

**The Unity of the Intellect and the Intelligible  
A Brief Comparison between Ibn Sina and Mulla  
Sadra**

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**Abstract**

Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra are two Muslim philosophers whose philosophical principles and beliefs have been dominant in the Iranian philosophical centers for centuries. The principle of the unity of the intellect and the intelligible separates the ways of these two philosophers. Ibn Sina severely criticizes it while Mulla Sadra considers it as one of his honours. In this article, explaining the point of difference between the two, we first mention four arguments of Ibn Sina against this principle, and then we will answer to and reject them according to Mulla Sadra's doctrines. In different places a comparison between the two philosophers is made and in the end, the contribution of each one is specified, but Mulla Sadra's viewpoint is supported.

**Key Words:** 1- The intellect      2- The intelligible  
3- Ibn Sina      4- Mulla Sadra

**1. Introduction**

It is almost four centuries now that Sadr al-Mutaalihin Shirazi, known as Mulla Sadra, is considered by the people of knowledge as the greatest philosopher of Iran and even the world of Islam. The philosophical views of this divine philosopher became so dominant in the religious and philosophical centres in Iran that they eclipsed the beliefs of the great philosophers before him. Following his death in the eleventh century AH his works and doctrines were studied almost in all the religious seminaries where philosophy was

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taught. The principles, theories and philosophical studies of Mulla Sadra, which either were of his invention or if they belonged to his predecessors he made them demonstrable, were the fundamentality of existence, the unity of the reality of existence, the gradation of the reality of existence, substantial motion, the corporeal origin of the human soul and its spiritual subsistence, corporeal resurrection, the union of the intellect and the intelligible, and some other principles. The question of the union of the intellect and the intelligible is discussed on different occasions in sections on the mental existence, in the categories (when the category of quality is discussed), and sometimes in a separate and independent section of 'Knowledge and the Known'. Mulla Sadra in Part 10 of his encyclopaedic book *Al-Hikma al-Muta'aliya fi-'l-asfar al-'Aqliyya al-Arba'a* (*The Transcendent Philosophy Concerning the Four Intellectual Journeys*), known briefly as *Asfar*, discusses in several chapters the question of the union of the intellect and the intelligible and its related issues. In this article the major views of Mulla Sadra are cited from these chapters. As will be mentioned, he holds that this principle is one of his honours that the great philosophers before him despite all their greatness could not attain it. One of these philosophers is Ibn Sina known as the Master of the Muslim philosophers who in his principal works *Al-Shifa* (*Healing*) and *Al-Isharat wal Tanbihat* (*Points and Remarks*) attacks the principle of the union of the intellect and the intelligible and its proponents. But before discussing the views of Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra on this subject it is important to have a brief survey of the history of the question.

## 2. The History of the Debate

Most of the Muslim philosophers in their philosophical books have attributed the principle of the union of the intellect and the intelligible to a philosopher called Porphyry. They say he was born in Syria in 232 AD and was one of the philosophers of the Alexandrian school and a Neo-Platonist (one of the disciples of Plotinus). With the entrance of the Platonic, Aristotelian, and Neo-Platonist thoughts into the Muslim world, the principle of the union of the intellect and the intelligible was discussed by both the philosophers and the Muslim mystics. One of the great mystics who hinted at this principle was Sadr al-Din Qunawi of the eight

century AH in *Al-Nusus*. On the union of knowledge, the knower and the known he says “The highest degrees of knowledge of a thing, whatever it is and whoever the knower is, whether the known is one thing or many things, is acquired through the union of the knower and the known and the equality of the two”(p.197). Sanaie Ghaznawi in *Hadiqat al-Haqiqah* says in a verse: “With no doubt, flaw or hesitation/ the intelligence, the intelligible and the intellect are one” Mawlawi Rumi in *Mathnavi* also holds the perfection and truth of man is the same thought and in philosophical term the essential intelligible:

O brother! You are no more than a thought  
The rest are bones and cords.  
If your thought is a rose you are a rose garden  
But if it is a thorn, you are a heap of thorns.

Among the Muslim philosophers, two great philosophers, namely Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra, have discussed this principle more than others. Khwajah Nasir al-din al-Tusi, the well-known commentator and defender of Ibn Sina, states the principle of the union of the intellect and the intelligible is a false belief, and where Ibn Sina calls this principle a poetic idea, he comments: “He says it is an absurd poetic idea; he attributes it to poetry because it is imaginary, and because of their imagination the common religious people and Sufis hold it is true”(2, V:1, p.233). Fakhr al-Razi, another commentator and a critic of Ibn Sina calls this principle ‘a horrible poetic idea’. He says “when the shallow-minded liked this horrible poetic idea, they thought the intellect was invariably united with the intelligible, whether it perceives its essence or the essence of others”(9,V:1,p.339).

Now let us see what this principle states that such great and knowledgeable people call it a false belief or a poetic idea, whereas Mulla Sadra counts it one of the honours of his Transcendent Philosophy.

### **3. Explanation of the Point of Contention**

If we intend to explain the principle of the union of the intellect and intelligible in one sentence, perhaps we may not find a shorter sentence than this: “The soul in the process of intellection is united

with the intelligible forms gained from things.” Indeed all the point of contention lies here. To explain, we can say when we perceive something, six things may be identified: 1 and 2. The existence of the intellect and its quiddity (the existence of the soul and its quiddity); 3, 4. the existence of the intelligible by essence and its quiddity (the existence of a form in the mind acquired from things and the quiddity of this form); 5, 6. the existence of the intelligible by accident and its quiddity (the existence of the external thing and its quiddity).

