

## Part 3: Ontology

**Lesson 21: Introduction to Ontology**

**Lesson 22: The Concept of Existence**

**Lesson 23: Entified Reality**

**Lesson 24: Existence and Whatness**

**Lesson 25: Precepts of Whatness**

**Lesson 26: Introduction to the Fundamentality of Existence**

**Lesson 27: The Fundamentality of Existence**

**Lesson 28: Unity and Multiplicity**

**Lesson 29: Unity and Multiplicity in Entified Existence**

**Lesson 30: The Levels of Existence**

## Lesson 21: Introduction to Ontology

### [Introduction to the Lesson](#)

Part I of this work began with an overview of the history of philosophical thought, followed by some remarks on philosophical terminology, and a brief discussion of the relation among philosophy, the sciences, and 'irfan. This part ended with a declaration of the need for and importance of philosophical inquiry.

In Part II, on Epistemology, an account was presented of the roles played by reason and experience in the formation of ideas and their relations to their instances. The aim of this account was to establish the 'value of knowledge', showing that the intellect has the ability to solve the problems of philosophy and metaphysics.

In this, the third part, we are to employ the God-given power of reason, one of the greatest of divine

blessings, to survey the problems of metaphysics. Metaphysics is called ‘the mother of the sciences’, and is said to hold the key to the most important questions man faces in life, questions which play a most fundamental role in human destiny, regarding eternal felicity or damnation.

In this part one will find a discussion of the truth (haqiqah) of existence, the ways in which it is manifested, and the relation all existents have to one another. Prior to these discussions, however, some issues must be explained concerning concepts and the relation between concepts and their instances, and concerning words and the relation between words and their meanings, as well as some related matters.

## **Warnings about Concepts**

It is obvious that the employment of the intellect requires the use of concepts. Concepts are irreplaceable tools of thought which must be used whenever one engages in thinking or reasoning. Even knowledge by presence, when it is to be used in thinking or reasoning, must be used by means of mental concepts which are obtained from it.

When we indicate entified existence in the external world, and the attention of the mind is turned to that which lies beyond it, we use ‘entified’ and ‘objective’ concepts, which play the role of mirrors, or symbols and signs for the entified realities (haqayiq).

All uses of concepts in thought and reasoning are not equal. The variation in the uses of concepts stems from the essential differences among the concepts themselves. For example, there exist differences among whatish, philosophical and logical concepts, and each of these types must be further specified in a particular branch of the sciences, for these differences in the concepts pertain to the different characteristics of their employment and the ways in which the mind attends to them.

For example, the concept ‘universal’ cannot be understood as a mirror or sign for something objective and entified, for objective things are always existents in the form of individuals. It is impossible to apply the property of universality to an objective existent. It is with respect to this point that it is said, “Existence is equivalent to individuality.”

Thus, the inapplicability of the concept of universality as a mirror or sign for something objective is due to the essential characteristics of this concept itself, which, like other logical concepts, can only be used for other mental concepts. Philosophical and whatish concepts, on the other hand, may be used to describe objective things.

In our discussions of epistemology, we divided concepts into two kinds, universal and particular. Each particular concept is a looking glass for a particular individual, and is unable to describe anything but its own individual instance.

To the contrary, universal concepts have the ability to act as mirrors for countless individuals. This

bifurcation is related to the mirror-like referential and conceptual capacities of the concepts. Universal concepts themselves, however, have other aspects pertaining to their existential aspects in the mind. In this respect, things such as the existence of particular concepts and such as existences outside the mind are considered as cases of individuality, as was said in Lesson Fourteen.

The group of universal concepts which have objective instances, which in technical terms are said to have 'objective characterization' (ittisaf khariji), may also be further subdivided into two groups: whatish concepts, which group together equivalent cases and specify their whatish limits; and philosophical concepts, which refer to fundamental being and existential relations, as well as to deficiency and nothingness, but which do not represent specific whatnesses.

The concepts of the first group naturally refer to common whatnesses among individuals, or, in other words, they refer to equivalent limits among existents. The members of the second group, however, are not applied to things in this way, for their abstraction depends upon a specific intellectual point of view.

In technical terms, the occurrence ('urudh) of philosophical concepts is mental and their application to numerous different cases shows the unity of the point of view which the intellect takes toward them, however different these cases are with respect to their whatnesses and the limits of their existence, as, for example, in the case of cause, which may be applied both to material and abstract instances despite their whatish differences.

Of course, the abstraction of the concept cause from various different instances is not meaningless, but the unity of the concept does not provide reason in support of the unity of the reality (haqiqah) of its instances. It is enough that all of the instances have a certain aspect in common, that other existents depend upon them, an aspect which is determined with the effort of the intellect.

For this reason, this kind of intellectual aspect must not be confused with objective aspects and existential limits. It would be better to use the expression 'existential manners and aspects' instead of 'existential limits' regarding the philosophical concepts.

For example, we should say, "The unity of the concept of causation indicates the participation in a manner of existence, or the participation of several existents in a single aspect, that is, they are all participants in the respect that other existents are their effects, or that other existents depend upon them."

Likewise, the multiplicity of philosophical concepts, or the number of philosophical and whatish concepts which apply in a given case, does not indicate a multiplicity of the objective aspects of the case, just as it is known to us that there is but a single simple subject of our various states of consciousness and of presentational knowledge. The mind obtains numerous concepts, and it reflects them in the form compound propositions.

Also, the application of a single philosophical concept to an object, such as the concept of causation,

does not provide reason to deny the application of its opposite, contrary to the case for whatish concepts. For example, if the concept of white is applied to a body, then the concept of black will not apply in the same state at the same point.

To the contrary, one may attribute to a single thing the concept of being the cause of an existent in the very state in which one attributes to it the concept of being the effect of another existent. In technical terms: contrariety in philosophical concepts requires the unity of both the aspect and what is added to it.

We have learned that one must pay attention to two points regarding the employment of concepts. First, one must take into consideration the specific characteristics of each kind of concept, so as to avoid over generalization from one kind of concept to another, and in this respect one must especially pay attention to the characteristics specific to each of these three kinds of concepts: whatish, philosophical and logical, for many philosophical difficulties are the effect of confusion about them.

The other point is that one must not fall into the trap of the fallacy of confusing concepts with their instances, either by attributing the characteristics of concepts to their instances, or the reverse, attributing the characteristics of the instances to the concepts which apply to them.

## Warnings about Language

We know that the fundamental instruments of thought and reasoning are concepts and the intelligibles, however, the communication of our thoughts and understanding is by means of words.

In the same way that concepts play the role of mirrors for the objects of the external world, words also play this same role in relation to concepts. There exists such a strong relationship between concepts and words that often when one thinks it is words which convey concepts to the mind, and on this basis, words are said to be the 'verbal existence' of things, just as concepts are considered to be their 'mental existence'.

Some have exaggerated this point to such an extent that they would reduce thinking to a kind of mental speaking, and proponents of this sort of view have been found among advocates of 'linguistic analysis' and 'analytic philosophy' who imagine that philosophical concepts have no reality beyond that of words, so that philosophical discussions are to be reduced to topics in some branch of linguistics. The shallowness of this idea was indicated to some extent in our discussions of epistemology.

Analogous confusions to those warned against with respect to concepts are possible regarding language. Sometimes the equivocal use of a word is taken to indicate a single meaning or concept, while sometimes the opposite mistake occurs and participation in a single meaning is viewed as a merely nominal agreement.

Then again, sometimes the key to the solution of a philosophical difficulty is sought in distinctions among various linguistic features, reference and metaphor, or other figures of speech. Concepts are sometimes

expressed by a single word or expression because of the closeness of their meanings, and there is confusion here with the phenomenon of equivocation, as was mentioned in the fourth lesson.

In this respect one must be very careful not to mix up verbal questions with questions of real meaning, and also not to confuse the principles of language with those of meanings. In every discussion, the intended meanings must be fully specified so as to avoid mistakes due to equivocation.

## **The Self-evidence (Badahat) of the Concept of Existence**

In Part I, we observed that prior to beginning on the questions of any science, we must first become acquainted with its topics so as to obtain correct ideas about them. Also, in every true science (i.e., science which is not simply conventional) we must become aware of the true existence of its subjects, for otherwise the discussions which pivot on this axis will be without basis or foundation and so will be unable to get anywhere.

In case the existence of the subject is not evident (badihi), it must be proven by means of one of the confirming sources of science, which is usually the function of another science which requires philosophical discussion.

We must now see how the subject of philosophy itself fares with respect to idea and assertion. According to the basic definition of first philosophy or metaphysics, the subject of this science is the 'absolute existent' or 'being qua being'. However, the concept of 'existent' is one of the most self-evident concepts abstracted by the mind from all existents.

A definition of it is neither needed nor is it possible, for just as it was said that no concept can be found which is any clearer than the concept of knowledge ('ilm), which could be used to explain it, so too, it may be argued in this case.

One of the clear indications of the self-evidence of the concept of existence is this: during our discussion of epistemology we came to know that when an item of presentational knowledge is pictured in the mind, of necessity, it takes the form of a simple proposition (halliyah basitah), the predicate of which is "existent", [e.g. "I am an existent", or "Fear is an existent"].

This is an action performed by the mind with respect to the most easy and most elementary findings which are present to it and witnessed by it. This action would not be possible if a clear concept were not obtained of existent and existence.

Reasons for doubt have been suggested regarding the concept of 'existent' or 'existence', and have given rise to heated discussions in both Western and Islamic philosophies, which will be indicated briefly below.

## The Relation between Existence and Perception

Among the discussions about the concept of existence is that of Berkeley, who claimed that the meaning of 'existence' is nothing more than 'perceiving or being perceived', while other philosophers have given it different meanings, about which they have engaged in fruitless discussions whose source is the misuse of this expression ['existence']. Berkeley, however, insists on his claim, and considers it one of the fundamental principles of his philosophy.

The truth is that Berkeley is deserving of this charge, for this expression and its synonyms in all languages (like *hasti* in Farsi) have no ambiguity, and are never understood as meaning 'perceiving or being perceived'. If it so happens that in some language a synonym for 'existence' and a synonym for 'perception' have the same root, this should not interfere with its known meaning.<sup>1</sup>

Among the indications of the invalidity of this claim is that existence does not have more than one meaning, while perceiving and being perceived are two different meanings. Also, the meaning of existence is a single concept in itself in which there is no relation to a subject or object.

For the same reason, it is applied to the existence of Almighty God with respect to which there is no room for imagining a subject and object, whereas, to the contrary, the meaning of perception includes a relation to subject and object.

Actually, this proposal of Berkeley's is an example of mistaking a concept for its instances. Here it is a double mistake, for he confuses the level of subsistence (*thubut*) with the level of proof for subsistence (*ithbat*) and he relates the implications of being able to prove the subsistence of an entity, perceiving or being perceived, to the subsistence of the entity as it is in itself.

Therefore, the concept of existence and the concept of perception are two distinct concepts, and the concept of neither of them is to be obtained through the analysis of the other. And the only thing which can be said is that after proving the existence of God and His omniscience, it can be said that every existent is either a perceiver or is perceived, for if an existent is not a perceiver, at least it may be said that it is subsumed under divine knowledge.

However, this [extensional] equivalence of instances, which requires proof, has no relation to the [intensional] equivalence between the concept of existence and the concept of perception.

<sup>1</sup> The root of the Arabic word for existence, *wujud* means to be found. [Tr.]

# Lesson 22: The Concept of Existence

## The Unity of the Concept of Existence

Another discussion which has been raised about the concept of existence is whether existence applies to all existents with a single meaning, with an unequivocal meaning, or with different meanings, with a kind of equivocation.

The origin of this discussion is that a group of theologians imagined that the sense in which existence is used for creatures could not be used for God the Almighty. For this reason, some said that when existence is related to a thing, it takes the meaning of that to which it is related.

For example, in the case of man it will have the meaning of man, and in the case of tree, the meaning of tree. Some others, in this respect, posited two meanings, one specifically for God the Almighty, and the other for all other created things.

This sort of doubt may be traced to confusion between concepts and their instances, that is, that which cannot be compared pertaining to God the Almighty and to creatures is the instance of existence, not its concept. Differences among instances do not require differences in concept.

We also can understand the source of this confusion as being due to confusion between whatish concepts and philosophical concepts. Commonality of concept indicates a common essence among instances only when the concept is a kind of whatish concept.

However, the concept of existence is a kind of philosophical concept, and its unity only indicates an aspectual unity, which the intellect considers in order to abstract [the concept of existence], and that aspect is that of the lack of nothingness.

In their refutation of the first position, Islamic philosophers have made several claims, including the following: "If existence had the same meaning as every subject to which it is applied, this would require that in simple propositions the predication, which is a kind of common predication, should be turned into a primary predication and be self-evident. Also, knowledge of their subject and predicate would be equivalent, so that if one did not understand the meaning of the subject, he would not understand the meaning of the predicate either."

For the refutation of the second position there is an explanation which amounts to this: If the meaning of existence with respect to God the Almighty were anything other than its meaning with respect to contingent things, this would necessitate that the contradictory meaning of each would correspond to the other, because there is nothing of which one of two contradictories is not true. For example, each thing is either man or non-man.

The contradictory of the meaning of existence among contingent things is nothingness. So, if existence in this sense, opposed to nothingness, is not related to God, nothingness is related to the Creator, and the existence which is related to Him would really be an instance of nothingness.

In any case, one whose mind is not confused with such doubts will have no qualms about the fact that the words 'existence' and 'being' are used with one meaning in all cases, and the necessity of the unity of the concept of existence is not that all existents have a common essence.

## **The Substantival Concept and the Copulative Concept of Existence**

The third discussion regarding the concept of existence is about equivocation regarding existence between the substantival independent sense and the copulative relative meaning.

It is explained that in logical propositions, in addition to two substantival and independent concepts (subject and predicate), there is another concept regarding the relation between them, and in Farsi this is indicated by the word *ast* (in English, *is*).

But in Arabic there is no equivalent, and a kind of sentence structure is used for this purpose (equational sentences). This concept is a kind of verbal concept, such as the concepts indicated by prepositions, which cannot be independently imagined, but must be understood in the context of a sentence.

Logicians call this verbal meaning 'relational existence' (*wujud rabti* or *wujud rabit*). This meaning of 'existence' is contrasted with its substantival meaning, which can be a real predicate, and which for this reason is called 'predicative existence' (*wujud mahmuli*).

