

**Ethics in Politics: Political Virtues of Citizens and Politicians<sup>1</sup>****Siyasette Ahlak: Vatandaşların ve Siyasetçilerin Siyasal Erdemleri****Nihat Yılmaz<sup>2</sup>, Metin Aksoy<sup>3</sup>****Abstract**

Today, “ethics” is an important and widely used concept. Generally it points out what is good and what is bad. Nowadays, most societies in the world are complex and they have complex problems. These complex problems may not always be held in check by sanctions. Therefore, another concept that would be helpful to solve such a problem is the concept of “virtue.” When these two concepts are brought together, the concept of “virtue ethics” emerges. Virtue always requires the accompaniment of the law. Thus, even though virtue ethics may not replace the law, it is a necessary complement. In that regard, a democratic state and a lawful state can only be functional with virtuous and ethical citizens and politicians. Since democracies promote all citizens to participate in the politics, the citizens must carry the basic qualities of political virtue. It is even more important for the politicians who assume active positions in politics. Additionally, other political powers who have the power to influence the politics, such as journalists in the media or representatives of various interest groups must also have political virtue. When everybody acts virtuously in its respective environment, most of the problems may be overcome. At that point, certain elements that are required to act virtuously gain prominence: Adopting democracy as a lifestyle and a democratic education, applying democratic decision making processes (at home, at work, etc.), offering successful experiences of democratic politics, etc. In this declaration, the concept of political virtue, which is vital to having virtuous and ethical politicians and citizens, is emphasized and its basic qualities are studied. Afterwards, information is shared on things that can be done to spread political virtue in a society. In short, democracy needs virtues and in particular political virtues. For this, some demands are have to be made from certain actors in the society.

**Keywords:** Political Virtues, Political Ethics, Citizens, Politicians, Democracy**Öz**

Günümüzde “etik” sıkça kullanılan önemli bir kavramdır. Genel anlamda neyin iyi ve neyin kötü olduğunu belirtmektedir. Bugün dünya toplumlarının birçoğu karmaşık toplumlardır ve karmaşık sorunlara sahiptirler. Bu karmaşık sorunlar her zaman yaptırımlar aracılığıyla kontrol altına alınmamaktadır. Dolayısıyla böyle bir sorunu çözme noktasında etik kavramının yanı sıra bize yardımcı olabilecek diğer bir kavramda “erdem”dir. Her iki kavram bir araya getirildiğinde “Erdem etiği” kavramı ortaya çıkmaktadır. Erdem her zaman kendisine eşlik eden hukuk kavramına gereksinim duymaktadır. Bu nedenle erdem etiği hukukun yerini tutmasa da hukuk için gerekli bir tamamlayıcıdır. Bu bağlamda demokratik bir devlet ve aynı zamanda hukuk devleti erdemli ve ahlaklı vatandaşlar ve siyasetçiler sayesinde işlevsel olabilir. Demokrasilerde tüm vatandaşların siyasal hayata katılmaları teşvik ediliyor olmalarından ötürü vatandaşların siyasal erdem temeli niteliklerine sahip olmaları daha da önemlidir. Bunun yanında siyaseti etkileyebilecek olan diğer siyasi güçlerden medya çalışanı olan gazeteciler ve belli çıkar grubu temsilcilerinin de siyasal erdemli olmaları gerekmektedir. Herkes kendi bulunduğu ortamda erdemli hareket ettiğinde sorunların büyük bölümü halledilebilir. Erdemli hareket etmek için yapılması gereken belli başlı unsurlarda burada önem kazanmaktadır: Demokrasiyi yaşam şekli haline getirme ve demokratik eğitim, demokratik karar alma süreçlerini uygulamak (okulda, işte vb.), demokratik siyasetin başarılı tecrübelerini sunma, vb. Bu bildiri de, erdemli ve ahlaklı siyasetçi ve vatandaşa sahip olmak için gerekli siyasal erdem kavramı üzerinde durularak siyasal erdem temeli özellikleri irdelenmektedir. Daha sonra da bir toplumda siyasal erdemi yaymak için neler yapılacağına ilişkin bilgilere yer verilmektedir. Kısacası demokrasi erdemlere ve özellikle de siyasal erdemlere ihtiyaç duymaktadır. Bunun içinde toplumların belirli aktörlerinden bazı taleplerde bulunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Siyasal Erdem, Siyasal Etik, Vatandaş, Siyasetçi, Demokrasi

<sup>1</sup> Bu çalışma International Balkan and Near Eastern Social Sciences Conference Series (IBANESS) kongresinde bildiri olarak sunulmuştur.