Of these six things what is intended by the philosophers is the union of the existence of the intellect and the existence of the intelligible by essence, that is, the union of the existence of the human soul and the existence of mental form which is directly and without any medium present to the soul. From the viewpoint of Mulla Sadra, when we speak of the union of the intellect and the intelligible, this includes all levels of knowledge, that is, the absolute union of the knower and the known, including the imagination and the sensation. So, in all cases where the soul knows something, either by intellection, imagination or sensation, the knower and the known are one. Here we must say in regard of the soul’s knowledge of itself there is no disagreement among the philosophers on the union of the intellect and the intelligible. Even Ibn Sina, who is one of the trenchant opponents of this principle, accepts the union in this position. He says: “the soul’s knowledge of itself makes it the intelligence, the intellect and the intelligible” (3, p.212). But the main question that separates the ways of the two great philosophers, Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra, is whether the soul when perceives things is united with the mental forms. This question is the main origin of the contention. Ibn Sina gives a negative answer to it, but Mulla Sadra gives an affirmative answer. Now let us discuss the views and reasons of each of these two outstanding philosophers.

#### **4. The Viewpoint of Ibn Sina**

Before discussing Ibn Sina’s arguments rejecting the principle of the union of the intellect and the intelligible it may be helpful to know that he has criticised severely the exponents and supporters of this principle in his works and even did not refrain from insulting them. As Mehdi Haeri says “Ibn Sina’s constant criticism

of this theory is so severe that we must say unlike his accustomed way it turns away from a scientific and philosophical debate and becomes insulting” (1, p.49). To give an example, we may refer to two instances out of the numerous cases where he attacks Porphyry to whom this theory is attributed. Ibn Sina in the fifth article of the sixth skill in the psychology of *Al-Shifa* following an argument against this principle writes: “And the person who mostly tempted people in this regard was the author of *Isagogic*. He insisted to speak in imaginary poetic and mystical language in which he confined himself and others to the imagination, and his works on the intellect and the intelligibles and his books on psychology prove this to the people of discernment” (3, p. 213). In *Al-Isharat wal Tanbihat* in a section titled ‘an anecdote’ he writes “They had a man called Porphyry who wrote a book on the intellect and the intelligibles admired by the Peripatetics, all of which is nonsense and they know that neither they nor Porphyry himself understand it. It was criticised by a man of his age, and he also criticised that critic in what was more impertinent than the first” (2, V: 3, p. 321). We hear such immoderate views, which are far from the dignity of a philosopher, from a person who has been known as the most rational philosopher in the Muslim world.

## **5. Ibn Sina’s Arguments against the Union of the Intellect and the Intelligible**

### **5. 1. The First Argument**

Ibn Sina in the seventh section of the Metaphysics of *Al-Isharat wal Tanbihat* states that a group of the predecessors believed if the substance of the intellect perceives a mental form, the intellect will be one with the intelligible. Now let us suppose the substance of the intellect perceives a thing such as A. According to the view of the proponents of union, the substance of the intellect will be united and one with A. Now the question is whether the substance of the intellect after perceiving the intelligible A will have the same state it had before the unity or its previous state will perish or change. In the first case there would be no union, for the intellect, whether or not it perceives A, would have the same state it had before perception. In the second case the intellect would lose its previous state and a new change would occur to it. The second question that rises here is whether with such a change the essence

of the substance of the intellect will endure or its essence will perish totally and a new thing will be created. In the former case, the essence of the substance of the intellect would remain, but it would lose an attribute or a state (ignorance, for example) and acquire a new attribute (such as knowledge). Such changes happen frequently to the soul, but there would be no union between the substance of the intellect (i.e., soul) and the intelligible; rather, the soul with the subsistence of its essence would appropriate new changes. In the second case the substance of the intellect would perish and a new thing would be created, rather than the union of the intellect and the intelligible, for no essence is left to be united with the intelligible. Moreover, the change or transformation of one thing into another demands the existence of common matter, whereas the soul is immaterial and has no matter at all. Ibn Sina mentions this argument under the title 'An Error and a Remark', rather than 'A Point' that he usually uses to explain an important point (2, V: 3, p. 319). This shows his contemptuous treatment of the union of the intellect and the intelligible.

### **5. 2. The Second Argument**

The second argument Ibn Sina offers is a general argument against the absolute union of two things. According to him, the change of one thing into another thing—not in the sense of the transformation of one state into another (such as the cooling of hot water) nor the combination of one thing with another to produce a third thing (such as species that emerges from the combination of matter and form), but in the sense that a thing exists to be another thing—is a “poetic expression” and is absurd. For, if both of those two things exist, they will be two different things rather than one thing, and if one of the two things perishes and another is created, this also will be “the annihilation of one thing and the creation of another.” Therefore, in the second case also there is no union (Ibid, p. 322).

