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MULLA SADRA AND SUFISM: Fazlur Rahman Interpretation

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Abstract

This article examines the complex link between Mulla Sadra, a famous person in Islamic philosophy, and Sufism, a mystical school within Islam, via the lens of Fazlur Rahman's perspective. The essay opens by describing the historical background in which Sadra formulated his theories, emphasizing the sociopolitical and religious issues of the time. Mulla Sadra's philosophy is distinguished by its emphasis on existence, knowledge, and the nature of reality, setting it distinct from Sufi thought. While Sufism frequently emphasizes experiential knowledge and mystical states, Sadra combines intellectual investigation with spiritual insight, resulting in a unique philosophical framework. This article examines the ontological, theological, and psychological aspects of Sadra's ideas, contrasting them with Sufi perspectives. In the ontological domain, Sadra's denial of existential monism calls into question the Sufi belief that actual existence is limited to God alone. The article investigates how Sadra's multi-tiered explanation of existence provides a more sophisticated perspective that accounts for multiple levels of reality. Theologically, Sadra's intellectual approach to understanding the divine contrasts with Sufis' emphasis on mystical experience. Furthermore, the psychological part of Sadra's philosophy emphasizes the soul's active role in the search for knowledge, which differs from the more passive receiving of knowledge commonly found in Sufi teaching. By examining these characteristics, the article hopes to provide a thorough understanding of how Mulla Sadra's thought interacts with and differs from Sufi traditions. This article is basic research for scholars and students interested in the interconnections of philosophy and mysticism within Islam, providing insights into Mulla Sadra's thought's continued significance in modern discussions.

Keywords: *Mulla Sadra, Sufism, Ontology, Theology, Psychology*

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji hubungan kompleks antara Mulla Sadra, tokoh terkenal dalam filsafat Islam, dan Sufisme, aliran mistis dalam Islam, melalui perspektif Fazlur Rahman. Esai ini dibuka dengan menggambarkan latar belakang historis di mana Sadra merumuskan teorinya, dengan menekankan isu-isu sosio-politik dan agama pada masa itu. Filsafat Mulla Sadra ditandai dengan penekanan pada eksistensi, pengetahuan, dan sifat realitas, yang membedakannya dari pemikiran Sufi. Meskipun Sufisme sering menekankan pengetahuan pengalaman dan keadaan mistis, Sadra menggabungkan penyelidikan intelektual dengan wawasan spiritual, menghasilkan kerangka filosofis yang unik. Artikel ini mengkaji aspek ontologis, teologis, dan psikologis dari gagasan Sadra, membandingkannya dengan perspektif Sufi. Dalam ranah ontologis, penolakan Sadra terhadap monisme eksistensial menantang keyakinan Sufi bahwa keberadaan aktual terbatas pada Allah semata. Artikel ini menyelidiki bagaimana penjelasan Sadra tentang keberadaan yang berlapis-lapis menawarkan perspektif yang lebih kompleks yang mengakomodasi berbagai tingkatan realitas. Secara teologis, pendekatan intelektual Sadra dalam memahami yang ilahi bertentangan dengan penekanan Sufi pada pengalaman mistis. Selain itu, aspek psikologis filsafat Sadra menekankan peran aktif jiwa dalam pencarian pengetahuan, yang berbeda dengan penerimaan pasif pengetahuan yang umum ditemukan dalam ajaran Sufi. Dengan menganalisis karakteristik ini, artikel ini berharap dapat memberikan pemahaman yang komprehensif tentang bagaimana pemikiran Mulla Sadra berinteraksi dan berbeda dari tradisi Sufi. Artikel ini merupakan penelitian dasar bagi para cendekiawan dan mahasiswa yang tertarik pada hubungan antara filsafat dan mistisisme dalam Islam, serta memberikan wawasan tentang relevansi pemikiran Mulla Sadra dalam diskusi modern.

Kata Kunci: Mulla Sadra, Sufisme, Ontologi, Teologi, Psikologi

Introduction

Since antiquity, scholars of Islamic thought have been profoundly engaged in exploring the relationship between Sufism and Islamic philosophy, or falsafah. Mulla Sadra (1571–1640), a distinguished philosopher of the Safavid period, established the school of Transcendent Theosophy (*al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah*) and epitomizes the amalgamation of intellectual rationality and mystical spirituality. He was born in 1571 and passed away in 1640. Mulla Sadra's beliefs embody a distinctive amalgamation of Peripatetic philosophy, Illuminations (*Ishraqi tradition*), and Sufism, encompassing metaphysics, epistemology, and mystical experience. Nevertheless, the complexity and profundity of his synthesis necessitate meticulous reading to uncover the many ways in which Sufism shapes his metaphysical perspective.

Fazlur Rahman (1919–1988), a preeminent Muslim intellectual of the 20th century, significantly advanced the comprehension of Islamic intellectual history, especially through his critical analysis of classical thought. Rahman's view of Mulla Sadra is particularly compelling as he portrays Sadra not only as a traditional philosopher but as a thinker whose metaphysics is deeply imbued with Sufi experientialism. This constitutes a substantial contribution to the discipline of philosophy. Rahman's

interpretation challenges the exclusive rationalist readings of Sadra and underscores the importance of existential experience (wujud) and intuitive knowledge (*'irfan*) in Sadra's objectives.

This connection raises substantial scholarly inquiries, particularly regarding the extent to which Mulla Sadra can be classified as a Sufi philosopher. What is Rahman's view of the metaphysical and epistemological importance of Sufi ideas in Sadra's work? Moreover, what implications does Rahman's study have for a more thorough comprehension of the intellectual and historical connection between Sufism and philosophy in Islam? It is imperative to take action to resolve these challenges, especially in the contemporary context, where bridging the divide between rationalist and spiritual perspectives on Islamic knowledge is becoming increasingly crucial.

