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Avicenna's Theory of Practical Reason in *al-Ishārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt (Remarks and Admonitions)* and Its Commentaries

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Abstract

Understanding morality, first and foremost, requires an understanding of the foundation from which morality arises, which is "reason" or "intellect." By "reason," we do not mean specific or acquired reason, but the nature of reason. And by the "nature of reason," we refer to what serves as the foundation of morality, the foundation of contingent knowledge, the foundation of all human philosophies, and the foundation of metaphysics. Thus, an understanding of reason is inevitable and required for an understanding of morality, of any discipline, and finally, of metaphysics. This is why understanding reason precedes understanding all disciplines, including ethics. Earlier scientists, philosophers, and scholars were well aware of this fact, and before delving into definitions of disciplines, philosophy, as well as scholarly and ethical issues, they sought to understand "reason" and elucidate its various degrees.

Keywords: reason, practical reason, Avicenna, morality, ethics.

Definition of Theoretical Reason in Avicenna's Perspective

In Eastern philosophy, the texts of Islamic philosophy, the texts of classical Western philosophy, and since ancient times, including the works of Avicenna, there have been categorizations of reason, particularly its division into theoretical and practical reason.

The standard definition[2] in Avicenna's philosophical texts is that theoretical reason is a type of reason that perceives that which is knowable, but cannot be an object of any action. This definition is confined to acquired reason, without encompassing presence-based and intuitive forms of reason. It should be noted that reason is not restricted to theoretical acquired reason; however, theoretical reason corresponds to acquired reason, where the latter, in its specific sense, also corresponds to the former.

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2. A "standard definition" is one that is conventional within a discipline, regardless of whether or not it is objectionable.

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By "acquired reason," we mean a type of reason that is concerned with propositions, meanings, and concepts, involving conceptions (*taṣawwur*) and assents (*taṣdīq*), as well as definitions, statements, and syllogisms. Theoretical reason is a type of reason that perceives things that are not matters of action or practice.[3]

Alternatively stated, Avicenna defines theoretical reason as the perception of things that are not types of actions and do not pertain to actions. It involves perceiving things that are unrelated to the do's and don'ts underlying human free will. Instead, it encompasses the perception of entities that lie outside the realm of decision-making by humans and other similar creatures.

Avicenna's Definition of Practical Reason

In Islamic philosophy, there exists a standard definition of practical reason as well. In his *Remarks and Admonitions* (*al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*), Avicenna defines practical reason as follows:

> Of the faculties of the soul, there is one that the soul possesses due to its need for directing the body. This is the faculty known as practical reason. In particular, this faculty infers the necessary things among human affairs that are necessary to be done in order to attain its volitional goals. This necessary inference from the primitive self-evident, widely accepted (*mashhūra*), and empirical premises is carried out with the assistance of theoretical reason concerning a general judgment, allowing reason to proceed to the particular matter with the aid of this general judgment. (Ibn Sīnā 1375 Sh, 2:352)

In his commentary on Avicenna's words, Ṭūsī states:

> Hence, volitional actions, which are specific to humans, cannot be undertaken except through perceiving what is worthy of doing in any given case.[4] This perception involves discerning a general judgment inferred from general primitive self-evident, empirical, widely accepted, or conjectural/probable (*ẓanniyya*) premises, as determined by theoretical reason. Practical reason utilizes these premises to derive the general judgment, which is not specific to a particular instance. In reaching the general judgment, practical reason

3. In what follows, we demonstrate that this definition of theoretical reason does not encompass all constitutive components of theoretical reason. It is necessary to reveal the nature of theoretical reason through a different definition.

4. This is a perception of the "ought," the perception of the worthy and requisite action, which, although not currently in existence, should exist or is worthy of coming into existence. However, in our critiques, we will note that terms such as "requisite" or "worthy" are used in two instances of the definition of practical reason. First, regarding rational directives (*tadbīr*), which I believe do not pertain to practical reason in its specific sense. Second, regarding moral judgments. "Practical reason" in its specific sense refers to this kind of reason that serves as the origin of moral judgments.

> seeks assistance from theoretical reason, and then, by drawing upon particular or sensory premises, it arrives at a specific judgment and acts accordingly. In this manner, it fulfills its worldly and afterlife objectives. (Ibn Sīnā 1375 Sh, 2:353)

In fact, one nuanced and intricate aspect of Islamic philosophy is the definition provided therein of practical reason. To address this complex issue, we must offer the following detailed analysis.

The definition provided by Muslim philosophers for practical reason consists of two stages.

