Ethics and Normativity (2024), 1(1): 43-52
DOI: 10.22034/EAN.2024.200155 https://ean.urd.ac.ir/

The Purest Human Will

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(Received: 08 June 2023; Accepted: 28 September 2023)

Abstract

Certain statements by renowned philosophers, who are everlasting in human intellectual history, require explanations to be fully understood. These explanations are dependent on various principles within the relevant philosophy, whose combination has given rise to these statements. Without considering and grasping these principles, deciphering these statements is impossible. These statements contain substantial content and possess a beauty and appeal that captivate readers from all levels of intellectual knowledge. One example of such a distinguished scholar in intellectual disciplines and philosophy is Mullā Ṣadrā. Some of his statements showcase his elevated status in both religious studies and purely intellectual disciplines. The phrase "rational will" originates from a statement he made in the introduction of his magnum opus *al-Asfār*. This article explores some of the implications of this phrase and how its elaboration in terms of his principles has significant consequences for practical wisdom and ethics.

Keywords: rational substance, will, divine intention, human end.

Introduction

Due to the rational faculty or intellect possessed by humans, they have a distinct type of will that cannot be found in any other creature in nature. If we assume that animal souls also possess wills, the human rational soul differentiates the human will from animal wills. Unlike the will of the rational soul, the will of the animal soul serves as a serves as a genera to a differentia. The same distinction can be made when comparing and contrasting the perceptual faculties of humans and animals. The rational soul transforms all perceptual faculties in humans, even those that are at the stage of the animal soul, connecting them to rational or intellectual perception. This connection gives sensory, imaginary, and estimative (*wahmī*) perceptions unique features that are absent in animal souls. Mullā Ṣadrā has discussed the exclusive kind of will found in the human soul. His statements on this matter are scattered throughout his writings, making it necessary to examine his various relevant remarks in order to understand his overall perspective.

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This article focuses on a phrase he used to describe the human will, which provides an outline of his viewpoint. Before delving into this phrase, it is important to introduce several principles that serve as prerequisites for understanding his intended meaning.

1. The First Principles: Perfect Alignment between Every Entity and Its Exclusive End

Every entity possesses its own unique purpose or end, which is determined by its existential distinctions from other entities. This purpose represents the ultimate perfection of that entity. Thus, each entity is defined by its specific purpose or end (Mullā Ṣadrā, n.d., 1:35-36). This purpose is perfectly aligned with the existence of the entity itself. When this purpose is fulfilled, it will be in harmony with all levels of its existence, and the entity in question reaches its highest state of being. If the entity possesses perception, it will experience the utmost degree of harmony, delight, and pleasure. If an entity can attain its existential end, then it has achieved the entirety of its reality and possessed its entire existence. In some entities, since such an end is not preceded by the absence of that end, it obtains both at its incipience (*ḥudūth*) and during its survival, and in some other entities, the end is merely potential, which must be actualized through a movement towards existential perfection. Entities in the latter group suffer from an imperfection in their existential reality if they divert from the path of attaining their main goal to other goals or if they fail to obtain their exclusive end, although they may still have relative perfection as compared to entities in lower degrees. Alternatively put, as long as an entity is on the path towards achieving its peculiar end, it is imperfect with respect to its exclusive existential perfection. On this path, as it achieves certain degrees, it cannot stop, and if it is a kind of entity that possesses perception and consciousness, it cannot rest content and be pleased with such degrees when it considers its exclusive end. The end in question always attracts the entity towards itself, as if the entity is a boat on a sea, which only looks towards the shore. The boat cannot be pleased by merely approaching the coast and continue to stay on the sea.

In this way, the exclusive end is the more remote end towards which an entity must move, and all other ends on its way cannot be its essential ends, even though it may be impossible for it to attain its ultimate end without those intermediary ends. Such intermediary ends prepare the entity for a transition to the ultimate end, providing a disposition for achieving subsequent ends. However, underlying each intermediary end is an attraction towards the ultimate end to prevent it from lingering in the intermediary end. In that case, the entity cannot achieve its exclusive end and its genuine perfection—the degree of its full existential perfection.

2. The Second Principle: The Possibility of Each Entity Achieving Its End

Any entity that is potential with respect to its exclusive end has in its existential core the possibility and even the disposition for the end in question, provided that it is not hindered from achieving the end (Mullā Ṣadrā, n.d., 2:392-93).

