

Chapter 48: Sadr al-Din Shirazi

Sadr al-Din Shirazi (Mulla Sadra)¹

A. Life and Works

The intellectual activity revived in Persia during the Safawid period, some features of which we have discussed in previous chapters, “The School of Ispahan,” found its culmination in Sadr al-Din Shirazi known to his compatriots as Akhund Mulla Sadra and to his disciples as simply Akhund or as *Sadr al-Muti’allahin*, i.e. the foremost among the theosophers. This figure, about whom the whole intellectual life of Persia has revolved in the past three and half centuries and who is one of the major expositors of Islamic intellectual doctrines in the Shi’ah world, has remained until today almost completely unknown outside Persia, even in other Muslim countries. Many have heard of his name, and nearly all travellers to Persia since the Safawid period, who have been interested in the intellectual life of the country, have recognized his importance have been impressed by his fame,² yet no one outside a group of his disciples in Persia, who have kept his school alive until today, has done justice to his doctrines in presenting them to the world at large.

Mulla Sadra, whose complete name is Sadr al-Din Mohammad, was born in Shiraz in about 919/1571,³ the only son of Ibrahim Shirazi. A member of the famous Qawam family of Shiraz, Ibrahim held the post of a vizier and was a powerful political and social figure in his native city. The young Sadr al-Din exhibited his exceptional intelligence from childhood and was given the best possible education in Shiraz.

Having completed his early studies, he became intensely interested in the intellectual sciences (*al-‘ulum al-‘aqliyyah*), especially metaphysics, and, therefore, left Shiraz for Ispahan which was at that time the capital and major seat of learning in Persia. In Ispahan he studied first with Baha’ al-Din ‘Amili, learning the transmitted sciences (*al-‘ulum al-naqliyyah*) from him and later with Mir Damad who was his most famous master in the intellectual sciences.⁴ Within a few years he became himself a recognized master in all the branches of formal learning especially in *Hikmat*⁵ in which he soon surpassed his own

teachers.

Not satisfied simply with formal learning, Mulla Sadra left the worldly life in general and retired to a small village named Kahak near Qum where he spent 15 years in asceticism and purification of his soul until, as he claims in his introduction to the *Asfar*, he became endowed with the direct vision of the intelligible world. He now came to “see” through illumination (*ishraq*) what he had previously learned theoretically from books.

Having reached both formal and spiritual perfection, Mulla Sadra returned once again to the world. Meanwhile, Allahwirdi Khan, the Governor of Shiraz, had built a large *madrasah* and invited Mulla Sadra to return to Shiraz as the head of the new school. Akhund accepted the offer and returned to his native city, making the school of Khan the major centre of intellectual sciences in Persia.⁶ He remained there until the end of his life spending the last period of his terrestrial existence entirely in teaching and writing.

Despite his extreme piety which is shown by the fact that he made the pilgrimage to Mecca seven times on foot – he died in Basrah in 1050/1640 during the seventh journey – Mulla Sadra was often molested by some of the exoteric ‘*ulama*’ who could not accept his gnostic interpretation of the doctrines of the faith and who denounced him publicly on more than one occasion. It was only the influence of his powerful family that made it possible for him to continue his teaching activities.

Mulla Sadra’s life, then, can be divided into three distinct periods: the period of childhood and schooling in Shiraz and Ispahan, the period of asceticism near Qum at the end of which the composition of the *Asfar* was begun, and the period of teaching and writing which represents the result and fruition of the other two periods. His life is itself the testimony of one of the main aspects of his wisdom, that in order to be effective theoretical knowledge must be combined with spiritual realization.

The writings of Mulla Sadra, nearly all of which were composed in the last period of his life, are almost without exception of great merit and have been among the main sources from which the later generations of theologians, philosophers, and gnostics have drawn their inspiration. All his writings concern religious sciences or metaphysics, theodicy or *Hikmat*,⁷ and are in a very clear and fluent style making them more easily understandable to the reader than the writings of his predecessors like Mir. Damad.⁸ Since Mulla Sadra’s writings are nearly completely unknown outside Persia, we take this opportunity to list the works which, according to the leading living authorities and the best historical evidence, were written by him.⁹

The works dealing with metaphysics and intellectual sciences include: *al-Asfar al-Arba’ad*, *al-Mabda’ w-al-Ma’ad*, *Sirr al-Nuqtah* (possibly not authentic), *al-Shawahid al-Rububiyyah*, his most lucid and masterly work, *al-Hikmat al-‘Arshiyah*, glosses upon the *Hikmat al-Ishraq* of Suhrawardi Maqtul, commentary (*sharh*) upon the *Hidayah* of Athiri,¹⁰ glosses upon the metaphysical parts of ibn Sina’s *Shifa’*, *Fi Ittihad al-‘Aqil w-alMa’qul*, *Fi Ittisaf al-Mahiyyah w-al-Wujud*, *Fi Bad’ Wujud al-Insan*, *Fi al-Tasawwar w-al-Tasqid*, *Fi al-Jabr w-al-Tafwid*, *Fi Huduth al-‘Alam*, *Fi Hashr*, *Fi Sarayan al-Wujud*, *fi*

al-Qada' w-al-Qadar, Fi Tashakkhush, al-Masa'il al-Qudsiyyah, Iksir al-'Arifin, al-Waridat al-Qalbiyyah, al-Qawa'id al-Malakutiyyah, Hall al-Mushkilat al-Falakiyyah, introduction to *'Arsh al-Taqdis* of Mir Damad, *al-Mazahir*, glosses upon *Rawashih al-Samawwiyyah* of Mir Damad, *Khalq al-A'mal, Kasr al-Asnam al-Jahiliyyah, al-Mizaj, al-Ma'ad al-Jismanim, Tanqiyah* in logic, *diwan* of poems in Persian, and answers to various questions on philosophy.

The works that are primarily concerned with the religious sciences include the Qur'anic commentary: *Mafatih al-Ghaib, Asrar al-Ayat*, commentary upon a large number of the verses of the Qur'an, commentary upon a few prophetic *Ahadith fi Imamah*, glosses upon the Qur'anic commentary of Baidawi, glosses upon the Khwaja Nasir al-Din al-Tusi and upon Qushji's commentary upon the *Tajrid* (of doubtful authenticity), glosses upon the commentary of the *Lum'ah*, commentary upon the *Usul al-Kafi* of Kulaini, one of the four major sources of Shi'ah Law,¹¹ *Mutashabih al-Qur'an*, and a Persian treatise called *Sih Asl* on the soul and its destiny.¹²

Mulla Sadra composed also several quatrains in Persian, a few of which are mentioned in the traditional sources and some appear in his own handwriting on the first page of his commentary upon the *Hidayah*.¹³ They deal mostly with the Sufi doctrine of the unity of Being (*wahdat al-wufid*), which may be considered to be the central theme of Mulla Sadra's doctrinal formulations. For example, in one of the quatrains he says,

The Truth is the spirit of the universe and the universe of the body,
And the orders of the angels are the senses of the body,
The heavens, elements, and compounds are its organs,
Lo! Unity is this, and the rest nothing but rhetoric.

In dividing the writings of Mulla Sadra into the intellectual and the religious ones, we do not in any way wish to imply that these two categories are completely separated in his view. On the contrary, one of the major achievements of Mulla Sadra consisted in uniting and harmonizing religion and the intellectual sciences. All of his works, even in philosophy, are replete with the Qur'anic verses in support of his conclusions, and all of his religious works, even the Qur'anic commentaries, are full gnostic and intellectual interpretations. One can only say that some of Akhund's writings are concerned more with religious questions and others more with intellectual ones.

Likewise, among the above-mentioned works some are more gnostic in character and others are presented in a more discursive language, although they all bear the fragrance of gnostic doctrines. Among writings which are of a more gnostic vein one may mention *al-Shawahid al-Rububiyyah, al-'Arshiyyah, Asrar al-Ayat*, and *al-Waridat al-Qalbiyyah*, and among those which are presented in a more discursive language are the *Sharh al-Hidayah* and the commentary upon the *Shifa'*.

Without a doubt the most important work of Mulla Sadra is the *Asfar al-Arba'ah*. It is comparable in dimension and scope to the *Shifa'* and the *Futuh al-Makkiyyah* and in a way stands midway between

the Peripatetic encyclopedia of ibn Sina and the compendium of esoteric sciences of ibn 'Arabi. The title of *Asfar* itself has been the cause of much difficulty to the few Orientalists who are acquainted with the book. The word *Asfar* is the broken plural for *safar* meaning journey as well as *sifr* meaning "book" from the Hebrew *sefer*. So it was that Gobineau considered the work to be a series of four books."¹⁴

Both views are, however, erroneous. Actually, *asfar* means journeys but not the account of travels in the ordinary sense of the word as Gobineau understood it to be. As Mulla Sadra himself mentions in his introduction to the book, the *Asfar* consists of the following four stages or journeys of initiatic realization (*suluk*): (1) the journey of the creature or creation (*khalq*) towards the Creator or the Truth (*Haqq*), (2) the journey in the Truth with the Truth, (3) the journey from the Truth to creation with the Truth, and (4) the journey with the Truth in the creation. This monumental work is, therefore, an account of the stages of the journey of the gnostic, systematized in a logical dress.

In content, the first book of the *Asfar* deals with Being and its various manifestations, the second with the simple substances, i.e. the intelligences, souls, and bodies and their accidents including, therefore, natural philosophy, and the third with theodicy, and the fourth with the soul, its origin, becoming and end. All these topics are treated in detail taking into account the voluminous.¹⁵ In a sense, this vast *opus* is the culmination of a thousand years of contemplation and thought by Muslim sages as well as the foundation of a new and original intellectual perspective which issues forth from within the matrix of the Muslim tradition.

B. Sources of Mulla Sadra's Doctrines

According to Mulla Sadra, there are two forms of knowledge: that derived from formal instruction (*al-'ilm al-suwari*) and that which comes from intellectual intuition (*al-'ilm al-ladunni*). The first is acquired in school with the aid of a teacher, and the second based upon a greater degree of certainty than the first, is the science possessed by the prophets and saints through the purification of the soul and the catharsis (*tajrid*) of the intellect.¹⁶ There are then, according to this view, two sources for Mulla Sadra's ideas, one formal and in a sense historical, i.e. manifested in history before him, and the other spiritual and invisible. Regarding this second source, which may be called his "guardian angel" or "hidden Imam," the source of all inner illumination, we have little to say except to emphasize its importance in Mulla Sadra's view.

