Durham E-Theses

Mulla Sadra and the mind-body problem: A critical assessment of Sadra's approach to the dichotomy of soul and spirit

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Chapter Two: Fundamentality of Existence

2.1. Introduction

The Sadrian philosophy in the Iranian philosophical tradition is deemed to be the high point in Muslim philosophical thought, so much so that Ibn Sina's philosophy, with all its apparent power, pales in comparison.[1] However for most people outside of Iran who are familiar with Muslim philosophy, the philosophy of Sadra is little known or completely alien.

If we see Sadrian philosophy from the outside i.e. with the current standard of intellectual western philosophy, we will see it as a mixture of intellectual peripatetic issues, gnostic observations, and theological proofs. For a person who is completely familiar with the Sadrian philosophy and is also familiar with the philosophical thought of the rest of the world, that is mainly western, this philosophy arguably is a treasure-chest of possibilities for resolving the perennial problems of the history of world philosophy. Although the Sadrian philosophy apparently, for a reader of philosophical writing in the west, may have more similarity to peripatetic philosophy, with a little profound thinking, one will realise that from the point of view of both matter and form, it is completely different.

Among Mulla Sadra's innovations and original contributions the most important is the issue of "fundamentality of existence" *(aṣāla al-wujūd)*, which serves as the basis of most of his philosophical views. Before the 16th century, the issue of quiddity *(māhīyya)* was not approached or debated in the same way that it would be debated later; the word "quiddity" was used merely to describe material objects. The significance of this issue in Mulla Sadra's thought was that he gave the word a philosophical status, demonstrating its nature by means of a number of philosophical

[1]Mulla Sadra used all the features of previous philosophical systems like Mashā'ī and Ishrāqī philosophy as well as Ibn 'Arabī's mystical teachings and also the contents of religious teachings. Therefore it could be said that his philosophical system is a mixture of all the previous philosophical systems in which the defects of the previous systems have been removed. ('Ubūdīyyat, *Dar Āmadī bi niẓām-i ḥikmat-i sadrā'ī,* vol. 1, chapter. 1, pp. 30-31.)

reasons which were peculiar to him, as well as responding to his opponents' arguments.

The philosophical demonstration of the fundamentality of existence created a revolution in philosophy and granted it the elevated status it really deserved. Moreover, in the light of this principle, Sadra was able to pave the way for solving some very complex problems.

If the fundamentality of existence can be proved we can also prove that existence is objective rather than subjective and mental. In this chapter we will attempt to show what this principle is trying to say and reference will be made to some of the related arguments.

Being external for existence was an issue that philosophers before Mulla Sadra could not find acceptable reasons to prove. Suhriwardī assumed that existence is an abstractive issue rather than an external and fundamental one.[2] There was a similar problem in western philosophy. Kant, for example, concluded that existence is one of the schematised categories.[3] We will explain his idea in brief shortly.

The lack of philosophical proof that existence exists in reality in the external world has had its own influence on many previous psychologists and philosophers. The result of this issue in arguments related to the soul was nothing but the denial of the existence and reality of the soul by some contemporary psychologists. We will express some of the psychologists' ideas in Chapter Five.

However, Mulla Sadra believed that we can prove the reality of the external world with our intellect.[4] If existence is assumed to be an external and fundamental reality, the existence of the soul will also be more justifiable as one of the external existents of this material world and an inability to prove this could put the reality of the entire universe, including the human soul, under question. This is why we have to explain the claim of fundamentality of existence first.

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[2] Suhriwardī, *majmū'a-i muṣannafāt-i shaykh-i ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 71.

[3] A.C. Ewing, *Sharḥī koūtāh bar Naqd-i 'aqli maḥḍ-i Kant* (A Short Commentary on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason), the University of Chicago Press, 1987, translated by E. Sa'ādatī-i khamsi, pp. 165-168.

[4] - Sadra, *Asfar*, vol. 4, p. 120; vol. 5, p. 2.

It is worth mentioning here that our main target in this research is to consider the question of the soul from Mulla Sadra's point of view and then finally there has to be a discussion about whether the soul and the spirit are two separate things which Mulla Sadra does not accept. The denial of this separation has created some problems concerning the soul in his philosophical system. However, regarding our main objective we will briefly consider the issue of fundamentality of existence for the purpose of considering the soul in more detail.

The issue of "fundamentality of existence and subjectivity of "quiddity" *(aṣāla al-wujūd wa i'tibārīyya al-māhīyya),* henceforth referred to as "fundamentality of existence" is the most important issue in Mulla Sadra's transcendental wisdom *(al-ḥikma al-muta'ālīya).* One could even say that all subjects that make up Sadra's transcendental wisdom are based on the notion of "fundamentality of existence". Unlike mathematics, where understanding the problem is easy but proving it is difficult, in philosophy, usually understanding the form of the problem is difficult but after that, proving the problem is not so difficult. Regarding the issue of "fundamentality of existence", the problem of initial understanding is especially complex and difficult; however, once understood, it becomes easy to solve. The fundamentality of existence with all of its simplicity could serve as a solution to many philosophical problems.

2.2. An important point

As far as the history of philosophy shows, the issue of fundamentality of existence was begun by Mir Damad.[5] He accepted the fundamentality of quiddity *(māhīyya)* and as Mulla Sadra himself has stated, like his master and many other philosophers, he believed that quiddity is fundamental and existence is nothing but an abstraction,

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[5] See: chapter 1, Ref No: 10. For more details about his idea in this regard see: Mir Dāmād, *Muṣannafāt,* vol. 1, pp. 504-507.

until God guided him to the right path and disclosed to him that existence is fundamental[6].