Since the end of an entity is part or the entirety of its existence, which it has not yet attained, its existential constitution must possess the possibility of attaining it with all the requisite equipment. Moreover, this possibility must not be one that makes it difficult or nearly impossible to achieve the end under any circumstances. This is a possibility that can leave its subject by reaching it to it end except if there is an obstacle. As long as the possibility is present, it targets the end and encourages the subject to achieve it. In this way, if the thing floating on sea sees the coast of the end, but lacks the necessary tools for reaching the coast or is so distant from the coast that it is practically impossible it to arrive there, then it cannot move towards it.

On the other hand, the optimal order of existence ensures that entities within it can fulfill their ultimate purposes. This is because the optimal order of existence can only achieve its overall purpose when it enables each part and component to fulfill their specific ends. For example, if an object floating on the sea has all the necessary tools to reach its intended destination on the coast, but the sea is extremely turbulent and causes the equipment to malfunction or be lost, then the equipment becomes useless and the object will fail to reach the coast, resulting in it aimlessly wandering on the sea.

Now we can assert that there is no inherent barrier within the nature of any entity that prevents it from attaining its purpose or end, which is its truth, perfection, and fulfillment. Furthermore, there is no perpetual, unavoidable barrier within the framework of existence where it coexists with other entities. In other words, the mere existence of one entity does not serve as an obstacle for another entity, although it may have that effect. However, if an obstacle exists solely to function as an impediment, with its primary task being the destruction of other entities or the prevention of their goals, then both the existence of that goal and the existence of the entity in question will be in vain.

3. The Third Principle: Exclusivity of Rational Faculty to Humans

The perfection or ultimate goal of human beings is a unique end that resides within the very essence or core of their being. This core is their rational or intellectual faculty, which not only distinguishes humans from other natural beings but also characterizes them, even in the aspects they share with other entities. If there were an organism in nature similar to humans but lacking the rational faculty, it would not exhibit the same effects as humans. Instead, it would be on par with other animals. However, the presence of the rational faculty in humans has led them to display distinct effects, such as their ability to manipulate and dominate nature. This ability stems from their rational capacities and capabilities. Without the rational faculty and its remarkable abilities, there would be no differentiation between humans and other conscious biological entities, as they share all other faculties and powers. Moreover, the mere intensity of these other powers alone cannot enable humans to manifest such effects.

Therefore, all the tools and instruments used by humans are harmoniously aligned with the goals of their reason. One such remarkable tool is the language system. Without the presence of reason, this system could not have been developed to its full extent. The language system encompasses a wide range of rational activities, from creating vocabulary and linguistic structures that serve rational purposes to the physical apparatus within the human organism that facilitates those purposes (Mullā Ṣadrā, n.d., 4:78-80).

4. The Fourth Principle: Rational Faculty as a Supernatural Entity

The rational faculty is a supernatural or transcendent power. While it exists within nature, it does not possess the characteristics of nature or natural entities.

Contingent or potential beings can be classified into physical and intellectual categories. The physical category pertains to measures and quantities, whereas the intellectual category is devoid of any determinations except pure existential determinations. From an existential standpoint, reason does not belong to the physical realm. Instead, it is associated with a world that transcends the limitations, conditions, and constraints of nature. Reason manifests itself in the natural world through the human form, while maintaining its existential boundaries and adhering to the disciplines and rules inherent to its existence. Humans are composite beings, consisting of both physical and intellectual aspects. They are composed of elements from both the natural and supernatural realms. Rational faculties are a part of one degree of human existence, while other faculties belong to other degrees of human existence. Non-rational faculties, like rational faculties, are active in both perceptual and theoretical domains, as well as in practical domains. Due to the distinction between rational and non-rational faculties, perceptions and practices can vary and sometimes conflict. As individuals composed of two different realms, there can be a conflict between their input and inclinations, leading to internal tensions (Mullā Ṣadrā, n.d., 7:353-54). However, at the core of human nature lies reason. The rational faculty takes the initiative to govern the non-rational faculties, ensuring that they maintain a balanced relationship with one another. Additionally, it imposes rational disciplines through its regulations, transforming their conflicts into cooperation with reason. This allows each non-rational faculty to align itself with rational objectives and ends, guiding human existence towards its ultimate end, which is the pursuit of purely rational ideas. With the presence of reason, all aspects of human knowledge, including sensory, imaginative, and estimative faculties, which are non-rational cognitive faculties, are influenced by the cognitive qualities of reason and exhibit rational characteristics. In addition, the practical capacity of reason exercises control over the impulses and desires arising from non-rational practical faculties. These faculties, driven by their instinctual urges, tend to pursue pleasure without deviating from their natural course. Through the power of reason, the human composition

