

# Mulla Sadra's Theory of Substantial Motion<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

One of the most important philosophical theories of Mulla Sadra is substantial motion, which has greatly influenced other philosophical discussions. In this article, first we refer to the historical background of the theory before Mulla Sadra, namely in Peripatetic Philosophy, and then deal with Mulla Sadra's innovations, such as transferring the discussion of motion from natural philosophy to metaphysics, explaining clearly substantial motion, stating the five important arguments for the theory, and finally showing its main philosophical results like the explanation of God's creation, the reality of time, origination of the material world, the relation of the originated to pre-eternal being, the unity of the world, and proving God's existence and the Resurrection.

**Key words:** Mulla Sadra, Transcendental Philosophy, motion, substantial motion, metaphysics, Peripatetic Philosophy.

## 1. Introduction

One of the innovative views of Mulla Sadra is the theory of substantial motion in which he presents a new interpretation of motion

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in general, which differs considerably from Aristotelian theory. Mulla Sadra's words in defense of substantial motion in the frame of Neoplatonic context deserve careful consideration. Emphasizing the importance of the theory, followers of this philosopher today believe that it affects other philosophical discussions greatly. It can be said that this theory is one of the basic principles of Mulla Sadra's ontology and cosmology; in this theory, he offers a new philosophical explanation of natural and metaphysical discussions, such as the temporal origination of the world, continual creation, the relation of the changeable to the unchanging, the relation of temporal contingent to the pre-eternal, the relation of the body to the soul, and resurrection of the body. In fact, the theory of substantial motion is a connecting link of the Origin and the End. By explaining the theory and its arguments, we analyze its metaphysical results.

## 2. Historical Background

Pre-Socratic philosophers have paid careful attention to the problem of stability and change. Considering the criterion of acceptance or rejection of change, we can divide these ancient philosophers into two groups. On the one side, Heraclitus says that nothing is stable, and all things are in motion constantly. He holds that the only stable thing in this world is that every thing is constantly changing. He likens the world to a river whose water is ever flowing and argues that everything that is seen exists from one view and does not exist from another view. He says, "In fact the one only exists in the tension of opposites: This tension is essential to the unity of the one ... We must know that war is common to all and strife is justice, and that all things come into being and pass away through strife." (Copleston: 1962, 1: 39-40) On the other side, Parmenides and his followers deny any kind of change and hold that becoming or change is illusion. (Ibid: 48) From an intellectual perspective, change and motion are impossible. Zeno, a disciple of Parmenides, offers some arguments to prove that change is an illusion and is even impossible. (Ibid: 55-58; Aristotle: 1984, *Physics*: 239B)

The opposition of these two currents of thought leads to this paradox that if a thing changes, it cannot remain the same thing, but if it keeps its identity, it cannot change. It is quite clear that in the first

case, the subject of motion and change will not endure, and in the second case, if a thing keeps its identity, no change occurs. So, either change is accepted and identity is rejected, or vice versa. Both mentioned currents of thoughts face this dilemma, and each one has chosen a side and admitted its corollaries. Heraclitus accepted changing at the price of denying the identity of a thing, but Parmenides kept the identity and stability of things at the price of rejecting any changing or motion.

It is obvious that common sense does not completely accept either position. Accepting such a position, Aristotle believes that some things remain as they are while they change accidentally. Accordingly he distinguishes between two kinds of change. The first change does not allow a thing to remain as it is when that change occurs. He considers this change an instantaneous or substantial change and calls it “generation and corruption.” The second is the change that by its occurrence the thing stays as it is. Such a change is gradual and is called motion. So motion is a gradual change in time.

Aristotle argues that every kind of motion has an origin and an end; he contends that if all potentiality actualizes, the motion becomes rest (**Aristotle: *Physics*: 224B**). From this point, he reaches his famous definition of motion: “Motion is the first perfection for that which is in a state of potentiality qua something in potentiality” (**Ibid: 201A**). Therefore, the meaning of motion is understood by considering the relation of a potential and an actual thing.

In general, motion is determined with regard to its end. Its beginning, however, is either from that which is the opposition of the end of motion, or from middle limit which is situated between the end of motion and its opposition. For example, if something becomes hot, it must have first been cold or at least warm. If a thing becomes dark, it must have first been white or a colour closer to white. Accordingly, every motion occurs in two oppositions, one of which takes the place of the other owing to motion. It is clear that, because the beginning and the end of motion are opposed to each other, they must be under a common genus. For this reason, the numbers of summa genera of motions should be equal to summa genera that accept opposition. Aristotle explains that, from the ten categories, only three (quantity, quality, and place) accept opposition; because categories are not reducible to each other or to one common

category, motions that occur in the three mentioned categories are also not reducible to each other or one motion (Aristotle: III, 200 B; 201 A).

Aristotle states that the beginning of each of the three motions is a privation of a quality or a position, just as the end of these motions is possession of that quality or position. So these two, namely, privation and possession, must belong to a subject that is fixed when motion occurs (Ibid: I, 7). For this reason, he does not accept the occurrence of motion in the category of substance, for no substance has any opposition. As a result, any substantial change into another substance cannot be a gradual change or a kind of motion; rather it is an instantaneous change or of the kind of generation and corruption.

Aristotle's followers have accepted his theory and even Ibn Sina has added "the motion in position." Consequently, the earlier philosophers, belonging to the period after Aristotle, have argued that the categories in which motion occurs are four: quantity, quality, place, and position. They have denied substantial motion, i.e., the occurrence of change in substance. Ibn Sina's main argument is that motion requires a fixed subject in which motion occurs. If substance itself changed, there would remain no fixed subject for motion, for the actualization of motion depends on a fixed subject that endures as long as motion continues (Ibn Sina: 1405, 123-4). Following Aristotle, he holds that the occurrence of change in the forms of things is in an instantaneous way. In consequence, the Peripatetic philosophers divide all existents into three groups:

Absolute, fixed existents that are immaterial.

