



Sadra's Wisdom and the Problem of Meaningfulness in Human Life

Bahman Zamanian¹

Received: 2025/04/06

Accepted: 2025/05/21

Abstract

Meaningfulness and meaninglessness are new philosophical problems confronting philosophers. Islamic philosophy, especially Transcendent Theosophy (Hikmat Muta'aliyah), as a philosophy concerned with identifying the truths of the world, is no exception and must offer a response to this issue. The aim of the present research was to reconstruct the viewpoint of Transcendent Theosophy on this problem using a descriptive-analytical method. Based on the principles of Transcendent Theosophy, the findings of the research can be explained as follows: Transcendent Theosophy considers meaningfulness and meaninglessness as philosophical second intelligibles (ma'qūlāt-e thānīyah falsafī) that can be abstracted from human life, and the goals present in human life lead to the abstraction of these concepts. Sadraian wisdom claims that the more real and harmonious the goals are with human life, the more

1. Ph.D. in Comparative Philosophy, Department of Philosophy and Kalam, Shahid Motahari University, Tehran, Iran.
Email: sadrazamane@gmail.com

* Zamanian, Bahman. (2024). Sadraian Wisdom and the Problem of Meaningfulness in Human Life, *Theosophia Islamica*, 4(8), pp. 63-90.
<https://doi.org/10.22081/jti.2025.71589.1060>

meaningful human life will be. The solution proposed by Transcendent Theosophy in this regard is to return to human primordial nature and to redefine monotheistic goals and eternal life for humanity, as these concepts contribute to the meaningfulness of human life.

Keywords

Meaningfulness, Meaninglessness, Life, Pure Relation, Transcendent Theosophy.



Introduction

The quest for and discovery of truth is a fundamental characteristic of human existence. As a conscious being, humanity has faced various questions throughout life, such as the mystery of its own existence and that of surrounding objects: "Where have I been? Where am I? And where am I going?" Humans are fundamentally seeking a convincing and rational answer to their questions. The emergence of philosophy as a discipline can be traced back to this very pursuit. These types of questions have not only preoccupied the minds of ordinary people but have also been particularly significant for philosophers throughout history. They have striven to find answers to these questions, leading to the development of philosophy as a field of study. Therefore, questions of this nature are as old as human civilization itself. The degree of success or failure of these endeavors, however, is not the focus of this research.

One of the most important issues that has engaged philosophers in recent decades, and for which they are seeking a compelling answer, is the meaningfulness and meaninglessness of human life. Specifically, questions arise such as: "Is absurdity dominant in human life?" or "Does human life have meaning?" and "How can one escape absurdity and experience a meaningful life?" Many books and articles have been written on this topic, including: "An Analysis of the Role of Ethics and Religiosity in the Meaningfulness of Life with Emphasis on the Solutions of the Holy Quran" by Akhtar Soltani and Hamed Hayati (Intercultural Studies, Fall 1399: No. 44); "The Role of Self-Knowledge and *Hayat Tayyebah* (Good Life) in the Meaningfulness of Life from the Viewpoint of Allameh Tabataba'i" by Ali Ghanavati et al. (Quranic Theology, Fall 1399 SH: No. 15); "The Absurdity of Absurdity" by Asgari Soleimani (Naqd-o Nazar, 2003: No. 32); and "The Meaning of Life in

Khayyam's Thought" by Touraj Aghdaii and Hajar Khadem (Conference on the Promotion of Persian Language and Literature, 2013: No. 8).

The distinguishing feature of the present research is its explanation of the meaningfulness and meaninglessness of human life based on the specific principles and characteristics of Transcendent Theosophy. Although the concepts of meaningfulness and meaninglessness of human life were not explicitly addressed by Islamic philosophers, especially Sadr al-Muta'allihin, an investigation and analysis of the ontological, epistemological, and anthropological foundations of Sadraian wisdom will guide us to a particular model of giving meaning to life. In other words, Mulla Sadra's understanding and interpretation of meaningfulness in life can be discovered in his works and principles, and his answer to the aforementioned problem is predictable. Therefore, based on this criterion, we aim to extract and infer Sadr al-Muta'allihin's analysis of the meaningfulness of human life through library research and data processing using an analytical-descriptive method.

1. The Mode of Existence of Meaningfulness and Meaninglessness

Given that the subject of philosophy is "being qua being" (*mujūd bimā huva mawjūd*), the identification of reality and external truths has been a central concern for Islamic philosophers. They seek to comprehend reality and know it as it truly is. According to this theory, understanding truths and attaining reality depends on humanity's ability to discover reality. This means that humans possess the capacity to discover reality as it is, and reality can be grasped by humans. Therefore, there is a direct and undeniable connection between Islamic ontology and epistemology. The dominant method in Transcendent Theosophy is the rational method, meaning the identification of reality is based on rational self-evident truths. Hence,

it can be said that its ontology is a rational ontology.