achieves a full-fledged unity, wherein inputs and outputs are subject to purely rational principles both in theoretical and practical terms. Without this dominance of rational unity over the composite nature of humans, human existence would either succumb to the confusion and multitude brought about by conflicting non-rational faculties, or engage in conflicts across various domains, hindering the attainment of its purpose.

5. The Fifth Principle: Reason's Cognitive Path towards Discovering the Reality

The rational faculty serves two fundamental functions: knowledge or cognition, and action. The cognitive aspect is referred to as theoretical reason. This aspect of reason strives to understand and comprehend things, except when reason determines that the object of knowledge surpasses its cognitive capacity. Once this determination is made, reason seeks to apprehend the object as it truly is, aiming to grasp the reality of the object. While it is true that reason's cognitive power is a theoretical faculty, with its object existing beyond its own existence, reason does not seek to perceive the object in a detached or incomplete manner, but rather aims to fully apprehend its reality. During the process of cognition, reason strives for correspondence with reality and truth. It does not settle for detached or incomplete knowledge, but rather seeks to reach its ultimate goal. Furthermore, when encountering obstacles that may lead to erroneous cognition, reason has the ability to discern these errors by tracing its data back to reality. By doing so, reason can expand its theoretical scope and attain knowledge that aligns with reality. Correspondence with reality is an active cognitive purpose and goal for reason, enabling the construction of knowledge that is as comprehensive as reality itself. Philosophers have formulated this idea in the context of establishing philosophy as a means to provide individuals with certainty and knowledge about entities in their true nature, encompassing both conceptual understanding and assent:

> The aim of theoretical philosophy is to imprint the image of existence onto the soul, using the system of existence in its entirety, and transform it into a rational world that mirrors the objective world. (Mullā Ṣadrā, n.d., 3:20)

The ultimate goal of cognitive reason is to attain this end, although theoretical philosophy may not have fully achieved it at a certain stage of its history. Cognitive reason aspires to elevate itself to the existence of a world, transforming into a world that harmonizes with the objective world. The objective world, when cognitively present in reason as it truly is, becomes a rational world within a perfectly rational entity. In this manner, reason maintains that its perfect realization will comprehend this ideal, and as long as it strives for this level, its quest remains endless.

On the path towards this cognition, any cognition that corresponds with reality will satisfy reason and actualize a portion of its capacity. However, since reason itself belongs to the supernatural realm, no cognition can lead it towards its existential

perfection and ideal quite like the knowledge of intelligible entities that are pure from matter, position, direction, and change. As reason transcends from the natural realm to the supernatural realm, it contemplates the transition from contingent beings to the necessary existent, from dependent and needy entities to the independent entity. Any degree of knowledge of the necessary existent elevates reason to the highest cognitive and existential state. It is precisely this knowledge that emanates from the essence of rational substances. In the process of cognitive ascent, reason returns to the core of its substance, attaining perfection and fulfillment.

Therefore, the knowledge of God stands as the sole knowledge that can elevate reason to its highest degree, as the object of this knowledge is incomparable to any other. Reason acknowledges its limitations and restrictions in this knowledge, but it can aspire to attain a portion of it according to its capacity. Every degree of perception of God brings reason to a distinct existential position that cannot be reached through any other object of knowledge. The deeper this knowledge, the closer the rational substance draws to its true function, capacity, and underlying essence.

