

# Philosophy

## What Is Philosophy?

### Literal and Semantic Definitions

The logicians say that when one asks about the whatness of a thing, one is actually asking various things. Sometimes one is asking the conceptual meaning of a word. That is, when we ask what a thing is, we are asking about the very word. In asking about its whatness, we seek to know the lexical or idiomatic meaning of that word. Suppose in reading a book we run across the word *pupak* (hoopoe) and do not know its meaning. We ask someone, “What is a *pupak*?” He replies, “*Pupak* is the name of a bird.”

Or suppose we run across the word *kalima* (word) in the terminology of the logicians and we ask someone, “What does *kalima* mean in the terminology of the logicians?” He says, “*Kalima* in the terminology of the logicians is equivalent to *fi’l* (verb) in the language of the grammarians.” Plainly, the relation between word and meaning is conventional and terminological, whether the terminology is restricted or general.

In answering such a question, one must search out instances of usage or consult a dictionary. Such a question may have numerous answers, all of them correct, because it is possible for a single word to have various meaning in various contexts. For instance, a word may have a special meaning in the usage of the logicians and the philosophers, and another in that of the grammarians.

The word *kalima* has one meaning in common usage and in the usage of grammarians and another meaning in the usage of the logicians. Or, the word *qiyas* (analogy, syllogism) has one meaning in the usage of the logicians and another in the usage of the jurists and the legists. When a word has two or more meanings within a single body of usages, one must say that it has this meaning in this expression, and that in that. Answers given to such questions are called verbal definitions.

Sometimes when one inquires into the whatness of a thing, what one seeks is not the meaning of the

word, but the reality of its referent. We do not ask, “What is the meaning of this word?” We know the meaning of the word, but not the reality and suchness of its referent. For instance, if we ask, “What is man?” we do not seek to know what the word “man” has been coined to mean. We all know that this word is applied to this bipedal, upright-postured, speaking being. We seek instead to know the identity and the reality of man. Plainly, in this case there can be only one correct answer, called the real definition.

The verbal definition is prior to the real definition. That is, one must ascertain first the conceptual meaning of the word, and then the real definition of the referent so delineated. Otherwise fallacies and pointless disputes will arise because a word has numerous lexical and idiomatic meanings, and this multiplicity of meanings is easily overlooked. Any party may define a word by a special meaning and idiomatic usage, heedless of the fact that it is envisioning something different from what another party has envisioned. So they dispute pointlessly.

The failure to distinguish the meaning of the word from the reality of its referent sometimes results in the transformation and evolution that take place in the meaning of the word being ascribed to the reality of its referent. For instance, a certain word may at first be applied to a whole and then, through changes in usage, to a part of that whole. If one fails to distinguish the meaning of the word from the reality of its referent, he will suppose that that whole actually has been fragmented, whereas in fact no change has occurred in the whole, but rather the word applying to it has been displaced in meaning to apply to a part of that whole.

Just such an error in regard to the word “philosophy” has overtaken all of Western philosophy and its imitators in the East. Philosophy is an idiomatic word and has found numerous and various idiomatic meanings. Various parties of philosophers have defined philosophy each in a special way, but this discrepancy in definition does not bear on any reality. Each party has used this word in a special sense, which it has defined as its object. What one party calls philosophy, another does not call philosophy; the latter will completely deny its value, call it something else, or regard it as part of another science. So neither party will regard the other as philosophers. I shall take these various usages into account.

## [The Word “Philosophy”](#)

*Falsafa* has a Greek origin. This word is an Arabic verbal noun derived from the Greek word *philosophia*, which is a compound of *philos* and *sophia*, the former meaning love, the latter, wisdom. Therefore, *philosophia* means love of wisdom. Plato called Socrates a *philosophos* in the sense of his being a lover of wisdom.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the word *falsafa* is an Arabicization, a verbal noun, meaning the work or pursuit of philosophers.

Before Socrates, a party appeared calling themselves the Sophists, meaning the scholars. They made human perception the measure of reality and used fallacious arguments in their deductions. Gradually, “sophist” (*sophistes*) lost its original meaning and came to mean one who makes use of fallacious

arguments. Thus we have the word “sophistry,” which has the cognate in Arabic *safsafa*, with the same meaning.

Socrates, out of humility and also perhaps a desire to avoid being identified with the Sophists, forbade people to call him a *sophistes*, a scholar.<sup>2</sup> He therefore called himself a *philosophos*, a lover of wisdom. Gradually, *philosophos*, with its original sense of lover of wisdom, displaced *sophistes* as meaning scholar, and the latter was downgraded to its modern sense of one who uses fallacious reasoning. *Philosophia* became synonymous with wisdom. Therefore, *philosophos* as a technical term had been applied to no one before Socrates, and it was not applied to anyone immediately after him. The term *philosophia*, too, had no definite meaning in those days; it is said that not even Aristotle used it. Later, use of the terms *philosophia* and *philosophos* became widespread.

## Muslim Usage

The Muslims took the word “philosophy” from the Greeks. They gave it an Arabic form and an Eastern nuance, using it to mean pure rational knowledge. Philosophy in the common Muslim usage did not refer to a special discipline or science; it embraced all rational sciences, as opposed to transmitted sciences, such as etymology, syntax, declension, rhetoric, stylistics, prosody, exegesis, tradition, and jurisprudence. Because this word had a generic meaning, only one who comprehended all the rational sciences of his time, including theology, mathematics, the natural sciences, politics, ethics, and domestic economy, would be called a philosopher. Thus it was said, “Whoever is a philosopher becomes a world of knowledge, analogous to the objective world.”

When Muslims sought to reproduce Aristotle's classification of the sciences, they used the words *falsafa* or *hikma*. They said, “Philosophy, that is, the rational science, has two divisions: the theoretical and the practical.”

Theoretical philosophy addresses things as they are; practical philosophy addresses man's actions as they ought to be. Theoretical philosophy is threefold: theology or high philosophy, mathematics or middle philosophy, and natural science or low philosophy. High philosophy, or theology, in turn comprehends two disciplines, general phenomenology and theology per se. Mathematics is fourfold, each of its areas being a science in itself: arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. Natural science has numerous divisions. Practical philosophy is divisible into ethics, domestic economy, and civics. The complete philosopher comprehends all these sciences.

## True Philosophy

In the philosophers' view, one area enjoys a special prominence among the numerous areas of philosophy. It is called first philosophy, high philosophy, the supreme science, the universal science, theology, or metaphysics. The ancients believed that one of the features distinguishing this science from all others is its firmer foundation on demonstration and certainty. Another is that it presides over all other

sciences; it is in truth the queen of the sciences because the others depend on it totally, but it has no such dependence on them. A third distinguishing feature is that it is more general and universal than any other science.<sup>3</sup> According to these philosophers, this science is the true philosophy. Accordingly, sometimes the word “philosophy” is restricted in application to this science, but this usage is rare.

Therefore, in the view of the ancient philosophers, the word “philosophy” had two meanings: one, the prevalent meaning of rational knowledge as such, including all but the transmitted sciences, and the other the rare meaning of theology, or first philosophy, one of the three divisions of theoretical philosophy.

Accordingly, there are two possibilities if we choose to define philosophy according to the usage of the ancients. First, if we adopt the common usage, because here philosophy is a generic term applying to no special science or discipline, it will have no special definition. It will mean all nontransmitted science. To be a philosopher will mean to comprehend all such sciences. It was in accordance with such a generalised conception of philosophy that it was said, “Philosophy is the perfection of the soul of man from both a theoretical standpoint and a practical one.”

Second, if we adopt the rarer usage, defining philosophy as that activity the ancients called true philosophy, first philosophy, or the supreme science, this will constitute a special definition for philosophy. The answer to the question “What is philosophy?” will be that philosophy consists of a science of the states of being from the standpoint that is being, not from the standpoint of its having a special individuation, for instance, of its being body, quantity, quality, man, vegetable, or what have you.

Our knowledge of things is of two kinds: It may be restricted to a certain species or genus; it may apply to the special states, determinations (*ahkam*),<sup>4</sup> and accidents (*avariz*) of a certain species or a certain genus, as does, for instance, our knowledge constituting the science of the determinations of numbers (arithmetic), of quantities (geometry), of the states and properties of plants (botany), or of the states, properties, and determinations of the human body (medicine or physiology). This sort of knowledge embraces the rest of the sciences, such as meteorology, geology, mineralogy, zoology, psychology, sociology, and atomics.

Or our knowledge may not be restricted to a certain species; that is, we may say that being has these determinations, states, and properties not from the standpoint that it is of a certain species but from the standpoint that it is being. Sometimes we study the universe from the standpoint of its plurality and discrete subjects, whereas sometimes we study it from the standpoint of unity; that is, we regard being from the standpoint that it is being as a unity, and we pursue our studies with a regard to this unity that embraces all things.

If we liken the universe to a body, we see that our studies of that body will be of two kinds. Some of our studies will pertain to the members of that body (for instance, its head, hands, feet, or eyes); others will pertain to the whole of that body, as we ask, for instance, “When did this body come into being, and how

long will it persist?”

Or is it at all meaningful to ask when in relation to the body as an aggregate? Does this body have a real unity, the multiplicity of the members being an apparent, not a real, multiplicity? Or is its unity nominal, on the level of a mechanical interrelationship; that is, does it not exceed the unity of a manufactured device? Has this body a source member from whom the other members have sprung? For instance, has this body a head, which is the source for the other members?

Or is it a body without a head? If it has a head, does this head have a sensible and perceiving mind, or is it hollow and empty? Does the whole of the body down to the nails and bones enjoy a kind of life, or is the intelligence and perception of this body confined to some entities that have appeared by chance, like worms on a corpse – these worms being what we call the animals, including man?

Does this body as a whole pursue an end, course toward a perfection and a reality, or is it an aimless being? Are the appearance and decline of the members an accident, or does the law of causation govern them, no phenomenon being without cause and every particular effect arising from a particular cause? Is the system governing this body certain and inescapable? Or does no necessity or certainty govern this body? Is the order and priority of the members of this body real or not? How many are the basic organs of this body?

