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## The Rationality of Desires and Beliefs in Moral Action

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### ABSTRACT

Ethical action and rational action are considered by moral philosophers to be important factors in human Eudaimonia and perfection. Desire and belief refer to the two areas of human tendency and perception, which are considered as the foundations of human action. Before a person undertakes an action, there may be a conflict between desires and beliefs (sometimes in conflict with values), and the process of realizing the action, especially moral and rational actions, may encounter challenges. This issue refers to an important debate (Internalism and Externalism) among moral philosophers. In the present research, the viewpoints of two contemporary moral philosophers in Islam and the West (Āyatollāh Meṣbāḥ Yazdī and Michael Smith) has been explored in solving this problem using an analytical and comparative method. Finally, it is found that both of them adhere to Externalism and acknowledge the motivational relationship between desire and belief in action. However, they propose different solutions to resolve the conflict. Smith considers rationality to be effective; however, Meṣbāḥ Yazdī regards rationality as a secondary factor and adopts a different approach.

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## Introduction

Desire and belief refer to the two areas of tendency and perception of the human soul, which are presented as preliminaries for human action. The desire determines the subject's orientation towards the environment and the indication towards their goal in the act. Belief also refers to a mental and cognitive state that contains information about the environment in which the agent's behavior takes place, and determines how the agent fulfills that desire (Zākerī, 2016). In moral philosophy, desire and belief are two key elements in the formation of moral action. The moral value of an action arises from the interaction between desire and belief: If an individual's desire aligns with their ethical beliefs and they act in a way that promotes good or virtue, that action is considered to have positive moral values.

Emotions and desires must be specifically controlled due to their impact on perception and beliefs; since if they conflict with other values, they cannot be preferred without reason. Rather, that conflict should be controlled and managed with reason. Therefore, emotions and desires do not automatically cause Eudaimonia and desire has absolutely no value (Makārem Shīrāzī, 1999); rather, its value depends on other criteria and factors.

John Searle believes, for example, that if the subject has no desire to buy a plane ticket, regardless of their beliefs, they do not intend to buy a plane ticket (Searle, 1980); that is, even if they know that they should buy the ticket, they don't want it; they don't have the will to do it. On the other hand, Hume considers doing an action purely according to desire as rational, and believes that our desires cannot be wrong. Alex Gregory, one of the professors of philosophy in America, proves in the book, "Desires and Beliefs," that they are actually one thing, and tries to create a compatible strategy in conflict between the two. In his opinion, if an action reflects the outcome of what you desire, it is rational and compatible with the rationality of beliefs (Gregory, 2021). On the other hand, one of the Islamic philosophers believes in the relationship between perception and tendency: If the tendency does not have a perceptual basis, it will lead to deflection (Jāvādī Āmolī, 2018). They support each other.

It should be known that the field of tendency in humans includes many examples. All kinds of inclinations in humans, such as desire, affection, feeling, sensual mood, lust, etc., are included. On the other hand, the levels of the soul in passing from consciousness to desire, or vice versa, and in reaching or not reaching the volitional area, vary depending on the belongings and the levels of desires and beliefs. For example, a person knows that they must buy a ticket to go on a business mission. This knowledge creates the tendency and desire to buy tickets. Other beliefs of the subject are also supportive and compatible with this desire. They include: in order to progress in work, one must attract attention of the management, and if one does not go to the mission, may face a stagnation in work. Therefore, they decide to buy a ticket and go on a business mission. On the other hand, if the knowledge or belief in buying a plane ticket is weakened by other incompatible desires and beliefs, naturally a person will not reach the stage of will. Beliefs such as, "I am going to resign, so what is the need to go on this mission," are among the elements that not only do not support the individual's tendencies but also weaken them. The important issue here is that sometimes there is a conflict between the two areas of tendency and belief. Therefore, a superior process is needed to monitor the functioning of tendencies and beliefs, and by giving a criterion, establish the necessary proportion between the desires and beliefs of the subject. This issue refers to a debate among moral philosophers. They have two different positions about how beliefs and desires have motivational power and lead the subject to perform the action:

**Internalists:** They consider belief to be a necessary and sufficient condition for arousing the subject and view the relationship between belief and action as essential. **Externalists:** While they regard belief as a necessary condition for action, they do not consider it sufficient and identify desire as another condition for motivating the subject. Internalism, in this context, has been supported by Thomas Nagel, John McDowell, Christine Korsgaard, while Externalism has been supported by figures such as Michael Smith, Donald Davidson, and Alfred Mele

Since the majority of moral philosophers consider rationality as an effective factor in the compatibility between desires and beliefs, resolving the conflict between them and guiding the subject towards moral and correct action, the issue in this article is that rationality assist in creating proportionality and balance. What is the role between desires and beliefs and how is it justified? In the

process of human tendency and perceptive field performance, is it belief and knowledge that leads to desire or vice versa? What factors are effective in correctness and incorrectness of desire and belief and the proportionality between them? Desires lead to the cultivation and creation of awareness, and it is perception and knowledge that fertilize or suppress human tendencies. The fact that an individual should not give value to any desire and tendency and make any belief the basis of their action, indicates rationality. Moral rationality requires that, instead of blindly following every desire or belief, individuals evaluate and assess them. This process helps individuals base their actions solely on those desires and beliefs that align with ethical values. The way of combining desire and belief, as well as the extent of their involvement in arousing the subject, presents us with various approaches.

