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# Tusian Perfectionism

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**Abstract**. I offer a reconstructive reading of Ṭūsī's (1201-1274) account of natural goodness in the *Naserian Ethics*. I show that Ṭūsī's version of Aristotelian ethics is especially well-suited to accommodate an intuition that is hard to integrate into a theory of natural goodness: human good is nobler or more elevated than animal and vegetative goods. To do this, I analyze Ṭūsī's discussion of the relationship between different kinds of perfection from non-living material compounds to vegetative, animal, human, and divine beings. I close by noting that, depending on our reading of Ṭūsī's conception of divine beings and their perfection, his proposal might come at a cost to his Aristotelian naturalist ambitions for ethics.

## 1. The Humanist Challenge

One of the grand ambitions of Aristotelian naturalism in ethics is to show that there is a shared and informative sense of 'good' that we can identify in the following kinds of sentences (Foot 2001, 46–47; Hursthouse 2002, 203; Moosavi 2019; 2022; Thompson 1987):

1. A good oak tree has sturdy roots.
2. A good cheetah has sharp teeth.
3. A good person has courage.

Anyone would agree that there is a trivial sense in which a generic positive attitude is expressed in the above sentences. However, the Aristotelian is saying more: namely, that there is an underlying shared function of good that can be specified in relation to each form of life and that can explain patterns of valid evaluative judgment in each kind of case. Hence, the claim is not that the term 'good' has the exact same meaning in these three sentences, or that it picks up an identical shared substantive property among these objects. Rather, Aristotelians claim to identify a shared schema

or function that outputs a substantive account of goodness as we specify different forms of life.[1]

This ambition puts the Aristotelian account under pressure from two opposing sides (Mousavi 2019). On the one hand, some have worried that the resulting theories are too reductive in their naturalist ambitions that although they may explain the goodness of sturdy roots for oak trees in terms of biological functions, when applied to the human case, they end up with strange and sometimes abhorrent moral verdicts (Millgram 2009). On the other hand, there is a threat of excessive anthropomorphization. This threat arises when, in reaction to the first challenge, Aristotelians characterize goodness primarily as 'flourishing.' But, the critic argues, the idea of flourishing as applicable to cultural creatures like us has no place in scientific naturalistic descriptions of oak trees and cheetahs (FitzPatrick 2011).

Now, many Aristotelians can be characterized as trying to escape these polar pressures from naturalizing and anthropomorphizing directions by relying on what is arguably a central feature of Aristotle's own thinking, namely perfectionism. Perfectionism, narrowly construed, refers to the idea that the human good consists in the complete realization of properties that are fundamental, essential, and characteristic of human nature (Hurka 1996; Foot 2001; Kraut 2009). Aristotelians generalize this narrow conception of human good to arrive at an informative yet generic concept of natural goodness:

> **Aristotelian Perfectionism**: The good of a life-form (vegetative, animal, human) consists in the complete realization of properties that are fundamental, essential, and characteristic of the life-form.

This solution is attractive for at least three reasons. First, we define a generic conception of the good across different species of life via a shared functional explanation, not a shared property. As a result, there is a promise to explain the similarity between human good and the good of an oak tree without conflating these forms of life and

[1] This idea can be traced back to Aristotle's famous objection to Platonism about the good as a substantive shared property among good objects (Nicomachean Ethics, bk. 1, chap. 6). In Chapter 7 of Book 1, he offers an alternative by defining natural goodness in functional terms.

what is good for each of them. Second, the generic concept is informative. For instance, an Aristotelian Perfectionist account would offer substantive claims about the good-making features of human life and the systematic relations between them. Lastly, the account at least has the potential of being genuinely naturalistic because it characterizes the good of each category in terms of the properties of the "life-form." Presumably, these properties directly pick natural facts or at least are rooted in them.[2]

Here, I want to focus on one central challenge against Aristotelian Perfectionism, which I call the challenge of Humanism. According to the intuition behind Humanism, the human good is nobler or more elevated than a vegetative or animal good. For example, many of us would agree that although there are many 'good dogs,' no dog is a moral hero, nor is any dog capable of extreme moral evil. Intuitively, the greatest human achievements by moral heroes, great artists, etc. are much nobler than anything a good dog could possibly do. Likewise, the greatest human evils are much worse than anything a 'bad' dog could do.

I will take the underlying intuition behind Humanism for granted. To be sure, some Aristotelians might object that the Humanist intuition is false. That may be so, but the problem with Aristotelian Perfectionism (as construed above) is that it renders this intuition senseless. That is because Aristotelian Perfectionism does not seem to leave room for inter-species comparison. For them, the goodness of each species of life is defined in terms of the perfection of its life-form. Accordingly, someone who is committed to Aristotelian Perfectionism would have to say that Humanism is just conceptually confused: the acts of human moral heroes are good given the human life-form, but they cannot be meaningfully compared to what dogs do in their lives.[3]

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[2] Many neo-Aristotelians take pain to argue that the relevant properties of the life-forms are not naturalistic in the sense of natural scientific properties (i.e., properties that, for example, a biologist would identify in a life-form). Instead, they try to appeal to a "pre-scientific" conception of a life-form and its properties (Thompson 2012; Foot 2001; Lott 2012; C.f. Moosavi 2019). By contrast, I argue that Ṭūsī does not shy away from relying on scientific biological descriptions in characterizing different life-forms. For a discussion of the complexity of Aristotle's own view on this issue, see Gotthelf (2012).

[3] Arguably, Aristotle's own position about inter-species evaluative comparison is more complicated. Or at least, that is the case insofar as Aristotle can be taken as committed to the idea of *scala naturae* (Lovejoy 1976; Granger 1985).

Now, firstly, it is in good Aristotelian spirit to try and accommodate common sense as much as possible (Nussbaum 2001, chap. 8). And I think it is a deliverance of the commonsense that, e.g., Stalin was so much worse than any bad dog has ever been or could possibly be; or that Dr. King's efforts for the Civil Rights movement were more valuable than anything that a good dog has ever done or could possibly do. I thus think it would be an advantage if a variation of an Aristotelian theory of natural goodness could accommodate this basic intuition.

And secondly, I will argue that there is an attractive type of Aristotelian Perfectionism which both accepts this intuition and explains and justifies it. To uncover this, I turn to the *Naserian Ethics* [*Akhlāq-e Nāṣirī*] (*AN*, hereafter), by Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (1201-1274), which is widely regarded as one of the most influential ethical treatises in Persian and Arabic philosophy. I argue that in Book 1 of the *AN*, Ṭūsī offers us a unique and insightful conception of natural goodness, which could be employed to incorporate the Humanist intuition into perfectionism and explain it.

