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Mulla Sadra's Existential Philosophy and Cultural Dialogue

This article is a part of a course taught by the writer under the title of "Ontology in the Transcendent philosophy" in ICAS which is affiliated with Paramadina University in Indonesia. This essay aims at introducing Mulla Sadra's philosophy as a model and basis for cultural dialogue.

The very feasibility of a Christian-Muslim dialogue should be called into question. Can the Islamic world enter into a dialogue with the secular West? Any dialogue or discourse requires a common language, a shared worldview, and some basic agreements on some of the fundamental axioms around which a worldview is formed.

Any student of medieval philosophy can observe two distinct periods in history of medieval philosophy, defined here as early and later, each of which has its own distinct characteristics. The early period belongs to the Church father's who laid the groundwork for Christian philosophical and theological frameworks. Early Christian philosophical writings of such figures as Augustine, Boethius, Origen, John Scotus, St. Anselm, Peter Abelard, and others were responses to specific questions of an intellectual nature. Of course, Greek Philosophy and its proponents in Christendom were clearly there, but, as their works reflect, Christian philosophers merely adopted certain concepts from Greek philosophers in order to offer a rational defense of the faith. Early Christian Philosophy, having been influenced by the Greeks alone, dealt with specific issues and attempted to find solutions to problems that Christianity was facing. In this regard, the two civilizations, Greek and Christianity, were engaged in a dialogue that was immensely beneficial to the enrichment of Christian intellectual thought.

On the Islamic side, such early Muslim philosophers as al-Kindi and al-Farabi also followed the same pattern, namely, their views, concerns, and comments were responses to Greek philosophers, in particular Plato and Aristotle. When reading early Islamic Philosophy, one clearly gets the impression that it too was engaged only with the Greeks and their central concerns became the Muslims central concerns as well. Clearly, a kind of dialogue was taking place between Muslims and Greeks on the philosophical level simply because Muslims needed to learn the discursive method of the Greek philosophers in order to defend, in rational manner, the pillars of the faith. The two cultures differed profoundly, which made the dialogue both necessary and fruitful. This was necessary, since the perspective of one culture (Greek) was intellectually stimulating, and it was fruitful since it was through this philosophical dialogue that Muslim philosophers were able to adopt the Greek worldview within the Islamic religious universe.

Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi (Mulla Sadra) is perhaps the single most important and influential mystic-philosopher in the Muslim world in the last four hundred years. The author of over fifty works; he was the culminating figure of the major revival of philosophy in Iran in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (safavid period). Devoting almost exclusively to metaphysics, he constructed an exhaustive philosophy which brought together Peripatetic, Illuminationist philosophy and Muslim mysticism along with Shi'ite theology within the compass of what he termed a "Theosophy", "Metaphilosophy", a kind of mystical theology the source of which lays in the Islamic revelation and the mystical experience of reality as existence (the external being).

Mulla Sadra's metaphilosophy or "Transcendent philosophy" was based on existence as the sole constituent of reality, and rejected any role for quiddities or essences in the external world. Existence was for him at once a single unity and an internally articulated dynamic process, the unique source of both unity and diversity. From this fundamental starting point, Mulla Sadra, was able to find original solutions to many of the logical, metaphysical and theological difficulties which he had inherited from his predecessors.

Mulla Sadra, the founder of the "Transcendent Philosophy" (al-hikmat al-muta 'aliya) school of thought has presented distinctly innovative philosophical principles. Among these innovations is his special method of proving the "Necessary Being" or God, which is well-known as the 'proof of the highly veracious' (burhan al-siddiqin). He himself introduces it to be the most valid and sacred of the proofs for the existence of God. Mulla Sadra, after briefly explaining that there exist different methods of proving the Necessary Being, introduces the method that he had devised, as the best, from which various principles could also be drawn.