It was the first category that we are primarily concerned here. There are five principal elements which are clearly detectable in the new analysis brought about by Mulla Sadra; they are also found, though less explicitly, in the doctrines of the Safawid sages before him. These elements include the philosophy of Aristotle and his followers, the doctrines of the Neo-Platonic sages, especially Plotinus whose *Enneads* the Muslims considered to be a work of Aristotle, the teachings of ibn Sina, the gnostic doctrines of ibn 'Arabi, and the principles of the Islamic revelation, especially the more esoteric teachings of the Prophet and the Shi'ah Imams.¹⁷

Among these sources the last two are of particular importance. Mulla Sadra created a new school of *Hikmat*, on the one hand, by putting the intuitions of the gnostics and especially of ibn 'Arabi and his followers into a logical dress and, on the other hand, by drawing out the philosophical and metaphysical implications of the teachings of the Imams especially as contained in the *Nahj al-Balaghah*, creating thereby for the first time what may be called a distinctly Muslim school of *Hikmat* based especially upon the inspired doctrines which form the very basis of Shi'ism.

Mulla Sadra, like Suhrawardi, held in great esteem the pre-Socratic philosophers and sages of Greece, both historical and mythological, and regarded Thales, Anaximander, Agathedemon, Empedocles, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle as the last group of sages in the ancient world to have possessed wisdom in its entirety. He, like many other Muslim Hakims, considered Greek philosophy not to have started with Aristotle but to have ended with him and believed all the later Greek sages to have been masters of various arts and sciences other than metaphysics. [18](#)

For Mulla Sadra, therefore, Greek philosophy was essentially the wisdom of the Hebrew prophets inherited, systematized, and later in part forgotten by the Greeks, a wisdom which was integrated into the Muslim intellectual perspective and brought to full fruition in the light of the Islamic revelation. That is why Mulla Sadra wishes to reject some aspects of the teachings of either the Peripatetics or the Illuminationists he appeals so often first to the Qur'an and the Hadith and then to those fragmentary sayings of the pre-Socratic philosophers with which the Muslims were acquainted.

C. Mulla Sadra's Method and the Characteristics of His School

The particular genius of Mulla Sadra was to synthesize and unify the three paths which lead to the Truth, viz. revelation, rational demonstration, and purification of the soul, which last in turn leads to illumination. For him gnosis, philosophy, and revealed religion were elements of a harmonious ensemble writings. He formulated a perspective in which rational demonstration or philosophy, although not necessarily limited to that of the Greeks, became closely tied to the Qur'an and sayings of the Prophet and the Imams, and these in turn became unified with the gnostic doctrines which result from the illuminations received by a purified soul. [19](#)

That is why Mulla Sadra's writings are a combination of logical statements, gnostic intuitions traditions of the Prophet, and the Qur'anic verses. Through the symbolic interpretation of the sacred text he demonstrated the gnostic quality of the esoteric meaning of revelation and through intellectual intuition he made rational and discursive thought subservient to the universal truths of gnosis. In this fashion he achieved that synthesis of science and revelation in the light of gnosis and in the general perspective of Islam towards which Farabi and ibn Sina – the latter particularly in his Qur'anic commentaries – had aimed and which Ghazli, Suhrawardi and the whole chain of sages extended from the Saljuq to the Safawid period had sought to achieve from various points of view. [20](#)

In metaphysics or, more generally speaking, *Hikmat* itself, Mulla Sadra is credited with founding the third

major school of Muslim “philosophy,” the first two being the Peripatetic school, the greatest exponent of which in the Islamic world was ibn Sina, and the Illuminationistic or *ishraqi* school founded by Suhrawardi Maqtul.²¹ Mulla Sadra adopted certain principles from each school as, for example, the hylomorphism from the Peripatetics and the gradation of Being and the celestial archetypes from the Illuminationists. Moreover, he added certain principles drawn from the teachings of the Sufis like ibn ‘Arabi such as the continual becoming of the substance of the world and unity of Being which had never appeared as principles of any school of *Hikmat* and were never systematized in the logical language of the Hakims before Akhund’s time. That is why Mulla Sadra is often credited with founding a new and original form of wisdom in the Muslim world is usually called *al-Hikmat al-Muti’aliyyah* as distinguished from *al-Hikmat al-Masha’iyyah* (Peripatetic philosophy) and *al-Hikmat al-Ishraqiyyah* (Illuminationist theosophy).²²

D. Division of the Sciences

Before discussing the basic features of Mulla Sadra’s doctrines it is useful to consider his conception of the relation of the sciences to one another and especially the meaning and significance accorded to *Hikmat*. In the introductory chapter of the *Asfar*, he divides the sciences, following the Peripatetics, into theoretical wisdom consisting of logic, mathematics, natural philosophy, and metaphysics and practical wisdom consisting of ethics, economics and politics.²³

In the treatise *Iksir al-‘Arifin*, he outlines a somewhat more complete and in a way more original division of the sciences.²⁴ According to this scheme, the sciences (*‘ulum*) are either of this world (*dunyawi*) or of the other (*ukhrawi*). The first is divided into three categories: the science of words (*‘ilm al-aqwal*), the science of acts (*‘ilm al-af‘al*) and the science of states of contemplation or thought (*‘ilm al-ahwal* or *afkar*).

The science of words comprises the sciences of the alphabet, word-construction, syntax, prosody, poetics, and the meanings of terms in logic. The science of acts consists of what belongs to various material objects from which the arts of weaving, agriculture, and architecture come into being, what is of a higher degree such as the art of writing, the science of mechanics, alchemy, etc, what belongs to providing a living for the individual and the society from which the sciences of family, law, politics, and the *Shari‘ah* are created, and, finally, what belongs to the acquisition of spiritual and moral virtues and the casting away from evil from which the “science of the path” (*‘ilm al-tariqah*), i.e. Sufism, comes into being. As for the science of thought, it consists of the sciences of logical demonstration, the science of arithmetic, the science of geometry including astronomy and astrology, and the sciences of nature including medicine and the various sciences dealing with minerals, plants, and animals.

The sciences of the other world which are not accessible to the ordinary intelligence of men and are not destroyed with the death of the body include the knowledge of angels and intellectual substances, the knowledge of the Preserved Tablet (*lah al-mahfuz*), and the knowledge of the Exalted Pen (*al-qalam*

al-a'la), i.e. of the divine decree and of the first determination of the divine essence which Mulla Sadra, following the earlier Sufis, calls also by the name of the reality of Mohammad (*al-haqiqat al-Mohammadiyyah*). These sciences also include the knowledge of death, resurrection, and all that pertains to life hereafter.²⁵

Among the pursuits with which man can occupy himself in this life, none stands in as exalted a position as *Hikmat* the divisions of which we have outlined above. And among its branches none is as important and principled as metaphysics or the science of the principle of things, so that this branch of knowledge alone is often considered worthy of being called *Hikmat*. Mulla Sadra defines this science as “coming to know the state of the essence of beings as they are, to the extent of human capacity” or “a man’s becoming an intellectual world (microcosm) corresponding to the objective world (macrocosm),” or, to quote still another definition, “the comprehension of universals and catharsis from the world of matter.”²⁶

The above definitions imply that *Hikmat* is a purely intellectual form of knowledge in which the knower himself undergoes a certain transformation in the process of knowing and his soul becomes a mirror in which the cosmic hierarchy is reflected. With such a conception then it is no wonder that Mulla Sadra spent so much of his life in teaching and writing about *Hikmat* only and regarded all the other sciences as its subsidiaries.

E. Principles of Mulla Sadra’s Doctrines

In discussing the basic principles of *Hikmat* as understood and expounded by Mulla Sadra, we have chosen to mention those major principles of his thought which distinguish him from his predecessors and which are the characteristic elements of his metaphysics. The doctrines of the Peripatetic and Illuminationistic schools as well as the ideas of ibn ‘Arabi and his followers form the common background for the metaphysics of Mulla Sadra.

There are four topics in each of which Mulla Sadra has departed from earlier philosophical perspectives and which form the principles of his whole intellectual vision. These four subjects concern (1) being and its various polarizations, (2) substantial motion or the becoming and change of the substance of the world, (3) knowledge and the relation between the knower and the known, and (4) the soul, its faculties, generation, perfection and final resurrection. We shall consider these questions in the above mentioned order, emphasizing in each case the particular complexion given to these subjects by Mulla Sadra.

1. Unity and Polarization of Being

The cornerstone of Mulla Sadra’s doctrines is the principality and the unity and gradation of Being. As we have already mentioned,²⁷ one of the major points of contention among Muslim philosophers and theologians concerned the question whether Being or the quiddities (*mahiyyat*) of things are principal. We saw that the Muslim Peripatetics like the Sufis believed in the principality of Being, i.e. the objective reality of Being independent of mental abstractions and considered the quiddities to be nothing but

accidents, while the Illuminationists beginning with Suhrawardi Maqtul and followed by Mulla Sadra's own teacher, Mir Damad, developed a "metaphysics of essences" and held the opposite view that existence is an accident and that the essences are principal. In this debate Mulla Sadra sided definitely with the Peripatetics and Sufis in accepting the principality of Being, and opposed the Illuminationists.

On the question of unity and gradation of Being, however, Mulla Sadra departed from peripatetic teachings completely. In the view of the Muslim Peripatetics the being of each thing is in essence different and distinct from other beings while it is principal with respect to its own quiddity. According to Akhund, however, Being is the same reality in all realms of existence, it is a single reality but with gradations and degrees of intensity. Just as we say the light of the sun, the light of a lamp, or the light of a glow-worm and mean the same subject, i.e. light, but with different predicates, i.e. under different conditions of manifestation, so in the case of Being, the being of God, of a man, of a tree, or of a heap of earth are all one Being or one reality but in various degrees of intensity of manifestation.²⁸

Moreover, Being, no matter where it manifests itself, appears always with its attributes or armies (*ʿasakir*), as they are traditionally called, such as knowledge, will, power, etc.²⁹ A stone, because it exists, is a manifestation of Being and, therefore, has knowledge, will, power, and intelligence like men or angels. However, since at the level of a stone the manifestation of Being is very weak, these attributes are hidden and not perceptible.³⁰

The various beings in the world of manifestation are limitations of the one reality or Being. These limitations are abstracted by the mind and become the forms of quiddities (*mahiyyat*) of things, and when transposed into the principle domain, they become the Platonic ideas or archetypes. Unlike Being which is objectively real and in fact is the reality of the cosmos, the *mahiyyat* are accidents of Being abstracted by the mind without having a reality independent of Being. Even the archetypes (*al-aʿyan al-thabitah*) possess a form of Being which in this case is God's knowledge of them.