<sup>2</sup> Doç. Dr., Gümüşhane Üniversitesi, İİBF, Siyaset Bil. ve Kamu Yönetimi, nihatts@hotmail.de

<sup>3</sup> Yrd. Doç. Dr., Gümüşhane Üniversitesi, İİBF, Siyaset Bilimi ve Kamu Yönetimi, metinaksoy@hotmail.de

---

## Introduction

In a period where the democracy is faced with a crisis and the people's interest in politics is reduced, the ethical foundations of democratic political systems are becoming more and more important. The education should play an important role in gaining the virtue to the citizens and the politicians. Cultivating virtuous people through education shall be an effective way to solve amoral of the problems of the countries. The citizens and politicians are bestowed a virtue ethics through education and thus a successful governance can be achieved, which is discussed since ancient Greek. In achieving a democratic government system and sustaining this system, both citizens and politicians should have virtue ethics. The importance of virtue ethics is progressively increasing in a time where the trust in politicians is progressively decreasing. Therefore, in this study the ethics, the virtue, and virtue ethics are explained. Then, we shall construe the political virtue ethics with emphasis on its link to the democracy.

### 1. Ethics, Virtue and Virtue Ethics

The Ethics is a branch of the philosophy; it is moral philosophy or philosophical thinking on morality, moral problems and moral judgments (Frankena, 2007: 20). The Ethics word comes from "Ethos" of the word which means traditions in the Greek. The general definition of ethics is responsibility to the ability to distinguish right from wrong and doing the right thing. Ethic; is related to moral, philosophical values and behavioral norms of society. General ethical norms contain accuracy, honesty, respect against other people and justice (Ayaydın, 2013: 64). The "Morality" is a word we aren't stranger to, that we often hear and use in our daily life. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that: what we often hear or use in our daily life isn't "morality", but "immoral" or "immorality". Because what mobilize our thoughts about morality is the immorality or the actions we deem as immoral. Let's continue with a word of the last sentence: the action. The immoral (ity) is used as an attribute of an action, a human action. The objects, the incidents, the situations may not be considered moral or immoral. Likewise, the actions of the animals may not concern the morality, either. What is moral or immoral are solely human actions. The morality is the set of judgments, attitudes, behaviors, principles and rules which enable the human actions to be expressed in value judgments such as right and wrong. The ethics are a deep thinking activity that deals with the morality. The morality is about the human actions. It points out the general rules that direct the human actions towards good. The morality includes the idea of freedom by necessity. The freedom is the prerequisite of the morality. The morality occurs in the actions of the individual in one hand and depends on the will of the individual. But on the other hand, it is based on a continuous social basis. The idea and structure of the morality is already present in the society in which we participate by birth (Uzun, 2015: 3).

Although the morality concerns the actions, the "immoral" is an attribute conferred to the individuals. By characterizing an individual as immoral, we mean to have made a habit of acting against certain rules that we think that they should be complied with. The "immoral" also refers to the wickedness in some cases. "Immoral" evokes by definition negative thoughts about the individual attributed. Such use of immoral points out a lack by its nature: the lack of morality. When we think in those terms, the morality that the characteristic "immoral", first of all, makes reference to the personality, the character, the temperament. So while the immoral means wicked, bad character, weakling; the morality or having morals means, being moral indicates the good nature, the integrity, the good character, and the strong personality. Having good morals and its antonym poor morals is included in the same meaning (Uzun, 2015: 4). Besides that, another important concept of the morality is the "virtue".