Those existents that do not change gradually; however, instantaneous changes, namely, generation and corruption, sometimes occur to them. All material substances are of this group.

Those existents subject to gradual change or motion. They are the four accidents: quantity, quality, place, and position.

According to this attitude, motion or change takes place only in the exterior of the world of nature and does not penetrate its interior or substance. The substance of a thing remains stable in time, except on certain occasions in which it is instantaneously corrupted and another substance is generated.

Defending the theory of substantial motion, Mulla Sadra successfully challenges the earlier philosophers' belief in this regard and provides some arguments to prove the theory. From his point of

view, the entire world of nature is in continual change and motion, and there is no fixed corporeal substance. This theory has had considerable results in metaphysical discussions.

### 3. The Source of the Theory of Substantial Motion in Mulla Sadra's Statement

Mulla Sadra refers to some of the sources of his theory of substantial motion that are mentioned here.

**A. The Quran and Prophetic traditions:** Introducing the Quran and traditions as his main and most important sources, Mulla Sadra says, "The essences of all material, celestial, elemental bodies and souls are renewing, and they have fluid existence. This issue has become clear to me by meditating on the verses of the holy Quran" (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 3, 110). He also says, "This speech that renewal of substance is a new doctrine in which no philosopher ['wise person' or *hakim*] has believed so far is false, for God is the First Wise One [al-hakim al-awwal] who makes this clear in His Book, and He is the most Truthful Wise" (Ibid).

In *Asfar*, *Arshiyyah*, and *Asrar al-Ayat*, he refers to some verses of the Quran on substantial motion (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 3, 111; 1361, 230; 1363, 64; 1360, 86). In *Risalat al-Huduth*, after reciting some verses he says, "Among Prophetic traditions, there are many statements that indicate the renewal of substances and the transformation of natures." Subsequently, he mentions some examples in this regard (Mulla Sadra: 1378, 61).

**B. Uthulugia:** Mulla Sadra states that earlier philosophers and mystics have believed in the theory of substantial motion and discussed it in their books. He then refers to two paragraphs from Plotinus' *Uthulugia*, which, according to his viewpoint, express the aforementioned theory. The first paragraph is as follows: "Every body, whether it is composite or non-composite, and even if it has no soul or spirit, is not stable, for the body by nature is flowing constantly. If all bodies of the world have no soul, then they will be demolished" (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 3, 111).

Mulla Sadra concludes that all natures are essentially changing and renewing, and what remains stable are souls and spirits. The second paragraph is as follows:

If the soul is a physical thing like other bodies, it will inevitably be renewing and flowing, and this causes all things to be reduced to prime matter or *hyle*. If things are changed into *hyle*, the entire existence will perish, for *hyle* does not have a form, while the latter is its cause and the cause of its actualization. Accordingly, if the entire existence is purely bodies, the world will perish, and this is impossible. (Ibid)

C) **Zeno:** Quoting Shahrestani's *Melal va Nehal*, Mulla Sadra mentions the following passage which he believes is a proof for substantial motion.

Zeno, one of the greatest divine philosophers, argues for substantial motion where he says, "Existents subsist and perish. Their subsistence is by renewing of their forms. And they are perishing, because the first form is perished when another form is renewed." Zeno also says, "Perishing is indispensable for form and *hyle*." (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 3, 112; 1378, 62)

D) **Muhyi al-Din Ibn 'Arabi:** In many cases Mulla Sadra has quoted Ibn 'Arabi about the discussion of substantial motion. For example, he writes:

Confirming our view about substantial motion are Ibn 'Arabi's words in *Fusus al-Hikam*, saying, "One of the wonders of the world is that man is continuously developing but because of the delicate veil and the similarity of forms is unaware of it. As God says, '*They were given something resembling it*'" (2:25). In *Futuhāt*, he says that all beings are in continual motion in this world and in the Hereafter, because creation without a creator is impossible. The Essence of Truth continuously owns infinite words and attentions and God's words that '*what is with God shall endure*' (16:96) points to the eternity of God's intellectual words, which are eternal because of His eternity, although their bodily idols are infinite and perishable.' (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 3, 112-123)

#### 4. The Place of the Theory of Substantial Motion

Following Aristotle, Ibn Sina mentions the discussion of motion in physics. Their justification is that motion is an accident of the natural body, and because the subject of physics is the natural body to which motion and rest correspond, the discussion of motion must be dealt with in physics or the traditional philosophy of nature (Ibn Sina:1405, 1, 38).

Conversely, Mulla Sadra considers this discussion to be a metaphysical one, and deals with it under the title, “Division of Existence into the Unchanging and the Flowing.” The reason of changing this position is that from meditating on substantial motion Mulla Sadra has concluded that motion is basically an analytical accident of the renewing existence rather than its external accident; i.e., motion is not added to the renewing existence from the exterior (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 3, p. 74). Accordingly, contrary to accidental motions, in substantial motion the moved and motion are not separate from one another. Rather, a changing thing in every instant is other than itself in former and preceding instants, so motion and the moved are one thing: the renewing existence (Tabatabaei: 1410, 3, 69; Mulla Sadra, 1410, 3, 180).

