

EXISTENCE AND ESSENCE IN MULLA
SADRĀ'S PHILOSOPHY: A COMPARATIVE
STUDY OF ESSENTIALISM AND
EXISTENTIALISM

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ABSTRACT

The article explores Mulla Sadrā's unique position within the tradition of Essentialism by comparing his views to prominent Western philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, and Christian Scholastics like St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. While Sadrā acknowledges the reality of essences, he differs fundamentally from traditional Essentialism by asserting the primacy of existence over essence. This contrasts with Plato's view that essence precedes existence, as well as Aristotle's focus on essence as the defining element of being. Sadrā supports the existence of Platonic Forms but transforms them from abstract universals into particular, transcendent beings. Unlike the static ontology of the Greeks, Sadrā introduces the idea of substantial motion, emphasizing the dynamic nature of existence. The article also compares Sadrā's views with modern thinkers like Louis Lavelle, revealing striking similarities in their integration of classical ontology with theistic frameworks. Sadrā's philosophy is ultimately characterized as a synthesis of existentialism and essentialism, where existence is central, but essences retain a semi-reality, making him an "Essentialist Existentialist."

According to Essentialism at first sight existence seems to impart being to things. But in actual fact existence is an existence of something. What a thing is matters even more than the fact of being.

Sadrā, as we have already stated in the earlier section of the treatise, does believe that essences are real in a sense. He affirms the mental character of essences and also the existence of Platonic Forms. He also asserts that the Forms are independent existents, and they are not the contents of the mind. They are not universals, but particular beings. These views make Sadrā an Essentialist but with a difference. In the present section of the treatise we would try to compare and contrast Sadrā's Essentialism with some of the prominent Western exponents of Essentialism.

We begin the comparative study with Plato who is considered the founder of Essentialism by presenting the theory of Ideas. Socrates teaches that all knowledge is through concepts. Plato accepts this epistemology but turns it into a metaphysics by claiming that the Ultimate Reality is the Ideas. Then he proceeds to describe the fundamental characteristics of the Ideas and calls them substances, Forms and Essences. He goes further and maintains that they are existents in the world of Ideas. Here again we see departure from the Socratic point of view who believes that the concepts exist in the human mind not external to it, as they were subjective. However, the Platonic Ideas become objective realities.

The second important feature of Plato's system of thought is the claim that the world of material objects or the world of existents is a pale copy of the world of the Ideas. The ultimate Reality is the world of the Ideas or Forms. The world of existents is a degradation of the original perfect world of Ideas.

Sadrā not only affirms the existence of Platonic Forms in the Divine realm but also rejects the Neo-Platonic view that Forms exist either in the mind of God or of separate Intelligences. Like Plato he believes in their independent existence. We, however, bear in mind the following fundamental differences between Plato and Sadrā:

- (i) Plato is a pure essentialist. For him essence is prior to existence, but Sadrā thinks that existence is prior to essence.
- (ii) According to Plato the ultimate reality is ‘the Ideas’. For Sadrā the ultimate reality is existence.

The influence of Plato is evident if we study his doctrine of the unity of Being. He asserts that the various beings in the world of manifestations are all limitations of one reality or Being. These limitations are abstracted by the mind and become the forms of quiddities (*mahiyyat*) of things, and when transposed into the principal domain, they become the Platonic ideas or archetypes. Unlike the Being which is objectively real and in fact is the reality of the cosmos, the *mahiyyat* are accidents of Being abstracted by the mind without having a reality independent of Being. Even the archetypes possess a form of Being which in this case is God’s knowledge of them.

