



Examining Mulla Sadra's Approach in Reducing Aristotelian Moderation to Unity

Rahim Raouf Moghaddam¹

Ali Alahbedashti²

Received: 2025/05/22

Accepted: 2025/07/09

Abstract

Aristotle and Mulla Sadra have similar approaches to acquiring moral virtues. The three main ethical approaches are virtue ethics, deontology, and consequentialism. Mulla Sadra, while accepting Aristotelian virtue-centeredness and moderation as the manifestation of true virtue, completes it and reveals the nature of true virtue. True virtue is of the genus of knowledge and belongs to the highest part of human identity, namely, the theoretical intellect. Moderation in practical reason provides the necessary ground for attaining the true virtue of theoretical wisdom. The final flourishing of the theoretical intellect is achieved by knowing the highest stage of unity. Both thinkers emphasize the acquisition of all moral virtues and the completion of all dimensions of human identity. Mulla Sadra considers all virtues, even moderation, to be preliminary,

1. PhD Candidate, Department of Ethics, Faculty of Theology, University of Qom, Qom, Iran (corresponding author).

Email: v0322619181@gmail.com

2. Professor, Department of Islamic Philosophy and Theology, Faculty of Theology and Islamic Studies, University of Qom, Qom, Iran.

Email: alibedashti@gmail.com

* Raouf Moghaddam, Rahim. (2024). Examining Mulla Sadra's Approach in Reducing Aristotelian Moderation to Unity, *Theosophia Islamica*, 4(8), pp. 33-62.

<https://doi.org/10.22081/JTI.2025.72181.1099>

viewing true virtue as the theoretical intellect's knowledge of the high stage of unity. The teacher of philosophers (Aristotle), however, while also focusing on theoretical wisdom, considers all virtues related to human perfections as true virtues and does not accept the deprivation of any of them. In this paper, the author aims to integrate Aristotle's holistic approach with Mulla Sadra's monism using an analytical method and to explain this process in order to provide a more complete depiction of ethical virtue-centeredness. The data collection method for this paper is library-based, and the research method is descriptive-analytical, which are methods of qualitative research.

Keywords

Aristotle, Mulla Sadra, Moderation, Unity, Virtue.

1. Introduction

Among Aristotle's three ethical works—the *Magna Moralia*, the *Eudemian Ethics*, and the *Nicomachean Ethics*—his references in ethical writings are mostly focused on the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The unique Aristotelian style of writing and his argumentative thought process are more apparent in the *Nicomachean Ethics* than in the other two books. For this reason, this paper will rely on a translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* for a brief account of Aristotelian moderation. This work contains ten books, each of which consists of several chapters. This book will be used solely to explain the foundation of Aristotle's ethical view.

Some Muslim thinkers fully accepted the Aristotelian theory of moderation regarding moral virtue, while others added a number of virtues but still accepted the core of Aristotle's ethical thought. This paper reports on the complementary approach of the founder of Transcendent Theosophy (Mulla Sadra) to Aristotle's ethical framework. In this area, Mulla Sadra accepts Aristotle's solid ethical framework and uses it as his starting point, but he does not stop there. He goes beyond it, providing a dynamic reading of moderation and preparing the ground for its return to true virtue.

In this regard, many valuable works have been written, such as "The Place of Practical Reason in the Perfection of Theoretical Reason" by Morteza Keshavarz, "The Theory of Moderation in Farabi and Ghazali" by Mahboubeh Yazdanpanah, and "Sadra's Moral Education" by Sara Tousian, among others. However, none of these valuable works have analytically and step-by-step documented the way the First Teacher's (Aristotle's) moderation is reduced to Sadra's unity. The innovation of this paper lies in depicting this reduction in three steps: definition, explanation of the components, and arguments.

2. Analysis and Examination of the Components of Aristotelian Ethics

In Aristotle's ethics, virtue, moderation, excess, deficiency, and vice are the main components. Moderation is the criterion for identifying virtue, while excess and deficiency are the criteria for identifying vice. From his perspective, the existence of virtue is essential for ethical behavior, and matters such as consequences or legal duties are not at the core of ethical thought. Of course, he does not consider the mere existence of virtue sufficient for the moral agent; the agent must necessarily apply the virtues, otherwise, they will not become virtuous (Aristotle; 1999; pp. 38, 60).

Aristotelian ethics places a special emphasis on the end goal. There is a strong focus on moral development in ethical education and training. Virtue is considered to have intrinsic value. He emphasizes the important role of understanding virtues for performing ethical actions. In his ethical thought, happiness (eudaimonia), which is an objective matter, is the goal of human behavior and is achieved through the acquisition of virtues. Intention and motivation are sometimes more important than knowledge. If a moral agent acts commendably without justice, it is not considered a true moral virtue (Aristotle; 2007; p. 38).

Practical wisdom (phronesis) enables the moral agent to discover universal rules and specific judgments, such as what action to perform, in what manner, towards whom, and to what extent, in different situations. The true politician is someone with a great and specific passion for learning moral virtues, because they want to raise their fellow citizens to be noble, honorable, and law-abiding people (Aristotle; 2002; vol. 1; p. 83). From his perspective, a reciprocal existential relationship exists between practical wisdom and

moral virtues, where the absence of one leads to the absence of the other. Virtue is both intrinsically desirable and desirable because it leads to happiness. The criterion for the correctness of an action, in his view, is internal, and actions have moral value only if they are motivated by good intentions (Aristotle; 2007; p. 38; 1999; p. 46).

