

# **Knowledge as a Mode of Being: Mulla Sadra's Theory of Knowledge**

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## **Abstract:**

Mulla Sadra's (1571/2-1640) theory of knowledge is unique because, contrary to modern epistemology which is separate from ontology, it is a part of his ontological system and cannot be discussed in isolation. Rather than pure epistemology or ontology, Sadra has an 'onto-epistemology', according to which truth and being are two sides of the same coin. For this reason, this paper starts by explaining two of Sadra's ontological doctrines: 'the primacy of being' and 'the gradation of being', both dealing with 'being', which is the cornerstone of Sadra's system. After that, Sadra's ontological definition of knowledge is explored. According to this definition, knowledge is a mode of (immaterial) being and is identical with presence. Then Sadra's account of

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the real known objects will be explained. According to him, 'mental existences', which are created by the soul when confronted with external objects, are the real known objects. In the next step, the relationship between the known objects and the knower will be discussed, which according to Sadra is identity. The role of knowledge, which is a factor in changing the substance of the soul, is the next issue discussed. This role will be explained by means of 'substantial motion', which is an important ontological doctrine in Sadra's system. Finally, two points in Sadra's epistemology will be considered critically: the issue of correspondence and his theory of truth. It will be argued that Sadra is not clear about the issue of correspondence and therefore his theory of knowledge cannot cover experimental knowledge.

**Key Terms:** Mulla Sadra, being, ontology, epistemology, correspondence theory

## Introduction

Let us put aside for a moment the common debates in contemporary epistemology, such as the relations between belief, truth and justification, and only suppose that in this world some people have knowledge. By this supposition, it is not irrelevant to ask, does this knowledge 'exist'? Naturally, when we say somebody knows something, we presuppose the existence of this knowledge. But if knowledge exists, it is reasonable to question, what is the relation between the existence of knowledge and the existence of other things? Does this not mean that when dealing with ontology, we will inevitably deal with epistemology and *visa versa*?

The argument above has similarities to the argument of the Iranian philosopher, Mulla Sadra<sup>1</sup> (1571/2-1640).<sup>2</sup> Around the same time that Descartes (1596-1650) established the modern school of philosophy and tried to separate epistemology from ontology (the school which continued up to Kant (1724-1804) who managed to completely separate these two) Mulla Sadra took a different view. He tried to establish a philosophical system in which questions of knowledge could not be asked without questions about being, such that epistemology becomes identical with ontology.<sup>3</sup>

### 1. The Ontological Grounds

Sadra's theory of knowledge is a part of his whole ontological system and cannot be discussed in isolation from it. In this section, we introduce two main ontological doctrines: 'the primacy of being' (*aḡālat al-wujūd*) and 'the gradation of being' (*tashkīk al-wujūd*), and in the next sections we will discuss his theory of knowledge and explore more of his other ontological ideas. The most important notion in Sadra's system is 'being' (*wujūd*). When confronted with an object in the external world, our minds perceive two things: first, its existence, we recognize that it exists, and second its quiddity (*māhiyyah*), we recognize that what kind of object it is. However, the object in the external world is only one; its being and its quiddity are not separable. The distinction between being and quiddity is a function of our mind. Now this raises the question: in the external world, which one of these two has realization? In other words, which

one is genuine, constituting reality? And which one is our mind abstraction? This very old question is rooted in works of Aristotle (384-322 BC) and many Muslim philosophers have discussed it. Ibn Sina (Avicenna) (980-1037) held that being is an accident of quiddity, and Suhrawardi (1154-1191) held that not only is quiddity real and genuine, but also being is just a mental abstraction and so is a mental concept without any counterpart in the external world (Suhrawardi 1994, 64-72).

However, Sadra took a different position, rejecting Suhrawardi's arguments and presenting some new ones, and establishing his own doctrine: 'the primacy of being'.<sup>4</sup> According to this doctrine, quiddity is our mental abstraction and it is being that has realization in the external world, constituting reality. Being is genuine, and quiddity is nothing more than a boundary of being. Quiddity is possibility (possibility of description) which *per se* is neither existent nor non-existent (Mulla Sadra 1981, Vol. 1, 176). Being and quiddity are identical in the external world, but it is our minds that separate them into two things. Being is genuine and has primacy, however, when we consider being and quiddity in our mind; the priority of quiddity in the mind and its important role in mental perceptions and judgments misleads us to consider quiddity to be primary in the external world (Mulla Sadra 1981, Vol. 1, 56).

Being has some special attributions (see for example Mulla Sadra (1981, Vol. 1, 259-262), among which the gradation and 'intensification of being' (*ishtidād al-wujūd*) have the most importance. According to Sadra, when we speak about ordinary objects and refer to their existence, and when we speak about God and refer to His existence, we literally refer to the same thing. In other words, the existence of God and existence of other objects have the same nature, or in Aristotelian terms, they are univocal rather than equivocal. The only difference between God and others is that God is not limited by quiddity; He is pure and simple being, beyond quiddity, while others are limited by their quiddities. This shows that from an ontological point of view, if we only consider pure beings, there is no difference between God and other objects. Sadra, following the neo-Platonists, believes that the existence of all creatures has originated from the

Necessary and Absolute Being and that there is only one existence in the world. But does this mean that God and other creatures' level of being are same? In other words, by accepting that there is only one existence that occurs in all things, how can we explain the multiplicity of creatures (and therefore the multiplicity of beings) in the world? What makes objects, with the same existence, so different?