Notably, though, Ṭūsī starts his treatise by presupposing the Humanist intuition, and only later comes to explain and defend it. In section 2 of Book 1 of the *AN*, discussing the importance of ethics as a discipline, he writes:

> In the human species, one can find the basest of all existent things, but also the noblest and best of them […]. Thus, what noble discipline [ethics] can be, which can elevate the lowest of all existent things to the highest. (Ṭūsī 1981, 107 W. 78-79)[4]

Here, he notes that in ethics, we deal with a special kind of creature: one that is capable of the basest forms of evil (e.g., genocide) but also the highest forms of goodness (e.g., selfless charity). In characterizing the ethical enterprise in this way, Ṭūsī

[4] For ease of reference, as much as possible, I try to stay close to Wickens's English translation of the *AN* (Ṭūsī 1964). However, most translations of the *AN* are modified by me. I use Minawi's Farsi edition of the *AN*. The Farsi edition page numbers appear first, and they are followed by a "W." page number, pointing to Wickens' version. Recently, the Arabic version of *AN* was also edited by Lameer (Ṭūsī 2015).

thus presupposes that we can compare goodness and evil across different species of life, and indeed across different 'beings' [*mawjūdāt*].[5]

In what follows, I will argue that Ṭūsī's theory of natural goodness can accommodate and explain Humanism because his conception of perfectionism is different from the common Aristotelian conception that I sketched above. Roughly, on the Tusian account, we can make sense of the perfection of one species only in a hierarchical relation to other species which is organized by an idea of good simpliciter. As we will see, this comes at a cost. Ṭūsī's theory will give us an account of *natural* goodness only if we can make sense of the ideal of an *absolutely perfect being* in naturalistic terms – and that, I will suggest, is a difficult feat. In other words, by investigating Ṭūsī's account, we come to see that there is pressure to supplement a theory of natural goodness *for*-a-form-of-life with an account of natural goodness *simpliciter*. Ṭūsī, I suggest, can offer us an outline of how such a theory would go.

Methodologically, this paper engages in a "rational reconstructive" project. The premises of the arguments I offer will be textually based on Ṭūsī's writings. However, I will, always with due warning, offer new arguments and revise certain aspects of his view for philosophical reasons. Relatedly, I will not always discuss the genealogy of Ṭūsī's ethical ideas, except when it is necessary for my reconstructive purposes. To be sure, there is a highly valuable project to analyze the historical context of Ṭūsī's thought and contextualize it in relation to its Greek and Arabic philosophical heritage, Ismailism, and Sufism (For example, see Chittick 1981; Dabashi 1996; Fakhry 1994, 131–42; Madelung 1976; 1977; 1985; 2000; McGinnis 2019; Nasr and Razavi 2008; Meisami 2019; Kars 2017). However, there is little to no other reconstructive work on Ṭūsī's ethical writings in recent scholarship.[6]

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[5] The notion of "elevating the lowest of all existent things to the highest" makes an allusion to the Quranic verse 95:4-5.

[6] Originally, Ṭūsī was commissioned to translate the *Refinement of Character [Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq]* (Miskawayh 2003; 1981) of the Iranian historian and philosopher Ibn Miskawayh (c. 930 - 1030) from Arabic to Persian. This project roughly corresponds to Book 1 of *AN*. However, Ṭūsī took liberties with his translation, radically changing the order of presentation, adding details based on the Avicennian psychological themes, as well as introducing important changes to the structure of virtues. Ṭūsī's changes were significant enough

## 2. Ṭūsī's account in the *AN*

I will start with an overview of Ṭūsī's methodological remarks in *AN*. Most of what Ṭūsī says in this section reflects a common consensus in the Arabic Aristotelian tradition. However, as we will see, some of the finer details in his conception of philosophical ethics as a discipline will prove important to his conception of perfectionism.

### *a. Ṭūsī's methodological naturalism*

Ṭūsī opens the *AN* with observations about the position of philosophical ethics within philosophical sciences [*ḥikmat*].[7] In these brief remarks, he highlights his methodological commitment to ethical naturalism as the idea that natural scientific facts must constrain and inform ethical theory. To arrive at this point, he starts by offering a taxonomy of philosophy, drawn in a manner that is traditional to the Arabic tradition, dividing it into two categories (Ṭūsī 1981, 38 W 27):

> **Theoretical philosophy** [*ḥikmat-e naẓarī*] where the "existence" of the object of knowledge "does not depend on voluntary human action."

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that about a century later, the entire *AN*, including Book 1, was translated back to Arabic by al-Jurjānī (1339-1413). Since Ṭūsī seemed to change things when he disagreed, or added details when he saw fit, there is scholarly consensus that Book 1 represents Ṭūsī's views. For a comparative study of the changes that Ṭūsī introduced to Miskawayh's original text, see Abtahi (2020).

That being said, much of Book 1 of the *AN* can be treated as an adaptive translation of Miskawayh's *Refinement*. As a result, most (but not all) of what I will say in this paper could be said by relying on Miskawayh's text as well. However, I rely on Ṭūsī's *AN* for two reasons. First, and most importantly, I will borrow from Ṭūsī's other ethical writings, including Books 2 and 3 of the *AN*, to shed light on some of what Ṭūsī writes in Book 1. This will be especially important towards the end of the paper when I discuss the notion of "absolute perfection." Second, although, more generally, Ṭūsī's ethical writings synthesize what was already asserted in different contexts and by different philosophers in the Arabic medieval tradition, he offers a very significant synthesis. For once, we get a fully developed ethical theory by someone who also stands as a major figure (among those who shape the "core" of the tradition) in the trajectory of Islamic philosophy. This might partly explain the legacy of the *AN*, which came to define the genre of ethical treatises in Arabic, Farsi, and Turkish after the 13th century (*Akhlāq* texts). Accordingly, my emphasis on Ṭūsī, instead of Miskawayh, is not in virtue of the originality of the former in comparison to the latter. Rather, I focus on Ṭūsī because he offers a unique and largely influential synthesis of Avicennian, Ismaili, and Sufi trends in Arabic philosophy.

[7] These methodological remarks were added by Ṭūsī and are not present in the *Refinement*.

> **Practical philosophy** [*ḥikmat-e ʿamalī*] where the "existence" of the object of knowledge "depends on control and regulation" of persons.

Notably, his further taxonomical divisions show that, for Ṭūsī, practical philosophy is constrained by and dependent on theoretical philosophy. In particular, he introduces practical philosophy as dependent on "psychology" which he identifies as a sub-field of theoretical philosophy. To see why, we should first see how he characterizes practical philosophy:

> [P]ractical philosophy is the knowledge of what is beneficial in voluntary action and skilled activities of humankind insofar as it helps the organization of their life in this world and hereafter in such a way that is necessary for the perfection towards which they are directed. (1981, 40 W. 28)

Thus, he holds that the objective of practical philosophy is to offer a kind of knowledge that can be employed for a good organization of life. In turn, we can evaluate the quality of candidate principles for organizing life in relation to the regulative ideal of human perfection. For Ṭūsī, the decisive question for normative ethics is this: Which principles of organizing life are best suited for human perfection?

Clearly, any such attitude towards normative ethics must start with a conception of human perfection. At one level of analysis, he holds that the relevant conception of human perfection comes from "psychology" (as we will see, in a specific sense of the term). First, he notes that we should distinguish between three different levels of practical principles, corresponding to the three books of *AN* (Ṭūsī 1981, 40 W 28):[8]

**(1) Personal Ethics**: practical principles for the perfection of an individual.
**(2) Household Ethics**: practical principles for the perfection of a community of individuals living together in a "dwelling and household."
**(3) Political Ethics**: practical principles for the perfection of the community of individuals in a "city, land, region, or realm."[9]

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[8] The *Refinement* only contained what would be equivalent to Book 1 of the *AN*. With the *AN*, Ṭūsī defines the genre of *Akhlāq* treatise that is characterized by this tripartite structure.