3. The Nature of Virtue

Virtue is something that influences emotions and actions. In its nature and definition, it leads the agent to express the mean of actions with correct goals. According to Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the phenomena of the soul are of three kinds: passions, faculties, and states of character (Aristotle; 2002; vol. 1; p. 96).

Virtue, on the one hand, cannot be one of the passions that affect the soul, because a person is never known as virtuous based on the passions and feelings that come over them. They are not praised for their emotions; they are not worthy of praise simply for feeling fear or joy. On the other hand, virtue is not a faculty or a capacity either, because no one is considered virtuous or praised for being receptive to passions (our faculties and capacities are innate and natural, meaning they are inherent) . Therefore, virtue must be a state of character.

Performing a behavior, along with practice and persistence, gradually leads to the creation of a firm state of character. As a result of this state of character, the performance of that behavior will no longer be abandoned (Aristotle; 2002, vol. 2, p. 77).

Virtue is not necessary, but it is acquired and "voluntary." This is because the subject of rational deliberation and choice is matters that lead to an end, and every virtuous activity is related to these

matters (Aristotle, 2002, vol. 1, p. 130). With this statement, he critiques the famous phrase of Socrates that "the root of every undesirable behavior is ignorance." Moral virtue is acquired through habit, while something that arises from the nature of a thing does not change as a result of habit. Therefore, virtue is acquired neither by nature nor in opposition to it (Aristotle, 2002, vol. 1, p. 87). If you bring a piece of plastic close to a magnet a thousand times to create a habit for it to be attracted to the magnet, it will never happen, because it is not in its nature.

4. The Type of Virtue

Moderation is the state of being in the middle ground, and what is important about it is being between two vices. Virtue is a state of character that makes a person good and well-behaved (Aristotle, 2002, vol. 1, p. 98). Merely being a state of character is not enough to create virtue; rather, it is the moderation and balance in the rational, spirited, and appetitive faculties that leads to the manifestation of beliefs, emotions, and actions in a proper measure. In other words, the good for a person is achieved through the activity of the soul in the way of virtue (Aristotle, 1999; p. 39).

Virtue is a state of character of the type of the mean or moderation. It is a state of character that, in emotions and actions, chooses the middle ground between the extremes of excess and deficiency, which is compatible with rational principles. The person with practical wisdom determines this mean by considering these principles (Aristotle; 1999, pp. 64 and 66).

Syntactic equality is a form of moderation. In all examples, moderation is a single point that is equidistant from its two sides. The moderate state is positioned in a good, moderate place such that its position cannot be moved a little farther or closer (Aristotle, 1999, pp. 66- 67).

However, from his perspective, the "state of moderation" in human ethics is not in an equal position relative to the two sides across all people and different virtues. What is important in the virtue of moderation is being between two vices (Aristotle, 1999, pp. 63, 173). The virtue of moderation is relevant both for quantitative actions and for qualitative activities, where it means observing the conditions of "proportions and measures" in various situations and circumstances (Aristotle, 1999, p. 66).

If all human passions and actions are applied at the appropriate moments, in the correct situations, and toward the right people, then moderation has been observed, and it will lead to success. Thus, virtue is a state of character of the mean and always aims for moderation (Aristotle; 2002; vol. 1; p. 100). In other words, feelings must be applied at the right moment, on appropriate subjects (a mother's anger at an infant's crying is incorrect), in proportion to the status of the people involved (one should show less sensitivity toward the mistakes of people who have rights), with the right cause and motive, and in the correct way (Aristotle; 1999; pp. 64-65).

5. Features of Moderation

The middle point is determined through reason. However, for a specific instance of a mean like self-control, Aristotle does not define any limits of excess or deficiency. Similarly, for instances of excess or deficiency, such as licentiousness or insensibility, he does not define any limit of moderation. For him, acts like prostitution, theft, and murder are unacceptable (Aristotle; 2002; vol. 1; pp. 100-102; 1999; p. 66).

A sign of moderation in the appetitive faculty is that when a person abstains from excessive desires, they must enjoy this abstinence. The person who is excessive or deficient, however, does not enjoy abstaining; rather, they enjoy their excess or deficiency

because they lack temperance. The excessive person has one way to distinguish pleasure derived from virtue from an unworthy pleasure: they must be raised from childhood to enjoy worthy things and feel pain from unworthy ones. Pleasure and pain must be regulated within the realm of rational judgment in education and training to serve as a standard for identifying virtuous behavior (Aristotle; 2002; vol. 1; p. 91). Therefore, the virtue of moderation is both a semantic guide for the moral agent and a practical guide for virtuous performance (Aristotle; 1999; p. 39).

To perform specific actions in the realm of individual agency, it is necessary to explain specific virtues and not just suffice with explaining moderation. The middle point in different ethical judgments can shift for two reasons (Aristotle, 1999, p. 66):

First, ethical matters possess diverse natures that cause this. With regard to courage, which is the middle point for the spirited faculty, cowardice is farther from rashness, because the nature of courage and rashness are closer from a rational perspective.

