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An Examination of the Soul and Sense Perception in Aristotle, Avicenna, and Mulla Sadra, with an Emphasis on Mulla Sadra's Theoretical Rupture

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Abstract

This article, using a descriptive-analytical method, aims to articulate the epistemological rupture of Mulla Sadra's theory of the soul from that of the Peripatetic philosophers. We begin by critically examining the theories of the soul and sense perception in Aristotle and Avicenna, then delve into Mulla Sadra's intellectual leap on this topic. We'll demonstrate how a transformation in this theory also leads to a revolution in the theory of knowledge of the external world. In general, regarding the discussion of perceptions and knowledge, Mulla Sadra rejects all previous theories, which include: The critique of knowledge being quidditative and the theory of correspondence between knowledge and the known, The critique of knowledge being a psychic quality, The critique of the theory of abstracting the form of the external object in the mind, The critique of knowledge being a mental form and an addition.

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One of Mulla Sadra's unique conclusions in his theory of the soul is the power of actualization and inventiveness of the mental form. From his perspective, the soul is the agent and creator of sense and imaginative forms. Therefore, it must be stated that with this view, the relationship between forms and the soul is one of action to agent, not one of acceptance to recipient. As Mulla Sadra would assert, just as God emanates creation, we too emanate our knowledge in the form of mental images from within.

Keywords

Aristotle, Avicenna, Mulla Sadra, Soul (Nafs), Sense Perception, Inherent Subsistence (Qiyam-e Hululi), Emanative Subsistence (Qiyam-e Suduri).

1. Introduction

In this article, we'll explore the similarities and differences in the theories of the soul (nafs) and sense perception among Aristotle, Avicenna, and Mulla Sadra. Our primary aim is to highlight the brilliance and advancement of Mulla Sadra's views on these topics compared to his predecessors. Therefore, our evaluations will be based on Mulla Sadra's perspective, considering his approach as the dominant one throughout this article. We'll specifically focus on explaining Mulla Sadra's theoretical rupture in the concepts of the soul and sense perception, relative to the two aforementioned thinkers, by drawing on the new principles of Transcendental Philosophy (Hikmat Muta'aliyyah). This will also provide the reader with a brief understanding of the distinct logic underlying Transcendental Philosophy and Peripatetic philosophy.

In this article, the author argues that Mulla Sadra's theory of the soul and perceptions could lead to a distinct epistemological theory. While the term "epistemology" should be used loosely when referring to both Greek and Islamic philosophy (as their focus was more on the ontology of knowledge, and modern epistemology, as it emerged in 17th-century Europe, is a later development fundamentally different from classical thought), Mulla Sadra's theory offers a new approach. This approach should be understood as a rupture from previous meanings. Mulla Sadra had the potential (if his views were correctly interpreted) to mark the end of the old philosophical path and, at the same time, to lay the groundwork for a new foundation from which a theory of epistemology could be extracted.

Among the areas where Mulla Sadra extensively engaged in debate with his predecessors is the topic of the soul. He successfully

brought about a revolution in this field using the new theoretical foundations of his philosophy, thereby surpassing his forerunners. He developed his new approach in these discussions by employing principles such as gradation of existence (tashkik al-wujud), mental existence, trans-substantial motion (harakat jawhariyyah), intensive substantial motion, the idea of the soul being corporeal in its origination and spiritual in its subsistence (nafs jismaniyat al-huduth va ruhaniyat al-baqa'), and more.

According to the author, this very act of thinking—Mulla Sadra engaging with his predecessors and, in essence, with his own tradition—and criticizing them, paved the way for the development of his own principles. It's through this intellectual struggle between Mulla Sadra's theoretical faculties and his tradition that thought evolves, and a tradition becomes dynamic and vibrant.

2. The Soul from Aristotle's Perspective

Aristotle defines the soul (Nafs) as "the first actuality of a natural body having life potentially, that is, for an organic body" (Aristotle, 2014, p. 78). For Aristotle, the soul is the substance or form that actualizes all the characteristics within a potentially living natural body. He illustrates this with an example: "Now what we have said applies to the parts of the living body. If the eye, in fact, were an animal, its sight would be its soul, for sight is the formal substance of the eye" (Aristotle, 2014, p. 81).

Émile Bréhier explains the soul in Aristotle's philosophy as the first actuality for a potentially living natural body, or, in other words, the form of the body. By "potentially living," Aristotle means a body equipped with the necessary organs to perform vital functions. Thus, the relationship between the soul and the body is akin to the

relationship between the sharpness of an axe and the axe itself. The soul is the primary principle of activity for a living body, much like a scholar's knowledge is the primary principle of their thought for discovering truth. Therefore, for Aristotle, the soul is the origin of vital activity and the unmoved mover of this activity. Understanding the soul can serve as a prerequisite for studying all other living beings, just as, in Aristotle's philosophy, knowledge of God is, in a way, a prerequisite for understanding the world (Bréhier, 2014, Vol. 2, p. 294).

In other words, for Aristotle, the soul is the form of the body—an entity that actualizes matter and gives it existence. There is a type of unity between the soul and the body in Aristotle's philosophy, as they cannot exist without each other; they gain meaning only in conjunction. One could even argue that both the soul and the body come into being and perish together. As Émile Bréhier states, "Just as sight is dependent on the eye, the soul is also considered to be in relation and unity with the body" (Bréhier, 2014, Vol. 2, p. 294). However, there are differing interpretations among commentators on this point, with some believing that Aristotle posited a separate (immaterial) soul.

From Aristotle's perspective, one can conclude that a type of conjunctive composition exists between the soul and the body, or between form and matter, through which an entity becomes actualized. However, what's crucial for us is the kind of duality observed here. Neither side of this relationship is derived from the other; rather, they gain meaning only in relation to each other. In the author's view, this might still retain the duality present in Platonic philosophy, depicting the external existent as bifurcated.