What distinguishes the earthly manifestation of things from their celestial archetypes is not a gradation of the *mahiyyat* from more subtle to more gross modes of existence, as certain followers of the Illuminationist school believe. Rather, it is the intensity of Being which determines the level of existence of each creature. If the light of Being shines upon the form or quiddity of a man with a greater intensity than now, he will become the man of the intermediate world (*barzakh*) and if the intensity is greater still he will become the celestial man identified with his heavenly archetype.

Absolute Being itself, which is the proper subject for metaphysics, is above all limitations and, therefore, above all forms or *mahiyyat*, above all substances and accidents. It is the "Form of forms" and the Agent of all acts. By manifesting Itself longitudinally (*tuli*) It brings into being the various orders of Being from the archangels to terrestrial creatures and by manifesting itself latitudinally (*ʿardi*) It creates the various members of each order of Being.³¹ Being is the reality of all things so that the knowledge of anything is ultimately the knowledge of Its being and, therefore, of Being itself. Likewise, the archetypes exist eternally through God's knowledge without which they would have no share whatsoever in Being.

Since Being is unity in multiplicity and multiplicity in unity,³² it partakes of logical distinctions and divisions while remaining in essence indivisible and above all polarizations. Mulla Sadra goes into great detail about the various divisions and categories of Being and in fact most of the first book of the *Asfar* is concerned with them. We mention here a few of the division which Akhund discusses with great rigour in his writings, especially in the monumental *Asfar*.

One division of Being is into connective being (*al-wujud al-irtibati*) and self-subsistent being (*al-u'ujud al-nafsi*). Connective being is that which connects a subject with a predicate as in the statement, "Man is a rational animal." Self-subsistent being is one which stands independently by itself and is not simply the means of connecting two terms. This category of being which exists in itself is in turn divided into three kinds: that which is objective existence is not the quality of something else and is called substance (*jauhar*), that which is the quality of something else and is called accident (*'ard*), and, finally, that which has need of no cause outside itself, i.e. the Being of God. From another point of view Mulla Sadra considers the being of all things other than God to be the connective being (*wujud al-rabit*) and only the Being of God to be Being *per se*.³³

Another division of Being adopted by Mulla Sadra is that of the necessary (*wajib*), possible (*mumkin*), and impossible (*mumtani'*) beings which nearly all the Muslim philosophers and many theologians coming after ibn Sina and following his example, have accepted.³⁴ If the intellect considers a being and finds that the meaning of being is essential to it, i.e. lies in its essence, and that there are no causes outside it which have brought it into being, that being is called the Necessary Being. If it has need of a cause outside itself it is called possible being. Moreover, the attribute of possibility pertains to its quiddity as well as to its being. The possibility of its quiddity concerns its relation to *its particular being*, and the possibility of its being pertains to its relation to *the Necessary Being*. The *being* or existence of each object, therefore, depends upon the being of God and the knowledge of anything upon the knowledge of the root or principle of its own being. Since the root or basis of the Necessary Being is unknowable, the knowledge of the being of things remains also unknowable to us and it is only the quiddities or *mahiyyat* which we can know.

These quiddities, as already mentioned, are the limitations placed upon being and abstracted by the mind. The intellect in perceiving any object immediately analyses it into being and quiddity, the latter consisting of the limit determination of the former. It is only in the case of the Divine Being that such an analysis cannot be made because Absolute Being has no *mahiyyah*. One can say that It is without *mahiyyah* or that Its Being and *mahiyyah* are identical.

The quiddities in themselves are only mental concepts without a separate objective existence so that the effects produced by things come from their being and not from their quiddity. Likewise, cause and effect are categories of being which in one case becomes the cause and in the other the effect of things.

The *mahiyyat* are either particular or universal; the latter either exist before or are abstracted by the intellect from particulars.³⁵ The universals which exist independently of all particulars are the archetypes

of Platonic ideas upon the reality of which Suhrawardi Maqtul had insisted against the view of the Peripatetics. Mulla Sadra likewise criticizes Aristotle and ibn Sina for considering the Platonic ideas to be nothing but the forms of things impinged upon the divine intellect. He insists upon the reality of the archetypes in a spiritual world that is completely independent of the world of particulars as well as of all mental images formed in the human mind.[36](#)

Akhund praises Suhrawardi Maqtul and accepts fully the reasons he had given for the existence of the Platonic ideas or “masters of the species” (*arbab al-anwaʿ*). There is a spiritual man in the spiritual world who is the real cause for the activities and ontological qualities of the terrestrial man; likewise in the case of other species each has an intelligible idea or archetype which governs all the activities and life of that species on earth.

The archetype is in essence one with its particulars but differs from them in characteristics which arise from the substance or “matter” of the particulars. The archetype appears different in each stage (*taur*) of manifestation while in the realm of reality it is one and the same truth. The beings of this world are the reflections and shadows of the archetypes so that they are like them and share in their reality and at the same time are different from them in being less real and farther removed from the source of Being.

One of the principles for which Akhund is famous is called *imkan al-ashraf* or “the possibility of that which is superior.” According to this principle, just as each being in treading the path of perfection passes through various stages from the lowest to the highest, so it is necessary that for each imperfect being in this world there be degrees of being in the higher stages of the cosmic hierarchy, since each being has descended from the divine Principle through intermediate states of being. For example, the being of man on earth in his present state of imperfection necessitates the being of man in the intermediary world of souls, and the latter the being of the spiritual man in the intelligible world. According to this principle, therefore, the very existence of quiddities in their earthly state of souls or the world of inverted or reflected forms (*al-amthal al-muʿallaqah*) and these in turn necessitate their existence in the spiritual world of simple intellectual substances.

After showing the *mahiyat* are in reality limitations of being, Mulla Sadra goes on to assert that the logical distinction made by Aristotle and all the later philosophers between substance and the accidents which together form the ten categories concerns only the *mahiyat*; Being properly speaking, is neither substance nor accident but above both. When we say of a thing that it is such and such a substance or that its particular quality and quantity are its accidents we refer only to its *mahiyahi* and not to its being.

The relation of cause and effect, however, contrary to that of substance and accidents, concerns only the being of things.[37](#) All things in the universe have a cause and an effect and since everything is a manifestation of Being, every effect is but an aspect of its cause and cannot in essence differ from it. That is why the well-known principle that from unity only unity can issue forth, *ex uno non fit nisi unum*, must be true. From the divine essence which is simple and one, only a simple being can issue forth. Mulla Sadra calls the first manifestation of the divine essence extended being (*wujud al-munbasit*), the

first intellect, the sacred effusion (*faid al-muqaddas*) or the Truth of truths (*haqiqat al-haqa'iq*) which he considers to be one in essence but partaking of degrees and stages of manifestation.³⁸

He divides reality into three categories: of the divine essence, of “Absolute Being” which he identifies with extended being, and of relative being which that of the creatures is.³⁹ The cause of all things, therefore, is extended being which in turn the first determination of the divine essence. God is, thus, the Cause of causes and the Ultimate Source of all effects to be seen in the universe, because all causes and effects arise from the beings of things and all beings are in reality the stages of the One Being.

To terminate our discussion of the polarizations of Being in cosmic existence we must also consider the question of form and matter. On this question Mulla Sadra sides with the Peripatetics and is against the Illuminationists in accepting the theory of hylomorphism. In his view, however, matter is not limited to the corporeal domain. Rather, it is the aspect of potentiality which manifests itself in all the realms of existence according to the conditions of that particular realm. Bodies have a matter belonging to the corporeal world, and souls (*anfas*), a matter conformable to the subtle world of the psyche, moreover, in each world matter is a lower degree of being of the form with which it is united and for that reason accompanies it in all realms of existence until the highest realm which is the world of pure intelligences (*mujarradat*). That is why, as Akhund expresses it, matter has love for form which forever compels it to seek union with it (form). Only in the intelligible world, which is also called the *'alam al-jabarut*, are the spiritual realities completely separated from and free of all species of matter, even the most subtle.

2. Substantial Motion

The question of potentiality leads to that of motion because motion, as Aristotle said, is becoming actual of that which is potential. Mulla Sadra rejects the possibility of sudden change from one substance to another which the Peripatetics accepted along with gradual change. Rather, he considers all change to be a form of motion and introduces the idea of substantial motion (*al-harakat al-jauhariyyah*),⁴⁰ which is another of the well-known principles associated with his name, as a basis of his whole outlook from which he goes on to prove the creation of the world in time, bodily resurrection and many other doctrines that will be discussed in the course of this chapter.

It is well known that the Muslim Peripatetics, following Aristotle, limited motion to only four of the ten categories, i.e. quantity (*kam*), quality (*kayf*), place (*makan*), and substance,⁴¹ the last understood only in the sense of generation and corruption. Ibn Sina rejected completely substantial motion in any sense other than instantaneous coming into being and passing away and argued that since the essence of a thing depends on its substance, if that substance were to change; its essence would also change and lose its identity.⁴²

Following the Sufis, Mulla Sadra considered the world to be like a stream of water which is flowing continually and believes motion to be nothing but the continuous regeneration and re-creation of the world at every instance.⁴³ According to him, it is not only the accidents but the substance of the universe

itself that partakes of motion and becoming, i.e. continuous re-creation and rebirth.⁴⁴ In order to prove this assertion, Akhund makes use of several arguments. For example, he writes that it is an accepted fact that accidents have a need of a substance upon which they depend for their being and properties. Their subsistence depends upon the subsistence of their substance and their creation and regeneration upon its creation and regeneration. Therefore, every change which takes place in the accidents of a body must be accompanied by a corresponding change in the substance; otherwise the being of the former would not follow the being of the latter. Or, in other words, since the effect must be the same as its cause, the cause or substance of a changing accident must itself be changing.

In addition, it is known that all beings in the universe are seeking perfection and are in the process of becoming and change in order to overcome their imperfections. Since divine manifestation never repeats itself, God creates new theophanies at every moment in order to remove imperfections and bring new perfections to things. The matter of each being, therefore, is continuously in the process of wearing a new dress, i.e. being wed to a new form, without, however, casting away its older dress. It is only the rapidity of this change that makes it imperceptible and guarantees the continuity and identification of a particular being through the stages of substantial motion.