Second, one side of the middle point can have greater ugliness, because it is more sought after by human desires. The inclination towards licentiousness is greater, and its ugliness is greater than that of insensibility. In fact, a lack of desire is very rare (Aristotle; 2002; vol. 1; pp. 103-108).

A moderate person will never enjoy the excessive things that a wicked person desires and will be disgusted by their existence. Conversely, the moderate person benefits from pleasures that lead to health and well-being and are within the bounds of moderation, as long as they do not harm their honor or exceed their capacity. The behavior of a moderate person in relation to pleasures will be based on "sound reason" (Aristotle, 2002, vol. 1, p. 146).

Exceeding the bounds of moderation is linked to licentiousness (Aristotle, 2002, vol. 1, p. 68). For a noble and moderate person, virtue is something that is real and truly good. However, the immoderate and blameworthy person does not care about what is genuinely worthy and considers anything they desire to be good (Aristotle, 2002, vol. 1, p. 127).

He dedicates two chapters of the third book to explaining that moderate behavior is both voluntary and acquired, defending the free nature of ethical behavior. He believes that all beings in nature, except for humans, progress toward perfection in a determined way. However, the fact that some individuals may have an innate talent for certain virtues or feel a "sense of contentment" regarding them does not make moderate behavior an involuntary trait.

6. Problems with Aristotelian Moderation

The first problem is that the virtue of moderation is a psychological phenomenon and is never of the genus of feelings and emotions that are independent of reason. Like a natural talent, it is not innate and constantly with the moral agent. Therefore, the range of moderation in various conditions and actions must first be identified, which is not an easy task, and the general term "moderation" will not solve this problem. Performing a moderate action requires a sage who has, through extensive practice, gained skill in controlling the three faculties to achieve balance among them and has the ability to identify the point of moderation in any given situation.

From an ontological perspective, Peripatetic philosophers always analyze individuation by incorporating particular accidents. Naturally, in ethical discussions, they will also seek to determine the appropriate individual moderate decisions by identifying specific ethical rules. The thinker of Transcendent Theosophy (Mulla Sadra) consistently criticizes the Peripatetic philosopher in the field of

ontology, arguing that by adding accidents to one another, no matter how numerous they are, one cannot arrive at a particular individual of an existent thing. This point can also be raised in ethics: by identifying particular ethical rules, no matter how detailed, one cannot arrive at the individual rule of moderation that is appropriate for a person. This is especially true given Aristotle's point that in choosing a passion or an action, there is no single, fixed, and correct choice that is independent of all conditions for all people. This insight only applies to the identification of certain general ethical rules (Aristotle, 2002, vol. 1, p. 100). Even assuming a limited number of fixed ethical laws, it would be impossible to identify the point of moderation with a single rule. Therefore, simply identifying the critical points of excess and deficiency will not result in the power to make correct ethical decisions and choices. Based on this, it will be difficult for people who neither possess the virtue of moderation nor have access to a sage to determine the personal ethical rule that applies to them in a particular situation.

The second problem is: what is the justification for making moderation the criterion for the goodness of ethical behaviors, and is this criterion considered a self-evident matter? Assuming that moderation is the criterion for goodness in a general sense and in certain actions, why should it be the criterion in all actions? Does such a definition meet the formal conditions of definition provided by this prominent philosopher?

Most Islamic philosophers have accepted the definition of this prominent philosopher and considered it to meet the conditions for a definition. The mean (observing moderation) leads to beautiful character and health of the soul, just as observing moderation in eating leads to physical health (Farabi; 1992 AH; p. 58). The states of character (the state of moderation) by which a person performs good and

beautiful actions are virtues (Farabi; 1985; p. 24). An action is considered a moral virtue if it is the mean (moderation) between two vices (Ibn Miskawayh; 2005 AH; pp. 46-47). The mean (the virtue of moderation) is like the center of a circle, while the countless points on the circumference are the vices (Ibn Miskawayh, 2005 AH, pp. 45-46). The perfection of the spirited, appetitive, and rational faculties lies in observing moderation (Amiri; 1996; p. 75). The prerequisite for having a virtuous character is justice (Mulla Sadra; 1989; vol. 9; p. 127).

7. Components of Mulla Sadra's Thought

In Sadra's ethics, virtue, moderation, and unity take on new meanings. Here, moderation is the manifestation of virtue, and the prevalence of unity is the criterion for true virtue. He divides nobility and happiness into two parts:

1. True Nobility and Happiness: This is achieved by the human intellect and brings the most fundamental part of a person's identity to perfection.
2. Preparatory Nobility and Happiness: This is not true happiness; it is achieved through the human soul and provides the groundwork for true happiness. It is not true happiness because the soul is the aspect of a person that is connected to the body and requires physical actions to form its identity. This part belongs to the more superficial aspects of human identity, and its existence is necessary as a medium for completing a person's identity. This is the practical part, and its happiness lies in liberation from the pain and suffering of the natural world, which has a negative nature (Mulla Sadra, 1989, vol. 9, p. 131).

7. Identifying the Place of Moderation

In the thought of most Muslim philosophers, the criterion for moral virtue is definitely observing moderation in all aspects. Mulla Sadra presents moderation as the general and primary criterion for the nobility of the soul and considers all other virtues to be its branches (Mulla Sadra, 1989, vol. 9, p. 92).

