




A New Explanation of the Types of Rational Action Based on the Pattern of 'Four Journeys' (ASFĀR AL-ARBA'A) and the Possibility of Utilizing This Pattern in the Philosophy of Social Sciences*

Ebrahim Khani¹ 

1. Assistant Professor, Culture and Civilization Department, Faculty of Culture and Communications, Imam Sadiq University, Tehran, Iran. (Corresponding Author) Email: e.khani@isu.ac.ir

Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p>Article type: Research Article</p> <p>Article history: Received: 19 July 2024 Received in revised form: 22 February 2025 Accepted: 05 March 2025 Published online: 21 March 2025</p> <p>Keywords: <i>Epistemology, Four Journeys, Four Journeys of Thought, Philosophy of Social Sciences, Rational Actions.</i></p>	<p>This article seeks to demonstrate the efficacy of the "Four Journeys" model as an innovative methodological framework in the philosophy of science and the philosophy of the social sciences, using a research discourse approach. To this end, the concept of the Four Journeys in Islamic mysticism is first clarified, and it is then argued that the model represents a comprehensive cognitive framework, not confined solely to mystical or spiritual discourse. This claim is substantiated by analyzing and critiquing various types of rational action, showing that forms of analytical, essential, universal, descriptive, and synthetic reasoning align methodologically with the four stages of the Four Journeys. As such, the "Four Journeys of Thought" model may be regarded as a novel epistemological theory. Subsequently, in order to demonstrate the model's applicability within the philosophy of the social sciences, several prominent sociological theories are re-evaluated through the lens of the Four Journeys. Despite the significant methodological and theoretical differences among these thinkers, their intellectual trajectories can be mapped onto the logic of the Four Journeys, thereby enabling a unified framework for their comparison and interpretation.</p>
<p>Cite this article: Khani, E. (2025). A New Explanation of the Types of Rational Action Based on the Pattern of 'Four Journeys' (ASFĀR AL-ARBA'A) and the Possibility of Utilizing This Pattern in the Philosophy of Social Sciences. <i>Journal of Social Theories of Muslim Thinkers</i>, 15(1): 21-41. https://doi.org/10.22059/jstmt.2025.379404.1724</p>	
<div>  <div> <p>© The Author(s).</p> <p>DOI: https://doi.org/10.22059/jstmt.2025.379404.1724</p> </div> <div> <p>Publisher: University of Tehran Press.</p> </div> </div>	

* This article was presented orally at the International Congress of Islamic Humanities in 2021 and was financially supported by this congress.

1. Introduction

1_1. Statement of the Problem:

Nasir al-Din Muhammad ibn Muhammad Tusi (597-672 AH) is a prominent thinker in the Islamic world and a multi-dimensional scholar, whose contributions to explaining and systematizing various sciences, including "civil science," occupy a significant position. By utilizing the intellectual heritage of thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Al-Farabi, Ibn Maskuyyah, and Avicenna, he introduced valuable and unprecedented innovations in this field. His numerous works in practical wisdom, including *Nasiri's Ethics* and *Risala al-Imamah*, reflect his profound understanding of social and civil issues.

The central problem of this research is to comprehend the nature and typology of civil science within Tusi's thought. As a branch of practical wisdom, Tusi's civil science analyzes human voluntary actions that are grounded in "nature," "law," and "social contracts." Through the exploration of the concept of the "independent body of society," Tusi emphasizes the two-layered and three-dimensional nature of the social realm, positioning society as an entity beyond the mere algebraic sum of individuals, capable of being an independent subject of scientific knowledge. This perspective, initially articulated in the practical wisdom of Khawaja Tusi and especially in Nasser's Ethics, forms the foundation of his civil science (Tusi, 1992: 213-214).

The aim of this research is to revisit these ideas and reinterpret them in light of contemporary needs, as the fundamental concepts proposed by Tusi can serve as a model for the study and analysis of the social domain. The innovative aspect of this article lies in the explanation of the three branches of civil science—jurisprudential, religious, and orthographic—from Tusi's perspective, each examining a different dimension of the social based on its own principles. These three levels complement each other and provide the foundation for a comprehensive study of human actions.

The research question is as follows: How can we reinterpret Tusi's civil science framework in a manner that accounts for the various dimensions of the social?

To answer this question, this research employs a descriptive-analytical method and draws upon Tusi's works to outline the philosophical foundations of civil science and analyze its three types within the social thought of al-Khajeh. The study, while acknowledging Tusi's civil science, aims to design a systematic model for understanding the dimensions of the social and to offer a foundation for future research in this field.