The difficulty arises from the tendency of many modern interpretations to either excessively highlight Mulla Sadra's mystical aspects without adequately addressing his philosophical rigor or to confine Mulla Sadra inside the philosophical tradition. Fazlur Rahman's perspective offers a compromise, although it also prompts inquiries regarding methodological considerations, especially concerning the approach to personalities like Sadra who resist straightforward classification. Consequently, it is essential to perform a thorough examination of Fazlur Rahman's interpretation of Mulla Sadra and Sufism to attain a more profound understanding of both Sadra's intellectual legacy and the evolving dialogue between Islamic philosophy and mysticism.

This article primarily aims to examine the complex link between Mulla Sadra and Sufism, two influential currents in Islamic philosophy that have significantly influenced the intellectual landscape of the Muslim world. Mulla Sadra, a prominent figure in Islamic philosophy, is recognized for his significant contributions to metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. His philosophical framework, commonly known as Transcendent Theosophy (*Hikmat-i Muta'aliyah*), aims to harmonize many elements of Islamic thinking, encompassing both the rationalist traditions of philosophers and the mystical perspectives of Sufis.

This article will examine how Sadra's concepts interact with and critique Sufi philosophy. Sufism prioritizes the experiential and mystical aspects of spirituality, but Sadra's methodology is defined by a stringent intellectual framework that aims to anchor mystical experiences in philosophical rationale. This dichotomy offers a fertile ground for investigation, facilitating a nuanced comprehension of how Sadra traverses the intricacies of Islamic spirituality and philosophy. Rahman, a prominent professor of Islamic philosophy, offers incisive analyses of Sadra's oeuvre and its connection to Sufism. His insights elucidate the differences and overlaps between Sadra's philosophical pursuits and the mystical practices of Sufism. This article utilizes Rahman's views to elucidate Sadra's stance within the wider framework of Islamic thinking, especially concerning Sufi traditions.

This article will examine specific subjects including the nature of life, the intellect's role in spiritual comprehension, and the ethical ramifications of Sadra's philosophy about Sufi teachings. The study analyzes these issues to clarify how Mulla Sadra's philosophy enhances comprehension of the spiritual and philosophical aspects of Islam, while also considering the faults and limitations of Sufi practices.

This article aims to achieve two objectives: first, to examine the connection between Mulla Sadra and Sufism, and second, to employ Fazlur Rahman's interpretation as a basic framework for this examination. This article seeks to enhance the current discussion regarding the relationship between philosophy and mysticism in Islamic thinking, providing insights pertinent to both researchers and practitioners of Islam today.

Research Method

This study utilizes a qualitative research methodology with a hermeneutic and philosophical perspective. Considering the subject matter, which entails the analysis of intricate philosophical and mystical literature, qualitative methods are best suitable for examining meanings, conceptual links, and intellectual progressions. Historical analysis positions both Mulla Sadra and Fazlur Rahman within their philosophical frameworks and delineates the evolution of interpretative traditions.

The research method employed is library research, concentrating on the critical reading, interpretation, and analysis of both primary and secondary materials. The research is interpretative-analytic, intending to rebuild Fazlur Rahman's interpretation of Mulla Sadra concerning Sufism.

The data sources used in this study are the works of Mulla Sadra, specifically *al-Asfar al-Arba'ah*, *al-Shawahid al-Rububiyah*, and *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah*. Another that, Fazlur Rahman's works, including the philosophy of mulla sadra and his other books, address Islamic philosophy and mysticism. The secondary Sources in this research are academic articles, books, and dissertations examining Mulla Sadra's philosophy, Fazlur Rahman's interpretations, and the interplay between Sufism and Islamic philosophy.

Data are gathered through meticulous documentation, analysis, and extraction of pertinent statements, arguments, and interpretations from primary and secondary sources. The procedure entails recognizing essential themes, conceptual frameworks, and philosophical concepts articulated by Mulla Sadra and Fazlur Rahman. The data analysis employs a hermeneutical approach, aiming to evaluate texts within their historical and philosophical settings. The analysis will unfold in multiple phases: (1) textual analysis, a meticulous examination of chosen excerpts from Mulla Sadra and Fazlur Rahman to reveal the philosophical substance and Sufi aspects (2) comparative analysis, namely evaluating Fazlur Rahman's interpretation alongside other scholars'

exegeses of Mulla Sadra to underscore unique characteristics (3) contextualization. Positioning Fazlur Rahman's interpretation within the wider discourse of Islamic thought, particularly discussions regarding the relationship between philosophy and Sufism.

Results and Discussion

Background of Mulla Sadra

Mulla Sadra, born Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Shirazi in 1571 in Shiraz, Iran, emerged as a pivotal figure in Islamic philosophy during the Safavid period, a time characterized by a flourishing of arts, culture, and intellectual discourse. His upbringing in a region steeped in Islamic scholarship and mysticism significantly influenced his philosophical development. Sadra's education began under the tutelage of prominent scholars, where he was exposed to various Islamic sciences, including theology, jurisprudence, and philosophy.

By the age of 30, Sadra had already established himself as a leading thinker, engaging with the works of earlier philosophers such as Avicenna and Suhrawardi. His intellectual journey was marked by a quest for a deeper understanding of existence, knowledge, and the divine. This quest led him to travel extensively, seeking knowledge from various scholars across Persia and beyond. His experiences during these travels enriched his philosophical outlook, allowing him to synthesize diverse strands of thought into a cohesive framework.

Mulla Sadra's philosophical contributions are often contextualized within the broader intellectual landscape of the Safavid era, which was marked by a revival of Shiite thought and a reaction against the dominant Sunni orthodoxy. The Safavid dynasty, which established Twelver Shiism as the state religion, provided a fertile ground for Sadra's ideas to flourish. His works, particularly "The Transcendent Theosophy" (*al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah*), reflect a synthesis of Islamic philosophy, theology, and mysticism, positioning him as a bridge between rational thought and spiritual insight.

Mulla Sadra's significance in Islamic philosophy cannot be overstated. He is often regarded as the founder of the school of Transcendent Philosophy, which seeks to reconcile the rational and mystical dimensions of Islamic thought. Rahman emphasizes that Sadra's philosophy represents a critical turning point in Islamic intellectual history, as it moves beyond the limitations of earlier philosophical traditions. His approach integrates the insights of Islamic mysticism (Sufism) with the rationalism of classical philosophy, creating a unique framework that addresses fundamental questions about existence, knowledge, and the divine (Rahman, 1975).