The portion of our studies that pertains to an organology of the universe of being is science, and the portion that pertains to a physiology of the universe as a whole is philosophy. There is thus a special class of questions that resemble those of none of the world's sciences, which investigate particular beings, but that compose a class of their own. When we take up the study of this class of questions as an exploration of the parts of the sciences, and when we wish to understand of what subject questions of this class are, technically speaking, accidents, we see that they are accidents of being *qua* being.

If one of us should ask, “What is philosophy?” before answering we must state that this word has a special sense in the usage of any given party. Among Muslims, it is most commonly a generic noun representing all the rational sciences, not the name of a particular science and less commonly a name for first philosophy, a science of the most universal aspects of being, pertaining to no particular subject but to all subjects. This is a science that investigates all of being as a unified subject.

## Metaphysics

Aristotle was the first to discern a series of questions that belong to none of the natural, mathematical, ethical, social, or logical sciences and must be seen as belonging to a separate science. He may have been the first to discern the pivot on which all these questions turn as accidents and states, which is being *qua* being. He may also have been the first one to discover the factor that interconnects the questions of any one science and the standard by which they are to be distinguished from the questions of another science – in other words, what is called the subject of a science.

The questions of this science, like those of any other, were later to be greatly expanded and augmented. This fact grows clear through a comparison of the metaphysics of Aristotle with the metaphysics of Avicenna, not to mention the metaphysics of Mulla Sadra. But Aristotle was the first to elaborate this science as an independent field, to give it a special place among the sciences.

Aristotle gave this science no name. His works were posthumously compiled into an encyclopedia. The section in question followed that on natural philosophy in sequence and, having no special name, came to be known as *metaphysika*, meaning after physics. It was translated into Arabic as *ma ba'd at-tabi'a*.

It was eventually forgotten that this name was given this science because it occurred after natural philosophy in Aristotle's work. It was supposed that this had occurred because at least some of the questions this science addresses, such as God and the pure intelligences, are external to nature. Accordingly, it occurred to some persons, such as Avicenna, that this science should be called not metaphysics but prophysics because it includes the subject of God, Who is prior to nature, not posterior to it.<sup>5</sup>

This verbal error in translation later led to an error in meaning among some modern students of philosophy. Many Europeans supposed that metaphysics is equivalent to hyperphysics and that the subject of this science consists of phenomena external to nature. In fact, this science includes the natural and the supernatural, in sum, all that exists. This group has erroneously defined this science as follows: Metaphysics is that science which deals solely with God and phenomena separate from nature.

## Philosophy in Modern Times

The watershed between the modern era (beginning in the sixteenth Christian century) and the ancient was marked by the displacement of the syllogistic and rational method of science by the experimental and empirical method, a change instituted by a group foremost among whom were the Frenchman, Descartes, and the Englishman, Bacon. The natural sciences *en bloc* departed the domain of syllogistic reasoning and entered that of the experimental method. Mathematics took on a semi-syllogistic, semi-experimental character.

After this course of events, some decided that the syllogistic method is unreliable. So, if a science is beyond the reach of concrete experiment, if it calls exclusively for syllogistic reasoning, it is groundless. Because this is the case with metaphysics, that is, because concrete experiment has no place in it, this science is groundless. Its questions are beyond confirmation or refutation through research. These persons draw a red line through the science that once had stood above all others and had been called the most noble of sciences and the queen of the sciences. According to them, the science of metaphysics or first philosophy did not and could not exist. They took from man the questions his reason most keenly feels the need to address.

Others maintained that the syllogistic method is not in all cases unreliable and must be employed in

metaphysics and ethics. They created a new terminology: “What could take the form of research through the experimental method they called science, and what had to be approached through the syllogistic method, including metaphysics, ethics, and logic, they called philosophy. Philosophy consists of those sciences that consist in research through the syllogistic method only and in which concrete experiment plays no part.

In this view, as in the view of the ancient scholars, philosophy is generic, not specific, in meaning: It is not the name of one science, but comprehends several sciences. But philosophy in this sense encompasses less than it did according to ancient usage. It includes metaphysics, ethics, logic, law, and perhaps a few others, but mathematics and the natural sciences are outside its compass.

Members of the first group totally denied metaphysics and the syllogistic method, trusting in the empirical and experimental sciences. In time, they realised that if all that falls into the domain of the experimental sciences, and if the questions they address are restricted to particular subjects, then we are going to be wholly deprived of an overall understanding of the universe, which philosophy or metaphysics had undertaken to provide. Thus, they founded a scientific philosophy, that is, a philosophy resting completely on the sciences.

Through comparative study of the sciences, inquiry into how their questions connect to other questions, and discovery of the kind of relationships among the laws and questions of the sciences, the totality they compose, a range of more general questions would devolve. They called these more general questions philosophy. The Frenchman Auguste Comte and the Englishman Herbert Spencer took up this method.

Philosophy was no longer an autonomous science either in its subject matter or in its sources, since such an autonomous science had for its subject being *qua* being and had its sources – at least its chief source – in first axioms. Philosophy had become a science whose function was to study the products of the other sciences, to interrelate them, and to derive general questions from their more limited questions. Auguste Comte's philosophy of positivism and Herbert Spencer's synthetic philosophy are of this sort. According to this view, philosophy is not a science apart from the other sciences, but constitutes a broader and fuller view of things seen and learned through the sciences.

Some others, such as Kant, thought it necessary first to study knowledge itself, along with the faculty that is its source, that is, reason. They made a critique of human reason and designated their researches philosophy as such or critical philosophy. However, this, too, has nothing but the word in common with what the ancients called philosophy or with Comte's positivism or Spencer's synthetic philosophy. Kant's philosophy has more to do with logic, which is a special form of ideology in the strict sense (*fikr shinasi*), than with philosophy in its original meaning, which is cosmology.

In the European cultural sphere, whatever was not science, that is, whatever did not fit into any of the natural or mathematical sciences but was a theory of the universe, man, or society, gradually came to be known as philosophy. If someone were to collect all the “isms” that have been called philosophy in

Europe and America and list all their definitions, one would see that they have nothing in common except being not science.

The difference between ancient and modern philosophies is dissimilar in kind to the difference between ancient and modern sciences. Compare ancient and modern medicine, geometry, psychology, or botany. Ancient science is not different in identity from modern science (for example, the word “medicine” did not refer to one science in ancient times and another in modern times).

Ancient and modern medicine share a single definition; medicine has always consisted in knowledge of the states and symptomatic conditions of the human body. But ancient and modern medicine differ in how they approach questions. Modern medicine is the more empirical; ancient medicine is the more deductive and syllogistic. Modern medicine is also the more developed. This sort of difference holds for all other sciences.

The term “philosophy,” however, has had various referents, and a separate definition for each referent, in the course of the ancient and modern periods. In ancient times, philosophy sometimes designated rational science as such and sometimes had a specialised meaning applying to one of the branches of this science (such as metaphysics or first philosophy). In modern times, the word has been applied to numerous referents, having a different definition in accordance with each.

### Divorce of the Sciences from Philosophy

An egregious but prevalent error of our time that arose in the West and has grown widespread among Eastern imitators of Western thinkers is the myth of the divorce of the sciences from philosophy.

A linguistic change pertaining to a convention of usage has been mistaken for a change of meaning pertaining to a real referent. In the language of the ancients, the words “philosophy” and “*hikma*” generally were used to mean rational, as opposed to transmitted knowledge. Thus, these words comprehended all of man's rational and intellectual ideas in their meanings. In this usage, philosophy was a generic, not a proper, noun.

In modern times, this word became restricted to metaphysics, logic, aesthetics, and the like. This change in the name has led some to suppose that in ancient times philosophy was a single science embracing theology and the natural, mathematical, and other sciences and that later the natural and mathematical sciences were divorced from philosophy and grew independent of it.

It is as if the word “body” once meant the human frame, as opposed to the spirit, and included the whole human form from head to feet and later acquired the secondary sense of the trunk and limbs, minus the head. Suppose some came to imagine that the head of man thus had become separated from his body. A linguistic change would have been mistaken for a change in meaning. Consider also the word “Fars,” which once referred to the whole of Iran but today refers only to one of its southern provinces. Someone might think the province of Fars had seceded from Iran.

This is the status of the divorce of the sciences from philosophy. The sciences were once lumped under the name “philosophy,” but today this name is applied to only one of the sciences. This change in name has nothing to do with a divorce of the sciences from philosophy. The sciences have never been part of philosophy proper; so they could not be divorced from it.

## Illuminationism and Peripateticism

Islamic philosophers are divisible into two groups: illuminationists and peripateticists. Foremost among the illuminationist philosophers of Islam is the sixth century scholar Shaykh Shihab ad-Din Suhrawardi (otherwise known as Shaykh-i Ishraq, but whom I shall refer to as Suhrawardi), and foremost among the peripatetic philosophers of Islam is Shaykh ar-Ra'is Abu Ali ibn Sina (Avicenna).

The illuminationists are considered to be followers of Plato and the peripatetics, of Aristotle. The principal and essential difference between the two methods is that the illuminationists consider deduction and rational thought insufficient for study of philosophical questions, especially of divine wisdom (*hikmat-i ilahi*), and the path of the heart, asceticism, and purification of the soul as incumbent if one is to realize inner realities. Peripatetics rely solely on deduction.

The word *ishraq*, meaning illumination, aptly conveys a sense of the illuminationist method, but the word *mashsha'* or peripatetic, which means ambulant or much ambulant, is purely arbitrary and conveys nothing of the peripatetic method. Aristotle and his followers were called the *mashsha' in*, the peripatetics, because Aristotle held forth while taking walks. “Deductionist” actually describes the peripatetics' method. Thus, it is more accurate to label the two kinds of philosophers illuminationists and deductionists, although I shall continue to use the more common term, peripatetic.

The major questions over which illuminationists and peripatetics differ in Islam today generally pertain to Islam and not to Plato or Aristotle. They include the questions of essentialism (*isalat-i mahiya*) versus existentialism (*isalat-i wujud*), the unity versus the multiplicity of being, the question of fabrication (*ja'*), the question of whether a body is compounded of matter and form, the question of ideas (*muthul*) and archetypes (*arbab-i anva'*), and the question of the principle of the more noble possibility (*imkan-i ashraf*).<sup>6</sup>

Did Plato and Aristotle actually have two different methods? Did such a difference in outlook exist between the master, Plato, and the pupil, Aristotle? Was Suhrawardi's method, propounded in the Islamic era, actually Plato's method? Did Plato follow the way of the Heart, asceticism and the discipline of the soul, or the illumination and witness of the heart? Was he an exponent of what Suhrawardi later called experiential wisdom (*hikmat-i dhawqi*)?