Since the comparative and analytical approach and the confrontation of opinions gives a more comprehensive analysis, we will examine the current issues from the perspective of two Western and Islamic moral philosophers. Both Āyatollāh Meṣbāḥ Yazdī and Michael Smith<sup>1</sup> have presented readings in this regard, which should be analyzed. Michael Smith and Āyatollāh Meṣbāḥ Yazdī both adhere to externalism and acknowledge the role of desires and beliefs in motivating human action; however, they adopt two different approaches in explaining the rationality of desires and beliefs.

It should be noted that the course of discussion in the thinking of the two philosophers will not proceed under the same titles due to their differing approaches;<sup>2</sup> however, it remains coherent. Āyatollāh Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, an Islamic thinker and philosopher, does not discuss this field directly; however, in the book where he presents his views on the dimensions of the self, one can find answers to the following questions: does he approach the problem more realistically? Another contemporary philosopher, Michael Smith, has especially taken initiative in this regard. But in order for the discussion to proceed systematically, there is a need for creativity in the arrangement and the way of addressing the problem and its solution on the part of the author. Therefore, in this study, the nature of desires and beliefs, the relationship between them, the conflicts, the method of selection, the factor required for resolving conflicts among desires and beliefs, and finally, the function of rationality in between, are discussed according to the opinions of two philosophers. Finally, the differences in the approaches of both thinkers are highlighted in their presentations of the discussion and the type of relationship between desires and beliefs. The result will be the recognition of the distinctive function of rationality in resolving conflicts, its scope, and its relation to morality.

## **Michael Smith's Point of View**

### **Definition of Belief**

Belief is a special knowledge formed in relation to reality (Smith, 2018). Every knowledge is formed by connecting the human perception to the reality outside their mind; however, people's different perceptions of reality and the way they relate to it make their perceptions different. For example, if the cognitive field is realistic, the knowledge is formed correctly, and if, for any reason, the relationship between the individual and the real world is not established correctly, then the knowledge or belief is wrong. Therefore, not every type of knowledge can be considered a human belief, as it is a profound understanding that should serve as the basis for one's actions and is the result of specific conditions. Consequently, according to Smith, there are two types of encounters in the formation of human belief:

1. Communication with reality (the world outside the mind)
2. Communication with the subject themselves (evaluation of the subject)

That is, beliefs are formed not only by a person's actual awareness but also by how they respond to the available evidence. Therefore, belief is established through the mind's relationship with the external world; however, this belief can be theoretically logical in two ways. First, the relationship between humans and reality must be accurate; that is, it should reflect reality as it is. In other words, this relationship should not be manipulated, and other factors should not introduce errors between human perception and the real world. Second, the perception and evaluation of individuals should be

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1. Michael Andrew Smith (born on 23 July 1954) is an Australian philosopher who teaches at Princeton University (since September 2004). He is the author of a number of important books and articles in the field of moral philosophy.

2. Michael Smith, for example, believes in the multiplicity of theoretical and practical rationality; Therefore, rationality is analyzed in two separate titles; however, Āyatollāh Meṣbāḥ Yazdī does not agree with this distinction and accepts only theoretical rationality. He fills the void in Smith's practical rationality by another concept.

realistic, and their relationship with the real world should be correctly established, ensuring that they pay full attention to perceived reality.

### **Levels of Belief**

According to what was stated in the analysis of belief from Smith's viewpoint, two characteristics of belief from his viewpoint can be expressed as follows:

1. The level and degree of belief that the subject believes in. For example, a person is sure that the sun will rise tomorrow and doubts whether it will rain tomorrow or not. The same person is more confident that there will be a football match tomorrow. Here, three levels of knowledge are identified, reflecting differences in the degree of belief and understanding of the subject. One level evokes suspicion, another instills confidence, and the third is characterized by greater certainty and assurance.
2. The second characteristic of belief pertains to how the degree of belief in knowledge is influenced by various information and thoughts of the subject. According to Smith, the initial degree of belief depends on the extent of the subject's conviction, which varies based on the strength of the reasons and evidence supporting that belief. Some beliefs remain stable over time and may even strengthen, while others may become unstable and weaken. Therefore, the power of belief is related to two factors: first, the degree of a person's conviction in it, and second, the volume and quality of information available in support of or against the belief, which can influence the decision to abandon, maintain, or change that belief (Sayre-McCord & Smith, 2003).

### **Definition of Desire**

Smith considers desires to be levels and types of perception that arise from human passions. He follows Hume in this regard and often cites Hume's opinions as confirmation or supplementation. For example, he expresses the meaning of desire according to Hume, who believes that desires represent a form of passivity, and that passivity is a specific type of feeling. Emotions are also forms of understanding, contributing to self-understanding, which is another kind of feeling (Smith, 1994). In other words, desire is a sensual passivity of feeling; it represents one of the levels of human understanding and knowledge. Therefore, when we experience a desire for something, we actually feel an emotion of either dislike or longing (Smith, 1994). According to this perspective, people are directly aware of their desires; thus, it can be said that, according to Smith, desire is a unique psychological feeling.

### **Degrees of Desire**

According to Smith, two characteristics were mentioned in the identification of belief. He also expresses the same characteristics about desires. First, the power of desires that a subject has. The strength of their desire motivates them to make certain decisions in life; however, if the desire is weak, the subject will not pay attention to it and will not be motivated accordingly.

Second, the degree of stability and durability of a desire, which can be different depending on experience, information, reflections and other things. According to Smith, the importance of the amount and stability of desires is measured by different types of perception. The perception that is consistent with the desire and is in line with it, strengthens the desire, while the perception that is not in the direction of it, gradually leads to its weakness and, eventually, its elimination due to the lack of support of the desire (Sayre-McCord & Smith, 2003).

