

The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra

Being a Summary of His Book

al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah fi al-Asfār al-'Aqliyyah al-Arba'ah

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Abstract

The depiction of Mulla Sadra's philosophy could be best out by referring to his *magnum opus*, *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah*, usually referred to as *al-Asfār al-Arba'ah*. The book contains almost all aspect of philosophy such as theory of essence and existence, substance, movement, time, world order, knowledge, intellect and the likes. In addition, being Muslim peripatetic, he also gives special interest on the demonstrating the concept of God and eschatology. The summary below could hopefully be instrumental for paying particular interest in further studying Mulla Sadra thought for academic purposes. The point interest, however, is to be found in his repudiation against Ibn Sina's concept of Essence and Existence. Whereas Ibn Sina vindicates the essence rather than existence, Sadra gives priority to existence rather than essence. Not only has Mulla Sadra differed from Ibn Sina and other Muslim peripatetic on the issue of essence and existence, but also on the problem of substance, movement, time.

Keywords: *al-hikmah al-muta'aliyah*, mode of existence, universal intellect.

Introduction

Sadr al-Din al-Sirazi who is known as Mulla Sadra was born in Siraz, but the detail information about the date of his birth and his life is extremely scarce. He came to Isfahan when he was young and studied with the theologian Baha' al-Din al-Amili (d.1031 A.H./ 1622 AC) and with the Peripatetic philosopher Mir Fendereski (d.1050 A.H./1641 A.C). The principle teacher among

his teachers was the philosopher-theologian Muhammad known as Mir Damad (d. 1041 A.H./1631 A.C).

His philosophy is reflected in his *Magnum Opus al-Hikma al-Muta'aliya* in which we could find his philosophical thought in some details. The major point that will be elaborated here are: Ontology (Existence, Essence, Substance, Movement and Times), Theology, Psychology, Epistemology and Eschatology.¹

His Ontology

On Existence

With reference to the development of philosophy in Islam, Mulla Sadra is quite critical of his predecessors like Ibn Sina, al-Suhrawardi and others, particularly concerning the problem of essence and existence.

The discourses concerning essence and existence prevailed among Muslim philosophers including Mulla Sadra. Ibn Sina reputed with his vindication of essence rather than existence, al-Suhrawardi against the idea of the reality of existence, the philosophers regarded that existence has only the reality of a secondary intelligible (*al-ma'qul al-thani*) and does not correspond to extra mental reality and the like.

What is particular concern is the strong rejection of Sadra on the view that nothing in reality correspond to existence and on the contrary he asserts that nothing is real except existence. But this existence, which is the sole reality never be captured by the mind which can only capture essences and general notion. Hence there is fundamental difference between general notion of being or existence and those of essence. Since essence does not exist *per se* but only arise in the mind from particular forms or mode of existence and hence are mental phenomena, they can, in principle, be fully known by the mind, but the general notion of existence, since existence is the objective reality and its transformation into an abstract mental concept necessarily falsifies it. In other words, what exist is the uniquely particular, therefore it can never be known by conceptual

¹ Rahman, Fazlur, *The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975).

mind, whereas essence is by itself a general notion -and does not exist *per se*- and hence can be known by the mind.

In his *al-Asfar Sadra* argues that the essence of external world experience is grasped by the mind and preserved in it, but when it is in the mind its mode of existence already change. Since the nature of existence is outside the mind and can never come or transformed completely into the mind, the existence can never be conceptually known by any mind.² Thus, there is an abstract notion of existence in the mind out of different existents but that abstract notion falsifies the real nature of existence.

Here Sadra actually rejects al-Suhrawardi who hold that if existence were real, it will exist and will be existent and thus result in vicious regress. To Sadra it is not proper to say that existence *exist*. Existence is that primordial reality thanks to which things exist but according to the common use of language it self cannot be said to exist; just as whiteness is because things are white, but whiteness itself cannot be described as white in the common use of language. In this sense a special usage of term can be employed, that is that existence is existent *par excellence*, just as that whiteness is white *par excellence*.

Furthermore, Sadra distinguishes between essence and existence. Essence is static where each instance of an essence is identically the same. No instance of an essence is a unique individual (*fard*) but only a case (*hissa*). Manness of A, B and C is identically the same essence. Existence on the other hand, is dynamic ever unfolding itself in new and higher forms (*wujud munbasit*), and it has unique individuals (*afraad*) not just cases (*hisas*) of existence.³ It is this dynamism of existence which creates those modes which result in essences in the mind. Real existences have no names such as properties and description, while essences have names and describable properties.⁴ Reality then is the proper place for existence, while mind is the proper home of essence, concept and static notions. Sadra then emphasizes that existence is *existence* of an essence, not of something which is then asserted of an essence. Existence is simply

² Mulla Sadra, *Al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah fi al-Asfar al-'Aqliyyah al-Arba'ah*, (Beirut: Dar al-Ihya' wa al-Turats al-'Arabi, 1981), p. 43.

³ *Ibid*, p.43.

⁴ *Ibid*, p.49, p. 348, "That which is experience is existence but that which is understood is essence".

the status of being real, not an attribute of something which is in its own right already something real.⁵

Now Sadra turns to elaborate the nature of existence. According to Sadra God is Absolute Existence, and what the philosophers call Separate Intelligence are actually God's attribute, and is like the Platonic idea or what Ibn Arabi calls the "Essence of Contingents" and the "Fixed Ideas" (*al-'ayan al-tsabitah*). To him this have no external existence but forms the contents of God's mind as His ideas. At God's level there is nothing but pure existence; and this pure and absolute existence manifests itself in different forms, through process of self-unfoldment and the resultant beings, which are contingent and are modes of existence (*anha al-wujud*). These modes or contingent existence are differentiated from absolute existence in that they exhibit *certain essential characteristics to the mind*. It is in the mind and not in external reality that the essence arise as a kind of secondary nature of primordial reality which is existence.⁶ It is like the sun, the source of light, which is, in a sense, identical with the rays emitted by it. But the rays can give rise to different characteristics as, for instance, in prism.⁷

The basic formula for Sadra's doctrine of Existence is that "the more existence is complete, the less of essence it exhibits"; hence God has no essence. Essence, therefore, constitute negation of and are dysfunctional to, existence. Existence is positive, definite, determinate and real; essence are vague, dark, indeterminate, negative, and unreal. This is why the more proper to say that, for example, "this is man" than to say "man exists". Since essence are nothing in themselves whatever being they posses is due to their being 'conjoined' with existence, while existence is self-real, thanks to their being manifestation of and relation to the absolute existence.