He believes the happiness of each of the soul's faculties is in accordance with the nature of that faculty, but he places the perfection and happiness of the soul itself within the bounds of moderation and away from excess and deficiency. The reason for avoiding excess and deficiency and staying within the bounds of moderation is so that the soul does not become passive and weak in relation to the body. The soul's constant preoccupation with the body leads to its enslavement. Moderation is, in fact, the emptying of the soul from its preoccupation with the excessive and deficient matters of vices. Of course, the complete emptying of the soul is impossible as long as it is occupied with managing the body in the physical world. However, when the moral agent achieves a state of moderation for the soul, actions are issued from the soul with ease, free from excess and deficiency.

Excess and deficiency cause the body to influence the soul, but moderation results in the soul being free from the influence of the body. In his words, moderation is like abandoning bodily actions and weakening one's attention to them, similar to temperate water that is neither hot nor cold (Mulla Sadra, 1989, vol. 9, p. 126). With this statement, he elevates his ethical thought from a basic level to a transcendent one, a progression he also makes in his ontology.

7.2. The Elevating Aspect of Moderation is Consistent with the Nature of the Soul

In a general understanding of human identity, there are three fundamental domains:

- 1) The Domain of Intellectual Realities: This domain lacks bodily and material characteristics.
- 2) The Domain of the Material and Bodily Aspect: This is completely separate from the immaterial aspects.
- 3) The Domain of the Soul: This serves as the objective intermediary between the intellect and the body. The soul is similar to the first domain in that its identity is akin to intellectual reality, but it resembles the second domain in that it requires bodily actions to perform ethical behavior.

The elevating state of ethical moderation is not contrary to the nature of the soul; rather, it is of the same genus as the soul's immaterial identity. Any entity that contains contradictory components will experience conflict in receiving grace from higher principles. It needs to be emptied of this struggle and conflict to remove the obstacle to receiving grace, and this liberation will happen in the field of moderation (Mulla Sadra; 1981; p. 238).

8. Analysis and Examination of Mulla Sadra's Foundations

To understand the connection between Aristotelian moderation and "unity," it is necessary to explain the philosophical foundations of Transcendent Theosophy.

8.1. The Main Foundation

1. The Primacy of Existence as Goodness: A key tenet of Mulla Sadra's view is that if the very principle of existence is good,

then awareness of existence (of any existence) will also be good. Everything possesses goodness to the extent that it partakes in existence (Mulla Sadra; 1989; vol. 9; p. 121).

Considering what has been said, the acquisition of the virtue of moderation, from Aristotle's perspective, is for the purpose of achieving happiness (eudaimonia) and attaining goodness (Aristotle; 2002; vol. 1; p. 73). Virtue itself is also desirable, and goodness, relative to virtue, is considered a goal that is dissolved in the path of virtue. By combining both principles, one can conclude that the purpose of acquiring the virtue of moderation is to achieve a higher share of existence.

2. The Unity of the Soul: The soul has three human, animal, and vegetative dimensions with multiple faculties, such as the rational, animal, imaginative, perceptive, vegetative, nutritive, growth-oriented, and motive faculties (Mulla Sadra; 2004; pp. 553-554). Since the core of the soul's essence is celestial, it possesses a special kind of unity that encompasses all these dimensions and faculties within a single identity (Mulla Sadra; 1989; vol. 8; p. 54).

Furthermore, every firm virtue in the soul arises from one of these three things: a) Knowledge (Sciences) b) States (Inner states, characters, and psychological dispositions) c) Outer behavior. On the other hand, correcting behavior is for the sake of improving inner states and achieving intellectual growth and progress (Mulla Sadra; 2002; pp. 74-80). Therefore, the human soul must be understood to the necessary extent.

Building on Mulla Sadra's virtue-based ethical framework, which is influenced by Aristotelian ethics, ethical growth isn't just about correcting behavior. The goal isn't to simply perform a duty or achieve the right behavioral outcome; instead, it's to cultivate a

virtuous person. This can only be achieved through an understanding of the soul's dimensions and faculties.

8.2. The Faculties of the Soul

Mulla Sadra drew extensively from the ideas of earlier philosophers, including Plato, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Ghazali, and others. As a result, he provides multiple classifications for the soul's faculties.

- The vegetative soul has many sub-branches of faculties but lacks perceptual and motive ones.
- The animal and human souls, however, have both perceptual and motive faculties (Mulla Sadra; 2004; pp. 523-599).

The human soul's perceptual faculties have two parts. The core of this is the theoretical intellect, whose cognitive development is of utmost importance for a virtuous person. The second part is the faculty of knowledge, which has three cognitive functions: discerning truth from falsehood in statements, distinguishing right from wrong in beliefs, and finally, determining beautiful from ugly actions (Mulla Sadra; 1989; vol. 9; p. 78; 1987; vol. 6; p. 373). From the perfection of the faculty of knowledge, wisdom is born (Mulla Sadra; 1987; vol. 9; pp. 88-89).

The motive part of the human soul is the faculty of justice and reason, which manages the motive faculties of the animal soul, namely desire and anger. The virtue of this faculty is justice, which is the head of the aforementioned motive faculties and serves the directives of the cognitive faculties (Mulla Sadra; 1990; vol. 1; p. 421).