### **Types of Desire**

The strength of a desire is generally considered to be established through the causal power of that desire to influence action (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2015). Smith refers to desires and wishes that remain stable over time as strong desires, while those that are unstable are termed fragile desires (Sayre-McCord & Smith, 2003).

### **The Theoretical Rationality of Desires and Beliefs**

Michael Smith considers desires to have a potential to represent the rationality or irrationality of the subject. In his opinion, desires can be strong or fragile for various reasons. Some of those may reflect

the rationality of the subject and some vice versa. The subjects change their inclinations only when they believe in something; that is, there is a reason for it. In his opinion, if a desire is in harmony with other desires, there is no reason to change it, because the subject in this situation has no consideration against the desire to change or abandon it. The stability of these desires is a sign of their rationality.

Of course, the desire may be strong in a person; however, not only does it have no logical support but also irrational reasons and evidence support it. For example, a person may have a desire for something without a logical basis due to a habit (everyday life) or a trauma experienced since childhood. The subject here has the option not to be passive; they can recover their information, ignore some aspects, and mitigate the impact of others. According to Smith, the subject can manage the power of their desires and how these affect them in order to regulate their desires in light of experience, information, and reflection (Sayre-McCord & Smith, 2003). Therefore, the growth, change, and weak or strong functioning of desires are directly related to the cognitive field. Of course, it is not the case that perception necessarily causes desire; rather, the cognitive field plays a role both before and after the desire is aroused. That is, it is definitely not the case that the perceptual field precedes the tendency field; rather, according to Smith, these two areas are intertwined and mutually influence each other. If a desire has justified perceptual support, the relationship between them indicates theoretical rationality. This leads to the practical rationality of desires and beliefs.

### **The Practical Rationality of Desires and Beliefs**

Michael Smith defines practical rationality as the balance between desires and beliefs to realize human behavior and actions. When individuals have various desires, the desire they act upon depends on which desire is supported by different pieces of evidence in their mind and environment. In other words, based on the normative evaluations of the subject, the evidence they present to strengthen their desires aligns with their beliefs. Here, Smith makes the correct functioning of desire based on the correctness or incorrectness of beliefs, or their logic or illogicality. Each desire corresponds to a belief in humans. Each belief, depending on its strength, can cause a desire to flourish. For example, enjoying delicious food corresponds to a partial norm; that is, the specific dos and don'ts that every individual establishes for themselves. At the same time, it may not align with more general norms, such as health, which is a universal standard with established regulations on a broader level. For instance, while delicious food may be enjoyable, it can also be harmful to bodily health. The partial norm for a person is instant pleasure, and the general norm is the health of the body, which a person may, sometimes, overlook, considering it as a secondary factor when choosing food. Therefore, according to Smith, beliefs have different levels, each of which indicates norms that influence desires and tendencies on a partial or extensive level (Smith, 2018).

### **Rationality at the Partial Level (Total Irrationality)**

It has been stated that the art of integrating beliefs and norms and establishing a balance between them constitutes rationality; however, it is not merely any form of proportionality. The explanation is that if the subject chooses instant pleasure while valuing their health, the proportion of desire and belief is still established. This indicates a very low level of rationality, which Smith equates partial rationality with general irrationality. To clarify this issue—partial rationality or general irrationality—it should be noted that, sometimes, a desire is so strong that it leads to the neglect of beliefs. The temptation and enjoyment of tasty food undermine the belief in health, preventing the desire for health from being created and nurtured (Smith, 2018). Therefore, not only is the perceptual field effective in the tendentious field but the opposite relationship is also possible.

Therefore, if the subject performs an action in accordance with a weaker desire while a stronger desire with logical justification exists, this action lacks rational justification. In Smith's view, the individual is partially rational here because they have acted according to their desire and belief in immediate enjoyment. However, from a more general perspective, they have acted illogically and irrationally. The level of rationality is crucial in Smith's thought. If the level of rationality and the proportionality of desire and belief are partial, the subject should not always fulfill their desires at this level; otherwise, they remain trapped in superficial desires and irrational actions. If beliefs and desires are fleeting and sensual, actions based on them represent superficial rationality. Although the balance

and proportion between desire and belief have been established, this superficial and partial rationality holds no value.

According to what was argued, it is known that, in Smith's thought, the result of believing in reality and the desires arising from it and acting according to them, is a practical rationality.<sup>1</sup>

### **Āyatollāh Meṣbāḥ Yazdī's Point of View**

According to Āyatollāh Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, the human soul has dimensions, one of which is the cognitive and perceptive dimension, and the other is human inclinations and tendencies. Desire knows no boundaries; however, perception and knowledge are related to human wise power (Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, 2011b).

### **Belief**

Āyatollāh Meṣbāḥ Yazdī has not provided a specific definition of the term "belief"; however, based on the synonyms he has used and the related concepts he has mentioned, it can be understood that in the context of Islamic ethics, "belief" refers to acceptance and submission to revelation and reason, which arise from knowledge and understanding (Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, 2011b). From his perspective, belief is a form of inner and heartfelt knowledge, that is, in terms of depth, more profound than mere knowledge.