The afore-mentioned discussion supports the view that Sadrā is an essentialist like Plato. Yet we should bear in mind the following fundamental differences between the two thinkers:

- (i) Plato is a pure essentialist. For him essence is prior to existence, but Sadrā thinks that existence is prior to essence.
- (ii) According to Plato the ultimate reality is “the Ideas”. For Sadrā the ultimate reality is “Being.”
- (iii) In Plato’s system of thought the existents are the shadows or pale copies of the Ideas. Thus for him existence is a degradation of the reality. But Sadrā maintains that existents are the manifestation of the ultimate Reality.
- (iv) According to Plato the Forms or the Ideas are universals. Sadrā, on the other hand, believes that they are particular existents or beings. Sadrā maintains that it cannot be accepted that a thinker of Plato’s caliber would not distinguish between an intellectually abstract entity and a concrete existential order of existence which contains all peculiarities. Here Sadrā is not presenting the Platonic view, but his own doctrine of the movement of the concrete.

- (v) The afore-mentioned discussion leads us to the conclusion that though apparently Sadrā accepts the Platonic theory of Ideas, but transforms Plato's essentialism into his own form of existentialism by maintaining that the Platonic Forms are not abstract. They are concrete particulars and not abstract universals. They are transcendental beings. Each having an individual existence of its own. Their universality only means that to the mind they appear universal.
- (vi) Although, in the Platonic system of thought the concept of God is not clear.¹ But it is evident that Plato's philosophy cannot be considered theistic. Sadrā on the other hand, is clearly theistic thinker and the concept of God is consistent with his philosophy of existence. Since 'Existence' is the only reality. Therefore, God or the ultimate Reality is not to be searched beyond the sphere of existence. He is within the realm of the existence. God is simple and pure Existence.
- (vii) According to Fazal-ur-Rehman (p. 49 II para) Sadrā mollifies the epistemological function of the Platonic Forms. It is consistent with his general doctrine that intellectual cognition cannot capture reality which is pure existence. Sadrā, however, wishes to retain the metaphysical function of the Platonic Forms. Here Fazal-ur-Rehman criticizes, because; in his opinion it is inconsistent with his doctrine of the flow of existence. Fazal-ur-Rehman points out that the whole notion of a pre-existent superior order of the world contradicts the idea of continuous emergent movement of existence.

Aristotle and Sadrā

Aristotle a pupil of independent mind tried to reconstruct the Platonic idealism in a more consistent and scientific manner. According to him Plato seemed to place the Forms beyond the stars. Moreover the gulf between Form and Matter had to be bridged somehow. Aristotle retains the changeless eternal Forms which are the idealistic principles of Plato, but rejects their transcendency. He brings them down from heaven to earth. He maintains that the Forms are not apart from things but inherent in them. Form and matter are not separate. They are eternally together. Their combination produces individual things. The human reason has the power of discerning the Forms in their

particular exemplifications. From this point of view 'Forms' constitute the essences of things or particular material object. At the same time they are principles of reason. Then they are both forms of thought as well as reality. In Aristotle's view they i.e., thought and being coincide. The universals are the last thing we reach in our thinking, but are first in nature. In other words, they are the first principles of reality.

Plato regards the objects of experience as imperfect copies of the universal ideas. For him forms are the substances. Its copies i.e., concrete material objects of the world are mere accidents. Aristotle, on the other hand, considered the particular objects or the individual beings as real substances. But the essence or true nature of the particular concrete being is constituted by its form—the essential qualities of the class to which it belongs. So after all, the form or idea is for him too, the most essential element.

The study of Sadrā evidently confirms that for him the ultimate reality is existence. Essence, on the other hand, is 'idea', but still it is real in the following two senses:

- (a) An idea occurs in the mind. It has a sort of existence, but it is mental existence.
- (b) There is something in the external reality which causes it to arise in the mind. Thus essence has a kind of secondary reality.

This leads to major difference between Sadrā and Aristotle. For Aristotle, essence still remains primary to existence; because; in his philosophy there is graded system of beings. At the upper end is pure Form, which is the final cause.

Moreover, as it has been pointed out earlier, Aristotle despite of all differences with Plato, still agrees with him that essence or Form is the most essential element in the constitution of a particular concrete being and it is universal. But for Sadrā it is 'existence' which is the major reality. 'Essence' has some kind of mental existential status. However, this status secondary in nature or in other words, it has semi-reality.

