



# The Role of Knowledge and Practice in Human Happiness from the Perspective of Sadr Al-Mota'allehin

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### ABSTRACT

Are opinion (as the product and perfection of theoretical reason) and practice (as the result and perfection of practical reason) involved in the ultimate happiness of humans? Why and how? According to a well-known perspective, Sadr Al-Mota'allehin regards the perfection of theoretical reason as the foundational structure of ultimate human happiness and the perfection of practical reason as a means of removing obstacles toward achieving theoretical reason's perfection, which constitutes ultimate happiness. Furthermore, he advances a related theory suggesting that ultimate happiness not only stems from the knowledge derived from theoretical reason but also requires detachment from material concerns—a practical virtue and outcome of practical reason. This detachment is an intrinsic affirmative act within the core structure of ultimate happiness. In this view, the perfection of theoretical reason (knowledge) is the principal element of ultimate happiness, while the perfection of practical reason (virtuous dispositions) forms its supporting framework. Finally, Sadr Al-Mota'allehin identifies the highest human ascent as annihilation, where theoretical and practical faculties unify and merge in the Divine Essence, culminating in ultimate happiness.

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## Introduction

Islamic philosophers throughout the history of Islamic philosophy have consistently paid attention to the essence of human happiness and the methods of attaining it. They have evaluated it in relation to the roles of theoretical reason and practical reason, considering it as the most significant intellectual issue regarding happiness. The central question revolves around whether the perfection of theoretical reason (true knowledge) constitutes the real and ultimate happiness of humans, whether the perfection of practical reason (virtuous dispositions) does so, or whether both play a role, and more broadly, what the role of each is in shaping the ultimate goal of human perfection.

The well-known perspective among Muslim Peripatetic philosophers on happiness emphasizes its intellectual and rational nature, asserting that in ultimate human happiness, the highest level of theoretical reason—referred to as "intellectual emanation"—is realized. This entails the acquisition of all intelligible forms within the human soul. Within this framework, the perfection of practical reason, defined as the attainment of virtuous dispositions by the soul, serves merely as a preparatory step for the perfection of theoretical reason and nothing more (Farabi, 1995, p. 101; Al-Aati, 1998, p. 222). From Ibn Sina's viewpoint, ultimate human happiness is defined by intellectual and rational perfection, consisting of the knowledge of existential truths (Ibn Sina, 1404 AH, p. 426; 1379, p. 686; 1375, p. 345; 1383, p. 80), which corresponds to the perfection of the faculty of theoretical reason. Additionally, the influence of practical reason, non-rational faculties, and the body on absolute happiness is viewed as merely preparatory (Ibn Sina, 1404 AH, p. 426; 1379, pp. 687–688; 1980, p. 59; 1383, p. 103).

Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi, the founder of the illuminationist school of philosophy in Islamic philosophy, acknowledges the hierarchical nature of human happiness and rejects the exclusivity of intellectual perfection in defining ultimate happiness (Suhrawardi, 1976a, p. 95). Although Suhrawardi does not limit ultimate happiness to the perfection of the

theoretical reason, he recognizes the perfection of lower faculties (e.g., imagination and estimation) as contributing to ultimate happiness. However, he identifies the greater happiness (Azma) as solely derived from the realization of theoretical reason's perfection and the attainment of knowledge and vision of higher existences. In the path toward the soul's happiness, Suhrawardi considers detachment from material attachment (Suhrawardi, 1976b, p. 225; Shahrazuri, 1373, p. 541) and achieving superiority and governance of the soul over animalistic and bodily faculties as necessary (Qutb al-Din Shirazi, 1380, p. 478; Shahrazuri, 1385, p. 597). Therefore, in Suhrawardi's view, ultimate happiness is composed of knowledge and vision concerning higher existences, which represents happiness in the domain of theoretical reason and cognitive faculties beyond it. Other faculties and their happiness—including practical reason—are excluded from this ultimate happiness.

The central question of this article is: From the perspective of Sadr Al-Mota'allehin, what is the relationship between the soul's ultimate happiness and the perfection of theoretical and practical reason? Is his view consistent with those of other schools in Islamic philosophy? Mulla Sadra presents three perspectives, with his second and third views differing significantly from the well-known perspective and his final (third) view diverging substantially from the dominant theories among Islamic philosophers and the Peripatetic and Illuminationist schools. Considering the distinctions and priorities Mulla Sadra assigns to his final view over the other two, it becomes evident that he intentionally differentiates these three perspectives.

This article is organized as follows:

1. Explanation of theoretical and practical reason according to Mulla Sadra.
2. Analysis of happiness from Mulla Sadra's perspective.
3. Relationship between human happiness and the perfection of theoretical reason.
4. Relationship between human happiness and the perfection of

practical reason.

5. Finally, a clear synthesis of the perfection of theoretical and practical reason and their relationship to human ultimate happiness is presented.

