

# PHILOSOPHICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF YŪSUF BALASAGUNI'S ETHICAL PARADIGMS

## RECONSTRUÇÃO FILOSÓFICA DE YŪSUF BALASAGUNI'S PARADIGMAS ÉTICOS\*

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**Abstract:** The aim of this research was to Philosophical reconstruction of Yūsuf Balasaguni's ethical paradigms. The article covers the ontology of the ethical teachings of Yūsuf Balasaguni, a great poet and thinker of the medieval East, in the context of the philosophical reconstruction of his social and ethical heritage in modern discourse. Ethical ontology questions the essence of people, their role, and their purpose in society. Yūsuf Balasaguni found the values-based paradigms of ideal social life in a community that exists as a harmonious entity based on justice and knowledge.

**Keywords:** Yūsuf Balasaguni. Society. Philosophy. Ethics.

**Resumo:** O objetivo desta pesquisa foi a reconstrução filosófica dos paradigmas éticos de Yūsuf Balasaguni. O artigo cobre a ontologia dos ensinamentos éticos de Yūsuf Balasaguni, grande poeta e pensador do Oriente medieval, no contexto da reconstrução filosófica de sua herança social e ética no discurso moderno. A ontologia ética questiona a essência das pessoas, seu papel e sua finalidade na sociedade. Yūsuf Balasaguni encontrou os paradigmas baseados em valores da vida social ideal em uma comunidade que existe como uma entidade harmoniosa, baseada na justiça e no conhecimento.

**Palavras-chave:** Yūsuf Balasaguni. Sociedade. Filosofia. Ética.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Until recently, Yūsuf Balasaguni has not been known unlike the author of "Kutadgu Bilig" ("Blessed Knowledge") in the history of philosophy. The latter is an outstanding example of early Turkic literature and a unique moral code governing human existence. Until the 1970s, there had been few scientific works analyzing philosophical views, including the ethical concepts of the poet. Today there is a positive interest in the ethical and didactic views of the thinker. The first studies show that it is necessary to consider Yūsuf Balasaguni's ethics not only in historical-philosophical and evaluative terms but also in the retrospective (Tekin, 1989). Thus, the philosophical reconstruction of his socio-ethical heritage has been done from the viewpoint of the current discourse.

To study the issues of ethical ontology, an interpretive reconstruction of the previous moral experience is necessary since it contains the moral potential that constantly spiritualizes human life. The basis of Yūsuf Balasaguni's ethical concept is the model of a fair, rational, and moral principle "Adam Bol" ("Be a Person"). The philosopher interpreted the essence of people through the moral principle, defining a human being as a civil being. Thus, Yūsuf Balasaguni focused his social and ethical teachings on people and tried to unravel their inner secrets. This shows that the thinker formed a holistic view of a person. Consequently, ethical ontology questions the essence of a person, their role, and their purpose in society. Yūsuf Balasaguni found the values-based paradigms of ideal social life in a community that exists as a harmonious entity based on justice and knowledge (Devereux, 1985).

For the thinker, morality is one of the main spheres of the human world and existence in general. This universalization of morality contains the metaphysical aspects of "Kutadgu Bilig". Despite the abstract and idealistic ontologization of ethical issues, Yūsuf Balasaguni paid much attention to the specifics of morality and highlighted its features that distinguish morality from other social determinants of human activity. However, Yūsuf Balasaguni was primarily a poet, therefore his poem does not provide a harmonious system of philosophical, sociological, and ethical concepts. Nevertheless, a rich and complex world of his socio-ethical paradigms can be seen through poetic forms or allegories, which generalize his moral ideal as exemplified by a particular society.

The conversations of fictional characters and the images expressing ethical

concepts (Kyun Togdy – justice, Ai Toldy – happiness, Ogdulmysh – reason, Ogdurmysh – contentment) reveal the poet's reasoning about the ideal state, good and evil, justice and injustice, happiness, wisdom, will, etc. The thinker interpreted these concepts from the standpoint of reasonable humanism and placed an emphasis on morality.

## 2. METHODS

In the course of the study, we analyzed the early Turkic literature, conducted a comparative analysis of studies, and summarized scientific opinions on the issues of ethics and morality in the modern world.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Yūsuf Balasaguni, a prominent poet and thinker of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, lived and worked during the reign of the Karakhanid dynasty. He was born in the town of Balasagun. At that time, the territory reached a high economic and cultural level and was one of the administrative and political centers of the Karakhanid state. According to historical data, this settlement was located in the Chüy Valley of Kyrgyzstan, not far from modern Tokmak.