Besides the afore-mentioned point there are other differences between Sadrā and Aristotle's views which should be kept in mind. Those differences are the followings:-

- (i) Sadrā affirms the existence of the Platonic Form in the Divine Realm.² Aristotle clearly rejects their existence in

a transcendent world. For him they exist in this very world in the concrete objects.

- (ii) According to Sadrā Forms are particular beings, but Aristotle thinks that they represent the universals. In other words, they are concepts consisting of essential qualities of all members of a class. According to Sadrā they appear universal to the mind. In reality, however, they are individual transcendent beings.
- (iii) Sadrā distinguishes between two types or meanings of essence. Firstly, it may mean only a notion without any reference to any existent. Secondly, it may mean the notion or concept of an existent. In the former case, essence has only mental status, while in the latter case it has existential status. Fazal-ur-Rehman³ points out that this distinction has an Aristotelian basis, but it seriously modifies Aristotle's view, since, according to him only existents possess an essence or a real definition, while in the case of fictional or imaginary objects, only the meaning of the term can be given, and is not mentioned a proper essence. In short in Sadrā's opinion essence only has a semi-reality while Aristotle maintains that an essence must exist in order to be a proper essence.
- (iv) Aristotle has presented matter-form formula, in order to explain every concrete object. Ibn Sina converts it into genus-differentia formula. Differentia becomes more important, because; by declaring differentia simple and irreducible, it becomes allied to simple and unanalyzable fact of existence. For Ibn Sina, however, differentia is not identical with existence, Differentia as a part of specific essence (i.e., genus plus differentia) is subsumable under a genus, and is, therefore, part of what Aristotle calls, "secondary substance."

Sadrā maintains that the differentia is neither a substance nor an accident, since it is identical with individual existence. Sadrā develops on argument which interprets the genus-differentia formula in accordance with his doctrine of emergent movement of existence or substantial change. Thus he synthesizes it with the principle of essence-existence.

To sum up, Aristotle presents matter-form formula which is interpreted as genus-differentia formula by one of the greatest interpreter—Ibn Sina. Later on this interpretation was turned into

essence-existence formula, which was a further deviation from the original Aristotle an position.

Sadrā and the Christian Scholastics

St. Augustine (Birth. 353) is the most prominent teacher of the early Christian Church. Plato's impact on his thought evident. The world of essences are identified with the divine intelligence. He believes that the Divine Mind is the abode of Forms or essences. These are expressed through the Word. Thus all that exists, exists only by participation in the ideas of the Word, It is the Word itself, Thus it is given to us in all the creatures. Man is on the horizon of the two worlds. His lower nature is in the existence, while the higher nature in the essences. However, the Augustinian doctrine is much less essentialist than that of Plato on account of two reasons. Firstly, essences do not constitute a world of their own. They are no more than the ideas in the mind of God. Secondly, the objects of the material world are real, but essences play major role in their nature.

Let us compare St. Augustine and Sadrā. Although, Sadrā teaches that the essences have some sort of reality, but at the same time emphasizes the fact that it is a semi-reality. In St. Augustine's thought, on the other hand, they are primary realities as the Divine ideas. He argues that all that exist, exists only by participation in the ideas of the Word. Its implication is that essence precedes existence. Sadrā, however, believe in the principality of existence. He does confirm the existence of the Forms or essence, but he believes them to be secondary to existence. Thus St. Augustine is a thorough essentialist, while Sadrā's essentialism is less essentialist as compared to him, because; in his philosophy existence plays the major role.

Thomas Aquinas and Sadrā

Thomas Aquinas (1225/27—1274A.D) is considered the culmination of Christian Scholasticism. In general his thought seems to be in conformity with the Augustinian metaphysics, but he adopts Aristotle's method and uses his concepts. According to him God has created the world. It follows as St. Augustine asserts that as a creator he has the idea of all existents. For St. Aquinas concrete beings are composed of Form and matter. By Form he means the Platonic Idea. The human intelligence does not grasp individual things in their individuality. It judges existents according to those essences in which they participate. St. Thomas Aquinas has

no interest in existence, except as a means of access to essences. Therefore, St. Aquinas too, is a thorough essentialist.