The first stage involves differentiating the nature of practical reason from that of theoretical reason. Practical reason, unlike theoretical reason, does not concern itself with facts, whether positive or negative. It is not preoccupied with the existence or non-existence of things. For example, it does not take a stance on a proposition solely as a proposition. This is why propositions concerning definitions, conceptions, assents, and arguments within the realm of practical reason are indeed derived from theoretical reason. This illustrates the integration of practical reason and theoretical reason in their quiddity. The nature of reason encompasses two essential processes: a theoretical process and a practical process (in fact, it has at least these two processes, where the practical process is not separate from the theoretical one). Therefore, texts and commentaries of Islamic philosophy consistently assert that theoretical reason reaches a practical understanding with the aid of theoretical reason and subsequently issues a practical judgment. If the issued practical judgment is directive, it pertains to theoretical reason or directive practical reason. If the issued practical judgment is moral, then it pertains to moral practical reason. This partly elucidates the type of relationship and interaction between theoretical and practical reason.

The second stage of the definition of practical reason delves into how practical reason arrives at a practical judgment, along with an elucidation and definition of a practical judgment in a manner distinct from the concept of theoretical reason. This distinction is essential because while theoretical reason is integrated into practical reason, the two must be distinguished from each other. The definition of practical reason indicates its concern with what is required and worthy of doing (what should and ought to be done); in other words, what does not currently exist but should be brought into existence. This signifies that practical reason is linked to events within the realm of human free will. It is concerned with things not because they do or do not exist, but because they can be objects of human free will and can be willed into existence. It is concerned with determining, among all possible actions that it can undertake, which one should be chosen as required and worthy. Alternatively stated, practical reason pertains to acts of will or acts of a free agent aimed at determining the action worthy of being willed, such that if the action is not willed, then the free agent has not performed the right action according to

practical reason, whether this pertains to a violation of the right action in a directive judgment or a moral judgment.[5]

After these explanations, to unpack the points within the above passage from Avicenna's *Remarks and Admonitions*, it is necessary to note the following points.

Propositions, with which theoretical reason is engaged, are works of reason related to assent, which bestow actuality upon it. Since the function of theoretical reason is to elicit assent, its foundation and content consist of what does and does not exist. However, whether something ought or should be a certain way falls under the purview of practical reason. Thus, to articulate this "ought" or requirement as a proposition or practical judgment, practical reason seeks assistance from theoretical reason. This practical proposition is a synthesis of the workings of both theoretical and practical reason. Requirements and worth ("ought" and "should"), much like good and bad, their perception, and their conditional or unconditional status, as well as whether something in a particular condition is good or not, in that it ought to be done or not, are all relevant to practical reason. However, with regard to whether they exist or not, they pertain to theoretical reason. Nevertheless, there are significant challenges in the account of practical reason as offered by Avicenna and Islamic Peripatetic philosophy as a whole, particularly considering the flaws in their elements and criteria, which will be outlined in our critique in subsequent sections.

In our exposition of Avicenna's perspective, we have thus far concluded that there is a theoretical aspect concerning propositions and definitions, and another theoretical aspect concerning deduction or inference, namely, inferring a general practical judgment with the aid of premises from theoretical reason. However, objections arise regarding the relevance of these premises to theoretical reason.

For clarification, let us review Ṭūsī's passage again. He stated, "Hence, volitional actions, which are specific to humans, cannot be undertaken except through perceiving what is worthy of doing in any given case."

This text may pertain to a moral undertaking involving a volitional action, or an undertaking of a volitional action that encompasses both directive and moral actions. In either case, it involves a will under the control of practical reason, in the sense that free will and determination of the will arise from practical reason. A will that is not controlled by reason falls outside of this discussion. Therefore, Ṭūsī refers to an undertaking of a volitional action, which is unique to humans and other creatures that possess a power of choice. Any creature endowed with the ability to make choices shares something in common with humans, and if their wills align with moral patterns, then it is considered a moral will; if they align with directive patterns, it is a directive will.

5. However, as will be explained in the critique section, a directive judgment arises within the domain of theoretical reason and does not pertain to practical reason as moral reason.

Now, if we generalize Ṭūsī's notion of the undertaking of a volitional action, it will encompass any volitional action done in line with making a choice, whether it aligns with morality or contradicts it. This generalization is possible because humans are not compelled to act upon morality, but even in cases where they act contrary to moral disciplines, they make their decisions based on practical preference and choice. In the next section, I offer further elaboration to demonstrate that a practical preference is moral only when, at least, it aligns with moral judgments.