From Mulla Sadra’s viewpoint, all beings are divided into two kinds. 1. Stable beings that have no dimension of time and cannot be measured by the criterion of time, and so they are not changed and transformed. 2. Renewing beings that are in a state of flux forever and have the dimension of time. Accordingly, in a fundamental division, existence is either fixed or flowing, which is like the other divisions of existence into cause and effect, one and many, potential and actual, temporal and eternal, and other divisions. These divisions are considered to be the essential accidents of existence qua existence; therefore they should be discussed in first philosophy. On this basis, Mulla Sadra has moved the position of ‘motion’ from physics to metaphysics. (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 3, 20)

## 5. Arguments for Proving Substantial Motion

In many places in *Asfar*, Mulla Sadra presents some proofs for substantial motion. Three of these proofs are based on the relation of substance and accident, and the fifth is based on the reality of time. They are as follows:

**The First Argument:** Mulla Sadra’s first argument is based on the notion that the nature of substance is the cause for its accidents. He does not mention this argument under the title of “an argument to prove substantial motion;” rather, he presents it as “the relation of the changeable to the unchanging.” He holds that in relating a changeable affair to an unchanging one, the nature of a substance must inevitably

be fluid and renewing in essence so that motion would be the essential attribute of its existence. By saying that the cause of a changeable is changeable and that the chain of these changeable causes cannot be infinite, he maintains the chain of changeable causes and effects must necessarily lead to a cause that is changeable by essence. Also, since the cause of accidental motions is substantial nature itself, it is essentially renewing and fluid. The reason that the cause of all accidental motions is substantial nature is that these mentioned motions are either natural or voluntary or by constraint. The natural motions are caused by the nature of things; motions by constraint also lead to nature, and voluntary motions are achieved by employing nature. Therefore, the immediate cause of all motions is substantial nature. The conclusion of Sadra's assertions is that substantial nature is the reason for the motion of accidents, and the cause of the changeable is changeable; thus, the substantial nature is changeable. **(Ibid: 61-64)**

Mulla Sadra presents this argument in *Shawahid al-Rububiya*: "If nature does not own the state of flux and renewing in its essence, then giving motion to others through nature will not be possible for it, since it is impossible for a changeable to come into existence from a fixed thing" **(Mulla Sadra: 1375, 324)**.

We may classify this argument in the following way.

The substantial nature of things is the immediate natural cause of the accidental motion of things.

The immediate natural cause of every motion is changeable.

Conclusion: The substantial nature of things is changeable.

According to A, the immediate cause of every motion including motion in quality, quantity, place, and position is the substantial nature of things; no motion is caused by the immaterial agent immediately. Although Ibn Sina severely opposes the theory of substantial motion, he agrees with this principle. Ibn Sina in its justification argues that nature is the cause of motion but the change that occurs in nature is not essential. That is, despite being stable, substantial nature is characterized by the attribution of change because of the elements that are imposed from the outside. These external elements differ according to the kind of motion, whether it is natural, voluntary or by constraint. For example, in natural motions achieving different degrees of proximity or remoteness to the end, in motions by



constraint meeting obstacles and weak or powerful preparatory causes, and in voluntary motions continuous generation of specific partial wills in every limit of distance cause a change and evolution in accidents. Thus, the substantial nature which is the internal cause of accidental motion is the incomplete cause of these motions and is fixed and unchanging by itself, while the complete cause of these motions which is changeable and renewing is the whole substantial nature and the external events and elements of accidents. When it is said, “the cause of a changeable thing is changeable”, by cause is intended the complete cause and not the incomplete one (**Mulla Sadra: 1410, 3, 65; Tabatabaei: 1362, 208**). But Mulla Sadra does not agree with Ibn Sina’s justification and says that the change and renewing of those external elements will finally lead to either a nature that is changeable and renewing in essence or to an infinite regress. The infinite regress is impossible, so it leads to a nature that is changeable and renewing in essence. (**Ibid**)

According to B also if the immediate natural cause of a thing is stable, its effect will also be stable and if it is changeable, its effect will also be changeable. This premise is approved by the principle of general resemblance of cause and effect. According to this principle, since motion is something gradual, its immediate cause must also be gradual, for assuming the stability of the immediate cause of motion necessitates either the disobeying of effect from the cause or realization of all the assumed parts of motion together, which contradicts the existence of motion. Evidently, both consequences are false, so the antecedent that assumes the stability and lack of changeability of the substantial nature is also false. Sabzawari puts this argument in verse as follows:

God’s emanation stops if nature is stable;  
How does the stable relate to the changing?

He further explains, “Deviation of effect from the complete cause is not acceptable; so, if a stable thing is the cause of a changing thing, it will necessitate that all parts and limits of the changing thing be realized at once. Thus, the assumed renewing and changing thing would not be renewing but stable, which is paradoxical. Therefore, the substantial nature must necessarily be renewing and changing, not in its quiddity but in its existence. (**Sabzawari: 1366, 249**)

**The Second Argument:** The difference between this argument and

the previous one is that in the first argument the emphasis was on the causal relationship between substantial nature and motion of accidents, whereas in the second argument the emphasis is on the mere relation of accident to substance. As is known, the viewpoint of Mulla Sadra and his followers concerning the relation of substance to accident is different from that of Aristotle and Ibn Sina. According to Ibn Sina, the existence of accident is existence-in-itself-for-something-else, while Mulla Sadra believes that the existence of accident is a subordinate existence, in the sense that its existence-in-itself is the very existence-in-something-else. Thus, the accidents of any substance are the subordinates of the existence of that substance and are existent by its existence. So, accidents have no existential independence. Their relation can be compared to the relation of matter and form. Matter and form exist by one existence. Form is a cause for matter in the sense that the existence of matter is dependent on the existence of form. Here, there is no duality between cause and effect. Similarly, the substance and accident exist by one existence and the causality of substance for accidental motions does not contain any duality. It is more correct to say that accidents are the rays, manifestations and ranks of substance, and it is clear that the ray or manifestation of a thing is not separate from it and they all have one existence. Hence, since accident is a manifestation and rank of substance it follows substance in all precepts. Accordingly, if an accident is changeable, so must be the substance.