To answer these questions Sadra (1981, Vol. 1, 423-446) presents the doctrine of 'gradation of being'.<sup>5</sup> According to this doctrine, being (similar to light) is a gradual thing, which according to its strength and weakness, priority and posteriority, perfection and imperfection, has different levels.<sup>6</sup> Although both God and creatures have the same being, their levels of being are different. God as the Creator and Necessary Being has the most powerful, intense and perfect being, and so is the highest level. Creatures likewise fit into different levels and are not all confined to the same level. After God come incorporeal beings, and corporeal beings, consisting of primary matter, are in the lowest level. The being of substances (*jawâhir*) is more intense than that of accidents (*'arâq*), immaterial beings are more intense than material beings, and the being of causes is more intense than that of their effects (Mulla Sadra 1981, Vol. 1, 36).

Sadra uses this doctrine to explain what makes objects different. In reality we just have pure and simple being, but this being manifests itself into different objects with different degrees of intensity. When we are confronted with these different modes of being, they present themselves in our mind as different quiddities and therefore we recognize them as different objects. The world has unity because there is only one being in it, and at the same time has multiplicity because this unique being manifests itself in different modes of being with different intensities (cf. Cooper 1998).

## 2. The Ontology of Knowledge

Sadra has different definitions of knowledge, because he considers this subject from different points of view, and, of course, he believes and tries to show that these definitions are compatible. In this section we consider his general definition of knowledge, which has an

ontological nature, and in the next sections we will look at the other definitions. Sadra expresses his definition of knowledge thus:

"Knowledge is neither a privation like abstraction from matter, nor a relation but a being. (It is) not every being but that which is an actual being, not potential. (It is) not even every actual being, but a pure being, unmixed with non-being. To the extent that it becomes free from an admixture of non-being, its intensity as knowledge increases." (Rahman 1975, 213)

As this quotation shows, Sadra regards knowledge as a mode of being. In another passage he defines knowledge thus: "knowledge is the presence of objects' forms in the mind of the knower, and the relation between knowledge and the known object is similar to the relation between being and the quiddity which accepted that being." (Mulla Sadra 2002, 2) We will return to this definition and say something more about it later, but at this stage let us just remember that for Sadra, being and presence have the same nature and are identical. As a result, Sadra defines knowledge, as a mode of being which is identical with presence.

Before we turn to Sadra's reasons for this definition, let us mention a point about knowledge. As mentioned, being is a gradual thing. Now if knowledge is a mode of being, it should be gradual too. According to Sadra, the intensification of knowledge has a direct relation with its generality. To the extent that knowledge is more general and covers more known objects, it is more intense (Mulla Sadra 1981, Vol. 3, 378-379). He says (1981, Vol. 3, 373):

"Being [and therefore knowledge] has levels of strength and weakness. Whenever being becomes stronger, its inclusion of universal meanings and abstract intellectual quiddities becomes more, and when being reaches the realm of simple intellect which is totally separate from matter and quantities, (it) covers all intelligibles and things."

Now let us return to the definition. Knowledge is a mode of being and presence, but what kind of being is it? Sadra has an argument that shows knowledge is not a material being, because in a material being we have absence and not presence. Suppose we have a material object. This object is compounded of some material elements, each of these

elements being absent from one other, and the whole is absent from its parts. Therefore, according to Sadra, knowledge cannot be a material being, because knowledge is identical with presence and in material being we have absence rather than presence. So, knowledge should be an immaterial being. Now the question arises, what is the relation between the material being of an object and its immaterial being as a part of our knowledge? As mentioned, for Sadra, an immaterial being is more intense than a material being. Therefore, real knowledge of an object is more intense and is at a higher level than the object's material being.

To understand Sadra's ontological definition of knowledge, it is necessary that we know his view about the process of acquiring knowledge. According to him, the real active agent of acquiring knowledge is the soul. God has created the soul similar to Himself, and so the soul has power of creation too. The soul, by creating mental forms, gives existence to them (Mulla Sadra 1981, Vol. 1, 264-265). However, since the soul has a lower level than God, its creations will be less intense, and hold a lower level of being than God's creations. It is for this reason that God's creations have some external effects in the external world, while the soul's creations exist in the mind with no external effects in the external world<sup>7</sup> (Mulla Sadra 1981, Vol. 1, 266). Sadra calls the soul's creations 'mental existence' (*al-wujūd al-dhihni*). Mental existences are immaterial beings which the soul creates in itself, and do not have external effects.

The next step in Sadra's system is the claim that knowledge is mental existence (see for example Mulla Sadra (1981, Vol. 1, 268-314)). When confronted with an object in the external world (objective object), this object produces certain effects in our sensory organs. These effects provide appropriate conditions for the soul to create a mental existence in itself (subjective object), which corresponds to the external object. This mental existence, which is an immaterial being, is identical with our knowledge of that object. In other words, knowledge is a (immaterial) mode of being and presence, which has mental characteristics (mental existence), and which the soul has created in itself.