### **5. 3. The Third Argument**

Ibn Sina in *Al-Shifa* admits the union of the intellect and the intelligible in the soul's knowledge of its essence, but he rejects the union of the intellect and the intelligible in the perception of other intelligibles. He argues “I hold what is said on the union of the soul's essence with the intelligibles is absurd. For I do not understand how a thing becomes another thing as they say, and I do

not understand how that is possible” (3, p. 212). He continues if by the change of something into another they mean the first thing loses one form to take another form, and it is one thing with the first form but another thing with the second, in fact the first thing does not change into another thing but has totally perished and its subject remains only, a subject that can accept different accidents, such as water that is sometimes cold and sometimes hot, or the body which may be white, black or in other colours. The Peripatetics usually call such kind of composition ‘transformation’, ‘qualitative motions or ‘accidental changes’, and the union of the intellect and the intelligible is not of such kind. Moreover, the change of something into another could be of the kind of the combination of form and matter. In real compounds things lose a part of their existence to accept another part. For example, water loses its form and turns into vapour. The Peripatetics call this phenomenon ‘generation and corruption’. The relationship of the soul and the intelligibles evidently is not of such a kind.

Ibn Sina mentions another kind of the change of one thing into another that has four forms, all of which are impossible. He argues when one thing changes into another thing, following their union, either the first thing exists or does not exist (two assumptions). The second thing also after the union may or may not exist (two other assumptions). Now following the union of the two things, four states may be assumed:

1. The first and the second things both exist (in that case, because both of them exist they are not united).
2. The first thing exists, but the second thing does not exist (in that case the union of the existing thing and the nonexistent thing means the annihilation of the first thing).
3. The first thing does not exist, but the second thing exists (this state like the last one would be impossible).
4. Both the first and the second things do not exist (in that case there would be no unity because both things perish).

Ibn Sina concludes this would be annihilation rather than unification, and decisively asks “How can the soul be the forms of the things?” Following this argument he gives his opinions on the relationship between the soul and the intelligibles. From his point of view, although the soul in the stage of the material intellect is

immaterial, it acts as the place and the subject for those intelligibles and forms.

The argument of Ibn Sina on the impossibility of the union of the soul and the intelligibles in the process of intellection comes in the form of following syllogism, that is, if the soul perceives a form of the actual beings which are immaterial, according to the view of the exponents of the union it must be united with that form. This form itself is pure actuality and neither potentiality nor matter has a place in it. The soul is also an actual and immaterial existent. If the soul unites with that form in the process of intellection and becomes identical with it, as the believers in the union of the intellect and the intelligible hold, it should not accept other forms, for essentially it is pure actuality and has no potentiality, preparation or matter to receive other forms, whereas we clearly and intuitively see that the soul receives other forms. Therefore, this assumption, namely the union of the intellect and the intelligible, is absurd.

#### **5. 4. The Fourth Argument**

This argument comes following the last one in *Al-Shifa*. Ibn Sina holds if the soul while intellection is united with the intelligibles, it must become different from its essence, and because the consequent is false so is the antecedent. To explain further the link between the antecedent and the consequent, when the soul perceives a form, according to the view of the opponents, it must become one with it. Now, as was mentioned above, the soul also receives some other forms. When the soul accepts the first form it becomes one with it. Then it perceives the second form, which is definitely different from the first form. So the soul once becomes one with the first form and then with the second form, and because the two forms are different from each other, the soul must necessarily be different from its essence. Ibn Sina following this objection says “This [i.e., the discourse on the union of the intellect and the intelligible] is meaningless.” Then he explains when we analyse the intelligence, the intellect, and the intelligible it becomes clear that they are not one and the same. From his viewpoint the substance of the soul is called the intellect. Intelligence also has two meanings: i. the soul’s perceiving faculty by which it perceives the intelligibles, ii. The perceived form, which is in the soul, and therefore the soul is its place. The soul which is the intellect then



perceives this intelligible form. In any case, in both meanings of the intellect, the intelligence, the intellect and the intelligible are different from each other. He concludes “Therefore, the intelligence, the intellect and the intelligible are not one in our souls” (3, pp. 212-213).

From the viewpoint of Ibn Sina the relation of the soul with its intelligibles is similar to the relation of the substance and accidents. The substance in its essence is independent of the accidents. For example, the body has certain accidents, such as a special colour, place, and relation, but in essence it is independent of these. The relation of the soul and the intelligibles is similar to that. The soul in its essence is a substance and is independent of the intelligibles. The intelligibles for the soul are pure accidents which cause its enlightenment and knowledge, just like a body that may accept different colours. Accordingly the difference between a child and an old person is only in the number of the accidents, and likewise is the difference between a layman and a Prophet or a scholar. Later in this article, when Mulla Sadra’s view is explained, we will display the objections to this viewpoint of Ibn Sina and show its invalidity.

So far we have cited the views of Ibn Sina in *Al-Isharat* and *Al-Shifa*, where he insists strongly on rejecting the union of the intellect and the intelligible and counts it as impossible, or as he puts it “what is said on the soul’s essence becoming one with the intelligibles, I think, is one of the impossibilities.” However, in spite of all his insistence and denial, Ibn Sina in *Al-Mabda wal Maad* explains the theory of the union of the intellect and the intelligible and almost goes half the way Mulla Sadra goes later to prove and even accept it (4, pp.6-10). But some scholars including Fakhr al-Razi and Khwajah Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, both are commentators and interpreters of the philosophical views of Ibn Sina, believe he composed *Al-Mabda wal Maad* only to explain the philosophical views and opinions of the Peripatetics. In other words, because the union of the intellect and intelligible is one of their convictions, Ibn Sina has explained it according to their beliefs, and it is not one of his accepted beliefs. Fakhr al-Razi in this regard writes: “Know that the Sheikh in all his works insists on rejecting the union except in *Al-Mabda wal Maad* where he states the intelligence is the result of the union of the intellect and the