Essences, as long as they remain un-illuminated by the light of existence, are not something to which the mind can point as existence. They eternally remain in their native concealment of non-being and their original state of non-existence. They cannot be said to be or not to be – neither do they create, nor are they objects of creation. It is

⁵ Ibid, p. 43

⁶ Acikgenc, Alparslan, *Being and Existence in Sadra and Heidegger: A Comparative Ontology*, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC Press, 1993), p. 63

⁷ Ibid, pp. 70-71

because the object of creation is the contingency existence and not essence. Contingence existences are pure relations to absolute existence and have no existence independently of God. However, unlike essence these contingent existences are concrete realities, uninfected by the indeterminacy of essence, pure existences without the admixture of essence and simple lights without any darkness.⁸

In relation to God Sadra clarifies that when the absolute existence ceases to be absolute and becomes “modes” of existence (*anha' al-wujud*), these modes necessarily give rise to essence and as a result the existence is real while the essence is subjective element. God Himself gives rise to essence when He “descends” from His absoluteness and generates attributes as content of his mind. If His attributes is viewed as pure ideas or quasi-essence in His mind (e.g. power, will, knowledge) they have no real existence at all but are purely subjective to Him. However, when God is viewed as His names (e.g. Powerful, Willer, Knowing) they become modes of existence. For this latter point Sadra identifies with the Ideas and separate Intelligence of the Muslim Peripatetic. Thus, the absolute existence move downward into diversified modes of existence and then these modes of existence generate the diversified essence.

In the above sense, Sadra is in opinion that existence creates essence. Therefore, existence cannot be genus or a differentia, since it is existence that creates all essence, and whatever abstract “is ness” belongs to essences, it does not belong to them *per se*, but because their being is derivative from real existence. In other words, the essence are invested with this “is ness” when they become objects of a mind.⁹

On Essence

With reference to the real world, Sadra hold that essence in any case has only a semi-reality.¹⁰ An essence is neither one nor many, neither universal nor particular, neither is it existence nor non-existence. The reason is that existence and non-existence are meaningful only within the context of real existence and not with reference to an essence by itself.

⁸ *Asfar*, I, 1, p.87. lines 1-11

⁹ *Asfar* I, 2, p.290, lines 2-5; for detail understanding read the entire text of Chapter 25, pp.286-290. See also *Asfar*, I, 1, p.87, lines 1-11

¹⁰ Rahman, F, *Philosophy of Mulla Sadra*, p.45.

An essence is not by itself universal, in one sense it is a “nature spread out among particulars” and, so long as one particular exists. This means that essence will exist for its relation to different particulars, but its relationship is not like the relation of a single father to different children, but rather like the relation of different fathers to different children.¹¹ At this level it is called “a natural universal” (*kulli tabi'i*).

Moreover, with regard to essence at the second level that exists in the mind, Sadra holds that it does become universal, but the mode of its existence in the mind is not in his ontology but in his epistemology, which is discussed separately from ontology. However, in relation to object Sadra defines it as “something representative and cognitive which does not exist independently in the world and is a kind of shadow.”¹²

In relation to the individual Sadra holds that matter cannot constitute individual. The individual according to him is nothing but the unique mode of existence which is the reality (*haqiqa*) of every individual. Since existence itself cannot be captured by the mind numbers of distinguishing conditions can be used to identify individual. This notion is actually based on his doctrine of the identity of the individual as existence. Here he seeks the support of al-Farabi, who hold that existence of thing cannot be derived from matter and form, and contradict Ibn Sina who characterized existence as an accident of the essence. To him existence is the primary and the sole reality, and essence may be an accident of existence.

Besides affirming the intelligible character of essence Sadra also affirms the existence of Platonic Form in the Divine Realm¹³ as similar to Ibn Arabi's *al-A'yan al-Tsabitah* (The Stable Essence). Thus, to him the Platonic Form is transcendental beings, each having an individual existence of its own. They are not universals but particular beings. Their universality means simply due to its appearance in the mind and applicable to members of a certain class. At the lower end they are equally individual but material objects. When the mind look at these objects, a power generated in it whereby it is able to

¹¹ Asfar, I,2, p.8, lines 3-5

¹² Muhammad Abdul Haq, “Metaphysics of Mulla Sadra”, *Studia Islamica*, Vol. X, No. 1, March 1971, p. 9

¹³ *Ibid*, p.4b, See also Part I, Chapter IV, Section B, the discussion of the “Breath of the Merciful” and its content; Also Part III, Chapter II, Section B, first three paragraphs; Also Part II, Chapter II on God's knowledge and Platonic Forms.

look at or contemplate the transcendental, *individual* Form. But since the human mind is weak for it still engrossed in the material world, its vision of Form is blurred. Hence it is possible to regard a truly concrete, particular, existence reality as *a universal essence applicable to a whole number of things*.¹⁴

Sadra analysis of essence is constructed as what follow: a) That genus is identical with or parallel to the potentiality of matter, while the differentia is identical with the actualized form, b) That genus, because of its imperfection and indeterminacy, require and is perfected by the differentia, c) That differentia is the only reality, since genus, as a pure potentiality in the nature of matter, cannot form part of *actual existence*, d) That what is called "species" or "specific nature" is nothing but a classification of objects by the mind since actual existence exhibit certain characteristics whereby the mind is able to compare and contrast them and put them in different classes.

The above analysis shows that genus can be treated as matter or as something potential whose actuality is the form or the differentia. Indeed Sadra says that just as matter offers the "contingency of potentiality" (*al-imkan al-isti'dadi*) e.i, an actual possibility to become a form, so does genus offer the 'inherent contengency' (*al-imkan al-dhati*) to end up in a diffetentia.¹⁵ The only difference between the two is that whereas matter refers to something in the real world (although only a potentiality), genus is in the realm of concepts.