Therefore, the geography of philosophy and philosophers' presence will be as vast as the geography of existence. This means that all of existence, by virtue of its being, falls under the subject matter of philosophy. In other words, philosophy is responsible for explaining existential truths as they are qua existent. On the other hand, humans sometimes perceive something as real and true when it is not, leading to error. Conversely, they might consider something unreal when it actually possesses reality. Given philosophy's characteristic and its philosophical method, which is rational ontology, one can distinguish real truths from unreal ones (Tabataba'i, 2008, p. 9).

In summary, Islamic philosophy, by virtue of its subject matter and demonstrative method, has the capacity to examine realities in terms of their existence, distinguish perceived realities from non-perceived ones, and investigate the mode of existence of these realities. Meaningfulness and meaninglessness of life are no exception to this rule. That is, by considering the subject and demonstrative method of philosophy, the mode of existence of meaningfulness and meaninglessness in life can be thoroughly examined and investigated. Therefore, it must be clarified what kind of existence meaningfulness and meaninglessness possess, how they exist, and whether absurdity (pūchī) has any share of existence. Mulla Sadra believes that the reality that fills the external world is "existence" (wujūd). Consequently, primacy (aṣālat) belongs to "existence," and external existences are, by themselves, instances of existence and existent. This means that in the predication of the concept of "existence" to those external realities that fill the external world, they are independent of any intermediary or restrictive aspect. However, essential realities are not like this. They exist through existence and are realized under the

protection of "existence" (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 1981 SH, p. 6). The judgments they accept are also through "existence." This means that a reality such as quiddity (māhiyyat) is predicated with existence through its union with "existence," and consequently, it is existent by means of existence and exists with a restrictive, limiting aspect. In other words, quiddity is not, by itself, an instance of existence or existent. Rather, it is abstracted from the "limit and finitude" of existence, and since existence is limited, quiddity is abstracted from "existence."

Some other realities, such as unity (vaḥdat), actuality (bi'l-fi'l), and potentiality (bi'l-quwwah), exist by virtue of existence (bi'l-wujūd). However, they are neither like the essence of existence that fills the external world, nor are they like quiddities (māhiyyāt) that are realized through a restrictive, limiting aspect. Instead, such realities exist with a restrictive, potential aspect (ḥaythiyyat-e taqyīdiyyah sha'niyyah).

These types of concepts, unlike quiddity which is abstracted from the limit and finitude of external realities, are abstracted from the very text of external realities. In other words, these realities exist in an inclusive manner; they are accumulated, abstract attributes of existence, woven into its fabric (Yazdanpanah, 2010 SH, Vol. 2, p. 290). Such concepts, which exist with a "restrictive, potential aspect," are termed philosophical second intelligibles (ma'qūlāt-e thānīyah falsafī). They are essentially distinct from first intelligibles and logical second intelligibles. It is worth noting that Mulla Sadra claims philosophical second intelligibles are not merely mental constructs, unlike logical intelligibles; rather, they have an external reality. This means that in reality and in their state of being, they exist by virtue of existence. Consequently, philosophical intelligibles and concepts are considered external. In other words, not only is their attribution external, but their occurrence is also external. This is because attribution is dependent on

and a pure relation to its relata; thus, if the attribution is external, the relata of the attribution must also have externality. Of course, the externality of each existent will be proportionate to its specific existential locus.

«و الحق أن الانصاف نسبة بين شيئين متغايرين بحسب الوجود في ظرف الاتصاف
فالحكم بوجود أحد الطرفين دون الآخر في الظرف الذي يكون الاتصاف فيه تحكم»
(صدر الدين شيرازی، ۱۹۸۱م، ج ۱، ص ۳۳۶-۳۳۷).

"And the truth is that attribution is a relationship between two distinct things in terms of their existence within the context of the attribution. Therefore, judging one of the relata to exist without the other in the context in which the attribution occurs is arbitrary." (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 1981, Vol. 1, pp. 336-337)

His mentioned occurrence does not lead to a multiplicity of external texts. Instead, if philosophical concepts exist externally, they are realized by external existence, and they are woven into its fabric, existing with a restrictive, inclusive aspect. Therefore, realities-in-themselves \ do not cause a proliferation of external texts; it's not that we encounter two distinct texts externally. Rather, there is one reality called "existence," with which these realities coexist. These concepts are abstracted from the very core of "existence"; hence, a text separate from existence is not conceivable for these realities. Now, a question arises: in which category of the aforementioned concepts do meaningfulness and its opposite, meaninglessness of life, fall? Are they of the nature of "existence" that fills the external world? Or are they like quiddities that exist with a restrictive, limiting aspect and are abstracted from the finitude and end of a thing? Or are they of the nature of philosophical second intelligibles?

Although concepts like meaningfulness and meaninglessness are predicated on human life, it should not be overlooked that their

predication on human life will not be like the predication of the concept of "existence." This is because these concepts are not, by themselves, instances of existence or existent. Therefore, one cannot expect a concept like meaningfulness to be identical to the concept of "existence." On the other hand, the mentioned concepts are not of the nature of essential concepts, because meaningfulness and meaninglessness are not abstracted from the limit and finitude of things and external realities. Therefore, their type will be distinct from the type of essential concepts.