Since many aspects of this section are not our primary focus,

we'll only elaborate on Aristotle's theory of sense perception from his discussions on perception to eventually draw comparisons with Mulla Sadra. Regarding the soul, sense perception, and the alteration (استحاله) that occurs in the soul, Aristotle writes: "Alteration and growth are also caused by the soul: sensation, in fact, seems to be a kind of alteration, and no being is capable of sensation unless it partakes of the soul..." (Aristotle, 2014, pp. 104-105).

Émile Bréhier, in explaining sense perception in Aristotle, states: Sensation, for Aristotle, is not a mere passive inherence in the perceptual organs, where the organs simply receive the qualitative effects of constantly changing and moving sensibles. While the sensitive faculty is actualized only under the influence of the sensible object on one of the sense organs, sensation cannot be reduced solely to the action of the sensible object. Therefore, sensation must somehow be a joint act of the sentient and the sensible, similar to the combined action of color and sight, or sound and hearing. It must be emphasized that sensation cannot be attributed to only one of the two factors, namely the sentient or the sensible (Bréhier, 2014, Vol. 2, p. 298).

Here, it appears that even in the discussion of sensation, Aristotle does not consider the sentient faculty to be merely passive. Instead, in sense perception, the sentient faculty plays a role in actualizing the sensible object. In reality, sense perception is an alliance achieved through an active process between the sense and the sensible.

However, it's important to bear in mind that Aristotle's approach to knowledge occurs through the abstraction of the form of the external object from its matter. As Ali Morad Davoodi writes: "In the act of sensation, the sensible form is abstracted from its matter to

reach the sense organ and become homogeneous with it" (Davoodi, 2010, p. 53). It is through this process of abstraction that you gain knowledge of the external object.

On this point, Aristotle writes: "Generally, regarding every sense, one must grasp that sensation receives the forms of the sensible without their matter, just as wax receives the imprint of a signet ring without its iron or gold. In sensation, too, an affection arises under the influence of an object that has color or flavor or sound, insofar as they have such qualities" (Aristotle, 2014, pp. 170-171).

In fact, Aristotle believed that the process of sense cognition occurs through acquiring the form of the external object within our soul. The more you perform this act of abstraction, the more you ascend to higher forms of knowledge, including imaginative and intellectual understanding. In other words, Aristotle's theory relates to the famous correspondence theory of mind with reality; that is, for the mind to acquire knowledge of an external object, it doesn't create it within itself but rather receives it from the outside. Even the function of the sense faculty is nothing more than the actualization of sense perception.

Another weakness of Aristotle's theory, beyond explaining knowledge acquisition through abstraction, is considering the faculties of the soul as material. This can be easily understood from Émile Bréhier's comment on Aristotle's *On the Soul*: "[Here, Émile Bréhier was explaining the difference between intellectual and sense perception] But the difference is that the sense organ, when affected by a sensible object of extreme intensity, like a light that blinds the eye, ceases to function, whereas the stronger—that is, the clearer—the intelligible object, the greater the power of intellectual thought"

(Bréhier, 2014, p. 301). Aristotle attributes weakness to the faculties of sense perception when encountering external objects, a point that can be helpful for our ongoing discussion. As he writes:

> From this, it can be clearly understood why sensations of great intensity destroy the sense organs. In fact, if the movement of the sense organ is too strong, the form (which, as discussed, is the sensation itself) is dissolved, just as when one strikes the strings of an instrument with too much force, the harmony and rhythm are disrupted. (Aristotle, 2014, pp. 171)

3. The Soul from Avicenna's Perspective

As mentioned, Aristotle, in explaining the soul, uses terms like potency (qūva), form , and first actuality (kamāl awvalī) for a natural body. Following him, Avicenna also attempts to explain the soul using similar terminology. He, too, considers the soul the first actuality for a natural body. Regarding this, in his *Treatise on the Soul*, he writes:

> "It is called a potency because actions arise from it, and it is called a form perhaps because matter comes into actuality through the soul. It is called actuality (kamāl) to signify that the meaning of 'body' becomes a 'species' through the existence of the soul. If we wish to define the soul, the soul is a first actuality, more fundamental than definition and description. Among other meanings, the term 'potency' is applicable to the soul because it adds action to it in one respect, and affection in another. The human soul possesses both an active potency, which is the power of movement and stirring, and an affective potency, which is the power of perception and reception. The term 'potency' applies equally to both cases. If we focus on only one side of the

> relationship, one part is left out, and the definition becomes incomplete." (Avicenna, 1952, pp. 5-9)

Avicenna is significantly influenced by Aristotle in his treatment of the soul (Nafs). The definition of the soul, as articulated by Aristotle, largely holds true for Avicenna as well. As mentioned previously, Avicenna, following Aristotle, defines the soul as the first actuality for a natural organic body.

He refers to the soul as a "potency" (qūvah) in relation to the actions that emanate from it, meaning it's the origin of action. Considering its capacity to receive sensible and intelligible forms, he also terms it a "potency" in the sense of being the origin of reception. When likened to the matter in which it inheres, he calls it a "form", and because it perfects the genus, he calls it a "specific differentiator".

Consequently, much like Aristotle, Avicenna considers the soul to be the form and perfection of the body, through which potential capabilities are actualized. Furthermore, he views the soul as passive in perception, meaning the soul receives material and intellectual forms either from matter or from the active intellect.

Avicenna attempts to prove the existence of the soul through two main arguments. The most famous is the "floating man" thought experiment. His second argument posits that there must be something within a human being that is the source of actions and effects, as the body alone cannot be the origin of movement and sensation; otherwise, all bodies would possess these abilities.