Sadrā seems to be richer in his philosophical insight though like St. Aquinas, he too, has theological interests. He is much more original than him. He accepts certain notions of Aristotle, but interprets them in such a way as to assimilate them into his general theory of existence.

Another difference between Sadrā and St. Aquinas lies in their attitude towards existence. The former believes in its principality, the latter considers it only a means of access to essences. Since St. Aquinas adopts the Aristotelian philosophy on the whole, he also adopts Aristotle's matter-form formula as it is. Sadrā, as we have mentioned earlier turns it into genus-differentia formula and identifies differentia with existence.

Moreover, under the influence of Aristotle St. Aquinas believes that forms are present in the concrete objects of the material world, while Sadrā affirms the transcendental nature of the Forms. Therefore, he resembles in this respect to St. Augustine for whom the Forms are the Divine ideas. But Sadrā instead of considering them ideas in the Divine Mind, thinks that they are the Divine attributes. He, however, still seems to take a philosophical view closer to St. Augustine than St. Aquinas.

Sadrā and the Modern Essentialism

Essentialism is characteristically a classical philosophy which later reappears in the Medieval times among the Muslim thinkers based on the notions of essence and existence. In the preceding section of the book we have already compared the Greek essentialists such as Plato and Aristotle and Mulla Sadrā, as well as the Christian essentialists like St. Augustine and St. Aquinas. Still there remains the comparison of Sadrā and the modern essentialism, though it is a philosophy which is no longer supported by the majority of the modern philosophers. However, there are exceptions to the above-mentioned statement. One exception, worth mentioning in this respect is Louis Lavelle who is perhaps its chief exponent in the 20th cent. with his own brand of essentialism.

Louis Lavelle (July 15, 1883—Sept. 1951) is one of the great metaphysicians of the 20th cent. He is French, taught philosophy at Sorbonne (1932-34). Later on he joined college de France (1941-51). During his times reaction against system building was prevalent; but he boldly elaborated an extensive system of thought.

The historian M. Delfgaau⁴ considers it a new brand of spiritualism, which is at the same time an extension of the tradition of essentialism. It is a sort of return to the concept of the Absolute. In 20th cent. the French tradition of spiritualism continues. Bergson, Gabriel Marcel and Louis Lavelle embraces it.

Louis Lavelle:

According to Louis Lavelle there is no metaphysics of the objective. Metaphysics should be the science of spiritual intimacy. He rejects all the modern doctrines of negativity, because of their emphasis on despair and anguish. In his opinion such attitudes are the result of subjection to the physical and total denial of the spirit. Consequently, those make the human beings slaves to the temporal leading to servitude and not freedom. He believes that philosophy of spirit restores the respect Love for the spirit.

Actually, Lavelle revives the classical themes of essence. For him the absolute is an endless reservoir of forms and essences from which the individual being receive their own limited existence. The primary aim of our life—the human life is to discover our unique from and spiritual essence. The accomplishment of our essence at our death means the radical passage from finite to the transfinite Being.

Although Lavelle is characterized as an essentialist, because; he believed in the spiritual essence of man, and considers the Absolute as the infinite source of forms or essences, but at the same time he describes it as the pure Being and actuality, which is also dynamic and not mere formal immobility. Consequently, he believes in temporal progression and creativity, actuality and potentiality, perfect Being and continuous act of discovery.

Comparison of Lavelle and Sadrā

The resemblance between L. Lavelle and Sadrā is amazing, though we cannot assert that there is any direct influence of one on the other. Sadrā exists, speculates and presents his views long before Lavelle. It would be more appropriate to say that he anticipated Lavelle. Here the question arises, ‘Whether Lavelle has studied Sadrā’s thought by any chance? There is no substantive proof that he has or he has not. Still there is astonishing resemblance.

