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Mīr Dāmād on Essence, Existence and Priority

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Abstract: Mīr Dāmād, as a philosopher in Islamic and Peripatetic tradition, scrutinizes the issue of essence and existence. His main ideas are as follows: first, existence is not a real attribute; second, existence is nothing but to be existent; and third, essence is prior to existence. In this paper, I explain how these ideas can be interpreted within the context of the history of Islamic philosophy. I shall interpret Mīr Dāmād's views on essence, existence and priority against most eminent figures in the tradition such as Suhrawardī and Avicenna among others. As I will argue, Mīr Dāmād proposes an innovative view within the Peripatetic tradition, though he is following (his own interpretation of) Avicenna's philosophy of existence.

Keywords: Mīr Dāmād, Avicenna, Essence, Existence, Priority.

Introduction

There is a consensus that Mīr Dāmād's writings are breathtakingly difficult. I agree. But I believe that one should seek for an explanation for this fact. My own explanation is that one cannot understand Mīr Dāmād unless he knows sufficiently about the historical background of this great philosopher. In this paper, I will illustrate how this process can be exemplified. For the sake of specificity, I concentrate wholly on a fundamental problem in Mīr Dāmād's philosophy: essence, existence and priority. I will show how the philosopher tries to solve a traditional problem by means of his own devices.

In the first section I set the historical background. In section 2, I expose Mīr Dāmād's view on existence and essence. Section 3 is devoted to the essence and priority. At the end, I give some remarks on how Mīr Dāmād's thesis can be understood from a contemporary analytical philosophy perspective.

Historical Background

When Mīr Dāmād (1631/32) aims to articulate his thesis about essence and existence, he refers to Avicenna and insists that there is no disagreement between him and Avicenna (Mīr Dāmād, 1391: 21, f.23; Mīr Dāmād, 1367: 37).

Even, surprisingly, somewhere, considering some issues which are related to essence, he claims that Avicenna 'goes through our path' (*sā'irunmaslakanā*). Although this fact blurs the cut between Mīr Dāmād as a commentator of Avicenna and Mīr Dāmād as an autonomous philosopher, it sheds some light on how to posit his philosophy of existence within the history of Islamic Philosophy.

In order to locate Mīr Dāmād's philosophy of existence in this history, let me begin with a well-known fact. After Avicenna, there was a controversy over how to interpret his texts on essence and existence and on whether it is true. There are two conflicting interpretations: according to the one, existence is something superadded to essence, both in mind and in reality; according to the other, existence is something superadded to essence, just in mind (and not in reality).

Rāzī ascribes the first interpretation to Avicenna. Furthermore, he confirms this thesis. (Rāzī 1384H: 53) Among some other *Ash'arī Mutikallimūn*, Rāzī uses this thesis (and Avicenna's metaphysical system, in general) as a tool for the restoration of some *Ash'arī* old theological perspectives. Rāzī uses the term *zā'id 'alā* (is something superadded to) to interpret Avicenna's distinction.¹

Averroes, also, ascribes the first interpretation to Avicenna but he, unlike Rāzī,

rejects it. He claims that for Avicenna, existence is an *accident* that belongs to an object (*'araḍunfishay'in*). He argues that Avicenna is baffled by two non-identical senses of existence: one of which is a predicate of concepts and has a uniquely shared meaning; and another which is a predicate of particulars and does not have a shared meaning (either it means the category under which the particular falls or it means the essence of the particular). To block this conflation he suggests a turn back to Fārābī and Aristotle who both distinguished between these two meanings of existence (Averroes, 1377: 8-11).²

Suhrawardī, however, ascribes the first interpretation not explicitly to Avicenna, but to *the followers of the Peripatetics* and like Averroes he rejects it (Suhrawardī 1375H, Vol.1: 343-64; 1375H, Vol. 2: 64-65). It is not indisputable whether Suhrawardī actually refers to Avicenna.³ However, like Rāzī, he uses the term *zā'id 'alā* as if it is the standard formulation of the issue under consideration. Suhrawardī considers the distinction between essence and existence to be a fundamental flaw in the Peripatetic metaphysical system and aims to construct an alternative systematic philosophy based on light (Nūr).⁴

Tūsī, on the other side, changes the atmosphere and ascribes the second thesis to Avicenna and defends it against commentators

¹ These are all due to Wisnovsky's influential works under the topic (2003, 2004, 2012, 2013).