A significant difference between Avicenna and Aristotle lies in the issue of the soul's immateriality. Avicenna explicitly states that the

soul is immaterial (mujarrad) and survives the death of the body, whereas Aristotle believed only the intellectual part of the soul persists. Ishaq Taheri explains Avicenna's primary reason for proving the soul's immateriality as follows:

> "We can intellect our own essence, and whatever intellects an essence will have the quiddity of that essence present to it. Therefore, the quiddity of our essence will be present to us. Now, this intellection of the essence either occurs through another form identical to the form of our essence, which would necessitate the impossible conjunction of two identical things; or the essence itself is present to us, which is the desired and correct conclusion. Then we say that whatever has its essence present to itself is self-subsistent (qa'im bi al-dhat). On the other hand, every body and corporeal thing is not self-subsistent. Therefore, the soul is an incorporeal substance." (Taheri, 2014, p. 102).

This proof is not based on the imprinting of intelligible forms in a substrate but rather focuses solely on the essence of the soul itself. Thus, whatever has its essence present to itself is self-subsistent, and our soul is self-subsistent, but bodies are not; therefore, the soul is not a corporeal substance.

It's clear that for Avicenna, the soul (Nafs) is considered an immaterial (mujarrad) entity from its very inception. As soon as a body is created, a soul simultaneously comes into existence for it. In common terms, one could say that for Avicenna, the soul is spiritual in its origination (ruhāniyat al-ḥudūth) and spiritual in its subsistence (ruhāniyat al-baqā'). Thus, the Peripatetic belief regarding the origination of the soul posits that this substance is devoid of any matter and will persist after the death of the body, never

decaying or undergoing a movement toward perfection.

In the third *Namaṭ* of his book *Al-Ishārāt va al-Tanbīhāt* (Pointers and Reminders), after proving the existence and immateriality of the soul, Avicenna delves into the human faculties of reception and moving powers:

> "To perceive something means that its true form is obtained by the perceiver and the perceiver observes it. So either that reality, when perceived, is identical to the reality outside the perceiver. This possibility is not correct; because it would cause something that does not exist externally to have reality; like many geometric shapes, many impossible hypotheses—when they appear in geometry—among things that have no realization whatsoever. Or else, perception is that the form and reality of that thing is imprinted upon the perceiver in such a way that it has no discrepancy (in essence) with it, and that is a form that remains." (Avicenna, 1994, p. 83)

As quoted from Avicenna, he believes that perception is the attainment of the form of something in the mind, which essentially means the soul's passivity in relation to an external object. Avicenna maintains that the form through which we acquire knowledge is not the exact external reality of the known object, but rather a likeness or a form of that external reality. If the first case were true, then many impossible hypotheses or things that lack external reality would have to become real.

In his *Al-Ishārāt va al-Tanbīhāt* (Pointers and Reminders), Avicenna elaborates on sense perception:

> "...when Zayd is perceived, he is encompassed by accidents (which are far from his quiddity) that, if removed from him,

> would not affect his quiddity; such as having a specific place, position, quality, or quantity. If there were a substitute for these, it would not create a problem for the truth of his human quiddity. The sense faculty perceives Zayd in a state where he possesses these distant accidents, which are attached to him due to the matter from which he was created. The sense faculty does not separate Zayd from these accidents; it perceives him only in conjunction with these accidents. For this reason, when this connection is severed, the sense form will no longer exist" (Avicenna, 1994, p. 84).

As cited, Avicenna believes that a sense is a form imprinted upon the soul, and it remains dependent on all its material accidents. As soon as this connection is severed, no trace of sense perception remains.

We can analytically summarize Avicenna's view on sense perception into these five key points regarding his method of perception, which we believe clarify the discussion significantly:

1. The external world has reality and exists.
2. The perceiving subject (or "we" as the perceiving agent) also exists. This subject receives the forms of external objects into its soul, where they are actualized. Even realities that do not exist in the external world, or even those whose existence is impossible, are present within the soul.
3. The external world influences our mind. During perception, it leaves an impression as the perceived object within the perceiver.
4. These received impressions are referred to as examples,

forms, or specters. That is, when the soul encounters the external world, it undergoes an impression from outside, which is referred to by these terms.

5. This received form is similar to the realities of the external world and is not distinct from them.

Avicenna's theory of perception, like Aristotle's, is achieved through abstraction and the correspondence of the mind with reality. He believes that we gain perception through the process of the external object's form being imprinted upon the soul. As Dr. Yathribi quotes Avicenna, human perception and reception mean that the form of the reality of objects becomes present in our perceiving and apprehending faculties, in such a way that these faculties observe those forms (Yathribi, 2013, p. 63).

However, our discussion here focuses primarily on sense perception and how it is imprinted upon the soul. This, too, is achieved through abstraction, which also leads to imaginative and intellectual perception. As Avicenna states: "Imagination abstracts itself from the positional relation that exists between the sense and material accidents, and the intellect can abstract the quiddity that is intertwined with distant individual accidents, and present it in such a way as to prove that it has treated the sensible as if it had rendered it intelligible" (Avicenna, 1994, p. 84).

Our sense faculties can only provide us with an image of an external object if they are in proximity to it. If they distance themselves from the external object, they no longer perceive it. This is because sense perception carries material accidents, and without them, it lacks the power to form an image and cannot establish a correspondence between the sense form and the external object. Thus,

the sense acquires the form from matter with its associated accidents and through a relation occurring between these accidents and matter. When this relation established between the soul and the external existent is dissolved, this type of perception also vanishes, because the sense has not acquired the form with all its accidents, and if the matter moves out of reach, it cannot preserve the form.