Thus, accepting motion in an accident is accepting motion in an existent such that accident is that existent's manifestation or its rank. Motion in this existence means motion in substance and accident (Mulla Sadra: 3. 101-102; Tabatabaei: 1362, 208).

It is possible to formulate this argument as follows:

The existence of accident is as a ray or rank of the existence of substance. The former has an existential dependence on the latter.

Any change that occurs in rank of a thing is a sign of change in the thing itself.

Conclusion: Motion in accidents is a sign of motion in substance.

**The Third Argument:** Mulla Sadra in his final view considers accidents and characteristics of a thing in existence to be among the ranks and rays of the existence of a substance. He contends that every corporeal being has an existence that is specified, determined and

individuated by itself and that the accidents of every being are the signs of its individuation (*tashakhkhus*). His predecessors believed that the accidents and characteristics of a thing are the cause of its individuation and that things in their specification and individuation need their characteristics and accidents. However, from the perspective of the fundamentality of existence these characteristics and accidents are not causes of individuation but rather signs of individuation. Sadra says, “Each corporeal substance has a kind of existence that requires some necessary accidents inseparable from that existence. ... Most philosophers hold that these necessary accidents are the cause of the individuation of the existence of that thing, whereas they are the signs of its individuation rather than its agents” (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 3, 103). Therefore, different beings are individuated, specified, and differentiated according to their existence; it is because of this individuation of identity that their characteristics are different, and not vice-versa. That is why every being has only one unique identity, which has different manifestations.

On this basis, the accidents of a thing are the ranks and rays of the existence of a substance. Their existence is unique and they have personal unity. As this personal unity is an instance of continuous substance, it is also an instance of the various accidents, such as quality, quantity, place, and position. However, it is impossible for a substance to remain stable while there is change in its accidents (*Ibid*).

The difference between this argument and the second one is that in the second argument emphasis is placed on the subordination of the existence of accidents to substance, while in this argument emphasis is placed on accidents as signs for the individuation of substance, unlike the assertion by earlier philosophers that accidents are the cause and agent of individuation. According to this theory, what exists externally is the unique specified being from which the different accidental and substantial concepts are abstracted and if a motion is detected, it is related to this unique being. Of course, since these two arguments are based upon the external unity of substance and accident, they are very close to each other and can even be reduced to one argument.

**The Fourth Argument:** On the basis of the impossibility of the separation of *hyle* from form, Mulla Sadra presents another argument: The change and transformation of material substances are obvious; even those who deny *substantial* motion agree that material

substances change, although they consider this change to be instantaneous rather than gradual and to belong to the category of generation and corruption rather than motion. But substantial transformation and change cannot be categorized as generation and corruption, because such change necessitates that matter remain formless for at least an instant, for “generation and corruption” means that a matter loses one form and obtains another; as a result, in the interval between losing the previous form and gaining the next one, that matter remains formless, while actualization of matter is through form and it cannot exist separately or without form. When the impossibility of instantaneous change of substantial forms or generation and corruption is proven, the change must necessarily be gradual, and this is motion (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 3, 177-178).

In other places Mulla Sadra expresses the same argument; for example, in *Asfar* he says, “If there is no common boundary between water and air which is the warmest instance of water and the coldest of air, it will require that in an instance, that is when water transforms into air, *hyle* stays formless, which is impossible. This is a point upon which all philosophers agree and can also be proved by demonstration” (Ibid: 4, 274).

The following formation may be suitable for this argument:

The substantial nature is changeable.

The change of substantial nature is either instantaneous or gradual.

The change of substantial nature is not instantaneous and of the kind of generation and corruption.

Conclusion: The change of substantial nature is gradual and of the kind of motion.

Premise A has sensible evidence and no realistic person denies it. Premise B, an exclusive disjunctive proposition, has an analytic truth. Premise C is true because if the change of substantial nature or specific form were instantaneous and were of the kind of generation and corruption, it would necessitate that a matter remain formless for at least an instance, which is impossible. When the impossibility of instantaneous change of substantial form, or generation and corruption, is proven then this change must necessarily be considered as gradual, and gradual change is the very motion. (Ibid: 3, 177- 178)

**The Fifth Argument:** Mulla Sadra presents another argument to prove substantial motion on the basis of his view about “the reality of

time.” On the basis of the theory of substantial motion, he considers time as the fourth dimension of the body. In his view, temporality of bodies is a sign of a kind of extension in their existence, and time is the extent and quantity of corporeal nature, considering its renewing and flux. Therefore, corporeal nature has two extensions: one is gradual temporal extension and the other is instantaneous spatial extension. If corporeal nature has no spatial extension in its essence, it will not find quantitative determination with respect to mathematical body; in the same way if it does not have temporal extension in its essence, it will not find temporal determination. So, since corporeal nature, i.e. material substance is temporal it must be moving and flowing essentially. (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 7, 290)

Mulla Sadra’s demonstration is as follows: “No doubt, as the occurrence of a thing in time and in the category of time—whether by essence or by accident—involves the way of the existence of that thing, the occurrence of a thing in place and in the category of place—whether by essence or by accident—is the way of the existence of that thing. So, it is impossible that a spatial and temporal thing in its external existence and personal identity be separate from time and place and its existence be realized so that time and place make no difference for it” (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 7, 290). This argument can be put into the following hypothetical syllogism:

Every corporeal substance has a temporal dimension.

Everything that has temporal dimension is gradual, changeable and in flux.

Conclusion: Every corporeal substance is gradual, changeable and in flux.

## 6. The Philosophical Results of the Theory of Substantial Motion

Mulla Sadra and his followers come to important conclusions from the theory of substantial motion in discussions of cosmology and psychology. Some of them are as follows:

### 6.1 Continual Creation

Muslim thinkers have interpreted the theory of “Continual Creation” in different ways. The atomist theory of Ash‘ari theologians is one example of its intellectual interpretation. Another example is

the renewal of existence (*tajaddod-e amthal*) of mystics. The theory of substantial motion is a philosophical interpretation of the theory of continual creation.

