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ṢADRĀ'S SYNTHESIS: KNOWLEDGE AS EXPERIENCE, KNOWLEDGE AS BEING

İbrahim Kalın

Editorial Note on Reprint

This work by İbrahim Kalın, *Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy: Mulla Sadra on Existence, Intellect, and Intuition* (Oxford University Press, 2010; ISBN 978-0-19-973524-2), was originally published as part of Oxford University's ongoing commitment to excellence in scholarship and education. Catalogued under Library of Congress Classification B753.M84K24 2010, the volume has been widely recognized for its rigorous contribution to the study of Islamic philosophy. It is republished here with the permission of the author. The editorial board has chosen to reprint this study in recognition of its enduring scholarly significance. By exploring Mulla Ṣadrā's reconceptualization of knowledge as simultaneously ontological and epistemological, Kalin offers a comprehensive account of the interplay between existence, intellect, and intuition in later Islamic philosophy. This work situates Sadra within the broader trajectory of metaphysical inquiry and comparative philosophy, highlighting his synthesis of Peripatetic reasoning, mystical insight, and theological discourse. The text is reproduced without alteration to preserve the integrity of the original publication.

Abstract

This paper examines Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophical synthesis with a focus on his reconceptualization of knowledge as both experience and being. Within the Islamic philosophical tradition, Ṣadrā challenged two major problems: essentialism and the representational theory of knowledge. His *transcendent wisdom* sought to establish a being-centered metaphysics that bridges the gap between existence and cognition. This study explores how Ṣadrā redefined knowledge as a mode of existence, thereby overcoming the dichotomy between the ontological and epistemological domains. By analyzing the processes of sensation, imagination, estimation, and intellection, the paper highlights Ṣadrā's departure from subjectivist tendencies in both classical *Kalām* and modern rationalism. Ultimately, the research demon-

strates that Ṣadrā's philosophical contribution lies in uniting epistemology with ontology, presenting knowledge not as an abstract representation but as an existential reality.

Keywords: *Mullā Ṣadrā; Islamic philosophy; Ontology; Epistemology; Knowledge as Being; Transcendent wisdom*

Within the Islamic philosophical tradition, two problems proved to be the most challenging for Ṣadrā: the critique of essentialism and the representational theory of knowledge. The 'polemical' aspect of Ṣadrā's thought centers, *inter alia*, around these two issues. The ultimate challenge of Ṣadrā's 'transcendent wisdom' is to formulate a being-centered metaphysics and apply it to the problems of traditional philosophy. The definition of knowledge as a mode of existence is an important application of this concern whereby Ṣadrā tries to overcome the dichotomy between the order of existence and the order of cognition. In contrast to the subjectivist tendencies of both classical Kalam and modern rationalism, Ṣadrā begins with existence as his starting point, and works his way back to the manner in which it unfolds itself in our knowing processes of sensation, imagination, estimation, and intellection. The mind as the locus of the *intelligibilia* and the world as representation are non-starters for a proper ontological analysis. The task at hand is to start out with existence and eventually end with it.

Ṣadrā's relentless effort to ground all knowledge in existence and its modalities has led some scholars to make comparisons between his thought and some trends in modern philosophy. Heidegger's revival of the question of existence is the first that comes to mind. Attempts have been made to bring out the similarities between Heidegger's *Dasein* and Ṣadrā's *wujud*.[1] Although there are fundamental differences between the two, Heidegger's attempt to overcome the misdeeds of modern epistemology, which he attributes to the Cartesian *cogito*, shares the main thrust of Ṣadrā's ambitious project to ground all cognition in existence. This is predicated upon Ṣadrā's oft-repeated premise that it is impossible to know existence from a purely epistemological point of view, for there is no way we can stand outside existence to know it 'objectively.' Nor can we see existence and its modalities from the standpoint of a 'world-less subject' who, then, looks at a 'subject-less world.'[2] Although starting with different

premises and arriving at different conclusions, both Heidegger and Ṣadrā conclude that knowledge is not the exclusive property of the knower. Knowledge defined as an 'effect' and modality of existence denies any central role to the knowing subject as the sole locus of intelligibility. Ṣadrā's defense of the unification of the intellect and the intelligible is essentially non-subjectivist in the sense that it places knowledge not in the internal procedures of the mind but in the interactions between the knowing subject, the world, and the *intelligibilia*, all of which are subsumed under the all-inclusive reality of existence.

The comparisons between the two philosophers, however, stop here. Ṣadrā's analysis of existence is a far cry from the main thrust of modern philosophy. For one, Ṣadrā's philosophy is grounded in a concept of transcendent that retains and expands the fundamental vision of traditional metaphysics. The knowing subject or the 'individual' never stands out as a major concern of the traditional philosopher. The individual does not arise as a proper term of philosophical analysis for it is seen as part of the larger framework of existence and intelligibility. There is an even greater contrast between what Ṣadrā means by transcendent and how it is used in modern philosophy. Ṣadrā defines the transcendent as that which not only goes beyond the individual but also reaches out to the Divine. By contrast, a common tendency in modern philosophy is to see the transcendent as that which lies beyond the sense-experience of the individual but which does not involve necessarily any references to the Divine in the religious and metaphysical sense of the term. The transcendent can be defined as a system of relations, history, memory, the hermeneutic circle, and so on, and it will be perfectly logical to use the term without assigning to it a religious connotation.[3] It goes without saying that Ṣadrā's use of the term transcendent is based on both the philosophical and religious senses of the term. Any comparisons between Ṣadrā and other philosophers will have to keep these points in mind.

In discussing Ṣadrā's transcendent metaphysics, two main issues stand out. The first is the question of mystical knowledge and the extent to which Ṣadrā's transcendent wisdom lends support to mysticism. Ṣadrā's defense of the unification of the intellect and the intelligible and a host of other epistemic concepts which he borrows from Suhrawardi and Ibn al-'Arabi make him a good candidate for a mystic. Yet, Ṣadrā was neither a mere Peripatetic-Illuminations philosopher nor a Sufi in the conventional sense of the term. His 'synthesis' calls for a different typology to locate him within the Islamic intellectual tradi-

tion. The second issue is Ṣadrā's claim to present knowledge as a way of finding existence. I shall explore Ṣadrā's idea that in claiming to know ourselves and other beings, we respond to something larger than us, and that this larger context is provided by existence and its various modes of 'expansion,' 'relationality,' 'flow,' and 'self-delimitation.' A metaphysics that prioritizes existence over other considerations leads to a concept of the self-situated in a framework of relations. This is contrasted to the disengaged agent of Cartesian philosophy which is privileged to see things from the point of view of a 'world-less subject.' The kind of epistemology that Ṣadrā advocates pre-empts such a possibility, and leads to a notion of the self that is engaged in the larger context of ontological relations. In Ṣadrā, the 'self' never arises as a self-enclosed entity in the first place, and this makes self-knowledge more than a mere knowledge of the self. Any discussion of the self already presupposes the existence of the non-self.

EPISTEMOLOGY SPIRITUALIZED: IS MYSTICAL KNOWLEDGE POSSIBLE?

In modern scholarship, Ṣadrā's concept of transcendent wisdom has been the subject of two divergent readings.[4] The first considers Ṣadrā a 'mainstream' philosopher with interests in Sufi themes. Those who subscribe to this view focus on the analytical aspects of Ṣadrā's thought and present him as an Illuminationist- Peripatetic thinker. Much of Ṣadrā's elaborate discussions of such traditional subjects as existence, essence, substance, accident and causality are seen as original yet eventually Peripatetic deliberations.[5] This line of interpretation is tenable only to a certain extent and can be defended only when we confine Ṣadrā's thought to the dense analyses of the *Asfar*. While the *Asfar* itself contains many passages that easily place Ṣadrā within the ranks of Muslim mystics, his other works reveal him even more as a man in search of mystical knowledge. In the introduction to his *al-Mabda' wa'l-ma*ʿa*d*, Ṣadrā says that he wrote the *Asfar* with the 'people of philosophical investigation' (*arbab al-na¿ar*) in mind.[6] In the *Kasr a*ʔ*nam al-jahiliyyah*, he launches a virulent attack on what he considers to be 'pretentious mystics (ʿa*mmat al-muta*ʔ*awwifah*) and ordinary preachers' (ʿ*awamm al-wu*ʿa¿)[7] while distinguishing them from the 'community of God and people of the heart.'[8] Therefore, it is not surprising that many of Ṣadrā's works contain clearly Sufi references when Ṣadrā

is talking about such overtly religious issues as the purification of the soul, spiritual wayfaring, resurrection, the hereafter, and the ways of knowing God.[9]

The second line of interpretation treats Ṣadrā as a straight Sufi thinker and 'gnostic' ('*arif*). Those on this camp adduce as evidence Ṣadrā's passionate endorsement of Ibn al-'Arabi on all of the key points of philosophy and his use of a distinctively Sufi vocabulary when talking about intuitive knowledge.[10] Ṣadrā is fond of bringing up various Sufi themes in the middle of a straightforward philosophical discussion, and does it with considerable frequency. Furthremore, Ṣadrā's works contain numerous references to practically all the major figures of classical Sufism including Bayazid Bastami, Junayd al-Baghdadi, Abu Manṣur al-Ḥallaj, Abu Ṭalib al-Makki, Ghazali, Abu Sa'id Abi'l-Khayr, Farid al-Din 'Aṭṭar, Abu Ḥafṣ 'Umar Suhrawardi, Ibn al-Farid, Jalal al-Din al-Rumi, Ibn al-'Arabi, ?adr al-Din al-Qunawi, Dawud al-Qayṣari and Maḳmud Shabistari. One can also mention the occasional use of Arabic and Persian mystical poetry in Ṣadrā's Arabic writings as well as his diwan of poetry in Persian.[11] While these references point to Ṣadrā's strong predilections toward Sufism, in the final analysis they are not sufficient to declare him a purely Sufi writer. The analytical aspect of his thought is too strong and ubiquitous to brush aside.

One can say that both views offer valuable possibilities for an engaged reading of Ṣadrā. Yet they fail to bring out the 'synthetic' nature of his thought and overlook his unrelenting effort to dovetail the various strands of classical Islamic thought. While Ṣadrā cannot be considered a mainstream Peripatetic like al- Farabi or Ibn Sina for his transcendent wisdom claims to overcome both the Peripatetic and Illuminationist metaphysics, he cannot be regarded a Sufi either in the traditional sense of the term. His works not only contain elements that are clearly Avicennan but also disagree with certain views that are traditionally associated with classical Sufism. Furthermore, neither Ṣadrā's autobiography nor the available hagiographical sources indicate that Ṣadrā was initiated into Sufism. Nor do we have any indication in Ṣadrā's works that he advocated following a particular Sufi order (*ṭariqah*) as a condition or end-result of his transcendent wisdom. Even his discussion of *nubuwwah*, *imamah* and *shuyukhah* as the three stages of the 'great, middle and lesser guidance' (*riyasah*) falls short of pointing toward any formal attachment.[12]

This disparity between philosophical and practical Sufism appears to be in tandem with the Safavid context in which Ṣadrā lived and composed his

works. It is during this period that we see the rise of a new distinction between 'theoretical wisdom' (*'irfan naẓar*i) and 'practical wisdom' (*'irfan 'amal*i)—a distinction that will be the hallmark of philosophical thought in Persian Islam to this day. This interesting distinction can be attributed to the Shiitization (*tashayyu'*) of Persia at the hands of the Safavids on the one hand, and the peculiar and somewhat uneasy relationship between Sufism and (Safavid) Shiism, on the other. The Safavids' conscious effort to make Persia a 'Shiite land,' which began after the second half of the sixteenth century and reached a peak in the seventeenth century, resulted in the diminishing presence of Sunni scholars, philosophers and Sufi orders in the predominantly Shiite-Persian territories. While such common Sufi themes as the purification of the soul and the default nobility of an ascetic life found their way into the works of many Persian-speaking philosophers, an important outcome of the official wedding between the Safavid power and the Twelve Imam Shi'ism was the eastward migration of major Sufi orders to India. Given the deliberate efforts of the Safavids to consolidate their rule as a Shiite power against their archrival the Sunni Ottomans, it was only a matter of time before the Sunni Sufi orders diminished in power and population as they were the only organized network of Sunni Islam in Persia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[13]

The critical attitude of some Shiite scholars toward a number of Sufi ideas and practices seems to have contributed to the interpretation of Sufi orders as deviations from what we might call a typically Shiite spirituality centered around a passionate devotion to the Family of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*) and the twelve Imams. This peculiar aspect of Shiite spirituality appears to have left little or no space for traditional Sufism that preached a different kind of spiritual allegiance and which could be seen as rivalling the centrality of Shiite Imams. Even in cases where established Sufi organizations were accepted by Shiite communities, they had to take on a Shiite color by incorporating such elements of Shiism as Shiite *Ḥadith*, the twelve Imams and their spiritual-esoteric function. During and after the seventeenth century, the Sunni Sufi orders diminished in number and influence in Safavid Persia, and the distinction between theoretical and practical wisdom, which we do not find anywhere else in the Islamic world, became further established.