One of Sadra's most notable contributions is his concept of "substantial motion" (*al-harakat al-jawhariyyah*), which posits that all beings are in a constant state of change and development. This idea challenges the static notions of existence prevalent in earlier

philosophical thought and aligns more closely with the dynamic nature of reality as understood in Sufi mysticism. Rahman notes that this concept not only redefines the nature of existence but also has profound implications for understanding the relationship between God and creation (Rahman, 1975).

Furthermore, Sadra's emphasis on the role of the intellect in attaining knowledge of the divine marks a significant departure from traditional Sufi thought, which often prioritizes experiential knowledge over rational inquiry. Rahman argues that Sadra's integration of intellect and intuition provides a more comprehensive understanding of the divine, allowing for a richer engagement with both philosophical and mystical traditions.

In summary, Mulla Sadra's contributions to Islamic philosophy are characterized by his innovative synthesis of rational and mystical thought, his redefinition of existence, and his emphasis on the dynamic nature of reality. His works continue to influence contemporary Islamic philosophy and provide a foundation for ongoing discussions about the relationship between reason and faith, knowledge and experience. As Rahman aptly states, Sadra's legacy is one of profound intellectual depth and spiritual insight, making him a central figure in the history of Islamic thought.

Overview of Sufism

Sufism, often described as the mystical branch of Islam, emphasizes the inward search for God and the cultivation of personal spirituality. It is a path that seeks to achieve a direct, personal experience of the Divine, contrasting with the more legalistic and doctrinal aspects of Islamic practice. The term "Sufism" is derived from the Arabic word *suf*, which means "wool," referring to the simple woolen garments worn by early Sufis as a symbol of their renunciation of worldly possessions and their commitment to a life of asceticism and devotion (Rahman, 1975).

At the heart of Sufi practice is the concept of *tazkiyah*, or purification of the soul. This process involves the removal of egoistic tendencies and the cultivation of virtues such as love, humility, and compassion. Sufis believe that through this purification, one can attain a state of closeness to God, often referred to as *ma'rifah* (gnosis) or *ihsan* (excellence in worship). This experiential knowledge of God is considered superior to mere intellectual understanding, as it involves a deep, personal connection with the Divine (Schimmel, 1975).

Another key concept in Sufism is the idea of the *Qalb*, or heart, which is viewed as the spiritual center of a person. Sufis emphasize the importance of the heart in their spiritual journey, as it is believed to be the seat of divine love and knowledge. The heart must be cleansed and opened to receive divine illumination, allowing the seeker to experience the presence of God in their life (Nasr, 1991).

Sufi practices often include *dhikr* (remembrance of God), which involves the repetition of divine names or phrases to cultivate mindfulness and awareness of God's presence. This practice can take various forms, including silent meditation, vocal recitation, and communal gatherings. The rhythmic nature of *dhikr* serves to elevate the spirit and facilitate a deeper connection with the Divine (Arberry, 1950).

The historical development of Sufism can be traced back to the early centuries of Islam, with its roots in the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad and the Quran. Early Sufi practitioners, known as *ascetics*, sought to emulate the Prophet's spiritual life, emphasizing simplicity, humility, and devotion to God. The first known Sufi order, the *Qadiriyya*, was founded by Abdul Qadir al-Jilani in the 12th century, marking a significant moment in the institutionalization of Sufism (Rahman, 1975).

Throughout the centuries, Sufism has produced numerous influential figures who have shaped its teachings and practices. One of the most notable is Jalal al-Din Rumi, a 13th-century Persian poet and mystic whose works, particularly the *Masnawi*, have become foundational texts in Sufi literature. Rumi's poetry emphasizes the theme of divine love and the longing for union with God, resonating deeply with Sufi practitioners (Schimmel, 1975).

Another significant figure is Ibn 'Arabi, a 12th-century philosopher and mystic known for his concept of *wahdat al-wujud* (the unity of existence). Ibn 'Arabi's teachings emphasize the interconnectedness of all beings and the presence of the Divine in every aspect of creation. His works have had a profound impact on Sufi thought and continue to be studied by scholars and practitioners alike.

In the 14th century, the *Naqshbandi* order emerged, founded by Baha-ud-Din Naqshband. This order emphasized silent *dhikr* and the importance of following a spiritual guide, or *sheikh*, in the pursuit of spiritual knowledge. The Naqshbandi order has played a crucial role in the spread of Sufism, particularly in Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent (Arberry, 1950).

In modern times, Sufism has faced challenges from both orthodox Islamic movements and Western secularism. However, it continues to thrive, with many contemporary Sufi orders adapting their practices to address the spiritual needs of modern seekers. The emphasis on personal experience and direct connection with the Divine remains a central tenet of Sufi thought, making it a vital aspect of the broader Islamic tradition.

Key Themes in Rahman's Interpretation

Rahman's contributions to Islamic thought are extensive and multifaceted. He is best known for his efforts to reconcile Islamic teachings with modernity, advocating for a reinterpretation of Islamic texts considering contemporary issues. His seminal works, such as *Islam and Modernity* (1982) and *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (1980), explore the

relationship between Islam and modernity, emphasizing the need for a dynamic understanding of Islamic principles that can address the challenges of the modern world.

In his analysis of Mulla Sadra, Rahman highlights the philosopher's unique position within the Islamic intellectual tradition, particularly in relation to Sufism. He argues that Sadra's philosophical contributions offer a critical lens through which to understand the complexities of Islamic thought, especially in the context of mystical traditions. Rahman's insights into Sadra's work provide a foundational framework for exploring the intersections between philosophy and mysticism in Islam.

Rahman's analysis is crucial for understanding the relationship between Mulla Sadra and Sufism, as it sheds light on the philosophical underpinnings of Sadra's thought and its implications for Sufi practices. By situating Sadra within the broader context of Islamic philosophy, Rahman enables a deeper exploration of how Sadra's ideas both engage with and critique Sufi traditions.