### **1. Theoretical and Practical Reason from Mulla Sadra's Perspective**

As a starting point for this discussion, understanding Mulla Sadra's definitions of theoretical and practical reason is essential. Mulla Sadra defines theoretical reason as the essence of the soul (Mulla Sadra, 1368a, Vol. 9, p. 176), the faculty that perceives universal theoretical matters (i.e., matters where truth and falsehood are meaningful), and as the faculty that discerns universal practical matters (i.e., matters where good and evil, or beauty and ugliness, are significant). He considers its function to be one of discovery (Mulla Sadra, 1363, p. 515; 1368a, Vol. 9, p. 176; 1381b, pp. 258, 261; 1391, p. 64).

He defines practical reason as the faculty that perceives specific practical matters (Mulla Sadra, 1363, p. 515; 1381b, pp. 258, 261; 1368a, Vol. 8, p. 148). This perception leads to the formation of specific judgments related to actions, ultimately resulting in the management and governance of the body to actualize external actions (Mulla Sadra, 1368a, Vol. 8, p. 148; 1381b, Vol. 2, p. 432). Mulla Sadra emphasizes that practical reason necessarily depends on bodily faculties for its functions, whereas theoretical reason does not rely on bodily faculties. Therefore, in the afterlife, theoretical reason performs its intellectual functions without the need for the body (Mulla Sadra, 1381b, p. 261).

Additionally, Mulla Sadra's primary assertion regarding the purpose and goal of these two faculties is that theoretical reason provides the capacity for the soul's intrinsic perfection, enabling it to reach higher states. Consequently, the ultimate purpose of theoretical reason is the soul's attainment of such perfection. On the other hand, practical reason facilitates the soul's avoidance of afflictions and impurities (obstacles to happiness) and oversees the body and its faculties. Thus, the goal of

practical reason is to govern the body and remove impediments to the soul's happiness (Mulla Sadra, 1381b, p. 261). Practical reason achieves its goal through a partial cognition accompanied by judgment and deduction.

## **2. Happiness from Mulla Sadra's Perspective**

Mulla Sadra broadly defines happiness as the attainment and realization of that which the soul desires, accompanied by partial awareness and understanding of it. Conversely, he defines misery as the absence of such attainment, coupled with an awareness of that absence (Mulla Sadra, 1366c, p. 519). Based on this explanation, Mulla Sadra equates happiness with pleasure, aligning himself with a hedonistic perspective in this definition. In Sadrian philosophy, pleasure is defined as the perception of something harmonious and compatible with the soul and its faculties—specifically in its relation to the soul (Mulla Sadra, 1368a, p. 142; 1360, p. 192). Objects of the soul's inclination are considered harmonious with it.

Accordingly, in another definition, Mulla Sadra describes happiness as the realization of what is compatible with an individual's essence and aligned with their nature. He considers what aligns with a being as that which is a requisite of its existential properties and constitutes its perfection (Mulla Sadra, 1381a, p. 164). Therefore, whatever aligns with the essence of a thing is genuinely harmonious and compatible with it, a concept that also influences the understanding of the essence of pleasure.

Considering the above, and noting that in Sadrian philosophy, what aligns with the true essence of the human soul and its highest faculties is certain knowledge (Mulla Sadra, 1422, p. 452), the most delightful objects for the soul are true perceptions that bring joy to its highest faculty, the rational faculty (Mulla Sadra, 1368a, p. 122). Consequently, Mulla Sadra identifies certain knowledge as the essence of true happiness and regards doubt and ignorance as the essence of misery (Mulla Sadra, 1390, p. 196).

In another perspective, Mulla Sadra equates happiness with existence (Mulla Sadra, 1368c, p. 121; 1381b, p. 363) and considers the most blissful beings and the happiest individuals to be infinite existence (God), which is self-aware and self-present (Mulla Sadra, 1360, pp. 144–145; 1363, p. 267). This identification stems from his existential perspective on the essence of the soul and knowledge (Mulla Sadra, 1368b, p. 223). Consequently, what aligns with the soul is also existence, and ultimate happiness equates to existence—a realization that entails the genuine expansion of the soul. Since knowledge is a mode of existence, ultimate happiness for the human soul, defined as achieving true and certain knowledge, represents the expansion of the soul’s existence (Mulla Sadra, 1360, p. 144). Thus, the highest degree of perfection and happiness is defined as the certain perception or direct observation of Absolute Being (God):

“Therefore, the perception of the Truth and the vision of His Beauty and Majesty are considered by the mystics and divine philosophers to be the ultimate perfections and the most delightful forms of happiness” (Mulla Sadra, 1381a, p. 165).

Regarding the happiness of the soul’s faculties, Mulla Sadra also discusses obstacles (impediments) to happiness. He believes that the happiness of each faculty is defined as the realization of what is a natural consequence and function of that faculty, provided that there is no impediment: “without an obstacle” (Mulla Sadra, 1368c, p. 126). Obstacles may prevent faculties from achieving their unique pleasure and happiness, even if their functions are fulfilled. Each faculty has its specific perception, and when the realization of its natural function aligns with this perception, the faculty’s pleasure and happiness are achieved. In contrast, the presence of obstacles prevents such realization and, consequently, the faculty’s pleasure and happiness.

