

Re-Reading Mulla Sadra on the Intersection of Cognition and Emotion

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Human emotions are in connection with his deeds on the one hand and his perceptions on the other, and this complicates the analysis of emotion. Furthermore, any school of thought in search of presenting a comprehensive perspective on the human should clarify its stance with regard to emotion and the position it has in the structure of human cognition and deeds. This fact places the answer to the following questions in the field of philosophical anthropology: Does perception have a role in the development of emotions? Are emotions voluntary or involuntary like hunger and thirst? Is human soul passive in the creation of emotions, or does it play an active role? Is it possible to judge the reasonableness or unreasonableness of an emotion as a state that is mainly considered in contrast with rationality? Do all individuals experience similar affective states in similar conditions? In other words, are emotions typical or individual? In this paper, we try to answer these questions from the perspective of the forerunner of Transcendental Philosophy, Mulla Sadra Shirazi.

Keywords: emotion, Mulla Sadra, practical reason, perception, deed, character, pleasure and pain

Introduction

The theories of substantial motion and gradation of being are among the most important contributions of Mulla Sadra Shirazi. These principles have permeated his entire philosophical system and led to new perspectives on different issues, including his analyses of human soul or so called “anthropology.” According to Mulla Sadra, the

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human possesses the perfections of all other beings in different gradations. Human soul includes a verity of faculties: the faculty of nutrition principally belonging to plants, moving by the will that is the differentia of animals, and reason which is the differentia of human beings. Despite having different faculties, the soul has no plurality in its essence; rather, it has the real unity. In fact, the soul is the cause of every motion and the doer of each action, such as nutrition and change, albeit with the mediation of the faculties.

Therefore, there is no gap in Mulla Sadra's view between the faculty of knowing and the faculty of acting. Although emotion, as one state of the soul which has a relation to perception and action, has not been taken into consideration separately by Mulla Sadra, he has addressed it in his discussion of practical reason and the faculty of acting. The position of cognition in the creation of emotions, the relation between emotion and action, the criterion of reasonableness of emotions, and the necessity of training emotions are among the issues that Mulla Sadra has taken into account in his general discussions of practical reason.

The Position of Cognition in the Development of Emotions

The inherent complexity of emotion and cognition as mental states, in addition to the difficulty of grasping the interwoven philosophical system of Mulla Sadra, makes the analysis of the role of cognition in the development of emotions very difficult. The fact that Mulla Sadra has not discussed the issue of emotion separately but included it among his discussion of the states belonging to the practical aspect of the soul, such as pleasure, pain, love, and hate, adds to the difficulties of the analysis. This is why it seems at first glance that he has no consistent theory in this regard. Of course, reviewing his works from the perspective of the above questions shows that he has a special and accurate theory regarding emotions.

In his book *al-Mabda' wa'l-ma'ad*, he says, "Pleasure is the perception of the suitable, and pain is the perception of an unsuitable thing. Indeed, the word 'perception' is a universal term, which can be divided into pleasure, pain, and that which is not pleasure nor pain" (Mulla Sadra 1354 Sh, 147). Pleasure is the perception of something suitable with the perceiver and the faculty of perception, and pain is the perception of something not fitting the perceiver. So Mulla Sadra classifies perception into three categories from this perspective: pleasure, pain, and perceptions that are neither pleasure nor pain.

So far it is clear that emotions are cognitive in Mulla Sadra's view. In other words, emotional states form a kind of perception that is the

result of the activity of the human soul, in contrast to reactions such as hunger or physiological pain in which the human soul is passive. This puts Mulla Sadra's view of emotions among theories that consider emotional states related to the faculty of knowing, distinguishing them from other impulses in which the faculty of knowing has no role. The definition of emotion based on feelings or excitements is rooted in the common look at emotion, which is taken from ancient Greece. Based on this view, emotions are powers outside us that force us to do something. For this reason, Plato who considers emotions as irrational motions of organism suggests athletic solutions, like rhythmic motions, to pregnant mothers for diminution of fetus' emotions. In this view, emotions are not considered as related to the human differentia or the faculty of reasoning, and it is believed that reason has no relation to emotion. Emotional states are caused by factors outside the human essence and move the individual like sea waves without his/her awareness, in contrast to thinking in which the human person plays an active role. In other words, in the common view, humankind has a human aspect—that is, his thoughtfulness—which is active, and has an animal aspect, which is passive; emotions are pertinent to his animal aspect.