According to what Mulla Sadra has claimed in this regard every being in this world is essentially contingent, but its contingency is by virtue of need, i.e., existential dependence; on this basis it is non-existent by itself. Mulla Sadra considers worldly beings as dependent whose existence is their very dependence and if their dependence to their cause is cut for a moment, they will instantly perish due to their essential and existential need.

On the other hand, since according to the theory of substantial motion every material being is changing and renewing in its substance and its existence in every moment is different from that of the previous moment, God the Exalted endows a new existence every moment and His will is always in the process of a new creation. In the common point of these two questions, existential need of all things and God's continual emanation, the meaning of "New Creation" or "Continual Creation" emerges. The identity of the world in its essence and in every moment clearly shows its dependency. It shows that not only in appearance and exterior but also in its existence and identity the world is in a state of flux. Indeed the existence of the world is nothing but dependence. Mulla Sadra quotes this holy verse of the Quran to confirm his view: "*Every day He is engaged in some work*" (55:29) (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 7, 284).

## 6.2 Explaining the Reality of Time

By introducing the theory of substantial motion, Mulla Sadra presents a new explanation of time. Before him, there were different views regarding the reality of time. Some regarded it as illusory. On the contrary, some others believed in its external existence. Among these some considered it as substance and others as accident. But the common belief was that of Aristotle, who had said that time is the continuous non-static quantity that corresponded to body through motion. At the beginning, Mulla Sadra accepted this view, but later he disagreed with Aristotelians and raised this question: What kind of motion is time the extent? Aristotelians believed that time is the extent of axial motion of the heavenly sphere round itself, but Sadra believes

that it is the extent of substantial motion of the heavenly sphere (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 3, 123; 4, 220; 6, 304). Of course, in some cases he also considers time as every substantial motion and not only the substantial motion of the heavenly sphere (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 3, 126). In the next stage he regards time as the extent of nature, and not the extent of motion, for according to the theory of substantial motion nature or the corporeal substance is the very change and motion, and time is the extent of this nature which is renewing in its essence when its essential priority and posteriority is considered. Therefore, corporeal nature has two extensions: one is gradual and the other instantaneous. The former is time itself and the latter is the length and width or the spatial extension of the body (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 3, 140).

He adds that the relation of extent to extension is like the relation of specified to obscure things, which are united in existence while their concepts are different. Moreover, as continuation in three-dimensional geometrical form is not independent from continuation in the physical body, the continuation of time is not separate from the gradual continuation in renewing corporeal substance by essence (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 3, 141). So, time is among the analytical accidents of corporeal substance and does not possess any independent existence from the renewing corporeal substance.

### 6.3 Temporal Origination of the Material World

Philosophers and theologians before Mulla Sadra differed on the subject of temporal origination of the world. Theologians believed in temporal origination of the whole world on the basis of religious texts. On the contrary, according to the principle that “every material phenomenon is preceded by potentiality and time,” philosophers held that the material world has no beginning; rather it is pre-eternal in terms of time. They interpreted the concept of origination taken from religious texts as essential contingency or origination. Since the criterion for the need of a thing for a cause is essential contingency, they consider the precedence of a thing to essential contingency as essential origination and correspond it with the religious texts. They believe that all effects whether material or immaterial are contingent in essence. Also every material being comes into existence in time except for *hyle*, which is pre-eternal in terms of time. Therefore, in

addition to immaterial beings, all beings of the material world are also pre-eternal in terms of time. They say that this statement that the whole world has come into existence in time contradicts the divine emanation and grace. This interpretation, however, is not practically accepted by theologians so that it becomes one of three theories by which Ghazali excommunicates Farabi and Ibn Sina. The earlier philosophers' theory persuades not only theologians but also some later great philosophers like Mirdamad so that he suggests the theory of contingency through perpetual duration to solve this problem.

Mulla Sadra claims that by the theory of substantial motion he somehow explains the world's coming into existence in time in a way that is in agreement with both the religious texts and divine emanation and grace. On the basis of substantial motion he both accepts the essential and temporal contingency of the world and rejects the world's coming into existence in time in the sense that the whole world has a beginning in time. According to substantial motion all beings in the natural world are changing in essence and their parts are continually coming into existence and extinction. Thus the whole world like its parts is coming into existence in time (**Mulla Sadra: 1410, 7, 289-298**). Elsewhere he says, "Since there is no whole without its parts, so the world with all its parts including heavenly spheres, stars, simple things, and composite things, is contingent and finite, and everything in it in every moment is another thing and a new creature" (**Mulla Sadra: 1410, 7, 298; 1363, 64; 1361, 230; 1360, 63- 64**). One must not forget that what Mulla Sadra means by the world is the material world, for immaterial beings that are somehow among God's attributes and Lordly Essence are eternal (**Mulla Sadra: 1410, 3, 108**).

It is obvious that on the basis of this view it is not possible to imagine a beginning point for the world; indeed, there is no need to suppose so. Because this is true only if there exists a time separate and independent from the world and then the world comes into existence in a specific time. But since time is defined as the extent of the substance of a changing thing, and not something independent, it is not possible to discuss the beginning point of the world, which consists of a collection of bodily substances. In fact, the world is timeless in the same way that it is placeless. Temporality is something that can be attributed to the parts of the world and not to the whole world. Actually, attributing time and place to the whole world is a



kind of confusion in categories. It is as if one were to say that the world is up or down. Therefore, it is nonsense to discuss the temporal contingency and pre-eternity of the world.

