

Mullā Ṣadrā and the Project of Transcendent Philosophy

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Abstract

In this study, we have endeavored to elucidate the ‘project’ of Mullā Ṣadrā’s transcendent philosophy (*al-ḥikma al-muta‘aliya*), an expression that Ṣadrā himself saw fit to describe his philosophical works. The meaning and method of Ṣadrā’s transcendent philosophy, which inform his unique philosophical positions, can be better understood when it is placed against the backdrop of discursive philosophy (*ḥikma baḥthiyya*) of the Muslim peripatetics (*al-mashshā‘īn*). In explaining the project of transcendent philosophy, Ṣadrā suggests that the *muta‘alih* (deiform one) like any other ordinary philosopher builds theoretical models to describe the nature of reality and its diverse phenomena. However, what sets him/her apart from the latter is that he/she believes that through spiritual practices his/her soul can be transformed to the extent that he/she can attain presential knowledge (*al-‘ilm al-ḥuḍūrī*) of the reality of being (*ḥaqīqat al-wujūd*). That is, he/she can well penetrate the true essences (*al-dhawāt*) of things insofar as this is a possibility.

Life, Intellectual Background, and Works

Mullā Ṣadrā is, by any reckoning, one of the most important of all Islamic philosophers, matched only by the likes of Avicenna (d. 1037) and Suhrawardī (d. 1191). A wide-ranging thinker and philosopher, Ṣadrā, left a great body of work spanning a vast array of fields from Qur’anic exegesis (*tafsīr*), commentary on the traditions (*aḥādīth*), logic (*mantiq*), philosophical Sufism (*irfān*), ethics (*akhlāq*) to natural philosophy/physics (*tabī‘iyyāt*), theology (*kalām*), and metaphysics (*ilāhiyyāt*). His oeuvre comprises over 45 works (some in several volumes) that draw on practically every field of Islamic intellectual learning from its inception until his own day.

In the present paper, I will endeavor to elucidate the ‘project’ of transcendent philosophy (*al-ḥikma al-muta‘aliya*), an expression that Ṣadrā himself saw fit to describe his philosophical works. But before such an undertaking, some clarifications regarding the word ‘philosophy’ are in order. Although specialists in Islamic intellectual history may be aware of the nuances between the current usage of the term ‘philosophy’¹ and the way it was understood by a traditional thinker like Ṣadrā, it would be helpful for the general reader to lay bare the technicalities of such differences. Mullā Ṣadrā lived in a time (16th–17th century Safavid Persia) when the world would still be called what Charles Taylor termed as the ‘enchanted’ world.² That is to say, the philosophizing of Ṣadrā took place in a context where prophecy, supernatural forces, and, more importantly, the notion of ‘vertical causality’ did not yet lose their philosophic significance. The events in the cosmos or in nature, in this philosophy, were not understood *solely* in terms of self-explanatory laws of nature, without also taking into account the intervention of a ‘higher agency’ from beyond the physical realm. Thus it is that most of transcendent philosophy will remain senseless if we do not allow for concepts such as the hierarchy of different ‘worlds’ (*marātib al-‘awālim*) or of different levels of being (*wujūd*). Unfortunately, the paucity of space will not allow us to elaborate on this issue further other than these brief remarks, but it would be useful to keep in mind the difference in orientation between our modern conception of philosophy and the manner in which it was conceived by Ṣadrā. With this in mind, we can now move on to briefly sketch Ṣadrā’s biography and the intellectual context.

Mullā Ṣadrā was born in Shiraz into a relatively prosperous (his father was a court employee) in the year 979–80 AH/1571–72.³ After completing his early education in various ‘transmitted sciences’ (*al-‘ulūm al-‘aqliyya*) such as grammar, (*naḥw*), Qur’anic exegesis (*tafsīr*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and the science of the prophetic traditions (*‘ilm al-ḥadīth*), he moved first to Qazvin in 1000 AH/1591 and then to Isfahan in 1006 AH/1597, successive capitals of the Safavid empire. It was in these major centers of culture and civilization that Ṣadrā studied philosophy (both peripatetic philosophy and Illuminationism of Suhrawardī) and theology with Sayyid Bāqir Muḥammad Astarābādī, known as Mīr Dāmād (d. 1631), and *tafsīr* and Shī‘ī *aḥādīth* with Bahā al-Dīn Muḥammad al-‘Āmilī known as Shaykh Bahā‘ī (d. 1622). Both of these influential men of letters left an indelible impression on his intellectual and spiritual life, even though he would sometimes disagree with them on certain philosophical issues. It should be kept in mind that Ṣadrā was the immediate heir to some 200 (or more) years of philosophico-theological speculation that had begun in the Tīmūrīd period (1370–1507) in the city of Shiraz, where major figures of the ‘School of Shiraz’ including Ṣadr al-Dīn Dashtakī (d. 1498), his son Ghiyāth al-Dīn (d. 1542), and Jalāl al-Dīn Dawānī (d. 1502) were active.⁴ In his pioneering study, Reza Pourjavady avers that together with Jalāl al-Dīn Dawānī, the Dashtakīs are the three best-known scholars who were teaching philosophy and theology in the late 15th century Shīrāz (Pourjavady 2013, p. 32). It is important to note that the work of these figures played a vital role in the philosophical formation of Ṣadrā, to whom he would often refer as *‘ba‘d al-muta‘akḥkhirīn’* (some of the modern/recent philosophers) in his treatises. In addition, Ṣadrā’s philosophy betrays a strong influence of Ibn ‘Arabī and his school, especially in regard to his ontology.⁵

