran: Al-Huda Publishing.
- Amin, N. B. (1981). *Ethics and the Path to Salvation: A Translation and Adaptation of Miskawayh’s Tahdhīb al-Akhilāq wa Taṭhīr al-‘Rāq*. Tehran: Nahzat-e Zanan-e Mosalman.
- Amini, A. (n.d.). *Al-Ghadīr fī al-Kitāb wa al-Sunnah wa al-Adab*. Qom: Al-Ghadir Center for Islamic Studies.
- Amidi, ‘Abd al-Wāhid b. Muḥammad. (2001/1422 AH). *Ghurur al-Ḥikam wa Durar al-Kalīm* (H. Alami, Ed.). Beirut: Al-‘Ālami Publishing.
- Baqillani, M. b. Tayyib. (1957). *Al-Tamhīd* (R. J. McCarthy, Ed.). Beirut: Al-Maktabah al-Sharqiyyah.
- Torabi Kalateh Ghazi, A. (2020). Ethical components of governance in the school of Martyr Soleimani. *Transcendent Governance Quarterly*, 1(1), 81–108.
- Al-Tawhīdī, A. H., & Miskawayh, A. b. M. (1991). *Al-Hawāmil wa al-Shawāmil* (A. Amin & S. A. Saqr, Eds.). Cairo: General Organization for Cultural Palaces.
- Group of Authors. (2000). *Miskawayh: Biography, Works, and Thought*. Qom: Howzeh & University Press.
- Khajeh Naeini, A. (2014). An introduction to the concept of network governance: Desirabilities and challenges. *Political & International Approaches Quarterly*, 6(39), 81–108.
- Ranjbar, I., & Gholami, S. (2019). Ethics and politics in the political thought of Abu Ali Ahmad ibn Miskawayh al-Razi. *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 25, 89–123.
- Sajjadi, A.-M., & Daraei-Tabar, H. (2016). Examining the relationship between politics and happiness in the thought of Aristotle and Ibn Miskawayh. *Ethical Research Journal*, 7(1), 93–110.
- Sadeghi, M. A. (2000). Historical method and political thought of Abu Ali Miskawayh. *Nameh Farhang*, 35, 115–121.
- Fazayeli, M. (1987). *Introduction to Tajāreb al-Umam*. Tehran: Zarrin Press.
- Lotf Abadi, M. (2012). Shari‘ah and governance from the perspective of Miskawayh al-Razi. *Kheradnameh*, 8, 97–108.
- Laysi Wasiti, A. b. M. (1997). *‘Uyūn al-Ḥikam wa al-Mawā‘iz* (H. Hasani Birjandi, Ed.). Qom: Dar al-Hadith Cultural & Scientific Institute.
- Mohammadi, R., & Khaza‘ili, M. B. (2019). Ibn Miskawayh’s theory of civilization. *Journal of Foundational Studies on Modern Islamic Civilization*, 2(1).
- Modarres, M. A. (1970). *Riḥānat al-Adab*. Tabriz: Shafaq Printing House.
- Miskawayh, A. b. M. (1899/1898). *Tartīb al-Sa‘ādāt* (in margin of Makārim al-Akhilāq by Ṭabarsī). Tehran: Bina Publications.
- Miskawayh, A. b. M. (1901). *Al-Fawz al-Asghar*. Beirut: n.p.

- Miskawayh, A. b. M. (1969). *Tajāreb al-Umam* (translated by A. Q. Imami). Tehran: Soroush Publications.
- Miskawayh, A. b. M. (1976). *Tajāreb al-Umam*, Vols. 5–6 (translated by A. N. Manzavi). Tehran: Toos Publishing.
- Miskawayh, A. b. M. (1978). *Al-Hikmah al-Khālidah: Jāvidān-i Hīrad* (T. al-Dīn M. Showshtārī, Trans.). Tehran: Farhang Kāvosh.
- Miskawayh, A. b. M. (1981). *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq wa Taṭhīr al-A'rāq*. Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāh.
- Miskawayh, A. b. M. (2001). *Tajāreb al-Umam* (ed. A. Q. Imami). Tehran: Soroush Publications.
