

# Wisdom and Ethics

*The Art of Fashioning Oneself*

by

Masoud Karimi-Ghartemani

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Based on

## **The Nāsserī Ethics**

a Classic Persian Treatise by

Khājah **Nasīr ad-Dīn Tūsī** (13<sup>th</sup> Century AD)

Summary and Notes in English by

**Masoud Karimi**

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# Preface

The classic literature in the Persian language (Farsi) is rich and enormous, both in poetry<sup>1</sup> and prose<sup>2</sup>. Most theological and philosophical literature written by Persian scholars is in the Arabic language<sup>3</sup>. Those on ethics and wisdom are in both Arabic and Farsi<sup>4</sup>. They constitute a magnificent yet humble treasure that answers the questions of mankind; those that are perennial but unfold differently due to human conditions. Unlocking that treasure, however, needs some effort on the part of the seeker.

This book aims to exhibit in the English language some pearls from one of these treasures called “The Nāsserī Ethics,” by a highly regarded polymath of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Khājah Nasīr ad-Din Tūsī. The scope of this prose treatise is “wisdom and ethics” (also called “applied wisdom”); it addresses the human attitudes and behaviors, thus engaging both intellectual and moral dimensions.

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<sup>1</sup> Such as the Mathnavi and Shams Collection (of Jalāl ad-Din Rūmī), Poem Collection (of Sanāei), Language of the Birds (by Attār), Book of the Kings (by Ferdowsī), Five Treasures (by Nizāmī), Poem Collection (of Hāfez), The Rose Garden (of Sa’dī), The Garden of Secret (by Shabistārī), The Quadruples (of Umar Khayyām), Poem Collection (of Nāsser Khosrow), Poem Collection (of Khājooye Kermānī), Poem Collection (of Shāh Nematullāh Valī), Seven Thrones (of Abdurrahmān Jāmī) and many others.

<sup>2</sup> Such as The Garden (of Sa’dī), The Alchemy of Happiness (by Ghazālī), The Letters (or The Perfect Man) (by Nasafī), The Hagiography of Saints (by Attār), and The Writings (of Abdullah Ansārī, Shams Tabrīzī, Kharaghānī, etc.) and many more.

<sup>3</sup> Such as those by Ibn-Sīnā, Ghazālī, Nasīr ad-Din Tūsī, Mollā Sadrā, and others.

<sup>4</sup> Such as those by Ibn-Miskawayh, Rāqib Isfahānī, Nasīr ad-Din Tūsī, Narāqī’s, and others.

It is written in a rigorous style with a universal exposition. Therefore, it is as applicable today as it has been for many past centuries. We published a summary of this book in Farsi<sup>5</sup> and another with added explanations.<sup>6</sup> An English version is now presented. In addition to summarizing and presenting the text in English, we have added explanatory footnotes and notes in the body using ♣...♣ signs. We tried not to exclude any major topic, but we substantially reduced the philosophical and technical discussions and explanations.<sup>7</sup>

The Khājah Tūsī's book is divided into three chapters, respectively, on the wisdom and ethics at the individual, family, and society levels. The individual level, the book's largest chapter, teaches the topic as it concerns an individual human being. The second part explains it for an individual as a member of a family. The last part expounds it for an individual placed within settings larger than a home, such as a community or a society. We divided these chapters

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<sup>5</sup> *"Wisdom and Ethics: Individual, Family, Social"*, Summary and Rewrite from "The Nāsserī Ethics" of Khājah Nasīr ad-Dīn Tūsī, by Masoud Karimi, *The House of Wisdom, Isfahan, Iran*, 2023, 136 pages, ISBN: 0978-622-92987-4-9.

<sup>6</sup> *"Know yourself Grow yourself, Wisdom and Ethics: Individual, Collective"*, Summary and Rewrite from "The Nāsserī Ethics" of Khājah Nasīr ad-Dīn Tūsī, by Masoud Karimi, *The Ghāem Books, Qom, Iran*, 2025, 200 pages, ISBN: 0978-662-6621-50-2.

<sup>7</sup> The English translation "The Nasirean Ethics" by Mr. G. M. Wickens, published by Routledge in 1964 is a solid and comprehensive translation (except for some choices of words and a few minor mistakes in translation). It is the choice for any in-depth and academic reading. However, it suffers from a similar problem that the original Persian version does: lack of accessibility for general readers of today. Our short version, therefore, features 1) a significant reduction of detailed philosophical discussions, 2) addition of clarifying notes (distinct from the text), and 3) a more contemporary presentation style (with bullets and diagrams), without excluding any central topic from the original text.

into two parts, i.e., the individual and collective, the latter including both the family and society.