On Substance

Differentia which is regarded by Aristotle as part of 'secondary substance' or part of specific essence (subsumed under genus), for Sadra is neither a substance nor an accident, since it is identical with individual existence. It is primary one in Aristotle's sense, for it is the differentia that *exists*. It is the mind that makes it part of the secondary substance by combining it with an extracted genus, constructing a definition in terms of a species and by subsuming that species under that genus. But even then it is only "accidentally" a secondary substance which is really applicable only to the genus and the artificially constructed species.

¹⁴ Walbridge, John, *The Science of Mystic Lights Qutb al-Din Shirazi and Illuminasionist Tradition In Islamic Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 25

¹⁵ Ibid, p.38, lines 4-8

On Movement

In order to appreciate Sadra's idea on movements, it is worth mentioning briefly the idea of traditional philosophers. To them movement is a stable condition of flow (*halah sayyalah*) which creates continuous process in the mind. Movement needs a substrate to support it and this substrate being at once something stable and moving, i.e being in a sense actual and in another sense potential, since actualization consists in movement. This view of course holds that movement occurs in accident only.

Sadra's theory of movement is something novel in the history of Islamic thought. Solid bodies are analyzed into a factor of pure potentiality of movement called 'matter' and an actualizing factor called "physical form" or "bodily nature". This is continuously changing and giving rise to a continuum where neither space nor time exists independently but both are integrated function or aspects of this continuum movement. This movement is unidirectional and evolutionary, resulting in ever higher forms of existence until material existence reaches the stage where it rises beyond the realm of space-time. This movement is called "movement in substance" (*al-harakah fi al-jawhar*), where the very substance of bodies is subject to change as opposed to the merely qualitative change.

Since motion means *moving* as a verb, that is "a continuous renewal and lapse (*al-tajaddud wa al-inqida'*) of the parts of motion, it is impossible that its immediate cause should be something with a stable or enduring being. For, a stable or enduring entity will contain in itself the passing phases of movement as a present fact, and this togetherness of all passing phase would amount to stability, not movement. Movement therefore cannot be established on the basis of a stable entity. Such an entity can have a stable *essence*, but not a stable being which must consist simply in change and mutation. There is therefore, a more fundamental change beneath the change of accident, that is "a change in substance".¹⁶

How does the movement itself start?

Here the two series and their interaction are inadequate to describe the origin of the movement. The answer must lie in the nature of the body itself and hence the nature of the body must

¹⁶ *Asfar*, I,3, p.61, lines 7 ff

itself lie in motion. This indicates that nature is in constant flux and every moment we have a new body with a novel form. If it is so, where the idea of unity of a 'thing' arise from? The answer is that in any given "thing" the constantly changing forms are so similar that we *imagine it* to be the same and subsume it under a stable, static concept, like man or plant. This is because concepts or essences are static and serve to describe certain properties which enable a certain set of them to be invested with "thingness".¹⁷

Therefore according to Sadra a "things" is a particular "structure of events", thanks to the continuity of movement and the similarity of infinitesimal forms which permit the subsumption of a particular event-system under a mental concept or essence. In reality, there is nothing but a flow of forms and since this flow is unidirectional and irreversible, each successive forms "contains" all preceding forms and transcends them. The movement is from the more general and indeterminate towards the more definite and the more concrete: this process resembles the rise of ever more concrete species and individuals from the general and indeterminate being of genuses, thanks to the emergence of successive differentia.¹⁸

In order to prove the existence of substantive movement or movement in the category of substance itself, we need the detailed consideration of how movement can be said to occur in the accidental categories of quality and quantity. Movement in accident is linked with and consequent upon substantive movement. It is therefore as irreversible as the latter. But it is obvious that qualities not only increase but decrease: cold change into hot and vice versa; black becomes white and vice versa. Yet Sadra insist that all qualitative change is towards perfection and is unidirectional like movement-in-substance¹⁹ and indeed consequent upon it.

The point to be noted here is that in the case of motion in accidents, the substratum of movement is not the accidental categories themselves but the substance itself: when black increase in intensity, it is not the case that "blackness increase", but the body increases in blackness.

¹⁷ Mulla Sadra (Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi), *Al-Syawahid al-Rububiyyah fi al-Manahij al-Sulukiyah* ed. Sayyid Jalaluddin al-Asyiyani, (Masyhad: Masyhad University Press, 1967), p.64

¹⁸ *Asfar*, I,2, p. 36 lines 10 ff; also pp.28-29; p.35;

¹⁹ *Asfar*, I,3, p.80 last line, p.62;

To recapitulate, Sadra's ideas of movement can be described in the following points: All movement is essentially evolutionary and un-directional. All movement has the effect of producing an individual process – entity whose unity is assured by a substratum and an indeterminate quantities and qualities, as a genus does. The substratum is matter or bodily nature.

On Time

Time as defined by Sadra is not a measure of movement, as Aristotelians do, but as “measure of physical nature in as much as it moves and renews by itself”. Therefore, time far from being an independent ‘in’ which events occur, as in a container, is part this process. It is an extension or dimension (*imtidad*) of physical nature, just like other three spatial dimensions.²⁰ Time is related to the physical nature (or form) in respect of its time-dimension just as spatial magnitude is related to the bodily nature (or form) in respect of its space-dimension”.²¹

Whoever reflects a little on the nature of time knows that it has no reality except in the observer's mind. It is not quality which externally characterizes body like black and white but arise only through mental analysis. Since it does not exist externally, it cannot be described as “arising” or “passing” attribute which characterizes physical nature itself, thanks to its perpetual, substantive movement. Here Sadra concerns to emphasize that 1) just as all body of “physical nature” has a spatial magnitude, so it has an inherent time-dimension, thanks to substantive movement, and that time does not attach itself to it from outside. 2) that since this movement is continuous, the entire physical field is a spatio-temporal continuum. 3) that this continuum is an evolutionary process which has, as its goal, the attainment of a level of divine existence which is free from change and mutation, and hence beyond time.

The absolute standard of time is the movement of the outermost heaven – the movement, that is, in the substance of the heaven which produces the visible circular motion in terms of endlessly successive position. The Intellect, being the Divine Logos,

¹⁹ Rahman, Fazlur, *The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975)

²⁰ Mulla Sadra, *Al-Mabda' wa al-Ma'ad*, ed Sayyid Jalaluddin al-'Asyiyani, (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1976), p. 140

is the creator of time, while the soul –body complex of the heaven is its primary recipient, for time is an inherent function of a body, and the soul, insofar as it is attached to the body, is also like a physical form. Time itself, being subjective entity, does not change or arise or pass. When it is related to God or Intellect is called “eternity” (*sarmad*), and when it related to heaven is called “perpetuity” (*dahr*); when it related to things that come into existence and pass out of existence is called “time” (*zaman*).