Sometimes, this theory is accompanied with the view that emotions are mostly pertinent to the body rather than the mind. Therefore, in emotions, in contrast to cognition, the individual is passive and passionate. If it is so, are emotions equal to other impulses that come to the human from outside? With a little attention, we realize that emotions are not like external assaults. Emotions are a kind of perception. This is exactly what Mulla Sadra emphasizes on in the above passage, but let us dwell a bit longer on the difference between perceptions that are categorized as pleasure and pain and other perceptions. In other words, is the criterion of division of perception into the three above categories inherent or conventional? If this cause of division were conventional, Mulla Sadra's theory would be among theories that consider emotions as mere cognitive affairs and would not be able to answer questions about fundamental differences between this kind of perception and other kinds.³ Familiarity with Mulla Sadra's view concerning how emotions are cognitive requires an analysis of the difference between theoretical reason and practical reason.

Theoretical Reason and Practical Reason

“The mental faculties of human beings are divided into practical

3. See Lyons (1980), Gordon (1987), and De souse (1987).

reason and theoretical reason from the standpoint of the activity they have and from their relation to human deeds” (Mulla Sadra 1360 Sh, 199). “Practical reason needs the body in its actions, while theoretical reason in itself does not need the body or its faculties” (Mulla Sadra 1981, 9:84). It is obvious that Mulla Sadra considers practical reason as the faculty of knowing practical affairs. In his view, the existence of the perceptions that are not pleasant nor painful cannot be useful by themselves and cannot create the link between action and perception. In other words, such perceptions, which are placed in the third category in the above classification, only make cognition possible for the soul, but this is not practically useful. Therefore, along with theoretical reason that attempts to perceive the world as it is, another faculty is required so that perceptions would be practically useful; this faculty is practical reason. The human soul achieves the third group of perceptions through theoretical reason, but pleasure and pain, as two kinds of perception, are beyond the power of theoretical reason. This is because theoretical reason is concerned with the superior realms of existence (Mulla Sadra 1360 Sh, 199), while pleasure and pain are mostly relevant to the body and the inferior realm of the existence—that is, the material world. In other words, “the theoretical faculty is a faculty through which man achieves awareness whose statues is that it is not to be practiced, and the practical faculty is a faculty through which he identifies affairs in the domain of practice (Sabzavari n.d., 310). It seems that the immediate agent of pleasure or pain is practical reason.

Therefore, it seems that the soul presents the perception through practical reason to the faculties that are inclined to the inferior—namely, desire, wrath, and will—after the perception of objects as they are. It is exactly here that the perception that is either pleasure or pain is developed. If the object perceived by theoretical reason and presented by practical reason to desire, wrath, and will is suitable with the nature, the feeling and perception of pleasure will be developed in the human soul; if the object is not suitable, the result of the common activity of practical and theoretical reasons is the development of pain.

Thus, Mulla Sadra considers fear, envy, and so forth relevant to the desire and wrath faculties, so it seems that his view could be explained as follows: The human soul perceives the outside world through its perceptive faculty, but in order for these perceptions to lead to actions, it is necessary that some faculties exist in the human to direct his desire to the perceived objects. In other words, the human soul divides its perceptions into the ones suitable with its nature, the ones unsuitable with its nature, and neutral perceptions. The human soul does this division by its faculties, which include desire, wrath, and

will. Since emotions are studied in the discussion on the acting faculty—namely, desire, wrath, and will—it can be concluded that emotions are the results of the comparison of perceptions with the faculty of motion and consequently the perception of their suitability or unsuitability with one of the levels or grades of the soul. In other words, when the soul finds a perception suitable with its nature, it feels happy as a result; and if it finds that against its nature, it fears or gets angry.