The conclusion is that meaningfulness and meaninglessness will be of the nature of philosophical second intelligibles. This means that just as concepts like unity, actuality, and potentiality are abstracted from external realities and predicated upon them, meaningfulness and meaninglessness are also abstracted from human life and predicated upon it. The upshot of the argument is that meaningfulness and meaninglessness are two concepts abstracted from human life. That is, human life is such that these two concepts are abstracted from it and predicated upon it. Therefore, the criterion and basis for the abstraction of such concepts is human life and its existence. Hence, if there were no life or existence, the abstraction of the two concepts of meaningfulness and meaninglessness would also be impossible.

2. Critique of Absolute Nihilism

Based on the preceding discussion regarding the mode of existence of meaningfulness and meaninglessness in human life, absolute meaninglessness (pūchī muṭḥaq) cannot have external realization or actualization. This is because absolute meaninglessness signifies utter invalidity and pure non-existence. Therefore, no external instance can be found for absolute meaninglessness, and it does not possess

external reality or establishment in this sense. Consequently, absolute meaninglessness would be paradoxical and contradictory. Just as a square circle is impossible to realize externally, absolute meaninglessness is also impossible to realize externally. This is because absolute meaninglessness, while being non-existence and invalidity, would simultaneously need to have realization and existence, which is a contradiction.

Thus, the hypothesis of absolute meaninglessness for life would be impossible, and life would not be characterized by absolute meaninglessness. Therefore, life being characterized by meaninglessness or emptiness will be a relative attribution. That is, a meaningless or empty life is a life that *could* be meaningful but currently lacks meaning. Since such a life is not characterized by meaningfulness, it is called a meaningless or empty life. In other words, the acceptance of meaninglessness depends on the acceptance of life's meaningfulness; without acknowledging life's potential for meaning, one cannot speak of its meaninglessness. The conclusion is that the presupposition of the claim of meaninglessness is the acceptance of life's meaningfulness (Shahriari, 2003, pp. 92-107). Therefore, anyone claiming absolute meaninglessness has already presupposed meaningfulness for their claim; consequently, absolute meaninglessness is impossible (Soleimani Amiri, 2003, pp. 2-42).

The claim of absolute meaninglessness is akin to the claim of absolute skepticism, which denies all knowledge, yet implicitly acknowledges a form of knowledge behind this very claim. Meaningfulness and meaninglessness of life are like the concepts of sight and blindness. Just as the concept of blindness is predicated on a being that *has the potential for sight*, the concept of meaninglessness is predicated on a reality that *has the potential for meaningfulness* but

is currently not meaningful. Therefore, the concept of blindness cannot be predicated on a wall, because a wall does not have the potential for sight to begin with. In other words, there is a privation and possession (malakah and 'adam malakah) relationship between meaningfulness and meaninglessness/emptiness. Meaningfulness is predicated on a reality that possesses the attribute of meaningfulness, and meaninglessness is considered the privation of this attribute.

3. Human Identity

Understanding human identity (huwīyyat-e insānī) is essential as one of the fundamental and important bases for giving meaning to human life in Sadraian wisdom. That is, the connection between meaningfulness/meaninglessness and understanding human identity is undeniable and will influence our stance on this matter. In Islamic philosophy and Transcendent Theosophy, arguments have been put forth for the immaterial aspect of human beings. Sadr al-Muta'allihin believes that in addition to a material dimension, humans also possess an immaterial and abstract realm. Therefore, based on this principle, the truth and identity of human beings must be sought in their abstract realm (sāḥat-e tajarrudī). Consequently, a being possessing such a characteristic will be immortal (nāmīrā), and human individuality will also reside in that very abstract aspect. Even the material and bodily aspect of human life will be dependent on the abstract aspect.

كما أن البدن حي بحياة النفس و أنها أصل قوامه و لبه» (طباطبائی، ۱۹۸۱، ج ۶، ص ۱۰۸).

"Just as the body is alive by the life of the soul, and it [the soul] is the origin of its constitution and its essence." (Tabataba'i, 1981, Vol. 6, p. 108)

Such an abstract reality can be called the "Divine Spirit " (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 1984: p. 86). The existential inclination and tendency towards

the higher world, the existential desire for infinite perfection, and the innate inclination towards praiseworthy virtues and perfections are inherent characteristics of the human truth and abstract realm. That is, these characteristics must be recognized in the mode of existence of the soul. In the philosophical culture of Sadraian wisdom, such a mode of existence is called primordial nature (Mulla Sadra, 1984, p. 242).

This means: "It is a unique nature and a special creation, distinct from nature, which is found in all inanimate, non-growing, or lifeless animal beings, and distinct from instinct, which is present in animals and the animalistic dimension of humans." (Javadi Amoli, 2010, p. 117)

Among the mentioned characteristics, the inclination towards the sacred realm and the desire for infinite perfection are of paramount importance. This existential yearning for an infinite truth will be the fundamental axis of meaningfulness in life. It is crucial to remember that this existential inclination and desire for such an infinite truth is not a mere concept; that is, the discussion is not about the *concept* of infinity, but about the existential reality of infinity.