However, this issue was not propounded in such a clear manner before Mir Damad. Therefore none of the philosophers were able to accept one of the two principles and deny the other. For example, Ibn Sina and his followers, who were later known as fundamentality of existence philosophers,[7] believe that the natural universal *(kulī-i tabī'ī)*[8] exists in the external world[9], however it is clear that this idea is harmonious with fundamentality of quiddity and as a result they deny trans-substantial motion based on fundamentality of quiddity.[10] Conversely, Suhriwardī and his followers, who were later known as fundamentality of quiddity philosophers[11], believed that by relying on existence, 'things' can be individuated[12] *(mutashakhiṣ)* and clearly this idea cannot be accepted unless by relying on fundamentality of existence.[13] However the important point is that trans-substantial motion cannot be accepted unless fundamentality of existence has been accepted. Trans-substantial motion of the soul, which is the basis of Mulla Sadra's concept of the soul, is also dependent on the acceptance of the fundamentality of existence and this is why it is necessary to explain fundamentality of existence and the issues of motion and trans-substantial motion in the next two chapters in advance.

In this chapter we will attempt to show what the "fundamentality of existence" is purported to be. Firstly we will explain in brief the meaning of "fundamentality of existence" and those key concepts connected to it. Then, using these key concepts, we will embark on a comparison between the two main issues in question, namely

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[6] Sadra, *Asfar*, vol. 1, p. 10.

[7] Ibn Sina, *al-Shifā, Tabī'iyyāt*, vol. 1, pp. 98-99.

[88] Natural universal such as the human being (*insān*), tree and the like which all have many instances in the outside for example Ali, John and Sara are instances of the human in the external world.

[9] Ibn Sina, *al-Shifā, 'ilāhīyyāt*, p. 202.

[10] For more details about how denying trans-substantial motion is based on fundamentality of quiddity see: Sadra, *Asfar*, vol. 3, pp. 85-86.

[11] M.H. Sabziwārī, *Sharḥ-i Manzūma*, p. 6.

[12] S.D. Suhriwardī, *Majmū'a-i Muṣannafāt,* vol. 1, p. 335.

[13] Sadra, *Asfar*, vol. 1, p. 43.

the "fundamentality of existence" and "fundamentality of quiddity" in a way which is consistent with that of the Islamic philosophers.

2.3. Existence *(wujūd)*

Existence is the only thing that does not need to be proven or defined because it is self-evident *(badīhī)*; everything is defined by existence and there is nothing more obvious than existence. Everybody is conscious of it naturally, whether in his inner being or in his experience and his actions. However it is not possible to perceive existence by means of acquired knowledge *('ilm-i ḥuṣūlī)*; it can be perceived only with presential knowledge *('ilm-i shuhūdī)* and personal and inner feeling.[14] This is that very reality of existence which one experiences everywhere. A differentiation here must be made between existence and the concept of existence that we sometimes form in our minds: the concept that we have must not be confused with existence as externally the two are different and are covered by different rules.

Sometimes philosophers compare existence to light; this is an accurate comparison because when a light is shining on a thing, it will be determinate, individuated and illuminated.[15] Existence, by itself, is one thing, but the quiddities of things are multifarious in the world. Inanimate objects, plants, animals and humans are different from each other. Each kind possesses some limitations and borders which

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[14] Our normal understandings are acquired knowledge *('ilm-i ḥuṣūlī)*, since this kind of knowledge can be obtained via learning from others, thinking and researching, however presential knowledge *('ilm-i shuhūdī)* cannot be achieved by learning, or something else. Our inner knowledge to our understandings, feelings like happiness, pain and the like are a low level of this knowledge. At the higher level this can be a kind of intuition which may happen for divine cultured men who have purified themselves. It is also a kind of knowledge which has no error. For more details about acquired and presential knowledge see: Sadra, *Asfar*, vol. 6, p. 155 and *Taʻlīqih-i Sabziwārī*, p. 231. See also: ʻUbūdīyyat, *Darāmadī bi niẓām-i hikmat-i sadrāʼī*, vol. 2, chapter. 8, pp. 19-22.

[15] Suhriwardī is one of the philosophers who used light to explain the existents chain. His optical series *(silsila-i nourīyya)*, which includes all existents, is a well known theory in the history of Muslim philosophy. (Mājid. fakhrī, *sayr-i falsafa dar jahān-i islam*, pp. 320-321.) Mulla Sadra also used this theory to shape one of his important principles i.e. gradation of existence *(tashkīk-i wujūd)*.

make them distinct from others. This makes the essence and reality of their existence. In fact every existence has a specific mould and form that is called quiddity *(māhīyya)* in philosophy.[16]

Existence can be seen from two perspectives; from the first we can abstract the conception of existence from the presence of things *(ḥuzūr-i ashyā)*. This means that existence can be understood from the external quiddities *(māhīyyat-i khārijī)* – even though they are different from each other- which exist in the external world. Then we can say these things exist i.e. they possess existence.[17] When we look at things ordinarily (non-philosophically) their reality seems to be the same as their quiddity rather than their existence. As a result, we would say we have abstracted existence from the presence of things. If quiddity is the very identity of things, then existence has no reality and it is only a mental phenomenon.

From the second perspective, on the other hand, with a subtle and more precise investigation it can be understood that that is quite wrong and it is the quiddity of things which is a mental phenomenon and can be abstracted from the being of external existence. Therefore quiddity continually is not necessitating existence and it has no concomitance with existence. It is a very well known phrase that "quiddity, in itself, is neither to be existent nor non-existent". This means that – as a philosophical vision - it is enough to pay attention to this point that quiddity is not always concomitant to real and external entity, because reality of everything is whatever possesses the effect of that thing and the effect of things always arises from their existence. There are a great number of quiddities, like human being, gold, fire, tree and the like, that appear in our mind, our writing and speaking; they are created by our mind and have no effect on the external being and thus they have not been proved to be true.[18]

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[16] We will state intended meaning of quiddity via more explanation. For more detail about quiddity see: *Ma'rifat-i falsafī,* A Quarterly Journal of Philosophical Inquiry, A.R. 'ubūdīyyat, *Aṣāla al-wujūd* (the fundamentality of existence), (Qom, 1382 SH), vol. 2, p.195.