Ṣadrā's career paralleled another important development in Safavid Persia: the rise of the Akhbari-Uṣuli bifurcation in Shiism. The Akhbaris, spearheaded by Mulla Muḳammad Amin ibn Muḳammad Sharif of Astarabad

(d.1623–4), rejected all sources of knowledge other than what has been transmitted from the revelation, i.e., the Qur'an, and the traditions of the Prophet and the Shiite Imams. For them, the role of the *'ulam*a' was to interpret these established texts according to their internal logic and literal meaning. Even *ijtihad* as understood by the *fuqah*a' was redundant as they claimed to add something to the sources that was not in them. This line of thinking led the Akhbaris to reject speculative philosophy, metaphysics, and much of Sufism. To prove that *akhb*ar, i.e., the reports of the previous imams and scholars were enough a foundation for interpreting religion, the famous Akhbari scholar Muḳammad Baqir Majlisi wrote his famous *BiVar al-anwar*—a monumental work collecting in 176 volumes all of the available reports transmitted from the Shiite Imams and other Shiite *'ulam*a.'

The robust anti-intellectualism of the Akhbaris, which is comparable to some of the *ahl al-Vadith*, however, does not seem to have deterred either Ṣadrā or his mentor Mir Damad from undertaking a serious study of theology, philosophy, mysticism.

Ṣadrā's attack on the pseudo-Sufis in his *Kasr a?nam al- jahiliyyah* is as much directed at what he considered to be pretentious ascetics as at the self-proclaimed pietism of the Akhbaris. Furthermore, Ṣadrā was openly critical of the strict literalism of certain Ḥanbali scholars,[14] and this can be seen as an indirect reference to the Akhbaris of the time with whom Ṣadrā had obvious differences. Even though by the end of the eighteenth century the Uṣulis had re-established themselves, thanks to the work of Aqa Muḳammad Bihbahani, and certain Sufi orders come back to Persia, the primary interest of the great majority of Shiite intelligentsia remained confined to 'theoretical wisdom.' It is fair to say that the situation has not changed in any substantial way in the Persian speaking world of philosophy today.[15]

This short background may help us understand the absence of institutional or 'practical' Sufism in Ṣadrā and his likes during the Safavid period. None of the above, however, is sufficient for us to write off the claim of mysticism in Ṣadrā's thought. This is not only because Ṣadrā's strong predilection toward Sufi metaphysics cannot be explained simply in terms of Safavid or Shiite history but also because Ṣadrā's concept of existence and knowledge leads to a mode of thinking that is bound to be mystical. As I shall argue below, philosophical mysticism flows naturally and almost necessarily from Ṣadrā's carefully articulated deliberations on existence and knowledge. This is where

Ṣadrā's thought is closely linked to *both* the Sufism of Ibn al-'Arabi and the mystical-Neoplatonic tendencies of Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi.

Before going any further, however, a word must be said about mysticism itself. The difficulties involved in any definition of mysticism require little explanation. In a broad sense, mysticism includes a wide range of ideas and practices from an ascetic life and supplications to miracles, metaphysics, and intuitive knowledge. It is commonly contrasted to what Russell has called the 'scientific impulse,' and presented by its critics as a form of poetic imagination devoid of cognitive content.[16] It is also described as a closed system not available to the non-initiate. The kind of mysticism that we find in Ṣadrā does not exactly correspond to any of these definitions. Nor can Ṣadrā be considered a mystic like a Shankaracharya, Hallaj or St. Francis of Asisi. His mode of thinking is 'philosophical mysticism': mysticism as a mode of cognition and pure consciousness, as a way of overcoming the subject-object bifurcation, and finally finding the Divine in the order of existence through intuitive knowledge.

There is a sense in which we can say that the kind of mysticism we find in Ṣadrā is a logical extension of the 'rational mysticism' of al-Farabi and Ibn Sina. Recognizing the possibility of obtaining knowledge through means other than rational procedures and sense data, the Muslim Peripatetics had admitted that knowledge gained from a source outside the individual is a first step toward accepting a notion of knowledge broad enough to recognize mystical knowledge as a valid epistemic claim. The critical philosopher may disagree with the content of such claims. In fact, the skeptical philosopher may reject the mystic's claim to knowledge on account of two main objections: first, the impossibility of gaining knowledge from any source(s) outside reason and experience and second, the impossibility of proving the validity of intuitive knowledge through rational demonstration (*burhan*).

At any rate, the role of mystical experience in the mystic's attempt to make an epistemic claim works in a way similar to the indispensable function of the active intellect as a condition of gaining knowledge. In this regard, Ibn Sina's working principle that knowledge is based on syllogism on the one hand, and some incorrigible and universal principles that can be neither constructed rationally nor derived from experience on the other, makes the appellation 'rationalist' a tenuous one for most Muslim philosophers.[17] In fact, Ibn Sina attempts to construct a *theory* of mystical knowledge in a famous section of the

*Ish*a*rat* called *Maq*a*mat al-*'a*rifin* where he explores and eventually approves of the legitimacy of the mystics' claim to veritable knowledge. Here Ibn Sina presents himself as a philosopher who can perfectly understand, appreciate, and give a 'demonstrative' account of what the mystic claims to have as veritable knowledge. As he puts it, the 'mystics' ('a*rifin*) have 'some exterior states (*um*u*r* ¿a*hirah*) denied by those who deny them but praised by those who really know them.'[18] The crucial point is that Ibn Sina's overwhelmingly positive attitude is extended to mysticism not merely as asceticism and devotion but as a mode of knowledge.

The central role played by the active intellect in Peripatetic epistemology opens up further avenues for 'intellectual mysticism,' and Ṣadrā makes full use of it in his more mystical expositions. As a principle of intellection that remains outside the knowing subject, the active intellect, and conjunction with it, confirms the possibility of obtaining knowledge from a supra- rational and supra-individual source. The active intellect's intervention into the process of knowledge as a principle of cognition external to the mind prevents intellection from becoming an internal procedure of the mind. It is not hard to see the underlying link between this delineation of the active intellect and Ṣadrā's more elaborate language of presence, unveiling, illumination and intuition. It will be wrong, however, to think of the active intellect only in terms of epistemology. As I have discussed in Chapter II, Ṣadrā places the active intellect within the domain of metaphysics and does not shy away from assigning a clearly mystical and even ecstatic function to it. This is borne out by the fact that Ṣadrā joins al-Farabi in associating the active intellect with the Archangel Gabriel called with various names including the 'rays, lights, and effects' of the Divine Essence (*al-dh*a*t al-il*a*hiyyah*).[19] In short, the function of the active intellect as a principle of metaphysics and a condition of knowledge provides a basis for making a cogent case for intuitive knowledge.

Finally, we should briefly touch upon the place of revelation (*waVy*) in Ṣadrā's epistemology. If the mystic can demonstrate that there is a kind of knowledge that falls outside the limited scope of reason and sense-data and that he can verify the content of such knowledge through rational analysis (*burhan*), then he will be on a safer ground. As we have seen before, Ṣadrā presents numerous arguments to establish this very point. Now, the case for a mystical theory of knowledge has a better chance of success in a theistic context because the tenets of a religion contained in revelation already go

beyond the limited scope of reason and experience. If there is one valid form of knowledge outside reason and sense-data already established through the Divine word, why not another one? While Ṣadrā holds fast to the categorical distinction between revelation (*waḥy*) and inspiration (*ilham*), he is aware of the implications of revealed knowledge for the validity of non-rational forms of knowledge. As a Muslim philosopher, he could not have remained indifferent to the epistemic challenge of revelation to philosophy. Unlike the Farabian attempt to humanize the process of revealed knowledge, Ṣadrā takes revelation to be a special case of knowledge to be understood in its own terms. This, of course, is not without consequences for inspirational or intuitive knowledge. That is why Ṣadrā sees God as the true founder of the science of metaphysics: 'This science is nobler than it can be established by a human because God has established it through revelation and inspiration given to the prophets—peace be upon them—, and the previous philosophers have taken the principles of this science from the niche of prophecy (*mishkat al-nubuwwah*).'[20] In short, the foundation of metaphysics is neither reason nor even intuition but revelation and what the prophets and philosophers have deduced from it.[21]

With the exception of revelation that stands on its own as a special kind of knowledge, there is an element of Platonic intellectualism in all of the above. Once we accept Plato's basic insight that the true knowledge of things lies outside and above them, it becomes logical to say that knowledge is not only constructed but also received and discovered. This provides an important *raison d'etre* for non-rational and non-discursive forms of knowledge in Islamic philosophy. All that a philosopher like Ṣadrā needs to do is to take the next step and declare the source of this special kind of knowledge, i.e., mystical vision and experience to be more real and reliable than what is available to us through rational analysis and sense data. Both the *intelligibilia* and the *sensibilia* bring us to the threshold of non- rational knowledge in that they are ultimately based on some kind of an intuition which makes both rational and empirical knowledge adequate for our cognitive dealings with the world.

This 'rational' explanation for the veracity of mystical knowledge, however, does not nullify the fact that a mystic's claim to a particular form of knowledge can be contested on various grounds. The differences among the Sufis themselves regarding epistemic claims are notorious. One such celebrated case is Aḳmad Sirkhindi's rejection of *waḥdat al-wujud* as a lower state of the understanding of *tawḥid* and his proposal to correct it with *waḥdat al-shu-*

hud. Among the philosophers who claim to base the principles of their central teachings on some sort of a mystical experience and intuition, one particularly revealing case is the contrast between Ṣadrā and Suhrawardi. Both philosophers work from a similar concept of 'tasted' and 'realized' knowledge and structure their philosophical conclusions around similar if not identical experiences of 'witnessing.' The result, however, is two different ontological systems: Suhrawardian 'essentialism' versus Sadrean 'existentialism.' So, there is no question that particular cases of mystical knowledge based on mystical experience are subject to multiple readings. That different and even contradictory conclusions can be drawn from similar or identical experiences, however, does not negate the legitimacy of mystical knowledge. It simply underscores its fragile nature when it is articulated into a second-order proposition. This is where the philosopher with a claim to mystical experience re-enters the domain of discursive reasoning and attempts to demonstrate the rational basis of his visions.