According to Mulla Sadra, each body consists of matter and two forms: one, the form of the body which gives matter dimensions and the possibility of accepting other forms, and the other the form of the species (*surah nau'iyah*) which determines the species and identity of the body. Each of these two forms is at every instant changing, and matter is taking on new forms at every moment. Moreover, at each stage of substantial change the totality of a being which itself consists of form and matter may be considered to be the matter of the aspect of potentiality for the next stage the actualized aspect of which then becomes the form.

The power or force which motivates this change in nature which is a force hidden within the cosmic substance. In fact, since Being comes before nothingness, motion in this world comes before rest through the force immanent in the cosmos. Needless to say, this motion is limited to the degrees of cosmic existence in which matter is present, i.e. to corporeal and subtle manifestation, and does not extend to the world of pure intelligences or archetypes which are beyond all change.

Substantial motion itself has also the two aspects of change and permanence. Each form has two faces, one in the world of archetypes and the other in nature, the first permanent and the second in continuous renewal. The substance of the world itself is, therefore, the intermediary between permanence and change; it possesses two aspects, one which is continuously in motion and the other, which Mulla Sadra identifies with the intelligences, above all change.

Time, for Akhund as for Aristotle, is the quantity of motion, which, in a world of continuous substantial motion, becomes an inherent feature of cosmic existence.⁴⁵ It is, more specifically, the measure of the substantial motion of the heavens but not the measure of their rotation as held by the Peripatetics. The heavens, according to Mulla Sadra, are in continuous contemplation of the perfection of their beloveds,

i.e. the universal intellects which at every instant cause a new form to be projected upon the essence of the universal souls. The cause of celestial motion is, therefore, the desire to reach perfection, a goal which, because of its limitlessness, makes celestial motion endless. The heavens are in continuous creative worship, their motion being a sign of their contemplation of the divine by means of the intelligences, and their causing generation and growth in nature through their illumination being a sign of their act of creation. The whole world, therefore, both in its gross and subtle domains, partakes of substantial motion, and time is the measure of this motion as it occurs in the heavens where it is most regular as well as regulatory.⁴⁶

Mulla Sadra makes use of the principle of substantial motion to explain many of the most intricate problems of metaphysics and physics including the relation between permanence and change which we have already mentioned, the creation of the world, the creation of the soul, and various eschatological questions. This principle can, therefore, be regarded as one of the distinguishing features of his doctrinal formulation.

As to the question of creation Akhund opposes the simple creation *ex nihilo* of the theologians who believe the world to have been brought into being in time from utter nothingness. Likewise, he rejects the view of the Peripatetics who believe the world to have been created only in essences or in *principio* but not in time and the view of Mir Damad about *al-huduth al-dahri*.⁴⁷ Mulla Sadra believes that creation is in time (*al-huduth al-zamani*) because through substantial motion the being of the universe is renewed at every moment or, more explicitly; that the world is created at every instant, so that one can say that the being of the world depends upon its non-being at a previous moment. Where he differs from the theologians is that his conception of creation *ex nihilo* is complementary to the view that the archetypes of the world of creation exist changelessly in the intelligible world and that the world is connected with its divine origin through a permanent hierarchy.

This hierarchy begins with the first determination of the essence which Akhund, following the Sufis, calls the reality of Mohammad.⁴⁸ This is followed by the pure intelligences which are completely separated from matter and potentiality, the last of which is the giver of forms to the universe and the governor of the world of generation and corruption.⁴⁹ This last intellect is like a mill that grinds out new forms at every moment to feel the *hyle* of the world. It governs the world according to divine decree and gives revelation to prophets an inspiration to saints. Following the intelligible hierarchy there is the world of cosmic imagination or inverted or reflected forms or the purgatory between the intelligible and the material domains and, finally, the visible universe. The world is, therefore, created in time in the sense that its being is renewed after a moment in which it “was not”; at the same time it is the terminal state of an immutable hierarchy which through the subtle and angelic realms of being relates the visible cosmos to its divine source.

3. Divine and Human Knowledge

From what we have already said, it is clear that for Mulla Sadra knowledge forms the very substance of

cosmic manifestation itself and is moreover the gate to and means of salvation for the soul. Like all other gnostics Akhund considers knowledge and being, or, from another point of view, the knower and the known,⁵⁰ to be essentially the same and identifies the being of things with God's knowledge of them.⁵¹ God knows His own essence and His essence is none other than His being, and since His Being and essence are the same, He is at once the knower, the knowledge, and the known.

In the case of pure intellects or forms that are completely divorced from matter also, the intellect and the intelligible are the same, the difference in the two instances being that, although knowledge of the intellects is identical with their being, it is not identical with their quiddities, since their being surpasses their quiddities, whereas in the case of God's knowledge is identical both with Being and quiddity, since God's quiddity is the same as His Being.⁵²

Mulla Sadra rejects the Peripatetic notion that God's knowledge of things is the projection of their forms upon His essence as well as the idea followed by many Illuminationists that God's knowledge is the presence of the very forms of things in His essence. Rather, he uses the gnostic symbol of a mirror and considers the divine essence a mirror in which God sees the forms or essences of all things and in fact, through the contemplation of these forms or archetypes in the mirror of His own essence, He brings all things into being. Moreover, since the forms of all creatures, universal as well as particular, are reflected in His essence, God has knowledge of every particle of the universe.⁵³

Mulla Sadra divides knowledge (*'ilm*) into acquired (*husuli*) knowledge and innate (*huduri*) knowledge and, like the Illuminationists, divides the latter category into the knowledge of a thing in itself, of a cause of its effect, and of an effect of its cause. Perception is for him a movement from potentiality to actuality and an elevation in the degree of being in which the perceiver or knower rises from his own level of existence to the level of existence of that which is perceived through the union between the knower and the known which characterizes all intellection.

As for acquired knowledge or the knowledge of the human soul of things other than itself, it is not a reflection of the forms of things upon the soul and the soul does not have a passive role in the act of knowing. Rather, since man is a microcosm composed of all degrees of existence, his knowledge of things comes from the contemplation of these forms in the mirror of his own being much like divine knowledge with the difference that God's knowledge leads to objective existence (*al-wujud al-'aini*) of forms, while man's knowledge leads only to their mental existence (*al-wujud al-dihni*). Otherwise, man's soul has a creative power similar to that of God; its knowledge implies the creation of forms in the soul – forms the subsistence of which depends upon the soul as the subsistence of the objective universe depends upon God.⁵⁴

According to Mulla Sadra, mental existence or the presence in the mind of forms that yield knowledge of things as well as knowledge of itself is above the categories of substance and accidents and is identical with Being Itself. The knowledge that the soul has of things is just like the illumination of the light of Being. This knowledge established the form of that which is perceived in the mind, as Being establishes

and manifests the forms and quiddities of things externally. Moreover, it repeats in an inverted order the degrees of cosmic manifestation. Just as cosmic existence originates from the divine essence through the world of the intelligences and consists of the degrees of cosmic souls, bodies, forms, and matter, so knowledge begins from the senses, then rises to the level of the imagination, apprehension, and finally intellection ascending the scale of Being to the summit from which the whole of universal manifestation has descended.

4. Soul, Its Origin, Becoming and Entelechy

Another of the important changes which Mulla Sadra brought about in the formulation of *Hikmat* was the emphasis he laid upon the importance of psychology or the science of the soul (*'ilm al-nafs*) above and beyond what Peripatetic philosophy had accorded to it. Moreover, he removed the discussion of psychology from physics or natural philosophy and made it a branch of metaphysics and a study that is complementary to the science of the origin of things.⁵⁵

The soul (*nafs*), according to Mulla Sadra, is a single reality which first appears as the body (*jism*) and then through substantial motion and an inner transformation becomes the vegetative soul, then the animal soul, and finally the human soul. This development occurs from within the substance of the original body without there being any effusion from the heavenly souls or the active intellect.⁵⁶ The substance of the human sperm is at first potentially a plant, and then as it grows in the womb it becomes actually a plant and potentially an animal. At birth, it is actually an animal and potentially human, and finally at the age of adolescence it is actually human potential either an angel or a disciple of the devil.⁵⁷

All these stages lie hidden within the first substance or germ which through substantial motion traverses the degrees of being until it becomes completely divorced from all matter and potentiality and enjoys immortality in the world of pure intelligences.⁵⁸ The soul is, therefore, brought into being with the body but it has spiritual subsistence independent of the body.⁵⁹ Or, to be more precise, the soul at the beginning "is" the body which through inner transformation passes through various stages until it becomes absolutely free from matter and change.

The soul in each stage of its journey acquires a new faculty or set of faculties. As a mineral it has the faculty of preserving its form and as a plant, the faculties of feeding, growth, and the transformation of foreign substances into its own form. As an animal the faculties of motion and various forms of desire are acquired, and as a higher animal it develops in addition to the external senses the inner faculties of memory and imagination.⁶⁰ Finally, in man the five inner faculties: *sensus communis* (*hiss al-mushtarik*) which perceives forms, apprehension (*wahm*) which perceives meanings, fantasy (*khayal*) which preserves forms, memory (*dhakirah*) which preserves meanings and the double faculty of imagination (*mutakhayyilah*), and thought (*mutafakkirah*) which in the first case governs the sensible and in the second the intelligible domains, are also acquired.⁶¹

Throughout its development it is the same single soul which in one case appears as sight, in another as

memory, and in yet another as desire. The faculties are not something added to the soul but it is the soul itself, or, in a more esoteric sense, being itself which appears in various forms in each case.⁶² The soul passes through this stream of becoming – this world – and the parts of its course are marked by the archetypes or Platonic ideas that distinguish one species from another. It wears a new dress and a new guise at each point of the stream but the traveller is throughout one and the same.⁶³

Although the enumeration of the inner faculties of Mulla Sadra is essentially the same as that made by previous Muslim authors borrowing it from Aristotle, there is one point in which Mulla Sadra departs from the Peripatetics completely. It is well known that Aristotle considered only the universal intellect to be immortal and the Muslim Peripatetics like ibn Sina accorded immortality only to the intellectual part of the human soul. Mulla Sadra, following certain Sufi and hermetic teachings, asserts that the faculty of imagination enjoys also a form of immortality or at least existence independent of the body. He considers the universe to consist of three domains: the intelligible world, the sensible world, and an intermediate world (*barzakh*) of imagination which is macrocosmic as well as microcosmic.