[17] *Ma'rifat-i falsafī,* vol. 2, p. 180.

[18] In fact, this paragraph is going to state that concepts have mental locations. Mental concepts cannot have external effects. The concept of human is other than a human (for example David) which

Mulla Sadra argues that if quiddity has no continual concomitance with existence then how could it be an efficient cause of being of external existences.[19] However, practically we can see that existence of external realities (not mental) is self-subsisting and for its being it has no need for anything else, since existence is essential for it, rather than accidental. In other words existence exists in its essence and not through something else and quiddity requires existence for its being. In fact existence is not an accident *('araḍ)* for quiddity; rather it is quiddity which is like a mental mould for existence. This is a very short explanation about the "fundamentality of existence" and a brief explanation of what we are going to explain in more detail.

We will now explain this word as understood in its philosophical sense. The word "existence" is used with two different meanings in philosophy:

2.3.1. The first meaning of existence: having external correspondence *(miṣdāq)*

The first meaning of existence is that of 'conceptual thingness' *(shay'iyyat-i mafhūmī).*[20] This means that we are able to conceive in our minds the existence of a thing which has a corresponding external reality *(miṣdāq).* Therefore if a concept corresponds to an external reality, then that concept of existence can be said to have conceptual thingness.[21] For example the concept of human corresponds to an external reality such as John or Ali so it is true to say that mankind exists as a concept. It is clear that if a number of different concepts can be applied to a single

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is the source of effect and the concept of fire is different to the fire which is hot and burns things. The concept of fire has no burning effect. It is the external existence of things that has real effects. However our only way of understanding external realities is through mental concepts which are images of the external realities not actual realities. The real external fire or mountain cannot come into our mind unless through its concept.

[19] All Mulla Sadra's arguments aim to prove that quiddities are subjective issues. We will explain his argument in this regard.

[20] Sadra, *Asfar*, vol. 4, pp. 200, 201-207. See also: Sadra, *al-shawahid al-rubūbīyya,* (Tehran, 1360), second edition, p. 133; Sadra, *al-mashāʿir,* (isfahān), pp. 10-11-54-55.

[21] Sadra, *Asfar*, vol. 5, p. 2. See also: Sadra, *risāla al-shawahid al-rubūbīyyah,* pp. 49-50; Sadra, *sharh al-hidāya al-athīrīyya,* p. 302; Sadra, *sharh-i uṣūl-i kāfī,* p. 335.

external reality, all of those concepts can be said to have conceptual thingness. For example the concepts of mankind, essential contingency *('imkān-i dhātī)* and being a single unit *(wāḥid)* can be applied to an external reality such as John or Ali so it is true to say that those concepts exist. In short, every concept that corresponds to an actual external reality – not just a hypothetical or metaphorical reality - can be said to have an actual matter of fact *(nafs al-'amr)* existence. Therefore according to this meaning, quiddity, philosophical secondary intelligibles[22] and even non-existence *('adam)* in the sense of privation can be said to exist.[23]

2.3.2. The second meaning of existence

The second meaning is that which fills the external world, or external reality itself. If we say a thing exists from this perspective i.e., it is the same as external reality, and precisely the opposite of non-existence, such a thing cannot be conceptual and if we wish to express this in philosophical terms, we say that it has an external and existential thingness *(shay'iyyaht-i wujūdī)*. One can find this meaning of existence in many of Mulla Sadra's writings.[24]

Distinguishing between the two meanings of existence can help us to understand the "fundamentality of existence" and the "subjectivity of quiddity"; indeed, to conflate them leads only to confusion and error.

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[22] Some concepts like the concept of cause and effect, subjective and objective, actual and potential, above and below which can be taken from the comparison between things are called secondary intelligible, see: S.M.H. Tabātabā'ī, Nihāya al-ḥikma, jāmi'a-i modarisīn publications, (1362 SH, Qom), p. 256.

[23] Sadra, *Asfar,* vol. 3, pp 32-33; vol. 6, p. 163. See also: Sadra, *majmū'a-i rasāil-i falsafī-i sadr al-muta'allihīn,* (Tehran, hikmat, 1375); Sadra, *risāla al-fawā'id,* p. 19; Ibn Sīnā, `ilāhīyyāt-i shifā,* explained by Mulla Sadra, pp. 150, 152, 185, 242; Sadra, *Ta' līgha bar hikmat-i ishrāq,* pp. 198, 250.

[24] Sadra, Asfar, vol., 1, p. 117; vol. 4, p. 120; vol. 5, p. 2; vol. 6, p. 163. See also: Sadra, *al-mashā'ir,* (isfahān), pp. 10, 11, 24, 44; Sadra, *Ta'līqa Bar Hikmat-i ishrāq,* pp. 49, 279; Sadra, Risāla fil-ḥudūth, p. 43; Sadra, *Sharḥ al-hidāya al-athīrīyya,* p. 223.

2.4. Quiddity *(māhīyya)*

At first glance, each quiddity, for example "mankind", can be a concept in the mind like the concept of human and it can also be an external reality like all of us. But whether it is conceptual or actual we should not think of it in terms of subjectivity or externality: rather, we must simply consider mankind itself; in philosophical terms, we must see mankind in the general sense *(ma'nā-i kullī)*, paying attention only to its essence and its essential characteristics. It is only by looking at mankind in this way that we can understand the quiddity of mankind, or mankind as a natural universal *(kulī-i tabī'ī).* The names of quiddities such as "mankind", "gold" and the like have been constructed to express this modality[25].