Now, a question arises: Why does such a desire exist within the very essence and identity of human beings? From Sadr al-Muta'allihin's perspective, human beings possess a poor identity, and poverty is considered an intrinsic and essential part of their existence. Therefore, this characteristic and attribute is not something bestowed upon them through an external act of positing (ja'1) (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 1984 SH, p. 280). In other words, the human identity is entirely dependent on others, and this dependency is not something that a cause has given to it; rather, poverty is the very essence of human identity. To elaborate, humans are not "poor" in the sense of being a thing upon

which poverty, as an accidental attribute external to their essence, might befall; instead, their entire essence is poverty.

«الفقر والحاجة عين حقائقها لا أن لها حقائق على حيالها- عرض لها التعلق بالغير و الفقر والحاجة إليه بل هي في ذاتها محض الفاقة والتعلق» (صدر الدين شيرازي، ١٩٨١م، ج ١، ص ٤٧).

"Poverty and need are the very essence of their realities, not that they possess distinct realities on their own which are then incidentally characterized by dependence on others, poverty, and need for them. Rather, in their very essences, they are pure indigence and dependence." (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 1981, Vol. 1, p. 47).

To approach and understand Sadr al-Muta'allihin's intention regarding the impoverished existence of human beings, it's necessary to examine the characteristic of human poverty through four hypotheses and identify the correct one.

a: Hypothesis 1: Poverty and Need are Accidental Attributes

The first hypothesis is that poverty and need for humans are like heat for water. This hypothesis is incorrect because heat, as an accident, is external to the essence of water. That is, water has an intrinsic essence, and heat is an attribute that attaches to it from outside its inherent identity, separating from it after a short time. If poverty and need were like heat for water, it would imply that humans are, in their essence and identity, independent and self-sufficient of a Creator. This is rejected from an ontological and theological perspective, as humans cannot exist independently alongside God.

b: Hypothesis 2: Poverty as an Essential Concomitant

In the second hypothesis, poverty is considered an essential concomitant. While it is impossible to separate an essential

concomitant from its essence (except through intellectual reflection and analysis), this category is also not considered correct by Sadr al-Muta'allihin. Even though an essential concomitant, like evenness for the number four, can never be separated from the essence of the number four (and the number four is always concomitant with evenness), poverty for humans is not like evenness for the number four. This is because "being four" has a priority in rank over evenness, and the existential level of "four" precedes its concomitant, evenness. Therefore, if poverty were an essential concomitant of humans, it would imply that humans are, in their identity and essence, independent and self-sufficient of a Creator. This type of independence for human identity is not accepted in Transcendent Theosophy.

c: Hypothesis 3: Poverty as a Quidditative Reality (Gender and Species)

In the third hypothesis, poverty is regarded as a quidditative reality (*ḥaqīqat-e māhavī*) and a logical genus or species for humans. This is also not accepted within the Sadraian philosophical system. In Transcendent Theosophy, quiddity (*māhiyyat*) is conventional (*e'tibārī*) and lacks primacy (*aṣālat*). According to Mulla Sadra, what is primary and fills the external world is existence (*wujūd*), and quiddity exists dependently and in the shadow of existence. Therefore, from Sadr al-Muta'allihin's perspective, accepting poverty as a quidditative characteristic for humans would entail human independence at the level of existence, which is inconsistent with Mulla Sadra's existential system.

d: Hypothesis 4: Poverty as Pure Relation based on the Primacy of Existence

The fourth hypothesis is analyzed based on the primacy of

existence (aṣālat-e wujūd). According to this criterion, the entire existential identity of a human being is encompassed by poverty, and they are the very essence of relation (‘ayn-e rabṭ) and the very essence of dependence on the cause. This means that a human being, as an effect, is nothing but an illuminative emanation (ifāḍah ishrāqī) and a mode (shu’ūn) of the cause.

To illustrate, consider an example: whenever a human intends, they can create forms in their mind. The mental form in question is the very essence of dependence and relation to human will, such that it is created immediately upon attention and ceases to exist with inattention. An effect like a human being is similar to that mental form; that is, it is the very essence of dependence and relation to its cause. It is worth noting that the human intellect has the power of separation and individuation. This means that in the laboratory of the intellect, one can hypothetically separate human identity and its poverty, considering human identity independently. However, externally, human identity is nothing but a relation to the cause and dependence on it. Therefore:

"The effect does not have an identity distinct from the reality of the cause that emanated it... Therefore, the effect, in terms of its being an effect, has no reality except by being subordinated to the cause, and it has no meaning other than being an effect and subordinate to the cause." (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 1981, Vol. 2, p. 299)

Therefore, with its impoverished identity, humanity belongs to the bestowing cause of existence, and its existential subsistence (qawām-e wujūdī) depends on that very cause. This means the effect is subsistent upon its bestowing cause of existence. (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, Vol. 3, p. 250).