Regarding the first possibility that Ṭūsī means an undertaking of a volitional act from a moral perspective, it should be noted that, in his view, a moral undertaking of a volitional action, which is unique to humans, cannot be undertaken except by perceiving what is worthy of doing. Moral practical reason is not unconditionally engaged in executing actions. Rather, for an action to be moral, rational, and grounded in the model of goodness and rationality, it should align with the criteria of theoretical reason and moral practical reason. Otherwise, the action will not be considered good. This perception involves discerning the general judgment inferred from general premises. As Ṭūsī explains, this general judgment regarding "what should be done," "what should not be done," or more succinctly, in terms of "do's and don'ts," and "ought/ought not," is derived from theoretical premises. Drawing upon theoretical premises, practical reason arrives at a general practical judgment. These general premises may be primitive self-evident (*awwaliyyāt*), empirical, widely accepted, or conjectural.[6]

The upshot is that, according to this account, the general practical judgment is derived from the general theoretical perspective. Drawing upon general premises that may be primitive self-evident, empirical, widely accepted, or conjectural, practical reason infers a general practical judgment. However, the task of practical reason does not end here. In order for it to enter the realm of volitional actions, be able to select actions, and yield them to free will, practical reason requires another stage at which it can apply general judgments to particular specific instances, which are specific actions. To accomplish this, practical reason is aided by theoretical reason in applying a general judgment to a particular instance. Consequently, a particular judgment arises from practical reason, indicating that this particular action is good and ought to be done. The action that volitionally arises based on this criterion will be considered a moral action.

For instance, if a needy person asks someone for help, then while helping them could entail a lot of trouble and suffering for the helper, practical reason deems the help imperative in terms of its moral judgment. In this case, drawing upon the premises, practical reason infers a general moral judgment and then applies it to this particular instance of help. It concludes that while this specific instance of helping the needy individual is accompanied by harms, it is nevertheless required and worthy

6. In my critiques, I will argue that the main problem with the definition of practical reason lies in the premises from which moral judgments are inferred.

of doing. It should be noted that, in these cases, there is an equivalence between the "required" and the "worthy," although in certain cases, the two may be distinguished as the required thing is what is necessary, while the worthy thing is something preferable without having reached the point of necessity. Whether this is a particular or general distinction is a question pertaining to supplementary issues of practical reason according to philosophers, which we do not consider here. In any case, the particular action of helping falls under a general judgment, which is applied to this particular case, and then a particular judgment issues forth. Subsequently, the will is determined in accordance with this particular judgment. The determination of the will is the free will in the sense that a free agent chooses an action within the idea of practical reason, as applied to a particular case, through their will.

On this account, practical reason involves perceiving volitional actions that are worthy of undertaking. Generally, this perception aligns with premises derived from theoretical reason. Once a general perception is obtained, practical reason advances to a second stage. In this stage of implementation, it applies the general judgment to a specific instance and then issues a particular judgment. This understanding aligns with how the majority of Islamic philosophers, as elucidated by Ṭūsī's commentary on Avicenna's *Remarks and Admonitions*, define practical reason and its dual general and particular processes.

Some explanations offered by certain scholars suggest that practical reason solely encompasses the stage of issuing particular judgments and the subsequent particular actions undertaken by the agentive (or conative) faculty. If this interpretation is accurate, then perceiving the general judgment would fall outside the scope of practical reason. Considering the commentaries on *Remarks and Admonitions*, the fundamental issue with the definition of practical reason lies in whether practical reason also involves general practical judgments, or if it is confined to the stage of issuing particular actions based on particular judgments, or at least the issuance of particular judgments.

Hence, Avicenna's definition of practical reason sparked philosophical inquiries that persisted up to Iṣfahānī's commentaries on Khurāsānī's work on the principles of Islamic jurisprudence, *Kifāyat al-uṣūl*. Additionally, some of Iṣfahānī's students expanded upon his account, with notable contributions from Muhammad Rida Muzaffar in his book, *Uṣūl al-fiqh* (Muzaffar 1386 AH, 1:216-40).

For a comprehensive grasp of Avicenna's theory of practical reason, we utilize the method of analysis, partitioning, and composition to elucidate the theory as it was developed in Avicenna's works: *Remarks and Admonitions* and *The Book of Healing*.

Definition of Practical Reason in *Remarks and Admonitions*

In the physics section of his Remarks and Admonitions, Avicenna offers the following definition of practical reason:

> Of the faculties of the soul, there is one that the soul possesses due to its need for directing the body. This is the faculty known as practical reason. In particular, this faculty infers the necessary things among human affairs that are necessary to be done. (Ibn Sīnā 1375 Sh, 2:352)

Let us elucidate this passage. Avicenna suggests that practical reason is a faculty that discerns the necessary actions to be undertaken concerning human-related activities that are deemed essential, as humans urgently require them. In this passage, Avicenna employs the term "necessary" in two distinct senses. To avoid tautology and repetition in this definition, given its precision, I propose to differentiate between the two occurrences of "necessary" in this text. Thus, we interpret the first occurrence as "required" or "worthy," and the second as urgencies and pressing needs. Therefore, the text indicates that practical reason identifies the worthy and required actions among the urgent and inevitable human matters, such as working, sleeping, eating, and abstaining. Hence, the second "necessary" pertains to pressing needs and urgencies, while the first signifies "ought/should," encompassing both directive and moral imperatives.