### **Desire and Tendency**

God has placed the path of perfection within humans in such a way that they possess a special inclination and desire for it. According to him, there exists a group of desires in human beings that the hand of creation has deposited in the human body (innate desires), so that, according to their requirements, they should move, strive, and be guided towards perfection and happiness (Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, 2005a; Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, 2014). These desires are contrary to material desires. Material desires are those intended to meet the physical needs of humans, such as the feeding instinct and the desire for food, the purpose of which is the continuation of material life, or such as the sexual instinct. There are also genuine desires within the human being, whose scope extends beyond material life (Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, 2005b; Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, 2013). Although these desires also influence the material life of man, they are intended to provide for human spiritual perfection. The important characteristic of such desires is their unlimited nature. Due to this characteristic, not all people benefit from these desires in the same way, and there is no need to limit or restrict them (Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, 2005b).

### **Types of Desires and Tendencies**

#### **Instincts**

Instincts are the tendencies related to humans' vital needs which are related to one of the body's organs. Like the instinct of eating and drinking, which both addresses the natural human need and is related to the digestive organ (Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, 2019), it generally justifies and interprets all human behaviors and encompasses all sensual tendencies and desires that form human. Instinct is specifically related to the material and physical aspects of human desires (Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, 2014). Therefore, non-acquired tendencies and perceptions regarding vital needs associated with an organ of the body are called "instinct" (Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, 2005b). According to Āyatollāh Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, instincts generally have two main branches: the first is the preservation of the individual's existence, and the second is the education of perfection. The goal of the first branch is the survival of man in this world until the end of the age of perfection, while the goal of the second branch is infinite and eternal, "in the end, good and abiding" (Qur'ān 87:17). The Hereafter is superior and more stable; therefore, it should take precedence in any conflict, which will be explained further.

#### **Emotions**

Emotions refer to desires that appear in relation to other human beings, such as the affection of parents to their children or the various attraction of humans to each other. As our social, natural or spiritual relationships increase, the emotion becomes stronger; for example, in the relationship between parents

1. This practical rationality will be the basis of moral valuation. Appropriate desires and beliefs bring rationality, which is the origin of morality.

and children, since it has a natural support, the emotion is stronger, and the relationship between the teacher and the student has a spiritual support (Meşbāḥ Yazdī, 2019). According to Āyatollāh Meşbāḥ Yazdī, emotions should be controlled and, in case of conflict with other values, they cannot be preferred; rather, it is necessary to fight against the extremes of emotions and put them under the guidance and control of reason (Meşbāḥ Yazdī, 2014).

### **Passiveness and Feelings**

The dimension of feelings and inactions, while being more superficial than other dimensions of human existence, is also broader than all of them. Passivity is the opposite of emotions, in that it encompasses the same negative tension and mental state (Meşbāḥ Yazdī, 2019). Therefore, passivity is a psychological state through which a person runs away from or rejects someone due to a sense of loss or discomfort (Meşbāḥ Yazdī, 2014b). Emotions pertain to states that are more intense than instincts and inactions and are uniquely reserved for humans, such as the feelings of surprise, glorification, and love, culminating in the feeling of worship (Meşbāḥ Yazdī, 2019).

### **The Highest Desire**

When desire is penetrated, it transforms into love (Meşbāḥ Yazdī, 2019). Āyatollāh Meşbāḥ Yazdī considers love for God and His saints to be the strongest desire, possessing the power to persevere and stand against all human sins to triumph over them. On one hand, Almighty God has instilled the desire for "perfection" in humanity, and on the other hand, He has placed the desire for "examples of perfection" within them. The ultimate and original perfection of humanity is closeness to God (Meşbāḥ Yazdī, 2011b). It is possible for human desire to conflict with the closeness to God.

### **Obstacles to the Tendency of Correct Perception**

Āyatollāh Meşbāḥ Yazdī, in expressing the obstacles to correct perception, approaches them from the two dimensions of insight and tendency. If an individual deviates from the higher desires and follows the instincts and, consequently, the animal desires, they will suffer from "negligence" (Meşbāḥ Yazdī, 2011b). On the other hand, if an individual does not have the desire to explore the truth, they will not pay heed to it, and no understanding will be achieved. If someone is not immune to the dominance of opposite desires and focuses their interest on material things and lusts, they cannot hope to draw correct conclusions from mental and intellectual activities (Meşbāḥ Yazdī, 2014a). In this case, humans are deprived of a wide range of perceptions, neglecting the instrumental role of the senses. Their knowledge will be limited and devoid of generalities, relying solely on mere sensory perception (Meşbāḥ Yazdī, 2014). Individuals who suffer from a weakness of reason, instead of thinking for themselves and employing their intellect correctly, tend to trust the beliefs of others and adopt those beliefs (Meşbāḥ Yazdī, 2014). This is a form of imitation.

### **Ontological Relationship between Desire and Belief (Proportion of Desires and Beliefs)**

When a person finds some kind of lack within themselves and feels dissatisfied with it, this feeling prompts them to try and make an effort to remove their suffering by doing the appropriate action and provide for the lack of pleasure. When a person finds some kind of lack in themselves and feels dissatisfied with it, this feeling prompts them to try and make an effort to remove their suffering by doing the appropriate action and provide for the lack of pleasure. This awareness leads them to the desire and tendency to work (Meşbāḥ Yazdī, 2016). The satisfaction of desire depends on proper perception, and many perceptions are involved in the realization of a desire.

Our lack of awareness regarding the type of attention and perception is not the reason for the absence of perception; rather, this issue stems from our ignorance of that particular perception. Therefore, no perception, and consequently no desire, is accidental or without cause. If a person examines their ego in any endeavor, they will find that before desire and motivation are aroused, there exists a suitable perception for it (Meşbāḥ Yazdī, 2004b). Thus, sensory stimulation initiates the process of awareness and thinking, leading to the emergence of desire and, ultimately, will.