4. Human's Relational Identity and the Cause's Existential Encompassment

We've established that human identity is the very essence of relation, dependence, and need for its cause. This analysis leads to a specific kind of existential kinship and suitability between the cause and the effect. The effect's identity is not distinct from the identity of the cause that emanated it. Sadr al-Muta'allihin believes that this relation and dependence not only creates a unique kinship between cause and effect, but also signifies a deeper, more precise truth. In this relationship, the bestowing cause of existence has a "sustaining togetherness" with its effect, which is humanity. This means the cause is present within the effect's very locus and level of being.

« لكن العلة موجودة مع المعلول في مرتبة وجود المعلول » (صدرالدين شيرازي، ج ٧، ص ٣٣١).

"But the cause is present with the effect in the level of the effect's existence." (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, Vol. 7, p. 331)

In other words, the Cause of Causes, by virtue of its oneness (vaḥdat) and existential encompassment, is present throughout all existence. Therefore, no locus can be found where the Almighty Truth is not present (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 1981, p. 36).

Humanity, as one of the effects, is no exception to this rule. The Cause of Causes is present in the human existential locus and fills the human domain with its sustaining presence. However, it's self-evident that the sustaining presence of the Divine Truth in the human existential locus does not imply indwelling, union (ittiḥād), or mixture with humanity or any other effect. Rather, because the Divine Truth is in the ultimate state of simplicity and is "One in Essence", the existential scope of such a reality encompasses all existence, and there is no locus where the light of Truth is not present. Therefore, the sustaining togetherness, simplicity, and oneness of "He, the Exalted,"

will not permit such a mixture (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 1981, Vol. 6, p. 373).

The example of the soul (nafs) seems useful to explain the above content. Based on the intellectual framework of Transcendent Theosophy, humans possess an immaterial reality called the soul that constitutes their identity, and it is through this abstract realm that they attain individuality. This means that humans acquire a single "I" that remains from the beginning of life to its end (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, Vol. 9, p. 39). This "I" is a simple reality that is present in all human existential loci. That is, the "I" is present in the sense realm and perceives sensibles, and this very "I" is present at the level of imagination and performs imaginary perceptions; furthermore, the "I" is present in the intellectual realm and intellectually perceives intellectual realities. Therefore, although the reality of the soul or "I," as a single reality, possesses a simple unity, it can be present in sense, imaginary, and intellectual loci (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 1984, p. 554). This means the "I" feels, the "I" imagines, and the "I" inteljects, but the presence of the "I" in different loci does not lead to composition or anything else.

5. Human Knowledge and Gnosis of the Cause

Given the preceding discussion, the sustaining presence of the Almighty Truth, the Cause of Causes, within the human existential locus yields the conclusion that human beings possess an intuitive and unmediated knowledge of the Cause of Causes.

«إن إدراك الحق تعالى على الوجه البسيط حاصل لكل أحد في أصل فطرت» (صدر الدين

شیرازی، ۱۹۸۱، ج ۱، ص ۱۱۶)

"Indeed, the perception of the Exalted Truth (al-Ḥaqq ta'ālā) in a simple manner is achieved by everyone in their primordial nature (fī aṣli fiṭratih)." (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 1981, Vol. 1, p. 116).

Even the priority of knowledge of the Cause of Causes over

knowledge of oneself will be a logical consequence of the aforementioned principle. That is, humanity first intuitively knows the Divine Truth and the Cause of Causes, and then, after this intuition, discovers itself. However, it should not be overlooked that Sadr al-Muta'allihin considers this knowledge to be simple knowledge. This means that although humans have knowledge of the Divine Truth, they do not have knowledge of that knowledge, unlike complex knowledge where knowledge of knowledge is included. More clearly, if a human being has knowledge and awareness of a reality, and is also aware of their knowledge of that reality, such knowledge would be complex. But if this is not the case, such knowledge would be of the nature of simple knowledge (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, Vol. 1, p. 116).

In addition to intuitive knowledge of the Cause of Causes, one can also point to humanity's existential inclination and desire towards that transcendent reality. That is, an inner pull directs humanity toward an unlimited perfection and calls it toward an infinite perfection. The upshot is that the abstract realm of humanity, i.e., the soul (*nafs*), possesses intuitive knowledge (*ma'rifat-e shuhūdi*) and an existential desire (*mayl-e wujūdi*) for the Cause of Causes. However, attention to the material world and egoistic attachments causes this knowledge to dim. That is, the product of egoistic attachments to the world prevents humans from acquiring complex knowledge. Nevertheless, the existential desire and inner inclination towards infinite perfections remain in humans. But since this existential desire is not accompanied by complex intuitive knowledge, humans seek infinite perfection in other matters and substitute perceived instances for the true instance. Therefore, if intuitive knowledge is elevated and transformed into complex knowledge, humanity will not lose sight of the instance of infinite perfection, and a correspondence will be established between existential desire and intuitive knowledge.

