



University of Zanjan

## **The Journal of Ethical Reflections**

Summer, 2020, Vol.1, No.2, pp. 109-127.

ISSN Online: 2717-1159 / ISSN Print: 2676-4810

<http://jer.znu.ac.ir>

### **The Essence and Origins of Action in Mullā Sadrā's Philosophy of Action**

Seyed Ahmad Fazeli

*Assistant professor of Philosophy, University of Qom, Iran.*

*ahmad.fazeli@gmail.com*

#### **Abstract**

According to Sadrian philosophers, human beings' voluntary actions are movements born of the effect of recognizing their perceptive faculties concerning outside matters and this effect forms through the intention or will that rises in a person's soul. The starting point of human action is the point of the formation of the immaterial aspect (the soul) in a human being. According to this perspective, the origins of human actions are cognizance, desire, and will. In a human being's voluntary and involuntary actions, it is the soul that is in motion. This substantial motion of the soul is part of the great substantial motion design that is progressing in the whole of the natural world and that which belongs to it. The motion of the essence of the soul is also necessary and perpetual and its goal and ultimate beloved is God; however, a human being's voluntary action is another substantial motion which forms within this necessary motion of the soul and can intensify the perpetual motion and revolution of the soul towards its real object of love so that it may attain the perfection worthy of it through this intensification or can throw a person into a whirlpool of decline. The ultimate goal of human beings' voluntary actions is to arrive at the closest level of closeness to God that has two aspects: 1) possessing the most intense

knowledge concerning all existents and the levels of the world and 2) abstraction of essence and action from matter. All motions in creation happen through God's grace and, therefore, a human being's voluntary actions are all performed through the help of God's eternal grace without affecting man's free will.

**Keywords:** Free Will, Voluntary Actions, Philosophy of Actions, Sadrian Philosophy.

## Introduction

Even though philosophy of action in its modern sense does not have a history of more than 50 years, comes under the realm of contemporary philosophy in the West, and has been specifically developed in the field of analytic philosophy; however, the history of reflection over issues of this kind goes back to the ancient philosophies of Iran, India, and Greece.<sup>1</sup> One of the areas that ancient philosophies have delved into in issues of philosophy of action is free will and how an act that rises from such a will is actualized. Thus, free action, its essence, and how it occurs has become one of the important discussions of philosophy through the course of history. Thinkers and philosophers like the Stoics, Xenon, Cleophas, Crispus, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, the Epicureans, the Aristotelians, Fārābī, Avicenna, Ghazalī, Averroes, Augustine, Aquinas, Scotus, and so forth have delved into the philosophical study of these types of issues from the ancient times. These contemplations can also be found in the works of later philosophers like Thomas Hobbes, Descartes, Mullā Sadrā, John Locke, Berkeley, Mulla Hadi Sabzvari, Thomas Reid, Kant, and so forth. However, focused studies in this regard which have mostly been pursued as a branch of the science of philosophy can be found in the works of contemporary analytic philosophers like Elizabeth Anscombe, Donald Davidson, Alvin Goldman, David Pierce, and George von Wright.

In a very general view, one can say that philosophy of action discusses the essence of "human action", how it occurs and other issues related to it. In reality, the science of philosophy of action is formed of the following types of issues: 1) what is action and through what criteria do we distinguish human action from merely physical action? In other words, what components are present in human action that differentiates between it

---

1. Hornsby, Jennifer, Helen Steward, "Agency and Action", in *Agency and Action*, ed. Steward H. and John Hyman, CUP, 2004.

and mere movement? It is regarding this very issue that matters such as cognizance and belief, desire and inclination, intention, will, and choice are discussed. This issue is known as the “essence of action”. 2) Do the different aspects of action and its various attributes have a real effect on the way action is perceived or must we differentiate between the actual action and its various attributes? For example, does describing an action based on the direct or indirect results it yields cause us to attribute different actions to the agent or not? This discussion is sometimes known as the “individuation of action”. 3) How and to what extent do matters such as cognizance, belief, desire, and will play a role in actions? Can an action be explained in the framework of beliefs, desire, will, and so forth, from a causal perspective and if so, are these causes always effective in the same way in accomplishing actions or not? Or, in seeking the causes of action, must one pursue other matters and believe in some other role for these matters? This chain of questions is recognized as the “explanation of action”. 4) What kind of action is a voluntary act described with this attribute and, in case one accepts causal necessity, how can one believe in an action being voluntary? This discussion which is the debate of “determination and free will” is one that is extensive in the history of human intellection.<sup>1</sup>