Ṣadrā's claim that 'knowledge as experience' cannot be gained through reason alone but can be explained in terms that are intelligible to the non-initiate underlies his concern to provide an intellectual basis for all mystical experiences. Ṣadrā's oft-repeated principle that 'true demonstration (*al-burhan al-Ɱaqiqi*) does not contradict witnessing based on unveiling (*al-shuhud al-kashfi*)'[22] underscores an important fault line between mystical experience and the way it is articulated in philosophical language.

Now, let us turn to how Ṣadrā makes a case for mystical experience as a basis for knowledge. In Chapter II, I focused on the philosophical aspects of Ṣadrā's epistemology and stated that Ṣadrā considers representation as a legitimate form of knowledge only when it applies to second-order conceptualizations. Against knowledge as representation, he proposes two alternatives: unification of the intellect and the intelligible, and knowledge- by-presence. Both views are derivatives of Ṣadrā's gradational ontology and culminate in knowledge as a form of witnessing and unveiling—the two terms of mystical epistemology employed by Suhrawardi and Ibn al-'Arabi. When the soul passes from one state of being to another, say, from sensation to imagination, it not only acquires a higher epistemic ability to analyze concepts but also becomes 'more' in an existential sense. By reaching a higher ontological status, the self becomes a 'simple intellect' (*'aql basi*ị), and contains in itself 'all intelligibles.' What enables the soul to become a receptive agent of the intel-

ligible form of things is its isomorphic unity with the intelligible world. But how does the soul reach this stage? How can something material and sensate become a container for something non-material? Ṣadrā's answer lies in his spiritual intellectualism, which is summed up in his oft-repeated idea that the soul is a physical entity in its origination and a spiritual- intellectual being in its subsistence. Through its trans-substantial movement, the soul emerges as a material substance and gradually sheds its qualities of physical existence as it progresses toward the perception of intelligible forms. The idea that the soul is material in its origin is pre-Sadrean and goes back to Aristotle. With Ṣadrā, however, it assumes a far more significant role and accounts for the soul's intellectual and spiritual transformation through knowledge: the more the soul knows, the more intense and simple it becomes in terms of ontological proximity to the world of the *intelligibilia*. Knowledge is a way of participating in the intelligible world, and for Ṣadrā, this has a transforming effect on the knower because such a participation or unification elevates the soul to higher levels of cognition.

This elevation in the hierarchy of existence and intelligibility is closely related to Ṣadrā's doctrine of disembodiment (*tajarrud*), which I have already analyzed at some length. The definition of intelligibility as disembodiment entails non-attachment from the material world: the soul becomes a simple being and finally unites with the active intellect through the stages of gradation and disembodiment. The key idea here is 'disengagement' from the material in the broadest sense of the term. This not only calls for the unadulterated and uninterrupted concentration of the mind on the pure intelligibles but also requires the soul's detachment from material pleasures that hinder it from a full-fledged participation in the 'world of the sacred.' When describing the stages of the 'knowers' (*al-ʿarifun*), Ibn Sina stipulates 'non-attachment' as a condition of attaining happiness: 'If the knowers and those who are above imperfection shed themselves of the pollution of relation to the body and are released from preoccupation with it, they will reach the world of saintliness and happiness, and the highest perfection will be engrained in them.'[23] Not surprisingly, Ibn Sina's description of how knowers reach intellectual and spiritual realization is in perfect harmony with what Muslim mystics will have to say about the subject. But Ṣadrā takes the step Ibn Sina does not—a step that establishes realized knowledge as superior to other forms of cognition. This is where disengagement as a condition of intelligibility is rendered into a method

of spiritual purification. As Ṣadrā repeatedly states, the meaning of things is revealed to the knower through his unification with the intelligible world on the one hand, and with the world of separate spiritual realities (*mujarradat*), on the other.[24] All this hinges upon releasing oneself from the limitations of material existence in both the epistemic and spiritual senses of the term.

By applying this principle to human knowledge, Ṣadrā establishes a strong link between epistemology and mystical knowledge: one's state of spiritual perfection is proportionate to one's proximity to the world of the *intelligibilia*. This is also the philosopher's gateway to 'true happiness.' Following the Neoplatonic tradition, Ṣadrā defines detachment from the material world as a condition and end result of happiness (*sa'adah*). It is to be remembered that happiness is traditionally contrasted with sensual pleasure and defined as a spiritual state of consciousness. In Ibn Sina's terms, 'the internal pleasures are higher than those of the senses.'[25] The fully realized and virtuous souls reach a pinnacle in death whereby they leave the body— their main obstacle to unification with the world of pure intelligibles and spiritual substances. One's state of consciousness and happiness is at its highest after physical death provided that the soul in question has already reached a state of spiritual and moral perfection. In Ṣadrā's words, 'as long as the soul's existence is attached to the body, it cannot reach the perfect intellective state and cannot exercise power except on the animal faculties.'[26]

Now, the word 'death' (*al-mawt*) in this context is to be understood in both physical and spiritual senses. In the case of physical death, which applies to all mortal beings, it refers to the transfer of the soul to the next world in which the soul meets God, the ultimate source of truth and happiness. In the case of spiritual death followed by spiritual rebirth, the mystic considers it to be a possibility 'here and now.' Spiritual death is thus defined as the detachment of the soul from the lower levels of existence and the carnal desires of the ego. The famous Socratic- Platonic saying 'die before you die,' which is also a saying attributed to the Prophet of Islam,[27] expresses the same idea.

Ṣadrā defines the 'pleasure of our intellective life' to be higher and nobler than other forms of happiness:

> Our self-consciousness is more intense when we leave the body because [at that moment] our presence to ourselves becomes more complete and firm. Since most people are immersed in their material bodies and occupied with

> them, they forget themselves. As God the Exalted said: 'They forgot God and God made them forget themselves' (Qur'an 59:19). They do not perceive themselves because of this intense relationship except as mixed with their bodies. This is so because the conjunction of the soul with the body and its relation to it is like the conjunction of light with shadow, torch with smoke, and a person with his image in the mirror (…)
> When this relationship between the soul and the body is terminated and this obstacle disappears, the intelligibles become visible, their consciousness present, their knowledge real (*'aynan*), and [their] perception an intellectual vision (*ru'yah 'aqliyyah*). Thus the pleasure of our intellective life becomes more perfect and nobler than all other forms of goodness and happiness. You have already learnt that real pleasure is existence (*wujud*) and especially intellective existence due to its detachment from the mixture of non- existence. This is particularly true for the Real Beloved and the most perfect Necessary Being for it is the reality of existence that contains in itself all aspects of existence. Partaking of Its pleasure is the highest pleasure and repose. In fact, it is the repose in which there is no worry. (*Asfar*, IV, 2, pp.124–125)

Detachment from the limitations of sensual and material existence as a condition of happiness is an old idea in classical philosophy, going back to Plato and other ancient philosophers. Before Ṣadrā, the Muslim philosophers had considered intellectual happiness possible only in the absence of material hindrances. Ibn Sina, for instance, goes so far as to say that 'every evil results from attachment to matter and non-being.'[28] This view, Platonist in spirit, is based on two sets of distinctions: one between sensation and intellection in epistemology, and the other between becoming and being in ontology. For Plato, sense data, reserved for the transient world of becoming, could only yield opinion (*doxa*), which is ontologically imperfect and epistemologically unreliable whereas *episteme*, the true knowledge of things, can only be obtained from the world of the Forms for it has a higher ontological status and warrants epistemic credibility.[29] True and enduring happiness is derived from knowing these Forms. Furthermore, detachment from the world of becoming 'represents a demand for universal rationality' and elevates the individual to a position of spiritual discernment higher than one's limited, often passionate and thus erroneous point of view. This 'universal rationality' is grounded

in 'a world of immutable norms, which are opposed to the perpetual state of becoming and changing appetites characteristic of individual, corporeal life.'[30]

At this point, the opposite of existence is not non-existence (*'adam*) but becoming, for becoming signifies what is potential, thus imperfect and incomplete in things. This is a crucial point for understanding Ṣadrā.[31] As the classical philosophers insist, existence is reality, perfection, existential plenitude, completion, comprehensiveness, permanence, light, clarity, goodness and order whereas becoming is imperfection, confusion, cloudiness, transience and illusion. Ṣadrā sums up this radical distinction by saying that 'the good (*al-khayr*) in things comes from the fact that they are actual whereas evil (*al-sharr*) stems from what is potential. A thing cannot be evil in every respect; otherwise it would be non-existent. And no being, in so far as it is something existent, is evil. It becomes evil as a privation of perfection such as ignorance, or it necessitates its own non-existence in other things such as oppression (*al-¿ulm*).'[32]

While this axiological description of existence characterizes a good part of medieval philosophy, it takes on a special meaning with Ṣadrā. For the mystic of a philosophical bent, the above qualifiers of existence are not mere reports of metaphysical facts but rather what Rudolf Otto calls 'saving actualities.'[33] The mystics' interest in questions of existence lies in the fact that the problem of existence is not 'metaphysics but a doctrine of salvation.'[34] Quoting 'Ala' al-Dawlah al-Simnani, one of Ibn al- 'Arabi's important commentators, Ṣadrā defines the meaning of the study of existence not as an investigation of actual substances and their properties, as Aristotle would say, but as a Divine theophany (*tajalli*): 'The True Existence (*al-wujud al-Ḥaqq*) is God the Exalted, the absolute existence (*al-wujud al-muṭlaq*) is His act (*fi'l*), and the conditioned existence (*al-wujud al- muqayyad*) is His work (*athar*). And what we mean by the absolute existence is not existence as a generic abstract term but expanding existence.'[35] Ṣadrā completes Simnani's statement by asserting one more time that 'the first existence that has emanated [from God] is the expanding absolute existence.'[36] Approaching existence and knowledge from such an axiological point of view, Ṣadrā takes the distinction between being and becoming to be foundational for his spiritual epistemology and cites Ibn al-'Arabi's 'five Divine presences' (*al-Ḥaḍarat al- ilahiyyah al-khamsah*) as intermediary stages linking the two worlds in a hierarchical manner.[37]

Defined as both intellectual pleasure and spiritual refinement, happiness rests on an axiology of existence. In *Kitab al-millah*, Farabi explains happiness

as proximity to the intelligible world.[38] Ibn Sina concurs: 'Happiness cannot be attained except through perfection in knowledge.'[39] Ghazali bases happiness on the 'noble nature of the intellect,' reasserting the link between intelligibility as disembodiment and happiness as spiritual detachment.[40] In his *Abkar al-afkar*, the theologian Sayf al-Din al-Amidi (d.1233) defines the end of human life as spiritual perfection (*kamal*), and spiritual perfection means the comprehensive knowledge of the *intelligibilia*.[41] In a similar vein, the Andalusian mystic and philosopher Ibn Sab'in (d.1268) describes the stages of happiness as the 'taste of wisdom which is to grasp the realities of things' at the beginning and 'the knowledge of God' (*ma'rifat Allah*) and 'proximity to the First Truth' at the end.[42] Perhaps the best example of this approach is to be found in Abu Bakr al-Razi's (d.925) famous treatise *al- Sirat al-falsafiyyah* in which al-Razi states that 'the most virtuous matter for which we were created and towards which we are moved is not getting bodily pleasures, but the acquisition of knowledge and the practice of justice; through these two comes about our deliverance from this world of ours to the world in which there is neither death nor pain.'[43]

Ṣadrā joins this tradition by construing happiness within the context of his gradational ontology. He reaffirms existence as the source of existential and axiological qualities: existence is what gives meaning, intelligibility, and order to everything from the angelic to the mineral world. Happiness as the 'consciousness of existence' (*al-shu'ur bi'l-wujud*) is true felicity, for it is found not in the fleeting reality of becoming but in the permanent habitat of the *intelligibilia*. In one of his bold contrasts, Ṣadrā says that 'the pleasure of the angels of the spirit in perceiving the light is above the pleasure of the donkey's perception of sexual pleasure and nuts.'[44] The soul finds its true identity by 'shedding' the imperfections of material existence, i.e., worldly pleasures, and by becoming a part of the intelligible world. In a similar way, it comes to know things as they are through their intelligible forms, which are ontologically more real and cognitively more reliable than their sensate properties. Knowing as appropriation and participation in the intelligible world gives us a mystico-philosophical concept of happiness.