There are some points that should be mentioned about this schema. Firstly, the being and quiddity of a subjective object (i.e. mental existence) are identical. We can separate being and quiddity of an objective object in our mind; however, in the case of a subjective object we cannot imagine its being without its quiddity, so they are not separable. The quiddity of an objective object is identical with the quiddity of its counterpart subjective object, and identical with the being of the latter. However, this being is separate from the external being of the object. As a result, an external object and its mental existence counterpart (i.e. our knowledge of it) have the same quiddity, but differ in being. The second point is that although an external object provides some appropriate conditions for the soul to create a correspondent mental existence, our real known object is not the external object, but the mental existence (Mulla Sadra 1981, Vol. 3, 462-4). This interpretation of the known object has some important consequences. One of them is that Sadra faces questions like, how do we know the external world? Or how do we know that there is an external world at all? There are general questions for those who want to defend realism, but these questions are more crucial for Sadra, because he believes that our known objects are not the external ones.<sup>8</sup> Another consequence of taking such a view is that Sadra can easily explain how we know non-existent or impossible things. Although these kinds of things do not have external being, they have mental existence in our minds. And to know them their mental existence is necessary, not their external being (Mulla Sadra 1981, Vol. 1, 247 and 345).<sup>9</sup>

### **3. The Relation between the Knower and the Known Object**

One thing that every theory of knowledge has to explain is the relation between the knower and the known object. Sadra has a unique view on this issue, but before we examine this let us look at alternative relations that some Muslim thinkers prior to Sadra had proposed, and which Sadra criticized (Mulla Sadra 1981, Vol. 3, 284-6). Some might say that knowledge is a privation. To know an external object means to remove matter and material characteristics from it, and *abstract* real knowledge. In other words, according to this view, knowledge is



abstraction (from matter) and every abstraction is a privation, so knowledge is privation. Sadra does not accept this view because he thinks that abstraction (from matter) is a general and universal concept and does not differ from one person to another. In other words, it is nonsense to say this is A's abstraction from matter and this is B's abstraction from matter, and these two abstractions are different. However, with regard to knowledge it is quite reasonable to say that A's knowledge of this object is different from B's. Therefore, knowledge cannot be a privation like abstraction.

Other Muslim thinkers accept a representational view about knowledge, considering that when we are confronted with the external world objects produce representations in our minds. If these representational forms correspond to reality, we say we have knowledge. Therefore, knowledge is a correct representation of the known object in our mind. Aristotle, Ibn Sina and other Peripatetics have defended this view, which Sadra does not accept. His main objection is that in the cases where we know things about ourselves, there is no representation in the process of acquiring knowledge. In other words, when the knower and the known object are identical (for example when both of them are the soul) there is no representation of one thing in the other.

According to a third view, knowledge is considered to be a relation: a relation between the knower and the known object. Again Sadra does not accept this relational account of knowledge. According to him, it is possible that we can have knowledge of a non-existent object. In this case, because the known object does not exist in the external world and does not have external being, there is no relation between us and something else. Similarly, when we have knowledge about ourselves there is no relation between the knower (the soul) and the known object (the soul).<sup>10</sup>

Now let us turn to Sadra's view about the relation between the knower and the known object. According to him, the knower and the actual known object (subjective object) are *identical*. This is one of the most famous doctrines of Sadra which is usually called 'the unity of the intelligent and the intelligible' (*ittihad al-'aql wa'l-ma'qul*).<sup>11</sup> Sadra has two arguments for this theory: according to the first, the real

and active knower agent is the soul and the actual known object is mental existence in our soul, which has been created by it. For Sadra, the soul is an immaterial being and, similar to all immaterial beings, cannot be divided into different parts. In other words, the soul is simple. Now if we accept that the soul is simple, it implies that the soul is not a separate thing from its creations within it. Therefore, the soul and all mental existences that the soul has created are identical. Thus, the knower (the soul) and the actual known object (mental existence) are identical.

The second argument for this unity goes as follows: let us posit an *actual intelligible*. The essence of this actual intelligible is that it is the subject of the intellection of an intelligent. There are two possibilities here. Firstly, we can suppose that this intelligent is a separate being from the intelligible. In this case the intelligible is not intelligible forever and *per se*, because whenever the intelligent does not intellect, it will cease from being intelligible. In other words, in this case the intelligible is not an *actual* intelligible. In this case, intelligibility is a potentiality that will be attained whenever an external intelligent thinks about the subject. However, our first supposition was that the intelligible is an *actual*. The only way to escape from this contradiction is that we suppose the intelligent is not a separate being from the actual intelligible. In other words, the actual intelligible must be self-intelligent and self-intelligible (Mulla Sadra (1984a, 51-52), see also (1999a, 63-103)).<sup>12</sup> This argument entails that the actual intelligible (or the known object) is identical with the intelligent (the soul), and knowledge is nothing more than intellection of the soul about its creations and itself.<sup>13,14</sup> This conclusion puts Sadra's system in contrast with "...the common sense epistemology which is based on the binary opposition of the subject and the object." (Kalin 2002, 79)