4. Mulla Sadra's Departure from Previous Theories

Mulla Sadra expresses his position regarding Aristotle's and Avicenna's views on perception as follows:

> "This objection applies to the theory of one for whom imprinting means the perceived form inhering in the essence of the perceiver. But with us, it is not so; rather, it is through the subsistence (qiyam) of the perceived form *to* the perceiver. And subsistence does not necessitate inherence (hulul) or descent, but merely presence." (Sadr al-Muta'allihin, 2013, Vol. 4, p. 215).

The discussion of mental forms subsisting in the soul through inherent subsistence (qiyam-e hululi) predates Mulla Sadra. Mulla Sadra, however, has repeatedly expressed his opposition to this approach, a topic we will delve into further later. This is because, from Mulla Sadra's perspective, the subsistence of mental forms to the soul is a matter of emanative subsistence (qiyam-e suduri), and the soul itself is the agent or intellect that creates mental forms.

Avicenna, like Aristotle, doesn't consider the soul's faculties to be immaterial; rather, he sees them as material. It's through the passivity they experience from external objects that they become aware of them. Similar to Aristotle, Avicenna believes that we gain

knowledge of the external world through the inherence of the form of the external object within our sense organs.

Dr. Nasrullah Hikmat further explains how the material intellect (aql hayulani) transforms into the intellectual world (alam aqili) in Avicenna's philosophy:

> "The transformation of the material intellect into the intellectual world is realized through the attainment of the forms of existents. Now, every existent is either intrinsically devoid of matter and intelligible—in other words, a pure form—or it is intrinsically unintelligible and a form within matter. Where a form is within matter, the intellectual faculty abstracts the form of that object from its matter and attains intelligibility. The abstracted form, its existence is its intelligibility, and if it is not intelligible, it does not exist... What prevents intelligibility, intellectuality, and being intelligible is matter. Anything that becomes abstracted from matter becomes intelligible. Also, an object becomes an intellect when it becomes abstracted from matter, and whenever an immaterial form is attained for another immaterial form, this attainment is intellect" (Nasrullah Hikmat, 2011, p. 321).

To summarize, Avicenna, on one hand, believes the soul is immaterial and undergoes no change until the end, a point that Mulla Sadra disputes. In essence, Avicenna ultimately succumbs to a duality within the human being, considering the body separate from the immaterial soul. Furthermore, we observe that he adheres to the correspondence theory of knowledge and the abstraction of the external form into the soul, rather than its creation, which is also a point of disagreement for Mulla Sadra.

In this regard, Avicenna struggles to explain the acquisition of

perception and ultimately concedes only to the abstraction of the external object and the soul's passivity in receiving it. This mode of external perception also dominated the views of most medieval philosophers. As Dr. Ilkhani states regarding Thomas Aquinas: "For him, the human mind is an unwritten tablet upon which information is imprinted through sense experience" (Ilkhani, 2011, p. 396).

5. The Soul from Mulla Sadra's Perspective

Mulla Sadra, unlike Avicenna, does not dedicate a separate section to proving the existence of the soul, nor did he find it necessary to provide an extensive explanation on this matter. Thus, we will present excerpts from the beginning of the eighth volume of his book *Asfar* (The Four Journeys), which addresses this topic, followed by necessary explanations.

In proving the soul's existence, Mulla Sadra offers an argument quite similar to Avicenna's second proof. Mulla Sadra writes: We observe bodies in the external world that emanate effects such as sensation, movement, nutrition, growth, development, and reproduction. However, the source of these effects cannot be the body itself, as it is purely receptive and lacks actuality. Nor can it be the common corporeal form shared among them. Therefore, these bodies must possess other principles, distinct from their corporeality, which have the power to initiate these actions. In his discussions of potency and act, Mulla Sadra previously explained that any active potency from which effects—not in a uniform manner—are emanated, we call the soul (Nafs). This term refers to this potency, not according to its simple essence, but in terms of its being the origin of such actions as mentioned. Hence, the discussion of the soul has become part of the natural sciences. (Sadr al-Muta'allihin, 1981, Vol. 8, pp. 7-8).

Mulla Sadra, like Avicenna, uses the phrase "first actuality for an organic natural body"[1]to define the soul, but he imbues it with a different meaning compared to Avicenna. Due to his concept of intensive substantial motion (harakat ishtidadiyyah fi al-jawhar), he explains the term "organic" in a way that encompasses plant, animal, and celestial souls. Since he equates potency with instrument (ālah), he defines the soul as a potency in a natural body that, by utilizing another potency, has the capacity to perform an action. As Mulla Sadra writes: : It is clear that the soul is the first actuality for a natural body, but not for every natural body. For instance, the soul is not the actuality for fire or earth. This is because the soul in this world is the actuality for a natural body from which secondary perfections emanate, with the aid of organs that assist in vital actions like sensation and voluntary movement. (Sadr al-Muta'allihin, 1981, Vol. 8, p. 16).

It's clear that the characteristic of the first actuality for any natural body that performs actions through an instrument is the soul. Therefore, any power of a natural body that performs an action by bringing another power under its command, we refer to as the soul.

1. "It is clear that the soul is the first actuality for a natural body, but not for every natural body. For instance, the soul is not the actuality for fire or earth. This is because the soul in this world is the actuality for a natural body from which secondary perfections emanate, with the aid of organs that assist in vital actions like sensation and voluntary movement." (Sadr al-Muta'allihin, 1981, Vol. 8, p. 16)
In essence, Mulla Sadra emphasizes that the soul is not just any animating principle for any natural body. Rather, it's the specific **"first actuality"** that brings a **natural** *organic* body to its potential. It's tied to bodies capable of vital functions like sensation and voluntary movement, which require specific organs or faculties to manifest these "secondary perfections." This distinguishes the soul of a living creature from the inherent properties of inanimate elements like fire or earth.