There is a structured relationship between knowledge and desire. The arousal of previous desires constitutes a form of knowledge (Meşbāḥ Yazdī, 2013). Consequently, sages have stated that

knowledge is the cause of enthusiasm. However, this does not imply that it is the cause of tameness; rather, passion and knowledge are distinct categories. It signifies that passion cannot be attained without knowledge, as a person cannot become excited about something until they are aware of it (Meşbâh Yazdî, 2011a).

In fact, science is a complement to the cause of passion; as the flourishing and arousal of the natural motivations and potential human desires for material pleasures and spiritual things existing in human nature is conditioned by science. Therefore, regarding the relationship between science and tendency, the role of science can be drawn as follows: First, it clarifies the truth for man and makes them discern right and wrong. Second, the desires existing naturally within human beings, after achieving knowledge and awareness, lead the subject towards heart recognition; therefore, knowledge will help the flourishing of those desires and their practical effect (Meşbâh Yazdî, 2014).

### **Conflict of Desires**

If, at any given moment, there exists only one instinct in the awake human being and one desire in the human soul, the individual will strive to satisfy it. Under suitable conditions and in the absence of external obstacles, this desire will be realized. However, if multiple desires arise and it is not possible to satisfy all of them simultaneously, conflicts will emerge between them (Meşbâh Yazdî, 2013). The strength of each desire attracts the attention of the soul, prompting attempts to satisfy it; for example, a mother who feeds her child, or a young person who prioritizes studying over socializing and partying (Meşbâh Yazdî, 2016).

What is the role of a person in the conflict of desires and instincts? Is the individual merely a spectator, following whichever desire prevails due to natural or social influences? Or does the person have the capacity to choose and exercise their will through intellectual and voluntary actions, sometimes even refusing to satisfy their strong natural desires? In the first case, although they have undertaken some optional and desirable actions, they have actually abandoned humanity and human values, neglected their special human powers, and left themselves like a straw in the hands of the whirlwind (Meşbâh Yazdî, 2016). Internal tensions sometimes influence each other and sometimes are caused by a combination; in such a way that they are related to perception and cognition, and perceptual powers also affect them; thus, some desires find specific directions (Meşbâh Yazdî, 2019). For example, eating and drinking are not merely responding to a desire; rather, they are combined with desires such as the tendency and belief in halal and delicious food, as well as cleanliness and pleasantness.

### **Resolving the Conflict of Desires**

Various factors play a role in avoiding conflict in the emotional field, the most important of which is awareness, which is related to the cognitive field. Of course, depending on the strength of the field of cognition, the resolution of these conflicts will vary (Meşbâh Yazdî, 2019). The conflict of desires does not occur only due to lack of awareness; rather, it also occurs due to its weakness; sometimes, a person possesses knowledge, but still they cannot act correctly in solving the conflict or they may not reach the conflict of desires at all; rather, they prefer a weaker desire that cannot be noticed in the action stage. This goes back to the weakness of cognition. For example, getting used to something makes a person neglect other knowledges and choose the wrong way.

### **The Role of Reason in Resolving Conflicts of Desires and Beliefs**

Intellect is a unique power in the realm of perception, representing the essence of humanity and serving as the distinguishing feature that sets humans apart from animals. Intellect calculates, with awareness, where a particular action may lead, allowing individuals to decide their course of action based on this awareness, calculation, and measurement. They may prefer either positive desires guided by reason or negative desires driven by sensual moods. Therefore, logic is not arbitrary; rather, it is inherently perceptual in nature (Meşbâh Yazdî, 2014). In this context, intellect is described as a perceptive faculty whose primary characteristic is the perception of generalities, devoid of desire or inclination. Thus, the faculty of intellect is not fundamentally a product of inclinations and instincts (Meşbâh Yazdî, 2014).



### **Theoretical Reason and Practical Reason**

Reason has rulings in the realm of practical ethics and values; however, this does not imply that it automatically and directly comprehends them. It makes judgments about value issues completely separate from theoretical perceptions. Furthermore, it does not suggest that humans possess two rational perceptive faculties—one for understanding facts and another for grasping values, practical rulings, and moral concepts. Such intellectual duality, which some thinkers propose and refer to as "theoretical reason" and "practical reason," is considered unstable in the view of Āyatollāh Meṣbāḥ Yazdī. From his perspective, intellect is singular, and all its perceptions ultimately relate back to theoretical understandings (Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, 2014).

Almighty God has equipped man with the power of reason to be aware of theoretical and practical truths, and to be able to know the truths of existence, especially things that are beyond the reach of the senses, with the help of reason, to be able to distinguish the good from the bad and the related dos and don'ts, and to recognize optional behavior (Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, 2013).

When a person is at a crossroads, with different motivations pulling them in various directions, it is the intellect that determines which motivation holds more value and should be pursued. Therefore, it is under the guidance of reason that moral value is established (Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, 2014, Vols. 3 & 2). The mere presence of natural motivation does not constitute proof of moral value; rather, it is through the intervention of reason that the moral value of each action can be assessed. For example, sexual desire is a natural motive, and determining its moral value relies on the judgment of reason. Depending on the circumstances, reason may ascertain the positive or negative values of this desire. In fact, natural desires serve as a means to achieve rational goals. The power of reason assists in recognizing the right goal and finding the main path. However, to comprehend the details of the path, one seeks guidance from religion and revelation (Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, 2005b).