While comparing L. Lavelle and Mulla Sadrā we should keep in mind the following points describing their affinities and differences:-

1. Both have been thinkers and received regular formal education of philosophy and trained to philosophize.
2. We have already discussed epistemology of Sadrā in a previous chapter of the book. During his retirement to Kahak Sadrā mediates and comes to the conclusion that purely rational method is extrinsic and superficial. The realization leads him to search for a method that transforms merely rational propositions into experienced truth. Similarly, Lavelle maintains that spiritualism is based not on speculation, but induction. In other words, knowledge is merely speculative. It should be based on observation and experience. Thus both Sadrā and Lavelle present a comprehensive epistemological theory. According to it all forms of experience should be considered. Sadrā and Lavelle do not believe in divorcing any source of knowledge.
3. Sadrā and Lavelle revive the classical ontology of Plato and Aristotle, and their essentialism, related to the Platonic idea that anything without essence would not be what it is. Aristotle though sceptical about Platonic Idea that anything without essence would not be what it is. Nevertheless accepts the idea of 'telos' or purpose within and try to identify various essences or final causes.

Sadrā while affirming the mental character of essences, also confirms the existence of the Platonic Forms in the divine realm. Thus supporting Plato's thesis that Forms or Ideas or essences have an independent existence, because; he at the same time rejects the Neo-Platonic view that Forms exist in the mind of God or emanated Intelligences.

Louis Lavelle also accepts the essentialists thesis that the value of man is not his particular being, but his essence. Lavelle in his spiritualistic Essentialism maintains that ever if existence is primary to essence, nonetheless, it is given to us so that we can acquire our essence. He does not reject the notion of an Ideal essence which links individual being to the Pure Being.

4. The concept of God in the philosophies of both the thinkers seem similar. For Sadrā God is pure Being and a source of various modes of existence which are His manifestations. Lavelle too asserts that God is the Absolute Being and as such pure actuality and infinite dynamism and endless forms.

5. Sadrā and Louis Lavelle's concept of being are not very different. For Sadrā existence is not a state of being. It is an act — the transition from possibility to actuality. (Hossein Nasr and F. Schuon) Similarly, For Lavelle being is an act— a real experience and a personal accomplishment. A thing becomes a being through an act of participation—an active participation in the process of self-discovery. (Deli'etre, Paris, 197, p. 35)

6. Both of them are theistic thinkers. Therefore, they try to integrate Platonism with their religious beliefs. Here they part with classical essentialist Ontology of Plato and Aristotle. The latter thinkers mentioned the word 'God', but their concept of God very different from that of Sadrā and Lavelle. Moreover, we should note that both of them synthesize their religious beliefs with the classical essentialism, but their religious belief system is different. In the case of Sadrā integration of the classical essentialism is in the context of Islam and in Lavelle's spiritualism it is a synthesis or at least an effort to connect it with Christianity.

7. Sadrā and Lavelle seems to present philosophies which can be categorized as pantheism. For example, Lavelle asserts that the accomplishment of an essence at the time of death means the radical passage of our essence from finite into transfinite Being. Sadrā, however, counter the impression that his thought is pantheistic by the principle of *Tashkik* or ambiguity of existence. He solves the apparent tension between his existential monism (pantheism) and *Tashkik*, i.e., the principle of the ambiguity of existence according to which every contingent being has a unique reality of its own which cannot be reduced to anything else. He maintains that God alone is real as Reality. Then how this all-embracing monism can be reconciled with the above-mentioned view? By making a distinction between necessary Being and contingent beings. Everything is a mixture of essence and existence except God who is Necessary and absolutely simple. Therefore, he cannot be identical with anything that is composite, where as all contingent beings are mixture of essence and existence, therefore, composite. Hence, Sadrā rejects the existential monism (pantheism) of those Sufis who think that existence is a single individual reality, i.e., God, and it is universal having multiple instances.⁵

To sum up, Sadrā counters the assumptions of contradiction of two opposing conclusions which can be drawn from his philosophy of essentialism. The question arises: What about Lavelle? We are not sure, but he has been criticized by Gabriel

Marcel.⁶ If the immanent proceeds from the transcendent, then Lavelle circles back to be original dialectic.