2.5. The terms fundamental *(aṣīl)* and subjective *(i'tibārī)*

The term fundamental means, a thing that exists in reality, like all realities which we can see externally; on the contrary, subjective *(i'tibārī)* means a thing that does not have external existence but because of the kind of relation or connection it has with a thing which *does* exist in reality, our intellect assumes figuratively that it is exists without any thought to its figurative nature. In other words, the intellect deems that it is existent. Philosophers usually use the terms "accidental" *(bil-'araḍ)* and "essential" *(bil-dhāt)* instead of "reality" *(ḥaqīqa)* and "figural" *(majāz)* and they say "real" i.e. essentially existent *(mawjūd-i bil-dhāt)* and "subjective", i.e. accidental existent *(mujūd-i bil-'araḍ).*[26]

There is an important point that should not be forgotten. As previously stated, existence has two different meanings and concerning the issue of essential existent and accidental existent, only the second meaning of existence is intended. Therefore the fundamental *(aṣīl)* is the thing that actually and essentially is a reality and which fills the external world, and the subjective is the thing that does not fill the external world, but which our intellect figuratively and accidentally supposes to be a reality.

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[25] Sadra, *Ta'līqa Bar Hikmat-i ishrāq*, p. 374, see also: Sadra, *Asfar*, vol. 2, section 1, p. 2; Ibn Sina, *al-Shifā, 'ilāhīyyāt*, pp. 196-200; Motahharī, *Majmū'a-i āthār*, vol. 10, pp. 551-567.

[26] Sadra, *Asfar*, vol. 2, pp. 286, 287.

Perhaps this amount of explanation about these two words is enough to understand what philosophers claim that fundamentality of existence is, but the meaning intended by reality *(haqīqa)* is intellectual reality, and what is intended by figurative *(majāz)* is related to verbal mode of predication *(bāb-i ḥaml)* and this is not a linguistic issue. For this reason philosophers have called reality "essential" *(bil-dhāt)* and figurative "accidental" *(bil-'araḍ).*[27] It is better to have an exact explanation of them under the title "Essential and Accidental".

2.6. The terms essential *(bil-dhāt)* and accidental *(bil-'araḍ)*

Let us assume that there are two subjects "A" and "B", and that A has an attribute, C. Let us also suppose that A and B are similar in one respect, for example two pens which are the same length. In philosophical terms it is said that, because of this similarity, they have a kind of unity.

In the above example, our intellect usually ascribes the attribute of one subject to the other with which it is united. For example, when A and B are associated with one another in some way, that is when they are said to be united *(muttaḥid),* to use the philosophical term, the predicate C that pertains in reality only to A is also ascribed to subject B. Obviously, in such a case, the attribution of predicate C to subject A is correct while the attribution of predicate C to subject B is merely suppositional; that is, the mind only imagines that C is a predicate of B. This type of suppositional ascription is referred to as metaphorical ascription *(majāz dar isnād)* and is indicated in philosophy by the term accidental *(bil-'arad)* as opposed to real ascription *(isnād-i ḥaqīqī)* or predication, which is designated in philosophy by the term essential *(bil-dhāt).*[28]

Let us apply these terms to the example in hand. It is said that the ascription of predicate C to subject B is accidental whereas the ascription of predicate C to subject A is essential. It is also said that A is the intermediary in the predication of C

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[27] Sadra, *Asfar,* vol. 5, p. 298.

[28] Sadra, *Asfar*, vol. 2, pp. 286, 287.

to B. In other words A is mediating in the occurrence *(wāsit-i dar 'urūḍ)* of the attribution of conditional mood *(ḥaythīyyat-i taqyīdīya)* C to B, because it is due to the fact that A and B are associated or united that we apply C to B. Without the true application of C to A, we would not ascribe C to B. This sort of metaphorical ascription is quite common. Philosophers interpret this intellectual action as: "the characteristics of a thing that becomes united with another are transferred to the other."[29]

It is important to be aware of the following point:

Recognizing some kinds of intellectual reality and figurativeness *(ḥaqīqa wal majāz)* is relatively easy. For example, a driver says: "I had a puncture in the middle of street". However, it is clear that what he actually means is that the tyre of the car had a puncture, and not the driver himself. However, in some cases there is need for discussion and deliberation, while in others it is too difficult to distinguish the two kinds from each other. For instance, consider the phrase "a cat is smaller than an elephant". Is it true that we have used a kind of figurative expression in this sentence? Usually the answer is no, but in actual fact we must say yes, because every cat and elephant has a body and a spirit and it is clear that the spirit cannot be measured and cannot be spoken about in terms of size.

Is it therefore more precise to say that "a cat's body is smaller than an elephant's body"? Is there any figurative expression in this sentence? Again, the usual answer would be no. But in fact the answer is in the affirmative. Because bigness, smallness and equality are characteristics of quantities and measurements and according to the teachings of the philosophers they are accidents and they are not characteristics of bodies *('ajsām),* which are substances *(jawhar)*.[30] However, because quantity and

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[29] Sadra, *Asfar*, vol. 2, pp. 286-287.

[30] A short definition of substance and accident: philosophers define substance as a thing that has no need to a place. It is itself a place for some accidents *(a'rāḍ)*. For example a red apple has some accidents like red colour, shape, sweet taste, soft and the like but the apple body is its substance. If there is no substance there is no accident because the redness, shape and the like all belong to the substance and are located in their special place on it. On the other hand accidents need a place in which to occur. The red colour needs a body to colour. Aristotle divided substances to five categories

body *(jism)* are always joined together, so that there is no body without quantity and no quantity without body, then our intellect figuratively ascribes the characteristic of quantity to a body and judges that a cat's body is smaller than an elephant's body. It is therefore more precise to say that: "The measurement of a cat's body is smaller than that of an elephant's body". It thus becomes clear, as we progress, that, recognizing the figurative becomes more difficult. We can now ask whether there is anything figurative in the last sentence. Philosophers before Mulla Sadra would have said there is no figurative expression involved, but Mulla Sadra's answer on the basis of fundamentality of existence would be positive, since for him, measurement, body, cat and elephant are quiddities and according to the notion of fundamentality of existence, which is the real source of effects, the realities are instances *(maṣādīq)* of these quiddities. Then it is more precise to say: "the reality which indicates the measurement of the cat's body is smaller than the reality which indicates the measurement of the elephant's body". Now is the chain of figurative expressions complete? From the philosopher's point of view the answer is yes, but according to the notion of connective being *(wujūd-i rābit)* in Mulla Sadra's transcendental wisdom, which has a gnostic overtone, and also from the perspective of gnosticism in general, the answer is negative. There is a well-hidden figurativeness here and naturally this calls for another step forward in our process of reasoning.[31]