This definition—"first actuality for an organic natural body"—is comprehensive and encompasses all souls, because the "instruments" mentioned in the definition of the soul do not refer to organs like body parts, but rather to faculties. Examples include the nutritive, growth, and reproductive faculties in the plant soul, and imagination, sensation, and appetitive faculties in the animal soul—not organs like the stomach, liver, heart, brain, or nerves. (Sadr al-Muta'allihin, 1981, Vol. 8, p. 17).

Mulla Sadra further explains that the attribute of "life" in defining the soul for both animals and celestial spheres holds the same meaning. He states that if we consider life as the origin of perception and movement, and define perception broadly to include sensation, imagination, and intellection, then these apply to both. Even if we consider only sensation[1], its condition for existence is not the passivity of an organ. As he writes:

> If by "perception" in the definition of life we mean only sensation, it can also encompass the celestial spheres, because for Mulla Sadra, the meaning of sensation is not the passivity of the organ. Even if a particular form does not achieve realization and stability for the sense faculty, sensation will still undoubtedly be created. Therefore, the truth of sensation is the presence of the particular form, not the organ being affected by it, nor the imprinting or engraving of the form within it. This is because Mulla Sadra believes that even sight is nothing but the soul's creation and origination of another form, distinct from the form in external matter, yet similar to it and suspended in a non-

1. "And also, if by perception taken in the definition of life is meant only sensation, it can encompass the celestial sphere, for it is not a condition of the meaning of sensation that the organ be affected" (Sadr al-Muta'allihin, 1981, Vol. 8, p. 20).

> material place. The celestial spheres are likewise sensitive in this manner; their sensitivity is a type of action, and Mulla Sadra does not consider them passive in this regard either. (Sadr al-Muta'allihin, 1981, Vol. 8, p. 20).

It's evident that Mulla Sadra does not understand the soul and its faculties as passive, as the Peripatetics did. Instead, he sees them as the agents of their own knowledge and perceptions. They do not acquire knowledge through passivity or the inherence of the external object's form within the cognitive organs. Regarding sense perception, Mulla Sadra explicitly states in the preceding paragraph that it is an action of the soul, not a passive affection of it. He considers the truth of perception to be the presence of the particular form to the soul, and in future chapters, we will explain what he means by "the particular form present in the soul."

We must also address the issue of whether sense forms are particular or universal. Unlike his predecessors who considered the soul a fixed essence and merely a receptacle for the imprinting of intellectual forms, Mulla Sadra believes that the soul's intellectual perception reaches the stage of immateriality (tajarrud) through the perfection of its faculties. Since in this state the soul and its intelligible forms possess an immaterial existence, they have an existential encompassingness (sa'at wujudiyyah) over their material instances and maintain a uniform relation with them. It is this uniform relation of the immaterial intelligible concept with its material instances that constitutes the universality of this concept (Sadr al-Muta'allihin, 1981, Vol. 3, p. 322). Therefore, we arrive at our argument: if the universality of an intellectual concept depends on its immateriality and existential encompassingness, then sense and imaginative concepts must also be immaterial, because they too possess existential

encompassingness and encompassment over their material instances, and are thus universal in this sense.

Mulla Sadra diverges from his predecessors regarding both the soul and the mode of knowing the external world. His views on the soul are fundamentally different due to his prior theories, namely principiality of existence (asalat al-wujud), gradation of existence (tashkik al-wujud), unity of existence (vahdat al-wujud), trans-substantial motion (harakat jawhariyyah), and the union of the intellect and the intelligible (ittihad al-aqil va al-ma'qul). He expresses his belief about the soul in this paragraph from *Asfar*:

> You have known that the human soul ascends from one form to another and from one perfection to another. So, in the beginning of its manifestation and establishment, it progresses from complete corporeality to elementary form, and from that to minerality and plant life, and from that to animality until it fully grasps all the animal faculties, culminating in that essence which is the first thing that does not relate to bodily matter. And when it further progresses from that state, it ascends to the first rank of existents that are entirely separate and distinct from matter, and that is the acquired intellect (aql mustafad), which has a close resemblance to the active intellect. The difference between the two is that the acquired intellect is a separate form that was once paired and intertwined with matter and becomes abstract from it after its transformations and changes through various stages and states. Whereas the active intellect is a form that was never in matter, and such a thing is not possible unless it is separate.1(Sadr al-Muta'allihin, 1981, Vol. 3, p. 461).

1. Mr. Obudiyat has identified four stages for the soul's intensive substantial motion, which he describes as follows: "First, the **natural stage (nash'at al-tabī'īyah)**, in which the soul has not yet attained immateriality and lacks any perception or →

We've explored the different stages of the soul's movement, from its most rudimentary and material state to its most abstract, as presented by Mulla Sadra. Throughout these stages, the soul undergoes intensive substantial motion, replacing its previous state with a more perfected one. Crucially, it retains all its past states while expanding and developing itself.

From Mulla Sadra's perspective, when a human being perceives something, it triggers a potential, moving the soul from a hidden state of potency to actuality. This actualization is a perfection for the soul, and thus, the human s'oul becomes more complete with every perception (Sadr al-Muta'allihin, 1981, Vol. 1, p. 462).