8. After a brief comparison of Sadrā and Lavelle it becomes obvious that both of them are syncretic thinkers. They tried to integrate the different sources of human experience and the classical dialectic of essence and existence. Both of them are exponent of speculative rationalism. Both of them tried to accommodate both primacy of existence and a place for the concept of essence in their system of thought.

9. Both the philosophers introduced dynamism into the classical ontology of Plato and Aristotle. We have already discussed Plato and Sadrā in a previous section of the treatise. Sadrā affirms the existence of the Forms in the divine realm. But at the same time he asserts that they are not abstract notions devoid of all particularity. He also denies them primary reality and attribute only secondary ontological status. At the same time he asserts the idea of constant creative flow of existence. The Platonic Ideas are perfect and permanent. Hence no change is possible. The Platonic world view confident change an illusion and a flaw. Hence their world view is static. Similarly, Aristotelean ontology in a modified way supports the notion of static ultimate reality, though there is an evolutionary movement upward, but they have been eternally determined by the Final cause.

Sadrā, however, develops an argument which interprets the genus-differnia formula in accordance with his doctrine of emergent existence, substantial change and thus assimilates dynamism to the classical static ontology.

Similarly, Lavelle's conception of the nature of the relation of beings to the Being is dynamic. The Absolute Being is pure actuality and an infinite source of existential Forms from which the individual receives his own finite existence. In short, his view of the nature of beings to the Absolute or Pure Being introduces dynamism to the traditional Aristotelean ontology. Moreover, his definition of being not as a state, but an act, automatically makes room for movement, evolution, change and dynamism.

10. Finally, the greatest affinity between Sadrā and Lavelle is that they did not mollify the concept of essence, and yet they believed in the primacy of existence. As such both can be considered Existential Essentialists with one point of difference that they belonged to totally different times and periods of history. In a way Sadrā anticipated L. Lavelle.

The Problem of Change (Mulla Sadrā and the Greek Philosophers)

Philosophy's birthplace is Greece. Its date of birth is considered round about 475B.C. The first period of its history is called, "The Pre-socratic age." Its first school is considered "The School of Ionics." Therefore, we will bring our comparative study of the Greek thinkers and Sadrā on the question of change with a survey of the Ionics.

The phenomenon of change becomes a philosophical debate among the Greek thinkers right from the beginning. Thales—the first philosopher and first Ionic, when he declared, "All things are Water," he conceived the great thought of the unity of the world. He however, is silent about the question of becoming, i.e., how water the primary principle changes itself into different forms and objects. But Thales' statement implied that the fundamental reality or the substance of the universe is capable of change and assuming forms of different objects.

The second Ionic thinker-Anaximander's views that the primary substance is the indeterminate Matter. He also presents the vague idea of two processes responsible for the origin of the world and the phenomenon of change. Thus he, too, seems, conscious of the process of change and the question of the emergence of different multiple forms from the unity of the original source. Later on the third Ionic thinkers—Anaxemines maintains that the different things come into being through the processes of rarefaction and condensation. So it is evident that even the first school of Greek philosophy is aware of the problem of change in the world and the question how it takes place or occurs in the primary unity of the original source leading to multiplicity.

The second school of Greek philosophy known as the Eleatics, however, rejects all change and consider it to be illusory. Their chief exponent believes that the ultimate reality is Being and it is above motion, time and space. He concludes that they are mirages produced by the senses. It is only reason that leads to truth and tells us that the ultimate reality is permanent, static and unchangeable. Being is and not-being cannot be. Motion and multiplicity are not-being. Consequently, Zeno-the follower uses all his logical skill to prove that motion and multiplicity do not exist.