In the West, E. G. Browne’s *A year amongst the Persians* (London: 1893) is perhaps the earliest work that referred to Mullā Ṣadrā, followed by Comte de Gobineau’s *Les Religions et les philosophies dans l’Asie centrale* (Paris: 1900). In his doctoral thesis *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1934) presents a brief survey of Ṣadrā’s philosophy, which unfortunately is tainted by a number of errors. The German scholar Max Horten also composed two monographs on Ṣadrā: *Die Gottesbeweise bei Shirazi* (Bonn: 1912) and *Das philosophische System von Shirazi* (Strasburg: 1913), in which he both translated from Ṣadrā’s works and provided a modest analysis of his philosophical system. However, Ṣadrā studies gathered momentum when in the 60s and 70s Corbin (e.g., 1956), Nasr (e.g., 1978), and Rahman (1975) began to publish widely on his works. At present, there are over 20 books on Ṣadrā in various European languages including translations of some of his treatises. Some of the better studies of Ṣadrā are those of Bonmariage (2008), Rizvi (2009), Kalin (2010), Rustom (2012), and Meisami (2013). In addition, mention should be made of Açıkgenç (1993) and Kamal (2006), who compared Ṣadrā’s philosophy with that of Heidegger. A recent comparative study on the Ṣadrā–Heidegger question is that of Faruque (2017), which puts the previous literature on this question in its place. Some of Ṣadrā’s major works are listed below:

Al-Ḥikma al-muta‘aliya fī l-asfār al-‘aqliyya al-arba‘a (The Transcendent Philosophy of the Four Intellectual Journeys). It is Ṣadrā’s magnum opus named after the four ‘symbolic’ journeys of the Sufis. A unique *tour de force* in Islamic philosophy containing discussions of almost all the major philosophical issues (*masā‘il*).

Mafātīḥ al-ghayb (Keys to the Unseen). A major work on Qur’anic hermeneutics that contains discussions of the intellect (*‘aql*), the nature of mystical unveiling, metaphysics of the divine names etc.

Sharḥ Uṣūl al-kāfi (Commentary on the *Uṣūl al-kāfi*). An unfinished multi-volume commentary on the premier ḥadīth collection of the Shia tradition. Contains discussions of many ontological themes.

Ta‘līq ‘alā Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-ishrāq of Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 1311), itself the commentary on the magnum opus of Suhrawardī (d. 1191). (Glosses upon the Commentary upon the ‘The Philosophy of Illumination’ of Suhrawardī). An important work on metaphysics that still awaits scholarly investigation.

Ta'liqa 'alā l-ilāhiyyāt min Kitāb al-Shifā' (Glosses on the Metaphysics of Avicenna's *al-Shifā'*). A major work on metaphysics that shows some of his disagreements with Avicenna.

Al-Ḥikma al-'arshiyya (The Wisdom of the Throne). It deals primarily with eschatology, although contains musings on metaphysics.

Īqāz al-nā'imīn (The Awakening of the Dormant). A work that can be categorized as belonging to philosophical Sufism (*'irfān*). It contains important ruminations on the nature of Absolute Being.

Al-Mabda' wa-l-ma'ād (The Origin and the Return). An earlier treatise that is devoted to metaphysics and eschatology.

Hudūth al-'ālam (Temporal Origination of the World). In it, Ṣadrā discusses the history of philosophy beginning with Adam, and its continuation among the Greeks before it reached the Islamic world.

Iksīr al-'arīfīn fī ma'rifat tariq al-ḥaqiq wa-l-yaqīn (The Elixir of the Gnostics on the Knowledge of the Path of the Truth and Certainty). Treatise that discusses classification of the sciences and self-knowledge.

