



Visions of Virtue in Tokugawa Japan: The Kaitokudō Merchant Academy of Osaka. by Tetsuo Najita

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Najita, Tetsuo. *Visions of Virtue in Tokugawa Japan: The Kaitokudō Merchant Academy of Osaka*.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987. Pp. x+334. \$14.95 (paper).

It will soon be the case that worthwhile work in moral philosophy will require a detailed knowledge of more than one social and cultural order, if only because comparison and contrast are a necessary part of the work of elucidation. Moreover, ancient Athenian thought and practice are too familiar, too ingrained in our educational inheritance, to perform this function adequately. It is going to become necessary to learn Swahili or Urdu or Japanese. A foretaste of how worthwhile this can be is afforded by Tetsuo Najita's splendid book.

The Kaitokudō was an academy in the merchant city of Osaka, founded in 1726 and closed down at the end of the Tokugawa regime in 1868. It was a center for scholarship and moral teaching, educating the intellectual leadership of the merchant class in a society dominated by samurai and by samurai values. It was in the course of a systematic challenge to the samurai worldview that accounts of the virtues and vices, intellectual and moral, were elaborated by the teachers of the Kaitokudō. Najita's study provides within the framework of its history of the academy an introduction to a strikingly wide range of philosophical and practical standpoints. Here are thinkers of high importance about whom almost all of us are barbarously ignorant.

Two philosophical themes stand out. The first is a contrast between the appeal to history made by the ideologues of the samurai regime and the appeal to nature made by the moral theorists of the Kaitokudō. This opposition emerges not only in rival theorizing but also in rival interpretations of the same classical moral texts. So the Tokugawa scholar Yamaga Sokō could argue that the ideals portrayed in the *Analects* were the historical creation of a particular class, in the light of whose moral achievements the present samurai must evaluate himself and others. By contrast, Miyake Sekian found in the *Analects* warrant for the view that every human being is by nature a sage and that the teachings of the great sages articulate a virtue native to every human being. Miyake dismisses the notion that the virtues are contrivances to sustain public order; they are those dispositions by exhibiting which human beings exhibit their true nature.

A second theme is the working out of an epistemology which entails a mitigated, nonrelativistic skepticism, one that allows its adherents both to challenge claims to knowledge and to authority based on knowledge in a socially effective way. The philosophical interest lies of course in the detailed formulation of such claims. Here Najita's elegant summaries provide enough to make one want much more.

This is a sociological history of the first order, a major contribution to the comparative study of the virtues, and one which stimulates crucial questions. Which of the several Western conceptions of nature correspond to the conception of the Kaitokudō thinkers? What weight does the expression translated by

"knowledge" carry? Najita's book must be read, and the first result of reading it may well be increased enrollment in courses in the Japanese language.

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Hourani, George. *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics*.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. Pp. xv+282. \$39.50 (cloth).

It is doubtful that anyone in North America knew more about Muslim philosophical and theological ethics than the late George Hourani, Distinguished Professor of Islamic Thought and Civilization at the State University of New York at Buffalo. He has asserted his authority in a series of previously published articles and papers. The book contains a preface by Hourani, a foreword by Michael E. Marmura of the University of Toronto, a listing of conventions, the titles and locations of the original articles, and an introduction by Hourani.

The kinds of ethics discussed are ethical theory in the theological and philosophical modes (but not normative ethics) and essays on classical Sunni thought with the addition of pieces on philosophers, namely, Averroes on good and evil, Ibn Sīnā on destiny, the rationalistic ethics of Abd al-Jabbār Juwaynī's criticism of Mu'tazilite ethics, and a comparison of the method of deliberation in the latter as compared with Aristotle.

In his first chapter Hourani outlines various presuppositions of the book. He holds here that the ontological status of value in ethics has to be settled and the status of human knowledge of values in ethics must be established. Three Muslim positions were held on these problems.

First, values may have an objective existence and can be known independently of human reason or may be known from scriptural tradition. This was the position of Mu'tazilite theologians. Second, values are whatever God commands and hence can be known only from tradition with subordinate aid in "extending" tradition by reason. This position was held by the Ash'arites and most Islamic jurists. Third, values are objective and can be known entirely by the reason of wise people, "including philosophers." These "objective" values, however, are expounded by prophets for the benefit of the common people. This is the position of the Islamic philosophers, according to Hourani. He cites no exceptions.

The second chapter deals with ethics in classical Islam and highlights the struggle between tradition and authority on the one hand and reason on the other. It differs from European ethical development partly because of the impact of juridical views. We see some parallel development of this kind in India from circa 600–300 B.C. Theistic subjectivism is powerful, a synonym being ethical voluntarism. It is the judge who decides (Jerome Frank of the Yale Law School pointed out that the law is what the judges say it is). This is subjective. It is purported to be God who decides. As such it is theistic.

It is a weakness of writers on Islamic ethics that they seldom give examples of the substantive issues, such as conflicting claims to property, which could give the reader a clue as to *why* there could be such excited disagreement among philosophers, theologians, and jurists. In this sense, much of the writing on Islamic ethics tends to be presociological. The reader may feel that he is in a vacuum of testy wordmongers. What follows for the reader is an exercise in the