#### **4. The Role of Knowledge**

Knowledge is a mode of being and every being has the capacity to make certain impressions. What is the impression of knowledge on the world generally and on the knower specially? To answer this question we must first explore one of the important ontological ideas of Sadra: 'substantial motion' (*al-ĕarakah al-jawhariyyah*). Traditionally,

Islamic philosophers, following Aristotle, defined motion as a *gradual* change from potentiality to actuality. In this definition, the manner of change (i.e. gradually) is very important, because if we drop this, motion can happen in all ten of the Aristotelian categories. However, according to a commonly accepted view, motion can only happen in four categories: quality, quantity, place and posture. Adding the adjective 'gradually' restricts motion to just these four categories. On the other hand, philosophers traditionally thought that substance is something that remains unchanged during motion. In Aristotle's system, substance had been invented to preserve the identity of the moving object during motion. Therefore, if the substance of the moving object changes, then the moving object loses its identity, and this is 'sudden change' (Aristotle called it 'generation and corruption') rather than motion. Again, Sadra took an opposite view in this regard and held that substance is also subject to motion (See for example Mulla Sadra (1981, Vol. 3, 59-113) and (1999b, 45-58)).

According to the doctrine of substantial motion, 'moving from potentiality to actuality' is our abstraction from the real motion that happens to substances. All substances are in a constant state of change and flux, and the accidental changes are the consequences of this substantial motion (Cooper 1998), (Rajaie 1976, 226). Here we shall not consider Sadra's arguments for substantial motion in detail, but only mention the relationship between this doctrine and the concept of time, which is useful to understand it better. According to Sadra, time is the measure of motion. This point shows two things: first, that the mere fact that things are placed in time shows that there is one thing in their reality which is changing constantly, which is their substance. In other words, with the passage of time, the substances of things, and therefore their realities, undergo constant change and renewal (Mulla Sadra 1981, Vol. 7, 291).<sup>15</sup> Second, time is not an independent entity in which things are simply placed. Time is a dimension exactly like the three spatial dimensions, and "... [according to Sadra] the physical world is a spatio-temporal continuum."<sup>16</sup> (Cooper 1998)

Now let us return to knowledge. The soul, which is the actual and active knower, is the subject of substantial motion too (Mulla Sadra 1984c, 27-28). But how does the substance of the soul change? Sadra

mentions three factors, the first of which is knowledge. As explained earlier, when the soul acquires knowledge it becomes identical with it. This means that, by acquiring knowledge, the nature and substance of the soul changes. But what is the direction of this motion? According to Sadra, substantial motion is toward perfection. All beings are going to be renewed, and by this evolutionary motion, they are going back to their first origin, God (Mulla Sadra 2003, 128-9). As a result, the direction of the soul's motion is toward perfection too. The soul, by acquiring knowledge, changes its reality and its substance to become more abstract from matter. To the extent that the soul can acquire more knowledge, and to the extent that its knowledge is more abstract from matter, the soul moves towards perfection. The final step is unity of the soul with the Simple Intellect, which is completely abstract from matter.

Knowledge makes the soul more intense, and this means that whoever knows more is more perfect and has a more intense being. This is the reason that Sadra calls philosophy 'becoming of the soul'. By acquiring philosophy as the most abstract knowledge, the soul becomes more and more perfect. For this reason, Sadra is able to distinguish 'a mistake' from 'ignorance' (a separation which few Muslim philosophers clarify on the basis of their philosophical assumptions), saying that making a mistake is better than being ignorant. Making a mistake is in the direction of perfection and can help the soul in its journey towards perfection (Mulla Sadra 1981, Vol. 2, 173).

The second factor for changing the substance of soul and for its perfection, as mentioned earlier, is time. With the passage of time and by moving from adolescence to old age, our soul becomes more perfect (Mulla Sadra 1981, Vol. 4, 273 and Vol. 8, 344-345). The third factor is our deeds. Sadra has a doctrine that says that deeds, similar to knowledge, are identical with the agent who has done them (the soul), and so can change it.<sup>17</sup> (The doctrine of 'incarnation of deeds' is also related to this topic, but is beyond the scope of this paper.)

## 5. Epistemology

The parts of Sadra's theory of knowledge discussed above have direct relations to his ontology. Naturally, if some do not accept Sadra's ontological grounds, or have criticisms about them, they would be able to extend their objections to Sadra's theory of knowledge too. Generally, it is a characteristic of Sadra's theory of knowledge that is dependent on his ontology, and in this sense he has an 'onto-epistemology' rather than a mere epistemology. Therefore, this 'onto-epistemological' system suffers from the same objections that his ontology suffers from. In the former sections we simply accepted Sadra's ontological presuppositions and did not try to criticize them. However, some parts of his theory of knowledge have looser relations with his ontology. We present these parts in the next sections and try to consider them in more detail and see how they can actually cover our knowledge.

