

## An Analytical Reading on the Relationship Between Theoretical and Practical Wisdom in IBN Sina's Thought

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### Abstract

Determining the subject for a science plays a significant role in identifying and determining the problems of a science. The division of sciences, which was first proposed and examined by Aristotle in terms of the history of philosophy, is considered to follow the determination of a specific subject for each science. In Islamic philosophy after Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina has presented a detailed discussion in this area.

Following the division of reason into theoretical and practical, Ibn Sina has also divided wisdom into two categories: theoretical and practical. By defining wisdom as the non-seasonal, inorganic science, he has divided it into two categories: theoretical and practical, and consequently, each of them has been divided into three categories: physics, mathematics, and theology in theory, and politics, management in the home, and ethics in practice. Finally, from Ibn Sina's point of view, although theoretical and practical are common in the divisions of reason and wisdom in the end, which is the perfection of the soul, they are distinguished from each other due to the difference in their belongings, principles, results, and consequences.

The following essay attempts to discuss the theoretical and practical division of reason and wisdom in Avicenna's thought, after examining why and how the sciences were divided in a specific way.

**Keywords:** Avicenna, reason, wisdom, theoretical, practical

### -1Introduction

The division of sciences is one of the topics that Muslim philosophers such as Avicenna, following Greek philosophers including Aristotle, have raised at the beginning of their discussions in order to clarify the subject, position and importance of sciences. According to Aristotle, in every science we are faced with a central concept, and the other propositions of that science seek to identify the rules of that fundamental concept. Therefore, a knowledge that deals with all subjects is considered unreasonable, so he emphasizes that in every science, research is conducted on the inherent aspects of a subject. (Aristotle, 1366: 64) Therefore, from his point of view, the scope of activity and the position of a knowledge are determined by its subject, and the study and analysis of the inherent aspects of that subject are also considered the epistemological field of that knowledge. In Islamic civilization, the necessity of dividing the sciences originates from the fact that for Muslims, sciences have been created under the shadow of a fundamental unity, in other words, science is like a tree that has branches and each branch is like one of the scientific disciplines. Therefore, just as a branch of a tree cannot be the whole tree and at the same time a branch cannot continue indefinitely, so by dividing the sciences, in a way, the single nature of science can be better understood in its different branches. (Nasr, 1359: 6)

Aristotle, as the first philosopher who specifically proposed and examined the division of sciences, spoke in his book *Metaphysics* in various ways about the threefold division of theoretical, practical, and industrial wisdom, following the threefold division of reason (Aristotle, 1366: 239). Although some have considered practical and industrial wisdom to be the same, Aristotle himself has distinguished the two by the difference in the way he considers the functioning and purpose of industry and ethics. (Aristotle, 1389: 13) Apart from this first division

that has been explicitly found in the philosophical thinking of the Islamic world, apart from the brief references that exist in Al-Kindi, there is a division that is found by Al-Farabi, a prominent Muslim thinker. He explicitly states the issue of the theoretical and practical nature of philosophy under the division of sciences into useful (non-philosophical sciences) and beautiful (philosophical sciences) and believes that the beautiful or philosophical sciences are divided into two categories: purely scientific or theoretical philosophy and the other is scientific-practical or practical philosophy. (Al-Farabi, 1413 AH: 256) Although Al-Farabi, in his *Ehsa' al-Ulum*, looked more closely at the fivefold division of sciences and divided the sciences into the following sciences: literary, logic, teachings (mathematics), divine and natural, and finally civil, jurisprudence and theology. (Al-Farabi, 1996: 67-79) After Al-Farabi, the process of dividing sciences continued and thinkers such as Amiri, who, considering Sharia as a science, divided sciences into two categories: religious and philosophical sciences, although he distinguishes sciences for each of these two sciences according to the criteria of sense, reason, and common between sense and reason; For example, in the religious sciences, he introduces Hadith as sensory, theology as rational, and jurisprudence as a type of combined sensory and rational sciences. For the philosophical sciences, he introduces physics as sensory, theology as rational, and mathematics as rational and sensory. (Ameri, 1408: 80-81)

Apart from the content of the divisions, the most prominent Muslim philosopher who has worked in the field of classifying sciences, especially in the theoretical and practical fields, is the famous Iranian thinker Avicenna. Coherence, precision, and order are the three main characteristics of Avicenna's thinking in all his works, and in the discussion of the classification of his sciences, especially the division of sciences into theoretical and practical, it is particularly worth exploring. The following article intends to analyze his division in the field of wisdom after examining the binary division of theoretical and practical in the discussion of reason.