For instance, Rahman emphasizes that while Sadra incorporates elements of Sufi thought, he does so within a rational framework that distinguishes his philosophy from the experiential focus of traditional Sufism. This distinction is vital for comprehending the nuances of Sadra's contributions to Islamic philosophy and the ways in which they relate to the mystical dimensions of the faith. Furthermore, Rahman's work encourages a re-evaluation of Sufism itself, prompting scholars to consider how Sufi practices and beliefs can be understood considering philosophical inquiry. By bridging the gap between philosophy and mysticism, Rahman's analysis opens new avenues for dialogue and understanding within the Islamic intellectual tradition.

Fazlur Rahman provides a nuanced understanding of the distinction between philosophy and mysticism, particularly in the context of Mulla Sadra's thought. He argues that while both domains seek to understand the nature of reality and the divine, they employ fundamentally different methodologies and epistemologies. Rahman asserts that philosophy, as practiced by Sadra, is rooted in rational inquiry and systematic analysis, whereas mysticism, particularly in the Sufi tradition, often emphasizes experiential knowledge and personal intuition.

Rahman states, "Philosophy is concerned with the rational understanding of existence and the principles governing it, while mysticism seeks a direct, often ineffable experience of the divine" (Rahman, 1982). This distinction is crucial for understanding Sadra's approach, which integrates rationality with a form of intuitive knowledge, but does not fully align with the Sufi emphasis on mystical experience.

In his analysis, Rahman highlights that Sadra's philosophical system, known as *Hikmat-i Muta'aliyah* or Transcendent Theosophy, is characterized by a rigorous intellectual framework that seeks to reconcile various strands of Islamic thought, including theology and philosophy. Rahman notes, "Sadra's work represents a synthesis of the rational and the mystical, but it is primarily a philosophical endeavor that does

not abandon the critical faculties of the mind" (Rahman, 1980). This synthesis allows Sadra to engage with Sufi ideas while maintaining a distinct philosophical identity.

One of the key themes in Rahman's interpretation is the centrality of rationality in Mulla Sadra's philosophical framework. Rahman emphasizes that Sadra's thought is deeply rooted in the Islamic intellectual tradition, which values reason as a means of understanding the divine and the cosmos. He argues that Sadra's philosophy is not merely a mystical endeavor but a rigorous intellectual pursuit that employs rational analysis to explore metaphysical questions (Rizvi, 2013).

Rahman writes, "For Sadra, reason is not an obstacle to spiritual insight; rather, it is a necessary tool for achieving a deeper understanding of the divine reality". This perspective challenges the notion that philosophy and mysticism are inherently opposed. Instead, Rahman posits that Sadra's work exemplifies how rational inquiry can lead to profound spiritual insights.

In his critique of Sufi thought, Rahman acknowledges the value of mystical experience but cautions against its potential to overshadow rational discourse. He states, "While Sufism offers valuable insights into the nature of the divine, it often risks reducing complex philosophical questions to mere experiential claims". This critique underscores Rahman's belief that a balanced approach, which incorporates both rationality and mysticism, is essential for a comprehensive understanding of Islamic philosophy.

Rahman's analysis also includes a critical examination of Sufi claims in relation to Mulla Sadra's philosophy. He argues that while Sufism has made significant contributions to Islamic thought, it often presents a view of reality that is at odds with Sadra's philosophical framework. Rahman contends that Sufi mystics tend to prioritize personal experience over rational discourse, which can lead to a form of intellectual relativism. In his critique, Rahman states, "Sufi claims to knowledge often lack the rigorous standards of proof and rational justification that characterize Sadra's philosophy" (Rahman, 1982). This assertion highlights the importance of maintaining intellectual rigor in philosophical inquiry, a principle that Sadra exemplifies in his work.

Furthermore, Rahman points out that Sadra's rejection of certain Sufi ideas does not imply a wholesale dismissal of mysticism. Instead, he argues that Sadra's philosophy can enrich Sufi thought by providing a more robust intellectual foundation. Rahman notes, "By integrating rationality into the mystical experience, Sadra offers a path that transcends the limitations of both philosophy and mysticism" (Rahman, 1980). This synthesis allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the divine, one that respects the insights of both traditions while maintaining a commitment to rational inquiry.

Mulla Sadra's Views on Ontology

Mulla Sadra's ontology represents a significant departure from traditional Islamic philosophical thought, particularly in its treatment of existence and essence. His ideas are foundational to understanding his broader philosophical system, which integrates metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. At the heart of Mulla Sadra's ontology is the distinction between existence (*wujud*) and essence (*mahiyyah*). Sadra posits that existence is the primary reality, while essence is secondary and contingent upon existence. This perspective marks a critical shift from the Aristotelian framework that dominated Islamic philosophy, where essence was often considered the defining characteristic of a being.

Sadra argues that existence is not merely a property of things but is the very foundation of reality. He states, "Existence is the most fundamental reality, and all essences derive their significance from their existence" (Rahman, 1982). This assertion implies that understanding existence is crucial for grasping the nature of all beings. In Sadra's view, essence cannot be fully understood without considering its relationship to existence, leading to a more dynamic and fluid understanding of reality.

One of the most significant aspects of Sadra's ontology is his rejection of existential monism, a view often associated with certain Sufi interpretations that posit that only God possesses true existence. Rahman highlights this distinction, noting that Sadra critiques the notion that "existence is represented in only one individual, God" (Rahman, 1982). Instead, Sadra proposes a pluralistic view of existence, where multiple levels of reality coexist, each with its own characteristics and degrees of perfection.

This rejection of monism allows Sadra to articulate a more complex ontology that accommodates the diversity of existence. He introduces the idea of "levels of existence," which suggests that there are varying degrees of reality, from the most abstract and divine to the most concrete and material. This framework not only enriches the understanding of existence but also provides a basis for exploring the relationship between the divine and the created world.

Sadra's concept of levels of existence is crucial for understanding his metaphysical system. He categorizes existence into several tiers, each representing a different mode of being. At the highest level is the Necessary Existence (*wujud al-wajib*), which refers to God, the source of all existence. Below this are contingent existences (*wujud al-mumkin*), which include all created beings that derive their existence from the Necessary Existence.