Kitāb al-mashā'ir (The Book of Metaphysical Penetrations). One of Ṣadrā's premier works on being (*wujūd*) and its modalities.

Sharḥ al-hidāya al-athīriyya (Commentary upon the *Hidāya* of Athīr al-Dīn Abharī (d. 1264)). Though considered a peripatetic work, it contains a good deal of the principles of Ṣadrā's ontology.

Al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya fī l-manāḥij al-sulūkiyya (The Divine Witnesses on the Paths of Spiritual Journey). A summa of the *Aṣfār* but departs from it on a number of occasions.

An Outline of Central Doctrines

It would not do justice to the complexity of Ṣadrā's philosophical doctrines, if we attempt to summarize them in a few words. Nevertheless, given the perimeter of the present study, we can only outline Ṣadrā's major philosophical contributions. Mullā Ṣadrā is, above all, a philosopher of *wujūd* (being/existence). The centrality of *wujūd* in Ṣadrā's perspective becomes evident from the citation below:

The problem of 'being' is the foundation of philosophical principles, the basis of metaphysical inquiries, and the axis around which rotates the millstone of the science of unity, the science of eschatology (*ma'ād*) and the science of the resurrection of spirits and bodies (*ḥaṣhr al-arwāḥ wa-l-aṣṣād*) and many other things, which we have been the only one to demonstrate and the sole person to bring out [their meaning]. Whoever is ignorant of the knowledge of *wujūd*, his ignorance runs through the most important of all subjects and the greatest among them, and he will become mindless of it and the secrets of Divine knowledge (*'ilm al-rubūbiyyāt*) and its inner meanings will become lost to him as well as the science of Divine Names and Qualities and prophecy and the science of the soul (*ma'rifat al-naṣf*) and its connections [with the whole of cosmology] and its return to the Origin of its origins (*mabda' mabādī uhā*) and its final end [eschatology]. Therefore, we saw to it that we begin with it [the question of *wujūd*] (Ṣadrā, *al-Mashā'ir*, p. 3, trans. Nasr, modified).

Thus, it comes as no surprise that Ṣadrā establishes the primacy of being (*aṣālat al-wujūd*) in the debate between being and essence (*wujūd wa māhiyya*)—one of the central issues in Islamic philosophy. However, it is important to note that unlike the peripatetic philosophers, Ṣadrā's starting point in ontology is the 'concept-reality distinction' in *wujūd* instead of the famous being-essence distinction—a point that is not sufficiently emphasized in the existing Ṣadrā studies.⁶ Ṣadrā is credited with formulating his unique doctrine of the gradation of being (*tashkīk al-wujūd*), which can be outlined as follows (granted that premises are true): (1) existence is primary (from the doctrine of *aṣālat*); (2) existence is synonymous (*al-musharak al-mā nawī*) in all existents; (3) multiplicity in existence is real; and (4) existence is simple (*basīṭ*). Therefore, existence must be a gradational reality (*amr mushakkīk*) embracing unity in multiplicity and multiplicity in unity. It is worth noting that Ṣadrā also accepts the famous Sufi metaphysical doctrine of the unity

of being (*wahdat al-wujūd*).⁷ In addition, some of the other notable contributions of Ṣadrā are the following: substantial motion (*al-ḥarakat al-jawhariyya*),⁸ unification of the intellect and the intelligible (*ittiḥād al-‘aql wa-l-ma‘qūl*),⁹ the soul is temporal in its origination and spiritual in its subsistence (*jismāniyyat al-ḥudūth wa rūḥāniyyat al-baqā*),¹⁰ ‘bodily’ resurrection (*ma‘ād jismānī*),¹¹ the simple reality is all things, and at the same time it is not anyone of them (*basīt al-ḥaqīqa kull al-ashyā wa-laysa bi-shay’ minhā*),¹² and so on.

