

## Molla Sadra: substantial movement of the soul

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### ABSTRACT

*One of the famous philosophical systems in Islamic world is Molla Sadra's transcendent philosophy. Through reconciling the peripatetic, illuminist and mystical intellectual currents he drew up a new scheme and a new discourse in the sphere of thought. Transcendent philosophy has several bases on which some problems are unraveled. One of the difficult problems of human thought is constancy or alteration of the substance of soul; the various views are expressed about this; some believe to its being constant and bring several arguments. Sadra lays the foundations of a new discourse in this field. He believes that the soul is in the first instance material and reaches gradually an incorporeality. In this article we have read first the characteristics of transcendent philosophy and then we have a glance to its anthropological foundations especially the problem of substantial movement; subsequently we have stated Sadra's arguments in proving the movement in the soul substance and at the end it has been evaluated and criticized some arguments.*

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### Introduction

The knowledge of soul is one of the most long-lasting problems of human mind. The wonders of life and trying for hermeneutic of its mysteries have had as a consequence the gradual progress of psychology that has passed through three periods of ancient Greece, middle ages and modern era. Beside the western scholars the efforts of Muslim philosophers have been remarkable (Taheri, 2009: 13-14). These efforts indicate the importance and dignity of psychology. The dignity of psychology among Muslim philosophers is double, because the religious doctrines have insisted also on it very much and some problems of psychology are even among the postulates of other sciences such as ethics and the educational systems.

The most important questions about the soul are as follows: what range of beings the soul includes? What is the truth of soul? Is the soul eternal or contingent? Is it abstract or material? Corporeal or spiritual? Constant or alterable? What is the relation between soul and body? What are the faculties of soul? Is the soul one or multiple?... (Hassanzadeh Amoli, H., 1983, second book).

One of the schools of thought in this territory is Molla Sadra's transcendent Philosophy. Transcendent Philosophy relying on philosophical systems before itself, peripatetic philosophy, illuminism, mysticism and theology comprises the unique innovations. Sadra with founding the new principles in philosophy procures the transcendent philosophy and pursues the philosophical thought in this territory. One of his significant innovations is

the theory of substantial movement based on which some problems are resolved.

On the nature of transcendent philosophy, its special characteristic and probably its superiority over other schools of thought there are several approaches:

#### 1. Eclecticism in transcendent philosophy

Transcendent philosophy is the confluence of four currents of thought in the Islamic world, namely the peripatetic discursive philosophical method, illuminist philosophical method, method of mystical journey (Sadrudin Shirazi, 2008: 41).

#### 2. Top results of transcendent philosophy

Prior to the establishment of transcendent philosophy there was always conflict among the four currents of thought over superiority of their own ways and Sadra with using all of those methods ended that conflict (*ibid*: 43).

#### 3. Superior language of transcendent philosophy

Natural language in its common use is a tool for talking about the external world; but sometimes we discuss with a natural language about other natural language or this language itself. Here we are faced with two languages: a language that is an object of discussion and is called the object language; the other is a language with which we talk about an object language that is called meta-language. Molla Sadra for teaching his philosophy has used a meta-language. He has used also an object language in his philosophy that is the main language of peripatetic and illuminist philosophy. It is noteworthy that Molla Sadra by the correct use of the language in his philosophy has prevented the creation of any kind of fallacy and paradox (Haeri Yazdi, M., 2005: 161-162).

4. Differentiating the context of judgment from the context of discovery

Molla Sadra's method in the context of judgment is only demonstrative and in the context of discovery he uses the revelation, intuition and quotation of the important persons' and mystics statements; using the revealed and intuitive propositions and statements of the greats in the context of discovery is not in contradiction with philosophical system and demonstrative method (Oboudiyat, 2006, p. 63 & 65).

5. Transcendent philosophy as an interdisciplinary approach  
Molla Sadra unlike others recognizes the mysticism, philosophy and religion as the elements of a harmonious set and attempts to show this unity and harmony in his philosophical system and considers the compatibility between reason, mystical intuition and religious law as the basis of his philosophical discussions (Faramarz Gharamaleki., 2009: 183-193).

One of the unique innovations of Sadra is the problem of substantial movement of the soul. Peripatetic philosophers assume the substance of soul as constant and bring several reasons for the truth of their statement: A. the soul is non-material and every non-material thing doesn't have a potentiality and preparedness and anything that does not have the potentiality and preparedness is not changeable and everything that has not transformation has not movement. (B) If the soul is exposed to a transformation cannot perceived the transformation in his temperament, senses and moods, but the soul perceives his moods, then he does not transform (Ibn Sina, 1404 AH: 192-195 and Dana Seresht, 1984: 224-228).