intelligible form” (9, V: 1, p. 328). Fakhr al-Razi then cites in brief the Ibn Sina’s argument from *Al-Mabda wa al-Maad* allegedly to reject it. Khwajah Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, who also calls the theory of the union of the intellect and intelligible a false belief, argues that Ibn Sina has composed that book to explain the philosophical beliefs of the Peripatetics. He writes: “He composed that book to explain their school” (2, V: 3, p.320). For this reason Khwajah himself did not seek to invalidate that view. Mulla Sadra also when he comes to Ibn Sina’s argument for the union of the intellect and the intelligible in *Al-Mabda wal Al-Maad* writes “I wonder if that was said by way of explaining their school [i.e., the school of the Peripatetics] for a certain purpose, or it was his true belief following an enlightenment he had through the divine light that shines in the heavenly horizon” (6, V: 3, p. 335). He accepts then the view of Khwajah Nasir that Ibn Sina wrote that book to explain the well-known views of the Peripatetics, and declares that the theory of the union of the intellect and the intelligible and its rational demonstration is one of his innovations which Allah has conferred on him.

### **6. The View of Mulla Sadra**

Before explaining Mulla Sadra’s view concerning his theory and his answers to Ibn Sina’s arguments and objections, it may be important to note that when he offers his own views he modestly ascribes them to his predecessors. For example, when he discusses the substantial motion, which is one of his original views, he says it is not a new thing and others have also discussed it. But he leaves his accustomed way when he comes to the theory of the union of the intellect and the intelligible. Not only he is proud of his theory but he also clearly states in different places that this theory is one of those points which Allah has inspires him with. For example, in one of the manuscripts of *Asfar* he has a commentary in his own handwriting on the union of the intellect and the intelligible. He writes “I was in Kahak in Qom when I composed this point; then on Friday I came to Qom to visit the shrine of the daughter of Imam Musa Ibn Jafar asking her help, and then this point was revealed to me by the help of the Exalted Allah” (8, V: 2, p. 17). At the beginning of the seventh chapter of the tenth part of *Asfar*, when he explains the union of the soul with the intelligible forms,

Mulla Sadra also states that when he understood the difficulty of this point and did not find any solution in the books of the leading Muslim philosophers, such as *Al-Shifa*, *Al-Nijat*, and *Al-Isharat* nor could he find anything on this point in the works of Ibn Sina's equals or followers, such as Bahmanyar, Suhrawardi, or Khwajah Nasir al-Din to seek their assistance, in such a state he says "We turned naturally to the Cause of the causes and prayed humbly to the Facilitator of the difficult issues to open this gate... then he conferred on us at the time of composing this chapter a new kind of knowledge from the treasures of His knowledge, and opened our heart mostly clearly to the gates of His mercy, and that is Allah's grace which He grants to whomever He wishes, and Allah is dispenser of a great grace" (6, V: 3, p. 313).

At the end of the eighth chapter of the same section, he writes on the intellectual forms, "I knew by the argument that Allah inspired me with that those forms disregarding other things are intelligible in their essences whether there is a thing in the universe to perceive them or not" (Ibid, p. 334). Then he concludes this chapter with this statement: "Understanding this sacred point was not possible to the predecessors nor did the reflective scholars expert in philosophical discussions inherit it, until Allah favoured some of the poor wayfarers with it and expanded his breast by the power of the All-mighty and All-wise" (Ibid, p. 335). Of course by the poor whose breast God has expanded he means himself and no other.

Another example of these claims is that Mulla Sadra explains at the beginning of the correlation argument in *Al-Mashair*: "Then every perceptible form, intellectual or sensible, is united in its existence with the existence of its perceiver according to the argument conferred on us by Allah" (7, p. 239).

He in the eleventh chapter of this section of *Asfar* writes: "Praise to Allah Who has guided us and we would not have been guided without His guidance. Indeed we by Allah's knowledge and enlightenment have shown the right way which many philosophers let alone scholars had not understood, so that there remains no doubt about it for anybody unless for his misunderstanding or defective intellect" (6, V: 3, p. 347).

## **7. Preliminary Issues in the Principle of the Unity of the Intelligent and the Intelligible**

Mulla Sadra to answer Ibn Sine's objections to this principle, grounds his discussion on three points:

1. According to the principle of the fundamentality of existence, which is one of his innovations, reality belongs to existence. Existence in every thing is real and fundamental and is the cause of the individuation of its quiddity. Existence in his words "is intensified or weakened and made perfect or imperfect while the person is the same person." Man's existence, for example, since he was an embryo or a foetus until he is intelligent and intelligible passes through different stages and creations, while his existence and union remain the same.