Regarding this expansion and development, Professor Motahari, in his comprehensive commentary on *Manzumeh*, draws a comparison between Mulla Sadra and Avicenna:

> Avicenna believes that the essence of the human soul remains unchanged from early childhood until the moment of death. The soul's essence remains what it was, merely burdened with additional emanations and having acquired a series of patterns and designs. Mulla Sadra, however, in contrast to Avicenna,

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voluntary movement, including the elemental, mineral, and plant stages of the soul, all of which are material. Second, the **animal stage (nash'at al-ḥayawānīyah)**, including all stages where the soul possesses a kind of imaginative immateriality but still lacks the rational soul. In this stage, the soul is the same as the imaginative body that has particular perception and voluntary movement. Third, the **human stage (nash'at al-insānīyah)**, in which the human possesses the rational soul but still lacks pure intellectual perception. Fourth, the **intellectual stage (nash'at al-aqliyah)**, in which the soul also possesses pure intellectual perception, including all stages where the soul has a kind of intellectual immateriality." (Obudiyat, 1392, Vol. 3, p. 433).

> believes that the soul is initially a small reality, and as it gains knowledge, it expands its own reality. This expansion and perfection *is* the very reality of the soul. The soul *becomes* what it knows; it *becomes* what it understands (O brother, you are that very thought). (Motahari, 2015, Vol. 9, p. 379).

Here, we've clearly explained Mulla Sadra's step-by-step evolution of the soul from pure corporeality to the acquired intellect. Of course, Mulla Sadra could not have reached this foundation without his discussions on the principiality of existence, the gradation of existence, intensive substantial motion, and the union of the intellect and the intelligible.

In other words, Mulla Sadra masterfully manages to create an internal connection between the body and the soul, no longer considering them as two separate entities merely added to each other. Instead, he believes the soul is corporeal in its origination and spiritual in its subsistence (jismaniyat al-huduth va ruhaniyat al-baqa'). It is precisely from this premise that he would later be able to prove the corporeal resurrection. Furthermore, as explained by Martyr Motahari, the very reality of the soul expands and develops with each new piece of knowledge it acquires.

On the other hand, Mulla Sadra considers the human soul capable of ascending to the Acquired Intellect (Aql Mustafad), meaning it can gain knowledge of all matters just like the Active Intellect. For Aristotle and Avicenna, however, the Active Intellect was merely considered an external agent.

Allameh Hasan ZadehAmoli, in discussing the theory of the soul in Mulla Sadra's philosophy, writes:

> "The soul, at the beginning of its origination, is a corporeal form

> and faculty imprinted in the body, and this is the lowest rank of the soul. But after that, due to intensive substantial motion, it changes and gradually transcends the physical world through its existential intensification, creating an affinity with the transcendent realm. It reaches the stage of intermediate immateriality (tajarrud barzakhi), and thereafter intellectual immateriality (tajarrud aqlani), and then the supra-immaterial rank. He also writes that, according to Mulla Sadra, the soul has no limit (hadd-e yaqf) and lacks numerical unity, which the Peripatetics affirmed. Instead, it possesses a true, divine, shadowy unity (vahdat-e haqqah-ye zilliyah-ye ilahiyyah) " (Hasan Zadeh Amoli, 2014, p. 79).

In the paragraph above, Hasan Zadehalso points out how a material, corporeal substance transforms into an immaterial substance. The answer is that this occurs through intensive substantial motion. Thus, the soul is no longer merely subject to accidental changes, as was previously imagined before Mulla Sadra.

One of Mulla Sadra's unique conclusions in his theory of the soul is the power of actualization and inventiveness of the mental form. From his perspective, sense and imaginative forms are not imprinted upon and inherent in the soul, as the Peripatetic philosophers claimed. Instead, for Mulla Sadra, the soul is the agent and creator of sense and imaginative forms. Therefore, with this view, the relationship between forms and the soul is one of action to agent, not one of acceptance to recipient. As we mentioned before, just as God emanates creation, we too emanate our knowledge in the form of mental images from within.

As we've stated, the quidditative form of the external known object is not what we gain knowledge of. In reality, this is somewhat simplifying the issue, because the fundamental question here is: what

is the relationship between the specific external known object and its form in my mind, and where does knowledge occur? Mulla Sadra attempts to articulate that there is a mode or aspect of existence that is neither the external object nor merely what is in my mind. Rather, I construct a form in my mind and gain knowledge of it; it's an image that my mind creates with its own internal faculties. This is precisely what Mr. Obudiyat means by the "reality of knowledge," as he also states that both the form of the external known object and the external known object itself are, for Mulla Sadra, only known or intelligible per accidens. Therefore, that known object must acquire another mode to become known to my mind.

It is here that Mulla Sadra expresses his unique view: the soul's power of origination or emanation of knowledge (insha' or sudur), rather than mere passivity. Mulla Sadra writes:

> "However, as per our approach, imaginative and sense knowledge do not inhere in the imaginative or sense organs. Instead, these organs are like mirrors and manifestations for them; they are neither their locus nor their position. Consequently, their essences are substances that are abstract and separate from matter, and their accidents are accidents that subsist in these substances, and all of them subsist in the soul, similar to the subsistence of possibilities in the Divine Presence" (Sadr al-Muta'allihin, 1981, Vol. 3, p. 305).

In this paragraph, Mulla Sadra explicitly demonstrates that he does not accept the theory of the inherence of forms into cognitive organs. Rather, these organs are merely mirrors, and knowledge is not created within them. He emphasizes that the sense and imaginative faculties are not material; instead, they are emanaated by the soul, just as God brings possibilities into existence. Furthermore, Mulla Sadra

points out that the soul's faculties are independent of a locus, considering the locus merely as a ground for the emergence and actualization of the faculty. Elsewhere, regarding sense perception, Mulla Sadra explicitly states:

> "And sensation is not as the common philosophers believe, that the sense abstracts the sensible form in its very essence from its matter and interacts with its encompassing accidents, and imagination further abstracts it. This is because you know that the transfer of imprinted entities—with their quiddities—from matter to non-matter is impossible.
>
> Nor does sensation mean the movement of the sense faculty towards the sensible form existing in its matter—as some have imagined regarding sight—and it is not merely due to the soul's relation to these material forms—as the author of *Talwihat* (Sheikh Ishraq) imagined—because it has been said before that a positional relation to bodies is not their perception. An epistemological relation (idafah-ye ilmi) cannot be in relation to objects with material positions. Rather, sensation is achieved in this way: a luminous or cognitive form is added from the Giver, and by this, perception and consciousness are realized. Therefore, the sentient is actual, and the sensible is actual, whereas before this, there was neither sentient nor sensible—except potentially. However, the existence of the form in specific matter is among the enabling conditions for the emanation of a form that is actually sensible and sentient. And to speak about this form, which is sensation, sentient, and sensible, is precisely to speak about the intelligible form, which is intellect, intellectual, and intelligible" (Sadr al-Muta'allihin, 1981, Vol. 3, pp. 316-317).

Since Mulla Sadra's theory of vision (bāṣirah) is closely

related to our discussion of the soul and sense perception, and he sometimes explains these together in *Asfar*, it's important to include a section on this.

Mulla Sadra categorizes previous theories of vision into three main groups and briefly outlines them:

- Naturalists believe that vision is the imprinting and engraving of an image onto a part of the vitreous humor (rūṭūbat jalīdī), which resembles ice or hail, acting like a mirror reflecting a colored object.
- Mathematicians contend that vision occurs due to the emission of rays from the eye.
- Sheikh Shahāb al-Dīn Suhravardī argues that vision is neither ray emission nor imprinting. Instead, it arises from the confrontation of a luminous object with the receptive organ that contains a gleaming moisture[1]. (Sadr al-Muta'allihin, 1981, Vol. 8, pp. 178-179).

Mulla Sadra then explains his own theory regarding how the external object's image forms in the faculty of vision:

"The truth, in our view, is that vision is distinct from these three

1. According to him, visible forms seen in the manifest world without mirrors are obtained through **presential knowledge (ilm-e huzuri) by illumination (ishraq)**. This illumination occurs when a luminous body confronts the eye, and the eye is healthy and free from defects and ailments, and other conditions that are part of the complete cause for the attainment of presential illumination. Since the visible object has an external quiddity, after the conditions are met and obstacles removed, presential illumination is achieved, and the soul, through this illumination, perceives that external object. (Muhammad Sharif Nizam al-Din Ahmad ibn Harawi, *Anwariya*, p. 141).

> theories. It is the origination and creation of a similar image—by divine power—from the mundus imaginalis (ālam-e malakūt-e nafsānī), abstracted from external matter, present to the perceiving soul, and subsisting in it—a subsistence of action to its agent, not a subsistence of reception to its recipient." (Sadr al-Muta'allihin, 1981, Vol. 8, pp. 179-180).

In the context of the faculty of vision, as with other faculties and perceptions, Mulla Sadra asserts that we are not passive in receiving the form of the external object. Instead, the soul, along with the faculty of vision, actively emanates and originates what it sees in the act of seeing. This is how Mulla Sadra distinguishes himself from the three preceding theories, emphasizing the active role of the soul[1]. Mulla Sadra further highlights another crucial point, which we will elaborate on after quoting him:

The proof for this is derived from the arguments we have established for the union of the intellect and the intelligible, and it applies precisely to all sense and imaginary perceptions. We cautioned and drew attention to this matter in the discussions of the intellect and the intelligible, stating: Sensation, absolutely, is not as is famously

1. Martyr Motahari, in a footnote to his book *Philosophy and the Method of Realism*, writes: "Mulla Sadra, the renowned Islamic philosopher, has a distinct view on the reality of vision. This scholar stated that neither of the two aforementioned theories, even if correct and complete, can explain the reality of vision, because both theories relate to the natural function of the eye, while vision transcends natural science. This scholar, by proving the theory of the **union of the intellect and the intelligible** and the **union of the sentient and the sensible**, demonstrated that **seeing is a type of creative activity of the soul**, for which the natural (physical) act is a (precondition). After the completion of the natural act, the soul, by its active power, invents and originates a similar form of the sensible object within its own domain." (Allameh Tabataba'i, undated, p. 76).

held by all philosophers who say:

> "The sense abstracts the sensible form in its very essence from its matter and interacts with the accidents that encompass it; similarly, imagination further abstracts the sensible form from its matter, as this is understood from the impossibility of the transference of imprinted entities." Rather, perceptions, absolutely, are obtained in such a way that a new form, luminous and perceptive, emanates from the True Giver, and by it, perception and consciousness are realized. Thus, that (form) is actually sentient and actually sensible, but the existence of the form in specific matter is neither sentient nor sensible, except that it is the precondition for the emanation of that form—upon the fulfillment of conditions—which is actually sensible and sentient. (Sadr al-Muta'allihin, 1981, Vol. 8, p. 181).

In the preceding paragraph, Mulla Sadra clearly states that all types of perceptions are formed in the same manner he explained in the discussion of the union of the intellect and the intelligible in the third volume of *Asfar*. There, Mulla Sadra posits that every type of perception becomes comprehensible through the soul's invention and origination (ibdā' va inshā'). The subsistence of mental forms to the soul is one of emanation (qiyām-e ṣudūrī), not inherence (ḥulūlī).