[9] I have used my own labeling for these subdisciplines to reflect their topics in a contemporary language, while highlighting Ṭūsī's insistence that these are parts of one and the same discipline, i.e., practical philosophy. Ṭūsī's labeling of these subdisciplines is different. He calls the first one "refinement of character" [*tahḍīb-e akhlāq*], the second

Second, in each of the three cases, we should distinguish between practical principles which have roots [*mabādī*] in nature [*ṭabʿ*] and those that are rooted in convention [*waḍʿ*]. Conventional practical principles are historically contingent in that they are "subject to change depending on changes in states of affairs, changes of prominent individuals [*rujāl*], passage of time, differences in historical epochs, and changes in nations and states" (Ṭūsī 1981, 41 W 29). Notably, he identifies religious practical principles and their study [*ʿilm-e fiqh*] as historically contingent, and thus conventional in this sense (ibid). By contrast, the practical principles that have roots in nature are not contingent in the same way. Rather, these practical principles are known by "investigating what is universal" with respect to a good organization of life. Practical philosophy, he writes, is strictly concerned with these latter kinds of practical principles (Ṭūsī 1981, 41 W 29).

Now, according to Ṭūsī, the universal aspects of the good in organizing an individual human life are known through the study of the nature of the human soul [*ʿilm-e nafs*]. His argument for this claim takes two steps. At the outset of Book 1, Ṭūsī notes that the subject-matter of practical philosophy (in the Personal Ethics section) is the human soul insofar as its voluntary actions can be evaluated and appraised (Ṭūsī 1981, 48 W 35). Consequently, practical philosophy must depend on the branch of theoretical sciences which studies the faculties of the human soul:

> Thus, the subject-matter of this science [practical philosophy] is the human soul, inasmuch as from it can proceed, according to its will, acts fair and praiseworthy, or ugly and to be condemned. This being so, *it must first be known what the human soul is,* and wherein lies the acme of its perfection; what are its faculties, by which (if it uses them properly) it attains what it seeks, namely perfection and felicity; what, again, it is that prevents it from reaching that perfection. (Ṭūsī 1981, 48 W 35; emphasis added)

This discussion comes in the context of explaining the epistemic hierarchy of sciences where a "higher" science offers a demonstration of the fundamental premises of a "lower" science (Ṭūsī 1981, 47 W 35). In turn, the relevant science that underpins

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"household management" [*tadbīr-e manāzel*], and the last "civil politics" [*sīāsat mudun*]. Wickens translates these as "ethics", "economics" and "politics" respectively (Ṭūsī 1981, 40 W 28).

practical philosophy, he holds, is "psychology", which is a sub-sub-field of theoretical philosophy. Earlier in the book, he identifies three sub-fields of theoretical philosophy: metaphysics *[mā baʿd al-ṭabīʿa]*, mathematics [*riyāḍiyāt*], and natural sciences *[ʿilm ṭabīʿī]*.[10] Psychology is then listed as one of the eight "fundamentals of Natural Science" *[uṣūl-e ʿilm ṭabiʿi]*. He characterizes psychology as concerned with "the states of the rational human soul, and how it regulates and controls the body and what is outside the body" (Ṭūsī 1981, 40 W 28).

In short, Ṭūsī's methodological remarks culminate with this question: Given what psychology teaches us about the human soul, what kind of perfection is fitting for us?

*b. Ṭūsī's conception of psychology and compound unities*

As we just saw, Ṭūsī sometimes identifies psychology in a narrow sense, as a science concerning the human rational soul and its relation to bodily behavior (Ṭūsī 1981, 40 W 28). Surprisingly, this conception of psychology is similar to our contemporary conception of that science. However, Ṭūsī's subsequent discussion of "psychology" in *AN* closely follows the typical Aristotelian psychological topics, discussing natural functions such as reproduction, nutrition, perception, movement, and rationality across human, animal, and vegetative life forms. In that sense, the subject-matter is certainly broader than what we call psychology today – it also encompasses botany and zoology, which he identifies as other subfields of natural sciences. But what is especially noteworthy is that, unlike the Aristotelians, and like other philosophers in the Arabic tradition, Ṭūsī's discussion often considers functions of non-living material compounds as relevant to psychology as well.

To be sure, in keeping with the tradition, in the natural scientific context, Ṭūsī uses the term "soul" [*nafs*] as applicable to plants, animals, and humans only (Ṭūsī 1981, 56 W 41-42). However, as we will see, in almost all discussions of the

[10] Pace Avicenna, Ṭūsī offers the following as the principle behind his taxonomy: the object of metaphysical knowledge can exist without matter, while the object of mathematics and natural sciences cannot exist without matter. Further, he holds, while the object of mathematics can be conceived as without matter, the object of natural sciences cannot even be thought or conceived as not mixed with matter.

"perfection" of souls he uses a principle that he readily applies to any compound entity, living or otherwise. When he is concerned with questions of perfection, he investigates any natural phenomenon where what is good for a compound is distinct from what is good for the parts of the compound. For instance, he concludes his observations from psychology, by noting:

> The perfection of any compound entity is distinct from the perfection of its parts and simples, as the perfection of oxymel is something other than the perfection of vinegar and honey [...]. And since mankind is a compound entity, its perfection is distinct from perfection of its constituent parts. (Ṭūsī 1981, 69 W 51)

At the outset, I noted that Aristotelians are often interested in accounting for a generic concept of good across different life-forms. As a result, the concept of *life* plays a crucial role in their analysis of natural goodness. At this point, we can see a way in which Ṭūsī's version of Aristotelianism is distinct.[11] For Ṭūsī, although "souls" are characteristic properties of living beings, the notion of perfection of souls belongs to the broader category of compounds [*murakkabāt*]. In particular, he is interested in compound entities where the goodness of the whole is distinct from the goodness of its parts. I will call such compounds *compound unities.*[12] Below, I will show that Ṭūsī is primarily interested in accounting for a generic concept of good across different compound unities.[13] *A fortiori,* he also gives us an account of a generic concept of good across different life-forms.

In short, for Ṭūsī, to say that practical philosophy must presuppose natural psychology is to say that it needs to rely on facts about the ways in which different compounds in nature work as compound unities: i.e., as entities where the good of a whole is distinct from the good of its parts. This idea becomes even more apparent when we look at his actual "psychological" observations in the *AN*. In what follows,

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[11] Note that the contrast is being drawn with the Aristotelian tradition today. Otherwise, paying attention to compound unities is very standard in the medieval Arabic Aristotelian tradition.

[12] C.f. Moore's "principle of organic unities" (Moore 1993, 78–80)

[13] This becomes more important towards the end of the paper because, as we will see, Ṭūsī wants to employ a notion of natural goodness that readily applies to the *cosmos* as a compound unity as well.

I will outline his investigation of four types of compound unity: mineral, vegetative, animal, and human. My goal is to show how his notion of ethical perfectionism develops out of this discussion in such a way that it can answer the Humanist challenge.