6. Human Identity and Meaningfulness in Life

With humanity's intuitive knowledge and existential desire for infinite perfection, a clear picture of the meaningfulness and meaninglessness of human life emerges. Based on this, Transcendent Theosophy presents the meaningfulness of human life as a return to one's existential truth and original, authentic human primordial nature (fitra). It believes that the dust of illusion and fantasy must be cleared from its face. Through this process, human life and existence will acquire a humane color and essence, escaping emptiness and experiencing a life imbued with transcendent meanings.

«فتطهير نور الفطرة عن رذائل التخیلات ، والارتهاان بالموهومات التي استرقت العقول الضعيفة والنفوس القاهرة والقوى الجزئية» (صدرالدین شیرازی، بی تا، ص ۷۵).

"So, the purification of the light of primordial nature from the vices of imaginations, and from being enslaved by delusions that have subjugated weak intellects, suppressed souls, and partial faculties." (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, bi-ta, p. 75).

Therefore, the expansion of worldly life and a complete focus on humanity's natural and material dimension won't give life meaning. Instead, it distances individuals from their true life and leads to perplexity. Has industrial development and modernity truly brought meaning to human life and freed us from confusion and aimlessness, or has it fueled our perplexity, aimlessness, and nihilism? So, only goals that align with human intuitive knowledge and existential desire can imbue human life with meaning. Such goals are more real, have a more objective correlate, and bring endless joys. The delight, joy, and happiness derived from a life rooted in knowledge and an existential yearning for infinite perfection are incomparable to the fleeting pleasures of other life models.

The upshot is that the meaningfulness and meaninglessness of human life must be sought in its proximity to or distance from that infinite perfection. In other words, the more one's intuitive knowledge (ma'rifat-e shuhūdī) of the Cause of Causes and the Divine Truth, and one's existential desire (mayl-e wujūdī), increase, the more human life acquires a transcendent meaning. Conversely, the more this knowledge and existential desire diminish, the more humans fall into perplexity and aimlessness, perceive their lives as meaningless, and succumb to emptiness.

6-1. Meaningfulness in Individual Life

Before engaging in social life, a human being possesses an individual identity with specific individuality. Such a being, with such an identity, has been created in a way that free will is inherent in its very essence and nature. In other words, the mode of human existence is a conscious, volitional mode, hence, one is "forced to be free" (Javadi Amoli, 2015 SH, Vol. 1, p. 514). Therefore, the principle of human freedom and free will is itself not optional. Consequently, any action a human performs or refrains from is done or refrained from by their own will and choice.

Of course, animals also operate similarly; they act based on will and possess two categories of faculties: perceiving and moving. However, the volitional realm of humans is distinct from that of animals. The distinction lies in the fact that humans organize their actions based on a will that possesses human identity, unlike animals whose consciousness is limited to imaginal consciousness. That is, animals do not engage in rational deliberation or contemplation in their actions, and their moving faculty is a power called the instigating or appetitive moving faculty or instinct. Humans, however, have a will that originates from faculties that do not have an animalistic

flavor. Their perceiving faculties are rational, and their motivating faculties are superior to the appetitive moving faculty. Sadr al-Muta'allihin refers to the faculty superior to the appetitive moving faculty as practical intellect.

«هذه الإرادة في الإنسان من قوة هي فوق القوة الشوقية الحيوانية- التي تتشعب إلى الشهوة و الغضب و هي العقل العملي» (صدر الدين شيرازي، ١٩٨١م، ج٦، ص ٣٥٤).

"This will in human beings originates from a faculty that is above the animal appetitive faculty — which branches into desire (shahvah) and anger (ghaḍab) — and that faculty is the practical intellect (al-ʿaql al-ʿamalī)." (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 1981 CE, Vol. 6, p. 354).

On the other hand, humans have an inherent inclination and existential desire for beauty and splendor. They find pleasure in anything that brings them joy; the actions and behaviors they undertake are also for this very purpose, and they desire such a life. Especially if this beauty and splendor has greater permanence, their desire for it will be even stronger. In other words, humans prefer beauty and splendor that isn't fleeting. Thus, beauty and splendor give meaning to their lives. Such beauty and splendor must be found in the ultimate cause and the Exalted Truth, because He Himself, in addition to possessing absolute beauty and splendor, is also the source of all the beauties in the world.

«أن الواجب تعالى أجمل من كل جميل» (صدرالدين شيرازي، ١٩٧٥، ص ١٥٦).

"Indeed, the Exalted Necessary Being is more beautiful than every beautiful thing." (Sadruddin Shirazi, 1994, p. 156).

Therefore, humanity's ultimate perfection must be sought in recognizing and reaching the ultimate cause (the Cause of Causes). It's essential for humans to organize their actions and behaviors based on a conscious will directed towards it. The result is that if a person's voluntary actions are oriented towards their innate knowledge and

existential desire for the ultimate cause and the Exalted Truth, they will attain a special life that gives meaning to their existence. Thus, meaninglessness and meaningfulness are two concepts that can only be abstracted from human life. These concepts describe the nature of human existence: if a person seeks their innate knowledge and existential desire, their life will be meaningful to the extent that they acquire that knowledge. Conversely, if they deviate from this innate understanding, they will experience bewilderment and meaninglessness in life.