Among these, Islamic philosophers have focused on the following main discussions in philosophy of action: 1) one of the main focuses of Islamic philosophers regarding human action is on the issue of the essence of action which has been the focus of many discussions in this branch of philosophy. However, the purpose of this discussion in Islamic philosophy has mostly been to explain issues of the human soul or matters related to human happiness. This does not, however, mean that these types of discussions have addressed the essence of actions briefly and secondarily; rather, we encounter a complete and precise discussion in this regard. 2) In the discussion of the causality of the will for actions, Islamic philosophers discuss actions for which human agency is accidental. In this context, the results of actions that were not the object of the detailed intention of the agent are brought forth and the question of whether one can attribute these actions to a voluntary agent or not is discussed. This discussion is indeed, to some extent, different from that of the individuation of action in the current philosophy of action; however, it provides the ground for advancing this issue in the framework of Islamic philosophy. 3)

---

1. C.f. Davidson, D., “Aristotle's Action”, in: *Truth, language and History*, Oxford: OUP, 2005.

That which has been addressed concerning the essence of action in Islamic philosophy also involves the explanation of action and Islamic philosophers have spoken of the causality of the spiritual origins of action in relation to action in this discussion. However, since this issue has not been addressed in this manner in Islamic philosophy, the discussion in the context of this philosophy needs a kind of reconstruction to be able to answer the contemporary issue of the explanation of action. 4) Islamic philosophers, like others, have also written about human free will and its effect on human actions from early times and this has a direct effect on pursuing this issue in philosophy of action.

Ibn Yaqūb Kindī can be considered the first person in the Islamic philosophical context to have entered into the abovementioned discussions. The next is Fārābī who has extensively addressed voluntary action, the human will, and the origins of voluntary actions. Avicenna, influenced by Fārābī, discusses the prevalent discussions in this regard in detail; this custom continues till Mullā Sadrā and has become ingrained with his innovations in this discussion. Mullā Sadrā not only focused on the heritage of Islamic philosophers but also on that of the mystics. After him, his thoughts continue to be studied and critiqued until today and have created a dynamic movement in Islamic philosophy. Similarly, in the contemporary age, Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī has presented some relatively new views in this regard which are worthy of discussion and pursuit.

Among the philosophers, Mullā Sadrā today has a more serious and profound influence over those of us who pursue Islamic thought than other philosophers. Accordingly, to advance this discussion in the field of Islamic philosophy, we need to be aware of Mullā Sadrā's view in this regard before anything else. Therefore, in this article, we are topic and not issue-focused; in other words, we intend to present a relatively comprehensive picture of Mullā Sadrā's views in this regard.

It is obvious that none of the views of any of the Islamic philosophers were precisely focused on the issues of philosophy of action until a few years ago and as it has been previously mentioned, some of these views are more applicable to these discussions while others are less so. However, clearly, the views of the Islamic philosophers provide an appropriate context and opportunity to advance these discussions and in finding solutions. Thus, it is necessary for scholars in this field to know about them.

Action in this paper refers to human action and work from the aspect that this work

is related to the specific characteristics of a human being. In other words, the action of a human being as a human being who forms a species distinct and different from other creatures is under consideration. Accordingly, philosophy of action is of the category of *Falsafī-yi Muzāf*<sup>1</sup> in relation to realities that discusses the study of the definition, essence and identity, origins, causes and types of human action and its role in human perfection and happiness, its position concerning realities and different domains like God and His actions, religion and society and, in short, all that can be studied from a transcendental perspective regarding human activities and work.

According to Mullā Sadrā, possessing intellect and free will are the characteristics that are specific to human beings in comparison to other congeneric creatures, that is, animals (Mullā Sadrā, 1360 AP, pp. 262 & 322; 1981, vol. 7, p. 133). Therefore, human action from the aspect that they are humans, according to Mullā Sadrā, must be explained as the concept of action that arises from the human intellect and free will. This is whether this action arises directly from utilizing the intellect and free will or whether it arises from the selection of the soul that possesses the ability of intellection and free will without the aforementioned act being directly determined by reason and will. For in this last instance too if the intellect is not somehow under the influence of the imagination and senses and the will is not subjugated by the irascible and appetitive faculties (Mullā Sadrā, 1381 AP, p. 221), no action would take place. Thus, the aforementioned act, in reality, is *an act of a human being who has descended to the domain of animals* (Mullā Sadrā, 1302 AH, p. 198). Considering this explanation of action in Mullā Sadrā's philosophy, in Sadrian philosophy, philosophy of action is a philosophical and transcendental view of an action that is the result of employing the human will; with the condition that this will is somehow in connection with the speculative and practical intellects and is not reduced to merely an animal desire and purpose. Therefore, the soul and body's automatic actions like breathing are produced from this domain; because these types of actions are considered merely animal in human beings. Given these explanations, *human actions in the abovementioned meaning, start during human life when the intellect and will have reached their minimum actuality and the possibility of benefitting from that exists in*

---

1. Second-order Philosophy

2. Philosophies are divided into two general groups: philosophies in relation sciences and knowledge, and philosophies in relation realities (other than science).