Sadr al-Muta'allihin (Mulla Sadra) mentions in the *Asfar* that the use of the word 'existence' with its copulative meaning is a special term with a meaning other than that with which it is commonly used, while its ordinary meaning is substantival and independent, and therefore using the word 'existence' with these two meanings must be considered a kind of equivocation.

Some have not taken note of this point, and have considered the concept of existence to be absolutely univocal. They have even gone so far as to try to establish entified relational existence by these concepts, explaining that, for example, when we say, "Ali is a scientist," the expression "Ali" refers to a specific person, and for the word "scientist" there exists its science, which exists in the external world.

Therefore, the concept of the relation of the proposition which is indicated by the word "is" refers to a objective relation between science and Ali. Hence, in the context of the external world there also is established a kind of relational existence.

There is confusion here between the concepts and principles of logic with the concepts and principles of philosophy, and the principles of propositions which are about mental concepts contaminate the

objective instances.

On this basis, they deny the existence of the relation in the 'simple question' (halliyah basitah, i.e., of the form 'x exists'), for one cannot imagine a relation between a thing itself and its existence. But the existence of a relation in a proposition which refers to a simple thing does not require the objective existence of the relation in its instance; rather, basically, one can never consider the relation to be a entified objective thing.

What can finally be said about it is that the relation in a 'simple question' is a sign of the unity of the instance of the subject and the predicate, and in 'compound questions' it is the sign of their entified unity.

It is strange that some of the Western philosophers have denied the substantival meaning of existence (predicative existence), and they have limited the concept of existence to the copulative meaning, considering it to be a relation between the subject and the predicate. For this reason, they consider 'simple questions' to be pseudo-propositions, not real propositions, for they suppose that in reality such propositions do not have predicates.

The truth is that this kind of position results from weakness of mental powers of philosophical analysis, otherwise the substantival and independent concept of existence is not something to be denied, rather the copulative meaning is that which can only be established with difficulty, especially for someone in whose language there is no particular equivalent for it [the copulative meaning of existence, which has no equivalent in Arabic].

It is possible that the reason for the denial of the substantival meaning of existence is that in the language of the deniers, there is but one word which is the equivalent of the copulative and substantival meanings of existence, unlike Farsi, in which the word "hasti" (being) is used for the substantival meaning, and the word "ast" (is) is used for the copulative meaning. That is why this ambiguity has arisen such that the meaning of existence is absolutely limited to the copulative meaning.

Again we emphasize that philosophical discussions must not rely upon linguistic ones, and the principles of grammar and linguistics must not be taken as the basis for the solution of philosophical problems. We should always be careful not to allow ourselves to be misled by the features of words from the way to the precise knowledge of concepts, nor to make mistakes about knowledge of the principles of entified existents.

## **Existence and Existents**

Another point worth mentioning about the expressions for existence and its concept is that since the word wujud (existence) is the source from which mawjud (existent) is derived, it is an infinitive [Arabic words are typically derived from infinitives] and includes the meaning occurrence, and it is related to a subject or object, and the equivalent to it in Farsi is the word budan (to be).

Likewise, from the grammatical point of view, the expression *mawjud* (existent) is a passive participle and includes the meaning of the action of the verb upon the essence. Sometimes from the word *mawjud* (existent) an artificial infinitive is obtained in the form of *mawjudiyat* (being an existent), and is used as an equivalent to *wujud* (existence).

A word in the Arabic language which is used in an infinitive form is sometimes divested of its meaning relative to a subject or object and is used in the form of a verbal noun (*ism masdar*) which indicates the action of the verb itself. Therefore, with regard to *wujud* (existence) one may also consider this sort of meaning.

On the other hand, the meaning pertaining to the action of the verb which indicates motion, or at least indicates a state or quality, cannot be directly predicated of things. For example, one cannot predicate *raftan* (to go), which is an infinitive, or *raftar* (going), which is a verbal noun, to a thing or person, rather, either a derivation must be obtained from it, for example, the word *ravandeh* (goer) may be a predicate for it, or another word which includes a derived meaning should be added to it, for example, *sahib-e raftar* (one who is going).

The first type is technically called *hu hu* (it it) predication, and the second type is called *dhu hu* (possessor of it) predication. For instance, the predication of 'animal' to 'man' is *hu hu* predication, while the predication of 'life' to it is called *dhu hu* predication.

This discussion, as has been observed, is basically related to grammars, whose rules are conventional and differ from one language to another. Some languages are richer than others with regard to vocabulary and rules of grammar while others are more limited.

However, since it is possible that the relations between words and meanings may lead to mistakes in philosophical discussions, it is necessary to mention that in the usage of the expressions *wujud* (existence) and *mawjud* (existent) in philosophical discussions, we must not merely attend to linguistic features, but rather, basically attention to them distracts the mind from discerning the intended meanings.

In philosophy, when the word *wujud* (existence) is used, the intended meaning is not that of an infinitive or the action of neither a verb, nor, when the word *mawjud* (existent) is used is the intended meaning the respectival one of the passive participle.

For example, when it is said of God, the Exalted, that He is "sheer existence", is this to be interpreted in terms of the action of a verb or the relation to a subject and object, or as meaning a quality or state and its relation to the essence? Are we to quibble over how the word *wujud* (existence) is to be applied to God, the Exalted, when the predication of an infinitive to an essence is not correct?

When the word *mawjud* (existent) is applied to all realities and these include the Necessary Existent as well as contingent existents, is this to be understood in terms of the meaning of a passive participle? Is it

to be argued on this basis that since a passive participle requires a subject that God also requires a subject? Or to the contrary, is it incorrect to apply it to the Necessary Existent because of that meaning, so that it may not be said that God is an existent?!

It is obvious that this sort of linguistic discussion has no place in philosophy, and not only is one unable to solve even one of the problems of philosophy by engaging in such discussion, it increases the problems and yields nothing but distortions in thought.

In order to avoid misunderstandings and fallacies, one must pay exact attention to the technical meanings of expressions, and in cases where these do not correspond to the ordinary literal meanings or a technical meaning in other sciences; this difference must be given full consideration so that one does not become the victim of confusion and error.

It follows that the philosophical concept of wujud (existence) is equivalent to absolute reality, and on this point is the opposite of nothingness, and in technical terms is its contradictory. It includes all things from the sacred divine essence to abstract and material realities, from substances to accidents and from essences to states.

When these very same entified realities are reflected in the mind in the form of propositions, at least two substantival concepts of them are obtained, one of which is associated with the subject, and is usually a whatish concept, while the other is the concept of 'mawjud' (existent), which is a philosophical concept, and is associated with the predicate, since its being respectival requires its being a predicate.

## **Lesson 23: Entified Reality**

### **The Self-evidence (Badahat) of Entified Reality**

The subject of philosophy is considered to be the 'existent', as was explained in the two previous lessons. Now, we shall present the explanation of the self-evidence of the belief in the entified reality of being.

The truth is this that existence is like 'ilm (knowledge) both with regard to its concept and with regard to its objective reality and just as that concept requires no definition, its entified reality also is self-evident and without need of proof. No intelligent person imagines that the world of being is nothing but nothing, and that no person exists or any other existent. Even the Sophists who considered man to be the measure of all things, at least accepted the existence of man!

There is only one sentence from Gorgias who is considered to be the most extreme of the Sophists,

which apparently is an absolute denial of all existence, as was mentioned in the discussion of epistemology. However, it does not seem that his intention—assuming that it has been correctly narrated—is that of the apparent meaning of his words, such that it would include his own existence and that of his speech, unless he was severely afflicted with mental illness, or uttered the words out of spite.

In Lesson Twelve about doubts leading to the denial of knowledge, we said that these doubts themselves presupposed knowledge, to which we may add here that this same doubt requires the acceptance of some existents which correspond to the mentioned knowledge. However, if someone would deny his own existence and the existence of his denial, he would be like the one whom, in the previous problem, denies the existence of his own doubt, and he must be treated practically to make him accept reality.

In any case, an intelligent person whose mind has not been polluted with the doubts of the Sophists and skeptics, not only accepts his own existence, the existence of his perceptive powers, mental images and concepts, and his own psychic activities, but also is certain of the existence of other people, and the external world, and for this reason when he becomes hungry, he eats food of the external world, and when he becomes hot or cold, he decides to make use of things in the external world.

When he faces an enemy, or feels himself to be in some other danger, he thinks about defense and seeks some solution for it, and if he is able he will rise up and fight, and if not he may prefer to escape. When he has feelings of friendship, he decides to become intimate with a friend in the external world, and establishes friendly relations with him, and similarly with other facets of life. And do not imagine that the Sophists and idealists behaved any differently, for otherwise they would not have lived very long; they would either die of hunger or thirst, or some calamity or disaster would afflict them.

For this reason it is said that belief in entified existence is self evident and natural. But this discussion must be expanded and elaborated in more detail, and we will do this to the extent required. But before presenting this subject, it is worth giving an account of the ways in which reality is denied, so that we can take an appropriate position regarding each of them.

## Ways to Deny Reality

The denial of entified reality appears in various forms, which can be divided into five categories:

1. The absolute denial of being such that for the concept of existence which is the subject of philosophy, there remains no instance, as required by the apparent words of Gorgias which were narrated.

It is clear that with such an assumption there not only remains no place for philosophical or scientific discussions, but also the door to speech and hearing must be absolutely closed. And for such claims, a logical response is inapplicable, and they must be treated practically.

2. The denial of the being of anything but “I, the perceiver”, such that only one instance of “existent” remains. This position is not as silly as the previous one, but on the basis of it, its proponent has no right to speak or debate, for he does not accept the existence of another person with whom to converse or debate.

If such a person is in a position to be debated, he must first be charged with having violated his own claim, and this violation requires the rejection of his assumption.

3. The denial of being beyond that of humanity, as has been reported of some Sophists. On the basis of this position, instances of “existent” will be limited to humans. This claim, which is relatively more moderate than those mentioned above, opens the door to discussion and debate.

There is room for asking the proponent for reasons in favor of his own existence and that of other people which will oblige him to accept some self-evident propositions. Then, on the basis of the self-evident propositions, some other theoretical points may also be proven.

4. The denial of the being of material existents, as is understood from the words of Berkeley, for he considered being an existent equivalent with being a perceiver or something perceived, and perceivers include God and non-material existents. So, it is decided that perceived things are to be limited to perceptible forms (essentially known (ma‘lumat bil-dhat) which are realized within the perceiver himself, not outside him.

In this way there is no room for the objective existence of material things. Other idealists, like Hegel, may be joined to those mentioned above, for they imagine the world to have the form of thoughts for absolute spirit, which are considered to be subject to the laws of logic (but not of cause and effect).

5. There is room to include along with the idealists, who deny a part of reality, that is, material reality, the materialists, who are also deniers of reality, and they truly deny the greater part of reality.

Moreover, the idealists are more logical than the materialists, for their position rests on knowledge by presence and internal experience which have absolute value, however much their inferences may be erroneous. However, the position of the materialists rests on that which is given by the senses, which is the source of most perceptual errors.

By attending to the various types of denial of reality, we reach the conclusion that only the first hypothesis implies an absolute denial of reality, and each of the other hypotheses implies merely a denial of a part of reality and a limitation of its circle.

On the other hand, for each of the five kinds of hypothesis, there is another hypothesis which appears in the form of doubt in absolute reality or with respect to specific realities. If these doubts are mingled with a denial of the possibility of knowledge, that is, if in addition to presenting his own doubt he claims that logically no one can have knowledge, this sort of claim is related to epistemology, and the answer to it is

given in its own place.

However, if the presentation of doubt is not mingled with a denial of the possibility of knowledge, the answer to it may be found in ontology. Basically, the clarification of philosophical questions is to remove doubts and to provide defense against them.

## **The Secret of the Self-Evidence of Entified Reality**

As we indicated at the beginning of this lesson, the absolute denial of reality, the view that the world is nothing, is not something which would be claimed by any conscious intelligent person without some ulterior motive, just as it is regarding the absolute denial of knowledge and apparent doubt about everything, even about the existence of the doubt and doubter. Assuming that someone expresses these sorts of claims, one cannot reason with him logically; rather he must be given a practical response.

On the other hand, the existence of every particular reality is not self-evident, and proof for many of them requires reasons and arguments, and, as has been indicated, one of the most important duties of philosophy is proof of the specific kinds of realities.

Now the following question will be raised: What is the mystery of the self-evidence of the basis of reality?

Perhaps an answer will be given for the affirmation of the existence of entified reality by way of summary, and the affirmation of material reality will be definitive and specific, corresponding to the nature of the intellect, and evidence for this is the existence of such beliefs in all men, as is confirmed by their practical behavior. In this way, four of the methods of denying reality, with the exception of the fifth way, are shown to be invalid.

But this discussion is not sufficiently logical, for, as was mentioned in lessons seventeen and nineteen, for in this way the correctness of this subject cannot be guaranteed, and there is room to ask whether our intellects would not understand in some other way if they had been created differently. Moreover, to seek confirmation on the basis of the views and behavior of men, in reality is a defective method of inductive inference, which is of no logical value at all.

Perhaps it will be said that these affirmations are primary self-evident truths (*badihiyyat awwaliyyah*), for which the mere imagining of their subjects and predicates suffices to produce assent.

But this claim is also incorrect, for if we assume that a proposition is in the form of a 'primary predication', it is clear that its purport will not be anything but the conceptual unity of subject and predicate. If we suppose that it is in the form of a 'common predication' and we consider its subject to refer to external instances, and we consider it to be what in logical terminology is called essential necessity (*dharuriyyat dhatiyyah*), then the truth of such a proposition will be conditional on the existence of the subject in the external world, while this means that its objective existence would be proved by this

proposition.

In other words, propositions about reality are like conditional propositions in that their purport is that whenever an instance of the subject obtains in the external world, the predicate for it will be proven. For example, the famous self-evident proposition, “Every whole is greater than its own part,” is not able to prove the existence of whole and part in the external world. Rather, its meaning is that whenever a whole obtains in the external world, it will be greater than its own part.

The invalidity of this claim in relation to external reality is clear, for it is not forbidden to imagine the non-existence of the material world. If God had not had the appropriate will, such a world would not have come into existence. Likewise, after its creation, whenever He willed, it would be destroyed.

