

# Economy in Ethics: Economical Concerns in Ahlâk-ı Alâî

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## Abstract

In the ages before modern social science disciplines had been established, it was not possible to encounter independent work on issues covered under economical thought; however, it was possible to visit these issues in books of various disciplines. Examples include books on ethics. Economic issues were often dealt with in these books, sometimes only scarcely and others more frequently. One of the most important examples is Kınalızâde Ali Çelebi's work Ahlâk-ı Alâî, and, notably, its section titled İlm-i Tedbir-i Menzil (Science of Domestic Economy). Also formulating the 'circle of justice' that was particularly important in understanding the Ottoman mentality, this classic work discussed man's spirituality and the house he dwells in; the structure of the family and of building a city that can be lived in; and commercial relations and the properties of the rulers' integrity in their relations among each other. He referred to many resources of the language and literature while completing this work, and in the İlm-i Tedbir-i Menzil section, many issues, including material necessities of the family house, the fathers' duties as lords of the house, and rules for rearing the children, are considered an integral approach in addition to the issues covered by the theory of economics today, which include the functions of money, saving, spending, etc. Supported by verses from the Koran, deeds of Muhammad, and poetry, the issues are expressed with an elaborate and literate style. To ensure that these types of classical works continue their relevance today, they shall be understood correctly when first considering their semantics and background; only then shall they shall be given a meaning that can be utilized to answer our questions of today. Our work is only an effort to provide grounds for this purpose.

## Keywords

Ethics, Ahlâk-ı Alâî, Economic Thought, İlm-i Tedbir-i Menzil, Kınalızâde, Oikonomia.

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When we observe studies on the available history of economic thought, we can see that a Eurocentric approach is dominant much as it is in other historical studies. Just as in philosophy, economic thought begins with the Greek age; the period referred to as the Middle Ages is never mentioned or mentioned with only a few paragraphs in such a manner that would justify referring to this age as the “dark ages.” Nevertheless, these ages are the most brilliant periods in the history of Islamic thought. Only the naive would permit thought that no prior discussion has ever addressed economic matters, so one merely has to browse through different resources to uncover issues under the heading of economic thought. It is obvious that this has historically been a difficult task, when considering the abundance in the history of Islamic thought and the method of covering these issues in the various works. Sabri Orman’s “İktisadî Düşünce Tarihinin İslamî Kaynakları” (Islamic Resources on the History of Economic Thought, 1999) is considered the most important guide and the only work available in this field. Prevalent throughout this work are thoughts on how economic issues can be found throughout many different fields and works and how the economic issues are resolved in relation to their problems and within their contexts. One of the most important examples is Kınalızâde Ali Çelebi’s work *Ahlâk-ı Alâî*, and, notably, its section titled İlmi Tedbir-i Menzil (Science of Domestic Economy).

What is important (or maybe even more important than finding thoughts on economic issues from different sources and elaborating on them) is the means and methods of approaching these thoughts. In the aforementioned resources, these issues were resolved as answers to questions which were, in general, different than questions which would be posed today. Any assessments made without considering these questions and problems, or the social and intellectual grounds where the thoughts were presented, shall be incorrect or, at least, incomplete. Sabri Ülgener’s (2006) approach may be given as an example, for although Ülgener is among the exceptional in assessing *Ahlâk-ı Alâî* in terms of the economic thought present in his work, “İktisadî Çözülmenin Ahlâk ve Zihniyet Dünyası” (Ethics and Mentality of Economic Disintegration), his method is flawed as he did not consider the points we have mentioned. He did not try to understand it within its own sphere of meanings, within its own

questions and context; he, instead, considered it an example of the “ethics of middle age” that he developed through the book and criticized on the grounds that it prevented the development of the economic mind.

Defining “economy” includes a common way and restraint in addition to its other meanings. The focus of the books on ethics is that man shall act on restraint in all issues; this is called “virtue.” When we mention *Economy on Ethics*, we refer both to the discussion of economic matters in ethics and common way or restraint in the approach to ethics. Therefore, we suggest that this issue is discussed within these books in the context of the properties that make man virtuous instead of individuality. In other words, the goal of the books on ethics throughout the history of Islamic thought, notably *Ahlâk-ı Alâî*, is the construction of a virtuous man, a virtuous society, and a virtuous state. Economic issues are considered in this context, and the economic acts that shall contribute to this goal are discussed.