A full explanation of the multiple classifications of these faculties requires a separate and extensive research project and is beyond the scope of this paper. The soul's core identity is celestial and possesses a unity with its faculties. The central point and essence of

the soul, during external sensations, descends to the lower level of the senses, and in the perceptions of the theoretical intellect, it rises to that level (Mulla Sadra; 2004; pp. 553-554).

8.3. Attributes of the Soul's Faculties

He outlines the main attributes and their numerous branches, without which virtuous behavior is impossible to attain. These are:

- 1) The Angelic and Rational Attribute: This is the pure source of knowledge and purity.
- 2) The Satanic Attribute: This is the site of the raging of satanic forces, from which deceit, cunning, trickery, arrogance, love of rank, pride, and dominance arise. The necessary cunning for acquiring the means of carnal pleasure and debauchery is a result of the resourcefulness of this attribute.
- 3) The Predatory Attribute: Its roar gives rise to envy, contentiousness, conflict, and struggle.
- 4) The Beastly Attribute: From its activity, greed and licentiousness emerge (Mulla Sadra; 1989; vol. 9; p. 82).

Moderation is achieved for the soul by the internal cleansing of these very faculties. This process begins with internal purification and manifests in behavior (Mulla Sadra; 1990; vol. 1; p. 421).

9. Levels of Virtuousness

Practical wisdom is of three types:

- 1) Practical wisdom as a disposition (character).
- 2) Practical wisdom as knowledge about a disposition.
- 3) Practical wisdom as actions resulting from a disposition (Mulla Sadra, 1990, vol. 4; p. 116).

Practical wisdom as a cognitive faculty is at a higher rank than practical wisdom as a disposition, and practical wisdom as a disposition governs practical wisdom as an action. This is because every action that a person performs must be based on a wise, moderate will, and every dispositional wisdom must be derived from the path of wise knowledge.

The moderation achieved by the soul's faculties and the resulting virtuous behaviors are a path that must lead a person to the transcendent point of true virtue (Mulla Sadra, 1990; vol. 9; p. 80). The virtue of moderation is not the final good or the ultimate goal for a person; rather, it is a safe and direct path to attain true virtue (Mulla Sadra; 1987; vol. 6; p. 376).

10. The Concomitance of Virtue and Pleasure

From the perspective of both thinkers, a virtuous life is accompanied by pleasure. According to Aristotle, ordinary people often face conflicts between lower-level pleasures and higher ones. However, the taste of those who seek higher things leads them to a sincere inclination toward lofty matters. Their life is not based on pleasure, but their virtue is inherently associated with pleasure. A truly good person feels pleasure in performing good actions. If a generous person does not feel pleasure from their giving, they are not virtuous, as they are giving begrudgingly. All virtuous behaviors must, in their essence, be pleasurable, and these two are inseparable (Aristotle; 2002; vol. 1; p. 71).

According to Mulla Sadra's approach, too, the goal of virtue is happiness, and this is accompanied by pleasure, because everything attains pleasure by achieving the desire of its essence (Mulla Sadra; 2004; p. 202). This statement shows that pleasure does not belong only to those with awareness but also includes inanimate objects.

The perfection of each of the sensory faculties is in its perception of the sensory quality appropriate to it: the imagination through hope and longing, touch through the perception of a moderate temperament, the sense of smell through pleasant aromas, and so on (Mulla Sadra; 1989; vol. 9; p. 80).

What can be inferred from Aristotle's words is that a person who seeks higher things has a pure inclination toward lofty matters. However, Mulla Sadra's words explicitly state that pleasures associated with lower-level virtues merely facilitate and provide the groundwork for attaining higher and true virtues, and they are not sought for their own sake.

The advantage of Mulla Sadra's statement over this prominent philosopher is that he goes into detail about the ranking of pleasures, considering true pleasure to be a matter of perception. "... their perceptions are of different ranks" (Mulla Sadra; 1989, vol. 9, p. 122). Given that the foundation of pleasure is perceptual, bodily and natural pleasures must be weaker than psychic and imaginal pleasures, and psychic pleasures must be weaker than intellectual pleasures (Mulla Sadra; 1987; vol. 3; p. 770).

From the combined words of both philosophers, it is clear that happiness is accompanied by the sum of pleasures derived from all virtues. However, Mulla Sadra's works place a strong emphasis on higher, intellectual pleasures, considering them incomparable to other pleasures. Nevertheless, his emphasis on the higher pleasures derived from true virtues does not mean that the lower levels of pleasure, which come from lower-level virtues, are not desirable at all.

11. Evaluating the Superiority of the Virtue of Theoretical Wisdom in Mulla Sadra's View

The principle of existence and the perception of existence are

equivalent to goodness. Two conclusions can be drawn from this: first, every rank of existence, no matter how weak, possesses goodness and is desirable. Based on this, commentators who concluded from Mulla Sadra's emphasis on higher ranks that he considers the lower ranks to be undesirable are mistaken.

Desirable things are divided into three categories:

1. First Category: Things that are desirable for their own sake.
2. Second Category: Things that are desirable only for the sake of another goal. This includes psychic, bodily, external, and providential virtues, each comprising several sub-items.
3. Third Category: Things that are both desirable in themselves and for the sake of another goal. He gives the example of health, which is both an existential and desirable good in itself and is also desirable as a prerequisite for acquiring higher virtues (Mulla Sadra, 1987, vol. 1; pp. 158-159).