Rahman emphasizes that this hierarchical structure has profound implications for both philosophy and spirituality. It allows for a nuanced understanding of the relationship between God and the world, suggesting that while all beings are contingent upon God, they also possess their own unique realities. This perspective fosters a sense of interconnectedness among all levels of existence, encouraging a holistic view of the universe.

Moreover, Sadra's ontology has significant ethical implications. By recognizing the varying degrees of existence, one can appreciate the intrinsic value of all beings, leading to a more compassionate and responsible approach to life. Rahman notes that "Sadra's ontology invites us to engage with the world in a manner that acknowledges the dignity and worth of all forms of existence" (Rahman, 1982).

In conclusion, Mulla Sadra's ontological perspectives represent a transformative approach to understanding existence and essence within Islamic philosophy. His rejection of existential monism, coupled with the introduction of levels of existence, provides a rich framework for exploring the complexities of reality. By emphasizing the primacy of existence and the interconnectedness of all beings, Sadra's thought continues to resonate in contemporary discussions of metaphysics and ethics.

Sufi Ontological Meaning

Monistic Views of Existence

In contrast to Sadra's ontology, Sufi thought often embraces a monistic view of existence, asserting that all things ultimately derive from a single source—God. This perspective posits that the multiplicity of the world is an illusion, and that true reality is the oneness of the Divine. Sufi thinkers such as Ibn Arabi articulate this view, suggesting that all beings are manifestations of God's essence. This monistic approach emphasizes the interconnectedness of all existence, where the distinctions between creator and creation blur, leading to the idea that everything is a reflection of the Divine (Kamal, 2016).

Fazlur Rahman notes that "the Sufi perspective tends to emphasize the unity of being, where the multiplicity of existence is seen as a veil that obscures the underlying oneness of God" (Rahman, 1975). This view is foundational to many Sufi teachings, which often focus on the experiential realization of this unity through spiritual practices and inner purification.

Moreover, the concept of *Wahdat al-Wujud* (Unity of Being) is central to Sufi ontology. This doctrine posits that there is no true existence apart from God, and that all created beings are merely reflections of the Divine reality. As Rahman explains, "In the Sufi view, the ultimate goal of the seeker is to transcend the illusion of multiplicity and realize the singularity of existence in God" (Rahman, 1982). This understanding leads to a profound sense of spiritual intimacy with the Divine, as practitioners seek to dissolve their individual identities into the greater reality of God.

The Relationship Between God and Creation

In Sufi thought, the relationship between God and creation is often characterized by a deep sense of intimacy and unity. Sufis view God as both transcendent and immanent, meaning that while God exists beyond the physical realm, He is also present

within creation. This duality allows for a personal and experiential relationship with the Divine, where the seeker can encounter God in the depths of their own being.

Sufi poets like Rumi express this relationship beautifully in their works, emphasizing the idea that the Divine is not distant but rather intimately connected to the human experience. Rumi, for instance, writes, "I am not a drop in the ocean. I am the entire ocean in a drop," illustrating the profound connection between the individual soul and the Divine essence. This perspective aligns with the Sufi belief in the unity of being, where the distinction between the Creator and the created is ultimately transcended.

Fazlur Rahman notes that this intimate relationship is central to Sufi spirituality, as it fosters a sense of belonging and connection to the Divine. He states, "In Sufism, the relationship between God and man is not merely one of creator and created; it is a relationship of love and longing, where the seeker yearns to return to the source" (Rahman, 1982). This longing for unity with God drives the Sufi's spiritual journey, leading them to seek deeper understanding and connection through practices such as meditation, prayer, and the remembrance of God (*dhikr*).

The Sufi understanding of God's immanence also emphasizes the belief that the Divine can be experienced in the natural world. Nature is seen as a reflection of God's attributes, and by contemplating the beauty and complexity of creation, the seeker can gain insights into the nature of the Divine. This perspective encourages a holistic view of existence, where the material and spiritual realms are interconnected.

In summary, the Sufi conception of the relationship between God and creation is one of profound intimacy and unity. This understanding fosters a personal and experiential approach to spirituality, allowing seekers to encounter the Divine within themselves and the world around them.

The Concept of Unity of Being (Wahdat al-Wujud)

The concept of *Wahdat al-Wujud*, or the Unity of Being, is a central tenet in Sufi metaphysics that further illustrates the monistic view of existence. This doctrine posits that there is only one reality—God—and that all beings are manifestations of this singular reality. Sufi thinkers argue that the apparent multiplicity of the world is an illusion, and that true understanding comes from recognizing the underlying unity of all existence.

Ibn Arabi, one of the most influential Sufi philosophers, articulates this concept by asserting that "the universe is a manifestation of the divine names and attributes." He emphasizes that everything in existence is interconnected and ultimately derives from the same source—God. This perspective encourages a holistic understanding of reality, where the distinctions between the creator and the created blur, leading to a profound sense of unity.

Rahman (1975) notes that this Sufi perspective challenges the more dualistic views found in other philosophical traditions, including that of Mulla Sadra. He states, "In Sufi thought, the distinction between God and the world is not absolute; rather, it is a relative distinction that reflects the different levels of reality." (Rahman, 1975). This understanding invites seekers to transcend the superficial differences and recognize the divine presence in all aspects of existence.

The implications of Wahdat al-Wujud extend beyond metaphysics; they also influence Sufi practices and ethics. By understanding that all beings are interconnected, Sufis cultivate a sense of compassion and love for all creation. This perspective fosters a spiritual ethos that emphasizes unity, harmony, and the importance of recognizing the divine in every aspect of life.

In summary, the concept of Wahdat al-Wujud serves as a foundational element of Sufi ontology, illustrating the belief in the unity of all existence and the intimate relationship between God and creation. This monistic view contrasts sharply with Mulla Sadra's more nuanced ontology, which maintains a distinction between existence and essence, and highlights the dynamic nature of reality.