Do the questions that illuminationists and peripatetics have been known to differ over since the time of Suhrawardi (questions of essence and existence, of fabrication, of the compoundedness or simplicity of the body, of the formula of the more noble possibility, and of the unity or multiplicity of being) actually

date back to differences of opinion between Plato and Aristotle? Or are the questions, at least some of them, later developments unknown to Plato or Aristotle? There were certainly differences of opinion between the two; Aristotle refuted many of Plato's theories and countered them with different ones.

In the Alexandrian period, which was the watershed between the Hellenic and Islamic eras, the followers of Plato and Aristotle formed two opposed ranks. Farabi, in *Al-Jam' Bayn Ra'yay al-Hakimayn* (The reconciliation of the views of the two sages), discusses the questions over which the two philosophers disagree and strives to resolve these disagreements. There are three basic questions on which Plato and Aristotle differed, questions different from those discussed during the Islamic era.

It is highly doubtful that Plato advocated a spiritual way, with asceticism and discipline of the soul, and witness of the heart. Thus, the notion that Plato and Aristotle had two distinct methods, the illuminationist and the peripatetic, becomes highly debatable. It is by no means clear that Plato was recognised as an illuminationist, an exponent of inner illumination, in his own time or any time soon thereafter. It is not even clear that the term peripatetic was applied exclusively to Aristotle and his followers in his own time.

As Shahristani says: "Now the strict peripatetics then are the members of the Lyceum. Plato, honoured for his wisdom, always taught them while taking walks. Aristotle followed his example, and accordingly he [apparently Aristotle] and his followers were called peripatetics."<sup>7</sup> Aristotle and his followers surely were called peripatetics, and this usage was simply continued in Islamic times. However, it is doubtful and even deniable that Plato was called an illuminationist.

Prior to Suhrawardi, we never find any of the philosophers, such as Farabi and Avicenna, or any of the historians of philosophy, such as Shahristani, speaking of Plato as a sage advocating experiential or illuminationist wisdom.<sup>8</sup> It was Suhrawardi who gave this term currency, and it was he who, in his *Hikmat al-Ishraq* (Wisdom of Illumination), called a party among the ancient sages, including Pythagoras and Plato, exponents of experiential and illuminationist wisdom and who called Plato chief of the illuminationists.

I believe Suhrawardi adopted the illuminationist method under the influence of the 'urafa' and the Sufis; the admixture of illumination and deduction is his own invention. But he – perhaps in order to improve acceptance of his theory – spoke of a party among the ancient philosophers as having this same method. Suhrawardi offers no sort of documentation on this subject, just as he offers none on the matter of the ancient Iranian sages. Certainly, if he possessed such documentation, he would have presented it and so avoided leaving an idea to which he was so devoted in ambiguity and doubt.

Some writers on the history of philosophy, in writing on Plato's beliefs and ideas, have not mentioned his supposed illuminationist method. Shahristani's *Al-Milal wa'n-Nihal*, Dr. Human's *Tarikh-i Falsafa*, Will Durant's *History of Philosophy*, and Muhammad Ali Furughi's *Sayr-i Hikmat dar Urupa* do not mention such a method in the sense Suhrawardi intends. Furughi mentions Platonic love, which is a love of the beautiful that in Plato's belief – at least as expressed in the Symposium – is rooted in divinity. It bears no

relation to what Suhravardi has said about the purification of the psyche and the Gnostic way to God. Plato is said to hold: “Before coming to the world, the spirit beheld absolute beauty; when in this world it sees outward beauty, it remembers absolute beauty and feels pain at its exile. Physical love, like formal beauty, is metaphysical. But true love is something else; it is the basis for illumine perception and realisation of eternal life.”<sup>9</sup>

In his *History of Western Philosophy*, Bertrand Russell repeatedly mentions the admixture of ratiocination and illumination in the philosophy of Plato. However, he offers no documentation or quotations that would shed light on the question of whether Plato's illumination arises from discipline and purification of the soul or is just that experience born of love for the beautiful.<sup>10</sup> Further investigation of this question must include direct study of Plato's entire corpus.

Pythagoras may have employed the illuminationist method, apparently under the inspiration of Oriental teachings. Russell, who regards Plato's method as illuminationistic, maintains that Plato came under the influence of Pythagoras in this regard.<sup>11</sup>

Whether or not we see Plato as an illuminationist in method, there are pivotal ideas among his beliefs that define his philosophy, all of which Aristotle opposed. One such concept is the theory of ideas, according to which all we witness in this world, substances and accidents alike, have their origin and reality in the other world. The individual beings of this world amount to shadows or reflections of other-worldly realities. For instance, all the human individuals who dwell in this world have a principle and reality in the other world; the real and substantive man is that man of the other world.

Plato called these realities ideas. In Islamic times, the Greek word for idea was translated as *mithal* (likeness, idea), and these realities were called collectively the *muthul-i aflatuni* (Platonic ideas). Avicenna strenuously opposed the theory of Platonic ideas, and Suhravardi just as strenuously advocated it. Among later philosophers holding to the theory of ideas are Mir Damad and Mulla Sadra. However, these two sages' definitions of idea, especially Mir Damad's, differ from Plato's and even from Suhravardi's.

Mir Findiriski is another advocate of the theory of ideas from the Safavid era. He has a well-known *qasida* in Persian in which he propounds his own views on this theory. Here is how it begins:

*Lo! The star-studded wheel, so beauteous and splendid!*  
*What's above has a form here below correspondent.*  
*Should this lower form scale the ladder of gnosis,*  
*It will ever find union above with its origin.*

*The intelligible form that is endless, eternal,*  
*Is compendious and single with all or without all.*  
*No external prehension will grasp this discussion,*  
*Be it Bu Nasr Farabi or Bu Ali Sina.* <sup>12</sup>

Another of Plato's pivotal theories concerns the human spirit. He believes that, prior to being attached to bodies, spirits were created and dwelt in a world above and beyond this, which is the world of ideas (or of similitudes, *'alam-i muthul*), and that they are attached to and settled in bodies subsequent to the latter's creation.

The third of Plato's theories is based on the first two and amounts to a corollary of them. It holds that knowledge comes through recollection, not through actual learning. Everything we learn in this world, although we suppose it to be something we were previously ignorant of and have learned for the first time, is in reality a recollection of those things we knew before in that, prior to being attached to the body in this world, the spirit dwelt in a higher world in which it witnessed ideas. Because the realities of all things are the ideas of those things, which the spirits perceived earlier, these spirits knew realities prior to coming to this world and finding attachment to bodies. After finding this attachment, we forgot these things.

For the spirit, the body is like a curtain hung across a mirror that prevents the transmission of light and the reflection of forms from the mirror. Through dialectics (discussion, argument, and rational method), through love, or, as Suhrawardi and like-minded people infer, through asceticism, discipline of the soul, and the spiritual way, the curtain is lifted, the light shines through, and the forms are revealed.

Aristotle differs with Plato on all three of these ideas. First, he denies the existence of ideal, abstract, and celestial universals; he regards the universal, or, more properly speaking, the universality of the universal, as a purely subjective phenomenon. Second, he believes that the spirit is created after the body, that is, as the creation of the body is completed and perfected.

Third, Aristotle considers the body in no way a hindrance or curtain to the spirit; on the contrary, it is the means and instrument by which the spirit acquires new learning. The spirit acquires its learning by means of these senses and bodily instruments; it had no prior existence in another world in which to have learned anything.

Plato's and Aristotle's differences of opinion over these basic questions, as well as over some less important ones, were kept alive after them. They each had their followers in the Alexandrian school. Plato's followers there became known as neo-Platonists.

This school was founded by the Egyptian Ammonius Saccas. Its most celebrated and outstanding exponent was the Egyptian of Greek descent, Plotinus, whom the Islamic historians called the Greek master (Ash-Shaykh al-Yunani). The neo-Platonists introduced new topics, perhaps borrowing from ancient Oriental sources. Aristotle's Alexandrian followers and expositors were numerous. The most famous were Themistius and Alexander of Aphrodisias.

## Islamic Methods of Thought

There have been other methods of thought in the Islamic world, at variance with the illuminationist and peripatetic methods, that have played genuine and basic roles in the development of Islamic culture. Two such methods are *'irfan* (gnosis) and *kalam* (scholastic theology).

Neither the *'urafa'* nor the *mutakallimin* have regarded themselves as followers of the philosophers, whether illuminationists or peripatetics. They have taken stands against the philosophers and clashed with them. These clashes have had an appreciable effect on the fate of Islamic philosophy. *Irfan* and *kalam* have both motivated Islamic philosophy through conflict and clashes and opened up new horizons for philosophy.

### Four Islamic Approaches

Many of the questions Islamic philosophy addresses were first addressed by the *mutakallimin* or the *'urafa'*; although they express themselves in a way different from that of the philosophers. Islam comprehends four methods of thought, and Islamic thinkers are of any of four sorts. I am discussing methods of thought having a philosophical character in the most general sense, that is, constituting an ontology and a cosmology.

I am treating the universals of philosophy, and not the methods of thought of jurisprudence, exegesis, tradition, letters, politics, or ethics, which are another matter entirely. Each of these methods has taken on a special character under the influence of Islamic teachings and differs from its counterparts outside the Islamic sphere. The particular spirit of Islamic culture governs each.

One method is the deductive method of peripatetic philosophy. It has numerous adherents in history. Most Islamic philosophers, including Al-Kindi, Farabi, Avicenna, Khwaja Nasir ad-Din Tusi, Mir Damad, Ibn Rushd of Andalusia, Ibn Baja of Andalusia, and Ibn as-Sa'igh of Andalusia, have followed this method. The perfect exemplar of this school is Avicenna. Such philosophical works of his as the *Kitab ash-Shifa'* (The book of healing [the so called *Sufficientia*]), *Isharat va Tanbihat* (Allusions and admonitions), *Najat* (Deliverance), *Danishnama-yi Ala'i* (The book of knowledge, dedicated to 'Ala ad-Dawla), *Mabda' va Ma'ad* (The source and the destination), *Ta'liqat-i Mubahathat* (Annotations to the discussions), and *'Uyun al-Hikma* (Wellsprings of wisdom) are all works of peripateticism. This method relies exclusively on rational deduction and demonstration.