According to this analysis, the happiness of the rational faculty lies in attaining certain knowledge, the happiness of the faculty of desire lies in the satisfaction of its inclinations, and the happiness of the faculty of

anger lies in the fulfillment of dominance and retribution. Similarly, Mulla Sadra extends this framework to the five external senses. However, in Sadrian philosophy, it is emphasized that the happiness and perfection of faculties lower than the rational faculties, including practical reason, do not play a direct role in achieving ultimate human happiness but instead serve to remove obstacles to it (Mulla Sadra, 1368c, p. 128). This perspective will be discussed further when examining the relationship between happiness and practical reason.

In Sadran philosophy, the happiness of each faculty of the human being, in a general sense, as mentioned earlier, is related to the essence and specific function (effect and role) of that faculty. Therefore, in determining human happiness, especially from the perspective of his specific faculties, special attention must be given to his specific characteristics. According to Mulla Sadra, the essence of humanity is summarized in two characteristics: 1) the imagination and apprehension of abstract meanings and the attainment (reaching) of knowledge about unknown intellectual matters, which is the function and characteristic of the theoretical intellect; 2) the ability to act in general and particular matters; action here means positive influence, and thus action in general matters only results in belief, not in action. However, acting in particular matters, which require the addition of perceptions and particular opinions, leads to action (Mulla Sadra, 1363, p. 603). This can be rephrased by saying that in Mulla Sadra's philosophy, the special function of the theoretical intellect is to accept higher levels, which is a scientific and intellectual function, appropriate for the cognitive (perceptive) faculty. The specific function of the practical intellect, on the other hand, is to bring about action in lower levels (bodily faculties), corresponding to the operative faculty (Mulla Sadra, 1360, p. 199). Therefore, it should be noted that the first characteristic (imagination and apprehension of meanings, etc.) is passive and intellectual, while the second characteristic (acting in particular and general matters) is active and practical. Of course, acting in general matters, which is considered a specific function

of the practical intellect, does not mean acquiring general knowledge; because acquiring knowledge is a process of passivity towards the higher realms, and passivity is distinctly different from action, which is active. Instead, acting in general matters means issuing the preliminary steps for acquiring belief and certain knowledge. A precise analysis of this action would state that the theoretical intellect in Islamic philosophy, especially in Transcendent Wisdom, has four stages: 1) the potential intellect, 2) the intellect by habit, 3) the actual intellect, and 4) the acquired intellect. The practical intellect also has stages such as 1) purifying the outward, 2) purifying the heart, 3) enlightening the heart with scientific forms and divine knowledge, and 4) annihilation (Mulla Sadra, 1363, p. 609) In these stages, the third stage of the practical intellect, enlightening the heart with scientific forms and divine knowledge, is considered the process by which the intellect is purified. Given the non-scientific nature of the practical intellect, especially its distance from acquiring general beliefs, it can be understood that the emphasis in this stage is on illumination, which leads to the attainment of scientific forms and divine knowledge. This results in a level of the theoretical intellect, which is referred to in the above phrase as the acquired intellect: "The human soul is like a mirror, and when polished by the intellect... and the veil of nature is removed from it, the light of knowledge and faith shines upon it... and this is what is called by the philosophers the acquired intellect." (Faiz Kashani, 1383, p. 194). This phrase shows that the result of the purification of the soul (the first two stages of the practical intellect) is a state in the soul that leads to the reception and reflection of the light of knowledge, wisdom, and faith. These sciences and wisdoms in the soul constitute a level of the theoretical intellect, which in the above phrase is termed the acquired intellect<sup>1</sup>. A detailed explanation of this discussion

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1. Regarding the matter of why Mulla Muhsin Faiz Kashani referred to this level as the "acquired intellect," several points can be mentioned. In general, what he has called the acquired intellect is, in an absolute and general sense, referred to as the actual intellect. However, when it is restricted by the condition of "all" sciences and divine knowledge, it becomes the acquired intellect.

will be provided in the final conclusion.

Thus, it became clear that the happiness of each being is related to its essence, and that human beings have two main characteristics in theoretical and practical intellects. Therefore, we will now examine the relationship of these two characteristics with happiness.

### **3. The Relationship Between Ultimate Happiness and the Perfection of Theoretical Reason According to Mulla Sadra**

The happiness of the rational faculty of the human soul culminates in its transformation into the “acquired intellect,” a state that signifies the existential perfection of the human being while maintaining their personal identity through the integration of all stages of this gradual journey (Mulla Sadra, 1368c, p. 95).

The beginning of this journey starts with material existence, which Mulla Sadra explains is not the “lifeless body” (the mortal frame), as it is outside the scope of transformation and growth. Instead, it refers to something that has a relationship with the soul analogous to the relationship between light and the sun (Mulla Sadra, 1368c, pp. 95, 99). From this starting point, the journey progresses through levels of sensory, imaginal, and intellectual perception, culminating in intellectual growth within the four stages of intellect. This process is called abstraction (*tajrid*).