The truth is this: the self-evidence of reality first takes shape regarding things in consciousness and which are understood by infallible knowledge by presence, and then with the abstraction of the concepts of ‘existent’ and ‘reality’ from their subjects they take the form of a proposition called qadhiyyah muhmalah<sup>1</sup> which refers to the principle of reality as such [without quantification], and in this way the principle of entified reality summarily (ijmalan) takes the form of a self-evident proposition.

## **The Source of Belief in Material Reality**

The conclusion of our last discussion was that the source of belief in the basis of entified reality is just knowledge by presence of the realities of conscience, and hence knowledge of other realities, including ‘material’ realities, cannot be considered self-evident (badihi).

For, as was said in Lesson Eighteen that which is really self-evident and can be known independently of any sort of argument are objects of consciousness and primary self-evident propositions, while the existence of material realities belongs to neither of these two groups. Therefore, the following question may be posed: What is the source of the dogmatic belief in material realities? And how is it that every person automatically accepts their existence, and that the behavior of each person is firmly based on this?

The answer to this question is that the source of a person’s belief in material reality is an ‘spontaneous’ (irtikazi) but half conscious argument, and it is really a proposition which is close to being self-evident, which is sometimes called ‘innate’ (fitri).

This may be explained by the fact that in most cases, on the basis of the awareness which it has acquired, the intellect of a person reaches a conclusion very quickly and almost automatically without the process of inference being reflected clearly in the mind. Especially in the period of childhood when the self-awareness of a person is not yet developed, this mental process is rather obscure and close to being unconscious.

Therefore, it is considered that this knowledge obtains its conclusion without a process of thought from

its premises, in other words, it is innate and automatic. But as the self-awareness of man develops, and one becomes aware of the activities within one's own mind, the obscurity decreases, and gradually it assumes the form of conscious logical reasoning.

The propositions which logicians have called 'innate' (fitriyyat) and which have been defined as propositions which accompany deductions, or whose middle terms are always present in the mind, are really of this very sort of 'spontaneous' (irtikazi) proposition, reasoning about which takes place very quickly and half-consciously.

Knowledge of material reality really is obtained by this very 'spontaneous' inference, which, especially during the period of childhood, is far from the level of awareness. When we want to explain it in the form of exact logical reasoning, it takes the following form:

Perceptual phenomena (for example the burning of the hand when it comes into contact with fire) is the effect of a cause, and its cause is either it itself (= I, the perceiver), or something other than it. But I myself have not brought it into existence, for I never wanted to burn my hand; therefore its cause will be something other than my existence.

Of course, in order to strengthen our belief in material things with material properties, and to refute the probability of the direct effect of something non-material there is a need to supplement this with other arguments based on knowing the characteristics of material and non-material existents.

But God the Almighty has put such power in the mind of man so that before acquiring mastery of exact philosophical reasoning, he is able to obtain conclusions which are 'spontaneous' and are half-conscious. In this way he is able to secure the needs of his life.

1. This is a kind of proposition whose quantity is indeterminate, e.g., "Metals expand when heated," in which it is unclear whether the proposition is intended to apply to all metals or only some. According to traditional logic, this is a proposition whose quantity is unspecified, but it is treated like a particular rather than a universal proposition. [Tr.]

## **Lesson 24: Existence and Whatness**

### **The Relation between the Topics of Existence and Whatness**

According to the previous lessons, as was indicated on numerous occasions, when entified reality is pictured in the mind (the locus of acquired knowledge), it is pictured in the form of a simple question (halliyah basitah), which is composed of at least two independent substantive concepts, one of which usually serves as the subject and is a whatish concept, which can be considered in the conceptual framework of limits to an existent, and one of which is the predicate, the concept of 'existent', considered

to be a secondary philosophical intelligible which denotes the occurrence of the instance of that essence. In this way two different concepts are obtained for one simple truth, each of which has its own rules and characteristics.

With regard to the concept of existence, or existent, philosophers have contented themselves with mentioning that they are self-evident intellectual concepts, without saying how the mind obtains this concept. Only recently has the late 'Allamah Tabataba'i, may Allah be pleased with him, attempted to explain how it is abstracted.

Regarding the appearance of whatish concepts, there are various opinions, which were mentioned in the section on epistemology. The opinion which we accepted was that there is a special mental power called the intellect which acquires these concepts automatically from specific percepts. The characteristic of this intellectual picturing is this very universality and ability to correspond to countless instances.

Many philosophers, especially the Peripatetics, have explained the acquiring of whatish concepts in a way which has been the source of many disputes and arguments in the course of the history of philosophy, and in most philosophical discussions, it has been especially influential.

The result of their explanations is this: when we compare several persons, for example, we see that these people, despite their differences in height, weight, skin color and other specific characteristics, all have a common truth which is the source of the common effects in them. The specific attributes of each person are really the particular specification of that person which distinguishes him from others. So, the mind, by deleting the individual specifications acquires the universal perceptual concept of man, which is called the essence of human beings.

Therefore, the perception of several individuals of each essence is required for the direct acquisition of that essence, so that the mind, attending to individual accidental specifications and the deletion of them is able to abstract the common whatish aspect from the specific accidents and extract the universal essence. It is thus except when a whatness is known by the analysis and composition of other whatnesses without need of prior knowledge of their own individuals.

Therefore, the essence of everything in the external world is often mixed with characteristics which cause their specific qualities. Only the intellect can abstract the essence from the collection of specific accidents, and obtain the pure, sheer, abstracted essence from the specifics.

Then, that which is found after the abstraction is that very thing which exists in the external world concurrent with the individual specifications and specific accidents, and with the plurality of accidents it becomes numerous and a multiplicity. But when the mind abstracts it, it is no longer capable of being multiple. For this reason it is said that a sheer essence is unrepeatable.

Since a whatness, with that very quality of whatish unity, can correspond to a countless number of individuals, it is called a natural universal (kulli tabi'i), although the characteristic of being universal only

applies to what is in the mind, for otherwise, as was already stated, in the external world they are realized always as mixtures with specifying accidents and in the form of individuals and particulars.

Following this, other topics are presented such as, whether natural universals themselves also exist in the external world, or are what obtains in the external world only the individuals, so that the natural universal occurs only in the mind.

There have been many discussions and disputes about this, and researchers have finally come to the opinion that in the external world the natural universals in and of themselves are not existent, but their existence is by the existence of their individuals, and the individuals play the role of intermediaries for the occurrence of natural universals.

Here another precise question can be raised, whether the mediation of the individuals in the occurrence of natural universals is fixed or accidental. In other words, does the mediation of the individuals cause the true occurrence of the natural universal with another existence other than that of the individuals? Does this cause the natural universal to have the property of being existent as its own true attribute? Or does the mediation of the individuals cause an accidental pseudo-attribution of being existent to be related to natural universals?

Another issue is the problem raised in Islamic philosophy of whether a universal may be individuated by means of specific accidents. Every accident in reality also has a whatness to which the mind attributes universality, and therefore it participates with whatnesses of that which has accidents in the need to be individuated.

And this question can be repeated with regard to them, as to how they are to be individuated. How is the addition of a universal essence to cause the individuation of a universal essence of that which has accidents?

Finally, Farabi offered the solution that the individuation is an essential requirement of entified existence. Every essence in reality is found to be individuated by existence. Specific accidents each of which is individuated by its own existence are considered mere signs of the individuation of the essence of that which has accidents, and cannot be truly considered the cause of the individuation.

It seems that this position of Farabi is the first sprouting of the [doctrine of the] fundamentality of existence, which gradually grew until in the time of Mulla Sadra it took the form of an independent and fundamental topic in transcendent theosophy (hikmat muta'aliyyah).

With this brief explanation, along with several other indicated topics, it has become clear that the topic of the fundamentality of existence is not a topic with which to begin cold in the program of one's research.

One may guess why programs in which it is the first topic of philosophy cause the bewilderment and confusion of students, so that after spending much time on discussions concerning this, they still do not

understand it correctly. So what was the motivation for this discussion? What philosophical difficulty can it solve?

In order to find an appropriate place for the problem of the fundamentality of existence by which it can be elucidated in a clear manner, we must indicate prior to this some other problems which will prepare the ground for the presentation and clarification of this subject.

We will choose correct and specific subjects, then we will present explanations of the terms and concepts needed for these discussions, and finally we will take up the discussion of the principle question. In this manner not only will the problem be solved in a clear fashion, but it will also assist in the solution of other important philosophical problems.

## **How the Mind Becomes Acquainted with the Concept of Existence**

As has already been indicated, we have no explanation from the ancient philosophers as to how the concept of existence is abstracted by the mind, and among Islamic philosophers this subject was presented for the first time by our late professor ('Allamah Tabataba'i), may Allah be pleased with him. He has discussions of this in both Usul-e Falsafah and Nahayah al-Hikmah, which can be summarized as follows.

Man primarily finds 'by presence' the existence of a relation in propositions which is really an action of the soul, and the mind, from this, obtains a nominal concept (mafhum-e harfi), which in Farsi is expressed by the word 'ast' (is). After that, it is viewed in an independent form, and the substantial concept of existence is abstracted 'in the possessive case'. Afterward, that qualification is deleted, and it is understood in an absolute form.

For example, in the sentence, "Ali is wise", at first the meaning of 'is' is obtained by a judgment of the soul to affix wisdom to Ali, so that the meaning of 'is' is copulative, and no idea of it is possible except through the sentence. Then it is considered in an independent form, just as the preposition 'from' is considered independently and interpreted as meaning 'origin'. It is said, the word 'from' refers to 'origin'.

In this way, the meaning of 'the attribution of wisdom to Ali' which is a possessive concept, is obtained, which includes a relational meaning. Then the possessive and relational aspect is deleted and the independent and absolute meaning of 'existence' is obtained.

But perhaps an easier explanation can be presented for how the mind becomes acquainted with the concept of existence and other philosophical concepts. An example of this will be mentioned here, and allusion will be made to it in some other cases as well.

When the soul observes within itself a non-material quality, such as fear, and after it is removed it

compares two of its states: the state of fear and the state of a lack of fear. The mind then becomes disposed to abstract from the first state, the concept of the 'existence of fear' and from the second state, the concept of the 'absence of fear'. After the possessive and relational qualification is deleted by abstraction, the absolute concepts of 'existence' and 'nothingness' are obtained.

This method is also used to abstract other philosophical concepts, and by comparing two existents from a special point of view, two opposite concepts are abstracted. From this the secret of the pairing of these concepts is revealed, such as the concepts of cause and effect, objective and subjective (khariji va dhini), potential and actual, fixed and changing.

In Lesson Fifteen we explained that one of the differences between whatish concepts and philosophical concepts is that the first group is reflected in the mind automatically, while the second group requires mental activity and comparison and analysis, and here we also saw how the mind finds the disposition to abstract the two opposite concepts of existence and nothingness by comparing two states of the soul.

## **How the Mind Becomes Acquainted with Whatness**

Aside from the position of the Platonists, according to whom the perception of whatnesses is by observing abstract truths or by remembering previous observations of them, and some other positions, most philosophers agree that the perception of whatnesses occurs by abstraction from specific objects of perception and from individuating accidents.

On this basis they consider necessary the priority of the perception of several specific and particular things. However, first, this question can be raised, how this abstraction is accomplished for kinds for which there is only one individual? Second, regarding the accidents themselves, which they admit have whatnesses, what is to be said? For it cannot be said that for every accident that it itself has individuating accidents, so that by abstracting and peeling them off (taqshir) universal whatnesses are obtained.

Hence, some of the scholars have said that this philosophical exposition is metaphorical and is only used as an approach to the subject for new students to philosophy.

The truth is that a whatish concept is a passive perception which is obtained by the intellect, and an individual perception is sufficient for obtaining it, with no other condition. In like manner, an imaginary perception, which is an individual passive perception, is obtained by the faculty of the imagination (khayal) after a single sensory perception.

For example, when our eyes see something of a white color, an imaginary form of it is reflected in the faculty of the imagination, and its universal concept in the intellect is interpreted as the essence 'whiteness', and likewise for other sensory and specific perceptions.

That which causes it to be imagined that the perception of a universal essence is obtained through

abstraction and peeling off the accidents is the fact that in this way an answer is sought to the question regarding compound things—such as man, whose elements and attributes are known by different senses and even with the help of scientific instruments, analysis and mental deduction, from which various intellectual concepts are naturally abstracted—as to how a single whatness can be related to them so that all their essences (dhatiyyat) will be included?

In such cases, it is thought that first one must know the accidental aspects of them, aspects whose change, alteration or removal does not cause the destruction of the principle of that existent. For example, if the skin color of a man changes from white to black, his humanity is not removed, and likewise for changes in the height, breadth and other physical attributes and the psychological states of a man.

Hence, all of these aspects and attributes, in relation to man, are accidental, and in order to know his essence all of them should be removed. One of the best ways for knowing which attributes are not essential is seeing whether they differ in different individuals. So, we must look at several individuals who have various attributes and accidents, and by means of the differences among them we find that none of these is essential for man, until we arrive at concepts such that if they are negated the humanity of (the individual) will not remain.

They are the same essential concepts which are common among all the individuals and which are the components of their whatness. In this way, compound whatnesses are considered to have genera and differentia, each of which indicates a specific essential aspect in the compound whatness, as is mentioned in classical logic.

But this subject is based on positive principles which must be discussed in philosophy. From among them is the question of whether each compound existent has a single existence and a single existential limit which is reflected in the mind as a single whatness. What is the standard of their true unity? How is a multiplicity of elements compatible with that unity? What is the relation between the parts with each other, and what is the relation of all of them with the whole?

Are all of the parts actively existent with respect to the whole, or is the existence of all or some of them potential with respect to the whole? Is that which is called the parts or elements of a compound existent the preparatory condition for the appearance of other simple existences, which constitute the truth of that existent, and which by negligence are all called single existences?

Suppose that there is a way to solve these and other problems completely coherent with a logical theory of genus and difference. It will still only be true of compound whatnesses. The perception of simple whatnesses can never be justified in this way. Finally, each compound essence is composed of several simple whatnesses, and the question of knowledge of the simples will remain.

# Lesson 25: Precepts of Whatness

## Respects of Whatness

In the previous lesson we narrated from the sages that the essence of every existent in the external world is mixed with specific accidents and pure essence obtains only in the mind. With regard to this point, we may consider two respectival conceptions of essence: one is the restricted or mixed essence which occurs in the external world, and the other is the abstract essence which may only be imagined in the mind.