Time, as a subjective analytical factor, is eternal and has no beginning, just substantive movement is eternal and without a beginning. As for God and the Intelligence, they are beyond the successive or serial time. All other beings, including souls are within time since they are subject to substantive movement. Time is eternal because whatever is conceived to be “before” time necessarily turns out to be in time, since “before” in this context must involve time. The very temporality of time, therefore, involves the eternity of time.²² Time in this respect is different from space, since the “limitedness” of space does not involve space beyond space. Of course “beyond space” can exist as an image or an idea in the mind, but this does not mean real space; However, with regard to time, the mere idea of a “time before time” involve real time because the reality of time is only in the mind.²³

Although the notion of time arises from mental analysis, yet its status is different from that of an essence which also arise from a mental analysis of a concrete existent into essence and existence. Whereas essence are “nothing positive” by themselves, time is something positive and has “a peculiar existence”²⁴ of its own and of course has an essence as well. With reference to the distinction of essence and existence, time in Sadra’ view is relational (*mudaf*). What is relational in this respect is the essence or the concept of time which is “non-stable and continuous extension or quality”. If the concept of time is relational, the existence of time is not relational, since every

²¹ Ibid, p. 141

²² Ibid, p. 124, lines 11 ff; also p. 148, lines 5 ff where Aristotle is referred to as having said that whoever, believes in the temporal origination of time, unwittingly accepts the eternity of time.

²³ Ibid, p.149, line 5; p.150, line 5.

²⁴ Debbashi, Mehdi, *Mulla Sadra’s Theory of Transubstantial Motion: A Translation and Critical Exposition* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1981). p. 161

point of time is an existential fact or reality, hence its reality is not exhausted by relationality.²⁵

On World Order

The prevailing belief among the philosophers was that the heaven – the place of the eternal movement – is eternal in both its body and soul. However, Sadra rejects the philosophers' account and believes that the heaven itself is subject to perpetual substantive mutation. The perpetual change of position of heavenly body is only an outward symptom or effect of its inner, substantive instability and constant mutation.²⁶

Further he explains the origin of the continuous and eternal movement on terms of the substantive change of all physical nature. This physical nature, whose eternal and unchanging idea exist in the mind of God (Platonic paradigm), is such that *when it exists*, it necessarily exists as subject to change and evolutionary mutation. Change therefore, is not a characteristic of the essence of physical nature, i.e., its idea or concepts, but of its existence.²⁷ Most things, when they are transformed into concepts or essence shed their existential characteristic: for example physical quantity and volume have extension in existential reality but their concept is not extended. But in the case of existence itself, its nature can never be captured by the mind and formed into concept; hence existence is unique fact which has no real essence. Now, all physical nature at the existential level, is a constant flow which cannot be captured by the mind: it can be known only through a direct intuition.²⁸

Another argument that Sadra tried to use is from Primary Matter. Matter in a primary sense is a pure potentiality and share some kind of existence. Now existence is fundamentally the same in all existents although it differs in all existents as well, in term more or less. Matter, then, characterized by the greatest intensity of yearning for the higher

²⁵ Ibid, p.151, line 19 ff; for Sadra this is equally true of movement and the physical nature which is inherently characterized by movement. Ibid, p.131, line 5ff; Indeed for Sadra all three are existentially the same. Of the three the "really existential" is the physical nature which since it is in perpetual change, give rise to movement which, in turn, is measured by time, movement being "more real" or "less unreal" than time.

²⁶ Asfar, I,3, p.131, lines 2 ff; also p. 118, lines 6, p.121, line 1-2; p.122, line 11.

²⁷ Ibid, p.151, lines 19 ff. For Sadra this is equally true of movement and the physical nature which is inherently characterized by movement: Ibid, p. 131, lines 5 ff.

²⁸ Ibid, p.132, lines 9; p.133 lines 14.

in the entire existence since it is the most deficient in all existence.²⁹ Sadra then corroborates the argument by another derived from a consideration of the idea of contingency or possibility itself. Contingency or possibility belong to the very nature of Intelligence – God’s mind and His attribute – everything that flows from them is contingent. This contingency being intensified in proportion to the degree a being is removed from the source of existence, God. Now the essential or pure possibility or contingency (*imkan dhati*) which characterizes Intelligence comes to assume the character of possibility in the sense of potentiality (*imkan isti’dadi*) in matter. All potentiality and its actualization, therefore, are due to the nature of matter which seeks ever higher form at different levels of existence in the physical world such as inorganic matter, plants, animal and man.

The above argument reflects an upward movement of world order and what follows is another argument in horizontal direction. In this direction, matter regarded as going through an infinity of successive forms. Infinity means that it has neither beginning nor an end. But this does not mean that the endless series is purposeless. The endless series has as its purpose that those forms or species which cannot be perpetuated as such should be perpetuated in individual manifestation; each succeeding individual behaving as the purpose of the preceding.³⁰ If matter did not have this kind of change, it would always be with the same form, which would therefore be eternal. God, therefore, gives new forms upon matter every moment, since God’s creative impulse is ceaseless.³¹ Since the temporal series is endless, it is obvious that the “other life” or the “hereafter” cannot take place in this horizontal direction. It is the vertical order which means “hereafter” in the proper sense. This vertical direction is conceived by common man and theologian as the after-life or after the end of time.

His Theology

On God’s nature

The first and important problem dealt with by Sadra on God’s nature is the proof of God’s existence. Here he does not agree with

²⁹ Asfar, I, p.239, lines 1 ff

³⁰ Asfar, I,2, 244, lines 8 ff; p.265, lines 5; p.267, line 14.