Transcendent Philosophy is the most important and exalted philosophical system that dominates Muslim philosophical circles, especially in Iran. By establishing this philosophical school of thought in the 17th century, slowly and gradually, the philosophical schools of thought such as the Peripatetic philosophy of Avicenna, the Illuminationist philosophy of Suhrawardi (d. 1191) the mystical school of Ibn ‘Arabi and scholastic theology were partially eclipsed by this philosophical system founded by Mulla Sadra. As a system, it contained the outstanding and important points of the four aforementioned schools of thought, and formed a synthesis of all of them. At the same time, it also consisted of profound, new insights and was disseminated in religious and intellectual circles open to philosophy and speculative theology, where it prevails.

Mulla Sadra, Muhammad ibn-Ibrahim Sadr al Din Shirazi, a contemporary of Descartes (1596-1650), was trenchant in his decription of the vacuity of essences when treated by reasons in reductionist manner. Today, Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) is considered particularly clairvoyant for having predicted – 70 years after Mulla Sadra had done so – that the human race would be reduced by such abstractive reason to a race of intellectual brutes, but brutes nonetheless devoid of sense of personal freedom or cultural creativity. In order to find an alternate way Heidegger points out this each major step ahead implies a decision to develop one path which leaves alternate paths unexplored. Hence, the real step ahead consists in the step back to that which thus far has been left undeveloped. This suggests that in order to understand Mulla Sadra’s penetrating and skilfully elaborated “philosophy of existence” it may help to review once again the sense of existence as it emerged initially among the Christian Church Fathers in the early centuries of this era.

Although Greek philosophy grew out of an intensive mythic sense of life in which all was a reflection of the will of the gods, it nonetheless presupposed matter always to have existed. As a result, attention and concern were focused upon the form by which matter was determined to be one type rather than of another. For Aristotle, this was the most manifest reality and his philosophizing began from there. By the end of his metaphysics he had come by a philosophical route to considerations of divine life as the principle of all.

The Greeks had considered matter (hyle/first wheule – the stuff of which things were made) – to be eternal. Hence, no direct question arose concerning the existence or non-existence of things. As matter always had been, the only real question for the Greeks concerned the shapes or forms under which it existed. Only at the conclusion of the Greek period did Plotinus (205-270 A.D.), rather than simply presupposing matter, attempt the first philosophical explanation of it’s origin. It was, he explained, the light form the “One” (“ahad”) which, having been progressively attenuated as is emanated further from it’s

source, finally turned to darkness. The answer may not be satisfactory, but our interest lies in whence came this new sensitivity to reality which enabled him even to raise such a question.

It is known that shortly prior to Plotinus the Christian Fathers were aware of the need to explain the origin of matter. They explicitly opposed the Greek supposition of matter and affirmed that, like form, it too needed to be explained. The origin of both they traced to the Pantocrator; hence, the proper effect of creation was neither form nor matter, but the existence of beings so composed, or existence simply.

Later, this would be the central insight also of Mulla Sadra. It is still being unfolded in the contemporary emergence of the existential sense of the human person. This directs the mind beyond form and species, that is beyond essence, and beyond place and time or any of the scientific categories. It centers instead upon the unique reality of each being, above all of the person as a participant in the creative power of God, as a being bursting into time who is and cannot be denied. It rejects the person being considered in any sense as nonbeing, or being treated as anything less than its full reality. The human person is a self, affirming its own unique existence, and irreducible to any specific group identity. It is an image of God for whom life is sacred and sanctifying, a child of God for whom to be is freely to dispose of the power of one's new and unique life in union with all humankind.

It was the unfolding by the Church Fathers of awareness of God and of his creation that made possible the discovery of existence which Mulla Sadra so brilliantly developed. This enabled him to articulate a line of causality deeper and more primary than the horizontal causality of motion between creatures, namely, to explore the vertical line of existence from God to creatures and their return to Him. Mulla Sadra would develop this latter line with the Philosophical tools he personally elaborated in a neo-Platonic vein as the flow of pure being.