1_2. Objective

As previously noted, the primary aim of this article is to extend the methodological utility of the Four Journeys model to the fields of epistemology and the philosophy of the social sciences. Specifically, the article advances two interrelated claims. First, the Four Journeys model not only offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the stages of mystical ascension but also provides a precise analytical tool for examining cognitive processes and rational phenomena across various domains. Second, this model holds significant potential for application in the human and social sciences, where it can serve as a meaningful and impactful conceptual framework.

1_3. Questions

1. What logic and objective does mystical ascension have at each of the four stages of the Four Journeys?
2. How can the logic and objective of each stage of the Four Journeys also serve as a model in the stages of thought? In other words, how can the primary rational actions in understanding phenomena be aligned with the logic of the Four Journeys?
3. How can the logic of the mystical Four Journeys be employed to explain the stages of understanding social phenomena, and what is the relationship of this model with existing social theories?

1_4. Background

According to the research conducted, the application of the Four Journeys model as a cognitive framework has only one known precedent. In that instance, the author of the present article explored the correspondence between the stages of the Four Journeys and the stages of rational understanding in a paper titled “Examining the Logic of Mulla Sadra's Rational Four Journeys and Utilizing It to Present a Comprehensive and Novel Model for Explaining the Stages of Rational Thought.” However, the current study differs from that work in two important respects: first, it addresses the types of rational actions and their methodological alignment with the stages of the Four Journeys—a topic not examined in the previous paper; and second, it seeks to apply this model within the domain of the philosophy of social sciences, particularly in interpreting and analyzing social science theories. With regard to the classification of rational actions, two relevant prior studies can be noted. The first is the book *The Philosophy of Philosophy* by Professor Yahya Yazdanpanah, which offers an analysis of different types of rational action (Yazdanpanah, 2016, pp. 141–181); this article takes a critical stance toward some of its conclusions. The second is an article by Professor Hamid Parsania, in which he outlines various forms of rationality (Parsania, 2015, pp. 86–91). However, Parsania’s perspective and typology differ substantially from the approach taken here and are not directly aligned with the objectives of this article.

2. Methodology

This article adopts an interdisciplinary approach. In the philosophical sections, an analytical-philosophical method is employed to explain the types of rational action and their correspondence with the stages of the Four Journeys. In addition, the method of indicative research is applied to extend the application of the Four Journeys model into the field of social sciences. This method involves employing the foundational concepts and theoretical frameworks of one discipline in order to address research questions within another, thereby fostering conceptual cross-pollination and methodological innovation.

3. Findings

The findings of this article can be categorized into two main sections. The first concerns the correspondence between types of rational action and the Four Journeys model, while the second explores the alignment of certain methodologies and findings in the social sciences with the logic of the Four Journeys.

In the first section, the article defines each type of rational action and then elucidates its alignment with the corresponding stage of the Four Journeys. For instance, it is argued that the first and arguably most foundational form of rational action is analytical reasoning. This refers to the intellect’s effort to separate and abstract intertwined meanings perceived through sensory faculties in order to attain a purified understanding, free from extraneous elements and distractions. For example, when encountering a flower, one initially perceives its color, fragrance, delicacy, and other attributes as a unified whole. Analytical reasoning, however, isolates these components—such as color or fragrance—in order to comprehend their individual essences. Analogously, in the first mystical journey, the seeker aims to transcend veils of darkness and light to attain an unveiled, direct perception of Divine realities. Thus, analytical reasoning in the cognitive realm parallels the first journey in the mystical path.

Following this, once analytical reasoning has isolated pure meanings, essential reasoning emerges. This involves identifying the intrinsic and immediate qualities of those purified meanings. Just as distilled water must then be understood in terms of its fundamental properties—like its freezing or boiling point—so too does essential reasoning aim to grasp the essential nature of phenomena. In the Four Journeys model, this mirrors the second journey, wherein the mystic, having passed through the veils of creation, becomes absorbed in the direct witnessing of Divine manifestations.

The article further demonstrates how universal reasoning and descriptive reasoning correspond to the third journey, and how combinatory reasoning - which integrates understanding and aims at action - aligns with the fourth journey.

In the second part of the article, the model is extended to the field of the social sciences. It is shown how different methods and epistemological stances taken by social scientists correspond to various stages of the

Four Journeys. For example, when a researcher employs qualitative methods such as participatory observation within a hermeneutic framework to deeply engage with a social phenomenon, they are - according to this model - traversing the first and second journeys. In contrast, when a positivist or affirmatory researcher seeks to apply general laws to particular social cases, they are engaging in the third journey. Lastly, when social theorists make prescriptions or interventions aimed at improving or regulating social life, they can be understood as operating within the logic of the fourth journey.