³¹ Morris, J. Winston, *The Wisdom of the Throne: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mulla Sadra*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p.149

the philosophers who seek to prove God by something other than God. It is because God being the Ground of all else, cannot strictly be proved by all else, but is Himself the proof of all else. God has to be His own proof or else He cannot be literally proved.. Therefore God is not to be searched for beyond the realm of existence but rather to be found in it as its absolute ground: “God is His own Witness” as the Qur’an puts it.³²

This proof is based on the principle of *tashkik*, or systematic ambiguity of existence. Existence while being one, is also many. Further, existence does not have two aspects, one by virtue of which it is one and the other by virtue of which it is many, but is one simple reality which by virtue of its being one is many. Only existence has this characteristic basically, which is also shared by movement and time derivatively, but latter are, in a sense not real. To perceive one and many, absolute and relative, perfect and imperfect at the same time would be problem for some people. This is because those people conceive existence as an essence, i.e concept which uniformly and unequivocally applies to all members of a class or species, e.g., every man is man no less no more. But essences in their very nature are different from existence. Essence are strictly definable, existence is not; essence are therefore, divisible of reality into classes and categories like man, animal, plant, substance, accident etc. which existence unites and hold all these in its simple and all-inclusive grasp and is yet capable of differences. If essence was real and not existence, like the idea of al-Suhrawardi, this essence is incapable of such differentiation, being static and closed. Only existence is not static and close; it is always open and therefore it is capable of *tashkik*. Hence existence can never become a real universal like an essence.

The other proof of Sadra is from his refutation of philosophers’ argument from contingency. The philosopher states that a contingent existence cannot exist by itself – since contingency means hanging in the balance between existence and non-existence – and therefore, needs a cause which should tilt this balance towards existence. But, this series of causes cannot regress ad infinitum and so we must reach a cause which exists by itself and does not need another cause. In the idea of Sadra This argument does not proceed from and is not based upon existence as reality but existence as a concept (*mafhum*).

³² Asfar III, 1, p.13, lines 3 f, al-Qur’an, 3:18

The concept of existence is inspected and analysed into two kinds: contingent and necessary. Moreover, this argument simply brings in God to terminate the infinite regress and that, therefore, the value of this argument to prove God's existence is inferential and indirect at best. Starting from the contingent, they find it necessary to come to some necessary being which may be God. Thus God who is the cause and Ground of all thing became their effect or consequence. This also imply that there is some being, either necessary or contingent, and this is far for proving the existence of God. Or if they say that part of the concept of existence is necessary existence, this would also imply that there is other part of the concept of necessary existence, which may be necessary being and not God the most real existence. For Sadra to talk of some necessary being is hardly to talk of God.³³

Furthermore, Sadra also in opinion that God is pure existence without additional essence. There are several argument to support this notion, but the most important one is the following. If God had an essence besides existence, His nature would be characterized by a duality. His existence, being an accident, would then be caused either by an outside factor or by His essence. It cannot be caused from the outside because God would then become contingent, and would cease to be necessary. But if His existence is caused by His essence, then two fatal difficulties follow. First his existence would become an effect and hence would become contingent. Secondly, His essence would have to be assumed to exist (being cause) prior to its existence. Therefore God must me simple and absolute existence without essence.³⁴ It is on the basis of the above argument that Sadra proof the unity of God.

On God's Attribute

God's attribute according to Sadra are identical with God's Existence and are not additional to it, but have the status of notions (*mafahim*). This are somewhat analogous to essence in contingent existents but cannot identical with the existence of contingent. God' attributes are original and essential, whereas these attributes in

³³ Nasr, Seyyed Hussein, *Sadr al-Din Al-Shirazi and His Trancendent Theosophy*, (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1979), p.28

³⁴ Afar I, 1, p.96, line 7; p. 97, line 6.

contingent beings are derivative and accidental; Just as in the case of existence, there is original existence which belongs to God and a derivative, contingent existence which belongs to contingents. So with attributes like knowledge and power: there is an original, essential knowledge or power which belongs to God and derivative, accidental knowledge or power which belongs to contingent.³⁵ Supporting this idea Sadra argues that since all attributes arise out of existence, which the primordial reality, in the Necessary Existence they are necessary, while in contingent existence they contingent.

Thus in God, who is the fullness of existence, pure and simple, un-derived and original, in which there is no composition (*tarkib*), attributes are identical with His existence. In a contingent, on the other hand since its existence is derived and non-necessary and is hence subject to the dualism of essence and existence, attributes and existence make up some kind of duality or composition. In God, knowledge for example, is as self-necessary as His existence; in the Intelligence it is of the order of intellect, while in the soul it is of a psychic order. It also follows that whereas in God knowledge, life, power and will are existentially identical with each other, although not conceptually, since their meanings or notions – *mafahim* – differ from each other. They are existentially different in contingent beings since these latter do not have fully integrated existence.

God World Relationship

The question of God-world relationship concern mainly with relationship of the contingent to the Necessary Being and its subject matter is ontological in nature. The subject of discussion in Sadra's philosophy is the causation of the vertical contingent by the Necessary Being or emanation of the former from the latter. Sadra's theory is actually an attempt to synthesize the Muslim philosopher's theory of emanation and Ibn 'Arabi doctrine of "descene" (*tanazzulat*) of the Absolute Being.³⁶

In his theory Sadra's doctrine of essence is an important part that needs to be emphasized. According to him essences have nothing in themselves and therefore they cannot be characterized by causation or emanation, meaning they cannot be caused, let alone

³⁵ Asfar, III, 1, p.124, lines 9-12; cf. P.121, lines 4-5.

³⁶ F.Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra*, p.82.

be caused to exist. In the contingent being, what exists is a mode of existence (*nahw al-wujud*) which in turn causes essence to arise in the mind. He rejects that existence and essence are conjoined in real existence as certain body may be conjoined with black. It is because black exist only as its accident. Essence, therefore cannot be caused; what is caused is the modes of existence, although this causation also indirectly affect essences insofar as they arise in the mind. To attribute causation or existence to essence is a pure metaphor.³⁷

In this theory Sadra postulates that God is the efficient cause that "together with" and "present in" its effect. Furthermore God the absolute and the simple existence as well as the First Cause produces His first and only effect. The first effect is described by Sadra as the "first self-manifestation" of God to Himself at the level of self-knowledge and the "self-unfolding existence" (*al-wujud al-munbasit*). When God as Necessary Existence, reflect upon Himself, the first effect from His being takes place.