A second method is the illuminationist method. This has fewer adherents than the first method. It was revived by Shihab ad-Din Suhrawardi and followed by Qutb ad-Din Shirazi, Shahrzuri, and a number of others. Suhrawardi is considered the perfect exemplar of this school. He wrote numerous books including the *Hikmat al-Ishraq* (Wisdom of illumination), *Talvihar* (Intimations), *Mutarahat* (Conversations), *Muqavamat* (Oppositions), and *Hayakil an-Nur* (Temples of light). The best known of them is the *Hikmat al-Ishraq*; only this work is wholly devoted to the illuminationist method. Suhrawardi

has written some treatises in Persian, among them *Avaz-i Par-i Jabra'il* (The song of Gabriel's wing) and *Aql-i Surkh* (The red intelligence).

The illuminationist method rests on rational deduction and demonstration and on endeavour and purification of the soul. According to this method, one cannot discover the underlying realities of the universe through rational deduction and demonstration alone.

The wayfaring method of *'irfan*, or Sufism, is the third method. It relies exclusively on a purification of the soul based on a concept of making one's way to God and drawing near to the Truth. This way is said to culminate in the attainment of Reality. The method of *'irfan* places no confidence at all in rational deduction. The *'urafa'* say that the deductionists stand on wooden legs. According to the method of *'irfan*, the goal is not just to uncover reality, but to reach it.

The method of *'irfan* has numerous adherents, some of whom have grown famous in the Islamic world, including Bayazid Bistami, Hallaj, Shibli, Junayd of Baghdad, Dhu'n-Nun Misri, Abu Sa'id-i Abi'l-Khayr, Khwaja 'Abdullah Ansari, Abu Talib Makki, Abu Nasr Sarraj, Abu'l-Qasim Qushayri, Muhyi 'd-Din Ibn 'Arabi of Andalusia, Ibn Faridh of Egypt, and Mawlana Rumi. The perfect exemplar of Islamic *'irfan*, who codified it as a science and had a compelling influence on all who followed him, is Muhyi 'd-Din Ibn 'Arabi.

The wayfaring method of *'irfan* has one feature in common with the illuminationist method and two features at variance with it. Their shared feature is reliance on reform, refinement, and purification of the soul. The distinguishing features of each are as follows:

The *'arif* wholly rejects deduction; the illuminationist upholds it and uses thought and purification to aid each other. The illuminationist, like any other philosopher, seeks to discover reality; the *'arif* seeks to attain it.

Fourth is the deductive method of *kalam*. Like the peripatetic, the *mutakallimin* rely on rational deduction, but with two differences. First, the principles on which the *mutakallimin* base their reasoning are different from those on which the philosophers base theirs. The most important convention used by the *mutakallimin*, especially by the Mu'tazilites, is that of beauty and ugliness.

However, they differ among themselves as to the meaning of this convention: the Mu'tazilites regard the concept of beauty and ugliness as rational, but the Ash'arites regard it as canonical. The Mu'tazilites have derived a series of principles and formulae from this principle, such as the formula of grace (*qa'ida-iy lutf*) and the incumbency of the optimal (*wujub-i aslah*) upon God Most High.

The philosophers, however, regard the principle of beauty and ugliness as a nominal and human principle, like the pragmatic premises and intelligibles propounded in logic, which are useful only in polemics, not in demonstration. Accordingly, the philosophers call *kalam* "polemical wisdom," as opposed to "demonstrational wisdom."

Second, the *mutakallimin*, as opposed to the philosophers, regard themselves as committed, committed to the defence of the bounds of Islam. Philosophical discussion is free; that is, the philosopher has not the predetermined object of defending a particular belief, The *mutakallim* does have such an object. The method of *kalam* is subdivided into three methods: the Mu'tazilite, the Ash'arite, and the Shi'ite.

Mu'tazilites are numerous in history. There are Abu'l Hudhayl 'Allaf, Nazzam, Jahiz, Abu 'Ubayda, and Mu'ammār ibn Muthanna, all of whom lived in the second or third centuries of the Hijra. Qazi 'Abd al-Jabbar in the fourth century and Zamakhshari around the turn of the fifth–sixth centuries also exemplify this school.

Shaykh Abu'l-Hasan Ash'ari (d. 330) perfectly exemplifies the Ash'arite school. Qazi Abu Bakr Baqillani, Imam al-Haramayn Juvayni, Ghazali, and Fakhr ad-Din Razi all followed the Ash'ari method.

Shi'i *mutakallimin* are also numerous. Hisham ibn al-Hikam, a companion of Imam Ja'far Sadiq (upon whom be peace) was a Shi'i *mutakallim*. The Nawbakhti family, an Iranian Shi'i family, produced some outstanding *mutakallims*. Shaykh Mufid and Sayyid Murtadha 'Alam al-Huda are also ranked among Shi'i *mutakallimin*. The perfect exemplar of Shi'i *kalam* is Khwaja Nasir ad-Din Tusi. His *Tajrid al-'Aqa'id* (Refinement of beliefs) is one of the most famous works of *kalam*. He was also a philosopher and mathematician. After him, *kalam* took a wholly different course and assumed a more philosophical character.

Among the Sunnis' works of *kalam*, the most famous is the *Sharh-i Mavaqif* (Elucidation of the stations), with text by Qazi 'Azud ad-Din Iji (a contemporary of Hafiz, who praised him in his poetry) and annotations by Sharif Jurjani. This work was deeply influenced by the *Tajrid al-'Aqa'id*.

## Sublime Wisdom

The four streams of thought continued in the Islamic world until they reached a point of confluence called “sublime wisdom” (*hikmat-i muta'aliya*). The science of sublime wisdom was founded by Sadr al-Muta'allihin Shirazi (or Mulla Sadra) (d. 1050/1640).<sup>13</sup> The term “sublime wisdom” occurs in Avicenna's *Isharat*, but Avicenna's philosophy never became known by this name.

Mulla Sadra formally designated his philosophy sublime wisdom, and it became so known. His school resembles Suhrawardi's in method in seeking to combine demonstration with mystic vision and direct witness, but it differs in its principles and conclusions.

In Mulla Sadra's school, many of the points of disagreement between peripateticism and illuminationism, between philosophy and *'irfan*, or between philosophy and *kalam* have been definitively resolved. Mulla Sadra's philosophy is not a syncretism, however, but a unique philosophical system, that, although the various Islamic methods of thought had an impact on its formation, one must regard as autonomous.

Mulla Sadra has written numerous works, among them the *Asfar-i Arba'a* (The four journeys, or books),

*Ash-Shavahid ar-Rububiya* (Witnesses to lordship), *Mabda' va Ma'ad* (The source and the destination), *'Arshiya* (On the Empyrean), *Masha'ir* (The perceptual faculties), and *Sharh-i Hidayah-yi Athir ad-Din Abhari* (An elucidation of Athir ad-Din Abhari's guidance).

Among Mulla Sadra's followers is Hajj Mulla Hadi Sabzavari (1212/1798–1289/1878), author of the *Kitab-i Manzuma* (The rhymed book) and the *Sharh-i Manzuma* (The elucidation of the rhymed book). A typical basic library for study of the ancient sciences might consist of Sabzavari's *Sharh-i Manzuma*, Mulla Sadra's *Asfar*, Avicenna's *Isharat* and *Shifa'*, and Suhrawardi's *Hikmat al-Ishraq*.

Mulla Sadra organised the philosophical topics concerning the intellectual and rational way in a manner paralleling the manner in which the *'urafa'* had propounded the way of the heart and spirit. The *'urafa'* hold that the wayfarer accomplishes four journeys in carrying through the method of the *'arif*:

1. The journey from creation to God. At this stage, the wayfarer attempts to transcend nature as well as certain supernatural worlds in order to reach the Divine Essence, leaving no veil between himself and God.
2. The journey by God in God. After the wayfarer attains proximate knowledge of God, with His help the wayfarer journeys through His phases, perfections, names, and attributes.
3. The journey from God to creation by God. In this journey, the wayfarer returns to creation and rejoins people, but this return does not mean separation and remoteness from the Divine Essence. Rather, the wayfarer sees the Divine Essence with all things and in all things.
4. The journey in Creation by God. In this journey, the wayfarer undertakes to guide the people and lead them to the Truth.

Mulla Sadra, considering that philosophical questions constitute a “way,” if a mental one, sorted them into four sets:

1. Topics that constitute a foundation or preliminary to the study of *Tawhid*. These (the ordinary matter of philosophy) constitute our mental journey from creation to God.
2. Topics of *Tawhid*, theology, and divine attributes–The journey by God in God.
3. Topics of the divine acts, the universal worlds of being–the journey from God to creation by God.
4. Topics of the soul and the Destination (*ma 'ad*)–the journey in creation by God.

The *Asfar Arba 'a*, which means the Four Journeys, is organised on this basis. Mulla Sadra, who called his special philosophical system sublime wisdom, referred to conventional philosophy, whether illuminationist or peripatetic, as common or conventional philosophy.

## Overview of Philosophies and Wisdoms

Philosophy and wisdom, in the widest sense, are variously classified from different perspectives; but if we consider them from the standpoint of method, they fall under four headings: deductive wisdom<sup>3</sup> experiential wisdom, experimental wisdom, and polemical wisdom.

Deductive wisdom rests on syllogism and demonstration. It has to do only with greater and lesser, result and concomitant, contradictory and contrary, and the like. Experiential wisdom pertains not only to deduction but to experience, inspiration, and illumination. It takes its inspiration more from the heart than from the reason.

Experimental wisdom pertains neither to a priori reasoning and deduction nor to the heart and its inspirations. It pertains to sense, trial, and experiment. It takes the products of the sciences, the fruits of trial and experiment, and, by interrelating them, welds them into wisdom and philosophy.

Polemical wisdom is deductive, but the premises for its deductions are what logicians call common knowledge (*mashhurar*) and accepted facts (*maqbulat*). There are several kinds of premises to deduction, including first axioms (*badihiyat*) and common knowledge. For instance, the idea that two things each equal to a third are equal to each other, which is expressed in the phrase “the equal to the equal are equal,” and the idea that it is absurd for a proposition and its contradictory to hold true at once are considered axiomatic. The idea that it is ugly to yawn in the presence of others is considered common knowledge.