In the remainder of the passage, Avicenna makes a noteworthy statement: "In particular,[7] this faculty infers the necessary things among human affairs that are necessary to be done in order to attain its volitional goals." This necessary inference of the worthy action is facilitated by theoretical reason, utilizing primitive self-evident, widely accepted, and empirical premises. In other words, reason deduces the required course of action concerning individual, familial, or societal matters from premises derived from theoretical reason. As we will elaborate further, if these premises are directive, then it will be classified as directive reason, and if they are moral, it will be categorized as moral reason.

For further elucidation, several aspects of Avicenna's definition must be clarified:

1. Avicenna posits that the inferences made by practical reason are particular or specific.
2. These inferences are drawn upon premises from theoretical reason.
3. In addition to primitive self-evident, empirical, and conjectural premises, widely accepted practical moral judgments are also involved in theoretical reason.

Let us now briefly explicate these points.

As for (1) and (2), practical reason involves two processes of inferring the "necessary": the first is a general process where the general practical judgment is inferred. However, this inference is not efficacious since a general idea cannot determine a particular will; we need a particular will for action. If a general notion remains confined to the realm of

7. In the Arabic passage, it is ambiguous which phrase the adverb "in particular" modifies. To maintain this ambiguity, we positioned it at the beginning of the sentence. If it modifies "human affairs," then it signifies that the practical faculty infers required actions among specific human affairs. If it modifies "infer," then it indicates that the practical faculty makes particular inferences of the required action among human affairs. And if it modifies the faculty itself, then it conveys that the practical faculty, which is particular, infers required actions among human affairs.

generality and does not find its way into particulars, it will be inefficacious, remaining merely a mental or non-experiential matter, which cannot have an effect on the world. This is why, in his definition of practical reason, Avicenna only introduces the result, which is the second process. Thus, the necessary thing is inferred in particular, and the general necessity that is inferred in the first process, namely the general practical judgment, is applied to a particular instance through a different process, namely a different syllogistic work. For instance, under my specific circumstances, it is good to pay the money to a claimant with whom I have a dispute, as it is an instance of a general practical judgment (namely, dispute settlement is good). Provided with the general practical judgment, practical reason arrives at a particular judgment through reasoning and syllogism. The reasoning is done with the help of theoretical reason, because the entire process of inference is conducted by theoretical reason, and it is with the help of theoretical reason that practical reason arrives at the particular judgment. If theoretical reason is disregarded, practical reason will cease to exist. Therefore, the problem of interference of practical and theoretical reason does not arise in Avicenna's account. If there is a problem, it arises from another perspective.

Accordingly, practical reason and theoretical reason maintain an interactive relationship. The latter aids the former in inference and applications, while the former assists the latter in providing the appropriate possibilities and context. Once again, when theoretical reason fulfills its function, it provides the outcome to practical reason. Hence, practical reason serves theoretical reason, and vice versa. To function effectively in a conducive environment and organize its tasks, theoretical reason requires practical reason. For instance, within society, it is practical reason that fosters a rational society with minimal issues. The responsibility for shaping such a society, family, or individual in accordance with the ideal rests with practical reason. By fulfilling this task, practical reason fosters balanced individuals and a harmonious society, wherein theoretical reason can carry out its duty of advancing human perfection and fostering knowledge without hindrance.

Alternatively stated, for general judgments to be effective, practical reason relies on theoretical reason to apply them to specific cases. For instance, concerning the payment of money to the claimant, let us assume that, given the circumstances, the claimant is rightfully entitled to it. Consequently, in accordance with the dictates of practical reason, an applicative process is initiated, which unfolds as follows: the money rightfully belongs to the claimant, and I have no legitimate claim to it. It is a universal principle that anything rightfully belonging to someone should be returned to them. The mandate of "render to every man his due" is an absolute law of action that transcends specific times, places, individuals, or circumstances. Hence, if someone possesses a rightful claim to something, it should be restored to them. This is a specific conclusion drawn by practical reason, through which the overarching principle of returning rightful possessions to their owners is applied to concrete situations. Before such application, this general principle exists

beyond empirical reality and cannot manifest in the tangible world. Theoretical reason assists practical reason by facilitating inferences, and through practical application, it brings these general principles into the realm of sensory experience, thereby transforming the particular, limited process into a moral imperative. Thus far, we have expounded on the first two points: one concerning the particular nature of judgments made by practical reason, and the other regarding practical reason's reliance on theoretical reason.