² Menn (2012, 2013) gives clear and lucid exposition and explanation of Averroes's critique of Avicenna's conception of existence and his return to Fārābī and Aristotle.

³ Wisnovsky (2012) argues persuasively that Suhrawardī, following Khayyām's footprints, is referring to

Avicennian metaphysics that is emerging by some *Ash'arī Mutikallimūn* such as Rāzī.

⁴ It is not my concern here to engage in the problem of finding the origin of the term *zā'id 'alā*. Wisnovsky (2012, 2013) argues that Rāzī is the man who used the term *zā'id 'alā* in interpreting Avicenna. This is interesting, but it does not settle the question about the founder of this term, if there is any, since Suhrawardī and even Khayyām use this term.

such as Rāzī. He, however, uses Rāzī's and Suhrawardī's terminology *zā'id 'alā* in his own great book *Tajrīd al-I'tiqād*, though maintains that the distinction occurs merely in mind. This terminology has endured among the commentators of his great book *Tajrīd al-I'tiqād*, for centuries.⁵ I will name this terminology 'standard terminology'.⁶

These historical details set aside; it can be observed from great books, such as *Tajrīd al-I'tiqād*, *Mawāqif* and *Maqāshid* and their commentaries *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, *Sharḥ al-Maqāshid* and Jalāl al-Dīn Dawānī and Ṣadr al-Dīn Dashtakī's glosses on Ghūshchī's New Commentary on *Tajrīd* (called Ṭabaqāt Jalāliyahwa Ṣadriyah), written by *Mutikallimūn* and philosophers during 7th/13th to 10th/16th centuries that the controversy over how to interpret Avicenna's text and on whether it is true remains alive throughout these centuries. Within this background literature, Mīr Dāmād as a commentator of Avicenna comes in and, like Tūsī, ascribes the second interpretation to Avicenna. Mīr Dāmād, nevertheless, has significant disagreements with all participants of this controversy. First of all, unlike Tūsī, he does not use the standard terminology, *zā'id 'alā*, to describe the relationship between essence and existence; instead, he prefers to use his own terms such as being a real attribute (*awṣāf'ayniyah*), as we shall see. Furthermore, he does not deviate from Peripatetic

terminology around essence and existence, hence does not introduce new fundamental terms for his metaphysical system, such as Suhrawardī's 'light'. More significantly, although he does not refer to Averroes anywhere, Mīr Dāmād believes that there is no confusion in Avicenna's conception of existence: the predicate has a shared meaning when is a predicate of particulars.⁷ He pursues, then, to defend this thesis on independent grounds. Throughout the defense of the thesis and the filling of its gaps, Mīr Dāmād suggests innovative and original ideas and arguments; hence Mīr Dāmād as an original philosopher emerges. He then suggests himself as a unique figure in this controversy since *he* is the philosopher who aims to reconstruct Avicenna's philosophy of existence on secure grounds; a project that none of the participants of the literature is committed to accomplish.

Mīr Dāmād on *Existence and Essence*

In the beginning sentences of *al-Ufuq al-Mubīn*, Mīr Dāmād says that existence is nothing but an infinitive clause *to be existent* (*al-mawjūdīyah bi al-ma'na al-maṣdarīyah*) and it is not a thing (*ma'nā*) which is concretely added to (*yunḍammūlā*) or abstracted from (*yuntaza'u min*) essence (Mīr Dāmād, 1391H: 9). Elsewhere, he illustrates what he means by the two terms 'abstract' and 'concrete' in relation to real attributes (*awṣāf'ayniyah*). For Mīr Dāmād, real attributes have two sub-

⁵ Wisnovsky (2013) reports aspects of this endurance in some details.

