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Survey and Critique of the Doctrine of the Mean

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Abstract

The doctrine of the mean is a version of the virtue ethics
theories which were originally introduced by Plato and
Aristotle. This theory because of its compatibility with
Islamic texts is the most prevalent theory of ethics
among Islamic scholars. Farabi, Miskawayh, Avicenna,
Nasir al-Din Tusi, Mullsadra and others have been
influenced by this theory. The principle of the mean
constitute the core of this doctrine and is the basis upon
which the moral virtue is defined as moderation and all
moral virtues are considered as the desirable middle
between the two extremes excess and deficiency. The
practical implication of this theory is respect for

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moderation in all actions and emotions. The doctrine of the mean, beside its strong points such as simplicity and public acceptance, suffer some weak points such as internal inconsistency, ambiguity in the concept of the mean itself, the issue of the difficulty of determining the mean, defects in resolving ethical conflicts and its failure to be applicable to all virtues and vices. The present article examines the doctrine of the mean based on the criteria for evaluating moral theories.

Key Terms: *Ethics, the Doctrine of the Mean, Moderation, the desired middle, virtues and vices, Aristotle*.