Deduction on the basis of axioms is called demonstration, and deduction on the basis of common knowledge is considered an element of polemics. Therefore, polemical wisdom means a wisdom that deduces global and universal ideas from common knowledge.

The *mutakallimin* generally base their deductions on the beauty or the ugliness of a thing, on rational beauty and ugliness, so to speak. The *hukama'* hold that all beauty and ugliness relate to the sphere of human life; one cannot evaluate God, the universe, and being by these criteria. Thus, the *hukama'* call *kalam* polemical wisdom.

The *hukama'* believe that the central principles of religion may be better deduced from the premises of demonstration and in reliance on first axioms than from the premises of common knowledge and polemics. In Islamic times, especially among the Shi'a, philosophy, without departing from its mission of free inquiry and committing itself in advance, gradually proved the best source of support for Islamic principles. Accordingly, polemical wisdom, in the hands of such persons as Khwaja Nasir ad-Din Tusi, gradually took on a demonstrational and illuminationistic character. Thus, *kalam* came to be overshadowed by philosophy.

Although experimental wisdom is extraordinarily valuable, it has two shortcomings. One is that its compass is confined to the experimental sciences, and the experimental sciences are confined to what

is sensible and palpable. Man's philosophical needs extend beyond what is in the domain of sense experience. For instance, when we discuss the possibility of a beginning of time, an end to space, or an origin for causes, how are we to find what we seek in the laboratory or under the microscope? Thus, experimental wisdom cannot satiate man's philosophical instinct and must elect silence on basic philosophical questions.

The other shortcoming lies in the fact that the value of experimental questions is rendered precarious by their confinement to and dependence upon nature. Questions of experimental science have a time-bound value and may grow obsolescent at any moment. A wisdom based on experiment is naturally precarious and so does not meet a basic human need, the need for certainty. Certainty arises in questions having mathematical abstraction or philosophical abstraction, and the meanings of mathematical and philosophical abstractions can be clarified only by philosophy.

There remain deductive wisdom and experiential wisdom. The questions discussed in the following sections should elucidate these two wisdoms and spell out their value.

## Problems in Philosophy

### Being

Philosophical questions pivot on being. That which is to philosophy what the body is to medicine, number is to mathematics, or quantify is to geometry is being *qua* being. It is the subject of philosophy and all philosophical topics turn on it. In other words, philosophy has for its subject existence.

Several kinds of questions turn on being. One is questions pertaining to being, or existence, and its opposites in the two respective senses: nonbeing and essence (*mahiya*).<sup>14</sup> There is nothing but being in the objective world. Being has no opposite outside the mind. But the conceptualising mind of man has formed two concepts vis-a-vis being or existence: nonbeing and essence (of course, essences). A range of philosophical questions, especially in sublime wisdom, pertains to existence and essence, and another range pertains to being and nonbeing.

A second group of questions pertains to divisions of being. Being in its turn has divisions that are regarded as amounting to species of being; in other words, being is divisible (for instance, into the objective and the subjective, the necessary and the possible, the eternal and the created in time, the stable and the changing, the singular and the plural, the potential and the act, and the substance and the accident). Of course, these are the primary divisions of being, that is, the divisions that enter into being by virtue of the fact that it is being.

To illustrate, divisions into black and white, large and small, equal and unequal, odd and even, or long and short are divisions not in being *qua* being but in being *qua* body or in being *qua* quantifiable. Corporeality in being corporeality, or quantity in being quantity, admits of such division. However, division into singular and plural, or division into necessary and possible, is division of being *qua* being.

Close research has been done in philosophy as to the criteria for these divisions, what distinguishes the divisions of being *qua* being from other divisions. Some philosophers have regarded certain divisions as applying to body *qua* body and thus falling outside the scope of first philosophy, but other philosophers for various reasons have regarded these divisions as applying to being *qua* being and thus falling under this same domain.

A third group of questions pertains to the universal laws governing being, such as causality, the correspondence of cause and effect, the necessity governing the system of cause and effect, and priority versus synchronism among the levels of being.

A fourth group of questions pertains to demonstration of the planes of being or worlds of being. Being has particular planes or worlds. The *hukama'* of Islam believe that there are four general worlds or four emergences (*nash'a*):

1. The world of nature, or the *nasut*
2. The world of ideas, or the *malakut*
3. The world of [separate] intelligences, or the *jabarut*
4. The world of divinity, or the *lahut*

The world of *nasut* is the world of matter, motion, and space–time. It is the world of nature and sense objects, this world. The world of [Platonic] ideas [similitudes], or the *malakut*, is a world superior to nature, having forms and dimensions, but lacking motion, time, and change.

The world of *jabarut* is the world of the [separate] intelligences or the world of the [abstract] idea (*ma'na*), free of forms and images and thus superior to the world of *malakut*. The world of *lahut* is the world of divinity and unity.

A fifth group of questions pertains to the relations between the world of nature and the worlds above it, the descent of being from *lahut* to nature, and to the ascent from nature to the higher worlds. With special reference to man, these are called questions of the destination (*ma 'ad*) and figure very prominently in sublime wisdom.

### Existence and Essence

Is existence substantive, or is essence? We always distinguish two valid senses in which things may be spoken of: the isness of a thing and the whatness of a thing. For instance, we know that man is, the tree is, number is, and quantity is, but number has one whatness, one essence, and man has another. <sup>15</sup> If we ask, “What is number?” we receive one answer. If we ask, “What is man?” we receive another.

Many things have a patent isness; that is, we know that they are. But we may not know what they are.

For instance, we know that life is or that electricity is, but we may not know what life is or what electricity is. We know what many things are—for instance, we have a clear definition of a circle and so know what a circle is—but we do not know whether the circle exists in objective nature. Thus, isness is something other than whatness.

This plurality, this dichotomy of essence and existence, is purely subjective. In extensional reality, no thing is twofold. Therefore, one of these two is objectively so and substantive, and the other is nominal and not substantive.

The whole question of existentialism versus essentialism has no ancient historical antecedents. This topic originated in the Islamic world. None of the early philosophers, Farabi, Avicenna, Khwaja Nasir ad-Din Tusi, or even Suhrawardi, discussed anything under this heading. The topic made its debut in philosophy in the time of Mir Damad (the beginning of the eleventh century of the Hijra).

Mir Damad was an essentialist. However, his famous pupil, Mulla Sadra, made a compelling case for existentialism, and from then onward, every philosopher of note has been an existentialist. [16](#) In the third volume of *Usul-i Falsafa va Ravish-i Ri'alism*, I have discussed the respective ideas of the 'urafa', the *mutakallimin*, and the philosophers as precursors to this philosophical conception of Mulla Sadra's.

Another philosophy sometimes known as existentialism has flourished in our own time. This form of existentialism pertains to man and has reference to the idea that man, by contrast with all other beings, has no definite, preassigned essence and no form determined by nature. Man designs and builds his own whatness.

This idea is largely correct and supported by Islamic philosophy, except that, what in Islamic philosophy is called existentialism does not apply to man alone, but to the whole universe, and, second, when we speak of existentialism or *isalat-i vujud* in an Islamic context, we are using the term *isalat* (-ism) in its sense of substantive reality or objective being, as opposed to nominal or mental existence. When we use it in the Western context of modern existentialism, we are using it in its sense of primacy or priority. One should by no means conflate the two senses.

### [The Objective and the Subjective](#)

A thing is either objective or subjective. Objective being means being external to and independent of man's mind. We know, for instance, that mountain, sea, and plain have being external to our minds and independent of them. Whether our minds conceive of them or not, indeed, whether ourselves and our minds exist or not, mountain, sea, and plain exist.

But that mountain, sea, and plain have an existence in our minds as well. When we imagine them, we give them being in our minds. The being things find in our minds is called subjective being or mental being.

Two questions arise here. One is why the images of things appearing in our minds should be conceived of as a kind of being for those things in our minds. If they are, one might say that the image of a thing painted on a wall or printed on a sheet of paper deserves to be called another kind of being, a parietal being or a papyraceous being. If we term mental images a form of being for the thing imagined, to be just, we have employed a metaphor and not spoken the literal truth, but philosophy ought to deal with the literal truth.

The relation of a mental form to an external object (for instance, the relation of a mental mountain or sea to an external mountain or sea) is far more profound than the relation of the picture of a mountain or a sea on a sheet of paper or a wall to that external mountain or sea. If what appears in the mind were only a simple image, it would never give rise to consciousness, just as the image on the wall does not give rise to consciousness in the wall. Rather, the mental image is consciousness itself.

The other question is whether mental being, as a concept actually relating to man and the human psyche, belongs to the realm of psychology. Philosophy deals with general questions, and such particular questions pertain to the sciences.

Philosophers have demonstrated that we are conscious of external objects because our mental images, far from being simple, are a kind of realisation of existence in our minds for the essences (*mahiya*) of the objects. Although from one standpoint, the question of mental images is a question of the human psyche and so belongs to the field of psychology, from another standpoint, that man's mind is in fact another emergence (*nash'a*) of being, resulting in being in its essence taking two forms, subjective and objective, it is a question for philosophy.

Avicenna and Mulla Sadra have said (the former allusively, near the beginning of the "Ilahiyat" of his *Shifa'* and the latter explicitly and at length in his commentary to the same work) that at times a question may pertain to two different disciplines from two standpoints; for instance, a question may pertain to philosophy from one standpoint and to the natural sciences from another.

### Truth and Error

The question of mental being has another angle that has been studied: It has to do with the validity of perceptions, the extent to which our perceptions, sensations, and conceptions of the external world are valid. From ancient times, philosophers have asked whether what we perceive of an object by means of our senses or our reason corresponds to actuality, the thing in itself.

Some postulate that some of our sense perceptions or rational perceptions do correspond to actuality, the thing in itself, and some do not. Those that correspond to actuality are termed "truth," and those that do not are termed "error." Sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell are all subject to error. But most of our sense perceptions correspond fully to reality. Through these same senses, we accurately distinguish night from day, far from near, large from small in volume, tough from smooth, and cold from hot.