### 5.1. The Divisions of Knowledge

Knowledge is a mode of immaterial being, and every being is self-evident, simple and individual, and cannot be analyzed by the categories of quiddity like genus and species. This means that both being and knowledge are simple, and so cannot be defined, categorized or divided into parts. However, there is one way to do this task. Being is identical with quiddity in the external world, and knowledge is identical with the known object in the mind. Therefore, in one sense the divisions of quiddity are divisions of being, and the divisions of the known objects are divisions of knowledge (Mulla Sadra 1981, Vol. 3, 382). Sadra divides knowledge, on the basis of the divisions of the intelligible, into two parts. In the first, knowledge is a 'necessary being' (*wājib al-wujūd*). Only God has this kind of knowledge. Because God is a necessary being, his knowledge of himself and other beings is necessary too. The second kind of knowledge is a 'possible being' (*mumkin al-wujūd*). The knowledge belonging to all beings, except God, is in this group. This kind of knowledge, similar to quiddity, is divided into two parts: substance and accident. Sadra defines the former as knowledge of immaterial

beings of their essences (of themselves), and the latter as their knowledge of other known objects (Mulla Sadra 1981, Vol. 3, 382).

This division of knowledge is compatible with the other division which Sadra presents. There are two kinds of knowledge: 'knowledge by presence' (*al-ilm al-ḥuqīqī*) and 'knowledge by acquisition' (*ilm al-ḥusūlī*).<sup>18</sup> As mentioned, the actual known object is mental existence in the soul. Now if the known object only has one being i.e. if its actual being as the known object is identical with its real being, we have knowledge by presence. However, if the actual being of the known object is different from its real being in the external world we have knowledge by acquisition (Mulla Sadra 2002, 4-6). For example when we have knowledge about ourselves, because the known object has just one being and its being in the soul is identical with its real being we have knowledge by presence. But, when we know something about an external object in the external world, because its real being in the world is different from its actual being in the soul, we have knowledge by acquisition. As a result, we can define knowledge thus: knowledge is the presence of objects' forms in the mind of the knower. Whenever beings of these mental forms are different from their real beings, we have knowledge by acquisition. And whenever they are identical we have knowledge by presence. As you can see, this division is similar to the former. When knowledge is Necessary or substance, according to the last division, it is knowledge by presence. And when knowledge is accident, it is knowledge by acquisition.

Sadra, like Aristotle, divides knowledge by acquisition into two parts: 'conception' (*taḡawwūr*) and 'assent' (*taḡdīq*).<sup>19</sup> Conception is a genus and assent is a special kind of conception, i.e. one of its species. In conception we have a pure mental existence (a concept) of the known object. This concept is separate from other mental existences in the mind (like external beings that are individual and separate from each other) (Mulla Sadra 2002, 13-4). In addition, this concept does not entail any judgment. For example when we have a conception of a table, it means that there is a mental existence, which corresponds to the table and is separate from other mental beings, and this mental existence does not entail any judgment about the table. However, assent is a kind of conception, which either is identical with or entails

a judgment (Mulla Sadra 2002, 42). For example when we have the concept of 'self-contradiction' in mind, it entails the judgment: 'self-contradiction is impossible'. Therefore, it is an assent.<sup>20</sup>

## 5.2. The Problem of Correspondence

Now let us consider the issue of correspondence. It is obvious that according to Sadra we can have a conception in mind and therefore know it, whereas the subject of this conception does not exist in the external world. As we have seen, Sadra believes that non-existent and impossible things have a kind of mental existence and therefore we can know them, whereas these conceptions do not have any counterparts in reality. Rahman (1975, 217-8) puts this point thus:

"According to Sadra, the area of the conceivable is larger than that of the real and the possible. In other words, not all that is impossible – logically impossible – is absurd in the sense that it has no meaning at all. In this sense, a mind can even conceive itself to be non-existent – which is, of course, logically impossible. But to be a meaning – and hence exist in the mind – is one thing and to be a real essence is quite another. The impossible has no essence, for it can have no instances in reality. In general, Sadra seems to distinguish between: (1) the real which has an essence and real instances; (2) the non-existent, e.g., the '*anqā*' [a mythical bird], which is not real and has no instances in reality but can logically have instances and since it is not impossible, also has an essence; and (3) the impossible, which logically *cannot* have real instances and consequently has no essence (*ēaqiqah*), but is conceivable by the mind and therefore has meaning and is a genuine notion (*mafḥīm*)."

As a result, when we know something by its concept, a concept that does not entail a judgment, this knowledge should be independent from the external existence of its subject. Every mental concept is a part of our knowledge.<sup>21</sup>

Now suppose that we have a conception of an object that exists in the external world. In this situation, it is normal to expect that if this conception wants to be the conception of that object, it should have some kind of relation with the object. In other words, this conception should be related with only one object in the external world, and

because of this relationship having that conception means knowing that object. But what is this special relationship? According to Sadra, it is a relationship of correspondence. Sadra says, "I would say that the conception of something generally means the advent of its meaning to the mind corresponding to the actual thing." (Rajaie 1976, 202)

But there is a problem here. In the quotation above, Sadra says that the issue of correspondence is a component of *every* conception, which is obviously false. Here Sadra faces a contradiction. On the one hand, he says that non-existent objects have mental existence and so we can know them. But it is obvious that conceptions of non-existent objects are not correspondent to any real thing. From this it must be concluded that correspondence is not a component of conception. On the other hand, and according to the quotation, he says that correspondence is a component of every conception, and so every conception is correspondent to reality. It seems that the reason for this confusion is that Sadra does not separate the issue of correspondence from the issue of conception and wants to unify them, which is impossible. (We will return to this point later.)