6. The Sixth Principle: Reason's Capacity to Create Moral Actions

The aspect of reason that is involved in actions and practices is known as practical reason. Practical reason operates within the natural world, where entities' actions and practices are governed by the laws of nature. The wills of conscious beings within nature are determined by these laws, and genuine causation can be traced back to them. For example, when an animal experiences hunger, it initiates a voluntary movement to seek food. Once its hunger is satisfied, based on the causal laws of nature, its will is determined to cease eating, allowing for the preparation of future voluntary movements to obtain food once again. Within the realm of nature, reason manifests through human beings to fulfill specific functions. In the physical aspect of humans, the laws of nature operate in two ways: with the mediation of the will or without it. Examples of the latter include natural bodily processes such as respiration, digestion, blood circulation, and the expulsion of toxins. The former is demonstrated in actions like eating, drinking, and pursuing other desirable things that engage our faculties of attraction and aversion. In these cases, the laws of nature utilize sensory and imaginative perceptions, often in the form of pleasure and pain, to influence human behavior. The natural existence of humans allows their wills to be largely determined by the laws of nature. On one hand, certain laws of nature act upon the imaginative faculty, giving rise to theoretical formulations of natural motivations. On the other hand, desires and urges are stimulated, making pleasures appear enticing. Through the collaboration between the imaginative and appetitive faculties, both of which operate in accordance with the laws of nature, human free will is determined within the framework of natural causality. At this point, nothing can divert human will from its desired goal unless the imaginative and appetitive faculties operate differently within the natural system.

In the realm of practice, reason seeks to stimulate human existence within nature, prompting movement and action. Given the inherent difference between the rational and physical aspects of human existence, it is impossible for the respective laws governing these two components, which depend on the will, to operate independently. This is because, in some cases, it would lead to contradictions within the will. Therefore, either the laws of nature that influence human will must be subject to the rational laws that affect the will, or vice versa. Since human reality is dependent on the rational faculty, the latter scenario has no place. However, as humans originate from nature, they are deeply influenced by the laws of nature and the motivations that arise from them. This sometimes leads them to perceive themselves as lacking free will, attributing their actions to the deterministic nature of these laws. In the realm of practice, reason must provide support in a theoretical, motivational, sensory, and emotional sense, without compromising their rational nature. It should elevate human existence to a state of greatness, perceptiveness, motivation, and delight, such that individuals can resist worldly pleasures and joys when they conflict with reason, considering them insignificant and trivial in comparison.

An action that springs from the essence of rational substance and manifests in nature cannot be derived or originated solely from the natural realm and its constituents. The status of a rational action, whatever it is, cannot be contained within the confines of limited natural time and space, conforming to its elements, components, constituents, and additions.

In this manner, reason, with its distinct purpose, enables the supernatural realm, which serves as its existential and practical foundation, to have some form of interaction with nature. By fulfilling this purpose, reason establishes a connection between nature and the supernatural realm in terms of its judgments. Without reason, these two realms would remain isolated from each other, lacking a unifying factor. However, human reason can reside within nature, and by providing rational guidance to natural actions, it can transform human existence in the natural world into an existence that is aligned with reason, thus bridging the gap between the natural world and the world of the supernatural. Indeed, reason originates from a different realm, and its role is to bring nature closer to the supernatural realm by cultivating rational individuals who actualize their true essence through rational freedom.

In its practical aspect, reason possesses an ideal that originates solely from its rational essence. Its practice emerges from a will that is influenced only by reason itself. Reason elevates the will, freeing it from any external influences, in a pure manner, devoid of motivations or purposes that are rooted either in this world or the hereafter. At this point, the discussion no longer revolves around reason and worlds, but rather centers on the creator of reason and the world. Reason finds itself in the presence of the divine, experiencing the glory of His existence at the

very foundation of its being. Just as reason recognizes, at the core of its existence, that the most ideal form of knowledge is knowledge of God, encompassing all other forms of knowledge within its scope, in its practice as well, it deems the most ideal form of action to be one that originates from and culminates in the perception of God.

In its capacity to act, reason establishes a discipline known as practical wisdom or philosophy. The aim of this discipline is to engage individuals in virtuous actions, allowing the non-rational faculties within human existence, which are intertwined with the physical aspect, to be regulated and guided by reason. If humans did not possess a physical component alongside their psychological aspect, similar to rational beings, their actions would solely be governed by the laws of reason and consistently aligned with what is good. However, due to the presence of bodily faculties, desires, and relevant motivations within the psychological-bodily aspect, human actions are often subjected to indeterminacy. Discipline in the determination of the will is achieved through moral laws enacted by reason. The purpose of these laws is to cultivate a consistent pattern of good actions (Mullā Ṣadrā, n.d., 3:21). Yet, the ultimate good is one that depends on the necessary good in all its existential degrees. The will that originates from the core of rational substance is preceded by a perception that arises from this aspect of reason. This perception, exclusive to reason, focuses solely on God as its object. It provides humans with a rational motivation for action, wherein the purpose becomes solely directed towards God.