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as such: Matter or hyle *(hayūlā)*, form *(sūra)*, body *(jism),* the soul *(nafs),* intellect *('aql)*. Apart from matter all the other categories have further divisions. In order to understand how and why Aristotle divided substance to these five types see: Motahari, *Majmūʿa-i āthār*, vol. 7, p. 147; ʿUbūdīyyat, *Darāmadī bar falsafa-i islāmī,* A publication by Imam Khomeini Institute for Education and Research, (Qom, 1384 SH), ISBN 964-6740-96-0, section 3, pp. 179-186.

[31] The problem of connective being *(wujūd-i rābitī)* is one of the important issues of transcendental wisdom. According to this issue, the multiplicity of existence was negated and referred to the modes of being *(shuʾūn-i wujūd)*. As a result, Mulla Sadra could prove both particular unity of existence and multiplicity of the modes of being. This proof was in accordance with philosophical reasoning which was understandable by man's intellect and is of course in accordance to accepting the multiplicity which is an evidence for the claim of philosophy. Further suggested sources on this subject are: ʿUbūdīyyat, *Darāmadī bi niẓām-i ḥikmat-i sadrāʾī,* vol. 1, pp. 199-248; S. M. H. Tabātabāʾī, *Bidāya al-*

With respect to the above explanation, a "fundamental", i.e. a thing which exists without anything to mediate in its occurrence *(wāsit-i dar 'urūḍ)* and conditional mood *(haysīyyat-i taqyīdīyya)* , describes something which is in itself real, and which fills the external world; that is the real opposite of non-existence and the real source of effects in the external world. 'Subjective' *(i'tibārī)*, on the other hand, describes a thing that does not in fact have external reality but which our intellect, thanks to the mediation in its occurrence of another existent, assumes to be real. Something which is 'subjective' cannot be the real opposite of non-existence; it is not the real source of effects in the external world, although our intellect supposes that it is.

2.7. An overview of the notion of the fundamentality of existence

To provide an overview of the fundamentality of existence we must first accept the following three contentions:

i.   There is a reality or realities and the world is not non-existent or null and void. This is self evident.

ii. The above-mentioned reality exists really and essentially: it is not accidental or figurative. In other words it is not something which our intellect merely assumes to exist in the external world. Thus this reality is real and not subjective. In other words, real things actually exist in the external world.

iii. This reality essentially is essential, external and distinct. It is not possible for it to be a universal concept *(mafhūm-i kullī)* and also it is the real opposite of non-existence.

The result of these three things is that in such a notion as fundamental reality – or, if one believes that external multiplicity is self-evident, fundamental realities - actually exist. Furthermore, these realities are essentially external, distinct and are real opposites of non-existence.[32]

ḥikma, Matba'i al-'ilmiya, (Qom, 1364 SH), p. 10; Tabātabāī, *Nihāya al-hikma*, chapter 2, section 1, pp. 28-30.

[32] *Ma'rifat-i falsafī, Aṣālat al-wujūd* , p. 199.

Now with regard to this introductory statement we can ascertain, according to Mulla Sadra's point of view. Which of these two sentences is true: 'Existence is fundamental and quiddity is subjective; or 'quiddity is fundamental and existence is subjective'. In other words, are the things with which we are familiar in the external world quiddities or are they something else? If we accept the first option then we admit that quiddity is fundamental and existence is subjective and in short we admit "fundamentality of quiddity". However, if we accept the second option then we admit that existence is fundamental and quiddity is subjective; in short we admit "fundamentality of existence".

Thus fundamentality of existence applies to that external reality which fills the world, is the opposite of non-existence and the real source of effects in the external world – and that external reality cannot be a quiddity. In actual fact, then, external existence is something whose actual essence is unknown; it is an instantiation *(miṣdāq)* of the concept of existence, while quiddity is the image of that in our mind and cannot be found in the external world other than as a figurative and accidental thing. In other words, our intellect assumes that quiddity is the same as external reality.[33] Then although at first glance quiddity can be seen to exist in the outside world and possess existential thingness*,* in the final analysis this is not so i.e. according to fundamentality of existence quiddity is actually conceptual – a mental image, as it were. This means that quiddity has conceptual thingness rather than existential thingness, since existence is that very source of effects whose externality is essential: it cannot enter the mind and we cannot perceive its reality and essence by means of acquired knowledge *('ilm-i ḥuṣūlī)*. For this reason it is considered to be unknown in its essence *(majhūl al-kunh).*[34]

2.8. Arguments for fundamentality of existence

[33] Because of the great resemblance of the image and the owner of the image they are usually mistaken for each other i.e. we will take the image of existence as the existence itself.

[34] The reason why Mulla Sadra insists on the fact that existence has two meanings, as stated above, is to prevent the error of taking the concept of existence which is in fact the image of existence instead of existence itself which is fundamental. See: Sadra, *Ta'līqa Bar Hikmat-i ishrāq*, Lithography, p. 183.