For him the creative act of God and human actions were the same act.

This, however, urges the question of the reality of the horizontal causal line, of the human and of one's interaction with other persons and with nature. Today these are the issues of social justice, the treatment of minorities, and the protection of the environment; They are the special human concerns at this juncture. We shall look next for ways in which these concerns can be grounded ontologically and then finally for ways implement the free and creative possibilities of humankind opened by Mulla Sadra. As the project is vast we must proceed here in somewhat summary fashion to suggest issues and sources which merit subsequent development.

THE EXISTENCE AND COMPOSITION OF FINITE BEINGS

If attention during the first millennium was focused upon God, it can be said that for the second millennium it has been focused upon this world, especially upon the human person. During the first millennium it was sufficient to see these in some relation to God, to show with Plato that unity did not preclude multiple beings provided they be seen precisely as related by participation to God.

The issue of this second millennium has been rather the existence of creatures - not by themselves, but in themselves. Since God exists, can there be room for the world, and particularly for truly free human beings? Here we shall look at two issues: (a) the subsistence of finite beings as existing in themselves, and (b) the internal constitution of such beings. The third issue, namely, the freedom and autonomy of the human person will be the subject of other chapters and essays. We shall treat each issue and its response in sequence; in fact, however, they constitute a cumulative problematic, just as their response also is cumulative.

a. The Internal Composition of Finite Beings

It is not sufficient, however, simply to leave subsistence as existence for of itself this would be divine. Hence, in order for creatures not to be absorbed into God, which researchers like Fazlur Rahman see as continually threatening the thought of Mulla Sadra, it is necessary to look into the constitution of beings which so exist. For lack of this the Mutakallimun were left with an “occasionalism” which carried a number of implications. There were no finite substances or beings which exist in themselves; instead all must be recreated at each moment. From this it follows also that human actions do not effect or cause things, but rather are the occasions upon which God brings things about as His effects. Fazlur Rahman insists that for Mulla Sadra this does not mean that only God causes, but that nothing causes without God. However, he recognized that some expressions of Mulla Sadra seem to go beyond this and there may be some inconsistencies as he struggles with this point. Further, while “occasionalism” is generally and correctly considered a metaphysical position regarding the being of effects, it has powerful epistemological implications. That the premise, the conclusion is the very heart of logical reasoning. If, however, with “occasionalism” it is not finite beings, but God who causes effects, then the premises do not cause the conclusion. As the premises may be wrong but the conclusion could be correct, for there is no necessary connection between them. This entails skepticism with regard to human reasoning.

Thomas Aquinas agreed that God was indeed great, but not because he caused the finite effects of each human action, but rather because he caused finite beings who were themselves fully capable of carrying out all the actions and effects, which corresponded to their nature. This is the proper autonomy of the human person; it is the implication of the participation of beings as act in “Absolute Being” as existence itself.

The reasoning of Aquinas a century after Ghazali is indicative of what can be done with Mulla Sadra’s insight of the centrality of existence. The discussion of being as existing had proceeded in al-Farabi and Ibn Sina to the point of distinguishing it from form, and relating it to essence as its principle of limitation and definition. But how these were related in a being, and indeed as constituting that being, was not understood. As Mulla Sadra would later argue, if existence was an accident in relation to essence then essence would need to exist in at least logical priority to existence -- which would be logically absurd.

b. Subsistence: the Existence of Finite Beings

In the first millennium of Christ and Muhammad, because human attention was quite absorbed in assimilating their teaching about God, the relative disappearance of the human was not considered to be a special problem, for humankind searched in God for its fulfillment. In the middle of this present millennium, however, attention shifted to the human. For some this was the person in search of God and for one’s proper role in His creation. Increasingly, however, philosophers took a Promethean attitude. Today they will not be satisfied unless the legitimate human question in religion is recognized and receives an answer, namely, the issue of the status and role of creatures and of the human person in God’s Providence.