All virtues and their fruits and goods, even their lowest rank, are to some extent desirable. Having a more intense existence is equivalent to having more wealth and goodness. The intellect has the highest rank of existence, and the psychic and bodily ranks are in the subsequent positions. Therefore, the virtue of theoretical wisdom is at the highest rank of all virtues (Mulla Sadra; 1989; vol. 9; p. 131).

Of course, attaining this intellectual virtue is impossible without first attaining practical virtues. By acquiring the state of justice through moderate actions, the soul achieves all its practical virtues concerning the desires of the motive faculties of lust and anger. However, two other higher ranks of cognitive virtue still remain. The

first higher virtue relates to the "faculty of knowledge and intellect," which has three duties: distinguishing truth from falsehood in statements, right from wrong in beliefs, and beautiful from ugly in actions. The next, and highest, virtue is theoretical wisdom, which begins with the theoretical knowledge of the realities of existence and reaches higher ranks of knowledge. Through the effort to acquire this highest virtue, the rational faculty achieves its highest rank of actualization (Mulla Sadra; 2001; p. 153).

The effort to acquire practical psychic virtues results in the purification of the soul from excessive and deficient vices and pollutions. This brings about valuable fruits and goods, such as clear and pure-hearted observations, very sincere intentions that foster true virtues, humble heart-felt attentions, and abstemious bodily actions in eating, sleeping, and the like (Mulla Sadra; 1987; vol. 5; pp. 333-335).

12. Mulla Sadra's Arguments

True virtue and nobility are achieved through the virtue of theoretical wisdom. It is in the realm of theoretical wisdom that the virtuous individual first gains knowledge of the realities of existence, including absolute existence. In higher stages, they directly observe the immaterial and separate intellectual beings. The higher stage of connection is where the individual becomes identical with the relational aspect of the active intellect's existence (and not the independent existence of the active intellect). In the highest stage, they attain the meeting with the Most High Reality.

12.1. Unity as the True and Demonstrative Criterion of Virtue

Mulla Sadra quotes the philosopher Pythagoras, stating: "The virtue and nobility of every being arise from the prevalence of unity, and the less unity it possesses, the more imperfect it will be in terms

of nobility and virtue" (Mulla Sadra; 1989; vol. 5; 212).

No being is devoid of this unity, and naturally, no being is existentially deprived of nobility and virtue (Mulla Sadra, 1989, vol. 2; p. 88). Since the Most High Necessary Being does not have multiple objective aspects and is completely free from any stain or multiplicity, it holds the highest rank of nobility (Mulla Sadra, 1989, vol. 7; p. 252). Therefore, any being that reaches an existential proximity to the Most High Reality will benefit from this highest rank of nobility and virtue (Mulla Sadra, 1989, vol. 7, p. 191).

When the criterion for nobility becomes the prevalence of unity, it becomes clear that the ranks of nobility will increase or decrease according to the degrees of closeness to or distance from the single, Most High Principle. The natural world, which has the weakest rank of unity, is the furthest existential rank from the highest rank of unity, which is the Most High Principle. The intellectual world, which has the most intense rank of unity, is existentially closest to the Most High Reality (Mulla Sadra, 1989, vol. 9; p. 11).

Given that the criterion for true nobility and virtue is unity, why can true nobility and virtue only be attained through the intellect and theoretical wisdom? Why can the faculty of justice and practical reason not reach the highest point of virtue? (Mulla Sadra, 1989, vol. 9; p. 11).

From Mulla Sadra's perspective, every human perception—from sensory perceptions and imaginations to conjectures and intelligibles—and all sensory, imaginative, and intellectual faculties are existentially immaterial. For this reason, they possess a greater degree of unity than the natural world.

However, despite the fact that all cognitions are immaterial, the degree of immateriality of intellectual perceptions is greater than

that of imaginary perceptions, and imaginary perceptions are greater than sensory ones. Therefore, while the sensory faculties have perceptions with a weaker degree of unity, the perceptions of the intellectual faculties possess the highest degree of unity (Mulla Sadra, 1989, vol. 9, p. 371).

Since the faculty of justice and practical reason are responsible for moderating the animal motive faculties of desire and anger and for controlling psychic desires, they are logically incapable of attaining the highest degrees of virtue and nobility. This is because true virtue and nobility are of the genus of knowledge (Mulla Sadra, 1989, vol. 9, p. 122). Sensory and imaginary perception, which are responsible for perceiving the multiple and colorful external matters, cannot be worthy of receiving true virtue and nobility, despite being a cognitive faculty and thus higher than the motive faculties, because of the weakness of the perception of unity in the senses and imagination.

However, the intellect and theoretical wisdom, which can perceive the highest degree of unity, are worthy of receiving the highest degree of virtue and nobility. Of course, a person cannot attain theoretical wisdom unless moderation and a virtuous disposition (moral wisdom) govern them, and moral wisdom is a necessary condition for acquiring theoretical wisdom. The moderation of desire and anger itself is managed by practical wisdom and the faculty of justice, and the moderation of the faculty of justice is guided by the theoretical intellect (Mulla Sadra, 1989, vol. 9, p. 90).