Therefore, in Mulla Sadra's view, practical reason is responsible for the cognition of beauty and ugliness, or good and evil. In other words, practical reason considers external objects in their relation to the soul and their importance for it. Thus, in emotional states, an object that is emotional is considered with a particular view, and deserves that emotional state due to the valuation of the practical reason. This valuation is achieved in accordance with one's objectives and through the attention that the individual pays to desire, wrath, or will; otherwise, the object is perceived as an external object that belongs only to perception, and there will be no emotional state towards it.

If there were no perceptions of pleasure or pain, no perceptions would result in action, because "will as one of the levels of the acting faculty completes usefulness of reason, and perception alone without desire for that issues would not lead to intending them" (Mulla Sadra 1354 Sh, 214). Emotional judgments are evaluative. For this reason, they create disturbance in human nature and stimulate him, but this stimulation is not due to their object in itself, because the cognition obtained in the perceptual faculty will not result in motion if it is not accompanied with will. It is clear that the perception of thousands of relevant and useful matters will remain at the identification level, if it is not accompanied with causation faculty, and if no desire is created for it in human nature.

Emotion and Action

It is clear that the achievement of emotional states in human beings depends on the mutual activity of practical reason and theoretical reason. The point that seems necessary to be discussed here is whether emotional states are equal to emotional behaviors; that is, with the development of emotional states in the human soul, are equal behaviors with those states created in the human or not? In other words, is the achievement of emotional states in the soul the essential and sufficient condition for behavior or not? If the answer is positive, can we explain different behaviors, and in some cases opposite behaviors, by different individuals or even one individual in different

conditions? It seems that Mulla Sadra has considered the issue and distinguished between emotional states and behaviors resulting from emotional states. He says:

What heart first wants is called impression, and that is a cognitive form; for example, when the face of a woman comes to mind. Second is the excitement of desire to see, which is the feeling of lust in human nature and is called eagerness or desire. Third is the judgment of the heart as to the merit of doing that action, which is called belief and follows imagination and desire. And fourth is the resolution to do that action and the firm decision, which is called intention. It is also weak, but it is converted to emphatic ambition and firm decision through the revision and reanalysis of the result. After resolution, he either commits the act or gives it up because of other issues, or an external obstacle hinders the action. Therefore, the heart passes four stages before action: inner chatter (*hadith al-nafs*), desire, belief, and finally intention. (Mulla Sadra 1984, 216)

“The human soul, first makes a notion from an object through theoretical reason and perceives that object; in the next stage, it presents it to his animal nature, which is his desire and wrath” (Mulla Sadra 1360 Sh, 191) and then desires it. Then, since the human has a higher nature than desire and wrath, he analyzes that object based on his values and beliefs and presents it to his exalted nature. Until this stage, the human soul perceives different emotional states based on presenting the perception of the theoretical reason to the different grades of causation faculty through practical reason, and experiences pleasure or pain. However, no action has occurred yet, but the human soul has merely experienced emotions based on the mutual activity of his practical reason and theoretical reason. Finally the human soul makes a decision that leads to an emotional behavior by reanalyzing these crossing emotional states that are obtained from presenting the notion to different degrees of human nature and its suitability with each of them.

Thus, the experience of emotional states in the human soul is different from the execution of actions, which is the result of emotions. Paying attention to this makes the explanation of different behaviors committed by individuals with the same emotional states possible. For example, when two humans who are hungry both perceive an apple tree near them, the notion of the apple is presented to their desire, and the desire to eat the apple is created in them as an emotional state. Do they necessarily show similar behaviors? The answer is no. Based on the above passage, the perception of pleasure is created in each of them after presenting the notion of the apple to the animal and hungry soul. In the next stage, this notion is measured

with other notions and values that these individuals have in mind. In the area of values of one individual, observing others' rights presents the notion of the apple to his human soul and causes the individual's rejection of eating the apple; while the other person tends to eat it, because he lacks such values. Until now each individual experiences different temporal emotional states, but in the next stage, they should do an act by analyzing these emotional states. In this stage, the individual decides to do that action. In the next stage, the individual takes out the act if an external factor does not hinder it.