Certainly, the path of being is the royal path for the human mind to develop its knowledge of, and response to, God. Parmenides had seen this immediately; it was the very first step in his initiation of the science of metaphysics in the West. As Mulla Sadra rightly pointed out, if this were a process of abstraction then the first principles would be empty. If, however, they are statements of being and the mind proceeds according to the reality of existence then they articulate the Divine and its work.

As mentioned above, in his Poems Parmenides noted that being as such is affirmation and hence could not include its own negation: being is, non-being is not. Negation is essential to beginning and limitation, and hence to multiplicity and change; but being as such is affirmation and hence must be eternal, one and unchanging. Mulla Sadra agrees and thus sees being as absolute and noncomposite or simple, which is to say, that it is the unique and infinite Divine life.

Some, would see Parmenides as denying all reality to limited, multiple or changing being. Nevertheless, the second part of his Poem is entirely concerned with such changing beings. How to reconcile the two - the unlimited and the limited, the infinite and the finite, eternity and time - was left to Plato. He responded by developing the structure of participation. But in his famous "allegory of the cave" this worked in a manner similar to light so that the multiple were but shadows or images (mimesis) of the One. Aristotle soon abandoned the use of the term mimesis for fear that it would not allow for an adequate appreciation of the active reality of limited beings, but reduce them to passive shadows.

Earlier medieval Christian philosophy, working on a Platonic and neo-Platonic model, experienced difficulty in asserting the distinct activity of finite beings. While benefiting from the mystical potentialities of the vertical line of causality from God's existence, its Platonism left it poorly equipped to affirm the distinctive reality of the horizontal causal line between creatures. Hence, some form of divine supplement in the form of illumination or latent forms of seminal reasons was required as if creatures were not quite entitled to act -- and by implication to be -- in their own right.

Mulla Sadra shares this problem. His attempts to resolve it in a neo-Platonic, emanationist framework led him to statements which strongly suggest that if being is "existence" and not "essence" then not only is God all, but there is nothing other. It is true, as Mulla Sadra points out, that God's existence is also consciousness, which develops a limitless number of existents according to multiple modes as finite beings. But when this route was classically developed by Shankara in the rich Hindu metaphysical tradition the reality of limited being seemed ultimately to be absorbed into God. In even closer parallel to Mulla Sadra, Ramanuja attempted to give more distinctive reality to limited beings by constituting them ultimately via attributes of God. All three would say that in the stage of reasoning (in contrast to that of intuition) the world is real. Fazlur Rahman noted that higher knowledge does not negate old knowledge, but puts it into perspective.

Yet there was always the still higher or deeper -- and, in any case, truer -- level of intuition in which the world and the individual could be called an illusion (maya) by Shankara and "perishing" by Mulla Sadra. For a distinctive step beyond the difficulties of this Platonic and neo-Platonic horizon one needs to turn to Aristotle who precisely went beyond Plato's more passive sense of beings as images or shadows remembering what had been passively observed and now remembered. For Aristotle the point of departure was being as changing and hence as active and dynamic. Beings were ultimately substances standing in their own right and all depended not on a passively contemplated "One", but on a quintessentially active divine life as the act of "knowing on knowing".

Paul Tillich notes that because Platonic formalism does not adequately establish the distinctive reality of the world and human beings, while nominalism and positivism do not establish the reality of God, philosophizing in a religious context has gravitated naturally toward an Aristotelian realism in recognition of both God and world. This was precisely the step taken by Thomas Aquinas.

In going beyond the Platonic thought of the Patristic age, and adding to it Aristotle's scientific structures and active sense of being - now intensified in terms of existence - Thomas opened a new scientific philosophical age in which "theology", properly as a Logos, could be born.