⁶ It is an interesting fact that the terminology remains popular through the subsequent centuries within *al-ḥikmat al-muta'āliyah* (MullāSadrā 1981) and even in the contemporary literature in Iran (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1393H; Āmulī 1375H; 'Ubūdiyat 1385H; Fayyāḍī 1388H).

⁷ I will remain neutral with respect to the issue that whether Avicenna's view on existence is that existence has a shared meaning when it is predicated to particulars. What is indicated in the text, instead, is that Mīr Dāmād and Averroes both ascribe this thesis to Avicenna, though they disagree on whether the thesis is true.

categories: concrete attributes (*awṣāfinḍimāmīyah*) and abstract attributes (*awṣāfintizā'iyah*). A concrete attribute is an attribute of something *in reality* (*fī al-a'yān*); it has a distinct existence from its bearer, in reality. In contrast, an abstract attribute is an attribute of something *because of reality* (*biḥasab al-a'yān*). It does not have a distinct existence from its bearer in reality, rather they are distinct only in mind (*dhihn*) or in intellect (*'aql*). Instead, its bearer has a state or aspect (*ḥālatun*), in itself or in comparison to something else, that *because of it*, it is true to say that the bearer has the attribute. The state or aspect of the bearer is a *ground* (*asās, binā*) for that attribution (Mīr Dāmād, 1391H: 59)

An example of a concrete attribute is blackness for a body. Blackness is a concrete attribute which has a distinct existence from the body, in reality. An example of an abstract attribute is being above something else. Think of the fact that the sky is above the earth. Being-above is not an attribute which has a distinct existence from the sky and the earth. The sky, instead, has a state in comparison to the earth that *grounds* the truth of its being above the earth. They are not distinct in reality, but the distinction between the sky and being above the earth only occurs in mind or in intellect.

With this background, Mīr Dāmād indicates that existence is not a real attribute of essence. That is to say it is not the case that existence is a concrete attribute which has a distinct existence from essence, in reality, nor is it the case that the truth of essence's being

existent is grounded in essence's being in a state (Mīr Dāmād, 1391H: 83-4; 1381H: 118-120). In *Qabasāt* (Mīr Dāmād, 1367: 37) and *al-Ufuq al-Mubīn* (Mīr Dāmād, 1391: 255), Mīr Dāmād has a couple of arguments for this claim. Here I report just one from *Qabasāt* which to my knowledge has no predecessor in Islamic philosophy. Both concrete and abstract attributions, the argument goes, is being of something for something (*thubūtushay'in li-shay'in*). In other words, they must be stated in a compound-if⁸ proposition (*al-hal al-murakkab*). Existence of something, but, is being of something (*thubūtushay'in*) and must be stated in a simple-if proposition (*al-hal al-basīṭ*). Since these two kinds of propositions are not the same (or even intersect), neither are the correspondent realities. Existence, consequently, is not a real attribute.

The predicate existence, Mīr Dāmād continues, is not derived (*mushtaq*) from a concrete attribute in reality, neither is it derived from an abstract one. Almost all other predicates⁹ either correspond to a concrete attribute or to an abstract one. In each case there is a source of derivation of the predicate. In concrete attributes the attribute, itself, is the source of derivation and in abstract attributes the state or aspect of the object under consideration, which grounds the attribution, is the source of derivation. By reason of the aforementioned argument, neither source is available in the case of the predicate existence. (Mīr Dāmād, 1391: 13)

⁸ I owe the translation of *halbasīṭ* vs. *halmurakkab* to simple-if vs. compound-if to Strobino (2015).

⁹ Significant exceptions include being made (*maj'ūliyah*), being one (*waḥidiyah*), being an individual

(*mutashakḥkhiṣiyah*). The list, however, is not exhaustive. As a rule, all predicates which are *musāwiq* to existence share this feature in common. A detailed treatment of *musāwaqah* is out of the range of this paper.