Khājah Nasīr ad-Din Tūsī writes the first part mainly based on an Arabic text called “The Book of Purity, on the Edification of Characters” by Ibn-Miskawayh. He then adds two other sections on the second and third branches of applied wisdom. Khājah Nasīr describes clearly the faculties of the human soul and systematically derives the chart of virtues as the perfections of those faculties. He then proceeds to establish correct intellectual foundations and ethical characters that produce and govern correct interactions at the family and society levels.

These three branches of applied wisdom address the questions and challenges that human beings always face. They are based on this two-sided key principle: 1) The human soul “grows” on (or “develops” or “fashions itself” by) “knowledge and action”, and 2) it has no duty more important and no aim nobler than this “self-development”. At every stage of life, the human soul is “identified with” its knowledge and deeds. “The soul is all it knows”, a famous saying tells. Knowledge shapes the soul from inward and deeds from outward.

Thus, human being is on a path of “fashioning the soul” whose goal is “perfection” resulting in happiness and felicity, a true felicity that would cross the boundaries of time and never diminish. The first step on this path is the “purification” of thoughts, actions, and sentiments from wrong, bad, and disagreeable effects which are either inherited, imposed, or willfully adopted. The second step is the “acquisition” of beneficial knowledge and good habits. The third step is “assimilation” and

cultivation of those knowledge and habits in the soul to turn them into its second nature. Such a soul earns its everlasting life in peace and bliss.

In this regard, discerning correct attitudes (discerning between right and wrong, good and bad, beautiful and disagreeable) and learning the right ways of doing form a science and discipline which is called Wisdom and Ethics, Applied Wisdom, Purification, Self-Development, and so on. In Arabic, it is called *Hikmah* and *Tazkiyah* (respectively emphasizing the knowledge and action components). Its all-embracing definition does not allow a single term to convey all its meaning and scope.

Khājah Nasīr states and emphasizes that the principles of applied wisdom are independent of the conditions of time, place, people, language, religion, etc. Their details and explanations, however, may depend on such conditions. Divine Law reiterates and presents them and determines their ways of implementation in the best form, proper to the conditions and state of its audience. As such, the practical benefits of this science and discipline are all-embracing. Its goal is to achieve the perfection proper to the human being that leads to true happiness and felicity at the individual and collective levels. This is what essentially every human being aspires to, knowingly or unknowingly.

I am grateful for being able to do this work. My cordial thanks go to my teachers and parents who instilled in me an interest in essential aspects of life. I thank my friends, especially Dr. Asghar Goli and Dr. Mohammad Sepehrifar, for their encouragement and support; my wife, Mahboubeh, for encouraging and facilitating; and my son, Yusof (who was the initial reason for exploring the

original text), for his help in editing the English text. Our goal has been to make this book available and accessible to general English readers. We hope that it helps to attain the intended objectives of this wisdom for many. “Ultimate gratitude and praise are due to the Wise and Generous Lord of the world.”

Masoud Karimi

Spring 2026, Starkville, Mississippi, USA

Remark 1: This translation is based on “The Nāsserī Ethics, (in Farsi), edited by Mojtabā Minovi and Alirezā Heidari, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition, ISBN 946-487-067-5, Khāwrazmi Publications, Tehran, 2012”.

Remark 2: In Farsi, the male and female pronouns are not distinct. In this book, we have also tried to follow this, to a certain possible extent.

# Short Biography of Khājah Nasīr ad-Din Tūsī

The Khājah's family was from Jahrood (a suburb of Sāveh), but they moved to Tūs (in Khorāsān).<sup>1</sup> He was born at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and was named Mohammad. As he grew and started shining, he became known as Khājah Nasīr ad-Din Tūsī.<sup>2</sup> His father was a scholar and, together with family and local teachers, taught him the preliminary sciences. Upon observing his extraordinary genius and steadfastness to learning, they facilitated his travel to the known centers of science such as Neishābūr, Qom, Isfahān, and Baghdād, where he learned from their scholars.