The faculty of imagination in man as well as in some of the higher animals is, according to Akhund, a microcosmic counterpart of the cosmic imagination and has the power of creating forms. Upon the death of the body, this faculty, like the intellectual part of the soul, enjoys a form of life of its own and may in fact lead the soul to the intermediate world if it is the dominant element in the soul.

Mulla Sadra, like other Sufis, compares the soul to the cosmos on the one hand and to the Qur'an on the other, identifying the higher states of being of the soul with the esoteric meanings of the Qur'an.⁶⁴ There are seven degrees of existence for the soul as there are seven heavens and seven levels of interpretation of the Qur'an. These degrees he enumerates as nature (*tab'ah*), soul (*nafs*), intellect (*'aql*), spirit (*ruh*), secret (*sir*), hidden secret (*khafi*), and the most hidden state (*akhfa*) which is that of perfect union with God.⁶⁵ Each corresponds to a state of being, the totality extending from the life of nature or the senses to the divine life of union with God.

According to Mulla Sadra from another point of view the soul has two faculties, the practical (*'amali*) and the theoretical (*'ilmi* or *nazari*), which the latter at first is dependent upon the former but later becomes completely independent. The practical faculty consists of four stages: making use of the Law (*Shari'ah*) of various religions sent to guide mankind, purifying the soul from evil qualities, illuminating the soul with spiritual virtues and the sciences, and finally, annihilating the soul in God, beginning with the journey to God and then in God and finally with God.⁶⁶

As for the theoretical faculty it, too, is divided into four stages: the *potential* or *material* intellect (*'aql al-hayulani*) which has only the capability of accepting forms, *habitual* intellect (*'aql al-malakah*) which knows only simple and preliminary truths such as the truth that the whole is greater than its parts, the *active* intellect (*'aql bi al-fi'l*) which no longer has need of matter and concerns itself solely with intellect demonstrations and is either acquired or bestowed as a divine gift and finally the *acquired* intellect (*'aql al-mustafad*) which is the active intellect that has been united with the divine origin of all existence and

is the highest degree attainable by man and the purpose of cosmic existence. These stages are also road-marks upon the path trodden by the soul without implying any form of multiplicity; the soul remains the one traveller traversing all these stages on the road to perfection, the fruit and end of which is union with God.

Mulla Sadra deals with eschatology in great detail in many of his works and departs completely from the usual philosophical language in the treatment of this subject. His language is primarily that of the Qur'an and the hadith and of the gnostics. According to Akhund, the relation of this world to the next is like that of the mother's womb to this world. While the child is in the mother's womb he is actually in this world as well, but being separated from this world does not know of its existence. Likewise, man, while in this world is also in the next but the majority of people are unaware of the invisible world. Only the gnostics "see" the other world while they are here on Earth and that is because for them terrestrial existence has become transparent.

Akhund divides cosmic being into five classes each of which has a destiny and an end proper to its nature:⁶⁷ the pure intelligences separated from all potentiality, the intelligences which govern the heavens, the various psychic entities belonging to the world of the imagination such as the *jinn* and certain parts of the human soul, animal and vegetable souls, and, finally, minerals and elements. The separated intelligences subsist forever in the divine essence and are never separated from it. As for the rational soul (*al-nafs al-natiqah*), it is either perfect, as the souls of the heavens and of some men, and, in both cases, returns to God, or else it is imperfect. In the latter case it is either devoid of all desire for perfection as in the animals and those human beings who have committed much evil in this life, or it is desirous of perfection like many persons who, having chosen the wrong path, realize their mistake and wish to be guided towards the Truth.

In the former case the soul, like other psychic entities belonging to the intermediary world, after separation from the body becomes united with the forms of the intermediary world of imagination (*'alam al-mithal*);⁶⁸ in the latter case the soul suffers after its separation from the body until it is finally purified and united with God.

Plants are either used as food by men and animals and, therefore, share in their destinies, or have an independent existence, in which case, after the end of their terrestrial existence, they join their archetypes in the world of pure forms. Likewise with minerals and the elements, they too become united with their intelligible counterparts after their terrestrial existence terminates. In fact, these terrestrial beings are united with their archetypes even while they are on Earth, but only the gnostics are aware of this reality.

As for man's bodily resurrection on the Last Day, Mulla Sadra considers it to be one of the great mysteries of metaphysics revealed only to those who have reached the highest stage.⁶⁹ He accepts bodily resurrection which he interprets in a particular fashion. It is known that man's individuality and distinguishing characteristics come from his soul and not from his body because the substance of the

body changes every few years without in any way destroying the unity of human beings. Of the faculties of the soul, however, intellection and imagination are innate to it, while the vegetative and animal faculties such as the external senses and passions are received by it through the body.

According to Akhund, in the next world all souls will receive the power to create external forms as prophets and saints do here in this world. For example, each soul can create the pleasure received through sight from within itself without the need of what appears to us here as an external organ. In other words, the organs of the body which appear as “external” to the soul are created from within the soul in the next world so that the resurrection of the soul is really complete with body according to all the meanings we can give to the word “body.”

Difference between paradise and hell lies in that the souls in paradise have the power to bring into being all the forms that are beautiful and pleasant, all the flowers and *houris* of paradise, while the impure souls in hell have only the power to bring into being ugly and unpleasant forms and are in fact forced to suffer by the very forms they will have created. Mulla Sadra adds, however, that ultimately the pains suffered in the inferno will come to an end and, as ibn ‘Arabi had said, the fires of hell will freeze and all will return to the divine origin of things.⁷⁰

F. Significance of Mulla Sadra and His Influence

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the importance of Mulla Sadra lies not only in rekindling the lamp of learning and reviving the intellectual sciences fully for the first time in the Muslim World after the Mongol invasion, but also for uniting and harmonizing revelation, gnosis, and philosophy together. Some authors have criticized Mulla Sadra for taking certain principles from ibn ‘Arabi, Farabi, and Suhrawardi Maqtul and have, therefore, refused to accept his “originality.” But as Aristotle has said so justifiably, there is nothing new under the sun. One cannot create metaphysics of one’s own as if the metaphysics were a mechanical invention. The principles have always been and always will be the same. What determines the originality of author in a traditional civilization like that of Islam is his ability to re-interpret and reformulate the eternal verities in a new light and thereby create a new intellectual perspective.

Regarded in this way, Mulla Sadra must certainly be considered to be one of the most significant figures in the intellectual life of Shi‘ah Islam. Coming at a moment when the intellectual sciences had become weakened, he succeeded in reviving them by co-ordinating philosophy as inherited from Greeks and interpreted by the Peripatetics and Illuminationists before him with the teachings of Islam in its exoteric and esoteric aspects. He succeeded in putting the gnostic doctrines of ibn ‘Arabi in a logical dress. He made purification of the soul a necessary basis and complement of the study of *Hikmat*, thereby bestowing upon philosophy the practice of ritual and spiritual virtues which it had lost in the period of decadence of classical civilization. Finally, he succeeded in correlating the wisdom of the ancient Greek and Muslim sages and philosophers as interpreted esoterically with the inner meaning of the Qur’an.

In all these matters he represents the final stage of effort by several generations of Muslim sages and may be considered to be the person in whom the streams, which had been approaching one another for some centuries before, finally united.[71](#)

More specifically, Mulla Sadra was able to harmonize his doctrinal formulation with the teachings of Islam in such a way as to overcome all the major difficulties which the Peripatetic philosophers met in the face of the teachings of the Qur'an and for which al-Ghazali criticized them so severely.[72](#) Of particular significance was his divorcing metaphysics to a large extent both from Ptolemaic astronomy and Aristotelian physics. While in Europe, Galileo, Kepler, and Newton were destroying the homogeneity of Aristotelian cosmology and physics and in this way weakening the medieval Christian world-view which was closely linked with it, Mulla Sadra, through his doctrine of substantial motion and through considering the science of the soul to be independent of physics, separated metaphysics to a large extent from medieval natural philosophy.

This separation, although perhaps not of immediate significance in the 11th/17th century Persia, which was still immune from European ideas, became of great importance in the later centuries. As the modern scientific world-view became more and more accepted in Persia during the Qajar period, the separation brought about by Akhund between metaphysics and natural philosophy helped to preserve the traditional wisdom in the face of attacks by modernists whose only weapon was modern scientific theories connected with the world of matter. In this way also, Akhund rendered great service to the Muslim intellectual sciences and helped their preservation until today.

There is no doubt that nearly the whole of the intellectual life of Persia during the past three and half centuries has centred on Mulla Sadra. Of his immediate students, Mulla Muhsin Faid, 'Abd al-Razzaq Lahiji, and Qadi Sa'id Qumi, all of whom are among the leading figures of Shi'ah Islam, we need say little here for they have already been discussed in a previous chapter.[73](#) It need only be added that these men in turn produced a generation of students who extended the teachings of Akhund far and wide.[74](#) In the Qajar period, after a short interim of anarchy caused by the Afghan invasion, the school of Mulla Sadra was once again revived, the most famous of its members being Jaji Mulla Hadi Sabziwari, Mulla 'Ali Nuri, author of one of the most important commentaries upon the *Asfar*, Sheikh Ahmad Ahsai'i, founder of the Sheikhi movement and the commentator upon Mulla Sadra's *Masha'ir*, Mulla 'Ali Mudarris Zunuzi, author of a significant work *Bada'i' al-Hikam* in Persian and glosses upon the *Asfar*, and Mohammad Hidaji, also the author of a commentary upon the *Asfar*.[75](#)

The influence of Akhund is to be met with wherever the traditional school of *Hikmat* is still preserved and taught in Persia.[76](#) All the adherents of this school have regarded Mulla Sadra as their master and it is no exaggeration to say that Akhund stands along with Farabi, ibn Sina, al-Ghazali, Nasir al-Din Tusi, Suhrawardi Maqtul, and ibn 'Arabi among the principal formulators of the Muslim intellectual sciences and, though not well known outside Persia, is no less a figure than his more famous predecessor.[77](#) In him the many spiritual streams of the earlier centuries met and united in a new river which has watered

the intellectual soil of Persia during the past four centuries; his teachings are as alive today as they were at the time of their formulation.