The third point is that, according to Avicenna, practical reason primarily serves an applicative role in deriving particular judgments, while the inference of general practical judgments relies on primitive self-evident, empirical, conjectural, or widely accepted premises. Now, the question arises: if propositions generated by theoretical reason serve as the basis for deducing practical judgments, then how do we transition from theoretical to practical reason, and in what manner does this transition occur?

For instance, when we assert "every effect needs a cause" or "every incipient entity requires a causer, and every contingent being requires a necessary being," we suggest that all ordered events rely on non-accidental causal chains and adhere to a legal order of causation. Whenever their causes come into existence, the effects necessarily follow suit. Similarly, concerning volitional actions, whenever the motivating factors emerge, which prompt urges, and if there are no physical impediments, the motivation is transmitted to bodily factors, leading to the completion of the action. This process is theoretical in nature. Now, the question arises: How do we derive a practical judgment from theoretical premises such as self-evident or widely accepted propositions? This is a challenge present in the definitions offered by Avicenna and other philosophers, necessitating elucidation and critique. While we can derive directive practical judgments from self-evident, empirical, and conjectural propositions, extracting practical moral judgments from them is more complex. It is within widely accepted propositions that we seek a criterion for transitioning from theoretical to practical judgments. For Avicenna and the majority of Islamic philosophers, widely accepted practical propositions are rational judgments that express the moral goodness and badness of human actions. Though they are not primitive self-evident truths, they are such that rational individuals do not dispute them. This category of widely accepted propositions is distinct from widely accepted theoretical propositions, which do not relate to practical goodness and badness. In the subsequent discussion, I will provide an exposition of Avicenna's perspective on this matter.

Avicenna's Definition of Widely Accepted Practical Judgments

In his *Remarks and Admonitions*, Avicenna posits one category of propositions known as widely accepted propositions (*mashhūrāt*), which are propositions necessitating assent or affirmation due to universal acknowledgment. While primitive self-evident propositions are also universally affirmed, their necessity of affirmation stems from their own contents, and reason naturally assents to them, with universal affirmation caused by their inherent self-evidence. Conversely, widely accepted propositions lack

an inherent criterion of acceptability. The sole criterion for assent and affirmation lies in the widespread acknowledgment of these propositions by rational individuals. A subset of these propositions comprises commendable judgments (*al-ārāʾ al-maḥmūda*), grounded in widespread acceptance within the community of rational agents. This includes judgments that, if humans were to rely solely on reason, estimation (wahm), and sensory experiences, they would not affirm them; acknowledgment of these propositions requires training. Individuals cannot even hold a probabilistic belief in these propositions through induction, nor are they influenced by human emotions. Such propositions are not affirmed based on reason, estimation, or sensory perception (Ibn Sīnā 1375 Sh, 1:219-20).

This is a succinct overview of Avicenna's account of practical commendable judgments, which encompass general moral principles. These include beliefs such as justice being good, falsehood being bad, the necessity of keeping promises, and the wrongness of breaking one's promises.

In what follows, I will outline the distinction between Avicenna's viewpoint and the principle of essential goodness and badness (*al-ḥusn wa-l-qubḥ al-dhātī*), elucidating my divergences from this standpoint. Additionally, I will pinpoint the elements shared by widely accepted or commendable judgments with both the principle of essential goodness and badness and the unbounded, unconditional law of morality, as articulated in my previous article titled "The Law of Morality based on the Critique of Reason with Reason."

For further elucidation, it is important to note that within Islamic intellectual history, there have been two predominant explanations for moral goodness and badness. The first explanation revolves around the concept of essential goodness and badness, while the second focuses on commendable and widely accepted judgments. Over time, Islamic intellectuals, including philosophers, theologians, and scholars in the principles of jurisprudence, have proposed various iterations of each of these explanations.

In this manner, a plethora of theories have been put forth regarding the principles of morality. However, it is crucial to recognize that all these perspectives and explanations ultimately trace back to the common underlying foundation of rational goodness and badness. This foundational concept has been universally acknowledged by scholars with a focus on justice (*ʿadliyya*) throughout Islamic history.