Mulla Sadra clarifies that abstraction, contrary to common understanding, does not mean eliminating some attributes and retaining others. Instead, it involves a transformation of lower forms of existence into higher and nobler forms while preserving the personal identity of the human being (Mulla Sadra, 1368c, pp. 99–100): “When the soul achieves perfection and becomes the actual intellect, it is not by stripping away certain faculties, such as sensory perception, while retaining others, like the rational faculty. Rather, as the soul becomes more perfected and its essence rises, all its faculties rise and achieve perfection alongside it.”

He also stresses that this transformation and abstraction cannot occur without a shift from the transient, ever-changing material realm to a stable and lasting spiritual realm (Mulla Sadra, 1368c, p. 157). In other words, the process of abstraction is an existential transformation rather than a separative change.

Mulla Sadra enumerates the prerequisites for this transformation:

1. Knowledge of it and faith in its occurrence.
2. Recognition that this transformation is the primary purpose of human existence, aligned with human nature, as long as ignorance and wrongdoing do not lead to deviation from the original path.
3. Action aligned with the demands of human nature to facilitate this transformation and remove obstacles hindering its realization.

The first two conditions are intellectual, while the third relates to practice. Although the ultimate result of the third condition is the happiness of theoretical reason, it is achieved through the application of practical reason, a point Mulla Sadra had previously mentioned in his works.

This intensification and perfection, or transformation, ultimately result in the formation of an essential, intellectual form within the human being, originating from the initial qualities and faculties (Mulla Sadra, 1368c, p. 291). Through this existential journey, the human soul attains the status of an active intellect, a state embodying and surpassing the faculties of human souls and their powers in the highest and noblest manner.

In this ultimate state, the soul becomes a purely independent, abstract existence, possessing complete knowledge of all intelligible and real aspects of things as they truly are (Mulla Sadra, 1368c, p. 128). Therefore, the intellectual knowledge and abstract existence that constitute the happiness of the soul encompass the realities of sensory and imaginal perceptions and include all human faculties at higher levels of existence.

From Mulla Sadra's viewpoint, the true happiness of the human being arises exclusively from the intellectual aspect of the soul, which is the

principal part of its essence:

“True dignity and happiness are achieved by the soul through its intellectual part, which is the origin of its essence” (Mulla Sadra, 1368c, p. 131).

In other words, since theoretical reason and the rational faculty form the essential and intrinsic part of the soul, the happiness of the soul is intrinsically tied to this faculty. This perspective stands in contrast to the practical reason, which Mulla Sadra does not consider to be an intrinsic or essential part of the soul. Further exploration of this topic, particularly regarding the relationship between practical reason and happiness, follows in the next section.

#### **4. The Relationship Between Ultimate Happiness and the Perfection of Practical Reason According to Mulla Sadra**

Human happiness, as previously discussed, is intrinsically linked to the unique properties of humans in their two dimensions: theoretical and practical. Therefore, achieving happiness requires the presence of both faculties (Mulla Sadra, 1366b, p. 306). In the realm of practice, human happiness is impossible without the functioning of these two faculties (Mulla Sadra, 1367, p. 318). Both are influential in achieving ultimate happiness, and there is no disagreement on this point. Regarding the cognitive nature of theoretical reason, there is no notable divergence between Mulla Sadra’s interpretation and that of other philosophers.

However, when it comes to the cognitive function of practical reason, Mulla Sadra attributes to it a form of specific cognition (Mulla Sadra, 1360, p. 200). The reconciliation of this view with the abstraction of the soul is made possible within his final theory of the soul, which incorporates assertions such as "the soul is corporeal in origination and spiritual in subsistence" and "the soul in its unity encompasses all faculties" (Mulla Sadra, 1368b, p. 222).

##### **4.1. Mulla Sadra’s Initial Perspective on the Relationship Between**

### **Happiness and the Perfection of Practical Reason**

As previously explained, theoretical reason is the principal part of the soul, and its perfection brings the human being happiness concerning their essence (Mulla Sadra, 1368c, p. 131). On the other hand, practical reason pertains to the soul only in its relationship to the body, which Mulla Sadra refers to as the "soul-ness" of the soul, making it a secondary or auxiliary component:

“[Practical reason is] its part related to its attachment to the body and its attribution to the soul’s ‘soul-ness’” (Mulla Sadra, 1368c, p. 131).

Mulla Sadra believes that humans’ reliance on practical reason is not perpetual; after death, humans lack certain faculties related to action and the body (Mulla Sadra, 1368c, p. 125). Without a material body, the practical aspects tied to corporeality are rendered meaningless (Mulla Sadra, 1360, p. 201). Even in this world, certain actions, such as the “evil eye,” may occur without the involvement of practical faculties (Mulla Sadra, 1363, p. 602). Thus, the role of practical reason in happiness is intermediate and instrumental; it does not contribute to the person’s essential identity.

Mulla Sadra explicitly states:

“...True happiness is achieved by the soul through its intellectual aspect... As for what the soul achieves through its practical aspect... it merely brings relief from torment and distress, purification and clarity, and freedom from punishment... which alone do not confer true dignity or intellectual joy” (Mulla Sadra, 1368c, p. 131).