Bibliography

Ja'far 'Ali Yasin, *Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi Mujaddid al-Falsifah al-Islamiyyah*, al-Ma'arif Press, Baghdad, 1375/1955; Sayyid Jalal al-Din Ashtiyani, *Hasti az Nazar-i Falsafih wa 'Irfan*, Khurasan Press, Meshed, 1379/1959; Mohammad Hussain Fadil-I Tuni, *Ilahiyat*, University Press, Teheran, 1333 Solar; Comte de Gobineau, *Les religions et les philosophies dans l'Asie central*, les Editions G. Gres et Cie., Paris, 1923; M. al-Khudairi, "Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi," *Risalat al-Islam*, No. 2, 1950, pp. 212 – 18, No. 3, 1951, pp. 318 – 27, Murtada Mudarrisi Chahardihi, *Tarikh-i Falasifih-Islam*, 2 vols., 'Ilmi Press, Teheran, 1336 Solar; Jawad Muslib, *Falsafi'i 'Ali ya Hikmat-i Sadr al-Muti'allihin*, vol. 1, University press, Teheran, 1337 Solar onwards (this work is a translation and commentary of the *Asfar* in Persian of which only the first of the several volumes has appeared so far); Hussain 'Ali Rashid, *Dou Filsuf-i Sharq wa Garb*, Parwin, Ispahan, 1334 Solar; Sadr al-Din Shirazi, *al-Asfar al-Aarga'ah*, ed. Mohammad Hussain Tabataba'i, vols one and two, Da'ir al-Ma'arif al-Islamiyyah, Qum, 1378/1958 onwards (this is a projected nine-volume edition of the *Asfar* with various commentaries of which three have appeared so far); also Teheran, lithographed edition, 1282/1865; *Asrar al-Ayat*, Teheran, lithographed edition, 1322/1904; *Hashiyah 'ala Sharh Hikmat al-Ishraq*, Teheran, lithographed edition, 1316/1898; *al-Mabda' al-Ma'ad*, Teheran, lithographed edition, 1314/1896; *Mafatih al-Ghaib*, Teheran, lithographed edition; *al-Masha'ir*, Teheran, lithographed edition, 1315/1895; *Sharh Ilahiyat al-Shifa'*, Teheran, Lithographed edition, 1303/1885; *Sharh Usul al-Kafi*, Teheran, lithographed edition; *al-Shawahid al-Rububiyyah*, lithographed edition, 1286/1869; *Kasr Asnam al-Jahiliyyah*, ed. M. T. Danish Pazhuh, University Press, Teheran, 1340 Solar; *Sih Asl*, ed. S. H. Nasr, University Press, Teheran, 1340 Solar; S. J. Sajjadi, *The Philosophical Vocabulary of Sadr al-Din Shirazi*, University Press, Teheran, 1380/1960; S. H. Nasr, "Mulla Sadra dar Hindustan," *Rahnama'yi Kitab*, vol. 4, Dai, 1340 Solar; Akbar Sairafi, *Tarikh-i Falasifih-i Islam*, Danish Press, Teheran, 1315 Solar; Mohammad Hussain tabataba'i, "Musahibih-i Ustad 'Allamih Tabataba'i ba Professor Henri Corbin dar Barih-i Shi'ah," *Salanah-i Maktab-i Tashayyu'*, No. 2, Qum, 1339 Solar; Abu 'Abd Allah al-Zinjani, *al-Filsuf al-Farsi al-Kabir Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi*, al-Mufid Press, Damascus, 1936; M. Horten, *Das Philosophische System des Schirazi*, Strassburg, 1913.

1. This chapter has been written with the invaluable help of Hajj Mohammad Hussain Tabataba'i, one of the leading authorities on the school of Mulla Sadra in Iran today, the author of the 20-volume Qur'anic commentary al-Mizan and the editor and commentator of the new edition of the *Asfar*.

2. Comte de Gobineau, one of the most observant of travellers who has visited Persia during the past few centuries, was quite aware of Mulla Sadra's significance although not quite well acquainted with his ideas, for in a well-known passage he writes, "Le vrai, l'incontestable metite de Moulla Sadra reste celiui pue j'ai indique plus haut: c'est d'avoir ramine, rejeuni, pour le temps ou il vivait, la philosophie antique, en lui conservant les moins possible de ses forms avicenniques..." Gobineau, *Les religions et les philosophies dans l'Asie central*, Les Editions G. Gres et Cie, Paris, 1923, p. 102.

3. The date of Mulla Sadra's birth was unknown until quite recently when in preparing the new edition of the *Asfar*, Tabataba'i collected a large number of handwritten manuscripts of the work. On the margin of one of the manuscripts dated 1197/1782 with marginal notes by Mulla Sadra himself, the authenticity of which cannot be doubted, there appears this

statement, “This truth was revealed to me on Friday, the seventh of Jamadi al-Ula 1037 A.H. when 58 years had passed from (my life)...” Therefore, the date of his birth can be established as 979/1571 or 980/1572.

For the traditional accounts of the life of Mulla Sadra and his works, see M.B. Khunsari, *Raudat al-Jannat*, Teheran, lithographed edition, 1306/1888, vol. 2, pp. 331 – 32; M.A. TABRIZI, *Raihanat al-Adab*, Sa’di Press, Teheran, 1331/1912, vol. 2, pp. 458 – 61; Mir Khwand, *Raudat al-Safa*, Teheran, lithographed edition, 1270/1853, vol. 8, p. 120; T. Tunikabuni, *Qisas al-‘Ulama’*, ‘Ilmi Press, Teheran, 1313/1895, pp. 329 – 33, and Agha Buzurg Tihrani, *al-Dhari‘ah al-Gharra* Press, najaf, 1355/1936, on dealing with various writings of Akhund.

As for secondary sources see M. Mudarrisi Chahardihi, *tarikh-i Falasifih-i Islam*, ‘Ilmi Press, Teheran, 1336 Solar, vol. 1, pp. 179ff; A. A. Zinjani, *al-Filsuf al-Farsi al-Kabir Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi*, al-Mufid Press, Damascus, pp. 212 – 18, no. 3, 1951, pp. 318 – 27; J. ‘Ali Yasin, *Sadr al-Din al-Shrazi Mujaddid al-Falsifat al-Islamiyyah*, al-Ma‘arif Press, 1375/1956, and the introduction by M.R. mazaffar, in the new edition of the *Asfar*, *Da’ir al-Ma‘arif al-Islamiyyah*, Qum 1378/1958.

For an account of the life and doctrines of Mulla Sadra in European languages, see Gobineau, *op. cit.*, pp. 91 – 103; E. G. Browne, *A Literary history of Persia*, University Press, Cambridge, 1924, Vol. 4, pp. 429 – 30; and m. Horten, *Die Philosophie des Islam*, Verlag Ernst Rheinhardt, Munchen, 1924, pp. 57ff. Also Browne, *A year Amongst the Persians*, Adam & Charles, London, 1950, pp. 141 – 43.

4. Concerning Baha’ al-Din ‘Amili and Mir Damad, see the preceding chapter.

To know the names of the masters of a Hakim is important because learning Hikmat from “within” is impossible without a master for the majority of even of those who are gifted to pursue it. One can learn certain ideas from books alone but to really understand what Hikmat means and what the various authorities meant by various expressions there is a need of a master who himself learned the doctrines from another master and so on going back to the early masters. The Hakim is, therefore, as insistent upon the authenticity of his chain of masters as a verifier of hadith is about the ismad of a tradition or a Sufi master about the isilsilahi or chain of his tariqah.

5. We have already discussed in detail in previous chapters the meaning of this term as used here, i.e. a combination of gnosis, illuminationist and Peripatetic philosophy which is neither theology nor philosophy as currently understood but theosophy in the proper and original sense of the term and not in its present usurpation by various pseudo-spiritualist groups.

6. The Khan school which is one of the most beautiful edifices of the Safawid period had fallen into ruins for some years when about ten years ago the Bureau of Archaeology of the Persian Government undertook the task of repairing it. It is now operating once again as a madrasah for traditional learning.

7. He in fact criticizes ibn Sina for having spent his time composing works on other sciences like mathematics and medicine.

8. The story is told in most of the traditional sources mentioned above that Mulla Sadra once asked Mir Damad why he was respected by all the religious authorities while Akhund, despite his powerful family, was molested so much by some of the ‘ulama’. Mir Damad answered that although they were both saying the same thing, he hid his ideas within so many difficult expressions that only the elite would be able to understand them while Mulla Sadra wrote so clearly that anyone with a knowledge of Arabic could detect the trend of his ideas.

9. See also *Raihanat al-Adab*, pp. 458 – 61, where 50 works by him are mentioned, and A. A. Zanjani, *op. cit.*, pp. 19 – 22 where he mentions 26 metaphysical and philosophical and 17 religious works some of which are of doubtful authenticity. Refer also to J. ‘Ali Yasin, *op. cit.*, pp. 58 – 62, where 26 works are named.

10. The *Kitab al-Hidayah* dealing with the complete cycle of Hikmat, i.e. logic, natural philosophy, and metaphysics was composed by the seventh/13th century Persian author, Athir al-Din Mufaddal ibn ‘Umar al-Abhari, it soon became one of the basic books of instruction in the madrasahs. The tenth/16th century commentary upon it by Kamal al-Din Mibudi was the best known before Mulla Sadra composed his own commentary upon it.

[11.](#) The Usul al-Kafi was also commented upon by Majlisi as we have mentioned in the previous chapter. The commentary of Mulla Sadra which is of a more intellectual nature is one of the most important Shi'ah works written in the Safawid period and is perhaps his most significant religious composition.

[12.](#) The unpublished treatise the manuscript of which exists in the Majlis Library (MS. 103) in Teheran is the only known prose work of Mulla Sadra in Persian, all the other above mentioned writings being in Arabic.

[13.](#) The manuscript of the Sharh al-Hidayah in the Mishkat Collection at Teheran University, MS. 254, is in Mulla Sadra's own handwriting, several quatrains appear in the opening pages which are without doubt his own.

[14.](#) E.G. Browne, op. cit., vol 4, p. 430.

[15.](#) The 1282/1865 Teheran lithographed edition with the commentaries of Sabziwari on the margin runs over 1,000 large pages and the new edition by Mr. Tabatabai'i with running commentary by himself and several other Hakims of the Qajar period including Sabziwari and Mulla 'Ali Nuri is planned in nine 400-page volumes of which three have appeared so far. The Asfar which is used in graduate school of theological faculty in Teheran University is taught over a three year period and then only a part of the First Book is covered. It is said that Haji Mulla Hadi Sabziwari, the greatest Persian Hakim after Mulla Sadra, taught the complete Asfar to his advanced disciples over a six year period.