The genre of "Kutadgu Bilig" belongs to literary works of an edifying-didactic nature and ethical-moralistic orientation, popular in the East. A. Kononov, a major connoisseur of this piece, claimed that "Yūsuf Balasaguni's poem, as its name "Blessed Knowledge" implies, is an ethical and didactic work written to show the path leading to the wisdom of government, everyday life and treatment of people" (Kononov, 1963). For all its moral orientation, "Kutadgu Bilig" cannot be regarded as a book with formal ethical and didactic instructions, as well as futile teachings. This poem is a work of art that analyzes the meaning and significance of human life and determines social obligations and moral norms of human behavior.

The most important values of "Kutadgu Bilig" include the author's commitment to rational traditions: deep respect for human consciousness and knowledge, reliance on the achievements of advanced culture, the desire to connect the idea and practice, rationally justify the possibility of resolving all social problems experienced by their compatriots. However, the possibility of eliminating the injustice and unreasonableness of social

relations only with wise advice puts this poem on par with utopian concepts. If we view the poem as a work that does not contain anything other than instructions divorced from reality, then obvious injustice would be allowed in relation to its author who, first of all, generalized his moral ideals through real people and preserved the real content of social and ethical concepts. Sh.F. Mamedov and Yu.D. Dzhumabaev emphasized that not all provisions of Yūsuf Balasaguni's poem "should be considered divorced from real practice; moreover, his ethics often preach the morality of a real person and describe their earthly experiences and actual striving for happiness" (Dzhumabaev and Mamedov, 1974). From this perspective, the moral and ethical judgments of Yūsuf Balasaguni deserve special attention. However, his social and ethical ideals in the Middle Ages characterized by the domination of Islam were not fully realized. This does not mean that Yūsuf Balasaguni's views were isolated from real life. On the contrary, the environment was too far from rational morality. In the words of K. Marx, "reason has always existed, but not always in a reasonable form" (Marx and Engels, 1973). The philosopher noted that he wrote instructions for life not for oblivion but for understanding. Nevertheless, medieval Oriental literature had its own specifics, i.e. it was characterized by the idea that a literary work should educate the reader. This humanistic tradition is common to the works of Yūsuf Balasaguni. The idea of humanism is the main message in the entire structure of "Kutadgu Bilig".

The main plot of the poem consists mainly of the conversations between fictional characters and their letters written to each other, in which they address three topics: the inevitability of death and the need to believe in eternal life (to be careful, do good, make a good name for oneself); the futility of worldly temptations and the need to serve God; the changeability of vain blessings and the need to appreciate the transcendent (goodness, justice, intelligence, knowledge, etc.). Their dialogues reflect the author's reasoning about the ideal state, good and evil, justice, etc.

The ethical views of the poet are connected with his socio-political views. In his opinion, the moral perfection of rulers and their subordinates will ultimately lead to the political strengthening of the state, increasing its authority. In such a state, reason will be the main rule of government. Indeed, such a management system results in the general happiness and well-being of people, and the domination of universal moral norms in the relationship between members of society: friendship, honesty, truth, etc. No wonder the poet paid close attention to what should be the attitude of the people to the ruler and the

attitude of the ruler toward their people. He emphasized that if the people improved their mentality, the ruler also improved their morality. If the ruler is moral, the ruler is good to their people. The sociological views of Yūsuf Balasaguni belonged to the well-known utopian belief of an ideal state, where all members of society should be enlightened and wise. To ensure a good level of state affairs, the ruler must be enlightened and wise and have reason and knowledge. In this regard, the utopian project of Yūsuf Balasaguni (el) and Plato's ideal state (polis) are similar regarding the role and function of a person or group of persons who rule the state. If Plato's "State" adheres to the fact that state power should belong to elected aristocratic philosophers, then Yūsuf Balasaguni saw an enlightened person as the ruler. Thus, the philosopher departed from the ancient Turkic literature and folklore, and described the conditions of a nomadic way of life, preserving some features of the military-democratic system, where the ruler's virtue was understood as personal courage, military prowess, and knowledge. In "Kutadgu Bilig", the main emphasis is placed on the ruler's knowledge, intelligence, and management skills (sayasat). According to the poet, the science and practice of ruling can improve the temper of common people. One of the main tasks of Yūsuf Balasaguni's poem is to present the principles, rules, and norms of behavior of the ruler and their entourage. Being an educated person of that time, Yūsuf Balasaguni called on people to master various knowledge, seeing them as a *force* capable of leading society to progress. A person with decent education and knowledge can achieve a moral ideal. In his opinion, knowledge is a beacon that helps to navigate through a complex life. The thinker recommended taking a sober and reasonable approach to mastering knowledge since all goodness comes from knowledge. The symbolism of knowledge in its various manifestations is widely used by Yūsuf Balasaguni. In particular, he said that knowledge was light, wisdom, and happiness. The thinker substantiated an important epistemological principle about the absence of innate knowledge. Knowledge is experiential and not biologically inherited. Like a newborn who does not immediately pronounce words, a person is not born wise and masters knowledge through the improvement of life experience. For the poet, knowledge and education are the main means of teaching a person virtuous deeds.