According to Āyatollāh Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, it can be argued that the most important factor in the conflict of desires, as well as the best means of managing sensual and evil desires, lies in perceptions and their sources. To control behavior, it is essential to address its origins, which are the root of the desire to sin. This control is voluntary and optional (Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, 2005b).

The effect of desire on perception is not limited to sensory perception; this relationship is established in all types of perception—whether through the senses or intellect. Desire also influences the premises of perception itself, as it may prevent a person from paying proper attention to the foundations of their thinking. Therefore, one can be confident in their conclusions if they are immune from the dominance of conflicting desires and do not rebel against the self, which could obstruct attention to the correct premises, perceptions, and inferences (Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, 2005b).

Consequently, Āyatollāh Meṣbāḥ Yazdī considers the rationality of desires and beliefs to be the foundation of morality and does not view rationality as the ultimate goal. Rather, it serves as a pathway toward faith and piety, which are the true foundations of morality. In other words, these virtues lead to rationality, and rationality, in turn, fosters these virtues.

From the perspective of Āyatollāh Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, reason functions as a fundamental tool for discerning truths and moral values. Theoretical reason, through the analysis and understanding of realities and universal principles, and practical reason, through guiding behavior and ethical decision-making, assist individuals in finding logical solutions to conflicts that align with divine and human values. In other words, reason, by harmonizing innate desires, beliefs, and ethical principles, lays the groundwork for resolving conflicts and achieving balance in moral action.

### **A Revelation That Helps Intellect and Cognition**

Reason is unable to comprehend the criteria and the complex relationships between human actions, and the ultimate perfection of these actions remains unclear to us. Revelation assists reason in this understanding. The essence of humanity's need for revelation lies in our inability to grasp all the criteria for correct human behavior through ordinary means; thus, we require revelation.

There are certain aspects of intellectual independence that the intellect can understand independently and without the aid of revelation. However, these alone do not suffice and fail to alleviate the burdens of humanity. In some instances, a person cannot resolve problems through independent rationality and must turn to revelation for guidance.

### **The Function of Faith in Managing Desires and Beliefs and Its Relationship with Rationality**

In Āyatollāh Meṣbāḥ Yazdī's view, faith is not the same as science, but knowledge is necessarily the prelude to faith, and without knowledge belonging to faith, belief is impossible (Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, 2005b, Vol. 1). He emphasizes that faith has no meaning without knowledge. We cannot believe in something that we do not already know; since after a person raises awareness and understands that there may be some truth in this world, they raise doubts about whether what the prophets say is true or not. Man has no way to answer this question other than studying science. Of course, for the realization of faith, knowledge alone is not enough, rather other factors are also deemed necessary. Therefore, according to Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, science is neither faith in itself nor its complete cause, rather it is merely an incomplete cause among other causes. This is because after acquiring knowledge, faith does not come to man by force, but they have the choice to believe or not to believe. The work of the heart begins after the work of the mind and the study of knowledge, so that the mind decides to commit itself to this knowledge (Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, 2005b). After knowing the truths, it is the heart that can either submit to those truths or rebel against them. It is clear that the heart's acceptance and surrender differ from mental acceptance and surrender. After reasoning and confronting scientific premises, the mind has no choice but to accept; however, the heart can evade what the mind cannot escape.

With this understanding, we can succinctly state that, according to Āyatollāh Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, faith consists of knowledge along with the acknowledgment of the heart, the will, and the decision to commit to action. In other words, faith is an act of the heart and a sensory act, distinct from mental acknowledgment but grounded in it. This concise phrase reflects his theory: "Faith comes when the heart accepts something that has been confirmed by the intellect and the mind, desires to commit to all its requirements, and makes a decisive choice to fulfill its practical obligations" (Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, 2016, p. 94).

Now that we have argued about mental knowledge, how is it obtained? Āyatollāh Meṣbāḥ Yazdī divides the recognition of faith into three types:

1. Brief presence recognition (innate and unacquired)
2. General acquired knowledge (intellectual and acquired)
3. Detailed faith recognition (intuitive and acquired)

Innate knowledge is present, personal, and, at the same time, brief. Intellectual knowledge is acquired and general, but it is absent. Intuitive knowledge is present, personal, and clear. Both intellectual and intuitive knowledge are the fruits of the same innate knowledge, serving as its complements. Due to its vagueness and brevity, innate knowledge alone cannot serve as the foundation of true faith and is susceptible to various and even incorrect interpretations. Therefore, innate knowledge must attain sufficient clarity through intellectual or intuitive knowledge to become the basis of faith.

Although, according to Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, intuitive knowledge is the highest form of knowledge that a person can have about God Almighty (Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, 2013), he still considers a reliable and solid worldview to be faith based on reasoning (Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, 2011a). The way of knowing God is to make a rational argument, and the Qur'an deals with making proofs in the field of knowing God and religious issues to convince the minds. In his opinion, intellectual knowledge, besides being able to create a general knowledge of God, will also strengthen faith and acquire higher levels of it. It will also turn a borrowed faith into a fixed faith (Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, 2013b, 2016).

Therefore:

1. Each of human desires has a specific territory; for example, the instinct to eat and drink is related to food and has nothing to do with sexual instinct. In emotions, only the relationship with other people is discussed.
2. It must have a criterion that can make the best choice.
3. The conflict between high and low desires and tendencies are considered; not solely base and worldly tendencies.
4. The verb should be considered appropriate to its purpose, not related to human desire; rather, it is subject to the facts of the soul (Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, 2012).
5. Among all types of pleasures with different quantities, qualities and intensities, put the best, most intense and deepest pleasures in the scope of your selection.