### *c. Ṭūsī's perfectionist psychology*

Ṭūsī's discussion of psychology starts with a survey of Avicennian arguments for the immateriality of the human rational soul.[14] However, as far as I can see, his commitment to the immateriality of the soul is not directly relevant to his unique conception of ethical perfectionism. I will thus put these arguments aside (from Chapter 2 of Book 1). Instead, I will focus on his account of the perfection of different compound unities in nature in Chapter 4 of Book 1.[15] The chapter title is: "Showing that humanity is the noblest of this world's existent beings." Evidently, its target is something akin to the Humanist intuition.

**1. Non-living compound unities.** Ṭūsī opens the chapter by noting that "natural bodies" insofar as they are bodies are qualitatively identical (i.e., they are instances of "primary matter") (Ṭūsī 1981, 59 W 43). However, he notes that a difference in value can be introduced to them as soon as they form compound unities:

> When elements mix and mingle, insofar as the [resulting] compound approximates a real equilibrium (which is an ideal unity [*waḥdat-e maʿnavī*]), they receive trace of noble [*sharīf*] principles and forms and ranks and distinctions among them becomes manifest. Thus, among the solids, that which by virtue of its equilibrium of its mixture more readily receives forms is nobler than the other solids [...] (Ṭūsī 1981, 59 W 44)

In this short passage, Ṭūsī makes three important points. First, on the assumption that material compounds qua matter are identical with one another, he suggests that evaluative differences among them enter the scene when we consider a material compound *as* instantiating this-or-that form.

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[14] Here, Ṭūsī sometimes adds new arguments, and sometimes expands on arguments that are already present in Miskawayh's *Refinement*.

[15] Chapter 3 of Book 1 contains a brief overview of the basic faculties of vegetative, animal, and human soul. I occasionally use the material from this chapter below.

Second, he tries to discard cases of unstable and arbitrary compounds. To do this, he suggests that comparative evaluative judgments are reasonably made only for objects that instantiate a proper natural kind (i.e., they have an "ideal unity"). Further, this ideal unity must be instantiated by the object in a way that is materially *stable*. As he puts it, these objects have the ideal unity through an "equilibrium" in the mixture of their material parts. For example, the honey on my kitchen table has an ideal unity through a stable equilibrium of its elemental parts and is thus a proper object of evaluation of natural goodness. However, the honey-in-my-kitchen-plus-Mount-Everest compound lacks such a unity and is thus not a proper object of judgments of natural goodness. To understand why Ṭūsī places this requirement, recall that he is trying to account for judgments of natural goodness about compound unities, i.e., judgments about compounds where the good of the whole is distinct from the good of the parts. But arguably, the whole is a proper object of a *distinctive* evaluation only if it has distinctive unity, i.e., only if *qua* whole it instantiates a form that its individual parts do not instantiate. That is, what we need is something more than a mere aggregate of two parts (e.g., the honey in my kitchen and Mount Everest). In turn, for Ṭūsī, the proper unity of compounds that would enable distinctive evaluative judgments about them requires a kind of stability over time and change that can unify the parts under an idea of the whole (that is, under the idea of the form that characterizes the whole).

Finally, given their characteristic and essential properties, Ṭūsī notes that we can now make sense of a ranking among non-living compound unities. What qualifies a non-living compound as a compound unity is that these objects qua compounds can instantiate and sustain forms. Hence (given a yet-to-be-specified metric), the nobility of a non-living compound unity is a function of the nobility of the form it instantiates in a stable manner.

Sometimes, Ṭūsī offers examples that are independent of the interest of other creatures. For example, he notes that some minerals show a high degree of complexity, almost resembling some basic vegetative functions (Ṭūsī 1981, 59 W 44). In other contexts, Ṭūsī uses examples that seem to invoke the interest of other creatures. For instance, food, medicine, or artifacts are non-living compound unities that are "ennobled" by virtue of the distinctive form they instantiate qua compound. E.g., oxymel

has new properties and satisfies functions that its ingredients, honey, and vinegar, lack. If we could make sense of oxymel's emergent functions as "nobler", then the compound entity is nobler than its parts.

In short, Ṭūsī holds that there is a hierarchy of beings among non-living compound unities. Roughly, these beings are ranked on the axis of their capacity to instantiate "nobler" forms in a stable manner.

**2. Vegetative compound unities.** Having introduced the internal hierarchy of non-living compound unities, Ṭūsī points to an upper limit, where non-living compound unities approximate a form of life, namely the vegetative soul:

> This nobility [i.e., a non-living compound unity's ability to realize "nobler" functions in a stable manner] possesses many ranks and numberless ascending degrees: and eventually a point is reached where the compound gains the faculty of receiving the Vegetative Soul, by which it is then ennobled. Several important properties then appear in it, such as the ability to procure nourishment, growth, [etc.]. (Ṭūsī 1981, 59 W 44)

Let me flag the emerging central question, which I will try to answer later: In what sense is the vegetative compound unity nobler than the non-living compound unity? The answer cannot be merely quantitative: that is, it cannot just be that the vegetative compound unities instantiate *more* forms. As we saw, Ṭūsī uses a qualitative language: the forms that are instantiated by higher compound unities are in some sense "nobler." But what is the metric for this notion of nobility? And of course, we will have to ask similar questions as the hierarchy of beings moves to the animal kingdom and humanity.

Before answering these central questions, we need more textual material. We need to see how Ṭūsī proceeds through the hierarchy of compound unities. First, it is worth noting that what has happened by changing levels (from non-living to vegetative life) is the introduction of certain forms or functions that no non-living compound cannot instantiate, but the vegetative soul can: nourishment, growth, and reproduction (Ṭūsī 1981, bks. 1, Ch. 3).

Second, Ṭūsī notes that these vegetative functions are not equally developed and maintained across different plant species. He thus introduces another intra-species ranking among plants:

> These faculties [i.e., growth, nutrition, reproduction] likewise occur variously in it in accordance with variation of aptitude. That which is nearer to the region of the solids is in the same case as coral, which better resembles minerals (Ṭūsī 1981, 59 W 44)

Thus, on the lower end, we have vegetative compound unities that are not much more advanced than the higher end of the non-living compound unities. In the middle range, he notes, we have vegetative compound unities, which have more advanced properties such as reproductive systems:

> Next we come to things like those grasses which grow without sowing or cultivation, by the mere mingling of elements, the rising of the sun, and the blowing of the winds: in these the faculty for prolonged individual survival and the perpetuation of the species does not exist. In the same sequence, virtue augments in just proportion until we come to the seedbearing grasses and the fruit-bearing trees, which have […] the faculty for individual survival and the perpetuation of the species. (Ṭūsī 1981, 59 W 44)

On the highest end of the vegetative ranks, we have the plants like the date-palm, which, on Ṭūsī's (amusing) account, almost resemble animal functions[16]:

> Thus, until we arrive at the date-palm, which is particularized by certain of the properties of animals: […] in its constitution, one part is designated as having a greater innate heat, corresponding to the heart in other animals, and stems and branches grow thence like arteries from the heart. […] Some agriculturalists have recorded […] that one tree will show partiality for another, not conceiving from impregnation by any tree other than it; this property is close to that of affection and love as found in other animals. *In short, there are many similar properties in this tree, and it only lacks one thing further to reach (the stage of) an animal: to tear itself loose from the soil and to move away in quest of nourishment.* (Ṭūsī 1981, 60 W 44; emphasis added)