## **2- Theoretical and Practical Division in Avicenna**

The theoretical and practical division has a long history in the history of Islamic philosophical thought and has been prevalent as one of the most important philosophical and epistemological topics since the beginning of philosophy's entry into the Islamic world. This threefold division takes place from two aspects: sometimes this division is for reason as the power and strength of knowledge and understanding, in which case it is interpreted as theoretical and practical reason, and sometimes this division refers to knowledge and understanding itself, which is divided into theoretical and practical wisdom or science.

### **2-1- Dividing reason into theoretical and practical**

Ibn Sina considers reason as one of the powers of the human soul and examines it in detail in the topic of psychology. In the first and second chapters of his treatise on the soul, he defines the soul and in a general definition he considers it to be the "first perfection for the natural body" (Avicenna, 1383: 11) and introduces it as the origin of every type of celestial, plant and animal movement. However, by adding specific restrictions such as whether or not this movement is voluntary, he distinguishes between the inanimate and animal souls. By adding constant movement in one direction or movements with different directions, he creates a distinction between the celestial and animal souls. Finally, he divides the voluntary act based on whether its action is in one direction, which is known as nature, and whether its actions are in opposite directions, which he calls the plant soul. After that, the Sheikh uses an argument called "a man suspended in space" in his proof of the human soul, which he explicitly mentions in the hints and warnings. This argument, which does not need any explanation or interpretation, is stated in the Sheikh's language as follows:

"Return to yourself and meditate, if you are correct, but also on some of the other conditions, so that you are looking for a correct fitna. We believe that this is obvious to the observer, even that the sleeper in sleep and the drunkard in drunkenness do not know the nature of the nature, and that the person does not record the representation of the pleasures in remembrance, and if you have the illusion that your nature is the first creation of creation, the mind and the body are correct, and the assumption that it is based on the sum of the state and the body, without observing the parts and not touching the members; Rather, our moment is suspended and suspended

in the air of separation, and I find it oblivious to everything except the proof of its intentions." (Avicenna, 1375: 159)

Come to yourself and think about it when you are healthy, but also when you are not healthy, when you find something right, are you unaware of your existence? And you don't prove yourself? I don't think that the seer does not prove himself and is oblivious to himself. Rather, the sleeping person is not unaware of himself in his sleep and the drunk person is not unaware of himself in his drunkenness, even though he forgets to perceive his essence. And if you assume that you yourself were created with the right mind and form at the beginning of creation, and it is assumed that you have a state and form in which you do not see your body and do not touch your members, but rather those parts are suspended in space for a moment, you will find yourself in such a state that you are unaware of everything, part of the proof of your existence.

After proving the soul in accordance with the rule of "the One cannot originate from anything except the One," since it is impossible for a single substance to be the source of multiple and even contradictory things because it is one, the Sheikh proceeds to enumerate its various powers. After explaining the various powers of the plant and animal soul, which include nutrition, growth, movement, and sensory perception, he then proceeds to examine the powers of the rational soul, and in addition to all the powers mentioned, he speaks of another power, which is the power of reason.

"As for the soul, which is called the rational soul, its powers are of two kinds: one is the power of action, and the other is the power of knowledge, and both are called intellect by way of commonality." (Avicenna, 1383: 23) He considers intellect as the source of perception and perception, the rational soul, but he points out that human perceptions are of two types; first, those perceptions that are related to existing realities and matters and do not belong to or depend on our actions, which are called theoretical intellect, and second, those perceptions that are related to and depend on our actions, which are called practical intellect.

« فالقوة الأولى للنفس الإنسانية قوة تنسب إلى النظر فيقال عقل نظري؛ وهذه الثانية قوة تنسب إلى العمل فيقال عقل عملي؛ و تلك للصدق و الكذب و هذه للخير و الشر في الجزئيات، و تلك للواجب و الممتنع و الممكن و هذه للقبيح و الجميل و المباح، و مبادئ تلك من المقدمات الأولية و مبادئ هذه من المشهورات و المقبولات و المظنونات و التجريبات الواهية التي تكون من المظنونات غير التجريبات الوثيقة. و لكل واحدة من هاتين القوتين رأى و ظن، فالرأى هو الاعتقاد المجزوم به، و الظن هو الاعتقاد الميل إليه مع تجويز الطرف الثاني.» ( ابن سينا، 1417: 285 )

The first faculty of the human soul is attributed to opinion and is called theoretical reason; and its second faculty is attributed to action and is called practical reason; its work is obligatory and forbidden, and the work of this is ugly, beautiful and permissible. Its principles are from the initial premises; and its principles are from the well-known and accepted, and the doubtful, and the false and weak experiences that are derived from the doubtful, which are other than the experiences of collateral; and for each of these two faculties there is an opinion and a conjecture. So an opinion is a belief that a person is certain of, and a conjecture is a belief that has arisen by the assumption of the opposite.