However, Mulla Sadra is proud of his ability to bring together the idea of temporal contingency of the world and continuation of divine emanation. He believes that it is his innovation and no one before him has ever found it. Even mystics have not found it through intuition and inspiration; only according to divinely revealed religion do they accept temporal contingency of the world and the complete causality of God (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 6, 327; 1375, 296). Nevertheless, it seems that his statement is not a bringing together of the views of theologians and philosophers, and like the earlier philosophers' views, it disagrees with temporal contingency of the whole world, but agrees with temporal contingency of every material being separately. The only difference is that Mulla Sadra's explanation of time is different from that of the others already mentioned.

#### **6.4 Proving God's Existence**

One of the arguments presented to prove God's existence since Aristotle is the argument of movement. But this argument has different versions, some of which are more profound and exact than others. Obviously one can say Ibn Sina's version is more complete and exact than Aristotle's, and Mulla Sadra's version is more complete than Ibn Sina's.

According to substantial motion, Mulla Sadra offers a new philosophical explanation of teleology of the natural world; also he proves the need of the world in its original existence to a creator. Although Mulla Sadra uses expressions as those of Aristotle and Ibn Sina, he intends other meanings that are different from theirs.

Aristotle's argument of movement merely proves the existence of a God who is the end for the motion of the heavenly spheres' souls. Such an end causes joy inside the souls of heavenly spheres, and as a result, makes the spheres themselves move. This statement is consistent with the belief in the pre-eternity and independence of material substances, and as Aristotle holds, the world does not have any existential dependence on, or need to the First Mover. In fact Aristotle insists that the First Mover is not an existence- giver, but a

motion-giver.

The viewpoint of Ibn Sina is different from that of Aristotle regarding the relation between God and the world. Accepting that God is the creator, and the world has essential contingency, Ibn Sina explains the world in a way that it is emanated and kept by God in every instant.

Mulla Sadra accepts this view, but the difference between him and Ibn Sina is in the explanation of this philosophical truth. He believes that by denying the principle of substantial motion, Ibn Sina cannot prove and justify the way of permanent creation of accidents and substances in the natural world, whereas according to substantial motion, matter is being originated and created in every instant. Such being is impossible to come into existence by itself, for matter is essentially in the state of moving, and without doubt, any motion or moving thing needs a mover. Now if all the material world is in the state of flux and moves continuously, then the creation of the world is the same as giving it motion, for the creation of the world is identical with the creation of motion, and its creator and mover are the same.

So, the creation of motion is the creation of the material world. The mover or creator does not originate the motion separately and does not let it exist independently. Thus, the result of substantial motion is that an immaterial essence brings the material substance into existence incessantly, and all states, accidents and concomitants are moving and changing along with the moving material substance. This is permanent creation. In this regard, Mulla Sadra writes: "Renewing of motions is dependent on the renewing of the essences of the moving things, and accidents are subject to the substance in their changing and stability. Thus the material world along with all things in it becomes extinct at every instant, and it is in need of God to become existent again" (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 6, 47). In another place, Mulla Sadra clearly declares that according to substantial motion, the mover, in fact, is an existence-giver rather than motion-giver, i.e., He gives existence to a thing the essence of which is in a state of flux and renewal (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 3, 39).

Mulla Sadra believes that his argument of substantial motion not only proves the independency of the world upon the creator in its existence but also offers a new philosophical explanation for the teleology of the natural world and proves that the essences and

existences of all beings are the very flux and joy to reach the first source (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 2, 273- 274).

From this, Mulla Sadra concludes that the existents must have an essential goal; otherwise, it follows that the existence of joy and aspiration for finding God in their nature must be vain, whereas in the abode of existence, nothing subsists in vain (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 2, 201; 5, 204; 1363, 427).

### **6.5 The Relation of the Changeable to the Unchanging**

The relation of the changeable to an unchanging existent has been one of the difficulties during the history of philosophy, which occupied the minds of many philosophers. In this discussion, two suppositions have been accepted among philosophers: “The cause of the changeable is changeable, and the cause of the unchanging is unchanging as well.” There is no problem in the latter proposition; however, regarding the former, a dilemma is raised that if changing beings’ end in the essence of God, this requires His essence to be changeable too, and if those beings do not terminate in the First Principle, then an infinite regress is raised. Both consequents are impossible according to philosophical principles. Because of this, the problem of the relation of the changeable to the unchanging has remained unsolved until the time of the advent of Transcendental Philosophy.

Mulla Sadra says that by accepting substantial motion this problem is easily solved, for if motion for a thing is not essential, the thing needs a mover, which in turn must be a moving existent. However, if motion would be essential for the thing, then as it is essential, it does not need a cause; rather it is originated along with the origination of the thing itself. There is no separation between the thing and motion. Thus when we say, “A changing effect needs a changing cause” this is only true when we consider motion or change as something additional to the essence of things. If such a conception is true, then it should be said that a cause must create the effect first and originates motion afterwards. Contrary to this, the existents that are essentially changing and their existences are the same as change, in this case, their creations are the very creation of motion in them. Such existents if considered as existences-in-themselves are stable, but if

the relation of their supposed particles to each other is considered, they are changeable. The stability of such existents is the stability of their renewal. What the agent gives is their 'existences- in-themselves', and not their relative existence. Thus, considering its stability, the world of nature relates to the unchangeable cause, and its changing attribute originates changing things (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 3, 68; and 7, 285-292)

### **6.6 The Relation of the Originated to Pre-eternal Being**

The relation of the originated being to the Necessary Existent Who is pre-eternal by Himself, so that neither infinite regress occurs nor God's affection, has occupied the mind of Muslim philosophers who were not able to solve it. By accepting Mulla Sadra's theory of substantial motion, this problem is easily solved. For it was explained that according to substantial motion, the world of nature though renewing and changing is also fixed when its dependency upon its unchangeable cause is considered. Now we can say that from the very aspect of stability, the fixed being relates to the pre-eternal being, and its renewing and changing aspect causes the originated existents. Thus, a being that has two aspects, and renewing or changing is essential for it, is an intermediary between the originated and pre-eternal existent. (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 3, 68)

### **6.7 The Composition of Matter and Form by Way of Unification**

Some Muslim peripatetic philosophers believe the composition of matter and form is by way of annexation. Contrary to this belief, Mir Sadr Al-Din Dashtaki declares that this composition is by way of unification: Mulla Sadra prefers this to the viewpoint of the peripatetics and explains it according to the gradational unity of existence and substantial motion (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 3, 283).