Before expounding the arguments we should reiterate two important points:

The first point is similar to those covered in previous paragraphs. 'Ubūdīyyat makes some pertinent observations in this regard:

> Without doubt the locus of concepts is the mind while the locus of reality is outside the mind. It would be impossible for concepts to develop independently of the mind or for external realities to find existence within the mind. Basically, being conceptual is equivalent to being in the mind and being real is equivalent to being outside the mind. Thus, concept and reality are fundamentally distinct, each having its own separate domain.[35]

However, despite the fact that these domains are separate, they are not completely unconnected. As 'Ubūdīyyat goes on to point out, concepts are pictures of reality and, as such, shed light on what lies beyond the mind. Indeed, it is this very characteristic of concepts that tends to engender errors in our understanding of those concepts which are signified by the term 'quiddity' *(māhīyya)*, which is the equivalent of the Aristotelian *ti esti* or 'whatness'.[36]

'Ubūdīyyat goes on to say that nearly all people confuse mental concepts with real external existents:

> We can easily imagine a person mistaking a very clear and accurate portrait with the subject depicted in the portrait. Because concepts, especially quiddities, are clear and accurate pictures of reality, people, who have no way of comprehending external reality but through the conduit of these concepts and who never come into direct contact with the external realities themselves, presume that quiddities are in fact what populates the external world. As a consequence of this presumption, they sometimes misattribute the properties of concepts to the external realities which the concepts portray. Conversely, they sometimes ascribe wrongly the properties of reality to the mental concepts, the quiddities. In a word, they confuse the properties of reality and mental concepts.[37]

It is this conflation of the mental with the real that the principle of fundamentality of existence and subjectivity of quiddity can, one may argue, address. For this principle allows us to distinguish the ontic from the epistemic, thus drawing a clear line

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[35] 'Ubūdīyyat, *Darāmadī bi niẓām-i ḥikmat-i sadrā'ī,* vol. 1, pp. 82-83. Also see: 'Ubūdīyyat, article, The fundamentality of existence and the subjectivity of quiddity, translated by D. D. Sowdāgar and Muhammad Legenhausen, Published online: 12 July 2007, Topoi, A common error, p. 1. ('Abd al-Rasūl 'Ubūdīyyat is an Iranian professor in Islamic philosophy, especially in Mulla Sadra's philosophy.)

[36] *Ma'rifat-i falsafī, Aṣālat al-wujūd*, p. 194.

[37] *Ibid*, pp. 194-195.

between the image and the object which the image represents. According to this principle, the only real properties of quiddities are the properties of an image; as such, they are nothing more than indicators whose domain is that of the mind alone. As 'Ubūdīyyat concludes:

> It is impossible for them to encroach on external reality and to assume the properties of reality. The same truth applies to realities: They cannot themselves enter the mind and assume the properties of quiddity. Realities can at best have an image in the mind—a concept or quiddity—that represents them.[38]

Secondly, the idea of fundamentality of existence is based on the notion that the concept of quiddity alone is not enough to prove the external world and, if we wish to make an intellectual model of the external world without attaching existence to quiddity, we will become involved in an intellectual contradiction. However, with respect to existence it is not so, for the existence of the external world can be justified logically.

Furthermore, we can see clearly that every real thing in the world is a real unit which has many quiddities.[39] But if the external world is a manifestation of the quiddities only, then how are the co-existence or unity of different quiddities justified?

This is also a problem that the mind cannot solve. For example, from the concept we have of redness and of flowers we can imagine a red flower. The red flower constitutes a real unit; it is not merely two images placed side by side: a red flower is more, and other, than the mere combination of flower and redness. Here a philosophical question arises and the philosopher who supports the fundamentality of existence will question the possibility of quiddities being able to unite if, as their opponents claim, those quiddities are fundamental. This question was one which preoccupied Kant considerably; however, he was unable to answer

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[38] *Ibid*, p. 192.

[39] For example, a quiddity like an apple also has some other quiddities like redness, shape and size and of course we can understand something like redness in our minds as a concept (an image of real existence of redness in the outside world).

it.[40] For, unless existence is attached to it, Kant's "transcendental unity of the soul" remains a mere quiddity, and a quiddity by itself is not able to solve the problem of unity.

To understand the transcendental 'I' (*'ana*) as a phenomenon is in fact to understand a quiddity and nothing more: Kant accepted this and also knew that he could not move beyond it. For existence is the domain of the '*ding an sich'* (*shay'-i fi-nafsih*), and this domain is out of bounds for phenomenalist philosophy.[41] However, more than a century before Kant, Mulla Sadra solved the problem and showed that existence is fundamental[42]. It is not our aim here to propound all the arguments of the issue because the goal of this work is to explain the problem of the soul and the question of motion which is crucial to it. However, we will refer in brief to some of the arguments and of course there are many sources for anyone who wishes to learn more and we will refer to some of them.

Mulla Sadra himself gives sixteen proofs of the fundamentality of existence: these are scattered throughout his books, although eight of them can be found together in *al-Masha'ir*.[43] Later philosophers added about fourteen different arguments and so

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[40] Kant believed that, mental concept and quiddities are not real phenomena or noumenons, they are not about to show noumenons in reality, they pretend to show that they are real representatives of noumenon of objects, rather, they are not in this mould, they are only playing the part of noumenon objects. This is because Kant did not find the real connection between the mental concepts and their real sources in the external world.

[41] A.C. Ewing, *Sharḥī koūtāh bar Naqd-i 'aqli maḥḍ-i Kant*, pp. 213-215.

[42] However, Mulla Sadra believes that mental concept and quiddities are real representatives of the noumenon of objects. Quiddities actually show noumenon and basically they have no role other than to show the essence of objects. "Contingent being *(wujud-i mumkin)* exists essentially and the quiddity exists just the same as that existence, rather, it is accidental, since it is an instantiation of it". (Sadra, *al-mashā'ir, pp. 54, 55;* and also: 'Ubūdīyyat, *Dar Āmadī bi niẓām-i hikmat-i sadrā'ī,* vol. 1, ref No. 26, pp.118-119.)