When Mīr Dāmād indicates that existence is nothing but the infinitive clause *to be existent* (*al-mawjūdīyah bi al-ma'na al-maṣdarīyah*) he suggests that the predicate existence is not derived from a real attribute. That is, *existence* (to be existent) is derived from *is existent*. It is not the case that *existence* is derived from a real attribute and *is existent* is derived from *existence* and means *has existence*. This feature of existence can be illustrated in contrast with predicates that are derived from real attributes, such as *blackness* or *being-above*. *Blackness*, for Mīr Dāmād, is derived from a concrete attribute. Then, *is black* is derived from *blackness* and means *has blackness*. Similarly, *being-above* is derived from a state or aspect of the sky which is the ground of an abstract attribute. Then *is above* is derived from *being-above* and means *is in a state that grounds being-above*. The contrast is that in real attributes the order of derivation is from a real attribute or state to the predicate; but in existence the order of derivation is from the predicate to an infinitive clause.¹⁰

Then, what kind of predicate is *existence*? Mīr Dāmād proposes that “that-thing exists” (*kadhāmawjūdun*) should be paraphrased as “that-thing is in reality or in mind.” (*kadhāfi al-a'yān aw fī al-dhihn*) (Mīr Dāmād, 1391: 12).

¹⁰ To see the issue from another direction and using the contemporary terminology in analytic philosophy, *property abstraction*, Mīr Dāmād intends to indicate that one cannot abstract a property from the predicate existence. This is contrary to almost all other predicates. In some cases a concrete property can be abstracted from the predicate and in other cases an abstract property can be abstracted. In both cases the predicate adds something to its subject, but the predicate existence adds nothing to its subject; neither does the predicate existence add a concrete property to its subject nor an abstract one.

Two points suggest themselves in this paraphrase. Firstly, the subject of the proposition in question (*kadhā*) is a particular essence not a universal quiddity. Thus, as foreshadowed, Mīr Dāmād is engaged in the problem of predicating existence to particulars. Secondly, the paraphrase shows that for Mīr Dāmād, pace Averroes, the predicate existence, when is predicated to particulars, has a unique shared meaning: being in reality or in mind.¹¹

Thus far, Mīr Dāmād has argued that existence does not add anything, concrete or abstract, to essence. To illustrate further, he indicates that the essence itself is the correspondent of the proposition that essence exists (Mīr Dāmād, 1391: 10). In my words, Mīr Dāmād tries to posit his thesis about the predicate existence in a general theory of predication. Some predicates apply to something because those predicates correspond with real concrete attributes. The fact that the object in question has the real concrete attribute *grounds* the truth of the proposition that the object in question is so and so. For example, the truth of the proposition that this body is black is grounded in the fact that this body bears the concrete attribute blackness. Some other predicates apply to something not because they

¹¹ Because of the occurrence of ‘in’, Mīr Dāmād’s paraphrase might that he considers reality or mind as a vessel (*zarf*) that contains essences. Even he uses the term *zarf* frequently in relevant passages. For example he says that “there is nothing in the vessel of existence but essence” (Mīr Dāmād 1391H, 9) or “the existence of a thing in any vessel or container is the occurrence of that thing in that vessel.” (Mīr Dāmād, 1367: 37) However, I suggest that we should not take this metaphor at face value and should better rely on other explanations which are introduced by him.

correspond with a concrete attribute, but because of the object's being in a certain state. The fact that the object in question is in that certain state *grounds* the truth of the proposition that the object is so and so. For example, the truth of the proposition that the sky is above the earth is grounded in the fact that the sky has a certain state in comparison to the earth. The predicate existence, however, applies to essence in neither of these ways. It does not correspond with any concrete attribute, nor does it correspond with a state of essence; rather, essence, itself, *grounds* the truth of the proposition that essence exists.¹²

Now, I can declare why Mīr Dāmād evades using the standard terminology. The standard formulation of the issue under consideration is whether existence is something superadded to essence, in reality. From existence's being something superadded to essence Khayyām immediately concludes that existence is an accident that belongs to essence. (Khayyām, 1380) Suhrawardī in *ḥikmat al-'ishrāq*, uses *zā'id 'alā* in a broader sense, at least in the first glance. He says that if existence were something superadded to essence, existence would be either something which is *par soi* (*qā'im binafsihī*) or not. The first alternative, he continues, is irrelevant to the issue since according to it, existence would not be existence *of* essence. The second alternative is nothing but to say that existence is an accident that belongs to essence. Therefore, at the end of the day, for Suhrawardī, the only intelligible and relevant notion for existence to be

something superadded to essence is to be an accident that belongs to essence. (Suhrawardī, 1375, Vol.2: 64-65) This formulation is in accordance with Averroes's interpretation of Avicenna. Remember that Averroes indicates that for Avicenna existence is an accident that belongs to essence (Averroes, 1377: 10) therefore the standard formulation of the issue under consideration amounts to be whether existence is an accident that belongs to essence.