Heraclitus (Dates not known) presents the opposite view of reality. He thinks that change is the ultimate reality. Permanence is an illusion produced by the senses. Reason, on the other hand, tells

us that nothing is stable or enduring. Everything which exists, moves and changes. The objects come into being and again pass away into nothingness. Not only the absolute permanence does not exist, but even the relative permanence is not present. Being and not-being both are real. Becoming means simultaneous existence of being and not being.

Sadrā⁷ has some resemblance with Parmenides so far as the latter preaches unity of being. But his philosophical position comes much closer to his opponent—Heraclitus. Like him he asserts that change is a universal phenomenon of the universe or the world of existents. He considers the world to be like stream of water flowing continually. In his opinion all change is a form of motion and he introduces the idea of substantial motion (الحركة الجوهرية). He attaches much importance to this concept and discusses it not only in his first chapter of “*Al Asfār*” but in many other chapters of the book, and in nearly all of his other books. He, however, mentions the fact that he is not the first thinker to conceive this idea. He has great respect for the Pre-Socratics and indicated it, but either did not describe it explicitly or did not develop the concept. In order to judge the truth of Sadrā's statement we have to study carefully Heraclitus' concept of change. When we do that we certainly notice the resemblance between him and Sadrā.

According to Sadrā's point of view motion is the continuous regeneration and recreation of the world at every instance. He maintains that it is not only the accidents but the substance of the universe itself that partakes of motion and becoming, i.e., continuous recreation and rebirth. In order to prove his point of view, he presents the following arguments:-

(i) He asserts that it an accepted fact that accidents need a substance upon which they depend for their properties. Therefore, every change that takes place in the accidents of a body must be accompanied by a corresponding change in the substance. Otherwise the being of the former would not follow the being of the latter. In other words, since the effect must be the same as its cause, the substance, i.e., the cause of a changing accident must itself be changing.

(ii) It is known that all beings in the universe are seeking perfection. Therefore, they are in the process of becoming and change. In order to overcome their imperfections. Since divine

manifestations never repeats itself. God creates new theophanies at every moment in order to bring new perfections. Thus the matter of each being is in the continuous process of earning new dress, i.e., being united to a new form. It is only the rapidity of this change that makes it imperceptible and guarantees the continuity and identification of a particular being through substantial change.

Heraclitus, though, does not use the same language, but asserts that becoming has two forms which are the following:-

- (a) The movement or transition from not-being to being.
- (b) The movement change from being to being.

The above-mentioned change or movement is both in things (substance) as well as in their qualities or properties (accidents).⁸ For instance, a man does not exist, and then with his birth he comes into existence. Therefore, it is a movement from not-being to being. Later on he passes away, i.e., movement from being to not being. But between birth and death a number of changes occur in his characteristics. He grows old. His hair turn grey. He becomes wiser or grows more foolish, etc., etc. Similarly, a tree not only comes into being and then disappears, but in between, its height and size changes. It bears fruit. The colour of its leaves turn from green to brown, and then again from brown to green.

Heraclitus compares life to constant conflict and war between being and not-being. For him conflict is a fundamental feature of the universe. It is all-prevading. Sadrā, however, being impressed by Sufism does not use the metaphor of war. He compares life to a stream continuously flowing. In a stream the waters are always i.e., continuously changing, but there is no conflict among the waves. An over all serenity and harmony prevails.

Another common feature of Sadrā and Heraclitus is that both of them accept the idea of unity of being. For Sadrā various beings in the world are all manifestations of ultimate Reality or the Divine Being. But both hem also believes that there is unity in multiplicity and multiplicity in unity. Parmendies is the first to preach the doctrine of unity of Being, but excludes motion and multiplicity from the circle of reality. Consequently, his thought leads to the irreconcilable dualism between the world of illusion and reality. However both Sadrā and Heraclitus have to face no such problem. Both thinkers makes room for multiplicity, and yet unity of Being is kept intact.

In the previous section we have discussed the resemblances between Heraclitus and Sadrā, but the differences should also be noted. For example, one major difference is that in Heraclitus' thought we do not find any theistic reference. But in Sadrā's theosophy existence of God is a prior. Moreover, since Sadrā comes long after Heraclitus and long before Plato and Aristotle, therefore their terminology and conceptions are different.