Sadra sees this view as wrong and holds that substance of soul is transforming and it is by transforming that the soul reaches to own perfection. In this article we look at the basics of Sadra's anthropology and analyze and evaluate his view about substantial movement of the soul.

#### **A) Molla Sadra's anthropology is based on various foundations:**

1. The principality of existence: the existence is principal and in the external world has reality and the quiddity is a thing mentally-positing (Sadroddin Shirazi, vol. 1, 2004: 49).  
2. The analogicity in existence: from Molla Sadra's point of view the things exist and in existence they have unity; their multiplicity and diversity returns to existence as well, because some of them have existence more than others and some of them less than others (Oboudiyat, 2010, p. 49).  
3. The existence and individuation: For Molla Sadra anything is distinguished from other things by own existence not by the genus or differentia; in other words, something that distinguishes it is the specific existence of that thing not different concepts (Sadroddin Shirazi, Vol. 1: p. 62).  
4. Levels of existence in the world: for Molla Sadra the world consists of three levels; the lowest level is the material and natural world, the middle level is the world of ideal and imaginary forms which is somewhat separate of the matter and corporeality and the highest level is the world of rational forms and non-materials and divine ideas. Movement and transformation is inherent in the material world and all the beings that exist in this world are always becoming and don't have a rest. Two upper levels are eternal (Sadroddin Shirazi, 2010: p. 447).  
5. The theory of possibility in the sense of need: from the perspective of

Sadra the criteria such as the contingency and essential possibility for dependence of effect upon a cause are not clear enough and therefore he speaks of the possibility in the sense of need; it means that the reality of effect is its dependency upon the cause. 6. The substantial movement:

Substantial movement is one of the most important topics in Islamic philosophy which is tied with the name of Molla Sadra. In the light of this theory he provides a new philosophical interpretation of many philosophical problems that is new and incompatible with other approaches; problems such as the temporal contingency of the world, relation between the constant and the transformable, continuous creation, substantial movement of the soul, relation between mind and body, bodily resurrection etc.

Philosophers before Sadra generally believed that the movement and evolution is not admitted to the substance of things; but Molla Sadra sees the movement as a continuous renewal of the world and on this ground in addition to accidents, the substance of the world is constantly moving and being renewed.

Peripatetic philosophers based on the doubt of the non-continuance of the subject do not accept the substantial movement, because in any movement it should be a thing fixed so that its mood can alter and that thing is the same substance. They, especially Ibn Sina, recognize the movement only in four categories of where, quality, quantity and position (Sina, 1430 AH., p. 93).

Transformation is of two types: gradual transformation from potentiality to actuality that is movement and the sudden transformation that is called the generation and corruption. For peripatetic philosophers it does not occur the transformation of first type in the substance of things, but there is the second type of transformation, because the substance does not accept any intensity and defect, but the nature of substance when it takes corruption, its corruption is sudden (*ibid*: p. 98)

Nature of movement in Molla Sadra's philosophy finds another sense, just incompatible with the peripatetic one. The truth of movement for Sadra consists in the gradual contingency or occurring or going out from potentiality to actuality that occurs in the existence of material thing not in its nature. On this basis the meaning of substantial movement is that the existence of a thing is created as a passing and mobile thing; in this respect the movement and the moving is the same in reality, that is the passing and mobile existence. In other words, the movement is essential not accidental in every material thing and the matter is basically equal to transformation and God by creating the material things has placed movement within them and unless the matter is passing and mobile, it is not matter. This mobile thing has a subsistent thing the relation of which to that mobile nature is similar to the relation of spirit to the body; in this case the human spirit through its immateriality is subsistent and the body is constantly becoming. Molla Sadra for proving the movement in substance of material things brings a number of reasons (Sadroddin Shirazi, 2004: p. 74-77 and 111-112, 2007: keys of the invisible, institute for Sadra's philosophy).

## **B) Analysis and evaluation of movement in substance of soul from Sadra's point of view**

After a preliminary discussion, at present we analyze and evaluate Sadra's point of view about the movement in the substance of soul and by this way we can achieve a true theory of the soul.

For Sadra the soul is of corporeal origination. The corporeal origination is that the soul in its first existence is a something material and with it is inextricably linked; Everyone in the first stage of emergence has a form and a matter. The form is the soul and the matter the body. There is between them a composition by way of unification and on this basis the soul is material and has some faculties and for anything with faculty it exists essentially the movement, because we said that the movement is going out from potentiality to actuality. So the substance of soul as well as its other states is by itself in becoming and unless it is actualized, it remains the same.