Therefore, briefly speaking, in Mulla Sadra's view, practical reason experiences different emotional states according to his different grades and levels, but the final decision depends on the priority that the soul gives to one of these grades.

Thus, "the human, having the faculty of will, can reject the objects that he likes, and can will the ones he dislikes. It is because will is a voluntary desire, and delight is a natural desire (Mulla Sadra 1981, 4:113).

The Rationality of Emotions

Emotions of the kind of pleasure and pain are the result of presenting the perceptions of theoretical reason to desire, wrath, and will. Does this statement mean that emotions are typical? Does it mean that humankind experiences the same emotional state in confronting an issue? It seems that Mulla Sadra's answer to this question is negative (Nussbaum 1990, 50). In Mulla Sadra's view, humanity is not the final species, but it is the middle species; there are species following it that he can choose to adopt, such as brutality, evilness, and so forth. Therefore, each individual analyzes different issues according to his gradation of being and with respect to his end and purpose. Thus, he experiences different emotional states in confronting an issue. Therefore, useful or useless issues are different for each individual according to their end and their specific form of being in relation to other individuals.

"Regarding how the human soul passes the levels of perfection, it should be noted that the primary man is the first creature who was created from the synthesis of materials and the result of temperament adjustment of the sperm. In this state, like other animals, he understands only eating and drinking, then gradually the attributes of the soul such as desire, wrath, envy and the other attributes that are consequences of being distant from the origin of being and perfection will emerge. In this state, the human is really animal and different actions that make him reach the Truth are not fulfilled by him, and this

issue is due to self-enmity and animal wishes of desire and wrath” (Mulla Sadra 1354 Sh, 276). In other words, based on the substantial motion, human nature is realized by the type of his wishes and desires. Since the human determines his nature by actions as well as by desires that show themselves in his motion towards perfection, if the human follows his desires—namely, those which are the result of his animal faculty—he will not be more than an animal and will be deprived of his exalted human position. “And it is getting away from the original nature and being gathered blind and dumb with beasts and insects, because the love of position, the desire for property and chairmanship, and the pride of the concupiscent soul, as well as trick and whatever similar are the diseases of the soul and fatal, and form the principles of hell; as soon as they penetrate the soul and become chronic, spiritual physicians are unable to cure them, as physical physicians are unable to cure congenitally blind or vitiligious people” (Mulla Sadra 2008, 1:61).

We should note that there are types of perfection that the soul tries to achieve in accordance with knowledge, perception, eagerness, and love that God has placed for the human in each grade of being, but the point is that the human possesses all faculties and, therefore, his dignity is equal to the highest grades of these types of perfection. In other words, the human is measured with his highest perfection. Thus, the rationality of his behavior is measured by this exalted perfection; otherwise, all deeds in their grade of being are good and consequently reasonable. Therefore, no action is evil or unreasonable in itself; it may be good for natural beings and even for animal faculties. The reason why an action of a human being is regarded as evil is because it is not appropriate for his high and excellent human faculties that are to overcome his low faculties. “Thus, they are good for humans from the standpoint of their animal faculties and their legal and rational vilification is due to their relations to the human rational component.” (Mulla Sadra 1981, 7:62).