Khājah accepted the Quhestān's ruler's invitation (named Nāsser<sup>3</sup> ad-Din) and started his scholarly career there. He wrote "The

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<sup>1</sup> Tūs is the home of several remarkable personages. Among them, four are globally well-known: Hakīm Ferdowsī (940-1020 AD, great poet who revived and preserved the Farsi language), Shaykh Tūsī (995-1067 AD, pioneer founding scholar of the Ja'fari school of jurisprudence), Imam Al-Ghazālī (1056-1111 AD, prominent theologian, jurisprudent, and Sufi), and Khājah Nasīr ad-Din Tūsī (1201-1274 AD, distinguished sage polymath).

<sup>2</sup> The word "Khājah" (خواجه) has been used as an honorific title to indicate personal greatness and mastery, especially as a teacher of wisdom as well as ministry and ruling. It is used less in later periods and has diminished in its significance of meaning. However, it is still very common to address Khājah Nasīr ad-Din Tūsī simply as Khājah among the scholarly circles in Persia. Khājah Nasīr and Khājah Tūsī are also used to refer to him. "Khājah of the World" is used for the holy Prophet.

<sup>3</sup> Nasīr (نصیر) and Nāsser (ناصر) are two different words, although both are from the same Arabic root ("n-s-r", "ن-ص-ر"). They are here referring to two

Nāsserī Ethics” when he was about 35 years old at his request. He authored many books, protected books and resources, built libraries, trained scholars, invented astronomical tools<sup>4</sup>, and established institutes.<sup>5</sup> His books cover diverse areas such as theology, ethics, philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, poetry, logic, hadith<sup>6</sup>, and so on.

Khājah was staying at the Alamut Fortress when the Mongol army under the command of Hulagu invaded the area. Khājah played a major role in the peaceful surrender of the fortress and the prevention of the destruction of its precious resources. Hulagu found great respect for Khājah and consulted him in subsequent military expeditions, including the one that ended the Abbāsīd caliphate centered in Baghdād. This caliphate is said to have been undergoing heavy corruption and civil conflicts. In these expeditions, Khājah and several other scholars greatly helped in reducing the harms inflicted by war. Hulagu appointed Khājah as his minister and assigned a portion of his budget to scientific matters. Khājah received Hulagu’s approval and funding for building the Marāgheh Observatory, hiring its staff, building tools

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different persons, i.e., the Khājah and the Quhestān’s ruler, respectively. Quhestān was a large region in the south of current day Khorāsān including many townships, but it is currently a small town.

<sup>4</sup> Anniversary of his birthday is celebrated as “Engineer’s Day” in modern Iran, and one of the major universities in Tehran is named after him. A lunar crater of the moon is named after him as “Nasireddin” and a minor planet “10269 Tusi” is named after him.

<sup>5</sup> The famous scholar, traditional sociologist, and historian Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406 AD) considered Khājah Nasīr ad-Dīn Tūsī the greatest of Persian scholars.

<sup>6</sup> Hadith (“tradition”) is the science of sayings and conduct of the Prophet of Islam.

and astronomical instruments, and establishing a unique library in it. It became a central institute that attracted students and scholars from around the world.<sup>7</sup>

Khājah Nasīr is also known as “The Tūsī Researcher (Scholar)” due to his solid and rigorous approach to every topic he dealt with within a very diverse field. His life and the narrative of many recorded incidents, as well as the exceptional respect of many known great scholars of his time and after towards him, serve as clear indications that he had represented and realized the wisdom that he expounds in “The Nāsserī Ethics”.<sup>8</sup>

Khājah died in a mission while traveling in Baghdād at the age of about seventy-five years old. Based on his request, his body was buried in Kāzemiah (or Kāzemain) (a township close to Baghdād) beside the honored tombs of Imam Mūsā al-Kādhim (son of Imam Ja’far as-Sādigh) and his grandson, Imam Muhammad al-Jawād. His funeral procession was held with the utmost respect and was attended by a large crowd of people and scholars. His scholarly, solid writings have benefited untold number of souls (including scholars and otherwise) for over eight centuries and are still highly respected among those who can understand them and gauge their importance. May Allāh elevate his degree and have Peace and

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<sup>7</sup> This was not a mere observatory but an institution more like the Plato’s Academy, where the intermediary disciplines and sciences such as mathematics, astronomy, music, and so on, were taught in view and towards the perfection of the human soul.

<sup>8</sup> Turning the commanders of war and destruction, like Hulagu and many other Mongol leaders, into the supporters of knowledge and culture, many of whom gradually also became scholars in religion and spirituality, is another clear testimony to the greatness of Khājah and his peers and the effectiveness of their teachings and approach.