In our work, the relation between *oikonomia* and *ilm-i tedbir-i menzil* shall be investigated first to observe where this concept stands in the tradition of thought and then move to analyze Kınalızâde and his work. *Ahlâk-ı Alâî* shall provide additional discourse and, finally, the issue of *İlm-i Tedbir-i Menzil* in *Ahlâk-ı Alâî* shall be presented.

### **Oikonomia and İlm-i Tedbir-i Menzil**

It is possible to translate *oikonomia* (which is formed by the combination of *oikos*, “home” or “household” in Greek and *nem*, “management” or “administration” in Greek) as “domestic economy” in Turkish (Güler, 2005). The origin of categorizing economics as a science today, *oikonomia* was considered a branch of knowledge under the practical Greek Philosophy. The book accepted as the first authority on this is *Oikonomicus*, written by Xenophon who lived between 430 and 355 BC (Özgüven, 2011, p. 16).

The connection between Islamic Meşşai (Peripathical) philosophy and Greek philosophy has already been established. Developed from the translation of

Greek philosophical texts and, especially under the influence of the thoughts of Aristotle, Meşşâî philosophy is an example for the transition of thoughts to its reproduction in a new form. The presence of the strong connection between these two forms of thinking facilitates the understanding of the term “İlm-i Tedbir-i Menzil” or “Tedbirü'l-Menzil.” We can even say that this term is the precise translation of *oikonomia* (Orman, 2001, p. 302). Similarly, it is possible to translate “İlm-i Tedbir-i Menzil” as “Domestic Economy” in Turkish.

It would be beneficial to see the position of İlm-i Tedbir-i Menzil in the categorization of sciences in the tradition of Meşşâî philosophy to observe the part of the whole. Accordingly, philosophy, or “hikmet,” is divided into two parts: Theoretical Philosophy and Practical Philosophy. These are, further, divided into three branches each: Theoretical Philosophy includes (i) Metaphysics (high science), (ii) Mathematics (middle science), (iii) Natural Science (lower science) and Practical Philosophy includes (i) Ethics, (ii) İlm-i Tedbir-i Menzil (economy), (iii) İlm-i Tedbir-i Medine (politics) (Nasr, 2006 p. 16).

According to these classifications in philosophy, while theoretical philosophy is related to the knowledge of the man, practical philosophy relates to the acts of man; the former matures man in theory while the latter matures man in practice. When both philosophies are present in one person, true happiness is achieved. Relative to the subject of ethics, one of the three parts of practical philosophy relates to how the individual shall mature--the subject of İlm-i Tedbir-i Menzil is domestic economy, or ethics of the family, and the subject of İlm-i Tedbir-i Medine focuses on virtuously ruling the cities or countries (Aydın, 1989).

The term, Tedbirü'l-Menzil, is first used in İbn Miskeveyh's work, *Tehzibü'l-Ahlâk* by referring to *Oikonomia* in Greek (Çağrıçı, 2011). Although İbn Sînâ, İbn Miskeveyh's contemporary and most significant philosopher of the Meşşâî philosophy does not use the same term, he has a separate work titled *es-Siyasetü'l-Menziliyye*. In this work, İbn Sînâ becomes the most significant source for all İlm-i Tedbir-i Menzil literature after him (Orman, 2001, p. 327). This term would eventually also be used by Gazâlî and Nasîrüddîn-i Tûsî, but the subject was most widely addressed in Kınalızâde's *Ahlâk-ı Alâî* (Çağrıçı, 2011). In the relationship between İlm-i Tedbir-i Menzil and *Oikonomia*, it is possible to

say that the general philosophical method and form is taken from Oikonomia, however its content is reproduced from Islamic perspective and resources.

Kınalızâde, originally named Ali Çelebi ibn Emrullah (or Alâad-dîn Alî b. Emrullah), was born in Isparta in 1510. He was referred to as either Kınalızâde Ali Çelebi or, simply, Kınalızâde. The nickname Kınalızâde comes from the tale of his grandfather's application of henna on his beard. Due to this habit of his grandfather, his children and grandchildren were referred to by this nickname (Oktay, 2011, p. 41). Kınalızâde studied under various professors in Mahmud Paşa, Davud Paşa and Ali Paşa Madrasahs and went on to enroll in Fatih Madrasah to eventually become the assistant for Çivizâde Muhyiddin Mehmed Efendi, one of the prominent scholars of the period in 1538 (Aksoy, 2002).