As it is mentioned earlier Sadrā has philosophical affinity not only to Heraclitus, but also with his chief opponent Parmenides—the founder of Eclecticism. He resembles Parmenides as far as the doctrine of unity of Being is concerned. According to Sadrā Being is the same in all the realms of existence, but with different graduations and degrees of intensity, just like rays of the sun, the light of a lamp or the light of a glowworm is the same. (I chap. *Al-Asfār*). But they mean the same subject, i.e., light. However, their predicates are different under different conditions of manifestations. The same holds true in the case of Being. For instance, the being of God, of a man and of a tree or of a heap of earth are all one Being or Reality, but in a various degrees of intensity of manifestations.

Parmenides' doctrine of Being should be discussed in order to determine how far it reassembles Sadrā's concept of Being. Of course, Parmenides' is the exponent of the doctrine of unity of Being. In order to prove his view he present the following arguments:-

(i) Suppose that Being (the ultimate reality) is not a unity, then it means that it can be divided into different parts. The question arises what is that which divides it into different parts? It can either Being or not-Being. If it is assumed that it is Being which is dividing Being, then they still remain parts of the same whole, i.e., Being. On the other hand if it is asserted that it is not-Being which divides the Being, then its implication would be that not-Being is a being, i.e., a thing. But it is absurd, since not-Being is just an idea, not an existent. Hence it is wrong to suppose that Being is divisible. That which distinguishes one object from another is also Being. Thus such distinctions are illusions.

The afore-mentioned exposition of Parmenides' doctrine of unity of Being, makes it obvious that there is a similarity between his and Sadrā's doctrine of Being and its unity. But there is a major difference as well in their thought as far as multiplicity is concerned. Parmenides not only denies divisibility of Being, but

also multiplicity of the objects of existents. He considers it illusory. Sadrā, however, does not agree with Parmenides' denial of the multiplicity. He believes and argues that there is multiplicity despite the unity of Being on account of gradation of Being. This gradation depends on different degrees and intensities of the manifestations.

Conclusion

In the philosophy of Sadrā we find a synthesis of the various intellectual crosscurrents of the Muslim world of his times, such as Sufism, Shi'ism and the Greek schools of thought, i.e., Platonism and Aristotelianism. But if we intend to understand his thought in the light of modern perspective of the Western thought, then we will detect a curious blend of existentialism and essentialism in his views. Perhaps, he is not an existentialist in the modern Western sense according to some historians of philosophy, because, modern Western existentialism and its various brands are basically humanist and mostly atheistic. From another point of view he will be considered an existentialist, since he believes in the principality and primacy of existence. 'Existence' is the sole, reality and the very foundation of his philosophical system. There is no doubt that at the same time he affirms the semi-reality of essences. Thus he synthesizes existentialism (i.e., primacy of existence) with a sort of essentialism by supporting the existence of Forms or essences. Therefore, he can be and he is considered an Essentialist Existentialist in his own right and in his own way.

Notes and References

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- ¹ M. Delfgeau, *Spiritualistic Existentialism*, 1947, Amestradam.
 - ² Hossein, Nasr, *Sadrā al-Din Shirazi and His Transcendental Theosophy*
 - ³ F. Schuon, *Atma-Maya*, Studies in Comparative Religious, ff. 130, summer, 1973
 - ⁴ Louise Laveelle, *Del'etre*, 1947; Paris, p. 35
 - ⁵ Ibid., p. 22
 - ⁶ Refer to this treatise p. para. Where it has been pointed out that Sadrā rejects existential monism and asserts that the perfect man does not become God.
 - ⁷ One of the principal doctrine of Sadrā is unity of Being. According to him Being is the same in all the realms of existence, but with the different gradations degrees of intensity, just like rays of the Sim.
 - ⁸ Here both the terms, i.e., substance and accidents are used in Sadrā's terminology.