2. Mulla Sadra holds that the union of one thing with another is divided into three kinds:

a. The union of two things which are parallel to each other, or the union of the existence of two things, such as the union of two persons A and B or the union of water and fire. All philosophers are certain that such union is impossible.

b. The union of two concepts or two quiddities that are different from each other. Such union is also impossible. When Muslim philosophers come to concepts, whether secondary philosophical intelligibles or logical secondary intelligibles, they emphasise that no concept would be one with another concept. For example, the concept intelligent would never be equal to the concept intelligible. The advocates of the Transcendent Philosophy do not include the concepts and quiddities in their discussion of the union of the intellect and the intelligible.

c. The transformation of an imperfect into a perfect being, that is, one thing because of the gradual perfection of its existence is qualified with intellectual concepts that it did not have before. The movement from the state of potentiality towards the state of actuality when in its development the thing casts off its imperfections, such as a child becoming a youth, an ignorant a scholar, or a weak person strong, is of this kind of union. According to the fundamentality of existence, the gradation of existence and the theory of the substantial motion such a kind of union is acceptable. The existence of the thing in its substantial and evolving motion attains those perfections it did not have before and

its weak and imperfect existence becomes strong and perfect. Such a phenomenon is neither 'generation and corruption' nor 'doffing and putting on' of the peripatetics, but rather 'putting on after putting on'. The union of the intellect and the intelligible in the Transcendent Philosophy which means the union of the soul and the intelligible forms is just of this kind of union. Having said that, now on the basis of the principles of Mulla Sadra we will try to answer Ibn Sina's arguments and objections.

## **8. The Answers of Mulla Sadra to Ibn Sina**

### **8. 1. The Answer to the First Argument**

As was mentioned before Ibn Sina asks "If the substance of the intellect perceives the intelligible B, will it retain its former state or after its union with the intelligible will its state will change?" Mulla Sadra answers that he accepts the second option. The substance of the intellect following its union with the intelligible A will lose nothing other than its imperfection and defect, just like a child that becomes a young man. The child that attains adulthood loses only nonexistent issues, namely his imperfection, to be united with the perfection of manhood. Indeed Ibn Sina in the theology section of *Al-Shifa* confirms this, where he writes:

The changing of one thing into another may occur in two ways. One is that the first thing is what it is because by nature it moves toward perfection by reaching the second thing, such as a child who is a child because he moves towards manhood. When he becomes a man 'the child' is not annihilated but becomes perfect, for it loses no substantial or accidental matter except that which belongs to imperfection or what is potential in contrast to subsequent perfection. The other is that the first by nature does not move to the second thing though it has the potentiality to accept its form, not because of its quiddity but because of the carrier of its quiddity. If the second generates from it, it is not from its substance which is actual unless in the sense of 'subsequence', but it is from that part of its substance which corresponds with potentiality, like water which becomes vapour when its matter doffs its watery form and acquires the vapour form. In the first kind, as is not hidden

from you, the substance of the first is one with that of the second, whereas in the second kind the first does not have the substance which the second has but only a part of it, and that substance is annihilated (3, p. 329).

This is the summary of Ibn Sina's discussion of matter and form. Mulla Sadra on the basis of this discussion states that one thing may retain its identity and nature and become one with another thing, such as a child who attains manhood but does not lose its nature, and what it loses is nonexistent issues. Now how can Ibn Sina insist on denying the union of the intellect and the intelligible which is similar to the first kind of the emergence of one thing from another? Ibn Sina writes: If after its union with the intelligible the substance of the intellect does not change, whether or not it perceives an intelligible, its state would remain the same as it was before the union, and in that case there would be no union.

Considering this speech of Ibn Sina, as was said, it is clear that for him and his followers the relation of the intelligibles and the perceptible forms to the soul is like the relation of the accidents to the substance, and because the substance and its accidents essentially are never united with each other, the intelligibles also essentially never become united with the substance of the soul. The soul at the beginning of its creation is like a blank tablet and in its dealing with the external world gradually certain impressions are printed on it. Without these impressions and accidents no change occurs to the essence of the soul from the beginning to the end of its existence in this world. Murtada Mutahari writes:

We must admit that in essence there is no difference between an infant's and a philosopher's or a scholar's soul in regard of power and primary perfections. The only difference that exists is in the power and secondary perfections and impressions which are imprinted on these souls. Thus we must say the soul of Ibn Sina himself since he was a foetus until he was summarizing the latest of his philosophical views in *Al-Isharat* did not change except in matters of forms and accidental impressions (5, V: 1, p. 87).

Mulla Sadra following his answers to Ibn Sina's objection intensifies his criticism and wanders how Ibn Sina in spite of his

greatness and high position could argue that the human soul in every perception, even in the stage of sense and imagination, remains unchanging in perceiving the intelligibles from the beginning when it was potential to the end when it is actual intellect. The consequence of such a view, according to Mulla Sadra, is that the souls of the prophets and the souls of the insane, children and even the foetuses in the wombs of their mothers in regard of substance of human essence and reality must be equal and have the same degree, and their difference is confined to the strange accidents added to their existence.

Mulla Sadra also gives his answer to Ibn Sina's objection to the first state of the second option, that is, the intellect after perceiving the intelligible loses its former state and a new change happens to it. Ibn Sina had objected that in that case the essence of the intellect would remain unchanged and only its state would change, for example the cold water becomes hot, and had added in that case that would be like other changes and there would be no union. Mulla Sadra answers that the intellect would lose nothing of its essential parts or the existence of its essence. What it loses is its imperfection and non-existence. That is, the intelligent was imperfect in substance and then it is intensified in the substance of its essence, and its imperfection is removed. Such a change is neither of the kind of 'generation and corruption' where one essence changes into another essence (such as the change of water into vapour) nor like a qualitative change where the essence remains unchanged but its existential features change (such as heating the cold water).