Now let us consider the situation of judgments. Naturally, we want to exclude false judgments from our knowledge. In other words, being a true judgment is one of the conditions of being knowledge. Therefore, our theory of truth is important here, because by means of it we define truth and then say not every judgment, which is false by this definition, is a part of our knowledge. As we will show later, Sadra's theory of truth -following Aristotle- is the correspondence theory of truth. According to it, one judgment is true if and only if it is correspondent to reality. As a result, Sadra (in principle) should take the position that not every judgment is part of our knowledge; the minimum requirement is its truth. In other words, he should separate judgments from true judgments, and say only the latter is a part of our knowledge.

However, Sadra's epistemology is very weak in this regard, and he does not separate these two issues. He has two incompatible views about judgment. When he defines assent as a conception which is identical with judgment, he explicitly says that judgment means the possibility of being true or false (Mulla Sadra 2002, 49 and 97). It



means that every possible true or false sentence is a judgment. Therefore, assent (and hence knowledge) contains both true and false sentences. In other words, here Sadra omits the condition of being true from our knowledge and regards both true and false judgments as parts of our knowledge. This obviously goes against our intuition.

In his second view, Sadra says that every assent, by definition, is correspondent to reality (Mulla Sadra 2002, 82). In other words, here Sadra realized that knowledge requires truth; therefore, he says that every assent *per se* is correspondent to reality, and so is true (by definition). This view has two problems. The first is obvious: it contradicts the previous definition of judgment. In the previous definition, he said judgment means the possibility of being true or false, and therefore assent can be true or false. Whereas here he says, every assent is true. The second problem is more complicated. Let us accept that every assent is true. This means that in every assent, when we perceive the concept in our mind, it is identical with or entails a judgment which corresponds to reality. This kind of assent might be acceptable in cases of logical or mathematical truths. For example, when we perceive the concepts of number 'four' and 'two' in our mind, these concepts entail this true judgment: 'four is equal to two plus two'.<sup>22</sup> But what about experimental judgments? Of course we want to include many true experimental judgments in our knowledge. But, if we conceive two parts of an experimental judgment in our mind, does that entail a correspondent to reality judgment? When we conceive the concepts of 'water', 'salt', and 'solution' in mind, we cannot have the true judgment that 'salt is water-soluble' without experiment. Therefore, the true experimental judgments are not directly part of assents and hence our knowledge. And what about knowledge in an indirect manner? It is clear that these kinds of judgments cannot be deduced from the set of all true logical and mathematical judgments or the set of all conceptions. This means that Sadra's second view of assent and knowledge, in addition to the point that it contradicts his first view, cannot cover a very important part of our knowledge, i.e. experimental knowledge.<sup>23</sup>

It seems that both of these problems for conceptions and assents arise from the fact that Sadra does not separate the following two

issues from each other: mental existence and correspondence. Being correspondent to reality, for both conceptions and assents, is an *additional* feature, which is not a constituent of mental existence. Both true and false judgments have mental existence but only the former is correspondent to reality. If we accept this fact, we must conclude that knowledge is not equal to pure mental existence. Non-correspondent conceptions of the external objects and false judgments have mental existence; however, they are not part of our knowledge. To have knowledge we need something more than mental existence. It might be correspondence, but whatever it is, it cannot be a component of mental existence.

### 5.3. The Theory of Truth

Sadra did not explicitly explain his theory of truth, but we can draw its outlines from different parts of his works. As we have seen, Sadra divides knowledge into two main groups: knowledge by presence and knowledge by acquisition. In the case of knowledge by presence, because the knower and the known objects are identical, there is no room for doubt. According to Sadra, in this kind of knowledge, we do not need any criterion to check the relationship between our mental forms and the actual object. They are identical and therefore knowledge by presence is always true. As a result, we do not need any theory of truth for knowledge by presence (see for example notes of the Persian translator of (Mulla Sadra 1981) on pages 6 and 7).<sup>24</sup>

Sadra divides knowledge by acquisition into two parts: worldly knowledge and the knowledge of the next world. In this paper we shall not consider the mystical aspects of Sadra's system. However, it is worth mentioning that in the knowledge of the next world, the criterion of truth is a kind of spiritual experience (Rajaie 1976, 206-221).

In worldly knowledge, Sadra's theory of truth, following Aristotle, is the correspondence theory. According to it, when we know something (say when we know this book) it means that the mental form, which exists in our mind, is correspondent to the external being of this book. But how can a mental being, be correspondent with an external being? As mentioned, according to Sadra, these two beings

have the same quiddity, although their beings are different. In other words, when the soul confronts an external object via sensory organs, it creates a mental being, the quiddity of which is identical with the quiddity of the object (Mulla Sadra 2001, 13-15).