*action*. In Mullā Sadrā's philosophy, this level of abstraction is achieved at the beginning of formal maturity in a human being (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 8, p. 327).

## **1. Causes and Origins of Actions**

### **1-1. Internal Causes and Origins**

The internal origins of actions in a human being are the inner causes and reasons that form in the soul and different spiritual and physical faculties and, ultimately, result in action. Mullā Sadrā considers human beings to be agents-by-intention from among the various efficient causes. An agent-by-intention is one whose action is preceded by the will and this in turn is preceded by knowledge; this knowledge is connected to his purpose for that action. Similarly, according to Sadrā, the ability of the agent-by-intention to perform or abstain from an act is the same without the incorporation of preferences and motivations (Ibid. vol. 2, p. 223). Therefore, a human being's voluntary actions traverse four stages from the time they are issued from him until they manifest externally (Mullā Sadrā, 1354 AP, p. 129). These stages are considered as the internal origins and causes of human voluntary actions. Thus, overall, the internal origins of actions (voluntary actions) in Sadrian philosophy are the following: cognizance, desire, will, ability, and the faculty of physical movement (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 2, p. 251 & vol. 6, p. 414; 1387 AP, p. 315).

#### **1-1-1. Cognitive Origins**

The will, and, consequently, human voluntary action is not possible without conceiving action (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 2, p. 183), the goal of action, and attesting to the benefit of that goal. This acknowledgment could be rational and certain, or rational and uncertain, or it could be an assumed non-disjunctive judgment (Mullā Sadrā, 1354 AP, p. 175; 1981, vol. 2, p. 251; 1387 AP, p. 310; 1302 AH, p. 198).

In a human being, who enjoys both animal and specific human faculties, if a voluntary act is performed merely following one's appetitive and irascible faculties (animal origins of action) then the cognitive origin of action will also occur in one of the animal perceptive faculties: illusionary, imaginary, or, sensory<sup>1</sup>. In this case, once one imagines the action and its goal, if it is inclined with the animal nature, there is no need for a judgment

---

1. The fancy is the chief of the ultimate perceptive faculty in animals (Mullā Sadrā, 1354 AP, p. 234).

separate from those sensory, imaginative or fanciful conceptions. However, if a voluntary act is performed humanly, the intellect (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 7, pp. 132-134) first conceives the action and its goal and then acknowledges or refutes the benefit and favorability of that purpose and act for a human being (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 6, p. 342). Although, it is possible that this acknowledgment is uncertain and a person may will that act without certainty regarding its benefit. However, in a more human state, this acknowledgment is definitive. The goal in the intellect that has been described, for which the faculty of movement starts to work is sometimes motion itself and sometimes, the goal is the end of the motion. However, sometimes, the conceived goal of action is something that results from the end of movement in the perceptive faculty (Ibid, vol. 2, pp. 251-252).

The perceptive origin of a rational, voluntary act essentially consists of two general and specific stages: general cognition and specific cognition. In the former, there is first a general, concise cognition of the act in the speculative intellect (Ibid, vol. 7, pp. 15-16) which then becomes detailed in the next stage (the spiritual heart)<sup>1</sup> (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 7, pp. 15-16). In regards to the latter, since general motion cannot exist externally until it does not become specific and individual, the conception and will to perform the act must occur continuously and specifically so that action and motion can take place (Mullā Sadrā, 1354 AP, p. 178). Therefore, it is clear that until a general conception of an action and its purpose does not result in the creation of a specific conception of that act, that action will not happen; this specific perception forms in the imagination or fancy (the animal perceptive faculties) (Mullā Sadrā, 1354 AP, p. 129).

The result of the differences in the perceptive origins is the difference in the outcomes of voluntary actions: the desire and will that arises from mere appetite and irascibility mostly results in the detriment of a human being's ultimate happiness as these are dominated by illusion, imagination, and the senses (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 7, p. 134) which provide only immediate benefit and loss and consider only the present. However, since the human will is under the influence of the intellect (Ibid.) and the intellect perceives the outcomes of actions its actions are mostly to the benefit of ultimate human happiness (Mullā Sadrā, 1354 AP, p. 214; Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 7, p. 134).