Turning back to Mīr Dāmād's terminology, being an accident that belongs to something is being a concrete real attribute of that thing. Concrete real attributes, for Mīr Dāmād, are those that have a distinct existence from their bearers. This parallelism explains why Mīr Dāmād does not use the standard terminology because he intends to imply something more than this. For Mīr Dāmād, not only is existence not a concrete attribute (an accident), existence is not an abstract attribute either. To say that existence is not something superadded to (an accident that belongs to) essence is not adequate for implying what Mīr Dāmād intends.

Furthermore, in *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, Suhrawardī categorizes attributes as real (*'ayniyah*) and conceptual (*i'tibāriyah*). He indicates that all real attributes are superadded to essence and all conceptual attributes exist just in mind. He locates existence within the second category and concludes that existence is not something superadded to essence. However, he explicitly indicates that among the conceptual attributes are *possibility* and

¹² Mīr Dāmād differentiates between two claims: 1) that essence, *itself* (*nafsahū*), grounds the truth of the proposition that essence exists; and 2) that essence, *in itself* (*bi-nafsihī*), grounds the truth of the proposition

that essence exists. He explicitly concedes (1) for any essence and rejects (2) unless for the Necessary of Existence. (Mīr Dāmād, 1391: 10)

relative attributes (e.g. being-above). (Suhrawardī, 1375, Vol.2: 71-72) These examples are among the attributes that Mīr Dāmād categorizes as real abstract attributes (Mīr Dāmād, 1391: 83). Mīr Dāmād, as aforementioned, discriminates existence from these attributes and claims that existence is not even an abstract attribute. This asymmetry between Mīr Dāmād's thesis and that of Suhrawardī provides another explanation for the fact that Mīr Dāmād articulates the issue under consideration by means of his own terms.

Hereafter, I will use Mīr Dāmād's terminology. In the next section I turn to the second issue: the priority of essence to existence.

Mīr Dāmād on Priority

Mīr Dāmād explicitly states that essence is prior to existence. First of all, Mīr Dāmād notices that the priority is between an essence and existence of that essence, not between essence and existence. The absolute notion of existence is distinct from essence and there is no priority between them. Thus the claim is that *essence* is (in some sense) prior to *that essence exists* (Mīr Dāmād, 1391: 46, f.143). My objective in this section is to clarify the nature of this priority from Mīr Dāmād's point of view. As a beginning, we should recall that for Mīr Dāmād existence is not a real attribute; in Mīr Dāmād's words, in reality (and in mind) there is nothing but essence itself (Mīr Dāmād, 1391: 9). Consequently, the priority of essence to existence of essence cannot be metaphysical. By metaphysical priority, I mean a kind of priority that takes place between two distinct entities, in reality. Essence cannot be metaphysically prior to existence of essence in

reality, because the latter is nothing in reality. On the other hand, it seems trivial to claim that priority is conceptual. By conceptual priority, I mean a kind of priority that occurs between two concepts, one of which is in some sense determined by the other. In this sense, essence is, trivially, prior to existence of essence, since the former is a conceptual constituent of the latter. It might be better if this trivial thesis were not ascribed to Mīr Dāmād who devotes a lengthy discussion concerning this issue in order to disclose the nature of the relation between essence and existence of essence. What is then the nature of this priority? In order to explain this priority Mīr Dāmād first demonstrates a distinction between subsistence of essence (which is nothing but essence, itself) and existence of essence, and then shows that the former is prior to the latter.