> Know that existence is goodness and happiness, and the consciousness of existence is also goodness and happiness.[45] But existents are of varying degrees in terms of perfection and imperfection. Whenever existence is more perfect, its detachment from non-existence is more [real], and happiness in it is more

immediate. And whenever it is imperfect, its mixture with evil and misfortune is more. Now, the most perfect and noble of all existents is the First Truth/Reality (*al-Иaqq al-awwal*), which is worthy of [comprehension] first by the separate intellective existents and then by the souls. The lowest of existents is prime matter, time, and motion, and then material forms, then natural forms (*al-ịaba'i*), and then souls…. Since existents are of different degrees, happiness, which is their perception, also allows different degrees of superiority. The existence of intellective faculties is thus superior to the existence of animal faculties of desire and anger…. When our souls become stronger, terminate their relations with the body, and return to their true identity and source, they acquire a joy and happiness incomparable to sensual pleasures. This is so since the cause of this pleasure [i.e., the consciousness of existence] is the strongest, most complete and immediate of all joyous pleasures.[46] (*Asfar*, IV, 2, pp.121–122)

The critical question here is how Ṣadrā makes a transition from disembodiment as a condition of intelligibility to disembodiment as a state of spirituality. It is to be noted that non-materiality by itself is not sufficient for the kind of spirituality Ṣadrā advocates; otherwise we would have to accept everything immaterial as spiritual. It does, however, suggest that such beings meet the initial criterion of spirituality, i.e., the detachment from the limitations of corporeal existence. And yet, this is not enough to ground spirituality in intelligibility. What is needed is to redefine intelligibility in terms of onto-spiritual qualities. To do this,

Ṣadrā has to treat the world of the *intelligibilia* as a domain of spiritual actualities and construct an ontology of spiritual beings. This can be done only when we blur the demarcation line between the ontological and the spiritual and ultimately overcome it.

This is precisely what Ṣadrā does when he alternates between the demonstrative language of the Peripatetis, the gnostic mysticism of Ibn al-'Arabi, and the various Qur'anic terms.[47] As part of his general epistemology, Ṣadrā repeatedly comes back to the definition of true knowledge as one obtained through unveiling (*mukashafah*), confirmed by revelation (*waИy*), and proved through demonstrative arguments (*burhan*).[48] This is where Ṣadrā parts ways with the Peripatetic tradition: while disembodiment as a condition of intelligibility carries no spiritual and mystical overtones in al-Farabi or Ibn Sina, it

does become a cornerstone of Ṣadrā's claim that true knowledge always points to perfection of an onto-spiritual kind because the levels of existence are nothing but stages of spiritual refinement. This is also in tandem with the Neoplatonic idea of treating the 'stages of spiritual progress' as corresponding to 'different degrees of virtue.'[49]

In one of his personal testimonies, Ṣadrā describes his journey to certainty as follows:

> I used to busy myself with investigation (*al-baVth*) and repetition, referring constantly to the study of the books of the philosophers of theory so much so that I believed that I had gained something. When my vision began to open a little bit and looked at myself…[and saw that I was] far from having the knowledge of the truths and the real truths, which cannot be perceived except through tasting (*dhawq*) and consciousness (*wijd*a*n*). These are explained in the Book [i.e., the Qur'an] and the Sunnah concerning the knowledge of God, His attributes and names, books, prophets, and the knowledge of the soul and its states in the grave, the resurrection, the reckoning, the scale, the bridge (*al-*ʔ*ir*aṭ), and the heaven and hellfire, whose truth cannot be known except through the teaching of God and cannot be unveiled except through the light of prophethood and sanctity. (Commentary on the Chapter al-Waqiʿah, *Tafsir*, Vol. 7, p.10)

Furthermore, Ṣadrā considers knowledge essential for performing religious duties as well as for attaining virtues. This is an important step toward assigning an ethico-spiritual function to knowledge whereby intellective knowledge becomes a further step toward spiritual realization. For instance, Ṣadrā says that 'obedience to God is not complete without knowledge and knowledge is not attained except through the intellect.'[50] Obviously, this is a familiar theme in Islamic history, and one can cite numerous examples of it. Socrates, for instance, is reported to have said that 'all virtues come into being only through knowledge (*maʿrifah*).'[51] The proposition is true also when reversed: knowledge leads to virtue insofar as virtues are seen as having a cognitive value. Ibn Sina stipulates the purification of the soul as a condition of attaining knowledge and defines purification as obtainable by the 'assiduous performance of religious duties.'[52] This not only assigns knowledge a religious function but also sees religious duties as saturated with epistemic value. In a similar vein, Ṣadrā describes the acquisition of 'desirable sciences' (*al-ʿulum al-maṭlubah*)

as a conduit for happiness even in the hereafter.[53] All these provisions assign to knowledge not only an epistemic but also spiritual significance in that knowledge as bliss transforms the soul and brings it closer to the intelligible-spiritual world.[54] The philosophical justification of this premise therefore lies in the epistemic process itself: disembodiment as the *sine qua non* of intellection denotes the absence of impediments, imperfections, and darkness whereby the knowing subject is illuminated by a vision of the intelligible world.

The traditional definition of philosophy as 'the perfection of the soul by gaining the knowledge of the reality of things as they are through investigation and proofs, not through opinion and imitation' confirms the ethical and spiritual function of philosophical knowledge.[55] As Plato says, the ultimate goal of philosophy as wisdom is to be theomorphic, i.e., 'God-like' (*al- tashabbuh bi'l-bari' ta'alah*).[56] This definition cannot be written off as turning philosophy into theology. Rather, it should be seen as challenging philosophy to elevate itself to the level of applied ethics and wisdom. There is, however, something deeper involved in asking philosophy to be more than what it is: to recognize the validity of that which is beyond the purview of speculative philosophy since, as Ṣadrā explains in his short autobiography, speculative philosophy by itself will not 'satisfy the heart, tranquil the soul, ease the intellect.'[57] The 'Divine sage' is the person who sets out on a journey toward God by climbing the ladder of intellectual and spiritual perfection: 'The expansion of the breast is the goal of practical wisdom, and the light is the goal of theoretical wisdom. The Divine sage (*al- hakim al-ilahi*) is the one who combines both and is the true believer in the language of the Shari'ah, and this is a great triumph.'[58] Knowledge as a 'spiritual exercise'[59] is a step in the direction of drawing near unto God because to know the forms is to know an aspect of the Divine, i.e., 'what is in God's knowledge,' and thus attain proximity with It:

> Every celestial or elemental nature has an intellective substance as its principle and a substance that changes its existence. The relation of this intellective substance to these corporeal natures is like the relation of the perfect to the imperfect and of the principle to the derivative. God is ever closer to us than anything else, and these intellective substances are like the lights and rays of the First Necessary Light for they are the forms of what is in God's knowledge. Furthermore, they do not have an independent exist-

ence by themselves; their very essence is related to the Truth. (*Asfar*, I, 3, pp.95–96)

The knowledge of existence as a concrete state of consciousness is attained not in the mind, which perceives only the universals,[60] but in the 'heart' (*al-qalb*). This conclusion should not come as a surprise since the kind of knowledge Ṣadrā has in mind here is not conceptual knowledge based on universals and categories but knowledge as unveiling and witnessing. While the mind perceives forms as universal and abstract concepts, realized knowledge, which is always singular and concrete, is revealed in what Ṣadrā calls 'direct witnessing' (*shuhud 'ayn*i), 'illuminative presence' (*Иuḍur ishraq*i), and 'unveiling' (*kasfh* and *mukashafah*).[61] He further states that 'the knowledge of existence can be acquired either by presential witnessing (*al- mushahadah al-Иuḍuriyyah*) or through rational argumentation (*istidlal*) by analyzing its effects and concomitants. The latter, however, is nothing but flimsy knowledge.'[62]

In his Commentary on the *U*?u*l al-kafi*, Ṣadrā refers to the 'spiritual heart' (*al-qalb al-ma'naw*i) as the intellect.[63] He further says that 'the noblest part of man is the real heart (*al-qalb al- Иaqiq*i).'[64] This terminology of 'heart-knowledge' has its roots in the Islamic sources. Several Qur'anic verses, which Ṣadrā quotes more than once, refer to the heart as an instrument of understanding: 'They have hearts but do not understand with them; they have eyes but do not see with them' (Qur'an 7:179); 'Do not they travel on earth so that they have hearts with which they intellect? Verily, it is not the eyes that are blind but the hearts which are in the breast' (Qur'an 22:46); 'Do not they ponder over the Qur'an or are there locks on their hearts?' (Qur'an 47:24). Following Ibn al-'Arabi's concept of the heart in broad outlines,[65] Ṣadrā refers to the heart as 'the intellective power, the locus of the perception of the Divine (*mash'ar al-ilah*i), which is the abode of [Divine] signs and inspiration.'[66] The heart is thus the depository of the spiritual reality of existence when the veils of imperfection and ignorance are removed from it:

…These are the obstacles that prevent the soul from the knowledge of the reality of things. Otherwise every soul with its natural disposition is good and capable of knowing the true nature of things because it is a Divine

command (*amr*) nobler and distinct from all the other substances of this world. As for the Prophet, peace be upon

Him, who said that demonic powers (*shay*aị*in*) hover over the heart of the children of Adam [to turn them away from] seeing the angelic world, it is an allusion to this capacity and to these veils that come between human souls and the angelic world. When these veils and impediments are removed from the heart of man, which is his rational soul,[67] the form of the world of Dominion (*al-mulk*) and Angelic presence (*al-malak*u*t*) and the structure of existence, as it is, become manifest in it. (*Asfar*, IV, 2, p.139)

Ṣadrā's use of this Qur'anic terminology provides an important clue for the kind of knowledge obtained through the epistemology of the heart.[68] To state briefly, this knowledge comes in the form of a 'descent' rather than construction and discovery. The heart does not simply process knowledge but functions as a place of 'revelation' or unveiling. This is where the analogy between heart-knowledge and revelation becomes further accentuated: revelation is *sent down* to the heart, not the mind, of the prophet as the human receptacle of the Divine word. In the case of the perfect man (*al-insan al-kamil*), whom we can take as the penultimate mystic, knowledge as vision becomes so powerful that 'when the perfect man looks at this world and sees the heaven and earth and what is in them, its form becomes manifest in his heart so much so that even if his sight becomes obscured he still sees this form fully represented in his imagination and present in himself in a way that is more complete than the presence of external forms in his sensation.'[69] Obviously, this is not to suggest that all such knowledge is entitled to be religious revelation. But the process by which revelation reaches the heart of the prophet is similar to the way heart-knowledge functions in the mystic's claim to have spiritual knowledge. Ṣadrā's explanation of the process of revelation is worth quoting in full:

The reason for the descent of the Word [of God] and the sending of the Book is that when the spirit of man is disengaged from the body and goes out of the shackle of the house of its mold and its natural place, journeying towards its Lord to witness His great signs, and is cleaned from the dirt of rebellion, material pleasures, desires, wicked thoughts and attachments, the light of knowledge and faith in God and His exalted dominion begins to shine for it. When this light is firmly established and substantiated, it