Our reason is likewise subject to error. Logic was compiled to avert errors of the reason in its deductions. But most of our rational deductions are valid. When we add up all the debits and all the credits in a ledger and subtract the former from the latter, we are performing a mental and rational procedure that we are perfectly assured will hold true if we are sufficiently careful and exact.

However, the Sophists of Greece denied the distinction between truth and error. They said that whatever some person feels and thinks is for that person the truth. They said that man is the measure of all things. They radically denied reality and, having denied it, left nothing in corresponding to which man's perceptions and sensations could be true and in failing to correspond to which they could be erroneous.

The Sophists were contemporaries of Socrates (Socrates came along near the close of the Sophist period). Protagoras and Gorgias are two famous Sophists. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle rebelled against them.

After Aristotle's time, another group appeared in Alexandria, called the Skeptics, the most famous of whom is Pyrrho. The Skeptics did not deny actuality in principle but denied that human perceptions correspond to it. They said that one perceives an object in a certain way under the influence of internal states and certain external conditions. Sometimes two people experiencing different states or viewing from different angles will see the same event in two different ways. A thing may appear ugly in one's eyes and beautiful in another's, or single in one's eyes and double in another's. The air may feel warm to one and cold to another. A flavor may taste sweet to one and bitter to another. The Skeptics, like the Sophists, denied the validity of knowledge.

Bishop Berkeley wholly rejects external reality. No one has been able to refute his reasons for his position, although everyone knows they are fallacious.

Those who have sought a reply to the ancient Sophists exemplified by Berkeley have not taken the approach that could resolve the sophism. The philosophers of Islam have held that the basic approach to resolving this sophism consists in our perceiving the reality of mental being. Only thus is the puzzle solved.

In approaching mental being, the *hukama'* of Islam first define knowledge, or perception, as consisting in a kind of being for the object perceived within the being of the perceiver. They go on to cite certain demonstrations in support of this position, and then they recount and reply to certain objections to mental being or allegations of problems in it.

This topic did not exist in this form early in the Islamic period and *a fortiori* did not exist in Hellenic times. Nasir ad-Din Tusi was the first to speak of the objective and the subjective in his works of philosophy and *kalam*. Thereafter, it came to occupy a major place in the works of such comparatively recent philosophers as Mulla Sadra and Mulla Hadi Sabzavari. Farabi, Avicenna, and even Suhrawardi, as well as their followers, never broached the subject of mental being or even used the term in their works. The term first appeared after Avicenna's time.

However, what Farabi and Avicenna said on other subjects shows that they believed perception to consist of a simulacrum of the reality of the object perceived within the being of the perceiver. But they neither sought to demonstrate this point nor conceived of it as an independent question of being, an independent division of being.

### The Created in Time and the Eternal

The Arabic word *hadith* has the lexical and customary meaning of new, and *qadim* means old. However, these words have other meanings in the terminologies of philosophy and *kalam*. Like other people, when philosophers speak of the *hadith* and the *qadim*, they seek to know what is new and what is old, but in speaking of a thing as new, they mean that before it was, it was not – that is, that first it was not, then it was.

In speaking of a thing as old, they mean that it always has been and never was not. Suppose there is a tree that has lived for billions of years. In common usage, it would be spoken of as old, quite old indeed, but according to the terminologies of philosophy and *kalam*, it is *hadith* (new) because there was a time billions of years ago when it was not.

Philosophers define createdness in time (*huduth*) as the precedence of a thing's nonbeing to its being, and they define eternity (*qidam*) as the nonprecedence of a thing's nonbeing to its being. Therefore, an entity is created in time whose nonbeing precedes its being, and an entity is eternal for which no nonbeing prior to its being can be conceived.

Discussion of the question of the created in time and the eternal turns on this point: Is everything in the universe created in time and nothing eternal, such that whatever we consider first was not and then was? Or is everything eternal and nothing created in time, such that everything has always been? Or are some things created in time, and some eternal, such that, for instance, shapes, forms, and externals are created in time, but matter, subjects, and invisible things are eternal? Or are individuals and parts created in time, whereas species and wholes are eternal? Or are natural and material phenomena created in time, whereas abstract and supramaterial phenomena are eternal? Or is only God, the Creator of the whole and Cause of causes, eternal, whereas all else is created in time? Overall, is the universe created in time, or is it eternal?

The *mutakallimin* of Islam believe that only God is eternal. All else – matter and form, individuals and species, parts and wholes, abstract and material – constitutes what is called the world or 'other' (*masiva*) and is created in time. The philosophers of Islam, however, believe that createdness in time is a property of the material world, whereas the supernatural worlds are abstract and eternal. In the world of nature, too, principles and universals are eternal, whereas the phenomena and particulars are created in time. Therefore, the universe is created in time with respect to its phenomena and particulars but eternal with respect to its principles and universals.

Debate over createdness in time and eternity has excited acrimonious disputes between the

philosophers and the *mutakallimin*. Abu Hamid Ghazali, who, although leaning to *'irfan* and Sufism in most of his works, leans to *kalam* in some, declares Avicenna an unbeliever for his stand on several questions, among them his belief in the eternity of the world. In his famous *Tahafut al-Falsafa* (The incoherence of the philosophers), Ghazali has criticised philosophers on twenty points and exposed what he believed to be the incoherencies in their thought. Ibn Rushd of Andalusia has rebutted Ghazali in *Tahafut at-Tahafut* (The incoherence of the “incoherence”).

The *mutakallimin* say that if a thing is not created in time but eternal – if it has always been and never not been – then that thing has no need of a creator and cause. Therefore, if we suppose other eternal things exist than the Essence of the Truth, it follows that they will have no need of a creator and so in reality be necessary beings in their essence, like God, and the demonstrations that show the Necessary Being in Essence to be singular do not permit us to profess more than one such Necessary Being. Accordingly, no more than one Eternal Being exists, and all else is created in time. Therefore, the universe is created in time, including the abstract and the material, principles and phenomena, species and individuals, wholes and parts, matter and form, visible and invisible.

The philosophers have rebutted the arguments of the *mutakallimin* decisively, saying that all the confusion turns on one point, which consists in supposing that, if a thing has a continuous existence into the indefinite past, it has no need of a cause, whereas this is not so. A thing's need or lack of need for a cause pertains to its essence, which makes it a necessary being or a possible being; it has nothing to do with its createdness in time or eternity.<sup>17</sup> By analogy, the sun's radiance stems from the sun and cannot exist apart from it. Its existence depends on the sun's existence. It is the sun's luminance and issues from the sun whether we suppose there was a time this radiance did not exist or we suppose it has always existed, along with the sun. If we suppose that the sun's radiance has coexisted with the sun itself from preeternity to posteternity, this does not entail its having no need of the sun.

The philosophers maintain that the relation of the universe to God is as the relation of the radiance to the sun, with this difference: The sun is not conscious of itself or of its action and does not perform its function as an act of will; the contrary is true of God.

At times we encounter expressions in the primary texts of Islam that compare the relation of the universe and God to the relation of radiance and the sun. The noble verse of the Qur'an states,

***“God is the Light of the heavens and the earth” (24:35).***

Exegetes have interpreted this verse to mean that God is the light-giver of the heavens and the earth (that the being of heaven and earth is a ray of God).

The philosophers do not adduce any evidence for the eternity of the universe from the universe itself; rather, they approach this argument from the position that God is the Absolutely Effulgent and the Eternally Beneficent – we cannot possibly conceive of His effulgence (emanation) and beneficence as limited, as terminating somewhere. In other words, the theistic philosophers have arrived at the eternity

of the universe through an a priori demonstration, that is, by making the being and attributes of God the premise to the eternity of the universe.

Generally, those disbelieving in God advance the position of the eternity of the universe, but the theistic philosophers say that the same thing nonbelievers adduce as a reason for God's non-existence in their view implies God's existence. The eternity of the universe is a hypothesis to nonbelievers, but it is an established fact to theistic philosophers.

### The Mutable and the Constant

Change means transformation and constancy means uniformity. We continually witness changes in the universe. We ourselves continually make transitions from state to state, from period to period, beginning when we are born and ending when we die. The same holds for earth and sea, for mountains, trees, animals, stars, solar systems, and galaxies. Are these changes outward, pertaining to the configuration, form, and accidents of the universe, or are they profound and fundamental, such that no constant phenomenon exists in the universe? Are the changes that occur in the universe transient and instantaneous, or are they gradual and protracted?

These questions, too, date from remote times; they were discussed in ancient Greece. Democritus, known as the father of the atomic theory and also as the laughing philosopher, maintained that all change or transformation is superficial because natural being is based on atomic particles, which are forever in one state and unchangeable. The changes we witness are like those in a heap of gravel, massed sometimes in one shape, sometimes in another, but never changing in identity or real nature. This is the mechanistic outlook and constitutes a kind of mechanistic philosophy.

Another Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, maintains that nothing remains in the same state for two successive instants. As he says, you cannot set foot twice in the same river because at the second instant you are not who you were before and that river is not the same river. This philosophy stands opposite to Democritus's in seeing everything in a state of flux and inconstancy, but it says nothing contrary to mechanism; that is, it advances no idea of dynamics.

Aristotle's philosophy has no quarrel with the idea that all the parts of nature change, but undertakes to determine which changes are gradual and protracted and which are transient and instantaneous. It terms the gradual changes "motion" and the transient changes "generation and corruption" (that is, a transient coming into being is called generation, and a transient extinction is called corruption). Because Aristotle and his followers consider the basic changes occurring in this world, especially those that appear in substances, as transient, they term this "the world of generation and corruption."

At other moments, constancy obtains. If we regard changes as transient, because they occur in an instant, although at other instants or through time things are constant, such mutable things have a relative mutability and a relative constancy. Therefore, if change is in the mode of motion, it is absolute change. If it is in the mode of generation and corruption, if it is in an instantaneous mode – it is relative.

According to the Aristotelians, although nothing absolutely constant and uniform exists in nature, but everything is mutable (contrary to the view of the Democriteans), because substances are basic to nature and changes in substances are transient, the world has a relative constancy along with relative change. But constancy governs the world to a greater extent than does change.

Aristotle and the Aristotelians regard all things as falling under ten basic generic classes, which they call the ten categories: substance, quantity, quality, determination in space, position, determination in time, relation, condition, action, and passion.