[43] Sadra, *al-Mashā'ir, Mash'ar-i thālith, shavāhid-i*: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, pp. 9, 12, 13, 14, 15.

there are thirty arguments which purport to prove this principle.[44] We will now consider some of the arguments that are presented by different scholars in different books:

The argument below is the only one that Mulla Sadra expounds in *Asfar* and is perhaps one of the most convincing proofs offered in support of fundamentality of existence:

> Since the reality of a thing is the same as its permanent existential characteristics, then it is more fitting that existence should be the reality rather than anything else. For example, in whiteness, the colour white has priority over all other colours: for whiteness, white is essential; for other colours, white is accidental. Therefore existence exists essentially, unlike other things which exist only by means of existence, after existence has been conferred on them.[45]

Another argument, explained as the 'fourth proof' by Sabziwārī in his *Sharḥ-i mabsūt-i mandhūma* appears in verse form:

> All things emerge from the domain of equality *(istiwā)* thanks only to existence."
> *(kaifa wa bil koni 'an istiwā'n   qad kharajat qātibatul ashyā'i).*[46]

An elaboration here is necessary. When we consider quiddities - such as mankind, a tree or gold - we can see they do not require in and of themselves existence or nonexistence: both states are the same with respect to them. In other words, quiddities in and of themselves permit either existence or nonexistence. For example, if the coming into existence of an apple were necessary, then it would be impossible to imagine the non-existence of that apple; similarly, if remaining in a non-existent state were necessary for the apple, we would never be able to say that the apple exists; to combine the two opposite states is a logical impossibility and so we can say that the essence of the apple is in a state of contingency: by necessity it requires neither existence nor non-existence.[47] However, if an apple comes into

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[44] S.J. Āshtīyānī, *Hastī az nadhar-i falsafa wa 'irfān*, pp. 64, 65, 81-83, 85, 95, 105, 106. See also: Motaharī, *sharḥ i-mukhtaṣar-i madhūma*, vol. 1, pp. 39-41, 42; Motaharī, *Sharḥ-i mabsūt-i mandhūma,* vol. 1, pp. 123-141.

[45] Sadra, *Asfar*, vol. 1, p. 47.

[46] M.H. Sabziwārī, *Manẓdhūma*, p. 99.

[47] The contingency here is not like the contingency which is attributed to all existences. This is a state of each quiddity that, at this state, is not subjectivity and nor externality, it is just a quiddity in itself.

existence, and leaves that state of contingency, the question we must ask is how? The only answer is by means of existence *(wujūd)*, and it is this which sits at the heart of the notion of fundamentality of existence.[48]

In the book *Bidāya al-ḥikma*, Tabātabā'ī explains the argument as follows:

> The Peripatetics are correct in their idea that existence is fundamental and the reason is this: quiddity in its essence is nothing other than itself: existence and non-existence are equal with respect to it. However, when quiddity comes into existence and becomes a source of effects in the external world, what accounts for this change in its status? If someone says existence is not the cause of this changing then it means that nothing was the cause of this change, thus presenting us with an essential transformation that is impossible.[49] Therefore it is only existence which takes quiddity out of its state of contingency. And this shows that it is existence *(wujūd)* which is fundamental *(aṣīl)*.[50]

Mulla Sadra insists on the point that the realities which fill the external world are not of the stuff of quiddities: the human mind merely supposes that these realities are quiddities. In technical terms, they are subjective. Sadra has explained this point as follows:

> The realities that fill the external world are not quiddities. The existence of a quiddity is other than the quiddity, a truth that can be deduced from the dissimilarity of their properties. Among the properties of quiddity is its universality; it is applicable to a plurality of beings and individuals...whereas existence is essentially individuated, an individuation that is not extraneous to it.**[51]**

To elaborate, we would say that all external realities however are essentially existent, objective and individuated, meaning that as long as they are real they necessarily possess these qualities.

The assumption of a real object that is not existent, external and individuated is contradictory. Thus, existence, externality and individuation are essential and inseparable qualities of all real objects. In philosophical terms: the mode of reality is equivalent to the modes of existence, externality, and individuation. Based on this

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[48] Motaharī, *sharh-i mabsūt-i mandhūma*, p. 156.

[49] Transformation means a thing changing into another thing without any cause which is impossible.

[50] Tabātabāī, *Bidāya al-ḥikma*, chapter 3, section 1, p. 40.

[51] Sadra, *Ta'liqa bar Shifā*, Sadra publications, (Tehran, 2003 AD), vol. 2, p. 862.

reasoning, the conclusion is that external realities are not quiddities; quiddity is not equivalent to reality. However there are many arguments from different aspects which were stated by Mulla Sadra and his followers in this regard which provide readers with more details, but as mentioned before, for brevity we are not able to express all of them.[52]

2.9. Some ramifications of the fundamentality of existence

Mulla Sadra did not restrict himself to demonstrating the fundamentality of existence and the abstract nature of quiddity. Rather, he also tried to formulate some principles for that through drawing upon Illuminative philosophy *(falsafa-i ishrāqī)* and Muslim gnosticism and proving it in philosophical terms. As a result, he also tried to demonstrate that existence is graded *(mudarraj/mushakik)*, and that it possesses diffusion *(sarayān)*, unity, simplicity, power and so on. We will try to explain some of these concepts very briefly below.

2.9.1. The gradation of being *(Tashkīk-i wujūd)*

Mulla Sadra stated that the principle of "gradation of being" is based on fundamentality of existence. From Mulla Sadra's point of view existence from the highest to the lowest levels forms one single connected chain. All existents possess existence. Primary matter is at the lowest level of existence next is mineral matter *(jamādāt)*, vegetables, animals and human beings respectively. While they are all different in respect to their externality, they are united and connected to each other in respect of their inner being, that is, existence. Then, according to Mulla Sadra's