Importantly, this alignment does not imply that these scholars have consciously derived their frameworks from the Four Journeys model. Rather, the point is that the model possesses the analytical capacity to retrospectively interpret and evaluate the structures of thought and inquiry found in various social theories. Through this descriptive lens, the strengths and limitations of each theoretical position can be illuminated according to its place within the four-stage journey. Consequently, if social theories are reinterpreted in detail through this model, it would allow for comparative analysis across diverse paradigms within a unified and coherent framework.

4. Conclusion

The conclusion of this article can be encapsulated in the formulation of the theory of the Four Journeys of Thought. As demonstrated throughout the discussion, the Four Journeys model extends beyond a framework for analyzing the stages of mystical practice; it functions as a comprehensive cognitive model capable of effectively explaining the progression of fundamental rational actions in the process of understanding phenomena. This contribution amounts to a novel theory in the field of epistemology - one that clarifies the roles of distinct rational operations in shaping human cognition with greater precision.

However, this article aimed not only to affirm the epistemological relevance of the Four Journeys model, but also to briefly illustrate its applicability to the domain of social sciences. By mapping certain components of prominent sociological theories onto the structure of the Four Journeys, the article highlights the model's potential for reinterpreting, analyzing, and critiquing a range of theories and paradigms in the social sciences. This alignment suggests that scholars in this field may benefit from employing the Four Journeys model as a methodological framework - both to describe the intellectual logic underlying social theories and to assess their internal coherence and limitations. Future research may further develop and refine this application through more detailed case studies and comparative analyses.

Funding: This article was presented orally at the International Congress of Islamic Humanities in 2021 and was financially supported by this congress..

Ethical Considerations: Complied with.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- Azadarmaki, Taghi. (2007). *The history of social thought in Islam from its beginning to the contemporary period*. Tehran: Elm Publications.
- Avicenna. (1992). *Al-Mabahithat*. Qom: Bidar Publications.
- Avicenna. (2021). *Rasā'il of Avicenna*. Qom: Bidar Publications.
- Avicenna. (2023). *Al-Shifa*. Qom: Ayatollah Marashi Library.
- Barzegar, Ebrahim. (2010). Approaches to the localization of human sciences. *Methodology of Human Sciences*, (63), 29–54.
- Benton, Ted, & Craib, Ian. (2005). *Philosophy of social sciences* (Shahnaz Mosami Parast & Mahmoud Motahhed, Trans.). Tehran: Agha Publishing.