To expose this distinction, Mīr Dāmād expresses the fact that for essence, there is a difference between the level of self (*martibanafs al-dhāt*) and the level of existence (*martibat al-wujūd*). He names the level of self as subsistence (*taqarrur*) and actuality (*fi'liyah*). To differentiate between these two levels, he posits that the level of self is inquired by means of *real simple-if* (*al-hal al-basīṭ al-ḥaqīqī*), but the level of existence is inquired by *commonly-accepted simple-if* (*al-hal al-basīṭ al-mashhūrī*). Real simple-if is of the form 'whether a thing' (*hal al-shay*); in contrast to this, commonly-accepted simple-if is of the form 'whether a thing exists' (*hal al-shay'mawjūdun*). (Mīr Dāmād, 1367: 38)

There is a problem about how to conceive real simple-if, as Mīr Dāmād intends it. In Arabic, *hal* only can be concatenated to a sentence, not an individual term. The phrase *hal al-shay*' (whether a thing) thus seems to be

ungrammatical, and hence probably nonsense. Whether it makes sense in Arabic or not, the distinction between essence itself and existence of essence is nevertheless fairly intelligible if we consider the origin of the distinction. Types of ifs are originated in types of inquiries (*maṭālib*). Simple-if (as commonly accepted) is originated in the inquiry about the existence of something and compound-if is originated in the inquiry about an attribute of something. To this picture, Mīr Dāmād adds a new type of inquiry: an inquiry about something. Based on this inquiry, he introduces a new type of simple-if: real simple-if. In the following, I will assume that my interpretation of Mīr Dāmād makes sense of his distinction between types of simple-ifs.¹³

Mīr Dāmād illustrates the distinction between subsistence of essence (its self) and existence of essence by means of their disparate behavior with respect to making (*jaʿl*). As Mīr Dāmād himself refers to the literature around making, according to his predecessors in Islamic Philosophy, there are two kinds of making: simple-making (*jaʿl basīṭ*) and compound-making (*jaʿl murakkab*). Simple-making is making something such as making a table. It is the relationship between an efficient cause (*illah fāʿiliyah*) or maker (*jāʿil*) and its effect (*maʿlūl*) or what is made (*majʿūl*). Compound-making is making something to be something such as making a table to be black. It is the relationship between a maker and what is made to be another thing (*majʿūl*) and that other thing (*majʿūlun ilayh*) (Mīr Dāmād, 1391: 17-18).

Mīr Dāmād indicates that in simple-making, what is made is an individual, the essence itself; and hence, the result of simple-making corresponds to (or can be inquired by) a real simple-if. In contrast, in compound-making, what is made is an attribution of a real attribute to something; and hence, the result of compound-making corresponds to (or can be inquired by) a compound-if (Mīr Dāmād, 1391: 19-21). For example, if a table is made, what is made is *the table*; but if a table is made black, what is made is *that the table is black*. What is then to be said about commonly-accepted simple-if, that is, existence of essence? Does it correspond to a kind of making? Mīr Dāmād's answer is negative. Existence of essence is not a result of a making, simple or compound. The reason is that, in one hand, existence of essence has a compound structure (*hayʾ ahtarkibiyah*), and hence cannot be a result of simple-making. On the other hand, existence of something cannot be a result of compound-making, since existence is not a real attribute of essence.

This consequence has a welcome function for what Mīr Dāmād is pursuing. Essence is the result of simple-making, but existence of essence is not a result of simple-making (neither is it a result of compound-making). Essence and existence of essence have then different behaviors with respect to making, hence they are distinct. This is the first end Mīr Dāmād was seeking. He adds to this picture that whenever a maker makes an essence, the result of the making entails (*yastatbiʿu*) existence of that essence. It is not the case that

¹³ Somewhere, Mīr Dāmād names real simple-if, as introduced here, *simple-if* and categorizes commonly-accepted simple-if, as introduced here, as a type of

compound-if (Mīr Dāmād, 1391: 49-50). This variation in terminology does not affect my discussion in the text.

the simple-making of essence entails another making which its result is existence of essence. This contradicts the aforementioned claim that existence of essence cannot be a relatum of making. Rather, Mīr Dāmād pinpoints that *the truth of the proposition that essence exists is entailed by essence*. That is to say one relatum of the entailment relation is essence and the other relatum is the truth of the proposition that essence exists. Insofar as entailment relation is not symmetric, essence is in some sense prior to existence of essence. (Mīr Dāmād 1391H, 22, 46) This is the second end Mīr Dāmād was seeking.