Motion occurs only in the categories of quantity, quality, and determination in space. In all other categories change is transient; in other words, all other categories enjoy a relative constancy. Even those three categories in which motion occurs – because the motion is intermittent – are governed by a relative constancy. Therefore, in Aristotle's philosophy, one encounters more constancy than change, more uniformity than transformation.

Avicenna believed that motion occurs in the category of position as well. He demonstrated that certain motions, such as the rotation of the earth about its axis, constitute a positional motion, not a motion in spatial determination. Thus, after Avicenna, motion in spatial determination was restricted to translational motion. Avicenna did not demonstrate the existence of a new sort of motion, but reclassified as positional what had previously been categorised as a motion in spatial determination. His reclassification is generally accepted.

Mulla Sadra effected a major transformation in Islamic philosophy by demonstrating substantial motion. He demonstrated that, even on the basis of the Aristotelian principles of matter and form, we must accept that the substances of the world are in continuous motion; there is never so much as an instant of constancy and uniformity in the substances of the world. The accidents (that is, the nine other categories), as functions of the substances, are also in motion. According to Mulla Sadra, nature equals motion, and motion equals continuous, uninterrupted creation and extinction.

Through the principle of substantial motion, the visage of the Aristotelian universe is wholly transformed. According to this principle, nature, or matter, equals motion. Time consists in the measure or tensile force of this substantial motion, and constancy equals supernatural being. What exists consists of, on the one hand, absolute change (nature) and, on the other, absolute constancy (the supernatural).

The constancy of nature is the constancy of order, not the constancy of being; that is, a definite, immutable system governs the universe, and the contents of the system are all mutable (they are change itself). Both the being and the system of this universe stem from the supernal. Were it not for the governance of the other world, this world, which is wholly flux and mutation, would be cut off from its past and future. "Many times has the water exchanged in this stream,/Still the moon's and the stars' reflections remain." [18](#)

Prior to Mulla Sadra, the topic of the mutable and the constant was felt to belong to the natural sciences,

in that any determination or any division that applies to a body *qua* body belongs to the natural sciences. It was said that it is such-and-such a body that is either constant or mutable, or that is either still or in motion. In other words, motion and stasis are among the accidents of a body. Therefore, the topic of the constant and the mutable ought to fall wholly within the domain of the natural sciences.

This all changed with Mulla Sadra's realisation of existentialism (the substantive reality of being), his realisation of substantial motion, and his demonstration that the natures of the universe constitute the mobile *qua* mobile and the mutable *qua* mutable (that is, that a body is not something to which motion is merely added as an accident, whereby at times this motion can be annulled, leaving the motionless state we call stasis). Rather, the natures of the universe are motion itself, and the contrary of this substantial motion is constancy, not stasis.

Stasis holds for the accidental motions the state of whose absence we call stasis but is inconceivable in the case of essential, substantial motion. The contrary of this substantial motion that is the substance itself consists of substances for which constancy is the very essence. These are entities beyond space and time, devoid of spatiotemporal forces, potentialities, or dimensions. Therefore, it is not the body that is either constant or mutable. Rather, it is being *qua* being that appears either as constancy itself (as supramaterial beings) or as continuous flux/becoming/creation itself (the world of nature). Therefore, just as being is in its essence divisible into necessary and possible, so is it in its essence divisible into the constant and the fluid.

Thus, according to Mulla Sadra, only certain kinds of motions – the accidental motions of a body having stasis is for their opposite – ought to be studied under the heading of the natural sciences. Other motions, or indeed these very motions when not regarded from the standpoint of their being accidents of natural bodies, ought to be discussed and studied in first philosophy. Mulla Sadra himself brought in his discussions of motion under “general phenomena” in the *Asfar* in the course of discussing potentials and acts, although it warranted a chapter to itself.

Among the key conclusions arising from this great realization – basically, that being in its essence is divisible into the constant and the fluid and that constant being is one modality of being, while fluid being is another – is that becoming is precisely a plane of being. Although, nominally speaking, we may regard becoming as a synthesis of being and nonbeing, this synthesis is actually a kind of notion or metaphor. [19](#)

In truth it is the realisation of the substantive reality of being and of the nominal status of essences (*mahiyat*) that permits us to perceive this key reality. Without a grasp of the substantive reality of being, neither a conception of substantial motion nor a conception that flux and becoming are precisely a plane of being would be possible.

Motion has recovered its proper place in the modern philosophy of Europe by other avenues. Some philosophers came to believe that motion is the cornerstone of nature, that nature equals becoming.

However, because this idea was not based on existentialism (the substantive reality of being) and the primary division of being into the constant and the fluid, these philosophers supposed that becoming was the same union of opposites that the ancients had deemed absurd. They likewise supposed that becoming falsified the principle of identity (*huhuya*), which the ancients had taken for granted.

These philosophers said that the presiding principle in the thought of the ancients was the principle of constancy and that, in deeming beings constant, the ancients had supposed that either being or nonbeing must hold sway over things. Therefore, one alone of these holds true (the principle of the impossibility of union and cancellation of opposites). That is, either there is always being or there is always nonbeing; no third alternative obtains.

Similarly, because the ancients thought things constant, they supposed of everything that is itself (the principle of identity). But with the realisation of the principle of motion and change in nature, the realisation that nature is continually in a state of becoming, the two principles are groundless because becoming is a union of being and nonbeing; where a thing is both being and non-being, becoming has been demonstrated.

A thing in a state of becoming both is and is not; at every instant, its self is its not-self; its self is at once its self and not its self; the self of its self is progressively negated. Therefore, if the principle governing things were that of being and nonbeing, both the principle of the impossibility of the union of opposites and the principle of identity would hold true. Because the principle governing things is the principle of becoming, neither of these other principles holds true.

The principle of the impossibility of the union of opposites and the principle of identity, which held unrivalled sway over the minds of the ancients, arose from a further principle that they also accepted implicitly: the principle of constancy. As the natural sciences showed the invalidity of the principle of constancy, these two principles, too, lost their credibility. This development represents the conception of many modern philosophers, from Hegel onward.

Mulla Sadra invalidated the principle of constancy by other means. Motion, according to his realisation, implies that nature equals inconstancy and constancy equals abstraction. Unlike the modern philosophers, however, he never concludes that because nature equals flux and becoming, the principle of the impossibility of the union and cancellation of opposites is falsified.

Although Mulla Sadra regards becoming as a kind of union of being and nonbeing, he does not treat this as a union of opposites because he has realized a more important principle: that being is divisible in its essence into the constant and the fluid. Constant being is a plane of being, not a synthesis of being and nonbeing. The synthesis of becoming from being and nonbeing is not a union of two opposites just as it is not the negation of the self of a thing.

The modern philosophers' confusion has two roots: their failure to perceive the division of being into the constant and the fluid and their inadequate conception of the principles of contradiction and contrariety.

## Cause and Effect

The most ancient of philosophical questions is that of cause and effect. The concept of cause and effect appears in every philosophical system, unlike such concepts as existentialism and subjective being, which have a prominent place in some philosophies and pass unnoted in others, the concept of potential and act, which plays an important role in Aristotelianism, or the concept of the constant and the mutable, which has a deservedly prominent position in the philosophy of Mulla Sadra.

Causation is a kind of relation between two things, one of which we call the cause and the other, the effect. This is the most profound of relations. The relation of cause and effect consists in the cause's giving being to the effect. What the effect realises from the cause is its whole being, its whole reality; therefore, if the cause were not, the effect would not be. We find such a relation nowhere else. Therefore, the effect's need of the cause is the keenest of needs, a need at the root of being. Accordingly, if we would define cause, we must say, "A cause is that thing an effect needs in its essence and being."

Every phenomenon is an effect, and every effect needs a cause; therefore, every phenomenon needs a cause. That is, if a thing is not being itself in its essence—if it has appeared as an accident, a phenomenon—it must have arisen through the intervention of a factor we call a cause. Therefore, no phenomenon is without a cause. The hypothesis contrary to this theory is that a phenomenon may appear without a cause. This hypothesis is called coincidence (*sudfa*) or chance (*ittifaq*). The philosophy of causality radically rejects this hypothesis.

Philosophers and *mutakallimin* concur that every phenomenon is *an* effect and needs a cause, but the *mutakallimun* define such a phenomenon as created in time (*hadith*), and the philosophers define it as possible (*mumkin*). That is, the *mutakallimin* say that whatever is created in time is an effect and needs a cause, and the philosophers say that whatever is possible is an effect and needs a cause. These two definitions lead to the different conclusions previously discussed in "The Created in Time and the Eternal."

A certain cause produces only a certain effect, and a certain effect proceeds only from a certain cause. There are special relations of dependence among the beings of the universe such that any one thing cannot necessarily give rise to any other thing and any one thing cannot necessarily arise from any other thing. We rely on this truth in our everyday experience. For instance, eating is the cause of satiety, drinking water is the cause of quenching of thirst, and study is the cause of literacy. Therefore, if we wish to realise any of these qualities, we have resort to the appropriate cause. For instance, we never drink water or study for the sake of satiety, nor do we consider eating sufficient for the attainment of literacy.

Philosophy demonstrates that such a clear relation obtains among all the processes in the universe. It makes this point through this definition: A unique correspondence and symmetry govern every single cause-and-effect relation and appear in no other such relation. This is the single most important

principle in giving order to our thought and in presenting the universe to our thought not as a chaotic aggregate in which nothing is conditional upon anything else but as an ordered, systematic cosmos in which every part has a special place, in which no one thing can displace another.

There are four kinds of cause in the philosophy of Aristotle: the efficient cause, the final cause, the material cause, and the formal cause. These four causes are well illustrated in human industry: If we build a house, the builder or workman is the efficient cause; to dwell in that house is the final cause; the building materials are the material cause; and the configuration of the house, in being appropriate to a dwelling and not, say, to a granary, a bathhouse, or a mosque, is the formal cause. In Aristotle's view, every natural phenomenon, whether a stone, a plant, or a human being, has these same four causes.

Cause as defined by natural scientists differs somewhat from cause as defined by theologians. In theology, or what we now call philosophy, cause means giver of existence. Philosophers call what brings something into existence its cause. Otherwise they do not call it cause, although they may at times call it contributory (*mu'idd*). The natural scientists, however, use the word "cause" even where the relation between two things is simply one of transfer of momentum.