The Project of Transcendent Philosophy

The meaning and method of Ṣadrā’s transcendent philosophy, which inform his unique philosophical positions as outlined in the previous section, can be better understood when it is placed against the backdrop of discursive philosophy (*ḥikma baḥthiyya*) of the Muslim peripatetics (*al-mashshā‘īn*). Broadly speaking, in the wake of the translation movement of Greek into Arabic, there arose in the Islamic lands of Arabia and Persia a group of philosophers whose philosophy can be characterized as ‘discursive philosophy’ in the sense that logic, rational demonstration (*burhān*) etc. played a key role in it. Some of the major representatives of this philosophy were al-Fārābī (d. 950), Avicenna and their followers. However, even though Avicenna’s major works were composed in the manner of the Neoplatonizing Aristotelians, one already finds in his *Ishārāt* the distinction between discursive and ‘transcendent philosophy’.¹³ Unfortunately, Avicenna does not elaborate upon the concept of transcendent philosophy further. It was in Suhrawardī’s *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* that one encounters a full-blown distinction between discursive and what he calls ‘divine’ philosophy (*al-ta‘alluh*).¹⁴ In their translation, Ziai and Walbridge (in Suhrawardī 1999, p. 3) render *al-ta‘alluh* as ‘intuitive philosophy,’ which may not flesh out the full significance of the term. The word *ta‘alluh* derives from the root *a-l-h* and is of the same root as ‘Allah’. Although it literally means becoming god or *theosis*, it does not make sense when translated literally in order to qualify the word ‘philosophy’. Nevertheless, Suhrawardī clarifies abundantly what he means by it. According to him, if one is interested only in learning discursive philosophy, then that person ‘should follow the method of the Peripatetics’ which is ‘fine and sound’ on its own level. But the method of his ‘divine philosophy’ requires one to undergo the ‘noetic’ experiences of luminous inspirations (*sawāniḥ nūrāniyya*) and taste (*dhawq*) and participate in the Sufi practice of ‘retreat’ (*khalwa*).¹⁵ According to him, ‘the best of student’ of philosophy is the one proficient in ‘both divine and discursive philosophy.’¹⁶

It is against the aforementioned background that Mullā Ṣadrā develops his notion of transcendent philosophy. Put briefly, for Ṣadrā, as for Suhrawardī, philosophy is a ‘graded’ concept in the sense that it allows one to move from one stage (of philosophy) to another. Thus, transcendent philosophy makes room for discursive philosophy, but at the same time, it ‘transcends’ the latter by other higher modes of ‘intellection’ such as unveiling (*kashf*), illumination (*ishrāq*), and direct witnessing (*shuhūd*). Moreover, Ṣadrā’s philosophizing should be understood in the light of what Hadot calls ‘philosophy as a way of life’,¹⁷ because it involves a set of ‘spiritual exercises’ that goes hand in hand with conceptual understanding and mastering philosophical principles (that is, spiritual practices and epistemology are intertwined). In addition, since Ṣadrā operates in the context of the Islamic religion, the realities of ‘prophecy’ and ‘sainthood’ (*wilāya*) play a notable role in his act of philosophizing, and in fact, he claims that one can actually ‘harmonize’ all these diverse modes of approaching truth (see the ensuing paragraphs).

In what follows, we will let Ṣadrā speak for himself regarding the method and vision of his transcending philosophy by a careful selection of a number of key passages from his corpus. To provide a true contour of how Ṣadrā conceives the program of his transcendent philosophy, we can do no better than presenting some thought-provoking passages from the *Aṣfār*, in which

the former compares the life of the author of *the Enneads* (*Theologia Aristotelis*) with that of Avicenna (taken here as the paradigmatic discursive philosopher):

Most of the words of this great philosopher [i.e. the author of *Uthulūjīyā* (*Theologia Aristotelis*)] indicate his power of unveiling (*quwwat kashfihi*), his inner light, and his proximate position before God. He is indeed from the *perfect friends*¹⁸ (*awliya' al-kāmilayn*) [of God]. For his occupation with the affairs of the world, governing the people, the welfare of the worshippers and restoring the countries was after going through those ascetic practices (*riyādāt*) and spiritual exercises (*mujāhadāt*). After his soul was perfected, his inner self (*dhāt*) was [also] perfected, and he became perfect in his inner self so that nothing could preoccupy him. [And] he desired to unify the two positions and perfect the two modes of being [i.e. the theoretical and practical] (Spiritual Psychology, pp. 436–37, modified; *Asfār*, vol. 9, p. 109).

It is not clear from the above whether Ṣadrā has in mind Aristotle or Plotinus, which, in any event, is irrelevant in this context, since for him, the *author* of *Uthulūjīyā* (whoever he is) represents the model par excellence of transcendent philosophy. The contrast becomes sharper as he comments on Avicenna:

As for the Shaykh, the author of *al-Shifā'* [i.e. Avicenna], his preoccupation with the affairs of the world (*umūr al-dunyā*) was *not*¹⁹ according to the *above way* [i.e. *a la* the author of *Uthulūjīyā*]. It is strange that when he completed his discussion at the end of the investigation of the existential ipseities (*tahqīq al-huwiyyāt al-wujūdiyya*), and not the general matters (*al-umūr al-āmma*) which contain the rules [regarding them], his mind became dull-witted, and there manifested in him the incapability [to penetrate beyond them]. This is so [with him] in many matters (Spiritual Psychology, p. 437, modified; *Asfār*, vol. 9, p. 109).