Here correspondence is something that exists in every conception and judgment. It is the ability of our soul to create such mental copies which are identical with the originals. As explained previously, tying correspondence to mental existence produces some difficulties for Sadra. In addition to these problems, this treatment of correspondence caused Sadra not to try to clarify the conditions of correspondence. He did not explain the conditions through which we obtain correspondence. In addition, he did not discuss how we could realize that in particular cases we have correspondence or not. The main issue for him was the possibility of knowledge and knowability of the external world (Rajie 1976, 181), and so he did not try to formulate an accurate theory of truth.<sup>25</sup>

There is one untranslatable key term in Sadra's system, which can clarify his attitude to the subject of knowledge. '*Ēaqq*' has two meanings simultaneously: on the one hand, it means God, Creator, Absolute and Necessary Being. This meaning reflects the ontological aspect of Sadra's system. On the other hand, it means (permanent) truth, and something which is correspondent to reality (Mulla Sadra 1981, Vol. 1, 89-90). This term nicely shows that Sadra's system is neither pure ontology nor pure epistemology; rather he has an 'onto-epistemological' system. '*Ēaqq*' is wider than truth, because it has some connection with being. For Sadra, true knowledge must have a close relation with reality, and reality is nothing more than One, Simple, and Pure Being. For him true knowledge and Being are two sides of the same coin.

## NOTES

1. His full name is Sadr al-Dīn Muḩammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Yaḩyā al-Qawāmi al-Shīrāzī, but he is known as Sadr al-Muta'allihīn, Ākhīnd, Mulla Sadra or simply Sadra.
2. For reports of his background, life and works see (Nasr 1978) and also (Ziai 2003).
3. In addition to this point, there are some other differences between Mulla Sadra and Descartes' philosophical systems. For example, contrary to Descartes who believed in a distinct separation between mind and body, Mulla Sadra argued that, because of material origin of the souls, substantial motion and the bodily resurrection, there is continuity between them. However Descartes and Sadra share some common ideas, see for example (Sanei Darebidi 2002).
4. Sadra has presented his arguments in many different places. For a good and concise version see one of his latest treatises (Mulla Sadra 1984a, 9-18).
5. Some people called it 'the systematic ambiguity of existence' (Cooper1998).
6. Prior to Sadra, Suhrawardi held that quiddity is a gradual thing and is capable of having a range of intensities (Cooper 1998). It is interesting that both Sadra and Suhrawardi use 'light' as their examples. Light has an important and central role in Suhrawardi's system and he believes that all kinds of light are 'light' and so are identical regarding their beings; however, different intensities of light show that they have different quiddities (Suhrawardi 1994, 119-121). Sadra borrows this example, but uses it in a different way. He explains that being is similar to light and therefore has different intensities. Different kinds of light have different beings rather than different quiddities.
7. There is an exception here: according to Sadra, some elite people (for example the prophets) have souls more perfect and more similar to God. Accordingly, their souls' creations (their knowledge) can have some external effects in the world.
8. For an account of Sadra's reply to these questions, see (Rahman 1975, 224-225). According to Rahman, Sadra's view is a kind of 'idealist realism'. For a slightly different account of Sadra's reply, see (Rajaie 1976, 184-186). Rajaie (237-8) also criticized Sadra's combination of this view about the known object with his ontology, which is based on independency and objectivity of being.
9. Sadra introduces two kinds of prediction: 'ordinary informative prediction' (*al-ḩaml al-sha'i'*) and 'primary or tautological' (*al-ḩaml al-awwalī*) (Mulla Sadra 1981, Vol. 1, 292-293) and (Rahman 1975, 217). By means of these predictions, he argues that non-existent and impossible things are existent in our mind.
10. For proposed relations between the knower and the known object and Sadra's objections to them, see also (Rahman 1975, 211-3) and (Kalin 2002, 74-79).
11. Ibn Sina, like most of the Muslim philosophers before Sadra, rejected this unity. According to him, this unity necessitates motion in the substance (the doctrine which we will explain in the section four of this paper), and because the latter