Regarding the distinctions and differences between theoretical and practical reason, Aristotle claims that the basis of this difference is in the ends of the two, because the end of theoretical reason is ultimately opinion, and the end of practical reason is also action. (Aristotle, 1366: 260) Al-Farabi also believes that the findings of theoretical reason do not lie in the path of action, while the findings of practical reason, insofar as they reach the musts and mustn'ts, are in line with determined action, although they are limited to matters of human choice. (Al-Farabi, 1405: 54-55) Avicenna, taking into account these distinctions, believes that there is a close relationship and trust between practical reason and theoretical reason, because performing an action in practical reason is impossible without the prior understanding of practical reason regarding the recognition of the necessity of action, which is certain to be performed. Therefore, practical reason inevitably seeks help from theoretical reason and determines its tasks by considering the premises of theoretical reason. For example, from the general premise of "doing good deeds is worthy", he deduces the rule that speaking truth is a worthy action in this particular case. On the other hand, Ibn Sina considers the practical aspect of the soul to be the inclination of the soul towards the body, that is, an aspect of the soul that is achieved due to its interest in the body, and he considers this attention of the soul to

the body as the lower aspect of the soul and considers it the origin of the emergence of the science of ethics, while the theoretical power of the soul is a power that is used for the soul's interest in an aspect superior to itself and is the origin of the emergence of theoretical sciences. (Avicenna, Bita, 362) Of course, Ibn Sina considers the practical power to be of higher status than other physical powers and believes that this power should dominate other physical powers. He writes in *Shifa*; "It is obligatory to give this power control over all the bodily powers in such a way that the bodily powers are passive to it and he is not passive to the bodily powers, and man must be subject to and obedient to this power, not the bodily powers." Lest a body that benefits from natural matters be obtained in it, and these bodies are called vices, and it should never be passive to the body and should not follow the commands of the body, and this power should dominate the body so that a person can have virtuous morality." (Avicenna, 1375: 189)

## 2-2- The theoretical and practical division of wisdom

A correct understanding of Ibn Sina's division of wisdom seems a little difficult because he did not use a single word for the division of division in his works, because in one place he places the division as philosophy (Avicenna, 1404: 13), in another place as science (Avicenna, 1383: 3), and in another place as wisdom (Avicenna, 1326: 106). However, in the book *Mantiq al-Mashreeqin*, by placing the absolute of knowledge as the divider and dividing it into seasonal sciences or sciences that lack permanent rules and are specific to a specific time and place, and permanent sciences that have permanent and permanent rules and therefore deserve to be called wisdom. (Avicenna, 1405: 5) he clarifies his meaning of wisdom as a science with permanent rules. For Avicenna, wisdom as a knowledge science manifests itself in two branches: subsidiary and main. For him, subsidiary sciences are sciences such as medicine and agriculture, which he does not pay much attention to. Instead, he divides the main sciences into organic (instrumental) and inorganic sciences and discusses this topic in detail. (Ibid.: 6-7) He continues by considering the goal of a science in a special way, considering inorganic sciences and continues the division with the understanding that the acquired form known to the scientist is only for the purification of the soul or is it used for action in addition to purification. In fact, what Ibn Sina referred to as wisdom in his works and based his divisions on it is the original inorganic non-seasonal science. Considering this understanding of Ibn Sina's wisdom, he believes:

"Wisdom is divided into a single theoretical type and a practical type. And the theoretical section is the one that eliminates the attainment of certain belief in the existence of existence, which is not related to the actions of human beings and is intended, but it is the attainment of opinion only, such as the science of monotheism and the science of existence. And the practical part is the one that does not have the goal of obtaining a certain belief in existence, but perhaps the goal is to gain the correctness of an opinion about something that happens to win the human being to gain what is good from me, so the goal is not only to get an opinion, but to get an opinion for the sake of action, the theoretical opinion is the truth, and the practical goal is the good." (Ibn Sina, 1326: 105)

Wisdom is divided into two types: theoretical and practical; The theoretical type whose goal is to achieve a certain belief about beings whose existence is not related to human action, and whose goal is to achieve beliefs such as the science of monotheism and theology, and the practical type whose goal is not to achieve a certain belief about beings, but rather to achieve a correct and correct belief about what is good, and whose goal is not to achieve belief, but to achieve belief for action, so the goal of the publication is correctness and correctness, and the practical goal is goodness and goodness.