---

1. The term heart for this stage is because of its change and transformation from one known to another or because it changes and moves between the intellect and senses. (Mullā Sadrā, 1354 AP, p. 129)

### **1-1-2. The Origin of Desire (love)**

The second general stage of the stages of the internal origins of voluntary actions is the stage of desire (Mullā Sadrā, 1354 AP, pp. 233-234; 1981, vol. 2, p. 251). Desire comes from the faculty of *enthusiasm* or desire which is a subcategory of the animal stimulative faculties (Mullā Sadrā, 1354 AP, p. 233) and is considered the head of other stimulative faculties (Ibid., p. 234) (like the operative faculty which provides physical stimulation). The appetitive and irascible faculties (affective faculties) come under the faculty of desire and they oblige the faculty of desire to motion and desire by creating lust and anger, or in instances where the rational faculty stimulates desire, these two help in creating desire (Mullā Sadrā, 1354 AP, p. 233). In the state where human voluntary action occurs in an animal manner, the faculty of desire is stimulated only under the influence of imagination and fancy and under the guidance of lust and anger (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 7, p. 134); however, when human voluntary actions occur humanly and are actualized under the influence of the intellect, imagination and fancy which are under the control of the intellect, oblige desire to act with the help of lust and anger (Mullā Sadrā, 1354 AP, pp. 214 & 234; 1981, vol. 7, p. 134).

The relationship between desire and will which is the next stage of the origins of action is one of intensity and weakness (Mullā Sadrā, 1354 AP, p. 234; 1387 AP, p. 315; 1302 AH, p. 198); in the instances where the desired end of the action is something beautiful, desire is transformed into intense desire or love as a result of perceiving beauty and this love becomes the cause of seeking (loving will); seeking becomes the cause of motion which in turn becomes the cause for achieving that which is desired (union with the beloved) (Mullā Sadrā, 1363 AP, p. 377).

### **1-1-3. The Origins of Will (determination, consensus, decision)**

The third stage of the internal causes of voluntary action is the will, determination, or decision (Mullā Sadrā, 1354 AP, pp. 233 & 234; 1981, vol. 2, p. 251). As is mentioned above, the will is the same as intense or definitive desire (Mullā Sadrā, 1354 AP, p. 235), and, in fact, this intensity of desire is on part of the soul to ensure that any probability of the action not being performed is removed (Ibid, p. 234). Thus, the will also rises from the specific faculty of the will itself according to Transcendental Philosophy (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 4, p. 113) and has been utilized for two meanings: 1) the will refers to a motive

or determination that results in the complete preference or abandonment of action. This will rises from the origin of rational belief and is specific to human beings (Mullā Sadrā, 1354 AP, p. 214); 2) the will refers to intense animal lust or anger and depends on the temperament that originates from imagination. In other words, sometimes imagining acquiring a pleasure or repelling a pain brings about a state which causes us to abandon certain misconceptions and actualizes a particular temperament which stimulates lust to benefit from that pleasure or anger to repel that pain and creates a desire, the intensity of which creates the will (Mullā Sadrā, 1363 AP, p. 269). Thus, this will is nothing but the intensity of lust or anger (for example, see Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 7, p. 134; 1354 AP, p. 234) and is to be considered as the animal will. The Irascible or appetitive will considers benefit and loss in the present, however, the (rational) will considers the future; this is the ultimate purpose of the will in addition to those two (Mullā Sadrā, 1354 AP, p. 214).

The contiguity of reason and knowledge with action originates in the knowledgeable soul and the effect of that knowledge on action is sufficient for that action to be voluntary and through this, free will also applies (Ibid, p. 115). Sadrā emphasizes that perception (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 2, p. 183) and desire themselves result in the will and are sufficient for an action to be voluntary; not that there is a will before the will for an action to be considered voluntary (Ibid., vol. 2, p. 251). He clarifies that the origins of free actions before the will are all compulsive, involuntary, and automatic (Ibid., vol. 4, p. 114). In other words, the human will is not voluntary and leads back to reasons outside the essence of the soul, and, ultimately, lead back to God's eternal will (Ibid., vol. 6, p. 388).

Similarly, like knowledge and desire, the will must also become specific and apply to specific action and motion for action and motion to occur. Therefore, the will must rise from fanciful or imaginary cognizance and specific desire; whether this cognizance is governed by the intellect or is independent of it. Proof of this matter is that until general motion does not become specific and distinguished, it cannot exist externally (Mullā Sadrā, 1354 AP, p. 178).