The virtue is the skills, capacities and qualifications that an individual should possess in order that a moral situation could be materialized. The virtue is a

---

---

personality trait. But this trait becomes visible only through the actions. You can not call an individual liar if you don't witness any of his/her actions, however, you can not call him/her honest, either. To be honest, it is necessary to act honestly (Uzun, 2015: 4). The virtues such as courage, rationality, moderation, show the individuals how to act. So, what's to be done is to try to improve these virtues. Because the virtues aren't innate, but acquired personality traits, developed by practice. Predictably, an individual who adopts such justification, shall direct his/her interest to the character and education in ethical issues. In short, the proponent of virtue ethics is in the pursuit of being a "good person". In summary; the virtue ethics is an ethical theory that emphasizes to the personality traits instead of the actions of the individuals in determining the moral action. So the virtue ethics enounce that we should be a good person for moral actions, therefore, we should try to improve the virtues (Uzun, 2015: 24).

## **2. Political Virtue Ethics and Democracy**

European politicians are presently displaying a pretty bad image. In the most general sense, many former and new heads of state, ministers or members of parliament, who involved in corruption, are held accountable for the scandals one way or another. Although this bears on the money, it is closely associated with maintaining and sharing their important positions in the state apparatus and political parties. The reactions of the corrupt senior politicians when they are caught for corruption, are quite interesting. Or they deny their guilt, or they say they aren't aware their crime. Silvio Berlusconi has been portrayed for years as a victim of the conspiracies (Terkessidis, 2014). The virtue is required to overcome the problems of political corruption.

The is neither a political objective nor a strategy. However, it is an important prerequisite for "Good Governance". In the primordial era of the civil society, the "virtue" was a revolutionary idea. The French Revolution transformed the corruptions of the ruling order relied on inheritance, not on success, and tried to provide the food products that weren't sufficient to meet people's needs. Maximilien Robespierre in his discourse "On the Principles of Political Morality", defined "public virtue" concept. The public virtue can be possible only in democracies, because only in democracy, the individuals can fulfill their equality with interest in the common good. Thus, Robespierre sees the virtue and the equality as the "Spirit of the Republic". This also gives a particular responsibility to the politicians representing the sovereignty: The laws must be effective first and foremost on the politicians who promulgate those laws. The government also should check itself. If the government doesn't have any proper virtue, who will keep it in legal limits?" According to Robespierre, this virtue should be used to guarantee the livelihood or the citizens. However, with this term, not just food should be understood, but all "means of life" should be understood. When we read Robespierre's discourse at that time, the problems seem surprising (for instance, the increasing prices of the foodstuffs because of speculation) (Terkessidis, 2014).

When we expect that the politicians display a virtuous behavior in the political arena, in fact we are expecting of them to do "praised and proud" things by "temperament". In this sense, we can say that the qualities such as self-awareness, being free from envy, being ambitious and hardworking, fairness, honesty and patriotism etc. are accepted and approved by the general public as "praised and proud" virtues. In short, we must underline that it is vitally important to expect of any administrator to realize such virtues that enable them to demand highest good both for themselves and all members of society (Sam, 2010: 31).

Today, meeting the basic needs of the people can take a dramatic turn: food, rent, electricity, water, education or public transport costs have been considerably increased. Hanging posters everywhere in election campaigns is an important indicator of particular mistakes. Many citizens don't believe that the politicians

---

having "public virtues" will not pursuit those objectives any longer once they come to power (Terkessidis, 2014).

In recent years, the virtue is implicitly seen as a threat to democracy. But the lack of virtue erodes slowly the democracy from inside (Terkessidis, 2014). Therefore, the virtue can also be used for evil purposes even though it is essential for the democracy.

The contemporary democracy paradigm offers a new approach to the perception of personal ethics. Accordingly, the information society built on free and creative thinking requires the expansion of individual freedom, while it envisages the creation of internal control mechanism in the individual instead of external control in the sake of freedom. The difficulties experienced in the control of expanding individual freedom also supports this prediction. Therefore, in modern society, personal ethics should be established before the institutional ethics, in the sense of being virtuous, which is related to the social structure and education. Thus, while the individual adapts to the environment on the one hand, by gaining social values, on the other hand, internalizes universal values such as human rights, equality, rights, justice, freedom based on ethics, molding in personality, developing right and principles (Uluğ, 2009: 9).