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[52] We have tried to collect majority of the sources in which Mulla Sadra has explained arguments to prove fundamentality of existence, see: Sadra, *Asfar*, vol. 1, pp. 43, 66, 67, 68, 260; vol. 3, pp. 83, 84; vol. 6, p. 148; Sadra, *Al-mashā'ir*, pp. 12, 13, 17, 18; Sadra, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, p. 391; Sadra, *Risala fil-hudūth*, pp. 69, 70; Sadra, *Ta'liqa bar hikmat-i ishrāq*, pp. 183, 191, 313, 375; Sadra, *Mjmū'a-i rasāyil-i falsafī-i sadr al-muti'allehīn*, pp. 188, 190-191, 306, 307; Sadra, *al-shawahid al-rubūbīya,* published by bonyad-i Sadra, pp. 11, 12 and published by markaz-i nashr-i dānishgāhī, pp. 7-8; Sadra, *Arshīya*, p. 22; Sadra, *rasāyil-i falsafī, al-masa'l al-qudsiyya*, pp. 10, 11; Sadra, *Ta'liqa bar hikmat-i ishrāq,* pp. 78, 79, 162, 183, 184, 191, 305; Sadra, *tafsīr-i quran-i karīm*, vol. 1, pp. 50, 51.

point of view, the entire universe with all of its strengths and weaknesses consists of existence only.[53]

2.9.2. Motion in Substance (trans-substantial motion)

Mulla Sadra drew upon the two theories of the 'fundamentality of existence' and 'gradation of existence' and proved that the essence of every material existent (whose essence or nature is a limited existence), is, firstly, gradable (since existential motion is a gradual one and, since every existence is gradable, it is capable of motion), and, secondly, in self-motion (motion by essence). This is because the nature, structure, or quiddity of objects is of two types: the first consists of immaterial (abstract) substances, which due to being immaterial, are fixed and static (however, this is limited to immaterial objects), and the second consists of material substances of objects which all possess an essentially fluid and moving nature; that is, their existence is gradual and step by step rather than sudden *(daf'ī)*. If the existence of material existents were not 'fluid', there would be no development (no sapling would grow into a tree, and no infant would reach maturity). Unlike preceding philosophers (as well as physicists living before the advent of relativity physics) who believed that time (like place)[54] has an objective existence and is a fixed receptacle for objects and events, Mulla Sadra argued that time possesses an immaterial rather than objective existence and is abstracted from the trans-substantial motion of things and events.

This argument proves that the trans-substantial motion of objects exists in their essence and does not occur to them as an accident, and, thus, it is not in need of a particular reason and cannot be questioned. In other words, we never ask 'why does

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[53] 'Ubūdīyyat, *Niẓām-i hikmat-i sadrā'ī, Tashkīk dar wujūd*, a publication by Imam Khomeini Institute for Education and Research, second edition, (1387 SH, Qom), ISBN 964-411-062-5, chapter 8, pp. 191-214.

[54] Peripatetic conceived of time as the product of the motion of spheres. Mulla Sadra, apparently, does not deny this view; nevertheless, he does not, in fact, agree with this view either, and believes that time is related to the trans-substantial motion.

material substance have motion?', for it is like asking why is water wet or why is oil greasy? Such a question is absurd, because it is similar to asking why water is water, or why oil is oil. If the essence or inner nature of something – and, in philosophical terms, its quiddity – is fluid, nothing can stop its motion except its annihilation.

The general theory of relativity in modern physics appears to have confirmed Mulla Sadra's philosophical theory, since in this theory "time" is a part of everything, i.e. its fourth dimension, and everything has its own time (since as time is one of the dimensions of every individual it cannot be shared between them). We will investigate this issue in more detail in the next two chapters.

2.9.3. The question of the soul

The problem which was demonstrated on the basis of the theory of "trans-substantial motion" was Mulla Sadra's other theory on man's soul. He believed that the soul is created from Man's body, but develops in the light of evolutionary movement and finally becomes free from matter. We will explain the reality of motion in general in Chapter Three, trans-substantial motion particularly in Chapter Four, and the soul's motion in Chapter Five.

2.9.4. Other issues connected with the fundamentality of existence

There are other interesting issues that are based on fundamentality of existence like, "indigence possibility" *(imkan-i faqrī)*, "Platonic idea" *(muthul-i aflātūnī)*, "metaphysics of love" and the like, but we are not able to explain them here because of the limitation. Those who want to know about them may refer to Mulla Sadra's books and essays, in particular, *Asfār* and *Shawāhid al-rubūbīyyah*.

2.10. Conclusion

In this chapter we concluded that the location of quiddities and concepts is the mind. Quiddities can only be the image of existence and external realities. We also demonstrated that existence is not a mental issue; rather it has an external reality and external world. We also said that this means existence is fundamental *(aṣīl)*. By proving and accepting fundamentality of existence, which is proving the existence of external reality and that this external reality is a real issue which possesses real effect not a subjective issue with no effect, the following conclusions can be made:

1. The issue of fundamentality of existence became a basis for creating and putting forward many new issues which had no precedence in Islamic philosophy. Furthermore, according to this principle many philosophical problems found intellectual and philosophical justifications. We have referred to some of them in this chapter and will explain some of them, such as trans-substantial motion in general and trans-substantial motion of the soul in particular, in more detail in Chapters Four and Five.

2. The idea that existence is a mental issue had been a problem for all philosophers - including Muslim philosophers - which they were not able to solve. Mulla Sadra however was able to prove it via intellectual reasoning (as mentioned in this chapter). Mulla Sadra stated that although the essence of existence cannot be understood by acquired knowledge *('ilm-i ḥuṣūlī)* an intellectual perception of it is possible. However, as Mulla Sadra claimed, the essence of existence is also understandable via presential knowledge *('ilm-i shuhūdī)*.

3. The question of the soul an external reality, its trans-substantial motion and related issues found an acceptable justification. This is why until fundamentality of existence was proven, the existence of the soul, its motion and many of its related issues were not philosophically verifiable or they at least presented serious difficulties. The reason for this is the denial of the soul or its reduction to mind in contemporary psychology and philosophy. Some of these ideas will be referred to in Chapter Five. However Mulla Sadra and his

followers were able to prove the externality of existence, trans-substantial motion of the entire material world, trans-substantial motion of the soul as one of the material issues, the related issues of soul and many other important philosophical issues on the basis of fundamentality of existence.