The first respectival is called *ī'tibar bishart-e shay'* (the respectival conditional on a thing) and the second is called *ī'tibar bishart-e la* (the negatively conditioned respectival). That which is divided (*maqṣam*) into these two is also considered a respectival of essence, and it is called *ī'tibar la bi shart* (the unconditioned respectival), and it has neither the aspect of being in the external world, being mixed with accidents (restricted by existence), nor the aspect of being in the mind with a lack of accidents (not being in the external world), and it is called a 'natural universal' (*kulli tabi'i*).

It is believed that since natural universals have no restrictions or conditions, neither the condition of being mixed nor the condition of being abstract, they are assembled from both respectivals. That is, it is both in the external world with restricted essence, and also in the mind with abstract essence.

For this reason it is said, "The essence, in the respect in which it is nothing but itself, is not an existent and not a non-existent, not a universal and not a particular," that is, when we regard the essence itself, and do not consider any other aspect, we will have only a concept which includes neither the meaning of existence nor the meaning of nonexistence, neither the meaning of universality nor the meaning of particularity.

For this reason it can be the subject of the attribute of existence and it can be subject to the attribute of non-existence, it can be the subject of the attribute of being universal, and it can be the subject of the attribute of being particular, but these attributes will be external to its essence. In other words, all of these attributes are predicated in the form of common predications upon the unconditioned essence, the natural universal, and none of these attributes are predicated in the form of primary predication, for they do not have a conceptual unity with it.

It is necessary to mention that the expressions *la bi shart* (unconditioned) and *bi shart la* (negatively conditioned) are used by philosophers in a different context to distinguish the concept of genus and difference from the concept of matter and form. It is explained that when an existent in the external world is composed of matter and form, a concept is obtained from each of them, and it is possible that the essence of a thing is composed of genus and difference.

With this difference in mind, if we consider those concepts as genus and difference then one may be predicated of the other. For example, in the case of the genus and difference of man, it can be said that man is a 'rational animal'. But if the concepts refer to matter and form, then one cannot be predicated of the other. For instance, one cannot predicate the spirit of the body. In this regard it is said that what distinguishes the concept of genus and species from that of matter and form is that genus and difference are unconditioned (la bi shart) while matter and form are negatively conditioned (bi shart-e la).

This terminology is not related to the previous one, and is simply a case of homonymy. It is necessary to bear in mind that the diversity and difference of the 'respectivals of essence' (i'tibarat mahiyyah) are merely mental, and it is clear from the title that they are respectival, and have no entified or objective source, and in lieu of them there are no entified existents, and even if the fundamentality of essence is established, there will not be in existence this multiplicity of whatnesses.

## Natural Universals

From the review of the different kinds of respectivals of essence, the definition of 'natural universal' may also be obtained, for this is the same as the divisible (maqsami) respectival, the 'unconditioned' essence, in which there is no kind of restriction, not even that of being abstract and lacking accidents, nor that of objective existence. It is called 'universal' because it is common among individuals, and it is called 'natural' to distinguish it from 'logical universals' and 'intellectual universals'.

By the former is meant a universal which may have other accidental concepts in the mind, and by the latter, the 'intellectual universal' is meant the universal to which accidents are applied, and which is abstract, 'negatively conditioned', which is only realized in the realm of the intellect and which is the mental instance of the concept of a logical universal.

We previously pointed out that one of the most frequently discussed topics in the history of philosophy has been that concerning the existence of natural universals, whether it can be said that they also have existence in the external world, or if it must be said that their existence is only in the mind, only for intellectual universals, that is, whatnesses abstract of accidents, so that they should be like the universals for which there are no individuals.

The proponents of the existence of natural universals have explained that by existence in the external world they do not mean that the universal obtains in the realm of the external world, but that in the external world there is something existent in common among individuals, which objectively occurs in the mind, as well, where it obtains the attribute of universality.

The proponents of the existence of natural universals have reasoned that the natural universal is that which is divided into two other respectivals of essence, the mixed respectival and the abstract respectival, and the condition of being that which is to be divided is that both divisions should pertain to what exists.

For example, when the human is divided into two divisions, man and woman, the human, which is that from which they were divided, exists in both man and woman. So, natural universals should exist in both intellectual or abstract whatnesses and mixed or restricted whatnesses. Since the realm of the existence of mixed whatnesses is the external world, natural universals exist in the external world.

The soundness of this reasoning should be based on a true interpretation of mixed whatnesses that does not neglect anything [relevant]. An existent in the external world is truly a mixture of a whatness which has accidents and specific accidents, or is composed of essence and existence, but this cannot be proved— as was mentioned with regard to the way in which the mind becomes acquainted with whatnesses—and further explanation of it will be given in future lessons.

What is intended in speaking of the existence of a natural universal in the external world and its mixture with individuating accidents or existence is nothing more than that the intellect is able to abstract these various concepts from an objective existent, in other words, that the concept of natural universals and whatnesses are applicable to objective existents, so that the concepts of accidents and of existents are predicated of them. But it is not to be supposed that those who deny the existence of natural universals also deny their existence with this meaning.

On the other hand, those who deny the existence of natural universals in the external world have reasoned that in the objective realm there is nothing but the individual (instances) of whatnesses, therefore, there is no place for the existence of something else by the name of 'natural universal'.

With this reasoning an answer may be given, that every individual of a whatness you may consider is accompanied by accidents other than the whatness itself, such as an individual human is accompanied by height, breadth, color and other accidents. Undoubtedly, these things are not part of the human whatness, therefore, variation and change in them does not imply multiplicity and change in whatness. So, in all individuals there is the common aspect which is the natural universal.

It is clear that in this answer there is confusion between the individual by essence and the individual by accident. That is, that which is called the individual human is really a collection of individuals of various whatnesses, substantial and accidental, which due to negligence are considered as the individual human.

The principle individual which is human by essence is that same substantial individual which is the bearer of various accidents, that is, the same thing which is considered the whatish aspect of man and common among all individuals (individual accidents), and aside from this there is nothing else which might be called the 'natural universal of man'.

Finally, proponents of the existence of natural universals have claimed that by their existence in the external world it is not meant that aside from the existence of individuals there is an existence independent and separate from them, but it is considered that the existence of natural universals depends upon the existence of their individuals.

As was previously indicated, this position is open to two interpretations. One is that the existence of the individual is a means for establishing the existence of natural universals and is the cause of their occurrence, and in this way the existence of natural universals in the external world may be truly proven. But such things are not provable, for in the external world there is nothing but individuals by accident, including individuals by essence, and there is nothing which can be considered their effect.

Furthermore, universals cannot be considered the effects of individuals. The other interpretation is that the mediation of the individual for the occurrence of the natural universal is a mediation by accidents, that is, the standard for the predication of the concept of man to persons in the external world (individuals by accident) is the existence of the human substance (individual by essence, dhat) in it.

This means that this very aspect of one's humanity is a true instance by essence (bi dhat) for the concept of man. So we see that the implication of this interpretation is that it is established that there is nothing other than the individual by essence (bi dhat) along with the individual by accident.

The proponents of the existence of natural universals may content themselves with saying: "Our opinion is [that the existence of natural universals is] nothing but the correctness of the predication of a whatness of an individual, and, as has been indicated, such a meaning would not be disputed by those who deny the existence of natural universals."

For this reason some of the great scholars have said that the dispute between the proponents and opponents of the existence of natural universals is purely verbal.

## **The Cause of the Individuation of Whatness**

As has been explained, natural universals are those whatnesses called 'unconditioned' which are considered as having no restrictions on them, but which can be combined with all sorts of restrictions and conditions, and for this reason they are combined in the mind with 'negatively conditioned' abstract whatnesses, and the attribute of universality is applied to them, while in the external world they accompany mixed whatnesses, and the attribute of particularity is applied to them.

But of course, as has been mentioned in this very lesson, the meaning of joining a natural universal with an abstract essence or with a mixed essence is not that two independent whatnesses are joined together with each other, or are merged with one another, but the view is that two respectivals are joined, that is, when a whatness becomes established in the mind, the intellect is able to view it in two ways.

In one, the basis of the concept becomes the object of attention, without consideration of whether it has or does not have specific accidents, and this is the 'unconditioned' respectival, the natural universal; in the second it is considered bare of accidents, and this is the 'negatively conditioned' respectival.

In the same way the intellect can consider the essence of the existent in the external world in two ways:

first, as the basis of the essence common between the mind and the external world, that is the 'unconditioned' respectival, the natural universal; and secondly, with respect to being mixed with accidents, that is, the restricted 'negatively conditioned' respectival.

Now, if those who explain whatnesses and respectivals in this way are asked what requires the application of a natural universal to a particular while essentially it is not required to have such attribution, or, what is the standard for the individuation of essence, naturally they will answer that what requires the attribution of essence to particularity and individuation is that very mixture of it with specific accidents, a requirement of the essence for existence in the external world, so that what requires the application of the essence to universality is its lack of these accidents, required by the essence for existence in the mind.

An implication of this answer is that, if an objective existent were without accidents it would be universal, and likewise, if mental essence were attached to accidents, it would become particular. This answer, however, is by no means convincing, because this question may be repeated with respect to the essence of each accident: what causes the particularity and individuation of them, so that the essence of that which has accidents will also depend upon their specification?

Furthermore, the implication of this answer, that if the mental essence is attached to accidents it becomes particular and if the objective essence becomes bare of accidents it becomes universal, is not acceptable, for the universality of intellectual concepts is their ability to correspond to numerous instances and to reflect countless individuals, and this ability is not negated by coming to be attached to accidents.

Also, the external existent is not such that if it is without accidents it may be supposed that it is able to have countless instances. Abstract entities are not to be considered denoting countless individuals cannot be found in them.

Thus, some philosophers have decided to search for the standard of individuation of whatnesses in other things, such as matter, time and place. But it is clear that having recourse to such things is of no use, for all of them the problem remains of the standard for the individuation of the essence of matter, or of time or place. And to approach an answer to this problem requires the individuation of other whatnesses.

In conclusion, adding a thousand universal whatnesses lacking individuation to another universal and unspecific essence will not individuate it, regardless of whether it is a substantial or accidental essence.

As far as we know, the correct way to solve the problem of the criterion for the individuation of whatnesses was first presented by the great Islamic philosopher, Farabi. According to this solution, individuation is the essential necessary result of existence, and whatness is only made determinate in the shadow of existence.

That is, no essence can be individuated or made determinate by that aspect of it in which it is a universal

concept which can be applied to numerous individuals and instances, regardless of how many dozens of qualifications are added as a means to restrict it to a single individual, for, finally, the intellect will not consider it impossible that this very same qualified concept can be imagined to apply to numerous other individuals, even if in the external world there is not more than one such individual.

So, the criterion of individuation cannot be found in the addition and conjunction of other whatnesses. However, it is entified existence that essentially cannot be applied to other existents, not even to one other individual existent. And basically, application and predication and concepts of this sort are characteristic of concepts.

In conclusion, it is existence that essentially individuates. Every essence which is attributed to particularity and specification only does so in the shadow of unity with existence.

This answer of Farabi is the source of the change in the view of the philosophers, and it truly must be considered as the turning point in the history of philosophy. For until then, all philosophical discussions, no matter how unconsciously, were based on the idea that existence in the external world could only be known by whatnesses, and in truth, whatnesses figured as the pivot of all philosophical discussions.

However, since then the attention of philosophers returned to existence, and they considered entified existence as having special precepts which cannot be known by means of whatish precepts.

However, unfortunately, the illumination of this point was not able to penetrate all philosophical discussions rapidly, and change the face of philosophy very soon. It took centuries until this sprout grew and finally the great Islamic philosopher, the late Sadr al-Muta'allihin Shirazi (Mulla Sadra) officially posed the topic of the fundamentality of existence as the most basic principle of transcendent theosophy.

However, he also, in most of his discussions, did not abandon the way of his predecessors. Especially in the presentation of various philosophical topics, he followed the method of his predecessors. It was only in the final exposition of views and in drawing conclusions that he proposed his own opinion based on the fundamentality of existence.

Before concluding this discussion it is necessary to mention that the subjects discussed in this lesson, concerning the respectivals of existence and especially the existence of natural universals in the external world, take on a totally different aspect on the basis of the fundamentality of existence.

Basically, the existence of mixed whatnesses may also be considered as intellectual respectivals. Perhaps the aware reader will discover from the subjects of this lesson that the true existence of natural universals.

# Lesson 26: Introduction to the Fundamentality of Existence

## A Brief Look at the History of the Problem

As was previously mentioned, prior to Farabi almost all philosophical discussions were centered about whatnesses, or at least were unconsciously based on the fundamentality of whatness, and in statements reported from the Greek philosophers, no clear indications are to be found of any tendency toward the fundamentality of existence. But among the Islamic philosophers, such as Farabi, Ibn Sina, Bahmanyar and Mir Damad, not only is this tendency to be found, but there are also declarations of position on the topic.

On the other hand, Shaykh al-Ishraq [Suhrawardi], who paid particular attention to intellectual concepts (i'tibarat 'aqli), took up a position against the tendency toward the fundamentality of existence, and he sought by proofs for the respectival nature of the concept of existence to invalidate this tendency, although in his own statements points may be found which are more compatible with the fundamentality of existence, and which do not properly justify the doctrine of the fundamentality of whatness.

In any case, Sadr al-Muta'allihin was the first to place this topic at the head of discussions of ontology, and he suggested solutions to other problems on this basis. He says: "At first I myself was a proponent of the fundamentality of whatness and I defended it vigorously until, by the grace of God, I found the truth of the matter."<sup>1</sup>

He attributed the doctrine of the fundamentality of existence to the peripatetics and the doctrine of the fundamentality of whatness to the illuminationists. However, since the topic of the fundamentality of existence had not previously been presented as an independent topic and the concept of it had not been previously explained, philosophers cannot easily be grouped specifically and definitively in relation to it, so as to characterize the peripatetics doctrine of the fundamentality of whatness as a feature of the illuminationists.

Supposing, however, that this classification is correct, one must not forget that the fundamentality of existence was not presented by the followers of the peripatetics in such a way that it could take its proper place among the problems of philosophy to shed light on the solution of other philosophical problems. Rather, the peripatetics often presented and explained philosophical problems in a way which was more compatible with the doctrine of the fundamentality of whatness.

## Explanation of Terms

In order to clarify this topic and completely specify the area of controversy it is first necessary to provide explanations of the terms used regarding the problem, and then to precisely determine the purport of the topic and area of conflict.