Therefore, in the natural scientists' terminology, the builder is the cause of the house in being the point of issue for its construction, through a series of transfers of materials. The theologians, however, never call the builder the cause of the house, in that he does not bring the house into being. Rather, the materials for the house existed beforehand, and the builder's work has been confined to organizing them. Likewise, according to the natural scientists, the relation of mother and father to child is causal; but according to philosophy, it is that of an antecedent, a contributory factor, or a channel, not that of a cause.

The sequence of causes (causes in the terminology of the philosophers, not that of the natural scientists, that is, causes of being, not causes of motion) terminates. It is absurd that it should be interminable. If the being of a thing proceeds from a cause, arises from a cause, and if the being of that cause arises from a further cause, and if the being of that cause arises from a yet further cause, this process could go on through thousands, millions, billions of causes and more. However, it must finally terminate in a cause that arises through its own essence and not through another cause. Philosophers have often demonstrated that an endless regress of causes is absurd, which phrase they shorten to a regress of causes is absurd or usually even further to regress is absurd.

The word *tasalsul* (regress) is derived from the word *silsila* (sequence, series, range), with the root meaning of chain. Therefore, *tasalsul* means an endless chain of causes. Philosophers thus liken the ordered system of causes and effects to a chain whose links interlock in sequence.

### [The Necessary, the Possible, and the Impossible](#)

Logicians say that if we attribute a predicate to a subject, if, for instance, we say *a* is *b*, the relation of *b* to *a* will have one of three qualities. First, it may be necessary, that is, certain, inevitable, and inviolable;

in other words, reason may refuse to accept anything contrary to it. Second, the opposite may be true. That is, the relation may be impossible, meaning it is absurd that the predicate should be an accident of the subject. In other words, reason refuses to accept that it should be one.

Third, the relation may be such that it may be affirmed or negated; that is, it is susceptible both to affirmation and to negation. In other words, reason refuses to accept neither this relation nor its contrary.

For instance, if we consider the relation of the number four to evenness, we see that it is necessary and certain. Reason refuses to accept its contrary. Reason says that the number four is certainly and necessarily even. Therefore, necessity governs this relation.

But if we say that the number five is even, this relation is impossible. The number five has no possibility of being even, and our reason in perceiving this relation rejects it. Therefore, impossibility and inconceivability govern this relation.

But if we say that today the weather is sunny, this is a possible relation. That is, the nature of the day does not require that the weather be sunny or that it be cloudy. Either may accord with the nature of the day. Possibility governs this relation.

It follows that, whatever subject and whatever predicate we consider, their relation will not be devoid of these three qualities, which at times from a certain standpoint we term the three modalities. I have described the logicians' approach.

The philosophers, who study being, say that any idea or concept we consider, take as a subject, and predicate being of will fall under one of these three categories. The relation of being to that idea or concept may be necessary; that is, that thing must necessarily exist. We then call that thing a necessary being.

God is discussed in philosophy under the heading of proofs for necessary being. Philosophical demonstrations show that there is a Being for which nonexistence is absurd and existence is necessary.

If the relation of being to that idea is impossible, that is, if it is absurd that it should exist, we call it an impossible being. An example is a body that is at once spherical and cubical.

If the relation of being to that idea is possible, that is, if that idea is an essence for which reason rejects neither the existence nor the nonexistence, we call it a possible being. All the beings in the universe, in appearing and then disappearing according to a sequence of causes, are possible beings.

Every possible being in itself becomes a necessary being through its cause, but a being necessary through other, not a being necessary in itself. That is, whenever all the causes and preconditions for a possible being exist, it must exist and so becomes a being necessary through other. If it does not come into existence – if so much as one of its preconditions or one of the elements of its causal nexus is lacking – it becomes a being impossible through other.

The philosophers accordingly say that as long as a thing is not necessary, it does not exist. That is, until the existence of a thing reaches the stage of necessity, it will not come into being. Therefore, whatever comes into being does so according to necessity, within a definite and inviolable system. Thus, the system governing the universe and all that is in it is a necessary, certain, and inviolable system. In the language of modern philosophers, it is a determinate system.<sup>20</sup>

In discussing cause and effect, I said that the principle of correspondence between cause and effect imparts a special order to our thought and marks out a special connection between principles and ramifications, between causes and effects, in our minds. This principle – that every possible being gains necessity from its cause – which, from one standpoint, pertains to cause and effect and, from another, to necessity and possibility, imparts a special character to the system of our cosmology in making it a necessary, certain, and inviolable system.

Philosophy succinctly terms this point the principle of cause–and effect necessity. If we accept the principle of the final cause in reference to nature (if we accept that nature pursues ends in its evolutionary journey and that all these ends revert to one primary end that is the end of ends), the system of our cosmology takes on a further special character.

<sup>1</sup>. See Muhammad Shahrastani, *Kitab-i Milal va Nihal* (“Nations and Sects”) vol.2, p.231, and Dr. Human, *Tarikh-i Falsafa* (“History of Philosophy”) vol. 1, p.20.

<sup>2</sup>. Human, *Tarikh-i Falsafa*, vol. 1, p.69.

<sup>3</sup>. To explicate or demonstrate these three features is beyond the scope of these brief discussions. See Avicenna, *Danishnama-yi A’la’i: Ilahiyat*, the first three chapters, and Mulla Sadra, *Al-Asfar al-Arba’a*, the first few sections.

<sup>4</sup>. *Ahkam*, the plural of *hukm*, a term in logic, meaning conformity to the affirmative or negative relation between subject and predicate. Trans.

<sup>5</sup>. See the *Ilahiyat of ash-Shifa’* (old edition) p. 15.

<sup>6</sup>. Existentialists are said to hold that what is “fabricated in itself” (*ma’jul bi’dh dhat*) is being, but essences are nominal. Essentialists are said to hold the contrary.

That “more base” (i.e. natural) possible beings should arise directly from the Essence of the Truth is said to violate the law of correspondence between cause and effect. Thus, “more noble” possible beings, such as intelligences and souls, must exist as intermediate causes. Suhrawardi is said to have originated this idea, and Mulla Sadra to have endorsed it. Trans.

<sup>7</sup>. *Kitab-i Milal va Nihal*, vol.2.

<sup>8</sup>. Henri Corbin believes that this word was used for the first time in the Islamic world near the turn of the third–fourth centuries by Ibn Wahshiya. See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), pp.63 and 151, n.22. [Nasr cites for his source H. Corbin, *Les Motifs Zoroastriens dans la philosophie de Suhrawardi* (Tehran, 1946), p. 18. See also Henri (sic) Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie Islamique* (Paris, 1964), p.285. Trans.]

Sayyid Hasan Taqizada, in his “*Yad Dashtha-yi Tarikh-i ‘Ulum dar Islam*” (Notes on the History of the Sciences in Islam), in *Majalla-yi Maqalat va Barrasiha* (Monographs and Researches Bulletin), 3 and 4, Tehran, Publications Group of the College of Theology and Islamic sciences, p.213, after mentioning an unknown book attributed to this Ibn Wahshiya, says:

“Another book by Ibn Wahshiya the Nabataean has occasioned much discussion, titled *Al-Falahat an-Nabatiya* (Nabataean Agriculture), which has also been attributed to a sage of Babul named Quthami and which quotes older books from Babul, such as the writings of Zagrith and Yanbu Shad. Even Ibn Khaldun, with his flair for research, attributed this book to the Nabataean scholars and saw it as an Arabic translation from the Greek. But finally, through the researches of the German scholars Gutschmid and Noldeke and especially of the Italian Nallino it grew clear that this book is a fabrication

and full of balderdash; Nallino goes so far as to hold that no Ibn Wahshiya ever existed and that Abu Talib Zayyat compiled all these fantasies and attributed them to an imaginary person. Researchers believe that such books are works of the Shu'ubiya, who sought to prove that the sciences belonged to non-Arab peoples and that the Arabs had no part in them.”

It is not unlikely that the source of Suhrawardi's error was Al-Falahat al-Nabatiya or some similar work of the Shu'ubiya. This book is not available to us at present so we cannot compare its contents with what Suhrawardi has said on the subject.

[9.](#) Muhammad 'Ali Furughi, Sayr-i Hikmat dar Urupa, 3 vols. in 1 (n.p., n.d.) vol. 1, p.20.

[10.](#) Bertrand Russell, A History of Western Philosophy (New York, 1945). See especially pp.119-143.

[11.](#) For further study of Pythagoras, see *ibid.*, pp. 105, 120, 126, and Shahrastani, Kitab-i Milal va Nihal, vol.2.

[12.](#) Tafsir al-Mizan (Arabic text) vol.7, sura An'am, verse 59.

[13.](#) For a detailed study of Mulla Sadra's thought see Fazlur Rahman, The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra (Albany, N.Y., 1975). Trans.

[14.](#) There is no question here of a systematic distinction between being and existence. I merely have used the two English words to correspond to the two contexts in which being is discussed here. Mahiya has appeared throughout this work as identity, but here only essence serves the context. Trans.

[15.](#) Mahiya is an Arabic word, a contraction of ma huwiya. The phrase ma huwa means "What is it?" With the final letters ya' and ta' marbuta, it becomes the verbal noun mahuwiya, which is contracted to mahiya. Thus mahiya means "what is it-ness", or "whatness".

[16.](#) See Rahman, The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra, pp.27-34. Trans.

[17.](#) Here is how the hukama' have expressed this point: "A thing's need of cause hinges on possibility, not on createdness in time." For detailed discussion of this point, see my 'Ilal-i Girayish bi Maddigari (Causes of the Turn to Materialism). Mashhad, 1350 Sh./1971 [also many subsequent editions. Trans.]

[18.](#) Unknown. Trans.

[19.](#) See "Asl-i Tazadd dar Falsafa-yi Islami" (The Principle of Contradiction in Islamic Philosophy) in my Maqalati-Falsafati (Philosophic Essays)

[20.](#) This determinism is not opposed to free will in the case of man, and should not be confused with the form of determinism that is. The necessity of the system of the universe is not inimical to man's free will.

---

### URL di origine:

<https://www.al-islam.org/it/fundamentals-islamic-thought-god-man-and-universe-murtadha-mutahhari/philosophy#comment-0>