#### **1-1-4. The Origins of Physical Motion (which rise from ability or the faculty of action)**

The fourth origin of voluntary actions is the origin of physical stimulation which is the faculty of action present in the body's muscles and limbs (Ibid., p. 234). The faculty of

action is one of the faculties of motion and operation which is linear to the faculty of desire, is the origin of the will, and acts under their influence. Its purpose is to prepare the muscles to transport and move and has direct interference in physical stimulation (Ibid., p. 233). Therefore, the faculty of motion is considered a material faculty (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 8, p. 241). Overall, one must conclude that perception and the will must be accompanied by ability and suitable tools for actions; otherwise, they would have no effect in creating an external (material) act (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 6, p. 414; 1354 AP, p. 214).<sup>1</sup> Hence, the human soul (the practical intellect) employs muscle strength so that external actions are actualized based on perception, desire, and will (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 2, p. 222). The goal of the motive faculty is always the same as that of motion (Ibid., pp. 251-252). Sadrā explains human ability as this material faculty of action (Ibid., vol. 8, p. 241) or a form within it. He considers human and animal ability in another meaning to be a spiritual state through which they can perform an act which they will (Ibid., vol. 4, pp. 111-112). Clearly, this latter meaning is different from the first meaning of ability (a form in the faculty of action).

### **1-1-5. The Principal Origin of all Internal Origins of Action**

According to Sadrā, the origin of all the above mentioned internal origins (cognizance, will, etc.), and, as a result, the principal origin of all actions and motions is the human soul and spirit (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 8, p. 247; 1354 AP, p. 175); because the soul is the same as all its faculties (one of Sadrā's main principles is that the soul in its unity is all of its faculties); even in the stage of physical stimulation in which the physical faculties are effective, the soul—which is equal to these physical faculties as well—is present and is considered the real factor of human physical action (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 8, p. 248). Sadrā believes that an act issued from the human soul is like an act issued by God (Ibid., vol. 6, pp. 241-242). According to this and the soul being the direct origin in all levels of voluntary actions, one can conclude that the essence of human action is actually the

---

1. However, in its specific actions, the soul, like rational and imaginary perception or the voluntary actions of the heart, does not need the body or the faculty of action (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 8, p. 295).

rational soul and all its faculties extend and encompass the whole of its existence.

## **1-2. External Origins<sup>1</sup>**

### **1-2-1. Environmental Origins**

A human being's inner states are constantly changing from state to state under the influence of external factors and this affects the actualization of the will or his repulsion regarding different matters. The heart or rational faculty is constantly exposed to intelligible or imaginary forms from the environment around it; the effect of these forms is the apparent or inner states that re-enter the heart and, as a result, a person's inner state is constantly being transformed from one state to another and different thoughts and perceptions are formed in him which are the origin and cause of different wills (Mullā Sadrā, 1354 AP, pp. 199 & 200). In general, every faculty within a human being (including perceptive and active faculties) has pleasure and pain. In the first stage, when forms or the effect of some external thing is formed in the senses, a form of it enters the imagination and from that initial form, the soul becomes aware of it being pleasurable or painful and gentle or hateful. When the soul becomes aware of this matter, an effect takes form in it which is known as the will and inclination (in case of pleasures) or repulsion and hatred (in case of painful matters) (Mullā Sadrā, 1363 AP, p. 152) and creates different wills in him.

### **1-2-2. Transcendental Origins<sup>2</sup>**

#### **I. Angelic and Devilish Origins**

In the same way that effects appear in the soul from the outgoing door of the soul to the world, effects also manifest through the incoming door of the soul to the divine realms. Hence, the soul constantly finds effects and states within itself which originate in either the apparent aspect of the soul like the five senses and encountering the material realm or from the inner depths of the soul like the origins of imaginations and thoughts as a

---

1. External origins refer to the voluntary origins and causes of action outside the human soul.

2. Transcendental origins refer to the external causes and origins of action in the realms beyond the material realm.

result of being affected by the transcendental realms and most of the effects that arise from them stay in the soul even after the external factors have been removed. This is because those factors are only preparatory causes and create the groundwork for those effects. Human imagination receives the forms that are rooted in these encounters and achieves a specific state. The imagination and, consequently, the soul, transform from one specific matter to another similar to it to such an extent that the states which arise from those similar forms manifest as a constant and fixed attribute. Each of these types of fixed spiritual attributes has an origin and suitable faculty in the soul and it is these origins and faculties that create the capacity for the soul to accept eschatological forms that human beings will be revived with in the Hereafter. Under the influence of these circumstances, the substantial eschatological form is formed in the soul and is the reason why the soul receives its immaterial forms and performs the actions that are suitable to them; whether this form is from the evil origins (like the forms of devils) or good origins (like the forms of angels) (Mullā Sadrā, 1363 AP, p.153; 1354 AP, p.199). Considering the abovementioned matters, one can say that it is these thoughts and perceptions that create the will to do something or repel him from doing another.