This problem is usually presented by posing the question of whether existence is fundamental and whatness respectival or whether whatness is fundamental and existence respectival. However, Sadr al-Muta'allihin himself presented the problem in the following form. Existence possesses objective reality. The implicit purport of this is that whatness does not possess objective reality. Thus, the pivotal expressions of this topic are existence, whatness, fundamentality, respectival, and reality.

However, we have already explained the expression, 'existence,' which is sometimes used as an infinitive (masdar) (to be), and sometimes as a verbal noun (ism-e masdar) (being), and also sometimes it is used by logicians with a copulative meaning (is).

It is clear that in this philosophical discussion the copulative meaning is not under consideration, and likewise the infinitive which indicates a relation between subject and object is not meant. The meaning of the verbal noun, in the restricted sense of occurrence, is also not meant, unless the above restriction is removed so that it may be predicated of objective realities including the sacred Essence of God.

The expression 'whatness' (mahiyyah) which is a contrived infinitive (masdar ja'li) derived from 'What is it?' (ma huwa?) is used as a philosophic term in the form of a verbal noun (ism-e masdar, 'what-is-it-ness') but with the same condition of dissociation from the sense of occurrence, so that it may be predicated of an essence.

This term is used in philosophy in two senses, one of which is more general than the other. The specific sense is defined as "that which is said in answer to the question 'What is it?'" and naturally it is applied in the case of an existent which can be known by the mind, in technical terms, that which possesses specific limits of existence, which are reflected in the mind in the form of primary intelligibles (whatish concepts).

For this reason it is said that God the Almighty does not have a whatness: "There is no whatness of the Necessary Existent." Proponents of the fundamentality of existence say with regard to the objective reality of existence, "Existence itself has no whatness," and sometimes that "it does not have an intellectual form."

But the more general sense is defined as 'that which the thing itself is.' This includes both the objective reality of existence as well as the sacred Essence of God. It is in accordance with this meaning that it is said with regard to God Almighty, "The whatness of God is the same as His identity (inniyyah)."

In this discussion what is meant by the expression 'whatness' is the former meaning, not the concept

represented by the word whatness itself in the sense of primary predication. Rather the discussion is about the instances of this concept, that is, whatness in the sense of common predication, such as 'man'. For the proponents of the fundamentality of whatness also admit that this concept itself is a respectival concept.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the discussion is about whatish concepts (mafahim mahuwi), not the concept of whatness.

The expression 'fundamentality' (asalah) which is used with the literal meaning of being a root and is the opposite of 'far'iyah' which has the meaning of being an offshoot in this context, is employed with a specific meaning as the opposite of 'i'tibari' (respectival), and their precise meanings are jointly clarified.

In Lesson Fifteen several technical meanings of the expression i'tibari (respectival) were mentioned, according to some of which, even the concept of existence was called a respectival concept. But in this context, the meaning of i'tibar, being the opposite of asil (fundamental), is different. The respectival nature of the concept of existence, according to the previous meaning, is compatible with the doctrine of the fundamentality of existence and the 'respectival' nature of whatness according to the meaning appropriate to this context.

What is meant by the two opposite concepts of asil and i'tibari here pertains to the question as to which of the two, the whatish concepts or the concept of existence, refers to entified reality in itself (dhatan) without mediation, in the precise philosophical sense.

That is, after it is accepted that an objective reality is reflected in the mind in the form of a 'simple existential proposition' (halliyah basitah), whose subject is a whatish concept and whose predicate is the concept of existence (wujud) which by means of a [morphologically] derived predicate may be put in the form of the concept of 'existent' (mawjud), so that each of these terms will be predicable of that entified reality, so that it may be said, for example, "This foreigner is human," as it can be said, "This person is existent." Neither of these is metaphorical from a common or literary point of view.

At the same time, from a precise philosophic point of view, it may be asked—in view of the unity and simplicity of the entified reality and the multiplicity of these concepts and aspects, which is characteristic of the mental realm—whether the entified reality (of which the concept of existence is predicated with the special attention of the intellect and by mediation of the whatish concept, and which [i.e. the concept of existence] for this reason is a secondary and subordinate aspect) is to be identified with the whatish aspect, or whether the objective reality is that very aspect denoted by the concept of existence (so that the whatish concept is merely a mental reflection of the limits and framework of the reality and objective existence), and in fact it is the whatish concepts which are secondary and subordinate.

With regard to this question, if we take the first alternative and understand entified reality to be the unmediated instance of whatness, we would be upholding the fundamentality of whatness and the respectivalness of existence. And if we take the second alternative and understand entified reality to be the unmediated instance of the concept of existence, and we consider whatish concepts a mental

framework setting the limits for finite realities, we will be proponents of the fundamentality of existence and the respectivalness of whatness.

The expression haqiqah employed by Sadr al-Muta'allihin in discussing this problem is also an expression used in various senses, such as the following:

1. Haqiqah [literal usage] is the use of a word in its literal meaning, as opposed to majaz, its metaphorical usage, i.e., with another meaning with a sort of relation to the literal meaning. For example, the use of the word 'lion' in the sense of the well-known wild animal is haqiqah, while its use to mean a powerful man is a metaphor.
2. Haqiqah [truth] also has the meaning of knowledge that corresponds to reality, as in the previous discussions of epistemology.
3. Haqiqah may have the meaning of whatness, as when it is said of two individual humans that they are 'muttafiq al-haqiqah' [i.e., of a common reality].
4. Haqiqah in the sense of entified reality.
5. Haqiqah, in the terminology of mysticism ('irfan), is used in the sense of absolute independent existence which is confined to God, the Supreme, and it is so used in contrast to the existence of creatures, which is said to be 'metaphorical' (majazi).
6. Haqiqah also has the meaning of core and inner reality (batin), as when it is said that haqiqah of the Divine Essence cannot be fathomed by the intellect.

It is clear that the intended meaning of haqiqah here is that of the fourth term.

## Explanation of the Point of Contention

There is no doubt that every existent which has a whatish concept may be predicated by that concept, as the concept 'human being' may be predicated of persons in the external world.

Likewise, there is no doubt that the concept of existence (in the form of derivative predication (haml ishtiqaq), e.g., mawjud, (existent), derived from wujud, (existence)) may be predicated of every existent in the external world, and even in the case of God, the Supreme, Who does not have a whatness, it may be said that He is existent.

In other words, from an intellectual perspective every existent that has contingent existence has two aspects: one is the aspect of whatness, and the other is the aspect of existence. As the philosophers have said, "Every contingent thing is a composite duality and composed of whatness and existence." This is the same matter which we have repeatedly indicated, namely that reflections of objective realities in the mind take the form of propositions which are usually (that is, for things with whatnesses)

composed of a whatish concept and the concept of existence.

With regard to this matter, if it is supposed that for each of these two concepts there exists an objective entified aspect—that the whatish concept refers to one entified aspect and the concept of existence refers to the other entified aspect, which are joined together in the external world—or, in other words, an existent is composed of existence and whatness, and this composition is objective and entified, the meaning of this supposition would be that both whatness and existence are fundamental (asil).

But this supposition is not correct, for if each existent were to possess two entified aspects, each of them would be reflected in the mind in the form of a different proposition, which would include two concepts, and for each of them one would have to suppose another entified aspect, and this process would be continued without end, and the result of this would be that every simple existent should be composed of an infinite number of entified objective aspects.

This is what is meant by the statement of the philosophers that the difference between existence and whatness is a mental difference: “Existence is an accident of whatness in conception, and they are united in identity.”

That is, the predication and characterization (‘urudh) of existence to whatness, which requires each of them to be different from the other, obtains exclusively in the realm of mental conception, otherwise in external identity (huwiyah) they are one with each other. So, it cannot be that both whatness and existence are fundamental and considered to have entified reality.

Likewise, both cannot be viewed as respectivals. For ultimately, it is that very simple proposition which denotes entified reality and which must include a concept corresponding to entified reality. So, there is a choice between whatness being fundamental and existence being respectival or vice versa. Therefore, the problem may be posed in the form of two hypotheses based on several principles:

1. The acceptance of the concept of existence as an independent substantival concept, in technical terms, the acceptance of ‘predicative existence’. For if the concept of existence is confined to the copulative meaning and is relational in propositions it would be impossible to suppose that it should refer to entified reality, and in the words of Sadr al-Muta’allihin, that it should possess entified reality (haqiqah ‘ayniyyah), and there would be no alternative but the fundamentality of whatness.

2. Acceptance of the analysis of contingent existents into two (concepts): the concept of existence and whatish concepts. That is, if someone imagines that the concept of existence is not something other than the concept of whatness, as has been reported of some of the mutakallimin, according to whom the meaning of existence in every proposition is the same as the meaning of the whatness which makes up its subject, on this assumption there remains no room for doubt between the fundamentality of whatness and the fundamentality of existence, and it would determine the fundamentality of whatness. But the invalidity of this supposition became clear in Lesson Twenty-Two.

3. Acceptance of the fact that the combination of existence and whatness is a mental combination, that in the context of the external world there do not exist two distinct aspects, one of which corresponds to the whatish concept and the other of which to the concept of existence, that is, the hypothesis of the fundamentality of both is incorrect, as explained.

4. On the basis of these three principles, the question may be presented in this form: Does entified reality principally correspond to the whatish concept, such that the concept of existence is predicated of it accidentally, or the reverse, does entified reality principally correspond to the concept of existence, such that the whatish concept is predicated of it accidentally?

In other words: Is entified reality in itself an instance of whatness or existence? On the first hypothesis, knowledge of whatnesses and the principles pertaining to whatness is the same as knowledge of entified reality; but on the second hypothesis, knowledge of whatnesses means the knowledge of the framework of existents and their limits which are reflected in the mind, not knowledge of their entified contents.

## The Benefits of the Discussion

It is possible that one may imagine that the discussion about the fundamentality of existence or whatness is an academic exercise and that it has no relevance to the solution of important philosophical problems, for these problems have been solved both by the proponents of the fundamentality of existence as well as the proponents of the fundamentality of whatness.

But this idea is incorrect, for, as will become clear in the course of future discussions, the solution of many of the important problems of philosophy depends on the fundamentality of existence, and the way of solving them through the fundamentality of whatness is unsatisfactory and leads to a dead end. As we have seen with regard to the problem of the individuation of whatnesses, there is no correct solution on the basis of the fundamentality of whatness.

Of course, this problem, compared to more important problems [whose solutions are] based on the fundamentality of existence, is relatively minor. If we were to mention all such cases, our discussion would become too long. Furthermore, the explanation of the relation of these problems to the fundamentality of existence requires the presentation of these problems and reference to some sensitive points which must be explained in their appropriate place.

Here we will only mention two very important problems of philosophy, each of which in its own turn may serve as a basis for solving other valuable problems: one of them is the problem of causation and the reality of the relation between cause and effect, the conclusion of which, based on the fundamentality of existence, is the dependence of the effect on the 'being-granting cause' ('illat-e hasti bakhsh), on the basis of which very important problems can be solved, including the refutation of jabr (predestination) and tafwidh (libertarianism) and [explanation of] the unity of [Divine] acts (tawhid af'ali). Another problem is that of substantial motion, intensifying (ishtidadi) and evolutionary (takamuli), whose interpretation

depends on the acceptance of the fundamentality of existence, the elaboration of which will be presented in its proper place.

Therefore, the problem of the fundamentality of existence is one of the most serious and fundamental which is worthy of study, and must never be treated in a casual and offhand manner.

[1.](#) Asfar, Vol. 1, p. 49.

[2.](#) Cf. Suhrawardi's *Muqawamat*, p. 175; *Mutarahat*, p. 361, in Henry Corbin, ed., *Shihaboddin Yahya Sohrawardi, Œuvres Philosophiques et Mystiques*, Tome 1 (Tehran: Académie Impériale Iranienne de Philosophie, 1976).

## Lesson 27: The Fundamentality of Existence

### Arguments for the Fundamentality of Existence

Our aim is to know whether entified reality is the same as that which is denoted by whatish concepts or whether whatnesses only represent limits and frameworks for objective realities. If whatnesses only represent limits of existence, that which denotes the reality itself and the contents of a conceptual framework is the concept of existence which is considered to indicate reality itself.

The mind, by means of the concept of existence, understands reality itself. In order to know whether whatness is fundamental or existence, there are various ways, of which the easiest is reflection upon these concepts themselves and their meanings.

When we focus upon a whatish concept, such as the concept of 'man,' we see that existence may be negated of it without changing its meaning, no matter how many external existents to which it applies, and of which it may be predicated, where this predication is literal, according to ordinary language, and not metaphorical.

This is a matter upon which philosophers are agreed, namely, that whatness, in that it is whatness, is neither an existent nor a nonexistent. It neither requires existence nor nonexistence (*al-mahiyah min haythu hiya hiya laysat illa hiya, la mawjudatun wa la ma'dumah*, i.e., Whatness as such is what it is [and only that], it is neither existent, nor nonexistent).

It is for this same reason that whatness may be both the subject for existence and for nonexistence. Therefore, whatness in and of itself cannot represent objective reality, otherwise the predication 'nonexistent' to it would be considered the predication of one of a pair of contradictories to the other, such as is the case with the predication of existence to nothingness.

Another reason that whatness does not represent entified reality is that in order to denote an objective

reality we have no choice but to employ a proposition which includes the concept of existence and until we predicate existence of a whatness we will not have spoken of its real occurrence. And this very point is the best reason for claiming that it is the concept of existence which denotes entified reality. According to Bahmanyar, in the book *Al-Tahsil*, “How can existence not possess entified truth when its meaning is nothing but real occurrence?”<sup>1</sup>

Some of the advocates of the fundamentality of whatness have said: “It is true that whatness itself in itself lacks existence and nothingness, and does not demand either of them, and in this sense can be considered respectival, but when it is related to the Maker (Ja‘il) it obtains objective reality. And it is with regard to this matter that it is said that whatness is fundamental.”

It is clear that a relation that accompanies the occurrence of whatness in reality is due to causing it to exist, that is, the granting of existence to it, and this shows that its reality is that very existence which is granted to it.

Another reason for the respectivalness of whatness is that basically the analysis of entified reality into two aspects, whatness and existence, occurs only in the mind through acquired knowledge. In presentational knowledge no trace of whatness is found.

So, if whatness were fundamental, then it would have to be realized through presentational knowledge, as well, for it is in knowledge by presence that entified reality itself is perceived or observed internally without the intermediary of any mental form or concept.