Then Ṣadrā lists several philosophical issues that he reckons Avicenna failed to resolve (or, fell short of comprehension)²⁰:

1. change in the category of substance (*jawhar*);
2. platonian forms (*muthul aflātūnī*);
3. unification of the intellect and intelligible (*ittiḥād 'aql wa ma'qūl*);
4. unification of the soul and the active intellect (*'aql fa'āl*);
5. love of matter for the form;
6. transformation of the forms of elements to one form balanced in quality;
7. resurrection (*ma'ād*) of all bodies including those of plants and minerals;
8. eternity of the celestial spheres;
9. issues in animal psychology; and
10. transformation in essence.

Ṣadrā continues his criticism of Avicenna in the following:

These are the issues which Shaykh al-Ra'īs (Avicenna) could not perceive in spite of his fine wit, deep understanding, and subtle nature... Know that this subtle point and the likes from the properties of the existents are not possible to attain except through inner unveiling (*mukāshafāt bāṭiniyya*), the supra-sensible witnessing (*mushāhadāt sirriyya*), and existential visions. [In order to attain] them the memorization of the discursive rules and the laws of essential and accidental notions are **not sufficient**.²¹ These unveilings and witnessing are **not attained except** through ascetic practices and spiritual in the retreats (*khaluwāt*) together with deep separation from the company of people, severance from the accidental matters of the world, its futile pleasures, its high fantasies, and its false hopes (Spiritual Psychology, p. 436, modified; *Asfār*, vol. 9, pp. 108–09).

And then Ṣadrā explains why Avicenna failed to transcend the limits of discursive philosophy:²²

He (i.e. Avicenna) spent his time in acquiring the *unnecessary*²³ knowledge such as that of languages, advanced accounting (*daqāiq al-hisāb*), disciplines of arithmetic and music, and details of remedies in medicine, mentioning the [properties of] medicinal drugs, both as units and mixed, the states of poisons and antidotes... other than these particular knowledge which God has created for everyone to be worthy of. But the men of God (*al-rijāl al-ilāhī*) should not plunge into their deluges. That is why when Socrates was asked about the reason for his turning away from the mathematical sciences he replied: 'Because I was occupied with the noblest of science (*bi-ashraf al-'ulūm*),' that is, the divine science (*al-'ilm al-ilāhī*) (Spiritual Psychology, p. 445, modified; *Aṣfār*, vol. 9, p. 119).

According to Ṣadrā, one who is given acute mental power, subtleness, and quick wit should strive to attain 'presence of heart' by committing oneself to performing 'spiritual exercises'.²⁴ He then outlines the nature of some of these spiritual exercises:

In sum, the central and important thing for the one whom God has blessed with a pure primordial nature (*fiṭra ṣāfiya*), subtle nature, powerful mental acuteness, penetrating understanding, and vast capacity, should not occupy himself with the affairs of the world, the seeking of position and elevated place. Rather, he should *distance himself from the people, seeking the retreat*,²⁵ the intimacy with God, and *keep away from everything other than Him, with presence of heart and focused spiritual concentration* (*ijtimā' al-himma*), and *spend his thinking in divine matters* (Spiritual Psychology, p. 445, modified; *Aṣfār*, vol. 9, p. 119).

Further elucidation of the 'spiritual exercises' is provided below:

And the difference between the knowledge of theoretically oriented intellectuals and possessors of inner insight (*dhū al-absār*) is like the difference between those who learn the definition of sweetness and those who taste the same... Thus, I gained the certitude that the realities of faith could not be comprehended except through *cleansing the heart of vain desires* (*taṣfiyat al-qalb 'an al-hawā*), *purifying it of [the distractions of] the world*,²⁶... and *contemplating the Qur'anic verses and the tradition of the Messenger and his household* (peace be on them all) and *following the path of the virtuous for the remainder of one's limited life-span* (Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ka'im*, vol. 7, pp. 10-11)

But Ṣadrā's project of transcendent philosophy requires one to master 'theoretical sciences' as well. As he says:

This should be after he has attained some knowledge of the sciences pertaining to literature, logic, physics, and cosmos, which travelers on the way to God the Exalted (*al-sālikīn ilā-llāh ta'ālā*) should be knowledgeable about, but not so the ecstatic ones (*majdhūbīn*) of God, whose scales become balanced at the first instant of the divine ecstasy. Without one of the two ways mentioned above, how can anyone arrive at the degree of the cognitive unveiling (*al-kashf al-'ilmī*), and direct witnessing of the heart (*shuhūd qalbī*) concerning divine knowledge, the states of the origin and the return, the knowledge of the soul, its stations, and ascent to God the Exalted, if one is engaged in worldly matters, its attachments and its snares? (Spiritual Psychology, p. 445, modified; *Aṣfār*, vol. 9, p. 119).