Comparative Analysis

Differences in Understanding Existence

The contrasting ontological frameworks of Mulla Sadra and Sufi thought reveal significant differences in their understanding of existence. Mulla Sadra emphasizes the primacy of existence (*wujud*) over essence (*mahiyyah*), arguing that existence is the fundamental reality that underpins all beings. He posits that essence is contingent upon existence, meaning that the nature of a thing is defined by its existence rather than the other way around. This perspective leads to Sadra's assertion that existence is dynamic and ever-evolving, encapsulated in his concept of "substantial motion" (*harakat al-jawhariyyah*), which suggests that all beings are in a constant state of change and development.

In contrast, Sufi thought, particularly as articulated by figures like Ibn Arabi, adopts a monistic view that sees all existence as a manifestation of the Divine. For Sufis, the multiplicity of the world is an illusion, and the ultimate reality is the oneness of God. This perspective leads to a different understanding of existence, where the individual self is seen as a reflection of the Divine essence. Rahman notes that "the Sufi view of existence is characterized by a profound sense of unity, where the distinctions between the creator and the created are ultimately transcended" (Rahman, 1975). This highlights a fundamental divergence in how existence is conceptualized: for Sadra, existence is a dynamic process, while for Sufis, it is a unified reality.

Implications for Metaphysical Thought

The differing understandings of existence have profound implications for metaphysical thought in both traditions. Mulla Sadra's ontology encourages a philosophical inquiry that is deeply rooted in rationality and intellectual engagement. His emphasis on the dynamic nature of existence invites a continuous exploration of the relationship between the finite and the infinite, the material and the spiritual. This approach fosters a metaphysical framework that is adaptable and responsive to the complexities of existence, allowing for a rich dialogue between philosophy and spirituality.

On the other hand, the Sufi perspective, with its emphasis on the Unity of Being, leads to a metaphysical framework that prioritizes experiential knowledge and mystical insight. Sufism encourages practitioners to transcend the limitations of rational thought and engage in a direct, personal experience of the Divine. Rahman observes that "the Sufi path is one of inner transformation, where the seeker moves beyond intellectual understanding to achieve a direct encounter with God" (Rahman, 1982). This focus on personal experience shapes a metaphysical outlook that values intuition and spiritual insight over rational analysis.

In summary, the comparative analysis of Mulla Sadra's and Sufi ontologies reveals significant differences in their understanding of existence and its implications for metaphysical thought. While Sadra's framework emphasizes the dynamic and evolving nature of existence, Sufi thought presents a unified reality that transcends individual distinctions. These differences not only highlight the richness of Islamic philosophical discourse but also underscore the diverse pathways through which seekers can engage with the Divine.

Mulla Sadra's Theological Framework

Mulla Sadra's theological framework is deeply rooted in his understanding of God as the ultimate reality and source of all existence. He conceptualizes God not only as the creator but also as the sustainer of the universe, emphasizing the dynamic relationship between the Divine and creation. In Sadra's view, God possesses attributes that are both essential and active, meaning that God's essence is inseparable from His attributes. This perspective aligns with the Islamic tradition, which holds that God's attributes—such as knowledge, power, and will—are manifestations of His essence.

Fazlur Rahman highlights this aspect of Sadra's thought, noting that "for Sadra, God is not merely a distant creator but is intimately involved in the unfolding of existence" (Rahman, 1975). This understanding allows for a more relational view of God, where the Divine is actively engaged in the world and in the lives of individuals. Sadra's emphasis on God's immanence complements his view of God's transcendence, creating a holistic understanding of the Divine that resonates with both philosophical inquiry and spiritual experience.

Another significant aspect of Mulla Sadra's theological framework is his integration of reason and revelation. Sadra argues that true knowledge of God can be attained through both rational inquiry and divine revelation. He believes that reason serves as a tool to understand the truths revealed in the scriptures, and that revelation provides insights that transcend human intellect. This dual approach allows Sadra to bridge the gap between philosophy and theology, creating a comprehensive system that respects both rational thought and spiritual insight.

Rahman emphasizes this integration, stating, "Sadra's philosophy is characterized by a profound respect for both reason and revelation, seeing them as complementary rather than contradictory" (Rahman, 1982). This perspective is particularly important in the context of Islamic thought, where the relationship between reason and faith has often been a point of contention. By advocating for a harmonious relationship between the two, Sadra offers a model for understanding the complexities of faith in a rational world.

In conclusion, Mulla Sadra's theological framework presents a rich and nuanced understanding of God and divine attributes, as well as a compelling integration of reason and revelation. His thought not only contributes to the discourse on Islamic theology but also provides a foundation for ongoing discussions about the nature of the Divine and the role of human understanding in the pursuit of spiritual truth. For Mullā Ṣadrā, philosophical inquiry was not merely an intellectual exercise, but part of a spiritual journey (*suluk*) (Rustom, 2012).

Sufi Theological Concepts

Mystical Understanding of God

Sufi theology presents a mystical understanding of God that emphasizes the experiential and personal dimensions of the Divine. In Sufi thought, God is often perceived as both transcendent and immanent, allowing for a deep, intimate relationship between the seeker and the Divine. This duality is crucial in Sufi practices, where the goal is to experience God's presence in everyday life and to cultivate a profound love for the Divine.

Sufi poets and mystics, such as Rumi and Al-Hallaj, articulate this understanding through their writings, often expressing the idea that God is not only the creator but also the essence of all existence. Rahman notes that "the Sufi experience of God is characterized by a profound sense of unity and love, where the seeker transcends the self to become one with the Divine" (Rahman, 1975). This perspective highlights the importance of personal experience in grasping the nature of God, as Sufis believe that intellectual understanding alone is insufficient for true knowledge of the Divine.

The Role of Personal Experience in Theology

In Sufi theology, personal experience plays a central role in the understanding of God and the pursuit of spiritual knowledge. Sufis emphasize the importance of direct, experiential knowledge of the Divine, which is often achieved through practices such as meditation, prayer, and the remembrance of God (*dhikr*). This experiential approach contrasts with more doctrinal or philosophical methods of understanding God, which may rely heavily on rational inquiry and theological discourse.