> becomes a sacred substance, which is called the active intellect by the philosopher- sages in the language of wisdom, and the Holy Spirit in the language of the Prophetic Law.
>
> Through this intense intellective light the secrets of what is on earth and heaven begin to shine in it [i.e., the spirit of man]. Then the truths of things begin to be seen just like the blurred images in the power of sight begin to be seen clearly through the light of sensate vision when it is not hindered by a veil. The veil here is an effect of nature and the dealings of this lower world. This is so because the hearts and the spirits, by account of their primordial disposition, are perfectly capable of receiving the light of wisdom and faith when darkness like disbelief, which corrupts it, does not overtake it or when a veil such as disobeying [the Divine] and the like does not cover it. (*Asfar*, III, 2, pp.24–25)

It is not difficult to see what Ṣadrā is seeking to combine here in one single epistemology: intellectual truth and moral perfection. The soul's detachment from corporeal limitations is both an intellectual and spiritual exercise. It is an intellectual exercise because, as we discussed before, the highest form of intelligibility is obtained through the mind's detachment from the conditions of corporeality. Yet it is also a spiritual process because detachment has strongly ethical and religious overtones. Whether we define spirituality as having a cognitive experience or posit intellection as an essentially ethico-spiritual undertaking, the point remains that moral rectitude and spiritual discipline is a condition of epistemic veracity.[70] Ṣadrā's point is that the character of our epistemic search has a direct impact on what we can and cannot find. That is why he gives a long list of 'intellectual vices' that include 'false views and corrupt beliefs… that plague the soul and torture the heart.'[71] In one of his ruthless attacks on the Mutakallimun, he scolds them for opposing *al- 'urafa'* and says that 'what they know about the religious sciences is nothing but issues of controversy. Their goal in knowledge is not the betterment of the soul, refinement of the inner, and cleansing of the heart.'[72] While these remarks concern the Kalam arguments and reveal Ṣadrā's overall attitude toward the Mutakallimun, they also convey something of what Ṣadrā considers to be the ultimate goal of knowledge.

The four degrees of attaining knowledge complement the essential unity of the intellectual and the spiritual:

> There are four degrees of perfection [in knowing things]: the first is the refinement of one's outward state (*al-*¿a*hir*) by following Divine orders and Prophetic law. The second is the refinement of one's inward state (*al-b*aḷ*in*) and cleaning the heart from dark and despicable habits and behavior.[73] The third is the illumination [of the soul] by the forms of knowledge and favorable qualities. The fourth is the [spiritual] extinction (*fan*a') of the soul from itself and fixing its gaze (*al-na*¿*ar*) upon contemplating the First Lord and His Magnificence. This is the end of journeying towards God by following the path of the soul. After these stages, there are still many stations (*man*a*zil*) and degrees (*mar*a*Ɣil*), which are no less than what one has followed before. But one should prefer to shorten [the discussion of] what one does not perceive except through witnessing and presence. This is due to the inability to explain what one does not comprehend except through light. As for those who have attained spiritual perfection (*al-ka*m*il*u*n*), after they have journeyed to God and reached Him, there are other journeys [for them], some of which are in the Truth (*al-Ɣaqq*) and some of which are from the Truth but with the Truth. (*Shaw*a*hid*, pp.207–208)

By assigning to the heart an epistemic function, Ṣadrā attempts to overcome the dichotomy between rational and mystical types of knowledge. The goal is to define rational cogitation as a step toward knowledge as unveiling and witnessing. This is where

Ṣadrā *the philosopher* meets Ṣadrā *the mystic*: what the philosopher establishes through rational proofs does not contradict what the mystic attains through spiritual realization. To quote Ṣadrā's famous phrase: 'True demonstration does not contradict witnessing based on unveiling (*al-shuh*u*d al-kash*fi).'[74] The difference between the two modes of knowing is that whereas rational proofs belong to second-order conceptualization, witnessing is a first-order experience which the mystic attains through spiritual realization, purification of the soul, contemplation and meditation. 'The difference between the sciences based on theory and the sciences based on vision,' says

Ṣadrā, 'is like the difference between someone who knows the definition of sweetness and someone who has actually tasted sweetness; and someone who understands the definition of health and power and someone who is actually healthy and powerful.'[75] Articulating this point further, Ṣadrā introduces three

types of knowers, and his tone turns into one of philosophical mysticism in no ambiguous terms.

> From the point of view of their intellectual potentialities, the knowers (*al-ʿulam*a') are of three kinds. The first are those who are complete in their perfection with their dispositions as in the case of the detached intellects (*al-ʿuq*ul *al-muf*a*raqah*). The second (group) requires perfection but does not need an extraneous element and agent of perfection from outside as in the case of the celestial souls. Insofar as their natural disposition is concerned, the souls of the Prophets, may peace be upon them, belong to this group. After reaching perfection, however, they usually join the first group. The third are imperfect in their natural dispositions and need for their perfection agents from outside themselves such as the dispensation of Divine books and messengers. (*Asfar*, I, 3, p.503)

In construing knowledge as unveiling and witnessing, Ṣadrā follows Ibn al-ʿArabi's celebrated maxim that 'he who has no unveiling has no knowledge' (*man l*a *kashfa lahu la ʿilma lahu*).[76] Unveiling as seeing or witnessing is by definition based on three premises. First of all, it asserts the unique and particular nature of seeing. As discussed in Chapter II, seeing is a concrete act of cognition and involves the 'presence' of the object seen. Unveiling connotes a concrete experience of intelligible and spiritual realities as opposed to the 'abstract' nature of knowledge as representation and mirroring.

Secondly, unveiling as the disclosure of existence and intelligibility presupposes meaning to be a given quality of things because the mind unveils and discovers meaning inherent in things by removing the barriers of material embodiment and ignorance. The mind does not 'create' meaning but lets things manifest themselves and their intrinsic meanings through presence, illumination, witnessing, and clearing.[77] Thirdly, unveiling as a higher faculty of cognition rests on the knower's conscious and volitional act of removing the veils of imperfection and obscurity. This third condition is predicated upon the implementation of such spiritual exercises as the purification of the soul, attainment of virtues, daily prayers, contemplation, and so on, all of which can easily be quoted from a classical Sufi manual for the novices, and which underscore Ṣadrā's Sufi leanings. This, in turn, transforms the soul of the knower into a higher state of spiritual consciousness whereby the acts of being,

knowing, and doing good become one. Thus the process of knowing becomes a process of intellectual and spiritual perfection. This view is in tandem with Ṣadrā's concept of the evolving soul which he construes as undergoing 'substantial motion' at all times from the corporeal to the spiritual.[78] This is how the soul reaches the Angelic World and becomes the cosmos or what Ṣadrā calls the 'great man (*al-insan al-kabir*) in whom all beings are to be found.'[79] This is also how the 'Divine Gnostic (*al-'arif al-rabbani*)' becomes 'effaced in the light of [Divine] oneness.'[80]

It must be clear by now that the kind of mystical knowledge that Ṣadrā advocates rests on the idea of knowing as participation. Since Ṣadrā is eager to define the world of the *intelligibilia* in terms of spiritual substances, the intellect's participation in the intelligible world and its eventual unification with it is an important step toward blurring any clear-cut distinctions between the intellectual and the spiritual. When the soul as both intellect and heart attains perfect disembodiment and moral perfection, it can perceive things by seeing (*ib*?a*r*), witnessing (*shuhud*), unveiling (*kashf*), and illumination (*ishraq* and *tanwir*).

This alternation between the two realms of consciousness is predicated upon Ṣadrā's attempt to combine his spiritual ontology with mystical epistemology.

But what is the precise nature of this mystical knowledge? Can we define its content? Is it communicable? As it is the case with all mystical literature, we find no handy answers to these questions. To begin with the first, we may describe mystical knowledge as a special kind of knowledge about God. We can add to this the divine mysteries available only to a select group of people such as prophets and saints. Defined as such, mystical knowledge is the knowledge of the mysterious and thus to be protected against the ignorance of the non-initiate. This makes mystical knowledge a purely religious act. But, as we have seen so far, the mystic's claim to sound knowledge is not limited to God. It extends to existence, the soul, the cosmos, the hereafter, and a host of other theological and philosophical issues. That is why Ṣadrā is never tired of presenting witnessing and unveiling as the most reliable tools of knowing the reality of things.

We may say that the claim of mysticism is one in which an attempt is made to formulate a holistic view of reality and a vision of unity (*tawḥid*) in such a way as to open up a space for non-discursive forms of knowledge. To the extent

to which mysticism in this general sense is applicable to Ṣadrā, he begins with knowledge as a 'report' about the way things are and ends in knowledge as experience and participation. In presenting the heart-intellect as the proper instrument of grasping this holistic reality, he appeals to both rational and non-rational types of knowledge. Quoting 'Ayn al-Qudat Hamadani, the famous Sufi of the twelfth century, Ṣadrā agrees that 'reason is a sound scale, and its judgments are sound and certain containing no falsehood.'[81] Yet, the non-discursive forms of knowing are accorded a higher epistemic status for it is through them that we are able to see the whole. Ṣadrā considers the essence of the mystical understanding of the transcendent unity of existence (*waИdat al-wuju*d) as a move toward seeing things through the eyes of unity. To bring this point home, Ṣadrā quotes al-Ghazali this time. 'The fourth level of Divine unity,' says Ghazali, 'is to see nothing but one in existence.' But how can one see nothing but oneness when we continue to see the heavens, the earth, and all other beings that point to multiplicity rather than unity? The answer is that 'this is the penultimate goal of the sciences of unveiling. Verily, what really exists is only one. The multiplicity [that you see] in it is only for the one who separates his vision. But the vision of the unifier (*al-muwaИИid*) is not separated [from oneness] by the multiplicity of the heaven, the earth, and other beings. He sees all things as one single thing. But the secrets of the sciences of unveiling cannot be jotted down in a book.'[82]

The goal is not only to attain this vision of oneness but also to articulate it as a philosophical truth. Ṣadrā presents this as a prerogative of his 'transcendent wisdom' when he says, after quoting the views of the Sufis on God's knowledge of things, that 'thus we have indeed made their unveiling, based on tasting, correspond to the principles of demonstration.'[83] This articulation also extends to religious knowledge. In a typical sentence, Ṣadrā says that 'the religious law (*al-shar'*) combined with reason is light upon light.'[84] He sees no contradiction between physical analysis which grants us access to the knowledge of existence as delimited through matter and form, logical analysis which enables us to know existence through universals, and mystical knowledge which supplies us with a direct vision and experience of existence. Lest we think that Ṣadrā is alone in this enterprise, we should remember that even Ibn Sina ended up admitting the validity of those who 'engage in philosophy through tasting' (*ahl al-Иikmat al-dhawqiyyah*) in addition to those who 'engage in philosophy through research' (*ahl al-Иikmat al-baИthiyyah*).[85]

Furthermore, the experiential aspect of illuminative knowledge

brings out the 'subjective' element in knowledge—an aspect that the logician-philosopher dreads as arbitrary, whimsical, unreliable. It is at this point that mysticism becomes a most troubling enterprise for the reason-bound philosopher, a kind of poetical imagination and even sophistry devoid of cognitive content. While philosophy seeks to account for reality through clearly defined terms, not through subjective experiences, mysticism embraces human subjectivity as a *sine qua non* of the objective reality of who we are. More importantly, existence itself, as Ṣadrā relentlessly reminds us, defies any easy conceptualizations. Ibn al-'Arabi, who is a major source of inspiration for Ṣadrā's philosophical mysticism, asserts that 'the reason/intellect is a limitation and it delimits what is at hand in a single manner. But truth abhors such a delimitation.'[86] This is where the barriers between philosophy, logic, mysticism, heart, reason, intellect, and emotions are rendered loose. For the philosopher, this is too high a price to pay. For the mystic, this is a risk we are bound to take.