Mercy upon his soul. May we succeed in understanding the wisdom and cultivating the virtues he was promoting.

## In the Name of Allāh, The Clement, The Merciful

Ultimate and unlimited praise is due to God who, when bringing the truths into existence, worked the dough of the human for forty days so it became ready to carry the “Trust”.<sup>1</sup> The human, then, works it with *knowledge* and *action*, and takes it step by step and degree by degree to finally return it to its origin and complete the secret of the “Hidden Treasure”.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This refers to a Qudsī hadīth where Allāh says, *“I worked (fermented) the dough of human with my two hands for forty mornings.”*

A Qudsī (Holy) hadīth is a saying of the Prophet that is told by the Divine, but it is not part of the Koran. It should be noted that the Qudsī ahādīth (plural of hadīth) must be understood as primarily referring to subtle meanings in a symbolic language and should not be taken literally. For instance, “ferment”, “forty”, and “two hands” in this hadīth are interpreted as referring, symbolically, to the Divine “instituting” the “totality” of “complementary” qualities in the human.

<sup>2</sup> Referring to a Qudsī hadīth in which Allāh says, *“I was a ‘Hidden Treasure’, loved to be known, thus I created the creation (human) so I can be known”.*

The crown of creation is the human who is given the capacity to “know” the Divine from the place of the world. Ultimately, this “knowing” will engage all human faculties, including deeds and feelings. It is also called to “love” God, which primarily addresses feelings but goes beyond it. *“Love God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, all your strength”* (Gospel of Mark 12:30). It is also called to “serve” (or to “follow the ways of”) God, which concerns action but goes beyond it because fully serving God will engage all human faculties. *“I did not create the Jinn and the Human except to serve me”* (Holy Koran 51:56).

The human vocation may thus be called “to know”, “to love” or “to serve” God. All three will amount to the same thing with differences of accentuation on a faculty or a point of departure. They form a triangle and accompany each other, but a perspective may choose to place one of them at the triangle’s apex different from another perspective.

And the peace and blessings of Allāh be upon the master of leaders, Prophet Mohammad, and his noble family and companions, whose light of guidance liberates from darkness.

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In this regard, it may be said that each of the three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) adopts one of these perspectives or paths (i.e., Obedience, Love, and Knowledge) as its point of departure (and initial force) before engaging others. The confessional sectors within religions (such as Sunnī and Shī'a) may also be regarded in this way (Sunnī: Knowledge, Obedience, Love), (Shī'a: Knowledge, Love, Obedience).

# The Reasons for Writing and Naming this Book

During my stay in Quhestān, there was a conversation about “The Book of Purity, on the Edification of Characters” by Ibn-Miskawayh<sup>1</sup> in the presence of its leader, his excellency Nāsser ad-Din who asked me to translate this book from Arabic into Farsi. I indicated that it would be unfair to “remove such fine garments well put on such noble meanings”. Moreover, although that book covered the most important subjects of wisdom at individual level, it did not directly address the family and social branches of wisdom and ethics. Renewing these two areas would also be very urgent for our time. Therefore, instead of a translation, it would be more fitting to take a summary of that book and add the two other branches of applied wisdom as well.

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<sup>1</sup> Muskūyeh (or Mushkūyeh) was a town south of Ray (a suburb of modern day Tehrān) wherein he was born in 932 AD. He then moved to Isfahān, where he spent most of his life, and died in 1030 AD. He became a prominent scholar, historian, and philosopher. The mentioned book has always been well-known and used by scholars of ethics after him. In wisdom and ethics, Ibn-Miskawayh took the principles of the schools of Plato and Aristotle. One central teaching of this school is that the human soul has three main faculties: *Intelligence*, *Will*, and *Sentiment (Feeling)*, whose perfections lead to the virtues of *Wisdom*, *Courage*, and *Temperance*. The fourth virtue, *Justice*, is the result of equilibrium between these, or it may be defined as the perfection of the Applied Intelligence while Wisdom is that of the Abstract Intelligence. Another important book of Ibn-Miskawayh is “The Perennial Wisdom” --- written in Arabic --- which includes quotations and explanations of Wisdom from different peoples, including Persians, Indians, Arabs, and Greco-Romans.

When I presented this, he welcomed and admired it. Even though I did not deem myself fit to do this task, due to his great insistence, I started it, and it was finished by the grace of God. Due to his excellency, may Allāh have mercy on his soul, being the initial cause for writing it, we named the book “The Nāsserī Ethics”.