Following thinkers like Ghazali, he points out that for the highest degrees of virtue, there is a rank that, due to its elevation, is higher than the scientific perception of intellects and can only be reached by attaining high degrees of spiritual journeying (Mulla Sadra, 1989, vol. 2; p. 322).

12.2. First Argument

"Indeed, what is truly pleasurable (the effect of true virtue) is existence, especially intellectual existence, and especially the True Beloved... He will come to a comfort that has no pain" (Mulla Sadra; 2001; p. 365).

On the one hand, the principle of existence is good, and awareness of one's own existence or any other existence leads to the attainment of virtue accompanied by pleasure. In the second stage, since the existence of every being is pleasurable to itself, the perception of its own existence will naturally be pleasurable to it. In the third stage, if the cause of a being that has a higher and more intense rank of existence is present with its effect, the perception of the virtue and pleasure of the effect will become stronger and more intense, because it gains access to a stronger and more intense understanding of itself (Mulla Sadra; 1989; vol. 9; pp. 120-122). This explains why the higher ranks of virtue must be of the genus of knowledge and perception.

12.3. Second Argument

In addition to the principle of existence being good and a virtue, he uses his own foundational principle, trans-substantial motion (*al-haraka al-jawhariyyah*). Human perfection culminates in substantial motion. A person reaches theoretical wisdom when their existence is elevated, and in this case, they will be able to acquire higher degrees of virtue (Mulla Sadra, 1989, vol. 9, p. 121). The stronger the rank of existence, the more its nobility and virtue are elevated, and the lower the rank of existence, the weaker its nobility and virtue will be (Mulla Sadra; 1989, vol. 2; p. 11).

The specific characteristic that distinguishes humans from

other living beings is speech and reason, which is acquired in the advanced stages of trans-substantial motion (*al-haraka al-jawhariyyah*). With the help of this faculty, a person will be able to have rational perceptions. Consequently, the virtue that is perceived with the help of the rational faculty must be a high rank of virtue, which is of the genus of knowledge and perception. In the highest degrees of virtuousness of the rational faculty, union with the active intellect will become possible.

12.4. Third Argument

The means of attaining virtue are three: the knower who perceives the virtue, the perception itself, and the virtue that is perceived.

In the second stage, the power of perception comes from the power of the perceiver.

In the third stage, the power of intellectual perception is higher than the power of sensory perception. This is because both the intellect itself and what is perceived by the intellect are free from being mixed with matter, which is a weaker existence. When the intellect perceives something, the perceived object is fully present to the intellect, and nothing of the intelligible is hidden from it. This is unlike sensory perceptions, because although sensory perception is immaterial, it has a weaker degree of immateriality. Furthermore, what is perceived by sensory perception is material and has the weakest degree of existence. Thus, what is perceived by sensory perception is not fully present to the senses, and the senses only perceive a specific aspect of it.

In sensory perceptions without the involvement of the intellect, there is error and mistake of the sensory faculty, as well as forms of

conflict, opposition, deficiencies, flaws, and aversion. In intellectual perception, not only are these kinds of shortcomings and defects absent, but intellectual perception is also needed to remove the shortcomings of sensory perception (Mulla Sadra, 1989, vol. 9; p. 122). Unless the intellect states that when light enters a medium like air, which has a lower density, and then enters a medium like water, which has a higher density, it undergoes a tendency and turbulence, the senses alone will not be able to perceive this perceptual error.

13. Summary and Conclusion

How can the Aristotelian virtue of moderation, which is a kind of moral wisdom, be linked to the virtue of unity, which from Mulla Sadra's perspective is the principle and true virtue?

If practical reason—with the help of the views and beliefs gained in the realm of theoretical reason—uses its faculties to perform specific actions, it will open the way for virtuous behavior. Therefore, more valuable actions will be issued from the soul in accordance with each rank of cognitive growth that is achieved. The faculty of knowledge within the rational faculty perceives the beauty of generosity, but this level of perception is only general and not sufficient. It must be applied to a specific behavior by practical reason, such as a specific act of kindness applied to a particular needy person, to result in a virtuous action.

In this discussion, Mulla Sadra establishes a connection between the realm of ontology and the realm of epistemology. The elevation of a person's existential rank leads to the attainment of higher values, and the knowledge and application of higher values lead to the promotion of a person's existential rank. In this way, both realms reinforce each other until a person achieves the highest rank of virtue.

From an existential point of view, a person is a gradational reality (*tashkik al-wujud*) that has multiple ranks. The intensification of a person's share of existence is directly related to the extent of their share of rationality and moral values.

From his perspective, the perception of existence is virtue, and to the extent that a person's existence expands, their share of virtue will increase. This is because the more existence expands, the more perfect it becomes, and the impurities of non-existence depart from it. The purer it becomes from imperfections, the more virtuous effects will be manifested by it.

For the education of a person who has true virtue, on the one hand, the motive faculty of the human soul, namely practical reason, must temper the motive faculties of the animal part of the soul and subdue desire and anger. On the other hand, the perceptual faculties of the human soul, namely the faculty of knowledge and the theoretical intellect, must undergo voluntary cognitive perfection.