Since some scholars tend to emphasize only the spiritual aspect of Ṣadrā's philosophical project, it is important to note that for Ṣadrā, the hard stuff of discursive philosophy is not without a value:

Our statements should not be taken to mean merely the result of unveiling (*mukāshafa*) and tasting (*dhawq*) or blind imitation of religion (*taqlīd al-sharī'a*) without following the process of intellectual proofs and demonstrations and the rules they entail. It must be understood that unveiling without demonstration is an insufficient condition for wayfaring (*sulūk*), just as mere discourse without unveiling is a great deficiency in wayfaring... we have pointed out time and again that philosophy (*ḥikma*) does not challenge the truths of revealed religions (*al-sharā'i' al-ḥaqqa al-ilāhiyya*). Rather, the aim behind the both is one and the same: the knowledge of Ultimate Truth (*al-ḥaqq al-awwal*), His attributes and His acts... And one who does not possess the knowledge of how to harmonize religious addresses (*li-taṭbīq al-khiṭābāt al-shar'iyya*) with philosophical demonstrations says that they stand opposed to one another... Surely we have harmonized their unveiling and tasting with demonstrative principles (*Aṣfār*, vol. 7, pp. 326–27 and vol. 6, p. 263).

Thus, according to Ṣadrā, one can strike a harmony between the Qur'an, *burhān* (demonstration), and *irfān* (gnosis), without lapsing into contradiction because *true* philosophy does not contradict the 'essence' of scriptural truths. In fact, Ṣadrā claims that philosophy has a 'prophetic' origin as it started not with Thales but with prophet Adam and continued through Hermes and a number of other prophets until finally it reached ancient Greece, and thence to the Islamic world.²⁷ For Ṣadrā the attainment of truth requires illumination by the light of religion, even though one may have mastered all intellectual proofs/methods. But at the same time, he is decisively against 'taqlīd' or blind following of one's tradition:

And how can one who is merely satisfied in accepting the traditions with no proof, and who negates the methods of thought and intellection, attain guidance?... Also, how can one who merely adopts intellectual proof and satisfies himself thereby but has not yet been illuminated by the light of religion, be guided to the truth? I wish I knew how one may seek refuge in the intellect, when it is afflicted by incapacitation and limitation... Surely, one who does not harmonize religion and intellectual judgement in this manner is definitely lacking... (Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-kāfī*, p. 438; cited in Safavi, 2012, pp. 33–34).

He ends the discussion on the three-way relationship between philosophy, scripture, and illumination with an autobiographical note:

Earlier I used to engage in [theoretical] discourse and its reiteration and often busied myself in studying the books of theoretically oriented philosophers (*al-ḥukamā' al-nazzār*), until I thought I had learned something. However, when my inner eyesight (*baṣīra*) opened a little and I cast a glance at my own state. I saw therein that, although I had attained knowledge pertaining to the states of Origin, His transcendence over contingent and temporal attributes, and of the return of the human soul, I am far from apprehending the science of true realities, which cannot be known *except through* tasting and immediate awareness (*wijḍān*). And these matters are also mentioned in the Book [of God] and the Sunnah under the [rubric] of knowledge of God, His attributes and Names, His prophets and books... all of which can only be learned through the teaching of God, and can only be unveiled by the light of prophecy and sanctity (*wilāya*) (Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-karīm*, vol. 7, p. 10).

In a manner reminiscent of Suhrawardī, Ṣadrā expatiates on the attitude and rank of different people with respect to their understanding of reality (in a descending order):

The first level refers to the people of unveiling (*aṣḥāb al-mukāshafa*); those who know the ultimate truth by diverting attention away from themselves and annihilating their [illusory] essence... They witness His signs.

The second level comprises the noblest of the philosophers (*afādīl al-ḥukamāʾ*). They perceive Him only through intellect... When they intellect forms, their imagination represent these forms in the best subtle manner in accordance with [actual] intelligible forms. However, they know that those [forms] are superior to the imaginal forms [that their imagination describes].

The third level refers to common believers of faith (*ahl al-īmān*), who are incapable of [ascending] to a higher level. The most they can do is to construct imaginary forms [in their minds]...