The preface of *Ahlâk-ı Alâî*, Kınalızâde (2007) indicates the tradition he connects with his book, thus his resources through his reference to the names of three books: Nasîrüddîn-i Tûsî's *Ahlâk-ı Nâsrî*, Celâleddîn Devvânî's *Ahlâk-ı Celâlî*, and Hüseyin Vâ'iz's *Ahlâk-ı Muhsinî*. He discloses that as these books were all in Persian and that he wanted to write a book on ethics in Turkish (p. 38). Kınalızâde's philosophical resources that extended up to the Greek philosophers were, in fact, resources that he used via Tûsî and Devvânî. One of the most significant differences that distinguishes *Ahlâk-ı Alâî* from the others is that the religious resources he used were referred to significantly more throughout this work. He referred extensively to the religious evidences, such as verses of the Koran and deeds of Muhammed, particularly throughout the *İlm-i Tedbir-i Menzil* section on family ethics, which is the subject of our work. If we separated Tûsî and Devvânî from whose work he derives the essence and form of ethics, we can say that the most significant source of *Ahlâk-ı Alâî* is Gazâlî and his work, *İhyâ* (Koç, 2007). Thus, it would not be wrong to say that he has Islamized the ethics in the philosophical terms he inherited with the help of Gazali.

With all these features, Kınalızâde produced a new work with his *Ahlâk-ı Alâî* by synthesising the philosophical, religious, and sufistic aspects of all the knowledge assimilated before him. This work has become an example for many subsequent works and a resource for all ethics books taught in Madrasahs, thus rendering it a "classical" and original work (Oktay, 2008). If we consider

the commentary and annotation tradition, authenticity comes from the “composition, phrase, and addition” (Koç, 2007) and has resulted in this work being translated into Western languages (Kahraman, 1989).<sup>1</sup>

### İlm-i Tedbir-i Menzil in Ahlāk-ı Alâî

It is quite difficult to encounter—both in the Western and Eastern worlds—works devoted to economic matters from pre-modern times because economic matters were considered a part of individual and social life and were not given a separate field of existence. Although this does not indicate that they were not involved in economic matters, it does indicate that these matters were not considered a central role in the integrity of life. It is possible to find many Islamic laws, commentary, Sufism, and ethics works that discuss economic matters in relation to their various aspects of our world, but none of them are aimed at explaining economic matters. This is also the reflection of a world-view that “expresses a specific stance developed against being and the ethical codes of this stance.” Whether you are aware of it or not, or specify it or not, a world-view “provides direction for all human acts.” (Kalin, 2010).

Ignoring this point, which is methodically very important, may cause very significant mistakes in understanding the text as intended in the pre-modern age. A progressive and Euro-centric perspective creates an obstacle even before reading the texts in their own contexts.<sup>2</sup> Viewing former texts written with a perspective of social sciences that occurred at a later date and in disciplines that were separated within these sciences with a mentality where there was no such separation would inevitably cause a “disciplinary illusion.”<sup>3</sup> In such an approach where discipline is brought more forward than the text and the thought, the subjects are studied by removing their integrity and, thus, they are consumed. In this sense, our subject in this study, namely İlm-i Tedbir-i Menzil in *Ahlāk-ı Alâî*, shall be understood through the integrity of the work we are trying to build.

<sup>1</sup> Although *Ahlāk-ı Alâî* has been printed incompletely and in different forms, the latest and complete edition was edited by Mustafa Koç without any simplification by complete Latinisation, and was printed in 2007 by Klasik Yayınları.

<sup>2</sup> Using Kinalızâde and his work *Ahlāk-ı Alâî* as an example of the “ethics of middle age” was interpreted negatively and criticized on the grounds that it prevented the development of the economic mind, see Ülgener (2006).

<sup>3</sup> For the conceptualization of “historical illusion” and “disciplinary illusion,” see Köse (2009, pp. 1-19).

Kınalızâde (2007) has addressed *İlm-i Tedbir-i Menzil* in his very first sentence by stating that “*İlm-i tedbirü'l-men zil* is a science and, with that science, one can know the qualities of living orderly and reasonably among the residents of a household.” He provides that this science is about providing order among the residents of a household and states that, if the rules of living together are followed, happiness in the world and in the afterlife may be reached; however, as it is not possible to put these rules forth with reason only, this science shall be needed (p. 325).