It has already been mentioned (and argued) that Mīr Dāmād is about to examine the predicate existence when predicated to a particular essence rather than a universal quiddity. Here I can give another piece of evidence for this claim. For Mīr Dāmād essence, not existence of essence, is the result of simple-making. The result of simple-making must be particular. So, the essence in question is a particular essence not a universal quiddity. In addition, the essence, itself, entails the truth of the proposition that essence exists. The predicate existence, hence, is to be predicated to that particular essence. Therefore, the issue under consideration for Mīr Dāmād is the predication of existence to particular essences, not universal quiddities.

To sum up, Mīr Dāmād explains the nature of the priority of essence to the existence of essence by means of the fact that essence entails existence of essence. He then explains the nature of this entailment relation by means of his view about the existence predicate: the fact that essence, itself, is the ground of the truth of the proposition that essence exists. Now, I can merge Mīr Dāmād's explanation of the nature

of priority with my interpretation of Mīr Dāmād's view on existence and predication that I suggested before. In my words, Mīr Dāmād is about arguing for the following thesis. Generally, the ground of a truth is in some sense prior to the truth: the truth is true in virtue of (is entailed by) that ground and not vice versa. Particularly, in the issue under consideration, essence grounds (entails) the truth that essence exists and not vice versa. So, in this sense essence is prior to existence of essence. On one hand, this is not a trivial priority, because it is based on substantial claims about simple-making and grounding. On the other hand, although essence is in a substantial sense prior to existence of essence, it does not entail that existence is a thing (*ma'na*) in reality. In Mīr Dāmād's words, in reality, there is nothing but essence.

Conclusion

Let me outline Mīr Dāmād's philosophy of existence in my own terms. The project Mīr Dāmād pursues, as far as I can see, is to articulate a thesis about existence according to which existence is not a representative part of the language of metaphysics. Although it seems to be intelligible that there are truths containing the predicate existence, there is nothing in reality which this predicate represents. To accomplish this, Mīr Dāmād comes up with a certain theory about truth-making. Some subject-predicate sentences are true because there are two entities (parallel to subject and predicate) in reality that is related in a similar structure with the sentence. Some other subject-predicate sentences are true because there is an entity (parallel to the subject) in reality which has a certain aspect. Yet some other subject-predicate sentences are


true because of the occurrence of an entity (parallel to the subject) in reality. Individual sentences with existence as their predicate are in the last category. Since truth-makers are in some sense prior to truths, essence is prior to the truth that essence exists. So, in my words, Mīr Dāmād is about to propose a theory of truth and truth-making in order to carry out his project. This feature of Mīr Dāmād's theory about existence and predication brings him close to the contemporary literature in analytic philosophy around truth-making.

Historically, two traditions in interpreting Avicenna's texts about existence disagree about his view on a metaphysical issue: is existence a property? Rāzī, Averroes and probably Suhrawardī ascribe to him a positive answer and Khayyām, Tūsī and Mīr Dāmād ascribe to him a negative answer. Interestingly, all but Rāzī argue that the correct answer to the metaphysical problem, itself, should be negative. Among these commentators only Mīr Dāmād introduces a comprehensive theory about the issue. Khayyām leaves some initial comments; Tūsī's aim is firstly to block the alternative interpretation developed by Rāzī; Averroes propose a flash back to Aristotle and Fārābī; and Suhrawardī prefers to change the rules of Peripatetics. It is Mīr Dāmād who investigates a comprehensive theory in order to explain the nature of existence within the Peripatetic metaphysical system. This feature of Mīr Dāmād's theory about existence makes him a significant unique philosopher in the history of Islamic Philosophy.

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ذات، وجود و تقدم نزد میرداماد

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واژه‌های کلیدی: میرداماد، ابن‌سینا، جوهر، وجود.



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