# Introduction: Wisdom and Its Branches

Wisdom is to know things as they are and to do acts as they should, to the human being's capacity, to approach the perfection of this being. Therefore, Wisdom comprises both Knowledge and Action, and the Wise have both, and this is an invaluable thing to have.

♣ The word "Wisdom" in Arabic (*Hikmah*, حِكْمَة) is from the root "h-k-m" (ح-ك-م) that conveys meanings "to rule", "to judge", "to discern", and "firm and solid". To rule and judge correctly and firmly requires knowledge and action. Thus, wisdom (*hikmah*) naturally includes both "knowledge" and "realization".

This definition for *Hikmah* is all-embracing, and it has been said that no one can truly satisfy it. In Holy Koran, the epithet *Hakīm* (owner of *Hikmah*) is not used for any person; some elects "have been given from *Hikmah*" without being *Hakīm*. However, in the writings in this field, this title is honorifically given to great people of wisdom. This is not unrelated to the fact that in ancient Greek, this discipline is called "Philosophia" (φιλοσοφία) (love of wisdom) and a person of wisdom is called a "Philosopher" (lover of wisdom) not a "Sophist".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It has been said (by Al-Biruni among others) that the word Sufi is related to Sophia which indicates that it is meant to be a path of wisdom within Islamic framework. This explanation about *Hikmah* and Philosophy also explains why this path is called *Tasawwuf* (تَصَوُّف), an Arabic derivation which indicates a state of "working towards" and "behaving like" rather than "being" a Sufi, and why the genuine people of this path do not call themselves Sufi but rather "the people of *Tasawwuf*". The word 'Irfān (إِرْفَان) is also used among some Muslim circles, and the person who has achieved it is called 'Araf (عَارِف). The root word 'Arafa (عَرَفَ) is "to gain knowledge" and is used only for human. Thus, it avoids the shortcoming that *Hakīm* and Sufi have in this regard. *Irfān*

*Knowledge* and *Action* are rooted in the fundamental poles of *Consciousness* and *Being*. *Love* or *Sentiment* (or *Feeling*) may be added as a third element, or it may be integrated into *Action*. ♣

“Things” are divided into two groups as follows.<sup>2</sup>

Group (A): Things that are independent of the human’s influence.

Group (B): Things that fall under the human’s influence.

Accordingly, the wisdom that corresponds to the first group is called Abstract Wisdom and the one corresponding to the second group is called Applied Wisdom.<sup>3</sup>

The things of Group (A) are in two subgroups as follows.

(A-I): Things that materiality is not a required condition for their being.

(A-II): Things that cannot exist without matter.

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is also commonly divided into Abstract and Applied to emphasize its important aspects. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the term *Hikmah Mota’āliyah* (حكمة متعالية --- “Supreme Wisdom”) has also been used lately to restore to it (or to reemphasize) its higher levels through vision (شهود).

<sup>2</sup> Since the definition of Wisdom concerns “things” (objects of knowledge and action), a classification of “things” will lead to understanding the divisions of Wisdom.

<sup>3</sup> Abstract (Conceptual or Speculative) Wisdom involves knowledge of a thing without ability to influence it, such as knowledge of the planetary orbits. It should be noted that although Abstract Wisdom does not entail human influence, it supports and empowers the Applied (or Practical) Wisdom. “Verily only those revere Allāh in awe from amongst His servants who are knowledgeable.” (Holy Koran 35:26)

The things of subgroup (A-II) exist in two kinds as follows.

(A-II-1): Things that can be known independently of matter.

(A-II-2): Things that are known through matter.<sup>4</sup>

According to the above classification of the things of Group (A), Abstract Wisdom is divided into three branches: Metaphysics, Mathematics, and Physics, corresponding, respectively, to Group (A-I), Group (A-II-1), and Group (A-II-2).

♣ The term used in the original text for what we translated into Physics is “Tabīʿīyāt” (طبیعیات) which means “Naturals” or “Natural Sciences” and is more general than the modern terms “physics” and “science”. It extends to non-physical realms such as souls and their interaction with bodies.