Mulla Sadra clarifies that the form existing in the external material object is neither the sense itself nor the sensible, and he doesn't acquire knowledge of *that*. Rather, as will be discussed further, he gains knowledge of the sense perception (idrāk ḥissī) that is sensible *per se* (maḥsūs bi'l-dhāt)—meaning it belongs to the very nature of his own psychic faculties. The same applies to the faculty of vision, and for this reason, Mulla Sadra also disagrees with the Peripatetics on this point. Mulla Sadra continues:

> Secondly: Other senses perceive the sensible, meaning that the sensible form comes to them, not that something goes out from them towards the sensible. Vision is also like this.
>
> It has been answered: This is an analogy without a comprehensive principle.
>
> I say: In other senses, there is neither coming nor going out. Rather, it is through the emanation of a form appropriate to the sensible that is represented to the soul. Thus, the comprehensive principle is realized, but what they desire from the imprinting in the visual organ does not necessarily follow. (Sadr al-Muta'allihin, 1981, Vol. 8, pp. 183-184)

In this section, Mulla Sadra emphasizes that just as sense perception is not formed based on imprinting, neither is the faculty of vision. Its formation isn't through abstraction and imprinting, but rather through the soul's creation or origination (ījād or inshā') that we see something, and its form is imprinted in our soul.

Conclusion

Both Aristotle and, subsequently, Avicenna explain the process of knowledge through inherent subsistence (qiyām-e ḥulūlī). A key requirement for acquiring knowledge in this view is the abstraction of the form from the matter of the external object. Knowledge is then gained through the form imprinted upon the soul. The more this act of abstraction is performed, the higher levels of knowledge, including imaginative and intellectual, are attained. In other words, Aristotle's theory is linked to the well-known correspondence theory of mind with reality, meaning the mind does not create the external object within itself to gain knowledge, but rather receives it from outside. Even the function of the sense faculty is nothing more than the

actualization of sense perception. Therefore, both philosophers must have believed in the materiality of the soul's faculties, as it's through this materiality that they are affected by and receive impressions from external objects. Avicenna, like Aristotle, does not consider the soul's faculties immaterial; he views them as material and perceives objects through the passive impressions received from external things. Like Aristotle, Avicenna also believes that we gain knowledge of the external world through the inherence of the external object's form within our sense organs. Mulla Sadra fundamentally disagrees with all these points.

Avicenna and his commentators believed that the form that inheres in our sense organs and which we perceive is the mental form that we call the sensible *per se* (maḥsūs bi'l-dhāt). This is because if it weren't itself directly known, it would lead to an infinite regress of mental forms, which is impossible and negates acquired knowledge. Thus, the mental form of an object is known immediately and by itself; it is the sensible *per se*, while its external reality is the sensible *per accidens*.

However, Mulla Sadra holds that what is meant by the sensible *per se* is something that originates in the sense faculty and is actualized in the soul, while the sensible *per accidens* is something that does not. Therefore, for Mulla Sadra, anything referred to as sensible either yields an effect in the sense faculty or it does not. If it doesn't yield an effect, it's sensible *per accidens*; if it does, it's sensible *per se*. And for Mulla Sadra, this sensible *per se* is the form present in the soul itself, not an external object that merely corresponds to it.

Furthermore, for Avicenna, the soul is considered an immaterial entity from its very beginning. As soon as a body is created, a soul simultaneously comes into existence for it, meaning the

soul is spiritual in its origination and spiritual in its subsistence (ruhāniyyat al-ḥudūth va ruhāniyyat al-baqāʾ). In contrast, Mulla Sadra does not agree with this. Rather, based on the foundational principles of his philosophy—the principiality of existence (aṣālat al-wujūd), the gradation of existence (tashkīk al-wujūd), the unity of existence (vaḥdat al-wujūd), and intensive substantial motion (ḥarakat jawharīyyah ishtidādīyyah)—he believes that the soul is initially material and gradually becomes spiritual through its intensive motion, thereby transforming itself from within. Therefore, as we explained in the section on Mulla Sadra, he fundamentally differs from his predecessors regarding the formation of knowledge and the manner of sense perception. He does not agree with the correspondence theory of mind with reality (as understood by his predecessors), nor with the theory of abstraction and the inherence of cognitive forms in the soul. This is because he perceives no inherent affinity between them in this context and does not believe that our knowledge of an external object is formed in the manner described (i.e., through the soul's passivity in the face of an external material form)[1].

Instead, by utilizing the premises he introduces, Mulla Sadra aims to establish an initial affinity between the soul and our

1. "The sense abstracts the sensible form in its very essence from its matter and interacts with the accidents that encompass it; similarly, imagination further abstracts the sensible form from its matter, as this is understood from the impossibility of the transference of imprinted entities." Rather, perceptions, absolutely, are obtained in such a way that a new form, luminous and perceptive, emanates from the True Giver, and by it, perception and consciousness are realized. Thus, that (form) is actually sentient and actually sensible, but the existence of the form in specific matter is neither sentient nor sensible, except that it is the precondition for the emanation of that form—upon the fulfillment of conditions—which is actually sensible and sentient. (Sadr al-Muta'allihin, 1981, Vol. 8, p. 181).

immaterial cognitive faculties with the external material existent. He explains this affinity through mental existence (wujūd dhahnī), which resides within the gradations of existence. Moreover, he considers the reality of knowledge to be of the genus of existence, not of accidents or quiddity, unlike his predecessors. This allows him to establish an affinity between the entity in the mind and the external entity, both being degrees of existence.

Finally, Mulla Sadra does not believe that the subsistence of mental forms to the soul is through inherence. Rather, he asserts that the subsistence of mental forms to the soul is through emanation (qiyām-e ṣudūrī). As he explains in *Asfar*, this act of the soul's origination of cognitive forms is analogous to God's origination of creation. If we examine Mulla Sadra's theory more closely, we see that the object he places as the object of knowledge, through which all perceptions are attained, is neither the external object nor even the abstracted form of the external object in my mind. Instead, I perceive or gain knowledge of something that is created and originated by my own soul. In the author's opinion, this foundation holds immense potential and could have opened the door for various discussions leading to a new perspective on knowledge or cognition.

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