- Montaqemi, F. (2012). Theoretical explanation of love and friendship in Ibn Miskawayh's ethical thought. *Philosophical–Theological Research Quarterly*, 51, 181–204.
- Motahari, M. (1986). *Islam and the Requirements of the Time*. Tehran: Sadra Publications.
- Mousavi, S. Z. al-'A., Aghā'ī Jannat Makān, H., & Nourmohammadi, N. (2018). The role of Islamic ethics in ideal governance. *Ethical Studies Quarterly*, 23, 203–224.
- Mohajernia, M. (2001). *Political Thought of Miskawayh*. Qom: Bustān-e Ketāb Publications.
- Mohajernia, M. (2000). Political thought of Miskawayh. *Journal of Political Sciences*, 12, 45–70.
- Midari, A., & Kheyrikhāhān, J. (2009). *Good governance as the foundation of development*. Tehran: Islamic Parliament Publishing.
- Nasr, H., & Leaman, O. (2004). *History of Islamic Philosophy*. Tehran: Hikmat Publications.
- Nikonasbati, A. (2012). Governance and development: Past, present, future. *Journal of Planning and Budget*, 16(4), 129–154.
- Yasin, M. (2010). Greek thought in Miskawayh's theory of justice (S. M. Hosseini Esfidojāni, Trans.). *Hekmat va Ma'refat*, 5(6), 58–62.
- Annas, J. (2003). Virtue ethics and social psychology. *A Priori*, 2, 20.
- Bevir, M. (2013). *Governance: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Crane, A., & Matten, D. (2007). *Business ethics* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Menzel, D. C. (2009). *Ethics moments in government: Cases and controversies*. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.
- Ghafran, C., & Yasmin, S. (2020). Ethical governance: Insight from the Islamic perspective and an empirical enquiry. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 167, 513–533. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-019-04170-3>
- Hirst, P. (2000). Democracy and governance. In J. Pierre (Ed.), *Debating governance: Authority, steering, and democracy* (pp. 13–35). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hoebink, P. (2006). European donors and “good governance”: Condition or goal? *The*

- European Journal of Development Research*, 18(1), 131–161.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09578810500431252>
- Hosmer, L. T. (1995). Trust—The connecting link between organizational theory and philosophical ethics. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(2), 379–403.
<https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1995.9507312923>
- Johnson, I. (1997). Redefining the concept of governance. *Canadian Journal of International Development Agency*, 18(2), 99–114.
- Wieland, J. (2001). The ethics of governance. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 11(1), 73–87.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3857704>
- Motilal, S., Maitra, K., & Prajapati, P. (2021). The role of public practical reasoning in good governance. In *The ethics of governance* (pp. 29–49). Singapore: Springer.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-4043-8_2
- Nasir, M. O. (2003). *Iskawayh's ethical thought and its sources*. Bangi: Jabatan Usuluddin & Falsafah, Fakulti Pengajian Islam, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- Ramadhan, I., Hadist, N., & Kurniati, K. (2024). Etika pengelolaan pemerintahan perspektif hukum Islam. *Ethics and Law Journal: Business and Notary*, 2(3), 15–22.
<https://doi.org/10.61292/eljbn.209>
- Rieseneder, F. B. (2008). Good governance: Characteristics, methods and the Australian examples. *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, 24, 26–52.
- Singh, A. (2023). A theoretical understanding of governance and good governance. *VIDYA – A Journal of Gujarat University*, 2(1), 39–47.
<https://doi.org/10.47413/vidya.v2i1.125>
- Haq, S. (2011). Ethics and leadership skills in the public service. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 15, 2792–2796. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.04.195>
- Turan, R. (2017). The reflection of Ibn Miskawayh's aesthetics in Islamic thought. *Cumhuriyet İlahiyat Dergisi – Cumhuriyet Theology Journal*, 21(2), 615–630.
- Walzer, R. (1970). Early Islamic philosophy. In A. H. Armstrong (Ed.), *The Cambridge history of later Greek and early medieval philosophy* (pp. 648–650). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.