Therefore, according to Ibn Sina, beings are of two types; first, things whose existence is due to our action, and the second, things whose existence is not due to our action, the first example is our actions, and the second example is the earth and the sky, animals and plants, so the sciences (philosophy) are also of two types; the type that gives knowledge of our present and action, and this is called practical science (philosophy), because its benefit is This is to know what we must do so that the work of this world may be ours and the work of that world may be hopeful, and the other is to inform us of the state of existence of things so that our soul may find its form and the happiness of that world may be.... And this science (philosophy) is called theoretical. (Avicenna, 1331: 1) Then, for each of these two types of science, he states three branches according to the subject under consideration; first, in theoretical wisdom (which in his view is limited to three branches), in this order, natural science (lower science),

mathematical science (middle science), and divine science (higher science). He explains the limitation of the three-branch division of theoretical wisdom as follows; the objects that are discussed in theoretical wisdom are not outside of the three categories; Either there are things that belong to physical matter and movement in their conception and existence, such as celestial bodies, the four elements, and so on, because on the one hand, the external existence of these things is connected to matter and is associated with it, and on the other hand, man cannot conceive and reason about them without considering a certain matter, or there are things that need matter in their external existence, but man can imagine them separately from matter, such as triangles, squares, roundness, length, and the like, because although triangles and squares do not exist except in matter, they can be imagined and imagined without matter. The third group is objects that do not need matter and movement in their existence and conception, such as reason and existence, unity and plurality, cause and effect, and the like. Since beings are limited to the three types mentioned, theoretical wisdom was divided into three types according to them (Avicenna, 1328: 228). After explaining the categories of theoretical wisdom, he explains the types of practical wisdom with a view to their benefit. Considering society, family, and the individual, he outlines three types of practical wisdom: First, wisdom that is related to the regulation of society through awareness of the quality of participation in order to increase cooperation and collaboration in society to promote human social life and increase the likelihood of survival, which he calls *Tadbir al-Madinah*. The second is the wisdom that seeks to organize a small group of people in the society called the family through awareness-raising to increase the quality of participation of family members in order to secure the interests of the family as much as possible, and he calls this science home management. Finally, those ideas that lead to the organization of the individual's situation and the refinement, purification, and self-improvement of the person's soul through awareness of virtues and what are vices and how to acquire and avoid them in order to purify and purify the soul, which he calls ethics. (Avicenna, 1326: 16) Of course, due to the importance he attaches to prophecy and the law, in some of his works such as the types of wisdom, the Encyclopedia of 'Alai, and the Logic of the Orientals, Ibn Sina mentions a fourth type of wisdom in practical philosophy called the science of law, although in his works he describes it under different titles such as the science of the laws (in the types of wisdom), the craft of the law (in the Encyclopedia of 'Alai), and the method of the laws (in the Encyclopedia of 'Alai). He introduces the nature of this type of knowledge under topics such as the knowledge of prophecy and the need for human survival in the afterlife, etc., which are considered common to all religious laws. (Avicenna, 1383: 2) It should be noted that since Avicenna considers wisdom to be a type of non-seasonal and universal science, topics such as manners and jurisprudence are outside the scope of practical wisdom, because these sciences, regardless of what actions and behavior they are related to, vary in different times and places and different peoples and nations. On the other hand, Avicenna, in introducing the main and important sources for practical wisdom under ethics, introduces the main source as Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (Avicenna, 1326: 106), and in this way, he reminds us of the Aristotelian approach to ethics. In each of them, mystical aspects in the field of ethics can also be clearly observed. (Avicenna, 1375: 149)

Conclusion: Based on what has been stated, it can be said, as Ibn Sina states in his book *Nafs al-Shifa'*, that among the nine characteristics of man, his power to imagine general meanings is the most fundamental difference between him and other beings. (Avicenna, 1364: 184) And this power originates from a capability called intellect, which in his opinion is distinguished into two distinct powers; one of which functions as perception and the other as action. Therefore, he calls them by names such as the general, theoretical or active power, and the other as the active, practical or passive power, and he states that naming these two powers as intellect is due to the verbal commonality or similarity of the two in the name. (Ibid.: 37) Although, ultimately, the goal of both powers is the perfection of the soul. However, the theoretical and practical nature of these two powers in discussions related to their perceptions divides them into two wisdoms: theoretical and practical. These types of perceptions, due to their different origins, have several aspects of difference from each other, including:

- Theoretical and practical belongings are distinct and different from each other, both in power and in wisdom, theoretical belongings are generalities and practical belongings are details
- Theoretical and practical principles are distinct from each other, both in power and in wisdom, because theoretical principles are primary axioms, while practical principles are accepted, well-known, experienced, and suspected.

- Theoretical and practical results and consequences are distinct from each other, both in power and in wisdom, because the result obtained from the first premises is certain and the results obtained from the practical premises are in the highest state of suspicion.

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