Later, I will return to analyze the final sentence of the above passage. But for now, it is worth noting how a pattern is forming. First, Ṭūsī introduces an intra-species ranking among a form of compound unity. Then, this internal ranking is portrayed as containing a lower end and a higher end, where the higher end *almost* reaches the

[16] These remarks are not surprising in the historical context. The idea that the date palm tree is animal-like was widespread and religiously motivated. Ṭūsī ends the passage by citing a saying from Prophet Muhammad, "Honor your paternal aunt, the date-palm, for she was created from what remained of Adam's clay," adding that "This is surely an allusion to this idea" (Ṭūsī 1981, 60 W 45).

next stage of compound unity. I will refer back to this pattern as ***the progression schema.***

**3. Animal compound unities.** Following that schema, Ṭūsī introduces functions and forms that are essential and characteristic of animal compound unities (perception and voluntary movement). Second, he notes that these characteristic functions are not equally developed across the animal kingdom. And third, he introduces an intra-species ranking of the animal kingdom based on the development of their characteristic functions. I'll go through these in turn.

At the animal level, we have two main new functions: first, the capacity to perceive, store, recall, and imaginatively manipulate information about the environment. And second, the capacity for voluntary movement in the environment in accord with attractive and repulsive desires, often guided by the data of perception (Ṭūsī 1981, bks. 1, Ch. 3).

Ṭūsī notes that some animals instantiate these functions at such a rudimentary level that they almost resemble plants:

> This station represents the peak of perfection in plants, the beginning of contiguity with the animal region. Beyond this degree are the degrees of animals, the first of which are adjacent to the region of plants: such are those animals which propagate like grass, […] appearing in one season of the year and vanishing in the opposite season. Their superiority over plants is in the measure of their capacity for voluntary motion and for sensation, to the end that they may search for the wholesome and attract nourishment. (Ṭūsī 1981, 60 W 45)

Note that even the lowest ranked among animals are nobler than the highest among the plants just because they instantiate the characteristic functions of animality: perception and voluntary movement. Later, we will see why Ṭūsī treats the introduction of perception and voluntary movement as a qualitatively significant improvement over plant life.

As expected, Ṭūsī discusses some animals ranked in the middle. In general, animals can be more or less successful at registering, storing, recalling, and imaginative manipulation of information about their environment (i.e., have better "perception"), and at identifying and acquiring objects of their appetitive desires and avoiding objects of repulsion. Along these internal to animality dimensions, then, Ṭūsī identifies a ranking of animals.

And again, as expected, Ṭūsī introduces the highest ranks among animals by making a now familiar move of noting how these animals almost resemble a higher level of compound unity, namely humanity:

> The noblest of the species is that one whose sagacity and perception is such that it accepts discipline and instruction: thus there accrues to it the perfection not originally created in it. […] The greater this faculty grows in it, the more surpassing its rank, until a point is reached where the (mere) observation of action suffices as instruction: thus, when they see a thing, they perform the like of it by mimicry, without training or wearisome labor being expended upon them. This is the utmost of the animal degrees, and the first of the degrees of Man is contiguous therewith.[17] (Ṭūsī 1981, 61 W 45-46)

Hence, the highest ranked among animals are those who via perception can learn and acquire new functions that were not native to the species. Notably, here, Ṭūsī has turned his focus from the "quality" of forms that a being can instantiate to the range of forms they can acquire. Or at least, there is a change in emphasis: instead of focusing on the "nobility" of their forms, Ṭūsī emphasizes the fact that the higher animals widen the scope of forms that they can instantiate: i.e., they can acquire *new* forms. Hence, in a sense, it seems like although having "more" functions is not all that there is to the hierarchy, the widening of the scope of functions of a being is nevertheless relevant to its place in the hierarchy of species.

**4. Human compound unities.** As expected, the progression of perfections within (earthly) compound unities culminates with humanity. First, as we just saw, he notes the possibility of borderline cases where humanity and animality are contiguous. Ṭūsī's own examples are problematic.[18] But the underlying thought is still interesting. The highest among the animals, we just saw, are those who have the

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[17] Ṭūsī continues this passage with an abhorrent remark: "Such are the peoples dwelling on the fringes of the inhabited world, like the black people in the West and others, for the movements and actions of the likes of this type correspond to actions of animals" (Ṭūsī 1981, 61 W 45-46). He expresses similar attitudes toward women in Book 2 of *AN*. In this paper, I will not be dealing with these aspects of Ṭūsī's outlook. But it is worth noting that given the hierarchical nature of his perfectionism, given how the hierarchy is defined in terms of "natural capacities," and given the long history of oppressive conceptions of "natural capacities," a Tusian ethics might be especially vulnerable in reflecting its theorist's prejudices.

[18] See the previous footnote.

capacity to acquire new functions through "instruction", "discipline," and "mimicry." Here, he seems to have in mind a kind of learning that is guided and caused by external conditioning. Humanity, on the other hand, is a form of compound unity that is "nobler" because it can acquire new functions in a different manner, and make them bear on the organization of her life differently:

> Up to this limit, every ranking and discrepancy is necessitated by nature, but henceforth ranks of perfection or deficiency are determined according to will and reason. Thus, any person in whom these faculties are complete, and who can by use of organs and comprehension and deduction of what is given bring them from deficiency to a better perfection, enjoy a greater virtue and nobility than those in whom such notions are less developed. (Ṭūsī 1981, 62 W 42)

Thus, what is ennobling humanity is its capacity (1) to discover newer forms of perfection in a rational manner, and (2) to rationally organize one's life towards such perfections (i.e., to *will* them). These two functions correspond to the two aspects of human intellect: the theoretical and the practical rational faculties (Ṭūsī 1981, 69 W 51).

But we are not born with a perfected human intellect. This in turn will explain the intra-human hierarchy. On the lowest end, we can place children who have barely developed their intellect. Then, Ṭūsī identifies two intermediate degrees of intellectual perfection (Ṭūsī 1981, 62 W 46): First, there are those who use their intellect [*ʿaql*] and intuition [*ḥads*] to develop crafts and skills. Second, there are those who laboriously engage with science and develop virtues. In each case, both the theoretical and the practical intellect realize further potential. In either case (of developing skill or virtue), Ṭūsī notes that there are two steps in the realization of human perfection: first, theoretical acquisition of what is good and true, and second, practical realization of what one learns in the conduct of their life.

Now, like what we saw with other compound unities, the highest form of perfection of the human intellect results in a state that resembles a higher kind of being. For Ṭūsī, this state is characterized by (a) the theoretical intellect's immediate grasp of what is good and true, and (b) perfectly reliable dispositions, developed by the practical intellect, to act in accordance with what one knows to be good and true

(Ṭūsī 1981, 69 W 51). Ṭūsī's initial characterization of this highest degree of human perfection is certainly enigmatic:

> And when this stage is reached, it is the beginning of connection to the nobler world [*'aālam-e ashraf*], and arrival at the level of the sanctified angels, and abstract intellects and souls. And so to the limit, where is the abode of Unity, and there the circle of existence meets, like a curved line beginning from a point and returning to the same point. Then intermediaries are set aside, gradation and opposition cease, the beginning and the end become one, and nothing remains but the Reality of Realities, the Ultimate of Quests, which is Absolute Truth. (Ṭūsī 1981, 63 W 46)

Hence, the progression that started with material compound unities and went through vegetative and animal souls eventually comes to a resting point where human perfection would be reached. To be sure, Ṭūsī's account of human perfection in terms of a relation to "the Reality of Realities" is hard to digest. For one thing, one could worry that the appeal to this supernatural perfection thwarts the original naturalist aspirations of Ṭūsī's project to give an account of *natural* goodness.