Ṣadrā rejects the charges of unintelligibility against mystical knowledge on several counts. One persistent argument is that the opponent of illuminative knowledge lacks the epistemic tools to understand the cognitive content of spiritual experience. The opponent fails to understand the epistemology of mystical knowledge for he does not possess the necessary vocabulary. According to Ibn al-'Arabi, 'a person whose reason is sound (*salim*), that is, he who is not overcome by any obfuscation deriving from imagination and reflection, an obfuscation which would corrupt his consideration'[87] would recognize the plausibility of the mystic's claim to veritable knowledge even though he may lack any corresponding experience. This argument is interesting because, contrary to what we may expect, Ṣadrā is not arguing for a reciprocal experience in order to understand the content of mystical experience. All he has to say as a response to the critic is that he does not operate on a proper epistemology to make sense of the mystic's experiential knowledge. After analyzing the relationship between substance and accident according to the views of the gnostics (*al-'uraf*a'),

Ṣadrā makes the following remarks:

> You may think that the intentions [arguments] of these great gnostics, their concepts and symbolic words are devoid of demonstrative proof

> (*al-burhan*) and based on adventures of conjecture or poetic imaginations, from which they are to be exalted. The inability to apply their arguments to sound and demonstrative principles and established rules of philosophy is due to the imperfection of those who discuss their views, their lack of understanding them, and their weakness to comprehend those principles. In fact, the degree of their unveiling (*mukashafah*) is above the degree of demonstrative proof in expressing certainty (*al- yaqin*)…. True demonstration does not contradict witnessing based on unveiling. If in these matters discussed here there are points that seem to contradict theoretical philosophy, they are in reality their outward and visible spirit [in meaning and emanate] from the lights of prophecy and niche of sanctity that are cognizant of the degrees of existence and their concomitant qualities. That is why we do not abstain from explaining them even if those who pretend to be philosophers (*mutafalsifun*) and their imitators disdain their examples. (*Asfar*, I, 2, p.315)

Whether mystical knowledge is communicable or not presents another set of problems. If mystical knowledge is neither communicable nor susceptible to public scrutiny, then it should be discarded as a non-starter for philosophical inquiry. Furthermore, since mystical knowledge as unveiling is based on a special kind of experience that cannot be further explained in terms of another series of experiences, it does not lend itself to conceptual analysis in the conventional sense of the term. After all, the gnostic, as Ṣadrā tells us, is not simply after conceptual knowledge about God. The goal of the 'gnostic theosopher sages (*al-Ḥukama' al-muta'allihun al-'arifun*)' is to witness God's beauty and perfection.[88] Mystical knowledge as witnessing does not therefore meet the criteria of philosophical investigation. Nonetheless, since our knowledge of the world, as Ibn Sina shows us, is based on non-communicable types of intuitions, i.e., primary concepts, which cannot be further explained but must be taken as the foundation of all explanation, we cannot push the argument of non-communicability too far.[89]

But how does the mystic convey his experience? He does this by employing tropes, allegories, and similes. Here we are confronted with a perennial dilemma of language-versus-experience. The dilemma is that mystical knowledge and all other comparable forms of experiential knowledge are communicable only as second-order concepts. The mystic can have a genuine experi-

ence. But he cannot present it as an unmediated state of consciousness. What an interlocutor can perceive of the mystic's experience is this mediated form of thought, which is a kind of public knowledge and no longer the experience itself. The moment we turn experience into a statement of any kind, whether poetical, allegorical or didactic, it loses its immediacy and becomes a conceptual representation. Given Ṣadrā's belief that concepts, while indispensable for organizing human thought, distort reality for reality is always more than what we can say of it conceptually, we can understand his relentless effort to give his reasons for going beyond the merely rational. Yet, this is where the words fail the mystic. This is also where we run up against the limits of language. Hence the mystic's utter disappointment with human language. But this is a price the mystic should be prepared to pay otherwise he will have to revert back to the original meaning of the word 'mystic' and 'keep his mouth shut.'

KNOWLEDGE AS FINDING EXISTENCE

The definition of knowledge as a 'mode of existence' (*naVw al- wuju*d) points to another direction in Ṣadrā's epistemology. By casting knowledge in terms of existence and its modalities, Ṣadrā tries to achieve several goals. The first is to draw out the implications of a metaphysics based on the centrality of existence. This makes all philosophical thinking an exercise in ontology. The second goal is twofold, and it is to overcome the subjectivist tendencies of the Mutakallimun on the one hand, and the representational theory of knowledge of Ibn Sina, on the other.

To begin with the latter, Ṣadrā's first objection to the Kalam view of knowledge as a 'relation' (*iḍafah*) is that it reduces knowledge to a property of the knower.[90] Ṣadrā believes that the Mutakallimun are mistaken in holding that knowledge is 'a quality related to the soul (*kayfiyyah nafsaniyyah*).'[91] This definition goes against Ṣadrā's concept of knowledge as unification and participation. Knowledge as relation runs the risk of depriving intellection of any substantial content because 'relation lies outside the essence of everything'[92] and it is 'one of the weakest accidents to exist; in fact, it has no existence in the external world.'[93] Secondly, it assumes a non-cognitive content for objects of knowledge prior to their intellection by the mind, which goes against the definition of existence as inherently intelligible and axiological. As for the representational theory of knowledge, it not only fails to adequately address such

issues as self-knowledge and God's knowledge of things but also falls short of bringing out the existential-spiritual dimension of knowledge.

Instead of working through the vocabulary of representation, impression and relation, Ṣadrā defines knowledge as a modality of existence: 'Knowledge is a kind of existence. As a matter of fact, knowledge and existence are one and the same thing.'[94] We have already seen that the essential identity of existence and knowledge is a logical extension of Ṣadrā's axiological ontology. As the source of all valuational terms, existence is consciousness and intelligibility *par excellence*. The etymology of the word *wujud* provides additional support for this interpretation. The word *wujud* comes from the root verb 'w-j-d' and means 'finding'; its fourth form *awjada* means 'to be found.' The Persian word *yaftan*, meaning 'to find,' is used as a synonym for *wujud*.[95] In both cases, 'finding' implies consciousness and awareness: one has to have consciousness to be able to find something. Furthermore, consciousness, in the Husserlian sense of the term, is always the consciousness *of something*, and this entails an 'openness, directedness to the other, and denial of self-foundation. In this way consciousness appears to be not pure interiority, but should be understood as a going-out-of-itself, as ek-sistence.'[96]

The word *wujud* is also related to two other key terms, *wajd* and *wijdan*. *Wajd* literally means ecstasy and refers to the finding of the Real (*al-Ḥaqq*). Ibn al-'Arabi goes so far as to say that 'in the view of the Tribe, *wujud* is finding the Real in ecstasy.'[97] *Wijdan* is a particular case of both finding (*wujud*) and ecstasy (*wajd*) in that it refers to the 'unexpected occurrence of God' and His manifestations.[98] While *wijdan* signifies knowledge and consciousness, the plural *wijdaniyyat* refers to the soul and its internal faculties (*al-quwwah al-baṭinah*) when the soul attains the state of the pure intellect.[99] There is also the word *ijad*, God's bestowal of existence upon contingent beings, which entails the idea that things cannot be devoid of meaning because they have been created by an intelligent agent for a purpose. This is where Ṣadrā unites the argument of 'what-ness' (*ma-huwa*) with the argument of 'why-ness' (*lima-huwa*) because to be able to say properly *what* a thing is, is to say *why* it is and acknowledge its source.[100] The unassailable relationship between the existence and meaning of something is established by the intrinsically intelligible reality of existence.

While the identification of existence and consciousness plays a central role in Ṣadrā's cosmology, it also leads him to develop what we might call a doctrine of ontological vitalism. In this view, all things including inanimate objects have some degree of consciousness by virtue of the fact that they exist. Not to be confused with a Bergsonian élan *vital*, attributing some kind of life and consciousness to the entire cosmos including inanimate objects is an old idea in cosmological thinking.[101] In Ṣadrā, the issue is thoroughly ontological, and rests on a simple syllogism: existence entails consciousness; existents partake of some aspect of existence; therefore all things have some degree of life and consciousness. As he puts it, 'whatever is established in existence is capable of being intelligible even potentially,'[102] Ṣadrā believes that existence and knowledge penetrate the whole scale of being but 'the majority of intelligent people are incapable of understanding the penetration of knowledge, power, and volition in all things including stones and inanimate objects just like the penetration of existence in them.'[103] Just as individual existents partake of existence in differing degrees of existentiation, their degree of vitality and intelligence depends on their ontological intensity. In short, the more 'beingful' a thing is, the more life and consciousness it has. The entire cosmos is alive and has awareness, Ṣadrā insists, but each individual being participates in this cosmic vitality at different levels. Thus 'the intellect in man is different from the intellect in other living beings.'[104] Everything is interrelated through the penetration and expansion of existence: 'The abode of existence is one, and the whole universe is a big living being. Its dimensions are conjoined with one another but not in the sense of the conjunction of measurement and the unification of surfaces and environs. Rather, what is meant is that each degree of existential perfection must be adjacent to a degree that befits it in (a similar) existential perfection.'[105]

In a section of the *Asfar* entitled 'Of the proof that all things are in love with God the Exalted, yearn for meeting Him, and how they reach the abode of His munificence,' Ṣadrā expands on the ontological vitalism of things and ties it with cosmological love. Love here refers to the innate tendency of things to reach their natural perfection. This perfection changes in every being depending on their mode and state of existence. Yet, the essential trait of love and yearning for perfection remains unchanged because 'no caused being can subsist except through its cause, for it is its perfection and completion.'[106] In the hierarchical order of things, all things yearn for their perfection which func-

tions as their perfect form and final *telos*. This hierarchy of 'gradual completion' underlies the cosmological journey of all beings from stones and animals to separate intellects and angels. Thus 'the hylé is completed through its form, the form through its forming agent (*mu*ʔ*awwir*), the sense through the soul, the soul through the intellect, and the intellect subsists through the Necessary Being.' In Ṣadrā's words, 'love (*al-'ishq*) penetrates all beings' because life penetrates all beings due to the penetration of existence in them. We have also stated before that existence as a single reality is the same as knowledge, power and life. An existing being cannot be conceived without the nature of existence in a general way. By the same token, an existing being cannot be thought of as having no knowledge and action, and whatever knows and does, regardless of how, has life. In conclusion, according to the sages (*al-'urafa'*) everything is alive. But when the majority of people look at an animal, all they see is nothing but its external senses and its volitional movement from one place to another. (*Asfar*, III, 2, p.150)

There is a clearly religious component in assigning life to all things. The Qur'an (17: 44) describes the world of nature in vitalistic terms when, for instance, it refers to 'what is in heavens and earth' as praising God and prostrating before Him. Referring to this, Ṣadrā says that 'in our view, existence in a general sense is identical with knowledge and consciousness in a general way. Because of this, the Divine Gnostics hold that all beings are cognizant of their Lord and prostrate before Him.'[107] In responding to a question about how animals and plants exercise certain actions and why we do not perceive their consciousness,

Ṣadrā expresses his dissatisfaction with the views of the 'philosophers of Persia and many of the ancients' on the issue, and goes on to say that 'we argue that all animal, plant and inanimate natures have knowledge and consciousness by themselves, through the necessities of their essences, and their particular effects on account of their partaking of existence because existence is identical with light and manifestation. Existence is therefore united with the qualities of the perfection of existence in knowledge, power, volition, life, and the like.'[108] Not surprisingly, Ṣadrā criticizes Suhrawardi for holding that 'no corporeal being (*al-jism*) is alive by itself; every corporeal being in itself is dead and dark.'[109]