In critiquing this perspective, it can be argued that the function of the soul without a material body—though rare—demonstrates the essential abstraction of practical reason. Its dependence on the material body is situational and confined to specific states, emphasizing its higher degrees of operation. Indeed, Mulla Sadra himself acknowledges the abstract nature of practical reason:

“The practical intellectual faculty must necessarily belong to the abstract level in essence, while being relatively connected to material

forms, as we have previously stated regarding the faculty of estimation and the estimated forms” (Mulla Sadra, 1368c, p. 85).

This statement affirms the abstract essence of practical reason and its relative connection to material levels, paralleling the abstraction of the estimative faculty. In general, Mulla Sadra considers theoretical and practical faculties to be aspects of a single soul, differing only in perspective:

“The soul, as the source of actions derived from prudence and expediency, is referred to as practical reason, and as the source of intellectual contemplation of existents, it is called theoretical reason” (Mulla Sadra, *Alchemy of the Gnostics*, p. 314).

Thus, the distinction between theoretical and practical faculties lies in their subject matter—one concerning non-manipulable truths and the other concerning actionable truths—rather than their essence.

On one hand, the relational or existential nature of the soul and the instrumentalization of the practical powers, which in the view of some Islamic philosophers is interpreted as the connection between the soul and material matters outside of itself through a tool called practical reason, according to Mulla Sadra, does not mean a connection with something outside of the soul. This is because, for him, the material prime matter body or the dead body that remains after death and does not continue its existence with the soul in this world is outside the jurisdiction of the real body and is fundamentally outside the true control of the soul; therefore, it is outside the essence of the human being. Hence, the real controlling and practical relationship between the soul and the body, through practical reason, is a relationship between higher stages of the soul and lower stages of it, where these lower stages (the material, imaginal stages) are considered the true body and under the control of the soul (Mulla Sadra, 1368, Vol. 2, p. 99). Therefore, this relational or existential nature of the soul ultimately has an integrative root within the essence of the soul itself, and from this perspective, the soul can be considered one of its aspects: "The relationship of the soul is like the relationship of light to the

sun." (ibid.)

To explain this perspective regarding the relationship between theoretical and practical reason, one can refer to Sabzavari's statement: "Both [theoretical and practical reason] are two levels of a single intellect, not two distinct powers." (ibid., p. 83, note 2), which means that their essence is one, and both are considered within the essence of the human soul, with the only difference between them being their respective objects: the object of theoretical reason consists of things that cannot be controlled by the soul, while the object of practical reason consists of things that can be controlled by the soul. Therefore, the difference between the two lies in something external to their essence (their object) (ibid.).

#### **4-2. Mulla Sadra's Secondary View on the Relationship Between Happiness and the Perfection of Practical Reason**

In another analysis, Sadra presents an affirmative view on the relationship between happiness and practical reason. The preface to this view, which is aligned with another set of his statements, was introduced in the critique of the previous view. It seems as though Sadra progresses from a pre-transcendental state to an intermediate state, and then to a final stance. This intermediate state sometimes refers to the critique of the initial view (the view of negation) – as discussed earlier – and sometimes refers to the positive presentation of a new perspective. In this view, the practical powers of the soul are preserved in its ascending journey, and rather than being negated, they are perfected. Therefore, even after death, these powers will continue to exist with the soul. He states: "Thus, when the soul reaches perfection and becomes actual intellect, it does not lose some of its powers such as the sensitive power, while retaining others such as the rational power; rather, as it completes and elevates its essence, so too all its powers complete and elevate along with it." (Mulla Sadra, 1368, Vol. 2, p. 100). In this statement, Mulla Sadra rejects the idea that some powers (such as the sensitive powers) are removed while others (such as

the intellectual powers) remain. For him, the process is one of the perfection and elevation of all the soul's powers – both its higher and lower powers – which shows that the ultimate happiness of the soul occurs when all the powers of the soul, including the practical powers, are perfected, not just one or a few particular powers.

In another section, he considers the abstraction of the perceiving faculty (which appears to be a condition for human happiness and is typically associated with the elimination and negation of certain material or near-material powers of the soul) not as the negation of some powers of the soul, but as their transformation into a higher and more sublime existence: "The abstraction of the perceiving faculty does not mean the negation of some of its attributes and the retention of others, but rather the transformation of a lower, incomplete existence into a higher and more perfect existence. Thus, the abstraction of man and his transition from this world to the next is nothing but a transformation of his initial state into a second state." (ibid., p. 99). In other words, in the process of the soul's happiness, known as abstraction, both in this world and in the afterlife, all powers move together in an ascending journey, and the existence of each power moves towards a more abstract existence of that same power, becoming perfected. Thus, neither the sensory cognitive power, which is the closest cognitive power to the material world, nor the practical powers, which in this world are the closest powers of a human to the material world, are negated in the process of human perfection and happiness. Rather, the perfection and happiness of these powers are essential to the ultimate perfection and happiness of the human being. Additionally, it was previously mentioned that, according to Sabzavari, theoretical and practical reason have the same essence, and their only difference lies in their objects: one concerns matter beyond the capacity of the soul to control, while the other concerns matter within the capacity of the soul (ibid., p. 83, note 2). Given this shared essence, it is clear that the ultimate happiness of the human being, in terms of the perfection of theoretical reason, also entails the perfection of practical reason.