- was not acceptable, he rejected the former. According to Ibn Sina, both of these doctrines are poetic and not philosophical (Ibn Sina 1996, Vol. 3, 295-296).
12. It is obvious that when we say the intelligible is identical with the intelligent, we mean the *actual* intelligible. According to Sadra, there are two kinds of intelligible: the actual (subjective object) and the accidental (objective object). In case of the latter (object in the external world), its being *per se* is different from its being for the knower. However, in case of the former (mental existence) its being *per se* is identical with its being for the knower (Mulla Sadra 1981, Vol. 6, 151). This means that, Sadra does not claim that the external object is identical with the soul. For him the external object is not the real subject of knowledge.
  13. According to Sadra, one quiddity can be realized by different and separate beings. For example in the case of mental existence, its quiddity is identical with the quiddity of the counterpart object in the external world; however, their beings are different. Similarly, for one being we can abstract different quiddities. For example, in the case of mental existence, from one point of view we can abstract its quiddity as an intelligent and from another point of view we can abstract it as an intelligible. This multiplicity in quiddities does not mean that we have two beings. We just have one being, mental existence, with two quiddities. This is another way of expressing the idea of unity between the intelligent and the intelligible (Mulla Sadra 1981, Vol. 3, 346-53).
  14. For the historical background of 'the unity of the intelligent and the intelligible' in both of the Greek and Islamic philosophy, see (Kalin 2002).
  15. This point is very similar to the doctrine of 'temporal parts' which some metaphysicians have presented in contemporary metaphysics. Both of them say that objects have a temporal nature and by passing time they change: this table-at-time-t1 is different from the table-at-time-t2. The authors of this paper hope to finish a comparative study on this subject.
  16. It is an interesting point that Sadra had introduced something like the four-dimensional picture of the world before modern physics introduced it.
  17. In addition to the point that knowledge and deeds are identical with the soul and so are related, there is another connection between them. According to Sadra, the soul can acquire some kind of knowledge (e.g. spiritual knowledge) only after a period of self-mortification. On this basis Sadra, similar to Plato, believes in a hierarchy of knowledge. According to this, theology is placed at the highest level and can be learned only after learning geometry, arithmetic, logic, and physics. Learning theology before learning elementary knowledge and without self-mortification is impossible (Mulla Sadra 1981, Vol. 3, 446).
  18. For an account of epistemology in Islamic philosophy in general, and the distinction between 'knowledge by presence' and 'knowledge by acquisition' in particular, see (Ha'iri Yazdi 1992).
  19. There is no controversy in translating '*tasawwur*' as concept or conception. However, there are different proposed alternatives for '*tasdiq*', each of which

has different consequences. The Persian translator of Sadra's treatise *al-Taḡawwur wa'l-Taḡdīq* has implicitly proposed that '*taḡdīq*' is equal to 'belief' (Mulla Sadra 2002, X). When we explain Sadra's intuition of '*taḡdīq*' we will see that this is not a correct translation. Nasr (1978, 49) has proposed 'judgment' for '*taḡdīq*'. This is not correct because Sadra defines '*taḡdīq*' by means of judgment and if we translate '*taḡdīq*' with judgment, it will be a circular definition. In the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 'assent' has been proposed for '*taḡdīq*' (Inati 1998). Although 'assent' cannot transfer the whole meaning of '*taḡdīq*', it is the best available option and we use it in this paper. Note that in Sadra's system '*taḡdīq*' has two different and incompatible meanings (which we will consider later), and the problem of its translation partly arises from this point.

20. In addition to this general division, Sadra has some others. In one of them, he explains his classification of sciences. For a report of this classification with a critical review, see (Rajaie 1976, 190-201).
21. It is an important point that Sadra, following Aristotle, conceives concepts, as well as judgments, as part of our knowledge. However, in modern epistemology the subject of knowledge is a predicative sentence, which is either true or false. This point, as we will see, produces some difficulties for Sadra's system.
22. Of course, this is a controversial issue in the philosophy of mathematics; however we simply suppose here that the mathematical truths are *a priori* and analytic. This does not have any effect on our next discussions.
23. It is a general point that for Sadra the experimental knowledge and worldly knowledge-which have direct relations with the life in this world-are less important than the knowledge of the next world. In contrast with his predecessors, especially Ibn Sina, who attained great achievements in physics, logic, medicine and other sciences, Sadra did not have any great or new achievements in physics or logic (for his works on physics see (Mulla Sadra 1981, Vol. 4 and 5) or the chapter about physics in (Mulla Sadra 1996), and for logic see (Mulla Sadra 1996c)). Sadra (1981, Vol. 9, 118-9) believed that the reason for Ibn Sina's philosophical mistakes was that he dealt with some unnecessary sciences like mathematics and medicine. Instead of this, Sadra made great efforts to include theology in his system (see for example Mulla Sadra (1984b, 1998 and 2001)). This is an important point in the history of philosophical thinking in Iran and can be used to clarify reasons for the lack of Iranian development in natural sciences and technology in recent centuries.
24. For this reason, Sadra thinks that knowledge by presence is a perfect kind of knowledge and only God has it (Mulla Sadra 1984, 55-6). God's knowledge of Himself and of other creatures is present to Him. Beings of creatures in the external world are identical with their beings as the known objects of God. Therefore, God's knowledge is always true.
25. Rajaie (1976, 204-206) argued that Sadra, in addition to the correspondence theory, accepts the consistency theory of truth too. According to this theory, a

statement "...is true when it is consistent with the other statements which are already accepted as true" (p. 204). In this definition, we used the term 'true' to define some other true statements. Therefore, if we accept it as a theory of truth, which wants to define 'truth', our definition will be circular. It seems that we have to distinguish two questions: 1) what is truth? To answer this question we have to appeal to a theory of truth. 2) How can we obtain true statements? Regarding the first question, Sadra's answer is the correspondence theory. And regarding the second one, as Rajaie has shown, the main tool for Sadra is formal logic, which can check the consistency between statements. However, this does not mean that it is a theory of truth. By using formal logic, Sadra wants to reduce all true statements to basic ones, which we are clear about in regards to their correspondence to reality. His theory of truth is still the correspondence theory.

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