The thoughts that motivate interest and desire are divided into two groups: the thoughts that motivate the desire for evil (that which will bring loss for a human being in the Hereafter) which are known as condemned and suspicious thoughts; the thoughts that motivate the desire for good (that which will benefit human beings in the Hereafter) which are known as inspiration or praiseworthy thoughts (Mullā Sadrā, 1363 AP, p. 154; 1354 AP, p. 200). Since thoughts are contingent and every contingent requires a reason, these two types of thoughts also have a reason. The efficient cause of good thoughts is an angel (luminous intellectual immaterial substance) and the efficient cause for evil thoughts is a devil (dark spiritual substance) (Mullā Sadrā, 1363 AP, p. 154; 1354 AP, p. 200).

## **II. Divine Origin (the relationship between human actions and God)**

Apart from comparing internal origins to Divine actions (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 6, pp. 341-342), Sadrā believes that the primary, main, and ultimate origin of human will and action, above all origins and causes, is God and His will. This view can be studied in two levels:

- 1) His perspective regarding the relationship between God and the world according to

the popular view: according to this view, even though human-specific actions are voluntary, a human being is not free in being a voluntary agent; in other words, all causes and reasons originate in God's eternal will and, therefore, the final cause of an agent-by-intention's free will is God's will (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 2, p. 224).

2) His final view regarding the relationship between God and the world: in this level, based on the special mystical view on unity of God – which is the final view Sadrā accepts – all creatures are considered manifestations of God and, hence, all existential attributes in God are somehow (weakly or intensely) evident and manifest in all the creatures of the world. From among these attributes, the two attributes of knowledge and will are the main origins of actions within human beings (Ibid., p. 283). Therefore, human knowledge and will which is the main origin of human actions is the emergence of God's knowledge and will and is one of the manifestations of God.

Based on this view, a doubt may arise that since the human will originates in God's knowledge and will, we cannot consider human beings as free creatures and one who has voluntary actions (Ibid., vol. 6, p. 392). Sadrā's initial response to this question is that the voluntariness of an action refers to it being preceded by the desire and will of the agent himself; however, that his will too is voluntary would result in infinite regress and is impossible. This matter, however, does not refute the voluntariness of human action (Ibid., p. 388). Sadrā's more complete response is based on the specific mystical idea of God's unity in which all attributes in others (the manifestations), apart from God, are really attributed both to them as well as to God (the absolute existence) and, therefore, attributing the will both to the agent-by-intention (like human beings) as well as to God, is in accordance with reality (Mullā Sadrā, 1375 AP, pp. 274-276).

## **2. The Reality and Essence of Action**

In Transcendental Philosophy, the whole of the natural realm is in a constant state of substantial motion and this motion occurs necessarily and without choice. Every motion is a departure from potentiality to actuality and, therefore, substantial motion is always seeking perfection and completion (Muṭahharī, 1376 AP, vol. 3, p. 116) and its ultimate goal is God. Similarly, the human soul which is dependent on physical matter for its actions is included in the general substantial motion of the material realm as long as this dependency remains (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. vol. 8, p. 247) and is involuntarily in

substantial motion towards the ultimate goal of all the world's movements, that is, God (Ibid., pp. 395-396) and acquires intensity of existence (Ibid., p. 257).

On the other hand, this general substantial motion, as well as the substantial motion of the soul, must be explained as a type of existential love whose object of love is God. According to Sadrian philosophy, God's love for His own essence results in His love for the requisites of His essence and these are the other existents (Ibid., vol. 6, p. 415). God creates other existents based on His subsequent love for other creatures (Ibid., vol. 2, p. 264) and, therefore, the existence of other than God is based on love and can be considered the same as God's love (Ibid., p. 264). Thus, the whole of existence has been encompassed by love and all movements originate from love. However, since the origin of the existence of existents and their motions is the loving God and His love, the goal of these motions is also God. Therefore, we can consider all the actions and movements of the world to be a type of love journey towards God (Ibid., p. 277). Although, in this level, neither the love and nor the goal and beloved consciously considered. The human soul and its actions (including voluntary and involuntary acts) are also included in this general rule and, therefore, the soul is unconsciously moving on a love journey towards its real beloved.