An interesting observation is that, in this classification, natural sciences is a branch of Abstract Wisdom, which implies, by definition, that human influence is not deemed to enter its domain. This has been the perspective or the worldview of pre-modern traditional societies and civilizations, which did not approve the type of “scientific progressive venture” founded purely on material order and meant to alter nature without considering other realms of reality. ♣

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<sup>4</sup> The things of Group (A-I) are independent of the matter (such as the realm of spirit). Those of Group (A-II-2) are material or closely related to matter (such as bodies and souls). Those of Group (A-II-1) are in between the two, they exist in virtue of the matter but knowing them does not depend on it (such as numbers and geometrical forms). This also indicates that the “objects” of mathematics (numbers, geometrical forms, fundamental equations and relations) “exist” in a domain between material and spiritual.

Each one of these branches of Abstract Wisdom has primary and secondary subbranches.<sup>5</sup>

- ❖ Primary branches of Metaphysics: *Science of the Divine*, and *Supreme (or Primal) Philosophy*.
  - *Science of the Divine*: Knowledge of God, Angels, Intellects, and their functions.
  - *Primal Philosophy*: Knowledge of things as regards their fundamental aspects such as their being, unity and multiplicity, necessity and possibility, substance and accident, and so on.
- ❖ Secondary branches of Metaphysics: *Sciences of Divine Revelations, Messengers, Laws, Hereafter*, and topics of this kind.
- ❖ Primary branches of Mathematics: *Geometry, Numbers, Astronomy*, and *Relations*.
  - *Geometry*: the science of measures, their properties, and what belongs to them.
  - *Number*: the science of numbers and their properties.
  - *Astronomy*: the science of positions of celestial bodies to each other and to terrestrial bodies, measures of their bodies, dimensions, and motions.
  - *Relations*: the science of relations and ratios of constituting elements. When applied to sounds, it becomes the science of *music*.

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<sup>5</sup> This section contains technical terms that some readers may find hard to fully understand. Fortunately, such a full understanding is not required to delve into the rest of the book.

- ❖ Secondary branches of Mathematics: *Aspects and Perspectives*, *Algebra*, *Levitation (Mechanics)*, and other topics of this kind.
- ❖ Primary branches of Physics: *Fundamentals of Physics*, *Sky and World*, *Formation and Destruction*, *Celestial Effects*, *Mineral*, *Vegetable*, *Animal*, and *Soul*.
  - *Fundamentals of Physics*: the science of causes and principles of physical order, space and time, motion and stillness, infinite and finite, and other topics of this kind.
  - *Sky and World*: the science of simple and compound bodies, and properties of celestial and terrestrial elements.
  - *Formation and Destruction*: the science of the formation of things on a substance and their corruption or destruction.
  - *Celestial Effects*: the science of causes of phenomena such as thunder, lightning, rain, snow, quake, etc.
  - *Mineral*: the science of compound materials.
  - *Vegetable*: the science of growing beings, their souls and faculties.
  - *Animal*: the science of beings with volitional movement, their souls, and faculties.
  - *Soul*: the science of human soul and its interaction with body.
- ❖ Secondary branches of Physics: There are many, such as *Medicine*, *Astrology*, *Agriculture*, etc.

The science of “Logic,” which was systematized by Aristotle, is about the correct ways of acquiring knowledge and removing

ignorance. It is the science of knowing and serves as a tool for acquiring other sciences.<sup>6</sup>

The Applied Wisdom corresponds to the things that the human being can influence, i.e., those of Group (B). Consequently, and according to the domain of human influence, two levels are there: the Individual Level, which is the human being influencing itself, and the Collective Level, which is the human being influencing a collectivity that it is a part of. The Collective level is, in turn, divided into the Family (or Home) Level and the Society Level (including a community, tribe, city, country, etc.). Therefore, Applied Wisdom is divided into three branches, which may be called Personal or Individual Wisdom, Family Wisdom, and Social Wisdom.

♣ These three branches are interwoven as an individual is in a collectivity, and a collectivity consists of individuals. This division, however, allows an easier and more effective understanding and implementation of their virtues. Within every division, knowledge and practice constitute the pillars.