Mulla Sadra's followers believe that explaining and understanding the reality of the composition by way of unification, in the material world, is only possible by accepting substantial motion and the essential renewal of things. Sadr Al-Din Dashtaki, though, acknowledges that this kind of composition could not explain and prove it clearly and correctly, due to the lack of awareness of the gradational unity of existence and the theory of substantial motion.

Thus, the composition of matter and form should be considered one of Mulla Sadra's innovations (Motahhari: 1375, 74- 76; Ashtiyani: 1360, 55- 57).

### **6.8 Proving the Existence of Immaterial Forms**

Mulla Sadra proves the existence of immaterial forms in different ways, one of which is the way of substantial motion. In his opinion, as every nature in its essence is continuously flowing and renewing, it needs a mover that gives existence to it. This existence-giver must be a fixed, unchangeable, and immaterial being, for infinite regress of the chain of causes and effects is impossible (Mulla Sadra: 1360, 160).

In his explanation, Mulla Sadra views every natural species independently and regards the world of nature as filled with species whose existence are ever renewing and changing. In the light of this judgment, he says that every changing and renewing nature needs an unchangeable and immaterial being, and as the world of nature has different kinds of species, the archetypes are also different and plural (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 5, 202; 3, 65- 96).

### **6.9 Proving the Unity of the World**

In proving the unity of the world, Mulla Sadra uses a method particular to him. He proves in accordance with his theory of substantial motion that the world on the whole has a fundamental motion, and every being is a part of the body of this motion. Such a being like any other existent gets a new identity and accordingly needs an existence-giver to give its existence for which changing or flowing is essential. According to this interpretation, the order of the world is a personal one that has a fundamental and eternal unity (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 5, 342; 6, 98- 99; Sabzewari: 1410, 6, 98).

### **6.10 The Corporeality of the Soul in Temporal Origination, and Its Spirituality in Continuance**

Mulla Sadra considers the soul as the product of the substantial motion of the body. He claims that the soul in its origination needs a material background, and by passing from the corporeal form, vegetative soul, animal soul, reaches finally to the rank of rational

human soul. All these stages have existed in its material substance potentially. The soul by passing the mentioned stages, frees itself from matter and potentiality, and reaches the state of immateriality, due to its substantial motion. Thus, the substance of the soul comes naturally after the substance of body and, in fact, it is the natural continuation of the body, so that human form is the final stage of bodily perfection, and the first stage of the perfection of soul. In this regard, Mulla Sadra states a very famous philosophical rule, i.e., “The soul is corporeal in temporal origination and spiritual in continuance” (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 8, 390 and 330; 1360, 223). Accordingly, the relation of soul to body is completely natural. Every body has its own soul, which is specific to it, originated in its background and is the continuation of its material movement. So, it is false to think that every person has a soul that accompanies him from the beginning of his life to its end, for the soul acquires perfection and actuality gradually, and its identity is formed step by step by its deeds and what it gains (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 8, 328).

It should be noted that when it is said the soul is the product of the substantial motion of body, it is not meant that the soul is the effect of body or it is dependent on it; rather it means that the body is a background for the realization and actuality of the soul. It is a substance that needs material ground to come into existence, but in its continuation and subsistence it does not need this ground; as Mulla Sadra confirms, “The truth is that the human soul is corporeal in its temporal origination and in its acts and deeds, but it is spiritual in its subsistence and being intelligible. So the soul’s acting in bodies is corporeal, and its intelligibility for its essence and also its agent’s essence are spiritual. As for immaterial intellects, they are completely immaterial in their essences and acts” (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 8, 347).

### **6.11 The Dependency of the Development of Human’s Knowledge on the Development of the Soul**

Based on substantial motion, Mulla Sadra’s viewpoint about knowledge and perception is different from his predecessors. Propounding the principle of the unity of the intellect and the intelligible, he believes that the development of the human’s knowledge is dependent on the intensification, perfection, and development of the soul’s existence. In his opinion, the soul is not

fixed or unchangeable; it is not a fixed or unchangeable entity that accompanies man from its origin to the end, and only some of his attributes, like knowledge and perception, are changed. Stating a lot of objections against Ibn Sina's theory of the soul, Mulla Sadra insists that accepting the above-mentioned issues about the soul is only reasonable when one accepts the principles of the Transcendental Philosophy, and rejects some principles of the peripatetics in this regard (Mulla Sadra, 1410, 3, 322).

Unlike Ibn Sina, Mulla Sadra considers knowledge or perception as a movement from potentiality to actuality, and an ascent to a status by which the perceiver transcends his existential level and reaches the existential status of the perceived; in Mulla Sadra's interpretation, the intellect is united with the intelligible. He also maintains that the soul in the process of knowing does not merely have a passive role; rather, it has a creative power (such as the Divine creative power) that can create forms. These forms subsist on the soul, as the essence of God creates the world, and the world subsists on Him (Ibid).