I will return to discuss the above passage and try to make sense of its specific content later. But for now, I want to highlight the role that the passage plays in outlining Ṭūsī's general account. We can paraphrase the above passage by noting that, unlike the other stages of the progression of compound unities where one being's perfection was directed towards a relatively imperfect being, the perfection of human intellect is directed toward *absolute* perfection. In light of this, we can now outline Ṭūsī's account in its general form.

*d. Tusian Perfectionism*

On my reading, we can best understand the structure of Ṭūsī's account by attributing to him the following view:

> **Tusian Perfectionism**: what is good for a kind of compound unity $\boldsymbol{x}$ is determined by a regulative ideal to transform into another kind of compound unity $\boldsymbol{y}$ where $\boldsymbol{y}$ perfects what is fundamental, essential, and characteristic of $\boldsymbol{x}$.

In a slogan, to be good is to reach for a perfection that is just beyond one's purview. But why should we attribute this view to Ṭūsī?

My main reason for this attribution will come below by analyzing Ṭūsī's conception of the relationship between different forms of compound unities that I

described in the previous section. But before turning to that detailed analysis, I want to offer a piece of textual evidence from a later ethical treatise that is attributed to Ṭūsī, the *Qualities of the Nobles* [*Awṣāf al-ashrāf*]. Here, Ṭūsī comes close to explicitly formulating a similar structure for perfection as we are noting above. The passage is focused on the internal perfection of human beings, but the general point about the structure of *perfecting* nicely reflects what we have observed in the progression schema for inter-species cases above:

> And one must know: just as in motion where one station in a path always comes before one and after another until the last station is reached, each stage [of the path to perfection] is an intermediate between a preceding defect and a contemporaneous one, whereas the contemporaneous defect is the desired state from the standpoint of the previous defect, which when achieved characterizes deficiency of the current state. Therefore, reaching each state in relation to the previous stage is a perfection, and in relation to the next stage is a defect. (Ṭūsī 1994, 6)[19]

Put differently, Ṭūsī seems to think of perfection in two ways. First, there is the perfection of an imperfect being that is regulated by the ideal of a nobler but still imperfect type of being. As I will detail below, the point is not that vegetables *ought* to become animals, or that my cat *ought* to try to become a human being. Rather, animality represents how a vegetative life could be perfected if it could gain newer functions. Accordingly, we can evaluate the goodness of a particular vegetative life in light of this *regulative ideal*, i.e., an ideal that is postulated as unreachable and yet as fixing a point for orientation and direction.

But this relational notion of perfection between different imperfect perfections could go ad infinitum. For Ṭūsī, that is an untenable infinite regress. He argues that if all evaluative judgments of goodness are relative in relation to another state which is imperfect, then nothing is ultimately good.[20] He thus holds that at one point in the chain, the perfection of a "lower" being must be explained in terms of the

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[19] Translation is mine.

[20] Here, Ṭūsī adopts Miskawayh's view, which in turn, is a report of Porphyry's interpretation of Aristotle (Ṭūsī 1981, bks. 1, Ch. 7; Fakhry 1994, 133; Meisami 2019).

characteristic functions of an absolutely perfect being. There are, in other words, two kinds of normative relations:

> (**progressive**) how one imperfect being realizes the perfection of another, and
>
> (**final**) how a perfect being realizes the perfection of the series of imperfect beings.

Insofar as we reflect on the relationship between different imperfect beings, the schema of Tusian perfectionism (as stated above) applies. But surely, we will need to think about an absolutely perfect being in different terms. In what follows, first, I will show how this general schema of Tusian Perfectionism can explain the relations we saw in the chain from non-living compound unities to humanity. I will then return to discuss the mysterious category of an absolutely perfect being and how it relates to the rest of the series.

In the first step we saw in section 2.c., Ṭūsī identifies what is fundamental, essential, and characteristic of non-living compound unities as the capacity to instantiate a distinctive function or form in a stable manner. In other words, what makes a non-living material compound a distinctive compound unity is that it can sustain a form or function by virtue of its equilibrium. Now, according to Tusian Perfectionism, to make sense of the internal ranking of non-living compound unities, we should look at its relation to vegetative functions. In what sense are the vegetative functions a perfection of what is essential and characteristic of non-living compound unities?

The vegetative functions, I suggest, are a perfection of the non-living compound unities insofar as they sustain the noble forms that they instantiate by virtue of their own *activities*. Of course, that does not mean a plant's activities suffice for its sustenance. After all, vegetative activities introduce new dependencies: a flower needs food, bees to disperse its seeds, and sunshine and space to grow. The active self-sustenance of living things does not mark independence from other things. Rather, it marks the emergence of a "self,"[21] surely only in a very thin sense, i.e., as unified living compound that *has* needs and interests. Put differently: the vegetative

[21] The ambiguity between "self" and "soul" that the Persian/Arabic term "*nafs*" gives us is useful in this context. For discussion, see Faruque (2024).

functions represent the perfection of sustaining noble forms in that they represent the idea of sustaining *one's own* noble forms. Accordingly, the intra-hierarchy of non-living compound unities is a hierarchy directed towards the ideal of becoming an object that sustains a noble form through its own activities, i.e., through the activities of nutrition, growth, and reproduction.

In short, Ṭūsī suggests that what is essential and characteristic of the vegetative soul is the perfection of what is essential and characteristic of non-living compound unities. But, as we saw, he also holds that different kinds of vegetative souls have 'nobler' and less noble instantiations of growth, reproduction, and nutrition. How do we make sense of this next ranking, then?

Again, we should answer this by asking a question about the next regulative ideal: In what sense, the animal functions (perception and voluntary movement) are a perfection of what is essential and characteristic of the vegetative compound unities? Recall how in the date-palm tree passage, Ṭūsī noted that the date-palm is *almost* an animal because (1) it can *almost* register information about its environment and discern what is good or bad for it, and (2) it falls short of the nobility of animals because it lacks the capacity "to tear itself loose from the soil and to move away in quest of nourishment" (Ṭūsī 1981, 60 W 44). I read Ṭūsī as suggesting that the vegetative functions of nutrition, growth, and reproduction would be (in principle) perfected if they were regulated by the capacity to discern what is beneficial and what is harmful in the environment (i.e., perception), and the capacity to pursue what the power of discernment identifies as beneficial and avoid what it identifies as harmful (i.e., voluntary movement). So, in that sense, the essential and characteristic functions of animality are those which would perfect the basic vegetative functions.