The upshot of Ṣadrā's cosmological vitalism is the construction of life and intelligibility as an effect of existence. In the processes of knowing through intuition, experience or simple syllogism, we respond to this penetrating aspect of existence and articulate its various modalities. Existence-qua-existence precedes objects as well as their meaning-properties. Ṣadrā takes this to mean that the philosopher has to begin with existence and work his way back to the various modalities of cognition. This projection is underlined by the relegation of knowing, one of our prime modes of interacting with the world, to one of the modalities of existence. In this framework, every act of knowing is a step toward disclosing a particular aspect of existence. True, we create mental depictions of things through abstract and universal concepts. We may even follow Aristotle's lead and construe knowledge as conceiving universal patterns by which the world is constituted.[110] Our primary encounter with the world, however, is a concrete and particular one, and cannot be reduced to abstractions. This is so because 'perception is nothing more than the soul's attention to and witnessing of what is perceived. [But] witnessing takes place not through a universal but a particular form.'[111]

In a similar vein, existence defies conceptualization for its ever-expanding and dynamic act cannot be captured in the abstract and discursive deliverances of the mind. This is why 'the concept of existence in things is that it is something that has existence whereas in itself it is existence itself.'[112] As a second- order statement, I can divide actual entities into essence and existence, and attribute abstract-universal properties to them. But existence, as we perceive it through its particular modalities, does not lend itself to such a schematization because 'the reality of existence cannot be obtained in the mind. What obtains in the mind concerning existence is only a mental consideration [i.e., concept], and it is an aspect [of existence] among its aspects. The true knowledge of existence is based on witnessing and presence.'[113] The danger of mistaking the *concept* of existence for its *reality* is to turn it into an object, and then talk about it as if it *was* an object to which various properties can be assigned *a posteriori*. For Ṣadrā, this is the fundamental error of Suhrawardi's metaphysics of essences as well as the fallacy of the representational theory of knowledge.

In knowing things, we interact with the world but this interaction does not begin or end with the mind. Nor can this experience be relegated to objects-qua-objects. Rather, what we interact with is the myriad of the modalities,

states, degrees, and relations of existence. In knowing and articulating things through second-order concepts, we are responding to something that is not us, viz., our subjective deliberations about the world, but a realm of existence of which we are a part. It is the all-inclusive and 'dynamic' reality of existence that provides this context for us. To explain how existence penetrates all things while remaining the main point of reference in them, Ṣadrā borrows several key terms from Ibn al-'Arabi including the 'flow of existence' (*sarayan al-wujud*),[114] 'expanding existence' (*al-wujud al-munbasiṭ*),[115] and the 'Breath of the Compassionate' (*nafas al-raḤman*).[116] Each of these designates a particular 'act' of existence and indicates the various modalities and contexts within which existence as a singular reality comes to be particular. Its 'encapsulation' (*shumul*) of all things is also a particular act of existence not to be confused with the generality of a universal: 'The existence's encapsulation of things is not like the universal's encapsulation of particulars but through expansion (*inbisaṭ*) and flow (*sarayan*) in the temples of essences in such a way that no full description of it can be given.'[117] That is why existence cannot be limited to any of its modalities:

It is firmly established that the Necessary Being by itself is necessary from all points of view. There is no contingency in its all-inclusive essence. It is found with all beings without any delimitation and multiplicity. Therefore it is in everything and not in anything, at every moment and not in time, in every place and in no place; it is all things and not anyone of them.[118] (*Asfar*, III, 2, p.332)

At this juncture, Ṣadrā divides existence into three categories: things either belong to 'pure existence' (*al-wujud al-ʔirf*), 'attached existence' (*al-wujud al-mutaʿalliq*), or 'expanding existence' (*al-wujud al-munbasiṭ*):

There are three levels for things in their existentiation (*al- mawjudiyyah*):

The first is the pure existence whose existence is not mixed with anything else. Existence which is not conditioned by anything is called by the sages (*al-ʿurafa'*) the Invisible Identity, the Absolute Invisible, and the Absolute One. It has no name and attribute, and no knowledge or perception is attached to [i.e., comprehends] it. All that is attributed to it as name and representation is only a concept existing in the mind and or estimation….

> Things that are attached to Its Essence are the conditions of Its manifestation, not the causes of Its existence…
>
> The second level is the existent that is related to other things. It is conditioned existence with an additional attribute [attached to it], and qualified by limited conditions such as intellects, souls, celestial spheres, elements, and other composite beings including man, animals, trees, inanimate objects and other particular beings. (*Asfar*, I, 2, p.327)

> These two levels of existence pertain to the Absolute Existence, which is ultimately God and to the world of contingent substances, respectively. To connect the two levels of reality,
>
> Ṣadrā introduces a third category, the 'expanding existence,' which penetrates all existence and makes things what they are while it itself remaining unchanged and unaffected.

The third level is the absolute expanding existence whose comprehensiveness (*'umum*) is not based on abstract universality (*kulliyyah*) but on a different mode. Existence is sheer realization and actuality whereas a universal (*kull*i), whether natural or intellectual, is ambiguous and needs the addition of something to it for its realization and existence. The unity of expanding existence is not numerical (*'adad*i), which is the beginning of numbers. It is a reality that expands in the temples (*hayakil*) of contingent beings and the tablets of quiddities. It is not confined to a single particular attribute nor a determinate definition such as eternity and temporal origination, priority and posterity, perfection and deficiency, cause and effect, substantiality and accidentality, disembodiment and corporeality.

Rather, it becomes determined by itself without the addition of anything else with all of the existential determinations and external realizations. It is better to say that external realities are generated from the degrees of its essence and modes of its determinations and states. It is the principle of the cosmos, the sphere of life, the Throne of the Merciful, The Real Through Whom Creation Takes Place (*al- Ḥaqq al-makhluq bihi*)[119] in the tradition of the Sufis, and the truth of all truths. In its very unity, it becomes many with the multiplicity of existents united with quiddities. Thus it becomes eternal with eternal, temporally originated with temporally originated, intelligible with intelligible, and sensible with sensible. In this regard, people think that it is a universal but

it is not. Expressions used to explain its expansion on the quiddities and its comprehensiveness of existents are deficient signs [and it cannot be expressed] except through symbol and similitude. (*Asfar*, I, 2, p.328)

Speaking of accident as that which depends on something else for its existence, Ṣadrā states that 'we cannot imagine the independence of something from existence in its subsistence and realization.'[120] In fact, nothing escapes the penetration of existence including non-being because existence is the 'most comprehensive of all things on account of its inclusiveness and penetration of the quiddites to the extent that it is even predicated of the concept of the absolute non-being (*al-ʿadam al-muṭlaq*), addition, potentiality, capacity, poverty, and other concepts of non-being.'[121]

This leads us to what we might call a 'metaphysics of relations': everything in its essential constitution is related to the larger reality of existence. Ṣadrā goes so far as to say that contingent beings *vis-à-vis* the Necessary Being are nothing but 'pure relations' (*rawabiṭ maʾMḍah*).[122] Ṣadrā's metaphysics of relations places meaning within the context of ontological gradation: things have intelligibility in proportion to their state of existence. Meaning is revealed within the larger framework of existence and its modalities. The term 'relational existence' (*al-wujud al-rabiṭi* and *al-wujud al-taʿalluqi*) underlies this point, and refers to existence as particular instances of its self- delimitation (*taʿayyun*),[123] as opposed to 'absolute existence' (*al-wujud al-muṭlaq*), which refers to existence-qua-existence (*wujud bima huwa wujud*).[124] That is why Ṣadrā insists on determining the ontological status of things as weak or strong, prior or posterior, actual or potential, and perfect or imperfect to reveal their meaning and intelligibility. This brings us one more time to the threshold of defining knowledge as disclosing existence. In a rather lucid passage, Ṣadrā comments on man's place in the universe as an act of disclosure, and knits the microcosms and the macrocosms into one single whole:

> All existence from its highest to the lowest and from its lowest to the highest is [united] in a single relationship by which some parts of it are related to some others. Everything is united in spite of their external diversity. Their unity is not like the conjunction of corporeal bodies whereby their goals are conjoined and their surfaces linked. Rather, the whole universe is one single animate being (*ʾMayawan waʾMid*) just like a single soul,

> and its active potencies are like the intelligences, the souls and the like as the potencies of a single soul…man is the last being with which the world of nature is sealed…in man are gathered the truths of the higher and lower worlds and it is he who has added to the total truth of the world the truths of the True One (*al-Ḥaqq*) from His Names and Attributes with which man's great vicegerency in the macro-cosmos is affirmed after his lesser vicegerency in the world of nature. (*Asfar*, II, 2, pp.349–350)

Rather than being discrete and atomistic units, things, both animate and inanimate, are linked to the 'relational existence' on the one hand, and to 'absolute existence,' on the other. In this view, the world is no longer an aggregate of individual entities and a collection of independent objects set against the knowing subject that presides over them. Rather, these ontological relations are constitutive of reality itself.[125]

One important conclusion we can draw from the premise that the immediate subject of knowledge is 'relational existence' is that meaning is now reconstructed as a 'state' that comes about in the various modalities of existence. When I perceive the tree in front of me and analyze its properties, I do not simply examine a physical object but disclose a particular aspect of existence as it is related to this particular object in the form of relative and limited existence. The nexus of ontological relations determines the context within which a particular aspect of existence is disclosed, and this applies *mutadis mutandis* to the process of knowing: the knowing subject does not interact with the world as a *tabula rasa* shorn of relations and meanings. Instead, it encounters a world which is already derivative of relational existence. While relationality is an essential function of particular objects, it is also a ubiquitous component of how we perceive things. Since existence is involved in every act of perception as expanding, delimited or relational existence, we cannot perceive particular objects in complete isolation from the sets of relations within which we find them.

Taken to its logical end, this view breaks down the conventional barrier between 'perceiving through particulars' and 'thinking through universals.'[126] For instance, I cannot think of a tree as a particular object without knowing what it means to call something 'tree' and 'particular object.' By the same token, I cannot think of particular objects without placing them within a larger context of relations within which the meaning of being 'a particular

object' is obtained. In short, we fall back on a kind of 'aporetic ontology' where we perceive individuals as individuals and as instances of a whole, i.e., as both a particular and part of a universal at the same time.[127] This lends support to

Ṣadrā's claim that the world is given to us as initially structured and saddled with universal patterns, attributes, and relations. In contrast to the radical distinction between 'facts' and 'values,' it is by explicating these structures and relations that the knower can grasp the reality of things *as they are*, thus overcoming any radical boundary between 'bare facts,' for which Ṣadrā has no words in his vocabulary, and meanings. Given the extreme significance of this metaphysics of relations, we can see why Ṣadrā is never tired of discussing the relationship between contingent and necessary, lower and higher, body and soul, soul and the intelligible world, and finally the intelligible world and God.

We have already seen that sense perception provides us with the raw material of intelligibility, and the mind peruses the world through this material. If this is true, then we can not be in a position to perceive the world as 'empty,' or as nothing more that what Galileo had called 'primary qualities.' In contrast to epistemological subjectivism which holds that all we can know in sense perception are our own 'states of mind,' or 'ideas' in the Lockean sense of the term, Ṣadrā's epistemological realism would not allow such a radical cleavage between perception and reality. Rather, it would argue for what Mandelbaum calls 'naïve realism' which holds that 'the actual qualities of such [physical] objects are not different from those which we ascribe to them on the basis of sense perception.'[128] This strongly pre-modern view is consistent with the view that existence and its particular modalities are saturated with meaning already *before* they are processed in sense perception.