So far it is clear that although Mulla Sadra does not consider emotions typical and considers the emotions of each individual in accordance with that individual’s grade of being, he does not consider all emotions rational. In other words, he also believes that emotions, like beliefs, are true, untrue, reasonable, or unreasonable, but the serious question concerning emotions’ rationality is how we can consider an emotional state as reasonable or unreasonable. Mulla Sadra believes that the reasonableness of affairs should be measured in relation to something, but this criterion—in contrast to liberal views of our time—is not the collective wisdom. “In spite of the fact that the being of the human is nobler than that of the others, when we pay

attention to human beings, we see that the evilness such as lewd actions, bad behaviors, and false beliefs are overcoming them and, briefly, they are following their desire and wrath in practice and dominant ignorance in theory.” (Mulla Sadra 1981, 7:79). Thus, what most of humans agree on cannot be the criterion of rationality, because most of them are involved in an abyss of sin and corruption. In contrast, we should accept the rulings of reason and religious law against the view of the majority who disbelieve and obey their desire and wrath, because animals and humans are guided by desire and wrath, which make them inclined to what is suitable with their nature. However, the human needs another guide to incline him towards what is useful for his prosperity and make him free from destruction. This is the faculty of will and aversion that is under the control of reason (Mulla Sadra 1981, 8:159).

Therefore, the criteria for reasonableness of human actions are reason and religion. In Mulla Sadra’s view, only the fixed laws of reason and religion can be in charge of leadership of affairs towards the final perfection. That is why the rationality of all human actions, beliefs, and wills should be measured with these two criteria.

Thus, the inner aspect of the human is like a mixture of faculties some of which are animal, some brutal, and some kingly. Desire, evilness, greed, and debauchery originate from the animal faculty; envy, enmity, and rancor come from the brutal faculty; trick, pride, love of position, and domination are the effects of the satanic faculty; and the origin of knowledge and purity is the human kingly faculty. The principles of morality are these four elements, and they are so interwoven in the human soul that the soul cannot be free from them. The human soul can be free from the darkness of desire, wrath, and satanic faculties only by the guidance of religion and reason (Mulla Sadra 1981, 9:93). In Mulla Sadra’s view, at first, the animal soul is dominant over man, and desire overcomes him; then brutality is developed in his soul, and enmity overcomes him; and then the deposition of following Satan is created in him, and trick dominates him. When desire and wrath want him to use cleverness in seeking the world and satisfying desire and wrath, haughtiness and deceit emerge in him. Then reason is developed in him and the light of faith appears through it. Afterwards, a battle breaks out between the commands of reason and wishes of desire and wrath, and the forces that win this battle will direct the soul to the divine enlightenment or evil darkness.

In other words, we measure the human with the highest level of perfection he can reach, and judge the reasonableness of his behavior by this exalted perfection; otherwise, all deeds are good and therefore

rational at their own grades. Thus, they are good for humans from the standpoint of their animal faculties, and their legal and rational vilification comes from their relations to the rational component. (Mulla Sadra 1981, 7:62).

For example, adultery can be considered as a perfection seen as an aspect of existence, but if a person is not able to avoid it, he is considered a sinner. Desire, due to its nature of love and due to its role in the survival of human generation and because it brings about pleasure, is inherently good; it assumes evilness only when it does not follow reason and its instructions. Thus, its evilness is due to its deviation from reason and religion, leading to the extinction of generation, poor upbringing of the children, and chaos. Therefore, in existence, there is nothing that is inherently evil; rather, it is obtained merely from consideration (Mulla Sadra 1981, 7:105-6).

Thus, although desire and wrath bring about loss and benefit, they are not sufficient for the human. This is why God created for the human another motive, named will, which is dominated by reason that shows the end of affairs. Although it is possible that an action occurs in accordance with desire and wrath, which are divine gifts and have limited benefit for the human, the concern of desire and pleasure is the bliss of the material world, which is in fact adversity and nugatory in relation to the true bliss that mankind can achieve. Since this benefit is not suitable with the highest rank of humanity, it is not rational from this respect.

In short, the opinion of the majority is not the criterion of reasonableness at all, because the majority is often on the wrong track. For this reason, the individual should seriously analyze different emotional states that he experiences when confronting an issue. He should reanalyze the emotional state and manifest his emotion in accordance with the judgments of reason and religion in his final decision to do the action. Therefore, it is necessary that emotional states be developed based on the criteria of reason and religion in order to be suitable with the highest rank of the human.