With this shared foundation, we can interpret all variations in views and accounts of the principles of morality through the lens of rational goodness and badness. For example, two notable Islamic scholars, Mīrzā Qummī, the author of *Qawānīn al-uṣūl*, and Iṣfahānī, the author of commentaries on *Kifāyat al-uṣūl*, presented distinct perspectives in this regard. However, they both affirmed the principle of rational goodness and badness, along with its general judgments. Their discrepancies primarily arise in specific judgments.

Revisiting the Practical Characteristics of Commendable Judgments According to Avicenna's Account

Our inquiry centered on how to transition from the premises of theoretical reason to practical judgment. The response to this query can be inferred from the assertions of Avicenna and his commentator, Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, as outlined earlier. Let me expand upon this account.

According to Avicenna, commendable or widely accepted judgments are within the purview of theoretical reason, yet they possess inherent practical characteristics. This is because these judgments entail affirmations regarding the goodness of virtues such as justice, honesty, and benevolence, thereby endorsing the desirability of corresponding actions. Such affirmations can effectively stimulate the faculties of appetite or desire, rendering them practical in nature. Among these practical affirmations, those aligned with commendable judgments constitute moral practical affirmations, while those associated with directive judgments represent directive practical affirmations. Additionally, as delineated in my article "The Law of Morality," there exists another category of practical affirmations.

Conclusions of Revisiting Avicenna's Account of Commendable Judgments

Two conclusions can be drawn from the above revisit of Avicenna's account of commendable judgments. First, practical judgments, according to Avicenna, encompass not only moral judgments but also directive judgments. In his perspective, to say that a judgment as practical is to say that it is concerned with an action or its manner, a characteristic evident in directive judgments specifying arrangements for actions.

Second, moral practical judgments represent the sole commendable judgments within theoretical reason, constituting one group of basic premises.

Commendable judgments, akin to widely accepted general judgments acknowledged by all rational agents, function as premises for inferring particular practical judgments. Practical reason is indeed practical in that it draws upon widely accepted general judgments to deduce specific practical judgments.

Practical reason does not merely perceive but also infers particular practical judgments. Since inference involves a transition from general to particular judgment, practical reason draws upon all widely accepted general judgments from theoretical reason. However, it does not treat them as mere widely accepted judgments but rather as means for inferring particular practical judgments.

This reveals that widely accepted judgments are indeed theoretical judgments. However, as premises of syllogistic inferences, particular practical judgments are practical. Reason is considered practical by virtue of these general judgments serving as premises for inferring particular practical judgments.

In what follows, it will be argued that even this interpretation, which reveals the depth of Avicenna's account of practical reason, cannot provide a ground for reason

to become practical. Another characteristic is needed in virtue of which reason can become practical. Nevertheless, the above interpretation of practical reason remains the most articulate account of its practicality. For a more detailed interpretation of Avicenna's theory of practical reason, we should turn to his own words.

Avicenna's Remarks about Commendable Judgments

In the logic section of his *Remarks and Admonitions*, Avicenna presents the following account of widely accepted propositions (*mashhūrāt*):

> And of them [i.e., widely accepted propositions] are commendable judgments, for which we may reserve the title "widely accepted propositions" as they are solely grounded in widespread acceptance. These are judgments that one would not affirm if left to his own devices and merely relies on reason alone, estimation, and senses, if not trained to acknowledge them, if not led to their acknowledgement through induction, and if things in his nature, such as kindness and shame do not require them. (Ibn Sīnā 1375 Sh, 1:219-20)

Elucidation of Avicenna's Remarks about Commendable Judgments

In the passage above, Avicenna contends that there is no fundamental basis underlying commendable judgments within pure theoretical reason. Similarly, in practical reason, there is essentially no foundation beyond commendable judgments. Rather, commendable judgments emerge from a blend of reason, psychological virtue, training, and emotions. Avicenna argues that they cannot be considered outcomes of pure reason akin to primitive self-evident propositions. Hence, if reason operates independently, devoid of virtues, training, or emotions, it cannot produce any moral judgments. However, in humans, reason is invariably accompanied by virtues, training, and emotions. Consequently, all humans recognize commendable judgments due to their rational faculty, which explains the widespread acceptance of these judgments. Thus, commendable judgments exist in humans by virtue of reason combined with virtue, training, and emotion, without requiring arguments. Although they are not inherently self-evident and necessary, they are nonetheless established without arguments, akin to self-evident propositions. The reason for their broad acceptance within human societies lies in the general amalgamation of reason, virtue, training, and emotions. Regardless of whether individuals act upon these commendable judgments, they remain constant in humans as rational beings. This constancy enables their integration into syllogistic arguments to infer particular practical judgments.