To avoid the duality in God, which is cause and effect, or to be consistent with the doctrine of the Unity of God, Sadra regards the cause and effect as simply relational concept. The category of relation pertains the domain of essences or pure concept, while God is pure existence, having no objective essence at all. The pure existence cannot be captured by human mind the only ability is to state that the causal influence of God is by virtue of His very being and that the effect is internal to Him. The causation is a process, not a relation between static entities by which the verb *to exist* is applicable to things, but since it is God who originally exist, all other things exist by virtue of His existence. All existence is, therefore, God's existence in a basic sense, yet everything else also exist really, since the verb "to exist" is applicable to everything in a real sense. Sadra called this method the systematic ambiguity of existence.

This effect, which is the first effect of God, in a sense, is identical with God Himself as pure existence but as being the result of His self-reflection it is something different as well. But it is not to be understood as being separate from Him. This is an act of self-reflection as God is concerned and an act of pure effect so far as it itself is concerned. This effect can also be a hypostatis, the stuff of which all existence are made and Sadra calls it the self-unfolding existence

³⁷ *Asfar*, I, 2, p.290, lines 8 ff.

(*al-wujud al-munbasit*). Sadra even regard this hypostatis as the first emanant from God. The Peripatetic philosophers hold that the first emanant is the First Intelligence, for Sadra it is the First Intelligence only in comparison with the rest of the *particular* beings which exist in separation or quasi-separation from God and is the result of the conjunction of this self-unfolding existence with an essence. But the self-unfolding existence is not separate from God.³⁸

Now, God as a pure existence, who had generated the self-unfolding existence, creates by a *second reflection* upon Himself a multiplicity of attributes, such life, knowledge, power etc. But with this *second reflection* a change occur in the first one as well, although it retains the character of existence it become infected with essences. Sadra call this substance as the highest Intelligible Substance which generates the primary substance, pure matter. The principle involved in Sadra's argument is *that the higher a substance is in the intelligible Realm, the lower is its shadow in the material realm.*

On Psychology

The idea of Mulla Sadra on Psychology concerns mainly with the theory of soul. He accepts Aristotle's definition of the soul as entelechy of the body. According to him since the soul is not eternal but originated, it cannot be separate and independent of matter. It is because to say that the soul is separate and independent of matter is only compatible with the belief in the pre-existence of the soul, as Platonist and neo-Platonist believe. Since the soul is in matter, its soul-ness cannot be construed as a relation as if it had an independent existence of its own and then came into a relationship with matter. Thus, if the human soul were an independent substance, it would be impossible to integrate the soul and body, so as to form a natural physical species.³⁹

However, the relationship of the soul to the body is not like that of any ordinary physical form to its matter. All physical forms *inhere* in there matter in such a way that the two do not constitute a composite (*murakkab*) of two existentially distinguishable elements, but totally fused together to form a complete unity (*ittihad*) in existence, and as a result, the form work simply and directly in

³⁸ Mulla Sadra, *Al-Mazahir al-Ilahiyyah*, ed Sayyid Jalaluddin al-'Asyiyani, (Masyhad: Masyhad University Press, 1970), p. 332

³⁹ *Afar*, IV, 1, p.12 lines 4-13

matter. The soul works on its matter through the intermediacy of other lower forms or powers. Similarly, the phenomenon where one power or form work on matter directly but through other form is called "soul". Therefore, Sadra regards the soul as the entelechy of a material body insofar as it *operates through faculties*, and he insists that the word "organ" cannot mean "physical organ" like hands, liver or stomach, but faculties or powers through which the soul works, as, for example appetite, nutrition and degestion.⁴⁰

According to Sadra's principle of the "emergence" or "substantive change" of the soul, the soul is bodily in its origin but spiritual in its survival (*jismaniyat al-ḥuduts, ruhaniyyat al-baqa'*).⁴¹ Since the soul emerges on the basis of matter, it cannot be absolutely material, for "emergence requires that the "emergent" be of a higher level than that which it emerges out of or on the basis of. Consequently, even the lowest forms of life-like plants, although they are attached to and dependent upon matter, cannot be themselves entirely material.

Moreover, being entelechy of the body means that the soul renders the genus "body" into a species, i.e. a living body. This means that "body" must enter into the definition of plant, animal, and man. According to Sadra, both human and animal souls are free from matter and hence capable of existence independently of the body. Just as the soul comes into existence as an individual as a power in matter – although not as a power of matter - it remains its individual character even when it is severed from the body and becomes a member of the Divine Realm. As we shall see later in his doctrine of eschatology, he reject the transmigration of the soul as well as the view that after death, the individual soul dissolve themselves in the ocean of Eternal Being.

His Theory of Knowledge

General Theory

Knowledge according to Sadra is neither an abstraction from matter nor a relation but a being (*wujud*). It is neither every being

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.16, lines 4; p. 18, line 7

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p.4, lines 3 ff; p.35, last lines ff; p.121 lines 4 ff; p.123, lines 16-22; *Ibid*, 326, lines 6; p.327, lines 3.

nor potential being but an actual being. It is even not every actual being, but pure being, unmixed with non-being. The intensity of knowledge increase as it become free from an admixture of non-being. The Primary matter has the farthest possibility of possessing the status of knowledge for it is pure indeterminacy and potentiality. Body, therefore, cannot become knowledge, since it is not pure being.⁴²

Knowledge, then, is *pure existence, free from matter*.⁴³ Such existence is the soul when it has fully developed into an acquired intellect. The soul then does not need forms inhering in it as its accidents but creates forms from within itself. This is the meaning of the identity of thought and being. This also explains that all knowledge is related to the soul as the contingent world is related to God. For just as God is Pure and Simple Existence, the Absolute Mind and all other existents are related to Him, thanks to the “unfolding existence (*wujud munbasit*)”.

Theory of Perception

According to Aristotle and the Muslim Peripatetics, sense perception consists in the fact that sense organs undergo a qualitative change under the impact of the external object of perception and receive its imprint.

Sadra’s standpoint in this regard is based on the doctrine that 1) knowledge consists in a presentation (*hudur*) of the object to the subject; 2) nothing physical can be present either to anything else or to itself since its parts are mutually “absent”; 3) since both the external object and the sense organ are physical, there is no question of the former being present to the latter. Therefore Sadra rejects this idea of Aristotle and the Muslim Peripatetics by arguing that nothing physical as such can become the proper object of knowledge, since knowledge involve an entirely new status of being with which the object of knowledge in invested (*nash’a ‘ilmiyyah*).