With every movement and going out from the potentiality to actuality, it moves away from the matter away and is gradually perfected. It is transformed from a material thing into an ideal one and from the ideal to a rational; after the death and the release of body the soul leaves the substantial and accidental movement and achieves an eternal life. In brief, the soul during the birth is material and with the passage of time becomes rational and after death is non-material and remains non-material (Sadroddin Shirazi, 2003, vol. 9: p. 113-114).

Sadra brings for his theory several reasons that here are stated and evaluated:

First reason: everyone finds by an intuitive knowledge that before knowledge he is something crude like a mud brick of soil and after knowledge becomes something pure like the bright pearl. These two states are obtained when the soul is changeable, so the human soul is changeable; in other words, substance of everyone is becoming and moving (Sadroddin Shirazi, 2004, vol. 3, phase 10, Chapter 8).

Second reason: this reason is based on the acceptance of the unity of the intelligent and the intelligible. In the unity of the intelligent and the intelligible the question is the relation between a representation and the soul; is the representation an accident and the soul a substance and subsequently does not the soul need to the representation and vice versa; or the relation between them is like a relation between the matter and form for which the relation is reciprocal and neither is without the other (*ibid*).

For Sadra the representation and soul are so related as matter and form and the soul with acquiring a representation of a thing is united with that. Unity of the representation and soul means that the soul has a aptitude and potential for accepting the form and we said everything that has a potential and reception is material, so the soul at every step regarding the form that it accepts is material and after finding it is actualized. From what is said it becomes clear that the soul is both material and non-material; it is material in relation to what it accepts, non-material in relation to what it has accepted (*ibid.*, Vol. 4, p. 432). He says: « the human psychological substance is a matter for the perceptual form by which it is acquired another actually perfected substance so that it is acquired other mode of existence than the natural one» (*ibid.*, vol.4, p. 408). Therefore, for Sadra in so far as the essence and

substance of soul is material is becoming and by this way of becoming it is perfected and becomes non-material and after becoming non-material remains eternal and constant. Sadra's reasons for the constancy of the soul after non-materiality are the predecessors' reasons.

If we do not question on the firmness of Sadra's reasons, we can say that Sadra's claim is new and opens the way. It is new, because it is contrary to the dominant philosophical tradition and opens the way, because the predecessors' explanation was not efficient and could not reveal the angles of soul. However, Sadra in the light of substantial movement attempts to develop a theory that answers a specter of psychological questions. Firmness of Sadra's theory depends on the firmness of his reasons.

Now we need to judge these reasons and evaluate whether these reasons are logical and firm, or not. If so, then Sadra's claim is acceptable, otherwise not.

In our view, the first reason from several aspects is barren and false: A) Sadra thinks that we can't have an intuitive knowledge about the material things and on this basis we can't have an intuitive knowledge in a level in which we are material. B) the theme is that I was before knowledge an immature thing and after knowledge I have become something pure; if so, this means that the knowledge is one of my states, not I myself. The reason is inefficient, because Sadra claims that my substance transforms, while the reason indicates that my accidents are exposed to transformation. C) It seems that there is an I beyond me to know that I transforms and this is just the opposite of Sadra's reason.

The second reason is also confronted with severe difficulties, because it is based on acceptance of the unity of the intelligent and the intelligible. If someone refuses that problem or explains it otherwise, then this reason becomes inefficient and therefore the Sadra's statement based on which the substance of the soul is becoming becomes baseless. Second, from the acceptance of the soul we came to materiality of it and the knowledge of material things is not intuitive but is empirical, thus a mechanism that Sadra states for the substantial movement of soul has not a logical support.

In addition to what we said, the theme of these two reasons is not of consistency, they could not prove anything. First reason is based on intuitive knowledge and the second reason is based on the materiality of the soul. Nevertheless it can't be said with by no means Sadra's theory is wrong; perhaps his statement is true but false are his reasons. In brief, his claim is new and worthy of investigation and can be a good substitute for the rival claim, yet that good claim does not properly support. In other words, this is clear that the predecessors' explanation of soul is not satisfactory and Molla Sadra's statement can open the way, but his reasons are not satisfying.

### **Conclusion**

We have seen the philosophers before Sadra believed that the soul is a constant and static substance and Sadra on the contrary was insisting on its gradual alteration based on the foundations of his philosophy. His statement is basically new and opens the way, but his reasons in our view are inefficient and weak. Due to this expression of the various theories about the soul, we can find out the difficulty and mysteriousness of the soul against which philosophers such as Aristotle, Ibn Sina and Molla Sadra are amazed.

This should be astonishing that the human is perplexed in knowing himself, in other words not having known himself he will know the extremely wide and labyrinthine world. Hence this sentence “one who knows himself knows God”.

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