It is possible that to this argument the objection will be raised that just as there is no trace of whatish concepts in knowledge by presence, we see no trace in it of the concept of existence. In other words, just as whatish concepts are obtained by mental analysis, the concept of existence also occurs in the realm of mental analysis. Therefore, it cannot be said that existence is also fundamental.

In response to this objection, it must be said that there is no doubt that the two aspects, whatness and existence, can be distinguished from one another only in the realm of the mind. Their duality is specific to the realm of mental analysis, and for the same reason the concept of existence also, insofar as it is a mental concept, is not the same as objective reality, and is not fundamental.

But, nevertheless, this same concept is a means for denoting that which has objective reality, from which the whatish concept is abstracted, and this is what is meant by the fundamentality of existence and its having entified reality.

In addition to this, it became clear in the previous lecture that the choice between the fundamentality of existence and that of whatness is exhaustive, so that with the invalidity of the fundamentality of whatness, the fundamentality of existence is established.

Another argument for the fundamentality of existence and the respectivalness of whatness is that, as

was mentioned in Lesson Twenty-Five, an essential aspect of whatness is that it is not an individuating aspect, while the whatish aspect of external realities is an individuating aspect and is not universal, applicable to [different] individuals, and no external realities as such can be subjects of the attribute of universality and the lack of individuality.

In other words, individuality and particularity can only be applied to a whatness when it has external existence. From this it is to be understood that whatish aspects are those conceptual and mental aspects that have the capability of being applied to countless individuals, and entified reality is specific to existence, that is, entified reality is the essential instance of existence.

Another argument for the fundamentality of existence also can be raised, based on that which is accepted by the philosophers, that the sacred Divine Essence is free of any limitation which could be denoted by whatish concepts; that is, there is no question of Its having a whatness, and He is the most fundamental of realities and is the bestower of reality to all existents. If external reality were an essential instance of whatness, then the reality of the Divine Essence would also have to be a whatness like other whatnesses.

Of course, this argument is based on a premise which must be proved in the section on theology, but since this is accepted by the proponents of the fundamentality of whatness also, it can also be used here, and at the very least may be used in argument with them as ‘sound dialectic’.<sup>2</sup>

## Philosophical Metaphor

Here it is possible that a doubt will come to mind according to which the basis of the fundamentality of existence is that entified reality is an essential instance of existence, which implies that it will accidentally be an instance of whatness.

This means that the predication of a whatness, such as man, to individuals external to it will be accidental and by occurrence (‘urudh), and the characterization (ittisaf) of this concept will be metaphorical, which can be negated. Therefore, it must be that the negation of the concept of man of its individuals in the external world is correct, and this is nothing but sophistry.

The answer is that just as in the first argument [for the fundamentality of existence] we mentioned that the predication of every whatness to individuals external to it, from the ordinary viewpoint and from that of grammar, is a true predication without any figure of speech; however, precise philosophical precepts do not follow those of ordinary [language] and grammar with respect to the literal and the metaphorical.

So the key to their understanding cannot be sought among the rules related to language. Often these rules will be employed in such a way that with respect to grammar something will be literal, while with respect to philosophy, it will be metaphorical, and vice versa.

For example, the scholars of grammar and theoretical jurisprudence (usul al- fiqh) say that the literal

meaning of ‘derivatives’ (mushtaqqat) is something possessing the whatness of the source of derivation (ishtiqaq) (“The essential meaning of mushtaqq [derivative] is something with an established source”); for instance, ‘alim (knower) means someone who has ‘ilm (knowledge) and mawjud (existent) means something which has wujud (existence).

So, if the expression mawjud (existent) is used for entified existence (wujud) itself, then from the point of view of grammar, this would have to be a metaphorical usage, but from the point of view of philosophy, it is not.

The same point applies here. From the viewpoint of ordinary usage, there is no separation between the limit and the limited, and just as a limited existent is considered to be a real thing, its limits are also construed to be real entified things, while from the point of view of philosophy this is not the case, and the limits of existents, in fact, are abstracted from matters relating to nonexistence. Their being considered as real is metaphorical and respectival.

In order to make this clearer to the mind, the following example is given. If we take a piece of paper and from it we cut the various shapes of a triangle, a square, etc., we will have bits of paper, each of which, in addition to being paper, will have another attribute by the name of triangle, or square, etc., such that prior to cutting the paper they did not have these attributes.

The ordinary construal of this case is that specific forms and attributes came into existence in the paper, and that aspects of existence were added to the paper, while nothing came into existence in the mentioned paper except for edges which are aspects relating to nonexistence.

In other words, the edges which form the limits and bounds of various shapes are nothing but the ultimate ends of the surface of various bits of paper, and even the surface itself is really the ultimate end of the thickness of the paper.

However, these limits and bounds which have the nature of nonexistence, are construed from the ordinary superficial perspective as existing things and entified attributes, and the negation of their existence is considered a sort of denial of what is self-evident.

We should add that the same is true of the whatish concept (like paper in the example) in relation to entified reality; that is, it refers to specific limits of reality (of course, conceptual limits, not geometrical limits), limits which are considered as the empty molds for realities, and their contents are composed of entified reality.

Whatnesses are nothing but these very conceptual molds for external reality. But since they are the means and mirrors for the knowledge of external existents and cannot be viewed independently, they are construed as external realities themselves. This is the meaning of the respectivalness of whatness, that is, whatnesses are supposed to be realities, or the concepts are considered as the external instances themselves.

Thus, the mind may be compared to a mirror the reflections appearing in which are whatish concepts by means of which we are informed of the limits of external realities and kinds of existence. In this view, [wherein the mind plays the function of] an instrument and mirror, we do not notice the reflections themselves independently, but rather by way of them our attention is directed to that which is reflected, that is, the entified reality. For this reason we suppose that the reflections are that which is reflected.

Likewise, when one looks at one's reflection in a mirror one supposes that one is looking at oneself while that which is seen in the mirror is a reflection of the colors and contours of one's face, that is, a reflection of limits and not of that which is limited itself. However, from a superficial point of view we can say that that which we see in the mirror is our own faces.

The predication of whatnesses to existents is of the same sort. However much from the ordinary way of looking at things it is considered to be a true predication, from the exact perspective of philosophy, it becomes clear that it is only a reflection of their molds, not of them themselves. That is why Sadr al-Muta'allihin repeatedly emphasized in his books that 'whatness is a phantom of the mind or intellectual mold for entified reality.'<sup>3</sup>

With these explanations it has become clear that the real locus of whatnesses, insofar as they are whatnesses, is only the mind and its entified occurrence is its individual existence. From the exact perspective of philosophy, the whatness is never in itself that which entifiedly occurs [that is, as an entity]. So, the existence of mixed whatnesses, and consequently, the existence of natural universals in the external world, may also only be accepted as respectival, as was indicated at the end of Lesson Twenty-Five.

Hence, it may be said that to claim true existence for natural universals is the same as holding the position of the fundamentality of whatness, and to claim that the existence of natural universals is accidental and that individuals are the means of the occurrence ('urudh) of existence for natural universals is really the same position as the fundamentality of existence; that is, natural universals, which are the same as whatnesses, are respectival things. Their relation to existence and occurrence in the external world is accidental and a kind of philosophical metaphor.

## **The Resolution of Two Doubts**

The proponents of the fundamentality of whatness have raised certain doubts, among which two of the most important are:

First Objection: If existence were basic and possessed entified reality, it would have to be predicable by the concept 'existent,' and this would mean that existence possesses existence. So, another entified existence would have to be posited for it, which in turn would become the subject of 'existent.' This process would continue without end.

This implies that every existent possesses infinite existences! From this it is to be understood that existence is respectival, and that the repeated predication of 'existent' to it is a product of this mental derivation.

Answer: The origin of this fallacy is reliance on grammatical rules according to which the word 'existent' (mawjud) with regard to its being a derivative (mushtaq), refers to an 'essence' which is posited for the source of the derivation (mabda' ishtiqaq) (existence, or wujud in this case).

This implies the plurality of essence and source (mabda'). Thus, when the concept 'existent' is predicated of entified existence, it must be supposed that it is an essence for which is established the source of derivation, which is something else, and so on and so forth.

However, we have repeatedly warned that philosophical problems cannot be solved or settled on the basis of linguistic rules of grammar and syntax. The concept of 'existent' in philosophical usage is merely an indicator of entified objective occurrence, regardless of whether the aspect of objective occurrence in the realm of mental analysis is other than an aspect of the subject of the proposition or not.

For example, when this concept [i.e., existent] is predicated of a whatness, there is considered to be a plurality and difference between the subject and predicate, but when it is predicated of entified existence itself, this means that objective existence is the very aspect of its being existent.

In other words, the predication of a derivative (mushtaq) to an essence is not always an indication of plurality and difference between the essence and the source of the derivation. Rather, sometimes it indicates their unity. From this it is to be concluded that the meaning of the predication of 'existent' to entified existence is that it itself is that very being existent and entified reality and source of abstraction of the concept 'existent,' not that it becomes an existent by means of some other existence.

Second Objection: The other fallacy is the claims that if entified reality is an essential instance of existence this would mean that every reality exists by itself. This implies that every objective reality would be a necessary existent (wajib al- wujud), while only God, the Supreme, is existent-by-Himself.

Answer: The origin of this fallacy is a confusion between two senses of 'essentially' (bi al-dhat), and it is really an error of equivocation.

To explain, the expression 'essentially' (bi al-dhat, i.e., essentially or by itself) is sometimes used as the opposite of 'by another' (bi al-ghayr), meaning that it has no intermediary by which it is established, as it is said with respect to God, the Supreme, that He is 'existent-by-Himself' (mawjud bi al-dhat) or 'necessarily existent-by-Himself,' that is, not through something else, and He is not caused by any creator. To put it differently, the predication of 'existent' or 'necessary existent' to Him does not need any intermediary by which it would be established.

The same expression, essentially (bi al-dhat), is sometimes also used as the opposite of accidentally (bi

al-‘aradh), meaning that the predication of the predicate does not need an intermediary in its occurrence (‘urudh), even if it does need an intermediary in its establishment (thubut), as, in accordance with the fundamentality of existence, we say: “Entified reality is an ‘essential’ instance of existent, but whatness is an accidental instance of it.”

According to the second sense, both the existence of God, the Supreme, which has no intermediary in its establishment and according to the first sense is also ‘essential,’ is an essential instance of existence, and also the existence of creatures, which is established by an intermediary, caused by the Creator.

This means that being an existent is the true attribute of their existence, not the attribute of their whatness. From a philosophical point of view, existence is accidentally attributed to whatnesses.

[1.](#) Cf. Al-Tahsil, p. 286

[2.](#) Sound dialectic, jadal ahsan, is argument based on premises that are not only accepted by both sides but are also correct. [Tr.]

[3.](#) Cf. Al-Asfar, Vol. 1, p. 198; Vol. 2, p. 236.

## Lesson 28: Unity and Multiplicity

### Remarks on Some Issues Pertaining to Whatnesses

Essential concepts are either simple or compound. Two simple whatish concepts naturally cannot have a common aspect and will be completely distinct from one another, for it is supposed that there is a common aspect between them, which would be their own simple whatness, so that there would be no other aspect by which they could be distinguished, then they would not be numerically distinct and there would not be more than a single whatness.

If it is supposed that in addition to their common aspect each of them has a distinguishing aspect, then each of them would be composed of two whatish aspects, which is contrary to the supposition that they are simple.

So, two simple whatish concepts must be distinct in their entirety (bi tamam al-dhat). However, if one or both of them are compound, they may be supposed to have different forms.

In classical logic, compound whatnesses have at least two parts, one common part called the genus, which is a vague and indeterminate concept, obtained through comparison (tardid) among several different species, and one specific part called the difference, which causes the determination of the genus (to a single species). It is said that the whatness of man is composed of the concept of ‘animal’ and the concept of ‘rational,’ the first of which is common between the species of animals, and the

second of which is the specific difference of man.

The concept of genus, in turn, can also be compound, having a higher and more general genus, as the concept of 'body' includes animal, vegetable and mineral. But the concepts of differences are considered simple and incapable of being compound.

Finally, for all compound whatnesses, ten highest simple genera, or ten 'categories' are supposed, as follows: substance (jawhar), quantity (kamiyyah), quality (kayfiyyah), relation (idhafah), posture (wadh'), spatial locus (ayna), temporal locus (mata), possession (jadah), action (an yaf'al) (states of gradual effects), passion (an yanfa'il) (states of being affected passively and gradually).<sup>1</sup>

Regarding the number of the categories (the highest genera), and whether they are all really whatish concepts (first intelligibles), or at least whether some of them (such as relation and categories which are composed of relational concepts) are secondary intelligibles, there is controversy among the philosophers, but we shall not consider this matter further.

According to the logical apparatus of genus and difference, and based upon [the idea that] all compound whatnesses lead to some categories, they may be distinguished in two ways. One is a distinction among them in their entirety, and that is when two whatnesses pertaining to two categories are compared there is not even a common genus between them, for example, the concept of man and the concept of whiteness.

Secondly, their distinction may be partial, in case two whatnesses are compared from a single category, for example, the concept of horse and the concept of cow, which are common in animality, corporeality, and substantiality.

It may be concluded that whole whatnesses (species), if simple, will be distinguished and distinct from each other in their entirety; likewise if they are compound and from two categories. Also differences and highest genera, which are all considered to be simple concepts, are distinguished from one another in their entireties. No genus may be supposed to include all whatnesses. Therefore, there is not even one whatish element which can be considered to be common among all whatnesses.

On the other hand, the concept of existence, which is a secondary philosophical intelligible, is considered to be a simple, determinate, general and absolute concept which when added to a whatness individuates and limits it. The concept of existence specified and limited in this way is called a 'share' (hissah, lit. also 'part,' 'quotient') of the universal concept of existence.

In this way, expressions such as 'simplicity,' 'composition,' 'indeterminate,' 'determinate,' 'common' and 'distinct,' 'general' and 'specified,' 'absolute' and 'limited,' have appeared in the cases above, and the expression 'individuation' (tashakhkhus) mentioned in previous chapters, should be added to them.

But among these there are two pivotal concepts, the concepts of unity and multiplicity. We now turn to

the explanation of these two concepts.

## Types of Unity and Multiplicity

Each, specific whatness differs from the others. If two whatnesses are simple, then they will not even have a single common aspect, and likewise two compound whatnesses of two categories also will not have a common aspect. In view of the fact that a whatness may be considered by itself or along with other whatnesses, two opposite concepts may be abstracted: 'one' and 'many.'