For Mulla Sadra, thinking Platonically, these categories remained a passive function of essence and hence were seen as existentially empty. In contrast Aquinas, thinking in an Aristotelian manner, took them actively and in relation to existence. Hence a substance is that to which it pertains precisely to exist in itself, and a being possessing or exercising such existence would be a subsistent being. This insight regarding being as act and active made it possible to receive more fully the revelation of God's creative act as making things themselves to exist (something that Mulla Sadra showed himself most anxious to do through his critique of essence). Thomas's deployment of the Aristotelian category of substance in the existential context of creation makes it possible to appreciate the existence of finite beings as from, by, and for God, yet as lived by beings existing in themselves.

Based on his appreciation, like Mulla Sadra's, of being as existing Aquinas reasoned as follows:

- (a) as existence is quintessentially affirmation, where it is not infinite but limited (that is, where existence is not absolute, but in part negated) this must be due to something other than existence;
- (b) that "other" could not be merely outside of being such as its efficient cause, for being must have in, and as, itself whatever is required in order that it be what it is (it must be undivided in itself); further
- (c) as "inside being" this "other" would have to be or exist; yet as "other than existence" it could not be of itself; hence the "other" as principle of limitation would have to be made to be by existence, in relation to which it stands as potency;
- (d) this "other" must be then a determined and limiting capacity for existence, that is, a capacity for "this much of existence and no more"; and finally
- (e) existence being thus limited and graded, Mulla Sadra would call this an intensive notion of being.

On this basis Thomas expanded the meaning of Aristotle's act and potency from merely form and matter as the internal components of changing beings, to express the relation between the internal components of limited beings: existence as act and essence as potency.

Neither existence nor essence are things or beings, but are rather internal principles of being.

Existence is that by which a being is -- which was Mulla Sadra's great insight. But essence is also necessary, for it is that by which a being is what it is -- a limited and determined being distinct from all else.

Limited or finite beings are then composite beings. Their existence could not be selfexplained, that is, explained by their essence, which in this regard is potency. It could be explained only by Being that is incomposite or simple. This is quite the essence of Mulla Sadra's metaphysics. Studies on the history of the notion of participation show this to have been a personal discovery of Aquinas. His essential formulation of the nature of multiple beings or of the finite order as participating in the absolute being of God was the relation of composite beings (beings composed of existence as act and essence as potency) to the incomposite, simple, and hence absolute Being.

Researchers have pointed out further that the inner constitution of being meant that beings were inherently analogous. Each finite being constitutes a proportion of proportions, that is, of its existence to its proper essence (the existence of being A is in proportion to the essence of being A, as the existence of being B is in proportion to the essence of being B). This analogy between finite beings enables one to appreciate the extension of language as one proceeds from the finite or composite beings as effects (where the essence and existence are really distinct principles of being) to the infinite, incomposite or simple being as cause (where essence and existence are not distinct, but one). Analogy, we would conclude, is the language of Being ; Mulla Sadra would describe this as systematic ambiguity (Tashkik).

THE EXISTING HUMAN BEING

a. The Freedom and Responsibility

Pope John Paul II in his well-known Encyclical "Faith and Reason" suggests that the proper methodology for theology and philosophy is cyclical, that is: (a) to begin from revelation as received through the Prophets and Sacred Books which challenge one to develop fully and solidly the capabilities of the human mind, then (b) to proceed carefully, actively and creatively to the

development of philosophy by the light of human reason, and finally (C) to return to revelation so that philosophy thus developed can contribute to the proper unfolding of revelation in history.

The significance of revelation for philosophy becomes even more evident as one attempts to articulate philosophically a vision of the human person which can face the challenges of eschatology. This demands not only the full spiritual openness of the human to the Transcendent, but also, in view of personal resurrection and definitive judgment, an individual with personal freedom and responsibility subsisting in this world.

This challenge was central to the drama of the life of al-Ghazali as he described it in his famous book *Munqidh*. The spiritual nature of humankind was the crucial issue for al-Ghazali and the one which moved him to break away from philosophy as developed by the great Islamic heirs of the Greek tradition, al-Farabi and Ibn Sina.