Although practical reason is involved in the human ascent and its perfection is aligned with the perfection of the soul and theoretical reason, Mulla Sadra maintains that the essence of the soul's happiness and the highest rank of humanity in the process of evolution are depicted through the final perfection of theoretical reason. For him, the essence of happiness is still knowledge: "...The knowledge of God and the knowledge of His kingdom is the essence of true happiness." (Mulla Sadra, 1366, Vol. 1, p. 484); "The essence of all true happiness is knowledge and certainty... The true distinction between reward and punishment originates from knowledge and ignorance." (Mulla Sadra, 1390, p. 333). Therefore, although all the practical and theoretical powers are perfected in the process of the soul's evolution and ultimate happiness, and true and final happiness is the result of deeds and acts of worship – in this sense, practical reason is influential in ultimate happiness – the final certainty-based knowledge, or the state of acquired intellect, which forms the essence of human happiness, is the perfection of theoretical reason and the soul's intellectual faculties: "The essence of true happiness for the servant is for his intellect to be acquired from God..." (Mulla Sadra, 1366, Vol. 2, p. 383). Thus, Mulla Sadra states that the beginning and the end of the journey of the soul are both knowledge (Mulla Sadra, 1366, Vol. 4, p. 352), and knowledge is the ultimate goal of every action and movement. The result of all righteous deeds and acts of worship is the purification of the heart's mirror from the darkness of the soul's veils, so that with it, one becomes ready to receive the desired form (Mulla Sadra, 1390, p. 333)

#### **4-3. Mulla Sadra's Final View on the Relationship Between Happiness and the Perfection of Practical Reason**

In the initial explanation of the relationship between happiness and practical and theoretical reason, it was clarified that some material aspects of the soul<sup>1</sup>, including some powers and practical faculties of the human

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1. The material aspects of the soul, in the discussions of practical wisdom and happiness, refer to the soul's attachment to the material body, a concept frequently mentioned in the texts of Islamic

being, must be removed and discarded in its journey toward true happiness. In a more complete and harmonious explanation, Mulla Sadra interpreted this removal as the negation of these aspects and faculties, transforming and perfecting them. Because the soul's cognitive and practical powers, even though they are connected to matter, have a degree of abstraction (imaginative abstraction), and as they reach perfection, they will accompany the soul in its upward and evolutionary journey. However, despite the perfection of the practical faculties within the perfection of the soul, the essence of happiness, according to Transcendent Philosophy, is defined in the final certain knowledge, which is the realm of actualized intellect and derived intellect, which is the perfection of theoretical reason. Therefore, it can still be said that the perfection of practical reason does not constitute the essence of true human happiness. Thus, it seems that up to this point, Mulla Sadra has only turned the initial view of the elimination of some faculties in the ascending and perfectionist journey of humans into the perfection of these faculties and their transformation into more abstract stages. Nevertheless, he still considers practical perfections and non-cognitive, non-theoretical perfections to be lower stages of human final perfection.

Mulla Sadra, once again elevating his view, in his final view, instead of the aforementioned intermediate view, states that the essence of happiness is composed of the perfection of all faculties. This is because in the final stage of the perfection of the soul, which is the stage of its essential annihilation, all human faculties will merge into one, and the practical and theoretical faculties will become identical: "It becomes one

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philosophers. The necessity of the soul's abstraction as a movement and behavioral change on the path to happiness relates to these material aspects. Therefore, expressions like this, and similar ones in the context of practical philosophy, do not mean that materiality exists within the essence of the soul itself. Of course, since Sadra's viewpoint in this regard begins from a quasi-Aristotelian perspective, and practical intellect, according to the Peripatetic philosophers (at least the part of it concerned with detailed and operative matters), is considered a faculty of the soul and a material entity, the term "material aspects of the soul," based on earlier discussions – which referenced a quasi-Aristotelian foundation – may carry a more specific meaning. It is also clear that this perspective represents an initial standpoint in Mulla Sadra's thought, and such viewpoints are often designed by him to guide the reader to a higher and more precise understanding.

power, so its knowledge becomes action, and its action becomes knowledge" (Mulla Sadra, 1360, p. 200). Thus, according to Sadra, "Every soul consists of hearing, seeing, powers, and limbs, and will become identical with the body... [in this state] the body will be identical with the soul" (Mulla Sadra, 1390, p. 159). Consequently, in the final stage of happiness, a person will become a unified essence of both the perceiver and the mover: "Thus, in the human being, there is one thing, which is both the perceiver and the mover" (Mulla Sadra, 1368b, p. 222).