According to the poet, knowledge acts as an integral part of the most civilized society, which determines the behavior of people and the rule of rulers. For a reason, the thinker did not approve of people who did not have an academic degree, believing that all bad social deeds were the consequences of people's ignorance. Under the "Kutadgu Bilig",

knowledge is the power to change the development of society for the better. Being a pioneer of his epoch, the philosopher dreamed of reconciling all strata of society by the power of enlightenment and creating a just society on its basis. This is the main task arising from the socio-ethical teachings of Yūsuf Balasaguni.

"Kutadgu Bilig" presents the poet's thoughts about other moral qualities of a person. According to the thinker, a person, whoever they may be, must always be human as only humanity remains eternal in the world. Therefore, Yūsuf Balasaguni advised that if someone wanted their name to be associated with good, they should have a generous human soul and always do only good deeds. Humanity is understood as the noblest moral virtue. He said that good morals were the basis for all good deeds. Accordingly, there are two kinds of good and two kinds of evil. The first are natural good and evil, the second are acquired qualities. Subsequently, there are two types of people: good and evil by nature, and good and evil, depending on education or other circumstances. Yūsuf Balasaguni tended to divide people into good and evil by nature. The thinker preached the idea of an abstract person, either good or evil by their biological nature. Only noble and well-born people can have good moral qualities, while people of simple origin "kara budun" (rabble) are only capable of bad deeds and act under the influence of self-interest, envy, and other small passions. Yūsuf Balasaguni believed that the common people had low morality, therefore they did not know the norms and rules of secular behavior (Balasaguni, 1983). Hence, good people are nobles, while bad people are peasantry. This concept clearly reflects the views of a typical representative of the ruling social aristocracy.

The thinker had valuable thoughts on justice. This issue clearly manifested his desire to connect morality with a specific historical reality, which is an important feature of his understanding of morality and its social role.

An essential point in the socio-ethical worldview of Yūsuf Balasaguni is the meaning of life. In his interpretation, the meaning of human life lies in the active assimilation of the social experience of previous generations and the manifestation of its essence in virtuous deeds, consisting of spiritual and moral improvement.

The author also dwelled on the simplicity and modesty of a person, considering them signs of high culture, kindness, and nobility. Regardless of their status and wealth, a person should be modest and simple because modesty and simplicity is the best policy that makes people kind and beautiful. People turn away from an arrogant and haughty person as these character traits spoil and repel others. The poet also believed that a person needed

more skills and virtues in addition to the aforementioned qualities in order to achieve the highest perfection. A person should be shy, patient, enduring, etc. At the same time, the poet especially warned people against bad qualities. For example, a person should not succumb to excessive desires and passions since they lead astray. A passion for wealth is dangerous as it destroys one's humanity. In the poem, the author mercilessly castigated slanderers, profit seekers, and hypocrites, considering them the lowest people in society. The poet claimed that the most dangerous vices of such people were money-grubbing and hypocrisy. Therefore, the thinker advised avoiding two categories of people: the first are slanderers and scandalmongers; the second are hypocrites and money-grubbers (Khas Hajib, 1983).

The poet had his own opinions on other moral and ethical issues, including the attitude of elders towards youngsters and, vice versa, patriotism, family education, love, etc.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

These are some typical features of Yūsuf Balasaguni's ethical ontology. A brief analysis shows that the poet preached the humanism of the mind, and called people to justice and education. The humanistic worldview is reflected in his opinions on society and a person: the harmonious development of the individual's abilities, their focus on intelligence, the condemnation of social and moral vices, and the principle of reasonable needs in society. Yūsuf Balasaguni's morality is justified by the rational powers of people, and the thinker formed his ethics on a rational basis. In fact, the poet showed the relationship between society and an individual in an artistic form, as well as tried to comprehend the moral norms and values of society. Yūsuf Balasaguni was characterized by an intense search in the sphere of morality and the desire to identify the social nature and essence of a person.

Summarizing the universal ethical heritage of Yūsuf Balasaguni, we can state the well-known truth that the past is the key to understanding the present. Our present is based on the positive social experience of the past and its rational comprehension. It is a relevant task to preserve and develop the experience of ancestors, including the invaluable ethical ontology of Yūsuf Balasaguni from the viewpoint of philosophical reconstruction.

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