The unity which is related to each complete whatness is called specific unity. The reiteration of its form in one or more minds does not damage its unity, for what is meant is conceptual unity, not the unity of its mental existence.

Likewise, when we consider a common essential aspect of several compound whatnesses, another sort of unity is attributed to it, called generic unity.

In contrast to these two types of unity, there is also numerical unity, which is predicated to each individual belonging to a whatness. Its criterion is the same individuation the ancient philosophers considered to be due to individuating accidents. The correct [position] is that this individuation and this unity are essential attributes of individual existence, accidentally attributed to whatness.

The individuals of a whatness which have an essential numerical multiplicity are called, 'one by species,' likewise the species which are of a single genus and are essentially multiple in species are called 'one by genus.' It is clear that these two types of unity are not true attributes of individuals and species, but are attributed to them accidentally.

It is to be concluded from this that essential whatish unity is an attribute of species and genus, and is predicated accidentally to individuals and species. To the contrary, individual unity is really an attribute of individual existence and is attributed accidentally to whatness.

On the other hand, individuals in the external world have numerically distinct existences to which multiplicity is essentially attributed. However, considering that they are of a single whatness, they are called 'one by species,' and various species which essentially are a multiplicity of species are called 'one by genus' with respect to their unity of genus.

Therefore, each existence in the external world has an individual unity. When more than one of these is taken into consideration, multiplicity is attributed to them. Each of these two attributes, which are abstracted concepts and secondary intelligibles, are abstracted, according to [the doctrine of] the fundamentality of existence, from the existence of the existents. Hence, the existence also has unity and multiplicity beyond whatish unity and multiplicity.

From this it may be guessed that various numbers, which are instances of multiplicity, are also

secondary intelligibles, not primary intelligibles or whatish categories as most philosophers have held. Other reasons could also be mentioned in support of this, which shall not be presented here.

On the other hand, according to the fundamentality of whatness, whatish multiplicity is always a sign of the multiplicity of entified objective existents, for each of them by supposition refers to a specific entified aspect, although the multiplicity of existents in the external world does not always imply whatish multiplicity, as the multiplicity of individuals of a single whatness is not incompatible with the unity of their whatness.

With attention to this point, the question may be raised as to whether the multiplicity of whatnesses, in accordance with the fundamentality of existence, reveals the multiplicity of their existences or whether it is possible that several whatnesses are abstracted from one existence, at least in different stages.

In this way, other questions about existence may be raised, such as whether the existences of like complete whatnesses, especially simple whatnesses, must necessarily also be distinct, isolated and distinguished from each other, or whether it is possible that they are governed by a kind of unity specific to existence.

However, prior to beginning the discussion of this subject, an explanation is necessary about the use of the expression *wahdah* (unity) with respect to existence.

## **The Unity of the Concept of Existence**

Conceptual unity and multiplicity are not limited to whatnesses, even if the terms ‘unity of species’ and ‘unity of whatness’ are specific to them. Every concept, no matter whether it is a philosophical or logical secondary intelligible, is incompatible with another concept, such that unity may be attributed to each of them, and multiplicity to the collection of them. Plurality and multiplicity in equivocal concepts and conceptual unity in univocal concepts especially have many applications.

The concept of existence, which is also considered as a philosophical secondary intelligible, is incompatible with other concepts. As was mentioned in Lesson Twenty-Two, it is a single concept which is univocal among various instances.

This concept not only is unlike compound whatnesses, which reduce to genus and difference, but because of being simple it is also devoid of any other kind of composition. On the other hand, it cannot be considered a part of any whatness, as genus or difference, for it is not a whatish concept.

It follows that although the concept of existence has neither unity of species nor unity of genus, nevertheless, as is required by univocity, conceptual unity may be attributed to it, as with other secondary intelligibles.

However, the conceptual unity of existence does not mean that it is equally and uniformly applied to all

of its instances. Rather, it is a 'graduated' concept, whose predications to cases differ. In order to clarify this point, it is necessary to explain the terms 'graduated' (mushakkak) and 'uniform' (mutawati).

## The Graduated and the Uniform

Universal concepts, with regard to the quality of application to instances, are divided into two groups:

Uniform concepts are those whose applications to all individuals are equal, and the individuals of which have no priority or precedence or other differences in being instances of that concept. For example, the concept of body is equally predicated of all its instances. There is no body which in respect to its corporeality has any preference over other bodies, although each of the bodies has its own specific [properties] and some of them have advantages over the others, but with regard to the application of the concept of body, there is no difference among them.

However, graduated concepts are those whose applications to individuals, their instances, are different. Some of them have preference over others with respect to being instances of such concepts, as all lines are not the same with respect to being instances of length, and the instantiation of a line of one meter is more than the instantiation of a line of one centimeter. Or, the concept of black is not predicated equally to all its instances, some of which are blacker than others.

The concept of existence is of this sort, and the application of existence to things is not equal. There are priorities and precedences among them, as in the application of existence to God the Almighty, which has no kind of limitation and cannot be compared with its application to other existences.

There are discussions about the mystery of the differences in the applications of graduated concepts, and about whether whatish concepts are capable of being graduated in and of themselves or not, and basically, how many kinds of graduation there are.

The proponents of the fundamentality of whatness have accepted several kinds of graduation, such as amount (e.g., length) in quantities, and graduation in weakness and intensity (e.g., color) in qualities. However, proponents of the fundamentality of existence consider graduation in whatness to be accidental, and the sources of these differences are presented as differences in existence.

In addition to this, Sadr al-Muta'allihin and the followers of his transcendent theosophy call this sort of graduation 'common graduation.' They hold that there is another sort of graduation for the entified truth of existence which is called 'special graduation,' a feature of which is that two instances of existence will not be independent of each other, but one will be considered as a level of the other. Some others of a gnostic disposition also mention another kind of graduation, which need not be explained.

<sup>1</sup> This list is the same as Aristotle's (and that of Ibn Sina). Note that possession is usually called milk in Arabic; here it is *jidah*. Cf. Parviz Morewedge, *The Metaphysics of Avicenna (ibn Sina)* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 187. For a more elaborate treatment of the Aristotelian categories in Islamic philosophy, see D. Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian*

# Lesson 29: Unity and Multiplicity in Entified Existence

## Individual Unity

In the previous lesson there was a discussion of one kind of unity of entified realities, and that was the unity of each individual that is individuated from a whatness, that is, when the intellect considers an individual of a whatness and compares it with the whatness itself, and the difference is noted that whatness can be applied to individuals but individuals do not have this feature, 'individuality' is abstracted from the individual.

When an individual is compared with several individuals, and numerosity is not seen in a single individual, unity is abstracted from it. Hence it is said, "Existence, individuality and unity are equivalent, and whatever exists is individuated and a unit in this respect." Of course, it should be noted that what is meant by this unity is individual unity, not absolute unity, and it does not include specific unity or generic unity.

At this point the question will be raised of how the unity of an objective existent can be known. How can we be certain that an existent which we have imagined to be a 'unit' is really 'one existent' and has 'one existence'?

Philosophers often dismissively answered this question by an appeal to its clarity, but there are murky points in the environs of this question which must be explained properly.

If an existent is simple and unanalyzable, such as the sacred Divine Essence, and all immaterial things, it will naturally have a single existence. Of course, the existence of nonmaterial things and their simplicity are proved by demonstration, and only the existence of the soul and its simplicity can be consciously discovered through presentational knowledge. In general it may be said that every simple existent has a unitary existence.

However, with respect to material and analyzable existents it is not easy to prove their unity. Superficially, every existent which is continuous, and the supposed parts of which are not separated from each other, is considered to be a unitary existent having a unitary existence. But when we examine this matter closely, we are faced with two murky points.

One is whether bodies which appear to be continuous and monolithic are really so, or whether we

merely imagine them to be connected due to visual errors.

Providing an answer to this question is the job of the natural sciences, and as far as we know, with the help of scientific instruments it has been proven that bodies are not really continuous and are only apparently monolithic, and they are composed of very tiny particles which are separate from each other.

From a philosophical point of view, we may say that since no body lacks extension, each of the particles of bodies, no matter how tiny, will ultimately be continuous and have unity of continuity.

The second murky and questionable point, which is more important, is whether, supposing that the continuity of the parts of a corporeal body is established, how is it to be known that there is no other sort of multiplicity in it?

It may be replied that a continuous and monolithic existent will not have actual multiplicity, however much it may be analyzable and multiple potentially, but if it is analyzed, other existents will be obtained each of which will have its own special unity.

This reply, although it may be correct for the geometrical amounts and quantities of bodies, cannot be considered a complete and comprehensive answer. For with respect to this question the point may be raised as to whether, supposing that two different bodies are brought together so that there remains no space between them and, by way of a rough example, if two pieces of metal are welded together, can they be considered to be a unitary existent having unitary existence, or must they be considered multiple, having several existences?

It is possible that an answer will be given to this question according to which since two pieces of metal possess two different whatnesses, and naturally each of them is a different individual from the other, therefore they cannot be considered to be a single existent.

However, this answer is based on the supposition that the multiplicity of whatnesses reveals a multiplicity in entified existence, while this has not been proven. In other words, the multiplicity which has been established here is really an attribute of whatness not of existence, while the discussion concerns unity and plurality of entified existence.

On the other hand, a more precise question may be posed as to how we know that a continuous existent possessing a continuous unity does not possess two superimposed existences, such that one rides upon the other and sense is not able to differentiate their duality?

To explain, just as each of our senses is able to perceive one of the features of bodies (for example, our eyes see its color, our olfactory sense smells its scent, and our gustatory sense perceives its taste) without removing the unity of the body which possesses all of these senses, in the same way, it is possible that there may be a multiplicity in bodies which our senses do not have the power to perceive.

In other words, the unity and multiplicity of sensory perceptions does not provide sufficient reason for the

unity and multiplicity of entified existence. Hence, there remains the possibility that a body which itself has geometrically continuous unity possesses another multiplicity, as some philosophers have held with respect to different substantial forms, for example, an animal is known to possess several forms vertically: an elemental form, a mineral form, a vegetable form and an animal form.

The answer to this question is to be found in the ensuing lessons, and here we may say in summary form that the composition of bodies can be imagined to take several forms:

1. Composition of quantitative parts which do not have actual existence, but which come about as a result of analysis. This kind of composition is not at all contrary to actual unity.
2. Composition of matter and form, under the supposition that the existence of matter is a potential existence. This form also does not interfere with unity, and from one view it is similar to the previous supposition.
3. Composition of matter and form, under the supposition that matter also has actual existence other than the existence of the form. Also, composition among forms are each of which is vertically above the other. According to this supposition, an existent is considered a unit because of the unity of its highest form, and is related to all of them by accident, and it would be better to call them 'unified' rather than a 'unit.'
5. Composition among several actual existents which are on one plane horizontally and none of which is a form higher than the others, even if some kind of continuity and connection exists among them, such as the composition of the parts of a clock and other machines, which is called 'mechanical composition.' Under this assumption, the composed collection cannot be considered as a 'unit' or even 'unified' from a philosophical point of view; rather it must be construed as multiple existents, and as possessing a conventional (i'tibari) unity.
6. Composition among several disjoint existents which are viewed as having a kind of unity among them, such as composition of a corps of an army of several divisions, and the composition of a division of several regiments, and the composition of a regiment of several battalions, and the composition of a battalion of several companies, and so on to a number of soldiers.

Likewise, the composition of the society is into institutions, social classes and groups, and finally the composition of these by individual human beings. From the philosophical point of view, this sort of composition is also based on convention. This sort of composition cannot be considered to have true unity.

Two other sorts of objective composition may be added to the mentioned kinds: chemical composition and organic composition, such as the composition of living existents of several organic and chemical substances.

But from a philosophical point of view, the truth is that these compositions are not a special kind, but according to some philosophers belong to the second type, and according to other philosophers are of the third type. Perhaps the latter view is more correct, especially with regard to living existents.

In conclusion, we should recall that philosophers consider another kind of composition which includes all contingent things, and that is the composition of existence and whatness, which has been discussed. According to this terminology, simple existence is limited to the sacred Divine Essence. But this composition is analytical and mental rather than objective and entified.

It follows that unity may be attributed to material existents in several forms, some of which are true unity, like the continuous unity of [subatomic] particles, and the unity of form which has a simple existence. Some others are conventional unities, like mechanical unity and social unity.

However, regarding the composition of matter and form, if we hold that matter does not have actual existence and that every corporeal existent has but one actual existence, which is the very existence of its form, naturally it will have a real unity.

However, if we hold that matter also has an actual existence, and in other words if we hold that 'prime matter' is not to be accepted as a potential existent, then we must consider each of them to have a specific existence, and the collection of them would be called 'united' rather than a 'unit.'

Also if we believe in vertical and superimposed forms we must consider the collection of them 'plural,' and it is only because of the unity of the highest form that we can regard all of them as a unit by accident, as we regard the collection of the human spirit and body as one existent, while in reality its unity is due to the unity of the spirit.

## [The Unity of the World](#)

The unity which has been established until now for each entified existent by no means negates the plurality of the collection of them. However, another unity for the whole world may be proposed which negates its plurality and multiplicity, as it is well known that philosophers consider the world as a 'unit.' However this opinion can be interpreted in several ways.

1. [The first interpretation is] the view that the unity of the world is the continuous unity of the natural world, as philosophers have proposed in discussions of natural philosophy under the heading 'the impossibility of a vacuum,' and with various explanations they have tried to prove that between two natural existents a pure vacuum is impossible, and that in places where it is imagined that there is no existent, in reality there exist rarefied subtle bodies which are capable of being perceived by the senses. On this basis it has been argued that if two or several natural worlds are supposed, if they were connected and attached to one another they would have a continuous unity, and they would compose a single world. If among them a true vacuum were supposed, such that it would completely separate and

isolate them from one another, this would refute the arguments against the existence of a vacuum.

2. [The second interpretation is] the view that it is the unity of the system of the natural world, meaning that natural existents are always effecting and being effected by one another, acting and reacting, and no natural existent can be found which neither effects other natural existents nor is effected by them. By their own activities contemporaneous existents prepare the ground for the appearance of later existents, and they themselves appear as a result of the activities of previous existents.