Again, following the schema of Tusian-Perfectionism, we should expect an internal hierarchy of animals. To make sense of this internal hierarchy, we must think about its external relation to the next regulative ideal: In what sense are the human functions (theoretical and practical reason) a perfection of what is essential and characteristic of the animal compound unities?

On Ṭūsī's account, it is good for a compound unity to perceive the environment and discern between what appears beneficial to it and what appears harmful, but of course, it would be much better to do so rationally. And it is good for a

compound unity to pursue objects of its desire and avoid objects of repulsion, but of course, it would be much better to do so rationally. Hence, what is characteristic and essential of humanity (i.e., theoretical reason to understand what we perceive and practical reason to guide and manage our voluntary movements in light of what theoretical reason teaches us) is the perfection of what is characteristic and essential to animality (i.e., perception and self-movement).

Note again: when Ṭūsī states that, e.g., a horse is "more perfected" than an oak tree, it would be bizarre to read him as suggesting that the oak tree ought actually to transform into a horse. Rather, transforming into a horse is a regulative ideal for the oak tree such that we can say the following. The more the organization of the oak tree's life approximates the organization *it would have* if it were capable of perception and self-movement, the better it would be doing. For instance, consider an oak tree whose branches extend towards the part of the garden that receives more sun. Although it is not by virtue of perception and self-movement that the tree gets to this state, we could say that in this case, the oak tree approximates more closely how it would place itself if it had the capacity to perceive and move itself.

*e. Applying Tusian Perfectionism to Humans*

How about humanity? Should we apply the same schema as we did with non-living compounds, plants, and animals?

Here, the answer is complicated. So far, we have dealt with imperfect beings whose essential and characteristic functions would be perfected by another kind of imperfect being. But we have now reached a special kind of imperfect being. On Ṭūsī's account, the perfection of what is essential and characteristic of humanity is (in a yet-to-be-specified sense) absolute perfection. As we saw above, Ṭūsī identifies this absolute perfection with divine beings: angels, the intellects, the cosmos, and God Itself. Can we better understand Ṭūsī's view on human perfection if we focus on these supernatural beings and what they (purportedly) realize?

Of course, Ṭūsī's view could be interpreted in light of his religious and metaphysical commitments. However, as I will argue, for the purposes of understanding Ṭūsī's perfectionist theory, we can outline his view in abstraction from these

background theistic and religious themes as well.[22] Whatever details one may give about the nature of Ṭūsī's characterization of "the Reality of Realities" or similar concepts,[23] it is clear that, at minimum, and in the context of his practical philosophy, it characterizes "absolute perfection" which stands at the end of the hierarchy of perfections. Thus, take "absolute perfection" as the placeholder for whatever it is that stands at the end of the hierarchy of perfections (a notion that could be realized by divine beings like God, or a notion that could be taken as a theoretical ideal construct). Whatever the metaphysics of absolute perfection may be, we can still ask: What is it about humanity as a finite being (as opposed to, for instance, animals) that explains that its perfection could be construed in terms of absolute perfection?

Ṭūsī returns to this theme in Chapter 6 of Book 1, and I propose that his account in this section is more informative. Here, he presents the idea of divine perfection in terms of unifying perfected theoretical and practical faculties. He begins by noting that human perfection has two distinct dimensions because the human intellect has two distinct functions: "the Theoretical Faculty and the Practical Faculty" (Ṭūsī 1981, 69 W 51). He analyzes the perfection of theoretical faculty in isolation from the practical faculty:

> The perfection of the Theoretical Faculty lies in its yearning towards the perception of all the sorts of knowledge and the acquisition of the sciences, so that […] it may gain […] comprehension of the ranks of existent beings and an awareness of their realities; next […] it should be ennobled by knowledge of the True Quest and the Universal Goal, wherein all existent beings culminate, thus to arrive at the […] Abode of Unity itself. […] (Ṭūsī 1981, 69 W 51).

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[22] I take these to be complimentary projects: (1) an understanding of Ṭūsī's practical philosophy in light of his intellectual milieu, and his religious and metaphysical commitments; (2) an understanding of Ṭūsī's practical philosophy in abstraction from those contexts. The latter project is of course more relevant to the purposes of rational reconstruction.

[23] Other similar concepts that Ṭūsī invokes in this context include "Absolute Truth," "Absolute Man," and "Man as a Microcosm." All these notions invoke religious and philosophical themes from Ismailism and Sufism (Mohamed 2001, 120; Nokso-Koivisto, 2014, esp. 72-78).

Note how he identifies the perfection of theoretical reason in terms of knowledge of ordinary theoretical facts but also knowledge of the evaluative hierarchy of beings. In other words, in his view, the perfection of theoretical knowledge includes knowing full well what is the case and what is good in the universe.

However, it is one thing to have theoretical knowledge of the good and another thing to make that knowledge the determining principle for the organization of life. The perfection of the practical faculty, he notes, consists in organizing different aspects of life (at the individual, household, and political levels) in such a way that the appropriate relationship among different parts of life is maintained through reliable dispositions (Ṭūsī 1981, 70 W 52). Indeed, by supplementing Miskawayh's *Refinement* with Books 2 and 3 of the *AN*, Ṭūsī tries to show that in addition to perfecting the organization of one's soul, human perfection also requires the perfect organization of one's interpersonal and social relations. For instance, in the first chapter of Book 2, he identifies Household Philosophy *[ḥikmat-e manāzil]* as a proper part of "philosophical ethics" by arguing that perfecting the organization of household relations is needed for "every person of the species, whether a king or a subject, a superior or an inferior" (Ṭūsī 1981, 207 W 154-155). Likewise, in the first chapter of Book 3, he argues that politics is a proper part of philosophical ethics by noting that "in attaining perfection," human beings need one another, "and since that is the case," he adds, "the perfection and completion of each person depends on the other individuals of the species" (Ṭūsī 1981, 255 W 193).

In short, Ṭūsī explicitly characterizes "complete" human perfection in terms that go beyond mere theoretical or intellectual perfection.[24] In this sense, the perfection of practical faculty can be characterized as its unification with a perfect theoretical faculty. The former is perfected when it organizes life in accordance with what the latter evaluates as good. In the ideal case, the two faculties unify and become one:

> So the First Perfection [viz. theoretical intellect's perfection] is connected with speculation, and is (as it were) the form, while the Second Perfection [viz. practical intellect's perfection] can be regarded as matter. Just as form

[24] This is beyond the scope of this paper, but arguably, this aspect of Ṭūsī's thought shows a sharp turn away from the intellectualism of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā (Mattila 2022).

> without matter, or matter without form, can possess no stability or permanence, so theory without practice is abortive, and practice without theory absurd. Theory is the starting point and practice the conclusion. The perfection which is composed of both, is that which we have called the 'purpose of Man's existence'. […] (Ṭūsī 1981, 70 W 52).

We were asking: In what sense, do the divine functions of angels and the intellects (or even God Itself) represent a perfection of what is essential and characteristic of humanity? For Ṭūsī, the "absolutely perfect being" that represents our perfection is one whose intellect is fully unified and perfected: it knows all the good, and it organizes its parts in accordance with what it knows. This provisional answer is somewhat more informative, but there is a more interesting and informative answer that follows this.