For Aristotle the discovery of form and matter as intrinsic principles of any changing being meant that the form was intimately, indeed totally, related to the matter it informed. But if so then how could this form be the source and foundation of spiritual activity? If matter was concrete and singular, how could the form of matter be a principle for the abstract and universal terms which were central to scientific thought or, even more, the principle for the free exercise of the human will?

Aristotle's solution, taken up by al-Farabi and Ibn Sina almost 1500 years later, was that such terms must depend on a form which was separated from matter - an agent intellect existing separately which could be drawn upon by many persons. But as this would need to be also the principle of free human actions, it would then be difficult to assess personal responsibility. This, in turn, constituted a difficulty in interpreting the scriptural passages regarding personal immortality and the last judgment. As a result the Greek oriented Islamic philosophers tended to interpret final judgment and eternal reward rather as allegorical than objective statements of the reality of human life.

Al-Ghazali naturally drew back. All his instincts as a devoted servant of God told him "to take to the road," to escape this heretical attenuation of the faith regarding the meaning and exercise of human life. The result was his departure from Baghdad and from philosophy.

This was the crisis which Mulla Sadra would face later. Confronted with the restrictive confines of philosophy done in terms of essences or natures he would separate himself from such thinking at every turn and in every way. Al-Ghazali could see that a separated agent intellect would not allow for personal freedom and responsibility. Mulla Sadra's interpretation of the agent intellect as a divine attribute would appear to encounter similar difficulties, especially as to the personal nature of human freedom and its responsibility for evil.

Christian philosophy took the opposite path; reflecting its sense of the autonomy of creatures under God, it placed the agent intellect in the individual human person. But there it encountered Aristotle's original difficulty: if the soul was spiritual how could it also be the form of the body? In the Augustinian tradition up to Bonaventure this was resolved by positing multiple souls, but this created its own difficulties for the unity of the human person as identically bodily in nature and spiritual in dignity - something of great importance in our day.

In a manner analogous to his work on the inner constitution of finite beings described above, Thomas approached the issue of the spiritual nature of the human person, of human freedom and responsibility. He reasoned in the light of being as existence that:

- one being could have but one existence;
- one existence could have but one essence, and
- one essence could have but one form.

Hence, there could be but one form (or soul) in the human person, whose nature is then neither beastly, nor angelic, nor both, but properly and uniquely human. This entails, in turn, that the human mind is not dependent on a separated intellect in order to form universal concepts. Rather, the human intellect itself has the capacity to abstract universal natures from concrete sensed objects. Thus the agent intellect which for the Greeks, as for the Islamic scholars of Greek philosophy, had been separated from the human person and shared by many was now seen to be an internal capacity proper to each person. Each person is free responsible and subject to judgement and reward for his or her actions.

There are other implications here of supreme importance for our present attempt to construct a world that is truly humane: the unique dignity and destiny of the human body; the properly sensual and engaged, yet transcendent, character of human consciousness; the role of the human person as the Cusan point of unity of all creation; and the social character of human rights and their extension to the right to food, to work, to one's culture and religion, etc.

In sum, the participation that Plato saw only externally as between beings was now articulated in terms of the internal constitution of being. Finite beings and hence human persons could be seen as substances existing in their own right, but not by themselves or absolutely, as is God. As self-conscious and free, persons could act responsibly and hence be subject to final judgment, reward or punishment for lives lived well or ill. Their basic orientation as sharing in divine life is to the good and hence to resurrection and reward.

This eschatology, insisted upon by revelation and all who would be faithful thereto, suggests that any theory is in need of further development which would deny creative freedom or responsibility to persons and peoples, either as an ontological or as a socio-political reality.