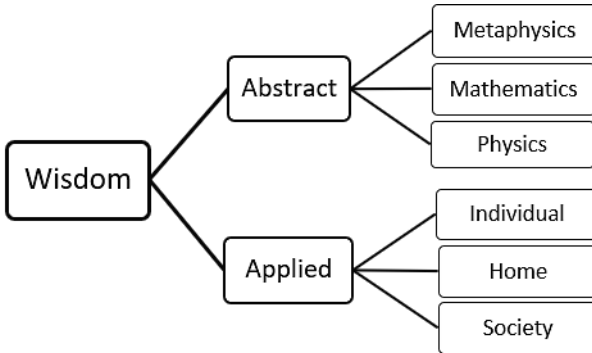
The personal division of Applied Wisdom is the main one because the other two depend on it. There are different names for it such as Personal (or Self) Development, Ethics, Purification, Morality, Building (Refining, Edifying or Cultivating) Noble Characters, and so on. The common term used in Arabic is “Tahzīb an-Nafs” (تَهْذِيبُ النَّفْسِ) or “Tazkiyah” (تَزْكِيَّة) which mean “Purifying (also, Edifying, Adorning, Growing, or Perfecting) Oneself”. It should be noted that “Nafs” in Arabic (نَفْس) is used for both the “Soul” and the “Self”.

This science and discipline of Applied Wisdom is also called “The Science of Ethics” (علم الاخلاق) which is often mistaken to have a limited moral and

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<sup>6</sup> “Logic” teaches correct ways of reasoning and avoiding fallacies.

ethical (even sentimental) scope without including its intellectual and practical sides.



An overall summary of this discussion on Wisdom and its branches is presented in the diagram shown. ♣

The principles concerning the qualities of the human being's actions (and, generally, that of what belongs to or is issued from a human being) are either rooted in "Nature" or in "Institution".<sup>7</sup>

Those that are rooted in Nature are not subject to change over time. However, they are explained by the wise sages of each era and place using their languages and terminologies. The divisions of

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<sup>7</sup> "Nature" here means "Nature of Things" or the "Primordial Nature". The original Arabic word is "Tab'" (طبع) and here it has the same meaning as "Fitrah" (فطرة). The Arabic word for "Institution" is "Waz'" (وضع) which means "to place" or "to institute". "Tab'" can also be understood as the "Original Institution" put into place "at the origin" as opposed to the others instituted subsequently, i.e., "Waz'".

Here the question that is being answered is this: What are the principles or references to determine the quality of a human action or knowledge? In other words, what or who determines what action or knowledge is compatible with wisdom?

Applied Wisdom fall within this category, i.e., their principles are in Nature. They are not subject to change with time and place.

♣ This means that the principles governing Applied Wisdom are rooted in human nature, which is unchangeable, and thus, do not change with time and place. The author is here substantiating the generality and universality of Applied Wisdom. In this book, he gives a universal presentation and avoids referring to religious texts and sources except a handful of times. In another book, entitled “The Mohtashamī Ethics”, he expounds this wisdom based on Islamic teachings. In his “Qualities of the Nobles”, he presents this in a concise and mystical form. His “The Treatise on Beginning and End” is also a highly concise and in-depth writing on this important topic, largely based on the Koran and the Hadīth. ♣

Those that are rooted in Institution are either based on the established ways of practice among a people (such as the cultural customs and norms) or on the teachings of a Divine Messenger or Prophet. The latter are called “The Divine Law” which contains **1)** the ways of purity, worship and their rulings (Individual level), **2)** the marriage, family matters, and their rulings (Family level), and **3)** the social and collective relationships and rulings (Society level); collectively called the “Jurisprudence”. These will undergo changes due to differences of people, time and space, and domination of some over others. Their explanations and details fall outside the scope of Applied Wisdom, and they are only included in it from an overall aspect.

♣ For example, Divine Law may prohibit something that was not prohibited before. Or the authentic norms and customs of a people may honor something contrary to those of another people. However, Honesty and Generosity are praiseworthy, and lying and miserliness are blameworthy regardless of temporal, spatial, mental, and racial conditions. Their explanations are also independent of such conditions, in principle, i.e., as far

as their content (and not their form and expression) is concerned. These are within the scope of Applied Wisdom. But, explaining how such praiseworthy acts are implemented and those vices are avoided in various situations, are done by Divine Law as well as the authentic norms and customs. These are not included in the scope of Applied Wisdom.