7. Formation of Divine Intention and Will in Rational Substances

Now, let us turn our attention to the passage from Mullā Ṣadrā that is relevant to our discussion:

> Now, the humble servant in need of the mercy of his independent Lord, Muḥammad, known as Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, expresses that happiness may be misperceived as degrees of sensory pleasure and the attainment of illusory ranks. However, it becomes evident to those who delve into matters and grasp the teachings that provisional happiness and immediate sensory gratifications do not constitute true happiness, nor do they bring about genuine delight rooted in reason. These individuals recognize that those who solely pursue such fleeting happiness become disconnected from the serenity of the divine, rendering it impossible for divine teachings to permeate their being. Furthermore, *it becomes unattainable for such individuals to possess a pure divine intention originating from the depths of their rational substance*. This intention remains untainted by worldly desires and unaffected by transient wishes. It is this intention that holds the potential to lead to the realization of true happiness and

> the connection with the supreme grace. This supreme grace removes the blindness veiling the soul's vision, a blindness caused by its confinement in the world of exile, its residence in the realm of the physical, and its inability to perceive the beauty of eternity and the eternal majesty. (Mullā Ṣadrā, n.d., 1:3)

According to Mullā Ṣadrā, when humans reach their ultimate purpose of existence, they are capable of performing actions that are beyond their own capacities sans reason and beyond the capabilities of other creatures in nature. The presence of humans in the realm of nature is unparalleled and distinct, and among all humans, only those who fulfill all aspects of their humanity can engage in the unique and special task assigned to them. This task involves the engagement of a special will within the realm of nature, a will that is guided by the dictates of reason. Furthermore, among all purely rational wills, the particular will in question originates from the most fundamental and ultimate aspect of pure reason. What prompts reason to manifest such a will is its perception of God. It is through this perception that the rational will comes into existence in its purest form, rightly referred to as the "divine intention or will." This will or intention is solely dependent on God, and it is through this dependence that it attains its divine nature. This purity signifies the inherent connection between rational perception and God, as well as the link between rational action and God. Any deviation from the realm of pure reason signifies a deviation from this connection. When humans become confined within the limitations of nature and are deprived of the possibilities offered by pure reason, this severed connection results in detachment from the fundamental aspects of reality and goodness. In this exposition, Mullā Ṣadrā lays the groundwork for a further explanation of *free will* in both its negative and positive senses.

Finally, let us turn to another passage from Mullā Ṣadrā that sheds further light on the aforementioned points:

> It is clear that those who know nothing but their physical bodies pursue actions that seek only bodily happiness. However, until the radiant sun of the spirit shines through the twilight of the body and the human countenance is illuminated by the light of the spirit, everything that emanates from humans remains flawed, somber, obscure, and subject to decay. Yet, when the heart is illuminated by the light of the spirit, all of these imperfections are transformed into goodness and benevolence. Even the physical body itself becomes a luminous ground, deserving of entry into heaven, or even a part of the heavenly realm, as it is written, "The earth will glow with the light of her Lord."[2] (Mullā Ṣadrā, n.d., 5:26)

2. Quran 39:69.

8. Implications of Mullā Ṣadrā's View for Quranic Exegesis

The written works of Mullā Ṣadrā can be categorized into two main groups: philosophical and exegetical. In his exegetical works, he employs intellectual and deductive methodologies to offer comprehensive interpretations and commentaries on religious texts, including the Quran and hadiths. While his exegesis of the Quran and his exposition of the collection of hadiths, *Uṣūl al-kāfī*, may be incomplete, they still provide valuable insights for understanding other undiscussed texts. Building upon the aforementioned perspective, we can utilize his understanding of the will arising from the core of rational substance to provide an interpretation of certain Quranic verses and hadiths.

One relevant Quranic verse in this context is as follows: "But as for him who is awed to stand before his Lord and restrains his soul from [following] desires, his refuge will indeed be paradise" (Quran 79:40-41). Additionally, an example of a pertinent hadith is the following: "the sound heart is one that meets its Lord without having anything but Him in it" (Mullā Ṣadrā, n.d., 6:58).

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