Mulla Sadra recoiled from the effects in philosophy of treating essences alone, which would reduce being to essence. But he is in danger of falling into the opposite dilemma, namely, of making existence to be being. Though here he is on more solid ground—for this is true of God as simple, absolute and self-explanatory—nonetheless, he is in danger of losing in the divine the reality of finite beings. As with the second half of the Poem of Parmenides and with Shankara, he articulates brilliantly the dynamic process that does exist on the finite level, yet always he is dogged by his words that in a final sense this is nothing. (Fazlur Rahman notes the similar ambiguity between passages of Mulla Sadra in which the first principles bespeak the very reality and power of God, and other passages in which such principles are spurned as empty and vacuous.) The significance of the work of Aquinas lies in the step he took toward resolving this central tension of being. To do so he developed the notion of subsistence in a philosophy of being as existence, rather than as essence, situating therein all required for the spiritual activity of human persons. Mulla Sadra approached this rather in terms of process.

b. Human Cooperation in God's Creation

In the philosophy of this century the thought of Mulla Sadra is perhaps most reflected in that of M. Iqbal who wrote his thesis on Mulla Sadra and drew notably on Bergson and related thinkers, and in Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy. It might be especially helpful to look at the concerns of the latter to uncover the special relevance of Mulla Sadra for our times.

Whitehead and the derivative school of philosophers share the concerns of many that a philosophy built in terms of substance would be limited and limiting. They fear that it would restrict the capabilities of humans to their generic and specific features, that all change could be understood only as accidental and hence as superficial, and that human progress would then be considered marginal rather than central. Finally, they fear that God as absolute would not be able to take account of, or be affected by, the heroic struggle and real achievements of people. Hence, they think of being as process and of finite beings very much in Mulla Sadra's sense. The world is a process of derivation from God similar to a "particular 'structure of events' Things are particular segments of this continuous process regarded as a particular "event system" for purposes of description".

Of course, an existential philosophy of being would respond that natures are markers of human dignity below which no one should be treated; that they are capabilities for conscious and free action according to the essence of each human person; that each concrete essence is unique, just as is each existence; and that the related actions as accidents are not merely external adjuncts, but make

the whole person to be such. For example, they make the person to be kind and loving or the opposite. This seems essential for the eschatological human destiny to judgment, resurrection and life in divine goodness.

Nevertheless, each age has its own proper concerns and unfolds its own particular dimension of the human mystery. Contemporary culture is marked by dynamic change which intensifies the search for identity and purpose. Mulla Sadra's process thought brings great richness to this search:

- his philosophy of existence focuses attention on the concrete particular person;
- his integrating sense of finality as orientation to the Absolute Good gives a sense of purpose, for God's creative act is both efficient cause making us to be and final cause drawing us to him in love;
- his dynamic movement-in-substance (*haraka fi'l-jawhar*) enables an intense sense of development and Progress; and - his systematic ambiguity opens new horizons of diversity and unity in this age of cultural globalization.

All this must be harvested and applied in our present circumstances. However, my sense is that if we remain within the terms of scientific reasoning employed thus far we will fail to reap the rich harvest of needed insight that Mulla Sadra brings to our present task.

He points out rightly the limitations of conceptual reason and the need to move beyond this to intuition, but he sees this as otherworldly and characteristic rather of the Perfect Man. What is both needed and within reach is instead a new level of human consciousness while in this life, namely, an aesthetic awareness. In the structure of Kant's Critiques this comes third. It goes beyond science and the universal and necessary categories of the Critique of Pure Reason, and beyond the universal categorical imperative of the Critique of Practical Reason. Yet, aesthetic awareness does not leave these behind, but integrates both in the third Critique of Aesthetic Judgment. This is understanding in terms of beauty and the sublime which marks an eschatology.