Aristotelian hylomorphism, which was a cornerstone of medieval realism, lends support to this conclusion. If 'sensation is the disengagement of form from matter'[129] and form is what gives meaning and structure to things,[130] then some kind of intelligibility must be operative in sense perception by which we sense what Locke calls the 'bare facts' of the world. It is impossible to conceive such a thing as 'pure matter,' for all experience is mediated through intellection, memory, recollection, estimation, and so on. This suggests that the world presents itself to us through forms that are themselves structures of meaning, and these structures are first perceived and processed in sense perception. This is not to suggest that the senses themselves create meaning; Ṣadrā's Platonic conceptualism would not allow that. As Plato argues, 'perception…can never

be the same as knowledge.'[131] The senses convey units and packages of meaning contained in sensible objects without actually *knowing* them: 'All external senses are like a messenger conveying its message without realizing that it is conveying a message. The sense of sight carries the message of the form of colors and conveys them. But it perceives neither the *meaning* of color nor the fact that it is conveying it' (emphasis added).[132] Thus it has been said that 'whoever has lost sense has lost knowledge.'[133]

Here we are faced with the biggest challenge of the skeptic: if the mind can only perceive the universals (i.e., quiddities), and the senses cannot know what they perceive (i.e., the physical objects), then how do we know that what we know as the world in our minds is the same as the world itself? If, as Hume says, 'nothing can ever be present to the mind but an image or perception, and…the senses are only the inlets, through which these images are conveyed, without being able to produce any immediate intercourse between the mind and the object,'[134] then all the mind can know is itself or its internal states, not the physical world. Al-Farabi seems to have no qualms about this when he says that 'in short, the sensible objects cannot be known, and the sensibles are parables for what is known' and 'a parable is different from what it is a parable of.'[135] If this is the case, then how can we be sure that what we perceive in sense perception is not the internal states of our minds but a world independent of us?

Skepticism had never had a fashionable history in Islam. The Muslim philosophers hardly took the skeptic's questions seriously as meriting much philosophical reflection. Ibn Sina is known for suggesting to throw the skeptic into the cold waters of a river to realize his foolishness. Ṣadrā's advice to the skeptic is to see a doctor before making more blunders in philosophy.[136] Wittgenstein appears to agree in a more moderate voice: 'A doubt without an end is not even a doubt.'[137] This can be attributed to the confidence of medieval realism which not only believed in the reality of a world independent of our minds but also insisted that the world is essentially intelligible because it is ultimately derived from existence. This medieval optimism was also coupled with the religious outlook of Abrahamic monotheism which conceived the world as a teleological work of art by a benevolent and intelligent artisan.

Having said that, Ibn Sina addresses this very question posed by the skeptic, and admits the difficulties of overcoming the difference between what the mind perceives as concept, which is all it can do, and what the world is like in itself. He begins by reiterating the commonly accepted view that what is

involved in perception is not the physical object itself but a representation (*tamthil*)[138] of it in the mind due to the 'impossibility of the transposition of [corporeal] natures in and of themselves from one matter to another.'[139] I can perceive a tree only as a representation, not as an actual physical object inside my mind. When we say that 'I have sensed an external object,' what we mean is that 'its form is represented in my sensation.'[140] What I am able to transmit through my senses is not a physical object but its abstract form. Ibn Sina admits that 'because of this it is difficult to affirm the existence of sensate qualities in physical entities.' He even cites Democritus and his students who 'have not accepted the existence of these qualities' in physical entities but, instead, relegated the differences in sense perception to the differences caused by the 'shapes' (*ashkal*) of atoms.

This suggests that we are trapped in the internal states of our minds and cannot prove that what we perceive is actually the world itself, not some stimuli or sense-data caused by it. Ibn Sina's answer is short and at first appears to be a badly formulated one. He works out what appears to be a moderate version of the causal theory of perception, and says that 'we know with certainty' that different objects cause different sensations in us. This means that sensate qualities cannot be attributed only to my sensation of them. Even if we accept Democritus' view, we would still be affirming the independent existence of sensate qualities because we cannot empirically prove that these 'shapes,' which are supposed to account for different types of sensations such as seeing, smelling and hearing, are interposed between physical objects and my perception of them.[141] The atomistic view of perception can be true only for the sense of touching where we touch the different configurations of the atoms to which Democritus refers. But, as Ibn Sina warns, the Democritan view cannot be accepted without reducing 'all sensation to touching.'[142]

Ibn Sina does not spend too much time to prove the fallacy of epistemic subjectivism because he, like Ṣadrā, believes that there is no such thing as 'pure experience' available for sense perception. Both philosophers implicitly reject the empiricist myth of the Given that sensation is based on the raw material of experience unaltered and unaffected by *a priori* processes of thought, intellection, ordering, estimation, and so on. The sense- data that we receive from the external world are not mere 'impressions' devoid of contexts of intelligibility. In contrast to Locke's 'simple ideas'[143] and Hume's 'impressions,' the sense- data do not enter the mind as the 'raw material' of the world, which then enables

us to form an *idea* about it. As Kant would argue through his 'transcendental deduction,' these simple ideas or impressions come to us as structured units *about* the world within the coordinates of time and space.[144] Kant's maxim that 'thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind'[145] stresses the same point: we cannot intend to the world as 'pure fact' through some sort of pure sensation.

Ṣadrā shrugs off the skeptic's epistemic attack by mobilizing his Platonic conceptualism. For him, neither our subjectivity *vis-à-vis* the world nor the all-inclusive and penetrating reality of existence would allow the possibility of seeing the world as a kind of pure sensation in the empiricist sense of the term. The question of whether we can ever cross the gap between what I perceive through sense-data and what the world is in and of itself never arises for him. He insists that 'the intellective forms of substances that actually exist in the external world are the very meanings of these realities and their essences.'[146] He goes so far as to equate the Peripatetic concept of the form (ʔu*rah*) with existence (*wuj*u*d*), thus overcoming the hylomorphic duality of matter and form.[147] The 'meaning' (*maʿn*a) and 'sensate form' (ʔu*rah maИsusah*) of physical objects cannot then be two separate ontological realities but two different aspects of corporeal beings insofar as how we perceive them. In short, the skeptic's question is an ill-formulated one because sense perception *already* takes place within a larger context of relations and structures of meaning. To explain this, Ṣadrā introduces the concept of 'illuminative and perceptual form' supplied by the 'giver of forms' (*w*a*hib al-*ʔu*war*), whose function is to mediate between the 'world' and the 'mind':

> Sensation (*iИsas*) comes about through the emanation of an illuminative and perceptual form from the Giver (*al-w*a*hib*)[148] by which perception and consciousness are made possible. Therefore it is sensing (*Иass*) in actuality and sensible in actuality before which there is neither a sensing nor sensible [object] except potentially. As for the existence of the form in a particular matter, it is one of the preparatory conditions (*al-muʿidd*a*t*) for the dawn of this form which is the sensible and the sensor in actuality. The argument for this form's being a sense, sensing and sensible is the same as the argument for the intellective form's being an intellect, intellector and intelligible. (*Asf*a*r*, I, 3, p.317)

All of this suggests that we encounter the world as saddled with meaning already at the level of sense-perception because we cannot perceive physical objects without their sensate forms, and these forms are themselves structures of meaning. More importantly, the difference between the two modes of existence, sensate-material and intellectual, is not one of category but degree.[149] Ṣadrā quotes an interesting passage from the *Theology of Aristotle*, which states that 'these senses are weak intellects and these intellects strong senses,' implying a strict hierarchy in the faculties of knowledge.[150] Ṣadrā employs the Peripatetic language of 'capacity' (*isti'dad*) to make his point:

> There is no doubt that sense perceptions necessitate the act of sense organs and the acquisition of sensible forms either in the sense organs themselves as it is unanimously accepted or in the soul through their manifestation, which is the right view. This takes place thanks to the capacity of the matter of sensation. The touching of our hands, for instance, feels the heat and is affected by it because of the capacity in it. Sensation takes place in seeing through the form of what is seen thanks to the capacity in it. Likewise, sound comes about in the ear thanks to the capacity in it. Sense organs have nothing but sensation and it is due to the occurrence of the sensible form in them or in the soul because of their effect. Sense organs or the sensate soul, insofar as they are sense organs, cannot know that the sensible has an existence of its own in the external world. This can only be known through experience. Thus it is the function of the intellect or the thinking self and not that of sensation or imagination [to know the independent existence of things outside the mind]. (*Asfar*, I, 3, p.498)

In this context, every act of knowing calls for a prior grounding of things in existence, and this leads us to another key aspect of

Ṣadrā's philosophy. In contrast to Descartes who would place the mind as 'a pure substance that thinks' over against a world of pure matter, Ṣadrā takes our primary way of interacting with things as 'finding existence,' i.e., disclosing existence in its various manifestations. Knowing the world as concept or as experience cannot therefore dodge the question of the penetration of existence for 'existence is what constitutes things. If there was no existence, there would be nothing in the mind or in the external world.'[151] Consequently, Ṣadrā agrees with Dawud al- Qayṣari's explanation of how existence is related to knowledge:

> The occurrence of knowledge in every knowing subject comes about only by means of it (i.e., existence). In this, it claims priority over anything else. Furthermore it is existence which necessitates all perfection and through which such qualities as life, knowledge, will, power, hearing, seeing and the like take place. And it is living, knowing, free in its choice, powerful, hearing and seeing by itself, not by means of something else. Thus, everything acquires its perfection through it. (Dawud al-Qayṣari, *Muqaddimat*, p.31)

There is nothing revolutionary about the idea that things must exist in some fashion *before* we can know them. Making existence a condition of all cognition, however, goes beyond common sense realism and subsumes all knowledge under existence, which is what Ṣadrā seeks to achieve. We can state this point as follows: to grasp the reality of X is to stand in a certain cognitive relation to the *existence of* X, which is ultimately existence particularized in the *form* of X. Knowledge is not so much cognition of some kind, although it is that too, as encounter with existence through witnessing, seeing, unveiling, and presence. The primacy of existence as developed into an epistemology prevents Ṣadrā from the danger of forging a 'subjectivizing ontology,' and pre-empts the possibility of positing a disengaged subject that can interact with the world as a 'pure substance' without itself being a part of it. Reversing this process has been the course of modern philosophy since Descartes, and has led to what Charles Taylor calls the 'ontologizing of rational procedure.' Defining existence in terms of how we know the world has resulted in an ontology of subjectivism where '…what were seen as the proper procedures of rational thought were read into the very constitution of the mind, made part of its very structure.'[152] As a result, the attempt to provide an epistemological ground for ideas without a prior ontological grounding is bound to result in a philosophy of subjectivism, which posits the knowing subject as the 'objectified' criterion of external reality.[153]

In conclusion, Ṣadrā's ambitious attempt to define knowledge as a mode of existence allows him to place noetics under ontology and prevents his epistemology from collapsing into a philosophy of subjectivism. This Ṣadrā achieves by holding fast to his gradational ontology. Instead of defining existence as something fused with 'intelligibility,' he reverses the picture and posits the intellect as something filled with 'existence' for it is the all-inclusive reality of existence that generates the world of corporeal bodies on the one hand, and the

world of pure intelligibles, on the other. When 'existence reaches the level of the simple intellect completely disengaged from the world of physical objects and quantities, it becomes all of the intelligibles and all things in a way that is superior and nobler than its previous state.'[154] It is this aspect of existence that turns knowledge into a mode of disclosing existence in its myriad modalities. This makes knowledge an act of participation rather than representation, an experience of witnessing rather than abstraction. And this asserts once more the futility of epistemology without a proper ontology.

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