In the first section, Kınalızâde mentions the innate requirements of man to a *menzil* (house). Here, he uses the term “*menzil*” as a house where man dwelt first and then as a home for the entire family. Thus, he mentions that *menzil* has both material and spiritual aspects and, as a result of the integral approach, mentions the physical conditions of a house in a work where ethics is described (p. 327). Kınalızâde mentions five elements that constitute a family: father, mother, children, servant, and foods that allow nourishment (*kût*).<sup>4</sup> Provision of these five elements is to provide for the order of the family and is only possible through its management. Whosoever would manage the family is the father, and the father shall manage the family in such a manner that members of the family shall stay away from bad morals (*rezilet*) while exercising good morals (*fazilet*). Here, *İlm-i Tedbir-i Menzil* is the knowledge of this household management and the purpose of this knowledge “are not the households built from stones and wood, maybe the haven that brings the aforementioned ones or more together.” (p. 328).

In the second section, Kınalızâde utilizes two analogies to describe the duties of the father, who is the leader of the family. These analogies are of a shepherd and a doctor. The analogy of the shepherd may have its inspiration from the deed of Mohammad, specifically “You are all shepherds and each of you is responsible for his own stock.” The same example of the leader of a family is also used by İbn Sînâ and Tûsî (Orman, 2001, p. 338).

4 Using “supplies” for the term “*Kût*,” Oktay (2001) states that this word is an expression that covers all needs of a family, such as clothing, dwelling and other materials other than food.

Kınalızâde (2007) returns to the physical conditions of a house in the sense of the third section and describes how a house shall be constructed. He divides houses into two types: immovable houses made of stones, limestone or wood where inhabitants of a city or village dwell, and movable houses, such as tents made of wool by the inhabitants of a desert or countryside. Stating that the former is better, Kınalızâde asserts that a house shall be firm, its ceiling shall be high, and its doors shall be wide. He details colors and ornamentation and states that continuous repairs and glamorization are bad habits and wastes that one should avoid (p. 333).

The fourth section of the İlmi-i Tedbir-i Menzil, the second of the three parts of Ahlâk-ı Alâî, consisting of eight sections on its own, is the section where economic matters are discussed most. This section may be considered as “Economy in İlmi-i Tedbir-i Menzil.” However, it would be more appropriate to think of it as referring to the “household or family economy” by considering the form of the book (Orman, 2001, p. 340).

Kınalızâde (2007) states that a stagnant measure that determines the values of all things is required in all applications and businesses. This is dinar (money) that is also called “nâmûs-ı asgar” (small honor). This shall be a precious thing that cannot be obtained by everyone at whatever point they require, and a small amount of it shall compensate for greater amounts of other things. The fact that it can be carried easily that man can meet his needs with it easily, and that it can stand for a long period of time and is appropriate for storing and collecting are the virtues of money (p. 335). In modern economic theory, the qualities and functions of money are described in a similar manner other than that it is a tool for economic policy (Dinler, 2000, p. 356).

Three conditions shall be followed when earning a property or income: (i) Avoiding cruelty and injustice, (ii) Staying away from shameful and immoral things, and (iii) Avoiding cowardice and abasement (p. 336).

When the earning of property (income) is complete, increasing (saving) the property comes next. According to Kınalızâde, property shall be increased because, if it is not increased, it would necessarily be consumed, increasing



the financial pressures and conflicts among the family and potentially resulting in breaking up the family. Property shall be increased, but man shall follow three conditions to achieve this: (i) Savings shall not go further to make the family feel pinched; (ii) It shall not be such that alms and relief is left and so religion and devoutness is compromised; and (iii) One shall not act as tight as to damage his reputation in the society (p. 338).

While these three conditions shall always be met, there are three additional points to be considered to protect and increase one's property: (i) Spending shall not exceed earning (income). It shall not even be equal; income shall exceed spending, so that it would be possible for one to save. Kınalızâde objects to the view of some sufis that all property shall be given away. He proposes, "A property cannot be reprehensible when its alms is given" and thinks that saving is possible when its alms are given. He formulates this view by citing a poem by poet Emîr Necâtî: "Some of it spend, some of it save/And some of it give away for the sake of God;" (ii) Property that will be saved shall be appropriate for protection. One shall not try to save properties that he cannot afford to protect. For example, one may not have properties in a village while he lives in a city; and (iii) One shall prefer properties on demand, even if their revenue is low, for saving. He shall not collect properties that are not used frequently or that do not have customers everywhere even if their revenue is high (p. 338-340).