Thus, as the human soul possesses all grades, it has different natures suitable for each grade. The human soul experiences a particular emotional state after presenting the perception of theoretical reason to each of these natures, but since the highest human grade is reasonableness, it is necessary to reanalyze these emotional states not in the court of the majority of people that is often in inferior grades but in the court of external and internal reason. Human reason chooses what is suitable with its high nature without suppressing other emotional states.

The accurate sciences of math, literature, good manners, and fine arts are, on the one hand, the founders of fine love and can spread love and aesthetic perspectives in the society, and, on the other hand, these perspectives form social and cultural backgrounds through which these accurate and fine sciences, including literature, math, and art, are transmitted to the future generations and develop at the same time. (Emami-Jomeh 2009, 48).

The point is that as human emotions need appropriate evaluation which develop through good manners and ethics and which hinder attachment to the material dimension, morality also needs paying attention to emotions in order for social and moral manners to flourish. Those people who have tender emotions train children properly and develop accurate sciences in the society.

This love that I interpret as intense pleasure as a result of encountering a beautiful face definitely has good principles and backgrounds and high and exalted objectives and wisdom. (Emami-Jomeh 2009, 48).

The objective and wisdom hidden in love, which exist in tender souls and those with subtle natures, are nothing but training children and the youth, teaching them sciences such as syntax, vocabulary, rhetoric, and geometry, fine arts, good manners, rhythmic poems, and nice songs, as well as teaching them stories, news, tales, and narrated traditions, and so forth. (Mulla Sadra 1981, 7:172-73).

In other words, love provides the motivation for this training and transmission of knowledge, literature, and art to future generations.

Conclusion

The human soul has various faculties and possesses all aspects. Although Mulla Sadra considers the soul in its union equal to all faculties, he strives to accurately analyze the supervising agent in each state and action of the soul. The agent of emotions also as one of the states of the human soul is the speech faculty, but for finding its supervising agent, different faculties should be taken into consideration.

Human reason can be divided into practical reason and theoretical reason. The latter is responsible for the perception of things as they are. In contrast, the former attempts to organize human actions. Human emotions are formed here; that is, when confronting the perception of an object, human beings find it either agreeable or opposite to their nature, wishes, and needs. At this stage, emotions are developed with the supervision of practical reason by presenting the proofs of theoretical reason to human nature, and thus the human experiences states such as fear, happiness, and so forth. Therefore,

emotions are particular perceptions—perceptions relevant to objects that are suitable with or opposite to the nature and are important for the individual and in the center of his objectives. At the next stage, the soul tries to do something to remove or continue that emotional state. This reaction is also an action of the self, but it is something other than the emotional state.

Emotions are the perception of objects that are important for the individual. The evaluation is the result of presenting the object to human nature and perceiving its suitability or unsuitability with the soul. It should be noted here that the human soul has different grades. In other words, the human soul has animal, satanic, and kingly natures. Thus, in presenting proofs to the soul, human beings not only do not experience the same emotional states, but sometimes they may have completely different emotional states. That is, when perceiving the same object, the individual who has animal nature experiences a completely different state than what an individual whose satanic nature is dominant experiences. Furthermore, each of these natures has various grades too. So in Mulla Sadra's view, each human is unique. Drawing attention to the different grades of the human and objectives does not close the door for evaluating the reasonableness or unreasonableness of emotions. Mulla Sadra believes that the grade which the human deserves to achieve by passing different grades is the grade of being human as such. It is the grade in which the high-exalted nature of humanity is realized. Although there are many grades in this grade, individuals in this grade measure things with their high nature—namely, reason and religion. Consequently, they follow objectives that bring them eternal bliss and their valuations are in accordance with these objectives. Therefore, since all humans deserve to achieve this grade, the criterion for the reasonableness of their emotions is suitability with the exalted human nature, which is acknowledged and emphasized by both reason and religion. Thus, the criterion for reasonableness is not the behavior of the majority, but the behavior of individuals who evaluate everything based on their exalted nature and set their objectives accordingly.

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