The lowest rank of human perception is sensory perception, and a person who is trapped by the senses and sense-perceived things can never display trans-sensory virtuous behavior. All sensory knowledge will only invite a person to virtuous behavior in the present moment, and only when they are in contact with sense-perceived things.

The higher rank is imaginative perception, through which a person imagines themselves within a human society, and by strengthening and cultivating this perception, virtues with a social dimension are achieved. Imaginative knowledge invites virtuous behaviors in all time frames. With the expansion of perceptions, a person will gain access to general concepts and will proceed to analyze the universe. The person's transcendent capacities will

blossom. By knowing sense-perceived things, they will achieve the expansion of their existence in the realm of sense-perceived things. By knowing imaginative concepts and producing imaginative value-creating virtues, they will achieve the expansion of their imaginal existence. Finally, by attaining intellectual knowledge and being freed from all perceptual limitations of the previous faculties, they will expand their existence to encompass the entire universe. In every step of expanding their perception, the reality of the world expands for the person.

Unless vices like bestiality, savagery, and devilry—which take over the heart from early childhood—are controlled from within a person in the light of moderation and the angelic faculties are not allowed to flourish, the human's inner self will remain a battlefield between the angelic faculties and the satanic forces, and attaining true virtues will become a myth for the person. In the animal realm, carnal desire and angry persistence are the drivers of actions. However, in the human realm, desire originates from knowledge and rational consciousness, which indicates a person's existential elevation. The will that is issued from practical reason is ahead of and higher than animal desire and is considered subsequent to and obedient to knowledge.

In Mulla Sadra's view, the path, the traveler, and the destination are one and the same in the journey to attain true virtue. As Aristotle also agreed, this is a movement that is realized from within.

However, Mulla Sadra considers the attainment of intellectual virtues to be stronger, more complete, and more numerous. Although he, like Aristotle, emphasizes the necessity of acquiring all virtues across the different dimensions of the soul, he places a greater emphasis on the acquisition of intellectual virtues. He considers their

product to be incomparable to other virtues for the virtuous person.

When a person knows something with their theoretical intellect, their soul is perfected through a union with that form due to the identity between the knower and the known. They then observe the light, value, beauty, and splendor of the essence of its cause within themselves through presential knowledge (knowledge by presence).

The purer the perception, the more possible it becomes to attain pure existence, and the attainment of pure existence will bring about a stronger perception. This continues to the point where a person achieves union with the active intellect and becomes identical with the relational aspect of this sacred intellect. The perceptual forms that are gained as a result of the connection with the active intellect are the most complete and perfect forms, and they are ultimately in harmony with the human soul. The pleasure derived from this will be incomparable to sensory and natural pleasures. The perception of this singular and unique reality will lead to the internalization of beautiful moral behaviors in the rational soul.

References

- Aristotle. (2000). *Nicomachean Ethics*, (A. Pourhosseini, Trans., 1st ed.). vol. 1 & 2, Tehran: University of Tehran Press. [In Persian]
- Aristotle. (1999). *Nicomachean Ethics*, (M. Lotfi, Trans., 1st ed). Tehran: Tarh-e No Publications. [In Persian]
- Aristotle. (2007). *Nicomachean Ethics*, (S.Saljouqi, Trans., 1st ed). Tehran: Erfan Publications. [In Persian]
- Ibn Miskawayh, A. (2005). *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq wa Tatheer al-A'raq*, Qom: Tolu'e Nour Publications. [In Arabic]
- Amiri, A. (1996). *Rasa'il*, (Tedayyon, Trans., 1st ed). Tehran: University Publishing Center. [In Persian]
- Farabi, M,(1992) *Al-Tanbih 'ala al-Sa'adah*, Lebanon: Beirut Publications. [in Arabic]
- Farabi, M. (1985). *Fusul Muntaza'ah*, Tehran: Maktabat al-Zahra Publications. [In Arabic]
- Mulla Sadra. *Iksir al-'Arifin*, Tehran: Iranian Institute of Philosophy, n.d. [In Arabic]
- Mulla Sadra. (1987). *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim* (M. Khajavi, Ed., vols. 1, 3, 5, 6, & 9). Qom: Bidar Publications. [In Arabic]
- Mulla Sadra .(1989). *Al-Hikma al-Muta'aliyah fi al-Asfar al-'Aqliyyah al-Arba'ah*, (vol. 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9). Qom: Mostafavi Publications. [In Arabic]
- Mulla Sadra. (1990). *Sharh Usul al-Kafi* (M. Khajavi, Ed., vol. 1). Tehran: Institute for Cultural Studies and Research. [In Arabic]
- Mulla Sadra. (1981). *Shawāhid al-Rubūbiyyah fī al-Manāhij al-Sulūkiyyah*, Tehran: University Publishing Center. [In Arabic]
- Mulla Sadra. (2022). *Kasr al-Asnām al-Jāhiliyyah*, Tehran: Sadra Islamic Wisdom Foundation. [In Arabic]

- Mulla Sadra. (2001). *Al-Mabda' wa al-Ma'ad*, Qom: Islamic Propagation Organization, 2001 [2001]. [In Arabic]
- Mulla Sadra. (1984). *Mafatih al-Ghayb* (M. Khajavi, Ed). Tehran: Institute for Cultural Studies and Research.[In Arabic]