[16.](#) Mulla Sadra, Mafatih al-Ghaib, al-Miftah al-Thalith, al-Mashhad al-Thamin.

[17.](#) See the preceding chapter in which the formative elements of Shi'ah intellectual life leading to Mulla Sadra and of the Safawid sages have been discussed.

[18.](#) See Asfar, Teheran, lithographed edition, 1282/1865, Book 2, Section 4. Mulla Sadra writes that these pre-Socratic philosophers actually spoke in a symbolic language (ramz) and implied by their theory that the world was composed of a single element, the doctrine of the unity of Being or wahdat al-wujud which is the basis of the gnostic doctrines of Ibn 'Arabi. Mulla Sadra, in fact, identifies the water of Thales with the nafas al-Rahman or the breath of the Compassionate which the Sufis consider to be the ultimate substance of the universe. These early Ionians who are considered by some today to be the founders of the modern quantitative sciences of nature appear to the Muslims in a different light as expositors of universal gnosis and those whom, as Mulla Sadra writes, "have adopted the light of Hikmat from the lamp of prophecy."

[19.](#) For an account of the relation of Mulla Sadra to Shi'ism and his success in unifying the three above-mentioned elements, see M. H. Tabataba'i, "Musahibih-i Ustad 'Allamih Tabataba'i ba Professor Henri Corbin dar Barih-i Shi'ah," Salanah-i Maktab-i Tashayyu', No. 2, 1339 solar, pp. 61 – 64. This is one of the most important works written recently by a Shi'ah authority on the general perspective of Shi'ism and the various sciences developed by the Shi'ahs, and is the result of a series of meetings between him and H. Corbin in which the latter posed several basic questions about the spiritual attitude of Shi'ism and the relation between Shi'ism and Hikmat and Sufism. The book was written in answer to H. Corbin's questions and contains a wealth of precious knowledge about the intellectual life of Shi'ism.

[20.](#) It may at first seem surprising that Mulla Sadra wrote a treatise against those who called themselves Sufis. But if we consider the social and political conditions of the later Safawid period in which Sufism was greatly disdained by political authorities and much of it had become body without a soul, we can perhaps understand some of the motifs for Mulla Sadra's attack on it. However, the "Sufis" whom Mulla Sadra attacked were not the Sufis proper but those who were seeking to destroy the exoteric truths and bring about social anarchy in the name of esotericism that they themselves did not possess. Otherwise, there is not the least doubt of Mulla Sadra's connection with Sufism – although he preferred to use the name gnostic ('arif) rather than Sufi – nor can one doubt in any way to the gnostic quality of his doctrines.

[21.](#) See the chapter of Suhrawardi Maqtul.

[22.](#) If we have translated Hikmat as philosophy in one case and as theosophy in the other, it is because the meaning of the term includes both the wisdom belonging to the rational and mental plane or philosophy and the wisdom which transcends the level of the ordinary human mind and which, properly speaking, belongs to the angelic order and cannot be called philosophy as the term is currently understood in European languages.

[23.](#) See J. Muslib, Falsafih-i 'Ali ya Hikmat-i Sadr al-Muti'allihin, vol. 1, University Press, Teheran, 1337 Solar, p. 3.

[24.](#) Sadr al-Din Shirazi, Rasa'il, Teheran, lithographed edition, 1302/1884, pp. 279 – 86.

[25.](#) Mulla Sara adds at the end of this discussion that the causes for the difference of view among various schools regarding different sciences are four in number: (1) differences in the science of unity leading to the creation of sects like

the atheists, etc., (2) the science of prophecy leading to separation between Muslims, Christians, Jews, and other religious groups, (3) the science of Imamate leading to division between the Shi'ahs and Sunnis, and, finally, (4) the science of jurisprudence leading to the creation of various schools and interpretations of law. Mulla Sadra adds that the main cause of multiplicity lies in misunderstanding the science of unity and the science of the soul or the science of the beginning and end of things. *Rasa'il*, pp. 287 – 88.

[26.](#) J. Muslih, *op. cit.*, pp 1 – 2.

[27.](#) See Chapter 19 on Suhrawardi Maqtul.

[28.](#) Mulla Sadra regards light as a perfect and intelligible example of the unity and gradation of Being and praises the Illuminationists on this point. See the first of the *Asfar*.

[29.](#) See Seyyed Hossain Nasr, "The Polarisation of Being," *Pakistan Philosophical Journal*, vol. 3, no. 2, October 1959, pp. 8 – 13.

[30.](#) The doctrine of the unity and gradation of Being in Mulla Sadra is not new, it was expressed clearly five centuries before him by ibn 'Arabi. Mulla Sadra, however, was the first person to give it a logical dress and introduce it as a principle of Hikmat as distinct from pure gnosis which does not concern itself with various logical distinctions.

[31.](#) In dividing the hierarchies of universal existence into longitudinal and latitudinal orders Mulla Sadra follows the scheme of ishraqi angelology, which was discussed in the chapter on Suhrawardi Maqtul.

[32.](#) What distinguishes the gnostics from the Hakims in this subject is that the former formulate the illuminations they receive which differ depending upon the degree of their inner realization. One gnostic in a certain state of contemplation (*hal*) may have been aware of only the creatures or multiplicity as a reflection of unity, another of only God or unity, and a third of unity in multiplicity. The Hakims, however, from a theoretical and more logical point of view, do not take particular perspective of the traveller upon the path (*salik*) into consideration and have even criticized some of the gnostics for considering multiplicity to be completely unreal.

[33.](#) By this latter distinction, Mulla Sadra implies the difference which exists, or at least used to exist, in European languages between Being and existence. All creatures exist but only in the case of God can one, properly speaking, say that He "is." See Seyyed Hossein Nasr "The Polarisation of Being," *op. cit.*, pp. 8 – 13.

[34.](#) See ibn Sina, *Kitab al-Shifa' (Ilahiyyat)*, Teheran, lithographed edition, pp. 291ff.

[35.](#) The feature which distinguishes particulars from one another and determines all other qualities in them is, according to Mulla Sadra, their degree of being.

[36.](#) Mulla Sadra writes that it was Hermes who learnt about the truth of the "Platonic ideas" when he became illuminated by the light of the intelligible world and separated from the world of the senses. In this state Hermes met an illuminated figure in the spiritual world who taught him all the sciences and when he asked the figure who he was, the figure answered, "I am thy perfect nature (*ana taba'aka al-tam*)," *Asfar*, p. 121. For a study of the rich symbolism of "perfect nature," which means the celestial or angelic part of the human soul, see H. Corbin, "Le recit d'initiation et l'hermetisme en Iran," *Eranos Jahrbuch*, vol. 17, 1949, pp. 121 – 88.HHHHHHHHHH

[37.](#) For the general discussion on cause and effect, see J. Muslih, *op. cit.*, pp. 85ff.

[38.](#) It is this "simple being" or the supreme intellect which the Sufis before Mulla Sadra identified with the reality of Mohammad. See ibn 'Arabi, *La sagesse des prophetes*, tr. T. Burckhardt, Albin Michel, Paris, 1955, pp. 181ff.

[39.](#) According to a principle – which is another of the well-known doctrines formulated by Mulla Sadra and is called *basit al-haqiqah kull of al-ashya'*, i.e., Truth in its state of simplicity contains all things – the divine essence in its state of simplicity and "contraction" contains all realities within itself. This is indeed a direct consequence of the principle of the unity of Being; if there is but one Being and the whole universe is nothing but Being, the universe and all its realities are contained in a state of "contraction" in that One Being.

[40.](#) See J. Muslih, *op. cit.*, p. 100. This distinction may seem to differ from what was said previously. But it must be remembered that the divine essence cannot be limited to Being, which is its first determination as well as the principle of universal manifestation. It is this distinction to which Akhund is referring here.

[41.](#) Mulla Sadra placed a lot of emphasis upon this point that he discussed it not only in the First Book of the *Asfar* but in many other chapters of the work and nearly all of his other books as well. See also H. A. Rashid, *Dau Filsuf-i Sharq wa Gharb*, Parwin Press, Ispahan, 1334 Solar, pp. 50ff. and J. Muslih, *op. cit.*, pp. 128ff. Mulla Sadra in the second Book of the

Asfar and other places insists that he is not the first among the Hakims to have introduced this idea but that the pre-Socratic philosophers had indicated although not explicitly the existence of substantial motion. Moreover, he gives the Qur'anic verses such as "Do ye create it or are We the Creator? We mete out death among you, and We are not to be outrun, that We may transfigure you and make you what ye know not" (51:59 – 61, Pickthall's translation) in support of his view.

[42.](#) See ibn Sina, *Danish-Nameh-i 'Ala'i (Tabi'iyat)*, University Press, Teheran, 1331/1912, pp. 3ff. Aristotle also in *De Generatione et Corruptione* (319b, 31 – 320a, 2) divides motion into the four categories of quantity, quality, place, and substance and speaks of substantial change as one of the processes which characterize the sub-lunary region. But the substantial change Aristotle means only generation and corruption and for that reason later Muslim philosophers did not even apply the term "motion" to it and considered motion to belong only to the categories of quantity, quality, locomotion, and posture.

Mulla Sadra, however, considers substantial motion to be an inner transformation of things somewhat in the alchemical sense in which there is not simply a coming into being and a passing away but a process through which a new state of being is reached. Moreover, substantial change for the Aristotelians is sudden and instantaneous while for Akhund it is gradual like other forms of motion. Also, substantial change in the Aristotelian sense is limited to the sublunary region, while for Mulla Sadra the whole of gross and subtle manifestation partakes of substantial motion. Akhund's conception of substantial change therefore cannot be identified with that of Aristotle and should not be confused with it because of similarity in terminology.

For an analysis of Aristotle's doctrine of motion, see also H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1929, pp. 512ff.

[43.](#) Ibn Sina, *Shafa' (Tabi'iyat)*, pp. 43 – 44.

[44.](#) The idea that God annihilates and re-creates the world at every moment is one that is shared by the majority of the Sufis. Jalal al-Din Rumi expresses it:

"Every moment the world is being renewed, and we unaware of its perpetual change.
Life is ever pouring in afresh through the body
it has the semblance of continuity."