In regard of the second state of the second option where the essence of the intellect is annihilated and another thing is created, Ibn Sina on the basis of 'generation and corruption' had said there would be no union there, too, for first the essence of the intellect does not endure to be united with the intelligible, and second the change of one thing into another requires common matter. Mulla Sadra answers both objections in the following way. First as was said what the essence of the intellect loses is nonexistent things like potentiality and preparation rather than perfection. The substantial change of the intellect here is neither of the kind of 'generation and corruption' nor of the kind of motion in accidents. In fact, Mulla Sadra in this regard has fundamental difference with Ibn Sina and

his followers, that is, besides admitting the motion in accidental categories accepted by the Peripatetics Mulla Sadra confirms the motion in substance which they deny. According to the substantial motion, the substance of the intellect changes without being destroyed and attains perfection through its union with the intelligible. To Ibn Sina's second objection, that is, the changing of one thing into another requires a common matter, Mulla Sadra answers that the thing needs not be material; in other words it needs not be like a corporeal form in matter or like an accident that depends on the subject. The thing must only be connected to matter and Mulla Sadra admits the connection of the substance of the intellect, namely the soul, with the material substance, and he accepts its relation with matter and nature. For when the ignorant soul is united with the intelligible forms and becomes knowing it will be definitely connected to nature.

### **8. 2. The Answer to the Second Argument**

Ibn Sina's second argument comes in the form of an exceptive syllogism, so that if two things after unity with each other exist, then both must be distinct and separate. Mulla Sadra denies the relation between the antecedent and consequent of this exceptive syllogism, for there are concepts which may have numerous meanings but one existence. For example, the concepts animal and rational have two different and separate meanings, whereas both concepts have one existence in man.

### **8. 3. The Answer to the Third Argument**

Ibn Sina explains that if the soul while intellection were united with the intelligible form, it should not accept other forms, while we intuitively find it accepts other forms. Mulla Sadra's answer to this objection is that, unlike Ibn Sina's and other Peripatetics' view, the soul at the beginning of its creation is not immaterial or spiritual. Mulla Sadra offers his philosophical principle that "The soul is corporeal in creation but spiritual in subsistence." Therefore, according to Mulla Sadra's view the soul at the beginning of its creation which is added to the matter of the body is a corporeal form (like the sensible and imaginary forms) rather than an intellectual or immaterial form. Ibn Sina following the Greek philosophers including Aristotle holds that the soul at the beginning of its creation is immaterial, and by attaching itself to the body forms a unit called man. But Mulla Sadra argues without the



intermediary of the perfections and the developments of the body's matter it is impossible to form a unique corporeal species like man from intellectual form and corporeal matter. More importantly he holds this "is the most impossible and the most horrible trouble." According to him, there should be a proportion between the form and matter, that is, if the form is immaterial, its matter should also be immaterial in kind, and if the form is material the matter should also be purely material. For according to him "the relation of form to matter is equal to the relation of the actualising differentia to the proximate genus." The soul at the beginning of its creation is a corporeal form of the beings of the natural world, but it has the potentiality to move gradually towards the divine world. In short, the soul is a corporeal form which also has the preparation to receive the intellectual forms, and there is no incompatibility between the actuality of the forms and the soul's acceptance of the perfection. For as was mentioned before, change is of two kinds: sometimes the thing loses its actuality to accept another actuality (doffing and putting on) and sometimes it comes to perfection while retaining all its identity. Here Mulla Sadra's answer to Ibn Sina may be understood better. Ibn Sina had argued that if the soul which is an immaterial form were united with the intelligibles which are also immaterial, it should no longer receive other intellectual forms. Mulla Sadra answers if the form were purely immaterial it would not receive other forms, but if it is corporeal like the soul, it must accept other intellectual forms.

Moreover, considering Ibn Sina's objection that there is no faculty in the essence of the form to receive the things, Mulla Sadra states the form also can receive subsequent actualities. He argues as the different kinds of the simple species in a deep intellectual analysis have genus and differentia, and though simple their differentia is implied in their genus, form which accepts the subsequent perfections also has the power to accept the perfections.

#### **8. 4. The Answer to the Fourth Argument**

Ibn Sina has already said that forms are different from each other; therefore, if the soul is united with them, it must differ from itself. Mulla Sadra answers the soul after union with a form numerically it does not become different from itself, but it differs in respect of perfection and imperfection. In other words, although the soul retains its identity, the degree of the existence of its essence

changes, and its existence becomes more perfect, virtuous and noble.

However, Mulla Sadra rejects the three points proposed by Ibn Sina about the rational soul and the two meanings of intelligence (the soul's perceiving faculty and the intelligible form). From the viewpoint of Mulla Sadra it is impossible the soul could be rational at the beginning, for it is still in the labyrinth of the material intellect. How can such an existent which at the beginning has only the potentiality to perceive and understand be intelligent? In regard of the two meanings of the intelligence, the first meaning or the perceiving faculty, either in the sense of the soul's preparation or an essence empty of impressions and intelligible forms, can never be one with the actual intellect. For what is potential can never be actual. Otherwise, we should admit that one thing in itself is both potential and actual and both ignorant and knowing which is absurd. The second meaning of the intelligence is that the intelligible form is one with the actual intelligence. According to Ibn Sina the soul is the perceiver of that intelligible form. Mulla Sadra here also objects how can the substance of the soul which has no intelligence perceive or understand an intellectual form that is essentially different and has a separate existence? Ibn Sina himself admits that the soul at the beginning is a material intelligence and only has the potentiality to perceive and understand. Evidently such an existent in essence cannot perceive the intelligible forms. Moreover, Mulla Sadra holds that the intelligible form irrespective of other things in its essence is the intelligence, the intellect, and the intelligible, and the soul through its union with this intelligible form acquires knowledge and intelligence.