Similarly, according to Sadrā, voluntary action is a motion (for example, see Mullā Sadrā, 1354 AP, p. 234; 1981, vol. 6, p. 341 & vol. 8, pp. 255-256) and its agent, that is, the soul must also be considered to be in motion while performing a voluntary action for several reasons: the first reason is the direct role of the soul in physical stimulation of the body (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 8, p. 247); because according to the Sadrian view, the soul, while unified, is also at the same time the same as and present in all its different faculties and the actions and motivation of those faculties are also directly attributed to the soul (Mullā Sadrā, 1375 AP, pp. 278 & 292). Since every direct agent of motion must also itself be in motion to accompany the motivated in all points of motion, the soul must also itself be in motion (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 8, pp. 244-245). The second reason: until general motion does not become specific and individualized, it cannot acquire external existence. Therefore, during physical motion, motivation, will, and conception must also be created specifically and continuously for an act and motion to be actualized (Mullā Sadrā, 1354 AP, p. 178). This continuous material creation of motion is itself achieved through motion (Ibid.) and, therefore, voluntary muscular movement depends on motion in conception,

will, and motivation and since the soul is present in all these levels, motion extends to the soul as well. In reality, the soul's motion is what causes the motion of conception, will, and motivation. As a result, physical motion takes place (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 8, pp. 255-256; 1354 AP, p. 178). The third reason: the soul is present at the level of physical faculties and is considered the same as the body and its faculties (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 3, pp. 66-67). Therefore, physical and bodily motion is directly attributed to the soul and it is the soul itself that motivates that motion and, as a result, is considered the motivator (Ibid., vol. 8, pp. 244-245).

As mentioned, the soul's involuntary motion is intense substantial motion (Ibid., p. 257). Similarly, a voluntary action that is performed in the way of true human perfection is substantial and perfective motion in the soul according to Sadrā (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 8, pp. 244-245). This is corroborated by the fact that ultimate human perfection is of the category of knowledge (Mullā Sadrā, 1363 b AP, p. 245) and knowledge is of the category of existence (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 6, p. 336) and since Sadrā's view regarding acquiring knowledge is the unity of knowledge, the knower and the known (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 3, p. 313; (n.d. a) , "Al-Mash'ar al-Sābi", pp. 50 & 51), the soul attains extension or intensity of existence through the aforesaid voluntary action and the knowledge that is acquired as a result of that. Therefore, the aforementioned voluntary motion must be considered a perfective motion in the substance of the soul.

However, even though according to Sadrā, the voluntary motion of the soul which is a substantial motion, is always (whether in the path of true perfection or decline) perfective and is one of intensification, in the voluntary motion in the path of decline, while acquiring one virtue other perfections are implicitly (consequently) lost and in these circumstances, the soul becomes weaker on the whole (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 4, p. 115). Therefore, it is only through achieving voluntary actions to acquire ultimate human perfection that the soul has achieved overall development voluntarily and consciously; however, performing voluntary actions against the direction of the ultimate perfection makes the soul overall existentially weaker voluntarily.

According to the view of Transcendental Philosophy based on the loving motion of all the existents towards God, human voluntary action is also an unconscious loving motion towards the beloved of the whole (God). However, this loving motion finds eschatological

value and affects human-specific perfection in the Hereafter only when it is conscious and voluntary. That is, the existential development of the natural world and human soul<sup>1</sup> does not actualize ultimate human perfection and happiness and, moreover, it is necessary that a human being moves towards his appropriate perfection and happiness with consciousness and voluntarily and the best description of this voluntary motion is the motion based on love. According to Sadrā, conscious love occurs when the understanding and conception of beauty causes love and love causes pursuit (i.e. will) and pursuit causes motion which ultimately results in unification and attaining the desired and beloved (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, 1363 AP, p. 377). However, since the real beloved of all love is necessarily God or His words and commands that are close to Him (Ibid.), love for God is considered conscious and voluntary when this matter (God is the beloved of all) is perceived and a human being becomes cognizant of Divine beauty and He becomes the object of human love and will. In this case, it can be concluded that human voluntary motion is a conscious and voluntary movement towards the real beloved, that is, God. This love which is known as the greatest human love is specific to the mystics and perfect souls (Mullā Sadrā, 1981, vol. 7, p. 188-190).

## Conclusions

Considering what has been discussed so far, we can say that in Sadrian philosophy, human voluntary action is a motion that rises from the effect of the cognizance of the human perceptive faculty in the external realm which occurs through the mediation of the will. Therefore, the starting point of human action is the beginning of the formation of the human will and intellect (which is the origin of the human will) or the transcendental aspect of the human soul.

The origins of human actions are cognizance, desire, and will. However, since

---

1. According to Sadrā, this existential development can be explained as such: through the substantial motion of the natural world, this world will ultimately reach a higher realm, that is, the Hereafter and, therefore, the Hereafter is a matter that will naturally emerge after the material realm. However, this does not mean that each of the creatures of the material realm will ultimately achieve immateriality; rather, the material realm as a whole will become immaterial and it is possible that some of the existents do not achieve specific immateriality. However the human soul is one of the existents that will necessarily become specifically immaterial and this immateriality is a type of perfection for all human beings. This extent of immateriality, however, does not constitute happiness of human beings as human beings and is not the specific human perfection; because it is possible that despite this immateriality, a person's place is in Hell and he is considered an evildoer.

cognizance and will originate in the human soul, it is the soul itself that is the principal origin. But since every change and motion in the world occurs through the perpetual grace of God, human action also takes place with the help of God's perpetual grace. In reality, a human being and his will as an agent – although he should not be overlooked – are subject to God and His will. Therefore, Divine decree and ordinance are not in contradiction with the voluntariness of human action.