Rahman highlights that "for Sufis, the journey towards God is not merely an intellectual endeavor; it is a deeply personal and transformative experience that involves the heart and soul" (Rahman, 1982). This emphasis on personal experience allows Sufis to cultivate a relationship with God that is both intimate and dynamic, fostering a sense of connection that transcends traditional religious boundaries.

The Sufi path often involves stages of spiritual development, where the seeker moves from the outer practices of religion to the inner realities of divine love and unity. This journey is marked by various states of consciousness and experiences that deepen the individual's understanding of God. Rahman notes that "the Sufi's quest for God is a journey of the heart, where love and devotion become the guiding forces in the pursuit of the Divine" (Rahman, 1980).

In summary, Sufi theological concepts emphasize a mystical understanding of God that is deeply intertwined with personal experience. This approach fosters a unique relationship between the seeker and the Divine, highlighting the transformative power of love and devotion in the spiritual journey.

Comparative Analysis

The approaches to divine knowledge in Mulla Sadra's philosophy and Sufi thought reveal fundamental differences in their epistemological frameworks. Mulla Sadra emphasizes the importance of rational inquiry and philosophical reasoning in the pursuit of knowledge about God. He argues that understanding the divine requires a synthesis of intellect and revelation, where reason plays a crucial role in interpreting religious texts and comprehending the nature of God. Rahman notes that Sadra's approach is characterized by a systematic methodology that seeks to reconcile philosophical reasoning with theological insights, stating, "Mulla Sadra's philosophy represents a profound attempt to integrate reason and revelation, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the divine" (Rahman, 1982).

In contrast, Sufi thought prioritizes personal experience and mystical insight as the primary means of attaining knowledge of God. Sufis believe that direct, experiential knowledge of the Divine transcends intellectual understanding. This experiential approach is often articulated through practices such as meditation, prayer, and the remembrance of God (*dhikr*), which facilitate a deeper connection with the Divine. Rahman highlights this distinction by stating, "While Sufism emphasizes the experiential

and intuitive aspects of divine knowledge, Sadra's philosophy insists on the necessity of rational discourse to arrive at a true understanding of God" (Rahman, 1980).

The tension between rationality and mysticism is a defining feature of the theological discourse surrounding Mulla Sadra and Sufi thought. Mulla Sadra's emphasis on rationality reflects his belief that human intellect is a gift from God, enabling individuals to engage with and understand the divine. He posits that rational inquiry is essential for grasping the complexities of existence and the nature of God. Rahman asserts that "Sadra's philosophy is a testament to the belief that reason and faith are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary in the quest for divine knowledge".

On the other hand, Sufi mysticism often critiques the limitations of rationality in comprehending the Divine. Sufis argue that intellectual pursuits can only take one so far, and that true knowledge of God is ultimately beyond the grasp of reason. This perspective is encapsulated in the Sufi saying, "The heart knows what the mind cannot comprehend." Rahman notes that "Sufism invites individuals to transcend the confines of rational thought and embrace the ineffable nature of the Divine through direct experience" (Rahman, 1980).

In summary, the comparative analysis of Mulla Sadra's theological framework and Sufi thought reveals a rich interplay between rationality and mysticism. While Sadra advocates for a rational approach to divine knowledge, Sufi thought emphasizes the importance of personal experience and intuition. This dynamic tension continues to shape contemporary discussions in Islamic theology, highlighting the diverse ways in which Muslims engage with the concept of the Divine.

Mulla Sadra's View on the Soul

Mulla Sadra's view on the soul is a cornerstone of his philosophical system, reflecting his broader metaphysical and theological insights. He posits that the soul (*nafs*) is not merely a passive entity but an active, dynamic force that plays a crucial role in the process of existence. Mullā Ṣadrā asserts that the soul, through its perfection, shall achieve unity with the Intellectual Reality, identified as God. The soul attains perfection through intuitive knowledge (*'ilm ḥudūrī*), a direct form of understanding devoid of middlemen, wherein the soul merges with the object of its cognition (Christian Kanzian, 2013).

According to Sadra, the soul is the essence of human identity and is fundamentally linked to the divine. He asserts that the soul possesses various faculties, including the rational, the imaginative, and the appetitive, each contributing to the individual's capacity for knowledge and ethical behaviour. Sadra proposes a concept of intentionality that is not just cognitive, but also existential and spiritual: consciousness is part of the dynamics of being itself, which always "intends" towards the source of its being (Parildar, 2020).

In his work, Rahman highlights that Sadra's understanding of the soul is deeply intertwined with his concept of substantial motion, which posits that the soul is in a constant state of development and transformation. This view contrasts with earlier philosophical traditions that often regarded the soul as static or unchanging. Rahman notes, "For Sadra, the soul is not only the source of human consciousness but also the means through which one can attain higher levels of existence and understanding" (Rahman, 1975).

Mulla Sadra's epistemology is closely linked to his understanding of the soul. He argues that knowledge acquisition is a dynamic process that involves the interaction between the intellect and the external world. Sadra emphasizes that the soul, through its faculties, engages with reality to gain knowledge, which is not merely an accumulation of information but a transformative experience that leads to spiritual growth.

Rahman elaborates on this process by stating that "knowledge, for Sadra, is not just a matter of intellectual comprehension; it is an existential realization that transforms the knower". This perspective underscores the importance of both rational inquiry and mystical experience in the pursuit of knowledge. Sadra believes that true knowledge is achieved when the intellect is harmonized with the heart, allowing for a deeper understanding of the divine and the nature of existence.

In summary, Mulla Sadra's view on the soul and the process of knowledge acquisition reflects a holistic approach that integrates rationality, spirituality, and personal transformation. His insights provide a profound understanding of the human condition and the potential for growth and enlightenment through the cultivation of the soul.

Sufi Perspectives on the Soul

In Sufi thought, the journey of the soul is a central theme that encapsulates the spiritual quest for union with the Divine. This journey is often described as a process of transformation, where the soul evolves through various stages and states of consciousness. Sufis believe that the soul begins its journey in a state of separation from God, and through spiritual practices, it seeks to return to its source.