Given the status of commendable judgments as outline above, the religious legislator as the guide for rational agents establishes them. This establishment of commendable judgments by religion forms the foundation of the principle of mutual entailment between rational goodness and badness and religious or Sharia-based

goodness and badness. However, on a broader scale, the alignment of these two forms of goodness and badness can be affirmed.

Avicenna adds to the above remarks that commendable judgments which serve as foundations of practical reason in virtue of widespread acceptance

> are judgments one would not affirm if left to his own devices and merely relies on reason alone, estimation, and senses, if not trained to acknowledge them, if not led to their acknowledgement through induction, and if things in his nature, such as kindness and shame do not require them.

He then adds:

> If one imagines that he was suddenly created with mature reason, without having received any training and without having followed any human or moral influence, then he would not judge about these statements [namely, commendable and widely accepted statements]. Instead, he may have not known the verdict and refraining from making any judgments. But such is not the case with his judgment about a whole being bigger than its part. (Ibn Sīnā 1375 Sh, 1:220)

Thus, according to Avicenna's account, one cannot assert that pure reason and cognitive faculties alone, independent of social training and traits, necessitate practical matters and commendable judgments. Unlike propositions such as "a whole is bigger than its parts," "nonexistence and existence do not simultaneously exist," and "two conflicting things cannot simultaneously exist," which are deduced from pure reason, widely accepted and commendable judgments do not originate solely from pure reason. Instead, they arise from reason accompanied by training, traits, and emotions. Therefore, while commendable judgments are among the widely accepted propositions of reason and serve as foundations for particular practical judgments, they do not fall within the scope of pure reason but rather stem from reason combined with training, traits, and emotions.

With this understanding of commendable judgments in alignment with the passage from Avicenna's *Remarks and Admonitions*, let us now outline the two main components of widely accepted propositions in Avicenna's theory.

Two Main Components of Widely Accepted Propositions

In the passage above, Avicenna suggests that widely accepted propositions may arise from necessarily true propositions, social norms and trainings aligned with the public interest, which he calls "al-tȧdībāt al-ṣalāḥiyya" (interest-based trainings), and Sharia laws.

In his elucidation of "interest-based trainings," Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī proposes that one basis for widespread acceptance is when something ensures the interests of the public, such as justice being deemed good. Some of these widely accepted propositions are described as unwritten or tacit Sharia laws.

The author of *al-Muḥākamāt*, while critiquing Ṭūsī's interpretation of Avicenna's theory, acknowledges a similar notion concerning the origins of widely accepted propositions: they either stem from statements that are necessary to affirm, namely necessarily true propositions, or from trainings that promote the public interest, such as considering justice as good and injustice as bad.

Avicenna's definition of practical wisdom has been endorsed by Ṭūsī, Sabzawārī in al-Manẓūma, and several eminent scholars of jurisprudence principles, including Iṣfahānī.

Ṭūsī's Elucidation of Avicenna's Definition of Practical Reason in *Remarks and Admonitions*

Ṭūsī interprets Avicenna's remarks as follows: It is impossible for humans to engage in volitional actions, which are exclusive to them, without perceiving what is worthy of doing in any given case. Without this perception, humans would act without practical reason. While actions might follow other faculties, carrying out actions in the best ways, aligned with general human ends, necessitates perceiving worthy and required actions. Practical reason fulfills this role by performing two functions: inferring general practical judgments from theoretical premises and transitioning from these general practical judgments to particular judgments. It then motivates the faculties of determination and will in accordance with these particular judgments. This process is only achievable if practical reason is ingrained within human existence as a habitual disposition (*malaka*), and virtues replace vices. Thus, practical reason issues a general judgment using the general premises provided by theoretical reason. The process of inference itself is theoretical, yet practical reason employs it to transition to a general practical judgment, from which it moves to a particular practical judgment, and eventually to the will and specific actions.

This was a recapitulation of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī's account of Avicenna's definition of practical reason.

Quṭb al-Dīn Rāzī's Explication of Avicenna's Definition of Practical Reason in *Remarks and Admonitions*

In his *al-Muḥākamāt*, Quṭb al-Dīn Rāzī presents an alternative interpretation of practical and theoretical reason. Essentially, he suggests that humans have perceptions and actions. The origin of their perceptions lies in the perceptive or cognitive faculty, while the origin of their actions lies in the agentive or conative faculty. The origin of perception is further divided into perceptions related to intelligibles unrelated to actions and those associated with actions. Both types of intelligibles are related to theoretical reason. Practical reason is a faculty that serves as the origin of actions, while theoretical reason does not function as the origin of actions but rather as a source of general perceptions, encompassing both theoretical and general practical perceptions.

The author of *al-Muḥākamāt* argues that the term "reason" is applied to these two faculties only by equivocation, owing to their shared nature as faculties of the soul.