Sadra differentiate between the mental perception and the organ perception. It is because organ’s perception like the eye see, the ear hears, the feet walk is not identical with seeing, hearing, walking.⁴⁴ Physical organs are required for sense perception only

⁴² *Asfar* I, 3, p.297 beginning; p.298, lines 4.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 292, line 6; p.294, line 11; *Asfar* I, 1, p.290, line 6 etc.

⁴⁴ Rahman, Fazlur, *The Phylosophy of Mulla Sadra*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975) p. 112

due to the accidental fact that we exist in a material world, not intrinsically. In fact pure soul when they are separated from the body can have all the perception, whereas in ordinary life the physical organ only mediate.

Sadra's theory of sense perception is based on his conviction that *knowledge is being*, meaning that the status of being and the status of knowledge are the same. For knowledge to be possible, the being of the external object has to undergo a transformation in an actual metamorphosis. This is what he calls "a being-for-knowledge" (*nash'a 'ilmiyyah*). Here he reject the notion that perception is "abstracting the form from matter" or that imagination is "abstracting the form from material attachments". To him, the act of perception requires not abstraction but a *transformation* of the object of perception. Perception occur because the giver of form, the soul itself, bestows another psychic and luminous cognitive form, and because of which perception and knowledge arise. What is the actual sentient and the actual sensible at the same time here is the form.⁴⁵ So the object of our knowledge is "the form within the soul". But how do we know the external world? Or how do we know that there is an external world? The answer of Sadra is that external world is known accidentally, indirectly, and secondarily.⁴⁶ But he does not deny that what we know is the external object; nor does he hold that we know two things, the one outside us and the other inside us or in our sense organ.

Sadra's notion that as an object of knowledge the external world of matter has to be transformed into a new being or status of reality, that is "the being-for-knowledge" does not mean that we know different world or we know the duplicate of the external world. The world as we know it is exactly the world as it exists; but its status of being changes, and attains a mental quality for knowledge to become possible. Sadra's overall position in this respect appears to be a kind of "idealist realism", a position compatible with his critique of the abstractionist doctrine.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.181, lines 3-9; Asfar I, 3, p.316, lines 6 ff.

⁴⁶ This can be understood in the sense that the material form, when it becomes the object of knowledge, is transformed in its very nature, due to the substantive motion of existence. See *Asfar*, IV, 1, p.1758.

Theory of Intellect

The goal of Sadra's theory of intellect is to show that the human mind ultimately unites itself with the Active Intellect or the Universal Intellect. Since, according to Sadra the end of all substantive movement is to achieve a new level of being, knowledge represents, such substantive movement (*harakah jawhariyyah*) whose end is the union of the human intellect with the transcendent Intellect, and hence the achievement of a new level of existence, that of pure and simple intellect. His main doctrine of intellect is, therefore the "simple intellect", meaning that that which exists at the lower levels with separate or mutually exclusive parts, exists at the higher levels as mutually inclusive and unitary.

Sadra's performance is essentially grounded philosophically in his doctrine of substantive change, supported in turn by his theory of the priority of existence over essence. This is carried out by an extensive and consistent critique of Ibn Sina's doctrine of the intellect, mainly on the doctrine of abstraction, on the simple intellect and on the identity of the mind and intelligible in actual knowledge.

Rejecting the idea of Ibn Sina that the knowledge change while the soul remain unchanged, Sadra hold otherwise. He says that the soul itself undergone an evolution and from its initial being of the material order, it becomes a being of the intelligible order at the intellectual plane.⁴⁷ The soul therefore, not merely "receive" forms but creates and becomes them, i.e., becomes literally identical with them. The soul "becoming" its object is not a temporary affair lasting only during the act of knowledge, but denotes a new level of existence which the soul achieves.

Preferring the concept of evolution rather than abstraction in a process of cognition, Sadra comes to formulate his doctrine of the "simple (*basit*)". What he means by simple intellect is that the intellect and the intelligible is one and simple. The simple and the higher form of knowledge include the lower and the detailed, and does not exclude any of the lower level of existence. Otherwise it would not be simple but deprived and partial. Hence he says that the same soul is "intellective, perceptive, smelling, tasting, walking, growing, self-nourishing, appetitive and angry."⁴⁸ The evolutionary change in

⁴⁷ *Asfar*, I, 3, p.366, lines 2-9.

⁴⁸ *Asfar*, I,3, p.306, lines 5; p. 307, line 11; *Asfar*, IV, 1, p.65 lines 13-14.

the process of cognition is a substantive change and not an accidental change like what was assumed by Ibn Sina. In accidental change the previous forms are substituted by the new forms, whereas in the substantive change the previous forms are not discarded or replaced by new forms but are perfected. In connection with his doctrine of pure existence, Sadra demonstrates the absolute reality of existence over against essence, and states that existence is unitary and inclusive. This means that knowledge, nourishment, locomotion, growth may be all different, but they all come together in concrete human existence. Thus he affirms the existence of a simple, creative intellect in man.

To prove the identity of the intelligible and the intellect, Sadra analyses the term "intelligible" and "actually intelligible". Something which is actually intelligible, must be *ipso facto* both self-intelligent and self-intellected, since the "intelligible" is unthinkable without an "intelligent". Now, if we suppose that the intelligible and the intelligent are two different entities and the relationship between them is contingent one, the intelligible will not be intelligible when it is considered out of relation with the intelligent. It follows that an intelligible must be self-intelligible, i.e self-intelligent. Hence the identity of the intelligible and the intellect.⁴⁹

In addition Sadra also discuss two orders of knowledge: *first* that exist in the natural world, that is the human soul, and *second* the transcendent intelligence. The human soul starts with the more general and less valuable primary truths and advances to more concrete, definite and existential knowledge, while the transcendent intelligence the order is reversed. When the soul perfects its knowledge and becomes "acquired intellect" and achieve an existential status analogous to that of the Active Intelligence, its knowledge-order also becomes like that of the Active Intelligence.