6. Hereafter pleasures are preferred over worldly pleasures and the two are always in conflict with one other (Meşbāḥ Yazdī, 2012).
7. Human beings should have aims targeted towards a specific purpose, so that the limits and restrictions are observed in the saturation of motivations. Reason can know God, understand God's purpose of creation and find out that humans should all walk the path of perfection.
8. Strengthening knowledge and guiding natural desires in the right direction is the result of faith in God's Oneness.
9. The most powerful belief that can inspire high desires toward correct human behavior is the awareness of God's constant presence and contemplation on His blessings (Meşbāḥ Yazdī, 2012).

## **Analysis and Comparison**

### **The Role of Faith and Rationality in Fostering Motivation and Commitment**

In order to know how the rationality of desires and beliefs as prerequisites for action is explained according to Michael Smith and Āyatollāh Meşbāḥ Yazdī, we must first determine whether desire and belief lead to motivation in action or commitment? In other words, is the subject motivated by desire and belief to do the right action or will they definitely do it? The difference between the two actually comes down to whether we consider these prerequisites as the reason for the action or its cause. The motivational relationship indicates the reasoning behind these elements, while the obligatory relationship indicates its causality. If beliefs and desires serve as motivating reasons, their associations with action are possible; if they are the cause of action, then the relationship will be obligatory, necessary, and causal. Similar to the approach of introversion discussed at the beginning of the article, a person is obliged to act according to their beliefs. Therefore, in cases where the action is not realized, it is clear that the elements and preliminaries of the action were not the cause of that action. Consequently, internalists consider belief to be both the reason and the cause of the realization of the action. In contrast, externalism views desire and belief as involved in achieving action, emphasizing that this relationship is not necessary in some cases.

According to the views of Āyatollāh Meşbāḥ Yazdī and Michael Smith, both can be regarded as internalists. Smith states that a moral person is one who, if they believe something to be true, is automatically motivated to act accordingly. This argument clearly demonstrates an internalist approach, as he establishes a necessary relationship between moral belief and motivation. In other words, moral action originates from within a person, stemming from their beliefs and will, and does not require external factors. This piety and faith, as internal forces, lead individuals to act according to morality. Therefore, moral action arises from within the individual and their religious and moral beliefs, without the need for external or social motivations (Meşbāḥ Yazdī, 2015, Vol. 1).

The point here is that Smith considers rationality to be effective in resolving the conflict and creating a balance between desires and beliefs, distinguishing it in two forms: theoretical and practical rationality. However, Āyatollāh Meşbāḥ Yazdī regards rationality as a secondary factor in addressing this conflict. Unlike Smith, he does not categorize rationality into theoretical and practical dimensions but only introduces theoretical rationality as part of the active management of desires and beliefs. We should focus on the relationship that Michael Smith argues exists between belief and desire, with rationality serving as a mediating factor between religious beliefs and moral commitment in the view of Āyatollāh Meşbāḥ Yazdī. It is argued that, in Smith's opinion, if theoretical and practical rationality work harmoniously, a proportion between perceptual and tendentious areas is formed, leading to moral action (Smith, 1994).

Smith elaborates on Hume's perspective, which states that beliefs and tendencies are two distinct mental states, and distinguishes these states based on their different orientations. The purpose of beliefs is to portray the world as it is; however, tendencies are capabilities within the subject to change the world in a way that aligns with their desires. The orientation of beliefs is a kind of mind oriented toward the world, while the orientation of tendencies is a kind of world oriented toward the mind. Only situations with appropriate orientations (tendencies) can be motivating; beliefs cannot motivate merely because they exist. Therefore, in Smith's opinion, if moral judgments are considered beliefs, these judgments will not be sufficient to explain action.

Smith is an internalist who does not see the relationship between desire and belief as obligatory action. That is, the subject may move toward the verb despite their desires and beliefs; however, due to a weakness of will, they may not succeed in performing the deed. Externalists view the relationship between belief and desire in two ways: Either they consider the relationship internal or external. Smith believes that beliefs produce desires (Smith, 1994). In his opinion, desires toward propositions are internal; at the same time, the relationship between belief and desire is possible. Maximal internalist philosophers consider mere belief to be both the reason and the cause of action (motivation and commitment), such as McDowell and Nagel.

In fact, Smith aims to justify why the subject believes in a moral judgment but does not perform a moral action. He speaks of wise people who have practical rationality but do not act morally. He addresses wise people who necessarily act according to their beliefs due to their practical and theoretical rationality. While accepting the motivational nature of beliefs, Smith believes that motivation requires desire, but he believes that normative beliefs themselves produce the desire to perform an action. As a result, for any action that we have a reason to do (motivation), we have a desire to realize it, provided that we are wise (Smith, 1994). At the same time, Smith (1994) accepts moral weakness, i.e., the agent's failure to fulfill moral obligations. He believes that a rational agent who has a belief, morally obliges themselves to do it. If a wise person should have the desire to do an action (Smith, 1994), they do the action because they are wise. Therefore, he brings the element of rationality into the puzzle of belief and moral obligation. The absence of rationality may disturb the internal balance and harmony of the subject, and the subject may perform the action due to internal inconsistency. Therefore, a wise individual acts according to their knowledge. Moral virtues also justify the necessary relationship between moral judgment and motivation (Smith, 1994).