Thus, Kınalızâde has given the general rules for saving property in the first three conditions and stated the economical requirements for saving in the latter three conditions.

After explaining matters on earning and protecting property as such, he addresses the spending of money. Kınalızâde highlights four things to avoid: (i) One shall not put his family in financial difficulty by reducing the expenditure required for their subsistence too much; (ii) One shall not waste and squander his money away; (iii) One shall not make any expenditure made for charity for reputation or pride. Because, if he acts this way, both his properties will reduce and he will not acquire any merit; and (iv) One shall not rub his good deeds and charities in; in fact, he shall not mention them anyway (p. 340-343).

Kınalızâde then divides the property into three categories relative to where it is spent: (i) Spending made for the sake of God. This may be a religious obligation, such as providing subsistence for the family or good deeds that are not obligatory such as relieving people in need; (ii) Spending made for generosity, humanity, and giving presents (there are five conditions for this: a. One shall act quickly, b. He shall give confidentially, c. He shall not grudge what he has given, d. He shall give continuously, and e. He shall choose where he shall give properly); (iii) Spending required for his subsistence and living (p. 343-346).

Economy is defined precisely by the spending of the property. This behavior that we can call economy (restraint, common way) in spending is the midpoint between wasting and meanness. Thus, economy is generosity and virtue. What we understand from this lengthy passage is that Kınalızâde's purpose is to promote a stable, regular family or domestic economy and a household that earns more than it spends (Öztürk, 1990, p. 106).

The fifth part of İlmi-i Tedbir-i Menzil focuses on the discipline and management of a household and is the longest passage in this section. While we will not go into detail on this passage (p. 349-403), information, considerations, and recommendations on every aspect of life in and around the family, such as the necessity of marriage, the woman as a mother, qualities to be sought in a woman to be wed, women who shall be avoided from being wed, matters on marriage ceremony, polygamy and its harms, divorce, man's responsibilities on behalf of his wife, woman's responsibilities on behalf of her husband, children and their nurturing at every stage, general etiquette, dining etiquette, rules of behavior against parents, matters on servants, various nations and their characters, types and degrees of love are described.

## Conclusion

It is quite problematic for academic disciplines to address texts written in the pre-modern age because these disciplines usually observe these texts without addressing their "question" and, thus, without considering the context in which they were written. When the "questions" of the texts are ignored, the integrity of

the text is also ignored and it becomes impossible to understand the text. Each academic discipline observes only one specific aspect of the text and approaches the text with its own questions. Approaching a text (or a part of a text) with new questions may allow creative deductions; however, one shall certainly not be able to grasp the meaning intrinsic to that text. When the intellectual, social, and political grounds discussed throughout the text is written, its sphere of meaning is ignored and that text shall not reveal anything new for today serving only as an object for the academic discipline from where one looks. In other words, the text discussed shall not be reproduced by entering into a prolific relationship with that text; it shall only be consumed by quelling the thirst of an academic discipline.

Kınalızâde's work, *Ahlâk-ı Alâî*, which we attempted to understand while considering the points discussed, searches for answers to questions on how a "just" individual, family, social, and state order shall be. The author of the book inherited the philosophical tradition preceding him, and he tried to explain it in an effective manner by blending it with Islamic sources to build a restrained individual, society, and state away from extremities. In addition, in formulating the "circle of justice" important to understanding the Ottoman mentality, this classic work discussed man's spirituality and the house wherein he dwells ; the structure of the family and building a livable city; and commercial relations and the properties of the rulers' integrity in their relations among each other.

In this work, we have discussed *Ahlâk-ı Alâî* and, specifically its section titled İlm-i Tedbir-i Menzil in a rather descriptive manner. This book and other sources on Islamic thought shall be analyzed by considering grounds, questions, and contexts in terms of economic thought without the manipulation by incorrect questions and methods. What these texts can tell us about today shall be discovered and reproduced by commenting on them. Our work shall only be seen as a beginning in this reproduction or reclamation.

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