The virtues are of great importance for all citizens, in particular for politicians. There are four "cardinal virtues": Wisdom, justice, courage and temperance. Everyone, but especially politicians need to use wisdom, so logic and reasoning skills. For standing behind the ideas and putting the ideas into action, everyone needs courage and boldness - with a modern expression courage-. For weighing conflicting demands and interests proportionality with each other, everyone needs the temperance, that is to say common sense. And finally this weighing should be carried out according to the principles of justice, in essence, rely on fairness and this should direct the behavior (Schmidt, 20002: 163).

For living together concentrated in a narrow space in a democratic and social state, such a catalog of course can not be considered sufficient. For example, where are the virtues such as honesty and honor - which especially should be demanded from the politicians? Where is peace? Anyone with state responsibility as politician should to ask for peace. Some civic virtues can be misused. Any virtue can be abused by anyone whether a higher authority or the state itself. It is possible to exploit the virtues so to speak; for example, The Nazis exploited the courage of countless people. However, the current and future values of virtue aren't reduced because the Nazis and the Communists abused them (Schmidt, 20002: 167). It is necessary to safeguard the fundamental rights of the people so that they display virtuous behavior. An individual who isn't free can not be expected to be virtuous. There are many democratic documents relating to the basic rights of the people.

According to the Virginia Declaration of Rights, all men have inalienable rights such as the enjoyment of life and liberty, pursuing and obtaining happiness. The governments (States) are established to guarantee these rights and take their powers from the consent given by those governed. When a government begins to act contrary to the purpose of its establishment, the public has the right to amend or depose the said government (Kara, 2015: 14). In this sense, the Declaration of Independence emphasizes that a state's duty is to protect and safeguard the inalienable rights of the people and if the governments don't fulfill those duties, the people has the right to revolt against these governments.

### **Conclusion**

The political virtue is one of the key concepts of our time. The political virtue is also an effective way of making politics moral. Both citizens and politicians should display ethical behavior in accordance with the virtue ethics for an ethical politics. The education can be used as a tool so that the citizens and politicians can be virtuous. The people can be made virtuous through education. The people can not be expected to exhibit virtuous behavior by leaving them to their own. The important

---

issue to tackle here is by which ethical rules we can make the people virtuous? Each country has its own set of ethical code. A virtue ethics should be created according to the tradition, and the customs, in which the conscience of the individuals might be activated. With the ethical rules acceptable to everyone, the individuals can be made to act virtuously by using families, school as well as mass media.

The political virtue and the ethics committee established by AK Parti is an important step in order to make the politics ethical. In this regard, the political parties may play a role as important political socialization tools in cultivating their members in a virtuous way. In short, there are many tools for the countries to have a democratic political virtue. If those tools are used successfully, it will be easier for both citizens and politicians to have the virtue ethics. Political virtue is needed by not just undemocratic political systems but also democratic political systems.

### References

- Ayaydın, H. (2013), Finans Alanında Etik Olmayan Faaliyetler Üzerine Kavramsal Bir İnceleme, (Ed: Celalettin. Vatandaş, Bilim ve Ahlak), Açılım Kitap, İstanbul.
- Franke, W. (2007), Etik (çev. Azmi Aydın), İmge Kitabevi, Ankara.
- Kara, U. (2015), İnsan Hakları ve Kamu Özgürlükleri, Anadolu Üniversitesi Açıköğretim Fakültesi Yayınları, Eskişehir.
- Sam, R. (2010), Siyasi Değer ve Siyasi Etik: Kurumsal ve Uygulamalı Bir Perspektif, Ezgi Kitabevi, İstanbul.
- Schmidt, H. (2002), Toplumda Ahlak Arayışı: Yeni Yüzyılın Eşiğinde Almanya, Sabancı Üniversitesi Yayınları, İstanbul.
- Terkessidis, M. (2014), Politik und Tugend, <http://www.taz.de/1/archiv/digitaz/artikel/?ressort=me&dig=2014%2F01%2F25%2Fa0191&cHash=f1cff933930aec7407e0bf8edfa3479a> (Erişim Tarihi: 15.02.2016).
- Uluğ, F. (2009), Yönetim ve Etik, Kamu Etiği - Sempozyum Bildirileri 1 (25-26 Mayıs 2009), Ankara: TODAİE.
- Uzun, E. (2015). Adalet Meslek Etiği, Anadolu Üniversitesi Açıköğretim Fakültesi Yayınları, Eskişehir