The fourth level consists of the people of submission (*ahl al-tasīm*) [i.e. those who imitate authority]. They do not even possess the capacity to conjecture, let alone imagination... They conceive of truth and the angelic reality in terms of material forms.

The fifth level refers to those who are incapable of reflecting beyond the physical realm (*al-jismāniyyāt*). (Ṣadrā, *Īqāz al-nā'imīn*, pp. 108–09).

Finally, Ṣadrā states the meaning and end of philosophy:

Know that philosophy is the perfecting of the human soul (*istikmāl al-naḥs al-insāniyya*) by means of knowledge of the realities of existents (*ḥaqā'iq al-mawjūdāt*) as they truly are, and by means of judgments about their *wujūd* investigated through demonstrations, and not through conjecture or blind imitation, as far as human capacity enables. [Or] if you like, I say: [philosophizing] gives the world an intelligent order (*naẓman 'aqliyyan*) according to the best of man's abilities ('*alā ḥasab al-ṭāqat al-bashariyya*), so that one may attain likeness (*tashabbuh*) to the Creator, the transcendent. Since human being appears as a mixture of two [substances], namely a spiritual form [belonging to world of] command and sensible matter [belonging to world of] creation, he inevitably possesses in his nature both the attachment to and disengagement (*tajarrud*) from the [body]. Philosophy, thus, is refined according to the two modes of being through the cultivation of two faculties (*quwwatayn*) as they relate to the techniques of disengaged theorizing and rational practices (*Asfār*, vol. 1, p. 20).

Considering what has been said so far, and what Ṣadrā has said in other places, the process of perfecting the soul can be taken to mean a number of things. First of all, the would-be philosopher should comprehend the metaphysical doctrines theoretically, which involves self-knowledge, and knowledge of Absolute Being (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*) and the modes of its self-manifestation (*zuhūr*).²⁸ Then she should concentrate on spiritual exercises that include, *inter alia*, detachment from the world, retreats (*khalwāt*), and invocatory practices (*dhikr*). Moreover, she should attain intrinsic, spiritual virtues (e.g., generosity, reliance on God (*tawakkul*), patience, and humility) that will purify the soul and prepare it for the reception of divine grace and illumination. As the philosopher-seeker progresses on the path and continues to focus on invocatory practices, she reaches a point where her 'ego-consciousness/I-ness' is completely 'transcended', and she comes to know the reality of her true self, as that which is 'identical' with the Divine Self. Ṣadrā expresses this doctrine as the 'identity of the invoker, invocation and invoked', which constitutes a single reality.²⁹ It is worth emphasizing that such a culminating moment occurs through the practice of invocation, which Ṣadrā expounds at great lengths in his *tafsīr of Sūrat al-jumu'a*.³⁰ To recapitulate, the *muta'llih* (deiform one) like any other ordinary philosopher builds theoretical models to describe the nature of reality and its diverse phenomena. However, what sets her apart from the latter is that she believes that through spiritual practices, her soul can be transformed to the extent that she can attain presential knowledge³¹ (*al-'ilm al-ḥudūrī*) of the reality of being (*ḥaqīqat al-wujūd*). That is to say, she can well penetrate the true essences (*al-dhawāt*) of things to the extent possible.

Legacy

The extraordinary attention that is given to Mullā Ṣadrā's legacy in today's Iran is a testament to Ṣadrā's continuing significance, even though many would debate some of the 'political' motivations behind it.³² Among the immediate followers and students of Ṣadrā were Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1680) and 'Abd al-Razzāq b. al-Ḥusayn Lāhījī (d. 1662), both of whom authored important works. Although the immediate influence of Ṣadrā is somewhat unknown in Persia, his *Sharḥ al-hidāya* (under the name Ṣadrā) was incorporated into the *Dars-i niẓāmī* curriculum of the Farangi Mahal in India, and in the course of time, nearly hundreds of commentaries had been written on it.³³ As for Persia, one can see the influence of Ṣadrā beginning with the late 17th century in the following figures that had continued down to the present day: Mullā Isma'īl Khajū'ī (d. 1759), Muḥammad Bidabadī (d. 1783), Qādī Sa'īd Qummī, Mullā 'Alī ibn Jamshīd Nūrī (d. 1830), Mullā Muḥammad Isma'īl Iṣfahānī (d. 1860), 'Abd al-Allāh Zunūzī, Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī (d. 1873), 'Alī Mudarris Zunūzī (d. 1889), Muḥammad Riḍā Qumshī'ī (d. 1888–1889), Mirzā Mahdī Ashtiyānī (d. 1952), Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Ghulām Ḥusayn Dīnānī (b. 1934), and Ghulāmriḍā A'wānī (b. 1943) are some of the important philosophers in the tradition of Ṣadrā.