This event in the soul happens because, with the intensification of the unity of existence, greater unification occurs, and what existed with multiplicity in lower stages of existence exists in higher stages with a greater unity. The meaning of the principle of "simplicity of the ultimate truth," which, as the great philosophers have clarified, is applicable to the various stages of existence in a hierarchical way, is that the more unity and simplicity there is in higher stages of existence, the more inclusivity and totality will be realized relative to lower stages. Thus, Mulla Sadra asserts that the direction of unity and inclusivity in the soul dominates, and the direction of multiplicity and fragmentation decreases in this stage (Mulla Sadra, 1368c, p. 100). As a result, the soul achieves the perfection of knowledge, and the delusions and false desires of the imagination are eliminated (Mulla Sadra, 1381a, p. 131). In reality, with the dominance of the direction of unity and simplicity in the soul, the ontological principle of simplicity of the ultimate truth will impact it, and the aspect of unification and inclusivity of the soul relative to the lower faculties, which includes faculties at the highest and noblest levels, will be actualized. Thus, the soul, in its true perfection, will unite all of its faculties in the most complete way, with unity and simplicity (Sabbzawari, 1369, p. 182).

An interesting metaphor that Sadra presents in this context is that he compares the human soul to a bird, where its theoretical and practical faculties are like its two wings. The feathers of these two wings are the branches of the two powers of theory and practice, and when the final

flight occurs, both powers, by encompassing all their branches, experience the flight of happiness (Mulla Sadra, 1363, p. 696).

It is noteworthy that Fayz Kashani also accepts this explanation as the final clarification and interpretation of happiness (Fayz Kashani, 1428, p. 431). He does not consider the general object of theoretical intellect's reception to be superior to the particular reception of practical intellect (Fayz Kashani, 1377, p. 912). Fayz explains this point by stating that intellect is abstract and cannot perceive particulars without the law (Shari'ah), which results in incomplete knowledge. Therefore, according to him, the theoretical intellect requires the practical intellect for the completion of its perceptions, and vice versa. Thus, neither intellect has absolute precedence over the other (Ibid). This view of Fayz supports and even explains Mulla Sadra's final perspective, which sees the ultimate happiness of the human being as the perfection and unity of all faculties without any superiority or inferiority.

As discussed in the stages of growth of practical and theoretical reason, according to Mulla Sadra, the practical intellect, in the second stage, reforms and purges (removes bad traits), and in the third stage, through the acceptance of good traits, becomes the locus for intellectual images, which is the beginning of the union between the cognitive and practical faculties. This is the stage where, according to Sadra, the rational soul (or theoretical intellect) is illuminated by the light of the practical intellect and, through its spiritual senses contained in the practical intellect, receives symbolic perceptions: "The source of these [symbolic] unveilings is the human heart, i.e., its rational soul illuminated by the practical intellect, which uses its spiritual senses" (Mulla Sadra, 1363, p. 150). This is the stage where the external senses, by elevating, reunite with their origin, the spiritual senses, and at a higher level, namely in the realm of spirit (which are inherently his faculties), they unite (Ibid, p. 151). He asserts that this is the stage of intellect where, because of being the ultimate simplicity according to the aforementioned principle, all existences, including external senses and practical intellect, are seen by it:

"The spirit witnesses all of that by itself because these truths merge in its stage when it is in the state of intellect, as intellect encompasses all things as demonstrated in theoretical knowledge, and we established the proof for it" (Ibid).

In this stage, the theoretical intellect also attains a corresponding spiritual insight, which in two different states is called spiritual perception or inspiration. This, in a higher level, becomes spiritual perception, and in this case, all of the inner and external faculties of the human being become illuminated by it (Ibid). Thus, according to Sadra, in the initial stage of union, which is the stage of purging the soul with good traits and intellectual forms, the human soul, in union, has both the perceptions of practical and theoretical intellects. In a higher level, which is the stage of union of faculties at the level of spirit, all of these perceptions merge into one. In fact, this spiritual union stage is the fourth stage of practical intellect, which is annihilation. The annihilation here refers not to essential annihilation but to functional and attributive annihilation, where human actions at the spiritual level are purified and disappear. The symbolic spiritual perception is the effect of such an annihilation. Similarly, in this spiritual level, the fourth stage of the theoretical intellect, which is the derived intellect, occurs, and all intellectual images are witnessed in the unity of the spirit in the soul (the intellect is the sum of all things). In this stage, the theoretical intellect becomes active, having all intellectual forms within it, so in this stage, the theoretical intellect also undergoes a type of functional annihilation, specifically in the intellectual forms of the theoretical intellect, which resemble the actions of the practical intellect. In other words, in the fourth stage (derived intellect), the theoretical intellect becomes the active intellect that encompasses all forms, and in this stage of functional annihilation, the intellectual forms merge into the active intellect, where the union between theoretical and practical intellects occurs with no loss of their functions (Ibid).