Therefore, the entire natural world is ruled by these relations of material cause and effect, and hence, it can be considered to have a single system. But it is clear that this unity is in reality an attribute of the system which does not have an entified existence independent of the innumerable existents of the world. On this basis, one cannot prove the true unity of the natural world.

3. [The third interpretation is] the view that unity of the world is in the shadow of the unity of a form such that all of the parts of the world are united under its umbrella, just as the parts of a plant or an animal are united under the shadow of the unity of their own substantial forms.

The single form which can be supposed for the whole world so that it also includes living existents such as man and animals, unavoidably will have another spirit which can be called the universal soul or the spirit of the world.

Some philosophers have gone even further to include nonmaterial beings and all but God, and in this way they have regarded the First Intellect or the most perfect contingent existent as a form for all that is below it.

Likewise, many of the gnostics ('urafa) have called the world the 'Cosmic Man.' However, thus far we have not encountered a proof of this matter, and particularly, to call a perfectly nonmaterial existent, such as the First Intellect, the form of the world is not devoid of loose talk.

In any case, this assumption also does not mean the negation of the real multiplicity of the parts of the world, for this unity, in reality, is an attribute of that very transcendental form of the world, and is only accidentally attributed to the whole world, as was said with regard to the unity of the spirit and the body.

It should not remain unsaid that the acceptance of this unity of the world requires acceptance of the third mentioned kind of composition, while the acceptance of that type of composition does not require the acceptance of such unity.

# Lesson 30: The Levels of Existence

## Positions on the Unity and Plurality of Being

We know that the individual unity of every entified existent is not contrary to the real plurality of all existents. Likewise, the continuous unity of the material world is not contrary to the plurality of material existents, a plurality which is obtained in the shadow of the multiplicity of different forms. We also know that the unity of the order of the world does not mean its real unity.

However, the individual unity of the world, taken to be a living existent having a spirit, cannot be established, and on the assumption that it could be established, it would be an accidental unity. Any way, the subject of unity in the three mentioned suppositions pertains to the natural world, or at most, to the world of contingent beings. The question now is whether or not a unity can be proven for all being, including the sacred Divine Essence.

In this regard, four positions may be indicated:

1. The position of the sufis, who consider real existence to be limited to the sacred Divine Essence, and they consider all other existents to have a metaphorical existence. This position is known as 'wahdat-e wujud wa mawjud' (the unity of existence and existent). This position appears to be contrary to what is obvious and [given by] consciousness. However, it is possible to give this position some sort of interpretation, according to which it can be taken as a form of another position, the fourth position, to be mentioned below.
2. The position of Dawwani, which considers [unity] to be demanded by the 'divine temperament,' which is known as 'wahdat-e wujud wa kathrat-e mawjud' (the unity of existence and the plurality of existents). According to this position, true existence is specific to God, the Exalted, while 'true existent' also includes creatures, but in the sense of 'being related to true existence,' not in the sense of 'having true existence.'

Likewise, some [morphological] respectivals also convey this meaning, for example, tamir, which is derived from tamr (date), which means date-seller and is related to dates, and the expression mushammas, which means something upon which the light of the sun shines, derives its meaning from shams, the sun, and the relation to the sun here is obvious.

This position is also unacceptable, for despite the fact that the words tamir and mushammas may be related to date selling and sunshine, this position implies that the expression 'mawjud' has two different meanings, involving a kind of ambiguity. However, there is no ambiguity with regard to wujud; so, it is also unacceptable with regard to mawjud. Moreover, the position mentioned is based on the fundamentality of whatness with regard to the Creator, which is incorrect, as became clear in Lesson

Twenty–Seven.

3. The third position is related to the peripatetics, and is known as the ‘plurality of existence and of existent.’ According to this position, the plurality of existents is undeniable, and necessarily each of them will have its own specific existence, and since existence is a simple reality, so, every existence will be completely distinct (bi tamam–e dhat) from every other existence.

The following argument can be given for this position: one of these cases has to be true of existences: [i] all of them are real unitary individuals; such as individuals of a single kind, [ii] they are of various kinds of a single genus, such as the participation of various species of animals in the genus animal; [iii] none of them have any essential aspect in common, and are completely distinct. This third alternative corresponds to the third position [mentioned above] which is currently under consideration, and with the refutation of the other two alternatives, it would be established.

However, the invalidity of the second position is clear, for it implies that the reality of existence is composed of a common aspect and a distinguishing aspect that is, composed of genus and difference and it does not correspond to the simplicity of the reality of existence, and this goes back to the fact that existence is really itself that common aspect, and by the addition of something else to it, it takes various forms of species. But in the world of being, nothing can be found other than existence which could be added to it as an entified distinguishing aspect.

However, the first alternative implies that existence, like natural universals, takes the form of different individuals with the addition of individuating accidents. But the question may be repeated regarding these accidents, for they are also existents, and according to our assumption all existents possess a unitary reality, so how, on the one hand, can any difference appear between accidents and that which possesses them, and among accidents themselves, on the other hand, so that with such differences there should be different individual existents?

In other words, if it is supposed that there is something in common among entified existents, this will either be a complete sharing, meaning that existence has a specific whatness, and has multiple individuals, or it will be a partial sharing, which implies that existence has a generic whatness, and has different species.

Both assumptions are invalid. Hence there is no other option but to admit that entified existences are completely distinct. But this argument is not perfect, because the threefold alternative we assumed regarding the entified reality of existence, were taken from the principles governing whatness.

An effort was made to establish the essential distinction among existences, like the distinction among simple whatnesses, by denying that existence is composed of genus and difference, and likewise by denying that it is composed of specific nature and individuating accidents. Nevertheless, what is common among existences in the reality of existence is not a common genus or species, nor is their distinction of the sort that distinguishes simple species.

It follows that such an argument is unable to refute the co-participation of entified existences in any form other than that of having a common species or genus. It will soon become clear that another kind of unity and participation can be established for entified realities.

4. The fourth position is one which Sadr al-Muta'allihin has ascribed to the ancient Iranian sages, and is one which he himself has accepted, and has tried to explain and establish. It has become known as 'unity in plurality itself.' According to this view, entified realities of existence both have unity and commonness with one another and also have differences and distinctions.

However that which is held in common and that which distinguishes them is not of such a kind as to cause composition in entified existence or to make it analyzable into genus and difference. Their differences result from weakness and intensity, like the difference between intense light and weak light, where the weakness and intensity here is nothing other than the light. Intense light is nothing but light.

Weak light is also nothing but light. At the same time, they differ with respect to their weakness and intensity. But this difference does not interfere with the simplicity of the reality of light which is common among all of them. In other words: entified existences have graduated differences, and that which distinguishes them results from that which they have in common.

Of course, the analogy between levels of existence and levels of light is only to make it easier for the mind to understand, otherwise material light is not a simple reality (although most of the ancient philosophers imagined that it was a simple accident). On the other hand, existence has a special sort of gradualness, contrary to the gradualness of light which is a more general sort of gradualness. The difference between the two was clarified in Lesson Twenty- Eight.

However, this position may be interpreted in two ways: first, there is the difference in the level of existence between one existence and another existence, which is considered to obtain among individuals of one whatness or of several whatnesses of the same horizontal level; second, there is the difference in levels which is considered to obtain exclusively between real causes and their effects.

Since all existents are directly or indirectly the effects of God, the Exalted, it follows that the world of being is composed of an absolutely independent existence and innumerable dependent relative existences, such that each cause is relatively independent in relation to its effect, and in this respect is more complete and possesses a higher level of existence, even if effects on the same horizontal level, which have no relations of cause and effect among each other, do not have such a gradualness, and from one point of view, they are reckoned to be completely distinct (bi tamam-e dhat).

However, the first interpretation is quite far-fetched and is unacceptable, even though it is apparently indicated in some places by Sadr al-Muta'allihin and his followers.

Let it not remain unsaid that he interpreted the words of the gnostics ('urafa') and sufi researchers to have this same meaning, and considered what they meant by 'true [or literal] existent and existence'

(mawjud wa wujud-e haqiqi) to be the absolute, independent existent and existence, and he interpreted what they meant by 'figurative existent and existence' (mawjud wa wujud-e majazi) to be dependent and relative existent and existence.

## **The First Argument for Graduated Levels of Existence**

Arguments can be given of two sorts for the graduated levels of existence, one of which corresponds to the first interpretation [mentioned above] and the other of which corresponds to the second interpretation. The first argument is that of Sadr al-Muta'allihin and his followers which has been discussed in this lesson; the second is obtained from their explanations of cause and effect.

The first argument, in reality, is about the establishment of that which is entified in common among objective realities. This may be explained as meaning that the fourth position may be divided into two cases: one is that multiplicity is attributed to objective existences and unavoidably these existences have distinctions among them; the other case is that that which distinguishes among them is not incompatible with that which is in common among them, and all of them, in their very multiplicity, are in possession of that which they have in common, which is neither inconsistent with their simplicity nor with their multiplicity.

Since the first case is self-evident and undeniable, they have directed their efforts to proving the second case.

This argument is that from all entified realities a single concept, which is that very concept of existence, may be abstracted. The abstraction of this single concept from multiple realities is reason that there is a entified [reality] in common among them which is the source of the abstraction of the single concept. If there were not any unitary aspect among objective existences such a single concept would not be abstracted.

This argument is based on two premises: one is that the concept of existence is a single univocal concept. This was proven in Lesson Twenty-Two.

The other premise is that the abstraction of a single concept from multiple things shows that there is a single common aspect among them. The reason for this is that if a single aspect were not necessary for the abstraction of a single concept this would imply that its abstraction would be without any criterion, and then any concept could be abstracted from anything, while the invalidity of this is clear.

In this way it is to be concluded that entified existences possess something objective in common. Then another premise is added, that entified existence is simple and has a single entified aspect. It cannot be considered to be composed of two distinct aspects. So, the distinctive aspect of entified existences will not be incompatible with the common aspect of unity among them, that is, the difference among the existences will be graduated signifying the different levels of a single reality.

However, this argument appears to be controvertible, for, as was indicated in Lesson Twenty–One, the unity and multiplicity of secondary intelligibles is not a decisive reason for the unity and multiplicity of entified objective aspects; rather, it corresponds to the unity and multiplicity of viewpoints which the intellect has in abstracting these kinds of concepts.

Often the intellect abstracts numerous concepts from a single simple reality, as of the sacred Divine Essence, from which it abstracts the concepts of existence, knowledge, power and life, while no kind of multiplicity or plurality of entified aspects is conceivable for that lofty station. And how often the intellect looks at different realities from a single viewpoint and abstracts from all of them a single concept, as the concept of unity is abstracted from various objective realities.

The concepts of existence and existent are of the same sort, as is the abstraction of the concept of accident from the nine categories; and the abstraction of the whatish concepts, category and highest genus from all the ten categories, although Sadr al–Muta'allihin believed that they had nothing essentially in common among them.

Therefore, the unity of such concepts merely shows the unity of the viewpoint the intellect has in abstracting them, not the unity of the entified aspects in common among them. If there is such an aspect, it should be proved in some other way.

## **The Second Argument for Graduated Levels of Existence**

The second argument is composed of premises which are proved in the section on cause and effect, and perhaps this has prevented it from being discussed in this context [pertaining to the grades of existence]. However, due to its importance we shall mention these premises as something given, while they will be proven in their own proper place.

The first premise is that there is a cause and effect relation among existents, and there is no existent which falls outside of the chain of causes and effects. Of course, only 'being a cause' ('illiyah; lit., 'causehood') is attributed to the existent at the head of the chain, and only 'being an effect' (ma'luliyah; lit., 'effecthood') is attributed to the existent at the end of the chain. In any case, no existent lacks both the relation neither of being a cause nor of being an effect to any other existent, such that it is neither a cause nor an effect of something.

The second premise is that the entified existence of an effect is not independent of the existence of its creating cause. It is not true that each of them possesses an independent existence, and that they are joined by means of a relation external to their existences; rather, the existence of an effect has no sort of independence whatsoever from its creating cause. In other words, it is the very relation and dependence on its cause, not something independent which has a relation with its cause, as is observed in the relation between an act of will and the soul.

This topic is the noblest of all philosophical topics, and it has been established by the late Sadr al-Muta'allihin. By means of it he has opened a way to the solution of many philosophical perplexities. Truly, it must be considered one of the most eminent and exquisite fruits of Islamic philosophy.

From the addition of these two premises the conclusion is obtained that the existence of all effects in relation to their creating cause, and ultimately to the sacred divine Being, which is the source of emanation of all existences other than Itself, is that very dependence. All creatures are in reality manifestations of the Divine existence.

In accordance with their own levels they possess intensity and weaknesses, priority and posteriority, and some of them are relatively independent of others; but absolute independence is reserved for the sacred Divine Essence.

Thus, the whole of being is composed of a chain of entified existences, in which the 'strength' (qiwam) of each link, with regard to its level of existence in relation to it, is more limited and weaker than that of the link above.

This same weakness and limitation is the criterion for being an effect. [The chain continues upward] until it reaches the source of being which is of unlimited intensity of existence and which encompasses all the levels of contingency, and sustains the existence of all of them. There is no existent which is independent and without need of It in any aspect or facet, but rather they are all poor, needy and dependent on Him.

By this existential relation is meant a special sort of unity which negates the independence of every existent except the Holy Divine Existence, and the concept of which only applies to entified existence and is naturally based upon the fundamentality of existence.

When one considers independent being, it will have no other instance than the infinite Divine Being. For this reason independent being must be considered unitary, and this is a unity which is not susceptible to multiplicity. For this reason it is called 'true unity' (wahdat-e haqqah).

When one turns one's attention to the levels of existence and its manifestations, multiplicity is attributed to them; however, at the same time a kind of unity must be admitted among them. For since the effect is not the cause, it cannot be considered a second to it, but rather must be considered as being sustained by the cause, and an aspect from among the aspects of the cause and a manifestation among its manifestations.

By their 'union' (ittihad) is meant that in the context of its own being, one has no independence in relation to the other, although the expression 'union' (ittihad) is vague and inadequate, and the proper meaning of it is not commonly discerned, and this leads to misunderstandings.

It is obvious without further comment that this exposition does not negate the multiplicity of existences at

the same level in some links of the chain, such as the natural universe, and this does not require that individuals of one or several whatnesses of the same degree differ in their grades [of being]; rather the differences among them are to be considered distinctions with the entirety of their simple existences.

---

**Source URL:**

<https://www.al-islam.org/philosophical-instructions-muhammad-taqi-misbah-yazdi/part-3-ontology>