- Bourdieu, Pierre, Gibson, Nigel, & Morgan, Gareth. (2014). *Macro sociological theories and organizational analysis*. Tehran: Samt.
- Danai-Fard, Hassan. (2016). Methodology of sign studies in social and human sciences: Foundations, definitions, importance, approaches, and implementation stages. *Journal of Research in Seminars and Universities*, (86), 39–71.
- Farabi, Abu Nasr. (1996). *Opinions of the people of the virtuous city and their oppositions*. Beirut: Al-Hilal Library.
- Farabi, Abu Nasr. (2026). *The extracted chapters*. Tehran: Al-Zahra Publications.
- Gilson, Etienne. (2020). *Critique of western philosophical thought: From the middle ages to the early 20th century* (Ahmad Ahmadi, Trans.). Tehran: Samt Publications.
- Hasanzadeh, Davood. (2012). *Analysis of the four journeys and its foundations in Islamic mysticism* (Master's thesis). Imam Khomeini Institute, Qom.
- Hasanzadeh Amoli, Hasan. (1999). *Maml al-Himma in the commentary on Fusus al-Hikam*. Tehran: Ministry of Islamic Guidance.
- Iman, Mohammad Taqi. (2017). *The philosophy of research methodology in human sciences*. Qom: Research Institute of the Seminary and University.
- Javadi Amoli, Abdollah. (2005). *The solid foundation of Imam Khomeini (RA)*. Qom: Isra Publications.
- Javadi Amoli, Abdollah. (2007). *The seal of the sealed*. Qom: Isranter Publications.
- Khani, Ebrahim. (2013). Evaluating the existential status of acquired knowledge in light of Mulla Sadra's theory of remote perception. *Journal of Sadrian Philosophy Research*, (2).
- Khani, Ebrahim. (2014). The divisibility of the essence of effort following the primacy of existence. *Journal of Ontological Researches*, (6).
- Khani, Ebrahim. (2018a). An examination of the logic of the four journeys of Mulla Sadra and its utilization for presenting a comprehensive and novel model in explaining the stages of rational thought. *Sadra's Thought Journal*, (91), 55–74.
- Khani, Ebrahim. (2018b). *Re-examining the foundations and structure of the ontological issue in transcendental wisdom based on the logic of mystical four journeys according to Qaysari's reading* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Isfahan, Isfahan.
- Khani, Ebrahim. (2020). *Traveling companion of Hussein: The four journeys of Ashura*. Qom: Ma'arif Publications.
- Khani, Ebrahim, & Farghani, Mohammad Kazem. (2014). The divisibility of the essence of effort following the primacy of existence. *Journal of Ontological Researches*, (6).
- Khani, Ebrahim, & Hoshangi, Hossein. (2013). Evaluating the existential status of acquired knowledge in light of Mulla Sadra's theory of remote perception. *Journal of Sadrian Philosophy Research*, (2).
- Khomeini, Ruhollah. (1991). *Adab al-Salat*. Tehran: Institute for the Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works.
- Khomeini, Ruhollah. (1997). *Misbah al-Hidaya to the Caliphate and Guardianship*. Tehran: Institute for the Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works.
- Mirahmadi, Mansour, & Mehrban, Ahmad. (2016). The capacities of tribalism in explaining political and social phenomena in the Islamic world. *Journal of Political and International Studies*, (48), 108–137.
- Moallemi, Hassan. (2017). *The background and plot of Islamic epistemology* (2nd ed.). Tehran: Research Institute for Culture and Islamic Thought.
- Mulla Sadra. (1981a). *Al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah in the four rational journeys*. Beirut: Dar al-Ihya al-Turath.
- Mulla Sadra. (1981b). *Al-Shawahid al-Rububiyyah in the methodological paths* (Seyed Jalal al-Din Ashtiani, Ed. & Com.). Mashhad: Universitynter for Publication.
- Mulla Sadra. (1984). *Mafatih al-Ghayb*. Tehran: Institute for Cultural Studies and Research.
- Newman, William Lawrence. (2010). *Social research methods: Quantitative and qualitative approaches* (Hassan Danai-Fard & Seyed Hossein Kazemi, Trans.). Tehran: Mehrban Publishing Institute.
- Panhai, Mohammad Hossein. (2014). Normative science and the localization of social sciences. *Cultural Strategy*, (28), 29–60.

- Parsania, Hamid. (2010a). *Critical methodology of Sadra's philosophy*. Qom: Ketab Farda Publications.
- Parsania, Hamid. (2010b). *Hadith of the measure*. Qom: Ma'arif Publications.
- Parsania, Hamid. (2012). *Social worlds*. Qom: Ketab Farda Publications.
- Parsania, Hamid. (2015). The relationship between the concept of reason in the Qur'an and narrations with reason in Islamic culture and history. *Ma'arif Quarterly*, (1), 83–112.
- Parsania, Hamid. (2016). *Ethics and mysticism*. Qom: Ketab Farda Publications.
- Qomshaei, Agha Mohammad Reza. (1999). *The collected works of Hakim Suhba*. Isfahan: Researchnter.
- Qaysari, Davood. (1996). *Commentary on Fusus al-Hikam*. Tehran: Scientific and Cultural Publications.
- Qaysari, Davood. (1998). *Qaysari's letters*. Tehran: Iranian Society of Wisdom and Philosophy Publications.
- Qaysari, Davood. (2004). *Commentary on the Taatiah of Ibn al-Farid al-Kubra*. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah.
- Ritzer, George. (2014). *Sociological theory* (Hoshang Nayeibi, Trans.). Tehran: Ney Publications.
- Sharet, Ivan. (2017). *Continental philosophy of social sciences* (Hadi Jalili, Trans.). Tehran: Ney Publications.
- Sideman, Steven. (2016). *The clash of ideas in sociology*. Tehran: Ney Publications.
- Soroush, Abdulkarim. (1997). *Lessons in the philosophy of sociology*. Tehran: Ney Publications.
- Tabatabai, Seyed Mohammad Hossein. (1997). *Al-Mizan in Quran interpretation*. Qom: University Teachers Society Publications.
- Tabatabai, Seyed Mohammad Hossein. (2008). *The principles of realism philosophy*. Qom: Boostan Ketab Institute.
- Yazdanpanah, Seyed Yadollah. (2016). *The philosophy of philosophy: Reflections on Islamic philosophy*. Qom: Ketab Farda Publications.