Finally, the doctrine of simple intellect is used by Sadra to explain God's knowledge of the particular. After long criticism of his predecessor, Sadra hold that God knows all things, particular as well as universal because He envelops all of them as His modes and manifestation – without being predicated of them or they being predicated of Him- in different orders or gradations of existence. For if his knowledge were treated in conceptual terms, as Ibn Sina apparently treats it, it will have to be as some kind of essence,

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, I, 3, p.313, lines 13; p.315, last line.

additional to His existence. God's knowledge is, therefore, nothing but His simple existence, an order of being unique to Him.⁵⁰

His Eschatology

Man's Destiny

In depicting the man's destiny, Sadra first appear with his repudiation on the idea of the transmigration of the soul. This idea is closely related to his idea of body and soul. To him body and soul are both potentials. When this potentialities are gradually realized, both soul and body move upward by an evolutionary process. It is not the case that the soul alone moves while the body remain static or vice versa, but the whole move through a gradual perfection to the new status of existence. When the embryo becomes a fetus, not only does life come into existence but there is a physical change as well, and this double-sided development continues through life. It is absurd to assume that a developed soul, after leaving its own body, can enter into a new undeveloped body and start developing once again from scratch. Thus devolution or transmigration is impossible.⁵¹

There is of course some religious difficulties with regard to the doctrine of evolution, for there is statement in the Qur'an that a group human being, because of their evil deeds, were changed into monkeys and pig by God. (Qur'an: 5:60). This statement is supported by Hadith which generally imply the transmigration insofar as they assume the reuniting of souls and bodies anew. Sadra solve the difficulty with his doctrine of "substantive movement" and the World Image (*'Alam al-Mitsāl*). The soul cannot be free from body and this material body cannot be resurrected once destroyed. Therefore, all undeveloped souls or souls which done evil deeds in this life, will create a body of their won by exteriorizing their inner psychic habits and states – acquired in this life – in the form of body in the World of Image.

When the Qur'an says that some people turn into monkeys, it is not talking of an event that took place in this world but in the Realm of Images, where all the events of physical resurrection take

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, I, 3, p.407, lines 3; p.417, end.

⁵¹ On irreversibility of the substantive movement, see Asfar IV, 2, p.2, line 10; p.3, line 5; p.4, line 10.

place. Therefore, the body in the hereafter will not be the same as the earthly body, but the body has the same form as this earthly body, its identity is preserved by its form not by its matter, which is continuously changing. So this earthly body in the hereafter will be pure physical form without matter but that physical form will preserve the identity of this body.⁵² Therefore, the body that will be resurrected will be identically the same as this body, except that it will not be material.

Afterlife, in the opinion of Sadra is a relative concept.⁵³ Intellect and soul have a transcendent existence before this world but they are not human intellect and human soul. When a human soul comes into existence in this world it is genuinely an originated thing having its being in its initial career in matter. One cannot speak of its pre-existence, for what is pre-existent is not the human soul but the Universal Soul. So everything in this world moves and develops, including human souls, the orientation of everything being towards God, afterlife is relative term. But there is difference between man and lower beings: whereas lower beings, when they develop into higher modes of existence have to change their species. It is man alone who, *in his individual existence*, passes once again from an embryo to a mature intellect. Individual in lower species also move and develop but each in his own species.⁵⁴ At the beginning of a man's career, his soul is "in the body" as it were, but as the soul actualize itself, the body gradually dwindles until at the purely intellectual level, the body is literally "in the soul".⁵⁵ The highest point of evolution, the possession of pure being, means absolute individuality; hence God is the supreme individual.

Another argument for the proof of afterlife Sadra holds that the human soul, while starting its career as a bodily form can progress to a point of intellectual development where it is united with the Active Intelligence. This Active Intelligence exists, not by Gods giving it existence but by God's own existence and hence is, in a definite sense, a part of God.

⁵² *Asfar*, IV, 2, p.31, lines 12; p.43, line 14 ff.

⁵³ *Ibid*, IV, 2, p.22, line 1 ff; p.162 line 12 ff; p.159, line 12 ff

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, IV, 2, p.24, line 1 ff

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, IV, 2, p.97, line 1; p.98 line 11; p.99, line 8; p.100, line 4; p.197, last line; p.47, line 9.

The first stage after death is that of the “grave”, a stage of intermediate between bodily death and “resurrection”. For Sadra “grave” means the envelopment of the soul in imaginative faculties, since in the common run of mankind, the intellect is not fully actualized and hence imagination and even certain bodily dispositions will persist, even though the material body is gone. For those who actualized their intellect, the stage of the “grave” will either be bypassed or will be passed through very quickly. The stage of the “resurrection” means the shedding, on the part of soul, of all that is physical by way of dispositions or memory.⁵⁶

Sadra then narrates various interpretation of a tradition according to which a human “the root of the tail” (*‘ajb al-dhanab*) will survived, from which God will creates the whole human being. Some say it is “soul”, others regard it as “atom in the human body”, some others says it means the “essence of man”. Sadra regards it as the “power of imagination”, because it is the “root of tail” connecting man with the world of nature, i.e., matter.⁵⁷ It is this imagination which takes the place of matter in the next world. That is why in the afterlife there is no process of becoming or the passage from potentiality to actuality, but an instantaneous creation, since magination creates its object all at once.⁵⁸

Conclusion

The foregoing delineation suggested that *al-Hikmah al-Muta’aliyah* not only represents Mulla Sadra’s intellectual journey but also demonstrates his philosophical thought, parallel to Ibn Sina’s *al-Shifa’*. The point interest, however, is to be found in his repudiation againts Ibn Sina’s concept of Essence and Existence. Whereas Ibn Sina vindicates the essence rather than existence, Sadra gives priority to existence rather than essence. Not only has Mulla Sadra differed from Ibn Sina and other Muslim peripatetic on the issue of essence and existance, but also on the problem of substance, movement, time. The same case is with his demonstration of God’s nature which is - unlike the philosophers who seek to prove God by something other than God - proven buy Himself, since God is His own Witness.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p.218, lines 13 ff; p.224, lines 13 ff

⁵⁷ Ibid, p.221, lines 3 ff.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 31, line 12 ff; p. 43, line 14 ff.

Be that as it may, Sadra's philosophy could be grouped into falasifah's position. It is because he maintained the *falāsifah's* theory of emanation and in some points adhered to Aristotle position.[]

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