Of course, our understanding of death's role in the meaningfulness or meaninglessness of life is undeniable. Hence, some, to prove the absurdity of human life, resort to their understanding of death and argue: "Since we are going to die, all chains of justification must be suspended in mid-air. We study and work to earn an income; we earn an income to pay for clothes, housing, entertainment, recreation, and food. We pay these expenses to keep ourselves alive from one year to the next, and we keep ourselves alive, perhaps, to support our families. Ultimately, for what purpose are all these actions performed? All of this is a long journey that leads nowhere" (Shahriyari, 2003, pp. 92-107). The question that arises is whether humans decay and perish upon death, or do they experience a new life? If someone believes that humans cease to exist upon death and provides a justified reason for their mortality, then the absurdity and meaninglessness of human life must be accepted as logical consequences of their argument. Although they may not conventionally abandon eating and sleeping, the question remains: what is all this effort and striving really for? Logically, there will be no convincing answer to this philosophical question, as no justified reason for it will exist.

Sadr al-Muta'allihin (Mulla Sadra) claims that humans spend a very short part of their lives in this world and continue their eternal life after death, meaning human identity is immortal. As mentioned earlier, humans possess a trans-material dimension, and this very trans-material dimension causes their survival after death and their immortality. While proving the immaterial nature of the soul and the existence of life after death is beyond the scope of this research, attention to the trans-material dimension of humans is undeniable in the meaningfulness of human life. Based on this premise, if the soul reaches the end of its worldly life, it enters a new life. Therefore, all those questions will find a logical answer, because worldly life is a prelude to constructing the afterlife. That is, there is a real and existential relationship between the actions a person performs in this world and their afterlife, and a person is tormented or blessed by the qualities they have established within their soul (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 1975, p. 344). In summary, belief in the resurrection (Ma'ad) not only frees human life from absurdity but also brings about a particular kind of meaningfulness in human existence, because such a life is consistent with human nature (Ashtiani, 2001, p. 173). That is, humans always seek an eternal life without suffering, even those who commit suicide because they love themselves and believe that suicide will free them from suffering. However, a person who does not consider life after death as the end of the road and believes in it will never suffer from depression or meaninglessness and is always waiting to attain eternal life.

6-2 Giving Meaning to Social Life

Up to this point, we've explored how individual life finds meaning through innate knowledge and an existential inclination towards the absolute being. However, a crucial question arises: Can we speak of giving meaning to human social life, or should meaning

in human existence be reduced solely to individual life?

As previously stated, humans are conscious, volitional beings; their actions and activities are intentional and deliberate. A significant portion of human actions are social actions. In fact, most of our interactions unfold within the framework of society, and society actualizes many of our hidden and potential perfections. For this reason, humans are inherently social beings. Mulla Sadra asserts that humans, in addition to their individual existence, possess a social life and are "civil by nature" (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 1975, p. 488). It's clear that the coherence of a society, for social life to thrive, depends on unity and integration. Without this solidarity, a society simply won't materialize, and anarchy will prevail. Furthermore, the coherence and unity of a society are contingent upon the existence of shared goals and ideals. What brings people together to live socially is the presence of these common objectives and aspirations. Determining which goals and ideals emerge in the social sphere or how a particular goal transforms into a dominant culture requires further investigation. Nevertheless, the existence of shared goals and ideals is essential for the formation of a cohesive and unified society.

These shared goals and ideals lay the foundation for social laws. For instance, a society built on secularist goals and ideals will establish laws consistent with those aims, whereas an ideological society will seek legislation aligned with religious objectives. Consequently, social actions, values, and norms are interpreted based on the corresponding goals and ideals of that society. Meanings consistent with these goals and ideals manifest in the objective realm of human action. Therefore, goals and ideals interpret and explain the meaningfulness or meaninglessness of human actions in the social arena.

Social actions, then, possess meanings. For example, a person driving might use their car horn. This action is performed consciously and volitionally, but behind this will lies a meaning embedded in the behavior. Honking might be a warning to a pedestrian, an invitation for a pedestrian to get in, or even a greeting to a friend (Parsania, 2022, p. 26). In any case, it is the goals and ideals that give meaning to social actions and make the behaviors of individuals in society meaningful.

It's crucial to note, however, that not every goal or ideal can be implemented in a society. Only those that align with human existential structure and fulfill its fundamental dimension are viable.

For example, a society with a physicalist interpretation might not acknowledge a trans-material dimension for humans, emphasizing instead a purely material human identity. In such a case, the society's goals and ideals would be shaped by this premise, pursuing the development of humanity's material aspect and worldly pleasures. Social behaviors and actions would be understood through this lens, and the meaningfulness or meaninglessness of life would be interpreted within this framework. This means if individuals in such a society succeed in developing their material lives, they'll experience a meaningful existence. Otherwise, their worldly lives will be meaningless, and futility will dominate.