However, they diverge in their operation: theoretical reason is influenced by reality, whereas practical reason influences reality. In other words, the former is passive while the latter is active. Thus, because perceptions can be related or unrelated to actions, theoretical reason itself is divided into two faculties: one serving as the foundation of theoretical wisdom and the other as the foundation of practical wisdom. For example, judgments concerning the goodness of justice and the badness of injustice fall under theoretical reason as they pertain to knowledge and general intelligibles. However, practical reason functions differently. Rāzī contends that even particular practical judgments are perceptions of theoretical reason. The role of practical reason is solely to execute (*īqāʿ*) particular practical judgments. Practical reason acts upon such judgments because it possesses knowledge of them (Ibn Sīnā 1404 AH, 2:352-53).

Certainly, Rāzī's interpretation diverges from the perspective presented thus far in the article. Previously, practical judgments, particularly particular practical judgments, were attributed to practical reason. However, the author of *al-Muḥākamāt* now denies even these particular judgments from being within the domain of practical reason, instead attributing them to theoretical reason. According to his perspective, practical reason is fundamentally distinct from theoretical reason, and their classification as "reason" is merely by equivocation, as one serves as the origin of knowledge while the other serves as the origin of action. Actions originate from practical reason, albeit through inferences made by theoretical reason regarding obligations and duties—dos and don'ts. In Rāzī's view, any perception, whether general or particular, and any inference, whether general or particular, are associated with theoretical reason. However, practical reason is supported by theoretical reason because action is impossible without knowledge. Matters related to knowledge, including both theoretical and practical judgments, fall under theoretical reason. Subsequently, this knowledge is transferred to the agentive faculty, which then acts accordingly.

In this perspective, the author of al-Muḥākamāt defines "practical reason" as a faculty for decision-making and choice-making—a dimension or degree of human existence that serves as the locus of decision-making, guided by intellectual and epistemic plans it receives. Practical reason, however, does not formulate its plans. This contrasts with the traditional view, which posited that practical reason engages in particular planning of practical judgments with the assistance of theoretical reason.

According to the author of *al-Muḥākamāt*, theoretical planning of all practical and non-practical processes is entrusted to theoretical reason. Practical reason subsequently relies on these pre-established plans and executes specific actions accordingly. Consequently, particular practical judgments also fall under the purview of theoretical reason, and any speculation or judgment issuance is the sole domain of theoretical reason. This is because both particular and general perception and inference from premises are specific functions of theoretical reason, with practical reason merely receiving assistance from theoretical reason in this regard. Therefore,

in this framework, practical reason merely adheres to the guidelines set forth by theoretical reason.

The author of *al-Muḥākamāt* provides an example to illustrate this point. Let us consider a general premise stating, "Any good action should be done." Theoretical reason deduces another general premise from this, namely, "Truthful utterance should be done." Then, drawing from these two general propositions, theoretical reason formulates a particular practical judgment: that this specific instance of truthful utterance should be done. However, it is crucial to note that the inference of a general judgment and subsequent inference of a particular practical judgment are functions of theoretical reason. Once theoretical reason establishes a particular judgment regarding a good action, practical reason executes the action by motivating the particular will accordingly. The author of *al-Muḥākamāt* explicitly states, "this [i.e., that this instance of truthful utterance is good] is a particular judgment, which is also perceived by theoretical reason."

The author of *al-Muḥākamāt* assigns practical reason the role of making practical decisions to execute actions in alignment with the judgments of theoretical reason, without engaging in independent planning at this stage. Any plans, general and particular commands, or perceptions are formulated through theoretical reason, which then transfers them to the decision-making center (Ibn Sīnā 1404 AH, 2:353).

Thus, in contrast to Avicenna's perspective, the author of *al-Muḥākamāt* strips practical reason of any capacity for judgment. Its sole function is to execute and implement the judgments provided by theoretical reason. Now, one might wonder why such decision-making is termed practical reason. This term is applied because this faculty obeys and serves the various perceptions yielded by theoretical reason. Consequently, if the decision-making faculty aligns with theoretical reason, it earns the designation of practical reason. However, if it deviates from this alignment, it cannot be labeled as practical reason. Instead, it becomes an agentive faculty that adheres to other faculties, from which it will earn its designation. Therefore, "practical reason" is used to characterize decision-making only when it follows and aligns with theoretical reason across all its levels.[8]

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8. A Persian text of this article was previously published in the book *Avicenna's practical wisdom* (Ḥikmat-i ʿamalī-yi Shaykh al-Rāīs), edited by Mohsen Javadi, Tehran: Avicenna Cultural and Scientific Foundation.