According to Āyatollāh Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, the question is that whether religious beliefs can have a motivating role and oblige religious people to perform moral and religious duties. Some people are against this idea. For example, Bloom believes that the relationship between religion and moral living is not necessary, evidenced most importantly by empirical proof. This refers to individuals who are religious but act immorally, provided that there is belief and that belief is strong (Bloom, 2012). Now we must consider whether, according to Āyatollāh Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, religious beliefs can have such a motivational role and oblige religious people to fulfill moral duties. Do believers have moral obligation and motivation because of their faith, unlike non-believers? Does this imply that non-religious people cannot have moral obligations? Considering that empirical evidence neither confirms the moral commitment of the majority of believers nor the absolute non-commitment of non-believers. It follows that, according to empirical evidence, religious beliefs are not the cause of morality (or the lack of moral commitment). In fact, morality is freed from the obligatory psychological dependence on religion. They posit a factor beyond rationality in creating proportionality and resolving conflicts in these two areas, which they term rationality and harmony.

In the opinion of Āyatollāh Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, faith is not merely a set of epistemic beliefs that form part of a person's identity and exceed the limits of mental acceptance. We have seen that religious belief alone cannot create moral obligation unless belief signifies deep knowledge that encompasses internal or external desire—an element independent of belief. Therefore, it is crucial to determine what religious faith Āyatollāh Meṣbāḥ Yazdī considers effective in action and what its relationship with action is. If we accept the proposition that faith impacts moral action, it can be understood in two ways: 1) Faith is the reason for moral action; 2) Faith is the cause of moral action.

As previously explained, if faith is the reason for action, it has a motivational role; if faith is the cause of moral action, it has a binding (or obligatory) role. Thus, according to Āyatollāh Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, while religious belief is a necessary condition for fulfilling moral obligations, it is not a sufficient condition in the sense that religious beliefs do not necessarily lead to moral commitment. Rather, a stronger factor is needed to bind the subject—an agent that relates to the field of their perceptions and encompasses the subject's beliefs, emotionally arousing the subject in such a way that they have no interest but to do the right thing. According to Āyatollāh Meṣbāḥ Yazdī, this factor is faith, an element that a person considers themselves committed to in their practical endeavors.

Faith, beyond mere knowledge, consists of belief and a mental and emotional state of submission as well as acceptance of God and His commands. After this submission of the heart, a person makes their knowledge the criterion of their behavior and acts accordingly, resulting in behavior consistent

with the knowledge and faith in their heart (Meşbāḥ Yazdī, 2022). Therefore, according to his belief, a person may possess the principle of faith, but due to a low level of faith—resulting from weak knowledge—they may lack practical commitment, leading to a gap between knowledge and action. That is, the stronger the faith, the more effective it is in the practical commitment of the subject. Hence, he clearly states: "The main source and psychological factor of such incorrect and unreasonable preferences and choices is the weakness of knowledge, followed by the weakness of faith" (Meşbāḥ Yazdī, 2022, p. 171). However, according to Smith, non-religious people can not only be moral, but being religious doesn't influence a person's moral actions.

## Conclusion

Āyatollāh Meşbāḥ Yazdī acknowledges the motivating and binding role of religious beliefs in moral practice. For example, knowledge as well as generosity can motivate the subject to perform the act of giving. However, there is one point and it is important: How is the relationship between religious beliefs and moral system described? Based on what belongs to religious beliefs, the way of communication is different. The psychological relationship talks about the motivational role of religious beliefs in moral commitment. The religious power of faith can motivate a person to act morally (Khazāee, 2013). The element of religious belief equips a person with such knowledge that helps them identify examples of moral actions.

In the analysis of Āyatollāh Meşbāḥ Yazdī's views, two central concepts emerge as crucial to moral commitment: first, belief in religious propositions, particularly theology; and second, belief in moral propositions themselves. He illustrates the knowledge of God through faith in His oneness. This belief or faith is a foundational element that compels individuals to respect moral propositions. In essence, moral values can be understood primarily as a form of religious value. Accordingly, Āyatollāh Meşbāḥ Yazdī posits that religious belief serves both an epistemic and a motivational role in moral commitment.

A believer in God possesses a distinct range of beliefs within the realm of perception. This perceptual framework effectively shapes their desires and inclinations, guiding them towards certain moral outcomes. A strong belief and genuine faith have the capacity to reconcile conflicting desires, addressing the disconnect between motivation and commitment—the gap that exists between the perceptual and tendentious spheres and the volitional realm. Āyatollāh Meşbāḥ Yazdī argues that the interplay between perception and faith in God plays a pivotal role in fostering a robust motivational framework within the cognitive psychology of the individual, thereby establishing a foundation for moral commitment and elucidating the rationale for moral actions.

In contrast to this, if we reference the work of Smith, it is noteworthy that he does not emphasize faith in the same manner. While Āyatollāh Meşbāḥ Yazdī interprets faith in the oneness of God as fundamental, Smith discusses a different context, specifically that of rationality. He asserts that rationality can fulfill a similar function to what Āyatollāh Meşbāḥ Yazdī attributes to faith. Thus, Smith's perspective accommodates the possibility that non-religious individuals can also experience moral motivation and commitment, which he believes is contingent upon the content of their beliefs and desires. He contends that religious beliefs alone do not necessarily result in moral obligation. Furthermore, there are non-religious individuals who adhere to moral duties. As articulated by Audi in his book, "Rationality and Religious Commitment," it is possible for individuals to possess religious beliefs without adhering to them (Audi, 2011, p. 90).

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