This discussion delineates the scope of Applied Wisdom versus Jurisprudence. Jurisprudence teaches to derive legal rulings (based on a given revealed law). Applied Wisdom teaches to discern right and wrong, good and bad, beautiful and ugly, and overall ways of acting accordingly. Its principles are not based on a given revelation. We have Jurisprudence of this law or that law, or even of this school and that school (within a given law), but Applied Wisdom is universal.<sup>8</sup>

This is in essence the difference between the letter of the law and its spirit, the domain of *Faqīh* (فَقِيه) and the Sufi, the theologian and the philosopher, and so on, which should not lead to opposition if **1)** each is sufficiently sincere in practicing their own discipline, and **2)** each has gained a sufficient depth in it.<sup>9</sup> Ideally, a true scholar should master both; ordinary people and students should learn enough of both disciplines to avoid conflicts. The Divine Law also teaches the principles of Applied Wisdom, with its own language, for those

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<sup>8</sup> *Hikmah* is universal. Ibn-Arabi in *Fusus-al-Hikam* enumerates 27 *Hikmah* corresponding to 27 personages mentioned in the Holy Koran. This approach helps to highlight and better understand an aspect (or an element) of wisdom that is directly manifested by each personage. In modern terminology, using adjectives for philosophy (such as Greek Philosophy, Islamic Philosophy, etc.) has become common. This refers to the style that may differ from one to the other, not the main content that they all share.

<sup>9</sup> The examples in the history that show the otherwise, such as the apparent opposition that Ghazālī showed towards Fārābī and Ibn-Sīnā, should be understood properly in the context of the time and conditions, as well as the role that a Ghazālī had to play regarding the whole condition of society at his time and for generations to come. A Ghazālī would live in peace and understanding with a Fārābī and an Ibn-Sīnā.

who can grasp or to the degree they can do so, depending on their level of receptivity.

One in pursuit of Applied Wisdom abides by and commits to the Revealed Law. While the words “Philosopher” and “Philosophy” have been used in this context, we deliberately avoid them (as much as possible) due to historical and modern abuses of these terms particularly in this relation, namely the general misunderstanding that philosophy implies lack of fully abiding by the Divine Law. Khājah corrects this misunderstanding (based on a narration from Plato): “When Justice is realized, the lights of the faculties of the soul radiate on each other, and the soul accomplishes every deed in the best way. This is the closest proximity to the Divine. Justice is total and includes all equilibria and balances. Justice is a station of the soul whence perfect adherence to the Divine Law emerges because the Divine Law determines all measures and middles.”

The Divine Law presents the true ways of practicing the elements of Applied Wisdom. For example, it will be explained later in the book that “Worship” is a division under the virtue of Justice. However, the ways of worship, i.e., rites and rituals, are instituted by Divine Law.

Divine Law determines the “balance” and measure of all things at individual and collective levels. It is a complete, so to speak, “operating manual” according to which the human being should “run”, to use some modern terms which may convey a tangible feel for some readers.<sup>10</sup> Determining the balance and measure of all things is beyond human capacity due to **1)** the vastness of the domain concerned, **2)** the limitedness of human resources

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<sup>10</sup> Another similar metaphor of this sort is to observe the Divine Law as the “software” that runs the “hardware” of the human being and governs its relationships and interactions with the world, with the rest of human beings, and with God. As human beings and the conditions around their lives change, they may need an “upgrade” to better “function” and especially to better encounter the new “viruses”. These remote but useful metaphors show the importance of Divine Law and the necessity of submitting to it and following it.

and experiences, and **3)** the interferences of passions and interests. Following the Divine Law is thus necessary to realize “Justice,” which is to keep everything in balance and right measure. Justice here is the key (and represents the culmination of all) virtue at both the individual and collective levels.<sup>11</sup>

In this connection, following an exemplary personage is also understood. In Islam, the Holy Koran is a complete statement of the Divine Law, and the Prophet is its human embodiment. Following his example is thus a direct and guaranteed way of imbibing the Divine Law and implementing the items of the Applied Wisdom. The Holy Koran says, “*Verily, there is for you in the Messenger of God a fair model, for those who hope for God, the last day, and remember God much*” (33:21), and “*Indeed, you possess an immense character*” (68:4). He (upon him be God’s peace and blessing) says, “Establish in you the Godly characters”, and “I came to perfect the noble characters”.

These statements attest to **1)** the importance of submitting to and following the Divine Law and Messenger(s), and **2)** the importance and high rank of the intellect-ethical (Wisdom, *Hikmah*) axis. It is common to underestimate the centrality of this axis while overemphasizing certain periphery aspects without being able to avoid errors in them, precisely due to the lack of wisdom. ♣

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<sup>11</sup> This entails that a *Sufi* should refer to a *Faqīh* if he is not a *Faqīh* (to learn the Divine Law and ways of practicing it), but a *Faqīh* does not practically need to refer to a *Sufi*.

## **PART I - Applied Wisdom: Individual**