Short Biography

Muhammad U. Faruque is a PhD student specializing in Islamic philosophy, science, and Islam and the West. His research focuses on Graeco-Arabica, Islamic philosophy and theology (especially, post-classical philosophy), and philosophical Sufism. Muhammad received his B. Sc. in Financial Economics from the University of London in 2011. After his graduation, he traveled to Iran where he completed his MA in Islamic Philosophy, and wrote his dissertation on Mullā Ṣadrā's and Dāwūd Qaysarī's metaphysics, with particular emphasis on their treatment of "absolutely unconditioned being." He has also authored and co-authored a number of articles in Persian and English, including a number of articles on Mullā Ṣadrā such as Rajab 'Alī Tabrīzī's Refutation of Mullā Ṣadrā's Metaphysics (forthcoming) and Mullā Ṣadrā and Heidegger on the Meaning of Metaphysics (2017). He is also a recipient of a number of awards including the prestigious The Berkeley Fellowship for Graduate Study.

Notes

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¹ The problem of defining the concept of philosophy, *inter alia*, is known as 'metaphilosophy'. For some of the current definitions of philosophy, see McGinn (2015) and Overgaard *et al.* (2013, 17ff.). For the contrast between current and ancient conceptions of philosophy, see Jordan (1992).

² Taylor (2007, p. 25). It is to be noted that Taylor's concept of the 'enchanted world' should be used with some qualification, when it is applied to the Islamic world due to the obvious differences in contexts.

³ Khamene'i (2000), Kalin (2014, chs. 1 and 2), Meisami (2013, pp. 1–17).

⁴ Nasr (1987); Kākā'ī (2007, 1996–97).

⁵ On the influence of Ibn 'Arabī on Ṣadrā, see the excellent monograph of Fereshte (2007).

⁶ For more information on this distinction, see Faruque (unpubl. 2014, ch. 1).

⁷ Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār*, vol. 2, p. 292.

⁸ Meisami (2013, pp. 61–71).

⁹ Kalin (2010, pp. 159ff.).

¹⁰ Rahman (1975, pp. 198ff.); Safāvi 2011; Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār*, vol. 8, p. 346ff.

¹¹ Al-Kutubi (2014); Jambet (2008).

- ¹² Zakawī (2005).
- ¹³ Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt*, vol. 4, p. 122.
- ¹⁴ Suhrawardī, *Hikmat al-ishrāq*, pp. 3–4.
- ¹⁵ Suhrawardī, *Hikmat al-ishrāq*, pp. 1 and 4.
- ¹⁶ Suhrawardī, *Hikmat al-ishrāq*, p. 3.
- ¹⁷ Hadot (1995). For an update on the concept of ‘philosophy as a way of life’ in ancient philosophy, see Cooper (2012), Sellers (2003), and Chase *et al.* (2013).
- ¹⁸ Italic mine.
- ¹⁹ Italics mine.
- ²⁰ Šadrā, *Aṣfār*, vol. 9, pp. 108–119.
- ²¹ Bold mine.
- ²² To be sure, Šadrā displays a love–hate relationship with respect to Avicenna’s intellectual attainment or the deficiency thereof. He admits that the latter’s life was full of turmoil and struggles, which prevented him from gaining transcendent wisdom. After mentioning this, however, Šadrā goes on to maintain that it is nonetheless inexplicable why Avicenna chose to compose so many voluminous books on mundane sciences (Šadrā, *Aṣfār*, vol. 9, pp. 119–20).
- ²³ Italic mine.
- ²⁴ The phrase ‘*exercitia spiritualia*’ is originally coined by St. Ignatius of Loyola (d. 1556); see Ignatius of Loyola (1964).
- ²⁵ Italic mine.
- ²⁶ Italic mine.
- ²⁷ Šadrā, *Hudūth al-‘ālam*, pp. 272ff.
- ²⁸ Šadrā, *Aṣfār*, vol. 2, pp. 331ff.
- ²⁹ Šadrā, *Tafsīr Sūrat al-jumu‘a*, p. 290.
- ³⁰ Šadrā, *Tafsīr Sūrat al-jumu‘a*, pp. 287–93.
- ³¹ On presential knowledge, see Yazdī (1992).
- ³² <http://www.mullasadra.org/> and http://www.mullasadra.org/new_site/english/Affiliated%20Section/Books/Books.htm
- ³³ Rizvi (2011).

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