### **9. The Arguments of the Union of the Intellect and the Intelligible**

Mulla Sadra and his followers have offered many arguments for the union of the intellect and the intelligible. To mention but a few examples, Mulla Hadi al-Sabzawari in his commentary on *Asfar* offers six arguments, and Allamah Tabatabaie gives some other arguments different from Mulla Sadra's ones. Here we refer only to two of Mulla Sadra's arguments.

### **9.1. The First Argument**

The Peripatetic philosophers hold that the soul at the beginning of its life is ignorant and lives the stage of potential intelligence. They further explain that the soul then meets with the intellectual forms, namely the intelligibles, and by its perceiving them acquires knowledge. Mulla Sadra here asks how could the soul which in this stage is no more than a passive faculty perceive the intellectual forms? Because the Peripatetics deny the substantial motion, they cannot answer that the soul in its substantial motion and by receiving the intelligible forms acquires knowledge. Mulla Sadra asks what makes the soul leave its state of potentiality? If the intellectual forms which are luminous and immaterial entities were not united with the soul, the soul would have remained in the same state of potentiality and ignorance, for the soul's essence did not change nor did it perceive the intelligible forms that lead to its knowledge. But Mulla Sadra does not meet with such a problem. For him perception is the one with the union of the soul with the intelligible forms. The substance of the soul by moving substantially in its essence unites with the intelligible forms, which are luminous beings and leads the soul's knowledge, and thus the soul travels the stages of its perfection. He writes:

How does that passive faculty perceive the intellectual form? Does it perceive it by its essence, which is empty of the intellectual forms? I wonder how can an empty, ignorant, and dark essence unenlightened by any intellectual light perceive a luminous intellectual form which in its essence is purely intelligible? If it said it perceives it by its essence, how can an empty, ignorant, and blind essence perceive the intellectual form and how can the blind eye see or observe? (6, V: 3, p. 318).

### **9. 2. The Second Argument**

The second argument is known as the correlation argument which Mulla Sadra offers in *Asfar* and *Al-Mashair*. We first explain it as it comes in *Asfar* and then we will cite it directly from *Al-Mashair*. The argument in *Asfar* is based on certain points.

1. The forms of things are of two kinds. The first kind is those forms whose existence is dependent on matter, position, place, time, quantity, quality, etc. These forms are not intelligible by

essence, and if sometimes they are called intelligible, they are intelligible by accident. The second kind is forms which are independent of matter, position, place, time, etc. and these forms are intelligible by essence or in actuality. Therefore, the intelligible is either intelligible by accident or intelligible by essence. The former is the objective form of a thing in the external, and the latter is the immaterial intellectual form which is dependent on the mind.

2. According to Mulla Sadra, all philosophers agree that the existence of the actual intelligible form in itself and for the intellect is one and the same. This means the essence of the intelligible form is identical with its existence for the intellect.

3. 'Being intellected' is ever inseparable from the actual intelligible, that is, the intellected form does not have an existence apart from the very aspect of being intellected. Mulla Sadra emphasises that this 'being intellected' is not like mobility or the heat for the body. For whenever we ignore the mobility or the heat of the body, mobility and the heat no longer pertain to the body but the body itself remains as it was, whereas if 'being intellected' is denied to the actual intelligible nothing will remain of it. We can conclude that the aspect of the essence of the actual intelligible is the very of 'being intellected'.

4. The philosophers divide the existent into the one and the many. One of the traits of multiplicity is otherness. Otherness in turn is either essential or nonessential. The essential otherness is the difference between two things because of their essence, which is called opposition. Opposition—the impossibility of co-presence of two entities in one place, in one aspect and at one time—is divided into four kinds: correlation, contrariety, privation and possession, and contradiction. The correlation opposition is two opposite things, both existential and are conceived in relation to the each other. Allamah Tabatabaie writes:

One of the properties pertaining to correlation is that there is a parity between the correlatives in respect of existence and non-existence, potentiality and actuality. Accordingly, if one of them is existent the other is also necessarily existent and if one of them is non-existent, the other is also necessarily non-existent. Furthermore, when one of them is in the state of actuality, or when it is in the state of potentiality, the other is

also necessarily such. It follows from this that they are concomitants and none of them precedes the other, neither in the mind nor in external reality (11, p. 150).

Considering the four points mentioned above, the intelligible and the intellect must be correlative. How can one of the two correlatives exist while the other does not exist? As was said already, the same thing that in essence and irrespective of external things is intelligible in actuality, according to the law of correlation is also intellect in actuality. The two correlative things are equal in existence and the degree of their existence. If one of them is actual, the other must be actual, and if one of them is potential, the other must be potential, too. If one of them occupies a certain rank, say the world of spiritual realities, the other will be in the same rank. Therefore, intellecting faculty (*'aqiliyyah*) and 'being intellectured' (*maquliyyah*) are inextricable from each other, and if 'being intellectured' of one thing is understood independent of any other thing, intellecting faculty will certainly be understood, too. In consequence, on the basis of the principle of correlation the actual intelligible is also the actual intellect, as the actual intellect is nothing other than the actual intelligible.