In the same way that the substantial motion of the whole of the natural world is necessary and its true goal in a love-based representation of this motion must be considered to be God, the motion of the soul's essence is also necessary and perpetual and its ultimate goal and beloved is God. However, human voluntary action and work is another loving substantial motion which forms within that necessary motion and if it is directed towards the true perfection, it can help human beings achieve their ultimate and worthy perfection. But if human action is in the direction of decline (contrary to true perfection), it will hinder human beings from achieving their worthy perfection and will result in their wretchedness. Thus, human beings' actions are divided into good and bad.

The ultimate goal of human actions and work is to achieve the closest rank to God because the goal of every existent is the good and perfection that he is worthy of and because goodness is of the category of existence and the highest existence is God and consequently, He is the ultimate good and absolute perfection, the ultimate perfection of every existent is in moving towards Him and existential closeness to Him as far as the existential capacity of that existent allows. Human beings' closeness to God has two aspects: one, possessing the most intense knowledge regarding all the creatures and levels of the world and two, the abstraction of essence and action from matter. The role of good actions in this domain is preparatory in relation to acquiring such knowledge and contingent concerning such immateriality. By balancing the animal faculties (irascible and appetitive), good actions bring these faculties under the command of the intellect and, therefore, free the soul from attachment and subordination to the inclinations of these faculties and steer it to true immateriality.

## References

- Davidson, D. (2005). "Aristotle's Action", in: *Truth, language and History*, Oxford: OUP.
- Hornsby, J. & Steward, H. (2004). "Agency and Action", in *Agency and Action*, ed. Steward H. and John Hyman, CUP.
- Mullā Sadrā (Shirazi, Sadr al-Din Muhammad b. Ibrahim). (1981). *Al-Hikmat al-Muta'aliya fi al-Asfār al-'Aqliyat al-Arba'a*. Beirut: Dār 'Ihyā al-Turāth al-'Arabī. vols. 2-4, 6-9.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1302 AH/1884-85). *Majmū'at al-Rasa'il al-Tis'ah*. Tehran: n.p.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1354 AP/1975-76). *Al-Mabda' wa al-Ma'ād*. Jalal al-Din Ashtiani (ed. and commentator). Iranian Philosophical Society, Tehran, 1<sup>st</sup> ed.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1360 AP/1981-82). *Al-Shawāhid al-Rūbūbiyya fi Manāhij al-Sūlūkiyya*. Jalal al-Din Āshtiānī (ed. and commentator). Mashhad: Al-Markaz al-Jameie Publications, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1363 AP/1984-85). *Mafātiḥ al-Ghaib*. Researched by Muhammad Khwājawī. Tehran: Mu'assisiyi Taḥqīqāt-i Farhangī.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1363 b AP/1984-85). *Asrār al-Āyāat*. Muhammad Khwājawī (commentator). Tehran: Mu'assisi-yi Muṭāliāt va Taḥqīqāt-i Farhangī.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1375 AP/1996-97). *Majmū' i-yi Rasā'il-i Falasafī-yi Sadr-u l-Muta'illihīn*. Hamed Najī Esfahani (ed.). Tehran: Ḥikmat, 1<sup>st</sup> ed.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1381 AP). *Kasr al-Aṣnām al-Jāhiliyya*. Muhsin Jahāngīrī (ed.). Tehran: Bunyād-i Ḥikmat-i Islamī Sadrā, 1<sup>st</sup> ed.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1387 AP/2008-09). *Si Rasā'il-i Falsafī*. Jalal al-Din Āshtiānī (ed.). Qom: Daftar-i Tablighat-i Islami Publications, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (n.d. a). *Al-Mashā'ir*. Henry Corbin (ed. and Researcher). Tehran: Ṭahurī.

\_\_\_\_\_. (n.d. b). *'Iqāz al-Na'imīn*. Mohsen Mu'ayyedi (ed.). Tehran: Iranian Philosophical Society.

\_\_\_\_\_. (1364 AP/1985-86). *Al-Mazāhir al-Ilāhiyya*. Tehran: Amīr Kabīr.

Muṭahhari, Murtaḍā. (1376 AP/1997-98). "Ḥarkat va Zamān" in: *Majmū'a-yi Āthar*. Tehran: Sadra [4 vols.].