Sufi poets and mystics, such as Rumi and Al-Ghazali, articulate this journey as one of love and longing. Rumi, for instance, emphasizes the soul's desire to reunite with the Divine, portraying it as a lover yearning for the beloved. This metaphor highlights the emotional and passionate aspects of the spiritual journey, where the soul undergoes trials and tribulations in its quest for divine proximity.

Fazlur Rahman notes that "the Sufi path is fundamentally a journey of the soul towards God, characterized by stages of purification and enlightenment" (Rahman, 1975). This journey is not merely intellectual but deeply experiential, involving the heart and spirit in the pursuit of divine knowledge.

Purification is a critical aspect of the Sufi understanding of the soul's journey. Sufis believe that the soul must undergo a process of cleansing to remove the impurities that hinder its connection with God. This purification involves both ethical and spiritual dimensions, where the seeker engages in practices such as repentance (*tawbah*), self-discipline (*mujahadah*), and remembrance of God (*dhikr*).

The Sufi path is often described in terms of various spiritual states (*ahwal*) and stations (*maqamat*). Each state represents a different level of spiritual awareness and closeness to God. For example, the state of *fana* (annihilation) signifies the dissolution of the ego and the realization of unity with the Divine, while *baqa* (subsistence) represents the return to existence with a transformed understanding of the self. Conversely, the Sufi objective is fundamentally spiritual: While it is essential to transmute our negativity and exert influence in the world, it is imperative to attain a condition of harmony with the Divine beyond that (Frager, 2005).

Rahman emphasizes that "the Sufi's journey is marked by a continuous process of self-purification and the attainment of higher spiritual states, ultimately leading to the realization of the soul's unity with God" (Rahman, 1975). This perspective underscores the importance of personal experience and inner transformation in Sufi theology, contrasting with more rational approaches to understanding the soul found in philosophical traditions.

Comparative Analysis

The roles of the soul in Mulla Sadra's philosophy and Sufi thought present a compelling comparative analysis, particularly regarding the active versus passive nature of the soul. Mulla Sadra views the soul as an active agent in the process of knowledge acquisition and personal development. He posits that the soul is inherently dynamic, capable of growth and transformation through intellectual and spiritual endeavors. According to Rahman, Sadra emphasizes that "the soul is not a mere recipient of knowledge but an active participant in the quest for truth" (Rahman, 1982). This perspective underscores the importance of rational inquiry and philosophical engagement in the development of the soul.

In contrast, Sufi thought often portrays the soul as undergoing a transformative journey that involves both active and passive elements. While Sufis acknowledge the active role of the soul in seeking God, they also emphasize the necessity of surrender and submission to the Divine will. The Sufi path involves a process of purification, where the soul must relinquish its attachments to the material world and cultivate virtues such as humility, love, and devotion. Rahman notes that "in Sufism, the soul's journey is characterized by a dialectical interplay between striving for divine knowledge and surrendering to the divine presence" (Rahman, 1980). This duality highlights the

importance of both personal effort and divine grace in the spiritual development of the soul.

The differing views on the role of the soul have significant implications for personal development and ethical considerations in both Mulla Sadra's philosophy and Sufi thought. In Sadra's framework, the active role of the soul emphasizes the importance of intellectual and moral development. He advocates for a rational approach to ethics, where individuals are encouraged to engage with philosophical principles to cultivate virtues and achieve a higher understanding of existence. Rahman asserts that "Sadrian ethics is rooted in the recognition of the soul's potential for growth and its responsibility to seek knowledge and truth" (Rahman, 1982). This perspective fosters a sense of agency and accountability in personal development.

Conversely, Sufi perspectives on the soul emphasize the importance of inner purification and the cultivation of spiritual states as essential components of ethical behavior. The Sufi path encourages individuals to transcend their ego and develop a deep sense of compassion and love for others. Rahman highlights that "Sufi ethics is fundamentally relational, focusing on the individual's connection to God and the community". This relational aspect underscores the significance of humility, selflessness, and service to others as integral to personal development.

In summary, the comparative analysis of the active versus passive roles of the soul in Mulla Sadra's philosophy and Sufi thought reveals distinct yet complementary approaches to personal development and ethics. While Sadra emphasizes rational inquiry and moral responsibility, Sufi thought highlights the importance of inner purification and relational ethics. Together, these perspectives offer a rich understanding of the complexities of the human soul and its journey toward self-realization and divine union.

Conclusion

Mulla Sadra's ontology emphasizes the primacy of existence (*wujud*) over essence (*mahiyyah*), asserting that existence is the fundamental reality that underpins all beings. This perspective marks a significant departure from earlier Islamic philosophical thought, where essence was often treated as the primary focus. In contrast, Sufi thought embraces a monistic view of existence, positing that all things ultimately derive from a single source—God. This perspective suggests that the multiplicity of the world is an illusion, and true reality lies in the oneness of the Divine.

The relationship between God and creation also reveals distinct approaches. Mulla Sadra conceptualizes God as both transcendent and immanent, emphasizing a dynamic relationship where God is the creator and sustainer of the universe. Sufi theology, on the other hand, emphasizes a deep intimacy between God and creation, allowing for a personal and experiential relationship with the Divine. This duality is crucial in Sufi practices, where the goal is to experience God's presence in everyday life.

When examining the theological insights, Mulla Sadra integrates reason and revelation, arguing that understanding the Divine requires a synthesis of intellectual inquiry and spiritual insight. In contrast, Sufi theology prioritizes personal experience and mystical understanding, where the journey of the soul is central to the quest for union with God. This journey is characterized by stages of purification and transformation, reflecting the Sufi emphasis on the experiential dimensions of spirituality.

In conclusion, the comparative analysis of Mulla Sadra and Sufi thought reveals significant differences in their approaches to existence, divine knowledge, and the nature of the soul. While Sadra emphasizes rationality and the active role of the soul, Sufi thought underscores mysticism and the experiential journey toward God. Fazlur Rahman's insights into these themes provide a valuable framework for understanding the intricate relationship between philosophy and mysticism in Islamic thought, illustrating how both traditions contribute to a richer understanding of spirituality and the human experience.

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