The aesthetic is able to grasp the higher principles which in their simplicity do not abstract form, but contain the multiple in their uniqueness. Creative intuition appreciates the dynamic process, but does so from the point of view of its aspiration for a goal in which opposition and conflict are overcome by goodness and love. For Mulla Sadra this is a realization which is beyond this life; it is through reunion with the Perfect Man, become an attribute of God. However, the final cause is not only the last in realization, but the first in exercise in as much as it mobilizes and coordinates all the rest. Hence, eschatology is not only a time after this life, but shapes our life process from the beginning.

To appreciate this - which is to live life meaningfully and fully - calls for a mode of awareness that can appreciate the concrete particularity of acts of human freedom. It must do so in a way that stimulates, integrates and

harmonizes them in intuitions united in terms of beauty and the sublime. To be lived consciously in time, eschatology requires an aesthetic mode of awareness.

Read in these terms, Mulla Sadra's work on existence and process can be appreciated in its full inspiration. It states life with a holy awe, is buoyed up and drawn forward with confidence, and opens to that commitment of love from which peaceful Progress proceeds.

Deeply understood, his philosophy emerges as a work of the Spirit - of faith, hope and charity - which can turn hatred into love, conflict into peace, and death into eternal life.

Conclusion

That modern man is not able to create great civilizations is because he has forgotten his true status in creation; he has forgotten what valuable means he has in his power to attain perfection, what his destination is, how to think, how to speak, how to love. His reason and logic and love have been subject to deception and evil, and his life no longer smells of love and faith. God seems to have left the dark world he has made for himself. The man who does not know the way nor the destination, who has no provisions, is so lost that he is not able to create anything, as did his creative predecessors. History seems to have come to its end for him. Turning on the glorious pages of history, he does not find anything of value. All he sees is wars, and the violation of human rights. Contrasts are agents of hostility, not of knowledge and compassion. Knowledge has been replaced with ignorance and prejudice and 'being a human being' has found a mythological and unattainable meaning, which is only to be found in children's bedtime stories.

The world, which was meant to be a means for man's spiritual perfection and advancement, has turned into the burial-place of spirituality. Divine prophets, great civilizations, great mystics and philosophers have kept borrowing from each other; not only have they not been at war with one another, but have brought messages of love and understanding. They have experienced tolerance and reasoning and have always urged man to take one step forward. The most crucial need of the human beings in the 21 century is a civilization based on faith. In a comprehensive dialectic, man has taken a critical attitude toward his life and the world around him, has critically surveyed love and intellect, and has found the courage to participate in the greatest round-table in history. He should thus be prepared to provide answers to the vital and basic questions, to start a new era of enlightenment in history by giving an end to the era of ignorance. The modern era is the era of learning and teaching, the era where man is thirsty for faith, a faith that will free him from the sorrows of life and the futility of routines. To start this era, man should know the real status of mankind, that he

may not attain knowledge of his, true being without faith and honesty. He should return to his very own nature, which is the manifestation of that mysticism and philosophy founded by the dialectic of religion and its grand dialogue. This dialectic language is the language of this very dynamic nature by which man ascends to its supreme status. It is for these reasons that prophets are human beings too.

Prophets, who are human beings, should, based on faith, love and thinking, make a universal civilization, and realise the promise of religion, which is the ultimate goal of history. This is man's conscious attempt to attain perfection as portrayed by religion. What is important is that regardless of our views of religion, philosophy, mysticism and the civilizations based on them, they all share an idea, and that is the link between God and man for attaining perfection and the truth of existence. The logical dialogue and intellectual colloquy give the human civilizations the possibility to know the Contradictions free from enmity and experience a happy and exalted life. To do this, they will have to rely on their sense of criticism and their compassion for fellow human beings. This is man's course of action in the future for establishing a universal civilization in the shadow of logic, love and understanding. In spite of all shortcomings, modern man knows well that the Caravan of human civilization will lead nowhere if deviated from this course. We must therefore try our best to present happiness and prosperity to the future as a gift.

Note

All references and sources will come at the end of this series of articles about Mulla Sadra's philosophy and its relevance for today.