In a later part of Chapter 6 of Book 1, Ṭūsī formulates the notion of human perfection in terms of the cosmos. According to this formulation, a perfect person would, in some sense, resemble the cosmos. He writes:

> When Man reaches this degree, [1] so that he becomes aware of the ranks of generables universally, then are realized in him, in one way or another, the infinite particulars subsumed under the universals; [2] and when practice becomes his familiar, so that his operations and acts are realized in accordance with acceptable faculties and habits, [3] he becomes a world unto himself, comparable to this macrocosm, and merits to be called a 'microcosm'. Thus he becomes Almighty God's vice-gerent among His creatures, entering among His particular Saints, and standing as a Complete and Absolute Man. (Ṭūsī 1981, 70 W 52; bracketed numbers are mine).

In [1], Ṭūsī identifies the perfection of the theoretical intellect, and in [2], he identifies that of the practical intellect. Then, in [3], he notes how such a perfected human being is *almost* like God's cosmos. [25] In simple terms, the analogy is meant to exploit the assumption that the cosmos, as a whole, is the result of the unity of divine wisdom and divine action. However, I will now argue that the characterization of "absolute perfection" in terms of God's cosmos is, in fact, subtler than that.

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[25] The passage reflects Avicenna (2005, bk. 9. Ch. 7. Para. 11). In Book 1 Sec. 2 Ch. 7 of the *AN*, Ṭūsī expands the analogy between divine creation and perfect human action further. In this historical context, the idea that the cosmos serves as an ideal for humanity is especially associated with Ikhwān Al-Ṣafā (9$^{th}$ and 10$^{th}$ centuries).

A basic tenet of Aristotelian naturalism in ethics is that *defects* are either due to external impediments or internal disorganization (Foot 2001, 75–76). For instance, a horse does well insofar as it acts according to its own proper nature, and it becomes defective either because something from outside causes problems or because the functioning of the internal parts of the animal conflict. But if so, then it is easier to see the sense in which the cosmos could be taken as standing for absolute perfection. After all, there are no external objects that could be impediments to the working of the cosmos. And arguably, since all organisms that are part of the cosmos are governed by its laws unexceptionally, there are also no internal defects in the cosmos. To channel Hegel, for the cosmos, what is actual is rational, and what is rational is actual. Thus, the cosmos is a regulative ideal for us in that it is a compound unity that necessarily functions according to its own proper nature.

However, we need to complicate our story a little more if we want to employ it to explain Ṭūsī's postulation of the cosmos as our ideal. That is so because on Ṭūsī's account, a horse that functions according to its proper nature is functioning *well,* though it is not *perfect.* For him, the horse that is doing well *approximates* humanity, which relative to the horse is a regulative ideal, viz. an ideal that is never realizable for the horse. But, as indicated above, it is one thing to approximate an ideal state *well*, and another thing to actually transform into that ideal state. Thus, in Ṭūsī's account, all we can say about the cosmos is that it functions *well* in approximating absolute perfection (God), but it is not identical with it. Thus, for Ṭūsī, the cosmos can function as a regulative ideal for us, but it should not be taken as identical with the ultimate ideal, i.e., absolute perfection itself. Put differently, for Ṭūsī, what we are to animals, the cosmos is to us. We ought to act *as if* we are transforming to the cosmos, i.e., as something that *approximates* absolute perfection.[26]

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[26] The unattainability of the actual ideal of absolute perfection is present in Ṭūsī's other writings as well. For instance, in his Sufi ethical writing, the *Qualities of the Nobles,* he argues against the view that a perfected Sufi saint unifies with God in the sense of "becoming one" with Him. Rather, he notes, the state of unification is that of "seeing" none other than God, i.e., the state of being aware of God and nothing else, including oneself, the act of seeing, etc. (Ṭūsī 1994, 95)

In short, we noted that in the last stage of his hierarchical account of perfection, Ṭūsī finds the need to stop the regress by postulating a relation between an imperfect compound unity and a perfect being. To be sure, Ṭūsī would be happy to identify this perfect being with God. However, even if we were to assume the religious premise, it would still be difficult to explain: (1) In what sense does, e.g., the idea of "the Reality of Realities" or "the Ultimate of Quests" represent the perfection of humanity? (2) Why the progression from imperfect compound unities to other imperfect compound unities must stop with humanity?[27]

But by looking at Chapter 6 of Book 1, I suggested that we can extract a more informative answer from Ṭūsī. In this context, the cosmos functions as our regulative ideal: the idea of a being that necessarily functions according to its proper nature, is not impeded by external obstacles, and has no internal disorganization. This ideal being approximates absolute perfection well. Further, I noted that this ideal could be formulated as the ideal of unifying a complete theoretical and practical intellect. In turn, this latter formulation explains why humanity is at the end of the chain of imperfect beings. The ever-present division between our theoretical and practical intellects is indeed a fundamental defect. But this is also the feature that relates us directly to the regulative ideal of approximating absolute perfection. Hence, in Ṭūsī's account, the truth of Humanism is *explained* by humanity's special place in the hierarchy of beings. We are not just a species among species of life. Rather, in virtue of our capacity to know via theoretical reason and organize our lives via practical reason, we are regulated by the idea of absolute perfection. In this sense, Ṭūsī does not merely assume the truth of Humanism. He also tries to explain it by noting the special way in which the capacity for reason orients us toward the ideal of absolute perfection.

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[27] In Book IV of his commentary on Avicenna's *Ishārāt* (Ṭūsī 1957), Ṭūsī gives a further reason as to why humanity and divinity are in a different *kind* of relation to the good compared to other compound unities. The underlying thought seems to be that humanity and divinity can act for the sake of good, while other creatures can only act in conformity with the good. Ṭūsī discusses this idea briefly in the *AN* (Book 1, Sec. 2, Ch. 6). For a somewhat different reading of Book IV of Ṭūsī's commentary on the *Ishārāt* see McGinnis (2019).

## 3. Conclusion

My proposed reading of Tusian Perfectionism in the *AN* can accommodate and justify the Humanist intuition. Moreover, it enjoys many advantages of the Aristotelian ethics. It is at least partially a naturalist theory in that it offers us an informative conception of natural goodness across different forms of compound unities in nature. Moreover, Ṭūsī's uniquely interrelated conception of perfectionism is interestingly different from other kinds of Aristotelian accounts because it builds in a feature to make sense of inter-species evaluative comparisons even if we were just focusing on non-human life forms.

However, since Tusian-Perfectionism defines the perfection of one species in relation to a "higher" species, it faces a threat of infinite regress. To block the regress, Ṭūsī posits an absolutely perfect being whose characteristic and essential functions represent the perfection of all other relative perfections. But, firstly, it is difficult to even describe this absolutely perfect being. Second, even if we succeed in describing this type of being, it is difficult to see it as part of nature.

To be sure, as a religious philosopher, Ṭūsī is happy to identify the absolutely perfect being with a supernatural God. A reader who is content with a form of ethical perfectionist naturalism that depends on religious premises would not see a problem here. However, for other readers, I highlighted some textual evidence where Ṭūsī seems to think that the absolutely perfect being can be a regulative ideal for us if we treat the cosmos as the natural object that can *stand for* absolute perfection. It can do so because it *necessarily* works according to its own nature.

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