But above these levels of spiritual union and annihilation (functional

annihilation), Sadra explicitly states that the stage of essential annihilation occurs (Mulla Sadra, 1363, p. 150), where all of these perceptions and unveilings reach complete unity. As mentioned earlier, the functional annihilation stage is considered the final stage of practical intellect, which applies to the spiritual level and final perfection of both theoretical and practical faculties. However, in essential annihilation, the very essence of these two faculties, which are considered attributes of the soul, are completely absorbed into the attributes of the Divine, following the essential annihilation of the soul in the essence of the Divine. Thus, not only do the two faculties unite, but even the notion of differentiation and multiplicity between them (i.e., the essence of these two faculties) and the multiplicity between them and the soul (i.e., the essence of the soul and its two attributes) disappears, and a perfect unity is created, the effect of which is the perception of annihilation (divine manifestation). As stated by Mulla Hadi Sabzevari, the final stage of human perfection, in which essential annihilation occurs, is the stage of true witnessing and knowledge, which this witnessing and annihilation, as explicitly stated by the mystics, is considered the final stage of action and practical intellect. It encompasses both the theoretical perfection (knowledge) and practical perfection (power) in an annihilated and unified state: "He guides you to this by making them witness the final actions of practical intellect... and they describe annihilation<sup>1</sup> as seeing every knowledge consumed in its own knowledge and every power consumed in its own power, and likewise, in all the higher attributes, in fact, all existence is consumed under its existence; thus, the final action is also witnessing, which is the perfection of knowledge" (Mulla Sadra, 1368c, p. 285). In other words, in the final stage of human perfection in Transcendent Philosophy (essential annihilation), with the essential annihilation of the soul and its attributes, both power, representing the practical intellect, and knowledge,

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1. However, Mulla Hadi Sabzevari considers this annihilation, which he later calls "essential annihilation," to be the fourth stage of the perfection of practical intellect in Mulla Sadra's view. In the opinion of the author, this interpretation is incorrect based on Sadra's expressions.

representing the theoretical intellect, are absorbed into the attributes of the Divine. Thus, the witnessing and knowledge achieved in this stage, with its unity, is both the ultimate goal of the theoretical intellect and the ultimate goal of the practical intellect.

It is clear that, according to the mystical journeys (Asfar), this happiness and perfection could, in Sadra's expressions, reach the stages of post-annihilation, but no clear statement was found from him in this regard. If the happiness of the soul were depicted in the stages of continuation after annihilation, the final perfection of practical intellect would have been clearer in terms of its divine influence over multiplicity. In other words, just as we accept that, in the stages of annihilative perfections, practical intellect, like the theoretical intellect, has a perceptive and intellectual end that encompasses both action and contemplation, in the stages of continuation after annihilation – if Sadra's philosophical analyses were to progress in that direction – we would have to accept that the final goal of the theoretical intellect, corresponding to the final goal of the practical intellect, is its divine influence and engagement with multiplicities...

### **Summary**

The relationship between the perfection of theoretical and practical intellects and ultimate human happiness has long been debated by Islamic philosophers. Most have adopted the view that the perfection of intellect, particularly theoretical intellect (a form of knowledge), is the key element of human happiness, while the goal of practical intellect is to remove obstacles preventing this state. According to the famous viewpoint in Islamic philosophy, Mullā Ṣadrā asserts that the perfection of theoretical intellect, or acquiring knowledge, is central to human happiness, while the perfection of practical intellect, initially, serves as a negative foundation (removing hindrances like the soul's attachment to material things) for achieving the ultimate happiness through theoretical intellect.

However, Mullā Ṣadrā's view diverges from the common approach.

Drawing on his theories about the soul, where the soul's essence includes a relative aspect to the body (practical intellect) and considers the faculties below theoretical intellect as separate and part of the soul's unity, he cannot fully accept the traditional view without contradiction. Thus, he revises the commonly accepted perspective, shifting toward a view where the soul's detachment from materialism is not purely negative but also carries a positive aspect. For him, as the soul ascends, its faculties become less attached to material things, while gaining more intellectual and immaterial qualities. He argues that practical intellect, rather than simply serving as a tool for removal of obstacles, is part of the soul's perfection, working alongside the soul's gradual ascent into higher spiritual realms.

Mullā Ṣadrā further argues that practical intellect contributes to the soul's happiness by progressing through various stages, such as the example world (‘ālam al-mithāl) and intellectual worlds. He maintains that practical intellect plays a role in helping the soul to reach ultimate happiness, even though theoretical intellect remains the highest form of knowledge and happiness. Therefore, practical intellect, in his final view, is essential in human happiness and can coexist with the soul's higher faculties without conflict.

In conclusion, Mullā Ṣadrā's revised perspective on the role of practical intellect in ultimate happiness aligns with his view of the soul, where the soul does not lose its faculties but refines them as it ascends. In this context, practical intellect remains part of the soul's higher, perfected form, which contributes to its eternal happiness. While this view contrasts with earlier philosophers like al-Fārābī and Avicenna, Mullā Ṣadrā merges these ideas and adapts them within his own philosophical system, showing how various faculties of the soul interrelate in the journey toward ultimate spiritual fulfillment.

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