The distinction of meaning-making in life through the lens of Transcendent Theosophy (Hikmat-e Muta'aliyah), compared to other interpretations, lies in its recognition of the Absolute Being and the Cause of Causes as the central signifier and fundamental axis for giving meaning to human life. This perspective, therefore, presents humanity with expansive goals and ideals that extend beyond the confines of worldly existence. It's important to note that Mulla Sadra's framework doesn't completely reject the world. Instead, worldly life gains meaning under the umbrella of divine unity, and it

becomes intrinsically linked with the afterlife and life after death. Consequently, a spirituality aligned with human existential structure and innate inclination emerges. In such a life, humans engage in an existential interaction with the Absolute Being, to the extent that it imbues all dimensions of human life—including behaviors, ethical values, and beliefs—with meaning.

It is in this context that Tawhid maintains a continuous presence throughout human existence, encompassing all aspects of human life and imbuing human actions with a monotheistic direction and meaning. Thus, with this interpretation, it's impossible for an action to occur without Tawhid being imbued within it and present in the arena of human life. The reason why giving meaning to human life solely based on worldly existence and its development, without considering Tawhid, yields nothing but absurdity is that the very nature of the world is characterized by flux and change (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 1984, p. 398). Therefore, becoming attached to such a reality will always be accompanied by anxiety, and if a beloved object possessing this characteristic is lost, the outcome will be nothing but a sense of emptiness.

Conclusion

Meaning in human life, within the framework of Transcendent Theosophy (Hikmat-e Muta'aliyah), can be explained and achieved based on its fundamental principles. According to Mulla Sadra's philosophy, giving meaning to human life falls within the category of philosophical second intelligibles and can be abstracted from the very nature of human existence. By this criterion, meaningfulness and meaninglessness are relative. Therefore, absolute absurdity would not have a coherent meaning and would, in fact, be contradictory.

The approach to meaning-making in human life derived from

Transcendent Theosophy relies on a specific anthropology. Based on Mulla Sadra's anthropology, human identity is a relational identity. This relational identity possesses an existential inclination and a particular knowledge of the Cause of Causes. The Cause of Causes has a sustentative concomitance with humanity, and it is precisely upon this innate inclination and inner knowledge that human life gains meaning. Furthermore, Mulla Sadra's understanding of death provides another foundational aspect for meaning-making in life. Considering the principles of Mulla Sadra's philosophy, meaning in human life is not only achievable in the individual dimension of existence but also extends to make social life meaningful.



References

- Ashtiani, J. D. (2001). *Sharh-e Zad al-Musafir* [Commentary on Zad al-Musafir]. Qom: Daftar-e Tablighat.[In Persian]
- Parsania, H. (2022). *Jahan-haye Ejtema'i* [Social Worlds]. Qom: Entesharat-e Farda. [In Persian]
- Javadi Amoli, A. (2010). *Ensan az Aghaz ta Anjam* [Man from Beginning to End]. Qom: Isra. [In Persian]
- Javadi Amoli, A. (2015). *Sharh-e Iqaz al-Na'imin* [Commentary on Iqaz al-Na'imin]. Qom: Isra. [In Persian]
- Shahriyari, H. (2003). Nagel's Article "Absurdity." *Faslname-ye Naqd va Nazar*, (30), pp. 92-107. [In Persian]
- Shirazi, S. (1981). *Al-Hikmat al-Muta'aliyah fi al-Asfar al-Arba'ah al-Aqliyah* [The Transcendent Wisdom in the Four Intellectual Journeys]. (Vols. 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 9). Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath.[In Arabic]
- Shirazi, S. (1984). *Mafatih al-Ghayb* [Keys to the Unseen]. Tehran: Moassese-ye Tahqiqati Farhangi. [In Arabic]
- Shirazi, S. (1981). *Shavahid al-Rububiyyah* [Evidences of Lordship]. Mashhad: Al-Markaz al-Jami' li al-Nashr. [In Arabic]
- Shirazi, S. (1975). *Mabda' va Ma'ad* [The Beginning and the Return]. Tehran: Anjoman-e Hikmat va Falsafe-ye Iran. [In Arabic]
- Tabataba'i, M. H. (1981). *Hashiyeh bar Asfar* [Gloss on the Asfar]. Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath. [In Arabic]
- Tabataba'i, M. H. (2008). *Nihayat al-Hikmah* [The End of Wisdom]. Qom: Entesharat-e Nashr-e Islami. [In Arabic]
- Asgari Soleimani, A. (2003). "Poochi-e Poochi: Naqdi bar Maqaleh-ye 'Poochi'" [The Absurdity of Absurdity: A Critique of the Article 'Absurdity']. *Faslname-ye Naqd va Nazar*, (31-32), pp. 2-43. [In Persian]

- Yazdanpanah, Y. (2010). *Sharh-e Hikmat-e Ishraq Vol. 2* [Commentary on the Philosophy of Illumination, Vol. 2]. Qom: Entesharat-e Moassese-ye Imam Khomeini (RA). [In Persian]
- Naraqi, M. M. (2000). *Sharh-e Ilahiyyat min Kitab al-Shifa'* [Commentary on the Metaphysics of Kitab al-Shifa']. Qom: Congress for the Commemoration of Naraqi. [In Persian]