### **6.12 Natural Death**

According to substantial motion, the soul intensifies in its essence and entity and moves from one state to another one. The more the soul intensifies existentially the less it pays attention to the body; subsequently the body and its faculties weaken, and then the soul reaches a stage of substantial perfection and existential independence that eventually its relation to the body discontinues, and natural death occurs. Therefore, the extinction of body's power and its faculties does not cause natural death; otherwise the soul must follow the body, and the body also should part with the soul, and not vice versa; whereas it is the body that follows the soul, and the separation between the two is caused by the soul's existential intensification and perfection and its independence (Mulla Sadra, 1410, 9, 51).

### **6.13 The Refutation of Transmigration**

One of the conclusions that Mulla Sadra has taken from the theory of corporeal origin of the soul, which in turn is based on the substantial motion, is the refutation of transmigration. According to

substantial motion, the human soul turns its potentiality into actuality gradually. When the soul, either traverses the way of felicity or the path of wickedness, reaches its actuality, it will be impossible for it to come back again to the stage of potentiality and relate to another body, as it is impossible for an animal after being an animal to come back to the stage of being an embryo (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 9, 2- 3). Therefore, it is impossible for any soul, after its death, to come back and relate to another body, for each body in its substantial motion has its own special soul and acts according to its natural and essential relation to soul. This soul, which has been pure potentiality at first, develops and actualizes gradually. Now, how is it possible for it to relate to an unfamiliar body that is not proportionate to it? On the other hand, how can the body, in its turn, accept a soul formed and completely proportional to another body? (Mulla Sadra, 1410, 9, 7; 1360, 228-230)

#### **6.14 Proving the Resurrection of the Body**

Mulla Sadra claims that his theory of substantial motion proves corporeal resurrection. Of course, he accepts that the theory does not show all details related to the resurrection of the body as stated in Islamic sources. But resurrection and its being corporeal are easily explained by his interpretation. According to substantial motion, the whole material world is moving in its substance. Like every motion, this moving unit necessarily has an end, and, once the unit reaches that end, it becomes complete actuality and ceases to move. Of course, this end is not something external to the world; rather, it is the superior reality of the world. In this journey the origin, destination, and moving thing are one. The moving thing starts from its low reality, and by passing different stages and levels it finally reaches its high reality. Then its motion stops, and another stage, i.e., the Resurrection Day, begins (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 9, 279).

From this, Mulla Sadra concludes that the great event of resurrection is not restricted to the earth and humans; rather it is a cosmic occurrence, a very great event that comprises the entire world and ends with a new cosmos.

From Mulla Sadra's point of view, the soul is an independent substance that traverses different stages in the material world and after



that is freed from matter and potentiality completely, becoming eternal in the world of immaterial intellects. Among the soul's faculties, intellection and imagination are essential to it, while the soul uses animal and vegetative faculties by means of the body. In his view, in consequence of the motion in substance and substantial perfection of man the soul in a level of perfection frees itself from this worldly body and is united with a body from the imaginal world (or the world of Archetypal Images which he calls *alam al-mithal*) or the Isthmus World (*barzakh*) (Mulla Sadra: 1410, 9, 159).

In the Day of Resurrection, all souls, due to their substantial motion, reach a stage of perfection that can create external imaginal forms and accordingly create their own parts of imaginal bodies, in a way that the resurrection of the soul will really be accompanied with the resurrection of the body.

## 7. Conclusion

The theory of substantial motion, in fact, has exerted a strong influence on Islamic philosophy. Earlier philosophers, before Mulla Sadra, argued that motion occurs only in four accidental categories: quality, quantity, place, and position. They considered the issue as one of the discussions of natural philosophy, i.e., in the realm of changeable and moving issues of the sense, rather than in divine philosophy or metaphysics. Mulla Sadra moves the discussion to the realm of the first philosophy and on the basis of the theory of substantial motion solves many philosophical problems, so that philosophers after him have accepted his solutions. The theory gives us another picture of issues such as the material world and its beyond, presence of God, human rational soul, temporal origination of the world or its pre-eternity, creation and its dependence upon God, and the resurrection of existents and renewing life of humans. These questions have been scattered before the advent of substantial motion, but in the light of this theory, they have been grouped under one heading.

According to this theory, each material existent obtains a new form in every instant that is different from the previous one, due to its essential or substantial change. Propounding the theory in Islamic philosophy, Mulla Sadra has originated a fundamental turning point in

metaphysical realms such as theology, cosmology, and traditional psychology. This must be classified along with his other theories, such as the fundamentality of existence and its gradation that constitute the principles of Mulla Sadra's philosophical system. By accepting it, one can have a different view of philosophical problems, and even the features of the world and human appear for him in a completely new manifestation and splendor. We have already seen the occurrence of motion only in accidents and the outward aspects of things; now we can see it occurring in substances and essences of all parts of the world. Rather, the world is seen as nothing but a part of motion completely related to its Creator, God. The dependency of the whole world on its agent or the motion-creator can be seen in every instant. Existence and motion in everything of the material world require an immaterial cause to originate them continually and unceasingly. The motion also necessitates the material world to have an end and destination beyond itself; that is, it will reach a stage that is the same as perfection and immateriality.

Previously, one would consider time as independent from the world and the whole world engulfed by it. Yet now, by accepting this theory, one abstracts time from substantial motion of the material world and regards the priority and posteriority of the parts of time as resulted from the priority and posteriority of the parts of this motion.

The problem of the relation between soul and body is also solved; the body with its motion and continual origination and extinction acquires a more complete form every instant until it reaches the stage of immateriality and is endowed with spiritual existence to be one of the immaterial spiritual beings.

According to Mulla Sadra and his followers substantial motion produces an extensive worldview. It brings a unity and coherence between nature and the supernatural realm. Now, after four centuries of philosophical thoughts and scientific research, is this theory still defensible? Are Mulla Sadra's commentaries and interpretations still satisfactory in the light of new Qur'anic research? Is his reasoning still considered to be based on true arguments? These are the questions that must be answered in another article.

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