R. A. Nicholson, *Rumi, Post and Mystic*, George Allen Unwin, London, 1950, p. 117. See also T. Burckhardt, *Introductio to Sufi Doctrine*, tr. D. M. Matheson, Sheikh Mohammad Ashraf, Lahore, 1959, chap. 4.

[45.](#) Substantial motion is essentially a rebirth because it always means the attainment of a new state of Being.

[46.](#) From what we have said above it is clear that in Mulla Sadra's view motion is principal, for it is an inherent characteristic of corporeal and even subtle existence, and time is subservient to it contrary to the view of many previous philosophers who considered motion to be subservient to time. Mulla Sadra's conception of time as the quantity of substantial motion, which is itself the renewal of cosmic existence, bears much resemblance to the doctrine of Abu al-Barakat al-Baghdadi for whom also time is the measure or dimension of existences. See S. Pines, *Nouvelles etudes sur Awhad al-Zaman Abu'l Barakat al-Baghdadi*, Librairie Durlacher, Paris, 1955, Chap. 2.

[47.](#) In *Fasl 33* of the first book of the Asfar, Akhund writes that all bodies are limited within the four dimensions of length, breadth, depth, and time, and are differentiated by the division inherent in time, while their unity is preserved through celestial archetypes or Platonic ideas.

[48.](#) See Chapter 47.

[49.](#) See Mulla Sadra, *al-Waridat al-Qalbiyyah, Rasa'il* pp., 243 – 49.

[50.](#) The world of change here as in the case of Suhrawardi Maqtul means the whole visible universe and not only the sublunary region of the Aristotelians. According to Mulla Sadra, the difference between the sublunary region composed of the four elements and the heavens composed of ether lies only in that the matter of the heavens is more subtle than the gross matter of the terrestrial environment and is governed by pure souls that are free from the passions of earthly souls.

[51.](#) The principle that the intellect, intelligence, and the intelligible are one (*ittihad al-'aqil w-al-ma'qul*) is another point in

which Mulla Sadra opposed the previous Muslim philosophers. This principle, which was accepted by the Neo-Platonists, was rejected by ibn Sina (see Isharat, Haidari Press, Teheran, 1379/1959, vol. 3 pp. 292 – 93) and other Peripatetics.

Akhund, while acknowledging his debt to Porphyry and earlier Greek philosophers (see his *Rasa'il*, p. 319), considered himself the first among Muslims to have reinstated this principle which is made a cornerstone of his intellectual edifice. Actually, Afdal al-Din Kashani and before him Abu al-Hassan 'Amiri in his *Kitab al-Fursul fi al-Ma'alim al-Ilahiyyah* had accepted this principle (see M. Minosie, "Az Kaza'in-i Turkiyyah," *Revue de la Faculte des Lettre, Universite de Teheran*, vol. 4, no. 3, Mars 1957, p. 50) but it was Mulla Sadra who first systematized this principle and demonstrated it clearly. For a discussion of the principle of the union of the intellect and the intelligible, see Asfar, pp. 277ff.

[52.](#) "God's knowledge of things is identical with their being" (Mulla Sadra, *al-Shawahid al-Rububiyah*, Teheran, lithographed edition, 1236/1820, p. 36).

[53.](#) See Mulla Sadra, *Sharh al-Hidayah al-Athiriyah*, Teheran, lithographed edition, 1315/1897, pp. 308 – 09.

[54.](#) See his *Rasa'il* p. 240, where he quotes the Qur'anic statement that "not a particle of dust in the heavens and earth is hidden from God's knowledge" as support and consequence of his conception of divine knowledge.

[55.](#) Akhund adds that in the case of prophets and saints, the creative power of the soul becomes so great that like God Himself it can even create objective and external forms.

[56.](#) The whole of the fourth book of the *Asfar* is devoted to the science of the soul where the soul takes on a meaning totally different from the quasi-material substance of the Aristotelians.

Mulla Sadra often speaks of the complete science of things as *mabda' w-al-ma'ad*, the origin and end, and has even a book by this name. He identifies the science of *mabda'* with theodicy and metaphysics and that of *ma'ad* with psychology and eschatology.

[57.](#) The view of Mulla Sadra regarding the growth and perfection of the soul resembles the alchemical view in which the power to reach perfection is considered to lie within matter itself and not outside it.

[58.](#) Mulla Sadra, *al-Shawahid al-Rububiyah*, pp. 152ff.

[59.](#) That is why Akhund writes that "the first seed of the universe was the intellect and the last stage is also the intellect which is the fruit of the same tree" (*ibid.*, p. 165.)

[60.](#) This principle which In Arabic is called *jismaniyat al-huduth wa ruhaniyat al-baqa'* is another of the doctrines for which Mulla Sadra is famous.

[61.](#) We have not enumerated these faculties in detail because Mulla Sadra follows the earlier Muslim authors especially ibn Sina on this point. See Chapter 66 on "Natural History" regarding the various faculties.

[62.](#) *Al-Shawahid al-Rububiyah*, pp. 134ff.

[63.](#) By emphasizing the immanent aspect of the development of the soul, Mulla Sadra does not forget the transcendent factor, for in the treatise *Iksir al-'Arifin* he writes the Arch-angel Israfil blows life into the body and gives it the power of sensation and motion, that Mika'il enables the body to assimilate food and sends it its sustenance, that Jibril gives it instruction regarding the revelation and acts of worship and finally that 'Izra'il enables the soul to abstract forms from matter and to separate itself from the body. *Rasa'il*, pp. 306 – 07.

[64.](#) Concerning the traditional conception of cosmic becoming, see A. K. Coomaraswamy, "Gradation and Evolution," *Isis*, 35, 1944, pp. 15 – 16; 38, 1947 – 48, pp. 87 – 94.

As for the unity of the soul which form the gnostic point of view is identified with the divine essence or self, see A. K. Coomaraswamy, "On the One and Only Transmigrant," *Journal of the American oriental Society*, June 1944, No. 3, pp. 19 – 43.

[65.](#) According to a famous hadith of the Prophet, accepted by the Shi'ahs and the Sunnis alike, the Qur'an has seven levels of meaning the last known only God. It is from the esoteric interpretation of the revealed book that Mulla Sandra and Sufis before him have drawn the gnostic doctrines inherent and hidden in the Islamic revelation as they are in all other revelations.

[66.](#) *Iksir al-'Arifin*, *Rasa'il*, p. 295. This terminology is a very old in Islam, it was adopted by the early Sufis from the traditions of the Prophets and Imams.

[67.](#) Al-Shawahid al-Rububiyah, p. 140.

[68.](#) Mulla Sadra, Risalah fi-al-Hashr, Rasa'il pp. 341 – 58.

[69.](#) In the case of animals, after death they join the masters of their species (rub al-nau') or archetypes except the higher animals who have the faculty of imagination developed in them. They have an independent existence in the world of cosmic imagination without, however, being distinct individually as in the case of people.

[70.](#) See Mulla Sadra, al-Mabda' w-al-Ma'ad, Teheran, lithographed edition, 1314/1896, pp. 272ff.

He criticizes both the naturalists who deny the existence of the soul after death and the Peripatetics who accept only the resurrection of the soul but not of the body.

[71.](#) This esoteric view expressed in his commentary upon the Usul al-Kafi as well as in the Asfar was one most attacked by the exoteric 'ulama'. The religious perspective which appeals essentially to the sentimental or passionate aspect of human nature must insist upon "eternal" punishment and reward in order to have its laws accepted in human society. Only the exoteric view meant for the saintly and appealing to the contemplative aspect of man, can take into consideration the relatively of heaven and hell with respect to the divine essence without in any way denying the reality of "eternity" of reward and punishment in the life hereafter with respect to human existence here.

[72.](#) For the background leading to Mulla Sadra, see chapter 47 on "The School of Ispahan in this work. See also Mulla Muhsin Faid, al-Mahajjat al-Baida', vol. 1, Islamiyyah Press, Teheran, 1379/1959, introduction by Sayyid Mohammad Mishkat , pp. 10 – 23, in which the background leading to Mulla Sadra as well as the distinguishing principles of his own doctrines is discussed.

[73.](#) It will be remembered that al-Ghazali in his al-Munqidh min al-Dalal considered the philosophers to be infidel on three points: their rejection of resurrection of bodies, their limiting God's knowledge to universals, and their belief in the eternity of the world. See. W. Montgomery Watt, The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazali, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1953, p. 37. From what we have discussed of Mulla Sadra's doctrine it is clear that he accepted the resurrection of bodies, God's knowledge of particulars, and creation of the world in time though not quite in the sense as that of the theologians.

[74.](#) Mulla Sadra's doctrines were especially influential in India to which country one of his disciples by the name of Mohammad Salih Kashani migrated – after reaching a wild state of ecstasy during one Mulla Sadra's lessons –and where he attracted many disciples. The works of Mulla Sadra have continued to be taught in the Islamic schools of the Indian sub-continent, especially his Sharh al-Hidayah which came to be known by the author's name as Sadra. Many glosses have been written on it by various philosophers and scholars in India such as Mohammad Amjad al-Sadiqi (d. 1140/1727), Mulla Hassan al-Lakhnawi (d. 1198/1783), Mohammad A'lam al-Sindili (d. 1250/1834), and 'Abd al-'Ali Bahr al-'Ulum who lived in the 13th/19th century. Numerous manuscripts of these and other glosses on the Sharh al-Hidayah are to be found in such libraries as the Raza Library of Rampur and the Khuda Basksh Library in Patna (see the Catalogue of Arabic and Persian Manuscripts in the Oriental Library at Bankiput, vo. 20 (Arabic MSS), Bihar and Orissa, 1936, MSS. No. 2351, 2386, 2371 – 78).

[75.](#) See Chapter 47 on "The School of Ispahan."

[76.](#) For a list of the names of Mulla Sadra's disciples in the Qajar period, see Raihdnat al-Adab and Gobineau, op. cit., pp. 103ff.

[77.](#) Iqbal's statement that, "It is, moreover, the Philosophy of Sadra which is the source of the metaphysics of early Babism" (Development of Metaphysics in Persia, London, 1908, p. 175) is true only in a negative sense in the same way as the doctrine of the Rhenish mystics might be considered to be the source of the Protestant revolt during the Renaissance.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/history-muslim-philosophy-volume-2-book-4/chapter-48-sadr-al-din-shirazi#comment-0>