What was explained above is the well-known argument of correlation in *Asfar* for the union of the intellect and the intelligible. Mulla Sadra also explains this argument in *Al-Mashair*:

Every perceptible form, whether it is intelligible or sensible, is united in its existence with the existence of its perceiver on the basis of the argument that Allah has conferred on us. That is, the existence and 'being intellectured' of every perceptible form including the intellectual are one with its existence for its perceiver, in the sense that it is impossible to suppose the intellectual form has a kind of existence not perceptible to its the perceiver (= the intellect); otherwise it will not be what it is.

Having said that, we may conclude the existence of that form cannot be different from the existence of its perceiver. Moreover, the relation of 'being intellectured' and 'intellecting faculty' occurs to these two existence, not like the relation of father and son, the king and the state, and

other correlated things for which the relation is occurred after the existence of the essence. Otherwise the existence of that form would not be one with its 'being intellected', and this is contrary to what we supposed already.

Accordingly, the intelligible form in itself and disregarding other things is both intelligible and subject of intellection, for 'being intellected' could not exist without subject of intellection as it is the rule with the two correlatives, and because we assumed its independence from other things, it is intelligible by essence.

Moreover, the subject here is an essence that understands the intelligible things, and it is understood from the arguments that "their intelligible forms are united with their perceivers", and this is no other than what we assumed already. So it becomes clear and evident from what we said that the existence of every intellect must be united with its intelligible, which is our intended point (7, p. 28).

The philosophers after Mulla Sadra hold that the correlation argument is the most important argument for the union of the intellect and the intelligible. This argument has been much discussed and debated even by the followers and teachers of the Transcendent Philosophy. One of the opponents of this argument is Hakim Sabzawari, the Iranian propagator of Mulla Sadra's philosophy in the thirteenth century A H. He as was mentioned offers six arguments for the union of the intellect and the intelligible but about the correlation argument writes "The argument of correlation which was followed by Sadr al-Mutaalihin in *Al-Mashair* and other books for this point is inadequate" (10, p.66). In another place he states "It is true that Sadr al-Mutaalihin has argued for the union of the intellect and the intelligible in knowing others on the basis of the equality of the two correlatives in *al-Mashaier* and other books, but I believe he could not prove the intended point in that way" (Ibid, p. 35).

Allamah Tabatabaie on the invalidity of the correlation argument writes "Indeed correlation is one of the kinds of opposition that is essential otherness, and such a thing does not happen in a thing as one thing" (6, pp. 313-314). Allamah in his two philosophical works *Bidayat al-Hikmah* and *Nahayat al-Hikmah* in his discussion

of the union of the intellect and the intelligible does not speak at all of the correlation argument. In answer to the critique of Allamah, we may say there is correlation between two titles of 'intellecting faculty' and 'being intellectured'. But Mulla Sadra's point is that in intellection the intellect is united with the intelligible, and from this one immaterial existent we abstract the two titles of 'intellecting faculty' and 'being intellectured', as in regard of Allah's knowledge of Himself we say the Essence of Allah is one but we abstract the two titles 'knower' and 'being known', and at the same time we admit that there is correlation between these two. Therefore, the impossibility of union pertains to the union of the two titles of 'intellecting faculty' and 'being intellectured' and also 'knower' and 'being known'. There is no correlation in one immaterial thing which is both the intellect and the intelligible and also an essence like God Who is both knower and known.

## **10. Conclusion**

We have considered the arguments of Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra respectively against and for the union of the intellect and the intelligible. In fact, this principle besides other principles and theories can determine the weight of each of these two great philosophers in the history of Islamic thought. Perhaps we can say two reasons prevented Ibn Sina from admitting the union of the intellect and the intelligible. First, the Peripatetics before him had not explained the question well. This could be understood from Ibn Sina's objections to this principle. This is the reason why Mulla Sadra to answer Ibn Sina's objections tried first to explain the introductory issues and principles, including the kinds of union, in order to clarify the form of the question for the seekers of truth. Second, Ibn Sina believed the relation of the soul and the intelligibles is of the kind of the relation between the subject and accidents. If we count knowledge one of the psychic qualities, which are of the kinds of accident, no longer can we accept the union of the intellect and the intelligible. But Mulla Sadra does not count knowledge one of the categories and argues knowledge is higher and nobler than that it could be a quality or accident in kind. For him knowledge is of the kind of existence, and on this basis he answers the objections made to the union of the intellect and the intelligible, just like the question of motion. Because the

philosophers before Mulla Sadra held that motion is of the kind of quiddity, they could not solve its problems. But when Mulla Sadra announced that motion is of the kind of existence, he was able to solve the problems not only of the substantial motion but also motion in the accidents.

Despite all this, Ibn Sina's contribution to the discussion of the union of the intellect and the intelligible should not be disregarded. As was mentioned, in his book *Al-Mabda wal Maad* he goes half of the way leading to the union of the intellect and the intelligible. Perhaps this little contribution has guided Mulla Sadra to identify this principle. Nevertheless, detailed discussions and argumentative demonstration of the principle of the union remains one of the especial contributions of Mulla Sadra.

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